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JAMEY AEBERSOLD
NEA Jazz Master (2013)

Interviewee: Jamey Aebersold (July 21, 1939-), New Albany, Indiana
Interviewer: Ken Kimery
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[BEGINNING OF DISK 1, TRACK 1]

Kimery: Today is December 16, 2013. I am in the home of Jamey Aebersold here in New Albany, Illinois.

Aebersold: Indiana.

Kimery: Indiana. Oh, God.

Aebersold: [LAUGHS]

Kimery: I'm glad you caught me. I flew into Kentucky, we're in Indiana... It's maddening. I was in Washington, D.C. this morning. My name is Ken Kimery. We're here to interview NEA Jazz Master—and coming up, the class of 2014, to be celebrated and awarded in New York—Jamey Aebersold. Jamey, if you gave us your full birth name and birth date and birth location.

Aebersold: Ok. Wilton Jameson Aebersold, nicknamed Jamey. Age 74 today. My birth date is July 21, 1939. And I was born about a mile-and-a-half from here at St. Edwards Hospital in New Albany, Indiana. I live about a block from where I was raised.

Kimery: Can we talk about your parents. You were born here, and of course, your parents have quite a legacy also. If we can get your father's, your mother's name, and any other relatives, and talk about their life here in New Albany.

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Aebersold: Ok. My father was Stanley Joseph Aebersold, and my mom was Wilma E. (Evelyn) Dierking. And they married in the early '30s, I think it was. And my grandfather and grandmother were dead before I was born, so I didn't get to see them. I didn't have any grandparents at all, as a matter of fact. My father's father, I'm pretty sure he came from Switzerland, and settled down in Brandenburg, Kentucky. Then he moved up to New Albany, here, Indiana, which is about 50 miles from Brandenburg, and I think he started a nursery at first, and then it moved into kind of a florist shop. My dad had been married about a year, I think, maybe two years at the most, when his parents both died, so he inherited the florist's.

I have an older brother, Stanley Joseph, named after my dad. He lives in Lexington. My younger is David Allen Aebersold, and he lives just down the street, and he and his wife and their daughter run the florist, Aebersold Florist. So it's been going on a little over a hundred years now in New Albany, Indiana—same location.

My mom played the piano and sang, and my dad played the piano a little bit and played the banjo. He was part of a Banjoleers group, Indiana Banjoleers. They would play on the radio over in Louisville, way back there in the '30s... '40s...and I remember hearing banjo music in my house all the time.

Kimery: So that's where the banjo comes from.

Aebersold: That's where the banjo comes from.

Kimery: I know that you're quite a fierce banjo player yourself.

Aebersold: No, I'm not! I know one song. [LAUGHS] "The World's Waiting For the Sunrise." But I took lessons on the banjo. I lugged my banjo over to downtown Louisville every week for lessons. Doc Eastwood was the teacher, and as I recall, it seemed like he really liked my tenor banjo, which was my dad's, and the lesson consisted of him playing the banjo. But I learned one tune, and I still play it once a year at my summer jazz workshops.

Kimery: Let's talk about the family business there. As we drove up, you pointed out the building, which is the same building. Has there been any modifications there?

Aebersold: Yes, there's been some modifications, but it's right there in the same place. Same place. Same size.

Kimery: And how did they get into the floral business?

Aebersold: I think my grandfather started a nursery business, and then my dad took it over, and they got into flowers. Weddings, funerals, things like that—general. Now my brother and his wife, they run it.

Kimery: Older? Younger?

Aebersold: Younger. David.

Kimery: Were you at any point looked at as being the successor of that business?

Aebersold: I could have been. But I told them I'd rather see what music had to offer. At that time, I wasn't doing much. I'm just playing jobs and teaching privately. But I seemed to enjoy doing that, so I stuck with that.

Kimery: As a kid, were you actively engaged in the business itself?

Aebersold: Oh, yeah.

Kimery: What did it consist of?

Aebersold: At a very early age, I started work, I'm sure. I'd work an hour in the afternoon after school. Couldn't go out and play ball until you'd work. So I learned how to work early on. Plantin'. Pottin'. Cleanin' off bits. Sweepin'. I worked all the way up even when I graduated from college. I'd be over there at 9 o'clock in the morning and work until about 3, with an hour break for lunch, then come back and teach private lessons at my apartment—which I rented from my dad, which was just across the street from the florist. So I've kind of stuck right here in this area the whole time.

Kimery: Did the business extend beyond New Albany? Did it go into Louisville? Meaning did you have business in Louisville?

Aebersold: Well, they delivered to Louisville. Now they've got it all worked out where they take flowers to a central point, and they deliver them way out in Louisville, and if the Louisville florists have people in Indiana, they bring them over here. They have some sort of a mutual exchange, like... Back then, we didn't deliver to Louisville much. It was basically here in New Albany.

Kimery: Was there a greenhouse around here?

Aebersold: Yes, there were greenhouses. Several of them. Four, I think. Four greenhouses. I want to say four. Five. Yeah. Oh yeah, it was fun when I was a kid. Playing hide-and-go-seek underneath those beds, with the cobwebs and the spiders and stuff, and the chrysanthemums that you could get up in the bed and hide in, you weren't supposed to... I remember one time we were having a chrysanthemum fight. The beds were so high, 24" or 30" tall, and about 4' wide, and these big, tall chrysanthemums... I can remember one afternoon I was out there with somebody, a friend of mine, and we were pulling out these nice, big chrysanthemum blooms and throwing them over the top, trying to hit the other person. My dad came home and caught us. Oooh, that was the end of that. I don't know what I was thinking.

A tornado came through there, incidentally, in 1917, and flattened the greenhouse. At that time... Of course, I wasn't around then. But my dad said that it lifted the barn up off of the house/horse(?—6:12) and took the barn about a block away and crushed it up on Indiana Avenue. We have pictures of the barn, all ruined and everything.

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Kimery: Though it wasn't one of those moments where it derailed the business. They were able to rebuild and keep going, as we can tell...

Aebersold: Yeah. Just keep going. At that point, as a matter of fact, 1917, my dad said he was into school here that I was telling you about, that we came by. He said they let school out and he had to walk down and step over the power lines out here on Silver Street.

Something I was going to mention to you... It has nothing to do with my early history. But the street we came in on, this Silver Street... Horace Silver Street. And we passed McLean Avenue; that's Jackie McLean Avenue. And if we'd gone down a little further, you would have seen Morton; that's Jelly Roll Morton. And yet another one up here is Lake; Oliver Lake. It's just a coincidence. But kids have asked me before when they noted that: "Mr. Aebersold, did you name those streets?" Cute.

Kimery: That's an interesting group there, too.

Aebersold: It is. Yeah, put those guys together and let them jam.

Kimery: So, since both parents were actually musically-inclined...

Aebersold: Yes, very much so.

Kimery: How did you find your... Besides hearing it around the house, when did you find that moment where you actually became a participant in this?

Aebersold: I think I was about 4 years old, and my older brother was 8, and he was going to take piano lessons from Maude Thomas. She wasn't married. Widow. What do you call that, when she's not married?

Kimery: Spinster?

Aebersold: Spinster, I guess. Yeah. Anyhow, my brother took lessons, and I was about 4, but they didn't let me take, and I was real disappointed. So I think a year later, when I was about 5, they let me take lessons. I couldn't wait to play. But then I got really tired of practicing, and so after five years my piano teacher finally fired me. She gave me my money back, gave me my 2 bucks back, said, "Go on home, you'll never be a musician; you don't want to practice." So that was the end of that. And then I made the natural switch to tenor banjo, because my dad played it. So I started learning the chords and things, and took lessons and so forth. Even went to Chicago. My mom and dad took me up there in about 1955 (I guess, '55) to a convention, and we played "Lady of Spain" or something like that, you know. That was fun.

But then, I couldn't see the banjo as being a jazz instrument, and the tenor banjo in particular, the stretch for the fingers was real wide. It's like a cello. Everybody plays five-string banjo today, but back then I was playing the tenor banjo, or trying to, and I didn't have a mentor jazz banjo. So I kind of gave it up. My brother started playing the alto saxophone, and then I

guess he kind of quit, and I kind of inherited the alto. Yeah, and I started playing alto in the sixth grade.

Kimery: So it sounds like you were wandering this path, the path to where you finally found the instrument that became...

Aebersold: Wandering, yeah.

Kimery: Until you found that primary voice. Though you play other instruments quite well, too. Piano, bass...

Aebersold: Yes. The piano has been my... I'm sure glad I got started on piano, because it's the master instrument, as far as I'm concerned. And if she had... Way back there, maybe if her teaching had been a little different, or if she had said something about improvising, I'd probably still be playing piano, and wouldn't have had to wander through all these other instruments.

Kimery: Do you recall during those lessons what she was having you play?

Aebersold: Oh, yeah. I've got some of the books here. Just classical, little things. Scales.

Kimery: Etudes?

Aebersold: Yeah, little etudes. And my older brother, when he was playing piano (and then I was playing, too, I guess), we worked up a couple of duets. "Bicycle Built For Two." We'd play at a church. Then another church asked us to come out on Sunday morning, and we'd go over there and play. I remember doing that. That was fun. But I just couldn't see where we were going with practicing the scales and stuff. If she'd had me improvise, I'd still be playing the piano.

Kimery: Was there much of a jazz scene here that...

Aebersold: No... Well, when I was young, I didn't know about it. I started hearing about jazz by listening to the radio. Is it WLW in New Orleans? "From the top of the blah-blah-blah hotel, and the Roosevelt Ballroom." Does that ring a bell?

Kimery: Yeah, I know the Roosevelt Ballroom.

Aebersold: Is it in New Orleans? Somewhere, on top of some hotel... I'd have my radio on underneath the covers, listening to it, and they played Dixieland. That was when I was about in the seventh grade—seventh and eighth grade. I would go to the junior high school library, and I borrowed a couple of books by jazz players. One of them was Mezz Mezzrow. They were talking about smoking marijuana and stuff, but they didn't say that. I couldn't figure out what they were talking about. But that's when I started listening to records, and reading probably a *Downbeat* magazine, or *Metronome*, or one of those ones that was out back there.

Kimery: How old were you then?

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Aebersold: I'd say 13. 14. 12-13-14.

Kimery: So at a young age, the curiosity was there for jazz.

Aebersold: I think so. Just because I was involved in music. My dad played the banjo. My mom played it. We didn't eat a meal but what my dad put a stack of '78 records on the changer. It wasn't jazz. Guy Lombardo, Wayne King, people like that. Sweet bands, I think you call them. But I heard all those standards.

Kimery: Besides playing it, music seemed to be a common thread within the family dynamic and the experience.

Aebersold: Yes, it really was. Not jazz. But music. Popular music of the day.

Kimery: Let's talk about the community here, which is an interesting one, because you're close to Louisville, but you're definitely a distance away, so it's not as easily accessible unless you have a driver's license...

Aebersold: Right.

Kimery: I'm not sure what public transportation was like at that time. But being a bigger city... You're really, to some degree, a little bit isolated here.

Aebersold: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

Kimery: So you've got to work twice as hard to be able to find those moments to develop your craft, or at least to find friends that had the same mind-frame.

Aebersold: Exactly.

Kimery: Was there a group of kids that you ended up running with that were also musically inclined?

