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**BRANFORD MARSALIS**  
**NEA Jazz Master (2011)**

**Interviewee:** Branford Marsalis (August 26, 1960 - )  
**Interviewer:** Dr. Anthony Brown, engineered by Ken Kimery  
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AB: Today is May 24, 2012 and this is the Smithsonian Oral History Interview with saxophonist, composer, bandleader, educator, radio and TV personality and erstwhile thespian, or actor, NEA Jazz Master Branford Marsalis in his home in Durham, North Carolina. Good morning Mr. Marsalis, how are you doing?

BM: Good morning, Mr. Brown. How are you?

AB: OK. If we can go ahead and forgo the formalities if I may call you Branford, you can call me whatever you want.

BM: Un-huh.

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AB: OK. So since this is the NEA Jazz Masters interview conducted by Anthony Brown, assisted by Ken Kimery. Let's go ahead and start from the beginning and get the....  
(beeping noise in background) We might have to deal with that.

BM: I'll turn this off.

AB: OK. Go ahead.... Today is May 24, 2012 and this is the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Interview with saxophonist, composer, bandleader, educator, radio and TV personality, and erstwhile thespian, or actor, NEA Jazz Master, Branford Marsalis, conducted in his home in Durham, North Carolina. Good Morning, how are you doing?

BM: Good morning, Mr. Brown.

AB: Seems like we've done this before. (laughs)

BM: Yeah, right? What are the odds of that?

AB: Yeah. So if we could start from the very beginning and if you could give us your birth name, birthplace and birth date?

BM: Branford Marsalis, born at Flint Goodrich Hospital on October [August] 26, 1960 in New Orleans.

AB: And is that your complete name?

BM: Iweanya, "i-w-e-a-n-y-a," is my middle name.

AB: What does that mean?

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BM: My father's friend. My father had a friend from, I think, Kenya. Kenya, no. Yeah, Kenya. And he honored him.

AB: I noticed that many of your brothers have, should I say, unorthodox names...not, unusual names, so maybe we'll talk a little bit more about that.

BM: Sure.

AB: What part of New Orleans did you live, or did your parents live at that time?

BM: I don't know, I was an infant. But my first recollections of life, we weren't living in New Orleans, we were living in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, where my father was a band director at Booker T. Washington High School in Breaux Bridge. Then he finally left Breaux Bridge and moved to a small place called Hanson City, which is outside of Kenner, which is outside of New Orleans where it was like the woods. We were living in Hanson City and from Hanson City we moved to Kenner and then we moved into New Orleans proper, I think, I might have been thirteen, or fourteen.

AB: That's when you finally moved back into New Orleans.

BM: Yeah.

AB: Now when you were growing up and going to school, were you going to school in these places like Kenner and...?

BM: I was going to school...in Kenner I went to Benjamin Banneker Elementary School. And my mother moved me to a Catholic school, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, when I was in the  
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fourth grade. I was one of, I think, five black kids in the whole school. And then from there I graduated from Oil P. H. and went to De La Salle High School from my freshman, sophomore, and half of my junior years. And then for the rest of my junior year and all of my senior year, I transferred to Illinois McMahan High School, which allowed me to go to the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts.

AB: When did you first become interested in music, or when did you first show an aptitude towards music?

BM: I was always.... We played since we were little. I played piano. I didn't like the piano very much, so when I was in first grade I had my out I wanted to join the school band, of course, there's no....

AB: In the first grade you wanted to join....

BM: Well it was just to get the hell off of the piano, so. Wynton got a trumpet, you know, and maybe it was the sec.... No, it wasn't the first grade. It was the.... Yeah, I think it was. First, or second grade. Second grade, because Wynton got a trumpet and I said, "Well, can I get something so I can join the band?" The whole idea was "I gotta get off this piano, I'm not feeling the piano." So I got a clarinet. My dad got Wynton's trumpet from Al Hirt, who was a very successful New Orleans trumpeter and his clarinetist name was, Pee Wee Spitelera. So Pee Wee gave a clarinet to my dad for me to play.

AB: And when you say you wanted to get away from the piano, is it because the lessons, or was it you just didn't want....

BM: I just didn't.... I wasn't feeling the piano.

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AB: But what were you doing? Were you taking lessons?

BM: Taking lessons.

AB: Were you learning to read?

BM: Yeah.

AB: Were you learning repertoire, or were you just learning scales?

BM: I was six, or five, so there's not much repertoire that a six-year old can learn, unless he's prodigious, and prodigious I was not, so. I was in a couple of concerts. I did a duet once. I just didn't like to practice a lot. And I did a duet once with a young lady named Barbara Krauss. I think we were both seven at the time, or eight. My mother was saying, you know, "You're gonna mess this piece up, because you don't practice." So, to lodge a protest, that's what she said, but I know it's because of her nerves. But to lodge a protest, when I went on stage to play, she got up and she walked out of the building, because I hadn't practiced. And that just pissed me off, so then I looked up and I saw her looking through the window like that, you know. There's the little windows in the door. And I nailed the piece. I just nailed it. Me and Barbara, we played great. And when it was over I was looking at her like, "Un-huh, who's gonna mess the piece up?" And that made her mad. (laughs) But I didn't like to practice. I think I was a really social person, even then. And playing the piano is a very solitary endeavor and I just wasn't feeling the lack of camaraderie that, as a young person playing the piano, you know, it's very solitary. Your friends are in bands, you're not, so I wanted to be in the band.

AB: Now did you have playmates, or other friends who were also involved in music?

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BM: Not involved in music, but, unlike most cities in America, being a musician is cool in New Orleans and the surrounding area. Or, as we say down there, “Oh yeah Bruh, you play that music, huh?” I mean they.... It’s like there’s this whole thing that I saw in movies and had other conversations with.... Like the term “band fag,” I mean I didn’t even know what that was. Some guy, when I was in college, said, “Oh, you know, I was a band fag.” I said, “What’s a band fag?” You know? He said, “Aw, you know, that’s what they call the bands.” Not in New Orleans. That’s not what they call the musicians ‘cause a lot of the musicians in New Orleans were thugs, tough guys. [So...] And this has been.... You can read Jelly Roll Morton’s book. I mean you can hear his oral history and you can read a....

AB: *Mr. Jelly Roll*, or Pops Foster.

BM: Pops Foster’s book and he talks about how a lot of musicians were cut throats and thugs. So there was a tradition of that in New Orleans and it’s carried over. So the idea of musicians being effeminate, that wasn’t part of my experience growing up. So I didn’t have the same peer pressure that kids from other parts of the country would have had, cause it was cool to play music.

AB: Now, when you picked up the clarinet, did you take to it immediately?

BM: Yeah. I loved the sound of it. I loved it. I loved it. Still didn’t practice. I didn’t have to. The music we were playing.... We were playing band music, so I guess in a way, I did have an aptitude, but it was incredibly easy music. And then when I was in Youth Orchestra, Mr. Demborium would yell at me, because I was too lazy to read, so what I would do was, we’d go to.... We’d have a few weeks of rehearsal and I just kinda fluff through the piece and then as we played the piece and I became more familiar.... When you play pieces by great composers, it’s clear where your role is. It’s not as random. It’s a lot of compositions you hear now where it’s really logical. So it was clear to me when I was gonna come in and what

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my note choices would be, and I would narrow it down. And it drove him crazy because, by the time the concert came, I could play the part. But I just wasn't.... He was like, "Why don't you just learn how to read and you don't have to go through all of this." I said, "Well I kinda like doing it this way." But it was not his way and it's ultimately.... As the music got more and more difficult, it was clear that that wasn't going to work and I had to make a decision. And it was either to constantly play less difficult music, or to go get it. For a while I chose the former over the latter. I just played less difficult music, because I just really did not feel like putting that kind of effort in.

AB: What kind of music were you listening to? I mean, you're playing band music, but what kind of music....

BM: Yeah. I was listening to what all my friends were listening to. So I went to a predominately white school, so I was listening to Led Zeppelin and, you know, Procol Harum and Deep Purple. I didn't really like Deep Purple that much, but that was the stuff.... Elton John, Dr. John and King Crimson and Pink Floyd.... Of course I'm forgetting people. You know, then the goofy stuff like, Doctor Hook and the Medicine Show, "On the cover of Rolling Stone" song and the Dr. Demento Show, with you know, "They're Coming to Take Me Away," "Louis XIV," all this stuff, but I lived in a predominantly black neighborhood, so I also listened to James Brown and Aretha Franklin and the Bar Kays and the local New Orleans bands like Chocolate Milk and the Neville Brothers. At that time they weren't called "The Neville Brothers." 'Cause they were the Meters. And we would go to the Meters concerts and we would do.... So I had kinda.... It was a handful of us - me, Eric...I can't remember Eric's last name right now...Teddy Lewis, one of the guys from my school, a trombone player. We had the best of both worlds, because we were listening to everything. And it was one of those situations where, if you go to the black neighborhood, they say, "Aw don't bring that white boy music in here." And you go to the white thing and they say, "Aw, don't bring that nigger music in here." So we just had this little group and we would play,

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you know, the Isley Brothers and then we'd play Hendrix and I'd play Elton John. And then Teddy was a big Jackson Five fiend and a Stevie Wonder fanatic, so he liked Elton John when he found out Elton was playing the piano and was playing songs like "Get Back Honky Cat" and all that. He was like, "Man, this cat's bad. Man, you know." So we didn't have an internet, so we just gotta figure this stuff out, you know. There was no internet around and a lot of times, in popular culture, they don't really.... They kinda make stuff up. They don't really talk accurately, so you didn't really get an accurate sense of how much gospel music that Elton John actually knew and what his training really was. They would say things like "classically trained" cause they think it sounds good. But you know the way they talk about Alicia Keyes? You know, she's classically trained it's just that you can't hear that training in the playing. But she is, trust us, you know. So, we were really turned on to that. I mean jazz was not really part of the program at all. I didn't like most of the jazz that I heard. I actually don't like most jazz I hear now, so that much hasn't really changed. As I got older, I was better able to articulate why I wasn't fond of a lot of the stuff that I'd heard, but, at the time, my dad would play this stuff and I would go, "Aw, Aw...ok, man. Just...allright, man. You got it." So I didn't get to jazz until much later.

AB: Was your dad an influence as far as your musical development, other than early introduction to piano?

BM: My dad was more of an influence just because he just.... I mean he would.... They would all get on my ass about not practicing and not being serious.

AB: You say, "They all." Who?

BM: My mother, eventually Wynton, my dad, you know, my family – well those three in particular. My younger brothers, they wouldn't say.... I'd pummel them, so they wouldn't say anything to me. They were not that stupid. But they were always, "You don't practice.

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You could be so good.” I’m like, “Well, man I’m playing R ‘n B tunes, how good do you have to be to play the horn parts for an Earth, Wind, and Fire tune? Not that good. So I’m having fun, leave me alone.” This is the banter, back and forth, back and forth. But there’s something about watching a man who makes a decision to play a music that’s essentially unpopular and never bitches about it, ever. Never complained about it, because he made his choice. And he would go and do his gigs, and people would talk during the gigs, he didn’t say nothing. You know you’re supposed to.... When I moved to New York, guys were just bitching all the time. “Man this is serious music. Mother Fuckers is talking while we playing.. They disrespectful, blah, blah, blah. How come I ain’t got no gigs? It’s some bullshit. Kenny G sucks. Why does he have all this money and we over here playing the real music.” I was so.... I would sit there and hear these guys and I be like.... Cause my father just, you know, he made his choice. So I remember when I home an Earth, Wind, and Fire Record, this record Open Our Eyes. It was one of their early records. They had, I think, two before that.

AB: *Keep Your Head to the Sky*.

BM: *Keep Your Head to the Sky* was before that and there was one before that.

AB: When they still had Jessica Cleaves singing with them, right?

BM: Right. Check you out. But the first one I bought was *Open Our Eyes*. I said, “Man there’s this band. You gotta hear it.” You know, where it was mostly for “Mighty Mighty.” That was the song that was on the radio. So I bought it. And my dad.... “May I see the record?” And my dad burst out laughing, he said, “Shit! That’s Maurice!” He starts laughing, “Awww! He made it. He made it.” And he said, “Yeah, I used to play.... This cat played drums in Ramsey’s band. He played drums in Ramsey Lewis’ band and I remember when he told me he was moving to L.A. And then I saw them when they were in L.A., because I was in the Marine

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Corps. And I would go to do gigs in L. A. and that's where I met Ornette and he was telling me this whole thing. And he told me, 'Yeah, we're starting this band, you wanna join?' I said, 'Naw, that's not for me.'" He said, "Man I'm so happy for him. " As opposed to what you often hear, you know. "Aw, that cat's a sellout, blah, blah, blah." My father was like, "This is great." So, when you have a guy who is just setting an example, while not trying to set an example, where he's happy for his friends and he's not sitting around.... You know, like he's firmly.... He has a firm grasp on the consequences, intended and unintended, of the choices that he made. And he doesn't begrudge anyone. So that was kinda my role model as a kid. And, as an adult, it still is. Which is why, some people would look at some of the choices that I made and say, "Man, why would you want to make such a choice?" Because, if they knew my dad, they'd know.

AB: You had a chance to study with Alvin Batiste, of course, one of the major, major, major accomplishments – made major accomplishments on the clarinet. What was that experience like?

BM: It was great because of the way Alvin.... Alvin's thing was about making you think, because he was a real thoughtful man. It's really funny. He would do this.... This is the funniest thing I have actually ever seen. And I was watching it because it wasn't...it didn't apply to me. He would tell the guys that are in the jazz ensemble to play a certain thing in a certain style. And they wouldn't do it. And then he'd tell them again. And they wouldn't do it. And he'd stop the band and he'd look at them and go, "ShumbleWumble, WumbleShumble. Suma, Suma, Suma, Sable. Suma, Suma, Sable. SumaWoma, Suma, Suma, Suma, you dig?" And then he'd count the song off and then they'd fucking play it right. (laughs) I said, "What the hell was that?!" It's like he figured out that you telling them things and that just slows the processes. It goes in one ear and out.... So you do something completely absurd and then they focus. It was the funniest damn thing I ever saw. I had this funny thing where I went to Southern to study with Bat, but I also wanted to march in a

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black marching band, because I marched in a military-style marching band, but never a high-stepping band.

AB: Where was that? Where you talking about?

BM: Military style is if you look at a band like Ohio State. It is a six-step march to every five yards. In a black marching band, it's eight steps to every five yards. And the knees are...it's high-stepping. I used to watch my friends in that band and I said, "Damn, I always wanted to be in one of those bands. So, I had a chance to go to Southern and study with Bat and I could march in the band. And I got a scholarship to march in the band. And Bat was constantly trying to tell me to quit the marching band. And the marching band guy had a feud with Bat, so he was like, "We'll start a jazz band over here. Why you studying with that asshole." I had to work both sides of it. So what I would tell the marching band guy, I said, "Man, you can't start a band as good as Bat's band and I'm sorry. Last I checked Doc, nobody's gonna pay me to march once I get out of school." And he goes, "Aw, that's true. That's true, I guess." Bat said, "Man, you gotta quit doing that." I said, "Well he gave me \$950 worth (of) scholarship. You match his scholarship, which I knew he couldn't, and I'll quit. He said, "Aw, ok, fine." So that was my way of kind of like playing, you know, staying in the middle of it, but not really picking either side. But it was a good experience. I don't.... I mean Bat is a lot more.... He's more of a linear thinker than I am. So when it came to concepts on soloing, I always struggled with his ideas.... He and my dad think a lot alike. They have a kind of rote methodology. And I've always.... Even when I wasn't playing jazz, I believed that if you gonna use the word "improv" it should be improvised. It shouldn't be regurgitated. And a lot of what I hear on records, a lot of what they call improvising, or happening in the moment, it was clear, just by listening to it, that it wasn't happening in the moment. That it had been rehearsed, even the solos. And then they just kinda repeat it. That started to become kinda the industry standard, particularly, after Charlie Parker. It made sense that they would do that in Charlie Parker's days, because songs had to, because

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of technological limitations, be three minutes long. So you work out the stuff that's the best. But then you hear Bird playing on those bootlegs, and he's playing all kinda stuff that never made it on the record. But then I think a lot of guys heard that and then that became the system – that became the way of playing. So you kind of work all your stuff out and play your worked-out stuff on the gig. And, at the time, I wasn't even thinking about playing jazz, cause I always thought, "Well, man, it should be improvised. It should be spontaneous. I mean that's what everybody says it is. So if you guys are all saying it's spontaneous, shouldn't it be spontaneous?" "Aw, shut up, man. What do you know? You don't have no records. You can't play." I mean that was.... It's like a thing...that's the way I felt about it. So, I learned a lot from Bat, particularly sound. He had such a beautiful sound that.... The idea when I played the soprano saxophone, a lot of people say, "Aw, that's such a beautiful sound, where did you get it from?" A lot of it comes from my time with Bat. A lot of it comes from growing up in a city where clarinet players get employed outside of orchestral settings. So hearing those guys play, I had more of a sound in my head different than that piercing bright Coltrane sound, which, for a lot of guys was the entre to the soprano saxophone. Which I always find interesting now that I know more about jazz, because Coltrane started playing soprano saxophone after he heard Sidney Bechet. So you have guys who say they want to play the soprano, but they listen to Trane, but they don't listen to Bechet. Very curious. You know, and then the other cat, you know, Steve Lacey, is the other soprano. When you hear him, it's clear he listened to Bechet. So it's always curious when guys make certain choices that, you know.... It's kinda like the thing I tell my students is that "It's odd that you wanna play jazz, when it's clear by your behavior you don't really like jazz. And when I thought like you, I didn't play jazz. (laughs)

AB: Well, we're going to talk about your role as an educator, because I'm sure that's... we can really dialogue that ad infinitum, both being educators. Who were some of the other clarinetists that you felt might have influenced you, or who you were listening to while you were coming up in New Orleans?

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BM: There weren't guys – specific guys that I was listening to. But it's amazing when you live in a city where you can be walking down the street and a concert breaks out. So some prominent people, and sometimes not prominent people, have died there's the brass band marching down the street. Saints won a big game, there's the brass band. It's like something that spontaneously happens in the neighborhood. Guys are having a party, bam--there's a band. You walking down Bourbon Street.... Back then, it wasn't tee-shirt shops, it was clubs and there were bands playing. So I used to hear Pee Wee play a lot. I used to hear Pete Fountain play a lot. I'm trying to remember this clarinet player. When I met him...I can't .... My dad would know his name. He was basically playing with gums. He didn't have no teeth left. And he was still playing at Preservation Hall. So you just get used to hearing things in the air there that you just don't hear in other places. So it wasn't a conscious idea to study clarinet, because I didn't really think that by the time I was fourteen I knew I was gonna play saxophone and I wasn't going to play a clarinet anymore. And playing in orchestra, and listening to orchestral recordings, when all these guys all have great clarinet sounds, you just grow up with the sound of the clarinet in your head. And a lot of my colleagues, they didn't listen to orchestral music. They didn't have that sound. So the only...if they played the soprano, the only people...the guys who liked jazz heard Trane and the guys who liked R'n B used to listen to Grover. And those were the two soprano sounds that we heard more often than not.

AB: Now when you're playing clarinet, at the age you were playing clarinet, clarinet wasn't really a presence in popular music.

BM: No.

AB: So you made the switch to saxophone because you were playing primarily popular music then....

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BM: Yeah. I was playing in a funk band.

AB: So who were you...I know you were listening to Earth, Wind and Fire, you know, probably the Ohio Players, all the big bands at that time in the seventies. Were there any particular artists whose sound that you gravitated towards, or caught your ear, since you weren't listening to jazz, per se?

BM: Well, all those...I was in a band and we were the DJs, cause there weren't...they didn't have DJs. DJs were in radio studios, they weren't in clubs. So it was our job to learn and perform whatever songs came out. Three, four songs a week were coming out. So I would learn everything I had to learn. I had this lazy-ass band and they didn't want to learn the tunes. So what I started doing was learning everybody's parts on every song. So if we played a talent show, so you really had to keep abreast of what was going on, because these people come on stage and say, "Let's play this song." You can't just say, "Uhhhhh?" So I was that guy, I learned all the songs. My mother was furious, saying, you know, "These people are taking advantage of you. They should pay you arranging fees." "I'm enjoying it, Mom, just let it go." "No...." And basically three, or four, straight years of learning parts every week, I started...my brain started to develop this thing where I could separate the bass line from the drum part, separate the drums from the guitar. And I could actually hear each part individually when, by the second year...by the start of the second year.

AB: What age do you think you were at this point?

BM: Fifteen. So one of the things that people talk about, and musicians talk about, with my playing is my hearing – the way I hear the music. And then the next thing they say is, "Aw, yeah, God blessed you with that." It makes them feel good, because their ear is kind of shitty. So they say, "Well he got that." No, I worked on it. And I worked on it for a long time,  
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but at the time, I didn't think of it as work. The songs were much simpler. It took me.... The first time I had to learn a song it took me a couple of days to learn a four-minute tune. By the time I was sixteen years old, it took me four minutes to learn a four-minute tune. I could just write it out as it was going by, because it's really not...those songs aren't difficult, that's part of their success. Part of their success is that they don't require high levels of cognition from the listener, you know. And I get that. So that was just an amazing time for me, because we were playing talent shows and I knew every song just about. I think in the two years that we did the talent show, there might have been one song that somebody called that I didn't know and couldn't scream out the changes to the band to get. And it's a song I should have known. It was an Aretha Franklin tune, "Giving Him Something He Can Feel." I said, "How in the hell do I not know this?" I knew it, but I never sat down to learn it and there were some tricky changes in there. And I was pissed about that for a long time. I felt bad for the singer, because we kinda left her out there. People were booing and most of the time they were booing, we just...we didn't know the song. It wasn't a great feeling, but all the other songs...everything people who came up and sang, I mean, we had that covered.

AB: You developed your leadership acumen pretty early. We see that at fifteen you had your own band....

BM: Well, it wasn't my band. It wasn't my band. It was a band called "The Creators." The original members were Ellis Cooper, Elmo Cooper, Gavin Bell on vocals. Ellis played bass. I'm sorry. Elmo Cooper played drums – I mean, guitar. They were brothers. Gavin Bell was the vocalist. Bertrand Russell was the drummer. I don't think they had a keyboard player, because, originally, that's what I played. I played keyboards. I was fourteen years old playing keyboards. I was thirteen, playing in this band, carrying around one of them heavy-ass Fender Rhodes pianos. I said, "I gotta get off this thing." Which is really funny, because, when I heard this Lester Young interview, they talk about him playing the saxophone, he talks about how much he hated breaking down the drum set, because all the chicks would

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be gone by the time he was done, so he switched to saxophone. It wasn't about girls for me, it was I just.... I was too little to be lugging around this piano and the guys wouldn't help. I was just, "Enough of this!" I don't like playing keyboards, anyway, even though the rudimentary keyboard stuff helped me learn these arrangements. So I switched to saxophone. It wasn't my band, but I decided to assume a role in the band, because the other guys.... We got paid well. We got paid more than my dad did. My dad was playing his tunes, he was making forty, fifty bucks a night. We out there playing other people's tunes and was making a hundred, a hundred and twenty-five dollars a night.

AB: What kind of gigs were you playing? Dances? Fraternities...?

BM: Night clubs, fraternities, dances, proms, weddings. You name it, we were doing it. So we were working a lot. In particular, the night club gig, I mean the owner was like, "Man, ya'll...I'm going to fire ya'll if ya'll don't learn the songs." I said, "Wow. I like the money. I'll learn the songs and teach it to them." So it was more about seizing an opportunity, not for very altruistic reasons, or not thinking that this is gonna help my hearing, just, you know, I liked the money. So, since they don't like the money, which is really a New Orleans thing, enough to do the work that's required, I'll do the damn work, so that way I can continue to get paid. So that's really what it was. Ultimately, it helped me as a bandleader, it helped me as an arranger, it helped me a lot. And the way...as a soloist, the way I interact with the group, but that wasn't the intention when I started doing it.

AB: So, in *The Creators*, How long did it last?

BM: Until I went to college, so 1978. I mean the band went on after me. Terrence Blanchard played in the band. Wynton was in the band. I got Wynton in the band. He was kicking and screaming and he loved it. He hates to admit it. But...now he doesn't. But, yeah, he loved it. He had a great time. Terrence Blanchard was in that band for a little while. Victor Goines  
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was in that band. You know, a lot of New Orleans cats played in The Creators. We bump into each other from time to time. Ellis Cooper lives in Virginia now. Elmo... I don't remember where Elmo lives. I saw Elmo somewhere. You know, and Anthony Hamilton was a...and Shannon Hamilton, the Hamilton brothers were the bass and drummer combination for a little while in the band. It was.... Kermit Campbell, who was one of my buddies, my best friend, he was the piano player. And I lured him from the band he was in to come in our band. And he told me he thought it was some kind of trick, or a trap, because he said, "You're a hell of piano player yourself." I said like, "Man I suck at the piano. What is wrong...?" He is really great. And I'm like, "Dude, you got self-esteem problems if you think I'm a good keyboard player, cause you are a killer." And when he joined the band, it was great. It was great.

AB: Did ya'll record?

BM: We have one.... We went in the studio and made this demo tape that I know Ellis Cooper has and he has promised to give me a copy. But the S.O.B. has not given it to me yet. But I know he has it. I know he has it. And we sounded a lot like those records. I mean we really were meticulous about trying to sound as much like those records as possible.

AB: So, when you were able to have someone else come in and play the piano, that's when you switched? So you played horn in that band?

BM: Yeah. I played alto.

AB: Now I know.... This is just for the record. When you said the music wasn't that challenging.... I mean Earth, Wind and Fire.... When I think of "Getaway" that's got some pretty challenging horn lines in there.

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BM: Naw. It doesn't really. Da da da dut, da da da dut, da da da dut, da da du daah daah daah  
(continues singing the horn part)

AB: What about the head?

BM: That's the horn part. (continues singing the remainder) So, yeah, it's ...the tonguing part is tough, but the melodic line itself.... And that's one of the reasons that we had one of those bands where musicians liked us more than people liked us, because we were kinda like.... There's something I learned that helped me in my jazz playing, too. My jazz conception.... We were a top-heavy band. We were all smart guys and one of the club owners once said and it was really funny. He said, "Man, I like ya'll. I like your daddy. The problem with your band is Ya'll ain't got no ass in the band. And when ya'll ain't got no ass, people don't dance. And when people don't dance, I don't sell drinks. So, if ya'll wanna work here, ya'll gonna have to get some ass. All that other shit ya'll playing is fine." And I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. And then gradually I understood what he meant was that it was all top-heavy music. We had all these arrangements we would.... We'd play four, five, six songs in segues. Deodato songs...just all this stuff we were doing. Gino Vannelli songs. Stuff that no other black band would be doing. But it wasn't funky enough, because the drummer just didn't play with that kind of grit that makes people dance. It was like a great piece of information for me to understand at sixteen. That all of this fancy stuff we playing on the top, don't nobody care about that shit. They wanna dance. And if it's funky enough, play whatever you want up top and it's the best of both worlds. Cause you pleasing yourself and the audience is grooving so they have the part they like. And, man, you know, it's a lot like the jazz scene. It's real top-heavy and the bottom part is just missing. And then everybody says, "Why don't people like it?" Because people are not interested in developing that kind of cognition. You know, why would they go through all of that work? They have to learn how to do whatever jobs that they have, to deal with their kids...have to do all of this, and then they gonna put on music where they have to sit there

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like this all the time to try to figure out what it is? They not gonna do that. And they're not...and I learned that early. So we got a new drummer and a new bass player. The Hamilton brothers came in, and all of a sudden people started dancing. And we could still do all our little heady stuff on the top.... Like "Getaway," we were one of the few bands that could actually play "Getaway." The audience don't care about that, if it's not grooving. You know what I mean? Just like that song. Just like the O' Jay's song. "I like music, any kind of music, just so long as it's grooving." It's like that's really...that's what it was. You know, so I learned that early. I didn't...again, at the time I didn't think it would be something that I would get to use later, because I never really envisioned myself becoming a professional musician. I was going to be a schoolteacher and just play music on the weekends.

AB: This was what you had...were aspiring to when you were in high school.

BM: Yeah.

AB: You wanted to be a music teacher?

BM: Naw. I wanted to be a history teacher. I didn't want to teach music.

AB: You wanted to be an educator?

BM: Yeah.

AB: History. Why history?

BM: I like it.

AB: When you were a student, was that...would you consider yourself a good student?

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BM: Naw. Well I was a good student in the subjects I liked. So I made A's in history and A's in English. C's and D's in everything else.

AB: Math?

BM: Didn't care.

AB: Science?

BM: Didn't care. Drove my teachers crazy. How can you make consistent As in history, you're not studying the other stuff. I said, "Look, I'm not going to be an astronaut. I'm not going to be a physicist. I know just enough math to count this grocery bill. I'm good. I'm good. I said, "History is way more important than this." English is way more important than math. And the math people, of course, "This is ridiculous." I'm like, "We all have our things."

AB: What about your parents? You have this disparity between getting all these As in certain subjects, and not doing all that well....

BM: But at the end of the day, I was just like my mother. I mean I was headstrong and determined especially when I believed I was right. And I always believed I was right, even when I was wrong. And my father had the sense to let me find out on my own and fall on my ass a couple of times. And I said, "Well now I have to modify this certitude of mine." But in this case, it was one of those things where my father really didn't disagree with me, simply because what we wind up doing in the school system that we have is that people just learn how to pass tests. And almost everything they learn they don't retain. Because of my love of English and my love of history, those are the two things that I actually retained. And I just don't think there are many instances where you can retain massive amounts of

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information in five, six, seven subjects. Some people can. Really, really genius, strange people, with quirky things. But, to maintain that much information, so I had to make a decision and I chose. I loved reading. I loved reading non-fiction more than I liked reading fiction. So, if you want to look at my books, I mean, it's mostly non-fiction. But in high school I read some fiction. I like fiction. I loved reading. And I loved history. I was completely intrigued by history.

AB: What sparked that interest?

BM: My seventh-grade teacher, Mr. Bonifield. He said, "The question that they're always asking in history is they always ask you when? When? When? When? But he says that, "When is nothing. This is how you pass tests. You know, without thinking, because you memorized all of these dates. He says, you know, "When did Columbus find the New World?" We all said, "1492" He said, "Yeah, right. Why did Columbus discover the New World?" Silence. What were the mitigating circumstances that allowed him to discover the New World? What do you know about the New World? He said, "That's what we're gonna learn." My head exploded. I said, "Wow!" Cause that's the stuff that...yeah, I wanna know that. The date's irrelevant. The date is cute for Jeopardy. But the reason that we are all here in the fashion that we are has nothing to do with the date. It has to do with events. The events are more important than the dates. But in school, generically speaking, the dates are more important than the events, because it is easier to grade a paper if there is a question and an answer to every question. It is easier to take a test, if there are answers to every question. But the moment that "Why?" is on the test, the teacher is going to have to grade wildly divergent answers. That makes more work for the teacher. The students don't like it because they have to actually answer a question. They have to study in a different way. But the thing that I think makes my music worth anything is the fact that "why?" is the question for me. "Why?" is the question. I put on records, and everybody says, "Man, these records are incredible, you gotta hear this." And I put it on and I say, "Man, this shit sucks." I say, "So  
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what makes it great?" And it's really funny, sometimes when I ask somebody, "Well what makes this great?" They don't even have an answer. Somebody told them it was great. And they put it on and said, "Yeah, this is great." It's like this lemming thing that goes on. So Mr. Bonifield kept me from being the lemming.

AB: What about English?

BM: I don't know. Just...was a thing. Just fascinated. Fascinated by the sound of...

AB: Were you writing yourself? Were you doing creative writing?

BM: Yeah. I did creative writing.

AB: Who were you reading that might have had an impact?

BM: At that time, I mean, I read Mark Twain, but I didn't understand it. I was a kid.

AB: Are we talking about seventh grade, or are we talking about younger now?

BM: Fourth grade, fifth grade, sixth grade, seventh grade. I mean you know, it was like this thing. Mrs. Dewey, my fourth grade teacher, she loved reading Mark Twain, but she didn't like black people, so she would always have me read the pages with the word "nigger" on it in a class full of white people, you know.

