



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

**MARIAN McPARTLAND**  
**NEA Jazz Master (2000)**

**Interviewee:** Marian McPartland (March 20, 1918 – August 20, 2013)  
**Interviewer:** James Williams (March 8, 1951- July 20, 2004)  
**Date:** January 3–4, 1997, and May 26, 1998  
**Repository:** Archives Center, National Museum of American History  
**Description:** Transcript, 178 pp.

**WILLIAMS:** Today is January 3rd, nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and we're in the home of Marian McPartland in Port Washington, New York. This is an interview for the Smithsonian Institute Jazz Oral History Program. My name is James Williams, and Matt Watson is our sound engineer.

All right, Marian, thank you very much for participating in this project, and for the record  
 . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Delighted.

**WILLIAMS:** Great. And, for the record, would you please state your given name, date of birth, and your place of birth.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, God!, you have to have that. That's terrible.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** Margaret Marian McPartland. March 20th, 1918. There. Just don't spread it around. Oh, and place of birth. Slough, Buckinghamshire, England.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** OK, so I'd like to, as we get some of your information for early childhood and family history, I'd like to have for the record as well the name of your parents and siblings and name, the number of siblings for that matter, and your location within the family chronologically. Let's start with the names of your parents.

**McPARTLAND:** My father was Frank Turner. He didn't have a middle name. Frank Turner. My mother was Janet Payne, and then . . . P-a-y-n-e, and then she married my father. I think her name was . . . I don't think she had a middle name. I think it was just Janet and then she became Janet Turner.

I have one sister who is younger than me. I'm not sure exactly how much. About three or four years. She's in her seventies. As indeed am I.

**WILLIAMS:** And her name.

**McPARTLAND:** Joyce. She's got three names: Joyce Mabel Kathleen Turner, and then married Tony Armitage, and she became Joyce Armitage. She has three grown children: Sheila and Christopher and Mark. They all have—my God the family's getting big—they all have children. Sheila has Andrew and Victoria. Chris and his wife Sonia, they have one little baby named Eleanor. Mark has two girls named Lydia and Francis.

**WILLIAMS:** Excellent. Any other relatives' names that you want to have documented, for instance your cousin?

**McPARTLAND:** Oh wait, yes, yes, yes, my first cousin, first and only cousin, Edward, Ted Turner and his wife Christine. She's still alive. She's in her eighties. Ted unfortunately died several years ago.

I have several relatives. I can't exactly say whether they're cousins or second cousins. It's somebody that I used to call "Uncle." There were several relatives of my mother's living in Windsor, close to, which of course sounds much better on the tape than Slough, but just happens to be right next door. I can't really give you these names chronologically. There was . . . They were all called Dyson. The family name was Dyson. I guess probably it's my great uncles. One had a music store. One played cello in the local orchestra. One had the jewelry shop which for so many years was the shop which was the jeweler to the royal family. In fact one of my second cousins, Cyril Dyson, who was the son of Harry Dyson, he was knighted by the Queen several years ago, and he became Sir Cyril Dyson.

**WILLIAMS:** O.K., yes, if I'm correct your cousin, your one and only cousin, is related to you on your father's side.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Yes.

**WILLIAMS:** Is that your father's brother?

**McPARTLAND:** Right, my father's . . . oh that's right I should . . . do I . . . probably should name them. My father was the youngest of four brothers. Will or William. I think Harry Turner was the eldest, Uncle Harry. The next one was Ted, Edward, who was the father of Ted, Jr., my cousin. And the other one was Will, William. Out of these four brothers only came myself and my sister. Then my uncle Ted had the one son, Ted, Jr. That's all I can think of. Maybe there's somebody I forgot.

**WILLIAMS:** I'll just develop that a little bit more. Does Ted, Jr., have any children?

**McPARTLAND:** Oh yes, that's right. That's what I was going to say. Ted, Jr. His wife Christine still lives in England. But he has two . . . wait a minute, yeah . . . he has two grown children. Caroline, who lives in New Orleans. She married a heart specialist. And Alan, who did what we all thought was a dastardly act. He became a . . . well, what are those guys who roam about in the airport? I can't even think what they're called. The name of the religious . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Hari Krishna?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. Yeah, I couldn't think of it. He became one of those, and it was like . . . I'm sure they're doing good works, but in any case, to my cousin Ted, this was not something he'd hoped for in the family. Alan, he was, he got married. Let's see, he was married and has two children. I've lost touch with them a little bit. Rachel was one who I've met, and there was another one who I think I've not met. Meanwhile he got divorced and now is living in London the life of a Hari Krishna, whatever life they lead.

**WILLIAMS:** Have you ever seen him in the airport when you travel through London?

**McPARTLAND:** No, thank God, I haven't.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]. Or would you recognize him if you did see him?

**McPARTLAND:** I probably wouldn't. Actually he's a very nice guy. Not that they shouldn't be nice, but I've met him, and he just seems very self-assured and jolly, and he must like his life. He just must be happy doing what he's doing.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Sounds like we've covered most of . . . what about one other question. On your mother's side, does she have siblings?

**McPARTLAND:** Oh yes, my mother had a brother, Arthur. He was married. I remember them in my childhood. He had a . . . his wife was named Amy, but I don't think they had any children. There's a lot of assorted cousins and second cousins still roaming around in Windsor, but I lost touch. The one I was closest to was Uncle Cyril, who was knighted. We always called him "Uncle." He wasn't really my uncle. He and his wife Sylvia came to New York and saw me at the Hickory House. They were having a convention of mayors in Windsor, Ontario, so he being the mayor of Windsor, England, was included in this convention. So he came over. I've said this before. It won't hurt to say it again, because it was funny. He thought the Hickory House was just a terrible place for me to be in. He sat through one set, and then he said to me, "Margaret, does your father know what you're doing?" Of course I said, "Well I'm only playing music. I'm not doing anything to be ashamed of. There's nothing wrong with it." But he just didn't like the idea of me being up behind the bar surrounded by bottles of liquor. It wasn't an ideal setup for a jazz trio. I'm amazed that it was so successful for ten years, because we really managed to make it into something quite successful.

**WILLIAMS:** I was going to ask you, just as a followup. This is kind of getting into some of your early and fond memories in life socially in Windsor, and how did that cultivate your interest in music? But you stated a little earlier about one of your relatives, uncles I think, played cello, and someone else played. Did any . . . did your parents directly, either one of them, are involved with playing a musical instrument or singing?

**McPARTLAND:** My mother played piano. She was probably my first musical influence. I knew that these great uncles in Windsor played, but I never did hear them. There was another one, Arthur Dyson. He was a composer of sorts. I've got one little piece that he wrote somewhere in all this pile of music. I don't think he ever became very famous, not famous at all.

But actually I should say that we moved out of Slough when I was just a few months old. We went to a town called Woolwich. In case you want the spelling, it's w-o-o-l-w-i-c-h. As the Americans would say, "wool witch." My father was a civil engineer. That was the place . . . I can't imagine such a peaceful man wanting to, or being, his work, his life's work being in a munitions factory at a place where they basically made guns and stuff like that. That's really when I think about it, that's what he did. But I was a small child.

Anyway, we lived in Woolwich for quite a few years. That's probably where I started to play was on . . . we had an upright piano, and my mother would play from the music. She

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



played Chopin piano preludes, Chopin, yeah, preludes and nocturnes and waltzes. That's really what I heard. That and whatever was on the BBC. There were no . . .

Goodness, you're the ones that ate the cookies, and I'm making all this noise. Let's see. I'm losing track of myself here.

**WILLIAMS:** O.K.

**McPARTLAND:** We were now in Bromley. You asked about my musical influence. That was it, was actually hearing my mother play. I don't have to go the piano and illustrate. I can tell you exactly what I heard that seemed to me to be something that I should follow up. It was a Chopin waltz in A-flat. I remember trying to play it and being at the piano from then on. That was my prime place to be at age probably three or something like that. Then when I went to kindergarten . . .

Oh, I've got to keep up with all these moves. We had moved, let's see, we moved . . . I went to one school, to a convent when we lived in Woolwich. I guess it was, I was too young. I remember being there, going there—I probably was about three—and walking to school with a nun, to this school. I remember even what I did, like drawing pictures of houses with the snow falling and little things. Anyway, we moved to a town called Bromley, which was a little further away from my father's place of work, but close enough that he commuted every day. That's when I remember the first school where I started to play tunes for the kids, or learning whatever tunes that . . . It was like, actually like a one-room school house. It was upstairs in the building and it was one big room with all of us little kids. I remember this teacher very fondly, Miss Hammond.

I don't know how in depth you want me to go. I can . . . I remember all that stuff very well, and playing all these little tunes. Then she moved to a place, an area called Sundridge Park, which was much closer to where we were now living in Bromley, which was in Kent. I could just walk to this, walk to school. I remember that as being a very . . . It was still more or less a couple of large rooms. It was still more or less just little kids. I've even got pictures to prove it. From age five, six, to maybe twelve, divided up into different classes. The thing I remember most, of course, was playing the piano and being a ham and playing all these . . . just learning everything by ear and playing for the kids. It was always my claim to fame.

Well, I'll stop, and maybe you want to interject something.

**WILLIAMS:** That's fine. We're getting a lot of these things that will just . . . the questions will lead to a lot of other information that we can just draw upon, ask questions

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



about. But that sounds good. Did your sister, was she involved with playing on a peripheral basis?

**McPARTLAND:** Not really. Not really.

**WILLIAMS:** Other than an interest in listening.

**McPARTLAND:** She was never . . . no I don't . . . the only things I remember was Mummy always saying things like, "That's very nice, dear." In fact I remember one particular instance which shows where my character has gone. I guess, yeah, we were in Bromley . . . wait a minute, I'm just trying to locate the house and what was happening there. My mother had this friend who was her, one of her girlfriends, who happened to be the mother of the dancer Margaret Fontaine. She was Margot's mother. Margot actually was . . . her name. Her actual name was Peggy Hookum. That was her real name. Mummy's friend was Nita Hookum. I'm only building up to my story, because she would be at the house all the time. They would be having tea. and Mummy would say, "Well, play something for Auntie, dear." I would sit down to play, and they would immediately resume talking and carry on as if nothing had happened. Then, when I had finished they would go, "Very nice, dear." I was mortified. I don't know what I was, angry, embarrassed, or what I was. It was something I didn't like. And then I thought about being at the Hickory House. I figured life hadn't changed much. I'm still doing the same thing. They're all gorging their steaks, and then they turn around, "Yeah, very nice. Waiter, bring another drink." It's so funny. I'm still doing it.

**WILLIAMS:** Things do have a way of working in cycles, I believe.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, I guess they do. That's always . . . it's funny, just now in recent years there is more respect for the music and the musician. People don't make noise as much as they used to. In fact, I guess I can talk about this later, but that's really what led me to try to get into the concert field, was to get away from noise and smoke and really having to admonish the people for making noise. It was getting to the point where I thought that they really should listen, so getting out of nightclubs and into the concert field did make a big difference in my life. because people were there because they wanted to, not because they came in for a drink or out of the rain or something.

**WILLIAMS:** That's true, and we will get back to that even further as we progress through the interview. I was going to ask you one thing: were you named after any of your relatives?

**McPARTLAND:** Was I what?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Were you named after any of your relatives?

**McPARTLAND:** No, I don't know why I was named Margaret Marian. I really don't know. I can remember some . . . I can't remember anybody in my family being named Margaret, actually. Or my sister either, like Joyce Kathleen, maybe there was a cousin or my mother's or a friend name Kathleen. Mabel was . . . my aunt was married to my uncle Will, Daddy's brother. Her name was Mabel. I don't know if Joyce was named after her. I don't know. It's so funny, all those names. In fact I have a running joke with Bobby Short, because I always told him I didn't like the name of Margaret, that I wanted to be called Mabel. He thought Mabel Turner was a very good name for me. In fact he always calls me that. So that's just by the, on the side.

So where are we now? I'm still in Bromley, I guess.

**WILLIAMS:** Also, so you decided very early, either professionally or otherwise, to be known by your middle name?

**McPARTLAND:** No, no, that didn't happen until much later. I was Margaret all through school and all through for many years until I actually had gone to the Guildhall School of Music. I was there, and that's when this thing happened about getting this date with Billy Mayall and going out and playing vaudeville. I think that might have been when I made up this name of my middle name and called myself Marian Page to . . . because I thought I shouldn't bring the family into it. I would have a separate name, Marian Page. That would . . . I don't know where Page came from. I think I started out saying Marian Payne, Mummy's name. Then I thought, well, Page sounds nicer, because they might take the wrong spelling of Payne. They might think I was one.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** So I'll be safe and call myself Marian Page. That's really what I did. That's how that came about. But I was never ever called Marian, to my knowledge. It was always Margaret. In fact, it usually was Mummy being, admonishing me for something: "Now Margaret, straighten up," or, no, no, not straighten up, "Sit up straight. You'll get round shouldered." There was a lot of critical remarks made there about me.

**WILLIAMS:** At that point. Yeah, so . . . also that gives you an idea of the kind of environment that cultivated your interest in music. You told me about some of your family members that played also. Were there music that you heard in the community? Were there other neighbors? Were there pianos in the homes of others?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**McPARTLAND:** No, not really, not really. I do remember going down to visit my uncle Harry, one of the . . . Mummy's uncles in Windsor. I remember that very fondly. That again was an early musical experience, probably very close after starting on the piano at home that Mummy played. And this Uncle Harry and Aunt Francis—I remember them very well. I guess they were quite elderly at the time. Anyway, I loved Uncle Harry. I thought he was a very sweet guy. They had this little upright piano that was . . . I wasn't smart enough to know whether it was in tune or not. It seems to me it might have been not perfectly in tune, but it was one of those pianos with a candle on either end, and it had pale yellow fluting, silk in the front of the piano. I remember being fascinated by that. But of course my main idea was to play the piano. And I did, and Uncle Harry would tell me how great I was. I think that then I was probably only three or four, doing that.

I used to go down there once in a while, and we would set up in the window and watch the royal procession go by. Once in a while there would be some big deal where . . . what was then? I'm trying to think who it would be. King George and Queen Mary, I think. I go back that far. Boy. They would be going by in one of those carriages. Then later on it got to be Elizabeth, or Elizabeth's mother, actually, and her husband, King . . . that was another George. And they were . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Is this the Queen Mother you're referring to?

**McPARTLAND:** It was Queen Mother. Right. So you have the right technology [*sic*: terminology]. They . . . because Uncle Cyril was a jeweler to the royal families, they would be seen to be going into that jewelry shop once in a while. In fact my sister and I once were in there at the time, and we were shoved into the back room, so we wouldn't disturb the royalty coming into the store.

I might make mention of one other thing. My grandmother, my mother's mother, her name was Annie Payne, and one of her brothers was Thomas Payne. He was one of the singers. They had a choir at St. George's Chapel, so that every time the Royal Family went to Windsor, they were in residence there, this choir would sing for them in this chapel. So my . . . I guess he was, I don't know what he was, maybe my grandmother's brother. That would be a . . . another great uncle, I guess. I don't recall meeting him, or if I did, I was very small. She had a house in the castle grounds, a place called The Cloisters. She had a tiny little house, and I would go in there, but not as often as I did to Uncle Harry, because he had the piano.

**WILLIAMS:** Just for the record, also, let's get your grandparents' names.

**McPARTLAND:** O.k., let's see.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**WILLIAMS:** Were they living at the time?

**McPARTLAND:** I don't . . . My grandmother, I remember her very well. She lived . . . I don't know. I was probably about ten or eleven. She lived with us for a while, after we moved to Bromley. I don't remember meeting my grandfather. Not on either side. Not on either side of the family. Only saw pictures, photographs.

**WILLIAMS:** What about your paternal grandmother?

**McPARTLAND:** No. I never met her. Or grandfather either.

**WILLIAMS:** Do you have that name?

**McPARTLAND:** Wait a minute. Let's see . . . Turner. I can remember, I can only remember that his name was . . . I can't think of his first name. Of course his last name was Turner. God, I can't remember either of their names. Sorry about that. Maybe it will come to me.

[At this point the topic leaps, unexplained, from her grandfather, whom she never met, to an unidentified "he" in the 1970s.]

I was living in New York. This was in the seventies, I guess. He would start talking without saying hello or anything. He'd just start out like, "Yes!" or something like . . . as if we were picking up a conversation from another day. And then it just went on for so long, and I was in the middle of cleaning the house. I was vacuuming. I just kept doing it. I had the phone, and talking to him. He says, "Are you vacuuming, when you're talking to me?" I said, "yes, it's all right." "Boy, that's the rudest thing I've ever heard." Bang. And he hung up the phone.

**WILLIAMS:** I'd like to find out, to what degree of importance was each of the following to your family? The first being religion; education, formal or informal; and other traditions and customs. Let's start with religion.

**McPARTLAND:** I would say that was pretty important. I remember as a very small child . . . I remember in Woolwich, in fact, every night saying a prayer and being . . . with Mummy holding me, and I'm saying this little prayer which now I can't remember: "Gentle Jesus meek and mild, look upon a little child." There's more lines. I should be able to remember this, but I can't. I just remember that much. I would say that every night. That was the start of things. Then of course, in school . . . I trying to think when we started . . . I guess I was quite small . . . going to church. I guess we'd say we were

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Church of England. It's probably equivalent of Episcopal or something like that. But it's really rather straight, straight ahead, like . . .

**WILLIAMS:** It's not Anglican, is it?

**McPARTLAND:** It's not like the Catholic Church. It's not Anglican. I don't know what to call it. It was . . . the . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Demonination of it?

**McPARTLAND:** Church of England, it was called.

**WILLIAMS:** I'm satisfied.

**McPARTLAND:** The pastor . . . I don't know what to call him now, reverend, whatever he was. He'd be in the pulpit. We'd do the psalm, do the different psalms, and then there would be a hymn. And then there . . . my father would sing the hymn very lustily. I can do that. I remember some of those. But then it would come the sermon. It was always so boring, and I would be squirming around. I would . . . My mother didn't go too much. My father would . . . and I would say, "Can we leave before the sermon?" Once in a great while he would . . . we would squeeze out when the hymn was going on. We'd just get out. But mostly, no. It probably wasn't all that long, but it just was . . . seemed so terribly boring. I think a lot of them were boring.

I always talk to Mary Lou Williams about this. I said you were lucky. You were brought up in the, with, in the black church with all that wonderful music. And you grew up with people like Earl Hines. I didn't have any of that. Everything was very straight and strict and stern. I don't remember any religious . . . the guys like . . . the first guy in the church would be a curate. That would be his position, and the next guy would be the Reverend So and So. I forget how they were all . . . what you had to call them. The curate would be . . . I mean they would all be Mr. So and So, I guess, but I don't remember knowing any of them that well at different churches.

But I always had a real . . . what?, a real thought that my parents definitely believed in God, and the prayers were certainly a part of school. You said one every day, eventually learning The Lord's Prayer. Saying that every day. I guess I've gone into that enough.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, did your mother either, or you, play religious music around the house at any stage or at the church or anything?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** No. She never performed in, never played, was any part of the church. I think she might have . . . I can't even think whether she played any hymns. I guess I just learned them by osmosis, learned them from church. I mean I knew all the hymns. Could . . . I would never see the music to any of them. Just sit down. So much music that I just play from hearing it. Then Christmas carols. I guess you could call that semi-religious. Some of the Christmas hymns. People would actually go out and sing carols on the doorstep. It was really nice. My father would . . . they would be outside the door singing, and my father would come to the door and give them a shilling or sixpence or something, which was considered money in those days.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I want to refer back, speaking of hearing hymns and things like that. I wanted to ask . . . I know you mentioned that you were influenced by what you heard on the BBC earlier. Did you have a victrola in the home, or . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Yes.

**WILLIAMS:** How was you influenced by radio? What was the first that you, that really touched you in a special way?

**McPARTLAND:** God, that's really hard to pinpoint. I guess the most excited I got was hearing dance music and pop tunes and things on the BBC. When I really come down to it, probably hearing jazz was the most excited I would get. Everything else . . . I was like a . . . like a steady stream of whatever music I was hearing was going in my head, and I was absorbing it and playing some of it.

I'm getting a little bit out of line here, because I'm starting to think of things I did later on when we moved to another part of Bromley. In this interim I did go to two or three schools. There was one called . . . it was called Avon Cliff. It wasn't a very good school. I don't think I . . . I was moved around like a pawn in a game. I don't remember ever . . . it was always, "You will do this" or "You will do that." You never, couldn't say, "Well I don't want to," because then it would be like, "Don't speak to your mother like that." One never did.

Then I was going to this convent school. I know I had . . . oh I know I had a point to make about that. That was something I really enjoyed. By then I think I was about twelve, maybe around in there. I played a lot at the school. There were a couple of other girls who could play. I remember one of the first tunes I learned was "You're Blasé." This one girl seemed to have some good . . . I remember even then, not knowing what they were . . . chord changes, but listening to what she played and thinking that I would like to do it that way. I guess I did. Here again, it was a case of you play and be accepted for being able to do something not too many other people could do.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Unique to other people. Yeah. You mentioned that you were influenced by jazz and other maybe pop music of the day on that. What was considered around your home acceptable or good music that you should be listening to, in addition to Chopin. I assume that was the European classics are high on the priority list.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, there were things, there were light operas or . . . God, I'm going back so far. There were shows . . . I guess it would be the equivalent of Broadway shows . . . that were being shown in London. There would be tunes that would come from those shows that maybe my mother would get sheet music and play the tune. I can't think of the names offhand. There was one. I'm probably going back so far it's ridiculous. There's one I remember called "Flora Dora." There were some pop tunes of the day. It would be like having tunes from *Hello Dolly* or something. My mother and father went to a few of these shows, I guess, because that's something that she seemed enthusiastic about. You would hear the tune, hear different things played on the BBC. At that time I'd play anything that struck my fancy, whether it would be a . . . something, like, by Delius or there was . . . there was a lot of classical music and what they called light music, which was not very good, but commercial. But I took in everything that I could play and would try to play it.

**WILLIAMS:** That would be like Gilbert and Sullivan type of pieces?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes, oh yes, now I'm glad you brought that up. I went to all those. Actually I loved those. My father loved Gilbert and Sullivan. I think I probably saw most of those. I can still play some of those things, like from *The Mikado*, and there was one called *Box and Cox* [*sic: Cox and Box*] God, I mean, we'll be here forever talking about those things.

Then in, at Christmas time, there would be what they call pantomimes, where they would, they would have like *Peter Pan* and . . . that's the one I can think of most, *Peter Pan*. They always came around Christmas, and they would . . . *Robin Hood* . . . and they would always be very light entertainment, but . . . trying to think what kind of tunes were played. I can't think of anything at the top of my head.

**WILLIAMS:** Well, that gives us a real general good focus on that. Anyway, I was wondering . . . so that, so they weren't opposed to you listening, and obviously they enjoyed listening to some of the pop music of the day as well, not you were just classically influenced by that. So that's . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Oh no. You see they, they . . . I guess I've come to a point here where I have to talk about music, because I wasn't . . . I was just playing by ear. I remember

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



actually asking if I could take piano lessons. I think I was about nine. My mother, for some reason or other, she had this hot idea that I must learn the violin. "Oh no, dear, you have violin fingers," she said. So because she said that, that was the reason for getting the violin. I never liked the violin. That's the point. I learned to play it under duress, although I did like the teacher very much. Her name was Edith Jarvis. She was a very nice woman. I think a very good teacher, but I was always pestering her to play piano. I would always want to be playing piano at the lesson. "Well," she said, "next year I'll start teaching you piano," but in the meanwhile she got very ill and died. My mother wanted me to keep up the violin. You're gonna love this name. I think it was maybe a student of Miss Jarvis or somebody, a youngish woman, like, really like a glorified student or graduate student. Her name was Eleanor Izzard. I-z-z-a-r-d. It's such a funny name. She was very nice, but she couldn't . . . I was too much for her. She couldn't teach me. She was very inadequate. I think I made a fuss and practically banged the violin on the floor. Anyway, they stopped doing that. They realized that just was not my thing. But I'm still not taking piano lessons. I'm still doing my own thing.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k., we've gotten some of that information about how . . . music you were learning and listening to at that point and how it affected that. I wanted to ask you, once again, this two-part question, the degree of importance placed on education by your . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, I would say, I would say a great . . . I never felt . . . what should I say, any kind of pressure, except from being a terrible mathematician and not being able to grasp anything and having my father help me with my homework. But I feel that I did have a very good education right from the word go. In fact the first teacher, the kindergarten teacher, used to take us on nature walks. We'd go in this little wooded area, and we would know all the names of all of the plants and different flowers. I just loved knowing all this and bringing little things home and planting them. You'd have a jam jar, and you'd bring home a tadpole and watch it turn from a tadpole into a frog, and stuff like that. To me, that's probably why I'm such a nature lover now. I've always kept that feeling.

Then my father loved to plant things in the garden. We always had a . . . the English are veterate gardeners . . . but he always had a nice garden. I'm trying to think about Woolwich. I don't re . . . oh yeah, that was a nice little garden. If I'd thought about it, I would have dug out pictures of all these things. The pictures of myself and my sister. And actually I was a cute-looking little girl, but I never thought so. I always thought I was ugly. My mother seemed to foster that idea, that my sister was the pretty one. I was, had things about me . . . she used to tell . . . I used to have my hair, or I did have my hair in a, in what they call a fringe, because my mother said my forehead was too big. So it was

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



years before I could get my hair off my eyebrows, have a, do my hair in a different way. Anyhow, that's beside the point. It's not really a part of education.

My father was pretty well educated. I read every . . . as soon as I could read . . . I think that the phonetic system of teaching kids to read is so much better than . . . what's the other thing they do, where you just have to grasp at the sense of the page or you look at the line of words? Something which I think is very unsatisfactory, because if you learn from phonetics, you've got every syllable, like . . . what could I think of? . . . like . . . now I can't come up with a good example. Name a word. Let's see. "Escape." You'd say "ee" - "sss" - "kah" - "ah" - "puh." I forget how it goes now. It's been quite a few years, but you could see the whole word.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, and through the sound . . . I agree. That and having a little knowledge of Latin and things like that really help to grasp that. So that was good that they put a certain amount of interest and importance there on having a formal aspect of education in a variety of areas, it sound like.

**McPARTLAND:** I would say that I was just really averagely well educated. It's something that people in England, you take for granted. I guess people would say, "Where am I in the social scale?" I would say we were middle class, or maybe even upper middle class. But you didn't even think about being well educated. You just had to be. In fact my mother used to mimick the neighbor whose name was Mrs. Miller-Brown, hyphenated, Miller-Brown. She liked to walk around, talking about somebody, and she would say, "They're very highly educated." That was something Mummy always used to say as a joke. That was something . . . you went to school and you learned. You better learn. You didn't goof off or anything. You just had to produce. I was really . . . it was something you took for granted. You just had to. You did homework, and if you didn't do it right, then you were . . . depending on whether the teacher was very strict or nice or whatever . . . but you were . . . well, you just got to do it, other than they gave you a mark, C or whatever. I always was somebody that felt terrible if I didn't do well, whatever it could be.

**WILLIAMS:** Or excelled in that area.

**McPARTLAND:** I was always at the bottom of the class. One school I was at, they would always read out the results of exams, and mine would be the last name to be read, if it was geometry or algebra or . . . People would . . . some girls would be sniggering and thought it was very funny. But then, of course, I could do something they couldn't do, play piano. That was always my big thing. But I've jumped ahead, because you were talking about education, and I just . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Well, this is a part of that.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . feel that this was a part of it, yeah. We were taught certain . . . French, and a little Latin. I really didn't like that. The teacher was a nun, and she was very . . . she was nasty. I didn't like her at all. But we had to do it. We had religious classes where we'd read from the Bible and we'd read certain . . . different excerpts, whatever this nun would have for us to do. I'm trying to remember what it was. We had to write a lot of stuff about what you read or what it meant to you or something. She would give out rewards, because I was collecting foreign stamps at that time. We all were. We collected stamps. If you did really well she'd give you a certain stamp that you were looking for. So she was bribing us all. I guess I was about ten or eleven at the time.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh sure, yeah. I'm going to digress back just a quick moment, just for our records, just to have . . . did your parents lead a lengthy life? What year did they die?

**McPARTLAND:** My mother was 79 when she died. My father was 76.

**WILLIAMS:** What years were they?

**McPARTLAND:** Gee, I can't tell you. Oh my God.

**WILLIAMS:** Was it in the '60s or something?

**McPARTLAND:** Wait a minute. Let's see. I remember when my father died I was on the road. Jimmy and I were on the road. This would be I think in the '60s, yeah. And then my mother died several years later. Let's see. Again I was on the road. I did not go to either funeral. At that time going to England was like fourteen hours. It seemed foolish to make that kind of trip. I made a lot of trips when they were alive. It was hard to get out of the gig and make the plans. Everything was last minute, so I didn't go. Then my mother, that was expected, because she had cancer. That would be in . . . maybe late '60s or early '70s. My sister would know. She has all those dates in her head.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I suppose. So, it is relatively recent times in that case.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, yeah. They didn't die when I was a baby or anything like that. Actually I . . . for years I felt . . . years later I went to a psychiatrist. I remember going on and on about how terrible they were to me. They really weren't at all. They did the best they could. My father was a . . . I think he was a very well-educated person. I really am grateful that I had such an opportunity to read. He really loved words. I do too. I'm really a word snob. I love to use good words if I can find them. And speak properly. I always loved Duke [Ellington] for that reason. I thought it was wonderful, the way he spoke.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





But anyway, so as I got older, the education just went on. I was actually in . . . I could name them. I was at Miss Hammond's school in kindergarten. Then we moved to Bromley. Then I went to this stupid school, Avon Cliff, for a couple of years. Then they said, no, the school's no good, and I went to the convent, Holy Trinity Convent. That was in Bromley. I think maybe that was about three years. Then my mother kept threatening me that she was getting reports that I wasn't behaving. I was a cutup, but nothing like people are now. When I think of how well behaved we were. Talk about prayers. There would be a prayer before every class. We didn't move around the building like they do here. We would all be in the same classroom. The teacher, whoever it was, would come to us. One teacher after another would come into the classroom.

Anyway, my mother kept threatening me, "I'm getting these reports you're not behaving. If you keep this up I will take you away from there and send you to boarding school." My mother was always the one that did this. My father was the silent partner in all this. So they did that. My last school was called Stratford House School for Girls. I guess it was o.k. I guess it was o.k. But anyway, I couldn't take the boarding school. I started to get headaches and feeling just terrible. It would be a weekly board. I would come home on the weekend. But I got so sick that . . . they figured that it was a psychological thing, so they stopped that. So I didn't go . . . I just went there as a day student. I guess it was o.k. I seemed to . . . I've rambled on about education enough. But the point is that you get a thing like . . . you graduate . . . it's called a school certificate. That's like graduating from high school. Wouldn't you know I left before that happened. I had already be accepted at the Guildhall. So they let me leave before the graduation and go to the Guildhall and start studying piano.

I left out a big chunk of how I arrived at that. It was my father saying to one of the teachers at Stratford House, "What shall we do with her?" This is what I found out afterwards. That's my . . . I became very friendly with this . . . she was an elocution teacher. She was wonderful. We learned all kinds of Shakespeare. I had really so many opportunities to . . .

**WILLIAMS:** What is that? That may not . . . I don't know that term: elocution?

**McPARTLAND:** Elocution? Proper speaking. How to speak properly.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. I do know what that is.

**McPARTLAND:** But it was really like an acting class. Acting. She would take us to Shakespearean plays. Then we would read them in class. We would read excerpts from Shakespeare. I became . . . I had a crush on her, and she would come to our house for dinner once in a while. I guess that's when my father asked her this, "What shall we do with her?" So she apparently said to my father, "Can't you see she's going to . . . she should be studying music." And he went "Really. Do you think she has that much

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



talent?" I got this all second-hand years later. Through her I got to audition at the Guildhall, which was a big deal. I was shaking in my boots. They'll never take me. I'm not good enough. It was always . . . I always had that feeling. I'll never make it. I'm not good enough. To my utter surprise I was accepted. So that's what I did for two or three years, taking piano and then they made me take the violin as a second instrument. But that failed again, because the teacher . . . what was his name? Mr. Wilby. He was just a terrible man. He was . . . he was a dirty old man.

**WILLIAMS:** In the sense of what we . . . that term though . . .

**McPARTLAND:** What we all know. Yeah. So I complained. I didn't know what to say. I was so embarrassed. Anyway, that stopped. I didn't go there anymore. I took piano, singing, and sight-singing and harmony. I would be there maybe three or four times a week, and the rest of the time . . . it was a short train ride. Then I would be at home, practicing. That's all I did, really, for several years. I didn't really have a teenage life.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes. Just to add on that point, not to bring that up to a sensitive subject. Is that the reason you decided to leave school, or was it because you had other offers? Because of this Mr. Wilby?

**McPARTLAND:** No, no, he was at the Guildhall.

**WILLIAMS:** That was just . . .

**McPARTLAND:** That was a very small incident, but . . .

**WILLIAMS:** O.k.

**McPARTLAND:** I just remember it, because I remember thinking . . .

**WILLIAMS:** It was traumatic.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . violin teacher is a respectable person. He's not supposed to act this way. Now I guess I'm a little bit more sophisticated than I was then.

**WILLIAMS:** So he never was a factor in you leaving the Guildhall prematurely.

**McPARTLAND:** No, no, that had nothing to do with it. He just was a very . . .

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. That's what I wanted to establish.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** No, no, actually I really wanted to learn. I felt that I had to catch up. I thought that I was going to be something in music. I thought I was going to be a concert pianist. They would have liked it, my parents. They didn't really like to think of me doing anything in music, but the thing they thought would be, quote, "nice," would be if I would be a music teacher or something. I had had . . . I forgot about this . . . I'd had one teacher come to the house for a little while. Her name was Gwen Massey. She was a local teacher. I think this was before I went to Stratford House School. She entered me in several local music festivals. I did do well in all of those things. That was . . . I was beginning to think very dimly, well I'm not too bad after all, because I had always had a low opinion of myself, not . . . certainly very far from being egotistical at all. It was always, like, "Well, who? Me? You think I'll . . .? Boy, will I really make that?"

Anyway, back to the Guildhall. I was just going along, and I don't know how I arrived at all this, but in the meantime, even though I was at the Guildhall, I had already started listening to a lot of jazz at home. My sister had had a boyfriend who was really into jazz, but she wasn't. She wasn't that keen. So he . . . he wanted to talk about jazz to somebody. So he switched to me. It was like, "I'm here. I'd like to hear that music." That's when I really got to hear some jazz, whether it be Duke Ellington . . . I didn't know what was what. I didn't know what was different styles. I listened to Sidney Bechet and Muggsy Spanier and Budd Freeman. It's funny. Somehow I never did hear Jimmy [her future husband Jimmy McPartland] on a record. I don't know why. It just happened that he didn't have any that included Jimmy, I guess. Then I started listening to Art Tatum and Fats Waller and James P. Johnson. I just . . . he would bring recordings, and I would . . . I even went out and bought a book of transcriptions of Art Tatum and just looked at it. I could faint. I didn't . . . I just looked at it and gave up right then.

I used to sit by the record player. Oh, you asked if we had a Victrola. In the early years we had a wind-up gramophone with a . . . that you wind up. Then gradually as things improved, the technical things improved, we got something better. But that's what it was for a long time. That's how I heard all the great players, was on I think a wind-up gramophone, whether it be . . . they were all 78s, the real thick ones. Tatum or Benny Goodman groups. It's incredible to think that I heard Lionel Hampton all those years ago and here he is today, still doing it. It's amazing. Mel Powell and Joe Sullivan. But most of my real heroes were the black players. I didn't think about it at the time. Boy, these were all the great players, Art Tatum and Fats Waller. Teddy Wilson, of course. I used to sit hours trying to do what he did, play some of those little sparkly runs.

Then that whole thing . . . the reason I brought this up is because it all carried over into the Guildhall, and I would be practicing, but then I would think that I'd try to play, do one of my Teddy Wilson things, try to play some jazz. The whole thing came to a head, because I was doing this and the professor, the piano professor, whose name was Orlando Morgan . . . he was a white-haired, distinguished, elderly man. Anyway, he heard me, opened the practice room door, and he said, "Stop playing that trash!" I was so embarrassed, terribly embarrassed.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



At the same time there must have been some change in my feeling there, because I think it was after that that I went to see this pianist that I'd heard on the BBC, Billy Mayall, who was a commercial pop player, like . . . it's like an English version of Frankie Carle. I guess you'd call it novelty piano. Nevertheless he played some good chords. It was . . . I learned to play a few of his pieces. So with great temerity I went there to his studio and said I would like to learn to play some better chords. I'm sure I must have been very shy and nervous. I'm trying to think how old I was, maybe 19 or something like that. I sat down and played for him. I think the first tune that we worked on was a tune called "Where Are You?" You know that tune? I didn't know the tune was that old, because I knew all these tunes by hearing them on the BBC. He just . . . he didn't really show me anything much, but the thing was, he immediately said to me, "I'm going out to play some dates with a group and would like to have you join the group." I was . . . it was like . . . I was flabbergasted, but I went home, and I had to ask my father, and said "I really want to go. I'll go back to the Guildhall later. I promise I'll go back." My father came up there to the Guildhall . . . uh, to meet Billy Mayall. It's funny. In this kind of instance it was always my father that would do these things, not my mother. He was always the one that figured in important things like this. Actually he wasn't all that much help, because Billy wasn't going to pay all that much. He paid ten pounds a week, which in those days, that wasn't too bad . . . now of course it's nothing, like change in your pocket. Anyway, they didn't want to let me go, but they did let me go. I guess I persuaded them that I just had to do this. I really didn't know where it was going to lead. I never did in my whole life. I never knew where I was going, except I had this . . . I just had to go and do this. But it wasn't really jazz. It was more corny pop stuff. I guess he could see the possibilities with me, because I have such a good ear. He didn't . . . there was no music to this thing. It was four pianos. Everything we learned . . . there was a guy named George Middleton, was in the group, and another girl named Kathleen. She didn't last very long. A girl named Dorothy Carless, who was a band singer who was very well known in England. She joined the group. We went out playing in what we called music hall, but it was essentially vaudeville, was what it was. You played in the theater with several acts, and I met a lot of American acts. I met Adelaide Hall, who at that time was, she was very big and figured in a lot of these dates. I must have played every date, every vaudeville theater in England, good and bad. As I think of it now, it's something I'm so glad I did, although when I started my parents were, I think they were embarrassed by me. I'm sure that . . . I never actually knew this, but I'm sure that my uncles would be calling up my father, saying "Frank, how can you let her do this? This is awful for the family," and all that stuff. I think now they must have really suffered, letting me do this, and my mother said, "You'll come to no good. You'll marry a musician and live in an attic." I always tell the kids in school that's exactly what happened [laughter]. But it didn't last long. They went along with it, but they weren't happy about it. But it was exciting to me. I can go on with this forever. Shall I stop for a minute and let you . . . shall we regroup?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** I'm fine if you're comfortable.

**McPARTLAND:** I'm out of my . . . I'm out on the road now, and I haven't really left home. I go back in between times. I think we did this for about . . . I can't remember exactly, maybe a year or two years, a year. We recorded for English Decca, and we did shows in the BBC. It was a name, a prodigious group. Billy Mayall was a big name. He'd be top of the bill like . . . who could I think of over here? . . . somebody like Ray Charles. Maybe not that big, but it would be that kind of a thing, where people would flock to see this group. Then we would have other acts: a juggler or tap-dancing acts or different people. I met some women one time . . . the Peter Sisters. Did you ever hear of them?

**WILLIAMS:** No.

**McPARTLAND:** Before your time.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs] Quite a bit.

**McPARTLAND:** Quite a bit. Yeah. But anyway, I just heard something about them the other day, and I thought, evidently if they're not still around, they must have recorded or done something. They were three girl singers like the Pointer Sisters, same sort of thing.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah. Let me see now. We've kind of jumped ahead. We're close now into the '40s I believe, are we not?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, I'm afraid, well no, '30s . . .

**WILLIAMS:** O.k.

**McPARTLAND:** '30s, but we have jumped ahead. I didn't . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Chronologically maybe you can tell us exactly where we are. Would you say this would be '36?

**McPARTLAND:** No, it was before that. God, I would really have to go and look up . . .

**WILLIAMS:** That's all right. Just give us a general . . .

**McPARTLAND:** . . . look up dates.

**WILLIAMS:** '33?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Let's see . . . maybe . . . let's say that . . . I could maybe look up something and find an actual date, but I haven't really kept perfect . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Now it can just be circa 19-whatever.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, well, circa 1930 to '33, maybe around there, because I know in '39 was where I was when war . . . that was when war was declared. In 1939, and I haven't . . .

**WILLIAMS:** You haven't gotten to that point.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . haven't gotten to that point, because by then I had left. Billy's group had disintegrated. He disbanded the group. I was floundering around, not really, never really knowing what I was doing. I'd had all these interesting experiences and met all kinds of people, but didn't really know what I was doing, and I fell . . . I was really very simple-minded, naive. I started doing some jobs with another woman pianist, and we would do things like . . . they would have music in the pit for a theater, maybe something like . . . it would be like off-Broadway. They would . . . instead of a band they would have two pianos. I did a lot of that.

Then for a while there was a . . . you could only call it like Major Bowes [the amateur-hour show], a guy named Carroll Levis that had this . . . Carroll Levis and his Discoveries. Somehow I got involved with this group. I was the pianist for the Discoveries. I would play for auditions. Here again, we would play all these vaudeville theaters. Carroll, same thing. He was a well-known name. I did something at that time I really didn't know I was capable of doing and that was rehearsing a pit band with the music of all these acts and telling them what went on with the different singers. I was . . . must have been fairly competent, because nobody got fired or nothing bad happened and every . . . but it's funny. I can't picture myself doing that now. God. So many years ago.

I became friendly with a lot of different people in the groups, both male and female. My father was travelling at that time. He was going to Germany. When I think of things they were doing. I think they were . . . everything he did was very vague to me, having to do with the sale, making the sale of guns. I guess I really never did get down to finding exactly what he did. Anyway, he was making trips all over the place. He would . . . we would be in some theater, and he would be in the town. He would come there and see the show. It seemed that he became accepting of what we were doing or what I was doing. He would seem to really enjoy himself. I'm running out of steam for a moment there.

**WILLIAMS:** No, that's fine. Because I wanted to set the record straight, because sometimes in some of the written biographical information, it was a grey area. It was . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





I was thinking that you were doing the four-piano vaudeville tour, that was part of ENSA [Entertainment National Service Organization], but it really wasn't.

**McPARTLAND:** No. No. That was a whole . . .

**WILLIAMS:** The way they have it written. So that's the reason I wanted to get this clear on . . .

**McPARTLAND:** No, that was actually, with Billy Mayall, that was the first professional job that I ever had. Although, actually, now that I think of it. This was not professional. It was just something . . . it was a little group of people at home in Bromley that we would put on little local shows. Again I would be playing. It was nothing. But I would get to play a couple of numbers, and we would have a singer. That was probably my first venture into anything with groups, although everything I . . . I did a lot of playing in school and at different concerts. But Billy Mayall, that was my first professional job. Then there were all these . . . this was a grey area . . . there were all these in-between things, because I really didn't know where I fit in, and I really wasn't playing jazz . . .

