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Funding for the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program NEA Jazz Master interview was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

**DOROTHY DONEGAN**  
**NEA Jazz Master (1992)**

**Interviewee:** Dorothy Donegan (April 6, 1922 – May 19, 1998)

**Interviewer:** Jeannie Cheatham with recording engineer and interviewer Matt Watson

**Date:** April 5-6, 1998, Beverly Hills, CA

**Repository:** Archives Center, National Museum of American History

**Description:** Transcript, 107 pp.

**Cheatham:** I'm here with Dorothy Donegan, my name is Jeannie Cheatham. This woman has been my idol for all these years and I finally get a chance to really talk to her about her life. Dorothy, the first thing I'd like to ask is where were you born and when?

**Donegan:** I was born in Cook County Hospital, Chicago, Illinois, April 6, 1922.

**Cheatham:** Where'd you go to school?

**Donegan:** I went to Willard School, DuSable, Chicago Musical College, Chicago Conservatory...oh, a lot of schools.

**Cheatham:** It sounds like it. I would like for you to tell us, who was your first influence when you were a little girl.

**Donegan:** Well, coming up, I had studied with Alfred Sims, he was my teacher. And then, I would get into fights with children. So, one day they chased me up three flights to Portia and Fredrika Goodlow's house. And they were pianists, I didn't know this. So I said, "Let me in because the kids want to beat me up." So they let me in. So they heard me play. They said, "Mama, she can play." They decided I should go downtown to Lillian Brown.

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**Cheatham:** So that was the way you started playing?

**Donegan:** Well, yes, of course I could play before I got to them, though.

**Cheatham:** Tell me your first instant at the piano when you recognized that that might be your instrument.

**Donegan:** I used to gig with the musicians, Roscoe Cotton (?)

**Cheatham:** I mean when you were a little girl...

**Donegan:** When I was eight years old, I could play all of Ellington, and I think I recognized it then.

**Cheatham:** I understand.

**Donegan:** And I used to stay with some of the drunk musicians who played very well like Raymond Walters and people like that. Sonny Thompson. And that I didn't know I would gorilla off of them (laughs).

**Cheatham:** Could you tell me, the first lesson you took, what did your mother pay your teacher?

**Donegan:** One dollar, that's all they got.

**Cheatham:** Very expensive.

**Donegan:** That was a lot of money in those days. But they took it. Alfred Sims was a good teacher, he had a lot of patience with me. But I would learn all he knew in about a year or two.

**Cheatham:** Yes. In some context, can you explain to people what one dollar meant? How much did one pound of sugar cost?

**Donegan:** I guess a pound of sugar cost a nickel. A dollar was worth three dollars now. 'Cause now if I get lessons I have to pay you \$75 or \$50. Of course, I don't get lessons, I get coached. "Do this," and "Do that." "Dorothy, a little bit more point."

**Cheatham:** Tell me one thing more. Did anybody in your family object to your practicing?

**Donegan:** No, except the neighbors downstairs, 'cause sometimes I'd be stomping and they could feel it underneath, you know. But nobody stopped me.

**Cheatham:** Did you have to put a sock on your foot?

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**Donegan:** No, I could stomp. Don Shelly (?) said, “That woman sure can stomp.”

**Cheatham:** Well, tell me, did you play in any orchestras when you went to school?

**Donegan:** I played in Roscoe Cotton’s band. But that didn’t last long. Because I think playing with a band was something Mary Lou Williams could do better than me.

**Cheatham:** Why?

**Donegan:** Well, I like to solo and that’s not good with a band. It’s better to accompany rather than solo. So, I’d be soloing and taking off by myself.

**Cheatham:** You were what you would call a diva.

**Donegan:** Oh yes. Yeah, I like to steal a show mostly.

**Cheatham:** Well, did your mother take you around to places to play when it came time for you to go into the nightclubs?

**Donegan:** Yeah, I was chaperoned by my mother and my brother. We’d play for fish fries and rent scuffles. The ladies sometimes couldn’t pay their rent so they’d give a party and sell fish sandwiches for 15 cents. Chicken (sandwiches) for the same. And that’s how they made their rent payments.

**Cheatham:** How about this—did you have special dresses even then to perform in?

**Donegan:** No, my mother would get me a pretty good dress, you know. Then, you could get a whole outfit for \$15.

**Cheatham:** Even the shoes?

**Donegan:** Yeah, the shoes were \$2 or \$3. We’d go to Rothschild’s. I didn’t know a thing about Neiman Marcus, ‘needless markups.’”

**Cheatham:** Tell me one thing more, when did you get your first pair of long hose to wear on stage? What year was it?

**Donegan:** Oh my goodness, I guess in the 40’s when I played Orchestra Hall. I played that all by myself and sold it out.

**Cheatham:** That’s when you got your first pair of long stockings?

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**Donegan:** I guess I was wearing them before then. I'd steal a pair of my mother's, you know.

**Cheatham:** Did you have to get a color for yourself, or was it hard to find the correct color during those times?

**Donegan:** No, I could find a color. They were all beige you know.

**Cheatham:** Yes. Did you have to dye them with tea?

**Donegan:** No, not then.

**Cheatham:** Not then?

**Donegan:** I also liked to wear black stockings but that came at a later time.

**Cheatham:** Yes. When you first started playing in nightclubs, did they have the separate dressing room for the lady performers?

**Donegan:** I think so. We had separate dressing rooms for the lady performers.

**Cheatham:** Did you have to dress in there with the dancers?

**Donegan:** Yeah, I dressed with the dancers. They used to say, "Now we have jazz in the house." I said, "Now you have talent in the house." (both laugh)

**Cheatham:** Yes. Can you tell me, some of the dressing rooms that you had when you first started playing. Did you ever have to dress in the basement or where they kept the liquor?

**Donegan:** At Elmer's, I dressed upstairs with the liquor bottles because they didn't want blacks to come in. So I'd go upstairs and dress with the liquor bottles. That was our dressing room. It was on State Street.

**Cheatham:** I can relate to that. Did you play with Red Saunders? I think I read somewhere where you had a chance to perform at the same time Red Saunders...

**Donegan:** Well, he'd give me some gigs you know. And I remember once, one of the ladies said, "Miss Donegan, you're very democratic, you're hiring a white man." I said, "No, he's been passing for colored for many years." (laughs) You're talking about Red Saunders, an oreo.

**Cheatham:** Yes. So, when did you leave the Chicago area? Did you go alone or with a band?

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**Donegan:** I left the Chicago area in 1944. I got a chance to do a picture with Cab Calloway called "Sensations of 45" and my mother went with me.

**Cheatham:** Where was that?

**Donegan:** We went to Hollywood.

**Cheatham:** Did you go by plane, train?

**Donegan:** We went by the Super Chief—it was a train, kind of exclusive you know.

**Cheatham:** Yes. Did they pay your way there?

**Donegan:** Uh-huh. They paid our way there and gave me I think \$3000 a week. Course I should have taken the MGM deal which was \$750 for seven years.

**Cheatham:** Oh, what happened?

**Donegan:** Well, the greedy manager took the three and the picture didn't last but one and half weeks.

**Cheatham:** What was his name?

**Donegan:** I call him Corkscrew Gervish.

**Cheatham:** Why did you call him Corkscrew Gervish?

**Donegan:** Well, they say he was kind of crooked.

**Cheatham:** He was crooked, huh?

**Donegan:** Yeah, he was crooked.

**Cheatham:** What percentage did he take during those times?

**Donegan:** Well, they would always say they would take 10, but they always thought 10% of a dollar was 60 cents.

**Cheatham:** I remember.

**Donegan:** It's still that way. They take a commission off the top and one off the bottom.

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**Cheatham:** When you arrived in Hollywood, did they put you in a special hotel, could you stay in the hotels or did they put you in a rooming house?

**Donegan:** No, I stayed with the Shacklefords, someone's personal home.

**Cheatham:** And you stayed there how long?

**Donegan:** We stayed there about four or five weeks.

**Cheatham:** Do you have a print of the movie?

**Donegan:** It's easy to get. Eleanor Powell, Cab, Woody Herman and Sophie Tucker. It was a circus. And Gene Rodgers and I played against each other. He was a very good pianist. Cab was directing and shaking his hair.

**Cheatham:** He always shook his hair?

**Donegan:** Oh yeah, sometimes it wouldn't shake because he'd put some grease on it (both laugh).

**Cheatham:** Did you meet your first husband out there?

**Donegan:** Yes, I met him in San Francisco. I met his sister first. I was going out with some of the AKA's and so she introduced me to Helen Wright. Helen Wright wanted me to meet her brother. So I met him in San Francisco.

**Cheatham:** Was it love at first sight?

**Donegan:** No. But as he gave me more things, I fell in love.

**Cheatham:** You fell in love or you fell in like?

**Donegan:** Both. The more you give me, the more I like you (both laugh).

**Cheatham:** So was it a big wedding or did you get married at City Hall?

**Donegan:** I took him down to City Hall. He was living in a place, so I moved in with him. You know, show women are always moving in with somebody.

**Cheatham:** Yes, that's true. So, how long did you stay with this man?

**Donegan:** We were together 15 years, off and on.

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**Cheatham:** That's amazing.

**Donegan:** Yeah, for me. 'Cause I get tired.

**Cheatham:** You stayed right in San Francisco all this time?

**Donegan:** No, we lived in Los Angeles.

**Cheatham:** Can you tell me something—did he want to travel with you or did he try to make you stay home and miss gigs?

**Donegan:** I don't think he wanted to travel unless he had to, 'cause he likes to stay around L.A. Whatever action he had before me, I guess he still kept.

**Cheatham:** What did he do for a living?

**Donegan:** As little as possible.

**Cheatham:** So when you told him you were pregnant, what did he say?

**Donegan:** "I didn't tell you to have that brat." I said, "Well, you got it."

**Cheatham:** He didn't want the baby?

**Donegan:** Hmm-mm (no). But the "brat" is a genius.

**Cheatham:** A genius, eh? Did you have a very hard labor?

**Donegan:** I thought so. Those nuns were pulling my hair, 'cause I was about to climb off the table.

**Cheatham:** Pulling your hair?

**Donegan:** Yeah, to make me get back on the table.

**Cheatham:** Dorothy, you were still performing. How long did it take you to have labor?

**Donegan:** Oh, about eight hours or so.

**Cheatham:** That short.

**Donegan:** Yeah

**Cheatham:** What did you say after you had that one?

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**Donegan:** I don't want no more.

**Cheatham:** But you did, right?

**Donegan:** One more. One bad one.

**Cheatham:** Well don't...

**Donegan:** He'd steal shortening out of gingerbread.

**Cheatham:** Steal shortening out of gingerbread? I'll tell you, I'd like to know who was the second husband.

**Donegan:** Oh my God, his name was Bill Miles and he was spoiled. He was a mama's boy. So, he married me for my money and I married him for his. We both got fooled.

**Cheatham:** Really? So how long did you stay with this one and which one was the most handsome?

**Donegan:** Both. I always went for handsome men and they usually no good. You should get somebody not so handsome. My mama said, "Why don't you get somebody that likes you for a change?"

**Cheatham:** So, what did he do for a living?

**Donegan:** Well, this one was into numbers. But he should have been writing them instead of booking them.

**Cheatham:** Too many people hit him?

**Donegan:** Oh yeah. A lot of times he'd say they were hitting and they hadn't.

**Cheatham:** Oh my goodness. So tell me, when you got your divorce, did you have to go to court then?

**Donegan:** I went to court.

**Cheatham:** I imagine the judge really believed you, right?

**Donegan:** No, he didn't. He said, "She makes more money than you." Men stick together usually.

**Cheatham:** You think that's what happened?

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**Donegan:** Uh huh, 'cause I could hardly get \$10 a week alimony.

**Cheatham:** You mean the judge gave you \$10 a week alimony?

**Donegan:** Yeah, and then he didn't pay it.

**Cheatham:** How about child support?

**Donegan:** Nothing. I didn't get nothing. I think his brother-in-law was a lawyer so he was able to do better than me.

**Cheatham:** Yes. How about the third husband?

**Donegan:** The third husband was around 80 years old. He owned a lot of property.

**Cheatham:** Was he more your mental equal?

**Donegan:** No, I thought he had more money than he did. He had to pay his wife \$700 a month. I just married him 'cause I didn't have any gigs.

**Cheatham:** I can understand. Whenever you would not have gigs, you would get restless.

**Donegan:** Or to get married.

**Cheatham:** You would get married, not restless.

**Donegan:** Well, I guess that's a form of restlessness.

**Cheatham:** Yes. Could you tell me, who kept your children while you were on the road?

**Donegan:** All different people.

**Cheatham:** Like who?

**Donegan:** My mother, some cousins. But I found out, if you're going to have children, you should keep them yourself.

**Cheatham:** Amen. So, the children, when you came off the road, were they glad to see you or were they resentful?

**Donegan:** They were glad.

**Cheatham:** They were glad.

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**Donegan:** And John T's son was staying with the Wrights, they were very wealthy, his brother-in-law and sister-in-law, the ones who introduced John T to me. He went to school with the Jacksons, you know.

**Cheatham:** When you had to leave them, how did you feel?

**Donegan:** Very bad. 'Cause they didn't deserve that. I shouldn't have had no children.

**Cheatham:** You're almost like a split person.

**Donegan:** You can't be in two places at the same time.

**Cheatham:** But you want to.

**Donegan:** You have to earn a living if you don't have a husband.

**Cheatham:** Yes. I know a lot of show women have this same major problem, even now, that was not just the '40's. So, how did you resolve it? When they had their high school prom and graduation, did you go to their graduation?

**Donegan:** Well, a lot of times I'd be away when they were graduating. And the second child, I don't remember him graduating. When he got 18, they threw him out of high school.

**Cheatham:** But I tell you, did you kind of have a family on the road when ....

**Donegan:** They'd go on the road with me. The young one went with me to Yugoslavia. And he acted so bad, they said, "Either you go or he goes."

**Cheatham:** Is that so?

**Donegan:** Uh-huh. And he went back to America from Yugoslavia, he was just that smart.

**Cheatham:** Did you make a family out of the musicians and the dancers while you were performing?

**Donegan:** I don't think so.

**Cheatham:** You were just a loner?

**Donegan:** Yeah. You play and go home.

**Cheatham:** Did you have a hobby on the road?

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**Donegan:** No.

**Cheatham:** What did you do when you went back to your hotel?

**Donegan:** Nothing.

**Cheatham:** Sleep?

**Donegan:** Yeah, I'm a sleeper.

**Cheatham:** You didn't like to play cards or anything like that?

**Donegan:** Uh-uhh.

**Cheatham:** But your folks did. Didn't your father like to play cards?

**Donegan:** Yeah, he liked to play cards. He'd hit the cards..."Hit the cards, Dummy...(you) don't beat it unless you got some aces." Things like that.

**Cheatham:** 'Cause I remember, my folks were the same way, they liked to play cards. Dirty Hearts?

**Donegan:** Oh, I love Dirty Hearts.

**Cheatham:** I knew you liked to play cards. Dirty Hearts, right?

**Donegan:** Mm-hmmm. Bridge, too.

**Cheatham:** Bridge, yes. Are you a good bridge player?

**Donegan:** I'm not using a book you know. I'm not using Culbertson or Scheinwold, but I guess sometimes I'm lucky and win.

**Cheatham:** Did you have a favorite color to wear on stage?

**Donegan:** I like black.

**Cheatham:** Really?

**Donegan:** Mm-hmmm.

**Cheatham:** Dramatic.

**Donegan:** It shows my skin tone better.

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**Cheatham:** I agree. In fact, the first time I saw you, you had on black.

**Donegan:** Yeah, I always had on a black dress.

**Cheatham:** Did you find it hard to get your clothes cleaned properly on the road?

**Donegan:** Yeah, you have to take them back to New York or Chicago or L.A.

**Cheatham:** So that meant you had to have a lot of clothes.

**Donegan:** That's right, 'cause they'd get funky.

**Cheatham:** So, did you figure out how to wear your clothes to advantage, in other words, did you have tops and bottoms that you changed around or did you have just one-piece dresses?

**Donegan:** I had two pieces, and one pieces.

**Cheatham:** Did you wash your own laundry in the hotel room?

**Donegan:** Yeah, I didn't have nothing to wash but bloomers.

**Cheatham:** That's correct.

**Donegan:** That's it.

**Cheatham:** Yes. Did you carry those little clothespins?

**Donegan:** No, I just put them on the top of the bathtub.

**Cheatham:** And let them dry.

**Donegan:** Mm-hmm.

**Cheatham:** I'd like to have you tell us a little more about your grandparents and where your roots came from.

**Donegan:** Well, my grandmother was an Indian and she had 13 children by my grandfather. He was a rascal. He was Irish. And she was very angry at him. He had had a baby by her sister. She missed him, though. She shot him.

**Cheatham:** She shot him?

**Donegan:** Yeah, but she didn't hit him.

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**Cheatham:** Oh (laughs). Where were they living?

**Donegan:** In Newton, Mississippi.

**Cheatham:** Newton, Mississippi. How close was that to Birmingham?

**Donegan:** I don't know but it's close to Jackson, Mississippi. Where are you from, Birmingham?

**Cheatham:** All my people are from Birmingham.

**Donegan:** Oh, that's good. Well, you got to be from someplace.

**Cheatham:** So where was your mother and father from?

**Donegan:** Mother was from Newton. She was pretty. And my father was from Huntsville, Alabama. He was a chef cook.

**Watson:** What were their names?

**Donegan:** Mother's name was Ella Baker Day. My father was Donazell Hogan Donegan.

**Watson:** And, how about your grandparents' names?

**Donegan:** My grandmother was named Veenie Day, she was a Willis, I think. And her husband was Matt Day.

**Cheatham:** So, what did your mother do for a living?

**Donegan:** She probably did domestic work. She used to work for the Jones Brothers.

**Cheatham:** Oh.

**Donegan:** You heard of them?

**Cheatham:** Yeah, they're from Buffalo, New York.

**Donegan:** Oh I didn't know that.

**Cheatham:** Yes.

**Donegan:** I think they paid her \$3 a day. They handled the numbers back in Chicago.

**Cheatham:** So, what did your grandfather do other than make children?

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**Donegan:** Make children, I guess. He didn't do much.

**Cheatham:** Did you have a farm or how did they make a living?

**Donegan:** I don't know. But they made it.

**Cheatham:** Do you look like them?

**Donegan:** No, he was very light, or white, yeah. And my grandmother was very, very dark, like a Indian. That's the way the white man and the colored woman are free.