Aebersold: Yes. Band gave me that opportunity to meet other people. I tried to get the band director...Actually, let me back up. In the sixth grade, when I started... I went to Silver Street School up here, and kind of joined the band. I think we met once a week. I thought it was really boring. I'd already played piano, so I could read, and I had played some banjo, and it just seemed like the stuff we were doing was very simple, because I'm sure there were a lot of beginners there. So the band director was spending part of his time on just getting the kids to finger and blow the right note. And I'd already started listening to jazz. I remember that. So I said, "Well, it must be next year when I'm a seventh-grader," down at the junior high school downtown, where you can ride your bike to school on a nice day, or ride the bus, and at lunchtime you can actually leave the building and go get a haircut if you want to, or go down to Woolworth's and eat lunch... As a matter of fact, the Woolworth's cafeteria in New Albany where I ate as a youngster was the first Woolworth cafeteria in America. I remember, for \$1.05, I could get fried chicken,

green beans, mashed potatoes, rolls and a Coke. That was a big deal.

Kimery: Can I ask you this. We're talking about American history. This is still part of the segregated United States.

Aebersold: Oh, yeah.

Kimery: Was that something that you were aware of at that time?

Aebersold: Just a little bit. Just a little bit, yeah. When I went down to the junior high school downtown, I thought that's where they were going to teach me everything about music. But I found out it was just kind of more like the sixth grade, only more people coming from the various elementary schools into the one junior high school. I didn't care much for that. That was seventh and eighth. Then I said, "Well, it must be when we get to high school that they're going to tell me theory and this-that-and-the-other." And I found out they were marching, and I really wasn't interested in marching at all.

Kimery: Concert band also?

Aebersold: They had a concert band, yes, which I played in. But the marching band, in the fall season there, they left the freshmen in the band room the last period of the day while the sophomores, juniors and seniors, who had uniforms, would go out and rehearse. They were going to play the football games and stuff. But the rest of us were just left in this room without any chaperone, so I just went on home, because I knew I had to work after school. That was my freshman year. Sophomore year, I didn't even sign up for band, because I just thought it was too boring.

By the junior year, we'd sort of made a little group called the Nighthawks, with trumpet and trombone, starting to play some sock-hops. We played down at the animal clubs, like the moose—the Elks and the Lions—on Saturday night, you know, for seven dollars. I've still got my books. I look at them. It's cute. \$5. \$7. So then, junior and senior, I joined the band again.

Kimery: With the Nighthawks, how did you get the repertoire? Was this all...

Aebersold: I would go over to Louisville on Saturday, and take my money that I earned from working in the florist, and buy these big band arrangements for dollar-and-a-quarter. I had stacks of them. Johnny Warrington, a lot of it. We'd play it with trumpet, trombone and a sax.

Kimery: Any of the Van Alexander stock arrangements maybe?

Aebersold: Probably. Probably. That name now rings a bell, but not back then. Johnny Warrington, I bought a lot of stuff... I'd just go over every week and buy one or two. I'd spend two dollars and fifty cents—because I'd earned four dollars for the week.

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Kimery: Oh, that's interesting. So you just took the parts. There wasn't any rearrangement?

Aebersold: No.

Kimery: Just you'd take that part, and you'd figure out...

Aebersold: It sounded pretty thin. Pretty thin. I've still got the bandstands, the old wooden kind with the thing on the top; it came like that and you could put a light on the top of it. I've still got them back in the back. It said "Nighthawks." Yup. They were real heavy, too.

Kimery: Was this your band?

Aebersold: Sort of. Because I got the jobs, and I paid the people and so forth. When I went to college, I said, "Ok, I'm not going to be the bandleader any more; I'm just going to do whatever is going on." So I don't think my freshman year of college I worked many jobs.

Kimery: Do you still recall some of the names of the musicians in the Nighthawks?

Aebersold: Oh, yeah. I've got a picture somewhere here of them. Butch Neal is one of my best friends, who's playing bass now—he played trumpet then. He played trumpet until a dentist hurt a nerve and that was the end of the vibrations. So he took up electric bass. This might have been 30 years ago. The piano player was Melvin Francis. He died here a couple of years ago. The bass player was Bill Pearl, and he had the 1956 chartreuse two-door Ford Fairlane that we thought was fantastic. He played bass. He's still alive. I don't know what happened to him, though. Another guy, a trumpet player, Larry Kinzer, he runs a t-shirt place around here. He's still alive. He doesn't play trumpet any more. So a couple of us ended up playing music. The drummer was Bruce Morrow from Louisville. He still plays. I'd say three or four of us out of that high school made music. Playing dances and stuff, you know.

Kimery: Were there any other areas within your academic pursuit in high school that interested you? Was music really the primary focus and everything else was really...

Aebersold: I liked to bowl. We bowled on Wednesday nights after school. No, there wasn't much else that really interested me.

Kimery: I know you're a fierce basketball player. Was basketball part of your life back then?

Aebersold: Just playing out in back of the florist. I got into it later, probably at age 30. I'm 74 now, so I've been playing ball a long time. As a matter of fact, I just had my cortisone shot right here, because somebody passed the ball to me last week and hit me right there, and just about killed me. And here's a jammed finger from last Monday, right there. It's still a little purple up here.

No, I love playing basketball. It reminds me a lot of jazz. Because you know what the goal is. The goal is to put the ball in the basket. But you don't know how it's going to get in there, or how your teammates are going to help you get the ball in, or how you're going to help

them. So it's improvising most all the time. Except a couple of times, there's ball-hogs, and you know what they're going to do. They're not going to pass the ball. They're going to run at and probably foul somebody. I'm joking, but it's the truth.

Kimery: I hear it's good to be on your team versus your...

Aebersold: I think it's better, yes. If somebody new comes along, especially if they're young, and I say, "Do you want to play?" They say, "Yes." I says, "Well, do you know how to take the ball out and pass it to me?" I like to shoot three-pointers. Because about 20 years ago, I really almost lost this eye. I got a finger, smashed my eyeball and stuff there, and my pupil was about that big for about ten years, and then we had what I call my miracle operation up in Cincinnati. He took the... As I understand it, the lens is held with all of these ondulas(?—19:24), and all of those were broken so the lens just kind of went clunk, and it stayed that way for about ten years. This guy brought it back up and sewed it...put a new one in, and sewed it in a couple of places.

Kimery: How long ago was this?

Aebersold: That was 11 years ago. But I got hit playing in June, or May... Really hard. A guy came in. It was a charge. He ran right into me and knocked me flat, and I think it loosened it, the two things that held it. About a month later, this eye...something happened to it. I couldn't see. It was strange. So I went back up to Cincinnati. A new doctor, but he was really excellent. He said, "Yes, it's broken, but I can fix it." So then I went up a month later and he sewed it back up, and now it's good.

Kimery: I was just thinking, because I know the LASIK surgery and that area there in the last ten years or so, has really been leaps and bounds.

Aebersold: He said they found out that the threads last about ten years, and mine lasted 11 years and 2 months. But I think getting hit started it to kind of loosen and fall down. So basketball, I love playing it, but, WHEW, boy, it's really done a number on my body.

Kimery: I look at some of the professional players... Of course, they play on a regular basis, but boy, your body...

Aebersold: I'm amazed how they get hit so hard, and they get up and they act like they didn't get hit. I don't know if they rehearse that or not.

Kimery: It's machismo. I get hit once, and I'm out. You might as well take off on a stretcher and out the door. Same thing with football, any contact sports...

Aebersold: We have a parking lot out back, but if you look at it carefully, it's a basketball court. We've played there for years. Then this fellow over at the Boys and Girls Club, who was my accountant at the time, he would come up and play and say, "Jamey, I need to get you a key so we can play in the winter months." So that's what we did. They've got a big sign up there that

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says “Jamey Aebersold Gymnasium” now. So if there’s ever... Like, when we play at the Boys and Girls Club, if there’s any disputes, I just point to the sign.

Kimery: Let’s go back to high school again. So your band teacher really didn’t provide much beyond...

Aebersold: He kept saying he was going to start a little jazz band, but he never did. So I started one, and then there was animosity between he and me. I think he even played with Paul Whiteman, and he’d been out on the road, and he thought that was not the way for young people to aspire to do. So I remember in my senior sitting over in the sax section, and he’s giving us a lecture. “If any of you want to be a music educator, I’ll help you get a scholarship to college,” dah-da-dah, “but if you want to be a professional musician,” dah-da-dah, and he looks right over at me, and he just says, “dah-da-dah-da-dah,” and I’m sitting there just thinking, “Wow, he’s looking right at me and talking to me—this is serious.” He was really upset with me.

Kimery: We’re jumping ahead here. But many years later, as he’s seen that you’ve been extremely successful, was he able to kind of swallow his pride there and acknowledge that...

Aebersold: Well, he died some years later, I think from a heart attack probably, and, I’ll be honest, for a long time I felt like I had caused his heart attack. I’m serious. There was something inside me. I felt like I had just bothered him, bugged him, irritated him, even though I was out of school for a long time afterward. I mentioned that in my Sunday School class one time, and a lady who was in the band, she sat next to me playing saxophone, she said, “Oh, Jamey, Mr. Myers had all kinds of physical problems; you didn’t cause it.” So it was a great relief that it was lifted off my head. I didn’t feel like I had caused my band director’s death. But it’s interesting how when you’re younger you think things differently than when you get older. [A. Fielder Myers, 1913-1963]

Kimery: That’s a heck of a burden to carry with you.

Aebersold: Yeah, it is.

Kimery: So high school itself, it sounds like there wasn’t a lot there that... I mean, besides the friendships and of course the educational foundation, which led you then to be an undergraduate at Indiana University.

Aebersold: Mmm-hmm.

Kimery: But was there any teacher in high school outside of music who was a point of inspiration. I think about myself; there was a math teacher that really helped me see things a lot differently. Not just for the subject itself, but just the passion she brought to it, and I recognized this years later.

Aebersold: Not really. Not that I can think of. I think at the end of each school day, I couldn’t wait to get out. I was pretty narrow-vision, I guess. Music—and that was about it. When you get to 16, you want to get some sort of a car, and at that stage I could go to Louisville. I found clubs

and things that had jazz. I don't remember... I was only 16, but I don't remember anybody ever asking me to leave. Which was interesting.

Kimery: Since you mentioned that... 16. What clubs, and who do you recall seeing there? Was there anybody who to this day was life-changing?

Aebersold: Yeah, I think there were... Well, not life-changing. No. But there were some people there that I'm sure I heard, but I didn't know who they were at that time. Because Fort Knox is like 50 miles down the road, and a lot of band people were there. Cannonball Adderley was there, and various other people. Stanley Turrentine was there. So they would come up to Louisville on the weekends. But I don't think I would go over on a regular basis. But there was this place called the Diamond Horseshoe, and there was one called the Tap Room, and there was another one called...I can't remember what it was. Several places where I would go over, like, 9:30, 10:30, 11, 12 at night, and listen to people play. Then I think when I went to college, I would still go to those places when I would come home. At one point, I got to the stage where I actually took my saxophone and maybe sat in on a tune. And by that time, the people who were playing, who were five-ten years older than me, they recognized me and knew who I was and so forth. I never thought much about the racial thing. Most of these places were black clubs. I can't tell you if there was any white people in there or not, come to think of it.

Kimery: But there was never any kind of challenge or animosity?

Aebersold: I don't think so. Not that I remember. Maybe it went right over my head because I was so involved in the music. When I was in high school, though... I was 15 years old. The bass player with this Fairlane Ford, he had heard about some lessons in jazz over in Louisville. I think it was 10 bucks probably for 10 lessons. He kept asking me, and I kept saying, "No," because I was just nervous.

