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BUDDY DEFRANCO
NEA Jazz Master (2006)

Interviewee:	Buddy DeFranco (February 17, 1923 – December 24, 2014)
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Murphy: Hello, I'm Molly Murphy and we're sitting down here in the beautiful home of Buddy DeFranco in Panama City, Florida. It is November 8th, 2008. Hello Buddy.

DeFranco: It's outrageous.

Murphy: [laughs]

DeFranco: I protest.

Murphy: I would like to begin this session by having you state your very impressive name, which is worthy of Italian nobility.

DeFranco: Right. Well, I can't really say it in Italian. I used to speak Italian fairly well, but it's so bad now that I'm almost ashamed. But in Italian it would be Bonifacio, my first name; Bonifacio – Ferdinando – Leonardo. Am I getting close? DeFranco.

Murphy: And you're the only one, probably, who can say that because I've asked so many other people – what's his real name?

DeFranco: Real name, yeah.

Murphy: And people take the wildest stabs and they always get it wrong.

DeFranco: Yeah the trouble is that, I'm Buddy because it's when I went to school, first went to school; the teacher would look at my name and say "Bonli, Bonie, Boni-Forborni, Borni." And all the kids would giggle and laugh and I'd be embarrassed. So it

wasn't long before my family finally said, "Buddy." Buddy, lets keep it Buddy. We don't need all that.

Murphy: Smart. And you, can you tell us your date of birth and where you were born?

DeFranco: I will not. [laughs]

Murphy: [laughs] Don't be vain now.

DeFranco; Don't be vain.

Murphy: We're documenting.

DeFranco: That's all I have left is vain. Let me see, February 17th, 1923.

Murphy: And you were born in?

DeFranco: I was born in Camden, New Jersey on Van Hook Street, I don't know if it's still there. And, but, shortly after, a few years, a couple years after that my family moved to Philadelphia. And I was kind of raised in south Philadelphia from that point on, until I left to go on the road.

Murphy: And Philly was a place where lots of jazz musicians lived but…

DeFranco: Oh, many good musicians.

Murphy: I think a lot of them, like you, maybe kind of migrated there, right? Is that right? The Heath brothers and Coltrane, they weren't actually born there, but they.

DeFranco: Coltrane, Dizzy, yep. Who am I thinking of now? That's terrible. My memory is not what it used to be. But Benny Golson and uh…

Murphy: Joe Wilder.

DeFranco: Joe Wilder, of course, we were in the same class together. Red Rodney. In face, Red, when I was going to this music school, well it was a vocational school; it had a terrific music course. My last term there was when Red Rodney came in. I remember him coming into it.

Murphy: And, of course, Joe Wilder was there with you.

DeFranco: Oh Joe, Joe and I were classmates for a couple years.

Murphy: Ok, but that's skipping ahead a little bit. Lets first talk a little bit about your family because you endured a lot of hardship as a kid, you know, in your family.

DeFranco: Well, I didn't really endure that much hardship when you think about. From the standpoint if you observed my life, you would say "yes." But my brother and I, Leonard, older brother, he and I kind of palled around. A great example was my father was blind, he lost his sight when I was about a year or two years old, I can't remember exactly. And that was devastating for him.

Murphy: And how did he lose it again? Just some accident?

DeFranco: It was an industrial accident. He was a foreman of a, in some factory, and he got some infection in his eye. And it was terrible circumstances, he had, he got this infection that was pretty serious, and the doctor said, "Well, this is so bad you've got to go into the hospital and maybe we'll take that eye out and we'll save the other one. And he went into the hospital and the doctor that was supposed to operate on him was in an auto accident and he couldn't communicate with the hospital well enough. The nurses kind of messed up a little bit. And he lay in the hospital for a couple days and the infection spread to both eyes. And so he had to have both eyes removed.

Murphy: Oh my God.

DeFranco: Yeah. Can you imagine the shock?

Murphy: No.

DeFranco: And he didn't talk about that for years. Years and years, he wouldn't say. But one time we had a really serious talk about life and all that. And he told me about the first year of his life he would dream that he could see and then wake up to the realization that he couldn't. Everyday, he said, for a year every day he just, you know, it tore him up. And then one day he said to himself, "Well, this is it, if I'm not dead and I'm going to live this way, I've got to figure out what to do." And he did.

Murphy: How old was he when that happened?

DeFranco: Boy. You know, I don't know. Embarrassing, but I don't really know. But a young man, of course.

Murphy: But you were a kid when it happened?

DeFranco: Yeah, sure. I was about two I guess, or something. And then he had three more children, they had. When I say, "he had", my mom and he had three more children. And uh, depression time. No money, I mean no money. But my brother and I always seemed to have fun. Whatever it was, we made airplane models or we'd find boxes and made a skate-mobile or something. And finally found music, both of us found music, of course.

Murphy: And this is your brother Leonard?

DeFranco: Leonard, yeah.

Murphy: And was he a year older than you?

DeFranco: He was a year older, yeah. And he played guitar and I played mandolin. And it was an enjoyable time for us, in a sense. We were never aware of the real bad circumstances that we were living in. And a good example was, my dad would try several things in order to make a living and my mom was a very bright lady, but very frail and, in fact, she lost it. She had to be put away in a state hospital because five children, blind husband, and no money. Figure that one.

Murphy: And didn't your youngest, didn't her youngest child die?

DeFranco: Yeah, the youngest child, Freddy, died in a hospital, yeah. From, really from a lot of things, malnutrition among others. But my dad would do several things and he was going to school to try to learn—he went to the School for the Blind in Overbrook, Pennsylvania—trying to learn piano tuning and repairing and he became an expert piano technician. But during the interim he would do certain things and he had this candy route. He would sell these cheeky candy bars and my brother and I would take turns taking him around the whole city where he would service these vendor machines. And sometimes when he didn't have enough money for a dinner or something or food, he would give us a candy bar. Well, my brother and I were elated, we got a candy bar for dinner, that was fantastic, you know. So in that way I said we never really felt that terrible poverty. They did, of course, my parents really had a terrible time of it.

Murphy: Do you remember when your mother was institutionalized? You were, hold old were you? You were eight?

DeFranco: Oh yeah, I remember pretty well.

Murphy: You do?

DeFranco: Yeah, and she, she didn't know, she was torn between a religion, which was Catholic, and she and my dad went to the priest. The doctor told her not to have any more children; it was bad for her. But the priest said, "That's ridiculous, you can always find some milk for your child, you will always provide for your child, God will." Well I don't know, somehow it didn't work out that way. She was torn between eliminating her children and herself from, and my dad would not have the burden, such a burden. And he would stay awake at night, sometimes all night long, because she would walk around the house with a knife thinking about, you know, maybe getting rid of her children and herself because of the impossible situation. It even pains me to speak about it I guess.

Murphy: I can imagine.

DeFranco: But that, you know. When people talk about life and its tribulations and worry about some trivial things. When you think about my parents, incredible. Just, and

how they survived, well especially my dad survived really. He got to be the president of the Blind Federation of Pennsylvania chapter and did fairly well as a piano technician.

Murphy: I just have to interject and point out the absurdity of when I first brought this up and suggest that you endured some hardship in your [laughs] childhood and you said, "No." And then followed it with yeah, that's Buddy DeFranco in a nutshell.

DeFranco: You know, well, [laughs] it's just my observations and my feelings, you know. Well, when you think about it, when we were just kids, it was really fun to find wood or different things to make a skate-mobile or to make an airplane model and watch it fly, it's great, that's fun. And we got, my dad had a mandolin and we learned to play that.

Murphy: So that was your first instrument?

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: You started at age? What? Five?

DeFranco: Five. About five.

Murphy: And you started because you had a mandolin in the house? Is that why?

DeFranco: Yeah, and my brother played guitar. We used to play sometimes, sometimes we'd play a duet in school. One time a little girl announced us, "Buddy DeFranco" – no Bonafici she said it, it wasn't Buddy at the time – "Bonafici Franco will play a mandolin solo occupied by his brother [laughs] on the guitar, I remember that.

Murphy: [laughs] That's very cute.

DeFranco: And then I went to the clarinet after that.

Murphy: So your dad, his interest in becoming a piano tuner, he was obviously already had a lot of musical interest. He played instruments and was an amateur.

DeFranco: Oh yeah, yes. In fact, the whole family did, my granddad, grandmother. Music was always the focal point of our entertainment.

Murphy: And were you growing up hearing a lot of recordings?

DeFranco: A lot of recordings, and in those days the big bands started recording, Ellington and Benny Goodman, and all those people. And the opera was, very you know, naturally, that permeated especially with my granddad, he loved the opera.

Murphy: Italian life.

DeFranco: One time he sent my brother and I to the opera, you know, to be exposed to the "civilized music" as he said. "Real music, not that stuff you listen." And we went to the opera and we came back.

Murphy: Do you remember what it was?

DeFranco: No. I can't remember what the opera was. It must have been an Italian opera, you know, probably Verdi. And he said, "How did you like it." We said, "It would be great without the singing."

Murphy: [laughs]

DeFranco: What we did was we, we meant that, you know, the opera, the singing was ok and all that. But that the marvelous music from the orchestra…

Murphy: So it was the instrumental…

DeFranco: The instrumental music was great, yeah. That really impressed us.

Murphy: Forget the singing, forget the plot.

DeFranco: Yeah, well, yeah the plot. You know is…

Murphy: They're always kind of silly and tragic. [laughter]

DeFranco: Yeah. Yeah, that was another thing where we learned what the plots were and what they were saying over and over again. It didn't make any sense, you know, it was boring.

Murphy: So you mentioned your grandfather, so had he, had your grandparents come from Italy?

DeFranco: They came from Italy, yeah.

Murphy: So they were Italian?

DeFranco: Yeah, they were Italian.

Murphy: Were they speaking mostly Italian?

DeFranco: Yeah, mostly, well they made a really a valiant attempt to speak English. It wound up that Italian broken English was really a comedy to listen to them. I loved it. But they were determined to be American. And they wanted us to be American; they wanted my dad to be American, to speak English. It was kind of funny, they could have had, they had as Italians they had great words about different things that apply in English. For instance, one funny situation was that we had at, my grandfather had at his home in

south Philadelphia, in the back was a typical outhouse. There was no bathroom inside, a toilet really, inside the home. But it was outside. And of course I had to in wintertime, summertime, every time to the back. And he used to call that "backhowsa." [sic] Backhouse. And it became "backhowsit." [sic] Backhowsit that. So my brother and I adopted that as Italian and for years I went through Italy asking people where the "backhowsit" was and nobody knew what I was talking about. And Frank Tiberi would let it go, we were together and he'd break up and let it go, and he'd let me get caught in that trap every time. He thought that was hilarious. Until one time he told me, "You know, Buddy, that's not a word." [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] That's funny. Yeah, I read somewhere where you were quoting your grandfather or something, as saying something about a "Your picture in the paper" [accented] or, heavy accent, clearly.

DeFranco: Oh yeah. Yeah, "Your picture in the paper." [accented] "What have you got in your pocket? he says. [accented]

Murphy: So did they live in Philly with you?

DeFranco: Well, as it turned out my father had married twice, he had gotten a divorce from my mom. The one thing, they went through, unbelievable, the third act of Faust to get a divorce, you know. It was ridiculous what he had to go through because, there again, the family physician said that he should have a mother for us you know, somebody with him. So he got married to this lady and it didn't work out at all. But in the interim my aunts, both Grace and Lucy, and my uncle there, Anthony, took care of us. And we moved to…

Murphy: Were they you dad's siblings?

DeFranco: Hm?

Murphy: Were they you dad's siblings?

DeFranco: Yeah, my father's siblings. My aunt Grace was really surrogate mother for many years. She was great.

Murphy: Yeah, I would have to imagine. If you essentially lost your mom when you were eight, that means your older brother was nine and then there were three others who were even younger than that, so…

DeFranco: Yep, sister younger and another younger brother, and then another younger brother yet after that.

Murphy: Were you guys taking care of the younger ones much, you and your brother?

DeFranco: Oh yeah, and…

Murphy: Because if your dad is out trying to make a living…

DeFranco: My aunt Grace took the responsibility of the four of us and she was like our mother for many years, many years.

Murphy: Well, more about the musical environment around you. Your dad played in a group, correct?

DeFranco: Oh yeah, he played in a group.

Murphy: And the name was?

DeFranco: They were all blind, a blind group. The name of the group was the *Jovial Night Owls*. Isn't that great*? Jovial Night Owls*. And they played, the style of their band was like the Mummers parade bands in Philadelphia on a New Year's Day when these bands would, Mummers parade bands would go all the way up Broad Street and play this specific sound. In fact, a band leader by the name of Art Mooney copped that style and made a big recording of *I'm Looking Over a Four-leaf Clover*. That was the style of the Mummers parade; well the *Jovial Night Owls* had that style of playing. And once in awhile they would invite my brother and I to sit in and play along with them. That's kind of where it started, where we started playing with groups and sitting in.

Murphy: So by then you had picked up clarinet. Why don't you talk a little bit about…

DeFranco: Oh yeah…

Murphy: …looking at, I know you were more interested in saxophone at first.

DeFranco: …I was at first. But then an itinerant musician, Virgil Cotrill, we used to call him "Happy." "Happy Cotrill" was living in the neighborhood and he was my first clarinet teacher, but he said I should play clarinet first and not saxophone because if you play clarinet first the sax will come easier. If you turn it around and play sax first, clarinet is much more difficult. So he taught me for over a year. Started me out playing all the…

Murphy: And this is when you are eight, eight years old?

DeFranco:…about eight years old, yeah. Seven years old, something like that. And then he left town, he was playing with some local bands in Philadelphia. Strangest thing was many, many years later, just maybe about fifteen years ago, suddenly Happy Cotrill appears. He was living in Wilmington, North Carolina.

Murphy: Yeah, I read that. That's the strangest story. Tell that story. How did that happen again, you?

DeFranco: Yeah, well. Its really a convoluted story. I had a furniture manufacturer who was interested in a pianist. His name escapes me. Do you remember the pianist's name? I can't remember his name. Oh that's terrible. That's why I hate these interviews. Good bye. [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] Well, it was good while it lasted.

DeFranco: Anyway, we talked about this young pianist, and we played and met him, he was a good player, and we played together. And he said, "You know, we know a saxophone/clarinet player, he's retired now, but he said that he taught you." And I said, "Well, how could that be?" He said, "Yeah, his name was Cotrill." I said, "Whoa, Happy Cotrill." After seventy years, or sixty years, whatever it is, I don't know. But we got together, I got some pictures of us together, yeah.

Murphy: That must have been amazing.

DeFranco: Isn't that incredible?

Murphy: Had he followed your career?

DeFranco: Through the years he said yeah he did, from time to time, yeah.

Murphy: You must have been his claim to fame. [laughter]

DeFranco: In a way, in a way.

Murphy: *Downbeat* poll after *Downbeat* poll.

DeFranco: Right, right. And then after that, I was playing in, I was living in my aunt's house. And one Sunday I was practicing, I always practice. I used to practice day and night, and the neighbors really got fed up with that. I think one time, I'm pretty sure, they got a petition against my practicing, so I had to limit that to eight hours a day.

Murphy: This was when you were just a little kid?

DeFranco: Yeah. Yeah. Oh I loved to practice, yeah, I really enjoyed it.

Murphy: That's pretty unusual for someone that young.

DeFranco: Yes! It was fascinating!

Murphy: And what were you practicing? How did you practice?

DeFranco: The fundamentals. I wanted to be what they called in those days, they still do call, legitimate. Legitimate clarinet player, as opposed to if you played jazz your were illegitimate, you know. A fellow of by the name of William D. Simone lived a few blocks

away from, he was walking by. He was a clarinetist who played in the Earl Theatre in Philadelphia, played in the pit, played sax and clarinet. He banged on the door and said, "I heard the clarinet, and I hear this kid playing." He said, " I think he has potential."

Murphy: Wow.

DeFranco: Willy D. Simone was his name and he taught me for quite a few years. For about a year and a half for nothing, didn't take any money. As years went on I began to play jobs and make a few dollars, sometimes three or four, five dollars a job. And Willy said, "Ok, you're working now you have a dollar a lesson." So I paid him a dollar a lesson. But he really set me in the right direction for being a clarinetist because he insisted on me being a well-schooled musician, and a well-schooled clarinetist. And he was by himself; he was a great clarinet player.

Murphy: And was he, what kind of repertoire was he having you practice?

DeFranco: Well he played in the pit in the Earl Theatre and it was everything. He played for the shows, and for the dancers, for singers, for comedians, for opera singers and he was well schooled in the symphonic area. So he taught me the correct way to play the clarinet. Fingering techniques and all that and gave me the right books to study. And he was also interested in jazz, of course. In those days he loved Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw. So he would try to emulate their playing and that's how I kind of got interested in jazz clarinet. I heard…

Murphy: So he was one of the people kind of directing you to those performers.

DeFranco: Oh yeah, yeah. And then in the Earl Theatre they had these stage shows. Four and five shows a day. Big bands were coming through, and they'd have a big band and a movie. The big band for an hour and then they'd run a movie and a newsreel, and then the band would come play another show. I remember listening to Tommy Dorsey, watching and listening to Tommy Dorsey's band. He featured a clarinetist, Johnny Mintz. Johnny played a long solo and I was so impressed, that kind of tipped me over into the area of jazz. I wanted to be a jazz clarinetist from that point on. Then I heard Benny Goodman, of course, everyone did, and he was a giant. And then I heard Artie Shaw, and Artie Shaw really was…

Murphy: So how old were you when you heard Johnny Mintz? And that was live, that was a live performance.

DeFranco: That was live. I must have been nine, ten years old. Of course, Artie Shaw became my favorite for a long, he still is one of my favorites. They were both; Benny Goodman and Artie were both marvelous players.

Murphy: Do you remember specific recordings that you were listening to of them? I mean, did you go out and buy records or was that hard to come by?

DeFranco: Yeah, no we could, we went and bought some records, a 78-rpm records. And, of course, I listened to the obvious ones, you know. Benny's *Don't Be That Way*, and *Let's Dance,* and *Goodbye,* and Artie's *Stardust*. *Moonglow*. I could, in those days I used to play his solos.

Murphy: Did you play along with the music?

DeFranco: Yeah, I'd play along with the records and sometimes it was rough because, many times, a turntable wouldn't be in tune with what you were doing…

Murphy: [laughter] Also clarinet, so…

DeFranco: You'd have to worry about fabricating something in between. But I got through that way, it was a good way to learn.

Murphy: So, I mean, that's a pretty young age to be listening to people and really absorbing things stylistically. But at that age, what about each of those players' styles was interesting to you. Between Johnny Mintz, and Benny Goodman, and Artie Shaw. What did you like about them?

DeFranco: Lets see. Johnny Mintz was a self-taught clarinetist that had a fascinating technique on the instrument and he could play fast. He had a great technique. Benny Goodman also had exceptional technique on the instrument. And he could also, had that swing lilt. He was known as the King of Swing, he had that swing lilt in his playing. Artie was different. Artie was different, Artie was like, played the clarinet like a fine violinist. It was more melodic, and extended his harmonic development was much more interesting and extended than Benny Goodman, or Johnny Mintz at that time. And, of course, as a clarinet playing jazz he took more "chances" as we say on the instrument and got away with it, got through with it. He kind of influenced me up until I heard Bird and that was…

Murphy: All bets were off.

DeFranco: Wow, it was a complete change in my approach and everything. It all augured well for that, to go into that bebop area.

Murphy: Getting back to Tommy Dorsey. He came back into your life in the form of the *Tommy Dorsey Swing Contest*.

DeFranco: Yeah, that was 1938 I think.

Murphy: 1930-yeah, it was.

DeFranco: I think. He was going through the country. It was called *Tommy Dorsey Swing Contest.* Management, they were holding auditions. I learned from Charlie Ventura, who lived in my neighborhood, we used to play together that they were

auditioning for the Dorsey contest. So I went up and auditioned and got through the audition, there were four contestants. I won that night. It was broadcast nationwide.

Murphy: Backed by the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra.

DeFranco: Backed by the band, yeah.

Murphy: That's amazing! So hold old were you?

DeFranco: Yeah, fourteen, thirteen, in my teens, early teens

Murphy: And this is where Willy D. Simone, didn't he orchestrate some sort of…[laughter]

DeFranco: Well, yeah. The whole thing was unfair in a way because I was a pretty good clarinet for being pretty bad, you know, one of those things. Willy said to me, "You're going to win that contest. I'm going to make sure you win that contest. And so you have to not wear the long pants you just got you, you have to wear knickers." And he said, "People will love it, because you'll look that much younger, wear knickers and…"

Murphy: So that's about the age that boys moved into long pants?

DeFranco: Moved into long pants, sure…

Murphy: Thirteen? Fourteen?

DeFranco:…I was so proud of them, you know, so happy.

Murphy: So that must have been humiliating to…[laughter]

DeFranco: It was humiliating. And then he said, "You're going to play *Honeysuckle Rose*, everybody likes that song." At the end of the song he showed me how to hold up the clarinet up with one hand, one hand and play one note, and poke that one note through. He said, "Hold your hand out so that the people will see you're playing with one." He said, "You'll break it up!" And to me that was really, even at that time, that was dumb, corny stuff, you know, ridiculous. But I did it and he was in the pit and he was giving me directions from the pit. And I finally got through the whole thing and it was an abominable solo, but the people, I mean those other contestants didn't have a chance. You know, here's a kid with a clarinet almost as tall as he was.

Murphy: How did they make the decision who won? Was it audience reaction?

DeFranco: They have, yeah, audience applause. The had one of those…

Murphy: Applause-o-meters.

DeFranco: Applause meters. [laughter] Oh yea, they had a pretty good trumpet player, who was a cadet. And a vibes player was quite good. And I believe a trombone player and myself. Of course, the other guys were pretty good, but it didn't mean anything, you know, they didn't have a chance.

Murphy: Were you nervous?

DeFranco: Yeah, of course…

Murphy: Having this big broadcast live, nationally?

DeFranco: Yeah, scared to death…

Murphy: Terrifying.

DeFranco:…but I got through it.

Murphy: Do I remember that someone did record that…

DeFranco: Yeah, somebody had taken a…

Murphy:…broadcast? Is there a recording?

DeFranco: Yeah, somebody had take a recording, they had this old recording machine, these vinyl machines that, it wasn't a wire, it was a vinyl machine that they recorded on. It was kind of distorted, I heard it.

Murphy: Do you have it?

DeFranco: No! Thank goodness. [laughter]

Murphy: Darn it! [laughter]

DeFranco: I'm not being modest, it was pretty bad. It was pretty bad. [laughter]

Murphy: Well, it certainly propelled you into a lot of…

DeFranco: Yeah…

Murphy:…other stuff.

