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JIMMY OWENS
NEA Jazz Master (2012)

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Maxine Gordon: Okay. Today is Saturday September 10th, 2011. We are in the Manhattan apartment of jazz master, Jimmy Owens, recipient of the 2012 A.B Spellman NEA Jazz Master's Award for jazz advocacy. My name is Maxine Gordon; I'm the interviewer. Also here is Ken, Kennith Kimery- with an "i"- from the Smithsonian Institution. He's doing sound and video, and Jimmy Owens. Jimmy Owens, please state your full name.

Jimmy Owens: My name is James Robert Owens Junior. I was born in the Bronx, New York, on the ninth of December 1943, at 5:55 in the evening.

Maxine Gordon: And your current address?

Jimmy Owens: My current address is 140 5th Avenue, New York, New York, 10011.

Maxine Gordon: Oh 10011…and your marital status and wife's name?

Jimmy Owens: I'm married, and her name is Stephanie Meyers Owens. We have been married since 2005, but we've been together for 13 years.

Maxine Gordon: And your children?

Jimmy Owens: My children, I have two children by my former wife, her name was Lola. My children, my daughter is Milan Alexandria Owens. She was born…the 23rd of March, 1967. My son, his name is Ayan Nyerere Owens. He was named after Julius Nyerere. And he was born the 18th of May 1972.

Maxine Gordon: Okay, very good. Let's begin with the Bronx. Let's begin with your parents. Could you state your parents' names and where they were from?

Jimmy Owens: My father was James Roberts Owens, he was born in New York City. My mother is Eva Louis Noisette Owens, and she was born Charleston, South Carolina. Her birthday is November 10th, 1911. My father is June 17th, 1911. My father passed away in 2004, and my mother passed away in 2002.

Maxine Gordon: And siblings?

Jimmy Owens: I have…there were four children in the family. My oldest sister is Yvonne Stephenson…no let's see how do I say it… Yvonne Owens Stephenson. She was born in 1937. I had another sister, Marcia; she was born in 1939. She is deceased now. She died in 1989. I have a younger brother; his name is Brent. He was born in 1953. So I think that is all of my family there, but I raised a daughter from my wife's first marriage. I raised her from the time that she was 12 years old. Her name is Scarlett Forre. She was born in 1953.

Maxine Gordon: So, okay, let's talk about the Bronx. We know that you were born in Morrisania Hospital in the Bronx, and you lived in the Bronx. So, talk about your early childhood in the Bronx.

Jimmy Owens: I grew up at 810 East 168th Street. It's between Union and Prospect Avenues in the Bronx. I had two subways stops. It was very interesting, I could walk to the Intervale Avenue Subway stop, or I could take a bus to the Prospect Avenue Subway stop, or walk. At Prospect Avenue there was a very famous jazz club called 845 Club where many, many, many musicians worked. It was always my interest to be able to be good enough to work at the 845 Club. And, I started to play the trumpet when I was ten years old. I started as part of the New York City Public School System music program. I went to P.S. 99 in the Bronx.

Maxine Gordon: Before that, let's just move back a little bit, where did you go to elementary school?

Jimmy Owens: I went to elementary school P.S. 99 on Stevens Avenue and Home Street. I then went to junior high school at junior high school 40, which was at Prospect Avenue and Ritter Place. Ritter Place is a little street that one of the great jazz singers, Maxine Sullivan, lived on that street.

Maxine Gordon: That's what we were trying to remember—Ritter Place!

Jimmy Owens: After junior high school 40, I took the exam for the high school of music and art and I went to the high school of music and art from 1958 to 1961. I graduated in 1961, and that was on the campus of…what is it called? College? Up at 135th street, City College, 135th Street and Convent Avenue.

Maxine Gordon: When you were a child, did you hear jazz in the house?

Jimmy Owens: Oh yes, my father played jazz all the time on the record player, Victrola. When I was three or four years old, I had my favorite records that I could go and pick out the record and put it on the Victrola and play it. The music that my father played most of the time were people like Duke Ellington, Billie Holliday, Count Basie's band, Charlie Shavers, this is what I was hearing when I was a kid.

Maxine Gordon: Do you remember the first live jazz that you heard?

Jimmy Owens: The first live jazz? Well, I guess the first live jazz was, actually, my sisters, they had a tape recorder given to them for Christmas. From that, the boy who were in—they went to junior high school 40 also—the boys from junior high school 40 who played music, would come over to the house and put on records like Miles Davis' gig. They would play along with these records and record them. The musicians were trumpet players like Oliver Beana, Vincent McEwan, saxophonist George Braithway, his name now is called George Braith. And there was a pianist by the name of Arthur Jenkins. They would all come to the house and, I mean, in part it was to record on the tape recorder but the biggest part was to court my two beautiful sisters. (Laughs)

Maxine Gordon: How old were you then? They were about ten years older than you, those musicians.

Jimmy Owens: Let's see one sister is five years older, and the other is seven years older.

Maxine Gordon: So they were the…

Jimmy Owens: Yvonne, my older sister, is still alive and she lives in Houston, Texas.

Maxine Gordon: So those musicians who came to the house would have been the same age as your sisters.

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, they were, you know.

Maxine Gordon: So if they were in junior high then you were…12, 10?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, I was in elementary school because I hadn't started to play trumpet, as yet. It was hearing the sound, live jazz, from Oliver Beana and Vincent McEwan that I decided I wanted to play the trumpet. But, I really think it was my father who had programmed in my ear, since I was three or four years old, to hearing the trumpet. Charlie Shavers, the trumpet section of Duke Ellington's band and Trumpets No End. Things like that that he played, that I heard the trumpet all the time. Then of course, Louie Armstrong, I would most definitely say that Louie Armstrong and his popularity made me play the trumpet.

Maxine Gordon: You always wanted to play the trumpet?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah.

Maxine Gordon: That was from the beginning…

Jimmy Owens: Well, yes, because from my very beginning, the kids in the neighborhood, we had a friend. His name was Al Henshaw, and Al was in the service. He was a career person in the service; he was getting ready to go to Korea. Before he decided to leave, he gathered all the kids from the neighborhood that used to hangout with him, he used to be a boxer, and he says, "What would you like to have?" One guy took the barbells; another guy took the this, and whatnot. He had a trumpet, and I took the trumpet. So, that's when I practiced.

Maxine Gordon: How old were you?

Jimmy Owens: Oh, I was about nine years old. So, you know, he showed me how to blow the trumpet. It was a defective trumpet. It had no tuning slide. It had a piece of rubber that he had connected the tuning slide…(laughs).

Maxine Gordon: Did you know—You didn't know that it was defective?

Jimmy Owens: Well, I knew that. But, it still made a sound. So, I mean, like a…It was only when I went to seventh grade and the music teacher, Mr. Lightman, said, "what is that!" I said, "It's my trumpet!" He said, "What's this piece of rubber?" And he says,

"Take your trumpet to Bronin's music store and see if they can fix it up." So I took it to Bronin's music store and they looked at it and said, "There's nothing that we can do about it. Do you want to buy a new trumpet?" And I said, "Well, I don't know, I can't." I went back and told my father. That Christmas, this was September, but that Christmas, my father got me a trumpet." So, I was ten years old by that time.

Maxine Gordon: Ten years old?

Jimmy Owens: Yes.

Maxine Gordon: 1953.

Jimmy Owens: Yes, 1953.

Maxine Gordon: That's excellent. So, could you talk about your teacher? Was that your first teacher?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, and I studied at P.S. 40, junior high school 40.

Maxine Gordon: Uh huh.

Jimmy Owens: I studied out of "Easy Steps to the Band." I have to say that one of the colleges I went to, to do workshops, about four or five years ago, I'm looking in their music room and there is a whole stack of "Easy Steps to the Band." I wanted to steal one really bad, but I was good enough not to. I looked at it and I looked at all of the stuff, the first note I learned was F. It was all in the book! (Laughs)

Maxine Gordon: Wow! Excellent.

Jimmy Owens: You know, so it was quite interesting to see that book and that they were still using that kind of book and teaching people how to play music.

Maxine Gordon: And then, who was your next teacher?

Jimmy Owens: Well, I guess in junior high school I had a lady teacher by the name or Edna Smith. Edna Smith played bass and she was one of the original members of the Sweethearts of Rhythm. Her, and Carlene Rey were very, very good friends I found out later on in life. Edna Smith was really the greatest thing for me because she prepared me to get into the high school of music and art. By the time I was ready to take the exam for the high school of music and art, which was for the ninth grade for me, she had prepared me to learn the keys up to four flats and four sharps, and how to write four-part harmony.

That was the aid in me taking whatever exams I had to take, written exams for the high school of music and art. I played a version of "Trumpet's No End Blue Skies," and ended with big high notes and played the melody high. The teacher accepted me, they accepted me o the high school of music and art I just had a 50th anniversary. June 2011 is my 50th graduation anniversary. It was interesting seeing all those people. Some of them looked exactly like they did in high school, just a little older. Many of them, I had no idea who they were, even looking at my yearbook. I still have my yearbook.

Maxine Gordon: Who, can you name some of your friends that you grew up with in elementary, junior high school, who became musicians? Any who remained friends?

Jimmy Owens: Well, I mean, I guess the two people who were really close to me in elementary school, and junior high school, and high school, there was a saxophonist, his name was Freddie Pettis. A trombonist, Joe Orange, Joe went on to be a professional musician for many years. Freddie never became a professional musician. He got into education, you know?

Maxine Gordon: But, your still friends with both of them from that period in the Bronx?

Jimmy Owens: Yes.

Maxine Gordon: And also, the other people you've mentioned…Vincent McEwan

Jimmy Owens: All of those people who used to come to the house and play on the tape recorder, they all became professional musicians. So, they were kind of my idols, you know? There was also a trumpet player by the name of Harry Hall, who was about two years older than me. He went to music and art and he was really one of the idols I had at that time. I wanted to play like him, like Vincent McEwan, like Oliver Beana.

Maxine Gordon: So, you started on the trumpet when you were ten. When did you first play in public?

Jimmy Owens: (Laughs)

Maxine Gordon: Well, we know you played in the Bronx when you were 15.

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, I was going to say…I had played in public before that because we used to have a band and we would play—you know this was in junior high school, so that was something. But, I think the first time I really started to play in public was, my Dad took me to Small's Paradise in Harlem, 135th St, Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard was called 7th Avenue at the time. He took me on a matinee to see Miles Davis and Miles'

group. When we walked in, they were on a break. I walked over to the piano and Miles' trumpet was in the piano, I had never seen a blue trumpet in my life. He had a tinted blue trumpet. So, I had heard and I had read all these stories that Miles was such a nasty person. But I walked in there and I put my hands behind my back to make sure nobody thought I was touching the horn. I was looking at the piano, in the piano, and all of the sudden Miles came to the piano and started playing some chords. He looked up at me and he said, in his voice, (imitates Miles Davis' voice) "Hey kid, you play the trumpet?" I say, "Yeah," and he says, "Here, play me a tune." So I took his mouthpiece out, put my mouthpiece in and I played "Walkin'," and he was impressed. At that point, John Coltrane, Cannonball Adderley, Bill Evans—no, Paul Chambers, and Jimmy Cobb. And the last person to come on the band stand was Bill Evans, at which point Miles says, "You hear this kid play?" Bill says, "No." He gave me the horn again and said, "Play it again." So, I started to play "Walkin'" and the band came in and joined me. So, I played with those musicians, and that's when I became friendly with Miles. I guess that was my first public performance.

Maxine Gordon: That's not bad!

Jimmy Owens: Yeah! (Laughs)

Maxine Gordon: You were 14?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah—well I was 15, I guess. I had been very, very interested in Miles, of course, that was my idol. [I was] listening to his records as well as Clifford Brown. I have to say that I became kind of friendly with Miles, from that point. He used to go to a gym up on 137th Street and Broadway and I was always going to that train stop in hopes that I would see Miles Davis sometime, you know? (Laughs) I had stared to study with Donald Byrd who lived in the Bronx at that time. I was going to Donald Byrd because I had heard him at the Thelonious Monk concert at Town Hall, and mentioned to a friend, "Man, I'd sure like to study with him." And he, this guy I was with, says, "Oh, man, he's a friend of mine. I mean, he lives right there in the Bronx on Teasdale Place." I said, "What!" He said, "If you want to go I'll take you down there to see him sometime." Now he was a musician also, and you know, not a professional musician. He arranged a time to take me by Donald's house. I went by Donald's house and the first thing he asked me to do was to play something. I put Carmen mute in the trumpet and I got into a stance where I was bent backwards and played. So he says, after I've finished playing a couple of notes, he says, "Well, what is all that stance? This mute in your—Take the mute out and let me hear you play!" Well, Miles Davis plays with a mute all the time, you know? So he says, "Let's stand up straight man! Your knees are bent backwards like that!" So he says, "play something." And he says, "Can't you get a sound out of the horn?" So he started to teach me, and I thought I was going to study jazz, you know? That's why I wanted to

study with Donald Byrd. But, he was teaching me to be a better trumpet player, so he broke down my sound, and my tonguing, and knowledge of me knowing scales, and chords, and all of that stuff. After a number of months, he made me transcribe some solos. As a matter of fact, he gave me an assignment, the first assignment. I was taking lessons every week for $5. He said, "Okay, next week I want you to have a Kenny Dorham solo, and a Miles Davis solo transcribed." Whew. (Laughs) Well, I learned the solos, but, to write them out? (Laughs) I was having difficulty. I was having difficulty. Yes, I was in the high school of music and art, but we were studying classical music and nothing about any kind of rhythms like jazz rhythms. That was the kind of stuff I really needed to learn. Donald then started to teach me that. He had Marshall Brown, who is a very fine educator out of the Newport Youth Band, Marshall Brown came down to hear him at some club in New York with him and Pepper Adams. Donald Byrd told him, I have a trumpet player that should be in your band. [Marshall said] "Tell him to give me a call, and I'll give him an audition." I went for an audition for the Newport Youth Band, which, I had many friends who were going to the High School of Music and Art who would had graduated two years before me, who were in the band: Harry Hall, Larry Morton, Astley Fernell, they had all gone to Music and Art. So, I was very interested in being in the band; that was a big thing. So, Marshall Brown set up and audition. I went in and I played with the rhythm section. I played—what did I play? I played "Now's The Time" and "I Remember Clifford." Is that all right?

Maxine Gordon: Could you go back and talk about Donald Byrd?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah. So, I studied with Donald Byrd when I was 15 years old. I studied about the trumpet, you know? He had me playing long tones and all the things to make me a better trumpet player, and all the time I was interested in playing jazz. So, I would practice—I'd have a lesson on Saturday and I would practice his stuff that he gave me Friday night and go to my lesson. I was never prepared. So, finally, he said to me this one time that I came there. He said—we were born on the same day, December 9th—he said, "Man, I am 11 years older than you, and one day we could be on the same bandstand, trying to get the gig and I'm going to use those 11 years to make sure I get the gig and you don't." I went home and practiced my buns off (Laughs) from that day. So, that was a good point of realization that he gave me. But, Donald was a great mentor to me; he was like a second father. Those 11 years that he had over me made a big difference to me at that age. He would take me around to rehearsals and introduce me to musicians. He taught me about the music industry, you know? And when the book came out, *This Business of Music* in 1964, I went to Bill Ward and got a copy of the book and then told him, Donald, and Herbie Hancock about the book, that they should get this book.

Maxine Gordon: Was Herbie living in the Bronx?

Jimmy Owens: At that time, he was living with Donald. When he came into New York to work with Donald, he lived up in Tisdale Place for, I don't know, a year or so.

Maxine Gordon: So is that in the same period when Donald took him to hear Mongo?

Jimmy Owens: I don't know.

Maxine Gordon: You know, in the Bronx mythology, how Donald Byrd took Herbie Hancock to hear Mongo's "Santa Maria" and said, "Try this tune" and…

Jimmy Owens: I don't know.

Maxine Gordon: You've never heard that story?

Jimmy Owens: I've never heard that story. I don't know that story. To my knowledge, Herbie was meeting all of the musicians and he had recorded "Watermelon Man" and Mongo heard "Watermelon Man." He probably recorded it. So, uh, at that point, Donald Byrd was very, very influential. Like I said, he talked up my getting and auditions for Marshall Brown's Newport Youth Band, which I got in the band. From that band, there are a number of us who are professional, who became professional musicians after.

[Police siren blares in background]

Kennith Kimery: Let's hold on for one second. You have a very active place, don't you?

Jimmy Owens: Yes, I do.

Maxine Gordon: This has to do with 9-11, I think, the anniversary.

Jimmy Owens: Yes, because I have a fire station right here at 18th street. But we haven't heard a fire engine, that's the police.

Maxine Gordon: Okay. So, I'm sorry, but could you talk about the Newport Youth Band?

Jimmy Owens: So, in the Newport Youth Band there are a number of musicians who became professional musicians. There were three trumpet players, you know, this is besides myself, and trombonists. They worked with people like Slide Hampton, Maynard Ferguson, Woody Herman, you know? The pianist is someone who writes lots of music, Michael Benny. The drummer was Larry Rosen, who started GRP records. Him and his partner Dave Grusin built that record company up and then sold it for 40 million dollars.

It was just the two of them! So, the education that we got at the Newport Youth Band was very, very important. The bass player, Eddie Gomez, is around. Of the people who are around now, it's just Eddie Gomez, baritone saxophonist Ronnie Cuber, and myself, and Michael Benny. That's it.

Maxine Gordon: And where did you perform?

Jimmy Owens: We performed all over. We did dances all up and down the east coast, mostly in the New England area. Sometimes, we'd have to stay off from school on a Monday or on a Friday, which was always nice. We'd ride the bus, our bus, we'd ride the bus, you know? So, it was really giving us and understanding of what a professional musician's life was all about.

Maxine Gordon: While you were still in high school?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, still in high school. I left the band—well, actually the band broke up by about 1960. So, my last year in high school was meant just to make up all of the bad grades that I had received so I could graduate with some kind of good grades.

Maxine Gordon: And then when you did graduate then, what was the next step?

Jimmy Owens: Well, after graduating I really wanted to go to Julliard School of Music or the Manhattan School of Music, but my parents didn't have that kind of money to send me there. So, I'd practice, and I learned more between June and September of 1961 than I'd learned in my whole three years in high school, about everything. I mean, I was reading more books, I was practicing more, and I was studying. But, my mother felt that to be responsible I had to go out and get a job. So, I would go and look for a job with the New York Times down on 42nd street and whatnot, all these places. I'd fill out all these forms, and I never got a job. I wound up going down there, and then fill out the form and then go to the movies, and then I'd go back. No, I didn't get anything. She didn't feel that I was being—that I was committing myself to be serious, even though I practiced from nine to five or six everyday. If I got in, I'd go to Birdland or something, and I got in at two o'clock, three o'clock, and four o'clock in the morning, at nine o'clock I'd be up practicing. I'd practice all day, off and on. So, she finally got me a job, and it was the only time that I've ever worked anything outside of music. I worked at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx, where she worked. She got me a job. I was called a stationary clerk. I ordered all the stationary supplies for the hospital. I kept that job for about a year and two months, something like that. I saved all my money. Now, when I said my parents didn't have the money to send me to college, they had sent my sisters to college, and the Manhattan School of Music's tuition was $750 a year—a year! Julliard was a little more expensive; it was $900 a year. I think now these people that are paying $40,000 for their

kid to go to school at The New School; I'm saying, "oh my god!" So, during that time I studied privately. I studied with the great; he was called a trouble-shooter, Carmine Caruso. And, I studied composition with a person a little later on, Henry Brant. So, I had saved my money. And, after a year and about two months I decided to quit that job, and my boss—it was a very easy job for me—I worked two weeks out of the month getting requisitions in, ordering the stuff, filling the requisitions. The other two weeks, I had nothing to do, so I used to lock myself in my little cubby closet from the inside and I would practice. (Laughs)

Maxine Gordon: Very good.

Jimmy Owens: I brought my mute, and I'd practice in my little stationary closet. Then, when I decided to leave, I told my boss. She said, "Well, what are you going to do?" And I said, "Well, I'm going to go out and make more money in one night than I make in a whole two weeks." I think I used to take home like $99 in two weeks. Every two weeks my check was $99 and something. (Laughs) It was pitiful, you know? But, I didn't have any expenses so I made $99 then I save $90. You know, you look back at that and money was a lot different than it is now. As a matter of fact, I asked a student who had some sort of app on his telephone what $55,000 in 1969 was equivalent to now. It was $300,050. So that was what I was making in 1969; it would be equivalent to $300,050 now, a year. And I was making more than that at that time. I look back at making that $99 and wonder what that was about in 1961.

Maxine Gordon: Did you sit in during that period?

Jimmy Owens: I would go to places, but I was not taking any work. A lot of the guys would call me to work, Billy Mitchell, Ernie Wilkins, and I wouldn't take any work. I was just practicing.

Maxine Gordon: You didn't think you were ready?

Jimmy Owens: Uh, I didn't think so because I was listening to Lee Morgan, and Booker Little, and Freddie Hubbard, all three that were great musicians and five years older than me. I couldn't approach any of the stuff that they were doing, and that's what I was practicing for, as well as Miles and Clifford Brown. You know, but those guys who were the closest to me, like Donald, he was different. He was 11 years older than me. But five years older than me, hey man, I figured I should be able to do that.

Maxine Gordon: For five years, the jazz generations, we say are five years. That's a big difference. It's not like you have a friend that's five years older. It's interesting how those

generations…you know, Dizzy being five years older than…it completely changes things; doesn't it?

Jimmy Owens: Sure. True.

Maxine Gordon: It completely changes everything that comes after. I'm noticing in your huge stack of memorabilia here, that when you were 15 you played at the International Park Inn in the Bronx.

Jimmy Owens: Yeah.

Maxine Gordon: With Curtis Fuller and Hank Mobley. What was that?

Jimmy Owens: Well, my father, like I said, he used to take me around and hear music. And he knew of the music, he was listening to the radio all the time. So he found out that there was going to be a jazz concert in the afternoon, up in this place called the International Park Inn in the Bronx. He took me there, and it was to hear Kenny Dorham, and Hank Mobley, and I really don't remember who else was in the rhythm section. I'd have to ask some of these people so I can write this stuff down, who are still alive.

Maxine Gordon: You could ask… Bob

Jimmy Owens: Bob Gumbs.

Maxine Gordon: Bob Gumbs will know.

