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EDDIE PALMIERI
NEA Jazz Master (2013)

Interviewee: Eddie Palmieri (December 15, 1936 -)
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[BEGINNING OF DISK 1, TRACK 1]

Brown: Today is July 8, 2012, and this is the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Interview with NEA Jazz Master, arranger-pianist-composer-cultural hero-cultural icon, and definitely an inspiration to all musicians everywhere, Eddie Palmieri, in the Omni Berkshire in New York City. Good afternoon, Mr. Palmieri.

Palmieri: Good afternoon, Anthony, and good afternoon, Ken.

Brown: This interview is being conducted by Anthony Brown and Ken Kimery. And we just want to begin by saying thank you, Mr. Palmieri...

Palmieri: Thank YOU, gentlemen.

Brown: ...for all the music, all the inspiration, all the joy you have brought to everyone who's had the opportunity and the privilege of hearing your music, and particularly if they've had the chance to dance to it—that especially.

Palmieri: [LAUGHS]

Brown: I'd like to start from the beginning. If you could start with giving your full birth-name, birth-place, and birth-date.

Palmieri: Well, Edward Palmieri. I was born in 60 East 112th Street in Manhattan, known as

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the *barrio*, and at about 5 or 6 years old... That was 1936.

Brown: What date were you born?

Palmieri: December 15th. A Sagittarius all the way.

Brown: Definitely!

Palmieri: And my parents then moved to the Bronx...

Brown: Before we get to that, can we talk about your parents' full names, and where they originally came from.

Palmieri: Oh, of course. My mother was Isabel Maldonado... Well, they called it Isabel Palmieri Maldonado; they gave the second name, the maiden name last. My father, Carlos Manuel Palmieri. They were both born in Ponce, Puerto Rico.

Brown: Now, the last name, Palmieri, is that of Corsican origin?

Palmieri: It goes way back. The Palmieris first appeared in Florence, Italy. The most famous of all the Palmieris was a gentleman called Matteo Palmieri, who was the President of the Republic. All of them had different states then. My daughter, Gabriella, found in a museum his statue, and brought a picture, and it looked like my dad—amazing. The whole profile. He owned a castle in Moncello(?—2:58), which was a little thing of Florence. My son and I went eventually to play in Florence, and we saw the Matteo Palmieri Avenue, which was the marketplace to buy fruit, and people come there on bikes, motor-bikes or regular bikes, and we sat down under an umbrella, having a beer, looking at the street.

And then, as the story goes... I met a gentleman on the airplane whose name was Harold Graham, and he was the Vice President of Uniroyal Tires in Cali, Columbia, and in the shoebox he had all the information for the Palmieris from the year 1000. That's merely because in 1921, there was a count called El Conde del Moran(?—3:53) in Paris that did the genealogy of the whole history of the Palmieris, and I was so... I went nuts. My brother, using a little humor...and we'll get to my brother... His name was also Carlos Manuel Palmieri. He eventually told my mother, "Mama, you may be a Countess, and Eddie may be a Count"—because I had a title, "The Count." "But count me out!" [LAUGHS]

Anyway, the thing was that there was...I have the floor plans(?—4:29), *La Hacienda Amelia*, off Ponce, more like towards Juana Diaz, and the house took an acre... The reason that happened was two brothers that left Corsica, and one got lost on the high seas, as the story was told to me by Mr. Graham. He had them in print, and then I translated them into English. I even have the coat of arms. Because I found the original Conde del Moran(?—4:58) that she kept the business going over there... Remember they had the title of Count. Then that Count stopped in 190... Even though we could have gotten title, but you have to get it from a prince. That's another story.

But the main thing is that two brothers left on one ship that landed in Puerto Rico. That's where my grandfather was born—Dominique...Domingo. That's how the family came about. There was two families he got involved with, and in one of the families was my dad.

Brown: Do you know why the two brothers originally left Corsica?

Palmieri: No. But they were very wealthy. Maybe that was the reason. They had like the gold inlays and... It was amazing, the stories that we've heard. And Amelia, the oldest daughter, was Harold Graham's mother. What a coincidence, right? Amazing story.

Then I met another Palmieri with my wife in Colombia, and he looked...you could tell he was a Palmieri. Could have been the ship that was lost in the high seas. But that brings the name of Palmieri, and... There's a place in Puerto Rico called Yauco, which is a little up north from Mayaguez. That's where the Italians were being brought. Plus, I got a book from a lady that...a young lady that my brother was telling her about the story, even though he didn't believe... But she then found a book that a gentleman named Joseph Palmieri, in (?—6:38) Aurora, used to take the Italians from Italy—Corsica, excuse me—to Puerto Rico and then back. So an amazing story of the name.

Brown: So is it accurate to say that your parents before leaving, or maybe at least your father before leaving Puerto Rico, was well-off?

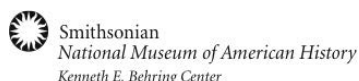
Palmieri: No-no, on the contrary. Remember, I told you there was two families. The story goes that, at that time, my mother left Puerto Rico and arrived in New York in 1925. My father came a year later, because my grandmother didn't like him, and chased all over Ponce with a broom. But my mother at 16-17 years old, she was a seamstress already, and then she sponsored...brought my father in... My mother was on a ship called *El Guamo*(?—7:37), which was eventually sunk in World War 2, bringing troops. My father came in one called *Porto Rico*, and he came in a year later. They married in New York. My brother was born in '27, and then I was born in '36. My father was into radio and television repairs. He was a genius in electronics. That's how he made his living in the United States.

But they weren't wealthy when they came. Because all that money... When my grandfather dies, the story goes, all the sisters, or what they call *la tia politica*, like the great-aunts, they all went back to Paris, and they all took approximately \$200,000 at that time with them. There were about 7 daughters or something like that, 6 daughters, that my grandfather stood.

Brown: So you were born in *el barrio*, but you moved to South Bronx at what age? Do you remember?

Palmieri: Oh, no more than 5 or 6. So I don't remember much about *el barrio*. My brother was 14, and already playing piano. He was a genius, a prodigy, Charlie.

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Brown: You mentioned Charlie...

Palmieri: The only problem that my brother had was he was already playing with some of the bands that, “Oh, the prodigy, the Palmieri kid, Charlie Palmieri,” and everything went fine, except at the end of the gig they would tell him, “Charlie, your mother’s waiting for you outside.” That didn’t go over too well. His mother!?! My mother was very stern and took care of us. Because of her we became musicians.

Brown: Were either of your parents musicians?

Palmieri: No, but she loved music, and then all of her brothers sang, guitars, and that... She sponsored all her brothers, five brothers... Actually, seven brothers, because there was a family called the Gates. My mother was Maldonado. That was the first husband for my grandmother, who used to have what they called *fundas*, which were restaurants. And my grandfather used to gamble...he was a gambler, and he lost a lot of *fundas* for her. She kept opening more. And then my mother brought them all to New York, eventually working as a seamstress—she worked down in the Garment District. When the Depression hit (remember, that was 1929; she arrived in 1925) and there was no work, she was earning between \$35 and \$40 a week, doing the hardest work, quilts and everything, piece-type...to bring them all in—and she got them all in. Then they lived on top of us in *el barrio*, like the old families did, and when we went to the Bronx, they lived on the third floor, we lived on the second.

Brown: How did Charlie get started in music?

Palmieri: My mother.

Brown: So she encouraged him.

Palmieri: Yes. He got teachers. Then they saw that he had really a special talent, and the next thing you know, he was playing *tangos*, *paso dobles*, and doing the *rumba*. By 14, he’d started to play professionally in a place called the Park Plaza, which is now a church, on 112th Street... When you’re going into the park on Fifth Avenue, there’s a church there. That used to be known as the Park Plaza, and that’s the first dances that Machito and his Afro-Cubans played when a promoter called Federico Pagani, who used to be the promoter that eventually went and opened up the Palladium... One of the great stories about Federico was, when he goes to the Palladium Ballroom, and Mr. Hyman, who was Jewish, his wife was an heir for the Otis Elevators, and he was from the Garment Center... Then he threw a dance, the first one with Machito, a matinee on Sunday—it got packed. But there was too many blacks. According to blacks...dark Hispanics...black, you know... So Federico finally told him, “Are you interested in black and green?” And green won. [LAUGHS] His wife goes, “He’s right—the place is packed.” Because it used to be a dance hall...a dance studio, Alma Dance Studio, on 53rd, right across the street from the Ed Sullivan Theater. It opened up in 1949. [sic: 1947] What it made was history. There was no other ballroom... It goes alongside in the jazz world as the Savoy and that... But the Palladium...there was nothing like it. Right next to the Birdland.

Brown: What inspired or motivated or precipitated your parents moving to the South Bronx

from *el barrio*?

Palmieri: Well, it was new territory. It was happening. A lot of Hispanics were going up there, too. Because they were giving you like three months free rent. You can't do that to the Puerto Rican. We're too slick. So you go in there for three months, then you check out at night, midnight, and you do the moving... Forget about a moving van, too. We used the subway at 5 cents to bring... "Look out with the bureau!" Bringing it... [LAUGHS] You know, we're quite... Then you get another apartment for three months free. That kept going until...because they needed... To me, that's why you had the exodus in '50. People create rent, and that's the ballgame that you learn later, like, in political economy... That can bring in big families, and then eventually... But there were a lot of empty apartments there, so they were giving a deal—three months free rent. "Oh my goodness!"

But we didn't really have none of that. We had a beautiful apartment. Kelly Street I was raised, between Longwood and Intervale, which later on they named the South Bronx. I didn't know anything about south or west. It was absolutely beautiful. On the top, there were some Hispanics. At the bottom of the block was Afro-Americans. So there was a great mixture. And then, my father opened up the two stories he had, one called the Bronx Radio Lab with a partner called Fonseca, at 163rd Street, and then he opened his own, Charlie's Radio Lab, on Intervale Avenue in the Bronx.

Brown: It sounds like, since you moved there when you were 5 or 6, that's when you went to school...

Palmieri: Right next door was the P.S. 39. Two blocks away. P.S. 39, right on Longwood Avenue.

Brown: Back then, music was part of your education. Was that the case for you?

Palmieri: Well, because of my uncles, too. I used to go upstairs, third floor, and both my uncles sang tangos and that... They came with guitars; they used to play guitars. Then one of them eventually makes his own orchestra later on, that I played timbales for him, at 13...

Brown: We don't want to jump too far ahead, but...

Palmieri: Yeah. But I heard music constantly. And then, my brother was already 14-15, going on that...and he was bringing in some bands, local bands... Like first the Machito Band, that started in 1939. That was THE orchestra. Then you had... That was it. Then you had Noro Morales, then the family... It was three brothers. Noro; Ismael, who played flute with the Cugat band, too; and then Humberto, who was the drummer. Then (?—15:19) existed that were very talented in Puerto Rico. But Noro Morales was a Puerto Rican pianist who was a mentor of my brother in those early years.

Brown: So your brother is playing these records at home. He's playing, like you said, Machito, For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



and he's probably playing some of the big bands as well, jazz big bangs...

Palmieri: Miguelito Valdés.

Brown: There you go. So you're hearing all this.

Palmieri: Right.

Brown: When did you start to feel like, "Hey, I want to do that, too," maybe be like Charlie or...

Palmieri: When I was able to get the first pair of sticks in my hand and my grandfather says to my brother, "We'd better buy him the timbales; he's ruining all the furniture and the lamps." I'm hitting them, like...man, playing with the things... By 13, they bought me my first (?—16:05) mallets. But I already had started piano by 8 years old. But I always wanted to be Charlie's drummer. I loved my brother so much, and I missed him so much. He was like my best buddy you could have...

Brown: What was he like? You're brothers, and he's nine years older.

Palmieri: My brother was a genius. Genius pianist. Not a piano player. He was a pianist that could play in all the different genres. He loved Oscar Peterson and Ahmad Jamal. Those were his favorite two later on, then of the Cuban players, he knew some of the...like, Peruchin earlier, and Orquesta Riverside(?—16:42). Through him, I started to listen to different bands coming along. But it was my brother and his influence... He was my main influence. By the time Charlie is 20 years old, he's already married and with Tito Puente, and I'm 11...nine years difference... Tito Puente has made the timbales so popular that that's what I wanted to be. I wanted to be a *timbal* player. Until my brother told me, "You know, Eddie, if you want to do that really, you're going to have to get involved in the whole drumset." You have the drummers that come in with their cymbals and their sticks and... No. You had to carry the bass drum, the tom-toms... When I looked at them, I said, "What?!" And my mother, when she bought the timbales for me, she bought me a metal box, like for a bureau, bureau material, because she was so... It was wisdom that was all around her. She would wait until my uncle would play the horn, to come down in that Ford station wagon, and then he saw...when I grabbed the box with the timbales, she would say, "Edward, do you see how beautiful your brother looks when he goes to work and he doesn't carry an instrument? When will you learn, Edward?" I went, "I'm ...[GRUNTS]..."

She won. Eventually, two years later, I told my uncle, "Listen, I'm going to tell you something. I'm going to make you a deal you can't refuse. I'm not even going to think about selling them. Take the drums, and I never want to see them again." The timbales. I went back to the piano.

Brown: So when you start on piano, did you have formal lessons?

Palmieri: Always. I had the best teachers. My brother would recommend me. The first one was called Boca Negra, "black mouth" (that's the translation). Boca Negra in the Bronx. That's how I started. Then I went to different teachers. But my best and most important teacher was the first

one, was one called Miss Margaret Barnes. Miss Margaret Barnes is in the Negro history books. She was a concert player—a concert pianist, excuse me—and my brother had studied with her. So Charlie recommended me. I used to take the train down, because she would teach in the Carnegie Hall building. They'd rent studios for certain teachers, you know that were teaching; you know, vocals, or this and whatever... She was a pianist. And I took lessons from Miss Margaret Barnes. Eventually I did a concert in the Weill Theater. They've got it confused that I did play Carnegie Hall. But I didn't play Carnegie Hall. I played the Weill Theater for an evaluation test...

Brown: A recital.

Palmieri: Yeah, a recital with certain professors, and they gave me a good mark, and that...

Brown: In reviewing your biography, there's also a mention of Claude Saavedra.

Palmieri: Claudio Saavedra. He was a Spaniard who then took me into another world, which was independence, truly independence of the fingers. I put my hands like that and I tell them 3-4, they go at attention at one turn, two turns. 2-4... It took me years, both hands. 1-3. 2-4. Then you get the independence of fingers. That gives you a certain piano touch, because when you hit the keyboard, the note, you've got three-quarters of an inch to get to the key-bed. So how do you get that weight distribution in that? So by controlling the fingers, you're going to be able to do that. Then, since I played timbales, and I was left-handed but I write with the right, it was a unique situation where eventually I created that soloing...doing a typical *tumbao* in the left hand and soloing with the right. I owe a lot to Claudio Saavedra for that. Which I did in my first recording, *Azucar*, and I was accused of using another pianist or overdubbing... There was no overdubbing again. But anyway...

Brown: We don't want to jump ahead. That is a landmark. But that was a little later, if you mention this piano teacher.

Palmieri: Yes, I was a little older. Then I went... Remember, I played timbales for two years, but I started playing with Margaret Barnes at 11. So for two years I stopped the piano, and I played timbales, and then I went back. Then I met Saavedra through a gentleman called...he was my brother's... Abie Lima. He was a drummer who played with my brother. My brother now had a small group traveling the Eastern Seaboard for MCA. They were the agency. Like Washington, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago eventually. But Abie Lima was the drummer, and he recommended to me Claudio Saavedra.

He was in charge of the choir... As a matter of fact, he brought his choir to where eventually... My wife used to go there, and her father, in the church where we eventually got married, which was taken over by the Young Lords years later.

