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GEORGE WEIN
NEA Jazz Master (2005)

Interviewee: George Wein (October 3, 1925 -)
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Levy: George Wein, thank you so much for sitting down with us.

Wein: Devra, it's good to be here with you. Really.

Levy: I have been reading your autobiography with Nate Chinen and it has so thoroughly documented an amazing breadth of history. From where I sit, you sit at the apex of really what I think is the intersection of art and commerce. You have a deep understanding of both aspects and you've managed to negotiate an ultra-successful career for yourself, but also enabling artists to do what they love and what you love to listen to. You've perpetuated an art form and benefited grateful audiences all around the world. I would like to see if we could spend a little time adding some more layers and some more understanding to how you built and executed this, because it's really an amazing task. We'll start with a really short intro, a little bit about your youth, and then we are going to try to figure out how you built this enterprise that you've built. I know you were born in 1925, the son of Dr. Barnett and Ruth Wein. You have an older brother, Larry. And you were raised in Newton, Massachusetts. I believe that music was always sort of an integral part of your family life. I know that you studied piano in your childhood. I want to hear why you were banished from the high school classical orchestra. And I want to know whether it was George Wein or Grant Wilson who got banished. Do you remember that day?

Wein: I remember it very well because ... it wasn't Grant Wilson.

Levy: Well, we'll get to that.

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Wein: Grant Wilson was in the Sunday Afternoons in the Cellar of 264 Ward Street. (chuckles) They were playing Shubert's *Unfinished Symphony* and I'm a piano player, I'm not a bass player. But they had another piano player and for some reason or other, they gave me a bass. And I'm playing the notes ... G-DoDo-De-Dum-De De-De-Dum-De-De-Dum So it was a G chord, I played another note of the G chord. I can't remember what it was. I just, you know, I was a jazz musician, I gotta improvise. So I played another chord, another note in the chord. "Get up!" The madness of that professor, Jim – I forget his name – he came over and looked and "What did you do?!" I said, "I don't know." So that's the story of improvising at one of ... one of the notes in the G chord, I mean, what's wrong with that? (laughs)

Levy: And this didn't leave you with a bad taste for the music world?

Wein: It cost me a credit toward graduation. (laughs) But I got graduated anyway.

Levy: Now, during those same years, you had a little band and you had an alter-ego.

Wein: Well, I, in those days, you know, it was the days before Simon and Garfunkle, you know, so people changed their names, you know, for For some reason other, other, Jewish names didn't do too well in entertainment. Eddie Cantor and Jack Benny and all those people changed their names. So I lived in the corner of Grant Ave. and Ward St. So I thought of calling it Grant Ward, but that was a little too waspy, you know? Grant Ward. So Grant Wilson, that was okay. I mean, I don't know. We had these little bandstands made up with Grant Wilson and his Stardusters. It was like a rock band that the kids do in the cellar and the garage now. We played every Sunday in our cellar and I had the arrangements from Glenn Miller's *In the Mood* and *Tuxedo Junction* and Tommy Dorsey's *Song of India*. I had three trumpets, two trombones and four saxophones and a drum and a bass, and even had a girl vocalist. We were all about thirteen, fourteen or fifteen years old and we learned a lot. I don't think any of the people in the group became professional musicians. One guy, Stan Spector, became a drum instructor in New York. He was a real technician. But it left a mark because see one of the things that was part of my life that I didn't realize at that time was I was an organizer kind of guy. I wanted to have a band. I called up the other kids. I wanted to play baseball, I call up the other kids and I had baseball team. And I guess that was something that was engrained in me. When I wanted to do something, I wasn't afraid to call up other people and say, "Let's do it."

Levy: Were you the only kid in your class or group of friends that had a band?

Wein: Oh yes. Nobody else had a band. There were other musicians a year ahead of me, some great musicians: Serge Chaloff and Hal McKusick, and they went out and they were much better musicians. But they didn't have their bands, they just had much more natural musical talent. This was a little later. This is when we were seventeen and they were eighteen. They left school as soon as they could and went on the road with Tommy Reynolds and bands like that. The war was

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on then and so there was a need for young people to go with these dance bands that were still out there.

Levy: So you just said "I want to do this" and would pick up the phone and make it happen.

Wein: I always did that. I don't know why or how. I mean, it ... uh, I didn't say anything like, "Hey, let's have a football team." You know The Beaver, we called. I watched ... listened to the radio and watched movies all the time. Watched Mickey Rooney and Andy Hardy. If they could do it, why couldn't we do it? You know? Hey?

Levy: Ah! Okay. Now, your brother went off to college, went to New York to NYU, I believe?

Wein: My brother went to several colleges. (chuckles) He didn't last too long at any of them because he didn't want it ... he knew he was going in the Army and so he didn't care. But he did spend a few months at NYU.

Levy: And you visited him.

Wein: And I went down every chance I could get.

Levy: And you heard a lot of great music.

Wein: Well, the first thing you do, we went down, we drove down usually or I drove down or whatever. I was past sixteen and had a license. We went right to 52nd Street and watched who was playing there in those days. It was 1942 or '43. There was Art Tatum and Coleman Hawkins and Stuff Smith and Count Basie's Orchestra and Red Allen and J.C. Higginbotham and then ... I mean, everybody was there. I mean, at that time. And that's where you really cut your teeth.

Levy: Now, you knew a couple of the musicians from having been out in the clubs in Boston.

Wein: I knew a musician called Frankie Newton. I don't know whether you knew Frankie. But Frankie was a wonderful trumpet player. He was on Billie Holiday's recording Strange Fruit. And he was more or less of a mentor to me because he indoctrinated me with a taste in music. For instance, I would hear J.C. Higginbotham, I loved dearly, and he would then tell me, Vic Dickenson is the man on trombone. Listen to him. And I'd listen and I'd hear the difference. And he loved to play with a mute and we'd work together. I'd get some gigs and I'd call Frankie, "You got a gig?" He always needed a gig. He was an alcoholic and the minute he got a dollar, he went into a club and bought everybody drinks 'cause he had to show everybody he had a little affluence. A lot of people were like ... a lot of musicians were like that. They had a show, they had a little money in their pocket. We had a gig together once and so I said, "Frank, I'm gonna hold on to your money." And at the end of the week, he had his money and my money all spent. It was all gone. I mean, it wasn't that much money, but (laughs) But he taught me the subtleties of jazz. And ever since, I mean, that's why the rock generation has very little appeal to

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me. The noise obliterates the music. It's too bad because some of the music isn't bad, but you can't get over that noise. It's very difficult.

Levy: It is.

Wein: The sound – I call it noise – it's loud, the sound, amplified sound to an extent that it just blots out the music for me.

Levy: When you talk about the subtleties of jazz, what would you tell a young person today to listen for? How would you explain to somebody, Listen to this and hear ... what?

Wein: I think it's like poetry to a degree. You have to understand it. To enjoy poetry you have to understand it and have to work to understand it. To enjoy great jazz you have to work a little bit to understand it because it's not just blowing notes. Blowing notes is important; technique and virtuosity is very important. The better you know your instrument, the better you can play. And some people have made it without being great virtuosos, but most jazz musicians knew their instrument and knew the music they were playing. One of my problems is that I didn't study music enough to really know my instrument that well. I have a lot of fun and I enjoy playing, but that's ... that's ... I reach a wall that I can't go over because I don't know, I don't have enough knowledge to go over. But the more knowledge you have, the more you can edit your own playing. The more knowledge you have, the more you can edit your own playing. That's the secret of great jazz, for me. And players like Bobby Hackett, for instance, and your father Jim Hall, I love the way they play. And I, of course, you know all the great players – whether it was Benny Goodman, whether it was Louie Armstrong or Duke, of course, himself – I worshipped these people. Miles ... Miles on trumpet, he edited be-bop and came up with his own style that referred to be-bop, but he came up with his own individuality. The name of the game in jazz is try to establish your identity without destroying the concept of the music itself. Identity is what gives you that individuality that a musician needs to really establish his name, persona.

Levy: You were very clearly much loved, confident, young man growing up.

Wein: I was loved by my mother and father. I don't know who else loved me that much. (laughs)

Levy: That will remain unknown to me. (laughs) But what I'm wondering is ... and your brother, you just said, didn't care much for school and went here and there, and the Army came along. You didn't seem early on to have a particular goal or direction that I know about. Did you have a plan in your youth as to where you were going?

Wein: No. My grandfather had a business which was not a great business, but there was enough for jobs in there, it was always sort of understood that maybe I and my brother and my cousins, there were jobs there. Well, it did end up that way with my cousins and with my brother. But not with me. I went over there to ask for a job and they told me to wait six months or something and I said, "Hey, I don't want this job anyway!" You know, you graduate college and you are running

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around and you're getting mad at your folks and yelling at them, and went storming out of the house and, you know, typical of young people. But of course I'd already had three years in the Army, plus four years of college. But all during college, see, I was playing the piano; by then I had become slightly professional, at least where I could get paid for working. And I played with some very good musicians who edited their music: Bud Freeman on tenor saxophone and Pee Wee Russell on clarinet. I worked with them six weeks while I was in college; seven nights and Sunday afternoon. Then I worked with Edmund Hall Quartet also for six or eight weeks when I was going to college. I scheduled my classes on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday ... Monday, Wednesday and Friday my senior year so I could at least sleep two days a week. So by that time, I'd started working with musicians in Boston and they taught me a lot ... Max Kaminsky needed a piano player, so they taught me all the Dixieland tunes. I started off playing Dixieland. But playing with Pee Wee Russell was more than playing Dixieland. You really learned what a musician who *thought* of every solo he played every night. Max played the same solos every night, but not Pee Wee Russell. So that's when you learned about a lot of the same subtleties that Frankie Newton had taught me.

Levy: Now the gig with Edmund Hall, if I'm not mistaken, was in '49 at the Savoy Club, I think, right? And it was very successful and they wanted to keep you on, but they didn't want to pay you any more money.

Wein: I asked the boss if he could give us a raise because we were ... we were ... we weren't the, we were the intermission group – they had two groups – but we did as well or better than the headliners. Bob Wilber's band was the headliner for a while, playing Jelly Roll Morton's music, and he was a good man with great people like Jimmy Archey and Henry Goodhorn (?) and Pops Foster ... real old-timers. And Bob was very popular in Boston. But we had our own thing going. I don't know ... I never ... you know, I never had been in business and I didn't know, wasn't very good at mathematics, but I was okay at arithmetic. (laughs) And so ... I, uh, I asked the boss ... Edmund automatically had been leaning on me to be the spokesperson for the I don't know why, it was just my personality or whatever it is. I'd say to Edmund, "Hey, don't you think we should ask the boss for a raise?" He'd say, "Why don't *you* do it". He was so ... I asked Steve Connelly for a raise. He said, "We don't/can't give you a raise." So I says, "Well, why don't you let us take two days a month off on Saturdays? You're packed anyway on Saturdays and we'll pay our substitute group and let us look for a gig elsewhere?" He said, "Okay." And I had a friend of mine who, at that time, William Morris had an office in Boston and he was an agent. He used to come in the club and have drinks with us, and he would book the band in colleges, and we came up with a program called Danceable Jazz. I said, "You know, people can dance to our music." We had a trumpet and a trombone, we added Ruby Braff on cornet who was one of my co-musicians. But he was more than that, he was a little ahead of all of us because he was ... he would teach all the guys because he could play ... you know ... he would scream at you when you played a wrong change, which was most of the time. (laughs) But you learned. Ruby was an important influence in my life and I guess I was the most important influence on his life because I helped him become a national figure. We had a trombone, we had Dick LeFavre who had played with Sam Donohue's band. We had our own band and we'd go out and play Dartmouth,

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we played at Middlebury, we played several ... four or five different places. We made more money in those one-night things than we did the whole week at the club. So that was my first foray into really being involved with business.

Levy: Your entrepreneurial spirit kicked in yet again.

Wein: Well, one week we did not have a gig, so I said to Edmund Hall, "Why don't we do our own concert?" That was how I happened to produce my first concert: George Wein Presents.

Levy: Was that the Brass Bands to BeBop?

Wein: Brass Bands to BeBop. Nat Hentoff wrote the album notes and MC'd the program. I brought up Wild Bill Davison and Frankie Newton and J.C. [Higginbotham] from New York, and we sold out Jordan Hall in Boston. Beautiful hall ... at the New England Conservatory of Music. I guess that was the first bite of the insect that infected me the rest of my life.

Levy: That was March 1st, 1949.

Wein: I guess that was the date. I guess that was the date, you know.

Levy: Now, I don't know if it was right then, but the popularity of that and the tour that you were doing with them, led you to have a conversation, to negotiate with Edmund – or maybe it was with his wife. And that you had ... well, this is what you wrote in the book: "Edmund's name might have driven ticket sales but my organizational work had been indispensable. The concert had been my idea and my onus. I had labored over every aspect of its production; I had undertaken the risks." What you have right there in the very beginning and perhaps throughout your career, is that loggerhead where George the artist, the lover of the musician is also the businessman. And that relationship I would like to explore – about artist and promoter, entrepreneur, presenter.