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, and Kwame Braith. Kwame Braithe took the picture of me, with me and Hank Mobley; I'm 15 years old, and me and Curtis Fuller. [In the picture] I'm playing Kenny Dorham's trumpet, I didn't have a trumpet, I mean I didn't take my trumpet with me, so Kenny Dorham let me play his trumpet. I had my mouthpiece with me. I remember I played "All The Things You Are" and Curtis Fuller said, "Hey man, you sound wonderful. You just gotta' work on those changes." I remember that I went home and I went to start working on those changes more. Miles Davis came to that concert up in the Bronx, because Miles and Kenny Dorham were friends, and Hank Mobley. So, Miles came to that concert and I got a chance to see him. This was in July. I had played with him at Small's Paradise in June. As a matter of fact, I found out the date from a book that was published about Miles, the date that he worked at Smalls Paradise. It was the end of the week, the Sunday matinee. Then I asked Jimmy Cobb, who was working at The New School where I was working, I asked him one time in the office I said, "Man, do you remember working with Miles at Small's Paradise at the matinees?" He says, "Yeah!" I say, "Man, you don't remember." He says, "Yeah, I remember that." I

say, “Do you remember a kid coming in and Miles letting him play?” He says, “Yeah, was that you?” I said, “Yeah.” I said, “Man you don’t remember” He says, “No, I’m telling you, I remember because that was my first week with Miles and I looked over at the bar and there, standing at the end of the bar was Philly Joe Jones and I got so nervous!” So he says, “Yeah, I remember that very well.”

Maxine Gordon: Wow. Great.

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, Jimmy Cobb is one of the jazz masters.

Maxine Gordon: So, in the…there’s a great photo of Jimmy Owens at age 15. Maybe you’ll take a shot at this, this one with Curtis Fuller on this 12th of July 1958. In the review, in the *Amsterdam News* “Jazz and Barbeque Invade the Bronx,” it says, “one of the surprises that evening was little Jimmy Owens, 15, and the Bronx resident who gasped the crowd as he sat in on trumpet with the big guns. He plays some of Miles’ tunes with the skill of a top artist.” That’s pretty good. You were pretty good in 1958!

Jimmy Owens: (Laughs) I think that was my first write up, too!

Maxine Gordon: That’s excellent, isn’t it?

Jimmy Owens: (Laughs)

Maxine Gordon: So, after you left high school and you spent that time practicing, then what happened?

Jimmy Owens: Well, like I said, I told my boss that I was going to quit and make more money in one night than I made in a whole two weeks. So, when I quit, the first gig I got was with Slide Hampton and his octet. We went to North Carolina to play a concert. I got paid $300 for the concert, okay?

Maxine Gordon: How did you get there?

Jimmy Owens: We drove, two cars.

Maxine Gordon: No, but I mean how did you get the gig in the band? Did you audition?

Jimmy Owens: I was around Slide, you know, he was…Harry Hall, the trumpet player who grew up in the Bronx, had played with Slide Hampton. A number of my friends from the Newport Youth Band played with Slide Hampton, so I met Slide and found that Slide

lived in the Bronx. He lived right around the corner from club 845. George Coleman lived in the same building with him. So I would go and see Slide and talk to him. So, he called me to do this gig. It was me and Richie Williams. (There is a loud crashing sound outside the apartment) I do think that what they're doing in all of that noise, is they're putting in those big plates.

Maxine Gordon: Plates, which is good.

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, it means they're finished drilling and everything. (Laughs)

Maxine Gordon: The sound of the metal plates is good, yeah. Richard Williams, say something about Richard Williams.

Jimmy Owens: Well, it was a great gig and all I did was I sat there most of the time and listened to Richard Williams play very well. I mean, I soloed also.

Maxine Gordon: What is unique about Richard Williams?

Jimmy Owens: Well, it was the fact tat I was playing next to him, I had listened to him from the days when he first came into New York. Ernie Wilkins, who used to mentor the Newport Youth Band, he wrote arrangements for the Newport Youth Band, he told me about this great trumpet player, Richard Williams, who had just come into New York. So I said, "Alright, I have to hear him." I got the record, and I still have the record up there among all of my record where "Richard Williams Takes All." I really was into Richard Williams playing. He was really a masterful trumpet player, a wonderful sound, had good register and range and everything. He expressed himself wonderfully. So, it was nice playing next to him, you know. Just playing Slide Hampton's music at that time was great. So, I worked with Slide and that group for a while. I worked with a lot of rehearsal bands in New York. Guitarist, Sal Salvador…Then I got a call from a friend who asked me, "Would you be interested in working with Lionel Hampton?" I said, "Yeah." So I went and go the gig with Lionel Hampton. He told Hampton, "You gotta be good," Hampton's office called me and I went and decided to work with the band, at first, it was Garnett Brown who called me, the trombonist. I worked with him for about a year, which I started to write music for him. I wrote my first arrangement on the bus going from New York to Albany, I think. I wrote the arrangement just like I had seen slide Hampton write the arrangement: no score, trumpet one, trumpet two, trumpet three, and trumpet four. I wrote the parts and then when we had it, I told Hampton, "I have arrangements." He said, "Oh, well rehearse it!" We rehearsed it and he fell in love with it. It was called "Complicity," that was the name of the song. He loved it, he played it on the gig that night. We would played it every time, from then [on].

Maxine Gordon: That was your first arrangement?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah.

Maxine Gordon: Wow.

Jimmy Owens: I had written arrangements for other small groups that we had. You know, me and Joe Orange had a group that had trumpet, trombone, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, and I was writing arrangements for that type of thing. But, this was the first time I had written a big band arrangement, and it did sound very, very good- you know, as I can remember. Hamp loved it. Where we came into New York we worked at the Metropole bar. We would do four sets a night and he would play "Complicity," by that time I had two arrangements in the book. He would play "Complicity" like twelve times a night. Each set he would play it three times. He played it one time all the way through, when we finished the people went wild. He'd play it again from the top all the way through, and they went wild. He'd play it from the out chorus, and every time we played it, every set, that's what he would do. So, when I approached him about getting paid for the arrangement, he said, "You gotta go speak to Gladys." She was his wife and business partner. So, I went and spoke to Gladys, who was the straw boss, and she says, "Yeah, Jimmy, we were thinking of taking the arrangement from you and giving you publicity" And I said, "Yeah, that's great but I said I wanted $125 for the arrangement" So, she says, "Yeah, well we can give you publicity, you know." I said, "Yeah, publicity is nice but I want $125 for the arrangement." So they decided that they would give me publicity and I went back to the Metropole that night and told Bobby Plater, "Listen, could you collect the saxophone." And he collected the trombone parts, and the trumpet parts. Hamp came on and said, "Complicity" and Bobby said, "We don't have any, and Jimmy collected them." He said, "What!" And this is during the set. He says, "Let's play 'Funk-a-De-Mamma.'" He said, "No, he collected that, too." So that was my, you know, I learned this business from Donald Byrd. I said I want $125. They said that they were thinking about recording it. Besides giving me publicity, they were going to record it. I said, "Okay, sounds good. Now, when you record it, it's going to say 'Complicity, written by Jimmy Owens' right?" And he says, "Sure, its 'Complicity, written by Lionel Hampton and Jimmy Owens." No, no, no, no. I said—and I was going to acquiesce and put it in their publishing company, which was called Swing and Tempo Music. And I had learned this stuff from Donald Byrd and Randy Weston. And by way of them, speaking to a lot of people like Cannonball Adderley, all about publishing and the problems we have always had, we, meaning jazz musicians, and publishers. You know, record companies who took our music and never made a lead sheet, and I had contacted many record companies, like Blue Note, asking for lead sheets when I was in high school, and never would get an answer. And finally I would call and they would say, "No, we don't have any lead sheets." I would say, "You published all these people's music. I want to

play that song." They'd say, "Well, we don't have any lead sheets." When this situation came up with Lionel Hampton, I just remembered all the stuff that I had learned. I said, "You go record it. I was going to give you the publishing, but you're saying that Hampton's name is going to be on it? No!" So I took my arrangements back, and from that day on I had about three months more that I stayed with the band. We did a trip out to Las Vegas and California. I, uh, (laughs) wherever Jimmy Owens was supposed to solo, (imitates Hampton) "Give that solo Martin Banks." So, I had no solos with Hamp, that's how he punished me. So, I stayed with the band about three months more and I left. After I left, I started to work with Hank Crawford, and from Hank Crawford I went to Charles Mingus. From Mingus, to Herbie Mann, and I was in Thad Jones and Mel Lewis' original band. We rehearsed every Monday night in the rehearsal studio, Phil Ramon's recording studio at one point. The very beginning of the rehearsals were at the studio that Jim and Andy's had. It was a bar on 48th street, a musician's bar. Above the bar, he had a rehearsal studio. So, we would rehearse every Monday evening at midnight. The reason that Thad and Mel rehearsed at midnight is because most of the guys in the band were active in the studios, very active. In actuality, there were just two people in the band who were not really into the studios that was Garnett Brown and myself. Garnett got into it before I did, you know? We rehearsed for about three months, just a lot of fun, maybe not even that long. Yeah, I would say this was probably November of '65 or '64. Then, Thad came to us and said, "Listen, I have a possibility of a gig. They want us to go into on Monday nights to the Village Vanguard. Would y'all like to do it? It's not going to pay a lot of money, $15 per person." Everybody said, "Yeah!" I mean, they were busy working; everybody was busy working either on a television studio band or doing record dates. So, I did that and I said, "Great, okay, $15!" I worked for the band for about three months at the Vanguard, and then I was working with Herbie Mann. Mel Lewis had this policy where you weren't supposed to take off. And we were going on to Japan, well, the west coast and then on to Japan. I was going to be gone for about two months, so I left the band at that point. So, I never recorded with Thad Jones and Mel Lewis.

Maxine Gordon: Excuse me, could you go back to Hank Crawford, because you moved over when you said you left Hamp you said you went with Hank. Could you talk about Hank Crawford?

Jimmy Owens: Hank Crawford aw as wonderful experience for me, I really learned how to project emotion better, learn how to play the blues better, cause he was a master of all that. [I learned] how to project my sound. The great players o this wonderful music we call jazz projected their sounds all the time, on their instruments. Jonny Hodges, Sidney Bechet, Louis Armstrong, they played with their sound. So, consequently, that was one of the things I really learned how to do when working with Hank Crawford. It was a wonderful experience; we played in the Deep South. We stayed in the south. One time we lived out of Mobile, Alabama, it was a black owned hotel we stayed in. We worked out of

Louisiana and Mississippi and Alabama. We did all kinds of gigs like that in the Deep South. This is 1964, 1965. We had a station wagon with New York license plates, a U-Haul trailer that was wider than the station wagon, with New York license plates, and this was the time that was called the Freedom Riders. So, in our band, we were nine people. In the station wagon, three people, and then three people behind, and then the last seat was a seat that you had to climb in the back of the station wagon. It faced out; it faced back. The only problem was that was the smallest seat, so the three smallest guys in the band had to fit there. So, it was always me, Marcus Belgrave, and Howard Johnson, I mean, Howard Johnson was skinny! He was skinny at that time. The problem was that the U-Haul trailer was wider than the car, so you couldn't see anything. I memorized U-Haul. I had it really in my memory, U-Haul. Every once in a while I could look back and see the ground. That was my nine months or so experience working with Hank Crawford. Musically, it was wonderful. With Mingus it was the same thing it was musically wonderful. I think that was the most creative gig that I've ever had, the one with the Charles Mingus band. It was three trumpets, Lonnie Hillyer, Hobart Dotson, and myself. Well, originally it was trombone, Garnett Brown, but Garnett Brown dropped out. Julius Watson, French horn. Howard Johnson, tuba, and Charles McPherson alto saxophone. So, it was all brass plus saxophone, and Danny Richmond and Mingus. We rehearsed for two weeks and learned three songs because what Mingus taught us on Monday, I was different on Tuesday, and then we'd come back on Wednesday and he wouldn't allow us to write anything down. That's why Garnett Brown left, because he said it was ridiculous and he was getting busy in New York getting record dates and stuff. (Laughs) So, we finally got these three songs together and we worked at the Monterey Jazz Festival. In between, he would fire the band, okay? (Imitates Mingus) "You guys are not playing shit! Get off! You're all fired! Lonnie and Charles, let's play together." I'll start from there, Lonnie and Charles and we'll play together.

[Stephanie Meyers Owens yells in the background]

Kennith Kimery: What was that?

Stephanie Meyers Owens: Federer is winning two sets. He's won the first two sets.

Maxine Gordon: Okay…if we could just go back a little to when you were discussing Lionel Hampton, about how much you made.

Jimmy Owens: Well, yes. We made…the salary we made was $125 a week. Or, if scale in the city that you went to was more, then they paid you more. But scale was never higher that $125.

Maxine Gordon: And there was four sets?

Jimmy Owens: Oh, there was six nights a week, and your day off you were always travelling so it wasn't a day off. More importantly, how much we made at that time, that was the same sum that people were making in 1957 with Hamp, $125 a week. So, you can understand that it was important when I looked at it that I get paid $125 for each arrangement that I did.

Maxine Gordon: Was the hotel paid?

Jimmy Owens: No, we had to pay our own hotel.

Maxine Gordon: Out of the $125 a week?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah. But, the hotels were $7 a night.

Maxine Gordon: Yeah, but you doubled up right?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, and if we doubled up it was three and a half dollars a night! (Laughs) Sometimes Hamp would get angry at us that we wouldn't stay in the hotel where he was staying, which was maybe $20 a night. We didn't have the money to spend $20 a night on a hotel! I was quite amazed how some of the guys in the band, like saxophonist Bobby Plater, who had been with Hamp for many, many years, and the guitarist named Makel, who had been with him for 30 years or something, how these guys raise families. Cause there was one time when Hamp was very busy and he would go out with the band for eleven months out of the year! They'd come home at Christmas time and then leave again in January. They could be home for December and then leave home in January. Guys raised their families and sent money back home. Bobby Plater was always telling me, you know, I guess that was my first appreciation of getting to know the guys who were much older than me and respecting them. They used to take me aside and say, "Well, you know, you're making some money now and you need to buy this stock." So, I wound up buying Holliday Inn, and I bough a few shares of this thing called Loans, which was like a food shop in the south, like a McDonalds. I sold it in a year or something like that, and I made a little bit of money. I don't think I made any real money on loans. But, those were interesting learning times. On the bus there were three sections on the bus. There were the good section, then you sat in the middle section, which was the pay sections, and then I sat in the last row of the middle section and then behind me was Skid Row.

Maxine Gordon: And how was that?

Jimmy Owens: Skid Row was where the guys were drinking and smoking and doing everything like that. Hamp sat in the front of the bus, the goodie-goodie section where he was reading his paper, the *Christian Science Monitor*. He would be listening to what the guys in the back were talking about, and then all of the sudden he would chime in with something from reading his *Christian Science Monitor,* (imitates Hampton) "Oh yeah, I remember that dog! She was…" so and so and so and so (laughs). It was always a wonderful experience. Pepper Adams was in the band, and Pepper Adams used to sit in his seat, always reading, and scrunched down in the seat with his knees up on the chair in front of him so you couldn't even see him. One time we stopped in Oklahoma and everybody got out to go to the restaurant and we came back and we checked, everyone checked. "Trumpets? Yeah everyone's here. Trombones? Yeah everyone's here." And we pulled off and we drove for three hours and somebody looked over and says, "Well, where's Pepper?" [Hampton] says, "Well, what do you mean, 'where's Pepper' isn't he in there?" No Pepper. "Is he in the bathroom?" No Pepper. We left Pepper back in this god-forsaken town in Oklahoma. We turned the bus around and turned back, we got back to this town and we found Pepper walking. I mean it was a town, a town? It wasn't even a town; it was four blocks. We found Pepper walking down the street. He had no money, Pepper never used to have money. I mean, if he had $15 in his pocket, wow that was a lot. I guess he was sending all his money to the bank or wherever. So, we said, "Man! We finally found you." He said, "Yeah, I checked the bus schedules on Monday and the next bus through her was like Thursday." (Laughs) So, there were a lot of funny things with this band. I think that's what the life of all of the bands were about, they were always funny. To go back to Hank Crawford, like I said, we were travelling in the Deep South in 1964, 1965—Freedom riders from all over the United States! We were a band with a station wagon and a U-Haul trailer with our instruments and our luggage in it with New York license plates. So, of the nine of us in the band, there were quite a few guns. We had a plan that if we ever got stopped by those racist cops in Mississippi, or Alabama, or Georgia, exactly what we would do—who would shoot who. We had some instances where they stopped us, we got stopped a number of times. Hank and Duke Wade, who was the manager would talk, let them know we were musicians, show them our instruments in the back of the U-Haul and we were on our way. It was quite frightening a number of times.

Maxine Gordon: Was that your first experience in the south?

Jimmy Owens: No, I had been in the south when I was a kid because I used to go to Charleston, North Carolina, my mother's hometown, and spend a couple of weeks with family like my grandparents and stuff down there.

Maxine Gordon: How was that? Did that affect you?

Jimmy Owens: Well, you know, like when you come from the north and you're a teenager, you're not used to any of this stuff. Colored water fountains, when I see a fountain and I'm thirsty then I'm going to go to the water fountain and drink out of it. "No, you can't drink out of that! You can't drink out of that one," that's what my friends were telling me from Charleston. I'd go over there and drink out of it and, you know, I guess I was bold and whatnot until the Emmett Till incident happened. That's what changed my mind about ever going back to the south. The few times I ended up going back after that were much different.

Maxine Gordon: And how was the Hank Crawford band?

Jimmy Owens: The Hank Crawford band was great. Howard Johnson was in the band, and Wendell Harrison from Detroit. We had…me and Marcus Belgrave on trumpets, and Hank and then it was just bass and drums. There was no piano or guitar or anything, and Hank would play piano sometimes. It was a great band and Hank wrote music for this small group.

Maxine Gordon: And where would you play?

Jimmy Owens: Mostly in the South. We played in Detroit, we played in Chicago, out in Los Angeles.

Maxine Gordon: Small clubs?

Jimmy Owens: Yes. We played the It Club; it was in Los Angeles.

Maxine Gordon: And the south was a segregated audience? Black audience?

Jimmy Owens: Most of the time it was always a black audience, and they always knew Hank's music. He could start to play like the first note of "Misty" he held a big long note. (Imitates note) and people would just go crazy applauding, just in him playing the first two notes. His record sold very well in the Deep South, so we had a following there. I remember one place that we worked; it was called Bowl Land in Mobile, Alabama. It was a bowling alley, a *huge* bowling alley. I don't know what time we started, but say if we started at nine o'clock, at quarter of nine they announced on the microphone, "We are having more chairs brought in." It was packed and they were getting paid off the door. Hank and Duke negotiated that. We played that gig that night; we got our $35 per concert. They took us back to the hotel and then our next gig—so that was maybe Saturday night—our next gig was, we were leaving on Friday. They went and disappeared. Actually, they didn't pay us. They went and disappeared, the two of them, unhitched the U-Haul trailer, took the station wagon, drove some place and came back

Friday morning. Marcus Belgrave and myself said, "Hey man, are we going to get paid?" (Imitates response) "Oh yeah, I'll give it to you after…" "Well, wait a minute. We just played this gig and you made all of this money." "Aww yeah, but…" They wound up spending the money, a whole lot of money. I mean, if he used to get paid, I don't know, $500 for a gig, maybe that night they made $2500, and all of the guys in the band were pissed that we weren't getting paid. We said, "We won't go and play the gig," and Marcus and I were right on them. I said, "Well, I'll go back to New York then," cause I always had money in my pocket. I used to carry a $100 all the time for myself. I said, "I'll go back to New York if you're not going to pay us." He said, "No, you can't go back to New York, we got gigs!" So, they came up with the money and they paid us. This is the kind of stuff that used to happen with some of the black bands. Guys would go out and party and didn't have the money to play the band, and the next gig was supposed to pay the band.

Maxine Gordon: But you didn't get stranded out there because they didn't get paid?

Jimmy Owens: No.

Maxine Gordon: Not with 11 guns and nine people.

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, I never got stranded in any band that I was with. And, like I said, I always had money so if I ever got stranded I had enough money to get back to New York.

Maxine Gordon: Very good idea.

Jimmy Owens: I gave my…back to Lionel Hampton; I gave my resignation when I was exactly two weeks out of New York. The next day, they fired me and they gave me a letter that said I was fired, I was dismissed from the band, you know? I mean, the kind of stuff that used to happen, I mean, this is another of the little negative situation. Hamp would get excited about playing, so we played in Albuquerque, New Mexico. We played at a private club, like a country club. We stayed on the bandstand for two hours, maybe two hours and ten or fifteen minutes, and we were supposed to play two hours. Then, he took a break and we came back and people love this, you know the audience is there. He came back, and we played and we were approaching an hour. And, finally, my chops were tired, Martin Banks chops were tired and everybody was tired. So I said, "Hey, man, forget about it, let's play the out chorus." He half turned around and gave the out chorus. And Garnett Brown he said, he told everybody "No man, listen, let's not play the out chorus." He half turned around to give the out chorus and none of the brass played, saxophones played, you know. (Imitates Hampton) "Jimmy Owens! I know you did this! I know you did this!" So I was blamed for that. That caused me to wait a couple of days. Here, we had three gigs coming back from Albuquerque, according to Hamp. (Imitates

Hamp) “Oh yeah, yeah, yeah we have gigs. We have gigs before we get back to New York.” Okay, so that’s good. So the bus driver drives from Albuquerque, New Mexico to Oklahoma City direct. Then, we stop and all of the guys in Skid Row know exactly where to go to get white lightening and the go and get their white lightening and stuff. You know? It would come in any type of bottle you had. There was no top, so they’d take a piece of paper and stick it in. And Martin Banks, he’s the trumpet player, he used to hold it up to the light, he’d say, “You see that stuff floating around in there? That’s what makes it good.’ (Laughs)

Maxine Gordon: And you sat in the last row of the middle section, what did you call that?

Jimmy Owens: That was the okay section. That was where Pepper Adams was and Garnett and what not. And then the saxophonists and the guitarists, they were in the front section where Hamp was, the goodie-goodie section, you know.