**Cheatham:** How about your brother?

**Donegan:** My brother was nice-looking. He died about six years ago.

**Cheatham:** What was his name?

**Donegan:** Leon.

**Cheatham:** Was he younger?

**Donegan:** Younger. And he drank a lot of whiskey.

**Cheatham:** Ohhh. Did you have to babysit him?

**Donegan:** No. I told him there were three shifts making it.

**Cheatham:** So, you never had to babysit him.

**Donegan:** No.

**Cheatham:** What did you do at home, other than practice?

**Donegan:** Joe Williams said that's all I did. Joe Williams lived in the next building, you know. And he would sell newspapers on the corner.

**Cheatham:** Joe Williams, the blues singer?

**Donegan:** Yeah. He said, "That broad, all she did was practice."

**Watson:** How old was he when you knew him?

**Donegan:** He was about 18.

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**Watson:** And how old were you at the time?

**Donegan:** I was much younger. I'd be about 12 or 13.

**Watson:** And what was he doing musically at that time?

**Donegan:** Well, he was in the hospital sometimes you know. I don't want to tell it. But we know about it, don't we? He'd be selling newspapers sometimes.

**Cheatham:** When you performed in Chicago, can you remember the very first nightclub you performed?

**Donegan:** I think I worked either the 65 Club or the Day Swingland (?)

**Cheatham:** Where was that located?

**Donegan:** On 55<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Cheatham:** Was that near Cottage Grove?

**Donegan:** No, it was near South Park.

**Cheatham:** Did you have a cover charge, or people just came in?

**Donegan:** They just came in.

**Cheatham:** Did they have a regular show or were you the main act?

**Donegan:** I wasn't the main act, but they let me play.

**Cheatham:** Did they have a dancer and MC? In those days, sometimes, they'd have an MC, a shake dancer, a comedian, then the musicians?

**Donegan:** Something like that.

**Cheatham:** That's what they had for you?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Cheatham:** A complete show?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Cheatham:** Do you remember how much a shot of whiskey was?

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**Donegan:** No, not really. Willie Bigtop says, there's 20 shots in a bottle.

**Cheatham:** It's true.

**Watson:** Can you tell me a little more about your father. You said he was a chef cook. Can you tell me a little bit more about what he did?

**Donegan:** Well, he was a chef cook on the Burlington Quincy Railroad. And he'd bring us turkeys home, cooked in a cheesecloth. He could really bake. And he used to come home and play cards. And my mother, when he would come home, she would pretend like she did a lot of work. She always married railroad men because she said they were gone all the time. But, she would be pretending she's busy and then when he'd leave, she'd do what she wanted to do. I like that.

**Watson:** Was he gone much of the time?

**Donegan:** Yes. She didn't marry a man unless he stayed gone all the time. They must stay gone.

**Watson:** And did you just have one brother or did you have other siblings?

**Donegan:** One brother, Leon. He was an engineer. And he was sort of lazy.

**Watson:** How about other extended family that might have gone up to Chicago? Did your mother and father have sisters or brothers that also migrated to Chicago about the same time?

**Donegan:** Yeah, a lot of people changed trains in Chicago. They came from the South, you know. And, they liked to come to Chicago. They wanted to get away from the prejudice down there.

**Watson:** What part of town did they live in?

**Donegan:** We lived on the South Side. 47<sup>th</sup> Street. 4738 St. Lawrence.

**Watson:** And where in your neighborhood, where would music be played?

**Donegan:** On 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. We'd play at the DeLisa, and we played at the Allstars. And then there was the Grand Terrace where Earl Hines played. Then there were some sewers around 47<sup>th</sup> Street where Dan Grissom played and Howlin' Wolf, and people like that would play.

**Watson:** How about theatres?

**Donegan:** The Rio Theatre, and the Oriental Theatre and the Dump. That was on 47<sup>th</sup> Street.

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**Watson:** Tell me about the Dump. I haven't heard of that one.

**Donegan:** That was where Cleo Brown played. And I got a chance to hear her. I liked her very much.

**Watson:** Do you remember the first time you saw Cleo Brown? What year was it?

**Donegan:** Oh, that was about, I must have been about 14 or 15. She could really play boogie-woogie. And she had a style where she could roll the bass. She played a number called "The Stuff is Here" and I went home and practiced it and learned it.

**Watson:** Tell me more about Cleo Brown's playing. We don't know a whole lot about her these days.

**Donegan:** No, she wasn't well known, but she could really play. She had a good right hand a good left hand (demonstrates while singing the notes). And in this left hand, the notes would be buzzing. She could make them buzz. I like the way she played. She wasn't classical, like I, but I liked what I heard.

**Watson:** Tell me about, you mentioned Howlin' Wolf, I think he might have come a little later. Tell me about some of the musical influences that were taking place in Chicago.

**Donegan:** They were hollerin' the blues and then there was Dan Grissom, he could really sing, you know. And then, Muddy Waters, and let's see, Memphis Slim. You would hear these people play in these sewers and I'd go in and see them, you know. They say, "What would you like?" I'd say, "Some champagne" and they would buy me champagne and I'd listen to them.

**Watson:** Let's stick on Memphis Slim for a second. Was his music considered in the community to be less sophisticated than some of the other piano players?

**Donegan:** I guess so because people didn't understand it as well as they... he made most of his money in Europe, though.

**Watson:** Yeah, that was later.

**Donegan:** Yes, he loved my playing a lot.

**Watson:** Let's go back to your musical training. You mentioned two of your teachers. From what I've read, you started to play at six and by eight you were taking classical lessons. Let's start when you were six. What were the first things you gravitated to on the piano?

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**Donegan:** I like classical music you know. Because there was probably more barriers against you learning classical. I would learn Bach, Beethoven, Czerny, Hanon, you name it. Then I went downtown and studied after I had exhausted Professor Sims.

**Watson:** Professor Sims was your first or second teacher?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** Which one, first or second?

**Donegan:** First.

**Watson:** How did Professor Sims teach you? What kind of exercises or techniques or reading...

**Donegan:** Oh, he'd teach me Bach and then I would learn pieces like Rondo Capriccioso by Mendelssohn. And things like that.

**Watson:** How quickly would you pick up music, was it something you just digested?

**Donegan:** Yes, it was like a duck in water. If you can hear it, you can play it. That's what Art Tatum said. You first got to hear it and then you can play it. You got to have an ear.

**Watson:** How about some of the other teachers you had as a child?

**Donegan:** I had Lillian Brown, very good teacher. She taught me the Wallin' Hop (?), things like that. Mendelssohn Concerto.

**Watson:** Were your parents supportive of you playing classical music?

**Donegan:** Oh yes, they liked for me to play it. They liked for me to play and bring the money home. And whatever brought it home, they liked it.

**Watson:** What were your parents' musical preferences? What were their favorite kinds of music?

**Donegan:** Well, they didn't care long as it had feeling. They said, "You must have feeling with this music."

**Watson:** Did either of them play instruments?

**Donegan:** No. My father had tried to play a trumpet but he never learned.

**Watson:** And your mother?

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**Donegan:** She was just pretty.

**Watson:** Who did you get to see play music as a child? Who were your musical role models?

**Donegan:** I used to see Fats Waller and Earl Hines. And I used to hear him play at the Grand Terrace (sings). He would tingle the piano all night. Raymond Walters, he was a Tatum protégée. But everybody in Chicago could play I think.

**Watson:** Now, you had a piano in your home?

**Donegan:** Yes, we bought one for \$50.

**Watson:** Was that before you started playing or as a result of your playing?

**Donegan:** Before.

**Watson:** How about any neighbors or extended family members? Did anyone else close to home show you or take you under their wing as a young child?

**[Donegan:** No. Hannah and Clemente, Kramer...]

**Cheatham:** I'd like to know—what do you use to warm yourself up and get your fingers ready to play when you haven't played for a while?

**Donegan:** Oh, Czerny, a lot of Czerny and a lot of Hanon, the Italian version of Hanon.

**Cheatham:** Yes.

**Donegan:** I use the Brahms exercises.

**Cheatham:** Could you explain a little bit how Hanon affects your fourth and fifth fingers? That's the weakest fingers on both hands.

**Donegan:** It is, and you just have to practice it until you get tired and hold the others down. But these two, you have to use them a lot.

**Cheatham:** Because they're only on one ligament.

**Donegan:** Oh, is that it?

**Cheatham:** The rest of them have their own separate but these two, that's why they're so weak.

**Watson:** The pinky and ring finger.

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**Donegan:** I used to catch a fifty-dollar bill with that ring finger.

**Cheatham:** Did you? Really?

**Watson:** Tell me about records in the home? What records sounded good to you, who would bring them home and ....

**Donegan:** Well, I used to hear Gene Austin (sings—"what makes the world go round..."). Let's see, what else did we listen to? Our father loved Lunceford. He didn't like Duke so much. But he loved Lunceford, he said he jumped, you know. And Martha Davis, I met. She was talking about Art Tatum. He was very good. He's my idol. I think he's every pianist's idol.

**Watson:** Were there any Tatum records in the Donegan household?

**Donegan:** Oh, yeah. I had to hide them because these musicians will steal them. I met him when I was 18 through Rozelle Gayle, did you know him? Rozelle was a giant and he had a tongue that'd reach from here to here, and he could make it quiver. But he could play like Art Tatum and sing like Caruso. And Tatum would say, "I don't know what to do about that girl. They say she made Art Tatum practice and Hazel Scott leave the country."

**Watson:** Did you have any real close friends when you were coming up?

**Donegan:** Yeah, like Pauline Willis was a close friend. Let's see, who else? A few...I think she was it. We would argue but we stayed friends.

**Watson:** You mentioned baseball just in passing.

**Donegan:** Well, I used to play baseball with the fellows. And I could hit the ball over the fence. But I decided I was going to hurt my fingers so I had to quit. I used to play with Charlie Carpenter's brother, Richard Carpenter. Charlie used to handle Earl Hines.

**Watson:** Tell me about your personality as a child. Did you keep to yourself, were you causing trouble, were you a good student?

**Donegan:** I was a pretty good student. I was temperamental though. I admit that. Now I'm less temperamental, but I still call it like I see it. Two and two got to make four.

**Watson:** How about radio when you were coming up. You mentioned Earl Hines' broadcasts.

**Donegan:** I used to listen to Amos and Andy, and people like that, you know, coming up. And Mert and Marge, Bing Crosby, Jack Benny, people like that.

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**Watson:** Were there any musical styles you heard through radio that you had not been familiar with before?

**Donegan:** I used to like Alec Templeton who had stolen some of Art Tatum's runs. Carmen Carvallero I liked. He was very good. Earl Hines.

**Watson:** Tell me about this broadcast from the Grand Terrace.

**Donegan:** He used to play, you could hear him in the alley. "Fatha' Hines, Fatha' Hines." So I would try to mimic him.

**Watson:** And how old were you at the time?

**Donegan:** 14 or 15.

**Watson:** Let's go back to the musical training. I guess by the time you were 10 you were playing organ in the church.

**Donegan:** I didn't play organ long because they wouldn't pay me. And if you play organ, you can't play piano.

**Watson:** How is that, explain it to me.

**Donegan:** Well, it's a different touch. If you play piano, you can't play organ. If you play organ, you can't play piano. The touch is much different. One is a hard touch and the other's a delicate touch. It's hard to separate the two touches. So I said, "Oh, I better play piano." Because you can change the sound of the organ with one button.

**Watson:** Tell me about church—which church did you attend as a child?

**Donegan:** Episcopal Church. Another one was Reverend Bolton's church.

**Watson:** What denomination was that?

**Donegan:** Baptist.

**Watson:** Was your mom of one denomination and your father of another?

**Donegan:** No, my father didn't go. He thought the church would fall in on him. My mother would go to St. Mark's Episcopal Church and she stuck to that.

**Watson:** Was she brought up Episcopal in Mississippi?

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**Donegan:** No, but she liked to go to Reverend Redman's church.

**Watson:** And which was that?

**Donegan:** Episcopal.

**Watson:** And what about the Baptist Church, how did that fall in?

**Donegan:** I didn't stick with that too long. We were Episcopalians.

**Watson:** Were you playing music in both the Episcopal Church and the Baptist Church?

**Donegan:** Sometimes.

**Watson:** Can you tell me how the music differed between the two denominations.

**Donegan:** In the Baptist Church it's more bluesy. The Episcopalian Church is more staid and relaxed.

**Watson:** When you were playing organ was that in the Episcopal or the Baptist Church or both?

**Donegan:** The Baptist Church, but I quit after two or three weeks.

**Watson:** Let's just talk about the influence of gospel music and particularly with Thomas Dorsey being in Chicago at the time you were coming up. How did that work its way into the Dorothy Donegan style?

**Donegan:** Well, if you listen to him, some of it's got to rub off. People like Willie Webb and Robert Mays could do that better than me. But I could sneak it in pretty good. But they could beat me playing it. There are certain gospel chords. Like Mahalia Jackson had an accompanist named Mildred Falls. She can really play that gospel piano.

**Watson:** Was there anything in the gospel piano sound or style that really appealed to you or did you just prefer to stick to the jazz and the classical training?

**Donegan:** I think I'd rather stick to mine and they stick to theirs. But I still sneak some of it in.

**Watson:** Can you tell me technically what that gospel sound is? What are the gospel chords or rhythmically, can you describe...?

**Donegan:** It's a C7, F7 and G7 back to the C7.

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**Watson:** How does that differ from a blues piano style using the same chords, in either feel, rhythmically, melodically, can you just describe that difference?

**Donegan:** I think the feel in the same you know, but the gospel has more meaning. When you hear it, you arise to it. And the blues, they have their thing too.

**Watson:** Between the ages of 10 and 14, from what I gather, you'd become a professional musician around the age of 14?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Cheatham:** What school did you graduate from?

**Donegan:** DuSable.

**Cheatham:** Oh, DuSable. You had a famous teacher there. Captain Dyette. Tell us about this man, I've heard so much about him.

**Donegan:** He'd cuss you out...I loved him, but he'd call you a MF in a minute.

**Cheatham:** He would? But you had to do the right thing, right?

**Donegan:** "That's a Bb7!" And he'd cuss you out if you made a mistake.

**Cheatham:** He must have been a wonderful teacher.

**Donegan:** Oh, he was great, yeah.

**Cheatham:** Somebody really should do a life story on this man. Because he was behind so many great musicians.

**Donegan:** Tommy Rigsby.

**Cheatham:** Name some more.

**Donegan:** Redd Foxx, saxophone player, Gene Ammons. And he always would get the students out of jail.

**Cheatham:** Dickie Morris.

**Donegan:** Dickie Morris.

**Cheatham:** Did you go to your high school prom?

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**Donegan:** I played for it. Yeah, I earned that dollar, two dollars.

**Cheatham:** Made the money on the prom, right?

**Donegan:** Yeah, well, he would give you money to play the High Jinx. And if the principal got jealous, (he) stopped it.

**Cheatham:** There's always somebody, right?

**Donegan:** There's always a- holes.

**Cheatham:** Tell me one more thing. Did you ever think that you would give up your music for romance?

**Donegan:** No.

**Cheatham:** Never even for a minute?

**Donegan:** No, I'd have to be hurt. And so I said, "Well, if I give up everything, he'll just be with another woman. So I'll just buy a dress and get over him."

**Cheatham:** Did you ever think about going to college?

**Donegan:** I went to college.

**Cheatham:** Where did you go?

**Donegan:** I went to LACC and UCLA, USC.

**Cheatham:** What did you take?

**Donegan:** Music and Sociology.

**Cheatham:** What was attractive about Sociology?

**Donegan:** They think all musicians are stupid. So I said—where'd you go to school? Oh, USC. Where'd you study at...

**Cheatham:** Did you like the classes?

**Donegan:** I like to be a student anyway. And then I got two doctorates.

**Cheatham:** They were bestowed upon you?

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**Donegan:** Yes.

**Cheatham:** Where from?

**Donegan:** University of Maryland Eastern Shore and Roosevelt. But I'm always at somebody's university.

**Cheatham:** Who did you think was the best woman pianist?

**Donegan:** Besides myself?

**Cheatham:** Besides yourself.

**Donegan:** I liked Laura Crosby.

**Cheatham:** I never heard of Laura Crosby. Tell us about her.

**Donegan:** She was a little heavy, I'd have to watch out.

**Cheatham:** Where's she from?

**Donegan:** Chicago.

**Cheatham:** About the same time you were growing up?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Cheatham:** Did she ever record?

**Donegan:** I don't think so but she had a beautiful touch. She didn't have my fire and everything but she was great.

**Cheatham:** Was she born in Chicago?

**Donegan:** Yes, she was Israel Crosby's sister.

**Cheatham:** Boy, that is news! Is she still alive?

**Watson:** Did she sing as well?

**Donegan:** Great pianist.

**Cheatham:** That's very different. Because most of the time they make women have to perform to get your money. I must say that is true.

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**Donegan:** She didn't make much money but she was good.

**Watson:** Do you remember some of the nightclubs she played at?

**Donegan:** She played at all the sewers like I. Played the Allstars and dumps like that.

**Cheatham:** She played the sewers?

**Donegan:** I did too. That's how you learn.

**Cheatham:** That's true, the Bucket O' Blood.

**Donegan:** Bucket O' Blood, the Pioneer Lounge. Laura could really play.

**Cheatham:** What did you think of Mary Lou Williams?

**Donegan:** As a woman or pianist?

**Cheatham:** Is there any difference? I think maybe we'll just stick to the music.

**Donegan:** She was a great pianist to accompany a band. I didn't like her as a soloist.

**Cheatham:** 'Cause there is a difference.

**Donegan:** She didn't excite me playing solo. Now, she could swing a band.

**Cheatham:** She could swing a band. And good writer, good arranger.

**Donegan:** And she and Hazel Scott were good friends. Did you know Hazel Scott?

**Cheatham:** Yes.

**Donegan:** Oh, you met her?

**Cheatham:** I met her in Akron, OH.

**Donegan:** Imagine that. She used to come in, she and Mary Lou, and they'd talk while I was playing.

**Cheatham:** Now, that's an insult. Oh, sorry about that.

**Donegan:** So I said, "Come on up here, you two B's."

**Cheatham:** You didn't tell them that.

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**Donegan:** Yes I did.

**Cheatham:** Did they come up?

**Donegan:** No, they ran out.

**Cheatham:** Of course.

**Donegan:** They would make noise while you're playing.

**Cheatham:** That's not very nice. But you really respected Mary Lou as a musician?

**Donegan:** Yes, as a writer. And she could accompany a band. She could swing a band.

**Cheatham:** Is there anybody else you knew that had the facility. Sometimes, it's not chops but feeling and could move a room.

**Donegan:** Basil Spears maybe, did you know her?

**Cheatham:** No

**Donegan:** She could play.

**Cheatham:** You're calling people that we'd like to find out more about. Was she from Chicago?

**Donegan:** Out of New York. And Hazel Scott was a good entertainer. She looked beautiful at the piano.

**Cheatham:** True. White dress and all.

**Donegan:** And she could show her bust and move the whole room.

**Cheatham:** Yes.

**Donegan:** She had that going.

**Cheatham:** Could you tell us the difference between Chicago players and New York players?

**Donegan:** I think Chicago players had more balls.

**Cheatham:** Even the ladies?

**Donegan:** We had more balls than the New York.

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**Cheatham:** How were they different?