Brown: What denomination was the church?

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Palmieri: Protestant. I was Catholic, but I married a Protestant. I don't believe in the Protestant, this-and-that... It's what you believe. The word is "believe." If someone asked me, "Do you believe in God?" and I say, "No." I say, "Do you believe in God?" He goes, "Yes." To me, it means the same. We both believe. I learned that a little later, though.

Brown: Let's go back to the very first time you performed. There's records of you actually being a vocalist very early on.

Palmieri: Now...now, I'd like you to keep that quiet.

Brown: But that's not the only time you sang?

Palmieri: What happened is, at 5 years old I used to sing. My brother would accompany me, and my father would bring me down to Harlem. There was a gentleman that made records there; my uncles would come down at night. I would sing. They would teach me the lyrics. But then I got sick. I got a certain fever or something like that, and my voice changed completely. I never thought of singing again. If I sing now... Did you ever see the ad for the Lotto. "The Lotto is now..."—and everybody disappears, running. If I open my mouth to sing, man, and all my tonsils, everybody will be fleeing for their lives! But I did sing, and those records, they were treasures. We don't have them. But my brother played piano, though, and accompanied me, and my uncles, too. Then they would bring me home... Listen, there was a gentleman who had a machine who made records in his house in Harlem.

Brown: Little 45s?

Palmieri: No. 78s. 45s came later. The thing that we had home, you had to crank it.

Brown: Oh, the old Victrola.

Palmieri: You've got to remember that... I tell everybody that I was born in 1898, in front of Tito Puente, "and I was a fan of Tito Puente then." He said, "Don't say things like that, Eddie.

Brown: What was your first professional gig?

Palmieri: My brother got me up to work with a group called... First of all, I played with a gentleman called Eddie Forrestier. Eddie Forrestier had a band...like, a local band. He played trumpet. I had some friends that worked with him. Then we played the Sunnyside Gardens. I'll never forget... We used to go there. He had a great sense of humor. He could draw, too. But he had a great sense of humor—he stuttered. He was a funny man. And talented. I started with him, and with him I started to learn some blues chords. Because I had no idea... Remember, I had stopped playing piano; then I started with him around...

I stayed with Eddie for not too long, awhile, and then from Eddie Forrestier... Then I had a kids' band. My friends from school, we met, we had a band that we would play the schools and this and that...

Brown: What high school did you go to?

Palmieri: The junior high was 52, called at that time Thomas Knowlton, the Friendly School. On my first day in there, they were beating a kid to death. It was all gangs-related. Where I lived were the Lightnings, and by Jackson Avenue was the Rockets, then you had the Italians—the Huns. They were all wrapped... That was the central school, Thomas Knowlton. So I made it my business to arrive late and leave early. At that time, my father had a candy store which was very popular at that time, called El Mambo.

Brown: So he had transitioned from being electrician to...

Palmieri: I made a deal with my grandfather. They did what they called a luncheonette. They bought an old candy store that was built in the 1890s or something that was all red. My father fixed it beautiful. Made it like a luncheonette. I made the egg creams. I was like the soda jerk. I'd bring the empties to the basement. And made sure that the jukebox was happening—because I was in charge of the jukebox with the guy that... I would tell him what records to bring.

Brown: So the jukebox had 45s.

Palmieri: No...

Brown: 78s?

Palmieri: 78s still.

Brown: 78s in jukebox.

Palmieri: Still 78s.

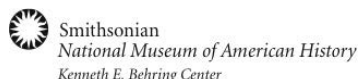
Brown: What was on the jukebox? What records were you putting on?

Palmieri: Oh, Machito, Tito Puente, Tito Rodríguez. A gentleman called Alfreddito who was also a jockey known as Al Lang—but he played vibes. He became popular; he was a player. Different bands. Perez Prado. But it was happening. Perez Prado sold more records than Carter's Liver Pills—I mean, really. When he did "Que Rico el Mambo." Remember, the Mambo was the highest pinnacle of popularity that we've ever had. It came from Cuba, and it influenced New York. But that mambo in the way they danced it...they certainly danced different in the Palladium Ballroom, and the Palladium Ballroom blew the whole thing out. I'm talking about from '49 and all the '50s. I eventually closed it in 1966.

Brown: Right. We'll talk about that.

Palmieri: But throughout the '50s... I started working the Palladium in 1956 with Vicentico Valdés, who was the vocalist for Tito Puente, when my brother was in the band, and Mongo

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Santamaria was the conga player. Manny Oquendo, bongo. An incredible *conjunto*. *Conjunto* meant that there was no saxes. That's what it meant. Only Machito had an orchestra. Tito Puente was a *conjunto*—three trumpets and a rhythm section...timbales, conga, bongo, bass naturally, piano, and three trumpets.

Brown: We'll talk about genres later, how *charanga* developed and things like that.

Palmieri: Right. Of course.

Brown: Unless you want to talk about that now.

Palmieri: Well, the *charanga* was naturally from Cuba. The *charanga* bands that made...the most famous one, naturally, that made the name... It started, like, in 1887, the first *charanga*... I forget its name right now. A guy named Falle [SPELLS IT], Arcaño Y Sus Maravillas is where Cachao as a young man, and his brother Orestes, who played cello, and Jesus Lopez, who becomes my mentor later, or one of my mentors... I mean, frightening. Frightening. They came from the classical orchestra, and they formed the *charanga*, which had to do with strings, wooden flute, timbales, (no conga early; they brought the conga later), bass, and singers. Ok? So Arcaño Y Sus Maravillas was the main... He was with another band before. But I'm talking about when they started. And from there, it started...

In Cuba, it started with the conjuntos, like Conjunto Barrera(?—29:31), 1920s... How do you figure they recorded these bands in the Caribbean? Only a friend of mine, whose name is René Lopez, who worked with the Smithsonian also, found that in the ship logs. They would bring the equipment on the ship, and go from island and island, and record these orchestras. 1920... Trio Matamoros. These are the bands that started. But as far as *charanga* is concerned... I mean, there's nothing like a *charanga* well-played. Then, little by little, the bands started coming out of Cuba. After him, then you have players like José Fajardo, Orquesta Aragón, Orquesta Sensación. These are all *charangas*. Orquesta Almendra. [(?)La Melodia Quarenta(?—30:19)]. I mean, it just goes on and on, the *charanga* bands that were...

Oh, Orquesta America—they are credited for the first *cha cha cha*, by a gentleman called Enrique Jorrin. Then they split, and one guy called Ninón Mondéjar goes to Mexico, and you had America in Mexico, that does all the films that you see... Even you see Mongo... Remember, from Cuba, they had to go through Mexico to get into the United States. But they stood there while... Beny Moré.

Brown: Beny Moré, sure.

Palmieri: Also in Mexico. That's how the *charangas* developed. Then eventually, my brother made a *charanga* band. He made the first *charanga* band from New York musicians in 1959.

Brown: When I asked you about *charanga*, and you talked about Cachao. Now, Cachao is credited with inventing the Mambo as well...

Palmieri: His brother.

Brown: His brother, Orestes.

Palmieri: He wrote a number called “Mambo.” It’s beautiful. [SINGS IT...] Beautiful. And a piano solo by Jesus Lopez that’s frightening. They had already brought in the conga. But the mambo that gets accelerated later is different. But the name “mambo” stays. And Mambo, in the religion, is like a deity...almost saying a witch doctor in the *Santeria*. They have a name, not mambo...it’s close to that... So the Mambo had that kind of thing, and Arsenio Rodríguez, who is credited for putting the congo next to a bongo, and the new start of *conjunto*... When you talk about our music, you talk before or after Arsenio. Arsenio first had one trumpet, and this-and-that, but then he comes with three trumpets, pianist... That’s my second mentor, which really becomes my first...his name was Luis Griñán, know as “Lili”—“Lili” Martínez. Between Lili Martinez and Jesus Lopez, and another one called Pepe Delgado that played with a *conjunto* called... No, he was with Nelo Sosa—this band. These are *conjunto* bands. You had the Conjunto Casino also, with Patato. And Peraza, Armando Peraza, played congo in Conjunto Kubavana[.

So all these bands...it’s just amazing what was coming out of Cuba. So I get into that a little later, when I joined that Vicentico Valdés band because of Manny Oquendo, who was the bongo player for Tito. Then I saw him... I was playing stickball, and I told him, “Manny, you remember...I’m Eddie Palmieri, Charlie’s brother.” He said, “Yeah, I remember you.” Because Charlie had taken me to the Palladium when I was about 15. He said, “What can I do for you?” I said, “Can you recommend a record that I should buy to listen to the piano solo?” And he went... He used to grab his moustache. “Uh... ‘El Viejo Socarrón’”. “El Viejo Socarrón” was by Conjunto Modelo, that had left... Arsenio’s band had a gentleman called Chapottín. Chapottín then makes his band; Lili also goes with him—then the Modelo is one that comes out of his band, and then they were rivals. And on that Modelo album, Lili played with them. They all played the same style, you know, *guaguanco*, so he plays on it, and “El Viejo Socarrón”...I believe it was his tune also, Lili...a solo that blew me away.

Brown: Now, since we’ve talked about these genres, *Mambo*, *Charanga*... The *Rumba* comes to America from Cuba, of course. It gets transformed when it comes to America. It gets really commercialized and stylized, and I guess the music does, too. Perhaps you can talk about that evolution as well, the *Rumba*...

Palmieri: Well, that’s the African captives. They were captives. They turned you into a slave, but you were a captive. They took you away from where you were born by force. So when they arrived, particularly in Cuba... They were distributed all over the Caribbean, but mostly in Cuba, no? First they took the Catholic religion and used it and disguised it... Like, Santa Barbara now became Chango. They started using the deities of their belief in that. Little by little, after they started to play the drums...their drums, they started...the different rhythmical patterns that went with each deity... Then they took *la rumba flamenco* from the Spaniard, and they took away *flamenco*, and they kept the word *rumba*, and as soon as they did that, there was a pre-judgment on that, that it’s for the blacks and for the lower class of people. But that’s where the richness of *la rumba* comes out of.

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The *rumba* has three derivatives—*guaguanco*, *yambu*, and *colombia*. Then from there, you have the *guaracha*, the *danzón*, the *mambo*, *dansonetti*(?—36:04), *Changüi*, *cha-cha-cha*—it just keeps going on. Eventually, they all get lumped together as a word called *salsa*. But besides being a misnomer to me, it's a sacred rhythmical lack of respect and a sin, because each of them have their proper names, these dances, these rhythmical patterns. But they took the word *rumba*, and that's where you hear what they call *ariana*(?—36:32), when you hear [SINGS REFRAIN]. That comes from the Flamenco, the Spaniard. Remember, the Spaniard is the one that brings them to...and allows them to play the drums. Because the Moors went into Spain in 711, and when they attacked, they played their drums first, and then they came and attacked—and they stood there 700 years. So the influence of the drum, when they brought the captain, and they said, "As long as he picks up that 100 bags of sugar and tobacco and that, and we can smack him around a little bit, and he wants to play his drum on the weekend..." They had an ordinance, but they let them play, and that's where the development and these rhythmical patterns crystallized and developed. In the New World, that were brought here by the English, British, and everybody else, French [sic—untrue], whatever, they didn't permit the drums for fear of communication and revolt. So what you got there is the sorrow that comes out in the vocal blues...

Brown: The spirituals and the work songs.

Palmieri: Yes, and the classical blues eventually. That's the development. That's why the jazz player is so intrigued by the Latin rhythmical patterns. Meanwhile, it comes from Africa. But the drum wasn't allowed here to the degree that it was... That's why, when Chano Pozo arrives, that Mario Bauzá introduced him to Dizzy Gillespie, and he shows the power of one percussionist. It changed the whole characteristics of an orchestra, the jazz orchestra. Not all the players in the band liked the drums, and all the numbers, and a lot of purist jazz...they were saying, "They're taking us back to the jungle"—the drums. They got belittled in that. But you couldn't do that with Dizzy. Dizzy loved the drums and knew that was the deal. The classics that they recorded, "Manteca" to "Tin Tin Deo" and down the line... Unfortunately, Chano Pozo gets killed two years later. Only two years.

Brown: Yes, exactly on that date. Do you know anything about that? I know there are a lot of rumors, a lot of stories...

Palmieri: Well, there was a Cuban, a friend of his, a gentleman called Carrito, who used to pick up grass for him... It was very difficult at that time. If it's still hard, imagine, you know, THEN. And he didn't like what he brought, whatever, and he smacked him, open-handed in a bar. That gentleman was a marksman in the army. He went home... All his friends were, "Hey, are you going to let him do that to you?" He came back and blew him away.

Brown: Well, let's go back to talking about Mario Bauzá.

Palmieri: He's the one, the musical director of Machito, his brother-in-law, and introduces Chano Pozo, in 1947-1948, to Dizzy Gillespie. Then Dizzy, in an interview, said, "Chano didn't speak English, I didn't speak Spanish, but we both spoke African." [LAUGHS]

Brown: Thank you so much for helping the audience to understand this development of the roots of what we call now “Latin Music.”

Palmieri: Oh, it’s a beautiful story. If you really get into it, and I try constantly to get even more information... There are some gentlemen that really know even...I know less than them—but they couldn’t love it any more than I do... But whenever I am able to relate, I do, because it’s so important, our genre. I love it so much. It put the world to dance.

Brown: Now, I interviewed Mario Bauzá. He was my first interview... Of course, we all loved Mario. But you yourself, you didn’t like...you kind of see the shortcomings of the word *salsa*... Mario said, “I don’t like ‘Latin.’ Don’t call my music ‘Latin Jazz.’” He said, “Afro-Cuban.” Do you have any issues, or do you understand...

Palmieri: Well, yeah. First of all, the word *salsa*...the best one that described that was Tito Puente, “I put sauce on my spaghetti, baby!” So he took care of that. That’s what he’d write, but it’s... “Afro-Cuban” is where we get the music. But it was brought to... The influence of the Puerto Rican is the one who upheld the rhythmical patterns and the genre of Cuba. So then that becomes Afro-Caribbean. And now it’s Afro-World, in my opinion.

Brown: So the term “Latin Music,” “Latin Jazz,” because, you know, “Sun of Latin Music”...

Palmieri: I would say you have what I call “Jazz Latin,” which they have no idea... Not that they don’t have any idea, but they have the least interesting situation of putting people to dance. They’ll play like straight-ahead and they’re great players. But I call that “Jazz Latin.” They have the trap drummer, and maybe they bring in a conga player for ornament or something like that. There’s nothing wrapped around him. Then you have Latin Jazz, which is most respected by me, with a full rhythm section and designed to put you to dance, too. So, within my compositions, I satisfy the jazz player’s desires, and then, within that composition, turn it to the percussion, because you dance with the percussion, and bring it to...like if it was a dance composition with vocals for me. Whenever you hear my Latin Jazz, it’s structured to put you to dance, too. You listen to the great players,(?—42:29)...., but we had there Brian Lynch, Conrad Herwig, and Donald Harrison...

Brown: Right. We’ll get to that a little later.

Palmieri: Yeah.

Brown: Now let’s talk about... So you were working with Forrestier... You go on to form your own band, La Perfecta. Do we want to talk about that progression to your own...

Palmieri: Well, first of all, I made another band. When Eddie Forrestier... I went to the Sunnyside Gardens with the young band that I had, and then I... [FEEDBACK—42:59]... There was a gentleman called Manny Hecklin, who was in charge of... Do you know anything about the Sunnyside Gardens? Sunnyside Gardens was a place where they had fights, boxing and

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wrestling. But on Saturdays... The Mambo was so popular, the Italians, they used to love... Everybody loved to dance Mambo! So they used to have it on Saturdays. So I went there. Manny Hecklin said, "Yeah, I remember you, Eddie." I said, "I worked with Eduardo here." He said, "yeah. What's the matter? What can I do for you?" I said, "I have a young band, with trumpets..." Not the Perfecta now. I'm about 17 years old, I would say.