Maxine Gordon: And did you always sit in the same seat?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, we have our seats. When I joined the Duke Ellington Band, I jumped on the bus and I sat in a seat. I think it was Cootie Williams who said, “Oh, no, no, no, you can’t sit there. That’s Rabbit’s seat. The only seat available is that seat over there.” And that’s where I had to sit. We wound up sitting, all the bands, in the same seat. Even with Hank Crawford, I was one of the people who faced that direction when we drove, you know, cause I was one of those smaller people in the band. Oh my god! Those days! Those days! (Laughs)

Maxine Gordon: I love that! So, then from Hank Crawford, talk about Mingus.

Jimmy Owens: Well, Mingus, like I said, was a very creative experience. His music was wonderful, what he dictated to us and what we got to play. We worked at the Monterey Jazz Festival; we worked in Shelly’s Manne Hole in Los Angeles. We worked at a club in Oakland; we worked in New York at the Village Gate. I stayed with the band work for about three to four months. Then, there was something else that Mingus wanted to do. It was always wonderful experiences, some scary experiences like Howard Johnson told me one time that he got this telephone call from Mingus’ wife. Mingus’ wife, Judy, asked Howard, “Howard, where are you now?” So Howard says, “Well, we are in such and such place.” I think we were in Monterey or something. And she says, “Is Sue out there with Mingus?” Howard didn’t think anything of it, he says, “Oh yeah, oh yeah. She’s out here.” Then he realized that he wasn’t supposed to say that and about the next day or two, who should show up but Mingus’ wife. I don’t know, he smoothed it out some way. I think he knew something was happening and Sue then went back.

Maxine Gordon: What about Lonnie Hillyer?

Jimmy Owens: He was a very fine trumpet player out of Dizzy Gillespie. He's traditional. He didn't have the chop and the strength that Dizzy had, you know, but he played that kind of stuff on the instrument. He was a good trumpet player.

Maxine Gordon: And he and Charles McPherson together…

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, well that was Mingus' group and they had a very, very good group.

Maxine Gordon: Very good.

Jimmy Owens: They played a lot of great music as well as a lot of funny music. They "Cocktails for Two" and Mingus would have us play that with the whole band sometimes, "Cocktails for Two." "When The Saints Go Marching In," we played. When we couldn't play all of the music that we had together at Monterey, they kicked us off after…I don't know, 25 minutes or something. Mingus was pissed so he had us play "When The Saints Go Marching In" and we marched around the stage, and marched off the stage and he cursed out Jimmy Lyons of the Monterey Jazz Festival. The things that don't get spoken about many times are the interesting things that musicians go through. That's why oral history is very, very important, you know?

Maxine Gordon: Now where were we with Mingus? How long were you with Mingus?
Jimmy Owens: I was actually with Mingus two times. I worked with Mingus in 1964 at Birdland. That was the band that was playing the music of black saint and the cinder lady. That was Rolf Ericson, Lonnie Hillyer and myself in the trumpet section. Britt Woodman played trombone and then Carlie Mariano played alto saxophone, Pepper Adams played baritone, and Eric Dolphy would come in and sit in sometimes. We worked at Birdland for two weeks, and Birdland being the original Birdland at 52nd street and Broadway. The first week we worked beside Billy Taylor and his trio, which was Earl May [on] bass, and Grady Tate [on] drums. That's when I got to know Billy in 1964 when I met him. This one time I'm listening to them and all of the sudden this guy starts to sing. And I'm looking all around and saying, "Where the hell is this singer?" And it's Grady Tate playing the drums with the microphone there, singing. It was the first time had ever heard him sing, and he had a wonderful voice. He still does. So that was the first week, and the second week was beside John Coltrane and his classic quartet. Now, Birdland was often very noisy. People came not to listen to the music, but to talk. But, when Trane played, give you 20 seconds and the Birdland club would quiet down because it was just so emotional, so much emotional energy that you could not talk over Trane. You just could

not talk over it, and people *had* to listen. It was very interesting. The control that John Coltrane had over everyone in his group, you know? Elvin Jones just could not get faster because Coltrane just kept playing that same tempo instead of getting faster, he would hold everyone back. It was very interesting. So, that was the time with Mingus, we played some other festivals. I think we played in Boston or something.

Maxine Gordon: Did you record?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah. We did record in a…. there was one album. It was called "Music That Should Have Been Played In Monterey" or something. We recorded that. It came out, and we never got paid for it. Mingus recorded it secretively. Howard Johnson and I, after we were fired off the bandstand in Los Angeles at Royce Hall, were walking around and we walked down in the basement and the lights were on so we went back to this room. There was this big recording equipment, and they're recording the concert. They say, "Well, this is for Mingus." Really? So, Mingus recorded, wasn't going to pay anybody, he put the record out, and we never got paid. Actually, we never got paid until Sue Mingus wanted to re-issue the record again, and I let her know we never got paid. She said, "Oh, no. You must have gotten paid." And I have all of my documentation and stuff, and I pulled out my documentation while I was talking to her on the telephone and I said, "Well, we worked at such and such place and we got such and such dollars." She said, "Wow! How do you remember this stuff?" I said, "I have it all written down." I said, "He recorded this stuff and didn't let anyone know that we were recording. I've never been paid." So, when this company, East Coast Records, wanted to pt the record out, she made sure that we got paid. We got $300, or something like that. It was one of those situations that happened with Mingus, like I said, that he made us learn all this music like Duke Ellington used to teach his band the music from the piano. The only difference was what he taught us on Monday, he changed on Tuesday. Then, we'd play it on Wednesday and he'd change it again, you know? (Laughs) We played this music and in all of these concerts and had it all together, came back to New York and we did a…Howard Johnson said it was a month. I don't remember it being a month, but [we did] a month at the Village Gate. I knew it was like two weeks or something, but he told me it was a month. We did a television show for the engagement, and Ralph Ellison was the announcer on the show. When we came in, we saw all these music stands on the stage. So, Mingus told us to go and sit down behind the music stands, then he'd call to Maybry Junior—Maxine Roach—I forgot his first name. Maybry Junior, okay, who was Mingus' right hand man, he says, "Hand out the music." So, he hands out all this music. Each part is like six, seven, eight pages long—Frank Mabry.

Maxine Gordon: Frank, yeah.

Jimmy Owens: Eight pages long. It's the transcription of what we had been playing all along. Okay, so he had somebody write this stuff out. Now, he said, "I just want to prove that black musicians can read music." So, we were supposed to read this stuff on the television show. Now Lonnie Hillyer did not read music very well, and Charles McPherson did not read music very well, and this stuff was written out very technically. I mean, two eighth notes, how we would play it, he had it written out as we would play it. It was a quarter note and an eighth note with a triplet. So, it was very complicated. I mean the music sounded like total shit! So much so that he says, "Let's just go back, let's go back. Just play it, let's play it from the beginning without the music." That's how we would up playing it for the television show. Now, Sue Mingus told me that she never could find that television show, that they erased that. They could have done that. Many, many television shows erased over stuff. But, that was a great experience. Ralph Ellison, I remember him being very eloquent in what he talked about jazz, and what jazz was, and the meaning of what jazz really is to black America and to America.

Maxine Gordon: When did you first record? Go into a recording studio?

Jimmy Owens: In a recording studio? I think in 1964, I did a recording with Donald Byrd on one of those big albums. I was in the trumpet section with Clark Terry, Stanley Turrentine was in the band. Snooky Young was in the band. It was a great recording. I think it was called "I'm Trying To Get Home." That was the album with voices, which is the second album he made with voices in a big band. I copied a lot of that music. I used to copy music by hand.

Maxine Gordon: For Donald?

Jimmy Owens: Yes, for Donald, for Sonny Red, for Duke Pearson, for Herbie Hancock. I look back at my stuff and I see that I copied and arranged it and got paid $10, you know? Like I said to Stephanie a couple of days ago, "I guess ten dollars was a lot of money back then! It could buy a whole lot in 1964." I'm seeing things where, as we talk about it later on, the collective black artists when we started it, guys were contributing two dollars a week. Sometimes guys didn't have two dollars; they contributed a dollar. I said, "that was a lot of money at that time."

Maxine Gordon: Were there other musicians who did copying, or were there copyists who weren't players?

Jimmy Owens: There were copyists, but there were some musicians who used to copying. But, I was fast, and because I was an arranger also, I could transpose anything real fast. So they'd give me a concert score and I'd have to write it for alto saxophone and write it for the trombone and what not. It was pretty easy for me to do at that time.

Maxine Gordon: How did you develop that skill, do you think?

Jimmy Owens: I think I developed it from growing up with Joe Orange, who played trombone. We would have a piece of music, it could be in the bass clef, it could be in treble clef, it could be in trumpet key, and we both learned how to play it so we could play it together in unison. [We learned] how to transpose it…it was the way I was used to doing it. I grew up with Freddie Pettis, he played alto saxophone so I could transpose any of the alto saxophone music, you know, to trumpet and play it. Side bar—1968, working with Duke Ellington, I was doing a movie score with him called "Change of Mind" and Russell Procope was ill and couldn't make the recording session. So, what Duke had written was for five saxophones, so at that point I said, "Hey Duke, would you like me to play the alto parts so you can hear them?" "Can you do that Jimmy?" I said, "Yeah!" So I came down to the saxophone section, sat in Procope's seat and played the alto saxophone part on flugelhorn. I could transpose it, so it was not a problem. I recorded it like that. As a matter of fact, the recording engineer, Jack Tracy, sent me a copy of that many, many years later when I met him at the IAJE. I was commenting, "I'd sure like to get a recording of that, I want to get a recording of the film." Jack Tracy said, "Oh, I have to send you a recording of that score," and he did. I listened to it, I hear myself in the saxophone section with Duke Ellington, and it was fantastic next to Johnny Hodges. So, '68 that is. 1973, Duke does a performance and we were in Vienna. I'm with a group called the Young Giants of Jazz. In Duke Ellington is a wonderful trumpet player, Johnny Coals, who is a dear friend of mine. So, I bump into Johnny Coals backstage and I say, "How's everything? How's the band with Duke?" He says, "Aw, man. I have to tell you I'm so tired! We jut got done doing 80 one-nighters, man. I mean, I think we had two days off that whole time. Wow, and then, you know, Duke had me come down and read the alto saxophone music on Flugelhorn! I said, man, 'Duke!' I tried to do it but I made a lot of mistakes, man! I don't know where he got that idea from, that I could this stuff on the Flugelhorn." So then I told Johnny, "Oh, man!" I told him the story about the record date and I guess he had a number of trumpet players come down and try and play in the saxophone section. So I asked him, "Take me back to see the maestro." So, Johnny Coals takes me back to Duke's dressing room, he has his head rag on and he's relaxing. I know how to talk to him. I say, "How are you doing Duke" "Oh! I'm doing great. We just finished 80 one-nighters, I'm just energized." (Laughs) I'm laughing because I'm just thinking about what Johnny Coals told me a few minutes ago. Here's Duke who is 73, 74 years old. So, funny instances that happen like that, I don't know.

Maxine Gordon: So, from Mingus, you went to Duke Ellington? How did you get that?

Jimmy Owens: No, from Mingus I went to Thad Jones, Mel Lewis, and Herbie Mann.

Maxine Gordon: Oh, Herbie Mann, talk about Herbie Mann.

Jimmy Owens: And after Herbie Mann, I decided to give up the road. I got married in 1965 in Oakland, California when I was out there with Hank Crawford. My first wife was in New York and she came out to California. We got married in Marin County. By then, I stayed out on the road for about another year, you know, off and on. I then decided, hey, I'm going to stay in New York, I'm tired of doing this. What's the purpose of me being married and me always being gone? After I left Herbie Mann, I decided to stay in New York. I called Clark Terry, I called Ernie Royal, and I called Snooky Young, Jimmy Nottingham, and all these trumpet players to let them know that I'm going to stay in New York if they need me for subs. They all knew me; I had played with all of them. They knew I could read music and interpret music, whatever. So, I started getting calls from all of them. "Can you go in for…I have a record date from…you know, two to five, and then I have another record date from five to eight. Can you go in and cover me for the first half an hour of the five to eight record date?" That's what I started to do for all of the trumpet players. Then people started to know that Jimmy Owens could read the music and play the music, and they started calling me. That's how I started to get busy in the studios from 1966.

Maxine Gordon: What about Herbie Mann? When was that?

Jimmy Owens: That was '65 to '66

Maxine Gordon: For a year, you were on the road with Herbie Mann?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, not quite a year, but nine months.

Maxine Gordon: You guys were a popular band right?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, we had three trombones and me. There was a rhythm section with congas, one of the trombonists, Jack Hitchcock, played vibes. He would accompany us sometimes. But there were no chordal instruments, no piano, no guitar or anything. Bruno Carr, who's from the Bronx originally, played drums. Earl May played bass, but then Earl May left and I told Herbie Mann, "Reggie Workman, he just left Art Blakey." So, he called Reggie Workman and Reggie Workman joined the band. So, it was a good band, you know?

Maxine Gordon: How'd you travel?

Jimmy Owens: Sometimes we traveled in, if it was close, in Herbie's car. I mean, not the whole band but some of the guys. The other guys have cars so we drove up to…where is that club behind the bar? Buffalo! We drove up to Buffalo, by the time we got to Albany—well, New York was, you could see the ground. By the time we got to Albany, the snow was so high we had to stop. We missed the first night, could not get to Buffalo. I remember that. Herbie's car broke down and he got it fixed at some place off the highway, off the thruway. It cost a ridiculous about of money to get it fixed because it was a different foreign car. But, most of the time we flew wherever. The first time I flew, not first time I flew, but the first time I flew with a band was Mingus. We flew from New York out to San Francisco, and then hopped on a small plane to Monterey. We got to Monterey. Me and Howard Johnson were sharing a room. We put our stuff down and we decided to walk around Monterey. We were walking around and all of the sudden we had the same thought, "Damn! You know, if we were with Hank Crawford right now, we'd be just getting off of the Pennsylvania turnpike." (Laughs) So, those are the kinds of things musicians go through. After being in New York for a while and doing studio work I started to get very busy. Three, four, five, six, seven, eight record dates a week. I started to make much more money and I started to work on televisions shows. I did the Dick Cavett show for a couple of weeks. The situation was, they were looking to replace a trumpet player who had left and they could only hire me for two weeks. If I stayed more than two weeks, they had to keep me on staff. So, they were trying me out, they were trying Virgil Jones out, they were trying Vick DuPaws out, each of us for less than two weeks. I worked a couple of weeks like that. I only remember that because I was looking in my…I've always written down things. So, I have books of every dollar I've made from when I started to make money from some part of my life.

Maxine Gordon: Excellent. It's called an archive.

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, It's all part of my archive. So, I looked in this book and I saw how much money I was making on the Dick Cavett show. Then, Billy Taylor called me and said, "I'm starting a band for a television show, and I'd like to know if you'd like to be in it. It's for the David Frost Show." I said, "Fine." He negotiates the contract and we wind up making, this is 1969, we wind up making $55,000 a year. That's our salary, our base salary. If we worked overtime or if we played a double, it was more. When he said that, I said to myself, "It was $600 something, a week!" We worked five days a week. I started to look and I said, "Damn! Johnny Cochran's, Clark Terry had sent me in to sub for him, the Dick Cavett show, I mean their scale was like $210 and we're like making $500 something each week!" Billy negotiated a very, very good contract for the musician. In that band, originally, was Frank Wess, Seldon Powell replaced saxophonist, Hubert Laws. Hubert was playing saxophone. It was trombone, another trumpet, and myself with a rhythm section. Billy had a pianist who played when he didn't play, when he was conducting. That show lasted from 1969 to 1972, of which sometimes David Frost would

do a show, when he would do two shows on Monday, one on Tuesday, two shows on Wednesday—that was the five shows for the week. We were off for the rest of the week, of which he would get n the plane and fly to London and do another show in London. David Frost was 29, so he was making millions of dollars a year at that time. I had a friend who has this app on his telephone to tell me how much, I think I told you before, to tell me how much $55,000 a year was in 1969. It's equivalent to $375,000 or $390,000 per year.

Maxine Gordon: I have a photo here of the Billy Taylor band. David Frost show, 1969-1972. [It was] Bobby Thomas on drums, Bob Cranshaw on bass George Burg…

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, Bob left after a couple of months and he was replaced by Wilbur Bascomb, who worked he rest of the show.

Maxine Gordon: … Jimmy Owens, Dick Hurwitz on trumpet, and Morty Bullman on trombone.

Jimmy Owens: Morty Bullman was a very fine trombonist who worked with the Arthur Godfrey Show, had done all these things. He was Carmine Caruso's first brass student, okay? This was in the early 50's.

Maxine Gordon: You were the youngest.

Jimmy Owens: Yes, I was always the youngest in the band, always the youngest. When Clark Terry called me, he said, "Jimmy, I need you to go these two gigs for me." I became the youngest again with Lionel Hampton and his Golden Men Of Jazz. I was the youngest in that band and I did those two or three gigs with Lionel Hampton.

Maxine Gordon: When did you join the union?

Jimmy Owens: I joined the union with the Newport Youth Band, we had to join the union. So, they arranged for us all to go down, and I had practiced all my scales, really worked on my harmonic minor scales.

Maxine Gordon: You have to audition to be in the union?

Jimmy Owens: You have to audition to be in the union, yes. I went and sat in front of Tino Brazzy, he was the person in charge of that. He asked me a bunch of questions. He says, "Now, what do you play?" I say, "Trumpet." He says, "Let me see." I open up my case; he looks at the trumpet, he says, "Alright, thank you. You're in the union." (Laughs) So, that was 1959…

Maxine Gordon: He had a gold watch from the union for being in the union for more than thirty years!

Jimmy Owens: No, I do pay a very, very reduced rate. I'm a senior, and I arranged that right before this administration took over a year ago, or two years ago. Instead of paying $210 a year, I only pay $80. I'm a life member. But, in looking at my records from the American Federation of Musicians' pension fund. I had my first pension contribution in 1959. That's when the pension fund started. I did a record date, or a series of record dates—no, a record date with the Newport Youth Band. And I got paid and there was money that went in to the pension fund. That was very interesting, to find that out.

Maxine Gordon: Let's talk about your recording career, specifically.

Jimmy Owens: Well, after Donald Byrd and that session when I didn't solo on anything, I worked with Mingus at Monterey and I soloed. That particular band, when we went to Los Angeles and recorded that unknown record, I had solos and I was kind of the band director. I would direct all of the stuff with my horn when I play. There were a lot of things that Mingus wrote that had to be conducted for everyone. It was wonderful working with Julius Watkins, he was a beautiful man and a wonderful musician. You know, Hobard Dotson was a great trumpet player. When he left, he was replaced with Melvin Moore from Los Angeles. We worked at Shelley's Manne Hole, I think, and Melvin Moore played trumpet. Hobart had gone back to New York. He—him and Mingus had an altercation in San Francisco at the Jazz Workshop. Hobart decided to go back to New York. Hobart had been around for a long time, he was a great trumpet player. He had worked with Billy Eckstine's band, probably at the same time that Dexter Gordon worked for the band; he was in the trumpet section. So, he didn't want to stand for a lot of stuff that Mingus was giving out. So, he decided to quit and had them fly him back home. Howard Johnson was my dear friend. We'd worked with Hank Crawford together. Mingus is a lot different than all of the other stuff that we had done together. When did I first start to record? I guess it was around '65 with Herbie Mann. I did a bunch of records on Atlantic—I'm speaking about recording where I was creatively involved. I made many records, studio records, with people. For creatively involved, I guess, '65. Herbie Mann did a couple of albums…'65, '66. Then I started recording with people on the Prestige label and other labels. I can't remember, I mean, I have a discography that I have to bring up to date. I think it stops at about 1972 (laughs). But, I've written—

Maxine Gordon: the—thousands of recordings, may I say?

Jimmy Owens: Yes, since then. (Laughs) I've made over 150 records with people or on assignment. I did like three albums with Eric Kloss on the Prestige label. Then I got, from my recording with Herbie Mann, Nesuhi Ertegun heard me on those recordings and signed me to Atlantic Records.

Maxine Gordon: What year was that?

Jimmy Owens: '67.

Maxine Gordon: You were only 24.

Jimmy Owens: Right. I won the Downbeat poll for New Star/Talent Deserving Wider Recognition. At that particular time, I guess that made Nesuhi Ertegun interested. He called me to sign me to Atlantic Records. When I went in, he was going to produce me alone. Then, he got Joel Don to produce. I said, "Well"—I want, I wanted to do an album. Me and Kenny Barron had been talking about doing an album together. We had been playing a lot together. Kenny Barron, Chris White, and Rudy Collins was Dizzy Gillespie's rhythm section. I would bump into them with Lionel Hampton, Hank Crawford, Charles Mingus, those different bands I worked with, they were still working with Dizzy all of that time. We'd bump into each other at various places. Kenny and I planned on doing a record together when we were younger than 19. It had gone till 1967, so how old was I?

Maxine Gordon: 24.

Jimmy Owens: Yeah. I think I was 23, not quite 24.

Maxine Gordon: It wasn't December.

Jimmy Owens: We did this album, Moody was going to be our saxophonist, but then he got called out of town with Dizzy for a long tour. So, we used Benny Maupin, who was pretty new on the scene. He had been around but he had not recorded a whole lot. I used that rhythm section: Kenny, Chris and Rudy Collins. Then, on one of the two sessions, I used Freddie Waits to play drums. We recorded an album called "You Had Better Listen" in 1967. Kenny Barron contributed two songs, or something like that, maybe three. I contributed one song, we played a standard "The Night We Call To The Day." It was a lot of fun, then I went for about three years with no recordings. Nobody signed me.

Maxine Gordon: After that one record for Atlantic?

Jimmy Owens: After that one record for Atlantic, yes. I think I got three percent, which I had to split with Kenny Barron. (Laughs) But, when I recorded my song, "You Had Better Listen," the publishing went alone to Jimmy Owens. All of my recordings, anything published, always belonged to me. I never shared publishing, or gave publishing away to the record company. Again, that's Donald Byrd, that's Randy Weston, who helped me.

Maxine Gordon: That's the second time you've mentioned Randy Weston, but how did he help you?

