



Branford Marsalis Interview

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What is jazz?

M-m-m. What is jazz? It, it's a sound, you know. It's almost like asking a question like 'what is French?', you know, and I don't think that it's a, a word that you can aptly describe, I mean, somewhere you look in the dictionary and see another language spoken by the people from this re..., region of Europe. When you say something like that, I remember... Jazz is a, it, it's a musical language. It's a musical dialect that actually embodies the spirit of America as far as I'm concerned. It is definitely based in the black American experience. But it is impossible to, if you look at what it is, you know... black jazz musicians playing European instruments, you know, traditional New Orleans music that they call Dixieland which is an African American derivation of the marches of John Philip Sousa. It is impossible to separate white from black on this issue. It is actually a sensibility, you know, as a black American sensibility and those are the reasons that I feel, more so than just about anything else it embodies the true spirit of America.

What is it saying about that true spirit of America? How is it the spirit?

Well, I mean the United States of America is one the greatest social experiments of the last millennium. This is incredible, what you have here. It is the first real place where people from all parts of the world were like thrown together and forced to live with one another. And I think that there're certain things that embody the spirit of America. As you well know, baseball is one. And jazz is another. And it is impossible, when you look at the legacy of jazz and the history of jazz, to separate black from white. You know, you look at the stories of traditional New Orleans music and what changed it forever was when the Civil War ended and Reconstruction was the order of the day and all these Creole people suddenly became black people overnight and these Creole orchestras which existed at one point suddenly disappeared and these clarinetists had no work so they were essentially forced to go into

the black community and start to play the clarinet with these black jazz bands. And that level of technical fluency forever changed the nature of the music.

So jazz is a negotiation?

In ever... it's an ongoing negotiation. Constantly. It, it, it and it's, it's the same now as it was then.

My questions won't be in it.

That it, yeah, well, the... Yeah the, the s..., you know jazz is a, is an ongoing negotiation, you know and that's to me the reason that it, it embodies the, the spirit of our country because, more so than a lot of countries, our country is, is going through a process of ongoing negotiation. We are constantly trying to find a way, at this point, of re-evaluating who we are, without ever really dealing with who we really are. I mean, it, it is the denial that makes our country more interesting than most. But there will come a time, just like in people in their lives, when, as a nation, we will be confronted with the reality and we will have to face it and pay the piper, sooner or later.

What part does jazz play... an alternative to that...?

No, well, jazz, it, it's kind of art..., artis..., artists have always been social critics or social observers, I should say, in, in any given society. I don't think that the music, despite people's attempts to make music and politics to become one and, and, you know, to say that artists are politicians or artists are not politicians - we're above them because we are actually reporting the goings-on, the spiritual goings-on of the society. And most times, unknown to the largess, you know, and most times, unknown to, to them, I mean one of the greatest p..., political satirists of the 18th century was Mozart. No one knew that, I mean it was amazing, the stuff that he could sneak in, you know, he and his librettist could sneak in to the operas and people didn't even understand that. I mean, if you really want to understand his opinion on, on the, on the, the, the, the tiered society in Europe at the time, you know, the aristocrats, you know, the wannabe's and the, the poor. I mean, check out Don Giovanni, who, when people talk about Don Giovanni, they always talk about "Oh, it's a story about a man, you know, who kills this woman's father... blah, blah, blah..." That's really, that's the generic text. But the sub-text is far more interesting and a lot more subtle and jazz is like an eternal sub-text, I think. It's very subtle and it's very, very subtle and very poignant.

What's it telling us about ourselves?

I mean, it, it's not really telling us, I think, it's just reporting on who we are as a people. I don't think it's telling us any one thing. You know, because it is America as seen through black American eyes.

So, if we study jazz...?

If we study jazz, we learn about ourselves, but we learn about ourselves from, from our perspective. 'Cause one of things that's, that's very interesting is... if you were to go down south right now and talk to any centegenarian that you find, go in Mississippi and ask a black centegenarian - tell me about growing up in Mississippi. Then go to a white centegenarian and say tell me about growing up in Mississippi, I guarantee you their perspective will be totally different, you know? Their perspectives will be totally different because the way they see their lives and the way that they see their role within the context of what goes on in society are very, very different.

I want to ask you that same question, but then I want to ask you how then is it not about race?

Well, to me jazz is a black American interpretation of American life. And the reason that I don't feel it's particularly about race is because, well, it is about race and it isn't. One of the things people in the egalitarian sensibility says that everyone is the same. See, but everyone is not the same. I mean, people are simply not the same. And black people are very different in a lot of ways from white people because we come from Africa. And the African sensibility could not be more diametrically opposed to the European sensibility in lots of ways. One of the easier ways is to watch a football game and watch a Michael Irvin score a touchdown and then he starts strutting in the end zone and, and you have one of my friends, a white guy say, "Why does he, why does he have to do that?" You know, and I, I know what a lot of those guys don't know and I'm like, "Well, you have to understand that it's a very African sensibility." There was a time in western Africa when they were losing so many men to war that they... you had a new version of war and it was basically talk and smatter. You know, and they would essentially talk trash to one another and whoever talked the most trash won the war that year. I mean, and it, it, it's a thing that has been a part of Af..., the African sensibility for thousands of years now. So, it is one of those things that happens when you take a group of people and you move them and you assign them new names and new identity, and you can do that. You can say, "Your name is now, you know, John. Washington. Or, you know, Le..., LeRoy Jones, or whatever the name is, but what you cannot do is go inside their souls and redefine their sensibility. You know, so, you take some Africans and, and call it fate, I mean, 'cause you, you can call it fate, design, or coincidence. It is very ironic that slaves can be taken away from west Africa and brought to a place in America that is almost exactly the same in climate to west Africa, I mean why wasn't slavery in Minnesota? You know what I mean? So, what they do by bringing them to Louisiana and Mississippi, there're a lot of indigenous plants between the two places and a lot of the plants that came from Africa could be grown in southern, you know, United States. So, and, in a place where, like Louisiana, where the French colonists

were no where as oppressive as the English colonists, and you had... something like the Napoleonic codes, where they didn't have enough Frenchmen, you know, they didn't, they didn't have enough Frenchmen to, to man the land. It was one of the constant problems they had in waging their war with England, they developed this role by which the French people would bed down with the, the African women and all of the children out of that offspring, they could never marry those women, but all of the children were entitled to the man's name and all of his rights and possessions and property, possessions and property. And it's one of the Napoleonic codes and at the same time, the French always had more of a curiosity about the people that they captivated, more so than the English, who were very repressive and tried to make everyone into Englishmen, wearing those ridiculous suits and speaking that way and, so, in Louisiana, foods that were Afro-centric by nature, suddenly became...

What drew you into jazz?

The sound. The sound of jazz. I mean, I, when I was a kid, I didn't, I wasn't a jazz person at all. And I think that that's one of the, the problems, I think, with the music is that we pretty much keep the same sensibility as a, as a nation, that we have as teenagers. We don't really stray far from that. You know, we like the security of consistency in the zone and jazz music is absolutely, you know, against all of that. It is constantly about change and damn near about revolution. But I was lucky because I had that sensibility. So, when I was like 19, I went to see my brother playing with Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers. When I saw Wynton playing with Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers, something just clicked inside of me. I said, "Man, I want to do this!" This is revolutionary stuff they're doing, you know. And it wasn't really the sound. It was the sound, but, it was just the idea of it, the idea of being on stage, wearing a suit, and playing in a group and being able to have... individual expression as well as group expression. And the music was actually the center of attention, 'cause I was in a band with an R and B singer at the time and he was the center of attention. It was the singer singing in pop music the singers or the guitar players and everybody else is just kind of in the band. And just the idea of something as radical as the actual music being the focal point really, really excited me.

How was the music itself different...?

Well, it was free. It was free. It, it wasn't subject to whether or not people liked it, it wasn't s..., wasn't subject to whether or not it could be played on the radio. It was just about freedom. The freedom to express to yourself in any manner, in any manner that you saw fit. And sometimes it was good and sometimes it wasn't, you know. But it was still the freedom.

What do you say to these people who say that jazz sounds like a noise, doesn't sound like music, I don't understand...?

You know, I, I don't, I don't really think you can bring them in. There's some people who... I have a very good friend from, from Norway and she felt the same way. But it was something about talking to her and the conversations that we had that made me feel that she could really understand and I would explain to her the highs..., history of the music. I would actually play records for her. And, the... when you play the earlier records, like Sidney Bechet records and the Louis Armstrong records, people don't understand that and you explain to them how the ch..., the time began to change and, you know, revolutionize, and it became freer and freer and she was actually hearing our band pay for a week in London and on the sixth night, I saw her jump up at the table and I said, "What happened?" She says, "I got it! I knew it! I could feel it!" And she was like really, like really happy about it. But she's a, she's an exceptional person. I think that you can, you can really get people to appreciate the music way before you will ever get them to really understand it because the more involved it g..., it gets really involved. I mean, we can actually play music that can confuse most musicians, to be honest with you (laughs).

Tell me about the saxophone.

Well, the saxophone is, is the jazz instrument, as far as I'm concerned there is no other jazz instrument. Louis Armstrong played trumpet and at that time, that was the jazz instrument. But, the music started to change and the saxophones became a focal point in big band swing music. But when Charlie Parker came on the scene, he made the saxophone king. And we're still the kings. We, we run the show.

What is it about it? This is just steel, this is metal...?

Well, the, the instrument itself, the saxophone is just a, it's a vehicle. It's a vehicle, but we're not as confined as some of those other instruments. We can play loud. We can play soft. We can play warm, we can play bright, and then we have so many more options in terms of technical fluidity, you know, multi-phonics, you can play like those things where the, way out. It's not actually a note, it's like 3 or 4 notes at the same time. You can, I mean, what other instrument could play like the music of, of, of Ben Webster, or Lester Young's smooth and sultry and the music of Charlie Parker, which is like a combination of the smooth and sultry thing but along with it a certain kind of technical fluidity which had never been heard... have a very technical approach to the music and then to John Coltrane, who was just like an emotional dynamo, who just, the music just touched your soul - it singed you.

Let me go down and have you give a capsule of the people... tell me about Coleman Hawkins.

