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**YUSEF LATEEF**  
**NEA Jazz Master (2010)**

**Interviewee:** Yusef Lateef (October 9, 1920 – December 23, 2013)  
**Interviewer:** Reuben Jackson  
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[Start of Tape 1]

**Jackson:** This is tape 1 of the interview with Yusef Lateef. This is Reuben Jackson, June 21, 2000, at the National Museum of American History. Uh, welcome, first of all. It's an honor to have you here.

**Lateef:** Thank you.

**Jackson:** Thank you. Uh, why don't we start with uh—what did Julie Andrews say in *The Sound of Music*? I shouldn't do this, should I?—the beginning, a very good place to start. Just some personal information: you're full name, date and place of birth?

**Lateef:** Well, my full name now is Yusef Abdul Lateef; however, I was born uh my name was William Emanuel Huddleston. I was born October 9, 1920 in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

**Jackson:** Okay, and uh how long did you uh, did you reside there?

**Lateef:** Until I was about three years old, and my parents moved to Lorain, Ohio, and uh at age five they moved to Detroit, Michigan, and that's where I began kindergarten.

**Jackson:** And uh what were your parents' names?

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**Lateef:** Uh...it seems that my father changed our last name again to Evans. So I finished uh grade school and high school as William Evans.

**Jackson:** Now, were you parents, was there music in your home?

**Lateef:** Well, there was the music of my mother, who played piano by ear, and my father had a beautiful tenor voice. And he would sing with his friends, like in the barber shop, quartet style. I remember that music in my home.

**Jackson:** Were they popular tunes of the day, or...?

**Lateef:** Yes, tunes of the day, like...*Down By The Old Mill Stream*, or...

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** ...*Ma, She's Making Eyes At Me*...

**Jackson:** Uh huh. Yeah.

**Lateef:** ...I remember my father used to sing that...*Memories of You*.

**Jackson:** And uh did your mother play primarily in the home, or...?

**Lateef:** Well, she played piano in the church, and for the choir. And she also sang in the choir from time to time.

**Jackson:** So, did you hear...you heard music at home and in the church?

**Lateef:** At home and in the church. Also, in the environment, the neighborhood. Um, for example, when I was twelve...uh downstairs under the place I lived there was a theater called the Arcade [pronounced: arcade-e] Theater, in Detroit, Michigan, and I would sit there in the front row. They had stage, what they called "stage shows," um...and there was a trumpet player named Buddy Bell, and a tenor saxophonist—both of whom have gone on—uh his name was Errol Farish [sp.]. And I was fascinated by the music that they played there at this stage show. They had dancers, comedians and the band. And I decided then that I would like to play the trumpet. And my dad he uh didn't approve of it, because he noticed that the trumpet player had a bump on his lip.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** So, I said, "Well, I'd like to have a saxophone." So, my dad said, "Well, if you get half of the money I'll give you the other half." Um, it took me six years to find an instrument I could afford, which was an alto saxophone for...\$80. I sold papers and I got 40, and my dad gave me the other 40. And when I was 18, I purchased this alto

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saxophone, and I started to study it in high school—Sydney D. Miller High School in Detroit, Michigan. The same school that Joe Lewis graduated from, prior to me entering, of course. And that’s how I began.

**Jackson:** Now, at that time in Detroit, we, we know Detroit is a real...just a city of riches, as far as musicians are concerned.

**Lateef:** Yeah.

**Jackson:** And you, you were there. People like Tommy Flanagan—we could just name tons of people—Paul Chambers, et cetera. Was, was that, was that quality, or that degree of musical quality, present in Detroit at the time you were, you had just gotten your saxophone?

**Lateef:** Yes, at that time, when I was 18, 19, there were people like um...Lamont Hamilton, who played tenor [saxophone], Moon Mullins [sp.]—both of which lived on the west side—um...Johnny Trafton. I don’t know if you’ve heard.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** Leroy Smith had an orchestra, he was a violinist. And there was this, the high school band at Sydney D. Miller was formed by Matthew Rucker, and uh I became a part of that band...along with um Frank Porter, who was an alto saxophonist, Alfonso Ford, tenor saxophonist. Willie Shorter was the pianist, who later worked for Motown. Um there was a tenor player, perhaps you haven’t heard of, his name was Lorenzo Lawson, and um he was quite proficient at that time, this is the late 40’s, early 40’s, early 40’s, yeah. Um he played so well that he was to take Lester Young’s place with Count Basie when Lester left, but unfortunately Lorenzo Lawson he died young, so that never happened. Um...another contribution to the ferment of music in Detroit was...there was a place called the Greystone uh...

**Jackson:** Ballroom, sure.

**Lateef:** ...Ballroom, where bands from out of town would appear every Monday. And we would hear people like Tiny Brech [sp.], or the tenor player his name was Count Hastings [laughing].

**Jackson:** [laughing]

**Lateef:** I wonder what happened to him. And there was the Jimmie Lunceford Orchestra, uh...Earl Hines Orchestra, Cab Calloway, uh this is where I saw Chu Berry, the tenor saxophonist...

**Jackson:** Oh yeah, Chu.

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**Lateef:** ...playing with Cab Calloway. Um...so every Monday we'd look forward to just standing in front of the bandstand. Uh...and...at the same time, within the city was people like Kenny Burrell—Billy Burrell was his brother, and he he taught Kenny how to play the guitar—and, low and behold, from Saginaw [Michigan] came Sonny Stitt. He would come down to Detroit frequently. Uh...he was a remarkable saxophonist. I often think of how to define him, but he was such a perfectionist, uh and he wasn't braggadocious about it. He just, he loved to play the saxophone. And I'll tell you more about him later, because we both migrated from Chicago.

**Jackson:** Okay.

**Lateef:** And um...that was the environment there in Detroit, this input of musicians from out of town: Coleman Hawkins and there was the Count Basie Orchestra, with Don Byas and Lester Young at the same time—of course, I was interested in the tenor players. And we would stand there all night and watch. We did very little dancing.

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** And um...this input from outside of Detroit, and inside and from Saginaw would come people like Thad Jones...

**Jackson:** Elvin Jones.

**Lateef:** ...Elvin Jones.

**Jackson:** Sure. Yeah.

**Lateef:** And they would...Frank Foster lived there for a while, he had a place. He worked at the Bluebird with Thad Jones. They had an interesting group. So, there was inspiration, motivation, helter-skelter in Detroit.

**Jackson:** Wonderful. Wonderful. So, in addition to you getting your grounding in high school, were you beginning to uh, to play with groups in and around the Detroit area?

**Lateef:** Yes, uh...after playing one year I was fortunate enough to get the job with Matthew Rucker's big band, it was called Matthew Rucker and the Thirteen Spirits of Swing. Um, I could read the music, and I didn't play a very good solo, but they kept me I think because I could read the music. Um... 'cause later on I found out that they were, they were thinking about getting Moon Mullins, or someone else, who played a better solo than I could at the time. But um they kept me, and I'm grateful for that, and I gradually learned more and more as time went on. Um...another fortunate thing happened for that band...uh in 1939. I had been playing with them for a year. Um...we uh left high school for a year and travelled throughout the South. We were fronted by a

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musician named Hardley [sp.] Toots, who was a...more or less famous, a bandleader in the South and Midwest, and we travelled all the way to Miami, Florida...uh for a whole year. And we played in New Orleans, we experienced seeing Canal St. in New Orleans, Rampart St., et cetera. And uh after that year we came back and we went back to school. It was a great experience. Um...I remember in Tampa, Florida we met a piano player, his name was, they called him “88 Keys.”

**Jackson:** [chuckling]

**Lateef:** [chuckling] And uh what was so fascinating was he could play like *Tea For Two* with the left hand, and *Honeysuckle Rose* with the right hand...

**Jackson:** My goodness.

**Lateef:** ...simultaneously. And uh we were flabbergasted.

**Jackson:** That’s incredible.

**Lateef:** And um we met a lot of road musicians during that year, and a lot of away-from-home experiences.

**Jackson:** When did you graduate from high school?

**Lateef:** Uh 1941.

**Jackson:** Now uh is it safe to assume that your parents were, were uh...behind your interest in music if they, if they let you take this uh this let’s call it “sabbatical,” for want of a better word?

**Lateef:** Yeah, you know, my father he uh was always in my corner. He told me, he said “You can go to school as long as you want, you like, intend to,” and uh he wasn’t against it. Um...and so after I finished high school...um I said to myself—well, my dad only finished eighth grade, so I thought that I had accomplished more than he had. And for nine years I just played music, until 1950. I didn’t go directly to college. But after going out on the road I found out many things—how important education was—and I came back in 1950 and I started taking classes at Wayne State [University]. And that went on uh for about 10 years. I guess I accumulated maybe 28 credits going part-time at night. So I had to work at Chrysler—I had two children—so I would take two or three credits a semester. And it wasn’t until 1965 that I entered the Manhattan School of Music in New York [City] full-time. Um...so I got my Bachelor’s in Music in...’69, my Master’s in Music Education in 1970. And I had had enough of studying music formally, so I enrolled in 1970 in The New School for Social Research in New York [City] studying philosophy. I studied the pragmatics—pragmatism, that is uh...existentialist. Um...and then in 1972 I was offered a doctoral program in education at the University of

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Massachusetts. So I enrolled in that, and uh in 1975 I got my Doctorate—Educational Doctorate. Uh but all this at the same time I studied music formally—um not formally, I mean on my own. I studied with a student of Karlheinz Stockhausen in Boston. And I would get scores of Ernst Krenek, et cetera, and study them on my own. Um so that's the gist of my formal education, but, of course, education goes on from the cradle to the grave.

**Jackson:** It's a, it's a broad, it's a broad umbrella. Certainly.

**Lateef:** Yeah, it never stops.

**Jackson:** Now, when you're uh—going back to, to Detroit here, are you primarily playing alto when you're enrolled at Wayne State? Had you started with tenor?

**Lateef:** Well, you know, I only played alto for one year...

**Jackson:** The year, that's right.

**Lateef:** ...The first year, and then I heard Lester Young. That's how I, I started on tenor in 1939.

**Jackson:** So many musicians uh...hearing Lester Young was such a water shed for so many people. Tell us what uh...what you fell in love with when you heard Lester Young.

**Lateef:** Um...I suppose I can say it was his ability to sound so poetic, uh...to express such warmth and depth of feeling, and that's what attracted me. And the interventions of non-saxophone sounds, perhaps, you could say, that he articulated with cross-fingerings, et cetera.

**Jackson:** No, I think that's, that's certainly true, and that's something that seemed to grow more sublime with him as he uh, as he progressed.

**Lateef:** Yeah, and his, the way he utilizes, utilized silence was, was unique. Uh...opposed...differ—a contrasting style would be Coleman Hawkins, who, he, who was a master, also.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** Of course. He uh, Coleman Hawkins would, would play mini-notes and, that were meaningful, but Lester Young would be play fewer notes, and there would be silence which would give you time to digest, I think I can say, what had gone before.

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

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**Lateef:** He was a master at that. He expressed that in *D.B. Blues*.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** [scatting the melody] You can hear the silence.

**Jackson:** He's like a painter, almost.

**Lateef:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

**Jackson:** Now, at this time, are you uh, had you started leading your own bands, or were you still in Detroit primarily working with, still with other groups?

**Lateef:** Uh I think in '50 when I returned to Detroit from being on the road with different bands I organized my own group. Well, at first, I played with Kenny Burrell in '50 when I returned...uh for a while, maybe a year-and-a-half. And it was Kenny Burrell who suggested that I play flute, and I took him up on it, and I started to study the flute in '51.

**Jackson:** Just to go back for a second, who were some of the groups that you were touring with before you returned to Detroit?

**Lateef:** Okay um the first group I left home with was The Trenier Brothers Band. Uh Lucky Thompson was in that band, and Sonny Stitt was in that band. Lucky Thompson recommended me, uh and I joined them in Chicago around 1944. And the band only—we worked at the Ritz Theatre in Chicago. And it's interesting, at that time, Sonny Stitt sounded in the vein of Carter...Benny Carter.

**Jackson:** Benny Carter

**Lateef:** Um...but that was before any of us had heard *Hootie Blues* with Jay McShann and Charlie Parker, and Sonny made about-face and he seemed like more influenced by Charlie Parker. Um anyway, that band only lasted a couple of weeks, and so I returned to Detroit. And then in about '46, Lucky Thompson recommended to the Lucky Millinder Band. So I joined them in New York in about '46. Um, at least I, he sent for me. I went to New York, I was supposed to take the tenor player's place who was supposed to go with Cab Calloway. Something happened, he didn't go with Cab Calloway [laughing], as it was. And uh so he paid me for two weeks, as the union says you should do, and I stayed in New York. I didn't want to return home. So during that period, I played with Hot Lips Page and Roy Eldridge uh...and I finally I left town with a territory band called Ernie Fields...

**Jackson:** Sure.

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**Lateef:** ...from Tulsa. Um I stayed with him about a year, maybe all of '46. And then in '47 I, I left Ernie and went to Chicago, and Sonny Stitt was there, and we had been friends in Detroit, you know. And uh...for about two years every day uh—of course, I had a wife and two children, but Sonny was living in Chicago—every day we'd get up in the morning and go practice at a saxophone player whose name was Howard Martin—who was a composer, saxophonist—myself, Sonny and a drummer called Buddy Butler. We'd practice every day, relentless. And Freddie Webster was there.

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** Um...I'll never forget, finally one day, Sonny said to me, he said, "Yusef, I can play now." And I didn't say anything, because he could, you know, it was so obvious. And it's the first time a musician had told me that. And it's interesting the kind of mindset musicians had during that period. Um it was kind of tacitly understood that you wouldn't talk a lot, but you would think a lot. You'd think about your craft, how you could improve it.

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** And Sonny was one of the individuals, and Dexter Gordon, Gene Ammon—Gene Ammons was there in Chicago. Um so relentlessly the musician every day, like a writer gets up and writes...

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** ...musicians, we would get up and study our instrument, our craft—music—how we could excel. That was the art of the day, and this went on for years. Uh finally, in '48 uh the Dizzy Gillespie band returned from Europe without James Moody, who had just had a, just hit *Moody's Mood For Love*.

**Jackson:** *Moody's Mood For Love*, sure.

**Lateef:** And Diz sent for me to join the band. I joined them in San Francisco, and I stayed with them for about two years, and I returned to Detroit in '50.

**Jackson:** So you um, going back to your, your education metaphor, it's clear that, as you stated earlier there's uh, education, let's call it a book with many chapters, and, and you mentioned earlier playing every day, comparing that to say an author. What kinds of things did uh...did you play? Were they popular tunes? Were they pieces you were, you were writing, or other, maybe all the above?

**Lateef:** You mean during that period?

**Jackson:** During that period, sure.

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**Lateef:** Well, every now and then we would write an original, but mainly I could say that most of us were addicted to playing standards during that time...and that's what we did. Of course, when Charlie Parker started writing songs uh like *Confirmation*, and Miles [Davis] wrote *Donna Lee*, we would learn those songs. And um, of course, *Donna Lee* caused us to become obsessed with agility and speed, and uh we would try to accomplish these things. Uh...I remember Freddie Webster and myself we, we learned *Moose the Mooche* off the record. Um...Charlie Parker's *Lady Be Good* that's still classic, was played at the Jazz Philharmonic, it was a classic solo. We all tried to emulate that. Um...it was later on when many of us realized that what, what these people were telling us, like Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, that, "Look, I can sound me and myself." So...of course, you know, it's not to that say that someone who emulates someone, if that's what they're happy doing and they do it...uh with perfection...uh they're not to be put down. This is my thinking. Uh it's just like Ray Charles who has the ability to sound like a country preacher...uh some other singers have been influenced to try to do that...

**Jackson:** Sure, mmhmm.

**Lateef:** ...and some do a good job. You take Lester Young, who influenced Paul Quinichette...

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** ...so much that they call...

