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KENNY BURRELL
NEA Jazz Master (2005)

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Brown: Today is February 16th, Tuesday, 2010, and this is the Smithsonian Institution National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters Oral History Program interview with guitarist, arranger, composer, educator, humanitarian, and my hero, Kenny Burrell. We are recording this interview at the faculty center at UCLA where Kenny has been teaching for well over three decades. So, good afternoon Mr. Burrell.

Burrell: Good afternoon Anthony, my pleasure to be with you, and as I said earlier I'm glad to be able to be interviewed by you.

Brown: Well, the feeling is mutual and again this oral history is so that we can capture your life and music in your words, this will be your story told by you. As in every story we have a beginning and we know that you came from Detroit and you came from Detroit at a time when so many of the great jazz innovators and influential artists were thriving in New York, I should say living and thriving in New York, and that list is extensive and we'll, of course, cover all of your early associates and colleagues. But one question that I had from Barry Kernfeld, who is the editor of the New Grove Jazz Dictionary, he says, "Get Kenny to tell us what was in the water in Detroit at that time [laughs] because how could all of those great musicians come out of there." So that would be...

Burrell: Okay, that's a good way to start. May I ask you to stop for a moment before I answer that?

Brown: Sure.

Burrell: Okay. Okay, what was in the water in Detroit? [laughs]

Brown: Or was there any other, you know, mitigating factor? I mean, the fact that such a critical mass of the artists that went on to shape the course of jazz hail from Detroit is something that is significant on the surface, but that's what we'd like to know if you have any insights into what contributed to that.

Burrell: I don't think I have any special insight. I think what I might say has probably already been said and said by people that are none musicians. That there was a migration from the south to places like Chicago and Detroit and Detroit in particular because of the automobile industry. And so a lot of black families, black people, came to Detroit looking for work and they found it. And they were able to buy some instruments for their children and as you know from speaking with Gerald Wilson it had a very good high school system and it was a town that was not necessarily known for integration but it was pretty well integrated in terms of it's school system. And the kids had a certain amount of freedom and educational opportunity plus the fact that they were able to get instruments through their parents or even some of them starting to work as early teens or as teenagers. And I think that that plus the natural talent of the musicians, that coupled with the natural talent, started to produced these musicians. I think it had to do with the opportunities and the economics and that's about all I can say about it, but I do think there was a part there in the blossoming of this music. And I think it was Jelly Roll Morton, or somebody like that, said that "the water in Detroit taste like cherry wine." [laughs] So it might be something in the water, you're right. [laughs] I'm not sure it was Jelly Roll, but it was somebody like that, you know, from a long time ago like that.

Brown: Well, you're right, Gerald Wilson spoke very highly of the neighborhoods and his situation, his experiences at Cass Tech....

Burrell: At Cass Tech, sure, yeah...

Brown:...yes of course. But that he was surprised coming from Mississippi by way of Memphis, coming to Detroit and coming to an integrated school...

Burrell: Yeah.

Brown:...he said that took him aback.

Burrell: Absolutely, and I think that was a big help particularly for the black youngsters.

Brown: So, it sounded like for the African-American population in Detroit, again generally speaking, that because of job opportunities that there seemed to be a higher level of, shall we say, class income.

Burrell: Right.

Brown: That afforded, as you said, for parents to be able to buy the instruments for their children and for children to have those opportunities.

Burrell: Right. Now there was still racism in terms of segregation, in terms of there was a black neighborhood and a white neighborhood and, you know, etcetera. But that's, and again, this was before, you know, this is before, you know, the 50's where everything was freed up. But the economics was still there so certain things were affordable.

Brown: Well, let's go back, let's talk about your personal life. If we can get you to state your full name, your birth date, and where you were born.

Burrell: Lets see if I can remember. [laughs]

Brown: [laughs] We thought we'd start easy.

Burrell: Well, it's Kenneth. Middle name is Earl. Last name is Burrell. [spells name] B-U-R-R-E-L-L. Born July 31st, 1931 in Detroit, Michigan. [laughs]

Brown: And your birth certificate would give the name of the hospital you were born in?

Burrell: Probably Children's Hospital, I believe, Children's Hospital.

Brown: And do you know the address, or what neighborhood you were born into, where parents were living in at the time?

Burrell: I was born into the lower east side of Detroit, which is commonly known in the circles as "Black Bottom" in Detroit. That was the area below Gratiot and Vernor Highway, east of downtown Detroit and west of Elmwood. The lower part of that section was the Detroit River. That's where I was born and raised.

Brown: And presumably, as you said, segregated neighborhood?

Burrell: Oh yeah, absolutely. The high school was Miller High School, I went to Miller High School where Al McKibbon went, as you know, and Milt Jackson, and also I went to Duffield Grade School.

Brown: So those were all within the neighborhood?

Burrell: Yes.

Brown: Okay. If we could for the record, if you could give us your parents name and where they came from originally.

Burrell: Well my mother's name was Elizabeth Day.

Brown: [spells] D-A-Y?

Burrell: [spells] D-A-Y, that was her maiden name, last name Burrell, of course. And my father's name was William Henry Burrell. They were both from Virginia. My mother was from an area near Amsterdam called Roanoke. I'm not sure of the area that my father was from, but he was also from Virginia.

Brown: And your father's occupation?

Burrell: He was a mechanic, yeah.

Brown: What type of mechanic, do you...

Burrell: Automobile...

Brown: Automobile, okay.

Burrell: But I think it was not necessarily a, as we think of now, top pro. I think it was just a something that he learned and picked up and was doing that for a living.

Brown: Did he work at one of the major plants?

Burrell: No, but I did later on. I worked at Ford for a few years, yeah.

Brown: And your mother?

Burrell: My mother was...

Brown: Homemaker, no?

Burrell: Homemaker, but also my father died when I was six years old.

Brown: What did he die from?

Burrell: I'm not sure. So my mother went to work and I remember a couple of jobs that she had, which I, she would take me with her sometimes because there were no babysitters. It was cleaning offices in office buildings, you know, she would be the maintenance person to clean offices and that was it.

Brown: So I know having done some research about your background, I know that you're one of, you're the youngest of three brothers, surviving three children of six.

Burrell: Yes, I am the youngest. My other brother, the middle brother, was Donald Burrell. And the oldest brother was William Henry, Jr. and there were three sisters before that. Let's see, I think their names were Hazel, Blossom, and I can't think of the other one at the moment.

Brown: But all older than you?

Burrell: Yeah.

Brown: And the cause of death for all...

Burrell: They...childhood diseases at that time that they didn't have cures for, diphtheria...

Brown: So they died in infancy?

Burrell: Yeah, yeah. Well, not infancy, but earlier on.

Brown: Okay, alright. Now lets talk about your brothers cause the records show that you were from a musical family, so presumably that would be some influence from your parents as well as from your siblings.

Burrell: Right, right. Excuse me; I have a little bit of soreness in my throat so I'm drinking this tea. As far as I remember back there was always music in my home and there was always a piano and also I remember going to church, Second Baptist Church, in Detroit. That's the same church that Ralph Bunche went to who was from Detroit. I would go sometimes twice on Sunday, there was something called BYPU and then there was a regular service. I think BYPU was Baptist Youth Union...

Brown: Like Sunday school?

Burrell: Or something like that, yeah. I would go with my mother and also with my grandmother, Matilda Day, who was my mother's mother—Matilda, grandmother. Enjoyed that very much, particularly, you know, because of the music. And my mother sang in the church choir, she loved to sing, had a good voice. And she loved to tinkle on the piano, not anything professional, but just making nice sound and that was pleasant thing to hear. And my father was kind of a happy-go-lucky guy who seemed to be able to pick up a ukulele or maybe a banjo and make some sounds on it, you know, nothing great but just having fun with it—those kind of instruments. So it was a house where music was an integral part.

My oldest brother Billy became serious about music and is how I think I got really serious because he became a guitarist first. He also played the piano. In fact, I remember hearing him attempt to play *Sophisticated Lady* from the sheet music, cause, you know, in those days certain things were printed. So I remember that was probably one of the first pieces of sheet music I ever saw sitting on the piano by Duke Ellington, *Sophisticated Lady*. Anyway, that's, you know, quite a piece, anyway. But then he became this guitarist and a good one. He and his friends would sometimes have rehearsals and little sessions at the house, and I was observing all of this and it was sinking in and influencing me, of course. And as we know, it sets a joy and love in creating and performing this music that has certainly rubbed off on me. And then I got

interested in the—how could I say—the music. And my mother gave me piano lessons, she took me, not took me, but she took me and I started to take piano lessons.

Brown: And what age is this?

Burrell: About seven or eight. So I tried that and it didn't work out too well, Mrs. Pitts was the, I remember her name. I'm sure this is a familiar story to a lot of musicians. I think it was fifty cents a lesson. But the point was, it was not something that I found appealing because of the, you know, you practice a lot of scales and fingerings and not getting into the music that is going to touch you inside. So I tried but I didn't continue with it because I didn't enjoy it at that age and it wasn't meaningful to me. On the other hand, watching my brother I could pick up the guitar and play a few chords and it sounded pretty good, you know, and if you play a few chords on the guitar you can make a song. So I was able to play some quote "music", in other words, some songs or some simple songs or something. Or at least play a couple of nice changes on the guitar. And I felt that that was better anyway. So I stopped the piano and I didn't really try to play the guitar, I just picked it up to see if I could do that and it was...I'd say, "well, yeah, I understand that." So I just let it go, I didn't think any much more about it, but I enjoyed that little bit that I did. But at the same time I was—how can I say—surrounded by all this music.

And then there were times I remember my brother Billy did one more thing that was very influential to me, or two more things. One, when I was that age, seven or eight at that time, we had two things; the radio was a crystal set, it wasn't electric. And the Victrola, the record player, was wind-up. It was a wind-up record player. So Billy, being this real serious musician, would bring home these recordings. I remember first, we were winding it up and finally electricity kicked in and we were...but the point is that I started hearing these recordings like Duke Ellington, and Count Basie, and Benny Goodman, and Bing Crosby, and the Mills Brothers. And you know, all of that kind of early swing, pre-swing, that kind of thing, and that was interesting. I started to hear a variety of kinds of music. Plus, in the neighborhood I grew up in there was all kinds of blues playing going on and a few clubs around and just people on the street, you would hear that. The guitar was still an instrument that people like to have fun with, you'd go to the park and someone would have a guitar and they would be playing and singing the blues. That was all part of my surrounding, all part of my environment.

Then I remember one other significant thing that happened. My brother used to go to a gentleman's, I can't think of his last name right now, but his first name was Percy. Percy was an older guy who loved the guitar, he couldn't play very well, but he loved the guitar and he loved music. So he would invite all of his guitar-playing friends over on Sundays, you know, maybe every Sunday or every other. I remember going there a few times, maybe like once a month or something like that. But my brother would just take me with him and they'd have these guitar sessions, maybe four, five, six, seven guitarists sitting around playing and Percy would, they would play the songs that he knew, he would play the melody and the other guitarists would just adlib, play the jazz, play around it. Also part of that, all that whole thing, was the blues, they would play the blues as well, you

know. And I'm watching that and occasionally I would get my nerve up and maybe play a little something, but not serious, you know, just because, you know, I felt like I could do a little something. And then so, those things influenced me as an early child, then I think I was around nine or ten. And then I'm born in '31, so '41 the war broke out, I think my brother went to the army in '42, he was drafted.

Brown: How much older was Billy?

Burrell: He was eleven years older than me.

Brown: And Donald?

Burrell: Five years.

Brown: Okay.

Burrell: So, Billy went off. Donald was in the hospital, he had a back problem which kept him in the hospital for a couple of years. And so, I just being a kid with baseball and all the other things that kids do. All of a sudden at about age twelve, maybe going on thirteen, I got this real interest in playing music, really, I want to play music.

Brown: You don't remember what sparked it? Or...

Burrell: I think I remember what sparked it was listening to the big bands like Count Basie and Duke Ellington. And what attracted me at first was the tenor saxophone and I really liked the way Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young...Herschel Evans, those kind of guys. And, well, I'd say, "That's really, that's a masculine, really a beautiful thing." And so I'd say, "I'm going to get it." But again, as fate would have it, we were poor. I didn't have, my father was dead and my mother was working two jobs. If she could get two jobs she was working two jobs. So there was no money for a saxophone. Plus the fact that saxophones were made out of metal and this was during the war and you know, they were...

Brown: Rationing...

Burrell: Yeah, so I decided, "Well, I'm want to do something, so I'll buy a guitar." So I bought my first guitar at a pawnshop up on I guess it was Gratiot, near the, still at the outskirts of this area called "Black Bottom" at one of the pawnshops. And I remember it was a stellar guitar and I had written my brother because he was always, we would write letters back and forth.

Brown: Where was he stationed?

Burrell: I don't remember, I don't remember where. He didn't go overseas, he was stationed here someplace in the States. And so I told him that I wanted to get a guitar and he sent me five bucks [laughs] to get my first guitar. And at that time I was also working

as a clean-up guy or clean-up kid to the barbershop around the corner from me. And I think the guy, I used to call him Mr. Sam, I don't know what his last name was, but Mr. Sam's barbershop. I'd go in there and sweep up the hair and, you know, all this stuff, and clean up for him. So he'd give me a quarter, or fifty cents, or whatever. But I started saving that up and I got my five dollars and put that together with the five dollars that my brother sent me and I bought this [laughs] ten dollar guitar with a hole in it. It wasn't electric, it was just acoustic, and I practically wore that guitar out. It was so funny to me, and to other people when I tell them the story, I mean, I played that thing so much. You know, the neck is made out of wood, now a good guitar has an ebony fingerboard. Well, this guitar didn't have an ebony fingerboard, it was cheap, you know. So the wood started to wear out in between the frets. I mean, to the point where, you know, it became difficult. So I decided, "Well, you know, maybe I'll put some paint on it and at least it won't look so bad." So I went out and made the mistake of buying some, I can't even think of the name of the paint, there's two kinds of paint. There's the glossy kind and there's the flat kind. And I went, you know, I got the glossy kind because I wanted it to look nice. But you see, the glossy kind, underneath the surface when it dries it's still wet. So I looked at it after a day, you know, or whatever, it looked like it was okay to me and I said, "Well, I'm going to try this." And I started trying to play it and then the wet paint underneath all came out and messed up everything so I couldn't even play it anymore. Well, I finally got, you know, I finally scrapped it all off and it worked with it for a while until I could get another guitar. But that was my first guitar. I think my second guitar was a Kay, which was a little better. It wasn't an electric, but at least it had a little better wood on it, and it was an f-hole guitar, I remember that. But it was like it was a second choice for me, it wasn't what, you know, I wanted a saxophone. But then at the same time, now this is in '45... somewhere in there, but what happened, no this is earlier than that. This is still during the war and Benny Goodman had this guitarist named Charlie Christian [laughs].

Brown: Yes. [laughs]

Burrell: And I heard him playing the guitar and he was the first one to really play, he wasn't the first one to use an amplifier, he was probably the second one. The trombonist, I can't think of his name at the moment... Ernie something... he's also an arranger. You'll help me with that later, we'll think of his name. But he's the one who not only played the electric guitar first, who kind of created the electric guitar, but he also gave Charlie Christian some lessons. He was also an arranger. But Charlie Christian took that idea and just ran with it, you know. So when I heard Charlie Christian playing the guitar, he was playing it through the amplifier with these beautiful single lines like a trumpet and saxophone. I say, "Well, the guitar's not so bad after all." [laughs] You know, because he was playing right along with all these other guys, in fact he is also credited with being one of the pre-boppers, you know, people who preceded and forecast what was to come with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. And he jammed up at Minton's with all those people, you know. I heard that and said, "Oh, yeah, this is okay." So then my next idea was let me get myself an amplifier so that I can do that kind of thing. So, you know, it took awhile to get that together. But the point was that solidified in my mind that the guitar was okay. And then to even further enhance my enthusiasm I heard Nat King Cole

with Oscar Moore. Not so well known at that time, and still not so well known, but Charlie Christian because he was with Benny Goodman, you know, became a name like Lionel Hampton and Teddy Wilson. Oscar Moore was playing more or less background to this great singer Nat King Cole and pianist.

But what I'm hearing him do at that time, and still, is playing all these beautiful chords. I mean, not only beautiful but innovative and progressive, clusters and all kinds of altered chords. And I'm saying, "This guy is playing the guitar like a piano." And so I had never heard that either. Just for the record, he's influenced more guitarists than we realize just in terms of the chords that he used and the voicings, progressive harmony, you know, experimental fingerings and voicings. That also was a big influence on me early on. Charlie Christian for the single lines, Oscar Moore for those beautiful chords. And then there was a couple of other things that I should mention. One, that I mentioned very early on, was the ever-present blues in my life, always. That was a given, that was almost like a natural, just like part of your language, this part of my feeling still is. People say, "Well, how do you do that?" I say, "I don't know, it's just there and it's been there ever since I can remember." Okay, so, and I love it and it's a natural part of who I am, natural part of my language.

The other thing about me, it's a Gypsy guitarist from Europe named Django Reinhardt. Now my brother and I, and all the other guitarists, used to admire, we loved Charlie Christian and loved Oscar Moore, and that was one of the things my brother and I shared. Because when he came back from the army, I guess it was when it was over in '44... '45, I mean it was over in '45 but he might have come back earlier. We shared that love and admiration for those guys and would listen to the records and, you know, learn as much as we could from them. But not only us, but all the guitarists we knew and so forth, and other musicians. But there was also Django Reinhardt that we admired for his feeling, for his technique, for his spirit, and also for the fact that he could play all of that stuff with just two fingers, because the other two were burned and he couldn't use them. He was the first one that I heard really do an extensive playing with what we call the octaves. I don't know how he did it with two fingers, but he did it, I guess it doesn't matter.

But what I felt about Django, and I think what other musicians felt, guitarists, was that we just admired him so much but the main thing I got from Django Reinhardt was the fact that you could get such an individual sound on an instrument, you know. And I said, "Boy, it's the same instrument." And different, he just, to me he just, it was just a stark example of how one can get an individual sound on an instrument. No matter what the instrument. And so, what I got from him earlier on in my life was the idea that you could get your own sound if you try. That you don't have to sound like anybody else, that if you do what you're really feeling and what you're loving, that it will come out in a special unique way that is yours. And that's kind of what I got from Django more than the music part was the whole attitude about music, how to approach it, his philosophy about music.

So those are the main influences guitaristically speaking early on in my life. And then my brother Billy, by the time he got back from the army he realized that I had practiced so hard and was developing so fast that he, I think, we never talked about it, but I think he

kind of decided to switch to bass. And because I think he just felt that there was no point in competing and that he would probably get more work as a bass player, but the point was he was a great guitarist. And he was my first real teacher because when he came back from the army he gave me some lessons, you know, and we jammed together. I think in those session I think he realized how I was improving. So he switched to bass and we became, we started working together, he as a bass player and me as a guitarist and occasionally we would have drums. And that's a whole another story about how I started that first trio with guitar, bass, and drums. And Billy was, along with Wes's brother Monk, were as far as I know, the first Fender bass players [laughs], and Billy was a really good one but, you know, he was local nobody knew very much about him but he was really a good musician, period. A good guitarist and very good Fender bass player. And then he also later on switched to upright, he started playing upright.

Brown: But if you say he was one of the first to play Fender bass along with Monk Montgomery, that would have been in the late '40's, about when was that? I'm just trying to place when that might have been. Because if he came back...

Burrell: When Billy?

Brown: Yeah, when he switched to Fender bass?

Burrell: Well, I think, let me put it this way, I'm just trying to put a timetable on it. In '46 I remember going to play, I think once a week they had these jam sessions down at the Club Sudan down in Detroit and Billy was still playing guitar with the Willie Anderson Trio, who was a great pianist. And then for a couple of years after that he continued to play and he gradually shifted over to bass, so I think you're right, late '40's, yeah. I think so, I think it was around maybe '48 when he became a real bona fide bass player and we would work together because I remember it was about that time maybe around '49 or '50 that I got this job with guitar, bass, and drums, which is an interesting kind of story. There was a club on either on John R or Brush, I think it was John R street, and this guy had a restaurant, I think it was called the Waha Room, and his name was Wally something or another, I forget. But the point is it was a very small restaurant and he wanted to put some music in there and so he asked me to, did I want bring a little group in. I said, "Of course." I wanted, you know, to play and get the gig. So he said, "Well, I'll tell you what, I'm going to take one of these tables out and you guys can be over here." Now, he's taking one table out of the, you know, one table with four chairs is not a very big space. I said, "Is that all the room you're going to give me?" He said, "Yeah, that's all I can afford." I said, "Okay." My brother was standing up with his Fender bass, I was standing up with my guitar, that doesn't take up a lot of room, and then I had my good friend who I had know from early, early on. His name was Hindal, [spells out] H-I-N-D-A-L Butts, [spells out] B-U-T-T-S. He was a drummer and I asked him if he could stand up and play [laughs] and he did. So he had the ride cymbal, the sock cymbal, and the snare drum raised way up somehow so he didn't have to stoop down.