Coleman Hawkins played like Sidney Bechet, which is something that a lot of people, I think, don't hear, mostly because they don't have any Sidney

Bechet records. (Laughs) But, Coleman Hawkins played like Sidney Bechet, but he was the first really technical jazz musician, I feel. Where Sidney Bechet had a sound and a sensibility and a harmonic approach, it was more like the trumpet players and he had a lot of technical proficiency. He did, he was one of those Creole clarinetists. So, he had a lot technical proficiency, but he played more on top of the chords. Coleman Hawkins played through the chords. You know, Coleman Hawkins actually had, he made "Body and Soul" a pop hit. With no singing. I mean he was the first guy to do that, I mean he was playing.

Can you demonstrate it?

What...?

Like Coleman Hawkins.

I haven't done this is years. I'm going to try, I'm going to try. I mean it's, it's, it'll come close. Some of the real musicians will... man, you didn't do it.

Just, just a few lines.

You know. (plays music) If I can, I'll try and play the "Body and Soul" thing. You know... with that vibrato, which is very fast for the time and the growl... (plays music) He used to play like that but it was amazing to hear a cat when the record is all scratchy, you know what I mean, and you hear him playing those, those like, instead of playing like, when Sidney Bechet would play. He would always play like arpeggiated things on chords. You know (plays music) with it like that. Instead and, and Coleman would play through the chord instead. Like on the same thing he played: (plays music) and like scales, you know (plays music) and he also did this thing where he would play and you talking about theoretically, he would play, instead of playing on the chord, it, like the, the way chord structures on standard songs go like 2 minor to 5 - 7 to one. Well, what he would do was on the 5 - 7 chord, he would play flat 2, instead of playing 5 - 7. I know it's very technical and it's almost impossible for people to hear but, it was the first time that something like that had ever been done - where you play the 5 chord, and everybody knows it. If I played it on a piano, 5 - 1, everyone knows 5 -1. Instead of playing 5, he would go a half step up above the tonic and play and go down to it and resolve it. It was amazing.

Is the history of you jazz the history of the revolution of the sax?

Ummm... Actually more, I think, the evolution of the saxophone, and not the revolution of the saxophone, because I don't consider what I am doing right now to be revolutionary at all. Charlie Parker was revolutionary. When...

Tell me about Charlie Parker.

Well, Charlie Parker was just, he was a student of Lester Young, and Buster Smith and Coleman Hawkins. And, he spent a lot of time listening to those guys and it just, whatever that little bird is you have inside your head, he had something else to say, to add on to what they had already added on to the legacy. So, it was a quite unique style. You know, it was quite, quite different for the time.

What's the, of the Charlie Parker stuff, what comes to mind?

Well, this, my, my favorite Charlie Parker record is, is a record called "Charlie Parker With Strings" where he was just playing pop tunes of the time. "Slow Boat to China", "East of the Sun, West of the Moon", and a lot of people at the time hated that record 'cause they're saying Charlie Parker had sold out. But what he did was absolutely revolutionary because he played these songs, he played them in a way that they had never been played before, you know, and he was still Charlie Parker. It's not like he sold out his identity to play these songs, and he played songs that people knew and people bought these records and they loved hearing Charlie Parker playing these records. But I mean, when you think of a song like, there's a song called "Just Friends" and... you know, "Just friends, lovers no more, da da da da duh." I mean, if he had just picked up his horn and played (plays music), then I think they would have a point. I mean you listen to this record and each song and this is thing that my father used to rave about, you have guys making songs, me included, 8, 9 minutes long. I mean, these are some of the most complete jazz solos ever and the song is like 2 minutes and 15 seconds, you know? And he would come in and he played this lick: (plays music) I mean, it, to... hear that it's... it's unbelievable when you put this record on for the first time and you hear this guy floating across the instrument that way. It, it's like, I was 16... and...

What must it have been like right after the 2nd World War, to hear Charlie Parker?

Well, I, I can that must have been very traumatic to hear Charlie Parker. There were a few people who knew about him, you know, because he was playing like that in Jay McShann's band, and Dizzy heard him and Dizzy Gillespie actually got him to come to New York. Hey, man, there's this cat, you know, and everybody always says, "Yeah, right. Here's this cat," you know. For, for the, for the greats, for a guy like Sidney Bechet, or a guy like Coleman Hawkins, or a guy like Lester Young, they probably smiled because they could hear themselves in him. But there must have been other cats who were like, in line at that time just to, to succeed, to succeed the next people. He came to town and just blew them all away. You know, guys in town that were just like, you know, just starting to play, just getting ready to get a gig, and were listening to guys like Coleman Hawkins or listening to guys and say, "Well, this I can play. I can deal with this." And then Charlie Parker comes to town, this farm boy from Kansas City, Missouri, and just lays them all out. I mean, I was, I was 16 the, the first time I heard Charlie Parker with

Strings. My father played it for me. And, at that time, I was listening to more popular music and my choice of saxophone players would have been more contemporary pop saxophone players at the time. And, you know, I used to love, and still do, you know, still do David Sanborn and Grover Washington, Jr., those guys, I mean they were like heroes to me. And, my father said, I want you to hear this record. I'm like, "Well, you know, my Dad's always playing this junk for me; OK, fine. You know, only have to listen for 10 minutes and then it'll be over and then I can go back to what I want to do." And the first song that he put on was that song that I played... was it "April in Paris"? No, the first song was "Just Friends" and I remember hearing that and he started playing and the first thing that came to mind was the, like, 'Oh my God!' And, while at that time I knew jazz wasn't what I wanted to play, - I didn't want to play it - I was impressed by it. But intellectually I knew that if any point, if at any point in my life that I decided that I would want to play, that what I was listening to at the time sure as hell wasn't going to help me get there. And it was an astounding moment for me to hear this and realize that as a saxophone player, I was nowhere near it.

Parker's story isn't always pleasant... self-destruction, about drugs. How do you understand that?

Well, I, I think that the amount of rejection that he received must have had, I mean, it's all, you know, opinion, but it must have had a very adverse effect on him, and a lot of those guys, because everybody talks about the 'glory years' in 52nd Street and all that stuff and I played a couple of gigs with Roy Hanes and he was very fascinating and very honest about the realities of playing back then. I mean, you were issued this cabaret card which was, which was essentially a means of controlling you and if you didn't listen to the bosses at the time, most of the clubs were Mafia-controlled, they simply revoked your cabaret card, and you couldn't work. It was their way of controlling you. He knew that no matter what he played, while the music was very serious and meaningful to him, it was always a background. You know, you listen to the live record, there's always people talking, loudly in the background. He played five sets, you know 45 minutes each. He was woefully underpaid and then when he would get a record, like Norman Grantz would tell him who was going to be on the record. You're going to use Buddy Rich on this session. He wanted to use Roy Hanes. Nope. You want to do this record? You're going to use Buddy Rich. I mean, just, I can't even imagine being in a situation like that, where you are creating this astounding sound, and you were just subject to, to the demands of all these other people who in, in a realistic way really have no interest in you or what you're playing. Just, they just see it as a vehicle to capitalize off of.

A lot of people believe that when you no longer could dance to jazz, when swing was out, that it wasn't jazz anymore. Is it still jazz?

Yeah, well, a lot of people say that jazz music, the decline of jazz was, the music, you couldn't dance to it anymore, when Charlie Parker essentially

came on the scene. And, you know, it killed jazz, and it, it ceased to be jazz or whatever, but as far as I'm concerned, the arrival of Charlie Parker is when jazz actually started. Like, you had great moments in jazz and you can't discount the legacy of the music of Sidney Bechet and Louis Armstrong and Barney Bigard and Duke Ellington and all these, you know, you know, when the arrival of Thelonius Monk, the rival, the arrival of Dizzy Gillespie, the transformation of Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, all these things happened at the same time and, in one seemingly fell swoop, jazz music became an art form. First. It was always very artistic. I mean, you know, when you put on some of those Louis Armstrong records, like "I Got A Right To Sing The Blues In A Small Band", those solos are unparalleled in their beauty and simplicity. But, it was always secondary to the entertainment value at the time. When Charlie Parker brought that music out, the music became paramount and they weren't trying to make people dance anymore. They were trying to make music, at any cost. And they were just going ahead, forging ahead with it. Yeah, I mean, people stopped dancing to it, but I mean, artistic anything is not subject to the whims of the public 'cause they don't know. They never do know. I mean, they go from thing to thing, you know, this year you have a hat that's in, next year, that hat's out, another hat is in. This music is in, that music is out. And the only people that really know at any given time are the musicians, you know and if, if we were really concerned with the opinions of this, the public at, at large, they would, there would have been no Mozart. There would have been no Beethoven. There would have been no Stravinsky. They were all almost despised at times for their music. There would be no Charlie Parker, no Charlie Mingus, no Ornett Coleman, no Wayne Shorter. I mean, forget it.

Please talk a bit about the last 30 years. We're having a hard time understanding where jazz is going. What do you see over the last couple of decades?

Well, it was, it was interesting that the music took a, a turn in the last couple of decades and the focal point is clearly is Miles Davis. Miles Davis was sort of a, a hero to a lot of people and to the people that he wasn't a hero to, to the people who didn't play jazz, Miles Davis represented jazz to them. And when Miles decided he wanted to be a rock star and like started wearing high heel shoes and sunshades and all that other stuff, it doesn't matter to me. I still have those records, and I like those records. But, it, it suddenly brought forth a change where every 10 years, you could see a new crop of kids, kids coming up. There's a new crop of cats that came in every 10 years and they would come in and they would like mark, you know, earmark a new change in the music or new growth. And then when the 70s rolled around, those kids didn't play jazz. You know, Chick Corea, Herby Hancock, Billy Carvan, Lorrato Michael Walden, John McLaughlin, they stopped playing jazz. They started doing something else and I can't sit here and criticize that music 'cause that is the music I listened to when I was growing up. And I'm not ashamed of that.

So, if it wasn't jazz, what happened to jazz?

Jazz just kind of died. It just kind of went a..., went away for a while. It was falling asleep; there were still people playing. There were still people playing, but to be honest, with the exception of a few like Kenny Barron or Ron Carter or Sir Roland Hanna, who really just stayed with it, you know, a lot of the, the, the more talented younger generation that was supposed to come up, did something else. And that had never happened before.