**Donegan:** In the playing. I think they knew more music than the New York—the New York people didn't play with any left hand. We had to play with left hand because Buck and Bubbles told us we had to.

**Cheatham:** Is that why, wait a minute...

**Donegan:** Buck and Bubbles. He'd say, "What you doing with your left hand, you leave it in the dressing room?"

**Cheatham:** Were the Chicago musicians more percussive?

**Donegan:** Maybe so.

**Cheatham:** Why would you think that? I've found it to be true too, but I just want to know what you think.

**Donegan:** Well, it was cold back then, I guess they had to play harder to get the gigs, you know.

**Cheatham:** Perhaps, but do you find the New York musicians were more...

**Donegan:** Timid?

**Cheatham:** They seem to be more flowery, they'd play a lot of runs and...

**Donegan:** Clyde Hart, and people like that, did you know him?

**Cheatham:** No I did not.

**Donegan:** Clyde Hart. And Herman Chittison.

**Cheatham:** Yes.

**Donegan:** He could play. But he wasn't heavy as the Chicago cats. And then there was Gideon Honore.

**Cheatham:** Where was he from?

**Donegan:** Chicago. Those Chicago cats could play. Bill Huff, Rozelle Gayle. They could stride, too.

**Cheatham:** Yes. Well, you know they had some New York stride pianists also.

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**Donegan:** Like who?

**Cheatham:** Lucky Roberts.

**Donegan:** Oh yeah, he could play, he was really heavy on that piano.

**Cheatham:** Didn't he play in New York?

**Donegan:** He had his own club.

**Cheatham:** Didn't you have your own club also?

**Donegan:** I had mine in Los Angeles on 45<sup>th</sup> and Western.

**Cheatham:** Tell us about that venture.

**Donegan:** Me and my ex-husband. He didn't want to pay me and then he wanted to go with every girl in the joint.

**Cheatham:** But what made you decide to have a club. That to me is the epitome of a monument to oneself.

**Donegan:** He wanted a club. Everybody likes attention. Then when they get the bills, they don't want to pay them.

**Cheatham:** Did you play in there every night?

**Donegan:** Yeah, he made me play, even when I was having a baby.

**Cheatham:** How long did it last?

**Donegan:** It didn't last too long 'cause I said, "I ain't going to play unless you pay me. You can go with everybody in here but you must pay me."

**Cheatham:** I don't blame you. So, what was the name of it?

**Donegan:** The Morocco. It was pretty. And then his sister and brother-in-law were giving us the money to front it, you know.

**Cheatham:** Do you have any pictures of the club?

**Donegan:** I think my ex-husband has a picture of it.

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**Cheatham:** I'll bet it was beautiful.

**Donegan:** Oh, and the food was good. We should have stuck together. I should have played free and let him go with all the women. Sometimes you have to do that.

**Cheatham:** I'd like to hear about that club. For a woman to have a club like that.

**Donegan:** It was gorgeous. And people like Doris Duke came in. And Groucho Marx. He says, "Oh, you ain't drawing, these women are drawing" I said, "You'll see." But it was great.

**Watson:** Who would handle the business end? Was that your ex-husband or were you involved in that as well?

**Donegan:** He didn't want me to handle none of the money. He had his sisters handle it. Everything he had, he had in his peoples' name. If he moved to a woman's house, he'd only take his toothbrush.

**Watson:** How about the booking, was that also his sisters?

**Donegan:** Yeah, they are a closely knit family.

**Watson:** Was it unusual to have women in the business of clubs?

**Donegan:** No, not necessarily. Because Dorothy Brandon had a club. And Maurice used to cook at the Dunbar. But he wanted his sisters to handle his money.

**Watson:** Who were some of the acts, the talent, that were booked into the club?

**Donegan:** He'd have some jive organist play. And then he'd have Wild Bill Davis.

**Watson:** Was it musicians that would be competing with you for gigs? Different style?

**Donegan:** Not necessarily.

**Watson:** What were some of the popular styles of music that would be represented in the club?

**Donegan:** Well, they'd just have to play funky. Make you jump. Starting on the F7 . . . And the Bb7.

**Watson:** What year did it open?

**Donegan:** '53.

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**Watson:** And how long did it survive?

**Donegan:** Just a year. But if I'd taken over, it would have survived more.

**Watson:** You mentioned that your ex-husband made you perform while you were pregnant. Was that common for women musicians or was that unusual?

**Donegan:** That was common. Because the men thought the money should go on. It was like a pregnant prostitute out of business, the woman stopped working.

**Watson:** Tell me about performing while you're pregnant. Obviously the movie that you did would not have been a possibility if you were pregnant. But was it expected for women to hide their pregnancy as well as possible?

**Donegan:** Not necessarily. But to perform, yes. To keep going as if it didn't happen.

**Watson:** How long after giving birth and recovering from the pregnancy would it take before you would return to performing?

**Donegan:** About three or four weeks.

**Watson:** And is that typical of other woman musicians?

**Donegan:** Yeah, like Martha Davis performed while she was pregnant. Did you know her?

**Cheatham:** Yes.

**Donegan:** She was a great musician too.

**Watson:** You were mentioning a few minutes ago some of the other women musicians whose names we didn't know. Are there any others? One of the reasons we do this is to find out who we don't know about, who didn't get a chance to record that were also influential either in the community in the music scene. Are there any others you can recall?

**Donegan:** Was Camille Howard a piano player or a singer? Well, Camille Howard was with Roy Milton. Annie Laurie. Hadda Brooks.

**Watson:** Were these primarily pianists?

**Donegan:** And singers. Nellie Lutcher.

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**Watson:** What format were most of these women performing in? Were they performing in trios, were they performing solo piano, in dance bands, what was the most common format?

**Donegan:** Some of them performed by themselves and some of them performed with a trio.

**Watson:** Tell me about the popularity of the trio format.

**Donegan:** As opposed to what?

**Watson:** As opposed to playing solo?

**Donegan:** With a trio you can rest more. And when you're playing by yourself, you got to do it all.

**Watson:** Let's talk about Nat Cole. To what extent was he the reason for the popularity of the piano trio?

**Donegan:** He was so good, I think. And he had taste. And he was a protégé of Earl Hines. And his wife wanted him to fire his quartet. So he became a trio and started singing alone with the trio in the background.

**Watson:** Tell me about Nat Cole in Chicago when you were coming up.

**Donegan:** Well, he used to play with brown-skinned models and he and his wife were on the road. And he used to have a band and he used to play at the Warwick Hall. They were very good. He played the piano with one finger. But it was tasty what he left out. And so he became a super star.

**Watson:** Tell me about the whole Earl Hines/Nat Cole lineage. Tell me what Nat's playing that Earl Hines is not and just the relationship between the two players.

**Donegan:** Well, Nat studied--didn't study, copied—all of Earl Hines' licks. So he put them in with his and that became the Nat Cole sound. And then he started singing which made it better. That rounded it out. (Starts singing, "Straighten Up and Fly Right"). And his wife would write these catchy ditties—Nadine. And they were going pretty good before he quit her, you know.

**Watson:** How influential was Nat Cole in Chicago? Was he known by everybody, was everyone trying to copy Nat Cole and his popularity, or were people pursuing their own direction?

**Donegan:** People were pursuing their own directions. And everybody, they weren't bowled over, but they liked him.

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**Watson:** How about the boogie-woogie craze?

**Donegan:** Albert Ammons, Meade Lux Lewis—oh, they could really play. Two hands, you know they played two pianos. They went to New York and played at Café Society. Two fat men at the piano, they could really play boogie-woogie all. You have to have endurance and persistence to play that long. Pete Johnson, that completes it.

**Cheatham:** Pete was a pianist, the rest of them are boogie-woogie players.

**Donegan:** Albert, too.

**Watson:** When did boogie-woogie really start to become popular? The recording started in 1938 with Ammons and Lewis.

**Donegan:** I guess it started in the '40's.

**Watson:** How big a development was that, specifically in Chicago?

**Donegan:** I guess it was... it didn't go crazy like Elvis Presley.

**Watson:** Was boogie-woogie more popular in New York?

**Donegan:** Possibly.

**Watson:** How about where it would be booked in Chicago nightclubs?

**Donegan:** There were some clubs downtown where it would be booked.

**Watson:** Such as?

**Donegan:** Where Chuck Palm works. I forgot the name of it.

**Watson:** Could you talk a little bit about the different clubs in Chicago and the different kinds of music they would book? Was one club, for instance, known for booking boogie-woogie as opposed to a smoother, more refined sound? And specifically, were the clubs that booked more sophisticated music in a certain part of town; could you comment on that?

**Donegan:** Yes. There was the Capital Lounge, the used to book Maurice Rocco, and he was a boogie-woogie pianist. He used to play standing up. Brass Rail. And the clubs all on the north side. They had a lot of clubs out there but I can't think of them now.

**Watson:** The first club you played at was...

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**Donegan:** The Garrick Stage Bar.

**Watson:** They also had the High Jinx listed...

**Donegan:** The High Jinx was a school play.

**Watson:** Tell me more about that...

**Donegan:** Captain Dyette would take all the talent and book it on one day. And it was successful. And it was called the High Jinx. It would go two or three days.

**Watson:** So, it's more of a school talent and music program.

**Donegan:** Yes. It was as good as anything downtown was.

**Watson:** Was that done every year?

**Donegan:** Yes, until this old principal, Chauncy Woods, stopped it.

**Watson:** Now, were you getting paid for playing the High Jinx?

**Donegan:** Yeah, you'd get a dollar a night, which was good money then.

**Watson:** Was it held at the school itself?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** Was it attended by students and parents and the community?

**Donegan:** Everybody. It was packed.

**Watson:** Big event.

**Donegan:** Mm-hmm.

**Watson:** Now you obviously were playing piano. Were you doing classical repertoire or jazz or a combination of the two?

**Donegan:** Both. Everything.

**Watson:** And that was your first paid gig I suppose.

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**Donegan:** No, I had done some sewers before that for a buck and one gig I worked, I got only a quarter, 'cause the broad said I had eaten three hot dogs. So, it's 35 cents for three, so the quarter was my pay.

**Watson:** Now, you mention the sewers, the clubs. Do you remember the names of any of them?

[End of first CD]

**Donegan:** Like, the Silhouette, The Capital Lounge, Elmer's, The Brass Rail, The Bar Music, places like that.

**Watson:** I wanted to ask you about competitiveness between musicians, especially as a teenager before your professional career really gets rolling—cutting contests or opportunities to compete with other musicians and learn from other musicians. Could you comment on that?

**Donegan:** Musicians had cutting contests. You get in there and you got to show what you can do. So I'm going for the jugular. A lot of times I'd win. Like, Art Tatum had a cutting contest with Hazel Scott and Erroll Garner. So they got smart with him one day. And Hazel Scott got smart and so on. He played so much piano, 'til she ran off screaming. And then he played so much piano for Erroll Garner, 'til he played "Little Man, You've Had a Busy Day." And he ain't been back since.

**Watson:** According to my notes, and I want you to correct me if I'm wrong, you're playing the High Jinx event around the age of 14?

**Donegan:** Yeah.

**Watson:** So that would place it about 1936 or so. Getting a dollar a night. Who were some of the other performers, students I assume?

**Donegan:** Savannah Strong, Tommy Rigsby, Bert McCloskey, you know all local people. But they were very good.

**Watson:** Were they students as well?

**Donegan:** Yeah, students but they had talent. And then a girl named Squeaky. She could really sing.

**Watson:** So, singers, and what other kinds of entertainers?

**Donegan:** Dancers, Raymond Sneed—he could dance, he was in "Stormy Weather."

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**Cheatham:** I know Ray Sneed, he choreographed an act for us in New York City. He used to dance the tree. He would become a tree and leaves would come out and branches come out. Did you play for him?

**Donegan:** In the High Jinx, yes. Of course I was with the band.

**Watson:** You were with the band, but did you also perform solo?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** Tell me about some of the acts that you would accompany.

**Donegan:** Ray Sneed and Squeaky and Savannah Strong.

**Watson:** How big was the band?

**Donegan:** About 10 or 12 pieces.

**Watson:** How would they get arrangements?

**Donegan:** Captain Dyette would arrange it.

**Watson:** I have in my notes that at the age of 15, about 1937, you started playing Garrick Stage Bar. Can you tell us about that?

**Donegan:** He was a pugilist and he used to train fighters, and so he hired me and Billie Holiday. He booked her, he thought she was a boy. And Red Saunders. Not Red Saunders, Red Allen. And Lips Page, he'd hire all the best talent. Joe Glaser would let him hire them real cheap. And I played down there. And then he decided to put me in a concert. So he put me in a concert and I sold it out.

**Watson:** Now, "he" being Joe Glaser, or ....

**Donegan:** Joe Sherman, who worked for Joe Glaser. And he had beat up Lips Page. He hit him in the mouth. So we got a free vacation that week.

**Watson:** When did Joe Sherman come into your life. Was he your first manager?

**Donegan:** No, he was not a manager. But he wanted to put me in a concert opposite Vladimir Horowitz. And so I outsold Horowitz.

**Watson:** At the age of 17.

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**Donegan:** I had 500 more people. And he hit me on the butt and said, “Go on out there and lead with your left.”

**Watson:** Tell me about the money at Garrick Stage Bar.

**Donegan:** Oh, I got \$250 a week, which was a lot of money.

**Watson:** Was there anything that came between playing the High Jinx at the age of 16 and playing the Garrick Stage Bar at the age of 17?

**Donegan:** Incidental gigs, you know. Nothing big. But he took me from Elmer’s and brought me around the corner for \$250 a week.

**Watson:** I have Elmer’s being a little bit later, 1942 but I want you to lay this out. I know to distrust the liner notes. I do want to attempt to get an accurate chronology. So, at the age of 17, Garrick Stage Bar, does that sound right? \$250 a week, there? So, that’s your first real money.

**Donegan:** Yes and then I went upstairs. After the concert, He didn’t want to raise me so I went across the street to the Latin Quarter. For \$750.

**Watson:** Was this before or after you made the recordings for Bluebird?

**Donegan:** After.

**Watson:** The information I have suggests that the big money came a little bit later. I could be wrong here but I’ve got Garrick Stage Bar in, you would be 17 years old in 1939. And then the Allstars, that would have been about 1940.

**Donegan:** That’s a dump, yeah.

**Watson:** So, you wouldn’t have been making the big money before ....

**Donegan:** No, \$2, \$3.

**Watson:** Was that per night?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** How many nights a week would you play?

**Donegan:** One or two.

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**Watson:** I think something that comes between this point in your career and making the big money is playing with Bob Tinsley's band at The Swingland.

**Donegan:** That was before.

**Watson:** Before the big money.

**Donegan:** Mm-hmm.

**Watson:** Tell me about Bob Tinsley, the band—I gather this was a dance orchestra?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** How did it differ playing with a band than playing solo or in a trio?

**Donegan:** I don't think I liked it too much but I took it anyway.

**Watson:** How big was the band?

**Donegan:** About six or seven pieces.

**Watson:** What kind of repertoire would they perform?

**Donegan:** All square music, you know. "One O' Clock Jump" or something like that.

**Watson:** And other than The Swingland, where would they play?

**Donegan:** I don't know of any other place. They weren't popular.

**Watson:** How much money were they taking in, in a night? What would be your salary playing with...

**Donegan:** Two or three bucks.

**Watson:** Back at this time as a teenager and young adult, late teen years, were you still living at home?

**Donegan:** Yes

**Watson:** Would you have to give your mother some of the money or all of the money?

**Donegan:** Some of it, I'd give her some of it and keep some of it.

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**Watson:** Although this is before you had your first big money, you were earning a living or helping...

**Donegan:** Yeah, she wanted ten bucks a week. For room and board.

**Watson:** Were you able to pay that from your earnings?

**Donegan:** Yeah, I'd get tips.

**Watson:** What would be a common tip?

**Donegan:** Five, ten and one man gave us a dollar once. So I said, "Is this going three ways?"

**Watson:** How were tips divided?

**Donegan:** It depends on my mood.

**Watson:** With someone like Bob Tinsley leading the band, would he take a larger percentage?

**Donegan:** No, not if it got in my hands.

**Watson:** After that, Costello's Grill?

**Donegan:** That was before then.

**Watson:** Before Bob Tinsley.

**Donegan:** That was at the beginning of my career.

**Watson:** Was that a solo gig?

**Donegan:** Solo.

**Watson:** How did you get booked into that?

**Donegan:** Some of my mother's friend's boy told the man downstairs about me.

**Watson:** And as a result...

**Donegan:** I got the gig.

**Watson:** Any sense of how much money you would get for that?

**Donegan:** \$60 a week.

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**Watson:** \$60 a week. Is that the first big money?

**Donegan:** Yeah.

**Watson:** Where was Costello's Grill located?

**Donegan:** On North Dearborn. Downtown.

**Watson:** Different part of town than you'd been playing.

**Donegan:** Yeah. 'Cause there was a segregated union and they didn't want the acts to play downtown.

**Watson:** So, did that cause problems for you?

**Donegan:** Uh-uhh. They can't tell me where to work. They didn't get the job.

**Watson:** Were other African-Americans playing downtown at this time?

**Donegan:** No.

**Watson:** How about transportation downtown from the South Side

**Donegan:** I'd take the L.

**Watson:** Were there places you were not supposed to go...

**Donegan:** With segregation?

**Watson:** With the segregation, Jim Crow, was it safe for you to travel from the South Side to Costello's Grill?

**Donegan:** Yeah.

**Watson:** How did performing solo at Costello's Grill differ from some of the venues that you had played previously?

**Donegan:** It was just another gig. I could play anywhere.

**Watson:** Did it give you more freedom, being able to play whatever you wanted?

**Donegan:** Yeah, well, I could always play what I wanted.

**Watson:** Was it more work because you were playing by yourself?

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**Donegan:** I didn't realize it at the time. I guess I had more energy.

**Watson:** What elements of the Dorothy Donegan style that we're familiar with today were in place back in 1939, 1940?

**Donegan:** I don't know. I know I had a good left hand, that helped me a lot.

**Cheatham:** Weren't you mixing your music from classical to jazz to boogie, even during that time?

**Donegan:** Yeah, I could swing the classics, you know.

**Cheatham:** That was sort of like a trademark with you.

**Donegan:** Yeah, me and Hazel...

**Cheatham:** You and Hazel Scott...

**Donegan:** She was the Dorothy Donegan of New York. And I was doing the same thing. She had a ceiling on my development, though.