So that was the gig. He might have had a tom-tom over there or something, but the point is it was a ride cymbal, sock cymbal, I don't think there was any bass drum, and it worked out pretty good. I really enjoyed it because there was no piano but of course I had been, these session I told you about where I would go and play with these guitarists, there was no piano there anyway. So we were kind of used to just playing jazz with the guitar being the main chordal instrument. So it worked out alright, but the point was that was my first experience and I never forgot it and so I kept that in mind when I moved to New York as something I really loved to do because it gives you control of all of the elements, the harmonic, the melodic, rhythmic, etc, etc. And the form and the orchestration, its all in your hand. And so I, that led to me doing my first trio record in, with guitar, bass, and drums at the Vanguard. Later on, we can talk about that later on, but anyway, that was it.

Brown: Yeah, okay. Well, about that gig. Interesting that you have an older brother eleven years older and it seems like you were the one brokering the gig.

Burrell: Uh-huh.

Brown: So here you have an older brother but you're the one who's handling the business.

Burrell: Right, well, Billy was not necessarily a guy who's a go-getter. He had a day job at the Edison Company, ConEd if you will, and he never gave that up. And he was not about to travel, he was married, and happily married with a son. And his intention was not to travel and be this real professional musician, though he loved it. But he didn't have the desire to do that, leave home, leave his wife and so forth, and family. So he would take gigs as a sideman with all the musicians and me included. So I was the one who was getting the gigs and became popular around Detroit as a guitarist and bandleader of sorts. So I don't know, for some reason this guy asked me about the gig and I said, "Sure, we'll do it, yeah."

Brown: Now, looking back, was there any music education in the schools that you attended? And did you participate?

Burrell: Yeah, that's the other grand part of my upbringing. As I mentioned earlier I went to Miller High School, I'll mention something that happened in Duffield later, but I'll start with Miller. I was very fortunate to play the guitar in the Stage Band, it was a dance band, jazz big band, you know, dance, regular jazz band, but fifteen pieces, or whatever. For some reason they called it the Stage Band because I guess it was on stage and occasionally we would play for dances. I guess jazz was still a word that wasn't used too often. But we played arrangements by Ellington and Basie, and stock arrangements, that was a big thing then. And I played the guitar in that. I'm just pausing because I'm thinking about my age at that point. I went, I graduated from high school when I was sixteen. I went to summer school twice so I could get out of there early to play music, I jus wanted to get out. So I must have gone there fourteen, graduate in three years. Anyway, so then I had this great teacher, Mr. Louis Cabrera, Mexican-American, who also taught Milt Jackson, who also taught Al McKibbon. He's a bassist, a bass player.

My brother Billy and I loved the bass, we feel that that's the bottom primary source for, you know, everything builds up from there. So I loved the bass, I still do, in fact I played some professional gigs as a bass player at one point. So I took, I think my first lessons from Mr. Cabrera in a, some kind of class, I don't know what the class would be, but I remember taking some lessons from him. I'm not sure if it was private lessons because I don't think they had private lessons in high school, it could have probably just been an instrumental class where people played different things. But I remember taking lessons from him and learning a lot and my technique was with the French bow instead of the German bow, that was his thing, and I was pretty good, not bad. I loved the bass. He liked me and he liked my ability as a guitarist, as a musician, he liked the progress I made on the bass. In fact, I remember once he had such a good relationship with his ex-students. I remember once Al McKibbon coming back to visit the school and I was in a class holding a bass and Al McKibbon was there looking at me. It's beautiful, I was, I have to say that I saw a picture of Al McKibbon's music room somewhere, it was either in his obituary or something, and I saw my picture on his wall. It made me feel really good because you never know the effect you have on people, you know, and to know that he thought enough of me to put my picture on his wall was great. Anyway, so he came back and Milt Jackson came back and whenever Milt would come into town with Dizzy Gillespie's big band Cabrera would invite him over and he'd come over. That's how they felt about him. Several other things that Mr. Cabrera did for me, he gave me, because one day I said I would like to write an arrangement for the band. He said, "Okay, do you know what a six-five chord is?" [laughs] I said, "No." He said, "Well, before you write any arrangements I've got to give you some theory lessons." And so he did. Not only did he give me theory lessons he gave me so much theory on his own after school, or in between classes or whatever, that when I went to Wayne State University I didn't have to do any homework for two years. I was a theory major. Theory composition major, that's how much he gave me.

But the other valuable part about that was that he was able to relate the regular theory, European theory, to what I was doing as a jazz person. You know, I could say, "Oh, C seventh is this, F sharp diminished is this." And I could hear this and then immediately transfer it into other terms, so that was a great great help, and he was able to do that. The other thing was he felt, a couple of other things, he felt confident enough in me as a person and as a musician that he even asked me to go sub for him as a bassist on a couple of gigs that he couldn't make. I didn't do it, because I made excuses, I was too scared. But he did ask me, I said, "Wow, that's, you know." Because I didn't know what I was all about, but he certainly asked me. And the other thing was I was also a percussionist in the...

Brown: Concert band?

Burrell: ...concert band, right. So I had all this experience about reading music and playing all the different percussion instruments. He also taught me conducting.

Brown: This is a high school teacher giving you all this background, amazing.

Burrell: [laughs] So he submitted me to the All-City High School Band and I got in as a percussionist in the concert band, All-City High School Concert Band. I played all these different things, and the cymbals, but the of it was it was an honor. Because I mean, I could read the charts and follow the stick and then I became his assistant conductor of the concert band.

Brown: Wow.

Burrell: Yeah, so it was cool. So I thank him, and I saw him later, you know, I used to see him. He's passed on now, but I used to see him an always like Bags and Milt and Al would always thank him. My brother Billy went to that high school, he knew Billy. Yusef Lateef went there, his name was Bill Evans at the time, went to that same high school. Eddie Locke...I can't think of his name right now, the other bop...

Brown: Did Paul Chambers go?

Burrell: No, no. It was another drummer that was Eddie Locke's best friend. They used to have a drum team called "Bop and Locke." Anyway, but it was reminding me of your first question, it was a ripe situation for music. It was basically an African-American school and we had this kind of teacher, and we had some instruments and we would blossom because you got the dream, you got the talent, and you got the encouragement, and you got the helps; you can't help but get better. You know, year, so I'll stop there for the next questions.

Brown: Okay, how we doing on time?

Kimery: Ten minutes.

Brown: Ten minutes, okay. Well, of course, you graduate at sixteen and then we know you go to Wayne State University, was there any gap between sixteen?

Burrell: Yeah, there was.

Brown: Okay.

Burrell: I decided that I was, and I was doing well after I graduated from high school. I mean, I had, I was working all the time and practicing hard and getting better and better, and had a little band, probably the most, one of the most popular bands in town at that time. Local jazz polls I would win. And then my mother, how did this happen...my mother encouraged me to go to college. I think the first offer I got was from Illinois Jacquet when I was about seventeen or eighteen because they used to come to Detroit, all the guys would come to Detroit. And they would come down to this club called the "Club Sudan." The Club Sudan was a place where you, I'm not sure if I got in because my brother was with me, I don't think, I think it was a place where minors could come if they didn't drink, or something. But I know that they had one day, at least one day, where they

had these jam sessions and the younger musicians could come in. Anyway, I was able to meet all kinds of musicians there; Clark Terry, Joe Jones, you name it. Illinois Jacquet, is one of them, and I remember he offered me a job to go on the road with him and he had a great band with Joe Newman and Leo Parker and all these guys. And my mother said, “No, no, no, no, this is not the time for you to leave here yet.”

And so, and then the next big thing was Dizzy Gillespie when I made my first recordings. I was nineteen and Dizzy came in town and he needed me for some reason, and I found out later the reason. His alto saxophone player and his drummer, I won't name the names, but had a problem with substance abuse and so he had let them go. And so he needed some replacement, so I think Milt Jackson probably recommended me, you know. And so Milt probably gave him how to get in touch with me. So he called me and in that band was John Coltrane and Percy Heath. Percy Heath, and the drummer—the replacement drummer was from Chicago—his name was Kansas Fields, and myself and Dizzy. No piano player. Again, that was no big thing for me because I had been used to doing that anyway, but historically speaking that was the first time Dizzy used piano-less group, okay. He would occasionally play piano, you know, and Milt maybe once in awhile, but basically I was providing the chordal background. And I'm nineteen now, I'm so excited to be playing with Dizzy Gillespie in 1951. This is incredible. So, I mean, I framed my first paycheck, I just put it in the frame. I mean, the envelope, I took the money out.

But the thing was Dizzy was a great teacher; he was like a father figure to many many musicians, including myself. So he was always a clown and so funny that he would—how can I say—telling jokes right up 'til the last minute. He'd be keeping you laughing and carrying on, and all of a sudden he'd [bang ban bang], he's counting it off and you're into the song before you even get a chance to be nervous, you know, because you're still cracking up from what he said and now he's counting a tune off. So it was a great experience, great experience. So that's when I first got to know Coltrane. I knew Bags, Milt Jackson, before that and I got to know Percy Heath. So then we made my first records then. We did four sides; two of them which became jazz classics, *Tin Tin Deo* and *Birks Works*. And *Tin Tin Deo*, they say historically speaking is one of the first Latin jazz records. So that was my debut on recordings.

Brown: Did you have a rehearsal before the session, or did you rehearse at the session?

Burrell: Well, we were playing at night...

Brown: Oh, okay...

Burrell: ...so the music was...

Brown: How long was the engagement?

Burrell: It was one month...

Brown: Oh.

Burrell:...yeah, it was one month. That was great for me, I'm at home playing a month with Dizzy Gillespie. And I got to know him pretty well and it was a great experience. And he asked me to leave and go with him, and that's when my mother said, "You know, that's great, and if he wants you now he'll probably want you later as well. But I think you should think about a backup plan and you should go to college." So I did. I thought about what she said and I went to college, I went to Wayne State University, and I don't regret it. [laughs]

Brown: And what was the application process? You applied as a music major, and they were known for their music program at that time? Not necessarily?

Burrell: No, its just one I could afford, because we still didn't have much money. But it was a good school and so I applied as a freshman and I wanted to major in music and the concentration was theory and composition.

Brown: You mentioned one of the professors there, Joe Fava, as having been an influence on your development.

Burrell: Well, Joe was a classical guitarist who worked for the local radio station, I'm not sure, I'll just throw out a name; WJR, that might have been the station. It was an NBC or CBS affiliate, or something. And he also played the viola, so he was definitely classically orientated. But he was the teacher that was connected to the school, and so at that point I wanted to learn everything I could about the guitar, particularly how to use my right hand...the hand where you use the fingers as opposed to the pick, or including the pick. I began to take lessons with him and it turned out that he was such an admirer of jazz and he like my music, he appreciated what I was doing, that he didn't even charge me any money. You know, its like I show him a few things in jazz and that was all, you know, it was like an exchange, more or less. He was a very cool guy, you know, showed a deep appreciation for the music and jazz, and for me, and for what I was trying to do. I studied with him a couple years and after a couple years I realized that I was not going to be a classical guitarist. I could play it pretty well, but my tendency was to want, after I'd play something a few times, I wanted to change some of the notes. And certainly I had an impulse to improvise, [laughs] and you can't do that. So I said, "Well, I'm okay, techniques and use, that classical guitar issues, so it's a matter of putting all those techniques together.

Brown: Two things about your college career; one, you mentioned that you were a composition and theory major, so what did you acquire? First two years you didn't have to do any homework you said, so was there any benefit in being a major, a composition theory major, did you acquire some more knowledge and experience expertise in that regard, as far as composition and arranging?

Burrell: Well, the thing I feel I benefited the greatest from going to college is hearing all kinds of music. When you study composition and theory you have to listen to all of the great composers throughout the centuries and I was exposed to all kinds of music and

loved a lot of it and began to understand it, you know, theoretically and otherwise. From the form, in terms of theory and so it's a good thing I didn't have a whole lot of homework to do because I was working at night. I wasn't getting much sleep anyway, I was gigging at night, you know, in clubs and so forth. But that was the main thing I got out of, musically speaking, but then the other thing, I met a lot of students and people and professors from all different walks of life, all different persuasions and nationalities and races and priorities. And that was an education in itself, just meeting all these different people. I don't know how many minutes you got now...

Kimery: We should probably change.

Burrell: ...that's what I thought. That's the bandleader...first electric guitar.

Brown: Well, I remember there was somebody Collins, but I don't...

Burrell: No, no, no...This is Eddie...

Brown: Oh, Eddie Durham.

Burrell: There it is, that's the guy.

Brown: 'Cause you said Ernie, so that threw me, I was thinking Ernie Wilkins, I know it's not Ernie Wilkins.

Burrell: Eddie Durham. Eddie Durham.

Brown: But Eddie Durham was the first, yeah, he was the first.

Burrell: Yeah, he was the first and he also helped Charlie Christian.

Brown: Are we running? [to Kimery]

Kimery: Yeah.

Brown: Okay, good. So we clear that up, we got Eddie Durham as the guitarist who inspired Charlie Christian...

Burrell: Right.

Burrell: And then we were talking about, before we came back on tape, about how you had this experience at Miller, versus all the people, like Gerald Wilson, everybody talking about Cass Tech.

Burrell: Oh, right. Well, I just felt with all of this special training I was getting at Miller that I didn't have to go to Cass Tech. Plus, I could walk to Miller, it was walking distance to my house. And Cass was on the other side of downtown, out of the neighborhood and

not, so I was happy there. Plus, I played, we used to play for the dances and we'd have all kinds of fun entertainment shows. It was just a good situation for feeling good about the music and the community, so I didn't feel like I needed to go anywhere.

Brown: Okay, now, in interviewing Gerald Wilson yesterday, he talked about how when he came from Mississippi by way of Memphis he came up to Cass Tech, and it's an integrated school...

Burrell: Right.

Brown: Was Miller segregated or integrated?

Burrell: Segregated. Segregated only in the sense that it was in a black neighborhood, I mean, that whole area, I mean that was a bunch of blocks called Black Bottom. I mean, I would say twelve to fifteen blocks going one way...

Brown: That's pretty substantial...

Burrell:...twelve to fifteen blocks going another way, or more.

Brown: Yeah, that's pretty substantial.

Burrell: I'd say maybe twenty, that's a big area and that was the area that both my grade school and high school were in and it was not an easy place to grow up because there was a lot of fights, you know, a lot of violence. But at the same time I learned to get along with people and one of the main things I feel saved me, in terms of the violent aspect, was music. It also changed my attitude about something to do in a positive way instead of fighting and having, and being part of a gang. I mean, I witnessed so many things where gangs were involved and it would just turn your stomach it was so bad, you know. And so many of the friends I had went to jail or got killed, similar to what is happening today. But music changed my attitude about what to look forward to, something positive, and really getting involved. And it also changed the attitude of those around me who saw me with my instrument, they kind of just left me alone like I was not to be messed with because I wasn't going to be apart of that negative stuff that was coming along, you know. In other words, kind of leave him out of it because he's not going to get involved in this, you know, that kind of thing. When I started playing music and carrying my instrument around there was even less conflict that I had, in terms of walking around the street and being with people, you know. There was even some, "What's going on? What is that? What are you doing?" You know, that kind of thing is another whole subject of conversation that transpired without, other than you know, the normal common everyday ghetto talk, you know. I have to say that it saved my life in many ways because I did have some violent episodes growing up and they weren't so nice.

Brown: Well, before we changed the tape we were talking about your experiences, wrapping up your experiences at Wayne State University. One of the things that came to light was the fact that you are a Kappa Fraternity member...

Burrell: Right.

Brown: So what was that like? What was the experience of being in a black fraternity back in the day?

Burrell: Well, it was a good one for me. You had to kind of, you didn't have to, but Wayne State was a university that was mostly white and if you were not white you were expected to maybe join a sorority or a fraternity. You didn't have to, but it was kind of like part of your social connections, you know. If you did that you'd make some new friends and you'd have more bonds and more connections, and blah blah blah, and that's all part of survival. Because not only in college but later on in life you're going to, these people are going to be your connections to whatever. So then my choice then was just to choose one and I just for no other reason that the people I were talking to from time to time, I just felt more comfortable, would be the word, with the guys I spoke to at that time. And they were Kappas. There was the Omegas, there was the Alphas, and the Kappas. And I just felt very comfortable with the Kappa guys and I remained comfortable with them. So I joined that, it was good, it was cool and we had some initiation processes, which I don't want to go into, but you know they all do. And sometimes it's a bit much, but you get through it and it's over. But the point is that happens all over the world, or wherever they have fraternities and sororities. But I'm happy about it, as a few other Kappas are I guess well known, like Billy Taylor and I can't think, Donald Byrd, and a few others. I'm not sure, I could name a couple more maybe. But it was okay, and I had a chance to play a few gigs for them. We had our black and white affairs, we mean the, you know, the uniform, the dress code. It gave me also the excuse to write some songs, I wrote a couple of songs for various occasions for them, it was enjoyable, yeah.

Brown: Well, nowadays, you know, the black fraternities are known for their step shows...

Burrell: Right.

Brown: Was that already in place?

Burrell: No, not so much then, not so much then...

Brown: No, I didn't think so. [laughs]

Burrell: But, it's cool though. It certainly did provide a certain social benefit, yeah.

Brown: Yeah, okay. Great, great, great...well we got to put that in this, include that in this interview. So, Wayne State, you're wrapping up there and then are you probably getting offers to go back out on the road, or you got your sights on New York?

Burrell: Well, I'm going to say a little bit more about Wayne State because, first of all, when I went there it was called Wayne University, it wasn't Wayne State. Secondly, the word jazz was not looked upon very fondly when I was there, not at all. One of the reasons I'm a teacher today is probably because of some negative experiences I had at Wayne State. There was no teaching of jazz, number one, it was not even thought of as being part of a curriculum. Now this is nineteen fifty-one through five, I believe and I remember one class that I had, I think it was a music appreciation class where I would attempt to talk about jazz. Now, mind you, I am a professional musician working at night, you know, making some pretty good money for mature audiences. Now I'm going to school the next day and they don't want to talk about this music that to me is a vital part of this culture; certainly a vital part of who I am and what I was doing. And so I had a problem with every time I would try to raise the subject with this particular instructor he would say, "We don't want to talk about that, that's not worthy of our discussion, we're going to talk about some real developed, highly developed music with great structure and great history and etcetera, etcetera. And I didn't want to argue with him because I wanted to get a good mark, and I didn't want to create a problem for myself. But it did create a problem, even the fact that I would bring it up a little bit too often, I got a failing grade in that particular class. So in order for me to graduate I had to take the class over, and I did and the second time I didn't say too much. So I just took the punishment, got whatever, I probably I didn't get an "A", I probably got a "B" or "C plus", or something, but I got through it. But the point was, during that second time something was churning inside me saying that, "this is not right, that this is music that deserves proper recognition, proper education, should be taught." And I made up my mind I that would be a teacher, and if I ever had a chance I would do something about it. And as you know I have gotten a chance and I'm trying to do something about it.

Brown: [laughs] Been doing something about it.

Burrell: But, in the meantime, now this is a music instructor, music teacher. I don't want to name names, so I won't mention his name. But if anybody wants to do deep investigation they could find out who I took classes from. But anyway, meanwhile one of, one thing that happened during that four years that I was there came from an instructor in humanities who came up to me one day, I was, what I used to do, I initiated in the student center, I think every, once a week we'd have jam sessions, jazz jam sessions, in the student center. I initiated that, of course I wanted to play jazz and play for the students, and so I'd get all of my musicians friends and we'd have a jam session, we liked jamming. I think it was after one of those jam sessions, or I don't know when, but this instructor had seen me around and he's in humanities. He said, "I'd like to ask you if you'd be interested in teaching a class for me." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Look, I don't know anything about jazz, and you seem to know a lot about it, and I think it's important." And he said, "I'm going to pay you, I'll pay you to teach the class for me, I'll be there with you, but I'm going to pay you." I said, "Okay." [laughs] I did one class for him, that's all, and he thanked me and he paid me. But that meant so much to me, one class. So in my mind, I said, "Well, wait a minute, not all these professors think that jazz is no good, this guy thinks it's really great." So that gave me some hope,

you know, so I always remembered that. Now that's the guy I wish I could remember his name, I don't remember his name now.