DeFranco:…and on that show Tommy said, "Stick around kid, you're going to play in my band someday." That was another round of applause I got.

Murphy: How often do you think he said that?

DeFranco: Not very often really. And the amazing thing was that I did, I did play with Tommy Dorsey many years later, and he remembered that, you know, of course.

Murphy: Even less often that it would actually come to fruition, that's amazing.

DeFranco: Typical of Dorsey. He was an interesting person, he was a marvelous trombonist, one of the best I ever heard. Strict band leader. But he was bigger than life, it was frightening, very intimidating. I sat down even to audition for his big band many years later. I had played Charlie Barnet and Gene Krupa, and Ted Fiorito, and a few other bands, territory bands. I sat down and they had these chairs lined up for the sax section, and a rhythm there section set up. And in came a pianist, I forgot his name now, anyway. Gene Krupa was playing drums. Gene had just got out of jail and Tommy hired him. And Sandy Block came in on bass. And the sax section lined up with the empty chair, and I sat in the chair. And then Tommy Dorsey came in with his entourage, three or four people, and management. I think he had his wife with him, Pat Dane, who was strange! Beautiful lady, but in terrifying ways. And he came up to me, and you know, I guess. Giant, he looked like he was ten feet tall, and I'm sitting there with a clarinet and sax. And then Sy Oliver came over and he told me what songs to get out, and they picked the toughest songs to play. And Tommy said, "You remember kid, I told you you'd play in my band someday, right?" I grinned, I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, don't think you've got it made, because if you blow this you're out of here." [laughter] For starters, I didn't even play a note.

Murphy: That's amazing that he remembered. Did someone tip him off do you think?

DeFranco: Oh yeah, he remembered.

Murphy: Or do you think he just remembered?

DeFranco: Yeah, he remembered…

Murphy: Very impressive.

DeFranco:…Well, he had that kind of a memory anyway, I learned that.

Murphy: You know, I wanted to ask you about that performance. Had you ever played with a full orchestra before? I mean a big band?

DeFranco: Oh, sure.

Murphy: You had?

DeFranco: Yeah, because at the time we were, when I say we it was, Al Alberts played piano. He was the, originated that group, I forgot the name of the group, anyway. *Four Aces*, the *Four Aces*. They were very popular in those days. He played piano in the band,

and we were all kids, and Joe Wilder was in the band occasionally. And we had this big band and we'd play different block parties around south Philadelphia.

Murphy: Is this the *BandBusters*?

DeFranco: This was the *BandBusters* and we played every Sunday morning on the "Horn and Hardart Children's Hour" with a big band.

Murphy: So, maybe to go back. That's right. So was this when you were at the Massbaum school?

DeFranco: Yeah, we were going to Massbaum.

Murphy: Ok, so just to back up a tiny bit. You, instead of going to regular old high school, you went to a vocational high school.

DeFranco: Right. We learned about this music course that they had up in north Philadelphia. I had decided, and my dad at the time, made the decision that I should go up there. It was a vocational school, great music course and great teachers. There again, luck was in my corner because Myra Lavin was a band and orchestra conductor. And Ross Wyre had the band, the concert band. They were both great teachers and Mira Lavin especially was terrific. There I got real excellent schooling in the classical field playing in his orchestra.

Murphy: Did you have to audition in order to get into that school?

DeFranco: Yeah, oh yeah. You had to audition, to play different things. But that was some of the best training I ever had.

Murphy: And all, so-called legit…

DeFranco: Legit, yeah.

Murphy:…what was their attitude about jazz?

DeFranco: Oh, they liked jazz. But they insisted that if we're going to have what they called a big band, stage band, that we would have to play in the orchestra and concert band. If we couldn't cut the orchestra or concert band, then we could have a big band, swing band. We had a good band, a lot of good players in there.

Murphy: I'm remembering Joe Wilder making a, telling me something about that school, that in the orchestra you weren't supposed to be playing jazz repertoire and somebody would sneak in a flatted fifth. And everybody would stop and the director would say, "Who played flatted fifth?" [laughter]

DeFranco: Or more likely he knew who played it and throw his baton in that direction. Mr. Lavin had ears like an elephant.

Murphy: So while you were there that's when you got this band together, the *BandBusters*. And how many people?

DeFranco: Yeah, Elliot Lawrence was in that band playing tenor sax. And his dad was the MC and he owned the radio station that we played in every Sunday morning. About fourteen, fifteen guys in the band.

Murphy: And was there a leader?

DeFranco: Well, my brother and I were kind of leaders, but there was no real leader as such. So it was the *BandBusters* featuring Leonard and Buddy and Elliot Lawrence. Pretty good band by all standards.

Murphy: And so you were playing on Sunday mornings, did you play gigs, too?

DeFranco: Hm?

Murphy: Did you played hired gigs, too?

DeFranco: Yeah, we played some gigs, yeah.

Murphy: You did. I think I read, there must have been a clipping from the newspaper, an interview with you, and the slang, the terminology you used was just hilarious. [laughter]

DeFranco: Yeah, although that was, we didn't use that much swing jazz terminology as was put in the paper. The guy that wrote it up…

Murphy: You mean they made that up?

DeFranco: Hm?

Murphy: He made it up?

DeFranco: Yeah, he made a lot of it up, yeah, you know.

Murphy: Your licorice stick?

DeFranco: Yeah, licorice stick.

Murphy: That's what, you didn't call your clarinet…

DeFranco: No really, no, we thought that was pretty corny. [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] Its very funny. Well, you mentioned in the Philly music scene, you mentioned the Earl Theatre. I'd love to hear a little about the bands, the people who were coming trough Philly and playing at the Earl Theatre, who you heard live. And I know, I think sometimes you said you event had to sneak in, is that right? Or sneak into after-hours jam sessions?

DeFranco: Well, we did both…

Murphy: But you were hearing a lot of live music.

DeFranco:...Yep, we used to, sometimes a side door would be open to the theatre and we'd sneak in and we'd sit there and watch three and four shows all day, you know, into the evening.

Murphy: Do you remember any in particular? You mentioned Tommy Dorsey when you heard Johnny Mintz.

DeFranco: Oh yeah, Gene Krupa, Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, all the big bands, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw…

Murphy: Amazing.

DeFranco:…they all came through and we'd devour that music. Most of the *BandBusters* were there watching those shows.

Murphy: Did you ever hang out with any of the musicians? Or talk to them?

DeFranco: No, well we tried to. Occasionally we would be lucky enough to link up with some, you know, somebody from. I remember talking with Teddy Wilson for quite sometime, he was really nice.

Murphy: And were there many after-hours places?

DeFranco: There were two, specific after-hour places, both were run by clarinetists. One who was an exceptional jazz clarinet player, Billy Krechmer, he was an excellent clarinet, jazz clarinet, player. At that time he was kind of in Benny Goodman's league, but he was so successful with that jazz club, the kind of after-hours club. And he like us, he'd let us sit in the back. And occasionally if business got a little bit slow, he'd let us come in and sit in with the rhythm section that he'd had. Which was uncanny, you couldn't do that now, he'd get arrested if he did that, you know. But it was great for us we got fantastic experience playing as kids, as teenagers.

Murphy: I'd say.

DeFranco: Nat Siegel had the other club. In fact, that's where I was discovered, in a sense, by Johnnie "Scat" Davis who came in, and sat in while we were playing and offered me a job and went out on the road, I was fifteen.

Murphy: That's amazing. And so when, so how, he offered to take you on the road and didn't he have to sign guardian papers for you?

DeFranco: He had to sign, yeah. He had to be my guardian, some guardian. [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] Right…

DeFranco: But, it worked.

Murphy:…kid's dream. Well, so what was that like to go out on the road at that age? Had you graduated from Mastbaum?

DeFranco: Yeah, well…

Murphy: That seems early to have graduated from high school.

DeFranco: Yeah, well I was kind of anxious to get through school and to get through that course. I managed to get through that in three years, or two and a half years, whatever it was, but quickly. I got a diploma and got ready to go out, even though I was fifteen.

Murphy: Wow. Well, so what was it…

DeFranco: And my family was all for it, you know…

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco:…unlike today, they might be a little hesitant. To get a job with a big band that's traveling in those days was marvelous.

Murphy: Dream come true.

DeFranco: Dream come true, yeah.

Murphy: Was your brother jealous?

DeFranco: Was he jealous?

Murphy: Yeah.

DeFranco: No.

Murphy: It sounds like you had been quite a pair up until then.

DeFranco: Yeah, right. Well he played around Philadelphia and did quite well. And he played, later on in life, he played many years with Fred Waring, I supposed you've heard of him.

Murphy: Well, so for a sixteen, or a fifteen year old going out on the road. What was that experience like? Were you, you know, traveling around on a bus? And where were you going? Was it a territory band?

DeFranco: Yeah, oh yeah. Every band had a band-bus and we played one-nighters most of the time and usually seven nights a week, usually. Same thing, which I did from that point on, we'd play a job and we'd be staying in a hotel. Checkout of the hotel, go to the next job, play that job and then jump into the bus, into the next. We called that, you know, they were doing one-nighters, was a hit-and-run. We'd jump into the bus and go to the next job that we were going to play and get into the hotel early the next morning.

Murphy: So you'd sleep all day.

DeFranco: Sleep most of the day, sometimes in those days we had to rehearse, so a lot of the bandleaders would call rehearsals, which wasn't too pleasant, but we had to do it. And Tommy Dorsey had a habit of calling rehearsals at a strange, inopportune time; he loved that. He was a little sadistic, no doubt about it. We were playing seven shows a day in Milwaukee, WI. So they would run a newsreel, a fifteen-minute newsreel, and a cartoon in between shows. So we had seven shows a day, so it was ten o'clock in the morning until about eleven at night. There again, you had to run in between shows to have your dinner.

Murphy: That's with Dorsey?

DeFranco: Oh, and we really…

Murphy: Did you say that?

DeFranco:…and there was a time, at that time that a Petrillo, Ceasar Petrillo was going to stop all recording because of some union dispute with the record companies. And everybody was running into the studios to record as much as they could until the recording ban took hold. So Tommy Dorsey made an announcement, during that time we were at the Riverside Theatre in Milwaukee, he said, "We're going to start recording as soon as we can before the ban goes in effect, so we'll have two rehearsals a day." Besides seven shows. [laughter]

Murphy: That's amazing.

DeFranco: Yeah, and I felt so sorry for the brass players. I mean their lips; you could see they were agonizing, and especially in that band with Tommy Dorsey. He wouldn't

tolerate any misses or goofs. And what was more exasperating was that he was stronger than the whole band. I mean he…

Murphy: Right, he would have been subjecting himself to all of the same…

DeFranco: He went through that whole thing himself…

Murphy:…pressures.

DeFranco:…and stayed right with it, you know. He was a phenomenal player.

Murphy: Well, going back a little bit to Johnnie "Scat" Davis. Your first experience in a big band, do you remember what you earned?

DeFranco: Seventy-five dollars a week at that time, which was pretty good, you know, yeah, pretty good…

Murphy: I would imagine.

DeFranco:…but, of course, with that we had to pay our hotel and…

Murphy: No extras.

DeFranco:…meals and all that stuff. But I managed to send money home every week.

Murphy: And did you know anyone else in the band?

DeFranco: Before I joined?

Murphy: Before you joined?

DeFranco: No. No, I didn't.

Murphy: And is that where you met…

DeFranco: I met a lot of guys that I played with later, like Dodo Marmaroso was a well-known young fellow. He wasn't, in fact, when he joined Johnnie "Scat" Davis, he was fourteen years old.

Murphy: Wow.

DeFranco: Yeah. A lot of good players…

Murphy: That would be illegal now, wouldn't it?

DeFranco: Yeah, really, really illegal. They wouldn't tolerate it now. Yeah, he was one of the best pianists at that time in the business, he was fourteen years old.

Murphy: And how long were you with that band?

DeFranco: You know, I don't know, about a year I guess, or maybe a little longer than a year.

Murphy: Because in those early years you had quite a few big band experiences after…

DeFranco: Yeah, from Scat Davis I went to Gene Krupa's band.

Murphy: …Right, so how did that come about? Did he raid the band?

DeFranco: He raided the band, he called, in fact he called Jimmy Pupa, a trumpet player, first trumpet player at that time. (Track#2, 20.07min) And Marmaroso, Dodo Marmaroso, and who else, a few other guys from Scat Davis band. But that was common knowledge, you know, bandleaders didn't get too bent up about that, they were, that was going to happen, you know. Especially if they had some real talent in their band, they knew that the top, the higher-level bands were going to call the good guys…

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco:…so we got telegrams from Gene Krupa to join Gene. It was great, Gene was a marvelous person. And he was more, he was more congenial and more fun to be with and more likeable than most any bandleader. Especially Tommy, Tommy Dorsey was notoriously rough. So then I went to Charlie Barnet, who was also a picnic with Charlie Barnet because he was probably the foremost playboy of that era.

Murphy: Party animal. [laughter]

DeFranco: Partying, yeah..

Murphy: That must have opened your eyes wide as a young man.

DeFranco: Yeah, and, in fact, eve at that age I couldn't keep up with him…

Murphy: Ok, tell us some juicy stories.

DeFranco:…huh?

Murphy: Tell some juicy stories.

DeFranco: Well, lets see, a couple stories about Charlie Barnet. He was from a wealthy family. I think it was New York Central Railroad. And he started playing saxophone, he got pretty good at it and he wanted a band. And his family didn't want him to get a band.

And his family attorney said, "Well, give him a few thousand dollars to get a band, and when he fails with it he'll come into the business." So they gave him a few thousand dollars, he got a band and he got a hit record. So he was a well-known bandleader. And some of the silly things that I remember about Charlie, Charlie always said that he wanted to buy an island so he could degenerate in peace. [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: That was Charlie. He was, I went, we had about four or five days in California open and Charlie called Dodo and I and said, "Come on over, we're having a little party, we're having a little party." He says, "I just got this house in the valley, I just bought it." So we went over, we got in a cab and went to his house. And we walked, knocked on the door. The door opened and there was this gigantic guy with two ladies, all three of them naked…

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: Come on in! Whoa! You know, we were kids, we didn't believe it. We went in there was kind of bodies all over the house and I could remember Charlie and his dog, a German Sheppard dog he had, were fighting over the last towel that they had available. Pulling the towel. That was typical of Charlie, great guy; everybody loved him, as you know, as you can figure out.

Murphy: Right, and you…

DeFranco: No nonsense on the bandstand though. My gosh, he had a good band, a lot of good players. In fact, he was one of the guys who discovered great guys, like Neal Hefti and those kind of players who were, and writers. I stayed with Charlie for about a year and a half, I guess, a year…

Murphy: And you made your first official recording, right, with that band? Aside from the…

DeFranco: Yeah, but I didn't play any solos.

Murphy: No solos.

DeFranco: No, no solos. But…

Murphy: [laughter] You have to go back to the Swing Contest for solos.

DeFranco: Yeah, well, I had to. No, my first really official solo recording was with Dorsey, *Opus One*.

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: And I think I told you the story with *Opus One*.

Murphy: Well, right. We should talk all about Dorsey. It was what, 1943?

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: He called you out of the blue.

DeFranco: Out of the blue, yeah. Join the band, and I did.

Murphy: So he essentially raided you from Charlie Barnet, is that how it happened?

DeFranco: Yeah, yeah. I think it was Charlie Barnet. Yeah, I think it was Barnet's band that he called.

Murphy: And had…

[background voices: switch tape]

DeFranco:…we finally made our way to the dining car, after about a couple hours. And you can imagine how we felt, I mean really beat out. We're waiting for a seat and finally got settle in a seat in the dining car after waiting for a long time. Sat down and across the table there's Tommy Dorsey and talk about shock. Dodo said to me, "Don't look at him don't say anything." Here he is, sure enough he got up and he came over. So Dorsey, Dodo says to me, "You know he's going to start swinging, grab a bottle or anything." [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: Tommy came over and looked at us for the longest time, I don't know what he went through. I mean veins come out of his neck, you could see the steam. Finally, he broke up laughing, he said " You shit-heals remind me of me when I was a kid." He said, "I'll give you credit for trying to make the job and going through all that expense to make the job, stick around, I'll give you some more money." So we got a raise! [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] Amazing!

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: What a character.

DeFranco: We stayed with him for quite some time after that, you know. And he used to break up once and awhile he'd say, "Yeah, you got me there, you got me there." But that was, there is a good idea of what this guys was, Tommy Dorsey, strange, but not all bad.

Murphy: But certainly inspired fear in his players.

DeFranco: Oh yeah, he was a marvelous player. I can remember him playing a solo and it was so moving that the band would applaud.

Murphy: You made and awful lot of recordings with him.

DeFranco: Yeah, yeah.

Murphy: Almost twenty, I think, right?

DeFranco: Not that many.

Murphy: Almost. How many do you think?

DeFranco: Oh, I can't even imagine, but not twenty, I don't think…

Murphy: Nineteen?

DeFranco: But we did a lot of, for instance, we did a lot of…

Murphy: [laughter] I'm serious, I think I've counted in the discography, I think it was nineteen…

DeFranco: Really?

Murphy: I think so…

DeFranco: Oh my gosh…

Murphy: I mean if your discography is accurate.

DeFranco: I didn't think so. Well, I know that we did a lot of those V-Discs. They used to, the ones for the Armed Services, they were calling them V-Discs. They were broadcasted and recorded, and we did many of those. A lot of those with just Dodo Marmaroso and Gene Krupa and myself, the trio in the Dorsey band.

Murphy: Now, was it when you were in the Dorsey band, you and Charlie Shavers, didn't you kind of discover bebop around then? Didn't you hear Charlie Parker for the first time with Charlie Shavers?

DeFranco: Yeah, it was, I think Charlie Shavers came, we ran into on Broadway sometime, and he said. "I heard this guy playing saxophone up in Harlem." And he said, "I don't know what he's doing but it's unbelievable. It's fantastic stuff. He said, "I'm going to go up and listen to him the next couple of nights." Or whatever it was. We had sometime off, so we went to hear bird. Strange, he was playing with a borrowed

saxophone, wasn't even his. And he played this strange jazz, you know, for us it was kind of strange.

Murphy: Do you remember where he was playing?

DeFranco: Nope. It might be Minton's, but I'm not sure. But I could remember just thinking about how fantastic this was and he was, it kind of change my whole approach and whole thinking about jazz playing from that point on. It stayed with me; we went to see hear him a couple times after that, just absorbed what he was doing.

Murphy: It had the same effect on Charlie Shavers?

DeFranco: Same effect on everybody, all of us, most of us, and especially Dodo Marmaroso. In fact, some weeks later, a month or whatever it was, Dodo said to me, "Why don't you try to play clarinet like Charlie Parker plays the saxophone?" And I said, "Of course, I have that in mind, that's what I want to do." And I was fairly successful doing that.

Murphy: Well, the *New Grove Dictionary* suggests that bebop and clarinet are incompatible. But I guess you proved that kind of wrong, huh?

DeFranco: No, that's, they are compatible; there's no question about it. It's just…

Murphy: But very challenging.

DeFranco: Really very challenging, probably the most challenging in jazz.

Murphy: Yeah, talk about, we haven't talked yet about the instrument, about clarinet, and why it posses such problems in trying to play bebop.

DeFranco: Well, where do we start? First of all, the clarinet is really not an octave instrument, in other words, as opposed to say the saxophone. If you play one scale on the saxophone and you depress and octave key, that's what you'll get higher, one octave higher. So the fingering stays essentially the same from one octave to the next. The pads cover the holes; you depress the pads, cover the holes. On the clarinet you've got six holes that are open and three, actually seven, depends on the clarinet that you are playing, seven holes that are open, or six holes that are open. But you have to close those holes with your fingers. If you just, fingers stray a little bit from closing those holes you'll get a squeak or the note won't come out. Plus the fact that there's no octave key, they call it an octave key on the clarinet but really it's a register key. So if you play one note and you depress that key as you would on a saxophone, you don't get an octave higher, you get a twelfth higher. Then you come into the middle register of the clarinet, which is the most difficult, the left hand, and you get a completely different set of fingerings for the same notes an octave lower, different set of fingerings. Then into the next one, which is not an octave higher, it's a twelfth higher, and you go up to that top of that, say, that scale and then you get from that point up to the highest register a completely different set of

fingerings again. So you're dealing with four sets of fingerings to play all these notes on the clarinet.

Murphy: What sicko conceived that? [laughter]

DeFranco: Conceived. Who was it? Somebody said, "It was conceived by three guys that never met." [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] Well put.

DeFranco: And you can feel that, I believe it because it's one of those instruments. You have to, and there's where legitimate technique on the clarinet comes in handy because you need that sort of technique to accomplish that, and the trick is to accomplish it on the instrument and then get relaxed enough to make it flow. So that's the challenge, that's why really at the time when bebop got famous, both Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw tried to play bebop. Now, they were both great players, but they mistakenly thought that all you had to do was listen to some bebop players and emulate those patterns on the instrument and it didn't work. It didn't work, they did not play bebop. But I was…

Murphy: Because they didn't have the feel, you mean, they were emulating the patterns but they didn't have the…

DeFranco: They didn't have the concept and didn't realize that you had to study that form of jazz as much as any other jazz. You just couldn't just pick it up, you had to study and I really studied jazz. I listened to Charlie Parker and observed what he did from the time he blew the instrument, his embouchure, as they call it—formation of the mouth on the mouthpiece—and his fingering technique, even the way he was playing an alto, I observed what he did and how he made that articulation work and I managed to do that on the clarinet. So I was pretty lucky I found it, you know, but I was wise enough to watch Charlie Parker.

Murphy: And so when did you actually meet Charlie Parker?

DeFranco: I don't know how long, maybe a year later or something.

Murphy: Was it just happenstance? I mean, just…

DeFranco: No, I think we were on a, I was starting to make my name as a "jazz person" and I think it was in New York. One of those clubs in New York, Royal Roost maybe, where we were both booked at the same club. Kai Winding was on trombone at that time. I'm trying to think of the rhythm section, it was fairly well known jazz rhythm section, and it escapes me. And there again, another intimidating and scary experience to be finally put on stage with this guy who I idolized.

Murphy: Was this after you had left Dorsey?

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: So it was after 1946?

DeFranco: Oh yeah, sure.

Murphy: You left Dorsey in ’46.

DeFranco: Yeah. That was really intimidating. Bird had, Bird was great though, he was congenial, nice person…

Murphy: So the first time you met him you played together?