**Jackson:** "The Vice Prez"

**Lateef:** ...Lester Young "Prez," [and Paul Quinichette] "Vice Prez." Right, and he...

**Jackson:** Right, exactly.

**Lateef:** ...I heard him, he was interviewed after Lester died, and he just idolized Prez. And if you would hear a record of Quinichette, it might take you...twenty seconds to know it wasn't Lester, you know. And if he was happy doing that, that's wonderful. However, as the other school of thought that...uh this is what I think they're telling us, that I can sound like me, and some people strive for that, and that's difficult. It takes time. Just like Miles said, once said, it took him twenty years to develop his sound, his own sound. Um so it takes time, and effort, studying, practice to sound like yourself in a convincing way, and an aesthetic way, you know, particularly when there are so many influences out there that influence you and things you like, and um you have to bypass that, though, and look for self, and that's a hard job.

**Jackson:** Sure. I want to go back to something...

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**Lateef:** Yeah.

**Jackson:** ...you mentioned earlier concerning uh the demeanor of musicians during this period.

**Lateef:** Oh yeah.

**Jackson:** Do you think that uh...looking again at the broader perspective, was this kind of part of the changing social firmament? Because you hear a lot about musicians say, as you mentioned, being more serious on the band stand as opposed to—and and I don't want, I'm not saying this to be disparaging, but—uh as opposed to a more overtly amiable person like, say Louis Armstrong.

**Lateef:** Mhmm.

**Jackson:** And and uh as you know there seem, there seems to have been just a more serious presentation of the music, people like Dexter Gordon, as you've mentioned. Do you, as I said, do you think that's part of uh something that was in the air in music, or, and beyond that, or, or uh...?

**Lateef:** Well, I don't know if I understand the question clearly

**Jackson:** Well, just a more serious attitude uh...maybe on the part of, of African-Americans, in general, you know, we're looking at the late '40s. I don't know, maybe, maybe that's, you don't think that's the case at all, but...

**Lateef:** Yeah, well, I think the predominate attitude was that of seriousness. Uh...like uh Ted Dunbar...the late...

**Jackson:** Guitarist.

**Lateef:** ...guitarist. He...he said that, "the bandstand is a serious place." Um, the late Eddie Harris said uh, "music is as serious as a heart attack." Um, and that's what I sensed being in the presence of people like um Sonny, the late Sonny Stitt, um...and Paul Chambers...Coleman Hawkins and Charlie Parker. It was, this is a serious affair uh...and that was the attitude that prevailed: of seriousness. No tomfoolery as this definition of, of the music as been given by Merriam-Webster CD-ROM. They define the music as tomfoolery, skullduggery—it's none of that. It's a serious event. And uh...when we'd, during that period when musicians would get on the bandstand, you could feel the seriousness, as though gladiators were—not to kill anyone—but the attitude was to be expressive...heartfelt, mind-embedded expressions. Uh that's what they meant by "telling a story."

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**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** Um...it's, it's as serious as um--there's a school of acting, for example. The school of drama was express by people like uh...um who was the gentleman with the bald head? He played Moses.

**Jackson:** Uh...Charlton Heston, I think, but he not--

**Lateef:** No.

**Jackson:** Oh, Yul Brynner.

**Lateef:** Yul Brynner, yeah.

**Jackson:** Okay. He was, he was Pharaoh actually. Yeah. Right.

**Lateef:** Yeah. Pharaoh, yeah. Uh...there's a school of acting. I can't think of it.

**Jackson:** Was it, was it Stanislavski, or was it the method acting? I know there were a couple of schools around that time.

**Lateef:** Yeah, the old lady who used to sit on the, the wagon in the [indecipherable] pictures.

**Jackson:** Oh, I know who you mean. I can't, I can't recall her name.

**Lateef:** Yeah. Anyway, they would use uh mental imagery.

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** Like, if they want to express sadness uh they would focus on a grandparent who had passed, at that moment and, of course, tears would roll down their cheeks. And, of course, those observing would feel the sadness. The music was as serious as that in many instances. Not only sadness: happiness...all the emotional, psychological states that man can experience were expressed in the music. Uh the musicians felt deeply, and thought intensely. It's not just playing what you feel. It's playing what you feel plus what you think. It's not a non-thinking occupation.

**Jackson:** I know that Duke Ellington would say there is--someone asked him about "serious music" and he said, there's no person serious than, more serious than a uh--and he, of course, as most of us disdain the "jazz" word--he said, "There's no more serious musician than someone who plays this music," and...

**Lateef:** Yes.

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**Jackson:** ...and I think, I think your comments bear that out. I want to go forward and get back to your work with Kenny Burrell, but before that if you could talk a bit more about uh the Dizzy Gillespie ensemble, because it...fortunately, I think people are beginning to uh to recognize the importance of, well, not just his career, but that, that band. But uh what was that like for you working there, and, and what can you tell us about the importance of that, that big band?

**Lateef:** Uh okay, um that was a learning experience for me. Uh for example...uh maybe the first two weeks I was in the band, we would play arrangements like *Swedish Suite*, *Jump Did-Le Ba*, and...I would, I would get to an end of a phrase in, in the saxophone section, and like the last note say is a whole note, I'd hold it four beats, and uh then there was a rest, but I noticed the saxophone players were still playing. So, I thought my part was wrong, and so I would over at the other, at the first alto saxophone, John Brown, and he would be look out from other his eyes [chuckling] at me, you know, and he didn't say anything. So, finally one night I found out what was happening with this, and what I did, I was was watching Dizzy Gillespie, who was in front of the band, and maybe with an elbow he would be moving it in an angle, from the side of his body to form a right angle, and so they would hold the note until his arm reached the right angle. It may go beyond the four beats, and then he might let the arm drop, and the note would fall [mimics the effect]. And so we were playing things like [mimics holding a note and letting it fall], you see. But that's not, you can't right that on a paper [laughing].

**Jackson:** Sure, it's fascinating [laughing].

**Lateef:** And so they had a new way, a style of interpreting music, presenting it. Sometimes I know it would go down, and then come up, and then down again, et cetera. You had new ways of punctuating notes. That's why it was such a dynamic band. It was these uh what you'd call "innovations" were, were rampant.

**Jackson:** Who were some of the other people in the, in the orchestra at that time?

**Lateef:** Oh there was uh Joe Gayles, the other tenor player, Ernie Henry...

**Jackson:** Mm, alto.

**Lateef:** ...the third alto player, John Brown, first [alto saxophone]. Um...uh there was [James] "Hen Gates" [Forman] on piano, Willie Kirk on trumpet. Um...Al McKibbon on bass, [Louis] "Sabu" Martinez, conga drum. Um...Lamar Brothers[?] on trumpet, uh J.J. Johnson on trombone, Sam Most, trombone.

**Jackson:** Wow.

**Comment [1]:**

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Clip 1)

Yusef on joining Dizzy Gillespie's seminal big band.

Tape 1, 33:09-35:26

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**Lateef:** Andy [Duryea]...I can't think of Andy's last name on trombone. It was a dynamic band, and, of course, the people who were writing for the band, John Lewis....um and other prominent writers.

**Jackson:** So, were some of the—you mentioned Sabu Martinez—were a lot of the Afro-Cuban pieces still being played by the orchestra at this time?

**Lateef:** Yeah, that was the time, yeah. Of course, [Luciano] “Chano” Pozo [Gonzales] had just departed.

**Jackson:** Passed by then, yeah.

**Lateef:** Passed, but they were still playing those tinged compositions: *Cubana Be*, *Cubana Bop*.

**Jackson:** *Cubana Bop*, sure.

**Lateef:** *Things To Come*.

**Jackson:** Now, uh getting back, back to uh your, your work with, pardon me, with Kenny Burrell.

**Lateef:** Mmhmm.

**Jackson:** Now, he suggested that, that your take up flute. What, what, what was uh, what was your response to that suggestion?

**Lateef:** Well, the response was I just never thought of it, but I took him up on it, you know. I thought it might be interesting, and I'm glad I did. Uh...it's interesting uh we had a teacher, his name was John Cabera, um he was from Spain, and uh I was in the class the day he suggested that Milt Jackson play the vibraphones.

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** We all wanted to play something.

**Jackson:** Uh huh.

**Lateef:** And, of course, Milt became one of the world's great vibraphonists. And he wanted me to play oboe at that time, and I said, “No” [chuckling], but years later I remembered that, and I started to play the oboe in the early '50s.

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

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**Lateef:** Um...and we played a lot of uh Spanish music, because his father was a musician and would send us compositions from Spain. I used to play the dances for the various high schools in Detroit, um...so I played with Kenny about a year and a half, but...from 1950 to about the middle of '52.

**Jackson:** Mmhmm. Now, at that time, that was still, flute in the music was still kind of...I'd say rare, not exotic, but rare.

**Lateef:** That's true.

**Jackson:** There weren't a lot of people doubling at that point.

**Lateef:** That's true. Well, but if you look at some of those old pictures of Chick Webb's band, you'll see flutes on the bandstand.

**Jackson:** On the bandstand, sure. Yeah. Bass clarinets, and all that.

**Lateef:** That's right, and, of course, what's his name, Frank uh Wess...

**Jackson:** Frank Wess.

**Lateef:** ...played flute in the '40s when he was with the [Billy] Eckstine band.

**Jackson:** Well, what did, what did you find uh flute brought to your uh your arsenal, for want of a better word?

**Lateef:** Well, the, the reason I appreciated playing the flute is because after I made my first personal recording in '55, I realized that, if I should continue to record, that I would have the vary of the canvas of my expression. So, being able to play flute helped me do that, and the oboe, of course, then I started looking, started studying music of other cultures. I wasn't able to travel abroad, but I could go to the library and study scores and records, and I, I did as much of that as I could. Um and then I found like a...the arghul, which is a Syrian, double-reed instrument, I found that it on the eastern market in Detroit, in a Syrian spice store. Uh...I, while working at Chrysler's between '50 and '55, I met um a Syrian person uh who introduced me to the rebab, which is a one-stringed fiddle. Uh...each middle-eastern country, farsian country, they have their one-stringed fiddle, and even in Africa. It goes by different names. Anyway, it's reported that the rebab was played by King David when he said his prayers about 5000 years ago. So, he made me that and um Ernie Farrell played it. I remember the first piece where we used the rebab was called *Morning*. It was 1955 on Savoy Records. Um then I started making flutes, after I started studying the Germanic sea flute. I'd make them out of bamboo, and I used a lot of them in some compositions. Um for example, the piece *A Long Time Ago*.

**Jackson:** Sure.

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**Lateef:** I used a couple of bamboo flutes that I had made by hand. Um I remember working at Ronnie Scott's [Jazz Club] in England, and uh a Chinese fellow gave me a Buddhist Temple flute, which I still have, and I used in a composition called *The African-American Epic Suite for quartet and orchestra*. It's kind of a fetish to, to discover flutes and make them. Like Max [Roach] said, we're "sound merchants" [chuckling].

**Jackson:** Merchants, yeah. Absolutely. Have sound, will travel. So, by the mid-'50s you've, you've uh, your first recording date's in 1955.

**Lateef:** On my own, yes.

**Jackson:** On Savoy, and uh, now, you're still in Detroit at this time?

**Lateef:** Yes, and we would travel to New York on our off night, and record. Hackensack.

**Jackson:** Sure, Rudy Van Gelder Studios.

**Lateef:** Van Gelder, right.

**Jackson:** Who was in uh, in the band at the time of your, your first recording?

**Lateef:** Uh it was Ernie Farrell on bass, Hugh Lawson—piano. Will Austin—bass, Louis Hayes—drums. Um...it was uh Wilbur Harden...

**Jackson:** Oh sure.

**Lateef:** ...—trumpet. The late Wilbur Harden.

**Jackson:** Those have just been reissued, have they not?

**Lateef:** Yes, they have, by Sony.

**Jackson:** Yeah, it just seemed—right.

**Lateef:** Yeah, that's right.

**Jackson:** Good taste is timeless.

**Lateef:** Mhmm.

**Jackson:** Uh now, when did, when did uh you embrace Islam? Was that in the decade of the '50s?

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**Lateef:** Uh yeah. No, during this period, uh 1947, I was introduced by Islam when I was in Chicago. Um...I was playing at a place called the Boogie Woogie Inn on the West Side of Chicago, and trumpet player came in to sit in with us. His name was Talib Dawud. Uh...and uh for some reason he had a...some different kind of air about him. Anyway, so I asked in the vernacular like we speak, “What are you into?”

**Jackson:** Right [laughing].

**Lateef:** [laughing] And he said, “Well, I’m practicing Islam, you know, through the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam.” I said, “Oh yeah?” He said, “Yeah.” So...and he happened to live around the corner from me—he was traveling, he was an itinerant person at the time. So, we went home, and I went by his house and he gave me some literature, which is printed by the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam. Um and this is a movement which was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian [India] um...in 1889. So, I began to read the literature there in Chicago, and I visited the mosque there in Chicago, which was at 4448 South Wabash, and I kept reading it, reading it, and um...I would read things like uh, “Through five daily prayers, one can become aware of God as their Earthly helper. That “one’s natural tendencies become directed in the proper channels.” And, of course, there was a veto on becoming intoxicated, drinking. And they were all positive things, and finally I said I better try this, it sounds right. So, when I joined Diz I went to New York, they were having the meetings at Abdullah Buhaina’s house, who was formally Art Blakey.

**Jackson:** Art Blakey.

**Lateef:** And Sahib Shihab was there. And so, I accepted the...I signed the buyout embracing the faith in 1948...uh there in Chicago. Um...and I found that it’s, it was good for me. Um it uh, it made me uh, increased my love for God and for God’s creation, regardless of color or creed. It just made me respect my parents—well, I always respect them, but it just made me express more love, outwardly uh for God and my fellow man. Um so, I don’t know any place else to go now. I’m very happy that that happened to me. Uh and that’s how that happened.

**Jackson:** I see. Now, uh, again—I have an uncle was a preacher who would always say, “Well, we’re just going to go back to the theme hear”—but, again, looking metaphorically at, at uh, at, at your career and this, this notion of—[speaking to someone off to the side] yes?

Person: I’m sorry. Do you need a minute?

**Lateef:** Huh?

Person: Do you need a, you’re, are you crying?

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**Lateef:** No, no.

Person: Oh okay, I'm sorry.

**Jackson:** That's okay. That's quite alright.

**Lateef:** I have a cataract here.

**Jackson:** That's quite—

Person: Oh okay. I thought you might—

**Lateef:** I'm scheduled for operation...

Person: Oh.

**Lateef:** ...on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

Person: Yeah. It was moving. I thought maybe you needed a minute.

**Lateef:** No, I appreciate that.

Person: Oh okay. Sorry.

**Jackson:** No, that's quite, that's quite alright. That's quite alright.

Person: And, while we're stopped, [to Yusef] are you comfortable?

**Lateef:** Yeah.

Person: Okay. [to Reuben] You're fine?

**Jackson:** I'm fine. Okay. Okay. Oh, just looking, looking at the uh, beginning with your first recording, your uh, your interest in what has been dubbed, and, and I use this apologetically, uh "world music" long before this term was even fashioned.

**Lateef:** Mhmm.

**Jackson:** Uh it brings to mind one of the, the core questions for the interview regarding critical response to this. What...—because as, as we uh look at the history of the music now, it's clear that people like yourself and, and, and, you know, later Don Cherry and people like that, were looking beyond uh, or in addition to what was found here at other,

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the music and, and rhythmic and melodic contributions of other cultures—what was the critical response to uh, to your, your early efforts along this line?

**Lateef:** Well, like I said, I felt if, if I would continue to record I'd have to, I couldn't give the people the same thing over and over. I mean, I felt that...like you can right a song based on *I Got Rhythm*, you know, like *Moose the Mooche*....

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** ...[indecipherable], you know. But how many times, how many tunes can you write on *I Got Rhythm* before it...it becomes redundant to oneself? Um so I thought I had to change that—the form, the instrumentation—in order to avoid monotony. I mean, you take people like Charlie Parker and Sonny Stitt, they got all the juice out the blues and *I Got Rhythm*. That was their offering, you know?