**Cheatham:** What do you mean?

**Donegan:** Well, she had New York sewed up.

**Cheatham:** Why do you say that?

**Donegan:** Well, the first one who gets it, gets it. And she went to Europe and that's when I got a better hold. Then they cussed out Lady Bird, and Lady Bird did this (loud noise).

**Cheatham:** Oh yeah.

**Donegan:** You remember that? They wanted her to resign from the D.A.R. and she said, "I don't give a darn (unintelligible)." So her husband called her the "last lady of the land." So that finished her in America. So that let me go to New York.

**Cheatham:** Did you ever meet Mabel Mercer?

**Donegan:** Oh yeah. Who hasn't?

**Cheatham:** Did you ever play for her?

**Donegan:** No, I'd go see her with some of my friends. Did you know her?

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**Cheatham:** Yes, through Jo Jones.

**Donegan:** Oh, did Jo know her too?

**Cheatham:** Yes.

**Donegan:** She was stuffy.

**Cheatham:** Well, that was like New York style. That's the difference you were talking about between Chicago....

**Donegan:** (sings) "It was just one of those things..."

**Cheatham:** Chicago had blood and muscles.

**Donegan:** And grits.

**Cheatham:** And energy. Where did you play in New York City?

**Donegan:** The Embers.

**Watson:** Miss Donegan, can you tell me about Hillard Brown's band?

**Donegan:** Yeah, I used to play with him. We used to play at the Allstars for \$15 a week.

**Watson:** \$15 for the whole band or for you?

**Donegan:** For me.

**Watson:** And was that before or after Costello's?

**Donegan:** After. And then the man would hold his hand up and that means you could go home. I often played all night.

**Watson:** Let me step back from Hillard Brown just for a second. If you were making \$60 a week at Costello's Grill, how did that gig come to an end, why did that fall apart?

**Donegan:** I don't know. Maybe I said something smart.

**Watson:** Were you known for saying something smart?

**Donegan:** Yeah.

**Watson:** Would that get you in trouble frequently?

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**Donegan:** Yeah. Some things are safer unsaid.

**Watson:** How did Hillard Brown's band differ from Bob Tinsley's?

**Donegan:** I think Hillard was a better musician than Bob Tinsley.

**Watson:** You were still playing at the Allstars which you considered not to be one of the finer clubs of Chicago.

**Donegan:** That's how you learn how to play is play those sewers.

**Watson:** I also have listed that Hillard Brown's band was performing at The Tank.

**Donegan:** That's where we performed, for Adolf. And he would raise his hand, "Now you can go home, thanks a lot."

**Watson:** He was the owner of the club?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** And his name was...

**Donegan:** Adolf.

**Watson:** Adolf? What part of town was The Tank in?

**Donegan:** McCormick and Pratt Blvd., on the North Side of Chicago.

**Watson:** Any major differences between North Side and the South Side clubs you described earlier?

**Donegan:** No colored came in.

**Watson:** Why is that?

**Donegan:** They didn't want 'em.

**Watson:** Further musical training...Chicago Conservatory. When did that come about for you?

**Donegan:** Ruth Brown. Then I went to Chicago Musical College and studied with a Rudolph Ganz. And then I went out to California and started going to USC.

**Watson:** How long were you at the Chicago Conservatory?

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**Donegan:** About a year.

**Watson:** And what were you studying in particular?

**Donegan:** Mendelssohn and Gershwin preludes.

**Watson:** Your decision to further your musical studies, in particular your classical musical studies...how was that reflected in the kinds of gigs you were getting with Hillard Brown, the solo gig at Costello's Grill, the performances with Bob Tinsley. Tell me about your desire to play classical music versus jazz. Was there room for you to play both?

**Donegan:** There was room for me to play both. In classical, you've got to fill the halls, though. But I'd rather play classical. I think classical stimulates me and the jazz pays me.

**Watson:** Tell me about "classical stimulates me." What is it about the music?

**Donegan:** I like to hear Ashkenazy and Horowitz and all the great masters play. I don't practice jazz at home. But I love to hear classical masters play.

**Watson:** Has your technique with classical repertoire ever been such that you are at that level, the classical master?

**Donegan:** Not quite. But I have played with the symphonies. But I said, "Oooohh, Horowitz..."

**Watson:** To become a classical master, would you have had to give up the jazz influence?

**Donegan:** I think so. That's all you do. You don't have no man, no woman, no nothing.

**Watson:** Did you ever have the desire to give up jazz and pursue classical music exclusively?

**Donegan:** Sometimes.

**Watson:** Was there ever a particular time that you were close, can you elaborate on that?

**Donegan:** Yeah, I was close but you still have to pay your bills.

**Watson:** Was there a time that you were close to giving up jazz to pursue classical?

**Donegan:** Yeah.

**Watson:** What happened?

**Donegan:** Some bills came.

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**Watson:** Does jazz pay the bills?

**Donegan:** Yes, classical don't pay them.

**Watson:** What led you to leave the Chicago Conservatory and go to the Chicago Musical College?

**Donegan:** I heard, you always hear about better teachers. So, I'm always curious. So I go see what's out there.

**Watson:** Did you give up performing in the clubs at this time or were you studying by day and playing jazz by night?

**Donegan:** Both.

**Watson:** Was there a time when you were only studying classical music and not playing out in the clubs.

**Donegan:** Very few times.

**Watson:** I'm trying to figure out about when this was. Do you know what years you were a student at either of those institutions?

**Donegan:** USC, '53. And the other, '44, '43.

**Watson:** Would that be before or after you recorded for the first time for Victor/Bluebird, because that's always been unclear in all of the writing about you.

**Donegan:** After.

**Watson:** Tell me about Elmer's on North State Street.

**Donegan:** It was a bar. Everybody came to it. We were right across from the Chicago Theatre. Right across from the State and Lake.

**Watson:** And were you playing by yourself, with a trio?

**Donegan:** Playing by myself.

**Watson:** How did that differ from the gig at Costello's?

**Donegan:** It didn't differ, just some more work.

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**Watson:** Different clientele?

**Donegan:** Yeah, different clientele.

**Watson:** How were they different?

**Donegan:** Maybe in class. And I began to get more attention. I would get musicians from the Chicago Theatre and from the State and Lake.

**Watson:** There was something that I missed in my notes. In 1940, which may or may not be the case, you show up for rehearsal for Lionel Hampton's Orchestra at the Grand Terrace. Tell me about that.

**Donegan:** That's true. I was working in Kankakee at the Circle Bar. Some of the musicians there, "You going to let this broad play?" "I went up there and played, so they started taking their newspapers down and listening. I played "Deep Purple" like Art Tatum. And so they said, "Heh, heh, heh, haaa.." So . . . Lionel Hampton said, "I want to hire this girl." So Gladys [Hampton's wife and manager] said, "You ain't gonna hire no broad in this band."

**Watson:** Was it her decision?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** How did the other men in the band feel about a woman having an opportunity to play with Hampton?

**Donegan:** Well, they all clapped which is something unheard of. 'Cause men don't want to hear women play anyway. So I played that, "Heeeehhhy" and when I got through, they all clapped. And Lionel said, "We got to hire her." Gladys said, "Uh-uhh, you ain't gonna hire this broad in this band."

**Watson:** Do you think you would have been the right pianist for that band or would you have wanted to play too much for a band of that size?

**Donegan:** Both, I guess. . . . See who was playing, Sir Charles Thompson.

**Watson:** Now, I guess Illinois Jacquet was in the band at the time.

**Donegan:** He was.

**Watson:** Was he supportive of you or was he fearful of you?

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**Donegan:** Supportive. When we're in Europe, he wants me to play with him. Especially if he ain't getting the audience. "C'mon up here girl."

**Watson:** Do you think that event in 1940, was it an audition?

**Donegan:** I just wanted to play, I already had a job.

**Watson:** Where were you playing?

**Donegan:** Kankakee, a sewer in Kankakee.

**Watson:** To what extent were you playing outside of Chicago? Because that's something that hasn't been written about your life.

**Donegan:** A lot.

**Watson:** How far outside Chicago were you playing?

**Donegan:** About 40 minutes. I'd take a train and go to Kankakee.

**Watson:** The Circle Lounge you mentioned. Were there other clubs as well that you played in Kankakee and other cities?

**Donegan:** No that was it at the time for Kankakee.

**Watson:** How was the money outside in Kankakee compared to Chicago.

**Donegan:** It was alright. I think I got \$20 more.

**Watson:** So, you would have been about 18 at this time.

**Cheatham:** When did you join the union?

**Donegan:** 1939.

**Cheatham:** They were separated then, weren't they? So, when you joined the union, how much did it cost to join?

**Donegan:** Yes. I think it cost \$50.

**Cheatham:** And the dues were about how much a year?

**Donegan:** \$20, \$30.

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**Cheatham:** And could you tell me, when you went outside like on the North Side, who collected the dues, the white union man or the black union man?

**Donegan:** Let's see, usually it would be the white.

**Cheatham:** He collected them, for his union? What did the black union have to say about that?

**Donegan:** Yeah. He didn't have nothing to say about that.

**Cheatham:** Did you ever play with white musicians at that time?

**Donegan:** No.

**Cheatham:** That's one thing that they didn't...

**Donegan:** They were segregated.

**Cheatham:** But I wondered who was collecting the money because I know what that means.

**Watson:** Tell me about your first recording session, Miss Donegan.

**Donegan:** With Victor/Bluebird? They said that was a pretty good record, with Mayo...

**Watson:** Mayo Williams? He was an A&R Director for Victor.

**Donegan:** Yeah. I did, "Piano Boogie" and "Everyday Blues."

**Watson:** "Prelude in C# Minor." How did that come about?

**Donegan:** They wanted me to record on Decca. I recorded a lot of things for Decca but they never released them.

**Watson:** Was that before you recorded for Bluebird?

**Donegan:** Around the same time.

**Watson:** Because I have no reference to Decca recordings in the discography. But that's one of the limitations of discographies too. How did you meet J. Mayo Williams?

**Donegan:** I don't know. I guess he met me first. "I want you to record."

**Watson:** How did you come into contact with Mayo Williams?

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**Donegan:** I guess he found me.

**Watson:** I think that's a pretty typical story of recording artists in Chicago who recorded for Victor. So you had two 78's that were issued, or was it just one?

**Donegan:** Two.

**Watson:** And how did that change your career as a performing artist? Did that enable you to raise your fees or did it give you more visibility?

**Donegan:** I don't think it did anything. Just some wasted recording.

**Watson:** Was it a big accomplishment for you, was it something you were proud of?

**Donegan:** I liked the technique in it. One critic says, "Ahh, more than eight to the bar." (laughs)

**Watson:** Do you remember the recording process, anything about it, what the studio was like?

**Donegan:** No, they just put the lights and say, "Go."

**Watson:** How was recording these tunes different than performing them live for you?

**Donegan:** Well, if you record it, you can rehearse when you make a mistake.

**Watson:** Can you tell me more about that?

**Donegan:** Today, they say if you record something, you can erase it and re-record it.

**Cheatham:** How many takes did you usually have to do?

**Donegan:** I don't think I did but two or three.

**Cheatham:** I didn't think so because you're very articulate and you change them around each time, don't you?

**Donegan:** Yeah, it's never the same.

**Cheatham:** So, did that make the engineer nervous?

**Donegan:** It might have.

**Cheatham:** 'Cause Dorothy is Dorothy. When you first heard yourself back on the recording, did you like what you heard?

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**Donegan:** Yeah, I liked one chord in there that I played.

**Cheatham:** One chord? What was so likeable about that one chord...

**Donegan:** I don't know, I played the right change and it clicked.

**Cheatham:** Touch you. Can you tell me what piano they used.

**Donegan:** I used a Baldwin.

**Cheatham:** Was it a baby grand or upright?

**Donegan:** Baldwin. It was a baby grand. Not the nine foot.

**Cheatham:** The baby grand. What is your favorite piano while we're here?

**Donegan:** Steinway. I want to get a nine foot.

**Cheatham:** That's a girl.

**Watson:** Miss Donegan, did you ever see your Bluebird 78 on a jukebox?

**Donegan:** No.

**Watson:** Do you think it was marketed to jukebox operators?

**Donegan:** It should have been, but it wasn't.

**Watson:** Tell me about those two selections: "Piano Blues" and "Everyday Blues."

**Donegan:** I composed both of them. And I just started sitting at the piano and whatever came out came out. Like mixing a cake, a little bit of this and a little bit of that.

**Watson:** Was there any record or blues tune before that you based it on?

**Donegan:** No.

**Watson:** What keys did you choose for those, do you happen to remember?

**Donegan:** The key of C.

**Watson:** Is C a good key for you to play blues?

**Donegan:** I think so. And D major too.

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**Watson:** What is it about those keys that is well-suited to the blues?

**Donegan:** Well, the chords fall easier.

**Watson:** In the recording studio, you're limited to about three minutes that you can fit on the side of a 78. If you were playing these two tunes in a nightclub, would you play them for five or six minutes?

**Donegan:** I might. It doesn't matter, 'cause you're not recording.

**Watson:** Were there any other limitations of the recording studio?

**Donegan:** No, just those two songs. They liked what they heard, so they printed it.

**Watson:** But they didn't schedule you for another session. Why is that?

**Donegan:** I don't know. Decca did, though.

**Watson:** How much later?

**Donegan:** Four or five months later. I recorded 60 tunes for them.

**Watson:** But they were never issued.

**Donegan:** No, they save them 'til I die.

**Watson:** Who scheduled the Decca sessions?

**Donegan:** Milt Gabler.

**Watson:** Did he contact you directly or did he have someone under him do it?

**Donegan:** I guess he did.

**Watson:** Let's step back to Bluebird for a second. What was the nature of your contract with them? Was it just for one session?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** And did they have an option to do more sessions with you if they chose to?

**Donegan:** I guess so.

**Watson:** Were you paid a flat fee for that session?

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**Donegan:** Yes. Mayo gave me what he wanted me to have.

**Watson:** What did he want you to have?

**Donegan:** As little as possible.

**Watson:** Any recall on how much or how little?

**Donegan:** Maybe \$150.

**Watson:** And there were no royalty arrangements on that?

**Donegan:** You never get royalties.

**Watson:** That's Milt Gabler, so we're talking the Decca sides. How about for Bluebird, through Mayo Williams.

**Donegan:** Nothing.

**Watson:** Did you get paid a flat fee with him?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** About the same?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** So you recorded approximately 60 sides for Decca? Tell me about the differences in repertoire.

**Donegan:** It's all classical. Swinging classics.

**Watson:** You mentioned you and Hazel Scott popularizing this form. Was that a musical trend that was popular or is it just something that happened both in New York and Chicago?

**Donegan:** I think she was into swinging the classics and I was in Chicago. Parallel development.

**Watson:** Did Hazel Scott have commercial success with recordings on swinging the classics?

**Donegan:** I don't think so. She was popular but not on records. Her records wouldn't sell and mine either. That's what my son says.

**Watson:** Over how long a period did you record the 60 sides with Decca?

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**Donegan:** Maybe a week.

**Watson:** And how many sessions might that have been?

**Donegan:** I guess all day.

**Watson:** For instance, the session for Bluebird, you recorded four sides. The next listed session for commercial releases is 1946 with Continental and it looks like you did six sides. The session following that with issued commercial recordings for Continental, six sides. Would they have you do more than that in a day?

**Donegan:** Decca did.

**Watson:** OK. Was there any major difference in approach in the studio on the part of the record company? Did Decca and Milt Gabler, did they do anything differently than Mayo Williams and Bluebird?

**Donegan:** No. They just had different music.

**Watson:** 60 sides of swinging classics, or was there blues and classical material and boogie-woogie mixed in there as well?

**Donegan:** Everything.

**Watson:** That's a big piece that has not been written about, so that's an important one. The last thing I wanted to cover today was what appears to be a turning point in your career in 1943 and that's the Orchestra Hall concert. Can you tell me how that came about?

**Donegan:** Joe Sherman wanted to put me in a concert behind Vladimir Horowitz. So I played by myself and he hit me on the behind and he said, "Go out there and lead with your left." So I played and it was a major success.

**Watson:** Who else was on that bill?

**Donegan:** Nobody.

**Watson:** You and Horowitz.

**Donegan:** Well, Horowitz had played a week before. But I had outdrawn him. I can't outdraw him now but then I did.

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**Watson:** From what I understand, you were the first African-American musician to play Orchestra Hall.

**Donegan:** Maybe so.

**Watson:** Tell me about the audience at Orchestra Hall.

**Donegan:** I get a lot of white people. Well, white people support jazz, you know. And African-Americans don't support it.

**Watson:** Was that true in 1943?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** Tell me about your performance there. What did your repertoire consist of?

**Donegan:** Classical and boogie and, they said, . . . I drew them out the swamp. I played classical first, and then blues next and boogie last. Something for everybody.

**Watson:** Why do you play them in that order, or did you in 1943?

**Donegan:** Well, you show first you didn't learn in reform school how to play the piano. And that's the way I do it. Play something first and, OK, now we get to the root.

**Watson:** You're suggesting almost a stigma with jazz, perhaps especially with white audiences in the 1940s and perhaps continuing today. Did playing the classical music in your performances help to remove any stigma associated with jazz or stigma associated in the minds of white folks with black music?

**Donegan:** Well, I played once for Itzal Hurok (?) and Margaret Truman was there. So, I played Rondo Capriccioso and Hurok was looking. Say, "You didn't know she reads, did you?" "I like that, you know."

**Watson:** So Joe Sherman helped to arrange that gig at Orchestra Hall? At what point did he come into your professional career?

**Donegan:** Yes. That was it after I played there 'cause he wouldn't give me a raise. And I stayed with him for a little while but I had to go upstairs for \$750. He was only giving me \$250.

**Watson:** Do you recall what you made for the Orchestra Hall concert?

**Donegan:** \$250.

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**Watson:** And that was a sold out performance, wasn't it?

**Donegan:** Yeah, every seat was sold out.

**Watson:** How did you go to a sell-out crowd in Orchestra Hall from performing in Kankakee, performing with a couple dance bands and as a solo artist in the clubs? What was the process of going to that next tier and to a very major step?

**Donegan:** Dixon Gayer of Downbeat had given me a great write-up.

**Watson:** Prior to the Orchestra Hall concert? Was it just on the basis of that one review?

**Donegan:** Yes. Claudia Castor had given me a great write-up in the Chicago Tribune on the front page.

**Watson:** How much of it was also working with Joe Sherman and therefore, Joe Glaser's office?

**Donegan:** I guess they helped too. Everybody helps you.

**Watson:** Looking back at that performance, was that fundamentally different from what you were doing in other clubs and venues?

**Donegan:** I guess it was a compilation of everything I had done.

**Watson:** Did you see it at the time as a turning point in your career?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** How about leading up to it?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** How about if it had not sold out or you didn't get great reviews as a result of it. Do you think that you would have continued to be booked in venues of that size?