**WILLIAMS:** At that point. Professionally at least not.

**McPARTLAND:** At that point. I was playing a kind of a mish-mash of stuff. When we were playing in these . . . when I was playing with this other pianist, Romer [spelling?] Clark, we would play little symphonic arrangements, cocktail arrangements. They were nice, but they weren't jazz. Then the things that I would do for a while, let's see . . . for Carroll Levis, I would play . . . wait a minute. I think I'm losing my own chronology here. I think I went with Carroll Levis after war was declared. In fact I did, because I remember being in theaters and there being an air raid. We were told to stay put, and everyone stayed in the theater. We had to continue to do our stuff on stage. So there are some more things that I have to fill in.

I would be doing some things called . . . they called it concert party, and again it's like an entertainment thing you do in the summertime. You have a show, a group of people, a singer, a juggler, tap dancers. Here again I was the piano player for the whole thing. I probably did more reading at that time than I've ever done since. I was never very good at it, but I'm certainly worse now.

I'm trying to think. That was a grey area altogether, because I really was trying to . . .

**WILLIAMS:** You were a freelancer in a sense.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, yeah, I was, but I didn't know what I was doing. I can't explain. I just didn't know enough to . . . and I didn't ever . . . I guess I didn't think of myself as being a jazz player. I don't know what I was. I was . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Well, maybe not performing professionally at that level. But that was . . . I just wanted to clear that part. I didn't feel . . . want you to have to try to recall every engagement you played during that . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Every engagement. No, Jesus, I can't.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . at that point in time. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** I'm picturing myself walking around London or going to an agent's office or doing things I wasn't prepared to do or not really know what I was doing.

**WILLIAMS:** I'm a backtrack a little bit and just ask you two quick questions. There was a point where . . . it must have been a transition . . . where you started to learn to read the music, and also, what records did you have, when you talk about you were listening to Teddy Wilson, and the sister's boyfriend had . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I remember we had . . .

**WILLIAMS:** . . . was playing some of his own recordings.

**McPARTLAND:** I remember we had things like Kay Davis singing with Duke, doing . . . what's that thing she had? Was it called "Azure," something like that?

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, "Azure."

**McPARTLAND:** I remember loving the vocal, singing way above the band. And then "Blue Goose" and . . . Those are two that stick in my mind. Then all the Benny Goodman things, like "Air Mail Special" and all the things that I got to play with the band later.

**WILLIAMS:** Fletcher Henderson arrangements, like . . . Edgar Sampson tunes, "Stomping at the Savoy"?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** "Don't Be That Way"? That kind of thing?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Yes, it seems like . . . that I've always known those tunes, always played them, never saw the music to them, they just . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Also, o.k., along those lines . . . So those were some of the records you had in your own personal collection, or someone had.

**McPARTLAND:** No, that he had.

**WILLIAMS:** You had access to . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I didn't really . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** I don't know when I started getting a few records myself. I . . . There's a grey area there in my brain. I just can't think what I did. I remember having a record with Fred Astaire. As I think of it now, Fred Astaire probably was quite a good singer. A lot of people . . . I'm trying to remember what it was. It was like . . . what's that thing? "Christopher Columbus."

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, that was by Fletcher Henderson's band.

**McPARTLAND:** I just fell into hearing these things. I guess I automatically like the good things. I remember hearing . . . I liked it, but I don't know why . . . hearing Sidney Bechet playing "Shake It But Don't Break It" or "Shake It and Break It." That was the name of the tune, "Shake It and Break It." Boy, that's going back a few years.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I don't know that one myself.

**McPARTLAND:** It was a blues-oriented thing. It had that rough barrelhouse sound. I liked those. I thought it was terrific. But I didn't know why. I just liked it.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k., that was part . . . just one other little quick theoretical question was: you're studying with Miss Jarvis. Was it she that taught you to read music at that point, and she obviously was a pianist as well as a violinist? Is that correct?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes. I never was a really good reader, but because of studying the violin, I got to read the treble clef, and then . . . with the . . . I don't know how I ever got to getting to the bass clef. I think that must have been her as well. And then there was this other person, Gwen Massey. I can't seem to recall how I actually learned to read a typical

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



solo piano piece, because I remember doing things by MacDowell, short pieces by different . . .

**WILLIAMS:** American composers? Twentieth-century composers?

**McPARTLAND:** I was thinking of English composers, like Jacques Iber, and of course Debussy. I didn't play too many of his things until later. I was . . . It was always a great painstaking thing for me to read music. I never was able to rattle something off. I just had to sit and learn everything very very slowly at that time. I also could . . . once I had it down I could memorize it, all these little pieces by Edward MacDowell. I remember those. That was what I was into when this woman was coming to the house, Gwen Massey, and that was the caliber of pieces that we were required to do at the Guild . . . at the music festivals.

Now I just thought of something interesting. I would really excel when they would . . . there would be one category in the music festival where you had to either improvise, or extemporise was the word we used then, on . . . they'd give you some certain notes that you had to improvise on. Or else you just had to do a total improvisation. Of course, in that area I really felt very secure. I could handle that, and did. I always won whatever category that was. Then there would be the other pieces. They were always some kind of short piece. It was never a Bach fugue or Beethoven. I didn't get to that until the Guildhall.

**WILLIAMS:** That's fine. I just wanted to have that documented. You were at the Guildhall three years or was it just two years?

**McPARTLAND:** Here again I should really get my dates together. I think it's about three. I could go and look.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, that's all right. You play in ensembles there? Were there like a chamber orchestra or anything like that? Or was there . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I never did that. I never did that. It was always . . . Maybe I would have if I had stayed longer. I never got to the point of playing a concerto. I was doing a lot of Bach and Beethoven and . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Solo piano literature mostly.

**McPARTLAND:** Yes, and scales and Hanon book and Chopin. Then I started to write at that . . . to write some pieces was part of it. You had to compose something. He would be very didactic about how to take a theme and improvise on it, or build up the theme. Showing you some things really quite valuable. How to put a piece together, how to refer

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



back to the theme and build it up to a fine climax. Everything I wrote they were just short pieces, but as I look at them now, they're really not bad. They're quite nice little things. I've probably lost them again. Periodically these things, they vanish, and then I find it, and I think, "There it is. I'll never lose this thing again." Then I promptly do. It disappears. I've got a whole envelope of these pieces.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh I know that feeling. I want to ask you something else about that experience there. Not so much about the Guildhall School experience, but I did want to ask you . . . I just want to once again ask, are you still in touch with any of your friends during that period of time, either at the Guildhall or some of the musicians that were a part of your life at that stage?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. Oh I . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Or even childhood friends.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. I had one friend at the convent . . . or two or three . . . though this one friend, I didn't see her for years, but then I . . . well maybe I . . . she lives in Toronto. I still see her once in a great while. Helen Miller.

My main friend when I was going to Stratford House was a guy I met at a party. His name was Ray Cobb. He was a fair piano player. I guess he was . . . he wasn't a bad player. We became friendly. He had two pianos at his house. We . . . it's funny . . . we would play tunes for one another. I remember just . . . we would . . . it's mostly what we would do, would be play music and "Do you know this one?" We'd learn other tunes. That was one person that I pretty much stayed in touch with for quite a few years.

Then I have another friend from Stratford House, but really not too many musical people. I just was not in any kind of a musical circle. Maybe I'll think of something the minute you leave, something that I did, but offhand I . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I just wanted to just think about that, because that may be something that may be of interest. I was going to ask you also, about . . . of course, even today, I guess it's considered less unusual, but how was it . . . with the exception of vocalists it was . . . how unusual was it to be a female soloist, instrumental soloist with a group? or . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Well I guess if you were a classical . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Did you see that very often with any groups, or were you on the ground floor of breaking, sort of setting that up at that point?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** It's funny. I never thought of such a thing. The only people that I thought about was Mira Hess. She was always the great example of the great woman classical player. Then I did hear about a couple of others. There was a woman named Rae DaCosta, and she was sort of a jazz player, I guess. I'm trying to think where I am in my chronology now.

**WILLIAMS:** I'm thinking earlier still. Just as you're starting your . . . into a professional career, moving from being at the Guildhall to now you're starting to look beyond that and at an early stage of your professional career.

**McPARTLAND:** It's so funny. I don't remember having that many . . . what I would call jazz friends. I became quite friendly with Adelaide Hall, and she had a pianist, an accompanist, who wrote . . . now I'm having a problem remembering his name. You would know it if I said it. He wrote all . . . Oh, this is terrible. He was somebody I admired a lot. He wrote all these . . . they were . . . I guess you could call them novelty piano. They were really good. "Dodging a Divorcee" was one. Oh, I can't think of his name [Reginald Foresythe]. I know you know it. But . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Not like Zeigfried . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Who?

**WILLIAMS:** . . . Confrey and those kind of things?

**McPARTLAND:** Who?

**WILLIAMS:** Not like Zeigfried . . . no, not, what is that guy there? . . . Confrey.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, Zez Confrey. No, no, not like that. That's really to the other extreme.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** No, they weren't that . . . They were more an elegant, drawing room kind of thing. Almost with an Alec Wilder, like a pre-Alec Wilder kind of feeling.

**WILLIAMS:** Sure, yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** Things that he had. But I didn't have . . .

**WILLIAMS:** A visual role model.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** . . . a circle of musical friends. There was nothing like that. Different friends I had in school they were . . . Oh, I . . . now it's coming back to me. I did have another friend that I saw recently after many years: Margaret Cooper. That's somebody else that . . . she would come to the house, and we would play piano for each other and do this, "Have you heard this?" or "Can you play this?" It seems that I did a lot of that.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. One of the things I wanted to ask you about, developing some of the points that we had spoken about during that period of time that you were starting your early professional career, is just, how competitive was the setting among musicians? Not only just among musicians in general, but also perhaps the dynamics of . . . regarding a female musician, instrumentalist in particular, competing with the male musicians. Was that a problem? Always feeling as though you were having to be tested? Or proving yourself or your musicality and those things.

**McPARTLAND:** I don't think I had any of this until I had come here and done a certain amount of playing with Jimmy. I think to begin with I really hadn't thought about doing anything. Some people think that I was guilty of some kind of skullduggery, because I married Jimmy. They all thought I wanted to come to the . . . it was the ploy to come to the States, because a lot of women did do that. But, there was . . . I didn't do it for that reason. At the time we were married I didn't even know. I didn't think further than that we would work together. And we did that for a while. But then I gradually gained some insight, and I started listening to bebop. Jimmy was always very supportive. He was . . . always wanted to show me off and tell people how great I played and all this stuff, whether I did or not. I certainly got better. But I'm just leading up to the point where I was on my own, did have . . . Jimmy really set it up for me, because my first gig with the trio was at the Embers.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, before we get . . . I'm'a go back, I'm'a digress a little bit, because I was more saying, before that period of time, when you were still in the U.K., was that . . . as you were starting this prior to your arrival in the United States, I think you kind of alluded and mentioned that that wasn't a factor that much in terms of securing work or feeling pressured to perform at a certain level of artistry because of the perception of you being there for the wrong reason.

**McPARTLAND:** I don't think I ever thought about all those things. I think it was a case of . . . that I was glad to be working a gig. I don't think I ever thought so coherently about women musicians. I didn't consider it one way or the other. I didn't think of . . . I only knew there were some women musicians that I'd listened to, that I had in the back of my mind that were great women, like Mary Lou and Hazel Scott and Cleo Brown and then a couple . . . this one I mentioned that I heard in England. But I never pursued, for instance

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



. . . listening . . . I remember when Fats Waller was at the Palladium. It never occurred to me to try to go and hear him. I would . . . first of all, I'm trying to think how old I was. I guess it was in my teens. But I just never thought about going there. It just seemed like all I ever did was listen on records. I think I must have been mentally retarded, because I never thought about all that stuff. It was more or less like I was really happy to be working, period. I didn't think of myself as any great shakes, really. I didn't think I was that terrific.

**WILLIAMS:** Or incompetent. Speaking of . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Lack of confidence, I guess.

**WILLIAMS:** Speaking of working during that time, I was just curious. How did work come about? Was it very different from what . . . by the standards of recent years? For instance, you were working pretty regularly with one group? Or were you freelancing and people would . . . I guess they didn't call on the telephone. How did they communicate or get in touch?

**McPARTLAND:** I was freelancing, and I guess I met a few . . . It's funny. I'm really trying to think how this did happen, how I met this one woman that I worked with a lot, Roma Clark. I'm trying to think how I did meet her. It seems to me that . . . I'm trying to think what I belonged to, like an organization, like the variety artists of the U.K. It wasn't that, but something like that. I knew a few people. But of course I knew Dorothy Carliss, who had worked with me with Billy. She was somebody who was very quite big in England as a band vocalist with Geraldo and these different bands, Ambrose. I think maybe through Dorothy I would meet somebody. I know when I met Roma Clark, I met a lot of people through her. I think she may have been the person who introduced me to some of the people I worked with in different concert parties, because she had done a lot of that.

That's what I was doing when war broke out. It was summertime, and I was working in a town called Felixstowe. Anyway, that's not really pertinent, I guess. But I think that's how I may have got the different gigs I did, was through Roma Clark. I hadn't even done much about writing any pieces. That took a long time with me, to write tunes. I didn't really do that until I was at the Hickory House. I wrote some classical pieces, but I didn't attempt to write any jazz things. The more I talk, the more I think I'm sort of retarded, a late starter. Very strange.

**WILLIAMS:** Well, let me ask you this. Do you remember one of the first jazz concerts or club dates that you heard in person while still in the U.K.? Was it local, for instance, was it a local? . . . when I say local, I mean someone that was from Europe or from the Commonwealth or something.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**McPARTLAND:** No. No. I don't remember. I remember listening to things like the Hot Five. I'm trying to think. I think the thing I remembered, or telling you that I heard . . . Oh, I just thought of something now. Going to Hatchett's to hear George Shearing in a group. I didn't . . . did I mention that to you?

**WILLIAMS:** No, you didn't.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh God, it must have been this other interview that I did. I was . . . I think my mother had fixed me up with this guy. I was also very backward in going out with guys. My sister was not at all. But anyway, it was somebody my mother knew who took me to this . . . it was a nice evening. We went to this club called Hatchett's, which was a very sophisticated nightclub. We went there. I was always trying to act grownup, and I probably failed miserably. But the thing I remember most was hearing this wonderful music. It was a quintet, I think. It was a guy named Arthur Brown playing a thing called Novachord, a little electric piano. George was playing piano. Stephane Grappelli. And then I don't know who the rhythm players were. But that's the first time I'd . . . in fact that's why I was talking about it today. I guess because I was talking about George. I didn't talk to him or anything, but I met him. I was aware that I was hearing some nice music.

Then, maybe in the same period, I went to the Savoy Hotel with some group of people there. There was a guy playing there with a band. Carroll Gibbons. Did you ever hear that name? He wrote . . . he was an American who became very popular in England, and he had a . . . I'm trying to think what you'd . . . maybe a Peter Duchin kind of a band, or maybe a little hipper than that. He played at the Savoy Hotel. [laughs] People thought he was fabulous. Sorry, Peter.

Anyway, I guess somewhere in this period I was consumed with a desire to play or improvise. There must be something stirring in my brain, because I remember that I got up and went to the bandstand and spoke to Carroll Gibbons and asked him if I could sit in. When I think now of doing these things, I think, was really that me doing that? I remember he looked terribly surprised, but he didn't say "Get out of here" or anything. He . . . "Yeah, well, why yes. What would you like to play?" So I named some standard tune, and I played it to polite applause, and I think they were mystified. I don't think I did anything terribly great.

But when I think of that . . . then I can just think of some other incident where I did this, where I was going . . . I used to go skating with the same teacher who had helped me when I was in school. By this time we were just friends. I had given up having a crush on her. I decided that wasn't the way I wanted to go, I guess. She and I were at the ice rink. Here again I had this sudden desire that I wanted to play, and I got up and asked if I could sit in with the band at the ice rink, who were playing average pop tunes. I can't think of any off hand. Something that would go with . . . a lot of waltzes. I think here

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



again they looked dumbstruck. It was another aspect of “very nice, dear.” Four guys, “Yeah, that was nice. Yeah. (Who is this broad?)” These little vignettes are just coming to my mind out of nowhere.

**WILLIAMS:** Were these clubs located in London at this point?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. The Savoy is *the the the* . . . oh it used to be then, *the* place. We were all dressed up. The guys were in tuxes, and I was wearing some kind of a long dress. It’s not too much that goes with music in this section of my life, but it just reminded me of [laughs] . . . When I think of it now, my mother was . . . she didn’t mean to be, but she was cruel. I bought this . . . I went out and bought this dress, and everything I bought had to be approved of by them. My shoes couldn’t be high heels. This would probably give a clue to my character. Anyway I bought this dress, and it was rather nice. I remember green and white, a silk dress, with straps, shoulder straps. It was cut low in front, and mother, “You can’t go out in that. You can’t possibly go out in that.” She insisted on cutting a piece off the dress somewhere else where it wouldn’t show, and sticking it in here like a little square. It just took away from the dress completely, and I was too intimidated, shall we say, or scared just to say “well screw that” and rip it out or take it out after I’d left the house. I just went along with it.

**WILLIAMS:** Well, that was part of the times then.

**McPARTLAND:** God, what a wimp. But I was really . . . and I remember my father taking me . . . I’d picked out some shoes that I liked. This is really funny. My father prowled around the shoe shop. “Well, let’s go in. That looks too high to me,” he says. So we go in, and they bring out the shoes. My father whips out a footrule and measures the heel. Do you believe that? [laughs]

**WILLIAMS:** No, I can’t.

**McPARTLAND:** It’s absolutely true. Of course I was mortified again. I think I had to compromise with some other kind of shoe.

**WILLIAMS:** You probably haven’t thought of that incident in a while, I am sure.

**McPARTLAND:** No, no, so you’re bringing out . . . I should be paying . . . this should be the 50-minute hour that I’m getting here.

**WILLIAMS:** 15 minutes of fame.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, no, the psychiatrist.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Oh, right. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** The 50-minute hour, that's what they call the time you spend . . . it's not quite an hour. It's 50 minutes.

**WILLIAMS:** I know, you're there for an hour and you spend only 15 minutes of quality time.

**McPARTLAND:** 50. Five-oh. Or close to an hour, sort of an hour, but anyway.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. You mentioned that these clubs were in London. At this point had you moved to London yourself?

**McPARTLAND:** No, no.

**WILLIAMS:** You were still commuting from Bromley.

**McPARTLAND:** I was . . . actually, I was still . . . wait a minute, when I went to the Savoy . . . oh, boy. I just can't quite place that incident. I have a feeling it was before I went out with Billy Mayall. I have a feeling that this was before, that I did that. I'll have to try to think that through. The skating rink, I'm sure we used to do that a lot, but I sure that it was . . . it was before . . . no maybe it was after Billy Mayall, and I was still floundering around trying to find different jobs. I don't know, but maybe I mistakenly thought Carroll Gibbons would put me on as a sub or something. I don't know what I thought. I had no . . . I didn't have any sane thoughts about the music business as such. Maybe that's why I developed into being so helpful when these young girls come up to me and some of them seem to be as ignorant as I was then. And I always think, this poor thing. I'll have to try to show her what to do.

**WILLIAMS:** Well thank goodness. There are those who are uniquely qualified and have the patience to go along with it, like yourself.

**McPARTLAND:** I am now, when I think of it. But I think I just went through a period of not knowing how to do anything, and just by . . . I was almost like a leaf in the wind. I never had a decision, "This is what I'm going to do. This is what I plan to do." Of course my . . . not so much my parents as my aunts and uncles, "Well Margaret, when are you going to get married?" And to think I wasn't even maybe 21. They were barking away. That was all they could see, that that's what I was supposed to be. I found that embarrassing too.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



I just can't put a time . . . Maybe between tonight and tomorrow I'll be able to come up with some of these things.

**WILLIAMS:** Sure, that's fine. That gives it a pretty good focus in a general sense, so it should be a problem there. So, what age were you when you finally decided to move from home? Was that a big . . . obviously you made your decision.

**McPARTLAND:** I'm trying to think. I was in and out. Then I guess one of the girls . . . actually it was an act. It was this very beautiful young girl. Her name was Nina and her . . . I forget the name of her partner. Anyway, they were on the bill. They were an act that we worked with when I was with Carroll Levis. I got friendly with her. This was like, "Well, let's get our own place." So then I did. That's when I actually moved. But it just . . . it wasn't . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Your parents were very accepting in that decision at that point?

**McPARTLAND:** They went along. They didn't really ask a lot of questions. Maybe they thought they better not. Then I had . . . then of course I did the wrong thing family-wise, because I had a boyfriend who was actually a member of Carroll Levis's show. He was Jewish, so that didn't go down well with them at all. You could probably get a feeling they're a kind of snobbish family.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah. What was his name?

**McPARTLAND:** His name was David Delmonte.

**WILLIAMS:** Did you ever see him in later years at all?

**McPARTLAND:** It went on for quite a while. In fact it was hanging on . . . He was in . . . went into the Army. He went to Africa, whichever army went to Africa. Meanwhile, while he was there—of course you don't want to hear all this on your tape—but there were other comings and goings of different people. I guess the last time I did see him was that . . . he was in Belgium with the army, and I was in Belgium with Jimmy, so that's the subject for another book.

**WILLIAMS:** Kitty Kelly will be . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, she'll be right along I'm sure.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . in touch very soon. [laughs]

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** I can only point out that musically—music does enter into this thing in some way—that I think all these different things in your life do go into your head, like into a computer. They can come out with musical ideas, or the way you would perform something is in thinking about some aspect of your life.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, I think so. I think you're right. We are able to call upon these different emotions or different feelings at various times . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I've always been . . . or rather as I got older, I got to be a more romantic kind of person and always affected by tunes and lyrics. I can always bring a life situation to bear on some musical situation.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, music goes . . . [inaudible]

**McPARTLAND:** In fact when you take that tape home. It's funny, there's a couple of tunes on there I wrote at the Hickory House. They're really not bad. At the time I was scared to play this tune. In fact this will give you a laugh, because I didn't even want to say that I'd written the tune, because I was sure I would get criticized by Bill Crow, who was very . . . He always liked to come forward with a remark. He'd probably say, "I don't care about playing that" or something. So I didn't let on that I'd written this tune. I said Walter Bishop had written it. [laughs]

**WILLIAMS:** Speaking of Walter Bishop . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Not even Walter Bishop, Jr., but his father.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, Walter, Sr.

**McPARTLAND:** Walter Bishop, Sr. I think I'd met him in the Hickory House. In fact I think I did tell this to Walter Bishop, Jr. I think he probably got a laugh out of it.

**WILLIAMS:** He probably would. You'll have to remind him when he comes to the concert. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, I must remind him. But then somebody said they liked the tune, so then I was able to accept it as my own work after that. In fact, I was a little disappointed. Jack Robbins, the music publisher, long before you were born, instigated me writing this tune, and then he took the tune and gave it to Irving Caesar, who wrote the lyric to "Tea for Two," and he also wrote the lyric for this tune. It's not bad. It . . .

**WILLIAMS:** It's not your favorite lyric, though.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Years have passed, and at the time I thought it wasn't all that great, but now when I hear the average lyric that somebody writes, that they're so puerile, and they don't even . . . nothing rhymes. People don't bother to rhyme, like "house" with "mouse." They put "house" and some other word which maybe sounded the same. People don't take any trouble any more.

**WILLIAMS:** That's a breakdown in the ability of mastering the language, which is likewise another conversation to go through as well. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** Yes, right, but it seems to have to do with nobody having the . . . taking trouble, whatever that instinct is, to work at it 'til you get it right. That's one of the things I was glad of getting a good schooling, because they just . . . you just worked at it until you got it right. There was no margin for error. You couldn't say, "I can't do that." It was like, "Well, you've got to do it." And so we did.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** Which is a good thing. Years later, I realized it was a good thing.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yes. Well, you usually find out that . . . under the heading of discipline, I guess you could call that. I'd like to continue in that transition period of becoming . . . moving from just being a musician to your early professional career and some of the dues and blues, as I call it, what we've done as well. I wanted to ask you about . . . just to digress back on . . . you played violin, but did you ever study or aspire to play any other instruments, or sing? Was that ever a part of your . . .

**McPARTLAND:** [laughs] It's funny. Jimmy always used to tell me, "When you sing, you sound like a little English schoolgirl." It's funny. The only singing I ever did . . . I did have a singing teacher, actually. I don't know why, because I was just . . . I thought this was something else my parents wanted me to do. This was when I was at the convent. I keep coming up with all these names. You'll love this name. This woman was . . . she was like a vocal coach. I loved singing in the choir. We had a choir at school. I, having perfect pitch, I could sing an alto part or be right in the middle and hit the note. I was . . . I did feel very confident about that. It's something I enjoyed, because I knew I could do it. I guess she was pretty good. Her name was Ada Bacon Hague. Mrs. Ada Bacon Hague. I've got more of these names if you're around here long enough.

**WILLIAMS:** I can imagine.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Anyway, somehow . . . again probably my mother decided I should take vocal lessons with her. So I did. I guess the only thing was, I could sing in tune. I was like a little light soprano. I did actually get up and sing at a couple of local music festivals. I was always scared stiff. I don't know why I . . . Well, it was something . . . it went along with everything else, where you have to do it. So do it. So I did it. But I always had this alibi. I always managed to catch cold or made like I had a cold and would be clutching a handkerchief as my excuse for . . . if I sang badly, that would be the reason.

**WILLIAMS:** It was a good way of circumventing around it.

**McPARTLAND:** One of my mini-alibis. We had all these things I didn't like to do in school. Gymnastics. I'm terribly bad at that. He's grinning. I would always have the same excuse, which . . . that I would have my period. That would be my excuse for writing up on the board that I wasn't going to make gym class. It seemed that I would probably have it every two weeks [laughs] according to this. I would get out of it as often as I could. I was really a wimpy person. Then we played lacrosse, and I could never be a good player, because I was so scared that one of the more aggressive players would hit me on the head with a . . . you know, have you seen?

**WILLIAMS:** The racquet. Oh, yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** That lacrosse racquet is a terribly deadly instrument, when I think of it now.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** That was something else. You have to play lacrosse. You have to do it. This is enough . . . I guess it all amounts . . . it all contributes to my musical . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Personality.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . personality.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, it comes through. I wanted to ask you . . . you mentioned about other instruments and that the violin was the only other instrument. But I wanted to just ask you, what captivates you about the piano? What is it about the piano that really captivates you? It draws you to it. Obviously even at an early age you kept . . . it was an attraction there, and obviously it still manifests itself as we speak. Is it any way you can put that into words? Is it the sound, the sonority of that instrument? Is it just the way it looks?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**McPARTLAND:** I can't honestly . . . It was just something that seemed so . . . Well, first of all, the melody sticks in my head to this day. I remember what she played. The one . . . she played several, but the one that she played a lot was this one Chopin waltz. I don't remember thinking, "Well, I'd love to do this" or anything. I just did it. It was my life. Really it was more important than anything else, although of course I loved all the little things, other things that we did, like gardening and actually, things that other kids might think was boring. I always enjoyed the things . . . working with my father, like cutting hedges and that sort of thing. People'd think I'm crazy, liking those things. Or having a pair of shears and clipping the edges on the grass. I loved all that stuff. Planting stuff. I guess I could have gone in that business.

But I don't know what to say about the piano, except it just was . . . But now when I think of it, I wasn't . . . I didn't have this terrible urge to be a technician or something like that. Just enough to keep playing. What I did a lot was keep playing tunes, or hearing something and immediately being able to play it. I don't think I'm as good at that now as I was then. I think maybe when you're young it just goes in easier, because when I think of learning all these tunes off the BBC, and haven't seen most of them, the music, but you just know what sounds right and what's right to play.

**WILLIAMS:** That's part of your musical intuition there on that, I'm sure. That's the same thing I feel. I know what you mean with the instrument. It's all aspects. The ability to sound like an orchestra. The size of the instrument too is something that . . . I think the different shades you have. I grew up around an upright piano, but of course seeing a concert grand, baby grand, and so and so forth, and just hearing . . . no matter, seeing one instrument on stage and hearing ten different people play that instrument, having a . . . yet a personal or unique sound coming out of it is also the other thing that I found with me. I'm sure that captivated you. The reason for listening to, say, Teddy Wilson and Fats Waller and all the pianists that have come before you in that sense.

I want to move on and ask you . . . get you to tell us a little bit more about ENSA, which for most Americans probably wouldn't be aware of. That was called Entertainment National Service Association, or . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Yes.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . Every Night Something Awful

**McPARTLAND:** [laughs] Where did you get that from?

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs] I thought you'd be surprised I knew that there.

**McPARTLAND:** It must have been somebody that was on it that . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** No. You do remember it was called that.

**McPARTLAND:** No, I actually don't. I don't remember actually ever hearing it.

**WILLIAMS:** You met John King down in Jacksonville.

**McPARTLAND:** Did I? Oh, you mean when we were just there?

**WILLIAMS:** Yes.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh I do remember. Yes, yes, I do remember. I do remember.

**WILLIAMS:** So he gave . . . I have to credit him. He gave me that little bit of information.

**McPARTLAND:** I remember that now, sure.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** My God, it happened so recently. I don't even know things from 30 years ago.

**WILLIAMS:** I have to credit him with . . .

**McPARTLAND:** It could be like that, because when I think of it, probably . . .

**WILLIAMS:** 1940.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . a lot of the people in it were probably . . . what shall I say? . . . not first, not all first rate players. A lot of people that didn't get much work anywhere else. I'm sure this happened a lot. In my own case, it was . . . we were . . . if I didn't do that, then I would be forced to be a member of the woman's army. I would have to be somebody that manned a gun or a balloon . . . they had these things called a balloon-barrage, where they put up scads of these great big balloons, and they had a bunch of very seemingly tough girls working those things. I thought, "My God." It's either that or go into ENSA, so I did. I went to ENSA and worked. That's how I got from there to U.S.O. It was the same kind of thing, except U.S.O. was better.

**WILLIAMS:** Marian, I'd like to get you to elaborate further on your involvement with ENSA and how that different or eventually led to your association with U.S.O., which I

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



guess were sort of parallel organizations, U.S.O. being here in the States and of course ENSA was primarily involved with the U.K. and Europe in general.

**McPARTLAND:** When I finally went with U.S.O. I realized everything was done on a much higher level than ENSA was. ENSA was really more . . . I guess it's like I really found out about the American way. Everything is bigger and better. I enjoyed being with ENSA, but some of the conditions . . . It was the same kind of thing, like being in a variety . . . a musical situation where you'd have a typical show. I would be the piano player. I would maybe play a couple of selections. Then there'd be a singer, juggler, tap dancer, comedy act, two comedians, an m.c., that kind of thing. They would all basically be like that. We would play these different camps, of course being very well received everywhere and going from place to place in a bus. Really what I remember most about it was that it was kind of spartan. It was . . . bad pianos, tough conditions, and long rides in the bus, things that . . . I had already gone through this kind of situation with Carroll Levis, because of the wartime. Trains were late, were cancelled, and a trip that should take two hours took ten hours. Oh, unbelievable. This was true of ENSA too. The bus would break down.

It's funny. I must have washed a lot of that out of my mind, because I had two girlfriends from the days of Carroll Levis. They were two sisters who had a singing act. Their mother and father . . . this is funny . . . their mother and father were in the show, and they had a comedy act. They were a regular act on the music hall bill, and the two girls were in the Discoveries show, but they were really awfully good. Some of the people who were billed as discoveries were really pros and could . . . were very good. These two girls did go with U.S.O. The one who was my better friend . . . Zoni [spelling?], her name was, Zoni Dale . . . "You ought to go with U.S.O. You'll love it. They pay more, and it's better. You'll meet some wonderful guys." Um-hum. It all sounded very good. So I did that. I must have got the address or the phone number or something from Zoni. They had an office, U.S.O. had an office in London. This much I do remember, calling up and making an appointment with this woman whose name I just happen to forget. Anyway, it was all set, because apparently a lot of the U.S.O. shows would come to London minus a piano player, and they would hope that they would get the musicians when they arrived in London. This was how they did things.

I started. It was the same kind of thing, except really on a higher level. I don't know. It seemed that much more exciting. Here I was, really . . . we all thought than anything American and meeting Americans, anything American was always better than anything we had. I remember this as a kid, going through movie magazines and reading about the glamorous life of movie stars from Hollywood. So, here I am, going all over England, and it was pretty much the same kind of thing. We're still going in a bus, but everything just seemed more comfortable. We stayed in some great English hotels. It was the same kind of thing. There was a girl singer. There was a dancer. There was . . . the first show I remember . . . I don't think you would ever have heard of these people. I'm

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



sure that . . . oh, you wouldn't know the names, but I'll mention them anyway. Cliff Hall and Sid Marion. Sid Marion, that was his last name. Did you ever hear of a show from years ago, *Baron Munchhausen*? You might have heard of it. Anyway, these people were known in the States years ago. Probably none of the other people were, although they were all good performers.

I guess this went on for about . . . this went on until the invasion which was . . . we're now in the fall of '94 [*sic*: '44] and everybody's talking about how the invasion is going to happen. I remember the night that it did, and you hear thousands of planes going overhead, like it never stopped. It went on for hours. I think I must have stayed up half the night listening to this droning on. They're all going over to smash the Germans. I only bring this up, because about a month after that they started sending people over to France. The group that I was with at that time went with the first bunch of people to . . . actually we landed at the beach, just like MacArthur did, except we didn't . . . you know, wading ashore, coming out of a boat, just the same kind of thing, except we didn't have guns. We had helmets and paratroop boots and mess kits and . . . It was exciting. It's awful when you think about fighting a war and people getting killed. Here we're going and having a good time. Playing for the troops that absolutely . . . it's not that we were so good. It's just that they would be so ridiculously pleased to see anything or anybody. Especially have some girls come, wearing skimpy outfits.

I can't find them now, but I've got pictures of myself sitting at the piano with an absolute sea of guys in helmets sitting around. There must have been 5,000 of them out on the grass in this particular place. I don't know where. Maybe I should stop, because I'm getting to the part where I met Jimmy. Do you want to keep going?

**WILLIAMS:** Uh-hum. We're very close to that point anyway. I was just gonna ask . . . just one other question, just before you get to that. And this could be applied . . . I think I kind of alluded to it earlier. About any role models, male, female, or otherwise . . . not necessarily just musical. Were there people that you felt that were very . . . that you admired, or someone that kind of came forth in addition to some of obviously the piano teachers you've mentioned?

**McPARTLAND:** Are we going back to . . . ?

**WILLIAMS:** We don't have to go back too far. I just wanted to take that time to have it on the record. Were there . . . just so that their names could come forth, someone's names like that.

**McPARTLAND:** I think that one of my . . . probably one of the people that was very helpful to me in every way, was this same person I mentioned, the elocution teacher at Stratford House School. Her name was Doris Mackey. It started out that . . . I don't know if it happens over here, but it seemed English schoolgirls would always have a crush on

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



some teacher. It would often be a female. That was the case with her. I had this sort of stupid crush on her and liked everything she said and did. It meant a great deal to me. Then it just developed. I got older and became a normal person. She was a lot older than me, but she was somebody . . . I got to know her and her family and her husband and herself. She had two boys. In fact one of them lives over here and I see him periodically. He lives in Lafayette, California. Now he's got kids of his own. But anyway, she was somebody that I . . . was a very sensible person that you could go and ask anything. I never got into any trouble where, like "I have to have an abortion. What should I do?" We never got to [laughs] anything like that. But she was so . . . In fact I did something which seemed to me outrageous at the time, though it probably wasn't. I asked her to lend me some money. I didn't have enough money to buy something, a really good-looking outfit or something I'd seen at Harrod's, which was like the equivalent to Bergdoff-Goodman or somewhere. To me that was such a terrible thing to do, to borrow money from somebody. She was quite carefree about it. I guess she knew that I was the kind of person that would pay it back.

This is not so much me as my sister. Later on she really helped my sister, who . . . it wasn't exactly that she had to have an abortion, but . . . if I'm going to get into family history here. My sister started going with a guy that she eventually married, and at the time she was not married. He was living at the house, and my mother was espousing and saying "I won't have this." My sister, she was much different from me. I wouldn't have dared to do all the . . . and my sister said, "Well, if you don't like it I'll leave," or she'd threaten my mother, and so she stayed. Meanwhile she got pregnant. I was having my own problems in Chicago. Jimmy as you know at one point had a bad drinking problem. That's a subject for another book. Joyce came over to Chicago, and her reason for coming she said, was to help me deal with my situation, but I later found out the real reason for her coming was to get away so that my father wouldn't see her being pregnant. [laughs] Anyway, the upshot of this story was that this same elocution teacher who was such a friend of mine took on . . . befriended Joyce. It's a long story, but she helped Joyce have the baby. My father never did find out that she wasn't married at the time. The baby is now 44 years old. It's my niece Sheila.

We're writing another book, aren't we? Maybe we should . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Yes, the other side.

**McPARTLAND:** But this all, all of this . . .

**WILLIAMS:** This all ties in. It really does.

**McPARTLAND:** It all ties in, doesn't it?

**WILLIAMS:** It's all part of a . . . It's a thread, the common thread to the entire family.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** I guess it is, because you can see that my sister was a different . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Personality.

**McPARTLAND:** She was a different kind of a person than me. Incidentally, I suppose this contributes to my character too. My mother always led me to believe that Joyce was more talented in every way than me, that Joyce was prettier, and Joyce was . . .

**WILLIAMS:** This and that.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . this and that. It took me many a year to think, well maybe I'm not so bad after all.

**WILLIAMS:** Sometimes it's unfortunate that even if a parent does favor one child to the other, it shouldn't be that . . . at least obvious to the two parties involved, because both pick up on it, positive or negative, however it might be.

**McPARTLAND:** It's so funny, because now my sister and I have had conversations, which by the way I'm hail and hearty and she's in bed, can't move without crutches [laughs], just in terrible shape, but we talk about . . . something I never knew. She said, "I thought you had everything. You were able to play, and you were able to draw and paint. It seemed like I didn't do anything as well as you did it." This was a revelation to me. I never had any idea of this.

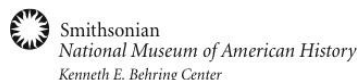
**WILLIAMS:** So she suffered in a different way maybe from a certain amount of low self esteem. You just mentioned something that we alluded back to, as we looked around your beautiful home, that you have some of your drawings and paintings up here on the wall. We didn't . . . this is a hidden talent that most of your fans are not aware of. Was that something that was started early, very early in life, and you put it aside for your music? Or did you periodically come back to it?

**McPARTLAND:** It was just a part of being at school. Actually, I never . . . These were just . . . some of them were done, I hate to say how many years ago, but I would say at least 50 years ago or more. I guess I could do even better than that.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** I was . . . the first . . . because now you know all the dates. In the first place, when I started . . . one of the things I remember was at the convent, because they had a very good, because they had a good art teacher, who was a nun. Of course they

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





mostly were nuns, although there were some regular teachers who were not nuns. Sister Jeanne, j-e-a-double n-e. She was the art teacher. It just consisted of her setting up something, an apple and a jug of water, the typical thing. "Draw this" or "Paint this." And we did.

I think most of these were taken from the next school, from Stratford House. Then we had another very good teacher, Miss Hollins. It was just a case of her setting up something and talking about perspective and all kinds of things they talk about. As you can see, I enjoyed nature things. I don't know if I picked them myself or if they were put there for me, but all these flowers were things that . . . everything I did was done in art class, except the one thing over there, sweet peas, which was the school crest or something. Sweet peas were the flower of the school, and so I was asked to design the . . . I don't know what it's called, a motto or a something . . . for the school. It's a little faded now, but . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Like a logo type of thing.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, a logo, exactly. I don't think we had that word then, but the equivalent of a logo.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, you know, we're a product of the '90s now. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** But I'm amazed that they lasted this long, because they've moved, been moved, like . . . Where did they go? God, they must have gone from England, then I collected them and brought them to Chicago, then I collected them and brought them to New York. They've been in envelopes vegetating with a lot of my other stuff all these years. This guy came to frame something else for me, a guy that used to work with me. He's a drummer turned antique dealer. He says, "You ought to have those framed." Boy, la la la. So anyway, he talked me into it, and when I saw them I thought they didn't look too bad. So that's the story. I've done nothing since.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, well, you're so prolific you just didn't have to do anything. But maybe you might want to describe to the listener or listeners . . . just give a very brief description of what they would see if they were sitting here. Could you describe those? You gave a little bit of a description, saying they're mostly involved around nature. How would you . . . I guess in a succinct sort of fashion . . .

**McPARTLAND:** One is a rose. Then there's another one. It's just a single rose. There's another one of willow . . . I don't know what they . . . pussy willow or catkins, whatever they call them. And then the one behind me is a bowl of primroses. Then there's other various flowers right opposite us, nasturtiums and then I've got a couple of pansies and one is a . . . they're all very bucolic, ordinary little flower paintings is what they are,

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





really, which shows my preference. Oh, I guess I have done a couple since. You know Abby Hoffer?

**WILLIAMS:** Sure. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** It just seems so funny. His wife Terry called me about something. It was for some kind of a benefit. Could I do something? Did I have a drawing or something to contribute, to sell at this, whatever it was, raffle or something. So, just out of a clear sky I dug out the paint box and painted a vase of flowers. That's all I've ever done since.

**WILLIAMS:** What medium would you describe this as? Are these . . .

**McPARTLAND:** They're just watercolors.

**WILLIAMS:** Watercolors, all right. Is there anything about the size that would be noteworthy?

**McPARTLAND:** They're all like, maybe not 8 by 10, 11 by 15. Some of them almost are a little bigger than 8 by 10, and some of them are quite small, but they're all small things. There's 1-2-3-4-5 . . . six on one wall of the room here. There's three on another wall depending on . . . Anyway, that's enough about my . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, o.k.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . my life as an artist.

**WILLIAMS:** What I would like to discuss, is now we're gonna move on to Mr. Jimmy McPartland. I want you to . . . this question actually will have several parts. I'll give it to you, and we'll come back to it in different portions of which maybe you'd like to discuss. I'd like for you to tell us about Jimmy, how you met, his immediate and lingering effect on your life and career, even about your divorce if you choose to talk about that, your friendship and continuing friendship, and even remarriage. Let's start, let's go back to the beginning.

**McPARTLAND:** You're going to have to save some of this for tomorrow, aren't you?

**WILLIAMS:** No. I don't know. This may be the last one, but we'll get to it.

**McPARTLAND:** Jesus.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** O.k. Let's start with how you met. You're obviously still part of ENSA, maybe U.S.O. at that point.