But finally I relented, and we went over, and I remember standing there with my saxophone, and there were these guys who I later became good friends with, a drummer, a bass player and a piano player, and they asked me what I wanted to play for my little audition. I told them, "Oh, anything," because I'd been listening to records and thought I knew a lot. So he mentions a tune, and I didn't know it. Then he asked me, "Well, pick something you know." So again, I said, "Oh, anything." He picked another one; I didn't know it. About the third time, he got a little exasperated with me. So finally, I said, "Can we do 'Tenderly?'" Because on one of these stock big band arrangements, the alto sax—me—had the melody for the first 8 bars. So he said, "Yeah, that's fine." He gave me a big arpeggio, a lead-in chord, and I could tell it was the right key... Oh, he asked me before that, "What key are you in?" I said, "Well, it starts on my G." At that point, he gave me the big arpeggio, and I'm thinking, "How did he know what key that was?" So I worked my way through the melody with a lot of mistakes, and when we finished the one chorus, he said, "Ok, let me hear you improvise." I'm sure I was trembling at that stage, because I didn't know anything about improvising at all.

But I studied with those guys, and they got me listening to Charlie Parker and different

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people. Because they were Louisville beboppers at the time, making a living.

Kimery: Ok. Let's take a break.

[END OF JAMEY AEBERSOLD INTERVIEW, PART 1 OF 3]

Aebersold: This is actually the very first one, because there's no ad or anything on the back. No real cover. Just paper.

Kimery: Let me zoom in just a little bit here.

Aebersold: You tell me when we're going.

Kimery: Ok. We're going.

Aebersold: Yeah. This is the very first Play-A-Long record, which came out in 1967. No ad on the back. The drawing was done by my sister-in-law. Handwritten music, not done on Finale. Scales and exercises, a little blues, a little of this-that-and-the-other. Interesting. "A new approach to jazz improvisation."

Kimery: So '67 is really when commercially you started to...

Aebersold: Yes, '67.

Kimery: And how did you go about... Because we were talking about now the marketing approach is a little different. Was this when you went to camps you brought it along and sold it, and....

Aebersold: Sold them out of the trunk of the car, with an LP, so to speak.

Kimery: Oh, with an LP.

Aebersold: Yes. But I took it also to some music stores in Louisville, on consignment, and was so delighted when I'd go back a month or six weeks later, and they would have sold 2 or 3. And then I put an ad in *DownBeat*, a little-bitty classified.

Kimery: Recording-wise, where did you go? What studio? Or how did you go about recording?

Aebersold: We recorded it up at Bloomington, at a music store downtown, right next to the railroad tracks, because they had a grand piano. We had to stop once or twice because the train went through. Then we've re-recorded it several times since then, because recording standards got higher and so forth.

Kimery: So when somebody orders this, you don't send out the first recording of it? That's more of just out the hole and historical...

Aebersold: I've some over here.

Kimery: An historical document there.

Aebersold: Yeah. And a couple of people have put them on CDs for me and sent me copies of them.

Kimery: I noticed also that on a lot of the Play-A-Longs, the melody is not there.

Aebersold: Right. The melody is not there on any of them. I'm trying to force people to learn how to improvise.

Kimery: Well, I think that's fantastic. What happens is that... A lot of us will play with records, and of course, the melody and everything is already there, so you're trying to mimic what's there, which is not a bad thing. But now you have this incredible rhythm section that's laying the foundation there, plus, then, the duration of time that one piece is played from beginning to end gives the student the opportunity to do a lot of exploration, versus it being very short and truncated. It's hard to develop those ideas in a very short amount of time. So that was also part of the mindset when you were...

Aebersold: It sure was. Yeah, you've got me copied exactly. Yes. As a matter of fact, and I've probably still got it somewhere here, a Music Minus One record with Clark Terry and a rhythm section. We played the melody, he'd solo a chorus or two, then he'd stop and you solo a chorus or two. I bought that record. I was thinking, "boy, I wish he'd stop playing; I've got Clark Terry on records; I don't need to hear him play." Just give me 4 or 5 minutes of just the rhythm section. That's why I did what I did.

And after I did the first one, I stopped by in New York City on my way to Connecticut one time, when I was doing the big band camp, and talked to Irv Kratka, who is still alive, and running Music Minus One—hundreds of Music Minus One records. We sell them, he sells our stuff. I remember walking back in the crowded upstairs thing there, his warehouse or whatever, and introducing myself and saying, "I have this new Play-A-Long record called *A New Approach To Jazz Improvisation*; would you like to sell it?" He said, "Yeah," and... I probably misunderstood him. But he said something, I think, about 10%. I was just thinking 10% wasn't very much, so I just kind of left and forgot about having anybody else do it. Because I really hadn't thought about advertising and promoting this at all. Actually, I thought if it was a good idea, Berklee School of Music, who had started publishing some things, big band arrangements, would pick it up. But they never did.

So X amount of years later, I came out with Volume 2, and then Volume 3, and then Volume 4 and 5. By the time I got up nine years later, to 1976, that's when Charlie Parker came along, and Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, Woody Shaw, David Baker—then we started taking off.

Kimery: There you've got Volume 6 with Charlie Parker, and then Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins and Woody Shaw.

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Aebersold: Incidentally, the Volume 1, the Volume 3, the Volume 6... Volume 14—Benny Golson. Volume 17—Horace Silver. Volume 18—Horace Silver. We, as of the last year or two...we have slowed those records down, those Play-A-Longs, and now they have two CDs—slower tempos and original tempos. Because jazz education has moved through the years down and down age-wise, so you've got 10-, 11- and 12-, 13-year-old people trying to play Volume 1, our Charlie Parker tunes, our Horace Silver tunes. So we've been able to digitally have Gene Perla, the bass player, up in Easton, Pennsylvania, with his program that he's got... It's fantastic. He can slow them down. And the cymbals sound great, the bass sounds great, the piano sounds great.

Kimery: And was it pitch control...not pitch control...

Aebersold: Yeah, basically. But some of them are really slowed down. If you have, like, my CD player here, which goes up or down a whole step, but as you go up, it speeds up, and as you go down, it slows down. As you go up, it kind of sounds weird, and as you go down, it sounds weird. But his program doesn't allow for any of that. Everything still sounds authentic, but slower tempos.

Kimery: Let me ask you this. I was just looking at the musicians. Come Volume 6, Charlie Parker, you've got Kenny Barron, Ron Carter and Ben Riley.

Aebersold: Yeah.

Kimery: Nothing to take away from leading up to that, incredible musicianship, but now you've got, especially Ron and Ben, these guys who really are...Kenny Barron, too... I'm trying to figure out what year this was done.

Aebersold: '76.

Kimery: '76. So Kenny was getting critical acclaim, but he wasn't Ron (with Miles) and of course Ben Riley...these guys were already very much well-known...

Aebersold: They were all really nice to work with in the studio. This was new for them, too.

Kimery: How did it come about with these guys? They were also in the education world themselves, is that what...

Aebersold: Yeah, they were, at that time. But I just thought they were great musicians, and I just called them and asked them if they'd do it, and they said, "Yes." I think they'd been playing together maybe a little bit, too. So they came in... You don't have to rehearse, you know. They may have said, "Jamey, how are we going to know when to stop." I said, "Well, I'm going to talk on the mic here, which is not going to go on the tape, and I'll just tell you, 'Let's play one more chorus.'" So we'd make sure we knew how to start and how to end. Some of them, I would sing along with. On that Charlie Parker, as a matter of fact, I played my saxophone in a separate studio. But most of the others, I didn't. Sometimes I would scat-sing, because they wanted to hear something to comp against.

Kimery: But it wouldn't necessarily make it on the final track there.

Aebersold: No, no.

Kimery: It was just a scratch track, or at least they were going to...

Aebersold: Right. On the Woody Shaw, Volume 9 there, that you're looking at, we recorded it here in the basement. He was over in one little room here, with headphones on, and he was soloing. I've actually got that on the half-inch tape back in the back, and some day I need to send it off to somebody and have them bake it, just to hear what he played while they were comping.

Kimery: The lineup... One of those things, too, as a musician, being able to hear these guys perform or play together, even if they're laying just a foundation for you as a learning tool... That chemistry, the playing, it's something that... It's inspiring.

Aebersold: Yes, it is.

Kimery: It's quite inspiring, and to see that really... You mix it up so much with so many different players there. I've never run across any of them where I said, "Well, that didn't quite work." Because you can tell there's like these all-star bands that are put together that are...at least on paper it looks great, but when it comes time to sit down and actually have them play...

Aebersold: I think I probably gave a lot of thought to who would play these songs well. Who is familiar with this person's music? I remember once in the studio, up in New York here... It's probably Volume 17 and 18, the Horace Silver. We probably did those in one day. We did about 20 tunes or so. I remember the guy running the tape, Tony May was his name... I don't know if he's still alive or not. Anyhow, he said, "Jamey, have you ever thought about producing?" I said, "What do you mean?" "You know, producing, like you're doing here—running the session and so forth." I said, "Oh, no-no-no, that's not anything I want to do." But he could see how quickly we did things, and again, how my ears could hear things, and I would mention something to somebody.

I remember once doing the Cedar Walton, Volume 35. We did all of his tunes; they were all his songs. But at one point, on I think it was "Ojos De Rojo," he was doing this little thing, [SINGS A CLAVE SECTION], then you go down a whole step, and then the next one. Well, at one point, on chorus 3 or 4, his hands hit the wrong key, and I'm in the studio and I'm going, "Wow, what happened there?" I'm expecting them to stop, but they didn't stop. After 8 bars, they just kept going. As soon as they finished, I walk out and I just got up to the piano bench, and he turns around, Cedar does, and he says, "You can fix that, can't you?" I said, "Yeah, we'll fix it." I didn't know how. Nowadays it would be very easy to fix with the computer. So I went home and I practiced on the piano that 8 bars, [SINGS SECTION], and we started the master tape in here... We'd recorded it in New York, and we rehearsed it a couple of times. I did it one time; I got it right. WHEW! But if you listen, you can tell. The timbre of the piano is just a little

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bit different for that 8 bars. But I never will forget him saying... Because he knew what had happened after it happened. He said, "You can fix that, can't you?"

Kimery: For example, with that one, because you're focusing on the artist, and he's playing his music, Cedar Walton: Did he come to you or did you go to him?

Aebersold: No, I went to him. As a matter of fact, they had played an engagement for a week or two before that, and we set this recording up at the end of it so Ron and the drummer would be familiar with the music. Who was it, Billy Higgins?

Kimery: It was Billy Higgins. I mean...

Aebersold: We did a... I got this school program out in Phoenix, Arizona. Todd Coolman, James Williams and Billy Higgins. We played a week. Each day we'd go to two or three schools. It was about Thursday of the week when it dawned on me that Billy was using school drums everywhere we went, but yet he always sounded the same. Then I realized he had brought his own snare and his cymbals, and when he'd get there, he'd tune everything up the way he wanted it to sound. That taught me a lesson, that drummers feel more comfortable playing with the drums that are tuned the way they like them tuned. And if you have the knowledge to do it, you just do it. You don't complain about the equipment.

Kimery: No. It can be even that much more of a reality now, when you're going on the road, the expense... If you're flying. If you're driving, different story. But the expense, and they're throwing something at you, and you've just got to figure out how to make music out of it.

Aebersold: Yeah. Exactly.

Kimery: It will throw you off a little bit, but you've got to tune it and do other things. So, some of the other musicians... Being a drummer myself, and I've always loved his playing, and he was on quite a few of the Play-A-Longs... Bill Goodwin.

Aebersold: Yes. He made several of them while he was with the Phil Woods group. They came here a couple of times.

Kimery: Did you find part of it... When they were in town for gigs, you found an opportunity?

Aebersold: Yes.

Kimery: So was there a lot of pre-thought prior, that you knew they were coming to town, so you said "Ok, this is an opportunity; this is what we're going to do..."