But it really stimulated me to have some faith in some people, you know, and not feel like everybody was against it, that is in this higher learning, you know, college atmosphere, because that was what I was getting at first, and then this one guy. So, anyway, in my mind I said, "If I ever have the chance I'm going to see if I can do something about that by teaching college or teaching jazz perhaps at college if I can." So right after that I graduated in fifty-five and Herb Ellis gotten sick, Herb Ellis the guitarist, and Oscar Peterson and Ray Brown were, you know, the Oscar Peterson Trio. Ray Brown's wife is from Detroit and so they happen to be coming through Detroit or something, for a night, or a stopover, or something like that, and they came into see me at this place called Baker's Keyboard Lounge. No, no, it wasn't, it was Klein's Show Bar, Klein's Show Bar in Detroit. Oscar asked me would I join the trio. I said, "What'?" And he told me that Herb Ellis had taken sick and he needed a replacement, and could I join him right away. And I said, "Sure." And my mother said, "Okay, that's cool."

Brown: 'Cause you had completed your degree. Now, you got your degree as Bachelor of Music Education, so you must have had...

Burrell: Bachelor of Music.

Brown: Bachelor of Music, okay, so, okay...

Burrell: Yeah, and so I joined Oscar Peterson right after I graduated from college and stayed with him six months, and then Herb Ellis got himself together and came back. By that time, though, I had been to New York and all over the States and got a taste of what it was really like on that high level of musicianship and dealing with the great New York City. I said, "Wow." So I kind of had a feeling better about myself and I was able to stay with the trio, I didn't get fired, I mean Herb was his regular guitarist, so certainly, you know, he came back to his job after he got himself together. But I was grateful to be there and I learned a lot from them and I learned a lot from Ray Brown 'cause we were, sometimes we would room together, you know, on the road with Ray. He taught me a lot about being dedicated practicing. I practiced a lot, but he'd get up at eight o'clock in the morning and start practicing.

Then he also taught me how to better my golf game, I was, I played a little bit of golf in Detroit just as, you know, for fun with some friends, but Ray Brown was a serious golfer. And, so I'd just say, "I might as well just get up, I can't sleep through this, he's practicing and then he's running out the door to go play golf." So finally I started getting up with him and practicing and going out on the golf course. And that was some couple of experiences there that were, I was thinking about that, I wrote something the other night in my memoirs, I'm collecting all kinds of stuff, and I was just thinking about two things. I saw a program on black golfers the other night on PBS and they were talking about Charlie Sifford. Charlie Sifford is known as the Jackie Robinson of golf. I took a lesson with Charlie Sifford through Ray Brown, Ray Brown knew him and one time we ran into

him on a golf course somewhere and Ray said, “Would you please give us a lesson?” And Charlie said, “Sure.” So we spent about an hour with him and so that was, one of the feathers in my cap is taking a lesson with the great Charlie Sifford.

But on the other hand I remember Ray Brown and I going on some golf courses and I think one, I remember one in Virginia where we went up to try and play eighteen holes, or nine holes, or whatever we wanted to play, and they wouldn't let us in. They said, “We're sorry, you look like nice guys, but we can't have colored people here.” So, you know, that's the way it was in those times, this was fifty-five. The revolution, you know, took a little bit later, you now, the Civil Rights Movement is around the corner but it still hadn't happened. Also I think golf courses are a private thing, you can't force—what is it—the rule about, you can't force a private club to change the rules unless, I don't, you know what I'm saying. Anyway, that was a negative, but one of the positives was playing with Ray, he's great, and hanging out with him and just playing with that trio was wonderful.

Brown: Now, you must have toured all over nationally. Did you tour internationally with Oscar as well?

Burrell: No, no, just here.

Brown: But even touring nationally, did you encounter other episodes of discrimination?

Burrell: Yes, but they were not—how can I say—they were not, they were not made so uncomfortable. Many times we would stay with people's houses rather than the hotels, rather than go through that. But, you know, that's what Duke Ellington taught us all how to do that. But he did it many times on the trains, and so forth, but that's another story. Anyway, for the most part it was good 'cause Oscar Peterson was well respected and for the most part we didn't have any trouble, you know.

Brown: And what was it like working with Oscar? I mean, this is your first big gig, your...

Burrell: Well, it was my first big gig, but again, it was, other than the fact that he played a lot of fast tempos, it was not a problem. 'Cause I mean, I played with Dizzy Gillespie...

Brown: Right.

Burrell: ...and the guys in Detroit weren't bad. I mean, you know, we prided ourselves on being competitive with the best, so our attitude was when we went to New York we were going to be ready.

Brown: Now, but working with Oscar, part of your extensive repertoire, so what was the learning process?

Burrell: Well, we had some rehearsals, oh yeah, we had some rehearsals and technically I felt that I was okay. It was good, I didn't have any problem with that, no I enjoyed it for the most part. So, yeah, that's what happened after Wayne, after Wayne State. And then...go ahead...

Brown: No, no.

Burrell:... and then when Herb Ellis came back, then I went back to Detroit and decided I was going to pursue a masters degree, so I reenrolled in a masters program in musicology at Wayne State University. I was there about two months, I guess, this was in the fall of fifty-five. And I said, "Wait a minute, I think I better take advantage of all these connections I made in New York, and blah blah blah." So I called up my best friend, Tommy Flanagan, I said, "I'm moving to New York in two weeks, would you like to go with me?" And he said, "Well, let me think about it." I said, "Okay, well, I'm going, you know." I mean, we were close, you know, so I didn't have to go into a whole lot of explanation with him. So he called me back in a couple of days and said, "Yeah, I'll go with you, we'll go together." So we got in my Chrysler and we drove to New York in the spring, early spring, I guess it was March of '56. And then we both stayed with my Aunt Betty up in Harlem, an apartment complex up there, somewhere between 125th and 135th on Fifth Avenue, I forget the name of that apartment complex. Anyway, and we stayed with her for about six months max, I guess, less than that, maybe a couple of months, and then we both got our own places. And that was the beginning of my venture in New York.

Brown: Now, did you go with a trio, did you have a trio when you went to New York? You and Tommy...

Burrell: No, we just went...

Brown: You just went.

Burrell:...we just went and started doing what we could do, and making gigs, you know. But Tommy, I think, Tommy first got a gig with J.J. I believe it was J.J. Johnson he was working with first. And I was just messing around with different gigs, whatever I could get, and working in the daytime at a department store named Bonwit Teller on Fifth Avenue. And, you know, stock-boy, that kind of thing. But at night I was, I would go up to, not at night, on Monday nights I would go to the 125 Club on a 125th street in Harlem and jam. And that's where I, you know, after some months doing that, or weeks rather, I met Alfred Lion, president of Blue Note, who asked me to make an album for him, which became my first album. I think I did that August, somewhere in August of '56, somewhere in there. Yeah, and that was it. And in the meantime, no, I wasn't doing demos and records yet. I think I was just getting ready to do that first album. It was a funny thing, though, he gave me an advance and of course I wasn't making any money, and working in this department store we were kind of poor right at that point. So he gave me this advance and I was so happy, I went to the store and got some groceries. I

remember getting some hotdogs and some beans, you know, what do you call those beans?

Brown: Boston baked beans? Beans and franks?

Burrell: Baked beans, baked beans, yeah, I got some baked beans and some hotdogs, and I was, yeah man, I was ready. I was opening this can of beans and cut my hand, I cut my finger right on my left hand. And I had to call him up and say, "Mr. Lion, I'm sorry I can't do the record date." And he said, "What?" I said, "Well, I cut my hand, and you know, I'm sure it will be okay in a couple of weeks, but right now." He said, "Okay." So he gave me a break. He said, "Okay, we'll do it a month from now." Or whenever it was. So after a couple of weeks it was healed, and then I practiced a bit, and then I went and did it. But that was a scary point for me. So I'm really careful now about opening cans. [laughs] Anyway, and so after that...

Brown: Did you choose all the musicians on the date?

Burrell: Oh yeah, well, actually I didn't know a lot. I chose Tommy and Paul, 'cause Paul was my protégé, I don't know if I told you about that. Paul Chambers was a gentleman that I met when I was in Detroit...dances, rather, and I guess like now Hip-Hop is for teenagers, we had some gigs where we played for teenage dancers. And he was at a dance, he was one of the teenagers at this dance that we were playing for. It was me and Tommy, and I don't who the drummer was, and probably James Richardson, who is Rodney Richardson's brother, who Rodney Richardson is the bass player who used to play with Lester Young. Anyway, and this kid was standing there looking at us and he said, "Can I play a song with you?" And I said, "Sure, I guess." You know, he's a bass player he came up and he played, I don't know what song we played, but...now I knew how to play bass, you know, I could understand technically what he was doing and also musically so, okay, now you've got to turn it off...

Brown: We don't know that much about him.

Burrell: Right.

Kimery: We're running.

Brown: And we're on, so if you want to, if you could talk about your first trio, your first...

Burrell: Well, Tommy and I, Tommy Flanagan and I were best friends, musically speaking but also socially. He lived in a neighborhood called Corner Gardens in Detroit where my cousins lived and I would visit them sometime as a teenager and he lived in that area and eventually we developed kind of a social, set of friends, social set of friends as teenagers that were in that area, so I would go visit. And I don't know exactly how we met, it could have been through one of those things where I found out he was a musician, 'cause I do remember going to his house and taking my guitar and, you know, just sitting

around and playing. But the other thing I mentioned earlier was that Nat King Cole was a big influence on, and Oscar Moore of course, on me and many other musicians at that time. And so we had decided to put together a trio modeled after Nat King Cole with piano, guitar, and bass. And somehow it was Alvin Jackson, Milt Jackson's brother. I think Alvin was a couple years older than Milt, I'm not sure. But, anyway, that's how that happened and I wish I could remember exactly how we met to form that trio, but that was the trio. And we played, you know, little gigs here and there. But that was the first group that I had, and it was kind of a co-op, it wasn't, I don't know, you know, it was just a trio playing music, yeah, that was good. From there it led to other things, but I guess that would, you could say that was my first organized group. And then I mentioned the other one about my brother and I, and the drums.

Brown: So now we've got your first recording, we'll go back into New York, '56, and you've made your first recording, this is the one that was release under *Introducing Kenny Burrell*.

Burrell: Right, right.

Brown: Right. So how did that impact on your career? Did...

Burrell: Well, it impacted really greatly because it got great reviews from *Downbeat* and *Metronome*, or whatever, I know *Downbeat* was the main magazine and *Metronome*, I think, was also important then. And I remember particularly Nat Hentoff gave it a very nice review and I believe Leonard Feather did the linear notes, I'm not sure, but it was really well received by the critics and the musicians. And I think the next year I won my first *Downbeat* poll of new star, you know, that kind of thing. And I felt good about it, I think your question earlier was who picked the musicians. I'm sure I asked for Tommy and Paul, and...

Brown: No, go ahead, I'm just looking at the personnel, 'cause you had Candido on there, too.

Burrell: Yeah, Mr. Lion, Alfred Lion suggested Kenny Clarke and Candido. Yeah, and that was okay with me. So that was the way that ended up, yeah.

Brown: But, Kenny wasn't on that date, was he? Kenny Clarke?

Burrell: Who was it? Who was the drummer?

Brown: No, you're absolutely right, *Introducing* was Kenny Clarke, that's right.

Burrell: Right.

Brown: Yes, right, yes, yes, yeah, 'cause they had been working.

Burrell: Right, and the other thing about it when I went to New York there were a couple of musicians that were very helpful to me and the other young Detroiters coming then at that time, and that was Kenny Clarke and Frank Wess. Kenny Clarke was kind of the house drummer for Savoy and Blue Note, and Prestige. He would kind of advise those guys about dates and so forth, who to use, and so he got me on quite a few dates as well as Tommy, and I'm sure Paul as well. Frank Wess was another person who involved me in some of the jazz records that I made early on, I'll put it that way. And in the meantime I was starting to get a few calls to do studio work, which—how can I say—I became busier and busier with that, which is good and bad. But the point is I was glad to be able to leave a day job and started to play music.

So one of the first things I started to do, I got this job up in Harlem at a club called Branker's, or was Bowman's, and then it was, it was Bowman's and then it was Branker's, up on the corner of 155th street and St. Nicholas place I believe it was. It was with an organ trio and the organist was Ram Ramirez, the guy who wrote *Lover Man*. And Johnny, I can't think of the drummer's name, anyway, it was a trio and then we played for the shows and we played songs on our own. And I was able to make, I remember I was making seventy-five dollars a week, which is cool with me 'cause at least I had a steady income and could play music for it rather than go through a day job. So I was able to do that for a living and play every night and it was cool. So from that though I met some people and started to get some calls to do some demos, demos, demonstration records for, you know, to be sent out to the real pros. They didn't pay much money but at least they were connections 'cause some of those people who contractors for the demos were contractors for regular record dates, so I started to get busy as a sideman doing all kinds of recordings. And although I've done several hundred as a sideman on jazz records, I've done two or three times that many doing Blues and Rock and Roll and Pop, and all that other stuff. Because, number one, I could read well, number two, I was able to play all kinds of music; the Blues and etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, and I didn't have a problem with any of it. So I started to get more calls and eventually I became one of the first call guys on guitar for studio stuff, which means you don't know what it's going to be, you know. And again, that can be a problem, and it was a problem for me after awhile.

To make a long story short, after awhile I was so busy I felt that I wasn't practicing enough. So therefore, I wasn't growing enough. I mean, I was, you know, a master of my craft and I could handle what was here, but what about up there, I want to get up there, I don't want to stay here forever. So I became kind of frustrated and one of the things that really kind of broke the camel's back for me was I remember one day I had a record date and I used to take two guitars at least, sometimes more, two. One with really thin strings if I had to play some bluesy stuff and, you know, quasi rock and roll, so you had to bend the strings a lot and so it doesn't hurt your fingers. And then my regular jazz guitar, which you know, I use.

And this particular day, for some reason, I only brought one guitar, which was my regular guitar. And I had this record date with I have no idea who this person was now, and it was some guy who did about twenty-four takes on each song, or whatever, at least twelve

on each song. And I had to play a creative a solo and I had to bend a lot of strings and I was, this was not the guitar to be bending strings on, so it was wearing me out. So I got through it but then later that afternoon I had a record date with Red Garland. And I went to the record date and I didn't have much left in my left hand and after a couple of tunes I knew that I was going to be an embarrassment to myself and to Red. So I told him that I had a real severe stomachache that I couldn't continue, that I had to leave. I was ashamed to tell him what happened. So I just begged off and he said he understood and feel better, blah, blah, blah. So whatever record that is but I'm just on two tracks, or two or three tracks, that's the record date that. So anyway, the point was on my way home I said, "That's it, I'm not going to do this anymore, I'm not going to do these things that I don't believe in anymore." Because it is detrimental to my psyche, detrimental to reputation, blah, blah, blah, I can't be going through this, so that was the thing that changed me. Later on, years later, I told Red, I said, "Man, I don't want to mess up your date so I had to fake an excuse." He said, "I'm glad you didn't try to make it because it would have been a problem anyway."

Fortunately for me, around 1959, late '59, I got a call from Elliot Lawrence, bandleader, had a big band, and kind of quasi-be-bop, but dance band. He was also breaking into becoming a conductor on Broadway. And so he had an opportunity to do a show called *Bye Bye Birdie*, and he wanted to get some guys, some cats in the band. So he asked me if I could play in the band, he said, "You know, you can take off whenever you want, you just send me a good sub." I said, "Maybe that might work because at least I know what I got to do and if I could take off if I have stuff, you know, records and stuff." I won't have to take all these other stupid record dates in order to make a living. The other thing about it when you subbed at your studio work, you don't want to insult the contractors, I mean if you start saying "no" they're going to all other people. So this allowed me the freedom to have a steady income, have a steady job with insurance and all that other stuff. So I took that and it last about a year and half. After about two or three weeks, it's the same music, so you don't even have to hardly look at the music, okay the conductor comes, the conductor, bang. You know, so you hardly have to even think about it because you know it by now, and you're playing.

So during that time I was able to practice on a regular basis, I was able to write, compose, I was able to get enough sleep and eat, you know, proper diet and so forth. And that became the time in which I created and produced my best selling album, *Midnight Blue*, was the one that I did, wrote and recorded during that time. I was so focused because I had plenty of time to think you're sitting there, and not just sitting there in the pit, but you know, you have more time to concentrate. I was so focused on this record, I wrote all the songs except one, Don Redman's "Gee, Baby Ain't I Good to You" is the other one. For some strange reason I wanted to put that one there. Now you know we do things when we're in a creative zone that we don't know why we do them, but if they feel right we just do them. So I put it on there. But I was so focused on that I even created a cover, that was the only cover I ever designed in my life and probably maybe the last one, but that's how focused I was. I went to Mr. Lyons, I said, "Alfred, I have an idea for the cover." I said, "I don't know if you'll like it, but here it is." He said, "Well, let me see it." I had

scribbled it out using crayons and stuff, and he said, "I like it, we'll use it." So he gave it to his regular designer guy to finish it, but this was my idea.

Just to show you how focused I was on now, how focused I was on what I wanted to do to get from this level to the next level. I also specifically had in mind to do it with no piano because I had certain guitar voicings and sounds that I wanted to play on there. That's all I needed, a certain amount of space, a certain amount of whatever. I had been working with, by that time, with Stanley Turrentine, you know we did all these records with Jimmy Smith and all these other people. And so Stanley was in my mind and Major Holley who was a great foundation bass player for me, and I had been working with Major Holley and Bill English, so we had a certain groove going in terms of the time and sub-pathical. And then Ray Barretto who I had worked with also with other musicians, Gene Ammons, etc. I could hear the conga drum in there, so I knew exactly what I wanted and it turned out to be a huge success. *Midnight Blue* could be called *Midnight Blues* because basically it's mostly blues on there. But as I tell my students we use that word interchangeable, anyway. But its interesting about this album, not only is it my best selling album, still selling, it's been one of the albums that has been resurrected because Rudy Van Gelder shows it as one of his connoisseur picks, or something like that, to be reissued. But it was Alfred Lyon's favorite, favorite album of all the ones he recorded.

Brown: Saying something.

Burrell: Now, I don't understand that, I don't understand that at all. And I could only tell you what his wife told me, it was also buried with him, when he went in his grave it was on his tombstone. The closest I could come to that is Ruth, I think her name was, she said, she asked him, "What was it about this album that you love." And he said, "Because every note swung." Now, I know you may have heard this, but all the musicians kind of imitate Alfred kind of behind his back in a teasing way because he did say a lot of times, he would stop something, or he would get you in between a take and say, "It's not swinging." And they would imitate him in his German accent and say, "It's not swinging, it's not swinging." But he was serious, he was serious, and for some reason this one got to him. I was surprised because, again, this is mainly blues and some of it is pretty simple. But of course it's coming from a deep spot.

Some of the musicians that I highly respected like Milt Jackson, and others, said, "Man, that's a great album." Surprised me because I'm saying, "It's just a blues." I'm just playing the blues, but other guitarists say that this is a primer for guitarists who want to learn to play jazz with blues inflection, and so forth. I mean, I heard a lot of things about it, but anyway. There's one more thing I was going to say about it, I can't remember it right now. It, besides being the best seller and Alfred Lyons' favorite, there was, oh, I know what it was, one more thing. It's the only time, because I was in the middle of it, it's the only time I created a song on the spot and recorded it. It's something called "Soul Lament", and that was created on the spot and I just felt that it could be, I could, I just felt this thing coming to me that I could complete it. I felt it was something that I could do as I told Rudy to turn the tape on, and he did, and so I just played it, and it was one take and it was done. Since then I've had a couple of people, one classical guitarist, who wanted

to, who did transcribe it and said he's playing it as a classical piece, because it's just solo guitar. Anyway, saying all that to say that I was really inspired.

Brown: Well, this was all recorded in '63 and, you know, you have, there's a big gap in between your first, *Introducing Kenny Burrell*, '56, and now '63. There were so many, as you said, you were a studio musician with so many other people...

Burrell: But I was struggling to maintain that, because there's a bunch of albums between my first one and this one, but what I'm saying is that I felt if I hadn't stopped all that other regular studio work my level would have started to go down. So an example of the level going up is the next album I'm going to talk about, which is *Guitar Forms*, which happened right after this.

Brown: Okay.

Burrell: And *Guitar Forms* album is one I truly had a chance to work on because of all the things I was saying, I had the time to rest and to think and practice. That was the first one that was nominated for a Grammy, but that's the one that I think explored all of the things that I wanted to do with the guitar, the classical, the blues, the jazz, the Latin, all sides of me are in that album. In fact, when people say, "What album should I get first of yours?" I always tell them this one because it shows the various sides of what I can do and I'm pretty proud of that and Creed Taylor, the producer, said "Who do I want to work with me on that?" And I said, "Gil Evans." Because again I thought Gil could do all those different things and he was a master accompanist for soloists, of course he did great things with Miles. Part of all that studio stuff that I had been doing, part of it was for Creed Taylor because he did a lot of different kinds of things because I remember doing records with Astrud Gilberto and Kai Winding and some of it was, some of the other stuff was kind of dumb, in fact to the point that I said, "I don't want you to use my name on it." So if you ever see any records with Buzzy Bavarian, that's me.

Brown: Buzzy Bavarian...

Burrell: Yeah.

Brown: Where did you get that name?