DeFranco: We played together, yeah. Of course, there was one time that he; it was customary, I think, to play games with playing, too. Or stump the experts as they say because we had one session together and we had, he said, “What do you want to play?” And I said, “I want to play *All the Things You Are*” because I had been wood-shedding *All the Things You Are* and I think it was A-flat, concert A-flat. And Bird says “Great, lets do it in D” and he went right into it, you see. [laughter] And my head started spinning and even the pianist was scuffling trying to find it in D, you know. We got through it, but he went back to A-flat, we played the thing out. And he said to me, later, he said, “I didn’t mean anything harmful by this.” He said, “But I noticed that you were getting standardized and you were getting set in certain ways.” He said, “You know, I guarantee you’ll be thinking about keys now from this point on.”

Murphy: Wow.

DeFranco: He was like a teacher, you know, and he was right. It wasn’t long after that that we, Dodo and I decided lets try to all the songs in any key, any key…

Murphy: Wow.

DeFranco:…which Bird could do, which Art Tatum could do. It’s funny, ‘cause that whole bebop experience was just interesting because Dizzy Gillespie came a second later and melded, got with Bird and they introduced this music form, bebop.

Murphy: Well, I mean, in talking about some of this, it’s probably noteworthy to say in ’46 you got your first *Metronome All-Stars* session, is that right?

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: And then in successive ones…

DeFranco: Right.

Murphy:…you were playing…

DeFranco: Right.

Murphy:…I mean, it was Charlie Parker…

DeFranco: Yeah…

Murphy:…and Dizzy Gillespie and…

DeFranco: Charlie Ventura, Charlie Parker. Was Lennie Tristano?

Murphy: So that first one in '46, you actually were replacing Benny Goodman, isn't that right?

DeFranco: Wow. How did you find that out?

Murphy: I read the books.

DeFranco. Ah, 'cause I couldn't remember. But it's very possible, yeah, that Benny was considered number and I, he couldn't make it and I replaced him. Yeah, that sounds familiar.

Murphy: That must have been a lot of pressure. [laughter]

DeFranco: Yeah, but I was kind of used to pressure I guess, you can guess by that time.

Murphy: Well, and the remarkable thing is in looking at all of these experiences that were having, you were still so young. You had done so much and you had been with so many bands, but you were so young.

DeFranco: Yeah, well I was anxious to make it [laughter].

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: Yeah, I really, one thing I can say, I can brag about, that I studied. I didn't waste too much time like a lot of young guys do. I was fortunate not enough, fortunate to dislike booze that much, and dope, I never liked. Well, I tried dope, I tried, well dope; marijuana, that's about it. The idea of sticking a needle in your arm, that scared the hell out of me, I wouldn't do that, I wouldn't do that…

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco:…and I watched too many guys kill themselves with that. But I did not lack the feeling that booze, excess drinking or dope, gave you; being detached from the world. I didn't want to be away from the world…

Murphy: Did it make you feel out of control?

DeFranco: Especially while playing, I wanted to be, I wanted to have the contact with the world while I'm playing. So that was pretty lucky, you know, that that turned out.

Murphy: Interesting…

DeFranco: Some guys can take dope and play well, you know…

Murphy: Right, interesting how it affected people…

DeFranco: Different people…

Murphy:…effects people so differently…

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy:…I mean, Charlie Parker and Art Tatum.

DeFranco: Although, Charlie Parker never really did play well when he was stoned, not really. I spent enough time with him to know that. And there again, Art Tatum didn't play that well when he was drunk, he didn't take dope too much. But he drank a lot of gin and beer, drank more beer than any one person I can imagine.

Murphy: You haven't met enough Irish men. [laughter]

DeFranco: [laughter] Was he Irish?

Murphy: [laughter] No, but they could…

DeFranco: Art Tatum.

Murphy:…give him a run for the money.

DeFranco: Boy, I remember doing a session with Art Tatum for Norman Granz and Norman had cases of beer for Art. But he never showed that he was drinking at all, he was always a fantastic player.

Murphy: What about the Boy Raeburn band?

DeFranco: Oh, when did that happen?

Murphy: That was in '46. So you had left Tommy Dorsey…

DeFranco: Right, I must have been in California…

Murphy:…and it was a pretty short lived experience, right?

DeFranco: Yeah, yeah, and the band was short lived in a way because Boyd was, he wanted to emulate Stan Kenton's success in a way and get a far out band. I mean really far out, he got writers who were excellent writers…

Murphy: Avant-garde.

DeFranco:…George Handy and John—John, who am I thinking of? Wow, how could that, well that happens sometimes. Anyway, but he got excellent writers at that time and he wanted to get a far out band to make a big splash like Kenton but it didn't work, combination of reasons. But he did have this band that was very musical in many ways and interesting for musicians.

Murphy: So when you say a far out band, you mean the repertoire…

DeFranco:…the repertoire…

Murphy:…you mean it was avant-garde?

DeFranco:…the kind of music that they, right, avant-garde, music that they played, and certainly not danceable.

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: He forgot that most of the bands during that time were playing with a beat that had a beat for the dancing and the dancers were the predominant audience. So it would be almost impossible to dance to Boyd Raeburn's band.

Murphy: But musically interesting for you?

DeFranco: For a musician it was a great experience and very difficult book to play. The thing about that band was that the band became kind of like a family, we liked what we were doing and we were interested playing and it was that different. But there was an old saying about our band, I mean, "We could empty a room in three minutes." Marvelous, you know, great for the players but pretty bad for business. And poor Boyd tried valiantly to keep it going but he couldn't keep it going, it just.

Murphy: And were you based in California, did you say?

DeFranco: Yeah, we started in California and then gravitated to New York and then we stayed in New York and worked out of New York for quite some time.

Murphy: I still can't…

DeFranco: Yeah, Johnny Richards is the writer I was trying to think of. He came out of Columbia studios. Fantastic writer, but there again, you could never dance to what he, he thought you could dance to it. He brought in an arrangement in seven-four time, instead of four-four, seven-four time, it was hard. And the guys are complaining, they said, "Johnny, we can't, it's so hard, seven-four." He said, "Are you kidding, I can dance in seven-four." And he did, in front of the band, he proceeded to dance seven-four time.

Murphy: Was he good?

DeFranco: He was good, he did it, yeah he wasn't kidding.

Murphy: And audience reaction, not…

DeFranco: No…

Murphy:…overwhelming.

DeFranco: No, they couldn't understand, they were staring at us, you know. He had a bassoon, French horn, and harp, different kinds of combinations of instruments: oboe, English horn. He himself played the bass sax, which is bigger than a baritone sax, and he was kind of a small guy, he was playing this gigantic instrument. [laughter]

Murphy: Sounds like a circus.

DeFranco: Yeah, in a way, yeah. But he had a lot, the band had a lot, to offer musically.

Murphy: Was that frustrating not to be, you know, to not have audiences respond?

DeFranco: Sure, sure. A lot of good players, there again, in that band: Hal Schaffer and Pete Candoli. I'm trying to think of the guys who were in that band at that time who really were good players, that enjoyed playing that music.

Murphy: So that disbanded less than a year after you joined.

DeFranco: Less than a year, yeah.

Murphy: So that's not such a long experience…

DeFranco: No.

Murphy:…but then you said you kind of migrated back towards New York and then did you join Dorsey again after that?

DeFranco: I think I did.

Murphy: So you just kept kind of coming back?

DeFranco: Yeah, three times I went with Tommy. So that Boyd Raeburn experience probably was from California to New York.

Murphy: I still can't get my arms around that idea of not having a home base and just being with the band and on, you know, on the bus.

DeFranco: Well, you have a home base in a sense that…

Murphy: Where is your stuff?

DeFranco:...sometimes your stuff is in California, you live there. I was married during the time and you put your stuff in the place, in the apartment or house, mostly apartment. And then went out on the road, and then you come back and if you had a week off that's where you would stay, and then you go out on the road again. And if the road trip was extensive you'd give up the apartment, store your bags some place and go out and stay out, live out of a suitcase.

Murphy: Certainly teaches you not to be a packrat.

DeFranco: Yeah, you learn, well, you try to learn.

Murphy: So in '47 you had your second Metronome All-Stars session and I think that that you were credited with your first true bebop solo on that session. Is that, would you say that? On *Leap Here*.

DeFranco: Wow, I can't. Oh yeah, *Leap Here*, right…

Murphy: Would you consider that your first…

DeFranco:…and *Metronome Riff*.

Murphy: Would you consider that your first real bebop solo?

DeFranco: Wow, I recorded, yeah, I guess so—first recorded bebop solo.

Murphy: Do you remember who the other people on that session?

DeFranco: No, no, not really because I did so many of those sessions and all the guys that were on those sessions kind of get mixed up after so many years. Like…

Murphy: I wonder if we can find it.

DeFranco: It might be in there.

Murphy: You have to fish through a sea of Tommy Dorsey recordings to find it, there's Boyd Raeburn. So Metronome All-Stars, no that's later, that's '49.

DeFranco: Not '47.

Murphy: Yeah, that's later. I thought it was interesting to read that while you were having all this success and having all these recordings made, that back at home Benny Golson was listening to you and listening to your recordings with Coltrane.

DeFranco: He told me that, yes!

Murphy: So they're back in Philly listening to the success story.

DeFranco: Right, right.

Murphy: And they called you the Art Tatum of the clarinet. That's a high compliment.

DeFranco: Yeah, which is an exaggeration, but I like that. [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] I can imagine, I'd like that, too.

DeFranco: In fact, I wound up doing an album with Art Tatum; great, it was a great experience. You see, there again, scary…

Murphy: Terrifying.

DeFranco: I mean, this guy, because he was a, I still consider Art Tatum and Charlie Parker in the genius area.

Murphy: I think I, somewhere you described Tatum and Charlie Parker—and I don't remember who else—as melting into their instrument.

DeFranco: Yeah, in a sense…

Murphy: That's a nice description. Maybe Coltrane and Artie Shaw, I think.

DeFranco: Artie Shaw, yeah.

Murphy: That's a nice description.

DeFranco: Yeah, their instruments and they become one. I used to try to do that with the clarinet and I was successful, sometimes, you know.

Murphy: Yeah, I would imagine that would be a great feeling when you accomplish that.

DeFranco: Yeah, when you, when you're not conscious of plunking your, and…

Murphy: Working at it.

DeFranco:…and working at it. It just, there's a flow that just happens out of your mind and body. And you become unified with that instrument, so the instrument becomes apart of you. And I watched Artie Shaw, that's exactly what he portrayed when he played, and of course, Bird and Art Tatum.

Murphy: Well, maybe we could talk a little bit more about some of the people you were playing side-by-side with in the late '40's. After you left Dorsey, I think for the last time, was your base New York for a little while, 'cause you played with Bud Powell. Or they played with you, is really more appropriate.

DeFranco: Oh yeah. Yeah, George Shearing and I, and John Levy, Denzil Best; we had a quartet at a club called the Clique. This was the late '40's, I guess.

Murphy: '48.

DeFranco: Yeah, somewhere, '48, you're right. The Clique club in New York, which later became Birdland, and Sarah Vaughan was the headliner. Then they had the Oscar Pettiford All-Stars, which included Bud Powell, and I think Max Roach, Kai Winding, J.J. Johnson, Dexter Gordan, Lucky Thompson—maybe. I don't know, who else, Fat Navarro, Miles Davis; they were all in the group: Oscar Pettiford All-Stars. And that was funny, it was great organization, a great band, but a lot of infighting in that band, because so many egos involved and Bud Powell was not well.

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: And he really resented George Shearing because George Shearing was such a fantastic musical being that whatever Bud Powell played in one session, George could get on the stage and play that same thing from memory, he was that good.

Murphy: Amazing.

DeFranco: Yeah, he was amazing and he could, we would sit in a dressing room and George Shearing would dictate a line for me for a song. And I'd take out my clarinet part to the stage and we'd play it, and he'd memorize the whole thing, and we'd play it as a piece. He was that good. But Bud Powell really resented George because George would lift phrases from Bud Powell directly. I mean, Bud would play some line or something and the next set George and I would be on stage and George would play that line. And he would get furious because George got to be such a popular personality and player and Bud Powell was not that popular. In fact, he used to go to George furious, he'd say, "Where did you hear that line, George? Here or in England? Or was it Bud Powell?" And poor George, you know, he was so intimidated…

Murphy: Was he intimidated? I mean, or did he not…

DeFranco: Oh sure, because he was, yeah in fact, he was afraid of Bud. Bud would put thumbtacks on the piano seat before George would come to play.

Murphy: You're kidding me!

DeFranco: No, and George would sit down, jump up, say, "Good heavens Bud!" He knew it was Bud Powell. "Good heavens Bud!" Poor George. But I can understand Bud's frustration because he was one of the movers and shakers of bebop, probably the first bebop pianist ever and a brilliant player, just psychotic.

[AUDIO RECORDER STOPPED AND RESTARTED]

(a brief passage is missing)

Murphy: I don't remember exactly where we left off, but it was in the neighborhood of the late '40's and I meant to ask you one thing that you did in the late '40's was you sold your alto saxophone.

DeFranco: I did, yeah, deliberately.

Murphy: Why?

DeFranco: Well, I was taking different jobs playing saxophone and clarinet and I was enthralled with the idea of being a bandleader and being like Artie Shaw or Benny Goodman, just play clarinet. Besides, frankly, when I heard Bird play what he did on the alto sax I knew there wasn't much I could say on a saxophone that he hasn't already, you know, said. So I figured let me try to do that on a clarinet, forget the alto. So I sold my saxophone in New York so that I would never be tempted to take a doubling job again, just a clarinet, it worked, it worked. That turned out to be a plus factor.

Murphy: Whole-heartedly committed yourself to…

DeFranco: To the clarinet, yeah.

Murphy:…taking it from swing to bop.

DeFranco: And I'm not sorry, I'm not sorry, I liked the idea.

Murphy: So jus to pick up again with George Shearing and your experience with him.

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: We were talking about Bud. I was going to ask was any of the tension between George Shearing and Bud Powell, was any of that racially motivated?

DeFranco: None. No. None whatever.

Murphy: Because we haven't really talked much so far today about racial issues in bands, of course, with…

DeFranco: Well, mostly my experiences in the bands that I played with, and the groups I've played with and the mix groups, and in fact I had a quartet for many years and I was a white guy and the other guys were black guys. But there comes a time after you're playing and playing with different people, there's no time or inclination to stop and ask what you are. What religion, what color, background; it didn't matter, if you played that was the essential part of it. And there was the interplay with what you did musically. The only time that we were confronted largely with the black-white thing was from, we call them civilians, from people outside of the jazz field who paid more attention to that fact. In fact, one time George, some woman writer came to George Shearing and kind of wanted to promote that idea of black-white-black-white and she said that, "I noticed that, something like, you have two white players and only one black player." And George says, "Really, I hadn't noticed." Which was right, we didn't seek each other because of color or religion that was not it. The problem always came with civilians. They always interjected that, and maybe they were right, I don't know. But it wasn't that much of a problem in our world. I was the only white guy on Basie's group and no musician came to me and said, "Hey, you're the white guy on the band."

Murphy: Do you remember the audiences up at say Minton's when you were going up to hear Charlie Parker? Was it racially integrated?

Murphy: It was integrated, yeah, white and black people. The most amazing thing was there was a certain section of the audiences that didn't understand what he was doing and didn't respond. But like Dodo and I there were a group of people that went wild with what he, which absolutely loved what he was doing. And realized that that was a turning point in jazz.

Even now, even now if you go anywhere in the world and you hear a jazz player, saxophone or otherwise, stand up and play he's a derivative of Charlie Parker. There's no escaping that, everybody wants to say, "Well, I'm doing my own thing and it's a new direction." New direction nonsense, it's still just like harmonically and technically anybody that is playing anything on any instrument is a derivative of Art Tatum, maybe Fats Waller, but not to that extent. Art Tatum; harmonically and technically.

We all live in their shadow and we all live in Bird's shadow, there isn't any question about that and it doesn't matter where you go to hear it, it doesn't matter. Could be a little town in Japan and a little band a guy stands up and is playing jazz, it's Parker-oriented, no pun intended.

Murphy: I remember you talking about as you got to know Charlie Parker better you had a common interest in Prokofiev.

DeFranco: Yeah, yeah. Well…

Murphy: What was his exposure?

DeFranco:…we all learned, especially in a harmonic sense, all learned from Ravel, Debussy, and Prokofiev, Shostakovich. But predominantly the reason that we kind of gravitated toward Prokofiev was that he had melodic lines in his gigantic and complicated orchestration and musicality. There was always a thread, always a melodic thread that was predominant and haunting. And, there again, in jazz that's the kind of a thing that you gravitate toward.

The difference between, my difference between, a good jazz player and just a guy who plays a lot of notes and showing off, would be the guy who has that melodic thread through his playing, which Bird did. The weirdest thing about Bird was everybody would say he couldn't play the melody and didn't have a vibrato and for some weird reason that stuck with a lot of people, including a lot of players who abandoned the idea of a vibrato and never realized that Bird had a most marvelous vibrato on his playing and he could play his concept of a melody was great.

And yet for some strange reason in a lot of bebop circles in those days they were abandoning the melody because they thought that was, I don't know, square maybe. And, there again, back to Prokofiev, Prokofiev had the combination of a lot of intricate harmonic devices and melodic lines that you could follow.

Murphy: And did you and he talk about this stuff?

DeFranco: Yeah, we talked about that, yeah, yeah. In fact, I can remember one time Bird and I had played up in Connecticut somewhere, Hartford I think it was, he was playing another job, he was playing another venue and I was playing at a place. And then I decided to go and hear Bird because my job was finished and a friend of ours took me to where Bird was playing, there again, his name, Sully I think was his name. Took me to where Bird was playing, we introduced him to Bird, he idolized Bird, and then we convinced Charlie Parker to come with us to his house after the job.

It was about one o'clock in the morning, one-thirty. And we went to Sully's house, woke up his wife, "Bird's here." "Bird? Bird who? Bird what? What do you mean? Why?" "Cook something. Lets drink." He got out his booze and Charlie Parker was drinking a lot, drank practically the whole thing and talking about music and he was just so enthralled with Bird. And finally, it must have been seven in the morning or six in the morning, we left, got on a train, both of us came to New York. Bird was, we were sitting together and a guy came in, looked like he had a cardboard suitcase, I don't know what he was doing there. And for some reason or other Bird and he got into a conversation, started talking about a lot of things about, like fishing or hunting.

Murphy: This is on the train?

DeFranco: On the train, yeah. I didn't realize that Bird knew a lot of things about a lot of, quite a bit about different things. We got back to New York and zero in on Prokofiev, we got to Grand Central Station and Bird was going to pick up his car at Pennsylvania Station. And he said, "Come with me because I just got some more Prokofiev records and we'll listen to them." And I'm beat by that time he wanted to go hear some recordings at his place and I said, "I absolutely can't make it." Oh there's another side story here that's funny.

We started walking toward Pennsylvania Railroad and it started snowing a little bit, it was cold, and I told Bird, I said, "I got to get back to the room because I'm too beat." And we walked a little ways and we stopped and listened to, of all things, a Salvation Army band. They were playing, probably before Christmas or something. And Charlie Parker said, "Wait a minute, lets hear this." I said, "Lets hear what? There's a Salvation Army band, no, no you can't be serious." "No," he said, "Lets hear this." And he was laughing through the whole thing; I don't know what he heard because it was terrible. I got in a cab and left him and I found out the next few days that somewhere, somehow, Bird wound up some place in Harlem and they took his saxophone and they beat him, and took his money, and left him stranded and he missed the job somehow. Make a long story short, there's where the Prokofiev thing came in, he wanted me to go with him. But then many months later I went to hear him on 52nd street, Three Deuces or someplace, and I saddled in next to the band's stage. "Hey Bird." You know. Then he spotted me and said, "Remember this?" And he came over and played the stupid Salvation Army band song.

Murphy: Amazing. [laughter] And you recognized it?

DeFranco: [laughter] I recognized, sure, you know. And he made it into kind of a jazz piece.

Murphy: Amazing.

DeFranco: He knew, Bird was interesting, he knew a lot about things, about farming, fishing, hunting…

Murphy: Skinning rabbits?

DeFranco: Hum?

Murphy: Skinning rabbits?

DeFranco: Skinning rabbits…

Murphy: What is that story? I don't remember it.

DeFranco:…yeah, that's another one. That's Sully's house at the same time that we were at Sully's house. That's right, that's right. Early in the morning these guys came over, banged on the door, they saw that the lights were on in Sully's house, friends of Sully.

And they said, “We were hunting rabbits and we don’t know how to dress them, to skin them, maybe you do.” And Bird said, “I do.” And they went to the cellar, Bird put on an apron and he cleaned all the rabbits for these guys.

Murphy: Did he actually know what he was doing?

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: Amazing.

DeFranco: We were both overwhelmed; here’s Charlie Parker, the greatest jazz musician in the world, here he is showing these guys how you dress a rabbit. I guess he learned that in Kansas City when he was a kid or something.

Murphy: Must have.

DeFranco: Fascinating guy.

Murphy: So what about Dizzy’s contribution to bebop?

DeFranco: Overwhelming in many ways, and actually Dizzy was responsible for making bebop a popular form because Bird was not that interested in fomenting a real interest in this kind of new music, he was just playing it. He never expected it to be that potent or important, but Diz did, Diz saw that thing that he could develop into a, in fact, I think it was Dizzy that called it bebop, I don’t think it was Bird.

Murphy: Oh really?

DeFranco: Yeah, I think it was Dizzy. Yeah, I’m not sure, but if my memory serves me, what’s left of it, serves me, it was Dizzy that told somebody, you know, “What kind of music are you playing?” “Well, we’re playing bebop, we’re playing bebop.” And he was responsible for the popularity as well as playing it so well, you know.

Murphy: Well I’m looking at your third Metronome All-Stars session in ’48 – ’49.

DeFranco: And Bird was there, and Dizzy.

Murphy: And it’s Bird, and Dizzy, and Miles, and J.J. Johnson, Lennie Tristano, among others. It’s just an amazing line up.

DeFranco: Yeah, Miles was just a kid in those, well I was too I was kind of young, but he was a kid. Although Miles got credits for, I don’t know how, but for bebop and developing some kind of new music in the bebop era, but not so, not so. It would be nice to say yes, he did become popular, and his sound was original, it was his, it was his. But he paled in comparison to Bird and Diz. I can remember night after night where Diz would just blow everybody away on brass, trumpet, and poor Miles finished third, fourth.

He was really never that good, but he got to be some kind of a hero. How's come, I don't know! [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] So you were also, this I don't have down, but you were also voted "Best Clarinetist" in the *Downbeat* polls.

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: And I wonder if, was that…

DeFranco: A lot of times.

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: Twenty times.

Murphy: Really? That many, twenty?

DeFranco: Yeah, yeah.

Murphy: So the *Downbeat* polls, those were readers…

DeFranco: Readers.

Murphy:…those were the fans voting.

DeFranco: Right, right.