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** They were masters at that. So, I figured I had to find my own expression, like they had.

**Jackson:** No, it's interesting, because this comes at a time when, well, musically and even thematically—when I say thematically, I'm talking even titles of pieces. You mentioned Wilbur Harden...

**Lateef:** Yeah.

**Jackson:** ...but a lot of people were looking at, well like the session you did with Coltrane, *Dial Africa*, you know, there's more of a nationalistic point of view coming through in the music. And uh it's just, it's just to me it's, I mention this because it seems as it's as big a flowering as what was happening in the previous decade, you know.

**Lateef:** Yeah, well, the “nationalistic,” if I follow you—

**Jackson:** I use that for want of a better word. Yeah.

**Lateef:** Your meaning like uh stemming from, from gospel and, and—?

**Jackson:** Well, that, that as well, but even uh...pieces that are beginning to have titles that reflect uh, you know, named after, you're starting to look at the independence of African nations. I'm just looking at this as part of what looks like a broader, well as I said, a broader flowering at this point.

**Lateef:** Yeah, well, I think one contribution to this um...different-ness of the music is musicians begin to travel abroad, and they learned from observation in other parts of the

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world, of sight and sound. Musicians travelled to Japan, to Africa. Like Don Cherry is known to, in a performance, to dance like the Maasai people, just jump straight up and down, you know. But if one had never seen the Maasai people, one might not ever realize that one can dance in one spot.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** So, travel kind of broadens peoples' thinking, and allow them to go beyond where they were before, traveling.

**Jackson:** Now, do you think, getting back to this question of uh...of, let's say, critical documentation of the music. Do you, does it, for example, I'll back to a previous decade, maybe some of the, the important recordings by people like Charlie Parker, and if you, if one looks at uh...the reviews of some of those, those recordings and, and, say certain magazines there was a, I think, a confusion and a disdain toward that, and, and, and uh that's why I was asking earlier if, what you may recall about um...you know, reviews and things of that nature concerning your, your efforts from, from say your first forward. Was, was there a, an enthusiastic response with, was there a confusion...?

**Lateef:** You mean the general public's attitude?

**Jackson:** Well, like, you know, let's look at the *Down Beats*, the magazines of that nature. I was...

**Lateef:** You're talking about the critics?

**Jackson:** Sure. Or both, let's talk about both: the public and the critics.

**Lateef:** Well, there's a disparity on one hand uh...frequently, during that, the earlier period. Uh one could read a review, and the critic might not even recognize the form of the music. Um...and when that happens...one can uh come to a conclusion that perhaps they really didn't know what they were listening to, if you misidentify a form. Um...of course, perhaps, that's excusable, because none of us are perfect, but on the other hand this discredits the person if, if he's misidentified, what he's doing is, is not um described adequately. Um...like the late James Baldwin said, "Beware of how people define you, define that which you do, because they may misrepresent you." Um there is a book called *Ferocious Alphabets* by, the author says, "If you misidentify what a person is doing, you may deny them credits that they should have." So, there's a danger in being a poor critic. Schopenhauer has gone so far to say in the book called *Art of Literature* that, "a critic is one who has no occupation of his own." In some instances, it may be true.

**Jackson:** That may be true, yeah. That's, that's not an unfair assessment in many ways, I think. When did you move to New York?

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**Lateef:** Uh I moved there in January of 1960.

**Jackson:** 1960. And uh are you still leading bands on your own at that time?

**Lateef:** Well, not at the beginning. In 1960, when I moved there, I worked with Charlie Mingus for a while in “The Village” [Greenwich Village]. Uh and then I worked with Babatunde Olatunji for a while...’60 and ’61. And then in ’62 I worked with [Julian] “Cannonball” [Adderley] for two years. That was the first I had an opportunity to go to Europe. It’s interesting, I should mention that at this time during ’60, ’61, those were rough years for me. In fact, I...I had \$35 when I got to New York, and it was pretty rough. Um and I had some farm property, you know, in Detroit, and I couldn’t keep up the payments, and, and I lost it. And I happened to read that Sonny Stitt, you know, who was a dear friend, and he said, “Why didn’t you tell me?” you know. He would have given me the money so I wouldn’t have lost it. I thought I should say that. Um but finally I went with Cannonball. I was offered to go with Count Basie, but I refused that to go with Cannonball, because John Levy, my manager, said, thought that would be better for me, and [Eddie] “Lockjaw” [Davis] took the job with Count Basie. So, I was with Cannonball from ’62 to ’63. We visited Europe, Japan. It was a golden opportunity for me. It was a good experience to work with that group. Also, Cannonball was an astute musician...

**Jackson:** Oh yeah.

**Lateef:** ...businessman, saxophonist. He could elaborate on Stravinsky’s *Rites of Spring*...

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** ...et cetera.

**Jackson:** He did marvelous...

**Lateef:** Yeah.

**Jackson:** ...those marvelous on-stage introductions.

**Lateef:** Yes, yes.

**Jackson:** It seemed that, and perhaps you agree, that group really seemed to uh...to really showcase your versatility, as well. I mean, there’s a, there’s a piece I remember—*Primitivo*—from that ensemble, it just, it seemed that it was just a wonderful extension of where you were going with uh this, this wonderful palette of sound.

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**Lateef:** Yeah, Cannonball sensed that. I think that's why he wrote that piece. He was a very savvy person.

**Jackson:** Yeah, that uh...I think that was just an, that was an important group in, in many ways and, and I'm—hopefully some of those recordings will be reissued again. I've got some things in, in my personal library from that band. But let me, I want to talk a bit about Cannonball more, but let's go back to Mingus for a minute, because it's...uh I mean there's certainly a piece that's associated with you on, on tenor from uh from the *Pre-Bird* sessions, the uh *The Prayer for Passive Resistance*.

**Lateef:** Yes.

**Jackson:** And that, personally, that was my, one of my many introductions, because my father would say, "Listen to this," because I thought I wanted to be a tenor saxophone player. He'd say, "Yeah, if you can play like this, then you'll be okay," and obviously I work here, so I wasn't able to play like that, but [laughing]

**Lateef:** [laughing]

**Jackson:** Uh how did you, how did you meet Mingus, and what was it like working with, with him?

**Lateef:** Okay, well—okay. When I got there in 1960, there was my attitude to go out and play with different peoples, people, so that uh, perhaps, I could get a job, you know...

**Jackson:** Sure [laughing].

**Lateef:** [laughing] ...if they, if they liked what I was doing. And so I—Mingus was working there at the *Showplace*, I think it was.

**Jackson:** Right. That's right.

**Lateef:** And, and so I went, I sat in with him, you know. And uh I don't know if it was the first or second time that he offered me a job, you know. And so I was very happy, you know. And that's how that happened uh...and then he also hired uh Rahsaan [Roland Kirk], and we were playing together. I remember a piece he wrote called *Ecclusiastics*.

**Jackson:** Right. Sure.

**Lateef:** Yeah...um Charlie Mingus is a, a very unique composer. I remember one piece, I had a solo, and uh when I got to the solo there were no chords. There was, he had put a picture of a coffin on it, and I say, "Where are the chords?" He said, "I don't want you to know the chords." He said, "Just play that. Play the coffin," you know.

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**Jackson:** Interesting.

**Lateef:** So, so I had to hear my ears and whatever um intuitive skills that I had, and it was an interesting way to approach the music.

**Jackson:** That is a unique way. Yeah.

**Lateef:** I think. And uh...he was very kind me. Some people think that, that he had a uncontrollable temper, but I think he was just uh intensely assertive, and, and uh like, for example, we were playing one night, and uh some people were talking incessantly, close to the bandstand, and Mingus stopped the band, and he told the people uh, "You may leave. I'll give you your money back, and you can leave, because you're interfering with people trying to listen to the music." That's the assertiveness.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** I was demonstrating it.

**Jackson:** And that clear passion for the music, which I think...

**Lateef:** Sure.

**Jackson:** ...it comes out in...

**Lateef:** Absolutely.

**Jackson:** ...I mean, his playing, his soloing, and his composing.

**Lateef:** Yes, yes.

**Jackson:** Now, how long were you with uh Charles Mingus?

**Lateef:** Maybe three or four month-[tape cuts away]. I was doing other things, too.

**Jackson:** Such as?

**Lateef:** Such as getting into the recording. Ernie, you know Ernie Wilkins?

**Jackson:** Sure. Oh yeah. Big arranger.

**Lateef:** He was giving me a lot of uh record sessions, when I, I finally got enough money to, to purchase a home in Teaneck, New Jersey, because of Mingus and Ernie Wilkins. And during that we period recorded *I<sup>st</sup> Bassman*. Ernie Wilkins wrote the music for uh the bassist um...Ray Brown.

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**Comment [2]:**

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Clip 2)

Yusef on Charles Mingus' unique approach to music.

Tape 1, 59:42-1:00:26



**Jackson:** Oh sure, sure.

**Lateef:** Yeah. I remember that session. Cannonball was in the saxophone section. Earle Warren was playing first alto.

**Jackson:** Oh wow.

**Lateef:** Cannonball, third [alto]. Budd Johnson was playing the other tenor...

**Jackson:** Tenor, ooh.

**Lateef:** ...and I was playing one. That was a grand feeling playing with those musicians.

**Jackson:** Were you getting a lot of session work at this time?

**Lateef:** Yeah, quite a bit. Yeah.

**Jackson:** Was that a—I've talked to some musicians who've found that a mixed blessing, was that the case with you?

**Lateef:** No, I was grateful. It was honest work...

**Jackson:** It was work, sure.

**Lateef:** ...and it was something I could do, and...it's labor.

**Jackson:** Right.

**Lateef:** A love of labor. Um...of course...doing that kind of work is, is not creative in the sense of creating your personal kind of music, because you're supposed to interpret whatever music they put in front of you. And if one is happy being a studio musician, and he's good at it, it can make a really decent living.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** And...but um one time I was trying to decide whether I should be a studio musician, 'cause I was getting quite a bit of work. I was working at the Waldorf Astoria in the band, orchestra behind Johnny Mathis, et cetera, but then I decided I didn't want to do that. I had, I thought I had something personal I wanted to express, so I kind of moved away from that.

**Jackson:** Were you continuing to uh...to work on your own composition at, at this time, as well?

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**Lateef:** Yeah, I did. In fact, I had a recording contract during that period with Impulse...

**Jackson:** Impulse, right.

**Lateef:** ...during that same period.

**Jackson:** Okay, so you leave Mingus and uh...

**Lateef:** Yeah.

**Jackson:** ...your next, your next uh encounter is with, with—

**Lateef:** Cannonball.

**Jackson:** Cannonball Adderley. Yeah.

**Lateef:** And then, after playing with Cannonball for two years, then I enrolled, I formed my group again and enrolled in the Manhattan School of Music in '65, I think it was. Um...and, of course, I had a record contract, which enabled me to, to stay in New York during the school sessions, and during the breaks, you know, like Christmas, uh...Thanksgiving. I would go out of town, maybe to Baltimore or Detroit, play an engagement.

**Jackson:** Now, what sorts of things are you uh investigating at, at Manhattan School of Music? You're, you're continuing—

**Lateef:** At that time?

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Lateef:** Oh, they had a pretty rounded program. Um...like uh...during the time I was studying baroque music, we would study baroque architecture, philosophy...that prevailed during the baroque period of music, um...literature of that period. Um...and as you moved through the periods, you would study the philosophy and musical forms, uh the art of, of each period. Um...they had a very good uh, oh and I had to take foreign language for two years, so I studied French. Um...I had a very motivating uh literature teacher, Mr. Linney, um...and he interested me in literature. Uh we studied things like *The Praise of Folly* by Erasmus...

**Jackson:** Sure.

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**Lateef:** ...um...Arthur Miller, et cetera, and he had lots to do with me um enjoying writing. As a result, I've written...two or three plays, and I've written a novella, a book of short stories, as a result of him inspiring me and motivating me.

**Jackson:** I was going to ask if you had started actually doing...well, your, your literary and philosophical efforts at this time. This is during the time you uh, you were studying at Manhattan School?

**Lateef:** Yes, mmhmm. Oh, in fact, the group at that time, we did a book called *Something Else*, with Kenneth Barron, Albert Heath, Bob Cunningham, myself.

**Jackson:** Now, uh...where are you instrumentally? You've got, you've added flute the previous decade...

**Lateef:** Mmhmm.

**Jackson:** Had you uh included the oboe and the bassoon at this point, or is that, was that still to come?

**Lateef:** Well, I included the oboe during the '50s.

**Jackson:** Right.

**Lateef:** Uh I studied bassoon in the '60s.

**Jackson:** '60s, right. Okay.

**Lateef:** That's it.

**Jackson:** What's the challenge in uh...I know as I, as I, as I jokingly say as a "fallen" tenor player that, I mean, certainly the embouchure is different for each instrument, but uh...what's, what's the challenge in being a, a musician with these instruments at, at your beck and call? Is, is there a, I mean technically, certainly, but—

**Lateef:** Well, it's the art— [tape ends]

[End of Tape 1]

[Start of Tape 2]

**Jackson:** Now, uh...where are you instrumentally? You've got, you've added flute the previous decade...

**Lateef:** Mmhmm.

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**Lateef:** Well, it's the art, it's called the art of doubling. I had a...a student, his name was Brian McLaughlin, he got his doctorates from Columbia, he's now an executive at um...BMI. Uh I found for myself that uh when I was with Cannonball, I had to, to practice like the saxophone maybe an hour, and then the flute an hour, and the oboe an hour and the bassoon an hour to learn how to make these transitions, 'cause it's really called the art of doubling.

**Jackson:** Interesting. Yeah, that, it's got to be a...it's a challenge, absolutely.

**Lateef:** It is, but it can be done.

**Jackson:** Sure. Sure. Now...just as you've talked of these, the different forms that you studied at the Manhattan School of Music, literary forms, you've obviously had a, a career-long interest in, in various musical forms. When did...when did you start, when did you become interested in, in uh working on, let's say, "longer forms," for want of a better words, you know, symphonies and things of that nature?

**Lateef:** Well, that was...well, actually...in the '50s when I was taking...the few courses that I took, I should say at, at Wayne State...

**Jackson:** At Wayne State.

**Lateef:** ...I became interested in the larger ensembles. Like I, I remember taking a class called uh "The Symphonic Tone Poem," uh...where we would study the music of Brahms, uh...and the teacher would elaborate upon...went into Brahms' *First Symphony*

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Like he would say things like, “Brahms’ *First Symphony* was as mature as Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*,” um...he just uh, “He developed these skills by playing for singers for years, and then he decided to write a symphony,” and, “e would elaborate upon the, the main theme, the subordinate theme, the transition, the recap—the development, the recapitulation. And I though this was...it made me admire these people the way the teacher put it to me, and, of course, many of the melodies, the music, I enjoyed. And I thought how wonderful it would be to be able to utilize of these types of functions that you find in form.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** So, it started in the 50’s, and um...by going to the Manhattan School in the 60’s it enhanced this germ that had been planted during the 50’s. Um...and as a result of this, I found the few works that I’ve done for orchestra, um...that when you listen to them played by the orchestra, at that time you, you relive the experiences that you had during the time that you actually composed the music and put the symbols on the score. Uh...maybe I can elaborate on that more. It’s in something that Stravinsky said. He said, “The greatest joy was not when you hear the music played, but when the ideas come to you when you’re composing.” Well, in my case, those ideas that come during the time of putting the symbols on the paper, I relive those moments when I hear it played back—those feelings. So, there’s a lot of joy in reliving these experiences of beauty, et cetera, if you understand what I mean?

**Jackson:** Sure, yes.

**Lateef:** Yeah, yeah. And um...the orchestra is so, is so vast in, in its ability to express feelings, you know, with the strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion. Um it’s like a whole choir of feelings coming at you at, at once.