Burrell: I don't know.

Brown: Sprechen deustche?

Burrell: That's just, anyway, that's one of the names I used. But the point was with all that Creed understood all the things I could do on the guitar. So he said, "Why don't you make a record exploring all these different things, all these different sides of you?" So I said, "Okay." My goal with this though was the, not only the, because I do love a lot of different things. I love all kinds of music, my goal was to make each piece stand on its own though. Not just have a collection of stuff and say, "Okay, boy, well, look at all

that.” To have each piece be outstanding, you know, and not just a weak thing so I wanted to make each piece very strong. And I feel good about that, I think we did that. With Gil’s help and those great musicians on that record date, unbelievable, it was unbelievable the musicians on that date, I won’t even go on and name them, but just incredible people. Speaking of that, I’ve had unbelievable fortune to play with so many great musicians on every instrument, you know, every instrument. From Eubie Blake to Herbie Hancock and all in between, if you can believe that. It’s just incredible, and that’s just on the piano, I even played with Teddy Wilson, and Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Jay McShann. Can you believe that?

Brown: Well, according to the Lord’s discography you have no less than approximately 600 entries, that means you were on 600 different recording sessions.

Burrell: Wow, I didn’t realize it was that many.

Brown: Over 128 as a leader.

Burrell: I thought it was about a 103, it’s a hundred, I better get that...

Brown: Well, there are some sessions that he’s got in here that are from Detroit prior to the Dizzy.

Burrell: Right.

Brown: So, there are some of those, maybe that’s what kind of...

Burrell: Yeah, a couple of those, just a couple though.

Brown: Here’s one with *Kenny Burrell and the Four Sharps*.

Burrell: Yeah, how can I get a copy of that?

Brown: Uh, probably I don’t know, but I’ll look tonight, I’ll go up and Google and see if it’s available.

Burrell: I appreciate it, here’s the reason, because they’re doing part of my, they have a five-year review here every now and then, and part of my review is they want a discography updated, and I don’t have an updated discography.

Brown: This is the Lord’s, this is available on CD, so this is from, I only got the 2007, so it’s current now...

Burrell: Is that 2007?

Brown: This is 2007, so there’s a 2009 that is going to be even more updated than this.

Burrell: Okay, I can't download that, can I? I have to buy it?

Brown: You probably have to buy it, you probably, I probably can loan this to you, we'll work it out.

Burrell: Okay, okay, I appreciate it, yeah, I appreciate it.

Brown: But, you know, and here's a session from Detroit 1952-53 Joe Alexander, Otis "Boo Boo" Turner, Ali Jackson, Oliver Jackson...

Burrell: That's who I was thinking about, Oliver Jackson.

Brown: ...and "Boo Boo" Turner, Clarence Gene Shaw on trumpet, and so yeah, these are from '53, '52.

Burrell: Yeah, I was thinking about Oliver Jackson before, I couldn't think of his name, we went to Mille High School.

Brown: The next one is Ray Bryant with George Duvivier and Art Taylor, that's...

Burrell: That's New York, I'm sure...

Brown: Yeah, that's when you get to New York, so that's the beginning of the New York sessions. So then Frank Foster and Frank Wess.

Burrell: I didn't do all that.

Brown: Then Kenny Burrell, and then Kenny Burrell March 12, 1956. And this is the session that they actually cribbed from this to actually put things like in you, in *The Best of Kenny Burrell*. So these are sessions before you were actually able to do your *Introducing Kenny Burrell*.

Burrell: Well, there was a, yeah, right, well anyway, I would like to get a hold of that because I got to turn that in soon.

Brown: Okay, alright, like I said, we'll work on it.

Burrell: I'd appreciate it if you can help me with that.

Brown: Sure, well, I do want to go back to that period between *Introducing Kenny Burrell*, '56, and lets say *Midnight Blue*, which is...

Burrell: I've got a class at five...

Brown: Okay. [laughs] No problem.

Burrell: I'm sorry. [laughs]

Brown: People recognize universally and that's the one you did with Coltrane...

Burrell: Right.

Brown: And the other is from that same year, from '58, that you did with the Godfather of Soul that most people probably aren't aware of, of "Try Me". Do you remember that session?

Burrell: I remember being there, I remember being there, I don't remember dates. I mean, the tracks and all, but I remember interacting with him. Yeah, are we, yeah, we're recording. I remembering James Brown being really specific for every instrument and every person about what he wanted them to play, and I was so happy I could meet his satisfaction because I didn't want to disappoint him. I mean, again, I love all kinds of music and respected him tremendously and this is part of my stuff as a studio musician. And I got the call and I said, "Sure." But he had specific, particularly rhythms, he had rhythms that he wanted you to play and he had a sound that he wanted you go get out of your instrument. So I was able to somehow do it like he wanted and it was okay.

Brown: So, well, James didn't hand out charts, obviously...

Burrell: No.

Brown:...so he just sang? How did he communicate?

Burrell: He sang the part...

Brown: He sang the part.

Burrell: He said...[sings vocal rhythms]...and so you had to try and get that and you mess around with the amp and finally he said, "Yeah, that's, that's". And when you get it he said, "Okay", and then he'd go to the next guy. There wasn't a lot of harmonic changes there, some, but not a lot, so you didn't have to worry about that too much. But rhythmically, and the sound and the voicing, of course, because the voicing has to do with how it's going to sound. He knew what he wanted in his own way, you know, he was a master of that and when he put it all together it worked. Yeah, so you mentioned one track in particular.

Brown: Well, "Try Me" was the big hit. [sings] I mean, we could put it on, but...

Burrell: No, I'm just saying I didn't even know that was the big hit...

Brown: Yeah.

Burrell:...that I was on.

Brown: And I think the flipside was “Tell Me What I Did Wrong.”

Burrell: Okay, you know more than I do about it.

Brown: Well, you were doing so many sessions it’s amazing that you can even remember doing half of them.

Burrell: But, man, that’s why I say you are the right guy for this. Man, you are something, man, that’s great, I’m so glad. Any way, yeah, so...

Brown: We got just about a few more minutes on this tape, we got about five or ten minutes, but then there is the historic meeting of you and Trane, ’57, and then coming back to recording the Kenny Burrell, John Coltrane. Would you talk a little bit about Coltrane and your relationship?

Burrell: Well, again, I first met Trane with Dizzy in ’51, I guess it was..

Brown: When you did the session.

Burrell: Yeah, when we did the session and very dedicated guy. One of the most focused musicians I ever musicians, one of the most humble musicians I ever met. Always trying, always thinking about the music, practicing. No ego to speak of, I mean, he was about the music. And I learned a lot just being around him, just about focusing and dedication. A beautiful human being, and so, I don’t know if you ever met him, but he was a, there was a calmness about John Coltrane that you always, I always felt at ease with him. There was never any tension or any weird vibes, there was always a calmness and a peacefulness. When I went to New York I would get called for these things called blowing sessions, and that was in the ’57, ’58, and so forth, and he was part of some of those things.

In fact, that record that we did together is one of those blowing sessions, and that’s on Prestige, so that was Bob Weinstock’s idea of putting us together. Just for the record, many people might know this, but the blowing sessions were when the A&R guy would call up a bunch of musicians that he selected and said, “Okay, we’re going to have this session two weeks from now, three weeks from now, and whose going to be on it, and you bring one or two songs.” Everybody one or two pieces and you’re expected to run those songs down once or twice and then record it no matter how complicated or how easy and that was what it was about. And it was always fun and it was always challenging, you know. On this date I guess they decided to make it a co-leader date, yeah, and I know Flanagan was on it and it was Paul Chambers and Art Taylor, is it?

Brown: Yeah, you had two different, no, you had two different sessions. One with you, Trane, Tommy Flanagan, Paul Chambers, Jimmy Cobb.

Burrell: Oh, right, Jimmy Cobb.

Brown: And there was the other one that was originally released as two trumpet and two tenors, *Interplay* for, and that was Idrees Sulieman, and...

Burrell: Right.

Brown: So that was an earlier session.

Burrell: Well, this one was with Jimmy Cobb.

Brown: Yeah, yeah.

Kimery: Lets just pause for one second.

Brown: And we're back to the Kenny Burrell, John Coltrane Prestige recording, and on here there is only one original by you. "Lyresto", is that the correct pronunciation?

Burrell: Right, "Lyresto."

Brown: So what was the inspiration for that and the title, it's a very, I thought it was "Liar-esto", but I wanted to get that clarification from you.

Burrell: I think I was thinking about it being lyrical, and I think I probably didn't spell it right.

Brown: Well, at least you get the royalties for it, it's your tune. [laughs]

Burrell: [laughs]

Brown: So, I mean, one of the other things that I think that's really significant about your career that has impacted the progression of jazz is working with Jimmy Smith and the organ trio. You already talked about working, you know, the earlier influences of working without a piano and working in a piano-less trio and then patterned after the Nat King Cole trio. So trios seem to be, your first group—Tommy Flanagan and you—seems to be a real comfortable format for you. But then working with Jimmy Smith, you mentioned working with Stanley. So what is that like, working in that genre, in that idiom of the organ trio?

Burrell: Well, I'll tell you. I think working with Jimmy Smith is probably one of the most magical things I've ever done in this sense. I really think he was a genius. There was a lot of mutual respect there, but we had hardly any rehearsal ever. It was always just kind of what do you want to play and do you know this and if, you know, it's like if you don't know it, well here is kind of the way it goes, you learn it on the spot or learn it in a short rehearsal. But not really any real rehearsals and it always something magical happen when I played with Jimmy. I think it was because we had mutual respect and I certainly learned early on that the most important thing is to make the music happen and

so if somebody else is soloing your job is to help them sound as good as possible. That's what I did with Jimmy, and so he really liked that and I think he did the same for me. I remember at Café Bohemia when Jimmy first came to New York in '58 I believe it was, around in there. We all went down to see this great new organ star who was revolutionizing how to play jazz organ. And I had worked with a couple of them before... Wild Bill Davis and Jackie Davis, great organists. But no one was taking it to that level that Jimmy with the bebop and the blues, and the modern jazz, he had it.

So we all went down there and Alfred was there one night, I went down to see him. Alfred said, "Would you please go up and play a song with Jimmy?" I said, "Okay, if he wants me to." And so Jimmy said, "Okay." And I went up and we played and man, it really worked so well and Alfred said, "I want you guys to make some records together." So that's what started it, Alfred heard us together and he decided it would work. And I made so many, at least a dozen with Jimmy and then he made a couple with me under my name. But it was just a magical pairing, I felt, I felt as you say, simpatico, we didn't have to have too much to say, just musically speaking I could almost anticipate what he was going to do and vice versa. Even if he was going to do something strange I was very comfortable by following him and trying to compliment it, you know, which is the way you are supposed to do it.

Brown: Jimmy has a lot of church influence in his...

Burrell: Oh yeah...

Brown:...playing the organ, so...

Burrell: Oh yeah.

Brown:...you guys were connecting on many different levels.

Burrell: Oh yeah, that's true, that's true, right. But I just think that his, how can I say, his spontaneity and continuous flow of ideas, to me, I don't hear that in a lot of musicians. I mean, that's to me the genius part and that music just kept coming out of Jimmy Smith.

Brown: And Jimmy had been working with Donald Bailey for a long time.

Burrell: Oh, I love Donald Bailey. Donald Bailey, I love him, another underrated musician.

Brown: He's up in the Bay area...

Burrell: Yeah, I know, I know.

Brown:...so we just had a tribute for him.

Burrell: I know, that's one of my favorite musicians, man.

Brown: Well, what is it about the drummers? I mean, yes, you've worked with all the piano players, you played with all the great leaders. But you've also played with all the great drummers...

Burrell: I certainly have.

Brown: ...I mean, your first recording is with Elvin. You know, and we can bring in everybody.

Burrell: Philly Joe, Papa Jo - you name it - Shelly Manne, you name it.

Brown: So what is it, when you, the last time we saw you perform live was at the IAJE when you had Sherman Ferguson, rest in peace...

Burrell: My man, yeah.

Brown: ...so, I mean, the breadth of the different styles you seem to be able to, not only function, but to create some sort of synergistic effect. I mean, watching you with Sherman was a real treat.

Burrell: Right.

Brown: You know, that was tremendous, you know...

Burrell: We had a good relationship.

Brown: So what is it you look for in a drummer? What is it that you want a drummer to provide? I know there are so many different contexts, but is there a general or...

Burrell: No, I don't have anything that I'm looking for particularly except that whatever way the music is going to go, whatever direction it's going to go, that we all pull together to make it happen. The music is king, you know. Certainly your part in there, and your solo part, if it is a solo part, is going to add to the composition, if you will, because it is a composition. But the overall result to me is did this composition work? Did this piece work? And if we all think that way then it's going to work, you know. Certainly there will be moments when somebody is going to be outstanding, that happens because you get inspired and you never know when something magical is going to happen. But I don't look for any particular thing in working with the fellow musicians, except honesty, of course, and being dedicated to the music.

Beyond that, just in terms of evaluating someone's performance, whether I'm playing with them or not, is the honesty between what they're really feeling and what they're really playing. You know, that to me is the key. When I say, "What they're really feeling." That means in terms of your deep feeling and what you're feeling is right, what you're feeling is good. That connection to me is the key to making good music. No

matter whether it's classical, blues, jazz, rock, it doesn't matter. You know, 'cause there in is the spiritual connection that we all have, that's what connects us, yeah, that's the one and if we can keep that network open that's what happens, that's the best.

Brown: Is that something that you teach your students?

Burrell: Oh yeah.

Brown: I mean, we're going to talk about your education...

Burrell: I teach them that, you know, that's your strength as Ellington is such an example of that. Don't be afraid to be yourself, 'cause that's where your real strength is, and you can't be anybody else anyway. You can't be anybody else anyway. But most of us can't even be ourselves, we can't be who we are. But the ones we love, the ones we adore, the ones who are our heroes, they're the ones who dare to be who they are and are courageous enough to say, "Here I am." And we love them for it because who they are is not measured in skin color and clothes, or anything, except spirit and they connect. Not with our clothes, our skin color, but our spirit. That's it.

Brown: It sounds so simple, but it's so profound. [laughs] So sublime, I mean, if it was that easy we'd have a better world.

Burrell: I'm afraid we're a long ways from that 'cause we do know right from wrong. But so many of us are afraid, fear, man, anyway. I don't want to get into that.

Brown: Well, we were talking about spirituality so that always brings me back to Coltrane because of all the figures that I associate with spirituality in the music, not religion, but spirituality. I think Coltrane was a unique example of somebody who could embrace everything in his music, in his spirituality, in his life.

Burrell: Yeah, and he just said this is what I feel and I'm going to do it. And he was ashamed, it was there in his song titles, he let us know just in a title.

Brown: "A Love Supreme." [laughs]

Burrell: Enough said, that's all he had to say and then the music revealed what he was feeling. And how can you not love that? Even if the music is not your favorite, how can you not respect that? You know, so that's, I tell my students as you ask a question, I tell all my students that's the key. And if you don't believe me think about your heroes. And they start thinking and saying, "Yeah, you're right."

Brown: Well, I want to go back again because when I look at your. Do we have a minute?

Burrell: Like one more minute, or a couple of minutes.

Brown: Okay, well again, so what I'd like to do is when we are able to resume is you were so prolific, I know they weren't all the sessions you liked, but during that period from '56 to '60, lets just say up to '61 before you got the pit orchestra gig. You were working with everybody, so I want to talk about your experiences, your first two guitar recording with Freddie Green.

Burrell: Oh yeah, that's great. But you know what this guy, the thing that...

Brown: The discography?

Burrell: This thing, whatever you got there, the jazz thing. I bet there's a lot more that's not even in there.

Brown: Probably.

Burrell: On sessions I was on that are not even listed because they were not jazz.

Brown: Well, he's got a lot.

Burrell: He's got a lot?

Brown: He has the James Brown on there, Wynonie Harris. And like I said, he's got a lot, I looked down there and I was saying, "Kenny is in the studio every week with somebody else." I mean, March of '57 you were just bam, bam, bam. And then some days were double I'm looking at the date and you're doing two sessions. Like you mentioned the one with Red Garland.

Burrell: Right.

Brown: Right, and it's completely different genres, you were all over the map and you were impacting music, so maybe we can just touch on that tomorrow and pick up with the rest of the career in the 60's.

Burrell: Okay, I really need to get a hold of that though, if you help me with that I'd really appreciate it.

Brown: Okay.

Burrell: I guess we should wrap it up maybe.

Brown: Well, you know, yeah, lets go ahead, but I mean, but we're still going to continue tomorrow?

Burrell: Of course.

Burrell: Okay, alright.

Brown: Today is Wednesday, February 17th, 2010. This is take two of the Smithsonian National Endowment for the Arts Oral History Program interview with Kenny Burrell; guitarist, arranger, composer, educator, humanitarian, and as I said on my initial introduction, my hero. We are now located in the music department ethnomusicology of UCLA, yesterday we were at the faculty center and we're resuming the interview with Kenny and we're going to go ahead and let you start off with anything you wanted to add or to amend from yesterday's interview.

Burrell: Well, I thought about a few things, Anthony, just in terms of the development stage as a teenager in Detroit. I was thinking about the fact that after I had worked pretty hard, meaning practicing hours and hours, and working with my friends and jamming and learning songs, and blah blah, blah. I became pretty popular around town and I was one of the musicians that they chose to accompany, or play along with, the bigger jazz stars when they would come through Detroit, such as Charlie Parker. If Charlie Parker was maybe playing a club or passing through this guy named Bill Randal had these, once a week he'd have a concert at a place called the Broadway Theatre, it was a regular movie house, but I think on Saturdays, I believe it was, Saturday afternoon he'd have a jazz concert. A lot of kids came, you know, and it was good for the artists, the renowned artists, and good for jazz and good the kids there and everything.

So I remember being asked to play with Charlie Parker, be in the band backing him up at the Broadway Theatre, and that was probably my first experience playing with that giant, you know, later on I told you, I was about sixteen or seventeen then, if you could believe that, it's hard for me to believe it that now that I'm thinking back on it. Maybe eighteen, but somewhere in the seventeen area. But then what an experience and my first meeting with him he was so gracious and encouraging. I mentioned to you that Dizzy was a great teacher, Dizzy was almost like a father figure. But Charlie Parker was like nurturing, almost like mother, you know, he really wanted to encourage you and anyway. So I got to know him and then he would occasionally be working at a particular club in Detroit, I think it was called the El Cino, and as I mentioned earlier that Tommy Flanagan and I were really good buddies, you know, and he was my best friend, both musically and otherwise at that point. And I remember we used to stand in the alley and listen through the door of Charlie Parker's band in the club. And we were cool with that because, hey, are you kidding, this is our hero, man, and he's...he had Miles Davis, and Max Roach, and Tommy Porter, and Duke Jordan, and that quintet.

So we'd go, we'd make it our business if they were there six nights we'd be there at least three nights standing in the alley. So finally we got our nerve enough, we got out nerve up to see if we could kind of sneak in. So we painted some mustaches on our faces and because it was so crowded, you know, and we kind of got away with it, you know. So that was cool and then I got my nerve up next time we went with my fake mustache I took my guitar. And now, again, I knew Charlie Parker by that time because I had played with him back, and I got my nerve up and went stood aside the stage and said, "Could I play something?" He said, "Sure, come on up." And I couldn't believe he said yes and I found myself sitting on the stage with Bird, Miles [laughs], Duke Jordan, and Max,

unbelievable. And just the experiences I remember from doing that, but the point, but beside the fact that it was exhilarating I got some encouraging words from those guys. "Yeah, that's cool man, keep going keep practicing." And then we'd certainly question, we were full of questions, you know, about what do you listen to and how do you practice and all that kind of stuff.

Then another couple of times with the same idea as I was a little older I remember working with Miles. Same idea, he would, he'd play a club somewhere in the valley, we called the valley that's an area in Detroit near Black Bottom I told you about. I found myself playing with Miles Davis on one of those gigs and that was thrilling as well and one of the things I remember besides the music was there was a spotlight, you know, on Miles. And I remember he always looked straight into the spotlight and I couldn't figure out how he could do that without hurting his eyes, I mean you know, it was a real bright spotlight he was looking. He might have somehow gotten to that trance or whatever he was doing, but the point was he sounded great as always, you know. But I just remember that aspect of his playing at that time. But I had quite a few experiences like that and I'm going to stop for a second, but...I wanted to tell you those couple of those stories.

Brown: Do you remember who else was in the Miles Davis band when you were?

Burrell: They were all local rhythm section, all local guys.

Brown: Oh, okay.

Burrell: I would suggest, I would guess the people in that group, I'm guessing now. Maybe on drums a guy named Leon Rice, who was a protégé of Max, I mean not a protégé, but he just loved Max Roach. The bass player probably was James Richardson, we called him Beans, brother of Rodney Richardson who played with Lester Young. The piano player was probably the Flanagan or Will Davis, and me, and I don't remember being a saxophone, saxophone, if there was one it could have been Billy Mitchell or I don't think Frank Foster had come to Detroit by then. It was probably Billy Mitchell and that was it.

