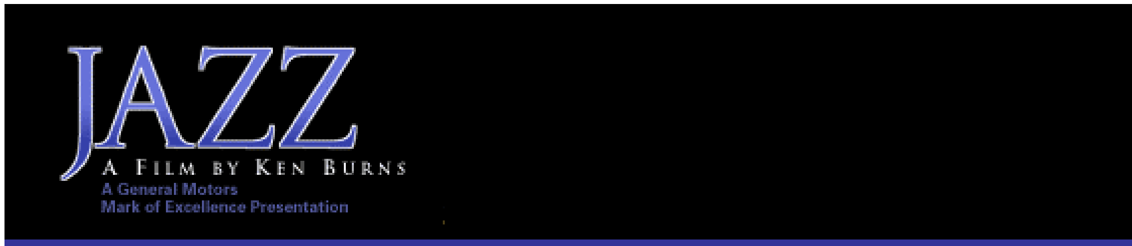

Stanley Crouch

Location: Small's Club
Date: July 1, 1997

Stan, what draws you to jazz?

Oh, I think the thing about jazz that makes it important is that it has all of the ingredients that it could make for the sort of charisma that we associate with America at large. I mean, you have the frontiersmen, you have the, the, the battles through the bush, you have the, the development of new territories, you have people who have problems in one place so they go to another place and when they get in that place, they're able to realize themselves. Like a guy like Lester Young. He had, he was a great talent, but he had to move around and finally when he clicked in to Kansas City, he was like the guy who, that was the place for him.

You have these very mysterious figures who like, say a guy like Miles Davis, who is really, a real middle class guy who becomes entranced by street life and is always kind of see-sawing back and forth between being the, the, an upper class guy who grew up with a, on a, on a, on a, a, family, on a family place in the country that had 2 or 3 hundred acres, where he rode horses and hunted and fished, and you know, the next thing you know, he's playing with Charlie Parker and, on 52nd Street in New York City and he's in the middle of this revolution of style and its addition, that was called the bebop movement.

And then you have guys like Thelonius Monk, who talked and didn't talk. You have these people like Dizzy Gillespie, who's this brilliant intellectual, but who has not a facade, but a personality that is so given to telling jokes and playing around and pranks that a person could really be very easily deceived about what this guy's really capable of. You have a guy like Duke Ellington, who comes from Washington, DC and is from a, a, a middle class background, if you will, who somehow is able to, to, to involve himself with all these people from the street, from high society, who's able to figure out

new ways of writing music. Deal with all these complicated personalities. So, he's kind of like a general. He's kind of like a guy who, like not, not, not like a, a Grant or, or a, or, or, or a Sherman, 'cause they're too crude. You know, their genius is what they do, but they're too crude to describe a guy like him, so...

So, you have all of these different kinds of people then you have these extraordinary female characters who, who, who, who aesthetically realize the pioneer woman side of American life, you know. The Bessie Smith's, the Billie Holiday's, the, the rags-to-riches tale, you know, Ella Fitzgerald, you know, very, very poor and then ends up an international star and invents a, a style of singing. Sarah Vaughan. So you have, so, so, so many things that s..., that to me seem to give jazz the, the aesthetic and, and personal ... realization of the, of America, of, of what we think about it as an American, as, as, as the American story, except it's played out in an, in an aesthetic arena.

You say, you wrote that jazz is about slaying the dragon. My question is, "What critic Stanley Crouch called 'Slayin' the dragon?' "

Oh, well I, I've, I've thought about jazz as, as slaying the dragon because from talking with Albert Murray, he often connected the fairy tale problem of dealing with the dragon as a fundamental part of the story and that the hero has to deal with this monster. And, and, and, in jazz, the, the, the, the dragon is, is the totally disorganized present. See, what, what improvising is about is it's about giving form to the present. See, in, in European concert music, you bring vitality to notes that were written in the past. The same way that an actor would, would, would bring a vitality to a role that had been written in another period. What you have to do, see, when you're on a bandstand playing, there's nothing there. And so, the only form that comes in is the form that comes as a, as a result of the interaction of the people. So, now if the band members are soph..., are successful in relating to each other in the material that they're improvising on, then they destroy the dragon of the chaotic present.