Jimmy Owens: Randy Weston was somebody who was around that, when I bumped into him, I asked him, "Can I get some lead sheets of your music." Like I said, the record companies, Blue Note and Prestige and whatever Bob Shad's record company was, they didn't have any lead sheets for all of these songs that they published. Randy Weston said, "Sure, come by! We're having a meeting up at 135th street about the organization to help musicians. Come by there and bring you some lead sheets." So, I went up there—I should say I went down from the Bronx to 135th street. This place was over a funeral parlor, and that's where they were having the meeting. Randy Weston gave me a stack of about an inch of his lead sheets. One of the things he said was, "You've gotta have your stuff written out if you want people to record it." This was all professionally done and wonderful. Then, you know, he would tell me things about publishing, and that was corroborated with Donald Byrd. Then, when Cannonball Adderley was around, I knew Cannonball from the Newport Youth Band. You know…the Newport Youth Band had a lot of guests. Our last concert, Ernie Wilkins wrote a piece for our alto saxophone, Andy Marsala and Cannonball Adderley. That particular work, we recorded that, up at Newport Jazz Festival in 1960.

[Recording Stops]

Maxine Gordon: (Laughs) Jimmy Owens part three. Could we just go back a little bit to Marshall Brown, I know we're taking us a few years back to the Newport Youth Band, because maybe you could talk about him and how that influenced you, and the importance of that.

Jimmy Owens: The most important thing about Marshall Brown was, his whole concept was to train us, the students, and you had to leave the band when you were 17. When I was in the band, I was 16 years old. You had to leave the band at 16, and what he wanted to have happen was that you were a thorough professional, that you understood what it was like and what you had to do to be a professional. That you could read and interpret any music that was put in front of you, that you understood about being on time before time, you know? One o'clock rehearsal? You saxophone players are there at quarter to

one. Twelve thirty, getting your reed together. All of that kind of stuff, he taught us about being professional musicians. The guys who came out of the band who became professional musicians were good professionals. The problem is, many of them got hung up into lifestyle problems: getting strung out, getting various substance abuse problems. Two trumpet players died, that kind of situation, after they were out in the professional world. Andy Marsala got burnt out. He was such a start at 15, and 16, by the time he was 20 he was burnt out. He moved to Chicago and started to write jingles. We had a reunion, the first reunion was a 15-year reunion, it was 1975, and I had it at my house. The next reunion we had was a 40-year reunion. 40 years? No, it can't be 40. 25 years. I was coming in from Europe, and it was in New Jersey at Larry Rosen's house. I came in from Europe and Joe Orange was waiting for me at my house to drive us over there. Joe was in the youth band also. We always got each other gigs, you know? I talked up Joe Orange just like Garnett Brown talked me up to go to Lionel Hampton, you know? When we walked into Larry's house, the first thing I see is a Miles Davis original painting that he had. Mind you, I told you that him and his partner sold the record company for 40 million dollars. He told us the story, at one time at IAJE, he told us the story of how the built GRP records. Finally, he ended with the fact that we negotiated and sold it. He told the people the price, you know, it was very nice.

Maxine Gordon: He lives in Florida right?

Jimmy Owens: I think he still lives out in Jersey, I think he has a house out in Jersey. He may have retired out to Florida because he was on his boat, sailing around or whatever.

Maxine Gordon: The other thing I wanted to go back to is Duke Ellington, when exactly did you work with Duke?

Jimmy Owens: I worked with Duke Ellington in 1968. I came back off of the road to work with Duke Ellington, I worked with him for about three months and I asked for a sum of money that, if I were to have researched, I would have found out that nobody in Duke Ellington's band made $550 a months—I mean a week. That's what I asked for. Duke was so nice. He says, "Jimmy, it's unfortunate that a little thing like economics is going to keep a talent like you, from joining an organization like ours." I loved it. (Laughs) But, I was making lots of money in New York. I was making six or seven hundred dollars each week in New York. This is before the David Frost Show, you know? I told him, "I can go out for a minimum of $500 a week." I think everybody in that band, most of them, were making $300 or something like that. But, the experience with Duke was wonderful. Just seeing him do the film "Change Your Mind" He had written a couple of things, but then, the rest of this stuff was [him] going to the piano and playing something. He says, "You play (scats Duke's singing different melodies to different players). Let me hear that. Uh huh. How long is this next cue? Is the guy

running down the street? Yeah, it's twelve seconds? Okay. Fine. Let's do it." Then they'd play and it was perfect. He'd say, "Can you play that backwards on screen, the film" They would do it, and that's how they did this movie. And change your mind was about a black man's mind being put into a white man's body, who became president or something. I can't remember all that, but I want to get a copy of that movie. I have to find where I can get it.

Maxine Gordon: When did you first leave the country? I mean, get your passport.

Jimmy Owens: 1966, I went to Japan.

Maxine Gordon: So you're 23.

Jimmy Owens: I went to Japan with Herbie Mann.

Maxine Gordon: You went and got…that was the first time you had a passport?

Jimmy Owens: I think so. Then I wound up going to Japan twice before I even went to Europe. It was very interesting. I went again later on in 1966 with a drum tour. It was Tony Williams, Elvin Jones, Art Blakey, McCoy Tyner, Ben Tucker on bass, Wayne Shorter and myself. We played for about a week and Tony Williams got busted. We were all informed by George Wein about no narcotics. I never had a problem like that so it didn't matter for me. But, no narcotics of any kind. If you were walking in crowds of people, put your hands in your pockets so nobody can put anything in your pockets. Because, he had two previous tours where musicians were busted. Okay? So, consequently that was a bad situation when Tony got busted, and then a couple of days later Elvin got busted. Now when Tony got busted, they replaced him at first with this Japanese drummer who played exactly like Art Blakey. He copied Art Blakey, he was the Art Blakey of Japan. So the Japanese are saying to themselves, "Wow, its amazing how Art Blakey plays like Yamaguchi." (Laughs) Then, finally, they had Kenny Clarke come in. Kenny played about three concerts with us, that was the first time I had met him. We got to like each other and talk, "Why don't we have breakfast tomorrow morning." "Okay, yeah." "Alright, before we leave, I'll see you downstairs at eight o'clock." "Fine." So, I go downstairs at eight o'clock and everybody's milling around. From the band I hear, "Hey, you hear what happened to Kenny?" I said, "Oh, man." All I'm thinking is that he had another heart attack and died. He says, "Man, the cops came in the middle of the night, packed up his stuff, took him to the airport and put him on a plane back to Paris because he came in on a tourist Visa instead of a work permit." They were on us. You know, I can understand. So, that was an unfortunate tour.

Maxine Gordon: Well, did Tony get out and go back with you. Did he have to stay in Japan?

Jimmy Owens: Tony stayed in Japan for six months in jail. Elvin stayed for quite sometime in jail. It was on that tour that Elvin met Keiko. She was on the train, and everybody said—Art Blakey said, "Man, you better leave that bitch alone. She's probably the cops." It wound up that he got together with Keiko. So, when he got busted, they had a picture of him coming out of the hotel with her on his arm, being arrested for narcotics. He didn't have any narcotics. I mean, he may have had reefer, but I don't think he had any. I also don't believe that Tony squealed on him. I think that they were doing that. I have to tell you, Ben Tucker and I, we were really the two straightest guys on the tour. McCoy had his situation and Wayne had his situation. I would go out of the hotel, me and Ben would laugh about this stuff because it was happening to him to. I'd go out of the hotel and there'd be a guy out there with a newspaper reading. I'd walk left and I'd walk about a half a block and then—ZOOM—turn around and walk back. This guy would put up his newspaper and he'd turn around walk back. It was unbelievable! It was like Keystone cops, what they were doing with us. So, that tour, we didn't do three weeks. We wound up doing about two weeks. George Wein paid, I think we got paid all the money.

Maxine Gordon: When did you go to Europe?

Jimmy Owens: 1967. I went with Attila Zoller.

Maxine Gordon: Say who he was.

Jimmy Owens: Attila Zoller is a, was a….

Maxine Gordon: Is or was?

Jimmy Owens: …was a very fine guitarist. He died a number of years ago. He was a very fine guitarist. He was a gypsy and he played with Herbie Mann before I was with Herbie Mann. That's when I met him, actually, you know. We liked the way each other played and he invited me to go to Europe with him. We had gigs in Düsseldorf, and gigs at the Berlin Jazz Festival. Then, I started to go to Europe—actually, after that tour with him, I stayed and I went to Holland. There, I had friends that I had met in Japan. Yap, and his wife Tayer Lutiker. He flew for KLM, and he set up some recording for me with the Metropole Orchestra. That was [one of] my first recording with the Metropole Orchestra. I was not too certain about writing for full orchestra; this is a 90-piece orchestra. So, I got Tom McIntosh to write two things for me. I recorded those, and recorded something else that they had for me. I went back—and it came off nicely. I went back the next year and I

wrote all of the music myself. I recorded four things with the orchestra. Over the years, I must have recorded about 25 of my musical compositions with the Metropole Orchestra, and with various big bands. Then, I would always do concerts with small groups. I'm the one who kind of turned on some of my friends who could do this kind of stuff, giving them names and whatnot of who to contact in Europe and they would get work. Some of them have not been reciprocal.

Maxine Gordon: I know we are moving chronologically, but I just wanted to ask you about trumpet players. One of the things that I've noticed about your career is how you have stayed in touch and looked out for the older trumpet players. How did you start meeting the ones from other generations? Talk about them.

Jimmy Owens: The trumpet players and the musicians from the other generations? I think that comes from me and my friend Joe Orange. Joe Orange was a trombonist, we worked—I got him with Lionel Hampton, he was with Eddie Palmieri, he worked with numerous people like that. His uncle was J.C. Hickenbottom. We used to go down to the Metropole when J.C. was working there, and we couldn't go in because we were too young, but we'd stand outside and hear the band play. Then, when they came off the bandstand, they had to come all the way to the door to go down the stairs to the dressing room, at which point he would say, "Uncle J.C., Uncle J.C." J.C. would see him and invite us in. So, I met Buster Bailey, and the first thing I asked him was, "How do you hold that note so long?" He says, "Well, it's a way that I know how to breathe where I can blow air out and I can take air in at the same time." I said, "Oh." So, I went home and tried to practice that. I had snot coming out of my nose! (Laughs) I practiced it for about a week and I couldn't get anything to happen, then all of the sudden, about two weeks later I felt like I had to hiccup when I was playing. I said, "Oh, wow, I took a breath." That's when I started the circular breathing; it was about 1960 by that time. A long with Buster Bailey, it was Roy Eldridge or Charlie Shavers or Red Allen, you know? So, I got to meet these people from J.C. and whatnot. As a matter of fact, in 1973, I did an interview for eight hours over three different days for J.C. for the Smithsonian. It's in the archives. It was educator Leonard Gornes, Donald Byrd, and myself, the three of us interviewed him. So, I guess that's what it was being around the older musicians like that. Then, I started to see the fact that they weren't with the moneyed people of this industry, they were struggling. Making this gig to pay whatever, you know, it wasn't a lot of money they were making. That started to give me an education about the stuff that I'm sure was all part of my activism after that.

Maxine Gordon: When did you meet Dizzy?

Jimmy Owens: I met Dizzy in 1959, the first time. Then, when I was working with Slide Hampton in '62 or '63, we worked in Virginia Beach. I keep saying, I'm going to have to

dig up the date. We worked in Virginia Beach and Dizzy's group came down and played at the convention center to do a concert. I said I have to look up the date, because it's the—two or three days before Slide Hampton worked on the boardwalk at a place called the Gaslight, we couldn't stay on the boardwalk. We had to stay in peoples' homes. They had passed a decree desegregating the beach.

Maxine Gordon: What year is this?

Jimmy Owens: That's what I'm saying, I think it's '63?

Maxine Gordon: We're talking about Atlantic City with a segregated beach?

Jimmy Owens: Virginia Beach.

Maxine Gordon: Oh, Virginia Beach, sorry. I thought you said Atlantic City.

Jimmy Owens: And, there were no black people who were going into the beach. Here we are, we're from New York. There's a couple of white guys in the band and we decided: okay, lets go to beach tomorrow. So, we go to the beach down by the club that we were working. Let's see, Joe Farrell was in the band, Eddie Deal played guitar, Garnett Brown played trombone, Floyd Brady, we called him "Trombonski", he was the oldest guy in the band. So, it was three trombones, two trumpets, me and Martin Banks. So, we all go down to the beach and Eddie Deal is doing these handstands in the sand, and he has his wife with him. He had brought his wife. She says, "Darling, can you put the suntan lotion on me?" He says, "Alright, hold on, my hands are all sandy. Jimmy, can you put the suntan lotion on her?" I'm friendly with them so I say, "No problem." She has a bikini on. She's lying down on her stomach and I'm rubbing suntan lotion on her. Slide Hampton says, "Hey man, when you get a chance look over your shoulder." So, I looked over my shoulder and the boardwalk is filled with all these white people looking at us. They're like, "Who's this a black man rubbing suntan lotion on this white woman with a bikini on, on our beach!" At this point, we had three weeks in this club. The owner of the club said, "I don't mind that you're going to the beach, but don't go down in front of the club. Go down a little further." That kind of irked Slide and we called this gig an end after two weeks. We came to some kind of agreement. That was a funny situation. Then, with—integrating the beach, we went to the beach a couple of times after that. I know people who are from Virginia Beach, and I guess I can ask them if they know when the beach was integrated.

Maxine Gordon: It might be in the paper.

Jimmy Owens: It's probably on the Internet or something, when the beach was integrated.

Maxine Gordon: I guess that was before Slide Hampton moved to Europe.

Jimmy Owens: Oh, this was much before.

Maxine Gordon: But that kind of incident, when you would see him in Europe he would list…

Jimmy Owens: Most of the musicians that moved to Europe—that's why they moved to Europe, because of the segregation in American and how that affected them musically. You know, what they could not do. If the ones who stayed didn't move to Europe, then they got substance abuse problems to kind of bury all of that stuff.

Maxine Gordon: What about meeting Louis Armstrong?

Jimmy Owens: I met Louis Armstrong in Atlantic City. The Newport Youth Band worked at the steel pier, and we worked all out on the steel pier. Louis Armstrong worked in the middle of the steel pier. Our shows alternated. So, we would play and then he would go on and I would run back to where he was and always catch his show, everyday for a week. After about the third day I said, "Damn!" I got to meet him and he gave me some of his soave and we talked and what not. But, I said, "Damn! He's playing the same solos." Now, I'm a player listening to Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, and Clifford Brown, never played the same solos, never worked anything out. I came to understand about a year later, that it was harder to play that same exact solo, which was challenging, then to create a new one every time. So, I met him then in 1959, I had times when I would go and see him someplace in New York and he would remember me somehow being a trumpet player. I really didn't get to know him until 1969 when I was a part of the recording session that Oliver Nelson did with Louis Armstrong. I had to take off the David Frost show, and I begged Billy. He said, "alright." So I did this recording session and it was part of a party also for Louis Armstrong for his 70th birthday. That's what it was, I think. Then, I played it at the Newport Jazz Festival in a big tribute to him for his 70th birthday. Dizzy Gillespie, Ray Natz, Joe Newman, I can't remember all of the other trumpet players.

Maxine Gordon: Well, there's a videotape of it.

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, there's a videotape of it. I played—we were supposed to do a tribute to him. So, all of the trumpet players played a song, acted like Louis Armstrong or something. They all got up there and said, "I am Louis' 'A' fan!" A trumpet player

mentioned that. Joe Newman went up there and said, "Well, I'm Louis' 'A number1' fan!" When it came time for me, I mean all I could say was, "Well, I'm Louis' Armstrong's youngest fan!" That got written up all in the papers and everything. I played "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," for him.

Maxine Gordon: Solo.

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, and I just played that with piano. Everybody played with the whole group, but I just played that with piano. I ended on a very, very low not on the flugelhorn that's not on the horn really. Pops always commented on the low notes I played. I think I'm going to give you a copy of the videotape so you can see the performance. They put it out a year ago or so. There was a lot of heavy negotiation on my part to get paid. They were not going to pay me. Or, they were going to pay me a very, very small amount of money of which I got ten times that amount.

Maxine Gordon: It was a very great event, very memorable.

Jimmy Owens: All they were doing is talking about, "Well, we just gave Louis Armstrong so much and…" And I said, "Hey, Louis Armstrong has so much money! He's dead, his foundation has…" I said, "I'm not even talking about Louis Armstrong, I'm talking about Jimmy Owens. This is what has to happen." Between lawyers and whatnot, we settled the matter. I didn't go to his funeral because something had happened when he died. I remembered that Charlie Shavers, a great trumpet player, was in the hospital. Louis Armstrong died like on the 7th of July. Charlie Shavers had a wreath made like a trumpet. He sent that to Louis Armstrong, he sent that to the funeral, and then Charlie Shavers died on the ninth of July. Charlie Shavers was one of my favorite trumpet players. I had a favorite record when I was four or five years old. And my father could say, "Jimmy, go get your record and play it." I could go get this record. It was a picture record. I can show it to you. I'd play it.

Maxine Gordon: What's a picture record?

Jimmy Owens: It was a picture on both sides of the record.

Maxine Gordon: A 78?

Jimmy Owens: Yes, I'll show it to you. I would go would get this record and play it. On one side, it was called "She's Funny That Way" and on the other side was "Dizzy's Dilemma."

Maxine Gordon: How old were you?

Jimmy Owens: Maybe five or six.

Maxine Gordon: And they you grew up to know Charlie Shavers until the end of his life.

Jimmy Owens: Right.

Maxine Gordon: That's very unusual isn't it?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, I was not very good friends with Charlie Shavers, I was friends with him. We had played together a couple of times and I had sat in on situations like that. I always respected him and he was fantastic. All these musicians, they made enough money to leave their apartments in Harlem and buy a home somewhere in Queens. Then, as time went on, St. Albans became the place that was better than Queens. Louis Armstrong lived in Queens his whole life. Dizzy Gillespie lived a couple of blocks from him. But, Dizzy then sold his house and moved to Inglewood, New Jersey. So, I mean, that's what was happening as these musicians made money, they bought their homes. But, they had no security from the standpoint of having a pension. Like I said, the pension fund just started in 1959. Most of those musicians had made their money in the 30's, 40's and 50's, before the pension fund. They never got part of the—became part of the pension fund, so they never built up a pension. Even someone like Dizzy, that, between 1959 and when he died in 1992, if he had known about the pension fund and if I had known about it really, to inform him. He could have had a pension of $5,000 or $6,000 a month paid to him. It was the same with Roy Eldridge. All the years he worked at Jimmy Ryan's he could have had a pension. But, the American Federation of Musicians was not about protecting Jazz musicians, especially black jazz musicians. It was only when I started working with the union earnestly, was in 1996. That's when I started to find out about all this stuff, and try to hip other musicians about the pension, about the ways that you can make the union work for yourself. You know, how to do that kind of stuff. Some people took advantage of it.

Maxine Gordon: What made you get involved with the union? Even though we are moving ahead, I had no idea that it was that late that you got involved with the union.

Jimmy Owens: Well, I mean I was a union member, like I said, from 1959. But, I got involved only from the standpoint of probable. I got a call from Harry Belafonte's office. Harry Belafonte was coming back on the scene. He was going to do a concert at Lincoln Center, or Carnegie Hall, I think it was Carnegie Hall. They wanted me in the trumpet section. I said, "Fine." This is like three months before, so Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson was going to arrange the music, and he had said, "I want Jimmy Owens in the trumpet

section." Somehow something happens where he wasn't following through writing the music on the schedule that he was supposed to. So, two weeks before, the contractor calls me and says, "We have to cancel that date." I said, "Well, are you going to pay us." He says, "No. We cancelled your date." I said, "Well I've had this on my book for three months and I've given up work." So, I wound up taking it to the union and the union made them pay us. When I called some of the other musicians who were on this gig, nobody would go and do this, I mean, even some of the very well known musicians who had years and years. So, I went and reported the stuff and that's how I got involved. People at the union then, Bill Dennison, Susan Borenstein, they were involved heavily with the union and they said, "Well, we should start a jazz committee." I said, "Well, I tried to do that and Grady Tate and Ron Carter and myself walked out of the first meeting when the then president said some stuff that was really ridiculous and that we couldn't do anything until we got some Latin musicians there." I said, "It was your job to get Latin musicians here, we got the jazz musicians, this is a jazz committee." So, they started some kind of jazz committee but it didn't do anything. But, in 1996, I then started along with Benny Powell, Jameel Nasser, and Bob Cranshaw. It was the jazz committee and Benny Powell named the jazz advisory committee. We were going to advise the union how to work with the jazz musician community. Benny Powell was on that Harry Belafonte gig. When I said, "Hey man I'm going to go to the union," he said, "You go to the union, that's alright, I'm busy." Then, he came in and we started this jazz advisory committee in '96 and we started with the general idea of helping jazz artists who were working, okay? So, we contacted the people who were working, and working a lot, to inform them about the pension fund. We got a number of musicians, Billy Taylor, signed the agreement. He started to pay pension for all of his musicians. Ahmad Jamal signed the agreement and started to pay pension for all of his musicians as well as himself. Like I said, Dizzy Gillespie didn't know about this, Dizzy's pension when he died was $89 a month. It's ridiculous. So, we were very successful with our campaign. We got a lot of musicians over the years to sign agreements to start their own corporation so their corporations could be their employer. The idea was to help makes sure that we weren't going to have the Duke Ellington situation, the Count Basie situation where musicians work their whole lives and get to be an age in their sixties and have nothing. As I would tell people all the time, the bus driver is going to get a pension, the person that's selling the metro cards in the subway is going to get a pension, why shouldn't you get a pension? The mechanism is there, if the mechanism wasn't there, I could understand it.

Maxine Gordon: When do you think that idea, you know, that finally came to be organized that late in the 90's, when did you start thinking in that way.