Murphy: The Metronome All-Stars, how did they choose?

DeFranco: Pretty much the same way except they gravitated toward more music critics and musicians voting for the first guys, number one guys.

Murphy: And so it was around then, '49 maybe, that you established your first big band.

DeFranco: Right.

Murphy:…does that sound right?

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: And why did you want to have a big band?

DeFranco: Because I was stupid! [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: There again, I had an ego that exceeded my real ability, at the time, and couldn't help it, I wanted to be a bandleader and play the clarinet, make a lot of money, all that stuff. And I thought that since I played that different on the instrument that I could form a band that would be a combination of this real musical bebop kind of band that would be danceable and I even figured out from the Tommy Dorsey days maybe what tempos I would use, would play, and what songs, popular songs or standard songs I could use.

Murphy: And what did you use, do you remember the music?

DeFranco: Yeah, we played a lot of standard songs and we played with a bebop inference in our music, but it was danceable, it was the right tempo. But somehow turned off people, it did not connect. I went through a lot of trouble, too. And I stayed up many nights writing arrangements and getting writers to write arrangements, too.

Murphy: What other writers were?

DeFranco: Guys that were not too well known. Lenny Sinisgalli, alto sax, he was one of the writers. And I had Gerry Mulligan write a couple things but that was painful because Gerry was not too responsible in those days. In fact, I had a record session, and Gerry was supposed to, my first record session with my band, and Gerry Mulligan was supposed to bring in a chart. And I don't know what happened to him but he didn't show up until we were well into the session and he showed up and he handed me a score, that was it. He said, "Here man, I'm sorry I'm late." What am I going to do with a score, you know. He apologized later on for that, in fact, I had to drag out one of my arrangements to do that, which wasn't that good to finish that session. There again, that was a dumb choice of, my first record session, dumb choice of music, and why I don't know. And not that the music was that dumb, but the choice, I should have had better sense.

Murphy: Who were some…

DeFranco: I didn't.

Murphy:…of the other members of the band, do you remember?

DeFranco: Yeah, there again, my first session I think my brother Leonard played bass, Jimmy Lyons played piano, was a fairly good pianist at that time, well known. Bernie Glow played first trumpet, Jimmy Pupa was on there on trumpet. Who else was in that band? I think I had in one of my sessions I had Lee Konitz. Isn't that funny? I can't remember all the guys in that band.

Murphy: And so you made a recording, were you also doing gigs around…

DeFranco: Yeah, we were doing different…

Murphy:…around the country? Or were you based in New York?

DeFranco:…no just around the New York area. We did some around different parts of the country, not too successfully. Then we had, gee the last job I had with my big band was Ansley Hotel [sic], I think, it was Memphis, Tennessee. We had an early radio broadcast, national hookup; it was about seven o'clock in the evening. And then after that we were going to take a break and then come back and play a dance gig, it was the roof of the Ansley Hotel [sic]. It was my last ditch effort to be somebody in the big band business. I not only picked a strange combination of songs for that broadcast. There again, why? I don't know. But I had some rather irresponsible guys and I hearken back to Tommy Dorsey again, if you have a boozer or a doper in your band he's going to pick the record session or the big broadcast to screw up. And he was right. I had a couple guys in the band that were not responsible and one, this poor guy who was a marvelous player, Gene Quill, you might have heard of him. In fact, he was paling around with, who the hell am I think of? Gene Quill and—anyway, Gene was in my band. Oh, Phil Woods, it was Phil Woods and Gene Quill around the same time, pretty much neck and neck, although Phil had the edge there. There again, Phil Woods to me is one of the greatest jazz interpretations of jazz ever. But Gene Quill was in the band and he was excellent player but had a bad habit. And got stoned before this broadcast. He got on the seat, and Buddy Arnold, I guess, was sitting playing tenor sax sitting next to him. And I had a theme song where I would start cold on the clarinet play something—bla bla bla bla bla (singing)—and then the band would come in. It was pretty impressive, called *Rumpus Room*. And the guy gave me the signal, the announcer gave me the signal to start, and I started my little thing for the clarinet and the band came in and what ensued was the worst sound you ever heard in your life; cacophony of weird. I went into shock and turned around and poor Gene Quill had his saxophone strap stuck in the keys.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: Which opened all those top notes and he couldn't play one note, he was trying to play one note and it sounded horrible, it sounded like a New Year's horn or something. And poor Buddy Arnold was also stoned trying to help Gene and they're both blowing into their instruments like everything is cool, you see. I don't know how we got through that song, I don't know how. And, of course, the guys in the band back in the brass section were all laughing, falling on the floor. [laughter]

Murphy: Sure!

DeFranco: What else, what else? That was the funniest thing ever. That was the last job we did.

Murphy: What would Dorsey have done?

DeFranco: Oh my gosh. Well, there again, it wouldn't have happened, you know, he was smart enough. And poor Gene, you know, he apologized profusely for the whole thing but he couldn't help it, he was just strung out, you know. But a great player, great player.

Some of those things happen are so dumb, you know, you wonder, "How could this happen?" Nobody's fault in real sense, those are circumstances. But when I listen back to those recordings that I made with that big band I could have done a lot better with half of what I did. I just overloaded everything. The arrangements were over-arranged. There was too much clarinet through everything. But in retrospect, I realize, you know, if you listen to the guys who really made it, like Benny and Artie, they didn't interject their clarinet or instrument through the whole piece until you got fed up with hearing it. And they didn't overload their arrangements; they were smart enough to edit the arrangements no matter who it was. It could have been Nelson Riddle; even Dorsey would edit Nelson Riddle's arrangements, you know, take out this, take out that. But I wasn't…

Murphy: Less is more.

DeFranco: Hum?

Murphy: Less is more.

DeFranco: Less is more.

Murphy: As Sweets always said.

DeFranco: And I wasn't smart enough in those days to do that or know that, I was just overwhelmed with this music idea. But you live and learn. [laughter]

Murphy: So in '49 and '50 you had your fourth Metronome All-Stars with Lennie Tristano, Lee Konitz, Dizzy, Max Roach…

DeFranco: Max Roach, yeah.

Murphy:…Stan Getz.

DeFranco: Oh, that's right, Stan was on that one, yeah, great player, too.

Murphy: So you remember that one?

DeFranco: Yep, I can remember that. You know, not exactly, but pretty much.

Murphy: Had you ever worked with him before, played with him before?

DeFranco: With Stan? Yeah…

Murphy: You had.

DeFranco:…yeah, we played some sessions together. And I believe we were on, there was one recording done, from a broadcast—a bootleg—with Stan and I. And also with Miles Davis and I and I used to tell people for years that I never played with Miles Davis.

But at the Royal Roost the announcer Symphony Sid said, "Here is Buddy DeFranco and Miles Davis." And it became a bootleg record.

Murphy: Do you listen to your recordings very much?

DeFranco: I try not to.

Murphy: And have you always been that way?

DeFranco: Yeah, you get, I listen to them, of course, but I like them when I hear them in a certain sense. But after awhile you know, I get picky and start, you know, thinking, "Why didn't I do this? Why didn't I change that? And that was stupid to play that and that was good, it's too bad that wasn't first." You know, all that. So, that's…

Murphy: Twenty-twenty hindsight.

DeFranco: Twenty-twenty hindsight. It's hard; it's hard to listen to your own stuff, very hard. You can't help it, you get picky, you cannot help it. That's why I listen to other people, it's much more enjoyable to hear somebody else, sit back and absorb it.

Murphy: Do you listen to recordings a lot?

DeFranco: Quite a bit, quite a bit. I'm still involved in listening to Art Tatum and Charlie Parker and Stan Getz, and all them.

Murphy: CDs.

DeFranco: CDs, yeah.

Murphy: I see a lot of CDs around your house.

DeFranco: Yeah, we got a lot of them.

Murphy: You have an iPod?

DeFranco: Yeah, and I like the idea of getting a CD, putting it in and listening to the whole thing, you know, and not worry about. There again, sometimes the iPod you're loaded with stuff and nothing means anything after awhile, after awhile.

Murphy: It's true, its kind of, I mean, it's interesting that if you look back at Ray Bradbury and *Fahrenheit 451*, do you remember…

DeFranco: Vaguely.

Murphy:…in that story he has a concept of, I think he called it a seashell, and this housewife is constantly walking around with the seashell in her ear and she's just bombarded with radio and talk and its almost like she just becomes a drone…

DeFranco: Right.

Murphy:…and now here we are and you see people…

DeFranco: It's pretty close.

Murphy:…walking down the street everywhere they go…

DeFranco: Isn't it?

Murphy: …everybody has got headphones on…

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy:…and of course some people are probably listening to wonderful things, but a lot of other people are probably not.

DeFranco: Yeah, a whole bunch of stuff and its a…

Murphy: Yeah, just becomes a drone.

DeFranco: And a lot of times silence sounds pretty good, many times, you know.

Murphy: Do you listen to a lot of classical music?

DeFranco: Yeah, yeah. But I still listen to my favorite guys, you know, like Prokofiev, and Shostakovich, and Ravel, of course. And there's an old saying, in jazz circles especially, "If you want to learn anything about orchestration, listen to Ravel." He had it; he was like an Art Tatum was. If you want to listen to a modern concept of chord progressions, listen to Art Tatum, it's all there, or most of it anyway.

Murphy: In 1950 you joined the Basie band and he had recently disbanded his big band…

DeFranco: Yeah, that's when…

Murphy:…in favor of small groups.

DeFranco: Right, that was Willard Alexander's idea because big bands were starting to fold one after another with the advent of Rock and Roll.

Murphy: Right. What was the reaction of audiences to that news?

DeFranco: It was a pretty good reaction, yeah, and there again, most of the audiences knew what they came to hear so they accepted what Bill Basie had to offer. And he was smart enough to make that small group sound almost like a big band and to never neglect the intent of the music and the rhythm and the feeling of the music. He never got carried away with so much stuff that you couldn't, and which there again, was my problem when I had my big band, was too much. But Bill Basie, there I learned economy in playing from Bill Basie. And there I realized how great he was in the group to make everybody play well and play in a good time feeling, a good sense, it made you feel good to hear it, and you could dance to it too.

Murphy: So many people talk about what he didn't play.

DeFranco: What he didn't play, yeah, and you could hear that. He was really an amazing force at the keyboard for directing without standing up and directing, directing from the keyboard what people, what his players are going to play and how they should play.

Murphy: So when you were playing with that group what was it? Was it a septet, or octet?

DeFranco: Yeah, it was septet. We had Clark Terry, Wardell Gray, and myself on the front lines. And he had Jimmy Lewis played bass, Gus Johnson was a great drummer; he played drums, and Bill, of course, piano. And then one night we were playing and Freddie Green came in, and he was a notorious player with Bill Basie for years.

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: He essentially was the sound, or a lot of the sound of the rhythm section. And he liked the group so much he had said to Basie, "I'm joining the band." So he did, "Yeah, great!" You know, and he came on, there again, he made such a difference too in the feel and the rhythm.

Murphy: You, when you talk about the feel and the rhythm, was that a different experience for you in playing with all these musicians out of Kansas City, everybody talks about that Kansas City swing with the Basie band.

DeFranco: Yeah, it was a different concept, different feeling. But I could play what I played with a bebop inflection with his rhythmic concept.

Murphy: And you mentioned Willard Alexander, is he, who was Willard Alexander?

DeFranco: He was one of the premier booking agents for bands, and he actually was one of the guys who booked Count Basie and kind of discovered a lot of those. He put together the Sauter-Finnegan band, too. He had a great ear for bands, for music and he really kept big bands rolling for a long time.

Murphy: And was he the catalyst for you joining Basie?

DeFranco: Yeah, kind of, he suggested that I join to Bill Basie. And, of course…

Murphy: Because all the rest of those players, weren't they from Basie's band, most of them?

DeFranco: No. No. Not all of them. For instance, when he organized the first group the tenor player was not Wardell, it was Bobby Graf from St. Louis, a white guy by the way. He didn't stay long, I don't know what happened, but he didn't stay long, and Wardell Gray came in, who was a great player also. I liked Wardell, and a brilliant guy, well read.

Murphy: And I think I read somewhere that you said that your impression of Basie was that he was one of the sort of old-timers who really appreciated a modern conception of music.

DeFranco: Bill Basie?

Murphy: Yeah.

DeFranco: Oh yeah, yeah, he did, he understood it. And somehow he made that—Wardell and I played, and Clark Terry played in modern concept, kind of a bebop—and he made it work with his group. Bill Basie knew how to make it work.

Murphy: Buddy DeFrigli [sic].

DeFranco: [laughter]

Murphy: Is that what Clark Terry called you?

DeFranco: Yeah, Clark Terry, yeah. Buddy DeFrigili [sic]! And he was "Torennce [sic]." Torencce [sic], mainly because when he played he tore in some notes.

Murphy: And you were the only white guy in the band, I know you certainly some…

DeFranco: I was.

Murphy:…racial issues.

DeFranco: I was the only white guy and it got to be ridiculous because we never thought about it until we get some phone calls that were nasty or somebody in the audience might, "How come you're playing with?" You know, it's really dumb, really dumb because we were almost like a family and I got a lot of static for being the only white guy in the band. And also they were doing these *Soundie*, sound, I forget what, short subjects on television, *Soundies* I think there were called.

Murphy: The Universal Studios shorts.

DeFranco: Yeah, right, for the shorts. And they had decided, the company decided, that they didn't want me filmed on it because they're going to try to sell them, *Soundies*—the shorts—down south, so they needed a black guy. So I played the background, I played the soundtrack, then they had Marshall Royal come in and simulate what I was playing. The whole thing was stupid because Marshall Royal looked more white than I did. So the whole thing didn't make any sense.

Murphy: How did Basie feel about it, did he take any position either way?

DeFranco: Well, he was pragmatic and he was kind of a guy that a lot of things he lived with, he lived with, and that was it. For questions, he wasn't going to stop the whole session because of this. "It's ok, well, you know, we'll hire Marshall." And he said to me, "Ok by you?" "Yeah, sure." But the strangest thing about that too, was many later years, I was told that a lot of people liked Marshall's playing on that session [laughter], and Marshall wouldn't say it wasn't me, he would just say "Oh, thanks."

Murphy: Oh, he never gave it up?

DeFranco: No. [laughter]

Murphy: That's pretty bad.

DeFranco: Who knows? Maybe he thought he played it.

Murphy: Right. Do I have it right that you had an offer from Ellington also?

DeFranco: I did. It was after I left Basie when I started rehearsing my big band at Nola's Studios. And that was in a way unfortunate because I should have gone with Ellington. That would have been a great move on my part and postponed the idea of the big band until later, until I learned more about it.

Murphy: So it was after you left Basie, so what do you think that was about nineteen…

DeFranco: And I was rehearsing my band at Nola's Studios in New York…

Murphy:…1951?

DeFranco:…I got this call from Ellington and I spoke to him, you know, he said, "You know, Jimmy Hamilton is leaving." And he said, "I'd love to have you on the band." And at that time I said, "Well, you know, I'm rehearsing my own band and I'm involved in this thing and I have some backing for my own band and I really want to do it, you know." And he said, "Ok." But that was dumb on my part, I really should have gone with Ellington, it would have made the difference in my own career.

Murphy: How?

DeFranco: Besides, you know Ellington's band was strange. There were times when it sounded horrible, but many times when it was just great, just great. And I could have used that exposure and experience on Ellington's band.

Murphy: So you're saying it would have changed your career in so far as what you were playing and how you were thinking about music?

DeFranco: What I was playing, and being well known and also…

Murphy: Exposure, too.

DeFranco:...and good exposure, and also learning from a guy like Ellington. Everybody that played with him learned from him. There again, he was a very wise man, he knew what to do, when to do it.

Murphy: And the opportunity never arose again?

DeFranco: Again? No, no, no.

Murphy: How long did it take you to regret that decision?

DeFranco: Immediately. No, not. After awhile when I had my band out and realized that I was going nowhere with this juggernaut. In retrospective at that time, I figured boy I really should have waited, waited a little longer and joined Ellington. It didn't take long for me to realize that it was a dumb move. But I was into it then and there were people who were putting money into my band.

Murphy: So did you form a big band in the late '40's, then it wasn't really working out, then you went with Count Basie—did some other things—and then reformed the Buddy DeFranco Orchestra?

DeFranco: No, the group. I reformed the group, I don't think I reformed the big band; I'm not sure which came. I know I did, I was back and forth, I had a big band and recorded that and also decided to get involved with a jazz group, which was a good move.

Murphy: How many piece group?

DeFranco: Four, five, yeah.

Murphy: So this is not, it was the big band that Lenny Lewis was managing?

DeFranco: Yeah, the big band, yeah.

Murphy: So can you talk a little bit about him, he was your manager? He sounds like a character.

DeFranco: Yeah, he was a strange person. But a bright guy, good organizer and a good talker, he's the guy that got people to put money in my band. And sometimes some very strange means, but he did. And he was a clarinet player…

Murphy: What do you mean "very strange means?"

DeFranco: I know, well somehow he managed to get some fairly influential and well-known prostitute to come up and put some money in my band. And that's the strangest thing that ever happened because…

Murphy: Take it where you can get it!

DeFranco:…Lenny Lewis was, Lenny was a little guy, he kind of had a hunchback, big nose, glasses, very intense but brilliant guy. Yeah, and knew music, he could tell you, I mean he knew what was good and he knew. A lot of times I should have listened to Lenny Lewis, in terms of what I played and organized in the band, but I wouldn't have it, you know. He was a manager; keep your nose out of my music. But he was bright, very bright guy. The only thing is he was too bright, and he had too much ambition. He wanted me to be a famous band.

I didn't know it, but he had road-managed Artie Shaw's band before that and then he assumed the role of management and road-management with Artie. But it turned out that Artie wound up chasing him down the street. I mean he was that, I don't know, he was that irritating and irrational in many ways. And sometimes he would, he was an ex-clarinet player, and he had a good band up in Buffalo, New York, had really good guys playing in his band. But he was not that good a clarinet player, but he kind of transferred himself into my playing and sometimes he gets overwhelmed with the band while we were playing. He'd jump on the stage and start leading the band, you know. I say, "Hey, what are you doing? Get off! Get off!" A weird little guy, and how this guy was able to convince this wealthy hooker to put money in my band.

Murphy: Like how much money in your band?

DeFranco: I don't know, in those days, maybe twenty grand or something like that; fifteen thousand, or something. That was a lot of money. Then there was another, he got another guy to put up money, Ross Hastings, whose family was the originator of Formica, he put a, Lenny got him to put up a lot of money in my band. There again, how he could talk these people into coming up with money was amazing, but he was a good talker.

Murphy: How did he become your manager? Did he find you or did you find him?

DeFranco: He found me. Yeah, I think it was up at Nola's Studios when I was just organizing a band and floundering around a little bit and he jumped in there and said, "I'm going to be your manager, I'm going to make you a big name, I'm going to make you into a big name." And then he bragged about his affiliation with Artie Shaw, which was a lot of it was fabricated because I didn't realize that Artie had already fired him, or chased him. Physically chased him down the street. Well, one thing about Lenny was that he couldn't keep his hand out of the till, whatever we would take in, half of it was his automatically.

Murphy: Well that's a problem.

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: You had a funny story in your book about your first one-nighter.

DeFranco: Oh, yeah. [sigh]

Murphy: [laughter] I mean funny, well…

DeFranco: Yeah, that was…

Murphy: Tragically funny.

DeFranco: Yeah, tragic.

Murphy: Comedy tragedy.

DeFranco: Well, we had, I had a whole. We rehearsed and had all this, a library and all this music to play and we're all of us all good players and ready to take the world on with the band. And we had, I forget the name of the place in New Jersey we were going to play. And on the way there Lenny was next to me in the bus, we were driving and Lenny coaching me. [Alters his voice] "And first you'll start with the *Theme* and then the band will come in, and then you'll play a real hot number and you'll get the audience going and then you'll simmer down and you're going to play dance music." You know, he gave me this whole ideas, you know, the whole format. "Yeah, then we're going to, and then you charm, then you finish with *oy* [noise] you play your cadenza and he's going to."

Murphy: Kind of like Willie DeSimone? [laughter]

DeFranco: [laughter] Yeah, more animated.

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: And then we got on the stand and I did what he said, we played the *Theme*, it was exciting, and looked out there and people looked at us, they stared. And then I went into the next song, and they're still staring. And then the next song I realized they

couldn't dance to that tempo and we lost some of them. And by the end of the evening there were very few people left. That was my first night! The way back on the bus, poor Lenny, he was so little, he looked like he kind of shrunk into the seat. What happened? What happened? So, boy, it was really.

We had some good engagements. We had a good engagement, surprisingly enough, on a riverboat out of Washington, D.C. And there again, at the expense of sounding a little racial, but the facts are there, we played the first dance tour on the boat and it was pretty good, came back, and the second tour was for black people and we tore it up. They loved it; they loved the band.

Murphy: Why the difference do you think?

DeFranco: I guess, whatever thing we did, connected with them, with their experience. But it was pretty successful. But then the trouble was we couldn't keep that success going with the band.

Murphy: And you had a big hit with that band *Out of Nowhere* that got a lot of radio play, right?

DeFranco: Oh, it really wasn't a hit.

Murphy: Oh.

DeFranco: But it got a lot of radio play, in fact, we thought it was a hit. And Lenny then called MGM and said, "You know, what about the royalties on it." And they said, "What royalties? You've got nothing coming, it's not selling." But we heard it on jukeboxes and we heard it on radio.

Murphy: So what accounts for that?

DeFranco: Nobody knows, nobody knows. I thought for sure it was a hit because of the exposure it got. But when they showed us the money, you know, the results and on paper it did nothing, it was dismal. So I don't know.

Murphy: And it wasn't that all the royalties went to Lenny?

DeFranco: No, not really, I don't think so. I think that it just was a turntable hit, as they called it in those days.

Murphy: That's too bad.

DeFranco: It really didn't amount to real sales and a real hit.

Murphy: But in the end Lenny, was he cooking the books? Or was he not being forthright with you?

DeFranco: Yeah, he was cooking the books and he, and in the end we went into court and he was awarded the bandstands, or something, and I got, I forget what I got, very little out of the whole thing. He got away with the library, somehow.

Murphy: With the library?

DeFranco: Yeah, I didn't get that. Then he disappeared and then I heard that he befriended some lady down south who was a big publisher and he swindled so much money from her that she had the Southern Mafia after him chasing him through the whole country. And he wound up in Hollywood in one of those cheap motels, and he died there, he got pneumonia, and he was about four or five days lying there dead before they found him. That was the end of Lenny Lewis.

Murphy: That's a bad demise.

DeFranco: Yeah, yeah. That was too bad because he had so much ability, he really did.