What's your earliest memory of jazz; how old were you; what did you feel...?

Oh, we, I think my earliest memory of jazz was on Central Avenue and, and, and Adams Boulevard, at a, at one of those, hot dog - chili stands, where I remember that there was a recording vibe... Actually, I, I, I, that, no, well that was, that was much later. Let me, let me do this again.

My first memory of jazz was on Adams Boulevard and Central Avenue in Los Angeles, at this little hot-dog stand, where there was a juke box and there was guy - the only guy that I ever saw who had a zoot suit on. And he put some money in this juke box and he played some kind of jazz tune. I don't

remember what the tune was. But I was so busy looking at him, and the sound, that I kind of, they came, they came to be one thing. There was this guy in this odd outfit; I was a little afraid, I was a little boy and I was looking at him, I said, "Why is he, what is that he's got on?" And then there was this music going on. He was ... and he had his chain, he was going ... And so, I said, "Oh, I guess that goes with that." Well of course, later on I found out that it wasn't limited to that.

What is it about the music that draws us all inexorably towards it...?

Well, I think that, I, I think that any art that touches people has to have something that makes you the listener feel as though this is your story. See, in other words, what makes Billie Holiday great is not that when she sings, you go, "Oh, I'm looking at her telling me what happened to her." That's part of the experience, but if she crosses into the real aesthetic arena, she creates a space that, that, that magnetizes you in, and then your experience begins to become part of what you're also hearing, and it, and it, and it makes another kind of sense. So there's something that happens to you; something that was terrible, something that was great, something that was mysterious. Those things are, are, are given a certain kind of meaning and, and, and they have a logic. See, most of your life doesn't have any kind of logic. It's just a sequence of stuff, you know, and you try to make it logical by saying, "OK. Well, I'll get married. I'll have kids. I'll get a job. I'll go to church. I'll buy a suit. I'll buy a car. I'll turn on TV." But see those, that's all fraudulent. See, because inside of that, there is no, there, there is no explicit meaning. The only meaning that ever arrives is what it, what the human connection is to an event. So, so when you hear a great player play, or a great singer sing, then suddenly, that thing that is really not true, logic, appears in human life, and that's why you feel elevated by it.

What is the relationship... There seems to be a relationship between jazz and this country - democracy...?

Well, I think that the, the, the big, the, the real connection between jazz and democracy, as democracy works in the United States through the social contract, is that American democracy is based on the fact that you are, are, are able to constantly re-assess what happens, and re-assess what you thought about something. And fi..., and, and if you, and if you decide, that is you, the public, decide that well, women not having the vote, seemed like a good idea at the time, but it wasn't a good idea, so we give 'em the vote. Slavery, everybody had a good time who had slaves, or they said they did. And they said the slaves had a good time, too. But, on close examination, we feel that, we feel that wasn't good. Child, you know, child labor... etcetera, etcetera.

So, you, so, what happens on a bandstand is that you have tune and the guys say today, "Well, I played this before. That didn't sound good." So,

what happens is you, you, you have this collective situation in which people modify their relationship to something and to each other. And by a kind of a, a, by, by, by, by a, by a, a an agreement that we call the groove, you re-assess and bring into life the policy that fits the song at that time. See, the groove is the moment that everybody plays right, when you, when, when you going someplace you say, "Well, they're in a groove." What that means is nobody's making a mistake. Now that means something has happened. Now, the piano could have started it, the bass player could have started it, the horn player could have started it, the drummer could have started it. But something happens and everybody begins to say, "This is the way we got to go."

So has America ever been in the groove?

Well, America, like, America like, like jazz bands, goes in and out of grooves. I mean, see, most bands don't sound as, don't sound superb every night. What you hope for is to sound good. And then, and then, if you're if you're sufficiently talented and you have the right people, you may sound great every couple weeks or so. For 2 or 3 nights. But, the audience doesn't come to hear you be uninspired so, you have to figure out a way to sound good as much as you can. Which is the same thing that anybody else does, I mean, you know, you go in court and the judge is sitting there. You can tell he's having a worse day than the defendant, you know? But he's got to … And so, that's what everybody has to do, and I think that that's why the music has a certain very close relationship to the constant adjustments that we make in our, in our country.