Aebersold: Yes. It finally got to the point where sometimes they would call me. "Jamey, we're going to be in Indianapolis" or "We're going to be in Cincinnati—you got a Play-A-Long you want to do?" Sometimes we'd do that. I'd say, "Well, yeah, let me think." Maybe a month or two in advance, and I'd get the rights to some standards or whatever. We'd do it that way. Yeah, we kind of worked together.

Kimery: So you really find yourself not only as an educator, but you're now feet-first into this business side of it trying to figure out... Like you said, you're talking about rights. These are things that you were going through the process of discovering.

Aebersold: Yes. Signing contracts and so forth.

Kimery: It can be one of those things that, if not discovered in advance, as you're looking to then make it commercially available, become a real big problem there.

Aebersold: Yes.

Kimery: So were there any bumps along the way?

Aebersold: Oh yeah. Bumps. A lot of bumps. But you just work across them. Right now, we're getting ready to do a Chick Corea Play-A-Long. We finally got the rights to some of the tunes. We've been asking for several years to get the rights. Finally, we're doing that. I've got other projects here that I'd love to do, but you can only do so much at a time.

The slowing some of these down has been the best thing in a long time, I think.

Kimery: That's just within the last five years?

Aebersold: The last three years probably. Maybe four. Time's flying.

Kimery: As we talked during lunch about technology, it's our friend, and it's sometimes our...I won't say enemy, but it challenges us because there's this expectation that now we can do a zillion things at once.

Aebersold: Sure.

Kimery: But the technology itself has also allowed us to do things that we never could imagine.

Aebersold: Let me mention something else, too. We've got a DVD, the one DVD that we made. A guy invited me years ago, in '92 maybe... I've lost track of time. But Wilson Curia, a piano player from Sao Paolo, asked me to come down and do ten days of clinics and stuff. He said, "While you're here, the people who are going to pay for your transportation would like to do DVD, a video." I said, "Well, I've never done that before." He said, "Well, they'd like for you to do it." I said, "What if I don't like the video?" He said, "Well, they'll pay you anyway, and pay for your transportation." I said, "Ok, fine." So we did it. It was short snippets, like 3 to 5 minutes apiece. He'd start and stop. Had a camera up above me. I'm at the piano. And everybody's speaking Portuguese except my friend. Someone would say, "uno, dos, tres, quatro," and that meant "start." So I'd start talking. I had little 3"-by-5" cards.

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It's one of the best things I ever did. They spliced it together. No help from me. I guess my piano player friend, Wilson Curia, helped them put it together. We sold a lot of them, and it's been very, very helpful. I've had people write me an email and say, "Jamey, I spend time with you every day at lunch. I put the video in and I'm eating lunch with you. It's so nice, because if I don't understand something, I can back it up and play it again, play it again." But it's been very, very helpful, that DVD. It's called *Anyone Can Improvise*.

Kimery: If we may somewhat shift gears here, but this is looking at the origins and the history of the Jamey Aebersold Summer Camp. At that time, there was the Stan Kenton.

Aebersold: Stan Kenton, and it was also called the National Stage Band Camps. That's Ken Morris, the fellow I showed you a picture of.

Kimery: Can you talk about Ken a little bit more?

Aebersold: Oh, yeah. Ken was a drummer, but I think kind of a society band drummer, and he also worked as a manager of the kitchen, a restaurant, at a country club up in South Bend. He's from South Bend, Indiana. Like I told you, he liked to gamble. We'd go to Vegas all the time. Well, he started this probably in...I want to guess in 1959 or 1960, this big band camp—and he may have started it at Indiana University. He had teachers, but it was all big band. By 1965, he for some reason asked me... I think I'd been hanging around, and in prior years I'd go up and spend a day or so there. He asked me if I'd like to teach and do sax sectionals, two in the morning, two in the afternoon, an hour apiece. I said, "Oh, boy, yeah, let me get up there with all those famous people." Then he actually took me to other places, like Utah; Seattle; Storrs, Connecticut; William Patterson; Rochester, New York—wherever he had camps. Miami. Different places. I ended up going.

Along the way, I realized there was a need for these students who were playing in the band to learn more about small group playing and improvisation. So after supper, I would put a note up saying, "Jazz clinics, 6 to 7," and kids would come in, and whatever adults were interested would come. I'd play records for them. Then I would say, "Well, how about... We've got some really good kids this week. Why don't we have a combo after supper?" I'd run the combo. That led, over a couple of years, to me, in about 1970 or 1971, asking Ken Morris, "Ken, why don't we have a combo camp, where everybody who comes, regardless of age or ability is playing in a combo, and on Friday everybody gets to take a solo. Not just several people standing up on the big band and then the week is over—everybody else is playing their part.

Well, after about a year or two, he decided to do it, and I think we started in either '72 or '73. Then after a couple of years, he cancelled the big band camps and did just combo camps, and our thing grew and grew. One year, way back there, we did 7 combo weeks in the summertime. We'd been to London, Scotland, Germany, Denmark, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, 7 or 8 countries, basically doing the same thing. And here in the States, we've been doing it ever since about '72, in different venues, and for the last 10 to 12 years, we've been over at the University of Louisville the first two weeks of July, which is sort of set in concrete.

Kimery: Where did it... Prior to it actually being here in Louisville, it really jumped around,

state-wise...

Aebersold: Yeah. We started out over in Illinois. We started at University of Illinois at Champaign. It was interesting, that first year we did a big band camp, and then the big band faculty wished us luck, and they all left, and here we've got Saturday to design our day, which starts on Monday morning. Sunday, auditions, concert; Monday morning we start work [(?)we don't have(?)—18:53]. I don't know who said it, but they said, "Well, we need to have theory." I was thinking of theory like in college, which was really boring. So I remember saying, "Oh, I don't want to have theory—no-no-no." But they talked me into it. So I took the beginning theory, Dan Hurley took the intermediate, and David Baker took the advanced. We had everybody take a little theory test, and put them in the class. Then, as soon as I did my first theory class, I said, "Man, we need more theory—we really do." And now we've got five theory classes.

But that got us started. And at that particular camp, I'm pretty sure that was the camp that Pat Metheny came to, Lyle Mays on piano and Steve Rodby on bass. They met for the first time, and after that they got together and formed the Pat Metheny Group.

Kimery: They were students at the time?

Aebersold: They were students at the camp.

Kimery: That's before... Because I know Lyle Mays went to North Texas.

Aebersold: Yeah, right. That was probably after they came to the camp, I suspect. I can't remember. But also, Bill Evans, the saxophone player that played Miles—he was from Chicago, and he came to the camp. I remember telling him... He wanted to get together a private lessons. So we put it off until the very last day, because I was busy. Then he came into the room, there were a bunch of people in there... I said, "Ok, I'm going to play piano; what do you want to play?" I think he said he wanted to play "I Can't Get Started." He started playing, and he played a chorus or two, and I stopped and I said, "Bill, you just need to learn your scales and your arpeggios; you're just flying by the seat of your pants; it's not making any sense at all." Well, I don't know if he listened to my advice or somebody else, but anyhow, he learned his scales and his chords. I remember telling him that at the camp. Of course, I wasn't hesitant to say it, because he was like a high school student. "This is what you need to do for beginners—just get started here."

So then, the combo camps branched out, and, like I said, one summer we did seven different weeks around the country and the world...

Kimery: Around the world. I want to talk about that. Because Hans Gruber in Germany...

Aebersold: Yes.

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Kimery: It's one thing to do them here in this country.

Aebersold: Mmm-hmm.

Kimery: It's another thing when you take it and export it somewhere else. Of course, you need somebody that has the contacts, that has the bases to be able to have them. So there are some key people there who it seems like they were critical in helping this happen. There was Hans Gruber in Germany. There was Greg Quigley in Australia?

Aebersold: Mmm-hmm.

Kimery: Charles Alexander in England?

Aebersold: Charles Alexander. Yeah.

Kimery: Had you worked with them prior to this?

Aebersold: No. How that started was, Hans Gruber started...

[RECEIVES PHONE CALL]

[END OF TRACK 2]

Aebersold: Hans Gruber brought me and David over. Actually, he came over here by himself. He had a music store in Rothenburg, Germany, classical mainly. He played trombone, and wanted to learn how to play jazz. He and his wife came over; they wanted to visit. I remember, I met him at the airport and brought him over here, and he slept for a day upstairs. The jet-lag really got him. So anyhow, the next year, he had me and David come over. Or it might have been just me and Sara by ourselves. I traveled around to Cologne and different places, and did things.

The next year... I had met Charles Alexander at the Kansas City IAJE. Charles wanted us to come over; wanted to do a camp. I said, "Well, let me come over first." So me and David came over, and we did it for Charles, and then we went over to Germany and did a thing for Hans. Then the next year, we started the camps. Charles and Hans helped with the transportation; they split it and so forth. We did a camp in England, did one in Germany. The I think the next year we got a little bit bigger faculty. We did England, Germany, and then went up to Denmark. Then at one point, we went Germany, Denmark, Scotland... I don't think we came back to London. We probably did three weeks in a row. A lot of different people. Flying and on buses. That got them going, and they're still going, just like I am, selling the stuff out of their house or their basement and so forth. And it got jazz education going in their countries, their respective countries. But they were also distributing stuff. So it was just kind of like me in the United States, and going to the world; they were going to their countries and other countries nearby. Jazz education started to flourish.

Kimery: With Germany, what year are we talking about?

Aebersold: That's going to be early '80s. I think the first time I went to Germany was about '83 or '84.

Kimery: I was just trying to think. Having lived there, there was... I was there 1971 to 1981, and during that period of time they had expatriates living there, and they had a lot of music and artists coming through, but their own jazz education was very limited. So by the end of my time there, it definitely had started to change in a major way.

Aebersold: When did you leave?

Kimery: 1981.

Aebersold: I think we went to London for week-long camps for about 21 or 22 years, with a little interruption in there in the middle. We stopped in...2008 was our last one. That's the economic crunch, and things hit the bottom. But over here, we're still going. 2008 was our last big involvement for our two weeks of camps, approximately \$395 each week. So you're talking about almost 800 people, plus the staff and the faculty. So 900 people for the two weeks. Then attendance went down—both the economic crunch... The bottom was hit in 2012, when we had about 250 people each week. Then this year, 2013, it came up to about 300 people each week. So I'm hoping 2014 will be more prosperous, and we can involve more people.

Incidentally, speaking of the camps, it used to be all teenagers. Not any more. Over half are over 21 years old; 21 or older. The demographics have changed.

Kimery: Lida(?—3:18) said something to me that I find to be very impressive and I think unique to the Aebersold camp, that you don't have any pre-defined qualifiers within the participants' ability. They can come in and have a very minimal facility on their instrument, and still be welcomed and find themselves in a very nurturing and learning environment.

Aebersold: I think the faculty has become more and more nurturing. We always say, "all abilities and all ages, welcome." Ages about 12 to 83, probably. We have some people who have come 20 years in a row. Yup, 20 years in a row, and they make it part of their vacation. A lot of people work, of course, and they will call us in the fall of the year wanting to know what are the dates of the camp next year, because they want to take their vacation then.

Kimery: A lot of it comes down to faculty, which faculties are critical at getting them to...I can't think of a better term...but drink the Kool-Aid... You are coming in and you are providing that welcoming and non-threatening environment to those coming in so that they will have a very successful and productive. Now, not all of us...or probably a majority of us walking into an environment like that who are seasoned professional would have a difficulty to make that transition. First thing, do you seek out those musicians that have the capacity to be able to do that, or is it a nurturing process that you go through with your teachers also in helping them develop this skill?