**McPARTLAND:** U.S.O. I was well established in U.S.O. by that time, and we . . . There were different groups that would come and go. I guess I should backtrack a little bit. Some of the shows that we worked with in U.S.O. in England, they would bring over a famous guest star. One show that we had had James Cagney. Of course I was very thrilled and dying to get to meet him and have my photograph taken with him, which I did do. Then they had another guest for another show, Edward G. Robinson. Then one time we had Dinah Shore. They would be very loosely attached to the show. They would come out as part of the show and usually have their own accompanists or people with them, and they would do their thing and disappear, but it added a little extra something to the show. I thought of that because we also did that later on.

**WILLIAMS:** Bob Hope, people like that was involved?

**McPARTLAND:** Never had, never had . . . Of course Bob Hope had his own thing going. He was always . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Keep Hope alive.

**McPARTLAND:** God, I think he might have given up the ghost at this point. But anyway, when we arrived in Normandy Beach . . . I really hate myself for not having kept track or kept a diary . . . we would go through all these towns that were absolutely razed to the ground. They were just nothing but bricks and mortar. It was really terrible. Then we'd go along these dusty roads, and on each side was, maybe broken-down howsers on one side of the hedge and on the other side sometimes we could smell a bad smell. It would probably be dead animals. I don't know. It was really awful going through these different towns. They would . . . people had all gone.

At that time the show . . . the leader of the show was a comedian from . . . I think . . . I don't know if he's still around. Don Rice was his name. I don't remember too many of the other people in the show. Somewhere along the line we picked up another group of people, a guy from Chicago, a comedian named Willie Shaw. Then we switched from . . . I don't know what happened to Don Rice, but we were . . . It was Willie Shaw and his wife, Julie, who was a singer. Willie Shaw was a very funny comedian. And [laughs] a girl who swallowed razor blades. She did a magic act, and she swallowed razor blades. Her name was Dolly Reckless. Well named. There was me, of course. I can't for the moment think of the other people in the show.

I'm setting the stage for the group, how we met Jimmy, because Willie Shaw had known Jimmy from Chicago. He was evidently quite a well-connected comedian who carried a lot of weight. He was a guy that could wangle anything. He would get all kinds

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



of extra rations and supplies and things that nobody was supposed to have, and he would always get them for us. He found out that Jimmy was in the area. I don't know how this happened. He went to the commanding officer who was in charge of our U.S.O. group, and said, "This man shouldn't be a G.I. He shouldn't be a foot soldier." I think Jimmy was with a group of guys that were manning a gun. He was a G.I. "He shouldn't be doing this. He should be playing his horn. He's a great horn player." Because of this they pulled Jimmy out from his unit and put him with Special Services.

I didn't know any of this until afterwards. All I heard was a whisper going through the crowd, "Jimmy McPartland's coming. Jimmy McPartland's coming." They had a big band stationed in the area, all soldiers of course. They gave a welcoming party for Jimmy. I wanted to be there. I wanted to be seen and let everybody know I could play piano. By this time I was getting to think maybe I could play a little bit. They had the party in this big tent. I know I've said this before. I guess I can repeat it, because to me it's funny. Jimmy said he could see . . . across the tent he could see me edging up to the piano, and he's saying to himself, "Oh God, there's a woman piano player. I know she wants to sit in, and I know she'll be terrible." "And you were," he says. He said to me. [laughter] Which was unkind, because he didn't think my time was very good, which was probably true. I probably was being nervous and rushing. But that was how we got together, because the commanding officer, the powers that be, whoever, decided that Jimmy should be with this group of us going out to entertain the troupes. So we would go out every morning at the crack of dawn, like really about seven o'clock or something, to go to some area where we would set up a stage and play. It would be Jimmy and myself and all the rest of the U.S.O. people, plus a G.I. drummer and a bass player. We would play, and we would accompany the acts. That's what we did for quite a while.

We were in this Belgium town called Eupen. E-u-p-e-n. It was a rest area for the troops. Like an officer's rest area. We were billeted in this hotel. We all had nice rooms and something. I guess it was damaging to a lot of people. You'd get an officer's liquor ration. My God, when you think about it. We'd get like two bottles of scotch and a bottle of gin and some armagnac or something . . . about six bottles. It was an officer's liquor ration. When you think of the opportunities to be alcoholics or be . . . [laughs] When I think of it now, I think they were a little too generous. I always told Jimmy that he liked me because of my liquor ration, which wasn't exactly true, but he certainly didn't mind being offered some when he would come up to the room, which was quite frequent.

What happened was he . . . They put him in charge of the little band that would play in the hotel for the . . . being a rest area, all these people would be coming on vacation, all the different officers from different areas would come to have a good time, meet girls, and generally misbehave. That was the atmosphere into which Jimmy and I . . . It just seemed inevitable, because he was a dashing, good-looking guy, and he could . . . I started learning all kinds of tunes, just standard tunes that he would play, that I'd never played, like "Embraceable You." Things that you think everybody should know, but I didn't know until that time.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



I'm probably going into too much detail about this thing. There we were. We just fell in love, you might say, and decided to get married. I didn't even think about it being a bad thing to do, that Jimmy was already drinking too much, like everybody was. It almost seemed like . . . well, I suppose, being a rest area, but when you think about it, it was just such a terrible situation, people getting killed every five minutes, and there we were having a good time.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. At one point, if there is any . . . several, probably several stages, did you see the transition of where you really felt with confidence, saw yourself as a jazz artist, as opposed to now, just being a pianist performing in a variety of settings.

**McPARTLAND:** At that point that we were talking about, when I met Jimmy and started going out to play for the troops, I think I was still thinking of myself as a pianist . . . I must say that I knew all the tunes. I had no problem with repertoire. I could play all the tunes and anything that was being played over there, like particular tunes were being played for the G.I.s. Repertoire, I've never ever had a problem with that. But meeting Jimmy, that was probably the first time . . . I think that might be the first time that I'd actually played with a horn player, because every situation with U.S.O. had been either with maybe at most a guitar player. If I was . . . I know in England we had a . . . it was kind of a funny combination, piano and then a rhythm guitar. I didn't . . . never did know how to deal with that.

But I think doing these dates with Jimmy . . . As I say, I knew all the repertoire, and I felt pretty good about playing. I remember at one point Jimmy said something to me about comping . . . I'd never heard the word in those days. "comping" [accompanying on a chordal instrument]. He says, "Play organ. Play organ." I thought, "What's he mean?" And I realized then, after a while, that I was jumping around and playing too much behind him. That's something I learned then and can always tell kids now. You don't want to get in the way of the soloist, and I think I probably was doing that in my attempt to do what was required. It was just the wrong thing to be doing. So I really felt much better about myself, but I don't think I . . . I don't think I really . . .

I go a long way ahead of what we're talking about now before I really felt confident as a player myself. I think I was still . . . I was feeling good about certain things about . . . It was exciting, doing what we were doing. I had no problem knowing any tune in any key and playing for singers. I could do all that, and people obviously appreciated it. I got a lot of compliments, but I wasn't paying any attention. Jimmy would tell me that I played nice harmonies, and I think I was beginning to know about that, although when I listen to myself on early records, I know that I've improved in that area a great deal, although I wasn't too bad at that time.

But the thing you were talking about, actually knowing that you're a jazz musician, I don't think I knew even then. I think I was still just feeling . . . well of course, on top of it all, I was madly in love with Jimmy. That was the thing uppermost in my

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

mind. Then to be in this hotel and enjoying playing every night. We'd do these concerts . . . We did some concerts in a local hall there. But then by this time we were talking about getting married. We did in fact get married. I think I always get the date wrong. February 4th, 1945.

Then everything fell apart. They sent Jimmy back to his unit, and they sent us with the O.S.O. show back to Paris. It was like, "Well, there you've had your wedding, we've given permission for your wedding, and we treated you to a week in Brussels." Which they did. "Now you're going to go back to work." So that's what happened there. I could talk about that, or I could just go to the point where Jimmy got his discharge there in Europe after the Japanese . . . whenever that date . . . when the whole war was over. That must have been April, around . . . well I know we went back in April '46. Or I'd never been to the States.

**WILLIAMS:** Just before we get to that point I was going to ask you, how long . . . just to say how long were you separated after your brief honeymoon?

**McPARTLAND:** I guess it was a few months, because I kept trying to visit him in these different places. It was difficult to talk on the phone. You'd have one of those army phones like you see in M.A.S.H. [laughter] It was the same kind of thing. He would tell me where he was going to be. Then I would try to go there. I would get some pilot or somebody that had a load of food for the G.I.s or something, somebody . . . or a mail plane. Somebody that was going in the area. I would beg a ride on the plane and go down there and visit Jimmy. I did that a few times.

**WILLIAMS:** Also . . . Sorry I didn't mean to interrupt.

**McPARTLAND:** It's all right.

**WILLIAMS:** I was going to ask you, how long was it before you introduced him to your family back home?

**McPARTLAND:** It wasn't until later, because I actually didn't tell them I was going to marry Jimmy, because they were so de-. . . I did the very thing that my mother was always saying you shouldn't. They would want me to marry someone nice, like a lawyer or a doctor or something like that. I thought, well if I tell them I'm going to do this, they'll somehow talk me out of it, or my father will come over and kill Jimmy, or something will happen. They won't like it. So I'm going to do it and tell them afterwards, and of course my father took it very well. The commanding officer of Jimmy's outfit was going to London, and he met my father for lunch and told him all about everything. I guess my father took it in a good spirit. But my mother said, "I cried all day when I found you were married." [laughter] That's a pretty nice thing to do.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



But you asked when we visited. I guess it was about . . . after we got back to the States, we never did . . . it was too . . . Wait a minute. Or did we? When we were in France. Wait a minute. If I . . . This is awful. I think we did make one trip. I have to think of this date. I remember what we did. I remember the . . . I'm trying to think if it was after we . . . no, it must have been while we were . . . while he was with U.S.O. and we were still in Paris, or close to Paris, with U.S.O. We made a trip over, and then they . . . in fact we recorded something with a group over there. Vic Lewis.

They really got along with him very well, because Jimmy was very well behaved and charming. He had the drinking thing under control when he was there. My mother . . . I remember my mother said, "He's not at all like an American. He's polite."

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs] That was one of the other parts of the question I was going to ask. Were you comfortable . . . How comfortable were your parents, or agreeable to your marriage to a non-Brit?, or even as you say, well you've already alluded about the jazz musician . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I don't think a non-Brit entered into it. I think it was that they didn't want me to marry somebody that they would consider below my station in life. If I had come there . . .

**WILLIAMS:** No status.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . with a Cockney-speaking green grocer or something, that would have really been awful. But Jimmy as you know . . . you probably did meet him, or did you ever?

**WILLIAMS:** Once or twice. I didn't know him.

**McPARTLAND:** He was a well-spoken nice guy. He certainly had all the attributes of a gentleman. When he finally quit drinking and joined A.A., he was perfect after that.

**WILLIAMS:** How long was that? Were you aware of that problem right from the outset? Or did it appear to be a problem? Or was there a certain stage that you thought that . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I don't know. I'm not sure whether I . . . Maybe I believed him. He said things. He would get quite drunk once in a while. Then he would always say, "I don't do that when I'm in the States. I drink like a gentleman. After all, there's a war on." You know, he made some kind of an excuse. I was probably in denial . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Naive.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center



**McPARTLAND:** . . . or naive. I didn't know anything about alcoholism. I was somebody that could always drink and always thought that if you drank and you lost control, then you were very weak. You just . . . if you have a couple of drinks and maintain your composure, which I always did do. I never . . .

I guess I was thinking to myself, "I'm sure that when we get back he will . . . I was so positive that being married to me was going to change everything. Total naive thinking. Of course it didn't change a thing

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** I never did really learn how to deal with somebody being an alcoholic. I don't know how I would act now, knowing as much as I do and being involved in A.A., which was a wonderful thing for both of us actually. It's a great organization even if you don't have a drinking problem. So many good things that the . . . Their beliefs are good for anybody. But I was naive enough to think, if I'm going . . . he's . . . definitely, I'm going to change him, or something. I guess women think those things.

**WILLIAMS:** I've heard that before. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, he must have.

**WILLIAMS:** When you first came to the United States, of course, you . . . am I correct in assuming that you moved to Chicago, his home town?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes. We did.

**WILLIAMS:** How long did you live there? Did you live with his parents? Did you get a home there?

**McPARTLAND:** Both his parents were dead. What happened was we came to New York. This was maybe what could have happened if he'd done . . . made certain decisions. We came to New York, and we went around. He showed me off very proudly to people at Eddie Condon's. I met Louis Armstrong. I was thrilled beyond belief meeting these people I'd dreamed about or read about or heard on records. Now to meet them. They were so friendly with Jimmy, and he knew everybody. God, I remember meeting . . . being in a place where Jimmy was playing, and meeting Fletcher Henderson. Some of these people . . . when I think of it now, it's unbelievable. Knowing what a nice man Fletcher Henderson was and being able to chat with him. Wow!

We did that for a few days, and we stayed at Gene Krupa's house. We would go out and visit different people and go to clubs. We went to the club where Gene was working. Anita O'Day was with the band. I was trying to find Mary Lou Williams. I

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





didn't find her until later on. I thought that all the people that I wanted to meet would all be working. I had this thought in my head that all the musicians would be in clubs and be readily visible. Instead of which, it took me a long time to find Mary Lou, because I don't know if she was even working when we first got over there.

We must have stayed in New York about a week or so. We stayed in a . . . Let's see. First we stayed in the Victoria Hotel. Then we moved. Gene Krupa invited us to stay there. Meanwhile we went to Eddie Condon's. By this time I was quite confident about sitting in and thinking that I wanted to show off. The band consisted of Wild Bill Davison and all these great players, each one of them drunk as could be. George Wettling, Pee Wee Russell, Georg Brunis . . . can't think of the bass player. Charlie Queener on piano, or Ralph Sutton. Can't think of the bass player. Al Casey [on guitar]. I'm not sure. Being there was like . . . that was maybe one of the last great jazz clubs. That's the place I think of when somebody talks about a jazz club. Of course it was a certain kind of music. It was more or less traditional music. It was a fabulous atmosphere. The band would sit there between numbers. The waiter would come up with this gigantic tray of drinks. Everybody would sit there on the bandstand and sip. Of course by the end of the night they'd all be done in.

I went there, and I went to Nick's. I guess the very first job I ever worked might have been at Condon's. I subbed one night for Ralph Sutton. I wasn't in the union or anything. I was so nervous. I wanted to do it, but I was very nervous, and I said to the head waiter, whose name I forget . . . I should remember it. I asked him to please not put the light on me, to leave it, just leave it very . . . and I crept into the corner where the piano was and played "In a Mist" and tunes like that. I wanted . . . I was nervous. I didn't want to be . . . I wanted to do it, but I didn't want anyone to pay attention. Weird.

**WILLIAMS:** Was that with the same group of musicians, Wild Bill and that group you were playing with?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, but they were all somewhere else. They were probably downstairs imbibing and telling rude stories. Boy, when I think of all those guys.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. That's after you'd moved to New York at that point.

**McPARTLAND:** We hadn't moved. We'd just arrived. It was like . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, o.k.

**McPARTLAND:** Actually at that time Condon asked Jimmy if—Wild Bill was leaving—asked Jimmy if he would like to join the band. I said, "My God, wonderful, why didn't . . ." Jimmy refused utterly. "No, I want to go back to Chicago. I just got out of the army. I've just come back from Europe, and I want to see my family. I want to

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



relax. I don't want to work." I often think if he had taken that gig, I wonder how differently our lives would have been, or what I would have done, whether I would have done the same as I did if he had done that instead of us working together. Because I must say that Jimmy was always very supportive of me and probably more proud of what I was doing than he should have been. He accepted me for . . . He never pointed out any mistakes, "You shouldn't play that chord." He was very supportive. But I was still playing . . . I would play all the tunes, but when it was time for my feature, to do a number, I would do something ridiculous, like "Claire de lune." The first date that we had in Chicago . . . We didn't work for a while. We went out and lived with his sister and her family. We stayed there for a while.

**WILLIAMS:** How long was a while?

**McPARTLAND:** About three months. Jimmy had no strong desire to . . . I guess I had to say, "We really ought to work and make some money." But the money we'd come back with was running out, and he was handing some out to his brother. All the McPartlands were all around there with their hands out. We were the ones with the money. So then we left there and moved to the Croyden Hotel. His brother was a very good guitar player, but he was a small time agent.

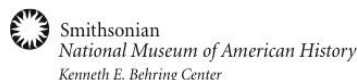
**WILLIAMS:** What was his brother's name?

**McPARTLAND:** Dick McPartland. He was in the band with Jimmy when they . . . when Jimmy replaced Bix Beiderbecke in the Wolverines. Anyway, before we ever worked together at a professional job, his brother got me a job playing in the St. Charles Hotel in a small town called St. Charles, which is out near where Jimmy's sister lived. I don't know why I did this. I took the job, and I don't remember what it paid. Probably not . . . It was just like playing in a cocktail lounge. I remember I did this. Jimmy and Dick would sit at the bar, drinking beer and talking, and I would be sitting up there playing piano. When I think of it now, I think, "Jesus, what am I doing?" I don't think it lasted very long.

Then after that we moved downtown to the Croyden Hotel. Then some agent . . . somebody at MCA or somebody that Jimmy worked with before . . . we got this job at a place called the Rose Bowl, which was a bar with a bowling alley next to it. [laughs] Jimmy would very proudly introduce me for my number, which might be "Claire de lune." There weren't that many people in the bar, but I would be playing, and somebody in the bowling alley would get a strike, and everybody would "ROARRRR" and that would . . . I would be back home again with my mother, saying "Very nice, dear," except nobody was really saying "very nice." They were all pleased . . .

So that was my introduction to starting to work with Jimmy. There is more of the same. I could go on forever about this, but that's probably all you need to hear.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Was that club located on the North Side?

**McPARTLAND:** It was on the South Side.

**WILLIAMS:** The South Side. That's what I wondered, because how did that affect . . . did you meet people like . . . or maybe he was already . . . no, Milt Hinton and that group was already gone at that point.

**McPARTLAND:** I never met Milt until years later. I didn't meet any of those people. I guess I met Dizzy in the '50s.

**WILLIAMS:** In Chicago?

**McPARTLAND:** In New York, because Leonard Feather had this great idea for a record date called *Hot vs. Cool*. Dizzy was on one side of it, and Jimmy and his band were on the other, and they all played the same tunes, like . . . Or maybe . . .

**WILLIAMS:** "Avalon" and tunes like that?

**McPARTLAND:** Maybe . . . I know "Muskrat Ramble" was one. I've got the record upstairs. It's really a collector's item. The idea was good, but I guess Leonard always had these . . . like *Cats vs. Chicks*. That was another one that he had. All these crazy things. I don't know. I lost track there.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k., so at this point what we've done . . . so that was . . . you were in Chicago a total of about three months, or was it longer?

**McPARTLAND:** No, probably maybe a year, because we started playing a lot of clubs in Chicago. We moved to the Croyden Hotel in Chicago, we got the little small apartment on North Dearborn Street, and then these jobs came . . . working . . . They were considered very good jobs for Chicago, when you think about them. They were really . . . it was really just a lounge, like the Brass Rail, a famous jazz club. We worked there. [laughs] Actually I remember little things, like Count Basie coming and sitting in. He was putting together a small group. He was going to have a small group somewhere. Dave Tough coming and sitting in. I can't think of anybody else offhand.

That was the toughest period in a way, because that was when the drinking thing got bad, and I didn't know how to deal with it. I was trying to stop him drinking, which didn't help a thing, as I found out years later. It all came to a head where he did quit and join A.A. while we were still there in Chicago.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** And . . . yeah, I'm sorry I was going to . . .

**McPARTLAND:** No, shall I . . .

**WILLIAMS:** No, o.k., what I was going to say . . . that kind of brought into there that Chicago scene, so actually . . . so you didn't . . . staying there for one year you didn't really get involved with that many other artists other than Jimmy's group and that circle of artists. For instance, did you . . .

**McPARTLAND:** No I didn't.

**WILLIAMS:** Was there much interaction with some of the black jazz artists on the South Side of Chicago, what group were there? At that point were there any integrated groups that were performing, or . . . at jam sessions, formally or . . .

**McPARTLAND:** There were. I never was aware of this whole thing. I was so naive. There was a guy there that used to promote . . . a young concert promoter. He promoted this concert with Jimmy on the one hand, and Bunk Johnson. I guess they brought him out of retirement and got him some new teeth or something. He played this thing. People flocked to see him. The concert was quite a success. After the concert, the two of them . . . Jimmy . . . he and Jimmy went off somewhere and got loaded. I lost . . . I never was that interested in Bunk Johnson, but they went somewhere and disappeared.

There wasn't . . . We talk about interaction. I remember Dave Garroway had a few concerts. I'm just trying to think of different people I played with just by accident. We had a concert out near Jimmy sister's place. I don't know how these musicians got together. It was Jimmy and myself, and Baby Dodds was there. It sounds funny now to say I got to play with him, but I was thrilled. My God, Baby Dodds. He sounded pretty good.

But there was no . . . what you're talking about, like a really . . . I would meet different people at different times. Jimmy knew everybody. Like Red Saunders. Did you ever hear that name?

**WILLIAMS:** Sure.

**McPARTLAND:** We used to go out and see him. He was on the South Side. He had his own club, Club DeLisa. Then we worked at the Blue Note. Billie Holiday was the headliner, and we were the other band. That was very exciting. She had Bobby Tucker on piano. We had our little group. We were the opening act. Jimmy knew Billie very well. We got some wonderful pictures taken of them. Somebody else was in the club opposite us . . . Eddie Heywood.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Actually, I worked opposite Eddie Heywood at the Embers. I don't want to forget to slot this in somewhere, because I was so proud of working at the Embers and having Ralph Watkins bring in some guest artists who consisted of Coleman Hawkins and Roy Eldridge. For some reason Eddie Heywood didn't want to have them play with his group. He refused. No, he didn't want to have any guest artists. So needless to say I was only too thrilled to have them play with my trio. I was thrilled that they would even consent to do it. They were so nice. They were wonderful. Roy always talked about it, 'til . . . every time I saw him. It was some of my better moments, more exciting moments in jazz.

**WILLIAMS:** Let's move on to New York City. Let's just briefly . . . I wanted to ask you before we bring this close . . . bring this session to a close . . . when you're there, you sort of alluded to some of the first engagements was down at Eddie Condon's. How long were you in New York? Do you guys go to Harlem for jam sessions? Is that when you kind of discovered . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Never went to Harlem. I never did go there. I would love to have. I didn't know enough to . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Venture on your own.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . go there. At that time you could go anywhere. It wasn't that you'd be afraid to go somewhere. I would have loved to have been . . . later . . . I didn't think of how important it would have been to go to somewhere like Minton's, but as it was, I was trying to ferret out people that I knew about, like Mary Lou, and I did finally find her

**WILLIAMS:** I would have thought that that would have been one of the places that she would have been . . . to look.

**McPARTLAND:** No, I never saw her there. She was at a place on 52nd . . . on 54th Street called the Down Beat. That's where I met her, and I met Billy Taylor and a whole bunch of people. John Lewis, I think I met him there. But that's how long I've known Billy. Billy was like a string bean. He was about 20, I guess. [laughs] He played at Birdland a lot. He was . . . I think he was the house piano player.

**WILLIAMS:** So were you aware that . . . of the name of some of the younger beboppers at that point before you came . . . as you came to New York? Obviously Jimmy was from an era before that. Was he aware of Dizzy? Was he aware of . . . let's say, Kenny Klook [Kenny Clarke, nicknamed Klook] or Coleman Hawkins and some of those guys?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Oh yeah, certainly I was aware of Coleman Hawkins. Actually I'll have to backtrack a little to when Jimmy and I were in Paris, before we'd come back here. We were still in U.S.O. We went to Charles Delaunay's house. You know who . . .

**WILLIAMS:** The writer or something? A critic or something?

**McPARTLAND:** The writer. He wrote the biggest and best jazz discography years ago. He was a fabulous guy. Anyway we went to his apartment, and he played me this record of Dizzy Gillespie doing "Hot House." I was flabbergasted. I didn't know what I was listening to. I couldn't think how the piano player, who I think was Al Haig, . . . I couldn't . . . That was the first time I heard that kind of comping, and I'm saying to Charles, "How do they do that? Is it all written out?" Stupid question. I remember talking to Dizzy about this later. So I was well aware of him then, and of Bird [Charlie Parker] of course too. But, for whatever reason, I guess because I was more into . . . maybe I was more into following Jimmy's kind of group then, I never said, "Let's go up to Harlem and hear some of those guys," which I probably should have done while those places were still flourishing. It just never occurred to me.

**WILLIAMS:** And one last question along those lines is that . . . how did . . . how was Jimmy's reaction to that? Did he like . . . was he taken by Bird and Dizzy's music, or Monk's music at that point at all, or ever, later in life, kind of came around to that?

**McPARTLAND:** He and Dizzy . . . He loved Dizzy. They were very friendly. Jimmy always said, "I" . . . I think he was a little . . . what? . . . I think he felt . . . in fact he said something about people running up and down the hall. I don't think he could understand quite what the beboppers were doing, although he loved Dizzy and would listen to a lot of the things that he did. I think he was more mystified that I when we were in Charles Delaunay's office . . . in his apartment listening to "Hot House."

Then when we came to the States . . . I'm trying to think how I'd tie this . . . I can't remember how or where we met Dizzy. I can't remember that. But I do know that I met him at about the time that they made this record. They were always very friendly. In fact when Dizzy did the "Piano Jazz" show with me, Jimmy came up to the studio. He almost disrupted the whole show, because Dizzy would take him into a corner and would be showing him things to do. He'd be asking Dizzy's advice about . . . Jimmy always had lip problems. It was probably because he didn't practice enough. They always had fun together. I've got an outrageous tape that Jimmy made with Dizzy—I'll have to copy it and give it to you—where they were both rather high.

**WILLIAMS:** I'd love to hear it.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Jimmy was supposed to be interviewing Dizzy for a radio show. It just developed into this ridiculous conversation.

**WILLIAMS:** I know you also told me Miles was also fond of Jimmy.

**McPARTLAND:** Miles was very fond of Jimmy. Whenever I would see Miles, he would always, “How’s your old man?” That was always his first question.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, well, o.k. I think what we’ll do is take a pause for now until tomorrow, and we’ll finish up then.

**McPARTLAND:** Yes doctor. Very well.

**WILLIAMS:** It couldn’t have been stated any better. Thank you very much for your time.

**McPARTLAND:** You’re an excellent interviewer. I think you’re doing a great job.

**WILLIAMS:** Well thank you. You say nice things.

**McPARTLAND:** You’ve got all your . . . you’ve got your act together. You’ve got everything written down. And here I’m babbling away.

**WILLIAMS:** Ah well. Sixty percent of the questions have come from your comments. These are just to get me started.

**McPARTLAND:** It’s funny. You don’t have to have this on the tape. I used to be a nervous wreck about speaking. I couldn’t say anything. When I opened at the Embers . . . because Jimmy was always the front man, always doing the talking. I never did get to say a word. He didn’t coach me or anything. So when . . . by the time I got my own group, I couldn’t say anything. So here I am at the Embers. I’m really having a hard job just saying, “Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. Now we’d like to present Eddie Heywood.” I had it written on a piece of paper.

Now, years later, I’m so voluble, you can’t stop me. It’s just the total . . . Jimmy would always say, “Be yourself. Just be yourself. Don’t try to be anything fancy.”

**WILLIAMS:** That’s very good advice, because there’s . . .

**McPARTLAND:** It took me a long time to keep it.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**WILLIAMS:** That's what all of us should do. If we followed those rules, I think a lot of things would fall in place, musically and otherwise.

**McPARTLAND:** God, and he . . . Jimmy left me with all these good things, like I would be saying, "I'm so depressed. God, I can't get out of this mood." He'd say, "Count your blessings. Think of all the things you have in your favor. You've got talent, and you've got money in the bank, and you've got me, and you've got friends." He would go through all these things.

**WILLIAMS:** Said especially him, right? [laughs] That's a good . . . That's right. That's true. It should be.

**McPARTLAND:** Actually he didn't say that. I would be the one that would say that. He would list all these other good things, but it was always, "Count your blessings. Be thankful." Those were the things. Always be thankful for everything you have. Don't . . . How can you be depressed? So, anyway . . .

**WILLIAMS:** That's very true.

[end of day one of the interview]

-----

**WILLIAMS:** Today is Saturday, January 4th, nineteen hundred and ninety-seven, and this is a continuation of our oral history interview with Ms. Marian McPartland. Hello, Marian. How're you doing this afternoon? I think we'll just pick up with a few . . . before, actually, before we pick up with some of the questions we had before dealt upon, I just wanted to backtrack a little bit after your arrival in New York and get a sense . . . after being there for a year or so, or two years, what . . . did you have any particular favorite jazz clubs that you like to visit or that you enjoyed going around to?

**McPARTLAND:** You mean, after we moved back to New York?

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, after leaving Chicago and returning . . .

**McPARTLAND:** After leaving Chicago . . .

**WILLIAMS:** . . . and actually becoming a residence [*sic*: resident] of New York City.

**McPARTLAND:** I'm trying to think. I think I just . . . I'm trying to think what was open at that time. 52nd . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Was it Onyx and was there . . .

**McPARTLAND:** No. That was gone. That was closed. Most of the clubs that were such big-name clubs, by the time we got back there, they were gone. I remember going to the Down Beat, which I say is where I met Mary Lou, which is a comparatively new club. The Hickory House was one of the older ones. I went there, not thinking I was going to be working there. Mary Osborne was there at that time. I boned up on the history of that club. They'd had a lot of jazz in there.

So really, all the big clubs were gone. The club that was most . . . the hot club of the moment was the Embers. That's actually where I first worked, because . . . Actually, Jimmy and I did things that probably were crazy, probably weren't that sensible at all. I don't know why. We decided to go to Long Island. He had to wait out his [musicians union] card. He had let his card lapse. I don't know. Probably if he'd paid some money or talked to the right person, he could have got his card right away, but he didn't. So we would drive into town and go and hear somebody, and then we'd drive back out to Long Beach. It was nice out there. We had a little apartment hotel right on the beach, which of course they don't have any more. Long Beach has become trashed.

**WILLIAMS:** So listeners won't confuse that with California, Long Beach is here on the . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Long Beach, Long Island.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes, o.k.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. Right. I'm glad you said that. Meanwhile we were . . . me in particular, I guess, was anxious to try to be working somewhere. We went to the Embers several times and saw . . . went there . . . saw . . . Joe Bushkin was there. Joe Bushkin was making a great hit at that time. People like Tallulah Bankhead were in the club, swooning at his feet. All that kind of thing. Jimmy knew various people to talk it up, to get me in the club. I forget how it actually happened. Through an agent, I think. A guy named Dave, not Brubeck, but Braybeck. I think he was booking the club at that time. I guess probably through Jimmy, that was my first date, was in there.

**WILLIAMS:** Was that solo? Or was it with a trio? Or what context?

**McPARTLAND:** It was a trio. I had . . . this was in 1950, I think. I had Eddie Safranski and Don Lamond. I think I mentioned this to you yesterday, that when I was in there . . . after Joe Bushkin left, the business dropped off, because I had no name recognition at all, and Eddie Heywood was the other act, and he didn't seem to be drawing anybody. So that

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



was why Ralph Watkins brought in these heavies, Coleman Hawkins and Roy Eldridge. That perked things up a bit.

Meanwhile Jimmy . . . There were a lot of places to work, like Childs' Paramount, which was in Times Square. That was . . . It was a restaurant where they had a big room in the basement and where they . . . a lot of weekend or one-night jazz things that Jimmy would play. Of course he wound up playing that awful place, but it was a good jazz place there, the Metropole. I must say I heard some fantastic musicians in there.

I think I've answered the question about the jazz clubs. Or have I?

**WILLIAMS:** The Metropole is still open under different management, shall we say, now. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** Absolutely. There used to be a little room upstairs that I played. They had this little jazz club on the floor above. A lot of good groups worked there. I remember we were there with the trio and worked opposite Buddy Rich. Meanwhile, they'd have something like Woody Herman or somebody, downstairs.

**WILLIAMS:** Lionel Hampton's band played there a lot.

**McPARTLAND:** Hmmm?

**WILLIAMS:** Lionel Hampton's band I understand worked there quite a bit too.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, yeah. Back to while we were working in Long Beach. We would come in, and Tommy Dorsey was holding forth at the Statler Hotel. I heard a lot of people with his band. I don't think Frank Sinatra was there anymore, but Jimmy knew Tommy very well. So he would like to go there several nights and hang out. I remember Buddy Rich was in that band and Charlie Shavers was in the band. We used to hear all these stories about how terrible Tommy was. He had a quarrel with Charlie Shavers on the . . . driving to another gig, and he put Charlie Shavers out of the car and left him on the road and drove away. Isn't that awful?

**WILLIAMS:** It is. Especially in those times, to say the least, or any times, for that matter.

**McPARTLAND:** Anyway, that has nothing to do with anything.

**WILLIAMS:** I was curious also about the repertoire that you were playing with your trio prior to Coleman Hawkins and Roy Eldridge's joining the group. Were . . . was it . . . did you have a pretty set trio selections or repertoire that you guys focused around nightly, or

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



did you kind of vary that up as often as I like to think you . . . I see you do in more recent times?

**McPARTLAND:** What?

**WILLIAMS:** In terms of your trio. The selections that you played. Did you have trio arrangements that you primarily worked around?

**McPARTLAND:** Not really, or very very primary.

**WILLIAMS:** Loose arrangements.

**McPARTLAND:** Nothing too complicated. And of course Coleman and Roy played all standard tunes, blues, and “Moten Swing,” “Stomping at the Savoy,” and all those things that mostly were blues oriented. By that time I had learned how to comp, or at least they never said anything, like nobody ever said anything to me, “Don’t do that. Do this.” Maybe they hated what I was doing. But they were so wonderful to me. I felt good. I felt I must be doing something right. I only wish that I’d had the sense to tape it, make a . . . record it or something.

**WILLIAMS:** That would have been interesting. Also, how long did they . . . you played on that engagement for ten years, but how long did they, Coleman Hawkins and Roy Eldridge, stay?

**McPARTLAND:** No, this was just about a six-weeks gig. This was at the Embers, not the Hickory House. It was pre-Hickory House. But we did some other things. George Wein was just starting in Boston. He flew us up to do a Sunday afternoon concert. Savoy did record that. I’m sorry they did, because the piano was awful. I was listening to that in Chicago. Jimmy’s granddaughter had that on a CD she brought with her from France for me to hear. I didn’t want to hear this thing. They shouldn’t even put out this old stuff. Nat Hentoff was the m.c. He’s introducing me as Marian Page McPartland. The first and last time I’ve ever heard that one.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]. Yeah, that is a first.

**McPARTLAND:** I was doing things like this, and then Jimmy started working at a place called Lou Terrassi’s Club, which was just again another lounge. In fact I think that’s . . . when I was in there, digging the band, that’s when I met Fletcher Henderson. I forget who Jimmy had in the band. I think the usual suspects. Joe Sullivan. Pee Wee Russell. Just an absolute group of alcoholics, if you ever . . . It’s just a shame, because they were all such good musicians.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** To paraphrase what one friend, one excellent musician said . . . I'll tell you who it is at some point . . . He was asked, why did he hire certain musicians who had notorious habits? This artist's response was, "Those are the only musicians who can play." [laughter]

**McPARTLAND:** It may be partly true. I don't know.

**WILLIAMS:** At that time maybe it was, for sure.

**McPARTLAND:** But that certain era . . . you asked me who I hung out with. I was thinking about it after you left. I was more, in the beginning, drawn into people that Jimmy knew, and that kind of music, and just got away from it gradually, later on, after I got in the Hickory House. I think I had already met Duke in Chicago. We went to hear . . . to a concert there. They had Django Reinhardt . . . was visiting. He was the soloist or guest artist with the band. But talking about a bad habit. He sure had one. He just would have a few drinks, and then he'd disappear. He was never around when he was wanted for the concert.

He came over to hear Jimmy and me. We were working at a place called the Capital Lounge. In fact there's a picture of him with us in a lot of jazz books. This picture got around to a great many people. I was so thrilled to meet him. I could hardly stand it, after listening to all these records while I was still in England.

Let's see, the Embers. Then I got this record date . . . I made a list of things like all the records I could think of that I ever made. Is that something that would be nice to have?

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, very much so. A discography.

**McPARTLAND:** A list of things. I don't know where this came from. It materialized from somewhere. Somebody with King Records. They had a subsidiary label called Federal. That was the first real record date I did. Previous to that, in Chicago, Jimmy and I had started our own label. I'm going to show you one. They'll probably fall apart if I take them out of the pile. 78s that we made on our own little label. We had a label called Unison. We put those out.

Anyway, this was an actual record date for Federal. We had a harpist and a cello player and a bass player named Bob Carter, who you would never have heard of. He was fabulous, but he was a guy that was really wild. I did use him at the Hickory House, but I had to fire him, because he was so drunk and disorderly. I felt terrible doing that. It was like . . . I had a hard job . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Hard time.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** . . . having to confront somebody and tell them they had to leave. It was awful.

**WILLIAMS:** So he was the original bassist when you started at the Embers?

**McPARTLAND:** No, the bassist . . . what people I had at the Embers, I just had the one group. The first time I had Eddie Safranski, who had just left Stan Kenton. He was trying to make it in the studios in New York. And Don Lamond, who had just left Woody and who was doing the same thing, wanted to be in the studios. So they took this gig with me, and they couldn't have been nicer, except Don Lamond had . . . they both had a bit of a drinking problem, I think. They used to take me to a bar on Third Avenue between sets. Luckily I never lost . . . I've always been too wanting to be in control. I could never allow myself to be drunk.

So anyway, the Hickory House. That started . . . that was actually in 1952, February 1952. During that other period I was doing things. I did this record date on Federal, and I did some things with Jimmy. Then there were two jazz gigs. I don't know what you'd call them. It was like a . . . one was at a place called the Stuyvescent Casino. This again I suppose it would be a trad thing. Many, many musicians were hired for this thing. People like, again, Pee Wee Russell, Joe Sullivan, and all these people. Jimmy. It was a huge room, like a madhouse, where they'd sell jugs of beer at the bar. They made a movie called "Jazz Dance" . . . I don't know if you've ever seen or heard of it. . . with a lot of dancers, like Honi Coles. People like that were in it. I played a lot of those gigs. Stuyvescent Casino.

The other one was run by a guy named Jack Crystal, who is . . . That was on Second Avenue. It was the same kind of thing and the same kind of personnel and a real bad piano. I was in there. I was still Marian Page. Jack Crystal was . . . He had the Commodore Record Shop, which you may have heard of. I'm going back too far for you, baby doll. Child.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs] I suppose it's true.

**McPARTLAND:** He was also Billy Crystal's father. We knew them pretty well, Jack and his wife. That went on. I can't remember all the gigs, but that's what I was doing. Then I got sick. . . then I went to . . . then we worked in Storyville, Jimmy and I. George [Wein] was just starting out.

**WILLIAMS:** Up in Boston.

**McPARTLAND:** Up in Boston. We had a very strangely assorted group. It was Jimmy and myself, Roy Haynes, and a bass player named Dick Nivirson, who was neither fish

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



nor fowl. He wasn't trad and he wasn't modern. He was in between. Roy was wonderful. He just played wonderfully well in that idiom. I know he can do anything he wants to do, and he did it very well. Jimmy would call him Dixie Haynes. We did that for quite a while. We were a little house band, and people would come in. Ella [Fitzgerald] came in with Ray Brown, and they had adopted this baby. I don't think they played. I think they just came there. Then they would have a guest artist, like Frankie Newton. You ever know that name?

**WILLIAMS:** Sure.

**McPARTLAND:** Wonderful.

**WILLIAMS:** Roy also played with him up there. Let me interject that "trad" for the listeners is traditional jazz and modern jazz. The other point is . . . you said for quite a while . . . An extended engagement is much different than what we think of it in 1997. How long was that extended engagement at Storyville?

**McPARTLAND:** Well, I can't . . . I'm being vague, because I'm not sure. I'd say maybe at a crack we'd be there for three months, and then maybe we'd go somewhere and come back, because I remember being there, and I remember playing there myself.

**WILLIAMS:** But you actually was living in Boston for a temporary period?

**McPARTLAND:** Well, we lived . . . no, we stayed at the hotel.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, that's what I meant, at that point.

**McPARTLAND:** We would be there. We still had our little pad.

**WILLIAMS:** Home here.

**McPARTLAND:** I don't think we had yet moved into New York. We finally did get an apartment in New York. Jimmy then had his card, and I had my New York union card, already had a Chicago card. But one thing that I should probably mention. I was supposed to become an American citizen. The people at the union kept saying, "Do you have your papers yet?" "Yes," I said, "I'm doing it. I'm doing it." Finally they stopped asking. I never have become an American citizen.

**WILLIAMS:** To this day?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**McPARTLAND:** To this day. It just seemed unnecessary somehow. They had a clause in the papers that you had to fill out. There was an item in there that said, “In case of war, would you take up arms against your country?” Every time I’d read the thing, I’d see that. I’d go “Oh, shit,” and I’d throw it back in the drawer. Gradually I just forgot about it. And they did too. So that was the end of that, but in case anybody needed to know, I’m still a Brit.

**WILLIAMS:** But of course that gives . . . you have a green card, which is like a . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, I do have a green card some . . . like a resident alien.

**WILLIAMS:** That’s very interesting to note, that you played with different guests that also had been invited to play, and you guys were in essence like a house group at Storyville in the early ’50s.

**McPARTLAND:** Yes. Yes.

**WILLIAMS:** Also, this is before the Newport Jazz Festival in ’54.

**McPARTLAND:** Yes. George . . . I remember George, who to me has always looked the same, except I think when I first saw him he was about 20. I met him outside Storyville. At that time I met his mother and father. I knew everybody and his brother Larry. We spent so much time in Boston. We knew a lot of the musicians in different . . . We played a couple of other clubs. There was another club called Jazz at 76, was the name of it. I think we played there maybe before Storyville even [November 1950]. It was Vic Dickenson and Buster Bailey, and a young drummer who I’ve never seen since. Max Wayne was on bass. And Jimmie and myself. That’s where I learned to drink whiskey out of the bottle.

**WILLIAMS:** I see.

**McPARTLAND:** Backstage with Vic and Buster.

**WILLIAMS:** I’m sure they were great enough exponents to teach you.

**McPARTLAND:** They were very well educated in that department. I loved working with those people. Vic was one of my favorite people always.

**WILLIAMS:** Excellent, excellent. There was one . . . a couple of little sidebars I just wanted . . . Did you meet musicians like John Neves and Alan Dawson at that time too?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Oh yes. But it's funny. I did not meet Alan Dawson. I don't know why I didn't. But I met John Neves. Didn't he have a brother . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Brother Paul Neves.

**McPARTLAND:** Paul Neves. Didn't he die?

**WILLIAMS:** Yes he did.

**McPARTLAND:** John worked with me at one point later on, after I'd been in the Hickory House. I really loved his playing. He worked with me in St. Louis . . . other places too. But not for long. He was tempermental.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** He really was tough to get along with.

