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**BILL HOLMAN**  
**NEA Jazz Master (2010)**

**Interviewee:** Bill Holman (May 21, 1927 - )  
**Interviewer:** Anthony Brown with recording engineer Ken Kimery  
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**Brown:** Today is Thursday, February 18th, 2010, and this is the Smithsonian Institution National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters Oral History Program interview with Bill Holman in his house in Los Angeles, California. Good afternoon, Bill, accompanied by his wife, Nancy. This interview is conducted by Anthony Brown with Ken Kimery.

Bill, if we could start with you stating your full name, your birth date, and where you were born.

**Holman:** My full name is Willis Leonard Holman. I was born in Olive, California, May 21st, 1927.

**Brown:** Where exactly is Olive, California?

**Holman:** Strange you should ask [laughs]. Now it's a part of Orange, California. You may not know where Orange is either. Orange is near Santa Ana, which is the county seat of Orange County, California. I don't know if Olive was a part of Orange at the time, or whether Orange has just grown up around it, or what. But it's located in the city of Orange, although I think it's a separate municipality. Anyway, it was a really small town. I always say there was a couple of orange-packing houses and a railroad spur. Probably more than that, but not a whole lot. I never knew that place, because we moved to Orange before I started remembering things.

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**Brown:** And if you could state your parents' full names.

**Holman:** Mother is Ida Holman. Father was Leonard George Holman. My mother was Ida Mae Holman.

**Brown:** And her maiden name?

**Holman:** Beard.

**Brown:** B-e-a-r-d?

**Holman:** Yeah.

**Brown:** Were they originally Californians?

**Holman:** My father was born in Oceanside, California. My mother was from Butte, Montana.

**Brown:** They met and married here in California?

**Holman:** Yeah. I think my mother and her sisters came down in the early 19s, before the first world war. They were working in some kind of a jewelry plant in Long Beach. That's where they met.

**Brown:** What was your father's occupation?

**Holman:** At that time I don't know. Later on, after I got to know him, he had a lot of different things. He was trying to be an entrepreneur and not doing well at it. So he drifted. He had a couple of gas stations and a produce department of a market. During the Depression I think he even worked for Orange County in some kind of road building. I'm not sure of that. But mainly he was trying to start a business. It never seemed to work out well for him.

Then in the '40s he heard about a correspondence course for accounting. He took that course, became an accountant, got a civil service job with the Navy, and did great from then on. So he finally came out.

**Brown:** Sounds like a late bloomer. Any siblings?

**Holman:** I have a sister who is eight years older. She's still living. She's in a retirement home in north Los Angeles.

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**Brown:** Would you consider your family as a musical family coming up?

**Holman:** Definitely not. We didn't even have a record player in our house. The only music we listened to – that the family listened to – was a program called *The National Barn Dance* on the radio every Saturday night. And every Sunday afternoon there was *The Fitch Bandwagon*, which was popular tunes, and a program called *The Manhattan Merry Go Round*, where they did all show tunes – Broadway show tunes. They always had a xylophone doubling the lead, doubling the melody. So it was impossible to miss this hammering going on.

But I, early on, found the radio disc jockeys as a source of music. I, without knowing why, started listening to it when I got maybe 10, 12 years old, something like that. At that time, Top 40 was all big bands. So it was just one continual stream of big-band music all day. It came in very handy later on, when I started to play and to write, to have all this backlog of all these years of listening to bands on the radio. I had the vocabulary down pretty well before I even knew what it was.

**Brown:** Before you actually, at least consciously, became interested in music, maybe even as just an avocation or vocation, either one. Could we talk about the schools that you attended and whether there was any music education in the schools?

**Holman:** Grammar schools – I started in Orange. No music that I remember at all. In the first or second grade it's pretty rare when you would get music, although I imagine there is some now, because they start the kids pretty early in everything.

Junior high school – when we entered, everybody got a musical aptitude test. I did well on the test. So a few weeks later the band director came around and said, "Would you like to play clarinet in the band?" I said sure. I didn't know anything about clarinet or band. He gave me a school-issue clarinet. I must have had some instruction on it, but I can't remember where I got it.

**Brown:** I was going to ask, what prepared you, or what kind of experiences prepared you for you to do well, to score well on this music aptitude test?

**Holman:** I don't know.

**Brown:** Do you remember what the music aptitude test was trying to measure? Was it a performance test or just a written test?

**Holman:** I don't know. There must have been some kind of performance in it, to be a musical aptitude test. Maybe play a couple of tones and say, "Is the second one higher than the first?"

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**Brown:** Tonal memory.

**Holman:** Something like that. It's an interesting question. I'd never even thought about that. Anyway, that's when I first started thinking about music as something I could do.

**Brown:** Were you happy with the band director's recommendation to go with the clarinet? Or did any other instrument at that point interest you? Any other instruments?

**Holman:** Chances are I was the kind of kid that, once somebody suggested clarinet, I didn't even think about the other possibilities. I just stayed on the clarinet. I knew I didn't want to play the flute. Piano they didn't have in the band. I wasn't even thinking about saxophone in those days, because he said, "Do you want to play clarinet?" and that's what I focused on, clarinet.

**Brown:** You didn't want to play xylophone?

**Holman:** So that went on for a while. Somewhere along there – this is when I was still in junior high school – I saw a movie featuring Kay Kyser and his College of Musical Knowledge, which was a radio program. They finally put them in a movie. I don't know if it was about his program or what, but the band had a lot of exposure in it. I got to see these guys in their uniforms, standing up and sitting down and doing that with their instruments. I thought, wow, that's pretty neat. Kay Kyser's band was a commercial band. It wasn't as commercial as, say, Guy Lombardo or Sammy Kaye, but it was definitely in that direction. He had a few guys – one trumpet player that he featured a lot was named Ish Kabibble – on that level.

That lit some kind of fire under me, and I started thinking about: wouldn't it be nice to play in a band like that? But naturally the opportunity wasn't there. They had – at that time, none of the schools had any jazz band, and definitely not a junior high school. So it just went along like that. I got out of junior high school, went to senior high school.

**Brown:** What were the two high schools, the junior high school and the senior high school you attended?

**Holman:** Junior high was called Francis E. Willard Junior High School. I think the high school was just Santa Ana High School. Soon after enrollment, the band director came around. He'd been alerted by the band directors from the other schools, who was in the band. I don't know whether he put any judgments in there or not, but Mr. [Heigess] came around and wanted to know if I would like to be in the band, and I said sure.

I guess this fantasy about being in a band had been building all this time. So then I started thinking about saxophone. One of my good friends and I went down to the music store. We decided we were going to buy saxophones. So we went to the music store. They had

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two saxes. One was an alto. One was a tenor. The tenor cost \$50 and the alto cost \$35. I had the extra \$15. So I became a tenor player. How's that for fate?

Then I started a band, playing stock arrangements. This is in Santa Ana, a small town. There's no big music store where you could buy stock arrangements or anything. So a couple times a year we would get on the red car, the – what would you call it? – interurban transport – transit, that they destroyed during the '50s. It ran all over Southern California – we would get on the red car, go from Santa Ana to L.A., and spend the day going around to the music stores and looking at their assortments of stock arrangements, which cost 75 cents at the time. It was like gold to see all these things laid out on a counter and be able to go, "Look at this, Glenn Miller, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington. It can be mine for 75 cents."

**Brown:** Do you remember any of the names of the stores? Or their location in Los Angeles?

**Holman:** They were all downtown, downtown L.A. Hold on. I almost had it.

**Brown:** We can come back to that. You can add it later.

**Holman:** We rehearsed in my living room. I'm really surprised that my mother allowed us to do this, because somehow she was aware that there would be moisture put on the floor from the brass instruments. So she'd – before every rehearsal there was newspapers all over the floor. But she let us do it, which really amazed me, because it's one of those families where you never used the living room. Mostly hanging out in the kitchen. Anyway, she let us do that.

The band must have been terrible. I didn't even have enough knowledge to know how bad it was, but, looking back on it, it had to be rotten.

**Brown:** How many pieces?

**Holman:** We had – when everybody showed up, we had four saxes, two trombones, three trumpets, and three rhythm. Most of the time – not everyone showed up all the time. It didn't make a whole lot of difference to us. That's another reason that I know that it sounded bad, is because we didn't care whether there were two saxes or four. They never got a sound anyway.

The Santa Ana High School mascot was called Sammy Saint. He was this little dog that had a halo around his head. So my mother – we were looking for a name for the band. My mother came up with the Melody Saints, which to me was always embarrassing. But it was my mother. What are you going to say? "Ma, that doesn't make it"? So we became the Melody Saints. I think we played one high school prom. I don't know why they

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weren't throwing tomatoes at us. To have a whole evening of this band must have been really raunchy. But maybe they just followed the bass or something and figured it was enough.

**Brown:** Were these all your contemporaries from high school?

**Holman:** Yeah. Then I graduated. I was going to go into the Navy. So I forgot about music for a while. I wanted to get in the Navy officer training program called V12 Program, where they sent you to school – to a college. You took part civilian courses and part Navy courses. At the end of it, you went to officer training school for three months and you got a commission. That's what I went into. Naturally, there was no music involved in that. They sent me to Boulder, Colorado, to the University of Colorado, which was a beautiful place. I look at it now and think, why didn't I have more fun there. But, to me, it was – what do they do when they send you out of the country, what they did to Napoleon?

**Brown:** Exile.

**Holman:** Exile, yeah. To be away from L.A., where I thought everything was happening, to be exiled to Boulder, Colorado, was just terrible. I always had that in the back of my head, and it kept me from having more fun there. But it was pleasant. I did well. I was studying mechanical engineering and a few Navy courses. They were doing three semesters a year then, at that time. So I got in, I think, five semesters. I went in in 1944. 1945 the war ended. When the war ended, a rumor was going around that regardless of that, if we went ahead and got our commissions, we had to go on active duty for four years. Not wanting to face that – when there's no war going on, it's hard to get that enthusiasm for the Navy. So a bunch of us washed out. We just didn't go to classes, and we got flunked out of that and sent to boot camp. I went to boot camp in Great Lakes, Illinois, in January of 1945. Talk about a Californian being immersed in cold weather. That was one of the coldest places on the continent, I think. Went through boot camp and got shipped out to Mare Island, which is near San Francisco. I got put on a ship, a light cruiser called the USS Pasadena. We were taking these daily shakedown cruises out of Mare Island every day, just short, go out a few miles, come back. Then we came down to Long Beach Harbor, which is great. Here I was, almost home. I get liberty every other weekend. I can go home. I had fun on the ship, because I like ships, I like the water, and I like to sail. Since so many people were getting discharged that had been in important positions, like the quartermasters that worked in the wheelhouse, steered the boat, worked in the map room, we got to do that, although we were just seaman second classes, which is the lowest rung. Yeah, apprentice seaman when you're in boot camp. Then you got to be seaman second. We got to hang out in the wheelhouse and sail the ship. That was fun. So I had a pretty good time on board the ship.

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The last few weeks there was one ensign. He was a new guy. He was a trumpet player, and he wanted to start a ship jazz band. I don't know how we connected, but we started this band, and it was worse than my high school band. We had one trumpet, a couple of trombones, a couple of saxes, and maybe a piano. I played in that. We'd rehearse on off time. But we never had any function to do. We just . . .

**Brown:** Did you have any colleagues from your high school or your naval tenure – not career – that turned up in the jazz field later on? Anybody that went on to make a name for him- or her- – himself, at that point?

**Holman:** When I was in boot camp, there was another tenor player. I tried out for the band when I was in boot camp. The Great Lakes Naval Station had an official jazz band. I tried out for it and didn't make it. The guy that was there, his name was Duane Tatro. Later on he became a composer and he wrote a lot of t.v. shows out here. I see him at the arrangers society meetings now. He didn't know me, but I knew who he was. A bass trombonist, who showed up in Kenton's band when I joined it, had been in that band then, although I didn't know him. Those are the only two that I remember.

**Brown:** We were talking about this horrible band that you were with in the Navy.

**Holman:** I think we've said enough about that.

**Brown:** So your commitment was then two years as opposed to the four years, had you completed the officers training? How long was your . . . ?

**Holman:** I was in two years overall, including the college and the boot camp and the ship.

**Brown:** So if you joined in '44, then you were discharged in '46.

**Holman:** Right.

**Brown:** Something very significant happened in Los Angeles in December of '45 that we prefaced before we came on mic. That was when Bird and Diz came out from New York to Billy Berg's. You said that you were able to catch that.

**Holman:** Yeah. I forgot who I was with. I was with somebody, I know. We fearfully went up to Billy Berg's, trying to act as old as we could, paid our money, and went in, no problem. Like I said before, the only drink that I knew the name of was a whiskey sour. So I said, "I'll have a whiskey sour." No problem. We got to hear Bird and Diz and Lucky Thompson. I think Milt Jackson was there too. Yeah.

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**Brown:** He was – the way Diz tells it, is, he brought him just in case Bird didn't show up on the gig.

**Holman:** Good thinking.

**Brown:** Stan Levey on drums.

**Holman:** Stan, yeah. Of course we were in awe of them. So we didn't try to talk to them or anything like that. They were people on another plane. So I did get to hear that. Billy Berg – that building is still there. I don't know what it is now.

**Brown:** Had you heard many live bands prior to that one? Were you able to get out and see some of the larger bands or any of the smaller combos by this time?

**Holman:** Before I went in the Navy, occasionally we could come up to the Palladium or out to the – it's called the Meadowbrook, out in Culver City, and hear bands, but not too often, because it required either on the red car, the Pacific Electric train, which didn't run late at night, as I remember. So we had to be able to get the car, and I didn't – I was young. I didn't turn 16 until I was a senior in high school. So I could only get the car towards the end. I heard some bands, more after I got out of the service. I think I really was more interested in them by that time.

**Brown:** So you're discharged in '46. Did you return home as soon as you were discharged?

**Holman:** Yeah. My folks were living in Laguna Beach at that time. I went home. There was – I had nothing to do. I didn't know anybody there. Sometimes I'd be able to get the car and go to Santa Ana and see some old school chums. I just – I told myself that I was decompressing from my stressful days in the service. Then my folks moved to Riverside, and I moved up there with them. They had a club up there that had jam sessions on Sunday afternoon. I started going to those. That was, I think, my first shot at meeting professional players. Edgar Hayes. I don't know if you know that name.

**Brown:** Sure, because Kenny Clarke played with him.

**Holman:** Really?

**Brown:** Yeah.

**Holman:** Edgar Hayes and his Stardusters. I met Curtis Counce, who later I used on a couple of my recordings. Teddy Bunn was the guitar player. I met him and his brother Jimmy. They used to have out-of-town people come up and play the club steady, and then they would show up on these Sunday sessions. Harry the Hipster Gibson was one of

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them. So I even got to meet Harry the Hipster. I'd been bugging my parents with all these song titles from him, like *Who put the [? tol] in Mrs. Murphy's Overalls?* [Actually, *Who put the Benzedrine in Mrs. Murphy's Ovaltine?*] Finally got to meet him. And I met some local people that would come into the session, and I started getting a few gigs up there.

My dad was getting a little impatient about my seeming lack of direction. I had worked – before we moved to Riverside, I had worked at the El Toro Marine air base post office during their Christmas rush. They always hired temporary people. I worked there for about a month. I guess I did okay, because later on they got in touch with me and said they had a spot open in the Santa Ana post office, and would I be interested? I was starting to get these playing gigs. So I was thinking, well, no, not really. And my dad said, “Yes. You’re going to take that” gig. So I did. I commuted from Riverside to Santa Ana every day. Being young, I didn’t realize what a drag it was. I worked – I must have worked there for about a year.

In the meantime, before we had moved to Riverside, my mother let me know that she’d heard of a program at L.A. City College that was a jazz program, where they taught arranging, which she knew I was interested in. They had a band that you could write for and play in. It just sounded ideal, which, again, surprised me, because they were pretty adamant about my not becoming a player, a musician. They didn’t know anything about it. In fact, one day my mother and I were having an argument about it. She said, “They all smoke dope.” I said, “Not the good ones, Mom.” That seemed to go over. That was right after Gene Krupa had got busted. So it was on everybody’s mind.

I went up and went through all the enrollment things at L.A. City College. Finally got to meet the director of the jazz program. He looked at my resume, which was not too hot. At the time, there were a lot of professional players getting out of the service that were coming to L.A. In order to work out their union cards – there was a union rule that you couldn’t work a steady gig for six months after you came to a union. So they would go to school on the G.I. Bill and get paid by the government. There were a lot of those in this City College program, and there was just no room. So the guy said, “No, I’m sorry. Can’t take you.”

**Brown:** Do you remember who that director was? We’re talking – let’s reconstruct the chronology, if we can go back and look. You were working at a post office at Christmas time. So that would have had to have been maybe Christmas of ‘46 or maybe ‘47?

**Holman:** Probably ‘46.

**Brown:** Then you went to work for the Post Office the next year, when it opened up, in ‘47.

**Holman:** Yeah.

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**Brown:** I'm just trying to get this chronology, when there was a jazz program being offered at all.

**Holman:** Okay. This was before I moved to Riverside. This was when we were still in Laguna Beach, although I was staying at my sister's part of the time in Santa Ana, so I could be closer to my friends. So this – the trip up to L.A. City College must have been in 1946, in the summer, or probably in the fall, when school was getting ready to go.

**Brown:** And they had a jazz program.

**Holman:** Yeah.

**Brown:** Unbelievable.

**Holman:** It was one of the first ones. Bob MacDonald was the guy's name. We later on got to be friends, and I used to rib him about this all the time. He turned me down.

**Brown:** So then what did you do? You got refused or rejected by L.A. City College.

**Holman:** Yeah. So then is when, after a while, we moved to Riverside. I started going to these sessions, started getting gigs, got the call to work the Post Office, and made plans to go to UCLA to finish my engineering studies. I went to UCLA, lasted one semester, and said, this is not for me. While I was going there, I had some friends – I was in a fraternity – I had some friends that were also interested in jazz. We decided we'd go down to Central Avenue and see what was happening there, because that was still going on, but it was tailing off. We went down, went to a couple of clubs, and saw all these players, young guys, about my age. Everybody seemed to be having a good time. I started taking my horn down, met some of the guys, and got to play a little. Again, I started getting occasional gigs with some of the people I met down there.

One night we were at another session somewhere else. I don't remember. I was telling one of the guys that I was interested in learning how to arrange and also wanted to study saxophone. He said, "You go talk to Britt Woodman, because he's going to a place where they" – how can I phrase it? – he said, "They'll teach you how to read fly **shit**."

**Brown:** Oh yeah. I've heard that many times.

**Holman:** So I went and talked to Britt. He was really enthused about it. He said, "Yeah, go down there." He told me where it was. I went. It was down on Alvarado Street, which is two-thirds of the way downtown in this funky old gray Victorian house that was leaning. I said, this is a school? I said, this is the address. I'm going in. So I went in. I could hear sounds of music coming – practice rooms. You could hear guys toodling. I

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went into the office. “Yeah, this is Westlake College of Music.” I said, “I want to enroll.” They said, “We got to get it straight with the V.A.,” because I was on the G.I. Bill, going to UCLA. Called the V.A. and had an appointment with a guy in downtown L.A. He said, “You want to transfer from UCLA to a music school?” I said, “That’s right.” He said, “We’re not – it doesn’t sound like something we would really recommend.” I said, “That’s what I want to do.” He said, “Okay.”

When I was at Westlake, they had set me up to take what they call a Seashore Test, which is another musical aptitude test that’s much more advanced than the one I took in junior high school. It was all musical things, like is this rhythm different from that one, or this pitch higher than that one? In school I aced it. I really came out well on it. So they were starting to think, yeah, we want this guy to come here.

So the guy at the V.A. said, “We want to give you a Seashore Test to see if you have any aptitude for this stuff.” So I took another Seashore Test and really did bad on it, which, they say, it’s possible, depending on your concentration that day or your hearing even, and how well you can relate your hearing to what you’re thinking about. So that was another obstacle to get over, because when he got this, he was saying, “I told you so. You’re engineer material.” I kept saying, “No, no. I’m not. I’ve been through that. I don’t want engineering.” So he finally relented, and I got permission to switch.

So I went to Westlake College. Going back to all my years of listening to the radio, listening to big bands on the radio, I had – like I said, I had the vocabulary in my head. So as soon as I learned a few technical things about writing, like transposing and how to handle tones that aren’t in the chords and things like that, after a couple of weeks I was writing charts.

**Brown:** Who were your instructors? Who was on the faculty there?

**Holman:** Nobody famous. We had Kenny Farrar. He was one of the arranging teachers. And David Baskerville, who later became head of the program at Denver University, I think, or Colorado University at Denver maybe. Kenny Farrar is still around. He was a drummer, and he wrote arrangements, the first drummer I knew that did that.

Anyway, just showing me the basics, and right away I started writing charts. Everybody thought I was some kind of whiz, because I could put down a lot of the stuff that I had heard. And I started studying privately, saxophone, with Lloyd Reese, who was a trumpet player and a teacher. He taught a lot of people. Dexter Gordon and Eric Dolphy are the famous ones. Lloyd, he didn’t get as deep with me as he probably did with some of the other guys. He had – his impression of me was not great, because he told me one day that I reminded him of another student at Westlake College who was a little more advanced than me. I didn’t really dig this guy. I figured that if Lloyd had that impression of me, he was not wild about me. But he had me running chords, arpeggio style, all the chords

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through every – to a tune, every bar, going through the whole 32 bars to a tune playing arpeggios of the harmony. I got that – was able to do that, although I could have used a little more philosophy, I think. But that was not forthcoming. So I made due with what I got. It turned out to be a good thing, because a few months later I auditioned for a band here that had made some records which I had heard on the radio. His name was Ike Carpenter. On the records, he'd use Lucky Thompson, who had a chordal approach which really knocked me out, because I was – I loved his sound. And I was able to do that from this thing that I had been studying with Lloyd. So that came in handy. But as time went by, I learned that that was not playing jazz. That was running chords.