Wein: The thing that happened was Winnie Hall, who was fighting for her husband said, "Well, Edmund has a bigger name than you." Now, we had a deal. That's the most important thing. We had a deal: 50/50. And she said, "Well, I think it should be 60/40." After the fact. And I could not understand that because we had a deal. I was very young. My word was my bond and my word is my bond now. But I had never encountered ... I was a naïve baby ... I'd never encountered somebody saying all of a sudden they want 60/40 when we had a 50/50 deal. And I realized I had done everything I said in the book. And I ... I wouldn't give in. I ended up giving something ... the program book money or something like that. And I said, "But Winnie, I can't go on; I can't work with Edmund like this. I mean, I love Edmund but I can't." I really was destroyed ... and I really ... I cried that night. I ... I ... I ... and Edmund was going to get me become the headline group with Ruby and Vic Dickenson and he wanted me to play piano with him. And they ... I couldn't do it ... and they brought in a much better piano player, Ken Kersey, but I could have played that – and I wanted to. I just couldn't do it. I don't know why or how but

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it was one of the worst nights of my life – to encounter what now seems like a very unimportant thing, you know ... oh so they wanted 60 ... but no, no, I don't want to give 60 ... forget about it; let's do 50/50, which we agreed upon. You run into those things all the time or you give the 10 percent, don't worry about it, you know. But when you're a twenty year old kid and you run into these things ... and we had a deal. And Winnie was ... I sat there ... when I got up from the conversation, Steve Connelly who was a manager of the club, he took one look at me and says, "You need a drink." And he gave me a drink. Which he never did. He gave me a drink. And so, it was very ... it was a much more important night in my life than I write in the book. It really ... talking about it now, I can still feel how I felt that night. I ... I ... I ... it only had to do with we had a deal.

Levy: Not keeping his word.

Wein: Yeah. That's all it was and then I had to learn that people didn't always honor deals. Now Edmund was a beautiful man and later on, I always worked with Edmund and I liked Winnie. I didn't hold that against them because I learned a little bit more as life went on, you know, that this is what life is about. I'd been in the Army, I'd learned about people on a different level but not on a business level, so I just had to absorb that, and it was a good lesson. But it was an important incident in my life.

Levy: Did you feel then that there was an appreciation of – or lack of appreciation – for what you had done from the business side? Forget about the piano playing; do you feel that artists understand at all what it takes to do what you had done for him?

Wein: No, they still don't understand. Most artists still do not understand what it is for an entrepreneur to get together and put something together and employ other people. They really don't. Even many ... they could be many years in the business and not understand it. Eventually, they do. But uh ... you know, it's like anybody thinks they can do a jazz festival. You just rent a stage, get a sound system, hire musicians, put an ad in the paper, and go. Like, I can't take the time to explain the difference right now. We have the festival in August and I got two people here working twenty-four hours a day. I got other people ... I got people up in Newport. I have Darlene in California, I have people who are just concentrating on every aspect of that event. What hotel rooms ... and this and the ticket price ... forget it, you know. That's why when people come in and say, "Oh" ... I mean, I've had it happen to me several times. We've been engaged by people to produce events and we do it, and they say, "We don't need them." They do it for a year or two, it's all over.

Levy: We're going to get back to that subject in a little bit. I do want to know a little more about the logistics.

Wein: I don't think artists fully understand because their problems are one, they don't get enough money. It's like I say, if you say you're loved, ... musicians ... I had musicians hate me for two reasons at the beginning: 1) I didn't hire them, that was the first thing; and 2) If I did hire them, I

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didn't pay them enough money. So this was a double-edged sword. No matter what you did, you were wrong. Because I was The Man, right? I was a kid running the Newport Jazz Festival and it was the biggest event in the world, and if I didn't put you on that festival, I was ruining your career. And if I put you on that, well, why didn't I pay you as much as I paid so-and-so. Boy, you have to learn, you have to learn how to handle that. You have to learn that when a musician says, "When are you going to give me a gig?," you don't lie to him and say, "Whenever I can, man." (laughs) The thing is ... the difficult thing at the beginning was I love jazz musicians. I love them, I worship them. I had such respect for them because being a musician myself and knowing the quality these guys had as artists and musicians and also having to hire them, this was a dilemma because I knew what I *don't* know about music and I know what they *did* know about music. Then having to be in the position of hiring them ... that's ... I've never written this type of thing, but it's a difficult situation. And when you're young, you really don't know how to handle it.

Levy: How did you find your way?

Wein: (laughs)

Levy: Did you have any help?

Wein: The human condition develops the attitude. Now a guy can say to me, "What did you think of my band?" And I say, "I think it was great; you keep it up." "Can you use me?" I says, "One of these days, don't worry." I mean, am I gonna tell a guy, I didn't like your band? If I tell a musician I didn't like his band, it's like sticking a knife in his heart. I can't do that. I'm the one that's supposed to have set the standards for the top of the ladder. Not so much now, but in the days when Newport was *IT*, it was the number one jazz event in the world. And if I ever said a negative thing to a musician ... and ... uh ... (sighs) ... you can't do it.

Levy: Did you have anybody to turn to for advice as you found your way in these early days?

Wein: No. We were doing something that had never been done before. And the problem was we didn't know we were making history. We didn't archive it correctly. We didn't know, we were just worried about, you know, if we made it this year ... a few dollars, Can we do it next year. That's all. We had no backers and no support. Louie Lorillard at the beginning but after that, starting in 1962, I had nobody with me.

Levy: Before we get to Newport, you had a few other starts and beginnings. The very first club I think you opened was The Douxce Jazz? Le Jazz Douxce? [sic]

Wein: That was with Frankie Newton. That showed I didn't know anything about French. (laughs) That was where I used to take Frankie's week's pay and my week's pay and – I mentioned that before – Frankie would go around little bars and buy everybody a drink to show he was working. But that was fun. That was in Le Jazz Deuxce [sic]. We had a little room, just

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sat around on cushions, and the room seated only maybe twenty/thirty people. Frank put the mute in and I had a bass player and I played the piano. Just a trio. It was some beautiful music that Frankie would play. It was so close to the people. You'd go right up and play pretty little things. And he loved it and we loved it, but it wasn't a success. It couldn't go. But it was my first ... my second after the concert that was of trying to do something on a ... some sort of a commercial level.

Levy: Then you became the music director for the Savoy for a short time.

[NOTE TO KIMERY re below– George says what sounds like 'Club Sade' and 'Mrs. Donnelley', but we are talking about the Savoy and the owner was Mrs. Donahue. I think George was tongue tripping over Donahue and earlier club manager Connelly]

Wein: Well, Mrs. Donnelley who owned the Club Sade [**Mrs. Donahue owned the Savoy**] and I knew the musicians and why not do that. And I did that successfully. That was a good thing for about a month or two, I don't know. I brought in Vic Dickenson and I brought in Wild Bill, I brought in Joe Thomas, a wonderful trumpet player, and with local musicians, and I was playing piano. We had some good weeks there. But I think when Phil Napoleon came in with his own band and sold Mrs. Donahue the idea of having his band – which was good for the club – I think they did a little more business. So somebody came to me after that and I says, "We're not doing anything" They said, "Why don't you open your own club?" Open my own club?! I never dreamed of opening my own club. That's when you say, Did I have any motivation? I didn't have any motivation, I didn't know what I was gonna do. I was out just enjoying myself. I had plenty of money ... because I didn't *need* any money. During college I was on the 52/20 Club and I was making sixty dollars a week most of the time while I was in college. So I was walking around with fifty, sixty dollars and living at home. Then I got my own little apartment that cost something like fifty dollars a month or something like that. So, I mean, I didn't need money. But when they said open a club, I said, "I don't have any money to open a club." I *did* have in the bank account five thousand dollars that had been left to me for my education. But since the GI bill had paid my education, I had five thousand dollars which I didn't even know I had. I mean, I knew I had some sort of an account that had been put away by my grandfather, my father, mother; but it was five thousand dollars. This lawyer – I forget his name ... Levinson, I think his name was – he said, "You don't need to open a club; make a deal with the hotel; lease a room." So I went down and I met the people at the Copley Square Hotel who owned it then. Later on they changed it. I think it was a guy name of Billy Leonardi, and he was very happy to make a deal. But he said I had to get the room together. So in those days, it's amazing what five thousand dollars could do. You could buy second-hand chairs for five dollars – Bentwood chairs. And tables for ten dollars. So I had, you know, I set the room up for family style, two hundred people. So that was two hundred chairs, that was a thousand dollars. And fifty tables, that was five hundred dollars, and a cash register was a hundred fifty dollars, and a piano was six hundred dollars, and a sound system was four or five hundred dollars, two little speakers with a little amplifier. I got another kid, Danny Schneider, came in and did a beautiful mural on the wall for nothing ... free drinks. Next thing I know it's a business. The first six weeks we filled it every

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night. One night – and Bob Wilber as the opener – and I asked Bob but he a different kind of band. He had Wilber and Sidney de Paris and Big Sid Catlett on the drums. And of course having Big Sid there was ... that was a thrill. But I mean, that band cost me a thousand dollars a week. That's a lot of money. Six guys living in New York, paying their hotels ... and getting a thousand dollars a week. Maybe it wasn't a thousand, maybe it was nine hundred. One night Louis Armstrong and the All-Stars were playing at Symphony Hall. And the All-Stars were ... [disruption – phone call] One night Louie Armstrong and the All-Stars were playing in Symphony Hall. Barney Bigard was the clarinet and Jack Teagarden, trombone player, Cozy Cole on drums, Earl Fatha Hines on the piano. I mean, this is really an all-star group – and Arvell Shaw on the bass. I said to Sid, "Take the night off, we'll get another drummer; you go down to Symphony Hall and get those guys to come back to the club." Already being a big time promoter, you know. This is three weeks after my business ... and Sid got them all to come back. But what happened was they came in one at a time. Sid was at the microphone and as they walked in the back of the club, Sid says, "Oh here comes Barney Bigard." He went right up on the stage. "Oh here comes Jack Teagarden." It was like rehearsed but it wasn't; they just walked in and the next thing you know, the whole band is on the stage. The last one to come in was Pops – Louie Armstrong. And here comes Pops himself and he walked right up on the stage. The electricity in that room was so incredible. The place was packed and Louie Armstrong in this little room that sat two hundred people – should have sat a hundred and forty – but we had it packed. He walked on the stage and sang *Sleepy Time Down South*. I knew at that point that I had to get involved with this way of life. The electricity was something you could never imagine. You could not describe it. That was when I realized I couldn't just have a little club with the same band every night, that I had to get involved with the ... I won't say necessarily the bigger names, but the greater dimension of the music. The club stayed in business for six weeks until we found out that there was some finagling with the whiskey. They had bought some whiskey during the War – some cheap whiskey – and they were filling different bottles with the same thing with different labels and charging me for whatever the label was. My bartenders finally hipped me to what was going on. They said, "This guy is screwing you" So I had to quit. One night I quit. And we were making money. And then we quit. In one night I just went in and said – packed house, all the time it was packed – but I could not go into business that way to start my life that way. I don't know why I had these feelings because we were making money. I had most of my five thousand dollars back in six weeks that I'd invested in it. I think I had forty six hundred dollars back out of my five thousand. I'll never forget the discussion I had with the owners of the hotel. I says, "I can't ... I've gotta get all my liquor in sealed bottles; I can't go on like this; I'm a young guy, I don't want to start with this kind of reputation in my life." They said, "Well, now you have to pay us so much – because we were partners – and they were making their money off liquor. I said, "I can't afford to pay that." So I closed down. I'll never forget the brother of the boss; he said, "I told my brother never go in business with Jews but I told him you were different." I've never been able to figure out what he meant by my being different. (laughs) It never hit me to know, What did he mean by my being different? That I was good or bad or indifferent, I don't know. But I closed the club up immediately. I was out of business 'til January. I went to the Hotel Buckminster and reopened and never caught the same feeling that we did when we opened ... until the next Fall.

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[NOTE TO KIMERY re above and elsewhere– George refers to Pops as Louie, rather than Louis. Don't know if/how that should be handled. George does the same re Louie/Louis Lorillard.]

Levy: Before we move to the next Fall, do you have any recollection on what possessed you to send Big Sid down to get Pops and his band? Did you have a vision of what could happen?

Wein: Well, I'd been involved in jam sessions so I knew musicians did like to bring their horn to someplace maybe after a gig and play. That's the only ... but I knew that Sid knew these guys and I knew Sid's personality. I did pick that up very quickly. Sid was a kind of a guy that could ... I mean, the best thing about Sid Catlett ... the story was he invites everybody to a house; Big Sid's having a party in Dorchester and he kept passing out cards so Vic Dickenson and I – he was at another club, Vic was – and he was working for me. Vic and I go over there and we go to get a drink and that'll be a dollar. Vic says to me, "Well, kiss my wrist; Big Sid's having a rent party." (laughs) And that's what Sid would ... Sid had this incredible personality. I loved Sid Catlett. That's one of the sad things, he was gonna come back to work for us in April, and I get a ... No, let's see, he was coming back in May and it was Easter Sunday, and I get a wire from him: Looking forward to seeing you in a couple of weeks. And that night he had a stroke at the (unintelligible), the same day he sent me the wire. That was it for Big Sid. But I knew that he had the kind of personality that could go down and say, "You guys gotta come back to this club where I'm working." Which he did.

Levy: But your motivation then was just to have a fun jam.

Wein: Yeah.

Levy: You did not know that this would like create a reputation ...

Wein: No.

Levy: ... that it was a promotional gimmick of all decades?

Wein: I knew it would be good if all those guys came back to the club. That wasn't difficult to figure. But I never dreamed they'd walk in and walk right to the bandstand, and then Pops would come in like a rehearsed show. It was like ... it couldn't have been planned better than it actually happened.

Levy: Wow. Okay. Do you need any water or anything? You okay?

Wein: I'm all right for the moment. [Phone rings, Levy asked Kimery if phone sound is interfering with recording.]

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Levy: Okay.

Wein: Are you getting what you want?

Levy: Yes! Yes. And you're right on script, having not read it.

Wein: Pardon?

Levy: You're right on my script even though you didn't read it. So we're perfectly in sync here.

