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

DAVE LIEBMAN
NEA Jazz Master (2011)

Interviewee:	Dave Liebman (September 4, 1946 -)
Interviewer:	Bill Kirchner with recording engineer Ken Kimery
Date:	January 4-5, 2011
Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Description:	Transcript, 166 pp.

Levy: Today is January 4th, 2011. I'm Bill Kirchner. We're here in my home in South Orange, New Jersey, and we're going to be talking with NEA Jazz Master Dave Liebman. Let's start out with the most obvious thing. What's your full name, Dave?

Liebman: No middle name. In fact, when I was about 13 or something, I said, "How come I don't have a middle name?" to my mother, and she said, "Choose one." In those days I was enamored by all the tough guys in the neighborhood, who were Vinny, Vito, Tony, Tito. I said, "Can I do Tito or Vinny?" She said, "No, I don't think so." So that was the end of any middle name. Nobody in our family has middle names. This is a rarity, I guess.

Kirchner: And just so we get the formal stuff out of the way, you were born what day?

Liebman: September 4th, 1946, Brooklyn, New York.

Kirchner: In a hospital? At home?

Liebman: Brooklyn Jewish Hospital.

Kirchner: What were your parents' names?

Liebman: Francis. Her maiden name was Gatina – Hungarian, Alsace, a little German, and my father was a Liebman. They were from Belarus, White Russian Minsk, around

that area. My father was – a grandfather – I never met him. I think he died when I was very young – he was a butcher, upper East – East Harlem. My mother lived in Brooklyn. I think that's where they were always, like Crown Heights, that area. They met through school, teaching, because they were both teachers.

Kirchner: So you're a first generation American.

Liebman: I would be second, right? No, I'm second generation, because I'm talking about the grandparents coming from the Old World. My parents were born here.

Kirchner: What did your father do for a living?

Liebman: Teacher. That was the Board of Ed., New York school system, both my parents. Eventually my father, his last 10 years, 15 years, was an assistant principal in Brooklyn, Ditmas Junior High, and he was out in Rockaway. My mother was in Rockaway. My father was in Borough Park and then at Ditmas Junior High. My mother was in Bedford-Sty, because when I was a kid, I used to go – we had to go to the hospital. I would go spend the day with her. Then she ended up in Far Rockaway. The Board of Ed., until they retired.

Kirchner: Are they still alive?

Liebman: My mother died in 2006 or '7. My father died in '86.

Kirchner: Do you have any siblings?

Liebman: I have an older brother, five years older. I'm not sure where he is now. I think he's in Las Vegas. We're not in contact.

Kirchner: Is he musical at all?

Liebman: He played accordion, which I got to say, that's what I first saw. But nothing more than that.

Kirchner: Were your parents musicians?

Liebman: My mother had classical piano lessons when she was young, from what I understand, and would occasionally sit down and play. In fact, on my first record, *Look How Far* – my first official record as a leader, I did *Pablo's Story* for Pablo Picasso, and at the end I – what's the word? – I put in, inserted, *The Breeze and I (Andalusia)*, because I always remember her playing that at the piano [Liebman hums a phrase of the melody]. That one.

Kirchner: I was going to ask you why you did that.

Liebman: That's why. It was dedicated. That's good that you know that.

My father loved classical music. I remember – and I still have them, LPs – Tchaikovsky. I know Brahms's Fourth was there. I remember Beethoven. He loved Caruso. I would hear that in the background in the house. He wasn't a fanatic, but that was the music he loved, opera and classical.

Kirchner: What do you remember of your earliest musical experiences, things you heard on the radio, or live, or whatever.?
Liebman: Rock-and-roll. I loved – I don't know if I heard *Rock Around the Clock* when it came out, but I was there certainly pretty close to the beginning. And Elvis was my big hero, Elvis Presley. Even I used to sing, when I was on crutches – because I had the polio thing, which I'm sure we'll get to eventually – I would take the crutch, like a guitar, stand in front of the mirror, and think I was Elvis. I sang *Hound Dog, Don't Be Cruel, Heartbreak Hotel.* I loved Elvis Presley. So I was – the first musical experience, it's got to be 8, 9 years old, listening to rock-and-roll and Martin Block's *Make Believe Ballroom,* AM radio, Saturday mornings, the Top 25, and I had my own Top 25 for years. I still have it. But I liked the best of the week, and collected 45s. I still have – probably have a pretty valuable collection of original 45s, things from Elvis, Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry, etc. That was my first music that I loved. I liked to dance. I learned how to dance. As I said, I won a talent show – I guess it was not a talent show, but it was an assembly in fourth grade, PS 99, I got up. I know I sang *All Shook Up.* I remember that. Yeah, it was rock-and-roll.

Kirchner: When Bill Haley and Elvis came on the scene, you would have been about 9 or 10. So that makes sense.

Liebman: That's about right, yeah And I loved – to get to it, I liked the sound of the saxophone. And of course since early rock-and-roll, as you know, had – the saxophone was the main soloing instrument, 8 bars here and there. I liked the tenor. I didn't even – certainly didn't know what it was. Nobody in my immediate family – I never saw a tenor. But I liked the sound of it, and I wanted to play that instrument from rock-and-roll, right from the beginning.

Kirchner: Did you hear some of the r-and-b tenor players like Big Jay McNeely and Sam "the Man" Taylor?

Liebman: Not at that time, no. These are solos from, like, *Rock Around the Clock,* that guy Rudy whatever his name was, a long Italian name. Duane Eddy had a great

saxophone player, *Rebel Rouser*. Then there were the little crossover things, as I know now, like *Walkin' with Mr. Lee,* Lee Allen, *Honky Tonk,* Bill Doggett. They were r-and-b guys who snuck into the pop charts, and I heard – that's where I heard tenor. Even *In the Still of the Night* has a great – no, *Come Go with Me,* my favorite song – the Del Vikings – my favorite song from that era has a great tenor saxophone solo with a giant squeak in the middle of it. I'm either thinking of *Come Go with Me* or *In the Still of the Night,* which is a very famous tenor squeak. The cat's reed, and that's the way – but I liked the sound of the tenor from rock. I really did.

Kirchner: How about Sam Butera with Louis Prima?

Liebman: Not at that time, nope, no. There was no jazz – jazz, swing, Benny. None of that was in the house, that I remember, and I didn't have any relatives. Often you hear, "I went to my uncles, and I heard Benny" [Goodman] – not that I recall.

Kirchner: You mentioned getting polio, which happened pretty early in your life, right?

Liebman: '49, yeah. Summer of '49.

Kirchner: Why don't we talk about that now?

Liebman: I of course don't remember the actual incident, but from what my mother told me, and described, I got up. I couldn't walk. I just fell over. I had had a fever. Went to the doctor. He said, "We don't know what it is." She raced home. She tells me she had a police escort across the George Washington Bridge. This happened in Monticello, where we – we spent summers in the Catskills, as most teachers did. They had July and August off. We were at a place called White Lake. I guess it still exists. I just got sick and was in the hospital for the next 13 months from that day, from what I understand. Of course then, at three years old, you don't know anything, and you don't realize it. Somebody asked me – in fact I was just talking to somebody about this earlier – we were just talking this week – earliest childhood memories. It's always good to say, "What do you remember from – the earliest thing you remember?" I remember the balloon losing air at the end of my bed in the hospital. Again, I'm not sure if this is when I was 7 or 8, when I had a couple of the operations. But I remember watching the balloon go down. It was right – somebody gave me a balloon. In the middle of the night it was starting to wither, and how upset I was.

Also I remember once with my brother, that – he wasn't allowed in. He was then – he was 12, 13, whatever. My mother, they wheeled me out to the balcony – whatever it was – overlooking the parking lot. My brother was downstairs. He was waving to me. But that's about all I remember, except a couple other hospital scenes. But that was – my whole childhood, outside of normal, whatever normal was, is tied up with the next doctor,

the next thing, and when you're going to have this magic operation that'll enable you to walk without a brace. That happened eventually, I'm 13 years old, after several operations, several broken legs, etc., etc.

Kirchner: You mean you broke your legs trying to walk?

Liebman: I broke my leg in the hospital, that three-years-old thing. Fell down. That was an extra four months. I broke my leg on ice. I've done that several times through that whole era. And I had a couple operations. They did – I don't know what they tried. The main thing was, we went to Bellevue. It was a world famous guy, Dr. [?Diever]. The reason we were going there – this is when I went to my mother's school. That's why I know she was in Bed-Stuy, because I would be off from school. I'd be with her until 2, 2:30, 3, and then we'd go to 34th Street. I remember this very distinctly. It's probably where I learned geography so well. It's because there was a giant map outside the elevator, and pins of people who came to this rehabilitation center. I remember sitting for hours, waiting for the doctor, going, "Look at the Philippines," like that.

Anyway, the big deal was that I was – I could have this operation called arthrodesis, which was something to do with stabilizing the bones, so that the foot wouldn't go out. You had to wait until your bones were mature, which is somewhere around 12, 13 years old. So it was always like, "When are we going to do it? When are we going to do it?" "He's not ready yet. David's not ready yet," cha cha cha. Finally, about 13, 14, I had that operation. Then, shortly after, I got rid of the brace until the last 20 years.

Kirchner: So they considered the operation "successful"?

Liebman: Yeah, from what they – which means, like right now, I can lift it only in one direction. It's stabilized. That's – my problem was that the foot just went out, from whatever the polio did. Of course everything was atrophied, weak. The knee was weak. But I then went without a brace until 1987, '88. We'll eventually get to it. So that's a long period that I didn't have a brace.

Kirchner: Gene Lees, whom we both knew, also had childhood polio. I don't know if you knew that or not.

Liebman: Yes I did. In fact he wrote some great articles about post-polio syndrome, years ago.

Kirchner: I wanted to ask you about this, because he said in later years, it was expected that things would come about.

Liebman: Some people have gotten it. I know some people who have. I have not, thankfully. I feel weakening happening. I definitely see myself walking worse. But I'm also 64 years old. Not to tell you about that. That's going to happen no matter – in a normal situation, let alone in a situation like our situation, where you are stressing on this one side of your body, etc., etc. It's eventual – it's wear and tear. I feel it. There's no question about it.

Kirchner: So knock on wood.

You started playing piano fairly early, right?

Liebman: Yes, because I wanted the saxophone. I was vehement about it. She said, "You must take two years" – my mother. My father, of course – it's just that my mother was the vocal one. So I always say, my mother. "You got to take two years of piano, because that's how you'll know music." Aw, come on. So I did. I took three years, classical. It was a neighborhood teacher. *Für Elise, Spinning Song*, and a little Bach, blah blah blah. Eventually, like 12 years old, I said, "Okay. Is it time? Can I get it?" Then there was the, "You have to play clarinet first." So I didn't get to tenor until right before my Bar Mitzvah, because I know I played at my Bar Mitzvah, *I'm in the Mood for Love*, with the band, and I'd been playing nine months. So that's when I'm 13. That's September of '59. So by the time I was . . .

Kirchner: You played that on clarinet?

Liebman: No, on tenor, finally, because I took clarinet, like around 11 and a half, 12 years old. I did it for a year or whatever. Hated the clarinet, probably because I didn't – I was pushed into it. Because those days, the belief – you know – the belief – not the belief. De rigueur. You've got to play clarinet first, because it's harder.

Kirchner: That's what I – I started on clarinet when I was seven.

Liebman: Yeah, because it's much more difficult, which it is. But my question still remains: whoever said you wanted to play clarinet, anyway?

Kirchner: Did you ever hear Frank Wess's remark about the clarinet?

Liebman: No.

Kirchner: The clarinet was invented by two guys who hated each other.

Liebman: With all due respect to the great clarinet players in the world, it's just never been an instrument that turned me on. I love it in classical, and of course, obviously – I

think the reason that it never turned me on, because I always associated it with that sound of swing and that kind of syrupy, corny extension of Jewish klezmer-type playing that I probably never heard. If I had heard Jimmy Giuffre first, I probably would have loved the clarinet, because he was so hip and so cool on it, or if I had heard someone like Eddie Daniels play, but I guess Benny just didn't get to me when I was a kid. "Aw, that's the old stuff." And it's not fair to clarinet, because, as I'm saying, there's some amazing players on it. Tony Scott, man, the way that guy played the instrument, it was a joke, it was ridiculous, it was beyond the instrument. So I take everything back I've ever insulted the clarinet for. Hold the guards, please.

Kirchner: Although you and I being people who specialize in the soprano, we've heard all the dissing about soprano players. We have to put up with that garbage.

Liebman: That's right. Thank you very much. I feel better.

Kirchner: So you started – when you started saxophone, was it on tenor?

Liebman: Yeah, finally tenor. Yes. Yeah, right away. Never did the alto. It just never came up.

Kirchner: The first saxophone players you heard, then, were rock-and-roll tenor players.

Liebman: That had already by then been ensconced in my brain. Not that I played like that. I didn't try to play like that. I began playing – I have to back up. Where I studied music, after the classical, where I did clarinet, where I did saxophone, was in a little neighborhood school called Bromley – B-r-o-m-l-e-y – Studios. It was a family, Fay Bromley, Buster Bromley, and Eric Bromley, the son, who was going to Juilliard. I spent Saturday mornings there. This is from around 12 years old. My mother found it in the phone book, I guess, neighborhood school, 15 minutes from the house in Brooklyn. I went for piano lessons. I went back, took piano with the father, learning chords and all that. I took saxophone with Nat Shapiro. He was the teacher at that time. And I took combo. You sat and you play *Combo Orks* [orchestrations]. You remember *Combo Orks*, with all three . . .

Kirchner: Charlie [?Cohen] books.

Liebman: The three-part harmony written out. This family – this mother, Fay, who just died – amazing. I was in touch with her all the way through – she booked you in the Catskills as soon as you could play. I was there. I'm 13 years old. My first summer – because I'm September. So right July, August of my 13th year, becoming 14, I played at the Cedar Hill Hotel in South Fallsburg. I basically was playing – what I'm getting at is, I didn't play blues and rock-and-roll that I heard. I played club dates, because my teacher

was a club-date musician. He taught me the vibrato with the wa-wa with the jaw, wa-wa-wa-wa. I had that sound. I learned tunes. I wore a tuxedo at 14, 15 years old. I felt like quite a mensch. You know what I mean? I was going. I had a tuxedo. I had three tuxedos at one point. So, style-wise, that's what I was playing before I started to hear jazz.

Kirchner: It's like Gerry Niewood once told me, that he thought club dates were the best preparation for jazz playing.

Liebman: Little I knew, that we're playing the bebop tunes, that when you're playing *How High the Moon* [Liebman sings the opening melody], that you would end up hearing Bird [Charlie Parker] playing it. Because then, Top 40 didn't exist. Club date was the standards and cha-chas and mambos and the freilachs and Hava Nagila and tarantella and all that stuff. That's where the clarinet – clarinet and the flute, because now I was playing finally. By about 14, 15, I got the flute. So you're playing the Latin tunes on flute, blah, blah, blah. But it was a great training, first of all, in styles – maybe it led to my eclecticism. I don't know – in the fact that you had to switch from a Latin tune to the Peabody [a dance] in two seconds, because Grandma asked for it, or something like that. That was a great – it was a great training ground, and I did it religiously. I was in the Catskills every summer until I was 18 or 19. I was there at Passover weekends and Sukkot and all that stuff – from April to October, every weekend, more or less, that we could, we were in the Catskills. I had a group called the Impromptu Quartet, and we were a club-date band. That was really my training.

Kirchner: Student musicians don't get that now, and they don't know what they're missing.

Liebman: No, they don't get it. They'll never get it. It's over, all over. But of course Top 40 ruined that too. By the time that came in, a guy doing "a club date," even before the deejay stuff, '80s, '70s, they were already playing Top 40, because they're old tunes. They lost their value to the new generations.

Kirchner: When did you first hear jazz?

Liebman: I always tell the famous first story of Birdland. If that's the first, I don't know. But how I really heard it was at Bromley Studios, because between the combos at 11 o'clock, and then they switch over at 12 o'clock to another bunch of kids, Eric, who played alto, and his assistant, Nick something, played – I don't know if he was a drummer or not. He played drums like I do, amateur have-fun drums – they would just play while you were putting your horn away. Kids are coming in and out. I'm like, what the heck? I always tell this story. It sounds so naive, but it's the truth. "How do you move your fingers that fast with your eyes closed and no music in front of you?" That completely floored me. I just couldn't believe it, because here I am, playing, looking, and

everything like that. And moving fast, and seeming to have a good time. I didn't under- – I had no idea what the music was like. But that's probably the first time I heard jazz.

Then it was more so when I went to the Catskills, because of course the guys all wanted to play after the gig was over. The Catskills had certain places where you could hang. It had sessions every Thursday night at a place called the Hom[?], which is still I think in existence near Ellenville, in that part of the Catskills. 1 o'clock in the morning until 5, they left the nightclub open. Arnie Lawrence was the leader of the band, and you could sit in. I didn't sit in until I was 16. I had no chance to get on stage. I could hardly play. But this is Eddie Daniels, Steve Schafer, Marty Morrell, this guy named Donny Kretmar who just disappeared. He had been playing electric bass. I don't know what ever happened to him. I thought he was brilliant. Lonnie Rutstein. I remember these guys' names better than a lot of other people from the past. I heard it every summer. So it was like, "Where are the guys playing? Where are they playing?" So that's where I informally heard it.

Then finally, the most formal way was at 15 years old. I'm in a dance band, playing tenor, high school – Lafayette High School – and my friend said, "Do you want to go to Birdland?" Christmas week, vacation. "What is Birdland" What is it? Blah blah blah. Anyway, I cleared it with my parents, went to Birdland. I was just talking about this. I'll tell you how this is a funny story. I was in somebody's house a couple days ago, and he put on Count Basie at Birdland, 1961.

Kirchner: Great record.

Liebman: I never knew this record. It had – because it said it's his only engagement in New York during those years. It said something in the liner notes. This is just a few days ago, for a Christmas party. I said to the guy, that has to have been the week I was there, because I saw Basie opposite Gerry Mulligan's – whatever it was called – the jazz concert band.

Kirchner: Concert Jazz Band.

Liebman: I was – that's Christmas week of my – I'm 15 in September. So that's Christmas week of that year. It's '61. The reason I remember it – I don't remember the music – I remember that a Coca-Cola was a dollar. We sat in the peanut gallery.

Kirchner: I was going to ask you that.

Liebman: Which I didn't know and became intimate with eventually. We sat in the back, high school kids. I was the youngest. They were 17, maybe 16 years old, the other guys. Took the subway. "What you want to order?" They came over. I said, "Coca Cola." She

said, “That’ll be a dollar.” I went, “What?” I flipped, because it was five cents in Brooklyn. So that’s 20 times. Okay.

Plus, I had never seen so many black people in one place. I had never seen women dressed the way they were dressed, the waitresses and the girls that had the cigarettes and the box around the – we have a camera, so you know the – the box with cigarettes, and then the camera girl with the big flash. I said, what is this about?

So then started the whole folklore thing. Philosophically, I had no idea I’d do music. You’re a kid. You’re into music because of the music. But you also get into music because it represents something to you. Something’s going on that isn’t just because it sounds great. I think what happened there is, I went, “There’s another world out here.” This is not Brooklyn. I don’t think so. This is not Mom and Dad and Aunt so-and-so.

Kirchner: You’re not in Kansas anymore, Toto.

Liebman: Thank you. This is exactly it. I think that is – in a way, it was a gigantic culture shock which I’m still absorbing in a certain way, because I wasn’t headed in that direction.

And then – to finish this – a few months later I went – I’m sure we’ll talk about this, but I went, and I saw [John] Coltrane live. That was – epiphany was – if there was a night, it was that February gig, because now I see, because of Fuji’s [Yasuhiro Fujioka] book with all the dates, I see the billing, Bill Evans and Coltrane, and now I’ve pinned it down to the week that I was there, February of ’62. That was the beginning of realizing that something more than meets the eye . . . .

Kirchner: The first time I ever heard Coltrane was live at the Pittsburgh Jazz Festival, nine days before he recorded *Ascension,* June 1965.

Liebman: What a way to come in.

Kirchner: So, I’m curious, because we both were exposed to Coltrane live for the first time, before we knew who he was or had heard him. What was your initial reaction to Coltrane?

Liebman: There’s a few things that happened that night. The first one was, it was the group with Eric Dolphy. I’m with my first girlfriend, a flute player in the orchestra. I’m first clarinet. A love affair. We went to Mama Leone’s for dinner, and we went to Birdland. I walk – I didn’t have any idea, except that I had been there a few months earlier, but I didn’t know who was playing. There’s a placard. It has a picture of Bill Evans – maybe a picture of him, Bill Evans Trio – I didn’t have any idea who he is – and

this picture of a guy playing soprano. It's Coltrane. I'm just starting to read *Down Beat.* I said, "This is the guy who plays soprano saxophone," which was a big thing then, because I never saw one. So we go in. They're playing. I say to Julie, I say, "This guy sounds like he's practicing." He's missing notes. This is that period when he's going for the altissimo. He's squeezing out the G's and the A's and all that. And the other guy, with the ball in his head – that thing that Eric had – I could recognize in the little fledgling ear that I had at that time, that this was jazz, because Eric played at least rhythmically. He played in that style. Trane was just like – I don't know what he was doing.

So that was the first thing. The second thing was, they go into this tune. She leans over. She says, "That's from *The Sound of Music.*" I said, "Wait a minute." So now I think – this like, we're walking into the hippest place in the world, and I say, there's no way that those guys are going to play something from Julie Andrews. This is the height of absurdness. No way. Sure enough, of course, it was *My Favorite Things,* as I found out. Those are the big things that night, was, "Who is this guy? He sounds like he's practicing," and this ditty from *The Sound of Music* is being played in Birdland. It impressed me.

Kirchner: It's funny. My reactions were very much the same. I was two months short of 12 years old.

Liebman: But you heard the free stuff then.

Kirchner: No, he was – this was . . .

Liebman: '66?

Kirchner: No, '65. This is the so-called transition period, with the quartet. He played *My Favorite Things,* but it was like – you know the '65 records, like *Transition* and . . .

Liebman: And *Vanguard Again* – but that's '66.

Kirchner: It was really intense.

Liebman: Oh God. I can't believe walking in on that.

Kirchner: Half the audience walked. But the bill that night, just to be quick about it – I don't want to hog your time – but the bill that night was Earl Hines, Carmen McRae, Stan Getz's quartet with Gary Burton, Steve Swallow, and probably Roy Haynes, Coltrane's quartet, and the [Duke] Ellington band.

Liebman: It definitely stood out like a sore thumb.

Kirchner: Everybody but Ellington and Coltrane were on before intermission. Then Coltrane's quartet came on after intermission. So as a result, even though a lot of people walked, a lot of people like my parents and me gritted our teeth and stayed, because we wanted to hear Duke.

Liebman: Isn't it – when you think about it though, especially then, where he played, from '65 until the end, he must have been aware of the – not antipathy, but of the reaction. I remember Newport, seeing him in '66, the people – and the Titans of the Tenor Saxophone story. I always tell that story. Half the audience left Lincoln Center. He must have known that. He didn't have his eyes closed. This is a big difference in the response from – you hear the Europe concerts in '63. They're playing *Mr. PC* then. They're playing *Impressions.* The people are enthusiastic. Then you hear this. Is this because it was America, where you just don't know anything? Or it's just because he was really taking it far out? He must have felt that vibe. How could he not? I think about that.

Kirchner: I get the impression from reading stuff that he said in interviews and whatever that he just felt that it was what he had to do, regardless of the consequences. He just felt that that was the course he had to take.

Liebman: But imagine the guys getting off the bandstand. You know how you are, when you're on with your guys, and you get off the bandstand. "Man, it was weird out there." Somebody's thinking something. There's four guys up there. Maybe nobody's talking about it, but you got to think, God, they just got up in the middle and left. What a drag.

Kirchner: For example, at the end of '65 McCoy Tyner and Elvin Jones left, because they couldn't deal with the way the music was going. Did you ever talk to Elvin about this? Did he ever say anything?

Liebman: No. It's just what I read, what you read, that it was too loud, two drummers, and I think ego-wise, he didn't want to be competing with anybody else. You know the way he was. And Rashied [Ali], he was the kid on the block. Who knows? McCoy couldn't hear himself, he says.

Kirchner: But Elvin never said anything to you about this?

Liebman: No. I would think that would be taboo.

Kirchner: Yeah. I would imagine.

All right. So that's your first experience with Coltrane. Obviously that was a life-shifting experience for you.

Liebman: Eventually. Certainly not that night, although I tell it like it was. Epiphanies don't happen immediately. They take time to enlarge and magnify and get exaggerated with time, because we exaggerate. But it certainly made me – the main thing is, it made me see, this is not a hobby. What can I say? I'm still 15 years old. This is not just playing saxophone in school band. That's the same instrument I have at home in Brooklyn under my bed. This can't be possible, that's the same instrument. It's a tenor saxophone. It's the same instrument, made by the same people. How could he play it like that? That was the thing. And then of course Elvin and McCoy in the band, the intensity and energy, the way that they played when you saw them live. It was just such an experience. You're shifting in your seat, 45 minutes. They're still playing a duet, and your back hurts. You know what I mean? People like this – guys are serving drinks, and they're still playing the same tune. Everything about it made me go, this is way beyond any reality – again, I'm 15. I'm not – I can't cognate these thoughts. But it appeared that this was what was going on. This is way past anything I ever knew. This is beyond Birdland's lifestyle. This is like – how can four guys make music like that? What is this about, this kind of intensity, that I can't take my eyes off it? I have certainly no understanding of the music. I didn't understand a thing. Nobody knew what was going on in my – whatever my peers were at that time. I was trying to play like that. I'm sure we'll talk about it. But we know at that period, there was no jazz education, there was no transcription books, blah blah blah. I was just mystified, but I knew there was something here that's got to be dealt with. You can't turn away from this.

Kirchner: When you were in high school, did you have a band director who was especially hip to these things?

Liebman: No, not that – we never talked jazz. It was a decent band director, Mr. [?] and Mr. [?Polikov]. I remember them. We were in the dance band. We kind of ran ourselves. But no, I didn't have any older guy who said, "Listen to this." I didn't. I had my friends, Mike Garson, my first friend, piano player. We hunted it together, maybe. And my friend Steve Lipman. He would come and see Trane with me. You had friends, and they'd say, did you hear this record?, did you hear that record? But I would say, more or less, I was on my own. And the teaching, again, remember, there's no teaching either, because I'm studying with Mr. Shapiro, and that's certainly not jazz. Not that it was taboo, but it wasn't – nobody taught jazz then. There was no – eventually I got to [Lennie] Tristano, because he was the only game in town. But nobody taught jazz, really.

Kirchner: When did you get to Tristano?

Liebman: It looks like I'm 17. So, '63, '64, and it's because of my friend Mike Garson, who plays piano. His father was a liquor salesman, and on one of the rounds, they stopped at the Half Note. He supplied liquor to the Half Note. Mike walked in, and he

saw Tristano with Warne [Marsh] and Lee [Konitz]. He – Mike was a year older than me in high school. He was part of my Impromptu Quartet, my first close friend, musical friend. Somehow he knew the – "Do you give lessons?" Anyway, he started studying with Lennie, and he said, you ought to go to Lennie. I was desperate to have anybody teach me anything about jazz, because there was nobody. There was nothing. No books. There was nothing to learn from.

So I went to Lennie at 17. The short of the story is, it was a year, and I went Sundays. You might know he lived out Hillside Avenue, 190th Street, in Jamaica.

Kirchner: In Queens.

Liebman: You had to take – from Brooklyn, you had to go to Manhattan. Then you went to blah blah – Jamaica line. You got off. You took a bus up Hillside Avenue, and then you walked a block or two. He was at the end of a street, Victorian house. I can see it right now. Dark trees. It looked like Vincent Price. It looked like the House of Usher. It was forbidding, let alone going in there. You lined up. You got in. You got a lesson.

My favorite story is, at the first lesson, I'm walking – first of all, the room is empty, except for the piano, living room, whatever it is. White, if I remember right. Somebody answered the door, a little weird. I don't know. It was strange. And I'm intimidated and nervous, although I don't know who Lennie really is, musically. I don't really know. I just know he's a famous musician who teaches jazz, from Mike, but I'm not at all aware of the genius that he was. He says, "What do you play?" He's blind, right? Because he'll take any instrument. "Tenor." He says, "Play a B-flat major scale from the bottom all the way up to the top." Now you know, because you're a saxophone player, how difficult it is on a good day to get a B-flat out with having an explosion, and on a nervous day, at 17 years old, etc., etc. So I went bleh bleh bleh. Finally it came out, and I got up to C or D or E-flat. I think I got halfway up, and he said, "Go home, and learn how to play your low notes." Or he said, "Go home and learn how to play that scale, and don't come back until you do." Something like that. That was the end of the lesson.

Of course he was right. Eventually I studied with him. I did the Lester Young. I did the blah blah blah, playing a melody without the chords, just with an [?] note. I did the thing. I was loyal, because I wanted to. I didn't get it, not that you really get it at that age. But I didn't get it, and he was so strange that I – look, I'm a kid. You're a kid, and so everything's personal. You don't like the guy. So suddenly he's of no use to you. You know what I mean? I didn't say I don't like the guy. I didn't have any feeling about him. But until one night – one Sunday I came in, having just seen Trane the night before, blown out of my brains, saying oh, I – I'm just talking, like a kid. I say, "I saw John Coltrane last night, and it was fantastic." He says, "He ain't playing nothing, and Elvin hasn't played good since he came to New York." Some categorical diss. Dissed

completely categorical, nothing – don't even go there. I'm like – the guy couldn't see me, but I must have fallen off my feet. I was like, how could you say that about my man? Anyway, that was my last lesson. I couldn't face him after that.

Kirchner: Reportedly he had those kind of views, but then he would turn around. Like, I heard that he loved Wayne Shorter's solo on *E.S.P.* on the Miles [Davis] record.

Liebman: It's quite possible. He was very selective. He was a genius. But basically, it all stopped with Bird, as far as he was concerned. In the end – look, I could dig it. From that standpoint – it's like a Barry Harris situation, too. I can understand these guys. I respect them. I appreciate them. I don't know if that's the way to live, but that's their business. Because to me, you're cutting off half the ship, but that's your – if you want to be like that, you must have a reason.

But he was – the thing about Lennie – the main thing that I got, though, when all is said and done – I don't think there's any one thing I got, except understanding more about Lee Konitz and Warne Marsh, which is timely, because I just recorded with Lee. So I know more now than I ever did, and it came back to Lennie. But it was that there's a system that you can learn this music. Because of the conditions in those days, and the "we can't teach jazz" thing that was around, you just didn't know what to do. I saw – even though it wasn't right for me, and I wasn't – it wasn't Lennie. It was me. I wasn't mature enough – that you could learn this music. You can do something. It isn't just hit and miss and put your finger in the air and wait for the wind to hit. That was the thing that – I didn't know it then when I left him, but I see that that's what it is. He said, "This is serious business," because he was very serious. Outside of peculiarities, and eight-minute lesson, and when you missed a lesson, you had to pay – I never heard of that before, but he was right, etc., etc. – the point was that this was a discipline that was real, and there was a way to approach it, which came to roost 20 years later when I became this jazz education thing. But that was a thing that had to be noticed. There was a guy who really knew what he was doing.

Kirchner: Our lives ran parallel in a number of ways. One of them is, I studied with Lee when I was about the same age as you were, when I was – from 18 to 20.

Liebman: He's much more communicative.

Kirchner: Yeah. Lee is a more sympathetic person than Lennie was.

Liebman: As a human being.

Kirchner: That was for me a life-changing experience. But I got the same revelation that you did.

Liebman: Especially at that age, and especially in our time, because of the lack of its being organized. We didn't know Jerry Coker. I didn't know [David] Baker. That's going to come later, when I finally met them and became friendly with them, familiar with them. But we from New York had nobody. We had [John] Mehegan, Hall Overton's little class on [Thelonious] Monk or whatever he did at The New School, and Lennie Tristano. That was it in New York City, from what I understood.

Eventually I took lessons with Charles Lloyd. I went up to Charles. This is a couple of years later. This is just because Bob Moses, who became my first real playing friend, and who was way ahead of me. He was into jazz when he was eight years old. Parents lived in the same building with Max Roach and Elvin Jones, Central Park West. Abbey Lincoln was his godmother. Blah blah blah. He was my conduit to knowledge. I said, "Who's the one that sounds the most like Trane? Who can I go to." He said, "Charles Lloyd. He's playing with Cannonball Adderley." So I went to the Half Note. Sure enough, they're doing *Fiddler on the Roof* and all that. I went up to Charles, dressed beautifully, perfect. I went, "Mr. Lloyd, do you teach?" That's all. I just said, "Do you teach?" He said, "No." Then he looked at me. He said, "But you could come over tomorrow. I live on West 4th Street, across from the firehouse," which is right near the – right across from the Blue Note. I said okay.

I went that next day, Sunday. It was the next day. And for the next year I spent every Sunday with him. I even drove Keith [Jarrett] and Cecil [McBee] – they don't remember – Cecil, Keith, and Jack [DeJohnette], I drove them to Newport for them, because they were playing. And this is when I saw Trane at Newport, '66. Okay, I'm 20 years old.

I spent the year with Charles. I became his gofer, his aide-de-camp. I drove him around. I got him when he was at Slugs with [Pete] LaRoca. That's when I first met Pete, Tony Williams, etc., etc. I was a kid. He didn't teach me. I just hung out with him. We just hung out. I helped him. One night he said, "Let's go. We're driving to New Jersey." He looked in the *New York Times.* He went and he bought a Maserati, that day in New Jersey. Went to this beautiful, elegant house overlooking the Palisades, or something like that. Went up there. "I'm Mr. Lloyd." Blah blah blah. "I'm interested in buying your car." He said, "Okay, I'll buy it with cash." I don't remember. But I was his guy at that time. I spent a year, a solid year, being with him. I can't tell you that I learned anything in particular, but there are things that I gleaned from being around him, because he was a very intelligent teacher-type guy. He was a teacher, and there were things that I got out of him.

But again, once again, there was nobody to really tell you what to do. So, at 20 years old, I was still in the same boat, which is like, there's not going to be anybody to tell me. Now I could see that this is all going to be hit and miss, trial and error. Finally. No teacher is

going to show you what's going on. You're not going to get instruction from A to Z in order. Berklee School of Music, that's not – you don't do that. So, what? – you're on your own. I realized then that the only way I'm going to get good, is playing, playing, man hours spent on the horn, just man hours. That was the resolve that led me to the next years of my life, which is finally, after college – whenever we discuss that – the whole idea, how to live in a loft, that I had to play every day. I had to have drums and a piano, and a bass if possible, and that that door had to be open all day, and that was the only way I was ever going to get good, because of this situation.

Kirchner: When you went to college, you went to NYU, right?

Liebman: I went first year to Queens College. I stayed. I didn't want to leave New York, because of the music. By then I knew that there's no way to go anywhere else and still do anything to do with this. I got into a couple schools. I was on the waiting list at Brandeis, I remember, and I said to my mother, even if it comes through, I don't want to go there. Queens College, at that point, the major was going to be music. What else am I going to do? Because, in the back of your mind – first of all, it was expected of me to go to college. There was no question about it. The back of my mind, straight job, real world. Parents, right? Okay, music teacher, play on the weekends, like my teachers had been, all of them. So, Queens College. A very good music department, even then, known, really is well-known, blah blah blah. So I'm living in Brooklyn, my home, driving in and out, commuting to Queens College.

Kirchner: Rudi Blesh was teaching at Queens College, right?

Liebman: I don't remember anybody. I'm a freshman. So I certainly didn't get close to music. The only thing I do remember is the first day, the orientation, they handed us a music major, a list of four years required listening. It went from Palestrina to Stockhausen. I certainly was not equipped for classical music at all. This would have – this is like me walking into a complete new – a foreign country, not knowing the language. I diligently tried to catch up in the first semester. I stayed after school in the music library. I listened for hours to Palestrina, Vivaldi, and all these – I couldn't stand it. I'm trying to transcribe Miles and Trane and whatever, at home. I'm starting to get more serious about it, because all these events are coming together at 18 years old. I said, I'm not going to – this music major shit, that's not happening. So I switched to psychology, because in those days, English lit., psychology, they were the go-to, when you had nothing else to do. I don't know what it is now, but there's always like, I don't know what I'm going to do. I'll major in that.

That didn't work. I don't know how we picked NYU, but I went to NYU uptown division, University Heights. It was the arts and science up there. I don't know why I went up there, but anyway, it was great. It was a campus in the middle of the Bronx, off

the Major Deegan highway. Decided I was going to take a major that's something I liked. I loved history and was always very good in it. I was in advanced placement in high school. I won some contests. I liked American history. The reason is because I had a great teacher in high school. In the end, if you have a great teacher, you probably – that makes you like the subject. He was Mr. Feldman. He was an amazing teacher. I still see him now. He was great. I just loved history. So I majored in American history and decided that I'm going to have two lives. I'm going to do school. I'm going to get through school and get my degree, bachelor, B.S. in this case, bachelor of science, and I'm going to live downtown when I don't have to be in school. So that was the beginning of two lives, 19, 20, 21, Charles Lloyd, that whole thing. This is that period.

Kirchner: When you were in college, who were the peers in your peer group that you were playing with at that time, besides Moses?

Liebman: Moses. This is just about – not yet. I'm not meeting [Steve] Grossman and those guys yet. No, I am, because he was 16 and I'm 20, 21, through Mike Garson, who went into the Army and then found guys were playing. There was a guy named Jimmy. He played like Elvin.

Kirchner: Strassburg?

Liebman: No, not Jimmy Strassburg. I'll talk about that. The guy lived out on Long Island. I forget his last name. A piano player, Larry Schubert. Completely disappeared. He played like McCoy. Lanny Fields was the bass player. I think he's still up in the Catskills. And Grossman. It was a little crew. Eventually Lenny White and this whole thing. That's where I met George Cables and Lenny. This was all Queens guys, a little crew. Steve lived in Queens then, on Long Island. They were the people that I started associating with, besides Moses, going downtown and playing with Moses. That was another circle, Jim Pepper, those guys. That was a different thing. And also some of the free guys. So there's these two communities that I was trying to hang with, get on with.

In certain ways Steve was my first guy – Steve could really play, because he was great at 16. He was already good. I was seeking jam sessions, playing. Even in high school, I had already played at hospitals and whatever. My mother had always set up concerts. I played at Bellevue. I did all that stuff. So any time there was a concert at NYU, I always had a concert. Larry Coryell through Moses, Jim Pepper through Moses. Then the other side was this Grossman crew and all those people. So these were two cliques that I was circulating in.

Kirchner: When did you start playing with Pete LaRoca's band.

Liebman: Pete is ’69, through Moses again. Moses heard from Swallow that they were looking for a saxophone player, and Pepper couldn’t make it, because I guess he was up for it. I don’t know who told me, if it was Swallow. I had met Swallow through Moses. That’s right, because me and Swallow go back with Moses to before Pete. He said “We’re playing in my house,” so-and-so, “Come, and we’ll hear you play.” It was on 19th, 20th, or 18th and Ninth Avenue, a brownstone. I remember it. That’s where Steve was living. It was Chick [Corea], Steve, and Pete. I walked in and set up. He said, “What do you want to play?” First time I’d met Pete. I’d seen Pete with Charles, but I didn’t know him. I said, *Softly as a Morning Sunrise.* We played like eight bars. He stopped. He said, “Let’s rehearse.” That was the beginning of my time with him, ’69, which was very important for me, because he was the first mentor I really had.

Kirchner: Let’s talk more about that.

Liebman: Pete, when I talk about Pete, I always go like this [Liebman exhales], with a sign of resignation. He’s still alive.

Kirchner: He’s still playing.

Liebman: Not really, unfortunately. That’s the sadness of it all. Brilliant cat, smartest guy probably I’ve ever met, almost too smart. Became a lawyer. It’s more – he’s got a whole story. But anyway, he was – the band was every bass player and every piano player in New York, and me, because I could see, this was it. As soon as I got with him, I could see, this is a heavy guy. I didn’t really know him. I knew he’d been with Trane. I knew the story, etc., etc., but I really didn’t know how he played until he played. It was magical, and with Chick and him and Swallow, the rhythm section, it was unbelievable. I have tapes of it. It’s still unbelievable. We’re playing tunes – not standards, maybe one or two standards, but everything was Pete’s music. Chick would play *Straight Up and Down,* play a couple tunes like that. Normal tunes, but these guys, what they could do with time and changes. Steve’s on an upright bass, and sometimes Dave Holland, who had just come over and hadn’t met anyone, before he was with Miles. George Cables, JoAnne Brackeen, Jimmy Garrison, [Charlie] Haden, Larry Willis. Everybody came through, because what happened is, we took a gig at a club called La Boheme. Do you remember La Boheme?

Kirchner: Yeah.

Liebman: 69th and Broadway. $5 a night. I mean, $5 a night. Pete became – I don’t know if it was the house band or what, because Jimmy Lovelace used to play there a lot. He used to go up and jam there a lot. Anyway, we worked there somehow for six months. I don’t know if it was every night or every week, but we worked a lot there, and it was an ever-changing cast of bass and piano players, because, you know, a $5 gig. But I was

there every night. I was there. That's when I'm out of school already. I'm substitute teaching to make a living. Pete was – he was magical. He was the best drummer – he was among the best musicians I've ever known. Unfortunately he's not playing. He could be playing. Over the years – to digress, over the years, he would come out. In the '80s we played a little. I'm sure you saw it, because there was some press about him.

Kirchner: You even did a record, right?

Liebman: Did a record. Then he would go back in his hole and did his law thing. He's retired. I don't know what he does now. I was supposed to play with him a couple months. He's a problem child. I don't know how to explain it. With all due respect, he's just a very obstinate and difficult person, not socially or anything like that. Just, he's a perfectionist, idealist. I've never met a more – what's the word? – frustrating personality who you just absolutely love and respect. Anytime I'm with Swallow, we talk about it. It's the same. This is just his persona. But he was a great teacher and an incredible drummer. This guy – that's why I wish he was playing, because I wish drummers could hear him, because nobody ever played like this guy. He's probably the greatest of all time, so slippery, so loose, so natural, so musical. He could sing anything. He would sing the bass parts. He would sing the melody. It's the first time I ever understood what it was to really phrase, because he would say, I'm the only one. So he would sing the melody to me, of the tune. It would be his tune, or whatever. He'd say, "Like this," and he would put these little nuances to it, like everything you would ever want to play, and make it swing and feel so great, just singing it to you. I said, "God, Pete, I can't . . ." – "No, no, no, just" [Liebman hums]. I said, "I can't play like this." "Just listen." He was very cool with me. He was, of course, because he was my first, and I'm completely a basket case of nervousness and not-good-enough-ness and all that stuff, never feeling I was good enough, getting off the stage with these guys and trying to get up the nerve to come back the next night. He was cool with me. I've got to say, he was patient with me, because he could see I wasn't out of my mind. He said, "You wouldn't be here if you weren't doing it." I learned something, that, which is, you're not going to get gold stars. It's not the second grade. If they don't give you a demerit, you're in. If they don't fire you, you're in. If you expect them to say, "You're the greatest thing since apple pie," you're in the wrong place. I was used to getting, "You're good." You say, "I'm great." The guy didn't say nothing to me. So I was always going home feeling frustrated. This is simple communication, but those days – not those days – in general, you don't talk to musicians like that. They're not your friends. You don't say, "Do I sound good, man?" You just got to go home and wonder.