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Aebersold: I think personally... I've never thought much about this. But I think I've personally helped a lot of people become much better educators than when they started with me, say, 15 years ago or 20 years ago. Much more patient. They realize that these people are probably not going to become professionals. So back off. Don't expect so much from them. Help them out? This-that-and-the-other. I've let some people go because their personalities clashed with my objectives, which is, like you said, to welcome everybody, no matter what level they're at. We've advertised "all levels, all abilities, all ages." All right. That means we're going to go with it. That doesn't mean that I am going to give so-and-so teacher the lowest group, because I know they'll be frustrated. They don't know how to work with that age group. I'll move them up here, to the middle, or move them to the top, or wherever they fit best. And if they don't fit, then I use somebody else. But I'm very conscious of that. The last thing I want is somebody to go home and tell their mother they had an awful experience, or to leave on Wednesday, period, without even telling me they're leaving because they're so frustrated. And it does happen. You're dealing with a whole lot of people, a lot of different personalities.

But I got a beautiful email from a father in Louisville. His son played alto. I forget how old; maybe 15-16 years old. The boy was a little hesitant about coming to camp last year. The parents didn't know on Sunday if he was actually going to get out of the house and go over for the audition and so forth. He did the audition and so forth. Monday came around, he was still a little hesitant. But he said that Jamey, at 10 o'clock, when I meet with most all of them on Monday, gave a very inspiring talk, and the boy suddenly dropped all of his inhibitions and so forth, and decided to dig in. By the time he got to Friday and played the concert, he was ready to come back next year. Had a great time. When I read that email, I said, "Hallelujah." This is what I'm interested in. We also say it can be a life-changing experience for you. And that happened for that boy. It happened for him. It also happens for other people, too. People think they can't improvise. I always tell people, "it's one of the scariest topics in the world." A jazz clinic, Jamey Aebersold, or jazz clinic, Joe Blow. Jazz clinic. "WHEW, I'll not take my horn." "Bring your horn." "Oh, forget it; I'm not going." "Bring your horn. But you don't have to; horns are optional." "Oh, good. I'll leave my horn at home and I'll sit in the back room. I'm not going to be embarrassed. But yet I'm still curious about this."

Oh, I can tell when I do my two-day workshops, which I do the first Saturday and Sunday... Last year, we had 100 people. The ones sitting in the front row, they're ready to go. They've got their horn, they're ready to go, they're not afraid, they're not embarrassed. And you look back in the back, and there's the people, it can be any age, and they're sitting back there with this big question mark in their mind: "What is this going to be like? Am I going to be embarrassed?" Etcetera etc., etc. We try to make them relax and just dive in, and start giving information. We have an awful lot of returns. Wow. Last year I'll bet we had 50 people who had been here before. Or 60 maybe. Why count? 2-4-6-8-10. 2-4-6-8-10. Wow! "Have you all really been here before?" "Yeah." "How many of you have been here 8 years or more?" Then you get X amount of people. "Anybody been here 20?" A couple of people raise their hand. The new people are looking around. They can't believe that people are coming this many times.

It can be a life-changing experience for you if you really want to learn how to play the music. Like one of our teachers has said to students, "You need to come three years in a row; after that third year, you'll be set and you'll know exactly what you need to do. You can come

again, but you need to get three years under your belt to really grasp what's going on here, and to get it inside your mind, how to organize and how to practice and get the most out of your time."

Kimery: It sounds like the audition for teachers is not necessarily just the one camp. They come and they show a capacity to be able to do this, but they might not have the full ability. You see that "there's a talent here, let's go ahead and nurture it" also with your teachers as you do with the students...

Aebersold: Yes.

Kimery: ...because you can see that they'll eventually be able to have success in an environment like this.

Aebersold: Exactly. Yeah.

Kimery: Are there any particular teachers along the way, any of your colleagues that you'd like to single out? During lunch, we talked about Joe Henderson, that Joe was part of one of the camps at one point, and as you had stated, it was probably not the most successful environment for him maybe.

Aebersold: It could be. But he just couldn't bring himself to say... I think he felt like he would embarrass the student by making constructive comments, which is what I hired him to do. I still remember with Joe... He was just the greatest guy in the world, and the greatest player. We were at the camp, and on the second day one of the boys in the top group... Which is what we gave Joe that year. He came to me and said, "Mr. Aebersold, can I ask you a question?" I said, "Sure." He said, "Is it ok if I move to another combo?" I said, "Whose combo are you in?" He said, "Joe Henderson." I said, "Oh. Well, why would you want to move?" He said, "Well, he's not giving any comments." I said, "Well, what is he doing?" He said, "Well, he just asked us what we want to play, and we'll play it, and then when that's over, he'll say, 'Fine, what are we going to do next?'" I said, "He's not making any comments?" So I went and talked to Joe, but I don't think I got through to him. I think it was just not his nature. So at that point, I realized, ok, we've had Joe for a couple of years; I need to get somebody else. It's just not his environment.

He actually called me the next year. It was interesting. He really wanted to do it. I don't know if he lowered his pay or not. He said, "And the kids can have their cassette recorders set up at the front of the stage." Her didn't like them recording the things. That's back when people bootlegged stuff, and he was afraid a record would come out.

But I think a majority of the people know how I think, the faculty, and most of them are that way. They're great teachers, got a lot of information. Sometimes they've got too much information. In other words, they give out too much information, and the students don't get to play enough in combo. I'm always looking for that balance. Tell them a little something, try it out, listen and see if you hear them doing it, and if not, explain it a different way, try it again. Because you've only got five days.

Kimery: You've got to get them activated and going...

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Aebersold: Activated and get them moving.

Kimery: I was looking at this coming camp's roster, on your faculty. What an impressive and very robust and large faculty there.

Aebersold: Yeah.

Kimery: That takes a lot of pre-thought and coordination and scheduling. Is that something that falls in your lap to do all of that?

Aebersold: Yeah, it sure does with the faculty. Yes. I just emailed them yesterday, as a matter of fact. Hadn't written to them in a while. One of our faculty members is having hip surgery, and he's kind of been out of commission for a couple of years, and none of us have heard from him—Steve Erquiaga. So I called him and he wasn't there, and I left a message, and he emailed me back. He said, "It's been a horrible two years," but he misses the camps and the people. So I sent that on to the faculty, along with, "Well, this year we're not going to be able to eat at the Louisville Grill for lunch, our meals, because they won't allow us to have jazz at lunchtime." Don't ask me why. They didn't really say. So we're going to probably have to go back to the place we had last year, which some of them weren't too happy... They liked this other place because they had more variety. So last year, we went to this place, which was real close. So I said, "I think we're going to have to go back to the University Club." I forget now why I mentioned that. Why did you say that? Oh, just keeping the faculty and doing that stuff.

But also, as far as administration of the applications and tuition and taking in the money, Jason Lindsay, who has worked for me for a long time, does that. He is the camp administrator. He's in his thirties. He does a fantastic job. He loves doing it. He's got a staff of...last year he had 13; this year we'll probably have 12 or 13. Usually college or just-out-of-college people, all musicians, and they help. I don't think you're going to find anybody who comes to our camp walking away saying, "Boy, they didn't treat me right" or "I kept asking a question and never got an answer." You're not going to hear that at our camp.

Kimery: Let me ask this also. I've seen this over the years, and actually there are some in the Washington, D.C. area, too, that... There now seem to be a lot more jazz camps out there.

Aebersold: Mmm-hmm.

Kimery: Which is a testament to what you have done over the many years, and the success of... Those camps are definitely an outgrowth of that. Have you found that, first, of course it's a compliment, but also a point of maybe economic challenge, too?

Aebersold: It's an economic challenge. But I also realize that those camps are nothing like our camps. Nothing at all. We say "for the serious musician." I think those camps often feel like... The people running those camps at the college level, I think they often feel like our camp would be over the heads of their students. They don't realize that's not the case. But they just kind of think that. We're back to that ear-training thing that we talked about some time ago. I think your

average band director does not have real good ears. They can't hear harmony, they can't hear melody, they can't hear a lot of things because they weren't taught it in school and they haven't sought it on their own, like so many jazz musicians have done. So consequently, when they hear their students play and when they solo, they assume that that student would get lost at our camp, because our camp is way up here. But that's not the case at all. Like you said earlier, we take... We have some people who come to our camp, honestly, they would probably have better spent their money by staying home and taking private lessons for a year. But it's over. They're there at the camp. You can't tell them that. You're not going to refund their money and tell them to go home. But they think they want to be there. So we work with them at whatever level they're at.

We used to have three theory classes—beginning (me), intermediate (Dan Hurley), David Baker-Advanced. We found out right away that people in my class are not beginners. Some of them are below beginner. So what do we do with them? Somebody says, “How about if I take...” Who are they? Well, they tend to be drummers and guitar players. “Let me take them over in the piano lab.” “What are you going to do over there?” “Let me just teach them some 2- and 3-note voicings on the blues, and get their right hand going on the blues scale or whatever, and let's just teach them some theory about music.” Ok?

Because they're going to get the guitar in their master class, and they're going to get drums in their master class, and they're going to play in combos. We've been doing that. Then, what do we do with people who have been in David Baker's advanced class 3 or 4 years? Pat Harbison says, “Let me take David's concepts, and we'll have it in an advanced-advanced class over here.” Good. Now we have five... We feel like we're covering just about all the bases.

“Jamey, I've got somebody in your class, and he's just really struggling. It's an older guy. He doesn't understand the chromatic scale or whole and half steps and so forth. How about if I take him in theory class on Monday and Tuesday and work with him privately?” I said, “Hallelujah. You got it.” On Wednesday, he comes back into my class—straight-ahead. So we're really trying to individualize things as best as we possibly can.

Kimery: So those moments of discovery don't actually happen until they're at the camp and you...

Aebersold: Right. Oftentimes, it happens on the first day.

Kimery: Wow. So there's that light-afoot, or quickness in being able to turn around and identify it, and then make them part of...not alienate them, but help them...

Aebersold: Find a place for them. Make a place. Improvise.

Kimery: That's fantastic.

Aebersold: Yeah. I tell them on the first night, I say, “Look, when you go to theory tomorrow, if you get in there and you're in there for 30 or 35 minutes, and you feel like you're anticipating

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what the teacher is talking about, you're in the wrong class. So raise your hand and say, 'Pardon me. Can I move up a class?' They'll tell you which class to go to."

Or, after the first session, if somebody walks up to me and says, "Mr. Aebersold, I am lost." I'll say, "Ok. Tell you what. You see me at lunchtime, and I'm going to get you with David Cain. You remember that name, David Cain. You come to me at lunch, no matter what I'm doing, and I'm going to have him get together with you tomorrow morning in theory, or maybe tonight after supper, and we'll get you straight and on the track."

Kimery: That's fantastic.

Aebersold: Yeah. We really try to individualize it. And the guys, they don't mind doing that at all. They love it.

Kimery: I noticed some of the... This was a little bit of research here. Some of the notable attendees who came out of your camp, one of whom is teaching there now...

Aebersold: Yeah.

Kimery: But you've got Chris Potter...

Aebersold: Uh-huh.

Kimery: ...and Dave Stryker and Scott Wendholt.

Aebersold: Yes.

Kimery: You mentioned, of course, Pat Metheny, Lyle Mays...

Aebersold: Steve Rodby. Mulgrew Miller. James Williams. Chris Botti. And a couple of more. There's a list of about 20 who have come to the camp at one time or another, probably one time, but it helped them make... As a matter of fact, I've thought about this often. Somebody comes to the camp and they're really talented in jazz, and they're 16, 17 and 18 years old. Come one year. They meet Rufus Reid, they meet Dan Hurley, they meet Ed Soph, they meet all these other people who are musicians and educators, and they were going to go to this college, but after coming to our camp they go to this college, and end up, like Scott Wendholt or James, doing this and doing that, and jazz becomes their life. Had they not come to the camp and met these people, it would either have been a whole lot harder or they wouldn't have done it at all. They go to New York, and James Williams or Scott or Rufus Reid comes up, "Hey, I saw you at the camp (two years ago or three years ago). What are you doing?" Well, I just moved here, and I'm trying to get in..." "Oh. Are you in a rehearsal band or anything? Here, let me give you somebody's name." It's a great environment for pursuing whatever it is you want to do if it has to do with music or jazz."