**WILLIAMS:** I didn't know him at that period of course. And Alan may have been out with Lionel Hampton at that particular time, so that may have . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I don't know. I didn't meet Alan until much later, years later. I would go up to Boston. Played at the Jazz Workshop. I think I took my own trio at that time. I think I took Michael Moore, but then I . . . later I did play with Alan at a place called the Stardust Room, which was . . .

**WILLIAMS:** No, the Starlight.

**McPARTLAND:** Starlight Room. It was owned by . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Starlight Roof. It was on . . .

**McPARTLAND:** No. Well, yes, and this was owned by this guy that married Carol Sloane, Bucky . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Right, yeah, Buck . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Bucky something.

**WILLIAMS:** Buck Spur.

**McPARTLAND:** Buck Spur, right.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Oh, that's much later. That's even during my time, had a little . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Oh really. That was not . . . I guess I mention that because of Alan. It was not too much before that that I met Alan Dawson. I don't know how I escaped meeting him. There would be different circles.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yes.

**McPARTLAND:** Still, in a way I guess I was still more involved with the people that Jimmy would have. And then I met . . . I'm having to go back to Chicago . . . Sidney Catlett and people like that. Anyway, he was in Boston at the time, and he had a rent party that we all went to.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I'd like to see a few of those right now. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** I forget whose rent we were paying. Probably his.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, speaking of rent, that gives me an idea for another question, is that, maybe you can tell our listeners what the average pay per week for musicians, sideman and a leader, say at Embers or Storyville or some of the clubs, what that would average. Would it be a little different on the road as opposed to being in New York, I would think?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, it was different, but it was awfully low, and I . . . when I think of how little . . . I can only pinpoint the Hickory House. I think it was something like \$550 or \$600, between three people.

**WILLIAMS:** Per week?

**McPARTLAND:** Per week.

**WILLIAMS:** We realize that we're talking about over 40 years ago too.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, but that was considered not too bad.

**WILLIAMS:** For that time it probably wasn't too bad.

**McPARTLAND:** And then give a commission out of that, too.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh the agents were collecting commissions?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Pretty awful, isn't it? And then union dues.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** And then all we got from the club would be cups of coffee. John Popkin would say, "I'm sick of keeping you people in free coffee." He'd get mad if he lost at the racetrack.

**WILLIAMS:** He didn't serve meals to you?

**McPARTLAND:** Not free. You got a discount. You could eat anything you wanted.

**WILLIAMS:** I just wanted to review one more time about salaries of the early '50s, with either sidemen or sidewomen, and leaders, that the average club date, not concerts, but club dates would pay, for an example, the Hickory House, being on location in New York City, as opposed to say, for instance, going to Boston or Washington or Chicago to perform. What were the salaries, for instance, around, that would be an average salary for a trio, for your trio maybe?

**McPARTLAND:** When we started, I think scale was \$550, union scale that was. Then he might have been magnanimous and given us \$600. This is also less commission, and it was a six-day week. Yet it didn't seem to dismay anybody.

**WILLIAMS:** That was good for that particular time.

**McPARTLAND:** I guess so. When I think of it now . . . Then we went up for a one-nighter during the day. I've got a picture of myself with Don and Eddie taken beside the airplane which [laughs] . . . airplanes look like a Piper Cub. There were no jets at that point. [laughs] I think we got about \$350 just for the day for the three of us, plus the plane fare. At the time I thought that wasn't bad. I think it was around in there. Certainly not more than \$400.

I didn't keep track of these, but somewhere . . . maybe I can find them sometime . . . somehow I got hold of a list of the people at the Metropole. I mean names, like Coleman Hawkins and Red Allen and all these people. They were getting abysmally small amounts of money. It's horrendous when I think about it.

**WILLIAMS:** I'm not surprised. As you said, that was the case. I'm sure each group, as you said, salaries varied from a contingent on how effective their agents and representatives were. Something else along those lines I was going to ask you was, you mentioned about six-day weeks . . . How many sets would that be per night? On average.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** I think maybe it was about four. It was half an hour on and half an hour off. I think we started 9:00 to . . . I think we played 9:00 'til 3:00, I'm pretty sure. There was a girl piano player who would play the intermissions. She would start . . . It was either 8:30 or 9:00. I know we went 'til 3:00, but I . . . We would seriously screw up the schedule, because we were just across from Birdland. We would get off after the . . . it would be a half an hour on and half an hour off. We'd go running over there if it was Duke or Count Basie or Billy Eckstine, Sarah [Vaughan], whoever it would be. Then tear back in time to do there . . . maybe be a little late, even, to get back and do our next set. We used to do that every night.

Then people would come to the Hickory House. I can remember Oscar [Peterson] being there and sitting in. Duke used to sit in periodically. He was there every night when he was in town. He would be there every night.

**WILLIAMS:** So Duke and Oscar both sat in with your trio?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes.

**WILLIAMS:** At different times.

**McPARTLAND:** Duke was probably writing something, because he played this piece I'd never heard. I was sitting at the bar, and I hollared out to him, "What is that?" He gave that mysterious little smile, and he says, "It's called 'Night Creature'." I thought he was just putting me on, but he did in fact write a piece called "Night Creature."

**WILLIAMS:** Was that one of the movie scores later on, wasn't it?

**McPARTLAND:** Yep. I think so.

**WILLIAMS:** *Anatomy of a Murder* maybe.

**McPARTLAND:** He probably gave me one of the best criticisms I ever had, which I think I've said it on "Piano Jazz" and I can say it again. I got off after a set, and I would go and sit down at his table. His lady, Eve, was there. He would say to me, "You play *so* many notes." I thought about it and after a while I thought, he probably telling me I'm playing too many. A very nice way of criticizing somebody.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes, it's a kind of a nebulous thing then. Hopefully you . . . one would read between the lines.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Well I did. It took me a while, but I did. Billy Strayhorn would be at the other end of the room. He always sat by himself. But you don't want to hear about . . . I don't need all that. I mean you don't, unless you . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Oh sure . . . just quickly give us a list of some other personalities. I remember once you told me Oscar Pettiford came by.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, Pettiford. He used to . . . Oscar Pettiford came a lot, and he would sit. That's where I learned so many of his tunes, like "Bohemia After Dark" and "Black-Eyed Peas" and . . . what was the rest of that one?

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, "Blues in the Closet."

**McPARTLAND:** "Swinging 'Til the Girls Come Home." We used to play all those tunes with him.

Another guy who would come in, but he would come in in not terribly good shape, Wilbur Ware. What a fine bass player he was.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. Great.

**McPARTLAND:** Just a tragedy.

**WILLIAMS:** One of the most swinging of bassists. Yeah, Wilbur. I used to call him Wilbur B. Ware. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, right. And then Monk came in.

**WILLIAMS:** Did Thelonious sit in and play ever?

**McPARTLAND:** No.

**WILLIAMS:** He just visited.

**McPARTLAND:** It was interesting what happened with him. This is a silly anecdote. I met Monk on the street. At that time he was more communicative than in later years. He could say "hello" or something, without too much trouble. We stopped and spoke to each other, and I said, "Gee, I'm at the Hickory House. I'm so enjoying playing some of your tunes. I'm trying to learn your tunes. I'd love it if you'd come by some night." A dumb thing, to invite *Monk* to hear *me* play his music. Anyway, he came one night. The tall, thin guy looking sinister. He had on a black raincoat and a beret, and he had a friend with him who was just as tall and sinister looking. The two of them came in, walked to the

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



back of the room, and sat down, ordered some drinks. I kept looking to see if there was any reaction. They were just in earnest conversation the entire set, talking back and forth. Then they got up and left, and Monk left me the check. [laughter]

**WILLIAMS:** He wanted to make sure that you remembered that he came [laughs], that he showed up.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, that was his comment on my rendition of “Round Midnight,” probably. [laughter] But I think that’s so funny.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh I love it.

**McPARTLAND:** It’s wonderful. But that’s typical Monk, isn’t it? I used to go to the Five Spot a lot and hear him. He would really get up and do a little dance around the piano, a little shuffle or something, wearing one of his ridiculous hats. I went there a lot and heard him.

**WILLIAMS:** Probably that’s where Wilbur Ware was playing with him at some of that time.

**McPARTLAND:** I can’t remember. I know Wilbur Ware would do crazy things, like play on a street corner.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, Roy Haynes, maybe Johnny Griffin were in the band at that time.

**McPARTLAND:** It’s funny. Somehow Johnny . . .

**WILLIAMS:** John Coltrane, perhaps.

**McPARTLAND:** I went to hear Coltrane. It changed my life. Jimmy and I played together in Indianapolis. The club was the Embers. That was called the Embers. Down the street in another club, Coltrane was playing. He was playing on our night off, so we went, and it was the original group. It was McCoy [Tyner], Jimmy Garrison, Elvin [Jones], and Monk.

**WILLIAMS:** Not and Monk. And Trane.

**McPARTLAND:** I mean Trane. I’m sorry. I’m losing my mind. It was just . . . I think he spent the whole set maybe playing two tunes or one tune or something, but it was so exciting and absorbing. I couldn’t move. It was . . . I don’t know what to say except that it was very . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**WILLIAMS:** Intense.

**McPARTLAND:** Intense. Moving and exciting. But it's funny, because it did affect me musically. The next night on the gig I found myself playing stuff I'd never played before. Everybody remarked on it. "What are you doing? I never heard you do that before." It gave me a jumping off point to improve my playing.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I figure, and I want to develop that thought a little later in our conversation. One of the things in terms of affecting your career and your life, too, I wanted to touch on, would be to find out specifically what major resistance, if there were, that you were subjected to, say, by maybe the jazz community or by certain individuals regarding, say, your nationality or your sex or any potentially racially inflicted type of things. Let's start with, was it any resistance because of you being a musician from . . .

**McPARTLAND:** A female.

**WILLIAMS:** Well let's start . . . o.k. we'll start with that here, female.

**McPARTLAND:** I've repeated it so many times that it's silly. When I was in the Hickory House, the first big writeup I had was by Leonard Feather. He said, "She's got three strikes against her. She's English, white, and a woman." It was like, those are three reasons why she'll never get anywhere.

**WILLIAMS:** Is that what he actually said, on record?

**McPARTLAND:** Actually said it. It's funny. It's been widely quoted ever since. Leonard was always trying to get out from under, and he kept saying, "Marian, I didn't . . . I wasn't really serious. I was joking." He was protesting . . . I made a lot . . . I had a lot of fun with that, because I don't remember every feeling daunted by that.

As far as a racial thing, I always . . . I don't know. I just had nothing going on, because all the people, or a good many of the people Jimmy introduced me to, were people like Louis, and he introduced me to Coleman Hawkins. I think I must have met Coleman Hawkins before we went in the Embers. I think I met Teddy. I met all these people. I never felt any kind of a draft or anything like that. Maybe once. One time I remember a very funny feeling, playing at Monday night at Birdland. This guy that ran Birdland, Oscar Goodstein. They would bring other bands or put a band together on Monday nights.

**WILLIAMS:** Several groups. Yeah, I know, sometimes.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** I don't really . . . I can't really put a name on any of the people there. They weren't people that I'd met, like . . . thinking of specific people that worked with Bud [Powell], like Curley Russell or somebody like that. I don't remember any names, but I was hired to play, and there was a bunch of musicians, and they really ignored me. But it so happened that I knew all the tunes. I just felt uncomfortable playing, but nobody spoke to me. They'd just count off a tune.

**WILLIAMS:** Do you remember any of the musicians that played.

**McPARTLAND:** No, that's it. I don't. I don't. I'm not being evasive. I just remember that they obviously were not pleased to have this particular piano player there. They might have liked somebody else.

**WILLIAMS:** Did you subsequently play at Birdland in setting such as that, after that as well?

**McPARTLAND:** I played at Birdland a lot, and it was always good. A lot of fun.

**WILLIAMS:** I meant like in a jam session type, where . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Yes, yes.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. So it wasn't just your trio coming into Birdland. It was always one . . .

**McPARTLAND:** No, no, I played in jam sessions. I played in a lot of jam sessions. In fact it almost seemed as if . . . sometimes . . . if people would bend over backwards to be especially nice or . . . I don't know. I really can say I've had pretty much good feelings from everybody. I can't think of anybody that's an enemy or somebody I have bad feelings about. Except [laughs] a bass player, the first bass player that worked with me in the Embers. I've just remembered him. I can't think what his name was. Bill . . . He was a bass player that would be more or less of a cocktail bass player. I don't know why I had him. I think I . . . Somebody gave me his name. He was somebody that had a little drinking problem. I would want to end the tune, and he would keep taking another bass solo. Things like that.

**WILLIAMS:** That can be a little disconcerting.

**McPARTLAND:** He would look at me like, "Man, don't finish the tune. I'm not . . ." or "Play some more." He was obnoxious. So I had to . . . It was very hard for me to do that though, to . . . I'm not good at confrontational things.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** So you felt in general, looking back . . . we certainly know how the jazz community feel about you, certainly in recent years, but you would say even in your early years in New York City, just to finalize this little point here, that say through the '50s and '60s, '40s, '50s, and '60s, by and large you still felt welcome and a very integral part of the jazz community.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, always. Always. I never had a doubtful moment. When you . . . when I think of the first trio job, having people like Coleman Hawkins . . . Roy was such fun. Coleman Hawkins was a great guy. Always having people like that around. And then going to the Hickory House and having Duke there every night. *He* certainly was in my corner. Every time I would go to Birdland, you could see people coming in down the stairs. He could always see who was coming in, and he would always call me over and get me to sit in or make a big announcement. I would be cringing, but yet wanting to go and sit in. No, I always had . . . In fact, I think years ago feelings for every way might be better than they are now. It seems to me that there's—not towards me personally, but generally—there seems to be a little bit of separation between races.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I think that's very true. Also, along those lines, just where . . . you've obviously observed this. Can you think of specific examples that you can think has either caused that or that you've seen illustrations of this in recent times?

**McPARTLAND:** What? Something that's caused it?

**WILLIAMS:** Well, no, I shouldn't say caused it. What illustrations have brought this to your attention?

**McPARTLAND:** Maybe just certain areas, like concerts, and you see where the personnel is really maybe all black musicians but one, or maybe none, maybe no white people in the band. See that a few times.

**WILLIAMS:** Also actually I've seen it quite reversed too, and a situation, just from my observations of being a contemporary artist, I think some of it has been caused because of record companies, record . . . or agents and promoters, whoever, the powers of authority, who orchestrate a career or certain careers and make decisions. Of course that causes a certain animosity among the artists, because it's less work available, and it's fewer places and it's fewer recordings companies, and things like this. It's sort of like the haves and have nots, that I have seen. Whereas before we usually could call up each other, musicians, say, "Look, I want you to play. Are you available or interested in playing?" Now you have to go through an agent.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** That's true.

**WILLIAMS:** You can't . . . Probably even some of the young musicians that you would like to have on "Piano Jazz," you probably have to . . . You can't call up musicians, certain artists. You have to talk to their representative and go back and forth and even those little things, so you don't develop the rapport with people that you did, and see them out in the clubs, and that kind of thing as well.

**McPARTLAND:** That's true. That has happened. As a matter of fact, in my life, it's a big thing. It's trying to get away from managers and agents and actually talk to the person, because if you talk to the person, it's so much better all the way around. I remember I had a hard time—this was a while back—trying to get a hold of Wynton [Marsalis] through this guy in . . .

**WILLIAMS:** In Washington?

**McPARTLAND:** . . . Maryland or D.C. or wherever he is. But finally we went around him or did whatever we had to do. You have to go over or under or around or through these people. It does happen a lot.

**WILLIAMS:** Exactly, and it takes away . . . It takes a lot of energy to do that, because then it involves much more, and I agree that almost in all cases if you can talk directly, the artists talk directly to each other, these, any of these potential problems can be worked out, and it can go on. O.k, but I just wanted to get your feeling on that. We may develop that a little later.

I wanted to get back to . . . you mentioned you had a lot of information about the Hickory House. Let's talk about that a little bit. How did that engagement come about? Why did it end? Were you just decided you wanted to move on and be in a different setting? And what were some of the highlights during those years there? Obviously your career really moved into another echelon, recording-wise as well as in terms of just high visibility.

**McPARTLAND:** It was about ten years, actually. I think that we were signed with Joe Glaser, with Associated Booking. I think that came about, getting a call from a guy there, Larry Bennett. Actually I was not working for a while. I had an operation, abdominal operation. It wasn't all that serious, but at the time they thought it might be. So I was off the scene for a few weeks. It was during that period . . . Actually we were . . . We had taken an apartment or something . . . what the hell? We were living in Boston. I can't remember where. I think we did have an apartment there for a little while. Anyway, I was recovering from this thing. That's how that happened. Somebody called up and said if you play your cards right, you could probably . . . you could go in the Hickory House.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

You could maybe stay there for a month or two. I remember that part of the conversation distinctly. “Yeah, that’d be great.”

So I went there expecting just that and being an absolute nervous wreck. Joe Morgan, who you never met, the Hickory House press agent who was also Duke Ellington’s press agent . . . He was a terrible man, a real pest. But he did get stuff in the papers. I remember I had bought this gorgeous dress for the opening, which is still hanging in the basement here, 40 years later. I still have it. We opened, and I had . . . I didn’t really know who to get. I don’t know how I arrived at this guy. Somebody I’d heard played well. A drummer named Mel Zelnick, who now lives in Phoenix. That was the drummer, and the bass player was . . . oh, this is terrible . . . I was sure that I would know who the bass player was. Bob Carter played with me, but that was later. This is awful. I usually know the whole personnel from beginning to end, but I can’t remember who that was.

**WILLIAMS:** It will come back to you later.

**McPARTLAND:** Anyway, we started, and it was obvious that things were going very well. Nothing was said about leaving. We were there for a year before anybody said anything. The owner, for him to smile or say . . . he never said anything, like things were going well. He might try to crack a smile, but he was a very grumpy guy, because he didn’t want anyone to know that business was good, in case they asked for a raise. We did eventually get a little money. I don’t think we ever got up to more than about \$800. In ten years I can’t remember being . . . like creeping up \$25 here and \$50 there, just creeping up a little bit.

During that time I was recording for Savoy, and I had a radio spot on what was then WNEW. A guy named Jazzbo Collins. You know him? You know of him.

**WILLIAMS:** I’ve heard his name.

**McPARTLAND:** He was very big stuff in those days. Every day at 5:00 we had this little local radio spot. And then we had one in the club. They called it a remote. Somebody would come from NBC with an engineer and setup and do a half an hour live in the club. All over the country. That’s what helped get me started, was that kind of thing, people hearing us in California. What else? Oh, all these shows, like the Steve Allen Show, the Tonight Show.

**WILLIAMS:** The Tonight Show. Dave Garroway, the Today Show?

**McPARTLAND:** Dave Garroway. I think . . . I’m not sure if he had yet come to New York. Somewhere in that time he moved from Chicago to New York. Yes, we started doing that. But then there were other shows. Patty Page had a show. Kate Smith had a

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



show. It seemed people like Barbara Carroll, and Cy Coleman had a trio. He had a little club. Oh no, he was working at the Rainbow . . . at what is now the Omni. It's changed its name so many times. Park Central it was then. He was playing on that circular bar. I don't know if they even have that any more.

**WILLIAMS:** There's a variation of it in the hotel now.

**McPARTLAND:** That was considered a good spot. There were other places. Anyway, I thought I was doing pretty good with Savoy and the tv and all that stuff.

**WILLIAMS:** When you mentioned that they had remote at 5pm, did that meant the trio had to show up at the club?

**McPARTLAND:** No. No. Actually the remote was at night during the job. That would be between the hours . . . maybe they would come in at 10:00 and do a half an hour. No, the other thing . . .

**WILLIAMS:** And it would be shown at 5:00 the next day or something?

**McPARTLAND:** That was the other one. The other one was at the radio station. I would go to the radio station and work with the two guys who were on staff. Walter Yost was the bass player. And Phil Schwartz, I think his name was. These were two guys that . . . There was a lot of live . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Studio work at that time too.

**McPARTLAND:** There were things . . . You never have that kind of stuff anymore, where there would be jazz on a radio station in the afternoon. It's unheard of now. It just got phased out. Having big bands. I'm trying to think where I would hear that kind of thing.

Then we started to go on the road. We would get booked in other towns. And then come back to the Hickory House.

**WILLIAMS:** Let me ask you a question. When you would go on the road, would that mean that you'd have, say, two weeks vacation, like you'd do a traditional job, that he would allow you away from the club a specific time? In other words, if Joe Glaser said, "I have a month in Chicago," what do you, how far, how did you make arrangements? Was it your responsibility to get a sub? Or did the club hire another trio to come in in your place?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** I think maybe that was worked out. I'm not sure. I think that was probably worked out between Joe Glaser and John Popkin.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, o.k.

**McPARTLAND:** We would never be happy with the situation. It was always, "God, I'd love to go on the road and get out of here for a while." Dumb attitude. Then we'd go out on the road, and we'd want to come back again. We would go for maybe six weeks, say like a week in maybe Columbus, Ohio. We'd go to Chicago and play at the London House. Maybe be out for several weeks, and then come back in the Hickory House again. This kind of thing went on for ten years, doing this.

**WILLIAMS:** During that time, Jimmy now is pursuing his own trio . . . career with his own group or personnel, so that would be periods of time, long periods of time, that you guys would be in different cities.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. Although sometimes it would be a quartet, and he would go. I don't think that was an entirely satisfactory thing. I think it would have been nicer for him if there had been more horn players. We were compromising. We were playing tunes that he liked to play and things that he liked to sing, and then we were doing our own things. I had by that time got a lot of tunes in little arrangements.

**WILLIAMS:** Had your own repertoire for the trio.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. I knew millions of tunes, and sometimes we would just play tunes. We wouldn't necessarily play something we'd worked out.

**WILLIAMS:** Just continuing a little more about the Hickory House, I just wanted to get an idea as . . . obviously your career was developing. You were getting more confidence doing the presentation as well as just performing and developing your artistry at the piano. Do you want speak on that, and what made the Hickory House special for you, or Billy Taylor, or Hazel Scott and different people that played there . . . Mary Lou Williams, who worked there.

**McPARTLAND:** I don't know where to start. It's funny, because when I think of it now, in retrospect it was a good thing to be doing, but at the time we were always grumbling about the noise or some of the help. People in there . . . The owner's son was very grumpy. It seemed like we were . . . We should have been more happy to be doing what we were doing. Actually we did have a lot of fun and a lot of laughs, and I had gone through . . . I had a few different guys and finally arrived at this good trio with Bill Crow

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center



and Joe Morello. That was the . . . one of the good groups I had in there. Then later on I had Dave Bailey and Ben Tucker.

As far as repertoire, I tried to pick up on a lot of tunes. I learned some tunes by John Lewis and Bud. I learned a lot of Billy Strayhorn tunes and a lot of different Duke Ellington tunes, which I didn't play, and we made little charts on different things. And a lot of standard tunes. That was when I made my timid attempt at writing stuff. Jack Robbins, the music publisher, would come in there all the time. There were people that came in that really were . . . just seemed to love the group. In retrospect, listening to what I played, it sounds terrible, I'm thinking. I have improved a lot since.

You said something that sounded like you like what you did earlier better than what you're doing now, which is a reverse from me. I didn't like anything that I did then. But I was doing the best I could. I was doing as good as I could do. We had . . . in those days they had song pluggers. All these song pluggers would come around bringing tunes that they wanted played on the broadcast. That was another period where you either had to fight them off or you give in and play the tunes, play the tune. I did some of both. Sometimes I'd evade doing the tune, but these guys were pests. They would spend a lot of time trying to make you do the thing.

I think I learned from listening to other people and going to other clubs and picking up tunes. Going down to the Vanguard and hearing Bill Evans. Going across to Birdland every chance I got. I started hearing Dave Brubeck. Actually, he was never a great influence for me, but we liked to play some of the tunes. I'm probably jumping ahead of myself.

**WILLIAMS:** No, that actually dovetails quite well into a lot of things. You mentioned about these things. How did some of the other groups that played there at that time when you weren't there, or subsequently followed you there, for instance, I mentioned about Billy Taylor and his trio, or Mary Lou Williams. How . . . would they . . . did they find the Hickory House as special as you did? Were their tenures as long?

**McPARTLAND:** No, their tenures were not as long. Actually, Mary Lou didn't play there until years later, and Billy played there right before the place closed or the music policy ended, because I remember I was there, and I felt terribly sad. I'll tell you who they had. Toshiko [Akiyoshi] had just come over [from Japan], and she did a stint in there, or maybe more than one, when I was gone. There was a woman who was awfully good, but she doesn't play any more, at least not in New York, Pat . . . Oh, God, her married name . . . Pat McCoy. She was Pat Moran. She was recording for RCA. She was very, very good. Then they had a German girl that Leonard Feather had discovered, called Jutta Hipp. She's recorded a lot with a lot of German musicians, and she came over, but she quit. She couldn't stand the pressure of everything. She gave up and lives . . . Now she lives in Long Island City and has not played for years. I went and interviewed her one time.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



So those are the kind of people that came in when I was gone. I would be jealously thinking, “I wonder if they did better than I do” and things like that. The competitive thoughts that you have. They did all do well, but I always felt a good feeling coming back. We’d feel good about coming back. “It’s great to be back.” Then five minutes later, “God, we got to get out of this place. Can’t stand it.”

**WILLIAMS:** In regard of the competition of that . . . we alluded to that in regards to, say, someone like Miss Barbara Carroll was one.

**McPARTLAND:** Yes, yes.

**WILLIAMS:** Maybe you’d like to elaborate on that to this point . . . and others.

**McPARTLAND:** It’s funny. Something just occurred to me, apropos of that. That is, going to Birdland and hearing people like Bud Powell and Phineas Newborn and various groups. I never felt that I was competing with those people. In my mind was that they were all on a much higher level, that those were people I only thought of in terms of great admiration for what they were doing, not people that I was thinking, “I could go in there and play his gig.” I didn’t have those kind of feelings at all.

But the people that were in my immediate circle . . . Barbara was one. And then Cy Coleman had a trio. It seemed that we were always rotating between these afternoon television shows.

**WILLIAMS:** Interesting. What that sounds like is almost two circus . . . two parallel circuses going on, like you said, because the echelon and the kind of rooms that you’d see Phineas Newborn or Art Tatum perhaps at some point or Erroll Garner and so and so artists, Ahmad Jamal . . . they, like you said, they weren’t really . . . we have them in such esteem there that, like you said, maybe the people who were more your contemporaries coming in at a different, not necessarily lower echelon, but like I say, are parallels, like being in two different dimensions, so to speak.

**McPARTLAND:** When I think of it now, you mentioned Ahmad Jamal. He and I played the identical club in Chicago, the London House, except when he had his own place at the Pershing Hotel, out the South Side. Art Tatum, he worked at the Embers a lot. It’s sad when I think of it. Art Tatum worked in a lot of dives that we worked in. There was this club in Cleveland called Lindsay’s Sky Bar. I’ve got a picture of Art and myself. I must have had a lot of balls, because I’m sitting there at the piano next to him. Then there’s one picture where he’s standing up and I’m sitting at the piano. I’ve got one of those pictures of myself with Oscar [Peterson] and Ray Brown.

But there was no difference. We would all play the same clubs. I would be different in the money department, I guess. Art and I and other people . . . maybe not so

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

much Barbara. She stayed, seemed to stay in town a great deal. She didn't travel. We all played many of those same clubs. But as I say, I never thought of those people on my level. To me, Tatum . . . I was in here somewhere, and Tatum was up there. We might have played the same club, but so what? I don't know if I'm making myself clear.

**WILLIAMS:** No, that's very clear. Let's just elaborate a little more on this situation. For instance, with Barbara or maybe a Hazel Scott or Dorothy Donegan or someone like that. How would that . . . how would you feel in terms of that, being a bit competitive? For instance, maybe whether relating to t.v. shows or articles being written about you or any number of things.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, here's another thing. I always had this feeling about Mary Lou being in another dimension. She didn't . . . she was somebody . . . and I worked with her. There was a club in New York called The Composer. Wonderful little club that had . . . and we would have two trios. It would be my trio and maybe Cy Coleman. Then at another point there was a trio . . . fantastic . . . Jim Hall, Jimmy Giuffre, and Bob Brookmeyer. A wild combination, but interesting as hell. They were working opposite us. Then the guy booked Mary Lou Williams working opposite me, or vice versa. I thought that was great, and I wrote an article about it in *Down Beat*. She was very nice. We were very friendly at that time. Later on she became very annoyed with me for something. I don't really know what it was.

**WILLIAMS:** Are you a friend of Mary Lou?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** What do you suspect that might have been? Do you have any ideas?

**McPARTLAND:** It might have been because she went in the Carlyle [Hotel], and for whatever reason, she didn't come back, but I did. So I think she just got mad at me. But it's nothing . . . That's the only thing I can suspect. But I had nothing whatever to do with her going in there or not going in there.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I agree there. I think a lot of times, looking at it from a perspective of an artist too, there's a frustration either if . . . not have . . . or if a certain artist's career isn't nurtured either by management or affected by who gets the work, even if it's not your . . . obviously it's not your fault directly, because you have no decision on that, but just the idea that things like that happen, sometimes that . . . after that happened to people over a period of time, they lose the perspective of it and become disillusioned about the scene or about what their perception is. Even though we may give lip service to a certain artists being, as we say about an Art Tatum, but probably Art Tatum didn't financially

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



make the kind of situation in the same echelon as an Oscar Peterson or an Erroll Garner or yourself or somebody like that.

**McPARTLAND:** Well, me, I was way down there, but I always felt that Art—not to get off the subject of Mary Lou—but I always felt that Art was not getting what he should have had. He did have a manager, named Joe Marsellais [spelling?]. But I would always see Art working in these neon-lit joints which I was working in at the same . . . People were noisy. He's working at the Embers and people are clanking bottles and waiters are . . . I remember being really incensed by that, thinking how terrible it was.

Back to Mary Lou. It's possible that because I had an agent and I never liked to do my own business . . . I had an agent. That may have been how that happened. Bobby [Short, the pianist and singer at the Café Carlisle] was very friendly with me. I guess what happened is I went in the other room, in the bar, to play [Bemelmans Bar in the Carlyle Hotel]. There's a whole long story connected with this, but it's not too important. Then Bobby was going away in January of whatever year. '70-something. '73 or '74. Bobby was instrumental in me being hired there to replace him. I'm always grateful to him, because he really set me up in that room, and I did play there a lot, on and off for ten years, mostly in the summertime, when he was gone. I seem to be good at being somewhere for ten years.

That's maybe when Mary Lou . . . I was talking about Mary Lou. I didn't have the competitive feeling. For me, as I say, she was in another dimension. It was Barbara and the people that I felt were my contemporaries, or Cy Coleman . . . I say him because he was always on the scene. There was these nice trios, and Barbara was always at the Embers and I always seemed to be at the Hickory House. I felt, I'm in this real rough-and-ready room with sawdust on the floor, and the waiters are shouting. Barbara is in this elegant, plushy room on the East Side. I remember she and I talked about this. We had a good laugh about it

**WILLIAMS:** See that's worked out, because obviously the music has not . . . That didn't dilute your friendship and all, even though it was a friendly competitiveness to that. For our listeners, Bobby is Bobby Short, a noted pianist and vocalist. The thing about that too is that once again, your perception of Mary Lou, just to stay with that a little bit longer . . . My take on that even though you gave her the kind of respect and admiration that she deserved, my feeling is that, and this is only a hypothesis, that she didn't feel like she received that from the people who were in a place . . . Decisionmakers looked at it in a very different perspective. It was just another pianist, or something like that. Which could be motivated by any number of reasons, from being female to being a female Afro-American to being not what they'd like as the image of what they wanted in the room, maybe the repertoire, maybe the music. So I think it could have been all of those factors keyed in, and especially in a room . . . for our listeners, the Hotel Carlyle is an upper East Side five-star hotel. That all could be . . . because now, American culture and Madison

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Avenue . . . ironically that's located on Madison . . . is very image-conscious about everything, so we have . . . That could also have been a factor which had nothing to do with the two of you as two artists. Those things do factor in, and I see it more in 1997.

**McPARTLAND:** It's a very sane way of explaining it, and it probably is it, but I felt wounded by the fact that Mary Lou was giving me the terse treatment. I remember going down to hear her at the Cookery. I remember I took her some roses. It was the same thing. She was very terse, curt, didn't have much to say to me at all. It took a while. I think before we became friendly again that she was ill, and then I called her up in Durham or I spoke to her down there. She became more friendly again. As you know, she was very religious. I spent a lot of time going around town trying to find a gold St. Cecilia medal. It's harder than you would imagine. I did finally find one and sent it to her. That warmed her heart a little bit. Then I was back in her good graces.

**WILLIAMS:** Thank goodness for that. I also want to get just a couple of little sound bites about some influential artists that was . . . this is a sort of a part, I consider a part of the New York pantheon of the '50s especially. We've mentioned about Art Tatum, but just give us maybe two or three sentences of your impression of the following people: Joe Venuti.

**McPARTLAND:** I'd hear of Joe Venuti. He's somebody I knew from the start. I'd heard of him in different bands. I think I met him at this very room, The Composer room. He was a guy that was . . . like a very lively, vibrant guy who'd say anything . . . lot of terrible stories about him, because he was just wild. But at the same time I felt . . . first of all, he was a wonderful player. He was a great player. He was just a character. You can't tell all the stories here, but you've heard some of them.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes.

**McPARTLAND:** He's outrageous, like an overgrown schoolboy, some of the things he would do. Fly into rages. He would do things that were really crude, but yet he was a wonderful player. He and I made a record together.

**WILLIAMS:** I was going to say you have a recording. Joe Venuti is one of the great jazz violinists. How about this for a twist: Leonard Bernstein.

**McPARTLAND:** I never did meet him. I loved all that music. I went to see the *West Side Story*. I play a lot of his music, or more than I do now. Somehow for a time everybody was playing everything from the *West Side Story*. Then it went out of fashion. But the tunes are just as great as they ever were. Bill Evans made a beautiful record of . . . what is it? . . . "Some Other Time," I think it's called.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

I tried desperately to get Leonard Bernstein on “Piano Jazz.” His people were always very polite, but couldn’t get that together. I think the man was marvelous, and he had a lot of great ideas and did a lot of things for kids. I think it’s incredible that he wrote so much terrific pop stuff and yet a lot of more classically-oriented music. He was just a . . . I would like to have met him, because he was . . . I think he was brilliant in many ways.

**WILLIAMS:** Very much so. One of the great renaissance people of the twentieth century, I think. I wanted to, because I wanted to see how that music and those personalities, even off at a distance, affected your playing, affected your music or choice of styles or concept rather, as well as repertoire. Obviously things that you may have played with Joe Venuti and listening and being affected by Leonard Bernstein. I’m a ask you about two more artists, linked together, that we’ve alluded to a little earlier, and two great pianists that came into their own in the ’50s and see your relationship in terms of how . . . if there was any influence or effect one way or the other with Oscar Peterson and Phineas Newborn, Jr. Did you meet Oscar shortly after after you arrived in 1949?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes, yes. I met Oscar . . . I think somewhere back yesterday I mentioned Jimmy and I played in Toronto in maybe the end of the ’40s or 1950. It was about the time that this particular club in Canada . . . They were going through a change where they had these terrible liquors. You couldn’t get a drink. All of a sudden it changed. So Jimmy and I went up there and played in this club called the Colonial Tavern. The big act was Oscar Peterson and Ray Brown. I had just assimilated all the records that I could find of his.

**WILLIAMS:** You had heard of Oscar. You were aware of him before that.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, yes, I definitely was.

**WILLIAMS:** Because Ray was already in New York with Dizzy and Ella prior to that anyway.

**McPARTLAND:** I met Ray that time in Storyville when he came in the club with Ella. I didn’t meet Ray to have a lot of conversation with him until we were there in Toronto. Then we were working together, and I saw a lot of him. He and Oscar were wonderful to me. They couldn’t have been nicer. I was a nervous wreck, thinking, “Oh my God! Here we’re working opposite Oscar.”

Actually I had . . . I went through a period of having a . . . being apologetic about playing traditional jazz, which really is terrible of me to feel that way. I was wishing [laughs] we were playing more bebop tunes. Of course that’s childish. I got over that.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





But we were talking about Oscar. Since that time we've been as friendly as anybody can be with being on the road and only meeting here and there. I would go see him in clubs, and I remember he came to the Hickory House. As I say, he sat in, and we had a long conversation about music and different things. He had his school, and we were talking about things that should be taught to kids.

**WILLIAMS:** Did you ever visit his home or vice versa?

**McPARTLAND:** No.

**WILLIAMS:** Or have dinner together?

**McPARTLAND:** No. Oh, we've had dinner together I think maybe at a festival or somewhere. They were always scuttling off to go to some terrific restaurant. Two years ago when I was working with Benny Carter, we were all in Vienna together, and I was supposed to go for dinner with them that night. But I don't know. Everybody else seemed to last more than I did. I was always absolutely worn out after one of these plane trips. Oscar and Ray, they seemed ready to go. They couldn't wait to go out and have a big meal. Louie Bellson was there. We'd see a lot of people. At the North Sea festival I saw Oscar. I went and heard the group that time. So many times. I remember seeing him at Basin Street East when Ed Thigpen had joined the group. Poor Ed Thigpen was . . . he was a nervous wreck at that time, trying to fit in and do everything they wanted. Ray's giving him an aside, "Pick up the sticks. Pick up the brushes." It must have been a tough gig for a few nights.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, for a few years perhaps. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** 'Til he got it together.

**WILLIAMS:** He was there for six years. Let me just ask a couple . . . just your impression of someone like Oscar who burst on the scene, Phineas Newborn. Did you . . . were you familiar with this name before he came to New York? Or did Leonard Feather bring it . . . or any others, George Wein, others like that, mention his name? Or were you aware of him only when he came to Basin Street East or something?

**McPARTLAND:** I was aware of him on records. There were a lot more d.j.'s playing jazz then than there are now. Every town you would be in, there would be at least one radio station. That's something we all miss, but I haven't thought of it 'til this minute. You would pick up on a lot of new people and new stuff, because you'd hear it on the radio. A guy like Dave Garroway, he was insatiable for wanting to hear new people and

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





playing it. So I had a lot of records of Phineas. I didn't actually meet him . . . I'm not sure if I ever . . . if I met him it was peripherally, like "hello," but I had a lot of his records.

I remember a period when . . . Do you remember a name, John Mehegan?

**WILLIAMS:** Yes, the pianist and author.

**McPARTLAND:** He was working opposite me at the Hickory House. I could never go for that piano method of his. I couldn't.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, that's a whole other conversation. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** He was writing for *Down Beat*. He wrote a very inflammatory article about Phineas, about . . . It was like he really wasn't a jazz player. John used to write these terrible articles. He wrote one about Bill Evans, calling him a cocktail piano player. Then he wrote one about Phineas, saying he was all technique. It was a bad thing. In those days, something like that, a lot of people would see it and talk about it.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah, like he says.

**McPARTLAND:** It seemed to me that that was at the point where Phineas became weird. He went back to Philadelphia. Wasn't that where he's from?

**WILLIAMS:** No, he's from Memphis.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, of course he is. But he must have been living in Philadelphia. I can't get it all together, but I know that was . . . Things seemed to not go so well for him. I'm sure John didn't change his life, but . . .

**WILLIAMS:** I'm sure it was a major factor, because like you said, people are very impressionable from . . . especially in a prestigious magazine like *Down Beat* or somewhere like that.

**McPARTLAND:** *Down Beat* was really big stuff at that time, bigger than it is now.

**WILLIAMS:** And no-one challenged critics at that point so much as they do in more contemporary times.

**McPARTLAND:** I don't remember anybody challenging that. I didn't . . . I know I wasn't into it that I was going to write about that, although I did write a comedy letter, because again John did a big criticism about Dave Brubeck. I can't remember what was said in the letter. I just found it the other day, but it . . . I was telling John to lay off.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** It sounds like he was mostly writing criticisms . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Well he did.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . more so than any construction[ *sic*: constructive] criticisms. I wanted to just get your take on that and also to see how that affected the way you performed. Obviously we feel like in the case of a Mr. Newborn or Mr. Peterson or Mr. Jamal or Mr. Evans that that may have affected how they approached their music, that the critics have that much power. Of course we know we heard criticisms about Thelonious Monk and probably everyone who we've . . . time has been gracious to show went beyond what they said. Did that have any effect on you, when you would see this kind of scathing criticism about someone? At that point were you confident enough in your career to go beyond that and still play your true convictions? Or did you sometimes feel like . . . all of us . . . at least I have at certain times . . . wonders, "Maybe they're right. Maybe I'm wrong." Did you ever doubt any of the things you were doing because of what you may have read?

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, no. I didn't relate that to myself at all. I thought Phineas was fabulous. There was a point there where he seemed better than anyone around. He had these tremendous chops, as you know. I'm trying to think what I've got upstairs. It's probably . . . he was on Atlantic, I think.

**WILLIAMS:** Atlantic and Contemporary and others.

**McPARTLAND:** It seemed like everything he did was flawless. I was very preoccupied with my own stuff. I don't remember . . . He wasn't somebody that I knew, or that I would consider myself so important that I would consider that my view would be so important for everybody. I had that feeling. They're not going to give a damn if I write about it. But I was very upset by it and indignant about it. But of course I knew John, because he worked at the Hickory House. He could have very well taken some of his own criticism for his own playing.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs] Yeah, most of us that write articles like that don't see it that clearly, unfortunately.

**McPARTLAND:** It's too bad that they would . . . I went through a little period where I did something quite bad, where I would . . . They had me doing jazz criticism, being a critic for jazz records for *Down Beat*. [laughs] You only got \$5 or something for each one. This is years ago. I don't know why I did that. I must have had the time, or I thought it was . . . wanted to see myself in print, or I don't know. After doing it for a little while, I couldn't go on, because I would get records that I really didn't like, didn't like the sound

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



or didn't like . . . and I thought, I can't be sitting here criticizing my peers. I'm in the business. I can't be telling people that I don't like a record by John Coltrane or I don't like this . . . So I stopped then. I had to stop, because if you're going to write about some fellow musicians, you've got to be . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, if you live in glass houses . . . [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** Exactly! It was fine if I got a record that I liked, but I . . . They sent me so many that I wasn't too crazy about, so I stopped doing it. But John, he was a headstrong . . . he had very strong opinions. He used to tell me what I should do. He said something to me once—he's probably right—"Marian, you sound too much like Teddy Wilson. You don't have enough Bird in your playing." That's what he said. He might have been right.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs] Bird being Charlie Parker.

**McPARTLAND:** Not that there's anything bad about sounding like Teddy Wilson. But, "You don't have enough Bird in your playing."