Kirchner: What's the musicians' joke?: "You sound great. How do I sound?"

Liebman: There's no reality there. So you're guessing everything, and you're not good enough to know. You're young. Nobody knows who you are. And you're up there with

the heaviest guys on the planet, and Sonny Rollins is walking in. I'm out of it. But he – until he decided to give it up – what happened was, we played the [Village] Vanguard. We played Thanksgiving weekend. This is 1969. It's the first time I played the Vanguard, and it was Chick and Swallow. We played three nights. I don't know how it was a split booking, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday – four nights – opposite Novella Nelson, who I don't think I ever heard of since, two bands.

Kirchner: Yes, you did.

Liebman: Did I? Singer, right?

Kirchner: Singer. I'll tell you this later.

Liebman: She became somebody else? I don't know.

Kirchner: No, she became – she's an actress.

Liebman: She's an actress?

Kirchner: Yeah.

Liebman: I only remember her name. That's all. We were opposite her. We played those four nights, and Pete, who had been gunning for this gig, bothering Max [Gordon]. "We going to be playing the Vanguard. We're going to be playing the Vanguard." Max finally gave him a gig. Then, the night after, he says, "I'm finished." He says, "That's it. They don't want me back. I'm not playing anymore. I'm going to become a lawyer." I said, "What?" And sure enough, the year later I saw the guy at NYU. He had books up to the ceiling.

Kirchner: As I heard it, he was driving a cab for a living.

Liebman: He was driving a taxi. Yeah, that's what he was doing. He said, "I don't want to work." He wouldn't be a sideman. He had decided – this is what I mean by his obstinance. Herbie [Hancock] wanted him, when Herbie did *Speak Like a Child.* He wouldn't do it. He said, "I don't want to play anything but 4/4." He's very – what's the word? – he wants it the way he wants it.

Kirchner: Doctrinaire?

Liebman: Very doctrinaire, and even now, when I want him to play – this gig that was supposed to happen a couple – it was supposed to be this spring, with [John] Abercrombie. "I'm not playing any eighth notes." I said, "Okay, Pete." So, very

doctrinaire is the word. For whatever, he wouldn't be a sideman. He wouldn't do anything. He was only going to be a bandleader and didn't meet with success. I don't know what happened. He became a lawyer. He became – in some things, he was my lawyer over these next – what? – 30, 40 years, until he retired. Very frustrating, but, to finish this part of the story, he is definitely my first jazz mentor, no question about it, outside of friends and things we've been discussing, peers or older peers. He's the first heavy guy that I was with on any kind of basis that imparted knowledge to me, both verbally and musically, because he was verbal. He was very, very intelligent. He also introduced me to the Sufis. He was into the Aranchia. This guy was – he was the smartest guy. He was a great lawyer, because he was so clever and so good with words. I love the cat. He's why I'm here, really.

Kirchner: You know his one Blue Note album, right? *Basra.*

Liebman: Oh, yeah. Of course. We played *Turkish* with him, *Turkish Women at the Bath,* and we played *Eider Down.* We played those tunes. He was some musician.

Kirchner: Around that time you were involved in a loft scene and started this thing called Free Life Communication, right?

Liebman: You and about two other people know about it.

Kirchner: I'm reading from your bio here.

Liebman: That's why nobody knows about it. As I said, when I knew that I had to play a lot, I had to get into the loft situation. I was familiar with the loft situation because of Moses. Moses, already by 17 he was living in a loft. I understood what it was about. You could play all the time. This was exactly what I wanted. So absolutely in '69, when I finished college – I graduated in June of '68. The next day I went in upstate New York to a place called Lake Katrine, near Kingston, Woodstock, boom boom boom. I found a place. I'd gone up in April. Drove a taxi for one week in April, Easter week, mid-break. Drove 20 hours a day to make just a certain amount of money, because my parents said, once school's over, you got it. You're on your own. We did enough for you. The NYU was $3,000 a year then, which was – I had to get some money. So I drove a taxi. I took the hack that I drove. That was an interesting week. I had enough money that I could rent a place for like $200 a month. It's 1968, '69. Had a girlfriend. Had a bass-player friend. We went and lived in this place from June, the day after graduation, until Thanksgiving. And that's my only real time of serious eight-hours-a-day practicing. I really had the chance to do it. What I did, I don't know. Transcription or whatever.

But when I came back, I said, I must get a loft, and I had to teach school. I had a degree, and I had the license for substitute teaching. I found a place on 19th Street in January,

Village Voice. You had to go 7 in the morning to Sheridan Square. You got the *Voice* as soon as it came out. You went into the ads, and you made the calls. By 9 o'clock, you had a place or you didn't. You didn't even get it. I found this joint on 138 West 19th Street. The guy's – the landlord's name was Lieberman, Sol Lieberman. Talk about coincidence. This is complete – this is comic. Nobody lived there. It was a Tai Dai shirt factory, three floors. I don't know what was on the first and second floors, but the third floor was the one that was available. It's the first time I ever got wind of what key money was. I had to pay somebody off in order to get in the door. Wild shit. Anyway, a long story short, the loft became a center, and we played all the time. My mid- – I don't know, mid-'70s, late '70s, Moses was the first who said it. He said – I don't know who said it, but he said, "There's organizations, the Chicago AACM," and there was something in St. Louis, that Oliver Lake thing, right? And Julius [Hemphill]. I was getting to – we were playing the loft for ourselves. Hundreds of hours of tapes. We're not playing for people, because jazz in '69 is at the lowest point it had ever been, at least up to that time. Rock-and-roll was completely ascendant. I said, we got to do something. Why don't we organize? Go out, play in churches. Do something. We got to play for people. We're just playing for ourselves. It's not right. Forget about making a living, because everybody was driving a taxi, or a bartender, or whatever. We got to do something to figure this out. He said, "They did organizations" blah blah blah. Moses wasn't quite the organizing kind of guy, but I am. I said, let's have a meeting.

We had a meeting, and we invited Leroy Jenkins, who was the St. Louis guy, and Anthony, who was the Chicago guy – Braxton – to come and talk to us. I'm talking 20 guys sitting on the floor of my loft. Bob Berg, Michael [Brecker], Randy [Brecker], Chick, Dave, Lenny White, some guys who disappeared since then. Richie Beirach, Frank Tusa, those guys. I remember, because Leroy came up, and he basically said, "If you don't have a cause" – you know, since you're not black or something. It was kind of an intim- – "if you don't have a cause, raison d'être, there's no reason to organize," for community and all that stuff. Kind of left us like, why did he come here and talk? Then Anthony came up at 10 o'clock at night, and he was peace and love. He was like, "Oh yeah, it's beautiful. I think it's beautiful." So that night, we talked, and we came up with a name. Bob Berg came up with the name, Free Life Communication. Somebody had a friend who was a lawyer. Next thing I know, we're a 501c. Next thing I know we're up for the New York State Council of the Arts grant and got $5,000. Next thing I know we're in the Space for Innovative Development on West 36th Street, a renovated church that the Rubin Foundation, who then supported the National Symphony in Washington – that's all I know about them – they came to my loft to hear us play, so we could get in. Nikolais Ballet, Murray Louis Dance Company, Joe Chaikin Video Theater or whatever it was called at that time, and Free Life Communication on a 2,000-foot square, beautiful, pristine space. We became the resident music group of this place. So we were a big deal for a couple of years, 300 concerts the first year, all free jazz.

We're stopping?

Kirchner: Why don't we switch now.

[recording interrupted]

You said you did – what? – 300 concerts?

Liebman: The first year of our official stay at the – it was called the Space for Innovative Development, this renovated church I'm talking about. As I say, we were there with Alwin Nikolais Ballet, the Murray Louis Dance Company. It was prestigious, as I discovered. I didn't know it then. But we were all into free jazz.

Just to go aside now, the model for the music, for at least the people I was hanging with, was *Ascension.* We just wanted to play like that. The loft, these tapes I have, the most that went on in my loft and other lofts – Moses had a loft, Gene Perla had a loft – maybe less so in Gene's place over there. He had Jan Hammer and Don Alias living there. But definitely in my loft it was free jazz à la *Ascension,* 6 guys – 6 saxophones at once, everybody playing drums, piano. It was like the collective energy jazz of *Ascension.* Let's put it this way: we were not even aware – I was not even aware of the whole *Nefertiti, Sorcerer,* the whole mid-Miles quintet. I really didn't know what the heck – I had no awareness of that. Everything was Trane, and late Trane. I think that what was happening in New York in the late '60s, right? – the cluster's really around '70, '71 – is the – I don't want to say – it's not negative – but the remnants of the free-jazz movement, because Coltrane's death – Coltrane embraced the free-jazz thing at the end, as we know. With his passing, it was as if – this is like Charlie Parker passing, in a way, what happened with bebop, not just the man, but the music.

Kirchner: A father-figure was gone.

Liebman: Yeah. And Trane being so massively the father-figure, and having taken so many of these guys under his wing, specifically who was on that record date, by the way, on *Ascension.* Him not being there, and free jazz never catching on as a popular, commercial music, which was never – that was never going to happen. We were kind of like the leftovers, because we're predominantly white and a little late in the game. There's a big separation. This is 1968. This is Vietnam. This is the height of the assassinations, and [Robert] Kennedy and [Martin Luther] King, blah blah blah. There's a whole social milieu thing happening that this is – we're part of. On the other hand, we're also – we're white middle class, a lot of us, and to one degree or another, we are exposed to rock-and-roll, or have been, because it's part of our generation. We're 20 years old. We passed through the '60s. We saw the Beatles. We heard the Beatles. We heard Janet [Joplin]. We heard Jimi Hendrix. I always say – I tell you, if it had been a couple of years

later, it would have been Jimi Hendrix, not Coltrane. That would have been, "This is my idol."

[recording interrupted by phone call]

I'm saying, what we were doing in the loft – let's put it this way: we had *Ascension,* and then we had *Bitches Brew, In a Silent Way, Filles de Kilimanjaro, Miles in the Sky.* I've got to give them all credit, because they're all of a whole. Then *Live-Evil* and eventually, *On the Corner,* with me. This is – we're really caught in the crosshairs between a change of music. So, even though the loft represented the free-jazz thing, slowly, everybody's starting to see that there's this fusion thing, and that leads me to my gig with Ten Wheel Drive, which means, I'm on salary. This is what's so notable – most notable about Ten Wheel Drive in my life is, you're on salary.

The day I got the gig – I auditioned for the gig through my friend Steve Satten, who was playing trumpet. They needed a guy playing – first, soprano, I had to play. Baritone, soprano, clarinet, flute, tenor. I had to go get a soprano. I auditioned, got the job, and it was $125 or $150 a week, and you were on call every day. You either rehearsed or had a gig. This was a working, Polydor Records, fusion, standing aside next to Chicago, Blood, Sweat and Tears. Never as famous, but it was in that genre. Genya Ravan, the singer, she was a Janis Joplin knockoff, but she was great. Five horns. The guys who arranged it, Mike – Aram Schefrin and Mike Zager. Michael Zager studied with [Stephen] Sondheim and was a real Broadway writer who organized this music. The music of Ten Wheel Drive was pretty heavy, actually. I've listened to it over the years, once in a while. Words were great. Music was great. It was that orchestrated rock-and-roll. It was not some throwaway stuff. So with seeing that there's a way – there's something going on here that is a new thing – of course, Miles opened the door, but Blood, Sweat and Tears, Chicago, the whole idea of horn bands, the New York studio musicians who were in the studios at that time – not me – a chance for them to play, do some improvising, and be commercial but yet jazz. This is all a big fermenting pot, from '68 to '71, '72.

The loft, our little Free Life Communications, this little thing, was a little window of what we were doing, what this particular crew of people was interested in. We had 60 people in the organization at one point. We were – guys were getting auditioned to come in, which is a mistake. I learned a lot. I learned about, first of all, the administration, leadership, and don't judge your peers, a lot of stuff.

Kirchner: Judge your peers, but don't judge your peers.

Liebman: Don't tell them. But we were like the underground – this is before the Lower East Side, before the whole downtown thing, we were kind of that. Again, predominantly white, middle-class guys. Not New York. A lot of guys coming from elsewhere, but all

around 20 to 25 years old and all working other kinds of gigs, for the most part – making a living and just wanting to play jazz. But this is the era when jazz is at a very low point, when there's a transition musically happening, and when economics were such that you never expected that you were going to be playing jazz for a living. It wasn't like that. And everybody's wanting to be a sideman to somebody who's still around. It was still Horace Silver. It was still [Art] Blakey. It was still Elvin. It was still Miles. There was always the hope that somebody will get picked. Lo and behold, two things happened. Horace Silver got Mike and Randy [Brecker]. That was heavy, but not really, because Horace was, with all due respect, considered a little – not commercial, but not quite the real deal. But when Gene Perla got the gig with Elvin, that was the beginning of our generation's starting to be taken into account. Gene's older than me, but he was part of this little crew, and when he took Wilbur Little's place and became the bass player with Elvin Jones – you can't talk about a heavier position for a bass player. That, and Bill Evans. Those are the bass player gigs at that time. That's the top of the pyramid. When that happened, that meant, slowly – it was a signal and a sign that our generation was coming of age, that some of us would become part of the scene and of the mainstream, which is eventually what happened.

Kirchner: When you were doing these loft sessions and concerts, who were some of the young saxophone players besides yourself who were involved in them?

Liebman: The main crew was Brecker – was Michael, Grossman, Bob Berg. We were the crew. Gary Campbell, another guy – he has been in Florida the last few years – he was there some of the time. We were definitely – me and Steve were definitely together all the time. We were buds. We were like living together. It was, he went to Juilliard. He was done on Wednesday. He'd come home with me. I did my substitute teaching Monday and Tuesday. Took the tie off. We'd drop a little LSD or something of that sort, and we would be launched for the next four days, ending up in Chinatown at four in the morning at Wo Hop, come back, play, listen to tapes. Also, we were into macrobiotics at that time, and in this building . . .

Kirchner: Acid and macrobiotics. What a . . .

Liebman: Yeah, what a great collection. Talk about – well, yin and yang, after all. And we're in the building with Dave Holland on the second floor. This is another story, Dave Holland on the second floor, and Chick is on the first floor of this loft. So this is a pretty happening loft building. Because these were small lofts, 1200 square feet. This is nothing like the massive lofts that were usually identified. But this was quite a community going on there in this period. And Miles – I'm there with Miles, on top of it.

Kirchner: There was one on Grand Street that Marc Copland told me about.

Liebman: I moved to Warren Street, eventually, in ’72, the next loft – in ’73. Down the street was Abercrombie and Copland. That was down by the World Trade Center, on Warren Street. Michael came and took my place from me. He was there for 10 years. Michael eventually, in the ’80s, went to Grand Street. There were a couple places which meant open-door policy, pretty much. You want to play? I’m ready. Whoever. Bass player? Whoever wants to come up. Let’s play. Again, mostly free jazz, until one day, everything changed.

Lanny Fields, the bass player – I remember this distinctly, ’70, ’71. He walked in. He says, “Any of you playing this record called *Speak No Evil.*” I said, “No.” He says, “Check this out.” Phonograph. Great tunes, great tunes. “Man, what’s that tune about? What’s that tune about?” Spent the whole night transcribing the record. Taking the bass lines, best we could. Suddenly realized, you know what? We’re really not that good on chord changes. Certainly not these chord changes. In other words, slowly – at least, this is for me. I don’t talk for anybody else – but slowly, the reality of the past and of the need to understand the legacy, reared its head. We all collectively – I don’t think we sat down and decided this – realized that, you know what? To one degree or another, we have to take care of business, that stuff that came before. And this isn’t *Ascension.* It’s pre-*Ascension.* In other words, what was Trane doing in ’58, ’57? Could you do that? Could you play on *Speak No Evil* or *Witch Hunt,* etc., etc.? Slowly, the whole mood changed – which has never got back again since then – but it changed to – I don’t say more conservative, but the need to have a total jazz education. Remember, we didn’t have school. We didn’t have anybody to tell us this. Nobody said, “You got to know” – because there’s a course on jazz history, you’re going to transcribe Louis Armstrong. Nobody did that for us. So we came to that on our own, collectively, and then slowly, by the mid-’70s, now I’m Miles, Elvin. Michael’s on his own. Randy – slowly we’re becoming the guys of the next scene. But this is a very interesting period, for this reason, these reasons.

Kirchner: Before we go any further, there’s one teacher that we haven’t talked about, of yours, and that’s Joe Allard.

Liebman: Oh yeah, well, he was the guru of saxophone. Joe was from – we’ll backtrack. I’m about – I don’t know. Am I 16 or 17? After three or four years with Mr. Shapiro from Bromley studios, I can see that I got to move up. I literally take the phone book, saxophone teachers. I think it was even the yellow pages, and I called, among others – because you know some of these names – Marty Napoleon, Garvin Bushell. This is amazing, because he’s on that record *Live at the Vanguard,* playing bassoon, oh my God.

Kirchner: Right, but he went back to the ’20s.

Liebman: I didn't know anything. I just see their names. And I spoke to them. My mother, she said, "You speak to them." And Joe. He seemed to be the most whatever. He was at Carnegie Hall studios. That didn't sound so bad. You got to take lessons, you take lessons at Carnegie Hall.

I went every Sunday to Joe. Is this before Lennie or after Lennie? Could be the – it may overlap. I'm not particularly, specifically sure, but it's somewhere in my late – 16, 17, 18 years old. It goes on for a few years. No, it's Saturday lessons, I think. It was subway, same thing, to Rockefeller Center, D train, Sixth Avenue line.

Joe was – the great lesson with Joe is – outside of saxophone – is that when it's really heavy, you definitely don't know it at the time. You really need to take some time to understand the depth of what's going on. And that less is more. Joe gave me the same lesson over and over again.

You study with Joe?

Kirchner: I took a couple lessons from him.

Liebman: You had the same lesson I had. I just had more of them. He did repertoire, I'm sure, with the classical guys, because he had straight guys too. But for me, I wasn't classical. This has got to be right before Queens College, because I did go in purportedly for clarinet, because you did need an instrument major. So that's got to be 17. So that would be '64.

Kirchner: You used your lower lip to cushion the reed.

Liebman: I didn't know anything. Here was the main thing: his thing was about sound; my teacher had never said a word about sound. And you know what? To this day, most teachers don't talk about sound. Saxophone is – the thing about saxophone is, you put it in your mouth, and you can play it. You really don't need much to get it out. Something comes out. Whether it's pleasant or not, but it's unique, for sure, which is probably why it was so good for jazz. He said . . .

Kirchner: And why there are so many bad saxophone players.

Liebman: Well, that's the thing. It's self-taught. You don't need much. It's not iron chops to get this instrument down. My teacher, again, I said, he never said a word about sound, not Shapiro. He taught me to transpose up a step, thank you very much, and to read, and to be a good technical musician. But he never said a word about sound. I never understood really what sound meant. What does tone mean? What is the significance of a good sound? What is a good sound? Joe's thing – although he didn't talk about it like

that, his thing was to understand the basics, get your principles together, so that you're at least in a position to be able to find a sound that's you. That's the overall gist of what he did.

And to not be handicapped. You walk in there. Your head's too low. You're putting pressure here. Your lip's like this. How can you play? You're not hearing it. You're not singing it. What are you feeling? It's not just fingers. Basically, that's what his thing was. To take you – I was young, but I still had bad habits already. By 17 years old I had bad habits. To break habits, and to instill new ones, is why he gave the same lesson over and over again. I see that now. He just said overtones, the lip, things with the larynx. Take out the book, the *Grey's Anatomy*. He'd point to that page. He'd show you the breathing thing. I use it right now. He'd show you the whole throat, the larynx, the pharynx, the trachea, the whole thing, what's going on. Then opera singers, and when they used to sing, they would do this. And then Marcel Mule and [?].

I didn't know what he was talking about. And I got to tell you. I'm going to Carnegie Hall. I think it was 15, 20 dollars a lesson. Guys are lined up from all over the world. The guy taught 70 people a week. I'm walking out of there that first year, going like, "I don't know. Sounds like a con job to me." Here's another Lennie Tristano vibe. I'm getting no books. I didn't get past the first four bars in the Rose clarinet studies the first six months. I didn't get past the first four bars. I played the first bar, he'd stop me and just rap, have me do these singing, these exercises, the overtones, the mouthpiece alone, all the stuff I teach. I said, this is the heaviest teacher in New York? What's this? Is this it? Is this all there is? As I said earlier, that was ten years later when I realized it, because it took me about ten years to get what he was talking about.

Kirchner: Coltrane and Dolphy, among others, took lessons with him, right?

Liebman: That's the folklore.

Kirchner: I first heard about him from Pat LaBarbera, who took lessons from him.

Liebman: Everybody came to see Joe. He was the doctor. If you came to New York, you had to see Joe. He took everybody. He made room for you, and he gave you that one lesson. You basically – in the end, that's what it was, which is what I do now. That one lesson, three hours, you got it, I got nothing more to show you about saxophone. All you got to do now is just keep doing it over and over again for the rest of your life, because it's all about getting the body in tune, and there's nothing more to tell you. That's what he did. He was at the essence of what it was to play. He was – it was very sad, because he was like, "It's easier than you think. You're singing. You're talking. Just extend what you do when you sing." It sounds so simple, but it was very difficult to grasp, especially when you come in with all kinds of bad habits.

He hated Larry Teal. He thought that the whole Larry Teal thing – I can't tell you I'm intimate with what Larry Teal's method was, but he would talk about it like, that's telling a kid to do certain things, and that's just going to make them more nervous and more uptight and more strained. How can you play music when you're under stress and strain and under pressures and tension? He resented anybody – I know that's his – was his mantra. The more you think about it, the worse it's going to get, because you're going to be self-conscious. You can't play music – [Liebman speaks with his mouth clenched] "It's like me talking like this. How can I talk like this?" That's what he would say.

He was funny. He was a very nice guy. He was a warm man. Also, the last 15 minutes were spent fixing your reeds. He could take – he could take this [object unknown] and make it play. "Give me that. Knife. Sandpaper." You'd watch this guy make – I could do it now. I don't do it. Could do it. He'd say, "Give me that reed. Let me give you – let me take care of that reed for you." That was the last 15 minutes. He loved it. He had this little table with the sandpaper, the reed brush, little things like that.

He was a very humane guy, and I stayed friends with him and continued my relationship with him. I guess I was one of his prize students. Grossman studied with him, Eddie Daniels, Dave Tofani. These were some of the names of guys that I knew. That's how I knew Eddie Daniels's name. Joe taught at New England Conservatory. So he was in Boston. Anytime I was playing those clubs, he'd come. He'd be the only – you'd see gray hair. It was Joe Allard. Students would bring him, take him back to the hotel or wherever he slept. He met Miles. He met Elvin.

He was – as I got older – as I say, somewhere in my 20s, five to ten years later, I realized the significance of his teaching, of his lessons. Then I was more like, the guru. Then, with all respect, I was like, Joe, I'm here. I'd go up and check things out with him. I would have him check me out. The book I wrote was me talking to him over two summers of discussion on cassette and everything. My book is him talking, filtered through me. It's all the things he talked about, which I wasn't sure of when he was doing them. Ten years later now, I'm 30 years old, 35 years old, and I'm like, "Joe, what did you mean by the E position? What did you mean by the V position for the lower lip? What did you mean by the tongue and the soft palette and all that?" I really pushed him, because I realized he was a good teacher, but he was not very detailed, and he was a little more general than I like to be with a student, and that there were holes in what I had understood, yet alone – I had written down – I would walk out of the lesson. There's no cassette machines or anything. I go home on the subway, and I write down his notes, and I realized there are things that I didn't understand what I was talking about. I said, "Joe, this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to talk to you about some things that I'm just not clear about." He said, "Yeah, go ahead, write away." I had the whole list. It took several days over two

summers at his summer home in New Hampshire. That's what the book – the video – is about.

It was really – his thing is about getting the body in tune and getting it right, so that you start at an even plane. Then you pick what you want to play. That's why he taught classical and jazz. He didn't care. He was very ecumenical, which those guys weren't, in those days. There was a real separation between the classical saxophone and jazz, trumpet, everybody. It was like, "Don't do that in this room." That type of thing. He didn't care. He was about understanding the concepts, and you choose the music. That's up to you. What you want to do musically is your business. But he had the *Giant Steps* solo in the corner. I remember coming up one day, and I saw the transcription. I said, "That's very interesting, Joe. What's that?" He said, "That's – one of the students gave me that. That's what John played on this tune called *Giant Steps.* Are you familiar with this?" "Hmmm, a little bit." He said, "Oh, it's a fascinating study, very difficult to play." That's great, classic. I love it.

Kirchner: Let's get back to Ten Wheel Drive. You were on salary with them. How many gigs? Did you record with them?

Liebman: You worked. You worked. You toured. You got on the bus. You went South. We worked. We worked opposite Sly [Stone]. We worked opposite other groups. Worked at festivals. They never attained gigantic success. It was mostly East Coast, never overseas. But you worked or rehearsed. It was a show. We had parts. As I said, I had to get a soprano. I had clarinet parts. I took a solo with the girl and played a bluesy thing. I was the big jazz man in the band. I was Mr. Jazz and all that.

This was one of the great lessons of my life, actually. I was into macrobiotics very strictly when I got this job. I was really trying to follow it. Chick was into it. Dave was into it. Grossman. It was a whole thing. We baked bread every night. It was rice and vegetables, yin-yang, Greenberg's on 8th Street, St. Marks Place, the only health-food place in New York. We'd come out with 40 pounds of millet, 40 pounds of bulgur wheat, put it in the taxi. It was out.

So now we're on the road.

Kirchner: Good luck.

Liebman: I carry a bag with nuts and raisins. In fact, that's my – they nicknamed me on the record, the Illustrious Raisin. I had a nickname, because I used to carry a little bag, a little leather pouch. I'm on the road with them. We're in Gainesville, Florida, 90-thousand degrees out, rock festival, some [ ] whatever. Everybody is hanging out at the pool, frolicking. I'm in the room with a Bunsen Burner or whatever, and tahini, rice

cakes, because I'm going to be on my diet. and eat my shit. I'm seeing them out there at the pool, and I said, there's something wrong with this picture. This is not good. You got to go with the flow, Dave. Because I was resisting it, resisting it. I was smoking, doing everything they were doing, but I had my Mu tea. I was really trying to maintain my thing. And also because jazz, and I'm the jazz man. I'm a serious guy. These guys are just – they're potheads, and they're rock-and-roll. Great guys, though. I realized that, when in Rome, do as the Romans. It's better for you. You'll learn much more, and you'll come out being a fuller person. That was the big lesson from Ten Wheel Drive.

Kirchner: I didn't realize that Steve Satten was part of that too. He and I . . .

Liebman: We haven't spoken about that.

Kirchner: No.

Liebman: You know him?

Kirchner: We did a bunch of club dates together 25 years ago. One of the great characters.

Liebman: He was my club-date partner, 14 years old, the Catskills. He was part of this whole crew. I'm still in touch with him. He lives upstate. He lives in Saugerties.

Kirchner: Do tell him I said hello.

Liebman: I will. I'll e-mail him tonight. In fact I just got a New Year's greeting from him. He became – went into real estate. But he's – now – he sent me in the last six months a few rap tunes that he did. They're really great. Because he was always a very soulful cat. He was very honest. He made that one record on Columbia. He got [Bruce] Lundvall to sign him for one record, unbelievable. *What it Is*? No, something with *You Could Hear Me Now* [*Whatcha Gonna Do for Me?*]. He had Jimmy Cobb on it and everything like that, [Walter] Booker, all those guys. He started a record company for a minute. In fact, in that discography, there's a record on CVS Records.

Kirchner: Contempo Vibrato.

Liebman: Contempo Vibrato. That's his label.

We were very, very close. A lot of times in New York, when I didn't have a place in New York in my in-between period, I stayed with him in a loft. He was at 23rd Street, where [Joe] Lovano was, for years.

Kirchner: And then they got burned out.

Liebman: They got burned out, yeah. But he's a very good friend, Steve.

Kirchner: Oh, give him my best.

Liebman: Club-date partner.

Kirchner: We did lots of dumb gigs together and survived.

Liebman: I have to tell him that. I didn't know that.

Kirchner: In the mid-'80s.

Liebman: That's great. Great guy.

Kirchner: Absolutely. How long did the gig with Ten Wheel Drive last?

Liebman: The upshot is, we had a fight with management. En masse, the horn section quit. Big letter to the *Village Voice.* Big thing. This is basically capitalist, the moguls versus the worker. We went out. We were probably right. I don't know. It was one of these star-versus-the-sidemen things. It became us versus them. The band decided to quit. Three of us – I can't recall. It was me, John Eckert, and – was it the third guy? Anyway, we found, through Jimmy Strassburg – you mentioned Jimmy Strassburg. That's another story we have to go to. You know him. But somehow I met Jimmy Strassburg, and Jimmy Strassburg put us together with a guitar player named Link Chamberlain.

Kirchner: The first night I heard you was the night I heard you with Link Chamberlain and Jimmy Strassburg.

Liebman: Is this in Rapson's?

Kirchner: Rapson's. John Stowell brought me up there.

Liebman: This is out. This is the story of – I don't know how I got there, but that – when I met – that's how – we took the horn section . . .

Kirchner: With Enrico Rava and Frank Vicari.

Liebman: Yes, and we started a band called Sawbuck with a singer – we found a singer named Sky Ford. He was a killer – and Link. One guitar, bass, and three horns. An amazing instrumentation, actually. No keyboard, no two guitars. Link was a pretty heavy

guy. Great tunes. He played great. He was jazz, but he was also rock. This band became a real thing. We went and we worked. It became – we didn't live together, but it was rock band time, the whole idea that your band is your life, and you've got to rehearse every day. Kind of coming out of Ten Wheel Drive, but now it was like, it's our band, and we're going to get a contract, and we're going to do it, blah blah blah. Anyway, it ends up, we get a contract with Motown Records, the first white group for Motown. We're in a division they called – they started a new division. Just when we got the contract, after six months of working on this – '69, '70. This is during the loft period – I get Elvin. I get the gig with Elvin. This is all coming in the same period. I'll never forget it, because when I got the gig with Elvin – that's another story – but when I got the gig with Elvin and had – I went to that next meeting. I said, "Gentlemen, I" – I'm one of the leaders of the group. We're about to have our break – I go, "Elvin Jones asked me to join the group." I was in tears, because it was like family, all the girlfriends. You're living together. They said, "Are you kidding? Are you kidding me? There's no question about this. God bless you. Good luck." And they went on to record. They went on to have a little bit of limited success. Sawbuck. That was the name of the band, with Jimmy Strassburg, Link, Sky Ford, John Eckert, John Gatchell – the other trumpet player. Vicari came in, or was he there at the beginning? I forget. And eventually Pee Wee. That's how I met Pee Wee Ellis. That's when I began my relationship with Pee Wee that ended up six years later being the Ellis–Liebman band. I still wanted to do this rock thing at some point.

In any case, that was an interesting period. That morphed into Elvin. Eventually I – what Ten Wheel Drive did for me was stop my straight life. I didn't have to teach anymore. I took the tie off, grew a beard. That was the end of tie and suit. I remember that. That was the big symbolic thing. I don't have to put a tie on anymore, and I don't have to go to PS 21 in the Bronx at 7:30 in the morning and be a substitute teacher, which is the death. So this was the beginning of my really, in a certain way, officially making my living only from music, was Ten Wheel Drive. It enabled me to do that, and that morphed into Elvin. This is all during the same thing, during the loft period. This is all happening simultaneously.

Kirchner: How did you get the gig with Elvin?

Liebman: Gene, when he got the gig – when Gene Perla got it, he said, "I'm going to get you and Grossman on it. Watch." He said, "Watch me." Sure enough, man, six months later, I get a call. January. So this is January of '70, maybe? It's right now. It's '70 or '71. 11:30 at night, the phone rings. "We're at Slugs. Elvin wants to hear you right now. Come now." I get into a taxi at 19th Street, that loft. Went to East 3rd. I walk in. It's so dramatic. Elvin's standing at the bar with Joe Farrell. I think I see Gene. I don't know. I walk in. There's nobody there. There's four people there. It's a winter night, 12:30 at night. I had my tenor. He says, "Are you ready?" Just like that. I said, "Uh, yeah, I guess so, whatever." "Get your horn out." Joe don't say nothing. He's just standing there like

this. So I go up. It's Gene, Elvin, and me, no Joe. I go up. He says, "What do you want to play?" So I figured, I've been once successful. I'll try it again. I do *Softly* again. I figured if it worked once, drummers must like it. It's my tune I know the best. I played *Softly as a Morning Sunrise.* "Next. You know *Yesterdays*?" I said yeah. I said okay. And then *A Night in Tunisia*, 3 tunes, 40 minutes, 35 minutes, something like that, late set, done 1:30, quarter to two, something like that. Get off the stand. I don't know what I played. I have no idea. He said, "I'm recording next week at Rudy's. You know where that is?" I said yeah. He said, "Bring a tune, 10 o'clock, Thursday." Okay, that's it. Wow. Now what?

A week later, we do the record *Genesis.* That date is the first tune I recorded, my *Slumber*, which had written, based on *Speak No Evil*, for Elvin. Amazing. The tune is completely – me and Gene are completely in the wrong place, but tell anybody you know that – harmonically. That was 10 o'clock in the morning. By 10:30 we were doing *Slumber.* I don't think I recorded three times before that, in my life. Who knows how many times I'd been in the studio? And I'm plus with Elvin Jones and his trio, and it's Rudy, who's the most unfriendly cat in creation, right up until the last time I was there, actually. Not to me personally, just cold, ice.

Kirchner: He's nothing if not consistent.

Liebman: And I'm like a kid. Come on. I'm so scared, I'm shaking in my boots. I'm doing a trio with Elvin Jones at Rudy Van Gelder's, where Coltrane recorded with Elvin. I'm 25 years old.

Anyway, you do the record. We did the record, whatever that after- – one day. He didn't say anything to me. That's it. By chance, two weeks later I did *My Goal's Beyond* with [John] McLaughlin. That's another story. I met him. But it's February – January, February of '70 or '71, I do these two records, heavy records. I'm still with Ten Wheel Drive, no problem. This is this period.

September of that year, the phone rings, 4 o'clock in the morning. Now we're in another loft. Is this '72? I don't know when this is, because I think I'm on Warren Street, the second loft, with Elena Steinberg. I said – the phone's across the loft – "Okay, I'm going to get it." She gets the phone. She says, "It's Keiko Jones." I said, "What?" She says, "Keiko Jones. Who's that?" I said, "Uh oh." I get the phone. She says, "David, Elvin wants you to take the next plane. We have an afternoon hit, 12 o'clock, a school outside of Chicago, and he wants you to come." She said, "There will be a ticket waiting for you. Get going." I go out. I don't know how I get to the school, DeKalb, De-something outside Chicago. We play trio, no Joe. Just trio. I don't think Joe. Maybe Joe, because he was still on the gig. I'm not sure. Anyway, we go back to the hotel. He says – we're staying that night [at] the Croydon Hotel, which is the musicians' hotel, as I found out – he said, "Come to my room." He said, "I want you to join the band tonight, as of now." He says,

"Joe's leaving. You're going to take Joe's place." He says, "So it's going to be a transition period." And in that next six months, Clifford Jordan, Frank Foster, and Joe. I would always be with one of them, sometimes with none of them, sometimes Jan Hammer. Chick played a little bit. But this was this transition period, until finally Joe was gone and Grossman came into the band. Somewhere 6, 9 months with Elvin, and eventually Don Alias. He was with us for a year. That's the period with Elvin, which is a two, two-and-a-half year period.

Kirchner: I heard one of those gigs. The first time I ever heard you, I was just 18. I had just come to New York to go to college. This is the fall of '71. There was an ad in the *Voice* for this little gig. It was a free concert with Elvin's quartet at this place on the Upper West Side called the Goddard Riverside Community Center, in the 90s on Amsterdam. It's still there. I went there, and there was – it was this little auditorium, no sound system. They just set up on the floor. It was you, Joe Farrell, Gene, and Elvin. It was – I can still remember it vividly. I can remember *Three Card Monte*, *For All the Other Times.*

Liebman: That's it. That's the book.

Kirchner: I remember Joe playing this . . .

Liebman: *Fancy Free.*

Kirchner: You didn't play that.

Liebman: No, because that's with Grossman. That's right.

Kirchner: Joe played this outrageous flute solo on . . .

Liebman: *Time for Love.*

Kirchner: No, it was . . .

Liebman: *My Ship.*

Kirchner: . . . *My Ship.* I think . . .

Liebman: That was his thing.

Kirchner: Is it just me? I think Joe Farrell is the unsung great flute player in jazz of all time.

Liebman: Thank you. Thank you very much. I totally agree with you.

Kirchner: I don't think anybody in jazz has ever played the flute like Joe.

Liebman: Lew [Tabackin] is . . .

Kirchner: And Hubert [Laws].

Liebman: Hubert, but real jazz. Nothing personal.

Kirchner: Neither of them have the command of harmony.

Liebman: Hubert is the flute player of all time, but as far as jazz goes, Lew – Lew great, but Joe for the depth of ideas.

Kirchner: He took all of Coltrane's shit, harmonically, and brought it into flute . . .

Liebman: I totally agree with that.

Kirchner: . . . in a way that nobody else has ever done.

Liebman: I loved – I also felt – I didn't – I didn't say I didn't like it, but on tenor and soprano, he was good. He was very good. But on flute, he was exemplary, no question. I totally agree with you. Then I had to play flute after him. Can you imagine me getting up and playing *Time for Love* or *My Ship*, after hearing him do it? This was – but Elvin said, "You're going to play flute."

Kirchner: You're a better – as jazz guys go, you're a better than average flute player.

Liebman: Yeah, but I stopped it because of that. I didn't want to be second best. That instrument, you've got to hit that every day. This is not – you don't just take – saxophone you can . . .

Kirchner: Joe was a flute major in college.

Liebman: As was Lew, as is Hubert. That makes a difference. That's why you – that's great. I don't remember that gig. But this was – Joe didn't say a word to me. I don't know if Joe was just the way he was. I don't know anything about him.

Kirchner: I've heard Kenny Berger – Kenny Berger told me that Joe is a cold fish.

Liebman: It appeared that way, but maybe it was personal. He didn't like me. I don't know. The only time I got anything out of Joe was – and it was heavy, because it kind of determined the course of my life. In this period, he called. Again, the phone. "It's Joe Farrell," Elena, "Joe." He goes, "I got a double at the Plaza, Sunday night." Something like that. No hello, no nothing. "Double," meaning, "I got something else. Do you want to take my place?" The Plaza Hotel. You know what that means. That's top. That's tuxedo. That's going to be with the Lew Soloffs of the world and the Snooky Youngs. That is the studio clique, because that Plaza Hotel, it's going to be the top gig. And I know. I could – I knew right there, because the studio thing was very big then. I knew that this was – this is a yes or no, and this would determine the – I could feel that. I said, "Could I have a second?" He said, "Come on. Hurry up." I said, "Elena, this is a chance." If I do good, which I figured I would, I could walk into the studio situation, which Joe was in, and I could be that thing, which was a very big thing in the '60s and '70s. If I say no, that's it, because once you say no, you're off the list, and they don't forget. She said, "What do you . . . ?" I said, "I don't want – the studio thing's the last thing I want to do." She said, "Then tell them no." So I said okay. "Okay, Joe, I can't make it." Bump. You just closed the door, boy. Don't you ever come around this place anymore. That was the end of my studio, any desire or chance I might have had to go into studio work. That was the closest I ever got to Joe Farrell.

Kirchner: The irony is, considering what happened to studio work in New York in the '70s, and you know what happened with Joe.

Liebman: Yeah, not the worst thing. But at that time . . .

Kirchner: You made the right move.

Liebman: Because guys were making some bread.

Kirchner: Oh yeah.

Liebman: And Elvin was 300 a week or something. We weren't making any money. I was – I'm starting to think about how am I going to live? This question's starting to dawn on me, that I'm not a kid anymore. How do I make a living?

Kirchner: Also, by the way, at that same place I later heard Novella Nelson, who was – she wasn't a jazz person, but she was a good singer-actress.

Liebman: I'm glad you told me that. That completes the cycle from that Thanksgiving night with Pete.

Kirchner: Yeah, exactly. Now you're off and running with Elvin. You did the *Genesis* record.

Liebman: And *Live at the Lighthouse.*

Kirchner: And then *Merry-Go-Round* was in between.

Liebman: *Merry-Go-Round,* record date, real date, two pianos, Jan, Chick. Three sopranos, *Brite Piece.*

Kirchner: Yeah, *Brite Piece* in particular, with . . .

Liebman: Three sopranos.

Kirchner: Who was the third soprano?

Liebman: Torturing three times. Me, Grossman, and Joe. Torture times three.

Kirchner: Those are all – that isn't the working band. Those are all augmented groups.

Liebman: No. *Merry-Go-Round* was an augmented thing. *Mr. Jones* was an augmented thing. But *Lighthouse* is the – *Lighthouse* is still – that's kind of a classic among saxophone players. It captures that energy, and it captures that post-Coltrane thing. I know why *Lighthouse* is – I know why everybody puts it on their list. First of all, Elvin and Gene were amazing. But it's because we, by then, had that language – whatever that language was, we had it down by then, that pentatonicy, post-Coltrane. We were the first generation post-Coltrane. Here we were. We were the hot guys in New York. We were the guys you had to hear, if you were young. We were basically playing whatever we could glean from Trane. I don't think me and Steve ever sat down and talked about the music one inch, but we played a lot. We played a lot together. Besides Elvin and the loft, we had – it was kindred spirits. I was the Pharoah [Sanders] to his Trane. And then we did this dance where I was with Elvin and then Miles, and he was with Miles and then Elvin. So we'd change partners over this three- and four-year period. We were very close in that respect, but we never sat down and said, "It's a pentatonic on E-minor." But somehow we played it. That's the language that comes across on *The Lighthouse,* and that's why I guess people like it, and it's notable for that reason.

Kirchner: Yeah, it's – even at that time, in the '70s, as soon as that record came out, a lot of the hip young saxophone players just jumped on that recorded and analyzed – that was one of those records that were like textbooks for young players. That one. *Joe Henderson in Japan* was like that. There were just certain records.

Liebman: Yeah, that happens every – New York has – I was telling this, because it was Joe, and it was us. Then it was Michael, and [David] Sanborn. Then Lovano had his time. Steve Coleman a time. Now Mark Turner and Chris Potter. Every five years, three to five, a new flavor of the month comes out, and that guy is hot. He's the guy that saxophone-wise – it's probably the same for all the instruments. It is – a guy is the guy, or guys, that you have to hear, and they're working around New York. So you can hear them. New York's like that now. It's always like that. You have your little day in the sun when you're the style, you're the guy to listen to, and then it passes on to the – the torch is passed on. We were then, that period. Michael always, he said, "When I came to New York, I came to hear Steve and Dave. That's why I came to – that was – I knew I had to hear them." It's like Miles coming to New York and Juilliard, and he knows he's got to find Bird. That was what was happening. That was that period. *The Lighthouse* epitomized it.