Kimery: I think Lida had mentioned also... Once again, back to the fact that this is such a nurturing environment, as you mentioned. A tenor player, a reed player, this attorney who knew

3 notes on the saxophone, and is just a continued participant or a summer attendee because he...even though he had limited ability, the experience was so refreshing and so nurturing that he just found this is something that he's got to do on a yearly basis.

Aebersold: Mmm-hmm.

Kimery: But the whole notion of somebody coming in from a different profession, but he has a limited capacity on his instrument, and that has developed a lifelong friendship.

Aebersold: Yeah.

Kimery: So it's also, I see, not just about the music, but it's about a community.

Aebersold: Oh, yeah. There's a fellow that... A French sky-diver. French sky-diver. He came to the camp probably 5 or 6 years ago. Played the flute. His English wasn't very good. He was a national French sky-diver several years in a row. He lives out in the middle of nowhere. He doesn't have the internet or anything. No phone.

He came to the camp, and it was kind of difficult to get going, because he was frustrated. He came to my two-day workshop, and he stayed for a week. He wanted answers to questions, but he couldn't ask the question in a manner that I could answer right off the bat. So he got a little frustrated. Anyhow, when he got through, he wrote me a letter after he was back home. He said, "Jamey, when I came to the camp, I had 6 (or maybe 10) things that I wanted answers to, and if I didn't get the answers, then I was going to stop playing jazz—that was it." Which I thought was kind of interesting. Anyhow, he said: "I had all my answers..." Let's say he had 10 questions. "I had all 9 of them until Friday, and I was trying to figure out how could I get that last question answered." He said, "After I played my concert with my group, I asked somebody something, and they gave me the answer." One of the faculty. He said, "I can't tell you how good I felt, completing my list..." (this is just something that he devised) "...and then going home and practicing" and so forth. He was thanking me for that. I just saw a letter from him somewhere here, two days ago. I took a stack of stuff this high. It's over there. I'm going to sit down and go through it. Then I saw his name, the sky-diver. He was probably 65-70 years old.

Incidentally, last year, guess how many countries were represented over the two weeks. 22 countries. I think there was about 60... There's a map back there. Can you see that colored map on the floor?

Kimery: I do.

Aebersold: That tells you how many students from each state. The majority were from Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Kentucky, Virginia... Yeah. Right there. Nobody out west. The Dakotas, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana—nobody from there. I was really surprised. California was big—26. Florida was 26. New York was about 17, I think. But it was interesting, where they come from. Texas was pretty good—maybe 20.

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Kimery: International also?

Aebersold: International. 22 countries. That's probably the most we've ever had.

Kimery: With that... I assume they're coming, they already have some command of the English language, so you don't have to get over that hurdle, or they don't have to get over that hurdle...

Aebersold: They don't have to get what?

Kimery: The hurdle of this basic communication, besides the music communications...

Aebersold: Well, sometimes, yes. Yes.

Kimery: So that becomes an interesting point of negotiation, how to... We know music and jazz itself, there's a common language there. But there's still some of that...especially theory you're talking about... So how is...

Aebersold: I think it's hard for some of them. And it can really slow a combo down. Because somebody's not understanding what you're saying... Although like you say, you can demonstrate it musically, and sometimes you can then move on. But theory class can be a problem. We give everybody one of these books, incidentally. It's free. *Jazz Handbook*. And it goes all over the world. We give out hundreds every month. It's a compilation of a lot of different things. But we give them this book before they come to the camp. So there's theory pages in there, there's piano pages, there's a lot of stuff. This is one of the best things on the planet for music in general. This is like a graduate course. If you can do everything in here, you're on your way.

But it's kind of like what Albert Einstein says, too: "Imagination is more important than knowledge." So if you learn everything in here and you can recite it, what good is it unless you use your imagination? That's where jazz comes along and gives you an opportunity to use it.

Kimery: Let's once again shift gears here... It used to be NAJE, then it was IAJE...

Aebersold: Mmm-hmm.

Kimery: But you were actively engaged and involved in that, in the... Of course, I've seen you many years having a booth there, and product, but also the education was very...not just the commercial side of it, but you were engaged with and making sure, because it's an educational environment, that you had a presence there.

Aebersold: Mmm-hmm.

Kimery: What was your... We all ad nauseam talk about the unfortunate demise of it. But I think moreso just that community in the building of that organization... How integrally involved were you with it, besides having a presence there, with all the wonderful product there...

Aebersold: I think my biggest influence was after each convention, I'd probably write a 1- or 2-

page letter about how to make it better. For instance, I really don't think little jiggers of Jack Daniels in everybody's hotel room is a good idea. There are a lot of younger students here. What are we promoting? Dah-da-dah-da. I don't think taking \$10,000 from Jack Daniels or whatever it was, having the Dixieland contest, is the right thing to do. That pops into my mind right off the bat. But I made a whole lot of suggestions. Some of them they listened to and some of them they didn't do.

If you put the emphasis entirely on education, your conventions are going to have smaller people...smaller attendance. You've got... The New York ones were the best, because you could draw on people. They supposedly didn't pay anybody to play on the evening performances. So if Slide Hampton was there, or Michael Brecker or Randy Brecker or whatever, they supposedly are being paid by the record companies or whatever—dah-da-dah-da-dah-da. But in New York, you've got a much bigger pool of people to draw from. You move to Dallas or you move to San Diego, for instance, or Anaheim, you're going to have less of the big names; consequently, you're going to attract fewer people. Now, you know the new organization J.E.N.

Kimery: I do.

Aebersold: This is their fifth year coming up. They are going to be in Dallas. It will be interesting to see the attendance. But IAJE was a big deal for 40 years. I contributed financially to them, too. That last year was... I don't know what they did with my donation. I don't think they did the right thing. Bill McFarlin was running the show, you know. I asked him about my donation. He never did answer me. When everything crashed.

Kimery: Oh.

Aebersold: But it was a good organization that brought people together once a year, and you had a good magazine with nice articles and so forth.

Kimery: I just think about the many years I was involved in it, what I saw was, one, an opportunity for us all to get together. So once again, it's that community thing. Because we're all going in many different directions, sometimes we don't see each other for an extended period of time, and this was an opportunity to come together.

Aebersold: It brought everybody together for the Jazz Jam once a year.

Kimery: Yeah. I think that alone was worth the price of admission. For those young students, and their aspirations to become a professional musician or be part of this community, it gave them access to their heroes in a way that they might not have had access to.

Aebersold: Sure. And the clinics were, for the most part, excellent. 55 minutes of knowledge. And 9 of them going on at the same time, another 8 or 9 here. Each hour. It was a big undertaking.

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Kimery: I found it to be just an incredible... I looked forward to it every year. An incredible opportunity just for myself to continue to learn. It was a learning experience there. And you never... Of course, the nature of the music, you never... As they say, you never arrived

Aebersold: No.

Kimery: ...and if you ever thought that you arrived, you need to get into a different business or a different avocation there. But you get that opportunity to continue to ask those questions and get more information. So I see now, of course, with that, the transition to JEN, Jazz Educator Network... What I've seen so far, and hopefully you can talk about, too... It seems they've taken some of the continued spirit of that, kind of refocused it in a little different way there.

Aebersold: Yeah.

Kimery: But if you can... You've seen the last four, going on five years?

Aebersold: Yes, this is the fifth one coming up. I've been at all of them. Now, some of them have not been well-attended, and as a businessman, it makes me wonder whether it's worth shipping or driving stuff to Dallas to sell, when you don't sell as much as you used to. This year will be an interesting year, to see what happens. The upcoming President here, in a year or so, is Bob Sinicrope, who teaches at Milton Academy, in Milton, Massachusetts. He's been teaching with me for years. He's going to be the new President. They're working very hard to make this one in Dallas a big success. Next year, they go to San Diego. Then they come back to Louisville here. The Louisville one I thought was very good. The hotel is great. We're all kind of on the same floor. You don't have them go to other buildings and this-that-and-the-other. I think Dallas is all in one hotel.

The IAJE ones in New York were the best. Different levels for different things, get on the elevator or just walk up and down. A lot of excitement. You could sit out in the hallway and visit fantastic, great, famous jazz musicians. Now, that's not so much when you go to places like Dallas and San Diego, because in New York, the famous jazz musicians would come over and hang out. It didn't cost them air-fare and hotel fare and so forth. That changes the dynamics of it. The more famous people you have there, the more the kids get out of it, and the more the educators get out of it, too. They feel like they're rubbing shoulders with the famous people.

Kimery: That's part of... I see part of the challenge of having these conferences at different locations... Because New York, you're always going to get those iconic individuals in jazz. Because they live there, there's a concentration of people there. Also, just the pure fact that the density of the island itself and everything that's going on at the conference and outside of the conference, it's going to be an incredible experience there.

So yeah, East Coast-West Coast, there are some issues that are challenging with it. I think, though, what I've seen in JEN which I really like is there is... The industry side of it, which is an important part of it...there's a better balance right now. I think at one point there was a little bit of a flop there that became difficult when you talked about these performances. The industry was driving that moreso—who played and what time and all those things. So it became

somewhat of a “ok, hands-off.” Now, here, you feel like, ok, you’re more part of it, you can have connection and contact, and have access to these individuals a lot easier. I think you’ve got a lot of practitioners there that are driving this and understand what’s needed for these moments.

I sat in last year when John Clayton did his spiel on the bass. I’m not a bass player, but I was very interested. Some of those things there that we just don’t think about, just the pure posture and how you set it up... For me, as a drummer, it gives me a different perspective. So when I’m listening to him, I can, of course, transpose it to my playing, or I can look at a bass player and figure out, “So why is he playing like that?” So you can see the way there’s a little tension in his body...

Aebersold: Yeah.

Kimery: It’s things like that you pick up, and I thought it was quite spectacular to have somebody like that break it down to such an extent, “Ok, I get it.”

Aebersold: I was looking for something for somebody, a video... I video a lot of stuff. I accidentally ran into 2001, IAJE in New York City. I am doing the clinic. The clinic is probably titled something like, “My first day with my high school combo.” We had a group from Long Island, high school kids, and they wanted to see what we were going to play. I said, “No-no, I’ll just bring the music.” We were just going to play, like, “Cantaloupe Island” or “Satin Doll,” something like that. But they didn’t know that. They wanted to prepare us. I said, “No, don’t prepare.” So I tell the audience... I’m listening to this the other day. I haven’t listened to it in what, 12 years... Anyhow, I remember, I’m standing, walking back and forth, got the mike and so forth. “Ok, let’s play this tune.” I forget what it was. B-flat blues, I think. Yeah, that’s what it was. “Bass player, let’s have you play...can you outline the chord?” The boy couldn’t do it.

To make a long story short, after a few seconds, or minutes, and me demonstrating the bass a little bit to him, he didn’t know where B-flat was on the bass. So I asked him, I said, “How long have you been playing the bass?” He said, “Six years.” I said, “Did you say six years? You’ve been playing the bass six years and you don’t know where B-flat is?” Then I turned around to the audience. I said, “I’m a band director. I do not have time to teach him where B-flat is. He needs to get with a teacher right now. Because the bass is the foundation of the group, time-wise and outlining the harmony. Ok? So, if the school doesn’t have money, I would pay for his bass lessons to get him started. Because we need to... If this is the only bass player we’ve got, we’ve got to get him going, or this is going to be a disaster.”