Wein: The story of what I know ... and so many people ask me, "How do you do it? ... I don't remember everything about my life, but what I do remember, I remember vividly. So those are the stories that I told. I didn't try to dig up stories that I didn't remember. If I remembered it vividly, I put it in the book. If I didn't ... I mean, people are always telling me, "Well didn't you remember this?" Just like you told me about John's program. I don't remember the details of that program.

Levy: Yeah. Well there's been a lot of those. I couldn't even start to count the shows. All right. So, again, your ethics, your sense of what's right and wrong, you're a man of your word, you were hurt when someone else didn't keep their end of the bargain, you're supposed to be given certain liquor ... it's faked, broken ethics again, man of principle. Okay, I'm done here. And yet you didn't, you know, go off and say, "Enough of this business; I don't want to deal with these kinds of people." You just said, "I'm not gonna deal with *that* person." And you started all over again. You opened a new club in a new location.

Wein: Everybody looked at the possibility of somebody new coming in, like I would go to a hotel that they could make a lot of money. I don't know ... I wanted to make money. I wanted to live the way I live now. But it wasn't the most important thing. The important thing was to survive in an atmosphere that I liked, that I loved, that was my life – which was music and jazz. As long as I could survive ... and all through my book, I wrote, "Well I did this but didn't make any money; did this but didn't make any money; did this but didn't make" People say, "How did you stay in business?!" I say, "I don't know." I mean, we survived. Then all of a sudden things opened up, things opened up and I got well, so to speak, as the expression goes. But all during the heyday years of Newport, all during those great years, I wasn't making any I was surviving. One year I'd have to borrow money, then I made a little ... lucky ... and I'd pay it back. I can't recall all the things that happened or what it was, but people would lend me money, and the most important thing I learned when people lend you money is – the first thing, of course, is to pay them back – but the second thing is don't run away from them when they lend you money. They lend you money because you're their friend. A lot of times when you lend people money and they can't pay you back, they disappear because they're ashamed. Which is the worst thing you can do. That's the best advice I can give. Everybody has to borrow money sometime maybe, you know, in life. Don't run away from the person you borrow money from. Pay them back if you can; pay them back a hundred dollars, pay them back ten and then pay

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them back the other ninety, you know. It's just little things like that, and you learn how to survive. So, I wanted to survive and I wanted to be in my world. We'll get to other stories as we go on, but you asked me that question. I ... Look, none of us are holy-than-thou. I think of my sins every so often. You really think of them, what you did in life that maybe was right and maybe was wrong, and it's nobody's business except your own. But it never had anything to do with stealing money or cheating somebody or going ... I've gone back on my word, but when I went back on my word, I told them I had to go back on ... make it up to you another time. So that has happened. But I never ran away when I did that. So those ... the dealing with individuals was always very important with me. That ... that is what a lot of people didn't love me at the beginning. Maybe they didn't get to love me in the end, but they trusted me. Trust is the most important thing. And you weren't trust (laughs) I'll never forget ... oh, what's her name? ... piano player, a woman, she's a wonderful player. Jim has recorded with her. Uh ... uh ... I'll think of her name. But the best story was gaining ... She said, "I read your book and I pinned it on my wall when you talk about gaining the trust of musicians." I said, "The first thing in gaining the trust of a musician is pay him." (laughs) And she put that up on the wall. If you say you are going to pay him, after that then you can start earning their trust. (laughs) And she Why can't I think of her name? She's very famous. And I didn't expect that from her. It was in the dressing room and I was amazed that she had told me that. But that ... that aspect of my, my character or personality or whatever you want to call it is very important to me.

Levy: How do you account for your just continuing on? We're talking about a time when you were still quite young, still before Newport, and it doesn't work, and you get disappointed, and somebody does you wrong, and yet you were steadfast.

Wein: I still am.

Levy: Yes you are. Where does that come from?

Wein: I don't *know*. You don't know your own character. My wife Joyce said, "You know" She fell in love with me, which she did, thank god ... she said, "When I realized that you are always thinking of something to do, that you are never sitting there without thinking of something to do." She respected that. I guess that that's ... when I had nothing to do, I was thinking of something to do. That's the entrepreneurial spirit, I guess. I always tell someone, "If you want to be free and you want to have a chance in making money, go into business for yourself, because if you work for somebody else, there's this ceiling that you reach. If you go into business for yourself, you may lose everything you have, which I did several times, but you got a chance."

Levy: Well, you persevered and you reopened and then we get to that Fall and you book the Shearing Quintet.

Wein: I got a call from an agent in New York. Who was that agent? Not important. I can't think of his name. I used to remember all these names. He says, "You should play George Shearing." I

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said, "Who's George Shearing?" (laughs) He wasn't one of my traditional players that I loved like Big Sid Catlett or Louie Armstrong. "He has a hit record called *September in the Rain* and you gotta play him. So I checked up. I went to hear him in New York, very nice, and I put an ad in the paper in August (we were closed.): George Shearing Opening in September. We had no air-conditioning in the room they were in and September was a hot September. We ... the minute I put that ad in the paper, the phones started. There was nobody answering the phone. And he sold out eight days, every night. I made seven thousand dollars in his engagement. I thought I was gonna be rich the rest of my life. I mean, all of a sudden, I said I never ... I always told George this story; he loved it when I told that story. I was paying him twenty-five hundred dollars a week! I mean, I'd never paid more than nine hundred, a thousand dollars. I thought I could lose my shirt. It was an amazing week and the club was so hot and there was people sweating and ... (laughs) So I booked everything in sight after that, everybody: Art Tatum, Billie Holiday, you name them, Charlie Barnet, I mean, people you could ... everybody that I could think of, including Charlie Parker and of course none of them did that much business, and I was twenty thousand dollars in debt six months later. I was in debt for years and how I got in debt I don't know. How I got out of debt, I don't know. Then I'd find a good week and I made a few thousand dollars. I mean, it was just a survival period set in, but I was learning my trade and I was getting to know the great people in the business. I'd get to know people like whoever you'd think of: Dizzy and Miles ... name them all ... Blakey and Billie Holiday and Sarah Vaughan and Ella Fitzgerald. They all worked ... Louie Armstrong worked for me, Duke Ellington, and that's when I really learned my trade. I call it a trade because that's what it was. I learned more about music listening to music every night. I learned. Those ten years at Storyville, very, totally important to me because out of that, of course, came Newport.

Levy: Now, in that Storyville time, along came Charlie Bourgeois.

Wein: Charlie came along in 1951. I was playing Shearing and then I'd bring in people like Tatum, who Charlie worshipped. Marian McPartland was a great player, Billy Taylor, with Charlie Mingus on bass. Charlie loved piano players. What he would do, he would call ... Charlie graduated from college the same year I did and I hardly knew him ... he would call the classical music critics. He was a public relations man. I had Harry Paul doing public relations – an old friend who lasted with me until he died. But Charlie would call ... I forget the names of the ... I wish I could remember ... I have them ... but he would call these classical ... "You must come down and hear Mr. Tatum play." And they would go back and write about it. These were classic. They reviewed the Boston Symphony and all the classical concerts. All of a sudden there was a little jazz being reviewed. There were no jazz critics per se. One day I said to him, I said to a friend of mine, I says, "Who's Charlie Bourgeois? Is he a rich kid or something?" He comes in here and he doesn't even ask for ... he pays the drinks for these writers, famous writers. Cyrus Durgin was one, old time Boston writers. Rudy Healy, Rudolph Healy [**cannot find/verify proper spelling**], he was this famous ... in Boston they were established writers back in the Fifties. I said to ... I said finally, "Charlie," I says He said, "Oh I'm not a rich kid, I can use a job like anybody else." Just like that. So I said, "Well I don't have a job," I says, "but I'll at least give you an expense account. (laughs) You can bring his people in. Next thing you know, he

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was working for me and he worked for me ever since, so it's sixty years Charlie's working. He's ninety-two years old now. We just got back from New Orleans. He was down there running around like a young kid. But Charlie set up something that influenced a lot of the musicians. Charlie had an innate sense of quality that wasn't, you know, from his sartorial point of view. He would take John Lewis over and he would take Miles Davis over to the Andover Shop at Harvard Square. And then there was a period he took Roy Haynes over there and there was a period where all the musicians were dressing so correctly. You'll see pictures of Miles in those days, and John Lewis, of course, knew about those things. Roy Haynes got George Frazier; one of the best dressed men in American because ... and Charlie affected me personally. Everybody around him, he had that innate sense of quality. He became very friendly with Charlie Davison [cannot find/verify proper spelling] of the Andover Shop who is still alive and still running the Andover Shop. So Charlie brought that; he had an awareness of food, he had awareness of ... I always said, "Why don't you open up your own business – An Aide to Gracious Living?" – because he understood gracious living. Everybody that knows Charlie loves Charlie Bourgeois – to this day. You ask Deborah or Melanie or any of the people around him, they'll do anything for Charlie Bourgeois. And of course his sense of music. He has tremendous tastes in music.

Levy: Yes, he does have good taste.

Wein: We were a good team.

Levy: Since we're talking about Charlie, let's talk just a little bit more about promotion before we take a break. Was Charlie, back then, a publicist already? He was a kid like you, really, right? Just doing what he loved to do?

Wein: Absolutely. He came out of Island Pond, Vermont, the hometown of Rudy Vallee. I think Charlie was concerned with getting away from Island Pond, Vermont, in those days. The last few years, he went back there to check it out. But he didn't want to be from Island Pond, he wanted to be from Harvard Square, Cambridge. He wanted that quality that life gave you that a lot of people love and a lot of people hate. A lot of Republicans hate it very much. They run the country, you know, they don't like that – Harvard Square running the country. But that's another political scene we won't get into. (laughs) He was just ... he liked more contemporary jazz. In fact the first time I met him was the night I did the Edmund Hall concert. Charlie had scheduled a concert himself with Lenny Tristano and Mary Lou Williams. And all of a sudden there were two jazz concerts – this was 1949 again, I'm going back again. That's when I first heard of Charlie Bourgeois. That's why I thought he might have been a rich kid. He probably thought I was a rich kid (laughs) both putting on jazz concerts. He had to move his concert for another couple of weeks because it would have been wrong to have two concerts on the same date. But that was the difference; he liked Mary Lou Williams and Lenny Tristano, and I was still with Edmund Hall. We all ... well when he came in with me, it was a very ... he wasn't a partner or anything like that. He was an influence, and a very good influence.

Levy: But he was sort of operating on his own to your benefit.

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Wein: Oh yes. He was never ... Charlie was anything *but* an entrepreneur. How we ever decided to do a concert, I don't know. But he had ... he did not understand business per se. It was not his thing. That's why he was happy to be involved with me. It gave him the ability to exercise his taste and things like that without having the responsibility of an entrepreneurship.

Levy: And he knew everybody in town, he knew who to bring to the club and who to ...

Wein: I don't know what he knew, but he did have the ability to call people at that time. If he felt it, he would do it. I really don't know. I've known Charlie for sixty years and I don't really know Charlie. He's one of those people. He's his own man. He has no family ... that I know of. So I don't know what to say about Charlie.

Levy: FPI is his family. [FPI = Festival Productions, Inc.]

Wein: He's a confirmed bachelor. You know, there was a time when people were bachelors. They ... and that was their life. They had friends – male, female friends – but they weren't part of the so-called or whatever people are talking about nowadays. He had nothing but friends.

Levy: You seem to also be steeped in a solid family and friend relation because all through the years I've known you, all the decades, there's always a core group of people who are, in fact, treated as family in your small world. Where did that come from?

Wein: I think it comes from the fact that everybody I ever hired never had the qualifications for any job. Strange, isn't it?

Levy: But you hired them.

Wein: Well, but I didn't have any qualifications for any job. So it wasn't like they had a Master's Degree in entertainment or education or something like this. They were all college graduates from ... maybe ... and they weren't all college graduates, I don't know. But they had a dedication and they gave me their lives and I gave them loyalty in return, and they became that, and so the next thing you know, they're working for me twenty years, thirty years, forty years, fifty years. I saw no reason to ... you know, it's very difficult to fire somebody. You ever had to fire anybody?

Levy: Yeah.

Wein: It's a very difficult thing.

Levy: But you have a knack for picking people to work for you, even though they don't have, quote, have the qualifications. What is it that you saw that allowed you to put this picture together?

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Wein: Well it's sort of like, you know how parents have a little baby and they take it in the swimming pool, and they throw them in the swimming pool, and they make sure they're there in case the kid sinks. But if the kid swims, then he's gonna be all right. Same thing. Throw them in, if they swim, you keep them; if they don't, they're gone in a week or two weeks. We never gave a job description. Anybody I ever hired never had a job description. The story was: If there's anything to do, do it. I guess we came up with some initials – DIN, Do It Now. And people did that and to this day, the same thing. Melanie in there is doing websites, she's doing artist relations, she's doing sponsorship. Deborah's doing everything. Whatever has to be done is being done. It's still the same thing.

BREAK

Levy: We are resuming ... for the record. We have George Wein sitting here, talking to Devra Hall Levy, revisiting decades of amazing stories.

Wein: You have a pretty good story yourself.

Levy: (laughs) We'll get to that one day. Where do I want to go from here? I think I want to talk a little bit about your sense of programming because I think it has a lot to do with that balance that you achieved between art and commerce. Your creative programming was in evidence long before the festivals began because I'm thinking about a week where you had Sidney Bechet playing, I think, in the Mahogany and Art Tatum working upstairs in Storyville, and you put the two of them together on a ... is it a Sunday afternoon jam session or something? Tell me about that and what were you thinking?