**Jackson:** That’s a good analogy, I’d say.

**Lateef:** Yeah, yeah.

**Jackson:** Now, were you affected by uh...toward the mid- to late-60’s there was a...a lot of musicians had difficulty finding, finding work in the uh, let’s say the improvised music community for wont of a better word, due to the uh, the ascendancy of what was dubbed “rock n roll.” Was that ever a, a struggle for you? You know, a lot of clubs had started to close, and uh...

**Lateef:** Yeah. Mhmm, mmhmm. Well, yes, I suppose so. Um...in, in the first place, I don’t think the music belongs in, in the clubs with, with all the smoke and the smell of alcohol. Um...I think too much blood, sweat and tears and labor has gone into music for it to be uh put into what Albert Heath calls “the smoke cellars.” Um, I don’t think the

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music belongs there. That's why, in January 1980, I stopped playing places that sell alcohol. I thought I had done that long enough.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** Uh that's enough reason, besides trying to obtain knowledge, that I went to school to try to—[*break in the audio*—academic credentials, which, by the grace of God, has enabled me to teach. And I can...avoid and, and not accept those kind of jobs. I, I'd rather teach than to work in that type of environment anymore. I pray that I never have to do that again.

**Jackson:** Sure. Are there um, are there any recordings—again, let's look at, let's say, the mid-60's forward— that you'd like to talk about as, as uh, that you consider noteworthy and, and, you know, important for, for specific reasons?

**Lateef:** Which period?

**Jackson:** Uh let's just say...roughly say '65 up until...anything from any of the Impulse recordings that are of, of note to you, and you could just, if so, tell us why. Or maybe there are compositions that, that you'd like to uh...put on the record as being important to you?

**Lateef:** Uh Yeah, I think uh...the album *1984* for Impulse.

**Jackson:** I humbly agree [laughing].

**Lateef:** Yeah, I, I think that is a landmark in my career in recording. Um...I, I took some chances that I had never taken before by using chordal chords, uh and writing melodies, and doing what I call "autophysiopsychic music," which simply means "music from the physical, the mental and spiritual self," expressing autophysiopsychic uh linear uh lines against chordal chords. Um...I also think that um *The Blues Suite* is an interesting use of quartet and orchestra, as recorded by the Köln Radio Orchestra. Um its different aspects of, different forms, variation on forms of the blues form, the 12-measure blues form. I incorporated some...uh what do you call "chorale" uh like a...I guess you could call um...forms of the blues, if you will. Uh...with, with the chorale basically coming out of...the German Presbyterian Church literature. Um uh this was a hybrid kind of presentation. Um and they all, there is also uh some bamboo flute sections in that piece. That's a piece that I made. Uh beyond that, I think uh...well, there's another piece, there's a tone poem that I did for the Hamburg Radio Orchestra which hasn't been recorded, which is based upon on an Indian raga. Um raga which is— this particular raga expresses the idea of one searching for...uh...for that uh feeling of a love that has left, that one knows but yet it has been separated from one being, and there is a search for it. Um and then after the, the most recent uh thing I've done for orchestra is called *The African-American...Epic Suite*.

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**Jackson:** *African-American Epic Suite.*

**Lateef:** Yeah. I, I think it was 1992 that I did for a quartet and orchestra. The quartet being *Eternal Winds*, which features Adam Rudolph on percussion, Ralph Jones on woodwinds, Charles Moore, trumpet, flugelhorn, and Frederico Ramos, guitar...and myself. Um...now this is in, in essence its a tone poem. This is a piece with an extra musical idea, and um the idea is that of reflecting um the epic uh historical factor or slavery. In fact, the first movement is entitled, what do you call it, *The African As Non-American*, which starts in Africa. Um and of course, in this movement, one can um hear, at least I tried to project with instruments, the feeling of slaves being captured on the shores of Africa. Uh the disparity, the futility of trying to escape is heard uh in orchestral sounds. Uh the second movement is called *The Middle Passage*, which means the experience of the slaves being placed in the bowels of the slaves ships, and the trauma, physical and psychological, that they experienced, that they experienced during the middle passage. Um...you can hear the poignant sounds of the thoughts of, of course I had to use my imagination, uh of a slave wondering if he'd ever see his family again, his loved ones, his children, and you can hear this expressed in the strings and the guitar...et cetera. And you can hear the agony of slaves lying in their own feces, if you will, et cetera. Um the brutality of shackles, et cetera. And in the third movement, which is called *Love For All*, uh you, I try to reflect uh the feeling that was experienced during the Great Awakening, when American, both white and black, preached the brotherhood or mankind, which extended from North Hampton, Massachusetts to the Blue-Ridge Mountains of Kentucky, and of course, this sounds very spiritual...um and gospel-like.

**Jackson:** It's a beautiful, yeah, it's a very beautiful piece.

**Lateef:** Yeah. Thank you.

**Jackson:** Now, um you talked—

**Lateef:** [begins to speak]

**Jackson:** I'm sorry. I didn't mean to cut you off.

**Lateef:** No, I just wanted to mention the last movement is um...uh *Freedom*, which expresses the poets and the musicians of the 60's, the revolutionary poets, et cetera, and the music of Ornette Coleman, et cetera. Yes?

**Jackson:** Now, well, that actually brings to mind another question. People like— how, how influenced were you, are you by people like...like Ornette Coleman and uh...you know, [John] Coltrane? I know you've recorded with people like Archie Shepp, and, and uh...

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**Lateef:** Hmm. Well, uh...Ornette Coleman is uh...he's a very innovative person...uh and I respect him for that. Um...when you listen to *Skies of America* orchestra, you hear his innovative...uh ways he has from going to A to B to C...uh linear harmonically. Um I can appreciate this. Um...not only that uh, I remember, I think it was during the early-60's I was at a Newport [Jazz] Festival, and uh Don Cherry and Ornette Coleman were rehearsing a piece outdoors, and, and I looked at the piece um and there were just note heads on the paper, without any values, and uh before they um finished rehearsing they were able to play it together. What happened is they convened on, on the rhythms to be given to these note heads. These rhythms were very complex. I'd never seen anyone uh...put music together like that. That's just one of the innovations I was talking about. Um also he has a, another thing that he talks about in his...harmolodic music...

**Jackson:** Harmolodics, mmhmm.

**Lateef:** ...Is that any, any one triad can go to any of the other 11 triads, and...that's the true. If you start looking at the triads you can see that one can, can go to, to the next, any of the other eleven of the twelve.

**Jackson:** It's a very democratic way of looking at, at music.

**Lateef:** Yes, it is. Absolutely.

**Jackson:** It's, it's interesting when you mention *Skies of America*, which uh, which has just been reissued. I was thinking about...well, some of your, you orchestral works, and actually one comment that made earlier about working with Dizzy Gillespie, and watching the, his bodily movements to, to uh convey this nuance, because there's, there's so much uh, there is so much, as you've said, in the music that is not—it can be written, and yet there are certain musical gestures, if you will, which are...

**Lateef:** Mmhmm, mmhmm.

**Jackson:** ...I mean, they're so sublime that they are, it's amazing when you hear people who are able to, to convey that and, and certainly the writing and uh, well, like your *African-American Suite* and, and *Skies of America* for one of them, for two good examples. You hear so much music, it's much closer to even, say, the human voice than um, than something that is concretely notated, it's somewhere in between. It's notated and yet there is such...I don't know, there's...it's like sculpting in a sense, maybe. Now, how do you, because I think that...you seem so concerned with the, as you mentioned talking about Lester Young earlier, the personality involved. How do you convey to a musician, say for example, if they're playing *The Middle Passage* and um...outside of what is on the paper, how do you convey to them what you want them to...to bring across.

**Lateef:** Well, for that particular piece uh...for Ralph Jones who, who played uh...the bass clarinet on the first movement—he also played a part on the second movement—I put note,

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just note heads. Of course...the harmonies may have been uh, and they were in some cases...uh...there are various kinds of harmonies that I use. For example, I may use uh...hexatonic harmonies. There are only four hexatonic scales, and I would juxtapose against these verticalities...maybe three notes over one measure, and then for the, when the harmony changed there might be four notes against that change now, et cetera. Ralph was free to use those three notes or four notes in any manner he chose. He could put notes in between the first and second notes that he chose, or between the second and third, and I tell him that.

**Jackson:** I see.

**Lateef:** And...he may have different ways of looking at those three notes. He may play first note plus the major seventh, or that note, the second note plus the tritone of that second note, the third note plus the flat nine of that note. There are many approaches, and because we've talked about intervals, like I've just talked about major seventh, which is a minor second, an octave higher. Or he may play a series of, of uh major thirds, minor seconds, major thirds, minor seconds, and then to the first note. He may preface the note with uh, or he may depart from the note before he gets to the next one...uh with major thirds, minor seconds, major thirds, minor seconds. See, this is something I've been dealing with about the last four or five years uh with intervals. See, there are only six kinds of intervals...and their inversion. Uh...in school, they teach us intervals in order to sight sing or to take dictation, but no teacher ever said to me, "Use particular kinds of intervals uh to write melodies, uh play melodies." And that's what I'm beginning to realize, that no matter what melody you have it is composed of intervals, but when you restrict a linear line to particular elements, uh particular intervals it becomes unique because of intervocality, if you will. If you, if you write a melody with all the intervals, it really has no definition...um and I could go so far as to say it becomes comedic. Say, for example, if a guy had on one gym shoe, one patent-leather shoe, uh tuxedo pants, a bow-tie, a sombrero, what do you have?

**Jackson:** Right.

**Lateef:** It's not unique, you see. It's everything. You don't know what it is, so what's it— So, what I've been postulating for a quite a while now is particular sets of intervals, and uh each set has its own... "rasa," as the Indians call it. It has its own color. So, I may tell Ralph in the second movement, "Just play a succession of minor seconds, major thirds," or, "Major thirds...major seconds." And of course, he's been practicing this, also. So, this distinct color, and this distinct rasa will come out, based on that. Um...at the same time, the, the, the compositional part of the orchestral part may be, as I said, hexatonic harmonies. Uh it may be...minor seconds, minor thirds in diminished intervals...or it may be a succession of major thirds, minor seconds in diminished intervals, which gives you, which becomes triple-diminished patterns, if you do that.

**Jackson:** I see.

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**Lateef:** If you play major thirds, minor seconds in diminished intervals you'll come up with a twelve-tone row. So, it's two things. It's, it's a triple-dimin– you know, there are only three diminished chords...

**Jackson:** Three, sure.

**Lateef:** ...So, when you use one note from one diminished, a second note from the next diminished, a third note from the third diminished, it's three notes. Then, you go back to the first and get a note you haven't gotten, and repeat this, you wind up with a twelve-tone row that's also triple-diminished. So, you may have triple-diminished harmonies moving underneath a specific set of intervals...solo intervals, and that gives a particular distinct character to the music when you become, when your assignment is unique, if you will, which enables one to make departures, in spite of playing specific intervals. There are moments when you can depart, and then come back, and that gives character, also. It's like a, I'll give you a graphic picture, um...if, if you're in a helicopter and you're going, you're going...no, not a helicopter. Let's abolish that. If you're going down the street, straight, there's a straight, and then you come to a gangway, and you go in the gangway, you're not on the street anymore. You come back out of the gangway, and you continue down the street. Did you follow?

**Jackson:** I got you. I–

**Lateef:** The street may be specific intervals, but this over here may be something else–

**Jackson:** Something else.

**Lateef:** –Another set...that's a departure.

**Jackson:** Got, yeah. Sure, I see.

**Lateef:** See, this is, this is an approach I've been working on to replace the things that have become redundant...to me. Uh you can, one can talk up, like John Coltrane said, "Knowledge will set you free."

**Jackson:** Right.

**Lateef:** If you, if you have, if you don't have knowledge of anything different than what you have, you can't go anywhere. So, that's been the biggest job, trying to replace the old things, habits, if you will.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** And that's what I'm working on intensely at this time.

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**Jackson:** Now, how does that uh...tie in, or, or maybe even conflict with...looking at, let's just say the music business and recording companies who seem to have a particularly—now, and if you disagree, feel free to jump in—a fixed notion of what the music is, or what it, what it should be? Has that been a frustration for you?

**Lateef:** No, it's just been an, I've just observed this on some levels. It doesn't bother me um...because people are free to do what they wish. Uh I remember, there was a time in the 70's...um when a certain record company would cut, cut a song in the morning and take it to the disco at night...

**Jackson:** Right.

**Lateef:** ...and watch its reaction on the people. If it didn't work, if the people didn't react, they'd come back and change something. That's, that's another approach. That's the commercial approach to music. That's not the artistic approach to music. Um...so it's two different ballgames. I mean...there's the letters of uh, it's not Rachmaninoff, it's, it's some composer I can't think of. Um...I can't think of the composer, but he said, "It can matter less to a true composer whether, if only one person accepted what he's done that's enough." He claims that a true composer/artist is concerned with the music, not whether it has commerciality or not. And, and in history we've seen people walked out on the *Firebird Suite* by Stravinsky.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** People walked out of the concert.

**Jackson:** It caused riots, sure. Absolutely.

**Lateef:** But, now he's one of the world's great composers, but he did what he believed in, and that's what a real composer does. They don't, they don't, it doesn't matter if people love it or not, if he, if his heart and mind is in it, that's what he strives for...he or she.

**Jackson:** Now, I know in uh the early-80's you went to Nigeria to uh, to teach at ABU [Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria].

**Lateef:** Yeah, I went there, yeah, 1981, August.

**Jackson:** Okay.

**Lateef:** I was given the position in the Center for Nigerian Cultural Studies at Ahmadu Bello University...[thought continued below]

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**Jackson:** Thank you for spelling that out [laughing].

**Lateef:** Yeah.

**Jackson:** My dentist is from there, so he always calls it ABU.

**Lateef:** ABU, yeah.

**Jackson:** Thank you.

**Lateef:** [thought picked up]...uh as a senior research fellow. I did research into the Fulani flute. It's called a "sariwa." The Fulanis are the cattle-bearers of Nigeria. Um they made the flute, originally, out of wood, uh...preferably pagoda tree. It uh, it has four holes in it...um and they play it as a past-time in the evening. Um and so, before I left there they were making it out of steel, and copper and glass, and it altered the shape of it a little. Um..and by the grace of God I made a fingering chart for it. And the range of it is about a half-octave beyond the Germanic sea flute.

**Jackson:** Now, what lead you to uh, to decide to go to Nigeria?

**Lateef:** Well—

**Jackson:** Was this something that had been building, building up uh...?

**Lateef:** Well, you know happened like this. Uh...um my song was born in 1975, and uh I had said that when he becomes five and time to go to school I would come off of the road. Of course, prior to him becoming five, he went with my wife and I on the road. So, when he became five, I was offered—actually, he was six, he didn't start school until he was six—I was offered this position uh at, at Ahmadu Bello. So, I thought this was ideal time, because I wanted to, when I finished a days work I'd come home to my family. So, it happened very appropriately at the time that he became six, about five-and-a-half. That's how that happened.

**Jackson:** Now, were you, were you at UMass [University of Massachusetts] during the 70's? Was that, this before...?

**Lateef:** Yeah, I was...uh at UMass from '72 through '75. That's when I worked on my Doctorate at UMass.

**Jackson:** And you got your Doctorate...?

**Lateef:** '75.

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**Jackson:** '75, right. Were you able to successfully uh juggle academics and performing? You were recordings, as well, still?

**Lateef:** Yeah, during that period, yeah.

**Jackson:** And which record label were you, were you with?

**Lateef:** Uh I was at Atlantic.

**Jackson:** Atlantic, okay. And so, we can just go back here to, now you were how, for how long were you in Nigeria?

**Lateef:** Four years, from August '71 to August '75. I'm-- yeah. No, I'm sorry.

**Jackson:** '81.

**Lateef:** August '81...

**Jackson:** '81, right.

**Lateef:** ...to August '85, yeah.

**Jackson:** And was any recording uh...

**Lateef:** Yeah, yeah, I made one recording while in Nigeria. It is called *Yusef Lateef in Nigeria*. It, it's interesting. The agreement was to make one record for the Center of Nigerian Cultural Studies. It was called *Hikima*, which means "knowledge." And uh the same sound, the basic rhythm track that was used for *Hikima*, I used the same track for *Yusef Lateef in Nigeria*...

