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BOBBY HUTCHERSON
NEA Jazz Master (2010)

Interviewee: Bobby Hutcherson (January 27, 1941 -) with his wife Rosemary Hutcherson
Interviewer: Anthony Brown with recording engineer Ken Kimery
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Brown: Today is December 8th, 2010.

Bobby Hutcherson: Oooo, December 8th.

Brown: This is the Smithsonian NEA Jazz Oral History interview with Bobby Hutcherson in his home in Montero, California. Good afternoon, Bobby.

Hutcherson: Good afternoon.

Brown: It's indeed a pleasure to be here, be in your home and be able to talk to you, one of my heroes for so many years, a fellow Californian. If we could just start by you stating your full name at birth and your birth place and birth date, please.

Hutcherson: Robert Howard Hutcherson. I was born January 27, 1941, in Los Angeles, but I grew up in Pasadena, California.

Brown: But you say you were born in Los Angeles.

Hutcherson: Um-hmm.

Brown: Is that where your parents were living at the time of your birth?

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Hutcherson: No. It was – they were living in Pasadena, but a lot of my relatives were living in Los Angeles, Watts and stuff like that. So it worked out, because they could be there. My mom had me very late in her life, in those days, and so it was better for my father to take my mother to the Los Angeles hospital, because he was – his work, he was a bricklayer. So he – my aunt – two of my aunts would be there to help. One lived in Watts and one lived in what they call now south central L.A.

I didn't know about south central L.A. until I grew up. That was – I didn't realize that that's where I was. I thought that was the hip part of town.

Brown: Could you please state your parents' names, full names?

Hutcherson: My dad, Eli Herman Hutcherson.

Brown: Where was he from originally?

Hutcherson: Atlanta, Georgia. He's from a family of – the whole family were masons – bricklayers. They grew up in Atlanta. He was one of – he was the seventh son of 13 kids. He moved to New York to build a lot of the brownstones in Harlem. He was also an excellent pool player. He used to shoot a great game of pool after working all day. The family – he and another family which grew up on a plantation there, they had the original 40 acres and a mule paper that came down.

My father, who was an excellent pool player, decided to go to the – go play this game of pool one day. He had a fight with a guy – our name was actually – if I believe right, it was actually Hutchinson – they had a fight and the guy died in the poolhall. So my father put “er” in the name and came out to California, and it became Hutcherson.

He used to always tell me that he was a great pool player, and I didn't – I used to not believe him, because I used to work summers with him. His fingers were all swelled up from the cement and the lye. He said – one day, he says, “Let's stop by this pool hall. I want to show you how I used to shoot pool.” He hadn't shot pool since the altercation happened in New York, which was years and years later. He says, “I'm going to bank every ball off the table. Watch this.” “Yeah, Dad. Sure. Yeah. Right. Okay. All right.” He did. Showed me what every mark on the table was for, and he banked every ball up. He went around balls and hit the ball. He was – and everybody in the pool hall just stopped shooting pool and just watched. I said, “My God.”

Brown: And your mother's name?

Hutcherson: Esther Fulk. My mom was from Arkansas, one of three sisters. The other two sisters were electrocuted in a storm, underneath a tree. A strange thing with my

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family – in fact there was – in my family there’s been three people who have been electrocuted. My father’s brother was electrocuted in a foundry, and my mother’s two sisters were electrocuted by a bolt of lightning in Arkansas.

I’m not laughing because of what happened, but one day, years later, I’m a young kid. My mother and I, we had just gone to the store, and we’re bringing groceries into the house. It’s a day like this, but it’s raining really hard and the lightning’s coming down. A lightning bolt hits the main terminal in the house, comes out of the light socket. We’re in the hallway. All the lights blew out, and this gigantic blue bolt comes right between me and my mother, standing there. My mother looks at me, and I’m looking at her. She says, “Oh boy, here we go,” because all of the history of our family being electrocuted. The bolt hit the door at the end of the hallway and knocked it off of the hinges and burnt the door down. We made it. Yeah. We made that one. That’s going to be in the book. As I talk, I’m thinking about all these things.

So, my dad moved out to Los Angeles. Rosemary, I think I need you here for some of this history. He built a – they built the first – was it the first post office in Los Angeles? One of the first post offices in the L.A. area. My dad, he was married first to another lady. What was her name? Had a son, my older brother Teddy, who passed away.

Then they divorced. He saw my mom sitting on a bus stop. She had come out to California. He was driving a car or something and turned around and picked her up, asked her, could he take her home? They became a butler and maid for a guy that lived in Palm Springs. Also, he was still doing brick work.

Brown: You mentioned your older brother. Do you have other siblings as well?

Hutcherson: Yeah. My sister Peggy. She’s passed away now, my sister. She really got me into a lot. My brother, who was, I guess, 15 years older than me, he went to school at Jefferson in Los Angeles. He went to Jeff, and he went to school with Dexter [Gordon]. Dexter was in the marching band. My brother was a cheerleader.

My mom, who had been sick, bedridden, for the first four years of my life, which probably had a lot to do with me getting into music, because I didn’t go outside and play. There was this piano. I used to always sit around and play on the piano as a toddler and listen to the radio, listen to a lot of music on the radio. My brother Teddy and Dexter used to come home after school and watch over me, play records. Little did I know that I was going to be as close to Dexter as I was later on.

I had an older sister, Peggy, who – she started singing. She used to – we used to have our youth choirs at church, First AME. She used to sing all the Christmas shows. She had a

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beautiful voice. She also – she fell in love with Billy Eckstine, and she was so jealous of June Eckstine, it was just unbelievable. She wanted to be June Eckstine.

Anyway, she was singing, and she meets a young pianist who was living in Pasadena at the time. His name was Sonny Clark. Sonny Clark gets together with her, and they start making little gigs around Pasadena. They played – they had this big concert at John Muir one time. Sonny had this bass player who was – I was just a young kid. During intermission, he comes up to me and he says, “Say, kid. You want my autograph?” I said, “Yeah, sure, right.” Well, it was Oscar Pettiford. Whoa. This is Oscar Pettiford. I told people. They said, do you realize who you just met? You got this autograph.

Sonny Clark, Oscar Pettiford. Who was playing drums? Bill Douglass or something? Remember him?

Then my sister started – she met Gerald Wilson, and she started – Gerald became very interested in having her sing. She used to go to rehearsals. Eric Dolphy was in the band, and they became boyfriend and girlfriend. So Eric used to come over to the house. That’s how I met Eric. Eric was my sister’s boyfriend. I was, “Hi, hi.” He’d sit down with me and have dinner.

Brown: Do you remember how old you were about this time?

Hutcherson: I’ll say 9. So Eric started doing all this different stuff. He was into doing so much stuff and moving. He wanted to go to New York. So my sister started going out with Billy Mitchell from Count Basie’s band. Billy comes over to the house. Right when that happened, I was – I had been – it was summertime, and I was walking down the street. I came past this guy. His name was Percy Smalley. He had an outdoor speaker. He’s playing the Giants of Jazz. He’s playing *Bemsha Swing*. I’m walking down the street, and as I walk, I hear Milt Jackson playing. I’m saying, wow, man, this is bad. I came back in. I bought the record, took it home, and just wore it out. I’m sitting there listening, Monk, Miles, Kenny Clarke. What a great group. Just wore the record out.

So I told my mom – I said, “I want to buy a vibraphone,” this instrument here. She says, “Why do you want to?” I said, “Because – listen. Mom, listen. Listen how he plays. He makes you feel like you got money in your pocket.” She says, yeah. She says – because Milt played so – he completed all of his ideas. I said, yeah, I want

So I started working every summer with my dad, to save up money. I was going to school. Herbie Lewis had a trio. I told Herbie – I said, “Herbie, I’m going to buy a vibraphone.” He says, “Oh, good.” He says, “If you get a vibraphone,” he says, “we can be just like the Modern Jazz Quartet.” And I say, oh yeah. We’ll be like the Modern – the MJQ. Oh yeah. That sounds slick.

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So I saved enough money. I went over – my mom and I went over to this music store in L.A., [Lockey] Music Company, bought this little funky set of vibes that had the most beautiful little sound. I didn't realize that the notes were made out of nickel and steel. They don't make nickel and steel notes any more. When you hit it, it sounded like John Henry hitting the steel-driving thing. PING! You hit the note like this. Beautiful sound. The notes are made out of aluminum now. Beautiful sound.

Brown: Have you had musical training before you picked up the vibraphone?

Hutcherson: Well, that's a good one. Yeah. My aunt, Aunt Addie, who lived in Watts, which – she was a minister of the Holy Roller Church. It was one of those churches. It was in a tent. They would really get to going, where everybody was screaming and hollering and shaking, and everybody's rolling around on the ground? The Holy Ghost. You know what I'm saying? The real thing, Aunt Addie, and her son, Junior. Junior played organ and still does. Unbelievable organ player. He plays a lot down in Arizona until they burned his house up and ran him out of there. That's another part of the book.

Brown: We may come back to that.

Hutcherson: Yeah, right, that's a heavy – it's heavy. Yeah, it's some heavy stuff in my family.

Brown: So Aunt Addie . . .

Hutcherson: Aunt Addie. My dad – as I was maybe 5 or 6 years old, my dad says, "Listen. Aunt Addie want to give you piano lessons." At that time, I had no interest in music, 5, 6. So I said okay. My dad drives. We go down to Watts. Aunt Addie was one of those ladies like, "HI, HI." She's real – "Hi, Aunt Addie." "HI, COME ON IN!" "Dad, is Aunt Addie all right? Is she all right? Okay." So she pulls out a book. We – I'm sitting there, but I can't read no music, but she's going to help me. She's going to sit right there. I'm playing. She's showing me something, and I'm sitting there. All of a sudden, she grabs my leg like this and she says, "Oh my God, the Holy Ghost is right next to us!" I said, "Oh shit. Where? Dad, I want to get out of here. She's scaring me." "The Holy Ghost is here? Say it oh Lord, oh Lord." She was – that was the end of the piano lessons. That was the end of that piano lesson, and I didn't want to get into no kind of music, because all I knew is the Holy Ghost was about to kill me. She called up. "Bobby, you want to come down?" "No, no." My sister thought it was funny. She thought, oh yeah. She's dying laughing. So that was the extent of my musical training, Aunt Addie and the Holy Ghost. You know what I'm saying?

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So I buy these vibes, because I had heard – and my sister’s singing all the time. I’m going – I hear her singing with Sonny Clark. All of a sudden this heavy music thing – my brother’s – he’s taking care of me. Dexter had been coming around. All this had been mixing all up in me as I’m growing up. I get the vibes. I brought them into my bedroom the first day. I called Herbie up. I said, “Herbie, I got the vibes.” Herbie comes over. He says, “Good,” he says, “because we’re playing a concert in two weeks.” I say, “Herbie, I can’t play no concert in two weeks. I don’t know nothing about – I’m just looking at them.” You know, hey, look, look. See look at that. Hey. Forget about playing. Let’s just look at them. Let’s just look at the darn things. We ain’t got to play them. That comes later. Let’s just look. Herbie says, “No.” He says, “We got” – he says it’s going to be a competition between several different groups at the Pasadena high school – but then it was Pasadena City College. So I said, “How am I – how are we going to play?” He says, “Listen. We got about two or three tunes we have to play.” He says, “I’ll take a felt marker pen, and we’ll mark on the bars what note to hit next.” I said, oh. I said, “Wait a minute, Herbie. That could be getting up to in the hundreds.” You know. It ain’t going to be just 1-2-3. You got to play that melody. You got to go to the bridge. And then if we play another tune, 78, 142, 215. Where’s 216 at? 216 over there?

Every day he came over, and we practiced this. Notes – little stuff was written all over these bars everywhere. Looked like a chicken had got on there. We got it pretty good. We had it down pretty good.

Well, everybody in Pasadena had heard that I had just got this instrument, and I’m playing it. My mother – my mom is so proud. “Oh yes, Bobby’s playing vibes.”

Brown: Was it a quartet? Or was it just the two?

Hutcherson: Yes, it was a quartet: piano, bass, drums, and vibes.

Brown: Do you remember the other guys?

Hutcherson: Yeah, Nat Brown on piano, Roger Dawson, Herbie, and myself. We had these little tunes. We had one tune, *Romance of the Stars*. Oh boy, we just thought we was just the baddest thing, playing this tune.

So, all my friends – “Let’s go see. Bobby can’t be playing. He just got this.” “Oh yes he is. That’s my son.” My mom was all over the telephone. I said, “Mom, come on. Please. Stop. Wait until we see how it comes out.”

We go down there to play. We’re getting ready to go on stage. The stage manager says, “Okay, kids, you’re on next.” He says, “Now get out there,” he says, “and do a good show. Don’t be nervous, and really do the best you can. Oh Bobby, by the way, I saw a

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bunch of stuff written all over your bars. So I took a wet towel, and I wiped . . .” I say, “You what?” “I took a wet towel and I wiped all that stuff that was all over your bars. I wiped it off.” I said, “No, you didn’t.” He said, “Yes, I did. Now get on out there and have a good time.” My heart said BAM BAM BAM.

Brown: “Don’t be nervous.”

Hutcherson: And the curtain opened up. Here’s all my friends that went to school. “Come on, Bobby. Come on now.” I said, oh Lord. My heart was about – I have never seen my heart jump that far out. Right down in front was my mother and my father. My mother – well, I said, “Herbie, what am I going to do, Herbie?” Herbie said, “Just do the best you can. That’s all you can do.” I hit the first couple notes, and then after that was complete chaos. I was trying to pull notes out of the air. AAAAAGGGGGHHHHH. And the crowd went crazy, laughing. They was laughing. You could hardly hear us play, they was laughing so hard. I was so humiliated. But my mom sat there just – that’s my boy. I looked at her. I said, “Mom, I’m so sorry to put you through this, Mom. Oh, Mom.” My mom, that was the biggest thing in my life. My mom looked back at me, and she – I could see through her eyes. She says, “I don’t care what you do. I love you, and I’m here to be by your side. Whatever happens, I’m with you.” That was the biggest lesson I’ve ever had.

Brown: Do you remember how old you were?

Hutcherson: 12, maybe. 11 or 12. Yeah. She was right there by my side, and no matter how hard them kids laughed, it didn’t even faze her.

Brown: You’re talking about growing up in Pasadena. Most folks don’t realize that Pasadena had a black neighborhood. Or was it a black neighborhood?

Hutcherson: It was – the black neighborhood was in the northwest section, and the northwest section was very famous. That’s where Jackie Robinson grew up, on Pepper Street. In fact, it was called the Pepper Street Gang. On Pepper Street, Jackie Robinson lived right next to the Dean family, Delano Dean, who opened the Both/And nightclub in San Francisco. We all went to the same school. All the kids went to the same school. We went to Cleveland Elementary, Washington Junior High, John Muir, then on to Pasadena City College. When you walked into the gym at Washington Junior High School, the boys’ gym, there were all these records from Jackie Robinson and his brother, Mack Robinson. A lot of people didn’t know about Mack Robinson, who was the oldest one of three boys, but Mack Robinson was the one who handed Jesse Owens the baton in the 1936 Olympics. He ran the third leg. That’s how bad Mack was, Mack Robinson.

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There were three boys, Mack, Jackie, and Elroy. Elroy was the troublemaker. He was always in a bunch of trouble, getting in a bunch of trouble, because – I guess just because of the pressure of having these other two brothers who were something.

One of the most famous stories about the Robinsons is – and everybody used to try to imitate, all the boys. They tried to equal all the football, track, basketball, baseball, everything that was up on the – in the men’s – when you come into the men’s gym. But the big thing was, one day, Jackie and Mack decided to take those skates, where you take the key and you tighten them up on your shoes, before they had actual skates with fitted – that you buy. They had these iron wheels that – you would put them – you would attach them to your shoes, and you take a key and tighten it on to the sole on your shoe, and skate. This is before t.v. and all that stuff. We didn’t have no televisions in those days.

Anyway, there was this street called Rosemead that went from Pasadena to Huntington Beach, pretty much straight, but it went through a lot of different towns, Bellflower and all these different little towns on the way. You’d eventually wind up in Huntington Beach. Mack and Jackie decided to skate from Pasadena to Huntington Beach. They were always competing. They were skating down the street. It was a 25 mile an hour speed limit in the – where the stores were, where the civic – it was a 25 mile an hour speed limit. Well, the Robinson brothers came through town exceeding the speed limit, and the cop pulled them over to the side. He pulls them over, and he gave them a ticket. The next day, it was in the front page of the *Pasadena Star News*. It was just as bad as Joe Louis winning the title. It was like, the Robinson brothers do it again. Ain’t no brothers ever got a speeding ticket coming through Bellflower on some iron skates. We all went crazy. We had a parade for that. Oooo boy. I’ll tell you. We thought that was the greatest thing. Shoot, Pasadena was – shoot, that little town was rocking then. You ain’t never seen nothing like that in your life. I’ll tell you. Boy, we celebrated for days on that. Man, people had it all up in the barber shop. A guy come in to get a haircut. “Man, look – look at this.” It was everywhere. People had it all on their clothes and jackets. It’s pinned all on their sweaters and stuff. Oh yeah. Oh boy. I tell you. It was the talk of the town. You go to church, and they was – it was the first thing that Reverend Robinson – “Oh Lord,” he says, “once again we’ve done it again, my brothers and sisters. I want you to know. You just don’t realize what we’re doing over here in the northwest section of Pasadena. Let me get an ‘Amen’ on that.” “AMEN!”

Brown: It sounds like a great place. So you spent your childhood there.

Hutcherson: Oh yeah. I was there . . .

Brown: You graduated from high school, right?

Hutcherson: Yeah.

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Brown: Can we go back? I was going to say, what happened after that concert, after your performance debut?

Hutcherson: I realized either two things: I was either going to lay there on the floor, from getting decked like that, from that Sunday punch, and have everybody at school say, “See, I told you,” or I was going to get up off the canvas and make my mother proud. So me and Herbie, we started hanging out with Terry – what was Terry’s last name? He lived over in Glendale. We used to go over to his house and sit there and listen to records. Gee, I can’t remember the name. I can’t remember Terry’s name. You know what they say sometimes: I’ve been diagnosed with age.