**Brown:** We'll let this progress until you actually make your first recording with Ike Carpenter, but I'd like to go back and look at a couple things. One is, by this time I suspect you had a different horn. I was just wondering if you were using a different tenor at this point? Or was it still the same one you got for fifty bucks?

**Holman:** Oh, no.

**Brown:** That's what I suspected.

**Holman:** Yeah. I don't remember how that happened, but I had a newer – it wasn't a great horn. It was a Martin, which is – saxophone-wise is not a great horn, but it was newer.

**Brown:** Do you remember your mouthpiece and what kind of reed you were using at that point?

**Holman:** I had an Otto Link mouthpiece, because I knew that all the big cats were using that. So on one of our trips to L.A., I made sure that I went to the mouthpiece store, and was always pretty disappointed that I didn't get the sound that the other guys got – the big guys got. Same mouthpiece, you know (laughs). But this is continual learning.

**Brown:** The other thing I wanted to ask, because we're talking about the late '40s and of course America's still de facto segregated at this point: it seems like you were able to go down to Central Avenue and to associate. So perhaps you can talk about what was the sociology and the cultural milieu in Los Angeles at that time as a jazz musician, being able to – because it was a – we had segregation, and I don't know if that had any impact on – it seemed like you were able to go with whatever circle. If you could talk a little bit about that.

**Holman:** I never felt a bit of strain or stress or even fear for going down to Central Avenue. It was all people having a good time. In sessions I never felt anything like that. Late at night, we didn't think about it. Later on, when West Coast jazz started to happen – we'll get to that eventually.

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**Brown:** I was just interested because, nowadays, it's not an issue, but in those days there were places you couldn't be in, or it was just – it was a divided society. What I've found, through conducting these oral histories, is that, as a musician, that just faded to the background. You were there for the music. People saw that you were earnest and were really, really passionate about the music. So all the barriers came down. It sounds like you had that kind of an experience.

**Holman:** Yeah, it was. Didn't think about it. Didn't come into mind.

**Brown:** Westlake – what part of town was that in? Was that also an integrated school at that point? There's not a lot about Westlake. So, whatever you can tell us about it.

**Holman:** Yeah. It was integrated.

**Brown:** Britt was telling you to go there.

**Holman:** Yeah. Everybody went there. The neighborhood was more Latino, I think, than black. No, I think it became Latino later on. I think it was probably just multi at that time.

**Brown:** How large was the faculty, and what kind of courses were they offering? Obviously theory. Probably composition, performance.

**Holman:** They had a counterpoint class – ear training, counterpoint, the arranging classes. I don't think they had a composition class, except what came in in the course of arranging. The man that started the school had the idea of a vocational school that trained you to be a popular musician. One of his standard things he said was, "The best double you can take up is being able to sing the third part in a vocal group." Not a bad idea, but we didn't want to hear about it.

**Brown:** It seems like you had – not broad based, but at least you had an opportunity. Was it a four-year college?

**Holman:** No.

**Brown:** Or was it a two-year college?

**Holman:** No. I think in most cases it was, go until the G.I. Bill ran out, because it ate up the G.I. Bill benefits really quickly. The tuition must have been horrific. My G.I. Bill lasted two years there, which was enough to complete the course. I think I did get some kind of a certificate. So I completed. But what I was getting at was that from the top down the thrust of the college was towards popular music, to be a commercial musician. Naturally, when you get the young guys in, they start thinking about jazz. This guy plays

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jazz, and this guy. So we would start little groups, like another saxophone player and I had a quintet, a two-tenor band. At that time the Lennie Tristano, [Lee] Konitz, Warne Marsh records came out, 1949. Everybody was trying to do that, copying all the harmonic figures they were playing. So there was a lot of jazz talk going around in the school. But Mr. [Lehman], I don't think he ever heard any of it, because he was kind of a spacey guy to begin with. He was just working on his idea of making everybody a commercial hit.

I met – Bill Perkins was going there at the time. He became a really excellent tenor player. Dick Grove, who started the Dick Grove School. My friend Dave Madden, who – he went to Lake Tahoe and played in the hotel bands there. John Anderson, a trumpet player. I don't – I never really knew what he did, but I would see his name occasionally. So I knew that he was doing something. Onzy Matthews. You ever hear of him? I think he had a band once in a while. I'm also hazy about what he did. Another guy, a tenor player, Al Pelligrino, played tenor with Harry James's band and later on became the conductor out at Century West – Century City Hotel. He was the bandleader there. They had shows there all the time.

I was going to Westlake. I was working a lot of weekend gigs with this band, the Ike Carpenter band. We even took a road trip where I became the road manager. We went up north to Portland and Spokane. We even got into Montana. I remember playing in a town called Cut Bank, Montana.

**Brown:** A sprawling metropolis.

**Holman:** But it's all experience. That's about all until the end of school. I figure I ended school in 1950, I guess. I was writing a lot for rehearsal bands around. Sometimes I'd take charts back to Westlake and have their band play it. I was playing the horn, going to sessions.

I became friendly with Gene Roland, who was with the Kenton band – a lot of other bands. He was – he had a funny way of insinuating himself into a band. He was writing for Stan and traveling on the road with him. This was when Stan only had eight brass: four trumpets and four trombones. He started sitting in with the trumpets, making up his own parts. Finally he wrote out a fifth trumpet book, and Stan said, "Yeah, I like that. Let's have five trumpets." So Gene was the new fifth trumpet player. The same thing with the trombones. He could play trombone too. So they wound up having ten brass.

Anyway, he was – Gene always started a band wherever he was. He traveled around a lot. Wherever he put down roots, he would start a band. It was always four tenors, four trumpets, and rhythm section. All the horns are in B-flat. So all he had to do was write out four parts that worked for the trumpets, and an octave lower, it worked for the tenor saxes. He would write a real basic way, all the old standards, *Tea for Two* and all that.

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But he wrote hot. He was a jazz writer. So I learned a lot playing with his bands. Art Farmer played with one of his bands, I remember.

Gene was at the house one night. As a joke – with his meat and potatoes orientation, he didn't want to know anything about twelve-tone music or Schoenberg – so, as a gag, I pulled out the recording of a chart I had made at Westlake which was a twelve-tone blues, which I guess every writer has to do at least once, just to prove you can do it. But I'd made a big-band chart of this twelve-tone blues thing. It had all kinds of lines going. Gene didn't laugh about it at all. He said, "My God, this is what Stan's looking for," because apparently Stan had been talking to him about a more linear approach to the music rather than the vertical thing that they'd been doing with Progressive Jazz. He wanted to make it a little more melodic. What Gene heard in this chart was what he got out of Stan's conversation about it.

I went on the road. I was playing with Charlie Barnet at the time. While I was out on the road, Gene took this record up to Stan and played it. Stan was really interested. So Gene set up a meeting with him, Stan, and me. I went up and met him. He said, "Look. I'm very interested. Are you still doing things along this line?" I said, "Not really. It's more – my approach is a little more toward jazz now. It's not so much the twelve-tone thing." This didn't make a hit, because, as I found out later, that was – he didn't want any, as he used to call it, Tommy Dorsey charts, anything that smacked of a dance band or a jazz band. No Basie. Uh-uh. But he said, "Why don't you write a couple of pieces for us and see how that goes?" So I wrote a couple of pieces, took it into a rehearsal, and rehearsed them. They were both washouts, nothing happening at all. I was trying too hard. I was doing things I didn't know how to do. With that flush of success, I thought I had the world by the tail, and they just didn't make it. So that ended that.

[recording interrupted]

**Brown:** I was just recounting the personnel for the Ike Carpenter date. This was Bill Holman's first recording session – at least the first documented one. We talked about some of the people on there. But it doesn't seem like it was a real fresh or vivid memory for you, even though it was your first date?

**Holman:** Part of it is. *Dancers in Love*, which is the Duke [Ellington]. He had a lot of Duke's voicings down. He knew a lot of the repertoire. So I guess he wrote that chart. It had a clarinet part which – I've never been a great clarinet player. Every time we would play that chart, I would squeak on the clarinet. Take after take, we'd get to the same place, and I would squeak. We finally got a take where I didn't squeak, and we got through it.

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Listening to the names, Jim Hawthorne was a disc jockey and a comedian. He had something to do with *So Long Letty* and *Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk*, I guess, because I don't remember what those were about at all.

**Brown:** Right. They were vocal numbers for him.

**Holman:** The a&r man on the date, that was running the date, said, "That man is never going to work in an RCA studio again." So that was my first record date.

**Brown:** You also mentioned before we switched tapes that you had already begun to working with Charlie Barnet. You first recording with him was in November of 1950. So there's almost a two-year gap between those recording sessions.

**Holman:** November 1950?

**Brown:** Actually, it's a Snader telescription, one of the soundies. Back then they were the – I forget what you call them, where you looked into the view.

**Holman:** Soundies, weren't they?

**Brown:** Soundies. Okay.

**Holman:** Yeah. That was when I first joined Charlie. I always think of it as 1951, but that was our first road trip. I wanted to say something about him, because I think he was a wonderful guy to work with. His book had all these lovely charts. He had things by Manny Albam, [Neil] Hefti, Andy Gibson. I don't know who all wrote the charts, but he'd collected these tunes through the years. So they were a distillation of his taste, and it was really good. I liked working with him.

**Brown:** How did you get in the band?

**Holman:** A friend of mine, Dick Meldonian, who later got me on the Kenton band, got me on Charlie's band. He was the lead alto player. He showed me quite a bit about saxophone playing. Although he was a few years younger than I, he'd studied with a real good teacher. I don't know where he was from. The guy that also taught Joe Maini and Paul Gonsalves. What's the big town in Rhode Island?

**Brown:** Providence.

**Holman:** Yeah, Providence. He was from there. He got me on Charlie's band. As I say, it was – I had more fun there than I did with Stan, actually.

**Brown:** I see that Gene Roland was on the date too.

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**Holman:** He was on that band occasionally.

**Brown:** They got him here listed as trumpet, vocals, and trombone.

**Holman:** Whatever you need.

**Brown:** He was expanding.

You're in Charlie's band. It looks like your first actual recording session was in March 1951. This one looks like you had *Cherokee*, *Skyliner*, *Tennessee Waltz*, *Redskin Rhumba*. Any recollections about that one? That would have been the first official recording session.

**Holman:** March of '51?

**Brown:** Correct. In Hollywood. That's not to say that this can't be incorrect, but that's what's on the historical record.

**Holman:** We did one in New York earlier than that in '51. Because that was – as I said, my first road trip with him I think was in January or February of '51, and I'm sure we did some record dates back east. I'm trying to figure out what the purpose of this was, to do all those old hits. I don't know. Maybe *Charlie Barnet in High Fi* or something.

**Brown:** Let's see if there are any other notes about this. I don't understand how they could have stereo back then, but maybe it was reprocessed as stereo. So that note is not relevant. Well, again, this is a discography, and the other date isn't showing up. From there the next one is the Bob Keene date. So obviously that one didn't make the historical record. But we will amend that to make sure that we look for that, the previous date in New York.

Anything more about working with Charlie Barnet? You seemed to work with him there, came back, doing arrangements for him. So it's a long-term relationship.

**Holman:** I wanted – I was so happy with the band that I wanted to write for it, but he was winding his career down and he wasn't buying any charts. I wrote one, which he did give me \$50 for, but that was the only one. It never got recorded.

**Brown:** It never got recorded? Do you remember the title of that chart? I also want to ask you the title . . .

**Holman:** I think it was *I Get a Kick Out of You*.

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**Brown:** Also, do you remember the title of your twelve-tone blues?

**Holman:** No.

**Brown:** “Arnold’s Strut.”

I mentioned the Bob Keene [later, from 1955, spelled Keane], the session that was done in Los Angeles in August of ‘51, *Dancing on the Ceiling*, with Bob Keene and his orchestra. The reason why I bring this one up, not only because it’s your date, but the drummer on that date was Remo Belli, whom we interviewed at this time last year, and he talked about working in his very early career in Los Angeles, coming from Indiana. I was just wondering if you had any recollections of meeting Remo. Do you remember anything about his playing or what he was like as a youngster?

**Holman:** Yeah. We worked – let’s see. In ‘51 we worked at the Lighthouse together pretty often. We used to ride out there together. In those days his name was Remo [Holman pronounces it ray-mo], but since he got the drum company, it’s become Remo [ree-mo]. He was energetic, talkative, no secrets, straight-ahead, and a good drummer.

The Bob Keene date – Bob Keene had an Artie-Shaw-type band before this, with four saxes and five brass. He wanted to enlarge it to seven brass and five saxes. So he hired me to go through his whole book and write parts for these extra horns. I got – he finally let me write one of my own. I can’t remember the title now, but we recorded it on that date. It’s probably down there.

**Brown:** I can tell you the titles that they have listed: *It Ain’t Necessarily So*, *It’s Easy to Remember*, *Dancing Tambourines*, *Jug Stop*, *Flying Home*, *Begin the Beguine*. Those are the ones that are listed. So it doesn’t – not too many original songs. The first date – they list these by session, not the original disc. So the actual session.

**Holman:** We may have made – are there any more Bob Keenes there?

**Brown:** Not from this session. They’re only listing two sessions. They’re not giving specific dates. They’re just saying Los Angeles, August of 1951. Two titles at the first one: *Ain’t Necessarily So*, *It’s Easy to Remember*. The second date, they list four: *Dancing Tambourines*, *Jug Stop*, *Flying Home*, and *Begin the Beguine*.

**Holman:** Well, I know they recorded my chart, because I’ve heard it on the radio. But I don’t know why it’s not there.

**Brown:** Were there other Bob Keene dates? There must have been other Bob Keene dates.

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

**Brown:** Like I said, this is, as we're finding out, not completely correct or comprehensive. So we'll continue to amend. That's one of the things that we try to do with these oral histories, is try to correct the historical record. So we'll definitely look for that. But you don't remember the title. So that's going to be a little tough. Because you can search this by title as well. But maybe it'll come.

Then the next listing is the Stan Kenton date in February of 1952. That's the next. But feel free to fill in whatever you like from the Bob Keene and that whole period. Touring with that band as well?

**Holman:** No, he didn't tour. It was a local band. We were playing some Saturday nights down at the Balboa Rendezvous. That was about the only gigs.

The next thing would be Kenton. As I said before, my two attempts to write for the band laid an egg. So I was out of that picture. But he was re-forming his band, because all of his stars had left at the end of '51. Bob Cooper, Bud Shank, and all those guys were leaving. So he was starting over, reorganizing the band. My friend Dick Meldonian got the lead alto chair again. They were auditioning all the chairs in the sax section, and he decided on Steve White, as going to be the jazz tenor player. Steve was a wonderful player, a heavy Pres [Lester Young] influence, but he was really out there personality-wise. He was apt to make a record of him singing *In My Jet Plane* and things like that. When I heard that, I didn't think – how could Steve be happy on Stan Kenton's band? Sure enough, he and Stan came to the agreement that it wouldn't be the place for him. So they were looking for a tenor player. My friend Dick recommended me. I went and tried out. He liked me okay. So I went as the tenor player. I wasn't really good enough to do that, but Stan works a lot on what he thinks is promise, what you can be rather than what you are. While I was on the band, he hired a trombone player unheard, but the guy had played with the Salt Lake Symphony. So he hired him to play lead trombone, and it was a couple years before the guy could even play a third part. Anyway, I guess that's why he accepted me on tenor.

He remembered that I was a writer, and he was always encouraging me to write. But in my short time on the band, I knew that what I was writing wouldn't go over with him. So I just was content to play in the section. Gerry Mulligan had written about ten charts for the band at the same time that I joined. We got to play some of those. Stan didn't like them all, because he thought Gerry was too light and too frivolous, wasn't serious enough, gravitas. But we played some of them. I got to listen to those and hear the voicings, his musicality, and his form. That really gave me a lot in learning how to put a chart together. I'd had the basics in school and writing for myself and for rehearsal bands, but I didn't really have a conception. Gerry helped me to put that together.

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So toward the end of '51 I started writing some charts. Stan liked them, and he encouraged me. He'd been encouraging me the whole year, but I just wasn't up to it. He started liking them, and I started writing more. So that got it started with him.

Gil Fuller one time told me that he would have liked to have heard what would have happened if I had come up through a different band than Kenton, which intrigued me, because I would like to have heard that too. I have no idea what it would be or what band. Kenton was a pretty stylized band to be your first writing experience. I don't know how much of that rubbed off on me and how much not.

**Brown:** He had quite a stable of arrangers on this date. He had Johnny Richards, Pete Rugalo, Gene Roland, Bob Graettinger. So already quite a stable of arrangers.

**Holman:** Yeah. Those were guys who had been writing for him. Some of those were old charts. When I was on the band, Bill Russo and I were the two main writers. Johnny Richards wrote a lot too. Russo and I were the only guys playing in the band that wrote for it.

**Brown:** Looking through the discography, it looks like there – you – a profusion of recordings from this period with Kenton.

**Holman:** That first one, I was petrified. My first recording session with Stan Kenton. I had solos to play. But I got through it. I heard one of them. It wasn't as bad as I thought.

**Brown:** How was he to work for, other than what you already explained about really looking at someone's promise and potential rather than their actual ability at that time? Was he nurturing? Was he a stern bandleader? We've got the whole gamut from the Ellington through the Benny Goodmans.

**Holman:** Stan always had a secret desire to be a psycho-analyst – psychiatrist. So he practiced on the guys in the band. In fact, Russo used to say, "We're all patients." He would talk to every guy in the band and try to build him up to where the guy had some self-esteem, which is not always the best approach for a band, because you want to have a close-knit bunch of – guys that are capable, but they're not worried about their own egos. As opposed to Charlie Barnet, who said, "As long as you can play your part, you're okay with me, and forget all that other stuff." But I think – me, what do I know about bandleading compared to Stan Kenton? – but that to me was his big deficiency, the way he – he was great. The money was as good as he could possibly make it. He didn't embarrass anybody. Conditions were always great. He was always willing to talk to you. It was just that I think he talked about the wrong things. Anyway, he had a pretty successful band.

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Where was I? At the end of '51 I was writing. During this time Richie Kamuca had come on, who was a very capable jazz tenor player. He took that chair, and I moved to the other one. Stan Levey also joined the band then, which was a treat, going back to my first exposure to bebop at Billy Berg's and Stan Levey.

**Brown:** Did you get to know him very well, as a person, Stan?

**Holman:** Yeah. Not as well as I should, because I was bashful, and he didn't have that laid-back California personality that I was used to. Like that hard-core Philadelphia. So I didn't understand that. There were a lot of guys from the East that I couldn't tell if they were being friendly or not. But Stan and I got to be good friends.

We made the Europe trip, 1953. I was on the band in 1952 and left at the end of '53. Oh, Zoot. How could I forget Zoot? That was the high point of my being on the band that whole two years, was when he joined. To be able to hear him every night and hang out with him during the day was really heaven for me, because my friend Dick Meldonian, that was one of the things he had done, was got me to appreciate the young tenor players that were around, Zoot and Al Cohn. I really had a good time with Zoot. We went to Europe. We all bought Rolleiflex cameras, and every time the bus stopped, we all got out of the bus and took pictures of each other.

When we returned from Europe, we had one of those Birdland All-Star tours to do. We were traveling in two buses. We were on the Pennsylvania Turnpike on the way to Pittsburgh from New York. The bus driver nodded out and ran into the back of a truck. Some of the guys – I didn't get hurt. The whole trombone section had been lying down in their seats. So, when the bus stopped, they went and hit the seat in front of them, and they all got their chops smashed. So the whole trombone section, except for Russo, I think, was out of commission. We got to Pittsburgh the next – how did we get there? I forget how we got there. Anyway, we had a meeting of the band, and Stan said, "Fellows, we've got a rehearsal tomorrow afternoon, because we're flying in a whole trombone section from Chicago, and they need to rehearse the book." Zoot says, "We know our parts. Why do we have to rehearse?" "Because the rehearsal takes the whole band. The whole band has to be there." He said, "We know our parts? How come? Why?" So, it got to, "Because I said so, Jack." He always called him Jack. He couldn't bear himself to say Zoot. "Because I said so, Jack." Zoot just kept saying, "Why?" Stan finally said, "Jack, I think you better give your notice." So Zoot says, "You got it." Two weeks later, he left, and that night I gave my notice. It just was no fun without him.

**Brown:** I'm going back and looking at the discographical record, at the concert in Ontario [California]. That was the recording-performance of your *Concert in Miniature*. You're listed on the credits as tenor saxophone and arranger. Is that accurate?

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**Holman:** Yeah. We did those every Monday night on NBC. They were radio broadcasts, remotes. So there should be a lot of those.

**Brown:** Yes, that's why I'm saying – we got to the Kenton. There's four pages of entries. So, was this – you've already had some of your works – your arrangements performed?

**Holman:** When was this? What date?

**Brown:** This one was June of '52.

**Holman:** You have titles?

**Brown:** *Concert in Miniature*. You're listed as arranger, but they don't list which selections you arranged, unfortunately. For your credits, it's Bill Holman, tenor saxophone and arranger, but it doesn't list the arranging credits for each title.

**Holman:** I don't know that I had written any charts by that time. Do you have song titles?

**Brown:** I'm looking down. There are a lot of titles, but they're crediting – I don't see a "BH" behind any of these titles. So that's one of the things I was asking, if there were . . . ?