AB: Nigger Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*.

BM: Yeah. Constantly. Constantly. And I sat next to this guy – I don't wanna say his name cause you know – Lance, his name was Lance. I won't say his last name. He was just like a

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big jackass, but he thought it was the funniest thing in the world, cause I had to say the word, “nigger,” you know. It was a drag, but there are worst things in the world. Cause I’d come home whining about it. My dad said, “You know who Emmett Till is?” I said, “No.” So he tells me who Emmett Till is, you know. For people who might not know who Emmett Till is, Emmett Till was a young black kid from Chicago who went down to Mississippi and flirted with this white lady at a grocery store. And when he went back to his aunt’s house, or whatever it was that night, this woman came by with three other dudes, dragged him out of the house, shot him, tied him to the back of a car, dragged him, tied his body to some metal contraption and threw it in the [Tallahatchie] River. And my father said when he explains who Emmett Till was he says, “Do you think if Emmett Till were told you could come back but you have to say the word “nigger” ten times, you think he’d be alright with that?” “Yes.” “Alright. I don’t wanna hear this no more. Life ain’t fair.”

AB: That’s some serious old school.

BM: “Go be a man. Go be a man.” And Lance Tacky.... It was really funny because Lance...don’t use his name! (laughs) Take that out, don’t use his name! My man Lance. He said one time we were sitting in class...he was...he was a dimwit man. And we were in geography and they had the map of Africa. And there is the country Niger. And he points, he’s going, “Hey look at this?” I’m like, “What?” “You know, look.” And I said it real loud. I said, “You stupid ass, “nigger” has two g’s.” And he goes (makes facial expression) He was a dimwit. It was just kind of how my parents dealt with it, you know. It’s just like, you don’t, you know.... My father says, “Why would you allow people who don’t like you to define you for you?” You don’t wanna hear that. I know adults that don’t wanna hear that. Well, he was just like, “Man do you believe you are what they say you are?” “No.” “Well, why does it bother you then? Your grandparents had to deal with a lot worse shit than that.”

AB: Did you know your grandparents?

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BM: Yeah.

AB: OK.

BM: My paternal grandparents and my maternal grandmother. He said, "Your grandparents had to go through a lot worse shit than that. You'll never know. It's like your grandfather, if he said the wrong thing, it could get him killed. You'll never know nothing about that." He said, "Them buses you ride on everyday to public school, I used to have to sit behind a cage that said 'Colored Only.' You ain't never know nothing about that. So you gonna come in here and they gonna call you a couple of names and you don't like it, well, fight 'em. What you want me to do? I remember how bad it used to be. I'll trade you my childhood for yours." Shit, and I'm like, "This is fucked up, man. This is what I'm getting from him?" But then, as I got older, I said, "Damn." I just blurted it out one day. I said "Man, ya'll don't get to define me." It was like one of those great moments. "Say whatever the fuck you wanna say."

AB: Was this while you were still in school?

BM: I was nineteen, twenty whatever it was. I was like, "Ya'll don't get to define me. Say whatever you gonna say."

AB: Your father gave you that emotional armor to deal with this.

BM: My mother, too.

AB: Un-huh. Un-huh. I know your mother's strong—Delores.

BM: Yeah, she's combative man, Jesus. Angry black woman there, boy. Yeah, there was always, you know.... There was one time that she went to the school and cursed Miss

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Dewey out was because, you know, she didn't care about none of that other stuff. Like she wasn't .... We were learning plurals, or something like that, and I said fishes....

AB: This is when you were young.

BM: I was in the fourth grade. Fishes and, you know....

AB: Deers.

BM: "Do's" instead of "does." And I came home and I said, "He do's that all the time." And she goes, "No, it's 'does' honey." I said, "No it's not, it's 'do's.'" So she said, "Who told you that?" I said, "Well Miss Dewey, I said it today and she didn't correct me." So my mother went to the school and let her have it. Cause her whole vibe was, well you know, "Well, look at him? You need to lower your expectations." And my mother went off.

AB: Miss Dewey said this to your mother, "Look at him. You need to lower your...." That's what the teacher told your mother?

BM: She might not have said, "You need to lower your expectations." But she said like, "Well, look, you know, c'mon, really? Yeah." She wasn't really...she really didn't...she was one of the people who really resented having to teach black kids. And, you know, she didn't say too much. She didn't make my life a living hell, but she didn't really.... She likes to believe that we were incapable of learning. And then her son was this really talented quarterback who played, Blaise Dewey [?]. He played for LSU and he just developed some weird ass cancer. In the sixties, man, that's you know, that's a death sentence. And he died, she was never the same after that. [And] I felt bad for her. I felt bad for her, so it was never one of those things where their behavior caused a tremendous amount of animosity in me.

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Mostly I think because my parents were just like, you know.... You don't let them define you. They do what they do. You just focus on you.

AB: So you got through high school. You graduated from high school?

BM: Yeah.

AB: At this point, as you said earlier, you wanted to be a teacher? So?

BM: I was going to Southern. I was taking history classes and I was minoring in music. I learned something about like, you know, like.... I mean black schools have a lot of weird issues. Cause I had taken all of these classes at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, and I was in a freshman harmony class and I wanted to test out of the class. And they wouldn't let me test out of the class, because they didn't want to make the other students feel inferior, or something like that. Because these kids were from small towns in Louisiana. That's what I loved about going to Southern, 'cause I got to meet Black folks from all over the state, from places I would have never.... Cause I just knew New Orleans people. All of a sudden I'm meeting people from Mamou and Monroe and Natchitoches, and Pointe Coupee and just all these places. Man they live a totally different life than me. And I would spend Thanksgiving with them. So they say, "Well, you know, you can't test out of the class." So I said, "No problem." So I just told my boy, Kelvin Washington, who is now the band director at Howard University.... I said, "Kel, just tell me when the tests are man." So I just blew off class. And it was a dilemma for them.

AB: Were you getting good grades?

BM: Harmony I. Shit! I took Harmony I when I was fifteen. You know, Walter Piston, Harmony I. So I would show up and Mrs. Curie, she was just really bugged by it, because I  
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was just like, "I shouldn't even be in this class." But rather than sit there and protest and moan and complain, I said, "Man, what's the solution?" I got a free hour. I'm not going to this shit." Then I come in take the test, pass the test, move on. But ultimately, when I left the school, it was time.... I needed to go anyway, because I'm sitting in there saying, "Well, I should be starting Harmony IV, so I'm not gonna take Harmony IV until my senior year, which is just a complete waste of time. And Batiste saw that I was just not practicing, and you know I was playing "Mr. Magic" for the girls, and they loved it. And he was like, "Man, you ain't...you gotta get outta here. This place is like poison for you." I said, "Naw, I'm cool. I'm cool where I am. Don't worry about it. So he called my dad and said, "Don't send him back here." And my dad said, "Bat said you can't go back to Southern." I said, "Ya'll can't do this shit." He goes, "I'm paying, I can do this. You ain't going back." I stormed around. And he said, "Go find someplace else to go." So I went to Berklee, to Berklee College of Music.

AB: So, how many years were you at Southern?

BM: A year.

AB: Just a year. And you must've been living on campus? Did you join a fraternity?

BM: No. There was no time. There was no time for that. I thought about it. I joined Phi Nu Alpha. They beat the crap out of me, you know, which was illogical to me. It didn't make any sense. It's like this great, kinda weird, psychological thing, where they literally beat the shit out of you. They beat you. And all kind of crazy stuff goes on. And then when it's over you're supposed to embrace them as a brother and I'm going, "I got five brothers. If I beat my brothers like this, they wouldn't speak to me again. So, it was... that was the biggest problem with it, is that, you know.... I said, "Well, the majority of you, or the small minority of you who did that, you are not my brothers, so you won't...there will be no speaking to me. "Hey man, you gotta let that go. I said, "Naw, I can't. I can't let it go, just.... All the rest of

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ya'll, ya'll cool, but those three motherfuckers over there, don't call me, ever. Don't speak to me. Don't say anything to me." So, it's just...yeah, it's crazy. And my whole thinking was that, you know, well what happens when the guys come up under you, are you going to swing a board on them? "Hell no! By the time I'm done with 'em, they'll wish I was swinging at their black.... "Please, just beat me and get it over with." And I came down there for one week and I had all those - we call them- you know, worms. Boy, by the time I was done with them, I swear they were like, "Man just beat us and get it over with." I said, "No, no, no, no. This is too much fun." You know I just did all kind of crazy stuff. I made 'em, like you know, I had this thing called "worm food" with, you know, raw eggs, clam juice, tobacco sauce, you know. And then they had to drink it. And then I made them share an egg. You know, put it in their mouth, pull it out and share it down the.... Because they are supposed to be.... They gotta look out for each other. They're brothers. So, anyway, they got to the last guy who was getting ready to put it and I (smacks hand and yells) "It fell! Now you have to do it all over again." You know, so it was just ... (laughs) You know, so I had all of those, the high jinks that I'd learned going to all my different schools. I had my high jinks on a high level. They still talk about the stuff. When I see those guys, they say, "Man, you were outta your mind." But I say, "Naw." I say, "I'm not going to swing a board." Never swung a board. Never swung a board. People take it too far. Look at what happened to those guys at Florida A&M this year. You can put that in chyron underneath. Tell them to go click on the link so they can read about it. Kids getting killed marching in the band. Craziess, that's craziess.

AB: Now when you were at Southern, were you already getting into jazz at that point?

BM: Yeah. I was doing.... I was playing in Bat's band. I mean I was the king of the pentatonic scale.... So I learned two solos in high school. I learned a Charlie Parker solo, "Tico Tico" from a record called *Fiesta*. And then I learned a....pst, pst. Can you believe that? I can't remember. "Summertime!"

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AB: Why did you choose to learn those?

BM: They were nice. Just something, you know, something to do.

AB: When you say “Summertime,” which version?

BM: *Bird with Strings*. Easy, not a bunch of notes, not real fast....

AB: But beautiful.

BM: Well, I didn't ...I was...I didn't have a conception of beauty. I was fifteen. Fifteen year olds don't have any conception of beauty, man. They just don't. I don't know what it is. And, occasionally, Shostakovich did, when he was fifteen, but that's.... That's an isolated thing. It's very unusual, very unusual. But, yeah they were nice solos. My dad was playing the records for me. But I learned a couple, just cause, you know, if you can't do it, then you should try to do it...try to learn it. But it was still no idea...I just, you know.... When I went to Berklee, I went to go into production, like Quincy's stuff, you know. Quincy Jones-type stuff. Writing arrangements, I was gonna move to L.A., write arrangements for the bands and do all the.... There was a guy named Tom Tom Eighty-four. It's not his real name, but that's what we called himself out of Chicago. And he was doing that stuff for Earth, Wind and Fire. And I said “Wow, I wanna do that.” And right around that time, MIDI showed up. I said, “Well, that's it for the horn sections. (laughs) It was so clear that the horn sections were just going away. And I heard..Wynton had got the gig with Art Blakey and he was coming to town and I went to see that band. I didn't go to hear it yet, but I did go to see it.

AB: Interesting distinction.

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BM: It's a very important distinction. Very important. With Wynton on trumpet, Bobby Watson on alto, Billy Pierce tenor, Charles Fambrough on bass, James Williams on piano and Bu, Art Blakey on drums. And it was just something about the concept of it – where you have this group and every person in the group gets to shine for a little moment, but it's more about the group – cause that's one of those things you learn when you play R 'n B, especially in the horn section. It's about the group. So you have to be committed to the group, because you're not going to get to solo on every song. So you can't be saying, "Hey, look at me. Hey, look at me." It doesn't work. You're anonymous and you have to fall in love with the anonymity, or you just wind up playing things that make no sense and you will be replaced. So I was already of that mindset. I was not really interested in using the stage as a vehicle to call attention to myself. And, with that band, it seemed like that was what was really going on, although there are elements of it that young musicians can latch on to, focusing in on the instrument of their choice then using it as a comparative analysis. I was never that cynical as a kid. I was kinda wide-eyed and, you know, optimistic. I was just digging the fact that my brother had the gig and it was right at that time I said.... You know two things happened, that gig and.... Marvin 'Smitty' Smith was my roommate and it was the first time that I had heard "Nefertiti," Miles' record. I didn't even know Herbie Hancock had played with Miles. My dad didn't have any.... When he started having kids and making 40,000 dollars a year, records – you don't buy records. And I was born in 1960, so maybe until 1964 or something, but by '64 he had three kids and it was ...there was just no money for that. So there are a lot of records that we didn't have access to and we didn't hear. And there was no internet, so.... I remember when I heard "Nefertitti" the first time. I was like, "Good God!" You know, I just...there was something about the regimental...the regimented nature of post-bop. I just.... I had no interest in playing that style of music, because it sounded in my mind as dated and not very forward thinking, because the whole obsession became soloing on chord changes. So, if you heard guys playing some licks that the same other guy played, everybody will say, "Man, it's killin'." Cause it is harmonically correct. But that's something I learned at Berklee, because Berklee had, at that time, all these harmonic

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rules. So I wrote a piece of music and the teacher said, "Well, this is a very pretty piece of music, but it does not adhere to the Berklee rules for harmony." "What the hell? Is that what we're doing here?" So I went and I meticulously wrote this piece that adheres to all the rules the way they were taught in class. And I named the piece "Shift" and an asterisk at the top. At the bottom it says, "The F is a ghost letter." Because it was a piece of shit. It sounded like garbage, you know. But, it was correct!

AB: It was correct! (yells this simultaneously)

BM: Exactly! And then I put on some of these records and I'm like.... So he's playing "Cherokee." He's playing the same idea over and over and over again. You know, its...what is this? And my dad was like, "Yeah, you oughta play jazz." I said, "I don't wanna play this." And then I heard that record with Wayne and them, I was like, "Whew! Now that, I wanna play that. I wanna play that." And Billy Pierce, who was also teaching at the Berkeley College of Music.... I said, "Man, I'm not...." Like everybody was Coltrane, Coltrane and I said, "I'm not feeling the Coltrane thing." And he said, "I know you and I know how your mind works, you don't need to be listening to those Atlantic records at all, because all of that stuff is linear, and it's regimented, so you know.... Trane didn't even play that stuff live it was more like exercises." He said, "These guys are making this into the Bible." He said, "You need to go get these Atlantic records, I mean the Impulse records. So then I started buying the Impulse records. Me and Tain. Tain had a lot of the stuff and he had the Impulse records. I heard that and I was like, "Oh my God!" That, I wanna do that." And then I moved to New York and Stanley Crouch played Ornette Coleman for me and I said "Aw, this is trash." And four months later, I woke up and said, "Oh shit! It's not. It's great." I wanted.... It took a long time to understand where he was coming from. I wanna do that.... So then it started to.... I started to actually gradually to become a jazz musician, just based on hearing things that, you know...well I don't know what this is. Cause, if I knew what it was, I'd say, "Well, man, if I know what it is, it can't be good." (laughs) 'Cause I don't know what I'm

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doing. If I can hear it.... And that's the opposite, like a lot of people feel empowered by the regimented nature of it, because, you know, "Yeah, that stuff is hip, because I can hear it, so that makes me hip." Well, my whole thing was, "Well shit, if I can hear it, something's wrong with it." Cause I don't know what I'm doing. But when I heard Wayne playing with "Nefertiti," I said, "I don't know what this is." That's what I want. When I heard Trane playing on *Coltrane*, on the record, *Coltrane*, I didn't even get to *A Love Supreme* yet. Just *Coltrane*, I said, "That's it...."

AB: That's "Out of this world."

BM: That's it. That's it. Yeah. "Outta This World" that's the tune, right off the top. Right off the gate. And then you know, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*?

AB: Un-huh.

BM: I was like, "I gotta do that! How do I do that?" I mean, that's just.... Yeah, that was the thing that got me going...the thing that got me going. And that's what empowered me. I guess that's where the history played in, because I got excited about the stuff I didn't know. I wasn't thrilled about the stuff I knew, because I felt that, "Shit, I already know it." (laughs) What's so exciting.... This is what I'm going to do for the rest of my life? Play a bunch of shit I already know?" Naw, let's, you know.... Gradually, you know, I got turned on to the idea of playing jazz at Berklee. I called Wynton and my dad said, "I think I'm gonna play jazz." They laughed. They thought it was hilarious. My father just laughed, "Now you gonna play jazz? You not serious about this." I said, "Alright, let's just have this conversation in a year. And it took me a long time to learn how to play. And I kept...I did a gig with Sting that kinda side-tracked the development, but helped the development. And then I go and do the TV show, which just essentially side-tracked the development. But I guess it also helped the

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development in a very different way - not in a musical way, but in a ideological way, or personal way. So it...I probably didn't like the way I played until I was close to forty.

AB: Let's end right there . . .

BM: Alright, stop.

[End of CD 1]

BM: ...I don't mind if in perpetuity, if people see me eating a Fig Newton, man. It's cool. Because it's Smithsonian, it's cool.

Ken: We love Fig Newtons.

BM: You know what I'm saying, you know? If our technology and shit is around a hundred and fifty years from now they will be going, "What is that thing he's eating?" This is a Fig Newton. Yum. Very good.

AB: Nutritious.

Ken: We collected Crispy Cream for the museum.

BM: My god. I'm not saying that.... No way is a Fig Newton nearly as nutritious as a Crispy Cream donut. (laughter in background)

AB: Take everything you hear with a grain of salt. (more laughter) So we can pick up where we left off....

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BM: Crispy Cream donuts. Reporting gastric by-passes for a hundred years. (laughter) OK, Mr. Brown.

AB: Well, I just think it...I find it quite interesting that when you talk about your introduction to contemporary jazz in the guise of Miles Davis circa sixty-six with Nefertitti and then the Impulse beginning in sixty-one with Trane, that there were two drummers, you said your roommate was Marvin Smitty Smith and then you mentioned Jeff Tain Watts as well. Talk about the relationship with those two drummers. Ah, two people.

BM: Aw, that was just coincidence. Drummers are idiots.

AB: Really? Take everything you hear with a grain of salt. (laughter)

BM: If you have to explain it to them, it's not worth it, man. Don't do it. Just you know? Yeah.... Tain and I have a thirty-year personal and working relationship that's very amazing. I mean, Smitty and I.... I haven't seen Smitty in a long time, since he moved to L.A. He kinda stayed out there. But, I mean, Smitty taught me a lot about music, taught me a lot about jazz, because there was a lot of stuff I didn't know. He had access to information and he was very diligent. He practiced every day. It was inspiring to watch him approach his craft. You know? He used to practice his rudiments in a pillow.

AB: Un-huh.

BM: I said, "Why are you doing that, for sound?" He goes, "No, for strength." Just little things I would never thought about. Yeah, him and Tain, they knew a lot of music. They know a lot of music. And I was lucky. I was lucky to have gone to Berklee at the time that I did, because there hasn't been anything like that since. And I don't think there had been

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anything like that before, either. There were a lot of guys there at the same time. I met Kenny Kirkland the first time, because I was at Berkeley. He came to town playing with Angela Bofill. And his girlfriend's sister lived two doors down from me in the dorm. So that's how we met Kenny. Me and Tain showed up at the same time. Wallace Rooney was there. Donald Harrison was there. Walter Beasley was there. Terry Connolly was there. There were a lot of guys. Tim Williams was there. He's a trombone player. There were all these guys there and we were trying to play.

AB: Did you know any of the New Orleans guys before you met them in Berklee?

BM: Which New Orleans guys?

AB: Donald Harrison.

BM: Yeah, I knew Duff. We went to high school together and he went to Southern when I went to Southern. And then I went to Berkeley and he followed me to Berklee. So, yeah, I knew Donald. So, Donald and there was a guy named Terrence Manual, a piano player and that was our first.... Me, Donald and Terrence were roommates. And then we went to another room and it was me, Donald, and Smitty were roommates – room 401. Yeah, New Orleans is one of them places where all the guys in that generation, they kinda know each other.

AB: And who else? Are there any other drummers who are of note, or...that might bear mentioning.

BM: No, I'm not giving all that love to drummers. Enough, enough with the drummers.

AB: What about the guitarist?

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BM: Ringo Starr was a great influence.

AB: Take everything you say with a.... (laughs)

BM: But I think that Danny Bonaduce was probably the.... Who was the drummer in the Partridge Family, wasn't it Danny? You supposed to know this. You're a drummer.

AB: No comment.

BM: You got to know your standards, man. You gotta know what's happening. Yeah, he was something. You know, I loved that man. So, ahh...clearly, Art Blakey.

AB: What is.... (laughs) There we go.

BM: Clearly, Art Blakey. Look, man, some people take themselves too seriously, some people don't take themselves seriously enough. I just happen to fall into the latter category. I think it was Danny Bonaduce. Anyway, yeah, Art Blakey was really instrumental in me actually developing into a jazz musician in terms of my mentality. He challenged every preconception I had about the music, about how easy it was to play it, about how to actually learn it, about the fallacy of improvisation and the fallacy of innovation – as opposed to the real application of it. Shit, anybody can innovate anything, by today's standards. You can just come out.... I can do a record with a DJ right now with a turntable. It's innovative. No one has ever done it. Saxophone and turntable. But Art Blakey's thing is, "Damn that, is he good?" It don't matter if it's innovative. And it's one of those things I had never thought about. He was the first guy to make me understand how bad I was on ballads.

AB: How did he do that?

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BM: By cursing me out and telling me I was a sad motherfucker and making me play a ballad. It was one of those Gershwin tunes. I can't even remember which one it was. But I do remember that I was writing all these alternative chord changes in the piece. And he walks by and he says, "What the fuck is that shit?" I said, "I'm just trying to make this shit hip, man. You making me play it." He said, "Let me explain something to you. George Gershwin was a bad motherfucker. He does not need your sad ass to make him hip. He's already hip. The only thing that's clear here is that you don't know how to play songs, so you trying to tailor the song to your sad shit so you don't sound as bad as you're going to sound tonight. But that shit's not gonna happen. Play the song the way it's written." (laughter) I can think of a hundred musicians who I'd love to say that to right now.

AB: Now he said that to you backstage, he didn't say that to you on the stage?

BM: No. It was on the stage, but it was before the gig. We were rehearsing on the stage. And he was like, "What is that shit?" You know, I didn't like it at the time, but when I finally learned how to play a ballad I was like, "Yeah, thanks, man." I hadn't listened to Ben Webster. He said, "Why don't you go listen to Bird, go listen to Ben Webster, go listen to Hawk. Listen to people who know how to play ballads. What are you doing? What are you doing?"

AB: So, when he gave you that advice, did you follow up on that? So, he mentioned...so, of course you already listened to Bird. You were already doing his solos....

BM: I wasn't really listening to Bird. I'd learned a couple of solos. I wasn't really listening to Bird. But I was into the Wayne Shorter thing at that time, so I didn't get to it at that time. But it was duly noted. It was duly noted. I got it. I'm going to have to get to this. And then Wynton left and started his band and I still didn't get to it, but I kept hitting these walls. I  
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was cognizant of the fact that I was basically repeating myself every other bar and playing the same shit over and over again and I just didn't have enough information. I started listening to that Ornette Coleman record in eighty-four that Crouch gave me.

AB: *The Shape of Jazz to Come?*

BM: *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. And then suddenly I realized that.... It took me four months to figure out that he was soloing on song.... Almost all the songs on the record are either free, blues, or rhythm changes. "Well, how the hell you learn how to solo like this on rhythm changes?" Cause he was like the first guy that I ever heard that could play a solo that was essentially devoid of four and eight-bar phrases. Even Bird didn't do that. I said, "Man, how do you even get to that? How do you get to that?"

And Art Blakey again.... This is another great Art Blakey story. I'm listening to Coltrane, cause Wayne listened to Coltrane, and he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm checking out Trane." He said, "For what?" I said, "You know, I'm trying to get some Trane in my playing." He goes, "Uhh. And you think that's gonna work?" And I turned to him and I said, "Oh, so in order to learn how to play like Coltrane I'm supposed to not listen to Coltrane, right?" He goes, "Let me ask you a question. When Coltrane was fifteen years old, what the fuck do you think he was listening to? Tapes of himself in the future?" And then he walks away. And I was like, "I don't know what he listened to." Damn. This ain't.... This is not like, Let's Google it. There was no Google, none of that. So I ran into Benny Golson, I said "Man, what was Trane listening to when he was younger?" He said, "Oh man, that's a great question. Nobody ever asked me that." I didn't tell him Bu, you know.... I took the credit for that shit. He said, "Yeah, you wouldn't even believe it. Who do you think?" I said, "I have no idea. Bird?" He goes, "No, Johnny Hodges." I said, "Johnny Hodges!" So I had to hold my nose and go back and put on some Duke Ellington records. That was the sentiment at the time. I mean if you go to young kids right now, not even young kids, there's guys who are seasoned

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veterans of the jazz scene right now, and they don't know any Duke Ellington tunes, except in a fake book. They never listened to it. I had to hold my nose. And after a month or so, I was like, "This shit is incredible."

AB: OK, I can understand the context, or the setting for the Johnny Hodges, but the sound on "Prelude to A Kiss" ....

BM: Man, I'm a modern jazz musician. Fuck all that old stuff. I'm gonna change the music. I'm gonna be an innovator. That shit's just gonna hold me back. You dig? Genius. And after awhile, back to Mr. Bonifield, I said, "Well, man.... It almost doesn't make any sense to make fun of shit that you can't do. So let me learn how to do it and then I can make fun of it. But a funny thing happens on the way to the Forum. I actually like this shit now. So I can go learn it and I'm glad I learned it, but I can't make fun of it. And lo and behold, now all of a sudden when I hear Charlie Parker, I hear a funny thing. I don't just hear notes. I don't hear omni, Charlie Parker omni-book notes. All of a sudden I'm hearing rhythm. I hear rhythm in the solo. Where'd that come from? All I heard before was just notes. And then I started hearing sound. That majestic sound that he had that's never really discussed except for guys who are from that generation. You can hear it on the recording. And then you start A-B'ing all these great saxophone players and just that sound. There's no sound like that. Nobody sounds like that. Just no sound like that. It's nothing. So, I'm starting late, but at least I'm learning. I'm not learning in the sequential order it should have been learned, mostly because of misinformation. Sometimes, outright disinformation. But through a marvelous, you know.... Through happenstance. Through a lucky, marvelous sequence of events I'm actually learning how to become a jazz musician. And, in the process, I'm actually falling in love with jazz, as opposed to seeing jazz as a vehicle by which I can glorify myself. Funny how that happens. And it took a long time for all that information to congeal into something that made any sense and, you know, my little detours, like I said, you know, stymied the process to a small degree. But I mean I was amazed at the number of people, it was so clear

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what the path was. Due to the sequence of events, it's so clear this is the path that all these guys took. They didn't just show up one day, you know, scratching their butt, and saying, "ting!" I got a sound. It's a development. And then that tape came out that they found of Charlie Parker playing like Coleman Hawkins. I said, "Yep, that's it." You know, and then there's the tape that came out...you know, with Coltrane playing the "Jump Blues." Playing in 1954 with Johnny Hodges band at a dance. And playing a standard ballad in a very traditional way. I said, "Constant levels of affirmation about this is the way you gotta learn how to play this music." I said, "OK. Shit, let's get to work, then. Let's get to work." And do it gradually, because it's going to take a long time. Because I didn't have.... I have other advantages that those guys didn't, but even living under the throes of de facto government-sponsored segregation, and all of the shit that came with it back then, Charlie Parker didn't have to live under the pretense of "I gotta get a high school diploma." Cause he was basically...he found...he knew what he wanted to do and he began to apprentice as early as fourteen, or fifteen. So by the time he's twenty-five, he's been had ten years of gig experience, which, according to Malcolm Gladwell is the exact amount that you need – ten thousand hours, which is ten years. So, unfortunately I had to go to high school and I, you know, dabbled in college, started late. So I figured, well, this is even before Gladwell, "I'm not naïve about this. This is going to take awhile. And I'm not going to rush it. And a lot of my colleagues and other people said, "Well, man, I don't hear your individual sound in here." Individual sound! I can't even play! What the hell are ya'll talking about? And I remember talking to a writer and just said, "Hey man, you know, everybody sounds like themselves." Cause I was in debate class in high school. You know, everybody sounds like themselves. I don't verbally and playing music is just like having a voice. I don't mistake you for Ken. It's clear what you sound like now and what you sound like. And when you were in debate class, you could always spot the guys that had a very limited vocabulary and you knew how to attack 'em. And it's not about the vocabulary, because much like in music or in plays, there ain't but a dozen themes in the world. You know, love, hate, betrayal, sex. And then there are twists and turns based on all of these things. You know – naiveté, youth

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blossoming into adulthood, adulthood decline, death – it's been the same thing for two thousand years. These are the stories. And then there's just the names change, the circumstances change. You know the geography changes. The weapons change. But it's all basically the same stories. So, if you're in a debate class, if you can kind of repeat a narrative by using examples from other cultures, it's gonna be hard if the other guy's basically read three books. It's going to be very difficult for him to win. And that's the way I feel it is in music. Because when I listen to musicians and I can tell that they've only studied one person, or a handful.... Every record is going to sound the same, if you can actually hear it. If you don't just hear it as a big wash of sound, you can kind of really listen to it and split the sound apart and hear it. All the records, they have to sound the same, because you don't have enough information. And I knew that I didn't want my records to sound that way so I had to go out and I had to get a ton of information. And that was going to take some time. So, all these people said what said and guys have come and gone that have invented new styles of jazz. They've been around and they are not here anymore. They've diminished, I guess, you know? It's new, but it didn't last. I mean a lot of times jazz musicians are more like pop musicians –(laughs) than jazz musicians – because they keep showing up and disappearing. You know, showing up and disappearing. It wasn't like that in the glory days.

AB: Glory days being...?

BM: Forties, fifties, even the sixties. The sixties was when it started to decline, you know. But in the forties and fifties, thirties, forties, fifties....

AB: When in the sixties do you mark this decline?

BM: I think it was like a confluence of events. Old guys started dying. Trane died, too soon. And then Miles stopped playing jazz. And all the young guys, who were looking up to him, he didn't have any faith in the music, so they didn't have any faith in the music. So they

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split. And then there was just this big void where you had guys from the fifties continuing to play gigs, but not updating the culture - the way that culture gets updated by subsequent generations. And that was kinda where it fell into a sink hole.

AB: So Trane dies in sixty-seven, Miles stops playing jazz in....

BM: Sixty-eight, sixty-nine....

AB: So the late sixties?

BM: It was done. It was just....

AB: But Ornette Coleman, I mean we're talking about....

BM: Yeah, but Ornette, you know, is like an outlier, a thing unto himself. I mean his music started to stray from jazz real quick. After *Free Jazz* it became more just, you know, double, you know, double rock band, *Skies of America* with orchestral parts that are impossible to play.... (laughs) He just became this other thing. He just became a completely.... He became a different thing. And he wasn't really training musicians, the way Blakey was training musicians, the way Miles was training musicians, the way Trane was training musicians, the way that.... There was no, it was, "Yeah, c'mon and play this gig and do whatever you want and it's gonna be cool." It had become a different thing. It had become a different thing. 'Cause even when you listen to some of the avant-garde music, as they called it, most of those guys were traditionalists. You can hear, you know.... You can hear John Gilmore playing with Blakey. Sun Ra, I mean he was.... When that music goes that way through extension, it is very different than listening to guys who have never really learned a diatonic tune, and they just playing. It has a randomness to it and a lack of gravitas.

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AB: Well, you bring up Sun Ra I think that's a real interesting character, because, you know, he'd do an arrangement for Fletcher Henderson, you go see Sun Ra, they could be "Space is the Place" turn right around and play "Stampede," you go "Whoa!"

BM: Yeah.

AB: So Gilmore had, I mean...yeah, we know his influence on Trane, but he seemed to somehow inculcate a lot of that too - the breath of the tradition.

BM: Yeah. I mean most of those guys, that's kind of what it was. And then, by the time the seventies rolled around, the most important thing in jazz.... I think this is kinda like the unintended consequence of Trane. The most important thing became the soloist. Whoever was soloing, that became the most important thing.

AB: You don't think there was something similar with Louis Armstrong early on in jazz?