Anyway, we used to go over there and just listen to a lot of music. I had this – I had a house – my parents’ house – and a separate garage. We started having jam sessions in the garage. Everybody in town used to come and line up on the street and sit in their cars on the street or sit on the lawn and listen to the jam sessions. People who were coming through town, coming through L.A., used to come over. We’d have these big jam sessions going on, which really started helping me to develop. All the – Charles Lloyd used to come over, H. P. Barnum. Remember H. P. Barnum? Boy, was he something. Phineas Newborn used to come over. Walter Benton. Remember Walter Benton? Miles loved Walter Benton. Joe Gordon, fabulous trumpet player from Boston. He died too young. Died in a fire. All these – all of a sudden, it was like a nightclub in front of my house. People would come, and they’d just be – all these things started happening.

So all of a sudden Herbie got a job. He found this coffeehouse on the Sunset Strip. Oh boy, the name of that one. We started working there, and all the kids from school used to come, because they didn’t serve alcohol, but you could come to a place on the Strip. It’s right across the street from Ciro’s. Pandora’s Box. Working right down the street was Lennie . . .

Brown: Lennie Bruce?

Hutcherson: Lennie Bruce. Ciro’s right across the street. All the kids from school used to come.

Brown: Who was in the band? You and Herbie.

Hutcherson: Me, Herbie, Nat Brown, Robert Jenkins on congas.

Brown: Congas?

Hutcherson: Yeah.

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Brown: You had a conga player?

Hutcherson: Oh yeah.

Brown: We're talking about – you were born in '41. So the late '50s or mid-'50s, you had a conga player?

Hutcherson: Yeah, yeah.

Brown: Wow. That must have been unusual.

Hutcherson: Oh, the band was great. People just loved it. They'd sit there and drink their little coffees and stuff. We really started getting big because of the jam sessions and us working at Pandora's Box. Some of the white kids started getting jealous. One day I was having a party at my house with my girlfriend, Herbie's girlfriend, and the other guy's girlfriend, and they threw a torch up on top of the garage and burnt the garage down, with all the instruments. Everybody in Pasadena came and watched the garage burn up. My girlfriend's parents' brand new convertible was sitting in that garage, Chevy – a '56 Chevy convertible. Or was it '57? '56 or '57. I think it was a '56, champagne color. Oh boy. I'm picturing it right now. I remember that knock at the door. We're in there dancing and stuff. We're dancing to some jazz. Hey, yeah. Boom boom boom boom. [Hutcherson makes door-knocking sounds.] "I wonder who that could be? Yeah?" "Your garage is on fire." "Oh shit." I ran down there. My father's truck and the convertible were inside the garage. I ran, opened up the door. When I opened up that garage door, it wasn't like how the garage doors close now, the one big piece. When you open up the piece, the fire – all the fire jumped out the front door. I knew I had to get that car out of there, and the truck before I even messed with the instruments. I could hear the sirens coming, a crowd of people standing there watching me. I was telling all the other kids, run down to the houses. Get house. Get all those – I got the convertible out first. Told my girlfriend, drive. She later became my first wife. I told her to go home, get the convertible out of here. Let me get the truck out before it explodes. I did that.

My mother and father were at a party down at Dr. Moses's house, a few blocks away. They heard all the fire engines. I went running around to the side door, opened up the door. I had just bought a new set of vibes. I don't know why I traded in those old funky vibes with the nickel and steel for these real pretty ones that had aluminum notes, but I got them. The door was too small to pull the vibes out. The vibes are sticking halfway out the door. I look over. I see Herbie's bass over there burning up. I can't go the other way with the bass. There's a set of drums. I figured there was a window. Maybe I could throw them through the window, but I couldn't get back into the garage, because my father kept bottles that have paint thinner, and they were all exploding.

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The garage burned down. All the instruments burned down. Every kid at school was standing in front of my house, watching that, watching all the instruments burn up. Next day, they pulled me and Herbie into the office at school and said, we don't want to see any fights behind this. I said, I know who burnt my garage up. They said, if you do, you're not going to graduate. I said, I know who did it.

Anyway, my father told me – he says – okay, after the fire, he says – boy, he was really understanding. He says, “Okay, we have to collect every nut and bolt for insurance. We'll get everything back.” Herbie got another bass. We got another piano. Got another set of drums. I got another vibraphone. I had the vibraphone in – this – I kept – I took it in my bedroom when my sister started going out with Billy Mitchell. Billy Mitchell had just left the Count Basie band, he and Al Grey. He comes over to the house, and he hears me in the bedroom, playing the vibraphone. Pianist Gene Keys had been playing with him, and he had just left the band. So Billy says, “I need someone to play piano parts. I need you to comp on the vibes.” He says, “Can you play four mallets?” Well, I had never played four mallets in my life. Two mallets was it. That comes back to the experience where all the kids at school was laughing. That was enough. I lie, of course. Right away, I did. “Sure, four mallets.” Shoot, I can play ten. Have you ever heard ten? I put one here, one here, one here, one here. BAM. How you like that chord? I'll tie these things all over me, like – what's that guy with all – Edward Scissorhands. I'll have some – I'll show you some chords. Are you kidding?

He says, “I got two weeks at the Jazz Workshop in San Francisco opposite – playing opposite Mingus.” He says, “And you're going to love the bass player, Doug Watkins.” I said, “Doug Watkins? Oh my God, Doug Watkins?” He says, “Yeah. Come on up here and play on Broadway.” So I come up to – I got with Billy and Al. We play two weeks opposite Mingus. Mingus is – Mingus was so funny, because I'd heard all these stories about Mingus. He came up to me after a few nights, and he says – and I'm just a teenager. He comes up to me, and he says, “Hey, kid.” I said, “Yes?” He says, “You sound pretty good.” I said [Hutcherson speaks in a high voice], “Well, thank you.” He says, “Listen, I'm Charlie Mingus. When I tell you you sound good, you say ‘thank you,’ but say it rough.” I say [Hutcherson makes his voice rough], “Okay.”

I used to carry my mallets in this ladies straw bag, because that was the only thing that I found that I could – that was deep enough to carry my mallets. Doug Watkins, Doug was always immaculate, beautiful suit, tie. I mean, Doug was so sharp, it was just – it was a killer. He saw me walk into the club with this straw bag, pieces of straw hanging out. He said, “Bobby,” he said, “Get yourself a mallet bag.” I said, “Doug, I ain't got no time to do all this.” He said, “You ever hear of the Barracuda?” I said, “Barracuda? What that?” He said, “Barracuda will straighten you out.”

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The next night, my little straw bag was hanging on the coathanger, and there's a sign on it. It says, "Barracuda says, 'Get you a nice bag for your mallets,'" and there's a little picture of a fish with his teeth like that. It says, "Barracuda gives you your first warning." I say, "Hey Doug, Barracuda left me a note." He said, "Really?" He said, "What did the note say?" I said, "[]".

Next night – I didn't heed the warning. Next night, a bigger sign, and a bigger barracuda fish is drawn on there. It says, "Barracuda gives you your final warning. Get yourself a new bag." I say, "Hey Billy, Al, Doug, look at the sign here on my – which one of you guys is doing this?" He said, "Nobody knows who Barracuda is. But what does the sign say? Sign say, get you a mallet bag, a nice one to carry your mallets." I say, I ain't got no time to do all that.

The next night, I came in. My mallets was all over the floor. All kinds of stuff was strewn all over the place, and a big hole was cut in the bottom of the bag with some scissors, and a big sign on the bag, it said, "Barracuda has struck. Now, go get yourself a bag. Barracuda don't like that."

Brown: We're going to take time. He's going to change the tape.

Hutcherson: Okay.

Brown: Barracuda.

Hutcherson: Yeah, Barracuda has struck.

Brown: Are we back on?

Hutcherson: One time, Art Blakey had this duffle bag. Art didn't play no stuff. It was this funky bag, all nasty looking. Art used to run through the airports with this bag, trying to get on the flight. So all of a sudden, Barracuda left a sign on his bag. Says, "Your duffle bag looks bad. Please get another bag," signed, Barracuda. Well, Barracuda never said please, but this is for Art. Art had a meeting with the band. He said, "Aw, you know I don't play that Barracuda stuff. Whoever put this shit, you're going to have to return to talk to me about it. Ain't no – I don't play that shit. Talking about Barracuda. Ain't no Barracuda."

Well, Barracuda put another sign on. "Please get yourself a nice bag for when you run through the airports. We are embarrassed," signed Barracuda. Art gave the same speech again. Finally, Art was late for an airplane and somebody – Barracuda took and cut the bag out – the back of his duffle bag out, and all of his dirty underwear. He left a trail from

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where he pulled up with his car to the gate, and on the bag was a big old sign. It said, “Barracuda has struck.”

Anyway, let’s get back to where we’re . . .

Brown: So you’ve gone up to do the gig.

Hutcherson: We played two weeks. I come back. Actually, I’m still kind of like – I start taking a college class in music.

Brown: Where at?

Hutcherson: PCC. Mr. [?Bernoas]. I kept trying to write this stuff, and he, “This – we’re not studying this. I can’t give you a passing grade.” All of a sudden, Billy calls me up from New York. He says, “We got two weeks at Birdland. Would you like to come?” I said, “I certainly would.” I said, “Let me talk to my mom.” I said, “Mom, is it okay if I leave school and go play at Birdland in New York City?” She says, “Of course.”

Now, my mother – my mom, she been on the phone ever since the thing at school. She been calling. She says, “I talked to the Governor yesterday. Said he came out and saw you play. Said you sounded great.” I said, “Aw, Mom, the Governor said that?” She says, “Yeah, and I getting ready to call up the President right now. Um-hmm. That’s right, because – and all them other people, the Senators. We’re going to call everybody and make sure they hear you play.”

She says, “All I want to do, when you come back, I want you to be wearing a blue suit when you knock at the door.” I said okay. That was the thing, a blue suit.

The deal was, we had to drive across the country in Doug Watkins Peugeot, his black Peugeot, the one he got killed in. We drive across country, bass all between us, Al sitting up there in the front. Windshield wipers start [?] in the wintertime. Doug had to roll down the window and manually work the windshield wiper in the snow as we’ll coming across – driving across Route 66. Car broke down just out of – 30 miles out of Albuquerque.

Brown: You guys didn’t get too far.

Hutcherson: That was the first time it broke down. We started out having steak dinners. When we got to New York, we didn’t have enough money to pay to come through the Lincoln Tunnel and we smelled like – we were ripe. When we rolled down the window, the guy who was getting ready to take the money, he said, “Oh, go ahead, go ahead. Go ahead, you all. Just fill out the envelope. Good God. How long – where you all been – how long you all been traveling? Oh, go ahead, man. Good Lord.”

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We go to Birdland, playing opposite Art Blakey. I bring my vibes into the side door on 52nd Street. It's nobody there. The club's closed. I'd always heard about Pee Wee Marquette. I'm opening the door. I'm coming in. I'm bringing my stuff around. I have to come through the back. Pee Wee has come through the front and come down the stairs on Broadway and comes down to the club. The club was downstairs, Birdland. So it was just me and him in the club. He's smoking this big cigar. The club is dimly lit. I'm trying to set up my instrument. He walks up to me, and he says, "Who you?" I was 18 or 19 years old. I said, "I'm Bobby Hutcherson, and I'm going to be playing with Al Grey and Billy Mitchell here." He says, "No, you're not." He said, "We got Lionel Hampton and Milt Jackson. Get your stuff. Get on out of here."

Well, I'm bigger than him. I don't care if I was 18, 19 years old. Here's this little tiny little cat smoking a big ol' cigar, telling me what to do. He said, "I said, get on out of here." I said, "I ain't getting out of here." I said, "You know Billy Mitchell." He said, "Oh." Don't nobody mess with Billy. He takes this cigar and blows a big ol' thing of smoke right in my face. I said, man, this is exactly what I heard this cat is like, this little midget. I ain't supposed to say it. I'm supposed to say "little people."

So, you're going to get me. It's the first week. Pee Wee does all the announcing. "Ladies and gentlemen, from the jazz corner of the world, Birdland, 52nd Street and Broadway, I'd like to present to you the Al Grey-Billy Mitchell Sextet with Al Grey, Bill Mitchell, Doug Watkins, and Bubba Hutchkins on vibes." I say, "Awwwwww." Everybody laughed, especially Tommy Flanagan. Tommy Flanagan used to always sit right there in the gallery, because he knew that he was going to mess with you. Tommy Flanagan's down there dying laughing. I said, oh Lord. Every night.

Across the street was this famous hotel called the Alvin Hotel. We used to go over there and get paid. So I go over there. Al Grey's got a room over there. I'm in the room, getting paid. [Hutcherson makes the sound of a door knocking.] "Bobby, answer the door and see who that is." I got to the door. I open the door and a big ol' puff of cigar smoke blows right in my face. "You got something for me, Papa?" I said, "I ain't got nothing for you. You must be kidding." Al Grey says, "Give him \$5." I said, "I ain't giving him 5." \$5 in 1960 was a lot of money. In 1960 \$5 was a lot of money. I said, "I ain't giving you nothing." [Further door knocking.] "Got something for me, Papa?" "Give him \$5." He walks off. Next week, "Ladies and gentlemen, from the jazz corner of the world, Birdland, 52nd Street and Broadway, I'd like to bring on Al Grey, Billy Mitchell, and Bobby Hutcherson on vibes." I said, "Whoa." And Al Grey says, "See what \$5 do?" I say, "Oh, wow."

Then we went from there to the Apollo Theater. I had heard so much about the Apollo Theater. That's when the Apollo Theater was really into almost vaudeville, still

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vaudeville. It started at 8:30 in the morning. They would do – they would show – you would do a show. There was a whole bunch of acts, Gloria Lynne, Sonny Rollins, all these – Shirley Scott, Stanley Turrentine, two movies, a newsreel, and then the shows would start again.

The thing was, they had – once a week they had talent night. Whoever was the youngest group to play on the bill had to back up all the singers for talent night. Well, it was us. I had always heard about talent night. We come out. They drop a cheesecloth in front of us. “What’s that mean?” “The audience is going to bring stuff to throw at these people.” “No kidding?”

We started. People would come out, and they start – they come out and they touch the log, or whatever it was, for good luck. The guy said, “What are you going to sing?” He says, “I’m going to sing *Tree*.” “Yeah. Where you from?” “Mississippi.” “Mississippi, all right.” The audience goes crazy. Everybody in the audience had a brown bag of rotten fruit and eggs. Everybody. The guy says, “Don’t stop singing or else you can’t be judged. You got to finish your song.” So we’d start backing him up.” [Hutcherson starts singing:] “I said I could never see” – poom. As soon as he got to that “see,” a big old tomato, pow. I said, uh-oh, here it comes. All of a sudden now, he’s ducking and dodging and stuff. All of a sudden now, a siren goes off and they’re trying to stop him. The cat said, “Don’t stop. Don’t stop singing.” We be – I said, man, I ain’t never seen no shit like this in my life. All of a sudden, [singing] “a poem lovely as a tree.” Then he’d come out with the hook, and he’d try to hook him around the neck to pull him off, and the cat’d be ducking and darting, trying to run around from him and stuff. He says, “Stay by the microphone, so they can hear you.”

Next thing you know – he’s still singing. So they say, “Draw the microphone into the floor. He’ll have to get on his knees.” He’s a sitting target then. So the guy, he’s singing, and all of a sudden you can see him – the microphone’s starting to go, and all of a sudden you see him going down, right with the microphone. I say, oh Lord, look at that. Look at that. This it it. This has got to be it. He’s down there on his knees, [singing] “a tree whose hungry mouth . . .” Man, that shit’s flying at him, the rotten eggs and stuff, and that cheesecloth was saving us. Oh Lord. That was the most – that had to be one of the most funniest gigs I’ve ever had in my life. Then they’d have somebody who was really good coming on. They’d just – the crowd would just go crazy.

We left there and went to Chicago. Played the Sutherland Lounge opposite Redd Foxx for a month. We had Redd Foxx party records, but I had never seen him live. When I first – the first night that I saw him, it was like I couldn’t take it. I actually got on the ground. I was beating the ground. Oh man. I was just going crazy. They told me after the first night – they said, you’re going to have to leave, because you’re interrupting the show. I said, okay, I just want to see him. Just – can I see him walk in? Because at that point, I

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understood, real comedians, they don't have to say anything. All you have to do is see them, and as soon as you – when you see them, you see that that is the most funniest thing in the world, just the way how they walk, the way how they turn around and look. They don't have to say one joke. "I just want to see him, please." They said no. A month. It was just unbelievable, unbelievable. I used to go and stand in the kitchen. I just couldn't take it. I just didn't believe that anybody was that funny.

We used to live in the Sutherland Lounge, in rooms. During intermission, I'd go up to Billy's room. They all would be smoking grass. I would walk in. This guy walks up to me, and he says, "You want some?" I say yeah. Hands me a j. Goes in his pocket. Takes out a star. He says, "I'm the police." I say, "Chicago police?" "Yes, Chicago police." I say, "Here, take the j. You take it." He says, "Oh, you don't like it. You don't want my grass?" He says, "I ain't going to bust you." I said, "I got something to do. I got someplace to go. I'm going to my room." I'm just a kid.

The thing in that band was to break the drinking – see which band could drink the most. Every night you had to drink a bottle of gin, a whole bottle.

I got to meet an awful lot of people who were in show business. Austin Cromer, who used to sing with Duke Ellington.

Brown: You were recording by this time.

Hutcherson: Yeah, I started recording. I was recording before I left, with – first thing I did was with Rosemary – what's his name?

Brown: According to your discography, there's a recording with Curtis Amy and Frank Butler, *Groovin' Blue*.

Hutcherson: Yeah.

Brown: And before that, various artists, *This is the Blues*, volume 1?

Hutcherson: Yeah, but who's playing piano?

Brown: It doesn't list the personnel. Then there's, in '61, Ron Jefferson, *Love Lifted Me*; Al Grey, *Snap Your Fingers*; Billy Mitchell, *This is Billy Mitchell*.

Hutcherson: What's his name? Plays real funky piano, from L.A. [Les McCann].

Brown: Hampton Hawes?

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Hutcherson: No.

Brown: Funky piano. Not anybody you mentioned already? Not Sonny Clark or

Hutcherson: No, real big. Short, heavy. He had Ron Jefferson and Leroy Vinnegar.

Brown: I'm thinking Buckner, but he was an organist, Milt Buckner. You said short and heavy.

Hutcherson: Yeah. Ask Mom.

Brown: So that was the first recording you did, was with . . . ?

Hutcherson: Yeah, *This is the Blues*.

Brown: Funky piano player. You mentioned a lot already, Sonny Clark, Phineas Newborn, but I'm drawing a blank too.

Hutcherson: Honey, who did I do that record *Oatmeal* with?

Rosemary Hutcherson: Donald Byrd?

Bobby Hutcherson: No, honey. He's a piano player from L.A.

Brown: You described him as short and heavy.