Wein: Well, as time developed, in my book as it says, we went to the Buckminster and we went back to Copley Square and then I took the room upstairs in the Copley Square which was not the original Storyville. The original Storyville was downstairs, which I put ... I still love the traditional music, and I created Mahogany Hall and I had Storyville upstairs and Storyville upstairs was playing the more contemporary artists, and downstairs was the more traditional artists. So I'd have Art Tatum upstairs and Sidney Bechet downstairs, and Sunday afternoon, we'd have jam sessions. I'd bring the band from downstairs to play opposite both bands on Sunday afternoon. I mean, these were fantastic days, but you know, Boston ... like now I go to jazz clubs in New York that are packed all the time. People don't even know who's playing. I don't know who's playing. You don't know the name ... I see musicians ... I had world famous musicians, you couldn't fill a club. It was a different world in those days. And we didn't ... no cover charges, you know. Sixty cents for beer and ninety-five cents for a scotch. Hey, you had to have people in order to make it. I remember nights when we had thirty people opening up for Terry Gibbs, or Buddy DeFranco and groups like that. You wonder how you stay in business. And you'd bring in the Four Freshman and pack the club and that would pay for the three weeks of losing money on jazz groups. You know, this is the years that went on. But get back to that ...

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it was just ... the musicians loved each other. It was great. And Dan Morgenstern was there that day.

Levy: Oh!

Wein: He was a young kid and he was there. Dan is a little younger than I am and I don't know what he was doing, but he remembers that day of Bechet and Tatum. The other thing that we did, we brought up the band from downstairs and Charlie Parker was upstairs and I had Vic Dickenson and Doc Cheatham in the band, and I was playing piano, and I had Bird play with us. So Bird ... we're playing the *Royal Garden Blues* together and Bird played with the Mahogany All-Stars. That's what we called them at that time, and when he started playing the blues, everybody turned around and looked, liked the strength of his playing. So I played with Bird, you see, so that was one of the Sunday afternoons. So people say, "You played with Charlie Parker?" "Yes, I played with Charlie Parker." And Vic Dickenson nearly dropped a trombone because he was so strong and so fantastic and fit right in to the ensemble and everything of *Royal Garden Blues*. So there were some great moments in that. But where it came out ... where all this ... as I grew, as musically I grew, I realized that jazz was a music from J to Z. That's the expression I use. There's no one way to play jazz. Jazz has got the expression of that individual, the guy who wants to play *his* music, who wants the public to love him, but isn't catering to a taste that is not his own taste. Because you can do that and still be a jazz musician. But the real jazz musician is just waiting for someone to call him up on the telephone ... "We got a gig and come on and play, man." You get a little group together and can I sell my group, playing my music? Now, your music may be very original, it may be derivative, but it's still your music. And you're not saying, "Well what's the latest way to make a hit record." It still can be jazz but it's not, that's not the definition of a jazz musician. A jazz musician sometimes has to do that to make a living, but the definition is the guy that's got his horn waiting to be called for a gig to play his own music, play what he wants to play. Whether it's from the avant-garde or whether it's tradition, it's the same thing. Whether you are a New Orleans musician playing in the Preservation Hall Band or whether it's somebody gets a gig with an Ornette Coleman acolyte, it makes ... you're still a jazz musician. A lot of people don't agree with that and they don't understand that, but the first time I produced ... the first evening that I produced at Newport, I had Eddie Condon with Bobby Hackett and Wild Bill Davison and Pee Wee Russell and a few others; and on the same program, I had Lennie Tristano with Lee Konitz and Warren Marsh. This had never been done before. In addition I had Dizzy and Billie Holiday, and you know, whoever. I had a whole program of them. But the mixing up of the program became the direction of jazz and the great jazz festivals after that and started the very first Newport Jazz Festival. And why I did that was all out of Storyville. It started at Storyville, as you say, you know.

Levy: Was it good for business?

Wein: The first year at Newport was amazing. We had five thousand tickets and we sold five thousand tickets both nights. I was supposed to draw five thousand dollars salary for the festival and I didn't draw my salary so that the festival showed a profit of a few hundred dollars. So

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Louie Lorillard who backed it could say, "Look what I did; I put on this great festival; it didn't cost me a dime." And I needed the five thousand dollars, believe me, but I knew it would be better for my future if I didn't take it.

Levy: Ah ...

Wein: That was a time when you ... maybe my understanding of human nature because I didn't always think like that. Approximately 1960, six years later, after the riot at Newport. I had an arrangement to produce concerts at Ipswich, Massachusetts, where they had the Crane estate, beautiful estate. I was so successful – I had a percentage arrangement – I was so successful that ... we had so many people that never came there ... I'd have a concert with Duke Ellington and Lambert, Hendricks and Ross. I had a few other great concerts. We'd draw seven thousand people and the people loved it, but it was crowding the roads up there (laughs) so the mayor of Everett, Richard Russell, who was in charge of the Crane estate, says, "George, we owe you twelve thousand dollars; why don't you not take your commission and we'll do our concerts next year." I said, "Sir, are you asking me to buy my employment for next year?" He says, "Well more or less." I says, "Why don't you give me my twelve thousand dollars and we'll forget about next year?" – which is what they wanted to do in the first place. And I knew that that would be the case because we were too successful. My friend who lived up there, Robert Pirie – he's still my close friend – he remembers those days very well. We actually were too successful. But I mean, at that point, it's not the same as not taking my five thousand ... I took my twelve thousand dollars which I needed like air to breathe. (laughs)

Levy: The programming again for the first year in Newport, which you've described as ... eclectic is maybe one word, deliberately to bring in that number of people? Was this: George said, "Okay, how am I gonna sell five thousand seats? I'll need a certain amount of this and a certain amount of that, and a certain amount of this to bring them all together under one roof." Is it that clear, or ...

Wein: No, no. The only thing clear was that in running Storyville from 1950 to '54, I knew what was popular among jazz audiences in New England. I also knew that New England was an area where people would get in their car and drive fifty, sixty miles to hear ... go to a ballroom, or go to hear a band up in Canobie Lake, New Hampshire, from Boston if Duke Ellington was playing up there or something like that. So Newport was a place seventy miles from Boston that nobody had ever been to. No buses, no trains. There were buses ... no trains, no planes, and you had to pay a toll to be able to get there or go on a ferry to get there. It was inaccessible. The perfect place to do a festival. I always wanted to go there because I'd read about the beautiful houses, The Breakers and everything, and I'm sure a lot of other people wanted to go there. It was a destination. I didn't use that word then but now you understand that word destination. That's why I say we didn't know we were writing history. Now people use the word destination as a major thing for an attraction. So knowing who the artists like George Shearing and the people like that that were popular, in mixing them in with the ones that weren't necessarily so popular, so you'd get the beginning of the ... a ... I didn't use it then but I used it for many years which I'm not

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using it now; I've changed it ... but commercialism with credibility. That was an expression that developed. It put it right in.

[George's assistant Deborah brings tea.]

Wein: Thank you. Thank you.

Deborah: You did say milk and sugar, right?

Levy: We're great. Thank you, Deborah.

Wein: So that was the meaning, putting in popular groups along with the groups that had this artistic credibility, not that the popular groups didn't have artistic credibility, but there were other groups that critics loved and weren't necessarily popular with the public. And that really created a theme for the festival, created an entirely different approach to the presentation of the music in those days. That was done with thought, that wasn't by accident. The other thing that we did was ... you know, I ... I ... to this day there's a fight with the Lorillard family. They're all ... they're about dead, except for the daughter ... but who thought of the festival. They did not think of a festival, they thought of bringing me for jazz, to do something. I'm forever grateful to them and I always acknowledge them. But I will not say they created the Newport Jazz Festival. They founded the Newport Jazz Festival, but I created the Newport Jazz Festival. There's a big difference in the create ... creativity. Because they went away to ... they left and said, "We're going away for vacation two months; we'll be back a week before the festival." I created this ... I felt that in addition to the music, there should be something that recognized jazz as the art form that it is. Now this was not original with me. There were other people, Marshall Sterns, there were people that were very involved with this. And with the help of Marshall Sterns and John Hammond, whom I leaned upon quite a bit because they knew more than I did; they were older than I was and they'd been ... they knew a lot more than I did. We had these symposia and brought in musicologists and I'm very sorry to this day that they were not recorded. We did not have the equipment in those days and it wasn't easy to do those things. But that was a very important thing because they'd been doing those things at the Music Inn, some of those things up in ... up in ... and that was a very insular situation. Newport was not insular, it was national, it was a major thing. Those symposia and the promotion of jazz as the American art form had a very important ... I really ... I think had a very important effect. Boston University called me to give lectures on jazz, and I wouldn't lecture. I said, "I'll write a course if you give it for credit." From what I understand, it's the second course ever given for credit at an American college, you know, for graduation. I think Nesuhi Ertegun didn't want it at UCLA for a while. We were ... I've always had a fight with Nesuhi about that. Did you do it before I did or not? I don't know. What it meant, Max Roach was teaching up at the University of Massachusetts and a lot of this, I think, related to what we were doing in Newport. I don't know for sure. But I know it didn't happen before. And then now, of course, jazz is a total ... there are thousands of kids graduating with degrees in jazz. It's unbelievable what's happened. You go to college and you major in jazz. I don't know how you major in jazz in college, but ... they do.

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Levy: Who would have every dreamed that.

Wein: [sipping tea] So Newport in its beginning was a unique event. I'm very grateful to the Lorillards for making it possible for that to happen.

Levy: Was '56 the first?

Wein: '54.

Levy: '54 was the first, that's right. Okay. '56 was the Ellington.

Wein: '55 was the Miles.

Levy: In '56 – just some curiosity questions – Ellington both opened and closed. That seems very unusual.

Wein: I think we just had the man open to ... uh ... I had forgotten that he opened and closed until I read about it. I probably had to let the band play the *Star Spangled Banner*, I think. You know, we had the senator Francis Green, he made the opening talk. A little formal ... you know we used to wear tuxedos at the beginning ... the people in the box seats, you know. It was a very different kind of sartorial elegance in those days. We had reserved seats and box seats, and we'd set up, we'd take, we'd set up, the first year, five thousand. As it grew, by '56 I think we had ten thousand seats in Freebody Park and we would number every seat. Every seat was reserved and we'd rent ten thousands chairs and spend two weeks setting up the stage, the whole thing. [still sipping tea] I had to learn from the pop generation to just get rid of the chairs and let the people walk around. That's something I learned from pop music, pop festivals. But this was before pop festivals ever existed. When they did Woodstock, they did that all from us. They took our sound people but then they'd use their own personnel. And I took from them as the years went on. You learn ... they learn from you and you learn from them. That's a good way, fair exchange.

Levy: What you remind me as you're talking about the opening and the *Star Spangled Banner* and a politician involved, you're reminding me that there is more to it to getting something this major on its feet and on to a stage – more than just setting up the sound and the seats, and there must be politics ... you've talked about understanding the geography of your location, the behavior of the audience, their preferences. What are some of the behind-the-scenes – I don't mean just the funding from the Lorillards and so forth, but dealing with the city, dealing with ... I mean, you must have to deal with all kinds of people in the preparation of such an event.

Wein: Unfortunately, we didn't deal with the city that much, which was a terrible mistake. The city didn't deal with us and we didn't deal with the city. That's probably why we had the riot in 1960, which wasn't a riot at the festival, but the riot was in the city. But the next day ... "Riot at Newport Jazz Festival." Nobody wrote the police asked me to keep the concert going 'til two

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o'clock while they cleaned up what was happening outside. That wasn't in the newspapers. All it was was "Riot at Newport Jazz Festival." But the cause of the problems that we had with the city ... because they would not work with us and we never went to them and said, "You have to work with us." When I went back there in 1990, I guess, after being out of the city for ten years – or 1980 I guess I went back then – I met with the city and we decided what hours we would use and how many people we would have, etc., etc., etc. All the details. But the city had its own concepts of trying to make some money. They had one o'clock closing like, for bars. But this was an island and they owned the island, right? So let the bars stay open until four o'clock in the morning. Let's make some money for a change because all these people were in town. And that started, I think, about 1957 probably, '56, '57, '58 and thousands of people would come to Newport because here was an oasis in the closings of one o'clock ... staying ... and you could have a ball. It was a bacchanal. And that's because we didn't work together and say what's the important thing: the festival or the ... and we kept the concerts going too late, until one o'clock in the morning. A lot of things wrong. I don't blame the city totally, but actually if I, in my heart, I do blame them totally. But we did not ... it was our fault in that we did not work close enough with the city. Now we work much more closely wherever we go. Whenever we do something, we work very closely with City Hall. [sipping tea] The concept of, for instance, of length of sets of the musicians, we'd have too many musicians on the program and their sets would be too short, they'd be too long or whatever. Musicians now have a festival set and we give them an hour. We don't give them twenty minutes or thirty minutes or an hour and a half unless it's the big headliner of the show maybe has an hour and a half. But they've developed a festival set and that all came out of Newport, our learning. We've learned one thing with the group: If the audience is screaming, don't give them one more because one more, one time, with a big band is three minutes, and with the band blowing it can be twelve minutes and your whole schedule is thrown off. So you don't give them one more.

Levy: But you did!