BM: No. No. No, because musicians, and you hear it on the recordings, bass players didn't get solos and they played hard. Horn sections, all these guys.... They only played one chorus. Everybody played one chorus, including Louis Armstrong, two tops. But when Trane was out there playing these incredible extended solos, the template for that in the hands of a lesser musician is horrible. And you had a lot of lesser musicians using Trane as, you know, not understanding the group dynamic. Trane had a great band. And that band played with a level of intensity that was unrelenting. And Trane understood things from.... For instance, when you listen to Trane's band, the point at which the music is most volcanic, Trane is almost playing nothing. When the music is, as a group sound, is most volcanic, he instinctively understood that when McCoy is banging and Elvin is going off, all he has to do is hold a whole note. And that is exactly what he did. Or play something in a rhythmic pattern. He wasn't going (makes sound of saxophone runs) at those points. And  
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you hear, the guys that have listened, they fall in love with the music because of its technical possibilities, they don't really embrace the concept of the group, the concept of the tradition, so find a whole note, find me one. I haven't heard one lately. You know, they hard to find, because everything is designed as a vehicle to glorify whomever the soloist is. Bass players have made the action on their bass lighter and lighter and lighter so they can play faster. So when you listen to guys like Jimmy Blanton, or you listen to a guy like Jimmy Garrison, who was never the most technically advanced bass player in the world, but had a thing that was in that tradition of jazz bass players, driving the band, playing with a certain level of intensity. Guys play with amps now. And when the music gets more intense, they don't pull the strings harder, they just turn up the amp, which does not have the same effect. So then you just hear a soft sound being more amplified, which is not the same as some guy pulling the string. The music doesn't grow in intensity. I mean there's a million things that they didn't learn when they were just taking Trane, separating him from the group and putting his stuff on a poster board and studying it harmonically. And when you talk to a lot of musicians, this is where their heads are. They not even trying to get a group. So there's a lot of things that just disappeared. Trane died. Miles split. Vacuum.

AB: Well, there seems to have been some folks who have come out of the post-Coltrane era. The first one that comes to mind is someone like Woody Shaw. I remember hearing his band at the Vanguard. Victor Lewis was, I mean, you know...I mean....

BM: This isn't to disparage those guys. But Trane's band. Elvin Jones.

AB: Let's be honest. Nineteen sixty-four in the history of music reached a pinnacle with John Coltrane's quartet and Miles Davis' quintet.

BM: Yeah. But when you are a musician, and you're aspiring, and you have those guys as your examples, and then you come on the scene and there's nobody there. What I'm saying

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is that, if Woody Shaw had been playing, and Miles had still been playing, Woody's thing would have had a whole different thing. It would have had a whole different thing. Because, when you listen to Woody's music, he had this system of playing that he had figured out. Like his solos had a formula to them, when you listen to them. And you listen to him on Unity, he was like formulating his.... 'Cause Joe Henderson was a formula guy, too. Joe Henderson was a formula guy. And you listen to them on Unity and Woody was figuring it out. Then you put the records on and the solos, you know, kind of like the way Clifford Brown used to play, not as fluid in that direction. He had this system that he was working under, whereas Miles was just.... He didn't have a system. Just whatever it was.

AB: Did Trane have a system?

BM: Aw yeah. Trane had a system, definitely. But, because he had done all this other work, because he had understood how to play swing, he understood how to play ballads.... Think about guys that have systems now and imagine them trying to make a record like the ballads record, or the record with Johnny Hartman, or the record with Duke Ellington. I mean, of all the guys that have systems now, and there are piles of them, name me the one that you think can actually do that?

AB: Did Miles not go through all that preparation, as well, playing in the big bands, playing swing, playing ballads....

BM: Yeah, you kind of proving my point.

AB: You said he didn't have a system.

BM: No. He didn't play from a system.

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AB: Right.

BM: He didn't.... Hey Nicole. C'mon in. Come over here please. See ya'll need to meet my wife. She's really pretty and she's smart too. She's smart and she's pretty. It's better that way. She just got her Masters degree just two weeks ago. So she's the only person in the house that has actual degrees. So clearly she's the smartest one.

Nicole: He says this with tongue firmly planted in his cheek.

BM: No I'm not. That's some bullshit. I'm serious. Anthony, Ken.... (introduces Nicole)

Nicole: Nice to meet you.

BM: Come here please. Say "hi" to the virtual peoples.

Nicole: Hello virtual peoples. I'm the smart one. (laughter)

BM: If we're lucky, you know, a hundred years from now somebody'll see it. And they'll say, "Who are those people?"

Nicole: Exactly. Especially her.

BM: Wait a minute. I thought I was going to see Justin Bieber. Where's Justin? So, yeah Miles didn't play with a system. But when guys play with a system and they have that other thing, ok. It sounds good, it feels good.

AB: I think what I was trying to say....

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BM: It sounds good and it feels good. But when they don't have that thing, it doesn't feel good at all.

AB: So you can get there without having a system, but you have to go through....

BM: I think the ultimate goal is to get there without a system. I think that if Trane could have got there without a system, he would have done that. As a matter of fact, there's a guy that nobody knows named Cuthbert Simpkins. So you know about Doc. Alright. Coltrane dies. He is a doctor living in Shreveport, Louisiana. Coltrane dies and he gets in his car and he drives to New York City and walks around with a tape recorder and just starts talking to musicians. "Tell me about Trane. Tell me about Trane." Because he was a doctor, cause he lived in the South, the jazz writers said "This is our turf." And they basically discredited his work and it's obscure, but I've got a chance, thanks to a guy named Sam Stevenson, I've had an opportunity to hear some of these tapes. And one of the great things is when he is talking to Ornette Coleman. "Tell me about Trane." And Ornette says, beautifully, he says, "Yeah, Trane was trying to get out, he had to get out of that thing, he had to get out of that thing." Meaning the *Atlantic* Trane. And he knew he had to stop playing them tin pan alley tunes, because, you know, if he was going to play them tunes, they were going to do that thing on him. So he stopped playing that stuff and it's really like that's the stuff. Like the Rubicon, the record for me is one of the worse records Trane ever played on. It's a record that they call "The Avant Garde."

AB: With Don Cherry, Ed Blackwell....

BM: Its Ornette Colman's band. Alright? The fact that he does a record with this band, playing Ornette's music proves beyond a shadow of doubt that Trane was sick of the shit he was playing. And he had to find a way out of the system that he had created. Because there are other guys who are from that time and they feel comfortable playing in their system

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and they play in their system until they die. And Trane was like the King of Jazz basically at that point, with the exception of maybe Miles. And he's like, "OK, I just won the Masters, I needed to change my swing." And, everybody said, "You don't do that. Nobody does that. You don't change your swing after you've won the Masters." "Naw, I gotta change my swing. You know I gotta do a Tiger Woods." Forty-five years prior to Tiger Woods, "I gotta change my swing." So he heard this stuff that Ornette's doing and he tries his hand at it, but because Trane is such a linear thinker he can't play that way. But he tried. And when you listen to the record, the record...Trane does not sound good on the record. But when you think about how insecure musicians are right now, think about a guy who is at the top of his game, who will go and put himself in an environment that is not only foreign to him, but hostile to his way of thinking, and he did it. It's the most amazing record I ever heard. That was one of the most inspirational records I have ever heard. And then he realized he couldn't figure it out that way, so he had to do something else. So he kept playing music and working on things and thinking and that's why his mind was incredible. Everybody loves talking about "Countdown" and "Giant Steps", well you know what's really interesting, there are no...I've yet to find a bootleg recording of him actually playing those songs on a gigs. If it was to Trane everything that people say it is to them, then it is logical to suppose that he would have played that stuff on gigs. Yet, he didn't. There's no record of it. I know a guy in Germany. I knew a guy in Germany, who had a ridiculous amounts of Trane, fifteen hundred hours of bootleg Trane and Miles. And my dad and I had this argument for years, because I'm not really a fan of the Giant Steps thing, my dad loves it. So I was going to get some bootlegs for my dad and say, "Here you go. Here is your Coltrane fix. You and Bat. Ya'll can listen to, you know, ya'll can listen to countdown." Not to be found.

AB: Do you have a supposition as to why not?

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BM: Because I personally think that Trane saw that as a mathematical experiment. And once he solved the puzzle, there was not enough in it to continue to play it, because your options are limited when you play those sorts of songs. So he just didn't play 'em.

AB: So we understand that Trane had a system through his Atlantic years. When he gets on Impulse Records, does that period....

BM: He used.... He employed all of the stuff he'd developed when he was working at Atlantic, he used those same things in the Impulse years. But he doesn't use them in the same way, because the songs didn't have those II-V-I chord sequences. So when he plays it, it doesn't have that robotic kind of...even though, now Trane didn't sound robotic, like I'm talking about the thinking. I know guys that play it now, they sound completely robotic. But with Trane its like, "II-V-I, beek!" He knows exactly what he's going to play on that. So he realized that the only way to not play like that is to stop playing songs like that. So he did. He didn't stop playing standards, but he stopped playing songs like that and then it became songs like "Chim Chim Cheri," "Greensleeves." And then there is, you know, "Impressions," which is actually.... He stole that from this American composer, Martin Gould, who wrote this piece called, "American Symphonette Number 2-Pavane" and every note of the song, including what McCoy was playing was in that song. It was written in thirty-nine. So, that's again, to a lot of musicians, who believe in the false idol of innovation, they are offended by that. I'm inspired by that, because I always believed that creative music does not occur in a vacuum. And that it's clear that the roots of "Impressions" are in this Martin Gould piece. But Martin Gould didn't play it the way Trane played it. So I think it's great. That's the way I learned music. I'll steal from everybody. I'm always stealing. I'm always stealing. I'm like the, you know, the second iteration of, or maybe it was the third iteration, of Star Trek. No, it was the second, you know, where they had this race of people called the "Borg." And they would fly around and take over worlds, but everything that was good from that world, they would stick it into their world to make their world better and the whole thing was "prepare

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to be assimilated.” I mean that became my phrase after awhile, because that’s how I learned music. I assimilate.

AB: Now, when Trane gets into his Impulse period, his song titles, perhaps, I’m asking you this question, they may signal a direction as far as his musical influences: “Spiritual,” “India,” “Africa.”

BM: I don’t really.... People latch on to that, but I don’t because, you know.... The quality of the man, or woman makes the music, not the other way around. So, his spirituality is evident in his playing, but not in a way that it would have significantly changed the playing if he had been less spiritual. I know that’s a tough one for people to grasp. Nobody wants to hear that, but, I mean, Trane was gradually working to this place, regardless of Eastern, Indian religions and all of that stuff. And all of those things have an effect on how your music sounds, there’s no doubt about that. But I can think of a lot of really spiritual people that can’t play a note, not one. And I can think of musicians who are really spiritual and they can’t come close to playing what Coltrane played. Everything you do as a person affects the outcome of your music. I definitely believe that, as opposed to the popular ideology, that the music and the person are inextricably bound. The music does not make the person. The person makes the music. And your life experiences have a say in that. But I don’t hear this quantum leap in his music when he started dealing with Indian mysticism in Eastern spirituality. Elvin Jones did not embrace any of those spiritual things in that regard. I don’t see any evidence that McCoy did either. But when they were playing that music together, that was a spiritual experience. It is impossible to dispute the fact that it’s a spiritual experience, you know. But, I’ve played music with people who are very religious, but who are not very good and I’ve played music with hedonists who can play their asses off and the music always sounds better with the better players.

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AB: I'm inclined to, in the discussion about Coltrane, to try to delineate, or at least demarcate that there is a difference between religion and spirituality.

BM: Naw. There's no doubt about that. A lot of people who are religious are not spiritual. I get that.

AB: So....

BM: But I still stand by the fact that the guys in his band, some of who were actually junkies at the time – just to be blatant about it – they played that music with a level of spirituality that few musicians have come close to. And they didn't subscribe to any of the stuff. And I think that Trane's power in his music is the power in his ability to get a band that can help him mold his sound. Cause there are a lot of great players now, they don't have bands. The music doesn't have the same impact. I don't care how much they practice. I don't care how many hard songs they write. If you don't have a band, you got nothing.

AB: Well then we're back to 1964.

BM: Or, sixty five. Or sixty-six.

AB: Yeah. Well, OK, let's talk about Trane in sixty-six. It's definitely different than what he was doing when Elvin was in the group.

BM: Oh, well when Miles.... Yeah, when Elvin.... Trane was always a seeker. Trane was a seeker. He was an idealist by more than anybody. Trane was a seeker. He wasn't going to sit in the same place and he had to keep going. And when you hear those solos, that's one of the few times I hear solos that are really long and don't have really nothing to do with the song that he's playing, and I don't feel self-indulgence from it at all. Because he was just....

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He wasn't even there. He wasn't even there. By every account you get, he wasn't even there. I mean, you can.... There's an article that comes out saying the brain is only able to absorb about four hours of serious practice a day. By all accounts, Trane was practicing eight hours a day. You can't learn eight hours of stuff a day, but he was still doing it, because it kept him away from whatever he needed to be kept away from. And I don't know, so I ain't gonna try and presume. I've talked to guys that say that towards the end of his life, they were playing with him and his mouth was bleeding. You can't practice eight hours a day, without having physical repercussions from doing it. And he continued to do it. Like he was just somewhere else. He was somewhere else. And, in that case, it's like it reminds you of kinda of what you read, or hear about some of those Indian mystics, who just...they go to another place. And he was clearly in another place when he was playing these records. It really is an amazing thing to listen to, and on the other hand, it can be a very uncomfortable thing to listen to, because it's.... Are you willing to make that jump? I'm not willing to make that jump. To just like, you know.... I'm not willing to pull a Commander Kurtz. You know, "I ain't coming back. Sell the house, sell the kids" – phееew!

AB: Colonel Kurtz [*Apocalypse Now*]?

BM: Colonel Kurtz. I'm not gonna pull one of those, you know. Yeah, I mean, when you hear those records, he did it. But, again, the music doesn't have the same impact because the musicians just aren't as good. And you can put those records on and as much as Trane is killing, he can't drag, he can't lift those guys, but Trane was just in another place. He had to keep going. And Elvin was like, "I can't go here with you." Suddenly it was two drummers. It was him and Rashied Ali. And Trane.... And Elvin was like, "Where's it going? What's happening?" So they just kind of peeled away.

AB: McCoy first.

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BM: They just kind of peeled away. It's just it wasn't what it was and they liked what it was and Trane like, "I appreciate that, but it needs to be something else for me now. That is not good enough for me now. And I need to try to go over here." So there's some of those records.... There's one.... There's a bootleg of Trane playing with Alice and I'm not sure who the band, maybe it's Rashied Ali. I mean, I really.... They were doing a concert live at Temple University to show you how far we've come, and they were broadcasting, or how far we've slipped backwards, playing at Temple, live concert, on the radio and it's killin'. It's killin'! I mean it's great. It's not the other band. It was just.... But, you know, Trane just kept striving. It was just.... He was, you know, he had to keep moving. He had to keep moving. Who knows what he would have been playing had he made it to sixty. Who knows? Cause there wasn't much left. (laughs) There wasn't much left. I guarantee you he wouldn't been up there playing all them funk tunes, like a lot of the guys that were into him that went that way. And they all like to say, "If Trane was alive..." This kind of foolishness. "If Charlie Parker was alive this is what he'd be playing." Maybe. Not Trane. Maybe Bird. Maybe. Definitely Miles, you know. Trane would've just, you know.... Guys like that have a seminal influence on particularly the younger musicians.

AB: Are there other people like Trane, or even approximate that level?

BM: Coleman Hawkins had that kind of.... Younger musicians had that kind of reverence for him. Sonny Rollins is, to this day, still in awe of Coleman Hawkins. Coleman had that thing.... There's a great recording of Coleman Hawkins toward the end of his life doing this record. It's not a very good record. It's a combination of strings and big band. It's called "The Hawk Flies High in the Land of Hi-Fi." They were doing these hi-fi records. MRC was doing these records and that was the thing. Cannonball Adderley in hi-fi, Sara Vaughan in hi-fi and he did this record. And he does a version of the song, "There will never be another you." And he basically plays a Charlie Parker solo. When it goes into double time, he plays a Charlie Parker solo. He even plays the high E sharp the way Bird used to play it. And, you  
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know, here is the guy who was playing in the twenties, when Charlie Parker, learning how to play like him, and then he's - I don't know how old he was, he was probably in his sixties - he's playing like Bird. Like, just to humble yourself to that degree, to go from being the master to the student, is some of the most inspiring stuff that I have ever heard. And I can understand why Sonny revered him so much. Cause Hawk was always trying to get to the next thing. When the big bands died away, and the small groups took over, guys like Benny Carter stayed bitter and pissed off. Hawk got a small group. You know, everything's changing, you change with it. You change with it, 'cause you know, you can't hold on to stuff that's dead, because, as Rilke said, "It crumbles and changes in character." So you really can't hold on to it anyway, you know. That's like the whole gay marriage debate. It's actually already settled. In my state, they can pass amendments and all of that. It's already settled. [to Ken: There's the fox. He's checking out your ride.]

AB: Let's talk about Coleman Hawkins. You know, he truly to me, there are very few, there's a finite few people who continue to progress and, as you call it, seeker. Coleman Hawkins 1948 unaccompanied tenor sax solo.

BM: Yeah.

AB: "Picasso."

BM: Un-huh. Hey man, look, first of all he could. And this is the thing I mean.... You know, I get into this argument with musicians all the time, cause this is just the way they think about it. It's not a level playing field. It's just like sports. You know, it's just like sports. I mean every quarterback in the NFL would like say that they're as good as Tom Brady, or they are as good as this kid in Carolina, or as good as Drew Brees is right now, they all want to say it. When you talk to 'em, "I'm as good as any quarterback." No they're not. Some are just better. I mean Michael Jordan wasn't the most dominant player in the NBA all of the

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eighties and part of the nineties, because he worked harder than other people. They worked hard too. They worked really hard trying to catch up with him. Like that's the effect that he had on these guys, but he had a level of intuition, a cognition and intuition that was just superior to all the other people around him. And that was Coleman Hawkins. That was Coleman Hawkins. And he was able to do that. A lot of other people, they couldn't make that transition. But a lot of times we talk about these musicians and we keep talking like it's a level playing field. Like everybody is.... Everybody is good in their own way, or whatever they say. Everybody, you know, like the old... (starts singing) "Everything is beautiful" – remember that song? Everybody, you know, everybody has something to say. Well, some people have more to say than others. And, as a musician, and as a student of the music, cause I don't you know.... I'm not a fan. I'm not a music fan. I'm not a fan of music, I'm a student of music. It's different, because fans - fandom is problematic. Cause if you are a fan of Coltrane, that means that everything that Coltrane has ever done is great, so what happens when you hear him and he doesn't sound so great? Then you start making...spinning it, "Well he musta been sick that day. Or, well..." It's just a bad day. Sounded like shit. Oh well.... You know what I mean. That's just part of the information. On this CD they have of Trane playing with Johnny Hodges, the early part is him as a teenager playing Charlie Parker tunes getting lost in the form sounding like hot garbage. That just shows you how far somebody can come if they want to use their intelligence, and use their ambition, and work hard. Now the myth is, of course, that these were all just great natural players. All the colored boys are natural players. They don't work hard at it. They can kinda you know.... They can kinda just show up and the shit is just, you know, cause, you know.... It's a genius, but it's a kind of intuitive genius, you know. Louis Armstrong, he couldn't read music....

AB: Instinctual genius.

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BM: Therefore, it was all instinct. OK. (laughs) What do, you know.... OK, if that works for you. I mean I can read. Don't make me a good actor. Robert Downey, Jr. is a damn good actor. It ain't cause he can read, it's cause he can act. You know, it's....

AB: But I think if we look at every major figure in this music, or any endeavor, you will see a development. I mean, we were looking at Tony Williams earlier today. So at fifteen he's, you know.... He found those ten thousand hours real early on to get to where he was at seventeen, or fifteen when he played with Miles.

BM: Well, when he was playing.... No, when he was playing with Miles he was eighteen.

AB: Seventeen.

BM: Seventeen. Yeah. But there is a big difference between Tony Williams at seventeen and Tony Williams at twenty-one. There's a big difference between the stuff he was playing on *Four and More*, which was still incredible, but then you hear him playing on like "Country Son" on *Miles in the Sky*, I mean, it's a completely different – a completely different guy.

AB: Have you heard.... This is an aside. I've gotta ask you this cause, I find.... I'm just wondering if it's just me, or is the entire jazz community asleep, but they released that box set, the bootleg, Columbia did the three CDs and the DVD, I was.... I am still, still in awe of that music in sixty-seven, before Miles starts to make that transition bringing the guitar....

BM: Oh yeah. They were at the height of powers.

AB: Tony. Wayne.

BM: They were at the height of their powers.

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AB: I'm surprised people haven't said....

BM: Well the thing about that music.... The thing about that music is that they were playing standard songs in a fashion that is impossible to codify. Musicians are generally fans of codification. Jazz writers are fans of music that really isn't jazz, but they can call it jazz, you know. So, if you playing like, you know, pop tunes, "Yeah, man, that's.... These guys are stretching." Like Gary Giddins wrote this great piece called, "Jazz is dead is Alive Again." And the basic premise of the piece is that, in popular culture, if jazz is jazz, it's dead. If they're playing like jazzy versions of pop tunes, it's possibly relevant. And he just brought up all these examples of groups that, you know. "Could this group be possibly relevant now that they're playing, you know, whatever the groups are now. I can't remember the names of the groups, because I hardly listen to that music anymore. You know, Cold Play. Guys play a Cold Play tune and everybody says, "Yeah, man, that's the kind of jazz I like. That Wayne stuff.... Man, that stuff is just, you know, that's just....

AB: Well, that's the thing that's so interesting...

BM: That stuff, it's .... There're two words for me in art and sports are cognition and intuition. Because, when you hear it, you have to understand what it is and you have to react to it. And that's what that band did incredibly well. Like, a new idea was introduced, they all knew exactly what it was and they would just make a turn on a dime and go right with the new idea. And most guys are still thinking, you know, Cherokee is a thirty-two bar song, when, in fact, it's a one-bar song.

AB: Again, that sixty-seven collection is, to me, is vital because he's playing some of the standards.... You know, they're playing...but they are also playing "Riot." They're playing "Masqualero" ....

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BM: Yeah. (cuts in again)

AB: So they're playing.... So, you know, Miles was always criticized, he was playing the old repertoire, but no, when he was in Europe, or wherever, in sixty-seven he was playing Herbie's tune, Wayne's tune....

BM: But everybody can play their own music, man.

AB: But I'm saying this music...(BM interrupts again)

BM: You know? Everybody can play their own music. They, you know, sound great on the record playing that stuff. I mean the other people talking about how he's playing the same old material. I mean that's how you teach people how to play. I mean, what's more impressive to me is you have an AB comparison. Like you have, you know.... When you have Miles playing a (sings the melody to "On Green Dolphin Street") What's the name of that song?

Ken: "On Green Dolphin Street."

BM: Thank you. Playing "On Green Dolphin Street" with Trane, in that band, and then you have him playing with Wayne and Herbie and 'em, you can hear the substantive leap. Whereas, when they playing "Masqualero" I mean there was no recording of guys, it's their tune.

AB: Right.

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BM: It's their stuff. So for me, for the information.... It's like, when you can put on "On Green Dolphin Street" and you can hear it when he was doing the *Workin', Steamin',* crappin' records, you know, dyin', flyin'.... Then you hear, you know, the subsequent versions on the bootlegs with Trane. And then you.... You can hear this kinda growth and maturation and expansion – is the right word, I guess – of the concept of how the songs can be played. And how each group really blossomed in a way and Miles was definitely smart to just let them do to these songs what they did to those songs. And, you know, "Masqualero," I mean I love all that stuff. "Riot," but again, that's your music. The jazz world right now is full of people who write and play their own music. And either you like it, or you don't like it. But I guarantee you, if you took a lot of these guys and put them in the wayback machine, and suddenly they were on stage, standing next to Lester Young, he goes, "Ready, one, two...." They gonna be in trouble. They gonna be in trouble because they didn't learn the music like that.

AB: So, let's go back to your development as a saxophonist. So, you're in Art Blakey's.... How long were you in Art Blakey's band?

BM: Eight months.

AB: And I remember seeing you at the Keystone Corner, probably eighty-one, eighty-two, no, eighty-two.

BM: That was fun. That was fun. I loved that place.

AB: So.... You loved that place? Oh, yeah, the Keystone Corner, did you see the book?

BM: No.

AB: Kathy Sloane, she's got a book out.

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BM: Wow.

AB: Yeah, beautiful. You'll love it. You know that book on Trane. We'll talk about that off-tape.

BM: Which one?

AB: There's a recent book by Oxford University Press called "Coltrane and...." What is it called? I contributed one chapter, but it's called *John Coltrane and Black America's Quest for Freedom*.

BM: Aw yeah.

AB: It's all-black, all-black contributors. Scholars and musicians. You know Leonard Brown.

BM: Un-Un.

AB: He's up at Northeastern. Anyway, he's held the Coltrane festival. He's the editor. If you don't have a copy, I'll get you a copy.

BM: Please. Thank you.

AB: So, as a saxophonist - and now you started on alto, but then you go on tour with, was it Slide early on and you go out and you're playing bari. So you're playing E flat horns, but then you ultimately gravitate, as we heard today, you know, soprano and tenor. So those would ultimately become your voice, the choice for you to express who you are. Those instruments become your voice. So, when you start as a historian, and as a musician, when  
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you start to, cause you know it's incumbent on you to do your research, to do your historical research, to figure out how the music got to this level. So when you went back, who were the people, who were the folks that you started, like you said.... Well, Johnny Hodges, but who were you listening to to develop that sound?

BM: When I was on alto, I was listening to Wayne. And when I switched to tenor I started listening to Bird. Genius. But I often, I mean the horn is kind of a medium to me. It's not the thing, the ideas are the thing. And those ideas are interchangeable regardless of the instrument. So when I'm listening to those guys, I'm trying to capture their sound. And I'm really paying attention to how they react to the rhythm section and I'm trying to learn the rhythm, because each guy has a unique way of playing, employing, rhythm in their solos. You know Trane, which is one reason he was so popular was because a lot of his stuff had more of a straight eight feel to it when he played, which meant that it was easier to put in a book. So guys that have a linear approach to music, which will always outnumber...they will always outnumber the natural musicians. They could approximate that, even better.... When you look to buy the *Charlie Parker Omnibook*, and there's this stuff he's playing and they don't know what it is, and they put little X's where the lines...where the notes should be, because they have no idea, no earthly idea what it is. Trane played with a fashion that you could actually codify it. So there was suddenly a whole new legion of guys that were Trane fans, more because they could see what it was, rather than what they could hear, cause they don't really hear very well, those guys. But when you listen to Bird and 'em, it takes a while to learn those solos, because the rhythm is so deep. Like the rhythm, the note choice and it didn't matter to me what instrument they played. It was just about when I was introduced to the music...I was playing tenor when I started listening to Ornette. And it took me four months before I figured out what the forms were and then, from that point, then I could try to figure out: Well, what's he doing? How's he doing it? So then I started buying earlier records and I realized that he was basically a be-bopper and a swinger.

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AB: What did you think about Ornette on tenor?

BM: I dug Ornette on tenor. Matter of fact I wrote on my new record we have this song called "Whiplashing", the first notes of my solo are the first four notes on the song "Eos." Just the same thing Ornette played. He wasn't a good tenor player, but again, he was just using the tenor as the medium. And when he played tenor, it completely changed the character of the songs in a way that, had he played that on alto, it wouldn't have sounded that way.

AB: Talking about Ornette and going back to the Coltrane axis. Yeah, Coltrane played with Ornette's rhythm section, but then Ornette played with Trane's rhythm section....(interrupted)

BM: Oh yeah, but Ornette played with Trane's rhythm section, but he brought them to his thing.

AB: Right.

BM: When you listen to records like *New York is Now* and all that.... Whew! But he brought them to his thing. You know what I mean. He wasn't trying to get to Trane's thing. He just said, "Alright, let's do it." You know, man, that's a great record, too. With Dewey, yeah that's killin' man.

AB: Talk about Dewey, because I don't think Dewey has gotten enough credit for what he's done.

BM: Well, it happens. I mean, you know, he.... Again, he's a guy that had the full understanding of the tradition. And he was labeled, because of his affiliation with Ornette.

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It's one of those weird things that happens when you don't .... The guys that get the most credit are the guys who have the best bands. And when you keep bringing these names up, with the exception of soloists and big bands in the thirties, but in the small group era, there were a lot of great players who never got good bands, never got credit for having good bands. They just never did that. And Dewey was one of those guys that never really got his due. Never really got his due as a player. But he's closely affiliated with Ornette. That's the thing. He's affiliated with Ornette. But there's a.... He's a player, man. He's a player. You know and bluesy. He's a Texas boy ain't he?

AB: Un-huh.

BM: Yeah. Yeah, I see how that makes sense. Yeah, he's, you know, from Texas. Swing his ass off, play some blues shouts, and he played the freer stuff with a flair. Cause there's a record that he did, one of my favorite records, it's just him and Blackwell live in Willisau, Austria. And I wrote this tune.... What's the name of that tune? (whispers this) "Citizen Tain," I think. And the whole thing is based on one of the songs, the first song on the record, I think, on *Live at Willisau*. It's not a note by note ripoff, but a conceptual ripoff. And the spacing of the notes and all of that. Yeah, I mean, yeah Dewey was something. Dewey was something. But you gotta have a band. For the stuff you're talking about. Not to be a good player, but if you want to be a guy that's mentioned, you gotta have a band. You just got to.

AB: Early on you had the opportunity to share the stage with Sonny Rollins. Talk about Sonny.

BM: That's my man. He is emblematic to me...he's of a level of quality and it was so hard to learn how to play like him.

AB: Why?

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BM: Cause it's just.... It's completely nonlinear.

AB: Can you explain what you mean by that for the audience that may not understand the difference?

BM: Linear players have a firm grasp on what scales work upon what chord and what patterns work on what chord. So they will play ascending lines and descending lines based on the chord structures. And if you listen to enough songs, you can sort of...there's a level of predictability in the solos. Trane is my favorite example of that. Trane is like a fastball pitcher, who has one pitch, but can't nobody hit it. So he gets on the mound and everybody says, "Well you know it's coming. Number one." And he strikes out twelve, thirteen batters. You know, then there's other people who say, "Aw man, that cat man, he doesn't have a change-up, he doesn't have a this...." Sit your ass down. You just got struck out. You know, like Mariano Rivera, cut fastball, hit it if you can. Oops! You can't hit it. You know, so that you know what's coming, you know what's coming with Trane. And when he plays it, it feels good as hell. But a lot of guys, when you know it's coming, it don't feel good. It just feels repetitive. You know, and that's the magic of Trane. But Sonny Rollins, you could put on a record, and you do not know what's coming. And that to me is the quintessential nonlinear player. Anything could come out of that horn at anytime. And his approach is to learn ten thousand songs, no matter how insignificant, how trivial the song might sound. "How much is that doggy in the window?" You know what I mean? Just crazy songs like that. And then just throw them in solos at any point. This is going to go wherever I feel like going – right now. It's not like, I'm gonna set up a template and, you know.... That's not what it is. You put these songs ...especially the live stuff. You just don't know what's coming. And that's what's.... I was learning one solo, not long ago, about three, four months ago, rhythm changes, real fast and then I realized that, the majority of what he was playing was kinda based on this one lick. It's like a Coleman Hawkins thing. It's based on this one lick and he

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would change two or three notes in it and start it in a different place, it sounds like a completely different thing, you know? And linear players also, I have to add, linear players everything can kinda be four bars to eight bars. Four bars, eight bars, sixteen, thirty-two. Everything is in fours, eights, you know, twelve, sixteen, and thirty-two. I don't know why they skip twenty-four, but they do. It's like sixteen to thirty-two. And so everything is neatly in a little box. Sonny... everywhere. Ornette...everywhere. Charlie Parker...everywhere on bootlegs. Yeah, that's something, that's something to hear that. I mean it's one of those things that when I figured that out.... It's one of those things I do, cause I have a lot of students that study a lot of Coltrane. So if you take a student who plays like.... They don't play like Coltrane. They really don't, because they don't know enough music. But they play very linearly. If you take a guy that has four bar - eight bar phrasing straight up and down, what you tell them is you can play anything you want, pick any tempo you want, and you can play anything you want and the only caveat is you cannot play anything in the fourth bar. So you have to play three-bar phrases the whole time. And then it's like watching those movies when the computer starts freaking and the lines are going "blurrp, blurrp..." because they have to play in that fourth bar. This is how they practice. And you deny them the fourth bar, they get lost immediately. By the bridge they don't know where they are. And the whole idea is you not supposed to be...it's not supposed to be that programmed. It's not supposed to be that programmed. Music should be in one. It should be in one one. And you should play any time, any place, anywhere. It should be able to happen in the middle of phrases, outside of phrases, but you have to be willing to sound like shit for a long time to get that and a lot of people, they don't have.... I don't know what it is. They lack the security. They go out there and play bad to get good. So they try to get good in the practice room. And then they just sit there and they say, "Well this is me. This is what I am." And I just say, "Uhh!" If I was going to do that I'd rather play pop music and make a pile of money doing it. But if I'm going to come and do this I'm gonna try and do it and try to take it as far out as I can. And so then I got the choice, I can do the old in and out. Cause we can play something really stretching and when our audience gets

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confused, we come back in and we play a ballad and then they're happy. Then you hit 'em again. It's time to stop.