Rosemary Hutcherson: Walt Dickerson?

Bobby Hutcherson: Honey, piano player.

Rosemary Hutcherson: What does Walt play?

Bobby Hutcherson: Plays vibes.

Rosemary Hutcherson: Oh, right. I didn't mean Walt. I meant the other guy that sounds like Dickerson, plays piano. Not him. Too young? Oh gosh. I can't think, because *Oatmeal* wasn't in my lifetime.

Bobby Hutcherson: He used to play at the Bit.

Rosemary Hutcherson: It wasn't my lifetime, honey.

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Brown: We can come back to it. But that was your first date?

Bobby Hutcherson: Yeah.

Brown: Then you're recording with Al Grey and Billy Mitchell, several. Then there's one coming up with Dave Burns, *Warmin' Up*.

Hutcherson: Yeah. Boy. Whoa. Forgot about that.

Brown: Then the next one that's listed is Jackie Mac [McLean], *One Step Beyond*. So I don't know if you want to get right to that already, or – once we get to Jackie Mac, that's

...

Hutcherson: When I say his name, you're going to say oh, of course, the pianist. He's always going on diets, trying to lose weight. Anyway, Herbie used to play with him.

Anyway, the group broke up, with Al Grey and Billy Mitchell.

Les McCann.

Brown: Oh yeah.

Hutcherson: The group broke up. I had been on the road for so much with these guys. In other words, I had been on the road for a year. We were – we used to play what we called the chitlin' circuit. We used to go around and we'd play all these places where there was – a lot of organ groups used to play. We'd play in Boston. We'd play in – wherever the chitlin' circuit was, that's – we would – what was nice about the chitlin' circuit was that you could always eat at Father Divine's. Now, for those of you who don't know about Father Divine, Father Divine had churches in all the small town where you could go. They would prepare food, and you would pay whatever you could pay. If you only had 15 cents, you could get a whole meal. And the food was unbelievably good. So what happened was, a lot of people from really big businesses were going to Father Divine's restaurants and eating and running all the other really top of the line restaurants as a business, where everybody would be in there eating all these beautifully prepared meals. It became – they had to figure out a way to stop it. Father Divine, when he said, when he was going to die, that he was going to raise after 3 days, just like Jesus, everybody was standing around the grave. He never came back. Never came out of that grave. But yeah, Father Divine. Boy, I used to love – “Where are you going to eat?” “Are you kidding, man? We're going over to Father Divine's. The food is” “How much you got?” “I got 20 cents.” Well, 20 cents was enough. You can go in there and get you a full course dinner, desert, and everything. 20 cents, whatever you could afford. If you didn't have any money, you got it.

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My first wife had come to New York. My oldest son, who was born while I was playing at Birdland. I got the call. "Bobby, it's the telephone." Aiii. Right when I was getting ready to go up on stage and play.

Like I said, that group broke up, and I had been on the road so much that I didn't know anyone. I had this apartment in the Bronx at 156th Street and Woodycrest [Avenue]. That's where I was living when Kennedy was killed. I remember taking my son to the park and coming home, and everybody come screaming out the stores, "The President's been killed. The President's been killed." I ran to the t.v. and I saw it. Everything was on t.v.

All of a sudden my money starts running out. I got down to one dime.

Brown: And you had a family with you now..

Hutcherson: I had a family. I said, okay, here's all those kids at school that was laughing at me, said I wasn't going to make it. What am I going to do now? My mom said, "I'm by your side. Don't worry. I'm here." So I said, okay, Mom. I took that dime and I called all my friends collect. I had a mason jar. I called them up, and I said, listen, I don't have any food. I got to feed my family. You got anything you can put in my mason jar? They say, yeah, we got some tuna, or we got some potatoes, or we got some – come on, walk on over here. So I'd make sure I get my dime back out that telephone, my lucky dime that I called everybody collect on. I'd walk up to there house and walk over to Herman Wright's house, Candy Finch's house. I'd get food in my mason jar, and I'd bring it back home to eat. I said, boy, boy, boy, this New York can kick your butt. I said, I got to do something else.

So I started working at Grand Union store, the Grand Union stores, stocking shelves. I didn't like that. I didn't like stocking shelves at Grand Union. But it was – it did – and they did let me take old food home. It had been on the shelf or something. I got – so I could take old food. That was another way to feed, because at that point all of a sudden I realized, this is about eating. This is all about eating. I had a young baby, six months old, and he had to eat.

After that, I said, there's got to be another way. I was looking at all those taxis in New York. I said, why don't you get a driver's license to drive a taxi, and you can drive around and meet musicians, have your – it's a way to take your instrument around. So I went and applied for a driver's license. I passed the test. I used a taxi to take the test in, and I was able to start driving a taxi. I said, hey, this is great.

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On certain days, I couldn't take the taxi with my instrument. So I made this dolly, a big platform, and I had five cases: big vibraphone. I used to roll it down this hill to the Yankee Stadium subway. I'd take these vibes down the steps. When the train would pull up, I'd try to run, get in the door, block the door, get them in the train, and then take the dolly in, and the train would pull off. People were mad! I did that for a while. I said, boy, you must really love to play the vibes to do this, because it was – I was coming down a hill, like “Aaaahhhh, look out.” I had five. I had the big vibraphone. You know how I'm saying? Oh Lord. You must really love this instrument.

Then I just started leaving it in the taxi. All of sudden, who comes in town but Herbie Lewis, playing with Art Farmer – with the Jazztet, playing with the Jazztet. Herbie says, “Bobby,” he says, “I got an apartment down here on the Lower East Side.” He says, “I'm starting to have some jam sessions like we had in Pasadena.” He says, “Why don't you bring your vibes over in the taxi and we'll have a jam session?” He says, “And there's a trombone player who's playing in the Jazztet. His name is Grachan Moncur. Come over and play, and you'll start to meet some musicians.” So I said okay.

I brought the vibes over to Herbie's house. Grachan's playing. Grachan was so hip. Grachan, you could hear the notes coming out before he would. “How's it going Grachan? That's bad, baby.” Grachan say, bah dah dat. I say, hooooo, that's bad, that's bad. Grachan say – he says – Grachan says, “I think this would work.” I said, “What do you mean?” He says, “I'm going to call Jackie McLean.” He said, “I think we got a gig coming up.” He said, “I want Jackie to hear you.”

So Jackie comes over to Herbie's house. Baht. Some different shit here, man. Bah-dat. I said, whooooo. Jackie said, “I got two weeks at the Club Coronet in Brooklyn. I just met this drummer up in Boston. His name is Tony Williams.” He said, “Let's go into the Club Coronet and play two weeks.” He said, “We'll rehearse.” So we say, oh, yeah.

So I meet Tony. We're still kids. Tony's got comic books in his back pocket and stuff. We're just having a great time. So he said – we had these tunes. Grachan had a lot of tunes. Grachan said, “So what we going to play? What we going – What you want to do? What you got? What you got?” Grachan said, “I got one.” He said, “This one here. It's called *Frankenstein's Mama*.” I said, “*Frankenstein's Mama*?” I said, “Yeah, I like that.” Yeah, baby. [Hutcherson sings:] Bop, be da doo, beep, dee. I say, “Ooooo, that is bad. That is bad.” We said, “Okay, what else you got, Grachan?” “*Ghost Town*.” “Whoooo, *Ghost Town*. I want to play that. I want to play *Frankenstein's Mama* and *Ghost Town*.”

All of a sudden, the band starts sounding weird. Dang. This ain't no regular bebop. What happened to this band. “What you got next, Grachan.” Grachan said, *Air Raid*.” “*Air Raid*? Where do you get these tunes from, Grachan?” Grachan said, bah da bop. I said, “Ooooo, that's bad, man. That is so bad.” Then we say, “What else you got?” He said,

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“This is *Saturday and Sunday*.” “Oooo, *Saturday and Sunday*. That’s my kind of stuff. I’m ready to play.”

So Jackie says, “Okay, we’re ready for two weeks at Coronet.” I said, “Wait a minute, Jackie. We only got four songs. How’re we going to play two weeks with four songs?” He said, “Easy.” He said, “If we start out with *Frankenstein’s Mama, Air Raid*.” I said, “Okay” – he named all the four songs. I said, “Then what are we going to do the second set?” He said, “We’ll start out with *Air Raid*.”

In those days, they had what was called 40-20: 40 [minutes] on, 20 off, 40 on, 20 off. We would start at 9 o’clock. We didn’t finish until 4 o’clock in the morning. We did not finish playing until 4 o’clock in the morning. The people would be at the bar. They’d be down there just drunk, drinking and stuff.

After the first night, there was this guy that was sitting down there. He was just – because we were just kids going crazy, just playing this music. They just loved the titles. *Frankenstein, Frankenstein’s Mama*. Everybody would say, oooo, yes, yes, yes. So the cat down there, he says to me – he says, “Say kid, come here.” I said, “Yes. What is it?” He says, “You know what I like about this band?” I said, “No, sir. What do you like about it?” He says, “You never repeat yourselves. That’s what I like about this band.”

Brown: Four tunes.

Hutcherson: Yeah, four songs, man. We didn’t play but four songs.

So Jackie calls Alfred Lyons. Alfred Lyons comes down. Alfred’s standing there. Alfred says, “Jackie, we have to record this. We have to record.” So we go into the studio. Right when we’re doing the first recording, Alfred walks over to me and he says, “Want to sign a contract?” I said, “Yes I would.” I was with him for 15 years. I think Horace Silver was probably the longest one with Blue Note, but I did 15 years with him. What happened was, Alfred would say to me, he’d say, “You can record any time you want. Tell me when you’re ready. Just call me up, and we’ll go into the studio.” Well I was ready every – I was ready to record almost every month. That’s – all of a sudden I was turning out records like mad, like mad, like mad.

Brown: Did Alfred ever say what it was that captivated him about you or your playing?

Hutcherson: No. He said it was different, because I was doing all kinds of different stuff. I was – coming up and playing with Al Grey and Billy Mitchell, I was used to playing mainstream type. I was used to playing what they would call avant garde, out stuff. I was used to doing – really because of my sister’s singing so much, I was used to doing Broadway-type things, standards. I could do a lot of different type things which I could

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project myself into. Because of hanging out with a lot of musicians, I was playing a lot of different time signatures. I found myself playing – doing a lot of things, say like with Joe Chambers and stuff, where we would be playing in 7. I was playing in 7s and 9s a lot. Plus, Eric showed up at the Coronet, and he had all these different things going on. So the harmonies and rhythms and stuff made it so that I was doing a lot of different things. I wasn't just here. I was all over the place. So it made it so that I was – I could start adapting to a lot of different things.

Brown: Had you been playing free or more avant garde prior to hooking up with Grachan and Jackie?

Hutcherson: No, no. But what came to seem to make it able to come off was the fun, where you don't have somebody saying, now this is what you got to do. It was more like, whoo hoo. The thrill of the note and the thought makes you think – would make your imagination run. So I found myself catching into that a lot.

Brown: So, working with Tony Williams when he was just a kid with comic books in his back pocket. What did you think of his playing when you first heard him? Was he distinctive already?

Hutcherson: Oh yeah. I noticed he would play things backwards, if he wanted to. I noticed – say, like, we'd be into the first part of the tune. Well, when we got to the bridge, he'd – all of a sudden, the bridge would go. I'd say, wait a minute. What? Wait a minute. Wait a minute. What am I hearing there? All of a sudden, everything would go backwards. Whatever he was playing here, he'd start playing there and play it there. I'd say, oh, that's different. That's different. And it would groove. Then I'd say wow. Check that out. So a lot of things started opening up.

Brown: Did you discuss much? Did you guys discuss any of the tunes or structure or . . . ?

Hutcherson: Uh-umm. We talked – you know what we talked about more was personalities. It's like, I was at rehearsal at Eric's house, Eric's loft, right before we did *Out to Lunch*. There was this trumpet player who was supposed to be on this gig. We were going to go and play Crawford's Grill in Pittsburgh, and then we were going to come back and do *Out to Lunch*. Eddie [Arman]. He was the – he had the nastiest attitude. Right in the middle of rehearsal, he starts packing his instrument up. Eric, who was sweet as a lump of sugar – he was just a wonderful person – so we're playing, and all of a sudden Eddie says, "Eric." The band stops. He says, "I don't like you. I don't like your music. I ain't going to make the gig, and I want my money." We're all staring at him like, whoa. He says – and he reiterated it. "I really don't like you. I don't like none of you." We're all standing there like, oooo. So he's packing his horn up and just throwing

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it in the case and stuff. Eric's sitting there, just watching him. We're all just kind of looking down, waiting to see what Eric's going to say. He gets his horn in his case, puts on his coat and his hat, because it was wintertime. Starts to walk through the door. Opens up the door, and before he can go through, Eric says, "Eddie" – and with the nastiest answer, the way to say WHAP, and with the most complete conviction of seriousness and love, Eric says, "If I can ever help you, please don't hesitate to call. I'm there for you." There was my mom's thing again. There she was. With that, he could not take it. He slammed the door, and he went out. When he slammed the door, Eric says, "Okay. We'll start playing." We started playing. We started playing the music from *Out to Lunch*. It just took off. It just went into another thing. We just played. Again, there was my mom. He said, "I'm there for you." Whatever it is, I'm there. I'm right by your side. Don't worry. Just have on a blue suit.

Brown: Did you ever get home with a blue suit?

Hutcherson: Oh yes I did. I made sure when I knocked on the door I had on a blue suit.

Brown: That's great. Talking about personalities, as we all know, since all of us in this room are musicians, a lot of times the band – the success of the band or the – let's just say the success – is because of what you just said, the personalities, rather than so much the artistry. It's that the synergy, if you will, that comes from people coming together. I'm holding in my lap all of these recordings from Grachan Moncur, Jackie McLean, and *Out to Lunch*. It's you and it's Tony on all these dates, or Jackie's on all his dates, of course, with Grachan. So you guys must have had the simpatico that produced such a creative fervor or outbreak. So, getting to know them – you talked a lot about Grachan and how mesmerized you were with his – maybe a little bit more about Jackie or about Tony and their personalities and how you related to each other, both on the bandstand and off.

Hutcherson: It was always fun. Jackie was fun. He made everything where you couldn't complain about anything, because it was fun. We had a gig one time over in the Front Room over in Jersey. We had to be over there at 7:30 in the morning. Tony, Eddie Kahn on bass. Remember Eddie Kahn?

Brown: Um-hmm.

Hutcherson: We're putting our – we're going to the Port Authority, putting drums and vibes underneath a bus. We get to the club, and Jackie's not there. The owner of the club says, "Where's Jackie?" We said he'll be here soon. Finally, the door opens up, and Jackie comes through the door with his horn. He walks in. He comes and stands in front of me, and his pants are completely ripped out in the back. We're – Tony says, "Jackie." Jackie says, "I know, I know, I know." "Jackie!" Jackie says, "Wooo, it's hot up here."

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The next thing is he says, because it's so early, he says, "Give me a ham and eggs on the rocks," and we just died laughing.

We did a concert the day that Kennedy was assassinated – the next day, at Judson Hall, me, Tony, Grachan, Eddie Kahn. The nation was in mourning. Nobody was – one guy showed up and sat right in the middle of the audience, so he can get stereo sound. So we said – I said, "Jackie, are we going to play?" He said, "Yes, we're going to play. Every time you play, it's important. It's the most important time. Every gig is important. Don't forget that. Of course we're going to. And we're going to have a great time." Well, we started off with *Frankenstein* right away. That was the first thing. We start to play. This cat's, "Aghhhh. Wow." We're getting out there. We're playing that. Remember that show, *Laugh In*? We end the song. [Hutcherson claps.] All you here is this one person clapping. "What you want to play next?" "*Air Raid*." "Owwwwww." Bah-dat, bah-dah-dah-dat. Oooo, that is bad. That is bad. That is so bad. That is so bad. That is so bad.

Judson Hall, it's not on the ground floor. It's like on the third floor or something. I'm right in the middle, playing chords, Grachan's taking a solo, and Tony's going crazy back there, all that stuff. All of a sudden, Jackie comes over to me, and he's got his coat on, and his horn is in his case. He always called me Barbs. Jackie says, "Hey, Barbs," and I'm saying, "Yeah, Jackie? Jackie, why are you dressed?" He's, "Hey Barbs. Something's funny with the money. I'll talk to you about it later." I said, "What, what? What was that? What was that? I didn't get that. What was that?" So he goes over to Grachan. All of a sudden – and Grachan and Jackie used to argue – "Jackie, where you going?" Now all of a sudden Grachan puts his horn down and Grachan goes – Jackie – we see Jackie disappear out the side, and he's going down the steps. Well, Grachan took off after him. With that, Tony was right behind Grachan. I was right behind Tony, and Eddie Kahn walking like – he used to do that cowboy walk. "Say, pilgrim." Now, all of a sudden, we all go running after Jackie. The guy that was sitting out there in the middle, when the music started, all of a sudden like it's minus one: one leaves and then another. It gets – the music got thinner and thinner and thinner. He said, "Hey, where you all going? You going to finish the concert? Man." The band, we're going this way, trying to catch up with Jackie. Where's that money? All of a sudden I look, and he was behind Eddie Kahn. He's running behind Eddie Kahn. "What's going on?"

Brown: We're going to stop. We've got to change the tape. Boy, Bobby, you got some stories, man.

[The recording resumes in mid-sentence.]

Hutcherson: . . . to have been there. I was playing an instrument where you didn't really think of it as being integrated into a forceful type situation. You think of trumpet, saxophone, drums, bass, piano, but you don't really think of vibes being at the forefront,

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to start something new. That was – I was lucky that way, to be able to have joined in on that one.

Brown: You brought the right stuff at the right place at the right time, it seems.

Hutcherson: The thing is, you got – we started doing those things with Jackie, and then at the same time, like I say, I started recording with Blue Note and I ran into Joe Chambers . . .

Brown: Let's talk about that. Let's talk about Joe.

Hutcherson: . . . who had a lot of different things going on. Duke Pearson really had a lot to do with a lot of things. Duke was – Duke brought out a lot of thoughts. Right when that was going, all of a sudden, Duke says, "Hey, I want you to do this record with Grant Green." I said, "I never met Grant Green." He says, "I want you to go up to Harlem and go in the club and hear Grant play." So I went up to Harlem. As soon as I walked through the door – you know, sometimes when you walk through a door and the music is so captivating, as soon as you walk through the door, you say, ooooo, this is special. You don't even have to sit down. Grant was playing, hunched over the guitar, and I said, oh man, there's something special going on here.