And look, it's Elvin Jones. I sat at his feet enough times, with Trane. On my top 10, he's on six of them, for God's sake. He's the greatest drummer who ever lived. There's a reason for it, and here you are, sitting next to him, in Coltrane's shoes. Once that one, finally I could digest that, just the fact, the way he played and what it was like to play with him, just from the musical standpoint of time and of feel and of knowing what the beat was and knowing about how he played behind the beat, which is not something you can ever really learn. You've just got to get it.

Also he was – you had a nice time, and everybody knows, because everybody has stories about Elvin. Certainly from the '70s on and after he made peace with drugs, he's the heaviest guy I've ever known. Next to my father, he's the cat. This is the guy. Pete, of course Miles for a particular thing, and various guys – a painter friend from Lookout Farm, Eugene Gregan. There's guys. But the heaviest guy I ever knew, in spiritual and his ability to do something well, was Elvin. The feeling he imparted to you when you knew – when you were just with him. It wasn't a show. It was very personal, and sometimes it wasn't good. It depended on the situation. He wasn't just a nice guy. He was a deep cat. He knew – he knew everything, and he knew it – not factually, not intellectually, but he was way in touch, the way he played, first of all, and then just knowing him, and the things he would say, the way he would look at you and the way he would impart – his way of imparting knowledge to you. He knew he was like that, too. By the time it got to the '80s and '90s, he certainly knew about himself. You become what you are. He was a heavy guy, no question about it, in my time with him, and my relationship with him over the years continued. It just was a really – he's still the big figure in my life in a lot of ways, musically and as a person.

Kirchner: Why with these working bands did he want to do without the piano?

Liebman: I don't know.

Kirchner: He never said?

Liebman: I think he had piano from time to time. He had [Masabumi] Kikuchi for a while. He had Jan for a while. We were – he was with us a little bit. Chick did here and there. Elvin never had trumpet. He didn't like trumpet either, it seems. It didn't appear that he liked the sound of the trumpet. I don't know. I don't know why it was. I can only speculate musically. It was more open, and the kind of style that Elvin – if Elvin was anything drum-wise, it's about fullness of sound. If you put him next to Max [Roach] or Roy Haynes or any – Philly [Joe Jones] or Art Blakey, they all have unbelievable stuff, but one thing that marks Elvin, among other things that marks him different from everybody else, is the absolute fullness of the tonal palette, especially the bottom end. I could see that the piano could be in the way, I guess. That's about all I could think.

Kirchner: Or just to get away from the sound of the Coltrane quartet.

Liebman: Possibly that, yeah. Maybe so. But then, why not take trumpet? I don't know. Because we all wanted to be Coltrane. Anybody that's going to go play with Elvin, it's like, you must want to be Coltrane. Anybody who plays with Bill Evans is going to want to be Scott LaFaro. You can't help it. That's the image.

Kirchner: How long were you with Elvin?

Liebman: Elvin is – I have to get this right. Either two-and-a-half years or one-and-a-half, but I think it's two-and-a-half years, because it begins in September of '71? '72? – maybe it's a year-and-a-half, because I went with Miles in '73. This could all be found out. In any case, Miles is definitely January of '73. That's for sure. I remember.

Kirchner: Although you had done *On the Corner* before that.

Liebman: *On the Corner* is six months before, the tracks that I'm on.

Kirchner: Shall we get into Miles?

Liebman: Everybody always asks, how did you get the gig? It's a small community then, in those days. I was saying, Lenny White was a friend. Chick and Dave [Holland] lived in the building. I was around Miles. I went to the gigs. I can't say I was around him, but I was backstage. It's like how I knew Elvin. Before I worked with Elvin, I had done this Jazz Interactions thing at Lincoln Center – at Town Hall. I won the contest. It was Elvin, Rahsaan [Roland Kirk], and David Liebman Quintet with Randy, actually, and Mike Garson. And Elvin knew me because I had played with Pete. One night he came into La Boheme. "You stay with Pete. You stay with Pete." Like that. It was like that. I guess

Miles knew my face, and he certainly had Grossman already. He came down once to hear us. We played at Danny's Hideaway during this loft period, on a Sunday afternoon, double rhythm section: Moses and Lenny, Lanny Fields and Holland, George Cables, and me and Steve. We played one tune a set. We played *Slumber* for an hour, and we played another tune for an hour. Miles came down, and he hired Steve that night. In fact, that's the night he – Miles came down. He said, "I just got shot," and he took us outside to show us where he got shot at, in Brooklyn. "Look at the bullet holes." Because he knew Lenny. That was the contact at that point. And Dave, of course.

So, how do you get a . . . ? You're around. It's like I would say. If you're on line, your number comes up, eventually. I don't know. I can't speak about the present. But it used to be that way in our business. You're around. You're hanging. You're at jam sessions. You're getting better. Your name gets around. It seems like you're the next logical guy to call. Maybe that was what Wayne [Shorter] – when Wayne got the gig. He was the next guy to call, after Hank Mobley and the interim, after Trane. Who was next? "Wayne. Oh, he's playing with Blakey. Okay, okay." Then he wouldn't do it for a few years. It's like you're on line, in a way. It seems to be some kind of informal system, so to say.

Specifically, I got a call. I was in a doctor's office in Brooklyn. My mother got on the phone. She said, "Teo Macero said, 'Come to the studio'." I said, "What?" He said, "Come to the studio, right now, 52nd and Madison, to record with Miles Davis." This is like 11 o'clock in the morning. By 12:15, 12:30, I'm walking into the studio. I did that first track, *On the Corner*. Is that *Black Satin*?

Kirchner: I can look it up, if you want.

Liebman: It's the first track, the first thing you hear, and I have no idea what key I'm in, because everybody's plugged in, except me, with no headphones.

Kirchner: That's terrific.

Liebman: Miles signaled me to come in, and then he pushed me up to the microphone.

Kirchner: Okay, we have June 1st, 1972, and there are four tunes: *On the Corner, New York Girl, Thinking One Thing and Doin' Another,* and *Vote for Miles.*

Liebman: Maybe it's *On the Corner.* Yeah, it's *On the Corner,* I guess.

Kirchner: Yeah, that's the album.

Liebman: Okay, and it's the tune, *On the Corner*?

Kirchner: There you go. [He hands the paper to Liebman.]

Liebman: Yeah, *On the Corner*. That's the first tune. I walk to – I get into the room between the booth and the studio. I look inside. There is Herbie, McLaughlin, Chick, Billy Hart, [Jack] DeJohnette, Larry Young, Badal [Roy], Collin Walcott, Don Alias, and a guy named Harold Williams, it ends up, another keyboard. Massive amount of guys in the studio. Big studio, 52nd and Madison. Nobody looks. I walk in. I come in. Miles is over Jack's head – Jack's shoulder, whispering something. Everybody is silent. There's tension in the room, which there always was with him, especially when recording, as I found out. I'm just sneaking in. I had my horn with me. I don't know why I had my horn with me, because I had been in Brooklyn. But I had the soprano. He sees me. He goes like this. They start playing. They're playing chick-a-chick-a-chick. Again, all I'm hearing is the rattling of keys and like plp, plp. There's no – nobody is acoustic, except the drums. He played – I think he might have played, or didn't play, but there's this gigantic mic on a boom. You've seen the pictures of it. One big mic like that, on a giant boom, like 8 feet in the sky. He goes like this. So I get the horn out. He pushed me up there. I can tell you what I'm thinking, if you put the track on now, because I remember everything. I'm up there going, holy shit, what do I do?, because I have no idea what key they're in. They are in a key, right? This is a vamp. What's going on? I'm playing around. I finally found E-flat. I don't know. It's like – anyway, finish this tune. This is already 12:30. The session ends at 1. This is a 10 to 1 session, as I found out. I finish. I knew Chick and Dave – no, it was Michael Henderson. I knew Jack. A couple – "Hi. How you doing?" [?] said, "Yeah, how you doing?" But everybody's packing up. There was always a little tension around Miles.

Next thing I know, he's in and out. He's walking out. He walks past me. I'm standing in the booth against a railing. He says, "Join my band." I go, "What?" He said, "Join my band," and he looks at me funny. I don't know if he meant it. I don't know what he meant. I said, "I'm with Elvin. I can't do that." He said, "Ahhhh," and he walked off. That's that day. The next time is the call.

Okay, then the waltz starts. January 1973, Elvin, we're at the Vanguard, me and Grossman, Perla, and Elvin. Tuesday night, Miles shows up. Wednesday night, he shows up. He's there all night. He's talking to my girlfriend. He's talking to me. He's very nice. Miles [?] it. "What's he doing here? Inky. What's Inky doing here?," like that. He says in the mic, "Miles Davis is here." It's weird. He's sitting in the back. He's being very nice, actually. He's just sitting. He's talking. He's saying, "Join my band. Join my band." I don't know if he's – I don't know what's going on. He doesn't talk to Steve at all. Elvin and Keiko, they were like, no, way no. I could get the vibe.

Next thing I know, he calls me on Wednesday. I was living in Connecticut by then. We were up in Greenwich, this Elena girl, who's married to Jimmy Cobb now. Phone rings, 4

in the morning. No, he left – this is what happened. That night, after the second night, he said, "Join the band. Join the band." He called me up. I forget the sequence of events. I said, "You got to talk to Elvin." That's right. He called me at 4 in the morning. I said, "You got to talk to Elvin." 20 minutes later, the phone rings again. He said, "Elvin said it's okay." He says, "Friday night you play with me at the Fillmore. Finish with him next week in Boston. Then you're mine." Like that. He says, "I'll see you tomorrow night." I walk in Thursday night, this week in January, first week of January, right now. I walk in Thursday night at 8:30. I like to get there early. I walk in. Elvin's there. He's at the bar. He looks at me. He says, "If Miles Davis wants you, you got to go." He looks at me straight. I said, "You're the boss." He said, "You got to go. It's a chance. You understand?" Not chance, because he wouldn't give it up. But he hugged me. He said, "Friday night you do the gig with him and come back here after you're done." He said, "You do Boston with me next week. Then you go with him."

The next night is the night, is Friday night. Miles comes down again that night. Now he only comes for a short time. He says, "When you're done, I'll leave a car for you, bring you up to my house." So, after the gig, there's this limousine outside. Takes me up to Miles's, 78th. I walk in. I know I've told the Miles story a million times, but in any case, the whole thing, boom boom boom, the pad, the way it is, and this one track, he keeps – he's in the bedroom. I don't see him. He's in the bedroom. He says, "Put that track on." This is all records then, and it's from this *Fresh*, Sly's record called *Fresh*, and it's a tune called *It's Time*. "Check this track out." Great bass line, great drum beat. "Put it on again." I must have put it on 50 times. He said, "That's what we're playing." Because the record had just come out with live in concert from Philharmonic Hall (*In Concert: Live at Philharmonic Hall*]. He had had that accident on the West Side Highway. He was limping around. So this was a little interim break. I didn't know that Carlos Ward was in the band.

Kirchner: Garnett.

Liebman: Carlos Garnett, right. I didn't know anything. He says, "We're going to play that. We're going to play that." He comes out. I'm with Elena. He says, "How much money do you want?" How much money do I want? I said, "I don't know." He said – it's five in the morning or something like that. He says, "I'll give you 400 every time you play, and you can bring her." He was like this. He says, "The road guy will call you tomorrow." Ten o'clock in the morning, got to get a pickup. That day, went to Manny's and had holes drilled in my horn. This was traumatic. Varitone pickup. Remember. You had to – in the neck, you had to have a hole. Soprano up here, neck of the tenor, and the flute pickup at the – I had to do it, because he's – Jim Rose. He said, "You'll never hear a note," which I never heard anyway. But you won't hear a note. So I go to the Fillmore, 6 o'clock, 7 o'clock. I didn't know anybody except Al in the band. I know Al. At least I knew Al Foster. Everybody else is like – it's so weird there. This is the opening of the

Fillmore since it had been closed for a year, and it's the only night it opened. After that, never again. It was Paul Winter and Miles. We played . . .

Kirchner: How strange.

Liebman: Yeah, strange billing, and it was one night. We played at 8 o'clock. Miles came on. I have it on video, because a guy was filming it. I actually have it. It's the weirdest – we're in a semicircle playing. He's dressed in all black with a cape with a hat. It was dark up there. I had no idea what to play. I didn't know anything. He just pointed to me and I played. I don't know what I did.

But I'll tell you, the upshot of that night is this: it was the most traumatic night of my life, musically. I finished the gig, 9:15, 9:30. Taxi, Second Avenue, 8th Street, Fillmore, over to the Vanguard. I get into the Vanguard, open that door, stand on those steps, and hear that sound, Elvin, Steve, and Gene playing jazz, just coming from this most bizarre, out, 21st-century, I mean, out. I didn't hear one thing. I didn't know anything that was going on. Completely, seemingly random, chaotic, disorganized, and here I go in and it's like, jing jing-a-ding jing-a-ding bap bap. I go, holy shit, this is out. I'll never have a night like this again in my life. The past and the future, and I'm playing with Miles and Elvin Jones on the same night. So I just sat on the steps. I actually sat – I stood there for a minute or two, just savoring the moment. I walked down and finished the gig. I did Boston the next week, and then I was with Miles. That's how it worked, and that was the beginning of that year-and-a-half.

Kirchner: As I understand it, you never really rehearsed with that band, right?

Liebman: We had one or two. Boston once, because stuff was set up, and we played Paul's Mall. We tried a rehearsal. It completely fell apart. He came and then he left. And I think once at the Keystone Korner, because again we were there for a few nights and we had the equipment set up. He said, "Let's rehearse." There was nothing. Never rehearsed. I don't know how we learned new tunes. He didn't actually have any new tunes.

We recorded quite a bit. But a lot of times, whatever we recorded didn't find its way to the gig. One or two things did. But he just would bring – he would – you'd get a call from the roadie saying, tomorrow at 10 o'clock, and you would show up at the studio. You'd know Miles had been up for three days already, and he had something that he wanted to do. He had carte blanche. He could do what he wanted. You would walk in, do an hour, hour-and-a-half sessions. An hour-and-a-half, done, out of there. Maybe that tune would go on the gig, but most of them didn't. We had one book. We played the same thing almost every – pretty much the same thing every night.

What I learned from both of those guys – Elvin too – those guys, once they got a set, they didn't want to – why mess up a pretty thing? I tell you. If it worked, the audience liked it or something, the musicians liked it, he liked it, they didn't change tunes. You played the same tunes night after night, which became a thing – a lesson to me, later on, that I had with Elvin about that. But with Miles, we played almost the same thing all the time. It was – but never discussion. He never told me what to play. I asked him one time. I don't know what I played behind him. I played something. He said, "Play thirds." So the next night I played thirds under his melody. [Liebman sings a phrase and it's harmonization.] I don't know what the hell I was doing. He never said anything. Again, I went back to Pete. I said, they don't say anything. I guess you're cool. He never said a word to me. He said once, he said, "Yeah. You should finish before you're done." I said, "What?" Now I've thought – I'm still thinking about that statement, because I think I understand what he meant. If you're already thinking about it, you've already overstayed your welcome. Finish up, get off, which was his thing. He knew when to stop, of all things.

He had a different relationship with everybody in the band. With me, we had a – I don't how much of this we should put on camera.

Kirchner: As much as you want.

Liebman: Drugs was a big part of the relationship. No question about it. He was definitely a big-time pill-head at that time, and coke. He had a lot of pain. He was in pain for years. It ends up he had pneumonia. It ended up he had walking pneumonia. That's why he had all that phlegm and everything like that. I'm a Miles Davis fan. If he said jump, I'll jump. You know what I'm saying. Who else is going to hang out with him to six in the morning? Me. Me, or Elena, and sometimes Al. The other guys were a whole separate thing. There was a lot of stuff in that band, a lot of tension, a lot of stuff. It was also a black-white thing, Black Panther thing. It was all Black Panther colors, flag of the Black Panthers with the Yamaha equipment, and here's whitey, standing there. Not the greatest – I could see them looking at me a little weird. But not all. It was a vibe.

But Miles, I got along with him. I just got along with him. It was not about the music. But he had to tape every night. He recorded. The first big Sony cassette machines. He recorded everything, and he'd come back to the room. He had it on all night. He would listen to everything. But he never talked about it. He just said, "Yeah, it's bad, motherfucker." He never said anything. He just got out and did it. You know from that period, he was conducting a lot, when to play, when not to play. He'd cut you in, cut you out, cut them in, cut them out, stop time, not eight bars, stop time, just random start again. It was weird. It was very hands on. He was very in control. He didn't want nobody else to bring tunes in. That was his thing. It was like that.

But I was with Miles Davis. So, number one, for your career. Number two, just to be around to hear him every night, because I don't care what the music is. He played the shit out of it. I was there pinching myself. I said, I wish it was ten years earlier. I certainly wished it could have been *ESP*. I certainly was – I felt it wasn't challenging, the music. I don't know what to play on E-flat for an hour.

Kirchner: He didn't want you to play for an hour anyway.

Liebman: No, but I mean, the music was just one thing over and over again, more or less, I thought. Later on, in retrospect, I see more that there was. Obviously, he knew what he was doing. But it didn't seem like he knew what he was doing when I was there. I had to pinch myself and say, what do I play? Blues licks? What do I play? Pentatonic? I was trying to find some material to play. There's no interaction, because that music wasn't about the rhythm section. Complete – a carpet of sound behind you that had nothing to do with what you play. So everything I knew about jazz was out the window. I didn't know what to do. I don't know what I did. But when he got up and played, he played. He always played creatively. He always played the way he played. He always left space. He always did what Miles does. Even though it was this music, it was decibeled out and loud, he did what he did. He always had a focus about his own playing. He had better nights than other nights, of course, chop-wise especially, but it was remarkable how he could tell a story in the middle of this bup bud-up bup bud-up. Nothing else happening. I think about it. I swear, if I played right now and had to play like that format – last night I thought about it. I think about it all the time. In fact today, in the studio, I thought about it. I think about, today we played D Phrygian for 15 minutes with no direction, because the guy didn't know what he was doing. And I thought about Miles. Any time I come to that situation, I think about him, and it makes me think about at least some way to approach it, whatever I learned from him, being next to him. So it was great.

Our personal relationship was a – I just hung with him. Half the time I didn't understand what he said. I went, "Yeah," because he talked so like that, and the higher he got, the harder it was to understand him. He didn't talk that much, but when he would say something, I would say, "Yeah," and I didn't really understand half the things he said. We're talking 4, 5 in the morning, and his voice was bad, as it was. Drugs was part of it. Also, I think that – this is just my thought. I think that the way – he saw me walk, and he saw me deal with the leg. He was in pain in those days, one way or the other. I think he respected me for my ability to get around. People look at you, and they look at me, and they say, "How do you go about this?"

Kirchner: You put one foot in front of the other.

Liebman: Carrying three horns across the planet, and no complaints, and never look like you're in trouble. I think it was coming to that part of his life, when his body was starting

to fail him. He was looking and saying, this is going to be a new game in town, and here's a guy that doesn't even wince. I said, "Miles, I was like this . . . ." He'd say, "How do you do that, man?" I said, "I've been like this since three years old. I don't – it's not something I think about. It's what I – it's the normal thing." He said, "Man, it's hard for me to walk." That's taking away that part of your life, when you've been doing it all your life.

Kirchner: Let's break here. He's running on the end. He needs to switch.

Whatever "tunes" there were, or material, or whatever, Miles brought in, and Miles conducted.

Liebman: Yes. It started with a bass line, and the drums would start. He'd just play a little melody. The melody, there was nothing more than two bars. Maybe there was a four-bar melody. There was one melody – one longer melody.

Kirchner: Even that music going back to *Bitches Brew*, most of it is based on bass things, like *Bitches Brew* or *Miles Runs the Voodoo Down*, or whatever.

Liebman: Exactly. That's the point. That's what he was pursuing. It came from the bass, in the end. And Sly – that's why this line from Sly was great. It was very slippery, a slippery bass line, no real 1. Although Michael Henderson was much more rudimentary than that. The thing that made Michael Henderson great, I thought, was that he was very simple and he laid it right down. He did not play that fast stuff. He was not – Jaco was not a thing yet, but he was not coming out of any of that stuff. He didn't even play like Chuck Rainey. He played much simpler than anybody, Michael.

Kirchner: He was a Motown . . .

Liebman: He was a Motown prodigy, of Jamerson. He was Jamerson's protégé, Jamie Jamerson, who was the main guy. Very simple and very solid and very literal. I think that – Miles would just work off of the sound of the guitar. Reggie just played any kind of comp. The main soloists were me and Pete Cosey, besides Miles.

Kirchner: Cosey was from Chicago.

Liebman: Cosey's from Chicago. Played with Gene Ammons before he was with Miles.

Kirchner: I didn't know that.

Liebman: A blues player.

Kirchner: I always think of him as a really out player.

Liebman: Absolute down the pipe, also out too. Part of the AACM thing. Founded the AACM, part of the beginning with Muhal [Richard Abrams]. Very nice guy, Pete. Very – looked very off-putting, but he was a very nice cat, very nice. And into – whatever. And Al. Al was a New York bebop drummer who never played rock-and-roll until the first gig with Miles. Miles got Al from the Cellar, 96th and Broadway, playing with Walter Bishop. Miles went down and hired him. What's he playing with Walter Bishop? He's certainly not playing backbeats. Next thing you know, he comes in. Al said the music was like da-da-da-da. He said he never played like that in his life. He never played – you know, never. That wasn't his thing, until he played with Miles.

There was one thing about that, among all the things I have said about Miles, I think, as far as sidemen go. One thing that, almost to the man, certainly with exceptions: we played – this "we," meaning the sidemen of Miles – on every instrument, played a certain way with Miles that we never played again. This would be an interesting thing to follow up, to take the list and look at. Did Keith [Jarrett] ever play like that again? Did Chick ever play quite like that again? Did Dave ever play like that quite again? Did Steve Grossman ever play like that again? Did Trane really play like that again? Did Wayne play like that again? Not really. Okay, Sonny Stitt. There's others. That wasn't – Hank Mobley, yes. Wynton Kelly. But certainly, as time went on, there was something about the way he was and the way his perception was, that he heard in you what he wanted out of you, and somehow you did it, and he didn't say anything about it.

I talked to other guys. He didn't say anything to Chick. He didn't say anything to anybody. A couple words here and there, little bits, but never really directions, and nothing on paper. Somehow he heard you and could tell that he could get you to do what he wanted, which is the best thing – a great thing about being a good producer or a director. It's like the guy with a movie. He knows who should play that role. I always said Miles was the best director around. He knows the backdrop. He knows the outfits, the costumes. He knows the timing. He knows what scenery should be on the stage. And he knows who should say what, when. That was his great expertise, I think, right from the beginning, his ability to perceive the total picture, of which he was an important part, but not the only part. That was the thing that made Miles different than everybody else, his ability to think bigger and around him, rather than just, I'm playing good, I'm with a band, and that's good enough. He had a wide scope, an ability to transcend just himself and to be able to tell a story. He wanted the music to tell a story. He understood that. He understood that you need all the moving parts to do that. That was his thing, I think.

Kirchner: I have a feeling, and I'm not alone in thinking this, that his electric bands were his way of reproducing the stuff he did with Gil Evans, but in an electric setting, but with him as the centerpiece.

Liebman: That's a valid – I could see that.

Kirchner: But trying to do with electric instruments . . .

Liebman: Color.

Kirchner: Yeah.

Liebman: Color, and the storytelling aspect of what color does. What color does is it enhances the story. It's what harmony does. Harmony enhances the melody. We have – 99% of the music in the world doesn't have harmony in it. It's been doing fine for 5,000 years. But when you have harmony – which, thank you, Western world – you deepen the emotional impact of the melody. You broaden it. You change the color of it. Gil: master of color, at that period, for sure. I never thought of it like that, but you have a valid point. I could understand that.

Kirchner: I listened to the *Dark Magus* record recently, which was one of your last gigs with him.

Liebman: Yeah, March, and then I left him – yeah, actually, because I left him in April.

Kirchner: Which is an interesting record. Apparently on that record he brought in Dominique Gaumont and he brought in Azar Lawrence.

Liebman: He didn't bring them in. The band – Mtume [James Forman] brought them in.

Kirchner: What was the deal behind that?

Liebman: I have no idea. The idea was to get rid of me, obviously. Finally Mtume found a way to do it. Azar comes out and cannot – doesn't know what to do. Miles goes like this – give him my horn, because he didn't have a pickup. I said, no way. I was pissed off. My mother and father were there. I think Joe Allard was there. I'm at Carnegie Hall with Miles Davis, and you're going to bring out a ringer for me? I said, I ain't taking this shit. I was pissed off. I was really pissed off. The nerve of him. Plus he came an hour-and-a-half late from 20 blocks away. How are you an hour-and-a-half late when you are from 78th Street to 58th Street? Can I get this right? He comes in. It's everybody, overtime at Carnegie Hall. George [?]. Everybody's backstage flipping out. It's Carnegie Hall. It's New York City. Guy comes in late, high as a kite. Not one word. Out from the car right to the stage, dressed in complete black. That was not a great gig. But I – I had to write notes for it, whenever they re-released it.

Kirchner: Late ’90s.

Liebman: It wasn’t that bad. It wasn’t so bad. That guy, Azar, he didn’t know what to do. I felt bad for him. He didn’t know what to do. But it was near the end, because – the reason I left him, which is because I had a band in waiting. I had done already *Lookout Farm* with ECM and was about to do *Drum Ode*, and had an opportunity, had a chance, and had a band. I had Richie [Beirach], I had Frank [Tusa], and I had Jeff Williams. I found the drummer, and I knew I had to do it. I had to jump on it while it was hot. There was nobody conducting my career. I didn’t have managers or anything. But I could see that – look, after Miles, there’s nowhere else to go. That’s the top of the food chain as a sideman, as a horn player. It doesn’t get better. It’s only going to go down. You could work with Freddie Hubbard. It’s not the same. So what was I going to do? Be a journeyman sideman? I had more ambition than that. I also had some stuff that I wanted to do, which was a combination of him and Trane, in the end, at the beginning at least. And I had a relationship with Richie that was growing and that had already been developing for a couple of years. I just wanted to take the opportunity.

I told Miles that. We were in Brazil. I gave him notice. I came back after a gig. We came back. I sat in. I went around to all the clubs. His door was open. Boom boom. “Come in. Who’s that?” I say, “First of all, how do you play samba?,” whatever they’re playing. He said, “1 and 3.” I said, “1 and 3?” He said, “Bird used to call *Tico Tico*, first tune in the set, fast. I had no idea.” He said, “1 and 3, Dave, 1 and 3.” I said, “Okay, thanks.” I said, “Listen, I got to leave.” He said, “Where are you going to?” I said, “I got guys.” He said, “You going to play any bar shit?” “Yeah.” I said, “You know what? If I would skip that . . .” I said, “You did it for 30 years.” I said, “If I would skip that, what would I say to myself?” He said, “Bahhhh.” Whenever he didn’t like something, to acknowledge you, he would never go like, “Yeah.” He’d go like, “Ahhhh.” He would say, “Ahhhh.” There’s this gasp would come out, like, “Ahhhh, you asshole. Forget you, man.” He said, “Yeah. I always knew you would leave.” He was cool.

But then I went back, and we did – Duke died, talking about Duke Ellington, as we were earlier. Duke died that week. So we could find the exact date, because it’s April, I believe, of ’74. Is that right?

Kirchner: May 24th, ’74, he died.

Liebman: All right. So this is then. Okay. I’m a month off. I went back. When is *Get Up with It*? The track *He Loved Him Madly*. *He Loved Him Madly* is after I left him, within a few weeks.

Kirchner: Let’s [checking discography].

Liebman: See, this is great, because you know your life by this. This is better than my birth certificate. I can't count on anybody else that knows. You know what I'm saying?

Kirchner: I feel like Ralph Edwards. *He Loved Him Madly* is June 19th or 20th, '74.

Liebman: Okay, that's within a month after Duke. So we're in Brazil in May, and he – because Duke died, whatever night that was, or day – who knows? It could have been three days until we found out. He said – we were on the bandstand. Afterwards, he said, "Duke died." I said, "Whoa." He said, "Got to do something for him." Then, that's what we did. *He Loved Him Madly.*

Kirchner: Because you had done . . .

Liebman: One of the most bizarre tracks of all time.

Kirchner: Why do you say that?

Liebman: Whew, talk about floating for 27 minutes. It's repeated – Teo repeated my solo at the end, my flute solo, except this time he put it through an Echoplex or something. I don't know. That tour. We came in. That track – I don't know if you recall that track. It's like a dirge of dirges. It is slow. It is sort of in time, not really. Miles plays. It's the organ throughout, completely [Liebman makes a distorted sound]. It's like complete atmosphere. I play flute. I don't think I played saxophone on it. It has no – at all – melody. And it went on and on and on. It came out. It was 27 minutes. Do they tell you that stuff?

Kirchner: No.

Liebman: Okay. I believe it was 27 minutes, one of the longest tracks of all time, pressed . . .

Kirchner: I remember it being long. It took a whole side of an LP.

Liebman: Anyway, that was my last time with him. That was my last thing with him, a month after I left him.

Kirchner: Because you had done part of that record . . .

Liebman: That record goes a few years.

Kirchner: . . . September of '73, *Calypso Frelimo.*

Liebman: And I think there's stuff from Sonny Fortune there too, on *Get Up with It.* I think from the future.

Kirchner: They only list the stuff that you're a part of.

Liebman: Oh, I see, because this is my discography. No, I think that record has a couple of things from even '72, something before me and after me, a hodge-podge record, except *He Loved Him Madly.* That is definitely done at that time.

Kirchner: Why did Miles play the organ? That was the only period that he was doing that?

Liebman: The first gig at the Fillmore, it was Cedric Lawson on organ. By February he was gone, March he was gone. Lonnie Liston Smith. By April he was gone. Next thing I know, "I'm playing it myself." Next thing I know, his elbow is on the keyboard. I don't know. I dared once to go over and play a chord, like this. I could play more piano than he could, because in fact he had me playing for him. We were in Japan. One night we went out afterwards. In Japan, you're done at 9 o'clock. You play at 6:30. He went out afterwards to the hang, a bar or whatever this was. "Go play." I said, okay, so I went over and played some Bill tune, Miles, whatever, one of those tunes. He came over. He said, "Gil showed me this," and he gives me like f#-c-f voicing, like a D7 or whatever it is. He said, "Yeah." Then he moves it around, half-stepping. "That's what Gil showed me," like it's the hippest thing in the world. I go, "Yeah, Miles, that's great." He goes, "Yeah, yeah."

But no, the keyboard was there for him. That was his way of just hanging out on stage and keeping busy, I guess. I don't know why, except color, and back – you might be really right about that. In the end, that organ, as primitive as it was compared to what is available now, it had more sound than anything before that. It certainly had more sounds than an electric piano. In fact, when you went like this and you played a triad on it, that predominates this music of my period with him. There is something to be said about the color aspect of it. It certainly wasn't harmonic, because he played triads, is all he did. Or he played clusters. But it is definitely a color. Maybe he was trying to be the brass section. I don't know.

Kirchner: In the meantime, you had been working on your own thing. You had this thing with Moses called *Open Sky.*

Liebman: That the first real formed music. That's already the loft.

Kirchner: Do you want to talk about that first?

Liebman: That's already '70, '71, and that's coming out of the loft. That's basically Ornette [Coleman], Sonny [Murray], Albert Ayler, a free trio. Some time, some changes, but basically free. That's coming out of my relationship with Moses, which is my longest musical relationship. I mean Moses, we go back to '61 – all right, so, '62, a sweet sixteen party where I saw him, grabbed him. He – Moses is still one of the greats of all time. There's another killer gem, an amazingly creative, killing drummer.

Kirchner: Is he still teaching in New England?

Liebman: Yeah, he lives in Boston, teaches in New England. We just did something a little while – we just did a gig up in Boston with the Fringe and Moses and me. I'm going to Boston now, because my daughter's at Emerson. So now I go up and play a little bit more there. We just did a couple months ago. He's – Moses is a crazy, eccentric, maniac, amazing guy, and a killer drummer. *Open Sky* came out of that. It was Frank Tusa, but it was Swallow, Miroslav [Vitous]. We had tapes. It was [Eddie] Gomez, a variety of guys. Moses was definitely ahead of everybody. He was already – as I said, he was jazz mad already. By a teenager, he knew everything. He played – he was playing with Rahsaan when he was 17, 18. That's how I sat in with Rahsaan, through him. He was with Gary Burton when he was 17, 18. He was advanced.

Open Sky was that. It was more of a collective. My first real Dave Liebman is *Lookout Farm,* and that is because Lookout Farm is a place, still, 100 miles up north near Napanoch, New York, where this painter Eugene Gregan lives. He was very influential in my life and Richie's life. We spent a lot of time with him. He was my – he was one of the gurus guys. He's still there, still painting. My house, his paintings are everywhere. You'll see tomorrow. He was the artist head of a – he was a street guy with the artist temperament, from Hartford or New Haven, tough guy. Completely artist. He would make – he was like a Picasso. He would take this and make something out of it. He took a bone and made something out of it. He explained art to me and Richie. A lot of times we were together. We'd go up there, we'd have some – we'd get high, spend two, three days there, up – pristine. John Simon owned it. John Simon, the producer, he owned the land. It was called Lookout Farm. It wasn't a farm. It was just beautiful.

I learned about art through him. I don't know how to explain it. He was not an intellectual, but he was – incredible eyes. He would take something out of a book and say, see this, see that. His paintings – you'll see tomorrow the way he painted in this particular period. Now he's doing Monets and flowers and everything, but in this period it was miniatures and stuff like that, Persian shit, like you go inside, you see a face. It was sort of psychedelic, but it ancient. Anyway, he was a very heavy influence, and that first record we named after him and the tune on there called *Napanoch,* that I recorded later, is after him, and on the *Forgotten Fantasies* record, there's a track called *Eugene,* which we wrote for Eugene.

So we called the group Lookout Farm. You've got to remember, those are the days when everybody had a band name. We co-opted rock. What's Dave Liebman Group? So corny, no, please. Got to find a name. So, the Onions, whatever. So Lookout Farm was, why not? It had some meaning to us. It completely meant nothing, because people came up to say, "Do you guys live on a farm?" "We live at Spring Street and 19th Street," and we're Lookout Farm. It had nothing to do with anything, but it was those days.

I had a chance to frame some music and form it. ECM came because he saw me with Elvin and he later saw me with Miles, Manfred. That's how ECM started.

Kirchner: So he made you an offer.

Liebman: The first year it was with Elvin, Berlin festival, '72, '71, whatever. "Hello, I'm Manfred Eicher. I'm ECM." Just the very beginning. Just had a few records out. "Oh, thank you. I'd love to record." Never heard from him. Next year, I was with Miles, Berlin Festival. He said, "I really want to record you." I said, "I have a group now." He said, okay, let's go. That's how we did Lookout Farm.

Kirchner: You did it with Richie and Tusa and Jeff, plus . . .

Liebman: John Abercrombie, Armen Halburian on percussion, and my girl at that time, Elena, she sang some things. Don Alias, I think, was on it, and Badal maybe. He's on drums. I don't know. The times get mixed, but they're all part of this whole thing.

Kirchner: You must have had a nice budget.

Liebman: Manfred – it was a two-day date.

Kirchner: Where did you record that? What studio?

Liebman: Tony May was the engineer, and it was somewhere. I don't remember. Tony May, he was the engineer for that. But it was very unusual, because Manfred did not record outside of Oslo or of Ludwigs-, what the other one is, Ludwigsburg or Ludwigs-something, with the piano. I don't know if this is the first date in New York, for him to come to New York.

He's a case, another case. But he was there at that date, and that went well. The thing with percussion, a lot of drums, ECM is not about that. So it stood out. But it was a hit. It became – we had – we were hot. I got – that was the hottest I ever did, those next two, three years, definitely. We won the *Down Beat*, group deserving wider recognition, blah

blah blah. That led to *Drum Mode*, which led to the A&M contract, *Sweet Hands* and so forth.

This was a definite period of ascendency for me. Again, as I said, to reiterate, if you came out of Miles, you had your chance. In those days, there was still a system of apprenticeship and recognition that you had put your time in. The business recognized you. The business, meaning records, whatever they were, and promoters, people, the Max Gordons of the world. You had put your time in. You deserve your shot. You had to have music that's yours. There's a big difference now in that discussion, the last 20 years. Then, if you didn't have music that wasn't yours, don't even come around. But you're expected to. You're coming out of Miles Davis. You've got to have something that's yours. You've got to have something that shows you, what you believe in. That's what Blue Note worked on. That's what Columbia – they worked on that system of recognition, that you had put your time in and now you had earned your stripes. Now, what do you have to show for it? We'll give you the shot, if you've got something to show for it. I was ready. I had Richie, and I was ready to go.

Kirchner: I think Joe Lovano is maybe one of the last people who's actually come out of that system.

Liebman: Yes, because of Bruce, because Bruce was around and he knew him.

Kirchner: I can't think of anybody else after Joe.

Liebman: Not, this is over. It's been over since the '70s, and by the '80s, definitely, because you didn't have longevity with a band. When I was with Elvin, okay, it's not 20 years, but I was with him two, three years. I was with Miles a year-and-a-half. There's something. Not like five years with Art Blakey. But you were expected to be obedient and do your job. Be a sideman, shut your mouth, and do the job. Get on the stage and play your ass off. Don't say anything. It was really – it's like a plantation system, in a way. Those guys . . .

Kirchner: Yeah, indentured servitude.

Liebman: I believe it. I've got to tell you something about the black cats. I believe this. They – with each other, man, they were like, "That's my property." I think, when Miles wanted Wayne from Buhaina [Blakey], Buhaina said, "No way. That's my man. I got him." You stand in line, Miles Davis. You can't – you don't take my property. Miles would always get – like, if Al worked – I had this thing with Quest, when we get into it. When Al was with me and Miles started working again, and Al had to leave, they don't like – they own you. It's not that you're on salary. In some cases you were. I wasn't. But you were an indentured servant. That's actually – that's very true. You're like, you're

signed to this guy and don't be thinking about doing nothing else. On your own time, but if it ever conflicts, you know where you better be, or you're in trouble. And if the word gets out that you're in trouble, that you've double-timed – it was like a verbal system of trust. You're with me. You're my man. Don't – he doesn't have any right to you. And don't be doing any interviews when you're with him that you wouldn't be doing with me. Watch your Ps and Qs. It was understood, in a certain way.

I respect that. I wouldn't have that now. But I respect that, and I think that that's the way the guys worked. That system lasted as long as there was work, because without work – you can't indenture a guy if you don't have the fields to work on. We didn't have gigs. Once the gigs stopped, you couldn't have a steady band. So this whole system broke down. That's what happened. It's too bad it broke down, because I . . .

Kirchner: It really is.

Liebman: Look, I've had a band for 20 years now. I would love to able to have enough work to say, "I'd like you to come in one night on bass" or somebody else to come in, besides Vic, or with Vic, let's say, just using him. If I had six weeks in a row, I could do that. But if I have like six days a year, I can't do that. That's a side effect of not having work that we don't think about, that you can't – the relay system. You don't have anything to relay, because you don't have time to do it. I think musically that's not good, unfortunately. It's an unfortunate part.

Kirchner: The whole idea of working clubs.

Liebman: Anyway, that's a lot of by-products of that, the lack of work, but that's one of them. It's a subtle thing.

Kirchner: You did *Lookout Farm.* I want to talk about that for a moment, because later Chuck Berg worked on a book of that music.

Liebman: Yeah, small group improvisation, one-of-a-kind book. Great book, too. It was us talking about the process.

We had a very good relationship, Richie, Frank, and Jeff. It was like a rock band in that vibe, in a certain way. We talked. Every night we came back with the tape, and we listened religiously to the tape. We'd fall asleep. I know I always fell asleep in my clothes. Richie would say, "You're going to fall asleep," and then I'd lay out on the bed and I'd be asleep. Wake up next morning. I'd say, "Did we listen?" "Yeah man." Then we'd change something. We were very into it. It was Dave Liebman, because I had the name, but it was really a co-op. Richie was my best lieutenant of all, still is. We all had a part of it. So, when I got A&M – when A&M came – when I signed with them – this is a

major record label, major deal, there's a publishing link called Almo. "Is there anything you want to do, Dave?" I go into the guy. He was the head of *Billboard* for years, older guy, Joe something. I said, "Yeah. I got a band. We talk about the music a lot. I just think it would be of interest." He said, "Sounds good." He said, "It won't be for everybody, but it will be good for the catalog." Class act. He said, "I know what you're doing." He understood that we were jazz, because A&M was a rock label. It just wasn't this Horizon thing for a little offbeat thing.

Kirchner: That was John Snyder.

Liebman: Yeah, that was John. They gave him the money, and whatever. He said, "Do what you want." So I said, okay, here it is. So what we did is, Chuck sat with us for three days with a tape recorder. I remember we took it apart, because we had this woman that I knew. She gave us the use of her apartment, Third Avenue. The four of us – Badal too. Badal was there too – five of us sat around, and I had five tunes, I think it was, or four tunes. We talked about how we put the tune together. "Dave, talk. Jeff," like that. Then we had the CD – no, at that time, the plastic – what do you call it? – the plastic record that you used to do at a fair, that you made for ten cents or 25 cents. That was in the back of the book. That had the version of the tune that we talked about after. So the tune was called composition – the book was based on composition and performance, and we discussed afterwards how it was different from what we thought or how it came out. We were very analytical. Chuck transcribed it. He wrote it out. He wrote it out from the tape. They put beautiful pictures in. They had lead sheets. It was – it's a classic book, anybody who knows it, because no-one's ever done it, before or since, about a group discussing the process, which I love to do, obviously.

Kirchner: The book is out of print, unfortunately.

Liebman: But that was Chuck, yeah. He helped us, big time. I knew I'm never going to have an opportunity like this again to sit with peers and discuss the nuts and bolts of the music, because most guys don't talk and most guys can't talk or won't or whatever. Also, I could see that this is a young guy's game. This is something that I'm into now, but I probably won't be later on. The natural enthusiasm of youth, like, "What are we doing, man? It's so exciting. Let's discuss it." You don't want to leave it. You go home after the gig, you don't want to leave it. You just want to savor the moment. I could feel this is certainly not going to go on for the rest of my life. So if there was any way to take advantage of these four, five personalities being together that really are into this vibe, I might as well take advantage of it. This happened to end up being, businesswise, the guy came in with me. It was great.

Kirchner: So you did those records with ECM, and then you got this deal now with Horizon.

Liebman: That's the big time. Herb Alpert's office. Charlie Chaplin's studios. That's where A&M was. Still is. La Brea Avenue in L.A. Expense account. I still owe them $98,000. Let's put it that way.