Brown: Now, had you worked with all these musicians that were working with Miles either on occasional or regular basis? I mean, this was at the level you would consider yourself in the local scene.

Burrell: I don't quite understand the question.

Brown: The names you just mentioned, are these folks that you also worked with outside the context of working with Miles?

Burrell: Oh yeah, the guys I mentioned were local Detroit guys that I played with all the time.

Brown: Okay.

Burrell: Oh yeah, I had, what I'm saying is that I was in that upper echelon of musicians so that I would get these calls to go and accompany or back up these great jazz stars who came through and that has happened as you know in many different towns. I've done that myself, I've just gone to a town myself and they had a rhythm section, they provide me with a rhythm section. So that's all that was, but I also felt kind of special because they didn't need a guitar, you know, guitar was just like an added attraction. All you need is the bass, drums, and piano, so it was cool. Anyway, I just thought about that since we're talking about the heritage and the influences and experiences of how I developed into what I'm doing, you know. Yeah, I just wanted to mention those couple of things.

Brown: Well, I think it's great with the insight you give on Charlie Parker to know that he was a very nurturing, you know, soul. I mean that's, that was...

Burrell: Oh man, he was.

Brown: Because there are so many contradictory, or conflicting stories about Charlie Parker so it's nice to hear about his humanity as well.

Burrell: Well, yeah, he was a victim of narcotics and, I mean, that addiction is, you know, it's terrible. And it's hard to get away from it once you get hooked, and that's unfortunate. And that's a whole subject for another discussion in terms of the social aspects of why people, musicians in particular, become drug addicts, you know, especially at that time. But regardless of his personal habits, you know, in terms of addiction and so forth, he was a beautiful, beautiful person. And he always spent time talking, he never was like brush you off, or seemed like he was in a hurry. He was always very modest in terms of accepting compliments. I mean, we worshipped him. He would just, you know, say, "Oh, no, I'm just trying." You know, he would never, no bit of, show no ego at all, but he was always very encouraging to us and I remember him saying to me, "You sound good, you know, keep." That's really important to a young musician.

Brown: The encouragement from the professional?

Burrell: Oh yeah.

Brown: What was it like, what was Miles like, on the other hand?

Burrell: Miles was very quiet, didn't say a lot but when he did say something it was important. I had a chance to kind of socialize with him because he spent a couple years in Detroit in recovery. He was also strung out on drugs and for some reason he had some friends in Detroit and he came there to just kind of get himself back together. I remember we used to play at a club in Delray, Michigan, which is a suburb out of Detroit. There was a hotel there and the owner and his wife they loved jazz. It was on the way to the Rouge Lounge which is the big jazz club further away from Detroit. But on the way to the big jazz club was this hotel, so what we would do we had our music we would start around midnight and go until about four or five in the morning, so we would get the after

the club crowd and it was good for us too because if I had a gig somewhere I could go there and start at two o'clock in the morning, it's okay.

But it was a place where musicians would hang out and people who loved jazz would hang out. I can't think of the name of the hotel at the moment, but I will maybe think of it later. I remember a few occasions that Miles was there just hanging out and relaxing. I think one time we were able to convince him to play a song, but he really wasn't thinking about that too much, he was just trying to get himself together. I remember he did a real beautiful version of "My Funny Valentine" once and he sat down, you know, but, you know, we had, in other words, I had a rhythm section. I had Flanagan, or Harold McKinney, Paul Chambers who I told you I had, or did I tell you I discovered him?

Brown: Oh yeah, he came up and played.

Burrell: Oh yeah, okay. So now Paul was with me and Hindel Butts, the drummer, and myself. We had basically a rhythm section. And then other guys would come out and just play with us, Donald Byrd, Yusef Lateef, Pepper Adams, they all, you know, guys I'd be working with earlier in the night or just in town would come and we'd have jam sessions. The people loved it and we loved it. It was a good place, there was no alcohol, there was food. But people naturally would bring their own little bottles and sneak them in there, but you know, it was just a hotel restaurant that was open until daybreak usually. But I'm just thinking about that as a place where, in fact, that's where I met the Baroness, she was there one night with Monk. She came in, they were you know, and that was the first time I met her, you know. A lot of the people would pop in if they were in town, especially if they were playing at the Rouge Lounge, which was the club that had brought in the big names. So going back to Detroit they would pass by this little hotel and it was cool. But that was a very good experience, too. That was some really good jam sessions, you know, what we all, it was free, and we all jammed and everything, and it was good. So I just wanted to mention that one.

Brown: That's great. How, there was something that yesterday we were looking through the Lord's discography and I was identifying some of the earlier sessions and there was one with you and Elvin Jones in 1950. So I was just wondering what was it like, what was Elvin like, I mean, we know...

Burrell: Well, that's the other group I had, I was going to mention that too. I had a quartet, I guess, what happened is my original guy, who my childhood friend, Buddy Hindel Butts. You know, I used him as much as I could but he wasn't quite on the same level with Elvin and a few others. So I started to use Elvin. So it was Elvin and Flanagan and myself. I don't think Paul was involved, I'm not sure, but Elvin was, how can I say, one of the most creative drummers I ever heard in my life. Talk about polyrhythms, it was incredible.

Brown: Already, already at that early age, he was already...

Burrell: Of course...

Brown:...formulating his style.

Burrell:...of course, of course. I mean, it was in him, that was in him. I don't know, you know, whatever your music is, if you can bring it out its great, and that was in him. I mean, it had nothing to do with him keeping time, I mean, the beat was great but then he had all these other things going and it was incredible. That's why there is only one Elvin. But I remember we used to work some gigs, he was so dynamic, you know, I mean, how can I say it, he was almost like you couldn't contain him in terms of his enthusiasm. It was funny, we used to work at this place out in Gross Point. I had this gig maybe once a week out there and they had a hard floor, you know, it was like aluminum, I don't know what it was, but it was hard, it was slippery, you know. This is the first time I saw somebody eventually tie some ropes around the bass drum and tie around the stool because before Elvin got to that point it was so funny, he'd start, he'd be over there with me and he'd take a solo and he'd start out here and he'd end up over there somewhere 'cause he was not going to stop playing and give up anything. The drums started to move 'cause the way he was kicking that bass drum and the bass drum would go and he'd just...it was amazing to watch him but it was so funny and even the customers were laughing. That just shows you his intensity of what he was feeling and so eventually he started to tie, and I tell some of my students about that, if you don't have a rug or something, just tie a rope around two edges of the bass drum and wrap it around your seat and it's not going anywhere, you know. That started, the first time I saw that Elvin Jones was doing that 'cause you don't need a rug, you need a rope. Beautiful guy and he played the guitar as well as Milt Jackson played the guitar. In fact, on my guitar form that was one of the songs that he wrote, he taught me that song.

Brown: Opening number, "Downstairs."

Burrell: And it's called, the original title that he didn't really, what's the name of it?

Brown: They call it "Downstairs."

Burrell: "Downstairs." But the original title was "Foxes and the Hounds." That was like his thing, you know, the hounds chasing the foxes, you know. And, you know, that's old country stuff there and that's what it sounds like. So we had a discussion about it when I was making the record, I said, "I know, what should we call it?" He said, "I don't care what you call it, you know, just as long as I get the royalty, you know." And I'm assuming he, yeah he did get the royalty, and so we called it "Downstairs." But he played that kind of folk-bluesy guitar, which is part of his heritage, part of his family, and you'd be, I mean, what a contrast to hear that kind of guitar. I mean, he played it just about like I played it. And then this progressive, I don't know, I think Elvin had everything covered. He had avant-garde, he had the blues, he had the whole thing covered in terms of drums. We know he set the tone for the modern drummer, all the guys that came after him.

I had a rich environment, it was like a university without walls, I have to say that and we all looked and there are guys you don't even know about who were there that we played

with and were helping each other and teaching us. It was just a great exchange. It was all about the music and reaching for that level of being really good. So we had a lot of discussions about material, about songs, and I think we developed some pretty sophisticated taste, in terms of what's good and what isn't and how to discern the good from the mediocre. And all of that is learning, especially when you're a teenager is invaluable. So like I say, it was like a university. So when we got to New York we really felt like we were prepared.

Brown: Well, I know, Miles always said, "Well, when I left St. Louis when I got to New York I thought I was going to learn a whole lot, but there weren't that many people who were going to teach me that." You know, he thought about Monk and Diz...

Burrell: Right.

Brown: ...but it seems like those urban centers, St. Louis, you know...

Burrell: Philadelphia.

Brown: ...Philadelphia, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Chicago, I mean, they were thriving communities that were developing their own, not only their own sound or group of musicians, but it seems like there would be migrations from there, you know, coming to New York, and bringing that sound with them.

Burrell: It was a highly developed aesthetic in that music in these various urban centers, particularly in the black communities. Highly developed, not just among the musicians, but among the people who listened to the music. That was very critical because they had developed taste as well and they would often let you know. And they were educated in those terms, they knew what was going on. Real serious collectors and listeners, anyway, that's some of the stuff I was talking about before. Oh, and then, one more thing, I guess I had at Klein's Show Bar was a quintet, which I used a couple saxophone players. One was with Pepper Adams, this was with Flanagan and sometimes Oliver Jackson, sometimes Hindel Butts, sometimes Paul Chambers. And sometimes my brother Billy, when we started 'cause he was still playing bass, and Yusef Lateef, who I worked with and while we were working I was at Wayne State. I encouraged him to go back to school, he hadn't even thought about it and he went to Wayne State and got his bachelor's and then the rest is history, you know, he's Dr. Lateef. Went onto Amherst, I believe, and then to the New School and got his Ph.D. and also I encouraged him to play the flute...

Brown: You encouraged him?

Burrell: Yes, I did.

Brown: Why did you do that?

Burrell: I don't know, I just felt that, you know how you see potential in some people? Like the other day a young lady was auditioning here and she was playing the saxophone.

And just something about her, I said, “You know, did you ever think about playing the flute?” She said, “Kind of.” I said, “Well, I have a feeling you should try it.” He started playing the flute and oboe, and all kinds of stuff. But, you know, it’s just a matter of, how can I say this, there’s a certain consciousness that we have that I think is very deep and once in awhile that little door opens and you get a little glimpse in there. We have a regular consciousness, you know, I’m looking at you and you’re looking at me, and we’re doing what we do. But underneath all that there’s another knowing kind of thing that we can’t explain, we probably never will explain and will never understand. But it’s coming informs of hunches and feelings and every now and then you get the nerve to say, “You ought to try this. What do you think about that?” You don’t know why you said that. Where that’s coming from, I think and that’s probably why I said that to Yusef, I could probably hear him, or something, who knows why. Again, that’s a whole other world of “intruition”, if I could make up a new word. [laughs]

Brown: That’s a great word. [laughs]

Burrell: I kind of like that myself, intruition.

Brown: Yeah, that’s beautiful.

Burrell: Anyway.

Brown: So, you know, Yusef Lateef, Dr. Lateef has gone on and obviously made a tremendous impact as far as bringing in other non-Western influences.

Burrell: Absolutely.

Brown: Was that something, you think, might have been cultivated in his Detroit years being in Detroit?

Burrell: Well, I think probably it comes, part of it comes from the fact that he is Muslim and he was starting to study the history of his religion and some of the music that went along with it. But even a larger sense would be the fact that he really realized that venturing in that direction that there’s so much beautiful art and music in many cultures. And why not look into it. I know they don’t see you on camera, but I know that is the way you’ve been feeling for many years and you’re still exploring, still growing, still doing it, and why not. As Ellington would say, “There’s only two kinds of music, good and the other kind.” So I think that not so much in our environment because we were really trying to keep up with the latest things in Detroit. But Yusef was, he and Matthew G, the trombone player, were the first guys in Detroit to adopt a Muslim faith.

Brown: About when was that, do you remember? Late 40’s?

Burrell: I don't know when he did it but I know that when we worked together at Klein’s, which was the mid 50’s, he was, it might have been that. I know they both worked with Dizzy for awhile. I know Art Blakey...

Brown: Buhaina.

Burrell: Buhaina. Who knows how things connect and people connect? But anyway, just to answer your question, I think I stemmed from his adopting of the Muslim religion and things that are connected to that and he wanted to continue to grow, which he did and is still doing, you know, and he's a beautiful man.

Brown: Okay, I want to ask you two more questions about Elvin. One specifically about, you know, you've given us this very detailed portrait of Detroit as your nurturing and where you...[recording change] Tony Williams, there are some similarities in their style that seem to be geographically located. I was just wondering, I know that Elvin was unique, we all know that Elvin was unique, and Ken and I actually had the opportunity and privilege to interview him also, you know, for this same program. But we never got a picture if there were any other, whether there were drummers or they were teachers who might have been, maybe not a direct influence in that we could hear their sound in Elvin. But maybe any other drummers or was there a particular style that might be identified as a Detroit style?

Burrell: I can't say that. We can stop for a minute.

Brown: Ready to pick it up?

Kimery: We are ready.

Brown: Okay, so before we had to briefly interrupt I was asking about, again certain areas developed a style, and in this case comparing it to the Boston school of drumming. But I was just wondering if there are any other drummers in that area who might have either inspired Elvin or might have another style, I'm just trying to get a sense 'cause Elvin's style, as you valorize it, is the uniqueness of somebody's individual voice. And Elvin's voice, we can't trace, I mean, there's some like Roy Haynes...

Burrell: I don't think there is.

Brown: Okay.

Burrell: I don't think there is any predecessor, if that I can use that word, for Elvin. The only clue I can say is that he was in a marching band in the army. I guess he told you this, that was the first time he started playing. I guess it kind of reminds me of when black musicians came her and started in New Orleans started playing ragtime and they first called it ragity-time. They couldn't figure out what these guys were doing, you know. They were doing the syncopation and so Elvin was very cognizant of the beat but wanted to do all these other interesting things and that's what gave him that uniqueness. There's another drummer in Detroit that I don't think influenced Elvin, but I think Elvin influenced him. His name is Roy – what's Roy's name – he played with Horace Silver for awhile.

Brown: McCurdy?

Burrell: No.

Brown: Roy Brooks?

Burrell: Roy Brooks. He's the one I think, in terms of influence, would be the only one I would kind of connect to Elvin kind of directly 'cause he certainly was listening to Elvin a lot. But then my other good friend, Jack DeJohnette, I'm sure has been influenced by the stuff that Elvin has done, but Jack has his own thing as well. But just to extend his boundaries of rhythm is incredible and Elvin is like the personification, as far as I'm concerned, of the drum choir. As you know was what it was in Africa. Finally Papa Jo told me that he even knew, or one of his friends knew, the person that put together the first drum set, you know, after the...

Brown: That would have been D.D. Chandler in New Orleans was credited with putting the bass drum and the snare drum.

Burrell: Right, so before that it was all different people doing different stuff and I think Elvin just expanded it taking it, you know, a step outward if you will.

Brown: Well, I just want to add a footnote to you talking about yesterday when you were talking about keeping your horizons open, you know be exposed to as much different kinds of music. When I asked Elvin, you know, what he was listening to when he was with Trane he said they listened to Stravinsky and the African, the pygmies. So he was listening to, I mean, Elvin was listening to, and Trane, was listening to so many different things.

Burrell: Oh yeah.

Brown: You know, way back. Max also says the same thing.

Burrell: Oh sure.

Brown: So you know, there's this idea that jazz musicians are just focused on what they do. But I think from this interview and others we will see that jazz musicians kept their horizons very broad and absorbing and a lot of things. One thing, oh, go ahead.

Burrell: I was just going to say that jazz musicians deal with good sounds and they're interested in anything that sounds good, you know, and it doesn't matter whose doing it. That's kind of almost the unsung, unheralded, not talked about aspect of being a jazz musician, or the jazz aesthetic, jazz attitude is that we're always looking for interesting sounds and we find them. Fact, more I think about it I think we, and I consider myself among them, we are responsible for some of those obscure sound to become known by others because we're saying, "Hey man, you gotta check this out, this is hip, this is good,

you know.” People say, “What? I heard this thing.” And then people start talking about it and they say, “Oh.” All of a sudden it’s being talked about and maybe being recorded and maybe written about by some critics and all that stuff. Jazz musicians have discovered a lot of things in search of great music, in search of good music I believe.

Brown: Okay.

Burrell: I’m sure you agree with that.

Brown: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. Well, again, you know, that’s one of the things that continues to inspire all of us in this music is that searching for a more newer sound, or different sound, or trying to enhance what we’re doing. I mean that’s what you talk about a lot in your interviews, you talk about sound, the sound, and you go extensively talking about how you get your sound. I know you’ve been interviewed, “How do you get your sound?” You talk about the strings, you talk about the guitar, you talk about the amp you talk about the electrical chords.

Burrell: Every little thing.

Brown: So you’re very, very, in a very meticulous and a very detailed and explicit you were consciously shaping your sound with all the factors that go into it.

Burrell: Right, right.

Brown: So I think that that, and it shows in your music. For example, when we were talking about *Guitar Forms*, you know, it opens up, but I say, “Oh, well, I can hear.” And I was telling Ken, “You can hear T-Bone Walker.” You can hear it, but it doesn’t sound like him, it sounds like Kenny, but you can hear that he’s been influenced by T-Bone Walker but he took another place.

Burrell: Right, right, it’s all part of the language, all part of the heritage. We’re influenced by a lot of things, we’re influenced by a lot of things and we all play a lot of the same notes, we all use a lot of the same words when we speak. But there’s a connection from inside that makes it a little different when you do it if that connection is there. To me that’s the key, you know. I can even imagine somebody saying, “I have a dream.” Now that’s a well known phrase, and we all know who said that but if somebody has a special connection for some special reason, I bet we would respond favorably if they used those three words, those four words. Depending on what they’re connecting to. You follow me?

Brown: Um-hm.

Burrell: It’s highly unlikely, but I would imagine it could happen. Like for example, I can imagine an eight year old young girl saying those four words from her perspective and it would move you. Right? I can imagine that ‘cause she coming from a world of her,

from where ever her world is dreaming. In other words, she saying, "I have a dream, too." That's the kind of thing I'm talking about, it's connecting that deep part of you.

Brown: Okay, well, we're going to continue to come back to this because obviously we recognize this is the source of our inspiration and our expression. As you say, connecting to that, dipping in that well, going back to that well. I brought a lot of CDs in because I can't bring in all nearly 600, the CDs that you've been on. But I just thought that, you know, you identified that you favored. But there are a couple that I wanted to ask you about because, whether I have the CD here or not, but there are certain sessions I felt were historic and perhaps if you could share your recollection of it. Recording with Billie Holiday.

Burrell: Well, that's another situation that started in Detroit, again, by that time when she used to come, I would say that this is in the early 50's. I had a pretty popular band, you know, I was working around town a lot and she used to come and work at this place called the Rouge Lounge, the big club I told you about. So I had worked there with my group and the owner, I can't think of his name at the moment, but the point is that he would call me to back up Billie Holiday. I got to play with her and get to know her, and rehearse with her and she likes my music, she likes me and there was never any problem. She was always very frank, she didn't hold back. If she wanted something she'd tell you and she wouldn't, you know, suffer through anything, she'd just say, "No, no, lets do it this way." But in a beautiful way she was a lady day, you know, a lady. Unfortunately, you know, we all know the story of how she was abused and misused and taken advantage of, but she was such a, to me, a gentle tortured soul. So I met her then. Then later on when I moved to New York in the, '56, you know, after I had been with Peterson, I had got a call from various contractors and different people and I think for some reason Ralph Burns was associated with some of those records I made with Billie Holiday. Oh no, no, the first one I think was live *At Carnegie Hall*.

Brown: Right.

Burrell: Right, and that was, I don't know how that came about. I know Tony Scott was on it, I think Chico Hamilton, I'm not sure if Chico was on there, but anyway, it was a date where they used some young guys and not so young guys. Anyway, I was fortunate enough to be on it. That was kind of a historic date, you know, because it was Carnegie Hall and so forth. But then I also remember doing some studio dates with her, and these were some small dates. I think it was Harry Edison and either Ben Webster or Sam "The Man" Taylor, you know, the rhythm section. I just enjoyed playing for her as we say among the musicians that she never sang one note she didn't mean. And as we were talking earlier about how you're connected to your deep self, well, she certainly was connected and that's why she got to so many people in terms of connecting to audiences and communicating. She was a wonderful, wonderful singer who influenced so many singers, male and female. Sinatra, and all kinds of people she influenced and musicians.