So we went ahead and played, but I didn’t say anything more to the bass player. And I remember this. Watching the video, it comes back very clearly. He’s going to be a problem. But what I thought was interesting, he played six years and didn’t know where B-flat was on the bass. How can that be in public education?

Kimery: That’s a mystery to me. You hit on something there that I’d like to tease out a little bit—your philanthropic side. You mentioned you’d pay for his lessons. But you actually have

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done that over many years of being very community- and education-conscious, and taking a hard-earned monetary success and being generous in giving it away. It's very unique... Especially in a capitalist society like this, people like to hold on to their money, but you've been quite the contrary. Is that something that came to you naturally? Was that something that was instilled in you through your parents? Why?

Aebersold: That's probably part of why we spent 20 minutes with that Mississippi truck driver today, trying to get him to the right place.

Kimery: I noticed that today, and I thought "wow."

Aebersold: I was hoping you didn't mind.

Kimery: No. This is what told me exactly why this is Jamey Aebersold.

Aebersold: This guy was lost. Had he gone down and gone over...up... I don't know where he would have ended up.

Kimery: He would have found himself trapped...

Aebersold: He might have gotten trapped. Yeah.

Kimery: I watched this whole process. Besides the money side of it, it's just the generosity of who you are, and the openness, and noticing that somebody is in need, and you jump out there...

Aebersold: He was lost!

Kimery: ...and I thought, "Wow." You were determined, too, to help him out.

Aebersold: Yes. I wasn't going to give up until I got him over there. Man, I was thinking, with this new highway stuff... Then it dawned on me, "I think this is going to do it." And we got it. That was fine. And he was so thankful.

I don't know. I like helping people. I guess maybe I always have. I'm sure there was a point way back there where I thought more of myself than of helping other people. But I see so much need out there in so many different ways. You don't know it, but I've got a drawer over here of... I do a lot with prisoners. I send them instruments. There's a guy in Louisville named Doug Carlson, and he owns Music Go Round. All kinds of stuff. You want to sell something? Give it to Doug? He'll give it for you, and then he'll sell it on. If it's a trumpet, and it needs work, he'll get it repaired and sell it on.

So any more, I'll just type Doug and I'll give somebody... This guy... These prisoner letters. "To Doug: Can you send a trumpet to this guy? Duh-da-dah, duh-da-dah," type it up. He'll write back and say, "I've got one that's 100 bucks, and I'll throw in a book and such-and-such a mouthpiece and a case." I say, "It's fine, send it off." He charges my credit card. But I've been doing this for a long time.

But it started out way, over at Volume 1. I distinctly remember a prisoner down in Tennessee writing and asking me if I could send him the Volume 1. He was interested in jazz. Clearly, he had no money. They never tell you what they did to get in, and any more, I don't care. But when I was younger, I did care. I was curious. "Why is he in jail?"—or in prison. So I sent it to him, but then I was kind of like, "What's he asking me for?" But then, more and more people were asking. After a while I said, "Well, the only way I'm going to shut this up is to send them what they want." Within reason, you know.

So I've really helped some programs. There is a program in New York State that has something to do with Carnegie Hall. Otisville. Otisville prison at Ossining... Sing-Sing, is what it is. Sing-Sing Prison. I've just helped a lot of people. And I'm not bragging at all. I don't like to talk about it. But they need instruments, they need music and so forth, and we're all used to it here. "This one is going to a prison; make sure you've got their I.D. number on there," this-that-and-the-other. "And you'd better insure it." One guy, I sent four keyboards to. The last one, I bought a brand-new, kind of computer thing for 160 bucks. I sent it up there. I said, "This is going to be it; it's not used, they can't send it back." They sent it back because it had a UBS port on it. That's the fourth one I sent to him. He's not a piano player. He wanted it to arrange and do things for the little group that they had.

He wrote me the other day, and he said, "Here's another one that you might check on." I've since emailed Doug and asked him, "Does this have this?" and he wrote back and he said, "All of them nowadays have gunshots on them." You can't have the sound of a gunshot. It sounds like POP-POP-POP. It doesn't sound like a gun.

But yes, I do a lot with prisoners. I really do.

Kimery: Have you performed in any of the prisons?

Aebersold: A long time ago, I was doing a clinic down in Decatur, Georgia, and then I went across the border to Alabama, and at the prison down there I did a thing with them yes.

Prison pictures. Here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here. Over there. Two of them over there. One there—Lonnie Lee. He got killed when he got out. What a tragedy. Missouri. Really nice guy. There's another... No, that's my son.

This guy I've been corresponding with for probably 30 years, down in Alabama. He's got a program going. I sent him folders, like this. I sent him pens. We sent him drumsets. This-that-and-the-other.

Here's a picture of a group. Here's a guy with a guitar. I got a really nice letter recently from a fellow... He wasn't too tall, but he had his guitar, and he said, "this is not a very good picture of me." I wrote him back and said, "Hey, you look great, and the guitar looks great; I hope you learn how to play it."

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That's been part of my life ever since I started publishing, and had the very first record, Volume 1. I realized that there's a lot of people out there who would like to play jazz, but they don't have the means to do it. And an awful lot of these guys have been in a long time, and they don't have any family. They've outlived their family. Their mother or their dad has died, this-that-or-the-other, they haven't heard from anybody in ages. And any more, I don't even have any reason to doubt whatever they tell me. In the beginning I'm sure I did. "Oh yeah, he doesn't have a family; I'll bet he does." I don't even think like that any more.

Kimery: I notice also there's a scholarship up at Indiana University.

Aebersold: Uh-huh.

Kimery: So it seems to me that definitely part of your DNA also is to make sure that this music is accessible.

Aebersold: Exactly. I went to China the first week of October. China Conservatory of Music. There was a translator, and we did really good. I wouldn't mind going back. The students were very good actually. As far as improvisation goes, they weren't real skilled in improvising, but they had good technique.

It was interesting, because they were hesitant to take me up on the stuff that was free. Like, on my last day, my flight wasn't until 4 o'clock, and we were going to go about 12:30 out to the airport, because I want to get there early. But I said, "How about we get together, a couple of you, at 9 o'clock? I'll see you at 9, see you at 9:30, and 10, 10:30." Every time, "Do you really want to do this?" "Yeah, let's do it." I gave them some Play-A-Longs and stuff. They didn't know whether to take it or not. It was kind of interesting.

Also, speaking of China: I could tell that their curiosity and their imagination was definitely stifled. Very interesting for me. So new for me. I wanted to buy them basketball nets for the two goals. He said, "You can't do it." I said, "Why?" "Security." "What do you mean, 'security'?" "They won't let you put them up." I said, "Well, we'll buy them and put them up at night." "No! No, they won't let you do it." So I dropped the conversation. It's a different country.

But the jazzers, they're really nice guys—and girls. Really nice.

Kimery: It's interesting in China, Shanghai has had a history of having jazz there in the '20s and '30s.

Aebersold: Yes. I just heard the people there. They have a jazz club, but there wasn't any real jazz going on, and it was smoky, so I didn't bother going there.

Kimery: Well, they have a Conservatory of Music, and of course, the classical tradition is very strong there, but they're developing, and there seems to be now the thread of jazz being more and more embraced—or part of it. But yes, there is that state rule kind of mentality there that still, unfortunately, creates a lot of suspicion or concern about engaging in Western...

Aebersold: Now, see, I went over there with the idea that on... I arrive don Friday, started teaching on Saturday and Sunday, and then Monday and Tuesday I'm listening to 8 different combos. Tuesday night we had a big concert to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Modern School of Music inside the Shanghai Conservatory, which jazz is a part of. So I get there, and I notice the schedule says, "Concert Sunday at 5." I didn't say anything. Ok. We had a little rehearsal, and we played the concert.

Afterwards I asked the fellow I'm with Gene Aitken, who has been over there six times... He travels all around the world. "Gene, what happened to the Tuesday night thing?" He said, "Well, the way I understand it is, the people with the money that were going to advertise it and this-that-and-the-other thought that the lower-level bureaucrats would waste the money, which they have a tendency to do, so they just cancelled it, and said, instead of doing it Tuesday with a big fanfare, do it Sunday afternoon at 5 o'clock."

I had asked him, "How did these people even know the concert was going on?" "Word of mouth and parents." I said, "Oh." I said, "What about the Tuesday night thing?" Then he tells me this. Then I got a little idea of how things are run. Much different than over here.

Kimery: Oh, yeah.

Aebersold: I gave out a whole lot of Duke Ellington quarters. You've got one, I guess?

Kimery: I do. You might have given me one.

Aebersold: Oh, Look around the corner, right where that picture is with the tux. Yeah. Is that them? See all the rolls?

Kimery: Oh, yeah, the rolls of them.

Aebersold: There's more there. I give them out when I do clinics, when somebody does something special.

Kimery: Let me ask you this now. I know we're coming closer to a close here. You've got all these mini-hats you're wearing, and you still maintain a high level of artistry as a player.

Aebersold: A high level what?

Kimery: A high level of artistry as a player.

Aebersold: I try.

Kimery: Not only on alto, but you play piano, and I heard you play some bass here. We talked about banjo. I see a guitar over there.

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Aebersold: Yeah, there's a couple of guitars. I've had to curtail my guitar playing because of the arthritis on my thumb.

Kimery: In your daily tasks, how do you find time to still maintain your...

Aebersold: I don't. That's simple. I just don't have time to practice. Or I don't make time to practice. But I'm thinking music all the time. I tell people... I'm 74. I tell them, "I started the sax at age 12, and at about age 50, the saxophone gave in. It said, 'Jamey is not going to stop. So why don't we make it easier for him to play what he hears in his head.'" So for the last 24 years, it's been a whole lot easier to play. I'm not sure why. Maybe mentally I thought differently at age 50 about chords and scales and ideas and things. I don't think I tried playing any simpler or easier ideas to make me feel good. Not at all. Unh-uh. We played last Wednesday. I was listening to us... With that semi driver together, I was listening to us play "Invitation," for instance. I'm listening to myself playing, "Oh, that's good. Oops. Muffed up a couple of things there." Yeah. But the thinking and the line of thought from my mind to the fingers is much better than it's ever been. C-minor.

Kimery: In conversations with Benny Carter and other people, Benny, because of also being very active as a writer, would go through periods of time where he just didn't have his instrument in his mouth, but because of thinking or being in music all the time, then there was this period of time... Getting back to playing was so much quicker because of the fact that you're thinking about it all the time.

Aebersold: Right.

Kimery: Do you find that's the same thing?

Aebersold: Oh yeah.

Kimery: I mean, there's muscle memory, and if you do it enough over a period of time, it's going to naturally come there. It's just some of the mechanics of it, getting back into it.

Aebersold: My wife... Several times in our 52 years of marriage, when we're lying there in bed, she'll say, "You're practicing, aren't you?" She can somehow tell that I'm thinking in my mind. I'm not really uttering a sound, but she can just tell. I say, "How do you tell?" "Just the way you're still; I can tell you're practicing." I'm sure there's other wives who think that, too, about their husbands.

Well, yeah, I wish I had more time to practice, but actually I don't think I'd want to really give up anything else I'm doing. The prisoner letters, the payroll, the dah-da-duh, the watching out for this, and doing this-and-that. I don't think I'd want to change anything.

Kimery: It's very fulfilling.

Aebersold: Did you get one of these?

Kimery: No, I didn't.

Aebersold: You got one now.