**WILLIAMS:** One more point, before we move on to another era, I want to ask you about is . . . we . . . another gentleman whose name came up earlier, Leonard Feather, because once again he really was a major influence. Not only was he a critic that wrote numerous articles and later, *Encyclopedia of Jazz* and all of these things, but obviously had a very powerful voice in the industry in terms of producing recordings and things like that. Getting back to his comment about the three strikes against you, that obviously did enflame a few viewpoints in addition to yours certainly, yours or Jimmy's. What were some of the things that he did? Why . . . How did he get into that position? He didn't come from England that much . . . maybe after you arrived. I don't know.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, no. He was already established before that. I don't know the story of Leonard's beginnings over here. I met him through Jimmy and was at his house when he lived on Riverside Drive. He had a great apartment. I remember being there in this mob of people, feeling like just one of many people digging the scene. I felt safe and secure with Jimmy, because he was friendly with everybody. He was always somebody that talked and was jovial and a good personality person to be with. I knew Leonard from then on. I must say, outside of that one remark, he was pretty good to me for years, although one of the records I put out for Savoy, he did criticize that for not swinging or rushing or doing something I probably was doing. I've never felt . . . I always felt that anything he said was justified.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** I think one has a right to make that kind of statement. And they shouldn't . . . friendship shouldn't be a factor. No-one likes every note or every phrase or every song that someone interprets. So that part there, but he was doing record productions and things like this. He was associated with Duke Ellington and had aspirations for managing George Shearing and things like this. So he really had his hands in a lot of irons . . . had a lot of irons in the fire, it sounded like, at one stage in the '50s and '60s.

**McPARTLAND:** And he wrote a lot of tunes. Dinah Washington recorded one, didn't . . . "Evil Gal Blues." Isn't it something of his?

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** He got mad at me once a few years ago, because he said I have never played any of his tunes. He called me up and bawled me out over the phone. But for the most part he was very friendly and very supportive. I can't complain. I felt as if he was a friend. I always felt pretty good about Leonard.

**WILLIAMS:** The point I was illustrating is that when there are key people in the industry who are in a unique position to make decisions about one's career, and so if they do fall down, if the cards fall down on the positive side, that can elevate and have an emerging artist moving much further at a quicker pace. Conversely, if it didn't fall that way, it could be a . . . it could very well signal a career in a free fall, so to speak. Would you say that was a good assessment?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes, yes. About Leonard, I think it had to do with his personality. He was somebody that could come up with ideas. He always had these ideas which he seemed to be able to put into practice, like *Chicks vs. Cats*, with this record of women musicians opposite some guys. In fact Mary Lou . . . There were a couple of records, I think all girls, that he made. Mary Lou was in one of them, years ago. And then he did this one with Jimmy and Dizzy, *Hot vs. Cool*. He did that . . . Some of it was recorded at Birdland. Jimmy's band and I think Max Kaminsky, maybe somebody else. They played the same tunes. I think I mentioned this already.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, but not on tape. That's good.

**McPARTLAND:** It was a cute idea.

**WILLIAMS:** Let's continue on along those lines, Marian. Right now we're talking in general, your place in the lineage of jazz and your influence by artists like Duke Ellington and Willie "the Lion" [Smith].

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** I was talking about being influenced by Duke as a piano player. Some of his songs, some of the greatest things, are things that I only played a few years ago, like “Reflections in D” and “Single Petal of a Rose.” Things like that, which are so beautiful. I don’t . . . I can’t actually say in what way I was influenced by him. Harmonically and tune-wise. So many tunes. There’s one that you don’t hear much, like “All Too Soon,” and some of these tunes like . . . “Squeeze Me” was another one. [*sic*: not by Ellington; written by Fats Waller]. I just thought of a . . . “Mood to Be Wooped.” That’s a tune I used to play at the Hickory House. I don’t know if anybody’s ever . . . I don’t know anybody who plays that. It’s a nice ballad.

Duke as a person, and being around him, having a chance to be real friendly and see him under different circumstances, like at Billy Strayhorn’s funeral. That was very sad. And having him come in and tell me all about the session that he did with Max Roach and Charles Mingus, *Money Jungle*. He felt that he almost got wasted, he said, on that session. By them. He had . . . Things like that. Little insights.

When Miles came out with . . . I would see Miles periodically at different gigs, Birdland, everywhere. When he came out with *Kind of Blue*, that was a landmark for me, and for everybody, but especially playing those tunes. That caused a lot of people to start playing a different way and thinking about different tunes, more modal tunes. Needless to say, I did play a lot of those tunes and got very excited by that particular record. It seemed to me like that was an absolute landmark Miles Davis recording. It still stays in my memory that way. Bill Evans on piano. Wonderful personnel on that record. Then later on, a few years later [*sic*: the same year], John Coltrane came out with *Giant Steps*. That was another . . . as we know [laughs] . . .

**WILLIAMS:** All too well.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . another landmark for me. Hearing that thing, when I first heard it, it was the same thing like hearing Dizzy Gillespie playing “Hot House.” “What are they doing? How could I ever play that thing?” Gradually it all comes clear. “Giant Steps” is now almost like Mantovani, it’s so easy, but at the time it was horrendous, trying to play it. Here again, the way he played, I was very influenced by that and by hearing him personally of course. Not to actually copy what they . . . these people did, but it gives you a new dimension, opens up your head, or makes you . . . flexes your musical muscles, something like that.

**WILLIAMS:** That’s what I was going to ask. Conceptually, how did that . . . It obviously affected you. And also, attitude . . . There’s a certain attitude to playing jazz and playing different styles of jazz that come in in which one could posture a certain way. I’m not talking about physically, but just with the attitude of the music, whether it’s the tempo or the kind of harmonic interest it may be a part of the tune, and all those things. How were you affected, for instance, by hearing Coltrane’s music in person? Were you . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



. Did that bring a certain excitement to your group? And did your audience receive that, because they had heard you in a different context, maybe, or hearing you play “Stomping at the Savoy” and then suddenly hearing you play “So What.” Maybe two different reactions from a core following for you, did you find?

**McPARTLAND:** I can’t remember that particularly. It seemed to me that the audience has always . . . or for years I seemed to have had an audience that I could pretty much announce anything I was going to play and they would accept it, unless it was something like we were talking about yesterday. I feel real bad about that. I think I could get in a set, if I wanted to . . . I could play a free piece, and people would accept it. But I wouldn’t want to do that too often.

I always have a feeling that I want to entertain the audience, so that they have to hear some things they can catch on to. If I’m going to play some unknown tune or original tune, I should explain it or say what it is, so they’ll be more likely to accept than if I just play it and not say anything. After being somebody that couldn’t say a word, then I suddenly became terribly verbose and can’t shut up.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. That’s good. That brings me . . . while we going in this direction. In that case obviously hearing Miles . . . you’re right, a very innovative album like *Kind of Blue*, *Milestones*, that period of time. Wynton Kelly and Bill Evans were sharing . . . and Red Garland were sharing the piano chair with Miles’s band. McCoy Tyner coming on the scene, playing a lot of exciting things. How was . . . Let’s go back just a few years before that, when the hard-bop period came in.

**McPARTLAND:** Horace.

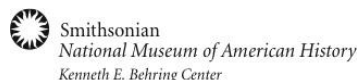
**WILLIAMS:** Horace Silver, Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, Les McCann, Hampton Hawes, what was that? . . . Bobby Timmons. How did . . . would that music . . . did you find that somewhat exciting during that period too?

**McPARTLAND:** Oh yes. But then they had . . . all those people had very lean left hands. They only played an open chord. They didn’t play harmonically rich stuff like Bill Evans, but that was a period I think when everybody including me was trying to play that way. There was a guy on the scene that you probably maybe have not heard his name. Eddie Costa?

**WILLIAMS:** Sure, I know his name.

**McPARTLAND:** I remember Joe Morello loved Eddie Costa’s playing. He was criticizing me, “Why can’t you swing like Eddie Costa?” It was that kind of thing. Everybody was trying to sound like Horace I think at that point. There was also a point at

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



which everybody was trying to sound like Red Garland with that particular use of chords. I don't know. I never really caught on to that. I was always in that romantic . . . Ravel . . . from Bill Evans, that kind of voicing. Although the Horace Silver thing was really wonderful rhythmically. I always felt frustrated that I didn't really . . . I don't think I really was swinging too much in those days. Maybe I was trying too hard.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I understand with that. You mentioned of course Red Garland. People like Red Garland, Bill Evans, Phineas, people like that . . . and Ahmad. All paid homage to Nat "King" Cole. Was Nat "King" Cole someone that you heard in person very much as a pianist?

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** Or just after a stand-up vocalist?

**McPARTLAND:** Both. I had a lot of records. It seems to me that I heard him on records as a pianist while I was still in Europe. Then I did see him a few times. In fact he came to the London House once, but then I went to see him in a club, Café de Paris or something, in New York. I can't . . . a supper club. I remember being so upset. People were noisy. I can think of it even today. He's . . . There's this wonderful guy, standing up singing, and people are making noise. I think he had to stop and tell them to shut up or keep silent for a minute.

**WILLIAMS:** You mentioned he was standing up at this point.

**McPARTLAND:** Yes, but he had . . .

**WILLIAMS:** So he had hired a pianist to play for him.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** Who was his pianist at that time?

**McPARTLAND:** I don't remember. I honestly don't.

**WILLIAMS:** You were there. Go play piano. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** I felt . . . I always thought that it was such a terrible thing to do, that they . . . It's a shame that they did that.

**WILLIAMS:** This is one more example of what we alluded to a little earlier.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**McPARTLAND:** Commercialism.

**WILLIAMS:** About the fact of sometimes decisions made by others and not by the artist, and how this can affect the music in the big picture. If a manager or a record-company person said we think it will be up for image and appearance. You should stand and sing, and let's get someone else to play whatever. Or just because we want to market it a certain way, that affected a lot of things there, the music that he probably wrote and played, because now, he's not playing for himself, so perhaps he's not singing the music as challenging, because who's going to come in practically behind Nat Cole and play piano with that kind of virtuoso artistry?

**McPARTLAND:** I wonder how much . . . because naturally, the other person, unless they're being really coerced, the other person has a chance to say "No, I won't do that." Maybe there's a point at which they think that they are thinking of dollars and furthering their career. Maybe he's thinking, I'll get bigger and better, and I'll get better known, and I'll be this and that. But to me that really was a bad decision, because here's that . . . just to see that. He's standing there singing and not getting the attention he should have. Of course I didn't see him in a million other places where maybe he did very well. He had a tv show and everything.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, that only lasted a short while. As you recall, the reason he did leave that show after only two seasons—it was very successful—is because he wasn't able to get the sponsors.

**McPARTLAND:** It was a racial thing, wasn't it?

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. Revlon and others that said that they would not sponsor his show, because of that reason. We see that shortsightedness has come to pass in recent years about that too . . . I just wanted . . . because that whole lineage came through there. What I'd like to do is now, having touched up on that, exciting things of Art Blakey or people like that . . . we mentioned Bobby and Horace. Let's jump back up again to 1959, 1960, when another exciting quartet arrives in New York and makes quite a splash that carries over beyond the jazz circles to people like Gunther Schuller and Leonard Bernstein, that this is very innovative. We're talking about the Ornette Coleman quartet.

**McPARTLAND:** I knew you were going to talk about Ornette. Yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** Did you hear that group in person? I know Milt Jackson told me they . . . many times the Modern Jazz Quartet would work opposite Ornette's quartet.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Really.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, like at the Village Vanguard when Max [Gordon] used to have double bills there.

**McPARTLAND:** I heard Ornette. Not at the Vanguard. I'm trying to think. It was some theater. A theater that was temporarily . . .

**WILLIAMS:** The Jazz Gallery?

**McPARTLAND:** Maybe the Jazz . . . No, not the Jazz Gallery. It doesn't matter, because I remember being very impressed by the music. But here again, I was . . . I can't remember who I went with. Here again it was one of those things where it seemed very hard for me to understand. He probably was playing some of his early things, like maybe "Lonely Woman" or something, which I've since learned to play. I do one or two of his things, like "Rambling." I love to do that.

**WILLIAMS:** About the effect of something like artists such as Ornette Coleman, Cecil Taylor, making an appearance on the scene in the late '50s or early '60s. Were you taken by that immediately? Or did you gravitate to that music compositionally a little later, a few years after it had settled into the jazz community? Or was there an immediate interest in it?

**McPARTLAND:** No. I know when I heard Ornette I was intrigued. Actually I enjoyed hearing some of his music played by other people more than I did by him. For instance, just to name one, Dick Katz did some very interesting arrangements for Helen Merrill, and one of the tunes he did was "Lonely Woman." The arrangement he did was fantastic. That made me want to play that tune more than hearing Ornette play it, although in recent years I think I've come to appreciate early Ornette more than . . . what he's doing now I find a little difficult. I've got two new records downstairs, and I'm finding them a little hard. But he's got some tunes that are wonderful, like "Turnaround." What a wonderful tune to play on. Do you play that?

**WILLIAMS:** No, but I know that one. Know of that one. I play "The Blessing," is one that I like of his music.

**McPARTLAND:** That's off one of these new records, I think.

**WILLIAMS:** No, it's on one of the early ones as well.

**McPARTLAND:** Is it?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Different people like Walter Norris recorded, when he played . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I ought to play that one.

**WILLIAMS:** Paul Bley, different ones. So that music . . . compositionally you've been more affected by Ornette Coleman perhaps more than his individuality on the alto saxophone, yet alone the trumpet or violin, right?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, I thought the trumpet or the violin . . . I felt that he was getting out of his element there.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I thought he was putting folks on or a little bit of novelty there.

**McPARTLAND:** But there was a point, and I'm trying to think when it was . . . Well I know when it was. I can't think of the year. But I did get into playing more freely, so that I would be able to perform an Ornette tune. It was . . . I think it was in the late '60s or '70s. I was playing at a little joint on Second Avenue called The Apartment. There was a singer-pianist working opposite me named Charles Deforest [spelling?]. It really wasn't a perfect place for me, because first of all it had an upright piano. It was almost like a piano bar, but I guess, now that I think of it, that was probably the period when I was going to a psychiatrist, and was taking on any and all jobs. In fact I played a lot of club dates with Roy Eldridge and Buck Clayton. Those themselves are interesting segments. The bass player was. . . his name was Linc Milliman. He's around here, a very good bass player. The drummer was a young guy, Jimmy Kapus [spelling?]. Unfortunately he died. These were the guys working with me. They used to be . . . or Jimmy especially kept saying to me, "Why don't you play more outside?" I'm saying, "What do you mean, outside? What's outside?" I must have been very conventional in those days. "Just forget about a key signature. Just . . ." I don't know. He kept nagging me. All of a sudden I found I was doing it. I suppose it's like riding a bicycle. All of a sudden you know how it's done.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, once you get the concept in there. Let's develop that a little bit with the listener. When one says playing outside, basically would mean one's thinking of playing outside a tonal center and/or the term "free improvisation" is kind of a nebulous term too. What . . . Can you, if possible, or maybe not . . . Can you describe what you consider your take on free improvisation is? My take would be a little different, in the sense of it would be certain kinds of structure, but maybe much more lack of a structure among the harmonic part of the piece. It would be taking more liberties rhythmically and melodically, but I don't know how you would feel about it.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** One way of describing it, I suppose, would . . . if anybody's familiar with Charles Ives and some of that music, where you hear two bands going on at one time when one is in one key and one is in another. I remember at the Hickory House Paul Bley came and sat in. He was doing this. I'm thinking to myself, "What the hell is he doing?" Actually he was playing a B-flat blues. It was in the key of B-flat, and yet all the improvisation he did was in A or other keys. He would skate through all the other keys, but he would still basically be playing a B-flat blues and would never lose the sense of the . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Form?

**McPARTLAND:** . . . the form, yeah. The 12 bars. So that's one way of describing it. But I started finding that I could just go away from whatever tune I was playing. Even something like "I've Got Rhythm." All right, so we're in B-flat and then again you start playing in B or A or just anywhere away from that key and maybe not even playing any bass notes associated with that tune. But in your head, you know where you are in the tune. You can get crazily away from the entire tune and the harmony altogether, but at will you can come back and fall right back into the tune again.

**WILLIAMS:** Some of the exponents, in addition to someone like Paul Bley, maybe Herbie Nichols or someone like that.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, Herbie Nichols. There's a good example.

**WILLIAMS:** And also Cecil Taylor. Did you know . . . I know you know Cecil. Did you know Herbie Nichols very well or at all?

**McPARTLAND:** I never did. I didn't know much about his music. I just knew him, because he died quite a few years ago, didn't he? I think the most I've heard about Herbie Nichols is that Geri Allen made a point of playing a lot of his music. Through that . . . He did some playing with or working with or composing for or something with Mary Lou Williams, because I had a tune which allegedly was written by Mary Lou in this whole bunch of tunes that I received from Peter O'Brian [spelling?]. In there was this tune called "Mary's Waltz, which she may have had some part in, but I'd swear it was more typically Herbie Nichols's kind of piece.

I went once with Patty Bown to hear Cecil. Both of us wanted to be educated. This was . . . this must have been . . . I'm not sure exactly when he came to New York, but maybe if I said the '60s I'd be safe.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, he actually got here in the late '50s, but his impact was more the '60s.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

**McPARTLAND:** This was at Town Hall. He was doing pretty much things that he does now, except I remember—talk about visual—he had on some kind of a sports outfit and sneakers. He had a little knit cap which he has had since. He would get up from the piano and run around to the other end of the piano and strum the strings. Then he would run back to the keyboard. We were fascinated. I didn't quite know what I was listening to, but I was interested in it. I liked it. It seems to me what he did at that time that some of the things were a lot less dense than what he's doing now. He's incorporated other stuff. Now, some of his things . . . He reads poems. He does all kinds of chants and different things.

But at this point when this drummer was telling me, "Play outside," that was when I could . . . This was long before "Piano Jazz," but when "Piano Jazz" came along, I found it really easy to play with Cecil, have him on the show, because I wasn't . . . There were no strictures of any kind, of chords, structure, of form, because it seems to me he really . . . a lot of . . . It seems to me that all of what he does is improvised, although he swears that he's got stuff written down. I haven't seen any of it.

**WILLIAMS:** That's interesting. Maybe he does. He studied at the New England Conservatory. I don't know if you know.

**McPARTLAND:** I know he did.

**WILLIAMS:** One aspect, just going back, I want to stay where you are in this lineage. We've talked about some of the people who came before you in regard to Duke Ellington and maybe some of the others, Teddy Wilson certainly, that came . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Teddy and Art Tatum were big influences on me.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes. Was someone, and these can be little quick short answers, influenced, say someone like Lennie Tristano?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes. As a matter of fact I went and took . . . I took a lesson or two with Lennie Tristano. This was when Jimmy and I first came to New York. I thought he could help me improve my overall jazz playing. I'd heard that Bud Freeman went to him and took some lessons. Bud Freeman was saying how interesting . . . in fact it was written up in *Down Beat*, like it was a happening. Bud Freeman studies with Lennie Tristano. How bizarre can you be?

Anyway, I thought I would go, and I went to see Lennie. I think I had met him in a club. I found him very forbidding. It wasn't . . . It was like going to a church and seeing some kind of mysterious being. He asked me to play, and I played something. I don't know what. And he . . . his criticism of my playing was that I had very erratic time. He

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



said, if you want to be a romantic kind of player who plays rubato and goes with the . . . you just flow back and forth, you don't keep a steady rhythm, that's fine. But if you want to be a jazz player and have good time, you better go home and play with the metronome. That was pretty much what he said. I was crushed, but I felt that it was a valid criticism, and I did that.

**WILLIAMS:** So it was, you felt it was productive, those two lessons or whatever it was.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh definitely. Definitely.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. let me mention just one or two other names from the past that I wanted to ask you about. Did you know, and this is still dealing with the piano again, how was someone like Earl Hines?

**McPARTLAND:** I had the good fortune to go to South America with Earl Hines, because George Wein set up this tour. I was very pleased to be on it. It was me, Ellis Larkins, Teddy Wilson, and Earl Hines. I already knew Earl. I met him with Jimmy, and I'd heard him years before when they had this group with Louis and Jack Teagarden and Earl. That was a short-lived group, but I did hear Earl then and on other occasions in clubs. He was always very very nice to me, fatherly and encouraging me and "You sound good" and all this stuff.

I was fascinated. He took a tune by Herb Alpert, which sort of surprised me. "Close to You." Remember that tune? It was interesting to be on this tour, which was about a month or six weeks. He would be working into this tune. He would play it every night, and you would . . . It would be like somebody doing a sculpture, starting with a piece of clay, and as nights went by, you'd see the thing take shape, how he would change the harmony and improve on the choruses. It was really fascinating to see how he developed some new tune that he was going to play.

Then he played a lot of things that . . . in his repertoire. It used to amaze me that he would seem to get so far away from the tune. He would start rhythmically. It would be like [laughs] he would be wriggling and wriggling and wriggling and getting into a corner, and you'd think he's never going to get out of this, with all these sheets of sound and things that he was doing. He's painting himself into a corner. He's never going to be able to come back to the melody. Of course he always did. As you know, he was a great showman. Just watching him night after night was a fascinating experience.

He allowed me to record him for Halcyon. We recorded the four of them for my label. I made the record in Argentina. The engineer couldn't speak English, and I had to have someone translate everything so that he knew what I wanted to do. We did it live in this concert hall. I carried this huge reel of tape all across South America, through Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and everywhere. Brought it back to the States and "Jeez, is there

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

anything on the thing?” Took it to the studio, and it was perfect. The sound, everything, was really great.

**WILLIAMS:** That’s interesting, because now, what we see . . . in a sense Earl also was a very abstract player, and I like, I use that term as opposed to free, because like you said you could see where it would develop out, seemingly out of nothing. Very embryonic stages and yet you started seeing little shapes of melodies and harmonies for the pieces. Having spoken to someone like Cecil Taylor, they feel like they’re following a tradition of Earl Hines, Duke Ellington, and Thelonious Monk, people like that, Elmo Hope, that in his playing, even though it may not be apparent to us all the time, but when I’ve heard them speak, that same thing. So it’s interesting that a player like that who we’d know mainly his work from the ’20s on up into the ’80s, still there was a sense of freedom within that concept of playing as well. So I think that avant garde has been present in all styles at some point. At some point every style has been a little difficult or a little on the cutting edge. Even probably when we first heard stride, the Harlem stride pianists, it was probably a little different from what people were used to hearing from the early . . . late 19th century and so and so forth.

**McPARTLAND:** I know when I first hear Earl, which was probably on a recording somewhere—I can’t really place it—he always seemed to me to be . . . Nobody said “far out” in those days. But it always had that quality of abstract . . . puzzle . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Walking on the edge.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . like a puzzle. You always felt that he was a little further out, that he wasn’t going to make it, and he always did.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, very interesting. I . . . The one time that I heard him I know that same feeling.

Let’s talk about some of the people who you feel have followed you. We can go right up to 1997. After your place, which has been established for let’s say roughly at least 35 years, if you don’t mind me putting a number on it. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** No, no.

**WILLIAMS:** And historically well secured there. Since that time, who are the players . . . I’ll give you a few names just to start thinking about it. Seeing a McCoy Tyner or Herbie Hancock or Chick Corea come on the scene, and others, Harold Mabern, whoever . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**McPARTLAND:** All those people. All those people. I've got probably an LP upstairs of Herbie playing "Watermelon Man." That's what I remember about him. And certain points . . . certain records of his that I liked a lot. Tunes like "Maiden Voyage" and "Tell Me a Bedtime Story." There's a bunch of things.

**WILLIAMS:** "Dolphin Dance."

**McPARTLAND:** "Dolphin Dance." That we all play of course.

**WILLIAMS:** That's what I admire too, is that you've always updated your repertoire. You kept things that were very significant to you on a musical level and maybe personal level, yet always the repertoire . . . was always evolving. For instance that music in the '60s. In the '70s I can remember hearing you playing a medley of "Yesterdays" and "Yesterday."

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** Things like that. So it incorporated . . . Or some of Stevie's music [Stevie Wonder] as well as some of the jazz composers of that time too as well.

**McPARTLAND:** A lot of Stevie's music. Yeah, absolutely. Chick . . . actually I think one of my favorite records of all time is probably that Chick Corea record with. . . I can't think of the name of it right now . . . with Roy Haynes . . .

**WILLIAMS:** and Miroslav Vitous.

**McPARTLAND:** *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs*. I thought that was a fabulous record. And it made me . . . Is it one of your favorites?

**WILLIAMS:** One of my favorites.

**McPARTLAND:** It made me realize how Roy Haynes . . . There's a guy who's moved with the times, who's kept up to everything. I thought he was fabulous on that record.

**WILLIAMS:** Are there other . . . Obviously there are landmark albums and recordings that you remember early in your career, in addition to say like *Now He Sings, Now He Sobs*, are there . . . and you can just name, even if not necessarily specific albums or certain artists that touched you . . .

**McPARTLAND:** A particular . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** A pianist or non-pianist.

**McPARTLAND:** A particular . . . Obviously we've got people like . . . We haven't even mentioned, like Bird and Sonny Stitt and all those players who . . . I remember Bill Crow said to me once . . . He made a very good remark which I tried to remember. He said, "Piano players shouldn't listen to all piano players. They should listen to horn players." That's really true, because . . . That fits right in with John Mehegan saying, "Marian, there's not enough Bird in your playing."

You do get ideas and things, not to necessarily copy, but to give you ideas about what to play. There were tunes by Chick Corea. I learned to play "Windows." I love that tune. A lot of things that he did before he had that electric band. He was with Stan Getz. I remember some interesting music that he did then. Of course I could listen to Stan Getz forever, as far as that's concerned. I think Stan Getz may have turned me on to more beautiful tunes . . . like hearing him at Carnegie Hall play Billy Strayhorn's tune "Blood Count." I think the way he played that, I had to go right out and learn it, and all these other tunes, like "Isfahan." I learned a lot of those tunes so that I could . . . I think actually for some strange reason I was one of the first people to put out an album of all Billy Strayhorn tunes. It was amazing. Art Farmer did one about the same time, and then the two of us played on a concert at Pace University, doing . . . Art doing his different selections of Billy Strayhorn tunes and me doing mine. I'm very proud of that album.

We're talking about . . . well, Wayne Shorter. There's a guy I've listened to for years and still mystified by all those tunes. I can play "Footprints," and there's one or two other tunes I'd love . . . "Infant Eyes." That's a tune. Do you play that?

**WILLIAMS:** Sure, oh yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** God, that thing is beautiful. You hear the harmonies in there, the things he does . . . I'm just amazed, because I think . . . you keep thinking it's all been done. Nobody's going to do something so different, and then they come up and do it, like him. He's . . . I have to learn a few more tunes, but I want to have him on "Piano Jazz." First I have to learn a few more of his tunes.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, that's amazing. That is very much so, some analysis like that. I was thinking . . . let's say . . . let's move into some of the period when jazz did get . . . evolve . . . instead of going more avant garde, it took another right angle. The music started to be more affected by rhythm-and-blues, soul music, pop music, and came a title what they call "fusion." Did that have an impact on your playing? I think it had an impact on the industry, which we can talk about it too. But let's talk about those groups.

**McPARTLAND:** I'm not sure when that happened, because I . . . for a minute I thought you were going back to that period when suddenly it seemed like rock took over.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Suddenly it was Bill Haley and the Comets, and it was Chubby Checker and all these people. It seemed like there was a cloud over jazz, because of these people.

Fusion . . . I can't exactly know when I started to hear . . . I don't exactly know . . . I get mixed up. I don't know what to call fusion. It's . . . Where does a guy like Archie Shepp fit into this?

**WILLIAMS:** No, I would say he would be probably part of that school of John Coltrane, Cecil Taylor. Maybe I could suggest, for instance when Miles's groups, with the *Bitches Brew* group . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Oh yeah, *Bitches Brew* and all those things.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . or when, or John McLaughlin's group, with Tony Williams's Lifetime . . .

**McPARTLAND:** True. Right. Yes. Right.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . Return to Forever, Weather Report. That period.

**McPARTLAND:** Right. O.k. I guess I got to thinking of somebody whose name I can't come up with and I know it very well . . . they started . . . this is more into WQEW, the generic saxophone sound that everybody suddenly started to get.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah. That's that sort of wimpy smooth jazz things.

**McPARTLAND:** [laughs]

**WILLIAMS:** Actually, what I wanted . . . I think what I'd like to have you answer that along those lines, is that, how did that . . . because of the shifts in the groups there . . . how did that affect you in terms of venues or places to work, concerts? How did it affect other musicians that played the style, played what we call the real deal? Did that, because there were less places to play, were there . . . did that take away . . . we knew it took away from it musically, but economically how did that affect the scene?

**McPARTLAND:** I'm trying to think, is it . . . did . . . when this happened. Was this in the late . . .

**WILLIAMS:** This is the late '60s or early '70s . . .

**McPARTLAND:** . . . late . . . o.k., o.k., because . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** . . . when, around the time you were starting your record company as well.

**McPARTLAND:** O.k., because that, what you're talking about, might be one of the reasons I started the record company. I can only pinpoint one date, and that's 1963, because of the fact that John Kennedy got shot, and the other reason being that I was winding up a tour with Benny Goodman. I always tell everybody Benny Goodman drove me to the Meninger Clinic [spelling?]. In a sense it was true, because I was becoming more and more upset with myself, feeling I wasn't getting anywhere. Benny didn't like the way I played. That gave me more of an inferiority complex. So I left Benny and I did in fact go to the Meninger Clinic. It probably was a . . . It's amazing how hip they were then. They had copies of all the jazz magazines. They had a great piano. All the people in there seemed very hip. I almost felt like staying.

**WILLIAMS:** How long did you stay?

**McPARTLAND:** Only two weeks. They checked me out from head to toe. Then they recommended a doctor that lives on the other side of the island. I did go and see him for quite a few years. I think I got a lot out of it, to tell you the truth.

During that period I was doing all kinds of things. This is when this music came in, I guess. *E.S.P.* [Miles Davis's quintet album of 1965.] There's another one that I've got upstairs and I . . . It certainly did affect me record-wise. I did feel at that time . . . I did a lot of things, because I just had to keep busy. I don't recall ever having . . . not being busy, but doing different things. I had to invent some things, because there were, I guess there were less venues. Or what I was doing . . . I'm trying to think where I did play. There was a place called the Strollers, opposite the Embers, and I know we played there. Here again I can't go into every gig. But I did . . . That was one period when I started doing school dates, going into schools and doing things. That actually turned out to be not only interesting to do, but something I never dreamed I would make money at, actually getting paid for doing a three-month stint in different schools in Long Island. That was one thing that I did. I had the same group. I had Linc Milliman with Jim Kapus. Ray Copeland. I'm sure you know Keith, his son. I had Ray Copeland. He played all these school dates. That went on for a long time.

I think it was in 1970 . . . I started to get tired of trying to get a record date. The only people that were recording were big people like Monk and Miles. I got a record date . . . Sam Coslow . . . It's funny. He's not well known as a composer. He's written so many popular tunes, like "Flamingo" and "Cocktails for Two" and wrote for movies. I don't know where . . . I met him somewhere, and he said he wanted me to record some of his tunes, and he would back me for the date. So I did that. I had Grady Tate and Ron Carter as a rhythm section. I was scared stiff, because Ron Carter . . . of course now I know him a little better . . . at that time he seemed forbidding, and he wasn't very helpful.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



He wasn't about to help me put the thing together. I was looking for somebody to say, "Hey, why don't we do this in here?", and he didn't. He waited for me to tell him.

Anyway, the thing came off fairly well, but then somewhere along the line they wanted to have some singers. They actually made a commercial record out of this thing, going "do-wah do-wah" kind of thing, which didn't sit well with me at all. When the thing was packaged and put together, it had a generic blond on the front cover. On the back it had some generic liner notes, but it didn't mention the rhythm section. I was so pissed off. I think it was at that moment—this was on Dot—I think it was at that moment I said, "I'm going to do my own record." I was so angry about the way this was marketed and everything. I thought it's going to go nowhere. It's not . . . It's got these wonderful players, and they sounded good, but there wasn't too much chance for them to really open up. That's when I started Halcyon.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k., Marian, let's do a little retro from a few moments and talk about different stages in which movements, non-jazz music, had a strong and in many cases adverse effect on what we were doing and what you were doing at that time. For instance, when the early rock-and-roll movement came in, when you started hearing about . . . even Elvis Presley, but before that, obviously there were the Little Richards and Chuck Berrys and people like that. But they kind of worked kind of parallel alongside that, because records like Peacock and Savoy and all, were recording all these same artists and they didn't really have that much separation, but by the time that Elvis came on the scene, it did have . . . and Bobby Darin, people like that. That really changed the perspective of what . . . and Bill Haley, we talked about that. How did that really . . . did you notice a shift in terms of the focus in live music and studio.

**McPARTLAND:** I'll tell you when I really noticed it. Actually it was in the early '50s, when we were playing a club in Rochester called Joe Squeezer's Club. I had Joe Morello, and Bill Britto was the bass player [*sic*: in the latter half of the 1950s, not the early 1950s]. There was a disc jockey in town that I knew very well. He came over and wanted me to go out to a school and play for kids. His son was in the school. I said, "They don't want to hear what we" . . . [?] was playing "Lullaby of Birdland" and "Stomping at the Savoy" and Joe was doing his famous drum solos and all that stuff. "Oh yes," he insisted. So we went. We played for the kids and they all applauded. I guess they were probably grateful to be let out of algebra or whatever. At this point, some point in the program, I said to the audience, "What would you like to . . . Is there something you all like to hear?" And with one voice they all yelled "You Ain't Nothing But a Hound Dog!" Right then I realized—that was like a bolt from the blue—I realized then that they didn't know anything or want to know anything about jazz. That's what they wanted to hear.

Actually, that's when I started doing school dates, was then. I would go wherever I was working, on tour, wherever I would be. I remember doing a date in Florida, being in Ft. Lauderdale, and talking to people, just talking to teachers or somebody and saying,

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



“I’d like to come over to your school and play for the kids.” We would do that. Not get paid or anything. Just go there. I remember playing “Things Ain’t What They Used to Be” for these kids, and they loved it. They were all . . . They thought it was great. Then you’d play somewhere for older kids, and maybe they’d say something like, “Why don’t we ever hear music like this? We don’t hear this music. Why not?”

That was the start of that thing. Then gradually all these other elements crept in. I can only think of Chubby Checker. That seemed to be the one that offended me. Or Bill Haley and the Comets. And then of course the Beatles.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k., let’s jump. O.k., so right there, that’s now we’re talking about mid-to late ’50s, where the rock-and-roll is really taking over. Suddenly the major studios have started embracing a teeny-bopper type of audience and clientele. They’ve left their mature audience, mature being anybody probably over 25 or 30 years old, and focusing on selling large amounts of CDs, large amounts of records . . . let me get back out of my time warp. So now we have a . . . in the same thing . . . at the same time while that’s happening, a very commercial thing, the avant-garde movement is coming in into the jazz. That alienates people a little bit too, because they don’t hear the melodies. They don’t hear familiar tunes. So that may have been a factor . . . would you say that could have been a factor, pushing a few other people away from there, because now the music wasn’t as involved around the dance as it had been in previous years.

**McPARTLAND:** No, I remember that being said, either in print or by people, that . . . People like Miles. I think he was specifically mentioned, because they were alienating the audience. They didn’t seem to care if the audience listened. Just what you said. They were playing music that nobody understood. You’d see this in print. It was two things. The jazz musicians in a way were hurting themselves . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Shooting ourselves in the foot.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . by doing that and not trying to combat the influx of the rock musicians who just took over. It just felt like an entire atomic cloud or something. It just took over from the jazz scene. Here they were. This ridiculous stuff with the Beatles. I happen to like the Beatles, a lot of the music, but such hype.

**WILLIAMS:** I want to just continue along with how you felt about the pop music really nudging, actually more than nudging, pushing the jazz scene aside. I think the people that were recording the music now, that are being hired by the industries, know less, knew less about jazz, more and more, and they came in, and they were bringing in people who would change, literally. That affected the club scene, because people now didn’t go out and hear as much music live in terms of certain clubs, and subsequently that affects us

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





economically in the amount of work and how the music develops. Did you see that change with you and Jimmy at that point in your careers or because of this?

**McPARTLAND:** It's funny. I don't know why I'm being so dim-witted about this or have such gaps in my memory. I do remember. This was a period . . . I just have to try to recap here . . . this was a period when I was going to this analyst. I can't remember where I was . . . I know I was working, and some dates were with Jimmy. I can't think of what dates he was doing. Not steady dates. I think places like the Metropole . . . He would be doing . . . He had a lot of dates in New Jersey. The New Jersey Jazz Society or somebody's . . . He was doing different gigs, one-night things, and I wasn't always aware of them. We did this thing together at this place called the Strollers, which was opposite the Embers. It was . . . I don't suppose you ever heard of this. It was a show that was on Broadway with Dudley Moore and Peter Cook, called *Beyond the Fringe*. It was a comedy show. The thing we were doing, it was like in a theater. This was the same kind of thing. It was a comedy show with all British actors. Actually, I was playing there with . . . This was my trio. Dottie Dodgion, and Eddie Gomez on bass, if you can imagine that. Jimmy would come in and play sometimes with the show.

I know I'm going into detail, only because I'm trying to remember what I was doing around that time. I think I was trying to do things to keep busy, and I had . . . at that time I had a radio show. There was a station in town, in New York, W . . . Oh, God. The Pacifica station . . . WBAI? Chris Albertson . . . You know him? He was working there. I remember, because I wanted to do some jazz. I called up Chris Albertson and said, "Can I come up there and do a jazz show with recordings?" He seemed delighted. So I did that once a week. Actually, that's where I started getting interviews . . . did a lot of interviews with Herbie Hancock, Bennie Goodman, Bill Evans. People like that. The tragedy is that I was too dumb to keep them from recycling those tapes. I don't have too many of those shows. We had George Wettling and Jimmy and Eddie Condon and Alec Wilder. I had all these . . . Actually these things are priceless. I've got some of them, but a lot of them were just recycled, like the one with Herbie, I know is gone. Who else did I have? Steve Kuhn. Anyway, that's beside the point. It was just something that I felt that I had a chance to promote jazz on records, and I suppose in a way I was trying to put my ten cents in, so that people would be hearing jazz as opposed to all this other stuff they were hearing.

**WILLIAMS:** Exactly, and so in a sense you've . . . you had to reinvent yourself as well as . . . in the course of developing a new dimension to your career and other aspects of your career, by suddenly you being involved as a radio personality, having been seen on tv ten years earlier for some degree of regularity too. So this is . . . so I think a lot of that, like you said, became sort of like a mother of invention there, because of things happening, in the sense that we take on other roles that maybe whereas ten years earlier we were just concerned with playing music and composing music and things like that.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, well, just wanting to be busy. And of course making money. That's when we were playing all these club dates. Things I probably wouldn't . . . I wouldn't want to do them now. They didn't make a lot of money, but there were a lot of them. This . . . I forget the guy's name. This was out in Long Island. This would be like the hotel . . . It would be a wedding or a bar mitzvah or anything at this one place. I can't think of the name of the . . . The guy that was in charge was a drummer. [laughs] Always bad on a club date. He would hire me, and I was playing this rotten little piano. It didn't even have 88 keys. He would always have a jazz star in the group, like he had Roy Eldridge. We played a lot of dates together. He had Buck Clayton. These were the two I remember most. They saved the day for me, and maybe we helped each other. Roy knew that there'd be somebody there that could back him. I remember that I did have a proper piano for the main room, but then we would have to play for . . . It was really rather degrading. We'd have to play for cocktails or something before, in another room, and I'd be playing on this terrible piano. It would be Roy and the drums and bass. Once in a while they'd have some vocalist. They had a guy named Harry Sheppard. You probably never heard of him. A vibe player. Vibes player. We did a lot of these. I'm sure that people turned out to see Buck Clayton and Roy Eldridge. I'm sure that the guy insidiously put out publicity with these jazz names. I think they must have been going through hard times, because they didn't seem the least bit perturbed at playing them. Actually we had a lot of fun. I felt like I was in good company with them, but it wasn't by any means a top job at all.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes, I think you're absolutely right that they were going because the scene shift. That generation was ahead of you. It was no market for that. It was a youth-driven business, and the younger stars, like you said, like a Miles Davis or maybe a little earlier, Clifford Brown and Lee Morgan, people like that were the trumpet players, Freddie Hubbard perhaps already, were the people that they were starting to speak of, and those names, but a Red Allen and people like Roy Eldridge and his . . . Sweets Edison, that generation, were not being as celebrated as they had been. So these things did come in play to be there. Also, it must have been something that made you angry enough to make you decide to start your own recording company.

**McPARTLAND:** Well it was, this really . . . this thing with Dot. They didn't have enough either knowledge or respect or decency to put Ron Carter and Grady Tate . . . But they didn't have the personnel. They just had this stupid sort of liner notes. It was written in a flowery . . . just a real market, like a marketing job by some hack. That's what made me angry.

Actually a lot of musicians . . . There was a bursting of mail-order records. I had this friend that gave me . . . willed me the piano, Sherman Fairchild. He was still very busy with all his stuff at I.B.M. and Fairchild cameras and all that stuff. He got in the act

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



by putting up a little money for Halcyon and letting me use his shipping facilities, some area and some place where he shipped materials. We could ship the records out of there. At that point I got involved with a guy maybe you know. Hank O'Neal. He's got this record label, Chiaroscuro. He was involved for a little while.

**WILLIAMS:** He was your engineer. Is that correct?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. Not for terribly long. That's another long story. He was o.k., but eventually we went our separate ways. Actually, Sherman died. We got out about . . . We got a wonderful record out with Earl Hines coming to New York. This was Hank's idea. It was really a good idea to record . . . I can give you this before you leave. Earl Hines re-recording all his earlier things, like "Chimes Blues" and all that. Earl Hines doing 25 years later [*sic*: 45 years later] what he had done. Really a nice album. We recorded Willie "the Lion" [Smith], and then I started doing my own trio things. Then we had this . . . Then Sherman died, unfortunately, and then Hank divied up certain things. I had a record that I'd made at Sherman's with Teddy Wilson. Two pianos. I proceeded to put that out. So I just went out on my own, doing the best I could. It's funny now when I think of it. Me calling up somebody at Sam Goody's, trying to get them to send me the money that they owed me. In most cases I did get it. I think there was only one group of people that I can remember, and I think they're still around. Daybreak Express. The only people that I know that took scads of records and didn't ever pay. Most people would pay, but it would be . . . You'd have to absolutely hound them to get it.

So when I called to speak to Carl Jefferson [of Concord Records] he did know that I knew something about the record business. We would talk, and he would be talking about the same kind of thing on a higher level.

**WILLIAMS:** I want to come back and talk about your company a little bit more in detail, but now that you mention Carl, how did that relationship come about? Did you . . . How did you meet?

**McPARTLAND:** It was through Jake Hanna, the drummer. Concord were just starting out. For some reason—I don't know how—Carl Jefferson and Jake were friends. Jake did me the favor of telling Carl Jefferson that he should get me for the label. I was about getting to the end of my rope with Halcyon. We'd made 18 records, all of which have some merit, I think. He offered . . . said he'd like to have me with the company. I jumped in and said, "Yes." That was 18 years ago, and I've never . . . [laughs] Nobody's been making that many overtures to get me on Columbia or anything. I'm quite happy with Concord.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Yes, so, you said, you made one point that when you talked about certain technicalities about that, he knew because you had been a president of your own record company.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** What were some of those technicalities that you mean?