He goes, "Oh, but of course, Eddie. I'll give you the work." He said, "But I got a problem, Eddie." I said, "Well, what's the problem?" "It's your name. See, I have this society band called Al Lombardi, and if I put Al Lombardi and Eddie Palmieri, they're going to think I have two Italian bands. So if you want the job, I'll have to change your name."

Oh, wow! The first thing I said to myself was, "My father's going to kill me." So he goes, "Look, instead of Eddie, we'll call you Eduardo, and instead of Palmieri, Pamos." So I became Eduardo Pamos and Seconds. But I wanted the gig. See what you for a gig? Heh-heh. And they paid \$100 for the whole band. Then after we used to do the gig, we'd come back to the Bronx, I would treat the band to White Castle, which was 12 cents a burger. I was the big shot.

Brown: Big spender.

Palmieri: [LAUGHS] But I still have... My mother made me my case, with my Eddie Palmieri band, and that's how my wife eventually meets me. A friend of mine came to the Sunnyside Gardens, and she says he goes, "What are you doing here?" She went to collect some money from a friend who owed her at that time \$50—five dollars here, ten dollars here. She said, "I've got your money for you, you come, but look—what's going on with the Italian guy?" That's her friend. So she goes, she was just going to pick up the money and go to the Palladium. She used to go to the Palladium... She met my friend Jimmy, who was always in the Palladium. Tito Rodríguez was his friend. And Jimmy played piano. His father played saxophone, too—professional. She goes, "Jimmy, what are you doing here?" Jimmy says, "Oh, I came with my friend Eddie. You know Eddie Palmieri, Charlie Palmieri's brother, who plays with (?—45:29)." "Yeah, but who's THAT?" Eduardo Pamos. Oh God! So he said to her, the main thing is...

I had seen her two other times before. Because I had played places like the Rockland Palace, where... I went with Eddie Forrestier there, and I saw Charlie Parker, Charlie Ventura... I didn't know who they were, because I wasn't into jazz at all. My thing was really the Latin music, *tambor*, all that. But Eddie Forrestier played a lot of the black dances that they brought in the Latin bands, and he was the band that they would bring. There was other bands, but he was one of the main ones that they brought.

And I had seen her, like ran after her, and I couldn't... I didn't know who she... Two times, I didn't know who she was. Then, on that gig, she came in, and then after that, man... I took her home, and then we started going out, and that's how it all happened.

Brown: Could you state her name?

Palmieri: Yes. Iraidá González. Iraidá González Plana(?). Her mother was raised from the Taino Indians, and her father was one of the most famous diamond-cutters in the world. He

worked with Harry Winston for forty years. I'm very proud of that. And he was my father-in-law. He couldn't stand me, because every time he came home from work, he'd see me on the floor listening to records and my wife working... That didn't go over too well. Heh-heh-heh-heh. But I loved him.

Brown: How long have you been married?

Palmieri: Oh, we already passed the half-a-century. Going on 57 years.

Brown: Of course, Eddie the Second...

Palmieri: Don't call him "junior."

Brown: I didn't say that. I said "the second." I've known him for a long time. Our kids grew up together. How many kids do you have...

Palmieri: My wife and I, we have four daughters and my son. And my son now is my manager. We've traveled together for the last twenty years.

Anyway, I just wanted to tell the story about how we met.

Brown: That's great. But I wanted to get the family in there, too. So at 17, you're already leading bands...

Palmieri: And from there, my brother is the one who again, "Eddie, if you're going to be... You have to go with a professional band. This thing is fine, but you've really got to..." My brother used to play... By that time, he already had left Tito, and he was driving around all over the Eastern Seaboard with a quartet... My brother could play by himself. I mean, forget about it. He knew everything. But he had a trio, quartet, whatever, and when he came in, he would be off for maybe a couple of weeks or a month before he left again. So everybody would call him, "Charlie, man..." You'd go to the union... You used to go to the union, and you'd go Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and you had a section for the Latin players, and the rest was all the show people, musicians... "We need a guy for Thursday, Friday," this or that. The Latins, the Spanish, they looked at their ...(?—48:33)... Whatever instrument they played, they were looking for work.

So sure enough, my brother recommends me to Johnny Segui. My brother played with Johnny Segui, who was a bass player, but he had a great book, because he was also an artist. But he was a copyist. At that time, you did all the copying by hand. So he would do a copy. Tito Rodríguez and Tito Puente recorded constantly, every session, with like four records for Tico 78s. He would tell them, "Look, I'll make you a copy, you don't have to pay me, and I can make a copy for myself." They would say, "Sure, Johnny." So he had a very interesting book. The tunes... A hip book. Then he played the paso doble in that, and he played in the Caborojeño, 145th Street and Broadway. There was two. The first one, the owners burned it for the insurance, For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



in 1940, then they built it again in 1955—they opened it new. I opened up the Caborojeño at 145th and Broadway, I think it was...right.

So anyway, the thing is that then I started playing piano there. I lasted six months. There was another Cuban player called Jose Cárdenas, and they called him “Pancho Rompeteclas,” “Pancho the Keyboard Breaker.” There was an old piano that we used to use, and then, I hit hard, too... So somehow, the owners took it out on me (I was the youngest), and they came to the bandleader, Johnny Segui, and they told him, “Either the piano player gets fired, or we’re going to fire you with the whole band.” So Johnny told me, “Eddie...” He lives in Puerto Rico and I liked him a lot. Very talented on his bass. And had a good *conjunto*. Willie Rosario, who had the top band in Puerto Rico later, he was a *timbal* player, and he stayed with the band in the Caborojeño later...

But anyway, the main thing, they fired me. And it could have been the best thing that could have happened, because then my brother recommended me to Vicentico Valdés. I stayed with Vicentico for two years. I never recorded with him, because he used to have René Hernández, who was like my musical godfather to me and was the greatest arranger that could have happened in the history of our music, particularly to Machito...

Brown: In that context is where you met him, René?

Palmieri: René, I met him later on. In other words, when I do the... I meet him in that time when I joined...played the Palladium, and that’s where I meet... He knew my brother, naturally. He used to talk ...[MIMICS HIM—51:18]... Then eventually, I worked with him throughout my life later. Very important. When I make La Perfecta years later.

But in 1956, I start with Vicentico Valdés at the Palladium. We did what they called the graveyard shift, which meant the whole summer. Nobody played there in the summer, because Tito Puente would go to the President Hotel, Machito would go to the Concord, and then Tito Rodríguez would also go out to Long Beach or whatever, to be able to come back in September. You know, the Big Three are back in New York, and then it blows up in the Palladium for the fall into the winter and until next summer. Then in the summer they cut out, and then... That was the idea.

So I played with him in 1956, and I stayed with him. Then I went with Pete Terrace for about a year—the vibe player. Then I came back in 1958, and played in the Palladium again with Vicentico. Then my brother by that time recommended me to Tito Rodríguez. So then, I start with Tito Rodríguez for two years, ‘58 to ‘60, but Tito doesn’t have the band... He wants to do a show, a Vegas show...

Brown: But he’s BIG.

Palmieri: Oh God, one of the biggest names. But he wanted to do a show. And then, his wife was Japanese, that he had met in the China Doll... He wanted to do like a Lucille Ball-Desi Arnaz. That’s how Desi met Lucille Ball, and they became so popular in the ‘50s with their show. Tito Rodríguez saw himself doing that. But he had to get a Vegas show. So there was a

gentleman called Bernie Wayne that he went, and put on a show for him for about \$10,000... They put a show together for him. The show really wasn't happening. Tito put on a 6-gallon hat with two guns, and go, "My-name-is, hop-a-long ti-to, bang-bang..."

Brown: No.

Palmieri: Yeah. We went to Vegas, and next thing we know, we were fired—within the month.

Brown: Tito Rodríguez up there doing...

Palmieri: Yes. Then his wife would sing like "Poor Butterfly." She dressed like in a kimono. He had a Cuban young lady called Marta, who he danced with. I had my cuz... I call him "Cuz," but it was Luis Goicochea playing conga—we were very good buddies. Julio Andino, the great Julio Andino, who had a band that played...he was Tito's bass player for a while. A gentleman called Morty Lazar on sax. We had a trumpet player, Joe Demerre(?—54:08), who did a takeoff on Louis Prima, but the money he charged...that he wanted Tito to pay him, Tito didn't want, so we had a regular trumpet player, a gentleman called Dave Tucker... I remember the name; it's amazing; it's coming to me. Dave Tucker had nothing to do with Louis Prima—and he couldn't stand his patent leather shoes. So Tito was letting him have it, for whatever... He's blowing on his feet. His feet were killing him! [LAUGHS] He would send letters in back of a guy... In Vegas. We're talking Vegas now, 1959. A guy behind bars. He asked him, "Send me a radio; I don't care if I just hear static."

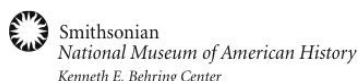
So the main thing is that we did Vegas for a month. The other band was Billy Williams' Revue. Billy Williams was the Billy Williams Singers that were on the Sid Caesar *Show of Shows*, four black brothers who sang—they took care of BUSINESS, right... He forms a revue in Vegas...which I didn't know when we got there even who he was... A band called Horace Henderson.

Brown: Fletcher Henderson's brother.

Palmieri: Yeah, Horace Henderson. And he has a band, a trumpet player, an elderly trumpet player, like a takeoff on Louis Armstrong... The drummer was called Snake-Eyes. Had four beautiful female singers... No, two singers. One blues and one ballad—female. They had four brothers from Kansas City. And his nephew was Skip, named Skip (I forget his last name) [Skip Cunningham], that tap-danced. I mean, a show that was INSANE. And Horace Henderson on the... Unreal. UNREAL what I saw there in 1959. And then Tito clashed with them. He kept yelling, "Between them and I, like night and day!"

So the main thing is that we got fired, and a great gentleman called José Curbelo, who in the '40s he had a band that... Tito Rodríguez and Tito Puente were in his band. He was a Cuban pianist who had arrived in 1939. Then he becomes an agent. Still alive. 95 years old. He's still alive. He had a saying that said, "You either work or you work through Vegas"—and we worked through Vegas! Then eventually, that group that I go with Tito...

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Then he went to California, in a place called The Virginias in Los Angeles at that time that was happening, and he puts a bigger band, and we had...you know, Juancito Torres from Puerto Rico was traveling, who had traveled the year before with Nolo Morales—a USO show in Asia, one of the biggest things ever. And he stood in California. Tito hires him. And a Cuban guy called Cuchillo (knife, you know)... It made a great band—dance band. But he wanted to do the show in there, too, and he did... It was like WOW.

Then we go to Vegas; from there we come back. Then we record *Live at the Palladium*. I do one album with Tito. It's a classic album, *Live at the Palladium*. Then we go to four months in a place called the Balmoral in Miami Beach with a small group. Then after that, I left Tito. We had a little thing there. So I said, "Look, best that I leave before it gets any happening..."

Then I told him, "Look, I've worked with the top...whatever... I think I'd like to make my own band." That's how I started. In late '61, La Perfecta starts.

Brown: Let's take a break right there.

[END OF FIRST SECTION, END OF CD #1]

[BEGINNING OF SECOND SECTION, CD #2]

Brown: While we were on break, you mentioned your high school experience. Do you want to talk about your high school... It was James...

Palmieri: James Monroe. Then, unfortunately, I had to leave. The Dean called me in and said, "Palmieri, you either leave or we throw you out."

Brown: So you never finished high school?

Palmieri: I went back. Night school. But that didn't work either. The reason that didn't work... Can I tell you what it was?

Brown: Sure. Please.

Palmieri: My father, like I told you, fixed televisions and radios. So in there, there was a friend of mine that went to the school, too. His name was Harry Gibbs. Light black. And my friend Jimmy Ortiz. He was going to night school, too. He went to Taft, up by Fordham. First day in there, first night or whatever that I get there, and I get my thing, I'm going to go for my diploma, it's the sixth(?—1:04) term, I'm ready to get in a year, and out, and get my diploma...

Harry Gibbs tells me a story. He says, "You know, yo' daddy came to my mother's house and took her television to fix it, and my mama was without her TV for the longest time, Eddie. The longest time. Then your daddy came and brought my mama's TV back, after a long time. Charged a lot of money, Eddie. And only after he goes out the door, my mama turned on the TV and that TV blew up." Now, you see, you can't do things like that to me, because... We're

laughing so much that now...by the time that this is happening, he's told me the story... Now I'm up in front of the teacher, who's asking me...asking your name, and I'm looking at the teacher, and I used to look back at them, and at my friend Jimmy Ortiz... We're going [SUPPRESSED LAUGHTER], the explosion, and I'm laughing... Now the teacher is, "What is so funny? What are you laughing about?" Oh, that's all he had to say. And with the explosion inside, and me laughing, I just walked right out of the classroom, hysterical, waited for Jimmy to come back, got in the little '38 Dodge that he had also, one of the old cars—and I never came back. That's why I never got my diploma. "He charged my mama a whole lot of money, Eddie, and as soon as your daddy walked out that door, my mama turned on that TV—her TV blew up, Eddie." [HEARTY LAUGH} Til this day, to me... Harry passed away, by the way. He'd get to see me in the concerts later. We used to talk about it. We laughed so much at that story. [DISSOLVES INTO LAUGHTER]

Brown: Ok, we're going to modulate.

Palmieri: [LAUGHING]

Brown: Let's pick it up where we left off, the formation of La Perfecta...if we can.

Palmieri: As for La Perfecta, my mother-in-law loaned me a thousand dollars, which I gave to a friend...

Brown: She loaned you a thousand dollars?

Palmieri: Yeah.

Brown: In 1960-61?

Palmieri: In late '61. That she saved from the shopping that my father-in-law would give her to go shopping. She saved... She had a thousand dollars, and loaned me the thousand dollars, and I gave it to my friend Angelo Rosado, who owned the Triton Social Club on Bruckner Boulevard. There was dances there. No liquor. It was a social club. That's where I met Barry Rogers earlier.

Brown: Ah, there we go.

Palmieri: Because Charlie Pacheco used to do... Charlie worked a lot with the black musicians, and Barry did, too—and used them. We all were about the same age. Johnny was a little older. Johnny was extremely hot. He already had broken the record on 45s with his *charanga*. He played flute for my brother. He learned how to play the flute and practiced the flute with my brother when my brother played next to the Birdland, at a place called...oh, it will come to me...it was... The International. The International was a supper club, and my brother was there with a quartet. The original trumpet player, Mario Cora, went to Puerto Rico to play with Cortijo. That's when Cortijo goes berserk, when he's with Mario Rivera... They break all records. That's the hottest band that we have, *Bomba and Plena*. Right? You heard of Cortijo, right? All right. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



So...all right...thank you... Pacheco is a great percussionist. He did a lot of work with a gentleman called Willie Rodríguez, who was a drummer, a professional drummer, and he did recordings, and he liked Pacheco to play bongo. Excellent. I mean, that's how talented Johnny Pacheco is. But he was studying to play flute. He used to play saxophone when we were kids, and I told him once that he's the worst saxophone player I ever heard in my life. We have that joke over and over when we see each other. But he played flute, and he became quite special.

He records with my brother, that first *charanga* album for United Artists, called *La Duboney*, Orquesta Duboney. My brother, what he did was a tremendous work. He took standards... They wanted standards. Like [SINGS] "Domino, domino, la-ba-de..." My brother translated the lyrics in Spanish, and he had the Cuban singer...the *charanga* band... Played great! Pacheco plays flute. The album comes out.