Murphy: So in '52, I guess that would be after you disbanded the big band.

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: That's when you first came into contact with Art Blakey. Is that right?

DeFranco: Yeah, yeah.

Murphy: And that became a really important collaboration.

DeFranco: I had a job at the Birdland, you know, as a soloist. And the house band was Art Blakey, Kenny Drew, and Eugene Wright. And from the first note we gelled, it was picnic, everybody liked it and we, and by the end of that engagement, I think it was two weeks I had Birdland, I said to Art, "Lets make a group out of this and go out." And Art said, "Yeah, lets do it." So we did, we became a bona fide traveling group. And did well most of the time.

Murphy: Known as the "Buddy DeFranco Quartet." Right…

DeFranco: Buddy DeFranco…

Murphy:…and a lot of people mistake that as you playing with Blakey's group, is that right?

DeFranco: Yeah, there's even a recording that I did with Art that I did on bass clarinet and Art Blakey was in the group. And later on they turned out the same CD with Art Blakey featuring Buddy DeFranco. And a lot of people used to say to me many years later, "Oh, I remember when you played with Art Blakey's group." And when that wasn't

it, it was my group and featuring Art Blakey. Good experience, Art was, he was something.

Murphy: Why musically did you gel so well do you think?

DeFranco: Oh, I think that because of the intensity of the music and the feeling. That group was hot, it really was. It was every bit as hot as the group on *Jazz at the Philharmonic* and that was with Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown, and Louie Bellson or Buddy Rich. It was hot. That group with Art Blakey was really intense, you couldn't miss the message.

Murphy: Can you describe Blakey's approach and how he drove the band?

DeFranco: [sigh] Well he got, he was one of the few players in history that got stronger as the night went on. Most of the guys would kind of simmer down and flake out and get, not him, he would get more intense and stronger. And he had an inherent feeling that seemed to generate through the band and everybody got it, everybody got that message and I think that's why he called it "Jazz Messengers" because there was a message there. He was a, the funniest thing, he became a Muslim, he called himself Abdullah Buhaina, and he talked a good Muslim story, but I don't think he every understood what it was supposed to mean. Really, I don't. But he had a lot of Muslim friends and they would come and visit him, some dignitaries too from different nations would come to see Art. But, there again, it was like a reprieve from being a black guy in a, you know, in a group or in the music business because there was still, there again, with the civilians there was still that funny attitude. I know I was criticized for having three black guys in my group for a long time, which I couldn't understand at that time because I was involved with the music and these were human beings not black, white, or green, or whatever.

Murphy: Where were you guys playing?

DeFranco: We played all over; we played a lot of clubs, different cities. We played Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Washington—where else did we play—we played St. Louis, California a lot. I can't remember the names of the clubs; especially in L.A. we played quite a few clubs in L.A. We did good business.

Murphy: Did you have a manager booking you?

DeFranco: Yeah, Willard Alexander booked my group, basically. I did have Billy Shaw for a while book my group, and I had a road manage that was also another story; his name was Milt Gray and he was from Philadelphia. And he was, I could never call him a thief, he wasn't a thief, but sometimes when we played New York he'd come up with different items from motel lobbies and hotel lobbies and…

Murphy: Souvenirs?

DeFranco: Huh?

Murphy: Souvenirs?

DeFranco: Souvenirs, yeah. One time he had an apartment and somehow managed to furnish this place with different pieces from around the city. He, Frank DeVito was a…

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…and Milt Gray picking up pieces of ham and bacon in his coat walking, sometimes he'd pick up, in a restaurant, he'd pick up plates and he had this coat he'd put in these pocket and be walking with these plates and stuff.

Murphy: That qualifies as a thief. [laughter]

DeFranco: No, it was just, he [laughter], I don't know. Frank said to him, "Why did you pick up that ham?" He says, "Because I like ham with my breakfast." [laughter]

Murphy: Well, with that size of a band, how were you getting to your gigs? Were you traveling around in a, like would you get a big station wagon and drive?

DeFranco: Combination of things. We traveled in a station wagon and a car most of the time. And, there again, I got a great Blakey story. I told Ken about this last night, this is one of the funniest stories, Art Blakey, because he drove the station wagon like he played the drums…

Murphy: [laughter] Uh oh!

DeFranco:…straight ahead! We made time with that. I can remember trying to go to sleep and Art's at the wheel and we're going 90 miles an hour and I look up and there is a fork in the road and a station here, gas station with a truck parked there, and I figured, "Oh, here we go. What's he going to do now?" And I don't think he really knew what road to take anyway so he went straight ahead and through beside the gas pump and the truck, went right through the station and left, and right into the other road without missing a bit. Boy, I'm telling you [swoosh], it was great! And I looked at him and he said, "You thought I wasn't going to make it, right?" I said, "Right!" But that's the way he was, he was great, he was fun too, Art Blakey, he had a great humor. Another time. [beep in background]. What was that? [voice in background]. Oh.

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Murphy: I'm Molly Murphy. It's November 9, 2008 and we're here with Buddy DeFranco. And Buddy, I'd love to pick up with, with talking about your quartet, Art Blakey was in your quartet, and I think we finished yesterday with you telling us a story

about Blakey and his driving habits. You were traveling across country in a station wagon.

DeFranco: Right, right yeah.

Murphy: And talking about all of that, all of those road trips that you guys made. I know that one issue that came up was, you know, experiencing the effects of racism because the band was three black guys and you. You were the only white guy. So, do you remember any instances that were maybe particularly, I don't know, poignant? Along those lines?

DeFranco: Oh yea, well the first, I don't know if I mentioned the fact – where am I thinking of. Des Moines, Iowa? Was that it?

Joyce: Muncie, Indiana

DeFranco: That's right. Muncie, Indiana.

Murphy: Thank you, Joyce.

DeFranco: Some club there. Did I tell you about that one?

Murphy: I don't think so.

DeFranco: That was with a group. Kenny Drew, Art Blakey, and Eugene Wright were with me. Three black guys and myself, I was white. And we, we played at this club, we hadn't played there before, and when we got there we set up the band stand, set up the bass and drums and everything in the afternoon and spoke to the owner.

And the owner came to me and he said, well he said, "I see you have colored men in your group." He said, "They can stay downstairs in the cellar, we have a place for them." And that immediately turned me off. And I said "What? Wait a minute. What do you mean they can . . .?" and he said "Well, during intermission they can go down there." So I started the fume at that point, I said, "Well you know, I can't have that, I can't have that. They've got to be up in the room with me – the whole night. That's it, that's it." I said, "You know, I don't have an animal act. I have human beings with me. We live together."

So, he finally conceded, he gave us a table in the back of the club and he said, "Well, this will be the band table in the back," he said, "but the black guys can," he didn't say black by the way, they could stay at the table there during intermission. He said "but you can mix with the people." So I said "No, I won't mix. I'll stay with the band. That's it. That's my band. We're one family and that's it. That's it."

And I wasn't being really, that altruistic, I mean, it was to me common sense. And I was really, it was a personal effrontery to me. Giving me all these directions about, I thought maybe he was going to find out, ask for their, you know for their, identifications and

what not in the background. So I said "We can't have that, can't have that." I said, "I'll stay with them here." Well that's the way it worked out. I stayed with them at the table during intermission with the guys. Some of us strayed a little bit but then went back when he wasn't around. The place was jammed and it a total success.

Murphy: And did the musicians know that this was what this guy had laid out?

DeFranco: Oh yeah, yeah

Murphy: So.

DeFranco: Yeah. But, you know, they were sensible enough to know this arrangement would work and we could get through the job. We didn't want to blow the job, totally. None of us wanted to. And finally, we had a fantastic night. I mean, a successful night. The audience loved the group and we left, got in our station wagon and car and back to the motel, and when we got back to the motel the motel owner was there, greeting us. And he said, "I don't know how to tell you this, but the black guys have to go in the colored neighborhood. They have to leave." This was three in the morning. I really flipped and so did the guys, and we got in the station wagon, the car, went back to the club, and we got the bass and the drums, packed them, and the guy was still here. The owner was still there, you know, counting all his money, I really…

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: "What are you doing!" I said, "We're through,"…

Murphy: And…

DeFranco: . . . "Because the motel owner said the Chamber of Commerce called him and said that the black guys have to leave the motel." So that's it, so we left.

Murphy: And this was a…

DeFranco: We went to Chicago.

Murphy: This was a gig you were supposed to do for, how long was your engagement?

DeFranco: It was two weeks. But we had to…I said, "No, we'll make it somehow." We went to Chicago. And I got, I think it was Billy Shaw was booking us at the time. And, that's another great thing about agents in those days, that is, the jazz guys. Billy Shaw was not bent out of shape that we did that, he understood. You know, he said, "you did the right thing. It's too bad that you're going to lose money and I'm going to lose commission" but he said, "good for you."

Murphy: Well, and you know, the guy who booked the gig, I mean the guy at the place, they lost money too.

DeFranco: Oh, they lost a lot of money.

Murphy: It sounds like if you had a great reception . . .

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: Everybody loses.

DeFranco: Yeah, everybody loses. So, that was only one incident, we had a lot of, a variety of incidents, but we had some strange situations where we'd be playing some place, jam packed and a lot of people, and some poor lady who was a white lady somehow gleaned on Kenny Drew. She just, she got the message from Kenny Drew [laughter] and she wouldn't let him alone and she kept hugging him . . .

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: And she finally got so drunk, "I always wanted a black man! I always wanted a black man!" And Kenny was yelling at me, "Help! Help!" You know, "get me out of this!" [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: We had, we had a few incidents like that. Also, one time in Chicago we were playing the Blue Note, and it was my group and Harry Belafonte was, he was the headliner at that time. So, we kind of hung out and had dinners and all that during the two weeks we were at the Blue Note. And I was staying at the Croydon Hotel. They had, the room had a Murphy bed that came down, my room. So, one night after the job Harry and I hung out, it was kind of late, and I said, "Harry stay with me. Why go back to your hotel? Stay here." So he did, he stayed there, but he actually stayed for about two nights or three nights, you know, because it was very convenient. And, I got a phone call, well I got several phone calls, but one was really nasty. Nasty, nasty. And then one day I walked out of the hotel, down around the corner to another hotel and about five or six guys came after me. And two of them pinned me against the wall and I figured well this is, this is the end of my career. This is it. And, one of the guys said to the other guys, in Italian, "Leave him alone, he's Italian." So they walked away. And as I walked away he kicked me in the pants, but that was it, and then they walked away and left.

Murphy: Wow.

DeFranco: Because, that's because Harry had stayed at my . . .

Murphy: And they had seen it, people they had just seen him walk in the door or something? Seen…

DeFranco: What? I beg your pardon…

Murphy: People had just seen you two? Sort of coming and going from the same place?

DeFranco: Well, yeah, they saw. I guess they saw the whole thing. I don't know if anybody really observed this. But the tragic part of the story is many years, twenty years or twenty-five years later, I was in California. I had a friend of mine, it was an attorney for Nancy Wilson and her Wil-Den Products and John Levy was head of that company. I was in there, and I hadn't seen Harry for twenty-five years or so – just one of those things. And, he got to be a big name – a star. And I said, "Harry!" ready to embrace him, "Harry how have you been?" And he said, "Oh, it has been a long time." He gave me a left hand, Hollywood salutation, you know…

Murphy: Really?

DeFranco: Yeah! Oh – okay, goodbye.

Murphy: Oh, that's too bad.

DeFranco: But, those things happen too, you know.

Murphy: Sure.

DeFranco: Through it all, we made it. The group did very well.

Murphy: When Art Blakey left, what were his reasons for leaving the quartet?

DeFranco: He wanted to get his own group. I could sense it. Even several months before he left he mentioned that, "I think I want to get going on my own, I want to get my own group" which he did. He did very well.

Murphy: So how long did he stay with you for – what was it two years, couple years?

DeFranco: It was almost three years I guess.

Murphy: Almost three.

DeFranco: Two and a half years. Yeah. And . . . after Art left I got Bobby White, Bobby White on drums who was excellent. And Kenny Drew recommended a fine young piano player, Sonny Clark. So we had Bobby White, Sonny Clark, Eugene Wright, and myself . . . after Art left.

Murphy: Another big association that came, I guess while you were still, while the quartet was still together but you started working with Norman Granz and went out on *Jazz at the Philharmonic* tours.

DeFranco: Yes I did.

Murphy: How did you hook up with Granz?

DeFranco: Well, I really didn't want to join Norman Granz for some reason or other, you know. In fact I was…

Murphy: Did he come to you?

DeFranco: Yeah, he came to me and he said, "I'd like to have you with *JATP*," and I was a wise guy. I said something like, "I don't want to be part of your circus" or something. You know how young people are.

Murphy: No I don't. [laughter]

DeFranco: [laughter] Sound off like, I think back, I said some ridiculous things, but . . .

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: [laughter] Later on he came to me again. He said, "I really got, I really" he said, I'll quote him, he said, "I have nice eyes" he said, "I don't want any, no confrontation." So I said, "Yeah." I had calmed down by that time anyway. And he said, "Here's what I can give you." You know, "It's a lot of money" and I said, "Yeah" I said, "Okay." He said, "and I'll give you twenty minutes on the show." That's fantastic. And I said, "Do I have a backup group, on the show?" He said, "Sure, yeah, you have a backup group. You have Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown…" [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: "Herb Ellis and Louie Bellson or Buddy Rich. Whichever you want. [laughter]

Murphy: No! [laughter]

DeFranco: A backup group! Isn't that something? And it was. We did, it was a hell of a group, and a lot of fun. Oscar Peterson…

Murphy: And touring all over the world.

DeFranco: All over the world. And Oscar Peterson is always . . . unbelievable player.

Murphy: Had you ever played with Oscar Peterson before that?

DeFranco: No.

Murphy: That was your first encounter …

DeFranco: That was a first …

Murphy: And then you became life-long friends and …

DeFranco: Life-long friends and we did a lot of recordings together, and I wanted to do a Gershwin album with Oscar and I approached Norman Granz with the idea. And this meant with strings, a big orchestra, maybe thirty pieces, twenty-seven …" and he said, "absolutely not, no." He said, "I'd like you to stay with the small group." I went to Oscar and I said, "Oscar, I'd like to do this Gershwin album with you, with a big orchestra" and Oscar said, "yeah, great." I said, "but Norman doesn't want to be part of it." He said, "leave it to me." And he, somehow, got a hold of Norman and made Norman think that it was his idea. He worked that out.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: Pretty neat. And we did. And that, by the way, was a very successful album *George Gershwin Song Book* it was called. Oscar was the closest thing to Art Tatum I think. There again, so many people, especially some of the critics, they were annoying because he was so good, it was just, to me, he was just so good, there's no way to mistake his ability. And they were saying too many notes and too many clichés. Well, clichés? He was playing his own clichés. [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: I said, "They belonged to him, you know." Really sad, but . . . he was dynamic. So was Ray Brown. Ray Brown was also fantastic.

Murphy: And Norman Granz also put you to together with Tatum, speaking of Tatum.

DeFranco: Yeah, he had decided for a series, which gives a good example of Norman Granz's thinking about the future and about the archives of music. He put a series of albums together with different players and Art Tatum. So Art Tatum recorded with Ben Webster and Roy Eldridge and a lot of other players and myself. And that was something. That was really intimidating too because I idolized Art Tatum my whole life, from the time I was a kid, and then to be in the studio with Art recording . . .

Murphy: Terrifying!

DeFranco: Wow.

Murphy: And did you say you were both feeling kind of under the weather that day?

DeFranco: I was . . . he wasn't feeling that well I guess. I can't really put my finger on it. I wasn't too . . . I had a cold or something. But in fact I was determined to go through with this because I knew if, if I coped out and said I couldn't do it, I probably would never get the chance again. So I managed to sit down while I was playing, instead of

stand up, which was just as well. I'm lucky I did sit down. And I could sit next to Art and observe, we didn't isolate each other we were just playing right next to each other, which was great. And a great engineer who understood that's what we wanted. And I'm glad I did . . .

Murphy: Who chose what you were going to play? Did you and Art?

DeFranco: We both did. We both came up with … although the funny thing is Art Tatum could play anything in any key.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: He was that facile. So when we, when we think about songs he was a lot like Bird. In order to really make it interesting he'd pick a difficult key or another key, other than the standard key deliberately, because it would force you to think in another direction and be really creative. So, half of the songs were in different keys, and that kept me hopping pretty good. Yeah.

Murphy: Did you describe playing with him like chasing a train?

DeFranco: I described it that way.

Murphy: I thought I remembered that.

DeFranco: Like chasing a train and never getting it. [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: Well, everybody knows, all musicians that know Art Tatum know that he loved that game anyway, that music game. And, he would change the chords and chord progressions every bar. And so I was really besides myself trying to stay with it, with him, and trying to make what I was playing make sense with what he was doing. I was fairly successful, I'm proud of it.

Murphy: Many retakes?

DeFranco: Not too many. No, no that was amazing too. Once we got into it there was rhythm to it and a flow. It seemed to work, it just seemed to work.

Murphy: And didn't you say that Norman Granz had a keg of beer for him on the [laughter]…

DeFranco: [laughter] Yeah. Yeah, well he knew Art drank a lot of beer. He had the keg of beer for Art and he drank gin with the beer, but not a lot of gin, but, what? boiler makers – whatever they call them…

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: However, he wasn't drunk. He was never drunk. He just drank one beer after another, took s shot of gin every once in a while and, but he, absolutely straight ahead. Never showed that he was …

Murphy: Those *Jazz at the Philharmonic* Tours, were those the first chances you had to travel outside of the United States? Or, had you done that before?

DeFranco: Yeah, I guess it was…

Murphy: Go to Europe?

DeFranco: Yeah…

Murphy: Do you remember the first trip you ever took to Europe?

DeFranco: No. I did one . . . what was that Leonard Feather?

Joyce: Tommy Dorsey, too.

Murphy: Oh, Tommy Dorsey? You traveled through Europe?

DeFranco: Oh yeah, that's right. We traveled to different places. Yeah, that was in conjunction with the Armed Services. We played, yeah the way he worked, he had a deal with the Air Force whereby he would play three or four civilian jobs and then he'd play two or three Service jobs on a ship or on a Service base and the Air Force would fly the whole band around, so he got transportation for the whole thing.

Murphy: Good deal.

DeFranco: Good deal, yeah. And once in a while they, they flew us in some, B17 was one. I remember that because it was a great experience for me. I could go down to the bomber's, the bomber's turret, I guess, down at the bottom.

Murphy: Scary.

DeFranco: And plexiglass, you could see the ground.

Murphy: Terrifying!

DeFranco: And I slept like a baby. It was marvelous.

Murphy: [laughter] You're kidding!

DeFranco: Yeah, really. [laughter] Yeah.

Murphy: That's kind of like Charlie Shaffer sleeping next to Louie Bellson. [laughter]

DeFranco: Charlie Shaffer. And I could also look down at the ground. They had taken those… What were they called? The guns, the machine guns. I forget what they were called. Anyway, I'll think of it later. Yeah.

One time, which was kind of funny, Buddy Rich was on the band, part of that time, had the *Clark Sisters*. They were *The Sentimentalists*. The *Clark Sisters* sang with the band, and they decided they were going to get the, I don't think it was a trainer plane, but it was a fairly large, twin-engine plane besides the B17 that we were on. And that was going to be a special flight for the girls on this trainer plane, or whatever it was. Anyway, Buddy said, "I want to go, I want to go on, I want to go on." So they said, "Yeah, great." So there was the *Clark Sisters* and Buddy Rich, and Buddy said, "yeah" like he was going to fly the plane, you know he was such a braggart anyway.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: He got on the plane and he said to the pilots, which he never should've said, "let's see what you can do!"

Murphy: Oh!

DeFranco: Oh? You want to see what I? So he said, "ladies? Do you want to?" "Sure!" Oh, they went through a few song and dance routines, and Buddy got sick! [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: Buddy got sick and the girls came off, "wonderful! Oh how great, how great!" [laughter]

Murphy: That's good. I wanted to ask you about your tour in '54, was it? With Billy Holiday, and that was not a *Jazz at the Philharmonic* that was Leonard Feather.

DeFranco: That was Leonard Feather, that was Leonard Feather.

Murphy: And that was called Jazz Club U.S.A.? That was his operation?

DeFranco: Right, right. Yeah.

Murphy: And you had played with Billy before, did she sing with Basie when you were in the small Basie band?

DeFranco: No, no. She sat in. She sang a couple times, but not extensively.

Murphy: So not a lot.

DeFranco: So that was really the first time we worked together…

Murphy: Closely together…

DeFranco: No, I'm wrong. The first time we worked together was the first festival out in California …

Joyce: Monterey.

DeFranco: Yeah, the Monterey Jazz Festival. And that was, that was unbelievable experience because Sonny Rollins, Gerry Mulligan, Benny Carter, and myself and Billy Holliday were scheduled for something about eleven thirty at night, or eleven, but everybody went so long that we didn't get on until about two in the morning or one thirty.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: And [there were] very few people left because it was freezing. And it was a sad situation because Billy was cold, everybody was freeing their . . . But we all stayed because we wanted to play together and I stayed there specifically because I wanted to work with Sonny Rollins. In fact, I told him that I said, "the only reason I'm here, you know, not anything against Billy, but the only reason I'm here is I wanted to work with you." I told Sonny Rollins that. And, we had a good time even though it was cold, but poor Billy was out there freezing trying to sing and a few people left.

Murphy: Miserable.

DeFranco: Yeah. That was the first Monterey festival. It got out of hand. But the trip to Europe, opening night in Sweden was a disaster because Billy somehow, opening night she met the man, or somebody, that turned her on. And when she came on, opening night at Stockholm she couldn't even find the microphone. She was…so that was a washout. Bad reviews the next day. Then she cleared up the next couple of days and she was marvelous. The rest of the tour she was terrific. Really great, yeah.

Nice person, Billy. There again, to me, a lot like Bird in many ways. A real nice person and just unfortunately as a child caught up in that dope thing. And, everybody knew once, once you're a kid and you get involved in that, it's a hard way out. Very few people ever make it out of that.

Murphy: Yeah. Well I thought it was interesting what you said this morning before we started interviewing about Bird that people had that perception of him, you know that he was kind of crazy, but actually…

DeFranco: Not!

Murphy: The opposite.

DeFranco: Not at all. It was just he opposite. And there are a few sessions where you could hear Bird speak. And that's a tip off, to hear him speak. Even as opposed to Dizzy at the same time, where Dizzy was all hip talking silly and, Bird was really very reserved and well spoken.

Murphy: Intellectual.

DeFranco: Intellectual. Pretty near. Of course everything was self-taught. He didn't go to any universities to become what he did. He had a fantastic brain.

Murphy: Talk about another vocalist. You worked with Ella Fitzgerald.