**Holman:** Maybe they just put that on there. Like I said, Stan looks for promise.

**Brown:** Okay [laughs]. So he was projecting into the future.

**Holman:** The arranger to be.

**Brown:** So you leave Stan Kenton in '53. I'm still scrolling down. This is about the fourth page. These are all entries for Kenton: Lima, Ohio, Cincinnati, Ohio – so obviously a Midwest tour – Chicago, Chicago. These are almost daily. I would imagine again this is broadcasts, I presume? Then we get to – these are still all Kenton. I've scrolled down considerably. I'm only at November of '52, December of '52. Here's a NBC radio broadcast from the Hollywood Palladium in January of '53. Oh, *Works*. I'm seeing Bill Holman, credit for arranging *Works*.

**Holman:** On that, the Palladium?

**Brown:** Yeah, the Hollywood Palladium. This is January 1953.

**Holman:** Yeah, *Works*.

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**Brown:** You got *Bags*. You also arranged *Bags* and *Works*. Those are ones that are credited to you on those.

**Holman:** Yeah, that was the start of when I started writing a lot for the band.

**Brown:** After you leave Kenton, what happens? By the way, when I'm looking down here, there are no entries for Zoot Sims in here. Did he go by Jack Sims? Did he have any aliases? He's not credited on any of these. That may be yet another problem with this discography.

**Holman:** It would be in '53, probably summer of '53 he would have been there.

**Brown:** Okay. Let's scroll down and see if he's added. Oh, here's a very interesting one, when Laurindo Almeida was in the group, or at least recorded. This is showing in January of '53 he's recording with the Kenton orchestra.

**Holman:** Yeah. We did a South American tune, I think. A samba, maybe.

**Brown:** Which predates the bossa craze that came in towards the end of that decade. What was it like? Did you know Laurindo?

**Holman:** I met him. That's about all, because he didn't travel with the band at all.

**Brown:** Here's some more radio broadcasts, all the way down through January. Then here's a recording, *23 Degrees North, 82 Degrees West*. You're credited here as an arranger as well. But it's still the same tunes. It's got *Works* credited to you here. I'm going to continue to scroll down. April. This is in Chicago. *All About Ronnie*. You're not the arranger on that one. Let me see if I can find another. How about *Hav-a-Havana* and *Frank Speaking*. These are broadcasts from Birdland in April of '53. These give credit to you for these arrangements.

**Holman:** *Frank Speaking* was Bill Russo.

**Brown:** Excuse me. You're right. I'm sorry. It's *Hav-a-Havana*.

**Holman:** Yeah.

**Brown:** Was that in reference to the cigar?

**Holman:** Yeah. I wanted to think of something in Cuba. I remembered having seen those billboards and ads. It's the Cuba connection.

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**Brown:** Then I'm showing some jam sessions in July of '53: Shorty Rogers, Conrad Gozzo, Maynard Ferguson, Herb Geller, Jack Montrose, Bill Perkins. They've got you listed as bari. Lorraine Geller on piano, John Simmons, bass, Chuck Flores, drums. It was live at the Rendezvous Ballroom, Balboa Beach. Any recollection about that?

**Holman:** No.

**Brown:** That's the first entry after your Stan Kenton entries.

**Holman:** You say that was '53?

**Brown:** Yeah. This is Balboa Beach, July 11, '53, live at the Rendezvous Ballroom. Tunes: *Sometimes I'm Happy*, *How High the Moon*, *Short Snort*, *Take the "A" Train*, *C-Jam Blues*, *The Great Lie*, *Buzzy*.

**Holman:** Oh, I took a vacation. I came home sometime around then. It may have been while I was here. But I don't remember it.

**Brown:** Then the next entry is in – actually in July 11, 1953: Jazz Super Stars. Shorty Rogers and his big band.

**Holman:** Yeah. I guess I was in that too.

**Brown:** You're credited with tenor and bari on this one. This is also live at the Rendezvous Ballroom, Balboa Beach, but again, this is Shorty Rogers, and a pretty extensive repertoire here. *Sometimes I'm Happy*, all the way down, *Perdido*, *Nice Work If You Can Get It*, *Why Shouldn't I?* No credits for any of the arranging, but it sounds like . . .

**Holman:** It's probably all Shorty.

**Brown:** Then the next one is, again, Shorty. So, are you in Shorty's band? Because it's Shorty Rogers's band. *Hot Blood* is the next entry. It's got Shelly on drums, Jimmy Giuffre, Bob Cooper on bari, Jimmy Knepper.

**Holman:** What date is that?

**Brown:** This one is July 14th. So, literally, it's almost every day they've got something. But this one was an RCA date, because it was released on RCA records.

**Holman:** It must have been my Shorty Rogers period.

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**Brown:** Okay. Anything you would like to share for the historical record about your Shorty Rogers period and what was he like to work with?

**Holman:** Shorty was great to work with, but a lot of times he left the work to the other people. One time I remember, we were doing a big band date, and he hadn't marked any of the notes that were to be played short and which ones to be played long. To me, that's very important. So we had to take out an hour and have Al Porcino tell the whole band, make this one short, make this one long. Shorty just stood there, twirling his hair. Talk about mild-mannered. He was the personification of that: never a bad word about anybody, always very encouraging, sympathetic. I think he gave up a lot of opportunities to have things his way, by his manner. He let other people take it away from him.

**Brown:** Then, by August of '53, we're showing more recordings with Stan Kenton.

**Holman:** Yeah.

**Brown:** So you left, and you went back.

**Holman:** Yeah. It was just a vacation. I think I came home. We moved into our first house. I had to help do that.

**Brown:** When you say "we," by then you were already married?

**Holman:** Yeah. I got married at the end of '49, I think. No, not to Nancy.

**Brown:** So you moved into what neighborhood in Los Angeles at that point?

**Holman:** Out in Reseda. That's where the cheap houses were.

**Brown:** You're back with Stan Kenton. They resume again, the massive page after page of recording credits and broadcasts. I'm looking at one here: NBC broadcast, Lincoln Park, Rhode Island, August 18, 1953, *Boop-boop-de-doop*, Bill Holman

**Holman:** Yeah, *Boop-boop-de-doop*. I just got that title from a rhythm of the bridge. It goes "boop boop-de-doop doo-be-doop doo-be-doop." So I used that for a title. Stan – I told you he wouldn't say "Zoot." He wouldn't go near "*Boop-boop-de-doop*." In fact, we played it on several broadcasts from Birdland, and he made me get up and announce it every time.

**Brown:** Let me just backtrack a little bit, because I found in my notes two compositions: *Invention for Guitar and Trumpet*. The first entry that I saw for that was in September of '52. There are several entries. Again, all the live broadcasts. Then, *Solo for Alto*, which I presume was for Lee, maybe? Please tell us about those two.

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**Holman:** The *Invention for Guitar and Trumpet* was one of the few assignments that Stan gave me at the time. He knew I was interested in lines and counterpoint and things like that. So he took the name of a contrapuntal form, which is the invention. He had Maynard to play high and Sal to play fast, and asked me to write the piece for them. I did. I don't like it at all. That's probably the worst chart I wrote for Kenton, and it's been recorded the most and re-released on this label and that label. It's coming back to haunt me all the time.

**Brown:** Like Ravel's Bolero.

**Holman:** So, there it is. I'm responsible.

**Brown:** Okay, then let's go on to *Solo for Alto*.

**Holman:** I don't know what that is. What's the date on that?

**Brown:** I have November 27th, 1952, NBC radio broadcast from New Jersey.

**Holman:** Yeah, that would have been Konitz, probably, but I can't remember. I've run across that title before, and I can't remember what it is. We did several with him on *All the Things You Are*, which is his favorite tune of all time. He gave it different names, but I don't think *Solo for Alto* was one of them.

**Brown:** You're back with Stan. How are things? You took a little break. A change in personnel in the band? How did the band feel when you came back in to it?

**Holman:** The same.

**Brown:** Did you get more opportunities to do arranging and contribute to the repertory?

**Holman:** Yeah. I got an opportunity to write a piece for Zoot, which I called *Zoot*. Come to think of it, Stan did finally start announcing that piece. In his car on his way home from the rehearsal, he – back to the hotel. We were in Cincinnati – he said, "I like the *Zoot* piece, although it sounds a little like Basie to me." I recognized that word. "I had to write it for Zoot. That's what came out." He accepted that and played it, but he had to get his criticism in there.

**Brown:** Showing an August of '53 – September, performing in Wiesbaden, Germany. How was that tour, going overseas?

**Holman:** It was great in one aspect. Stan had never been there before, and the crowds were really anxious to see him, and a lot of them. We had tremendous crowds at every

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show. What wasn't so good was that the German booker had booked us for afternoon concerts and evening concerts too. If you see a week, you think seven concerts. No, say 12 or 14. And at that time their eating hours were pretty strict. So, during their dinner hour, we were always on the bus traveling. And during their lunch hour we were always on the bus traveling. So we subsisted on sandwiches and beer for however long, a month, that trip, however long it was. That was not so hot. The bus was like an avenue bus, not made for cross-country touring. They had the metal bar on the back of each seat. So if you put your head back, it's sitting on a metal bar. That was no good.

But we had some good experiences. We played – we couldn't play in England because of union rules. We couldn't play a commercial gig. We could do some U.S. airbases and stuff like that. So we played a concert in Dublin. The dressing room was in this high tower behind the auditorium. We looked out the window in this high tower. In the street, it looked like the French revolution down there. All that was missing was the torches. It was just jam-packed with people. They're all yelling and cheering, "Stan Kenton" and this and that. All these people came from England. They came by boat and by bus to hear us, because we couldn't play in England. That was really a trip.

The concert in Berlin, the crowd nearly got out of control. They were panicking and rushing to get seats. It's when Zoot had his famous argument with Stan about his shoes. Zoot had foot trouble from standing and playing on so many gigs through the years. So he had these health shoes that were constructed around the mold of your foot. They looked like spacemen's shoes, like somebody just poured oil on your toes. You could see the outline of each toe. They were black. So Zoot wore them on the gig. For some reason, Stan didn't see them until this gig in Berlin. When he saw them, he said, "Jack, I don't want you to wear those shoes." Zoot started to say something, and Stan cooled him down. He says, "We'll talk about it at intermission." The intermission came, and Stan was immediately surrounded by all these guys from Capitol Records and like that. They wanted to talk business. Zoot wanted to talk about shoes. So he goes up to Stan. "Stan, I want to talk about these shoes." Stan says, "Not now, Jack." "Come on. I want to talk now. I paid \$75 for these shoes. How much did you pay for yours?" I don't know how Stan got out of that, but they got it straightened out, and Zoot was able to wear his space shoe. Some other people have talked about that. I had the advantage of being there.

**Brown:** The next entry for recordings that seems a departure from the Kenton catalogue is a day with Red Norvo and his orchestra, with Shelly Manne on drums. That was . . .

**Holman:** That was here.

**Brown:** Yeah, February of '54, right.

**Holman:** That was after I'd left Stan. Oh, something else happened then. The night I left, Stan and I had a little argument about "Why are you leaving?" and this and that. I said,

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"The band doesn't swing. It's not a jazz band" – the kind of things you'd expect a player in that band to have. I expected that that was going to be all with me and Stan, because where I come from, in Orange County, if you had an argument with somebody, you were through with them, and they were through with you. But I got a call from Stan a couple of weeks later. He was doing another Birdland tour, Charlie Parker was going to be on it, and he wanted a couple of charts to play for him. So he asked me to write a couple of charts for Bird. I wrote *Cherokee* and *My Funny Valentine*. That really surprised me, that Stan was going to still be associated with me. Then I heard that he was coming back in February, and they were going to record a whole album of my charts, which really floored me, because, again, where I came from, once you had an argument, you were through. Here was this guy willing to look past all that and hand me a really big present, which is a whole album of original tunes. So, they did. They came out here and recorded it. I went to a couple of the dates. It happened.

What do you have after that?

**Brown:** That's what I said: the Red Norvo in February of '54. Then Woody Herman in March of '54 with Panama Francis on the gig. He's playing on *Mess Around*, which I presume was – did Ertegun write that for Ray Charles? Anyway, that's Woody Herman, a Woody Herman date. There are several between them. I'm showing in late '53, Four Freshmen, then Dick Lewis. Any of these ringing a bell?

**Holman:** Dick was the British Stan Kenton. He had a band too. Stan gave him a lot of charts. So he'd recorded some of my things. Later on we got to be good friends. The Four Freshmen I don't know about.

**Brown:** We'll go back up, look at that one. That was Four Freshman. Actually, they're not showing – did you? – I'm wondering if you would contribute, if they did an arrangement of yours. But they're not showing any credits for any. It was with Stan, Stan's orchestra.

**Holman:** I guess we were just backing them up.

**Brown:** The next one – here's the recording of all your arrangements. Stan Kenton and his orchestra. This is from March 1st of '54: *Of All Things, Lover Man, In Lighter Vein* – two different takes – *My Funny Valentine*. That was the first one. The next one had a variety of other arrangers, but they had on this also *Hav-a-Havana* and then *Solo for Buddy, The Opener, Kingfish*. We could talk about *Kingfish*. That seemed to have a lot of play. Is that one of your favorites as well?

**Holman:** Yeah. Nothing special about it. Just a lick that probably on the bus came to me, the original trumpet figure. Then I added the trombones and saxes to that. It was a basic

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blues, much more basic than anything Stan could have thought about a year before, but he relaxed a little bit too.

Bill Russo was another writer on this date.

**Brown:** Right. He did *A Theme of Four Values*.

**Holman:** He put out two LPs of all original pieces, all my originals and all of Russo's, and all at the same time. The record company would never do that.

**Brown:** *Fearless Finlay* is another one that's credited to you, another arrangement. *Fearless Fosdick*?

**Holman:** That was the original title for that. Stan called and said that the legal department at Capitol Records was worried about that, because it was something I took from Al Capp in *Li'l Abner*. So I changed it to Fosdick [*sic*: Finlay].

**Brown:** Any comments about the Woody Herman date? It didn't seem like that registered.

**Holman:** Are there any titles with that?

**Brown:** Let me scroll down to that. The one following that – again, these dates are coming in right behind each other. Stan Kenton, and then a Frank Rosolino. I'm still showing some Stan Kenton. Frank Rosolino is the next date. But the recordings of all your tunes that Stan did, that was in March, early March, March 3rd. Then there's a Frank Rosolino, but it's *Stan Kenton Presents Frank*. It's a sextet, and they've got some of your arrangements on here. Then the next one is the Woody Herman. Woody Herman is March 30th in New York. It's only – it's one session, four titles, but it's the entire orchestra. The four titles are *Mess Around*, with a vocal track, *Castle Rock*, *Mambo the Most*, and *Mambo the Utmost*. You're listed as an arranger.

**Holman:** I don't remember any of those titles.

**Brown:** I think the Lord discography is going to have to have a lot of addenda.

**Holman:** You say there's another Woody date?

**Brown:** No. That was the only Woody date. The next date is *Kenton Presents Jazz: the Bill Holman Octet*. This is from May of '54. This is in Los Angeles. You're credited with tenor sax and arranging on this one. This is with Curtis Counce, as you mentioned earlier, and Stan Levey, a relatively small group. Do you remember how that one came about, with an octet?

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**Holman:** Stan got this deal with Capitol to do a *Kenton Presents* series and to give young players and writers a chance to record. Wouldn't you know it? They're all guys who have played with his band. I was very happy to get that assignment. I sat down and started to write the things. I didn't know who I was. I'd been writing for other people. I write a chart for Stan Kenton. I have a picture of him, his personality and his band – his musical personality – and that's where I go. The same for Woody and all the other bands I'd written for. Now I'm sitting down, and I've got no picture of anybody in my head, because it's me. So I had to scuffle with that for a few days, until I figured I've got nothing to pin this on except myself. So you've got to figure out what you like, instead of what you can hang on these other guys' reputation.

After it got started, it came pretty easily. But that was a big eye opener. I went through the same thing later on when I made my first big band record. What's your big band going to sound like? Not Stan Kenton and not Woody.

**Brown:** Were you happy with the final results?

**Holman:** Oh yeah. I was really – I was delirious, because Capitol even put out a single, a 45, of a couple of the tunes on there. For a jazz guy to have a single was unheard of. I was really on top of the world for a few weeks.

**Brown:** The next one was the one I mentioned about Woody Herman. So I've got a different – you asked if there was a different session. Here's one that's from May of '54. Some of the personnel on here: Bill Perkins, Jerry Coker. As I mentioned earlier, Panama Francis, playing drums.

**Holman:** Any titles?

**Brown:** *Blame Boehm*.

**Holman:** Yeah, that's mine.

**Brown:** And then *Mulligan Tawny*.

**Holman:** Yeah

**Brown:** Those are the two that are credited to you. There's a third, *The Third Herd* (*Cohn's Alley*), which is credited to AC.

**Holman:** Al Cohn.

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**Brown:** So, working with Woody. What's working with Woody like? Were you joining the group? Or were you just on these sessions?

**Holman:** I wasn't there. They were probably done in New York.

**Brown:** Just your arrangements.

**Holman:** They did call me to join the band sometime around then, but I couldn't. I had some stuff going on at home, which was a drag, because I always wanted to play with that band. I envisioned Woody to be a leader like Charlie Barnet, and I'd liked Charlie so much.

**Brown:** Then there's a name that is not a household name among jazz aficionados. The title of the date is *Jazz for Moderns* by Duane Tatro. You've done several.

**Holman:** He was the guy in the Great Lakes training center band that I knew. He didn't know me. He turned out to be this far-out writer of twelve-tone music and everything. He did a far-out record on – I forget the label now.

**Brown:** Contemporary.

**Holman:** Yeah.

**Brown:** But when I look at the personnel on here. Lennie Niehaus, yourself, Jimmy Giuffre, Shelly Manne on drums. Sounds like it could have been a real hip thing. You're playing some pretty out music. Has he continued to have an influence on you at this time? Or you're basically just . . .

**Holman:** No. No, I wasn't into twelve-tone or anything like that at that time.

**Brown:** Okay. Even though you wrote your twelve-tone blues.

**Holman:** Like I say, every budding writer has to do that.

**Brown:** Then the next entry is back with Kenton: Stan Kenton Festival, Stan Kenton and his orchestra. This is in Portland, Oregon, September of '54. They've got you – now you've got Charlie Mariano in the band. So it's really starting – you've got Candido playing congas. So it's really taking on a different – it seems like a different incarnation of the band.

**Holman:** This was another Birdland tour, and Candido was a featured Birdland artist. So he wasn't actually a member of the band. He just did an act, played a couple of pieces. Yeah, that was a concert tour. I went back, and I was a player on that. In the middle of the

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tour, Stan sent me to New York to write a couple charts. He had an idea for making these long charts, making them like original compositions, with development sections and motifs, things like that. They should be around twice the length of a regular chart. He sent me. Put me up in a hotel there with a little – I had a little pump organ that you pump with your feet.

**Brown:** Like a harmonium?

**Holman:** I guess, yeah, something like that. I stayed there for almost a month, I think – no. I don't know. Two or three, three or four weeks. Something like that – and wrote those two charts, writing all day and going to Birdland and hearing Basie at night. It's when Joe Williams and Ruth joined them. They were on top. They had big crowds there every night, all that fan hysteria.

**Brown:** Would *Theme and Variations* be one of those? That is one of the titles that's credited here during this time.

**Holman:** No, no. It was *What's New?* and *I've Got You Under My Skin*. They weren't recorded until 1955.

**Brown:** The ones they have you credited for arranging here are *Sam Meets the Mambo*, *Theme and Variations*, and then *Fearless Finlay*, which we discussed earlier. Then the next session is Frank Rosolino's session.

Let me return to that Stan Kenton date, because Max Bennett is playing bass. It's one of the first times I see him credited.

**Holman:** Yeah. He joined on that tour.

**Brown:** I know him because of the L.A. Express, but obviously he had a career at least a couple decades long before that. He seemed to have been a major fixture, a cornerstone of the L.A. scene.

**Holman:** Not then. He was an Easterner then. He had been playing with Herbie Fields, with Rosolino, I think.

**Brown:** Yeah, because he's in the band.

**Holman:** And somebody else. Rosolino and Max had been playing . . .

[recording interrupted. It resumes in mid-sentence]

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. . . yet. So he came out and joined the band for that concert tour and stayed with the band a little bit into '55. I'm not sure of that, because I wasn't with the band then. Then he settled in L.A. That was Mel Lewis's first time with the band too.

**Brown:** Right, right. I'm showing the recording date, January 25th, 1955, in Hollywood. We got Mel Lewis, Max, yourself listed on tenor and arranging. A lot of vocalists on that date.

Okay. We'll take another break

Bill, why don't we talk about your craft, how you approached – how you developed your craft of arranging. Earlier in this interview you talked about being at Westlake, and then after a couple of weeks you were starting to already put pen to paper and coming up with some things, and people really took notice of you. So, if you could reflect on that period and maybe give us a sense of how you developed your craft and your approach to arranging. What are the mechanics? Is it something that you're taking dictation from your head? Are you working things out on the piano? A combination of things? Something else? If you could just share some of those insights.

**Holman:** As I said before, when I'm writing for someone else, I have an impression of that person and an impression of his music. I'm able to use that as a starting point to put in my two cents worth, to elaborate on what they did, to put my own slant on it. I don't know if that's something I picked up writing commercially for singers and more commercial bands or not. Sometimes I wonder, if I were going to be a true jazz writer, would I take the other person into consideration, or would I just consult my own muse and put down what I wanted to hear? I'll never know that, but it comes to me every once in a while, like, is this necessarily the right way to approach it?