The man and the instrument and how this is so expressive of the 20th century...?

Well, I think that the, I, I think that the relationship between the musician and the instrument is a, an idealized, at its best, it's an, it's, it's a, a perfect symbol of the relationship of human beings to, to technology. See, a lot, see, in, in modern life, the question is: can we take our machinery and have the same relationship to it that Charlie Parker had to the alto saxophone. Then if you have that kind of relationship to, he had to the alto saxophone, or that Coleman Hawkins had to the tenor, or Art Tatum had to the piano, or Charles Mingus had to bass, or Max Roach has to the drums, then that's symbolic of the fact that we don't, we don't have to be overshadowed by the machinery. And if the machinery, however intricate it might be, can truly be expressive of the human soul. See, I, that, that's what our, our fundamental concern is, in, in, in civilization, is, is how much of the human soul can make itself manifest in the things that we come in contact with.

Does jazz lead the way? Is jazz about ... a cipher, or message...?

Well, I think that, you know, jazz music is a lot, is, is a lot like American film in that it's, it's collective, you know, in the early days of film, sometimes the director would come with just a little sketch and they would improvise the story. The, the, the, the cameraman, the light, the, the person who handles the light, the person who handles the sound, all of those people were connected in the same that a rhythm section of bass drums and piano, and horns are related. The, the, the interplay that we get between the individual and the ensemble to me is much like the cross-cutting in film, from the, from the close-up to other kind kinds of scenes, so that the close-up in film is like the fea..., the solo feature in a, in a, in a band. Except that rarely do we have people in film who have as great a command of their faces, say, as these, as these musicians have of their instruments. So, I think that there is a, is a relationship that the music has to the society, but also to, to, to every element and that has become important in American life. I mean, from, from our ... our governmental system, to baseball, basket..., to, to sports, to film, and so it, so, so I, I think that's the thing that people feel in it, when they hear the music, both in the country and out of the country, is that all of those other things that they think about it, as American, they, they, they sense that they're in the sound of the music.

But also at the center of American jazz ... is this thing about race. What does jazz tell us about race?

Oh, well, I think that the, see, see the, see the, the, the one thing, see, what, what, what we see in basketball, we saw in jazz a long time ago. See, today, white people are totally at ease with worshipping Michael Jordan, which they might not have been in 1900, but now, white jazz musicians were completely at ease with worshipping Louis Armstrong in 1925, so that was no big deal to them. If you'd have walked to a white guy who played an instrument, when he heard Louis Armstrong play, Jack Teagarden, I mean, he's the, you know, he's a German-American, you know, Texas redneck but who grew up next to a black church and that's, you know, he could swing, too, cause he's the, he's the, he's ... list that(?). And see, when he describes Louis Armstrong, he talks about Louis Armstrong the way you would imagine a, a, a young sculptor would have described Michaelangelo working on David: "Gee whiz! Now, this is what this is."

So, I think that that, so, I think that as a..., there's a forerunning element to the, the, the destruction of the, the ideas about limitation and the racist ideas about black people, I think were broken down in the jazz world, and in the relationship of black people to white people in the jazz world. So, I think that in that way, it did, it, it was a forerunner of a number of things that we see now.

Where was jazz born?