DeFranco: Ah! The best. Yeah, they were all good. Billy Holliday of course was an innovator. She influenced so many other singers, but, and Sarah Vaughn was a fantastic musicians, played piano well, but if I had my druthers, it would be Ella.

Murphy: Do you like playing with vocalists?

DeFranco: No.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: I didn't then. I enjoyed it later on when I could more or less interplay with what they were doing, but I never really leaned towards vocalists, you know, working with them or playing with them. And what I did not like, which Ella could do well by the way, but I did not like most singers who try to emulate the horn and sing bebop, and all that stuff. I never, that wasn't, it wasn't real to me, but Ella could do it. Ella could do that. She could actually do almost anything she wanted to do, vocally. Very insecure, too…

Murphy: Ella was?

DeFranco: Yeah, yeah.

Murphy: In what context?

DeFranco: Well, her performances, she was never satisfied with her performances. It didn't matter what the audience thought. They loved her.

Murphy: It's like Sonny Rollins.

DeFranco: And even on a personal level, she was withdrawn a lot and on her own pretty much. And then of course she was swayed by a lot of different men who just seized the opportunity to latch on to somebody famous instead of really taking care of her.

Murphy: Well something interesting happened that, well I don't know if you'd describe it as interesting, but that 1955 *Jazz at the Philharmonic* tour, with Ella, you went to Paris. And you did not have a very warm reception…

DeFranco: Oh yeah, yeah…

Murphy: From the Parisians.

DeFranco: It was booed, it was booed. I didn't know why. I just started to play some of my feature songs. There again, a dumb thing, but I thought I was going to ingratiate myself with the audience so I played *April in Paris*. I recorded it. *April in Paris*. So I started *April in Paris* and all of the sudden I hear this booing, and it got pretty intense. Not the whole audience, but from a certain quarter . . . It got so annoying I stopped playing and walked off.

Murphy: Had you ever experienced anything like that?

DeFranco: No, no.

Murphy: Remarkable. Leave it . . .

DeFranco: And Norman came out and he said, "if there is anymore booing I'm going to close the curtain and that's the end of the show, and you don't get your money back. That's it." So he calmed everybody down. And Norman was the kind of a guy that could tell an audience off. Three thousand people, he could . . . he had that command. That's why he became what he did. He was really self-assured and an innovator. But then I've learned that there was one critic in Paris and a group of…

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…Dixieland players, musicians that were gung-ho about Pee Wee Russell, who played fractured clarinet and Dixieland stuff. And, with Pee Wee, he was not a good clarinet player – period. Probably get shot for saying that.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: But he wasn't . . . you kind of knew what he wanted to play when you hear him playing it and he had a certain degree of musicality that was valid, but they had the Pee Wee Russell fan club and Sidney Bechet fan club and there was one critic who every time I made a record he would Bum wrap it. He would put it down and write about how

terrible I was and what a terrible clarinetist I was. He had a group of people come in specifically to boo me off the stage. I learned that later on.

Murphy: That must have just been a terrible experience. How did you . . .

DeFranco: Infuriating. Yeah. Well, it was more infuriating than it was embarrassing because I knew what I was doing. And I knew I was, you know, saying something with the instrument. It's not that what I was playing was bad. If I squeaked and squawked and was really bad and got booed then I'd, I'd feel okay. I would deserve it, but . . . I was playing with Oscar and Ray and I believe Buddy Rich at the time, or Louie Bellson I can't remember, but we were hot. We were playing well. And to hear this boo was ridiculous, yeah. So, it made me angry, and it made Norman Granz angry too.

Murphy: I could imagine.

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: I would think your fellow musicians who understood what you were doing . . .

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: Trying to do. That's actually something that we haven't really talked about is the field of criticism. And, you were winning *Downbeat* poll after *Downbeat* poll and very popular in the public eye, but you did have a couple of critics who, you know, leveled some criticism at you, Whitney Balliett and Nat Hentoff.

DeFranco: Yeah, yeah.

Murphy: And, how did you receive their commentary.

DeFranco: Well, first of all, I've always understood that there had to be critics. And, in many ways, critics are necessary because they may pull your coat at the right time. They may show you something that you're lacking, that you could improve on. But sometimes, they get overwhelmed with what they're writing and it's unfair, many times. But, I read the same thing about Art Tatum one time when one critic, I can't remember who it was, said that he was a cocktail pianist.

Murphy: [laughter] That critic couldn't have made it very far.

DeFranco: Oh, he was well known.

Murphy: Really? [laughter]

DeFranco: Oh yeah. I'm trying to . . . and I figured holy smoke. [laughter] If they're going to say that about Art Tatum I'm not that worried about what they say about me. But it's a combination of things. You need them. You need critics because at times they can observe certain things that you could use. That you could really work in your playing, understand. In fact, one of the criticisms was that I was a cold player, and for a time that was true, very true. I played the clarinet in the very beginning making most of my

technical expertise and show off my ability as a clarinetist and what an expert I was. Anyway, as a result some of it is mechanical, and I can hear it when I hear my early recordings, mechanical, and can be construed as cold. But I changed that almost immediately in terms of the year, the years that go by.

Murphy: So when do you feel that change was happening, like what era . . .

DeFranco: Not long after I read about it. [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] So did you feel that there was validity when you read that? I mean that must have . . .

DeFranco: Yeah, there was a certain amount, but there was more distain and hate attached to the articles than there was validity, but there was something truthful about that. And, I did deliberately change, and of course during that time I was going through some mental problems, which everybody, I didn't realize, but everybody did. Some were open about it and some weren't. And I was going to a therapist in New York . . . who was a Reichian therapist, Reichian therapist. Have you heard of Wilhelm Reich?

Murphy: Hm.

DeFranco: Yeah. And the purpose of that therapy is to open you up – make you see yourself and see the world and try to get away from your inhibitions and your compulsive training and behavior. And in order to be a clarinet player you have to be damn compulsive. You really do. So, this therapy was beginning to work for me. I finally got so that I could speak on a microphone because up to that point I would freeze up. I would see the microphone and that would be it. I couldn't say anything.

Murphy: That's so interesting, as a performing when you're making your career as a performing. [laughter]

DeFranco: Oh yeah, a lot of people…

Murphy: You're facing your fears everyday then.

DeFranco: And I've met a lot of people that way, that couldn't really . . . open up. And so that was beginning to work, so that worked with my playing as well. It kind of opened the avenues of approach and the vistas of performing and playing, musically.

Murphy: And also, I'd imagine trying to tackle, you know, the type of music that you were playing when you were playing bebop, I mean there is so much for you to stay on top of, it's very difficult for someone to stay relaxed.

DeFranco: Of course, of course.

Murphy: In the midst of bebop on clarinet!

DeFranco: Yeah, and I finally got to the point where it was second nature to me. I could execute the clarinet that way and feel that I can actually make and expressive move and say something with my instrument.

Murphy: You were melting into your instrument.

DeFranco: True, true. It worked out pretty well.

Murphy: Yeah.

DeFranco: I really can't fault the critics though that much. Sometimes they go overboard but we all go overboard with what we believe in. And, if one critic was to have one person that they fall in love with, they love their playing, they think they're great – everything else goes by the wayside. They're not interested in anything else. So, I mean, I guess it's human nature.

Murphy: Well, and another thing that we should address is around this time, sort of towards the later fifties, the clarinet, which had been the king of instruments started to declined in popularity.

DeFranco: Oh yeah.

Murphy: And no one can account for the public's taste, and you can't really control it.

DeFranco: Although, every instrument has it's place in the sun from time to time. I could remember when the organ, electric organ, was a joke and the accordion was laughed at. And harmonica, my gosh, that was really a joke in jazz.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: And then when you hear like guys like Toots Thielemans play, and who's the young fellow in Chicago now who's a . . . I played with him, do you remember his name? I can't . . . Young fellow in Chicago I recently played with.

Murphy: Jazz harmonica?

DeFranco: Jazz harmonica, terrific. So, there you go, you know. Every instrument will shine. Even the saxophone kind of dwindled at a certain period of time. But the clarinet dwindled longer than most. [laughter]

Murphy: And could you feel that coming, you know, as that was beginning to happen?

DeFranco: Yeah, I could feel it and I knew it, but I was a clarinet player, sink or swim. So, I stayed with it.

Murphy: Well you'd already sold your alto sax so what are you going to do?

DeFranco: My solo sax? Right, right.

Murphy: [laughter] Well . . . Why don't we talk, you talked a little bit about Nelson Riddle yesterday and working with him and Tommy Dorsey. In '58 he wrote an important piece for you, the *Cross Country Suite*. Can you tell me how that came about?

DeFranco: Yeah. At the time the jazz business kind of folded, it was the beginning of rock and roll coming in, and most of the jazz clubs began to fold. The theatres that had bands come in, or even had bands in the pit, they folded, one after another. So there began to be a period of time where there was very little work for jazz players, very little. And I ran into Stan Kenton one time, and I was bemoaning the fate of jazz and, can't get work, and a lot of the agents told you, "Forget it, can't book you." And Stan said, "You should do what we're doing." When he meant we, he meant the band director at that time at North Texas State Teachers College. Band director at that time. See, age does…

Murphy: [laughter]

Joyce: Hall, was that Hall?

DeFranco: Eugene Hall, I'm glad, Eugene Hall.

Murphy: Thanks again to Joyce DeFranco off mike.

DeFranco: Huh?

Murphy: I said thanks again to Joyce DeFranco off mike for providing many little hints here and there.

DeFranco: It was Eugene Hall and Stan Kenton who got together and decided to do jazz clinics in the schools – high schools and universities, colleges. And he said, "If you play for a certain clarinet company, if you us a certain kind of clarinet, ask the clarinet to sponsor you and go into the schools and promote your music that way. Do these clinics." Which was a great idea and in fact the big bands in jazz would have folded completely if it weren't for the band directors in the high schools and colleges through the years that kept that jazz going, and kept the bands going. We actually owe our careers to those guys, those band directors. So I started to do it, make this a long story, but I did a lot of clinics for Leblanc Clarinet Company at that time.

Then I came back to California, I was living there at the time, and ran into Nelson, we got together for lunch or something. Yeah, and at that time I said, "Nelson, I'm doing these music clinics in schools and what I would like to do is when we hit universities and we have an orchestra, I would like to have something for the orchestra to play, and I'd like to have something that would be indicative of where I am in the United States." So he said, "Sounds good, I'd like to do it." And he was working with Nat Cole at the time on an album, but in spite of this he took this assignment on, and it was more than an assignment. It became, I think, one of the great instrumental pieces of our time.

He wrote eleven compositions and each composition was dedicated to an area in the United States. *Tall Timber, Smoky Mountain, The Rockies, Mississippi*, all the areas of the Unites States and it featured the clarinet throughout. And, a friend of mine, Jack Lee,

at the time, liked the idea and he brought the idea to the attention of Dot Records and convinced them to do this LP and we made an LP and Nelson called it *Cross Country Suite*. And it still holds up great. When you hear it, it still sounds good. And it's one of the real combinations of jazz and symphonic approach without being too mechanical or too obvious. It's a really good musical experience that comprised the jazz feeling and the orchestral approach, the symphonic approach. In fact, it won an award at that time for Nelson. One of the first Grammy awards, for Nelson. Yeah. It was recently re-released by Nelson's daughter.

Murphy: Yeah, that's wonderful.

DeFranco: It's amazing; she put out a CD, had it re-mixed.

Murphy: So you've . . .

DeFranco: I'm trying to think of her name, Sarah.

Joyce: Rosemary.

DeFranco: Rosemary. Rosemary not Sarah. [laughter]

Murphy: Close! Has an 's.' [laughter]

DeFranco: And it turned out really nice.

Murphy: So people are hearing it . . .

DeFranco: At the time . . .

Murphy: A lot of people now are probably hearing it for the first time.

DeFranco: First time.

Murphy: Which is great.

DeFranco: Yeah. And it sounds valid, it sounds good. It's one of the better compositions of the past twenty-five, thirty, forty, fifty years. [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: How long has it been?

Joyce: Fifty.

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: Fifty years.

DeFranco: Nelson was just a marvelous person, great, and very warm. Had great humor.

Murphy: And his writing of course. You know.

DeFranco: His writing is exceptional, unexcelled. It's not only *Cross Country Suite*, everything he wrote, most everything he wrote for the . . .

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DeFranco: I've got it, bad memory for that particular date. It was all bass clarinet. About three or four weeks before the date I went to the music store and got a bass clarinet and mouth piece and started wood shedding, and that was the only recording I made with bass clarinet through the whole thing – and – it's one of the few five star ratings I got on these…

Murphy: Really?

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: What do you attribute that to?

DeFranco: It was that different and it was into the modern concept of playing.

Murphy: Was it difficult to pick it up to make that transition?

DeFranco: Not really, not really. But that was the only time I ever played bass clarinet on a recording and I did play it for a few months after that, but then I realized when I was playing in different clubs that nobody particularly cared if I played it or not. It didn't, the album didn't sell. The album later on was released, and I think I mentioned this before, was re-released and it was Art Blakey, *Blues Bag* - Art Blakey's album – featuring – Buddy DeFranco on bass clarinet.

Murphy: That's the one. [laughter]

Sound Engineer: We just need to take a pause here. And, we're rolling.

Murphy: So, let's rewind a tiny bit and talk about rock and roll . . .

DeFranco: Rock and roll.

Murphy: For a second again.

DeFranco: [laughter]

Murphy: And you actually had a double-bill with Bill Haley and the Comets?

DeFranco: Yeah, that was a strange situation. I played; it was at a club, famous club in Philadelphia. In fact, the owner at that time was married to Barbara Walters. And, usually we were booked with other jazz groups that I was familiar with, one time I played opposite Oscar's group. This time I had another group I'd never heard of and I played my set, I came off stage, and then this other group followed me and I thought it was a joke. And I said . . .

Murphy: [laughter] Jokes on you!

DeFranco: [laughter] Yeah, jokes on me! I said to the owner, "what in the world? What in the world." He said, "I hate to tell you this, but they're going to get billing over you for the rest of the two weeks because the people are coming to hear them, not your group." He was that straight forward about it.

Murphy: And this was a venue that usually presented jazz? I mean, you think of an audience that is used to patronizing a certain venue and it seems like the audience for you and the audience for Bill Haley and the Comets . . .

DeFranco: Yeah, it turned out to be Bill Haley and the Comets.

Murphy: Amazing.

DeFranco: And, it got so that by mid week of the first week the audience couldn't wait for us to get off the stage so they could hear this other group, and it didn't make much sense to me, but it sure did with the public.

Murphy: And that was 1955, I think.

DeFranco: Yeah, somewhere in there. What they said was true, they put Billy's name up there. I was second to Billy…Lee somebody was the owner.

Murphy: This was Barbara Walter's husband.

DeFranco: Yeah, husband. He had quite a lot of . . . he was pretty well known and pretty wealthy guy, a lot of holdings in Philadelphia and elsewhere.

Murphy: Well, so these Rock and Rollers, they moved in on all the, all the jazz players.

DeFranco: Kind of, yeah, yeah.

Murphy: So, those were tough times for a lot of people.

DeFranco: Of course.

Murphy: And so in '66 I'm sure it must have been a great, you know, relief to have a good, solid, dependable gig . . .

DeFranco: [laughter]

Murphy: . . . in the form of the Glenn Miller Orchestra. Tell us about how that came about, how did you become a leader?

DeFranco: Let's see, there again that was Willard Alexander was booking the Glenn Miller Orchestra. Ray McKinley was the leader at that time and they maintained their popularity through everything because they had that hardcore Miller fans that would come out to hear them whenever, played all around the world. And, Ray McKinley was the leader, and Willard Alexander booked, and then Ray McKinley decided that he wanted to leave, and they, when I say they it was Willard Alexander and Dave McKay who was executer for the Glenn Miller Estate, and he was with Glenn when they were youngsters in the Service, in the Air Force. And he became Glenn's manager and attorney from that point on, and he actually made the Glen Miller estate into a gigantic enterprise. So, they, when I say they I mean Dave McKay and Willard Alexander canvassed different areas in the music business for somebody to take Ray McKinley's place to lead the Glenn Miller Band. And, one way they did that, they went to some former members of the Glenn Miller Orchestra and suggested different people and my name came up, and most of the people they interviewed suggested me as the leader – because of my background, big band background. And, they called me in California; in fact it was Willard Alexander that I had a meeting with in one of the little restaurants in Beverly Hills. And de said, "What have you been doing?" I said, "Nothing, is what I've been doing."

Murphy: Starving. [laughter]

DeFranco: And he said, "You're going to next leader of the Glenn Miller Orchestra." I said, "I am?" "Yeah," he said, "sure" he said, "I'm pretty sure of it." He said, "I've got to talk to Dave McKay. Get back" he said, "and I'm going to New York and I'm going to talk to Dave McKay and we'll call you probably in the next two days to come to New York and have a meeting, and that will decide whether you're going to lead the Glenn Miller Orchestra." It turned out to be pretty easy and a good idea because I was very familiar with all the charts and all the music of the Glenn Miller Band because my brother and I collected those records when we were kids. I knew those records by heart. So, he called me, sure enough two days later he called me and said, "Fly to New York." So I flew to New York, I had a meeting with Dave McKay. "Great, you're going to be the next leader of the Glenn Miller Band. Go back to California, get some clothes, and get back on a plane and come back to New York. You're going to start at, some place in New Jersey," I forget where it was, Glen Island Casino, some place in New Jersey, "and you're going to go there and that will be your opening night." It was about four nights later, would be my opening night…

Murphy: Not much time to get used to that idea.

DeFranco: No. So I got some clothes, packed some clothes, flew to New York had another meeting with Dave and Willard, and then the next night I was on the bandstand. Here I am, hello folks. And, it wasn't a club, it was a concert. And Ray McKinley led the first half and then he gave me the baton to the, and I played the second half and here I am, the Glenn Miller leader. But, I had a lot of help in the band and the manager, Matt Copus, was really helpful, he played baritone sax and when I wasn't too sure of the tempos of the songs I'd watch his foot, and that would give me the tempo of the next song we were going to play. And I'd watch him for different times when the band would slow down or the vocalist would make a retard to the next part and then pick it up again, and I'd watch Matt Copus and he kind of helped me along the way for several nights to get the idea of all the tunes and how they went, and with that background I had knowledge of the Miller music. It turned out pretty good.

Murphy: Did it feel like any kind of artistic compromise for a bebopper to…?

DeFranco: Yes, it was a compromise and for a long while I was not permitted by the Miller Estate to play any of my jazz clarinet so I was relegated to some of the clarinet parts that were in the band. I played very little jazz, but over a period of time, a lot of the audience, and the people who were listening, almost demanded that I play some jazz. They wanted to hear *me* play, and they made it known to Dave McKay, and Willard. And I remember having a meeting with them where they said, "well, set aside a portion of your show to play with a small group or the band, show off your clarinet, show off what you do." So I did. So it was kind of a compromise, but it was worth it. So I kept my hand in the jazz.

Murphy: So then you were doing your own repertoire. So you weren't just working yourself into the Glenn Miller book and updating that and changing that. You actually did your own stuff too?

DeFranco: Yeah, we did our own . . .

Murphy: I didn't realize that . . .

DeFranco: In fact, many times I got a hold of Bill Finegan again and asked him to write a couple new arrangements and different people that I liked, Billy VerPlanck, I asked them to write new arrangements to put the Miller style, which they did. And sometimes when I would play these songs somebody would pass by and say, "I don't remember that" and I would say, "Well, that's a song that we found in the archives."

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: 'From thirty years ago, twenty years ago." And they'd say, "Oh yes, that's right!" And they'd go on dancing. "Wonderful!" [laughter] It worked. [laughter]

Murphy: So with hardly any lead-time, four days lead-time, you jumped into a job that was seven days a week, three hundred and whatever…

DeFranco: Yeah, we had two nights a month off, fifty weeks a year.

Murphy: Two nights a month, not consecutive.

DeFranco: Not consecutive, and, as it turned out most of those nights were four hundred or four hundred fifty mile trips so you wouldn't get into the next city until late at night, you know. It was rough. It was very rough.

Murphy: Wow.

DeFranco: And, when I think back, I don't know how I did it. But, I did it. I did it eight years.

Murphy: Fifty weeks a year, is that what you said?

DeFranco: Yeah. And, Joyce was on for close to five years of that, on the bus.

Murphy: Right, you met Joyce, you met your wife Joyce…

DeFranco: In Indiana.

Murphy: At a concert in Indiana.

DeFranco: Yeah, and she came to hear the band with one of her students there. She came over and wanted a program or something. And I said, "Forget the program, what's your phone number?" [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: So I gave her the program and she gave me her phone number. And I called her.

Murphy: That's a good deal.

DeFranco: And I said, "Join me to…" we were passing by Anderson, Indiana and I said, "meet me and we'll have dinner" or something. One thing led to another. And she came on the bus . . .

Murphy: And here were all with her giving you the answers to the test questions. [laughter]

DeFranco: Yeah, and I'm glad she remembers because I don't remember. [laughter]

Joyce: That was back to Muncie, Indiana.

DeFranco: Muncie, Yeah, yeah.

Joyce: That's what.

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: Right, full circle.

DeFranco: And she's put up with me every since. I don't know how…

Murphy: Yeah, amazing, so you know…

DeFranco: Yeah, I know, it's amazing! [laughter]

Murphy: So she…[laughter]

Joyce: [laughter]

Murphy: I didn't really mean that part, but come to think of it, it is amazing. [laughter]

DeFranco: [laughter]

Murphy: But for her to jump into that scene. I mean, you at least had spent a good part of your life traveling around like a vagabond on buses, but she hadn't.

DeFranco: It was new, it was new for Joyce. But she . . .

Murphy: And you guys didn't even have a house, right?

DeFranco: No.

Murphy: I mean you didn't even have a home.

DeFranco: No, our suitcases were…and…

Murphy: And she was out-numbered with a whole bunch of guys, right?

DeFranco: Well they brought, a couple times they'd bring their wives or here and there lady friends here and there. Sometimes we had some funny incidents, because we were in Canada one time, and we were going across Canada, one spot to another. And we had this pianist at this time, I'll make him nameless because I don't like to . . . he found this lady at one of these places we played and he brought her on the bus and he said, "we're in love and we're going to get married. We're going to get married!" And I said, "wow, that's marvelous."

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: So, we're going to being her on the bus. So she came on the bus and sat with him and it was all love and kisses and marvelous, I said, "Yeah" I said, "Great, that's great, they're going to get married, that's nice." And time went on and I kind of heard this arguing and carrying on. And finally, I hear her say, "where's my hat, I want my hat." "Here's your hat, you bitch," or whatever, bla bla bla. And they storm through the isle and it was the middle of the night, it must have been three or four in the morning. And we had a crazy bus driver, Bob Bates, who at the time, [laughter] I remember, he was absolutely, He was a weird guy too. It's a story in itself the bus driver. He could make the bus go faster than it could go.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: Always.