Ken: Yep.

[End of CD2]

AB: Rolling now?

BM: He'll tell you when. Alright.

AB: "Is you is, or is you ain't my baby?"

BM: That was one of those things that Blakey taught me. He says a.... And it was harder than it is now, because it wasn't digital technology. You had to find this shit. "So you wanna learn how to play jazz?" "Yeah." He said, "Go get you some Louis Jordan." And my answer was, of course, "Well, who's Louis Jordan?" He said, "You gotta be fucking kidding me." (laughs) That's what he said. "Man, you young people. Ya'll are just...." So, he gave me the list. You gotta go get some Slim and Slam. You gotta go get some Louis Jordan. He said, "You know all these little...these little songs, they're like pop tunes, and they all swinging, and they all teach you how the music is supposed to sound. Like the rhythm is built into the song? And, I mean you know, try and go to Tower Records and find a Louis Jordan record in 1982. Huh! That shit was.... So I eventually bumped into some stuff and put them on cassette tapes, because that's what we were dealing with at the time. And that's when I started learning all those songs. "Is You Is" and "GI Jive" and "Ain't Nobody Here But Us Chickens."

AB: "Five Guys Named Moe."

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BM: "Five Guys Named Moe." You know it's funny how my jazz sensibilities started to become better when I started learning all those songs. I even play this stuff for my kids sometimes. You know, "A Tisket A Tasket." Ah....

AB: "Choo-Choo-Cha Boogie"

BM: "Choo-Choo-Cha Boogie"

AB: [To Ken] That was Georgia's favorite.

BM: I'm talking about Ella doing, "A Tisket A Tasket." Slim and Slam doing "Flat [Foot] Floogie" and "Sweet Safronia." And you just learn all these songs and I was playing golf once with Freddie Cole. And I would stand on the tee box and I was just singing some of these songs and he was like, "Man, where did you learn all those songs from?" I said, "Man, Blakey made me learn those songs thirty years ago. He said, "Damn, I don't meet no young fellas that know those tunes." To me that's jazz. If you learn that stuff, then you can play jazz. "I ain't never heard nobody your age say it." Shit, I'm forty something years old at the time. But I said, "Yeah, that's pretty tragic." It really does.... It really helped me to understand the sensibility of the music. You know like the Fletcher Henderson song, "Tain't What You Do" and all that. I didn't know any of that stuff.

AB: Jimmy Lunceford.

BM: Jimmy Lunceford, I'm sorry. That was Blakey's boy, too, Lunceford. "Aw, Lunceford's band." He used to love Lunceford's band. Jimmy Lunceford. And, you know Cab's stuff, cause he played with Cab. Blakey played with Cab as a kid. Yeah, I learned all of that eventually. It was a process. I became a better musician as I learned that stuff.

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AB: Now, you were recently out in the Bay Area and I caught a clip of you on KGO television and ... I forgot the... I can't remember who the host was....

BM: That's the hardest thing to do.

AB: What's that?

BM: Those shows are hard.

AB: Why is that?

BM: I mean I'm good at it now because they are the exact opposite of what we do for a living. And you have to find a way...I mean, you basically can't talk about the music when you're on those shows. So you have to find a way to find a middle of it and be affable and kind of up on current events and throw the barbs out there because those are housewife shows. They're basically housewife shows. And, if you get on say...it reminds me of the character of a lot of jazz musicians. It's because that's one thing the old guys did very well is that they knew how to be entertaining in a way that was inclusive of what they did, but separate of what they did. I watched Blakey do it. I watched Dizzy do it. I watched a lot of guys do it. It's something that's in short supply in the modern era, when guys are generally kind of really introverted, really smart. You know they go on stage... like that's an amazing thing. You go on...you listen to Blakey, Blakey get on stage and say, "Thank you ladies and gentlemen." And you go on...I'm not naming names, because it doesn't really merit anything. People can go to concerts and that out on their own. You go to a modern concert and the guy goes, "Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Now I would like to introduce the band. On saxophone...." (spoken in a low, cool-acting voice) There's like this weird...it's very strange. So suddenly you're on one of these shows where they say something like, "So tell me about your music?" (in a low cool-acting voice again) "Well, you

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know, its um.... What we're trying to do is, we're trying to combine the elements of a ...the Japanese shakuhachi flute with the...shhhh!" So you just flip a switch on them. You say, "Aw, you know, we just do what we do. Now how about those Mets." I mean you just.... So when I was on that show, I can't remember what he was asking me, but.... Oh, he said, "What are you listening to on your ipod?" And I just said....

AB: I'll tell you what you said.

BM: I know what I said. "Monteverdi Madrigals."

AB: Book eight.

BM: Yup. Monteverdi Madrigals...because, you know, I thought about it and I said, "Well, I could say 'Adele' and everybody would applaud. Because it was kinda like a brief thing. You know, I had the Adele thing. I could have said Adele, but naw. You know, then he'd say, "Me too. I love that stuff." And I'd say, "Aw, that's great." Cause I said, "Yeah, I'm gonna throw this out there and let you know that...yeah, you ain't me and jazz ain't what you think it is, but, at the same time, it is really OK to be you. And, as long as you make it OK to be them, "I kinda like that guy. I think we gonna go see this show." Not hear it, but see it. And one of the things that our band does is that we give people something to see. That's probably what our best attribute is, is that we give them something to see, because the majority of people coming to a concert ain't gonna hear it. I ain't... Even if it's music they like, they ain't gonna hear it, which is why they participate in it the way that they do.

AB: Meaning...what is that?

BM: You've been to our concerts. You've been to an Earth, Wind and Fire concert. The song starts, (BM sings the opening line of "Sing a Song") "That's my jammm!" And then they start

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singing along to it. And the singers get hip to it and they like, “Aw, yeah, yeah, sing along with me!” Cause they don’t feel like singing that night. Their voice is tired. And they’ll sing the whole damn song. So, you know.... In Opera you pay two hundred and twenty-five dollars to hear a guy sing. In a pop concert you pay a hundred and twelve dollars to not hear a guy sing, because it’s an experience. And an experience cannot be beat. I’m just.... For anybody that’s trying to say, “Oh, there’s going to be a thing.... Man, the spectacle, stage, light shows, the aura, four dudes in suits – hell naw. And, you know, four dudes in jeans who don’t have a charismatic bone in their body? Ain’t working. So, we can’t compete with popular culture in that respect. You just can’t. Can’t do it. So, but what we can do is give them some... like in my band, right? You have Eric Revis on bass. Justin Falkner on drums. Joey Calderazzo on piano. There’s an energy between the musicians. We’re constantly looking at one another when we play. We’re interacting, we’re listening, we’re reacting to each other, we’re talking to each other on stage. So there’s charisma between us. Almost all of the women who come to the show are gonna be in their thirties, forties, fifties. They love looking at Eric. Six foot three, hazel eyes, big-ass muscles, beating the crap out of the bass, sweat poring down. And they all make.... When I talk to people about the show, I always say, “What did you like about the show?” “Aw, I sure did like that Eric Revis.” You know, as a man, that sucks. But I live with it. It’s fine. I can, you know, I’m secure. I can take that beating. And then there’s other people who come up and say, “Aw, that drummer you got there....” And this is what they say. “It’s just amazing to watch him. His hands are going all this way and that way, and its just....” They don’t say “I’m amazed at what he played.” And then there are a couple of people that said, “I’m amazed at what he played.” Most people, “Man, he’s just astounding to watch.” Joey plays, he’s like this. He stamps on the floor when he plays. He stands up like this, “Boy, I just love watching that guy.” We got all the bases covered. We got all the bases...then there are some people who come to the concert and there are some white people who come to the concert who just love the fact there’s a white guy up there. And I have the vantage point, because I’m sitting behind the stage, so I get to watch the first ten rows and watch them. You know, there’s the women looking at Eric like

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this. Then the guys, the white guys are looking at Joey, "Yeah, one of us, yeah." You know? "Yeah, he's playing it too." You know, so he's like Elvis. You know what I mean? So, and then there's people watching Justin. "How old is that kid. Aw, he's amazing." And we play these songs. And we play with a lot of energy on certain songs and we played energetic songs and pretty songs. That's kind of what we do, energy and pretty and it's a good combination. It works well. But I understand that eighty percent of the audience, I don't care what kind of music it is, classical music, no difference, eighty percent of the audience, they don't even know why they are there really. They're there to see something. And if there ain't nothing to see, they don't come back. And that's what [Gustavo] Dudamel is. Dudamel gives you something to see, and for people who know the music, there's also something to hear. But you need to have both. And if you can't have both, then give them something to see. Because, with all the talent in the world and no charisma, they'll go once, they won't come back. And the guys who are lesser players who look the part better, people will come back. Cause they don't have those kind of sophisticated ears. The hardest thing about our job is that you learn all this music and it's hard to embrace the reality that it's just for you, really. It's just for you, and a couple of your colleagues, maybe. So you spend all your time learning this crap and you have to wanna do it and love the music enough to do it, because the audience, they don't give a shit. And it's not their job to care. It's our job to make them feel that it's important. It's our job to make them want to be there. It is not their job and it's amazing how many musicians feel like, "Well, I put in all this work, the audience is obligated to be there and enjoy it." It's kinda crazy what's going on now. The older guys understood what that was. Whenever you're around them they understood it. And some of them would tell you and the rest of them you could just see it on the stage. They got it. They understood the relationship between the audience and the players and what that was, and how you had to deal with it. The one's that succeeded at it, the ones that were able to do it really well, and the musicians who continually did well were the ones who could play the best melodies. Time and time again. When you look at those old George Wein posters, and the guys who kept coming back year after year? They were the guys who played the best

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melodies. Not the guys who played the best solos. It was the guys who played the best melodies. Dizzy, Stan Getz, you know, Blakey's band - cause he was a melody freak - Herbie, Wayne, you know. It always was the same guys. When he was alive, Duke.

AB: You mentioned earlier that the experiences you had working with Sting and working in the television show had a - now I have to paraphrase you - let's just say, had a profound impact on you.

BM: Un-huh.

AB: Can you talk about that?

BM: Yeah, sure. When I was playing in Wynton's band and I really.... I wasn't really a jazz musician, I was playing jazz, but I didn't know what the hell I was doing. But I had learned all these Wayne Shorter solos and we were working out of the mode, the Miles band was kind of our band. So I would play these really long solos that never really went anywhere and everything was like an inside joke. Because it was the band, we knew what was going on, the audience was sitting there going, "Ok. Where is this shit going?" But, I didn't have any other way to do it at that time. You know, and we were working on things and it never really goes anywhere, And we're playing like this and everything...sorting it out, and then suddenly I was in this band where every solo, with the exception of one was going to be like forty-five seconds. So then you realize then "Ok, I gotta hit it and quit it." As James Brown used to say. I gotta hit it and quit it. I don't have five minutes. I got forty-five seconds. So, much like the stuff I had to do in the earlier R 'n B band, if I could take every musician and say, "You got forty-five seconds," after about a year, they would know how to hit it and quit it, because you don't have a choice. Nobody has...the song does not have time for you to sort out all of your nonsense. You have to get to your nonsense quicker. And when I came back to playing jazz, my solos were much more concise and not nearly as long, because I had to go through the discipline of self-censorship and truncating.... The same thing that

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Charlie Parker and those guys went through when the medium, you got one chorus, two tops. And they were all influenced by swing music, and in swing music they didn't have those big long-ass solos like they have now. You know, post-Coltrane, you know.

AB: Well, maybe the Count Basie band back in thirty-six, thirty-seven. Herschel Evans....

BM: Herschel Evans might have had one song.

AB: Playing for dances. But you're talking about the recording, but if we...

BM: Herschel Evans might have had one song, but they did not have songs with Herschel Evans playing for fourteen minutes - song after song, after song, after song, after song. We can go get some bootlegs. It's just you.... That's not a successful formula, because, as much as people like to dance, it's the melodies that attract them. Cause if it was Herschel, then they would have said, "Count Basie Band Featuring Herschel Evans." Or, "The Herschel Evans Band Featuring Count Basie." But it's like the game inside the game. Solos were tolerated. They weren't the game. It was the sound of the band. The shit had to be swinging and you had to have melodies. And, if you didn't have those, then.... There were a lot of bands that had bad melodies and could swing a little bit. You know, we know of them, but they're not Basie's band. They're not Duke's band. You know, it really...like guys solo...there's that big solo.... Do you know "Diminuendo in Crescendo in Blue"? That's an isolated thing, though. That's one, it's a great solo. It was at a jazz festival, not a dance. That's an isolated thing. I think the solos were more like the way that, you know, Ben Webster's solo was on "Cottontail," four chorus, five choruses. Not Trane where like you have three songs on an hour record. You know, fifteen minutes plus. You know, it's just, you know, it's like a completely different.... So if you went through the thing where you had to have that kind of discipline, cause now, I mean everybody plays long solos and they don't go anywhere. They don't go anywhere. They just sit there. And they just keep playing, and

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keep playing, and keep.... I remember... (laughs)...when Joey first joined the band. He was playing this tune and he wasn't playing very well. And he said a.... He believed.... Well, he's a gambler. He has a gambler's mentality. "If I play one more chorus, I'm gonna find my way out of this shit." So he says.... I'm sitting there and he's dying. He's dying. And he says, "Can I have one more?" I said, "Take as many as you need, bro." And he just kept playing and I just sat there. And when it was over he said, "That didn't work, did it?" I said, "It just sucked. Just a word of advice. When it ain't working, just get out and save your dignity, cause you're not going to find your way out of it. Try again tomorrow." You know, it's just one of those things.

AB: When did you learn that?

BM: Well, I was never really a good player, so I never was inclined to play long solos, because I didn't really have the kind of technique that would lend itself to that. So I was more of a melodic player. But, even when I didn't play those kind of long-winded solos, conceptually I was constantly thinking of ways to approach it. And you can hear it on Wynton's band. Solos, solos, solos, space, space, space, start soloing again. Maybe we'll go in this direction, but.... After a year and a half of forty-five second solos, hit it and quit it. Get in and get out. And on certain songs, yeah. If you play a song in that Coltrane vibe, yeah, go for it. That's why the original "A Love Supreme", I think, is thirty-five minutes long and when we played it, it was an hour and five minutes long. But that was...we had to develop to learn how to do that.

AB: Let's talk about that because there are two recordings. In the first one and the second one you even talk about the disparity....

BM: Yeah. The first one sucks. The first one's shit.

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AB: Why?

BM: A million reasons. First reason is we were trying to make an eighteen-minute version of it to acquiesce to the nature of what we were doing. We were asked to play it, because there was this CD out called, "Red, Hot and Cool." There were these red hot records they were making in every genre of music and it was to raise money for AIDS awareness. And then the record comes out and there is no jazz on the jazz record, except us. There are rappers and grooves and instrumental solos. And then there is this thing and they were trying to edit what we did. They were trying to edit that one down. And I went, "Well, just take it off the record, because it's already too short." And it was...so they made a special CD and it was just us and Alice Coltrane on this one CD. But ultimately the reason is because I had not really internalized enough swing music and my blues shit was really weak.

AB: And you're saying that this lacuna in your foundation deleteriously impacted your ability to....

BM: He said "lacuna." Wow.

AB: ...to realize this piece by John Coltrane?

BM: I didn't say that. I just said it sucked. I don't know what the hell you talking about, but, in English.... Well, yeah, when you listen to Coltrane's music, even when Trane wrote a song that was just a scale, like a...I never remember the name of...(sings "Transition") It's a Phrygian scale. Right. When he gets rid of the scale, he blows blues. (sings blues licks) It'll be the blues. (completes the blues phrase) And I just didn't have it. To me, at that point still, the blues was a twelve-bar form and it wasn't the sound of the blues. I'd bought some blues records, but I hadn't really paid enough attention to them. And I already had the records, cause I had just collected them. And, once I heard this "A Love Supreme" and just...the first

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one, and listened to it, and listened to it, I began to embrace my lacunas, or is lacunae also plural?

AB: Where is Miss Dewey?

BM: It was...yeah. And I basically pulled out...cause I had the records already. There was one that I'd been listening to which was.... Well, what happened is when we were in Wynton's band, early early on, at the Montreal Jazz Festival, they had two shows on the same bill, but not at the same time. So it'd be a short four and a short seven. I used to get to the venue early and I was walking around. I was more adventurous then. I was twenty-two, twenty three. And the four o'clock show was Willie Dixon. I said, "Well, I ain't never heard Willie Dixon, let me go." And Willie Dixon just.... Well, first of all, he blue me away, cause I didn't realize he had written all of these songs. And he was playing all these songs and I just went out and Chess had released a box set of Willie Dixon tunes. But in the box set they had all the different artists singing his tunes. So, they had him, They had Willie Dixon. And then they had Howling Wolf singing his tunes. And John Lee Hooker singing his tunes. And a...

AB: Muddy Waters.

BM: Muddy Waters singing his tunes. And, the harmonica player from New Orleans?

AB: Sonny Boy Williamson? Oh,....

BM: No...Sonny Boy, too. Little Walter.

AB: Take me with you when you go.

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BM: Sonny Boy. So I went out and I started buying their records. So I had this big pile of blues records and after I heard that thing I said, "Well, I I gotta get to work." And I was on the Leno Show at that time. I was on Jay's show. So, when I got off of work I used to come home and just listen to music. And I just started listening to all these blues CDs and learning all these blues things, just learning how to phrase with blues phrasing. And, after about eight months of that, it started to creep into the playing. And I said.... I wasn't thinking at the time, "Oh, now I can tackle 'A Love Supreme' again." Aw, it wasn't.... Basically, my thing was I'm glad we played it because it exposed all these holes – I'm sorry – "lacauna" in our philosophy and in our playing. And we all knew it. And one of the things that's hard to do is to play that style of music with sustained intensity for that long. That's why nobody does it. So, the next time we played it.... Sometimes we'd play some of the movements with the band with Kenny and Tain. Once we left Leno's show, we'd just play a couple of movements at the Vanguard. We wouldn't play the whole thing. Or, maybe once we played the whole thing. I was in Paris in 2001 and this guy was talking to me about European jazz. I was like, "Well, there really is no such thing as European jazz. Jazz is jazz." And, unfortunately, most musicians these days don't really sound like jazz musicians, including these guys. This went back and forth. I said, "I never really heard of a music.... I'm hard pressed to find a music in history where the people who are playing it now would be so ill-equipped to play what it was back then." I said, "In sports there's nobody that's saying that, you know, people who play football now couldn't play football sixty years ago. As a matter of fact, they'll probably be better." I said, "In jazz, in every instance, every musician would probably be worse than the guys who were sixty years ago." And I kept going, I said, "Look, man, you know, you wanna impress me? The stuff they're playing doesn't impress me. Let's hear them play 'A Love Supreme'" And the guy says, "Well, I haven't heard you play "A Love Supreme." I said, "Good. We'll play it tonight." Now, that's how it happened. I walked in the dressing room and I said, "We're playing "A Love Supreme" tonight. They said, "What? Are you crazy?" Cause Joey hadn't played it with us. And I think one of the things if you listen to our version, the first chord that we play on the record, that's the wrong chord. That's not the chord that

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Coltrane played. But, the thing that was really cool about when we played “A Love Supreme” is that at no time during the times that we played it, had we ever rehearsed it. Like, when we started playing it with the band, we...actually we did it before we moved to LA. We were sitting in the dressing room one day talking about “A Love Supreme” and Bob Hurst said, “Hey man, let’s just play it.” So we played it. Based from.... And everybody played it based on the thousand of hours we spent – naw, that’s an exaggeration – the hundreds of hours we’d spent listening to it. And it was a pretty good adaptation of it technically, but spiritually and emotionally it was wack. So, we went out and played it this time and it was, to a man, when the show was over we sat in the dressing room at The New Morning in Paris. And if you knew.... This is a loquacious group of guys. No one said a word for ten minutes. I’m not exaggerating either. We all sat on the bench and everybody was kinda like (starts heaving heavy breaths). It was one of those things. It was like you’d just run a marathon or something. And no one said a word. We just sat there. And that’s when I felt, “OK, we can do it now.” Cause now we understand what it takes to play a piece like this. And what it means to play a piece. And if you cannot suppress or sublimate your own ego, or your own insecurities, and submit to the music and I think, perhaps, I would definitely concede that this is where the spirituality part plays a role. Because they just followed Trane’s lead, because they weren’t spiritual at all. But there is a level of submission that has to occur in order to make this work. And if you’re on stage saying, “Well, I’m gonna play a solo on this one, and this one, and I’m gonna save my best solo for this.” You don’t stand a chance in hell of playing this piece. And once we played it, I said.... The first guy who spoke was me, I said, “We gotta record this.” And Tain said, “Yeah, man.” So, the next day we were playing in Spain and I had this silver mouthpiece and it was brown and I said, “Maybe it was cause....” It corrodes. You know, it’s silver. You gotta polish it, or it fades. But I said, “Man, it’s brown.” Then I kept looking at it and I realized that I’d bitten through my lip during the performance the night before and did not know that I had. And then Revis with his macho shit was like, “Yeah, baby, that’s right, that’s right! Didn’t even hurt, did it?!” I mean it just went to this place. We were laughing about it. But it wasn’t the significance of it

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for me was not lost on me, because I'd finally gotten to this point of emotional maturation where the music meant more than the sum of its parts, or more than what the page was. And I was no longer interested in, or worried about, "What are those five guys in the back think of what we're doing. Cause it's like this nerdy musician thing we do. You have a hundred and ten people in there and three of them are musicians and we immediately turn and we play to the musicians and alienate the hundred and seven. It was way past all of that.

And I think that, being on the Tonight Show really helped me with that, because I was never really fully committed to the idea of playing jazz for a living. I like learning and I enjoyed playing, but when I was on Leno's show, it was one of those things where, "OK, you can sit here for the next fifteen years of your life and you can make a lot of money doing this, but your music career is essentially over and you gotta make peace with that, if that's what you want." And it was amazing, by the end of the first year I.... The first year I said, "Yeah, I can make peace with that." But by the end of the first year I couldn't make peace with that reality. And to people that don't play music, like even Jay was saying, "Well, what are you talking about?" You know? "You can play on the weekends." It's like hard to get...like he's a comedian. Comedians can do that because so much of what they...what makes them great, they develop inside their heads. They don't have to worry about.... They don't take diction class. They don't have.... It's not like they're opera singers. They don't have to shed. They just.... They think of stuff. And they look at stuff. And they make pointed observations, then the observations are funny. He can do that on the weekends. He can also do it during the week. But when you're spending hours and hours a day not doing what it is that you used to do, you lose that ability. It atrophies. It goes away. And by the end of that first year I had to make a decision. Do I.... And once I decided that I was gonna leave the show, I realized that there could be no bitching from me. Like, if I was going to leave the show, I was going to have to become a musician for real and just do that and accept all the consequences that come along with that, you know, good and bad, real intended, and unintended, and not look

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back. And that was kinda like the point for me. It was like the point of no return. Cause, after that first year, it was like, “Well, what are you going to be? You gonna be an entertainer, or you gonna be a musician.” And I chose a musician. That also helps when we were playing that “A Love Supreme” I was all in emotionally. I was all in emotionally and intellectually. I was all in when we played it. All of those factors, I think, really helped to make it much better in the.... I mean how many years was that? Five years, maybe? No, it was longer. Ninety-two and in 2001, so nine years. Nine years later it was good.

AB: You said you came to that realization after the first year, but you joined in May ninety-two, then you left in....

BM: January, ninety-five.

AB: Yeah, so....

BM: It’s not the kind of thing where you say, “Boy this was fun. I quit.” It’s just not.

AB: Well, what was it like? I mean, you say you weren’t able to focus on what you wanted to do as a musician, so what were you doing? What was it like? What was it like being on the Tonight Show? What did you do to prepare? What was it like dealing with the studio folks? What was that....

BM: I mean I already knew how to do that. I either chose to do it, or chose not to do it. I understand what diplomacy is, so I you know.... I was in a mock-UN as a kid. I was...I did debate. I get it. So either I was going to play ball, or not play ball. But, one of the good things about it was they have this roll-out, because we were new, so all the affiliates fly in. They fly them in from all over the country. Fly the affiliates in. We gonna fly them all in and interview all of the principals. So they were gonna interview Jay and interview me. Those  
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are the principals, basically. So.... The first question out of everyone of their mouths, with the exception of New York, was, "OK, well, who are you? And how did they find you?" Now this is after Blakey, after Wynton, after Sting, playing Grateful Dead - Who are you? So.... When you hear musicians use this language about famous, "Well, this guy is famous," they start talking about famous guys cause this guy is on the cover of downbeat, I'm like, "Believe me, no one knows who you are." But, you know, when you work inside...because in, you know, if the world is concentric circles, the world is here and then jazz is in here and every conversation they have is inside this little - yeah, its in there. So, yeah, you're famous - in there. You're successful - in there. People talk about you - in there. But once you leave there, and you get here, who are those guys? "Dave Brubeck, who? Herbie who? Oh, you mean the guy who did 'Rockit?' Yeah, I like that guy. The guy who did 'Chameleon' that's my guy. Wayne Shorter, who's that? Oh, he played on the Steely Dan record. Oh, yeah, I like that guy. Jazz record, never heard of it." So, we get caught up in this completely false premise. Jazz controversies, you know. And I been in my fair share of them.

You know, and, I mean man, I said something...I was talking about Cecil Taylor's philosophy that people have to prepare for his music and I said it was self-indulgent bullshit.

AB: In the last episode of Ken Burns' *Jazz*....

BM: I don't know which episode it was, cause...when I...that's where he put it. When he was interviewing me in my house, it wasn't.... So...and it was in direct response to the quote that he said, you know, "People need to be ready. They need to prepare." I said, "Man, I'm a big baseball fan. I don't have to go field two hundred grounders to get a feel for the game. I mean that's what they do. I'm paying money. People paying money to hear a concert, they got jobs and they're working. They don't want to go and take a damn harmony class to get it. That's our job. We take the harmony class to make it easier to present to them. And, people started saying that I said that his music was self-indulgent bullshit. And, its this big

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contro-..., you know, aaa knashing of teeth. About four or five jazz writers somewhere said, "Aw, yeah, he's causing waves." Believe me, nobody gives a shit. I already know this, because it's post-Leno. I said, "This isn't a controversy." I said, "Do you know what a controversy is? A controversy is when you go to a high school and you say that, you know, the theme that you wrote for the Tonight Show is OK. It's not really a great piece of music, but it works for the show." And it's in the *USA Today* the next day. And for the next six months people were saying, "So, you don't like the theme song?" Nobody knows who Cecil Taylor is, so this is like some little fraternal shit that.... Ya'll wanna play this game, we can play it, but, you know, I'm a big boy. So, you know, if he wants to put on the gloves, we can do that, but you know, I'm not.... It's this thing where everybody wants to feel important I guess. So they were like, "How could you say this about Cecil?" And one guy says, you know, "I'm never going to buy any of your records before." I said, "Sir, it's clear you don't have any of my records, or you wouldn't write me with this shit." It's like, "Who cares?" You know? Who cares? I'm just a guy. If somebody said that about me, you think I'd be, "How dare he?!" You know, but my grandmother used to have this saying when she bust me, cause she'd bust me and I get mad. She'd go, "See, you throw a brick in the crowd the one it hits is always gonna holla." And that's all it really was. And it was the wrong damn brick. I was not implying to the man's music. But, it was one of them things, just to watch the jazz community to get all atither. And that's the great thing about living here in North Carolina. There is not a single person in this neighborhood who gives a tinker's damn about what I just talked about. Not one. And it's really helpful for your music when you understand that. Because you get so caught up in trying to write something that's gonna fuck up the jazz community, you know. "Man, they gonna be fucked up when they hear this." You know, it reminds me of a ...there's a movie that I like, *Elizabeth*, with a...when the old girl was young, Kate Blanchett. young Kate Blanchett and the guy from Australia – I can't remember his name, but he's a really good actor. He played the piano player who had schizophrenia....

AB: Geoffrey Rush.

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BM: Jeffrey Rush. And they expose this Catholic plot to unseat her and they catch the guy redhanded, the Lord of Norfolk, or whatever he is, and he goes, "How dare you? I am the Lord of Norfolk." He says, "You were the Lord of Norfolk." He says, "Well, fine. What I did, I did for my God and my country. So, kill me. Make me a martyr. People will remember me for it." He goes, "No. They will forget." (laughs) There's this great line, where, you know, these guys are like, "Man, you know, you trying to start a controversy?" They will forget, because they don't give a shit. And neither do I. So, let's just play music, you know. I learned a lot from being in that environment. I learned about how, in popular culture, how insignificant they view what we do. Musicians like to say it's with disdain to not like some shit, you have to know it exists first. It ain't got nothing to do with "I don't like it. I never even heard of it." So, I'm clear on what this is when I make these records. I have all the information. I have no naïve thoughts about it. And this is what I chose. I'm good. And Jay's show, the show, helped me understand that.

AB: What about looking at the difference between the milieu of jazz, as you so aptly described, and the milieu of pop culture? And working in both of those? And what was it like working in the pop culture?

BM: I grew up playing pop music. It's fun for me. Not as much fun now as it was, because I just don't have the time to practice and I'm not really interested in people who are thirty years younger than me singing. I'm just not, you know, it's just.... Jazz musicians these days have more in common with pop singers, because what they both have in common is that they are ignorant of their own history. So, when I hear this my girls is coming, talking about, you know, Justin Bieber, or Miley Cyrus, or Selena Gomez and all these people and I hear their songs, I mean it's just bad singing. Bad tunes and bad singing. I just feel fortunate that I grew up in an area where the music was better. You know, Stevie Wonder....

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AB: Aretha Franklin.

BM: Aretha Franklin and Yes and Zeppelin, James Taylor... I mean, it's just better songwriting – they wrote songs. Now, I mean, songs are produced in computers and they have pitch-correction machines that fix all of the stuff...and, you know?

AB: Auto Tune.

BM: Yeah, and everything is just, you know.... And all of the beats are like, (sings electronic-sounding techno-beat), that European thing that was going on in the mid-eighties.

AB: Mid-seventies.

BM: Yeah, OK. “Touche’, touche’.” And they’re doing that thing and you know I don’t have anything in common with them, so I wouldn’t.... Like somebody said to me, you know, “What do you think about Clarence Clemons playing on a Lady Gaga record?” Nothing. I don’t think anything of it. Good. You know, they try to attach some significance to it, like she’s really hip and chic and forward-thinking. I’m like, “What’s to make you think that she actually recommended him? Who’s the producer of the record?” You know this isn’t the era where artists are actively involved in the production of their record. So, good, great, but, you know you’re trying to attach some importance to it that I don’t think really exists, but I enjoyed it at that time. I enjoyed it. I liked the music. I liked that style of music. But I like what I’m doing now a lot more. I like what I do now. You know, working for months to play a recital when there are going to be about three hundred people there, maybe. But I like that. I know how hard it is. If it comes off well, I feel good about it. And on the other hand, I know how easy that is, and the fact that people like it doesn’t really.... I could do that in my sleep.