Well, I mean, New Orleans people say it was born in New Orleans, but, of course, people from New York say that's not true. And, there're people from the Midwest who say, "Well, you know, we heard people playing jazz before those guys came up here from, from New Orleans. So, what I imagine is that in many different places, a number of the elements that came out of the, the, the folk music, out of the spirituals, and it, and it, and it found its way into blues situations, and into secular entertainments of one sort or another that used instruments, may have been thought of by a number of people as jazz, even if it wasn't. But now, we do know that Buddy Bolden was one of the first guys to really begin to figure certain kinds of things out, in New Orleans. See, one of the things he figured out was that he, he figured out how, the, that the, how the strings should work in the jazz band. See, he was one of the first pe..., he may have been the first guy that really figured that out. And also, he, he, he, he discovered the importance of surprising the audience by improvising. So, there were a lot of people would go to him to, to see what he was going to do. You know, it's kind of like, you know, ... it's almost like a magician, you see him as, like a ... if a magician comes in a circus, you know, if, if he's on a circuit, then you say, "Well, what's he going to do this time? What's, what's the trick going to be this time?" And so, I, I, and so I think that, that was part of it but it'd be, but, so he would insert these little things that he invented that weren't on the paper, and people'd go, "Oh, gee! Wow!" And, so, I think that, I, I think that probably the central elements came out of New Orleans. And other parts came in other places. But I think the central thing came out of New, out of New Orleans.

As we're watching the evolution, what is it about the stuff that is jazz from the stuff that isn't? What has it got…?

Oh, well, I think that what, I think that ..... I, I think that what makes jazz jazz, the music that it is, is a body of things. One of 'em, one of 'em is, is, is the, is the feeling of, of, of the rhythm, is the swing. See, I mean, well, for instance when you hear Jelly Roll Morton singing "Stars and Stripes Forever," and he's, I think the way he did it was something like, he says that they, instead of saying: "Doo dee dah doo dee dah doo dee..." he said they said, "Ep poo doo boo do bo dooden dit doo dee...Eh boo boo Bee boo bah - Doo dee doo dee - Dah doo dee" and that's it. That's it. When you hear that, you know what that is. Plus, see, the other thing about is is that see, it's the, it's like see, every group of people has figured out something that makes, that, that, that defangs the wolf at the door, as it were, you know, the Irish had their way of doing it, the Russians do it another way, the Chinese do it their way, Jews got their way of doing it. See, that Negro though, there's something about the idea that, well, here we are. What choice do we have? Well, we can sit up and say, "Boy this white folks sure is doin' some terrible to us today." Or we can say, "Ep poo deh boo dooden deh boo dooden dit doo dee..." you know, you do, you got, you got a choice and, see I think that that was also part of what the appeal was, you know, because some people

said, “Well, now wait a minute... That’s ...” I, I would imagine if I was a white guy in 1930, right?, and I heard Louis Armstrong playing I’d know he was on to something, ‘cause I would know what we were doing to them. You know what I mean, it’d be like, you know, I mean, I’d say, “Now wait a minute. Now if they can have this much fun, see, ‘cause we got our foot pushed up their rectum. Now I know they’ve figured something out. We need to get some of that.” You know what I mean? You know what I’m saying? So, I think that that’s part of it, too. See, what then, when somebody doesn’t see the person, right?, when somebody is a white kid in Seattle, listening to a broadcast, who doesn’t even know who Louis Armstrong is, then that’s the other thing. See, then that’s the part that, then that’s when the achievement in a certain way arrives on, on a human and spiritual level, where, where a number of the things that we think about don’t even, don’t even enter. See, the little white boy with his, under, under the, under the, under the, the, the, the b..., the bed, the bedclothing... Is that what they call it? Yeah. The sheets, they had sheets, blankets with the radio, listening to those broadcasts of Louis Armstrong or whomever he’s listening to. Or his, or, or his sister said, “I got the radio tonight! You can’t, you can’t have the radio tonight! I’m going to listen to the broadcast.” “No, you can’t listen...!” And then the parents come in and say, “What are you all arguing about?” “Oh... blah, blah... She got my ball.” “You all stop making that, stop making that noise.” Then they go out. “I got the radio!” “Alright, OK. Both of us’ll get under there and we both try to listen to it.”

Now see, when, when that’s going on, then we’re into that other dimension, it seems to me, where the, the, the, the American technology provides a certain kind of liberating relationship between people.

So, most Americans who listen under their pillows say, “Well I think about American history, I think about the Negro as being marginalized”…?