Another thing was – Shorty Rogers was – during the '50s, he was the big band writer in L.A. Everybody wanted a chart by Shorty Rogers, and he wrote the same chart for everybody. You know, not the same notes, but the same approach, maybe the same form, same voicing. I tried to write different. As I said, for every situation, I'd write different, according to what went into the hopper in my head. Shorty was wildly successful, and I wasn't doing anything. So I'm trying to figure out – I know which is the better moneymaker, but which is the right approach? Again, that still comes up. It's not that big a deal anymore, because I'm as successful as I need to be.

A lot of questions, in talking about my music. Like, when I'm writing for a soloist, do I give him a very sparse background, in order for him to feel like he's not encumbered by anything that's happening in back of him? Or should I give him stuff to relate to and bounce off of? Should I put my musical content in there too, or just provide a platform for him to do his? I came across that with Carmen McRae. She was a musician as well as a singer. I never did get it settled in my mind, whether it's best to leave her alone out

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there or to give her stuff to bounce off of. That gives you an idea of how many areas of wonderment there is in my writing.

When I went to Westlake, they taught us the basic four-part harmony, which is what most of the bands were using. It just, you have a lead alto, you have three harmony parts, and you have the baritone on the bottom who's usually playing the same thing the lead alto is, except an octave lower. For all of the sophistication that Stan Kenton's band was supposed to have and what it was supposed to exhibit, most of the charts that I wrote for him in '52 and '53 were using that block harmony that Count Basie had been using for years. Because of the size of the band, maybe, with all those horns, it made it sound much more grandiose, in fitting with the Kenton style, and a lot of people don't realize that it's that same do-re-mi four-part voicing. Gradually I got a little more sophisticated than that. But it's still a very workable voicing to use in the new century, even.

The counterpoint things, I usually – in jazz charts, I feel pretty free with that, but if I'm doing a vocal chart, like, say, for Tony Bennett. A couple of years ago I did a record with him with the Count Basie band. I wrote it strictly like meat and potatoes Count Basie style. I didn't – there was only one chart where I did a linear thing, because I think Tony said, "I just love the Basie sound." I know that he's not thinking about counterpoint. I know he's thinking about brass socking and saxes singing. So I did that. I just – one of my basic tools, I left it out completely, because it wasn't the thing to do.

Charts for myself, or for a jazz band, usually I just let it flow and don't censor anything. But if you're doing commercial stuff, you censor it. That's another thing. Should I have been doing commercial stuff all this time, and what would have been the results if I hadn't? I'll always wonder about that too.

**Brown:** You followed in the Westlake tradition.

**Holman:** No. Just writing any kind of chart where their requirements are different from yours. It puts you in a different state of mind, I think possibly even to the lines that I write. I try to make them appealing. Is that because I think they should be appealing? Or is that my pop music training, writing for all these other people, where everything is supposed to be appealing? Is music supposed to be appealing to begin with?

I was stuck – when I went to New York that time to write a couple of charts for Stan, I was stuck completely on the one for *What's New*. I couldn't figure out how to get started. The day we had gone into town – the day they dropped me off there, Shorty Rogers, Jack Montrose, and I had gone down 48th Street, where all the music stores were, and looked through a cabinet full of miniature scores. There was a Bartok third and fourth string quartet in there. I bought both. I bought the third and the fourth. So here I am, stewing about how am I going to start this chart, and I got out one of – I can't remember which one it is now. I think the fourth. It has – it's starting out just with these long notes and

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then a couple of figures above it. That appealed to me. So I noodled around on that organ for a while, and I came out with a thing. I had the low horns playing a chord and the altos come in with this frilly motif, which I used all the way through the piece, which is what Stan was looking for. He wanted motifs that you could recognize all through the piece, like a classical piece. It's the only time I've ever done that, but I think of the story about Hollywood film composers. They all have shelves and shelves of classical scores with bookmarks in them for each – the kind of music they're looking for.

**Brown:** And you can hear it too, can't you?

**Holman:** Yeah. So, inspiration. Inspiration. Sometimes I'll sit at the piano and just noodle until I find something that – a combination of notes that I think I can make into something. Sometimes I'll just start writing nonsense down on paper, just because I – this is one – the guy who started Westlake. I don't know where he came up with this, but he said there's a connection between – if you're writing, there's a connection between your head and your hand. I think that. If I can get myself writing something, sometimes that'll spur my head to come up with an idea. Or maybe I'll write something and say, hey, that doesn't look bad. If I change this and that, I can make it into something, and away we go.

Form and continuity is also something I've spent a lot of time on, the form of a chart, so that it builds. It doesn't get to a climax too soon, where you're beating your head against the wall trying to top that climax the rest of the chart. I hear that with so many guys that are writing long pieces. They lose sight of the end and they get there too quick. Then the rest of it is just this, like, flogging to make it get hotter, and it won't do it.

Russ Garcia, when I studied with him – I studied privately with him, writing. I took in a chart. He looked through it. He said, "You've got enough music here for about ten arrangements. You've got – the thing is just dripping with ideas. You only need two or three ideas to make a chart. You vary those things in subtle ways, so that you don't lose the continuity." To him, the war between continuity and variety was always there. You've got the variety, and you run the risk of losing the continuity.

So my idea then of a jazz chart was like a stream of consciousness. You just write out whatever comes into your head and write it for so many minutes or until you feel like you've come to the end, and you quit, because I thought it was the way a jazz solo was constructed. Since then, I found out that a jazz solo has got form too, a good jazz solo. So I was wrong on both counts.

So now, I start an arrangement or a composition, I'm very conscious of where it's going to end, and when. How hot are we going to get before the end? How are we going to get there? Are we going to have a lot of solos, or just a couple of solos, or one, or none? I've done a couple of pieces with no solos.

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When I was at Westlake, I was learning mechanics, and even after I'd left Westlake and I was writing for local bands here – oh, by the way, I was writing Latin charts for a Latin band for \$10 a chart, copied. That's one of the things that Gerry showed me, how a chart could focus on one thing, and the form is built around that focus. It goes up, it comes down gracefully, and you don't get there too soon. So that was the big thing in forming my own conception. How much of playing in Kenton's band at the time went into it, I'll never know, but probably some.

**Brown:** And of course arranging and composing, although related, are not the same process.

**Holman:** No. Arranging, you're working with somebody else's composition. A good jazz chart, I think, has got to be a composition of its own. You're using – maybe you're using a tone row that another composer laid on you, but it's composition too. You don't get any royalties from it, but if you like what you're doing, you do it.

**Brown:** I'm showing here an entry for Russ Garcia and his orchestra, in which case you were playing tenor sax. They're all his tunes, all his arranging. This is called *Wigville*. This was recorded in February of '55, here in Los Angeles. How long did you study with Russ? Was it a formal lesson? Or was it more informal?

**Holman:** It was pretty informal. He had a book out which has really been successful. He put it out while I was studying with him, and it's been – it's still in print, it's still being sold, and it's in every language in the world. It taught you pretty much what a commercial arranger had to know. It talked a little bit about jazz. He had a pretty dismissive attitude towards bebop. He thought it was a matter of flattening the fifth, and away you go. But it touched on Latin music and a little bit about strings, some other instruments that you don't use all the time, and different dance rhythms.

So what we did was pretty much the same material, but in more depth. That was our private thing. He spent a lot of time – after he found out what my idea of form was, we spent a lot of time on that. But I was still unconvinced.

**Brown:** I'm also thinking about, you've led bands. You continue to lead. You've run your own recording dates. So you've had a very varied career. I know that you stopped playing after a while, but that was due to health reasons. Were there any other endeavors in the music business that were of interest or appealed to you? Say – I know you were a road manager on one of the early trips.

**Holman:** Yeah. One trip was enough.

**Brown:** Okay. How about your publishing? Because I know as a composer, you have to have your publishing. So, how . . . ?

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**Holman:** Yeah, well, my own companies exist strictly to collect royalties that would otherwise go to somebody else. My music is printed and distributed by Sierra Music Publications in Washington. Bob Curnow – who was also a writer for Kenton later on – owns this company. He did a great job. I hadn't had any luck. There was one company that had a Bill Holman series. They had a Phil Woods series, a [Bob] Brookmeyer series, and a Thad Jones series. When I made my first record with my band, the recent band, I was going to have these charts, our originals, put into the Bill Holman series. So I get in touch with them. They want scores and tapes. So I sent all the stuff. Three weeks later, I got a letter. It said, "Your music doesn't fit our catalogue anymore." They got rid of all these series, all the different guys, and started making charts that were easier to play, so they could sell more of them. Thad Jones and Brookmeyer, you just don't dismiss those guys like that.

I had sent a few old charts to Bob to do. He did a good job with them, good distribution, good promotion, and everything. Sold quite a few of them. So I decided to give him all the new ones too. He's got all the Kenton stuff, my stuff, Maynard Ferguson's stuff, and – *Blues and the Abstract Truth*.

**Brown:** Oliver Nelson.

**Holman:** Oliver Nelson. He's doing a great job. He sends me royalties for the print copies he sells. So I don't get into the publishing too heavy.

**Brown:** But obviously you're taking care of the business, because in music there's the art and then there's the business, and most of us artists, we don't really want to deal with the business.

**Holman:** Until they figure out a way to do away with the piracy, there's going to be no royalties anyway.

**Brown:** Are you represented by Bill Trout? Do I still have that correct?

**Holman:** Yeah.

**Brown:** How is he to work with? I met him because of my association through NARAS [National Association of Recording Arts and Sciences]. One of the first times I met him, he said he was – he had represented Tony Williams. Of course that made me perk up. How long has that relationship been?

**Holman:** About 20 years, I think. I think he was a promotion guy before, something like that. He was a tenor player also. He's always kept one foot in jazz, an interest. He's had some health problems too. So I don't know how long he's going to be going, but he's still

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in there. Been very helpful. I think Jon Hendricks and I are the only people he's actively handling now.

**Brown:** I didn't know that. You're in good company.

On July 20th, 1955, Stan Kenton orchestra, a recorded date entitled *Contemporary Concepts* which featured all your work. It was recorded in Chicago. This must have been also another milestone in your career.

**Holman:** Yeah. I had no idea they were doing it. In fact, I didn't know about it until they had an acetate back at the office here, because I wasn't traveling with the band then. Apparently they had some time left over from some pop attempts that they were doing. So they did those things. The band loved them. So we got good performances from everybody. But it was almost an accident that it happened. Mulligan got the only original on the whole thing. Mine were all arrangements.

**Brown:** In December of '55 in Los Angeles, Elmer Bernstein's *The Man with the Golden Arm*, the soundtrack for the film. Was that a memorable experience, working in that context?

**Holman:** Yeah, it was. It was Shorty again. He got to write some of the music, and he had a part in the picture as the conductor of the band that Sinatra was trying out with. Sinatra was the drummer who was strung out. He auditioned with the band, and he was so messed up he couldn't play. Jimmy Giuffre got in an argument with the director, the German guy . . .

**Brown:** Preminger. Otto Preminger.

**Holman:** Yeah. Preminger and Giuffre. He said, "Mr. Preminger, it wouldn't happen." Otto wanted them all to look back at Sinatra like that when he was screwing up, and Giuffre said, "It wouldn't have happened like that. We'd have all looked down. We'd have been embarrassed for the guy." And Preminger said, a saxophone player telling him how to run his picture.

Jack Montrose, that was the first movie music that he had ever played on. Midway through it, he turned to me, and he said, "Bill, this guy is a [?]," Bernstein, because he heard something that he had heard. He was well schooled in classical music, and he heard something that Elmer had stolen. That was his introduction to the habits of Hollywood composers.

The thing with Giuffre was really classic. I wish they'd have had a short of that.

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**Brown:** Then the other session that seems to be a monumental event was the recording of the complete *Porgy and Bess*. The people that I jotted down as being involved: Russ Garcia, Duke Ellington Orchestra, the Australian Jazz Quintet, Stan Levey group, recorded both in New York and Los Angeles. You're credited as playing clarinet on this, in addition.

**Holman:** I know I played tenor, because the lady singer – who was ? – does it mention some of the stars that were on there? Not Etta James.

**Brown:** No. It wasn't Pearl Bailey. I'll find it. What were you going to say about the singer?

**Holman:** She came over to me after we'd done a thing I had a solo on and said she liked my sound.

**Brown:** It credited you as both clarinet and tenor sax. But I hadn't seen you credited with clarinet and your early reference to your own particular skill on the instrument, I thought might be interesting.

**Holman:** Yeah. We were deemphasizing clarinet.

**Brown:** It's an extensive listing. Russ Garcia conducting the Bethlehem orchestra, Duke Ellington and his famous orchestra, the Australian Jazz Quintet, the Pat Moran quintet, the Stan Levey group, and then it goes on to list all the personnel, from Maynard through Cat Anderson to Clark Terry, Willie Cook, all the members of the Ellington orchestra, all the members of these other groups, even Ellington is listed on here. You've got Mel Tormé, Francis Fay, Betty Roche, Johnny Hartman. These are some of the vocalists. When I saw that list of personnel, I thought, my gosh. But maybe they were recorded at different sessions. Maybe you didn't really interact with everybody? Could you tell us a little bit about that project? It seemed like . . .

**Holman:** I don't know. I was not on very much of it. So I don't know. It was done here and in New York, and it was put together. All we saw out here was – all I saw was a couple record dates. That's all I knew, except that Russ was the big cheese.

**Brown:** The next entry that seemed to be of particular interest was one with Maynard Ferguson. I think this might have been the first one with him as a leader. There are several other Kenton orchestra dates, but you were only involved as an arranger. They were just playing your charts. Sal Salvador? Is that a memorable date?

**Holman:** No.

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**Brown:** *Frivolous Sal*. Sal Salvador. You arranged four or five. *Frivolous Sal*, the title cut. That was your arrangement. So, nothing memorable.

**Holman:** No, it wasn't much. I think it was just rhythm section and guitar.

**Brown:** Yeah, it's a small group. Then Shorty Rogers. Then here is Maynard. There's not a record title on this. It's just showing a date. *Blues at Five*, and it has you listed in the reed section. So we'll just skip over that one. Then *The Big Shorty Rogers Express*, Shorty Rogers and his orchestra. This one is from July of 1956, and you're performing in the group. Not showing any arranging credits on this one. Johnny Richards, Tommy Alexander. Here's another Maynard. On this one, it looks like a large group. Ernie Wilkins, Marty Paich, Johnny Mandel, arrangers. You're listed among them, and you're credited with *Somebody Wants Me Down There*, Maynard.

**Holman:** It must have been one of Maynard's own dates.

**Brown:** Yeah. He's listed as the leader.

**Holman:** Probably after he moved to New York, because I did three dates with him out here, three albums, I think. I think one of them was with an octet and two of them were the full size band. That's how Ernie Wilkins and Mandel would have been in there.

**Brown:** Then here's one that seems to be significant: *The James Dean Story*. Chet Baker and Bud Shank, listed as the leaders on this one. It's a film soundtrack, November of '56. You're credited with arranging *Fairmount Indiana*, *Let Me Be Loved*, *The Movie Star*, *Lost Love*, *Hollywood*. So this film soundtrack for *The James Dean Story*.

**Holman:** Leith Stevens had done the music for that picture. They were all his themes, and I just made arrangements out of them for a medium-sized jazz band.

**Brown:** Then here's a very interesting one: Ray Brown with Marty Paich's orchestra. *Bass Hit* is the title, from November of '56. A killer band: Harry "Sweets" Edison, Peter Candoli, Herb Geller, yourself, Jimmy Giuffre, Jimmy Rowles, Herb Ellis, Ray Brown, Alvin Stoller, Marty Paich. When you've got folks like that, I was just wondering, was that a magical session, when you bring folks like that together? There were only four or five titles done. There were several takes of *After You've Gone* though.

**Holman:** I wasn't really thrilled with that. Marty hadn't hit his stride. On this particular record it sounded like warmed-over Basie. Later on, when he did that Art Pepper thing and some of those other things, he really got into it.

**Brown:** During this time period, mid-'50s, then there's beginning at least the national recognition of a West Coast style of jazz coming out. I just referenced Chet Baker, Bud

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Shank. We talked about Gerry Mulligan. So the pianoless quartet has already been documented. What was the scene like, if you could capture that for us?

**Holman:** Are we recording?

**Brown:** Yes, we are, but we needn't.

**Holman:** Oh. I thought we were previewing tomorrow.

**Brown:** Oh, okay. How much time do we have, by the way, because I don't want to get into something that . . .

**Kimery:** We can stop right now.

**Brown:** Okay. Let's take it up tomorrow.

**Holman:** Yeah. You said you were going to start with something tomorrow, and then we got talking, and I thought we were still on tomorrow.

**Brown:** Today is Friday, February 19th, 2010. This is day two of the Smithsonian Institution National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Masters Awards Program and the oral history supporting the award to composer, arranger, once erstwhile, and it seemed to be resurgent in his career as a tenor saxophonist, and that is the incomparable Bill Holman in his home in Los Angeles, California.

I'll talk about that – we'll talk about that later today, about what precipitated the hiatus in your playing the tenor saxophone, because obviously, through the historical record, we know that you returned to performing perhaps on special occasions, but nonetheless, you have been documented performing since putting it down in the mid-'60s.

From yesterday, we got up until about '56, '57 in your career, focusing a lot on your vast recording output as both an arranger and a performer. I was just wondering if there were any details or any comments or any addenda from yesterday's interview that you wanted to add before we begin today?

**Holman:** When do you need to know?

**Brown:** On a need to know basis.

**Holman:** That's Van Alexander's remark when he gets a senior moment. He says, "When do you have to know?"

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**Brown:** Okay. If it's not something that's currently on your mind, then I'll start with a couple of things that I felt that should be included in the chronology, and that is the composition *Quartet*, for Shelly Manne's quintet, written in 1956, or at least recorded in 1956. This is quite an adventurous piece. It's written in four movements. Maybe you could talk about the inspiration and the writing of that particular work.

**Holman:** I wanted to bring to a small jazz band the idea of a longer work, and utilizing the concept of form, which isn't really a big consideration with most small jazz groups. Charlie Mariano, who is one of my all-time favorite alto players, was in the band at that time. I had been in Shelly's group earlier, the end of 1955, or actually when he formed it in '55. I had left, because I had writing to do, and I didn't feel that I could give it all the concentration that it needed, because I knew that he wanted to have a first-rate jazz band, and I was kind of dabbling, because my main interest was in writing. So I left the group and Charlie came on. I was just so thrilled with hearing him play in the group.

I still continued to write some things for the group. So I asked Charlie about this idea of writing a longer piece for the quintet, and he was all for it. So we did that. I tried to give it some continuity, giving the two horns parts to play that made sense with the rest of the piece.

The only – calling it *Quartet* for a quintet got a little bit of talk. I was thinking of – Somerset Maugham wrote a – what was it? – anyway, he called it *Quartet*, and I thought that was a good name, because it had four movements. So it fit some way. But I'm really glad to have had an opportunity to do that, because no small groups – well, the MJQ would have been doing stuff like that, but nobody that I was in contact with.

**Brown:** Okay. I wanted to look at – the personnel in the band other than Charlie Mariano: Stu Williamson, playing trumpet and trombone – valve trombone, that is. He's not a name that we consider a household name. Maybe you could talk a little bit about Stu, because he appears on a lot of sessions and seemed to be working pretty regularly.

**Holman:** Yeah. He was a wonderful jazz player. He didn't get a chance to do a lot of recording, but what he did really stood out as a very thoughtful and a very capable player. He's the brother of Claude Williamson, who is probably a better known player, piano player, younger brother. Stu I think had a great future, but he was very bashful and very critical of his work and never really happy with it. He got involved with things that he shouldn't have, and he died at a very early age.

**Brown:** Was he originally from Los Angeles?

**Holman:** I think they were from Brattleboro, Vermont.

**Brown:** Wow, about as far away as you can get.

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**Holman:** How's that for a fact?

**Brown:** You nailed it. And Charlie Mariano, who you mentioned earlier. Russ Freeman on piano, Leroy Vinnegar on bass, and of course Shelly on drums. The rest of the bandmembers, everyone knows, but Stu was not a known player. So I'm glad you're able to provide that about him.

Then, as I forewarned you, as we slip into 1957, there was an album that was recorded in April of 1957 entitled *The Fabulous Bill Holman*, Bill Holman and his orchestra. It looks like there were two sessions, one on April 25th and another one on April 29th, Duke Ellington's birthday, playing such tunes as *Airegin*, *Come Rain or Come Shine*, *Bright Eyes*, *You and I*, *Evil Eyes*, *The Big Street*. It's definitely your big band. There is another fellow that comes up, Conte Candoli, he and his brother. When we interviewed Remo, he did talk about the Candoli brothers, because he grew up with them, and they preceded him coming out here. I think that they might – one of them, if not both of them might have been instrumental in his coming out to Los Angeles. So talk about the Candoli brothers, because they were obviously quite influential in the scene.

**Holman:** They were a strong Italian family. They loved each other. Their playing styles were quite a bit different. They were a little bit from different eras, musically. Pete was the older. He came to fame with Woody Herman's band of the mid-'40s, both as a trumpet player – he always had a flair for theatrical things. He and Woody – I don't know who else was involved. They got involved with him wearing a Superman suit on the bandstand sometimes and doing a Superman act.

**Brown:** That's different.

**Holman:** Pete was – he had a really outgoing personality. When he moved to L.A., he wanted to have a band. He wanted to be an actor. He wanted to – I don't know whether he wanted to sing or not, but he wanted to do everything showbiz-related.

Conte, he wasn't bashful, but he had a lower temperature personality, no Superman suit. But he was a wonderful player from the first time I heard him. He sounded like a much older guy in his ability to play jazz. I first heard him, I think, when Chubby Jackson first took a band to Denmark or something like that in the late '40s, maybe early '50s. They had a shot in *Down Beat* of them going up the stairs to the airplane. Conte was in that. That was the first I'd heard of him. I always remember that picture.