Jimmy Owens: I started thinking about it in that way when I had to pull together my mother and my father's finances when they were getting older. My mother was very secretive about her finances. Only she knew about it, and maybe my brother Brent who

she would ask to drive her to…when she wasn't able to drive herself anymore, drive her to the bank so she could renew this C.D. that she had. This was at the time that C.D's were paying 18 and 20 percent. She managed to put away quite a bit of money during her life working as a New York City employee. She got a pension, she got social security, when she died in 2002, and her social security was more than my father's. He got a bump up. My father worked at the post office for 30 years, 1937 to 1967. His pension, he had a pension from the post-office, not social security. He worked from 1967 until 1977 for the Rockefeller Brothers' foundation. He was like a messenger, but he was a glorified messenger. He dealt with the president and the upper echelon getting a passport, getting a visa, he would have to go to the embassies and get that type of stuff. His pension from the Rockefeller Brothers was almost as much as his pension from the post office after 30 years. And when he died, I mean before he died, he was getting something like $4,400 a month. The house was paid for, you know, lots of money. The difference between what my mother was making and what he was making, you know and his social security. So, it made me think about it when I had to pull their finances together. I started to think about all of my idols: does so-and-so have this much money? Then, all of my friends who were in and of my age that I worked with, Richard Williams, Lonnie Hillyer, and Hobart Dotson was dead by that time, but so many other musicians who had nothing. I said, "I definitely don't want to be in that situation." I had always been a saver I had always saved money, like I said, when I was on the road I always-carried a one hundred dollar bill. $100 was a lot of money. When we were driving across the desert and Hank Crawford refused to fill up the tank here before we got into the desert, because it was too expensive, but we had enough gas to get across, and we ran out of gas. It was my $100 that had to buy the gas in the middle of the desert! And gas was cheap for that time. So, it came in handy a couple of times. So, I think that that's how I got to, you know, being around the older musicians and respecting them. Meeting them and respecting them, and seeing their plight…

Maxine Gordon: Well, it's one thing for you to say, "I'm not going to…this isn't going to be me. I don't want to live like that. I mean, that I want to prepare for my future." Because it you saw how your mother saved, and came from a stable background like you did. But, it's another thing to reach out and try to help other people see what you saw. So, I'm wondering, what do you think that is about you?

Jimmy Owens: I think what that is just me giving back. I recall how Randy Weston and Donald Byrd, and talking to Horace Silver and Cannonball Adderley, and all of these musicians, Nat Adderley, how they gave me information freely. Kenny Dorham, I'd ask a question and they'd answer it the best they could. J.J Johnson, I remember when J.J. was working with Miles, I went to see Miles at the Vanguard and…So, they all knew me as the trumpet player, not the trumpet player that they would call for their band, J.J. Johnson, but as the young trumpet player. He says, "What are you reading there?" I

showed him the book. He says, “Hindu Myth? That’s the stuff I’m studying right now!” I said, “Yeah, I’m glad!” So, we would get a relationship there. I think back on how all of these people were so free with their information to me. That’s what made me want to give back whenever I could. Whenever anyone asks me a question I would try to answer it with the best of my ability. By the time the book *This Business of Music* came out in 1963, I bought a copy and was reading through that, I had a lot more information to add to what had been discussed from other times. So, that’s when I started to talk to musicians about, “Hey, do you have a publishing company?” “No.” “Well, you should start a publishing company. Are you with BMI, or are you with ASCAP?” All of the business stuff, I just tried to give out information as free as possible. Later on, I started to teach courses for the organization we started, the Collective of Black Artists.

Maxine Gordon: Did you find everybody receptive to the idea?

Jimmy Owens: I found some people receptive, I found others kind of puzzled. You know, “Hey man, you could go buy this book. It cost $15.” Three months later I’d get a call, “Hey listen man, so-and-so just recorded my song.” “Well, didn’t you buy the book as I told you to?” “Oh, no man I didn’t have that money.” “Well, you must have put that much up you nose or, you know, smoked that much!” So, that’s how some of that stuff really worked out. Many musicians didn’t learn about the stuff and about protecting themselves for the future.

Maxine Gordon: Did you know Gigi Gryce?

Jimmy Owens: I met Gigi Gryce around Donald Byrd. I want to say that many years later, I played a concert at a school in Queens and Gigi was teaching there. We got to talking at that time. He had his Muslim name. He was a wonderful person; he was tired. He was tired of doing the stuff he had been doing and not seeing the results. I want to say, I’ve tried my best not to get tired. But, I’ve seen the people that I tried to help go down the drain. It hurts; it hurts a whole lot. Not taking heed that is going to be beneficial.

Maxine Gordon: I mention Gigi Gryce, and you know why I mentioned him, because Gigi Gryce was one of the first jazz musicians to talk about publishing and protecting you rights, and unions, and being a member. According to what we’ve heard, because of that, he was…

Jimmy Owens: Blacklisted.

Maxine Gordon: Do you call it black listed?

Jimmy Owens: White listed. (Laughs).

Maxine Gordon: Yeah, he was banned from advancing his career and recording. He becomes an example, it's true, who stepped up to inform people who didn't know. Because how would you know, nobody tells you?

Jimmy Owens: Well, I have to say, I get a feeling that a large part of my life is just like that. Record companies didn't sign me, they signed other trumpet players who could play. I could play also! Maybe I knew too much, I was passing on too much information to too many people. I went many years without a recording contract.

Maxine Gordon: Well, you have always been out spoken and advocating for other people. You knew what kind of money was involved so you knew what kind of money could be paid. One thing we know about the record business is that they try to undercut the price.

Jimmy Owens: The business, not the record business, just the business.

Maxine Gordon: Yes.

Jimmy Owens: The music industry.

Maxine Gordon: It's been very hard to raise the income level of jazz musicians over the years. I have been retired from this business for a long time, and now I come out and ask the question about what type of money these young players make in the club and so on. They're making the same money they were making in the 80s.

Jimmy Owens: That's right!

Maxine Gordon: And the cost of living has increased considerably. So, this is not good. Are they in the union? No!

Jimmy Owens: Well, many musicians are not in the union now. But, at the same time, I can't blame them for not joining the union because the union, the local 802 in New York City, just from 1996 started to take jazz musicians somewhat serious. I have to say, we built it up to a very high level of taking jazz musicians serious. Then, the new administration came in, and it's been down from there. Two years ago, very little has been done for jazz.

Maxine Gordon: I want to talk about Billy Taylor. Should we leave that or should we talk about Billy now?

Kennith Kimery: There's like seven minutes left or so.

Maxine Gordon: That's not enough for Billy Taylor. Is there something in seven minutes?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah, I think pulling some strings together; we talk about me going on the road in the early 60s with Lionel Hampton and whatnot. One of the things I was really about is seeing how these masterful musicians controlled their audiences. So, how Lionel Hampton, and how Charles Mingus did it, and then to see how Thad Jones did it was an education. Clark Terry, Hank Crawford, how they each did it. Herbie Mann, you know? That was a learning process for me, and that's a very, very important learning process. They each had a following and it wasn't only their performed music that made that following, and how they performed that music, it was how they dealt with themselves on the bandstand also. How they gave of themselves on the bandstand to this audience. Lionel Hampton hit the cymbal, the cymbal fell, hit the lady in the first seat in the club. It cut her head, right across her head, and he was down there signing autographs for her, giving her records, and she did not sue him.

Maxine Gordon: What's interesting about that, what you've just said, that you learn from those people, was it's not dependent on having a hit record or having a record deal. This is what happens when people go on the road and communicate with their audience, that audience comes back forever. Lionel Hampton had his audience; he had the 40s at the end.

Jimmy Owens: That's one of the bad things about the certain musicians who have gone under to the record industry; dealt with the record industry that you have to have a hit record or you're not going to work. Well, that's not how Billy Eckstine dealt with it. That's not how Charlie Parker dealt with it, or Art Tatum, you know, or Miles Davis. Their performances were so strong, and the records they put out were strong, even if they didn't get pushed enough, they had an audience. I have a dear friend that I'm always talking about this to, he can't work unless he had a hit record. He's been sucked into this kind of concept.

Maxine Gordon: Well, also, in terms of jazz history, one of the problems is that certain people who tell the history of jazz, tell it through recordings. So, you know, you're born, you went on the road, you made a record, and you died. So, if you don't follow this idea, you leave out the rest of this and the bands that are beloved these people not based on the record, but based on something they heard. Then, they buy the record. They're looking for the record because they heard something.

Jimmy Owens: Then, seeing the any number of musicians from the time that I first started to work on the road, and seeing how their lives have not been as great as what I thought they were. Meeting the musicians of other eras and playing with them, seeing that their lives were not all that great from the standpoint of economics, like the people who produced their records, or the people who promote their concerts. They had much more money. There have been a couple of good people out there who have helped musicians, and at the same time, there have been a lot of bad people who have not helped musicians when they've gained the money from those musicians in years and years of performance. So, in looking at that, it made me think about what I wanted for my life and those around me, not just my family, but those musicians around me also. So, I think that, in part, made me become the activist that I have become. At the same time, I'm always practicing because, music first.

Maxine Gordon: This is the Smithsonian Institution isn't it? I thought so.

Jimmy Owens: So, you did Tom McIntosh?

Kennith Kimery: I'm waiting; Tom is supposed to be in town for a recording session. We are trying to coordinate it.

Jimmy Owens: Recording sessions can be far off

Kennith Kimery: Yeah, he put me in touch so I have to call him when I get back. We'll see.

Jimmy Owens: He gave me the impression that he had done it already.

Kennith Kimery: We're working trying to schedule it. Okay, you're on.

Maxine Gordon: This is day two of the NEA Jazz Masters interview with Jimmy Owens, recipient of the A.B. Spellman NEA Jazz Masters Award for Jazz advocacy. It's Sunday, September 11th 2011. Maxine Gordon, interviewer, Ken Kimery, audio and video, location is Jimmy Owens' beautiful apartment in Manhattan. Day two, here we go. Is there anything from day one that we should go back and reiterate or expand on?

Jimmy Owens: If we are talking about chronological things, during the process of working in New York after I came off the road from 1966. In 1967 I started to teach. My first teaching situation was with the great bass player, who worked with me and worked with Dizzy Gillespie, Chris White. He had a school called Rhythm Associates, and at first they taught rhythm sections then they added me and Bill Baron to teach saxophone and trumpet. So, that was my first teaching experience and from that that I then got a few

students who were very interesting in studying, and I started to teach some more privately.

Maxine Gordon: Where was that?

Jimmy Owens: I taught in my house. The private studio, the Rhythm Associates was up on 85th street and Columbus Avenue where Chris lived. He had a wonderful apartment, which was like a doctors apartment. It had about 900 rooms and entranceways and exits, so it worked out very nice. We did many concerts there also.

Maxine Gordon: Anything else from that period?

Jimmy Owens: I never really talked about the beginnings of the Thad Jones band and how we rehearsed every Monday, like I said, at midnight, I talked about that, then when we started to work at the Village Vanguard it was always very interesting. The first night of the Village Vanguard, I think that's 1966, at that particular time jazz clubs were in terrible shape in New York. They were open most of the time Fridays and Saturdays. A big club could be open Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Maybe, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, but the rest of the week they were closed because the business was so bad. When Max Gordon approached Thad Jones about going into the Vanguard, it was about Monday night, which was a dark night basically in New York. Broadway shows were dark, so people wanted a place to go, he felt. So, he advertised the firs Monday night. I take a cab from my house, I was living at 19th street and Park Avenue South. I take a cab to the Vanguard and when I get to the Vanguard I see a line of people that goes up to 11th street and around the corner. I said, "Well, what is that?" And as I get to the Vanguard, that was the line to get into the club. It was packed! They had to turn people away from there. Every Monday night, it was almost like that, there was never an empty seat in the house. Max once said that he made his whole nut on that one Monday night, on Monday night, for the rest of the week no matter who he brought in! That was very interesting. I was working with a number of big bands in the trumpet section. Clark Terry had started a big band; I had left Thad and Mel because I went to Japan. Thad and Mel continued to work there, and then Thad started to call me to do subs for people who were not able to make a gig for one reason or another. I went to California; I played Boston Jazz Festival and a number of other things. It was very, very nice. Clark Terry had a big band, one of the fantastic things we did was play the inauguration of Mayor Gary, in…I forgot his name now…in Gary, Indiana. [It was] the first black Mayor in the United States, elected mayor, and Clark Terry was called in to play the inaugural ball or dance or whatnot. That was very nice and important. I had lots of things like that, then after Billy Taylor called me, I had to cut down on some of my recording work when I would get called. Because, if I got called to do a record date from 4 to 7, well I had to work at four o'clock so I couldn't do those record dates and whatnot. I was making enough money or the David

Frost show that I didn't miss much of that. But, when we started to work sometimes three days, I found myself going to colleges on the days off. I was booked for those particular things; I had a manager that was booking me and my group, Jimmy Owens Plus, from 1969. That was Anne Summers Management. She had been the manager for the group we had put together called the New York Jazz Sextet. The sextet was an outgrowth of what Tom McIntosh was interested in doing writing wise. So, originally it was Tom McIntosh, Benny Golson and myself. Roland Hanna, Bar Phillips [on] bass, and Freddie Waits [on] drums. Slowly but surely, people got busy and whatnot, Bar Phillips moved to Europe, Benny Golson moved to California. So, we replaced Benny with Hubert Laws, who was playing tenor saxophone as wells all of the flutes piccolo. We replaced Bar Phillips with Ron Carter, and after Freddie Waits left, replaced him with Billy Cobham. So, we had a very good group. We were working an average of two concerts a month. We were making good money at that particular time for a group. We were going out and making anywhere between $3,500 and $4,500 for a concert. The clubs didn't pay that for a week for most people. Dizzy wasn't making that to go to a club for a week. That kind of situation was happening. So, Anne Summers started booking some college concerts for me. So, I started doing some concerts, not only with the quartet, I called it Jimmy Owens Quartet. Then as time went on, I added a singer, and then it was then quartet plus one. First it was quartet plus, then quartet plus one. I started doing more concerts. The David Frost show went until 1972, I think in May. The show ended and I think I had two days, and then I left for Europe and I did concerts with my quartet in Europe. I did one concert with the group, sent them back, then I stayed in Europe and did a lot of recording. I did things in Holland and in Germany with their musicians. I recorded a few times before with the Metropole Orchestra in Holland. I mentioned that Tom McIntosh had written two arrangements for me. Then, the next year, 1969, I started to write stuff for myself. So, by 1972, I was very well versed in writing for the orchestra, for orchestra's period. I started to do more writing and more recoding in Holland, in Germany. That was all very good. I was making money and having fun.

Maxine Gordon: When did you go on the State Department? When did you go on that, was that later?

Jimmy Owens: I didn't start State Department stuff till much later. How that came about—like I said, the David Frost show went until 1992…

Maxine Gordon: 72.

Jimmy Owens: I mean 72. I had been called to play a dedication to Duke Ellington up at Yale University, by Willie Ruff, he had put this together. They had Ellington to name three individuals on each instrument that he felt very highly about to honor. So, he had Dizzy Gillespie, Roy Eldridge, and Cootie Williams on trumpet. For each person, each

group of people, they had a person who was going to play a dedication to those individuals. I was selected to do the trumpet. I did that. Richard Davis was selected to do the bass. Willie Rolf, Dwight Mitchell were selected to do the pianists. It was a really wonderful situation. It extended into vocalists and we had the great, great singer who, all-times not just jazz, Mr. Robeson. He was one of the people who Duke had selected. It was very, very heart warming, not only that I was selected, but when I got up there, I just thought about the tremendous artistic history that was there behind me. All I could think of doing in performing is trying to perform up to that level. So, I played "Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen," which was a very special song to me. I ended that with a slow blues, this is just me, no rhythm section or anything. From that, one of the people who was there was Walter Anderson, who is in charge of the music program at NEA, at the National Endowment for the Arts. He came up to me after had he said he loved what I played and he asked me if I had ever done any panel work. I said, "Yes, I had done some panel work in New York." I had worked for the CAPS program in selecting artists, and a few other little things like that. He says, "Well, give me your number. I would like to call you sometime to sit in on a National Endowment of the Arts panel. We have the Jazz, Folk, Ethnic panel." I said, "Fine." Sure enough, in two weeks he called and asked if I could make a meeting. He sent me a huge book of applications for me to go through and read. I wound up being on the panel from 1972 to 1976, which was a very special situation because everybody was usually called for one year. They kept calling me back. On the panel were people like David Baker, and Dan Morgenstern. Then we had Father Norman O'Connor, we had Willie Ruff at a time, and there was Mill Hinton. Numerous people over the years, you know? George Russell, Cannonball Adderley. So, that was a wonderful experience and it got me into really dealing with the funding situation. From that, I did many speeches and things where I was bringing in musicians to teach them how to write applications to get funded from the National Endowment of the Arts. Billy Taylor and myself did that sometimes together. By that time, I was enrolled in the special program up at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. That program was developed by Dr. Roland Williams. Dr. Williams had gotten Billy Taylor, Chris White and myself involved in this program. It was like one of the first University Without Walls. It was a situation where we were going to be given credit for what we had done before towards getting degrees. I had not been to college at all. My college was the bandstand. I had been on the bandstand with all of those great musicians by this time. I said, okay, this is like 73, I said, "Okay. Let me see how much I can impart to people to see if we can get this program up and really running." The program had started in 1969 with a grant of $5,000 for the United States. This is the Jazz Folk Ethnic Program, that $5,000 was then given to one artist because the panel said, "Oh, this is ridiculous," this is the year before I joined the panel, a couple of years before I joined the panel. They said, "This is ridiculous," so they gave it to George Russell.

Maxine Gordon: That was the first recipient.

Jimmy Owens: The first recipient, yeah. So, I took it upon myself, along with my other panelists, to see if we could get some more money. So, we really did a lot of work and we managed to get $50,000 for the United States. It went up every year, we eventually would up with $850,000 for the United States. Maybe $300,000 went to folk ethnic, and the rest was jazz. So, we had about $500,000. Eventually, they broke off Folk Ethnic and just kept the jazz program separate. Our panelists during that time, and ideas that we all had, it was a situation where we started great programs that affected many, many people. One program was a travel study grant. You could contact a musician, and get all of the information of how much that musician would like to be paid to go out, so you could go out on the road with them for a week long period and see what living the life of a professional jazz artist is really about. Cannonball Adderley was selected. A person called him and set up all of the information, put the application, got funded and when Cannonball came on the piano he told us about the story about the young man showing up. Whenever he was getting ready going out of town, and at no time did he mention that he was blind. Cannonball thought this was going to be terrible, very difficult; he was going to hold the group back. As it was, he didn't hold the group back. They travelled and he was right there all the time, learning. Other people who had travel study, it was very, very rewarding for them. We also initiated a composer program for people who wanted to compose and people who wanted to put on a concert. This was not in the National Endowment's grants ever before, this is stuff that the panelists brought up that would be important. I remember having a conversation around the table saying, "We're not getting enough applications." We were getting like 150 applications from the United States. "Where are you publicizing this stuff?" Well, the public relations people came in and told us, "Well, we put it in Vogue, we put it in Esquire…" I said, "No, no, no, no. You have to put it where jazz people read! You have to put it in Downbeat, you have to put it in…" We named all the magazines, gave them a big list, and the next year we had maybe 400 applications. We went up to having somewhere between…more than a 1,000. It was somewhere in that area. First we'd start at two days, then three days, and then four days. They told us, "Well, we have so many applications that if you spend ten seconds on each application, you'll be here for five days." You know, some figure like that. (Laughs) We had to really know the applications, and when we had to present it, each person was given a number of applications to present. When we had to present it, we had to get right to the point and say, "This should be funded, or this shouldn't be funded." Then we'd pass it around the table and we would vote on it, and onto the next one. We didn't have a lot of time, so it took a lot of time and research at home reading the applications and taking notes. Like I said, that went until 76. When I ended that panel, Walter Anderson would call me to sit on the music panel, where I'm sitting with Andre Watts. I'm sitting with Van Cliburn. People like that are on the music panel. I was representing j-a-z-z. There were some applications in the jazz category for people who wanted to do works with orchestras, and whatnot, and perform with orchestras. That was a very rewarding

experience because it opened up doors for me to tell many of my friends about the activity that was happening with symphony orchestras writing jazz. I remember Seymour Rosen, who was the manager of the Pittsburg Symphony, and a couple of other people coming up to me and saying, "Well, we are interested in having a jazz piece commissioned." Of course I couldn't say, "I'd like to do it!" (Laughs) They managed to get some compositions commissioned to perform with their orchestras. I was telling people like Billy Taylor, who was doing some of that stuff, Alvin Batiste, and David Baker was doing that also at that time. You know, writing for orchestra and having things performed. I started to get some of my things performed. I performed with the Symphony of the New World at Carnegie Hall in 1973. Some of this music that I written for orchestras in Europe was the music I was performing.

Maxine Gordon: I recall one time you had a panel in Harlem where a lot of jazz musicians came about the NEA grants. There was a lot of discussion about who was included and excluded. I recall some musicians thought, "Aw, they'd never give it to me because, you know, it's only for this…" and you were like, "Apply and see." And you know, at that time, I did help a few people with their grants. You know, everybody got it. If you had a good idea…

Jimmy Owens: Well we'd tell them, you not only have a good idea, you have to have the work to document it. The person who says, "Well, I want to write a work for symphony orchestra!" and they send in a duo. Well, what's showing us the skill that you have to write for symphony orchestra? Or, at that particular meeting up in Harlem—I think it was one with me and Billy Taylor—I had one person stand up and say, "Well, I don't know about this stuff. You get a grant from the National Endowment, they're going to want to own that music of yours." I said, "No, they're not going to own it!" "Well, that's what I was told." I said, "Well, I'm telling you, and I sit on the panel. The National Endowment is not interested in owning your music, you're going to own your own music."

Maxine Gordon: To men, that's a good example of advocacy, your advocacy as a musician and on the inside of what's happening, in terms of the government and other possibilities through grants. Because you are first a jazz musician, you were able to communicate this to the musicians. Somebody, perhaps, who was on the panel who wasn't a musician—the musicians would be skeptical. The history would enable them to be skeptical, we know why they are skeptical. That was a very—that period there, was very fertile. When did—could you talk about collective black artists?