Well, yeah but you also have to remember that see, when you talk about jazz and freedom, you also have to remember that see, everybody in the United States was looking for that. See, Daniel Boone was looking for that. I mean, he didn’t like being around a lot of people, so that’s why he kept going west. I mean, the people who ended up in the mid-west, they were trying to get away from the east. To people left the mid-west, and went to the west; they were trying to get away from the mid-west. And so, you always have to, see, you always have to remember that, that, the idea of finding a place where you can be yourself, and where you feel comfortable in whatever the community is, that you think that your family is safe, that you think that, that, that your dreams may have some possibility of being realized, that’s the American story regardless of what color the person is. So, all we get, really from the Negro, is just an intensification of the central ethos of the society. I mean, you know, I mean, how many stories have we seen with no black people in it where the white boy is talking to the white girl, and she says, “Well, Bob, what’s, what’s wrong?” He says, “I just don’t feel right

here, Clara. I just don't feel right. I can't be myself. I have to go somewhere; I have to get my own place. I want to do things. I want to get up in the morning. I want to be able to look out ... it's not here." And she says, "Bob, wherever you want to go, I'll go with you." So there you have, you know, the pioneer couple. Now, the pioneer couple is always in the story. Now, the thing I'm saying is, is that, w..., so that, so that whenever a person comes in contact with the kind of genius that a Louis Armstrong had, or the, the, the kind that Duke Ellington had, the kind that any of these great people had, they feel that thing being realized in sound or in singing or in the way that somebody's persona comes across, and that, and that that, that desire to get beyond a certain limitation, which is symbolic, which is symbolized, say, in a performance of a popular tune by the convention of the song itself. So that, that, that when Bob and Clara hear Louis Armstrong play "Stardust" they hear him do with "Stardust" what Bob wants to do when he wants to get out and go someplace and find a place for himself where he can be himself.

Can you tell me all the different kinds of music that went into the creation of jazz…?

Well, you know, there're, there're, there're, there're so many elements. You know there're, there're street chants, there's folk songs that are songs that came off of the, off the boats that came in 'cause it was a port city. There are, you know, there's the kind that, you know, there's that ... liturgical gravity that you get out of Catholicism, there's the, the, the, the grandeur of the opera houses, there's the p..., the you know, there's the kind, there's zest, the marching bands, there are the, the different kinds of dance musics that people celebrated themselves and the, the, you know, in the night - you, the night, and the music - with... All of those kinds of things came into it and at a certain point, in that way that we can never really explain, certain of these things began to meld together and create what this writer, I think his name is William Pearson, calls an intercontinental alloy. That is that all of these things from, from Africa, from the Iberian peninsula, from the, from the Caribbean, from the American Indians, all of those things came together in some kind of odd way that ended up being jazz. But I don't, but see, but you see, I don't think you can ever really explain that, because see, when I found out that Michaelangelo had been sculpting for about 4 years when he did "David," and I said, well, you know, he ...?... throw that out the window. See, you can't get that good that fast. You know, especially on that scale, when you actually see it, you say, "Oh. He'd been doing this for 3 years when he did that? Well, that is... that ends that discussion." How did he develop? He didn't, you know. And so, I think that there are elements like that, whenever, whenever a new ... a new art comes about, like jazz. I mean somebody can set up, I'm sure and say, "Oh, there's that. Ah, there's that." But, you see, we never know why those things, why, why somebody decided to put those together.

Jelly Roll Morton.