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AB: So now we're talking about you playing Western concert music. A recital, as opposed to a jazz recital? So, you say you like that music and you like....

BM: I like playing jazz. I like those musics, because I know how hard they are to play. I know how long it's taken me. I didn't spend.... Am I going to have any conversations of me saying it took me ten years to learn a King Curtis solo, you know. I've been doing this since I was a kid, so that makes it easier. When you learn this stuff growing up, you don't even acknowledge how hard it is. You just kind of do it. But, I remember when I was really listening to pop stuff and my dad played Charlie Parker for me one time and I remember thinking, "Well, I don't really like this, but it's clear...it's no question as to which one is harder. And if I'm gonna play this, then I'm probably going to have to stop spending so much time listening to the music that I prefer. So I'll just stick with the music that I prefer." And that was a wise choice at that time, because they were so different that you can't really...the two aren't compatible. The two aren't compatible. For me, I spent so many years doing that...I mean that's why jazz guys are such bad pop players, because, you know, in the words of one guy, he said, you know, "What's the big deal about James Brown? Shit, it's just one chord. And then the bridge goes to another chord. I mean, anybody can do that." Harmonically, yeah. But, make it sound good? No. Anybody cannot do that. And I think that's what the difference is that I grew up playing simpler music, so I know how hard it is to do that, because I did it growing up, it's not hard for me. But if I get up there and I'm going, (sings a be-bop phrase). Yeah, if you have to stop doing that to play simpler things, having not learned that, that's hard. That's hard. That's why I like the way I did it. I learned the simple stuff first and the hard stuff later. And it's the best of both worlds. So when I was playing with Sting's band I understood that I needed to employ less notes. I just had to remind myself how to do that. And it took six weeks before I could really find my niche, you know, because the music was so different than anything else that anybody had been doing. It was a combination of soul music and Weather Report at the same time. So you had to use that kind of Wayne Shorter-like, Weather Report sparsity, kind of the way he played on the

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Joni Mitchell *Mingus* record. He had to use that sparseness, or...but at the same time, you had to have this driving thing going on, too. And that was the hard one to restart, because I had been going into the pensive Wayne jazz thing and, all of a sudden, you know, I stopped doing something when I was eighteen years old and now I'm twenty-five and I have to hit those driving solos, I just didn't remember how to do it. And I didn't really remember how to do it until the sixth week of the tour, so on the record I'm playing it, it's eh, cliché as hell. But, by the time the live record comes around, I got a sense of how to do it, because I got to do it. It's like anything. You get to do it everyday, you gonna sort it out a lot better. You gonna sort it out.

AB: How did you get in that band?

BM: I don't know. The way I think the story went is is that there was a publicist at Columbia named Mary Ellen Cataneo, whom I still see from time to time, and she was friends with Andy Summers. And Andy Summers asked her to put together a package of cassettes. It's eighty-three, so. Stuff to take on the road. And in that package she threw my CD in there. And then Mary calls and says...Mary Ellen calls and says, "The guys in the Police wanna meet you because you were like the only jazz CD that I threw in there, but they loved the record. They keep listening to it. So I went to meet 'em and said "Hi" to all of them, but mostly talked to Mary Ellen the whole time, because she was the person I knew there. That world was.... Suddenly I was in this world that I'd dreamed about when I was a kid, but I knew that it wasn't my world and I wasn't trying to insert myself into it, because I not a networker by nature, so I just watched it and went, "Well, it's great...you know, thanks." I left. And two years later a guy name Vic Garbarini, who was working for *Musician* magazine at the time. He was the editor, I think. He calls me. He said, "I'm calling on behalf of Sting, Sting wants you to join his band." "I don't want to join the Police." He goes, "No, a new band." I said, "Oh, a new band? I might want to do that." And I met him at a restaurant. I thought it was a prank, because he said, "Oh, yeah, meet us at Odeon. I said, "Which one of

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my asshole friends is putting us up to this.” And so I told my first wife, “We’re going to the Odeon.” She goes “Why?” I said, “Either we’re going to meet Sting, or we’re going to have a really nice meal. One of the two.” Then, you know, there’s a maître ‘d there, and I’m walking up to this guy and I just feel like I’m the biggest dick in the world and I was walking in the res...and he said, “Can I help you?” I said, “Yeah, I’m supposed to meet Sting here.” And I waited for him to go, “Who, yeah, right.” He just went, “Oh, yeah, he’s over there at the table.” Then the rest of it is what it was.

AB: Yeah, but that meeting, what did you talk about?

BM: Hi. How are you doing? What are you listening to? I said, “I don’t really like *Bitches Brew*.” He said, “I love *Bitches Brew*. You might have to rethink that.” I said, “Might have to. No problem, I’ll check it out. What am I missing?” He said, “Oh, it’s like the link between jazz and pop.” I said, “It’s really not.” He says, “Well, I still think it’s a good record. How can you say that it’s not?” I said, “Because there were really no....” The rhythm section wasn’t a jazz rhythm section. It wasn’t like a bunch of jazz people who stopped playing jazz and started doing this. Wayne was on there. Miles was on there. McLaughlin is not a jazz guy. What’s his name? The bass player?

AB: Harvey Brooks. Electric bass was Harvey Brooks.

BM: Yeah. Yeah. Harvey Brooks.

AB: He was playing with the Butterfield Blues Band.

BM: Yeah. My point. It’s not a jazz band that stopped and just went electric. I mean, it’s myth. He went, “Well....” But on the course of that tour I started listening to it and he was right, it’s a great record.

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AB: But you had Zawinul, you had DeJohnette, you had, you know....

BM: So what they... . They don't sound like pop musicians, certainly. They don't. They really don't. But, you know, that was a unique thing. That was like a very, it was, you know.... A lot of the record, it was more edited, it's just random. It's a lot of randomness on the record. But I appreciate the random nature of it now.... You know everybody talked about it like it was this quantum new direction in jazz. First of all, it's not jazz. Even Miles was basically imploring Columbia to quit calling his music "jazz," because.... You know Miles was always wanting to be at the forefront of shit. He don't care.... If you got to be good to be at the forefront, then he'll be good. Like in his book, the first thing he says that's really telling. He went to New York for what? One reason – to play with Charlie Parker. All the great jazz musicians, they didn't want to play with them, because Charlie Parker was the man. The *enfant terrible*. That's the guy. I wanna play with Charlie Parker. So he's always had this thing where he wanted to be at the vanguard of shit. Not in the middle of it. Not around it. And when he saw that pop music was going to usurp jazz's role as the Bohemian music, he wanted out. He said, "Man, you get the guy who's doing the psychedelic Grateful Dead covers, let him do my cover. Let's get outta here. Let's get outta here." And all the hippies bought it and they loved it. Sounds great when you're on acid, I figure. I ain't never tried it, but I've had verification that it's a really great record when you tripping on acid. They loved it. Great. It didn't do shit for jazz. It didn't do anything for jazz. It was basically like all the jazz musicians on the record were running out of the door. And they left.

AB: So what happens with the advent of fusion, then?

BM: It's not jazz. I mean it's not jazz. You want to hear something really funny, listen to how great Lenny White sounds on Return to Forever and listen to him on Red Clay. Getting lost in forms and trying to play like Tony Williams and failing to do so. I mean it's just, you know, they weren't jazz guys. Jaco was a guy who had an incredible bass sound and he had  
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this incredible couple of bass lines that he played, but he didn't really play along with the group. He just kind of existed in this place. And he was suddenly like the star. Like bass players aren't supposed to be the stars. They're like centers on a football team. Centers aren't the stars, quarterbacks are the stars. Wide receivers, running backs. Now you got a bass player running around on stage. He's like the "star" of the band. The guy who is on the bottom is now on the top, so that's the way the music sounded. Like I said earlier, top-heavy. It was top-heavy. So you just had all these things going around and swirling around, I don't see how it possibly helped jazz at all. It didn't help jazz at all. It rendered sixty years of music moot for ten years, or maybe a little longer than that.

AB: Yet, one of the most significant composers and performers in the jazz tradition was at the center of Weather Report.

BM: Who?

AB: Wayne Shorter.

BM: Oh, yeah.

AB: You brought up Jaco, I mean that's a reference to Weather Report.

BM: Well Wayne was.... By the time Jaco got into the band Wayne was so marginalized. First of all I'm a Weather Report fiend. I got all the records and went to the tours a million times. By the time Jaco joined the band, Wayne was so marginalized and there was so much clutter and the lack of groove that, if you saw him, he would play a couple of notes and he would just walk away from the mike, because there was no room for him to actually play. And he didn't have the kind of personality where he would turn around and say, "Ya'll need to cut that shit out while I'm playing." And it was just busy, busy, busy compared to the early records. If you compare it to *I Sing the Body Electric*, or, you know, *Weather Report* –

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the original *Weather Report* record, or *Live in Tokyo*, where there was space and all that stuff, or even *Black Market*. There's space, there's space, you know. And then all of a sudden there was no space and *Birdland* was this big hit and people were coming to hear one song and.... It became like pop music. It became like pop music. Even though I like *Black Market* better than I liked the...what's that *Heavy Weather*? That's the one with "Birdland" on it?

AB: Un-huh.

BM: But I did like that record. There was some good stuff on that record. But, again, it didn't, you know.... It didn't have that thing where a bunch of guys sitting around listening to it became the next crop of jazz musicians.

AB: So, we're talking about different genres of music - pop, jazz. There was a statement in *Bring on the Night* where you, I guess it was Miles Copeland, and you were talking about marquee names and attractions and he just kind of, you know, put the whammie on you on this like, "We put your name up there." Ain't nobody show up. We put Sting's name up there....

BM: He wasn't talking to me. He was talking to the camera.

AB: OK.

BM: And he was completely correct. And it was like a weird thing, because I already knew that. But there were other guys in the band kind of saying, you know, "Well we need to have the same amount of attention as Sting. I'm like, "This is a stupid conversation." Like I said when I said I was in the horn section, we're invisible. I get that. I'm cool with that. There were other guys in the band trying to use this as an opportunity to enhance their profile. And Miles was responding to that. Because my manager says, "Well, you know...." He said, For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)

“How much money do you want? I went, “Well, it depends on the pie.” So, Miles brings that up, you know. “It’s none of your business what’s in the pie. It’s Sting’s pie. You put there names on the marquee, nobody shows up.” Absolutely correct. And they asked me about it and that’s the part they didn’t use. They asked me about it and I said, “No he’s right. Credibility don’t come cheap. Either he wants it, or he don’t. If he don’t want it, I go home. It’s that simple.”

AB: So there’s Kenny Kirkland, Darryl Jones and....

BM: And Omar Hakim, Janice Pendarvis and Dolette McDonald.

AB: Now were you responsible for bringing Kenny into the band?

BM: Yeah, Kenny and Darryl. I wasn’t responsible for it, no.

AB: You just recommended, or...?

BM: I said, “You need to call Darryl Jones to audition and you need to call Kenny Kirkland to audition. And when you do the auditions will be over because they are the best guys.

AB: Was he familiar with them?

BM: No. And they came in to audition and he went, “Damn, alright.”

AB: So then he decided that he gonna sing instead of play bass.

BM: No, he didn’t wanna play bass.

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AB: Right.

BM: That's why he brought up, "I need a bass player." I said, "Darryl Jones.' He said, "Why Darryl?" I said, "Because he plays the bass, not the bass guitar." Then he said, "Ok, sure." No he does. I told him when I heard Marcus Miller playing with Miles's band, Marcus is an incredible bass guitarist, but he doesn't know how to lock down a drummer that rushes, cause Al Foster is not a good funk drummer, so he would always rush when he played. But when Darryl joined the band Al couldn't rush, cause Darryl locked him down. End of conversation. It was just like, "You gonna sit here." And he sat there. That's the power of bass, when it's played like a bass. Like that song "Jean Pierre," right? Marcus Miller plays (makes the popping sound of an electric bass here). Darryl Jones plays, (make another electric bass sound to illustrate difference) for fifteen minutes. And when a guy does that, it goes nowhere. Cause he's not. "Check me out. Check me out. Look at my shit. Look at my shit." What's the groove? Boom. And that's what he did. That's why he's in the Rolling Stones. And when he does one of those little things in a tasty spot, it's not all the time, and he anchors. He anchors. Last time I saw him play with the Rolling Stones, I mean you know, Chuck Watts is always grinning. Not Chuck, that's my neighbor.

AB: Charlie. Charlie.

BM: Shit. Chuck Watts is my friend around the corner. Charlie Watts is always grinning. Charlie Watts is always smiling when they play, because it's just, you know, it's locked. And when you listen to the other...like Gary Talent is the guy who did that for Springsteen. John Paul Jones did it for Led Zeppelin. For whatever reason bass players don't get any love, none. Everybody talks about the drummers. Drummers are last. It's singers, then guitar players and drummers. And the bass is at the bottom. Nobody talks about the bass players, but the bass is a crucial element to a great band sound. A lot of bass players now are more soloists, than bass players. They don't play the bass. The acoustic bass is set up with a small

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setup and then the amp and they going, (makes sounds). But just like a bass (makes sound of bass strings) like pulling the strings? It's gone. It's gone. Another consequence of guys not playing the music left the door open to some other stuff that really hasn't made the music better. But it does do a better job of calling attention to the virtuosity of the players. It's two o'clock. That's four hours, I gotta go man.

AB: Tomorrow I wanna ask about Kenny Kirkland, because I think you can tell people about.... [cut off]

[End of CD 3]

AB: Today is May 25<sup>th</sup>, and this is Part II of the Smithsonian NEA Oral History with NEA Jazz Master, Branford Marsalis, at his home. Yesterday when we arrived you were preparing for a recital. If you could talk about that [for] ... as your upcoming project ... that would be great.

BM: What about it?

AB: About what's the program ... and who (are) you working with ....and ...

BM: Oh! Yeah, my accompanist, Ned Kirk, is a professor - a piano professor at a small college in Wynona, Minnesota. [And,] I was playing a concert there with a Brazilian orchestra, and he said to me "Have you ever done a recital?" I said, "I've never done a recital." "Would you like to do one?" "Of course I would!" "Love to." So, we were just joking about it. We were playing material that guys start playing when they were seventeen or eighteen years old in recitals. I'm fifty-one. I'm doing my first recital. So we playing a piece by a composer named Muchinsky ... there is one by (Engolf Dahl). .... [pause] something else? The Creston sonata, and ...

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AB: "Ich Liebe Dich."

BM: Yeah, we gonna do that too. We're doing *Lieder* by Beethoven. "Ich Liebe Dich" and "Adelaide." We're doing several songs by Samuel Barber, "Nuvoletta," "Nocturne," ... "The Pope and His Cat." I think it's the pope ["The Monk and his Cat"]. Yeah, it is, you know, songs like that. It is really going to be a really wide variety of stuff.

AB: And this is going to be when?

BM: July 1<sup>st</sup>.

AB: Well, we had the opportunity to hear you preparing, rehearsing, before your recital. And hearing your tone yesterday and then going back this morning and listening to "O Solitude" by Purcell. There is a difference in your tone, do you want to talk about that? ...about sound and production - sound production in dealing with the Western concert tradition?

BM: Well, it's really a lot simpler than it seems, but I guess it's also harder than it sounds. But, you are not going to be able to accurately play styles of music if you don't listen to those musics. And so many musicians, so many people who choose to become musicians are the kind of people that rely on their eyes more than their ears. And they rely on what they know, more than what they hear. One of the reasons that most schools don't have, for instance, a rock 'n roll class, or funk classes - well, number one, all the people that are doing that usually aren't in the university anyway. And, number two, you can't adequately reproduce those sounds with stuff in a book. But it's the same thing with jazz too. So, what a lot of people have done is change the sound of what the music is to line up more with the

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guys that play those scales up and down, you know. It's more of a light sound, an effete sound. It does not have that really heavy kind of aggressive sound that jazz used to have.

For me, I've been listening to classical records since I was in high school. So, when it was time to actually start playing the music, I knew what the music was supposed to sound like. I didn't have to go and buy a special mouthpiece to get a tone, and a special this. I knew what the music was supposed to sound like. So, even when I was really not good at playing the music, because the technical aspects of it are so different than what you do in a jazz situation. ...that, uh. A lot of symphonic people are still amazed that the direction of it, the tone of it, is still classical. "How do you do that?" I've listened to classical music half my life. So, yeah, it's more than half my life. And that's how you do it. It's the same thing with R'n B. It's the same thing with whatever you want to do, jazz - whatever it is.

AB: Now, you've been listening to it, you say, half your life, were you always performing it?

BM: No! No I wasn't, but, it's like anything else you listen to, you know what it is. You might not know the details of it. There was just an article in the *New York Times* just now about some young kid ... I got it right here, his name is ... [ah] Francis Tiafoe - "t," "i," "a," "f," "o," "e." [BM spells this out] And his father came here, and moved to the Maryland area, and got a job working as a ...he started construction in the building of a tennis center and they hired him as the maintenance man for the tennis center. And, because the work was a lot of work they let him stay there. Because of the living situation his wife had to get a job too, so both of his sons basically lived with him at the tennis center. And this kid has been watching tennis since he was four years old. And, one day he picked up a racquet and just started hitting the ball. And, he's fourteen now and he's supposed to be like the most promising young player for the US. But, you can't - you cannot take away the experience that he gained from just watching people hit the ball. Watching them hit the ball. And that was the thing that, due to his circumstances, that was the thing he chose, or the thing that

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chose him. You can look at it that way. Where you have so many people in our country who, say, in tennis, or, “I want my kid to play tennis. So, I’m gonna give them tennis lessons from the best tennis coach in the country. [You know ...] No opportunity is too cheap for my child – too expensive for my child.” The kid’s not watching tennis. The kid’s not playing tennis, the kid’s taking lessons. So, by the end of the lessons, the form is great. Great form. Can’t play tennis. People who play tennis, play it. And they can’t get enough of it. And they keep playing. And they keep playing. And they keep playing. And, we have some people who are on the side of players play, and then you have the other side where you have to have all of the technical things together, when it’s actually both. You have to do both. But listening is a key component to playing music. And I’m amazed at the number of musicians who don’t listen to music, and if they do, they only listen to the stuff that they like. They don’t give themselves – they don’t give their brains an opportunity to grow because the thing they don’t immediately understand they dismiss.

AB: Now, as far as your preferences in performing classical music, or Western concert music, are those the same pieces that you find enjoyable in listening?

BM: Nah, na, na, na, na. I listen to completely – that’s my point, I don’t just listen to the music of a lot of classical saxophone players. Saxophone players, the young ones that I talk to, they mostly just listen to classical saxophone players. I just ...it’s almost like having children with your sisters. It’s a weird kind of thing. It just doesn’t really work. You know you have to expand the way you hear music. You have to bring in other elements to get your point across, I think. To make your playing more universal and not so local. Not so localized.

AB: Do you think the genre of Western concert music allows for that amount of, or any amount of, outside influence into the conventional production of that?

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BM: I don't think that the music itself gives a damn, as long as it sounds classical. The idea is not to come in and play Louis Armstrong growls in the middle of it. The idea is to use the sound – all these sounds. Like I use all the sounds that I have in my head. In terms of pacing, in terms of tone, when to use vibrato, when to not use vibrato, that's one of those things that I've chosen to do, because of listening to a lot of operas. And, I noticed that the really good singers sometimes ... [you know] when we are so accustomed to vibrato, that's when you don't use it, then it has the aural effect of watching the old Batman shows. Cause, whenever they were in the lair of the criminal the room would be tilted. Every time, and it's very subtle. For a while I never noticed it. And, when you don't use vibrato it makes the music ...it has like an angler effect. Your mind is "...c'mon, give me the vibrato. Where's the vibrato?" And you don't use it, and so whenever there's tension in the music, the lack of vibrato can really work. It really can work. And sometimes even at the end of songs just no vibrato. It gives, it can have a calming effect to just not have that constant sweetener. And, if you listen to a lot of classical saxophone players they use vibrato perpetually. But, when I started listening to these operas, I was like, "Yeah, but this is ...." I didn't have to have a conversation with myself. I just started playing and I would get to a certain parts of the song and I just wouldn't use vibrato. And I do the same thing even when I'm playing jazz. I'll get to spots and I just won't use vibrato. But that's some stuff I got from listening to classical music. So, it's not about what the music will allow, it's about what you hear. And the more options you have, and the more things that you absorb, then the more you have to hear. And when you don't have that, then you wind up playing the same stuff in the same way over and over and over again. This is all there really is about – it's not even about talent, it's about exposure.

AB: What are some of the classical composers that you favor? ...that you find inspiring ...or exciting?

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BM: There's a lot of them. Bach and ... he's the king. And Mozart, Shostakovich, Prokofiev is really undervalued, but he is quite amazing. Stravinsky's great. Samuel Barber is fantastic as an American composer. Aaron Copland is great. Benjamin Britten is great. Wagner, love the man. Love ...especially the *Ring Cycle*, I love the *Ring*. Puccini is great. Verdi is great. Camille Saint-Saens is great. I mean there is so much great music out there.

AB: Sounds like you listen to opera. Do you listen to any of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century German composers of opera, like Alban Berg? Do you know his music?

BM: Yeah. I know *Lulu*. And Richard Strauss. [You know...] Like *Lulu*, yeah. I'm not really a fan of all of the, the, the, ...you know, what do they call it, I guess, "avant-garde," for lack of a better term? But I do like, I like the ones.... (coughs) I like anything if it has melody in it. And the idea that avant-garde should have an absence of melody is absurd. [And, you know...] The avant-garde sound allowed a lot of mediocre composers to jump into the fray who otherwise would've been able to do anything. That's not Berg, by the way. He's classically trained. And he wrote in very traditional styles, as did Schoenberg. But, when you listen to Berg, or you listen to Hindemith, playing this really hypermodern pieces. Or Zimmerman playing these really.... There's a melody line throughout all of it that can be followed, and its there. So as long it has melody, I'm cool. I mean Prokofiev wrote an opera like that called *The Gambler*. And, he's one of the most melodic writers. He could write anything. I mean those are my kind of guys. My kind of guys aren't the people who, for the sake of, you know, claiming the flag of innovation, find some thing they bump into and just repeat that over and over again. I like the musicians who can play anything. Who can play in any setting. And the guys who can write music in any setting. They can write operas. They can write ballets. They can write partitas. They can write... just write string quartets. They can do everything.

AB: Sounds like Bartok there.

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BM: Yeah. Prokofiev, I like him better than Bartok, actually. Prokofiev is ...his string quartets ...you could put them up there next to Shostakovich, although nobody talks about them. And his operas are incredible. And his ballets are incredible. He didn't really write a lot of symphonies. Neither did Bartok. [But uh ...] He wrote some. [I mean...] He was just a writer. Writers [you know] ...what did William Faulkner say? "A writer writes." He wrote. He wrote his ass off. He got kinda caught in that Cold War foolishness. Because in places like America, we already had two – we already had our two Russian [you know] defectors. We had Prokofiev, I mean, we had Rachmaninoff, and we had Stravinsky. So, Prokofiev showed up and [they said] "Well, you go over there. We already got the two we are going to pay attention to. We don't have room for a third one." In these discussions...the discussion is rarely about music. It's always about how the music is perceived. And Stravinsky's music had been perceived as revolutionary as early as 1919. [You know, so...] He had an *entre* that Prokofiev clearly didn't have. [You know...] It's kind of like talking to people about Ornette Coleman. They say, "Yeah, man. Ornette's music is out. It's out." That's what they called it when it came out, but it's actually in. Not all of it, but the stuff with the quartet. That stuff is inside. It's just extending. It's pushing the parameters of the middle. It's not stuck on the outside. But when you talk to people about it, they say, "Yeah, that stuff is out isn't it? It's out isn't it?" They don't hear it. So, everything is about shades of perception. Perception. Everybody goes with what is perceived and they kind of regurgitate that. So, Prokofiev just got caught in this funny place, but his music is astounding.

AB: There were many composers that were influenced by the jazz tradition, the music coming out of America. Ravel and of course you've done Milhaud. You also seem to...You toured with the Brazilian ensemble, so Villa-Lobos must figure pretty large...

BM: I like his music. He was very prolific and he wrote a lot. A lot. A lot.

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AB: And really dealt with the folk elements in his country.

BM: Well, they all did. They all did.

AB: Yeah, too a greater, or lesser extent.

BM: They all did. [You know...] It comes out of the folk music. It's not detached from .... Well, twentieth-century music, a lot of that is detached from the people. But, before that, whether you're talking about Bach, or Mozart, all this music Bach has this ... he did an entire rearrangement of old traditional Christian songs. They are finding all this stuff that he did. Songs by other people that he just reharmonized and added ...and they have. I have the record right now. There is so much folk music in Mozart's music. There is so much folk music in Beethoven's music. Mahler, he had the regular German folk tradition, and the Jewish folk tradition in there. You could take certain parts of Mahler songs and you could turn them into klezmer tunes in two seconds.

AB: Shoot, Mahler was checking out Chinese.

BM: Hey, you know, why not? You check it all out.

AB: Un-huh.

BM: You check it all out. [But, yeah...I mean...you know...] I don't think that [you know that] Villa-Lobos had the lock on it because [you know] he studied with Milhaud. And he went to Paris and he studied. And you hear a lot of that French influence in – in his writing. [But, ah...] I think that the one thing that Milhaud did that was really great is that he didn't try to recreate jazz in his writing. 'Cause all the guys that used jazz as an influence, it was always about "Yat-ta-ta-ta-taa." "Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-taa. Ta-tut-ta-tu-ta. Donk-dink, donk-dink,

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donk-dink. You know, Shostakovich in *Hypothetically Murdered*, which is his jazz suite. But, what Milhaud said was man he sat there and watched the music and said "What does this music sound like?" And, like if you listen to a piece like *La Creation du Monde*, he creates what the music sounds like using the conventional techniques that he has to create the sound of it. Not to imitate the rhythm of it. Because he couldn't do that anyway. It's never really successful when they do it. With the exception of kinda like the (title - "Hot Sonata," by [ah...]) what's his name? Can't remember his name. Hold on. "Hot Sonata." Schulhoff, Irving Schulhoff. "S-c-h-u-l-h-o-f-f" (spells out last name) He wrote a couple of pieces in a jazz style that were pretty good, depending on how you play it. Depending on how you play it. [But, uh...] *La Creation du Monde*, at the end it sounded, you could...I could hear a New Orleans jazz band in the twenties. At the end of the songs when guys were all playing at the same time, cause there's all these themes going - it's really incredible, an incredible piece of music. And that's what I prefer when you just try to recreate the sound of your influences, not trying to get down into the specific minutia of it, because that never works anyway. So, when we did "Solitude" I wasn't trying to recreate a classical piece. We read the music. I edited the music so it could allow some room for solos. Purcell always, almost always wrote these pieces so they had ostinato bass lines. And the ostinato bass lines obviously leaves room for us to just loop it in soloing. When I originally conceived this song in my head I said "I'm just going to play it any way that I would play any other tune. And we did the first take, and I just had this weird classical itch for vibrato. So I said "We got to do this again, because I don't want to do that." And then the second take we did it and there it was again. So I just had to accept that this was the way that my brain heard this piece and how it should be played. Even though it is counter to the way that I envisioned it, my brain wasn't buying it. I just [you know...] could've deliberately forced my brain to do something else, but it wouldn't have made the music as natural. So, I just had to accept it. That's the way my brain hear it and I went with that. [And...] a lot of guys that heard it said [you know] "Why'd you play alto on that tune?" "I'm not playing alto, it's tenor." "Naw, man, that classical thing, that's alto." "It's tenor." It's weird that the sound had changed so much using the same jazz

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setup. I didn't [use no new] mouthpiece, no nothing. That's the power of sound, though. When you grow up and you listen to a lot of music you get used to the way things sound and your brain kind of keeps a data base on that. And you just...I didn't change the setup. It's the exact same mouthpiece I play on everything else on the record. But when the song started, everybody thought... not everybody, but a lot of saxophone players thought it was an alto. It was kind of interesting. Didn't sound like an alto to me, but... I have a bigger listening palette than those guys.

AB: Yesterday, after we concluded the first portion of the interview...can you talk about Kenny Kirkland? I'm holding in my hand the requiem CD that you did. Why don't we talk about Kenny and the CD – this project?

BM: That record was tough, because it really wasn't a record. See Kenny and Tain, you couldn't get them to rehearse. If you called a rehearsal, they wouldn't even show up. So, I said "OK." So, I was on Columbia, so I'll just use the power of a company like that and I'd call a recording session. And the recording session will be a rehearsal. That's how they'd learn the songs. And I was always trying to write songs that could screw them up, that was hard to do. But finally, that song, "In the Crease," that was supposed to be on that session, they couldn't play it. I was very happy. That was a very beautiful moment. Tain was, "I can't believe this!" And Kenny was just laughing, "Ah, this is fucked up, man. I'm gonna have to hear this for the rest of my life." I said, "You gonna hear this from beyond, brother, because...when I see you up there I'm gonna be like, 'Remember that song I wrote that you couldn't play?' " And that was the way we had done the last few records. You do a session, a two-day session, get all the music out, and now we go on the road. We play the music, then we go back in and we do another two-day session where we record. And that's the actual record. But, Kenny died before we could get back into the studio. So, all we had to go with...we had to go with what was there. And what was there was just reference material. Just reference material.

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AB: That was the last session that Kenny...

BM: That was heavy, man. I just...We went back in and we played a couple of trio songs, because we didn't feel the thing was long enough. And I was screaming at the guys in the band. Writers were there. It was funny. When we were in Wynton's band, they kind of wrote us off. "These young punks. These imitators ain't good," which we weren't. We weren't very good. But, I always say that the reasons that we're not good, they're not writing about that. They just writing some shit, I don't know what it is. They're writing, but I guess it's how they feel personally. One jazz writer comes up to me.... At the session, they all wanna come now that Kenny's dead. So they are all at the session and he says, "A lot of us are starting to rethink that Wynton band. And I said, "Man, fuck y'all man. So, now Kenny's dead y'all wanna rethink the band. You guys are idiots, man. You guys are idiots! So now you want to give him flowers. Well, he ain't here. Away." I was just pissed. It was really interesting how that whole thing...if you're one of those musicians who needs validation from those guys, all you got to do is die and they will give you some. So, you know... That whole process was really funny, because people were nominated and being given awards I said, Man this is...Death. What is it about death that people are so afraid of. You know I was in Sweden doing an interview and he said, "I hear something different in this record. It's more profound than any other records." So, I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah. Could it have something to do with Kenny's death?" And, I said, "Well, if you have heard the record, then you will have to actually conclude that at that particular time, Kenny was very much alive. And since his death was essentially of a heart attack and he didn't have any long-term illness, we did not know at that time he was going to die. So I feel safe in saying that whatever it is that you feel in that regard, you are bringing that to the recording based on the information you have right now." He went, "I guess you're right." (laughing with AB) I said, "What the fuck is wrong with these people? The whole thing is just, you know? Even in death Kenny was very informative. It was a very informative time. But I would have loved

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to have done that record. Like the way we were playing the songs in September was very different than we were playing them in the spring. We made that...and it was going to be a really great record, but that's all we had.

AB: Would you talk a little bit more about Kenny? What were some of the things you enjoyed, and inspired you in his playing?

BM: I think that... the first thing is that his sound on the piano was just unbelievable. And I grew up with a man who had that sound when he played – although not that style. The modern jazz sound is a much lighter sound. I don't prefer it. I prefer density in the tone. And Kenny just had that in spades and it was...Soon as I heard it I said, "Aw, man, this is the guy. And, ah... I remember when I....He had all these...They used to call him "the phantom," because he couldn't say no to anybody. So if you ask him to do something, he'd say he'll do it, but he wouldn't show up. I didn't know any of that, 'cause I didn't really know Kenny. But, Kenny's girlfriend at the time was a bassist named Tracy Wormworth who played with the B-52s. She was an electric bassist. Her sister Mary Wormworth lived two doors down from me at Berklee, in the dorms. She went, "I knew Kenny when he was coming to town playing with Angela Bofill. I know Kenny Kirkland." I said, "I heard him play. This guy was amazing." "He's a friend of mine." "He's not a friend. Everybody's a friend of yours. You just name-drop." "Aw, no. He dates my sister." I said, "Call him right now." So she calls him. And miraculously, he answers the phone. According to people I know, he never answers the phone. And I got on the phone and I said, "Kenny Kirkland, my name is Branford Marsalis, I'm from New Orleans and we heard you playing with Angela Bofill, you a bad motherfucker, man. We just want to just have a jam session with you." He's laughing on the other line. "Marsalis, are you Wynton's brother?" "Yeah, man." "What's happening, man?" "Yeah, man, you know, if y'all come to New York, just ring the bell, man. Come on up. Here is my address." So, me, Victor...Victor...How could I forget this? This is ridiculous.