Jimmy Owens: Well, the collective black artists was an organization that a number of us came together and said, "We must do something for ourselves. We can't…no longer wait for people to do things for us. We cant wait for Colombia or Bluenote to possibly call us to say, 'We want to sign you.'" There were many, many issues with musicians who had

recorded with record companies and their publishing rights had been given to the record company and they had very little control over anything, they knew nothing about copyright. So, we came together with this organization…first it was Reggie Workman and myself, and Stanley Cowell, a very fine pianist. Then, we added a few more people who became the core of the collective black artists organization. We started in 1969 with a series of meetings where we collected dues. Dues were $2 each. Everybody laughed at us, but we had many, many musicians come through and they would pay $2 per week as a membership. I was the treasurer and I kept the book about who contributed and how much they contributed. By the time we got to about 14 or 15 hundred dollars, we had enough money to start to do things. We started to present some concerts. One of the first places where we had presented concerts, we had spoken to Ornette Coleman to use his apartment which was a huge loft on Prince Street. I think it was 131 Prince Street. We presented a series of concerts there. I remember the first concert we—Bob Cunningham and myself went out to look for—well, we needed a stage. Bob said where he was living, he was living in a place, that, in the basement of that place, there were many, many wooden crates. [They were] Coca Cola wooden crates and stuff. So, we wound up getting the truck, somebody had a van or something, these crates were just left there, they didn't belong to anyone. We took as many of those crates out as we could and we used that as the stage. We used that as the stage and set the band up on those crates. We nailed 'em together! (Laughs) It was very, very interesting, very crude. All of our concerts used to have food, we had a number of ladies who would make all kinds of food, which they would sell. They would then give 50% of that to the collective black artists. From that, Stanley Cowell and Charles Tolliver started a record company. There was an organization in Detroit that started to do records called Strata. And, Charles and Stanley talked to the people in Detroit, the musicians, they knew them very well, they knew these musicians and found out how everything was going and they started Strata-East in New York, the record company. The collective black artists went on, we had an ensemble, a big band, four trumpets, four trombones, five saxophones, rhythm section of four and sometimes five people with guitar and percussion. We had numerous people writing music, they wrote the music for the ensemble and we started to do concerts. We started to get people to book the band. Sometimes we'd make $300 to book the whole C.B.A ensemble and sometimes we'd make $1,500. We'd pay the guys, and we were paying very little, maybe $40. You know? But, it was $40 they had made playing music. $40 in 1969 bought a lot more than $40 in 2011 buys. In fact, in 2011 I think $40 will buy you a candy bar now. Well, the collective black artists grew to an extent where we put together what was called an institute of education. We started to present classes for aspiring professional musicians and professional musicians. I taught two courses, one on the philosophy of practice techniques, how to practice in the jazz traditions. Not many professional musicians took that, but aspiring professionals took that. It was very cheap, it'd be like 15 sessions for like $20. We were doing all of this trying to get our not for profit tax-exempt corporation. We also presented in the institute of education, classes on

improvisation, classes on notation, contemporary notation, classes on the business aspects of the music industry. Some professional musicians took that, but most of the people were aspiring professional musicians. Again it was, very cheap, $20 for 15 or 20 sessions. We would meet once a week, twice a week sometimes, to deal with the subjects. We had the history of African art. So, the institute began to grow and we attracted many people by the time we managed to get our not for profit tax-exempt status. We had a wonderful person come aboard to help us, Cobi Narita, who became the executive director. Cobi then organized everything for us and moved us into the first week, I think we collected $14, he moved us into making $75 or $76,000 a year to work off of. We presented every year, for a number of years, six concerts at town hall in New York. We put great musicians with the CBA ensemble. It was the kind of situation where these people never really played with big bands. You didn't see Art Blakey playing with a big band, or Max Roach playing with a big band. Every now and then, you could see a Billy Taylor playing with a big band, or a Randy Weston playing with a big band. But, a Weldon Irvine, numerous very fine artists on the scene featured their music with the CBA ensemble. I was the musical director for a number of concerts and then we let that title move around to various other people. Kenny Rogers and Frank Foster and Slide Hampton came back form Europe and he became the musical director of the CBA ensemble. Our concerts were usually well attended and we started to make money from the concerts. We were giving grants to do these concerts and we were making a little bit of money. We were paying musicians maybe $100 a concert now. We had three years or four years of wonderful concerts. All the while I was doing this, now I'm working with my quartet and doing a little bit of recording from 1972-75. I'm involved with the University of Massachusetts where I'm going up on two weekends a month to study with various teachers and to present sometimes. Sometimes I presented workshops on funding in the arts, workshops on African American history, jazz history, I did workshops on a number of other things that were involved with education and how we deal with education, the jazz artists. In my program, this is the school of education, there were people who wanted to be educators and they knew nothing about the African American tradition, they knew nothing about how we had made successful in roads in getting people to understand about the music, as well as getting people to understand about general education. Teaching people how to read better, how to deal with math, all through music. The collective black artists were also fantastic with that kind of stuff. The things I had been learning at U Mass, I put right back into my work with the collective black artists. We presented a number of conferences where we had people come in from various parts of the United States to address an audience. The audience would pay $20 or something for three days of workshops. We used to have those out at the Bed-Stuy restoration center. I remember one panel had Dr. Roland Wiggins, Dr. Leonard Gornes, Dr. Donald Byrd, and they talked about education. They talked about general education and what we do in the African American community in education. So, there was a lot of great information that was given.

Maxine Gordon: The collective black artists, the CBA, is one of the most important elements in the history of this music and advocacy, to just yours, but of all the musicians involved. The collective idea, which we know this music is the collective idea, and what happens in commercialization of jazz is that you get the big man, the individual pulled from the group and you're better than them. But, in collective black artists, that was not to be. It didn't matter who was making more money or who was more famous, we're all in this together.

Jimmy Owens: Well, it was supposed to not matter, there was still a lot of ego. There were a lot of musicians who had a big name value and when we said—I had come up with an idea that we should have a collective black artists publishing company. If we had all of these composers who would put one, two, or three songs in the CBA publishing company, we could get a better showing from BMI because most of us were BMI composers, that's the performing rights society. It worked for a while, some guys wanted to put songs in the publishing company, I did and Stanley Cowell and Kaine Zawadi. Nothing ever came of it because we couldn't get enough people. By that time, we are talking about 1975, when you would mention that to someone they would get angry. "Well, Jimmy Owens, you already have your own publishing company, I want to have mine now." I said, "Yeah, well I started my publishing company in 1965. This is now 1975, it's a different time."

Maxine Gordon: But, I think the history of the CBA—I just want to put a little ad in here—is something that deserves its own oral history project and its own look, which we have proposed to certain institutions and all. I think, from this discussion, that's something we should pursue.

Jimmy Owens: That's a good idea.

Maxine Gordon: Think about it, because it is such a good idea. And the idea, I consider it a success, because the ideas from that period you carried forward.

Jimmy Owens: At the same time, there was a dearth in getting people to be involved. I was committed to trying to get them to be involved. Here, I'm working with musicians who are full time musicians who never made $5,000 in their lives in one year. They were supported, in general, by their spouse who was out working. They would do a gig and they would, you know, if they made $800 from the collective black artists that year that was a hell of a lot of money for them in their overall income. After a while, it got very, very hard to work with those people who had such a negative situation. I started to put together a group of individuals to talk about the business of jazz music, and talking about the history of the business of jazz music. How certain artists sold a million dollars worth

of records back in the 20s and the 30s, and that was all that they got for paying, getting paid for recording that recording, maybe $15 or $20. Yet, the record company saw maybe 800,000 copies of the record sold at 75 cents a record. You know? You started to impart this kind of information on people. It made me deal more with teaching the business aspects of the music industry. The collective black artists went up until 1977, different executive directors. The last one was John Carter, who was my manager at the time. John Carter was an accountant who had gone in an opened up the books for a lot of blues artists, the books of record companies. He got Howlin' Wolf about $500,000 in back royalties, so this is the kind of stuff he was doing. He was working with Duke Ellington and putting Duke Ellington's publishing company in good shape. It was wonderful to go up to Duke's office and then Duke would walk in and the conversations were wonderful. I had worked with Duke Ellington already so we knew each other. It was a very rewarding time. The other stuff that I was doing at that time, like I said, I was doing concerts, and I was doing workshops and colleges. Sometimes that was with my quartet and other times it was just by myself where I would take my music, my big band music, to deal with their big band. One time I took the orchestral music down to New Orleans and Alvin Baptiste managed to get some violinists and get a whole string section and some other people, instruments, to play this music. It was really wonderful. Alvin Baptiste was one of our great educations and he is sorely missed.

Maxine Gordon: So, in this period you would call yourself—aside from being trumpet, flugelhorn player, composer—you would consider yourself and educator already?

Jimmy Owens: Oh, most definitely.

Maxine Gordon: And advocate?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah. I had many private students at that time.

Maxine Gordon: And also the advocacy was something.

Jimmy Owens: Yes, well the advocacy was through not only the collective black artists but in my work with the funding agencies, I had been on a number of panels by that time. Sometimes I would do that stuff at home and they would just send me the information. I think I was involved in New Hampshire and Delaware, Michigan. I can't think of all the state councils I was involved with over the years. That's all part of my advocacy, the advocacy of being able to help where I can help. Sometimes I'm looking at jazz applications, people who are dealing with jazz. Other times I am looking at just dealing with music. Beethoven or Brahms, and because I had known that stuff, like the New York State council used to send me out as a technical assistant. I would go in and hear a concert, review the concert from not only a musical standpoint, but from a business

standpoint. Did they put the publicity together? Did they have an audience? Do they have a program of building an audience? Those are all things I would talk to organizations about and write reports to them about a technical assistant.

Maxine Gordon: When did you begin with Jazz Mobile?

Jimmy Owens: I started to teach at Jazz Mobile in about 1973 and I taught at the Jazz Mobile workshop. Mind you, I'm friends and working with Billy Taylor and I'm in the quintet. We did many Jazz Mobile concerts, sometimes we would do two a day for five days for about three months. That was added income. We did some of that during the David Frost show days. The saxophone was Frank Wess and myself. And Billy's trio which was, sometimes the bass player was Paul Wess, or Chris White, or Larry Riddley, and the drummer was Bobby Thomas or Freddie Waits or Billy Cobham. It was usually the saxophonist, Frank Wess or Selman Powell, or, later on, John Stubblefield or Jimmy Heath. I was always there as a trumpet player. When I couldn't make a concert, say I was going to Japan or I was going to somewhere in the world, I would have people like Virgil Jones take my place. Or Richard Williams would take my place. So, the Jazz Mobile went up to the early 80s. I think it was 81 and Billy Taylor and I have been talking about education all of these years from the time at being at U Mass. He said, "Listen, I want you to become the director of the workshop program and put the workshop program together because it's too loosey goosey." So that's what I Did from about 81 to 86. Every Saturday, I would be at Jazz Mobile. I was teaching also there, I was teaching trumpet and teaching sight-reading, and ensemble class. Also, just being a resource when students wanted to ask question about copyright or some aspect of the music business as well as some musical aspect. "What is this chord in this song," or "How do you deal with this progression?" Again, I go back to thinking about all of the people who helped me when I was coming up, and this is why I could see myself giving back to individuals through being able to help them with whatever problem they were having.

Maxine Gordon: Maybe you could just say something about Billy Taylor. I mean, I know you wrote this beautiful article when he passed, and you've spoken on him many times before this oral history. If you could just—his influence on…his life.

Jimmy Owens: Well, when we are dealing with Billy Taylor, we are dealing with an individual who, right back into the 40s, was always looking ahead at what should be happening for jazz music, for jazz musicians, for the audience. So, he was very aware of many of the problems that were there and he was always working towards solving these problems with the contacts that he had. Besides that, he was fantastic musician, a fantastic pianist, educator, businessman, and singer. His publishing company in the 40s published books about how to play be-bop, how to play jazz. They published it with his compositions so people could learn how to play those compositions like he did on the

record. Right up until the day he died in 2010, he was a person who was always helping others. He was so human in what he felt and in what he showed to people. He's really missed, he was a mentor for me, and he was like my second father in many respects. Like I said, he really taught me how to work with money. Because of the David Frost show and the other things I was doing, I was making a hell of a lot of money at that time. How to deal with that money; that was important.

Maxine Gordon: Good. So, when does your participation with the Black Caucus, when did that begin?

Jimmy Owens: The first Black Caucus meeting was in 1986 in Washington D.C. Congressmen Conyers convened a number of people to be on the deus down in Washington, and I was one of those people. I gave a speech. Everyone gave a speech about something about their lives and what needed to happen in jazz. John Conyers was thinking about, at that time, someway that he could deal with the Congress to back jazz, to support jazz in some way. This caucus that we had, I mean, it had—I can't remember everyone but it had Amiri Baraka, Donald Byrd, Larry Ridley, David Baker…I think Eddie Henderson was there. There must have been 25 people on the deus and they all spoke for sometime. When it came to my time to speak, I had really done a lot of homework on who the black congressmen were and the areas that they controlled, or were involved with in Congress. In my speech, I addressed each of these congressmen to say what I felt they could do to help build the jazz, how can I say, to build jazz music in America. And when we say build jazz music, we're talking about getting it into elementary schools and junior high schools and high schools. Eventually, get it into colleges. Yes, it was in some of these places in some communities, but not as a situation where everybody had programs like that in their schools. I also addressed the fact that jazz was like the bald headed stepchild in America's music. Nobody looked at it seriously but jazz artists and the jazz public. So, I talked about how one young person who came on the scene, who was one of the only people who was packaged and marketed by the industry, by the record company he was signed with. The record company, they packaged him and put his information out like they did with popular artists. That's why we know the name Wynton Marsalis, because of how Columbia packaged him and because he was such a fine artist. He had this skill in being able to play jazz and to be able to perform in the European classical tradition. This was very, very important to how they did this. But, I also spoke about the fact that we knew Miles Davis, and we knew Dizzy Gillespie, and we knew Sonny Rollins and right at that time, Cootie Williams, a great trumpet player with Duke Ellington, had died. I said…and that we know Melvin Cootie Williams not because they were packaged and marketed, but because they are survivors. They are survivors of our great music. They are our national treasures and we should really deal with them as out national treasures. Just like the Smithsonian Institution is a national treasure, the Lincoln Memorial is a national treasure. I think from that, according to

Congressmen Conyers' lawyer, they took that national treasure and used that to name the bill that was finally passed in 1986. Before it was passed by both houses of congress, a number of us in New York along with Conyers, organized a session of the city council in New York to pass a bill that jazz was New York City's indigenous national treasure. Conyers felt that would be very good, easy for him to get this passed in the other house of Congress. He managed to do it, and we managed to get that bill. Jazz is America's national treasure, along with many programs to help the jazz community. Unfortunately, by this time, the National Endowment for the Arts no longer had a jazz program. They had put the jazz program within the music program so there was more competition for application that a jazz organization put it. They were going against the Metropolitan Opera, the New York Philharmonic, you know? They had stopped the individual grants from being given.

Maxine Gordon: What's the name of the bill?

Jimmy Owens: Jazz is America's National Treasure.

Maxine Gordon: No, the number and the…

Jimmy Owens: Oh, I forgot the number.

Maxine Gordon: We can look it up.

Kennith Kimery: House Resolution 57

Maxine Gordon: House Resolution 57, yeah. That's good.

Jimmy Owens: So, we'll remember to start at House Resolution 57.

Maxine Gordon: Good! Okay, cut.

[Recording Stops]

Maxine Gordon: With your group, Jimmy Owens Plus…, do you wanted to talk about some of the places you've travelled because I know you've been all over the world.

Jimmy Owens: Okay, you know so, Jimmy Owens Plus, first of all, the title of my group comes from the fact that the plus was always something special that I was performing with. It could be Jimmy Owens Plus the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, or the Symphony of the New World Orchestra, Jimmy Owens Plus the Rod Rogers Dance Company. It could be Jimmy Owens Plus you the audience, so that's how I came up with

the name. Lots of college concerts over the years, in all parts of the United States from about 1977. [I was] really getting active in Europe doing concerts, workshops, in all parts of Europe. [I did] jazz festivals. By 77 or 78, doing recordings with the quartet and the Hanover Radio Philharmonic in Germany. That was very, very rewarding. I have all of these recordings, they're not for public consumption, they're for the radio and the radio can't put them out as a record unless they contact me and I cant put them out as a record unless I get agreements from the radio. Let's see, we started to do some state department tours, the first one was in 1981. We did six weeks of state department. We were in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Pakistan, and we were supposed to go to Khartoum. That got all mixed up and we couldn't get there and whatnot. We were in Greece and we ended the tour in Israel. Of which, Menachem Begin had bombed Iraq. So, all of our concerts, which were geared for Arabic people, were cancelled, two concerts. We geared for Arabic people, this is what the state department told me, they didn't want to have that many Arabs get together in one place. So, they cancelled those concerts. Students from the university we were going to play at, or I should say perform at—I don't like that word, play—we were going to perform at this university. They found out where in Jerusalem we were staying and they proceeded to call me over and over again. They wanted me to come to the university. I had to tell them I couldn't do that because the state department has cancelled those concerts. But, I can work on trying to put together a concert, say like, around the pool of the hotel where we were staying, the American Colony Hotel in Jerusalem, and you could come. It would up that that was never able to happen. So, we were in Jerusalem the whole time and we had played no concerts. I sat around the American Colony pool—we were there [at the hotel] for four or five days—I sat around the pool, looking up at the sky just knowing that they were going to come over and bomb us. I told the state department that I wanted to get out of there so we managed to get out of there a day early and flew back to Paris. We flew out of Paris because I did six weeks with the state department and seven weeks of concerts in Europe. We were out for a long time. 13 weeks of concerts or whatnot. My group was: Eric Johnson, guitar. Jerry Germont, bass, electric bass because I had been using electric bass since 76. Darrell Washington, drums. He's the younger brother of Grover Washington Jr. I also insisted to the USIA that since we are going to perform to audience of 2,000 to 5,000 people, I needed to take a sound technician and our own sound equipment. "Oh, they have sound equipment over there in all of the places!" So, my manager made the state department wire each of those posts that I was going to play in to find out what kind of sound equipment they had. The stuff that came back, "Oh we have a broken amplifier and we have Lavielier microphones." At that point I let the state department know, "You chose me to go because of the artistic level of the concerts that we were able to do. That's going to be completely ruined if people can't hear it." So, I took my sound technician, his name is Seabreeze, and we too 23,000 pounds of equipment. That's a small sound system.

Maxine Gordon: And they paid for that?

Jimmy Owens: Most definitely. At the same time, as time went on, Billy Taylor was going to do that tour the next year, only he was starting in Pakistan and working back toward Morocco. I told Billy Taylor, "First, you should make them crate a piano for you. A Steinway piano, just like Horwitz would do if he was going on tour." Billy didn't feel like he could do that. I said, "If you don't do that then just to be on the safe side, you need to bring your Fender Rhodes." He hated to play his Fender Rhodes all the time. I said, "Just to be on the safe side." Well, he called me from someplace and wrote me from someplace, and said, "I am using my Fender Rhodes more than anything else." He says, "I stood there as the guy in Pakistan, with his tuning materials, tuned the piano so it was out of tune." (Laughs) So, he thanked me for the advice and said he wished he would have made the state department crate a grand piano, not a concert grand. You know, not nine-foot but a good seven-foot. I told Freddie Hubbard, he was going to Nicaragua, I said, "Hey man, I really think you should insist on them…" he was just doing one concert and he was going to be someplace else in Central America. I said, "I really think you need to seriously take a sound technician." Well, he didn't seriously do that. When he got there he wound up cursing out the people because—I mean that's the way he was, you know, Freddie Hubbard—cursing out the people because of the poor sound quality. They had substandard equipment. And they had, even worse, substandard people working the equipment. We find here in the United Sates, many engineers who are at the board don't know anything about mixing jazz music, they're used to doing rock and roll, rhythm and blues, pop, and the mix is completely different for that. So, that was a good state department tour that I had because I had taken the equipment and Seabreeze. The tour was very, very successful, lots of wonderful reviews from the different embassies. I had some wonderful experiences. I went from 81 to 89 before I did another state department tour. That one was to South America and Central America. We hit Guyana and South America and Venezuela. That was wonderful, also. My group at that time was Michael Howell on guitar, Kenny Davis on bass. I used my dear friend and drummer from Italy, Gulio Capiozzo, who I had been playing with since 1983 in Italy. I would go to Italy and he would set up two concerts, four concerts, eight concerts, ten concerts, and thirty concerts sometimes. That was the day of the lira so I would walk out with about that much lira! (Laughs) It was $3,000 or something. Gulio was a really fantastic drummer and he really enjoyed this trip. Places we had to get Visas, he didn't have to get a Visa from Italy. Our first stop was the Dominican Republic. We are walking and—well, actually, Seabreeze and Gulio went out walking. They had just met each other. They were walking on a road that down is the ocean, rocks and everything. A motorcycle comes behind them and grabs Seabreeze's bag off of his shoulder. He grabs the bag, unstables the motorcycle and then they proceed to run after the motorcycle to catch the guy. Fortunately, the two guys on the motorcycle escaped. Because, the first day, I know for a fact, they would have taken those two guys and thrown them over. I'm glad they didn't catch them. We had a number of little incidents that happened on that tour, nothing bad.

Again, we got wonderful reviews form the various embassies and the chief officers of the embassies, and the performing people who set up the concerts. In between those tours I did a number of concerts, Morocco with the group, I went back to Senegal. I was in Senegal the first time in 1980. I took the group to play at what was called the feast of independence. It was the 20th year anniversary of the freedom of Tunisia—of Senegal, freedom of Senegal from the French. It was a big event and it was during the whole long festival that was given by Club Med. Dexter Gordon was there. I think Dexter Gordon was there right before I was there because—we are talking about 1980—because I remember seeing Dexter leaving as I was arriving. My arrival in Senegal at that time, I took my wife at that time, Lola, my daughter, Scarlett, who is my wife's child by another marriage, my daughter Milan, and my son Ayan. My guitarist, Eric Johnson, brought his wife. Jerry Germont brought his girlfriend and Darryl didn't bring anyone. We played the concerts at Club Med and then this one big concert on Goree Island that had 35,000 people at the concert. President Senghor was there, the 35,000 people were in a round stadium. It was the first time I had played to that many black people in my life. I had played to 50,000 people at a festival that George Wein presented in Cincinnati or something. But, this was extra special. On the plane going over there, my son who was born in 1972, so he was eight years old, he did not sleep the whole time because he was looking out the window, looking for Africa. When the light came up and there was land, you know Senegal is close but there's land that you have to pass over. I think we had gone up and then we had to go down. He just kept asking me, "Is that Africa daddy? Is that Africa daddy?" I had to tell him, "No, not yet, not yet." We came into Senegal and I said, "Ayan," that's his name A-y-a-n, "there, that's Africa." He says, "Oh! Africa! I always wanted to come here." He's eight years old, you know! (Laughs) it was fantastic, and then when we got off the plane they had African drummers and all these beautiful African dress meet us as we got off the plane. It said "Welcome Jimmy Owens." We went to—when we got off the plane—all of my musicians and myself knelt down, cause that was my first time in Africa, and kissed the soil, kissed the ground. We were there for three weeks. In those three weeks, that was in March, in those three weeks, Eric Johnson, his wife was pregnant. She had her birthday, my daughter had a birthday, I had an anniversary, and my wife Lola, had a birthday. It was a fantastic period of time. The food was magnificent at Club Med. The overall ambiance was great. We didn't play every night; we played every other night. They would broadcast once a week to all Africa radio. Then they did a number of interviews with me to all Africa radio. It was going to all of the countries in Africa. We had a song that our bass player, Jerry Germont wrote, it was called "City Blues" and it had a very infectious beat. And, in a place it had a break. We would play this song and we'd get to the break, which was like (scats the melody leading up to the break). And, when we started to play this song at Club Med, people would fill in the break, "Ahhhhhhhh!" They were excited. Well, I guess that was just something African people would do. By the time we played at the feast of independence with the 35,000 people, it had been broadcast about three times to all of Africa radio. We got to

that part and 35,00 people yelled! (Scats intro to the hit) "Ahhhhh!" It was fantastic. On that particular concert was Dizzy Gillespie—they brought all these individual musicians over. They brought a group from Paris, which was Kenny Clarke's group. It was piano, guitar, bass and drums. Then they brought Dizzy Gillespie, Clifford Jordan, Jimmy Heath, Percy Heath…there was a guitarist and I didn't know him, I forgot his name. We all played on this festival. There was also the master drummer of Senegal, Du Du Endai Rose. He had one hundred drummers, of which about 20 of them were his children. They marched into the stadium form four corners of the stadium. Okay? They're not corners, but four areas of the stadium. When they got to the center of the stadium, then they started to play together. It was fantastic. I have tapes of that; I recorded all of that stuff. His drumming is fantastic. So, that was a wonderful experience. I mentioned about all if those birthdays and celebrations, every time I just told the Club Med, "Listen, my anniversary. Can we have a room and have a little party?" And they provided food and champagne all the time for us. It was a great experience. That was in 1980, the feast of independence.