**McPARTLAND:** Thinks like . . . [laughs] for instance I had this engineer. This is just one instance. Teddy [Wilson] and I made this record together, and . . . Wait a minute. Which one was it? No, I think it was in Argentina. Teddy made a horrible . . . played a really bad note. I said to this engineer—we were listening to everything—I said, “My God, let’s get rid of that for him. Let’s take that out.” It is so clever what they do. They take a little phrase from somewhere else. You probably know this. They had the same three notes in another part of the tune. He was able to take it and take out the bad note and put in this other little piece. It was neat. It’s so clever.

Years later I was able to do that, recording with Dave Brubeck. I did that same thing. Played a terrible wrong note. Phil Edwards, the engineer with Concord, he was able to take that out in the same way. That’s just one on many things. Hearing the different things and deciding what was better, and the balance, but most of all, haggling with distributors. That’s the biggest thing. Trying to get publicity. Actually, we didn’t do badly, now that I think about it.

But so many people . . . It was a rash of mail-order records. Mingus did it first of all. Remember that?

**WILLIAMS:** Debut Records. Yes.

**McPARTLAND:** That poor guy. I think it overwhelmed him. He wasn’t a businessman, and he probably pocketed the checks. [words inaudible] It’s a shame, because it was such a wonderful idea. Stan Kenton had a mail-order company. I can’t think of any more off the top of my head, but there were dozens of people that did that. There was a whole piece in either *Newsweek* . . . I think a magazine like *Newsweek* . . . there was a big piece about it, and all these companies were listed and their addresses given. I employed a couple of girlfriends to fill the orders and pack the records up. It seemed we were doing a lot of that at one time. Couldn’t do that again. Artwork. Getting the right wording. Liner notes. Oh, boy.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes. What . . . how do you feel about the pros and cons about having your own record company? You’re making artistic as well as business decisions. How did that affect you? I feel it’s an advantage as being a musician. Obviously you do too. Can you elaborate on how you’ve done that? I could use you as a model.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** I certainly knew everything I was listening to and knew what sounded good and what take, especially if I was recording somebody else and wanted them to really sound good. Like we recorded Jimmie Rowles, and we recorded Dave McKenna. I certainly felt like I had an advantage, because I knew what I was listening to, and I knew what I wanted, which was to use the tape which would show him to the best advantage. He didn't care. He was long gone back to Cape Cod or wherever. [Imitates McKenna's voice:] "Well man, take care of it," or whatever. He wasn't as interested in it from his angle as I would have been. He's one of those guys that would do the thing and then walk away. If they put a bad picture on the cover, he would just let it happen.

I think musicians have a great advantage being involved in a record. You've got a lot of your own things going. Obviously you're able to superintend the packaging, the sound, and who you want on the date. Everything, including whether you want overtime and how much you want to pay everybody and all that stuff. That all figures in there too. There's a lot goes . . . I don't think I could ever . . . I got as far as putting out three CDs on Halycon, and then I gave up. Luckily by that time Concord had kicked in. Jeff was very good to me inasmuch as he started Jazz Alliance and is going to put out probably all of my Halycon on Jazz Alliance eventually, which is really nice, so they're not lying mouldering away in some cabinet.

**WILLIAMS:** That's what I was thinking about that, because that does bring certain skills, and I think you obviously think this has helped fine-tune your skills as a businessperson in addition to . . . in terms of representation on all levels, management and everything. Does that carry over? Do you feel that those skills are now carried over into what you're doing now, "Piano Jazz" and the other projects?

**McPARTLAND:** Oh yeah. One thing I wouldn't want. I wouldn't want to be my own manager. I would like to have somebody deal with all those dates. The date and the setup and the amount of money paid and all that stuff. I wouldn't want to be doing that. But I certainly would like to have a hand in discussing it with somebody. "Do you think I really ought to do that?" or "Don't you think that it's too close to another date?" or "Don't you think it should pay more money?" or all these things that you can discuss with the other person. But I wouldn't want to be doing that personally. Same with "Piano Jazz." There's a hell of a lot that goes into it that they do. But there's so much to be done and NPR, they've cut down. They have less people, no budget, and all that. So we're all doing things. People are always saying to me, "You shouldn't be doing that." You've even said that. "You shouldn't be doing that." But then, if not me, who? It comes back to that. I've discussed this with Jean Bach. She suddenly found herself in the same position of doing all these things and calling people and doing interviews and putting tape together and editing and doing this. She's saying the same thing. "By the time I show somebody how to do it, I could do it myself." It's a very difficult thing.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** A very good point. Jean Bach is the producer of the very high celebrated documentary, *A Great Day in Harlem*. Also I just wanted to ask you a question about the advantage of . . . For instance, when you had, when you were president and active with your record company, was it a vehicle primarily for your own career, or were you . . . Obviously you recorded several other artists, favorite artists of yours. But you didn't necessarily solicit other artists to send tapes or write or anything like that.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, not at all.

**WILLIAMS:** How did you come about choosing the others that you did?

**McPARTLAND:** Because they were friends of mine. I know why I recorded Jimmie Rowles. Dave . . . In the case of Dave, I've always loved Dave McKenna. It was at a time when nothing much was happening for him. I thought it would be nice to record this guy. Actually, that's quite a story, how I . . . Charlie Bourgeois [spelling?] and I went around with Dave the evening before the date, trying to keep him from drinking. That's a whole other story. The one that got hungover was me, doing that.

But with the case of Jimmie Rowles . . . Alec Wilder loved Jimmie Rowles. He and I were always hanging out at the Cookery, because he wanted to hear Jimmie Rowles. So we would be there. Alec said to me, "If you would record Jimmie Rowles, I'll give you \$1,000 towards the date." I said, "O.k." So somebody maybe you don't know, Ed Furst . . . Eddie Furst. He used to be George Shearing's manager. This is a guy, very wealthy, that lived on Park Avenue with his wife Elie. He had a nice little studio and recording setup. So we recorded Jimmie Rowles at Eddie Furst's house. I don't think I paid anything for that, to tell you the truth. I think I just paid him off in recordings. He was glad to do it. He wanted to do it. That's how that came about. There are a lot of people that love Jimmie Rowles. I sold a lot of those records, and I gave Alec back his \$1,000. Everyone was very pleased. The cover didn't cost me anything, because I . . . Jimmie Rowles was known to be a cartoonist of some talent, so I went to the Cookery with a piece of paper and I said to Jimmie, "We need something for the cover. Can you do me a picture of yourself?" And he did. He just went bup-bup-bup-bup-bup, and it was done. It's really very cute.

**WILLIAMS:** I like it myself.

**McPARTLAND:** I've got it upstairs.

**WILLIAMS:** You mentioned something that Alec Wilder offered. Basically he offered to advance \$1,000. Was that an obligation that he expected back contingent on sales?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** No. No. He wasn't like that. It was like, "I'll give you \$1,000." I was the one that wanted . . . I didn't want to take his money. I took it for the moment. I could probably have done it without, but I know that he wanted to be involved in the project and it made him feel good. I'm sure he needed the money more than I did. I was happy to have it, I was happy to use it, and happy to give it back to him, because we did sell enough to make . . . if not a profit, to break even

**WILLIAMS:** What was, what would you say was your biggest seller? Was that your biggest seller?

**McPARTLAND:** There's a couple that are still going that would be the biggest seller. I don't . . . We did one at the Carlyle. That went on for a long time. We're talking about real small potatoes here.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah. I know.

**McPARTLAND:** No big deal. When I was at the Carlyle and had recordings to sell, you could certainly get rid of 50 in one night. You could keep doing that night after night. You could certainly make a dent.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k., Marian, this has been very enjoyable. We're going to wind down this portion of your career, but as you know, we're going to need a little more time. We have a lot more things to document. I'd like to thank you for your time and effort and cooperation and most of all patience. On behalf of the Smithsonian and certainly the oral history program there, I'm James Williams, and I'd like to thank you for your time here today.

**McPARTLAND:** Thank you, James. I'm enjoying myself doing it.

[end of day two of the interview]

-----

**WILLIAMS:** Today is May 26th, nineteen-hundred and ninety-eight, and this is the Smithsonian Oral History Program for Jazz Masters, part two or volume two of the interview with the grande dame of jazz, Ms. Marian McPartland. My name is James Williams

**McPARTLAND:** You better take that off there. [laughter] The one I like much better is when I was down in . . . This year I did the "Piano Jazz" with Michel Legrand. I was in Florida. One of these weekly papers called me "the coolest woman in jazz." That was the

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



headline. I thought that was neat. I don't mind that. But all those other things. Those other epithets. Queen of Jazz.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** Grande Dame. All that stuff. I thought that was a . . .

**WILLIAMS:** First Lady. You don't like that either?

**McPARTLAND:** First Lady. Every time I hear that, it's like a picture of Mary Lou Williams comes over my head. And I'm thinking wherever she is, she's going, "That bitch," or something like that.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** I always get that picture of her, because to me she was the First . . .

**WILLIAMS:** The grande dame.

**McPARTLAND:** She was the grande dame, if anybody was.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah. Well, she was the teacher, for true. Thelonious, Bud, and many others. O.k. We'll get started anyway. At this point, Marian, I'll probably do a little retro of things maybe we might have touched on a little bit, but we'll kind of fast forward through those as well. One of the things I'd like to do is go back to maybe the early '70s, prior to, just a few, several years prior to "Piano Jazz" and events like that and just get an idea, a sense of where you were with your career. Let's . . . let me focus that a little more. What . . . You had your own record company. What . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Yes, Halcyon.

**WILLIAMS:** Tell us a little more about that. Why you decided to form your own record company and the origin of the name and some of the artists that you decided to work with.

**McPARTLAND:** It was really because, one, I wasn't getting recorded. It was in a period when it seemed the only people who were getting recorded were Miles and Monk and the real name people. I remember trying to interest Teo Macero . . . and Brubeck of course. I was trying to get . . . I would make a few suggestions, like I said something about I would like to do a record with Beatle tunes. "That's been done." Everything you came up with, it's like, "No, that's been done," or "No, that wouldn't sell." So I just got pissed off and

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





said I'll start my own record company. At the time I had a friend who had tons of money, Sherman Fairchild, who was the . . . at that time the biggest shareholder in IBM, and he had Fairchild Cameras and Fairchild . . . all kinds of recording equipment. He was very interested in jazz, and he agreed to put up some money for . . . not so much money as give me space for Halcyon. Then Hank O'Neal . . . Do you know him?

**WILLIAMS:** I know his name.

**McPARTLAND:** He got into the act, which I wasn't too thrilled about after a while. That's how Halcyon started. It was . . . A lot of people were doing mail order. A lot of musicians were . . . had their own mail-order thing. Stan Kenton had one, I remember. I think probably was the first person I knew that was sending stuff out mail order.

**WILLIAMS:** That's right. Back in the early to mid-'50s Charles Mingus and Max Roach were doing . . . I think it was called Debut.

**McPARTLAND:** It was.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. The record company. So that was a source of inspiration for you obviously to do this, say 15 years later or something like that.

**McPARTLAND:** Definitely. Definitely. Having this help from Sherman of a place to send everything out . . .

The name was a word I liked a lot from Greek mythology, the mythical bird called the halcyon, which would settle on the ocean and make a nest and lay its eggs there. The ocean would calm down and be smooth. I thought that was a nice picture.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah. That typifies what a lot of the music, not only what you're doing, but like what you historically had heard and recorded and performed anyway. What about some of the . . . specifically what year was that that you started the company?

**McPARTLAND:** I'm not sure, but I would say about 1970, because by 1974 I had got several records out and I went to South America with Earl Hines and Teddy Wilson and Ellis Larkins . . . Ellis Larkin. I'd made up my mind I was going to record these things. I got permission from them. I'll backtrack a little bit, because I had a very nice tape of something I'd done in Rochester with a bass player named Linc Milliman, who was a wonderful bass player. I knew what I wanted. I knew what I wanted the label to look like. Jimmy's son-in-law, who's an artist, he sketched out the color and the label, which I know you've seen. Hank helped a lot. I went to various people that I knew and got the idea for the cover for the first one. Then Hank and Sherman got in the act. They wanted to record more older people, so they recorded Willie "the Lion" Smith and Earl Hines and

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

a guy named Bobby Henderson, probably you've never heard of. Did I ever give you that record?

**WILLIAMS:** Not with Bobby.

**McPARTLAND:** I should. Really good piano player. Then I did one of my own, *A Delicate Balance*. I won't go on, but we had . . . I did Dave McKenna, Jimmie Rowles, several of my own, myself and Joe Venuti, a couple of record's with Jimmy's band, and several . . . There's a solo album that I did at Haverford. Then wound up with a woman that unfortunately nobody knows anything about. Maybe you do. Teddi King, a singer. She was wonderful. She died. I have a double album of Teddi, which I was very proud of. But you can't market it, because nobody . . . "Who's that?" It's a shame.

So that was Halcyon. Oh, and I did Alec Wilder music. Concord has picked up several of them.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes, I was going to say. I wasn't sure if they had picked up the entire catalogue or just specific projects from the catalogue.

**McPARTLAND:** Now I have somebody who is going to pick up the whole catalogue. A guy named Michael Grantham has a thing called Classic Records. He leased my masters for the thing I did with Teddy called *Elegant Piano*, Teddy and I doing piano duets.

**WILLIAMS:** Teddy Wilson we're referring to.

**McPARTLAND:** I sorry. Yes, I should have said Teddy Wilson. That's coming out. That's going to be out. Then he wants to have the record I did with Joe Venuti. That will come out on his label. And the one I did at the Carlyle, which was me and the trio, which was . . . we did it with a live audience.

That's the history of Halcyon. Concord, because of the mess they're in now . . . They stopped putting out any more of my Halcyons. The original idea was they were going to put them all out, but now I am going to get them all out.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yes. That may have worked. That may be a blessing in disguise.

**McPARTLAND:** It may well be. The worst came to the worst, I said, "I'll reactivate Halycon. I'll do it myself." I would love to have all those "Piano Jazz" out. All of them. Yours. I'd love to have all those out.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah, well I think that someone will probably have a vision there. Let me just mention something that you mentioned earlier in there is that the climate which gave you the energy to do this is all of us go through that period at various stages. I

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



certainly have been one. We'll say if no-one's interested in doing any projects, we'll do them ourselves. But the climate there, as you say, people, artists, higher profile artists, for lack of a better term, like Miles, Thelonious, Dave Brubeck, maybe a handful of others, and some of the younger players who are getting certain notoriety there. But you had to have the fortitude to follow through. Certain things came in place. You said Hank O'Neal was sort of a competitor, although he sounds like he was collaborating too. He started . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Oh no, he wasn't a competitor. No, he . . .

**WILLIAMS:** He had his own label at that one point.

**McPARTLAND:** No he didn't have it then. He didn't have it. He was just really . . . I think he was still with the CIA, as a matter of fact. He had just come to New York. He was trying to get his foot in the door. Actually in the end I had to get a lawyer to get rid of him, because he was doing things . . . He was hiring people for my label, and I didn't even know about it.

**WILLIAMS:** Approve or anything, yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** One day I spoke to Bobby Hackett, and he said, "That's going to be nice, being on your label, Halcyon." I said, "What!" "Yeah, we're going to . . . Hank O'Neal is going to pick up the session we did at the Roosevelt Hotel." And things like that. I said, "No, that's not gonna happen."

**WILLIAMS:** And of course it puts you in a delicate situation, being a performer and colleague of various people, and when this comes down. That didn't affect your relationship personally with some of the artists where you know a lot of people . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Not at all. Not at all. Just my relationship with Hank. That had to stop. He was . . . Then Sherman died. Hank and I divied up the various records that we had. I took the Teddy Wilson and the Earl Hines, and he took something else. I forget what. Then he wound up putting out his . . . He took the thing that he wanted to put out with Bobby Hackett. He had these things that they were half-committed to Halcyon, but he took them and put them on his own label. I was left with pretty much all mine to do with as I wished. Then I immediately started to do my own thing. Sherman was gone. Hank was gone. I had to be my own everything. Talk about the last of the cottage industries. It really was.

**WILLIAMS:** That truly was a delicate balance . . .

**McPARTLAND:** It was.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** . . . to try to juggle that with being a performer, being a producer and entrepreneur. I think at that time you also had an early radio program that you had delved in at certain points. Am I correct?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes, you are correct. What I did was, during this fallow period, it seemed like other people . . . that I was not getting recorded. I felt bad about it. So having this time when I really wasn't working all the time, I called up a guy at . . . now I can't think of the radio station. The Pacifica station. WBAI. Chris Albertson was working there. I called up Chris and said, "I'd like to come up there and play some records, do an hour or two of jazz, because I don't hear enough in New York." I knew I wasn't going to get paid. I would go up there with a bundle of records. I called the show "A Delicate Balance." I had guests like Benny Goodman and Herbie and Bill Evans. It's really terrible. I think all those tapes . . . I did not take care of keeping those tapes. I only have some of them. I have one that I did with Alec Wilder and one that I did with Jimmy and George Wettling, but I can't find the one with Herbie or . . . So anyway, that got me off my ass, so to speak, dealing with radio and talking to people.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes, o.k., so that probably right now brings us up to around the mid-'70s of your career.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, I would think so.

**WILLIAMS:** Once again, maybe you can give me . . . although we had met at that point . . . give me an idea of . . . this is now a few years before "Piano Jazz." I'm sort of working my way into that, the evolution of what really made that possible at the time and when it finally occurred, because maybe a few years earlier, it may not have been something that would have been appealing to NPR as it was in, say, 1977 or 1979, during that period of time. Say in the mid-'70s, was your career pretty divided in . . . largely just performing? or did you have a kind of a still partially involved in education or composing or doing other little projects? What exactly, what was, what phase were you in in the mid-'70s?

**McPARTLAND:** One thing. Jimmy and I had separated, and I had an apartment in New York. I was doing all kinds of things. I don't know what year it was I met you out in Normal, Illinois, but I was . . .

**WILLIAMS:** 1970 or something like that.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . I was doing a lot of those things, like stage-band clinics with a really nice group. Sometimes Michael Moore would be the bass player. Phil Wilson from

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Berklee [College of Music]. John LaPorta. Another guy named Wes Hensel, who has died. You knew all those guys. That would be the faculty. Marvin Stamm was in it at various times. I did a lot of those things.

Then Jimmy and I worked some gigs together. I worked at a place called the Strollers Club, where they had a British group doing . . . It was sort of like a Monty Python type of thing. They were all . . . I can't think what it's called. It was complete satire. Eddie Gomez was my bass player at that time. A weird group. Eddie Gomez and Dottie Dodgion. We would play before the play. Then we would get off stage. Then we would go to another little room, and we would play after the play. It was really a good gig. We did that for a long time. Eddie Gomez was about 18. Dottie Dodgion would always give him a hard time. I don't know how she did . . . She always gave everybody a hard time if she thought the thing wasn't swinging enough. But that's all over.

Anyway, those are some of the things I was doing. I never wanted to be not involved doing something. That's really how I got into the schools things in the first place in the '50s, by just going to a school and wanting them to hear jazz and not getting paid anything. We just went there. Maybe we'd be on the road. We did a gig in Rochester at a place called Joe Squeezer's Club. Then I would go over to one of the schools in the morning, and we'd play for all the kids. That's where I got started. I'm sure I must have told you this—if you've heard this before you can cut it out—where I asked the kids what they'd like to hear, and they all hollered out, "You Ain't Nothing But a Hound Dog."

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** That's when I really knew that more people should be involved in jazz, in letting kids hear jazz. That really is what got me into playing in schools and colleges, was that one incident.

**WILLIAMS:** That would certainly be traumatizing enough to do that [laughs].

**McPARTLAND:** Well it was. That can maybe give you an idea of the date. Elvis was . . . he had taken over.

**WILLIAMS:** Mid-'50s.

**McPARTLAND:** All these people had taken over, like Chubby Checker, and Bill Haley and the Comets. You'd hear all this stuff. One had to find other things to do.

**WILLIAMS:** That was so forward thinking in that regard, in knowing what the climate is with jazz education in 1998, as we're speaking. But that, you made a couple things there that we may touch on if you'd be so kind to . . . You say that there's a lot of things that were going on in your life. You said that you and Jimmy had decided to separate . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Yes.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . not divorce. Is that correct? Is that some . . . did that . . .

**McPARTLAND:** No, we did get a divorce. It was too late, really, because the divorce was a failure, because we still continued to hang out together and see each other and play together. I always wanted to create gigs for Jimmy. If he couldn't find any I would create one, or we would all play together. A lot of things that we did that . . .

**WILLIAMS:** So obviously, as we well know, the professional relationship continued on to the very end.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** You say you create jobs. Because at the stylist . . . Let's talk about Jimmy just a little bit more too, because maybe people may not be aware of what . . . we know what his stature was. What do you think his legacy was? What do you feel that people should know about Jimmy musically that wasn't maybe accredited to him? Or certain things. Or some of the colleagues things. Or maybe something that he brought forth that really enhanced not only your career, but his group and everything. I know that during the '70s people thought of his style being more dixieland and so and so forth and it was kind . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, he hated that word.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . It was kind of a . . . yeah it was . . . terms are always limiting. So what would you like for the people, the listeners, to know about Jimmy that we maybe haven't touched on and maybe about his musicality and . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Of course I never knew all the things about Jimmy until later, until after I had gone to Chicago and met his family. Gradually all this jazz history came to me, how he had started at Austin High School, he and Budd Freeman and Frank Teschemacher and Jim Lanigan and his brother Richard [McPartland]. The piano player I think was Dave North. They were all going to school there. They listened to records of . . . Oh Christ!

**WILLIAMS:** King Oliver or Louis Armstrong?

**McPARTLAND:** King Oliver. Right. I was . . . sticking in my head. I couldn't think of . . . Yeah, they had records of King Oliver. Actually, there was a white band in there too,

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



that I guess . . . Somebody and the Rhythm Kings [New Orleans Rhythm Kings]. But Louis was coming along, and they met Louis. Jimmy grew up with Louis. Anyway, they took music by King Oliver. Took the music off the record, and they started with this group, the Austin High School Gang. Jimmy was playing very well, and he got . . . That's when he was asked to replace Bix Beiderbecke with the Wolverines, when he was only 17. He came to New York and did that for however much longer that band was together.

Then he made all kinds of records with every . . . I think I've probably got most of them upstairs. Early records with different people. I don't know, because I didn't know him then. I didn't know him until 1944, when he was in the army. He was playing very well at that time.

I think probably if he hadn't had a drinking problem, things would have been a lot better for him. But he did stop. I don't know if anybody realizes. He stopped and joined AA in nineteen forty-. . . about 1947 or '8. He didn't really hardly ever drink after that.

He made some wonderful records in the '50s. Bob Thiele had this idea for a record that's really a good record, called *Shades of Bix*. It's a lot of Bix tunes, but done in Jimmy's style. And some wonderful bands. I've got these records upstairs. They have people like Coleman Hawkins on them and . . . can't remember the personnel. He did one called *Shades of Bix*, and he did one called "*The Music Man*" Goes Dixieland. That word again. But remember when . . . no, you wouldn't remember when that show was on, *The Music Man*.

**WILLIAMS:** No.

**McPARTLAND:** You were just a little tiny twinkle in somebody's eye.

He was wonderful on those records. Really played . . . I don't know if I'm the person to say what his legacy would be, but he certainly . . . at a point in his life he certainly was a stylist. He did have his own sound, just the way you can tell if it's Louis playing. It might be a little harder to tell Jimmy's style from, say, Wild Bill Davison. But those of us that. . . maybe not the layman in the street might not recognize Jimmy, but he did have a recognizable . . . like a very bright, clear, really a great tone when he was in shape. I should give you a couple of those records to take home, if you don't have them.

**WILLIAMS:** No, actually I don't.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, just to hear what was going on.

**WILLIAMS:** You say he replaced Bix Beiderbecke at age 17. Refresh our memories of what year Jimmy was born.

**McPARTLAND:** 1907.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**WILLIAMS:** So he and Benny Carter are the same year.

**McPARTLAND:** Pretty much, yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** And Prez.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, God!, Benny Carter.

Then he started . . . There's a lot of records that he made with Tommy Dorsey, and a whole bunch of things. George Avakian was recording a lot in those days. He's still around and still doing it, but he was a pretty young cat at that time.

I'm glad we're doing this thing at the festival, in tribute to Jimmy, because some of the people of that era, when they die, they just drop out of sight. I've never heard of Bobby . . . I've never heard anything by Bobby Hackett again since he died.

**WILLIAMS:** That is a sad commentary.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, and Wild Bill. I think the only reason you ever hear something by Wild Bill is his wife is always pushing and promoting something, but you hardly ever hear anything, and you don't ever hear anything by Jimmy either.

**WILLIAMS:** By the way, for our listeners, Marian is referring to the 1998 JVC Jazz Festival, which is on June 22nd, will be a tribute to Mr. Jimmy McPartland, hosted by Marian and a myriad of guests and associates who were either close associates of Jimmy's, but, or influenced by his style.

**McPARTLAND:** All the people that worked with him, I think I've managed to collect. All of them. All the people who did work with him from time to time, like Eddie Locke on drums. Bill Crow worked with him a lot. Howard Alden. Warren Vaché. Jimmy admired Warren Vaché a great deal.

**WILLIAMS:** Did Jimmy play the cornet exclusively?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes.

**WILLIAMS:** Did he ever play flugelhorn? Ever play trumpet? Never saw him . . .

**McPARTLAND:** He did play trumpet, but he didn't like it. He liked . . . he started very early . . . he really kept to the cornet, because he liked the tone better. Although I did buy him a flugelhorn. He kept saying he'd like to try the flugelhorn, but by the time I bought it for him, I think he wasn't that interested. He didn't . . . he played it a few times, but he didn't really go into it very eagerly. He just kept to the cornet.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** A few more questions along those lines. Who were some of the people that Jimmy admired who maybe came along after his time, say, for instance, a Roy Eldridge or a Clifford Brown or anyone like that? Miles or anyone?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes. He and Miles . . . I think Miles really liked Jimmy, because every time I would see him, he would, in that raspy voice, “How’s your old man?,” he would always say.

Jimmy and Dizzy were very friendly. They were very good friends. At festivals and things they would get together. We did a boat trip or something with Dizzy. I’ve got something. I’ve temporarily lost it. I’ve got to find it. Dizzy was doing a date out here, and Jimmy was supposed to interview him for something. Maybe it was something on [W]BAI. I don’t know. We went over there, and the two of them proceeded to get high, and the interview is the most ridiculous thing you ever heard. Very funny, but it isn’t anything you could use outside of your own house or playing it for friends.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs] That’s definitely worth having in your archives.

**McPARTLAND:** I’ve got it, but I would . . . soon as I find it, I’ll dub it off for you.

**WILLIAMS:** I mentioned about some of the others. How did he feel about, and I just want to get a little bit of insight, because I know he was a very important influence on you as well, so this may eventually, this will tie in to what we’re saying, how is his feeling about swing music and about bebop or even more, say, more contemporary, like I say, did he hear Fats Navarro? Did he have any comments about Clifford Brown or Lee Morgan or some of the players that came up 20 years, 30 years after his time?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, but he was . . . he admitted that he was . . . he felt that he was committed to the style that he played. I think a lot of the . . . even sometimes with Dizzy, he would say, “It seems that all they do is play a lot of notes.” And yet when anybody would play a beautiful ballad or something, he would always dig that. I couldn’t hear him . . . he didn’t . . . I couldn’t see him getting into bebop. I think he had the style of playing so set in his mind that he wasn’t or couldn’t or wouldn’t change it. But at the same time he could see where I was going, because I was really wanting to play bebop. We would go every night in Chicago—this was in the late ’40s—to hear Charlie Ventura and Jackie and Roy out on the South Side, and we would go to hear . . . Red Saunders had a band. Then we were working at the Blue Note, and our little band, we played opposite Billie Holiday. Jimmy knew Billie very well. That was a great date. But he was always pushing me to . . . “You should have your own group.” I would make arrangements for the band which would be bebop-oriented, like all those things they were playing, “Anthropology” and “Ornithology” and all those tunes. I would make arrangements like that for the band,

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

and he would play them. But his heart wasn't in it. Yet he really admired other people. He loved Dizzy. Maybe more as a friend than . . .

**WILLIAMS:** A social contact.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . a social thing. Once we had to play for an act. We were playing in Chicago, and the music this woman picked for her act was Dizzy's thing, "Manteca." It broke me up to hear Jimmy trying to play that. He did play it. He had to, because it was part of the act. But he could have done that if he wanted to. If he really wanted to get into it, he could have.

**WILLIAMS:** So Jimmy obviously was very solid fundamentally as a musician. He read well, did other things like that. Was he comfortable in situations where, playing in a big band and things like that.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh yes. One of the last things he did before going to Europe was playing in Jack Teagarden's big band. I've got video of him playing with Jack and Benny Goodman in Benny Pollack's band years ago. I think maybe Jack . . . maybe that was . . . no, I'm sure he did play with other big bands early on, but I can't think where. Then he played . . . he had . . . he played for some shows in the pit . . . he would . . . played in some pit bands on Broadway. He did a lot of things.

**WILLIAMS:** So he enjoyed still being in a reading, an all-reading session and setting.

**McPARTLAND:** He could do that, but as years went by, he didn't do that much of it, because he was working with small groups, and they would play the same kind of tunes. They just didn't . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Stretch out beyond.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . branch out. They just didn't branch out into anything new. They did all tunes they knew from that repertoire, like "Royal Garden Blues" and "Louisiana" and "I'm gonna sit right down and write myself a letter." Not that there's anything bad about those tunes. Actually I probably have the best dixieland repertoire of anyone around. I know all those tunes. Some of them are really fun to play.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, they are great tunes. The tunes are timeless. That's what I was going to say, because this is interesting in the fact that even though he was in a sense like one of your first mentors . . .

**McPARTLAND:** He was.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** . . . here and maybe even before you came to New York and Chicago, but certainly the influence that he had, the vision to let, to know that you had to develop, not only as a leader, but as an artist, with the changing times and styles and trends that were occurring there, that he was able to let you go ahead and move and not feel like that was any kind of a infringement on his career, in other words.

**McPARTLAND:** A competition or something. No, he was . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. Especially at that time, when the wife is supposed to stay at home and the husband's career comes first and that kind of thing too, so it could have been easily, maybe you wouldn't have allowed it to happen, but that could have been the climate for the '40s, wouldn't you say?

**McPARTLAND:** In retrospect, the more I think of Jimmy being, having a great deal of pride in what I could do, and . . . He has always been my biggest booster. It seemed like it was really generous of him to not be jealous or be saying, "Woman, you stay at home" or "Forget piano playing," like some people would. He just wanted me to expand. He would help in any way he could, even if it meant that we would separate musically, which of course we did do. It meant that I didn't play as many jobs with him. I played some. In fact, we would go on the road when I was at the Hickory House, and we would play . . . There was a club in Detroit called Baker's Keyboard. Instead of taking the trio, we would take a quartet, so that Jimmy could go. We would mix up. He would be like the guest, and he would play three or four of his tunes, and he'd sing, and we'd do our thing. That worked pretty well.

When I was at the Hickory House, he was at the Metropole with . . . Oh, God, what a band. Joe Sullivan, George Wettling, Pee Wee Russell, Charlie Queener on piano. No, Joe Sullivan on piano. The bass player might have been Bob Haggart. A real bunch of jazz stars. But that awful place. It was before your time.

**WILLIAMS:** Yep. Well it's still there, in a very different context now. [laughs] I don't know if you know what it is.

**McPARTLAND:** It was a bar that had an open . . . the door was open out to the street, and people would even stand on the street and listen to the band. The bandstand was long and narrow, so you had to . . . the band had to be strung out, if you'll excuse the expression . . .

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** . . . across the length of the bandstand. The Woody Herman band would play in there. It would be ridiculous, because at one end would be the drums and piano, and at the far end would be the brass section. I don't know how they ever got together. They'd all look in the mirror. There was a mirror on the opposite side of the club. Somehow they managed to play together. I just loved to go in there all the time to hear them or Red Allen or whoever was there when we were through at the Hickory House. I'm so lucky. I had such wonderful musical experiences of every kind of music, because then we'd dash over to Birdland and we'd hear . . . Phineas Newborn was in town by that time, I think. Your buddy, Phineas. We'd hear him a lot and Bud and Duke. Duke would always invite me to sit in with the band. Whenever he saw me in a club he would . . .

**WILLIAMS:** You actually sat in with the band?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. Oh, yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** Wow! That's great.

**McPARTLAND:** They would all . . . They would play the blues or something. I knew their repertoire anyway. It was always something . . . there was no hard piano part to read. I would just fit in and have a ball. He always did that for me.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah. Let's see. What I was going to tell you that . . . I mentioned that . . . you talked about repertoire. Much of your repertoire you learned from Jimmy apparently is what you're saying.

**McPARTLAND:** Well I learned a lot of them before Jimmy. I knew them because all the tunes that were played in this country were played on the BBC. Big bands. Anything I heard on the BBC I could go to the piano and play. And then I had a lot of records that people brought to the house, of Duke and . . . I don't know how I missed Jimmy, because I remember having records of Sidney Bechet and Muggsy Spanier and all the Benny Goodman groups with Lionel Hampton and Teddy. I spent hours trying to play like Teddy. Art Tatum. And even when I was going to the Guildhall School of Music, I was more into listening to jazz than I really was into the classical end of things, which I was supposed to be working at, but in the end I left and went out with this vaudeville group.

**WILLIAMS:** That led to you meeting Jimmy at that point.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, well.

**WILLIAMS:** ENSA, I guess.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, right. ENSA was the English version. Then I switched to U.S.O. and went to France. I think I must have talked about this already.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** That's where I met Jimmy, was in Belgium when he was . . . he had . . . he was probably drunk. He had . . . I think he volunteered. He didn't . . . he wasn't very smart. He didn't get himself into a band, like a lot of people did, like Artie Shaw and all those people. They'd be in a band. He went and enlisted as a regular G.I. Then when we were in Belgium and somebody heard him play Reveille or something and said, "My God! It's Jimmy McPartland. We've got to get him out of being a soldier and put him in Special Service so he can play." That's how we got together. With this little group, going around and entertaining the groups [*sic*: troops]. They brought him into the U.S.O. group. So that's how all that happened.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. Let me jump up about 30 years again now. Let's talk about "Piano Jazz." I'd like to just get an idea of that. I'd like you to tell the listeners, because it's my take on it that that was your original idea. You proposed to someone at National Public Radio, perhaps Dick Phipps or someone. But what is the origin? How did that evolve from being just an idea on a piece of paper or a draft or a proposal to becoming what we now know affectionately as "Piano Jazz"?

**McPARTLAND:** It actually came from Alec Wilder, who a few years previous to that had written this book, which I'm sure you must have, called *American Popular Song*. Do you have that book?

**WILLIAMS:** I don't have it. I know of it.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, well I'm going to give it to you. I think everybody should have that book. The book . . . I remember going to the book party. Harold Arlen was there. Arthur Schwartz was there. All these composers. It was fantastic. Anyway, the book, it really is a good book.

Shortly after that, NPR started a series for Alec as a result of the book. He would have guests like Tony Bennett and Margaret Whiting, all singers. He had a little trio, and he would interview the singer, and the singers would sing and talk. It would be like "Piano Jazz," except that it was done with Alec and done with singers.

That ended. Right after that, somebody asked me about doing . . . somebody from down there, the same station, asked me about, would I like to do a show to follow on where Alec, what Alec was doing, something musical and yet educational? I said I would love to do it. We just started like that. I didn't find out until years later that the one that

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



was pushing for it was Alec. In fact I have a letter upstairs that he wrote to a guy at the station, saying the person you should get is Marian McPartland. Alec was the type of person that didn't want to take bows. He denied strenuously that he ever did anything to get me on the station, but he in fact was the one.

We were very friendly at that time. He wrote all kinds of music for me. It's really a shame that I didn't have him on "Piano Jazz." What a drag that was. But he . . . I'm trying to think. I think by the time we actually started, he had got sick. I can't remember what year he died. I don't think he even ever came to any of our "Piano Jazz" things. But he really was the one that got that started.

It was an experiment, really. We didn't know if it was going to be successful. Exxon . . . Dick Phipps was the prime mover of that thing. He was the producer. I think we did have Exxon sponsoring maybe 13 shows, and the thing just . . . Everybody liked it. So it just didn't stop. But it was funny, because we were doing it in there . . . oh, Baldwin gave us the pianos, so we were doing it in the Baldwin showroom where there were about 30 pianos. I would go in early and choose two pianos. Somebody would pull them out and put them up side by side. Then the engineer would have to come with a truck from South Carolina, set up in the ladies room or something. That's how we did the show for maybe a year. Some of the good shows were done in there, like with Teddy, Eubie Blake, Mary Lou Williams, Hazel Scott, Bill Evans, John Lewis, Makoto Ozone, Albert Dailey, people that aren't around now, unfortunately. Dick Hyman, Chick Corea, and so on.

All of a sudden everybody thought this thing is going to take off, and we got a studio. We got more money. It's just a thing that's kept going. Only just recently, the last five years, did we lose Exxon, because the guy that liked us retired, and the new guy didn't want to know about "Piano Jazz." We've managed to struggle along, getting funding here and there. So that's what's going on with "Piano Jazz."

**WILLIAMS:** There was something you mentioned, early stages there, about that. You didn't have to write proposals to get these grants, in order to do this, because Alec had already laid the foundation down? Is that the case? I would think today, in 1998, if you wanted to have a program or had an idea like this, it would, you would have to go through a lot of red tape in terms of paperwork, having someone write up a proposal. None of these things were a part of the original "Piano Jazz."

**McPARTLAND:** Maybe Dick did. Dick was very . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Thorough.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . what? authoritarian. He did a lot of things. We didn't have the kind of relationship that Sherrie and I have, where we each know what the other is doing. Dick did a lot of things. He may have, but I don't think so. It was all accomplished very easily.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center



The only thing I wish I had done differently was not let them own the show, which is what they do in South Carolina. South Carolina Educational Radio own “Piano Jazz.”

**WILLIAMS:** Would you have had an option to be the owner?

**McPARTLAND:** I might have. Or I might, if I’d known what was going to happen. I was just delighted to be doing it and thinking, “What a nice thing to do. I hope I can keep this up for a few weeks.” Never dreaming what was going to happen. They left the hiring of the people entirely to me, and they still do. I still . . . although there were a lot of people I got that Dick was . . . He was difficult. There were a lot of people he really didn’t want me to have. I went ahead and got them anyway. He used to be trying to get me to have certain friends of his which were not necessarily name people or people I was particularly interested in. So once in a while we’d have a little scuffle, but for the most part it was a good relationship.

**WILLIAMS:** One would probably wonder why South Carolina would be . . . as opposed to, here we are in the world’s greatest city of New York, and we would have thought the people here would have been enlightened and have a certain vision about what the program could do. Why was this program, or why was the origin of this in South Carolina at NPR?

**McPARTLAND:** I think they . . . I’ve always . . . they’ve done a lot of things that I . . . shows, television shows and things, that are probably more uncommercial . . . People here are so into, “Will it sell?” and marketing and all that stuff. They weren’t into that so much as, “Will it be an interesting and valid show?” They’ve always been like that, something that is something good. They wanted it to be part education, part jazz, part talking, part music. You couldn’t imagine too many people in New York going for that concept. They’d say, “If you’re going to do that, you’ve got to have Chubby Checker” or something like that.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. I understand what you’re saying. Interesting enough, the climate in the music industry was parallel to that too, because at that point my career was just starting up with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers. We were probably the only group out there of that size that still played progressive jazz, mainstream jazz, whereas you had, that was the height of the fusion music with Weather Report and Return to Forever and Mahavishnu Orchestra and these kinds of things.

**McPARTLAND:** Right.

**WILLIAMS:** So this was interesting that you’re evolving with this, that program too, and our group coming out with Billy Pierce and Bobby Watson and myself and Wynton

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Marsalis, which has evolved in a lot of ways, parallel, and been the beneficiary of what a lot of things that you've done there.

What do you, how do you feel that you have evolved as a host, as opposed, or an interviewer, from that, those early shows to say the kind of relaxed situation and how to work with various guests. Let me focus that a little bit more. Was it very difficult to interview certain artists more than others? And if there are any ones in particular, who would you say are the easy interviews at that point?

**McPARTLAND:** I think I made a bad decision to open . . . to have the first show with Mary Lou Williams, because she was tough, but I was such an admirer of hers that it just seemed logical. But I think that she might have been a little bit jealous that I was the one doing that show and she wasn't, because she was crusty to begin with. In fact, I think Dick had to smooth things over. She brought a bass player. We didn't want to have any bass players. She didn't ask. She just brought one. He wasn't all that great. So the . . . even though we put the show out on a CD, you can hear where I'm a little frightened of her. It wasn't all that bad

I got better immediately, because I think the next guest was Billy Taylor or somebody. Like a lot of these people. George Shearing. It's like you . . . everybody's a safety net. You know you can't go wrong with any of those people, because they're not going to let the ball drop.

**WILLIAMS:** Let's go back to Mary Lou again. Why were you intimidated? Other than I know she was one of your mentors as well . . . we talked about Jimmy, but she was a role model . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, yes!

**WILLIAMS:** . . . and a mentor for people like Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell. Art Blakey spoke of how, in high tones of how she was, almost had like a little school of young, aspiring, but very gifted musicians, not just pianists, that would come over to her house in the '40s and '50s and she would sometimes cook for them and things. That was probably a little bit before you got to New York. But I'm sure that she was an extremely great role model in many ways that I can't even start to count. So how did . . . was that part of that reason for the intimidation as well?

**McPARTLAND:** I knew Mary . . . I wanted to meet Mary Lou before I even got to the States. I finally found her in a club called the Down Beat Club. I went up to her apartment a couple of times. She was always very nice to me. In fact we worked opposite one another at a club called The Composer, which was a wonderful little club in New York, and I . . . in fact I wrote about that. I did a piece about her in *Down Beat* which was subsequently . . . which I used in the book that I put out, *All in Good Time*. There's a

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



really nice piece about Mary Lou. Oh, no, I guess I had done another one for *Down Beat*. I did several pieces about Mary Lou. She came to the house. Jimmy and I were living in Manhattan at the time. She came to the house and she wrote out one of her tunes, “Scratching in the Gravel,” for me. The copy of it, I still have it. I keep meaning to . . . it’s probably down in that pile. I’ve got to frame it. That’s the only way I’ll keep from losing it.

But as time went on, I think maybe I was doing some things that she wasn’t doing, like being at the Carlyle. She was at the Carlyle. She was there, but then instead of bringing her back, I went in. I was in the Carlyle on and off for about ten years. I think she got mad at me for that, because I would go down to see her at the Cookery, and I brought her flowers. I remember being there one time, and she barely spoke to me.

Anyway, she still agreed to do “Piano Jazz.” But I think that was really the main thing. She was . . . I was getting uppity, doing things that she should be doing.

**WILLIAMS:** I see parallels of this not only in my career but in the climate of things in these few years that I’ve been out here as a performer as well, so I think, and we can speak candidly, or if you choose not to address this we can go along. Do you think race played a role in this, as well as being a lady at that particular time, that they felt more comfortable? Do you think that she had the feeling that the powers that be would feel more comfortable . . .