Was the avant garde just an excuse to play free jazz, whatever, or was that noise?

I don't know if it, you could consider it noise, but I think that, when you listen to John Coltrane's avant garde records, they sound to me to be a logical conclusion, after his career spans the entire legacy of the music, and he ends there. A lot of the musicians that came after him actually started there. And it, it's very strange, and very nice to me, for instance, to see Archie Shepp at the..., at the end of his career, or at the later stages of his career, now he's playing standards. I think that's cool, you know. I think he should have been doing that first.

What's the future of jazz?

Jazz is, I don't know what the future of it is. I mean, there're, there're musicians like Joe Levanno, Joshua Redman, you know... There're also musicians like David Ware, who's considered an avant garde saxophone player, who I enjoy very much because when he plays songs, you can actually hear the changes when he's playing. So it's not really about avant garde versus bebop or versus this. It's just that there's a body of music that represents what jazz is and I don't care what the style is as long as you can hear that body of music in it. There is a strange kind of thing going on right now where there're a lot of younger musicians who have made a little niche for themselves economically, because jazz radio which is really not that much different than pop radio, has these formatted-type jazz songs that these kids can play and be very successful at. It remains to be seen whether these kids who are clearly the more talented people in jazz will decide to make, will make the decision to start actually start pushing the envelope, rather than staying in this, the little comfortable zone that they're in.

Can you say music in my life is not an emotional fix?

(Laughs) You want me to say that? Did I say that?

Yeah. You did say that.

No I didn't, did I?

Didn't you say that? I read it somewhere.

I might, I might have said it then.

I've got some old interviews...

No, I might have said it then, and that would have been true then.

Yeah.

I recognize that fact, but I've worked on that so...

(Laughter)

**I just want to get little snapshots of people... Coleman Hawkins?
What is slap-tongue?**

Something that I can't do. Slap-tonguing, I can do it a little bit, is when you, when you... what is it that you're actually doing? You place your tongue on the reed and... then you release, yeah, that's what it is, you release the bottom lip, away from the horn. So, instead of having the sound like: (plays music) it goes (plays music). I've got to use my other horn; this reed's not ready. M-m-m. (plays music). Like that. (plays music). You know, you could hear him playing it on those old records, it's a strange sound, actually. They were really, really good at it though, you know. They were really good, you can hear like Benny Carter, you know, play it. He could play that stuff really well. Like slap-tonguing? You he..., it's, it's very unique sound. You, you know it immediately when you hear it, you know. A lot of times you just in records POP!, you know. It's a good question - slap-tonguing. Have to work on that. I'll never use it though, you know? (plays music).

Ben Webster.

Ooo. Smooth. Smooth. You know, he wasn't one of those technical giants, you know, and he had two parts to his career. You know, but I mean, the fastest tempo he played was right, right there. Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, that was him right there. Bedoodle doo doodle deedle doo Doo deedle doodeedle doo Bedoodle dee doo dooby doodle dooby doo dooby dooble doo, you know, he'd play like that and which was a lot like the way Don Bias would play. It was, there was all an extension of Coleman Hawkins, you know. Don Bias, Ben Webster, but he didn't play as fast as those guys. Then, as his career got on, it got even slower. You know, when, when you hear, when you hear some of the early solos he played like with Duke Ellington on Cottontail, you know? He was playing like: (plays music). You know, like that. And then, when he got older in the 50s and 60s, he made a lot of records on Verve with Oscar Peterson, you know, and then everything was like slow and you know, (plays music). He was like that's, that was his thing. I mean, he went through 2 different stages in his career, I think.

Johnny Hodges.

Oooo. Johnny Hodges, the rabbit. Johnny Hodges is a disciple of Sidney Bechet. Except Sidney Bechet, when he would play, had this vibrato that was like frightening to me. Something I, you know, it's like, when he played, played: (plays music). Like that. (plays music). You know, if you hear the records, it's like: (plays music). Play... when, when Johnny, when Johnny Hodges would play the same thing, you know, the same kinds of solos, he would, you, you would play exactly like, like Sidney Bechet but without the vibrato. It would be fast, you know, (plays music), which is all Sidney Bechet stuff, you know. It's all Sidney Bechet and as his career, as he, he started playing like alto and soprano in the early Duke Ellington bands because early Sidney Bechet was, you know, he was the cat. You, you want to really like learn some soprano stuff, Sidney Bechet was the man to learn. And, you know, and he started, I, I think, even, I don't know, I, I'm not sure, I'm sure he did it before Ben Webster, you know, rabbit did, but when he , when you play those solos and you...?.. but he wasn't a fast solo-er. He didn't have all of his, but he would play the melodies and he, but, but when he played it's like, you know, (plays music). That's like, that was his thing, you know: (plays music), you know, it's real sweet though. It's like sweeter, I can't play that sweet. It was just sweet.

Tell me about Sidney Bechet.

Sidney Bechet was a classic New Orleans person, you know, and we have this thing, you know, that it's hard to... When I got to New York, I really realized how different we are. We all cuss a lot, and back them they all carried blades. All of `em. My great uncle, who looked a lot like Sidney Bechet, Alphonse Lambert. He carried a switchblade, they all carried blades, I mean you, if you play with any of the old cats, Clark Terry always carried a blade. Dizzy Gillespie, he always carried a blade. I mean, and Sidney was a hot-head, you know? I mean there's stories of him cutting people in Paris. Getting mad and like, talking about, you know, you always, "I'm getting my knife out and cut you." And he was serious, too, you know. And, he was an, an unbelievably great musician. He was a fantastic clarinetist who was the first one to embrace the soprano saxophone, as a jazz instrument. And. He was loved and adored in Paris, you know, which is why he stayed. They loved him.

What was his sound like?

Well, the sound like I said that vibrato, I guess, was popular for the time. It's very grating vibrato, for me. But, when you, it, it is so sultry at the same time, you know, when you hear him play a song like "Saint Louis Blues" or a song like "Maple Leaf Rag" and he does like "Saint Louis Blues" he plays it really slow. You know, he just plays it really slow and he, like... You know, the song, the song is: (plays music). That's how it goes and when he would play it, he'd go: (plays music). And when he gets to the second part, (plays

music), and when you hear that thing, it's like that, when you take away that vibrato, it's some... when you him play (plays music) (plays music). you know, it's just like, it's real sultry, you know, it's real sultry and, you know it, it, it's very, it's like you can hear like Sidney Bechet influencing Louis Armstrong and Louis Armstrong influencing Sidney Bechet, or they were both influenced by King Oliver and Buddy Bolden, Alphonse Pikou, I mean, it's like this thing that's in New Orleans and you, you hear it, you know, in their playing.

All blade carriers?

Oh, yeah, there's some blade carrying fools. Louis carried a blade. They carried blades, man, I'm not... Just ask around, man, everybody, you know. Everybody, see a cat, they carry a blades, man.

Ornette Coleman.

Ornette Coleman. A, a new kind of genius. A new kind of genius. It was the first time... that you heard a cat play like that - really, really out of tune, and didn't have that Charlie Parker technical, you know, efficiency. But you could hear that he had listened to Charlie Parker a lot and listened to jazz a lot and what he was playing was very meaningful. It's, to me, it's the true meaning of what avant garde is. It's a, it's astounding music when you hear it and it's even like, it's one of the things when you talk to musicians, they always say, "Ornette Coleman, aw, he's out. He's out." And it's an amazing revelation when you listen enough and one day it strikes you that it's not out at all and that it's very in. It is as in as Charlie Parker playing the blues and it's unbelievable that he was able to figure what he was able to figure out.

Why would you want to play out of tune?

That's the way he heard. It's not that he wanted to, it's not like he sat around and said, "I think I'm going to play sharp." But that's how he heard music. That's how he heard and when you consider that fact that on records like "The Shape of Jazz to Come" the majority of songs are blues form and rhythm changes and he was the first musician to my knowledge that actually succeeded avoiding playing in four and eight bar phrases. He simply didn't do it. I have live records of Charlie Parker trying to do it where he'll play an odd, play a phrase in five or a phrase in seven, but he always had to resolve back to one. He is completely free of those con..., re..., those constraints. He is just Ornette is just playing and it's so free, I mean, he was like my hero. He was like hero, when I play songs, especially because I play tenor most of the time. A lot of people can't hear the influence that he has. A few people do, but he was a major influence on me.

Frankie...

The day's long, man. See, DelSeyo, my brother, DelSeyo should be here to talk about Frankie, but he was one of those great trombone players with Louis Armstrong band. And, it's one of the unappreciated instruments in jazz, the trombone is. And Louis Armstrong had a tradition of great trombone players, you know, Frankie Trombard, Jack Teagarden... the other guy, he just died, I don't remember his name. See, I never remember their names even. Del... And, you know he was, he was a, a wonderful, wonderful trombone, won... musician.

David Murray.

David Murray is a good friend of mine and he's one of the leaders of what they call the avant garde, you know, school in, in New York. He's just like me; we're students of the music. I've admired his growth and he's admired mine. But I, I, I've checked him out for a number of years. We actually played on one of his records together, "Fast Life."

What's his sound?

His sound's really, really different. His sound's like, a little like Sonny Rollins and a little like Ben Webster. And a lot like David Murray.

We're talking about Louis Armstrong...?