So we started doing some things. I started doing some things with Grant Green and Joe Henderson, which went away from the avant garde types of modern things going on, back into almost more mainstream stuff. It was very enjoyable to be able to go back and forth from.

But all of a sudden it got to be – I had a hard time placing my beat, for a second. The thing is, where am I playing this note at? All of a sudden, I didn't – I had a thing of where I didn't understand playing. On a certain type of music, did I play on top of the beat, or this tune here now requires playing in the middle of the beat, or this tune now requires playing behind the beat? Hmmm. And being able to put the groove together for each one, to make this feeling come across.

I listened to a lot of different things to try to figure that out. One big lesson was, listen to John Coltrane's group. Here's John playing, and he's playing mainly on top. No, but he could play – John could play behind, in the middle, and on top. McCoy [Tyner] was playing on top of the beat, Jimmy Garrison was playing in the middle of the beat, and Elvin [Jones] was playing behind the beat, which – this rhythm section wasn't supposed to work. Hmmm. What do you do?

I remembered this: I remembered when I was playing with Al Grey and Billy Mitchell, that when we used to travel down the road, going someplace, they used to read a lot of

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poetry, Paul Laurence Dunbar. So I went and got the complete works of Paul Laurence Dunbar, and I started reading the poetry in it, to try to understand the delivery of a phrase, determining on how the urgency of what was being said, determining if it lays, where it's just cruising, and if it's back here in the funky part of the phrase. Very important, very important. Helps you to understand how to play a ballad. [He recites:]

'T was three an' thirty year ago,
When I was ruther young, you know,
I had my last an' only fight
About a gal one summer night.
'T was ol' Zekel Johnson and me,
Each of us tryin' his best to show
That he was Liza Jones's beau.

So that when I caught up with him,
I let my fist go kabim,
and I thought I just about finished him,
But ol' Zeke did n't take it so.
He jest ducked down an' dodged my blow.
Then he hit me so hard,
I thought I must 'a' hurt the yard."

You see what I'm saying? I'm going from here to here to here to here to here. That started showing me the . . .

Brown: Were you reciting aloud as well, or just reading in your mind and interpreting?

Hutcherson: Once I started – Rosemary loves me to do that, because she . . .

Rosemary Hutcherson: I can't believe this. I haven't picked up this book in maybe two years. I'm reading Paul Laurence Dunbar, and he started to recite.

Bobby Hutcherson: But the thing was, it helps you to understand that this – all of a sudden, this comes out, and it's got more aaaarrrrmmmm, and then all of a sudden this says hmmmmm. It's all within – so that you know – actually, the tempo – you know what I'm saying? There's just – actually the thought, the meaning of the thought – what is – you just don't play. This means something. What . . .

Do you ever watch Billy Higgins when he's playing. Billy's playing. Billy say, "Whooo, that's smooth."

Brown: Look at that smile.

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Hutcherson: Billy say, “Whooooo. Who’s that over there? Who’s that?” See, they ain’t all just there.

So all of a sudden it required a different thing with this person, to understand, and to help me understand that I had to do something to get my mind on that track to understand that. All of a sudden I’m doing these things with Grant Green and stuff. Now all of a sudden I’m doing stuff with Joe Chambers.

Right when all that was going on, I’m recording an album with Andrew Hill. We’re over at Lynn Oliver’s studios, 89th and Broadway. I say to Andrew, I say, “Andrew, I can’t get this song that you wrote.” I said, “Play it for me.” Andrew would play it. Every time he played it, he played it different. I say, okay? Alfred Lyons and Frank Wolff would be down. They said, “Okay. We’re going to go downstairs to the hotdog stand. When you guys get it together, call us, and we’ll come up.”

We practiced that song, just the melody. Finally we got it together. Andrew went running down the stairs, said, “Alfred, Frank, come up here and listen to this.” They came running up the stairs. We played it. Alfred says, [Hutcherson imitates Lyons’s German accent:] “Sounds good, Andrew. Andrew, that sounds good. Sounds good.” He said, “But Andrew, what are you going to play for a solo?” He says, “Is it going to groove? Is it going to swing?” We all said, “Yeah. What do you . . . ?” “It’s going to groove? It’s going to swing?” Boy, that “w” always was a “v”: “Swing. Swing it. Vill it swing?”

I turned to Joe after the thing. I said, “Joe, let’s go get some grass and smoke it in Central Park.” Joe says, “Good idea.” I knew some people around the corner. No, Andrew told me. He said, “There’s some people around the corner. I’ll call them and tell them you’re going to come by. So I go by. I get a bag of grass and I roll two j’s.

In these days, if you get busted, it was 10 years for a joint, in New York City, 10 years. We got to the corner – I came back out the house, and we got to the corner. I gave Joe his j, and I had the j and the bag. A Nash Neapolitan, like at the circus where all the clowns come out the tiny little car, pulled up, and all these narcos come rushing out the car and throw me and Joe against the building and busted us. Took us to the Tombs. The Tombs in New York City – you don’t want to be in the Tombs, especially on the weekend. The Tombs, they take you to this holding cell where people have thrown up, shit, and pissed. They’re laying in it, and you’re standing there. The smell is unbelievable. The only thing that you can do is look at the ceiling, because that’s the cleanest place in the cell. We’re standing there in this, and these people are standing down there bleeding from being beat by the police and stuff. Saturday night. We’re both sitting there. We said, oh, my God. We’re just young kids.

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The next morning – I was working with Hank Mobley at Slugs. The next morning we're – they held court. Joe had enough money on him on this thing, when they busted him, to get out. They passed the hat around for me at Slugs, and then didn't come up for enough money. They took me back in and put me up on the seventh floor. They went back down to Slugs to raise money. They gave me a blanket, and they were about to bed me down, and they yell, "Hutcherson. Step back. You're getting out."

Everybody on that floor in the next cells start writing notes. Call this person for me and tell him I'm here, please. I said okay, sure. Cop saw me taking these notes. He said, "Oh, no." He said, "Let me step into his cell and then close the door again." They stepped into the cell, put me up on the bars again, and beat the shit out of me with a rubber hose. He said, "Did you learn that lesson?" I said, yeah. They hit me. I was shitting. Shit came out my butt. Beat the shit out of me. Put my little shirt back on, my little jacket. Walked into Slugs, and boy, I got a standing ovation. "Oh, Bobby's out of jail. There you go."

I had a hack license and a cabaret card. You know what a cabaret card is? I had my cabaret card. I had to show up for court. They took my hack license. They took my cabaret card. That made it so you can't work, can't drive a cab. I got on a plane and came back out to Los Angeles.

Harold Land heard I was back out here and said, "Come and work with me at this club called the La Deuce. We can work six nights a week forever. Buster Williams is playing bass. Come on." I said, "Okay. I ain't got – I can't go no place else." So me and Harold, we started working at this club. I said, man, this is nice.

All of a sudden I get a call from Joe Chambers. Joe says, "The cabaret card's been abolished. Come back to New York. You can come back to New York and work." I said, oh, okay. So I told Harold, I said, "Come on. Let's go. Come back to New York with me. We can work at Slugs. I know everybody at Slugs." This was way before Lee [Morgan] got killed or anything.

We came back. We start working at Slugs. Started recording like mad. We're doing all this stuff. Joe's writing like mad. We're doing all this writing.

We did that *Now* album. I always thought that was really different, because that was the first time I did a thing with voices, and the voices were like another band. In fact, on one of the tunes I remember we were playing – the instruments were playing in the key of F and the voices – there's 4, 5, or 6 of them – they were singing in the key of A-flat, and we put it together, but when you hear it, you'd never know. I said, wow, listen to that. That's some different stuff there. Plus we were doing stuff like in 7s and 9s and stuff. We had Gene McDaniels. Gene was writing all this stuff.

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I wrote a tune for Albert Stinson. People use it a lot. It's funny. People use it at funerals, because it has to do with what you're looking for while you're in your lifetime, and then at the end of the song, you realize everything's a world of its own, and the world of what you're looking for is within you.

Brown: What's the title of the tune?

Hutcherson: *Now.* I recorded it with the L.A. Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl. It came off beautiful, all those strings and everything. I'm sitting there playing, and we're doing all this stuff. This guy named Dale Oehler, he did all the arrangements. Sarah Vaughan came on right before me, and then we came on. Sarah turned around. She says, "That was heavy."

Harold and I, we had started doing a lot of stuff. Joe – when we first started doing it, Joe Chambers comes to me. He says, "You know, Harold's a lot older. I don't think this is going to work." I said, "Trust me, trust me." All of a sudden we started doing this – Harold started Nichiren Shoshu, and his breathing – you could hear him breathing and breathing for this long – really begging. He was really begging for the note. I said, whoa, man. He was pleading for notes. I'm saying, Harold, that's – whoa. He's just begging for notes. It was just – it just – all of a sudden, the way Harold –we had started playing so much together, it sounded like the vibes and the saxophone was one instrument, because we were phrasing so much together. But he was just begging. We did a lot of albums, a lot of stuff.

We were in Verona, Italy, one time. The vibraphone company gave me this electric vibe. I thought it was the most ridiculous thing, but I decided I was going to take it on the road, because it was only one thing to carry. So we were going to the rehearsal, and I had left it there. Verona, that's the hometown of Romeo and Juliet. We're walking – me and Harold, we're walking, and we see this – over the stage at the vineyard, we see this big puff of black smoke. I say, "Look at that, Harold. I wonder what that is?" So we walked up on the stage, and the guy, the electrician, he says, "Oh man," he says, "We forgot that you have 110. We got 220." He said, "We plugged you in." I said, "Can you hear the vibes." He says, "No." He says, "But listen. We have excellent electricians here." He says, "Go home. Have a nice dinner and come back for the concert," he says, "because everything will be perfect.." I say, "Are you sure?" He says, "Don't worry. Don't worry." He says, "Goodbye." I said okay.

Harold – at this time, I was always pulling pranks on Harold. Harold used to get mad at me. One time we were playing in Boston, and this guy put some acid in my coke. We got up on the bandstand and I hit this note, and a banana came out of it. I said, "Harold." I said, "Harold, there's a banana." Harold said, "Bobby, please." He says, "The club's filled. Come on. Let's play." I said okay, all right.

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So we're playing, and all of a sudden this acid is really coming on me, and I can feel this little motor starting, hmmmmmm. So I reached over here and I hit this note, boom, and a dilapidated army boot, with the shoestrings – it was all curved and stuff. I said, "Harold." He says, "What is it now?" I said, "There's a boot. There's a boot over that note." He says – Harold says, "Oh, God." He says, "Will you stop this? Come on."

Now I'm really stoned. It gets to the end of the set, and Harold, before he can get the microphone, I grab the microphone, and I looked out at the people. I said, "You fools. You stupid fools, sitting there with drinks and smoking cigarettes." I said, "That's the dumbest shit I've ever . . ." With that, the club owner's security, they took and drug me off the stage and put me in the coatroom.

Anyway, we come back to the concert in Verona. The vibes is supposed to be fixed. We walk out. We're all dressed. The guy [?]. He says, "Ladies and gentleman, Bobby Hutcherson and Harold Land." The curtain opens. I go and hit the first note, and there's the biggest explosion you ever want to see. Poom, and the crowd goes crazy. What do you call that pyros that they have, where they – where the kids, with all the fireworks and everything on stage? Well, this was natural. This was – we had – I had – I was doing it natural. Just the biggest explosion, and Harold's like – he says, "Bobby, not again." I said, "Why Harold, I haven't done anything." He says, "Well, you could at least play." I said, "I am playing." He says, "I don't hear anything." He said, "I don't hear anything." Then some guy sitting a couple rows out in the audience, he says, "Bobby, I drove from" so and so, so many kilometers. He says, "Don't do this. Please play." I said, "I am playing." That was the last time I played that instrument, the last time.

Me and Harold, a lot of travel and a lot of stuff. We used to have a lot of fun. We wound up doing that movie, *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*

Brown: How did that come about?

Hutcherson: Ray Brown – they had asked Ray Brown to do it. Ray was too busy. Ray was good friends with Harold. He said – Harold said, "Me and Bobby will do it – got a group." He says, "What can Bobby do?" I grabbed a trumpet and acted like I was the leader of the band. So I became the leader of the band. So then, throughout the whole thing, you see me leading the band. Jane Fonda, Gig Young, Red Buttons. We were on the set for six months. Hadley Caliman, Teddy Edwards.

Brown: We just lost Hadley.

Hutcherson: I moved – Delano Dean, who used to live next to Jackie Robinson on Pepper Street, he had moved up here to San Francisco, and he opened up a club called the

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Both/And. I always wondered, what was the meaning of that title? Both/And is out of the Bible: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost – Both/And. A lot of people don't know that.

So I came up here. Because of me living up here, it became increasingly hard for me and Harold to work, because him being in L.A., although we did do several albums. One was called *San Francisco*, which had a big funky hit on it, called *Ummh*. It became the theme song for when the Watts Jazz Festival was going on. I called George Butler. I said, "George. You got a hit on your hands." He says, "What?" I said, "Go in your library. Pull out a tune called *Ummh* we just recorded." Boy, and he – boom. He says, "Oh, my God." They put it on, and it was a big hit right away.

I took the money that I had – that I made from *Ummh* and bought this house. I used to come down to the beach here all the time. I said, let me do something with this money. So I looked around and found this property, built a house on it. I said, let me do something now instead of just stowing it away. It's so easy to throw money away.

So I came up here, and I started working with James Leary, Eddie Marshall, and Manny Boyd. I started doing a lot of things with George Cables. I had divorced my first wife. I met Rosemary. Rosemary was working at the Both/And. She was taking tickets at the door. I thought I was hot stuff because I had been in New York. I was sly. I was bad. I walked into the club, the owner of the club. I saw Rosemary. I said, oooo, oooo. I said – I looked at her, and I said, "Excuse me. My name is Bobby Hutcherson." Didn't mean shit to her. She says, "My name is Rosemary Zuniga." I said, "Yeah but" blaaa – "I'm Bobby Hutcherson." She says, "You got a ticket?" I said, "Who cares if I got a ticket?" I say, "Do you need a ride home?" She says, "No. My uncle comes and picks me up and takes me home." Uh-huh. Well.

I came in the next night. She was there taking tickets. I said, "Excuse me. My name is Bobby Hutcherson." She says, "Yeah, I told you. My name is Rosemary Zuniga." I said, "No, you" – I said, "You don't understand. You . . ." – she said, "You got a ticket?" I said, "I don't need a ticket." [Henderson speaks out of clenched teeth.] I went into my ventriloquist thing, you know, where you don't – your teeth don't – "I don't need a ticket." "You need a ride home?" She says, "My uncle gives me a ride home." I said, "Uh."

Next night, same thing went down, and I said, "You need a ride home?" She says, "My uncle said he can't pick me up." She says, "I don't know if I can trust you." I said, oh – I – "What? Are you kidding?"

So I'm driving her home. She lives on Potrero Hill, on top of the hill. As we get to the top of the hill, the biggest shooting star you ever want to see – it's red here, and as it falls to

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earth, it turns bright white and it falls right in front of the car. I stopped. We just standing, looking at it. Whoa. We both looked at it. We looked at it, and I said, “Well, I guess that’s it.” We’ve been together ever since. We tell that story about that shooting star. It’s happened twice now. A couple years ago, on Christmas, it fell again, right in front of the car, the biggest shooting star.

We started doing stuff, traveling, quartet, Manny and stuff. Did that album, *Waiting*. We’re on the bus stop, and we’re waiting for the bus, and then on the back side of the album, the bus is gone and we’re still That was a funny thing. That was funny.

I had been doing a lot of recording. Alfred Lyons started to sell the company, and the company starting moving from New York to L.A. Duke got sick, passed away. He was wonderful. Rosie and I went to go visit him before he passed. We walked in. We surprised him. He had a hospital bed at his house with a bar where he could pull up on and a tape record. He was sitting there listening to all his old recordings. We walked in, he looked up, and he just started crying. Duke was a great person to have at Blue Note Records. He took Ike Quebec’s position, because Duke could not only play piano, he could play trumpet, bass, and drums. So when we had a rehearsal, somebody was late, he could play all those parts and play them very well.

Alfred sold the company. George Butler came in. I started doing stuff with George Butler. George just passed away a few years ago with Alzheimer’s, over in Hayward. They found him wandering in the streets. All of a sudden it was on t.v. They said there’s a guy named George Butler that’s – George Butler from Blue Note Records. Wow.

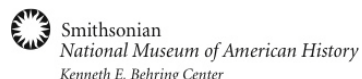
Then we did the *Highway [One]*. George went with . . .

Brown: Columbia?

Hutcherson: . . . Columbia. He made this offer to all the people who were – Hubert Laws, everybody – to pay everybody \$1,000 to do a record. Then he would try to make it up. He was taking money out of the producing – the budget – and putting it in his pocket. Sorry. They caught up with him. He wrote down – I came over to his office one time, and he had a brown paper bag lunch, and he wrote down this contract on a brown paper sack. I went for it. So did all those great musicians who were with Blue Note at that time. He made them – that’s why all of a sudden everybody was gone. That’s what happened. It was a brown paper bag contract. That’s what happened.

I did the *Highway One* album with Columbia, which started out to be a really great album. That’s the one with, on the front, with a camel caravan in the desert at a red light, waiting for the red light to turn green. I thought that was the funniest thing in the world.

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There's all these camels, man, and they're waiting for the light to turn green. Ain't nobody out there but – that's some funny stuff. I saw that and . . .

Brown: Who was the art director on that one?

Hutcherson: Yeah. I did another one, a second one, and that was the end of it. Then I was working at Keystone Korner, and Freddie Waits was staying here. I had had a few drinks the night before. I got out there. I was cutting the lawn. You know the side of the lawn mower where it says, do not put your hand in here? I did, and I cut the tip of my finger off. Freddie's standing there at the window, watching. I said, "Freddie, look." He says, "Yeah, yeah, you're doing a great job." I said, "No, Freddie, look." He screams and he comes running out. I said, "Help me find the tip of my finger." I said, "We got to go to the hospital, get it sewn back on." We found it and went around here to the corner hospital. The guy sewed my finger back on, and he says, "I don't know if you'll be able to play vibes anymore." I said, oh boy. I said, if I'm able to play vibes again, I'm going to do something that's going to be different. That's when I did the one where I'm all by myself, with a bunch of tunes where I went into a studio with all these instruments and did that.

Brown: How long did it take for you to get your facility back?