All of a sudden, then, Pacheco makes his own *charanga* with a big hit called "El Güiro De Macorina." [SINGS THE LYRIC] It becomes a monster hit. Nobody wanted to play it because it has a double meaning. You know? One gentleman in New Jersey named Ralph Font, he was talking to Johnny... He was a disk jockey, and I remember him. He said to Johnny, "I'll play it." All he did was play it. That becomes one of the most incredible hits... The next thing we know is that Johnny Pacheco sells 100,000 45s. We didn't even know about 45s or how many. We'd never heard of a number like that. I was still with...

I wasn't with Tito Rodríguez then, but I was free-lancing. The reason I knew Angelo Rosado, "Becko," is because I used to help him deliver groceries, to walk him... Underneath he used to sell the zip guns. He was like my in! Heh-heh... So we used to... I would help him with the grocery things. Then I mentioned, he opens up the Tritons. He opened up a couple of them. But he opened up the Tritons first, and in the Tritons... I told him, "Becko, listen..." I knew he was uptight for money, because he liked to gamble. I said, "Look, here's a thousand dollars; I'll rent the place for a month." I had so much faith in it.

I already had met Barry Rogers in that jam session when I met Johnny Haddad, and I said, "Wow..." I heard him play trombone, and I said, "Listen, I play up here once in a while..." I was playing already there, but I was talking about I play...I'm the only band for a month now... I said, "I play up here; could I call you?" He goes, "Sure." Then I meet George Castro on flute, who played with a band called Gilberto y su Charanga. They had no charanga; they had vibes, but he had the wooden flute. So at one time I could play with... The drummer was Mike Collazo, who was the drummer for Vicentico Valdés, with the rhythm section of Mike Collazo, Manny Oquendo, and Tommy Lopez in '56—that's how I met them. So Mikey had gone to the Service and came back, so I grab him right away to play timbales. Chickie Perez, the nephew of Luis Goicochea, I told you that we did Vegas with Tito Rodríguez... Chickie Perez was very talented. He played with Tito Rodríguez and Tito Puente, bongo. And a great ballplayer, too. He had a tryout with the Detroit Tigers. And a great stickball hitter. That was my...I loved stickball.

So Chickie played conga. Timbales, Mikey. Bass, Joe Rivera. Me on the piano. And I had met already with the friend that I told you, Orlando Marin, that had that problem, that early(?—9:18).... He had a singer... He already had a band. He's still with the band that I left. Then

he didn't make it... He was very popular, but he went into the Army, and then it never clicked again for him really. But he was doing... He had a singer called Mandilla, and they were always quarreling or whatever. So I went to an audition he was doing for different singers, and I saw Ismael Quintana. I didn't know his name. But I said, "The day I make a band, I'm going to go find that guy." Sure enough, I found him. Through other people, however...how I found him was amazing—but I found him. There was a gentleman called Ángel Nater. He becomes eventually the president of the union in Puerto Rico, the musicians union. But here he plays saxophone, and Ismael used to play conga and sing for him. So I tracked him down, and he told me, "Ah, Ismael Quintana." That's all I needed. The day we started working together, nothing that he knew, I knew; nothing that I knew, he knew—and it worked perfectly. Then we started to work together, and I gave him the Cuban records...whatever I did...what to listen to... Then he caught up. Very talented, and my best bandstand buddy...on the bandstand... My best musical buddy on the bandstand was Barry Rogers. He was a genius, Barry, you know.

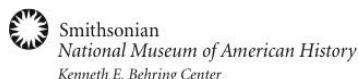
So that's how it started. I was using the trombone and the rhythm section or the flute and the rhythm section. I always the trumpets, *conjunto*, but I couldn't... Not that couldn't afford it. I didn't have the work to pay them. The trumpet players were mostly, you know, American trumpet players that I met with Tito and Vicentico, and you've got to pay them, otherwise they're going to go with the top dollar, and I didn't have that kind of gig. So it became an economic situation, the trombone or the flute... Then one night I was able to have them both, and I said, "That's it." Seven. Eventually it becomes eight, with two trombones, but it starts with seven.

Then that's how it started, the band, and now we become a hit in the Bronx. I knew I had someone special. No one had ever... We get credit being the only band that comes out of New York City, completely different than any other band ever. No other band had trombones up front. So we were recognized for that. Nobody is really looking at it that way. But we're the first orchestra with two trombones up front, one singing... First it's one trombone, but then we try different trombone players until we find José Rodríguez, who was Brazilian. Barry found him in a recording session, "We found the trombone player, Eddie. That's the guy we need." So I went and talked to him. That combination will never be equaled, of the range that they played in or how they played... Never. That will never happen again. They both passed away, by the way. We miss them dearly. And a tremendous vacuum.

But that's how the Perfecta starts. Later on is when he comes in. But in the interim, that's La Perfecta. That's how it starts. We start to work.

Now Tito Rodríguez decides to form another band, big, in 1962, and he calls Mike Collazo. Mike calls me, "Eddie, look, I got a call from Tito Rodríguez." I said, "Mike, you've got to go there." He's going to make a big band. He has Cachao, Victor Paz from Venezuela, Mario Rivera, Marcelito Valdés... I mean, he puts a band that's insane, Tito Rodríguez does. This is 1962 now. We were going to go to the Catskills for the summer, a place called Kutsher's Country Club, which I had played in 1955 with a first group called Ray Almo and Bobby Santiago. Two trumpets, they both played mellophones and one [Santiago] played vibes. The

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bass player, Guito [Al 'Guito' Gonzalez], who eventually plays with my brother at the International, and records with him, an album called *Easy Does It*—my brother plays jazz standards, amazing. And a *timbal* player. That was '55 in the Catskills.

So I had been to Kutsher's Country Club earlier, and then I'm going there with my own band now—'62. When I get there in 1962, Wilt Chamberlain is a bellhop... No, Wilt Chamberlain is a bellhop in '57, when I played with Pete Terrace also in Kutsher's. When I make my own band... There was a gentleman called Maurice Stokes, who had a terrible fall, and Red Auerbach from the Celtics used to have the summer camps up there... So Wilt Chamberlain was a bellhop.

Brown: He had to be the tallest bellhop on the planet.

Palmieri: Now he comes to play in '62, when I open up there with my own band, and he came up in his Bentley. What a transition a couple of years made. So the main thing is that now I'm ready to go up there. Mike says, "Listen, Eddie, Manny Oquendo is not working." Manny Oquendo had been playing with the charanga of Pacheco. Whatever band Manny Oquendo played with, "el zoomo." But he's playing timbales with Pacheco, and that band was happening. But for whatever reason, he left, and he's not working. Pacheco already had ideas to change to a new...an all *tumbao*, that he played... Like the sound of La Sonora Matancera that accompanied Celia when she was young—two trumpets, the bongo with the sticks...

So I call Manny Oquendo, you know, which we knew each other... And he takes the job. And now we've got Manny Oquendo on timbales! Chickie. Eventually, Chickie leaves, and then my brother has Tommy Lopez, which is the original conga player for Vicentico and La Duboney. And Tommy, when he sees La Perfecta making this move, because it was really the talk of New York City, he wants to come to La Perfecta. I had to call my brother and tell him. He goes, "Don't worry about it, Eddie. It's ok, man. Take Tommy." So he did, and my brother got somebody else. Now I got Manny Oquendo and Tommy Lopez, and then eventually Bobby Rodriguez leaves Tito, and he starts to play with me. But we didn't work that much, so he had to like drive as taxi also. Tito wouldn't give him \$5 more a gig. And the next bass player that comes, he buys him a bass and an amplifier. It's just unbelievable. But I reaped the rewards. That's why the album with Cal Tjader that you mentioned before, the two of them, it's Bobby Rodriguez on there. He used to come up to my home in Brentwood, Long Island, and we went over the tunes, and we knew exactly... Once you have your fundamental going... He was such a great bass player. The best that was here. He recorded also "El Molestoso."

Now, when he leaves is when David Perez is coming out of the service, the paratroopers, who played with Pacheco on bass... He went to the Service. I knew him when I was 15. He didn't want to take the job, because who left it was Bobby Rodriguez, but he takes it, and then David stays, and he's an incredible bass player, too—his timing and that, and another great buddy on the bandstand. And that's La Perfecta.

Brown: What's the repertoire? Are you writing all the music?

Palmieri: Yes, and doing the arrangements with Barry Rogers. We get everything together. I get the tune, and he would do the trombones and do the intros. That's how it worked.

Brown: When did you first start composing? Do you remember?

Palmieri: I did some work for my brother when he had his Charanga. But it's really when I start La Perfecta is really when I start writing... I had written some compositions. But when I start La Perfecta, I knew what I wanted, and I was already well-versed into the Cuban structures. I'd studied the structures. It was so incredible, why would they excite me in less than three minutes. How was it possible? I listened and I listened. That's why my father-in-law would find me on the floor, listening to records. Because Manny Oquendo in 1956 bought me 25 78s, and I studied them religiously—of different bands. Charanga, Conjunto, the piano players... I became quite a student.

When I eventually start La Perfecta, Barry introduces me to my greatest teacher eventually, that took me into another world. His name was Mr. Bob Bianco. Pianist. Saloon singer. Sang 60-70 tunes in the piano bars. He knew about the Schillinger System of music. He used to teach in the Henry George School of Political Economy, which helped wake me up. The only guarantee he gave me was, "You'll never read the newspaper the same again." Which I don't. I don't need to read the newspaper. I know what's in it. It's going to be the same. Except different names naturally, but the same problems that we have. Always. It's always going to be the same. Because it's one problem that we have. That's poverty. Once you have poverty and it's all over the world, you just predict that it's there, what's going to happen, wars, this, the whole thing.

Then Bob took me into the world of jazz harmony. His favorite pianist was...oh, the Italian, blind pianist...

Brown: Oh, Lennie Tristano.

Palmieri: Lennie Tristano.

Brown: Yeah, because he was straight out of Schillinger, too.

Palmieri: That was his favorite pianist. Or one of them, but his favorite was Lennie Tristano. The orchestra was Stan Kenton, only because...giving these great...these young talents a chance to write, like a gentleman called Barry [sic: Bob] Grossinger, who writes *The City of Glass*, and that it's all Stan Kenton... And what an orchestra...the essence of what orchestra was. There's only one orchestra for me, which is Count Basie. They have all different...Duke Ellington and all that, and what's his name, Billy Eckstine had a great orchestra, but ain't no band on this planet that swung like Count Basie, and I'll take that to my grave! Then that's how it happened.

So when I start to study that, now I learn...what I learned intuitively, why it works, or why it excites you, now I learned it scientifically from what I was able to capture from the Schillinger System. That has to do with rotary energy. That has to do with tension and resistance. Tension and resistances within the composition, which is just like sex. Sex and love. The
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reaction to the human is love and fear. Sex and danger; the reaction is going to be love and fear. The psychological dial, normal, ultra-normal, how to get to a (?—21:37). All this scientific situation. He was a scientific genius. George Gershwin studied with him, what's his name, the conductor, great pianist...

Brown: Bernstein.

Palmieri: No, the jazz pianist that worked on the West Coast with Shelley Manne...

Ken Kimery: André Previn.

Palmieri: André Previn, thank you. His uncle studied with... Oscar Levant. Benny Goodman. The mathematical approach. If music makes you feel that it's alive, it's mainly because it has movement. If it has movement, it must go with the mathematical logic. But all the arts. He wrote two volumes with 12 books in them, theory of rhythm, to theory of all the scales down the line. Mathematically, if I ask someone how many scales there are... What is it that you play?

Brown: I'm a drummer. A composer, too.

Palmieri: A composer. If I ask you how many scales approximately...scales in our tuning system, what would you say?

Brown: Well, there can be so many. It depends if you bring in modals. You can bring in the diminished, the half-diminished...

Palmieri: Hundreds.

Brown: Yeah, hundreds. Let's just say that.

Palmieri: Hundreds, right. There are exactly 13,313 scales, not one more, not one less. Dyads. In dyads, you have 11. Quarter semi tone, that's a scale of 55. And down the line. He has four... I was so involved in McCoy Tyner. My teacher, he was just so out. He goes, "Really? What is it that you like?" "Oh, man, his harmonies in fourth." "Oh, that's extension-2 in Schillinger." Jesus Christ! Because Extension-1 is thirds. So Extension-2 is fourths. Extension-3 is fifths. Sixths... You see? That movement... That whole thing, one root tone, one octave; two root tones, two octaves... You come up with 13,313 scales, whether anybody likes it or not. So things like that. That blew me away.

Then I came to his office one day. "I'm all burned out." I studied with him for 25 years." I bought... "I'm all burned out. There's nothing I can do, man. I can't think..." "Oh, really. I can write a thousand tunes a day." I said, "Oh, come on, come on. Don't do that."

"Yeah, really. You got a Yellow Page book? Telephone book. If you give me 7 numbers, using C as zero-extension and I count one, I've got C-sharp or D-flat. And every note that you land on, that becomes zero extension. So from the C-sharp or D-flat, 3. That's E-natural. Another one would be F. Whatever the numbers are."

The main thing is to have 7 numbers in seconds. I have 7 numbers. 7 notes. Now I grab that D-flat. I can make it a D-major-VII, D-flat-major-VII, D-flat-VII, D-E (I can make that an E plus 9). Now I've got 7 chords to go along, because... That's called from Schillinger mental organization of harmony, putting melodies to the harmonic structure. Not getting the melody. The opposite. See? Not getting the melody and then putting the chords to it. No. I'm going to get you the chords in seconds. You can feel lousy, you can feel like you're wanting to throw up or something, whatever, with a migraine headache or a hangover, and in seconds you start creating because you have no choice—the numbers will take you where the mind won't take you in seconds.

Mathematics becomes the soul of music. Because it's in all the arts. You can't paint a painting, otherwise they're all going to look like... I was going to say a goofy duck or goofy (?—25:52), but without mathematics you can't even get goofy out of the thing. Right? So it's all a mathematical situation of all the arts. His masterpiece was *The Mathematical Basis of the Arts*. Right? He has two volumes of music, from book 1 to 12, but then *The Mathematical Basis of the Arts*, which is the gem.

From there, with that tension and resistance, that's what's going to excite you, and that's going to give you the...it's going to lead to the musical climax. The reason you're able to get to that point is that it goes from a piano solo to a bongo solo to a conga solo. That's creating the centrifugal force—energy. So then it goes into a musical climax. That's why the Count Basie band would blow you out of your seat. They did this intuitively. [SINGS ARRANGEMENT] It's called an unbalancing axi. An unbalancing axi is characteristic of intros, you know, which goes away from the primary axi. You've got a primary axi. The primary axi you get by the note that has most value in that composition. Let's say it's a C again. Any note that goes away from that C is going to excite you. Then you have coming towards the primary [SINGS REFRAIN], below the primary, and then from [SINGS NOTE], up to the primary. That's like a diamond-type situation.

I thought it was crazy. When he finished with me, I was totally crazy. But when they told me, in an interview, in Spanish, “Is it true that Eddie Palmieri is crazy,” [IN SPANISH—27:37] (“...(?)... Eddie Palmieri ta loco”), I said, “Of course. But I'm referring to Plato, who said a musician or an artist is an inspired madman.” [LAUGHS] So that's where it went for me.

So there were four criteria that he taught me. “He who knows not and knows he knows not can be helped.” “He who knows not and thinks he knows, we got a problem with this guy.” “He knows and knows not that he knows...” My teacher, Bob, would put me in that one, he said. And the final one is, “He who knows and knows he knows, that's wisdom.” Very few humans fall into that category. Since... One of the books he recommended to me was known as “Muddlehead Geniuses.” It's also called “the wonderful wealth(?—28:32) machine.”