Kimery: Before I ask this final question that I have, there's much more, there's a lot more... But I wanted to open it up to you, if there's any particular thing, or things, or moments in your life that have not been thoroughly documented or talked about, that you find really to be an important part of your story and the national record. We talked about prison, which is something I didn't know about, which is something that shows a sense of compassion for people, no matter what their condition and setting is. Hopefully, that will make those who listen to this more compassionate people, in hearing that, and not saying because of their misfortune that they are rejected from society and they are not worth anything.

In the course of our conversation over the last 2½ or 3 hours, is there anything that we've missed on that you'd like to make sure is part of the historic record here.

Aebersold: We probably have, but I can't think of what they all are. But one thing does come to mind. I started going to a Methodist church, a neighbor took me and my two brothers, when I was about 5 years old. So I've always kind of been interested in religion, always gone every Sunday, to Sunday School and to church. And I really liked Sunday School when it was a discussion group, which I led for many years up until two years ago, when I finally decided to leave my church that I'd been at—downtown New Albany, Centenary Methodist—for 68 years. We had a new preacher, who had been around for a year or two, but I just didn't care for the ritual at all. So I decided to leave, and I went to Unity over in Louisville, and my wife left a couple of months later, because she had made an obligation to a women's group to host them.

Anyhow, we both go there now. We love it. We love what...they call it a 10 o'clock class, but I still call it Sunday School. Two guys run it, who have really been around the block, and they use a course in miracles, which I've read a lot of it over the years... It came out in 1976. But I think I've always been interested in life and death... Is there life after death? Was there life before birth? Just things like that. I kind of step back and look at people differently. Like that truck driver today. If I could help him save some time... I was also thinking, "If he gets up to the end of this and goes up over that flood wall, I'm not sure he's... He's going to have to back out at some point." So if I can get him back on the path... It's got nothing to do with life or death. But if I can just get him back on the path in the next 10 or 15 minutes... Actually, I was thinking we could do it in 5; but I think it took 20 minutes or so.

It's always been a challenge to me to help people get back on the path. Yeah. So I think the idea of...not religion... No, not religion, no. But spirituality. The idea of helping somebody else. As I get older, I realize this is all going to end. It could end today. It could be a big surprise, and that's it, and what happens after that, I don't know. But while I'm here, I've seen an awful lot of people interested in music, and somehow developing their creativity and using their imagination, but they don't know how. So if I can help them, I think it's a good thing to do to help them. Period. So I've tried to do that, not just locally, but globally.

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I think my countoff, one-two, a-one-two-three-four, is world-wide. I mean, it really is.

Kimery: It is!

Aebersold: They'd recognize my voice, if they couldn't see my voice or... I've had people do that before. "Are you Jamey Aebersold?" I say, "Yeah." "I thought I recognized your voice." And I'm just talking in conversation with somebody.

But I think the idea of just helping people is the right thing to do. I have the means to help them, I have the time—so I do.

Kimery: I'll just tell you quickly about a flashback memory. We interviewed Lee Konitz, and Lee has been known to be very...

Aebersold: Salty.

Kimery: And particular about his rhythm section, too. It got to a point where he decided that it was best for him to eliminate the rhythm section and have Jamey Aebersold Music Minus One as his platform or foundation.

Aebersold: Yup.

Kimery: A couple of things hit me. One was, "Wow, this would be a tough guy to work for," but two is that he felt such a sense of value and the artistry...even just because of playing... The method and what this was representing, that this blanket of sound was something that he felt he could be creative.

Aebersold: Yes.

Kimery: So it said to me that this is not just for those who are learning, but those who are professional in their field, and they find that this continue to be a very valuable resource for them, too.

Aebersold: He always thanked me for sending him Play-A-Longs, and he said he loves singing with them. Did you know that?

Kimery: I did not know that.

Aebersold: Now, this... Turn your camera over here, if you would. This area down here, folks, all of this here, which is really thick, is stuff from... A lot of times it's famous people. And Lee Konitz's letters are down in here. I've been threatening to pull all this out, and go through it. But it's going to take me days, I think, to go through it.

Let's just see what's this. That's a lady. But all of this down here is kind of famous people, and things I thought I should save—letters and this-that-and-the-other and so forth. I'm

really curious as to what's down there.

Kimery: I don't know if there's any archival schools around here, but maybe that's a way to get a student or somebody down here to help.

Aebersold: We need a grant. You haven't seen it, but I've got hundreds of cassettes and videos around the corner of stuff that I've shot over the years, and I've got file drawers, and over in the corner (you can't even see it), big boxes of photographs I've taken... I guess it's good that my dad and mom did not give me a camera when I graduated from high school, because it took like about ten years before I got a camera and started taking pictures, or I'd have thousands more than I have now.

Kimery: Well, this is really... I hope that at some point, there's a grant there, and you can start to sort through and identify, because now there's a lot of important historic correspondence and information...

Aebersold: Several schools have talked about it. I wouldn't want anybody to do it that wasn't a jazzer, because they would overlook things that they thought were unimportant, but are really very important.

Kimery: I think the other thing, too, in considering that is making sure access is an important part of it. There are great archives or facilities that do great jobs in archiving it, but the access becomes a little more challenged, and that to me is a danger there, because then there's just the limit about if people will have access to it. So it's one of those things you kind of look at, "Ok, when that moment comes, we decide who has the capacity to be able to do that?" The student body that will continue to benefit...or people in general benefit from the riches of the collection, or the archive itself.

Aebersold: Yes.

Kimery: I do want to ask you this as a final question here. We teed-up in the beginning...I already announced that you are a National Endowment For the Arts Jazz Master, but the actual ceremony will be in January. I wonder what that means to you. For those of us looking from our vantage point, we're saying, "Wow, Jamey Aebersold is incredibly well-deserving, he has contributed so much to this field and continues to contribute. Thank God." What does it mean to you?

Aebersold: Well, it's quite an honor. When it was...I don't know if it was Wayne Brown or who called me first... I thought he was soliciting. Then he said, "This is not a solicitation. I'm calling from the National Endowment of the Arts, and you've been selected for the 2014 Jazz Masters." My very first thought was, "Well, they've hit the bottom of the barrel." That was my first thought, "They've hit the bottom of the barrel. They've got nobody else to nominate." But he said it's the A.B. Spellman Advocacy Award, and I said, "Oh, wow, that's great."

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It is a big deal, and it's getting bigger as I get closer to January 13th. That's about all I have to say. It's a big deal, because everybody that's ever gotten it, I've got their records, and I've listened to all of them. Not a one of them I haven't listened to. So they've always been kind of out-there, and now, all of a sudden my name has been thrown in with all these people. Yikes!

Kimery: I recall, before we started the photo, you showed me... It's got Marian McPartland in there.

Aebersold: Yeah. She called me "the Troll," because I wrote a tune called "The Troll," that we played at a camp years ago. We rehearsed it. She was playing triads, just like C-E-G, just she and I. I said, "Let's try it again," and she played the same... I said, "Marian, why are you just playing triads?" She said, "Well, you've just got C written." I said, "Oh, I want you to put the VII in and the IX; just play it like you normally would." "Oh! I thought that sounded kind of funny." Then we dove into it and it was just right. At the camps... She did it several years. She was really a great lady. "The Troll."

But yes, it's a big award. It's a great honor. And I think an awful lot of my friends are excited that I got this award, which is kind of interesting, because I'm just... I'm who I am.

Kimery: Well, that says a lot about you and why you deserve that. Because if you are who you are, and as those of us who have benefitted from your generosity and your vision... It's well-deserved. We're so happy and so glad to hear that. When I saw that, I was knocked out.

Aebersold: You just made me think. My wife has been very supportive, although I've probably not given her as much attention as I should. And my son has been very assertive. He's been inspirational to me. He likes what I do, and so forth.

And my parents. I don't remember them ever saying, "Jamey, do you want to be a jazz musician?" Unh-uh. They were always very encouraging. They didn't listen to jazz. I'm sure they didn't understand it. As a matter of fact, after one Fourth of July concert downtown, our little group played, and my mom was there, and the next day I'm working in the florist, early in the morning, 9 o'clock and I'm in the front greenhouse, and I say to my mom... She walks up. I said, "What did you think of the concert yesterday?" She says, "I don't see why you can't play something with a melody I can recognize." My dad happened to walk in and heard that, and I said... I was a little upset. I said, "You've listened to me practice for 15 years or whatever. If you didn't hear anything you recognized, I think it's your fault." My dad said something like, "I agree."

But they always encouraged me. Never really said anything. Back then, in the '50s, when I started going to Louisville, black musicians would come over to the house sometimes, and borrow a mouthpiece, or maybe they needed to borrow \$10 or \$15. My dad would be standing there. He never said, "Jamey, who's that?" or "What are you loaning him \$15 for?" I appreciate that. Because that could have made a difference if they had said something, you know, "Oh, that was a black guy, Jamey; did you notice that?" Or: "Who is that guy? Where is he from? He's from Louisville? Do you trust him? Do you know him?" I don't remember anybody ever saying a word. Which really helped me to just get adjusted to the world as it's going on.

Yeah, that loaning, it started way back there incidentally, now that I think about it. Wow. It hasn't stopped. It hasn't stopped either.

Kimery: And it probably won't stop.

Aebersold: No. That was a good friend of mine, Boogie Martin. I remember him. A week later, he brought the 15 bucks back. Wanted to borrow a mouthpiece, this-that-and-the-other. We became good friends. He's still alive. I talked to him about three months ago. He's lost a lung and so forth. But we got to laughing about old times, and I realized how important it is to dredge up some of those memories, for each person, to kind of relive it. Because we're all reaching the end. It's getting closer and closer.

Kimery: Your son's name?

Aebersold: Jamey Dwayne.

Kimery: And you've got a grandchild, too?

Aebersold: His name is Alex. He's 12 years old now, and these are just silly pictures from when he was younger. The my sister-in-law's name is Julia. She's got her doctorate degree in engineering. She can take her car motor apart and put it back together, and turn the key and it will probably start.

Kimery: I would have extra parts.

Aebersold: Yeah, right. But my family overall has been very supportive of what I have done and what I've tried to do. I'm sure at times some feel I'm probably spending more time with other people.

There's no end to it. It's busy. It's been a really busy and fulfilling life.

Kimery: And more to come.

Aebersold: And more to come. Thank you.

Kimery: You've got a lot more to come.

Aebersold: And more to come.

Kimery: Well, on behalf of the Smithsonian Institute, myself, Ken Kimery... This has been really a treat for me to be able to sit here and spend the better part of an afternoon with you. We've had moments in the past, but it's always been kind of running, because business was going on. But to be able to sit down with you and have this wonderful conversation... Of course,

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the National Endowment For the Arts, because they not only have been critical in naming you an NEA Jazz Master, but they've also been critical in making sure these voices are documented before that moment no longer is possible. Thank you for spending time with me.

Aebersold: Well, thank you.

Kimery: I know you're a busy man, and it's been hopefully the beginning of many more conversations.

Aebersold: The fact that I got this award, and that I sent out the NEA emails and so forth, I think it's raised the awareness of a lot of people who haven't thought much about jazz. So I'm hoping that maybe this advocacy award will allow people to think a little more about jazz. Because it's from America. Incidentally, the kids now do not know that. When we do our programs now, I ask them where it's from. They name all these European countries. North Asia even. They don't know.

So I've made a big sign. After I ask them and someone finally says, "New Orleans" or "U.S." or "America" or maybe "Louisiana," then I say, "Yes, it's from America," and I turn the sign around. I say, "I'm going to sit this on this music stand, and for the next 45 minutes you're going to see this sign that says, 'Jazz is from America; it's our music.' And I want you to memorize that. If I come back next year, I want you to say, 'It's from America!'"

Kimery: With that, thank you very much, Jamey.

Aebersold: Yeah, that's a good way to end up.

[Transcribed by Ted Panken from a .wma file of the conversation.]