Kirchner: All record companies tell you that.

Liebman: According to the statement. They stopped sending it to me.

Kirchner: And of course you believe them, right?

Liebman: Well, John Snyder spent money like it was going out of style.

Kirchner: That's what I hear.

Liebman: Thank you very much. And in a lot of different ways, may I say? Flying John Abercrombie out for one tune, to L.A., "No problem." Charlie Haden for one tune. In those days – if there was ever a rock [?] – if I ever got close to it, it was the A&M, a year or two. Even through the Ellis–Liebman band. They put me on a promotion tour. I went to ten cities. I didn't play one note. Only did interviews, when *Lighten Up* came out, with Pee Wee. It was – this was the big time. These people treated me like I was Peter Frampton, who was their big guy at that time. They had no idea what jazz was. The guy would meet me at the airport with a white stretch limo. That's what you're supposed to do. In those days they had a guy in every city. They meet you, and they're like, "You want girls? You want dope? What do you want to do?" I said, "Let's find a jam session." I said, "Where are the jazz guys' places?" "Jazz?" I said, "Let me make a call or two." Once in a while it would work out, Atlanta or Dallas or something like that. This was a ten- or twelve-day tour. We had a single. It actually got on the charts. It was a real episode. I'm glad I saw it.

First of all, we did *Sweet Hands, Forgotten Fantasies,* and *Lighten Up. Sweet Hands* is a great record. *Forgotten Fantasies* is a classic. *Lighten Up* has some problems, because it was two different sessions, East Coast, West Coast, etc.

But it was – to be with a company that had muscle and that thought you were the next star, this was the day – the reason this started, Herb Albert and Jerry Moss, A&M, were on the West Side Highway, from what I understand, in their little limo, and on came George Benson with *Masquerade,* which was a humongous hit, if anyone remembers this. This was crossover. This made *Chameleon* look like nothing, and that – which had already been big. This was a massive hit, George Benson singing this tune, and they went like, "Why can't we do that? Why should Warner have that?" So he said, "Let's go a million dollars. We'll find a guy."

Snyder called me. I was the second call. I think [Dave] Brubeck was the first call. Because he called me. He said, "You're my second call." I said, "Who are you?" He said, "I work with" – he worked with Creed [Taylor]. He had some kind of position, something with CTI. He said, "A&M Records. You know them?" I said yeah. He said, "They gave me a million dollars to have a jazz label called Horizon, and I want you to record." That was the beginning of this relationship. How nice. It's like a book. That's great.

Kirchner: And you didn't know him at all before then?

Liebman: Never knew who he was. Never met him.

Kirchner: How had he heard you? Where had he heard you?

Liebman: He knew me. He knew me from Elvin and Miles. Guys know you, because you're on the scene. But we had a good time.

Kirchner: *Sweet Hands* basically is . . .

Liebman: That's the Indian thing. That's Badal. Here, now, Badal starts with me with McLaughlin with *My Goal's Beyond.* Then he goes with me *On the Corner.* He's in the band when I start with Miles. He was in the first three or four months before he let the sitar – and he let Hal Williams go. He let organ go. That was when I joined. Indian music. Look, it's . . .

Kirchner: Except the one Beatles tune.

Liebman: We did . . .

Kirchner: *Within You, Without You.*

Liebman: . . . *Within You, Without You.* But here's the thing – and *Ashirbad* is on there. That's wisdom – Indian music, in the end, is the heaviest shit, period, done. I was – now, everything is so clichéd, because of World Music, but then it was exciting. I wasn't the first to do it. Oregon and like that. And look, Eric Dolphy did a record with a tablā player in 1961. It's just that I really got into it. I studied bansuri. I got the flute. I got into Panallal Ghosh, all those guys, [?] Khan. I got into it. And Badal said, let's do it. It looked like a thing I could do, jazz and fusion and Indian, blah blah blah. So I dedicated the record to that vibe. That's why "sweet hands." "Sweet hands" means – the Indians use that to mean, you have talent. If you have sweet hands, you're like eight years old, your life is determined. You have sweet hands. That's how Badal explained it to me.

Badal became my man. He was my main guy. He's still very close with me. Badal was older. Badal was different from the other guys. He came from a different culture. He was – he started out as an accountant. He never played tablās until he came here. Went down on 6th Street and Second Avenue, Indian restaurants. "Oh, you play tablās?" "Sure, I play tablās. I play tablās." That's how John met him. That's how McLaughlin met him, going there to eat.

Badal became very – he helped me be a leader of the band. I don't know how to say it. I needed somebody to lean on. You know what I mean? I got very close with him. So I said to A&M – I said to Snyder, "This thing's happening, this Indian thing. We got some great stuff, and he's in the band." He said, "Go ahead. Do it." Then, it was really a thing. That was a real crossover at that time. That was new. The Indian influence was relatively new. Outside of the Beatles, nobody knew where India was. So that's how *Sweet Hands* came about.

Kirchner: You went from there to doing *Forgotten Fantasies,* which is a duo record.

Liebman: I wanted to give me and Richie – right, and John said yes. We did it at Electric Ladyland, because me and Richie by then really had – it was the beginning of our – this harmonic thing we play, in the way we play. I want to get that on tape. He said sure. John was cool. Duo record, on a major label, trying to be commercial. I mean, look, he did the Revolutionary Ensemble. Come on. If you do the Revolutionary Ensemble with my friend Leroy Jenkins, I think you could do Dave Liebman and Richie playing *Forgotten Fantasies.* So it wasn't a big leap for John, because he was just doing whatever he could. He was going crazy. They gave him a blank check. He did what he wanted to.

Kirchner: For a while, anyway.

Liebman: Yeah, he did. He got a lot done. He did.

Kirchner: Then your third and totally different record from the other two is with Pee Wee Ellis.

Liebman: Okay, here's what happened. This is – if there's ever been a time – this might be a good way to end this period. This fusion thing was getting a little out of hand. I won't say John Klemmer. I don't know who all, but guys were cashing in. I was cashing in, but guys were really cashing in, because they were getting hits. I'm looking there, I'm standing aside. I'm saying, I should be able to figure this out. How can I figure out how to do this? – which I still felt from the Ten Wheel Drive and the Miles period – how can I do this and bring some musical integrity to it, from what I know? How can I put Coltrane together with James Brown? Let's just put it – let me put it – let's put it succinctly. How can I do what I knew from there, with music that I felt an attachment to and loved?

I had this relationship with Pee Wee over the years. We had had it a little bit during that Sawbuck period. I stayed in touch with Pee Wee, a great musician. He stayed in the pocket. He wrote, goddamn, *Mother Popcorn* and *I Feel Good* for James Brown, for God's sake. The guy was an acknowledged master of that music who played a Stanley Turrentine type of jazz. I said, "Pee Wee, why don't we do something?" I said, "You'll be that. I'll be this. The front line. It'll be great." I said, "I'll play my crazy shit. You play that stuff, put that thing behind it. Let's get Jimmy" from the band, blah blah blah blah blah.

So what happened to me – and I will admit this – is that I got greedy, or I was trying to be greedy, in the sense that – it was a little ego, it was materialism, in a way, and it was musical. I'm not going to say it was one or the other, but it was all of them. There was some musical things I'm describing. There was, other guys were ahead of me on line, and they don't play anywhere near me. I'm from Miles and Elvin. Can't I figure it out, how to be on top? What's going on, Dave? So I said, you know what? I'm going to do it. So I stopped Lookout Farm, which was probably the worst move I ever did, because we were just starting to get [?]. On the other hand, I found a backer. I had found somebody who was ready to finance the whole thing, but I had to move to California. I had to move to California. I didn't want to do it in New York. First of all, I always wanted to live in San Francisco, from the first time I was there, '70, '71, I think Elvin, first time, I said, this place, you got to live here once. Just got to live here. Number two, I didn't want to do this in front of my peers in New York City, with my reputation the way it was, because it appeared to be – and it was – ostensibly a commercial entity, a commercial project.

So I moved to San Francisco. I took Pee Wee and his family there. We found a houseboat. I had checks made out every week to a roadie, to a secretary, to the guy who took car of the van, to the band. I spent probably $50,000 to $70,000 in six months until the guy finally "ptt" – he finally cut the thing, because we were – nothing happening. But I was – it was a chance for me to try to get to the next level commercially. That was the period. Everybody was doing it, and I just couldn't stand anybody else getting it, and I knew that I couldn't figure this out musically. We tried. We tried. They put me on a promotion tour. *Lighten Up* is partially a New York session and partially a San Francisco session. We tried. We played the Troubadour. Stevie Wonder sat in on drums. I always tell that story. And that was the end. The guy said, "I think that's enough money." I said, "I think you're right."

Kirchner: "Write if you get work."

Liebman: I mean, I already spent $60,000 of the guy's money. Everything on the up and up. We worked. We worked gigs. We were trying to get ahead. A&M was behind it, sort

of. But to pull together something like that is a major deal. It doesn't matter. I couldn't pull it together.

When it ended, I said, okay, I'll stay in San Francisco, lick my wounds. I like living here. I was in between women, blah blah blah blah blah blah. It's so nice out here. I'll play jazz. So I got and I get with Eddie Henderson, start working with him and Julian Priester. We worked six months in a club. Nobody came. Nobody. It was called Christo's, somewhere in San Francisco, Union Street or something. Nobody. Three people a night. Somehow they kept working there. It must have been a mob thing. I don't know.

Kirchner: Who was the rhythm section?

Liebman: It was Eddie Marshall, James Leary, and Mark Levine on piano. Mark Levine, and me, Eddie, and Julian Priester in front. It was a good band. Played *Maiden Voyage*, played *Dolphin Dance*, played originals of Eddie's. I was working with jazz musicians in San Francisco. I was accepted all right. They knew me, of course, because I had been at the Keystone Korner a million times by then. It worked and it worked and worked until Chick called me, and I went on the world tour. That's the beginning of me getting back to New York, probably a good place to stop for now.

But to finish this, this San Francisco thing. I learned a lot about business. I saw the other side for a minute. I saw what it is to have an expense account, where you don't have to think about it, what it is to have whatever you want, to be treated like a star, whether you earned it or not, and also to do something that – what's the word? It's not specious. It's that there's – I really didn't have the goods to back it up. I needed three girls with their dresses up to here. I wasn't – it wasn't . . .

Kirchner: You're just not Kenny G.

Liebman: I couldn't do it. What I learned was, you can't do something halfway. We were too commercial, and we weren't commercial enough. When I played, the band suddenly became – here's Lieb with that thing. I'm me. And then Pee Wee's bap bap, playing rhythm, playing the shit out of the blues scale. Jimmy is funking out. Everything's happening.

Kirchner: Jimmy Strassburg?

Liebman: Yes. The guitar player went on – he was 18. It was his first gig. He went on to be Huey Lewis . . .

Kirchner: Huey Lewis and the News.

Liebman: He wrote tunes. He lives on royalties now. The bass player was Tony . . .

Kirchner: Saunders.

Liebman: Yes, Tony Saunders, who came from Merle Saunders. They're father and son, very famous in the Oakland area, funky as could be. I'm still in touch with him.

Kirchner: The guitar player was Chris Hayes?

Liebman: Chris Hayes. That was the kid. He was 18, first gig. Jimmy found him. Jimmy was living in San Francisco. Jimmy put together the West Coast version of this, from Link and everything. He moved out there.

Yeah, you can't do something halfway. That's what it comes down to. If you're going to be jazz, you're going to be jazz. If you're going to be fusion, be fusion. But if you try to be cutting the line – at least I didn't find the formula. That's really what happened. We could play. It was a great band. We played great. We had a great arrangement of *Tequila.* We played *The Chicken.* We played great stuff. I took it a little out. Pee Wee played in, but he played interesting. It was funky. It swung. But it wasn't one way or the other enough for anybody to say, this is going to be the next thing.

Kirchner: It didn't have an identity.

Liebman: No.

Kirchner: Kenny G, whatever anybody says about him, has an identity.

Liebman: And that's years later. But even then, in that period, Chick was that thing. Weather Report was that thing. That was that period. I didn't find the right formula. I wanted to, as I said, for personal reasons. Some of it was musical reasons. But it got me out of New York, and that is – the upshot was, I had to get out of New York, because my life was a shambles. I was four years with Miles and Elvin, Lookout Farm. I was way off. By then, I didn't know who I was anymore. It was too much, too soon. I was over the top in a lot of ways, as a human being, with my relationship with women, with drugs. I needed to get out of New York. I was New Yorked out. This was a six-year period, '69 to '75, '76. I had had enough. I was way – I was up to here, and I was probably not in good shape. I probably sensed it. Part of the reason to go to San Francisco was to escape. I just needed to get off. The train was going around too fast. My life was – it was out of control. I was dealing with it as best I could. I'm capable of doing three things at once. I'm okay some times, but this was getting a little bit far. It was getting out there, Dave. I'm sure people saw it, and nobody would say anything, as usual. But I was definitely at that point of needing to get out.

So, in that sense, it was probably – it was a great thing, because it gave me air. It gave me room to breathe. In the next years, as we'll get to, it reflects a slowing down of the thought processes and of everything, and a rethinking of who I am. Look, I was 30 years old. It was perfect. Boy, if you believe in passages, my shit was like a clock. This is it. 30. Time to start thinking about who you are, Dave. Instead of being a result of events, to be instead the instigator of events. That was a change of life. That happens to all of us at some point. It was good for that reason.

Kirchner: Just before you moved out there – I think I've told you this – I saw – that's the night our friend John Stowell brought me up, who I've known – we go back to when I was in college. He brought me up to Rapson's, up in Port Chester. That's the – you were playing there with Link Chamberlain, with Jimmy Strassburg, maybe Lyn Christie.

Liebman: But that's earlier, though.

Kirchner: No, it's about '75.

Liebman: Okay. Maybe I went up to play again, because the main Rapson's thing is earlier.

Kirchner: And Frank Vicari and Enrico Rava.

Liebman: Yeah, that's right, because that's in mid-'70s.

Kirchner: Yeah, that's around '75 or something.

Liebman: Because Jimmy was very close with Enrico.

Kirchner: That was the first time I – I had heard you before, but I had never heard Enrico and Vicari and Link before. That was a real revelation.

Liebman: Link was a one-of-a-kind guy. Still has a reputation, because he was a big teacher in Connecticut.

Kirchner: He died young, right?

Liebman: He died young. He had leukemia.

Kirchner: Yeah. He was a great guitar player.

Liebman: Very sweet guy. Wrote great tunes. He was a real spirit and affected a lot of people.

Kirchner: That was an amazing night.

Liebman: That place was as big as a room, maybe.

Kirchner: Yeah. It was this little hole-in-the-wall bar in Port Chester.

Liebman: The thing was, because it was over the border, then people could drink. The Connecticut could come or the New York could come. It was 18 or 21. There it was 18. That's why he had that location on the border between Connecticut and New York. He was very successful because of that. I remember that. Because it was a joint.

Kirchner: Yeah. You guys were just playing bebop in the back room, playing *Stella* and whatever.

Liebman: That's right. I have some tapes from that. They're not bad.

Kirchner: I'm sure of that.

Liebman: They're not bad. All right, so we're up to '77.

Kirchner: Time-wise, we're almost at the end of this, right?

Kimery: You got about 20 minutes there. So we can stop now.

Kirchner: This is a good place to stop.

Liebman: Yeah, this is good.

[end of first session]

By the way, this is the painter from Lookout Farm, right here, that one, this triptych, and this. These three are a series. So that's what he was into when he was unveiling his secrets to me – me and Richie, just to clean up yesterday.

Kirchner: With that beginning, today is January 5th, 2011. I'm Bill Kirchner. We're continuing at the home of Dave Liebman in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, our interview. Explain to posterity what you were just pointing at. Explain who Eugene Gregan was.

Liebman: In our first part, we were talking about my first band under my name was at Lookout Farm and how the name was – how we came to the name. It was this painter, Eugene Gregan, from upstate, around Napanoch, New York, who lived on, not a farm, but they ended up calling it a farm. He was a painter, and his paintings are here. We're still in touch. He was very instrumental in my artistic growth – me and Richie, actually, together in tandem. His paintings were all over the house. He's still a remarkable guy. He still lives up there. He never had commercial success. Didn't want to play the art game, which really makes us look like a walk in the park, with art galleries. He just is up there painting to his heart's content. Somebody gave him a house, finally, rent free. He lives. He does a garden. He and his wife grow – he's Monet. [?]. Paints every day the flowers, according to the season. It's remarkable.

This is when he was into – it's more Islamic. If you go closer, you see faces, figures, mythical. That was his thing at that time.

Kirchner: Really amazing stuff.

Liebman: Again, he just – the way he talked about art was just – it wasn't music. He didn't know anything about music. He loved it and loved us and loved jazz, but it was his way of explaining how an artist – how he thought. I've always gotten a lot out of reading the autobiographies of artists. I had Vincent van Gogh, letters to Theo, I recommend – I was just telling one of the young guys. I said, get that book, because that is about revealing the process. When you see the process – especially when you see it away from – okay, we got jazz books. That's great. But when you see it in another art form, and then you make the leap – your imagination makes the leap to how that relates to what you do or what you know or who you heard, it enlarges your thing. I think it's a great way to get out of the jazz box, out of that thing of what we do, but to find a way to become who you are by looking outside the box. That's why I've always liked other guys. If they can explain what they do to me, I'm happy. I love it. "This is what I think when I do it." Because I can – like we're doing. I can explain what I do, to a certain extent. Certainly as a teacher, you can. So it's nice when you talk to somebody else in another form who's got his stuff together, who's mastered it, and they describe to you the process. You say, oh, oh, I should try that, etc., etc.

Kirchner: It's interesting also that there have been a number of jazz musicians who have been good amateur painters, like Ellington, like Miles, Pee Wee Russell.

Liebman: It is true, yes. Tony Bennett. Yeah, there's something . . .

Kirchner: George Wettling.

Liebman: The other art forms, certainly there seems to be something, the visual and the aural. There obviously seems to be a connection.

Kirchner: George Wettling, the dixieland drummer, studied with Stuart Davis, who was a well-known mid-20th-century American painter.

You mentioned Richie Beirach a moment ago. There are a couple of questions I wanted to ask you before we continue our chronological survey. One of the things I'd like to do is have you talk more in depth about your very longstanding and deep connection with Richie Beirach. We've touched on it peripherally, but I want to get more in depth about it.

Liebman: Amazingly, we're from the same neighborhood, which we did not know. He moved, I think, when he was 9 or 10 years old from 3 blocks away from me in Brooklyn. You know Brooklyn's alphabet soup, the area. We were in – he's on P. I'm on M. There you go. He was on 2nd or 3rd Street, and I was on 5th Street. So, put it together, we were a ten-minute walk away from each other as kids. That didn't come out until much later.

In him, I found a partner who, personality-wise, was a perfect fit to me. Quick as can be. Woody Allen, sped up, as far as absolute ability to express the situation that's going on. Funny and bright as could be, a real wit, and quick. I'm fast. I don't know if it's a virtue or what, but I move quickly. This guy could keep up with me or ever outpace me in thinking, whatever it will be about. That's with our social relationship. We also hung together and did things together. That's obvious, in those days. But musically, which this is really about, it was – he was a searcher.

We both were at the same point, which was, we had absorbed, up to a certain point, our influences, and the question was, how do we escape our influences? We dealt with it together, in the sense that, especially for a piano player in the '70s – it's not much different now, but you had Herbie, Keith, McCoy, and Chick active, already made major contributions by 1970, and living, and only 10 years older than you, if that. I had John, who died, and Wayne and Sonny Rollins and whatever – we can talk about Joe Henderson – as influences, about specific musical influence. How do you break the association between you and what you have absorbed, that you see – you are yourself through them? You're not really yourself. You're through them. You did your job good, and if you did your job good, you're even better at it than somebody who did it haphazardly.

Richie – and I must say, he led the way here – he went back – he had started classical music, and he went back into it. The guys I've mentioned all of course have battled or have played in cases Mozart, which they've not only – obviously, any piano player that I'm talking about is equipped in classical music, because that's the de rigueur for a piano

player, especially Chick and Herbie and McCoy and those guys. I'm not sure how much McCoy studied it. I don't know. But, the point was, that language, harmonic language that came out of them in the '60s – I'm talking particularly the '60s – I'm really talking Herbie particularly and McCoy particularly, and Chick and Keith, a lesser degree – that came out of classical 20th-century music, the voicings and harmony. If he heard it when he was with – what you said before, Herbie heard it with Clare Fischer playing with the Hi-Lo's, or because he heard – what's her name? the singer with the slow tempos, from Washington.

Kirchner: Shirley Horn?

Liebman: Because she had some of these voicings. Of course, all of this is available, this information. But the point is that Richie saw that 20th-century harmony was the place to go, that they had looked at it, but it could be done deeper, and he just did it deeper. That's what he did. He just went into it. He went into Schonberg. He went into Bartok. He took the scores. He figured out the voicings. He put names to them, and he developed his own language.

I knew, this is piano-player land. Horn player – this is not a horn player's thing. We're involved with the melody. That's our job. We're supposed to set the melody up. That means singing and expressive, blah blah blah, and rhythm. Those guys are harmony. That's their game. They got ten fingers. They do that. And we need them big-time, because Trane without McCoy? Sure, but really. And Miles–Wayne without Herbie? I'm not sure. The depth of the harmony and that kind of harmony. I could see Richie had it, and he was into it. That, for me, was – he was a ticket to learning. So we worked on it. That Lookout Farm book we discussed, that grew out of us talking about music, sitting at the piano and saying, what's that chord? Stop the voicing. Stop your hands. What is that? I was over his shoulder. I'd say, stop. We're going to call that E-flat minor over G7 flat 5. We were just showing this kid when you walked in. He learned that language from me, and now he's extending it. That's why I wanted him over here, by the way. That was the basis of our relationship. We got along good, and we thought alike. So, when I say lieutenant, I don't mean it in a condescending way, like I'm the caption, he's the lieutenant, but I'm – even with Free Life Communication, I put things together. I'm just good at doing that, at organizing. He was good at executing. So this is a good relationship for running a corporation and running a band and so forth and so on.

It continued. It went through Lookout Farm, with a little break in the late '70s for Pee Wee Ellis band and for me, as we'll get to, with – my band with [John] Scofield and Terumasa Hino, etc. He was with John Abercrombie. Then we reunited in the early '80s, and Quest was the result. Then we stopped in '91 and I started this present band I have with [Vic] Juris for 20 years, but now we're back together for the last five or six years, and we'll be in Birdland in four weeks.

He's the closest musician-brother that I have, in the end. He now – he had his problems. He paid his dues. He's been in Liepzig, at the conservatory there, as a full professor, a very good job. But at 65 years old, you have to retire. In Europe, you're done. Boop, out the door. And he will be. He's my age. So he is moving back. Right now, he and his former wife, who – they're still together, sort of – LeeAnn Ledgerwood, wonderful piano player. They are . . .

Kirchner: We're from the same hometown.

Liebman: That's right. She's from there, Ohio. Warren.

Kirchner: She's from Ohio, Warren, and I'm from Youngstown.

Liebman: Yes, because I was close to her, obviously. They're looking for a new place. He's been living in the same place for over 40 years, rent controlled, and they finally saw that he's not living there six months and one day. They got to be there 181 days. After all these years, they checked. They finally found out that he doesn't really live there anymore. She does. So he's got to get out. They made a deal. They paid him off. He's actively looking for a place, as we speak. He'll be in – he comes in in three weeks for his break, when we do Birdland.

Kirchner: Because, she was married.

Liebman: She married [Jeremy] Steig.

Kirchner: Then she married . . .

Liebman: Then she married a bro, a drummer bro, Sylvester something. He walked out. I don't know.

Kirchner: Oh, he's gone?

Liebman: She's been very ill, actually. She had cancer.

Kirchner: I see her at The New School once a week.

Liebman: So you know. She's in tough shape. Nicest girl. Talent. Forget it. Anyway, they are looking for a place. He'll be back in New York in a year-and-a-half from now, which I'm glad about. And he's glad. You have a great job when you're a German professor. It's great money, you get health, you get everything, but it's enough to be there

for ten years. I don't know how he lasted in Leipzig. That's the end of the world. Okay, Bach on the corner, but enough.

Kirchner: But it kept him straight too.

Liebman: Yeah, he's straight. He has straightened out. Also, he has diabetes now. He has diabetes too.

Kirchner: Oh boy, because he put on a lot of weight.

Liebman: Yeah. He got sick. They gave him – they read the riot act. He's cool. He had to cool it. So he's cool. He's in much better shape. He just sent me an e-mail. "I hope you enjoy your ceremony next week. You deserve it." He was very supportive.

We're going to record. We're recording at this Tommy Tedesco studio in Jersey, near Paramus. After our gig, after Birdland the end of February, we're going to record Miles '60s repertoire, because we just did two original records. We got record-of-the-year in France, blah blah blah. So I said, we should do some repertoire. I like to make something inside every couple records. So we're picking the '60s, particularly *Nefertiti, Sorcerer*, those records, those tunes. We're arranging them, light arrangements. We're going to record with Billy [Hart] and [Ron] McClure. So again, to finish the story, that means a 40-year relationship

Kirchner: The two of you collaborated, even though the book is under your name. What I consider a major book is *A Chromatic Approach to Jazz Harmony and Melody*, which our friend John McNeil gave me 20 years ago. It's an amazing book. A lot of it has to do with contemporary jazz harmony.

Liebman: He was supposed to write half of it, but he wasn't in a state of mind to commit pen to paper. In those days, pen to paper. But yes, he's the source of – and I say it openly in the introduction – he's the source of the – main source of the information in that book. Make no bones about it. I translate. I'm a good collector and organizer. But I certainly didn't come up with it. I had my way of looking at it, but no, I owe it to him, definitely. He's one – basically, he's the guy that taught me that stuff, just by being around him and playing, and of course being on the bandstand with him countless, countless nights. And I made a million records with the guy. So we – we just did a duo – we have a duo record come out in September. We have a record with Lee Konitz coming out in March. There we're playing standards.

We have a – it's a very good relationship, outside of a couple years when things were – he was a little wildman, and we had a split. It was just time to form a new band. Quest

had had its run, and I wanted to do a new band for other reasons. We didn't speak much for 15 years, until 2005. Now, since then, we're back together.

Kirchner: I want to talk more about that book, for people who aren't familiar with it. Could you capsulize what the approach of the book is?

Liebman: It's a workbook. I don't think of it as anything more than that. It's a system of thinking to enable you to get outside the stated key in an orderly fashion. So if you do A, you get this result. If you do B, you get this result. I got about A to L. In diatonic harmony, in pedal point, in modal, and in intervallic – those four categories, voicings, and how to think about the superimpositions. Much like we were just doing with this kid, calling it a certain name, the contention being that if you're an experienced jazz musician who's good at chord changes, who could read any kind of changes – which hopefully, we need that – that's the criteria to walk into the book. You don't walk into that store unless you can play on changes. We're going to use your knowledge of changes to build more complex chords. So the chords might get quite long looking on the page – F-minor 7 flat-9 no-2 plus-3 (89) over B7 flat no-3 (14) – but the truth is, that's a spelling that I can get to quickly, because I'm very quick at chord changes. The math is good. I can hear it, a certain amount of it, etc., etc. So why not use the language I'm most comfortable in to spell complex chords? Really, all I did is to come up with another numerology and a way of thinking about it in gradations: this is more dissonant than the other thing, and so forth.

So the course that I teach, like at Manhattan, when I do it over two years for the masters – a three-year course – I just divide the book into four parts. [Phil] Markowitz teaches it with me, because he's hip to it. It's just to get them to hear in an orderly way, because it's not enough to just say, "Any note's okay." We know any note's okay theoretically, and aurally possibly so, but that there's an order to your "outside" playing, some kind of thinking. It comes right out of the bebop shit. So all I did was take what we do with diatonic and put it into another language. I don't think of it as anything more than reorganizing material already done, casting it in different terms, and organizing it so that somebody could logically – that's why people like the book. You can logically go from 1 to 2 to 3 to 4 and get something out of it.

Kirchner: Voice leading is everything. I think what separates the haves from the have nots as far as so-called "outside" playing, is that there are people who try to fake their way through it, but then there are people like you who, because their voice leading is so happening, it makes it sound real.

Liebman: It's predicated on what came before. That's why you can't – you don't walk into that store unless you've shopped there before. The kids walk in. I don't audition them, but I – you've got to say, "You're masters students. Everybody in this crew can play on chord changes." To prove – the first thing I do, the first day, is I bring in *Sabiá*,

by Jobim, a very tricky tune. I bring in – there's an Alec Wilder tune, *The Wrong Blues*, pretty tricky tune. Outside of Wayne's crazy tunes or my tunes. No, not even that. Let's just – here, ii-V's, Jobim, but very hard. You've really got to think on your feet. I get a kid. I say, play that. Sure enough, they can. At least the kid who raises his hand can, the last couple of years. I say, okay, I have to expect that everybody in this class can do what you just heard this guy do. And if he doesn't do it, I say, well, we have a little deficit here. I don't know if you're representative of the class, but I expect that everybody can play on these changes pretty quickly. I know you'll play better the tenth time through, but good enough on the first time is what we need, because that means you have an ability to read chord changes. You don't need any practice on that. You'll get better at that tune, of course. But now I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the familiarity with chords so quickly that there's nothing that stumps you. Then, if that's the case, let's then start building chords upon chords. Now we're cool, because now we have the lan- – in other words, we learned the alphabet. So now we can reorganize the words. That's all it means.

Kirchner: Two of the most important pages in that book, by the way, are something that I think is incredibly basic, but that virtually nobody talks about, except you and maybe a few other people – like McNeil hipped me to it – and that is the idea of bebop and post-bebop jazz being basically even-eighth-note music.

Liebman: Yes, the dot – the disappearance of the dot in modern times, of the dotted feel.

Kirchner: To me, that's one of the most basic things there is, but virtually nobody talks about it. Could you just briefly explain it?

Liebman: I give it to Trane, really, in a certain way, because all Trane – outside of every once in a while – is very undotted. I don't know where he got it from. But compared to Sonny [Rollins], which is the other giant at that time, and Bird, who's like dut de-ah de-ah de-ah and not da-da-da-da-da-da-da. That evenness is basically modern playing. It opens up – first of all, it opens up speed. It opens up evenness. It means certain notes fit together in a different way than when they're like [Liebman sings a swinging bop phrase]. Instead you have [Liebman sings a more repetitive even-rhythm phrase]. It's more digital. It doesn't swing in the same way. That's for sure. But it swings in a different way. This is a discussion that we could have next week over the table with Marsalis. You know what I mean? If he could ever have a normal discussion about this, that there are other ways to swing, excuse me, sir. There are – nothing personal, but there are ways to swing that are – yeah, it's not that, but neither was Pres [Lester Young] Louis [Armstrong] or Corc, etc., etc. So, rhythmically, that. Note-wise, it evens things out. It was Trane.

Of course, when fusion came in, that's it, because that's all even, with that 16th-note stuff. So once you go [Liebman articulates a fast 16th-note rhythm], the paradiddle – it's

Wipeout. Once you're going to do that, once you're going to play even, and the beat's going to be chick-um-chac chac-um-chac-um-chac, yet alone Latin, you can't be going bop-ee-op-ee-op-ee-op. That is definitely not a fit. I used to think sometimes with Michael Brecker, when he was in the heyday, his time, when he was doing all those dates and playing over these vamps, and he's the cat for that stuff, that when he did the dotted feel purposefully, in the middle of it, it sounded forced to me, and weird. To me it was a mismatch, what he did. The even thing was even. Those things don't go together. That's like putting Johnny Hodges's notes with Ornette Coleman's sound. I don't know about that. There'll be some circus act that will do it, I'm sure. But I don't know. Some things are not meant to be matched. There is a lot to be said with matching, mixing and matching. But that's not always true.

So I think with this dotted thing – in the end, when I teach, if a guy comes down, I take him downstairs, and the first thing I do is play drums with him. I work. And I go, "Your dotted feel is good. Let's even it," or "You don't have a good dotted feel." Now I got to go, "Please transcribe [?]. We've got to start from the beginning. You're not at all ready for the chromatic thing. Let's not even go there." I say, "You're supposed to have the ability to do both, in this day and age. You got to be able to have the dot and have no dot." That's for sure. Because you might be playing *Donna Lee* tomorrow, and the next day you might be playing a fusion tune in 9. So you got to be able to do both. In this day and age now, these kids got to do a lot. That's one of the things they got to do, be able to swing in the old way, swing in the even-eighth note, up and down. It's duple triple. It's a lot to do with that. It's that triplet shi-un-da shi-un-da dat duh-dat dat, or ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba. It's duple versus triple, and a good drummer, a good guy, he's supposed to know how to do that today. That's part of your lingua franca.

Kirchner: But even with Coltrane – I think Coltrane got his evenness from Dexter Gordon.

Liebman: Dexter was more even. It's true. And Pres was more even. And that's the influence. That's the Pres influence on Trane that no-one talks about. I think that's a big influence on Trane, is the Pres influence, as compared to Hawk [Coleman Hawkins] with Sonny. You hear it. There's a big difference. That boom boom boom-pa thing that Hawk was very – not heavy handed. He was emphatic. And Sonny taking that and, really, amazing what he did with it. And Trane coming, really, out of Pres, time-wise.

Kirchner: Actually, if you take it a step further back, Pres was very influenced by Bix Beiderbecke, who was basically – if you listen to Bix's famous solo on *Singin' the Blues,* from 1927, it's an even eighth note solo.

Liebman: Which was rare in those days.

Kirchner: Yeah, but there's a lineage that goes back.

Liebman: Maybe it's white and black. I don't know. There's another thing there too, something about that too. I think it's something about that. I don't know. Genes, dna, blood, living under the sun. Something going on with the boom boom boom buh and the ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba. Something to do with cities. I think there's something in there. I don't want to get into this voodoo stuff, but there's something in there that is in the genes, in the background, in the makeup, in your m.o.

Kirchner: In your geography.

Liebman: Yeah. It can't be denied. It's what your ancestors heard, and it's part of your thing. There's a lineage. This is scientific now, and we know it's happening scientifically. The cat's a criminal because it's in his blood and the brain is different. It's out now, what they can find out. So why not with music? Why not that it does come from that? There is a point to be made about that, between the white and the black, feeling rhythm. Mozart, those guys, the Western giants of classical music, there's no dot there. You know what I mean? They never even knew what a dot was, as far as swinging. Then you go to Africa, and you go anywhere below the equator, somewhere where it's 110 degrees six months a year, and somehow the cats have ja un-ca un-ca, because they just are. They move that way, and they talk that way, because it all comes from talk, anyway. It comes from language. So, interesting.

Kirchner: One other question I have before we go back to our chronology: one of the things that you and I have in common is when we went to college, we were non-music majors. You majored . . .

Liebman: What was your major?

Kirchner: English.

Liebman: English. English Lit?

Kirchner: Yeah.

Liebman: English Lit.

Kirchner: And you majored in American history. As the years go by, I have mixed emotions about whether I would have been better off being a music major in college, and I was wondering what your feelings on . . . ?

Liebman: I definitely have a view on this, big time, because when I was in the midst of it, I really was very upset, because I said – first of all, remember in our time there wasn't a jazz program. But the fact that I didn't even do music, because after that Queens College debacle with the required listening, I just, poof, canned it and went into history, which I like. But the main thing was that I went to college. Now, a lot of my peers did not finish school. They didn't even go to college, or if they did, they certainly didn't go in for history. I felt that I was – this sounds so ridiculous to say this now after we've been talking about Miles and Elvin and all the great opportunities I had – but I kind of was on line a little late, compared to some other guys who came to New York, my peers. They were ahead of me, and I felt this partially because I finished college. My senior year, I was really – I wanted to get out, because I could see this coming. But I'd gone that far. So I had to finish.

But years later, finally, to come around, as it usually does, the fact that I did go to school – not the fact of school, but that I learned something – I think both of us – all of us sitting in this room would be hard pressed to say, do you remember anything you learned in college, June 25th, in your sophomore year, in chemistry? I don't think so. But the idea of thinking, or broadening the mind, of the intellect, of who I am, really, and who you are probably, a lot to do with it – it's because we had a college education, and that separates me from everybody else, one of the things that makes me different from the other 90 guys, because there's definitely a difference.

It's not the music only. I know it's not, not in my case. It's that part of me, applied to the music. I'm probably talking about you too. We have a different way of putting it together than a guy who wasn't educated. This is not, again – it's not condescending. It's not being like that, but it means that somehow – I'm not extolling the virtues of a four-year college education, because it's jive also, some of it, but the fact that we did go through the rigor of that and whatever that meant, taking chemistry or physics or taking American history, was, I think, a big contribution to finally who I am.

So when I think about it – when I talk to the kids – of course now everybody goes to college, but when there was a time when it was, "Should I or shouldn't I go?", maybe when you had a student in the '70, '80s, it was still not so mandatory, I'd say, yeah, a lot of it's going to be dead time. That's for sure. I said, but you're going to get something, because you have been forced to, that might separate you from everybody else, even though you're going into a field that has nothing to do with it, ostensibly.

Kirchner: My own feeling is that – there are times when I feel that the fact that I got an English degree, and whatever other experiences I had, was the right path for me. But on the other hand, there are times when I wish that I had had the structure of a college music program. I feel like I was – there are things that I got together a lot later than if I had been in a music program.

Liebman: I totally agree with that. Exactly. Again, remember though, in our day – we're close – there was no jazz music program, for the most part.

Kirchner: Except for Berklee and a few other places.

Liebman: Yeah, exactly, but it was not common, and it would have meant going to Berklee or some other thing. Now, when we say music program for us, it's so different than saying it to the kids who just left the room, because they mean jazz. We mean [?]. We had Queens College, with a major in clarinet, the most hated instrument of all time. Did I say that? So, we didn't have that. But I agree with you totally that when I see what these guys get, I'm jealous, because they do get it from A to Z. They have no holes in their education. I have definite holes. I'm not a big-band arranger. I don't know if I hear everything that a guy can hear now. I don't know if I know every tune that they know. I wish I had done from A to Z, like they get it, because if they had me for four years – let's say me, meaning, guys that are of our caliber, teaching them, they're definitely getting a good education. They are educated. That's why they're so good now.

I'm sorry I didn't have that education, but the other side of that is this: we had more room for individuality, because we didn't have a system. So we were trial and error. We gravitated to our strengths, not our weaknesses. Our time was maybe more productive in that field. Okay, we couldn't do that at all, but what we did do, we did it out of – because we loved it, we're good at it, and we wanted to do it. A kid has to do 80 different things – most of the kids walk out of school – I don't know if you saw this MP3 I have now. It's called *From Student to [Jazz] Artist.* It's one of those guys that you just met, and another one from this area, me talking to them for three hours about all this stuff. It's Advance Music. It's available. They're, "What do we do now?" By the time I was 22, I kind of knew musically what I wanted to do. You know what I mean? Not knew, but I knew what I could play, I could do, because I hadn't been confronted with everything else. So it was like, because we had no alternatives, we had no choice. So that's the advantage of not going through a system, that you don't – you're not organized. You don't have it all. But the advantage is, you have to find your way. When you find your way, you find out who you are maybe sooner than the other way, especially in this day and age.

What is the big problem that we have with everybody? They all sound the same. That's the one thing we all say. They're great, but every tenor player sounds the same. They sound like whoever the flavor of the month is, with a little bit of the older guys. If you put the radio on now, can you identify who it is? No. I can't. Used to be, I knew it was Dexter. I knew it was Joe Henderson. You knew it was Sonny. You knew it was Wayne. You knew it was Pharoah. You knew something. Now you put on. Everybody good, great playing. Who are they? That's the next discussion with kids. It's like, "Now, what do you do?" That's my last lecture to everybody, is, how do you find who you are? That's my

last – what I leave them with, because that means editing and leaving out, giving up what you love and finding out what you do, microscopic – make a microscopic thing into an explosion, writing 80 exercises on it. I have this thing that – I got rid of it from Richie. Maybe it's a disadvantage, but it's also an advantage, the fact that we didn't have it formalized.

Kirchner: I hear so much, especially of people over 60 especially complain about, oh, all tenor players sound the same, but I can tell the difference between you and Michael Brecker and Lovano.

Liebman: Yes, but I'm talking about the kids, the young guys. I'm not talking about us. That's true. But I'm talking about the amount of young guys who play great – let's say up to 40 years old. Pick an age somewhere between 30 and 40 – who play their ass off, but you cannot tell one from the other. Maybe not yet, or maybe never, but I don't know. But that's the complaint.

Kirchner: But 50 years ago, you had hundreds of tenor players who sounded like Lester Young, or hundreds of alto players who sounded like Bird.

Liebman: I don't know about that. I'm not sure if hundreds is the word. I think less than we have now. That's my point. Now it's just a – the number thing is exponential. There weren't hundreds then. If there were hundreds then, there are thousands now, because it's definitely more now. Take any given night in New York City and walk around to the classes – to classrooms that guys are playing – we did not have that 30, 40 years ago, because we didn't have the thing. We didn't have the forum for it. The fact that everybody is playing – and they play good. The quality is very good. But there's no individuality, or very little of it. This means – it comes to this, which is the same – there's nothing mystical about this. Only a few people are chosen to be individualized, or individuals, in any art form. I don't care if it's Aristotle walking around with 14 other philosophers. He was cool. There were probably 14 other guys who had thoughts.

It's like, in the end, just because there are more numbers of people playing jazz, that doesn't mean it's any different than it was when we had fewer numbers, which is, cream rises to the top. There's only a few who can escape – go through their influences, because we acknowledged that has to be done, and escape it. That's no different than 1920 or probably the year 10, AD, BC. Individuality is a rare thing. Just because more people want to play jazz doesn't mean more individuals will come out of it. It's still a small game, still a small percentage. So in that respect, I go, well, what did you expect? Just because more people play saxophone doesn't mean there will be more great players. They're good. But great? Still only very few.

Kirchner: I think the overall level of technical accomplishment is probably as good as it's ever been.

Liebman: That's what we're talking about. That is so high. So many play so well. But to rise above, to be like, I can recognize Jerry from Joey, that's a rough one now. And it's because of us, in some ways, because we taught them so well. When you teach, as you know – when you teach 30, you can't teach one. You got to go to the mean. You go too high, you go too low, you're screwed. A good teacher knows, if he's got 30 or 20 or 10 – anything more than 3 or 4 kids, really, in the end – you got to go to the mean. So that means everybody's getting the norm. If you doing your job well, they're getting it well. That doesn't address the guy on top of the pyramid, which is why they've set up these little special programs now, this Global Jazz Institute at Berklee. The Institute, they're trying to get the super super now, because finally they're realizing, they got to take care of the really talented kids. They can't put them in even the Manhattan School, even in a masters degree. They're very good, but a couple shine, and they should be in a special thing. The schools are starting to compete now in that level. Juilliard's starting a program where they pay free tuition. Then you have a contest. They pick three kids or something. I'm not sure if I got it right, but it's more and more the schools are starting to look towards, how are we going to address the ones that aren't the mean? Because they see that the mean has come in. They're all good, but what then? It's interesting. The pedagogy's moving on in that respect, jazz pedagogy.