**Donegan:** I think so. People like me anyway.

**Watson:** Do you think that you were at a different stage of being ready for a step up in your career? Were you just prepared at that moment?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** Was there any difference in your confidence or approach?

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**Donegan:** No.

**Watson:** Maturity in your style or artistic development?

**Donegan:** No.

**Watson:** Time was just right?

**Donegan:** Yes. That was it.

[CD #3]

**Watson:** Today is April 6, 1998 here in Beverly Hills, California for the second day of the Smithsonian Institution Jazz Oral History Program with Dorothy Donegan conducted by Jeannie Cheatham, engineered by Matt Watson, and I'll pass this over to Jeannie.

**Cheatham:** Dorothy, yesterday we were talking about rehearsal techniques. You know how you said you would rehearse sometimes 12 hours a day. What I'd like to know, when you would make a mistake in something you were studying, how would you take care of that?

**Donegan:** I would hit it real hard, so I would remember where the mistake occurred. And then go back to it and work it out with two or three fingers. Every mistake has a secret to it, so you can master it. You got to keep on practicing though, 'til you work it out. It must be worked out.

**Cheatham:** But you make the mistake again when you came to it?

**Donegan:** Sometimes. And then I would do the mistake with three fingers rather than two. C B A D C B E D C and work it around. And then go back A G F G F E F E D... go up and down the piano 'til I had mastered the mistake.

**Cheatham:** Did you find that also true...would you rehearse songs in different keys for that same reason?

**Donegan:** Not necessary. I wouldn't have to do that. I don't have to rehearse songs to play them in different keys. Just stumble up on it.

**Cheatham:** Did you have preferred keys that you use, for instance, for the blues?

**Donegan:** Art Tatum and I like E natural and B natural. And F sharp, which is G flat.

**Cheatham:** Would you do that only to confuse the bass player as I've heard? Would you change keys and play F sharp 'cause you know bass players can't play in F sharp?

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**Donegan:** No, I would just do it naturally.

**Cheatham:** Did you have certain keys that you prefer when you play the blues.

**Donegan:** I like to play the blues in D natural.

**Cheatham:** Why?

**Donegan:** I think it's more colorful, the key. It produces better changes.

**Cheatham:** It's a bright key.

**Donegan:** Yes. I said, "Oooohhh, la la" C doesn't have pretty harmonies.

**Cheatham:** That's true. How about G?

**Donegan:** I like to play "Rainy Day" in G.

**Cheatham:** I've heard you play "After Hours" and that's also in G.

**Donegan:** Yeah, well. That's enough with that song. (Sings it). Yeah, G is good for that.

**Cheatham:** How did you find that Hanon, the virtuoso studies, help your playing?

**Donegan:** It makes the fingers stronger. You can exercise the fourth and fifth fingers, which are the weakest.

**Cheatham:** Did you find Czerny the same?

**Donegan:** Yeah, I still practice Czerny, when I'm well. And I prefer the Brahms exercises.

**Cheatham:** Which one of the masters do you prefer, like Chopin, Beethoven, Bach, Brahms...

**Donegan:** I like Bach and Chopin. Chopin is so hard to play, oh my god, you have to play it real soft and light and fleeting.

**Cheatham:** And use the pedals, right?

**Donegan:** Well, yeah, I could use them. But you have to keep your fingers close to the keys and finger it all the way down.

**Cheatham:** You sure know your work. When you do songs like "Tenderly" which is almost a kind of a song you can use pianistically, can take it in and out of what I call a classical type

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sound. What would you do if you had a chance to play “Tenderly”? I’ve heard you go in and out of different...

**Donegan:** I start in E natural and get all the meat out of it. Then I may go back to D and then I may go back to G.

**Cheatham:** You know, talking all these keys, which is really rough on most bass players, I’m telling you.

**Donegan:** Well, you got to get a bass player first.

**Cheatham:** Who was your favorite bass player that you had the least problem with that could really...

**Donegan:** I liked John Clayton.

**Cheatham:** Tell us about John Clayton.

**Donegan:** He was very good. He wasn’t the funkier, but he was accurate. And then Ray Brown. I haven’t played much with him. Jon Burr, my bass player, was pretty good.

**Cheatham:** Where was he from?

**Donegan:** Upstate New York. He wasn’t funky enough for me.

**Cheatham:** Do you find that from different parts of the country that you get a bass player that plays certain ways?

**Donegan:** I guess so, yeah. “Put a little more Christian McBride in it.”

**Cheatham:** You like that little boy, huh?

**Donegan:** Yeah.

**Cheatham:** How about George Duvivier?

**Donegan:** He was good in his time.

**Cheatham:** Did you ever play with Jo Jones, old man Jo Jones?

**Donegan:** Oh yeah, he threw a stick at me once.

**Cheatham:** Why did he throw a stick at you?

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**Donegan:** I picked the time up. And he says, “Johnson’s on the whozits,” so he threw a stick at me and it landed in the piano instead of my head. He was aiming for my head. So I took the stick, I got up and said, “How dare you throw a stick in my piano?” So I took the stick and hit him in the head, it landed perfectly, you know. And he kept on playing. People thought it was part of the show.

**Cheatham:** Yes. He really loved you, you know.

**Donegan:** I did, too. That’s one funeral I made. I said, “Jo Jones couldn’t pack a club but he could pack his funeral.”

**Cheatham:** That’s true.

**Donegan:** Every drummer was there. Were you there?

**Cheatham:** He told us not to come to his funeral.

**Donegan:** Oh, it was raining and slushy. But I made it. I changed trains and everything to get there.

**Cheatham:** What other drummers were there?

**Donegan:** It would be safe to say who wasn’t there.

**Cheatham:** Max Roach?

**Donegan:** Oh yes.

**Cheatham:** Grady Tate?

**Donegan:** Grady Tate. They were all there.

**Cheatham:** Have you ever played in an all-girl band, trio or...

**Donegan:** Maybe with the Sweethearts of Rhythm, but that didn’t last long.

**Cheatham:** How long?

**Donegan:** About a week. I think it was over before then.

**Cheatham:** Is it because you don’t prefer playing with...

**Donegan:** Women? Well, why have sexist musicians? They’re either musicians or they’re not.

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**Cheatham:** I agree.

**Donegan:** They say all girls groups or all women's groups. Just put them with the men, they're all musicians.

**Cheatham:** You're a girl after my own heart. When you stopped studying your classical music, did you miss the studies?

**Donegan:** I never stopped. When I would play the jazz to make some money, you know you have to eat. It's necessary that you eat, I'd keep on studying and studying and studying.

**Cheatham:** Yes. Can I ask you, do you think that if you had gone to Paris when you were a young person that you would have fared better in your career in the United States?

**Donegan:** I don't know. 'Cause they only had one Josephine Baker. I guess Paris thought that was enough.

**Cheatham:** Have you ever played there, Paris?

**Donegan:** Oh sure. I played the Meridien Hotel, La Petit Journal. They liked me in Paris, but they make you play...

**Watson:** You played in Paris and you were treated well...

**Donegan:** Yes, but they want you to play with French musicians. I didn't like that. I started crying.

**Cheatham:** Why, what difference did you find?

**Donegan:** Well, they can't even play jazz. They don't play jazz.

**Cheatham:** Rhythmically, is that what they're lacking?

**Donegan:** Rhythmically, any kind of way.

**Cheatham:** Even harmonically?

**Donegan:** Yeah, see what they do is they play with Americans and they get a name and the next week, they got the trio. They had the Hot Club of France, I guess they were notable exceptions. Still would rather the brothers, you know. American, playing with them. They gonna play jazz, you know.

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**Cheatham:** Did you play with Jimmy Woode?

**Donegan:** Oh, did I. He was drunk on me sometimes, but I loved him.

**Cheatham:** I did too.

**Donegan:** Yeah, even drunk. I'd say, I'd fire him, but I'd say, "Come back tomorrow." He used to play, "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child," and he'd be crying.

**Cheatham:** I think he was homesick.

**Donegan:** If you're travelling in Europe you still have to find home in America, you're still an American. And black, don't forget that.

**Cheatham:** I won't forget it, I remember. Tell me, what were some of your favorite foods in France?

**Donegan:** I guess I liked to eat in the best restaurants. And I liked to eat in Switzerland because they put gravy on everything. And what's this musician out of Chicago, he'd throw the food up in the air, say "Everything about this food stinks!"

**Cheatham:** Who was that?

**Donegan:** What's that crazy drummer's name in Chicago? He's about 85.

**Cheatham:** He live there?

**Donegan:** No, he come over there and play.

**Cheatham:** And then they tell us, none of the American blacks can eat in a restaurant because of what he did. I said, "Well I'm gonna eat in here or else go home." And they said, "Well you can eat in here but the rest can't. " I said, "If that's the problem, I'll still go home."

**Cheatham:** Getting back to your different techniques, when you were playing did you prefer a certain type of piano? A certain brand did you ask for?

**Donegan:** I didn't know the difference back then. I took what I could get. People would give you a piano to play on, I'd say, "This ain't no good." They'd say, "They tuned it, so it must be alright."

**Cheatham:** They didn't care about the touch of the piano, the quality?

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**Donegan:** They were lucky to have a piano.

**Watson:** I'd like to go back to where we left off yesterday and that was around the Orchestra Hall concert in 1942. Was that one of the high points of your musical career?

**Donegan:** I think so. Here was a girl from the South Side with red hair, playing on the stage by herself in front of 2000 people. And to outsell Vladimir Horowitz, I thought that was something. And this promoter, Joe Sherman, wanted me to stay a slave for life. But I said, "I'll stay with you for a certain while but if I get a raise, I got to go."

**Watson:** How long did you stay with him?

**Donegan:** About a month or so. I gave him a chance to recoup his investment. Then I said, "I got to go."

**Watson:** Now, Time Magazine did a great big write-up on that concert at Orchestra Hall and I guess, gave you some national exposure, is that true?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** How did that change things for you?

**Donegan:** Well, I started being offered more money, which is always nice.

**Watson:** How much more money were you making?

**Donegan:** Well, I went from \$250 to \$750.

**Watson:** And that's per week?

**Donegan:** Oh yeah.

**Watson:** Now, yesterday you mentioned playing Kankakee, Illinois. Did your bookings extend further beyond Chicago and Kankakee after the national exposure.

**Donegan:** This was before the national exposure.

**Watson:** When did you start to really get booked outside of Chicago?

**Donegan:** After I made a picture with Cab Calloway.

**Watson:** What other opportunities did the Orchestra Hall concert present to you?

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**Donegan:** You get national exposure in the newspaper and I guess you'd get the movies.

**Watson:** It seems that about this time that Art Tatum became aware of your presence and your talent. Can you discuss how you came to meet him?

**Donegan:** Well, that lady right there, her husband brought him up to my house.

**Watson:** That lady being...

**Donegan:** Lois Gayle. And her husband was Rozelle. So they brought Tatum up to my house on St. Lawrence.

**Watson:** Tell me about that experience. They just gave you a call and said we're bringing Tatum over?

**Donegan:** Yeah, Rozelle said Tatum was coming up. And so, he came up to see me. He said, "That woman, you never know what she is going to do." (Laughs).

**Watson:** Were you intimidated by him?

**Donegan:** I was flattered that he came up, you know. How he could do it so easy. I could do what he did but it would be a little harder.

**Watson:** Do you think he was scoping out the competition that might come his way?

**Donegan:** Oh yes. He respected me, and so did the fellows in the block. See, we all lived on St. Lawrence and we'd have those cutting sessions.

**Watson:** Tell me about that.

**Donegan:** Well, everybody played what they knew and if you won, you'd cut everybody.

**Watson:** Where would they be held?

**Donegan:** Basements and dumps and houses.

**Watson:** How long would they last? What time would they start?

**Donegan:** About 10, 11:00 and last all night.

[Track 6]

**Watson:** So, Tatum began to mentor you and show you the ropes.

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**Donegan:** Yeah and I'd be under him like white on rice, trying to learn all the nuances and the half steps, the whole steps and how he would finger. And had this one (thumb) going underneath.

**Watson:** Tell me about that. Describe that in detail.

**Donegan:** Oh, I don't want to divulge my secret. That's one of the tricks he had. He'd have three up here and one underneath here, fingering all the way down.

**Watson:** And what would that allow him to do?

**Donegan:** Go fast. He could play so beautifully.

**Watson:** Have you ever seen anyone else since or before use their thumb in that way?

**Donegan:** No, there hasn't been anybody else. There never will be anybody else. He was first, second and third in my book.

**Watson:** What other tricks did he have in his style?

**Donegan:** Gee, I'm gonna tell you my style pretty soon. I guess he knew how to move the thumb. The thumb would go underneath the other fingers starting from the left. And he says, "If it don't fit, don't force it." The softer you play the faster you could play, is that right?

**Watson:** What other fingerings did he show you that made you modify your approach to the instrument?

**Donegan:** He would show me how to stride. That wasn't his main thing though, stride. And to keep this finger stiff so you can catch the G and the C going down.

**Watson:** That's the pinky finger.

**Donegan:** Yeah, it's ready when you want it.

**Watson:** Did he correct you on anything you were doing wrong or did he just show you how to develop more quickly?

**Donegan:** He showed me how to do it more quickly and not to hit the piano so hard. You hit it easily and softer.

**Watson:** Did you feel that he wanted to show you everything he knew, or was he holding back some tricks that he wasn't going to show anybody?

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**Donegan:** He held back a lot of stuff. I loved the way he carried his money. He carried it in five different pockets. The 5's, the 10's, the 50's and the 100's. He knew where everything was.

**Watson:** Was that a result of his vision problems?

**Donegan:** Yes, he had a good memory, too. He could play pinochle. He was a genius.

**Watson:** Were there any things beyond his playing that he taught you, taught you about the business or about booking or promoting yourself?

**Donegan:** No, he never discussed his bookings. He was just good to be around. I always found him very informative, you know. And I was glad to be around him.

**Watson:** Specifically, what did he show you that you incorporated into your playing?

**Donegan:** All the other things that I told you about.

**Watson:** How long did you really work with Art Tatum?

**Donegan:** I worked with him in Chicago and worked with him in New York. I used to go up to Minton's and we'd have cutting contests up there. And eat chicken and waffles and sausage.

**Watson:** Was Tatum a competitive player or was he so far beyond everyone else that he had nothing to worry about?

**Donegan:** He had nothing to worry about. As a matter of fact, he didn't have to compete, he'd just play. One musician said, "God is in the house." He could cut us with one hand.

**Watson:** Tatum is reported as saying, "Dorothy is the only woman who can make me practice."

**Donegan:** That's true.

**Watson:** Did he say that to you?

**Donegan:** Yeah. And made Hazel Scott leave the country.

**Watson:** Now, his comment, "Dorothy is the only woman who can make me practice," was that a compliment or is that a little bit of a back-handed insult?

**Donegan:** Well, I guess it's both but I like the compliment.

**Watson:** Do you believe that he would say that there's any man that could make him practice?

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**Donegan:** He didn't think about them too much. He wasn't worried. There was Billy Taylor and who else during that time? And Oscar [Peterson].

**Watson:** Do you think that there's anything that you might have shown Tatum that he might have lifted and worked into his playing?

**Donegan:** Possibly. Well, see, I never play a piece the same way. So maybe some of my pieces he may have caught things that I didn't know he was listening for.

**Watson:** According to my notes, this would have been 1943, around the age of 21 for you. Is that about right?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** Now, one of the results of the exposure from the Orchestra Hall concert, led to an offer of a five-year movie contract with MGM. Tell me about that.

**Donegan:** And that greedy agent, his name was Corkscrew Gervish, I called him. He took the deal from United Artists, \$3000 a week and I only did a week. With MGM, I had \$750 a week for seven years and he didn't take it.

**Watson:** And this was to appear in movies similar to the United Artists release?

**Donegan:** I would take anything.

**Watson:** Was this kind of revue-type music movies?

**Donegan:** Yeah. Where you can be inserted in a picture and deleted too.

**Watson:** Tell me about what you mean by being deleted.

**Donegan:** Like if you're in a movie, like if you play a Lena Horne and that, you can delete it for the South or for Southern audiences and the plot would not be disturbed.

**Watson:** So the MGM offer was before or after the United Artists?

**Donegan:** I think it was during the same time.

**Watson:** When did you go out to Hollywood?

**Donegan:** 1944.

**Watson:** What part of the year?

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**Donegan:** I guess in the middle of the year. Me and my mother went to do “Sensations of ‘45” with Cab Calloway, Eleanor Powell, Woody Herman, and Dennis O’Keefe.

**Watson:** How about Sophie Tucker and W.C. Fields, were they in there?

**Donegan:** Yes, and I was in a circus.

**Watson:** Tell me about that.

**Donegan:** I was playing opposite Gene Rodgers, who was a great pianist. And Cab had his self between us both, “C’mon Dorothy, C’mon Gene.” And he was shaking his hair. That’s what he contributed. We were doing the playing and he was shaking his hair.

**Watson:** Do you think you portrayed yourself well on film? Did your talent as a recording artist and as a stage artist transfer well to the screen?

**Donegan:** I think so. They could see my feet stomping and I’m doing all this, you know striding. So I did pretty good.

**Watson:** Did you have to wear anything different that you would in your normal stage appearance?

**Donegan:** No, I wore a gown. I think it was one of Pola Negri’s gowns. And I had my hair in an upsweep and a gardenia on the right-hand side.

**Watson:** Was it simply a musical part or did you have spoken lines?

**Donegan:** No lines. It was just a sequence that could be always deleted.

**Watson:** So, did that open up new doors for you?

**Donegan:** It opened up a door for me in New York, I played Loyce State (?) with the picture and they said that if I didn’t appear with the picture I would never do another film again. So I appeared with the picture.

**Watson:** Now, appearing with the picture, that’s not something that happens anymore. Can you tell me what that would...you would appear at the screening of the movie?

**Donegan:** Well, if they showed a picture, then I’d come on with a stage show.

**Watson:** With other performers from the film, Cab Calloway and such...

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**Donegan:** Cab didn't appear. Some comics, off-beat comics you know.

**Watson:** What happened after "Sensations of '45"—were there other attempts at film?

**Donegan:** No.

**Watson:** In fact, I've read in other accounts that there was another film made but I've never seen its title or anything. Can you clarify that? Did you ever do another movie?

**Donegan:** No.

**Watson:** Where did you go from there? What happened next?

**Donegan:** I guess I went back to Chicago.

**Watson:** Somewhere around this time, it's never dated, you were doing some package tours with both the International Sweethearts of Rhythm and Jackie "Moms" Mabley. Was that the same tour, were they on the package together with you?

**Donegan:** I must have done two theatres with them. Jackie "Moms" Mabley, she said, she'd stop the show and say, "Follow that."