So, if there's any iota of wisdom that I have, it's that I don't think... I KNOW I'm going to excite you with my music. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind I'm gonna get you. Whether you like this genre, or you like me or dislike me, I'm going to excite you with my music. Every composition is going to get you, because it all has the tension and resistance in

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there. It's designed that way. And you notice our Latin music now, which is a disaster, is because of the rhythmical patterns that have been altered. There's no respect towards them, and there's no piano solos, there's no bass solos, there's no conga solos, there's no timbal solos, there's no bongo solos. They've just got a young singer who's quite talented, she's constantly singing, and the arrangements are bland, and it's going nowhere, and if you're dancing with your partner and you truly love her, you should bring a little pillow so you can sleep on their shoulder and you're dancing what they call "salsa." And I'm in a good mood today.

Would you stop that for a minute?

[PAUSE]

Brown: We were talking about what sounds like not only a musical awakening for you, but also, let's just say, a world view. An understanding of the way life is. You got this at the same time...

Palmieri: With one teacher.

Brown: With one teacher. Amazing.

Palmieri: Yeah. Yeah.

Brown: Whatever happened to Bob?

Palmieri: He passed away. Bob was also an alcoholic. They used to pick him up from the gutter. He changed and straightened out his life, and became one of the most brilliant minds that I could have ever met—and saved my life, you know, by his teaching, and to get me prepared for what's constantly around me in the music field. That it's not easy. You're getting attacked constantly, one way or the other. Fights with the promoters. Fighting with the record labels at that time, that you were signing slave clauses and you couldn't leave. Your royalties never were paid to you. Then, if you came up with the audit, they would tell you, "Oh, Mr. Palmieri, I hear you're going to audit my books." "Yeah." "When they come for the audit, what set should I show them?" Then I sign with the record company, a woven tapestry—oh Lord, bring me a basket with talent. So I went through all of this. Then the problems in the street... And as you get popular, the envy that comes towards the band. How to protect yourself spiritually. How to protect yourself physically.

I had a great teacher, that I met for the first time with Vicentico Valdés, who taught me this. "Remember this," and he told me in Spanish, "It's dangerous to be alive; but dead, you cannot live." [LAUGHS]

Brown: Simple wisdom.

Palmieri: But much wisdom!

Brown: So you learn systems of composition. You now have your own band. You're writing for

the band...

Palmieri: Right.

Brown: You're obviously very prolific, because I looked down at your discography, and there are so many great titles that have impacted not only what we call Latin music or Afro-Caribbean music, but has gone on to influence music around the world. The first recording under your name, *La Perfecta*, featuring your tunes, primarily your tunes...

Palmieri: Yeah, about 8 of them.

Brown: Barry's arrangements.

Palmieri: There was 12... No, there were different arrangers. I went to René Hernández for one. Because I have three different bands there. I have the bands that I wanted. I wanted *conjunto*. Barry just comes at the last session. As the budget decreased, so did the musicians for the Alegre band. That was the '36 Dodge on the front cover that belonged to Chickie Perez, and we took it under the Whitestone Bridge. So my first recording is 4 trumpets, *conjunto*, that I want. Then the second one is 4 trumpets and 2 trombones, Barry and a gentleman called João Donato, who is a famous Brazilian player, pianist and trombone player also. I just met him fifty years later from when we recorded in Europe. The next one was just one trombone and one flute, which is the beginning of *La Perfecta*, that's on that first album—four sides. So we did 12 then. Until I changed all that eventually. But keep going... Eventually, when I got to *Azucar*, that broke the whole...

Brown: That was where I wanted to go. Not only is it revolutionary as far as its music, but as far as its presentation. We talked earlier about recordings being 3 minutes or less, and now *Azucar* comes, and it's 8 minutes and 30 seconds.

Palmieri: But you know how it was possible? First of all, the record company that was with Tico, was Roulette, but the A&R man... At that time, it was A&R. They didn't know them as producers. The A&R man was Teddy Reig. Teddy Reig was the manager of the Count Basie Band. I told Teddy... It was already a hit in the street. About a year-and-a-half earlier...I hadn't recorded it... I was playing it. But it was a hit in the street already, "Azucar." I said, "This is not going to be..." He said, "Eddie, just record it; don't worry about how long." "Oh, ok, guys, let's go." 8 minutes and 30 seconds. The Library of Congress chose to put it in the Library forever, so I'm quite honored.

Brown: Absolutely. So...

Palmieri: But there... Just let me interrupt you, Anthony. But there, in that one composition, you got the two style bands. Because *La Perfecta* was able to play *conjunto* music type when Manny Oquendo went to the bongo, away from the *timbal*... We had an Arsenio-type *conjunto*. Not necessarily Arsenio, but that idea. Conjunto numbers. When he took the *timbal*, it was more

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charangia, like *charanga*. So all in one number. In that “Azucar,” he plays timbales, but we start *tipico*, with the *coro* in that, and then the piano solo... At the Palladium, they would say, “Listen, if you’re expected to dance...” I used to close with “Azucar.” “If you’re planning to dance ‘Azucar,’ wait til after the piano solo, otherwise you’ll never make it.” Because in person, it went to about maybe 15 minutes, easy. The 8 minutes in the record, that was a short version. That was like for a 45!—the way it turned out.

But in there, you have... And then you have Latin Jazz in that...when we go, BUHM-BI-BI, CRKKKRKKK, BUHM-BI-DI... That becomes now Latin Jazz within the *tipico*, then it goes back to *tipico*. We’re going back and forth, just having a wonderful time with the different structures that exist in our music, from *tipico* to Latin Jazz. There’s no band that can do that like that, and we did it.

Brown: And that was your conception. Or was that like in Duke’s band, where people are contributing...

Palmieri: Oh, yeah. You have the flute solo, and then Barry behind... I mean, it just went on. It blew everybody away. Nobody could believe it when it came out.

Brown: Did that allow you now to be able to command... In ‘65, you’re at the Palladium already. Right?

Palmieri: We started in late ‘63, going into ‘64.

Brown: So you must be like THE thing at this point, by now. Your stuff was germinating, and now you’ve got the biggest hit... Symphony Sid is playing it on the jazz station.

Palmieri: Constantly. Because he was controlled by the record company I recorded with, and so he put it on rotation. “Azucar” blows everything away. At the Palladium Ballroom on Wednesdays you had the Jewish crowd, more or less, and you had the Mambo shows, which were very popular. You had Marlon Brando who would come over and want to play bongos. He played terrible. Then you had, like, Kim Novak... On Wednesdays, the movie actors. You had the amateur hour. They put the numbers on your back, and you danced for about \$15, \$25 a piece, the pair, whoever wins. Then the professional dancers come, like Augie and Margo, who were classic; Cuban Pete and Millie; the Mambo Aces; the Cha Cha taps—all dressed up sharp, they had their music and that... Whatever bands were playing there, like Tito Puente or Tito Rodríguez or Machito, played the show. In the summer, we did it with Vicentico on Wednesdays.

Fridays you had all the gamblers and their ladies, all the people in nightlife, heavy, and they would take the whole section of tables. There was a lady that used to handle that. Her name was Gladys. She used to be known as “Tutu Tata,” which I recorded a recording for her. She handled all of THAT, you know... Mr. Hyman loved her. She brought Mr. Hyman to the Bronx to hear me play. She was a major influence on getting me to play the Palladium, you know. What happened is, there was a raid in the Palladium, when Rolando LaSerie gets raided...he’s performing there...the raid... But it was a raid already...they were quite abusive, the bouncers,

throwing the Hispanics down two flights of stairs. And they really wanted them out, the high-rise...the big money behind it. Because the Palladium was only a two-floor dance studio. They wanted them out to put the high-riser which you see there now. So whatever the pressures were, they took away their liquor license. Now the old man has no liquor license.

So I got in became a barker. I rented the International...the Riviera Terrace that becomes the second Cheetah on Broadway, and on Wednesdays... “Not there, folks!” Against the Palladium. The old man, Mr. Hyman went crazy. “That kid is crazy, that kid is crazy.” And José Curbelo, with his Cuban accent, was the agent: “And then you will have to book him.” He got me 90 gigs. That’s what I wanted. 90 gigs on the calendar, for \$179.50, the whole band. The Palladium had an \$18 scale. You played 16 shows in four days for \$72, and took out taxes. And you needed your cabaret card, which is quite a racial profiling situation.

Brown: Say that again about...

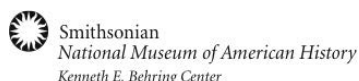
Palmieri: The cabaret card. It’s a racial situation there, because there was too many blacks and Hispanics working downtown. As long as you stayed uptown, Minton’s the jazz room, you were fine. You come down to Broadway...you know, downtown... So we had to go to the police department. Billy Taylor had a thing on that, an exposé on that. You had to get your fingerprints and a card. Without the card, you couldn’t play any place they served liquor, so you’re out of business. It happened to all the top jazz players that got caught on drugs and this-and-that, and that’s why, when I went to Europe, France opened the palms first, and that’s why I have a special thing for France...even though they can’t stand any American, I think... But we do well when we play there.

The thing is that it was a racial situation, profiling situation, and it was very sad. Billie Holiday. She could work New York, but only in the Carnegie Hall, but you could only do that once a year or every two years that she could work, for example. She died handcuffed to a hospital bed in the Metropolitan Hospital. Quite extraordinary. But that’s the way it was.

So eventually, I got into the Palladium, though, and I blew them away, because on Saturday... Then it was the blue collar worker, Puerto Rican mostly. Then on Sunday, all black. The majority was black. The blacks would come to me and say, “Hey, Eddie, you gonna give me some *azucar* tonight, baby?” They liked “Es Sabroso.” “Hey, what about...ok, try ‘El Sabroso,’ man.” “Ok, brother, you got it.” We were a favorite with the blacks. They were the ones that elevated me, and I could never thank them enough.

It was a band, an orchestra, not a dance band only. It was an exciting dance orchestra, but it was an orchestra that you enjoyed looking at. You learned looking at them, and you were fascinated to hear each individual showing his preparation, because they were featured. If there’s anything about me on the bandstand, and my bands, there’s no intimidating factor with me and my musicians. I want the best, and if I’m going to pay them, I’m going to showcase them, and you’re going to see something that you’re not going to be believe. And then, how we work in a synchronized form so we can give you that delivery.

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Because I knew I wasn't going to miss. I knew it intuitively, like I said, but as I studied with Bob, then I learned it scientifically, again with that tension-and-resistance thing. "Oh, now we got it!" You know what I mean?

Brown: When I look at your discography, of course, *Mambo con Conga Equals Mozambique*... That's one I heard real early on...

Palmieri: I got into a lot of trouble with that, too.

Brown: Why?

Palmieri: Because I was accused of being a Communist by the first Cubans that came from Cuba. The CIA and FBI went to see my record company. At that time, a gentleman called Mr. Morris Levy at Roulette. I told him... He brought me in and he said, "Mr. Palmieri, what did you record for me? What did you do this time?"

"I told him it's a rhythm called Mozambique, that it's coming out of Cuba. The fighting in Angola, I've got nothing to do with that, but it's a rhythmical pattern that we play, and it's the old *conga*, Mr. Levy." I'll never forget that.

Mr. Levy at 21 was the owner of the Birdland. He also owned Roulette Records. And he was backed by the big mafia...the Gambino family and all that. The Columbo Family. He was well-cared... He was more loved(?—43:57), let's put it that way.

So I explained to him from A to Z. "Mr. Levy, it's the old *Conga*, but it's called Mozambique." I explained it to him. They said, "Man, Eddie, you gave a great explanation there to Mr. Levy." When I finished he goes, "Oh, I see. I see, Eddie. Mr. Palmieri, don't record that shit any more." [LAUGHS] Which I did. I kept recording it. I had to give it to him. Then everything was fine until I did *Harlem River Drive*, and then again the FBI...

The Cuban problem with "*mozambique*" was that Alpha 66 got involved, and Alpha 66 were threatening to blow up all the radio stations that played my music.

Brown: Explain what Alpha 66 was.

Palmieri: That was the first Cubans that came from Cuba in the first ship-load that brought in all the Cubans, mostly the rich Cubans, white, that came in from Cuba after 1959. They organized a thing called Alpha-66, whatever it was, and I was the target when I did "The Mozambique." Threatening to blow up the radio stations that played my music. I had to go to an attorney called Bruce Wright, who became later a judge. They called him "cut 'em loose, Bruce." He got into a lot of trouble. Because he let the guys off, whatever. He saw the injustice in the courts. But he wrote a letter to Universal...you know, Universal Press International [sic], that music is music and politics is politics, and never should both be...

But that was my first problem. My second one was "Harlem River Drive." I wanted to go crossover, and my favorite, favorite fans were the Weathermen. Did you ever hear of the

Weathermen?

Brown: You're talking about the political group.

Palmieri: Yeah. I was their favorite artist. They caught all these guys with my record, and then here comes the FBI again, to Morris Levy again, and the CIA. Mr. Levy calls me in. "Mr. Palmieri, what did you record for me THIS time?" [LAUGHS] So you see what I mean?

Brown: But this is a significant album. Like you mentioned, you were doing crossover. So now you're not just blending Caribbean music...

Palmieri: In my opinion, it's one of the finest albums ever recorded. My opinion of where it went. Ronnie Cuber. He worked with the Aretha Franklin band. You've got Cornell Dupree, who passed away. Bernard Purdie. I mean, it is serious business now, the heavy-heavy-heavy. Then Randy Brecker with Burt Collins, trumpet. Ronnie Cuber brought him in on baritone—who is known as the God of the Baritone. A gentleman called Jimmy Norman, who sang with the Commodores, and he just passed away. It seems like...

I'm going to be very rich if I had an undertaker's business, because I've buried everybody so far...unfortunately.

But they always present that incredible recording, and that was an incredible recording. The statements that are on that record will be the effects that we have for the rest of the human existence on that this planet. It's all in that record. Broken home, what it is to come from a broken home, and this... Because the gentleman who wrote the lyrics, Calvin Clash... That's what I recorded in Sing Sing. I went to visit him in Sing Sing. He was an inmate there. Then they moved him, and then I did the recording in Sing Sing—that idea. Then I kept playing all the prisons, Attica twice, and Lewisburg when they brought in the people from the Nixon...the Watergate... Riker's Island.

I went to Riker's Island with Dizzy Gillespie. He came with the camera. He knew the gentleman named Carl Warwick, who at that time was the musical director at Riker's Island. He was a musician who had played with Dizzy. So Dizzy gets on the ferry; we go to Riker's Island. He's going to be my emcee. So he goes... Not we got the place all full of convicts, all sitting down. And he goes, "Before I bring out my Latin soul brother, Eddie Palmieri... Hey, Eddie! You ever see such a captive audience?" [HEARTY LAUGH] I went, "oh, wow!"

Brown: But hopefully they laughed.

Palmieri: They did. And some bood. BOO...and this shit...

Brown: Can we go back to "Harlem River Drive"? Talk about that session, putting those people together, all these different concepts, all these different kinds...

Palmieri: It was Ronnie Cuber. Ronnie Cuber did it. The "Idle Hands" was written by Marilyn For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Hirscher and her husband then, Ira Hirscher (they've separated). David Hirscher and Ira Hirscher played with the Orquesta Broadway, the *charanga*, in the Palladium, and they were very talented. David Hirscher's family owned the...another hotel in the Catskills, and I played there. I played Kutsher's and I played Brown's, and then I played the one that his family owned... I can't remember; it will come to me. His brother Ira then moved to New Zealand. He was married to Marilyn, who wrote, with my teacher, Bob Bianco, "Idle Hands."