**Jackson:** Ah.

**Lateef:** ...with different melodies. Yeah.

**Jackson:** How is "hikima" spelled? Is that the same as...?

**Lateef:** H-I, K-I, M-A.

**Jackson:** Okay.

**Lateef:** Hikima.

**Jackson:** Interesting.

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**Lateef:** It's an arabic word.

**Jackson:** Do you still uh...do you still have any connections there in Nigeria, or are you still in, in contact with any of the...?

**Lateef:** Yeah, I'm in contact with the basketball coach in, in Nigeria, in Ahmadu Bello University.

**Jackson:** When did uh, when did you start your record label?

**Lateef:** Uh...1992.

**Jackson:** Okay, and uh was this--well, there's an obvious reason for doing it--but was there any frustration with past dealings with, with other labels, or just the desire to, to get your own material out?

**Lateef:** Yeah, it was, it was just a desire. There was no frustration.

**Jackson:** Okay.

**Lateef:** It was desire to, to get my own material, to record my own material in the way that I wanted to...and uh...that was at the basis of it.

**Jackson:** I know there's been a history of artists doing this at various times. Mingus had Debut and, you know, any number of people. How many recordings have you, have you released to date?

**Lateef:** Well, since uh '92, I've made uh 20, 20 CDs.

**Jackson:** Now, we, we talked to some degree about--

**Lateef:** [chuckling]

**Jackson:** I'm sorry.

**Lateef:** No, no.

**Jackson:** I didn't, I didn't mean to cut you off. It is or is not important, depending on, on what one's view is of, of uh, you know, things like musical polls and that sort of thing. Has that ever really had any bearing on you? You know, like those, say for example, like the *Down Beat* Annual Critic's Polls. Uh, you...

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**Lateef:** No, not really. It doesn't bother me at all. Um I go along with something that Miles [Davis] said once. He said, he said, "I'm my best critic. I don't need anyone to tell me."

**Jackson:** It's uh funny, as you said earlier, I guess it's, it's uh, I forget whose definition it is about a critic.

**Lateef:** Oh, Schopenhauer?

**Jackson:** Schopenhauer, yeah. It, it's uh...sometimes I think there is that mixed blessing with, with uh...

**Lateef:** Mix.

**Jackson:** Yeah.

**Lateef:** Could be.

**Jackson:** Critical documentation, or, maybe that's a contradiction: "critical documentation" [laughing].

**Lateef:** [Laughing]

**Jackson:** Um let's talk a bit about your painting. Are, are you still uh...?

**Lateef:** Uh...

**Jackson:** 'Cause, you know, that's, you look at the music and there's so many musicians who have interests in, in the visual arts. I mean, [Duke] Ellington started as a, as a painter, and Sonny Rollins drew, draws. Anyway, are, are you still painting?

**Lateef:** I do some color drawings occasionally when I have time. Um recently, I did a...a children's book uh...with the help of um some members of the Ahmadiyya Movement, the Ansar members. The "Ansar" meaning the Muslims who are 40 years of age and above. It's a children's book called *Rozetka and Farida*[sp]. It's about two children um playing in the garden with the flowers, and, and, of course, the bees in the air, because they love flowers, and I expound upon uh different sayings. In particular, one about the bee that's in the Holy Quran that speak about this. "Q" is for men in, in the substance that bees uh give us honey, um...and then the, the, the, the father calls them to come to prayer. But on each page, I put a picture, an illustration of flowers. Uh I don't draw objects of people, just flowers or trees.

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**Jackson:** I uh was also curious about, you know, your decision to not play in clubs. Uh what...so are you primarily performing in concert settings now, or uh has that affected the degree to, to which you're able to perform?

**Lateef:** Yeah, it has cut down my visibility. Um...like um, say, this year, I have two engagements: one at the North Sea [Jazz Festival] in Holland...

**Jackson:** In Holland, sure.

**Lateef:** ...and one at the uh Carmel[sp] Festival in Kato-, Katotoma[sp], New York, I think it is. And um...you, you know, each, each of my contracts now have that no alcohol is to be sold at any of the performances uh in the venue that I play, at the time I play. And so, that's cut down my visibility. Um...many clubs have called me since 1980 to play, but I've turned them down for that reason. And I'm scheduled to, to play um the *African-American Epic Suite* with the Detroit Symphony in January 16, 2001. So, I don't perform that much, but I teach at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, thank God.

**Jackson:** Do you that there are as, well, I guess "great demand" is a relative term, but I know uh...I was thinking back to, back to *Skies of America* how, how seldom you hear these extended works by, by, by composers, and is that something that, that you find with uh...with, with works like the *African-American [Epic] Suite*? Is, is there a, is there relative demand for them, or are people associating you with quote...

**Lateef:** I think it's very shallow. Say, for example, I wrote this work in '92. It was recorded for radio performance in Cologne, Germany. Since then, it's been performed once in America. That's with the Atlanta, Georgia Symphony in 1998. It's six years, and I've tried on many, so it's not too plentiful. Those, those doors aren't open too wide. Maybe there's a crack in the door, if you will, but in time, perhaps, the door will open wider.

**Jackson:** Do you think there's a--and this is, I've have this discussion with other musicians, that there's a...a...a kind of a fixed image as to what...an artist whose considered...part of the, the improvising community should or should not do, and, and uh, because I, I work here with, with the Duke Ellington Collection, and you go back and look at the response to, to uh...say, Ellington's *Black, Brown and Beige* from '43, and a lot of the critics were, "Go back to those three-minute records," and uh its, it seems to be a real challenge once, once, once there is...you know, an image of what someone is supposed to do that, then uh you have to kind of swim upstream to get to those things. Do you find that to be the case uh...?

**Lateef:** Yeah, I look at it as swimming up stream. Uh...its uh...like, for example, it's easier to make a CD than it is to sell it. It requires a particular kind of skill, a marketing skill uh to sell CDs. Uh to get an orchestra to play your music requires a certain kind of

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skill, too. Perhaps, you know, many of us don't know much about that yet. We'll have to acquire...but it's a two-way, I mean. Of course, the door has to be open, too.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** Just knocking doesn't get anyone to open the door. Um...like, in time, perhaps, it will happen. Like Ben Webster said, I remember he said, one day Ben Webster said, "A few slip under the fence."

**Jackson:** Yeah [laughing].

**Lateef:** [laughing] So, maybe if you're more—

**Jackson:** Maybe a few more slip under the fence.

**Lateef:** In time, yeah.

**Jackson:** Yeah, I, I think uh...as I said, if you look historically there is that...that, that challenge, you know?

**Lateef:** That challenge, it's been there since the beginning. We remember the days when uh...when Lady Day [Billie Holliday] had to go in the back of the place she working, et cetera. It's unfortunate that we have that kind of history, but those are the facts of life.

**Jackson:** With, with that in mind um...I have to ask you about the, the historical documentation of, of the music. This uh, as I mentioned before, we started the full interview, there's a new uh, there's a new Charles Mingus biography, and uh I have another colleague who just finished reading it, and I said, "Well, what do you think about it?" We talked a bit about it, and his concern was, well it's, it's interesting to see uh something that he said Max Roach said, you know, "Whose choreographing your ideology?"

**Lateef:** Hmm.

**Jackson:** And um do you find as, as someone whose part of the academic community there's, there's a...uh, is that another case where there's some...some upstream swimming being done with, with uh historical documentation of the music?

**Lateef:** Uh...that's interesting that you say that. Last night, um Robert Rush...who was a congressman in Chicago—

**Jackson:** Right, right.

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**Lateef:** ...Was saying there's a disparity on the documentation of African-American contributions. That's why it's so wonderful that you're doing it now. Um...so, until we get people capable of documentation, and are granted with the facility and time to do it, it won't happen until then. Um...preferably the people who understand the music of the African-American. I know one man who does that. You know Herb Boyd?

**Jackson:** Oh, sure.

**Lateef:** Yeah, he, I think he really understands, and he can do it, and he's doing it. So uh...we need to focus on that, I agree with you. But...you have to have the cardinal things that people need in order to take time to write and document, which are, you know, a place to live, food, doctors, et cetera. Until we get those things, we won't be able to do it. I think we've been struggling so hard to just survive, you know. When we get beyond that, then we'll start documenting.

**Jackson:** Interesting. Could we, could we stop here for...? Okay.

[End of Tape 2]

[Start of Tape 3]

**Jackson:** I think I'd like to go back to uh, or maybe update or amend something we talked about early on concerning uh...presentation of the music and, and the way it uh affected you as a, as a young musician. You talked about coming up uh...and, and playing everyday, playing standards and, and uh, you know, the musical vocabulary of that day. How do uh...looking at, at the music today when obviously there have been changes in, in the way music is not only presented, but the way it's been written. There's the advent of technology, and its, its impact on, on composition. How uh...how do you think the presentation, or let's put it this way, the environment in which musicians have to, to interact has affected the quality of, of the music today? I've, I've heard any number of musicians say, for example, "Oh, it's not like it was back when." Whether there are no jam sessions, and I was recently reading an interview with Sonny Rollins and he talked about some of the musicians in his ensembles. A lot of the pieces that are familiar to him, say, let's just take a standard like *Where Are You?*, or, or *Autumn Leaves* are not necessarily pieces that younger musicians know, um so if you could address that.

**Lateef:** Well, as time passes, different songs come into, are composed. Um like when I was a young fellow, I mean, we played things like *Stardust*, *Cold Cat* [?], *I'm Confessin'*, and then, of course in the 60's, there *How High Is The Moon*, *Ornithology*. So, the songs that are en vogue depends upon the period, I would think, and all the attitude of the musicians, in terms of what they like, enjoy playing. Um I don't know if that addresses everything that you're interested in.

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**Jackson:** Well, now, do you, let me ask you this. Is something that your students might ask you from time to time? I, another reason I'm asking this, I was recently at a uh, a jazz conference, and I was talking to actually a young lady who was an alto saxophonist, and I said— she played very well. They actually, ironically, they were playing *Ornithology*. She was with a large ensemble, and I said, “Boy, you know, you’ve really got a beautiful tone, and, just out of curiosity, how, how old are you?” She says, “Oh, I’m 21.” And I said, “Well, what do you listen to when you’re not listening to uh, you know Charlie Parker, and Bud Powell and people like that?” Um, I, I guess it...my curiosity is, is uh, is two-fold. I mean, you’re someone who’s came up through those ranks, but obviously you’ve expanded your, your compositional palette, and, and, and have looked, you know, to the 32-bar song and, and beyond, and then— it, it seems that we’re at a point where there is so much technically speaking, or just available for an artist to draw upon, uh and maybe it was always that way, but, you know, how do you, what if you are some 21-year-old alto saxophonist who’s, you know, you’re interested in that which has gone before, but how do uh...you know, what are the standards of your generation? It, it’s a...

**Lateef:** You mean, the pedagogy?

**Jackson:** Sure. Yeah.

**Lateef:** Well, this very I think. Uh for example, some teachers, I think that uh, in fact they prescribe, you should uh, if you’re teaching an alto saxophonist you might say, “Transcribe *Now’s The Time*, Charlie Parker’s solo, and learn that. This will, this will be a means of teaching you how to express the blues.” But there are other schools of thought. Um I would never suggest that personally.

**Jackson:** I was going to ask you what your school of thought was?

**Lateef:** I would, because I feel, ultimately, the objective would be to sound like yourself. So, it would be, in my thinking, it would be a waste of time to walk west when you want, the objective is to go east. So, I would immediately tell them to start east, in other words. “Let’s here your ideas of how you play against G minor seven to C,” or something, and...if they express this I’ll say, “Well, do you like it?” And if they say, “No,” I’ll say, “Well, find that which you like.” So, there are two different schools of pedagogy on, on teaching. Uh...I personally believe that a good musician is one that teaches himself something. That’s the way I look at it. Um...not emulating, but innovating, and, like Don Cherry said, this is related, that “style is the death of creativity.” Uh what you hear, what you hear when you listen to when you hear Charlie Parker, that was Charlie Parker. That was his expression. It’s not really style. I mean, if you start emulating that, then you’re, you’re saying that this is the style of Charlie Parker. But Charlie Parker didn’t, I don’t think he saw it as a style. It was his way to express himself. Do you see the point?

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**Jackson:** Sure, and that's interesting. I know Charles Mingus one said that, he said that "Charlie Parker was not a bebopper, but the people who copied him were," and I always used to think that was a wonderful, you know, a wonderful quote.

**Lateef:** Yeah.

**Jackson:** Because there was this, you're right, they're

**Lateef:** There's something there.

**Jackson:** They're playing themselves, and then it becomes, you know, codified, and we call it this or that and, that's why, you know, I was, it's uh...I guess with the millennium there's so, there's so much recorded history now, and, and uh it's, it's certainly...it's a daunting task, I think, for, for younger people who've, whose generational references are different. When I started listening to the music, as I said, you know, my father had recordings by yourself, and Duke Ellington, and, and, I mean, everybody, Shirley Scott. You name it, he was very eclectic, but I heard that and love it, but I, there was also what we heard, my brother and myself, heard on the radio. You know, those Motown, and James Brown and all these things, and it uh...— So, you can either look at it as, as you seem to have clearly done with as, you can look at all these influences as a garden, or you can look at it as, you know, kind of a, a maze of confusion, and, and, and uh it, it seems that uh...that's, that's why I was just really curious about that. You know, one can either choose to uh...do what we talked about earlier. You know, those people who choose to hang on to one, to say that the music is one, is one suit, it's a sweater, or it's a, you know, a pair of corduroys and not maybe a lot of things. Or um, or just look at, you know, the entire closet. But uh, but anyway I, I, I digress and, of course, I'm not [laughing] I'm not [indecipherable], pardon me. My southern baptist comes out here [laughing]. Could...you, earlier we talked about, or you talked about musicians uh...that you heard and were influenced by. Who are some musicians that are playing now that, that have caught your ear over the last few years that you want to talk about?

**Lateef:** Over the last year?

**Jackson:** Over the last few years uh, you know.

**Lateef:** A few, what is "a few?"

**Jackson:** Oh...15-20 years. How's that?

**Lateef:** Of course...Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane.

**Jackson:** Anyone else?

**Lateef:** I, I can't think of anyone else.

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**Jackson:** Those are tough to follow, anyway, but uh– Well, we talked a bit about Ornette Coleman earlier, and, and what uh, what you found unique about his, his contributions. Could you talk a bit about, about Coltrane, and, and what uh...?

**Lateef:** Well, you know, what impressed me about John Coltrane is, is that he sounded like himself, like no-one else...and uh...there's an admiration. In my thinking, he's upholding tradition. Um you go back and, and you listen to the period when, when there was Lester Young, as we mentioned, Coleman Hawkins, playing the same instrument, but sounding uniquely different than each other. Uh and there was Don Byas, also, and Herschel Evans all sounded different, the same instrument. And to me that is the tradition of this music, to sound like yourself, and John Coltrane was doing that, and that's why he attracted my attention. He showed you that it's possible. Lester Young showed us it's different to sound, one can sound different than Coleman Hawkins, and, and that makes a difference to me. Uh it's, it's just like when you get into composition, if someone wrote symphony like Beethoven's *9th*, what is the accomplish of it? I mean, we could listen to...to Beethoven, as opposed to the new composer who writes like Beethoven...um unless you have some other reason for listening. Um...its the unique things that stand out for us as contributions of, in culture.

**Jackson:** Would that analogy carry over to um people who are, are...I'd say, currently involved in, in the music, or, let's say, people who are being uh touted by record companies who sound like, as a friend of mine likes to say, "who sound like 1955?" I mean, would you say the same thing for, for people who are leading uh...you know, ensembles that, that are...in, in the style of say, let's just say, like the Miles Davis Quintet of the early-50's? Do you think, would that analogy hold for you, as well?