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AB: Wooten?

BM: No.

BM: Bass player, yes. Electric.

AB: Victor Gaskin? Electric...Oh.

BM: This is crazy. Victor Bailey! (yells out) Good God, yeah. OK, here we go. Me, Victor Bailey, Donald Harrison, Smitty Smith, the principle guys who went. There were a couple of other guys who went. Maybe Cecilia Smith, this vibes player. We hopped a train and we went to New York. Kenny lived two blocks from Port Authority. So we walked in, rang his doorbell. He said, "Who is it?" I said, "It's Branford." "Oh yeah, what's up man?" He rang the doorbell. We had this jam session. We played a bunch of tunes. He said, "Hey, man, y'all know 'Giant Steps?'" We played Giant Steps and he laughed." He told me, "I never heard anybody play Giant Steps and sound like David Sanborn at the same time. That's cool, bro. That's cool." "I told you I was an R'n B sax player, now I was just getting into it." I was playing alto at the time too. So, I told him, I said, "You know, I think my brother wants to start a band." And he said, "Well, you know, I like his stance, I'm down with that cause, I'm down with that. So, if he does, you know, give me a call." And that was in 1980. 1980. And Wynton started the band in eighty-two. He said, "Who do you know out there?" I said, "Call Kenny Kirkland, man. Jeff Tain Watts should be the drummer. I don't know any bass players. But those two guys, you should get them." With Kenny, we'd just leave voicemails on his machine and he would show up. Like the damndest thing. And other people would say, "How did you get him to show up?" I'd leave a message on his machine and he shows up. "But I do the same thing for my gigs and he doesn't show up." "I guess he doesn't like what you're doing. I don't know why he shows up." I didn't know that phantom side of him. "Oh, it's legendary, he spaces on everybody." "He doesn't space on us. It's kinda cool. But I

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don't have a definitive answer for you as to why it is that he chooses to show up for our shit and not for everybody else's. I don't know. So... But I'm glad he does." Boy he was funny. Yeah, he was a funny – a funny cat. He was very hilarious. Had his own language. You say words with a harsh accent and it means the opposite of what it is. So, he would just do this thing. Some people would say, "Hey, man, you got this session. Will you do this with me?" He'd say, "I wee-ill." (with an accent) Which means "I won't." And the guy says, "Cool. Great." He sees this baby and says, "That's a real 'cuke' baby you got there." He'd put a "k" at the end of the word. "Oh, thank you very much." We were just laughing. He was just...He had a wicked sense of humor. He had a wicked sense of humor, boy. Old Kirkland.

AB: And his sobriquet, Doc Tone?

BM: Oh. Doctor of tone. We had this thing where we would be giving out these nicknames. Wynton started calling himself "Scain." I don't know why. Aw, I know why, because his nickname when he was growing up was Wimp for Wimpy. [spells out] "W-i-m-p" – like the burger guy. We started calling him "Wimp scain." And we had this bass player, Phil Bowler, who always wore these real corny-ass suits. So we would call him suave, because of them suits. So, we called him "Sua vain." And then it would all end with that "ain" sound. Doc started calling Jeff "Jeff tain," because we were driving through Florida and they have the gas station- the Chieftain. Chief. And Kenny used to always do that thing he learned from his brother. He would take words and split them up, so that Chieftain becomes "Chief tain." No smoking becomes "nozz mo-king," which is where the song comes from. So, Jeff became "Jeff Tain." Like, Chief tain. They tried it with me, but "Bran fain" really ain't gettin' it. Art Blakey once noted that whenever my hair grows...because we were going on long twelve-week tours with Blakey in Europe. And there were only a couple of cities that had black folks in them at that time. So you couldn't find a barber. But whenever my hair grows, it grows in the middle of my head first then out. So it looks like a church steeple. So they

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started calling me “Steeplonian.” Which then became “Steeplone” Just kind of morphed into “Steeplone.” Then “Steep” and “Steepy.” So, there you go. All banal shit. All of it.

AB: The lexiconography of all those monikers.

BM: Un-huh.

AB: On Columbia.... First, when Wynton put this group together--you just helped us understand how that was done--was it a collective feeling there, or was it a top-down kind of organization, Wynton’s group originally?

BM: It’s both. Because when you play with a trumpet player, the trumpet player is the top. There has never been a band where that has never been the case. Like I said earlier, Sidney Bechet has often tried to reverse that, and never to any great success. It’s the nature of the instrument. Trumpet on top, saxophone second, piano, bass, drums. And that’s just kind of what it is. But, there is always a collective feel, because all of the guys are going to bring what they have to the table. Wynton, he was a bit of a micromanager, but he wasn’t like “Here’s every note that you’re supposed to play.” It wasn’t like that. There was a lot of leeway and a lot of freedom to just do what you do.

AB: When I look at the output of that group, that original quintet, you guys seemed to have reached, what I felt was some real – I would say – distinctive music when you got to *Black Codes*.

BM: Yeah. Well, Wynton was writing good stuff. And Kenny was writing good stuff. They were the primary writers in the band. We weren’t very good players back then. I just heard *Black Codes* I said, “God, we sucked. My soprano tone was moving all over the place, fighting the sharp-flat thing. I mean we didn’t practice. Wynton was the only guy that really

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practiced. And Kenny was somehow able to maintain that kind of velocity without a lot of practice; maybe because he practiced earlier. When I hear the record now I just .... It would have been nice for me to have had the same level of seriousness that I have now. There is a carefree nature to the music , because there were a lot of other guys who were very serious and practiced all the time. Living in New York at that time - then they couldn't play the music that way. So, it's a healthy balance of the two of those things. Yeah, when I hear the record it just sounds kind of ...yeah-ahh! It sounds like where we were. It sounds like a bunch of kids playing. We were a bunch of kids and it sounds like a bunch of kids. Me and Wynton just talked about that about three weeks ago, man.

AB: What did he say?

BM: Sound like a bunch of kids. Bunch of kids who were playing jazz, and allowed to play jazz because of the vacuum that I told you about earlier, where there just weren't a bunch of guys playing it. So, we were able to kind of sneak in there. But if we were playing the way we played, and we tried to do that in 1960... nothing. "Keep trying kids." But then we would have had to have practiced more. The whole thing would have been different. There was just this big vacuum there for that style of music. Trying to play and.... At that time Wynton had just only started to listen to Louis Armstrong. Miles Davis was listening to Louis Armstrong when he was a teenager. He wasn't listening to Louis. He knew Miles and he knew Clifford. That's what he knew. Miles and Clifford. He had just started listening to Don Cherry. Just started listening to all kind of stuff. Didn't know any Duke Ellington. We didn't know anything. We didn't know anything. So, the songs we were playing were melodic, you know... ill-informed, the playing was ill-informed...and it was a sign of those times. Why it exploded the way it did, who knows? Just one of them things. I think Wynton's stance was kind of refreshing. Wearing suits. I didn't want to wear any damn suits, but it didn't take long to sell. Wynton said, "We're wearing suits." "Man, fucking suits, man? C'mon, man, nobody wears suits anymore." He said, "This is what it is, you don't want it, you ain't gotta

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play in the band.” So I went with him and I bought a suit. And I’m walking down the street in New York and all of a sudden all these women are going, “Hey, how are you doing?” They would have spit on my ass before. “Hi!” Smiling. I was like - it’s the suit. I’m buying suits. (laughs about this with AB) Because I just didn’t...because of the way my father grew up, we didn’t grow up...My father and my mother, well mostly my father, was not... did not really care about how he was perceived by other people. And I’m still like that to a major degree. But to deny, or misunderstand the power of perception in your chosen business, makes you a bad businessman. And it was clear that Wynton had already figured out that, for a lot of people who are going to come to the club, to get them there, they weren’t going to know anything about jazz. So, you had to have other reasons to get them in there. And, shit, there were people in there just...I mean, this is one of the first things they talk about. You see these interviews. The first thing they bring up is the suit. Of course, most of the times they are being derogatory about it. But it’s not lost on me that they bring it up. “Here they go with the arts-type of-young-lions-jazz-suit thing.” It’s like, you know.... So, like it’s amazing that the first.... We did a concert somewhere in California, that was like in the first paragraph. Before we get to the music, immediately they start talking about what we are wearing. And trying to make it look like it’s a bad thing, but they’re mentioning it. [You know...] I never saw an article where they say, “Brad Mehldau came out in his beautiful loafers and his slacks [you know...] They don’t...who does that? You know what I mean? [You know...]”Michael Stern came out in his jeans and sneakers – I think they were Converse” – just doesn’t – so I mean, Wynton was right about that. He was right about that. So I think people were kind of like “Who is this kid? His erudition is tight. He has this big-ass Afro. He can play the trumpet like nobody can. He’s wearing these suits. It was kind of...and they called it controversial, which is you know, shit... Well, what’s Muammar Gaddafi, if Wynton is controversial? You know what I mean? It’s like.... When you think of it in context, the whole thing was patently absurd. Patently absurd. But, it worked and we became like this big deal, or Wynton became this big deal and we were in the band so we became a part of that. But we didn’t know anything about jazz. The old guys – when we

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were on one of these big George Wein tours, for which I am eternally grateful - the old guys would – well I would go up to them and say, “What do I need?” Man, he would say, “The list is long, son. (laughs) I don’t hear no blues. I don’t hear no swing.” [You know...] “What does that mean you don’t hear no swing? We’re not swinging?” “No, son. Swing style. Basie. You got to get some swing, man. You got to get some Lester Young.” “I got some Lester Young” “Well, get some more. Get some Herschel Evans. You got to listen, listen to the music.” “OK.” [And, ah...] I saw Buddy Tate. He was at a jam session. He said, “What do you want to play? Do you know Mellotone?” I said, “What?” He goes, “Aw, he doesn’t know – he doesn’t know Mellotone!”

AB: He screamed on you. (laughing)

BM: All the guys went like, “Aww...” [So] But they liked me. I was like, “you know what: When I see y’all next time, I’m gonna have this shit. So, y’all may have fun now, enjoy yourself.” And the next time I saw ‘em. I saw ‘em and I said, “Mr. Tate, what key?” He just laughed. He said, “D flat, son. Let’s go.” So, I was talking to Dizzy, and I said, “Man, you know, why ain’t y’all telling kids this stuff?” He said, “Man, we been telling kids this stuff for two decades. Y’all just the first ones that decided to listen to us. They don’t want to hear it so after awhile we just stop talking.” “Alright, I’m listening.” Talked to Sonny [you know...].

AB; What did Sonny say to you when you played with him?

BM: Well, he said [you know...], “Man, you are a blessing to the planet. I’m just glad you’re here. Now, I’m gonna kick your ass all over the stage.” He didn’t say that, but that’s what happened. (AB laughs) And it was really funny, it’s like this is a great New York moment. New York is such a fucked-up place, man. Not the city, but the musicians themselves. This musician walks up to me and says, “Yeah, man, I was at that concert you played with Sonny, man. I’m sorry, man. I’m sorry.” I said, “Man, I just got my ass kicked by the greatest living

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jazz musician on the planet. There is nothing to be sorry for. Now if you was kicking my ass, I'd slit my wrists. But since that's never going to happen we ain't got to worry about that. It's fine." I was like, [you know, but that...] there's a million things you can say to a person when you see him. The first thing out of his mouth, "Yeah, I'm a... yeah, man, I saw you at that concert. Man, I'm sorry." Instead of saying, "Man, how lucky were you to be on stage with Sonny Rollins?" Because that's all it was really about. I was on stage with Sonny Rollins and y'all weren't. Fuck y'all. (laughs then shouts) I was on stage with Sonny Rollins! And it paid tons of dividends in subsequent years, because I got to watch him think. His eyes...thing... when you stand on stage when he's.... He's always looking in the audience – looking for things that are going to trigger things that - melodies that he knows. And he sees stuff, and then he plays what he sees. It's really amazing to watch that. Most guys play with their eyes closed cause their solo is already figured out. He plays with his eyes open. And, you know, he just has this wealth of information that he goes with. It was amazing to watch. It was amazing. It was amazing to watch that. And it made me better immediately, although it didn't come out of the horn for another five years, but it made me better immediately. [And a...] Here's another great jazz story. Since I like, you know... what's the problem with jazz...the musicians are mostly the problem with jazz. So, I just did this gig with Harry Connick. A duo gig. And he was doing a Broadway show at the time. And the show got bad reviews and it was gonna close 'cause the reviewers on Broadway.... Those reviews with power. Jazz reviewers don't have any power. They say this is the greatest record in the world, it sells a hundred copies. They say this is the worse record in the world, it sells a hundred copies. So, there is nothing to fear from them. They can write what they write. Write whatever you want. Spell my name right. I'm good. But they closed down his show. Lee Konitz said, "I really want to meet Harry." "Of course, man." "Harry, Lee Konitz wants to meet you, man." "Man, that's great, man. C'mon in." "Mr. Konitz, it's so great to meet you." "Yeah, Harry. How is the show? I hear the reviews are horrible." Jazz. Nothing but happy people. He was just like, "Fuck, man. Are you kidding me? That's the first thing out of your mouth?" So, when everybody talks about.... And that's the be-bop shit there. So, For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)



you know what it was like back then. Like in all the glory days. There you go. Scared, insecure people, just using defense mechanisms. That whole thing, I just.... I didn't grow up that way. I didn't grow up that way. It wore me out. Listening to that kinda...just, you know.... Cause it's like a passive-aggressive kind of negativity. I mean if you want to say "Fuck you," just walk up to me and say, "Man, fuck you, man!" Great. Now we can figure out what the source of this is. When you dance around it like that, "Yeah, man. I heard you playing with Sonny, man. Sorry, man. Sorry." I was like, "Aw, man. I could be worse. I could be you. (laughs) It could be way worse." You know, I don't get that. I don't get that.

AB: Now, has that vibe been in New York ever since you moved up there in 1980?

BM: Hell yeah. Hell-ll yeah. You go to jam sessions, they want to find the song you can't play.

AB: But that seems to be part of the tradition.

BM: It's fucked up. It's a fucked up tradition. In New Orleans, they're like, "What do you want to play? Let's play that." Cause the idea is, for me, its like, can a kid play, or can a kid not play? I'm not really interested in embarrassing him on stage. I mean, you know, when you hear the stories about what Miles... what Bird did to Miles, then it makes sense that Miles basically said "Well, here's the template." And he did that to his musicians. It's just that I ain't buying into that. I'm not buying in. I'm not buying into any of that. And I had guys try it on me, try to pay you in blow, you know, try and do all that kind of stuff. Try to not pay, try to psych you into doing dumb shit. All this.... That shit is nonsense, man. I don't care if it is in the tradition. [You know...] Hazing kids and beating them up is a tradition in black schools and marching bands, too. I mean we just, you know.... And somebody just got killed from it. So, "C'mon, man. That's in the tradition. Don't, you know...." Some traditions need to go. But then I just think it's in the nature of the people who choose to play this

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music. They so fucking insecure. And, they can't help themselves. [You know...] They can't help themselves. But, for me, if a kid wants to come sit in, I'm a relatively secure person. I'm not afraid of people when they come on stage. Can he play, or can he not play? So, I'm like, "Let's play blues. Let's play rhythm changes. Let's play, you know...." Sometimes they come up and they say, "No, I want to play Countdown." I say, "We ain't playing that. Because, you know, it's clear what your goal is. We ain't doing that. We'll play a tune. We'll play a standard everybody knows. We gonna take it easy and have fun. If you want a cutting contest, go somewhere else. That ain't what I do. I don't try to cut musicians. That's akin to [you know] the wide receiver on a football team trying to cut the other wide receiver. Just go look at film of Jim Jackson and Jason Kidd playing together for the Dallas Mavericks. Two great players fucking with each other the whole time, not passing the ball to each other. The team lost like crazy. And that team should have won. And they both know it. And that's what happens on bandstands. Guys up there trying to outplay each other, sabotage each other. Find songs guys can't play – how can you make music like that? How is that music being made? It's not...there is no music being made. It's just a bunch of crap. It's a bunch of nonsense. That's why I don't even go to jam sessions anymore, because you listen to the recordings, when they used to call them "cutting contests" so people would show up. I mean, you know, Lester Young wasn't trying to cut Ben Webster. He played just like Lester Young. And they were playing blueses and rhythm changes. I mean, if they trying to cut, they would go find some hard ass song and learn it, then call it. Then they try to get house. You know you can tell when they're doing gyrations when the audience started, you know, cheering and all that other stuff. They were just up there playing tunes, man. But now it takes...it has a more sinister turn to it, you know?

AB: Why do you think that's occurring?

BM: I don't know why. I mean I wish I knew why. I just [you know...] Jam sessions, a million people are there, they got a list, call the guys they wanna call on the list. Call other guys

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they don't call. You have all these people using the jam session. I think one of the things is that guys are using the jam sessions in the way that establishes themselves in the city. Whereas the jam – the old jam sessions – were all established cats that were playing and they were just having late night jam sessions. After one gig, they would go to another place and they'd have a session. Other than that, I don't know. I.... (pauses)

AB: Do you think that having jazz now in the academy and institutionalized has any impact on that?

BM: Hell no! Ted Curson was running a jam session in the eighties. I mean, he didn't go to an academy.

AB: No. I'm talking about this more competitive edge that seems to....

BM: Like I said, Ted Curson was running one and doing that kind of shit in the eighties at the Blue Note. And he didn't go to.... It is just how the people are. They're just like that. I mean one of the things that's consistent is that I can.... There's so many people that play jazz and they only like one segment of it. And it's usually the... you can always tell how they play, because the only part they like is the part that sounds like them (you know). "Yeah, Joe Henderson was the baddest cat." Well, OK, that cat plays like Joe Henderson. And all his tunes are going to have that kind of sequential thing to it. (whispering) What kind of.... Joe Henderson, that's it? [you know...] No Wayne Shorter, no Sonny Rollins, no Charlie Parker, no Coleman Hawkins, no Lester Young, no Sidney Bechet, no Getz, no Warne Marsh, nothing? Joe Henderson?! Ok. You know, so it's like a thing where everybody is trying to establish themselves. When the Ken Burns documentary came out, the majority opinion that I gleaned from reading about it on these blogs is that "How is this shit gonna get me a gig." (laughs) Like that was the whole point of it. Fuck the jazz history. Who cares? I mean, how is this going to get me a gig? [you know] "Wynton up there pontificating. Blah, blah, For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)

blah, blah, blah. Who the hell is he? Blah, blah, blah. What about this guy? What about that guy?" That's the way it always is. [You know] Even though I, you know, I believe in the axiom that [you know] if the water rises then all the boats rise at the same time. But then everybody else says, "Well, what about my boat? What about my boat? I want my boat. And so, you know.... And Wynton says that [you know] I hate to speak for him, but he does. He says [you know] all the musicians that claim to play jazz should be well rounded jazz musicians. They should be able to play any style. And then the other side says, "Well, you know, you're just [you know] a old cat playing the old style and you don't want to deal with the modern shit." I mean this is what's going on. This is what's going on. So, you know, and my manager [you know] we've had this discussion. "Well, Wynton's people called and asked one of my clients to come in and play, but they want him to play in a sweet thing on Ben Webster. He doesn't know anything about Ben Webster." "Tell him to go learn some Ben Webster then!" "How would you feel?" I said, "I can play like Ben Webster. I'd feel fine." "Well, shouldn't this be a vehicle for you to [you know] do your thing?" I said, "The place has a fifteen million dollar operating budget and a lot of old rich donors. Every other jazz club in New York will let you do your own thing. And those are the places that are usually empty. So why would he let you come in and empty out Rose Hall? (laughs) He has a formula that works. "Well, I mean, guys just won't play there then." "Then they won't play there." You know in the building, the acoustic building, all the guys that play now are more amplified guys, even the sax players. So, the louder the amp sound, the worse the room sounds. So, then they conclude, "This room sucks!" No, it's an acoustic room. If you play acoustically, it doesn't suck. This is like.... So, this is the kind of foolishness that you just.... I just watch it. I'm just glad not to be around that shit on a regular basis anymore, because it's just, you know. Downbeat and, you know.... Like reading Downbeat is like a dentist reading, you know, Dentistry Today. It's a trade magazine. That's what it is. And guys are carping over a trade magazine? Shit. You want...get in Time Magazine. That's something. [You know] That's something. I mean, just as an experiment, call up Downbeat and say "I wanna take out a full page ad, how much is it?" And then call Time. And one they say, "It's

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ten thousand dollars for a full page ad.” The other one, “It’s a hundred thousand dollars for a full-page ad.” Guess which one you need to be in? It’s like the whole business model is just...is just completely flawed, yet it is the one that perpetually exists and they only work within the context of that. You know the whole thing is...the guy says, “Yeah, man you need a publicist.” “What do I need a publicist for?” “Well, you know....” “What are you going to do for me as a publicist?” “I can get you in Jazz Times. I can get you in Downbeat.” “I can get me in Jazz Times and in Downbeat! I don’t need you to do that.” It’s like, you know, I want to see the publicist come in and say, “Man, I’m gonna get you in Newsweek. I’m gonna get you....” “I’m in. Here is my money.” It’s not what happens. A friend of mine who plays saxophone said, “Im gonna get a publicist.” I said, “For what?” And I told him all of this. And he gets the publicist, he gives him money and they give him a little blurb in Downbeat, a little blurb in Jazz Times. Doesn’t do anything. Doesn’t do anything. So you just, as a.... I just sit around and I watch the business and I.... Huh! This is... So, I like to... sit out here in the country. Play a little golf, practice. I just don’t have to deal with that shit. I don’t have to deal with, “You know what I heard?” Cause I ain’t gonna hear it out here. And, I just... when I go to New York, they say “Man, you hear about such and such.” “Mercifully, no, I haven’t.” (laughs) Rumors and, you know, that whole thing...it’s so fucked up, you know? Just like, well, y’all got this. I’ll just... I love the music. The rest of it, the social part of it, I can do without it. I can do without it.

AB: Can we talk about your business relationships, particularly with record companies? [working with a...] Maybe talk about Dr. George Butler and working with Columbia?

BM: Well, I mean, they left us alone. Columbia left us alone and George used what clout he could to just let us do the stuff we wanted to do. There were times early on when Wynton...it was very funny. Tom Browne had just had this big hit called, “Funkin’ for Jamaica.” So, they signed Wynton and he had just left Juilliard, and he played classical music and he was playing with Blakey and they thought that he was just going to do what jazz

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guys had been doing for the last twenty years. So, he makes one half of the record and they hear it, and they go, "What is this shit! This is crazy." And they had a big meeting with him. "We need something new, man. We need...." That's like the code word when they want you to play pop music. "We need something new." As though pop is new. "We need something new, you know, we don't need this stuff." Wynton was like, "Man, this is what I'm doing. This is what I told y'all I was doing. I don't know what...." "Have you heard Tom Browne's record? That's new." He said, "Well, that's great. I mean it's a cool tune, but that's not what I came here to do. I came here to do this." So, Herbie was the producer of the record. Well he said, "Herbie, what do you think?" Herbie just said, "Man, I think y'all should let this kid do what he wants to do. There are piles of other people who are doing the other stuff." And they said, "Well, fine. Allright." And they put the record out and the shit just went bananas. He got a Grammy for it and a Grammy for the classical thing. And then, of course, "We knew all along that jazz is an important part of the American fabric..." [And, you know] So, then Wynton wins this and all of a sudden RCA revs up its dead jazz label, starts reissuing records and signing musicians. Then Warner Brothers starts revving up its dead jazz stuff, and signing guys, and doing all these records. I'm like, "Man, this is a disaster. It's still jazz. I mean.... They saw Wynton...instead of seeing him as an outlier, they saw him as a template. And, if you read the Time Magazine article, and if you really read the article, the article kinda says, "Well, Jazz is in." And George Butler says, "Yeah, I was the guy who got Wynton to wear suits." Stanley Crouch said, "Yeah, I was the guy who taught Wynton erudition." Albert Murray says, "Yeah, I was the guy who taught Wynton about the blues." So, then you read the article and you say, "Well shit, if you want to play jazz, get a suit, learn the blues and speak well. Forget learning how to actually play the shit. So, all of a sudden, in New York there was just this infestation of teenage kids with horns and suits. (laughs) I was going, "This is not gonna work." It's not gonna work and they got signed. Signing all these young fifteen year old kids. Like, Amani Murray, you know. "What do you think about Amani Murray?" I said, "I heard the same Charlie Parker solo when he was twelve. That's

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what I think. I think he needs to learn more music.” “ Yeah, well....” They signed him and there’s a... Richard Holliday, or something like that.

Ken: Christopher Holliday.

BM: Christopher Holliday. I said, “OK.” And it went nowhere. And then by the time that the nineties rolled around, they realized, “Well this shit’s not selling anything.” So then Warner Brothers killed their jazz label, RCA killed their jazz label. Before everybody, RCA killed theirs. And eventually by 2000, Columbia killed their jazz label. And here we are.

AB: And you formed your own record company?

BM: Yeah.

AB: But you, of course, were on other labels in the interim. How did that come about?

BM: It had to be done. I didn’t want to do it. I didn’t want to do it. I didn’t want to waste my money. Set my money, put it in a hole and set it on fire is basically what you are doing. I didn’t want to do it, but it had to be done. So I did it. And we’ll do it for as long as we can. When we can’t do it anymore we won’t do it. That was the only reason we did it. It was just, “OK. Let’s give some of these really talented people an outlet where they can make their records and do what they want.”

[End of CD 4]

BM: Stop.

Ken: Let’s do it.

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AB: We've been sitting here laughing....

BM: Yeah, you know.... What it is is ah...I'm playing some of this music and it's all in concert. And I read concert OK, but there's a couple of pieces by Sam Barber and it's really hard like seven...six sharps. And I just can't do it. So, Sibelius is a music notation software (excuse me) and version seven allows you to scan files in. So I can scan the file in and do all the stuff I need to do. I was trying to buy seven yesterday and it wouldn't... you know, it wouldn't work. I just got a message from text support saying the reason is because you didn't put the complete serial number in – being the jackass that I am. I wish Buddy Rich were here right now to curse me out for that, but....

AB: Well, let's take our cue from this little bit of wit and talk about extra-musical facets of your career. If we look into your....

BM: Hey, man, there are no pictures of me with that goat. So, I'm not talking about that shit. (while AB laughs) Extra-musical! I'd be cleared of that. I'm not talking about that.

AB: We won't go with any images, let's talk about radio. Radio personality.

BM: When you start bringing up, "extra-musical." I'm like....Hey, man....The goat was seventeen. It was legal.

AB: I can see why people chose you to be a media personality. Can we talk about Jazz Set?

BM: Yes.

AB: How did that come about and....

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BM: I actually don't know how it came about. I don't know. I know it wasn't Duke Marcos, who was the engineer, but it could have been Becca Pulliam, who was the producer. She could have come to me and said, "How would you like to do this radio show? Our host is leaving." I think Ben Sidran might have been the host of the show, but they didn't call it Jazz Set, they called it something else. And, I said, "Ok, yeah, I'll do it. And, again, that was great. I did...I heard the first episode. I was pretty good at English, but I actually forgot how to speak English. I was mortified. And, so I got the script and I listened to the broadcast and I would circle every butchered word. So, and I would walk around the house, and I'd just practice the word. So, by the third episode or so, I was cool. A word like...(clears throat) I also did a (excuse me) I did a video called "Saxophone Kings" and I couldn't say the word "saxophonists." I would say "saxophonist-s." And I was looking at the screen like this. I was like, "You're a jackass. Look at you." So, I was looking at it. So, oh...so, yeah, you have to work on those things. I could have just blamed them, you know. Aw, it was cold that day, or something, you know, people.... But, a...so with Becca I would get all the words, circle them...and ah.... A lot of guys would say, "Well it doesn't sound like you, when you do the show. You know it should sound more conversational." Much like playing that Henry Purcell piece, I just don't hear it that way. I'm not trying to suddenly become this person where I speak this way, "Good evening. I'm Branford Marsalis." It's just...I used to have a slight lisp when I was a kid. And, I got rid of it by...I watched the CBS News because Dan Rather was on. And, I would just imitate Dan Rather; that middle-of-the-road, mid-Western kind of thing. And I would just imitate everything that he said. After awhile, when you do things like that, it becomes a part of your system. So the words come, and it's like...you know, and I tried to go, [you know] "Hey, what's happening y'all? This is Branford Marsalis, blah, blah...." It just doesn't.... Now, Wynton does that really well. He speaks on his radio show really colloquially. It doesn't work for me. It doesn't work for me. So, I had a great time doing Jazz Set. The biggest.... It was just hard to get good bands, hard to get programming. And then there was that inevitable fight where they started trying to get fusion bands in on it and, you know? If they were able to get more funding that way...I just

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didn't...I just didn't want to represent that. So, I said, "Naw, I'm not. I'm not doing this."  
After ten years, it was good. They needed to, you know, they needed to...Dee Dee's great.  
Dee Dee's doing a great job. They needed to get somebody. They needed some new blood in  
there. But ten years was a good long time for me. And I learned a lot. I learned a lot.

AB: Well, then, why don't we talk about your relationship with Spike Lee. How did you  
become a thesbian, or an actor?

BM: Fuck Spike Lee. He's a jerk.

AB: OK.

BM: I'm kidding. I lived around the corner from Spike. And....

AB: In Brooklyn?

BM: In Brooklyn, correct. And, his dad, Bill Lee, was in a band in the late sixties called "The  
Descendants of Mike and Phoebe." And, it could have been the late sixties, early seventies.  
My mom and dad took me and Wynton to this concert. And, I remember the concert. I don't  
remember the songs, but I remember the concert. And.... He said, "Yeah, my dad's a bass  
player. Bill Lee." And Wynton said, "Bill Lee? Is that the guy who was in The Descendants of  
Mike and Pheobe? He said, "Yeah, how did you know that?" He said, "Man, we were at a  
concert when we were like nine, or ten years old." So, we kind of hit it off. And he was....  
We'd sit on the stoop and talk. And I started playing with singing and what he tells me later  
is he was coming to ask me to be one of his – I don't know what – investors for *Do the Right  
Thing*. No, for *She's Gotta Have It*. But he couldn't bring himself to ask me. And, if he had, I'd  
gave him some money. But he didn't ask and I didn't presume, and I'm not.... I would never  
think, you know, "How do I get in on this action?" So, we went on one of those two-month

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European tours with Sting. And he said, "Man, you gotta come see my movie." I said, "I'm only home for the day. I'm leaving tomorrow. When I get back, I'll be happy to see it. Good luck with it. And we went to Europe and.... You know Europe in eighty-five, there's no internet. So, whatever happened on the other side of the world, you don't know. And I come back. And I get off the plane. And Spike's ass is on the cover of Time Magazine. (laughs) "How in the hell did that happen?" So I get the magazine, and I'm reading it, so the movie had come out, and everybody was talking about it and independent filmmaking and black films and this that and the other. So I called him when I got home and I said, "Yeah, man, good luck with your movie. Damn!" And, he.... No, I called.... I went home and, with my first wife, and we went to see the movie. Then we went and saw it again. So then I called him. I said, "Good luck with your movie, damn." He said, "Well, man, come over and see it." I said, "I already saw it twice, man. Great." You know? He said, "You didn't have to do that." I said, "It's for the cause man. It's five dollars, you know? Why wouldn't I spend five dollars on you, you know? Shit. It's fine." And, we were just cool, because you know it really helped that we were friends before he became famous, but he knew me enough to know that, no matter what he did my relationship with him wasn't going to change. Like, I was going to be me. I wasn't going to start yes-manning him. And one day he came to me and he said, [You know] "You ever thought about acting?" I said, "Well, I was in drama class in high school." (laughs) I was in drama school and I was good. And, my teacher wanted me to be an actor. It's the late seventies. So Miss Simmons says, "You should be an actor. That music thing is cool. But you could be a really good actor." And I said, "You know what, Miss Simmons? I thought about it. The idea of going and taking some drama classes, and flying to LA, just so I can say memorable things like, 'Shut up sucka-ass pig!' That's not for me." You gotta be from the seventies to get that. I said that to some kids at Central and they went.... I said, "Look, well, you know, watch the movies. Watch a hundred – *Across 110<sup>th</sup> Street* and *Shaft* and *Sugar Baby, Sugar Baby*. All those movies, you know? *Sweet Sweetback* and.... "What's up, old jive turkey?" "That's right. Yo mama!" "I ain't scared of you, pig!" "The man is going down!" I mean, I was just like, "Really? I don't think so." (laughs) I do not think so. So, Spike

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asked me to be in a movie. He told me what the movie was about. It was about HBCU's [historically black colleges and universities]. I said, "Well, I went to an HBCU. I'll do this shit for free. You gonna pay me to act like a crazy man like I did in college? OK, great." So, we were in Atlanta for six weeks. And, almost every thing we did was improvised. I started the.... There' s a big fight scene. I actually started the fight scene.