Calvin Clash wrote all the other compositions, except one called "If," which was written by Jimmy Norman. "If we had peace today..." The lyrics are incredible. Amazing album.

Brown: Was it a hit?

Palmieri: No. Only the Weathermen bought it. Amazing.

Brown: It's probably something that if you released it today...

Palmieri: That's what Eddie said. Maybe now, we could release it again...

Brown: Occupy Wall Street.

Palmieri: Yeah. But it was done. If it isn't meant to happen, it isn't meant to happen. But it was done. Just like *Lucumi Macumba Voodoo*. That's another one.

Brown: Right. We'll talk about that one.

Palmieri: I did it so well for Epic, they didn't know what to do. I was in the Black Department. I don't mean the "Black Department." The head of the black artists. They asked me, one of my friends said, "What happened?" I said, "I guess they weren't black enough." They didn't know what to do with my record.

Brown: This one was produced by Bobby Columby.

Palmieri: They brought him after...

Brown: They brought him after, for like both productions.

Palmieri: After I had the first session that didn't turn out well, I brought in René Hernández for a minute. I had brought René Hernández from Puerto Rico; he did a number called "A Danzon," that never came out on that album. It came out later, on the *White Album* of Fania. Bobby Columby brought me another... But Bobby brought in great singers on that. We really needed him to come in, because the first attempt to record it didn't turn out, and it cost the company a lot of money. They brought in Bobby to coordinate. And I'm glad I met him. Because of him, it turned out to be quite successful. But then I finished out the project, and I mixed it.

Brown: The title, of course, is in reference to traditional African religion.

Palmieri: Right. I studied the *santeria*. But it was *Lucumi Macumba Voodoo*. I figured if I

really get good into voodoo, all the people who were quite critics of me, I could have turned them into little hamsters. But it didn't work.

Brown: But each one, *Lucumi*, *Macumba* and *Voodoo*... I mean, *Voodoo* is from Haiti, right, but they all from African...

Palmieri: *Lucumi*, African, you know. And *Macumba*, Brazilian.

Brown: So you're diversified, but the root is from Africa.

Palmieri: Well, the idea was that it all related to the belief, the religious belief. *Chango* is Shango in Brazil. But the idea is that they were all captives that were brought in, and what happened to the development... I brought in the great percussionist, Francisco Aguabella. He sang there, he played the *batas*; it was quite accepted... As a matter of fact, my friend Manny Lopez was traveling with the Irakere, and he brought them to the studio when I was recording for CBS. They heard...Chucho Valdés heard *Lucumi Macumba Voodoo*. We blew them away. I mean, he just was so impressed with what he heard. But that it didn't do well commercially, that was something else. Because they put me in Epic, and they didn't know what to do with it. Whatever. And Puerto Rico wasn't going to understand it. It just wasn't going to... It just didn't happen. But it's there also. I am very proud of that recording.

Brown: I want to go back a little bit and talk about some of the records that personally really galvanized me. *Sentido*, *The Sun of Latin Music*, of course... To me this is another landmark.

Palmieri: *The Sun of Latin Music* blows everybody away.

Brown: Oh, yeah. Let's talk about that one.

Palmieri: It won the first Grammy. But *Sentido* before that is... We bring in Victor Paz, who was never known as a soloist but only the greatest first trumpet player that we've ever had in our genre. Mario Rivera and Barry and José. Barry did the orchestration for "Puerto Rico" and "Adoración" for the horns—they were my compositions. Then we did one called "Condiciones Que Existen," which again, hitting conditions that exist, the political existence that we... Without saying anything else, but just "Condiciones Que Existen" don't let me enjoy myself. Because "Condiciones Que Existen"(?—54:27).... which means party, the existing conditions which I'm talking about, which I explained before... The conditions we have every day, as everything rises—rent rises, everything...while wages tend to fall. So you have less buying power. That's something that's amazing, because poverty is only low wages or no wages. And everything that we do that has to do with land speculation, normal land speculation, goes into a height... That's where you have the boom. That's where you have the crashes—from '29, the one we just had here... You try to plug it with a thumb in the dam, and eventually it's got to collapse again, because it's out of context. Rents now are...the opinion...not an opinion—half of what you earn goes for rent. At one time it was supposed to be a quarter of what you earned. Now it's half going towards three-quarters of what you earn for rent. It's beyond anybody's comprehension. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



But that's what is, so how do you deal with it? All that was in my recordings.

Brown: We're going to have to break soon. For me, what I hear you saying is that not only are you a musician who is trying to make the best music possible for your audience, but you're also trying to give them some benefit of what you understand about the world, through your lyrics.

Palmieri: Something to think about.

Brown: Something to think about.

Palmieri: We are a thinking thing. We rationalize. It's the only thing that we have over any of the other animals on the planet. Somehow, we become these muddlehead geniuses, to quote *The Wonderful Wealth Machine*. We can do... What we've done has been incredible marvels, you know, all over the world—everything that we have done. We have gotten to the Moon—so they tell us. I think they all ended up in the Mojave Desert. But what I'm getting at is, the things that we have done, technically... And we can't get rid of the problem. The problem is poverty. There's got to be something that's... There's a villain in the plot. Once we have that, then everything else is going to stem from it—crime, wars, high rents. Bingo. Wages tend to fall. If you're earning a certain amount of money, and everything is rising around you, and your wages don't go up, you've got less buying power. You don't have to be a mathematical genius to figure that out. Remember, they threw me out of school. So just to rationalize, like... Just think, man. Think and see. Look what's going around. Don't you realize what's happening in the richest country in the world, the wealthiest situation next to the highest degree of poverty? How is that possible? Why is it happening? Do you give a damn? Do you have the guts to see it change? Those are the lyrics of *Harlem River Drive*.

Brown: We have to stop.

[END OF CD #2]

[BEGINNING OF CD #3]

Brown: We were talking about *The Sun of Latin Music*. But of course, the one that everyone, when they see this... I have the original LP. But on the CD now is "Un Dia Bonito." Eddie, piano solo... For me, that's kind of the epitome of what you've been talking about, building-building-building, and that explosion.

Palmieri: In Puerto Rico, there was a disk jockey. I'm in my mother's house... I stayed in Puerto Rico for about five years. But before that, I'm listening to his program at night. And he goes... He's talking with this kind of, you know, Continental voice. And he goes, in Spanish, [SUAVE VOICE] "escucha esto," "Listen to this, and listen to that piano playing. You could tell he's totally mad."

"Un Dia Bonito" I wrote on a boat here, on a boat ride that everybody hated. There used to be boat rides that were dances. You'd put bands in there on Sunday, but you put them at 9 o'clock in the morning. By the time they got back, they were all drunk, they're fighting in the

boat, they're throwing chairs at each other, some guy is overboard, and everybody, like Barry and all them, we all hated it. Because you had to get up early in the morning from Friday and Saturday, and then at 9 in the morning you've got to be on the boat ride to go to Bear Mountain somewhere, come back... That kind of job.

So I'm in one of those boat rides, and I grab the conga, and I started, [SINGS FIRST TWO LINES] "...yo me cuentro, e que no..." In a boat. "Un dia tan bonito(?)..." But the original part of "Un Dia Bonito" was when, in 1965, I went to California. Dave Perez, the bass I told you who comes in after Bobby Rodriguez, he comes downstairs... We were in one of those terrible hotels (I think it was called the Golden Nugget) that we had to put all the suitcases on top because all the insects were running around the hotel. At that time, promoters didn't care. We took many years to change all that around, but in the beginning, you want to gig...ok. He comes downstairs, David... He has a good sense of humor, too. The guy in the...when you check in...the desk... He goes, "Beautiful day, isn't it?" The guy goes, "Isn't it always?" But with this accent. "Isn't it always?" You don't want to... Oh, shit.

We laughed so much about that. And when I did the boat ride then, I could remember that, "Un Dia Bonito Comoy(?—2:49)." Plus I had family... In 1950, my two uncles drove to California and lived in La Puente, which is about 50 miles from Los Angeles. One worked for the Post Office and the other one got into different businesses and that... I mention that in that... "Un(?—3:13).... [SPEAKING SPANISH] in San Francisco" also,(?—3:16 to 3:19).... en La Puente, where my family is. So I sent out a cordial hello to Rosario and to San Francisco, because I love San Francisco.

Then it was a 16-year-old singer, which is Lionel Rodriguez. Ismael Quintana, after *Sentido*... Fania was very, very fortunate that every singer that sang with the previous band that he was with went on his own and did very well. Like Hector Lavoe from Willie Colon; Pete El Conde from Pacheco; Ismael Miranda from Larry Harlow... Every singer that went on their own, they did...you know, that kind of thing.

They couldn't get me, because I didn't want to be in there... There was an old saying (a little humor) that a friend said, "I don't want to be..." What was his name? Oh, his name was Joe Bananas and his bunch, was music with a peel. So the idea was, I didn't want to be one of the bunch. You know what I mean? And I found it more exciting to start a new company with some gentlemen that were starting the company. They called it Mango first, which is the original...it said, "(?—4:38) Mango." Then they had to change, because one of the Islands...Blackwell, or some one of those guys down there...Island Records had a Mango...

Brown: Oh, Chris Blackwell. That's right.

Palmieri: So they changed it to Coco. But that's how it happened. But Ismael went with Fania, which I was happy for him. You know, he rode through hell with us and with me and with all my madness, and fighting promoters. He didn't smoke, he didn't drink; the only thing he did was... He did breathe oxygen. But he was so... He was a gentleman's gentleman, and a very dear friend, For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



and a great bandstand buddy, was always there. In those gigs in the mountains, he had a day job. He used to drive 100 miles a day, him and Georgie, back and forth to do the gig, and “if you don’t do that, I’m going to have to get somebody else.” And they did it. I could never thank them enough for that, because it kept the band together.

But eventually the band breaks up. My deal is I’m not developing, I’m not getting... It was terrible years for me near the end of *La Perfecta*. By that time, the one that helps me out is Bob Bianco. But anyway, the recording of *Sentido* (?—6:03) is by (?), so I have no choice. I already had started “*Dia Bonito*.” One of the owners of Coco Records knew Barry, so he brings Barry in to work with me after all those years of absence, with *Sentido*, and we do “*Puerto Rico*”—he did the orchestration for the horns, and beautiful orchestration. He was a genius, the guy, and I loved him very much. We worked together great. He never worked with anybody like he worked with me. Never. Him and I, that was like magical.

So they bring him again for *The Sun of Latin Music*. Now, I have no singer. So I go to Puerto Rico, and I get to Puerto Rico, and when I get to Puerto Rico there’s a gentleman, a Cuban singer called Justo Betancourt. He had his own band. An excellent talent, man. Dance. You know what I mean? The guy puts on a show. And we’re friends. He worked with me like ten days when his mind was on vacation, before he might have left, you know. But by that time, he had left, and I get there, he’s already living in Puerto Rico—Justo, you know—and he’s got a friend with him. So I’m in the Americana Hotel, which is now known as the Intercontinental, next to the Savon(?—7:18), where my father eventually worked and died, at the Hotel Savon(?)—an electrician there. So it was called the American Hotel, then the Sands, then the Palace—all the different names, everybody doing their number and making money off the hotel. Then it becomes the Intercontinental.

But when I’m there, it’s still the Americana Hotel, and I asked... It had to be ‘74, going on ‘75. I said, “Justo, I’m looking for a young singer, not a name singer...” Because I asked El Gran Combo, asked them directly, Andy Montañez, if he would sing, and El Gran Combo gave him permission to sing two or three songs, but not the whole album. I needed somebody to sing the whole album.

So I got no cooperation there, I can’t do it, so I’ve got to get a new voice, a new singer. So I tell him, “Listen, I’m looking for a new singer, and if you know how to play guitar, that’s going to be a great help,” because... And the guy next to Justo(?—8:30)... said, “I have a young man here; his name is Lalo Rodriguez. His father works here as a waiter (he was a tremendous waiter, the father; fast; he was the fastest waiter I ever saw work). His father works here, and Lalo is from Carolina.” He was right there, he was so close there...Carolina.

I said, “Listen, tell him to come tomorrow to my hotel room, pick me up; come there.” I already had met the father...I mean, I saw him working and all that. The next day, a knock on the door. When I open it up, the guitar is almost as big as the kid. The kid is 16 years old. I said to myself, “Oh my God...why have thou abandoned me?” Heh-heh, heh-heh. So I just brought him in. I said, “Let’s go.” I didn’t even let him in my hotel room. “Come with me.” I went to Calle del Parque(?—9:34), took a taxi, and I went to René Hernández’ condominium, and I take him to René Hernández.

René was now working at the hotel, Caribe Hilton, doing the shows. The piano player for the two shows. He was doing the shows...the show band. But I had been talking to him. In 1973, I had started some work with René, which is the tango, “Dia Que Me Quieras,” and “Ritmo Alegre” that was in *The White Album*. But it was really arranged in 1973 for Cheo. I took some money from Fania as an advance, and then it didn’t happen. So I put those arrangements in a closet for six years. It was done by René Hernández, with the violincellos, the woodwinds, something we had seen and I wanted... He told me, “If you come up here, and we’ll spend a couple of hours working together...” Because he figured he was out of it already. I said, “No, it has to be you.” I love him and respect him so much, you know. So he did it, and then one day I walked, he goes, “Eddie, now I know what you want,” when it came to the tango, with the tango rhythm and all that for the respect of the country. Because when I brought him the “Ritmo Alegre,” that man took out an old Gerrard, blew it all full of dust, sat in a chair with a pencil and music paper, never got up from that chair, and I played the whole *danzon*, “ritmo alegre...” into the classic... He never got up. He had perfect pitch. And when I finished, I told him, “René, if I could only do that. Don’t you ever miss...” He goes, “Well...”—in Spanish. “Sometimes when I’m not feeling too good, I’m a semi-tone off.” [LAUGHS] That’s how we started.

But that music then went to the closet for six or seven years...six years, about six years. Because the guy from Fania...I mean, the guy from Coco paid him off, and he wanted me to record with him, not... He was an artist for Fania at one time. He got them the office space and everything. But the main thing was that I didn’t do it, and then I went and did *Sentido*, and then I sold them the Puerto Rican tape that we had, *Live in Puerto Rico*, and we worked on it, and then I sold him that, and then he’s setting up two albums to come out—that became a hit, too. Then we worked on “Dia Bonito”—you know, *The Sun of Latin Music*.

So I take him to René’s, and I tell him, “Sing what you want to sing.” So the kid takes out his guitar. He’s 16 years old. He said, “This is a composition that I wrote when I was younger.” Younger.

Brown: This is Lalo.

Palmieri: Lalo. And he sings a composition that the title of it is, “Savage Desires”—the translation. “You wrote that when you were younger?” “Desiros el barrio...” Wow! When he sang that, I said, “We’ll start with that one, give him a french horn lead in that,” and then, that’s how we started to work.

Now I get him to New York, but the young man knows nothing about intonation, *sonero*, but I know he’s got a spiritual insight, and one of his aunts is like the *santeria*—so he knows... He had a boiling temperature which I had to get to him; I had to bring it out of him. So we’re singing upstairs, working, and I’m telling him what to sing, like Piracione(?—13:36), to go with the number... “Let’s go downstairs.” I took him downstairs to the bar, and I have some coffee, I give him a sasarilla, I give him a glass of milk or something...I don’t think a beer... So I look at him, I tell him, “Lalo”... In Spanish, I tell him, “Lalo, I don’t want you to think that I think that

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you're a bad singer. What I want you to know is that I want you to be confirmed that you're the worst singer I ever heard in my life." And when I said that to that young man, Anthony, that shit was like... Excuse me. But that effect was like a volcano coming... That's what I needed. Coming out, like AGGHH... It got the warrior out.