Wein: I did and it was a mistake. (laughs) That's when you learn when you've got two horns that want to play and play. Sonny Rollins had a set the other night in New Orleans. He had ninety minutes. He was so involved, the people were cheering and yelling, and he came off the stage and he was in another world. He didn't know where he was, he was so taken He didn't stop playing that horn for ninety minutes but he had enough time – he didn't go overtime. But if he had been doing an hour set, he would have gone over twenty minutes. He would ... the audience was so fantastic for him and he was playing so great and knew he was playing great that he ... and that's what happens. You get on that stage and you get that feeling. You want to keep ... this is your moment, man. This is it. So it becomes a sense of ... of ... a discipline which is good and bad because it does, it does sometimes eliminate that moment, that rare moment that can happen. But at the same time, it creates a great program because there's other musicians on the program. That is the most important thing. You have to respect the other musicians. You cannot ... Duke Ellington, of course, he's the one that taught me the most because you don't have to put the headliner on last. Duke used to refuse to go on. "I'm not going on last." This is after

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'56. He said, "I'm not gonna play exit music." So you see there are many things to think about. And you learn as you go along.

Levy: But '56 ... this is really interesting because you also said that you felt Duke gave the audience what it wanted. Is there ever a time when you give the audience what it wants, regardless?

Wein: I don't know how that statement was out of context as you give it to me.

Levy: Well you were talking about the unending choruses that were going on at the end of '56.

Wein: The ... the ... what happened in '56 was the first happening at a music festival. Everybody always sat in their seats and they stood up and they applauded and everything, but nobody actually started to move to the stage. Duke saw what was happening and he realized this was his moment, and he was not gonna give up. I was trying to get him to go off the stage and he was not about to do that. But at the same time he knew what he was doing. And giving his audience what it wanted was giving more, you know. They finished that *Crescendo in Blue* and that place was crazy. A woman had started dancing. A guy wrote a whole book about it. What Duke did after that is he played a slow ballad with Johnny Hodges, and Johnny Hodges' beautiful sound wafted over ... that whole crowd settled down. Then he did one or two more numbers and got off the stage. That, he gave the audience what they wanted, you see. I remember that evening best from the recording. I forgot I was yelling for Duke to get off the stage. There are certain, you know, like I remember how I told Duke he'd better come in there swinging. That I remember. But it was an exciting evening. I can still feel the excitement. Jo Jones up there ... he wasn't playing, he was standing right next to Sam Woodyard and he had a newspaper and he was banging the newspaper with Sam Woodyard playing the drums. Oh, it was something. And Duke was banging that piano, man. He was a percussive pianist at that point. But he was paying attention every second as to what was happening.

Levy: You ... this all goes to the art versus commerce kind of fine line ... you speak about having learned some lessons at different points: one from Hot Lips Page when you had an opinion how the show should go or how he should play, what he should play and it didn't ...

Wein: Hot Lips Page was a great trumpet player, one of the best. In the Roy Eldridge tradition. But he had his own style, he had his own voice. He used to go down to Eddie Condon's and play. He was ... I used to hear him several times and it was absolutely fantastic. He was one of my favorite trumpet players. He came to do a concert at Symphony Hall as part of a show, and he had a little front band, trying to sell records, you know. They had nothing to do with the way he could play. And he came off and he was feeling good. I said to him, "Man I wish you played tonight like you play when you play at Condon's." He looked at me, never said a word. And I saw him a few months later – it was actually a Frankie Newton memorial. I went to say, "Hi, Lips." Because he took a look at me, he says, "You're the guy that made me go out and get drunk in Boston that night." He knew I was telling the truth, and I couldn't [unintelligible] and I was so

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sorry. That's why I say I can't say anything to a musician. I hit him where it hurt. He knew he was being a commercial set and he didn't play the way he could really play. He went out and got drunk because of what I said. You can't do that to a musician. You just cannot say that. Because they're trying to make a living and they're trying to do what they think is gonna make them a living. So that ... you learn. Everything is a lesson.

Levy: If you're building a festival, an event, a show, your programming, you know the audience and what you think will work. How much input, if any, should the promoter, producer have in telling an artist what/how things should go?

Wein: None.

Levy: None?

Wein: The only thing you can do is you can hear a group and say, "Can you bring that group to Newport?" That's it. Say you got an hour set, man. What he does is up to him. I'm meeting with all these young musicians now because now my theme is not commercialism and credibility; my thing is now non-commercial is commercial. That's what I'm trying to build. I'm trying to create something. You'll notice in my program this year there's ... I mix in one or two things to lighten up the audience. Trombone Shorty's gonna be there and couple of things ... but I'm using a lot of young musicians playing very, very contemporary music. I'm talking ... I go out to lunch with them, you know, and I'm really getting more involved in the totality of what we're doing. But I always tell all of them, "Man, I can't tell you what to do; all I can do is set the stage for you." I said, "And maybe we can discuss the guys you have and what you want to do, but then it's up to you". Like, I was with Ambrose – now this is interesting – Ambrose, I went to see him and he had an unhappy set. He likes to close his show – Ambrose Akinmusire – he likes to close his show with a ballad. I says, "You know, you can do that but you gotta know how to do it, Ambrose." And I told him a story. Years ago I had a concert up in Lancaster, New Hampshire, and Al Cohn was playing with me. Al Cohn was one of the great tenor players of all time, and he never played with me ... I think he played one gig with me. Well, those people were cheering and yelling. We played our last. We really broke it up. And I said, "I want to give you people a very special treat; we're gonna close this concert with Al Cohn playing *Body and Soul*. He played a solo and Al Cohn loved me for the rest of his life because I let him close the concert playing a ballad. I said, "You can do the same thing." I says, "You just have to set it up, you see." I don't tell them what to do. I says, "I'm not telling you not to close with a ballad; you just gotta set it up so you play something that gets the people going, go off the stage, come back and do your encore and play your ballad, and that's it." That kind of advice I'll give a musician but I won't tell them what to do or how to do it, you know what I mean?

Levy: You did make the mistake once or twice in your lifetime though, yes?

Wein: With Dizzy Gillespie I made a mistake by telling him not to clown which was maybe the stupidest thing I ever did. That may be the number one most stupid thing I ever did. (laughs) So

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... I can't think of anything as bad as that. (laughs) I mean, I have the ability to do some stupid things and get away and still survive, you know. (laughs)

Levy: But you've also done some amazingly smart things. I'm thinking in terms of programming and advice to musicians. I'm thinking about one of the rougher years. Was it Led Zeppelin?

Wein: Well, Led Zeppelin ... I learned that from Duke Ellington. That was the same thing. I mean, I ... he ... they had the crowd ... I had all these rock groups that year. This was my ... I always call it the nadir of my career. Because the Newport was dying and rock music was taking over everything and the writers had all ... and Ginger Baker was as good a drummer as Elvin Jones and Jethro Tull or Leon Anders [**cannot verify name**], or whatever his name was, was as good a player as Rahsaan Roland Kirk. And I'm ... I called a friend of mine, Joe Boy. [**cannot verify name**] "Who are these guys can really play?" Next thing I know I had a rock festival. I still had some jazz. I had Miles on it. That's the one where Miles stayed at my shoulder for three days, watching everything. That's when Miles was fully corrupted, you know what I mean ... (laughs) ... at that festival. The place was ready to explode. I didn't want to put Led Zeppelin on the stage because they were the ultimate in explosions. This was the last night and I had no control over the crowd or anything. And I wasn't going to let them go on stage. They had a manager, Peter Grant. If you know about Peter Grant, he was one of the great bullies of all time, and he would hit people. He was a huge man. He was a real thug. He was a real thug. I said, "I'm not gonna let you guys go on because I can't." And they were ready to ... they said, "We're gonna set up on the street outside," which they couldn't do, you know what I mean. If they wanted to, they couldn't do it because they couldn't get the equipment up. Finally, after screaming and yelling, I said, "I'll let you go on if you'll listen to me when I tell you to play a slow blues ... you play a slow blues." So they did their big show screaming and yelling and I said to Jimmy Page, "Play a slow blues." And he did. The crowd came right down, you see, which is what I learned from Duke Ellington. So that worked and they told that story ... they derided me, you know, because their whole thing is keeping a crowd up, not keeping a crowd down. It happened a week or so later ... I put them on before a group called Ten Years After. I had booked a lot of rock shows then. That was the last time ... in Philadelphia, and Led Zeppelin were on, and they had the crowd crazy. They came off and Ten Years After, I think it was ... was that the group? Yeah, I think it was. They would due on next and they weren't going on; they were waiting for the crowd, and I said, "Get the fuck on the stage while the crowd's up there," I says, "and keep them up there." They couldn't understand somebody yelling at them to get on the stage like that. I learned that from Lionel Hampton.

Levy: Really?

Wein: If the crowd before you breaks it up, get on there while they're still up and keep 'em up, you see. That's a little different thing. See, Hamp was a master. He did want to let them come down and then ... if they're up there, come on and start hitting, swingin', you know, with Lionel Hampton. So all these little things about show biz, it's show biz because show biz is still involved with jazz, anyway you talk about it. When you see a great classical pianist and you ... I

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remember seeing a TV show with Horowitz where he was playing his concert for his manager and his wife and another friend to see, Well, should I put this piece now or should I follow the Chopin with the Beethoven or should I do ... because planning his show, even though it's a classical concert, planning it in relationship to the show biz that's related to creating an audience, you know, and reaching an audience. These are all part of promotion and being a promoter ... without telling the musicians what to play.

Levy: What do you feel about rehearsals? It's very hard ... I mean, you can't rehearse a festival particularly, have sound checks and stuff. When you're putting mixes of things together, particularly, and I haven't even named some of the ones that intrigue me yet ... you had Carmen McRae and Gerry Mulligan joining the Brubeck Quartet, I think, and Dizzy and Moody with Muddy Waters and I mean some really interesting combinations there on your festival. I want to know what were you smoking when you put that show together? Where did these ideas come from?

Wein: You know, being a musician yourself sometimes screws you up because I'm used to calling six guys, going to a gig, and playing a two hour concert without a rehearsal. Rehearsing is something that I don't know much about. As long as I'm calling the tunes, I hire musicians that know the tunes I know. If I'm working for them, then I gotta know what tunes they are gonna play so I can refresh myself, you know. I don't play that often. So I listen to Muddy Waters play the blues and I know Dizzy Gillespie can play the blues. I'm sorry we didn't rehearse; it would have been much better. When I want to put Pee Wee Russell playing with Thelonius Monk, I know that they are musical brothers because they work on intervals in their playing. But I'm sorry we didn't rehearse because it could have come off much better if they rehearsed it. But I was hoping they would pick it up as fast as I picked things up when I'd bring in my bands, you know. That's like I knew how to play with bands I never played with. I mean Randy Brecker's a bebop trumpet player. I never played bebop, you know. I got Anat Cohen from Israel, plays anything. Lew Tabackin wants to play with just the bass and drum. And I got Lewis Nash on drums and I got great musicians, and Peter Washington. I don't need to tell them a thing. And Randy Brecker falls right into what we're doing because he ... I call the tunes and everybody's happy. We pay them well and we have a good time. I present them, let them do their thing. And I'm a good leader. I'm not a good player but I'm a good leader because I know how to make my men be stars. It's an all-star group. We don't rehearse. I had a band ... this was the best thing I ever did in my life ... I heard this little girl playing bass in the Vanguard. Pretty little thing. And that was Esperanza. I didn't know she sang. I heard her play all perfect notes on the bass. I mean, the intonation and all the right bass notes. I'm listening to this, and she comes over to say hello. I thought she was Brazilian. She's teaching up at Berklee, she's twenty two years old. The same week I hear this girl, Anat Cohen, playing at a Bechet concert, and she and Howard Alden did the *Shreveport Stomp* with just a guitar and a clarinet. I'm goin' like this. I get a chance for this gig, my friend Hans Zurrugg called me to play a week in Switzerland. So I call Esperanza and said, "Would you like to play in Switzerland when we ...?" She said, "It will be an honor Mr. Wein. [unintelligible]. I call Anat, "Would you like to play with me?" "It would be an honor." They all said the same thing. (laughs) So then I had Howard Alden and there's twenty two; thirty

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two was Anat,; Howard was forty nine, Randy Brecker came to play the gig; he was sixty four. I got Jimmy Cobb on drums who was seventy nine, and I was eighty two. And that was the band I had. And we had like a ten minute rehearsal, played for a week, two shows a night, and had the ball of our lives. We're all friends and we swung the whole week. Esperanza said, "Let's get that band together again." So that sometimes screws me up as a producer when I ask musicians to do it. Bobby Hackett used to be my man in jam sessions on festivals. I'd say, "Bobby, you sort of control up on the stage." Bobby died, I said to Dizzy Gillespie, "You're gonna have to be my Bobby Hackett." (groans, mimicking Dizzy) "Yeah." (laughs) ... as only Dizzy could do. They knew what I wanted. When one horn is out there and you got a session and you got a lot of musicians, somebody's gotta be in slight control. You give a signal like that and somebody's gotta know how to take it out. That's because maybe because I'm a musician and I ... I ... I'm a little bit of being a musician and so it ... and sometimes it goofs and sometimes it doesn't, you know.

Levy: Wow. These jam sessions, particularly at the end, I guess is usually when they happen ... are there artists that just don't like to do that?

Wein: They don't know how.

Levy: Oh.