In the sense that you express your feelings in your music and she was not ashamed to do that and I think probably the obvious example of that is *Strange Fruit*. The courage and

the nerve to do that is incredible. I had a nice compliment from her once, I remember we were going down in the elevator from a session and this was in, you know, mid late 50's, something like that. And she was saying, "You sound nice." And she said, "You know, I have only two guitar players that I like. I like Barney Kessel on the west coast and I like you on the east coast." And boy that made me feel good, you know. That basically were the two people she used most of the time, you know. We became friends and there was some real tragic aspects to her life. I've even written a song about her not too long ago, which I even hope to record one day, but I just remember tragically, or how can I say, sadly rather working at Minton's Playhouse, I used to work there a lot in the late 50's. That was quite a place for jazz and as you know Monk and Dizzy and Bird played there. I was able to come there, you know, a few years later and play. I even had a chance to play Charlie Christian's amplifier 'cause the owner, I can't think of his name at the moment, but Teddy something, he was a musician and...

Brown: Teddy Charles?

Burrell: No, African-American guy who played in the same era as Charlie Christian. But anyway, he was the manager of Minton's and he kept Charlie Christian's amp in the office and he let me play it one day, anyway. I remember Billie Holiday used to come to see us and I felt so bad for her because they kept arresting her in New York because of her heroin habit. And they were doing it to make an example out of her. Here's this woman now, she's basically all alone because all the men who were abusing her had left her now because she wasn't making a lot of money and so they had no more use for her so the only person she had, she was paying a guy who happen to be gay was helping her around and going around with her and would bring her up to Minton's. I remember once I said to her, "Why don't you go to England? 'Cause they have a, I guess its called methadone, methadone program. And they can, they'll take care of you because they love you over there. They love your music and they love you." She said to me, she said, "I don't want to go there, I don't want to go alone." She said, "I have nobody to travel with so I'm not going to go." So she wouldn't go. In other words, that's where she was in her life at that point and it was tragic to me. It may not show up on your, on the record...

Brown: On the discography?

Burrell: Discography, but I did her last album.

Brown: *Lady In Satin*?

Burrell: Yes.

Brown: It is on there.

Burrell: Oh, it is on there, 'cause I noticed on the recording itself it says Barry Galbraith, which is true, but Barry was probably, it was contracted to play the guitar. But I think either he, either I subbed for him, or they didn't list me. I didn't do the whole album, I

did some of it, but the last album, *Lady In Satin*, was like being in church. Again, the spiritual content was so deep on that record and I'm glad it was a hit. Yeah, it was a hit.

Brown: Great, we're going to have to stop. But before you stop it was Teddy Hill.

Burrell: Teddy Hill, that's right, he's the manager of Minton's.

Brown: Right, oh yeah, because, right, right.

Burrell: I kind of know what you mean, but I never thought about it, except that I can naively say that I don't think there was a style in Detroit because there was Oliver Jackson, Leon Rice, there was Art, a Caucasian guy, he was a good drummer too...

Brown: Mardigan was it?

Burrell: Art Mardigan, he was good. And there was Elvin, but they were all different...And Roy was different. I don't think there was a "Detroit Sound" but maybe there was a "Boston Sound" but I don't know where Art Blakey falls into all of that.

Brown: Oh he's Pittsburgh! [laughs]

Burrell: Pittsburgh! [laughs] and Joe "what's-is-name" is from there.

Brown: Joe Harris?

Burrell: Yeah, he doesn't sound like Art.

Brown: And Kenny Clarke.

Burrell: Oh Kenny Clarke, I loved him.

Brown: Can you tell me about, are we on?(to Kimery) I'll just name the tape. This is tape four.

Burrell: I mentioned Kenny Clarke the other day.

Brown: Yes!

Burrell: Yeah.

Brown: But my dissertation is on Kenny Clarke and Max Roach so whatever you can share coming from Detroit about "Holmes", "Klook-a-Mop"...'Cause I know Diz and Klook, and it was in Teddy Hill's band, see...

Burrell: Yep

Brown: And Edgar Hayes, they go back.

Burrell: Okay.

Brown: But whatever you can share.

Burrell: So this dissertation was on two drummers?

Brown: Um-hm.

Burrell: I'll keep that in mind, it's very possible.

Brown: [laughs] And I did it with Olly Wilson. So the way Olly Wilson did it was that we had to transcribe and I know you are a stickler on transcription. He would get, he would say "Brown, here's *Shaw 'Nuff*. I want you to transcribe every sonic event." Not what Charlie played, not what Diz played, not the piano solo, every sonic event. So we had to do the comping, we had to get all the fills and everything on the drums... You know, bass...you had to have every sonic event captured on paper, so that's why it took me nine years to get mine. [laughs]

Burrell: Is he still alive? Olly?

Brown: Olly is ill. He had a pace-maker and he had to get it replace, the first one didn't work. I talked to him just before coming down here, I'm going to meet with him on Saturday.

Burrell: Please give him my best.

Brown: I will do that, I figured that you two were very close. You just had him down here in October, he talked about that.

Burrell: Please give him my best.

Brown: I will. I will definitely do that. So anyway, what we were hoping to do, because your career is so expansive and extensive, I wanted to fill in--cause we'd gotten to the '60s but there were, I'm the '50s when you go through the discography is like, every week! Bam, bam, bam! Kenny Burrell here, Kenny Burrell doing R&B, Kenny Burrell doing whatever. But there are certain ones that I thought that if you could just share whatever recollections you have, and the one that comes--although this is from the '60s so I won't jump on this one first. You did these two, I don't know if they were actually companion, but the titles allude to each other. So you have "All Night Long" and "All Day Long". If you could talk about those sessions because those were pretty early on.

Burrell: Those are "blowing sessions" as we talked about where you get a call--and I am assuming those are on Prestige?

Brown: Um-hm.

Burrell: Yeah. You get a call and it was usually Bob Weinstock that would call the guys. He was the president, also his own A&R man I guess. Maybe Ozzy did do some A&R for him, I'm not sure. The point was, you'd get the call and you were expected to bring in one or two songs, usually two. Everybody brings in a song or two, you get there and you run it down maybe once or twice and you'd record it. So those are two of the songs I brought in. I brought in "All Day Long" which is a blues and "All Night Long" might be a blues with a bridge, I forget what that is now. There was always at least one blues on these records and I have had and still have plenty of blues lines and blues licks and blues pieces that I have in my library--original stuff. It was fun. Those were a lot of fun dates because they were no pressure. Just making music of a certain level. I think Donald Byrd was on them, maybe Frank Foster, maybe Frank Wess. I'm not sure of all those people. Maybe Art Taylor...

Brown: Mm-hm. Art Taylor, Doug Watkins.

Burrell: Doug Watkins, yeah. Just enjoyable, enjoyable stuff. Challenging yet fun if I can put it that way. I enjoyed it. Yeah.

Brown: I have another one here, "Blue Lights Vol. I and II" since these seem to be companion. We'll talk about this one. Its from '58.

Burrell: Those were a different kind of blowing session. Those were for Blue Note. Alfred Lion really liked to have a little rehearsal. He didn't like to take too many chances on stuff. You'd bring in some songs but if at all possible he'd like to have at least one rehearsal. Even if it was going to be an hour before the date he liked to have them maybe the day before or something like that, but even if it was sometime before they started recording he wanted to make sure you guys rehearsed the stuff to make sure the lines were together. One of the things outstanding about those two records is those are Andy Warhol Covers. This is before Andy Warhol was really expensive, he was affordable then and both of them are Andy Warhol covers. The designer was Reid...I'm not sure.

Brown: Yeah, Reid Miles.

Burrell: Yeah, so they were able to get some Warhol covers. Are these Art Blakey and Bobby Timmons and all that?

Brown: Oh yeah, Art Blakey.

Burrell: Ok. Those are the blowing sessions for Blue Note, which are great, and one of my unsung heroes, besides Junior Cook, is the other tenor player from the Bronx.

Brown: Tyner Brooks?

Burrell: Tyner Brooks.

Brown: So its pronounced "Teener," Okay.

Burrell: I loved him. I loved his sound and his feeling. He was quite--

Brown: Louis Smith is on here on trumpet.

Burrell: Yeah Louis Smith, I guess its Dr. Louis Smith now? He was at Michigan for a while. Yeah he was a newcomer on the scene then. I think Lee Morgan is on one of them, maybe, maybe not that one. Oh no, Lee Morgan is on one of the ones I did with Jimmy Smith. Same kind of sessions.

Brown: Now we are going to revisit one of your favorites, "Midnight Blue."

Burrell: Okay.

Brown: Because with the CD release there are two additional tracks that weren't released on the initial LP and when we listen to those they are different in flavor from the rest of the album, particularly the piece "Kenny's Sound" which is very--go ahead.

Burrell: Are these from the same date though?

Brown: Well according to the liner notes they are from the same date.

Burrell: Well then...

Brown: 'Cause its the same personnel.

Burrell: Then I'm a little bit confused except that I think that--I'm just taking a guess here--I think I left the final product, the A&R decisions, to Alfred Lion. So I think he chose to leave off "Kenny's Sound" 'cause that's a real up-temp piece. What's the other one?

Brown: "K Twist."

Burrell: Oh that's kind of a funky, fashionable for the time concept. I think that he probably felt that those were--and also I think I did "K Twist" on Columbia, on another label. He probably heard that, so I think he chose to leave off those two because the continuity of the other things really worked well.

Brown: Right. That's one of the reasons I wanted to bring that up, because yesterday we were talking about it and you were imitating Alfred Lion saying, "every note swung."

Burrell: "Every note swung." Based on what I found out that was his favorite record. I think that his main reason was, and I appreciate that because when I do a record I like to create and sustain a mood throughout the record and I think that one did it. Maybe "Kenny's Sound" was a little too up for...not quite in the character of the rest of the

pieces.

Brown: Right, right, right. So I guess that was more programming. The fact that they were all done at the same session was for me a revelation for me after hearing you talking about how this was one of Alfred Lion's favorite recordings.

Burrell: Right.

Brown: So the next one I have in my hand, staying in Blue Note, "A New Perspective". Donald Byrd, band and voices. With Coleridge Perkinson and arrangements by Duke Pearson so this--I don't know if this had an influence on you later when you worked for the boy's choir or not but I felt that this was a pretty significant date if you could talk about your recollections about this one. Herbie Hancock...

Burrell: Well, it was a great date to be on, I felt privileged to be working with Donald and Herbie. And his concept I loved, the original music and the way he put it all together, I thought it was admirable. I was glad to be a part of that. It reminds me of something else that happened in Detroit. We formed, me and a little nucleus of people, formed something called a "New Music Society." I don't know if you've heard of that but we were--when I was in college there was a group of people who had an experimental theater and they were dark on Mondays, they didn't have things on Mondays, so I said, "would you mind if we came in and had a little jam session on Mondays?" They said, "that's OK," 'cause these were my classmates at Wayne State, so we started having jam sessions there and we formed something called a "New Music Society" and it was--the name of the theater was "World Stage" so they have on in L.A. now, but the first one was ours in Detroit. I just thinking about it because some people who really were there a lot and played were Donald Byrd and Barry Harris and Sonny Red and Elvin and Roy Brooks and so many...Doug and Paul and all of the guys that would come to town. I remember Rahsaan Roland Kirk--they were off on Mondays so they would come to our "World Stage" and be a part of our jam session. I think this was in '53 or '54. So that was also another learning experience for me, not only in terms of organizing these jam sessions but also organizing an organization, because it was a non-profit organization. So we had audiences, so this way we were able to charge a little money and get the audience in, the guys were making a few dollars and so forth, it was a lot of fun. But thinking of Donald Byrd, he was one of the people that was involved in that, so we maintained our friendship. He says he's Dr. Donald Byrd, I don't know where he's teaching now, but he's somewhere on the east coast...

Kimery: I think its...

Burrell: Baltimore?

Kimery: No, Delaware.

Burrell: Delaware, yeah. Anyway, another fine, fine musician from Detroit. That was fun though, to do that wonderful record with Donald.

Brown: Well I was just wondering because "Love is the Answer," we're going to talk about that, in the chronological order. Obviously that is another milestone in your career as well and I had noticed that this one is also involved with voices and had a more expansive format. Another one, I'm sorry to do this but when I see Kenny Burrell with Coleman Hawkins on "Bluesy Burrell" and you're playing with Coleman Hawkins...

Burrell: Right, unbelievable, unbelievable. I started making some sessions with him as a sideman, I guess it's Prestige again?

Brown: Yes.

Burrell: So I just called to do sessions with this great master and then I think they allowed me to do a date as a leader and he said yeah, he'd play with me. I think this was after I'd done a couple with him, but I was amazed--you know you hear the records and you hear about how great somebody is but then when you play with them you understand. He was such a fast learner it was unbelievable. I had an idea about something and he'd say, "Well, what is it?" and before you'd know it he's playing it back to you! He was just a great, great musician. That's all I can tell you. And with great ears, he learned things so quickly, it was never a problem. So I much admired him, always. Again, didn't have such a great life at the end but I was able to spend some time with him. He was a wonderful, wonderful musician. Immediately identifiable. He's one of those guys you can say is truly unique. Not too many people before him had that kind of approach and not too many people after him had that kind of approach, even though he influenced them to some extent, but he stands alone.

Brown: Well, historical record shows that he really gave voice to the tenor saxophone in this music.

Burrell: Oh yeah, of course.

Brown: So significant, back with Fletcher...But to see you--of course you played with everybody who's anybody, so--but to see that Coleman Hawkins, one of those who has this longevity but still continues to be exploring and working with others...Coleman Hawkins and Duke, Coleman Hawkins with John Coltrane, Coleman Hawkins with Kenny Burrell, I mean continuing to expand his horizons.

Burrell: Yeah, I've been so fortunate it's unbelievable man.

Brown: So again, along with expanding horizons, the one I'm holding now is "Ode to 52nd St." featuring "Suite for Guitar and Orchestra."

Burrell: Right

Brown: So again, this is demonstrative of your exploration, continuing to be captivated by sounds. Expanding your own sonic palette. Could you talk about this project?

Burrell: Well, I think it has two sections. One is popular songs, or jazz songs, and the other is the suite. I had an idea just to pay homage to that great street in New York that spawned so many great jazz players. Not spawned them but at least gave them venues to play. 52nd St was THE street in New York for a long time and represented kind of a platform on which we who came later built our careers on. It represented a certain quality level which we built our careers on so I felt I owed a debt to that street and what it represented. That's why I wrote this thing called "Ode to 52nd St." Yeah so, for some reason it became a suite. It grew out of just a small form. It started to take on extra proportions here so it becomes a suite.

Brown: And for the orchestration, working with the orchestra--obviously you worked with other orchestras, you worked with Ray Ellis Orchestra and others. How did that come about? Who did the arranging and orchestration?

Burrell: Well Richard Evans right?

Brown: He's credited with producing.

Burrell: No, Richard Evans did the arranging.

Brown: The whole project? Okay.

Burrell: And I think Esmond Edwards...I'm not sure who...

Brown: The liner notes aren't...

Burrell: I think its Esmond Edwards probably did the producing, but I know Richard Evans and I worked hand in hand on the concept

Brown: Okay.

Burrell: But basically the orchestra arrangements were by Richard Evans.

Brown: Okay, alright. Okay good. Was that a satisfying, fulfilling experience for you?

Burrell: Absolutely.

Brown: 'Cause we look at *Guitar Forms*, we look at this...

Burrell: Richard to me is another great musician, a bass player, I don't know if he's still at Berklee or not. He was teaching at Berklee for a number of years.

Brown: Oh in Boston.

Burrell: Boston, yeah. Great musician. We collaborated on a couple songs I think and I

really enjoyed it. He did my Christmas album as well which is a big seller, you know. So I enjoyed doing that.

Brown: Okay. Well, we can pick it up now. Yesterday when we closed out the first half of this interview we were looking at your career in the early-mid '60s. You had already started working in the pit orchestra with "Bye Bye Birdie," so all these other opportunities. The way I'd like to describe you is the three words I used to describe Eric Dolphy once when I was asked to write about Eric Dolphy was "virtuosity, versatility and voracity."

Burrell: Voracity! [laughs] OK.

Brown: Keep it honest. [laughs]

Burrell: VVV

Brown: Yeah. So in the '60s we're starting to see you doing many, many more different things, as I was saying, pit orchestra...There was also the Guitar club, that was in the late '60s. Can you talk about that 'cause know you're a partner in owning a club so you're really expanding your horizons.

Burrell: Right. Well, a lot of things are born out of necessity. I had a friend who was a lawyer from Detroit--Fred was his first name, I can't think of his last name right now. But then he said he wanted to open up a restaurant with some music. I said "Hey, OK." He said he didn't have a cabaret license and he wasn't too much interested in getting a cabaret license unless it was necessary, which means you can't have drums in New York City. You have to have a cabaret license to have drums. So I said, well you know, I'll take that as a challenge because I like playing solo guitar and duo was not a problem because I had done that many times with my brother--not a problem. So I said, "Ok, I'll provide some music for you." So I went in sometimes as a co-partner. It was another gentleman involved named Warren, the three of us, and it was on 50th and 10th Avenue I think, in New York City. It was a small restaurant, we had some great cooking though. Soul food, it was great.

Brown: [laughs])

Burrell: Sometimes I played there solo, sometimes I played there duo. I was mostly solos and duos. I started booking other people in there. I brought in my friend from Washington D.C. Bill Harris, guitarist, to play solo. Did I mention Larry Ridley, I think I just did. No, I didn't. He played bass with me in the duo settings. Then I put together a couple of combinations. I put together Ron Carter and Jim Hall to come in. That was the first time they worked together, I was responsible for that getting together. A couple of guitarists, Joe Puma...

Brown: Chuck Wayne?

Burrell: Chuck Wayne, you got it. It's all probably there already. It was a good run for a while. It was OK because people who love the guitar would come in. That was the name of the restaurant. It was cool. It was fun, but low key, you know, nothing where we had a high visibility, but it was OK. I remember Papa Jo Jones used to come in and sit way at the end of the bar. He always had brushes with him somewhere and newspaper so sometimes I'd hear these brushes going and we'd be playing all of a sudden!

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: I'd look up and there he was in the corner smiling. What a beautiful man that was! Papa Jo. Jo Jones. He liked me a lot man. I fortunately was able to make some real records with him, that you know. He gave me so much advice--but he was another--he had the right name "Papa Jo" 'cause he really looked out for the younger musicians. I remember the first time I met Don Byas, who is one of my ultimate heroes. He came in one night just to hang out and played a song or two. Incredible musician. Musicians were popping in from time to time, singers and musicians. I'm just thinking of some of the memories of that place. It was very nice. The Guitar.

Brown: Well, since you titled it The Guitar lets talk about some of the other guitarists, the ones that were either your contemporaries or who have come after you. You know, like I'm sure Charlie Parker, anytime he hears and alto--well, when he was alive--anytime he heard alto saxophone he said, "yeah, well, I know he heard me."

Burrell: I guess a lot of them have heard me and I have been an influence on a lot of people but I have been influenced as well, so I don't know what to say about that.

Brown: Well, for one thing there are many different styles or genres or idioms of music that are either guitar-centric or guitar plays a paramount role. So I'm thinking of when the bossa nova craze came in the late '50s, early '60s I know you did some sessions with Stan Getz, but was that something that immediately caught your ear? Was that something you felt you wanted to bring into your sphere?

Burrell: Oh yeah. Absolutely. That was beautiful music. Guitar based music out of Brazil. The role of the guitar--the guitar was a major instrument in terms of the harmony and also the bass line and sometimes the melody. It was just another approach to balance, particularly balance, but songwriting, which certainly the rhythm was obvious. The bossa nova rhythm was obvious. But what was to me so beautiful and other guitarists was that harmonically it was so interesting and beautiful and the way it was played on the instrument, it had somewhat of a different approach than normally we would do that because you were also carrying the bass line. It really opened up another kind of sound for the guitar which had not been there before. I still think its beautiful. I still play it and its very nice. I had a chance to make some records with a few Brazilian artists. Astrud Gilberto, and I met some of the Brazilian guitars and it was very nice.

Brown: I want to try to keep the chronology 'cause I know we still have a whole 'nother book, another volume once you get out here in California. I want to try to make sure we

cover everything in New York before we make that transition.

Burrell: Yeah. OK.

Brown: So we talked about the club...You're on so many different labels, you're doing session work, how did you start to secure contracts as a leader?

Burrell: Well it started with "Midnight Blue." That was a hit as I had mentioned to you on the other...yesterday. I really worked hard, not so much practicing, just worked hard and I don't really...I take that back. I don't think I really even worked hard, it just started to focus. It started to come to me, this concept about this album. And it was there and I started to put the ideas together and it just kind of fell into place. It became my best seller at that point and people started to really like it so I was able to start getting jobs as a leader. And go to clubs and go out of town on the road and do some concerts. So that's how that began. And behind that came "Guitar Forms," which was an immediate critical success. It didn't sell as well as "Midnight Blue," but it really raised a level of me doing other things. For example I did a concert at Town Hall with that music of "Guitar Forms." In fact I got an e-mail yesterday from somebody who's doing a--unfortunately they are doing for the Gil Evans family. They are trying to put all the music together that he had written and the e-mail said that he didn't keep a lot of his music in order and its all scattered around everywhere and they wondering if I had some music from "Guitar Forms" that I could send them copies of. But that's the kind of prestige it added to my career when I did "Guitar Forms." We did a nice concert at Town Hall. Gil was able to help, he wasn't there but he was able to give me some extra parts if I needed them. I think those two things started me as a leader. To really make money as a band leader if you will.