Kirchner: Or you have these things like the Monk Institute or the Brubeck Institute.

Liebman: Exactly. The rewarding of high talent. I was with [Steve] Turré yesterday, after I left you. We were talking about that, contests. I never judge any. I have turned down all offers from the Notre Dame Festival somewhere in the '70s to the Monk thing. I won't do it. I refuse to do it. I will not endorse prize-winning for music. That is football and baseball and hockey. That's fine. Sports is cool. Competitive sports. That's the name of it: competitive sports. It is not called competitive music. Please stop this crap, and especially for jazz, of all music. Classical, I don't know. Maybe prima donnas are supposed to be. I guess. I have no idea. Rock-and-roll, I guess you're supposed to be a star. I don't know anything about it. I don't care about it. But in this music, which is a communal deal, which is about us being together, shine and then be with, step out and then step back, to reward "you're the best"? You're not the best. You're good. There's another good one too.

Kirchner: You haven't lived until you – you have to, just once in your life, judge a high school big band festival.

Liebman: I have done it, but with that, I don't give the prize.

Kirchner: That's scary.

Liebman: I give comments. I've agreed to do that, to give comments, but I won't say "best." Not me. You can do it, and I'll endorse it if you want, but I'll tell then, "You played good, but you could" E-seventh, whatever. But please, not this award-winning thing to kids, especially the high school kids. What a terrible message to send a 15-year-old kid, that he's no good because his friend is better than him. And he can't help but see that when you're young. You don't just accept it, oh, he's great, he's great, you're great. "You're great" means I'm not, because you take it personally when you're young, let alone when you're older.

Kirchner: The biggest problem is, a lot of the band directors are totally unhip, and they think of a big band as basically a marching band with a rhythm section.

Liebman: It's football. And of course it means they're better, if their kid wins. That's what this is about. We digress way off. This is obviously so dumb.

Kirchner: Let's go back to – when we left off yesterday, you were getting called by Chick Corea to do a world tour.

Liebman: I got a call. I was with Richie, duo in Houston. It's 1977. We still were doing some things together. The phone rings. We were watching the Super Bowl. I remember it. We were play La Bastille. A very good friend of ours booked it, in Houston. He said – Chick said – I hadn't talked to Chick in five, six years, since the loft, since he went to California and moved to Florida and the whole Return to Forever, and then Scientology, because I did Scientology with him and David in the beginning.

Kirchner: Oh really?

Liebman: Yeah. That's another story. But anyway, I hadn't really talked to him. No animosity, because I didn't have a scene with him. Others had, I guess: Lenny and some of the other guys in his band. Circle, they had a little scene, from what I understand. But I didn't have a scene with him, nothing like that. He just moved out one day, and he moved – he went to L.A. or something. So I don't know why he called me. Of course he knew Richie. "Hi, man." He said, "I'm doing a world tour. Joe can't make it. I want you to do it. It will be with string quartet and four brass." I think it was two trumpets, two trombones. I forget. "We rehearse for two weeks. Then we're going to Japan, Europe, and Australia."

Kirchner: Is this the one with Jimmy Pugh?

Liebman: Yes, and [Allen] Vizzzutti and [Tom] Brechtlein, Rick Laird. Gayle [Moran] played, and four strings, string quartet. Ron Moss was the manager. He played trombone. Pugh, Vizzutti, and I think maybe another horn. I forget. Or maybe just me. I was the main soloist. I did a world tour with him. It was two weeks rehearsal in L.A. Then we did everything.

That was very intense for a variety of reasons: because of my relationship with Chick, to be around him musically and socially, and then, he got me back to New York, because I was still living in California. It was then that I decided – I was at the end of this California dreamin' days, the tune *California Dreamin',* I think we know that. I had to get back. That was part of my – that was my way to get back, because financially, it put some money in my pocket.

Chick and I, we had a great time musically. This is three records he played: *Mad Hatter, Leprechaun,* and *Spanish Heart,* which were all strings. I learned – in a way, he's the best of all, of all the musicians I've ever known. I put Phil Markowitz up there on that level. He just can do anything, Chick, and I've heard him do everything. He can do anything. He can write. He's like that. To hear the music every night, and the way he wrote, was really a lesson in composition, because this guy is Mr. interlude, tag, intro, out-tro, shout chorus. He is way, way architecture man out. He's form city. He's like, jigsaw puzzle, great. A little overwritten in some ways, but great. Him, hearing him play every night . . . .

We always had a duo. We did *Lush Life* or we did *Crystal Silence* every night, one or the other. I soloed. I was playing flute and clarinet and sax, soprano and tenor. I was out front. It was a big thing for me. It was very prestigious.

But we got really into it about the Scientology, big time, and I can't say we've ever repaired our relationship, although we're friendly. He played down here. He played at Lafayette College – one of those colleges down – Lehigh, and my daughter, we met him, hanging out. It was cool. But I asked him to do a record date. He wouldn't do it.

We had it out. I couldn't believe the way he had changed as a person, and I took it upon myself. because I was that kind of idiot, to call him on it. Of all the nerve in the world. You're a sideman. But I just – it's the way I am. I couldn't help it. I said, "I don't understand" . . . . He tried to get me on his side. He said, "The Scien- – you were turned off because the people who did you, they were basically banned and thrown out of the organization. They weren't right, and that's why you didn't get the right picture of it." "Oh, is that so? Okay, yeah. So let's go from there." We had nightly discussions after the gig in hotel rooms, because he's a very intelligent guy, extremely well written. He knows how to write. He's a real guy. He's a real smart cat. And I think a self-taught guy, autodidac. I'm not sure he's the reader type. He's not schooled, but he's schooled.

Kirchner: Because he came to New York when he was about 20.

Liebman: That's what I mean. He just learned. He's a quick study. So you could talk. He was the kind of guy that could go on and on. He's a little bit of a loop, a little like LaRoca. It's a little like, "Yeah but," and then circuitous reasoning, no conclusion. So you can pick it up tomorrow night. This is good and bad, frustrating. We had interesting discussions. Of course, in the end, we ended up parting on not-good terms, basically because I smoked a joint the last gig and had a relationship with the viola player. You're not supposed to have uncaring sex, or something like that. He made everybody sign a paper. It was really rough. Everybody was in Scientology, almost everybody except the road guy, maybe two or three others. They had morning meetings. It was like, oh. I mean, cult stuff, I cannot stand that shit. I don't care what it is. I don't care if it's for the greatest good in the world. Once you start doing that, that means me and not you, and I don't go for that shit. So I was like – he left me alone. He didn't make me sign the paper. But everybody had to sign the paper, no uncaring sex and no drugs, or something like that. Whatever. I didn't – anyway, he got out of the airport – out of the plane – I don't know if we should actually put this on here, but he got out of the plane. He said, "You are against me." He said, "I never want to see you again." Out of the plane, on American soil. The last gig was in Honolulu. We landed in L.A. airport. He turned – got out of the plane, turned around. He went like that. I never saw anybody. It was dramatic. He said, "I don't want to see you again. You were against me. You fomented rebellion," something in there. Some of it was true. Some of it was definitely true, because I was a Wisenheimer and I thought I knew everything too.

Anyway, outside of that, it got me back to New York, taught me a lot about composition, and led to this record I did, *Dedications,* string quartet and so forth. I really learned through him about strings. Then I went to Bartok and Beethoven and did my work. He's a way great musician, way amazing musician. Tapes I have of him in '69 with LaRoca, I never heard anybody play jazz like that, jazz, the ideas, the speed, the looseness of rhythm, the harmonic content, and with Pete, the way he played, and Swallow, never anything like it. He's just a great musician, fantastic musician. Anyway, it got me back to New York and started my next stage. That was where we were at.

Kirchner: How long did that last with Chick?

Liebman: It was a three-month tour.

Kirchner: A pretty intense three months, obviously.

Liebman: Yeah, it was. It was intense, and it was all around the world.

Kirchner: At that point you decided to put together the quintet with Hino and Scofield and McClure and Adam Nussbaum.

Liebman: Yes. I was ready for guitar. I had had enough piano. Also, another reason – I should backtrack that I broke Lookout Farm up because I wanted to do this project with Pee Wee. The way that I painted it, it was commercial. We had – I just want on the record that it was positive. It was a good project. I enjoyed it. It was well done, and blah blah blah. And also because Richie was ready to hop as a soloist. That's a very important thing to recognize in your band, I think, is to know when to – not pull the switch, but when to let a guy go. You want to go? You got it. Because you don't want to get into a competitive situation. You don't want a guy to have to turn around and say, it's me or you, and now it's my turn. It's okay if it's done like that, but it's usually not as pretty as that. It's usually like, "I'm a leader too." I don't want to go there with my man. Manfred was ready to record him – Eicher – which he did, a trio with Jeff and Frank, the rhythm section. Very much like Herbie, like guys do. They take the rhythm section, Elvin, McCoy, trio records. So that was another reason that coincided with the thing with Pee Wee, was that, Richie was ready to hop.

When I came back to New York, Richie was with Abercrombie and his quartet, involved with him. It wasn't about me, going bad. No piano. I wanted some guitar, for a few reasons. Number one, I wanted a little more power. I wanted more single line writing the guitar affords you, and another horn. And I wanted more writing, period, which Richie didn't really want to do much of. I mean more extended – basically what I learned from Chick, codettas, codas, interludes, just more . . .

Kirchner: Form.

Liebman: Yeah, form, compositional form. I hadn't done it. So I wanted to do it.

Scofield was the hot kid in New York. Nobody really knew him. He was just – maybe Gary. Maybe not with Burton. I think it was Gary for a minute. Not really known. Hino already was a friend for 10 years, because Hino came to New York every year from Japan. Him and his brother, when Toko was alive, they would come to New York with a photographer and play in the lofts. So I knew Hino for years. I loved Hino.

This is a good story. I brought Mike Formanek from San Francisco, who was in my band. There was another band. When I broke that thing up with Pee Wee, I broke with Eddie Henderson – we spoke of that – but I also formed the – just like I did with these guys – a young band. There was Mark Isham, who now is making 500,000, a million a score.

Kirchner: Film score, right?

Liebman: A drummer named Mike Barsimanto, lives in L.A., and Mike Formanek. These were 18-year-olds. I called it the 3M quartet. We worked. We played lofts. We played in the San Francisco area, same time as I was with Eddie Henderson. But I liked Formanek. He was talented, and he wanted to get out of there. So this is a bandleader thing. Take a new guy. He stayed – I found a loft very quickly when I came back, and he stayed with me and so forth. He was going to be the bass player, and I wanted Moses, because that's – I love Moses. So I wrote music, arranged, got them together. Everything was great. It was happening. Opening as Sweet Basil. Dave hasn't been in New York for two years, basically. They don't know that I went through this thing with Pee Wee. Nobody knows. They only thing they know is I'm not there. "We don't know. He disappeared." So my whole community of people knew me. They're at Sweet – going to be at Sweet Basil, which by then had just started drums and bass, because they were originally a duo place also.

Kirchner: I remember that.

Liebman: We rehearsed. Night before the gig – Sunday. We're opening Tuesday – Moses calls me up and says, "I don't like the music. I'm not playing." A typical Moses. Let's talk about it later. I didn't talk to him for a while. Forget it. I said, "What?" He said, "I don't like the bass player, and I don't like the music." I said, "Moses, we're opening Tuesday night." I said, "This is ten tunes. What are you talking about?" He said, "Nope. I'm not going to play." He really screwed me up.

So now I'm there sitting in the loft, this loft on Sixth Avenue. I'm like, chhhh. Now, Adam Nussbaum had been hanging around me since Elvin, when he was 15 years old, and had sat in with Lookout Farm. Adam was on line. I said Adam, Adam Nussbaum. Called him up. I said, "Adam, now, right this minute, get in the car and come down here, because you got to work with me all night. You want to do this." "Yeah, of course." I said, "You got to learn eight tunes. We have 24 hours." He came. He was up with his parents in Norwalk. He came down, and he opened with me Tuesday night. That's how that band became him.

Then, eventually, Formanek didn't work out – I forget what happened – and I got McClure, who had been around in the loft also in the early '70s. So I went to guys I knew before. That was that quintet. That was a two- to three-year thing, in the last part of it, Kenny Kirkland, because Scofield started getting busy – Hino started getting busy on his own in Japan, so he couldn't be anymore in the States. First I had Kenny Kirkland. I had Kirkland and Scofield for about a year. I loved that band. That was a great band. Never got successful. Never really got across.

Kirchner: You only recorded a couple of . . .

Liebman: We did two records.

Kirchner: For Timeless.

Liebman: *Doin' It Again.* That was my call back to New York, *Doin' It Again,* and *If They Only Knew,* my ode to the critics. We had about a three-year existence. We had some European – intense European tours and so forth. But it was – I'm not going to call it – it wasn't a fusion band, but we certainly had eighth-note music and jazz. I was try to – again, as always, I was trying to bridge the gap, but this time not as overt as I had been with Pee Wee. Like I said yesterday, it was too much – too little and too much this way. This was more of – there was more of a middle about this. It was a jazz band with some different – with contemporary rhythms. Let's call it that. And of course the guitar, and him. He was a real individualist already. He had his way of playing. John was John already from the start. He always had that cry in his playing, that blues thing. It was – that was the way he played. And he loved me. He loved me and Grossman. He said his whole style is predicated on trying to sound like me and Grossman, so he said. He never listened to guitar players. He just wanted to be a horn player. So he was perfect.

Hino was – if you remember Hino, he was a complete individualist, style – talk about stylist. He was one of a kind.

Kirchner: Young kids today have no idea about . . .

Liebman: Yeah, because he disappeared. He's giving golf lessons on Japanese t.v. He's a star. Very unique guy. Great guy. Loved him.

And Adam, who was basically an Elvin, coming out of Elvin stylistically, and McClure, who's like the next – McClure's around early '70s. He was supposed to be the next [Eddie] Gomez. He was that kind of caliber. So I had a very, very good band, we had a good time. It went on for a couple of years, until that imploded and I got back with Richie slowly, over time. Richie's thing didn't work out as a trio leader. He worked with Abercrombie for two or three years, with Abercrombie's quartet. Then Richie was floating around again. That's how we started putting out stuff together again in the early '80s, leading to Quest.

But I was back in New York, full swing. That's for sure. Right on Sixth Avenue, 28th Street. I got married. I had a young – she was an actress. She was 18. I was 30, something like that. That didn't last long. That was an interlude.

I enjoyed being back in New York, after San Francisco. The charm of that had worn off pretty quickly, outside of the band, that Ellis–Liebman band breaking up, California,

there's no energy, and it's not happening. In New York – how anybody could ever live there. It's like – beautiful beyond belief, but ridiculous.

Kirchner: San Francisco is great if you're Denny Zeitlin.

Liebman: Yeah, or you come from there. It's not like this kind of temperament. No way. The people there are so slow. It's just not going to happen. So I realized that. I knew, this is it. I'm on the East Coast for the duration. Although I entertained going to Europe, because as we get to '88, one of the things – I had a bad period, and one of the things was to go to Europe. In any case, returning to New York was very – it was exciting. I was glad to be back. I was jamming. I was going out. I had a reputation. I was enjoying New York. I got married. I was really enjoying that band, until it imploded.

Then things conspired to create an atmosphere in the early '80s that things were – politically, Reagan; me, I was at a real down part of my career. That band hadn't gotten hold. I didn't know what to do next. I also got really restless about the rest of my life. If there was a mid-life crisis, this is when I had it, 35 years old. I didn't think I was using all the aspects of my personality. I thought that I had seen the world already. I had been on top. I'd already done everything. I'd been from Miles Davis to Japan to everywhere. Was this it for the rest of my life, the Village Vanguard? Is that all there is? Another poll? Another record? I was at that place where I had gone through ten years of whatever, and I just felt, there's got to be more than this. This is not a way to spend your life. Also, I didn't feel like that part of me, that organizational ability to be a leader, which I knew about myself and already had evidence of, from the band and from Free Life Communications and so forth – I wasn't using that. And, what was I going to do for the world? I was getting into this whole thing of, what do you do for the rest of your life, that's of value? In music, the most ego-centric thing of all is a jazz musician, me, me, me, my solo, outside of the group thing, which is true.

So it was like – and I had [been] the one who wanted to be a doctor. I wanted to be an orthopedic surgeon because of this crap. That's before Coltrane. I was on that path, etc., etc. Not just because of my parents, Jewish parents want you to be a doctor. I really wanted to be a surgeon. That was god to me, surgeon. When we – as we were talking about yesterday, we went to see – when I saw Doctor so-and-so, whoever the next guy was, it was like, this is going to Mecca. I want to be him. That was it.

Kirchner: Did you ever talk to Eddie Henderson about this?

Liebman: No.

Kirchner: He was a doctor?

Liebman: Yes, he was. Very good prescriptions, too. He was a democratic doctor. Yeah, not quite.

So I came to this great idea of – two things. One was law. It wasn't because of LaRoca, although it appears to be, and he was in on my calculations. I'd be a very good lawyer. I just decided, thought about it. I don't know, criminal law or constitutional law, the history thing. So I took the LSATs, and I went to Stanley Kaplan. I did the whole shit. Got my transcripts out, and got accepted to Baruch – Baruch, right? Is that across from the New School? Baruch? Yeshiva?

Kirchner: Yes.

Liebman: Fifth Avenue and 12th Street, whatever that one is. I got into New York Law, and I got into one other, again New York area. I didn't want to leave New York. This I knew. My mother was completely behind this, of course, because oh, my son the lawyer. My marriage had broken up. I was screwed. I didn't know musically what to do. So I took the law, and I got into these schools. You had to give your deposit by May 1st. I was dicking around, whether I should do it or not. I went to criminal court. I went with LaRoca to court. I went with a friend who I knew. I went to Center Street. I sat in on a criminal trial. I talked to everybody. Everybody to the man dissuaded me. They said, you think you're going to save the world, don't you, Dave? I said, yeah, sort of. They said, no. You got to sell out. You got to make deals. It's all backroom shit. You think it's cool. You think it's going to be law, because it's philosophical and that's where you're coming from. They were reading my mind. It's true. It's true. I was thinking about positive aspects of the law. They were dissuading me. But I still waited until midnight May 1st. The check was in my hand, the $500 down payment for tuition or whatever. I didn't do it.

When I didn't do that, I said, I'm not done with this search to find meaning. I said, Peace Corps, but not the Peace Corps, because I couldn't do the Peace Corps, because I think you had to have the age, or something like that. But anyway, I got all the aid agencies on one page, wrote to all of them – I have the letter upstairs – who I was, my background, why I thought I could be of help to the Third World, I'm saying, basically. Got a call back from Save the Children. The woman wanted to see me. I went to Washington. I went in there and talked to her. She was very nice. She said, you have a really impressive resumé. Of course it's not quite what we usually have, honestly. I played up my education, that I was an intellectual. I wasn't just some jazz musician, blah blah blah. I knew what to do. She said, the problem is, you're not equipped to teach how to dig water wells or agriculture or drainage pipes and the stuff you need in Kenya. They don't need this.

I wasn't going in to bring jazz to them. I wasn't that dumb. I was just offering myself. But what was my area of expertise? I couldn't speak any other language, a little French.

In other words, I was completely not qualified for the job. So she cut me right off. She introduced me to a guy who I'm still in touch with. [?Ntisa], his name is. He was in Haiti doing art with the community. But that was a Haitian connection, maybe special to Haiti. I don't know. In any case, that folded.

So now, I'm getting in a real crisis mode. This is already now late '70s, early '80s, by then. Then a couple of things conspired in '81. I broke my leg badly. Had a cast up to here, I got Hepatitis A, the mild one, and I got divorced. And I moved out of New York. This is all conspiring at this point to find some meaning and not to know what to do musically again. So I'm floundering.

What saved me was education, which brings me to the next 40 years of my life and basically what I'm sitting here doing, which is – the teaching thing started with Aebersold. We can talk about that. But in any case, by '81, I had already started to do some clinics with Jamey Aebersold, [David] Baker. Saw that side, which the guys from New York, we didn't even know what a clinic was.

Jamey Aebersold called me in '77. He said, "I'm Jamey Aebersold." I said, "Yeah?" He said, "I'd like you to come" – with that twang – "like you to come to a clinic." I said, "Clinic. What clinic?" I had no idea what he was talking about. That was how naive I was. He said "No, you stand in front of a couple of kids. You talk. You play." Hayes, Kansas, in January. I went, after I got home from India. I had gone to India with my mother. I came back. I got sick, I remember, because I had something in my stomach from an Indian thing. I ended up in the emergency room after the teaching.

I never saw anything like that, when I went to that clinic, because they were all there, Baker, Hurley, Coker, ABCs, all there, D, Dan, poom – Abersold, Baker, Coker, Dan. They're all there, ABCD. And they are – and [Ed] Soph – they're teaching ii-V-I's, organized. I had no idea. Way beyond my abilities to explain a little and do it. I was like, I can't – what is this thing? It was my first exposure to jazz education. Berklee, I knew guys. But this was like – these guys were like – I always say it joking: Jamey could teach a fly to sing the blues in an hour. It's true. They just knew what to do.

So I started to do those clinics, '78, '79, and '80, because he had the summer things. I'd do three, four weeks. He went to Indiana. He went to California, Haywood, whatever, Greeley, Colorado, with the pig smells at the slaughterhouse. It's unbelievable. I had an unbelievable time. I got friendly with the guys. I was the big mah, because I'm ex-Miles Davis. I'm the only well-known guy there teaching. They had Slide Hampton, Joe Henderson. These guys would come in. But I was on the staff. I always had the best combo. Me and Baker would have combo 1 and 2, or me and Jerry. I'm around these guys. I tell you. David, he just made it so enjoyable. Everybody's singing, laughing.

Coker knew everything backwards and forwards and could hear a pin drop and play it back to you.

Kirchner: With two hearing aids, which is all the more amazing.

Liebman: He would do the scale syllabus. Friday, you had to do the scale syllabus. Played all the scales in any key, Jamey playing in front of all the kids, 10 o'clock. With me, he'd tell me. He'd say, B-flat Dorian, okay, do whatever. Jerry would do it by ear. Jerry would just start playing. He'd just do it by ear. That's how bad he was, amazing.

And Jamey, being Jamey, just his whole personality, the [?] and the books, the whole thing. I didn't know. So now, by '80, '81, I'm starting to see this teaching thing a little bit and also realizing that – because my career's not at the greatest point now. I'm definitely in a dip – how am I going to make a living? This jazz thing is not going to pay, ever. I'm not a star. It's not going to pay. I do not want to do studio work. I am not doing club dates any more. I want to do something for the world, and I need to make a living. Teaching. That was it. That was the decision that I made.

Kirchner: Let's break it there.

Liebman: The teaching, it saved me. I'm talking about the very beginnings of it. Aebersold morphed into Banff, Dave Holland, '83. Banff was much more on a higher level. It was more select. It had money. And that morphed into me doing my clinics now for 24 years at East Stroudsburg University, ten minutes from here, and eventually to the IASC, which we'll get to. In other words, that was the beginning of me finding – it satisfied that part of me that was, do something good, positive, outside of my own little world. Unless you're Mozart, that means you're a mortal being. Coltrane. If you're not that, you're a good player. It's great.

Kirchner: And Mozart and Coltrane both died young, lest we forget.

Liebman: Yeah, a lot of them did, a lot of them. Jimi Hendrix did, and Bird did. But if you're not that – I'm being very categorical. Whenever I say this, people look at me, stupid statement – but my point being, if you're not going to contribute your art to the world, change the world with that, which those guys did, and that means 99.999% of all of us who are in the art, yet alone not – if you're not that, I think it behooves you to find something that is – I'm not going to say on the same level, because it can't be. You're not going to – you're not Ghandi – but that is of value. Enjoy yourself. Have a good time. Play all you want. Really, in the end, what the hell are you doing? Because you're not Coltrane. We haven't discussed this, because this is not the forum for it, but the psychological . . .

Kirchner: It's whatever you want it to be.

Liebman: The point of the psychological aspect of being so enamored by Trane and so into it and having to deal with Coltrane my whole life, musically, that I'm not going to be Trane, that in fact I may not even be the left pinkie of his, and that I haven't heard anything better and never did and never will, blah blah blah blah blah blah, etc., etc. By now, in the early '80s, this is a fact of life. I already had – I won't say I coped with it, but I had found I'm not. I admitted it. I admit it. I'm not. This sounds all stupid, but when you say it and really mean it, it takes years to get there. So this thing of finding something that could take up that place is what the teaching thing did for me. I just felt, and feel, and I'm sure you identify what I'm talking about, that we're on a mission and that turning a kid onto music is good. It's very simple. Phil Woods in his straight, absolute down-to-earth manner, when I asked him, jazz education, yeah, "You know why, Dave? It's better that they have a horn in their hand than a gun." In this culture, that's actually not far from the truth. So we're doing a mitzvah. It's jazz. It's very esoteric. Ten people in the world understand it, and no-one needs to. Understood, thank you. But the truth is, the values that come through jazz and the qualities of the music and the history that it represents, especially unique to America, is of value to you as a young person, to have. Even though out of the 150 I'm going to see tomorrow, maybe only one will find their way to the bandstand, those other 149 have gotten something they would never get out of anything else. I'm convinced of that. They will not get it out of any other kind of music. I'll tell you right now. Not classical. I'm sorry. You will not get it out of pop music. I'm sorry. I don't know any other field where they'll get such a love of humanity as a given, as in this music, and music in general, but in this case, in this music. So, to me, you can't be going wrong if you're doing that. This is after the 20 years of teaching, 20, 30 years of teaching, and I see the philosophy, and I can explain it. But I could see the beginning to that in the '80s. That's what saved me from the abyss, I got to tell you, because I wasn't sinking. I wasn't a junkie. I wasn't out to kill myself. But I was not in good shape. I had lost my center. I lost my desire. I didn't know what I would do. The music thing seemed to me to be a dead end at that point.

Kirchner: I tell my students, you're learning to be a jazz musician, and that involves learning to be an improviser. One of the things you have to learn is how to improvise as a career. That's what we all do. Did you ever read a book called *The Third Wave*, by Alvin Toffler?

Liebman: Yes.

Kirchner: He was – his heroes were jazz musicians, because jazz musicians could think on their feet and were much more flexible and could change directions rapidly.

Liebman: Yeah, we're becoming the model, and we're becoming a corporate model now. Guys going out and giving these clinics, right?, how to hit a conga drum, because, feel your inner Jones, make up the thing. Oh, be a little looser in your stuff. Yeah, there are a lot of great qualities to this music that are intrinsic to learning the music. But it's more than that. It's the lifestyle. I don't mean the negative part. That's understood. We got that. *Bird,* the movie, took care of that. It's the positive, life-affirming values that this music represents, from Louis Armstrong, from Jelly [Roll Morton], I don't care, the little I know about them, to today, kids, those two guys who just walked out of here. This is positive, period. There is not one negative bone of anything in this music. I never heard of music being negative, resentful, hateful, jealous, contemptible. Music is what we bring to it, and this music, above all, is American. It's democracy. You would not have found this in China, my friend. You're not going to find this in an autocratic culture. This is not the top down. This is about us all, level playing field. One guy stands out. Then he comes back. Basketball.

Kirchner: That's right. There was a reason why the Nazis hated jazz.

Liebman: Yes, absolutely. Communists.

Kirchner: And Communists.

Liebman: Yeah, because it's completely anti-authoritism, totali- – it's completely against all that.

So that was their rap. This was the rap that got me back on course in my life. Then events followed, and the teaching thing. To finish this – to go further with this – the second part of this was this Peace Corps thing. The first part was the law thing, satisfied by the teaching thing. The second part of it was this organizational thing, this thing of leadership that I felt I had qualities in. No Peace Corps. They didn't want me. What could I do, on a world level? I wanted something on a world level. That's what I was thinking. That's when the IASJ came up. Literally, that's exactly why it happened, because I needed something. It was right there, staring me in the face.

Kirchner: Let's talk about that.

Liebman: The story I always tell when I introduce – they ask me about this, is that I was doing clinics in Germany and France and tuh duh duh duh, because the '80s are the beginning of Europe starting to get on it, with Quest, maybe me and Richie, me alone. I'm going to Germany, and they don't know who Jean-François Jenny-Clark is. And in France, they don't know who Albert Mangelsdorff is. I mean, it's across the border, man. Forget about Tete Montoliu or Jon Christensen. Forget about Spain and Sweden. I'm

flipping out. I'm saying, this is ridiculous. You guys don't even know each other. That's absurd.

I'm becoming – by the way, that's when I started my European relationships. I'm starting to go to Europe more and more. That got me career-wise back, actually. That was through Advance Music helping me with the books and so forth. But this all is coming together, and I'm saying, this is ridiculous, and especially the education thing. You walk in the school. Everybody's talking about Miles Davis, whether it's Finland or Italy. No matter what language it is, everybody knows *Kind of Blue.* So there's so much more in common than there isn't, when you use jazz as the vehicle to communicate between cultures.

So with a couple friends of mine – Steve Lipman helped me, and Leon Segal. These are people who really helped me formulate the – you need a raison d'être. It needs a philosophy behind it. You can't just get up and get on the phone. You got to build up a philosophy. You need some groundwork. I did it. I started writing letters to the cats everywhere I taught, from Japan to Israel, everywhere. I said, we have more in common than we don't. Let's do a United Nations jazz. It was my metaphor: come together, the schools all together in one place. So, IAJE on a world scale. I used them as an example.

By '89 I had gotten responses, positive. "Oh sure." Everybody said yes, of course. I said '89, I'm going to meet you. I gave the address. It was Advance Music's office in Germany, Stuttgart. I said I'll be there at 1 o'clock in the afternoon at this bar, this restaurant, Yugoslavian restaurant that I like. I'll be sitting at the top floor. If anybody's interested, that's where we'll meet.

15 countries showed up. Cats drove from everywhere and said, yes. They all knew me. These were all – except one, who now ended up being my main guy, Walter Turkenburg, who came because the guy in Paris told him to come. He said, "This Liebman's onto something. He's a good guy. Go." He was there. He's the guy eventually who became my – he's the executive director. It was my attempt to bring people together. That was the beginning of it, in 1989.

Now we're 20. This is our 21st year. We're going to be in Sao Paolo, Brazil, in July. We have a meeting every year. We have a newsletter. We don't have an incredible infrastructure. We don't have certain money, like other organizations. We never could get funding. I tried. I tried the United Nations. I tried everybody. But the point is, we do have a network of 40 countries, and we come together. It's 150 people. That's what we do. It's the most positive thing I've done in my life. Outside of my family, my daughter, my relationship with Caris, the thing I've done most positive has been this thing, definitely. If you say, what have you done most in the world?, that's the one. It's small. Nothing like 10,000 people. It's not a convention. Nothing like we're going to see tomorrow in New Orleans. It's localized. It's small. I kept it small on purpose. Small is better in this case.

Everybody walks out of there knows each other's name. That's the main thing. That was my criteria.

Kirchner: I was involved with the meeting at Berklee in 2001 when I went up with The New School.

Liebman: Yeah, you were there.

Kirchner: I was there for that week.

Liebman: At Berklee. So you know the atmosphere.

Kirchner: I got up close and personal with it. You clearly are the driving force and without – in a non-narcissistic way, you're definitely the center of whatever goes on there.

Liebman: I know. I know my role, I know how to do it, and I learned a lot. This has been a lesson in etiquette. Believe it – in sensitivity – that me being the bull that I am, from New York City, sensitivity's not my strong point. We don't have time for that stuff. Excuse me, but sorry. That's the way it goes. Life is the way it is. To have to be sensitive to the cat from Italy – not sensitive, but understand the differences of lifestyle and of the way I speak, even how I express something, even the way I use my hands to talk, because we talk like this. They think that's aggressive. You know what I'm saying? I learned some real detailed stuff in how to get along, in how to set up a meeting, how to keep things quiescent in an atmosphere where there could be a lot of antagonism of personalities. It's psychology, big time.

Look, any head of an organization, it's basically about psychology. It's about – you bring a skill set to the table, of leadership, but the biggest leadership skills you bring is your ability – besides answering the phone and all that – is your ability to analyze what's going on around you, to get the vibe, and to be able to keep things moving, evolving, towards the goal. The goal here is – we don't have a main goal – the goal is network communication. That's all. Jazz. I'm not even into the jazz. I'm glad the kids are together.

When the IAJE called me on the carpet, as they did: "Why are you doing this?" Because they were trying to go world, right? You know they tried so many times. "Why are you doing it? Why are you doing it? You're one of us." Sort of. "You've been at every meeting." By then I'm going because she had the business. So she's at every meeting. I said, "Your organization's about teachers. It's about" – I didn't get negative and say, it's about showing off your bands. I didn't go there. I just went, "This is a teacher-to-teacher organization. My thing is student-to-student." Voila. Discussion's over. I didn't get into

what's negative about it or you're too big. All the stuff we talk about. Why we hate – why everybody's complaining about IAJE and everything – before they folded. I didn't get into that. I just said, sorry. The main thing to me is the kid-to-kid. This is supposed to be about kids, not about you. It's not about me. It's about the kids. Kids play every day together. Kids perform together. It's about kid-to-kid. I got 30 countries. They talk to each other. We've done a positive thing. It happens to be that the teachers are there, and the teachers have to communicate about finances and regulations, about how you handle vocalists, what do you do with your boss, how do you put concerts on, how do you get public funding? We'll have those discussions also. No problem. But the emphasis has got to be kid-to-kid, not teacher-to-teacher, showing off my band against your band or something like that, standing in the lobby and playing. I didn't say that, but that's what's it's like. They were like, mmm mmm.

Finally by then, just to finish this, Dennis Tini, who was president in '95, from – what's that one in Detroit? – Wayne State. He – right up to me, because by now, it's starting to get guys who knew me musically and were student types, respected me. I didn't have to deal with – I'm not going to name names – those kind of guys, who like, they didn't know me from nothing, because I wasn't big band or whatever. Matt Betton didn't know me. But Dennis Tini knew me. Baker knew me. They knew my capabilities. Some of them knew me because they'd seen me teach. He said, "This has got to stop. We got to do something." I said, "Please. Help me out." So they gave me $1500 every year to give a kid from Eastern Europe to come. We used to have a kid come who couldn't afford it. This was me and my [?]. I went right up to him. He said, "What do you need?" I said, "I need to help a kid." I said, "I don't need anything else from you." So he said, "Okay. We'll give 1500 to you." Like clockwork. I got the check for ten years, until things started to go out. So anyway, that's the premise of the organization, student-to-student, a vehicle. My mantra is cross-cultural communication using jazz as the vehicle. That's the mantra. That will be ongoing. I'll try to find new leadership, because the same guys are in. It's like every organization. I don't have to tell you. Who's going to take over? Old guys – you can't be there more than ten years before it's all – you're old wood, dead wood. It's organizational crap, which goes on forever.

But Walter's a great lieutenant. He's like the captain. And he was great that first meeting. He said – he came up to me after. He said, "I hear you." Because I said, I'm not doing this. I will do the music. If this thing comes to fruition, I will take care of the combos. I'll do the – I'll be Jamey Aebersold. I'll take care of it. I'll lead them. I'll inspire them. I'll do my job, which is about the music. But I am not going to be a secretary. I don't have time for that career. Everybody was um-hmm. But who's going to step up to the plate? He comes up to me. He says, "I'm your boy." I said, "If you mean it, you got to come. We got to talk. Spend a couple days with me." He came here, sat right there. Came here. This is '89, '90. He came. We put it together. Set the first meeting, at his school. That's why we just had a 20th anniversary last June, 20 years. Your school first. I said if we get

five schools, we'll do it. Other than that, this was a nice thought. We ended up with 11 countries, 11 schools, that first meeting in The Hague. He became – he was the guy who took care of it, put the non-profit together, did all – what I did with Free Life, but now on a world level. It's funny, because I had done it before. It was the same thing, organizing musicians, again doing it. I had some skills. I know I did. But I learned a lot too. I learned a lot about how to handle people. We've had some falling outs. Things happen. No money things. Not yet. I watch the dimes.

Kirchner: Numerically, what's the membership count now for it?

Liebman: We're 40 countries, maybe 50, 60 schools. But they drop in and drop out. Now, with funding problems, we're having a little gap. When IAJE went under a couple years ago, we had 10 new members, like that. Now we're starting to lose, because guys can't get $400, euro, 300 euro, I think it's 400 euro. Schools can't afford it. Stuff – Europe is in – starting to go. The funding's going down. That's what's happening. Finally they're getting like us. They can't afford little extras, like clinics and things. It's definitely changing in Europe. No question. Netherlands tightened up. France tightened up already. Germany's tightening up. Spain has no money. Scandinavia is being very tight. They're getting tighter and tighter.

Kirchner: Greece and Ireland are on the verge of bankruptcy.

Liebman: Yeah, we're supposed to be in Ireland – we're supposed to go to Ireland two years from now. We probably won't, as a meeting.

Kirchner: I'm sure Ronan Guilfoyle has tales to tell.

Liebman: He said, "We're on it," back and forth with e-mail. He said we don't have to worry about it. "Yeah, but by the time we're in Sao Paolo, you've got to give me a yes or no." We got to know two years in advance.

Anyway, that's been very, very interesting and broadening, and of course there's a real practical level of providing work for me. "Can you come to my school?" This became a source of income. My income is half teaching, or more, of clinics. It's because of these contacts.

Kirchner: What percentage of your work is Europe?

Liebman: 80, 90.

Kirchner: And the rest is?

Liebman: States. I don't go to Japan anymore. I don't go – once in a while you go to Israel on some weird plan, Brazil, something special, Korea last year, one festival. But no, no, no, I'm – that's the rough thing. See, guys like a Herbie or Chick. These guys, they have a Japan market now which is burgeoning into Korea, Manila. It's starting to. They have Europe, and they have America. They have three aspects. The Japan-Australia thing, the Europe, and the – I have one, Europe, and somehow I make out, but without America, it's tough. It's tough.

Kirchner: But that's the same for somebody like Phil Woods, for example.

Liebman: Oh yeah. It's everybody except A level, A level as far as commerce goes. There's no B level in America. It's A or D. I'm not – D is the kids, is these guys who'll go out for 50 bucks. I'm B, C. I mean money-wise. We're at 1500, 2,000 a night for the band, maybe, but not 8,000 a show. Lovano's low A level. Herbie, Chick, McCoy – McCoy to a certain degree – Wynton, of course. That's A top level. That's money. I'm talking about money. I'm talking about filling the hall with 800 people. I cannot get 800 people in San Diego. I cannot get 800 people in San Francisco. It's not going to happen. I know that. So you go to that club. How do you do a club three nights, and you got to get a car? That's why you don't work, or you work once every – somehow I bring this band and we do it, because we drive 18 hours at a time. But without America, you're screwed. And it just doesn't happen in America for me. It's interesting because, in the '70s, in this period, we were joking about it yesterday, with Horizon and ECM, Polydor, ECM, A&M Horizon, Miles Davis, Elvin Jones, winning a poll, blah blah blah blah blah, I had my day in the sun. I can't complain. You get your day in the sun. To be able to make that last, I don't know. I made – it didn't happen for me. Once it doesn't, you don't come back. Joe Henderson's about the only example I can think of of a resurrection, popular-wise, who disappeared into the cracks, played clubs, greatest tenor player, among the top who ever lived, playing clubs. I saw him in Berlin with a pickup rhythm section. It's a joke. You know what I mean? A joke. He was working. He was playing his ass off, working, and then got resurrected, because the – got somebody behind him. That's because Dick – Rich?

Kirchner: Seidel.

Liebman: They found a theme, and they found a way. But outside of that, if you haven't had, you don't get. You're not rediscovered, not at that level. On an underground level, yes. Like if Noah Howard comes back, who just passed. He was in the avant garde. "Oh, I haven't heard him in years. I could use anybody as an example. But not on the high commercial level. You're not going to – if you were never really popular, you're not going to be really popular when you're 90. It's not going to happen.

Kirchner: Lee Konitz has had an interesting . . .

Liebman: But it's still small. Lee's not making any more money than me, not really. He's still going out with some guy who calls him, just like I was on the phone this morning. That's – it's cool. I'm not complaining. Believe me. Because I'm doing – I do better than a lot of people. I'm a hustler. I take care of business. I knew a lot of guys who would be envious to be in my position. I don't take it lightly. But of course there is above you. You go like, wouldn't it be nice to be able to say I'm touring or I'm taking off three weeks. I can't do that. I can't take off. If a gig comes, I got to take it when they tell me. I can't say, "I'm on tour only July and August," and "Manager, please book my tour." Those guys can do that. That's an enviable position, I must say, to be able to do that. That's level 1 of commercial success in our field. As small as our field is, commercial success means – it's still – within it, there's commercial success.

But the education thing is – it ends up, there's a reason for everything. I have to believe that. The fact that I'm talking about this, describing my situation, is maybe why I've had such a high profile in education. In other words, the glass has got to get filled up somehow.

Kirchner: You are what you eat.

Liebman: In a way, it is what I should be doing. I'm a good player. I'm okay. I could be very good.

Kirchner: You're better than okay. Hey, come on.

Liebman: But that is not my contribution to the world. I'm Dave, and when they hear Dave, they get Dave, which is nice. But this thing, this education thing, especially the way I teach, it's – I know the level. I know what I do, and that has been, I think, more meaningful, and I think I was supposed to be doing that. I wouldn't be 64 and sitting here saying that, if it wasn't that things conspired to make it that way. If I was a bigger commercial success, I wouldn't be as – wouldn't have the time. I certainly would have played more, because everybody would rather play, so they think. I would not have done this. I wouldn't have written those books. I wouldn't have had the effect on it. I think I'm getting this award because of the education. In my mind, that's the reason I'm getting the award, really, because my effect in education is – I know it's been a big effect. And now, after 30 years, you've got students who – actually, they're 40 years old now. They're not 10 anymore. You've had an effect. It's cumulative. I always said the pen is mightier than the sword. I believe that. I believe. You certainly believe that. You know what I'm talking about. The pen is mightier than the sword, because of its long-lasting effect and of the ability to seep everywhere. Slowly, that's for sure. It's not like, they have a record with a tune, which is tomorrow night, hit tune, play your tune. But it's insidious. It can't be stopped, education. Ideas can't be stopped, as we know from the history of the world.

So, in a way, you will win the game, whatever we mean by that, with education. But it's slow and it's cumulative and it's decades, absolute decades. Long run, for sure. Playing is a different story. Now that I find myself at this point, being here and doing this, I think it's because of that.

Kirchner: It all has to do with how you achieve visibility. One of the hippest things I ever heard was from the late John Hicks, who said, "If you're not appearing, you're disappearing."

Liebman: Yes, in one way or the other.

Kirchner: So this is how you've been appearing and made your contribution.

Liebman: Yes, I know it, and I feel good about it. I mean, I'm sure I'd feel good if I was in a position of what Michael was like, success-wise, working, doing that. I'm sure I'd feel equally good too. But, in a way, I think this is a better one to go to bed with. I think, unless you're Coltrane. I keep going back to that stupid, naive statement, that I – but you know my implications. Unless you're that, everything's lesser. Let's face it. Therefore let's do something you really do that is you completely and that no-one else can do. If you can find that, what – you've found the secret to life, if you can find that.