Wein: A jam session is a performance. I just did something with the Jazz Gallery where I said, "You know, you people don't have to ... you can do jam sessions, you got so many musicians." Made arrangements to use Michael Dorf's Jazz ... the Jazz Winery and do a midnight jam session. And I went down there ... nothing was happening. I said, "You don't know how to do a jam session." They really didn't. They brought up ... I guess Roy Hargrove, he played with his group. That's not a jam session. Everybody ... they don't ... the younger players ... well, put it this way: When I played last at Dizzy's, I had ... I had Lou and I had Randy. I invited Ambrose to play with me for a night. I invited **[unintelligible]** to play with me. I invited **[sounds like Ludbrish Napa]** to play a number with me. And I invited Avishai Cohen... coming and playing. I invited Regina Carter who, of course, knows what we're doing. They all wanted to know what we're gonna play. I said, "Don't worry about it." They're not used to doing that, you see. So I said, "Everything is a little modal now so you find a tune like, say, *What is This Thing Called Love*. I mean, it's been played So I said, "You know what ... yeah." Next thing you know, they're playing the whole set. Everybody said, "What are we gonna play? What key?" I said, "I don't know; we'll figure out when we get up there." Because they've got to be able to do that, you see. If they can't do that, they're in trouble. And I went to pay them – oh, a hundred fifty bucks for playing a tune or a couple of tunes. They wouldn't take the money. I couldn't believe it, a musician not taking the money. (laughs) That was the first time in my life I ever experienced that. But they were in a jam session there and they didn't realize it, you see. I was watching in Newport just the other day and it was the first time I've seen Wynton's brother ... uh ... uh ... the trombone player.

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Levy: Delfeayo?

Wein: Delfeayo. He had a band, a big band. I looked at the stage and they're not sitting. He's got like fifteen musicians standing up. Three trombones, three trumpets, saxophones ... no music. And what they did was a jam session. But they did it in a way ... they played a riff tune and then they blow and then they play ... and they backed them up with the riff, you know, and everybody got a chance to blow. And it was a real jam session, but it was organized. They had stated a riff whether it was blues, *I Got Rhythm* or whatever it might be. And boy, they were swingin' because when they got to the finale, they were all blowin' together and they knew what they were doing and it was great. A lot of kinds don't know how to organize a session that way. Jam session's a tradition, not just blowing. There's a tradition to a jam session. And then once you get into it, you can play whatever you want, you see. You can play whatever your style is. So it's experience that's involved.

Levy: Is there a ... something that does to or for an audience when you have different acts on the show and then at the end, everybody comes out and does something together? What is that about?

Wein: It all depends. It all depends on the evening and the group. We don't always do that. We don't do that much at all. Sometimes your highlighter is in the middle of a show and the end just fades out. When people are sitting four or five hours listening to music, you don't ... maybe the last group's a throw-away, who knows. Maybe it isn't. You've got a big commercial name, you got, like a Jamie Cullum or a Chris Boti or something like that, and before that you might have the Mingus band. But every show is different the way you line it up. We're going over our programming for Newport now. We now have three stages and each stage is just as important now. That's the difference. That's why I'm talking about non-commercial is now commercial because our small stages is maybe one thousand people can get around, and they're packed because they want to hear the different kinds of music, the different things. They move around. So that what happened traditionally years ago does not necessarily happen now. When you had one stage, you had a program; one stage is different the way you program when you have three stages.

Levy: You've been doing this multiple stage thing for a very long time.

Wein: Not in the old Newport.

Levy: Not in Newport but in ... Nice?

Wein: The multiple stage thing happened when I came to New York and started the urban festivals. That was the first time at urban festivals. We used many halls and many facilities, and that was exciting coming to New York, the midnight jam sessions at Radio City with people lined up around the corner, six thousand people. I mean, jazz was exciting in those days. Jazz is the bottom of the totem pole right now. The only thing really going for jazz are the night clubs

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that are packed all the time because people come from the world to see a jazz club, like you go to Barcelona to see a flamenco club. They go to New York. You go to the Blue Note and check the people that are in there and I think one out of five might be from New York. The rest are all tourists. It's a whole new world of audience. Yet when Sonny Rollins played at New Orleans the other day, I mean there were ... it must have been this ... a thousand people *outside* the tent. Now they talk about there are fifty thousand people there, you know, but two thousand there to hear Sonny Rollins. That's a little more than the average. You know, it's two thousand out of fifty thousand. I wish we could get two thousand, a hundred fifty thousand music fans to go to concerts. Jazz needs personalities, it needs a leader. There's no leader. The only one that could be called a leader is Wynton maybe. And he's not really a musical leader; he's ... he's ... we don't, you know when you have a John Coltrane or Charlie Parker or Dizzy Gillespie or Duke Ellington, Louie Armstrong, you have a leader of a different era that sets a standard. Now everybody's off doing their thing, which is exciting and very good, but it's not commercial. So non-commercial is commercial now. (laughs)

Levy: O-kay.

Wein: You following what I'm saying?

Levy: I am! I am! And what I'm following, though, is your innate, intuitive ability to take a negative and turn it upside down.

Wein: Well, see, now I have motivation. I didn't have motivation earlier. My motivation is to keep Newport alive after I'm gone. And I know I can't keep it alive playing the same old people. Your dad is a great guitar player, but he's not gonna be around much longer than I'm gonna be around. So I need people that are gonna establish the ground rules as years go on.

Levy: And grow with the trends.

Wein: And whatever. Set the trends.

Levy: You're still not – as much as you still love traditional – you're not trying to have that be the be-all and end-all.

Wein: Wynton is doing that. I'm not ... Wynton is setting the ... you know, he wants to preserve the traditions of the music. I'm not ... I've been there and done that. I created the New York Jazz Repertory Company, and I'm ... I'm ... I've always had a little bit of the ... you know, years ago I played Sun Ra, I played Cecil Taylor, I played Ornette Coleman, I played John Coltrane – always as part of a program – Archie Shepp. They all played Newport, but they weren't, they weren't ... what's happening now is not avant-garde. It's young musicians creating their own voice, which may relate to the traditions or relate to ... you know, but they're not copying, they're doing their own thing and they're not The avant-garde has left his mark on jazz. Everybody can play modal now, everybody can play free, they can also play changes, and also

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play music, you know, and all kinds of things. So there's a lot of interesting things happening out there.

Levy: Where do you see the audience gravitating or are they gravitating in one way or another?

Wein: You go down to the Jazz Gallery, it only seats about eighty people, it's packed. You go to Village Vanguard, it's packed. You go to Brooklyn and the little clubs out there, they're packed. I go listening to groups ... I go listen ... I had Darcy James' Band, John Hollenbeck. I'm going out listening to these people. If what they're doing, they do well, I'm interested. They don't do it well then that's another story.

Levy: Looking backwards again, as an example for audience surprises or non-surprises, you did some shows ... things at the Apollo. Inexpensive tickets, right in Harlem, and the audience was not there for some tried-and-true big jazz names, whether it was – I don't remember – Carmen McRae or ...

Wein: Dizzy Gillespie.

Levy: Dizzy. Yeah. What happened? Do you understand how that happened?

Wein: I understand what happens and it's very sad for jazz. It's not very sad for people. To African Americans, music is a very, extremely social thing. It's the difference ... I always called it the difference between the white pop music and black soul music. When these kids go, white kids go to a pop concert; this is escapism from their ... they're middle class white kids who are escaping from their school, their mother and father, and their set of rules that they've been brought up with as young kids. When African Americans go to a soul concert and it's a Baby-Baby-Baby concert, you know, it's a reflection of their life. And that's the basic difference between pop music and soul music, and a black audience and a white audience. They're not looking for an escape, they're looking for a reflection of their life. When you see rap music, it's a total reflection of the life of a lot of inner city blacks in that situation. So what happens at the Apollo when you bring jazz, jazz has become a white audience music, an intellectual music. It's not a reflection. It *was* in the Thirties and the Forties when the Basie Band came to town and that was the ... that was it. When the Ellington band came to town, that was it. That was Harlem, that was a reflection of their life. Jazz drew a black audience. But it doesn't draw a black audience now.

Levy: When did that change?

Wein: Probably ... you see, be-bop had a black audience because of the militancy in the Civil Rights Movement and this was ... so it didn't have a major black audience, because it was still Sam Cook, you know, was still much bigger than jazz. But it did have a ... Miles had a reasonable black ... but Blakey started very early saying, "Where are the blacks? There are no blacks coming to my concerts." He was the first black musician to really make a statement about

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that. So it really started, you know, I guess at the end of the big band era with dancing. Dancing didn't become part of jazz; that's probably when it started. Dancing is a very big thing in ... it was a big thing with ... with ... with everybody, not just blacks but ... it's a social music. When it ceased to be a social music, that's when it ceased to draw blacks. Now you have ... you go to ... Trombone Shorty was on the stage at New Orleans. Trombone Shorty ... he was brand new, a young kid. He's an entertainer, incredible entertainer. There were twenty thousand people in front of his stage. There wasn't a black face in the crowd. Not one black face in the crowd. And here's a black entertainer. But when you put Lauryn Hill on the other stage, there were a huge number of African American faces because she's playing the music that reflects their lives.

Levy: That's fascinating.

Wein: It really is. It took me a long time to understand the difference. You just think of the lyrics of the songs, and you just think of ..., you know. But these kids that go and want to ... the kids that go to the pop concerts, they're not ... they're not ... this is their ... they can take off their ... girls can take off their bras, you know what I mean? And the boys can get high. Then they go back and they're going to college Monday. You know what I mean, hey? Or they're going back to work on Monday. That's escapism, you know.

Levy: I just never thought of it in those terms ... at all. Is there any connection between the exposure to the art form in earlier life, do you think? Should that change ... where we grew up with certain things, we heard things, we maybe have an appreciation because of that, and then ...

Wein: Are you talking about jazz?

Levy: Yeah.

Wein: I think the future of jazz does not lay with that. The future of jazz, the audience is gonna come out of the rock generation when they get tired of hearing the same shit all the time and start looking for something else. So you'll have, you will have a minority. Jazz has always been a minority music, never the majority, and out of every million kids that want to go, maybe a percentage of them will say, "I want to see something else." I can see that happen. I can see that happening with older jazz fans who are tired of hearing the same thing who for years would reject things they didn't understand. And now when I talk about Newport and I see a lot of older fans listening to music they wouldn't have listened to ten years ago. So this, I think, is where the future jazz audience will come from. Not from school or anything like that. I think a lot of musicians will come from school and education, but not the public. Some naturally, but the real audience will come out of the pop generation.

BREAK

Levy: Well let's talk just a little bit more about the education thing, because there are two things that come to mind that you were involved in. One goes all the way back to the late '50s. I think it

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was '57 where you put together a youth band made up of musicians from all over the world. And that struck me, as I was reading about it, I thought, were you the first to do that? Because now you hear about the Monterey students, or this group and that group, pulling together young musicians from disparate places and putting them together and doing some training and touring, raising awareness.

Wein: I'm trying to remember, I think Marshall Brown was the ... he had a high school band at Farmingdale High. Now, he was not the first to have a student band. I think the guy at North Texas State, but ... so we decided to bring the Farmingdale Band and put Marshall on the Board. But then I got the idea after the first year, and listen we had a lot of money at the Festival at that time, cause we'd been making money, and I nearly lost my job because of this, eventually, the first....I said, "Why don't we do a Tower of Babel Jazz Band?" That's what I called it. I says, "Everybody speaks a different language." We didn't use that expression, nobody accepted it, but that's what I had it in my mind. I said, "Let's go to Europe and take a musician from each country and show how jazz is." And this is definitely my idea. I told the board and they paid for it and I got a great trip to Europe. I got to know all the promoters in Europe. I really...and some of the musicians then became leaders in their country: Alvin Mack, Rudolph, and so many of them. And it nearly was great, but I think what Marshall did wrong is tried to give them too much. He went and got these brothers in Philadelphia – I forgot the name of these brothers in Philadelphia, you must remember their names -- who were very avant-garde composers, and he gave them music. He should have given them some Basie or Ellington or something like that and let them play, let them swing which is what they were used to, but it still was okay, it just wasn't as great as it should be, but it had a lasting effect in Europe. So everybody went back to their country, and they had gone to Newport, in each individual country. It was a great, great experience, and so we did that. I was very proud of that. It worked. They could play and [unintelligible 3:20-ish] and in America they didn't swing like they did in Europe. I'm afraid everybody is dead who was involved with that at that time. There were a lot of great stories, but I... it was an almost great success.

Levy: They were all young, they were students?

Wein: No they were professional musicians. The students, they were all with the Farmingdale High band that was the year before. They were all high school kids. That was a good band Marshall had. And Larry Rosen, ...no. Then we did, the next year we did a thing with the Newport Youth Band. That's when we brought in, they weren't all Farmingdale, that's when Larry Rosen was playing drums and I forget, there were two or three other musicians in that band that became fairly well known. I think the bass player, Gomez.

Levy: Eddie?

Wein: Eddie Gomez was in that band and a couple of others that became very good musicians. That was pulling together the Newport Youth Band, that was after the European band and after Farmingdale High band, so that was one of the first.

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Levy: So that was one of the first student bands.

Wein: That wasn't necessarily my idea, that was probably Marshall's idea, or the Board's idea, to tout jazz

Levy: Well jumping some years, and I will come back to other things, but that brings to mind also the Jon Faddis Carnegie Hall effort.