We went back upstairs, and the young man finished that album—and that's a classic. Barry did the orchestrations of the compositions, because I wrote everything out of "Dia Bonito"...but the orchestration. Then we had brought Victor Paz again, with two trumpets. Then the French horn, then the tuba. We had a whole different mix than we'd had. Mellophones that Barry played *ela cumbia* and a whole lot of things, until we lead to then *The White Album*... First after that comes *Lucumi Macumba Voodoo*...because after that album comes *Unfinished Masterpiece*, but that was going to be called "Kika Mache(?—15:24)." "Kika Mache(?)" had to do with the *santeria* religion again, when they throw four pieces of coconut, and to scratch for your best wishes, your best healthy and that... And how it lands is called "alafia(?—15:39)... If it lands on the four pieces white, it's the best sign—alafia(?)... And that was going to be our cover. It was gorgeous. We had already taken the picture. They didn't let me finish it, because of the budget, you know, and they decided to release as they did, and a lot of the musicians went and finished it off without me, including Barry Rogers, including Victor Paz... That's when you find out that it's not the money; it's the money. You've got to get over that, and you comprehend thing, or whatever.

I told them, "If you release that album, I'll never record for you again." They didn't believe it. And I never recorded for them again. That album, though, comes out and wins the second Grammy, and now I lock myself in my house for three years, you know... How I came out is because CBS, through a friend of ours called Michelle Zarin, who used to handle Tower of Power, knew one of the owners from here, and she knew one of the people at CBS, and the contract that they bought off Morris Levy for \$35,000... That was the first seventeen-and-a-half albums that were sold, and at \$2 wholesale, it came out to \$35,000... CBS gave them...

They made a half-million dollar deal. CBS gave them \$225,000. They gave me \$50,000. I went to pick up a Bösendorfer. I bought it up, because we needed some balance here. Eventually, the Bösendorfer got ruined, taking it to Puerto Rico back and forth. Then when I sent it to fix, they want the \$20,000, and I didn't have it in those years because I was going through all these changes...

All right. The main thing is that they give up \$225,000. I do *Lucumi Macumba Voodoo* with the understanding that if they don't pick up the option, which was another \$225,000 that goes back to them, I go back to them. And the album didn't sell. They don't pick up my option. I close myself in my home for another three years. They went bankrupt, because I was the one they were trying to invent... They went bankrupt, and it couldn't happen to...excuse my expression, but it's in my book...to nicer shitheads. Then I came out, because they sold my contract to Fania for \$60,000, and that's when I recorded *The White Album*.

Brown: Let's talk about the creation of that album. The inspiration, the sessions...

Palmieri: But I suffered dearly in those six years that I locked myself up in my home, without

working, without doing...with no communication, nothing. They didn't believe I would do that. When it comes to my music, and the way I am, and if it isn't coming out right for the people who are buying it, and you have a very big problem... I was never stopped from any other company that I ever...to record how I wanted to record. They were the first to attempt to do that, and I believe they learned themselves quite a unique lesson. I suffered dearly, and my family went through hell, but we're still here.

Brown: It was a matter of integrity.

Palmieri: Yes, sir.

Brown: So during your period of isolation, if we want to say that, were you still composing?

Palmieri: No. That's where Bob Bianco came in. Now I was...nothing... I was just at the piano, I was there, listening to...watching soaps with my wife. Played some of the records. Financial things were very bad. Because the promoters also had a ceiling of what you could earn. There was really no band. Just whenever I could get a gig. There was no set band.

Brown: You have a family, too.

Palmieri: Yeah. And they all went to college. My oldest daughter went... With all those lean years, my oldest daughter graduated from Miami University; my second from Ohio; my third one also from Miami; Eddie from Quinnipiac; and the young one from Boston College, and she got a scholarship and graduated from the University of Chicago. Now you figure that out.

Brown: Did you go into depression?

Palmieri: Everything. Depression. Tremendous problem with the IRS—because I didn't file for eight years. I went in front of the judge. "The half-a-million dollars you're looking for, your honor, went to my children's education and Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam lost." Eventually, I heard the judge say, "Get him out of here." Oh, "How do you make a living, then?" "Oh, I work in after-hours." Which is true. "I'd start at 3 in the morning, I'd finish at 9; we'd sell male and female prostitution, we'd sell every drug you could think of; and I go from one shylock to the other, because I borrow and I pay with interest, and that's how I make a living, your honor. Which is the truth." Get him out of here. Blow, before I lock him up for the rest of his life. And I walked out.

Then I straightened out with the government, an accountant and all that—and my whole life was changed around. But those were the years that I was fighting, I was a rebel in the street, and I paid dearly, but I won't give in to doing what you think you're going to do to my music. That you're not going to do. Nobody is going to do that. Something, huh?

Brown: A man of principle.

Palmieri: I always wondered if I had any part Indian in me.

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Brown: Persevere!

[PAUSE]

Brown: I'm kind of speechless after all that. So maybe we'll go back to the music. We'll talk about the music. I mean, that's...

Palmieri: Oh, we were talking about music?

Brown: I hope so.

Palmieri: Sure. This is just that what can happen in the career of a musician is not easy. You've got to have the will to take it and to dish it out, you know—and boy, did I take it! And then, when you dish it out, for me it was an outlet on the bandstand. I always had the most potent orchestras, the best of the musicians that I can find, and if something annoyed you about me, if you're a musician, or between bands and that...between band lingo... Then we'll let the bandstand decide. You know what I mean? Let's go on the bandstand, and you'll lay down what you're going to lay down, and then I'll come and I'll do... Because I consider myself a bandstand warrior. One of the greatest bandstand warriors was Tito Puente. My brother, Charlie, Tito Rodríguez, Machito. And I don't stay far behind.

Brown: I can only imagine that most of you all have to deal with this. Those were the days when stuff was really, really challenging.

Palmieri: Yup. And all the bands were happening.

Brown: You've mentioned *The White Album* several times...

Palmieri: *The White Album* to me, in my opinion, is the greatest album ever recorded in our genre. In my opinion, now. In the United States. I'm not going to go any further. And I'll put it against any place else. Because the execution of that... Those are four Victor Paz playing trumpet, and on the other side is three Barry Rogers—overdubbing. You'll never, ever be able to execute that the way that was executed.

Brown: Did you have this feeling when you heard this in the studio?

Palmieri: Oh, not only that... I hadn't seen Victor Paz for three years. We had a clash because of the *Lucumi* album for CBS. I already had recorded Jon Faddis, Lew Soloff, Chocolate, and Alan Rubin on the *danzon* album that went into the can. When I went with Fania, then they had a contract with CBS for the Fania All Stars. They got me the *Danzon* back, and then I had no choice but to call Victor Paz to do the tango, and when I called Registry, he showed up to the studio where I was...Theodore(?—25:32) Sound, to Fania. When he walked in, I said, "Vitin!" And he told me, in Spanish, "You called me because of your conscience." And that's how we started. And what he laid down there, there's not one trumpet player that could have...including Mr. Faddis, who we had the greatest respect for and the greatest lip... You have to comprehend the rhythmical patterns that Victor Paz knew, and his timing was impeccable. When you hear the

execution of the trumpets there, and everything in the album, it is the great album to listen, to study by, and to see how... If you're a trumpet player or a trombone player (just using the horns now), and then the woodwinds in the tango and all that... In that tango, at midnight, Victor Paz brought me all the musicians from a Broadway show to do the three violincellos, the woodwinds, the French horn, down the down...the tuba...down the line—then eventually, he put on the four trumpets. That's a classic-classic-classic. For students...you know.

Brown: Well, we're all students, according to Red Callender.

Palmieri: We are. But as a student, I laid down something for the students, me considering myself a student constantly. That's something...a work of art.

Brown: I don't think you'll get any argument from anybody about that one.

Palmieri: And René Hernández did the charts, seven years earlier. Remember that he passed away. We used to go downstairs... I worked with him two hours, I took him downstairs in Puerto Rico, buy him an espresso coffee, and then I would leave. He always sat up til 4 o'clock. I didn't realize that it was 4 o'clock until after he died, because I thought he was in church for the 5 o'clock mass—every day. When he died, he died in his sleep, as a saint. That's who we were dealing with. I loved him very much.

Brown: There are so many more albums we want to get to. But let's try to focus on some of the things that you feel are representative of your musical vision and philosophy...

Palmieri: Then you have to put *Justicia* there.

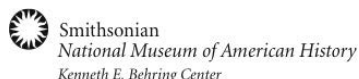
Brown: Then let's do that. Let's talk about *Justicia*.

Palmieri: In *Justicia* we talk about the injustice to the Indian, to the blacks, to everyone down the line, and with my call to the drum, "...(?—28:27)... del tambor," "I recall justice." And then I met a gentleman in Venezuela. His name was Francisco Luna, a newspaperman. I tell him, "The son or daughter of justice, who would it be? *La Libertad* or (?—28:44)?" That's when I did "La Libertad" also. On *Justicia* is Francisco Aguabella playing conga; Chino Pozo, the great bongo player that worked with Tito Puente; and Paul...oh, what's his name...he's a great writer...he's the one that wrote the theme for *The Tonight Show*... I can't think of his name right now, but a great, great musician... Little Ray Romero. We recorded that in a place called Incredible Sounds, for Morris Levy. Winter. Not heat. Every composition I had to use gloves to warm up to play the composition, and the piano was out-of-tune, honky-tonk—and that's how I recorded *Justicia*. That's justice for you.

Brown: Injustice.

Palmieri: Yup.

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Brown: That was released in '69.

Palmieri: '69. "Vaya" means go. That's what Joe Piro, "Killer Joe," used to say at the Palladium, in the mambo show. "Vaya" means go.

Brown: When I look at your... There are so many other important recordings, *Palmas*... But I'm seeing that there was a gap between '87, *La Verdad*, an '87 release, and then *Sueño*, '92.

Palmieri: Yeah. What we did was, *La Verdad* was the third albums that I did for Fania. After *The White Album*, then we did *Palo Pa' Rumba*. That was going to be for Celia Cruz and I, but it didn't happen. And then *Solito*, and then *La Verdad*. Those three won three Grammys. We were the first band that ever recorded in Puerto Rico and won a Grammy in Puerto Rico—the first one. I stayed there for a certain amount of years, because my brother had had a heart attack, he was working there, and there was nobody to take care of my mother. So we sold our home in Long Island, my wife did—the second home we had in Long Island, a place called Kings Park, a beautiful home. Then I moved to Puerto Rico. I arrived in 1983, going on '84, and I stayed until a little after '87, '88, around there, going there. Then, in that transition, is when we're coming back to New York. My wife don't fly any more, so she takes a boat—we came back on a boat. Then we had to get a place in new York.

And then we did *Sueño*, when I met a young lady from Germany (Cologne, Germany) called Vera Brandes. Then we did *Sueño* with a gentleman called Kip Hanrahan, and Jon Fausty, the greatest engineer in our music ever, who lives now in Tampa. Then we did *Sueño*. Then, from there, I did...

Brown: *Music Man*?

Palmieri: No. That's compilations. That all comes out of Fania. Then we did *La India*. *La India* was a company called Soho, which was a disaster; they didn't know what they were doing either. But I gave India her first album that she sang in Spanish. She was going out at that time with a gentleman called Little Louie Vega, who is heavy in the hip-hop world. She used to sing hip-hop. I recorded her for the first time singing in Spanish, and guiding her, like I did with Lalo Rodríguez, and she did a great... She's a great talent, and I always wish her well. Then after that, she recorded an album with another gentleman for Ralph Mercado, and it became a tremendous hit. I was so happy for her. She's still doing her thing.

Brown: You gave her the break, just like Chick Webb gave Ella their break. And then *Palmas*, which also...

Palmieri: Then *Palmas* became heavy. Because there was a gentleman who was in Warner Brothers, and Epic also, and he wanted to know... I forget his name right now. He was a very big man, a very high position in Warner Brothers, and he wanted to know what it would be... It was a series that was for certain musicians who haven't broken the barrier in sales; what would it be if they had the guns of a record company like this. So I started the recording. All of a sudden, the next thing I know, they go into a whole transition there. He leaves... I think he was also sick or whatever. But he leaves, and then it was a whole turnaround, and then I land in the hands of a

gentleman called Bob Hurwitz—very talented, plays piano, and knows his business. But I had already recorded *Palmas*. We had *Palmas*. We had little complications of bringing somebody else to mix it. They didn't know what they were doing. I took it away from them, brought it to Jon Fausty, and then he gave me the greatest sound on *Palmas*. It was nominated for Grammy, but it doesn't win. Arturo Sandoval wins that year, who did an album called *Danzon*. He'd just come from Cuba; he had all the hype and all that. But the true album of that year was *Palmas*, Latin Jazz.

Then I went back... But Bob Hurwitz didn't want to record the octet again. He said, "I've already got it." He wanted me to do something with the Gypsy Kings, like that. It's almost like Capilotito(?—34:38) shooting the guns and all that. So I said, "no, it's not going to work." So Ralph Mercado... My son made a deal with Ralphie for two albums, three albums, which we did *Arete* and then *Vortex*, and then we did *El Rumbero del Piano*, which was to do a Latin dance band. Because Latin Jazz doesn't sell, really, but the Latin... It sold a little bit for Ralphie, better than the other one, but then Ralphie had a problem with his company, and he lost his company. It seems that wherever I go, it has the Midas touch for destruction. [LAUGHS] So I said to Ralph, "The first thing you'd better do is, first, don't talk to me. Don't call me. Don't book me for nothing. And certainly don't record me, because you'll never know what's going to hit you."

Brown: In 1999, *Live*, and then 2000.

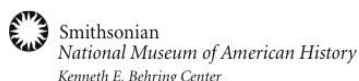
Palmieri: Oh, then with the greatest bandstand warrior, Mr. Tito Puente, who was my brother's dear friend for many years. They were partners. He was really my brother's friend. For years, though. Really friends. I came along, and then Ralph put this together. It was an album really for Ralphie, to highlight his singers. And then Tito... We were supposed to work together, but Tito wasn't feeling well. He knew that he had a problem, he had a valve problem, and he didn't want to operate it, and he wasn't giving up his lifestyle, and unfortunately, when we went for the operation, they couldn't stop the bleeding, and he passed away. He survived the operation, but they couldn't stop the bleeding, and it was terrible. But he passed away. The greatest bandstand warrior that you ever wanted to bump into. It was something. My brother and him made the greatest recordings together. Small groups, vibes and piano alone and rhythm. No one could have done it better than my brother, and Tito knew it.

Then I came along, and I did this album. It's got an exciting situation. It received critical acclaim by...some of the musicians didn't... But shame on them. Tito rose to the occasion, and I'm very proud of that album, that we were able to work together. And he went right from there, when he got the finished master...I gave it to him... He went right into the hospital, and never came out.

Brown: But he heard it.

Palmieri: Yeah.

Brown: I mentioned earlier there was that hiatus between 1987 and 1992. In 1988, something
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very tragic happened. You lost Charlie at that point.

Palmieri: Oh, my brother passed away. He died 60 years young, September 11th, I believe it was. The 8th or the 11th.

Brown: Yeah, 1988.

Palmieri: he was 60 years young. And left a vacuum, and changed my whole thing around, my life... He was my main everything. The greatest friend I could have ever had. The greatest brother that I DID have, but my friend. Friend. You can be a brother and not be your friend. I loved him so much, man. We had great... I used to love to be his straight man. Then when we got the title again of the Count... He told me...He used to always be on top of me with that. We had to give \$50,000 to a prince, and he gives us the title.