Hutcherson: Really it took a year, but all that time I was still playing. I'd just wrap tape on my hand and play. There was no way I was going to stop playing. One time when I'm working at Keystone Korner, I'm driving my van. I heard this loud explosion. I'm driving down Van Ness street. Boom. So I'm driving, looking all around, trying to see what's going on. I get on the freeway. I start driving home, and I see all these cops. I see the SWAT team. They're behind me. They pull up. What's going on? "Pull over on the next turn off and then go into the McDonald's parking lot – Safeway parking lot." I said, shit, man. There must be 30 cars behind me. I pull over, and they say, "Okay, get out and spreadeagle on the ground. We're the SWAT team. We're looking for – you just exploded a bomb at the Opera House in San Francisco." I said, "Opera House? What are you talking about?"

There's a bunch of guys on the ground, all like this on me, and there's one guy over me that's got a gun, and he's doing like this, at my head. The other guy – you know, good cop / bad cop – the good cop says, "You got any identification?" I said, "Yes, I do, but I ain't moving, because this fool here's going to kill me as soon as I move." I said, "If you want it, you got to go into my pocket right there." So he reaches in, and he says, "Okay, let's see what we got." He says, "Robert Hutcherson." He says, "Robert Hutcherson? Would that be Bobby Hutcherson?" I said, "Yeah, yeah, right, yeah, right." He said, "Were you playing at Keystone Korner the other night." I said yeah." He said, "Our precinct's right next to it." He said, "We came in and watched you play." I said, "My

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vibes are in the back of the van here.” He said, “John, open up the back of the van to check it out.” He opens it up and says, “Yeah, there’s some weird looking instrument sitting back here.” He says, “Wow. Jeez, you guys. We got the wrong guy.” He said, “Bobby, I’m really sorry. Come on, you guys. Let’s go.” So right – they’re all about to get in their cars, and all of a sudden the good cop, he says, “Oh.” He starts walking back, and he says, “Bobby” – he’s got a pen and a piece of paper. He says, “You think – could I get your autograph?” I – “Give me that thing. Yeah, man, sure. Yeah, here.” I get back in my car, drive back down there. Rosemary says, “Where you been?” I say, “You don’t even want to hear this one. You know – let’s talk about something else. You don’t even want to hear this one.”

Brown: A day in the life of a jazz musician.

Hutcherson: Oh Lord. I say, has this happened to all the guys that happens to me? Because me and Rosemary [?] – I said, I got to write a book. This is ridiculous, all this stuff happening. It’s just ridiculous.

Playing with Manny was just great. I really enjoyed playing with Manny. Manny had a different type of sound. He used to choose these tunes that would remind you of certain places. We had one that had – was Housman street. Housman street, Thursday afternoon. It was just how people were sitting on their stoops as you came into New York on a hot summer afternoon, people sitting out there, trying to cool off.

I was Rosemary’s – I wrote a song for her when we met. I’ve written a lot of songs for her, but the first song was called *Rose’s Poses*. She uses it as her – what do you call it?

Rosemary Hutcherson: E-mail address.

Bobby Hutcherson: Yeah, it’s her e-mail address, *Rose’s Poses*. Those things last for so long. The story – you can really see how she – where I was trying to depict how she was at that time when we first met and to be able to open the book and see, okay, here it is. This song shows you exactly where she was coming from. It’s nice to be able to see that.

We started doing a group called the Timeless Allstars, which was put together by Cedar [Walton] and Harold, Curtis Fuller, Billy, Buster, traveling all over Europe.

Brown: Do you remember what year you hooked up with Fantasy Studios and started recording there? It seems like you had a major output with your association there.

Hutcherson: Fantasy was . . .

Brown: It was Landmark. They bought Milestones.

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Hutcherson: They bought . . .

Brown: They bought the Riverside and the Milestones, and they bought . . .

Rosemary Hutcherson: Bobby recorded for Landmark maybe once?

Bobby Hutcherson: Yeah, because *Solo / Quartet* was originally John Koenig, which was – what label was that? I can't think.

Brown: We can pick it up tomorrow. We're going to have to cut it short. But I know you started doing a lot of sideman work with Fantasy, work with McCoy and . . .

Hutcherson: Oh yeah.

Brown: We can pick that up. I think we're going to probably have to cut it off. What do we got, about another 10, 15 seconds on this tape?

Kimery: We have a few minutes.

Brown: Oh we do? Okay. So, how did that relationship start?

Hutcherson: McCoy?

Brown: Yes, McCoy.

Hutcherson: I had seen McCoy before I went to New York. I saw him playing with John. I used to go see John quite a lot. When I started going to see John, I was too young to be able to go to the club. So I would put on these disguises, draw a mustache, and put on a hat with a trench coat and some dark glasses and walk in. I used to go in the clubs. I'd get there – like, if he was going to start at 9, I'd get there at 6. John would be in the back, practicing. I just – whoa, wow.

McCoy would be there. McCoy would come in, Steve Davis. They'd be playing. I used to go and sit there and watch McCoy. They'd be so immersed in the music, it was hard for them to realize that I was there. But I kept – I was always – I remember one time I was – I walked in, and there was only about 10 or 13 people. John was on his knees playing, crying. McCoy would be playing. They were really immersed. Elvin would be looking like he was crazy. He'd be playing, and John would just be crying like a baby. People – everybody'd just be sitting there. After it was over, you couldn't clap. It would have been wrong to clap. All you – the only thing people would do was – they helped – McCoy and Elvin helped John back up to his feet and took him back to the back room. The people

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who were there, they just came around and hugged each other and said wasn't it a wonderful thing to have witnessed this?

I started getting close with McCoy, because he had come in town with – doing stuff with the Jazztet, before he went with John. Then all of a sudden McCoy started recording a lot with Blue Note, and all of a sudden he was playing like Wynton Kelly. I said, wow. Because of the jobs that he was getting offered, Wynton Kelly's thing – just the thought of Wynton Kelly would fit, and McCoy could do that. But it wasn't his idea. It wasn't his recordings. It was on other people's recordings, and he started playing like Wynton Kelly. Then when he started doing his own thing, then he started playing as his – doing his own thing. It took me a long time before I realized that he was really left handed.

Brown: We need to stop? Okay. We're going to have to stop, because the tape's running out.

Today is December 9th, 2010. This is day two of the Smithsonian NEA Jazz Master Oral History interview with Bobby Hutcherson conducted by Anthony Brown in Bobby's home in the wonderful beach city of Montero, California.

Good afternoon, Bobby. How you feeling today?

Hutcherson: I'm doing very well. At least the rain has stopped. The fog has come in. But it's another beautiful day.

Brown: Yes it is, yes it is, even with the fog.

Hutcherson: Yeah. We're lucky to have another day.

Brown: Yes, yes. Yesterday you regaled us with your wonderful accounts and stories. We want to continue with your chronology of your career in music and your life. I wanted to be able to just a few minutes maybe to go back and fill in some of the – some things in the chronology that we didn't have a chance to touch on yesterday. We'll just go back to your beginning, when you first started out on vibes, looking at some of your early influences. Of course Bags [Milt Jackson] is the one who really instigated your instrument, or you had piano lessons – ill-fated piano lessons with your aunt. Were there other folks? I think of Lionel Hampton being such a strong presence in Los Angeles and wondering if that might have impacted on you? And any other vibraphonist that may . . .

Hutcherson: I'll tell you, one thing was, when I was going to junior high school, Red Norvo used to come and do assemblies at your school. He played with those big slat mallets. I always thought it was enjoyable to watch Red Norvo, because of the fun that he was having as he was playing. It didn't make me want to go that direction in life. But I

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remember I always looked forward when they would say, okay, Red Norvo is going to come and do an assembly at our school. He did – I remember he must have done around four or five shows at George Washington Junior High School. He was – I always remembered, he had this thing of playing and looking out at the audience as he was playing, not really looking down at the note.

Later on, as they used to show those little shorts of Lionel Hampton, still I wasn't pushed into the direction of wanting to play the instrument or get into music as I saw Lionel Hampton, but I did notice that Lionel Hampton never looked down at the notes. He just looked up at the camera, and he was playing like this. All of a sudden – something's different about these guys, because their peripheral vision – how do they see all these notes and what note to hit? Because just that slight thing, that's a miss. You could miss that note. Red Norvo could do it. Lionel Hampton could really do it. Lionel Hampton would laugh as he was doing it. He'd look at the camera and laugh, and he'd be playing. You'd say, wow, look at that.

I remember seeing Lionel Hampton one time. It was an NFL game, and it was halftime. It was about 1957, somewhere in there. They had the halftime entertainment. They wheeled a drumset out to the 50-yard line. Lionel Hampton walked out. Everybody's milling around. They'd gone out to get beer or whatever, hot dogs and stuff. All of a sudden, Lionel starts – he hits – he's got one big drum out there. He hits the drum. He hits it, does a little roll and stuff, and he throws one stick up. The camera's right out there, and he's ha ha ha ha ha. The stick goes up. He doesn't look up. The stick starts to come back down. He catches it with one hand, and he hits it, pow! A few people caught it. He said, "Look, he didn't even look up and catch the stick," and as soon as he caught it, he threw the other stick up a little bit higher. Now he's got this steady drum roll going on. I ain't never seen one person entertain a whole . . .

Brown: Stadium.

Hutcherson: Halftime – a whole stadium at halftime. All of a sudden, this one stick – the next one goes a little higher, and he's looking at the camera, laughing. Now, all of a sudden, the amount of people watching what he's doing, "Wow, look what he's doing," because he's not watching. All of a sudden the last stick goes up higher than the stadium, and now he's doing a roll with one hand. He's playing this one roll, brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr. The stick is up here, just twirling in the air, and he's going brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr, and he's looking at the camera, laughing. It goes up. It goes up above, and everybody's said, "Whoaaaaaa." Then it goes up, and it starts to come back. Brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr. He never looked. He just grabbed it as hit came, and he said pow. He hit this thing, and the crowd went crazy. Then he finished off the roll [Hutcherson imitates the drumming], finished it off. Everybody said that's the baddest shit I've ever seen in my life. One man – a one-man show came out. Usually you have to have a band come out and entertain during the

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halftime. He came out by himself and never even looked at what he was doing. I said, aw, man. But he would do that with vibes.

As I did start to play, we got be very good friends. He would always come to where I played, and he would always say – he'd sit right in front, and he'd say, "I want to play." I'd say, "Oh, yeah, Lionel Hampton, everybody." He'd come, and he wouldn't – he'd get up on the bandstand, and he wouldn't stop playing. The guys in the band, it would be like, they'd been playing up there two hours, and they wanted to take a break. Hamp would always say, "One more? One more?" I'd say, "Hamp, the guys want to take a break." He said, "Just one more now. Just one more."

We did a show one time., Betty Carter, tribute to Lionel Hampton, syndicated. It was shown across the country. 7 or 8 vibraphones across the stage. Betty Carter, because she had sang with Lionel. She was going to deliver this award to him. Lionel's sitting in the box seat up here. "And the award goes to Lionel Hampton." The audience is out there, "Applause." The light's going on, "Applause, Applause." This is Hamp in his later life. Hamp disappears behind the curtain. Five minutes goes by. The guy says, "Where's Hamp?" They say, "He's coming." Hamp was – he was so old, he was taking those little bitty steps, because he wasn't young like he was. When you get older, you're taking tiny little bitty steps. So Hamp's taking these – so they said, "Turn the applause sign off. Everybody just calm down for a second." "Hamp, where you at?" "I'm coming. I'm coming." Finally he gets down to the main floor. I'm standing there. "Okay, he's on the stage. Turn the 'Applause' sign back on." Betty Carter gets the award. Everybody starts clapping. Hamp starts walking across the stage. Betty says, "Hamp, here's your award." Hamp walked right past her, walked straight over to me. He says, "Bobby, give me the mallets." I say, "You got 'em." Hamp takes – took the mallets, said [Hutcherson sings a boogie-woogie line]. Crowd went crazy. Beautiful man.

Brown: I saw him play up – his 90th birthday. He came up up here to celebrate his 90 birthday, still playing. Amazing, absolutely amazing.

Hutcherson: When I first started playing with Herbie Lewis, Herbie says, "There's a vibe player and a drummer playing a dance at the YWCA. Let's go down and hear them" – in Pasadena. We walked in, and there was Billy Higgins and Dave Pike. Billy Higgins, same big glow around him, big smile, playing. Dave Pike was having a great time playing. We introduced ourselves, and we all became friends. We started going over to this nightclub in Los Angeles – of course we were too young, but we put on disguises to go in – called the Hillcrest. Billy would be playing, Elmo Hope. Dave Pike used to play there. Paul Bley, Scotty LaFaro, Ornette.

Brown: At the Hillcrest.

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Hutcherson: At the Hillcrest. The first time I saw Ornette, he had long hair and was playing like Bird. He told everybody, when he developed his style, he was going to cut his hair. All of a sudden, a little time shorter, he cut his hair, and he was playing completely different. Don Cherry was there. Walter Benton used to be there all the time. Harold Land. The Hillcrest. That was the place to be. You'd walk in there, and boy, the music just never stopped. Elmo Hope was something. A lot of people never really got a chance to hear Elmo. That was like Monk.

That's the first time I heard Charles Brackeen, I heard anybody play like Trane. Charles Brackeen used to be able to play – it was Trane. Daniel Jackson. Awful lot of great musicians, just to be there.

Brown: Red Callendar or Buddy Collette?

Hutcherson: Buddy Collette, because Buddy Collette used to play a lot with Harold Land. Unbelievable gentleman. I always thought jazz was – at that time, you had to have this little attitude, a little edge on all the time. Buddy Collette was the epitome of a gentleman. “Oh yes, yes son.” Always a big smile, always accommodating. “Very nice to meet you.” I said, man, this cat's . . .

Red Callendar, he was that handsome guy with this flaming red hair. My sister had a big crush on him. She used to sing with his trio, with – oh, what's his name? Piano. His son plays piano. I can't think of all these names right now. Yeah, Red, Bill Douglass, these guys. My mom and dad loved Red Callendar. Red used to – because Red had this deep voice that sounded like a disc jockey, kind of like that Herb Jeffries type thing we were talking about. He had the booming voice. Red Callendar and his wife used to come over for dinner all the time. They were – my sister had a crush on Red Callendar, Nancy did. She did. She used to sing these really beautiful songs. When I heard her sing – what was that? – *Out of this World*, that's not an easy song. *I Concentrate on You*. As I was coming up, they were into singing melodies that were – because – I hate to say it, but a lot of kids that are singing now only sing three-note melodies. They only go as far as a fifth. These people, when I grew up, they were changing keys. They were singing – because – part of the pressure was being put on by Sarah Vaughan, because Sarah Vaughan had a range of four octaves. Her range was bigger than my instrument. She had a range of four octaves, and she could pop a note right on it. Everybody was – she was getting her direction from Billy Eckstine, who everybody was, wow. You got to be able to sing more than a fifth. You got to be able to sing four octaves and pop that note. Hit it. Don't slide into it. Hit it.

There was so many really great musicians around in those days that were all – we used to have – we played these gigs in Los Angeles, and then we'd have after hours. After hours we go from – we played from 8 to 12, have a break. After hours, we go from 2 to 6. We go to the after hours jam session, 2 to 6. Everybody go for breakfast, and then we'd play

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that morning from 7:30 to 10:30. Got to bed, go to sleep, and get back up and do it again. That was the school. That was the music school. That was the Los Angeles school of music.

Barbecue joints. You'd go to a barbecue joint. Ornette would be in there playing. Eric would be in there playing. Joe Gordon be in there playing. Teddy Edwards, Red Callendar, Gerald Wiggins, great musicians. People don't even – Sonny Clark. They were all writing music. There was so much going on. It was like – you would walk in one place, and it would be another world going on. You'd walk over here. Everything was a different world with something going on. Everybody was talking music. Everybody was – let's go here, let's go there.

Brown: When I look at your discography, I see the name Curtis Amy. Most people don't know who Curtis was. Could you talk about him?

Hutcherson: Great, Curtis Amy was great. Curtis Amy played tenor saxophone. Most of his songs – he wrote a lot of songs, funky type songs that were a lot of fun. *One More Ham Hog Please*.

Brown: That's definitely soulful.

Hutcherson: I was working with Curtis Amy, Carmell Jones, Frank Butler – ooo, Frank Butler – at the Renaissance, opposite Lenny Bruce. We're playing. It's the end – kind of the end of the night. Nobody's in there. All of a sudden Marilyn Monroe walks in with her entourage, and we're playing *One More Ham Hog Please*. Curtis, he just loved to play, and Frank's playing. Frank is one of these persons, he didn't miss the scene. Anything happened, he checked it out right away. Curtis too. Eyes would be – first he sees these two blondes walk in, and then the one right behind. All of a sudden, Frank Butler says, "That's Marilyn Monroe." The band says [Hutcherson sings four notes], and the band stopped. Marilyn Monroe turned around with a big smile. She says, "Oh, don't stop. Please keep playing." Um-um. We all ran over to the table and had to go over and say hello. The music stopped. We ran right. Oh man, Marilyn Monroe. "Please go back up and play." So we all go back. Curtis had a – always played with a hat on, because he had a bald head with an indentation in it. He was a lot of fun to play with. And Frank Butler – Frank Butler was the only drummer who could come to a rehearsal or come to a gig without a set of drums, put a telephone book in front of the chair, play with his fingers on a telephone book, and make you think he had a full set of drums. He could take and roll his fingers on this telephone book, a press roll, with more force than Art Blakey.

Brown: On the telephone book.

Hutcherson: On the telephone book.

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Hutcherson: Oh, very separate, very separate, because even at that time there was separate unions. Everybody – there was the white union and there was the black union. You couldn't play at this area if you didn't belong to that union. You had to be white to play there, or blah blah blah.

Brown: I understand Buddy had a big impact on the – combining those.

Hutcherson: Yeah. It took a while before they combined and made Local 47. It was different. It was the same thing with Rosemary's Uncle Ernie. Uncle Ernie was playing with Benny Goodman. They wanted him to go – come and play with Duke [Ellington], but in order for him to play with Duke, he had to leave the white union and join the black union. He felt he was going to lose all his gigs, and so he couldn't do it, because it was – in those days, it was always a black union and a white union.

Brown: Her uncle, Uncle Ernie Figueroa is . . .

Hutcherson: Ernie Figueroa, Fig. One time Rosemary was – we were with Dex, right when we were doing *Round Midnight*, and Rosemary kept talking about her uncle to Dexter. Dex says, "You keep talking about your uncle. What's his name?" She says, "He played trumpet, and his name's Ernie Figueroa." "Ernie Figueroa! That's my hero." Ernie Figueroa, he had a – he was big. He – his – he was the epitome of Louis Armstrong's style on the West Coast. A lot of bands wanted him, a lot of bands.