Kirchner: Looking, say, at Michael Brecker . . .

Liebman: For example.

Kirchner: . . . he went through his so-called down period, where he was Mr. Triple-Scale Studio Player, playing on all those pop records, but he was being dissed by the jazz critics, who didn't take him seriously as a jazz player. It's only after he got away from that and started doing his own thing, that he started getting the credit he deserved as a serious artist.

Liebman: Absolutely. I just used him as an example of top dollars, etc., filling a hole and being a saxophone player. We can relate to that. But the education thing is – again, this must have been the way it's supposed to be. I believe in it. I have to, first of all. Look, I have limited time left. We're getting old. We're not going to live forever. I have to think that. Otherwise, what would I say about my life? You got to be cool, because in the end, you got to face the brother. Somebody's got to – somebody's going to be going, "So, what'd you do, man? What'd you do, boy?" You better come up with a damn answer.

Kirchner: Also, you wouldn't have the credibility as an educator if you weren't the caliber of player that you are. People take you seriously because you can get out there and deliver the goods.

Liebman: Right, and one hand watches – I agree. One hand watches the other, and it works for me. The balance is very good. That's why I think everything's – I think things are the way they're supposed to be. So I don't – I still got to hustle. I still got to make 15 phone calls tomorrow. But it's okay.

I do everything myself, because nobody can do it the way you do it, and I'm not giving away 15% to somebody because they're on the phone, as much as I'd like to have somebody do it for me.

Kirchner: And there are very few people who do it well.

Liebman: They don't, and you end up doing it anyway. Michael told me something very interesting with his manager. He said it took five years. He said it ended up he had to teach him how to spell his name, because you can't expect somebody else to read your mind. It's understandable. I now – I have a quote. I have a manager now. But it's impossible, because I – nobody can do it the way I'm doing it, because I do it for myself, and I'm first on the line to do it. Plus in our business, in a way, they want to talk to you. Now they know they can't talk to Herbie or Wayne. That's understandable. But Dave Liebman they can talk to, and they do not want to talk to – let's say my wife did it, or you, being my representative. They want to talk to Dave, for whatever that's worth. Not that I have wonderful discussions with a guy from Tallinn, Estonia, but it's just that they want to be in touch with you, because they feel that too, especially the foreign thing, which is most of my work. They – to them, you are a legend, and they want to know that, "Dave, he answered me on line." It sounds so dumb, but I know it means something, because I would have felt the same way if I was them. So there's a lot of reasons why you got to do it yourself. That's the way it is.

Kirchner: Let's backtrack a little and talk about how Quest got together.

Liebman: Richie and I started duoing again. We figured we had work we had not finished up with Lookout Farm, and the truth was, it was jazz. It was jazz. We wanted to play jazz, no more fusion. I don't want to fool around with that stuff. I had done it with Lookout Farm, I did it with Pee Wee, and I had done a version of it with the band with Scofield. It was time for us to take care of what we could do, which was basically Miles and Trane '60s, to put it really blank. It was what we loved the most, what we admired musically, what was our basic musical creed, to find our own way of doing it.

We were ready to do that. In the '70s, when I was talking about Richie before, we had to find out who we were. It was more of an individual thing. This was now like, okay, what can we do that could be as powerful as the Miles quintet, as powerful as the Trane

quartet, really. I mean, we didn't talk like that any more, by the '80s, but we all knew that, in our mind . . .

Kirchner: Those are the models.

Liebman: Yeah, exactly, because that was the most compelling music we had ever heard, and still had – see, that's the thing. By then, nothing had come up to it. I still didn't hear anything. Who am I going to listen to? Unless we're just old fogies, you only like what you do when you grow up as a teenager. There's something to be said about it, because you're – those are your age, that you're impressionable, and that's what you love the most. But it was more than that. There's still nothing like that. There's still – we got the bootleg tape. Something would be found from a live tape from Copenhagen of Miles that now is on DVD. You go, oh, God, listen to them play *Round Midnight* again. Oh man, it's unbelievable, wow, Jeez.

So that was what happened with Quest. We had Al Foster at the beginning and [George] Mraz. It don't get better. That's the rhythm section. That's a jazz rhythm section. Eventually Al, he had to go back with Miles when Miles came out of retirement. That was his first due. Billy was around. Went with Billy. Eventually Mraz was working too much with Roland Hanna. He's working in New York. He didn't want to go on the road. Music really wasn't for him, even though he's a phenomenal bass player. It wasn't for him, really. We got Gomez for a minute. He's too much of a star. McClure. I said, let's get McClure. I know him from [?]. I know he's steady and solid. He's a good man. He takes care of business, no bullshit. He's going to be cool. That's how that band finally got solidified by '84 in that personnel.

That band met with very, very good success in Europe and especially France. We were like the band. In New York, we were kind of the band for the young cats to see. We were the hot band in New York. You went to Lush Life. You heard us. We played the Vanguard, whatever. It was like, we were the jazz band of that time. That was when Brecker Brothers and all that stuff, whatever. Things were happening. A lot of kinds of music. When we played Seventh Avenue South, they knew that was a jazz band. That's what we prided ourselves on. It was. It was a Miles and Trane rhythm section type thing. I definitely was thinking about Miles and Trane all the time. Not musically. Just how to be the horn in front of a rhythm section of that magnitude, because it's the best rhythm section I've ever played with, Billy and Bobby and Richie. That's – I always say, if you don't have to think when you're playing, you're in. I don't know what I think about, but I know when I don't think. That I know, and with that band, I just played.

Also, it was only soprano. That was when I decided, only soprano. Played that for 15 years. It was very – we had a real center. It was really good. We had problems, personnel problems which reared their heads and basically – I can't say it led to the breakup of the

band, but it was not easy at the end. Richie was having drug problems. Ron was a little bit off. Things were not – it was hard. It's just rough to be on the road. It's tough.

I was the titular leader, even though it wasn't my band. But I was basically the leader, business-wise and representing us and all that stuff. It was just getting too hard. That led to the end, at that point. But we had a great run. Now we're back together. It's great.

Kirchner: How did that happen?

Liebman: I didn't see Richie for 15 years. Again, nothing "I won't talk to you." We just – he was dealing with his shit, and I was married, had a kid. My life had changed. I wasn't getting high anymore. Life changes. We're living here. We've been here 25 years, since the beginning of our relationship, more or less. So our priorities – my priorities have changed. I was just taking care of business, plus the education thing centered me, and so forth. Things just dissipated. It was the time to change. It was time to call it.

When a friend of ours asked, "Could you and Richie play for my birthday?" – 50th birthday. We have this mutual friend, Swiss friend – we said sure. So we played duo, and of course it was great.

Kirchner: Is that [?Jurg Zommer]?

Liebman: No, but his friend [?Ernst Bucher]. That's the – they come together. That's right, because that's the same town. They're like next to each other.

Kirchner: I just got an e-mail from Jurg yesterday.

Liebman: Yeah, great cat. Jurg was at a clinic at Advance with me. So was Ernst, and Ernst still, a very good friend.

We did it and said, why don't we play together? So that's how we started, 2005. And I said, okay, why don't we get Billy and Ron and see what happens, and so and so. They put us on tour, and that's how we got together. We made a record. Now we just made a new one. Richie and I suddenly have four or five records coming out this year. It's just ridiculous.

Getting back together again – the band is like the Modern Jazz Quartet. That's the best metaphor I can think of, in the sense that it's only those four guys that could do that. There are no interchangeable parts. The way we relate to each other is just because the four of us relate to each other that way. Nobody else could do it, another person there wouldn't do it, and we can't do it with anybody else. I can't do it with anybody else, and I know Richie can't. Even Billy. It's the best band – Headhunters and this band was the

best bands he played with. That's what he says always. We just have a chemistry. Now, after 15, 20 years, with a break and then we came back together, then it's even more so, because you value it more when you're older. You're glad you got it. You don't think about, oh, I don't like the way – you go into the positive, not the negative. All things are cool. We're doing good. We're up there playing. Let's just call it that. Be happy. Be cool. So I'm enjoying it very much. When he comes back, we'll be able to do a little more.

Meanwhile the other band that I've had since '91, with Vic Juris, Tony Marino, Jamey Haddad for 10 years, and Phil Markowitz for the first 6, 7 years, that band's still going with Tony and Vic and Marco now, Marco Marcinko. That's been a great experience. Those guys can play anything. I've done everything from Puccini to free jazz to rock-and-roll with these guys. They're just the most loyal, great guys. It's a great band. I loved that band. I love my band. We don't work that much, but I love it.

Vic is – you want to talk unsung heroes. This is way – it's criminal. He's so good and so not known. It's just – I can't even say. It's disgusting. It's really not right in this case. It's more than just like, hmmmm. It's a drag. I don't know why, and believe me, it's frustrating to him. It's frustrating. You know him. New York guys know him. But that's it. He's been with me. So anybody hears me goes like, "Huh?" And the same with Tony. Tony's a guy from up the line. He's from Scranton, family guy. Tony's self-taught, natural. I never had a word – I never say a word to him about music. He always knows what to do. He's also – guys come and say, "Who's that bass player?" But Tony's different. Vic has been out there and should be recognized, and is not.

Kirchner: Even John Abercrombie does not have the recognition that he should have.

Liebman: Not any more. I agree.

Kirchner: There's a very limited place at the top for jazz guitar players.

Liebman: But there's a lot, because jazz guitar is definitely a pretty fertile field compared to other instruments. They have the numbers, compared to any other thing. That's another – that's also not right, Abercrombie.

Kirchner: There's Scofield and there's – who else?

Liebman: Kurt Rosenwinkel. I don't know. I don't get it.

Kirchner: Yeah. Kurt Rosewinkel was the hero for the young kids.

Liebman: I don't get it. I'm sorry. I have a problem. I don't get it. I just don't get it. I don't understand. Abercrombie, also, he's like the father of all these cats. He's – direct

from [Mick] Goodrick is him. Goodrick's the top of the pyramid, because Goodrick was the one with the knowledge. Goodrick showed these cats the stuff. Whether he showed it to them or not, he was the guru. And John was the first in line. It's like Baker – it's Coker to Baker to Jamey. Coker's the top. He got it to Baker. Baker gave it to Jamey. This is like that. Mick is to Abercrombie, and then Abercrombie is to [Pat] Metheny and all – everybody else after that. You think that the fathers get a little credit? They don't. Or the uncles.

Kirchner: John's lucky that he still has ECM.

Liebman: He does, which is part of it. Maybe it's got a problem. He certainly could have jumped ship.

Kirchner: To what?

Liebman: There was a chance for him to have been on a major label in the '80s. Gateway. He had a lot – he was at the top of the game at a moment. He was the electric guitar player. He could have gone to a major American company, if he had investigated.

Kirchner: Who probably would have dropped him after two years.

Liebman: That's the other thing to be said. Right. We don't know. Exactly. But we see Metheny. We see Scofield had a life at the top. So there was room. I don't know. But yeah, of course. At least he's made 30 records with the same guy. That's guy's hard. He's hard even to his boys. Eicher, he's tough. Oh boy. From the sessions, he's a rough one. I couldn't get along with him. We were like oil and water. It was not going to work. After *Drum Ode*, it was too much for me.

Kirchner: A German and a New York Jew? That's a hard . . .

Liebman: I had a good time. Kurt Rinker. I was very cool with Kurt Rinker. I was good with Matthias at Enja. I get along with these guys. But Manfred's a particular case. He got his own – his own thing is at stake, and he's in there. He has his way of being, and I just couldn't take it.

The blowup was the *Drum Ode* date. *Drum Ode.* I got eight drummers, percussion, Steve Satten among them, in the studio, smoking like you couldn't see. The cloud of smoke was unbelievable. Cats having a good time. Drummers? Are you going to tell drummers to be cool. Excuse me. Drummers. This is their thing. This is drummers. What is more happening than drummers, especially when you get a couple together. They're the life of the party. They dance. They sing. They talk. They're great. They don't have to worry about notes. They have a free life.

He flipped, flipped. He was like, "Ah, I can't take it." What's that word?

Kirchner: Apoplectic?

Liebman: Yeah, apoplectic. He was like [Liebman inhales deeply]. He was like this – at one point, four or five hours into the session, he's like, "I can't take it. My sessions are like laboratories. They don't even bring their wives." He was like that. I said, "Manfred, it's New York City. This is drummers. It's New York City." Patato's there [Carlos Valdez]. Don Alias is there. You're talking about guys like joie de vivre, for Christ's sake, and it's New York City. This is drum land. And the guy's like this. I thought this is – that was the end of that. I never did any more with him.

By the way, if there's ever been a mistake, if I have ever made – I can't call it a mistake, but not a good move was that date when I kissed him off, basically, because I – outside of [Jan] Garbarek, I could have been the guy, and a lot of my aesthetic goes along with ECM, part of my aesthetic. I could have played ball with him. Let's put it that way. I don't know for how long, but I could have, and it certainly would have enhanced may career, no question about it, because he – look, he made a couple guys. But I pulled out, and whatever I did, I did. You can't go back on that.

Kirchner: Around that time, as you mentioned, in the late '70s, early '80s, you decided to put the tenor aside . . .

Liebman: Yes, '80, '81.

Kirchner: . . . and concentrate solely on soprano. What was the motivation for that?

Liebman: Basically to escape Coltrane, in the end, although not the immediate reason. The deep-seeded reason, certainly. But I could have said that in 1973. So why then? It's part of this midlife thing too. It's all around me, 35 years old, whatever. It's not midlife, but for me it was. I felt like I had a formula and a recipe, and I didn't like the thought that I had a recipe. You're not supposed to have a recipe in art. You're supposed to be changing and adjusting and screwing around with it. It's not right. A recipe is for pop music and not for what we do. The recipe was: tenor for the burns, soprano for the fusion, and the flute for the ethnic, basically. I mean, basically, that's what it was, even with Scofield, that band.

The other thing was – you know this, because you play saxophone – if you play an hour of music with your band – a band – how long do you actually play the instrument in your hands? We're not taking 35-minute solos like Coltrane. A 5-minute solo is long, believe it, right? If I take – in a set, you play 5 tunes, maybe. 6 tunes. 4 tunes, sometimes, some

bands, with Quest. I'm playing 15, 20 minutes of man time with my horn in my mouth, and I'm splitting it with three instruments. That's five minutes per instrument. You can't warm up. You don't even get the reed wet. It dries out by the time you pick it up. Plus you got to put your reed. You got to repair it. You have to worry about it. You're not really taking care of business. You've spread yourself too thin. This doubling or tripling thing that we became – why did the saxophone suddenly become triples, quadruples, and, like Joe Farrell, oboe, English horn, piccolo?

Excuse me. I'm sorry. I don't see trumpet players – maybe they pick up a flugelhorn, God bless them. I don't see piano players switching. Okay, it was electric piano for a while. Bass players, maybe a little electric bass. But it's nothing like – we were – it was mandatory that a reed player play all these things. Why? We're not club date guys. I wasn't playing a show. The reason with them is to hire less guys, right? I'm a jazz guy. I'm expressing myself. What do I need these three instruments for?

So that was it. Richie was helpful here, because he – I was like – I really – it took me 2, 3 years to do this, in the thought patterns and finally doing it. How could I give the tenor up? The tenor, the daddy, Trane, all the work I did on tenor. I'd never done anything on soprano. I never transcribed. I never did anything with soprano. Soprano came through Ten Wheel Drive, and I picked it up and just started playing. How could I give up *Impressions*? Literally. That's my – symbolic. He said, "Man, you got to do something," He said, "Because – and you know it and you're feeling it." I said, "I know it, but I can't face – I can't get up there and play – soprano's not going to work on *Impressions*. It's not going to work," in my mind, although there's a take of Trane playing *Impressions* that's surfaced, on soprano.

Anyway, why soprano? Because I had to give up something. It was very logical. Number one, the soprano, from the day I got it, it felt more natural to me. I didn't cognize that until the mid-'70s, late '70s. There's a physical thing. I'm little, not big. The tenor was a – you feel – you put that tenor on. You feel like – it's heavy. Not heavy, but it's a pain in the neck. Unless you're big, it's a pain. It's a weight. I just was – soprano, it was cool.

Also, I had absorbed a lot of Miles's trumpet stuff on soprano, which you couldn't do on tenor, and I could feel that. I knew that already. That I already knew. By the mid- to late '70s I was aware of that.

Next – these are all the reasons – next was – this is going to sound a little out, but I think in my past lives I played an instrument in the Middle East type of thing, nadaswaram, smadaswaram, ney, mey, wey, fey, shehnai, penai. I played something like that in a past life. I just know it. I feel it, especially when you're on LSD. You got into that space, and I could see myself doing that.

The other real practical reason was, there was a lot less water under the bridge for soprano in 1980. The tenor, still nobody was better than what I heard. There was just too many tenor players. Not contemporary. Just, I couldn't escape Trane. It was enough to say – if I said Trane and Sonny, I wouldn't even have to go further, let alone Hank Mobley, George Coleman, da-da-da da-da-da, and then Sonny Stitt, Wayne Shorter. The tenor was massively covered. Everybody had done something on it, for God's sakes, in the music that I loved, and nobody had done more than Trane in my – for me.

There was another insidious reason that I can't explain in any way except to describe it. By now, by the '80s, I had guys copying me, us. I'm not going to say Michael. But me and Steve, we discussed this yesterday with the Lighthouse thing, the way we had played on that, which by 10 years later was better. We're better at it, or I was better at it. Guys were starting to come out of the woodwork, Branford Marsalis, Rick Margitza, Brecker. Bob Berg changed his whole style. Everybody was playing this language, and I felt weird. Now I'm not saying they took my language. I'm not that presumptuous. But they were playing that language, and good, very good. Kind of the discussion we just had, of competence, technical competence. But it was weird to hear that stuff being shouted back to you in a jam session, and you knew they had heard it – not from you, but you were part of the growth of this way of playing, that tenor way of playing. It was – it bothered me. It was – it mentally bothered me, psychologically bothered me.

All these reasons contributed to, give it up, center in on one, and become a master on one. Forget this bullshit. The flute, I kept the flute for a couple more years. By the mid-'80s I let the flute go. I haven't touched it since, really, because I – as we mentioned yesterday, the flute, the sound, you have to play every day to get a good sound. I just couldn't do it.

So the soprano became the thing, and I got to tell you, within two years it doubled. The Quest record is the one – that was the first one. That record was recorded in '81, end – December of '81. There I could really hear, yes, I did the right thing. It was then a year, year-and-a-half into it. By then I could see the soprano raised its level. You know the soprano. It's – you got to hit it. You can't just pick it up and double on it. You'll always be a doubler, and I felt like a doubler. I didn't like it. By '82, '83, it really had raised to a level. I think, you know what? I'm in a good thing here.

The other thing is, it made Quest a little different, without the tenor. I didn't have to have exactly the tenor, like Wayne or Trane. At least the soprano made something different.

Also it fit very good with Richie, with the piano. It's great for duo. There were a lot of reasons for it. It fit that Quest – it fit that, at that time.

Then further into the early '90s with the band with Markowitz and Jamey, we were playing more electric. It fit there too. So I found a way to mold my shit around for the

next 15 years, that the soprano became an acceptable vehicle for what I heard. I didn't miss the tenor. I mean, I missed the tenor, but I didn't miss the tenor. That was – and then, by the mid-'90s, 50 years old, I said, you know what? I don't care what anybody thinks, and I don't care if I sound like Trane. I don't give a – they can take – I don't care what anybody says. I'm 50 years old. I've been doing this shit for a long time. I'm going back and see what I can do with this big boy. So now I play tenor again.

But I got to tell you – I'll be honest with you, Bill – I'm thinking again of stopping the tenor. I'm just – I'm starting to think about it for a variety of reasons. I don't know yet. Anyway, who knows? But that was what propelled me.

Kirchner: But you sound different on tenor now than you did.

Liebman: I know.

Kirchner: That quartet record that you did with Marc Copland in the early . . .

Liebman: *Lunar.*

Kirchner: *Lunar,* where you did that duo version of *Naima.* You really sound different on that than you did in your younger days.

Liebman: I do. You know what came into my playing? Wayne.

Kirchner: I believe that. I could hear that.

Liebman: He had never been an influence. I mean, he was an influence, but his way of playing had never influenced me in my formative – in the '60s and '70s. Compositionally, of course, and Miles, what we discussed as far as the band and all that, but I never sat and really copped Wayne. In some ways, I didn't really – I didn't dig it that much, in some ways. In some ways I felt saxophone-wise it was not [?]. But for some reason, when I picked up the tenor again in the mid-'90s – and I did not think about it – first I started out very Sonny. Sonny was in my head. I don't know why. But then, by about '97, '98, suddenly Wayne just started to appear, musically. It was articulation that did it. It's very interesting. Because he has such a unique way of articulating. Somehow my articulation had started – for some reason, I heard it go somewhere, and I went, wait a minute. That sounds like Wayne – with Miles. That sounds like Wayne, that speaking thing he has. He like speaks in tongues. It's like another Ornette. It's Ornette in another way. It's like it's vocal, it's verbal.

Kirchner: It's a very non-saxophone . . .

Liebman: Very non-saxophone. Not Sonny, not Trane. It's completely not that. It's speaking. There's something about it that's very [?], and in a way, I'm not going to say sloppy, but it's casual in a way, it's offhand in a way, and it's not perfectly correct. When I was younger, I couldn't accept that. I think that's what turned me off about it. It was like, that's sloppy. What the hell's that about? Trane, Sonny, uh-uh. That's clean, man. That's perfect. But by the – somehow, by the '90s it was like, yeah, bleuhbleuh. You understand me? [Liebman makes a sputtering sound.] Don't you understand what I mean?

Kirchner: Actually, the record that you and Wayne did in Japan, with Beirach and Gomez and DeJohnette . . .

Liebman: I was playing only soprano then, and he had the tenor.

Kirchner: Playing Coltrane.

Liebman: He didn't pick up tenor. It was right there. He didn't pick it up.

Kirchner: Did that experience affect you?

Liebman: No, not musically. It did otherwise. Being next to him was – that's the mantra. You don't know until you stand next to somebody what's really going on. You really don't. You sit in the audience. You can hear it 30,000 times on the record. You could sit two seconds away from the guy. But when you're on the bandstand with somebody – that's what I tell all the students, and it's the truth – you never know what it's like until you're there, until you're standing next to – and especially a guy on your instrument, especially, more so because everything about it is so similar.

When I played that one concert, which I had crutches. I had broken my leg then. I was on crutches. It was a scene. They had to carry me up the stage. It was out. Last time I saw Miles was that concert. I didn't think about it. I was just so glad to be there, because I had broken my leg. It was the best-paying gig I ever had, still to this day, and it was to play with Wayne. That was the thing about the gig. Jack, I knew, Gomez, and Richie, my man, was there. But to play with Wayne, who's like – I felt like a kid again.

When I broke my leg – I'm telling you. I broke my leg in California, playing Yoshi's, the Shattuck, on Shattuck Avenue, at the hotel, the Shattuck Hotel, in the garage. I rolled on a divider. Broke it bad. I remember – she was with me, Caris. I remember, I was on the ground. Outside of the pain, I knew it was broken right away, because I had been through it. I could feel it moving. It was right – it was here. The first – I'm telling you. The first thought that came to my mind was, shit, I'm going to miss this gig, which is four weeks

away, the money and Wayne. She said, “What are you thinking about?” She’s like screaming. I said, “Not the – get an ambulance.” I was like . . .

But they wanted me. I don’t think they could get Michael. That’s what I figure happened. They said, we’ll put you first class or business class, and you could bring your wife, for help. We did. We went for two – we landed, played the next day, and left the next day.

Kirchner: Did you play sitting down?

Liebman: No. You’ll see me. I’m on a stool. I’m on a high stool, which I never – I don’t play. I have it on stage, but I don’t play on it. If you look, you’ll see the crutches.

But it was a thrill. It was great to hear. He’s – first of all, what I’ve always suspected, and when you see the videos of him, he doesn’t move a muscle. Nothing moves. It’s the classical embouchure. It’s unbelievable stillness. Trane moves a little. You see the bottom lip move. A lot of guys, Sonny. He is still as can be. Everything’s happening inside.

Kirchner: So was Charlie Parker.

Liebman: Very still. Everything’s correct. All this shit is happening inside. This is unbelievable. I’m standing right next to the guy. He’s tonguing. He’s doing all that shit, and there’s nothing moving, and the lip is perfectly in place. It was deep.

Also, he had a great ear. As soon as you played something, he knew it. I could tell he could hear it. He might have perfect pitch. I don’t know. It sounds like to me he could play back anything, one of those guys. I’m not like that. I can’t just play it right back to you, but he sounds like he could play it right back to you. That was great.

Also, he was great. There’s great stories. We’re in the hotel lobby. We landed. Wayne’s group was there, and Gomez was – Gomez had his group, I think. Richie was there for me, with me, and I’m missing – I think Jack had his own group. I forget. This was a big festival. Coltrane, live under the sky, 30 years since Coltrane died, blah blah blah. We’re the big – the Coltrane thing. And the World Saxophone Quartet, weird thing.

Kirchner: I’ll bet.

Liebman: No problem. *My Favorite Things*, yeah. Didn’t appear on the record, thank you.

We go to the lobby, and there’s five guys sitting around. Now, Gomez is a bro’, Richie’s a bro’, and Jack, I know. Wayne’s like, he certainly knows them, but he doesn’t really

know me. Through Miles we had met, but – and Richie doesn't know him at all. So it's that moment of, what do you play? When you have these – what do you call them? – festival things. And who's going to suggest the tune? Because Richie's there.

Kirchner: It was decided it was going to be all Coltrane.

Liebman: It's going to be Coltrane, but the Japanese guys are sitting like they do, on the side, in there, coffee, tea, lobby of the New Otani or whatever, 1 o'clock at night. We just landed. But with Richie and Gomez, and I know Gomez. He'll go along with anything. I know Jack couldn't care less, really. He'll be glad to play. He'll play whatever. The gig pays ten grand. So it was Richie. I said, "We can play" – I went "*India.* Richie and I can do a duet." Everybody wants to do things easily. I'm not saying that I don't want to work, but if you just say, we'll do a duet, they go, yeah, yeah, that's good. Because I had my man there. So that's why we did *Naima* and *After the Rain.* I suggested *Impressions.* Anyway, nobody said a word. Everybody was, sure. We don't have to rehearse. There's nothing to do. Wayne's sitting there. He goes, "Dave, you know" – he says, "I don't really remember those heads, but I'll float around like Eric used to do." Like Eric used to do. So, from the horse's mouth, in there was the cat, the connection. I said, "Oh, that'd be just great." Thank – "like Eric used to do." Of course. Are you kidding? It's the best thing that could ever happen. Whatever you say, Wayne. I'm so glad you're in there. This is great. I was so – I was like, "Richie" – now we were like . . .

The next day, I don't know, ten hours we're waiting. They even gave us a hotel for the middle of the afternoon, because it was so many hours. We had to drive to the end of the planet. It was Yamaha Disneyland or some shit. We had to do the sound check, because we were last, 11 o'clock, and we played a little bit of *Impressions.* That was it. They played. Miles played. It was the last time I saw Miles. That's another story. We're waiting ten hours. We rehearsed with the World Saxophone Quartet, *My Favorite Things* arrangement. It was out.

Anyway, the World Saxophone Quartet goes on. They're on 9 o'clock or something like that. Me and Richie, they're drinking sake. It's enough already. Hours. 20,000 people. World Saxophone Quartet's playing. They're playing *In a Sentimental Mood.* Gomez – I'll never forget this. This shouldn't be on tape, really – Gomez says – he goes, "Lieb, our boy's losing it." I go, "What?" He says, "Richie is losing it," because he couldn't take the music anymore. They're playing like the way they do, and he's screaming. He's downstairs. He's just looking up. He's screaming, "Ayyyyyy, stop it. I can't take it anymore." We'd been there 12 hours, paid in piecemeal from t.v., from a record company, blah blah blah. Every two hours, a guy would appear with money. It's like that. It's unbelievable.

Finally, we hit the stage, and this is one of my greatest moments. I must say, in my career, when I say best, high moments, this is one of them. First of all, we walk on the stage. We start [Liebman sings the opening notes of *Mr. P.C.*], 20,000 people cheering. Now is that because we're finally there, or because they knew *Mr. P.C.* like they know the Beatles' tunes? I said, only in Japan are you going to get 20,000 people cheering the melody to *Mr. P.C.*

Then, I must say, when we did the duo, and we're done, the spotlight was on me and Richie, and I was there on that stool, and first of all, I was so glad to be there. This was like finally, the delay, boom boom boom. I was there with my man and a picture of Trane in the back. There's 20,000 people. We're playing *Naima.* I said, this is it. This is the high point.

Kirchner: Take me, God.

Liebman: Yeah. Savor this moment. It's for your guy, with your best friend, with Wayne Shorter on stage, in front of people who care, and paid well, and I'm standing instead of lying. That was a great moment, one of the great ones.

Kirchner: I should tell you. When I was 16, I found an E-flat sopranino saxophone in the back of a music store, bought it, started playing it, and played it for a number of years. Then, after playing that for about 7 or 8 years, then I bought the Couf soprano that I still play.

Liebman: You have a Couf soprano?

Kirchner: Yeah, Superba II that I still play, that I – it's been modified by Perry Ritter to accommodate my hand and all that shit. But having played that sopranino for a number of years and really gotten comfortable on that, that made the soprano feel easier.

Liebman: You know Les Silver, does the AMT mics? He just e-mailed me two days ago that when I go to [?] at his booth – he won't be there, but his son-in-law will be there – that he has a sopranino that everybody's very – Chris Potter, Joe Lovano, everybody loves this sopranino. So I'm going to – please call at his booth and make sure of it. Is that a special mouthpiece?

Kirchner: No. I just got a . . .

Liebman: You use a soprano mouthpiece.

Kirchner: You mean on the sopranino? There is a . . .

Liebman: It's a soprano mouthpiece.

Kirchner: Yeah.

Liebman: I'll try it next week – Friday.

Kirchner: If you can get a good horn, it really gives you a different perspective.

Liebman: I don't know if I would like – it's pretty high.

Kirchner: It's like an E-flat clarinet is to a regular B-flat clarinet.

Liebman: I think the soprano's high enough for me.

Kirchner: If you're not an E-flat guy, that's a whole different perspective.

Liebman: That's the other thing. I'm not. Joe got a G soprano, the guy in Copenhagen. It's handmade. It's down to G. It's long. It looks like a manzello/stritch, whichever one. Rahsaan had one that curved up.

Kirchner: The manzello was the . . .

Liebman: The one that looked like . . .

Kirchner: The saxello.

Liebman: Yeah, with a little curve up?

Kirchner: Yes.

Liebman: This is what the soprano looks like. It's fantastic. I tried it in Copenhagen. It's $11,000. Joe got it, which he's going to use on the saxello thing in February. It's a beautiful sound, because, can you imagine a fourth lower with that? That's beautiful. See, I think going down with the soprano is the way to go. Going up? I don't think so. I think we got enough problems up there, screechy notes. McClure used to say, when I was sorry, putting these poor guys through every day, roasting their ears, trying to get the altissimo, he said, "There's Lieb with pet store on fire." Talk about demeaning, but accurate. I said, that's right. Lieb is here with the pet store on fire, and you're gonna suffer, because I'm going to get a high B. I'm sorry. I'm going to do it, and it ain't going to be like Steve Lacy. It's going to be in your heart. It's gotten a little better. It's still a pain in the ass.

Kirchner: Do you want to break here?

Let's pick up with what Ken just said off-mic. As Ken just pointed out, you're from a family of teachers. So let's talk about that book, your self-portrait book, which you said again, the first sentence is . . .

Liebman: I come from a family of teachers.

Kirchner: Let's talk about that book.

Liebman: That was a book of – it's more of the same. It's me verbalizing how I became what I became, not anecdotal. Not this, and not what I'm doing with Lewis [Porter], the book that will be out on Scarecrow, which is really biographical. It's this, drawn out. It's about the music that affected me, why, the rock, the thing, bandleader, what it was playing with Elvin, with Miles. It's some of this stuff, but it's more about – it's the process of becoming who I was. So it's autobiographical, but also, the book was more about – it was – it's about me, obviously, but it's about how one goes to get there, how Indian music affected me, how being with Miles affected me to become a bandleader. What was it about that? How my psychological life affected me. It's not a lot of personal stuff in there, but there's some. I think I probably talked about the polio and so forth. It's about the process, which I love talking about. This goes back to me and Richie, back to the '70s. I was sitting around for hours, talking about the artist, the role, all that stuff you do in your 20s, that you talk about with your best bud. You get – you have a couple beers or whatever. It'll get you loose. You listen to a record together, and you go into the process. How did they do that? How do you do it? What are we doing? What is the value of this? How is this guy? Is the guy a nice guy? He plays nice. Is he a nice guy? But he plays. Stan Getz, he's nothing like he sounds. Why? What is there about the music that's not about your personality? All the mysteries that come to you when you're young and inquisitive and try to come up with answers. So that was the book of the summary of that process. Then in '96, getting to 50, I re- – I added to it. I refined it. What I'll do with Lewis, in a way, is that, but more – 15 years later, and I'll look back at my life step-by-step, live and personal.

Kirchner: One more thing about the soprano. As one who, like you, plays it as a primary instrument, do you hear all the stupid remarks about soprano saxophone as an instrument? If I had a dollar for every person who comes up to me and said, "I really hate the soprano saxophone."

Liebman: That's understandable.

Kirchner: Why is it understandable?

Liebman: Because it's so high and annoying. It's like darts in your head. And it's also played by – it's played badly, more readily played badly, because it's a secondary instrument, which is one of the reasons why I didn't want it to be like that. I don't think I was that bad, but I didn't want it to be annoying because I didn't put time into it, because it's the kind of instrument you have to tame. It is a wild beast. It's a hard instrument. It's high. It's a small mouthpiece and a small opening. You've got a lot of damn angle in it. It is oboe. That's oboe. She plays oboe. That's hell. This is the same thing. It's because you're putting all that air – really, it's a physics thing. It's putting all that air into a small place. So everything's critical, intonation, airstream, sound. You're up in the high register. It's an annoying instrument. It can be an annoying instrument. The low register is wonderful. As soon as you get above that left hand at the top, boy, you're in trouble. To mellow that out is a lifelong pursuit, and to get in tune is a lifelong pursuit. So I think that's why it is more annoying to most people, than the other – than the tenor or the alto or bari, which are much, much easier to take.

Kirchner: I tell people, there are lots of bad jazz flute players out there, but nobody goes around saying, "I hate the flute."

Liebman: Yeah, but soprano's a little more intense, and it can really – it can hurt your ears. Even people who love me say, "I can't" – Max Gordon couldn't stand it. He told me in the '80s, when we were with Quest. He said, "Why did you stop tenor?" I told him – I didn't give him a spiel. I said, "Artistic reasons." Walked away.

Kirchner: Some of that is a generational thing.

Liebman: Could be.

Kirchner: I've had – a lot of the people who really hate the soprano saxophone are people in their 70s and 80s and 90s.

Liebman: That could be. But then you had Sidney Bechet, because there's a big gap between Bechet and Lacy and Trane. They weren't brought up on it. It's true. It's just a weird instrument to have. But again, it's difficult, and most people that play it, don't play it well, because it's difficult and because we have this cursed doubling. If you had been – if you had started playing only soprano saxophone when you were 12 years old, if I had started playing soprano, and every other tenor player we know had done it, I don't think we'd have that same problem. We'd have more people who mastered the instrument, because it's time spent. It's a rough one. It's physically a tough instrument. Critical, critical stuff here.

Kirchner: Although the irony for me was, I was a good-sounding soprano player years before I was a good-sounding tenor player.

Liebman: Be glad you had a natural instrument. You hit the mother lode.

Kirchner: Because I was a good clarinet player.

Liebman: There you go, and also the register. I think that's a big thing. Nobody talks about it, but that being up an octave from the tenor and being in range with the piano, you hear clearer, it cuts through. This is the good and the bad. The bad is it's annoying if it's a terrible sound. The other is, it's really that note. It is an A. You don't have to transpose up a ninth. It is an A. That's nice. When you're playing with a piano player, it's really nice, because you're in unison. So there's a lot of redeeming values to the range, although there's a lot of annoying things about it.

Kirchner: But I think what you said about the Miles influence . . .

Liebman: Definitely trumpet. It's something about a straight horn. See, that's the thing. There's a difference between a thing that curves. Even the curved soprano I don't like as much. There's something about that versus that.

Kirchner: I hate curved sopranos. I think they should be lamps. I've rarely . . .

Liebman: I think it's a weird sound, although you hear yourself better. You do hear yourself better, because it's coming up at you, but it sounds like – it sounds so squeaky to me.

Kirchner: Tinny.

Liebman: Ugh. I don't dig it. I don't like the feeling of it either. I mean, if you're going to be like this, let's go. Let's go. This? Who needs that? But . . .

Kirchner: Garbarek is the best curved soprano player ever.

Liebman: Yeah, he's great, and he has – because he has found his own sound. Also, he has a very bold, declaratory, emphatic way of playing, stylistically, that fits his tone. There's nothing – it's not Jimmy Giuffre. It's not Chet Baker. There is nothing mysterious about it. That guy lays it down, like that, as coming from that part of the world, that's the way they play. They're very stark. It's stark. It's the way that landscape is up there, and that's why it fits with him. But I'm not sure anybody else could get away with it, with the curve.

I think the thing with the trumpet and the soprano and maybe clarinet to a degree, although because I dissed it so much, I shouldn't talk about it, but there's something

about a straight horn and the airstream. The airstream is direct, and you get the effect very quickly. Trumpet's like this. Boom, it's out. Soprano, it's out there. Tenor, and alto to a lesser extent – we're talking milliseconds here, I guess. I scientifically can't tell you, but it appears to me to be something about the flow of the airstream, the immediacy of a straight horn compared to a curved horn, that is an attraction. It could be a liability too. Therefore trumpet – even though it's not a brass, there's something about this that means I can cop some of that. I can get some of that, especially staccato rhythmic things. You can play bap and it means something on soprano. Tenor, it's flllgh, or it's a low note and it's like King Curtis. That. I'm not talking about the extremes of the tenor, which obviously were used. I don't know about that. Bap, going bap on the tenor. And the alto, I don't know. But soprano, you can really get [Liebman claps his hands once] that. It doesn't go further than that, because of that airstream. Trumpet is the most of that. So there's something about that. That's why – I saw that with Miles very clearly. I talk about that in my lessons, with the breathing thing, the immediate sound, that trumpet is about immediate response and saxophone's about a slightly delayed, and that's why there's something about the time feel. When a trumpeter swings, there's nothing like it. There's nothing like dee dee-oh dee-oo-dee. We don't quite go dee dee-oh dee-oo-dee. Deh-dat Deh-deh-dah. There's something about the length of the airstream, the fact that there's a continuous airstream in the trumpet, because it can, because it's short, that on the saxophone you have a little – there's a little break. It's too long for a continuous airstream.

I don't know if I'm getting it right. But there's something here and something about a time feel on trumpet. For example, the best was Freddie. Freddie's time, when it was in the pocket, was long time. The notes were like whap, buh-whap. They weren't bop-bah-dop-bah-dop. It was like every beat was connected up. That, I felt, it was Freddie, but it was trumpet.

Kirchner: John McNeil once gave me his transcription of Freddie's solo on *Birdlike.*

Liebman: *Birdlike.* That's a very famous one.

Kirchner: I tried playing that on soprano at the tempo he recorded that at.

Liebman: I have a transcription, a kid doing that, on soprano.

Kirchner: It's one of the hardest things I ever tried to do.

Liebman: It is. Well, it's Freddie. That's a great solo.

Kirchner: There's something about Freddie playing the trumpet and playing that articulation.

Liebman: Yes. He had a perfect airstream. Exactly. And somehow, trumpet, you can do it. There's something easy about it. It's not as easily available on the saxophone, on any of the saxophones. But soprano's a little closer.

Kirchner: We've talked about Quest. We talked about your groups that you started with Vic and everybody else. You started out having Phil Markowitz, and then he split for a while. What happened there?

Liebman: Right. I wanted keyboard, because I wanted a little more – again, coming out of Quest. It's almost the same thing with the band with Scofield. I wanted more writing. I wanted more programmatic stuff. I wanted more textural. I wanted electric. But I also wanted a guy who could play acoustic piano. So Phil was the perfect – because he's great at that. I wanted the guitar to be second horn. Vic was second horn.

What happened was, we did very well. There was some musical things, but it was cool. But, first of all, economically, five is tougher than four. You need a piano everywhere. It became a liability. And the real reason was very similar to what I had with Richie, which was Vic. I could see Vic needed to grow. He had given me seven years being second, the second soloist. He needed more. Not because his career was beckoning, but because I could see he needed more. I could hear it. And I didn't want him to turn around and say to me, "I can't do this anymore." I didn't want to lose him, because he was the most diligent musician I've ever known. That guy takes the music home, tapes it, asks you the voicing. Now we know each other, but I never saw a guy improve what he improved in those years. I never heard anybody go from the way he played to the way he became, 4, 5 years later. I could see he was like – and loved it. He was perfect for me, because he loved everything I was doing. He was supportive and took it home and worked on it.

So for those and for the mechanical reasons of the piano, I let Phil go. I told – I said to Vic – I said, you're now – you're not just second soloist. You're the main colorist. You got to comp for me, which is a challenge, you know. You're in charge of the rhythm section now, because you're the man. And, you got to write. I need your tunes, because I need tunes. I encouraged that.

So he had to step out from being – I'm not saying in the shadows, but from being in a secondary position to being equal or more than me, because he's got more responsibility. That was why that happened.

Jamey left because he got a gig with Paul Simon. What can I do? $50 versus $5,000. I don't think so. But I was very bugged with that. I tell you. I want to put this on the record. Not about Jamey. I love Jamey. He's a great musician. He was very loyal. It's just that I always resented those rock guys coming to the other side of the tracks. It's like this

Southern shit. Go over and get the black girls. I'll go over to the other side and get some chicks and take them home. I don't dig that, man. You know what I mean? They know we can do what they do, backwards. Then they come over and get your little eight bars out of us, who have spent our whole life putting this together and pay you money you can't turn down. You cannot turn it down. We know about the Branfords. We know about Michael with Paul Simon. We know about it. We intimately know the details. Would I have done it? Yes, I would. Am I better than them? No. [?]. Would I say no to $10,000 a gig? $500,000 for a six-month tour, or whatever it was? And be there, treated like God. I just don't dig it. I was – I don't like it. I think it's – stay over there. You do your thing. I don't care if it's Paul Simon, Sting. I don't care how good you are. And you know what, you're okay, too. I even like you. It's commercial music, my friend, period. It's about what people like and making them like it. They're artistic. Everybody's artistic. Lady Gaga's artistic. That's not the point. It's like, what is the art about, and what is the value of it to the world? To entertain? I understand that. Go to a striptease. I'm cool. Put on a comedian. Music? Not for me. Music means much more than that. And that's okay, but please, stay over on your side of the tracks. I stay on mine. I'm not – I mean, I'll grab an idea from you, if I can. That's okay. But [?] grabbing my guys underneath me, because you put a $10,000 bill up next to a $10 bill, who's going to say no to that? They'll give you eight bars. They'll give you the best eight bars you ever got in your damn life.