Brown: Now, as a composer one of the things I've asked other people in the oral history program is about the whole about publishing.

Burrell: Right

Brown: Folks like Benny Golson or Billy Taylor talked about Gigi Gryce.

Burrell: Yeah, Gigi.

Brown: So how did you work that out with your publishing and maintaining control of your own compositions?

Burrell: Well, I was really lucky. I was really lucky. First thing happened, I was able to do, I'm assuming there's something in that record about me recording with Nina Simone. Right?

Brown: Yes.

Burrell: Okay, good. The memory fades after awhile, you know.

Brown: Well, when you have 600 sessions, I think that's understandable.

Burrell: But the guy, she was really new on the scene, and I was new on the scene, too, but I was just like a, you know, jazz sideman kind of guy, hadn't really made a name. But she came on the scene, and that was Nina Simone. Somehow I ended up in her lawyer's office, I might have had a conversation with her, I think I probably worked with her at the Village Vanguard or something.

Brown: Village Gate? No, Village Vanguard?

Burrell: Maybe, I'm not sure, but anyway, I remember ending up in her lawyer's office and him telling me I should join ASCAP. I said, "Okay." I didn't know the difference between ASCAP and BMI. He said, "You should join ASCAP." And I did, and I don't regret it at all. And then, so I started at least collecting those royalties and at that time, now this was still in the late 50's, I did not have any publishing control, I wasn't even thinking about it. I mean I did records for Savoy and Prestige, and Blue Note, and all those songs went that way. Somewhere along the way I met, and I think it was through Thad Jones, I think it was through Thad Jones, who suggested I get my own publishing going on and he had a connection with a gentleman by the name of Phil Kurnit, who runs an organization called Publisher's Licensing Corporation, which kind of runs your company for you. I have two publishing companies, I have a BMI and I have an ASCAP. Publisher's Licensing Company does all the stuff for you, for a percentage, of course. That was pretty cool, I mean because I didn't have to do a lot of ledgers and paperwork and all that stuff and still concentrate on my music.

You mentioned G.G. Gries, among other guys, but he was one of the early people who really struggled to do this thing right. It takes a lot of work to run a publishing company. I always admired him and felt for him all the work that they had to put into that, but again, you know, if you're wise, if you're smart, if you're lucky, you can get other people to help you do things. You'll have to pay them something, again, that's tax deductible too, it doesn't matter. You're going to have to look for things, you know, tax, you know, things you take off your tax anyway. But the point is that's how I got into having my own publishing, which I'm very happy to say has paid off because those checks really come in handy sometime when the gigs weren't too plentiful, and there have been times when they weren't. But the royalty checks do come in and if you own your own publishing it's even better, you know. And I still have stuff with other publishers, but most of the time in the last twenty, twenty-five years it's been in my publishing, mainly ASCAP.

Brown: So you were taking care of business all the way around?

Burrell: Well, I was lucky, I got some good advice and it made sense, so why not do it. Why not have your own publishing? You know, it made sense, I mean, I didn't have to get that advice, I was just lucky. Like I say, Nina Simone's lawyer and my friend from Detroit Thad Jones who was an incredible musician himself.

Brown: Lets not forget Hank.

Burrell: And Hank and Elvin, the Jones.

Brown: Boy, that's a triumvirate there.

Burrell: Right, man, unbelievable. And I recorded with all of them, I'm so happy.

Brown: So, again, looking at your career in New York, 'cause we know you're going to make that transition, so we want to get as much covered in New York. So you've already, now you're a leader, you're signed to labels, have you stopped doing the pit orchestra and things like that 'cause you...*Midnight Blue*?

Burrell: I stopped that after *Midnight Blue* and *Guitar Forms*, and those two shows were over. The first one was "Bye Bye Birdie" and the second one was "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" so that was a three year period starting in, over in '63. In '64 I think I was just okay, I didn't have to do that anymore and the phone kept ringing.

Brown: When did you have your first international tour, going to either to Europe or...?

Burrell: I don't even remember.

Brown: Okay. Do you remember going as a leader or as a sideman>

Burrell: Oh, I don't know, let me think. That's an interesting question, I don't remember, at the moment I can't remember if I was a leader or a sideman. I know I spent many trips over there.

Brown: I was just wondering what is that first, you know, coming out of Detroit, of course, you've toured nationally already. But coming over seas and seeing other folks that are so embracing of your music...

Burrell: Right.

Brown:...and unconditional acceptance, not like in America.

Burrell: You have to forgive me, but at this moment I'm drawing a blank, I don't know maybe, for whatever reason. But I do know that I felt very encouraged whenever I went to Europe and Japan and I made two trips to Brazil and it was nice. A couple of trips to the Caribbean. But it was always good because you have some real jazz fans all over the world, parts of the world, they were really nice. I'm sorry I can't remember the...

Brown: No problem, that's alright, that's alright.

Burrell: I'm sure it's there somewhere, I just have to unlock it and I can't unlock it at the moment.

Brown: So before I ask you what year, about what time did you come, decide to make that move to the west coast and what precipitated that. What years did you run the, was the guitar, the club, were you affiliated with that?

Burrell: Oh, I think that was, 'cause I ended that up in, I'm thinking that's the early 70's, I believe it was because I was getting ready to leave to go to California and, yeah, either '70 or '71. I think my daughter, my wife was pregnant and I decided I didn't want to stay in New York and raise her. The other thing was that I had this opportunity with Fantasy, Fantasy Records, they signed me to a long term contract.

Brown: Was that Ralph Kaffel, no?

Burrell: Yeah.

Brown: Okay.

Burrell: This way I could afford to have a house, you know, buy a small house. So I decide, hey, move to California and start my family there, with my wife was pregnant, so that's what we did. And I believe that was '71.

Brown: Okay. Where were you living when you were living in New York? And you had mentioned that you had gotten married in the course of the interview, so maybe we could try to bring that information in.

Burrell: I was living in, the last place I was living, was on, where was that. It was on the east side some place, in the 70's on the east side, and a small apartment. I just remember the garage fees in New York were almost as high as the rent, something else, man. I got married in I think it was '70 around '71, stopped in Detroit and moved to Los Angeles and my daughter was...

Brown: Yeah, but Fantasy is up in Berkley, California...

Burrell: I know, I know.

Brown: ...so why did you decide to move to Los Angeles instead of northern California?

Burrell: I don't know, I really don't know, I can't explain that except for some reason I decided to go to L.A. Oh, I know why, I know why, because I figured the opportunities to perform, to record, were better here. And I think they were because I did do some studio work here with Quincy, and what's his name, Benny Carter. But at least I was a little more selective than I had been earlier in New York. So it was cool and I knew a lot of guys here, Oliver Nelson, and you know, people like that were here and I knew them. I didn't know anybody, I didn't know you or anybody in Northern California. But the other

thing was there was no, to speak of, no real recording studios there. This is Hollywood and all that, you know, Capitol Records, you know, this is the second main place for pop and jazz, so that's why I came, yeah.

Brown: Well, that makes sense. But you had played all the clubs in San Francisco I imagine on tours like...

Burrell: Yeah, I had played them many times.

Brown:...the Matador, and all those clubs, and the Workshop, and all those.

Burrell: Yeah, and here was, we had Shelly's Manhole that was the main place here. Yeah, I remember when I first came out here Ray Brown came by one night with about eight guitar players, scared me to death. He was looking at me smiling. He had been in some studio session somewhere and he had brought all of them with him. So anyway, that was funny. He was a guy, he was always, but you know, we had worked together with Peterson, so it was cool. But that was, I remember that. Anyway, so that's...

Brown: So you're here in '71, now we're in Los Angeles, you made it across the coast, or from coast to coast. So that was, did you have a goal coming out here, other than raising your family, as far as a career goal? Were you interested in continuing your career as a bandleader, or were you going to continuing the diversity of working...

Burrell: Right, as a bandleader and as a recording artist. So I would go up to make, I say maybe two albums a year. And then I started to record with other people for Fantasy, Gene Ammons and 'cause Sam Russell was my good friend, he was a kind of a contractor for Gene. And my good buddy Sam and he did some records with Lorez Alexandria and, you know, as a producer and I did a few dates for him. But, no, I just wanted to enjoy this area and take advantage of the opportunity and more or less do what I was doing in New York with out all the hassle. Just a little bit more relaxed situation. And I was very fortunate again, I remember one of the first weeks I was here I was in a hotel up in Hollywood, didn't quite know anybody and I come out just to explore and all of a sudden the phone rings and it's Jimmy Jones and a couple of other guys. They said, "Hey man, we're coming over here to see you." I said, "Okay." And the next thing I know they say, "Well, we want to take you down to the union." And they took me and walked me into the president's office and say, "You know." They said, "We think this guy should belong to this local." And he said, "Okay, let him go through the normal motions and I'll put in a good word for him."

So it was, I had a nice welcome because I had already known Ray and Ray was then established as a studio musician here. But, yeah, my goals were the same to keep on playing, to continue my writing. And again, as I said yesterday, in the back of my mind was still to be a teacher because of that episode that I had in college. So that was still in my mind, so I was doing workshops and seminars around the country and I had, when I got out here I did a few at UCLA and other places and that's how I eventually got a job at UCLA.

Brown: Okay, before we take that on, as far as your educational career because I really want to focus on that and talk about not only your career...

Burrell: ...trajectory but also talk about how you've developed your curriculum and your pedagogy. I want to talk about, the reason why I asked about your career goals coming out to L.A. because this is, forgive me, Hollyweird, Hollywood. And you've already done the soundtrack of *Pawnbroker* with Quincy, that was done in the in the mid 60's...

Burrell: Right, that was in New York.

Brown: So I was just wondering if you had, you know, your sights set on getting into film, you know, doing film scores or T.V. or any of that.

Burrell: No, I never thought about doing film scores, for some reason that was never interesting to me. No, I didn't think about that. I wouldn't mind playing on them, which I did, but as far as writing, no, I never thought about that.

Brown: What was that session like working on the *Pawnbrokers*? 'Cause that was such a, I mean, that was a landmark movie and the soundtrack with Quincy. And of course he did *In the Heat of the Night* and others as well, *In Cold Blood* and those. But *Pawnbrokers* is what put him on the map.

Burrell: Yeah, Quincy is a very focused guy, multitasking guy and extreme talent and knows what he wants. And that's why to me he is so successful. Now he's got a brilliant wealth of ideas and he knows how to make them, to put them in action. You know, his latest thing is *We Are the World Two*, you know, that's unbelievable. But you know, his concept comes to him and he says, "Hey, I want to do this." And so I'm not surprised at any success he has. It was exciting and fun, you know, working with him because you work with somebody who knows what they're doing, knows what they want and is showing you by example, by their actions that this is what we're doing and lets get to it with enthusiasm and it influences you. So that's the kind of atmosphere, for me, always with Quincy at work, anyway. Socially he's, you know, another laid back, well just laid back, but always thinking. He's a great guy. But in a working situation its enthusiasm and focus, and knowing what the hell he's doing, and he does, yeah.

Brown: And did you work with him after *Pawnbrokers*? I'm sure you did since you were living here in Los Angeles, but were there any other...

Burrell: Not a lot, I think it might be in the record, but I think one of the most important things I did was the T.V. show *Love You Madly*.

Brown: With Duke.

Burrell: I don't know if that's in there or not.

Brown: Yes, well...

Burrell: It's not on there because it wasn't recorded...

Brown: 'Cause it was a T.V. show.

Burrell: Yeah, and again, it was put together by Quincy and Bud Yorkin, unbelievable.

Brown: And that was the first time you got to play with Duke Ellington.

Burrell: That's right, first and last. First and last time I actually, he's playing the piano, I'm playing the guitar. I was on sessions with him where he brought in some music and was just there for Johnny Hodges sessions and Paul Gonsalves sessions, but I never actually played with him.

Brown: What was it like meeting him for the first time? I don't think we talked about that.

Burrell: Whew, man! You know what? I need to go take another five minutes.

Brown: Okay, lets take a break and we'll start the rest of the tape on that too but we're going to go ahead and get as much as we can on this one.

Kimery: And we are rolling.

Burrell: Okay, now the question was, when did I first meet Duke Ellington. Alright, I don't remember when I first met Duke Ellington. I'll just say I think it was around '59 I was kind of hanging around the, that club on 52nd street that Billy Taylor used to play all the time. The Lunt-something, the something, it was a restaurant, the trio was playing there all the time on 52nd street. It was a good restaurant, I can't think of the name of it, I'm sure you can think of it. But I was there that night, kind of hanging 'cause some of the cats were around, we was just outside talking intending to go in, in a few minutes. And all of a sudden Duke Ellington pulls up in a car or taxi, or whatever, gets out and Joe Morgan, his PR guy, one of his PR people was also standing. Joe was kind of a figure that kind of hung around 52nd street, around midtown area. I think I was talking to Joe and, you know, the waters part, the crowd parts, and here's Duke Ellington. And so Joe introduces me to Duke Ellington and I'm standing there dumbfounded and don't know what to say except for, "Hello, Mr. Ellington." And so after about three, four, fives minutes, three or four minutes, you know, some small talk, he says, "Come on in, lets have dinner." I said, "Okay." And so I go in and I sit with him and have dinner. And he orders whatever and I'm ordering whatever and then I get to really talk to him for the first time. And not knowing what to say I'm doing mostly listening of course.

But prior to that meeting I had read in the New York Times that he said I was one of his favorite musicians, which made me feel pretty good. So at least I had some kind of self-assuredness sitting there with him, I knew he liked my music. Also, I don't know if it was

around that time, or a later time. He liked a couple of my compositions his nephew had told me. Prior to that I hadn't met him formally but I had certainly seen him on the stage many times. But there was a restaurant, like a coffee shop, up in Harlem near the club that I used to play on a regular basis. I used to play at this place called Bowman's, as I mentioned, which became Branker's, and on one block from there on St. Nicholas Avenue and 155th street was this coffee shop and we would go there after we finished the gig at three or four in the morning and have coffee or a sandwich, or whatever, and Duke Ellington lived in that neighborhood, in that block. And he would come in after his gig downtown somewhere, and to get something to go out and take home and I'd see him occasionally. And usually I was with a few musicians so it was not any formal, we acknowledged the fact that it was Duke Ellington and he would nod at us, and so, you know, he...we knew that he knew we were musicians. So I didn't meet him but I think he kind of remembered meeting me that way, but it wasn't a meeting, it was just he acknowledged me. But, and then that first meeting at the London House, no that's in Chicago, can't think of the name of that, I'll think of it later maybe. But this is the place where Billy Taylor played in a lot.

Brown: Hickory House, no?

Burrell: Hickory House, that's it, thank you. Younger minds here. [laughs] Yeah, thanks for giving me that excuse about making all those records so I have an excuse not to remember things. [laughs] But, I appreciate it. It was the Hickory House, you're right. And so after that I, we were friends, kind of, you know. And so I would occasionally see him occasionally and got gradually to know his family, his sister Ruth particularly and his nephews Stephen and Michael. It was cool. And I remember the last time I saw him as well was very interesting. And then in between that I saw him, we did a T.V. show, you know, a T.V. show *Love You Madly*. In fact, that may have been the last time I saw him, on that T.V. show because this was in the fall of '73, he died in May of '74. I think I saw him in Chicago before that, anyway, it was an interesting, interesting situation. I was working at the London House and he was working at the Mister Kelly's. I don't know what year this was, I'm assuming it was in '70, '71, somewhere in there, maybe '72 'cause he was actually ill. So he kind of knew he had cancer. Anyway, so maybe this was '72. Anyway, so I'm, we, I was working at the London House with my little group and I went, made a bee line to the Hickory, no, not the, to Mister Kelly's to see Duke Ellington and his band the last show. So I'm sitting there and Luther Henderson is there and I'm saying, "Hey Luther." And listening. One of my real heroes, by the way. So we're sitting there and after the show we go back stage and Joe Benjamin, my good friend who I recorded with and so forth, a bass player then and also a copyist for Ellington. Ellington invited us to his hotel suite so we go to his suite in the hotel. And it's amazing I find myself, now here was Ellington he had his portable piano he always had...

Brown: Which is at the Smithsonian.

Burrell: Oh, is it?

Brown: Um-hm.

Burrell: Oh, good, good. And so I'm, here we are here about three in the morning, so forth, and he's playing excerpts and singing excerpts from his third sacred concert saying, "How do you like this? How do you like that?" And I'm saying, I'm in this group and he's asking, and I'm saying, I can't believe, like you said, "I can't believe I'm here." And he's sounding like he's forty years old because he's into that music so much and playing and just saying, you know. I've seen Stevie Wonder do it, you know, in similar situations. And then at the same time he's talking to Luther about something they're about to do on Broadway. It was a revival, some kind of revival they going to do on Broadway, and he's doing the sacred music. And we're telling stories and we're just having a great time. And no alcohol, just Coca-Cola, that was the fair of the day. As Duke Ellington said, he "retired undefeated." Which I hope to live up to myself. But, you know, he drank Coke, Coca-Cola. But it was, to me, it was just exhilarating to see this man who was then seventy...four...

Brown: Yeah, if it was in '73.

Burrell: That involved, that creative and at the same time that regular. I mean he wasn't saying, you know, he was saying, "How you like it?" You know, "I'm playing it, how do you like it?" So anyway, it just so happens that I was the last one to leave that morning. And I remember him asking Stephen to get him some Vitamin E because he kind of knew he had the big 'C' and not that that helped anything. But, you know, you never know. And he died of pneumonia and cancer, I mean pneumonia was the thing that killed him. I just remember when I said 'good morning' to him, the look that he gave me was incredible. I never had anybody look at me with that depth before. It was like...I guess the only word I can think of is eternity. It was like, I can't, um...I can't describe it, but it was a look that was, so deep, it's indescribable. Okay. Put it that way. And I felt I had a real, *connection* to him that would always be there. Let's put it that way. And, and I always remember that. I always remember that. And it was certainly a sad moment for me because I knew he was sick. And as we know now, there's not much you can do about cancer. You know? So...

Brown: Um-hm.

Burrell: Anyway, that was it. That was the last time I saw him.

Kimery: And we're running.

Brown: (to Kimery) So am I slating? No. Okay we're running. (to Ken) Alright, so thank you for sharing your experiences with Duke. We know that that's a very special relationship and of course you—we'll talk about education—but of course you started the first formal course on Duke Ellington's music so...

Burrell: Right.

Brown: We want to get there, but before we get to Duke we talked about some of the our other heroes, all- the heroes and the purveyors of this music, but you also had the opportunity to work with Pops, Louis Armstrong.

Burrell: Pops! Right...

Brown: So if you could talk about that, that would be great.

Burrell: One time only.

Brown: It's a wonderful world! [laughs]

Burrell: Yeah, yeah I labeled it "Do". I got a call to be on that record date. I think Oliver Nelson was the arranger. I'm not sure who was the arranger. But anyway, I got a call to be on it and they had a nice little part for me to play with some arpeggios. It was kind of an integral part of the sound of that record. But it was an interesting date because they had a studio audience, and the audience was invited to sing along as a- like a choir. And uh- it (was) just a beautiful feeling like the song itself, and I was glad that I was able to be a part of that. I don't know what else- much else to say about- bout it except I admired him as so many of us did and loved his music and loved him as a person. I think I met him once before just briefly but, you know, that was just a brief, brief episode. Yeah, yeah.

Brown: Um-hm. It was Oliver Nelson was the arranger on that.

Burrell: It was?

Brown: Oh yeah. There's, there's so many folks- I mean the list is about...

Burrell: I thought it was Oliver.

Brown: Yeah it is Oliver; Oliver did it, yeah.

Burrell: Yeah.

Brown: Scott or its got, also says they're crediting Ornette Coleman playing on one of those [laughs]...one of those sessions.

Burrell: [laughs]

Brown: [laughs] That must've been something. But again that- I guess that speaks to the- that forward- that expansion that jazz musicians seem to bring to...

Burrell: Yeah.

Brown: So of course being out here is when you were able to realize your dream as- to be an educator...

Burrell: Right.

Brown:...So if, if you could talk about that career progression, particularly how you ended up here- arrived here at UCLA.