Yeah well, I'll, I'll there're some people that try to say that, you know, for Louis Armstrong, it was all one thing. The art, the, the jokes, the singing and the, and, and that's an absolute absurd notion. 'Cause if you think about it historically, every black person who decided to become a performer, and I mean every one of them, knew that they had to be a minstrel in order to succeed, whether it's Duke Ellington, no matter who it is, they knew, you know, that Duke Ellington knew that he had to have Irving Mills come on-stage and call him "Dukie"... say, "Come on, Dukie, take a bow. Atta boy." You did it. And the thing that's fascinating about guys like Duke and the thing that's fascinating about Louis Armstrong is that despite all of the other people at the time who were minstrels, you know, and there were piles of 'em and they were immensely successful, he found a way to s-s-s-sneak some art in. He snuk art in on everybody, you know, and I don't, I know I can't sit here and say whether it was conscious or sub-conscious, it's just he was so great that everything that he heard, because what he heard, not only on the trumpet, was like the most logical thing that was, that, that could have been played, it was the only thing that could have been played because all of those solos are sheer genius. You know what I mean, but it's impossible for us to sit here and say, I mean, why do you think it is he never went back to New Orleans? You know, think he didn't love New Orleans? He just couldn't bring himself to go back to a place where he was subje..., subjugated to that degree, where he was subject to so much stupidity and ignorance. You know, he was a notorious pot-smoker. They did an interview and asked him why he smoked pot, he said, "To dull my senses from the

racism that I'm subjected to on a daily basis." So, he knew what was going on. See, and I think that to say that is almost a disservice to him when they say, "Oh, he just, it was all the same thing to him." He, it di..., it didn't take him long to figure out that if he really wanted to succeed he had to say, "Look out son! Look out boys, yeah! Whooo!", you know, and, and then that became a part of his thing. You know, I mean, that's why when you say 'Louis Armstrong' to most people that aren't jazz fans, they say, "Oh, yeah, 'Hello Dolly!' " They don't say "Strutting With Some Barbecue," they don't say "West End Blues." You know, they grabbed the things, you know, "Oh What a Wonderful World". I mean, that's, that's the thing that people remember. But the thing that made Louis Armstrong different than everybody else is that at the same time, he was able to still elevate everything that he did.

You can get around... look at his art, what's it saying?

It's just pure. Just, Louis Armstrong was a, was a pure musician. He was a pure genius and I think that was why he was able to succeed on the level that he did, at the same time while still playing. He wasn't pandering to anyone. It was pure, you know. And then there was the whole period when Louis was doing these songs, you know, disrespecting bebop and bebop musicians, I don't think for a second that was sincere. You know, that was a big thing, I mean there's actually a film where you can see Dizzy Gillespie with Ar..., Louis Armstrong and Dizzy had a vibe and not a good one with Louis. So, everything Louis plays, Dizzy plays it twice as fast and twice as high, you know, all wi..., you know, 'cause he made this song about bebop and let them, you know, you know, beat their heads against the wall or whatev..., I don't really remember the song that well, I heard it once, you know. So, Dizzy and them had a thing for Louis. You know, but if you really listen to what Louis' playing and you think about the legacy of this music, it is impossible for Louis Armstrong to hear Charlie Parker and not smile. It is impossible for him to not say, "Man, look what I started." It's impossible. You know he said it.

This is where the blues comes in, doesn't it? Has the blues got to be there?

Oh, well, cert... Anytime you look in any music, whether it's classical music, whether it's rock'n'roll or jazz, or whatever you choose to look at, what you will notice is that there is a point at which there are these huge derivations from the folk form. You know, it's like Bartok always talks about Hungarian folk songs and, you know, Beethoven used to talk about listening to these melodies, the German melodies that he'd hear in his village and granted most of the people who lived in these villages would prefer to hear the German melodies than hear Beethoven, but the reality is is that you grow up on these sounds. You know, Joe Za..., Zawinul, o..., often talks about listening to these, you know Austrian folk songs. And then, you, you listen to all this music and you start to re-interpret the things you grow up with. And

then, like jazz is a huge off-shoot, it's an, it's an absolute advancement on the blues. It's a derivation in our folk form, and our folk form is, without question, the blues. And I mean, like the gut- buckin', you know, steel-pickin' Blind Lemon Jefferson, you know, Lightenin' Hopkins, Robert Johnson, you know, Delta Blues.

The blues aren't a complaint, though are they?

No, they're not. The blues are about freedom. The blues are about freedom. You know, there's, there's liberation in reality and when they talk about these songs, when they talk about being sad? The, the fact that you recognize, the fact that you recognize that which, which pains you is a very freeing and liberating experience. It's just, it must be strange for other cultures where you spend most of your time trying to pretend like you don't have any of these problems or any of these you know, situations. When I hear the blues, the blues makes me smile. You know, and they can be talking about gettin' the blues but it's just, it's like such a positive thing, you know? It's but, when you listen to a guy like Sun House or a song called "Death Letter" which is sheer genius, you know, you know, "...woke up this morning with my eyes seeing red, I got a letter this morning said my, my, my love was dead...", you know, "... looked at her stretched out there on the coolin' board... " you know, "... didn't know I loved her..." you know, it's just like, you know, "... 10, 000 people at the burial ground, didn't know how much I loved her til they put her down..." But when I hear that it's so great, you know, it's so wonderful, it's not like, "Oh this is terrible. Oh this is so sad." This there's such a freedom in that, you know, there's such a freedom in, in, in, in that recognition.

Where does jazz take that recognition?

Oh, well, jazz is the blues. I mean, that, that's what it is. That's what it is, and when you hear, when, like when, when I hear John Coltrane playing, I hear like joy. You know, I mean, and there's some edgy stuff. There's a joy to that and when you hear it, I mean, that's why, you know, I can put it on in the car and start shouting. You know? I'm not shouting, you know, I want to kill somebody. I'm shouting like, 'Yeah!' You, you say, "Man!" You start shouting. It makes you, gets you all excited. You can see I'm getting kind of goosey-geosey over here. It makes me excited. You know, it ma... I, I, I teach a class now at Michigan State and we, we're, we're develop, developing a curriculum for jazz studies. That includes listening to the classical music, studying the classical music and listening, listening being the main focus. That, you know, the biggest problem we have is that musicians in our school do not know how to listen or what to listen to. And we have this listening class and when I play this music, I mean, it, it, it evokes such joy from me that the students start to catch it. They start to get what the music is about. It's not about 'H-m-m. That's very good, you know. Mixolydian re-interpretation.' It's a sound. And you hear the sound. And the sound should make you happy. I can't play and not smile. When I was younger I could

'cause I was trying to be serious. Now that I'm older and more secure, I mean, I can't play and not smile, I'm laughing the whole time I'm playing. It doesn't matter how aggressive the music is.

Dexter Gordon.

Dexter Gordon is interesting because Dexter pretty much created the sound that John Coltrane got credit for. The, the, the sound and approach that Coltrane had on those Prestige records was the sound that you should actually attribute to Dexter Gordon first. So, Dexter essentially re-invented his sound, you know, once John got his sound. And he got it honestly. It's not like he stole it, you know, and, and like, you know, and heard it and signed a contract like some of those old, you know, pop stories you hear about stealing songs and stuff. It's just that John made more of a reputation playing it than Dexter did, and Dexter came out and re-invented his sound. Again! Like a third time. And he's a great musi..., he was a great musician. He called me once, Dexter Gordon called me when, and I was very, very young, on my phone machine. And, I was like convinced at first it was a practical joke, because, you know, we were some vicious practical jokers back in the young days. We would pull some really incredible stunts, but... No one, you always wait for someone to call and say, "So, hey, man, you know, you... what's been happening? You talk to Dexter?" Then you say, "Aah, it was you!", you know, "nice try." But he called me out of the blue; I don't know where he got my number from and he just said "I been listening to you play," you know, "and I'm really impressed with you, young man. Just keep the fire burning and, you keep the fire burning." That voice of his, "Keep the fire burning," you know, "Keep the fire burning." Then he hung up. I was like..."No way."

How do you keep the fire burning?

I mean, it's easy. It's not even that hard because there's so much music out there. I mean, it's not just jazz music. I mean jazz musicians have always been polyglots, anyway. I mean you listen to songs with Charlie Parker's, cr..., as quoting Rimsky-Korsakoff. You know, Thelonius Monk as com..., quoting classical music, I mean, you hear it all the time. Duke Ellington did an interpretation of Mid-Summers Night..., Mid-Summer Night's Dream, you know, Shakespeare's play? And he also did The Nutcracker Suite, you know, the jazz version. We, we've always been stealing things from everywhere. So, with me, I mean I have, you know, music from, you know, the tuba singers in, in Mongolia, and, you know, the music of Tibet and Vietnamese string instruments and Japanese music and s..., operas, tons of operas and music just excites me. I mean, when I hear great music, the fire burns. And it burns deep, you know.

I want to talk about Coltrane because you brought him up...?

Sure. I know a lot of people are going to be mad at me when I talk about John because I, but it's something that I really, really believe, you know. I, I believe that John Coltrane was insane. I really do and believe me, I've got into some seriously heated debates with friends of mine. But, I, I'm a student of this music and I've listened to John very intently and when you think about a man who basically plays all of the time, and that's what he did, and I don't mean insane in a negative way, 'cause there're a lot of musicians who, when you think about it, they could, today, they might even be considered autistic savants, when you read the legacy of what they used to do, you know, and the obsession that they had with it. I don't think John was a savant. I just think that, I mean, it, it's, it's awe-inspiring. I, I, I will never accomplish what he's accomplished. I just don't have that kind of monomaniacal desire to create and, I mean... It doesn't matter who would, David Crosby from Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young told me a story about the first time he heard John Coltrane in Chicago. He comes on the stage, he plays one tune for an hour. And then, the slet..., the, the set's over, he keeps playing, he leaves the stage, David goes to the bathroom, 'Trane comes into the bathroom, still playing, goes to the corner and continues to play for the whole break. Draw the conclusions yourself, I mean, say whatever you want about it but it, it's, it's not something that, that you would necessarily say is, is normal behavior, but I think that that's one of the great things about about jazz, actually, you know. I think that he brought something enormous to the music, you know, he brought some thing that is, that will probably never be matched, to this music.

What sustains the intensity in all this...?

Desire. And insanity. (Laughs). But, desire. He just... it, it, it's, it's such a personal pursuit for him. I mean. I myself, I don't play that way, you know, philosophically. I like bouncing more off of what goes on around me. You know, I like the idea of being in the group concept, stealing ideas from the drummer or the piano player, who ever I'm playing with. But, John had his, had this way of playing and he'd just start his solo and it was his thing and everybody else just had to catch up. They had to keep up with him. You know.

He insisted that there was a spiritual dimension to jazz...?

No, well, there always was a spiritual dimension. He was just one of the first guys to actually talk about it. To verbalize it. You know, everybody often talks about his, you know, experiments with Eastern religion and Eastern music. I don't, I don't really hear how that had much of a profound influence on him, particularly in the, in, in, in the earlier records. This is me, I, I don't really hear that. In the later records, in "Ohm Interstellar Space" it was more conception than actual bow..., borrowing of, of music or ideas. It was definitely allowing his music to be influenced by those spiritual philosophies, you know, and the music took on a very strange sound. It's, it's very intimidating, when you listen to it. Because much like what Jesus must have

been like. To hear a man that plays with absolutely no pretense whatsoever, none, not a shed of pretense, not a shed of self-indulgence, is a very awe-inspiring thing. I mean, he had completely removed himself from the, the, the human frailties. It's like a, it's like when you listen to those records, it's it's, it's another, it's another kind of thing.