Murphy: Really?

DeFranco: He was unbelievable, and kooky.

Murphy: Was he your bus driver for the whole time?

DeFranco: Most of the time, most of the time. Kooky guy. So he was driving and Bob was the pianist, he came up with the lady and she's got her hat and she said, "I'm getting out." And I said, "You can't get out" and Bob Bates said, "You want to get out, then get out." he stopped the bus and opened the door!

Murphy: You're in the middle of Canada somewhere?

DeFranco: Yeah! I said, "Bob, what are you doing?" He said, "She wants to get out, that's her privilege, if she wants to leave," and Bob, the pianist says, "yeah, she wants to go" and she said, "Yeah, you're darn right, I want to go." She got out, closed the bus door and went on. And we never saw her again.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: [laughter]

Murphy: Well I wonder if she's still there [laughter]

DeFranco: [laughter] She's still there.

Murphy: Out in the field.

DeFranco: I couldn't believe. Well, there's a lot of things that Bob Bates did that were kind of humorous, but sick.

Murphy: That must have been a, you know, when is his book coming out, what an interesting experience.

DeFranco: Oh, he was – the whole thing could make such a movie. A sick movie.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: We were driving, we were driving somewhere in the middle of the night and then we came to a place where you had to take two or three different roads, Bob Bates took the wrong road, he backed up – now this is in the middle of the night again – he backed up at the intersection and started going into the other road and there was a poor guy, looked like a beatnik to me, with a dumb cardboard suitcase and he's yelling. And he thought that Bob was backing up to pick him up. That was not true. That's the last thing Bob, to be that generous to pick up a, you know.

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: And he's yelling with the suitcase on the ground and Bob stormed through and ran over the suitcase.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: And the guy's clothes were all over the road, and I'm yelling at Bob, "Go back and get this guy!" and, "ah hell with him. We've got to get to work." He wouldn't go back. This poor guy, I've often thought about what happened to him too.

Murphy: Right. Well, that's a big responsibility to have to get all those musicians to all those places every single night.

DeFranco: On time, yeah, really.

Murphy: You don't want to get lost.

DeFranco: No.

Murphy: Good thing he wasn't like that airplane pilot who…

DeFranco: Yeah. [laughter]

Murphy: Got you lost around Illinois. Well that's an exhausting life style. I would imagine.

DeFranco: It took its toll, after eight years, I crashed after that. Joyce and I moved here, in this area, Panama City. Not far from here.

Murphy: And last night Joyce said you spent, how long, a month and a half sleeping thirteen, fourteen hours.

DeFranco: Maybe longer, sleeping! All day long. I tried to recoup, and finally I got back to my normal ten hours sleep the night. [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] Or a day, depending on…

DeFranco: Yeah, or a day…I still do. I sleep about nine or ten hours.

Murphy: Do you really?

DeFranco: Yeah, plus a nap sometimes in the afternoon.

Murphy: How much do you practice everyday?

DeFranco: Well, I usually practiced all day long, when I say all day, three or four hours I could practice, but now I've had some problems with the jaw and, eyes and all that stuff, and I had to quit playing for a while.

Murphy: Really?

DeFranco: Yeah, yeah.

Murphy: How long?

DeFranco: Two months or so, or three months.

Murphy: Wow.

DeFranco: I had to have a tooth removed that was, root canal they had to take that out and they found an abscessed, and had problems with my jaw and hand. Anyway, now I'm back to practicing for about an hour, hour and fifteen minutes.

Murphy: Had you ever gone for a period of time without playing like that?

DeFranco: Occasionally, but not very often. Usually, I'd practice…

Murphy: That must have been disconcerting.

DeFranco: Yeah, it…annoying, it hurt. Not physically, mentally it hurt. It was – Because that's, a musician like I am that's my security. What else do I do? Mentally, I'm vacant without this thing. [laughter] Most of the time.

Murphy: Just watch some TV and listen to some rock and roll. [laugh]

DeFranco: Watch TV, oh boy.

Murphy: Go get some Bill Haley and the Comets CDs, catch up! [laughter]

DeFranco: In fact, I did drive Joyce crazy for a while because I'd sometimes sit on the couch and watch the tube and not know what in the world I was watching and she's say, "what are you doing? You're wasting your time!" and I'd be like a dumbly, just looking at nothing, at trite garbage. But, I got kind of out of that, pretty much, and I'm back into reading. [laughter] That's why my eyes are bad.

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: Back to reading. Yeah.

Murphy: But you're re-reading all the things you already read.

DeFranco: Artie Shaw**,** that makes good . . .

Murphy: Artie Shaw, you said you're reading Artie Shaw's book for the third time? Is that right?

DeFranco: Second time.

Murphy: The second time.

DeFranco: Well I glanced through it maybe once, but second time through.

Murphy: What's that Joyce, it's the tenth time? [laughter]

DeFranco: [laughter] And I'm back to reading other things too that…trying to make sense of, mostly scientific stuff, mostly.

Murphy: Scientific stuff? Like what?

DeFranco: Well, yeah kind of. Where is this book here that I'm reading…

Joyce: Stephen Hawking.

DeFranco: It's about the cosmos, and about planets, and the big bang theories, which I'm still grappling with – the big bang theory. You know, there's always that unknown what happened before then.

Murphy: Have you ever imagined another road that you might have taken, you know, had you not gone path the music? Have you ever . . .

DeFranco: Yeah, I really got very interested in psychiatry. I started to read everything I could find of, Freud and Karen Horney, Wilhelm Reich especially, I went for therapy for many years and I read practically everything he wrote. Wilhelm Reich who was a brilliant, brilliant guy and it seems like at this point in time everything is unfolding that he wrote about and spoke about. Everything seems to be coming to pass that he talked about and he's a lot like, in a sense Christopher Hitchens, in a sense. The world has gotten so strange that there isn't any way you can undo what's happened. That's it. Here we are with a pail of garbage, and we're all trying to filter out what we can, salvage what we can from it. And it's taken many years to do that. Wilhelm Reich's time was about the, was the 30s when he wrote, note for note the things that have happened now, politically, socially, intellectually. But, the tragedy with all of that is you can't undo the world, and you can't go back. You can't go back. That's it. Here we are.

Murphy: So, after you stepped down from Glen Miller and recouped, and you and Joyce made your home here in Florida,

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: You had your son Chad.

DeFranco: Right.

Murphy: And…

DeFranco: And he was a pretty good trombonist as a young fellow.

Murphy: Was he?

DeFranco: He could've been, but he didn't have that drive or that interest. He's a bright guy, very stupid.

Murphy: [laughter] All kids are.

DeFranco: [laughter] Boy, he's bright, and he's got a great ear! He can actually sing Dizzy's and Bird's solos.

Murphy: Wow.

DeFranco: He can! I mean, it's just incredible, you know, he could be a hell of a musician, but it's not just for him.

Murphy: Not his thing.

DeFranco: Yeah, and he does sound and lighting for a giant club here, LaVela Club. And he's good at it. In fact, they flied Chad to Mazula, Montana to do the Buddy DeFranco Festival, jazz festival, because the sound was pretty bad, and when he was, I don't know

eight, nine years ago, he was younger of course, but he helped along and he did so well they made him the sound and light guy for that festival.

Murphy: Well, isn't that nice.

DeFranco: Yeah, in fact, he did sound for a lot of good guys and a lot of important people. And I can remember in Whitefish, Montana Chad doing the sound for Mel Torme, who was, not at that time, but was always a rough customer, very demanding, and he loved Chad. He thought he was great, he did such a great job. And, at my festival Eddie Daniels remarked that what a great job he did on the sounds, in fact he said he'd like to take Chad on the road with him.

Murphy: Oh really?

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: So, it's worth noting that you set up home here, you also set up home in Whitefish, Montana. So you go back and forth between the two fabulous vacation destinations.

DeFranco: Yeah, just about when it gets really intense and hot here.

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: We go to Whitefish, which is a beautiful area. Joyce has her horse there and she does a lot of riding.

Murphy: And when did you establish the Buddy DeFranco Festival?

DeFranco: Nine years? Ten?

Joyce: I don't know, seven? I can't remember.

DeFranco: Maybe, yeah, eight or nine years, I think. Anyway, I did a music festival in Whitefish, Montana many years ago, it was successful, and they asked us back the next year and I did the second year and that was successful, and they gave us a place to stay for a week after that. And so we began to enjoy Whitefish, Montana and Kalispell, Montana and I came back for the third time. I was invited by John Denman who lived in Arizona, Tucson, Arizona. Fine clarinetist from England originally, and we became buddies, and he had me come out to this festival.

The fourth time we played at the Whitefish Jazz Festival, the Flat Fish Festival it was called, they gave us a place to stay for about a month or so, three weeks or a month, and that was that time that Joyce and I started driving around that area and decided we'd like to live there part of the year and looking for a place. And then a good friend of ours, Mike Stockland, suggested that I investigate the idea of doing a clinic and a concert in

Mazula at the University, and so I did and Lance Boyd was the band director there and the head of the music department, the jazz area. He suggested, he and Mike suggested that they change the name of their festival to the Buddy DeFranco Jazz Festival. And so we did our eighth year. And it's been really good; we had some really good guys on that. Andy Firth from Canada and…

Joyce: Australia.

DeFranco: Hm?

Joyce: Australia.

DeFranco: Ah, yeah I said Canada. Australia.

Murphy: Same thing.

DeFranco: Right.

Joyce: [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter]

Joyce: Right.

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: [laughter] Well this is, this is, we're starting to jump around a little bit. Something we have to talk about, that we have not yet discuss, is your collaboration with Terry Gibbs . . .

DeFranco: [laughter]

Murphy: And the invention of the Kosher pizza…

DeFranco: [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] As he called your group.

DeFranco: Yeah, well that was one of the great experiences of my music career and, Terry and I, we played together I guess it must have been about fifteen or twenty years through several tours and we played in Europe together . . .

Murphy: So you're hooked up with each other in about 1980, '81?

DeFranco: Yeah, somewhere in there.

Murphy: And how did you meet him?

DeFranco: The meeting was kind of similar to when I worked with Tom Gumina. It was immediate. We just fell in together and it worked and the sound was there.

Murphy: What was the occasion of you first playing together, was it…

DeFranco: My gosh…

Murphy: something else?

DeFranco: I can't even remember when we first played together.

Joyce: It was that club in London. Ronnie Scott's.

DeFranco: The first time?

Joyce: Ronnie Scott's.

DeFranco: That's right, it was Ronnie Scott's. Ronnie Scott's. Was a great jazz player, I don't know if you're familiar with Ronnie Scott. Had a nice club there, and Terry and I were booked separately, and it was Ronnie Scott who said, "why don't you guys play together, play one or two numbers at the end of the set together?" And we did, and it was instant, instant and people just reacted that, and we did, we felt so good and we both simultaneously said, "this has got to be a group. Let's try to…

[AUDIO RECORDER STOPPED AND RESTARTED]

…record it, and we did, we've done several recordings together over the years. And Terry is a delight to be with because he's really off the wall most of the time; he's a silly guy. In fact, when we're taking pictures I always say, "Say something funny, Terry Gibbs" so he would smile. He was one of the great innovators in modern jazz also. He followed Lionel Hampton and he preceded Milt Jackson by a few inches, few seconds in the modern jazz idiom. And he was responsible for, in many ways, for the popularity of the vibraphone in modern jazz, and he still is.

Murphy: You two have extremely different personalities, but clearly that must have been, they must have been complimentary?

DeFranco: It was, we offset each other. He would say something and I would say, "Yes."

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: The way it worked out, it was good. [laughter]

Murphy: That always works really well. [laughter] He described it to me as a marriage, that doesn't sound like, is that how marriage works?

DeFranco: Yeah, it was kind of a marriage, I guess, I don't know. But it worked, it worked musically especially, we had a lot of fun. We did several good CDs.

Murphy: Yeah, you made a lot of recordings together.

DeFranco: A lot of recordings, yeah.

Murphy: And was there ever any conflict between who was leading? I mean you were really co-leaders, weren't you?

DeFranco: No, Terry, there was no conflict, Terry was the leader. [laughter] I know, I mean, it's…

Murphy: Ok, that clarifies it.

DeFranco: Yeah, he did most of the programming simply because I was willing to get off the hook and have him do it because I trusted his judgment. And occasionally, if I felt it was not so good I'd throw in my two cents, I'd say, "Well, how about this? How about that?" And he'd concede, you know, we'd come to terms many times. And basically, easy to work with because it was, somehow it would always turn out to be a fun experience, silly, a lot of silly things and harmless, but silly. If you work with Terry long enough you'll understand his sick sense of humor, but it's a real good, you know, real funny guy, funny guy. A good example was we played London and it was Scotland, "Where did we have the wine tasting?"

Joyce: Scotland.

DeFranco: It was Scotland?

Murphy: Uh oh.

DeFranco: Fine restaurant in Scotland, and the waiter came and the waiter was a little more dignified than most typical, the waiter that you see in the movies, you know. He came and he brought the wine and he had the keys to the wine cellar, he brought this vintage wine and poured it to Terry, in Terry's glass, and Terry smelled it and…

Murphy: Swished it.

DeFranco:…swished it and then he drank it and he [spit sound], spit it out, he says, "That's the worst wine!" That poor guy, that poor guy went into shock and all the people in the restaurant. And he says, "I always wanted to do that!" [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] Sounds like a fun twenty years.

DeFranco: Yeah, you know, harmless stuff really. He had a sense of humor like Jackie Mason, that bordered on the Jewish sense of humor, which now has become out of sink with the world and all that and people get a little too. But it was very common for us to say something that had a Jewish slant or an Italian slant; we were, that was my background, you know. I used to quote my grandfather all the time and it was fun, you can't do that too much now. You've got to watch what you're saying. I get; in fact, I've gotten so disturbed and fed up with politically correct stuff, disappointed, you've got to say, "Well, come on now, loosen up a bit."

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: You don't have to be insulting, there's some things that really are funny about both areas, or all different areas.

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: If you don't have humor too, in this business, you're going to be finished. You'll wind up very sick or you won't last, you've got to have a sense of humor.

Murphy: Right, you talked about the one kid who came on the bus for one night, with the Glen Miller Orchestra and didn't even make it to the.

DeFranco: Didn't even make it to the first job. No, he was in Connecticut somewhere, New England some place and his family brought him to the club that we were playing, the place that we were playing, and he sat it. It was kind of an audition, and he was a fine player and I said, "You have the job." And he went back and packed his bag and he got on the bus with the guitar and bags and we traveled all night to New York. Of course, the animals in the group got a hold of him, and that happens, too, you know. The new comer on the bus, its sort of initiation. And we got into…

Murphy: Drinking, right? They made him drink, drink, drink.

DeFranco: Yeah, a little. Yeah, they got him drunk, kind of, I guess, sick. We got to the hotel and he got off the bus and he said to me, "I can't do this." And he never played the first night, he went home.

Murphy: Imagine how he would have felt in Tommy Dorsey's organization.

DeFranco: Oh, boy. Well, Tommy Dorsey, somebody, we were in a train one time, a young fellow that played, a young fellow I think he was a trumpet player. Tommy was telling jokes, and when Tommy told a joke it was on cue, everybody would laugh on cue, naturally. He'd tell a joke and everybody, "Yeah!" And this stupid kid decided to tell a joke. "I have one." And Tommy says, "Oh, you do, huh?" Ok, and he told this joke and he stammered and it flopped, it was terrible, nobody laughed. And Tommy said, "Ha-ha-

ha, very funny. Tell you what you do. Get your stuff together and get off at the next station, you're through."

Murphy: And fired him?

DeFranco: And fired him.

Murphy: Ah! Poor guy.

DeFranco: Poor guy, you know.

Murphy: A mother never wants to hear a story like that.

DeFranco: Oh, no, no. But that was the nasty side of Tommy, but he had both sides. You know, I got sick in Florida one time, went into the hospital with a bad throat and a lot of problems. And he sent his doctor from New York to take care of me. And after a week in the hospital I never saw a doctor's bill or a hospital bill, and I got paid. So that was the other side of Tommy Dorsey.

Murphy: That's pretty remarkable.

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: Someone else we haven't really talked about too much is Artie.
DeFranco: Artie Shaw?

Murphy: Yeah, not only an idol of yours but a life-long friend.

DeFranco: Not a life-long, we became friends later in my life and his life and mainly because, I guess, I didn't quite understand him on a personal level. He had such an ego it was incredible. And after meeting Artie for several times I realized, when you meet Artie Shaw he does the talking and you listen. Otherwise you're not going to have a sensible visit. However, when he did speak he made a lot of sense and he was well read, a real intellect. And after awhile you got to understand Artie and his warm side, he had a really good part of him; a good warm side that nobody, or few people ever saw or understood. Then we got kind of close, you know, he never did quite understand what I was doing with the clarinet, or didn't want to. He honestly thought that the way he played was the end of the, was it, was it! That's it! That's the way you should play jazz on the clarinet, the way he did it…

Murphy: Was it frustrating for you?

DeFranco: He was close to being right. He was close to being right, but not totally, see because he did marvelous stuff.

Murphy: Was it frustrating for you not to have that…

DeFranco: Acceptance?

Murphy: Yeah, recognition from him.

DeFranco: No, no because when you see a guy like that who has so much, a true intellect, a brilliant guy, and head and shoulders above most people in the business musically. And at one point the clarinetist in jazz at one point there, in spite of all the guys playing, Benny Goodman and myself, he was number one. In fact, I have often said, instead of trying to deviate from what he did, which was a mistake; his later recordings show that, if he had stayed on his…[microphone interruption] I beg your pardon. If he had stayed on his track, his way of playing and developed that, he would still be the number one guy in modern jazz, he had that much ability. I don't know, even Benny tried to get into the bebop expression and it didn't work, didn't work.

Murphy: So when did you get to know Artie? When did you first meet Artie and when did you actually get to know him better?

DeFranco: Well, I first met him [coughs], excuse me. I first met him many years, through the years, and most of the meetings were perfunctory. "How you doing?" "Hello." "Hello." But it wasn't until I played out in California that Artie actually came to see me, to perform in San Diego, or someplace else.

Joyce: That's right, with Rob Pronk.

DeFranco: With Rob Pronk, right.

Murphy: So when was that?

DeFranco: [sigh, whistle] When was that? It's got to be thirty years ago. Huh?

Joyce: Twenty?.

DeFranco: Maybe twenty years ago. There again, I did a CD, when we released the CD, where by I did it all this music on the CD with a great music in Holland, Hilversum, Holland. And the orchestrator and arranger, and conductor, also a pianist, great conductor, great orchestrator; Rob Pronk wrote all the stuff. We were scheduled to do three or four of those selections from one of my albums in San Diego at a festival.

Joyce: Rob Pronk came over.

DeFranco: Yeah, Rob came. But do you remember…

Joyce: He conducted.

DeFranco: Whose festival was it? Do you remember? I can't remember. Anyways…

Joyce: Radio station in Long Beach.

DeFranco: Yeah, Long Beach…

Joyce: It was KLON.

DeFranco: Yeah, that's right KLON and they brought Rob Pronk into conduct three or four things with me and the rest of his music. And Artie came from Thousand Oaks area, with a friend drove down to hear me play and we got kind of friendly then.

Murphy: How amazing, and did he just come up after the concert and say…

DeFranco: Yeah, yeah.

Joyce: Before and after.

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: "How you doing?"

DeFranco: And we then sat down…

Murphy: "No one has seen me for awhile."

DeFranco:…in the dressing room. Yeah, we sat down in the dressing room and talked about things.

Murphy: Fascinating.

DeFranco: I asked him, of course, why he didn't play anymore.

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: And he said, "Well, I've had it, I've had it, I've had it with the business and I've had it. I don't want to play anymore." But he did pick up my clarinet and finger it. Remember that? He grabbed my clarinet and started…

Murphy: Wow, interesting.

DeFranco:…which told me that he wasn't…

Murphy: Done.

DeFranco:…he wanted to play. I felt he wanted to play again, and he should have, but he never did. Then we got, Joyce and I got friendly with him, and visited Artie at his house.

It was kind of the same area that I used to live, Thousand Oaks area. That was fascinating. And there I think we got close, as close as he would let anybody, he was very cautious about people.

Murphy: Was he still involved in music in so far as listening to a lot of music, enjoying music even if he wasn't playing?

DeFranco: Yes, he was, except that he rejected a lot of things that, rightly so in many ways, but he rejected a lot of the modern things that were going on. And he didn't quite understand, one time he said to me, "I don't know, I don't get why you, and this Eddie Daniels". He'd say, "This Eddie Daniels." "I don't understand what you're doing, what that's all about," he said. I could relate to what he was thinking, especially the way he played, he played from the standpoint of a heartfelt expression of music. And Eddie and I both play from a heart, semi-heartfelt expression of music [laughter], coupled with the technical wizardry.

Murphy: Talk a little about your Artie Shaw project, which I still don't understand how you did it. This is in 2001?

DeFranco: Yeah, it was my bright idea and I befriended a great musician, Tom Ranier in California. He does a lot of stuff on television and background things, and *Dancing with the Stars* program. Plus he's an excellent jazz pianist and he's a good clarinetist. And we played together a lot, especially in California, kind of hung out here and there. And I got the bright idea one time listening to Artie Shaw's records, that wouldn't it be neat if we could isolate Artie Shaw's solos from his recordings, take away the background and utilize those solos, like segments of each solo, to put back over background—prerecorded—of songs that Artie never played. So it would be like Artie playing solos on songs he never played.

Murphy: I still don't understand how you isolated his solos.

DeFranco: Well, you know, electronically wipe away the background.

Murphy: I know, but that's hard to do if you don't have multi-track recordings to begin with, that's really hard to do.

DeFranco: Oh, it's very hard to do, that's why it was such. Yeah, you have to do it with a certain, with a certain device, electronic device that he has, and he has a lady friend who does this and she's helped him along with being able to just take out that clarinet sound and eliminate, for the most part, the background. And occasionally the background may fit what you're doing, may fit, and you use it, you can use it. We did one song…

Murphy: You just make the new background really loud and drown it out.

DeFranco: Yeah, no, it worked, it worked. We made *The Shadow of Your Smile* and we have Artie Shaw playing *The Shadow of Your Smile*, and he never played that.

Murphy: What did Artie think of the project?