**McPARTLAND:** . . . with a white person.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, and also, British too, because as we all think of in America, that’s the King and Queen’s English, and that’s the way the language should be spoken, so we’re talking about the radio, so the sound over the air would be there. Do you think any of that was a factor in her thinking or in the thinking of the powers that be?

**McPARTLAND:** Certainly not in the thinking of the powers that be. I think in her thinking . . . now I never thought of such a thing. I never thought of such a thing, because Mary Lou was . . . she was the number one female piano player, if you want to bring that into it, and the men all respected her. Some of them were afraid of her. In fact she was . . . she could . . . she was known to be tough. I remember when she was at the Hickory House, she fired Richard Davis. She would always seem to be very mean to the bass player. She had Brian Torff when she was at the Cookery. She would say, “Play them changes.” She would hollar out, and she would be always repeating the changes, so that even the audience could hear it. In fact on the thing she did on “Piano Jazz,” you could hear her calling changes to the bass player.

I think that in her mind she should have had that show, being a number one great pianist who had transcended being a woman pianist. She just was a great pianist. Maybe she thought it should have been her that should have had the thing, but it just happened

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



that me, white or whatever, I just was better qualified to do it, I think, than her. I don't think she . . . I just don't think that she could have handled it, because it wasn't her style. She was very into her own thing, and putting that together took a lot of work and also thinking of the other person rather than myself. I couldn't think too much about how I was going to play. I was very . . . gee, you're making me think of things I never thought of. I had to be very concerned about how I was going to present the other person and wanted them to look good. I wasn't so occupied with whether I was even going to play a number on the show. I was going to do duets with the guest. In fact I only did do one number myself.

So I think that's probably it in plain language, that she was jealous of me doing it, and thinking, "How is this white uppity person doing this?" But she cooled off afterwards. She was o.k. afterwards. She . . . I know there was one minute . . . Do you have this tape at home?

**WILLIAMS:** No. I'm gonna get it. [laughter]

**McPARTLAND:** I should give it to you. She says . . . She played some tune, and I said, "That's an interesting chord," and I played it on the piano, or thought I did. She said, "I didn't play that chord," in a haughty voice. She really bust the gig on that occasion, but it was still good enough for us to put it out. It really gives you an idea of what she could be like. It's good in that sense. You can see what kind of a person she was.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, a different dimension of that personality. But I think what, just, not being there and not knowing her personality . . . I met her and saw her one time . . . perhaps what she was directing at you, my gut feeling would be that she was really directing at the system of what she perceived as being the system, not you the individual, because like you said, maybe she did feel she was uniquely qualified to do that show. But you also know that it calls for much more patience and being able to work with people, the producers and everyone else. It's more than just going up on the show and just being a great stylist and performer. There's a lot of the work, preparation to get to that point. Calls for a great amount of patience and give and take and compromise and things like that. Like you say, everyone doesn't have that kind of personality to do that, whether . . . But I think that she could have looked at that, just knowing, being in situations like that as an Afro-American myself, I know how sometimes the perception of things are there, which are very real. Sometimes the reaction is not at an individual as much as it would be just, who makes those decisions for that to be the case. And I'm sure that's the reason why, despite all that, you still had a very cordial relationship right up to the end. So I think that's something you might consider thinking in that way.

**McPARTLAND:** I think I convinced her in the end, because when she went down to Durham, I would call her up a lot. I spent . . . she mellowed out a bit. Even towards the

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



end of the show you can hear that she got more mellow. In fact she even sang a number. We all went out for dinner, and then she became very jolly and very charming as she could be.

**WILLIAMS:** The way you would have liked to have been on the show. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, well, on part of the show she was fine. I know she said something to Dick. I think she actually said to Dick, "I should be doing this show." Dick said, "You're the honored guest on the show. It's the first show. This is the first one we're doing." I remember him saying that to her. "You're the guest." Trying to make her feel good. So anyway, she got over it. But that was a tough one for me.

You've just made me think about it. There really is a lot of work to it. You just don't go there and have all the stuff prepared. I do most of the preparation myself, including hiring the guests, because most of them I know, or they know me. It's much easier than giving it to some flunkie and then they say, "I couldn't get him for that day. How about next . . ." I want to cut out all that stuff and just get to the . . . leave . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Cut out the fat and go right to the lean.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** I know, doing our productions as well, I understand what you mean, because we have a connection, and we can, it's sometimes really discussing, and I think sometimes the artists don't speak enough. Sometimes we speak too many times through agents and promoters and publicists, and I think a lot of things that when you cut out the middle person, so to speak, in that, a lot more productive things get done quicker and efficiently.

**McPARTLAND:** That's what I think, because people are always saying to me, "You shouldn't be doing that. You shouldn't be doing that." I say if I don't . . . I think I do it best. I'd rather do it, which is probably conceited. [laughs] But I don't care if they're surprised to hear me call up and hire them. Then when they've said, "Yes, that date is o.k.," then I call up Sherrie and say, "I got André Previn to do the show." Here's his phone number, and it's such and such a date, and then I leave it over to let them handle it from then on.

**WILLIAMS:** A couple of other things. Maybe some little quick answers you can give. Who were some of your maybe half a dozen better interviews that you did that just springs off the top of your head?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Bill Evans. Oscar Peterson. Chick Corea. God, I wish I had had Duke Ellington. The one with Mercer [Ellington] was a lot of fun, but he really couldn't play. I was surprised. He couldn't even play "C Jam Blues."

**WILLIAMS:** On trumpet?

**McPARTLAND:** On piano.

**WILLIAMS:** He was a trumpet . . . that's a whole other story, I guess.

**McPARTLAND:** But he was a wonderful guest. He was just a wonderful man. I was really happy to have him and found out . . . he told me so much about his life with his father.

Oh, so many of them. Even people that you don't . . . that really aren't that well known, like, for instance, Roy Kral. I had him on the show. He did a wonderful show. And George Shearing. It's always a pleasure to have somebody again that you know is going to not drop the ball, because a lot of times this does happen. Somebody gets nervous. But then the glories of tape are, if something happens or somebody's hesitant, you can cut it out and start over again.

**WILLIAMS:** What do you consider that makes it a good interview? What do you, what makes that easy to interview these people? What is it? Is it any particular element or thing? Is it because of their relaxation? Or is the rapport?

**McPARTLAND:** It's a combination of all those things. A rapport, and probably knowing the person. When I think how well I know George and Billy Taylor, and Chick pretty well. But then there's other guys that you haven't met, and you immediately know them, like I really hadn't . . . I met him years ago, but I really didn't know Max Roach. He was wonderful. We did a great show. We just had a really good time. And Roy Haynes. Another one. It's like an instant . . . it instantly works out. You and I have done two shows. They've both been good. They both been great.

**WILLIAMS:** I hope so. [laughs] What about some of the ones would you consider, when I said difficult, I don't mean everybody was just fighting you every way, it's just something that made it a little more, where you had to be a little more spontaneous, reinvent yourself right on the air or something like that.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh man. Let's say Miss Donegan. There was one. She . . . that woman. She did a great show, but she was so eager to outplay me that in the middle of the show I started to get a headache. I took a break and went to the ladies' room. Took an aspirin and said, "Come on now. Shape up." At one point I played a tune, and she said, "I really like

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



that tune. I'd like to play you my version of it." I said, "Fine, o.k., go ahead." So at the end of the show, I said to her, "Dorothy, don't worry, you win." She says . . . now I can't think of the tag line. She said, "No contest," in a very haughty way.

**WILLIAMS:** True vintage. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** But it was a good show, and we're going to run it again in the fall

**WILLIAMS:** Oh great.

**McPARTLAND:** She got . . . talk about racist. She got mad at me and everybody at NPR, because she heard the show was repeated. I wasn't home, but she left a message on the service to the effect that I was cheating black people out of their rightful money by repeating the show and not paying her any more money.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** She left this message. She was a riot. This is just Dorothy. This is not race or anything. She said to me during the show, "You know what, Marian?" She's thinking of Dick Phipps. "He ought to tip me." I said, "You think so?" "He should give me a tip for this." She had already got her money in front, in cash. So I went in the control room. I said, "She says she wants a tip." So he gave her \$50. She was delighted. [laughter] Isn't that funny?

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yes. Well, you know, a lot of colorful characters in this music.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** That's what makes it . . . That's why we love it so much.

**McPARTLAND:** Probably.

**WILLIAMS:** At least one of the many reasons I guess. I think a lot of times just . . . you knew Dorothy much better than I did. I always had the feeling that she said and did things just for shock effects, almost like we see on tv now, but a much milder version of what we see with the rappers or something.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh probably.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**WILLIAMS:** These things, it's just to invoke a reaction a lot of times. And it's sort of an inside joke in a lot of ways. Who were some of the others like just that you would consider that would have been . . .

**McPARTLAND:** That were hard?

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, that were challenging, shall I say.

**McPARTLAND:** Denny Zeitlin. God, that man has such fantastic chops. That was another one where I felt like a wave had washed over me. But after the initial shock, I figured, I've got to keep my end up with this thing. He's a really fine pianist.

**WILLIAMS:** But he was a challenge to interview in terms of getting information.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh no, no. That was fine.

**WILLIAMS:** Well that's what I meant. Some of the others . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, as an interview. [laughs]

**WILLIAMS:** Any others along those lines? Just names. You don't, whatever.

**McPARTLAND:** It's funny. Most of them have been so groovy. It's hard for me to think of one that wasn't. Maybe Dave McKenna in the days that he was drinking.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah, and the one-, two- word answers perhaps. I would always think sometimes that would be, if you asked a question and you get an answer that's less than a sentence or one phrase, sometimes it's hard to follow that up and keep the momentum going.

**McPARTLAND:** Sometimes that happened. We've evolved a way of getting around that, because I don't allow enough . . . for people to be nervous. Sometimes they are nervous. So sometimes Sherrie will stop the tape and say, "We've got a problem in here. We've got to fix the tape." Or something to make it look like it's their fault. Then it gives me a chance to rephrase the question and give the other person a chance to be more forthcoming. Or I'll say, why don't you tell me about so and so? I can usually deal with that, to tell you the truth. Most of the time.

It's funny. Years ago, I think, Tommy Flanagan was the worst offender. I always make a joke, and he's heard me do this. I said something like, in the beginning of the show—he's done the show two or three times. But the first time, I said to him, "How's

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



things? Are you all right?” And he nodded. [laughter] I’m not sure if it actually happened that way, but I like to tell that story, even in front of him, and he doesn’t mind.

**WILLIAMS:** No, he has a great sense of humor.

**McPARTLAND:** But he was . . . He does. But the first time around he was kind of . . . because he wouldn’t pick any tunes. I remember that. We were sitting there for hours. He’d say, “No, I don’t know the bridge. No . . .” That was hard, but it’s so long ago, and I’ve had him on since, when he’s been a lot of fun.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, sometimes . . . I’m sure all of us our first time around, those of us fortunate enough to do it more than once, are happy because we feel there is room for redemption there. Speaking of which, how do you decide certain ones . . .

[The recording has an abrupt break. Perhaps the cassette tape needed to be changed. McPartland responds to someone outside of the room:]

**McPARTLAND:** I’m ready. I’m ready. I’m ready as I’ll ever be.

**WILLIAMS:** One of the things we’d like to follow up on, you mentioned earlier about “Piano Jazz,” is preparation. Maybe you can give us a little quick synopsis of what it is to prepare for a guest and how it may differ from one guest to another if there is such a . . . I know there are certain general things, but I’m sure there . . . if you know . . . let me give you an example. How do you prepare for George Shearing coming on the air, as opposed to, say, Mulgrew Miller?

**McPARTLAND:** Probably not too differently, actually, because . . . Actually I do . . . You probably don’t want to hear this. I almost do no preparation. If it’s somebody I know . . . Either one of those people, if they’ve got a new piece of music, a new record or something, I’ll get my hands on that and play it, maybe a week or two weeks before the show, or maybe the day before, even, just so I have something new to talk about. Or, if the person is in town, I’ll try to get to hear them in a club. But neither of those things sometimes work out. They don’t have a record and they’re not appearing in town, so I just go on what I know. I don’t do anything about anything until I’m in the car going to the date, and then I write up my little piece of business that I’m going . . . the intro that I’m going . . . what I’m going to say about them. I always do that in the car. I may have made a half-hearted list of tunes, mostly taken off a record cover or something, but I always ask the guest to bring a list of tunes. A lot of times they don’t do that. That’s one of the worst things, when somebody comes with no tune list and don’t know what they want to play. Then it’s a good thing if I have a list. A lot of times . . . Very few times is the guest really prepared with a list of tunes, knowing what they’re going to do. It’s

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



mostly haphazard. “What would you like to play?” Occasionally I get to talk to somebody on the phone a few days ahead of time and say, “Bring a list of tunes.” That’s really it, to tell you the truth. I can’t seem to do things ahead of time. I like to be as spontaneous as I can.

**WILLIAMS:** Sure. Right in the true tradition of the music itself. O.k. The reason why I directed that question is because of the fact that you do this preparation. Like you said, this isn’t something that you can delegate to Sherrie Hutcherson or to anyone else.

**McPARTLAND:** Not at all.

**WILLIAMS:** You have to be able to do it and know that. But let me ask you this. This is slightly a different question along the same lines. What is this . . . what if you’re having a guest that you do not only not know, but it’s a new artist on the scene. Let’s say you have someone who’s just . . . Geoff Keezer has just come out of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and all you know . . .

**McPARTLAND:** That happened. I think that’s when I did have him. I made sure he sent me a record, and I had some kind of a bio. Then I just write up some dummy questions like . . . that I may ask, at least something I can ask, which may lead him . . . like, where did you hear the music? Do you have brothers and sisters? Was your family . . . did they encourage your playing? How did you hear your first jazz? All that stuff. And that always leads into . . . then they get into variations on that. Then you think of other questions. But I’ve always got a list of basic questions that I can go to, plus the fact that we can always stop the tape. “Stop. I just can’t remember. I’ve got to look and see what I’m going to do.” If I had to go from start to finish, I’d have to be a lot quicker on the draw than I am now, because I know that I can stop any minute and say, “Hey, wait a minute. I’ve got to look this up.” But a new artist is no problem.

**WILLIAMS:** Sometimes how do you stay above the fray of politics, where you’re having publicists? You mentioned publicists like Don Lucoff and others. Record company people and managers that are constantly I am sure bombarding you with CDs, press releases, any other, faxes and everything else. How does that . . . politics creep into everything. How do you determine at certain points when you have to succumb to that or when you can circumvent that?

**McPARTLAND:** I usually circumvent it, to tell you the truth. I can’t really think of being trapped in it, except . . . I suppose the most political thing that happened was lately with this guy, Lofton Harris, because I got a pile of CDs from South Carolina, because a lot of them originate there and they send them to me. I didn’t know him. Sherrie called me and said there’s this guy there, Lofton Harris, and a woman whose name I forget . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Betina something . . . at NPR is his manager. They're all plugging for this guy. I know if I hadn't liked him, I wouldn't have done anything about it. But I . . . so then I played the record, and I did like him. He sings too. He's really quite good. He's young, and he's already a Baldwin artist. So it just filled in what we needed. We're doing a thing at the Baldwin showroom, and I was looking high and low for somebody and couldn't find anybody that filled the bill, so I hired him, because he sounded good. I played the record. He seems to be very . . . he's got to be very on the ball. Seems like they're playing him on [W]BGO all day long. So he must have somebody . . . It's amazing. So much of it is publicity or having . . . I don't know if anybody's paying anybody to push him. I don't know what's happening. But the guy is good. He just filled the bill. I didn't have to put up an argument.

But sometimes I do get this same kind of call or information from somebody. There's a guy. I don't know where he is now. I probably shouldn't even mention his name. I think he's . . . I just don't like this person's playing, and I don't want to have him on "Piano Jazz." So I avoid it or . . . I don't know. I don't usually get trapped into them, unless it's something that I like or can see myself doing a decent show. I would never want to do a show where I'm cringing about what I did.

**WILLIAMS:** I felt that way, but I wanted our listeners to hear that from you, so that they can feel comfortable, knowing that, because the integrity of the show has stood on its own merits over the 20 years plus that it has been on the air. Interesting thing. We talked about things being orchestrated. We'll digress and move parallel to, just for a few moments, to "Piano Jazz," in terms of the machinery behind it, because some 20 years ago plus that I was eyewitness to a career being orchestrated by that of young Wynton Marsalis when he was a member of the Jazz Messengers along with myself and others. We saw how that has gone from there, and we have seen now where in the days from the '80s and '90s, where many times the young artists, instead of coming to town, doing an apprenticeship and getting seasoning with veterans and being a mentor, finding a mentor as you did with Mary Lou, with Jimmy, and others, one of the first things they come to do is get a manager or an agent and try to get a record deal and if it happens then almost go out as a leader practically. What are your thoughts on how that has changed the perception of jazz and that has led to other things, events and stuff like that? How . . . I personally don't feel comfortable with that, because obviously I came in at the tail end of the generation where you really did what I considered the proper and the correct way of learning the music, putting the music first and the career followed.

**McPARTLAND:** God, I don't know how to answer that. First, I met Wynton and Branford [Marsalis] and Donald Harrison when I was in New Orleans. I was playing there. I met Ellis [Marsalis] too. He was playing in the hotel I was staying in. I think he was playing at that time at the Hyatt Regency.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

They had a concert for me to do. There was going to be . . . for a school thing that they set up, the school thing in some great big hall in the hotel. So fine, that's all set that I was going to do that. Lo and behold, Wynton and his little band . . . they said "This kid's band is going to play," and I'm thinking to myself, "Oh man, what is this going to be?" Of course they were wonderful at that age. They all knocked me out. I was absolutely knocked out. I wonder if I ever sent you the picture of me playing with that group.

**WILLIAMS:** No.

**McPARTLAND:** They're all about 15, and I'm thinking, my God! I couldn't stop raving about, especially Wynton. He certainly could stand on his talent. Then he came to New York and went to Juilliard, didn't he?

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, he went to, he attended Juilliard, and of course very shortly during that semester joined the Messengers . . . uh, second semester, joined the Jazz Messengers. But I didn't mean to single out Wynton inasmuch as the fallout from what has happened in his career, where we've seen, whether it's Roy Hargrove or Joshua Redman and others, Diana Krall, you can just go right down the list and see how now the setting has changed. The playing field is a little different from the way it was when you came to New York and even when I came to New York in the late '70s.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, you mean in other words they can get themselves a manager . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . and jump right in without doing any apprenticeship.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. How did . . . or very little . . . how do you, how does that, what is your take on that being as opposed to the way things were when you came to New York? What are the pros and cons?

**McPARTLAND:** As a matter of fact I don't think of myself as having a proper apprenticeship, like for instance Barbara Carroll, and JoAnne Brackeen, who played with Stan Getz. I've never played with any groups except Jimmy's, and in a way that was an apprenticeship for learning how to be in show biz and how to . . . But as far as learning tunes and getting into bebop and all the things I did do, I did that by myself, not through being with other groups. But I wish I had done that. The fact that they're all doing this now. It's like they're springing full blown from some other town, and they come to town and start out. I don't know what I think about it. I think . . . well, say, Joshua Redman, he . . . I don't . . . he's very good. He can certainly take care of business and go out there and be a leader and have a group. There's a couple of other ones. Who else did you say?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Wynton. I guess Wynton's larger than life. He has all kinds of help from every angle, and he's . . . I don't know.

**WILLIAMS:** I understand what you're saying. I guess what, the crux of what I'm looking, is that, how has that affect the way the music is going, has evolved, in say the last 15 years? In other words, right now, even though you with Jimmy's group, you learned the strong repertoire and the fundamentals of playing jazz during that time and was able to nurture that without being under the spotlight of saying oh gosh, everything's focused directly on you. You could do this in a very, at your own pace, and even though subsequent work that you did on your own with your trios and various other projects. The same thing, right now, we're almost expecting, my take on it is that it seems like we're almost expecting the finished product. When someone makes a CD, I always like to think that's a certain maturity there, as opposed . . . we know it's always an evolving thing and it's growth, but where do we, does the music suffer, because now it's almost like we have the carriage before the cart, something like that, the horse . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Now I understand a little more. There's something that really does bother me a lot. That is that somebody you don't know will put out a CD with all their original tunes. I see this all the time. I've got three or four CDs. One guy wrote to me. He's a very good piano player. He's just finished college. He's going out. He says in his letter that he wants to start performing. He sent me a CD, and they're all his own tunes except one, and I don't know why he picked it. "It Might As Well Be Spring." I hear so many original tunes. To me, for the most part, they sound like the poor man's Wayne Shorter or the poor man's Oscar Peterson. Mostly the poor man's Wayne Shorter or those kind of chord ideas. I just don't see how there can be that many good originals that they're not going to do maybe half originals and half standard tunes, so people can hear what they sound like doing a recognizable tune.

**WILLIAMS:** It's so important. I agree. And I think that a lot of that might be that it's been encouraged that they don't know the history of Wayne Shorter, that he spent many years playing standards, doing this, and playing with, played with Art Blakey for six years, played with Miles for four years, and played with Maynard Ferguson, and did all kind . . . Horace Silver . . . did a whole range of things before he was able to evolve to even do his first recording. And even his first recordings wasn't just original compositions. And he's one, like you say, he's a major composer, last half of the twentieth century.

**McPARTLAND:** I feel that these guys, that they're not thinking it through and nobody has told them. Or I'm thinking, do they think their tunes are so good? Or do they want the money from the royalties? How many records is a guy going to sell that nobody ever heard of? How's he going to get going?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center



This one guy. He seems like he's very . . . a driving kind of a guy. He may . . . he is a very good player, but I haven't heard him play anything but his own tunes. He asked me to give him some advice. Usually I don't say anything unless somebody actually asks. That's what I'm going to say to him. "Why don't you play some recognizable tunes?", because to me all his tunes sound the same. Why do one standard? It's almost insulting.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes, as opposed to the other way around. I agree. Maybe one original.

**McPARTLAND:** One original. Yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** And do the other thing. I just want to do that, because that's sort of parallel to once again the question we had about "Piano Jazz." I want to kind of bring the conversation back a little bit more by, towards "Piano Jazz." There's a couple of things I wanted to ask you about the program. How has, how do you feel has it evolved from the time you started up to what we're doing in the present day right now? Do you feel, are there things you would do differently? I'm sure there are. What things would you do? Is it anything specific that stands out that you would like to do that's not been?

**McPARTLAND:** I don't mind doing the same kind of thing. I'd like to have some certain guests that I haven't had. I would love to have Stevie Wonder, but I don't know if it will ever happen. I would love to have Billy Joel. He's got enough good tunes on there that are interesting. I'd love to have Quincy Jones, but there's a man that's so busy. But it does bug me that when you call somebody, that there's nobody working for him that is going to take the trouble to return the call, or if they do, they haven't the faintest idea what it's about. That does bother me.

**WILLIAMS:** That's part of the thing, like you say. It's been so insulated with all these . . . you have to go through such a filter of and battery of people there. Like I said, if they, it should, it's something wrong there when we can't get back to people we've known, or whether, it's just, even whether someone you don't know. There should be someone who can return the call and say, "He's not interested," or "We're not," "We can't do it this time," or "Please call back again later" or whatever.

**McPARTLAND:** That's something I've always tried to do, even though it's time consuming. I have somebody come in, and we go through all these . . . I do try to answer them all. I either answer them myself on a "Piano Jazz" postcard, like "Thanks for the CD. I hope you enjoy 'Piano' . . . We can't" or . . . I don't even say, "We can't use it" or anything. Just say something.

**WILLIAMS:** An acknowledgement.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**McPARTLAND:** Acknowledgement. Then we have some other letters where we say, “Thank you for the CD. Mrs. McPartland is away. She asked me to tell you that we’re putting your CD on file,” or something offputting. Even then, a lot of them write back. It’s really hard to . . . But I don’t want to leave people stranded, because I’ve had this happen so much. I just bulldoze on, but it’s so nice when you get somebody . . . like to call Cassandra Wilson, and she’ll call back. And we fixed up a show. It’s such a pleasure.

**WILLIAMS:** The thing is that I’ve seen, just as I said, in my time here, is that because of the lack of, fewer venues to play in, clubs or concerts, and everybody’s jockeying for position for festivals, for this and that, that every, there’s a sense of, the camaraderie is not as strong as it was when I first came. We were more interested in hanging out and playing the music. If someone wasn’t really thinking about looking at “Piano Jazz” as a stepping stone for my career. There was something that you had to be on a certain level artistically. You wouldn’t even think about wanting to be . . . I wouldn’t dare have sent you a tape [laughs] to do this. I think that right there, I would that a certain level of artistry and recognition and musicality would warrant you approaching me, as opposed to a young artist or approaching, trying to orchestrate that way into a career. That’s, I think that’s a different attitude, I guess is what I’m looking at right now, that has changed. The attitude has changed to where we really have to be careful that the music is first and not the method first.

**McPARTLAND:** I think maybe they don’t think about that, or they don’t realize what they’re doing. There are some people that are really pushy with . . . They’ve found my phone number, and they keep calling. There are some people that I just don’t call back, because I know that I don’t want to get involved with that person, that’s it’s just going to be . . . You have to use your own discretion on those occasions. Somebody . . . It’s so terrible. You think how can they even ask to be on the show?

**WILLIAMS:** I agree.

**McPARTLAND:** I don’t know what to say in summing this thing up. Over all I feel I’m very lucky to be the one doing, and I’m happy I can do it. You say, what do I want to do differently? I just would like to make sure that it’s entertaining and that we don’t bore people with it, that we try to keep it . . . keep everything we do within bounds, like we don’t let somebody get into a ten-minute speech, and we don’t let somebody get into a 15-minute tune. Even Cecil is good like that. He’ll do a three-minute tune or a four-minute tune.

**WILLIAMS:** And thank you for taking that recommendation from me. [laughter] That was nice to see him on that program. Cecil Taylor, we’re referring to, ladies and gentlemen. Let me ask you this. You always have other projects. Can “Piano Jazz” exist

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



without Marian McPartland? Are they one and the same? Have you ever had a guest host and appeared on the program yourself? That's two questions. Let's start with the first.

**McPARTLAND:** You mean have a guest host do a program with me?

**WILLIAMS:** Yes.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, I had . . . Billy did that a while ago, a long time ago.

**WILLIAMS:** Billy Taylor.

**McPARTLAND:** I felt very funny. It was really funny, being on the other end of it, but it was good. I don't know. I have sometimes thought of that, about "Piano Jazz." If I wasn't around to do it, who would do it? As far as the interviewing part, Billy of course would be the first person I'd think of. But there is a lot of . . . undercurrent of work that goes on all the time. We just booked some people for California in July. Sweets Edison, Joe Bushkin, who I had years ago. He's a very funny guest. He's going . . . I'm really looking forward to that. Thinking about him, I already pulled out two old LPs and listened to them and wrote down some of the tunes off the LPs, because I know that's what he'll want to do. And he'll want to sing the song that he wrote, . . .

**WILLIAMS:** "Oh Look At Me Now."

**McPARTLAND:** "Oh Look At Me Now." Couldn't think of the title. Yeah. He'll want to do that. So I'm pretty much set with Joe Bushkin. Then, after that, it's just controlling him, because he'll talk, like a monologue. He'll just go on forever. Then I'm going to have Ernie Andrews. That was really . . . I hadn't thought about him. Somebody called me. Dorthann Kirk called me from . . .

**WILLIAMS:** . . . [W]BGO . . .

**McPARTLAND:** . . . and she said, "It's a strange thing. Somehow nobody knows about Ernie Andrews, or he hasn't made . . ." I had already heard him with the Gene Harris Superband and thought he was fabulous, although he only did two or three tracks. So, I couldn't call that political. It was just somebody reminding me of something that would be a good thing to do. So I called him up and hired him, and then last night I played a bunch of those things. He's so great on them. Boy, I wish I had a band to back him, instead of just me. I don't know what point I was trying to make with this . . .

**WILLIAMS:** We were talking about how does "Piano Jazz," is "Piano Jazz" so much synonymous with Marian McPartland, that could it exist . . . if you decided to take a

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



sabbatical or something like that, much like say what Johnny Carson did with “The Tonight Show.” At various times he would do it. At first he was doing it five nights a week. Then he decided, I only want to do it two or three nights, or three or four nights a week and bring in guest hosts. Bill Cosby would do it. Joan Rivers would do it. He had a nucleus of people that was there at various age groups, various . . . or one was a comedian. Sometimes they were involved in other areas. Had you . . . had that occurred to you, that that may be a possibility? For instance you may, your performance schedule might get extremely busy, and you say, “Sherrie, I’m going to take a sabbatical?” What would happen.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, no. Oh, no. I would never do that.

**WILLIAMS:** You would never take a sabbatical.

**McPARTLAND:** I would never do that. I’d be afraid to do that.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh really. Why?

**McPARTLAND:** Because . . . you’re in the rat race. I would think to myself, suppose somebody came on, and they thought, maybe we should put Marian on one side and get this guy or female. I just wouldn’t ever take any chances like that.

**WILLIAMS:** That’s very kind-hearted of you to say that.

**McPARTLAND:** The only way I would do it is if I got sick or . . . Once in a while I do think of who could do it. You’d be a likely candidate. You’re a good interviewer, and you’re not afraid. You’re industrious. You’re not . . . You know so much. You do a lot of research. You know . . . I think a lot of musicians are not interested in other musicians. I remember when I had Teddy on the show, I was surprised at people that were coming up. This is a long time ago, and I can’t remember who I spoke to him about. The people who were coming up that he didn’t know, and tunes that were being played that he didn’t know. I thought, this shouldn’t be. Everyone, everybody should be conversant with what’s happening now. Whether or not you’re going to start playing a Celine Dion tune from *The Titanic*, at least you should know it exists.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs] Exactly.

**McPARTLAND:** There’s a lot of people that they’re really into their own thing, and they don’t listen that much to . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** I agree. I think that's a very sad commentary as well. For instance, would have Teddy Wilson, would have known of McCoy Tyner or Cedar Walton? Would that have been some names at least?

**McPARTLAND:** I don't know. He might have. I don't recall ever asking him something like that. I know I'm mad at McCoy Tyner. He won't do another "Piano Jazz."

**WILLIAMS:** Let's play a little game now that you mention it. I'm'a give you a name, and you give me a little two-sentence thought about this particular artist, something like that and you might see . . . Keith Jarrett.

**McPARTLAND:** [laughs] Keith Jarrett. I wonder if I'll ever get him. I really like his playing. I've got a couple of records of his that I really like, and I've known him for a long time and listened to him when he was with Charles Lloyd's group. In fact I think that's when I first heard him. Got those records upstairs. I would love to have him on "Piano Jazz." I think he'd be an interesting talker. But he just . . . It's funny. I met him at Tower Records one day, and I had just bought a couple of his records. I was trying to find a certain tune that he'd written, and I still can't find it. It's very pretty, like a ballad kind of a thing. I'm still looking for it. I had two records under my arm. I met him in the store and needless to say, tried to nail him for a date. "Marian, you'll have to understand. I just can't do 'Piano Jazz.' You'll have to understand." So, that's it. So far.

It's a rat race. I think you've got to stay and protect your territory, because I don't think for a minute that there couldn't be somebody that would like to bump off "Piano Jazz" and put their show on. I don't . . . luckily I don't know the machinations that are going on at NPR. Luckily, our show is doing o.k. But then, when you think about it, Billy Taylor has a very similar show, inasmuch as he's at the Kennedy Center. He's got a trio. He's got a live audience. He does the same kind of thing I'm doing.

**WILLIAMS:** Speaking of that, that's a good point of reference. How many shows have taken your role model and just sort of spruced it in a different way, put a different coat of paint on it and basically it's the same show? Would that be . . . Billy is the one, that particular one does come to mind. The only thing different is, like you said, maybe they're using the entire, his trio I assume is being used there. What is he doing different that is . . .? What distinguishes "Piano Jazz" from his show? If anything.

**McPARTLAND:** The fact that it's just one to one, and that people . . . I think it has a quality about it. I'm only saying this because I've heard it from so many people, that it has a quality of intimacy, much like you and I are talking here, sitting around on two chairs talking. People tell me that that's how it sounds, like people just talking in their living room, as opposed to a Barbara Walters type of thing, where she's firing off questions that she has prepared. I don't like to ever think of antagonizing anybody or

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



making them . . . in fact I ask people, “Is there anything you don’t want to talk about? Is there anything you especially do want to talk about?” You can clear the air with that one. I’m deviating a little bit. Having Ray Brown on the show, right after Ella had died, I thought that was going to be tricky. So I said to him, “I’d like to talk about you and Ella, and how you were married and all that stuff. Or would you rather not?” He said no, that’s o.k. So when we did talk about it, it was really very nicely done. It was tasteful, and then he played some tunes that he and Ella played together.

I think I’ve lost the track a little.

**WILLIAMS:** The thing is, what distinguishes . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Oh what distinguishes . . . well that.

**WILLIAMS:** What is Billy’s show doing that is different. If I’m a non-music aficionado, and both shows are on at the same time, what makes me want to listen to your show? What makes yours more compelling or less compelling than his, other than just . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I don’t know. I don’t know.

**WILLIAMS:** Have you heard this program?

**McPARTLAND:** Maybe it’s divided down the middle. Maybe there are some people that would say it’s more lively, because it’s a bigger room. It’s done in a hall. There’s an audience. People ask questions. There’s more happening. Maybe they could say that. Whereas other people like the intimacy. They say it’s like they’re hearing inside secrets or hearing things you don’t normally talk about. This could be true, because a lot of musicians do talk about . . . they seem to get inspired to talk off the cuff and talk about things that they might not talk about when you’re sitting on a stage in front of a big audience. There has to be a difference in the feeling, because you’re really in show biz. You’re sitting on a big stage, and it’s a bunch of people there digging it. It’s bound to be different from, say, Oscar and me just sitting in a studio, just the two of us, and even though the engineer and Sherrie are back there behind a plate-glass window, there is a sense of intimacy. You’re just there with that one person. It’s great. I love it. I forget they’re there.

**WILLIAMS:** So Billy’s program is taped in front of a live audience is what you’re saying.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. Yeah.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** O.k. So that's really, basically, what we're saying, that's really the only difference. The difference is that he uses a trio and he has a live audience, and I gather, I got the feeling that Billy interviews very few pianists. They're all singers, horn players, so and so forth.

**McPARTLAND:** It's funny. I never thought of it, because I don't . . .

**WILLIAMS:** But think about it. [laughs] I think that's what is the case.

**McPARTLAND:** It may be. I don't always catch the show, but I do sometimes think about . . . I think that I've had guests that he probably hasn't had or never would have, like a guy that I heard and I really loved him. I really had to have him on the show. That banjo player. Can't think of his name. A jazz banjo player that plays with Chick.

[voice of the sound engineer:] Bela Fleck.

**McPARTLAND:** Bela Fleck. I heard . . . There's a guy. I heard him on a t.v. show, and I said, I've got to have that guy. So I did. And he turned out to be a wonderful guest. But I wouldn't think that he's somebody Billy would have.

**WILLIAMS:** No, I've always, just my assessment is that he approaches it a little more conservative and more down the middle, a guess, in regard, like I said, first of all, I don't think, either that or his CBS morning news program very rarely interviews a pianist. Perhaps maybe you've been one of the exceptions.

**McPARTLAND:** I never thought of that.

**WILLIAMS:** I guess being a pianist I've noticed that. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** But then there's some other people that I think he probably wouldn't hire. Kenny Garrett. Because he seems to be getting far out. But I want to have Kenny Garrett.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh you should. Yes, by all means.

**McPARTLAND:** I think that would be fun.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I think you're right. It would be that unless, but, sometimes those shows also appear to be a little more driven, I think would be more influenced by either public perceptions and numbers, as well as media people saying, you should have Kevin Mahogany on here, because Warner Bros. has him signed to a recording. He's one of my

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



good friends, so I can use him as an example. [laughs] He's signed with Warner Bros. or a major record company. So the major record company folks are able to jockey people in through, especially if they happen to be on CBS, maybe, and CBS morning news program may, they have someone that can work those things there. That's just my observation there as a third party. I may be totally off base.

**McPARTLAND:** Maybe I could . . . I wish I could jockey someone to get Stevie Wonder. What record company is he with?

**WILLIAMS:** Well, you got to go to Motown, sweetheart. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** I don't know. There must be . . . I haven't really done enough scouting around to try to do that. Now I've tried desperately to get Aretha Franklin. I really thought I was going to have her. I've had long conversations with Ruth Bowen, and she says, "I really can't" . . . maybe she's lying, but she says, "I really can't influence Aretha. If she . . . I'll lay it out to her. If she wants to do it, she'll do it. If she doesn't want to, she won't." But I'm still after her.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, well, she's still the queen of soul. That's a good question. Who are some of the guests still living that you would like to have? Just give us some names. You started with a few already.

**McPARTLAND:** Stevie Wonder really is a big one, but I really would love to have Aretha, knowing that she does like jazz and knowing that we could hit it off. I just heard about somebody. Here's somebody that maybe you've heard of, who is actually an opera singer but supposedly sings jazz. Renee Fleming? I just have to follow this up, because somebody raved to me about her, and I have not heard her. Then there's somebody else I wanted to have. Denyse Graves. She is a fully fledged opera singer, but here again she loves jazz, and she says, "I would love to do your show. I would love to try to sing some jazz. If you give me some ballads to sing, I'll sing them." So there's somebody I'm working on, getting her.

**WILLIAMS:** Has Ray Charles ever appeared on the show?

**McPARTLAND:** Oh yeah. I'd love to get him again, but I don't think . . . I don't know. I'd love to try. That's good. That's a good thought. It's been several years, but I think his manager would probably . . . I tried to get him to let us put that CD out, but of course they wouldn't do that. But I booked Ray Charles myself. It was really very funny. He was appearing at the Blue Note. Sherrie and I went down there. Marie Saint Louis had supposed to get us seats, and when we got there, we found she hadn't done that. We stood in line, like the rest of the great unwashed. We went in, and a guy that was seating

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





people, who's really quite rude. We did eventually get seats. We felt like two crumbs. At the end of the show, I just ran up the stairs and knocked on the dressing room door. He came out. I hadn't met him. I introduced myself, and he said . . . he was very sweet. "Yes, I think I've heard your show." I said, "I'm dying to have you on the show, and I brought you a cassette of somebody you must know, George Shearing." And he says, "Sure, honey." And he put the cassette in his pocket. Lo and behold, a couple of months later, I did hear from the manager, saying Ray would love to do the show. But you just never know what you've got to do. I was so humiliated at the Blue Note, and I thought, boy, I'm going to do this.

**WILLIAMS:** So that tells you, o.k. listeners, that says something too, how sometimes we can't go just by the book in order for everything to happen, just every "t" isn't crossed and every "i" dotted. Sometimes you do have to take drastic, or seemingly drastic measures, in order to secure a guest or to get to the point where you get past that wall of, battery of bodyguards and so forth, protectors, and all that kind of . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Really. That's just one example. I really wanted to have him, and that was one way I could see that it could be done. But I didn't know it would work out that way, because after I gave him the cassette, I thought . . . I was depressed. I thought, "Oh well. I tried." Sherrie and I went away and had a few drinks. Anyway, I guess it shows you that a little determination or something. I don't know.

**WILLIAMS:** I want to talk about in addition still along the lines of "Piano Jazz." We talked about some of the grand masters and maybe some of your contemporaries as well. Who are some of the younger people, younger artists that have made an impression or that you feel that has, maybe we should just single it to . . . I don't want to limit it to just the pianists or anything. Are there any young artists that come to mind? I mean, if this question was directed to me, I'll think of someone like Christian McBride or Donald Brown or somebody or whatever. But if they were directed toward you, who, maybe in addition to those names, who would you say that you feel real good about their, the way their career is developing and how they're developing as an artist?

**McPARTLAND:** God . . . I would have to say Benny Green of course. Somebody told me about him when he was with Art [Blakey]. I was in California, and I went to Catalina's Restaurant, because Art was there, just to hear Benny Green. He looked like a kid. He still looks like a kid. He had a high collar on. He looked like a school boy. I remember thinking . . . In fact I know I went back stage and spoke to Art about him. So that's one guy that I think is doing well in his career, in that he seems to be making certain steps from Art to other things. He went with Ray Brown. Then he got his own thing. He's certainly one.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Now I haven't . . . I would certainly say Geoff Keezer, although I haven't seen too much of him lately.

**WILLIAMS:** He's playing with Ray Brown now. Brilliant, brilliant talent. I'm partial to him.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, I know. We had . . . Another Wisconsin kid, isn't he?

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah. He is.

**McPARTLAND:** You really like him.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh. He's something, something to behold. Yeah. Who else would you . . .

**McPARTLAND:** There's this woman . . .

**WILLIAMS:** And I don't mean just necessarily . . . Sorry to interrupt you. I didn't mean to just limit it to those . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I know you don't mean just piano, but I have to get rid of the piano players that are in my head.

**WILLIAMS:** Great.

**McPARTLAND:** There's a couple of players. This woman is not well known. Her name is Francesca Tanksley, and she's played for years with Billy Harper's group.

**WILLIAMS:** I know her.

**McPARTLAND:** I think she's just buried in Billy Harper's group. She's a very strong, feisty piano player, but you'd never know that. She's very quiet and shy. I'm really trying to push her into doing a solo thing, so that people can hear her, because I've heard her on records with the band, and I'm sure she's wonderful with them, but I don't think she's advancing her own career as well as she should.

There's some players out there. I don't know what happens with this woman. Stacey Rowles. Very good player, but I don't know what's the reason I'm not hearing more about her. I don't know what she's doing, if she's having trouble getting gigs.

Somebody like Regina Carter, she seems to know exactly what to do for herself. I think a lot of it has to do with knowing what to do and how to market—I hate that word—how to bring out the best in your talent. She's got everything going for her. She's

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



young, black, very pretty, great talent. She just went out and made herself a rock record. Not really rock. That stuff they play on smooth jazz.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah. CD 101 type of thing.

**McPARTLAND:** But she fits right in. What she did fit right in. I've got the record. A lot of it was really nice. Apparently she did the record for her mother, dedicated to her mother.

**WILLIAMS:** I have to say, you mentioned something there. You mentioned that she was young and she was black. Do you think that's an important thing? Sometimes we may see that from two different perspectives. I'm just, I just want to, you mentioned that in regard to Regina.

**McPARTLAND:** I don't know. I was just describing her, rather than making any particular . . .

**WILLIAMS:** I didn't know if you thought that would be an asset or not an asset in her career at that point . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I certainly think at this point in time, in this day and age, that it is an asset, if it's somebody really as talented as she is. I don't know. It would be . . . Now that's funny, because I heard a singer that I really like, and I keep coming back to thinking I must do something for her. I had no idea whether she was black or white. She sent me a tape. Her name is Judy Bailey. I've had this record around for . . . or the cassette, and I have it in the car, and I think, "I really should get in touch with this woman." So all of a sudden out of the clear sky I get a fax from her. Somebody must have told her to get in touch with me. I called her up. It transpires that she's . . . I would have thought she's a young kid. She's black. She's 41 years old. She's been a single mother. She's from Detroit. And somehow she's not doing the right things for herself or has . . . I don't know what her problem is. Then she sent me a tape. It wasn't nearly as good as the first one. And yet I keep thinking, "How can . . . what can I do for this woman?" I know I'm going to wind up doing something for her, because she sounds so likeable, and the first cassette is really good. She does a couple of tunes, and I was really knocked out.