Well, Jelly Roll Morton is a very, very interesting person because he's like the, he's kind of like... I'm trying to think - who is he like? Well, may..., he might not be like anybody. Well, Morton was a Creole, that's number one. One of his things was to people, he would say, "Never..." See, he would say to a person who was light-skinned, he said, "Never refer to yourself as a 'Negro' because you're too light. Because a Negro is dumber than 2 dead police dogs buried in somebody's back yard." So. Now, he would say that, right?, but, see, Jelly Roll Morton is ki..., see, he's the, see, the kind of Creole he was like, he was a lot like a white guy in the South, who has like stock, anti-black stuff, but actually prefers the black people to the white people. You know, it's like the white guy that you always, who, who can't stand Negroes, but he's always got them on the porch, and saying, "Yeah, Tom, now what you got to say today?" "Well, you know, I'm going to tell you this story, boss. You know, I saw so and so... Ha-ha-ha!" And then they'd say, "There's Bill out there with them Negroes again. What's wrong with him? He's always telling me he don't like 'em, but every time I look around, I can't find him, I know where he is. Wherever they are, he is." Now, that's Jelly Roll Morton. Jelly Roll Morton was always looking for that, you know. Now his, his great influence, the man, you know, his mentor was Tony Jackson, who was a soot black homosexual, right?, whom he, whom he, he, he had such great regard for that, when he talked, talked to Allen Lomax about him, Allen Lomax said, "Well, he was a fairy, wasn't he?" He says, "Steam..., steamboat won, but he was a great piano player. Could really play that piano. Play that piano." So, so you, so, when you see, when Jelly Roll Morton, the man, he's really like the story of the South in a strange way. See, if, if, if William Faulkner had ever known his story, or had ever been around, him, I think Faulkner would have had to write a novella or a novel about him. If he'd have ever had a ti..., time to talk with him, I think that would have changed Faulkner's stuff another way. And see, he, he also had this incredible gift for, for balancing the music in his compositions. See, when he wrote, see, when Jelly Roll Mort..., Morton wrote counterpoint, everything is absolutely clear. It's like Bach, in terms of jazz. I mean it's, you can hear every part perfectly and never... You know, a lot of people, when they say, when they hear New Orleans music, "What're they playing? I can't hear it. Where's the melody?" People don't say that when they hear Jelly Roll Morton. I mean, it's just, it, it's just, it's clear, it's perfect. That music is always perfect. Plus, the way he could play? See, Jelly Roll Morton could seriously play the piano. I mean, he could do things that are very difficult to do. He could play, he could play in front of the beat, in front of the beat on one hand, and the back of the beat with the other hand, and not, and stay there. And he could move in different, he could come in and go out on the beat in different places. He had incredible independence. Plus, see, he was as Negroid as you could get. The thing that's so fascinating is when you hear him talking to Allen Lomax, right?, and he's referring to himself as French, it's hilarious. You know it would be, it, it would be like, it would be like Groucho Marx saying that his family was from Canterbury. You know, with that whole thing that he would be doing

with no change, right? But he would be saying, "Well, you know, I mean, ...?.. the Marx b..., I mean the Marx, I mean, you know, we grew up ...?.. from Canterbury, you know, it's a long line, eight hundred years ago, you know, started, face back, la-da-da-da-duh. You would look at him and say, "What?!? Is he insane?" You know, and so, when Jelly Roll tells these stories with his inflection, to act, the, the way he looks at things is all so totally Negroid that you, it, you can't even, you can't make any sense of, of what he's talking about.

He called himself the king of jazz…?

He was. In terms of what he did, as a guy who organized the kind of ensemble, those other guys, I mean, King Oliver was good. And Freddy Keppard and all those people, but lookie here. They couldn't put the band together, writing music?, playing...? Jelly Roll was not to be messed with. Now, when Louis Armstrong came to power, that was another thing.

Let's talk about Louis Armstrong…?

Well, Armstrong was a very different kind of a person because, see, he, he had, he had an ability that has no, no parallel in, in, in Western music because he was both, he was an innovator both as a, as an instrumentalist and as a singer. And so, the way he played changed the way all, the gales..., pro..., provided so many options that the music changed dramatically, and everybody had to ho..., had to begin to address the way that he phrased and the, the, the, the quality of the line that he had and the, the, the, the, the power and flexibility of his sound. But, then, he also sang in a way that changed Americans singing and prob..., probably singing around the world. So that would have been like, that would have been like if, if all that music Bach could play, right?, and write, if Bach could have gotten up off the piano, you know, or the organ and start singing on the same level that he was playing and so that everybody would have to, "Oh! Guess we have to sing like Bach, too." See what I mean? So, it's not, nobody's ever had that much talent. I mean, in other words, where they had an equal impact as an instrumentalist and as a singer. I'm not talking about somebody writing some music for somebody to sing, like those great things that Bach and other people wrote. I'm talking about when Louis Armstrong put the trumpet down and starts singing, everybody had... See, because before him, people sang like: "I love you and you love me and I'm going to be with you, baby..," you know, that's the way people sang then, you know, and when that, then after Louis Armstrong, when he would s..., you know, when he would play, when he could play, why, he could just say like, "Boo bay doo day doo deedoodeedah," you know, "boo bee doodee, boo pee poo weee-e-e dee bop boo bee bah..." When he could sing like that, hey!, you ...?.., you're not going to sing, "I want you and you want me.." after you hear that. You know,