**Lateef:** I think so, and of course, I must keep this reservation, there are always the anomalies.

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** Um...of course, the Miles Davis group didn't sound like John Kirby's group, or the Savoy Sultans. That's why he was a unique sound.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** And every so often, someone comes through with this unique quality.

**Jackson:** Do you also think it's uh...and, and maybe this is the blessing and the curse of so much literature available in the history of the music that...there's a uh...that, that we as listeners, or critics, or archivists, in my case, are possibly subjected to um sentimentality when we're assessing music? I'll, I'll give you an example. I guess it was Sony Records just reissued the uh, its a box set of the Miles Davis/John Coltrane recordings, and, and

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**Comment [3]:**

12/10/11 11:04 PM

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Clip 3)

Yusef on the tradition of unique sounding individuals in jazz.

Tape 3, 9:29-10:41



uh...you know, someone on the radio said, “Well, this was the way jazz should have been,” and, and I mean, I called in and said, you know, “Don’t forget that when, when Miles Davis hired John Coltrane people said, you know, ‘Why did hire this guy? He’s nuts.’” And that we, without looking at the uh, are we really looking at history the way it was actually happening at the time. You mentioned Charlie Parker and, and, of course, he’s an innovator, but there, you know, there was a lot of controversy about these players, as well, and do you think there’s, is there a sentimentality, you think, in assessing the music, to some degree?

**Lateef:** You mean, people like John Coltrane?

**Jackson:** Well, I mean, people like John Coltrane, or is there a tendency to look at certain periods that happened to be past as the “good ol’ days,” as opposed to looking at, as you said, that there was clearly originality in, going back to the [Davis/]Coltrane Quintet?

**Lateef:** Well, let’s put it like this. Perhaps, there is some of that. Some people don’t continue on the journey with innovative people. They can go with them up to a point, and they’re unable to go beyond that point. I think this happened in the case of John Coltrane. Um there’s an interview, perhaps, you’ve heard of the, it was made in Sweden, I think, just before he left Miles?

**Jackson:** Oh, sure, right. In the early-60’s, right.

**Lateef:** The interviewer asked John, at least he said, “John people that you sound as though you’re angry.” You remember that?

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** And John simply said, [coughs] excuse me, he said, “No, no, I’m not angry,” he said, “Maybe they think that because I’m trying so many different things, and I’m trying to find out what’s best for me.” He was purely an eclectic, and I know for a fact that he was. In any hour of the day, you could go in his pocket and find things that he was working on, you know, like— So, in exploring this uh variety of processes um he was unpredictable, and uh people couldn’t continue. It was beyond their ability to comprehend, to appreciate. But we all have our limitations, but innovative people go beyond ordinary, you could say, uh, look at uh Alexander Graham Bell, he thought you could talk through a piece of wire. Charles Edison thought you could have a light using wire and glass, and he proved it, and so John went on to prove the ideas that he envisioned. They’re not ordinary things, and, and that’s what we call innovation, and moving towards genius: people who do things that aren’t ordinary.

**Jackson:** What, what’s your opinion of, of uh John Coltrane’s, let’s say, post-*A Love Supreme* work? ‘Cause that, that seems to be uh—in fact, Katya[sp] and I were talking

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about this fairly recently, that they've just reissued *Ascension* and, and *Kulu Sé Mama* and—I think your, your analogy is apt there. It's like someone walking a person home and they say, "I'll walk three blocks with you." If the person lives six blocks away, they stop on the third block and go.

**Lateef:** Yes, yes.

**Jackson:** What, what is, what is your opinion of, of those, those latter works?

**Lateef:** *A Love Supreme*. Well, I think they're in that realm of uh exploratory music. Um...you know, I think music like that shows us that, it makes us think, "What is it can I do? What can I contribute to culture? This man has moved from A to Z, you know. So, what am I?" It's motivating, I think. He shows you all these possibilities...and I think that's what it serves as a catalyst for others to, to contribute.

**Jackson:** We uh, we talked somewhat earlier about um, well, obviously your, your career as a, as a session player, as a, as a bandleader. Did you talk a bit about uh the art of...you talked about the art of being a multi-reed person, but the art of, of leading a band? It's, it's uh...you know, we have the, the Duke Ellington Collection here in the, in the, the Smithsonian, and it's interesting to have heard so many people talk about Ellington's ways of, of dealing with personalities. If you could, you, you could talk a bit about that, please.

**Lateef:** Well...perhaps, there are many musicians who have uh novel ideals...but to put them in, in, in a form that's palatable that uh becomes a fruition uh is not possible for some, because it takes certain means. I think, in Duke Ellington's case, um he had the ability to write songs that brought him enough money to maintain a big band for years. I think he was one of the biggest writers of ASCAP.

**Jackson:** That's correct.

**Lateef:** I think that's factual. And so, he could try things. He, he could try to write music for the personalities that were in his band, and, and keep them working at the same time. So, but, like Dizzy's big band was a unique band of the 40's, but he couldn't, financially, he couldn't keep it together. Neither could Billy Eckstine, he had to disband for the same reason. He preceded the Dizzy Gillespie band. So, the means to let an idea grow and blossom, we all don't have it. So, um some of our potentials are never realized, because of lack of means.

**Jackson:** What about um...the, the interaction with, with players in the band?

**Lateef:** Well, that—

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**Jackson:** Yeah, I think the, well in addition to, because, certainly, the brass tacks are, are more than a little important, but uh, because that's another— I, I think of Ellington again, because he had a lot of uh...I mean, he had tonal characters, and , and literal characters [chuckling] in that band. What's, what's your experience been, is, is, is there a, is there an art to uh—?

**Lateef:** You mean, with personalities?

**Jackson:** Yeah. Is there an art to keeping that kind of family functioning?

**Lateef:** Yeah, I think there is. You have to know the elements. It's having a knowledge of, of human chemistry in selecting the group.

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** Um some people work well together, some don't, for different reasons. They have to be on a level of kindred sensibilities, in terms of aesthetic interpretation, presentation. Like Kenneth Brand[?] used to say, "We don't need 'tudes," meaning "attitudes."

**Jackson:** "Attitudes" [laughing].

**Lateef:** [chuckling] They don't work, you know. So, you had to be humble, and, and willing to work together, in spite of having ability, and sensibilities. And Miles was, he was, more or less, a genius at putting together groups that worked.

**Jackson:** Does uh, does having a knowledge of a person's uh...self, for wont of a better word, does that affect or impact the way you might, say, again in the case of Ellington, write for, for individuals? You know, Ellington said, it helps, he says, "You can't write music for someone unless you know how that person plays poker," and, I mean, I guess you could sort of think of poker in a metaphorical sense, but have you found that to be the case? Having, obviously a knowledge of someone's musical range, but their uh, because, you know, again talking, as we mentioned earlier, about, again, the Lester Young and what's in-, inside, have you found that to ever be the case with uh...?

**Lateef:** Yeah, there's a thin line. For example, you can't write something that musicians can't play, that's so technical, because you'll never hear it. I remember when I was a young fellow, I was about 19, there was a composer to the conservatory in Detroit, and he wrote some music for, for us, a general ensemble around the neighborhood, and we couldn't play it. I'm sure it was genius music, you know, 'cause he had dotted 32nd's follow by three 16th's, you know, which was beyond us. So, he never heard that music. So, you have to have the ability to, to get the most out of these things that are comprehensible. I'm, I'm, obviously Duke had that, that ability, and Miles, too. You know, like *Kind Of Blue*? Such a, such a simple melody, but so effective. So, you have

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to know the nature, and you can't write beyond the person's ability to produce, otherwise you never hear it.

**Jackson:** Are you a, do you see developments on the musical landscape today that you, you can point to and say, and I don't mean this with any rancor, but you could say, "Oh, I was doing that 25 or 30 years ago," or, or uh—you know, it's like if you see somebody on the street with a necktie you go, "Oh, I had a tie like that in 1947"—Do you, do you see those sorts of, sorts of things in uh, in music today?

**Lateef:** No, I don't think I'm capable of saying that for the simple reason that I think each human being is unique, even if they try to emulate someone else, it won't be exactly. Like, we have unique fingerprints, we can never be another person, no matter how hard we try, I don't think.

**Jackson:** That's a, yeah, that's a good point. That's a good point. Is there anything else you'd like to say about uh, 'cause it seems you've been able to, fortunately, you've been able to balance your academic career with, it has not overshadowed your, your output as a composer. Um...do you think the two, one feeds the other? Do you see that...?

**Lateef:** The academic world?

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** Yeah, I think so. They go hand in hand, I think. One hand washes the other. Um you see, one purpose that history serves, uh to know about certain aspects of history, is that it motivates. Uh you...you find out what others have had to do to reach what they reached, and it causes you to realize that the things that you must to to reach your apex, if you will, because these events in history didn't happen by accident. They didn't fall out of the sky. There was certain concerted effort and understanding that moved these people towards the things that they accomplished. You take...take John Coltrane, for example. One night, after he had played with Miles in Detroit, we sat up um...after breakfast, we sat up a few hours and he would ask questions like um, "Which two keys give you 12 different tones? Which two keys give you nine different tones? Which two keys give you 11 different tones?" Um and we figured it out, you know. You know, like, the keys a half-step apart give you twelve tones, et cetera. Now, what he did with that is another thing, and uh after finding out what they were, and I think I hear it in *A Love Supreme*, where he moves to different areas. [Scatting "Acknowledgement"]. Then, he'd moved to [scatting more of "Acknowledgement"]. That's another, another key, [briefly scatting] and I then he might play in both keys, those two, and then he might play in two others, and I think that's what he meant by, "Knowledge will set you free." So, if one is capable of playing successively in various keys, if one has the knowledge of how to move through these keys...um...so I think that's the part of the, the things that ferments evolution is knowing how to do it. Um...his first wife was, was very um...important to his development, I think. I don't know if you remember—

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**Jackson:** Naima, you're speaking of?

**Lateef:** Naima.

**Jackson:** Right.

**Lateef:** Um the critics were talking about it sounds as though he's playing "sheets of sound?"

**Jackson:** Right.

**Lateef:** Perhaps, they didn't know that, that Naima had, I don't know if she rented, or bought or purchased a harp.

**Jackson:** Harp, mmhmm.

**Lateef:** And you set the pedals, and then you can just pull them, and you can hear the sheets of sound. Um...you can practice all the violin books, et cetera. Uh she was a heavy scholar of um...astrology. In fact, they told me about the esoteric astrology, and I went out on 42nd street and I bought the book they recommended. And there were things in there about hidden planets, which implies that there are things behind what you see.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** So, this is a stimulating possibility, even if you can transfer to these ideas to music uh you can come up things you wouldn't think of ordinarily. And um I think in the liner notes of the *Love Supreme*, it speaks about uh, this may have been Alice Coltrane that said that, at the end of John's life he was constructing like scales out of synthetic groupings of notes.

**Jackson:** Well, yeah, yeah. Alice Coltrane did some [indecipherable]. Mmhmm, mmhmm.

**Lateef:** So, you see, it was this incessant search for uh...progress and evolution that promoted[?] John. Uh and God knows what else he listened to. Um I remember seeing him at the airport the day he arrived from Ghana. They had some interesting music in Ghana. I think he heard that, too. I remember in Ghana, watching the flute players play...um...the indigenous flutes, and there were times when...their heads would be maybe 18 inches from the floor, but they'd still be playing the flute. Now, there were times when John would be performing at Birdland when his saxophone would be six or seven inches from the floor. Now, I assume that he had to assume that position to play what, what you were hearing. This relation of sound to shape and position. Of course, Elvin [Jones] was part of it. Elvin was quite, such a stimulus...for John.

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**Jackson:** Oh, sure.

**Lateef:** You understand?

**Jackson:** Oh, yeah.

**Lateef:** Yeah. Um...so, he had looked into many things, and, of course, he carried on the road books of various, various disciplines that he would study and try to relate things. He defin-, he's discovered what had been known in Europe by the "secondary dominance," the progression of minor third, fourth, minor third, fourth. You know, as opposed from going uh...C back to C, we'd go to C to E flat to A flat to B to E to G to C, you see, and he used that structure in a lot of the standards. He used it in *Body and Soul*, and some others. Um but it had been alive in Europe for years, secondary dominance, that's nothing new, but he's the first to use it in, in so-called "improv," which is really autophysiopsychic music expression. Yes?

**Jackson:** I was going to ask you, you know, you said "so-called improv." Now—

**Lateef:** Yeah. You know what I say that?

**Jackson:** Uh, let's go into that before—

**Lateef:** Yeah, the reason I call it "so-called improv," because one of the definitions of improvisation is "to present something without previous preparation," and that's not true in the case of our music. We use, we, we use a lot of preparation to play it. That's why that word is not correct.

**Jackson:** Have uh...now, I'm assuming this is something you present, what you just told me, is there something you present to your students. Are, are they receptive to uh...?

**Lateef:** Well, some are.

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** Some are, you know, and I can understand that, too. Uh...um it depends on how they see things, and how, their position in their environment. For example, um I had one student who was studying uh...*Body and Soul*, and uh...I had shown him it's possible to put an augmented eleventh in a major seven chord. Um you know, that's the interval that Bach was fired from many church jobs.

**Jackson:** Oh, that's interesting.

**Lateef:** They call it "diablos en la música:" the devil in music.

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**Comment [4]:**  
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Clip 4)

Yusef on jazz as "so-called improv" music.

Tape 3, 31:31-31:56



**Jackson:** Oh, the devil, that's right! That's right. Okay. Mmhmm, mmhmm.

**Lateef:** And uh he, he uh, he was a good saxophonist, and he would play these jobs in Holiday Inns with bands, and the bandleader, if he played that augmented eleventh and it made—the bandleader would look at him and say, “That’s the wrong note,” you know.

**Jackson:** [chuckling].

**Lateef:** So, so if he wanted to work with that band, he couldn't use that interval. Um...but um...so, the environment depends on what you uh, is appreciated, and what's not appreciated. So, what can I say? Um...people go so far. People have limitations. Some have more than others. Um...John uh was like a— I had one student who had gone to high school in Russia, and what they, they teach them um...um diametric materialism, which, which deals with um...what you find in Soviet countries, communist countries— but this student told me that uh John Coltrane had development to where he was because of his application of diametric materialism, and he gave me a graphic description of what he meant. And he drew a glass on the, on the board. He said, “John was like, he would get some information and put it in the glass, and then he would get some more and he would put it in the glass,” and he said, “finally, the glass would become full, and everything that had gone in would start leaking, and it would just spill over. So, what you'd hear John playing was an amalgamation, a compilation of many things. It wasn't just one thing. It was many things that had connected, that then became something else.” Which made a lot of sense to me.

**Jackson:** It does make a lot of se-, yeah.

**Lateef:** I mean, it sounds logical.

**Jackson:** No, it really does.

**Lateef:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Jackson:** It's, it's uh...it's interesting that you're, you're presenting these ideas, because I, one of the uh...we, we talked a little bit earlier about the...the literature, such as, you know, as it exists concerning the music, the biographies and those sorts of things. To the extent that you've, and I'm sure that you've looked at quite a number of them, do you, do you think...do you think we have a, we as a culture have a real, an accurate assessment of the contributions of these people if, if we don't have, if we don't take into consideration some of the, really, some of the philosophical ideas you've just, you've just presented?

**Lateef:** It would certainly make it easier to comprehend, I think, if we understood this philosophy.

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**Jackson:** ‘Cause it, it, it’s interesting, we were again talking earlier about this uh, this new Charles Mingus biography, and, and, and uh...I, I think, you know, we overuse, well, here in this museum we talk about context a lot, I think unless the shutters, as you’ve said, unless the shutters are open wide enough to kind of look at everything...

**Lateef:** That’s important.

**Jackson:** ...we don’t really get the uh...you know, this person is more than a bassist, or, you know, in your case a multi-instrumentalist. There’s, there’s so many uh, there’s so many things that go into, what is it Amiri Baraka said, “Hunting is not just the heads on the wall.”