He had a lot of influences in his jazz playing. Kenny Dorham was one of them, a very strong one, and Diz also, and a little bit of Miles too. Conte wasn't a real original player, but he could synthesize all these guys and come up with a really creditable solo. I also wanted to mention that he started – also had a quintet in 1955 that I played in. We had a

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steady job down here on Hollywood Boulevard for two months, which is kind of unheard of at that time, because things were starting to get tight music-wise at that time. I really had a good time playing in his band. He had Larance Marable on drums, Vinnegar again on bass, Carl Perkins on piano, me on tenor, and Conte on trumpet, really a good band. It started out with Larry Bunker on drums. Then Larance came in later.

That led to Shelly's group, because Shelly hired Conte and Vinnegar and me to be in his band. He and Russ Freeman were old pals. So that was a foregone conclusion. But it was kind of an outgrowth of Conte's band.

In spite of the difference in their playing, they made records together, and they had a little act that they'd do in clubs. They were a great pair, and I miss them both.

**Brown:** Some of the other members of the orchestra on this date, *The Fabulous Bill Holman*, include one of your reedmates, who seems to recur on several of your projects, Richie Kamuca. Did I pronounce that correctly?

**Holman:** Yeah, right.

**Brown:** Could you talk a little bit about Richie?

**Holman:** I met Richie when he joined Kenton's band in '52. He was from Philadelphia, good friends, family. They worked a lot together. A Lester Young. He had a lazy, floating way of playing, not unlike Pres. I'm trying to think. I guess he left Kenton's band when Zoot joined. I don't know if he moved to L.A. at that time or went back to Philly, but he eventually wound up out here and eventually played with Shelly's quintet after Charlie Mariano left. A wonderful player. Shelly made a few CDs from their gig up in San Francisco at – I forget what club it was. It was a well known jazz club.

**Brown:** The Blackhawk? El Matador?

**Holman:** Yeah, the Blackhawk. That was the best I ever heard Richie play. He really sounded like somebody lit a fire under him. He had a basic Lester thing, but all of a sudden all this energy. I'm sure glad he got to make that record, because it really adds to his catalogue.

He was part Italian, part Filipino. That's where his name came from.

**Brown:** Did he die early as well?

**Holman:** Yeah. He got cancer. He was doing *The Merv Griffin Show* after they moved out here and got cancer and went fairly quickly.

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**Brown:** Charlie Mariano, you said one of your favorites. How about when he came on the scene?

**Holman:** I'd heard of him. I can't remember where I first met him. We did a jazz – one of those jazz camps, the summertime, where they get a few professionals and to go be the instructors at a camp for a couple of weeks. No, I had known him before that. I forget where I got to know Charlie.

He had such a melodic sense that he could make you cry, almost, plus he had the knowledge of making his solos with form. He didn't let everything go the first bar. He always held something back, and he built the solo. But that melodic sense is what I kept returning to, because no bebop licks. Just improvising all the time, and a great ear and a wonderful personality. He was just a real charm. I saw him in Cologne, Germany, a few years ago. He and James Moody were joshing each other about who was the older. He died last year.

**Brown:** We all miss him.

Again, I was noticing these people in your orchestra at this time. It seems to be a community of musicians that reoccur within your sphere of operations. I just try to get some of your comments about them.

If I continue along in the discography, here, right after the April 29th, then the next listing is Bill Holman quintet. You have yourself, Pete Jolly, Howard Roberts, Red Mitchell, and Stan Levey. You did one tune. It's on the Verve label: *Relaxin' at Camarillo*. This is the first instance of you in a small group, but a very unorthodox lineup: piano, guitar, tenor saxophone, bass, and drums. How did that date come about?

**Holman:** I don't know.

**Brown:** Okay. That settles that.

**Holman:** When was that?

**Brown:** This was – it doesn't even give the month. It just says Los Angeles, 1957, but it is credited as a Verve date, and there's only one tune, *Relaxin' at Camarillo*. So I thought, this is an anomaly. I better ask you about it.

**Holman:** I can't remember it at all, and just having one tune from a date doesn't sound right, either.

**Brown:** I'm wondering. The personnel aren't the folks that were originally in your big band. So maybe everybody else took a break and we just cut a side. It doesn't look like

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that, because, again, the personnel: tenor saxophone, piano, guitar, bass, drums. Pretty unorthodox.

**Holman:** Yeah. That may have been a mistake.

**Brown:** The next one is the Mel Lewis sextet, which – it's showing quite a few other credits here, but Mel Lewis sextet. Here you've got Jack Sheldon, Charlie Mariano, yourself, Marty Paich, Buddy Clark. Buddy Clark is not a name that we're all familiar with. And of course Mel Lewis. This one's showing two different sessions on the same date: *Brookside*, *You Took Advantage of Me*, *Zig Zag*, *Jazz Goes Siwash*, *Charlie's Cavern*, and *Grey Flannel*. Any comments or recollections about that particular date?

**Holman:** No. I remember a little bit of doing that date, but nothing jumps out at me, except Marty did some surprising things on piano. I remember he used a lot of space, which is kind of a new thing for him as far as a piano player. I guess he'd been thinking about it for a while. I remember we were all commenting about his solos on that record. That's all I remember.

**Brown:** Okay. On June 6th, 1957, a date entitled *Free and Easy*, Jackie and Roy accompanied by the Bill Holman orchestra. You've done other sessions with at least Jackie Cain, but on this one were both Jackie and Roy [Kral]. You have both arranging and conducting in addition to being your bands. Jackie and Roy at that point were enjoying a great deal of popularity, if I recall correctly. Was this beneficial for you, as far as your career as well?

**Holman:** No. It kept me eating for a few months. In other words, it supported me for a while. A funny thing about that: Roy was really in love with Lou Levy's harmonic – the changes he used, and substitutes. So he came up with this idea where – what was it? – he would give sketches to Lou, and Lou would harmonize them. Then I would write – what he thought was, I would write the chart. But the way it was that Lou harmonized it, and there were figures in there. So I more or less orchestrated the thing, plus adding some of my own material. But it was very hard, because to try to think in jazz terms and use somebody else's harmony was backwards to me. It was constricting, because if I had an idea that I would say, "Yeah, this would work great," then I would look at his changes, and they wouldn't work with his changes, which were written in stone. I couldn't change them. So the charts, I think, came off a little stiff. But it was great to have a chance to work with them. They're very musical, and the tunes that they picked were nice. It was a nice experience, but it was tough.

**Brown:** Tough in that regard, insofar as that process.

**Holman:** Yeah.

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**Brown:** Also on this date it included Herbie Mann playing flute. I was just wondering – and this is the first time I’ve seen his name in association with you on recordings. So I’m just wondering, how did Herbie get into your band?

**Holman:** This was done for ABC, I think.

Brown: Yes.

**Holman:** I think he was an ABC artist and was one of those.

**Brown:** Ah, a company man.

**Holman:** Plus, I wrote all the solos for Richie. Herbie got to the date early and appropriated all the solos. I was too new in the business and unsure of what my position was supposed to be. So I didn’t correct it. Live and learn, huh?

**Brown:** I just want to briefly return to *The Fabulous Bill Holman*, the title of that album. I can’t imagine that that was something that you chose, but perhaps you can set the record straight on that.

**Holman:** I don’t know where – Shelly Manne was the producer on that, because a well known guy that had worked for Decca had called him and asked him to produce four jazz albums in L.A. We have to go back a little further, to a guy named Red Clyde, who was doing a lot of recording out here. I can’t think of the name of the label, but he commissioned me to write an album of big-band music and was going to record it. So I got all the charts done, and I called Red and said, “Okay, Red. We’re ready to go.” He said, “We’re having a little bit of budget trouble. Can we put it off a little bit?” “Okay.” So we put it off and put it off. Finally it became apparent it wasn’t going to happen. At this time, Shelly got this offer from the guy at Decca to do the four records, and he said, “Okay. Holman’s big band is going to be one.” That was that. I’m sure *The Fabulous* didn’t come from him. I think it must have come from upstairs in the warrens of Decca and Corl Records.

Then they got a professional photographer to make the album cover. That was a further intrigue, with a spacey look on my face. I’m gazing into the future with a cigarette and my tenor and a scorepad. Really kind of embarrassing at the time. Plus, with that title, I hesitated before recommending it to people I knew.

**Brown:** But you were happy with the music?

**Holman:** Yeah. The music is kind of old-timey on that thing. I was bouncing back from Kenton’s band, where nothing could be old-timey. I got a lot of this other stuff out of my system that I’d been holding back all those years.

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There was one other thing: *Airegin*. That caused a little comment, because it was a jazz tune that had been done by small groups and never by a big band. People looked around and saw that very few small-band records were making it to a big band. So that opened some guys' eyes as to possibilities.

**Brown:** Did you ever get any comments from Sonny [Rollins] about it?

**Holman:** No. In fact, I sent him a picture of – who was the baseball player?

**Brown:** Newk?

**Holman:** Newk, yeah, a current picture of him. I sent it to Sonny. He wrote me back a letter. He didn't know who I was.

**Brown:** I'm sure he knows who you are now.

As you said, it had some of that old-timey feel to it, but then one of the dates that came in a few months later, the Art Pepper Nine, which I thought, this sounds like it's pretty interesting. Red Callender on tuba, Art Pepper – another great alto saxophonist – Bud Shank on baritone, Monty Budwig, Shelly Manne on drums, arrangements by Shorty Rogers. How did – was this a working band? Or was this just a studio date?

**Holman:** No, just studio. Hardly any bands that recorded during the West Coast jazz were working bands. They were all just, let's do a record date and call up some guys and go and do it. That was one of my beefs with the whole West Coast jazz thing. Nobody ever got a chance to learn the music, really. You'd just go in and sightread the charts on the date. That's no way to record jazz.

**Brown:** When you say that's the way it was out here in the West Coast scene, let me – maybe this is an opportunity to talk about the West Coast scene, some of the differences, some of the things that made it unique here, maybe some of the issues that came up as a result of capturing your own sound or capturing your own aesthetic. Would this be an apt time to investigate this and discuss that?

**Holman:** Yeah. It started in the early '50s when I was on the road with Kenton. In '52 and '53 – I think '52 is when Gerry started – Gerry Mulligan started his quartet. People wrote about the quartet, and they used to refer to the trumpet and the baritone sax and the bass doing counterpoint to each other. So this word got into the vocabulary. Contrapuntal was another one. So when I got off of Kenton's band at the end of '53, this West Coast thing was in full swing. It all started with Gerry's quartet. The producers learned the word "counterpoint" and "contrapuntal," and they actually would call up and say, "We need some charts for" so and so, "a contrapuntal approach."

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So everybody was doing that, and the writing was getting to be a big part of the salability of the record: contrapuntal writing by Jack Montrose. It took me a while to get into it, because they didn't trust me. "Being from Stan Kenton's band, how contrapuntal can he be?"

As I said before, none of the bands were working bands, very few of them. So they would call up and say, "We're going to have a date with Chet Baker," say. "So would you do two charts? Use some counterpoint," and like that. We'd bring in the charts. Chet, I don't know how well he read changes, but he had a great ear. So he could get through them. But just reading these parts for the first time – Norman Granz loved stuff like that, but they would always do tunes that everybody knew. His idea of a jazz record was to go in with five guys and no music and just say, "Let's do *All of Me*," and off we go. But when you've got written out parts with new chord progressions and things like that, it's ridiculous to ask a guy to play, when he's got half of his mind looking through his eyes, when it should have been coming through his ears.

So there was that. There was the fact that it was almost totally white. With all the good jazz players in L.A., they only used the white ones that were in your group – in your community – your pals. Teddy Edwards was one of them. I had been a fan of Teddy Edwards since 1946, when I got out of the Navy. He was a real radical bebopper in those days and used to just make me grin to hear him play. I didn't meet him until 1958 or something like that. We just never got to that area. Buddy Collette was into it.

**Brown:** Chico Hamilton.

**Holman:** Chico, yeah. Well, Chico made his own opportunity.

**Brown:** But wasn't he playing in the quartet?

**Holman:** Oh, with Gerry. Yeah, right. Okay. When Gerry's quartet started, the West Coast rules weren't in effect yet.

**Brown:** I'm hoping that we'll be able to continue to bring to light some of the dynamics of the West Coast scene. One thing you mentioned about, that there weren't that many playing opportunities for the musicians. I'm thinking, well, wait a minute. In Los Angeles, you've got the entire Hollywood industry. You've got all these clubs. Bands are coming through, obviously. But why is it that the local jazz musicians aren't able to sustain a living performing on a regular basis? Why was that the case in the mid- to late '50s?

**Holman:** People talk about L.A. in that regard every once in a while. It seems to boil down to that there's too much to do here. But there's an inertia among the people here.

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They don't go out at night like in New York, where you can see a jazz club filled on a weeknight. You don't see anybody around here on a weeknight. There were a few clubs here. Bud Shank had a working group here toward the end – toward the late – when Mel and I had our group, Bud had a group working them. Buddy Collette had a group. In fact, Gerald Wilson was playing trumpet with him in a quintet. It was hard to find gigs at that time, but there were some around. Yeah, there was a few groups playing, but they weren't the groups that people wanted to record. They wanted to record a guy with a name. Chet had a group eventually, but they traveled. I don't know. I just usually write it off as L.A. not being a jazz town.

**Brown:** There was a significant – you said there were some clubs. The one that comes immediately to mind is the Lighthouse, which got a lot of attention, got a lot of press, and figures prominently in the history of jazz on the West Coast. Can you talk about that venue and the scene there?

**Holman:** I worked down there in 1951 on Sunday afternoons. They used to have this thing that went from around one or two o'clock in the afternoon until two at night. Shorty and I were doing that, Jimmy Giuffre, Remo Belli, Howard on bass – Howard Rumsey – and Frank Patchen on piano. It was a fun gig for me. It didn't matter to play all day. When you're in your twenties, you can play a long time. It was fun. You'd go down, play the afternoon, have dinner, sit around, and then play the evening gig. Always a big crowd down there. The people would come in from the beach, treading sand on their feet. It was very informal.

Then I left and went on the road, and it gradually became an institution. It was *the* Lighthouse. A lot of people went through. That's when Milt Bernhardt started playing, Shorty and Bud Shank, and then later on Bob Cooper. Max Roach even did a few months out there, which surprised me, because Howard wasn't a very strong bass player. I thought a guy like Max Roach would say, "No, I only want the best." But he must have had some reason. He was either trying to become a resident out here or something. I can't imagine him putting up with it. Then Stan Levey came after him. Stan Levey was also a top drummer. He just – anything that bugged him, he managed to shut out. He was a very strong-willed guy. So he lasted there a long time.

It became a really favored place in Hermosa Beach. The city would give them some kind of award or some kind of mention as being part of the economy of the city. Howard – eventually I guess it was sold or something, and they changed the policy. So Howard went up to the next beach town and started his own club. I can't remember the name of that, but it was in Manhattan Beach – no, Redondo Beach. It was a very nice club, and he ran it well. He got good people in there. I imagine he must have made money with it.

So there were clubs, but isolated, in a way. You mention Hollywood and the movies and everything. Movies have got no use for jazz. They tried it a little bit in the '50s. It didn't

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work. It gave them some problems. Then the baby boomers moved in, and they don't have any use for jazz to begin with. So it's pretty much a forgotten issue now.

When Mel and I had our group, we played at a storefront down here in Hollywood. Can't remember the name of that place either, but we would play in the normal hours, and then we would play after hours and hope to get musicians coming in from their own gigs to have jam sessions after we were through. That's where I met Ornette Coleman, because Mel told me, "There's a kid in town. He's been going around to all the sessions, and they won't let him play, because they say he doesn't know how to play." He showed up a few times, and we said "Yeah, we'll let him play." So he got up and played, and we said, "He does know what he's doing. It's just something different."

I met a lot of guys. Charles Lloyd was a little kid. I think he was going to USC or something, playing alto. He came in there. Charlie Haden came in. Clifford Jordan. I can't remember all the people now.

Our group was Lee Katzman on trumpet, Jimmy Rowles on piano, Mel, drums, and Wilfred Middlebrooks was the bass player. We were having a running war with Buddy Collette's group over who was going to get Wilfred Middlebrooks, because he was the only bass player – jazz bass player in town that would come out and work late at night. So that was that.

**Brown:** There were some other adventurous folks on the scene. I know that Ornette Coleman's first record on Contemporary Records has Paul Bley on piano. Was he also – was he on the scene at that time?

**Holman:** Wasn't it Walter Norris?

**Brown:** Oh, excuse me. Walter Norris was on the first one.

**Holman:** Yeah.

**Brown:** That's right. But Paul Bley – there's a bootleg recording of Ornette, his very first recording with Paul Bley, with Charlie Haden on bass, Don Cherry on trumpet. But the first – yeah, the Contemporary recording is Walter Norris. But was Paul on the scene too at that point?

**Holman:** Yeah. They were playing. I wasn't going out much then. I was having marriage breakup problems and drinking problems, and I was off the scene. But there was a place. Again, I can't remember the name. A lot of those guys used to play there. It was down south of town somewhere. I think it was out by the airport. I used to see Paul Bley's name there.

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**Brown:** You did reference your group with Mel Lewis. I'm looking at a record date in May, *Jazz for Five*. That was the first time I saw Wilfred Middlebrooks listed as – credited on a session. So, could you talk about him? You just mentioned that he was the only bassist that would come out for after hours.

**Holman:** He didn't partake of the recording scene. The first time I met him was when we were looking for a player. But he was a good player. He should have been doing some other things. He later went with Ella Fitzgerald. Was with her for a long time.

Later, Jimmy Rowles had to bow out, because he couldn't put up with the late night things, the sessions. So Lorraine Geller came on as the piano player. She was good too. It's Herb's wife.

**Brown:** Some of the other – as I mentioned earlier, some of the folks who didn't have as strong a reputation: drummer Irv Cotler. I saw him listed on a few dates. Any recollections?

**Holman:** He was an older guy. I don't know what bands he played with, but he was an accomplished studio player, mainly, and he was Sinatra's favorite drummer. Sinatra insisted on him all the time. I played very seldom – I think I made one record date that he was on. But I guess he was doing a lot of work. I'm not sure.

**Brown:** Yeah, maybe because of some of your arranging credits, his name was listed in association with your name. Another drummer that came from New Orleans out here – I believe that you were on the scene when he arrived – Earl Palmer, who obviously got plenty of work in the studios.

**Holman:** Yeah. Earl came later. He wasn't in on the West Coast scene, that I know of. He came in with rock-and-roll. He was doing everything, and very well too.

**Brown:** We just lost him just pretty recently, in the last few years as well.

When I look back on this period of your development, your early years working in the Kenton band and, basically, the entire L.A. scene, there were such a profusion of other arrangers – Bill Russo – and you guys all seemed to be in the same area. Was there much interaction, whether socially or professionally, with the other arrangers? Were you guys getting together, like, "Oh man, did you hear this latest arrangement by" so and so? Or, "I've got this thing I'm working on. What about you?" Or anything like that?

**Holman:** No, that never happened in L.A. That's one thing I noticed about the thing out here. There's no community. The guys are all independent contractors. They're all in their own niche, doing their thing, and there's nothing like that. Well, Jack Montrose and

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I used to do that. We used to talk a lot. But Russo was in Chicago. So we didn't have much contact at all. No. It's never happened.

**Brown:** Or Frank? I look at – you guys are all in the same band.

**Holman:** Who's Frank?

**Brown:** Frank Rosolino.

**Holman:** Well, no. I don't know about the players. I know more about the writers. After a while, there were not too many writers that were concerned mostly with jazz writing. So all that big pool of arrangers has shrunk quite a bit now.

Jack and I used to talk a lot about form and what comes next. You're sitting there. You write up to the part that you have sketched out. There's no more sketch left. Okay. What now? Coming up with something that fits. What I was talking about yesterday was continuity and variety in that vein, coming up with the next thing. What's it going to be? Mostly we just would up commiserating with how tough it is to find the next thing.

Jack wrote a lot for Pacific Jazz, which was the dominant jazz label at that time. When the scene cooled down, he went to Las Vegas and didn't write anything for years. I lost track – lost touch with him also. When we fin- – we did start communicating again and I would send him some things, the things I was doing in Europe – he got interested in writing again. So he was doing some of that. Then he got cancer and had operations for that. He could function after that. He could play. But it hurt him to sit at the desk and write. He couldn't sit up all that long. So that was another handicap he had. He went last year, or year before, also. He was my closest friend among the writers. Marty Paich was always too busy. He was working for some singer or doing that. He didn't hang out at all

**Brown:** Some other names: Pete Rugalo, Billy May.

**Holman:** No, they were up here. They were the guys that were getting all the work. Billy May was – he was doing an album a week and had the weekend to get sober again. He was – all those guys were in a different category. Pete was never really a jazz writer. His training was all classical. He managed to find a way that worked with Stan, worked very well, because that was – as far as I know, that was Stan's ideal. No, I take it back. Graettinger was Stan's ideal. In fact, there are rumors going around that all this other was just enough to make enough money to support Graettinger. Don't believe it.

**Brown:** You say that you really got the arranging bug and you got your early training at Westlake College. Could you tell us a little bit more about the longevity of that institution? How long had it existed before you attended? How long did it last? How was it supported? Obviously, through tuition, since it was so expensive. Ate up your GI Bill.

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**Holman:** It's a good point, because I think they lasted into the '60s or maybe longer. I'm not sure. I lost touch with them. But they moved a lot. While I was going there, I told you that it started out in this old Victorian that was leaning. Then we moved up the street, a couple of blocks away, to a really nice, well kept, also a large private residence and stayed there. Then we moved to Hollywood. We were in one building at the corner of Argyle and Yucca for a year or so. Then we moved around the corner to Vine and Yucca. That's when I left. I think after that they moved to a place out on Sunset Boulevard. They were on La Brea, something like that. That's the last I know of them.