Like we were showing you too, her aunt, Aunt Toni, played with the San Francisco Symphony, violin.

Brown: What happened to Curtis Amy?

Hutcherson: Curtis passed away maybe four or five years ago. Just almost made it into that Fathead [David Newman] style, almost, because that's where he was coming from. He almost got into that Fathead. He could do it, but he just – it was just a hard thing to cross over and get into. He would have done good if he could have got to the East Coast and started playing the chitlin' circuit, because that chitlin' circuit made a lot of tenor players, especially with an organ. You come through, a tenor player with an organ, boy, them chitlin' circuit, you got . . .

Brown: If we could just, for the last time, go back and talk about your early days playing – picking up the vibraphone. You mentioned how you were called to do a gig to replace a pianist . . .

Hutcherson: Gene Keys.

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Brown: Gene Keys, and they were requesting to be able to comp. Had you seen anybody play with multiple mallets previously?

Hutcherson: No. I hadn't seen, and I didn't know how to hold them in my hands. So I just developed my own style. It's not the same way that all the other vibists play.

Brown: Gary Burton?

Hutcherson: Gary Burton. They have the mallet way over here, and I do it just like that. So I was just – I just put them in my hands, and I said, okay, bam. There it is. Then, at the same time, we were talking last night. I was trying to figure out, how am I going to get the sound of this chord and make it sound big with only four mallets. That's when I started listening to Horace Silver. I started listening to Horace Silver, and I noticed, Horace Silver's got the third and the dominant seventh in his left hand, and he plays all the colors with his right hand. Ah, here we go. Here's the secret. Well. Okay, so I realized that if you put the third and the seventh in the left hand, now you can put fourths and major thirds and different things in this hand, and when you hit, now can play the colors. Don't play the bottom of the chord. The bass is going to play that. I said, oh, look what I found. Here's another way – here's how you do it. Here's how it's – don't play the bottom of the chord. Don't play it. Third and seventh.

All of a sudden I started realizing – I should have talked to Dave Pike about this. I don't know if he did, but we only touched on a few little scales and stuff as I was coming up – that the overtone series – which we were talking about – the overtone series, the first overtone that is created as you hit a note is the major third. The second overtone, when you strike a note, is the dominant seventh. So that's why the seventh chord is your most important chord. I said, wow, look at that. If you go an augmented fourth away, the same two notes – the same – they just alternate. It's the same. The third, it now becomes the seventh, and the seventh now becomes the third. That's why that's the first substitute. Oh, look at that. Look at that. A substitute. That's how you can find a substitute chord. It's got the same notes, only they're switched around. I said, how about that one? That's pretty good. Yeah. How about that?

Brown: So your music theory came from – that's like on-the-job training.

Hutcherson: Yeah, right. See, at the same time, you're on-the-job training, plus talking to people as you go into those jam sessions, and watching how – you listen to a lot of voicings. There's a lot of voicings that Sonny Clark was playing and Gerald Wiggins and these guys. What is that? What have you got there in your hand? Why is sound causing? Oh look. There's just that third, and there's that seventh. Look at that. Here's all this other stuff over here. All of a sudden I said wow.

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Then all of a sudden I said – I used to try to play exactly like John Coltrane, after I learned that I couldn’t play like Milt Jackson. I tried Milt Jackson for a while, but that just – I just couldn’t. After a while I realized. I said, that’s Milt’s cookies. What are you doing trying to mess with Milt Jackson? Milt Jackson had – plus Milt Jackson was so fluid. I just – leave that alone. That belongs to him. How can you do that?

So then I started listening a lot to John Coltrane, because it was so big at the time. I used to go and hear. But you know who really started me developing a style? Remember I told you when me and Herbie, after we lost the talent contest, we used to go over to this guy’s house, Terry Trotter. Terry Trotter, who married Jill Goodwin, who later – later, Jill married Phil Woods. Her brother, Bill Goodwin, the drummer, whose father was Bill Goodwin, who did the Maxwell House Coffee on the Burns and Allen Show. Did you know that? Famous announcer. He used to come on the show all the time.

My sister. That’s Peggy. That’s her, recording at Columbia Records with Gerald Wilson. She’s – that microphone right there? She’s singing *Out of this World* with a 17-piece orchestra.

unidentified voice: If you take it back to this marking, you can see what he’s talking about, how Hampton’s looking forward.

Hutcherson: Thanks, brother.

Brown: You said also that your sister sang with Duke Ellington.

Hutcherson: Yeah.

Brown: Was that out here? Or did she tour?

Hutcherson: My sister was something. She had this thing going where she was into magic and stuff. I went over to her house one time, and she says – I said, “What are you doing?” She said, “I’m making a – I getting ready to do something special.” She says, “I’m making something called instant success.” I said, “Instant success. Really?” She says, yeah. She got through. She says, “Now watch.” About two hours went by. Then the phone rang, and Duke Ellington was on the phone from Las Vegas. He says, “Please come down and sing with the band.” I said, “Oh my gosh.” She says, “See, look: instant success. I got a gig with Duke.”

Brown: Bobby, you – when you came to New York and you hooked up with Jackie Mac and a lot of the folks who would go on to be major movers and shakers in avant garde jazz or free jazz, there were many people here in the Bay – excuse me, in the Los Angeles

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area who are also looked at as pioneers in new music as well. You already mentioned Ornette, but there were others who were associated or – Eric Dolphy, Prince Lasha, Sonny Simmons, and we just lost Bishop Norman Williams yesterday.

Hutcherson: Yeah, but I didn't know those people until I came back from New York.

Brown: How about Bobby Bradford, who worked with Ornette, or John Carter? Did you know them?

Hutcherson: Still no, not really. I didn't know those people until I got back. When I went to New York, it was – I was more into mainstream and Broadway show tunes and into that style. It wasn't until I got to New York and I got with Jackie and Grachan that all of a sudden – and Tony – that I saw all of a sudden these new possibilities of things happening. With Tony, all of a sudden I saw that things could be played backwards. With Eric now coming in on the scene – because Eric used to come to the Coronet, and Eric saw me playing with Jackie. I used to go over to Eric's loft. Eric had scales that ran for more than an octave. One scale ran for two octaves, and in the second octave was a complete new set of notes. So here was all these possibilities that regular people who were playing bebop weren't doing. This was some new stuff. This was – the combinations now were starting to go.

Joe Chambers used to tell me – he says, "If you want to do something different, you got to come up with a different combination. Flour, cinnamon, sugar, and apples is always going to make an apple pie. No matter how you put it, it's going to be apple pie. You want something different? You have to come up with a different combination. Something new? A different combination." So all of a sudden we started looking into longer scales, different situations, different rhythms, different instrumentations. Joe said to me, "As long as Horace Silver has a tenor saxophone and a trumpet, it's going to sound like Horace Silver." He says, "As much as we love him, that instrumentation is going to be that. If you want to do something different, you got to change something. Something has to change." So we started looking at different ways to change things. Not only that. The music – the attitude, as we were playing, to create avenues, to be able to go down – go through another door.

It was important not to just stretch out and go crazy, because a lot of people were – and I was part of it, of just going crazy. You walk out, and you start playing and just go crazy. Sound. But to be able to move things around and cause different things to happen was very important. Today, with the fog, there's a scale there. There's a scale outside right now that causes this look to go on, and if we want to write a song that's going to make us feel that fog, then we have to understand what that scale is. It's not just the [Hutcherson sings an ascending major scale]. There is – it's another scale. The scale that was out there yesterday, from the rain, there was – there's another scale that if you're in tune to that

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scale, then as soon as you start playing on that scale and start doing things on that scale, when you listen to it, you're going to hear the rain. You're going to feel the rain.

Brown: We're going to take a break. I don't know how much more you want to expand and expound on that.

[The recording resumes in mid-sentence.]

Hutcherson: . . . because we were all from here. Come on, Bill.

Brown: You mentioned Herbie all this time. I had a chance to work with Herbie. You came up with Herbie. But we haven't really talked about how you met Herbie, and give Herbie his due, because he's gone.

Hutcherson: Okay.

Brown: Herbie – I love Herbie. Herbie was a little out.

Hutcherson: Herbie was great.

Brown: Are we back on? Okay, we're back on.

From day 1 in your association with music, your dealing with music, you've talked about Herbie Lewis, bassist; composer, I presume? Could you tell us a little bit more about him, how you met? Give us a little bit more about Herbie Lewis.

Hutcherson: Herbie – I've known Herbie since I was – I don't know – four years old, five years old. One of my first recollections was on Easter Sunday in church in which we all had these little poems to read in Sunday School. Herbie was standing in back of me. I was up to the front. The Sunday School teacher says – she says, "Bobby, you're next" to read your poem. So I walked up to the microphone, or pedestal, whatever, to talk. I'm getting ready to read my little poem. All of a sudden, somebody comes and pushes me out the way. "Excuse me, Bobby. I got to read my poem. I'm nervous." I said, "Herbie, what are you doing? You'll get your chance." "Excuse me, Bobby. I got to read." And Herbie read his poem. I – what's with this? What's with you?

We became friends, because we were always in church. We used to go to – we used to sit back in this area in church called the devil's corner and take money out the collection basket to go to the movies.

Brown: Your partner in crime.

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Hutcherson: Yeah. They'd pass the collection basket, and if you tapped the bottom and hold your hand in front, all the change would jump up, and you could grab all the change. The reverend would always say, "I know what you children are doing back there. You all taking money out the collection basket, because you all – we been seeing you. We heard you going to the movies. Hutcherson, Lewis, come on. Put the money back."

A few years later, my older brother Teddy married Herbie's aunt, Doris. Me and Herbie called each other cousins at the wedding. We thought that was something, me and Herbie. At the wedding, Herbie's mom Lulu, we went over to Herbie's house, and Herbie says, "Mom, who's the oldest? I'm older than Bobby, right?" She says, "No, Herbie, Bobby's older than you." "What?" "Yeah, he's" – we were both Aquarians, but I was two or three weeks older than Herbie. Herbie was just upset – very upset about that, very upset.

Then the group – I started playing in his trio. Herbie used to – Herbie's father was very strict, and Herbie used to always want to come down to my house and play music before he did his chores. His father would come down and just pull up in his car and grab Herbie by the ear, yell and cuss at Herbie, take him back up to his house, make him cut the lawn and take out the trash. Herbie would be all embarrassed. Next day, Herbie would be down at my house, knocking on the door. "Come on. Let's play some more." He was always like that.

One time, after we worked at Pandora's box, out there where all the kids from school used to come, Herbie says to me – after the gig's over, he says, "Bobby, let's stay out all night." I said, "Herbie, we're supposed to go home. Your father's going to be mad." I said, "My parents are going" – he said, "No." He said, "Let's go to" – I forget the name of this hotel. "Let's go to" this hotel "and walk around in the hallways all night." I said okay.

So we drove. We went to this hotel. In this hotel was all the musicians who were always staying. They – at this hotel, Paul Chambers used to always stay. We would walk down the hallway and stand in front of the door. "That's Paul Chambers's room." We stayed out all night. Early in the morning, we finally went home. I took Herbie home. Boy, his father gave him a whopping that was unbelievable. He came over to my house later. "Come on. Let's play. My dad whopped me."

I got to tell you a story. Doug Watkins said to me – he says to me, "You ever noticed the bass that Paul plays? It's got an angel up on the scroll." I said, yeah. He says, "Let me tell you about that." He says, "One day in Detroit, me and Paul" – who was – they were cousins. He says, they were walking down the street, and they see this bass in a car. They decide to break into the car and steal the bass. So, they steal the bass. They decide – both of them start playing the bass, and they said, whoever has a gig, that they play the bass and blah blah blah.

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Well, the bass turns out to be owned by the first bassist in the Detroit Symphony. He puts out flyers. All of a sudden he gets this call, “There’s this kid at this nightclub playing a bass with an angel on the scroll.” He said, “Oh, that’s my bass.” So he goes down to this club, and he walks in. There’s Paul Chambers playing this bass. He says – he stands by the bar. Paul’s playing it. Intermission. Paul comes to the bar. Paul orders a drink, and he stands right next to this guy. The first bassist says to Paul – he says, “That’s my bass.” Paul said, “Huh?” He said, “You stole that bass out of a” such-and-such car on such-and-such street on such-and-such day. Paul says, oooo. He says, “And I’m the first bassist with the Detroit Symphony.” He says, “But I’ve never heard that bass sound so good. It’s yours.” All those pictures, where you see Paul playing with Miles, Barry Harris, everybody that he was playing with in Detroit, that’s the bass. Every now and then, you would see Doug Watkins playing it, the bass with the angel on the scroll. Doug Watkins told me that story. That’s a – bass players love that story. They love that story, because that bass was so famous. That bass had such a beautiful sound. All those records you heard Paul playing, *If I was a Bell*, that’s Paul. That’s that bass. That’s the first bass with the Detroit Symphony.

Herbie – then all our instruments got burned up, like I was saying. Herbie started working with Les McCann. Herbie almost went to New York with Ornette Coleman. He almost went, because he was so tight with Billy. Billy was going to go. And we used to go over to Don Cherry’s house all the time. Then . . .

Brown: Charlie Haden.

Hutcherson: Charlie Haden came in there. Herbie almost – Herbie was almost the bassist that was going to go with Ornette. But Herbie, he was working so much with Les McCann, it was hard to give up that gig. Les McCann was working ten nights a week. He was working, boy. You couldn’t get in that club.

Brown: You said you were going over to Don Cherry’s house a lot.

Hutcherson: Oh, a lot.

Brown: What was going on over at Don Cherry’s house? Was it jam sessions, or just hanging?

Hutcherson: Yeah, a lot of playing, Don always showing – Don was always talking about intervals. Don was always saying, don’t mess with the tonic. Play with the fourth first, as though it’s the tonic. Start to play inside the chord. Play with the supertonic of the chord. Start to play the intervals of the supertonic. Play in the intervals of the major second. It was hard to understand these thoughts, but all of a sudden you could hear he

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was doing things. He would play these intervals, and you'd say yeah. Then Ornette would say, "It's all about the next note." "The next note, huh." "Yeah, the interval to the next note." You said, oh wow. We were trying to put this – we're trying – I'm just trying to learn to play a major scale. A major scale was kicking my butt. But those thoughts of playing inside the scale – because I almost heard people say, Trane's playing so much inside the chord. I said, what do you mean, he's playing inside the chord? They said, there's – within each scale, major, minor, this type scale, this type scale, there's all these series of chords that go within it. You have things where you have – you have the anything scale, the anything chord, that goes on anything. I said, what are you talking about? What does this mean? To try to figure those things out and have somebody not only talk about it, but demonstrate it and then use it in the music – and then do it in the music and make it sound as though it's very simple, that was the thing. He'd say, here it is right here. Listen how simple this is. Make it sound like it's very easy, like it's just – it's there. You say, okay. What are you saying? He says, listen to Dizzy play sometimes. You see how Dizzy can play really a bebop-type way, but sometimes all of a sudden he'll stop and he'll do this certain thing that really just goes out to the – it just puts you out on a – hangs you out on another tangent. It's – listen to what's going on there. It's this thing. It's this moment of magic that belongs to him that he starts playing in here, and all of a sudden, he's gone. Diz would – Diz could do it. He could do it so great. Trumpet players got to really listen to Dizzy Gillespie. He could really perform that – he could open up all of a sudden. All of a sudden he'd just play this one note, and it would go against all these other things.

It became a lot of different to be able to – understanding of playing and being able to play out, but not just go crazy, but to take development and thoughts and make it magical, and all of this would make it very simple. With that thought, then all of a sudden you understand: the rules of life are very simple. It's just not easy. But it's unbelievably simple. Doing that, you understand that the equation goes on forever.

Herbie and I, we started doing – I had him come and be on my *Stick Up* album. He and Joe Chambers used to always argue all the time, because they used to talk about where the beat should be. They used to talk about that. They used to talk about on top, in the middle, and behind. Remember I talked about the Paul Laurence Dunbar situation where every tune should be – a tune should be like a rubber band. It's taut. It's like that, and it's like that. It's got a – all of a sudden it goes to where there's a big loop hanging there. There is no tempo. There is just meaning to a phrase. It's just another thought that has to be explained a certain way, delivered a certain way.

We did *Stick Up*. We did one of Ornette's tunes on there. Joe Henderson was on it. Joe is great. Joe is great. Billy – Billy was one of the secrets. One of the secrets of listening, as you listen to Billy Higgins as he's playing, is his ruffs. Billy has this thing. You don't hear too many drummers play ruffs. Billy will play ruff ruff ruff, ruff ruff ruff, ruff ruff

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ruff. “What the heck are you doing, Billy?” Plays ruff ruff ruff. That’s of the secrets of how that *Sidewinder* – Lee Morgan *Sidewinder* – worked so good, because Billy could play those ruffs. Ruff ruff ruff. I said, “Man, what are you doing, starting a car or something? What the hell?” He would do it, and he’d just smile as he’d do it. It was so – it was because it was him. It would make that happen. It would kick it along. Ruff ruff ruff, and then it would smooth out and out. Ruff ruff ruff. But it was a way of kicking it along.

Brown: That sounds like a title that you used for one of your albums, *The Kicker*.

Hutcherson: We did that album. We did – Herbie was on that *Solo/Quartet* album. That was a different album, the *Solo/Quartet* with McCoy.

Brown: Later on, when you were leading the quintet with Harold Land, you had a variety of pianists in that group: Chick Corea, Stanley Cowell, Joe Sample. Talk a little bit about any of those gentlemen?

Hutcherson: Joe Sample was first, I think. We did a few things with Joe. He was – the Crusaders were starting to get really big in L.A. But Joe had – we always enjoyed playing with Joe. Joe was a lot of fun.

But the group was starting to develop a different way of playing, longer melodies and stuff. Stanley – Chick came in right before he went with Miles, I think. It started to be this long-type groove. That was interesting, because the things started getting longer and getting punched. Melodies got longer. Things got longer. It was important to play in tune.

A lot of things started happening with Stanley Cowell. Stanley wrote a lot. We started doing a lot of things. Stanley was a virtuoso – is a virtuoso. We could try a lot of different things. We could try a lot of different time signatures. Not that Chick couldn’t do it. Chick was ready to move on and go with Miles, because he got the offer. But Stanley, he was a virtuoso, and he could really do a lot of stuff. So we could always come in and saying and say, hey we’re doing this. We could do something very simple.