Maxine Gordon: Since this is one of the many times you've mentioned Dizzy Gillespie over the period of this interview, could you just talk about Dizzy?

Jimmy Owens: Well, I think I met Dizzy Gillespie for the first time in about 1959. Then, I eventually met him in 1963 in Virginia Beach. I told the story about being on the beach and putting the sun tan lotion on my friend's wife. So, it was 63 when they integrated the Virginia Beach. Slide Hampton said to me, "Dizzy is in town tonight at the convention center. Do you want to go after we play?" We played early and then we'd be finished early. So, it was on a night that we were off, that's what it was, cause we heard the whole concert. So, we got to the convention center and Slide Hampton then introduced me to Dizzy as Jimmy Owens the trumpet player, meet Dizzy Gillespie. From that day, we became friends and I would up playing with him many times, sitting in with him. I was doing all kinds of big celebrations for things like his birthday. I'd organize a bunch of musicians. One time out at Queens College, Dizzy was playing a concert and it was his birthday night. I organized a number of trumpet players to come and they sat in different place s in the audience. And I said, "Okay, at a certain point I'm going to get up and I'm going to start to play 'Happy Birthday' and I want you to then join in." So, we had Lonnie Hillyer, Richard Williams, Martin Banks and Danny Moore, lots of trumpet players. And when Dizzy started, I stood up and stated to play "Happy Birthday" and all these trumpet players came in from all over the auditorium, and it was pretty fantastic. Another time—I love this—we met him at the airport. We did that as he came in. One other time, I organized a number of trumpet players who were Jazz Mobile and Dizzy was up at Grant's Tomb and he was just playing. I had organized these trumpet players. I remember Howard McGee, Joe Newman, probably Lonnie and Richard Hillyer—Lonnie Hillyer and Richard Williams. We were off on the back, Dizzy's back to us, and he's

getting ready to play. He's playing one song with his group. We waited until that song was over and we marched up the roadway playing "Night In Tunisia" as a march. (Scats melody of "Night In Tunisia") He heard this, and we had a drummer playing with us too, he heard this and said, "What is that?" He turned around, looked behind, and saw all these guys that he was very familiar with. That's the kind of stuff I would like to do, you know, surprising musicians. We did a tour in 1968 to Europe with Dizzy Gillespie. It was called "The Reunion Tour." It was to celebrate 20 years and 10 years of the Dizzy Gillespie bands in Europe. So, we went back to the 1948 band and the 1956, 57 band. We happened to be there in 1968 over Dizzy's birthday. Dizzy's birthday is October 21st , we had played about a week of concerts beforehand. On October 21st we would start the concert with a song called "Things To Come." It's a very, very innovative composition that Gil Fuller had written in the 40's. It was the first time that band leaders like Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Jimmy Lunceford, and Stan Kent and anyone who you want to name, ever heard a big play like that, at that tempo. It was a tempo like Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie would play with a small group, only this was with the big band. So, that would be the first number. I told the guys in the band, "Well, when Dizzy gives the downbeat, let's not play 'Things To Come.' Let's use the downbeat as quarter notes and play 'Happy Birthday.'" So, Dizzy makes his big speech about things to come, and now things are here. But, this is what it sounded like in 1948, or 47. He said, "One, two…" (Scats the melody of "Happy Birthday") Dizzy was so surprised that the whole band played this! (Laughs) The band was James Moody, Chris Wood on alto saxophone, Paul Jeffery on tenor saxophone, Cecil Payne on baritone, and Shaib Shihab on baritone. There were two baritones. Curtis Fuller, Tom McIntosh, and Ted Kelly on trombone. The trumpets were, let's see, we had originally Steve Fertallo. But, Steve had backed out at the airport when we were leaving. He was afraid to fly and he got into an argument with Gil Fuller so he could say, "Man, I quit!" because he was really afraid to fly. So, we had Victor Paz, Dizzy Reece, and myself. Our first stop was in London. We picked up a trumpet player, first to just do the London stuff. But, he stayed with us for the whole tour, for three weeks. It was a fantastic tour; it was a great tour, 1968. Mike Longo on piano, Paul Wess bass, and Kenny Finch on drums. It was a great band, and Gil Fuller had called me and said, "Jimmy, will you put together a big band for this tour?" It was 1968; I think we made $450 per musician, per week. (Laughs) We played great music and we went all over Europe and played the concerts.

Maxine Gordon: Say something about Dizzy and his overall contribution, and how you place him in the history of this music.

Jimmy Owens: Dizzy Gillespie is one of the greatest trumpet players in the world. He's the innovator of so much on the trumpet. Things that he did that became part of trumpet playing, such as, a lot of trumpet players would play and play up the horn. Dizzy Gillespie was one of the first to start at the top of the horn and play down the horn. Just

being able to play anything that he wanted to play on the instrument. His skill level was so high. Also, he was a great educator, just a natural born educator. I had been in many situations doing workshops or something like that with him, that I saw him as the natural born innovator, natural born educator, and natural born trumpet player. It's not like he didn't practice, but he had to practice sometime in his life a whole lot to attain that mastery. In 1973—no, in 1970—we did a tribute to Louis Armstrong at the Newport Jazz Festival in Rhode Island. There were a number of trumpet players that were invited by George Wein, such as Dizzy, Joe Newman, Ray Natz, I can't even think of the rest of the trumpet players. Bobby Hackett, they all played. We all gave tribute to Louis Armstrong. Dizzy did an imitation of Louis Armstrong and the thing that he said that was most important was, "Thank you Louis Armstrong for my livelihood." I think I told you the story about how everyone was trying to top everyone. Bobby Hackett said, "I'm Louis Armstrong's 'A' fan!" Joe Newman says, "Well, I'm Louis Armstrong's 'A #1' fan!" And I came out and all I could say was, "I'm Louis Armstrong's youngest fan." So, Dizzy Gillespie, he knew the history of the trumpet. He had listen to all those trumpet players that had come before, and mastered the things that they had on their instruments. That was very, very important. We find that the greatest musicians are the ones who know the history of the instrument. So, we're right up to November…I think it was November 1st, 1992 that Dizzy Gillespie had been sick and his bass player, John Lee, and his wife, Pat, had given Dizzy a luncheon. Dizzy was coming to their house for a luncheon. They then organized a number of musicians, Paquito D'Rivera, Doug Proviance, myself and a number of other people were there. When Dizzy walked in the door, we started to play "Happy Birthday" for him because he had been in the hospital for his birthday. That was the second time I saw a tear in his eye. The first time was in Europe at the concert when he gave the downbeat to play things to come and we played "Happy Birthday." That was his 51st birthday at that time. Well, this particular time, Dizzy walked in and he had lost lots of weight. He had pancreatic cancer but he was very, very happy. It was a great party. I have pictures and I have a tape of us playing "Happy Birthday" for him and our discussion. I had him say, "Hello," to two of my students. I was out at the Oberlin Conservatory of music as a guest visiting professor for the year. I had him say "hello" to two of the students on the tape, and they cherished that. I'm sure they still cherish that.

Maxine Gordon: Dizzy Gillespie.

Jimmy Owens: Yep, he was my friend right up to till the day he died. From that party, he went in and out of the hospital in December. He died finally on the 6th of January, 1993. I was in Oberlin at the time and I called the attorney who was putting together the memorial service. I told him that I wanted to perform. He says, "Oh, we have you down to perform with the trumpets." I said, "I don't want to perform with the trumpets. I want to perform by myself. Solo, and I want to talk about Dizzy Gillespie," which I did do.

And the video is very nice; they taped his whole funeral. I played a composition called "Brother K" that he had written for Martin Luther King, and I ended that with "Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen." I've played that song many, many times at musician's funerals, and dedications for musicians because I really feel it says something very, very poignant about the jazz artist. He or she can get there perform in a happy fashion, and you really don't know what they have gone through in the past hours, days or weeks. I constantly perform that song. It's like a jazz musician tribute song for me. I usually follow it up with playing the blues, slow blues.

Maxine Gordon: In your generation of jazz musicians, I saw an article you wrote, you called them the middle ages but, there's so many good trumpet players in your age group who were your contemporaries. You mentioned Richard Williams, you mentioned Lonnie Hillyer, who else is in there?

Jimmy Owens: Well, Virgil Jones is in there. Well, you know, in actuality, you have those musicians who are five years older than us, all born in 1938 like Booker Little, Lee Morgan and Freddie Hubbard. I had an article written in the *New York Times* Sunday section, many years ago called "Jazz in the Middle Ages," where I talked about the fact that the musicians in their middle ages—and I dealt with 30 to 60—are getting no play whatsoever from the record industry. No managers! If you were very young, you had some play. Then they skipped that whole middle ages and started to deal with those musicians who were 60. All the sudden, you turned 60 and you became legendary and you had more work given to you than you had the last 20 years of your life. That's what happened to people like Jimmy Heath, Clifford Jordan, they had gotten to a point where, all of the sudden, they started to get work. So, this particular concept, I organized a group and we did some concerts. The group was Gary Bartz on alto saxophone, Billy Harper on tenor saxophone, Kenny Barron, Buster Williams, and Idris Mohammed on drums. A couple of concerts we used some other people on drums; I remember that. But, that was a concept that I had, "Jazz in the Middle Ages." I did a lot of interviews talking about that. Now that I'm 60—how old am I?

Maxine Gordon: 68.

Jimmy Owens: I'm 67, I'm going to be 68 in December. I look at that and I say, "I was wrong about middle ages." Seeing that I want to live to be 150 and be healthy, from 50 to 100 years old is the middle age. (Laughs) Legendary will come after 100!

Maxine Gordon: But the musicians you mentioned from that period, your contemporaries from that period, who didn't, you know, the record business changed, the scene changed, I've noticed that many of them have become educators and teachers. So, how did that come about?

Jimmy Owens: Well, that was the next thing. We got the college situation happening, and many musicians who were capable of being able to express what they do to students and teach students, were the ones who then started to look at that and say, "Well, since I'm not working and there are fewer and fewer jazz clubs across the United States, let me do this." So, there are a number of people all over the United States that started to teach. Many times, they were teaching as they were playing. Out in California, the musicians who were working with Gerald Wilson's band started to teach in the various universities out there. Gerald Wilson started to teach. He taught a course at UCLA on the history of jazz. He had 350 students in his class! Gerald Wilson is another special person for me. I recorded with Gerald Wilson in 1965. I was out in California with Herbie Mann, and Gerald had come by the club to hear us and invited me to record with him in the next couple of days. We rehearsed, and it was a composition that he wrote for a famous bullfighter by the name of Carlos Arruza, that he wrote for me to play. I played it, and to this day from 1965, it is one of my five favorites recordings that I have ever done.

Maxine Gordon: What are the other four? (Laughs) You said there were five!

Jimmy Owens: I can say that there's a recording that I did with Teddy Edwards that, this one song, I played such a wonderful solo I wondered how I came up with that stuff I played. They were telling me from the booth when I was playing my solo, my solo was last, and we finished the song. We didn't have but about five seconds before the tape ran out. (Laughs) That was one of my favorites. I liked the way I play, "Milan Is Love," a song I wrote for my daughter on one of my Polydor records. I liked how I interpreted that. The song that I did with Dizzy Gillespie from the 1968 band where we both played together and played off of each other, called "Things Are Here." It was a composition that was an answer to "Things To Come" that Gil Fuller wrote in 1968. I think one of the last recordings that I did which was a tribute to Thad Jones that we did on the IPO record label. One of the songs is called "Subtle Rebuttal." Along with that, "A Child Is Born" where they took Roland Hanna's performance from a "A Child Is Born" from a record that he did on IPO records and they took a whole chorus of him playing "A Child Is Born" rubato. They edited that and put our version right after that, where it features me playing the melody on after that. It's just beautiful and every time I listen to it, I go back to the many times that Roland Hanna and myself have played together in the duo situation. He was a member of the New York Jazz Sextet and we would play many duo things in the process of the concert. We would have Ron Carter and Billy Cobham lay out and it would just be me and Roland playing. So, it brought back a lot of memories like that. That may be more than five.

Maxine Gordon: That's very good. Are there any other key figures, there's so many that have affected your life and influenced you, any others that you wanted to say something about?

Jimmy Owens: I talked about Donald Byrd, I talked about Billy Taylor. I mean, I wasn't so friendly with Louis Armstrong, but I was friendly with him. He knew me and I knew him. I think that there are a number of other musicians that I am friendly with who are dear to me because of our relationship over the years. I think of Kenny Barron, I think of Paul Wess, I think of Chris White, you know? These are people who have been around together for many years, so all of them have a place in my heart. My current bass player, Kenny Davis, he came from Chicago and Lonnie Plaxico had been working with me and Lonnie couldn't do the gig coming up. He says, "Well, listen I just had a friend come in town, his name is Kenny Davis. Call him and see if he can do it." I called him and he could do it. I took him to South America, and that was 1986, and we've been playing with each other off and on. He's a fantastic young bassist, he plays acoustic bass, but with me he plays electric bass. I use electric bass. I guess there's some others that I forgot about, I'm sure there are. They're acquaintances. Reggie Workman is another one, you know, we go way back. There's an appreciation between us.

Maxine Gordon: Is that time? Good. I want to talk about the Jazz Musicians Emergency, when did that begin?

Jimmy Owens: The Jazz Musicians' Emergency Fund, it's a program of the Jazz Foundation of America. Billy Taylor called me and said, "Listen, I'm on this organization, I'm on the board, the Jazz Foundation of America Inc. I really don't have time, I wanted to know if you would be interested in being on the board." I said, "What is it about." He says, "It's an organization that really has some good ideas and I think you could add to those ideas." I said, "Sure." So, he let the people know and they called me and slowly but surely Billy backed out cause he was very busy in 1989 and I joined the board. The organization had wonderful goals of raising money and giving the money to the Schomberg Collection, the Schomburg Library, to sure up their collection. I sat there and listened to that along with the bassist who was on the board, Jameel Nasser and another person who happened to play bass also, who comes from the Bronx who we knew each other for many years, Leo Corby. Finally, in discussion with Jameel Nasser, we both came together and made an address to the board that it was wonderful to help the organization sure up their collection, but that was dead stuff. There's too much work to do for the living musicians. The board listened to us, liked what we said, and changed the direction of the organization to not support the dead, but to support the living and we started the Jazz Musicians Emergency Fund to help jazz artists who were in need. One of the first things that I was involved in was I had played this concert, it was jazz at noon. These are primarily businessmen who come together and would play every noon for like

two hours in a restaurant. They always invited a guest artist, like a professional musician, to kind of spark them on. This particular time, it was a concert, and Billy Taylor played piano and I played trumpet, so they had two professional musicians. When we were sitting down talking, one of the musicians said, "Wow, you know, I would have never been able to get through medical school if it haven't been for me playing jazz and concerts in clubs and whatnot. It gave me the money to get through medical school." I said to him, "would you be interested in giving back?" He says, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, jazz musicians get sick all the time and they can't afford going to hospitals and whatnot. So, could you organize a bunch of doctors that would see two jazz musicians a year and take them through whatever is necessary to get them well?" I called that the Physicians' Network. I took it back to the jazz foundation and told them that the doctors were going to do that. We wound up having 28 doctors organize, who love jazz, who agreed to see two jazz musicians a year at minimum and take them through whatever was necessary. That was the start of the Jazz Musicians' Emergency Fund. Those doctors were all part of Mt. Sinai Hospital. The problem that we had then was that Mt. Sinai would not give up any hospital room for anyone free of charge. That was a serious problem. Medical bills are very different with hospitals and the cost of hospitals and the running of hospitals. So, someone called me and wanted to do this celebration of Dizzy Gillespie's life. This was after Dizzy died; this was in 93, September of 1993. We have the Physicians' Network working, we've sent a number of musicians to Mt. Sinai Hospital. But, if they needed to be hospitalized then we had to find a hospital for them. Harlem Hospital did help many times for people who were really sick. Irene Reid was one of the people. We had a situation where anyone we helped would, it would be confidential unless you wanted to talk about it. Irene Reid did a big interview which was carried in the *New York Times* about how the Jazz Foundation has helped her after she had a heart attack, her condition, sending her to the hospitals, sending her to doctors, finding the best doctors and whatnot. So, this person, her name was Cindy Kaplan, she called me and said, "I want to do a celebration for Dizzy Gillespie." "What is it?" "Well, I called it '100 Trumpets for Dizzy.'" I said, "That's interesting, what are you thinking about doing?" She says, "Well, John Faddis told me to call you. I had called John Faddis first and he says, 'Oh, man that sounds wonderful. That sounds like something Jimmy Owens should be involved in.'" So, she called me and we met and we organized this thing called 100 Trumpets for Dizzy. We did it in Halworth, New Jersey because Inglewood, New Jersey would not give us a park to do it in. She lived in Halworth, we were able to get the park in Halworth, New Jersey. We put this thing on, I wrote music that was dedicated to Dizzy Gillespie. I had four choirs of musicians, like 25 musicians each. They were with a conga player or some kind of drummer in there. We called the choirs the John, Burke's, Dizzy, Gillespie, and each of those choirs preformed and came up to the stage. And in each case, when they got to the stage, we did the whole section over and then we went into a big jam session on a composition of Dizzy Gillespie's. And this was the beginning of our affiliation with Inglewood Hospital. We had pulled in

Inglewood Hospital who wanted to do something for Dizzy and didn't know how to do it, what to do. We pulled them into this idea of the Physicians' Network and that has been the start that was the start of the affiliation between Inglewood Hospital and the Jazz Foundation of America.
[Recording Stops]

Maxine Gordon: Good?

Kennith Kimery: You are great and we are going.

Maxine Gordon: Okay, in this last hour of the oral history interview with Jimmy Owens, we are going to discuss this award of the NEA jazz master. You are the first jazz musician ever to receive this jazz advocacy award. The previous honorees were in the business. We had a recording engineer, we had…

Jimmy Owens: Record producers.

Maxine Gordon: We had George Wein. We had…what was his name?

Kennith Kimery: George Avakian

Jimmy Owens: Orrin Keepnews.

Maxine Gordon: Yeah, and the recording engineer who did all the Blue Note records.

Kennith Kimery: Rudy Van Gelder

Maxine Gordon: Rudy Van Gelder, thank you so much. You know other people have been placed in that category of jazz advocates, but you are the first jazz musician to be in that category of both NEA Jazz Master musician and jazz advocate. So, so say whatever you would really like to say about this.

Jimmy Owens: Well, first off, I want to say that I am very proud to have been selected as an NEA Jazz Master. I have been involved with the NEA for many years as a panelist. I can say, I have been on the panel numerous times to select the jazz masters of that year, okay? I recall the panel that selected Art Farmer and Donald Byrd and Herbie Hancock, numerous other people. So, it is really rewarding to think that the panelists and the book that we have with the letters from public people who write in and say, "I think this person deserves a Jazz Masters' Award and this is the reason why." So, that makes me very happy that I have been selected. It makes me sad to think that they were going to eliminate this program after 30 years of it happening and 125 jazz artists being declared

Jazz Masters. Hopefully it is not going to end and I had some words that gave me the feeling that it is not going to end. I hope that is the case. To be recognized by your peers is very, very by your peers. To be recognized by your peers for a situation that you're not primarily involved with is even more important in my opinion. I have always been a jazz musician, a trumpet player, a composer, arranger, educator, and music consultant. That has been primary for me. Jazz advocacy has been about making life better for all of those around me who needed to have their lives made better, and in me knowing making their lives better was going to make my life better. Thinking of the people who I have known who have died because they were too proud to go to a hospital, or a clinic, because they didn't have the money is very, very hard for me to take. There have been numerous musicians like that. The many, many benefits that we jazz musicians have performed for our brothers and sisters to bury them, to help pay for a hospital bill—very hard. I think back on all of that and I feel very fortunate that in my life I have had to do nothing but music to make a living. I know many jazz artists who work at Macy's, who work at driving a taxi cab, who work in the Post Office to make money to feed their family and live. So, I'm very proud of the fact that I never had to do that. I think about that all the time, how lucky I am. I talk to students, I talk to them and tell them, "Very seldom do I have to pay for an airline ticket. I never have to pay for a hotel. Someone else is always paying for the airline ticket and the hotel. I go into a place and do what I love to do, perform music, talk about music, and when I get finished someone comes to me with an envelope with a check in it." It makes me very happy, it makes me very happy that I'm doing what I love. I feel very happy about the fact that the people I have known in my life, the people that I have come in contact with, have written the performance history of this music. I can speak about musicians that I have met from the different generations who were very responsible for writing the performance history of this music. I have had interaction with many of them. Teddy Wilson was a beautiful person. I think about Red Allen, Roy Elridge, I think about Ray Brown, I've already mentioned Dizzy Gillespie. But, Gil Fuller, numerous people, they helped me to become the advocate that I became. We have to stop the tape now. [Jimmy Owens is close to tears]

Maxine Gordon: Let's stop.