DeFranco: Oh, he liked it. He liked the idea; in fact, I have a couple of letters from Artie about how. We were trying to go after money for this project, in fact, Mel Brooks contributed some doe and a few people helped me out with it, helped us out with it. But we could never get enough money to do this kind of a project. Just a few weeks ago I went to hear Eddie Daniels and Tom Ranier was playing with Eddie. And Tom said, "We got to do that, we got to finish the project." I hope to sometime, I would like to do that. There again, Eddie, Tom was such a genuine jazz musician that he paid his own airfare, his own transportation, to fly to New York to play with Eddie.

Murphy: That's dedication.

DeFranco: Yeah, dedication.

Murphy: Was Eddie playing when you were just there, just for IAJE?

DeFranco: Yeah, he was playing at the Iridium.

Murphy: I mean not IAJE. [laughter]

DeFranco: In fact, he dedicated two nights to me, you know.

Murphy: That's nice.

DeFranco: And Paquito came over and played.

Murphy: Where was he playing?

DeFranco: Iridium in New York.

Murphy: Oh, that's nice.

DeFranco: And Ronnie Aldrich came and played.

Murphy: Your disciples.

DeFranco: Yeah, my disciples. Well, I kind of take the credit for discovering, partially discovering, Eddie Daniels. That's when he was with the Thad Jones—Mel Lewis band. He's one of the best I've ever heard on it.

Murphy: You mentioned Ron Aldrich, who was one of your very few students. You haven't really taught many, you have chosen not to teach people.

DeFranco: No. I taught he and, for a short time, Steve Botek, who is a psychiatrist now and has been for several years, and a good clarinetist, he doesn't play that much anymore. But I taught Ronnie for almost a year.

Murphy: And why just those two guys? I'm sure you had a lot of people coming to you asking for lessons.

DeFranco: Yeah, those two guys stood out as having enough musical ability to make it worth my while [humorously].

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: Because the most frustrating thing is trying to teach somebody who doesn't have it, so I wouldn't do that. But Ronnie Aldrich, he's an amazing guy, he's written a fantastic book among other things, not really related to jazz or music. He's one of the best the best periodontists in the country, or in the world maybe, and he goes to Italy several times to lecture on periodontal achievements. And he's an excellent clarinet player.

Murphy: And he treats all the musicians, doesn't he, in New York?

DeFranco: He treats many musicians and he saved many musicians' teeth, including mine.

Murphy: So those were your two students and for the rest of the people you wrote *Hand-in-Hand with Hannon*.

DeFranco: Well, yeah, that was a brainstorm of mine and it worked out pretty good, it turned out to be a good clarinet exercise book. And what I did was transcribed Hannon's exercise, about twelve of them, in every key for the clarinet. Turns out to be a good study for clarinetists. I get letters from time to time from a lot of excellent clarinetists that use that as a part of their studies.

Murphy: And was that something that you had done yourself as your practice routine and then decided to…

DeFranco: And I decided, yeah, I decided to write it.

Murphy:…formally notate it?

DeFranco: Right, and I still use it; I use it now when I practice.

Murphy: When you practice, so take me through a typical practice session. Do you do exercise plus play?

DeFranco: Yeah, the fundamentals first, got to be the fundamentals. And that goes as far back as what they called, what was the *Klose*, standard *Klose Clarinet Method*. Scales in

all keys and arpeggios in all keys, and then I gravitate toward the Hannon exercises in all keys for the clarinet. Some of the other things, like Vade-Mecum studies for clarinet, which are excellent, and that takes about three hours to go through that whole thing. Then if I don't have, or I'm not going to play with a group that week or whenever, I use Jamey Aebersold's background things to play jazz because he has tailor made rhythm sections for jazz players. So you can play a lot of the standard, or some of the guys' original pieces using that. And that about wrap-ups my whole study routine for a whole day, that would take about three and a half hours, maybe four. And when I was really going full swing that's what I would do. Now, as I say, I'm just starting again and I'm in hour and fifteen minutes now, just about.

Murphy: Was it frustrating to pick up the clarinet after two, three months of not playing regularly?

DeFranco: Yeah, oh yeah, sure.

Murphy: Did you feel rusty?

DeFranco: But it was easier than I thought it would be. Not as difficult as I thought, but frustrating because naturally when you're used to just zipping along merrily, and when you start again not so merrily, yeah, its frustrating.

Murphy: Well, physical ailments are, you know, they're really terrifying for a musician, they can be career ending.

DeFranco: Could be.

Murphy: I remember you had a problem for a while with your ear ringing.

DeFranco: They still ring.

Murphy: They still do?!

DeFranco: Oh yeah, I live with that, that's…

Murphy: Both ears?

DeFranco:…tinnitus. I live with that, sure. But I've learned to put it in the background. And I'm fortunate it that it's not a note, there's not a note there involved. I think maybe if it was a note or two notes it might be problematic, but it's not, it's a hiss. It's always there, but I've learned to shove that in the background and play.

Murphy: Nobody knows what causes it; nobody knows how to get rid of it?

DeFranco: No, not really, I've tried everything, I've spoken to a lot of doctors. They really don't, there's no cure for that. And sometimes the hiss is louder than the band I'm

working with, sometimes, you know, it gets old, but not that often. And I spoke to one doctor some years ago who was pretty familiar with music and jazz and he said, "Who was your drummer?" [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter]

DeFranco: And I said, "Art Blakey." And he said, "Go get him. He's the guy." And you know he might be right because I realize now that for many years I'd stand and play in front of the drummer. I shouldn't have, but I did. I might have like the idea of the beat and the feeling if he's a good drummer, I liked, you know. Stand in front of Jeff Hamilton or somebody like that, or even those days Art Blakey. But I shouldn't have because the sound of the drums and the cymbals, they wash over you. And it might have started that. Also, many years ago with my cousin I went, Joyce and I went to, fountain in the woods and I shot of some pistols and one shot from a twenty-two did something to my ear.

Murphy: Wow.

DeFranco: But then it went away and then all of a sudden it started coming back, that ringing.

Murphy: You know Rudy Van Gelder won't wear headphones ever because he's worried about what that might do to his hearing.

DeFranco: I think it could, he might be right, yeah.

Murphy: Which, I mean you think of a recording engineer, I think of…

DeFranco: That's what they do.

Murphy:…that's all, you know, that is the vision of a recording engineer, but he said he hasn't worn headphones for, I don't know, thirty years.

DeFranco: Well, he's proved that you don't need them, eh?

Murphy: Yep.

DeFranco: He's done a great job.

Murphy: And one other thing that you had a problem with was trigger finger. What is?

DeFranco: Yeah, this finger, trigger finger, it still clicks a little bit.

Murphy: What happens, does it get, it just gets locked into place?

DeFranco: I got a, yeah, sometimes I'd wake up and it would be locked and I'd have to pull it out. I got an injection of cortisone--wasn't it cortisone—yeah, cortisone and in a

few weeks it went away. Even now I wake up and it sticks a little bit but then after a short while it's gone, so that worked out ok. I'm fighting the battle now with this jaw and my eyes, and I have double vision.

Murphy: Double vision?

DeFranco: Double vision, that's why I wear these glasses, they have prisms on both sides to bring my eyes in focus, closer together. Its been seriously bad the past few weeks but I've got these glasses and they may help train my eyes because now I see both of you. [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] I hope they look good.

DeFranco: How are you both? [humorously] So that's kind of a problem except that in a sick way I always say, "If I read music I can play twice as fast." [laughter]

Murphy: Right. [laughter] Well, that's tough. "Getting old is not for the weak," someone once told me.

DeFranco: It's ridiculous, it really is ridiculous. Who ever made that thing up; it doesn't make any sense. I hate to blame it on God—what do I know about God, you know—but it doesn't make any sense. You're supposed to really get better over the years; stronger and better.

Murphy: Wiser.

DeFranco: [laughter] Wiser. Yeah, there we go again, when you're young you know it all, you know everything, and that diminishes to the point that you're really frustrated because…

[AUDIO RECORDER STOPPED AND RESTARTED]

DeFranco:…you say to yourself, "Don't I know anything?"

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: "Anything, give me something to hang onto."

Murphy: You go back to the big bang theory.

DeFranco: Big bang theory.

Murphy: Try to figure that out.

DeFranco: Yeah, right.

[Background (Kimery): Here we go.]

Murphy: So one thing that we haven't really covered is your instruments and you've changed instruments a little bit over the years but you said not very much.

DeFranco: No, when I consider compared to other clarinetists, I stayed with the same instrument for many years, through the years. For instance, the first actual decent clarinet I played on was a Selmer and I kind of oscillated between that and Buffet for some years. And I got a hold of a, mainly because of Artie Shaw again, a BT—Balanced Tone Selmer—and I used that for many years.

And then I did some clinic and ran into Vito Pascucci; Vito Pascucci brought the LeBlanc clarinet to the United State from France. There's an interesting guy, he would be, it would be incredible to interview somebody like that, Vito Pascucci, because he went to France, to Paris and he was originally in the service with the Glenn Miller Orchestra, he was a technician and repaired instruments and all that, a clarinet player. And he went to Paris and befriended the LeBlanc family, although he didn't speak French and they didn't speak English, but somehow he convinced them that he should take some of those clarinets to the United States. And he started at his home in Kenosha, Wisconsin with a few LeBlanc clarinets. And from that point on built the LeBlanc name and clarinet in the United States to gigantic proportions.

So I played, they were developing a new model of LeBlanc, which I liked, it has some better features than the ones I'd been playing, so I played LeBlanc for many years—many, many years. They sponsored a lot of clinics that I did, too, and it was easy because I liked the instrument I was playing so I could easily say here to the students, "Here's what I play." And over the years Yamaha came into the picture and they started developing clarinets and they brought some of their nice clarinets to the United States.

After maybe thirty years, I guess, that I played LeBlanc, I've tried the Yamaha and I liked it very much and it had some features that mine didn't at the time, and been playing Yamaha for maybe thirty years also, from that point on. Its funny, you know, I used to get some funny inquires about Yamaha in the very beginning because they were really not, I didn't know this, but they were a piano company first and then they got into the vehicles and then other instruments, and they now make top line instruments, marvelous. And they managed to over the years brain pick all the top clarinetists and clarinet players and clarinet companies and they've put together a fine instrument. But I used to get some funny inquires about playing Yamaha in the beginning, you know, "What mileage do you get on your clarinet?" But its been thirty some years and that was it.

Murphy: You know what I didn't ask you about was your first clarinet.

DeFranco: My first clarinet was a strange; well my dad was poor, of course. In fact, he spent the rent money for my clarinet and my uncle wouldn't speak to him for months because he did that; such an outrageous thing, spend rent money for a clarinet. And the clarinet was combination of a wooden top and a hard rubber bottom.

Murphy: Where did he get it?

DeFranco: At a pawnshop, a pawnshop that dealt with musical instruments. And my teacher at the time came over and helped out and picked out an instrument. I think it was thirty dollars or some minimal amount. One time I was, I picked up, it was a hard rubber bottom to it, and I picked it up and I was shaking out the saliva, I dropped the clarinet and broke the joint on the bottom. And I tried, my brother and I tried to hide it from my father, we tried to heat this hard rubber to glue together to stick together and it wouldn't go and what a ridiculous thing. But finally I told my dad about it and we went to a repairman and he managed to fix, to screw on a little joint part that holds the bell and I used that until we could afford a real clarinet, one whole clarinet that I think that was a Selmer. But the first one was just a strange mongrel.

Murphy: Well, amazing to have, you know, a parent with such dedication…

DeFranco: Yeah, he was…

Murphy:…when your child is that young to have some vision and actually put some hard earned money into it.

DeFranco: Yeah, I always appreciated it. Not only that, my dad was an unusual person, very kind man and tried his best to keep all of us somewhat stable. And I think we're fortunate, not one of us went off the track, we still held some values and kept somewhat of a normal life, all of us, through the years.

Murphy: Just for documenting purposes, what were your parents' full names?

DeFranco: Leonard was my dad's name, Leonard DeFranco, and my mom was Louise Giordano, and her family was from Calabria, her parents. My dad's parents were from Foggia, which is kind of central Italy. I don't know how my grandparents got together at all or where they met, but they somehow got to the United States. One of my uncles was born in Italy; he was about a year old when my grandparents came to the United States and settled by mistake in Philadelphia. They were originally going to go to New York and something went wrong and they found Philadelphia and managed to settle in South Philadelphia. So it's a combination of Calabria—they call it Calabrese—and Foggia, Foggian.

Murphy: And your mother's parents also lived in the U.S?

DeFranco: My mother's parents…

Murphy: So both sets, did you grow up being close to both sets of grandparents?

DeFranco: No.

Murphy: No.

DeFranco: Mostly my dad's parents. In fact, that's where I lived at their house for so long. Although we, you know, spent some time with my mother's parents, but I never got to really know them.

Murphy: Were they also in Philly?

DeFranco: No. They were in Philly for a while, but I think they went to New Jersey, but I lost track of them.

Murphy: Last night you mentioned that your grandfather made wine.

DeFranco: He made his own wine; there again, they used to call it "Diego Red." It was rough stuff and once a year he'd have the wine company, the grapes in boxes shoved in the bottom into the cellar from the outside from the street. And he had a couple barrels and he had a wine press, and he'd press the grapes and make this wine. Put it in the barrels and age the wine. He did a pretty good job and he made good wine, except that it was very strong. I mentioned that I got stoned, out of it on it. But that was a ritual once a year with him; he was quite a colorful character. I still, I find myself imitating him. In fact, a good friend of mine the other day said he did same thing, finding himself imitating his grandfather of all things, saying the same things.

Murphy: What kinds of things?

DeFranco: Well, I think I mentioned before that he had funny sayings about, "What have you got in the pocket" is one. He liked Benny Goodman, my grandfather liked Benny Goodman, and every time I come back he knew that there was somehow being a comparison in the music business and he'd say to me, "Hey boy, I heard you play. Are you here Benny Good-a-one." "What's a matter when an will you play, you hear Benny Good-a-one he plays?" [laughter] Benny Good-a-one. And he was a funny character when it came to the religion too; I guess I followed in his footsteps.

He was not antireligious but there was a portion of the whole religious experience that he simply wouldn't accept, and I followed suit in my life. And there again, at the expense of sounding antisocial or not politically correct, the priests in those days they worked on getting as much money as they could from this poor people in the neighborhood and they would come for collections before Christmas, before Easter, they would come to the house for the annual, or whatever it is, collections. And they would come in and my aunt would greet them, the priest, and my grandfather would be in the kitchen and he knew that the priest was in the living room and he'd yell at the top of his lungs, "Go to work like I work! Get a job! What do you come for money; we don't have money to give you, got to work, get a job! You're driving a car, I don't drive a car!" And she would, my aunt would say, "Don't pay attention to him he doesn't know what he's saying." And my grandfather says, "I know what I'm saying!" Which was hilarious, you know.

But I kind of got some of that attitude generally toward religion, organized religion, from him I guess, its comical but so much truth in it. And of course, the crushing thing with my parents when the priest wouldn't accept the fact that my mom should not have another child, they wouldn't accept it, and to me that was so stubborn and so wrong. She was so Catholic that she did whatever the priest said, that was it that was law. That soured me on religion from that point on.

Murphy: How long did she live?

DeFranco: She lived in her forties, in her late forties, I guess, maybe early fifties, but I don't think.

Murphy: So did you see her after?

DeFranco: We used to go and see her, and when I say we, my aunt would take my brother and I out to Byberry in the state hospital. She didn't know us; she didn't know anyone or anything and sometimes we would sit there for two hours while she stared into space not acknowledging anyone or anything. She was completely oblivious to anything happening.

Murphy: Was she medicated? Do you think that?

DeFranco: No, not so much, it was her condition she was schizophrenic and withdrawn. She just totally blocked out the world and it was so hard and there were some incidents there that would be funny if I weren't so tragic, it would make a great movie because one time my uncle came, my uncle Anthony. He was quite a guy he lived into his late nineties, mid-nineties, or ninety-six anyway. A veteran, a World War One veteran, and an unbelievable strength; walked through his nineties he would walk miles and fast, we never could walk with him. All of us, we'd walk with him and have to run to catch up, he was incredible he had so much strength through the years and a quick mind, a great mind.

We went to see my mother one time and she was just sitting there staring, and my two aunts were with us, and my uncle, and then we noticed a lady across the way at another table and chair looking at my uncle really seriously, I mean, she started mumbling and looking at him. I said to my uncle, "Don't look now but I think we got company, you know." My uncle said, "Yeah, I noticed, I noticed." And she was eating some kind of pudding or something. And then all of a sudden [spit noise] my uncle got it right in the face. [laughter] He said, "I knew it, I knew it." Which is ridiculous, you know, but that, I don't know who she thought he was, but he was not welcome.

Murphy: She did not like him.

DeFranco: That was a terrible tragic segment of my life because the state hospitals were so horrible.

Murphy: Yeah.

DeFranco: And they had so few people to take care of them and naturally the people that supposedly to take care of them were not competent really, and they would do outrageous things. They would tie them to the radiator heater to make them behave, you know, because they were out of hand a lot of them.

Murphy: Right.

DeFranco: There again, what could they do? They didn't have the necessary medication, which just started kind of later through my life, that they had the right medication to settle them down and treat them. Some of them got out of hand and those poor people had a lot of people on their hands to try to keep in shape, to keep in order. They resorted to a lot of nasty things.

Murphy: You know, I really think as a young person you dealt with a lot of things that, you know, many people never even experience in life, even adults…

DeFranco: Oh, yeah.

Murphy: And that's a lot for a kid to take on.

DeFranco: I think it is, it does two things; it does affect you in many ways adversely, but also you learn a lot. You have practical learning life experiences and if you're smart enough you can make some sense out of what happened. There again, you can learn to understand a lot of points of view and a lot of different people and reasoning for what they do. My point in time, I mean, I always say that a lot of people are impatient with people who are stupid. But if somebody is really stupid, can they help it? That is a fact. What can they do? That's the way it is, that's their concept. You can try to change them but it's to no avail, so the next thing is to try to accept them to some degree. A lot of times in the music business we have, the situation is that there are a lot of guys, a lot of musicians who are just simply not talented who are somehow making their way into the music business. Now, what do we do? When I say, "What do we do?" The ones who are professionals, sometimes they catch on, they get popular. We can't, you know, we can't be going out and be revolting. You accept it, that's it, that's the way they are. Can try and change it, of course, but…

Murphy: In talking about being an observer of people and, of course, not just, you know, in your childhood, but just encountering so many different audiences and traveling around the world, being on the road. One thing we haven't talked about is how you relate to your audiences. Is that important to you? When you're performing, are you aware of your audience and do they give you…

DeFranco: Oh, yeah, I'm aware of the audience. But in essence I really perform to the musicians that are out there. I zero in on the musicians because I know there is an immediate connection. If you make that connection the rest follows in and kind of develops and becomes a reaction from the people who really don't know what you're

doing and you see it, you can almost see it, it's almost obvious at times. If there are a group of musicians who hear you and they start applauding "Yeah!" You can see the people around them say, "Well, he says, yeah, ok, this guy is good." Although, you know they don't really know what you're doing, but they do react, they do react. So I try to play for the musician first, might sound idiotic but it works.

Murphy: How about when you're in a studio recording an album?

DeFranco: You still play for the musician; you play for the guys you're working with and you play for the musician whose not there. That gives you some confidence and you know that you're playing to somebody that can relate to what you're doing. Naturally what you play, you have to also impart a feeling, rhythmic or otherwise, a feeling. [phone rings in background] That's ok.

Murphy: Little pause. Well, you have been accused of emphasizing content throughout your career over commerciality and do you ever have any regrets about following that path?

DeFranco: Sure, only because you know that if you deliberately gravitated toward the commercial part of anything that you do that you're going to be more successful in terms of money. You want to get more money and you're going to be able to get more things and all that stuff. So in that way sometimes I considered it's unfair to my family to not be really commercial. But I feel also that if we get through and have a comfortable life, and Joyce has been great because she's been able to help with our living to a great extent, so we are comfortable. But I regret many times that I can't be like a lot of people who are gung ho for the commercial aspects in order to make it, to achieve stardom, or whatever that is.

Murphy: And when you say you can't be it just isn't in your bones.

DeFranco: It's not there, no, I'd be a big hypocrite. It just isn't there.

Murphy: What do you think about the state of jazz and jazz education today?

DeFranco: It's in pretty fairly healthy condition by comparison, say by comparing twenty or thirty years ago, it was almost nonexistent, almost. But there again, all those band directors through the years that kept at the big band and jazz as an important part of our lives and as an American art form helped us all survive, and so it grew. Now I hear more really good jazz players, young jazz players, than ever before not only in the United States but all over the world. In other countries you hear guys who are great players, great players.

Murphy: Who are some of the clarinetists that you are following? You mentioned Anat Cohen?

DeFranco: Anat Cohen is an excellent player, yes, and Paquito D'Rivera, and Eddie Daniels, and Ronnie Aldrich, and Ken Peplowski. There are a lot of guys and girls who are playing well, as opposed to say thirty-five years they were not known. That goes for all the instruments; there are some trumpet players and drummers, and pianists that I've heard young guys who are excellent now, more so than before. So it's a pretty healthy business, it's not like the rock business or commercial business, but it's pretty healthy.

Murphy: And you sit back as the father of bebop clarinet…

DeFranco: The father. [laughter]

Murphy:…and they all come to you. How does it feel to be in the position of being, you know, the NEA Jazz Master? And, you know, actually to attend an event, such as you attended a couple of weeks ago, where you are in New York surrounded by a lot of the statesmen of jazz. Is that something that is enjoyable?

DeFranco: Yeah, positively, really gratifying, you know, because no one likes to be ignored and when you are accepted like that for what you do in the business, very gratifying. And fortunately, it doesn't make you smug, it makes you like the idea but also gives you some imponents to continue what you are doing. So it's a good feeling to be recognized as such. And then those people that booed in Paris don't mean a thing. Right? Who cares? Here I am.

Murphy: I keep looking at your coffee cup. [laughter]

DeFranco: [laughter] You like it?

Murphy: "Old musicians never die, they just…"

DeFranco: "Decompose." [laughter]

Murphy: [laughter] That's very fitting, good. Well, thank you. Are there any other things that anybody else would like to talk about?

DeFranco: I can't, I'll probably think of a million things, you know, when we finish.

Murphy: You can call it in.

DeFranco: I'll call it in, yeah. Molly, thank you very much. Ken, thank you, you're here, but you're not in the picture.

Murphy: Not in the picture. And thank you Joyce for participating and giving all these…

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy:…answers to the test questions to Buddy.

DeFranco: Tough questions is right.

Murphy: She's not on camera, she's not on mike, but she's so instrumental. [laughter]

DeFranco: And beautiful, "Sweet-baby" I call her. [laughter]

Murphy: Sweet-baby? [laughter]

DeFranco: Yeah.

Murphy: Thanks.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

(Transcribed an edited by Matt Buttermann)