So then he comes to me one other day... Remember I told you about my mother cut me out? So he goes... He used to love Errol Flynn, sword-fighting and that, and he loved to cook. So he comes to me one day, he says, “Hey, Eddie, you’re really serious about this, right?” I said, “Hey, Charlie, I’ve been communicating with the lady; I got the coat of arms...” The coat of arms of the Palmieris were two lines by a tree trunk—*palmas siempre flore*(?—38:59). Palms will always bloom for the Palimieris. That’s why you got “palmas.” So that was the reasoning to them, inspired (?)’s reasoning. So all of a sudden, he goes, “I’ll tell you what, Eddie. I’m going to do it with you. I’ll go for the title, Eddie. What are you going to call yourself?” I said, “Well, Charlie, if we get it...” Because I took those papers to the archives in France, their historical department, and they were on the money. That’s how I found that these are exactly on the money. Everything was true. It’s unbelievable.

So the main thing is... “Ok, Eddie, we’ll go for the title. What are you going to call yourself?” I said, “Well, Charlie, if we get it I’m going to call myself ‘Count Edward.’” He said, “All right, Eddie. I’m going to do it. Tell them I want to be called ‘The Count of Monte Crisco.’” [HEARTY LAUGH] Then he told me, “Yeah, ...(?—39:58).... with all your baloney with that count...” Then we started laughing... [LONG LAUGH] Yeah, he was great, man.

And I used to love to be his straight man.

Brown: You a straight man?!

Palmieri: I’m just a straight man, yeah, because he answered the... He’d always see me with books, health books and that... Once I’m studying a book called “Eckankar: Soul Traveling.” I come to my brother... And now his car breaks down, it’s broken, and he’s in a garage at 8th Avenue and 52nd Street which was owned by some Dominicans, and it was called Maroon. Those were the...as we talked before...

Brown: Escaped slaves.

Palmieri: The captives, the slaves that escaped into the mountains in Haiti or whatever...they were called maroons. So this place was Dominican, and they called it Maroon, and they did it in

different chalk...different crayon thing...real rugged, like maroon... I'm talking about with the parking lot. So we're walking towards his car; he's going to give me a lift. Meanwhile, I'm telling Charlie, "This is it, Charlie—Eckankar, Eckankar. It's soul traveling. To get your soul cleansed you've got to travel a lakh. One lakh is 80 million years throughout the universe. You've got to do 80 of them, Charlie. 80 lakhs." I was walking, and he was just looking at me. He hasn't said a word yet. I said, "Oh, I'm telling you, Charlie; you've got to listen to me, man. This is it, man. This is IT, man. Lakh. 84. You've got to do 84 lakhs, and each one is 80 million years, going through the universe." He's looking at me, we're walking and walking and walking... Now we get to 8th Avenue, and across the street... And I tell him, "Because Charlie, when you finish them, when you've finished the whole cycle, you become the highest order. You become a Manhanta." That's the truth.

He looked at me. "That's who I am. That's exactly who I am. Look. Charlie Palmieri, Maroon in Manhanta... Get the hell out of here with your shitty books!" [RAUCOUS LAUGH] We laughed so much... When you're laughing, you can't even breathe, and we laughed so hard... I love him so much, man. "That's exactly right." He was good at that. "That's who I am. That's exactly right." Charlie went, "Maroon in Manhanta..." [LAUGHING] So you see what I mean?

Then I got into another book called *The Mucusless Diet Healing System*. "Listen, Charlie, I'm telling you Charlie, you got to get away from the meat..." Now, this guy, Arnold Ehret, who wrote the book, he was against meat all his life... He got killed by a meat truck. That's the honest truth!

So what happens? I'm in a place called Joe Harbors' Bar. It was owned by a dwarf, his friend... The owners (?—43:29) the two dwarfs very nicely. Used to catch sticks for the man. The Spotlight, right there, 53rd Street and Broadway. Made the Moscow Mules? Do you know what a Moscow Mule is?

Brown: Moscow Mule?

Palmieri: Yeah. It's a brass cup, and it's ginger beer, lemon and lime, and ice. Oh! In the summer, that's a killer. They call it Moscow Mule. And he made the greatest steaks. I'm in there earlier, but I'm coming out of the bathroom... My brother doesn't know that I'm in there, and I hear him walk in. He goes, "Joe, let me have one of those incredible, delicious, thick steaks that you have." Then all of a sudden I hear them, but I don't know... So I come running out. I said, "No! No, Joe! Salad. Salad!" He goes, "Oh, yeah, Joe—and bring me a big salad, too!" [HEARTY LAUGH]

So you could tell... We loved each other so much, man. We had a separation of nine years. When I was born, he used to take care of me, like in the crib and all that. This is serious business, man. But I used to love him. I loved to be his straight man. He always came up with a great... He couldn't believe. "Eddie. Where do you have time to read this, Eddie?" [LAUGHS] "I never see you with a music book, or anything to do with music. What are you reading?" And there were always like health book, or yoga, yin-yang, yoga for men... "Now, Charlie, you got to
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watch out til you get your spinal volt... Charlie, after 50 years old you don't get blood into your disk, Charlie so you need the spinal volt." And whatever I told him, he used to go, "Oh my God!" [LAUGHS]

My only thing was, with all the troubles that I had, the only thing that you can do for yourself is don't get you sick. Don't you get sick, man. That's only waiting for you to happen. Don't you get sick, man. And I couldn't help but listening to Bob Knight... You're going to edit this anyway, right? Bob Knight said with all his critics, "When I die, I want them to bury me upside down so all of my critics can kiss my ass." [HEARTY LAUGH] So you see what I mean?

And to me, musical critics... I learned from a gentleman named Harold Bauer, a classical pianist and violinist. He told a gentleman called Lawrence Gilman, who was a writer, a musical writer for the *New York Times*, who wrote well about him... Quite extraordinary, because that guy, Lawrence Gilman, was apparently very heavy. When he heard a work of Berg, who was from the Schoenberg school, Lawrence Gilman wrote... "Five Pieces for the Piano." This is what he wrote. "The amoeba weeps." [LAUGHS] So he tells Harold Bauer (Harold Bauer eventually stood in charge of the Beethoven Museum. Badass. Great musician!) That Mr. Gilman, who was so hard on critics...he was a very hard critic...wrote well of him. He said, "Well, I certainly appreciate that. That was very nice." He said to me, "Musical critics are unqualified nuisances."

And then Brian Lynch gave me a book called *Vindictives*, by Slonimsky, how they talked about all the composers. I mean, Debussy. The guy who was writing this... "I can't imagine how ugly he was, how filthy his bear; he looked like a Barbarian Hun." So killer... There's only one... And then we're going to...

There's only one classical composer that wrote back to a critic. His name was Elgar.

Brown: "Pomp and Circumstance."

Palmieri: The only one. This is what he wrote. "I find myself in the smallest room in my house with your review in front of me. Soon it will be behind me." [HEARTY LAUGH] So these are my mentors...

Brown: Well, Eddie, we're going to try to...

Palmieri: Now do you see what happened to (?—49:00)? Hah-HAH-HAH-HAH!!! I couldn't resist that. Wait til Eddie comes in. Hey, Eddie, what.... Oh my god. Heh-heh...

Brown: Well, we only have a little bit of time, and there's so much more we could talk about. But let's talk about... First of all, there's the fiftieth anniversary, there's the recent DVD...but *La Perfecta 2*. Now, it sounds like you start, that's your first major group, and now in...

Palmieri: Well, that was just something in memory... It came up from an idea from Conrad Herwig, the trombonist. His trombone idol was Bob [sic: Frank] Rosolino from the West Coast. I did a thing for him... He said, "Why don't we something like that for Barry Rogers." That's how it started. So he got me a young man, very talented, named Doug Beavers. Doug Beavers then

had broken his arm... He's a genius, that young man. Then he did all the Perfecta work. I said, "Not only will I do that..." But since I was having trouble with the publishing of my compositions, that they were taken from me by force... So I recorded them, but I got them back. In the interim, I put some Latin Jazz in there. But it went very well, because a lot of people want to hear these numbers, these compositions. So we've been working with it.

But I'm phasing out La Perfecta Dos. It's going to be the big band, which I've been traveling with, or the Latin Jazz Octet, Septet, Sextet—I've even been traveling with a quartet.

Brown: *Ritmo Caliente*, 2003.

Palmieri: Oh, that was again La Perfecta. Same thing. We did that for Concord.

Brown: Is that your current label?

Palmieri: No. There's no labels any more. There's really no record industry any more. It used to be prestigious to be with a record company. You've still got Concord, but nothing the same exactly. You can put a tombstone with "rest in peace." It's all over.

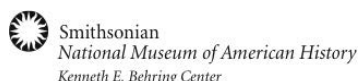
Brown: Well, if we go back and look at this industry, there have been some things that have been somewhat affecting the genre of music that you've helped to popularize worldwide. 1994, *Palmas*, gets the nomination, doesn't get the Grammy... But you start to advocate for a Latin Jazz...

Palmieri: Well, I had done that before. That's... When *Palmas* comes out, it already is established. I performed at B. Smith, a restaurant...a beautiful black model... I like "black" instead of "Afro-American." Just "black," man. Beautifully black! She has two restaurants. She had one on 8th Avenue... She opened a new one now. Now she has one in Washington, D.C. When you get off in the train, you're seeing it—B. Smith. It's beautiful. And what a beautiful person.

So she gave us permission to play there, and to play for the host committee, to show them the importance of the Latin Jazz category. The problem was that they would put us...and we were honored to be put in the Jazz category. But in the Jazz category, if you're a pianist, starting with me, or any other jazz pianist, Danilo Perez, down the line, they all... You've got to go through a Keith Jarrett. You've got to go through a Chick Corea, which we're friends... I love Chick. I don't know Keith, but I know Herbie Hancock. That's their category. That's their world. Ramsey Lewis. You name it, one after the other that are still alive and playing. I'm not just going because of the piano, but any instrument. Then in the saxophone, you're going to go through the jazz guys...

So we needed our own, and eventually our own...they had the jazz guys coming into our own, because they were intrigued with doing Latin. Even McCoy, who is one of my mentors. Everybody. Holland...what's his name...

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Brown: Dave Holland?

Palmieri: Yes. [sic: Charlie Haden] He did a thing with Rubalcaba. They won a Grammy for it in the Latin Jazz. So there were no ...(?—53:31)... our... But it's fine. It's an interchangeable thing. Some purists are saying, "Well, we don't need that; win it in the jazz thing." Why don't you win it in the jazz thing? And the ones that have been saying that haven't been able to do it. These are Latinos. Very talented. But they've been rapping about certain things that... Listen. We need our own category, because you're not thinking... You're thinking SMALL now. You've got to think in the larger amount, because you're thinking about the young kids that are coming behind, that there's no more record companies, and they've got to record in their basement with the drummer in the toilet and the other guy in the kitchen, inside the oven, to make a record. Come on! And then they're going to try to sell it from their trunk to see if they can qualify. And we're making it impossible for them to qualify. Now that you took it off, there had to be three... You had to get to a certain thing. Except to Latin Jazz in itself, they removed it. We had it. Now they brought it back. But the damage is done.

We got it back. The damage is done. Look, it took 17 years to put us into a category. I won the first one. One Grammy for all of Latin music and all of the Latin artists in the world. Machito, Tito Rodríguez, never could qualify for the Grammy because they never put us in the category for 17 years. Now you put us in a category and who wins? The old kid. That's 1975. I take the trophy and an honor, and I took it in the name of Tito Rodríguez, too. My brother Charlie never had a chance to win.

I don't want to get into it's a form of racism or prejudice, but it exists. That something about us pisses you off. Or, we're living in the wrong country. I mean, something is not gelling right here. So now, all the Latin Jazz...you know, they're intrigued by the Latin music. Why? Because they can't comprehend the rhythmical patterns. If you can't comprehend them, you're going to have to be intrigued whether you like it or not, and if you don't like it, then you're going to put it down. But if you don't like it or you find it interesting, you're going to make it your business to analyze it more. Gee, what makes it tick?

It came out of Africa, man. I didn't invent it. I put the world to dance. Bomba y Plena came from Africa. Puerto Rico's folkloric, all the folklorics in the islands came from Africa. So Mother Africa. It didn't happen here. But then don't take it out on Chano Pozo! You know what I mean. I'm just giving you...

Anyway, it was very important. Now they put it back, but it lost its essence. You already showed us a high degree of lack of respect, and because of pressure that came upon...you know, from some people, like a young man like Sanabria, Bobby Sanabria who put pressure... He was so wonderful in that, and he could speak for himself... I had said... I was the one instrumental to get it. Not the Latin Grammy, but the Latin Jazz Grammy. And now you took it away, man. You were plotting as we slept, man. Come on, now. Come on. Give us a break here.

But now they got it back. It lost the essence, in my opinion, and it's... Nothing to say.

Brown: Well, you've won nine Grammys...

Palmieri: My nephew says I need one more for the thumb. That's what he tells me. I got one thumb hanging there that I need another Grammy. That's ten.

Brown: Ken just gave me...

Palmieri: I've been very fortunate with that. We're talking about great musicians who never even knew about Grammys, or won... So I've been very fortunate. And we work hard for them. I know what I've recorded, it's been under money, and I record with such a drive... I'd rather not record than record something that I'm not enjoying or it's not going to go. I've gone through all of that.

So we've got 9. But the whole industry has changed. There's no record industry any more. It used to be prestigious to go to a record company and have them going to the radio stations to play your records. You had people who did that, the distribution, the transportation... None of that exists any more. You've got to sell from the trunk of the car, and shove it down somebody's throat and see if they're going to buy it.

My sadness... Not for me. I'm an old warrior now. Or a young old warrior. But the young players you got such great young talent... Like, these young Curtis brothers, that one, Luques that plays with me, his brother Zaccai... These are young talent. Louis Fouché, sax... He had to decide whether to become a musician or go to M.I.T. So he goes to M.I.T., graduates, and then he becomes a great musician. So you have brilliant young men that are so brilliant, and great musicians, and they'll never have the opportunity to qualify for a Grammy. They have it now, but it's all changed. Nothing is happening. Nothing happening to the positive. Now you record. "Oh, great, throw it in there and see what happens..."

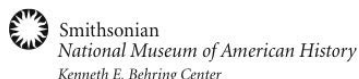
Brown: Well, Eddie, you've been recognized around the world. You've received international honors, honorary doctorates and...

Palmieri: Well, I want to tell you something. That's quite extraordinary. Because I just turned the corner and nobody knew who I was!

Brown: Well, maybe that's a good thing. But this year, in 2013, you'll be receiving the NEA Jazz Master Award...

Palmieri: Oh, that's an incredible award, man, and I'm so honored. There's nothing to say. I'm dealing with great jazz players. I'm not a jazz player. I respect it to the highest degree. To me, a jazz player, you've got to know the jazz repertoire, in my opinion. You've got to pay your dues. That I comprehend and feel it, or that I'm a Latin Jazz player, that's something else. Then we have symmetry. What I lack in the knowledge of the repertoire of Jazz, I have it in my forte of Latin Jazz. There's a symmetry there. So I accept it as the highest honor, and there's nothing else I can say.

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Brown: Well, I want to thank you for saying all that you did today, sharing with us your life story, your philosophy, your heart. I want to say on behalf of the Smithsonian and the NEA, thank you, Mr. Eddie Palmieri for all the joy you've brought to our lives...

Palmieri: Thank you, Anthony. Thank you very much.

Brown: ...for making some of the greatest music that's ever been made.

Palmieri: Thank you. Again, thank you.

[END OF CD #3, END OF CONVERSATION}

Transcribed by Ted Panken