I'm not sure whether they – they may have adjusted the tuition when there was no more GI Bill, but there were still guys going there. Several guys in my band went there later on. So I really can't help you much with the history of the place. I just know about the early days. That's it.

**Brown:** Returning to some of the arrangers, I was looking at some of the other dates that had you listed as arranger. Benny Carter was listed also as an arranger. He was out here by about that time, I presume. Did he make it out here by the '50s? I don't think Oliver Nelson was out here yet.

**Holman:** I think he was here earlier than that.

**Brown:** Yes, that's true, in the '40s, because I know . . .

**Holman:** Yeah, he made a couple of records that did pretty well. One of them was called *Malibu*, I think. Benny was also in another level, one of jazz history's greats. He didn't mess around with us too much. He did a little bit of t.v. writing during the '50s, but I don't think he was doing any jazz work. I don't know what – he must have been playing somewhere, but I don't know where. Maybe he traveled.

**Brown:** Probably so. I'm looking at another record date here, *Plays „Pal Joey*. "The reason why I bring up this date, this is a chamber jazz sextet. It included french horn and bassoon. You did arranging for this. Let me see if you have any recollections about that date. French horn and bassoon are not something that you normally see. These guys are doubling, obviously. Do you remember that? The *Pal Joey*, obviously this is a soundtrack.

**Holman:** What was the group?

**Brown:** It's called the *Chamber Jazz Sextet Plays Pal Joey*. Allyn Ferguson, french horn, piano.

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**Holman:** Yeah. They were from up north, around Stanford. I think Allyn was going to Stanford. So it's around there. I think they had me write one chart

**Brown:** *The Lady is a Tramp* is what they have you listed here.

**Holman:** Yeah, I guess.

**Brown:** Did you actually use the bassoon and french horn on that – on your chart?

**Holman:** I must have.

**Brown:** But obviously not something that was an indelible memory.

Then another date that jumps out in that same period in June is *Afro-Cuban Influences*, Shorty Rogers. He had eight percussionists on this date. That's what really caught my ear. This is June 19th, 1958, *Afro-Cuban Influences*, the big band of Shorty Rogers, featuring the Giants: Shorty, Al Porcino – I'm just going down, seeing names – Frank Rosolino, Harry Betts, George Roberts, Bud Shank, Herb Geller, Bill Holman, Bill Hood, Bob Cooper, Shelly Manne on drums, Joe Mondragon on bass; and then this list of percussionists: Modesto Duran, Carlos Vidal, Luis Miranda, Mike Pacheco, Manuel Ochoa, Juan Cheda, Frank Guerrero, Sirelda Gonzales. I've never seen that many percussionists on any date.

**Holman:** RCA, when they go for it – let's really do it up. Some of those guys were local. Mike Pacheco and – the first one?

**Brown:** Modesto Duran? Carlos Vidal? Luis Miranda?

**Holman:** Yeah, Modesto. He might have been from San Francisco. I'm not sure. Anyway, some of them had played with Kenton's band. Carlos Vidal had been with Kenton. They probably recommended some of their friends. I remember walking in there. I'd never seen so many drums, these guys that I didn't know.

**Brown:** So that's what you remember from the date.

**Holman:** Yeah.

**Brown:** I'm looking at another recording session here, *I Want to Live*, Johnny Mandel orchestra, a film soundtrack recorded August 12th and 22nd, 1958, for United Artists. Again, looking at the breadth of the work that you're involved with, whether you're arranging for or performing in it, this is the first time that I see you're credited with all three: tenor saxophone, bari, and clarinet. It's the first time I've seen that tripling coming from you, or required from you, in this session. But another very extensive – Johnny

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Mandel's orchestra, with a harp. Larry Bunker's playing vibes, Mike Pacheco on percussion, Milt Holland is on percussion, Shelly Manne and Mel Lewis. It could have been different sessions, of course. But just to look at who was involved with these kinds of projects. You're working with the cream of the crop in very different contexts. Do you recall this session?

**Holman:** Oh yeah, definitely, because it was like three days of heaven to go out to a studio and play this gorgeous music with all these good players and the great writing, to get paid for it too, and spend all day there. It was just like taking a trip somewhere, a vacation, because there was always something pleasant to listen to, every bar. I got a chance to play baritone solos. He'd written a lot of baritone, I guess because he had Gerry on the small group. They had a big orchestra and a small group, a jazz group, and Mulligan was part of that. So he carried the baritone over into the large band, where I was. So I got a lot of solos to play, written out solos, not jazz solos. They were melodic kind of things, and when the record came out, most people thought it was Mulligan playing the baritone. I don't know whether Gerry had a guilty conscience or whether he just took pity on me, but a year later he recommended me to the *Esquire* poll on baritone. You asked me if I remembered it, and I sure do, because that was one of the high points, a studio gig that was so much fun, so juicy.

**Brown:** It got you a poll recognition. Along those same lines, I'm looking at Bobby Troup and his Stars of Jazz, accompanied by the Jimmy Rowles orchestra. Here are a lot of great players, well known artists, of course Jimmy Rowles, Barney Kessel, again both Mel Lewis and Shelly. It's only listing one recording date. So I think I find that interesting, with both the drummers. Red Norvo on vibes. Benny Carter is in on this one, Bud Shank, Paul Horn. This was for Victor. So that might explain some of the participants. Any recollection about that one? Let me see: Shorty Rogers on this one, Conte, Pete – both of them on this one. A pretty extensive lineup. This was recorded in October of '58 in Los Angeles. It's a four side date.

**Holman:** Does it say who it's for?

**Brown:** Bobby Troup and his Stars of Jazz. It was under his name and Jimmy Rowles also.

**Holman:** *Stars of Jazz* was a t.v. show. I guess Bobby was the host for a while. I'm just trying to figure out if that could have been a t.v. show or a recording date. I really can't say.

**Brown:** There are only four sides listed: *Please Be Kind*, *As Long as I Live*, *Is You Is or Is You Ain't My Baby* – you go back to Louis Jordan – and *Perdido*, which was not issued. Only *Please Be Kind* was actually issued on LP. No, the first three have been issued on Victor.

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Then another, to show the breadth of your versatility, the next one was *More Vibes on Velvet* with the Terry Gibbs orchestra. This was in November '58. You're credited with tenor sax on this one. Pete Jolly, piano, Max Bennett, Mel Lewis; Pete Rugolo arranging and conducting on this one. I just thought it was pretty interesting to be working for Terry Gibbs. In your biography, his name shows up. Was that a rewarding and a memorable experience, working for Terry?

**Holman:** Yeah. Later on, when he got his own band – that started in '59, I think.

**Brown:** Yes. This date was in '58, November '58.

**Holman:** This date, I don't know anything about. I don't remember Pete writing for Terry. I think it was only the sax section – sax section and rhythm. I remember he did some dates with that combination, but I don't recall that particular one.

**Brown:** Then closing out the year of '58 with what I hopefully have identified correctly as a significant date, and that's *Ella Swings Lightly*, Ella Fitzgerald accompanied by Marty Paich's Dek-tette.

**Holman:** Right.

**Brown:** So you know the rest of the story on that, the date and the name. If you could share that with us, that would be great.

**Holman:** The Dek-tette was Marty's vocalist band. He accompanied quite a few singers with that group: Mel Tormé and Ella. I don't know who all. But it was a great group. It was very flexible. He had a set personnel that he used. It was an outgrowth the Miles things from '49.

**Brown:** *The Birth of the Cool*?

**Holman:** Yeah, with a few more people, but the general approach was like that, mellow, not brassy. A good sound. He used a tuba, a couple of saxes, and two trumpets, or something like that, and always Bobby Enevoldsen on valve trombone and sometimes on tenor sax.

**Brown:** He's got Vince DeRosa on french horn. Again that's that continuity with *Birth of the Cool*. Of course there's Gunther Schuller on that one.

Then there was actually two dates. Working with Ella, the consummate professional – she probably just came in and ran down, or do we not have the – is there another side to that story?

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**Holman:** Yeah, I think it probably went like that, because Ella was so easy. She would do a take and say, “Okay, that’s all right. That’s fine. Let’s go on.” They’d maybe find something that she could do different, and then we’d do another take. But in those days, everybody did four songs per session. Somehow when all the equipment got all that much better, they wound up only doing two songs at a session.

**Brown:** Actually, as I look at the session log for this, there were two days, November 22nd, November 23rd, back-to-back dates. The first date, it looks like eight. Then another eight the next day. So you guys were just blazing through these. *You Hit the Spot, Blues in the Night*.

**Holman:** It must have been double dates. We never did eight songs a session.

**Brown:** Okay. We’ll make sure – poor Tom Lord. This guy’s going to have to do so many changes to this.

**Holman:** Yeah, it looks – it’s exposed him as a fraud.

**Brown:** That gets us through ‘58. You close out the year working several recording dates with Shorty Rogers: *Chances Are, It Swings*. Then there’s a Jimmy Rowles date closing out the year in December of ‘58.

**Holman:** What’s the Jimmy Rowles date?

**Brown:** The Jimmy Rowles date is *Weather in a Jazz Vane*.

**Holman:** Yeah. I produced that record.

**Brown:** Okay. It doesn’t have producer credits. Let’s take about that. Is this your first production credit?

**Holman:** Yeah.

**Brown:** Okay. Let’s get to this one.

**Holman:** I made a record in ‘58 – I’m surprised he doesn’t have it there – called *In a Jazz Orbit*, a big band thing. The company that I recorded it for was an offshoot of Bob Keane’s label, the guy I worked for earlier. When was that?

**Brown:** Bob Keane [formerly Bob Keene], the first – you’re back to the first date. I can give you that: Bob Keane, back in L.A., 1951.

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**Holman:** Yeah, okay. He had a couple of labels, and this was one of them. It was run by a guy who made a fortune in the aircraft instrument business, altimeters and stuff like that. He eventually bought it from Keane, or something. Anyway, I was working for him. He didn't know anything about music. I'm not even sure if he liked it. But he was a businessman, and he was into it to run it like a business. So after – when I first started going down to the office of this label, Herb Albert and his friend, they were working there as producers. It was going to be a pop label, because that was it. They had Sam Cooke . . .

**Brown:** Was it Lou Adler? No.

**Holman:** Lou Adler. That was it. They had Sam Cooke. So they were . . .

**Brown:** We'll jump ahead and talk about *In a Jazz Orbit*. I'm sorry.

**Holman:** Where was I? They didn't have a producer to run our dates. A guy named Bumps Blackwell did it. He was very big in the pop scene. He got in there, and you could tell from what he was saying over the talker that he didn't know much about what we were doing. So I said, these guys, if they're going to do jazz records, they're going to need a jazz producer. So why don't I do it? So I put it up to this guy, and he said sure, no problem. So this was my first effort, to get Jimmy Rowles with four horns and do an album. We had to come up with a premise for it. I talked to Jim. How about this and that? Weather. Maybe we could find enough tunes that had something to do with weather. We did. So that's where that name came from. That was Rowles's first recorded vocal effort, this one tune. I can't remember the title, but it was supposed to be a piano feature. He came up at the start of the date and said, "I want to sing that song." I thought he was kidding. I didn't know he sang. Sure enough, he did.

**Brown:** Let's see which one they give him credit for on here. He's credited with *Throwin' Stones at the Sun*, maybe. This is the only one that's got multiple takes. They don't credit which tune he sang on.

**Holman:** That might have been it.

**Brown:** Yeah, because there's several takes. Maybe – does that sound correct?

**Holman:** He knew a lot of obscure songs that Billie Holiday had recorded or something.

**Brown:** I found it: *Too Hot for Words*.

**Holman:** That's it, yeah.

**Brown:** Okay. Only one take. Not bad.

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**Holman:** There was a two-bar break at the end that was supposed to be piano, and he went, “Sweltering swimmers.”

**Brown:** You mentioned – and I actually had this on the list – your joint group of, I guess, Bobby Brookmeyer? Is that right? *In a Jazz Orbit*? Or did I have the wrong credit here?

**Holman:** No, he wasn’t there.

**Brown:** Okay. Hang on. It was February of ‘58. So let’s see who you were paired with on that one, because it was a double credit. I’m sorry. I can’t read my own shorthand: Bill Holman big band, *In a Jazz Orbit*. This was February 11th in Los Angeles.

**Holman:** This was another project that Red Clyde had commissioned and then backed out at the last minute. So I was looking for somebody to record it. I did some charts for an Art Pepper date. I’m surprised it’s not there.

**Brown:** We talked about the Art Pepper Nine. No? Another Art Pepper date?

**Holman:** Yeah. It wasn’t that personnel that you had. It was something to do – Latin. I can’t remember what the name of the title was. Anyway, I did a couple of charts. I met these people and decided that I would try to push the big band record with them, and it worked. Talk about all-star personnel. We were talking about one of the things yesterday, the all-star personnel. The personnel I had on that record is astounding. I had Conte, Jack Sheldon, Rosolino, Carl Fontana.

**Brown:** Ray Sims on trombone, Herb Geller, Charlie Mariano, Richie, Charlie Kennedy, Bill Hood baritone, Victor Feldman, Buddy Clark, Mel Lewis.

**Holman:** Yeah. Talk about an all-star band. That was fun too. I mentioned that that movie date with Mandel was a lot of fun. This was fun too, just to hear those guys play.

**Brown:** You had three consecutive days in the studio. So that’s great to have three days, back-to-back, to work on the material. Where did the title come from, *In a Jazz Orbit*?

**Holman:** Them. The office.

**Brown:** Does it tie into the space race here?

**Holman:** I’ve got used to it now, but at first it really hit me as something that shouldn’t be there.

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**Brown:** Another session that I didn't mean to overlook, but you participated – mainly, they were just doing your charts. That was for Harry James, *The New James*. This one was April 1st, 1958. This one has an all-star lineup, but you're credited only as an arranger on this one. Let me see. *Here's One*. This is the one that you're credited with. What happens when you – was this a commission?

**Holman:** Yeah, they called me up and said, "Write us a chart." So I did. It's the only one that got recorded. Later on, in the '60s, I wrote a couple. I talked to him down at Disneyland. Harry's band was playing down there, and I went and talked to him during intermission. I said, "Need any charts?" He said sure. I said, "Okay. I'll write a couple and send them up." They were based in Vegas. So I wrote the charts and sent them. I get a check call from his manager and says, "We've got a couple of arrangements here from you, and we don't know anything about them." I said, "I talked to Harry, and he said, 'Write a couple of charts.'" He said, "Oh, Harry drinks." Harry had no recollection of this at all. As far as I know, they never even played the charts.

**Brown:** At least they recorded one. When you wrote for Harry, did you like Harry's band? What kind of process did you go, writing for his band, these charts?

**Holman:** It was nothing all that special. You could count on him for having a good band, and he was a fabulous player, but the chart I wrote was just a big band chart. It was nothing to write home about.

**Brown:** Then closing out '58, I'm looking at this date for Maynard Ferguson that's entitled *Swingin' My Way Through College*. So we're getting into that whole era where "jazz goes to college." Brubeck is going. You got Maynard *Swingin' My Way Through College*. I thought, that's a pretty catchy title. Let's see if you recall that particular date. It came after the Jimmy Rowles one you mentioned earlier. This was from December. This was recorded in New York. They just did one of your arrangements. They don't credit which one it was. But I'm just wondering about this time. How did you come to do the arrangement for Maynard on this one?

**Holman:** I did several dates with him, several albums with him. I'm not sure about dates, but I did an octet date with him. It seems like these were probably in '56.

**Brown:** Yeah, we did talk about one of those dates yesterday. I singled that one out. But I was just looking at this one in particular, because of the lineup he has, the range of tunes he was doing, and it's called *Swingin' My Way Through College*. I'm just wondering if there was some sort of . . .

**Holman:** I don't know that. You say it was done in New York?

**Brown:** Yes.

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**Holman:** So that was after he had gone to take the band back there.

**Brown:** Yeah. Most of – you’ve got Don Sebesky on trombone and arranging, Slide Hampton, Bill Chase.

**Holman:** I did two big band records with him out here, which were the precursor of that band that he took back East, or that band he formed back East. Unfortunately, when we were talking it over, he said, “Just Basie style.” I found out later that people say “Basie style” when they mean “typical jazz band style.” They don’t really mean Basie, because Basie was pretty stylized. There’s a lot of different ways to write a rhythmic jazz band album without sounding like Basie. But I took him literally, and so I did warmed-over Basie with a high trumpet on the shout chorus. But they were okay. He liked them. It gave him a start to figure out what he really wanted to do, which was the band he had back East, which is a pretty frantic band. He kept that frantic thing going until the end. The bands kept getting smaller, but they kept getting more frantic. It was always just a vehicle for Maynard’s trumpet.

**Brown:** I’m looking at an entry here called *Jazz Erotica*. This is a double bill with – Richie Kamuca and yourself, Bill Holman, are credited as joint leaders on this date. There’s no month. It just says Los Angeles, 1959. The players on here: Ed Leddy, Conte, Frank Rosolino, Richie Kamuca, of course yourself, Vince Guaraldi, Monte Budwig, and Stan Levey on drums. A few standards, a few titles I don’t recognize. Obviously, you must have been instrumental in getting Richie this co-leadership date?

**Holman:** I’m not sure. It seemed to me like it was Richie’s gig originally. He might have put me in as co-leader or something, because I wrote all the charts and I helped him – we talked over the instrumentation, who we were going to use. We did it in a guy’s living room. He was a guy that had made some money recording organists. He wanted to branch out into jazz. When the record came out – we didn’t know the title was going to be *Jazz Erotica*. When it came out, the cover had a bed with a naked woman lying on it. That thing won’t go away. It keeps getting reissued. They sell it to another company, and they put it out. Fortunately the cover is different and the title is different. Now they call it *West Coast Jazz* and they call it my record, instead of Richie’s. So it’s still there, and it’s not bad for being – a lot of guys record in the living room these days, but not then.

**Brown:** Then one we mentioned off-mic yesterday, but something that truly caught my eye. Again, another date that does not have a month assigned to it. This was entitled *Brass and Bamboo*. What made it really unique, in my eyes, was that it included samisen and koto, recorded by Kazue Kudo. Tak Shindo is listed as the leader, conductor, and arranger. That’s pretty rare to see that in a jazz listing, that the band has a samisen and a koto. I’m sure this has got to be memorable for you.

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**Holman:** Thinking about writing for those instruments was memorable, because I didn't know anything about either of them. Tak had this idea. I had worked quite a bit at Capitol Records. So somebody I think – because I didn't know Tak at all – somebody had told him to call me if he wanted to do a big jazz band record. They probably didn't know about the koto. So he called, and I wrote the charts. He explained to me what the koto and samisen – what they were. I wrote a koto solo in one of the charts.

**Brown:** Can we back up there? When you say you wrote a koto solo, were you given the register, the tessitura of the instrument, and some of the . . . ?

**Holman:** Yeah, and how to get the pitches when the stops are on.

**Brown:** With the frets and the bent notes, so that they can get in between the cracks.

**Holman:** I didn't get into that, because you can't do that on a trumpet. But they played what I wrote. It was very stately, rhythm-wise. There was no funk there. But it was done.

**Brown:** Had you listened to any recordings, or had you maybe consulted with the instrumentalists, or, in this case, Kazue Kudo, about the instruments?

**Holman:** No. I just talked to Tak.

**Brown:** Could you tell us a bit more about Tak? He's not a name that comes up on a regular basis.

**Holman:** I had never heard of him before then. He may have been an educator, because that's what he did later on. I didn't know all that much about him. He made another record a couple of years later maybe. I was living with Johnny Mandel at the time. So John and I collaborated on that. I don't remember this, but John says that Tak spent the whole day going around taking pictures, and it was up to Johnny and I to run the date. He was snapping.

Then I met him later on when I joined the arrangers society. He was a member. We had these luncheons every month. So I'd seen him on a few of those occasions. Then he was an educator.

**Brown:** Again, when I saw that as part of your catalogue, I knew I had to ask about that one.

**Holman:** Renaissance man.

**Brown:** The next – I wanted to end in the '50s, but when I saw this title, *The Beat Generation*, and it was recorded in Rome. It was Armando Trovajoli and his orchestra –

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was the pianist. Every other personnel on this – you did all the arranging for it. The only personnel I saw that didn't have an Italian name was Bill Gilmore, who did arranging, and he's credited with trombone. Armando Trovajoli, there is the pianist. I don't know if that date has any . . . .

**Holman:** No, I don't know what that – I wrote a chart for a guy in Italy. He was a jazz critic or something like that. I wrote a chart. It may have been done on that date. I don't know.

**Brown:** I just thought it was quite interesting, knowing in your career you had a lot of experiences in Europe. This is the first time I saw your name associated with a European. So I didn't know, was this the beginning of establishing contacts there? Or was this a one-shot deal?

**Holman:** It's a one shot.

**Brown:** It was in Italy, and you end up being in northern – in Germany and further north anyway. But hey, we all like Italy. It's a nice place to go.

**Holman:** I did eventually. A couple years ago I went there for a couple of concerts.

**Brown:** Then, one other date that I can't let go – actually, two more coming up. These are with vocalists. That seems to be something that you're either sought out, or perhaps that's a preference of yours as well. Anita O'Day with your orchestra, Los Angeles in August of 1960. The title of the release is *Incomparable*. You're listed as arranger and director, not conductor, but director. So I wonder if there were more responsibilities that went along with this date, like all of a sudden you were the de facto producer on one day? Is this a session that you could share with us?