Wein: That was an interesting thing because I had Carnegie Hall, I had a New York Jazz Repertory Company, and that lasted a year and a half. It was a great adventure, a little bit way before it's time, but that was the influence – Wynton always said it was the influence that directed him. Because I have about seventy or eighty musicians on the road but they were a lot of the originals, you know, a lot of the people were still alive. We would literally have the arrangements transcribed, and we were playing one of the great concerts of the time, one of the greatest concerts ever done. He wrote five arrangements, trumpets in harmony. We did the *Hot Five* and the *Hot Seven* things and recorded them, Atlantic recorded them. Fantastic recording, unbelievable, because those musicians had to work so hard to play those trumpet parts, but they played them, but so we did some great concerts with the – but we also brought in Cecil Taylor to do some big band things. We covered the whole spectrum of the music. I have the programs of those things. Fascinating to go back to them. If we were really going into depth, that would take weeks. But what we, what I did with Jon Faddis was I didn't want to do the same thing. I wanted to have a repertory company that was a singular company with as many of the same musicians as possible, but not transcribe the arrangements, get people like Jim McNeely, so many good arrangers, to take standard repertoire and re-write it in a contemporary way. The best way I can describe it is I told Jim McNeely, "Write *Sing, Sing, Sing*, your own version of "*Sing, Sing, Sing*." And he wrote an arrangement that was out of sight, and that was the whole point. And that worked. We did that for ten years, four concerts a year. We did forty concerts, and it would still exist except that I think, and this is for the record, there was the battle of the bands for two years – the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band and the Lincoln Center. They won the first year, we won the second year in the press. And I think that the hierarchy, I'm just assuming, I mean you've got what you call a cultural hierarchy in the city, millionaires, and the word came out. I said, "Look, we got 130 million dollars tied up with this Jazz at Lincoln Center, your band is costing you \$100,000 a year; do you think we could get rid of the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band?" I really think, because I spoke to the wonderful ... who was the man from NBC who died a few years ago, who ...

Levy: Ed Bradley?

Wein: No, he was at CBS. He was an English ... he was a British guy and he was on the Board at Carnegie Hall and a jazz fan. I can't think of his name. I think it was NBC he was on, not quite sure; Dan Rather was on CBS. And I said, "Do you think we can get the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band back?" And he said, "No, not as long as there's a Jazz at Lincoln Center." You know, this is for

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the Smithsonian, so it's not newspaper distribution. But I honestly think that, because at Carnegie Hall, it was just something that they were doing. One of the reasons they do jazz is they get grants. They're not crazy about jazz, but they want to be ... do an inclusive approach to what they are doing. There are grants available for education and things like that. I was on the Board of Carnegie Hall, and the only reason I was because they mention my name when talking about getting grants for jazz. And I am not deprecating myself, or them, but it's just part of the game, part of the cultural game, and I'm getting involved in that now that I'm non-profit. I have to think of what foundations want. I was up to see the Doris Duke Foundation the other day and what they are interested in, so I may have to program a little bit in relationship, if I feel like I want to do it, which happens to fit in with what I want to do. But, so there is a cultural hierarchy in this city that controls billions of dollars.

Levy: Well, let's talk a little about these billions of dollars. Because you survived, to use your own word, for many years in building the Newport and its predecessors and post-decessors. The corporate sponsorship tree.

Wein: I came up with an idea. I mean nobody had dreamed of sponsorship. We didn't have sponsorship when we started. But a man from Schlitz company had a very open mind. His name was Ben Barkin. He saw all the publicity Newport got; he said, "I want to be associated with that" and bought the back cover of the program book the first year. And then I said to him, "Ben," I says, "why don't we do a Schlitz Salute to Jazz? He gave me \$25,000 to do an evening at Newport. He was excited about that so we did a Schlitz Salute to Jazz Tour, that was the first time. It never made me money. They gave \$120,000, twenty dates, \$6000 a date. I mean that was a fortune for that. But what I did by calling it the Schlitz Salute, I put the name of the sponsor right in there. And then I came up with the Kool. The Kool came when we were doing these soul festivals, and it came from Louisville Kentucky, so why don't we call it the Kool Jazz Festival? So I was the one who invented the concept of naming it after the sponsor. We had the JVC festivals, and that's why I never had investors, because they gave me enough to stay in business. I never had to get involved in the cultural wars, so to speak, of looking for the cultural dollars because I had the sponsor dollar and that kept us alive all these years. JVC was with us twenty two years. That's a long time for a sponsor to stay, but that's because I gave them the name; it was the JVC Jazz Festival and they promoted it all over the world. And they never bothered me about the programming. I've had sponsors bother me about the programming or whatever, but the deal didn't last very long 'cause I couldn't deliver what they wanted. They would say, "Can't you get The Beatles?" You know, that's what they wanted. "Can't you get The Rolling Stones?" Whatever the biggest name is. That's not my business. I don't do that. And so I'd have them for a year or two and then they'd disappear.

Levy: The whole corporate sponsorship world, I would imagine, has a certain language, a certain process. I mean, where did you pick up on this? How did you finesse these situations?

Wein: Oh, very easy. I used to see Texaco Star Theater with Milton Berle, Television, Jello Again – This is Jack Benny instead of Hello Again. I mean, hey, sponsors support everything.

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This is American capitalist system, you know what I mean? If you can get some of that to keep yourself alive, get it as long as it didn't mess with your show.

Levy: Did you have to beat the bushes or did they come to you?

Wein: They always came to me. I never could solicit a sponsor. I have two new sponsors this year. I never heard of the companies. They're not paying me a lot of money, but they're paying me good money. One is a company called Alex and Ani. Did you ever hear of them?

Levy: No.

Wein: They make charms, bracelets. The young people are wearing these necklaces with one charm on them and bracelets with one charm. They're a Rhode Island company. They're sponsoring a stage. And the other one, we're just announcing today ... yesterday ... when is the 11th? They're announcing it today. It's a company, I don't know where they came from. It's an asset management company called Natixis. Did you ever hear of them? They walk in the door. There's a visibility we create and they want to be associated with that visibility.

Levy: So they're coming to you?

Wein: Yeah, they don't know, they don't come and say, "We want you to present so-and-so. We want to be involved with what you're doing." And so now I don't give away the title. They're the presenting sponsor, or they sponsor a stage or something. They're not giving me enough money to give them the title. And so, that's kept us alive. Believe me, we wouldn't be in business without sponsors. I don't look at sponsors as a money tree. I look at sponsors as a blood source. And I treat them that way, and that's why they stay with me. It's not just somebody that... I respect that they want to be ... to me it's a compliment that they want to be associated with what I do. And it's not that I believe in the American corporate life that much, but I have never run into a problem with them. I've never ran into anyone looking for a kick-back. I won't say I've never run in, I have run in but very early in my life, got out of that one quick. That was not sponsoring an event. We were doing a film. And the guy, well Mike Bryan, Benny's old guitar player, he wanted, says we can do a film and get Goodyear Rubber to back it. And [unintelligible] no money, he sold pieces of film. So one day I said to him, "How many percentages you sold 110 percent?" He said, "Well, I still have ten percent. I gotta give it back to the guy at Goodyear." I said, "You gotta what!?" And I had about \$3,000 tied up in this. I called my lawyer, they wouldn't refill me (?). I called Elliot, he wasn't my lawyer, he was my friend. I said, "Elliot, I want out of this 'cause they're giving a kickback and I don't want, I won't get involved in things like that." I mean we got involved with that in Nice. With a bunch of crooks. Didn't start off that way. Finally I said, "I gotta get out of here." You'll get dirty, you know what I mean? Because it is out there, these people. And you really have to, you gotta be careful. Because if you get involved once, you're, you, they have, it's just something you don't want to get involved with. But in the business, in the main sponsorship business, I've had the most wonderful people. The Japanese at JVC. I'll never forget. I invited, they signed up with me and I

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invited them to have dinner up at my house. They said, "Sorry, we have not been in business with you long enough to have dinner with you." That's a little different than you hear about.

Levy: Well you mentioned Nice, so I am going to digress to Nice for a minute. Twenty years that Festival went on, I think.

Wein: 1974 to '93. Twenty years, yeah.

Levy: Multiple stages, simultaneously. A logistics nightmare I can only imagine. And I think, correct me if I'm wrong here, you were also somehow kind of got involved in booking beyond the Festival, which served some benefit to you in getting guys over to Nice in the first place.

Wein: It's funny about life, because what I'm doing now is totally different from what I did at Nice. Because in Europe, at that time, there were a lot of avant garde festivals happening. Nobody was paying attention to traditional jazz. And I said, "I'm going to bring all the great players over, 'cause they were all still alive: Earl Hines, Teddy Wilson." Nobody cared about them anymore. They were all into either (post?), Coltrane was already big by '74, and you had these festivals in Germany, and you'd read the papers talking about all the critics with the avant garde. I said, "I'm going the other way." And I brought all the guys from the big band, the Harry Edisons, Buck Clayton, everybody. Jo Jones. And Eubie Blake. I brought everybody. A hundred musicians. And jam sessions. We had, you know, wonderful festivals. The greatest. Then slowly but surely we built up, we'd bring blues artists like Muddy Waters, B.B. King, and Chuck Berry. The festivals grew more commercial. What we did was when we brought all the musicians there, we drew people from all over France and Germany and Italy. Everybody came, and they wanted to start their own festivals in their own towns. And to this day they are all my friends. We would then bring musicians and sell them to the other festivals, so we hoisted ourselves on our own petard, as the expression goes. We started doing less and less business because the people that came from Bayonne (?) or that came from Limoges or they came from Umbria or they came from Spain, all started their own festivals. To this day I have a meeting of all the festival people here 'cause I don't do business in Europe anymore. Now I'm the Grand Daddy of all of this, and they treat me like a king whenever I go over there. It's very rewarding, it's very nice. And so that's what happened with Nice. But towards the end, the old man that was there, was a very wonderful old man, he died, and then the people that came in ... I would say, "How can you do what you do?", 'cause they were doing ... They'd say, "George, c'est la vie." I said, "It's your life, not my life." It really is terrible when you run into it, and you're hung there for awhile, you know what I mean? You can't, you can't tell people about it, and you gotta put up with whatever they're doing. They want to give you a kickback on deals they're doing. I said, "No, No. You keep the goddamn ... I don't want it."

Levy: Did you ever make money in Nice?

Wein: Oh yeah, we had some good years. Because we sold all the groups. That kept me alive for awhile 'cause we weren't making much money. In the '80s, remember I was fighting in New

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York; we were trying to make it, but we were in business. I had a big business at that time. And I was making a decent year's pay. I wasn't getting ahead of the game; I mean, I'd make \$100,000 a year and employing a lot of people, but we worked very hard for it, and I didn't make any money until Kool asked me to give the name Newport up. They paid me. That's the first time I could buy a painting with my money. That was the best thing I ever did was buy paintings, 'cause I made more money from my paintings than I did from jazz. But I always liked quality things.

Levy: Where did you develop the taste for fine wine, fine art? Where did that come from?

Wein: Art, I think, came from a relative of my grandmother's, a cousin, Mr. Kronberg. I have some of his paintings. When I was in college I took a course in the theory of aesthetics. It was a major influence on me because most of my college career was a waste 'cause I was pre-med. It was a stupid thing and I shouldn't have been a pre-med. I liked history and I liked philosophy. I liked courses like that. And I should have been majoring in them, you know. But when I was a student in college, I loved, I wanted to go to France. I'd been over there during the war, and I went back in '49 in the summer, and Mr Kronberg took me to museums and showed me about the Impressionists. So that's where I developed a taste for art. And an aspiration for it. And the wine, that sort of started at that time, but not that much. When I bought the house in France, I really, well, I started before, but wine was very important in making friends. It's the greatest thing in the world. You have a good, a unique, in those days I spent a lot of money on wine, but in those days a lot of money was \$50 for a bottle. Now that \$50 bottle cost you \$2,000 or \$3,000. Wine cost, you buy the great wines, they're \$30,000 a case. And I bought great wines at \$500 a case. It was a huge difference. Nowadays you have billionaires and I wasn't a rich man but I could afford a case of wine for \$500 every so often. But I didn't buy a \$100 case, I bought a \$500 case and so there's a big difference. But when I really started, you could buy great wines for \$50, \$30, \$40, so you could do that. I bought thirty cases of 1982 Grand Cru for \$13,000 – that was less than \$500 a case. You try to buy a bottle of LaFite '82 now and you'll see what I'm talking about. Or just buy a bottle of Lafite 2010 now and you'll see what I'm talking about. And so people would come to my house and I'd give them great wine and they were my friends for life. It really is amazing because it is the one thing your friends can take away with them; they can look at your pictures but they can't take it with them. But they can take the wine with 'em, cause they drank it and had a great night. My wife, we liked to entertain. Joyce was a great cook and we liked to entertain. The social life became part of my life. So all of these things make for the totality of life.

Levy: How do you handle the logistics of almost any of your endeavors floor me, but I know that Simone [Ginebra?] had a lot to do with how Nice operated. But I'm thinking too, I was reading about the 1971, I think, tour with Ellington that you put together and went on for most of it anyway, if not all of it. I mean, I have enough trouble booking travel for my trio. I mean, how do you move a band around the world for a sustained two-month period?

Wein: He was gone for literally ... I've got the whole list of the dates. You just develop a knack for how to do those things, and you do it the hard way when you are shipping people around. No

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difference with your own band. When you've got a gig in Illinois and you want to fly to that town and it costs a fortune, you fly to Chicago on a cheap fare, rent a car and drive a hundred miles to the gig. I mean, it's a way of economics, of the handling of transportation, and, I mean, I'm trying to think of how I set up that, you know. I had different people in different countries; they would each buy three dates, four dates; another country, another promoter would buy three or four; another government would buy dates and take them to Russia. Then I had a South American impresario. We'd fly to Brazil and he would set up the transportation all over South America, and they'd end up in Mexico and fly back to New York. So it's a matter of utilizing the people you've met in each country and say, "Look, Duke is available for this time." And they would then get the money they could get, and I'd make the deal with Ellington, and we'd make the deal. And we'd do it. Duke, of course, was a road rat, like all big bands are road rats. They don't know any other life. Like Basie, Woody Herman, all those band leaders were road rats, and they were only happy when they were on the road getting up. One day (chuckles) when I was in France with Duke and we were in a beautiful place and he played a concert that night, he had a day off to go to Saint-Tropez. I said, "Let's stay here, Duke." He says, "No, let's go." I said: "Why? We've got a nice place." He said if you don't leave town, people think you don't have any place to go. (laughs a lot) I mean it. They work into this. If you get to the town early, that's okay, but you can't stay in a town after you play, you gotta leave. I mean, these things, only experience can do these things. I acquired experience the hard way, by making mistakes.