**Watson:** Tell me more about her.

**Donegan:** She'd put her teeth in the glass, perform, she was a comedian, you know. She'd perform and stop the show. So, that's how you learn how to stop a show, with performers like that. And then there was another performer, Peg Leg Bates, had one leg. He'd say, "Let me break this other leg for you."

**Watson:** On that kind of package, what would the order be, the order of artists?

**Donegan:** They would close it. 'Cause I don't think I could close it then. Now I could.

**Watson:** At what point in your career were you able to close it?

**Donegan:** When I appeared against Teddy Wilson and Thelma Carpenter.

**Watson:** When was that?

**Donegan:** '54.'55. George Gewee (?) said I called and asked for the job, you know. So, he gave me \$500, I said, "Oh, I'll make this due." He said, "Oh, you gotta pay your men out of it." I said, "That's alright too." So, I played against Thelma Carpenter and Teddy Wilson. And Thelma

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Carpenter took all the time. I said, “You can take all night, it ain’t gonna make no difference.” So I got on there and stopped that show cold.

**Watson:** What happened after you stole the show?

**Donegan:** She never spoke to me again. She said, “Dorothy stole the show but I closed it.” I said, “Closed it?” Yeah.

**Watson:** How about the International Sweethearts of Rhythm, where were those two shows that you performed?

**Donegan:** At the Regal and the Fox Theatre.

**Watson:** The Fox Theatre being where?

**Donegan:** Detroit. No, it was the Paradise. They call that the Chittlin’ Circuit, TOBA. Tough On Black Actors.

**Watson:** Now, on the chittlin’ circuit, it would frequently also visit The Apollo, The Howard Theatre in DC, the Royal Theatre in Baltimore. Why did this bill with the Sweethearts and Moms Mabley not travel to New York, Baltimore, Pittsburgh?

**Donegan:** I don’t think nobody asked for them, you know. You got to be asked for, you know.

**Watson:** Differences in the audience between Detroit and Chicago?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** Tell me about that.

**Donegan:** Detroit was tough. The Howard Theatre was tougher: “Don’t be playin’ any of that classical music here.” And that Royal in Baltimore—the Ink Spots played there once and there was a big rat that ran across the stage. So somebody took out a gun and shot it. They thought it was a cat, you know. And Bill Kenny said, “Whoaaaaaaaa” and they ran off the stage.

**Watson:** What were some of your favorite clubs to play at this point, somewhere in the mid-40’s? What were your preferences? If you could pick a venue to play in the 1940’s, what were your favorites?

**Donegan:** Any place that paid a lot of money, that’s a favorite.

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**Watson:** Can you tell me about the wartime entertainment tax against entertainers? 20% tax on entertainers during the war years.

**Donegan:** I don't remember that. Unless it was on me. They claimed that I wiggled when I played and there should be a tax on it, you know. So the union says, "Well, she can wiggle as long as she keeps playing the piano." Some of the women pianists were kind of jealous.

**Watson:** Did that get you off the hook and keep you categorized as a musician?

**Donegan:** Oh yeah. And one of the owners said, "My wife don't want to come in here since she's here." I said, "I know she don't mind spending the money I made."

**Watson:** Tell me about the wiggling, the hip shaking, the arm flourishes.

**Donegan:** I'd be playing and I'd be wiggling and most people wanted to sit in the back rather than in the front. So people like the Duke and Duchess of Windsor would come in, Tallulah Bankhead, Ronald Reagan and his wife, Robert Montgomery and his wife, they all want to see me.

**Watson:** When did some of those aspects become a part of your performance style?

**Donegan:** I guess during then. Of course I don't do it as much now, I don't have the energy. And I find, the more piano playing you do, you don't have to do that.

**Watson:** Were you ever criticized for that?

**Donegan:** Yes, some people criticized it, you know. So I said, "Well, as long as I play the piano, I can shake. Some people don't have nothing to shake."

**Watson:** Who would criticize you for that?

**Donegan:** The other women pianists.

**Watson:** Why is that? Did they not have something to shake?

**Donegan:** No, their behind was kind of flat.

**Cheatham:** Most musicians have superstitions. Do you have any superstitions?

**Donegan:** You can't put your hat on my bed.

**Cheatham:** Can't put your hat on your bed. Why?

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**Donegan:** That means the show's gonna close.

**Cheatham:** Is that so?

**Donegan:** And you can't whistle in my dressing room.

**Cheatham:** Why is that?

**Donegan:** It's bad luck.

**Cheatham:** Can you tell me something—was it an advantage for you to be light-skinned versus a darker-skinned entertainer?

**Donegan:** In Europe, a darker skinned woman has a better opportunity than a light one.

**Cheatham:** Why do you think that is?

**Donegan:** They want to help our own. They want a colored woman. They say they got the light woman at home.

**Cheatham:** How about in the U.S.?

**Donegan:** In the United States, they want the entertainers to be dark, especially on TV.

**Cheatham:** Really. And during your time when you did movies, when you were young, like just starting out in Chicago and all, did you find most showgirls that danced and all were a particular shade?

**Donegan:** In the Cotton Club, all them women were real light. Like a woman my color or yours, we couldn't get work there. They had to be "high yella," an "oreo."

**Cheatham:** I understand. Did you have a lot of stage door men standing around waiting to take you out while you were playing?

**Donegan:** Yeah, those who weren't working were around there. If they were working, they didn't come around. Show women get nothing but pimps usually.

**Cheatham:** No rich white persons or persons of color with limousines that wanted to wine and dine you?

**Donegan:** Not really. They get people that have good manners, they pull the chairs back, 'cause they don't have a job so they have time to learn their manners.

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**Watson:** Miss Donegan, according to my notes, somewhere about 1945 or 1946, obviously following “Sensations of ‘45” you were performing solo in Los Angeles and, this may have been at the Latin Quarter? Is that correct?

**Donegan:** I think that was before then.

**Watson:** A revue program with chorus girls and dancers, the De Marcos as dancers?

**Donegan:** Yes, and Benny Fields and Blossom singing. I was in a show called “Star Time.”

**Watson:** I think this is what leads to “Star Time”—comedians Jerry Lester, Lou Holtz. Tell me about Lou Holtz and how he came into your career.

**Donegan:** He showed me how to walk out on a stage, Lou Holtz did. And I think he owned a piece of the San Francisco Hotel. But he showed me how to walk out. And he said, “If you give love in your eyes, then you’ll get love in response back.” And I was in the show with him, the Berry brothers got sick so I took their place. They were working too hard, like Buddy Collette, you know.

**Watson:** So, Lou Holtz took you back to New York to appear in “Star Time”?

**Donegan:** Yes, and the De Marcos, and Benny Fields, and one of those Blossoms, Blossom Seals. So I learned about show business from them, the vaudeville stuff. ‘Cause they knew all that.

**Watson:** Tell me about “Star Time.”

**Donegan:** It was a play, it didn’t run too long. I don’t think it had a book, a story.

**Watson:** How was it different from just a revue?

**Donegan:** It was just a revue. And I was the only black performer in it.

**Watson:** Where did it run?

**Donegan:** New York, and then it ran in Philadelphia. But it was soon to close.

**Watson:** Do you happen to remember which theatres in New York and Philadelphia?

**Donegan:** No.

**Watson:** What would you perform in your section of that performance?

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**Donegan:** I'd do something like the "Prelude in C# Minor" or else "Minute Waltz." You'd swing that and do a boogie-woogie.

**Watson:** Did you feel you were being locked into a certain style in your performances in the movie, "Sensations of 1945" and then "Star Time"? Were you expected in all of your performances to play the classics, to swing the classics and then to play jazz or did you have more freedom in your performances?

**Donegan:** Well, I picked the numbers but I picked the numbers that would sell. They liked classical and they liked jazz, so you can't miss with the combination. You got to get somebody.

**Watson:** How long did that run for?

**Donegan:** About six to eight weeks.

**Watson:** Miss Donegan, about this time, 1946 or 47, according to the discographies, you were recording in New York for Continental. The session is undated, solo piano "Some of These Days," "Kilroy Was Here," "Schubert's Boogie-Woogie," "How High the Moon," "The Man I Love," "Two Loves Was One Too Many For Me." Any recollection of these dates?

**Donegan:** I don't remember that one. "Two Loves Was One Too Many For Me."

**Watson:** Any recollection of that?

**Donegan:** I'd have to learn that again.

**Watson:** Any differences in recording for Continental than back for Bluebird?

**Donegan:** I think I liked that number "Yesterday" that I played for Continental. My brother said he liked it.

**Watson:** That was another Continental session from 1946, September. That was, according to the discography here, a trio...well, you did some solos and some trio work on that earlier session, September 1946...with Carl "Flat Top" Wilson on bass and Oliver Coleman on drums. Can you tell me anything about that? How were they?

**Donegan:** Fair.

**Watson:** Anything else?

**Donegan:** That's it.

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**Watson:** Tell me about, after “Star Time,” 1946 or 47, maybe you can tell me, you had another opportunity for a stage performance. A leading role in a Broadway-bound musical. It had a run in Connecticut in the summer theatre there.

**Donegan:** That’s “Star Time.”

**Watson:** That’s “Star Time” as well? According to the notes I’ve got, the production did not do well, never made it to Broadway.

**Donegan:** No, it was with Jane White, Walter White’s daughter. She was trying to boss everybody in the show. It didn’t have it, to go the extra 10 years.

**Watson:** Do you recall how much you got paid?

**Donegan:** About \$750.

**Watson:** \$750 a week? How many performances a week?

**Donegan:** About eight.

**Watson:** So, matinees on the weekend?

**Donegan:** Yeah. I like to work short. Work smarter, not harder.

**Watson:** On the “Star Time” production, were you required to stay around for the entire performance? Or could you come in, do your performance and take off?

**Donegan:** I could go home.

**Watson:** How long was your segment in the “Star Time” production?

**Donegan:** Around eight or nine weeks I think.

**Watson:** No, I mean in a given night?

**Donegan:** I could do as long as I wanted.

**Watson:** What can you tell me about...at this time, 1946, ‘47 after the war...the possibility to cross over from being a musical artist, a recording artist to a film artist to someone hopefully on their way to Broadway. Was it easier then than it is now?

**Donegan:** I think it was. Whatever the job called for, you know that’s what you did.

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**Watson:** Were you anxious to cross over into other venues than being just a recording artist?

**Donegan:** You were anxious to just get work. You weren't thinking about other venues, you were just thinking about getting work. You're supposed to get work.

**Watson:** Who were the most successful performers who started as musicians and made it on either Broadway or musical stage or movies at this time in the '40's.

**Donegan:** Oscar hadn't started then, had he? . . . Nat Cole.

**Watson:** Do you think Nat Cole opened doors for other African-American performers as he crossed over into television, film...

**Donegan:** I don't think so because in show business, they only made one of us at a time. And when they mess up, they'd book another one.

**Watson:** When you say that, how long would the average career of that one artist at a time be in vogue before they fell from popularity and the industry was looking for another one?

**Donegan:** I think as long as the public liked them. You could be Jay Gould one day and Jay Bird the next in the same day.

**Watson:** One piece of information that I've come across in some of the writings about that I'm very unclear about says that you studied Psychology at the University of Chicago in the 1940's, yes or no?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** Tell me about that.

**Donegan:** I had a boyfriend that was going there so me and him would study together. And I'd help him with some of his problems.

**Watson:** Were you enrolled there?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** How did studying Psychology at the University of Chicago differ from studying Sociology at USC?

**Donegan:** It's all the same. Every story got three different sections. And instruction is still instruction.

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**Watson:** Did you have any professional goals in the field of psychology?

**Donegan:** Not particularly. I just wanted to be knowledgeable. When people say “Van Gogh” or “The Rorschach Test,” I wanted to know what they were talking about.

**Watson:** How long did you study at the University of Chicago?

**Donegan:** Not too long.

**Watson:** 1948 you married your first husband. You didn’t mention by name yesterday, would you do that?

**Donegan:** John T. McClain, Sr.

**Watson:** And that marriage lasted how long?

**Donegan:** About 15 years. Too long.

**Watson:** Were there any good times with him that you want to document?

**Donegan:** No, it looked like I did all the work. And he just went on the road with me.

**Watson:** To what extent did he try to navigate your business decisions? Did he serve as your manager at any time?

**Donegan:** No, he wanted me to play in his club free.

**Watson:** You talked about that yesterday. Were there any other attempts for you to get movie work or stage work?

**Donegan:** No.

**Watson:** Didn’t you pursue more films or stage work?

**Donegan:** Sometimes I would get tired of playing and didn’t want to work much.

**Watson:** And what would you do during those times? How would you continue to pay the bills?

**Donegan:** I would go shopping and practice. I like to go shopping.

**Watson:** Tell me about that. That seems to be one of your hobbies.

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**Donegan:** They say, “Shop ‘til you drop.” But I understand when you go shopping you won’t have much money. But I love to shop. Still do. I don’t do it too much now.

**Cheatham:** “Shop ‘til you drop.” Tell me something—did you have a preference for long gowns when you played or short gowns or whatever was in style?

**Donegan:** Some periods I’d go through long ones and then the next one I’d go through shorter.

**Cheatham:** Even though sometimes you were on very high stages and women sometimes have to make a choice because of the workplace, as far as the stages are concerned, and make adjustments. Did you have to go through all that?

**Donegan:** No.

**Cheatham:** How about shoes—high heels?

**Donegan:** I’d have to get good shoes, ‘cause I’d break the heels.

**Cheatham:** Can you tell me some of your favorite designers?

**Donegan:** Chanel, St. John, Versace.

**Cheatham:** You’re really hip.

**Donegan:** I was in Paris and picked out a blouse. The woman says, “That’s silk.” I said, “Well, put it on me.”

**Cheatham:** She put it on you?

**Donegan:** Yeah.

**Cheatham:** Did you ever learn to drive?

**Donegan:** Yeah, but I drove so bad ‘til on the highway, the police would say, “Pull over, lady,” on the loudspeaker. So I must have been driving 15 miles an hour. Finally, I met the officer, “Lady, why do you drive so bad?” So, he says, “You’re the worst driver I’ve ever seen.” I said, “What color?” “Any! Any!” I said, “Well, mister, if you let me get away with this I won’t drive no more . . . How much time I got?”

**Cheatham:** You know what I’d like to know? You were very fortunate because most women, especially if they’re alone on the road, have to either have very good friends that drive or that drive themselves. You seem to ride around in a lot of limousines.

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**Donegan:** Well, see I would always take a plane.

**Cheatham:** And when you go back and forth from the hotel to the job.

**Donegan:** A cab.

**Cheatham:** Did you have a set cab driver for, like, if you had to stay somewhere six or seven weeks, did you have one guy that would pick you up all the time or you'd just go out ...

**Donegan:** No.

**Cheatham:** Just go out and hail one?

**Donegan:** Just get a cab.

**Cheatham:** In New York?

**Donegan:** (Give) the doorman a dollar and he'll get you a cab.

**Cheatham:** So, where would you stay in comparison to where you would play?

**Donegan:** When I played at Tavern on the Green, I stayed at the Marriott. Real good hotels.

**Cheatham:** Yes. How about the early days, your early days in New York?

**Donegan:** I stayed at the best.

**Cheatham:** Stayed at the best. Yes. That's why you're my idol. Did you have a chance to eat in the places where you worked or would they have a special table for you or would they try to tell you to go back in the kitchen and all that?

**Donegan:** No, no kitchen.

**Cheatham:** No kitchen for Dorothy?

**Donegan:** No. I'd just eat where the guests were. Of course, I didn't mind eating with the fellas sometimes. But they gave them bad food for a reasonable price.

**Cheatham:** What are the comparisons between the food out front and the food in the back?

**Donegan:** The food out front is prepared differently. The musicians get food that's like you got rid of the things in the ice box. They had specials.

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**Cheatham:** And they gave musicians the specials?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Cheatham:** I'd like to know what you think was the crowning point in your career? What was the most thrill for you as far as reaching a certain peak in your career?

**Donegan:** Being invited to play before the President of the United States.

**Cheatham:** You'll have to tell us about that.

**Donegan:** Thelonious Monk had heard me in Switzerland. So, he asked me would I like to play at the White House. I said "Sure." He said, "Well, I'll let you know when I get back to America." So, when I got back to America, he say, "It's official." But I noticed in the paper, they didn't announce me. So, I learned later on the reason why. They say, the rest of them wouldn't show up. So, I kept it under my hat . . .

**Cheatham:** Which President was this?

**Donegan:** Clinton. I played the Newport Jazz Festival.

**Cheatham:** Did you have a special dress you bought?

**Donegan:** I had dresses.

**Cheatham:** What did you pick out to wear?

**Donegan:** I had a silver coat and a Chanel copy baseball hat.

**Cheatham:** A silver raincoat and what kind of a hat?

**Donegan:** A Chanel copy baseball hat.

**Cheatham:** What kind of shoes?

**Donegan:** Rhinestone shoes.

**Cheatham:** Silver rhinestones?

**Donegan:** And a bugle beaded jet top and a black sequined skirt.

**Cheatham:** Oh my. When you arrived in Washington DC, did they have a car waiting for you?

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**Donegan:** Yeah, the Secret Service met us and took us to the Capitol Hotel. And old Herbie Hancock was there, Wynton Marsalis, and Joshua Redman and Red Mitchell. Everybody.

**Cheatham:** They were all there. So, they picked you up in the hotel and took you to the White House. Did they make you have credentials or something you had to show?

**Donegan:** You had to go through a screening.

**Cheatham:** What kind of screening?

**Donegan:** Oh, they took your fingerprints and everything.

**Cheatham:** Oh they did? Then, would they take you into the dining room or did they make you wait in the anteroom?

**Donegan:** I guess anteroom.

**Cheatham:** Until your turn?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Cheatham:** So, who came on first?

**Donegan:** I don't know.

**Cheatham:** When did you play?

**Donegan:** I followed Rosemary Clooney. And then Herbie Hancock had to follow me.

**Cheatham:** He had to follow you?

**Donegan:** He was disgusted. His lip dropped down to his thing.

**Cheatham:** What did you choose to play for the President?

**Donegan:** They only gave me 10 minutes, so I played everything I knew in 10 minutes.

**Cheatham:** Did the President look pleased?

**Donegan:** Yeah, I got a standing ovation.

**Cheatham:** Marvelous.

**Donegan:** And Bobby McFerrin, they were all frowning.

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**Cheatham:** Why were they frowning?

**Donegan:** I got that standing ovation, they couldn't top that. USA Today says, "You stole the show, thanks, you stole the show." And they all stood up. I was all by myself.