**Holman:** Yeah. I'd always liked Anita from her days with Gene Krupa. I liked her approach. I had heard that she could be difficult, but I'm willing to take a chance. So when Norman Granz called me to do the record, I jumped at it. He said, "She's coming into town. I'll let you know when she gets here." He called again and said, "Meet her at Ye Little Club." It's a club out in Beverly Hills that used to have singers all the time. "Meet her out there at" so-and-so "this afternoon." So I met Anita and introduced. We had a drink there. I had to take her home. I was driving a little MG at the time. So here's Anita and me in the MG, and she's holding her hat on. I said, "I'll always remember how you sang *Chickery Chick* with Krupa's band, and you made it swing." We talked a little about that. The next day I got a call from Norman. He said, "Could you come down to the office?" So I went down to the office. He said, "Listen, you've got to treat Anita with a little more care. She called me yesterday after you dropped her off, and said, „Who is this guy, talking about *Chickery Chick*?'"" She didn't know anything about me. So I guess it was probably a little scary to hear me go on about 1942.

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So I'd been warned. We started getting together to plan the thing. I had had a misfortune at my house about a month before. A kid had drowned in our swimming pool. So I was a basket case emotionally, and Anita was a pretty hard drinker. So I started getting into it with her. She has definite ideas about every tune she wants to do, but she can't write anything down. So she has to sing it, and we have to listen to it somehow. I can't remember. Did we record any? I don't think we recorded any. Walkmans weren't around then. So Lou Levy – I hired him to be the rehearsal pianist. We were scratching our head over these figures she'd come up with, because she can turn rhythms around. It's really tricky, and to do it with no sketch or no recording that you can play over and over again, it was just hours-long meetings at Lou's house. "No, that isn't right. That isn't what I wanted. Do this."

We finally got it all sketched out and did the date. This mixer that Norman always used – he was supposed to be a great mixer. He was Frank Sinatra's favorite for something. But he always wants the band to be really soft. So he kept turning the band down. After asking us to play softly for a while, he's turning the band down, when that didn't work. So when the record finally came out, the band is like a mere afterthought in the background. All you hear is Anita. My first teacher, Russ Garcia, was running the date. He's so agreeable that Anita was able to walk all over him. She listened to a playback after every take that we made. So we ran overtime. I got in hot water with the company for going overtime. I said – I tried to explain that I think it's the duty of the guy in the booth to run the date. It's not the conductor's gig to say, "No, Anita, you can't listen to that take, because there was a flaw here or there. Let's do another one." We had to sit through every take. I liked the charts. I like what's there. I just wish you could hear it a little better.

I talked Anita a few years ago when she made a halfway comeback. She got hurt. She'd fallen and hurt her arm or something, and she was out of commission for a long time. When she came back, her manager called me and asked me to come down to the club where she was. So I went down there. She was really full of enthusiasm. She had quit drinking. She and this kid that she was with laid out their plans to me. They were going to dump this manager, get a new manager. They knew of a record company. They were going to make a record, *Anita's Back*, and all this. I said, "Listen. If you're dumping people, I don't want to know anything about it. This is the guy that called me. That's why I'm here." And she didn't sing all that great, but I still liked her, and she still liked that record. That was one of her favorite records. So I was the guy that she had picked to make her new recording debut, but it never happened. Some of her friends made a documentary about her. I did a few scenes in that. I enjoyed working with her. I really liked her, after all of our scuffling.

**Brown:** Let's compare that one – compare and contrast that date in 1960 was another one with another diva. This one's in 1964. This was *Sarah Vaughan Sings the Mancini*

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*Songbook*. Here you're credited with the arranger and conductor, instead of director. Here you have two divas of very different styles, very different approaches. But you're the arranger and conductor or director on the last two dates.

**Holman:** It might have been two charts. I don't know. I only remember one, which was *I Love You and Don't You Forget it*. Quincy [Jones] was the producer. He's the one that hired me.

**Brown:** For Mercury, correct?

**Holman:** Yeah. There were no problems. Sarah is never a problem, and the chart was easy.

**Brown:** Here they have *Bye Bye, Theme from „Peter Gunn*. "They have that one credited to you. I'm not sure if it . . . .

**Holman:** Oh yeah. Okay.

**Brown:** So those two.

**Holman:** Yeah.

**Brown:** You just conducted your own numbers? Not . . . .

**Holman:** Yeah. In fact, the New Orleans drummer . . . .

**Brown:** Earl Palmer?

**Holman:** Earl was on that.

**Brown:** They didn't give him credit here. So I better tell – get that straightened out. Did you have much interaction with Sarah during – just for those two numbers?

**Holman:** Not at that time. I knew her slightly, because she'd done a tour with the Kenton band, one of those Birdland tours that I was on. So I knew her from that and just seeing her around. I'd written a chart for her maybe a few years before this, just for her to use in her personal appearances, but we weren't especially tight. I remember Jimmy Rowles had a commercial to do. He hired Sarah to do it. We did it on Sunday morning, after she'd been up in Oakland with the Raiders. She sang the Star Spangled Banner on the Raider game, and I know she was hanging out all night with those guys and showed up her at 11 a.m. and started singing. It just poured out. I said, "How do you sing like that after being up there and hanging out all night?" She said, "It's always good."

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**Brown:** If we follow the chronology, the mid-“60s is a period where you give up playing the tenor saxophone. Maybe you could talk about that.

**Holman:** In 1967 I got cancer in the bottom of my mouth, and a little bit of it went into my jawbone. So they had to take out some of my jawbone and take out all my lower teeth. So I thought, that’s playing. That’s all for that. After I started my band in ‘75, I wanted to be able to participate in some way. So I tried out the horn, and it kind of worked. Some of the strength had come back. By that time I had a denture, and my mouth is okay. It was a little weak, but I could make a sound. So I started playing again. Played with the band and did a few gigs. I was working in Germany. So I played tenor on a couple of those productions. Bill Perkins and I did some two tenor gigs together.

I went out to UCLA to get a – Conte Candoli was going to a dentist out at UCLA. He recommended him, because the guy’s a musician. He’s a saxophone player. So I went out and talked to him. He said, “We’ll make you a strong denture that will cap all these teeth and put in machine – metal contacts for the denture to fit over. You’ll be great to play.” So he did that. It took a couple of years. Eventually the caps came off and the teeth underneath died. So I lost the rest of the teeth on that side. So the guy recommended implants. “We’ll put in implants, and they’ll hook into a denture, and it’ll be as strong as your own teeth.” So they did the implants. When the implants were done, there was absolutely no strength in my lower lip. They had cut into the nerve. So I haven’t played a note in public since. I tried for months. I tried doing long tones and all the lip-strengthening things you can think of. Nothing worked. So I don’t play anymore.

**Brown:** Then you really directed your energies into your passion. You said you always wanted to write. So here, by default, that’s what you did.

**Holman:** Yeah, that’s it.

**Brown:** If I could just look – as we compare the two divas, I’m looking at two of the stellar drummers. You were writing for both Buddy [Rich] and Louie Bellson, maybe not contemporaneously, but it must be completely different working for two completely different personalities there?

**Holman:** Mostly what I did for Louie was arranging his tunes. He wrote a lot of tunes, but he didn’t have the time to make charts on them. So I was doing that. Buddy – I had a friend who was Buddy’s road manager when he started his band again in – what was it? “60-something.

**Brown:** What was the name of the road manager?

**Holman:** Steve Perlo. He got me an appointment with Buddy. I went to Vegas. At intermission I went up to his dressing room. He tried to scare me. He’d get a scowl on his

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face and say, “What are you going to write for my band?” I said, “Something hot, I suppose.” For some reason I wasn’t afraid of him. I figured if I just let it sit, eventually it would cool off, which it did. I wrote a few charts. He liked them. Had me write some more. It turned out we became good friends and he liked very much what I was doing for him. But I would send those charts away, I’d finish the score, put it in the mail, and a year or maybe two years later I’d hear a recording of it, totally different from what I would have done. Tempos were different, usually faster, plus that incessant bass drum. It’s almost making the bass superfluous. But he was up for it. Whatever I sent him, he accepted and liked it.

**Brown:** When you say you became friends, did you guys hang out?

**Holman:** No.

**Brown:** Or you were friendly?

**Holman:** When we were working together, we talked.

**Brown:** We can all tell Buddy Rich stories, but none of us in this room other than you had direct contact with him.

**Holman:** I’d like to hear yours.

**Brown:** We’ll skip over that. I’m showing that in September ‘66 you contributed some arrangements for the release for *Swingin’ New BigBand*. That’s probably about the time he was reactivating his band.

During this period of the ‘60s, again, very prolific in writing and doing a variety of works: Peggy Lee, working with Ed Shaughnessy. It still seems like you’re doing – it says here you did arrangements for a number of television series. Of course those aren’t showing up in the discography. Is that something?

**Holman:** Yeah. Let’s see. The first one was a show that Terry Gibbs had. It’s called *Operation Entertainment*. They took a band and some stars around to various army-navy bases and did shows like . . .

**Brown:** Like the USO?

**Holman:** They’d do broadcasts that were concerts, a variety show. They’d have a few singers in the band. I did that as long as the show lasted, probably less than a year. I got to meet a lot of people, because I was writing charts for all the guest artists that he had, as well as for the band. So I met all these stars. I never worked for them. At least I can say

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that I met them. I met Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., even, and was intrigued by the fact that he wore a necktie for a belt.

**Brown:** Did he explain why?

**Holman:** I guess he liked it. I wasn't about to ask him. "Hey sir."

**Brown:** Interesting sartorial standard there.

**Holman:** Then Pearl Bailey had a show for a while. Louie was the conductor. So he put out all the charts. I worked on that as long as it lasted. It's work. You apply your craft, you get paid, and you go away.

**Brown:** Not something that you directed your attention to as part of your more monumental achievements.

**Holman:** I may have mentioned this to people just to show that I was human, because early on I got put in this category of "he's not really one of us," because I was writing for jazz bands and everything. I wasn't doing studio work, like 90% of the writers around here do. So I may have had people look at the t.v. show just to show that I could be one of them.

**Brown:** That doesn't seem too fair. By the '60s you've got – Oliver Nelson's out here. Quincy's out here. You've got a lot of folks who really have a jazz pedigree who are able to get into that line of work. So it seems to be kind of a weird situation there. Were there particular cliques, or were there particular contractors, or certain folks? Was there a close-knit . . . ? – that's what we on the outside always presumed or have always heard. It was really hard to break in. You had to know somebody on the inside who could pull you in.

**Holman:** Yeah, contractors had something to do with it. I don't think there was any conspiracy. It's just that they didn't think of me. Part of it's my own fault. I'm not a promoter. I'm not a hustler. I could have done more to push my own career, and I didn't do it. I always think I had the better mousetrap theory: if you do it, they'll come.

**Brown:** So back then it wasn't necessary to have an agent, as an arranger or working in that field?

**Holman:** No. I didn't know anything about it, at any rate. I remember there was a show called *M Squad*. They were using a lot of jazz writers on that. I'd been told that the contractor had a lot to do with the people they used. So I hit on him one time, and he said, "I don't have anything to do with that." So that was my only aggression as far as hustling a t.v. gig.

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**Brown:** You said you started your band in '75. I'm looking at a couple of other dates in '76 and '77: '76, *I Told You So*, Count Basie. You did all the charts – all the titles for that one. And then I'm looking at, in '77, Carmen McRae with the L.A. Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl. You're credited as arranger for that. Those seem to stand out in your catalogue. I was just wondering if you have any recollections of those, and then you can talk about your band on the next tape.

**Holman:** The Basie thing I wish had come two years earlier, because by this time I was off into my own thing, and it wasn't really what Basie is known for. So I tried to get myself back into that groove and succeeded somewhat. Norman was just floored by the arrangements. He loved them. The first chart we did, he said, "This is" – I can't remember the name. Anyway, he thought they were a work of art. It was a chore not to get him to accept every first take, because that's the way he operates, with five guys and no music. You can't do that with a big band, especially Basie's band, because not only were they not good sight readers, but they had been off on Christmas vacation for two weeks. They hadn't played a note. They had two new trumpet players. Everything was stacked against me. They did okay. The intonation is not the greatest. The band is a little ragged. But I like it. Basie loved it. He wanted to do another one. The band played a gig out here later. I went. I was talking to him, and he said he was going to talk to Norman about doing another one. Then he got sick, and that was all.

**Brown:** *Tree Frog* was the first title on that session. I'm not sure that that was the first title that you actually tackled. Let me go down the rest: *Flirt*, *Blues for Alfie*, *Something to Live For*, *Plain Brown Wrapper*, *Sweet Pea*, *Tickler*, *Too Close for Comfort*, *Told You So*, *The Git*. *I Told You So* is the title. I don't know if that's significant.

**Holman:** We had an argument about that. Norman called up, and he said, "You've got a tune in there called *Told You So*. I think the term is „I told you so“." I said, "Yeah, it is, but the way you say it conversationally, sometimes you just say, „Told you so“." He said, "But the term is, „I told you so“." I said, "You're right." He said, "I want to call the album *I Told You So*. Can't you change the title of that tune?" I said, "No." So the tune is *Told You So* and the album is *I Told You So*.

**Brown:** You got your way, and he got his way. It works out. Then, the other one I mentioned – unless you have more to say about that.

**Holman:** On the strength of that record, he had plans. I was going to record, or write charts for all of his artists: Ella. He had never used me on a record for Ella. I had written a lot of the charts for her personal thing, like for the Basie band when she was with them. She loved them, but Norman wouldn't – for some reason he had me pegged as a studio guy, and he didn't like studio guys. I don't know what finally broke him down, but there he was on the phone for this. He was going to have me do Joe Pass and all the guys, write

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for everybody. So I pitched an idea to do a record with Zoot with a band, to him. We were working on that. We get to record it, and during one of the takes, when Zoot is playing the solo, I heard something wrong in the band. So having studio conductor in my resume, I stopped the band, which you do when you hear something wrong, so you can fix it. To Norman that was a sin that you couldn't repair. Nat Pierce told me that Norman went out on the road with the Basie band and was bad-mouthing me to anybody that would listen, about how . . . .

**Brown:** For that one infraction?

**Holman:** . . . about how an arranger could stop a classic soloist from playing a solo. So I never worked for him again. Plus all the bad press he gave me.

What were we talking about?

**Brown:** I was going to now switch to Carmen McRae and the L.A. Philharmonic. Again, I'm trying to capture the breadth and the versatility that is a hallmark of your career.

**Holman:** The orchestra – I hadn't written much for strings: a little bit for Peggy and a little bit on some pop records that I'd done sweetening dates for. So it was a little bit scary in that way, but I imagined a well mixed thing. As it turns out, when they have the soloist with the orchestra, and she's got a rhythm section, that's all you're going to hear, is the rhythm section and the singer. The orchestra is way in the back. So that was the first disappointment, because I had envisioned this big carpet of sound behind the singer. It didn't happen. Then Carmen picked out really pedestrian songs. I think for a situation like that she could have gone for a little more drama or something a little more involved. But she was just picking out songs that she felt like singing. She wasn't – I don't think that she was thinking about the context. So that was another disappointment. But there was one tune that was fairly involved. We got into some colors with the orchestra. It was re-recorded, actually, with a smaller orchestra. Marty Paich was the conductor. It was much better balance, but it was not the same as having the whole Philharmonic there. So it was another lesson. Things aren't always going to be the way they seem.

[recording interrupted]

I was – this was in the middle '70s, and I was not doing a whole lot. A friend of mine, Don Piestrup, who had written for Buddy's band and is a very good composer and arranger. He's also from – he went to U. C. Berkeley. He was a football player there, oddly enough – he was talking to one of the co-owners of Dante's club in North Hollywood. They were saying what a shame it is that I didn't have a band. Somehow it came out the guy at the club – the club owner said, "If he had a band, we could put him in every Sunday night as long as he wants to do it." Don said, "Maybe." So he called me and said, "Hey, if you want a band – if you put together a band, you can have these gigs."

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He told me about a copyist he had that was reasonable. The copyist helped me put together a library. I had some old charts, and he had some, and I wrote some new ones. So we had that gig.

The thing that really decided me was I'd been putting charts in the mail, writing for bands, and not having any control, losing control of them after I sent them. I said, it would be great to have my own band play the charts the way I want to hear them and not have to wait a year or two before I hear them. That's a bonus in having a band.

So I got the band together. We did a few Sunday nights, and all of a sudden, they're canceling the Sunday nights. So we don't have it anymore. But I've got a band, and I'm enjoying hearing the music. So the band continued. We'd rehearse every week. One day a week we'd go down to the union and rehearse. We started getting a few gigs, but no record. I didn't know where to look for a company that would take a chance on a big band, because there's a lot of expense and you're guaranteed sales that aren't very hot.

A Japanese guy from JVC called me. He wanted me to do some string sweetening for a singer they had. So I sweetened several charts, and we went down and recorded them. I said, "Ah, this is a record company." So the last date I took an envelope down with some CDs of people I'd worked for, and a bio. Oddly enough, they were up for it. So we got to do our first record for JVC in the late '80s. When it came out, there was a headline in the Japanese jazz paper that said something about [how] I hadn't done a record in 29 years. It was true. The last one I did was 1960, and this was 1988.

So that started – we did three CDs for them. The last one was an idea suggested by my manager, Bill Trout, that I was really worried about, because it was to do the music of Thelonious Monk. I realized that what I had to offer was a different version of the arrangement, or a different slant on an arrangement that I did differently from what other people do, and how can you do that with Monk's music? People raised hell if you did a conforming arrangement of a Monk tune and it didn't come out exactly right. They'd say, "Who is this creep, messing with Monk's music like that?" I knew that he had a lot of avid fans that were really going to raise hell if they didn't like it. So I stewed about that for a while. I finally realized that everybody else that does arrangements of Monk's music tries to make it sound like Monk. I said I'm not going to do that. I'm going to try to make it sound like me, using Monk's music. I did that, and it went over great. I was really relieved when it started coming in that people liked it. I got a lot of compliments, though *Down Beat* rated it three-and-a-half stars. The review was by a friend of mine who used to work out here and has moved back to New Jersey. He writes for *Down Beat* now. And getting compliments from surprising people, not professionals, that just – you think most people, they hear something they like and they say, "I like that," and that's as far as it goes, but they knew the name of the album, the name of the arranger, and everything. So that was great, and we were starting to think about another one. Then JVC pulled the plug on America. They said, "We couldn't make it work here." They couldn't figure out how

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to promote, how to distribute – the two most important things with records, because we got great air play on all three of the records we did for them, but they couldn't ever find them in the store.

**Brown:** You also started working with European-based bands. You started forming ties and seemed to be working regularly in Germany with a variety of the Rundfunk bands, the radio bands, and also into Scandinavia. How did that develop?

**Holman:** I had a friend, Jimmy Pratt, who was a drummer here in L.A. during the '50s. He had relocated to Germany. He had a publishing company. He was in on the jazz scene over there. He saw it as a way to make some publishing money by having me come over there and conduct orchestras and get radio performances. So in 1980 he set up a thing in Hamburg, Germany. 1980, Jimmy set up a production with the NDR, the north German radio network. I sent him scores, and they copied them over there. I con- – no, I didn't conduct. They had their own staff conductors. So I couldn't even conduct my own music. But at that time the band wasn't great, and they always had to hire a drummer, because their drummer was not capable. A funny thing: I found out later that the producer and the conductor are both free music fans. They weren't really enjoying my cast-in-stone charts.

Anyway, I did a couple of productions for them over the years and gave it up, but the producer of a Dutch band that had a weekly radio show on a Monday night called me and said, "You're finished there on Friday. Can you come to Holland and do a couple of your charts with our band on Monday night?" They played in a club and had a radio remote from this club every week. So I did that.

While I was there, Jimmy called and said that I should go to Cologne, that the producer there was anxious to meet me. So, after Holland, I took a train to Cologne. The producer walked to the radio – I was in their office, which is separate from where his office was. His office was over by the big cathedral, and these people were several blocks away. He walked clear over to where I was, took my suitcase, carried it back to his office, and said, "There's something I'd like you to hear." He took me to a little room. There's a tape machine. He started playing this tape. It was of their band. He said, "How does the drummer sound to you?" Apparently he wanted my advice about the drummer, because he didn't think that the drummer was doing a good job. So we got straight with that. I said, "No, I don't think so either." Then he said they were going to do a bebop program later in the year. They were going to have Sonny Stitt and Diz and I forget who all, and would I write charts for that? I jumped at that. I said sure. I got the charts done, and he called back and said that they had scheduling troubles and the thing was put off. Eventually, when we did it, the only star they had was Kenny Clarke, which is great. I'm glad to meet him. He's a wonderful guy. But bebop-wise, they had Tony Scott, who's a clarinet player. I can't remember who the other guys were, but none of the bebop stars materialized. So we scuffled through it. We managed to get the charts done. That was all.

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Then 1982 he called back and said they were going to do a program with Jiggs Whigham, and would I be the conductor and arranger on it? So that was my first chance to conduct a production with the WDR, and that went on for about 20 years. Every year I would do at least one production for them. And there were some other radio bands still going now that have disappeared. There's one in Sweden. There's one in Switzerland. I was working with them.

The Cologne gigs were nice, because they didn't tell you any – no requirements as to what to write. Just write as much original stuff or – depending on what you can decide with the artist. There was always a guest player too. You'd work out something with him. Maybe he's got some tunes he'd like to do. Otherwise you're on your own. You write anything you want. A full week to rehearse, four hours a day. Then a full week to record, and usually a couple of concerts at the end. So it was a great gig, and they paid well, paid your transportation and the hotel and everything. I'd take a couple of months to write the music, because it was that important. It was not something – the band was very critical too. So you don't just dash something off, throw it out there. You had to be doing something interesting or you'd hear from somebody.