Will you talk about "Love Supreme"?

The first time I heard "Love Supreme" was in college. I was at the Berkeley College of Music. 1979. Jeff Watts, who was a drummer in my band, and I, and Smitty Smith all, and Donald Harrison, there were a lot of musicians around and listening to this thing. And, it's one of those records I couldn't put it down. I, I listened to it for like 6 months straight. I just kept listening to it. You know, it, people would get up in the morning and hear the, the morning show with some goofy DJ, "Lalala...!!", you know, I would put on "The Love Supreme" in the morning for breakfast. Then, I'd put it on at lunch, and I put it on when I go to bed at night. I would put it on when I was watching the television. It was just on all the time. I couldn't believe that kind of sustained intensity. And everybody talked about the physical challenge of it, but as I spent more time listening to it and as I got older I realized that once you put yourself in a certain intellectual frame of mind, I mean, what is physical? You know, I mean, he had put himself in such a place mentally, that I mean, the physical problems, physical anything wasn't a problem for him because it was almost as though he had transcended the body when he started playing. The..., there's no one that can ever, there's nothing, you know, emotionally, to ever deal with the. I mean, my, my, my father talks about it everybody I know that has seen him talks about it, seen him on the floor, literally, knees bent to the floor, just playing. You know, I, I can, I can identify with some of that, you know, because sometimes I'll get in this place where my eyes will be open and I will be playing, but I will look up and I'll be 5 feet away from the microphone. I just went somewhere, but the difference between he and is that I kind of snap back into reality and say, "Oh." And I move over to the microphone. He just went out there and he stayed out there and it, it's... it's kind of like talking to... My brother DelSeyo told me this..., he plays with Elvin Jones, and he told me this story once of... play..., a lot of younger musicians were hanging around Elvin and they were talking about, "Man, you know, we, we had a intensity that you guys played when you were playing with Coltrane. I mean, what was that like? How do you like play with that kind of intensity?" And Elvin looks at him and says, "You gotta be willin' to die with the mothafucker." And then they started laughing like kids do waiting for the punch-line and then they realize somewhere in the middle of that, he was serious. And their whole demeanor says, "Alright, man. Later." `Cause, I mean, how many people do you know that are willing to die period, die with anybody, and when you listen to those records, that's exactly what they sound like. I mean, that, they, they would die for each other.

Can you talk about Lester Young...?

Lester was my man. Lester was the cat, you know, another New Orleans boy, carried a blade. You know that, New Orleans. And, Lester was a converted drummer, became a saxophone player. And he was just a smooth, another one of those smooth swinging cats. I mean, the, the records that he did with Billie Holiday are, are legendary. He's one of my favorite saxophone players. Definitely. He did these little things with the horn..., where's my...?.. did these little things with the horn that like..., Alternate fingerings, like if you play from C to D: (plays music), like that, there's an alternate fingering which is not really in tune: (plays music), that one and the sound is different: (plays music), so when he would play opposite D, it's probably something he got from playing the clarinet. 'Cause it's, the, the notes are on the clarinet are G, G-sharp and A, and they're really attached and you slide the fingers over so he would play a solo and go: (plays music), every time. You just play that with that D, you know?: (plays music), that was like his, his thing. He was the man. My favorite all-time Lester Young record will always be a record that he did with a trio and the trio was Buddy Rich on drums and Nat King Cole on piano playing stride piano. And there's no reason to assume that there's not a bass player on this recording because you hear one, but there is none. It's Nat Cole just firing, you know, and it's one of those things, everybody knows Nat Cole as a singer. And his piano playing which is the way it goes when you become that famous is completely over-looked even amongst jazz people. And he's playing in some of those songs like, you know, "I Got A New Baby" that'd Doomp chink-doo chinka doomp-chink doo, and he's like going. Doomp diddle doodle dooble-do, doo doodle oodle doo, he has Art Tatum down, you know this, it's a really, really impressive recording and Lester Young is at his absolute best. And then of course, there's the classic clarinet solo with Billie Holiday on "The Very Thought of You" is the song. They actually used it in a movie, which knocked me out 'cause I went to this movie... and I don't remember the name of it. Mel Gibson played a, a fighter pilot who got messed, caught in, he was in an experiment in the, in the World War II and he got frozen and suspended animation, whatever they called that, cryogenics, and he woke up in, in the 90s. You know, and, you know, this love story with one of his favorite songs was "The Very Thought Of You" with Billie Holiday and they played it and I was in the theater and they started playing that and I went "Oh-h-h, man!" And somebody looked around and went, "S-h-h-h!" And I was like, "Sorry." And that solo is just like the best..., it, it 's a lot like the way those, you know, Louis Armstrong solos were, because there's a trumpet layer on it and I'm guessing, I could be wrong, I think it's Charlie Shavers. But he played, you know the song for "The very thought of you..." and he plays a solo, Ba-bum ba bum ba-bum bee bum bum bum bum. Ba bee uh, ah um badump baddle da doodle dee dee deedeedee, ba deeba doodle deeble dooble, trying to play, and then Lester just comes in, just smooth, you know. And he was playing clarinet so he, you know, he plays ah: (plays music), the part of the song that goes you know, "I see your face in every..."

Stan Getz.

Stan. Benny Kapman. The first record I ever heard of Stan is a record that he did with JJ Johnson. I was in high school and I learned the Stan Getz solo which I would really mess up now if I tried to play it. But it was a song...?... and there was the blues. It was: dee dabup bah da doo dee boopee doo doo dah. And it was just: dee duh da dee... Stan Getz and JJ Johnson Live at Carnegie Hall or something like that, you know, it was one of the records my dad had and I was learning the solo because it was great solo, you know, little tre's between JJ and the stand. I, I don't, I don't think Stan ever really, you know, got the credit he should have gotten, you know. A lot of it had to do with him being white, a lot of it had to do with that Brazilian, you know, that fake Brazilian record he made, you know "Corcovado" with like, the nice melodies and little samba guitar, you know, that that has a ten..., tendency to change people's perceptions of what it is that you do, you know, and he was, I, I dedicated my, one of my albums to him when he died. You know, he was always, he was a brash cat, too, you know, he was brash. We played a gig together once, you know, and he, he said, how did he say it? We opened, he opened for us, which I thought was ridiculous, you know, but we were the hottest ticket at the time and we played the room. And Stan played the room. You know, he played the room and what we did was we were playing in a, at a Royal Festival Hall in London, which is a, more of a symphonic hall, boomy, echo-y and... We played what we play and you couldn't even hear it. We're bashing away; it's just muddled and awful and I came off the stage and said, "Yeah, OK. That's a lesson learned. Stan played the room." So then I saw him 2 weeks later, in...?... at the North Sea Jazz Festival, and I said, "Stan..." And he goes, "Hey! Marsalis, how you doing?" I said, "Yeah, you know, I really appreciated hearing you play 'cause I learned a lot about, you know, playing the hall and playing the room." He said, "Yeah, we, we're playing tonight at Ford, you know. Come down, you might learn some more shit, too, 'cause you could use it." I was like, "Thanks." (Laughs) "Thanks, Mr. Getz." But it was always from a good place. As far as I was concerned, it was always from a good place.

Do you think that there're white musicians that are better and have gotten the recognition because they're white?

Yeah. Lennie Tristano... It's funny, in jazz, I think that most of the, the white guys that got the credit weren't the better, better players. They were kind of corny, actually. I don't know why that is. Probably, I guess, it had to do with the sound or what ever, I don't know, but Lennie Tristano should have gotten major d..?.. One of the classics is Warren Marsh, who was a tenor player with Lenny Tristano in the 50s, 40s and the first time I heard a Warren Marsh record I was like, "Oh, man! This cat's been listening to Wayne Shorter." And I looked at the dates on the record and went, and did the, did the math and went, "No. Wayne Shorter's been listening to Warren Marsh." And I, I can't to this day figure out why he was like ignored. And it, there're people who continue to, you know, like when you talk about Louis Armstrong and then people say, "Oh, well, Bix Beiderbecke.." I don't hear that. I ain't going to

argue the point, because it's inarguable. Some people think Bix was the cat. I just don't, I personally don't hear it. I'm not against it. But, man, Warren Marsh was my hero. He was like, I ..?.. Playing, playing the saxophone. Today, Joe Lovanno is a marvelous musician, you know. There're always going to be cats that can play Jack Teagarden, You know. And but he did get, he did get some love, you know, Jack got the love.

Do you think that jazz is a meritocracy, that it rewards excellence, no matter what?

To some degree. To some degree. There is that thing, there is that thing. I mean, when you talk about swinging drummers, they don't talk about Louis Bellson, but he was, you know. But then there's another thing where you turn on these movies from the 40s and Louis was in there, Louis Bellson was in there, you know, I mean, and Sonny Greer wasn't. And Sid Catlett wasn't. So, I think that a lot of times, like a lot of things that happen in our country things that occur are a knee-jerk reaction to something else. Well, you know, I mean, I know Buddy Rich caught hell from black musicians, but one of the reasons he caught hell was just because that Norman Granz would like put him on these sessions. He would just say, "Well, you want to do the record, you going to do it with Buddy Rich." And there was a lot of resentment from a lot of guys. They used to call him Lead-foot 'cause he used to hit the four-on-the-floor real hard. And I mean, it's a tough call. It's a tough call, I mean it, it's a strange thing when you get, you know people come to you and say, "Well, how come you don't hire any white musicians?" Like, man, you find me a guy, a green guy who plays better than Kenny Kirkland. He's in the band. I mean, it's just that simple. I don't have time to be dealing with that. Jazz is hard enough to play, you know, I mean that's the one thing that I have always loved about jazz in general is that, you know, a lot of times, with the musicians, it ain't that racist. And it ain't sexist, either. You know, I mean, if you can play, you get the gig. I mean, American business could learn something from us, you know, because if you can play, you will get the gig, because there's so few people who can actually do it and do it well, you know, there are situations where it didn't happen, but there're not that many. There're not that many.