**Cheatham:** What did you do, take a bow?

**Donegan:** Yes, I bowed to the President, then I bowed to Hillary.

**Cheatham:** Wonderful. So, you think that was about the high point of your career?

**Donegan:** I think so. It sounds like a closer.

**Cheatham:** You could still have a movie, you know, of your life.

**Donegan:** When you gonna do that?

**Watson:** Miss Donegan, can you tell me why the celebration at the White House was so important to you? Why was that the high point?

[CD #4]

**Donegan:** Well people all over the country saw it. They call you up. They don't call you 'til they see you on TV.

**Watson:** How about the presence of your musical colleagues, there, was that important to you?

**Donegan:** Not really, 'cause they don't want me on the bill anyway and I know it. So, I had to get on the bill and get my money and get out. 'Cause Herbie Hancock wants to run everything. (laughs)

**Watson:** Were there any other events or awards or things that you've been honored with that...

**Donegan:** I got a doctorate from the University of Maryland.

**Watson:** Tell me about that.

**Donegan:** The President of the school heard me do a performance so he said, "I like you." So, he wanted me to teach at the school, he said he had run out of money. So I said, "There are other ways to pay me." So, they gave me a doctorate from the University of Maryland at Eastern Shore.

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**Watson:** I understand that you have been a student at the University of Maryland for master classes?

**Donegan:** Yeah, well, I go to the one at College Park and they have piano classes every year. I get to dress nice and learn to...

**Watson:** So, you're always a student there but never an instructor.

**Donegan:** You can always learn something.

**Watson:** What do you learn from those master classes?

**Donegan:** When somebody else does something, you learn the way they do it. And you add what you find from them to what you know.

**Watson:** Would you compare any of the learning to your relationship to Art Tatum.

**Donegan:** It's a different structure.

**Watson:** How is it different?

**Donegan:** We play classical music, no jazz there. But I learned a lot from them.

**Watson:** I've got some questions here about more sessions from the middle part of your career. Or some of the clubs you played. There's a card from 1951, a publicity card that was used, put out by the Music Corporation of America...

**Donegan:** They used to handle me.

**Watson:** Who was handling you there?

**Donegan:** Larry Funk. And you got the same salary whether you played there or not. Every job was the same salary.

**Watson:** And how much was it at the time?

**Donegan:** \$1300 a week.

**Watson:** Was that good money compared to some of the previous gigs you'd had?

**Donegan:** It was a good idea if you want security but I wanted more money.

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**Watson:** Some of the prestigious venues that were listed on that card: In New York, Café Society; Hollywood, the Trocadero; Chicago, The Latin Quarter and Oriental Theatre; St. Louis, the Chase Hotel; in Detroit, the Downtown Theatre; Los Angeles, Orpheum Theatre. It also mentions the film, “Sensations of 1945.” Some pretty good venues there.

**Donegan:** Yeah.

**Watson:** Any preferences for those?

**Donegan:** Not really.

**Watson:** All the same.

**Donegan:** All the same. It’s still work.

**Watson:** In the late 1950’s, were you shuttling back and forth between Los Angeles and New York? Would you split your time between the two cities?

**Donegan:** I played the Embers in New York.

**Watson:** And I understand that you had a 10-year contract with them.

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** How did that come about?

**Donegan:** Well, they didn’t want to hire me but they hired me. People like people who do business. If you don’t do any business, it’s no good. So that’s how I got the contract.

**Watson:** Ralph Watkins was the owner?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** Did he do the booking?

**Donegan:** Yeah, and Mo Louis (?).

**Watson:** Who were some of the other artists who would be playing at The Embers?

**Donegan:** Jonah Jones, Hazel Scott, Joe Bushkin, Jo Jones, Teddy Wilson.

**Watson:** You played there 16 weeks a year. How many weeks at a time would you play in a row?

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**Donegan:** Four weeks at a time.

**Watson:** So, four months of your year would be at The Embers in New York. Where were you living when you played there?

**Donegan:** I stayed in a hotel. Maybe the Park Sheridan.

**Watson:** Some of the other venues, the London House in Chicago?

**Donegan:** That was a good one. They had blueberry muffins there. He didn't want to play on the bill with me.

**Watson:** Who was this?

**Donegan:** George Shearing. They wanted to put me on the bill, he said, "Uh-uhhh, I don't know her." They put in Barbara Carroll or someone like that.

**Watson:** The Round Table in New York.

**Donegan:** I played there with Mel Torme.

**Watson:** Was Mel performing with you on the same bill?

**Donegan:** On the same bill.

**Watson:** Would you open or would you close?

**Donegan:** I think I'd open.

**Watson:** Were there differences between the audience at The Round Table and The Embers?

**Donegan:** I think so.

**Watson:** Different kind of crowd? How so?

**Donegan:** The audiences at The Round Table were more sophisticated. They're cabaret-ers.

**Watson:** In playing to that audience, what would you play differently than you would play at The Embers?

**Donegan:** Nothing really.

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**Watson:** Can you tell me a little bit about how you read an audience and give them what they want, especially considering different kinds of venues, different cities?

**Donegan:** Oh, that's my secret.

**Watson:** Give us a hint.

**Donegan:** Well, you hit one or two notes and hear the reaction. Or sometimes you have to ask them what they like to hear. But you usually know what the audience likes after you play one or two numbers.

**Watson:** One thing I'm unsure of from the liner notes and articles—I believe, did Jo Jones or J.C. Heard ever play in your trio's?

**Donegan:** Yeah, J.C. Heard used to be a boyfriend of mine.

**Watson:** When was this? J.C. Heard? Tell me about him.

**Donegan:** They called him "Swee-dee-dee." And he was sort of on the pimpy side. But that didn't hurt me, you know. But he was a good drummer. So, we'd be on the road. I discovered you don't go with people you work with. You can't 'S' where you eat. And so pretty soon, that broke up.

**Watson:** How long did it take before you learned that?

**Donegan:** About six or eight months, a year.

**Watson:** Did you continue to work with him or did you just break off the relationship?

**Donegan:** No, he went his own separate way. See, he wanted to be a leader and I wanted to be a leader, so it's not going to work. There's only one leader.

**Watson:** So you only played with him for about eight months. How about Jo Jones?

**Donegan:** Jo Jones was sort of a mentor. He was psychic, that's what Jimmy says. He liked to talk rough to you. "Dancers on the whoozits, whoozits on the whatsits." He threw a stick at me, you got that?

**Watson:** We got that.

**Donegan:** But he was a great person. I went to his funeral. It took me two days to get there.

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**Watson:** I wanted to ask you about live recordings. You recorded live sides for Capitol in 1958, '59 I believe. In the 1960's, you started recording for Roulette. 1960, you made a recording at The Round Table with Larry Rice on drums and Doc Jones on bass. Later on, 1962, you recorded live at The Embers on Roulette. Can you tell me the difference having your records recorded live and recording in the studio. What was your preference, how are they different?

**Donegan:** When you record, I think it's better in the studio because you don't hear the tinkling of the glasses and people chatting. When you record live, you hear everything. What they ate for breakfast and what they didn't.

**Watson:** Now many of your recordings have been in live settings, probably because you're such a wonderful live performer. Are there elements of your stage persona or performance style that don't come across in a studio recording?

**Donegan:** Well, that doesn't come across at all, it's just playing comes across, 'cause you can't see me wiggle.

**Watson:** You also don't hear the crowd respond.

**Donegan:** No. What you hear is what you get.

**Watson:** Do you think that the studio recordings, where what you hear is what you get, reflect your talent?

**Donegan:** Sometimes.

**Watson:** Have there been any particular recordings that you're especially proud of, that you feel really capture all of who you are as an artist?

**Donegan:** My brother said "Yesterday" captured some of it. Many of them do and some don't. Sometimes I say, "Oh I should have had more feeling." 'Course, you're not right every day.

**Watson:** I'd like to go through the discography on certain dates where the rhythm section is unknown, just to see if you have any recollection to fill in some blanks historically. First one, "Jazz, Live and Boogie." Unknown location and date, recorded for Pontiac. "Schubert's Boogie-Woogie," "Tin Pan Alley Boogie." This is listed after a 1946 or '47 date and before a 1953 date. Any recollection of that?

**Donegan:** No.

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**Watson:** Here's one, seven sides recorded for Jubilee, about the same time, somewhere in the late '40's, early '50's. It says "No details." "Up a Lazy River," "I Can't Give You Anything But Love," "Dancing on the Ceiling," "Happiness is a Thing Called Joe," "September Song," "St. Louis Blues" "I Get a Kick Out of You." Any recollection of where that might have been?

**Donegan:** Let's see, that would have been with Jo Jones. I don't remember.

**Donegan:** There were a number of recordings that were reissued by Rosetta Wrights (?) on Rosetta Records, on a cassette I believe called "Dorothy Romps," piano retrospective, 1953-1979, something like that. None of them seem to have any information. "Dorothy Rocks," "Minuet in G," "Donegan Walk," "Just in Time."

**Donegan:** Well, she snatched recordings from the rest of the records and then put them out on her label.

**Watson:** Did she pay royalties on those?

**Donegan:** She didn't give me royalties, she just paid me a flat sum.

**Watson:** So she paid you.

**Donegan:** Yeah.

**Watson:** How much, if you don't mind me asking?

**Donegan:** Not enough.

**Watson:** Could you tell me why so few recordings of your music are commercially available at this point?

**Donegan:** Well, my son, who is a great record producer—he produced Janet Jackson and Dr. Dre and people like that...

**Watson:** Who was this and what did he say?

**Donegan:** It's the rich one. John Jr. John McClain, Jr. He records artists for A&M and Polygram.

**Watson:** And what did he tell you about...

**Donegan:** It's an economy of notes.

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**Watson:** Meaning what?

**Donegan:** It isn't how much you play, it's how little you play.

**Watson:** Do you know how many records you have out on the market these days?

**Donegan:** No, I'm not aware.

**Watson:** I was trying to find a few and came up with a few recent ones from the recordings on the SS Norway on Chiaroscuro Records, 1990, '91 and '92 performances. There's also that recording that we just mentioned, on Rosetta Records, the cassette. There is also one that was recorded in 1980 called "The Explosive Dorothy Donegan."

**Donegan:** Yeah, Gus Gutierrez (?)

**Watson:** Tell me about these recordings, do they reflect your talent?

**Donegan:** So-so.

**Watson:** What changes would you make in your recorded output?

**Donegan:** I'd plan it more. See, you can't go and play like it's a jam session. I think that's one of the faults. It has to be planned.

**Watson:** Did you even do a session where you had that time to plan ahead and figure out what you were going to do?

**Donegan:** I don't think so. If you caught me right, you caught me right. If you caught me wrong, it wasn't.

**Watson:** For listeners who are going to listen to your records into the next century—25 years from now, 50 years from now—what are they going to take from those recordings of you that are available?

**Donegan:** I think they'd like them really. People who do buy them, you know I always say it's music that has snob appeal and I appeal to that kind of audience.

**Watson:** Explain that to me.

**Donegan:** Snob appeal.

**Watson:** Why do your recordings have that snob appeal?

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**Donegan:** They combine the classical influences and the jazz. So, that's how my music would sound.

**Watson:** In the 1960's, many of the supper clubs that you had been playing in began to close. How did that affect your career?

**Donegan:** Well, I would cry but everything doesn't last forever. Life doesn't last forever. So you have to wait 'til the time comes back.

**Watson:** Supper clubs are something that as a rule, don't exist today like they did. Are there any other places that opened up as a result—are there any other sectors of the entertainment economy, or venues, that started booking the kinds of acts that the supper clubs used to?

**Donegan:** The Copley Plaza, places like that. And the Village Vangate [Village Gate], the Village Vanguard. Some of the clubs on the West Side, Mikell's Pub, Jimmy Weston's.

**Watson:** When did you start playing some of those others, Jimmy Weston's for example?

**Donegan:** I guess '56, '57.

**Watson:** Did you ever have opportunities open up in Europe as things dried up in the States, especially in the '60's?

**Donegan:** I don't think so. Usually people call you in Europe when they need you. I guess that's every club owner. I get more gigs now than...

**Watson:** I read somewhere that you got in trouble with some of the European bookers for demanding and commanding the salaries that the male musicians were getting paid.

**Donegan:** I didn't get in trouble, I just said I should make the same money if I'm playing better or as well. And staying in better hotels.

**Watson:** Did you get that?

**Donegan:** Yeah, 'cause I wasn't gonna stay in the dumps. They put the musicians in dumps you know.

**Watson:** How did the male musicians feel about you commanding the same salaries as they were getting? Were they resentful or supportive?

**Donegan:** It wasn't good news.

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(Side conversation)

**Watson:** How about hotels? Did the hotel gigs either open up or were they consistent through your career?

**Donegan:** I had some, like the Meridien Hotel in Paris. I worked the Copley Plaza in Boston. Then I worked the Sheridan in New York. That was not too long.

**Watson:** Couple other holes I'd like to fill, the names of your second and third husbands?

**Donegan:** Let's see the second one was...what was that so-and-so's name? Bill Miles.

**Watson:** And you married him approximately when?

**Donegan:** '65.

**Watson:** And your third husband?

**Donegan:** Walter Eady.

**Watson:** You married him...

**Donegan:** '67 or '68

**Watson:** And you've been divorced since when?

**Donegan:** Since '61.

**Cheatham:** Dorothy, they say that women always marry the same man over and over, were they all three alike?

**Donegan:** Each one was different. They grew progressively worse. I should have kept the first one and not married the second and third.

**Cheatham:** When was the first one's birthday?

**Donegan:** January the 9<sup>th</sup>.

**Cheatham:** When was the second one's birthday?

**Donegan:** He was a Gemini, oh crazy. June 16th.

**Cheatham:** When was the third one?

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**Donegan:** He was November.

**Cheatham:** Now see, you have winter, summer and fall. Now maybe the fourth one should be from spring.

**Donegan:** I don't know. Three times, they trying to tell you something, ain't they? Just don't marry nobody. Stay single . . . I talked to Tommy Tucker and I said, "You getting married?" and he said, "I wouldn't shack with Jackie Onassis." He said, "I'm sick of doing time and marriage ain't nothing but time. They come in pretty, acting nice and after they get you, they change."

**Watson:** Can you tell me specifically what sacrifices you had to make as a musical artist because of those marriages?

**Donegan:** I don't remember making any sacrifices too much. But I think I should have just stayed single and just practiced the piano.

**Watson:** How about between marriages and having two sons, did you ever retire from the business?

**Donegan:** No, it retired me for a while. This is a funny business. One day you're Jay bird and the next day, the same day, you're Jay Gould.

**Watson:** Have you found that to be true in that order, going from lacking popularity to becoming popular again? What would lead to those new peaks in popularity for you?

**Donegan:** Well, in Chicago I had unpopularity, but I played for Delores Hope and we got a standing ovation, so I got popular again there. You can do a benefit sometimes and it awakens the promoters.

**Watson:** How about 1974, the tribute to Josephine Baker at Carnegie Hall. Did that represent kind of a new beginning in the '70's for you?

**Donegan:** Yes it did. Because I hadn't played Carnegie Hall. I wanted to play on that with Thelma Carpenter, she really didn't want me on the bill, but I was hired.

**Watson:** And what did the tribute to Josephine Baker consist of?

**Donegan:** Me, Teddy Wilson and Thelma Carpenter.

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**Watson:** (I want to) ask you about another experience at Carnegie Hall with Oscar Peterson. I understand there was a little bit of competition or rivalry, at least on his side, and not necessarily wanting to play after you. Can you tell me about that experience?

**Donegan:** Did I play first? Or did he play first? The critic, John Wilson, said that my runs had come more to the point that his, that I enjoyed no popularity, they thought I should be reckoned in the same light that he is. They said that I had played just as well, maybe better.

**Watson:** Do you think of Oscar Peterson as your closest competition?

**Donegan:** Sometimes I say that I'm more versatile than he is (laughs). He's more predictable but he's a great pianist. And he's lost his left hand.

**Watson:** It's the stroke. What do you most admire about Oscar Peterson?

**Donegan:** He's got a nice touch. He's a big man of the piano, a giant.

**Watson:** He's also an Art Tatum protégée.

**Donegan:** No, he's a Nat Cole protégée.

**Watson:** Interesting. Tell me about that. Take that a little bit further.

**Donegan:** He heard Earl Hines first. So, he patterned his style after Earl Hines and Nat Cole. And he sings too.

**Watson:** How about touring around the world. I understand you've been not only to Europe, but to Africa, Asia and Australia.

**Donegan:** I didn't go to Australia and Africa. But I went to Japan.

**Watson:** Good to know. Tell me about the Japanese audience and how that differs from your experiences in the States and Europe.

**Donegan:** They're just like anybody else. If they move, they hit their derriere. I found that I could move them, too. I was happy about that.

**Watson:** When did you first go to Japan?

**Donegan:** About three years ago. I'd gone before as a tourist.

**Watson:** How long did you perform there and where?

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**Donegan:** Six or seven days, in hotels and little bars no bigger than this. They charge \$100 to come in and get a drink.

**Watson:** Who was booking this for you?

**Donegan:** His name was Yoshi.

**Watson:** At what point did you begin playing with symphony orchestras?

**Donegan:** 1976, '75.

**Watson:** And which orchestras have you played with?

**Donegan:** New Orleans Symphony, and the Southeast Symphony and the Hollywood Symphony.

**Watson:** How did those come about?

**Donegan:** When I got popular, they wanted me to play with the symphonies. That's the way that comes about.

**Watson:** You said "when I got popular." How did you become popular again?

**Donegan:** That writer in the New York Times, New York Magazine, Whitney Balliett. Then I started getting all these good gigs, that don't last too long and pay more money.

**Watson:** How does your performance fit into that program compared to your own either solo or trio performance.

**Donegan:** I think playing with symphonies, you got to learn how to play with the other people, not run off. So I'm learning now how to play with people instead of playing for myself or with myself.

**Watson:** I wanted to ask you about some of the recordings you've made, starting in the '70's perhaps. Several of these are recorded overseas, "Dorothy Donegan Trio," "Live Best of Harlem," recorded for the Four Leaf Clover label, recorded in Stockholm. Also, dates issued by Black and Blue in Paris, 1979. Another '79 session in Paris for Black and Blue. Session for Ornament Records in Holland recorded in 1980, trio with Tony Mann on drums and Georg Lindzhes (?) on bass. You've got a session for Swingtime in Munich in 1980. A session in Zurich, Switzerland in 1986. Sounds like your European audience is really developing by the '70's that all of these live sessions are being recorded there.

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**Donegan:** Yes. Well, people record in the trees. When they have a storm, they come out the trees. They snatch your music you know. A lot of things I recorded, I don't remember recording.

**Watson:** Have you ever seen records released that you didn't even know about?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** Talk to me about the royalty arrangements on those European sessions.

**Donegan:** There's nothing to talk about, you don't get any royalties. Just memories. What did Babs Gonzales say? He said, "Kicks and no bread."