And Vic, with Paul Simon, lessons, *So What* voicing. He had no idea about that. It's a simple thing, fourths. He used to pay Vic, last tour, in California. It should be on the record. He said, "That motherfucker. I'll never – cheapest motherfucker. Stole my shit. Put it on the record." Because he's an operator. I said – because I said to Vic – he was honored, because Jamey got Paul Simon to take lessons with Vic. He said, "I want to expand. Who do I go? – oh, Vic Juris." Vic, of course, teaches great, knows everything. Goes in, turns Paul – completely probably turned his whole shit around, because the guy knows like three voicings, right? He's talented too. I like him. I like his words. I'm not dissing the guy musically. But I said, "Vic, that shit's going to be on his next record. You watch. And you, what are you going to get out of it? You get your little hundred bucks? What'd he give you for your lesson? What did he give when he [?] Connecticut to the estate?" "No, no, he's cool. He's cool." He's cool. He ain't cool. It ain't right, not right to me.

Not doing it – nobody does it anymore, because it lost it's – what's it? panache, like, "There's a jazz saxophone in the middle of the vamp." That's not a big deal anymore. That wore out. That was an '80s, '90s thing, and it wore out. Basically, Branford, that was the end.

When that happened to Jamey – again, I wasn't [?]. I said, Jamey, God bless you. Buy a house now. Have a nice life. I said it's just weird to me. Are you a jazz musician, or what? – or not? Because if you're a jazz musician, I'm not saying you got to suffer, but

this is a tradition. We got – we have our little mores. We have a thing here. This is a secret society. You know what I'm saying? And most of it's because of black cats who couldn't get into a hotel and get a goddamn meal on the road, by the way. Please. And then you're going to go over to that side of the tracks and give them the benefit of the shit that you got from those guys? Not just me. From those guys, because they got the money. I don't dig it. They're doing fine without you. But, excuse me. Peace. Sorry.

Kirchner: The great line that was attributed both to Paul Desmond and to Jim Hall: "Where do I go to sell out?"

Liebman: Perfect Paul Desmond. It's a Paul Desmondism.

Kirchner: Somewhere along the line you became a big-band leader. How did that happen?

Liebman: From the schools, because when you're invited to do a weekend and a clinic, you're going to end up playing with the high school – the college band. Guys would write charts for me. They said, "Can I take your tunes?" " Be my guest. I would never – I have no idea about big-band writing. I think anybody who does it is a genius or crazy. Too many choices. 15 horns? I'm sorry. That means 15 parts, doesn't it? "Dave, no. " "But doesn't it?" "No." But it does to me. I'm being very simplistic, but I tell you, too many choices. I'd be sitting there pulling my hair out with all those choices. I respect anybody who does it.

So guys wrote charts. They would take my stuff. So eventually, what the heck? I might as well put these charts together. I got 40 charts in the basement of tunes of mine, everything from *Slumber,* from the beginning, to a guy – I'm bringing a lead sheet to a guy in New Orleans tomorrow. He wants to do *Snow Day,* from one of the records with the group, *Conversation.* Nice tune. He wants to do it. Go ahead.

Of course, the soprano, again, to keep it that – to make it different. So Woody Herman, Glenn Miller. I'm Benny Goodman. You know what I mean? In a way – it's weird the way – Jewish clarinet player. Here I am, playing a soprano only in front of the band, because I didn't want to be the tenor. I didn't want – and also, I want to be heard.

Kirchner: I played a class of mine the chart that McNeely wrote for you on *Sing, Sing, Sing* last spring. They loved it, because it's such a perversion of the original.

Liebman: And the exchanges. The record we just did – it's *Quest for Freedom,* we were talking about – that we did with the band from Frankfurt, the HR, Hessian Rundfunk, their area big band, like the Cologne band, McNeely, me, and Richie. This is a heavy record. A *Sunnyside* release that nobody knows about. It's too bad. It came out in

September. The writing and the playing – he did – he took my heavy tunes. He took a couple of Richie's, but he really took mine, *W[TC]*, World Trade Center, the deep harmonic tunes that only McNeely understands. He's the only arranger. [Vince] Mendoza, to a certain degree. [Bill] Dobbins, to a certain degree. But Mac is – Mac knows what me and Richie play. A tune that me and Mac – that Mac's on one of the records with – from the '90s, *Port Ligat*, he took that, *Pendulum*, the tune Richie always – we always played with Richie. This is one of the best big-band records I've ever heard. Great writing. I played good. Richie played good.

I enjoy the big-band setting. I never really played in a big band. I hated it. I could not be in a section. Tenor is the worst thing to be. You're underneath everybody. You got to follow the alto player. I must say – in the Catskills, because I did a certain amount of big – you had to do a certain amount of large-group things – I must say, one time – I don't know where it was – I played lead alto, and I said, ah, this is fun. I could understand why you like being lead alto. You are on top of five guys. What a thrill.

Kirchner: And now, thanks to Thad Jones, you can be a lead soprano.

Liebman: Yes, but if you're not lead, you got to follow somebody else's phrasing. That's not – I couldn't do it. I just couldn't musically do it. I would get bored. I don't have the m.o. to be in a big band, be in a section, and not solo. I'm sorry. That's the way it goes. I couldn't do it, and I cannot write it. So this little career I have, having a big band, is because Gunnar, my man, he basically takes care of it. He's my man.

Kirchner: This is a good chance to talk about Gunnar Mossblad a little bit, isn't it?

Liebman: Former student who turned into – again, not to be pejorative, but – aide de camp. My sax book, he read. We did the transcription video he's on. We did *Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner*, with his – the arrangement for a saxophone quartet that she wrote, he did first. We did a Coltrane record with the JMU band when he was there. He did *Meditations* now for me three months ago. I'm blessed. I got a guy who's a really capable musician who just likes me, respects me as a friend, and believes in what I do. You know, you need help. You need guys. I mean, to get things done, you need guys. So he's like – he's Richie in another way, and a great musician, capable of – he understands what to do, and he knows how to – we just were on the phone today, because we have a DVD coming out of the band. He just said to me last night, he had some issues and blah blah blah. He's been great. He's been very loyal to me, and I completely thank him for everything.

The big-band thing, the little that we can put together – I can't work with this band. ESU gave me a gig. So that's why we worked Iridium. But the fact I can even do it at all is nice, and he's been great. The *Meditations* thing, Bill, I tell you, it was unbelievable.

Kirchner: I was there. It sure was.

Liebman: Yeah. Don't you – wasn't it amazing, the writing? He's been sick for weeks. I did not call him today, because he sent me this video last night. I haven't talked to him since the holidays began, because he's got a family. Leave him off. He's been sick for weeks. I said, "What?" He said, "Blood pressure, arteries." He said, "Just general exhaustion." And guess why? Because of that damn chart, because that took the shit out of him for the last year. Writing for an orchestra? He got $1,000. That didn't pay the paper. Justin, he said, "Yeah, but that's all I can give him, is $1,000." He goes, "Okay. We want to do it." He said, "I want to do it Dave." He did the big-band version of the one we did in Symphony Space with Ravi [Coltrane]. I'm so glad to have him. It wouldn't be the same without him.

Kirchner: Speaking of *Meditations* and other such, this brings us to the last of your ensembles, and that's the Saxophone Summit, which is basically your creation, isn't it?

Liebman: It was Michael and me in tandem. What happened was, it was a gig. It was – the gig I did – described, with Wayne, it was in '87. In '97 they had Live at [by] the Sea – same promoter, I believe – kind of like Live under the Sky, that we did with Wayne. Coltrane wasn't the center, but I think it was understood that there would be a Coltrane component, because it was the 30-year anniversary. It was supposed to be me, Michael, and Joe. I think Dave Holland's there. Jack was there. That really good piano player I would love to record with. He lived in Japan for a while. The white guy. Played with Blakey. You know. Great technique.

Kirchner: Geoff Keezer.

Liebman: Yes, yes. Dave. Christian McBride was there. What's his name? With Wayne, the drummer.

Kirchner: Brian Blade?

Liebman: Yeah. It was all-star. Metheny, Joshua [Redman]. It was a big deal. Joe [Lovano] got – Joe broke his – Joe had an accident. He fell from the stage or something. I don't know if you remember. He broke his leg or whatever. Anyway, he couldn't come. So they got [George] Garzone. So it's me, Garzone, I think Josh, and Michael. We did *Impressions.* We did *India.* It was great.

Within a month or two, I get a call from Michael's manager, from Darryl Pitt. "Red Sea Festival. We'd like to do something sort of like what you did there. You, Joe, and Mike could do it. Come and just play." Sure, we'll go. So we went. We played Trane,

whatever. At night I said, “Michael, let’s talk.” I said, “It’s got to come from me and you.” I said, “Let’s do this.” I said, “Check it out.” We had a very, very interesting talk. First of all, I had not really been with him much in the years. We had contact in the ’70s. We had not lost contact, but moved in different circles and so forth. By now, he’s a mega-star. It’s a whole other story.

He said, “They’ll kill us.” I said, “What?” He said, “The critics will kill us.” I said, “Michael, we’re 60 years old.” Not 60 years old at that time. 55, 60 years old. I said, “It doesn’t matter what they think anymore.” I said, “Who else is going to do it? You remember the loft?” He said yes. I said, “Don’t you think we owe it, to do that shit in front of people? If we don’t do it, it’ll never get done. You can’t count on no bros doing it, because they’re not doing it the way we’re doing it. Don’t count on David Ware doing it. That ain’t quite what we’re talking about.” That’s a different deal. You know what I mean?

Kirchner: Totally.

Liebman: I’m not talking about the screaming shit. I’m talking about boom boom. I said, “Nobody’s better equipped to do it than us, with Joe and with a first-class rhythm section.” I said, “Where Trane is the centerpiece. We owe it to him, and we’re the ones to do it.”

The thing with Michael’s relationship with me was very – he absolutely respected me. It’s like, Randy was like a brother; Michael was like the younger brother. As to Randy, he was to me. Also because we were about three or four years apart too. Michael looked up to me. He came to New York, as I said yesterday, and took my loft, that first loft. Michael took it from me. Then he lived there for ten years.

And Joe [Lovano] – I said, let’s talk to Joe. Joe’s agreeable to everything. You know Joe. The first rhythm section was – I got Phil in. He wanted – he said, “What about Joey [Calderazzo]?” I said, “I don’t want any kids. Nothing personal. Joey’s great.” I said, “But we need – we got – the [?]’s just got to go up.” I said, “I don’t want any white drummers.” I said, “We got to have some validity, if we’re going to get up there and do this shit.” I said, “We got to have somebody. As far as I’m concerned, it’s Billy Hart. Tain’s great. I understand. But – we can’t get Jack. Don’t count on it,” which would have been – would have been nice. “Roy Haynes? No. It’s too distant from us. There’s no loyalty. It’s got to come from the generation. And I like Rufus, particularly at that – I like Rufus for musical reasons, and also as a person.”

That’s how we did it. We played standards. I don’t know if you remember, but in the beginning, we played all standards. Okay, always a Trane tune or two, until 2003 or ’4. When we did the tour, we got to the original stuff.

That was the genesis of that group. When he passed, the night he passed was IAJE, as you remember. Alice [Coltrane] had passed, very far out confluence. I was – we were all devastated. We played at 7 o'clock at night with my group, and then we all heard about it about 10 o'clock at night. At least I heard about it. Adam. Adam came. He found me. I remember, the first thing I do, I have to talk to Billy. I must talk to Billy, because Billy's – he's ahead of me, for sure. I said, I got to talk to somebody. I got to talk to somebody that's ahead of me. To a [?]. I got to find him. I found him, Billy. He was in the lobby, 2 o'clock in the morning. He came up to the room. I said, "Jabali" – I said, "I mean, this is not the time to talk about it, but, this group's got to go on, because this is – Michael –we got to keep this going. Who are we going to get? What are we going to do that would be respectful to Michael and be respectful to what this group's about and to Trane?" That's how we – Ravi came up, but it wasn't finished, because what we had to do, we had commitments to gigs when Michael got sick. We had the Playboy festival, we had Newport, and we had one – Burlington, Vermont. We had three gigs we had to cover. We had to cover, because Michael couldn't do it. They wanted Phil Woods?

Kirchner: Huh?

Liebman: What do you call it? The Playboy. Way out there. I said, "No way." Jackie McLean. I don't think so. I don't know. We were given a name. They were out of it. They're out of it there. They're so far out of it. I said – so we got Joshua, which was acceptable. So we actually had Joshua, Chris, and Ravi for three gigs. I'm not going to say it's an audition, but it was. It's not much to learn. You just go play. Look what we're playing, nothing. We just liked Ravi. Of course it's caché, because he's John's son. Ravi was also a different generation. But so was Chris Potter and so was Joshua. It was just – we felt something – it was Joe and me in this case, because now we – Joe became, with me. I said, "Joe." I said, "Ravi's the guy. He's going to come up. He's going to get better and better. He's got the right thing. He plays different from us, and he's not being Michael, because the other guys, they're great, but" – I had my feelings about the other guys.

That's how that edition came about. That's the second edition. We'll be in Birdland in two weeks, first week of February. Then we're going to record on our own, but we're going to record – I'm recording a different kind of record, much freer record. No Trane. All originals, one from each guy. Very – trying to take it a little bit further.

Kirchner: At one point you did *Meditations* with that band, right?

Liebman: Yep. And by the way, we toured November. We did *Meditations* every night, because it was the 45th anniversary of *Meditations*, which is why I did it at the school. So

I said to Joe – I said, "You know what? Let's just put our book away and play *Meditations* every night." Six nights we played it, way out.

Kirchner: The reason you were able to do that piece is that Caris transcribed . . .

Liebman: She transcribed it. Yeah, in the '80s. It was just out of love. [Liebman speaks off-mic:] Was it love? Was it love?

She's radar ear. I don't remember, but I think they wanted me to do something in Paris, in concert. They called it *Ascension,* but *Ascension* [Liebman sings the opening motive]. I don't think there's much. But I always loved *Meditations,* as I've spoken about. She transcribed it enough that I had, like, nine pages of music, which is amazing. That's how I started doing it.

Kirchner: That analysis that you did of it, that you published in the *Annual Review of Jazz Studies* and now is on your website, I used with a class, and it was tremendously helpful.

Liebman: That is my piece for the third semester, for the interval semester, because, as I say in there, the unit on the intervals, again, Trane, I don't know. McCoy didn't help me with this. He said, "I don't know. He just came in." I cannot get – I can't believe that Trane just came up with these melodies, like the love melody. Forget my chords, because that's me. That is the most beautiful, gorgeous, incredible melody, and then the extension, the second and third page. He improvised that? It's unbelievable. It's just perfect. Everything about that – the whole – *Serenity* [Liebman sings a phrase of the melody]. Are you telling me he came in with no music, all in his head, and they played completely free? I don't know. To tell you the truth, I just don't know. It's mystifying, because it's so musical. It's so together. I just added the chords that appeared to be there, or would have been there if McCoy had played. McCoy just said, "He never said anything." Because I pushed him on it a couple – I pushed McCoy on it ten years apart. I think in the '90s I talked to him. Then when I toured – I did a gig with him in Australia in 2007 or '8, and I pushed him again. I said, "*Meditations*, McCoy, anything? Was there a rehearsal? Did you have music?" "Well, Dave," one of those I don't know, those answer that never – you don't know – you might as well not have asked the question, just mysterious.

Kirchner: And he didn't do drugs. So you can't blame it on brain cells.

Liebman: No way. No. I don't – they don't like to give it up, either. I think that's part of it. Why should he tell me? The most heaviest shit ever done, and he's going to give it away because I ask him? I can dig it. I'm not saying that's the reason, but enough's enough. Be open. You don't have to be that open, and I can go along with that. I got it. I

kind of got it. Not that he gave me that vibe. I'm reading into it. But, in a way, it's like you're in a secret society and you're going to give away all the secrets. It's like the way the old guys didn't teach. They didn't teach because they couldn't? I think they could have. I don't think they wanted to. First of all, they didn't think about making a living from it. It wasn't Tristano. It wasn't like that. I don't think they wanted to tell you what they did.

Kirchner: Except for Dizzy.

Liebman: Except for Dizzy. He's always the one I talk about. From what I understand, Dizzy was very generous with his time, and he would sit down at the piano with you any time, from what I understand. But most of those guys, Lee – Lee, he taught, but he was very – and even Charles didn't give up much. I don't know. I don't know if they could, wouldn't, or didn't, but they – I don't know if they could or wouldn't, or just wouldn't because they didn't want to let it go, because it's kind of a secret society, they're all kind of in league together. That's ridiculous. I don't know what it was. But I got a vibe like McCoy was like – because you know, everybody asks him everything about Trane, obviously, and he was going to give you just so much, which was not much at all, if there was nothing – maybe there was nothing to say. I'm reading into it. I don't know. But I can't help thinking about it.

Kirchner: Musically, what are you doing with Saxophone Summit now?

Liebman: I asked everybody to bring in a piece. I want it to be a pretty free record, quite free harmonically, not composed. Phil was over last week. Phil had had a tune. I said, I don't think so. He brought something last week which was much more open. Just that thing we did yesterday with Cecil and Billy. That was exactly it, last night. Yes, that was a very good example, because it's – I didn't explain the date to you, but I said there's this Irish guy. Anyway, he had music. Billy and Cecil just ended up playing a D Phygian for 15 minutes, and I and the guitar, we played. I don't know what it should have been, which we had to get the guys to eventually.

What they do best is that, especially Cecil. Cecil could do it. He could read and do everything. He's on a Denny Zeitlin record. But I think there's something that he brings to the table that's different, that when he's freer, it's more. I just feel that's what he does. I said to Phil – I said, "You know what? Let him be free. Let him be loose. Billy has a long melody. It has changes. Let's take the changes out. We'll play the melody. You reharmonize on the spot. Let Cecil be free. Build your solos around him. I have a tune, a 12-tone row. I'm splitting it up, 4 notes for you, 4 notes for him, 4 notes for me." I gave Phil the chord that's a 12-tone chord. I said, "We're going to play it. I'll bring in a cue. We'll play any rhythm with any pitches that you want." Joe adds a little different insight

too, with a little different trios and duos in between. Ravi, we don't know yet. And Cecil has a tune that's pretty much ends on a D, and you just go.

So somehow I was able to – I believe in a cooperative thing, for a variety of reasons, musical, but also it obviously creates goodwill. We're-in-it-together type thing. Instead of me and Joe and Ravi writing for – because we have easily done that, which – I want to include Billy. I want to include Cecil. Phil, obviously, is a great composer. So I encouraged everybody.

I sat with everybody on this tour. I got in touch with everybody before. I was very clear with them. I said, let's keep it open. Let's keep it loose. No Coltrane. No standards. Probably we're going to put this record out ourselves. Because of the way things are now, who knows what's happening? I said, let's go for the jugular. Let's go for it and play what we want to play – we want to play. I want to play.

We all play tight music. Joe's stuff is arranged. I have a group where we have stuff. Ravi plays – let's have one place where we can just go, musically, harmonically, rhythmically. You can't get a better band to do it, better rhythm section than this group. It's the top of the line. So let's use these guys for what we can do, at least for this particular record. Especially in light of the other two records we made, which were great records and had tunes. It was together. Let's go the other way. That's what I'm encouraging. We rehearse – January 31st is our rehearsal.

Kirchner: I assume this is not a record Telarc would be interested in.

Liebman: Telarc's over, anyway, because Dave's not there anymore. No. They paid $50,000 for each of those records. I'm telling you. By the time we were in and out. They were very generous. Dave Love. They didn't – they sold some of the first ones, because of Michael. I got to say about Michael also, it was very generous, because the money was split three ways. We paid sidemen what we paid him. Even that was, at the beginning was – because the manager was like – Michael's manager took care of the business, who gets who, routing through to the airplane. He said, "Pay them" so. I said, "You don't pay those guys that." He said, "That's what we paid" so-and-so. I said, "Not on my watch. You do not pay guys $400 a night. Way no. Not when we're making this kind of money, and not Billy Hart, Cecil McBee, or Rufus" whatever. So we got – I got that right, which is good sideman money. That's what you make. Then, whatever's left, I said, "Darryl, it's going to be split three ways. You know that." He said, "Yeah, I know." He says, "Michael takes a loss." I said, "I know he does," because we make – it's three of us is what Michael would make. I'm talking, $20-, $30,000. He said, "Michael's cool, because he wants to be with you." He says, "He'll do whatever you say." I said okay. I told Michael. I said, "Michael, you're very generous." He said, "I believe in this. I trust in you, because I want to play this music. I want to be with you. I like it. It's not about the

money," blah blah blah blah. Michael was a sweetheart. But I would get this from the manager. "He's taking quite a cut, you know," which means, he's taking a cut. So actually he was making less than me, because he had to give away 10 or 15 percent, which I didn't have, because I don't have a manager. So I ended up making more than the other two guys, probably, because Joe had to give it to his manager, I guess. I don't know how they work. It's not my business.

Kirchner: What I would like to do is, I have this discography. I would like to go through it and pull some stuff and see what memories this jogs.

Liebman: Do it now, because soon, we probably won't remember anything.

Kirchner: The very first item is the very first record you did with Lars Werner or Hans Vanner in Stockholm in July of 1967. How did that happen?

Liebman: First trip to Europe. My parents gave me $1,000 and said, go east, young man, with a book called *Europe on $5 a Day*, if you remember that series. Then it became $10 a day. Student hostels. I went with a tenor. Landed in London. Had a couple names. Called, got Dave Holland on the phone. I said, "I'm from New York. My name's Dave. I'm" so-and-so's friend. He said, "All the guys are at Ronnie Scott's tonight at 1 o'clock in the morning," a band made up of all the young guys. I got that night, off the plane – go that night. "Don't stay in a hotel. Stay with us." [John] Surman and Dave, 1967. So that's why I know Dave before Miles.

But of course my parents gave me the money purportedly to get culture, to go see the Prado, to see the Eiffel Tower. Go to Rome. Blah blah blah. So I did. I spent three weeks in London. I spent two weeks – I forget. Anyway, I work my way to Newcastle. Took the ferry to Bergen. Went way across Norway. Got to Stockholm. Had a name from Cameron Brown, who had lived in Sweden. The first name. This was Lars Werner. Called him up. He says, "Come over to my house." This is the bus you take. He said, "Do you know John Coltrane died today?" This is July 17th, 1967. I immediately – I started crying. He said, "Come over. We all know about this. We know what's going on. You'll be fine." I went in, became part of the family.

These guys took LSD every day, every day, and played eight hours, ten hours a day. I don't know what the hell we played. Then you'd go out in the garden, and you'd have lunch. It was beautiful, because Sweden in summer, it's great. Then you come in and play. I became part of the family. That's that record. It came out of that experience. He wrote a tune for me called *Ballad for Tenor Sax*, my first real solo. It was my first recording, outside of high school, doing little 78s with Impromptu Quartet. My first record. Re-released – the guy just released it on CD. The daughter's in touch with me, blah blah blah, memorial. He died. He became something crazy. I don't know what

happened to him. He became a nut. I don't know. Something happened to this guy. He was a Bud Powell kind of – he was a bebopper who went free, as a lot of those Scandinavian – that thing up there. It's different, as I learned.

Everytime I played the Fasching, in Stockholm, the guy in charge would say, "Lars would love to talk." I talked to him. I could see his voice. I think he had a stroke. I think he had trouble, because for years – he lives alone, and he's like, "Dave, I remember the great days," like that. Then he died, Lars Werner.

Kirchner: Next is your first recording that you made for Japan, but in New York, with Terumasa Hino, by 1970, *Journey to Air.*

Liebman: That's one of – that's Hino getting – that's *Ascension.* That's Hino with whomever. Do they have the list of characters?

Kirchner: Olu Dara, Pete Yellin, Gary Pribec, Grossman, Mike Garson, Lanny Fields, Dave Holland, Teruo Nakamura, Moses, and Motohiko Hino.

Liebman: Okay. We're all in the studio together. I think the whole thing is *Ascension.* That's a free – because Hino would come over and do something with American musicians. Upsurge Studios, 55 West 19th Street, Tom Di Pietro.

Kirchner: Next, immediately following that, is with John McLaughlin, *My Goal's Beyond.*

Liebman: Does that predate *Genesis*?

Kirchner: Yes.

Liebman: So *Genesis* is a week or two later?

Kirchner: *My Goal's Beyond* is August 1970. *Genesis* is February 12th, 1971.

Liebman: Okay. So John's first. John comes through Dave. Dave was living. When Dave came – 1971 – Dave came in '68 to join Miles. Calls me up. "I'm joining Miles Davis." I said, "What?" He said, "I don't know. I was playing a club with a singer at Ronnie Scott's. Next thing I know, Miles Davis walked in, and I have an airplane ticket." He says, "What do I do?" I said, "You come over here." I was on 19th Street. He stayed with me. He stayed on the floor. I think he stayed with me for a while, blah blah blah. I went to Sol Lieberman. I said, "What's going on with the second floor, Sol?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "I got a guy." He said, "Will he pay the rent?" I said, "Am I paying the rent?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "He's with a very famous musician. He will be on

salary. He'll be fine." He said, "Okay. He can live on the second floor." So Dave moved in on the second floor of 19th Street. Then shortly after, Dave said, "Chick's getting divorced, and he needs a place." "Sol, first floor?" "Same thing?" "Same thing." Chick moved in the first floor.

So John, when John came for Tony Williams, of course Dave knew him from London. John lived on 22nd Street, three blocks away. We found a loft for him, or Dave did it, whatever. Had Thanksgiving over there with him. John – I got to know John socially before I played with him. He invited me on that date. That's how I did the date. I had no idea who he was. I didn't know how he played.

Kirchner: This is with the forerunner of Mahavishnu, Jerry Goodman, Billy Cobham, but then . . .

Liebman: It is, yep. And then Badal's there.

Kirchner: . . . Badal is there.

Liebman: And Charlie Haden.

Kirchner: Charlie Haden is on it. Airto [Moreira] is on it.

Liebman: I don't remember Airto there.

Kirchner: And a tamboura player, Mahalakshmi.

Liebman: I don't know. I don't remember that.

Kirchner: I haven't heard that record, but I'm sure it's interesting.

Liebman: That's a beautiful record. The second side was solo guitar. The first side was these two tunes Indian-ish, and the second side was the –he did *Blue in Green* great, and solo guitar. Very unusual at that time for a modern.

Kirchner: Next is *Genesis.* We've talked about that.

Liebman: What is that, February?

Kirchner: February 12th, '71.

Liebman: Then I joined Elvin in September of '71. That takes care of that. So I was with Elvin a year and a half, because I was with him until January of '73.

Kirchner: I'm going to skip over the Elvin dates, because we talked about that.

Liebman: They have the order – is that the order – I asked you this – is that the order of recording?

Kirchner: Yes.

Liebman: Not of release.

Kirchner: It's all – it's totally chronological, from when the dates were recorded.

Open Sky with Frank Tusa and Moses.

Liebman: WBAI Free Music Store, live concert. That's right. That's the beginning of the trio, first music of "mine," part of a collective.

Kirchner: PM Records was Gene Perla's label, right?

Liebman: First guy to start his own label. PM, it was a cooperative deal. We were in it together. It was that. It was what everybody does. Gene's a very entrepreneurial guy.

Kirchner: He's a good engineer too.

Liebman: He's everything. He knows everything. Gene is the most well-rounded guy of all – we all know.

Kirchner: Just speaking of that, while we have him up for a moment, he put out a book of transcribed solos of you and Grossman from Elvin Jones at the Lighthouse.

Liebman: Done by a Norwegian student of mine, a great saxophone player who did like eight bars a day for over a year, and did it, incredible, and then played the solos, played them, certainly Steve's. Mine are a little – he played Steve's solos. We did gigs. We played the solos. Petter Wettre, from Norway, from Oslo.

Kirchner: That's intense.

Liebman: Yeah, it's 100 pages, everything me and Steve played.

Kirchner: Has the book sold much, do you know?

Liebman: People – not much, but it's the kind of book that people, because of the variety of the record . . .

Kirchner: Talk about a niche market, right?

Liebman: Nobody can play it. Nobody can get through 3 pages. It's like when I called Grossman and talked to him, the first time I talked to him in like 30 years. I was in town, playing with Italian cats. He said, "Oh, Steve was just here." I said, "You got his number?" "Yeah, call him, call him." "Steve, by the way, somebody transcribed – it's great." "Is it right, Lieb?" I said, "I have no idea." He said, "Okay. Let me see it." That's my last thing with him.

Kirchner: By the way, speaking of Grossman, how do you explain the stylistic 180 degree change that he made after your association with him?

Liebman: I cannot believe. He had a drug problem, obviously.

Kirchner: That was well known, yeah.

Liebman: I don't know why that would lead to answering . . .

Kirchner: To becoming a '50s hard bop tenor player.

Liebman: I don't know. I don't know, because, believe me, it was not there at all in our time together. He could do it. There's no question about it. He played like Bird at 15 years old supposedly. He had Trane down better than anybody. Middle Trane he had down. Even the soprano, *Afro-Blue* down. He had that style down. Why he did this, why he hung with those guys, who – by the way, Steve was the man. If you took – when you say, who were the saxophone players – we talked yesterday – of this loft period? Berg, me, Michael, Steve. Everybody gave it up to Steve. He was definitely ahead of all of us. Then he played every – he played bass. He played piano. He played trumpet. He was – he already could play better than anybody. He was naturally – he just seemed to naturally have it.

He was the nicest kid. I must say, the first joint he ever smoked was with me. Am I proud of this? I don't think so. Blah blah blah. He was a nice Jewish kid. I can't explain it. He had a 'tude, because he was arrogant, because he was way, way ahead of everybody, but he was – macrobiotics. We were buddies. He was like – I mean, first, we were kind of enemies, because I resented him, and he had an attitude. You'd imagine. When I went to jam sessions, it was like he froze me out, and I couldn't play as good as him. So I was bugged.

I made peace with him. I went to his house. This was around when? ’69, ’70? I went to his house. I said, “Look, you and I have a common interest. His name is John Coltrane.” I said, “We’re better together than not.” I said, “Let’s just – I apologize. You – let’s just get this shit together, and let’s get out there and make some goddamn music.” I said, “Because I don’t hear anybody else doing what we’re trying to do.” He said, “You’re right, Lieb,” and we became friends. We became brothers with Elvin, especially with Elvin. We were like this.

What happened to him? I don’t know. Europe. I don’t know. Being in Europe for 20 years, in Italy. I don’t know, but I can’t believe it either, because he had the chance to be something.

I just saw an interview with him, because when he played – he played Jazz Standard six months ago. Somebody interviewed him. He said with Miles, what happened with Miles. He said, “I wasn’t ready.” He said, “It’s the only time in my life I didn’t know what to play. I just got up there and didn’t know what to play,” which was true. He was kind of confused. But he sounds great on that shit. He sounds fantastic on Jack Johnson. He’s got something going nobody else has got going. He’s got that snaky shit going on soprano. He gave it up. I don’t know why. I cannot answer that question. It has mystified everybody who knew of this – knew of him, how that happened, that he ended up being Sonny – more Sonny than Sonny, and good, and good at it. He’s great at it. Why, I don’t know. I cannot explain it. I don’t even have a possible philosophy, because you know I usually just come up with a could-this-be-true? I don’t know. I can’t make a connection between that and getting high. I don’t know what it is. I don’t know.

Kirchner: *On the Corner* we’ve talked about. There’s a couple more dates, the *Mr. Jones* date with Elvin.

Liebman: That’s put together from, I think, a few dates.

Kirchner: That’s July 12th and 13th, ’72, at Van Gelder’s.

Liebman: I seem to remember that some of the tunes were from maybe another date. I don’t remember. *Mr. Jones* is not a – I don’t think we sat and did it. That’s a lot of percussionists there. Frank Ippolito was there.

Kirchner: Yeah. Albert Duffy on timpani, and Patato.

Liebman: There was a whole bunch of cats. I don’t remember much about that. I think *New Breed*’s on that, studio version.

Kirchner: Yes.

Liebman: But I'm not sure we did it that day. For some reason I think some of that record was recorded at another time. Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe they're more right than I am.

Kirchner: Or not. I'm going to skip over the live dates, and we've talked about *Live at the Lighthouse.* You did a record with Abbey Lincoln for Japan.

Liebman: Yes, first time in Japan. Landed with Miles. Like it was in those days, you got off the plane, and you had a record date. It's unbelievable. I did my first record as leader there, first visit. Stan Getz was there, and who was in the band? Richie, Dave, and Jack. So that's how *First Visit* came about. At the same time, the guy said, we're going to record Abbey Lincoln with Japanese cats and Al Foster. That's how that happened. That was great. *Africa* is a great track. It's well known, that track from there.

Kirchner: Let me just pick one more, and then we have to change tapes for the last time, I would think. We talked about *Get Up with It.* Then there's another day with Open Sky called *Spirit in the Sky.*

Liebman: Studio?

Kirchner: Yeah.

Liebman: Overdubs, singing. Steve Satten's on that.

Kirchner: Yeah. Yes he is.

Liebman: And his wife.

Kirchner: We talked about *Dark Magus.* We've talked about *Drum Ode.*

Liebman: *Drum Ode* – when is *Drum Ode* recorded?

Kirchner: *Drum Ode* was recorded in May of '74.

Liebman: Right, because *Lookout Farm* is '73. May '74, just when I left Miles, exactly.

Kirchner: Let's do one more and then change. There's a Moses date called *Bittersweet in the Ozone.*

Liebman: One of his big-band things.

Kirchner: Yes.

Liebman: Yeah, Moses, creative Moses, somehow organizing big-band stuff. Not the typical big band, but . . .

Kirchner: With one of the great unsung trumpet players, Mike Lawrence, who died young. I did a few gigs with him.

Liebman: That's right. Great cat, man.

Kirchner: Died young of cancer in the early '80s.

Liebman: Joe Henderson, *The Kicker*, right?

Kirchner: Yes, that was his – that and . . .

Liebman: He was very young with *The Kicker*, right?

Kirchner: Yes. *The Kicker* and then the other record he did with Joe, with Herbie Hancock.

Liebman: I don't know that.

Kirchner: He's on a couple tunes with . . .

Liebman: Is that *Pursuit of Blackness*?

Kirchner: No. *If You're Not Part . . .*

Liebman: . . . part of the problem, part of the solution?

Kirchner: No, no, no, no. Oh, I forget. But he did two records with Joe, *The Kicker* and that other one. Another one, a forgotten great player. Shall we change?

We talked about the *Sweet Hands* date that you did for Horizon, the Indian date, but there's a – right after that you did one under Badal's name called *Passing Dreams*, in Bombay.

Liebman: Yes, on our trip to India, State Department tour, one of the highlights of my life. We organized, through some guy who knew Badal, to get four Indian musicians in the studio with us. Walked up four flights, dark, midnight. Got up there, little t.v. studio. There were 50 people sitting there like this, waiting. I'll never forget it. Upright piano.

Guys could not speak English. I said, “Richie” – I said, “Let’s find a key that the sarangi is in.” It’s in A. I think it was on an A. I said, “We’re just going to drone. We’ll do duets. We’ll do some kind of *Equinox.* Somehow we’ll play it.” These guys just played. When I said, “Tell them in Sanskrit, or whatever you talk” – said, “When I point to them, they play.” That was a very special event, the feeling, the vibe. Later on, I finished and put extra tracks on at Badal’s house.

Kirchner: How would you compare that to the *Sweet Hands* date?

Liebman: No, *Sweet Hands* is a real record date in the studio, Abercrombie, Charlie Haden. That’s a real record date. This is like an Indian – put-together, just because we were in India. We were the first jazz group in India in 20 years, since Benny Goodman. Something like that. It was quite something, the trip to India. It was really amazing. Of course it was amazing.

Kirchner: There’s a variety of things with – at least the *Forgotten Fantasies* date we talked about. Then there’s the Lookout Farm date that Mosaic Select put out in recent years, that was done in San Francisco.

Liebman: Keystone Korner.

Kirchner: Yes.

Liebman: It wasn’t – it was a date. That was A&M. It was, again, John just letting me do what I wanted to. “John, can I record live?” “Sure, Dave.” John was very generous. Somewhere in the ’80s, he had all the reels. He said, you can have them. I transferred everything.

Kirchner: Luckily, Mosaic Select existed.

Liebman: Yeah. [Michael] Cuscuna liked us.

Kirchner: Now, here’s your first quintet date, with Mark Isham and Mike Formanek and . . .

Liebman: Is that Ego Records?

Kirchner: *The Last Call,* for Ego.

Liebman: Yeah. That’s my trying to get back into – that is that bad period, ’80, ’81.

Kirchner: This is ’76, actually.

Liebman: Yeah, but that's released – I didn't release it until '80, '81. That was the San Francisco M, M, and M group I was talking about. I had the tape. Finally, in '81, I found Joe Haider and had to get a record out and so on. But that was done during the San Francisco time.

Kirchner: *Lighten Up, Please!* we've talked about with Pee Wee Ellis. Here's an interesting one, the one with Link Chamberlain that Muse put out, with you and Link and Lyn Christie.

Liebman: It's Link's record. That was Link's record at a leader. It was his record to lead. We played a Wayne tune there.

Kirchner: You played *Mahjong.*

Liebman: Yeah, that one we played.

Kirchner: And Bob Leonard, who was the first good drummer I ever played with.

Liebman: I don't remember him.

Kirchner: He's from Connecticut. He became – John Stowell is still friends with him.

Liebman: I don't remember him at all.

Kirchner: He became a mailman or something.

Liebman: I have absolutely no memory of him.

Kirchner: First – I played a session. When I was a kid in college, I played a session with him and – with Stowell and Bob Leonard. They were Connecticut buddies. He did – he was a good drummer.

Next is a date with Masabumi Kikuchi in New York for East Wind with Hino and Grossman and Reggie – Reggie Lucas, Anthony Jackson, Al Foster, and Ntume.

Liebman: Because it was a Miles thing. That's *On the Corner.* You know the Japs – Japanese.

Kirchner: Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

Liebman: Kikuchi, he's first generation that. That was definitely that. That was when I started to do a lot of Japanese dates. I was hot in Japan for a minute, a couple of records, Japan.

Kirchner: Here's one. The *Pendulum* record that you did at the Vanguard, with . . .

Liebman: Artists House.

Kirchner: Yeah, originally Artists House, later Mosaic Select, with Randy Brecker, Beirach, Tusa, and Foster.

Liebman: That's the beginning of Quest, in a certain way. That was me coming back to New York, and just like, "Richie, let's just play some jazz." We did all standards. We picked a couple originals. "Let's just play some jazz with Randy," because we love Randy, and Al. "Let's just do it." So, in a way, that is the beginning of Quest, because that's Al. Randy is killing on that record. Now they're all – all the tracks are now released online. Randy – this is Randy's record. He is way, way in there.

Kirchner: Randy is, to me, a very underrated great jazz player.

Liebman: Yeah, I think he's number one – he's my favorite trumpet player of all time, period, nobody more creative, and can go from Don Cherry to Art Farmer. He covers it all. He knows more than anybody. He's just – I could talk about career moves, but I think he spread himself too thin, maybe. Also, his brother was so popular. I don't know what happened. I think Randy made some moves that I wouldn't agree with, that's all, and diluted his essence of who he was from a standpoint of the industry, the business. He was just too much all over the place. He made me look like I'm sedentary. His brother was like Janis Joplin to Henry Mancini to Frank Sinatra to playing free jazz. I don't know. But a way capable guy. I love him, always did.

Kirchner: Consummate professional.

Liebman: I love playing with him. He's my favorite horn player to play with, period, hands down, period, still.

Kirchner: And for somebody – a trumpet player in his mid-'60s to really have his chops totally happening is pretty amazing.

Liebman: He's a great, great musician, great musician, great guy, honest, right in there, really knows what the deal is.

Kirchner: Here's an interesting record – a couple of them. One is the quartet record in Australia with Mike Nock, Ron McClure, and Ed Soph.

Liebman: It comes out of a Jamey clinic, and then we stayed and did a couple dates. Horst Liepolt had this label, the guy who ran Sweet Basil. He had this label, and that's how this record came out. That's a good record. That record, a lot of people know *I Concentrate on You*, my arrangement of *I Concentrate on You.* I solo on that, because I put – I reharmonized. I put a little Coltrane thing in it, blah blah blah. That is a very burning record. Mike Nock's a bad boy, I tell you. That's a bad boy.

Kirchner: Yeah. He's back in Sydney now.

Liebman: I've seen Mike. We did a duo record. We won the Grammy of the year a couple years ago. We did it when I went to Wangaratta. We had never – we hadn't played since then. They put us together at a midnight show. They recorded it, radio. We put it out as a record.

He did a record that is his pieces played by a classical piano player. It's fantastic, written pieces, classical. Really happening. He didn't play. It's his. It's about 20 of his pieces. It's a masterpiece. He's great. Mike's way up there.

Kirchner: Next is Mashiko Sato, the Japanese keyboard player.

Liebman: I don't remember it really, except that's one of those Japanese combinations.

Kirchner: This is a funny but interesting band: Randy Brecker, Barry Rogers, Dave Taylor, Tom Malone, you, Sato, Ryo Kawasaki, Francisco Santino on bass, and Harvey Mason on drums.

Liebman: That's a commercial fusion record. That's an absolute fusion record.

Kirchner: Yeah. That's what it looks like.

Next is the first of three record you did with our friend John McNeil.

Liebman: Three records?

Kirchner: Yeah. I'll come up with the other ones later. The first is *Faun,* with Beirach, Buster Williams, and either Billy Hart or Mike Hymen.

Liebman: Is that live from the Montmartre?

Kirchner: No. There's a couple that came up later.

Liebman: Okay. That's John's date?

Kirchner: Yeah. That's for Steeplechase, though they're all for Steeplechase.

Liebman: I think there's a live one from the Montmartre.

Kirchner: Yes, there is. I'll find that.

Liebman: John comes out of Aebersold, meeting him at the clinics.

Kirchner: The second one with McNeil is from '81 and called *Clean Sweep* with JoAnne Brackeen, Rufus Reid, and Billy Hart.

Liebman: It's beginning my relationship with Billy, playing record dates with him. That's how I met Billy, through those dates and Japanese guys. That's how I brought Billy to Quest. Richie didn't really know Billy.

Kirchner: Then the third McNeil date is '83. That's at the Montmartre. That's you two, and then McNeely, McClure, and Soph.

Liebman: Yeah. That's an Aebersold clinic. We're there, and we recorded on the side.

Kirchner: Let's see. An interesting Bob Moses record called *Family.*

Liebman: Yeah, for Sutra.

Kirchner: For Sutra, later on Soul Note.

Liebman: Same band that we did *Home* for Swallow for ECM, around the same time.

Kirchner: Steve Kuhn, Swallow, and Moses.

Liebman: Is Hino on that?