**Lateef:** Hmm.

**Jackson:** And I think that, I think that a lot of what you’ve said, and certainly your, your music bears the scent that there’s a, well, he also called what, what comes out as writing as a result of a powerful motley of experience, and...

**Lateef:** Hmm.

**Jackson:** ...and, you know, obviously, as you mentioned earlier, your numerous experiences have, have fed uh, you know, have fed your, your career.

**Lateef:** Yeah, I think at any one point in music, you’re listening to the whole continuum of the individual, from birth until now at the time you hear them. Like John Dewey said in his lectures at Harvard in, I think in the early-30’s, *Art as Experience* lectures, he said um, “You can’t separate art from the experience of the person.”

**Jackson:** Are there uh...as I mentioned earlier, are there things that you want to uh, to get on record now? I mean, you could, you could be, feel free to uh, about your music, about other people you. Um I’ve said this before, I encourage you to use your eight bars. Not just eight bars [both laughing], but as many bars as you’d like...to uh...

**Lateef:** What do you mean, music?

**Jackson:** Well...

**Lateef:** Uh literature? What?

**Jackson:** Because it’s all linked. I mean, if, if there are things you absolutely are heartfelt, or adamant about getting on record, I would, I’d certainly encourage you to.

**Lateef:** Well, brother Jackson, to be frank with you uh, I’m looking forward to the day that, that I have I time to sit, sit, to sit down and write an extended work for the orchestra.

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Um...and one of the ideas is I'd like to write a piece, um the first movement being life...um...no, is it? It's pre-life, it's like the formation of life, cells that develop, that's pre-life, and then life itself, and death and resurrection. Those are extramusical ideas, but I'd like to use those themes for, for composition, those four movements. But to do that, I'd have to have time to sit down and, and do it, and time is a precious commodity in this world. Um but if I live long enough, I'd like to do that. That's one thing.

**Jackson:** Mmhmm. Anything else?

**Lateef:** Well, you mean, besides doing that?

**Jackson:** Of course, that's quite a lot, isn't it?

**Lateef:** Yeah, it is. It's a lot. Oh, I'd like to, I'd like to write some literature, too. Um...like I said I wrote one novella. Of course, that's been about 12 years ago. I'd like to write some more, but that's a, that's an occupation that one must apply uh themselves to everyday. I, I think writers get up every morning and write, you know.

**Jackson:** Well, we try [laughing], but you're right. Yeah, we try.

**Lateef:** Oh, You write also?

**Jackson:** I try.

**Lateef:** That's beautiful. Yeah.

**Jackson:** But, you're right, it's a...it's the doing, as the zen masters say, you know, "When you eat, you should eat," when you, you know, "When you write, you should write," and uh it's...you know, you talked about dedication to one thing, and, and uh I think that's, it's important to do that and not...you can't write and iron a shirt at the same time. So, it, I well understand what you mean about the, about the time factor.

**Lateef:** Yeah, well, you know, some people can do more than one thing. Like, I was surprised, you were there I think Katya, yeah, you, [to Katya] did you see Miles' artworks in Turkey?

**Katya:** Yeah, I was there.

**Lateef:** Yeah, they had two floors of all of his sketches. Wasn't it beautiful? So, it's possible to do more than one thing, once you can position yourself to do them.

**Jackson:** Sorry. Ah okay, sorry, I'm reading a question here. Is it? Oh, what year did the concept for...? [To Katya] You can help me out here. Sorry.

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**Katya:** auto-psyhic...

**Lateef:** Oh, autophysiopsychic.

**Katya:** Oh, I'm sorry.

**Lateef:** That's alright.

**Katya:** autophysiopsychic.

**Lateef:** When did that happen, you say?

**Katya:** Yeah, and what really brought– I'm sorry, Reuben.

**Jackson:** No, no, that's fine. No, go right–

**Lateef:** What prompted me to look at–?

**Katya:** Exactly, and your whole, and then what you just shared with me about the definition of– Did you already touch on that?

**Jackson:** To some degree, but no, go right ahead.

**Katya:** If you want to expound–

**Jackson:** The frustration with, with jazz. I can't even say it. That's probably why–

**Katya:** I know, we're all shying away from–

**Jackson:** That word sticks in my throat.

**Lateef:** Sure. Yeah, well that happened...hmm, let's see, in '70 at the Manhattan School of Music, when I was, when I got my Master's, just before I got it uh the Dean there Mrs. [Josephine C.] Whitmore had me do some research on the term "jazz," and uh...I found all these ambiguities that uh, I've show you some of them: tomfoolery, and poppycock and terms that I wouldn't even mention in front of ladies. Um and so, then and there I realized that our music had been misidentified. Um I don't know whether is was purpose, on purpose, or to steer tight people...uh unintentional. Nevertheless, then I said, I said, "Well, I should have my term that I feel adequately defines the music, and then that's when I came up with the term "autophysiopsychic music." "Auto" meaning "self," "physio" meaning "the physical," the body and the instrument, "psychic" meaning uh this "the spirit, the intellect and the soul," which means music from the "physical, mental and spiritual self." I thought the term was accurate, and I've been using it ever

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since. Um...I've been negotiating with a person in Springfield. Was it uh...um...the dictionary people there...Merri-?

**Jackson:** Merriam-Webster? Is that, is that—?

**Lateef:** I don't know if it's Merriam-Webster. I think it is Merriam-Webster. And to enter my term, and uh he told me that uh, "We have to see more," uh, "see it in print more frequently before we do it." So, I've been sending him articles for about two years, and maybe before I die they'll accept it. But uh I think this misidentification uh it stereotypes people...um and that's not good to stereotype anyone. It um, it denies geniuses the merits they should have. Um...people like Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Sonny Stitt, uh John Coltrane, and this is an injustice. Um...uh people should not demean others. We should acknowledge the contributions to culture with the proper terms, and that, that's how that term came about. There are some people who think, "Well, the term [jazz] has taken on more positive connotations." Well, perhaps it has, but the demeaning and vulgar ones are still there to be entertained. It was misidentified at the beginning, and it does harm. Some people are turned off at a concert if you even use that term. Um so, it's not needed, because of the harm that it does people. Um I was listening to a lecture by a professor from the University of Pennsylvania, he's an authority on stereotyping, and he said, he lectured at Amherst College, he said, "If you want to destroy a person, just start stereotyping them, them or what they do, and you'll destroy them." Uh...and this term does just that. I mean, it poisons the minds of some people who understands things through words, who aren't able to recognize the value of it through listening. Uh so that's why the term needs to be eliminated, because of that. Um..of course, I don't have to, to tell you the vulgarities that the term has.

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** When they tell you the term came from the red-light district of New Orleans, um which has a negative connotation. Um...it, it's not, it's not only done, stereotyping is done many different ways. Uh this lecture uh he, he gave an example, he said um, "If you say...," um, "If someone wanted to stereotype the Jewish people they would say, could say um, 'Oh um, Greenberg destroyed the Titanic. Oh, oh, no, I mean, iceberg.'"

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** You know, that's not right. It's not right. Um...during the the, the second world war, I'd open the mailbox and I'd see a picture of [Nikita] Khrushchev, his face appearing out of a toilet. This is supposed to make me think lesser of him, I don't even know the man. So, stereotyping is not good, and that's a stereotypical term. You can see by those definitions in the Merriam-Webster.

**Jackson:** Sure.

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**Comment [5]:**

12/10/11 11:04 PM

December 10, 2011 11:05 PM

December 10, 2011 11:05 PM

December 10, 2011 11:05 PM

Clip 5)

Yusef renames "jazz" for himself as "autophysipsychic music"

Tape 3, 42:26-43:55



**Lateef:** So, we don't need that. I think we should be very proud of African-Americans contribution to that aspect of culture called music, because they survived all the pangs of discrimination, being refused education. When slavery was abolished, they were removed from the plantations with only plantational skills, and they picked these old instruments off the dump heaps, disbanded by uh John Phillip Sousa, and taught themselves to play them without teachers. You could call that a survival occupation, and thats amiable. And from it, uh...the blues form developed, uh which has contributed, a musical form which has contributed to music, more music, than any other form that I know of. So, we should be appreciative, and not call the music by names that denigrates it. This is how I see it.

**Jackson:** You think we'll ever get to a point where that's, this argument is resolved?

**Lateef:** Resolved? I hope so. I hope so. I hope so. We need to do that. We need to respect people for their contributions properly, and we should move in that direction.

**Jackson:** [To Katya] Well, Katya, I am... Well, since actually, since you were discussing...philosophical matters, definitions of music and, and uh, well, just methodology-based things, let's, let's talk about the uh the process of selecting musicians as, as, as was suggested by, what did Charlie Parker say, "Our worthy constituency." How, how do you go about doing that, and, because I would agree there is a, there's clearly a sensitivity which is uh gone on with, with, with that process?

**Lateef:** Yeah. Well, basically, I do two things. I listen to them, to them play, and uh, and then I, I, I try to see what type of uh, hmm what do you call it uh...um...attitude, not attitude, their lifestyle. Like uh, if uh, if they are uh free of drugs, or...et cetera, you know, because that can cause a havoc to them, and, and if you travel abroad and you come to customs and drugs are found, then the whole group suffers. So, if they're, if they're free of those two, if I like the way they play and they're free of those habits, that's, that's enough if we can come to financial agreements.

**Jackson:** Now, you, well, you mentioned how something like that could impact travel overseas, if we get into, I guess this is a question which is, is been posed to so many musicians, but the uh, the question of acceptance of, of the music here versus other, other parts of the world. I, I refer, you know, again briefly to Ellington, because of my nine-to-five job, but he, it's one of these questions which he was asked so uh, so frequently, and, and, and uh, well, as so many other people have been, as well, but how do you uh, how do you, you view that? Is, is there in your opinion more acceptance, you know, across the water than here, or, or what's your experience been?

**Lateef:** Well, my viewpoint is, is this: America's the new world, Europe is the old world. So, in a sense you can say um that they have a head start on America, and in the sense of being to appreciate art, you'll find most of the art of the masters, you know,

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**Comment [6]:**

12/10/11 11:04 PM

December 10, 2011 11:05 PM

December 10, 2011 11:05 PM

December 10, 2011 11:05 PM

Clip 6)

Yusef on African-Americans' contribution to music.

Tape 3, 48:41-49:52



Titian, Van Gogh, et cetera, that was in Europe. So, they've been exposed to, to art longer than America has. Now, the guy that starts the race first, he's ahead of the guy that starts after, you see, which is common logic. Um..and for that reason, and I should say that; like, in France, they study solfège, I mean all the students, so they understand what goes into music making valid, viral music, and um for that reason they are able to appreciate it uh more in depth than, say, the average American. That's not to say that there aren't people in America who, who, who also appreciate it, but I think the masses of people who appreciate African-American music, may be in Europe. There are over 300 festivals in Europe every year. I don't think we have that many here. And uh they know what goes into development of John Coltrane, uh Coleman Hawkins, uh Earl Gardner. They realize the effort, and the thought, and practice that has gone in, and that's why they appreciate it. You go to the North Sea Festival, and you see families that have travelled maybe from Germany, and you see a man with his wife and two little children, and they're dressed very nicely, and, and, and they see you, and they kind of light up that you come to their country to offer the music, and, and because they realize uh the merits of the music, and it's just a matter of the head start. Um you take uh, for example, hmm...well, maybe I can say Niels-Henning [Ørsted-Pedersen], the bass player?

**Jackson:** Ørsted-Pedersen, sure.

**Lateef:** Yeah. He speaks German, Danish, French. Um...that alone shows you how, how he's been trained. Um and you take the Danes, for example, I've uh witnessed in Copenhagen at the [Jazzhus] Montmartre, uh Ben Webster, one night he played The Beatles song *Yesterday*, and you could hear a pin drop, and he played with so much feeling, the Danes some of them were crying, you know. Tears were running down some of their cheeks, and so they realized the depth and the heart that was in the music. It was as though his saxophone was connected to his heart, you see. So, you find people with that type of ability in Europe, in certain places in Europe...and it's because I think they've had more experience, more exposure to art, music and painted art than the average American, perhaps. And in, in Germany, for example, there's something else that, that is an invocation of this, uh when someone buys a radio, a television, they have to pay a tax that goes into a coffer uh for the, for the government, for the radio station to bring musicians into the country to play. That's why I was commissioned to write a piece for Cologne radio, because who had bought televisions paid a tax that permitted them to pay me to come do that. And at that studio, during the break when we were recording the *African-American Epic Suite*, I'd go by one room and you'd see some people from, from Borneo [Reuben laughs] you understand, and the next room would be some people from France. We don't, we don't have that here. People don't appreciate art to that extent. We may have some equivalence. The National Foundations for the Arts, but uh—

**Katya:** But that, really, I'm sure you know has, has shrunk. I mean, you know, and, and—

**Lateef:** Yeah, it has shrunk here. That's right, it has.

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**Katya:** As have the other foundations that used to support quite a bit.

**Lateef:** Yes. So, uh we're shooting ourselves in the foot, huh?

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Katya:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** [chuckling] If you will. So...you can't blame a person for not appreciating something if he hasn't been trained to understand what's so valuable, what are the, the profundity of the music. You, you have to be trained to appreciate it, if you don't have it normally.

**Jackson:** Do you think there's a, looking, looking at the history of, of this country and, and uh I think your, your comment about the youth, the comparative youth of this country is a, is a very valid one, uh I guess the paradox, if you will, of this music being primarily the product and genius of, of African-Americans in a society in which, you know, African-Americans are not necessarily valued? You know, here, here, here's this jewel coming from a segment of society...

**Lateef:** Yes.

**Jackson:** ...And maybe your feelings about this group of society has not been resolved. It's, it's a real, I was listening to uh an interview with, what's the guy's name who worked with, Sam Phillips, who had Sun Studio in Memphis, and he said, "So many people in this country don't realize that our, our symphonies came from, whether it's uh a great saxophonist or a gospel quartet from Tennessee;" and it seems at times that maybe when we, our view of "classical music" is something that's ironic that, you know, we think of just of Schubert and, and, you know [Dmitri] Shostakovich and people like that. As my uncle was fond of saying, "Yeah, it's, it's those four guys with the gold teeth down on the corner who sing in the church on Sunday." So, it, do you, I'm, I'm hoping that what you're saying is the youth, the fact that we're such a young country may mean that we, after we get through our terrible adolescence we'll embrace these things, but do you think the history of our nation has something to do with this wrestling that we, we seem to have, or, or kind of love/hate relationship with our, our music?

**Lateef:** Yeah. I think the lack of uh inclusion has affected um the appreciation of music in this country, um and it's obvious that there is a certain segment of people in this country, that being the African-American, who has contributed to world music. Uh you take the *9th Symphony* of Antonin Dvořák uh is based on an African-American theme that an African mother used to sing to her baby. It's, it was called *Goin' Home*.

**Jackson:** *Goin' Home*.

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**Lateef:** But actually, it was [singing] “Go to sleep, go to sleep, baby, go to sleep,” that this mother sang to her baby, and Dvořák admitted that this is a very significant music, the African-American. Tchaikovsky’s *Golliwog’s Cakewalk* is, is, is, is African-American.

**Jackson:** Debussy’s, right. Sure. Yeah. That’s right.

**Lateef:** And, and, and black and brown, black and brown concerto, Stravinsky wrote for...uh, what’s it, the trumpet, uh the clarinetist...uh Woody Herman.

**Jackson:** Mmm. Oh, *Ebony Concerto*. Right. Right.

**Lateef:** Yeah, *Ebony Concerto*.

**Jackson:** Stravinsky. Sure. Sure.

**Lateef:** Yeah, uh and piece that uh um Paul Robeson did, *Emperor Jones* came from African-American music, and so on. In fact, there’s a professor, well a doctor at Cologne Radio that wrote his dissertation in German, and he wrote about the influences of African-American music on classical composers, and I’ve just mentioned a few of them.