**Watson:** Do those European recordings benefit you in any way?

**Donegan:** I don't know whether they do or not. I guess it makes one more person know you that didn't.

**Watson:** Do you think that they helped you get bookings?

**Donegan:** Not necessarily.

**Watson:** Very few sessions were recorded in the States of your music at this time. I saw one New York date. Why is it that the domestic recordings dried up?

**Donegan:** I don't know. Maybe they didn't understand what I was doing.

**Watson:** Did you ever feel that you burned any bridges that you regret on the business side?

**Donegan:** Mmm-hmmm.

**Watson:** Can you tell me about that.

**Donegan:** Some of the booking agents I would burn the bridges, 'cause I thought 10% of a dollar was a dime instead of sixty cents. But I understand, if they don't steal, they won't book you.

**Watson:** What wisdom can you pass on to other younger musicians, in particular women musicians, from your experience, the rough experiences you've had with recordings, with bookings and just making a living performing this music.

**Donegan:** Well, I think they should go to school so they can get a job. 'Cause if you can't get a J.O.B. you'll be a B.U.M. And if you don't go to school you'll be a fool. And then show business should be the second career.

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**Watson:** How about...you talked about Tatum taking you on as mentor. Have you served as a mentor to other musicians?

**Donegan:** I don't think so. If I like somebody I'll help them. But I don't know. I think I'll help people. I won't show them everything but...

**Watson:** One of the words that occasionally comes up in writings about you especially in '70's and '80's is "feminist." How do you feel about that word?

**Donegan:** I think I still like for the name that pay the bills. I like that very much. I don't want to pay the man's bills. My money belongs to me and his belongs to him. I don't want no pimps.

**Watson:** Some of the non-musical flourishes that you incorporate into your act, the hip shaking and all, does that go back to vaudeville influences, not necessarily with you...

**Donegan:** It could be. We learned about Chippy Hill and Step 'n' Fetchit. Not Step 'n' Fetchit, Snake Hips Tucker.

**Watson:** That long tradition of vaudeville performance and entertainers, even going into Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie, the clowning...tell me about those performance aspects with some of the vocal impersonations, could you tell me about that?

**Donegan:** I could do Lena Horne and Ella, not Etta Jones, I keep calling her James sometimes. I can do Nellie Lutcher, Rose Murphy and a lot of them; Billie Holiday, especially.

**Watson:** I assumed the audience really loved that.

**Donegan:** It breaks up the monotony of the music.

**Watson:** Tell me about breaking up the monotony of the music, the entertainment role that you also...

**Donegan:** People have a retention span—you can't play too much music. You have to learn how to cut off and cut on.

**Cheatham:** Why do you think it is that Oscar Peterson and George Shearing, Billy Taylor, Calvin Jackson, they can all sit down to play all night and not sing or shake hips and they always expect us to do something extra?

**Donegan:** Well, if you can do something extra, then you should get two salaries.

**Cheatham:** I agree. But they don't want to pay us as much but they want us to do extra. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**Donegan:** Well, sometimes you sell a little records and make a little extra money, honey.

**Cheatham:** Maybe in the next world we'll have a chance to sit down and just play like we want to play without extra.

**Donegan:** They don't ask me to do that.

**Cheatham:** I know that.

**Donegan:** Sometimes if the music ain't going too well, I'll shake a little. But now I don't do it too much.

**Cheatham:** Yes. But why do you think it is that Oscar Peterson and some of those other musicians, never had to, all they could do is sit there and play, Ahmad Jamal, anybody else you want to name and they don't even have to smile.

**Donegan:** Well, it depends on how the audience is liking it.

**Cheatham:** Why do you think it's the fact that they don't expect that from them?

**Donegan:** I don't know, there's two sides to everything. Some women, like Shirley Horn, she sings. Have you heard her?

**Cheatham:** Yes.

**Donegan:** Nellie Lutcher, (sings). Everybody's got a gimmick.

**Watson:** In the early 1980's, it seems another wave of popularity for you. "Women Blow Their Own Horns," part of George Wein's July 3, 1981 Kool Jazz Festival. Did that open new doors for you, expose you to a new audience?

**Donegan:** Yes, and I think...that's what they called the show? What's his name, who wrote it?

**Watson:** George Wein produced it through Festival Productions.

**Donegan:** Who was that writer?

**Watson:** Whitney Balliett?

**Donegan:** That other writer.

**Watson:** I don't know. But I'm sure you did steal the show.

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**Donegan:** Yeah, that's what they said. Said I stole it two times.

**Watson:** Who were some of the other women on that performance, do you recall?

**Donegan:** Marian McPartland, people like that you know.

**Watson:** It's still pretty rare to see more than one woman jazz musician on stage at any time. Do you think that having an evening of performances by women artists, is that a good thing or not necessarily?

**Donegan:** We don't need it. Let them play with men, against men. There shouldn't be a separate role for women and a separate role for men. They either can perform or they can't.

**Watson:** Do you think that those all-women performances are more marketable to the people who are booking them?

**Donegan:** They could be.

**Watson:** How about in the early 1990's? It seems the cycle comes around every few years. New popularity. George Weins' Kool Jazz Festival, at Carnegie Hall, Lorraine Gordon booking you into the Village Vanguard. Tell me about that.

**Donegan:** What did I do at the Vanguard?

**Watson:** Is it a big deal that you're playing at the Vanguard or is it just another gig?

**Donegan:** It's just another gig. They all are gigs.

**Watson:** These are a little more high profile. Do these high profile gigs help bring you new audiences?

**Donegan:** Now I'm getting a Japanese audience.

**Watson:** Tell me about that.

**Donegan:** They bring them there in droves. And they watch me and they seem to like it.

**Watson:** American Jazz Master Award from the National Endowment for the Arts, 1992. An honor for you? You're smiling, tell me about that.

**Donegan:** Somebody called me up, Antoinette Handy, called me up and she said, "I been looking for you for four weeks." So I said, "Do I owe you money?" She said, "No, I have

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something to give you.” I started crying. She said, “We got \$20,000 for you.” I said, “Ohhhh, Ohhh.” She said, “It’s true.” So, that’s how I got that.

**Watson:** You mentioned honorary doctorates. What other awards and honors have you received? I remember Dorothy Donegan Day, your birthday, I think 1974 in Chicago, keys to the City, that type of thing.

**Donegan:** Oh yeah, I get that in New Orleans and Chicago, too.

**Watson:** What awards have you received that you’re most proud of?

**Donegan:** The doctorates. I like those better. When they gave me one, I said, “Ohhhhh.” I started crying. I said, “My husbands call me more than that.”

**Watson:** Hollywood Bowl performances with the symphony.

**Donegan:** That went good. If I can’t get you one way, I can get you another. So, I got a standing ovation of 17,000 people. And Jeffery Hines, Gregory Hines, snatched the flowers out of my hand and ran off the stage.

**Watson:** Why did he do that?

**Donegan:** I don’t know. I started to take my shoe and throw it.

**Watson:** [Did you] upstage Jeffery Hines and perhaps the symphony itself?

**Donegan:** I think, yeah, them 17,000 people upstaged him. My ex-husband was there with two women and he was clapping.

**Watson:** It seems that you upstage just about anyone you perform on a bill with. How do you maintain a professional relationship with these people? Or do you just leave them behind?

**Donegan:** Just leave them behind. They’ll call me again. Someone said, “I need her like Custer needed more Indians.”

**Watson:** I’d like to go through a list of piano players and just have you comment on them. What’s most significant about their playing in your mind? Why do they continue to be so influential? First, Jelly Roll Morton.

**Donegan:** Great. He was a pioneer of boogie-woogie style of the blues. I didn’t know him.

**Watson:** How about Earl Hines?

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**Donegan:** I liked him. He played the rolling of the fingers, the trumpet style.

**Watson:** Art Tatum.

**Donegan:** The master.

**Watson:** I guess there's nothing else you can say about Tatum. Raymond Walters.

**Donegan:** Oh, he was my idol. He showed me how to play like Art Tatum. He stayed drunk most of the time but he sure could play.

**Watson:** He was out of Chicago?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Watson:** What happened to him?

**Donegan:** I don't know. I been trying to find out every time I go to Chicago.

**Watson:** When he was showing you Tatum runs and fingering, was he right? Did he show you the same way Tatum showed you a few years later?

**Donegan:** No, Tatum played five ways and you pick what you can gorilla.

**Watson:** Teddy Wilson.

**Donegan:** He was the Mozart of the piano. He played very soft and fast.

**Watson:** Anything about his style that was incorporated into yours?

**Donegan:** I liked him.

**Watson:** Cleo Brown.

**Donegan:** She played a lot of rolls and bass. She had a good left hand.

**Watson:** Ellington.

**Donegan:** Ellington could play with his band. I guess he could stride a little bit, couldn't he? Him and Basie.

**Watson:** Basie was next.

**Donegan:** I like Basie, especially the record of him and Oscar Peterson playing.

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**Watson:** Erroll Garner.

**Donegan:** Oh, he was the funkiest. I loved him. His music made you want to shake or dance.

**Watson:** Fats Waller.

**Donegan:** I liked the way he played. He laid it down.

**Watson:** How about Fats Waller in that entertainer role?

**Donegan:** I liked that too.

**Watson:** Did you learn anything from his approach to entertaining an audience?

**Donegan:** I guess not, but I respected it.

**Watson:** How about in the same vein, Nellie Lutcher?

**Donegan:** Well, she knew what she could do best. (sings—"He's really gone...")

**Watson:** Nellie Lutcher a good entertainer?

**Donegan:** I think so. She'd have to be.

**Watson:** Meade Lux Lewis.

**Donegan:** Good boogie-woogie.

**Watson:** Anything in particular about his style that stands out?

**Donegan:** He could play it heavy.

**Watson:** Pete Johnson.

**Donegan:** Same thing.

**Watson:** Albert Ammons.

**Donegan:** Same thing.

**Watson:** Any difference between the three?

**Donegan:** No, they all were great.

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**Watson:** Who's your favorite of the three?

**Donegan:** All of them.

**Watson:** Nat Cole.

**Donegan:** He could play like Earl Hines. And who else did he play like? Yeah, he played like Earl Hines.

**Watson:** Thelonious Monk.

**Donegan:** He was an innovator.

**Watson:** How so?

**Donegan:** He played different from everybody else. He was a creator.

**Watson:** Phineas Newborn.

**Donegan:** He was a genius. He could play light and fast. He'd come over and challenge me all the time.

**Watson:** And how would those competitions go, those challenges?

**Donegan:** I would hang in there with him. I put one of those concertos on him.

**Watson:** And? Did he make it, did he live up to your high standards?

**Donegan:** Well, I liked him anyway. 'Cause he could play in the bass with two hands, that running bass (sings). I liked him.

**Watson:** How about Bud Powell?

**Donegan:** He was great, too.

**Watson:** In what way? How did his greatness differ from some of these other players?

**Donegan:** I don't know. But me and Erroll Garner heard him during his last days and he wasn't doing too well, but I admired him when he was right. When he and Buttercup were together, you know.

**Watson:** How about Ahmad Jamal?

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**Donegan:** Oh, I love him.

**Watson:** What do you love about him?

**Donegan:** I like the way he plays. I like Fritz. That's his real name, you know.

**Watson:** How about Cecil Taylor?

**Donegan:** He's a screwball but he got a lot of technique. They wanted to put me and him together you know, they had done it with Mary Lou. So I told 'em, I said, "I'll steal that show if I have to pull up my dress."

**Watson:** You mentioned a few of these people being geniuses. What does it take in Dorothy Donegan's mind to be a genius?

**Donegan:** Well, Cecil Taylor would be a genius in his way. And Ahmad Jamal. I guess geniuses, they know when they're geniuses.

**Watson:** How about Dorothy Donegan—genius?

**Donegan:** Uh-huh, I think so.

**Watson:** In what way?

**Donegan:** In all ways.

**Watson:** What has Dorothy Donegan brought to the musical world that was not there before and will not be there after her?

**Watson:** There will just be more Dorothy Donegans coming up.

**Watson:** You think so? Where do you see that support coming from and how do you see the younger players coming through?

**Donegan:** They're beginning to listen now and they got to learn how to play with the left hand. See, before they didn't know how to play with the left hand.

**Watson:** Tell me about your left hand, how it developed and how it changed over time.

**Donegan:** Well, I was playing in the '30's, so I met Buck and Bubbles. So, they said, "What you gonna do with the left hand?" I said, "I don't know." Said, "Did you leave it in the dressing

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room? Say, woman, you've got to play some left hand." So I think my left hand got stronger than my right.

**Watson:** How do you describe your own piano style?

**Donegan:** Mine?

**Watson:** Yes.

**Donegan:** I don't know. A highly-trained jazz classical pianist.

**Watson:** You said jazz first. Would you prefer them to be equal? How would you, if you had to do it all over again, how would you like to be as a piano player? What directions did you not take...

**Donegan:** I think I would play all classical. 'Cause then I wouldn't have to think about the jazz and making a living. In classical, you have to fill the halls. It's not just wanting to be a classical pianist.

**Cheatham:** Dorothy, I'd like to ask you about some of your classical influences. What do you think of Chopin?

**Donegan:** I love him. He must be played delicately, softly and fast. He's a very difficult composer.

**Cheatham:** He sure is. What about Mendelssohn?

**Donegan:** I like the "Rondo Capriccioso" and the "Caprice Brilliant" by Mendelssohn.

**Cheatham:** How about Beethoven?

**Donegan:** I like him. He was very clever.

**Cheatham:** In what ways?

**Donegan:** His harmonics.

**Cheatham:** His harmonics, yes. His left hand sounds like yours by the way. How about Grieg?

**Donegan:** I like the Grieg Concerto and some of his other pieces. The Peer Gynt Suite.

**Cheatham:** How about Bach?

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**Donegan:** I like him, too. He stresses the independence of each finger.

**Cheatham:** You mean the two-part and three-part inventions?

**Donegan:** Yeah, and then the other—what is it, the Well-Tempered Clavichord (sic).

**Cheatham:** How about Mozart?

**Donegan:** I like him, he's light.

**Cheatham:** What do you mean, light? Not difficult to play?

**Donegan:** He's difficult to play but he's light, very light.

**Cheatham:** Can you tell me something—when you're really, really down, which one of these do you prefer to play?

**Donegan:** I like to work on the Rachmaninoff Third Concerto.

**Cheatham:** When you're really down? What does it do for you?

**Donegan:** I don't know, there's so many notes to play.

**Cheatham:** You know they say that you receive music sometimes through the crown of your head, sometimes through your throat, sometimes through your solar plexus. Is that what Rachmaninoff does for you?

**Donegan:** He does everything. I think some of his music has some Negro spirituals in it.

**Cheatham:** You do?

**Donegan:** Yes.

**Cheatham:** Which ones in particular?

**Donegan:** Especially the Rachmaninoff Third. In some of his music you can hear themes that could be presented as jazz.

**Cheatham:** Like a universal language, huh?

**Donegan:** (sings) That's in the Rachmaninoff's Second.

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**Cheatham:** That's true, "Full moon and empty arms." Tell me something, have you always led a very clean life, I mean like food-wise... ?

**Donegan:** Yes, no dope, no cigarettes, no drinking.

**Cheatham:** You never drank?

**Donegan:** No, just Cherry Herring.

**Cheatham:** That's a liqueur, very sweet.

**Donegan:** That helped get the diabetes.

**Cheatham:** (laughs) Would you drink it straight or all through the night, or just have one drink at night or?

**Donegan:** One or two or three. I like to pour it over ice cream.

**Cheatham:** Oh yeah, I hear you. So, you never drank or never smoked or never took dope.

**Donegan:** No. One time I hit my own lamp post. Three times, and I said, "I'm hitting my own lamp post and I'm not a junkie."

**Cheatham:** Well tell me, what vice do you have, my dear?

**Donegan:** Just buy clothes. My ex-husband said, "I wish you wouldn't be buying all these clothes." I said, "Well I could have been a junkie." He said, "Well, I wish you had, you'd a gone to sleep."

**Cheatham:** So, shopping is your...

**Donegan:** Outlet.

**Cheatham:** You get high when you get in the store, huh?

**Donegan:** And I don't have to look at the price tags, like the schoolteachers do. They look at the price tags and then they say they want it. But I got good taste.

**Cheatham:** You do have good taste.

**Donegan:** You, too.

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**Cheatham:** Thank you. I'd like to ask you another question. What are your hopes and wishes now?

**Donegan:** I hope I get a million dollars, then I'll quit the business.

**Cheatham:** Is that true? You would really quit the business?

**Donegan:** Yes, the business ain't what it's cracked up to be.

**Cheatham:** If you had the million dollars, what would you do instead of playing?

**Donegan:** I would play occasionally. I'd take gigs that I wanted, not gigs somebody else wanted me to do.

**Cheatham:** I think that sounds good to me, too. Because you come to such a point, don't you?

**Donegan:** Yeah, it's time to quit. Lena, it's time to quit. Sit down before you fall down.

**Cheatham:** So, you've played, you think, almost every place you wanted to and if you had a million dollars would you think of building your own self a club and playing in it?

**Donegan:** Maybe I'd buy a club that's already put up.

**Cheatham:** And then play when you get ready.

**Donegan:** When I get ready. I call the shots.

**Cheatham:** I like that. I think that's a very, very good way....

**Donegan:** Like Artie Shaw, he quit. He took that clarinet and they said, broke it across a mirror.

**Cheatham:** Is that true? Artie Shaw.

**Donegan:** When most of us, we played when we sick. Like Lionel Hampton, 80 years old, should be not working.

**Cheatham:** I think that's keeping him alive, don't you?

**Donegan:** No, that's keeping him tired. And somebody said, his manager stole his money.

**Cheatham:** Maybe that's why he has to work.

**Donegan:** Could be.

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**Cheatham:** What other wish would you like, since this is your birthday?

**Donegan:** To get well and sit down. Just travel.

**Cheatham:** Where would you go?

**Donegan:** All over the world.

**Cheatham:** Would you like to live any other special place?

**Donegan:** I could live in Switzerland a little while.

**Cheatham:** Have a chalet in Switzerland? Who would you like to listen to while you're travelling? Is there any musician that you would especially like to drop in on?

**Donegan:** I'd go hear Peterson, Martha Argerich, some of those Russian pianists play. I like to be real sharp, though. And then I like to go to Vegas.

**Cheatham:** Who would you like to listen to in Vegas?

**Donegan:** I'd like to see the shows.

**Cheatham:** Well, I tell you, we'd like to thank you very much for these two days that we've spent with you and your birthday. On behalf of the Smithsonian, I'm certainly really glad we got you on tape, 'cause you are my idol.

**Donegan:** You've always been mine, you and Jo Jones.

**Cheatham:** Thanks a million.

**Donegan:** That's it?

[END]

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