[Recording Stops]

Jimmy Owens: Isn't there supposed to be a red light on.

Maxine Gordon: Let's talk about your education, no work.

Jimmy Owens: Alright, well like I've mentioned a couple of time s how happy I am to have known these masters of jazz and be able to shake their hands, or call them on the telephone, or meet them. Along with these masters of jazz in a friendship, or an

acquaintanceship, comes education. Each of them were great educators even if they did not stand in front of a classroom to teach someone. I often think about if some of these people could stand up in front of a classroom and teach, would they be effective? Teaching has been something that has been very important to me. I mentioned that I started to do it in 1967 with Chris White and Rhythm Associates. I went on to teach numerous private students. A rewarding situation was going to a big discussion at NYU and having the author of the Thelonious Monk book, Robin Kelley, say to the audience that, "I have to thank Jimmy Owens." I look over and I'm thinking, "Why the hell is he thanking me? I don't know him. I mean, I know of him but I don't know him." He says, "Because I thank Jimmy Owens for giving me a foundation and jazz. I studied trumpet with him when I was seven years old." I said, "Wow!" I remembered Robin, the seven-year-old kid, who my friend Freddie Pettis called me and said, "Listen, I have this friend and she has this boy who is seven years old who wants to study trumpet and they have no money. Would you see him?" I said, "Sure." And I started to teach him. I don't know how many lessons he took. I need to find my old, old book of lessons that I gave people. I was kind of shocked about that and after I talked to him I said, "Well, I remember you. Now I remember that, giving you lessons." I never put the two together that that was Robin Kelley. It was rewarding to think about the lady that…I think Sylvia was 75 years old and she studied with me at Rhythm Associates and then when Rhythm Associates stopped, she came to my house to study with me. She was 75 years old, her brother had died and left her this classic Cornet. She's decided to play the Cornet because she had very bad asthma and the doctor said, "That could help you get over your asthma." So, she would come and study with me. At that time I was charging eight dollars a lesson. She went onto practice, and she always practiced, and she went on to be able to play some melodies, not so much improvisation. She stopped studying with me, but about every year she would call and get in contact with me. She lived down on Christopher Street. After I released a record on A&M Horizon she called me and she said, "Jimmy, that picture of you with those bedroom eyes…" (Laughs) She says, "That's some picture. I went out and bought your record yesterday, it's great." So, I've had some very rewarding situations in teaching. I started to teach in colleges in 1982. I was on the faculty as a part time teacher of SUNY Old Westbury. They had a very innovative program out in SUNY Old Westbury that was put together by the alto saxophonist, composer, and educator Ken McIntyre. Ken had called me and asked if I wanted to teach out there. I said, "Well, what do I teach?" He says, "Well, I want you to teach these students about the business of music. And you can have an ensemble and we'll see what else." So, it wound up that I started to teach there. I would teach on Tuesdays and Thursdays, I would go out to Old Westbury on the Long Island Railroad. I stayed there form '82 to '86 and I taught the business of music. Actually, it wasn't called the Business of Music. Mu class was called the Business of the Performing Arts. Because, what Ken had put together under the rubric of African American History was, dance, music and theatre. Once a year, we would put those three departments together and create something. That was very rewarding. On the

faculty was the percussionist, composer, Warren Smith. Someone who works with me at the New School who just got promoted to full time, Richard Harper, a very wonderful vocal coach and trombonist. Numerous dancers and theatre people, they were all part of this program. I developed a course called Business of the Performing Arts that looked at music, dance, and theatre. I did lots of research, I bought lots of books about this stuff, interviewed people, had a little budget where I could bring people in from various fields. I brought somebody in who was in The Wiz, brought people in who had done different Broadway shows and told them to open up themselves if someone asked about money, if you can answer it, go on and answer it if you choose to answer it. Most people did. Bringing in musicians, and these were all people that I had a shake hand deal with; it was wonderful. Bringing in this musician that I had worked with numerous times, Phil Medley. I didn't know that Phil Medley had written for The Beatles and the Beatles recorded this song and he got ripped off because he didn't know the business. He made a little bit of money, but not the money he should have made. He imparted that stuff to these students. To this day ,I have a group of students who can find me on Facebook or something and they say, "I studied with you at Old Westbury and your course on the business was something very important for me. I'm not in the business now, I sell stocks and I still think about that." Another guy is in the media business, but in the business side of the media business, he studied with me at Old Westbury. So, I mean, that kind of stuff is really rewarding. The people who studied with me at Jazz Mobile, at the Jazz Mobile workshop from '82 to '86, some of them are very fine professionals right now. The young man who is playing with Roy Haynes right now, who is playing saxophone, he studied at Jazz Mobile. The young man who is playing with Randy Weston right now, playing saxophone, he studied at Jazz Mobile and they all studied with me in come kind of way. It's very rewarding, so the educational part of my life has been great. After Old Westbury, I taught at Queensborough Community College. In most of these instances, this was a program that needed to be developed on my part of the program and I went about trying my best to develop it. At Queensborough Community College, they wanted to form a jazz ensemble. They had some students and they wanted me to form a jazz ensemble. Well, I did that for about three years then they cut the program a little bit. But, before that time, I got them to hire Charlie Persip to come in and teach. I got them to hire another person to come in and teach. This was important to me because, hey, it's important to pass the dollar around when you can. Around 1990, I started to teach at The New School for jazz and contemporary music. Arnie Lawerence, a very fine saxophonist who had played with numerous people in jazz, developed this program in 1986. He had approached me and said, "Hey Jimmy, I'm starting this program, would you like to teach in it?" I said, "Man, I'm teaching at Old Westbury and I'm teaching at Queensborough College at the same time and I have concerts and I have workshops. I don't think I have time to teach at this school." Then, in about 1990, I approached him and said, "Listen, is that position still open? I'd like to entertain it." He says, "I want you to teach about the business." I had a reputation of talking about the business all the way back to 1969 when

I was writing articles about various aspects of the music business. You know, for people to understand about copyright and what copyright means for the, and the ownership of copyright and what that means for them and their families, and their grandchildren. I said to Arnie, "Alright, that'll be good." So, I developed a course on the business aspects of the music industry. What I had called my course all the time before, instead of just the business of music. There are many different aspects involved, so that's what I tuned into. My courses, now it's been 21 years I have been teaching at The New School, I had to argue with them all along that this course should be a course that is required of all students who come through this school. I argued with them for 16 years; it never became required. The 17th year, they made it a required course from the standpoint of you could either take the business course for one semester and then take an internship, if you wanted to, for another semester. Or, you could take a business course for two semesters. That was rewarding. Then, things happened within the program that were not so rewarding when people within the program did things that were completely against what I was teaching the students. That made me think, "Hey, I've been teaching this course 17 years. Let me let them have this course back and give me some other stuff." So, I was teaching that course. I taught—I organized a big band. Arnie was down on me organizing a big band. He says, "No, I don't want a big band, I don't want to be like this school and that school that has big band. We are a small group." I impressed on him the importance of what students can learn in a big band. There's Dizzy Gillespie music, Benny Carter music, and Oliver Nelson music, and then there's music that we should arrange for big band for these students to play. "Oh, I like that idea Jimmy, go ahead and do it." I organized the big band and I taught the big band from 1991 to about 1994, something like that. Which I then took a leave of absence for one semester because I had so many concerts to do that I told them to get Charles Toliver to teach the course because he had experience doing that. Then, they didn't have the business course the semester that I took off, but they gave Charles the big band. When I came back, he was so happy with the big band I said, "Listen, why don't you keep the big band." I told the administration at the New School, "Listen, I don't want the big band back. Why don't you just give me an ensemble in its place." So, I was given an ensemble. I had two ensembles and the business class. I went like that for many years. I still have two ensembles. I impressed upon the school, the importance of these students quote/unquote make their living reading music. When no one wants to hear you solo, all they want you to do is to read and interpret the music correctly that is put down in front of you. I initiated a course at Jazz Mobile, a sight-reading course, and I brought that over to The New School. The school eventually started it for each instrument. That wasn't my concept at first, but I said, "Well, that will work." So, we have sight-reading courses for every instrument. I tell my trumpet and trombone players that I am interested in training you so you understand what it is to read any music that is put in front of you. To execute it, to be able to look at it right then and there, you can't take it home. I had some wonderful success stories. A trombonist who came in to the school, his reading was very poor. In two semesters he

worked at it and got his reading better, his third semester, now he's a sophomore. I think he stopped taking the reading courses and kept working on it. In his junior year, while at school, the telephone rang. It says, "Listen, Barry Cooper." "Yes." "Do you have your passport." "No." "Go get your passport, I'd like to know, would you like to join the Count Basie band." He says, "Yes." They say, "Well, do you have a passport." "No." "Well go get your passport, meet us at the airport on.." Like it's Monday. "Meet us at the airport like on Thursday, we're going to Japan." He says, "Great, are you going to rehearse?" They say, "No. We don't have time for that." "Oh, can I get the music?" "Oh, the music has been sent to Japan already." He's thinking, "Damn." He says, "Are you going to rehearse when we get to Japan." "Chances are no. We arrive in Japan and we play a concert that night." "Oh, okay." So, he went and got his passport and went through all of the stuff. First thing, in Japan, unpacks all of the music, gets the set up and he has to read the music first time, on the concert. He did wonderful. He stayed with the band for a couple of years. He left school, and he came back to school to get his degree. He studied with Benny Powell. He asked me, "Well, who should I study with?" I said, "Well, I think you need to study with Benny." He studied with Benny Powell, he became wonderful friends with Benny Powell. He was with Benny, just about the day he died, he was with him the day before and he told us this story about how Benny was fine. He was walking around and everything and the next morning he was dead. It really hurt him. He's a success story for me. He was able to take those things that I had been telling him and follow through with him. A large part of my life has been education, people teaching me and then me passing on that information to others.

Maxine Gordon: Didn't you organize the instructors at The New School, the union?

Jimmy Owens: Yes. The program started in 1986. By 1996, everybody, there were about 75 part time faculty. We got a check every month. We got taxes taken out, city taxes, state taxes, and federal taxes. We paid social security. I said, "Well, it seems like we're employees. We are getting all of this stuff taken out but there's no health insurance, there's no pension." So, my affiliation with the musicians union, I start talking this up. They said, "Sure, we should be able to do that." The fact that there is 75 part time faculty, and at that time we had four full time faculty. I said, "Well, four full time faculty can't run this program." So, our union, our local 802 in New York, and the people who were involved in the program, really understood what needed to happen. They approached the school and said that the faculty wanted to have a union. The president of the school laughed and he then did an announcement to the faculty, in the jazz faculty meeting. He said, his words were, "Everything is going to get better. We understand what you're talking about. Trust me! Trust me!" I yelled out, "That's what the American Indians were told!" That's why I know I'll never get a genius grant, he left the school and became the president of the Mac Arthur Foundation! (Laughs) At that point, we forged ahead. One of the techniques that people at local 802 decided, we should get jazz musician educators at

other institutions to write the Dr. Fanton, the president of The New School, to tell him how important it would be to have union representation and to have a program that had health and pension for these faculty members. After a fight of about six or seven months and all of our members on the faculty signing cards saying they wanted to have a union, and the school doing all of the tactics they didn't need a union, this is a happy family and when you bring people from outside like that, they are going to break up the happy family. I said to many people, I said, "Hey listen man, when you get sick, do you have health insurance?" We found out that of the 74 faculty members, about ten of them had health insurance and it was only because their spouse worked someplace and had health insurance that covered them. We won our case, after a while we won our case and we started to get health insurance and pension contributions. We chose, instead of going into pension fund of the educators, to go into the pension fund of the musicians. Since you were a musician first, you were going to do concerts and performances, money was going to go into you pension fund from that possibly, then that's where your money should be going. From 1997, that's what's been happening. We've managed to get all of who taught at The New School vested. Vesting means that they have met the obligations of the American Federation of Musicians pension fund. All of the musicians will get a pension fund at some point. At the same time, I've tried to get numerous friends of mine who have been working, understand how they can pay into their pension fund. The rules and regulations of the American Federation of Musicians say you have to have a corporation and you have to have a collective bargaining agreement with the local. Once you have a collective bargaining agreement with the local, then your corporation becomes your employer so any work you do, you can file it through your corporation, into the pension fund. I've been doing that since—I started a corporation in 1995 I was doing that for all of my other work, and then with the stuff that happens with The New School, and any other work that I do, I would always run it through my corporation. I try to tell musicians that's what they should do. I have to say, many musicians have done that. Individual musicians, black and white, have started corporations and gotten a collective bargaining agreement and are going out doing concerts at colleges, and workshops at colleges, and other types of performances that they file these concerts to the pension fund and build a pension. I know some musicians are getting $6,000 a month, $9,000 a month, you know? So, that has been a success. I am very happy about that. It's about taking a chance. Like I've said, I know for a fact that when it becomes better for them, it's going to be better for me also. I can't fight it and do it for myself. Power is in numbers. I learned that a long time ago, so consequently, you get as many people who has alike interests to attack problem, it is no longer going to be a problem. It will be solved.

Maxine Gordon: How do you see the future of young musicians and the music and the situation as you look forward?

Jimmy Owens: Well, as I look forward I'm seeing a number of very, very accomplished musicians come on the scene, on every instrument. At ages that are less than 25, their skill levels are unbelievable. That they have taken what the older masters have done and learned how to do that, and are able to do that and the things that they want to do in the fields that they want to do it. I just feel, in many instances of these young players that are happening now, that there is a misdirection in many of them about the difference between technique for technique's sake, and technique for music's sake. I give to my students all the time, the fact that people in jazz always said that Miles Davis didn't have a lot technique, that Thelonious Monk didn't have a lot of technique. They had the amount of technique to express the ideas the way they wanted to express them. That was the most important thing for them the fact of playing technique for technique's sake, makes you a stiff musician most of the time. I'm hearing a lot of the musicians who are coming up, the younger musicians who can fly up and down their instrument, have very little emotion in what they do. I'm telling people all the time, that's not what j-a-z-z is supposed to be about. Just listen to Coleman Hawkins, or Lester Young, or John Coltrane, or Johnny Hodges, or Charlie Shavers; listen to these people feel what they were dealing with and you'll get the understanding that a whole lot of technique for technique's sake is not the answer. You have to make it technique for your expression's sake. So, what am I about now? Concerts, sometimes with my quartet, projects that I've put together, performing, at times, with the students at the school. I can take them into—I used to have, when I was in charge in the big band, I used to have a program that worked at the Blue Note. I've worked with my students at Dizzy's Coca Cola Club. Doing that kind of project thing is something important to me. Doing concerts just by myself where I go into a college and do workshops and lectures, doing my workshop on the philosophy of practice technique and how to practice in the jazz tradition. I go in and perform my music that I've arranged, original compositions and compositions by numerous other composers. To have the students perform this music, I've taken a lot of Dizzy Gillespie music into the schools and had them perform that music. Many times, I'm in front of the band, not only conducting. I don't believe in doing like this, they keep the time; you have to open your ears and your heart to play the time of the rhythm section. Very seldom do I have to ever do this. That's what I've been doing. Colleges across the United States, across the world actually, when I did a lot of these State Department tours I did workshops in those places. I used local musicians in those places. In Pakistan, I used a lot of Pakistani musicians. They played for us, and then we performed for them. Then we'd perform together. I remember a saxophonist saying, "Let's play 'Take The A-Train,'" in Pakistan. He played "Take The A-Train" with the rhythm section and he sounded pretty good. He had trouble making all of the changes but he sounded pretty good. And, projects with other people, that's what I'm about now, doing all sorts of projects with other people. Next week, next week, let's see…Sunday—in three days I travel to Paraguay to do a concert and a workshop. We arrive Thursday—leave Wednesday evening, arrive Thursday, do a workshop on Friday and a concert on Friday, and turn around and come back on

Saturday. I am interested in doing more of that type of stuff where you just go out for a few days and come back. I want to do that stuff with my quartet. I do that myself, with taking no group many times. Now, I like to do more of it with the quartet after I used to do that in the 70s and the 80s all the time. I stopped doing a lot of things with my quartet. It just wasn't the kind of work…I don't work in clubs to often. I've done projects in clubs but I don't really initiate my quartet going into a club. From 1969 on, I stopped working in clubs. It was not an interest to me, especially after playing a very quiet version of "'Round Midnight'" and have a waiter drop a whole tray of drinks on the floor. It's not too appealing.

Maxine Gordon: Is there anything you haven't done that you would like to?

Jimmy Owens: Well, things that I have done that I'd like to do more of. I'd like to record and perform, and write some more compositions for full orchestra. I've performed a number of times with orchestras in the United States and Europe; I'd like to do more of that in the United States with my quartet. In 1973, a couple of months after the riot in Attica prison, I negotiated with the Rochester Philharmonic to do a concert in Attica prison where I took the whole Rochester Symphony Orchestra from Rochester, New York into Attica prison to perform. I had Kenny Barron play piano, Chris White on bass, and Billy Hart on drums. We performed this concert in Attica prison and actually performed a composition, the orchestra performed a composition of one of the inmates who had written this composition as in inmate, and they performed this composition. As a matter of fact, they performed it the next night in Rochester without the inmate, he still was incarcerated. I'd like to do more of that. I'd like to have an active manager take over taking care of all of the business for me since I have been doing that myself for much of my life. The time I had managers and they did things for me, it was very important, it took a lot of pressure off of me. Times with Anne Summers and with John Carter and with Bess Pruitt. So now I'd like to have that happen again, someone doing that. My wife Stephanie is a very fine photographer. She's in their permanent collection of the Smithsonian Institution with about 30 images of jazz artists that she has photographed. She has always shied away from dealing with all aspects of the music business. But she decided to help me some time ago, she discovered how nasty and horrible the music business was and it just turned her off completely. She has never wanted to deal with being with that capacity. In the last couple of months, she has been functioning very, very well as a person tying up loose ends when it comes to the situation after I got the selection of Jazz Master. She is taking care of numerous things with both the NEA and the Smithsonian and started to do some things when people called about work. So, that's wonderful but I don't think that's something she is interested in doing. She has too many projects and too much creativity to just sit there and do my stuff. So, I don't think that is going to last, but I would like to find someone who is interested in the wide breadth of things I can do, I have done, and have a history of doing, to start to get work for me in

those areas. So, I say my wife, we've been married since 2005. We got married here in New York at Riverside Church. As a matter of fact, today is the eleventh of September, in eleven days we will celebrate the anniversary of our marriage. We're happily married, we've worked together, very hard, and to have the things we have around us. Our house, everything in our house, and we enjoy ourselves. I had been going to Europe, before we were together, ever summer and working. I discontinued that with Stephanie and it's been a wonderful situation taking her to places that she has never been. Her heritage, she's born in America in Boston, but her heritage is a Dutch heritage. She had never been to Holland and when we went to Amsterdam she said she saw her grandmothers over and over again, walking down the streets. We have, in our bedroom, about five wonderful, great, compilations of business cards and memorabilia from things that we've done in the world. Stephanie has put this stuff together and made these big picture frames of restaurants, cards, and everything. It's been wonderful. We both look at that and it brings back lots of memories. As a matter of fact, I think I want you to bring the camera into my bedroom and take a picture of some of that stuff on the wall. It would be very interesting. So, go clean up the bedroom, okay!? (Laughs)

Maxine Gordon: Do you want to say something final? Is there something you want to say that you didn't say?

Jimmy Owens: Yeah I have a lot to say!

Maxine Gordon: I know you do!

Jimmy Owens: Do you have four more tapes!?

Maxine Gordon: Do you have something else that you wanted to say though?

Jimmy Owens: I can't remember the date. It was probably 2000 or 2001 that I had been having my haircut shorter, I cut it shorter. By about 2001, I was starting to notice that I could count the strands in certain places and I had a student that shaved his head. And he, during a lesson, said to me, "Hey man, when are you going to let me shave your head?" I said, "No man, never." He came for a lesson one day and I said, "I'm ready for you to shave my head." And that's what he did, he shaved my head with a razor and I said, "I want you to leave a little spot in the back," because I was thinking of growing a little ponytail. There was a little square spot in the back oh so big, he left it, and after about eight months it was the same size and the same length. I said, "Damn, let me cut this damn thing off because it's too hard to shave around it!" (Laughs) So, I decided to have my head shaved. It's been wonderful. As soon as I went out, everybody said, "Oh my god!" Because they felt my head was so long. They were shocked and they said, "You really look younger." I said, "Oh, no kidding." So many people over the years have told

me, “Man, you look so young.” I guess it was different when I had a lot of hair that was covering my head and I cut it shorter and it was long on the sides and not so long in the center. My wife just always messing with me and she rubs this part of my head here and she feels stubble. Then she rubs this part of my head and says, “Oh, peach fuzz.” (Laughs)

Maxine Gordon: Do you have that picture album? At the beginning of the interview you talked about that picture disc?

Jimmy Owens: Oh I think…are you talking about my album?

Maxine Gordon: I guess you can’t get up?

Jimmy Owens: I can get up. My album, my record that was my favorite record when I was about four or five years old. It’s a Charlie Shavers record that is a picture record. It’s a 78 and it’s Charlie Shavers singing and playing on one side, “She’s Funny That Way.” On the other side is a picture and it’s called “Dizzy’s Dilemma” and it’s an instrumental. And this record I kind of stole from my father when he was alive. I said because Charlie Shavers is such a dear, great trumpet player and we’ve played together Daddy, you’ve gotta let me have the record. He did. This is one of my favorite collections right here. It’s on the Vogue label, I don’t know what year this was but I think I was about, maybe five years old. That would be 1948, it could be 1947. I’m going to find out when this record came out.

Maxine Gordon: That’s great.

Jimmy Owens: I’d like to thank the Smithsonian Institution for doing this oral history. I’d like to thank you, Maxine Gordon, for interviewing me. And I’d like to thank my wife Stephanie for making me understand that Maxine Gordon would be the best person to interview me since she knows more about my life and she’s come to our house many time and has enjoyed the wonderful cooking of Stephanie and the wonderful hospitality of Stephanie. I’d like to also thank the National Endowment of the Arts for one, selecting me to be the Jazz Master, the A.B. Spellman Award in Advocacy, and for giving me a check for $25,000. (Laughs)

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END OF INTERVIEW
Transcribed by Kyle Kelly-Yahner