**WILLIAMS:** That's in . . . consistent with the way you've helped many of us throughout our careers at various stages, mostly in the embryonic stages of our development. This carries on to where you've been involved with education as well as being an author, and in a sense, you've educated the audience through "Piano Jazz." How do you think the audience has expanded from "Piano Jazz." Do you think you get a cross-section of

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



listeners, not only just the jazz afficianados, but do you get people who may have at best a sideline interest to the music? Do you, can you see where your audience, the demographics of your audience has changed over the years?

**McPARTLAND:** Oh yeah, because now we get e-mail. I refuse to get e-mail. But they have e-mail in South Carolina. In fact I'll have to show you this thing in a minute when we get through. I get e-mails from people, obviously from all kinds—kids, women in their seventies that are taking piano lessons, people that knew me years ago. Yes. Across the board I get all these things. They send me a bunch of them. Those that I can, I scribble a note on and send them back to South Carolina and let them handle them. But I don't . . . I do follow them all up, and some of them are quite fascinating. It's obvious that there are all ages listening. Black, white, Chinese. I don't know.

I love it when somebody comes to a concert that's never seen me, and then says, "I thought you were black." I said, "Thank you." [laughter]

**WILLIAMS:** That is a compliment.

**McPARTLAND:** I know. That's what I always think so. Listen. All my heroes were black. I never . . . Who knew, thought anything about it? Tatum, Fats Waller, Teddy, Lionel Hampton. Benny [Goodman], he was the least of that group. Benny was the least of that group. I used to listen to Teddy most of all.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah. So you feel that that program, so it has say from 1977, what was the base listeners? Was it just the jazz fans at that point? Once again, that climate was still more of a, fusion was sort of the height of its reign at that time, disco . . .

**McPARTLAND:** No, I think at that time there were just less of them, because the show had not gained such popularity. Now it's on 260 stations, where at the time we might have been on 50 stations. Then there was a hiatus where I think we didn't do anything for a year. I never found out 'til later that Dick Phipps got . . . went into a snit of some kind and got mad at me for something. So there was a hiatus where we didn't record for a little while. Then we started up again, and then we started to really dig in and get grants from N.E.A.

Clark Terry and I have known . . . He's been on "Piano Jazz" of course. We've known each other for a million years. I remember when I was on "The Today Show," I mean "The Tonight Show," sitting there, watching them all in the band, and he's making funny remarks, because they had him in the back row. He's making remarks about that, about sitting in the back. Anyway, at one point Jimmy and I were working in a place called the High Note, in Clark Street. Must be late '47, something, '8. We had a bass player named Max Wayne. He had written . . . I think he wrote this. It's kind of a blues, called "The Black Cat." And just as Clark Terry walked in the door, Jimmy called that

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

tune, “The Black Cat.” And Clark got very upset. He thought Jimmy was talking about him, and he didn’t speak to Jimmy or me for quite a while, or to Jimmy. He just . . . I don’t think we met up with him anywhere for supper. We didn’t know we were being ostracized, but we were. So years later, this came out, when Clark and I were talking. He said . . . I don’t know how we got to the point of it, but at any rate I said it was . . . this bass player wrote this tune. [laughs] Clark said he felt so silly after he found out about it, but he really thought that Jimmy was badmouthing him. Isn’t that funny?

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. Many times I know, many times miscommunication has happened that way. Many of the conflicts in the world, probably, whether it’s religion or something that is seemingly innocent as that. I swear, we hope that as musicians and artists, we can be a little bit above that fray and make sure that when these possible things happen, they can be cleared up and all. Sometimes it takes a little bit longer, as in this case.

**McPARTLAND:** See I don’t think Clark ever came up to Jimmy and said . . . He probably wouldn’t. He would be wounded and he would think, “Why that rat,” or something. But if he had ever said to Jimmy, “Were you talking to me?” or said something, then it could have been explained right away. “It’s the name of a piece that . . .” Jimmy just happened to call it, and of course he always was good at making announcements and probably said it real loud. But I would think by his tone of voice that Clark would know it wasn’t meant to be him. But then I guess people are very sensitive to all those things.

**WILLIAMS:** Well in 1948 the climate dictates a lot, how a lot of people would feel and do things, and also how they would react, whether they would respond by saying anything or confronting the person too. So that would be, all of those things could have been a factor as well.

**McPARTLAND:** While we’re on this kick, I could give you one more that is pretty funny. When I first went down South, I didn’t realize—and this was in the early ’50s. I went to play in Atlanta at a club called At the Top of the Stairs. That was the name of the club. But the club was actually, in point of fact, at the bottom of the stairs. It was two groups, my trio, and Willie Ruff and Dwiki Mitchell. Apparently it was a big thing that a black and white group could work under the same roof. This was considered progress.

**WILLIAMS:** Revolutionary, ain’t that right?

**McPARTLAND:** Revolutionary. Somebody—I forget who it could be. Somebody connected with the club—said, “Just be sure that they do their thing and you do yours, and you don’t mingle,” was pretty much the message. Needless to say, it didn’t take long before I met them both, and of course we hung out. I was playing a tune that I’d written

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



called “So Many Things,” and Willie said, “I love that tune. I’d like to play that on the french horn.” So he did. I didn’t think anything. I just called him up on stage, and he came up and played the tune. Nobody ever said anything. It was like I forgot all this stuff. It’s so ridiculous, I forgot it. He came up, played the tune. People loved it, and I gave him a big hug. He said [laughs], “Take it easy. You’ll get me arrested.”

**WILLIAMS:** He was not kidding either.

**McPARTLAND:** Isn’t that incredible, that he could even be, that that could even be a possibility.

**WILLIAMS:** Well, this is back in the climate too. Remember I’m a product of the South too, although I didn’t . . . I really caught the very tail end of a lot of those kinds of things. But listening to my father speak of things, and in the course of what we read and have been well documented. But especially the fact of being a white lady, that might have been a factor too in the South, with all the stereotypes that goes along with that whole thing, and an Afro-American man, or in the case men, with Dwiki and Willie being there present. So a lot of things there were probably . . . He probably saw some very disturbing things, whether they’re lynchings or anything else along those lines that could be, could have led to that.

**McPARTLAND:** Well of course I think that . . .

**WILLIAMS:** There’s a beautiful movie called *Redwood* that . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Oh yeah. Oh God.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . that everyone should see.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh man.

**WILLIAMS:** It had a very short life here, even in New York. But everyone should really see that movie.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, I know they should.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. That will bring that forth and make a very sensitive kind of statement along those lines.

**McPARTLAND:** Fantastic.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. So that was very important [inaudible words]. Something I wanted to ask you about is . . . let's see . . . I want to get, the listeners to get a different perspective. What are some of your interests, non-musical interests and hobbies or influences that you enjoy doing in the rare times you're away from being a musician?

**McPARTLAND:** Somebody told me I was very narrow-minded, because I really don't have hobbies as such. It seems like everything I do is connected with music, because if I go out, I like to go to a club where there's music, so that I can hear either somebody new coming up, or somebody that I know, like I love to go to Zeno's and hang out with John Bunch. I like to go to the Vanguard and hear the Monday night band. Really, most of what I do, if I'm at home by myself, is just working. I guess I'm a workaholic. Or catching up on business, and then I have two or three women that come and clear up after me and do filing and stuff. But I . . . I like to go to the movies, if I can get somebody to go with me. I want to see *Wild Man Blues*.

**WILLIAMS:** I hadn't seen that.

**McPARTLAND:** Woody Allen's thing.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah. Any other, what other movies, let's talk about movies for a moment, because movies and music, sometimes are very parallel. What other movies that have made an impact on you, that you, over the years was it, whether it was . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I haven't been to any for ages.

**WILLIAMS:** Even 40 years ago.

**McPARTLAND:** What it is is just thinking what I'd like to see. I'd love to go see Jack Nicholson.

**WILLIAMS:** *As Good As It Gets*?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. I'd love to see that. Jimmy and I went to see *The Killing Fields*. [whistles] That will stay with me forever. That's the last thing I can think about, that I was so moved by. There's a lot of things I'd like to go to. It just seems I really . . . either I don't want to go alone and I can't get somebody at the right time, like my girlfriend and I are going to see . . . We are going to see *Wild Man Blues*. She's seen it, but she says she'll go with me. Because lately I haven't had that much time to do those things.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**WILLIAMS:** Real quickly, while we're on the subject, what about some of the movies that were made regarding music, for instance like *Lady Sings the Blues* or *'Round Midnight*? Did you have any, did you have . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Oh I saw that. I saw those. Oh yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** Do you have any opinions on those, any short opinions?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, I saw those. I thought Dexter Gordon did a great job of playing himself.

**WILLIAMS:** He was magnificent.

**McPARTLAND:** No, I liked that movie. I thought that was quite well done. Now wait a minute. There was one that Clint Eastwood did. The one about . . .

**WILLIAMS:** *Bird*.

**McPARTLAND:** The one about Bird. I thought he was too hot and heavy on the fact of him doing drugs.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. I think what happened, what I heard, is that they just bought that script, and they really didn't go through it like they should have.

**McPARTLAND:** No.

**WILLIAMS:** They really should have edited. O.k. Something else I wanted to ask you is . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Before you do that, there's another one coming up. They're doing, going to do one on Billy Strayhorn, aren't they?

**WILLIAMS:** Are they going to do the Billy . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Oh they're doing it. Yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** *Lush Life*?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. They're doing it.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** You know some, about 15 or 20 years ago, maybe not. No, it must have been about 15 years ago, there was talk of doing a movie on Duke Ellington. It was a possibility they were going to ask Phineas to portray Billy Strayhorn in there, because, as you recall from the photos you have of you and Phineas, they had kind of a similar stature and . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Absolutely.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . and features that it would have been perfect, and of course he was an exponent of playing Duke's and Billy Strayhorn's music as well, so that would have been an interesting thing at one time. So now they're going to do the movie based on Bllly Strayhorn, I assume based on the biography that's out.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** Is that an authorized biography?

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** Any opinions on that biography, if you've read it or not?

**McPARTLAND:** I thought it was o.k., but here again I just thought that he laid too heavy on the homosexual thing. I think people find something that they can sensationalize, and they go hot and heavy on that. The guy was such a brilliant musician. There was so much that you could talk about. I thought the book was all right, but it didn't kill me. A book that . . .

**WILLIAMS:** So in that case the movie might not be that strong. The book, usually the book is much better than the movie.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh I think they'll sensationalize that side of him in the movie too. I'm being, I'm probably being cynical, but I think so. It's funny. A book I liked was the one that Mercer [Ellington] wrote about his father. Did you ever see that book?

**WILLIAMS:** Uh, I remember . . .

**McPARTLAND:** He was very critical of his father. It was like he was getting it all out in book form.

**WILLIAMS:** Sort of a Daddy Dearest sort of a . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Yes. The funny thing is, Duke was always so revered. Nobody wanted to see anything bad written about him. I think probably Stanley Dance or somebody close got that book removed, because it . . . I've got it somewhere, but it . . . I read it . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, it's not available.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . but I remember thinking at the time, wow!, because nobody ever wanted to disturb the . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Pristine image.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . the pristine facade of Duke Ellington. He probably was a bastard. Well, things Mercer told me on "Piano Jazz," you could see that Duke really did terrible things to him.

**WILLIAMS:** That's too bad.

**McPARTLAND:** Very interesting. Do you have that tape?

**WILLIAMS:** No, I don't. I may have that tape. Yeah, I haven't listened to it though. I'll listen to it.

**McPARTLAND:** I tried to play that tune he wrote, "Moon Mist." It's a hard tune. A beautiful tune.

**WILLIAMS:** It is, yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** Anyway, I'm sorry I interrupted you. You had a point to make and I . . .

**WILLIAMS:** No, that's all right. We're moving right along. It's something else I was going to ask you about. We talked about the movies that you found interesting. The books, along the lines of education, I many times find that recommending reading certain biographies about the musicians are better than telling students to go buy theory books or method books. For instance, reading *Music on My Mind* by Willie "the Lion" Smith or . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Absolutely. They could buy . . .

**WILLIAMS:** . . . or *Raise Up Off Me* by Hampton Hawes.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** They could buy that book by Mingus, *Beneath the Underdog*. What a fantastic book.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes.

**McPARTLAND:** Or Dizzy's book, *To Be Or Not To Bop*.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes, exactly. All of those. So I at many times, how, you feel, you have had time to read many of these biographies. And of course you've been an author, is an author yourself.

**McPARTLAND:** Not like that. I just put these little pieces together.

But then I read Duke's book, which of course Stanley Dance wrote a very good deal of it. But Duke wrote some of it. He was a wonderful writer. There's certain passages that you know that he was the one that wrote that particular passage.

**WILLIAMS:** *Music Is My Mistress*?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes.

**WILLIAMS:** That particular one?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes.

**WILLIAMS:** Any others you'd want to say that you thought would be, just one or two others you thought would be recommended reading for our listeners?

**McPARTLAND:** I'll have to think. I think—I'm not too friendly with him—I think Gene Lees is a wonderful writer. But having the musician tell his own story is the best thing, I think. I think you picked the best, Willie "the Lion". That does give a kid an insight. I'm glad you brought that up. I never would have thought of that.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yes. I think it does.

**McPARTLAND:** Bill Crow had a couple of good, had a good book.

**WILLIAMS:** *Anecdotes* [*Jazz Anecdotes*] and all . . .

**McPARTLAND:** *Anecdotes*. Did you read that?

**WILLIAMS:** No I didn't, but I'm aware . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** It's pretty interesting.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I find . . .

**McPARTLAND:** It gives you ideas of what went on on the scene, and the way people acted. He took all my best stuff from the Hickory House.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]. Let me see. What do you see yourself in terms of the jazz piano lineage? If . . .

**McPARTLAND:** [laughs] God, I don't . . .

**WILLIAMS:** We know who some of your heroes and heroines were, and people who came before you, whether it was Mary Lou and perhaps Milt Buckner or different ones like that. Names I'd like to mention that people don't know . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Lil Armstrong?

**WILLIAMS:** Lil Armstrong. Who? . . . O.k., so are there a few other names out there . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Cleo Laine. I'm sorry. I don't mean Cleo Laine.

**WILLIAMS:** People who came before you.

**McPARTLAND:** I'm sorry. I mean Cleo Brown.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, o.k.

**McPARTLAND:** Cleo Brown. Jesus.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** What a great piano player, and that nobody ever knew she existed.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. You told her about, told me about her. You told her about me. Right. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** I probably would have told her about you too. She was something. I was . . . There's another person I absolutely knocked my brains out to find.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I remember.

**McPARTLAND:** Tracked her down. People kept saying, “She’s dead.” No. Then I tracked her down.

**WILLIAMS:** She was around then. O.k. So there’s some names . . . Are there any others before you that, maybe names like that you can now be the voice for the voiceless, so to speak.

**McPARTLAND:** Well, Hazel. Hazel Scott. I used to listen to her when she was in her bag of doing . . . jazzing the classics. At the time that I listened to that, I thought that was very hip. I was still in England, hearing those things.

**WILLIAMS:** Did you know her husband, Adam Clayton Powell.

**McPARTLAND:** I met him. Yeah, and I met his son too.

**WILLIAMS:** Who’s still very prominent in the New York . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I’m trying to think. There were a couple of English pianists, and there were a couple of American people that I met when I was in vaudeville, who had originally come from here, like Adelaide Hall. I became very friendly with her. Years ago, Elizabeth Welsh. I don’t know if that name would mean anything to you. Elizabeth Welsh had a piano player who wrote . . . Reginald Foresythe. How about that name!

**WILLIAMS:** Wow. Tell the listeners who Elizabeth Welsh was. Was she a vocalist or . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Elizabeth Welsh was a very . . . I guess she had gone to England from America. She was a very fine singer. A pop singer, like probably the Diana Ross of her day. And of course Adelaide Hall I think is well known to all jazz people.

**WILLIAMS:** Didn’t Art Tatum accompany her at one . . .

**McPARTLAND:** He might have. Yeah. But Reginald Foresythe was a . . . I guess you’d call him a pianist who wrote these very sophisticated novelty piano pieces. He did one called “Dodging A Divorcee.” It was the name of one of them. I used to play these things, and I thought he was fabulous. He was the accompanist for Elizabeth Welsh. I used to hang about back stage so I could hear him play, and he’d talk to me. He was a mentor, come to think of it. I hadn’t thought about him for years.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Maybe Hazel and Cleo Brown and of course James P. Johnson and Fats . . . Duke was over there in England, but I was too inhibited among . . . they were . . . they would never let me go anywhere to hear anybody. It didn't even occur to me to go, like kids do nowadays and then show up back stage. There was a singer that that you may have heard of. Leslie Hutchinson. Hutch, they called him. Very popular singer. I had a big crush on him. Bobby Short always laughs when he hears that.

**WILLIAMS:** Why?

**McPARTLAND:** Well, he probably knows that Hutch was not really one for girls.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughter] That's a good reason.

**McPARTLAND:** But he was terribly attractive, and sang all these love songs. Women swooned.

**WILLIAMS:** What was his name again, so the listeners with their . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Leslie Hutchinson.

**WILLIAMS:** Leslie Hutchinson. All right.

**McPARTLAND:** I learned a lot that I can play from his repertoire, hanging back stage and hearing him perform.

**WILLIAMS:** Wow. See this brings out some nice names there. What about some of the, the names of some of those of us who followed you in this lineage? How do you feel, who do you see that's come, if we were doing a tree, a jazz tree so to speak? I don't want to give Marian any extra play right now, but if we were doing this . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Oh yeah, I see what you're saying. There's some middle-ground guys that I perhaps haven't mentioned, like early '40s guys or late '30s.

**WILLIAMS:** Well even after you came on the scene too. Those of us who've come on, are there, you can see where you've influenced this either through educational arena as well as . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, well. That's awful. I can't think of anybody off the top of my head, except like Hampton Hawes or . . . God, my head is so filled with Phineas and Bud. There were a lot of other guys. The minute you leave the house I'll think of ten of them.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** It's just hard to bring them to mind right now. Oh . . . Oh, my God. What is the guy's name? A solo pianist.

**WILLIAMS:** Don Shirley?

**McPARTLAND:** No. Though he . . . No. Begins with "C."

**WILLIAMS:** Page Cavanaugh?

**McPARTLAND:** No. This guy was . . . Oh, it's awful. I can't think of his name. I can remember working in Columbus, Ohio, . . . when I was working in Columbus, and he was working in some little dump on the other side of the street, which was a big . . . like a four-lane highway. I would get out of the club and dash across that street and hope I wouldn't get killed to go and hear him. Then I would come back to play my own set later on.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. I think we . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I'll think of it.

**WILLIAMS:** I just wanted to ask just one . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Herman Chittison!!

**WILLIAMS:** Herman Chittison. I've heard his name, yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** God.

**WILLIAMS:** So he's one of the ones in the lineage.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. Oh, yeah.

**WILLIAMS:** Now once again, what about as we get . . . You mentioned some in the '50s. As we get to the '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s. Are there any names that you want to say that would be in that lineage that you've . . .

**McPARTLAND:** God, so many . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Well, just a few. We don't have to have a . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** But I can't come up with them. How old would they be now? Would we be thinking of guys . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Be anywhere . . .

**WILLIAMS:** . . . in their seventies, like Lou Levy?

**WILLIAMS:** He would probably be one that would . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Or Stanley Cowell? Definitely. I mentioned Hampton Hawes. Red Garland. My God, everybody aped that style for a while, his playing. Well, now I'm going back to old guys again. I should . . . I'm trying to get the middle road. Then I keep thinking of guys like Stephen Scott, and the guy that's working with Joshua Redman. The guy that's working with Joshua Redman is Brad Mehldau.

**WILLIAMS:** Would someone like Paul Bley fall into line there, you feel?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes he would. Mention a few names to me. Now Paul Bley's somebody . . . Carla Bley is . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Victor Feldman.

**McPARTLAND:** I thought Victor Feldman was fantastic. I'm glad you're mentioning these people, because he went and died when he shouldn't have died. What's that thing he wrote?

**WILLIAMS:** "Joshua."

**McPARTLAND:** No.

**WILLIAMS:** "Seven Steps to Heaven."

**McPARTLAND:** He wrote a marvelous piece that everybody plays.

**WILLIAMS:** "Seven Steps to Heaven."

**McPARTLAND:** "Seven Steps to Heaven." Yeah. Marvelous. Love that piece.

**WILLIAMS:** That gives us a little idea.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** God, I haven't come up with any Latin names. There's a couple of guys who now are so terrific. From Boston. I can't think of his name. Had him on "Piano Jazz."

**WILLIAMS:** Danilo Pérez.

**McPARTLAND:** Yes, Danilo.

**WILLIAMS:** He was a student of Donald Brown, are you aware?

**McPARTLAND:** Was he?

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, he and Cyrus Chestnut, at Berklee.

**McPARTLAND:** There's another one, Cyrus Chestnut.

**WILLIAMS:** We're out of the Donald Brown school of studies. [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** Of course we're going to the old guys now. Hank Jones.

**WILLIAMS:** Hank was a little before you, though.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh yes. He definitely was. I switched generations. That's more my generation.

**WILLIAMS:** How much . . . I know you said publically how much an influence George Shearing's been on you, but how much of an influence has you been on George Shearing?

**McPARTLAND:** I don't think George has been that much of an influence on me, truthfully, except of course everybody, when he first started, everybody liked to play his two-hand, his locked-hand things. I still like to do that, but not as much as I used to years ago. I used to like to do that. I still do it, but not in the same way. Not with the same chords, because after hearing . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Phineas and a lot of others.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . the way a lot of other people play. George still . . . He hasn't really moved much from either side, has he? He . . .

**WILLIAMS:** I don't think so, but that's just my humble opinion as well.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** He had the group, and that was one sound. Now he's doing the same sound with a duo. He hasn't really . . . I don't think he's changed much, although he does like to . . . he does . . . whenever he and I work together, he wants to do a free thing or get into some . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Other areas.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . other areas, and he can do it. He can do it.

**WILLIAMS:** I think sometimes artists get to that point where they almost feel that they, they're almost imitating themselves. They're afraid to move out of that area, because they're so well known for certain devices or whatever.

**McPARTLAND:** That is true of George, and he admitted it, that he was afraid to break up the quintet, because he would . . . people were so used to that sound. He went through that, of making himself break up the quintet, and I think he probably reached a peak of performance and being known by the public that it didn't matter whether he played solo or duo or what he did. It seems that he was well established, so he could do his own thing. At least that's my feeling. Because that's what he wants to do, is play . . . He likes to play with a symphony orchestra. I know he likes to have something written by Robert Farnon. And he did a couple of other things with some other groups, but mostly he does his own thing.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, and for the record historically, we know that Milt Buckner perfected, invented that block style and perfected by he and Nat "King" Cole.

**McPARTLAND:** He mentioned that too. He mentioned, George mentioned having stolen or taken . . . adapted that thing from Milt Buckner. He talks about that. But of course Nat Cole, I think, was and still is a great influence on all of us. I'm glad you brought that up. I used to listen to him with a trio when I was still in U.S.O. camp shows in Germany, and they had that record in all the day rooms and places where the G.I.'s hung out. In fact you'd see piles of records hanging on the . . . lying on the floor. They weren't treating them well, but you'd hear wonderful jazz records that I listened to. Heard a lot of Stan Kenton stuff and a guy who I haven't heard from for many years, Loumell Morgan. Remember that name?

**WILLIAMS:** No.

**McPARTLAND:** Had a very good trio, sort of like the poor man's Nat Cole.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** [laughs] Let me go with a few more I wanted to . . . First of all, let's talk about a few honors and awards you've received. Is it any one or two that stick out that resonates [*sic*: resonates] with you in your heart, that touches you in a special way right now, that of over the years I know it's been numerous and may be hard to single out any, but maybe there is something. It may not even be the most prestigious one, but it may just be something that just, like I said, touched you in a very special way.

**McPARTLAND:** I think getting the Peabody for "Piano Jazz" was a big thing. I think anything . . . We've had several awards for "Piano Jazz." In fact we're going to pick one up on the 18th of June [1998]. It's called the Radio . . . International Radio something. I forget the full title of it. It's a plaque or a medal or something. We've had two or three of those. The Armstrong Award. Things that Sherrie and I have plaques for.

The Peabody certainly was . . . That was the main one. But I've liked things in between. Getting the *Down Beat* Lifetime Achievement [Award]. Things like that. At Yale I got—I don't know what it's for exactly—the Duke Ellington Medal. I think Willie Ruff . . . That's something he must have engineered, wanted me to have. I went up there and played an concert of Duke Ellington music. I don't know why they gave me this thing, but I'm thrilled to have it, needless to say.

**WILLIAMS:** Of course. I can imagine. Let's talk about one other little thing that has happened very recent, of course your 80th birthday gala. How about that? Was it any particular . . . I know that had to be a thrill in one way, and maybe sometimes it can be a statement of lamenting because of the people you would have liked to have had there.

**McPARTLAND:** That's true. But I . . . It's probably the only public birthday . . . I usually ignore them and hope that I'll be on the road and won't have to mention it. It just seemed the thing to do somehow. John Schriber . . . I got talked into it by John Schriber. It seemed such a good idea to get a group together. I probably would love to have had a lot more different people than we did have, but . . . I would love to have had Cleo Laine and John Dankworth, who are great friends of mine. Most of who was there, all of who was there, were people I've known and worked with. That was the main idea, and it was great having you on it. I thought it went very well. They're going to cut it up into little bits and pieces and use it for specials. They'll use it over and over again on "Piano Jazz."

**WILLIAMS:** Great. It was a very spectacular and prestigious . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I thought it was.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . event to be there. I was grooving off of it as well, and I was honored to be a guest there. What about some of the lost opportunities of people that you would have liked to have played with? Is it any particular, I know there are probably, we all say this,

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



is there, let's start with the present. Is there someone that's still actively performing that you'd like to play with or you hadn't had an opportunity to interact with musically?

**McPARTLAND:** Can't think of one off the top of my head, except the ones I mentioned to you, like Stevie and Quincy Jones. Just the people I mentioned. As a matter of fact—this will probably make you laugh—I would love to have Paul McCartney on the show.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs] You're right, it does. No, I'm just kidding. [laughs] Oh yeah. He's a great composer.

**McPARTLAND:** No. It would be fun, because . . . Actually, I don't know what you think about the Beatles' music, but I think a lot of their music was terrific. I enjoy playing it. I don't know whether . . . [something unknown happens] This stupid thing is going down my back, and it's annoying me.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh sure. It was, I remember, you used to a medley when I'd come hear you play. You'd play a medley of "Yesterdays" and "Yesterday."

**McPARTLAND:** People still want me to do that. But you know who else did stuff like that? I'm not the only one that would do that. Earl Hines used to do that. He did that very thing, or something like it, when we were on tour in South America. He was playing a Bert Bacharach, and he would . . . "Close To You." Remember that one? That's not a bad tune. Listening to him work that thing over. Every night he would add to it and get it the way he wanted it. I think that might be on the record that we did on Halcyon. I'm not sure.

Anyway, I would love to have had Earl. I would love to have had . . . I nearly did have Earl. I nearly did have Count Basie. I would love to have had them on "Piano Jazz." And of course I would love to have had Duke Ellington.

**WILLIAMS:** What about those that are still with us? For instance, let me just name a couple of artists maybe you had. You mentioned Charles Lloyd earlier. How about Sonny Rollins?

**McPARTLAND:** Trying my hardest to get Sonny Rollins. I call him up, and I always get the service. Last year I met him and Lucille out at the festival out here, and Sonny says, "Man, I really will do 'Piano Jazz,'" but so far no luck. So I just keep . . . I would love to have Sonny Rollins. But . . . who did I see? I think I saw somebody that said they would ask him. It's all networking, like if he were going to play out here, if I were going to be on a date with him again, I think I probably would be able to nail him, because I'd say, "Come on. You promised." He was very nice about it. He said he listens to the show. We've had a few conversations in our time.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Charles Lloyd. I just can't think of them right now. We . . . I . . .

**WILLIAMS:** I know we talked about Ron Carter was one . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Ron Carter. He's on the list. Stanley Turrentine. There's somebody I should get. I've had Milt Jackson. I haven't had Jimmy Heath. That probably would be good.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes. Does the name Bobby Hutcherson?

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, yeah. I know I should have had him a long time ago. But yet you know who I think of that I want to get, and I don't think he'll do it? I would love to have Bobby Tucker, who played piano for Billie [Holiday].

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, that would be so special.

**McPARTLAND:** And she . . . he was at the Blue Note when we were there. We used to hang out. He's such a sweet guy. I did talk to him on the phone, and he said he . . . I don't know. He turned me down. But I think I'll have to try him again.

**WILLIAMS:** And did you ever have someone like Ralph Sharon or Red Richards or someone?

**McPARTLAND:** I had Ralph Sharon. Red Richards. I feel so bad about him, because he worked with Jimmy all the time. I knew him very well. He did a wonderful "Piano Jazz" show, because it's so historical. Do you have that one?

**WILLIAMS:** I think I do have that one.

**McPARTLAND:** There's a piece of jazz history. That guy. Worked all his life. Never was known to the public. But very solid citizen. Stayed . . . still married to the same woman. People always thing of musicians as being such rascallions.

**WILLIAMS:** It sounds like Harold Mabern or someone who's very steady, very consistent. Class act all the time.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah. Absolutely. There's another guy I didn't think of. Harold Mabern.

There's a guy. He's doing an awful lot. Cliff Smalls. Do you know him?

**WILLIAMS:** No. I don't.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**McPARTLAND:** He . . . I'm trying to think, who he worked with. He's somebody that . . . Stanley Dance is always saying to me, "Why don't you have Cliff Smalls," and I've tried, but he's always working somewhere, gone to Japan or something

**WILLIAMS:** Last but, let's say, what about some things we hadn't talked about? Is there anything you would want your listeners to, what is it, you're going to have a CD coming out of portraits of various artists. What is a portrait of Marian McPartland consist of, that our listeners don't know, that you would like known?

**McPARTLAND:** I don't know if I want anything known. [laughter] There's a lot of things I probably don't want known.

**WILLIAMS:** Not known. I hear that. But in any case . . .

**McPARTLAND:** I don't know. I just feel as if I am . . . that people that do know me, that there's really not too many surprises. I don't know. George Shearing did do a piece about me. It's in a book. It's very, very attractive. In fact, when I'm doing these dates with Dick Hyman, we do a thing where Ruth Laredo plays the tune that George wrote for me . . . no, Dick plays the one that George wrote for me, and Ruth plays the one that George wrote for Dick. But nobody's written one for Ruth, so I . . . every time we play together, I improvise one. Now I've got to the point where I'm embarrassed by improvising them, so I've got one on the table. I have to write it out and use that, so that I don't keep doing different portraits.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs] Different personalities, different days, I guess.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, but the tune that George did for me is very nice. It shows the good side of me, the nice Marian as opposed to the nagging bitch that I think I was to Jimmy. [laughter]

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, not necessarily. If you had a choice for a dream, let's say if you were going to put a quintet together, do you have a trumpet? Who'd play trumpet or cornet or flugelhorn or whatever?

**McPARTLAND:** Like now?

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, let's do now.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh God. Well . . . you could say . . . oh God . . . what is the . . .

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Let me throw some names out there. Jon Faddis. Nick Payton, Wynton Marsalis . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Wait a minute.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . Wallace Roney.

**McPARTLAND:** Roy Hargrove, I think.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. Roy Hargrove, trumpet. What about saxophone? Doesn't matter alto or tenor.

**McPARTLAND:** Well, maybe both.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. Let's do both then.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, this is so hard. This would be so hard.

**WILLIAMS:** Can be a veteran . . . would it be . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Maybe Joe Lovano.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k.

**McPARTLAND:** Or maybe somebody that's not around any more, like . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Let's say no. Those that are still living right now.

**McPARTLAND:** Those that are still around, because of course I'm always thinking of a Sonny Stitt lookalike or Dexter Gordon lookalike.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** Where are those guys?

**WILLIAMS:** So you're Joe Lovano or Sonny [?Rollins, presumably] or someone like that?

**McPARTLAND:** Well, Sonny, of course. Yeah.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** What about alto saxophone? Jackie Mac [McLean]? Charles McPherson? Frank Stozier? Phil Woods? Lou Donaldson?

**McPARTLAND:** Maybe Phil Woods.

**WILLIAMS:** Jerry Dodgion I know is a collaborator. He's a collaborator of yours.

**McPARTLAND:** Jerry Dodgion, yeah. He's a favorite of mine. He's a good player. He writes well.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k., bass player, real quick.

**McPARTLAND:** Maybe . . . I'd be hard put to not have George Mraz, I think.

**WILLIAMS:** George Mraz. O.k.

**McPARTLAND:** Christian [McBride] is very good.

**WILLIAMS:** That's the truth.

**McPARTLAND:** I think he's a guy that was there at the right time. John Clayton is another guy. Christian, he doesn't use a mic, does he?

**WILLIAMS:** No, he has that big warm, round sound, unamplified.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, he does. I don't know. Maybe I'm used to hearing it. I miss it sometimes.

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah, I know when I play with other people it has spoiled you, spoiled one.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, like . . .

**WILLIAMS:** What about playing the drums? We got, we still have Roy Haynes. We still have Elvin Jones, and . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Roy Haynes. Roy Haynes. Roy Haynes. Roy Haynes. No doubt about it.

**WILLIAMS:** Billy Higgins, and so and so forth.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, but Roy Haynes is it for me.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. So the Marian McPartland Dream Band, let's recap here, will be Roy Haynes on drums. George Mraz on bass. Of course Marian on the piano.

**McPARTLAND:** Or you could say Christian, slash Christian.

**WILLIAMS:** Maybe Christian McBride would be on second bass. [laughs] Who's on third base? No, just kidding. Anyway, and on the front line would be . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Roy Hargrove.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . Sonny Rollins . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Sonny Rollins.

**WILLIAMS:** . . . Phil Woods, and Roy Hargrove.

**McPARTLAND:** I've got to think of another one.

**WILLIAMS:** And that's a band, ladies and gentlemen, that could record, because they're still here.

**McPARTLAND:** I've got to think of another one beside Phil Woods.

**WILLIAMS:** There's . . .

**McPARTLAND:** There's a couple of other people out there that . . .

**WILLIAMS:** That play alto saxophone?

**McPARTLAND:** . . . I know I'll think of afterwards.

**WILLIAMS:** It'll come around. That's a good start right there. We could have . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Or I'll have to call you on the phone and say I meant so and so.

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** I'm sure that's what's going to happen.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



**WILLIAMS:** Let's see. Was there any . . . once again, just to give you an opportunity, is there anything that we didn't cover that you'd like to say, that pops into your mind as . . .

**McPARTLAND:** No. I want to finish with this Dream Band, because I just got through listening to this Gene Harris Superband, and some of those same people were on there, but whoever was on . . . Jeff Hamilton was on drums, and I thought, well that's . . . and John Clayton. That band. That absolutely knocked . . . me . . . out. I was listening to it so I could hear Ernie Andrews, but of course I wound up playing the whole thing . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Yeah. I went to their first concert.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . thinking to myself, my God, if I could have somebody write all these arrangements, as long as they didn't make it too difficult for me to read the parts, maybe I could do . . . still time for me to do a big-band album.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh sure, yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** Yeah, but who would pay for it?

**WILLIAMS:** I was going to ask you a couple of technical questions. Do you have perfect pitch?

**McPARTLAND:** Yes.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. How's your reading right now.

**McPARTLAND:** Terrible. Awful.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh, come on.

**McPARTLAND:** Awful. It's been that way for years. I've never been a good reader, because nobody had me learn piano. The only reason I can read at all is having taken violin lessons, which I didn't want to take.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes. Who are the good readers that you know on the piano?

**McPARTLAND:** [laughs]

**WILLIAMS:** Other than yours truly. No, just kidding.

**McPARTLAND:** You probably are.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



Smithsonian  
National Museum of American History  
Kenneth E. Behring Center

**WILLIAMS:** [laughs]

**McPARTLAND:** Dick Hyman.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yes, he's something, isn't he?

**McPARTLAND:** Dick Hyman. I don't know who else is a good reader. I don't know. Probably Fred Hersch.

**WILLIAMS:** Hank Jones.

**McPARTLAND:** Hank Jones, of course.

**WILLIAMS:** Hank, Herbie Hancock.

**McPARTLAND:** I didn't know about Herbie.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes. Geoff Keezer has very good eyes.

**McPARTLAND:** Really? I just don't know these things about them. I just know Dick, because I've known Dick for . . . but he's ridiculous. He would play a piece of music with fly specs on the music and make them sound good.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yeah. There was another studio pianist who was a contemporary of Dick and Hank Jones when they were doing it. I can't remember his name.

**McPARTLAND:** Lou Levy?

**WILLIAMS:** No, that Milt Hinton used to speak of. That was . . . he . . .

**McPARTLAND:** Jimmy Jones?

**WILLIAMS:** Jimmy Jones was very good, too, but this is someone else who did quite a bit of work. I don't recall. Once again, we'll think of that later. Those are some interesting points there. Was there anything else you'd like to say?

**McPARTLAND:** Gee, I've said enough already. But it's funny. The reading thing. It's a shame. If I had it to do all over again, I would like to read. I would like to be able to read. But I never bothered, because I could always pick something up. And then, pieces I was learning at the Guildhall, of course I had to read those. Beethoven sonatas. I was just

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



slow doing it. I did it, but I was slow. When I was learning the Greig, I learned it partly from the music, and then when I was looking at the music and I couldn't understand it, what I was seeing, I would play my Rubenstein record. I would hear the passage, and I would say, "Oh, that's what it is. O.k. Fine." Then I would play it.

**WILLIAMS:** Yes. The misconception is that all classical players are great readers. That is a misnomer as ever one. I know when I was in school I was shocked at how poorly some of the students who played the European literature read. They were not as good as most of the jazz players.

**McPARTLAND:** There's really only one way to learn to read, and that is keep reading. I just don't have the ambition to do that. I reached a point where I could read well enough to be in this variety show where I'd read the music for the juggler and the comedian and the girl singer. I would be able to handle all their charts. Not too well, but well enough. I never got past that point. I've just never been a good reader.

**WILLIAMS:** Albert Dailey was another excellent reader.

**McPARTLAND:** Who?

**WILLIAMS:** Albert Dailey. He was brilliant.

**McPARTLAND:** Oh, yeah. He probably was. There's another guy. Duke Pearson. John Bunch is a good reader. He worked with Benny [Goodman] a lot . . .

**WILLIAMS:** Oh yes.

**McPARTLAND:** . . . and Tony Bennett.

**WILLIAMS:** That's another question. How has doing, being sort of a renaissance person in the field of music, and I say that because there's not always just jazz involved, but mostly under the umbrella of jazz, has that affected you one way? Has that hindered or helped your performing career? This is going to be in separate parts. Let's start with that one part. How do you feel that has helped you in terms of a performer?

**McPARTLAND:** How do I feel as a performer?

**WILLIAMS:** Does that, has that, because of the fact that you're involved with several areas, as a producer, as an author, a radio personality, do you feel that that has either given you more opportunities to perform, or has it put that part of your career on hold to some degree over the last 15, 20 years?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





**McPARTLAND:** Oh no. I think the two things, performing and doing the radio show, have worked for each other. I think I do get certain dates maybe because of “Piano Jazz,” or because somebody has heard certain shows and the fact that we also are doing . . . we do live shows, and because there’s so much recorded on “Piano Jazz.” I think it helps the performance. I feel as if I . . . I don’t seem to have as much time as I did, but I can fit it all in. I don’t feel that one is curtailing the other. If I have to work harder . . . for instance, what I just did. I want to have Chucho [Valdés], and if it takes breaking up my free time and using another day to do that, I’ll do it. Maybe some people would say, “He can’t do it on this date, so I won’t bother,” but I really want to do that. So I’m trying to do it.

**WILLIAMS:** So you do, you are able to find the time within the 24 hours that all of us have to still, to find time to, say, get to the piano. Let’s say there may be times when you do want to practice. I don’t know whether you . . . is that still part of your routine? A regular practice? When I say regular practice . . .

**McPARTLAND:** No, but if there’s something I have to learn, maybe a tune I want to take off a record for a guest. Sometimes I’ll rush to get somebody’s tune off a record so I can play it back to them on “Piano Jazz.” I’ll find time for that, even if I have to stay up an hour later or get up an hour early. It seems like you can always find time for what you want to do.

**WILLIAMS:** That’s true.

**McPARTLAND:** It’s as simple as that.

**WILLIAMS:** What about the other way? Do you feel like that that has, if you had a choice, if you had to make a choice, would that be one or the other? You could, you wouldn’t give up either one, I know, but if there was only a certain amount of time, which one, you think . . . Is there a balance? Are they equally balanced and everything is symmetrical? Or do you, are you a little more interested in “Piano Jazz” at certain points and a little more interested in performing at certain points?

**McPARTLAND:** I don’t know. It’s hard. That would be hard. I think probably I would go with “Piano Jazz,” because it gives you an opportunity . . . it still gives me an opportunity to play, and it still gives me an opportunity to interact with other musicians. Plus I do feel that “Piano Jazz” is not a self-serving thing. It’s working out doing things that are beneficial to other musicians. And the fact that it’s become a historical thing. I’d rather feel that I’m doing something for the general good, rather than just doing something for myself, playing in a hall and getting money. I think if I had to think . . . I hope I don’t have to think about it. But then, on the other hand, there’s other things I am

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



trying to find time for. To write something. And composing. I can usually do something on the road. I seem to have more time on the road.

**WILLIAMS:** That's very true. What a great asset and what a great interview. We'd like to thank Ms. Marian McPartland for a very brilliant brilliant interview, which I think we'll all find very uplifting, and on behalf . . . My name is James Williams. Congratulations on the, your 80th birthday celebration, and I'm sure there will be at least another 80 in line for us to celebrate there. Keep on with "Piano Jazz" well into the millenium.

**McPARTLAND:** Listen. I'll call you if I make 90.

**WILLIAMS:** Oh sure, yeah.

**McPARTLAND:** We'll do another go-round.

**WILLIAMS:** O.k. I hope we do it before then. [laughter]. But nevertheless we'll certainly do one that particular year as well.

**McPARTLAND:** I should return the compliment and say that in order to get a good interview, the interviewer has to be very good and know what they're doing and come up with the proper questions and be altogether excellent, which you were, James.

**WILLIAMS:** Well thank you. You've made me feel very anointed.

**McPARTLAND:** Good.

**WILLIAMS:** So, once again, this is May 26, 1998, and thank you again, Marian.

**McPARTLAND:** It's a pleasure.

[Transcribed by Barry Kernfeld from a digital copy of the tape reels]

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)