We had a funny atmosphere in that band. It's a little bit tense, a little bit tight. But a few miles away, the Metropole band in Holland, they got the same setup, four hours a day, five days a week, same players every day, and their spirit was great. So I got to put it down to Germany, I guess.

**Brown:** Speaking of Germany and speaking of drummers, there's an entry here in the catalogue entitled *Lightnin'*, the Klaus Weiss big band. It's got Jiggs Whigham. But the reason why it caught my eye, it's got also Benny Bailey listed and also somebody that I had worked with, Joe Gallardo, who probably was in the Cologne big band too. He was also an expatriate in Europe – in Germany at that time. This date is from Ludwigsburg, from September of 1984. I don't know if you were actually involved. They've only got – they have you listed as arranger, but I'm not sure if you were present on the date.

**Holman:** No, I wasn't. I wrote, I think, four charts for the band.

**Brown:** Right. But Klaus Weiss, surprisingly enough, is a drummer. Do you recall him? – speaking of German . . .

**Holman:** Yeah. When he called me up, he had this hearty German-sounding voice. I could imagine the mayor of a small town. What's the word for them?

**Brown:** The Burgermeister.

**Holman:** The Burgermeister, with a big stein of beer or something, "Ja, ja, ja, ja."

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**Brown:** “Ja, Willkommen.”

**Holman:** He said, “I’m coming to Los Angeles. I’d like to meet with you.” Okay. He got here. He was a young guy, trim, but he had that big booming voice. We got along great. We’d kept in touch through the years. His idol was Buddy – Buddy Rich – and he played like him, which is not really my favorite way a drummer could play. But we got along good. He always got a good band together. Benny Bailey was one of our soloists in Cologne on one of our things. He was tough.

**Brown:** Benny – living in Europe, when you have expatriates like him or like Dexter [Gordon] – when Dexter was living there, or Kenny Drew, or any of those guys, it was always great to be able to connect with that. A little taste of home.

Let’s talk about drummers. You’ve had the opportunity to work with, if not always the best, among the best and the greatest and the most recognized percussionists in jazz. What is it that you look for in a drummer? You obviously know what you want. Perhaps you can tell us – maybe even identify drummers whose styles seem to fit your particular conception.

**Holman:** Mel [Lewis] was the ideal drummer for me, his spacing, the way he broke up the beat. It’s relaxed. Some of the guys, their eighth notes are a little too straight, and it makes me feel a little constricted. But a lazy triplet feel, like Mel got, is perfect for me. But he’s got to be able to keep time too. Since I’ve had my band, I’ve found out how many drummers – mostly, I think, probably from reading charts – when they get their face in the chart, the time just goes, rushing. Otherwise really dependable drummers, guys you figure, this guy has got to be a rock, they get looking at a chart and they speed up. I’ve been through practically all of the drummers in L.A. There’s the ones that don’t get the feeling I like. There’s the ones that rush. There’s the ones that don’t want to do it.

Jeff Hamilton played with us for a while. He was a great drummer for our band. When he left, he recommended one of his students, which is the guy we’re using now, Kevin Kanner. He’d never played with a big band before. So he came on, and he had trouble with tempos. I had confidence, because he had the feeling I like. It transmitted from Mel to Jeff to him. So I said, “Why don’t you take a year or so and get some more experience and everything. We’ll try it again.” We did. We tried it again, and the tempos are right in there. So he’s continued to be our drummer. Sometimes when I feel that he’s getting too involved with the sheet music, I tell him to play a few tunes without looking at any music at all. Then all of a sudden it goes from your eyes back to your ears, where it should be, and it straightens out. I learned that from Kenton. He had . . .

**Brown:** With the drummer he had at that time? Or just overall, as a concept?

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**Holman:** Overall. He never did it while I was there, but guys told me that he had done it afterwards. We get so used to using our eyes to absorb music that we forget it's got – the ideal place is your ears. There's a story about Monk that somebody told me. He was doing a date with some horns. He'd bring in a big case every day, set it over in the corner, go and sit at the piano, call the players over one by one, and have them learn their parts by ear. After they got everything recorded, they said, "Monk, did you really have the charts?" He went and opened the thing, and there they were. They're all copied and everything, ready to go. But he didn't want them to learn that way. He wanted them to learn it by ear, which is really important, because – especially in a town like this, with so much studio work, the guys are living through their eyes, and it has to do a complete circle around your head to get to your ears and then to your brain. But yeah, just take the chart away.

Drummers – Shelly was great. He was – I appreciate him more all the time, because tempos are always perfect. His beat was a little bit different from everybody else. So a lot of the guys weren't comfortable playing with him.

**Brown:** When you say his beat was different from anybody else, maybe a little more descriptive?

**Holman:** The feeling I was talking about comes close to a triplet feel. It's like two triplets and then one, t-tah, t-tah, t-tah, t-tah. There's all kinds of variations between that and between the straight eighths, which is da-da-da-da-da-da. And everybody falls into that one little place, but there are variations in here, and that's where the drummers – where you say that their beat is different, the way their spacing is.

Peter Erskine I think is another excellent drummer. He did one gig with our band back in the '70s, and it was the best that that band has ever sounded, I think. He's so relaxed and yet with authority and taste. But he's always – he's got so much going on, we couldn't depend on him to play – be in a band.

**Brown:** The first time I saw him, he came through when I was at the University of Oregon – he was 19 – with the Kenton band, of all things. But he's definitely been astronomical since then.

When you form a band, do you think of forming a core or the foundation? Or do you get the section leaders? How do you put together a band? Or is it just different for different situations? Let's just talk about your own band. When you're forming a band that's playing your music the way you want it, what are you looking for and how do you form it?

**Holman:** When I put the band together the first time, I didn't know. I was thinking more of having an authentic band, as many jazz players as I could get. It's hard to get a band

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full of jazz players, because there aren't enough solos to go around. So it's always a big compromise, if you're a jazz player, to go on a big band, because you know you're not going to get to blow that much.

I just called guys that I was comfortable with and who I knew were good players. I wasn't experienced enough to know about chemistry, how chemistry works or anything like that, personalities. I remember the first night I called people, I called Snooky Young. He was doing gigs with Doc Severinson. He had a traveling group that he did gigs with. Snooky was doing that. I called Teddy Edwards, and he said he just – no, he wanted to be a leader, and he didn't think it was good practice to play in somebody else's band, which is very honest. I was thinking of Blue Mitchell, who I did get on the band. After a few months, he got a contract with ABC Records, and they told him to quit any band that he was playing on, because he was going to be a star. He was one of our mainstays at first. Then it was just guys that I knew were going to be in town. I would have called Bill Perkins, but he was out on the road with Stan at the time. I called some guys I didn't even know. I asked people, "Who can I get for trombone?"

The band was pretty fluid at first. The first couple years, a constant turnover. Then gradually, the good guys that were willing to take the rehearsal seriously, and they could play too good and weren't too busy doing a lot of record dates. There's a thin stratum there of players that aren't too busy and they're . . .

**Brown:** And they're good.

**Holman:** And that they will rehearse. A lot of guys won't rehearse, because it's bad for business. If somebody sees them rehearsing, playing for nothing, they think, oh, he should be in the studio, working, and maybe he's slipping a little.

**Brown:** A different way of looking at things down here.

**Holman:** Yeah. Then gradually, the personnel has settled down. So it's practically constant all the time now.

**Brown:** Obviously when you re-formed your band, you were doing a lot of things right, because you started to accrue a lot of awards. You got a whole bunch of Grammy nominations and even snagged a few along the way, as well. How did that – how does it feel to get that kind of recognition, national and international recognition, after being in the trenches for so long and putting up with so much of the horrible things that go along with this business?

**Holman:** The Grammys are good. You would think that they would be good for business too, but they're not. It's like the Oscars. People win an Oscar, and they look forward to a

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year of retirement. What was really nice was getting the Jazz Master thing. That was – I feel that’s a payback for all the years and all the work.

**Brown:** Yeah, and look at the company you’re in, too. All the best. That’s validation.

**Holman:** That’s what I said at the ceremony. I said, “All of my heroes and influences are on this list.”

**Brown:** At the award ceremony in New York, you got to see a lot of folks. It must have been pretty gratifying to get that kind of recognition.

**Holman:** One of my kids was able to go there, and grandkids. Met Bill Crow, after all these years. I’ve known about him for years and had never met him.

Sometime I want to talk about the Terry Gibbs band.

**Brown:** Let’s do it

**Holman:** That’s apparently not in your list there.

**Brown:** We talked about an early recording with him, but let’s talk about that tenure with him.

**Holman:** In ‘59 he was working at a club called the Seville down on Santa Monica Boulevard with his quartet. He said – he asked the leader one night. He said, “How would you like a big band to come in here and work all week long for the same money you’re giving me?” The owner said sure. So Terry, the ultimate businessman, he put all these things together. He had a contract with Mercury to make a big band album. So he said, “We’ll do the album, use the charts to play on the gig – on our in-person gig.” So we did that. I wrote a bunch of charts, and Brookmeyer, and Manny Albam, Marty Paich. And we went into this club.

The club business – jazz club – has been on the skids for a long time. Business wasn’t great at that time. We go in the club with a big band, and Terry’s been on the phone and every other way at his disposal to promote the thing, and the place is overflowing with people. It went on for a month. We had great crowds every night. Towards the end of the month it started to dwindle off a little bit. But we’d had movie stars. Ginger Rogers even came alone one night. Sat at a table all by herself. The younger stars would come in. I remember one intermission we’re getting off the stand and Joe Maini says, “Come on guys. Let’s go work the bar.”

That was the start of it. Then he made – on the success of that he was able to make a couple of more albums, for Mercury, and I wrote a lot of charts for all of them. He would

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come up with the funniest tunes. One of them was – I think on the first album – was *Tico Tico*. I think of a lady organ player on *The Hit Parade* that used to play that, and they’d always shoot her feet on the pedals. But a jazz chart on *Tico Tico*? Uh-uh. But I did it, and it came off okay.

I wrote some of my best things for that band, I think, in strictly a jazz band vein. Terry – again, the businessman – he wanted a big chord on the end of every chart, whether it called for it or not, regardless of what the song was, what the mood of the chart was, a big chord. We used to – every time he made a record, he and I would get together and argue about this. This one time – the thing that finally sealed it – he said, “Willis, do it for me.” So he got his big chord.

I had a lot of fun on those gigs. At that time, everybody had the same conception of what a big band should sound like. We’d all played on different bands, but everybody had pretty much the same feel for how it went. Now, you have to rehearse everything, because everybody is involved in different kinds of music and they’ve got different rhythmic feels, and “Should this be no vibrato?”, where at that time it was automatic. There was – you knew it was no vibrato. You have to talk about things a lot more. You have to rehearse more. For my records, the three albums that I did, we had one hour rehearsal just to get out the wrong notes and then went in and did it live, and it sounds good.

Let’s see, Terry: then they got – they played at a club up on Sunset Boulevard for a while and then went down to one night a week at another club, but still did good business and the guys still had a good time. Then Wally Haider, who was a big name in recording down here for years, set up some microphones down at the club and just for his own kicks recorded the band several nights and gave Terry the tapes. Nothing more was talked about it until, later on, I guess Terry got the idea, “Hey, I got some records in my closet there.” So he took it to Fantasy. He worked a deal to pay the guys 1959 scale, which was \$41, I think, and the union went for it. He got four or five CDs out of it.

Anyway, I just wanted to mention that, because I got a chance to do a lot of good writing then.

**Brown:** That’s important. Anything else you want to mention? I’m looking at a couple of names to your credit. I see here Natalie Cole, *Unforgettable*. That’s back to the Grammys. And then working with Tony Bennett. I’m sure that must have been gratifying.

**Holman:** Yeah, it was okay, doing the recording and everything, but when the record came out, he had only used 4 of 11 charts that I did for him, for the Basie band. By the way, I was really happy with the Basie band, because my other experience with them – I told you about them having trouble reading. These guys were on top of all that. So there was no problem there.

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**Brown:** But two different directors at that point. By the time you did the Tony, was it Frank Foster then the music director? Or who was it?

**Holman:** No, a trombone player.

**Kimery:** Grover [Mitchell]?

**Holman:** No, he was a trombone player. This was the guy after him, I think. Oh yeah, Bill Hughes. Anyway, I ordered the record through Amazon – they didn’t send me one – with the special DVD of making of an LP – a CD. I played the DVD, and through this whole thing, there was not one mention of an arranger or a picture of me. They had a picture – a couple of shots of Lee Musiker, his piano player, making like he’s conducting a band, but he never conducted the band. They had me – they put me over at the side. They had the band in tuxes. Everybody was dressed up but me, and they didn’t shoot me at all in this DVD. I don’t know why they didn’t tell me to get some clothes on and stand in front of the band, but they had me over in the corner. So guys had to look over here to see me. They didn’t mention any of the arrangers. Frank Foster had a chart in there, and Mandel had a chart in there. I don’t know what – to hear him talk, you would swear that he’s in love with the arranger. I don’t know whether it’s his son, who is the brains of the outfit now – he’s the one that got his career going again – or what, but I was really hurt by that, because I spent a couple of months writing that stuff in all good faith. But I heard the album won a Grammy, I think.

**Brown:** Let’s see. It says there were three – they didn’t even credit it to you. It’s not . . .

**Holman:** Maybe it didn’t win. I don’t know.

**Brown:** What about one of your more recent CDs, *Homage*? That’s listed as recommended listening for you. How do you – how does that figure in your . . . ?

**Holman:** That was a live record we made, a concert. *Homage* was a long composition that I wrote for a production in Cologne featuring Buddy DeFranco. It was a tribute to Woody Herman. I wrote this piece, this *Homage à Woody*, homage to Woody. I wanted to get it on a record. So we decided we would do it on this concert. Maybe it wasn’t the right thing to do on a concert, because the band was a little rough on it. But it’s our band. It has some charming moments.

**Brown:** With a catalogue of over 400 titles, it might be hard to ask you which ones you would recommend if somebody says, “I’m an arranger. I’m a young, budding arranger. I heard a lot about Bill Holman.” It sounds like the Terry Gibbs would have been something that you could direct up and coming . . .

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**Holman:** Yeah, I think so.

**Brown:** Any other ones that you feel are representative of – of course, then you have probably – how many charts do you think you have to your credit at this point?

**Holman:** I don't know. No idea. Any of our records with the later bands will give you an idea of what I do. I think the JVC CDs were better than the last two we did, because both of the last two were live, recorded live at concerts. It's good to get the spirit of a live concert, but the charts suffer a little bit. The band isn't always precise as you would like to have recorded forever, and tempos – you don't get a second chance at a tempo. You count out the wrong tempo, you're stuck with it.

I want to also talk about working with Gerry Mulligan on the Concert Band. In 1960, when he put the Concert Band together, he had – the first time we hung out was in 1958, after I'd done the *Jazz in Orbit* album. I'd just got the acetates from it. I was thrilled.

That's another thing. Then, it was a thrill to go to the record date and hear the music played, because you hadn't heard it all that much before. Now we rehearse everything. So it's not that big a deal when we go to record it.

Anyway, at that time I had just got these acetates of our record and was really gassed with them. Gerry called up and wanted to hang out. He came over to the house, and I played them for him. He was knocked out too. He wanted to hear the whole album, and he stood at the piano and fingered the notes as they were playing, to get an idea of maybe a voicing or the register where the horns were. That was the start of our friendship. I had known him before, but just slightly. Knew him musically from way back.

So when he was going to put the Concert Band together, he asked me to come back and help him get the music ready. What it turned out was that he wanted me to write big band charts of his quartet hits. That was okay, except Brookmeyer and Al Cohn and Gary McFarland, all those guys, were writing anything they wanted to: originals or their favorite song or anything. I'm writing . . .

We had just done *I'm Gonna Go Fishin'* for Peggy Lee. That was lyrics she'd written to a Duke tune. So I recommended that to Gerry, to make a jazz chart on that. So I got to do that. It got a Grammy nomination. Didn't win, but that was my first one. So that was a nice thing.

I was back there for about three months. That was really a lot of fun to hang out with all those guys that I'd been hearing about for all those years, and Brookmeyer and I got to be good friends, and Zoot, of course. Zoot was going to be in the band, but for some reason he and Gerry decided that was not a good idea. So I got to play – for the first couple of

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weeks I got to play in the band, which was really a thrill for me. We played at Basin Street East. Then I came home, back to L.A.

But those – the two musicians bars: Junior’s and – what’s the other one? I don’t know. Can’t remember – they were trouble. If you wanted to see somebody, you just go to one of those bars and everybody in town was there. So we spent too much time in there. But we survived.

Gerry, when he was writing for Stan Kenton at that one little brief time, he wrote a chart called *Youngblood*, which has become a classic big band chart. So he was trying to write *Youngblood* for the concert band, a smaller band. He would bring that chart in every week, have it copied, and we’d rehearse it. He’d say, “Okay, pass it in.” We’d pass it in. He’d go home and change things. He didn’t finish that chart the whole time I was there. I wound up giving him advice. I’d say, “You got to realize this is not the last chart you’re going to write. If you want something different, put it in the next chart. You got to get finished.”

**Brown:** Do you think he was a perfectionist?

**Holman:** Yeah.

**Brown:** Or he just had something . . . ?

**Holman:** Yeah. They had – there was a gag going around at the time that so-and-so, you wind him up and he does this. You wind up Gerry and he changes something.

**Brown:** I’m thinking of some of the other – I’m thinking of the breadth of your accomplishments. I’m wondering, is there anything on the horizon? Is there something that you felt that you wanted to do that you haven’t done yet? You’re still keeping that on the back burner, perhaps? Do you have a new project that you’ve got coming up at this point?

**Holman:** No. I’m trying to figure out what to do now. People ask me when we’re going to do another CD. I don’t know about that, because the record business is in such a mess. I suppose I could do like everybody else, record it myself and put it on Amazon and CDBaby, but I need help. I need somebody to promote. I need somebody to run the dates for me. So I’m just on hold for now.

We’re still doing gigs with the band. We got – going to do the Reno festival in April. Just enjoying life. You notice our spiffy bathroom. That consumed two or three months of our lives

**Brown:** And now the kitchen, according to Nancy.

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**Holman:** Oh, you've been exposed, huh? I told you to stay in the other room.

**Brown:** Well-behaved women don't change history, do they?

Anything else you want to include in this historical record of your life and music? Or any thoughts? Any philosophies? Anything you want to share with any up and coming musicians, be they arrangers or tenor saxophonists or just musicians in general? The times have definitely changed. You've seen the entire evolution of jazz from being popular and dance-related to being – who knows what it is? But I think it's still useful for the seasoned players to be able to pass something back to the next generation and try to keep this music alive one way or the other. Somebody with the breadth of backgrounds and experiences and accomplishments, I'm just wondering if there's something you can share for the next generation coming up?

**Holman:** Just keep in mind that your music is an expression of you and try to have the best life you can have and the best intentions, because I think it will come out in your music. Try to get as much variety as you can, as much accomplishment, and to be honest. No technical talk, because I think that's probably my least accomplishment, is in the technical angles of writing. I think my success is being able to put down an organic piece that sounds like it's all coming from the same source at the same time. I think too many people grab at something that's current. They learn something new, they want to stick it in there, and they don't stop to think about whether it's going to fit or not. You should try to make every sentence relate to the sentence before it, however you do that.

I usually tell people writing, when you're writing – when you start in the morning, get out what you did the day before and sing the whole thing through in real time. Then you decide what should come next. This is the thing that Montrose and I were talking about: what comes next? If you go back and sing what you did yesterday, you get yourself in the same mental state that you're in when you wrote that, the same rhythmic feeling, because a lot of times that will get away from you. You come up with a new fresh start on Tuesday. You were thinking triplets Monday and you're thinking straight eighths today, that ain't gonna work. So always look back at what you did and sing it in real time, because that's how you get the feeling of it. End of speech.

**Brown:** I'll ask you just one thing about your craft, the use of counterpoint, the contrapuntal approach. Everyone always – Bach. You can't fault that. But it did find its way even into bebop, in Charlie Parker. He wrote at least two pieces that I'm aware of, *Ah-Leu-Cha* and *Chasin' the Bird*, that used the contrapuntal lines. Were they at all influential in your conception? Do you hear that there is a relationship between development of the West Coast school and these two pieces?

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**Holman:** I'm sure those pieces made an impression on me. I'm trying to figure out what it was, apart from delighted hearing it. You hear those intervals played by those guys. It really sounds juicy. But that linear thing came to me very early, as I told you about the thing I did at Westlake that I played for Gene Roland. I had never had any counterpoint study up to that time. In fact, I had very little of it. In fact, I don't even think of my music as contrapuntal, speaking of species, like that, one note against two notes against – I just think of it as two jazz lines that go together, or three, whatever, because I'm really dumb about counterpoint. I've never been through that discipline. I think the discipline is good for enhancing your musicality as well as learning how to write counterpoint. But I missed all that.

**Brown:** You just made it up the way you . . .

**Holman:** I had this idea when I just started writing. I don't know where it came from. You've got a line, and something's got to happen besides this line. We'll put another line with it.

**Brown:** That approach created the Bill Holman approach to arranging and composition. I mean, you arrived at your voice just by that process. That's also invaluable, to be able to tell that to – what I heard, it felt good to me.

**Holman:** Two days of talk, and it comes down to that.

**Brown:** On that note, unless you've got anything else you'd like to add to this Smithsonian NEA Jazz Oral History interview, I just want to thank you on behalf of those two institutions and Ken Kimery here. We have to say, the entire jazz field, jazz world, that we all are indebted to what you've contributed to this music, to American musical culture. Just want to say thank you, from our hearts.

**Holman:** Thank you, Anthony. That's good to hear.

**Brown:** Great. Thank you, Bill.

(transcribed and edited by Barry Kernfeld)

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