AB: Why are we not surprised? (laughs)

BM: Not on purpose. Not on purpose. Yes, I started the fight scene. And [Laurance] Fishburne was furious, because it wasn't choreographed so people could get hurt, you know? He was like, "We're professionals. Are we not professionals?" I went, "I'm not. I'm a fucking musician. He told me to act like I did in school." Hey, you know, I was talking trash to big brother Almighty Tee. And, talking to this girl, you know, saying, "Yeah, you want some of this don't you? You little creole heifer." You know just all this stuff. And you know, he said something to me and I flicked him on the head like that. "Pow! Shut up, punk!" And he just jumped on the stage and it was just.... It was a melee. And everybody was in character acting like a bunch of lunatics. So, there was one guy, Leonard - what's Leonard's last name? Unn. I'm a stickler for last.... I hate forgetting people's names like that. [searching for name] I won't have it in here, I'm pretty sure I won't. No, I don't. Well, anyway, Leonard was General George Patton. And, I can find it that way. [searching again] Character, big brother general George Patton. Yeah. No, not him.

AB: George C. Scott? (whispers)

BM: Yeah, exactly, that's where it's going too.

AB: I'm sure it is.

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BM: OK. School Daze.

AB: Can you talk and type? Talk and search?

BM: Yeah. I can do that. I'm just...it's a thing, I gotta do it. I gotta do it. I gotta do it. I'm getting close. Let's see. "Full cast and crew." Ah, so George Patton...ah, Rusty, Rusty Condif. So, at the beginning of the fight, Leonard comes rushing up to me and he picks me up, like this. And he's about to body slam me, right in the middle of the shit. And I'm saying, "Think fast, think fast, so I.... Leonard Thomas. So I kissed him on his mouth and he went.... I said, "Put me down, motherfucker." "You crazy man." He was in this other place. He's an actor. So, actors go to that place and they're in character. It's an amazing thing when you learn how to do it. It's an amazing thing when you learn how to do it. And they were in it. And that was a real fight. But I wasn't going to get body-slammed by his big ass. No sir. So, as soon as I kissed him in his mouth, he just froze. I was, "Put me down, man. Fuck, you crazy?" "Sorry about that man. I was in character." "I know. That's why I had to do something. You were about to throw me. You were about to body-slam me - head first. Fuck that, man." So, yeah, but it was fun. It was fun to be in a movie. You know I used to watch the old movies when they go, "Yeah, yeah, the camera loves you" when they were trying to get some chick, or something. I didn't know what it meant, but some of the actors were like, "The camera really likes you. You really.... You stand out. You should...." And it was another one of those things, well, great, I'm going to stop being a musician and be an actor. Got an agent, and like, "You need to move to LA." The more I thought about it, there are actors way better than me, who will always be better than me, who ain't working. Why would I put myself in that? Naw, that's OK. It could've worked out, but....

AB: It was a decision you made on your own? You didn't talk to other folks? Or...

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BM: Who could you talk to really? Who could you talk to? So many people want to be movie stars. They'll say like, "Man, you gotta go for this. This is your opportunity." You know, I'm going to make my own decisions. My parents want it like that. This is what I think you should do, but you need to do.... My father let me make mistakes. There was a guy, a choreographer who came to town in New Orleans in seventy six. I was making...working in a band and working at Baskin 'n Robbins. So I had a little change. And the guy says, you know, "You need to.... " He says, you know, "I want to write you a check for six hundred dollars and, you know.... I just need to get this done, you know. You can deposit it and you can give me cash." I go tell my parents. They're like...my mother said, "You can't do that. You don't know this man." "Well he's a nice man." My father said, "The check will bounce, but it's your money. You do what you want." So I did it. It bounced. Six hundred dollars - psst. Gone. Lesson learned. He could have denied me the lesson. And then I could have been a sucker in the financial shit when it all exploded. You know what I mean? It's just...but, he thought about it, and he says, you know, in the scheme of things that's not a lot of money. Let him take the hit. And he told me, "It will bounce. I'm telling you. It's going to bounce. But it's your money. You do what you want." I said, "I'm going to do it." He said, "Do it." Boing! So, my parents...I already know what they thought, anyway. My parents aren't into.... They're not into celebrity and fame. They are not into it. They are not into it. And if I walked in and said, "Man, I just love acting." They'd said, "Go act. But, why are you doing it? What's the.... Why should you do it? You really want to do that? You starting from scratch." I mean I was already aware of what it meant. I remember what it was like to start playing jazz from scratch, you know? It was 1982 and its 1987 now 1988 and right now I'm just kind of like barely good as a jazz player in eighty-seven. Again, kinda like my dad saying, you know, in the land of the blind, I was the one-eyed man. So, that was kind of like default king. And, you got to make a decision. So I just said, "Naw, I just think I'm gonna stick with what I'm doing. And a couple of roles came, but I was on the road. And, you know, they looking for other people at that point. That window closes up. And it would've been nice, but....un-un.

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AB: But you did go on to do a couple more roles?

BM: If I was available I would do them. But it was one of those things where I wasn't going to stop playing music. Cause, you know, in reality, when you move to LA, jazz is a zero in LA. So, if you move to LA, you ain't playing. You playing in restaurants. It just ain't, you know....it ain't just, you know.... And I really wanted to live in LA too, you know. January sixty three degrees, open the window, practice. The shit is great, but you gotta have some kind of feedback. Cause my bass player lives in LA right now. But he plays with us.... He has two different bands he plays with. He plays with Rosenwinkle's band. He has a band called Tar Baby. He has his own band. He's constantly playing. So he gets feedback. But, you know, if I'm gonna move to LA and I'm gonna be around auditioning for movies and playing by myself, it's a zero. It's just not a.... It's not a thing.

AB: But from ninety-two to ninety whatever, you were living in LA. Did you...?

BM: I was on a TV show. There was no time. Every day, I mean, that show was hard. We worked on holidays. We only had five weeks off a year. And it was five weeks off every five weeks. So it was never long enough for you to actually be able to do anything else. So it was hard. It was just too.... There was no time. There was no time. It was one of those things. It could have been fun. I mean, I really.... I had a lot of options. I could have done a lot of shit, you know? It's just...God put me here to play music, so I just have to learn to accept it. But I could have been a lawyer. I could have been a good one, you know. I could have been an actor. Might have been a good one.

AB: You wanted to be a history teacher.

BM: I would've been a damn good history teacher. I would have been a good history teacher. No doubt about that. It wasn't one of those things where I put all these eggs, you

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know, I'm gonna be a musician come hell or high water, musician or bust. I met musicians, like, "Yeah..." I met one musician. His whole thing was nine to five is for suckers. So I gotta be a musician. What a jackass reason to be a musician. It's just, you know.... I just, I be a jazz musician. I love doing it. I'm doing it. It's something that.... I said I could see myself at the age of sixty doing this. I couldn't see myself at the age of sixty wearing jump suits and singing pop tunes. I couldn't see it. No, sequins and...I couldn't see it. You know? I just went and heard, saw and heard, Earth, Wind, and Fire and I loved it. You know? Blast-from-the-past, Verdine [White] was still there. And I got to talk to him about just the times. Like when he...when the band was forming in the fifties, the stuff he was doing, what he was listening to, what the scene was like. And he's such a damn good musician. He's a perfect example. Nobody talks about him as a bass player and he's one of the best bass players there are in the business, because he plays the part with conviction and he's tasty. But, he can't play "Teen Town." So, he's not a good bass player. This is where we are! This is where we are, you know. This is where it is. [You know...] "That guy is awesome, he can play "Teen Town." That's what's so amazing about a guy like Victor Wooten, cause he can play all of that. When it's time to play the part, he just sits in the cut and plays the part and does nothing, really, to call attention to himself. So, bravo to him, brvo to him. I love that about him. [And a...you know] Yeah, so you know, being around Verdine was awesome. It was great. And being around some of the older...the old guys, you know? Being around Al McKay. It was...that was very cool. But I wouldn't want to be sixty doing that. You know? I wouldn't want to be sixty doing that. They deserve a lot more attention than they get, but it's one of those things.... Eddie Murphy had a joke once. You know he said, "Rock 'n roll never dies. Them motherfuckers are around.... Elvis is dead. They still see him in malls." R 'n B, however, (laughs) they die. Once the hit cycle is over, it's gone. They're gone. Cause even the people who supported them, don't support them. [You know...] Like all the guys that liked The Eagles when they were eighteen, they're sixty-five now, they'll stand out there and camp out and reminisce about when they first started to go to the shows. Like all the black folk who are sixty, they buying Jay-Z records. "Earth, Wind and Fire. Aw, that's

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yesterday's news. That's old." They don't even...I'm outta here...so, they not...so, you know, The Eagles been playing football stadiums right when Earth, Wind and Fire plays on jazz festivals. Kind of fucking wacky, but that's what it is.

AB: Speaking about The Eagles, you...I remember hearing a clip where you were talking about playing with Crosby, Stills and Nash and how so many folks at that time, in their generation, the sixties, were listening to Trane. If you can talk about working with some of those non-jazz contexts.

BM: I mean, I knew how to do it. It was fun. It was fun.

AB: In the relationship, is there a big difference working in that context, versus working in the jazz context?

BM: I don't understand the question.

AB: Working with the people? Talking about people, people interaction, rather than the music itself? The way people interact....

BM: Well, they were all rich. And they were cool as hell. They were just cool. And they liked the way I played and they brought me in because of that. I think that, because of my work with Sting, they knew that I was not going to try to upstage the song. I was going to play what the song required. [And...] It was cool to hang out with them. [You know...] They told their stories about hearing Trane's band. James Taylor...I just had a thing.... Like, his music, I love his music. And I know exactly what is required to make that music work. So, he'd just get me on these solos to do the stuff and....

AB: You're living in Carolina now. That's where he...he always identified with Carolina.

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BM: Well, he's from here, but he lives in New York. [And a...] You know, I dig doing that stuff. I dig doing it. Playing with Hornsby. It was great.

AB: Jack DeJonnette talks about playing with Hornsby. Well that's another thing. It's that interpersonal relationship. I mean, you know, coming from different worlds, but there is still some common ground.

BM: Yeah, I not from...I'm from that world. I not from a different world. That's what the difference is. You know, kinda like when (excuse me) when a Miles was trying to convince me to join his band, I'm like, "Dude, I ain't playing Cindy Lauper tunes. Especially with you. I ain't doing that. I ain't playing Prince tunes with you." And, he said, "What do you have against social music?"

AB: That's what he said to you?

BM: "Man, I am social music. When you were seven years old, you were listening to Pops. When I was seven, I was listening to James Brown. This ain't got nothing to do with what I have against social music. In my mind, you are one of the two greatest living jazz musicians in the world. And, I'm not interested in playing pop music with you." Then, a year later I was out playing with Sting. [You know...] And, he said, "Ah, you playing with that white boy." I said, "That's what he does." I said that, "If he called and said he wanted to go on tour and do Gershwin tunes I would not be on that hit." I said, you know, "This is what he does. He's the best at this. Of course I'm going to play with him." So, I'm not, you know...not gonna do that. I'm not gonna stop doing my shit to go play "Human Nature" with Miles Davis. Hell no. Hell, fucking no. I'm not gonna do that. I think he dug what I was saying though. If he didn't, it didn't matter, but I think he dug it, dug what I was.... He knew. Cause,

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even after that I did a couple of gigs and he came to the gigs and we rapped. And he was cool.

AB: But you did the session *You Are Under Arrest*?

BM: No, I did *Decoy*.

AB: Excuse me, *Decoy*, you're correct.

BM: That was killing. But we weren't playing Cindi Lauper tunes. But that's where it was going. I thought we were going to do the shit we did on *Decoy*. I said, "I can't wait to do this." Cause that's kinda like, [you know...] a less complicated version like the *Bitches Brew* stuff, or the *In A Silent Way* stuff. Blues-oriented and...just really killing music. It was great. Scofield was killing. You know what I mean? It was a great.... The whole band experience. Robert Irving the third, it was great. The whole thing was great. Darrel Jones was in that band. I was, "I'm gonna play with Darrow. Ah, this is going to be great. I would love to do this." And he called me and he said, "What do you think about Prince?" I said, "Aww, c'mon. I'm not doing this. I'm not doing it. I thought we were going to play this. I'm not doing that other thing. No. But *Decoy* was killing. You know, Miles has this aura, he just makes you a better player. For a long time, the soprano solos I played on that record were like the best representation of me playing probably 'til...for...'til the two thousands. Maybe that's an exaggeration, definitely until the late nineties. He just...he had me focused and its his vibe. He just stands there and you just wanna play. And you just focus, just complete focus all the time. That's the power of those guys, when I was talking to you earlier about when they split from the scene, that's the effect they have on people. They kind of stand around and like check out what cats are doing. And cats.... You wanna play better, because they are around. When they ain't around, you just do what you want. And it didn't really fare well for the music.

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AB: How about working with Grateful Dead?

BM: I loved it. That was fun. I didn't.... I had not heard a Dead song since the seventies. For a long time that thing functioned completely under the radar, which to me is the best possible world to be in. Cause they were actually musicians, and they were fans of the music that they listened to. Phil Lesh checked out a lot of jazz. Ah, you know....

AB: Phil Lesh studied with Milhaud too. Un-huh.

BM: Really. That's cool man. And, you know, Garcia checked out a lot of blue grass. They all checked out a lot of folk music. They just had this.... They have this massive vocabulary. So they are on stage and they are calling tunes. They don't have the set list on the floor. They're calling tunes. They had some old lights rack from the seventies and shit, you know? "This is kinda wild, tripods." They had upgraded the stuff before Jerry died, but in that early...in eighty-nine, it was like the old shit. And they'd yell tunes and.... That's what we do. They were yelling tunes across the.... They'd say, "Let's play this." "Naw. Let's play that." "Let's play this." So, they played Dylan tunes. They'd play tunes from The Band. They'd play old, you know, bluegrass tunes. They'd play a couple of their tunes. They'd just play stuff. The audience was digging it and they were keyed in. There were no.... There was no celebrity row. There were no velvet ropes. None of that shit. I mean, I was like, "Wow! This shit actually exists?" I just didn't even know. They weren't in the media anywhere. Ain't nobody was talking about them. This is before digital radio. So...it was just like this thing, where they had this thing where they were putting on their own concerts. There is no email blast. Just word of mouth. They were selling out 18,000 seat arenas, with their renting the arena. So, they are making all the profit. And they are recording everything. And its just that it was a great. And it was just a cool...the thing was just cool. It was just completely cool. [So ah...]

Jerry and them didn't know who I was, Phil did. And they were like, "Who is this guy?"

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So they bring me up on the last tune of the first set, of course. "Thanks for playing. Get the fuck out of here." (laughs) It makes perfect sense. So, I played the tune. And it was "Eyes of the World" or "Bird Song," one of the two. I can't remember which one it was. I think it was "Eyes." And, it's like a thing that I learned even when I was a kid playing with R 'n B singers, it's that you don't...it's about the singer. So, to learn the songs I wouldn't play...I'd play in the intro, but when the singing starts, I wouldn't play. And I'd listen to the song, and that's how I would learn the song. And then when the second chorus starts I'd play little frills and little things like that. And, ah... The solo form was just two chords, so I got this. So, we was playing, having a good time, and it was over and, I said, "Man, well, you know, thanks for letting me play. I appreciate it. Y'all great. I really dug it." They said, "Where you going? No. Stay for the second set." I said, "OK. They liked it. Great. Ok." So they called this song, "Dark Star," which is this big kind of expansive, you know...

AB: Trane influenced.

BM: Un-Huh. So, they said, "Oh, let's play "Dark Star." "OK." "Oh, we take it out, OK. We go into space. We do all this stuff." I'm like, "OK, yeah." And, they started playing the song and the roar from the crowd was like...(inaudible gesture), you know? And, later on, when Deadheads started calling me on my private number, I'd say, "How did you get this number?" "Don't worry man, we're harmless, but we're everywhere. He called and said, "Thank you, man. They haven't played 'Dark Star' in six months." They'd be following the band around. And it was just... It's just a great.... It was a great thing. It was one of the coolest things in popular music that I've ever seen. You know they didn't use the celebrity-media shows to drive their tour. It was completely under the radar. And it was a great musical experience. It was very sincere. And, I enjoyed playing with them. You know, and then there was the rumor that I was going to join the band. (laughs) And I said, "No, I'm not joining the band." You know I played with them three or four times and never got paid for the shit. I'm the jackass who's not in it for the money, so.... I mean, you know.... I was just....

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I'd call them up. I'm in town where they are. I say, "Hey, you guys want a sax player." They say, "Yeah, c'mon through." It was fun. I had a good time.

AB: Your relationship with Tain has been very close. In 2009, what happened?

BM: He wanted to.... He wanted.... He was in a place where he just wanted to play his own music. Umm, he just wanted to play his own music. And it was starting to.... In hindsight I realize it was starting to affect the band, simply because he couldn't muster up the enthusiasm to play songs that weren't his. He really wanted to play his music. I don't play my music in this band. (laughs) It's like, it wasn't going to happen. And he was lobbying for his tunes. He just, you know, he wanted to start his own band. And he just said, "Man, I can't do it anymore. I gotta go start my band." And I had already met Justin when he was sixteen. And Tain couldn't make a gig, because he had.... He couldn't make the gig, because he had a gig with his band. And, I encourage that with all the guys in the band. So I said, "I can see that this is where it's coming, I gotta find a reliable sub." I tried some people and it was alright. My cousin, Rodney Mack, who is a classical trumpet player. He plays with the Philadelphia Chamber Orchestra. He was doing this project on a very famous black cornetist at the turn of the century. Who was playing cornet music. And, he had found all this music, and kind of got this made, got this brass ensemble together and stuck me in the middle of it. And part of the thing was a master class. And I just assumed it was college students, cause he knows I really don't like high school kids. They all know it. Because, I mean, watch 'em on television. Look at high school kids now. They think they are so great and so special, they're disrespectful...just the whole...I just don't want to deal with it. So I show up and all these high school kids are there. I go, "Oh my God, why would you do this to me?" He said, "It's too late man, just deal with it." Then we go in there and they're all shitty. And you tell them they're shitty, and they get mad. It's just a constant thing. When I was fifteen and Sonny Stitt told me I suck, first of all, that wasn't a news flash, I knew I sucked. I said, "Well, I know that, what can I do to get better?" And he said, "This, this, this

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and this." And he thought I was going to do it, or I wasn't. So, for them, it's a news flash. "You suck." "How dare you? I'm the best guy in the section." I mean it's like...and that's what I don't like being around. I just hate that. It's not all high school kids. I mean there's some kids in Seattle, you know? Clarence Acox has a program in Seattle and they are great kids. But a...There are programs in other places, but for the most part, turn on the television, look at these high school.... Ahh! Anyway, so there was this band, as the story...as the movie story would be, it was the worst band of all the bands. And there was this drummer and they're just playing a slow blues, and he's keeping time. And the thing that I noticed is that, he has a left comping hand that I don't hear even out of professional drummers now. They don't know how to comp with their left hand. "Wow! This kid's got a left hand." (whispers this) And so, you know, everybody in the band was like, "Well, you need to listen to more music. Y'all don't listen to jazz, man. How do you think it's gonna happen. It's magic. Listen, listen, listen. And you Ives, I don't know where you came from, but whatever you're doing, keep doing it. And that was the extent of...and I said, "Where did you get a left hand like that?" He said, "Oh! My dad plays these Philly Joe Jones records at home." And I said, "That figures." And that was the extent of the conversation. Then, subsequently, Tain wasn't available for a gig and I called every drummer in New York. They were all busy. I'm thinking...I call my cousin and I say, "Hey man, find me that kid." And a couple hours later he called me back. His name is Justin Falkner. Here's the number. I called Justin and said, "Come to the gig." He was sixteen. He was raw. But you could tell what it was gonna be. And we played.... He wanted to play "In the Crease." I said, "That's a hard song." He said, "I really wanna play it." I said, "Allright." So we played it and he messed it up. Revis said, "Yeah, the kid kinda crapped all over 'In the Crease.'" I said, "Yeah, but the next time we play it, he's gonna crap all over us." "Are you sure?" I said, "Man, I can just tell you, this kid has the thing. He's got the thing." Two years later he showed up - psst - crapped all over us. Because he's not us, he had thought about ways of playing the song that was completely different than the way we had been playing. You know and that's one of the things that's different than how Tain approaches the music. Cause, with Tain, he got to a place where,

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when you bring in a new song, Tain tries a multitude of things. And once he finds the thing that he likes, then the song becomes an arrangement. So, everything that you do is done within the context of the arrangement. And that's kinda the way his brain works. He's a real smart kind of guy. This kid comes in and he was just trying things every night. Just like when we were in Wynton's band in the twenties. Every night was different. I was like, "Wow! That's gonna be..." So then we got to this place where we got an arrangement, but the arrangement was more an arrangement in dynamics. And the song would be softer than it used to be here. We get louder there, but how we got there would be different from night to night. So, it's been good. It's been good.

AB: When I look at.... As you see, we have probably just a, not even a representative sample of some of the CDs that you've done. I've noticed that, first of all....

BM: Hold that thought I've got to.... (mike's fumbling sound can be heard)

AB: Yeah, I was.... I wanted to talk about the a...particularly Delfeayo's contribution to your recording projects. Not only is he a producer, but he is also writing the liner notes. And in the liner notes I noticed that there is a lot of history in those liner notes. I'm wondering if that was something in the relationship that you and Delfeayo shared? This valorization of history and its importance.

BM: There is a lot of history? Huh. I don't.... I never really....

AB: You didn't read your liner notes?

BM: I read them back then, but I never really, I.... It's his thing. It's his thing. I didn't really interfere with that, you know? He's a good writer. He got his degree in creative writing from The University of New Orleans. And, I often did not agree with his a.... I didn't agree

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with his opinions, or his outcomes. But they are his liner notes, so I let him write them. [And, a...] It's real funny how people were like coming at me. "Man, that shit Delfeayo wrote in the liner notes...." I said, "Talk to Delfeayo about it. I had nothing to do with it." And, you know, I guess they thought that I was using Delfeayo as a voice pipe to say things I wanted to say. I said, "You know I'm a grown-ass man I can say it on my own. I don't need Delfeayo to do that." And a... you know, they were really well-done. A little over the top, but a.... He was a kid. I can't remember now, he was young. He was in his twenties. [ You know, and...] The really good thing that he did was that he was an audio engineer and he.... I used to talk to him and I said, "Ah..." He used to tape concerts in high school, which I did too. I used to tape concerts and he used my old system. And, I said, "Dude. What you need to explain to me is why do modern jazz records sound like shit and old records sound great?" And, he said, "Oh...." You know? "Let me get back to you on that?" So it's really interesting what he did. He started talking to producers and they were completely useless – you know, because jazz producers were basically like glorified baby-sitters, you know? Make sure the musicians show up on time. They didn't have any audio input. And, you go and you watch Wynton record a classical record and the producers, a guy named Steve Epstein, and the engineer, they start to talking about microphones. Get out the book and what microphones did we use on the recording of such and such. You know, what did they use in 1957? And then they open the book and say, "They used these mikes, and they were this far from the musicians, and they were in the room here and there." And you talk to the jazz guys and they say, "Aw, we just used whatever they had in the room. And we threw it up and...." That was the one thing, he said, "Yeah, when I start doing records, that shit won't be happening. I'm going to have specific notes about mike placement, distance, room size, all of these things. And, so he said, "I gotta go through a different route. [And,] There was a photographer named Don Huntstein, who was a staff photographer for Columbia. And he said, "Can I see some of the old recordings?" I mean "...see some of the pictures of the sessions?" He said, "Yeah, sure." So he looks at the sessions and he calls me back very excited one day. And I said, "Hello." He goes, "It's the room." I said, "What?" He said, "It's the room." For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or [archivescenter@si.edu](mailto:archivescenter@si.edu)





room. The rooms are huge. These guys were recording in rooms. I got a picture of Miles playing *Kind of Blue*. The room is eighty feet high.” We found out later it was an old church. And they are playing...they have the plexiglass in front of them the way the opera singers do when they do recordings in big rooms. That’s why you have direct sound, but it also has room sound at the same time. And, while you don’t hear a lot of drum leakage and all of that, one thing Jimmy Cobb didn’t play super loud, but you can hear everything as clear as a bell. The room sounds so rich and so fantastic. And, on the other side of that, I have friends of mine who say, “Well, I prefer Blue Note records. I like the way Blue Note records sound.” Which, I don’t. I don’t like the way Blue Note records sound.

AB: Why not?

BM: Because, if you sat down and played the piano, right now, go in the room and play the piano and put on a Blue Note record pianos don’t sound like...they don’t sound like pianos on a Blue Note record. If you hear Herbie Hancock.... I said, “We can put on....” Cause he said, “I prefer them to those Columbia records you like.” It was Bob Blumenthal. I said, “Bob, come over here and play on my piano for a little bit. And we’ll play whatever Blue Note record you want. And then we’ll play “Nefertitti” and then I’ll ask you the question, ‘Which recording does the piano actually sound like a piano in the room?’” The Columbia one, not the Blue Note one. The way that they recorded...it’s like, when you record in a room, you have to deal with drum leakage. And people deal with it in a creative way. Sometimes drummers play soft, but the way that Rudy dealt with it, was that he stuck the microphones in the tone holes. But most of the sound of the piano is from the outside of the piano, not from the inside of the piano. So when you put them in the tone holes and siphon everything off, you’re getting a lot of mid-range, and not the extreme ends of the wave form. So it has this dull kind of flat sound. Don’t take my word for it, just put on the records. [You know...] Put on a record of Horowitz playing and put on a jazz record. There is no comparison to the actual sound of the piano. We are so conditioned to that that most

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musicians don't even.... They don't even pay attention to sound. My dad. He doesn't even pay attention to sound that way. But because I grew up a rock 'n roll guy, and those rock guys were putting all this ear candy in the audio mixes, so we listen, me and a couple of my friends would listen with headphones and compare notes about.... I was an audio kid from...you know? And I kind of brought that sound in when we were doing jazz records. I wanted my records to sound a certain way. Most musicians are only interested in the information. They don't really care how it sounds. I care how it sounds. So it doesn't make the records bad records, I mean the guys play great on those records. But the sound of the record is not really representative of how the instruments actually sound in a room. They don't sound that way.

BM: Yeah. He did the Prestige records and those were more representative of how things actually sounded. Go figure. I mean that's weird. That's weird. So Delfeayo's research on all that really got us on a path to...you know, getting some stuff done. One second.

AB: (Talks with Ken) How much time we got left on this one? We only did five minutes? You said it was twenty before.

BM: Twenty minus five is fifteen, sir. I hate to break the news to you. In my world, twenty minus five is fifteen. But you live in that other world, so maybe you know something I don't.

AB: What world is that?

BM: I don't know. That world, over there.

AB: That was five minutes? I guess he's going to get his Sibelius seven now.

BM: I got to get this shit, man. I got to get this done.

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AB: Are you still rolling? I thought you'd put it on break ....

BM: Keep rolling.

AB: We were talking about.... What I was hoping is to talk a little more about your relationship with Delfeayo. It seems like it was a close working relationship. Growing up with...what, four other brothers? Five other brothers...let me see, Wynton....

BM: Four other brothers.

AB: Four other brothers. So, you being the oldest, it's only.... You were born in August of sixty and Wynton's is in October sixty-one. Being the oldest - (laughs)I know what it's like being the oldest - what was that like, having younger brothers. You're less than eighteen months apart, you and Delfeayo are several years apart, there must have been some dynamics among you?

BM: Well, it was me and Wynton against the rest of them. That was pretty much what it was. Me and Wynton against the rest of them. The rest of, you know, the hell with them. Just stay away from them. 'Cause they were four years younger than me. And, that's a lot. That's a lot. 'Cause.... My daughter's eleven and her sister's seven. So this is the only year that they will ever be in the same school at the same time. So when you're ten and your mother is like take your six-year old brother. I'm like, "I'm not taking him anywhere. I'd rather just stay home." So, that was the dynamic. I didn't really get to know Delfeayo and Ellis until we were out of school. Cause, I mean, I'm fifteen years old. I don't want to fuck with an eleven year old kid. No fifteen year old does. But me and Wynton were fifteen and fourteen, seventeen, sixteen, eighteen...that works. So, it was me and Wynton against them and we used to pummel their asses, you know? But not bruises, but like punch them in the ribs and beat on them. They'd get us back. They'd put water on top of the room. We'd come

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in and the water would fall on our heads. It was like, you know, just regular old family stuff. Regular old family.... It was funny. It was fun. We had a good time. You know.... It was always.... I remember one year we a... my parents, you know – they didn't have a lot of money – so for Christmas they bought us a Sears delivery truck and bought them a fire truck. It was two kids to a thing. So what were we going to do with these trucks? So we played smash up derby. We smashed them into each other. And then Wynton and I instinctively looked at each other and we faked throwing ours and they threw theirs out and as it got slower and slower, we pushed ours as hard as we could and the shit just exploded into a thousand pieces. And they cried. We got in trouble. But my mother said, you know, "You break 'em on the first damn day." Trucks? What are we going to do with these things? There is nothing else to do. "Ok, I'm delivering the package now." I mean did she not know her own children? How many boys.... I don't even know if I wanna know boys who are gonna say, "Wow, a delivery truck. Here's your package, ma'am." At five, OK great. Man we just broke the shit, you know. So we have all these kind of, you know, silly stories. That was the great thing about.... We did a family concert a few years ago. And, we were all kind of sick of them, you know, family concerts. Because of, you know, American audiences have this bizarre obsession with families. It doesn't have to be good. You just have to have five people in the same family standing on the stage. "That was amazing. It was so amazing." So, how we gonna make this shit interesting? Everybody had their ideas and Wynton said, "Man we need to just get up and tell stories about what it was like living in that house." [And] Wynton was flying in from somewhere. I was flying in from somewhere. Ellis drove, because he was living in Baltimore. Delfeayo flew up. And we sat in this bar and closed down the bar. We the only people in it. Telling these stories about the family and writing them down. "Wait, what about this one? What about this one?" And then you start thinking, we really had some silly stuff going on. Really, it was a lot of fun. A lot of fun in that family. A lot of craziness, but a lot of fun, too. That was good. That was good.

AB: Was it creative competition?

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BM: Naw.

AB: No. What about between you and Wynton?