Does jazz reflect the promise of America?

Hm-m-m. That's a tough question. I don't know. I mean, be..., because so much of what it is embodies what America is now. You know, I don't know if it embodies a promise more than you just have to allow time fir other Americans to wake up and figure out what jazz has been saying all along.

What's it been saying all along?

That we're all Americans, you know? Saying that, you know, black guys don't need red, black and green stickers on the back of their car. And we don't need Italian stickers on our car and Irish stickers and, you know Puerto Rican

stickers. I mean, we're Americans. That may have been where our ancestors were from, you know, but that's not where we are and I think that the moment we get to a part where we can, a point where we can start to embrace national identities, rather than break off in these little ethnic enclaves, we'll be a lot stronger as a country.

Talk to me about thank you. Talk to me about Paul Desmond.

Paul, I, I, I never really listened a lot to Paul, to be honest with you. I listen more to Warren, when I put on those Lennie Tristano records. I would listen to Warren Marsh over Paul.

This is the single male story. Now what are the exceptions? Just tell me one.

You mean in terms of females? Um-m-m... Mary Lou Williams. Mary Lou Williams was an exceptional piano player. Exceptional piano player. Recognized by all musicians as a great talent. Dorothy Donnegan was another wonderful piano player and singer. One of my all-time favorites, well, Betty Carter, as a singer. You know... (laughs). As Art Blakey and her... I, I saw an amazing di..., well, I can, that's, you're not going to use this but I'll give it to you anyway later.

Tell me about Billie Holiday.

Billie Holiday was my girl. You know, Billie Holiday... if, if I, if, if I had to do anything in my life, if I could be anything, I'd want to be a saxophone player in 1930-whatever and just played behind her. I just couldn't imagine doing anything better. I mean that would be totally fine for me. Even though we play like, you know, very Coltrane-esque aggressive style of music, in my heart, my sensibility is like just being Lester Young behind Billie Holiday. I mean, she was the greatest jazz singer of them all. Because she really was able to embody what jazz is about. She didn't have a great singing voice. She didn't have a marvelous instrument. But she still stands out. What she's, what she's saying commanded your attention. And, and that, that's a very special thing. That's a very special gift.

If you could talk to Charlie Parker,... what would you say to him?

"Hey, man, what's happening?" I would, you know, it's, it's...

My question's not in it.

I know. If I, if Charlie Parker were to walk in the room, I would just say, "Hey, man, how you doing?" I mean because the thing about this music is that, you know, I mean, by listening to what he plays and having listened to what he played for as many years as I have, I know what he's playing. You know, I mean, so we really don't have to discuss that, which is impossible to

discuss anyway, when you meet musicians who... It's almost like when you meet like, you know, what are you going to say? "I'm a big fan." "Thank you." I mean, you know, "You're my hero." "Thank you." Uncomfortable silence. Uncomfortable silence. So, so I'd just say, "Hey man, how you doing?" And he'll say, "What's happening?" And then we'll talk about sports or whatever's going on at the time that he, he knows about. And then I'll sit down and I'll watch him play. I'll watch his eyes while he plays because I can see what he's thinking when I watch his eyes.

Do you think that jazz will ever end?

Jazz will never end. Jazz will never end. There's always going to be somebody that wants to play this music. You know, and I'm still waiting for the next, like, you know, young monster to come along. And, I know he's coming. You know, and I'm going to give him a big hug. One, when Wynton, when Wynton came to New York started playing, Woody Shaw came to him. played, and when we finished the gig, Woody Shaw comes back and he hugs him and says, "I've been waiting for you for 20 years." You know? I'm waiting and I know I'm, you know, or her. When you hear it, see that's the thing. It's not about anything else. It's like you walk in the room and they start playing and it's like this... It's, it, it's impossible to really explain. It's a line of logic that is just flawless to a degree. It's just, you hear it and you go, "Oh, there it... That's it." That's what it is and it's impossible to explain to people that can't hear it. It really is, you know? It's... One interesting parallel for me was as a kid, Leonard Bernstein did a, a, a piece where they found the, some original drawings that drafts of Beethoven's First Movement of the Fifth Symphony...

Sonny Rollins.

Probably the second greatest saxophone player in the world, Charlie Parker being the first. Sonny's just a great saxophone player. You know, he has all of it - sound, huge sound, unbelievable technical facility, and to me, one of the things that most people overlook, I feel, and the thing that embodies the jazz spirit and makes him the consummate jazz musician is the lightening quick intellectual reflexes. He was one of the most spontaneous players on the face of the planet. You know, it's like a lot of cats are practicers and then they practice, and then they come and then they play basically what they've practiced. Sonny Rollins would just come out and play. And you can tell a lot things he played are just things that pop in his head. Immediately, right there. The drummer will play something, he will hear it and turn it around. It's like, you know...

He's in the moment.

He's in the moment. Very few musicians, on recording or otherwise, are actually in the moment. If you really listen to the music the right way, you

can tell that they're rather rehearsed. He is absolutely, positively in the moment.

We think of jazz as improvisation, and we think it's being made up on the spot. And you're saying it's really not.

Oh, yeah. A lot of people think of jazz as being, you know, improvisation and made up at the spur of the moment and I, I really feel that most times, it's not. It's very rehearsed and a lot of guys learn the sequence of the licks that they chan..., they play at different times. They don't play the exact same solo every night. But they play a very similar solo to the one they played the night before. Sonny Rollins does not.

What was the whole thing of going out on the bridge...?

Well, Sonny is a very, was, is a very unique person. I can relate an anecdote about Sonny that was told to me and you can, you know, draw your own conclusions from it. He'll kill me for doing this, but I don't care, you know? I'm, I'm bigger than he is. Herbie Hancock told me that one time Sonny Rollins came to a club where he was playing with Miles and he wanted to use Miles, Tony Williams and Ron Carter on this, on this gig. And he wanted Herbie to come down and talk to him. He says, "I'm playing at the Vanguard and he went down to Sonny and the show ended and he went up to whoever was working the bar and said, "Yeah, I have to see Sonny. He told me to come down." He says, "Oh, well, he's o..., he's over there, in the, in the door." And, the Vanguard hasn't changed, I mean, if, if I can... If, if I'm playing on the stage behind you, there's a, there's a, there's a alley or a, a walkway and then there's the kitchen where they used to cook burgers, but it's essentially the musicians dressing room. To the right is the liquor cabinet, where they store the liquor. But in the old days, that used to be a closet. And Herbie looks at the door and says, "Man, I, that's the closet." And the bartender says, "Yeah, I know. Sonny's in the closet. So go talk to him in there." So, he knocks on the door and you hear him in the back saying, "Who is it?" (laughs) Says, "It's Herbie." "Come in." He opens the door and he looks in and he sees a pair of eyes in the dark. And he stands there for a minute and he hears, "Close the door." So he closes the door and he comes in and Sonny doesn't say anything for a long time. So Herbie's standing there and standing there and finally, Sonny says, "Have you met Tennyson?" There's another guy in the room with him, sitting right there in total silence. Tennyson was this like singer from the 60s that everybody knows about, who wasn't very good. And I mean, I screamed, it, it's, it's vintage Sonny, though. Of that time, I mean. He's just, he was an eccentric cat. He was just an eccentric cat, so, you know, that makes perfect sense that Sonny will go out and play on the bridge, because that, that's Sonny, I mean, it's not even a big deal. You know what I mean, of course he would. It's Sonny. That, that's what Sonny would do. You know? It makes, it makes perfect sense for Sonny Rollins and if that's what it takes to play the way he plays, hey! Stand on as many bridges as you like. I mean, you know. I know a bunch of like

really regular people who can't play anything. You know what I mean, I know a bunch of really regular guys. I mean, this, this, you know, this is a very unusual music. It takes really eccentric people, I think, to play it and play it well.

He seems to celebrate that eccentricity.

Absolutely. And he should.

Can you talk to me about Duke Ellington...?

Duke Ellington is, is definitely one of the greatest. He's one of the greatest and, and the thing... Everybody talks about his compositions and everybody talks about, you know, his, his arrangements, you know, his big band. And they were revolutionary. They were absolutely revolutionary because they took on a context that was more symphonic than traditional big band stuff. You know, the way that he used instruments, the way that he used the clarinet was completely different for jazz. But the thing that really always knocked me out about him was his piano playing. It is something that is very rarely talked about. His sense of timing is impeccable and he actually used the piano like an orchestral instrument. When you listen to the arrangements, for long stretches of time, you won't hear the piano at all. And all of a sudden, the trombones will be playing something like, you know, Bedoo-bombom, bombom and then you hear the piano, Bom, just, just down here in the lower end with the octave, Bombom Bombom Bing bom ba... he was just amazing. He was an amazing piano player. He had amazing technical facility, but he didn't use it because it didn't fit in his conception. The perfect, the perfect example of, of, of Duke and his genius is that, you know, John Coltrane did a record with him in the 60s.. He didn't do any..., no disrespect intended, he didn't it with Count Basie, he didn't do it with Lionel Hampton. He, he did it with Duke Ellington. Because Duke Ellington was the man, you know. Duke Ellington is the, the, the father of Thelonius Monk, when you think about it musically. And Duke proceeds to come into this session, some 20 years after his what you would consider his prime, some 40 years after he actually went into the music business, and plays, you can't get any better than that. It's flawless, it's perfect what he played. It is modern, it is hip and that's the, the, the test of time, I think. When you have a guy Duke, at, at the age that he was when he recorded that, he was in his 60s I, I assume. And it was just m..., it was as modern as anything else. I mean, it was perfect, I mean, it, it's just when you listen to that record, it's very, it's very awesome.

And he's still cool?

He's so incredibly cool. He's so incre..., incredibly cool, you know, he was always very suave. He asked Charlie Parker to join his band once. Charlie said, "I'd love to, for this amount of money." And then Duke looks at him and says, "Well, Mr. Parker, if you ever find a gig paying that much money, you

call me and I'll work for you." (Laughs) It's just like that's, he was just the man. Duke was the man.

I'd like to go back to the first question in a few minutes - what is jazz?