Levy: Do you remember the first crazy tour you ever booked?

Wein: Yeah. I lost a fortune. That's when I nearly lost my job. At Newport, 1959, when I set up a tour and took Dizzy and Brubeck and Buck Clayton's All-Star group with Jimmy Rushing, we sold it all over 'cause I had met all the promoters when I did the International Band. I sold it all over, but in some places we didn't sell and promote ourselves, which was a total mistake. So when we came back, we lost a lot of money. And I come back and they fire me as producer of the festival I had created. And I was the first vice-president and producer. And they vote all of a sudden. I'm sitting there and they voted me out. Then John Hammond – who had been second vice president, now first vice president – made a motion that we re-hire George as producer. (laughter). That was '59, one more year in '60 we go, then I went back in '62. John Hammond was ... he had ... one thing about John Hammond, a lot of people didn't like John, but John knew the people that were doing the work and I was doing the work. There were a lot of people who were jealous and envious of me, wanted my job: Willis Conover, Gorge Avakian. They were't friends of mine. They were not friends.

Levy: Willis tried to take over the New Orleans...

Wein: See, in New Orleans they wanted me to do it and then they found out I was married to Joyce, and so they said it was embarrassing to the mayor. That's what they said, that the Mayor might be embarrassed if you're married to a Black. Willis grabbed that job as fast as he could. That's another whole story. There are so many stories and so many things...

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Levy: Well, tell me about this touring. A couple of things come to mind, some that are funny in retrospect, I'm sure were horrific at the moment, like drummers landing in jail in Japan, and not just one year but two years running, I think.

Wein: Two years running, yeah.

Levy: What do you do as a promoter?

Wein: Well, you feel badly for the Japanese promoters, but you still have buddies (Rich and Louie Belson and Philly Jo, and Charlie Persip) who are in jail. And you go to the Japanese jail and you say, "Why can't you let these guys out on bail? You're hurting your own thing. They pay bail and come back and stand trial or you can deport them, or whatever you want to do." "No way!" So you hire a Japanese drummer, you know, who's the Japanese Gene Krupa, they call him, and ... the next year I wasn't in Japan but it happened, but, "My, tell those guys don't do it, don't ask." So it was Elvin and, who was the other drummer?, the two of them, oh, Tony Williams, Elvin and Tony got busted the day they got there. They saw a guy and asked to get some stuff and boom, the guy was a cop 'cause they're waitin' on 'em. I forget who the other two drummers ... I think Oh, we had to call Klook to come in from Japan, Klook who was a notorious ... he was the supplier for everyone who came to Europe, he finished up the tour and did a good job. These guys were wonderful guys, and they weren't bad guys, they just had habits and sometimes their habits caught up with them. And they weren't even habits, smokin' tea or something like that, but they didn't understand that you don't do that over here. Just give it up for two weeks. They weren't, some of them were junkies, but most of them could handle it.

Levy: You had an idea in '71 for touring, to save some money. At least I think it was your idea. You took Dizzy, Sonny Stitt, Kai Winding.

Wein: Oh, the Giants of Jazz.

Levy: ... and Art Blakey, yeah. And it sounded like a consortium of some sort, or you got these guys to buy into a partnership or something.

Wein: Well, you know, as big as they were, there was not that much work for them, so ... and I'll never forget them because whenever I took Thelonious or Dizzy, they flew first class. But when we did this tour, they all agreed to fly tourist class, which I couldn't believe it, but they, you know, they were all getting paid well, not the same money. Monk and Dizzy got more than Kai Winding and Sonny Stitt, but they all shared in the tour. The cooperation was wonderful, but the rehearsal, the fascinating thing that I learned at rehearsal is that Dizzy and Monk were not musically related in any way. And Dizzy could not play Monk's tune that easily. Blakey, at the rehearsal, loved Monk. He said, "We gotta run down some of Theonious' tunes now." So Dizzy, Kai Winding could play 'em, and Sonny Stitt could play 'em, but Dizzy had a problem with ... and the thing that Dizzy couldn't, didn't realize was that when they played *Blue Monk*, there was always a recognition, applause, he said I didn't know they knew Monk's tunes like that. So there

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was this thing. We did three tours. And the music was never as great as it could be because of the problem with Dizzy and Monk...they got along fine, but just musically they really didn't relate. Monk needed musicians that played his intervals for something to really happen. And the last tour, Monk got sick on it, it was a problem. Cause I'd sat in rehearsals with Charlie Rouse, and they were rehearsing Charlie's improvisations, not that he wouldn't improvise, but he wanted a certain sound on the improvisation that related to his backing and his chords and he wanted that so he had to build that into Rouse who was perfect for him. But Dizzy couldn't do that. Dizzy was so used to playing his own thing. So that was a problem. But there were some good nights, but never as good as it could have been.

Levy: Was that, business-wise, that structure, was there a special deal or was it just your usual ... you paid the guys and you put it together.

Wein: They all knew me so well and they trusted me because I took them on so many tours and I'd always paid them so well. They always made as much money as the market could bear in those days. They trusted ... it's trust, it's a matter of trust, that's all it is. They trusted me before the tour, and they trusted me after the tour. So that was okay. That's the most important thing. It's the thing I treasure most. When Miles Davis called me "motherfucker, but you're the best," that was okay. (laughs)

Levy: Was he the only one you ever stopped a check on?

Wein: He's the only one I ever stopped a check on, yeah. He said, "Why'd you stop the check?" I said, "Why didn't you play the gig?" (laughs)

Levy: And he never pulled it again?

Wein: So, I mean, I ... I always bent but at the same time I had a point where I wouldn't bend. They were ... that was respect. They understood that because they always knew that what I said, I would live up to. And if I didn't want to do it, I would tell them, I can't do it.

Levy: Talk to me just a little bit ...

Wein: I nearly killed myself in Spain, you know, at that time.

Levy: Why?

Wein: 'Cause the Spanish people would have paid extra money for Miles to play that gig.

Levy: Oh, the one he walked on.

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Wein: Yeah, when he walked on, because he wanted more money to play, even though he had a signed contract for two concerts. If I'd called the Spanish and said he wants more money, they would have paid it. But I would have never done that because that ...

Levy: It would have broken *your* word.

Wein: And so they ended up, okay because they put on the concert with Miles' group which was Herbie [Hancock] and then Wayne [Shorter], and so they didn't get hurt that badly. In the long run, all my friends in Spain are very close. It's part of the history books in Spain. It's part of the history. They wrote up the history of the Barcelona Jazz Festival... so that's a big, big part of ... and I'm like a ... my best friends are from Barcelona. But at that time they were very mad at me.

Levy: You've had a couple of instances over the years about no-shows, and it seems like you always came out really well in the way you've handled it. I don't recall any bad fallout afterwards. Was there, that I'm missing? Somebody doesn't show up, you usually either offer to refund the money, you posted a sign, you had a substitute that was just as good or better. You did something.

Wein: Well, when you're doing a festival, you have five or six groups playing, you know, and if one doesn't show up and if the people ... you put a sign out front and say so-and-so is off and the program is So hey, they paid twenty dollars, forty dollars, fifty, they're still seeing a great night of music. And nobody's telling them they can't get a refund if they want to get it before they go in. So that's just the way you do it. But when you have one artist like Joao Gilberto, just recently, that cost me a hundred thousand dollars 'cause he didn't get his visa straight in Brazil; he couldn't get on the plane; he waited 'til the last minute to get his visa and we had to cancel the concert, give all the money back and pay the hall, pay the advertising. I'd given him a big advance and he sent the money back to me.

Levy: He did?

Wein: I couldn't believe it. He sent me back fifty thousand dollars. But we still lost ... we had three concerts in Boston and Chicago ... we still lost collectively about a hundred thousand dollars. But he wants to come back. He loves me. "George, I love you; George I love you; I'm sorry George, I won't do that again." But he's so crazy, you don't know ... he's a lovely man but he's crazy. He thinks the rules aren't made for him.

Levy: He's an *artiste*.

Wein: Yeah. So, some people feel the rules.. and yet when he gets here, he'll work ... he'll play two hours on the stage. You have to pull him off the stage.

Levy: Any memories of nights when you just thought, Oh my god, what am I ever gonna do now? Or something happened and you had to just scramble?

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Wein: Well, it's happened twice in my life. The first one was 1960 and 1971 in Newport when the kids broke the fences down. But you go home that night and you think, What am I gonna do now? Charlie Rouse, after the '60 ... I took Monk. I went to Thelonious and I went to his manager and nobody would touch Thelonious, nobody. They didn't want to know him. And I said I want to take him to Europe. I had to guarantee the money to the promoters that were buying, because Monk's reputation was so bad. But when I went to Europe, I just hung out with Thelonious and I made him feel good. He played, it's in the book, and gained his trust. I'm getting' too old and fat to go up and down these steps, I told Thelonious. I used to spend ... I'd drive him and Nellie home from Manchester to London and we'd talk. And ... uh ... my mind just switched; what were we talking about? What was the question?

Levy: We started talking about what are you ever gonna do.

Wein: Oh yeah, that was it. I said to Charlie Rouse, I says, "I don't know what the hell I'm gonna do." I lost my club in Boston and I don't have the festival – there had been a riot. And I says, I'm doing these things.... Charlie said to me, "I'm not worried about you, you're a good hustler." And he meant that in a, you know, like a good hustler, like a baseball player that runs out everything. And that was ... he understood that. So I guess I'm a good hustler. I don't know.

Levy: Well, you've certainly not only fashioned an amazing career for yourself, but you've catapulted many people into their own lime lights, both artistry and otherwise. I'm wondering who are some of the standouts for you are.

Wein: Well, people say you discover ... you don't discover anybody; you give them an opportunity to be heard and that's all. You have that stage, you have a responsibility to present the best that you think should be on that stage. So, I've been lucky that I found some great artists that everybody ... other people knew them. I don't learn them myself, I read, I have friends that tell me you gotta hear so-and-so. You're not an island unto yourself. You have to have people, you have to trust people. I had people working for me that go out and hear things. I have young ... I'm very close to young people. The young people know more than I do, you know, because that's ... they're like I was fifty years ago. They're out every night downtown hearing things. They're my ears. And I trust young people. Not all the way but ... (laughs) ... 'cause they get carried away sometimes, but it's fun. I've always worked with other people in that respect because there's always somebody who knows more than you do. As long as you recognize that, you'll learn something, and I'm not just saying words; that's the way I live. I really believe that. Those aren't just words to me.

Levy: What makes your heart gladdest about opportunities that you were able to give people? Are there any that just ... you just ...

Wein: Well, I just mentioned about Nate Chinen who wrote my book, by putting his name on the cover and giving him the promotion that, you know, was there instead of just being ghost

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writer. I helped him create a career and a life. And I've done that with a few musicians too. Some appreciate it, some didn't. Ruby Braff never appreciated it. He could have been a much bigger name, but Ruby was an anachronism. He ... he's a great trumpet player but he played in a traditional style and didn't play ... so the critics never He was a better musician, a creative player. And Ruby's last words, the last time I spoke to him was – we were talking about the old days – and he said to me, "You were all right in the beginning but then you changed." I said, "Ruby, I had to make a living." (laughs) I devoted so much time to him, you know, at the beginning 'cause we were both out there just beginning and starting, and I organized the groups and set up tours. Ruby got heard because of me. And John Hammond heard him, signed with Vanguard Records and the next thing you know, he's beginning to move a little bit. Then he stopped moving.

Levy: There's so much you've done that we haven't touched on. I think we're both fading at the moment.

Wein: I think we can fade. I like to talk but ... it's more or less getting your philosophies out there because people don't really know that there is a lot of thinking goes into this type of thing. It's not just that this group will sell and this group will reach these children this way ... that's not what I'm talking about. Any pop producer knows that. They know what ... I've learned a lot from them about certain things. I'm learning right now. I've got a young man producing a folk festival for me. And the whole promotion's different now. It's online and ... that's not my era. You have to ... I do my own emails now but I didn't start until about two years ago. So you have to ... if you're alive, you gotta be part of what's happening and you have to have people around you that ... they have to teach you. So you learn as you go along, and thank god, I hope I'm learning for a few more years.

Levy: What's next?

Wein: Who knows ... what?

Levy: What's next? What's next for you?

Wein: Trying to keep Newport alive, that's what I'm working on. I don't know whether I can. It may be too much, but I'm gonna leave whatever money I have to a degree, but it's not enough. I need help. If I get the help, I'll do that. If not, I'll just figure out something else to do. As long as I'm alive. But I definitely will be giving what I have back to the music I love. I'll definitely do that. Right now I'm working totally pro bono at Newport. I'm putting money into the non-profit foundation and when you put money in, you can't take money out. So it ... it's really a labor of love right now, and that's what I'll keep doing. I have enough income to live the way I want and that's all I care about. Not care about making money now; I've done that. Thank god, I've been lucky enough, you know.

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Levy: In the sixty seconds that are left on the tape, is there anything you want to tell the world that I haven't asked you?

Wein: Yeah, I'll say one thing. Don't worry about your enemies; they're always there, they never go away. Worry about your friends. They're the ones that make your life possible. And that's the most important advice I can give to anybody. Friendship is very, very important. There'll always be people that want to shoot you down. Don't worry about them. I'm not talking about physical, I'm talking about business. They'll never go away. Prejudice never goes away. Don't worry about that.

END

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