BM: Man, I play trumpet...saxophone, clarinet. He play trumpet. What's the competition? I was a good football player. He was a good basketball player. We competed a lot, but when we played football, we played on the same team. We didn't play on opposite teams. So, naw, not really. And, I was always bigger than him. He was a real skinny dude. So it wasn't like I'd just beat on him. It wasn't nothing there. You know... Our personalities, it's much like when we play music, they complemented one another. Cause he was always, you know, he had that little guy's complex, shouting and running his mouth and talking and I would just be the one cooling the shit down. Except this one time he picked on a good dude like six-five. Why would you pick on a dude that big skinny as your ass is? The guy was a basketball player in high school and he walked in front of us in the line. Wynton said, "Hey man, you don't fucking walk in front of people in the line. Who the fuck do you think you are?" The guy said, "Yeah, whatever little man." So Wynton's standing there and he says, "Hey man!" And he looks around and he just jumps up and pops the guy in the face. So the guy looks down and he grabs Wynton like this, "Pow! Pow!" And Wynton is looking at me, "Help!" And I'm like, (whistles) "No sir." "Man." After it was over, "You a punk, man. You didn't have my back." I said, "First of all, nobody asked you to punch that big-ass dude in the face. Allright? "It's not fair." I said, "Yeah, it's not fair." But he knew he could take advantage of the situation. "He's way bigger than both of us. Why would you do that? So I'm gonna get my ass kicked too. You feel better? So two of us will get our asses kicked? You shouldn't have hit him. Stupid. What's wrong with you? What is your problem?" That was funny.

AB: Jason's coming up now. He's getting a lot of attention.

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BM: Good.

AB: As far as the family situation, it's kind of interesting that you all chose different instruments.

BM: Well, that was the rule. Two people ain't playing the same instrument. My father....

AB: Oh, really? You all started on piano, no.

BM: No. I started on piano. Wynton's a great piano player, but he didn't start learning piano until he moved to New York. He started writing big band arrangements he wanted around piano, so he learned how to play. Jason doesn't play piano, he plays vibes. Delfeayo doesn't play piano and I don't play piano. But Jason is seventeen years younger than me. So, we didn't really have a relationship growing up. By the time he could walk I was in college. But he just has one of those brains. I remember I took him to my...to Southern, to the homecoming game. He wanted to go. So he gets in the car and he pops in a cassette of the Miles record, *Nefertiti*, and he whistles every solo, every song, every musician. And I was going to talk to him, but I didn't say a word. I said, "Let me see how far this shit goes." Every song. I said, "Good God!" You know? He listens with that kind of specificity. Great....

[End of CD 5]

AB: . . . artist-in-residence doing master classes)

BM: No. Not really.

AB: Well, you can....

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BM: Let's do it.

AB: Ok. So, your original aspiration was to be an educator and, in many ways, you've been able to realize that, not as a historian, but as a musician doing master classes, but, you know, taking on an artist-in-residence, or a prolonged commitment at an institution.

BM: I'm actually an adjunct professor now. I'm not really an artist-in-residence.

AB: Correct. Correct. I'm looking at the various capacities that you've filled in the past. For example, I remember when you were at San Francisco State and now you are adjunct faculty. So, can we talk about your educational philosophy and your experiences. And, ultimately, I'd like to know, because, as an educator myself, I would like to see a different way that this music is taught in the institution. But I'm not being interviewed, so I want to find out what you think about that. (BM interrupts) Sorry, go ahead.

BM: [1:03] There's an article I was just reading about how to practice. And a lot of students the way they practice is they practice things that they are already familiar with and they just hone 'em. And the whole idea...that's not really practicing. You can practice like that for hours and you don't really gain anything from it. So what I try to do when I'm listening to my students is I try to find out, "Well, what are their weaknesses?" And what can I do to make them aware of the fact, make them aware of these weaknesses. And we develop strategies to eliminate 'em. There are not a lot of students who really want to deal with that. And we are in this weird era where they really want you to do is tell them how good they are all the time. But, that ain't me, you know. And, I make them listen to a lot of early music, stuff they don't like.

AB: Stuff they don't like?

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BM: Yeah. They don't like it.

AB: I mean they've heard it and don't like it, or they...?

BM: They don't like the idea of it. They don't want to hear Louis Armstrong. They don't want to hear Fletcher Henderson. They don't. They wanna, you know, play like Wayne. They want to listen to Miles, you know. Play like the guys that are playing right now, that's why they are there, you know. Jazz is kinda like a catch-all at a lot of these places. You know that was a thing I noticed even at a place like State, at San Francisco State, was that, under the auspices of jazz, there was just all kind of stuff going on there, you know. Just falls into the jazz category. Jazz is like a catch-all word in a lot of these places. So, Andrew Speight is great. And I really like what he has been able to do with the program. But again, it's hard to find people who actually want to play this music. It's really hard, so you get guys who want to take a class here, you know? Like I remember one student and I was talking about jazz and he said, "Well, let me talk to you about jazz from an Egyptian perspective." He was an Egyptian kid. Jazz - from an Egyptian perspective? Boy, now that's some California shit there! And I was like.... And he was just running his mouth, talking, doing anything he can to avoid learning a Max Roach solo. And that's when you're supposed to say, "Yes, well that's really great and everything is always equal and its about learning and...." I heard one of the other teachers doing it, and I was like, "Look, man, you know.... You want me to talk to you about Om Kalsoum from an American perspective?" And it surprised him. He said, "Yeah, I listen to Egyptian music." I said, "That ain't gonna wash here. You know, either you gonna learn the music, or you ain't gonna learn the music. Maybe you got away with that last year, but it ain't flying here." He just transferred out of the class, that's all. 'Cause he didn't want to learn it. He was happy to sit in school, didn't know what he wanted to do with himself. It's his parent's money and, you know.... Jazz was just unspecific enough for him to kind of skate through it. I saw that at Michigan State, you know. I saw it in a lot of places. It's the same thing that goes on at my school. We put the clamps on these guys. They

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exploit loopholes, so we just close the loopholes. And it's just one of these things where I don't know why these guys even wanna.... If they don't wanna play it, I don't know why...what's the romance of studying jazz, other than – I don't know. They don't want to play jazz. They don't want to play it. Why do they do this? All we need are two or three. We don't need a lot. We'll find 'em. They show up every now and then. They show up.

AB: So your position is adjunct faculty. What courses do you offer and how large is your load? Are you on a semester, or on a term system?

BM: I teach private lessons. That's mostly what I do. I teach private lessons. I make them listen to music. I don't teach classes.

AB: You don't do lectures?

BM: Shit, I...for what? It's just.... There're people who make a lot of money doing that, but it's not...doesn't help. They need to listen to the music. Me running my mouth, it's not gonna help them listen to the music, you know. That's my whole thing. "Ya'll need to listen to the music." And sitting them in a class, like a survey of jazz class, playing it once, we have to develop a template to force them to listen to the music and make it affect their grades. Because in a survey of jazz class, I mean.... I think we were going to try it at San Francisco State where you...one of the things you can do to make them listen to it is you play them an example of Duke Ellington's music and then all the people that you play examples of on the test you play other songs by those people. So then they can't just have their rote memorization thing. They have to learn.... They have to learn it stylistically. But then, of course, you do that and it cuts the class load in half. Then the school calls and says, "Hey, wait a minute now, you know. You can't have a class, like you know, we got kids like leaving this class. The basketball team used to take Survey of Jazz all the time, and they just quit. What's going on?" You know, so you gotta negotiate all those things. So, I would rather just

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stay away from that part of it completely and just deal with the music students. And the kids who want to teach school are more important to me than the students who want to play, because.... I think I might have said this yesterday, too. It's really amazing and really unfortunate that basically every kid that comes to the class from these small towns in Carolina has never heard a jazz record, or a classical record. Never heard one. So what I wanna do is get them to the point where one day they are teaching in these schools and they have a really talented student and they say, "Here, check this out." So the kid can say, "Yeah, you know I heard this once. My teacher played something from it." See, that's where the progress comes. When you get these kids with the natural ability and expose them to the music early so they don't go through the culture shock of thinking they are really amazing players because they can play, you know, a couple of Kurt Wallum solos. And then they hear Coltrane and they're like, "I quit." (laughs) So, that would be progress. That's the goal. That's the goal to train them in a way that basketball coaches train guys who are not going to go to the NBA. But they are not absolved of going to practice. They are not allowed to just underachieve, because they are not going to be pro basketball players. The sports programs are run the way the music programs should be run. But then they start saying, "We are not a conservatory. These kids aren't going to be pros, but they are going to be teaching students. They should be pros. I'd rather take lessons from a failed pro than a person who has no pro experience at all and has never been trained as a pro. And that's kinda where we are. Where, you know, you have teachers who are accredited, but who are clearly not qualified. So, I wanna make qualified teachers. That's why I teach the way that I teach.

AB: When you have a student who shows great promise....

BM: It hasn't happened yet. (laughter) So I don't fucking know.

AB: Sounds like Justin had it, but he wasn't your student.

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BM: He wasn't my student.

AB: Right.

BM: But that would have been the guy. I wouldn't teach him anything. I'd do the same thing I did with him. When he joined the band he was eighteen years old and he had extraordinary ability and didn't know any music. So I gave him my twenty CDs. Revis gave him his twenty CDs. Joey gave him his twenty CDs. And we said, "Go get it." It took him two years. He got it. Changed his playing.

AB: What was among the twenty CDs you gave him?

BM: Bootleg...a recording that Jo Jones did where...it's a stupid recording, but it's gold for drummers. He did a trio with the drums louder than any other instrument in the group. Sounds like shit as a record, but it's gold for drummers because you can hear everything he is doing. How he works the brushes, the snare drum. How he works within the band. Just all of this stuff. That's a great record. You know, Billy Higgins records with Ornette. I didn't even bother with the Tony Williams stuff, because I knew he had that. He listened to Sonny Greer with Duke Ellington. He listened to Vernel Fournier with a.... That's where we kinda overlap cause he, Joey, me, and Revis all said, "You gotta check out Ahmad's trio records." It was all about group play. Not about flash and calling attention to yourself, but guys who play well in the function – in the group. And, he went to work. He had questions. I sent him some New Orleans stuff, too. So, some Paul Barbarin so he could learn that, you know. So, it was a lot of stuff like that. Classical music, I'd give him Shostakovich seven. There's a great snare drum part in the first movement. Some madrigal stuff. Just music. And then he started buying music on his own. He started listening to Hildegard von Bingen. He just...I said, "You listening to Hildegard?" He said, "Man, the shit's beautiful." He just did it. He just

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did it on his own. Things come up and I'd say, "I gotta send you this record." So it's a constant thing. He'll send me stuff. I'll send him stuff. Joey sent him stuff. You know, it's just one of those things. Just a constant process. Joey's trying to get him to play a different way behind him. I don't know why. Joey's just crazy that way.

AB: Let's talk about Joey then.

BM: He's crazy. (AB laughs.) He's crazy.

AB: How did Joey get in the band?

BM: There was only one other piano player in New York who played with sound. Who could project on the instrument and who could play modern musical ideas. It was him. He was the only one. So, when Kenny died just about everybody said, "Well, I guess Joey's joining the band?" That was the thing. I said, "Yep. If he wants to, he'll be the guy." Because a lot of the other piano players, they're specialists from an era, or a style, or they work on their own style. So, when you play songs that are counter to what they do, they don't have anything to do with that. They can't problem-solve. They just kinda resort back to what it is they already do. They've already established their personality. They're not open. Especially a lot of the tunes that I write, it's kinda about problem-solving. They just show up and I write 'em and it's just, you know, "Figure it out, guys. Make it good." And I'm not gonna say nothing unless I feel I have to. Generally, I won't say nothing. "Figure it out. Make it sound good."

AB: Now, does any of your pedagogy that you used with your students, did you get any of that...was your experience at Berklee have any influence on that?

BM: "Nope."

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AB: What was your experience at Berkeley, other than we knew about your roommates and, you know, the extra non-classroom things?

BM: Pierce told me to listen to Impulse Trane. Ed Tomassi told me I needed to check out some Bird. Orville Wright had a calypso class that was great. A lot of the P rooms...practice...the E rooms, the ensemble rooms, a lot of jam sessions at night with the guys. A lot of records being exchanged. A lot of information. Smitty was great, with his recordings. Tain had recordings. And Don Alico – it was... that was the great stuff.

AB: That was more of the peer interaction, rather than instruction coming...

BM: The peer interaction.... I mean, I had a good arranging teacher, so Andy Jaffe taught me a lot of stuff about arranging, but music is about hearing. It just is. Music is about hearing. Who goes to baseball school? You know what I mean? It's about playing. And when you go to the minor leagues, then that's your school and they teach you things. "Kid, you gotta learn how to hit a curve ball." This is how you do it. You know, like they don't have instruction, they say, "Son, you couldn't play, you know, you couldn't carry a tune in a bucket. This is how you do it. You couldn't swing if you were hanging. You gotta deal with this." They don't...it's not practical problem-solving. Like I got a kid coming in and he just didn't understand anything about the culture of the music. So I'm gonna get him to play in a church band. I tried that in San Francisco, the guy said, "Well, man, you know, I'm not a Christian." I said, "I'm not asking you to be a Christian. I'm asking you to play in the band." "I'm not going over there playing in that band. I might get mugged." You know. It's that kinda thing. This was at State. You know where the school is. There's a church right across the freeway. You need to play in that church.... "I'm not going over there." "Just go sit there and listen to the music." "I'm not going over there." They don't really want to play jazz.

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AB: When you say “the culture of this music,” could you expound on what you mean by that?

BM: I mean the culture of jazz is rooted in the black music tradition. The guys who play it best, they played in the church and they played R ‘n B. Every one of the guys I talked to played in R ‘n B bands. Every one of those old guys played in R ‘n B bands. Buddy Rich played in R ‘n B band. So, it’s culture. You know the reason I don’t even bring up color anymore...of course, I lived in America, so I was inundated in color consciousness. But I was listening to.... I was actually a part of the BBC – it’s funny they do stuff on American culture better than us – they did a thing on the story of black bands, black college marching bands. That was like the BBC? They don’t even have marching bands in England, but they’re doing this thing. So they interviewed me because I went to Southern and I heard the show and the guy found this one white kid who played in Texas Southern’s band in Houston. And this is where race comes up. He’s obsessed, like, “How does it feel to be the only white guy in a all-black band?” And the guy says, “Well, this is the music I was at a parade with my mom and I saw this band come through. And when I was ten years old I said, ‘I wanna play in this band and I love this style of music.’” And English people are funny, when you don’t give them the answer they want they say, “Well, fair enough, but....” So the guy says, “Fair enough, but how does it feel to be the only white guy in an all-black band?” How do you answer a question like that? So, the kid pauses and brilliantly says, “Hey man, this really ain’t about color, it’s about culture.” I almost ran off the road when I heard that, because he encapsulated in five words exactly what I have never been able to properly articulate when I talk about jazz, or anything else. Cause then it just devolves into a race conversation, you know. And that ain’t what it is. That ain’t what it is, you know. “Well black guys swing more than white guys.” Well, if the black guy grew up in Sweden, he ain’t swinging. So it ain’t got nothing to do with that. So this is a stupid conversation. And once I said, “You know what? If the shit was really about blackness, then the Sudanese would be the swingiest motherfuckers on the planet, because there are few who are blacker than them. That’s not

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what it is. But I couldn't articulate it. And this kid, whoever he was, that's what it is. It's about a culture. It's about culture. And now we have, you know, a handful of black kids who grew up in parts of California that play jazz, and they... swing is completely foreign to them. They live in secular communities and they don't.... That was kinda... 'cause my dad, he's old school, he grew up in segregation, it was about color. So when these guys came on and I heard this record I said, "Here's a present for you man. Put that on." I win this argument. He puts it on. He went, "Damn. That guy's a brother?" I said, "Culture, baby. End of conversation. Moving on." So, yeah, it's culture. You got kids playing jazz.... There is something in black music that makes some white people afraid of it. I don't know what that thing is. I wish I could. Either they don't understand it, or they are afraid of it. I had a student from the upper peninsula in Michigan, which is exceedingly white, culturally and racially. And I was playing some Son House for her, and she literally became physically uncomfortable. She said, "You have to stop playing this music." I said, "Why?" She said, "I don't know. It just makes me feel...I can't explain what it is, but it, it really makes me uncomfortable and you have to turn this off." That had never occurred to me before.

AB: How old was this person?

BM: College kid. I went, "Wow!" Cause, you know, as a black person, you know.... "Aw, they just don't like black people. They don't like this. It never occurred to me that there are sounds in black music that can make people culturally uncomfortable. I went, "Damn!" So, then, I went to Holland after that to the North Sea Jazz Festival and Elton John's band was playing. So I went to hear.... I mean Elton - Dr. John's band was playing, so I went to hear Doc. And he was playing songs like "Right Place at the Wrong Time." So as long as the beat was like this, (sounds off back-beat), the whole audience was grooving. And then he says, "We gonna play one of them stinky-ass New Orleans grooves for ya'll." The drummer went, (sounds off New Orleans beat), the whole audience was like this. (behavior demonstrated here, w/ AB laughing) It just went right over their heads. So I'm watching it going, "It's

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cultural.” And I’m watching it! And Dr. John is a white man! With his fonky-stink black ass. But, you know....

AB: He came up in that culture.

BM: ...came up in that culture. And, when you hear him talk it’s like, “Yeah, bruh, what’s happening?” I mean, he came up in-that-culture. So, the whole...the thing that I see, is that, sometimes it’s racial, sometimes it’s fear, sometimes it’s intimidation, discomfort, whatever you want to call it. But the discussion of culture and the importance of black culture, in general, is just dismissed, ignored. I have one friend of mine who went to school in Canada and he’s taking a jazz class and the teacher says like, “The dominant...the diminished chord has been used in jazz for the last forty-five years by the likes of Bill Evans and somebody else.” And the kid says, “And Duke Ellington.” The teacher says, “Well, if they used it, then it was an accident.” Something to that effect. I’m completely paraphrasing. But if “they” – it’s clear who the “they” was. So, some of it is that. And you’ll find that in Europe, it’s just that they have it more.... Joey went to teach at a Master class in Europe somewhere and they said, “Who do you listen to?” He said, “Bill Evans, Keith Jarrett, Brad Mehldau and you.” He said, “Why ya’ll afraid to listen to black people?” And, of course, the hackles come up, because, you know, in Europe, of course there’s no racism in Europe. We’ll just forget the fact that the white people here are descendants of Europeans. They just...they became Americans as soon as they crossed the water and, along the way racism just creeped in. But it was fine in Europe. Of course it was. “We’re not racist.” Naw, of course not. So, you know, Joey says this and it upsets a lot of people. It’s like this thing, I don’t get it personally. I just personally...I feel fortunate that I don’t get it. I don’t get it. I wanna play jazz, but I only wanna listen to white dudes. You know I was in Detroit, a black woman was writing an article and she comes to me and she says, “The question she has is ‘Why does the Detroit Symphony not play more pieces by great black composers?’” I said, “I think two major reasons. Well, maybe a bunch of major reasons. Let me see, you have Mozart and

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Beethoven, Shostakovich and Mahler and Prokofiev.” And I just started naming all these names and I said, “I have no idea why they don’t play, what do you think it is?” She was so stupid. I said, “Well, let me help you with this. Allright, classical music is European music—first of all. It’s European music. We don’t have any great black composers yet. We have composers who happen to be black. Let’s take...we don’t have any classical versions of Romare Bearden, who...that the painting is so good that his color is irrelevant. It’s painting. We just don’t have them. I don’t know why. They just haven’t shown up yet.” So the idea that the Detroit Symphony is supposed to just start filling out...like, programs. You know, you can’t...you know, you can’t put Mozart, Coleridge Taylor Perkinson. It doesn’t work. You can’t juxtapose those two. And she was like, “Thank you. Thank you.” But on the jazz side, that shit is completely encouraged, it’s propagated. Like the whole discussion, you know. “Let’s talk about great white jazz artists.” What the fuck is that? Either you can play jazz, or you can’t play jazz. To my ear, either you can play, or you can’t play, you know. But it’s like this kinda thing that just sits there and everybody don’t talk about it. They talk around it. And they talk all this shit, but you know. I remember when we had Kenny...the band with Kenny and ‘em and the whole thing was about, “Well, those black guys.” So now I got a white boy in the band. So what you gonna say now? Well, he’s not really white anymore. (laughs) You know what I mean? It’s like.... It was funny, because he joined the band and these guys would come to the band and there’s this thing they do with white bands. They yell out the names of the guys. “Joey, man, Joey.” You know...”Breckler, man.” They’re screaming at the concerts. Shut up and fucking listen to the music. So they would come to the gigs. “Oh, there go your boy friends again.” We would make jokes about it. But his playing, as he played with the band, and started listening to recordings, made this shift, and it ceased to be like shredding, lick-oriented, and it became more melodic. And he said, “What are those guys gonna say now?” I said, “Aw, they just gonna stop coming to the gigs, ‘cause you don’t play like that anymore.” Which is basically what happened, they just don’t come to the gigs anymore, you know. They have a camp and they stay in their little camp. And I just, as a person.... I wouldn’t pick a subset of football players to emulate. I wouldn’t

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do that. If I was good enough to be a quarterback, I wouldn't say, "Well, I'm only going to look at the black quarterbacks. "Y. A. Tittle, Well, fuck him. He was good in his day, but you know. Yeah, John Brody, he was pretty...he was ok, you know, yeah. John Elway, yeah, he was alright, but I don't need to check his shit out, because he ain't my...you know?" And this is what goes on everyday in these schools. Not my problem. It's just an observation. I'm not even incensed by it, because they are just doing a disservice to themselves; they're doing a disservice to the musicians. New York is full of mediocre-ass jazz musicians, who can play only the style of music they play. Revis just got accosted by some of them at Smoke, at this club. They surrounded him. Their basic premise was, "New York is full of great musicians who don't get to be heard. Like there's a conspiracy. (laughs)" "You guys are lucky." "Luck? Really? What are you gonna do? It makes 'em feel better at night I guess. You know what would really make them feel better if they just looked in the mirror and said, "I need to learn some music." But they are not going to do that. So, this is where we are. Banal discussions about European jazz. That shit is banal. That's the stupidest damn conversation ever – European jazz! You know and the premise is well, you know "America has it's folk music and in Europe we have our folk music, so now we're just gonna play jazz based on our folk tunes." That's what classical music is, sir. One of the highest levels of music based on your folk traditions. The jazz tradition...jazz is based on American folk music. So now you're just gonna change the definition so you can feel good about yourself. "OK. Well, you know, there is no need for you to get hostile." I said, "Man look, I'm still working. Ya'll ain't taking my jobs. I come to Europe every year. I play my concerts. I'm not threatened by any of this. It's just that the dishonesty of it is just astounding. This shit is just colonialism all over again. OK. Suit yourself. What can you do? I mean, you know, if they really want to believe that shit. There's a book this guy wrote, *Is Jazz Dead or Has It Moved to Another Location?* And his thing is Norway, Oslo, is the center of jazz now. The whitest city in Europe. Oslo, not London, not Paris, 'cause it's probably tainted by those Africans. Oslo is now the center of jazz. OK. (laughs) What can you say? The shit is so absurd. "Alright man, great. Great." They have an interview of me on You Tube saying, "Look man, they sound

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great. As long as I don't sound like them, they are fantastic. It's great. It's the best thing I ever heard. But please, if I ever sound like that, shoot me." And I said this thing, I said, "I went to a Michael Brecker concert once and he got seven ovations in eleven songs." I said, "Would they stand up seven times if they heard Trane's band?" So, of course, they wrote, in the comments, "Why you disrespecting Michael Brecker?" I said, "I wasn't. I was disrespecting the audience. (laughs) This wasn't a discussion about Michael Brecker. 'Cause, you know, "Who's better Michael Brecker or Coltrane?" deserves no discussion. That's not...that's not the discussion. The discussion is that, what would make people who are coming to hear some music give seven standing ovations? Not at the end of the show, during the show. It's fascinating. But one thing that's clear is that most of the people in the audience are saxophone players. What is it exactly that they are celebrating? And, for me, I feel it's just that they like music when they know what it is, because they can delude themselves into thinking it could be them one day. I like music when I don't know what it is, cause I gotta get to work and maybe - maybe one day I'll be able to scratch the surface of that. But I know how long it takes the other way around. I mean turning around and trying to play like Sonny Rollins was very frustrating and it took a long time. And these guys are on an accelerated program. They wanna live in a big-ass house by the time they're thirty. They don't have time to do this kind of work. You know, they ain't got no time to be studying some shit for eight years. Man, fuck that. I mean, what about my voice? What about my thing? It's like a whole mind set that you kinda see. So, you know, I stand by it. I stand by it and I'm still studying, still working and will do so. And that's one of the reasons that our records don't sound boring is that we're all striving. We're not done. Damn. We're not done. You know, we're not done. I got shit to do. So, we'll keep doing it.

AB: Now when we came yesterday, you were rehearsing for your upcoming recital. Do you have a daily regimen, as far as your practice? What is that?

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BM: Practicing. Playing these pieces. And when you get to the parts of the pieces that are really difficult, you stop and you turn them into little etudes and you play them over and over, and over and over again. And how it helps in jazz is that many times in the past when I had...my imagination will conjure up a melodic idea that I knew technically I couldn't approach, so I wouldn't even.... I would steer clear of it. And, as my technique started to improve, umm.... I mean, for the tenor saxophone, I could have really great technique right now. All I have to do is go to a smaller mouthpiece, and a smaller reed, and my hands would fly on the horn. But I'm not willing to give up the sound that I have on the instrument to play faster. So it just means that I have to practice more and more consistently in order to get facility the way that Sonny Rollins did, where you can play that fast. 'Cause the...but, much, you know.... I just did it playing classical music I been playing on a size five reed for ten years and I switched to a four two weeks ago. Swish, shwhoooo, flying. It works, I mean that's why guys play with smaller mouthpieces. They wanna get there with the least amount of work and they are willing to sacrifice tone for velocity. I just don't...can't do it. In another ten years I'll have to do it, cause I'll just be too old to play like that. But, for now, I'm not giving up my tone. To play faster, hell no. No. There's no reward in that. New York is full of guys that can play fast. Full. There's millions of them now. I don't wanna be.... I wanna be in the short line. I don't wanna be in the long line. I'm good.

AB: So when you are not practicing specific repertoire pieces, or specific pieces....

BM: I'm always practicing specific repertoire pieces. I'm always practicing them. Even when I'm not.... Like I'm playing the Creston Sonata. I've never played the Creston, ever. But I've been practicing it for years. I always play these pieces, because they are the things.... I mean, jazz is very personal. You know like Miles Davis, like Round Midnight, the changes kicked his ass, so he changed the changes. And now everybody plays Miles' version and not Monk's version. You can't do that. You can't fuck with Beethoven's music like that. You can't change it to suit your personal taste. And that's the beauty of it. You have to tackle it and

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deal with it as it is. And that's why I continue to practice and find pieces that just kinda tear me up, because I'm not allowed to rest in my comfort zone. When jazz, you know.... One of the great things about it is a...it allows you to change the songs to match your personality. But that's also the thing that's bad about it. Because it promotes laziness in a way, because you can just avoid dealing with things that don't suit you well. Can't play ballads well, rush through the melody get to a two-feel, rip. You know, classical music, when its an adagio, you can't go to a two-field. It's a fucking adagio, you gotta play it. And I think that's the thing that's great about it. That I'm put in a situation where I'm forced to deal with my technical inadequacies. And sometimes my musical inadequacies. I'm forced to deal with them, because I can't escape them. But in jazz you can escape 'em. You just can avoid it. And you can hide it under "This is my personal voice" card. Everybody say, "Yeah, it's great, man. It's really individual. It's really original." They just hear what they wanna hear. You know, and they don't hear.... [My stomach. I guess I'm hungry.] They don't hear what I'm hearing. So, you know, that's the thing that's great about.... So I'm always playing these pieces when I practice. Because the idea of just walking around the house playing a solo on "Cherokee" just doesn't appeal to me. Or anything. It just doesn't.... And I could.... There are a couple of songs where I would definitely benefit from doing that, but I can't bring myself to just start doing it, cause there is something really boring about it. About memorizing little licks and patterns that you know work on tunes and then just throwing them out there when the tune shows up. You know, something about that is just not my thing.

AB: Well I hear your stomach growling, I'm seeing shadows of people approaching.... We're getting towards the end.

BM: It's that time. That's my wife.

AB: We can go ahead and close, because last year when your family received the NEA Award, how did that make you feel?

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BM: Aw, it didn't make a difference to me, to be honest. I'm not a jazz master. I'm fifty-one years old. Still learning how to play. I'm happy for my dad. He was very excited. But the whole thing was kind of humorous, you know. Phil Woods wasn't gonna come in protest. People were talking about it. "Jason Marsalis is not a jazz master." And a couple of people I talked to when I did interviews.... I said, "Well, you know, man this shit is never really about that anyway." I said a.... I think I said it at the interview when they asked me. I said, "My neighbors, 'Congratulations on winning the Jazz Masters Award. Man that's great.' "Oh, where did you hear about it?' 'I saw it on CNN. Oh, I saw it on FOX News. It came in on the little thing at the bottom, the little ticker at the bottom.'" I said, " Do you know who Phil Woods is?" "Naw, who's that." "You know who 'Milt Jackson is?" "Naw." Yeah, they could have played it by the book and just let my dad get it. They got some other people to get it. All the other people that got it. But as soon as you put the family together it gets on the ticker. Now there is a whole bunch of people who have actually heard of the Jazz Masters that have actually never heard of it before. Will it help in the long run? Probably not. Who knows? But it will help a lot more.... It has more potential than what was going on before it. So, this is kinda where the rubber meets the road, you know. You have a bunch of guys who are having a semantic argument about who deserves it, rather than understanding the larger picture of why it was done in the first place. We have budget crunches. The arts are getting hacked everywhere. There was even a rumor that they were going to cut out the jazz masters. So, rather than look at it as something that can be done to actually promote the award and the event to keep it alive, the argument is about whether or not I deserve it, or whether Jason deserves it. Well, shit. "Do you think you deserve it?" "No, I don't." But I understand why they did it. It was a smart move on their part. And I said, "The fact that most musicians can't see that gives you a real clear indication of why jazz is where it is right now. 'Cause, you know, they don't get what it is 'cause they still walking around dealing with perception, you know. How it's perceived and how it looks and who actually deserves it. Shit. Who actually.... How many people actually deserve this shit – really? You

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know, five, ten? Like this is a ridiculous conversation. You know, it's.... So, it was nice. I was happy for my dad. You know it's a great award event. It really does good at Rose Hall. It's great there. Guys play. The Lincoln Center band is killing. It's a good thing. It's a good thing, but you know a lot people just don't understand like earlier, like the whole thing about wearing suits, they don't get it. They don't get the fact that people who want to go out for a night with their woman don't want to see dudes on stage wearing boots, you know. Like, you know, snow boots and a shitty shirt. And it's just amazing that they don't... 'cause my dad's one of those guys. That's the kind of shit he would wear. He'd like wear a suit with some boots on. I'm like, "Dude, c'mon." And he said, "Look man, I ain't nobody's stylist." I said, "Man this shit is business. This ain't nothing to do with style. It's business. It's business. Just telling you." Go to the jazz clubs watch the audience that comes to my show, watch the audience that goes to the other shows. Completely different audience. It's a completely different audience. I mean, I want the audience...my audience. I don't want their audience. (laughs) I want mine. Hey, but I know why they are there. So, you know, like I'm, you know, a jackass would say, "Well, they're there because of me." They are there because of what I represent. I get that. And that's the whole point. You got to represent something. I see those pictures of Charlie Parker wearing a suit. I wanna be like that guy. I don't wanna be out there wearing sneakers and a tee shirt. I just don't wanna, you know.... I don't wanna do it. I don't think it represents the music right. It doesn't represent my music right. You know it just doesn't. As long as guys are understanding that they are kind of marginalizing themselves in one way and they really believe in that, I have no beef with it. But then they start saying, "Well, how come people don't take me serious?" It ain't got nothing to do with the music. The people that come to my concerts, a lot of times they don't even like the music. But it's about what it represents. And I get that and I'm amazed that after all these years they haven't figured this shit out. I'm kinda amazed by it. But, you know, I'm a Jazz Master and, hopefully, in the next twenty years I'll actually learn how to play. Then it'll be given before it's due, but at least it'll be earned.

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AB: Branford Marsalis. (shakes hands]

BM: AB. Thank you.

AB: It's been a pleasure. I glad we had this opportunity for you to document a lot of what is in your heart and in your mind.

BM: Me too, bruh. I appreciate it.

AB: Thank you.

BM: A pleasure. Thanks a lot, dude. Thanks, Ken.

[End]

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