Dude. You killing me. What is jazz? Like I said, it's a sound. Just a sound, you know, it's... You know what it is when you hear it. Well, I know what it is when I hear it. There're a lot of misconceptions about it, but a lot of those people, just, they're misinformed. A lot of misinformation about what jazz is.

What is it, though? Why should we be interested in jazz?

Only popular music is, is a fly-by-night thing. Popular music comes and popular music goes. Artistic music, it, it sticks around. I mean, here it is, you know, some 30 years later and we're still talking about John Coltrane, you know. Some 70 years later, and we're still talking about Louis Armstrong. I mean, can you imagine how many pop hits there were or pop groups there were during that span? You know, we're not talking about The Exciters, we're not talking about The Shirelles, we're not talking about Rudy Vallee, we're, I mean, it's, it's, that's entertainment. And you know, they always talk about, you know, 'Let's take a look back.', or it 's like, on an oldies station somewhere. I mean, if you turn on a jazz radio station, they're still playing these songs. Because, at their best, they're absolutely timeless. At their best, 'scuse me, at their best, they're timeless and that is something that very few nations in the world can, can lay claim to.

I think this is primarily an African-American medium. What's the gift...?

I don't really know what it's saying but it, it's, it, it's, it, it's our gift to the world, and it's African-American, you know, not African-African. You know, not Canadian-American, not African-Canadian, I mean, it's, it's our thing. You know, it's, it's our thing. You know, it's, it's, it's a part of America.

Would it have happened without the other influences - the European?

Absolutely not. Absolutely not. You can't, you can't have that. If that were the case, then the best jazz musicians would come from Zimbabwe. Or they would come from, you know, Benin or Senegal. But, it, it's the combination of the two. I mean, one of the most amazing things about the African D..., Diaspora to begin with, is that everywhere that these Africans went, they internalized the music of the, the dominant culture and then re-generated it. I mean, you take, you know, West Africans and you stick them on an island like in the Dominican Republic, you get merengue. You stick 'em on the island of Cuba, which they supposed to be the same, you know, Spain, but over there, it's Afro-Cuban music. It's nothing like merengue. I mean it just, because each, like the tribes all brought with them different rhythms from

their tribes. You know, Jamaica, you have Ska music, you have Soca, you have reggae, and in America, you have jazz and you have blues.

A lot of our film deals with one of the major figures of jazz, Miles Davis and we have to understand his music....?

Well,...

What kind of a guy, where does he separate...?

I think that one of the problems that we have with history in general from an American standpoint is that we have to make our, our historical heroes into these wonderful figures and wonderful characters. And sometimes, they were just jerks. You know, and but we paint a picture of these really great guys and, you know, they took the moral high road and there's all this rubbish that, that goes on with it. And I think that that actually does a disservice to the music and to the musicians, because oftentimes, the level of musicianship that one possesses is completely separate of one's own personal view of one's own life, even, sometimes and the way that they treat other people. And, you should be able to separate those two. I think that that was one of the challenges of my career when I was much younger because I was playing with these great musicians and it's really strange, when you find out that they're less-than-desirable people. And you have to make a decision real quick and one of the things that I was fortunately able to do was separate the legend from the myth, you know. Just, and just deal with them for what they could offer musically, and avoid them personally. Miles was kind of like that to me, you know. Miles reminded me of one of those like, you know, manipulative punks that you, you meet in high school. And believe me I know a lot of people're going to be mad when they hear me say that, but... It doesn't mean he wasn't a genius - he was. It was actually his, his genius is, is what made him so unique. Because other than that, he was a pretty, you know, regular person, you know. My father and I got into a heated debate once when I called him and said that Miles Davis really didn't give a damn about jazz. And my father was like, you know, very upset by this, but I was talking to Miles. I was playing on a record and I was asking him a bunch of questions and I asked him about Charlie Parker. And he told me all of these stories that pretty much shot Charlie Parker down. You know: he was selfish, he was this, he was that, he was the other, and those stories might even be true. But he never talked about the music. And I find that very unusual and I read, I actually, when I talked to him, he actually said, "I read it." It was also in his book that he said this. He told me that he didn't come, he came to New York for one reason and that to play with Charlie Parker. And I thought that that was an interesting statement because there were many great jazz musicians in New York at the time. I mean, look, Don Byas, Chu Berry, Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Clark Terry... I mean, there was all these great musicians. Duke Ellington. He didn't want to play with any of them, because no musician, other than Charlie Parker, embodied the spirit of the bohemian lifestyle better. Charlie Parker was the ultimate

iconoclast. So, when he wanted to come to New York to play with Charlie Parker, Miles, even at a young age, was really keen on being a rebel. So, it was only natural that he would get older and buy a Ferrari. A yellow Ferrari and get speeding tickets and be confrontational, you know, and love boxing, and all these things. And he essentially created his own legend, which I think is great, you know. But, it, what gets obscured amongst all of this is the actual musical genius that he was and his ab..., and his ability to internalize music, and bring it out in a way that is very fresh and unique. And to utilize his abilities to the best, to the absolute fullest. I mean, you hear people talk about Miles and they call him a genius, they start talking about all this other crap, you know, women and cars and... The music, he was, he was an astounding musician.

What... I've heard people argue over whether he had limited range, unlimited range, or technically, he couldn't this or that, but he found his voice. Can you talk about Miles in that context?

Well, the thing about Miles, one of the things that I often like to do for people who don't play music is use sports comparisons. You know, sports metaphors, 'cause everybody kind of understands that. And to a degree, you know, not ultimately, but to a degree, the perfect example for Miles would be Dennis Rodman. If Dennis Rodman tried to get 10 shots a game, we wouldn't know anything about him. Nothing. But as far as rebounding goes, he is one of the greatest rebounders that the NBA has ever seen and the thing that makes him great is that amidst all of the fame and all of the attractions, he saw what it was that he had an ability to do and he spent his time studying that and becoming the best that he could be at that, rather than falling into the trap of saying, "I can be Michael Jordan, too. So, I want to shoot, I want to run. I want to make fancy passes, dribble between my legs and all these other things. He concentrated on the one thing that his ability best suited him for and he did that and then he became even more famous for all the outrageous antics and that's also very similar to Miles, with those outrageous antics that he used to pull and all that silly stuff he used to say. But when, when, when Bird, when, when, when Bird hired Miles, Bird definitely didn't have great technique and he didn't have great range.

Miles, didn't...

Yeah, well, when Bird hired Miles. No, when Bird hired Miles, he definitely didn't have, Miles definitely didn't have great technique and great range. But he found a way to play that music. He found a way to utilize the tools that he did have to fit within the context of that sound and it did fit and it did work. And one of the things that Miles has consistently done, which separates him, as far as I'm concerned, from almost all other musicians is that he has consistently found the best talent in New York or wherever, hired them, knowing fully well that their interpretations of his music will increase the t..., will increase the.... whatever it is, I can't even get... well...

Increase the value...

Increase the complexity, increase the complexity of his music and therefore increase the value and meaning of his music. And, by being the leader of the group, you simply take the credit for it. Something that I learned from him and something that I continue to do. I don't tell Jeff Watts how to play. I don't tell Bob Hirsh how to play. But when the Branford Marsalis Trio record comes out, everybody says. "Man, that's a great record." They give the credit to me. Hey, nice work if you can get it. Miles was the best at that, the absolute best.

Let's talk briefly about... Miles was said to have sold out, he just wanted to make money, he didn't care about music... Do you think he was really sincerely trying to create something or just following the bucks?

Man, Miles always wanted to be famous. Miles liked being famous and I think the reason he stopped playing that music, playing jazz music was because it was no longer the music of the bad boys. There was a new game in town. But whether or not it was selling out is really ridiculous because I'm a f..., I'm a fan of pop music and if you put on Jack Johnson or you put on "Agartha" or you put on "Bitch's Brew", ain't nobody going to buy that shit. No one's going to buy those records. You know, you got the choice of, you know, well, who do you like? Oh, I like, you know, The Beatles, Sly Stone, Jimi Hendrix and Miles? Those records don't sound anything like the popular music of the times. They still have this strange jazz sensibility, and he hired all these jazz musicians who would have been the young generation of jazz musicians and got them to start playing this stuff. So, when you put on a record like, like, like "Bitch's Brew", you know, Miles runs the voodoo down, man, that's popular. Maybe more acceptable to a bunch of kids who are listening to all kinds of music and are looking for an alternative to the stuff that's out there, but certainly not popular. I'm pretty sure that you're not going to find that in the record collection of the average American. So, it's absolutely an absurd notion to say that he was going for the bucks. I mean, it's ridiculous. Because if he was going for the bucks, he would've started trying to sing, or got a singer in his band, you know, or, or done that stuff but he was intrigued by popular music and he was more intrigued by the lifestyle. But in the end, he still had to be Miles about it, so he hired musicians who played that stuff with a jazz edge to it. You know, I mean, when you think about it, I mean, Joe Zawinul was in that band, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter was in that band, John McLaughlin was in that band. Billy Cobb, man, was in that band. Jack DeJohnette was in that band. These weren't pop musicians. These are like really great musicians and if you're going to play in, in that, like the pop style, you don't hire those guys, you hire pop guys. So, I mean, of course, that's a convenient thing to say that they were going for the bucks, I mean, there were no bucks in that, and I, I mean that's an easy one, that's a no-brainer. There were no bucks in the stuff that Miles was doing. He, but he definitely was enamored with that new

lifestyle. And he wanted to be at the forefront of something. He couldn't be at the forefront of pop music. He couldn't be. So, he was at the forefront of what they call fusion. So when you say fusion, they always say 'Miles.' Forget the fact that Tony Williams actually had the first fusion band. Lifetime was the first fusion band. When Miles did it, when Miles made sure to say that he was the one who thought of it, he was the one who invented it, and everybody accepted it as dogma.

So, there're... people come after Coltrane. So if they played like him or are influenced by him. What do you have to say about this, children of John Coltrane?