I remember when he got married, he wrote all the music for his wedding. We recorded all the music for his wedding. He married this girl named Effi, a beautiful girl. We played this wedding. A few years later, we heard that they got divorced. So all of a sudden, a few years later, I’m watching t.v. and they’re talking about the mayor in Washington, D.C., Marion Berry, getting this sting operation on him. He’s been brought – he’s going in – he’s been arrested, and his wife, Effi – I said, Effi? That couldn’t – oh, Effi. That’s Effi. Stanley Cowell’s wife. I said, wow. She was so normal and everything. “I’m going to stand by my man.” But as soon as they got through it, she divorced him and got the heck on out of there. But yeah, Stanley wrote this music for their wedding.

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Then, George Cables. George Cables, we started doing a lot of stuff with George, because George was writing so much. I started doing all this stuff with George. We were just the same – we were like brothers. We were like – that’s how we are. George calls me now. He’ll call me. He’ll call me from Europe someplace. “How you doing?” He asks me, how’s my breathing and stuff. His girlfriend’s just passed away from pancreatic cancer. He’s going through rough times right now. He’s had a liver kidney transplant. He’s suffered. He’s my buddy. But boy, an awful lot of music that we did. Back when I was with Blue Note, we started doing that. That *View from the Inside*, that’s George on there, for that *Houston St. Thursday Afternoon*. All those type things were done with Manny Boyd and later on with George doing the *Highway One* album, with the camels at the red light.

Brown: Waiting.

Hutcherson: Waiting. That’s George on there. Cedar Walton did all the arrangements.

Brown: You seem to have very special relationships with pianists and also great affinities with drummers. I’m looking at your discography, and I see that you recorded with Roy Haynes back in 1977.

Hutcherson: Yeah.

Brown: And Stanley had a close association with Roy Haynes in the Hip Ensemble.

Hutcherson: I didn’t really get to know Roy Haynes that well, as far as doing a lot of stuff. The first time I met Roy was when I was living with Billy Mitchell out in Long Island in New York. Roy Haynes came by to visit Billy Mitchell. Billy said, “This is Roy Haynes.” I said whoa, wow, but I didn’t really get to meet Roy that much or play with him. I did a record with him with Jackie, but not much that – not like how things really were. Even the thing with Tony – after Tony went with Miles, we strayed away from each other. We’d see each other, and we’d talk. Tony lived around – he lived – right where you’re staying? He lived a few blocks away from there.

Brown: Really? Because I knew he had a place in San Anselmo. I didn’t know he was living down in Pacifica.

Hutcherson: Yeah, he moved down here. I used to see Tony at the bank. Tony – I’d be standing in line at the bank, and Tony would come up and hit my leg and make my legs bend, pow. Hey. Tony was something. His mom – he had a beautiful mother. His mother looked like his sister. She looked so young. She stayed here when Tony died. She stayed here at our house. Tony wasn’t supposed to die. They – wrong diagnosis at the hospital.

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Brown: He had originally gone in for a gall bladder operation?

Hutcherson: Yeah, it was – they completely missed the diagnosis. Tony should still be with us.

Brown: Do you know anything more about that? What . . . ?

Hutcherson: Yeah, they just did the wrong thing, and then everybody passed the buck at the hospital, Seton Hospital, right over here. They just passed the buck on it. Yeah, Tony should still be with us. He told his wife – he says – after they have the operation, he says, “I still feel something’s wrong.” They completely missed everything. Sometimes some of these doctors, they’re like McDonald’s or something. They just – “Okay. Who’s next?” You know what I mean? “Okay. How much time do I have to perform this operation.”

Brown: The families, did they – any kind of lawsuit or any malpractice?

Hutcherson: No. Not that I know of. They know how to pass the buck.

Brown: When I think of your relationship with Tony, starting back in ’63 on Jackie Mac recordings, then that takes us all the way up to ’86, when you were both in *Round Midnight*. You have a starring role in *Round Midnight*. He’s in the band. We’ll talk a little bit about that.

Hutcherson: That was – the *Round Midnight* movie, that was when they – when Bertrand Tavernier wanted to get Dexter to do this part, Dexter wanted me to be in it. That’s when I changed my name from – they wanted me to be called Red. I changed my name from Red to Ace. That was because of Ace Hutcherson, which you saw on the picture. The band that was really there for most of time while I was there filming was Herbie, Billy Higgins, and – oh, the bass player from France. Sorry. Anyway, and Billy. Billy and I would go to dinner every evening. Then, when the part of the movie where Dexter came back to New York City, was working at Birdland, that’s when Tony came into the movie and Wayne [Shorter] came into the movie, which was a shorter stint for them. The longer – the bulk of the time that was spent of doing the music and stuff was with Billy. Billy was there, Billy and Herbie and – oh, what is his name? The bass player.

Brown: Michelot? Not him? Michelot?

Hutcherson: Yeah. Pierre, yeah.

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Brown: Pierre Michelot. How did that come about? We know the movie. It's an amazing movie. You have your starring role in your bathrobe. You seem to be more in your bathrobe than anything, serving food.

Hutcherson: I was supposed – they told me, okay, we want you to cook this food in your apartment and wear this bathrobe. I had a friend. His name was Sam Hill. He was the head psychiatrist at San Quentin. Sam used to come out to all of the nightclubs. He used to bring a pot of food. He would bring jambalaya, all this stuff. That's what was supposed to be in the movie, cooking. So I told Sam – I said, "Give me some of your recipes." I said, "I'm going to cook this on the set." So while they would be doing certain films – because they erected – inside this building, they erected this hotel and the nightclub in France. They would be in the other part of the building, maybe doing – Dexter would be doing the scene down there, while I'd be in my apartment – actually, apartment in the building, cooking. When we would take a break, I would feed everybody. Everybody would say, hey, man, this is good. They'd say, hey, you want some of these – that's why – in the scene where I say, "You want some of these rice and beans?" and all this, because I was actually cooking it. It wasn't – that wasn't some stuff that came from the store. It was – dirty dishes in the commode.

Brown: The bidet.

Hutcherson: Yeah, right, yeah. After it was over, I told Sam – I said "Your recipes really came through," I said, "because we were eating everything that you suggested."

The way – when Dexter suggested to Bertrand Tavernier that I do the role – what's the producer's name, honey, that did *Rocky*? and – he did all the *Rocky* movies. I can't remember his name right now. Anyway, because I had done *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, he was the producer on that, and when they said, okay, we'll do . . .

Rosemary Hutcherson: Sidney Pollack?

Bobby Hutcherson: No, not Sidney Pollack. But they suggested I – I think Sidney might have suggested it was okay, that I would be good in the movie, because Sidney was a director. Anyway, they asked that I go ahead, from doing *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*

But that wasn't the first movie I made. The first movie I made was *The Notorious Landlady* with Jack Lemmon and Kim Novak. I was working with Nina Simone in this nightclub. I'm playing – it was just a short scene. I'm playing with Nina Simone and stuff, and Jack Lemmon and Kim Novak – ooo, Kim Novak is so – gosh. That was a beautiful lady there. She used to be what's-his-name's old lady – the drummer with the Modern Jazz Quartet, Connie Kay. That was Connie's old lady. Yeah, Kim Novak.

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Connie said, “We’re going to give a party. Talk to my old lady over there.” We said, “Kim Novak? Yeah, right. Wow, man, that’s your old lady?” Yeah, Kim Novak.

So we’re doing this scene in this Paris nightclub, and everybody had to wear socks, because they were talking, so you wouldn’t hear their feet on the floor. We had to wear socks.

Brown: What year was that movie?

Hutcherson: Oh gosh. I hadn’t gone to New York yet. I would say it was 1958, *The Notorious Landlady* with Jack Lemmon and Kim Novak.

Brown: I’ll check Netflix. See if I can get it.

Hutcherson: Yeah. That was the first one.

Brown: That doesn’t show up anywhere in your biography.

Hutcherson: Yeah. I know.

Brown: How did you get into that one? Just from your association

Hutcherson: Gee, I’m trying to remember. It could have been Harold Land or Ray Brown. But they suggested, we need a vibe player to play with Nina Simone, and they suggested that it be me.

Brown: How was Nina? We know she came be temperamental, but she’s an amazing artist.

Hutcherson: She’s [Henderson makes a swatting sound]. “What are we going to play?” “Read the magazine.” “What magazine?” “What are we going to play?” “I don’t know. Read the magazine.” “What key?” “Read the magazine.” [Hutcherson makes another swatting sound.] “Okay.” “Just be ready.” “Can I sing?” “Okay. Okay. Nina, hit it.” I say – there I am at that PCC school again, and all them notes have been – all that stuff has been scratched off. I say, I got a whole bunch of notes. Which one do I? – I remember going, ah, no, ah, no, oh, oh, ah. How’s that?

Brown: We mentioned your relationship with bass players and piano players and drummers. How about your relationship with singers, with vocalists, now you’ve mentioned Nina? How about Carmen McRae?

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Hutcherson: Carmen was the ultimate singer. I loved Carmen because she was a wonderful pianist. Carmen could play the hell out of the piano. She'd say, "Hey, excuse me, here, check this out," not only say what it has to be, but demonstrate it. There it is. Carmen McRae. You know what I liked about Carmen McRae? She could – she didn't have to yell a melody out. She could sit there and have idle dinner conversation volume and make you – completely turn you around. It's just like a guy doing a film. He says, it's easy to do a scene where everybody's going crazy and yelling and stuff, but the hardest thing is to film two people sitting at a table with a candlelight having idle dinner conversation. Carmen McRae could do that when she sang. She could sit there and just sing this melody at just this relaxed thing and make you really understand the trip of what she's taking you on. She didn't have to scream anything out. She didn't have to whisper anything out. She just – it's just like turning the faucet on, and bam, here it is.

A lot of people got to understand that singing ain't about that every note you got to scream the melody out. We got this, and we got that. Hello, hello. Can you do that? I want to sing. Because when – if the sun don't – every day is not like that. Every day is not a storm. Every day – we don't have lightning every single day. Some days we got days like this, and that's a beautiful day. Can you make that day end?

I was working with Dizzy Gillespie. We were playing the Montreux Jazz Festival. Rosemary's with me. We're getting ready to go to the venue. Just before we go out the door, a piece of paper slips underneath the door. Says, "I would like to record this. Please sign, right away," signed – what's the guy over there that runs the Montreux Jazz Festival?

Brown: Claude Nobs?

Hutcherson: Claude Nobs. Signed, Claude Nobs. I said, Rosemary, look at this. All this time we've been getting ready to come over here, all of a sudden, here a recording contract comes up under the door as we're getting ready to go to the gig. Forget about looking it over. Wait a minute. So I didn't sign it.

So we go on to the gig. We're out there playing. Cedar's on the gig. Phil Woods is on the gig. Diz. Phil's going to do a ballad. Diz says, "Let's all walk off stage while Phil plays this ballad." We walk off. We go behind the curtain. Carmen's sitting there in a chair, because she's going to go on after we come off. "Hi Carmen." "Hey, Bobby. How you doing? Hi Diz. Hey, everybody." Claude Nobs says to me – he says, "Bobby." I said, "Yes." He says, "I see you didn't sign the contract for recording." I said, "No, I didn't." He says, "I just should have got somebody else." I said, "Fuck you. I'll kick your ass." At which, when I said that, Carmen says, "Hit him, Bobby. Hit him, Bobby," which revved me up all the more, because Carmen is, "Get him. Get him. Hit him." Diz is standing there like, oh shit. The security guy's standing there. I said, "You better grab him. I'm

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about to deck him.” He says, “I can’t grab him. He runs the show. He owns the festival.” I said, “I don’t care. Get him” – “Hit him, Bobby.” Diz pulls me back out. We finish the show. Carmen comes on. She comes past us as we’re going. She says, “Oh, you were so close to hitting him. I almost had you hitting him. I almost had you hitting him.” I died. I said, “Carmen, you something.”

I saw Claude Nobs. He says – our parting remarks. He says, “You’ll never play this festival again.” I said, “And you’ll never put a recording contract up underneath my door again either.” I’ve never played the festival since then, and I’ve never seen a recording contract from him up underneath my door.

Brown: The jazz business. I’d be remiss if I didn’t ask – and you can choose which episode you’d like to recollect for us. Of course, Bags loomed so large for anybody who plays this instrument, the vibraphone. Can you recall your first meeting with him, or the first time . . . ?

Hutcherson: With who?

Brown: Bags. Bags, first meeting, or the first time he heard you play, or just how you guys came to know each other?

Hutcherson: I used to always hear – the MJQ used to come on t.v. on this show that Gene Norman, a guy that used to have jazz shows in Los Angeles called Stars of Jazz. Milt used to come on with the MJQ. I – when it came – it was prom night. I didn’t go to the prom. I went to hear the MJQ. I drove past the place where the prom was, and I went straight over to Hollywood and went and heard the MJQ, went and heard Milt.

Billy Mitchell and Milt were good friends. I’m living with Billy out in Long Island. Billy and Milt used to talk on the phone all the time. Milt had a pool table at his house, and Billy was an unbelievable – Billy was unbelievable on the pool table. Milt, so-so. So Milt calls Billy, tells him, “Come over, shoot a game of pool and I’ll make you lunch,” because Milt loved to cook. I say, okay, we’ll just have time to get over and see Billy and Milt shoot a game of pool, and I’ve always heard about Milt’s cooking, especially his making sweets like sweet potato pies and stuff like that.

We came over. Billy beat the shit out of Milt on the table, and then we all sat down to this beautiful lunch that Milt made, topped off with sweet potato pie at the end. I remember, I just – I was just in awe. I didn’t – couldn’t say too much. It was – and Milt was very hard to get to know. He was very standoffish.

I start coming through town, through – in Michigan, where Milt’s family was. He used to come down – they used to come down to see Billy, because we all knew Billy, and I’m

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playing the vibes. So I met his brother and everybody. Word gets around. I'm this young kid in town. Milt's – and I had gotten to this thing where everybody – all the musicians who I met, I would hug. Milt couldn't take it. I'd see Milt, and Milt was – I'd say, "Hi, Milt." Milt would say, "Hey," and I'd run up, and I'd hug him. Milt would be just like this. I'd say, "Oh yeah, Milt. Yeah, Milt. I love you, Milt. Oh, Milt. I just love you." [Hutcherson mumbles] "Let go of me." Finally, he couldn't take it any more. He got used to it.

One time, we're doing a Joe Segal thing in one of those Norway ships, the cruise. It was – me and Milt were on the same boat, Hank Jones. I forget who. Grady Tate, I think, was playing drums. We're supposed to play up in the bow of the boat together. It was this unbelievable storm, but the room was packed to see me and Milt come up there and play. The boat's rockin' and rollin'. Milt calls me up on the phone. He says, "Hey Hutch." I say, "Yeah Milt." He says, "Come up to my room and get your soul together." I said, "Okay. I'll be right up. I'm coming. I'm coming, Milt." "You come right up here right now and get your soul together with me." I say, okay. We went up there. We got our souls together. He said, "Okay. It's time for us to go down and play." I say, "Okay. I'm ready."

So we go down. They forgot to nail the vibes down, because vibes have wheels on, so that they wouldn't roll. So here's two vibes, and everybody sitting there. Milt looks over to me. He says, "Hey Hutch." I say yeah. He says, "What you want to play?" I say, "Hey, Milt. Let's play *Just Friends*." He says, "Good one. That's a good one." We started. Hank says, "Let me do an intro." Said, okay. Hank starts to play this intro, and right as he starts to do this intro, the boat hit this wave, and it did like this, and both vibraphones rolled over to – away from us. We both were standing. We were saying – and everybody was sitting there started dying laughing. I looked at him like this, and Milt says – he said, "Hey Hutch. Don't panic. They're going to come back this way." I said, "Yeah, right, because the wave" – he said, "Don't mind it. Just stand right there." I said okay. So all of a sudden, it goes like this, and then all of a sudden, it comes back. All of a sudden, it came straight back. Milt yells. He says, "Get ready. Get ready." He said, "Now we missed a few notes in the tune, but get ready." Just as it did, it hit a quick wave, and they speeded up. They both came right past us, we both swung at the same time, boom, and both of us missed. Milt yelled out, "Strike one," and the crowd went crazy. Hank Jones was up there. Hank was on the floor. I said, "Oh Lord." He said, "Hey Hutch. Stand there. Here they come back again." I said, "Oh Lord." The vibes came back, and he said, "Get ready, Hutch." I say, "We can hit some part of this melody. Here they come." And they're both of them rolling right together. Rrrrrrrrrrrrr. He said, "Get ready." He said, "Okay, here they come." I said – he said, "Get it Hutch." I say, "Ahhhhhhhhhh." He says, "Strike two." Oh, the crowd was – man, the cameras were going crazy. We was on the floor. That was the funniest – me and Milt, we laughed so hard about that. He said, "That

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could only” – he said – after that, he took – I could hug him, from then on. I could take and just hug him.

Brown: Man, what a story. I don’t know how you can follow that story. But you are . . .

Hutcherson: I got one. I got one too. I got to tell you this.

Brown: Okay.

Hutcherson: Tete Montoliu, Tete, Tete Montoliu. Tete was blind. He had to have someone take him around. We did a lot of traveling over in Europe and the United States, but a lot of traveling especially in Spain.

Brown: Where he’s from, originally.

Hutcherson: Yeah. Tete was Catalan.

Brown: Like Pablo Casals.

Hutcherson: Yeah. He was Catalan. Tete – we had this tour set up. So I fly over to – I fly to Spain. Tete – and Todd Barkin goes with us. I get there, and Tete has this guy who is going to take him around. Tete will hold his arm. I could see this guy is an alcoholic. His name is Carlos. Tete says, “Bobby, I want you to meet Carlos. He’s going to take me around.” I say, “Oh, Carlos, it’s very nice to meet you.” Carlos put out his hand, and I looked, and Carlos was jaundiced. It was, oh my God, his fingernails are completely yellow. I said, “It’s very nice to meet you.” I said, “Tete.” Tete says, “Yes, Bobby?” I said, “Carlos is jaundiced.” He says, “What is jaundice?” I said, “He’s yellow.” I said, “He’s going to die.” Tete says, “No shit, man. He’s yellow?” I said, “Yes, he’s jaundiced.” He says, whoa.