Kirchner: Yes.

Liebman: Okay. Great record. Moses's record for a little unknown label. Very nice record, at the same time that *Home* was done with Swallow. That became a well-known record.

Kirchner: Yeah, for ECM.

Liebman: People still talk to me about *Home*, the poetry of Robert Greeley, that Swallow put to music.

Kirchner: Yeah, with Kuhn, Lyle Mays, Swallow, Moses, and Sheila Jordan.

Liebman: Yeah. Sheila did the singing. Lyle did the overdubs after, texture. I remember that. That was the first time I had seem Manfred since the *Drum Ode* debacle.

Kirchner: Were you on good terms with him by then?

Liebman: He didn't say much to me. Swallow. I was with my boys. I didn't talk too much.

Kirchner: Here's an interesting one called *Dedications*, with a string quartet.

Liebman: That's the post-Chick, learning about string quartets. When I came out of Chick, after playing those three months with the string quartet, I thought, whoa, wait a minute. I got Ravel, Debussy, Beethoven's last three, and Bartok 6, I put a year into studying, and I took the nerve to write string quartets. David Baker conducted. David arranged *Treblinka*, that Richie wrote, his tune for the concentration camp. I wrote a tune for my wife at the time, *The Delicacy of Youth*, and I wrote a tune for Richie, *The Code's Secret Code.* That's why it's called *Dedications.* This is all to somebody or about something. And I did solo flute and solo saxophone for my mother and father. It says *Mother / Father*?

Kirchner: Yes.

Liebman: That's one of my best records. That is a beautiful, beautiful record . . .

Kirchner: Did it ever make it to CD?

Liebman: . . . I must say, because it's the string quartet, and it's all soprano. That's the beginning of that whole time. I think the last tenor record is *Home* and the Moses record. Around that time. Maybe *What it Is* is around that time. But this is the beginning of soprano only. That was Kurt Renker . . .

Kirchner: Although here it says soprano, tenor, and alto flute.

Liebman: That's for the *Mother* and *Father*. But with the string quartet, it was the soprano, and that's the beginning of my relationship with Kurt Renker, with CMP, who I'm still friendly with, who's helped me with the downloads that just went online.

Kirchner: Did this ever make it to CD?

Liebman: No.

Kirchner: That's too bad.

Liebman: No, no, it did. Sorry. It did. Kurt put it out, and I add a viola duo, cello duo, and a violin duo to make a 60-minute record. That's one of my best records.

Kirchner: Interesting. Here's a big date with Hino for Flying Disc for Japan with a string section, and Marvin Stamm, all the studio heavies of the time.

Liebman: That is a Hino production, production date that I probably just came and overdubbed.

Kirchner: This is a big-budget, obviously.

Liebman: It's Japan. That's Hino. That is what? '80, '81?

Kirchner: '80. It's called *Day Dreams.*

Liebman: Because that is when Hino started to get busy with his career in Japan, and that's when I had to get Kenny Kirkland for that group. He left me. We had – I remember I was very upset. He didn't leave me, but he had to do it. But he couldn't talk to me about it. I'll never forget it. I learned something. He didn't tell me. He didn't come or something. I confronted him. I said, "Hino . . . ." He said, "Japanese, we can't face. We don't confront." "Hino, you're a bro. You're a brother, man." He says, "Dave, I just couldn't tell you."

Kirchner: It's like Coltrane when he had to get a piano player and get Elvin.

Liebman: He was honest. I can't explain it, but he was honest, at least.

Kirchner: Okay. I've talked about the John McNeil dates.

Liebman: See, I can remember every one – almost every one.

Kirchner: Yeah, that's pretty amazing. Here's an interesting one which is just you: *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections,* for Gene Perla's label.

Liebman: His studio up there with Jan Hammer, upstate, Kent, New York. I wanted to do a solo record.

Kirchner: So you played soprano, alto flute, piano, electric piano, synth, drums, percussion, and voice.

Liebman: I played drums. It was great. I played drums, and then I overdubbed the tenor, and it worked. It's called *The Vanguard.* That track's *The Vanguard,* like an Elvin–Trane duo thing with myself. That's a nice little record. That came out on CD eventually, on a label called Line, I think.

That was Carl Jung's book, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections.* It's a heavy record: *Remembrance* for Bill Evans; *Trois Gnoissienne,* Satie; *The Power of the Cross,* because of a German town. We walked. I was with Swallow and Gary Burton. We turned the corner. There was this gigantic cross in the street. It was so symbolic. What else is on that record? *Words,* words speak louder than . . .

Kirchner: Wow, I'll read it to you.

Liebman: I remember these tunes, because they're very personal, because *Memories, Dreams, Reflections,* Jung's book, affected me a lot.

Kirchner: *Hiroshima Memorial.*

Liebman: For that.

Kirchner: *Remembrance, Trois Gnoissienne.*

Liebman: Satie.

Kirchner: *A Guided Dream.*

Liebman: Borges, a Borges poem.

Kirchner: You mentioned *Words. Translucence.*

Liebman: Clarity, a Bill-Evans kind of waltz.

Kirchner: *Relentless.*

Liebman: For the nature of the Jones.

Kirchner: And the last is – you mentioned *The Power of the Cross.*

Liebman: My tunes – of the 300, 400 tunes, 80% of them probably are about a person, place, thing, or incident. I absolutely can remember what it was, and I can tell you musically – if we were at the piano, I could say, that chord was – that's the bomb dropping, that's my first wife, when she turned her face, that's Richie's left finger. I could tell you. I could remember, because music – writing, for me, is always a very personal – I always said that. I always envy the singer-songwriters who can express themselves, Joni [Mitchell] and James Taylor and just tell you what it is. We got no words. We have the music. Nobody understands that I mean a cloudy day, just because I say it's cloudy. They may say, sounds like sun to me. But to me it means something, and it has usually meant my inspiration for writing a tune. That's why a lot of this is programmatic, a lot of these tunes.

Kirchner: A couple of dates for our friend Steve Satten for Contempo Vibrato, one with Jimmy Cobb, one under your name called *Lieb Up Close.*

Liebman: Yep. Booker, Larry Willis, and Jimmy Cobb, swingin' record. And Steve. Steve is on a couple tracks.

Kirchner: Here's a big date with Moses: *Visit with the Great Spirit,* for Gramavision.

Liebman: One of his, for Gramavision. He somehow got a contract, just the one record, a Moses production.

Kirchner: The date with Jill McManus where she did the Indian tune.

Liebman: Indian Hopi stuff. Just saw her recently. She came somewhere. We reminisced about that. She had this Hopi – she went to Arizona, and she picked up chants. Gomez. I think Bruce Ditmas.

Kirchner: Here's the first of a couple dates you did over the years with our friend Jukkis Uotila.

Liebman: Yes. This is – he called me.

Kirchner: First called *Introspection.*

Liebman: European thing, called me, "I'm Jukkis. I'm from Finland." Dave Samuels? Dave Friedman? Something like that?

Kirchner: Randy Brecker.

Liebman: Mike Formanek? European record date.

Kirchner: Yeah. Dave Samuels, Formanek, Frisell – a very young Bill Frisell, probably.

Liebman: Yes, yes. I forgot that Bill was on that. Jukkis – I didn't know Jukkis. What's that? Hell of a musician here. What the heck is this about? I had no idea what Finland was.

Kirchner: One of my – a great European drummer.

Liebman: Yeah, he's great, killer, a great musician.

Kirchner: Here's one with a Canadian band, with Don Thompson and Claude Ranger, plus Steve LaSpina on bass.

Liebman: The legendary Claude Ranger, who's disappeared. This is Don Thompson recording and playing at the same time. Hitting the microphone and coming into the studio. It is his label called From Bebop to Now.

Kirchner: That's his label.

Liebman: I used him. He played vibes, bass, and piano. That's a musician of musicians. It's up there.

Kirchner: Yeah. A world class piano player and bass player and vibes player.

Liebman: Phenomenal.

Kirchner: You've done over the years several dates for Teo Macero for . . .

Liebman: He would call you and say, "Be there tomorrow," and the most disorganized of all time were his dates. You never knew what to – one take through. The music was disorganized, and he'd have a cast of characters. I don't know how he did it. He was the most disorganized guy. I don't know how he did Miles. I don't know how he did those edits for 20 years, because his dates were like pandemonium. "Say Teo, do I play at letter A?" "I don't know. Just go. Yeah, sure. No. Yeah." You just had to figure it out. It was insane. It was Teo Macero.

Kirchner: Let me just read the personnel list. In addition to you and him, Alex Foster, Carlos Ward, Bill Evans, Gato Barbieri, John Stubblefield, Dave Valentine, Mike Nock, Jorge Dalto, Lionel Hampton . . .

Liebman: I didn't know that.

Kirchner: Orlando DiGirolamo on accordion, Larry Coryell, Ryo Kawasaki, Lincoln Goines on electric bass, Cecil McBee, Buddy Williams, Carol Steele, and Alyrio Lima on percussion.

Liebman: No idea. They were definitely not in the studio. Lionel Hampton was not in the studio with me.

Kirchner: Oh, I'm sure he wasn't. You'd remember that.

Liebman: That's for sure.

Kirchner: Teo is nothing if not bizarre.

Liebman: Bizarre, but wrote good tunes and was a really good musician.

Kirchner: He was a good composer.

Liebman: He was a good cat, man. And in the end – little sidebar – I'm sorry, but Miles Davis would not be Miles Davis without that guy. Excuse me, but let's do credit where credit is due. If it wasn't for that – those records – what are we talking? 20, 30 records that we know Miles from? It's Teo. Teo put it together. Miles walked out and never heard – he didn't have anything to do with it. Teo, thank Teo.

Kirchner: Teo did the editing.

An interesting record that's pretty well known over the years is *The Lonliness of a Long Distance Runner,* one of your solo records. How'd that come about?

Liebman: The theme is from the book. The book and the movie had nothing to do with long distance running. But I loved the image of the long distance runner and the idea of the artist as a long distance runner. This was a very programmatic – the race, going against the wall, breakaway, wall of pain. I interviewed runners. I found out what it is like. It's just the idea of marathon runner. I couldn't think of anything more out, racing for 26 miles or 26 kilometers, whatever it is. What a fascinating thing. It made me – it really – great images in my mind. That is one of the most composed records I've ever

done. Everything is written out. I really worked on that, all soprano. If it wasn't for Walter Quintus, who got me in tune, it would be unlistenable, Walter the engineer.

Kirchner: So basically, the tunes are all through-composed?

Liebman: There's a lot of writing. The book, it's like this. I wrote a lot. There are four sopranos – sometimes four sopranos, sometimes three. I really put my heart and soul into that record. I was living in Long Island. I was basically on my own, and I could do it. I had the time to do it.

Kirchner: Is this around the time you met your wife, by the way?

Liebman: Yes, my lovely wife, around that time.

Kirchner: This is 1985.

Liebman: Is that correct, Caris?

'83. Sorry.

Kirchner: Got to be careful about that stuff. Another Moses date for Gramavision, *The Story of Moses.*

Liebman: *Story of Moses,* great record. I'm the burning bush. You know what he did with me? Soprano, and Don on congas – Alias. He said, "Is it okay if I put an effect on you?" I said sure. He double-timed me, so that I'm like [Liebman imitates the sound]. We just played duo. Then he double-timed me on the soprano. He doubled the speed. Something like that. Yeah, I was the burning bush.

Kirchner: *Homage to John Coltrane,* which Caris is on.

Liebman: This is the record that got the award in France that year.

Kirchner: For Owl.

Liebman: And this is the beginning of my relationship with Owl Records. That came out of the first *Meditations* concert in Paris. We did a concert at Billancourt, a suburb of Paris. This is what I was talking about yesterday. They wanted *Ascension.* She transcribed *Meditations.* We did *Meditations.* After that, the producer of Owl Records came up to me that night, and he said, "I want to record you. Could you do Coltrane?" I had not done Coltrane yet. I said, "I have not done Coltrane in my career except for *Your Lady* on the *Drum Ode* record." I said, "I think I'm ready to do it. I want to do electric

and acoustic, and I want to change the music around." That's how that date came out. That's a good record. A lot of thought went in that. I wanted to come up with my own way of doing Trane.

Kirchner: I'm jumping quite a bit forward now, to 1989. There's an interesting Tom Harrell record that I heard a long time ago, called *Sail Away.*

Liebman: Yes, his record. Record date, Bill Goodwin? Bill Goodwin production, I believe?

Kirchner: For Contemporary.

Liebman: That's Tom's date.

Kirchner: With you and Lovano, James Williams, Abercrombie, Ray Drummond, and Adam Nussbaum.

Liebman: Yes. Lovano on all the tracks. I'm on a couple tracks.

Kirchner: Yeah. Looks like all Tom's tunes.

Liebman: Oh yeah. It's Tom's record. Is that *Sail Away*?

Kirchner: Yes.

Liebman: That's a known record. People remember that. That tune, people did. In fact, Lydia did it in some chorus somewhere.

Kirchner: That's one of his best-known tunes.

Liebman: That's why. I didn't know that.

Kirchner: You're starting to get heavily into recording with Europeans, the guest artist for hire, it looks like.

Liebman: That resuscitated my career.

Kirchner: One with Franco D'Andrea.

Liebman: Duo, *Nine Again*? Just a record date, just like next – you're in Italy. Next day you go in and do it.

Kirchner: All standards.

Liebman: I didn't know Franco that well. I didn't know him at all.

Kirchner: All *Real Book* tunes.

Liebman: Yeah. He arranged them. Duo record.

Kirchner: Here's an interesting looking date of yours with Conrad Herwig and Caris, [Bob] Mintzer, McNeely, Rufus Reid, . . .

Liebman: Oh, *Timeline.* You know the Booker Little records, *Victory and Sorrow* and *Out Front*?

Kirchner: Yeah, with three horns.

Liebman: That's what I wanted to do. That's three horns, and Caris is on a couple, for four horns. I had Mintzer on the clarinet and tenor, of course Conrad, trombone. That's real three-horn writing, a lot of writing on that record. *Piccadilly Lily*'s on there, rearranged again, another life. Rufus and Adam, I believe, and McNeely.

Kirchner: Yes, and McNeely.

Liebman: That's where that *Port Ligat* comes from, that tune that we did on the record with Richie, we just did with the big band.

Kirchner: Here's an interesting looking one – it was done in Milan – of yours called *The Blessing of the Old, Long Sound.*

Liebman: Launeddas. I went to – what's the city I went to? Sardinia, with Paolo Fresu, who had – was not known then. Had a band. Invited me. Toured with him. In fact, Caris was on that tour. Recorded there. The launeddas is the Sardinian instrument. It is a – do you know what it is?

Kirchner: No.

Liebman: It's three pipes. One is the drone. One is a fourth and fifth with this finger. And one is – I guess four notes. So it's a triple – what do you call it? – circular breathing. 3,000 years old. They have absolute proof it was 3,000 years old. I'm always interested in where I go, bah bah boom. Could I meet the guy? I meet the master, the last living master. Name is Baranka, old cat, chain-smoking cigarettes, little Italian, 75 years old, playing the shit out of this thing. So the record date, it was arranged to meet – Liebman

meets launeddas. We did *India.* We did Richie's *Elm.* They arranged three different cats to play launeddas to play the chords. That's a kind of interesting record, folky type thing, ethnic.

Kirchner: Then you – there's a follow up. The same dates, it says, all for – the label is called Nueva. It's an Italian label.

Here's an interesting Ed Sarath date, *Voice of the Wind.*

Liebman: Is that Billy and JoAnne?

Kirchner: JoAnne, Cecil, and Billy.

Liebman: This is where I first got the idea of Billy and Cecil as a team. That's Ed's record. Ed came through University of Michigan. How did I meet Ed? I don't know. Maybe through IASJ. I don't remember how we first met.

Kirchner: Here's another solo soprano record called *The Tree* that you did in Milan.

Liebman: Okay. I did a duo concert with Lacy. This is a great story. I didn't tell this, didn't talk about this story. It's a nice story. It's what it is. Italian promoter. Lacy is very popular in Italy, and I'm the new soprano guy, blah blah blah. So they put together Lacy and Liebman in St. Stephan's Church, giant church in Florence.

Now Steve I met once with Miles. I didn't know him, but certainly knew of him, obviously. I don't know if he really knew me or what. But anyway – she was with me – he's – did you know him?

Kirchner: Yeah. I met him once.

Liebman: A very direct kind of guy. Makes Lee Konitz look talkative.

Kirchner: Very shy.

Liebman: Yeah, and talk about direct. They're all the same. Blade. They're all the same. They come from this generation of less is more, three words and guess. So Lacy is like – we're in the car. I don't know what we're going to do. I know he's got these little tunes, Hips, Blips, Wicks, all these little one-word titles, [Liebman sings a few notes], go. I don't know what I'm going to do.

He's sitting in the car. We had a little expresso. We go rehearse. We go there. He's sitting. He didn't even answer. I'm like – I always defer to senior. I don't say a word until

they talk about what we're going to play. He said – I don't know what he said – "I thought we'd play solo and then we'll play duo." Solo? This is the master of solo performances in the last 20 years. I had never played solo outside of a cadenza in my life. All right? So, I'm like, okay, sure. I look at her. I go, what? I'm not talking about competition, but could you consult with me, please? I don't play solo concerts like you do, Steve. Excuse me. No problem.

So we get out. I played the theme to *Long Distance Runner*: *Mind and Body.* I don't know. I think I played 15 minutes. Boom boom boom boom boom boom, done. I walk in the back – the picture's downstairs. We have a picture of me and him – I walk to the back. I walk to the dressing room, back of the church, gigantic church, full, a thousand people, echo, because no mics. He said, "I didn't know you played like that." I said, "Thank you." He said, "You're playing in the corners." I knew exactly what he meant, extremes of expression, blah blah blah. I said, "Thank you very much." He said, "Want to get high?" He brought out the smallest pipe I've ever seen in my life. This pipe, you could just about get one sliver of something in there.

Now, we're flowing. We're happy. Then he goes out and plays solo, 45 minutes of Monk tunes. It was the most boring shit I ever heard in my life.

Kirchner: Really?

Liebman: I had no idea what he did. I don't know why he did that. Then we went out and played together, 20 or 30 minutes, and now we were fast friends. So, I went to [Giovanni] Bonandrini for Soul Note, who was recording Steve. I said, "Would you like a solo?" I sent him the tape, live tape cassette. "Would you like to do it?" He said sure. Steve said no. I don't know why he said no. *Long Distance Runner* is dedicated to him. I don't know why he said no. I didn't ask him. I never asked him. I don't think I – I saw him after that. I didn't talk about it. So I went to Bonandrini. I said, "You know what? I'll do a solo record." So 9 in the morning I did a solo record, on that tour with Richie, duo. We just did it at 9 in the morning. *The Tree* was – my metaphor for *The Tree* is roots and limbs and branches as a body of – an art form, how it grows and so forth.

Kirchner: I heard him do about an hour-and-a-half solo concert over 30 years ago in D.C. that was just amazing. He mixed – it was a mixture of free things and originals and Monk tunes.

Liebman: He was an expert in that.

Kirchner: There a date called *Classique* with saxophone quartet, woodwind quartet, and string quartet.

Liebman: Yes. That's more like the *Dedications* record. I really wrote for that. That's one of my favorite records. It's winds and strings. I put my time in.

Kirchner: With a bunch of great players.

Liebman: No secrets. I still can't use it.

Kirchner: Have you ever done any of this stuff live?

Liebman: Yeah, I've done some of those live. I did *Adagio for Strings*, Samuel Barber. I play over it.

Kirchner: Here's a date for Motohiko Hino, a great drummer who's no longer with us.

Liebman: Toko's date that we did up at Swallow's – in what's her name? Carla Bley's thing up there. I think we did . . .

Kirchner: Willow.

Liebman: Yep. That's what we did up there. That was Toko's date.

Kirchner: How did he die?

Liebman: It was something. He got sick, something. He was a great cat. What a great drummer.

Kirchner: The first time I ever heard him is on *Joe Henderson in Japan* . . .

Liebman: Yep, that's the one.

Kirchner: . . . which is like an announcement for Americans that you could have a hip Japanese rhythm section.

Liebman: Thank you. Exactly, and the piano player was good. I used to spend – I did a couple of New Years – New Year's a big deal in Japan. Takes a week off and everybody – you do concerts at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. I was invited a couple times with those guys. I did it with Toko and a piano player, Fukiyama, whatever. I forget. He played with Elvin eventually. Karashima. Something like that. We had a great time. Then they would play bridge all night. I would just sit there with a bottle of Scotch and watch them play bridge. They weren't even playing for money. They just played. It was like a New Year's custom or something.

Kirchner: Here are two dates with a great piano player that nobody knows about, named Aydin Esen.

Liebman: Genius.

Kirchner: I have – somebody gave me a video of him with Lovano, Danny Hayes, Scott Lee. It was done at Sing Sing, a concert for inmates . . .

Liebman: This is a great, great cat.

Kirchner: . . . with him playing a synth.

Liebman: He was unbelievable at synth. He was unbelievable on piano. We did – I did a record with him a couple years ago with Steve Smith and Anthony Jackson called *Flashback* [*Flashpoint*]. We did it out here at Red Rock, a couple minutes from here. Ayden is a genius.

Kirchner: He went back to Turkey, I'm told.

Liebman: Lives in Istanbul. Had a family. That's what he does. I don't know what he does. He's invited me to play. We never pulled it together. But he is great, a great, great musician.

Kirchner: Yeah, he's just amazing.

Liebman: That was a date for Columbia. He had a contract for Columbia. They gave him – George Butler gave him a contract – a date. Dave Holland was a couple of hours late, snow or something like that. I remember it.

Kirchner: Dave Holland and Peter Erskine.

Liebman: Yep. Very disorganized date, because Aydin is kind of loose. He's like a mad genius running around the room.

Kirchner: Let's see. Moving along. This one looks really weird. This is definitely a Japanese record, *Sax Legends*.

Liebman: Oh definitely.

Kirchner: With the oddest collection of saxophone players.

Liebman: Joe Chambers producing.

Kirchner: Really?

Liebman: Yep. I'll tell you about that date. I drove with Phil Woods, in fact the first time that I actually really talked to him. I drove him in. I recorded my track with Steve Coleman. Then I got – Steve was playing – I never heard Steve play next to me. Like I said, you learn more when you're next to him. He played some stuff that was kind of like – not like me, but there was something there. I said, "Steve, would you come to my master class?" He came. It was one of my lectures. He was the best of all the guys I've ever had at this master class. There's 20, 25 guys already, everybody, Lovano, Brecker, everybody. He was the most together of all of them. He gave his dossier. He brought in a transcription. He explained everything he was doing. He was doing stuff that I did in the chromatic book with different names, intervallic stuff, interpolation. That guy is way on the case.

Kirchner: I've heard that from other people as well.

Liebman: Way on the case. He is way in there. He means it, and he's serious. He's the most serious musicians of that generation, no question about it. Everybody knows it. He's the man for that stuff.

Kirchner: I've heard many good things along those lines about him.

Here's a date from '94 with the late, lamented Jarmo Savolainen.

Liebman: Great record. We did it for Finnish radio.

Kirchner: Called *True Image.*

Liebman: With Jukkis, right? And Anders Jormin.

Kirchner: No, this is with Tim Hagens, Sonny Heinila, a Finnish tenor player, Jarmo on piano, of course, and Ron McClure and Billy Hart.

Liebman: I don't remember that. I'm thinking of another one.

Kirchner: This is done in Brooklyn for A Records.

Liebman: A Records. Yep, it's Jarmo's date. Jarmo is very – came to all the IASJ meetings.

Kirchner: That's where I met him. I actually played with him and Jukkis. I did a week in Helsinki in 2002. I was very saddened to hear.

Liebman: Great guy. Yeah, it was devastating, tragic.

Kirchner: I guess they just found him on the street.

Liebman: Yeah, just drinking.

Kirchner: We were speaking earlier about Dave Panichi. Here he is.

Liebman: That's the record. What's the date on that? The [?*Go For*].

Kirchner: '95.

Liebman: Not the [*Go For*]. Wrong.

Kirchner: This is with – you're on one track. Rich Perry's on the rest, along with Mulgrew Miller, Jay Anderson, and Victor Lewis.

Liebman: I have it confused with another thing, but I guess that's the date.

Kirchner: That's our boy.

This is a lot of other stuff that we've talked about. Here's your first record of *Meditations*, for Arkadia Jazz.

Liebman: Yes, who I signed with, and I had that in my pocket. David Baker had recorded it. We did it for – what do you call it? the world music – the world – what's his name? – the world – they do everything at the Beacon, Symphony Space – world music organization. What's his name? The guy, the English guy. Robert Browning. We did *Meditations.* Caris is on that. Tiger Okoshi's on that. I think Billy and Jamey, Cecil and Tony.

Kirchner: Yes.

Liebman: Phil and Tiger. I had that – that guy – I was just about to sign with Arkadia, and he came to that concert. He loved it. He said, "I'm going to put it out." I said, "You sure of that?" He said yes. So that's how it came out. How could you get him to put *Meditations* out? I don't know. He ended up being a complete asshole. I had to take him to court. He was a complete a-hole. But I made some very good records for him. *Puccini.*

I did the one with a Pat Metheny fan. I did some good records for him. He was a good producer. He was just a complete criminal, but a good producer. No problem.

Kirchner: I heard some of the stories, yes.

Liebman: It's okay. At least it was good for something.

Kirchner: Here's – with an old friend of mine, Jens Winther, the *4 Elements.*

Liebman: Very talented.

Kirchner: A very talented Danish trumpeter-composer.

Liebman: This is from the IASJ, Baltic cruise, 1996. We went around the Baltic to 10 countries, on the boat, playing jam sessions. He wrote a piece. That was the opening of the Danish Rhythmic Conservatory, done at the end of the tour.

Kirchner: Really? No kidding.

Liebman: Rehearsed on the boat. I have pictures of him rehearsing on the boat.

Kirchner: He and I were in the BMI Jazz Composers Workshop together.

Liebman: Serious guy. A little out, but serious.

Kirchner: Next is a very interesting record by Vic Juris of music of Alec Wilder.

Liebman: That's one of Vic's German record dates.

Kirchner: Tim Hagens, you, Vic, Steve Laspina, Jeff Hirshfield.

Liebman: That's Vic's date.

Kirchner: I knew Alec, by the way.

Liebman: You knew Alec!

Kirchner: I spent a day with him about a year before he died, up in Rochester. I was going up there for lessons with Rayburn Wright. I got an endowment grant to fly up to Rochester. A friend of mine, Loonis McGlohon, was close friends with Alec and introduced me to Alec. He said, "When you're up there . . . ." So I went over to Alec's hotel, which was near Eastman. They lived in a hotel called 111 East Avenue. I went and

spent the afternoon, just sat in his hotel room, just basically sat at his feet and let him tell stories.

Liebman: It was great, right?

Kirchner: Yeah, it was terrific.

Liebman: What a great guy, great musician.

Kirchner: He sent me – did you meet him?

Liebman: I never met him.

Kirchner: Really?

Liebman: No, no, no. Later on, I did an Alec Wilder record a couple years ago, got into his head, so to say. He was something else.

Kirchner: I heard – by the way, after this record came out, Vic did a concert that did not include you. He got Dick Oates with this band. They did a concert. There's an annual Alec Wilder concert that his friends produce.

Liebman: That's nice. Ah, that's so nice.

Kirchner: That year they did it at William Patterson. Dave Dempsey, who's involved with this . . .

Liebman: I think I remember this, yes.

Kirchner: Some of the faithful were scandalized by the non-verbatim treatments of some of these tunes, as you might imagine.

Liebman: The record I did, I did with trio, Dutch cats that I do recordings with. We did Kurt Weill and Alec. I didn't change much on it. That's one of the records – I didn't change Alec, because there wasn't much to do, really.

Kirchner: Because Alec – Loonis McGlohon told me this story – Alec, who is a very nice man, but when he drank could get evil – one day he heard – Loonis played him a record of Jack Jones singing one of his tunes, where Jack changed one note.

Liebman: He didn't like that.

Kirchner: He called up Jack and reamed him out.

Liebman: Here's this famous article that he wrote – he wrote an op-ed in the [*New York*] *Times* – that I – this is when I do my reharmonized standards class. I say there's two sides to the story here. There's play it like it is, or like it was, or play it the way you hear it. I say, "Alec Wilder" – first of all, I explain who he was – "I want to read you this article," because Vic gave me this article. It was from the '50s, how he said, "Would you change 'To be or not to be'?" He said, "What gives a jazz musician the right to change the harmony and the melody?" Of all things, and I'm thinking of Sinatra with *Night and Day* or something like that, *The Cole Porter Story.* He didn't like it either. Sinatra says, let him see what he says when he sees his royalty check. But the idea that – and equally valid – that the way we "ruin" the poor guy's tunes, what I do to tunes. On the other side is, "I wrote the tune, man. Play what I wrote." That's what he meant. So I could see your Jack Jones story is right on line, right in there.

Kirchner: But he was definitely an interesting man. About a week after I saw him, I got a postcard in the mail from him, thanking me for coming and blah blah blah.

Liebman: That book, the *American Popular Song* . . .

Kirchner: It's a classic.

Liebman: Killer, killer book. On the piano. I tell you, there are times I really read it. That's the – I tell everybody, you want to know what the standard is? That's the standard.

Kirchner: Which, by the way, that book would not have been written if it hadn't been for James T. Maher, who was based – he was a good friend of mine.

Liebman: He published?

Kirchner: He was a writer. He was a good friend of mine. He died a couple years ago. Basically, he sat Alec down and they – he basically wrote – transcribed what Alec said . . .

Liebman: What Alec's analysis was.

Kirchner: . . . and put it down on paper and fleshed it out.

Here's an interesting record with Rolf Kuhn, Chuck Loeb, Dieter Ilg, and Wolfgang Haffner.

Liebman: That's Rolf Kuhn's record.

Kirchner: Yeah. A great clarinet player that . . .

Liebman: Very good, very talented guy. Of course I knew . . .

Kirchner: . . . nobody knows about here.

Liebman: . . . Joachim very well. But he's an opera conductor. He's pretty set up there.

Kirchner: Yeah, but a really heavyweight clarinet player.

Here's another date with Jukkis, with Jarmo – this is for Jamey's label.

Liebman: That's Jarmo, and on this, Jormin?

Kirchner: Yes.

Liebman: He was a killer bass player. That's a very good record. *Headhunters*? *Gatherers*?

Kirchner: I have that. *Hunters and Gatherers.* I have – Jukkis gave it to me.

Liebman: *Hunters and Gatherers.* That's a nice record, good sound, very good tunes, and Ander Jormin, man, is wooo, a very heavy bass player.

Kirchner: Yes, he is.

The *Puccini* record you've talked about.

Liebman: I love the *Puccini* record. I just listened to it recently. I like it.

Kirchner: How did you – speaking of rewriting people's music, how did you do that?

Liebman: This is a blasphemy, of course. This is a story. It's a far – it's a great story. We're in Lisbon, with Caris. We're doing a workshop with Ronin in an old castle, old palace, funky, Count and Countess very odd people, interesting Communists, blah blah blah, very interesting. They gave us a videotape to lull away the hours. I don't remember. On the tape is Abercromie's group with Richie, from [?], and afterwards comes on Placido Domingo doing *Tosca* at the Met. I have never listened to opera in my life. I never liked opera. As soon as you say opera to me, I walk the other way. But I'm stuck in this room. We're hanging out. I'm listening to it. I say, there's some melodies here, man. What's going on?

I come back here. The guy at the university, Larry Fisher – did you know Dr. Larry Fisher?

Kirchner: No.

Liebman: He was the music guy here. I said, "Larry, what's with Puccini?" He said, here's all the scores; here's all the records. I spent the whole winter, whenever this was. I listened, I picked out my 11 or 12 tunes, I reharmonized them, and that's how the Puccini date came out. Phil Woods is on that. I have him on clarinet on that.

Kirchner: Larry Fisher plays bassoon.

Liebman: Yep, I had him on bassoon. Caris is on it. She's on oboe.

Kirchner: Caris is on it.

Liebman: I like that date. I did a lot of work on that.

Kirchner: Obviously.

Liebman: A lot of work. Like the *West Side Story* record too. I did a lot of work on that.

Kirchner: Here's a record I'm fond of, by somebody I'm fond of. That's Florian Ross's record.

Liebman: He's a killer.

Kirchner: One of the great undersung musicians of our time, I think.

Liebman: This is when he was very young. He is a great musician. That was, I remember, live. We did that live. The first night was completely out. Second night was perfect. I came off the plane first night. I was out of tune. I was screwed up. We had a long conference the next day. I said, do a couple of changes, couple of this, couple of that, and that record is a very nice record. I haven't heard it in years, but his writing – he's a heavy cat.

Kirchner: Yeah. He sends me all his stuff.

Liebman: He's still active?

Kirchner: Yeah. He's in Cologne.

Liebman: I've seen him. He's still writing. He's got three kids or something like that.

Kirchner: Yeah. He's got three kids, but he's done – he did a record with a brass section, and he did a record with five saxes and rhythm. He's done a couple things.

Liebman: Yeah, he's a real writer.

Kirchner: He's done a couple quintet records, a couple trio records, a solo record.

Liebman: I was very impressed with him.

Kirchner: I think he's one of the heaviest young – heaviest musicians under 50.

Liebman: He's got to be in his mid-30s by now.

Kirchner: He was born in '72. So he's 38. I tell people about him. Nobody knows him.

Liebman: They don't even know him in Europe.

Kirchner: Here's another record I like a lot, that you did at Banff with John Stowell and Don Thompson.

Liebman: Oh yeah. When they did the 25th anniversary of the clinic, they invited me back. I did two days. They had an hour – a recording studio overlooking these Rocky Mountains. I don't remember how it happened. I think John was – oh, John and Donald were going in to record in the middle of the night. I said, "I'll come in and play a few tracks."

Kirchner: Which you – you did three. You did *Milestones,* You did *Bye, Bye, Blackbird,* and you did *Nardis.*

Liebman: Yeah, standards, middle of the night.

Kirchner: That's a nice record. I like it.

Liebman: John is – he's special.

Kirchner: I think he's one of the great unsung guitar players.

Liebman: He's special, very special, one of a kind, one of a kind.

Kirchner: I've known him for 40 years. He was . . .

Liebman: He's a sweetheart too, sweetheart.

Kirchner: Oh, he's like St. Francis of Assisi.

Liebman: Yeah, he's beatific. I agree. There's something about him that's like a glow.

Kirchner: He lives in Portland, Oregon, lives cheaply, and travels all over the world.

Liebman: And works. I know.

Kirchner: Books all his own work.

Liebman: He was a Link guy, right? He studied with Link.

Kirchner: Yes. That's where I first heard Link, is the Stowells took me to Rapson's that night.

Here's an interesting record you did of all Monk tunes for Jamey Aebersold.

Liebman: A trio with Gomez, yeah.

Kirchner: Yeah, and with Adam Nussbaum.

Liebman: The idea of having a Monk thing without chords. That was the challenge. Having Gomez was kind of like having chords.

Kirchner: Yeah, but still.

Liebman: He played *Skippy* with me in unison. God, I couldn't believe it. I said, "Eddie, can you do" . . . ? He said sure, and he did. Killer guy.

Kirchner: All sorts of interesting odds and ends, mostly European projects with – obviously for hire projects.

Liebman: Off the plane and hit. There's a couple of interesting records with that group we called Far North, with Bobo Stenson, Lars Danielsson, and Jon Christensen. That was a 20-year group, from the mid-'80s – Lars's initiation, from the mid-'80s to the mid-'90s. We did a live record at Visiones. That was a real fun group. That, I learned a lot, because they definitely played in that style. Bobo and Jon and Lars, those great bass players from Scandinavia. I really enjoyed playing with that group, and that really taught me a

different way to play, because nobody plays rubato like them. They are rubato experts. That's what they do.

Kirchner: Here's – I'm looking at one record you did with Lars with the now very popular Nils Petter Molvaer on trumpet.

Liebman: Yeah, but I think that's his production record. I just did an overdub.

Kirchner: Yeah, it looks – with an orchestra and all the trappings.

Liebman: He's hit some very good stuff in the last few years. He's hit with success.

Kirchner: Here's your first of several records with Marc Copland, a duo record called *Bookends.*

Liebman: *Lunar* came first. Then *Bookends* came. Then, do we have another one? No. They're re-releasing *Bookends* in March as a single record. Marc and I go back, of course, for decades, but I don't remember – I don't remember how it came about. I think he just called me to do the record, and we decided – we had a nice combination together. We're doing duo next December. He's become one of my duo partners, like Phil, like Richie. He's a unique, one of a kind – another guy, one of a kind, special, way special.

Kirchner: He and Beirach are like Mr. Harmony, in very different ways.

Liebman: Yeah, very different, and Phil is kind of in the middle, because Phil can do what both of them do. I tell you, between the three of them, I am blessed to play with such piano players. I'm so lucky that they accept me into their circle of the elite. They are elite.

Kirchner: Here's another – *The Distance Runner*. Here's another solo.

Liebman: Live, from a Willisau festival. I did some tracks from the *Color* record, from the *Tree* record. I played drums, I played everything, but that's all horn stuff, Willisau. That was my first solo concert, only solo concert I ever did. I did one in a club in the '80s or '90s, but that was a real – that's because of the record *Colors. Colors* was all tenor. I did *Colors* at Banff the same week I did Stowell and Don Thompson, because I said to the engineer – I said, "You got a free – you free tomorrow night?" He said yeah. I said, "I want to come in and just play tenor." That – because of that record – it came out on the hat – hatHut, Swiss label – they asked me to come and do a solo concert, which I'd never done it before.

Kirchner: That must have been a scary experience.

Liebman: It was, but of course I had alto. I borrowed an [?]. I played piano. I played drums. So I didn't do what Steve does. That's hard. Or what Albert Mangelsdorff did. Trombone only? Eeehh, I don't know how you do that.

Kirchner: Well, he was Mr. Multiphonics.

Liebman: That helped. But Steve was the epitome of concentration. Soprano saxophone alone out for an hour? I couldn't do it.

Kirchner: Here's with a piano player who was an old buddy of mine from Washington. That's Dave Kane.

Liebman: Yeah, his dates. You know him?

Kirchner: Yeah.

Liebman: I don't know him outside of the recordings.

Kirchner: We used to play together in Washington in the '70s.

Liebman: Very nice tunes. Good writing, very good writing.

Kirchner: Yeah, with Dave and Drew Gress and the late Mike Smith on drums. He was a wonderful drummer.

Liebman: They're the Washington contingent.

Kirchner: Mike died a couple of years ago of cancer, unfortunately.

Liebman: Then we did another one. We did two with Dave. I did two with Dave.

Kirchner: Mike and Steve – Mike used to play with Steve Kuhn and Steve Slagle and the artist formerly known as Harvey Swartz.

Liebman: Mike Smith?

Kirchner: Yeah.

Liebman: Oh, our boy, Mr. Harvey S.

Kirchner: Yes, exactly. But he didn't want to leave Washington.

We've getting close to the end. Here's the one with Bobby Avey.

Liebman: That's the guy you just met.

Kirchner: He was here this afternoon. *Vienna Dialogues.*

Liebman: Oh, that's the duo. That's the Chopin and Schubert. We took the old stuff, Chopin, Schubert, Bach, Debussy, Mahler *Das Lied,* boom boom boom. Bobby – I wanted to do something with Bobby, and I wanted to do classical. I gave him free rein to arrange it.

Kirchner: This is 2005.

Liebman: We did that in the studio in (W)VIA, at the PBS studio up in Scranton.

Kirchner: He must have been about 9 years old at the time.

Liebman: No, he was in his early 20s. But I'm going to give you his record of his stuff, which is phenomenal.

Kirchner: Here's the second one with Dave Kane, *Machinery of the Night.* This is from 2006. We're getting close to the end.

Liebman: The end that you have.

Kirchner: Yeah, right, exactly.

Liebman: Because I've got about ten more pages in the last year or two.

Kirchner: I'm sure you have.

Liebman: I'm definitely over the top with this stuff.

Kirchner: Here's Bob Belden's project, *Miles from India,* with a cast of thousands.

Liebman: Yeah, yes, yes.

Kirchner: What did you do on that?

Liebman: I played flute. I actually brought the flute out, and I think I played soprano on something. That was a mess. I love Bob, but he's a little loose sometimes.

Kirchner: Well, that's part of his charm.

Liebman: Sometimes it works. Sometimes it doesn't.

Kirchner: Here's a duo record with Michael Stephans, the drummer.

Liebman: Yes, *Nomads*, up at (W)VIA. Found a German label. They're the same label that released the Ornette record that we won the award for.

Kirchner: This says ITM.

Liebman: It's Jazzwerkstatt. No, it's ITM. It's the other division of Jazzwerkstatt. That's right.

Kirchner: We have a bunch of dates for Saxophone Summit.

Liebman: Two, *Gathering of Spirits* and *Seraphic Light*, those two I talked to you about.

Kirchner: Last, the dates – the ensemble dates with the Manhattan School of Music Orchestra.

Liebman: *Porgy and Bess.*

Kirchner: *Sketches of Spain, Miles Ahead.*

Liebman: I loved doing those.

Kirchner: I heard one of those. It sounded wonderful.

Liebman: That was a real challenge, to step into those shoes. And I liked the *Sketches* in Europe. I got a guy there. We're doing it in April. In Linz I'm doing it. Linz opera house. I found a guy. He gets students. He rehearses them. I use a rhythm section from there.

Kirchner: And that, ladies and gentlemen, is all I got.

Liebman: So what – I'm just curious. The last entry is?

Kirchner: The last entry is . . .

Liebman: Or the year is.

Kirchner: 2010, *Contact, Five on One.*

Liebman: With Abercrombie. Marc and Abercrombie, yeah?

Kirchner: With Marc, Abercrombie, Drew Gress, Billy Hart.

Liebman: Okay. They're pretty recent. I just have about five since then, but that's good.

Kirchner: I'll leave this with you.

Liebman: I've been very – there's been a lot going on. There's more coming out this year.

Kirchner: Great.

Liebman: I am the last dinosaur. The bones will be extinct, and I'm going to be on the top layer as the last generation that lasted to walk the earth.

Kirchner: The last working musician.

Liebman: The last guy to record three records a year. I still . . .

Kirchner: What's a record, daddy?

Liebman: Self-production is great. I know it's the only game in town for the young guys. I understand that. But, I'm sorry, unless you're on it 20 hours a day, it's still better to have some guy doing it for you, at least from our standpoint.

Kirchner: You bet. That's all I got. Do you want to add anything else to conclude this marathon?

Liebman: No. This is great. I appreciate it. I appreciate you giving us the time, and I'm honored to be in the circles of the others that will be lying next to me on tape, on the same shelf as some of my idols of all time. That's the thing about this award. As I say, I'm not being – what's the word? – undue modesty. "I'm cool. Thank you very much." But to be mentioned in the same word as who's gotten this award, at least some of them, is – I still have to pinch myself, because I never expected that. That's for sure. I appreciate it. Thank you.

(transcribed and edited by Barry Kernfeld)