Well, I, I, I don't, I, I don't think they're the children of John Coltrane at all. There're a lot of people who came right after Coltrane and his, his avant garde experiments and they said they were like, you know, part of his legacy and, and they could. I mean, they got work out of it so, I was, wasn't like mad at 'em, 'cause if you can get a gig, good for you. But, from a historical perspective, it's absolutely ridiculous because if you were going to play some music, like John arrived at that conclusion after years of arduous study and practice and play. These guys kind of showed up at the age of 20 and started doing that and saying that they were playing, you know, they got these gigs with 'Trane, and they were playing like 'Trane, and... I mean, it was more like a, a good hustle, to me. Because when, if, if you had grabbed John and said, "You know, play some blues or play this...," he could have played it. You ask these other cats to play some blues, play some Sidney Bechet, play some traditional songs, play something, they, you can't, I can't consider a guy a jazz musician if he doesn't really understand the, the entire legacy of the music. I just can't do it. Because all of the guys that I know and respect, be they old guys or young guys, can do that. They can talk about it intelligently and they play it and then you have a whole generation of guys who didn't listen to any of that music, and just because they're black and they just, they say that this is their personal expression, they want it to be called jazz. And I, I just... It, it's absurd. You know? Actually, they're not all black. Actually, I heard a few of 'em, you know, around New York, you know... "This is jazz and this is the New Jazz." I mean, no, it's not. It's not because you can hear, like I said, there's a guy named David Ware who plays around town and he's in that free jazz, you know, expr... You can hear the legacy of the music in his playing, though. I mean, I remember, I, I heard him play once. He played this song, "Yesterdays" by Jerome Kern. Really free and really aggressive. And I can hear the changes going by when he played and it blew me away. I was like, "Yeah. Yeah, now that's..." I mean, that's, that's playing. It's not about playing like, you know, 'Trane or playing like Sonny Rollins. It's about being able to hear the influence of the music in the playing of the person who's playing. And when I listen to some of those, those early records, I, I simply do not hear that.

Thanks. That's very important.. We could talk about World Saxophone Quartet?

Um-hum.

What were they 70s, late 70s, early 80s. What were they trying to do that was different?

Well, I mean, I was at the very first World Saxophone Quartet concert. It was in New Orleans at the Southern University of New Orleans. Kid Jordan, who was a, another New Orleans family, the Jordans, you know Kent Jordan's father was a proponent of free jazz and he brought them down and it was their first show ever. I was 16; I had no idea what was going on. I was just, this music was flying by and I was like, "Huh?" Whatever, you know, just I, I couldn't make heads nor ta..., head nor tails of it.

These 4 guys get together - what do you think of this music?

I didn't like it when I first heard it - I was 16, but I didn't know. When I got older and I came to New York, I really understood what they were trying to do. And, and, you could really hear the tradition of the music, you know, I mean... You know, I mean, I've heard various groups, you know, with Arthur Blythe was in it a couple of times, you know, a..., you know, away from the original four. Arthur was in it, a couple of times, and John Stubblefield was in it a couple of times. But, the group with Hemphill, Hamiet Bluiett, David Murray, and Oliver Lake was just... I really, really enjoyed listening to them. I mean it. They were just playing music, I mean, what they were trying to do, I mean, they were just trying to play, they were trying to express themselves. And I think they expressed themselves within the boundaries and the traditions of the music, very well.

Do you think the audience likes to be educated? I know Cecil Taylor has said, "I prepare for my next concerts. The audience has to prepare."

Oh that's...

Would the audience have to be able to, to hear that or know...?

That's total...

to study for it?

That's total self-indulgent bullshit as far as I'm concerned. I mean, you know, I love baseball. I mean, I'm not going to go and catch a hundred grounders before I go to a game. I mean, that's what... we pay to see them do what they do and to appreciate them. I mean, why would the audience sit around and practice and prepare? I mean, they pay their money to hear what it is that we do and to appreciate what it is that we do. And I think the best example, or the, the best examples of it is when they can actually see us,

appreciate what we do on-stage, on our faces. When they can enjoy watching us enjoy ourselves. And I think at times, you know, people who call jazz 'the black American classical music', which is kind of like dopey to me, I think at times we take that a little too seriously, when you see guys coming on-stage, it's like they're at a funeral, playing and, you know, what... It's ridiculous. It's totally ridiculous, I mean, jazz is a very spontaneous music and it's very free, and when it's free and spontaneous, funny things happen on-stage, and when they're funny, laugh. Talk to each other on-stage, you know? I saw Walter Davis doing that actually one time, with Ben Riley on drums, and I think it was Abdul Malik on bass, I could be wrong. And it was like... Jeff Watts, my drummer, Tang, called me and said, "Man, you gotta come see this." He says, "You will never see bebop again. This is it." And he was absolutely right. Because all these other guys kind of play in the bebop tradition, but they're not playing bebop. I mean, they were so spontaneous. The ideas were flying around the room and they were talking to each other and laughing and I was like, "Oh man, that's what I've been wanting to do for years." So, I changed my whole thing, you know, I stopped standing on-stage empirically. You know, I just became myself, because that's my nature anyway and, you know, we receive criticism every now and then and I remember once, we had a review in, in Dayton, Ohio, Canton, Ohio. No. Canton's not it, Day, Dayton. Dayton, Ohio. It was a scream because we were playing things like playing Michael Jackson. We were playing "Beat It" on-stage, in the context of a jazz song. And, Jeff was playing the drumbeat and he'd play it backwards and then he'd play the middle of it on the end, and we'd play it and we were doing this other thing where we were the, I would take like this play in styles of other musicians, but play completely out of context. Like if we were laying a ballad, you know what I mean, I'd start playing like, you know Ornette Coleman against this ballad with all these changes going by. Not that Ornette doesn't play changes, but sometimes when you playing the conventional form and you play Ornette, it's like totally out. It sounds out. Or else you play like Lester Young on a really intense Coltrane-type tune and we were dying laughing on-stage. We were just having a good time and the review came out and they said that we were very rude and we were constantly telling inside jokes on-stage and not letting the audience in on the joke. I mean, and it's like, you, you can't win, 'cause you know, imagine if you get on the microphone and say, "You know, 365 bars back there, we played this song." I mean, you, you can't let 'em in. If they get it, they get it and if they don't, they don't.

I guess that's a tough one. They can enjoy it on the level that they enjoy it.

Most times, they do. Most times, they do. They really enjoy watching us enjoy ourselves.

I think that's exactly what it's all about. Art Blakey was a teacher, tell us, just a snapshot...?

Um-hum.

Like a paragraph. Who was Art Blakey?

Art Blakey was one of the greatest drummers in the history of jazz music. He had a group called Art Blakey and The Jazz Messengers which I was fortunate enough to be a member of. But, he was absolutely a genius of jazz. His career spans from playing in Cab Calloway's band, 'scuse me, Cab Calloway's band in the early 30s or maybe even the late 20s when he was 18 years old, til his death sometime in the, in the 80s. I don't remember the exact year. Or the 90s actually. No, it was the 80s, '88, '89. He was a m, m..., he taught more, he wasn't... Everybody said he was the teacher, but it's kind of like because he always had young guys in his band. It's kind of, 'Oh, he has young guys. He's a teacher.' He taught or more by, he led by example. He, he never really did sit down very often and, and teach you anything. But he gave young musicians an opportunity to play on a regular basis and he allowed us to play what we wanted to play. He taught me how to play the drums, telling me that I was never going to really understand the function of rhythm in the context of a band unless I played the drums and he was absolutely right. He totally changed my idea of music when he did that. I remember once playing a ballad, you, you don't want to hear anecdotes, you said you want it short. Oh well.

I'm sorry. That was great actually, but a snapshot. There are sacrifices necessary...?

Uh... m-m-m. Hmmm. There was a movie called "A League of Their Own" and Tom Hanks is in the movie and Madonna's in the movie and Geena Davis and there's a scene when Geena Davis is telling her coach, Tom Hanks, that she's quitting the baseball team because she wants to go home and get married and the road sucks and the food sucks and the lifestyle sucks. And he looks at her and says, "Well, of course, it's hard. If it was easy, everybody would want to do it. It's the hard that makes it good." And that's pretty much what playing jazz is like, you know. We are not going to be on major television shows. We are not going to be those, you know, Robin Leach stories, you know, we're not going to have the houses with the swimming pool and 24 track studio on board. But we have something that is unique. We have our craft. We have our art. We have our desire and our desire can never be subjugated by the petty whims of commerci..., commerciality. They can never be subjugated by audience requests or, you know, television requests. It can never be co-opted and be, be true to what it is. We have to spend a lot of time on the road. We have to spend a lot of time in, in hotels, you know, a lot of time in restaurants. But, I actually have very dear friends around the world and very few people can say that. I can go to just about any city, make a phone call and be absolutely taken care of. Those are the trade-offs. I mean, you know, how many people do you know, have chance to see the Louvre, the Musee D'Orsey, you know what I mean and get paid to go see them? (Laughs) You know what I mean? To like, to, to go, go see the

Eiffel Tower... you know, to go to museums everywhere, to go to Southern France and see the little Matisse house that everybody talks about - I've been there. You know what I mean, to see the like, you know, fascist Mussolini tribute to himself sitting in the middle of Rome and to see the Coliseum, I've seen all that. You know, we see, we get a chance to do things - I have pictures, 2500 pictures. I mean, I got paid to go to these places. And in the midst of expressing m..., my love for what I do to the audience, I get to see the best parts of those places. You know, not a part of some lame tour package, being dragged around on a bus like all these poor Americans you see, waving at 'em, you know, you know it's just like, and they're just being dragged, 'Oh here's this and here's that, and here's that, ' and they pay a pile of money, they go for 3 days and they get sent home. 'Get a real French meal', I mean, 'Scram!', you know? We're, we're really fortunate. We're really fortunate. I, I took my son to Europe this, this summer. I, you know, it's, it's... I mean, we went to Florence and we saw the statue of David. You know what I mean? I, they pay me to fly to Europe, play a show and take my son to see Michaelangelo, to see the frescoes. I mean, to see St. Peter's Basilica, you know, and, you know, I have 10 year old son who walks down the street, sees a picture and says, "Hey, that's Michaelangelo's statue. That's the Da... That's David, right?" And then some guy walks by and looks at him like he's out of his mind." I mean, he's not supposed to know that, I mean that's, there're trade-offs. There're trade-offs. I mean, the road is rough, love-life is disastrous, but if you look at it in the proper context, it's, it's made me a better person, which in turn has made me a better musician. So, it, it's a fair trade-off. It's a fair trade.

The End