Burrell: Well what happened is—I think—it’s interesting. I was in New York and my friend Rufus Reid, who is a great bassist and was running the jazz studies program at William Paterson College at the time, was going to take a leave of absence for a year and he asked me if I would take his place. And I said, “well, yeah maybe I ’d be good, you know? I’d like to do that.” He said it would be nice pay, and at that time I was living in New York again. And something else was going on with me at the same time. At that time, I was working on a PhD in what I thought was going to be musicology. [laughs] Okay? And- but I got- because what I wanted to do was to use that degree to get a job teaching college. [laughs] Okay? So, and at the same time, one of the projects I was working on as part of that was the music for the Boys Choir of Harlem, that record that I did...

Brown: Oh *Love is the Answer*.

Burrell: ...*Love is the Answer*. So this came about, this idea of me taking this program over for Rufus. And it was challenging, you know, to run a whole program, not having done it before. But then again, about six months into it, I got a call from UCLA to do the same thing. Now, it’s just funny how things happen. One of my jazz friends who was—had come back to school to get his doctorate here, Dwight Dickerson. I don’t know if you know Dwight who—pianist—was working on his degrees and was a very activist student saying, “We should have a jazz program here at UCLA.” And we saying “because Kenny Burrell’s been here doing his Duke Ellington class for so long, he’s got a strong track record, why not ask him to start it?” And then a couple other people: Steve Loesser who was here who was actually my TA at one time also said similar things. And UCLA finally- I guess they got around to deciding that they wanted to have a jazz program. Like I said, six months into the William Paterson, I got this offer from UCLA. I said “well maybe this is a rehearsal...[laughs]

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell:...to go out to UCLA and start that program” which it turned out to *be*, ‘cause all the stuff I learned there I was able to use here, you know? Like the juries and different things, you know. So that’s how it started here, but the prelude was William Paterson.

Brown: What year was that? ‘Cause the...

Burrell: ’96.

Brown:... '96 right. 'Cause *Love Is the Answer* is released in '97.

Burrell: Right. Uh-huh.

Brown: But you'd already, you'd already started the first class in teaching m- the music of Duke Ellington in '78...

Burrell: '78.

Brown: So that w- was that started here? Or...

Burrell: Yes.

Brown: ...Ok.

Burrell: This was the first class right here at UCLA under the Center for Afro-American Studies.

Brown: Ahhh. Not even the music department.

Burrell: No.

Brown: Yeah, ok. [laughs]

Burrell: They didn't induct us until twelve years later. It didn't even get into the music department until twelve years later. But anyway it was ok with me because I had all kinds of students coming into the class and my mission was to get that word out about how important Duke Ellington was in many, many ways, so I was cool with that. And then, but the fact that I had such a strong record, such a strong track record, on doing just that one course, and I met people here and I got strong recommendations. So it was cool. So it wasn't really a problem to- for them to follow up on the invitation. Plus I had gained quite a reputation as a performer and an artist, so that allowed me to get a nice salary coming in, you know. And tenure right away. So that was cool. And so it worked out alright. [laughs]

Brown: So what were your goals, you know, coming in? Or better still: did they ask you what your goals [laughs] were coming in...?

Burrell: No they asked me to put together a jazz program.

Brown: Um-hm.

Burrell: And, and I said "I think I can do that," because first of all, I knew enough musicians that I think would be...I could call to become teachers. So and then I had that, at least some experience at William Paterson about how to run a program, how it should run in terms of the curriculum and all the other things that were tied to that. But I was

very proud of the first group that I had. I called and it wasn't a lot of money, but these people were interested in teaching and interested in passing on the information and kind of interested in having a steady- a job doing stuff. So my first group, which you may have on your record, was Billy Higgins, was the drummer, Billy Childs was the pianist, George Bohannon was a trombone, Oscar Brashear was a trumpet, Harold Land was the saxophone... [laughs]

Brown: [laughs] What a band! [laughs]

Burrell: ...Barbara Morrison, Ruth Price, and Michelle Weir were the three—no, Michelle hadn't come—*me*, I was also one of the vocal instructors at the time. And then later on Michelle Weir came in. And the bassist was, well, Roberta- Roberto Miranda, and I think- and Gerald Wilson who was here anyway became part of our jazz faculty. And Garnett Brown was also conducting one of the bands. And it was a great beginning. *Great* beginning...

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: ...And unfortunately we had to replace some of the guys who passed on like Billy Higgins and Harold Land, but the others are still around. Billy Childs is playing and Oscar's still playing. So it's cool and we have some good people now. I have Bobby Rodriguez, Dr. Bobby Rodriguez on trumpet, and Charles Owens and Justo Almario on saxophone. those guys are great. And it's ok. Clayton Cameron on drums...

Brown: Woo.

Burrell: ...unbelievable. He's really nice, you know. So it's ok and the uh- and we got a- we recently got a- oh at least two years ago we got a multi-million dollar grant from Herb Alpert. So this is not the Herb Alpert School of Music, and so Herb loves jazz, you know, and so he made it very clear that the needs of the jazz program should be taken care of and so far so good! And then we have some addition, we have now James Newton with us, which is a great addition. And as you've just talked to Dr. Cheryl Keyes and others who- who do things that are connected to jazz like African American music, all courses like that are great. And Charlie Harrison, who's incredible, who's directing our UCLA Jazz Orchestra. Great musician, great transcriber, great arranger. He's done a lot of transcriptions of Ellington and Strayhorn for some Smithsonian- I guess you guys.

Brown: Um-hm. We met him yesterday.

Burrell: Yeah and who else? Let's see. We have three- and then James and I are doing a contemporary jazz ensemble. And it's working out fine. And Michelle Weir is here, and she's doing a great job. So, so far, so good. Normal politics at any institution which...

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: ... You know that sucks...

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: ...The point is- the mission is to prepare the students for a life in music and how to compete and realize what their music is, you know. Realize that they're all unique and they just have to open it up, let that uniqueness come out. And that's my mission. That's my goal. So far, we're doing OK. We had one student that I brag about all—she's gonna be here not too long from now. We're going to have her come over and do a master class—is Gretchen Parlato, a vocalist. She won the Thelonious Monk Institute Award a few years back. And, you know, that's like the number one in the world, that- to win that. And so she's doing pretty good. And others as well. And so she'll be coming back to do this- So I'm really proud of the fact that I was able to put together and maintain—at least thus far—this jazz program, jazz studies program. And it looks like it has got a good future. We're expanding now with more courses thanks to, again, to the funding from Herb Alpert. We've got more courses in composition and more courses in improvisation. And it's looking pretty good. Yeah.

Brown: Great. Great. You're offering degrees all- at all levels: bachelors, masters, and PhD's?

Burrell: No. We, thus far, have only a bachelors' degree in ethnomusicology, which is in a jazz concentration. Now, now the jazz concentration now has two tracks: one is composition and one is performance.

Brown: Okay.

Burrell: OK. But we are now working on a masters' degree. Now since Herb Alpert has—how can I say—come into the picture and has provided the funding for all of the music departments if you will, we are now cross-listing a lot of things and the genres are fusing and in the courses of- the courses are fusing. So what we are now doing is creating a masters' in music with a jazz concentration...

Brown: Okay.

Burrell:...And we are working on that right now. And, you know, if- I don't know when we're going to be dealing with the PhD but right- DMA. There is a DMA in music and some people have gotten there DMAs in performance, and part of that has been jazz. So it has been like Bobby Rodriguez and Fred Selden, (and a couple other people. Part of their recitals have been jazz pieces. So I think the next step would be—we're working on it now—is a masters in music with a jazz concentration. And then probably the PhD or DMA eventually.

Brown: Um-hm.

Burrell: Yeah. But I'm feeling good about it. This is now- this is '96. We're fourteen years into it, now- beginning now, fourteen, thirteen and a half. And it's working OK. Yeah. And I'm glad that I'm able to make this contribution. And back to my original dream; I'm glad that I'm able to be a part of making a difference in teaching and helping to spread the word about our culture and the importance of this music, jazz.

Brown: You mentioned earlier—off mic that—the importance of jazz scholarship. I was fortunate when I went to Rutgers. That was the first class they were offering a Masters in Music, but du- while the time I was there they also instituted a master- or a degree in jazz studies, so it was more jazz scholarship looking at. Is that on the horizon for here as well?

Burrell: Well, yes, I would- I would say [pause]...I can't be specific about it. I- I understand what you're saying and, um [pause]...I don't know how to say this: what I, what I would like to see is more courses in jazz history...

Brown: Um-hm. Um-hm.

Burrell: ... So people will really understand the depth and the bigger picture. You know, what we're teaching is how to perform, how to write music, but we're not teaching the big picture. And I would like to see that and I'm going to take your question as a suggestion that we, we look into that more.

Brown: Particularly since you have the affiliation or (are) under the auspices of ethnomusicology, which has a, you know, it definitely has a- a discipline, and jazz of course would- is ideally suited for that as opposed to musicology...

Burrell: Right.

Brown:...where you're looking at the cultural *context* of the music...

Burrell: Right.

Brown:...And you're understand the music and it- its role in culture.

Burrell: Right.

Brown: Now this is something you've been talking about for the duration of this- of this interview. It's obviously something that you hold near and dear: understanding where this music comes from; what are the values that have been invested in this music.

Burrell: Right.

Brown: So I'm just wondering if that's some- you know, something that you're able to bring into this very, you know, growing but ultimately comprehensive...

Burrell: Hopefully, but not now...

Brown: OK.

Burrell: ...but hopefully I w- hopefully we can. I hope we can. Yeah.

Brown: Um-hm. 'Cause you've got great, great instructors and professors here...

Burrell: I know.

Brown: ...that are very, very versed in that so...

Burrell: Right.

Brown: ...it- it'd be great to be able to offer that as well 'cause I think that that would make yours', you know, the program here, you know, the leading program...

Burrell: Right.

Brown: ...to be able to have that...

Burrell: Right.

Brown: Because of the emphasis you have on, on the performance already now, composition and then scholarship...

Burrell: I think you're right.

Brown: ...would be the- the...

Burrell: I think you're right...I'll take that as a very strong suggestion...

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: ..and in fact I would even ask you to put something in writing to that effect, so not only can I be reminded of your comments, but I can share it with some other people to remind them of the tracks we should follow. [laughs]

Brown: [laughs] OK.

Burrell: I would appreciate that doctor. [laughs]

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: That's a very thoughtful and- suggestion and coming from you I think it would help.

Brown: But again I- that's only- the inspiration for that was just hearing you talk about the music.

Burrell: I understand. But...

Brown: ...And, and...

Burrell: ...but you, you, you're bouncing back at me with that suggestion. I would seriously like you to put something in writing for that...

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: ...and I'll run with it. [laughs]

Brown: [laughs] Well, you know, there've been—as I said earlier, you know, in the, in the discography listing over, over, no less than six hundred sessions that you've performed on whether it was under your name or under your alias [laughs] when we add them all up. A couple other what I would consider—and hopefully you agree—some landmark recordings of yours'. You mentioned earlier *Love is the Answer* with the Boys Choir of Harlem. That...

Burrell: Right.

Brown: ...Could you talk a little bit about that project 'cause that, that seemed to be a very heartfelt...

Burrell: Well, it was. I was very inspired working with them. Occasionally, I don't know how it happened. I think, yeah, it started with me getting a call from them, that they were doing some recordings and they wanted to add extra instrumental guest to play maybe a couple improvised sections, solos, or something to enhance what they were doing. 'Cause they did all kinds of music, you know. And I remember working with them and was really impressed with everything about them: the discipline, the musicality, and- and the direction of Dr. Turnbull. And, and then is started to come to me that this might be a nice thing to do down the line, do some more work them. And then I got a call from [pause]...One day I got a call from a group in upstate New York called Art Awareness that I had done some concerts with as a couple that ran, it was kind of a countryside arts building that they had art exhibits and sometimes concerts and so forth. And socially I had spent some time with them and they said, "You know, you're always talking about the sound of a boys choir." I said "yeah" 'cause I, I do like that sound. There's a certain tambour before the boy's voice changes. I like that sound and I said "yeah, I do." They said, "you know, well we want to give you a commission to write something..."

Brown: Hmm...

Burrell: ...I said "Wow, that's timely," because I'd just been working with the Boys Choir of Harlem...

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: [laughs] ...so they said “Well, we want to give you a commission,” so I dove right into it, started thinking about it, and I called Dr. Turnbull and said, “Would you be interested in working with me? I’m going to write something with you guys in mind.” He said “Of course!” So I began. I began the piece. But at the same time, I was asked to write something for that PhD thing I was doing.

Brown: And what was that? What program was that?

Burrell: That was the Union Institute...

Brown: OK.

Burrell: ...in Columbus, which I didn’t finish because I got, I got so busy with all kinds of stuff and the goal of doing it anyway was to get a job, like I got... [laughs]

Brown: [laughs] Right, that you already- now did you already complete a masters or was this a P, a masters’/Ph...

Burrell: Both. Yeah.

Brown: Ah ok.

Burrell: So, I worked on it and we had a Lincoln Center debut of this piece. I think it was ’93. I believe it was. And it worked really well, but I was really impressed with these kids and Dr. Turnbull. About 98% of them went to college...

Brown: Mmm.

Burrell: ...And they were from some very bad situations home-wise, you know...

Brown: Um-hm..

Burrell: Yeah, it was very nice.

Brown: And the- the last session out of the multitudes would be the 75th birthday bash live...

Burrell: Oh yeah.

Brown: ...Back up, back up where I live [laughs].

Burrell: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah. That was nice.

Brown: Uh-huh.

Burrell: Yeah I- I was so honored that- that came about in a couple ways. The guy who runs the Monterey Jazz Festival, Jackson?

Brown: Yeah Tim Jackson?

Burrell: Tim...

Brown: Um-hm.

Burrell: ...called me and said he was applying see, you never know when things are going to happen for you. He was applying for a grant...

Brown: Um-hm.

Burrell: ...to have me and Gerald Wilson do something together. I said "That's great man." I said, you know, "Why?" He said "Well I just thought it'd be a nice pairing." I said "Well, I think so to!" [laughs]

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: And so, now this was about a year before my birthday. And I don't know where it came up, but it kind of- he was talking to what's-his-face at, what's-his-name at Yoshi's in Oakland?

Brown: Peter Williams.

Burrell: Peter. And they were saying, "okay, well let's hook up some kind of date" and I don't know at what point we realized it was my birthday was coming up at the same time. So they said, "Why not make it a birthday bash for you?" And so it worked out really well because there was a grant to help pay for all of that, the big band and everything. So Peter didn't have a lot to worry about...

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: ...And, plus the fact it was a big- celebrate my 75th so that was going to draw some crowds anyway. It was a tremendous week. I mean they had lines around the block, you know. And so I can't say enough about it. Gerald is always easy to work with so we talked about the music—it was not any, not any problem—and figured out what to do and so I had stuff with the big band. And what else did...? I had Joey DeFrancesco, right? On with a trio with the organ; and I had Hubert Laws...

Brown: Mmm...

Burrell: ...And I had my- my guys: a trio with Clayton Cameron and Roberto. It was really a wonderful, wonderful week. Couldn't have been better, as far as I'm concerned. And then we recorded, which is also- was also nice. And I believe it's- yeah that was on Blue Note...

Brown: Um-hm.

Burrell: ...And the Blue Note people were very supportive. I understand he's leaving now— Bruce...

Brown: Lundvall?

Burrell: ...I heard he's leaving Blue Note for some- retiring or something. You know, after a point, you get...

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: ...you just want to rest a little bit. [laughs] But anyway, he was very supportive. And Michael Cuscuna. So, there was- I didn't- there were no problems at all.

Brown: Mmm.

Burrell: And I think it all stemmed from the fact that there was this grant in place to begin with. And then we went to Muum...

Brown: Kuumbwa...

Burrell: Kuumbwa...

Brown: ...in Santa Cruz.

Burrell: Yeah, 'cause that was- I think that the grant was for two gigs. And so- and we did some recording there, too. So everything worked out *really* well. Really well. And it was, you know, like icing on the cake for me, man.

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: It's great. You know, and I am looking at Gerald and Gerald's 90-what? What is he 90...?

Brown: 91.

Burrell: So I'm saying "Well..."

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: ...I'm 75, but still, I'm still going to grow up to be like him, you know?

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: I had another friend the other day...what's today, Wednesday? Yesterday he was 96...

Brown: Mm.

Burrell: ...and he just is as spry as anybody I know and loves jazz. He was a(n) alto player for a while but gave it up for other things. But the point is I guess you're as old as you feel...

Brown: Mm.

Burrell: ...you know. And I don't feel too old. I'm going to be 80 next year. And, but I'm feeling good. I got a little sore throat, but otherwise, I'm feeling really, *really* good.

Brown: Got any projects on the horizon that you want to complete?

Burrell: Oh yeah.

Brown: Okay. [laughs]

Burrell: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, I got too many. [laughs]

Brown: [laughs]

Burrell: And I probably won't complete them, but the point is at least I can get them started or I can put them down somewhere where somebody else can work on them. Yeah but I've got some things. Planning something special for next year...

Brown: Um-hm, Um-hm.

Burrell: ...and certainly continue with the education thing here, I'm going expand on that, and certainly composing I still love doing that and want to continue doing that. I just finished another piece I am going to send off to somebody, one of my favorite singers, I hope that they will like it, that kind of stuff. I am going to ask, I have already been asked by ASCAP to, what do you call it, give a presentation or workshop, or whatever they call it. Once a year ASCAP has a thing for, that features songwriters, and this year they asked me to come in. And so I will talk about some of my compositions. They particularly were impressed with the thing I wrote for Ella Fitzgerald, "Dear Ella", which won the Grammy, you know. That kind of stuff and quite a few compositions, jazz and some of the other things, like the "Love is the Answer" which they couldn't figure out a category for it so it didn't get much airplay. The jazz stations didn't play it, the classical stations didn't play it, but I'm sorry, you know, that's the way the business is, but I still felt I

needed to do it. I can't think in those terms, I just have to think in terms of what the music's going to be.

Brown: So you've got the Grammy, and you've gotten other awards. The reason why we're able to conduct this interview is because of the National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters Award. I was just wondering if you would like to talk about that, if that was a significant milestone in your career.

Burrell: Absolute, I feel I am in some very, very special company with all these great musicians and highly honored to be considered a jazz master. I don't know what else to say about that, I can only, I just quote my mother on this, I've said this many times, but I don't think I've ever said it on the record like this. She always told me, "Just do good work and the rewards will come. Do good work and the rewards will come." She added, "They might not come when you think they'll come. They may not come when they want them to come, but they will come." That's an example. You never know when you're going to get something like the Jazz Masters Award or somebody will get a grant in your name to have you do something. I just recently got a special award from the Grammy's, a President's Merit Award, I don't know if you know about that.

Brown: Absolutely.

Burrell: But I had no idea that was coming. And they looked at the amount of work I've done and they said, "Hey, you know, give him that." But I felt especially honored because on the classical side they gave it to Placido Domingo. So the two honorees, I said, "Wow, that's pretty high class stuff, you know." But again, as I tell my students, and sometimes I have to remind myself, you know, you got to do what you truly feel, what you truly believe in. But that's your strength.

Brown: Well, Professor Kenny Burrell, you've been so generous with your time, with your thoughts, with your soul, you know, you've really shared with us, for the historical record. So anybody who consults this is going to see how profoundly you have shaped, had an impact and helped to shape this music that we know as jazz. Did you have any problems with the word 'jazz', by the way? Did that, yeah?

Burrell: Yeah, I did because I think it's, the image of the word does not cover the enormity of the music. That's the problem. But as Ellington says, "I have to use it because that's the one we're dealing with and that's the word that's known." So I think that the best thing to do now is to use it and try to enhance the meaning to make people understand how much music it really covers, how valuable it is. How widespread, how meaningful it is all over the world and so it gets away from the negative stereotype, this small narrow concept of what it means. So I guess part of my mission is to put the word in a better light, if you will, so that people will look at it with more respect, you know, and more love, if you will. I think that needs to be done and I'm going to try to help do that.

Brown: I can say that you have been doing it for the duration of your career.

Burrell: Well, yeah, in terms of the music, but now just in terms of the image of the word, I think that needs to be enhanced. I appreciate what you're saying. But it's still, in some people it has a negative, not only negative, it doesn't compare with quote "classical" music. See, the point is, if you really analyze, it's equally as important and as complicated if we really look at it in terms of all the elements. But the people don't know that, the world doesn't know that. So I think part of our mission as educators is to help eliminate that problem.

Brown: Well, we know you're going to join you, you're going to go teach your class, this is an ensemble class with James Newton, we're looking forward to joining you there. But I guess we'll go ahead and wrap this up as the formal interview portion...

Burrell: Okay.

Brown:...of our trying to have your life in music, your thoughts, your philosophies and your passion...

Burrell: Thank you.

Brown:...for the historical record.

Burrell: Thank you.

Brown: And Kenny Burrell, we thank you, and please just keep keeping on, keep doing what you're doing because as your mother said, "Do good work and good will come back to you." I think you're a living proof of that...

Burrell: Thank you.

Brown: And we thank you so much.

Burrell: Thank you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

(Transcribed and edited by Matt Buttermann)