Now, Carlos would collect all of Tete’s money at the end of the gig. Got to watch this Carlos. We’re traveling. We come into this town. We had been on the road for two weeks, one nighters. Carlos had a big wad of money of Tete’s. We come into this town called Lecce – Lecce, Italy – on a train. Carlos is inebriated. He’s – he was ripe. He stunk. Tete was practically leading him around. When we came into town, they – the mayor of Lecce was going to give Tete the key to the city. We pulled into the train station, and there were the balloons, the marching bands, the banners, the girl with the baton, the band playing with the trombones, the walkway up the stairs to the mayor standing there with a high hat and this beautiful gold key. Tete said to me, “Bobby” – he says, “I’m so proud. They’re going to give me the key to the city here in Lecce.” I said, “Oh, Tete, that’s wonderful. Let’s get off the train and enjoy the festivities.” So he said,

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“Carlos, come on and help me.” Carlos, arrrrrrrrrrr. He – “Oh shit, man. Bobby, I’ll . . .”
“Carlos, grab my hand. Just show me which way to go.”

They go out the door. I’m behind them. Todd Barkin’s behind me. We walk out. The band goes crazy. The confetti throws. The band is really hittin’ it now. [Hutcherson sings a march.] “Ladies and gentlemen, Tete Montoliu.” The crowd’s going crazy. Horns are honking. Man, it’s just – he says, “Tete, come up these stairs and stand at the podium and receive the key to the city.” I said, “Tete, I know you’re proud about this one.” Tete, he just did the great [?]. “Oh, Bobby, I’m so proud. I’m so proud.” Tete gets to the top of the stairs. Carlos is standing there holding onto his hand. The mayor looks at Carlos. He said oh my God. Anyway, he says, “Tete.” So Tete pulls his hand away from Carlos. Carlos is standing there. I’m right in back. The mayor gives a signal. “Stop the music. Everybody stop.” He says, “Tete Montoliu.” Tete says, “Yeah?” He says, “I’d like to present to you the key” – “Arrrrrrrrrr.” I said, “Shit, what was that? Carlos, was that you?” The mayor says, “Tete Montoliu.” Tete says, “Yes?” He says, “I want to present to you the key to the” – “Arrrrrrrrrr.” Tete said, “What was that?” I said, “It was Carlos.” He says, “The key to the” – boom. Carlos hits the floor, a little blood trickling out his mouth. I jumped on top of him. I’m beating his heart like mad. I’m yelling, “Don’t you die now. Not now. Not now.” The mayor’s standing there like – I’m beating, I’m beating, I’m beating. Tete says, “Bobby, what’s going on?” I said, “Carlos is dying.” He says, “Oh shit, man. Are you kidding me?” I said no. Bam, bam bam. He’s gone. I got up. I said, “Tete, he died.” He says, “You’re shitting me.” I said, “No, he’s right by your left foot. He’s dead.” The mayor says, “Don’t worry.” He says, “I’ll take care of this.” He says, “I know you’re very concerned, your friend here.” He says, “Get the ambulance. We’ll take him to the morgue.” Tete says, “Oh shit, man. You’re taking him to the morgue.” He says yes. He says, “Bobby, come here.” I said, “Yeah?” He says, “Oh shit.” I said, “Yeah, Carlos is dead. I know. It’s very sad.” He says, “No, man. Forget that. He’s got my money.”

I told Todd. I said, “Todd, ride in the ambulance.” I said, “We’re going to go with the mayor’s car.” I said, “Mayor, do you have a phone in your car?” He said yeah. I said, “Write the number on the card for me.” I said, “Todd, you got a phone in the ambulance.” I said, “Get in the ambulance and go through Carlos’s pockets, get Tete’s money, and call me on this number.” So now we’re driving to the hotel. Me and Tete are in the back, and the mayor’s in the front. Tete’s going, “Oh no, oh shit,” and the mayor’s going, “I know, I know. Don’t worry. I’ll have everything – I’m taking care of everything.” He says, “I don’t care about that. It’s my money. All I want is my money.”

All of a sudden the phone rings. The mayor says, “Oh, Bobby, it’s for you. It’s your friend.” So Todd says, “I got the money.” I said, “Oh good. Okay. Thanks a lot, Todd. I’ll see you at the hotel.” Boom. So I tell Tete. I said, “Tete, Todd’s got your money.” “Oh great, man, oh great.” The mayor says – the mayor’s like, why is this cat all excited now? His friend just died. “Oh shit. This is great news.” I said, “Tete” – the mayor’s driving.

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He said, “Don’t worry. I’ll take care of everything. We’ll embalm the body and we’ll send it back to” – Tete, “I don’t want the body. I just want my money.”

We’re almost to the hotel, and here comes that final thing. The mayor says, “I don’t know if this is the wrong time to bring this up, but are you still going to play the concert tonight?” Tete says, “Oh, shit yeah, man. We’ll play the shit out of this concert for you. This’ll be the best concert you ever heard, man.”

There’s a story my wife wanted me to tell you, that has to do with family. I told you that from my mother’s side we’re related to the Crouches. My mother’s father, Howard Fulk, he had moved to Las Vegas. I didn’t know much about this, because – anyway, we get a telephone call, or a letter, from a lady that’s writing a thesis about black history in the Las Vegas area. She writing about a guy named Howard Fulk, and am I related? Yes, as the telephone call comes in.

She’s gone into history, and she’s found out that Howard Fulk moved just outside of Las Vegas and started a gold mine. It was – what do they do when – homestead? what do they call that? homestead? when you just – if you lived there for so long there, it’s yours? There was a little area where the black people came in, and if you homestead there, you could have that lot or whatever. He found – evidently, he sat on a little piece became – to mine it.

So she says, “There’s a gold mine on your grandfather’s property.” I said, “No shit. No shit. Really? There’s a gold mine on my grandfather’s . . .” I said, “Gee whiz. Is it still producing? What’s going on?” She says, “We don’t really know. After a while, the people moved out – moved away from the little area where they were trying to homestead and build a city, just a few miles outside of Las Vegas. But the mine’s still there.” For a second, I told Rosemary, hey, let’s get in the car, get a pick and a shovel, and get down to Las Vegas and see what’s going on. Gee whiz. Do the stories ever stop?

We got that. Then we got a letter. We had a friend of ours punch it up on the computer. She says, “Yeah, here it is, right here.” She said, “His name is Howard Fulk, right?” I said, “Yeah, that’s my grandpa.” “Yeah, here it is, gold mine.” “Gold mine.” I told the kids that. They said [Hutcherson rubs his hands together]. Yeah, the kids said oh boy.

Brown: Bobby, I have to say as a San Francisco native and having lived here and returned home after 30 years, when I got back here to play this music, you always seemed – you always loomed large on the horizon for all the jazz musicians. You were the leading, the elder statesman of our community. You were the one we looked up to. I remember coming to see you every Monday night at the Keystone Korner when you had your quartet there with James Leary, George Cables, and Eddie Marshall. I just want to talk about two associations that you had, that you have had here in the Bay Area, one

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with Orrin Keepnews and Landmark Records, and secondly your association most recently with the S.F. Jazz Collective.

Hutcherson: Orrin – he’s a landmark himself. He’s done so much. An unbelievable book of knowledge. He did so many important things for Monk. He could write a story on how the development of Monk’s music within that time that he was working with him, how it all got stronger and stronger, and how he became this statesman for jazz throughout the world.

Orrin is known for his gift of gab. It’s hard to get him to stop talking, once he’s – just like me.

Brown: We’re interviewing him tomorrow.

Hutcherson: He’s just like me, but even more. I have the gift of gab, but Orrin just will not stop. He’s got this low voice, “Hey, Bobby.” He’s a very important person to the music. He finds a lot of new people. His ear is always looking for something new. I know he’s going to be elected into the NEA this year, or – I’m not sure. He hates when I say he’s not a good driver. He can’t drive his car. He hates that so much.

Rosemary Hutcherson: You better not say that.

Bobby Hutcherson: Oh, he doesn’t like it when I say – oh Lord. He gets so mad.

Brown: You mean driving his Mercedes?

Hutcherson: Oh, my gosh. He puts the pedal to the metal as soon as he turns the key. Rods and pistons and everything’s flying out the car. “Orrin, Jesus.” “I’m warming it up.” He’s – he never forgets a little – favors. He never forgets. He’s the kind of person that if you do him a favor – if he does you a favor, you do him a favor, he’s very – he never forgets those things.

You know what I like about Orrin? He’s always there. No matter where I play, if he’s around, he will show, no matter what his physical condition is. If he can get through the door – and he’s going to sit right up in front. He’ll get there early enough to get a good seat. He’s always there. He doesn’t want to miss the show. So-and-so’s going to play, he doesn’t want to miss it.

Brown: As a producer for your recordings on Landmark Records, how was he – what would you say were the things that distinguished him from other producers working on recording projects?

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Hutcherson: I used to get in the car, drive over to his house . . .

Brown: Over on Parker street in San Francisco?

Hutcherson: Um-hmm. That's when Lucy was alive. I'd go over. Lucy would make some little sandwiches, and Orrin and I would sit there and talk about the project, what we're going to do, put it together, get the people together, get times together, songs together. Come back a few days later. Work on it some more. Have it all ready, and go into rehearsals. We knew how much time even each tune was going to be, who was going to do the recording, who was going to do the editing, who was – how long each tune was going to be, how much time was going to be – recording time was going to be.

We did that, because we did this recording one time over at Rudy Van Gelder's, and Rudy and Orrin got into an argument. As we started the recording, the first take, Rudy says, "This is take one." So Keep says, "Let's do one more take of that tune." Rudy says, "This is 2RXZ blue Sky horizon infinity." Gee whiz, man. What happened to just take two? Orrin's sitting there. Orrin's – it kept going on like that. They got into an argument. Orrin says – Rudy says, "You want me to edit this recording, right?" Rudy said that, and Orrin says, "No. I'm going to take the tape with me." So Rudy says, "Oh, okay. Take it." Orrin took the tape and got over to another recording studio and could not find the track, because of all those numbers that Rudy had said. The tape was blank, he thought. It took him forever to find the combination, the secret, to find out where that track was. So, because of that, Orrin said, from now on we're going to have so-and-so do this, we'll have so-and-so do this, have everything worked, because – and we'll never record with Rudy Van Gelder's again. I said, I never – that was the way that Rudy had, so that, you came over to his place to record, then he could do the whole mixing and everything, not only recording. He could mix it. He could edit it. Because he only – he was the only person who knew how to find that track on that tape. That tape was like this, but that track on there is miniscule. Orrin said, "Do you believe this, man?" We finally found that track.

The Collective – what's his name? Randall [Kline]. Randall came and asked me to be in the Collective. I told him – I said I'm getting older now. It sounds like a young man's – something for a young musician. He says, "We would like to have you, because we need established people, and you've got that going." So I said, "Okay. Maybe for a year." I said, "I only want to do it if everybody in the band is nice." As I got older, I realized that in order to do things, it was really nice to be calm and relaxed when you're working on musical situations than to be fighting over everything, because it destroys the spirit of the music. It's like somebody cooking some food and arguing as they're cooking the food, and when you eat that food, even though it's got everything in it, there's something wrong with the food, because they've been – it's been prepared with anger. Food that's prepared with love, it don't have to have all that stuff in it. Rosemary made me a

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hamburger the other night. I said, boy, that's the best I ever – it just had that thing. There it is, right there. I said, "I want everybody – no arguing, because it's detrimental to the spirit."

I thought it was going to be just a year. All of a sudden it became this family, and I became the elder statesman of the family. I wound up – instead of being with them for just a year, I wound up being with them for four years. The band changed a little bit every now and then. The drummers changed. It was a good experience for me. My health started deteriorating a little bit. My coughing started getting worse. I knew it wasn't going to be as easy as it was when I first – I noticed I started catching pneumonia every year. That was really rough on me.

Then the traveling was for younger people. After a while, I told Rosemary – I said, "I think I'm getting a little too old. I'm in my golden years on this one." She says, "What are you saying?" I said, "I love to get up, do things around the house, practice, and sit by the fireplace." She says, "What about music?" I said, "I don't listen to the music much." She says, "What do you mean?" I said, "Eric Dolphy says, 'Music is like the wind: once you've played it, it's gone. Who knows where it came from, and who knows where it went?'" So, because of that, you can't sit around and hold onto it, because it doesn't belong to you. So don't sit around and listen to it. It's not yours. It's just a thought and a memory that it happened. You can go back and visit every now and then, and don't just remember the notes, but you remember the experience. I wrote this song, and I thought about – it made me think about this, or this made me think this. Nothing belongs to you, not even your own life. Only you can try to just give it guidance, give music guidance, and try to be a good example to people around you, to your children, to your community around you. Therefore, true love asks for nothing in return, only the thrill of giving it. The love that says, I'll say I love you if you say you love me, that's 50%, that's dangerous. The one that says, I'll love you no matter what; no matter what you do, I'll always love you, that's the best one of all. Can't say, what is that – what do you mean by that?

Everybody asks, what's the blues about? You say, blues? I say, blues? I say, remember when you was a teenager and there was a girl that you wanted to take out, and she just would not give you the time of day? You just followed her around like [Hutcherson makes the sound of a dog panting]. "Baby let me take you out" [more panting]. Finally she just got tired, and she said, okay, you can take me out. Come pick me up, so-and-so time. Took her out, and she treated you like the worst, like ahhhhh, I want. And you were [panting]. You took her home. She wouldn't give you a kiss. She slammed the door and didn't even look back when she went through it. But you'd do anything again just to be with this – you'd do anything in the world just to have her one more night. I said, that's what the blues is about.

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A lot of people say, “Is it this scale? I’m trying to play the blues, and I want to see – do I play a minor third right there, and a fourth? What scale do I play to play the blues?” I said, “Man, that ain’t got nothing to do with it. It’s got to do with, you’d do anything just to be with her one more time.” Just the thrill.

Dexter Gordon had throat cancer. He had a – what do you call it? Laryngectomy? Yeah, it was when they put a hole in your throat to try to get the cancer out. A very dangerous operation. That point where he had it, it was going to either cure him or kill him. I went over to talk to him. I said, “Dex, why you take such a dangerous step? Why’d you do that?” Dexter took his hand. Closed up the hole, so he could talk. “Hutch, I just had to play one more note. Just one more note, Hutch.” The thrill of it. Just the thrill of it makes people understand what it’s all about.

Brown: We are all involved in this music. It’s been – I would have to just echo what you said. It’s the thrill of . . .

Hutcherson: The thrill of one more. Rosemary’s saying to me, the thrill of . . .

Brown: Just one more – catching one more tune.

Hutcherson: She says, the thrill of Barack being our President, which we never thought was going to happen in our lifetime, which is what a wonderful thing. It puts everything into perspective, that everything is possible. It’s very simple. It’s just not easy.

Brown: Bobby, when I look past you, I look out into your yard, and I think about our dinner last night, where you talked about all the things that bring joy into your life, going fishing, working in your garden, chopping wood, and spending time with Rosemary here by the fire, it seems like you’ve had a good life.

Hutcherson: Oh yeah.

Brown: And you seem to enjoy it.

Hutcherson: I count my blessings. I’m very lucky. I’ve very lucky to be able to sit here with you guys right here, with Rosemary, with our family and our children, to be able to sit here in this house. Think of all – to be able to have the health to be able to talk about the things that we’ve been talking about, to be able to remember the stories.

Brown: Bobby, one thing about your contribution to this music: you brought a lot of joy to people. That’s what this music seems to do. We all – everyone in this room has traveled to many different continents. People are enjoying this music that’s known as jazz everywhere. You’ve given so much to making this music such a humanitarian force. Now

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the U.S. Government, the NEA, has wanted to return that favor in the form of recognition for you, designated in awarding you as a Jazz Master. What does that mean to you?

Hutcherson: I was glad it happened, and not – what’s the word? posthumous.

Brown: Posthumously. Yeah, right. You want to be there to get it.

Hutcherson: I thought that was great. That was great right there, because a lot of people get those thoughts from when it’s over. I’m a person who – I don’t relish in trophies and plaques, I guess, mainly because like the wind, it’s – if I get up on a bandstand, I could stand there and say, look what I’ve done. The audience would say, we don’t care. Play. We don’t care what you did. Play. That’s – or just be in front of us. Don’t even play that much. We just want to see you again.

Freddie Hubbard – you didn’t see Freddie for a while, and you would wonder how he was doing. All of a sudden Freddie showed up. They did a tribute to him at the Hollywood Bowl. They just want to see sometimes. They say, there you are.

There’s a lot of great people who they’re acknowledging. They’re really looking around and getting different people. I mean, Muhal [Richard Abrams] – it’s just – some of those – you got a wide range of people. So that’s good to see, the thoughts of – handing these thoughts to these people who – while they’re alive. A lot of us are passing away really quick now. We never know how much time we have, but it’s nice to have that – not so much the award, but the group of people. It’s a team, being on the team, where you can say – you can walk in, and everybody’s going to know you. You walk in. You say, “Hey, man. Hey, how you doing? Oh, man, it’s so good. You look so good.” That award is great. That’s great. “See you again. Stay healthy until we see you next time.” Those are nice – those are really great awards. “How’s the family? Remember the time when we – remember that?” It’s funny how people will say that. They’ll say – here’s an album that you did. “Remember that? Do you remember when you did that?” “Remember? I did it. What do you mean, do I remember it?” Compared to [?]. “Remember when I came in a club and I saw you play? Remember me?” “No.” I was focused on this.

The bandstand should become an altar, a place for prayer, a religious situation.

Brown: Isn’t that what Trane did?

Hutcherson: Yeah. That’s what you want. Why, actually, all of them did. It became a religious situation. When you get up on the altar, that’s where the – where you ask the spirit. It’s like Delano Dean, my friend Delano Dean. He had the club called Both/And, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, Both/And, the spirit. Devil can take your soul, but he can’t take your spirit. The spirit last forever. You can sell your soul to the Devil,

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but he can't mess with your spirit. Your spirit is eternal. Just to show that, as long as you can say someone's name, you can – that spirit comes out, and you remember what they were like. That's their spirit. The soul can – you say, okay, I'll give this up if I can get this, and that – the soul only lasts, but the spirit is eternal. So it's important to realize, as you're playing music, that you want people to remember your spirit, your love of life, your thoughtfulness, your peace of mind, where you stand, God, your family, and your children, your friends around you.

One more note: no matter what you do, I'll always love you. I stand behind you. I'm always there for you. Your spirit, the look in your eye, the understanding that as you walk down life's paths, you're on the edge. You can fall over on the side anytime. The roads are not safe.

Brown: Bobby Hutcherson, thank you so very much for spending this time with us, so that we could try to capture some of the humanity and the greatness and the love and the music and all that you've done to make America, to make our lives, to make this music, a force for good.

Hutcherson: We did pretty good, didn't we?

Rosemary Hutcherson: That's right.

Bobby Hutcherson: We did pretty good.

[transcribed and edited by Barry Kernfeld]

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