**Jackson:** Uh could you talk about your um, your stints working with uh, with Barry Harris?

**Lateef:** Oh, yes. Barry Harris is, is respected, highly respected, particularly in Detroit when we were all there, they called him the “high priest of music.” Um...he taught uh the saxophonist Charles McPherson, from about age 13 somewhere, and Lonnie Hilliyer. He’s a very wise man. In fact, I think I learned more about autophysiopsychic music from Barry than other one person, and he’s, he’s a world teacher right today. I respect him highly.

[End of Tape 3]

[Start of Tape 4]

**Jackson:** Uh could you talk about your um, your stints working with uh, with Barry Harris?

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from Barry than other one person, and he's, he's a world teacher right today. I respect him highly.

**Jackson:** Yeah, another of that great Detroit connection.

**Lateef:** I like his album with, with Sonny Stitt and, and your father, Katya. He played uh, I like that uh *Can't Get Started With You*. That's a beautiful album.

**Jackson:** Are any of your children musical like...?

**Lateef:** N-, well, they may be. Uh my son has some drums, but uh, and I asked him if he wanted to take lessons and he said, "No," so, we don't force him...

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** To not play, but he was interested in journalism at the time. So, as long as he's happy...

**Jackson:** Sure.

**Lateef:** It's okay, and uh my older son, he's a disabled veteran from the Vietnam War. Um my daughter passed last year...Iqbal, yeah. So, that's where that is.

**Jackson:** Now, this is something that we, we touched upon to some degree when, when we were discussing uh, excuse me, your, your work with the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band, but if you could a bit more about your uh working with, for wont of a better word, with latin-jazz, or jazz with an afro-cuban influence.

**Lateef:** Well, I've never—

**Jackson:** Sorry, I used that word, didn't I, "jazz?" Sorry, Mom. Okay. Yeah.

**Lateef:** I've never worked with an afro-cuban group.

**Jackson:** So, I guess, the Gillespie Orchestra would be the extent of, of that kind of flavor in, in, in your uh—

**Lateef:** I suppose, although I've recorded with [Puerto Rican percussionist] Ray Barretto...

**Jackson:** Mmhmm. Right.

**Lateef:** And um...[American percussionist] Chief Bey with the—

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**Jackson:** Oh, sure. Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** With Olatunji.

**Jackson:** Olatunji. Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** Yeah. That's as close as I've gotten to that.

**Katya:** Um...this, okay, uh we at the break, just now, we were talking about *The Blue Yusef Lateef*, and how that album was a, really a startling departure, or, after that, you made a startling departure from kind of the standard way of recording improvised music at that time, to really recording music that begins at the beginning and, and runs through with one thought until the end; and I just, we're just curious to find out when that happened for you, what was the catalyst for it happening, and, and how you are thinking musically, or what changed in your musical thinking between that and now?

**Lateef:** I, I think that period happened right after I returned from Africa in 1985. Some interesting things happened in Africa, which I think brought about this change that you speak of. Um for example, um in Africa I noticed, and this is in Nigeria, northern Nigeria, uh the way they structure instruments, say, the ballophone is different than the way it's constructed in the western world. For example, the lowest note may be in the middle of the xylophone, and the highest note may be on the left, and the lowest, another low note may be on the right of the lowest; whereas, the xylophone in American runs from the lowest on the left progressively to the right. So, they structure instruments different, and they play them in an elaborate way. Their music is very interesting. Um I also noticed that their concepts of attitudes, in terms of harmony, is different. Like, for example, in, in the western world, uh the type of harmony that expresses sadness is, is the minor key um, and I had this experience like in...in Africa. There was a production called *Queen Amina*, where, it was based on the life of a real-life queen who lived uh in northern Nigeria about 300 years ago, where all the, the various ethnic groups paid homage to her um in real life: the Nupe, the Maguzawa, the Hausa, Igbo, et cetera. However, in this drama, uh she, she's stabbed and then she dies, and there's a chorus on the stage like a Greek drama, and me being the, the music uh advisor of this drama, I orchestrated a minor chord for the chorus singers, and after a few rehearsals I noticed that the minor chord would change to chordal chords. Where I had orchestrated C, E flat and G, they would start singing C, F and B flat, which is a chordal chord, and so, they did this intuitively, because this type of sound expressed sadness. That's different than the western world. So, there was another difference uh with their, with their flute that they played indigenous, some of the indigenous flutes other than the sariwa. They would put spider-web membranes in, up in the aperture, which gave the flute a buzzing-like sound, and they would also put these membranes in the gourds of the ballophones, which changed the timbre of the ballophone. So, in all, I'm trying to say that uh in Africa, I found out that people had a different way of structuring, of expressing um the feelings in the music. So, when I returned to America, uh I had different ideas about how I should

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structure my music in America. The first CD I did was the [Yusef Lateef's] *Little Symphony*. Uh I also had a different sense of form, uh and I go along with uh Susanne Langer, I think her name is, who wrote a book *Philosophy In A New Key*, who said uh, "Any process that a man utilizes, or woman, is form." So, form is not set, it comes, it's, it's an, it's an intuitive process. So, I began to write songs that were not 8/8, 16/8. I began to write songs that were nine measures long, thirteen measures long. Mingus also did that. Uh so, my sense of form became different. That's the beginning, and now it has led to um...me abandoning uh the standard functionality of chord changes, like G minor seven to C seven to F, et cetera: this diatonic approach to chords. Uh and of course, uh this, again about through observing Stockhausen's idea about...diatonic intervals had be-, was the reason the music had become redundant, and what he did was devoid diatonic intervals, such as major seconds, major and minor thirds, perfect fourths. Um and so I began to think, "How, how I can I abandon the mundane, the repetitious kind of approaches that I had been dealing with in writing themes on blues, et cetera?" And what came to me was the utilization of, as I told brother Jackson, utilizing specific intervals. Like, for example, in a melody, writing a melody that consisted of um...say min-, major thirds, minor seconds, um like from C to E flat, to G to A flat, to C to B to G, to F sharp to A sharp uh in the various rhythm, for exa-, that's one example. Uh also, about three years ago I audited in, in biology at the university, and um came across a...of course, this idea, it's not an idea it's a reality, of an endophyte. Endophyte is something that lives inside of something else. Like, maybe in the stem of a plant you'll find entities that live there, and they more around. So, I, I've applied this concept to chordal sounds, and I'm not talking about conventional chords. I'm talking about verticalities, whereas if I had, say, a minor second it could a half-step apart, and then a C to F sharp in the octave; but say this, I had a verticality of, say, four notes vertically, and there was an interval of a minor second, a minor third and a perfect fourth, I would say that, after stating this five-note chord, that any one of the five notes could move, only those three intervals, could move. Maybe the bass note could move a minor second, and then a minor third, and then a perfect fourth at any rhythm, but only those intervals that you, that are in the the vertical uh sonority, and all of the five notes can move at different times, which will give you counterpoint, but they would only move in the specific intervals that you find there vertically. Now, I call that "endophyte composition." Um then comes...uh "hybrid endophyte composition:" having the notes, uh one of the notes move an interval that's not in the verticality. Then, this becomes hybrid, and uh so I started writing pieces like that: hybrid and non-hybrid endophyte compositions, counterpoint. Um so, those are some of the things uh that I, that I've been doing, and also there's comes to me the idea of, of uh taking A scale, say. For exampen, example, the Egyptian scale, which has, which Miles talked about, with uh two flats and one sharp—like C to E flat, F sharp, G, A flat, B, C—uh those seven tones, melodic tones, and have the bass play the none scale tones against it uh, and then have an harmonic instrument play the minor seconds of the scale. Like, for example, the piano would D and E flat as a cluster, the F sharp and a G as a cluster, and the G and A flat as a cluster, and the B and C as a, as a minor second, where the melody would be linear using any notes of the scale, and the bass playing the

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none scale tones, which would then incorporate all twelve tones of the scale. Uh I've been doing things like that, uh and it goes on and on.

**Katya:** Did you, I don't know if you touched on this or not, can you talk about the *World At Peace*?

**Lateef:** *World At Peace*. Oh, that's album? Oh, yeah.

**Katya:** And the, and the, yeah, the project.

**Lateef:** Sure, that project, yeah. Uh that was an interesting project. Um what Adam [Rudolph] and I used in that, for some of the composition, are what we call "syncretic composition," um meaning...a "syncretic composition" would be a composition that Adam and I wrote together, and the, the process goes like this. Uh we would designate uh how many measures the theme would be, let's say thirty measures, and we'd designate the tempo, the time signature, say it's in 4/4, and that's quarter note equals 116t, and then...that was for twelve instruments. So, for example, I would write for the cello, the vibraphone, the flute, and trumpet and bass; and then, Adam would write for the trumpet player, uh the harp, um...and other percussionists, um...for the same amount of measures. So, I wouldn't know what he was going to write, and he wouldn't know what I was going to write, and, and then we'd come together and play the composition, and that's how some of those comp-, the compositions that you see composed by both of us, that's the way we went about it. Uh that's called "syncretic composition," and um that's a different approach to, to writing, and you come up with some very interesting things. Uh another process is uh, is chaos theory that's in the air. Uh I've been utilizing the chaos theory in music composition. As one thinker puts it, "Chaos is not really chaos, it's, it's just a different, it's just a complex order," you see. So, what I do is create complex orders of composition for the instruments. Uh I may have, I may take a scale and have one instrument play all the none scale tones in a linear fashion. Uh then, I may have another instrument play all the scale tones, for the same amount of measures, different rhythm, in a linear fashion. Uh I may take a third instrument, and have them play a nine-tone row, that's in nine different tones, in a linear fashion for the same amount of measures; and for the fourth instrument, I may take another twel-, the retrogression of that nine-tone row and have it play the, the s-, those, the linear, that means the reverse order of the row for the same amount of measures, and so on, until you have these multiple complexities; and uh that's what you hear, it's, it's, it's a complex order. Uh so, I've been doing those kind of things, and it's really um, it's surprising sometimes, and stimulating to hear things like that, you know.

**Katya:** Very different to the ear.

**Lateef:** Yes, it's different. In fact, when we recorded the *World At Peace*, it was, it was interesting. We did it in performance, and there was an audience, and um we played a piece like that, and, and when we finished the piece, the people would look at each

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[everyone laughing] and they didn't know what to do. That was so beautiful. [everyone still laughing]

**Katya:** 'Cause they finally started [indecipherable].

**Lateef:** Yeah, finally. Then, they came out of it

**Katya:** Right. Right [laughing].

**Jackson:** Oh, my goodness.

**Katya:** [indecipherable].

**Lateef:** Yeah. Yeah. [laughing]

**Katya:** Can you expound a bit more on your relationship with Adam Rudolph, because as collaborators—?

**Lateef:** Yeah. Well, that, that, we also performed a duo, sometimes. We've, we've done a duet at the North Sea, and we have wanted to do it at Carmel Festival. Sometimes, during the duo, we have an electronic tape that we use, incorporate in our presentation. It's pre-recorded, and um it, it's a canvas whereby sometimes I play piano against, or flute, and he plays various instruments against it. Um oh, and one, another concept, he does the Buddhist folk singing, Adam does quite well. We utilize that. He has an array of instruments, hand percussion instruments. Um...I could say uh...oh yeah, uh Adam listens to a lot of different kinds of music, and he introduces me to, like, the music of Borneo, and sometimes we use what's called Dakpa music. Dakpa are the Lindi people in central Africa, who we refer to as "pygmies."

**Jackson:** Mmhmm.

**Lateef:** And—

**Katya:** [indecipherable]

**Lateef:** Yeah, they have quite a sophisticated orchestra, 18 pieces sometimes. The instruments are made out of tree uh, uh tree stumps and animal horns, and they have very soph-, they have section. Of course, the timbres are different than, than European sounding instruments. Um things that sound like [imitating the instrument], you know, this, which is fascinating to me. [coughs] Excuse me. And uh which motivates me to, to make the saxophone sound not like a saxophone.

**Jackson:** Ah.

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**Lateef:** Which is just something Sonny Rollins said in a *Atlantic Monthly* article a few months ago. He wanted it to sound like an aboriginal, he said, and I think I know what he meant [Reuben laughs]. And uh...one of the goals is, frequently, like we play with, without music, without written music. You see, the people of Borneo or Bali, they don't have music; but if you have, and we try to have a type of focus that permits us to deliver an aesthetic, in terms of melody, harmony, form, without written music. If you have a certain concept, you can do that...and that's, that's what we do sometimes. Yeah. I think that's where it's headed, you know, for us.

**Katya:** Well, it's a wonderful collaboration.

**Lateef:** Yeah, thank you.

**Jackson:** Yes.

**Lateef:** We really enjoy it.

**Jackson:** Yes, indeed.

**Katya:** A real fit there.

**Lateef:** We try to keep building on it, you know. Yeah.

**Katya:** Is there anything else? Now I'm all, I'm all questioned out. [laughing]

**Jackson:** No. No, it was good. Those are—

**Katya:** We've covered everything else.

**Jackson:** No, those were good. Those are wonderful. As, as am I.

**Katya:** Is there anything else that you want to add, Yusef? Can you think of someone getting this, you know, 50, 100 years from now, they're going to say, "Hmm, let me hear what Yusef Lateef has to say about music, about [indecipherable]?"

**Lateef:** Well, maybe tomorrow I'll have something else to say, but [chuckling] I think I've just talked about uh things I, I think about. Um...I, I try to learn from observation. I think that's important uh...and there are many things to observe internally and externally. I think the mind itself is like a universe, things that happen inside the mind, and we should observe and learn; particularly, when we are aspiring to create music or art. Uh you can go back to the music of African-American in the 50's, the thing they call "peckin."

**Jackson:** Oh, right.

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**Lateef:** Yeah. That was the pigeon, you know. You know, the movement pigeons or chickens make as they move around picking up gravel, that's a rhythm, you know, and you can simulate that in your, in your performance. In fact, if you said [scatting], you know, this kind of thing. Uh so, that's, you can observe. Um this might sound metaphysical, but uh I, I, I look, I see the leaves on the trees, and I tell Ralph Jones, I tell him, "Do you see, see the leaves? They're waving at you." But uh it's a rhythm, you know...which uh they move by the wind blowing through them. So, that's a rhythm right there. Um...and I learn from students, too. I had one student who told me that, "If you play with compassion, it will reach a person, no matter what it is." So, compassion is a very important element of projection. Compassion is important.

**Katya:** Actually, can I ask one more question?

**Lateef:** Sure.

**Katya:** When, it's just come to mind when you touched on the metaphysical, how does the metaphysical play in your music? What, what importance? What um...?

**Lateef:** Well, I think when one is involved in, in that type of process, it's uh, it's projected. Uh...and there's, there's something even deeper. Uh...I think what attracts a person to the, to the beauty, what they think is the beauty of a voice or an instruments, it's, it's not the player or the voice. What it really is, is that which created the elements that this is coming through. Now, that's, that's, that's kind of deep, you know, but I believe, I attribute creation to the Creator, and we forget this sometimes, that um we didn't create ourselves. We are creations of the creator, and, therefore, when we are drawn toward something, I think it's a yearning to, to, to go back to that which created us. Does that make sense to you?

**Katya:** Oh, yeah. Absolutely.

**Lateef:** Yeah. This is, I'm trying to write about this, and it's a difficult subject for me, but I believe that that's the beginning of it. Yeah, that's the source. Yeah.

**Katya:** Thank you.

**Jackson:** Thank you very much.

**Lateef:** You're welcome. [audio cuts in] find the beauty in things when we realize where it comes from. It's, it's not, its' not in technique. It's, it's the source it comes from. We talk about love, you know, compassion. Those are qualities that we can exude if we have them, but we have to have compassion to exude compassion. When we talk about a beautiful soul, we're talking about that which created the soul, not the soul itself. If we see a beautiful sky, it's not the sky that's beautiful, it's what created the sky, you know.

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That's why I try, I'm trying to remember more and more, because I believe that. Yeah. And that enables you to, to be tolerant, and not abuse people, and love people. Excuse me.

[End of Tape 4]

(Transcribed by Matt Lodato)

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