that's the bad choice, I mean, anybody going to go ... go back to that, they need to be deported, to *somewhere*. Not on the Earth. Maybe Pluto.

Take me inside his genius.

Well, see what the, well see, the problem with see, see, he's, see he's like Michaelangelo. It's, it's, it's that kind of thing. It's, it's not something that's explainable. I mean, you can say, "OK. He grew up in New Orleans and he played in parades, and he, you know, played wakes, and he did this, and he did that, and he heard that and he..." But he, but everybody else did too. You know, see, that's the thing we always have to remember. Everybody else who played a trumpet, who was born around 1900, 1901 in New Orleans, they heard the same stuff he heard. He wasn't by himself - they were right there. They were in the parades going: dee did di dee dit doo dee dut doo dah..." They, they were playing that, too. You know, he was another kind of an entity of the sort for which we have no explanation. See, the, that is that that, is, is just like Herman Melville - you can't explain Moby Dick reading his other books. You know, there's no development, you say, "Oh. He went to here, to here to here, then he wrote Moby Dick." That's not what happened. He turned a corner and then he just revolutionized the novel. And that was it. And so, when Armstrong, see, he just heard stuff on another level of, see, it was the logic of it. See, he had, he had certain things. Unexcelled rhythmic power. See, when he start playing, the rhy..., see, if ... see, he was the kind of person, whether everybody else could play or not, he could, he could make it happen. You put him in front of a band with mediocre guys while he's playing, you think they can play. See, you don't know till he stops playing that they really can't play. But while he's got his horn up to his mouth, they sound great. You say "Ah, ah, ah." Also, had this astounding lyricism, this is great, it's just this great lyric voice. Then he had this ability to, to, to, to, to, to combine to something that was like, was introspective and also the grand gesture. See, there's a, see, there's a garbage can point that keeps getting dumped in to the, to, to the story of jazz which is that, you know, before Bix Beiderbecke, you know, jazz didn't have any introspection, you know ...duhduhduh. Well see, you know what that's really about. That's about, you know, those people, those people are from the cottonfields. They don't really think about nothing. They just jump up and get rhythmic. But, if you listen to him play "Sweethearts On Parade," you listen to him play "Wild Man Blues," you listen to him play any slow blues, any ballad, I mean, he could do that. Then, he had this incredible sense of humor. You know, like, he's like, he, he, ... Like, well, he could, he wrote, he's got this song where he's singing, he goes, "Some day you'll be sorry, the way you treated me, the way you treated me, the way you treated me.." like a broken record, a broken record, a broken record. So, it's like he's at one point, 'cause he's, that's what you sound like to woman when she don't want hear it, right? It's like, you going, you know, "the way you treated me, the way you treated me, the way you treated m..." a broken record, a broken, a broken record. She says, "Are you calling me, saying that same thing again, Armstrong? Get off my phone!" Bam! So, he can have this thing with pathos in it, and then suddenly he can

make fun of it. Or he can take something that you think is funny, like on "Laughing Louis" and he can play this, this trumpet solo, unaccompanied trumpet solo, this, that's a heartbreaker. So, he had this, so see he had this epic sensibility. You know, as one ... as, as one guy said, Mort Murray Kempton. He said, Murray Kempton said, "He dares to be all men." You know, they, the, the, the, the, the, the, the, the prince and the buffoon, and everything between, you know. And so, see, he was a totally free guy. See, Louis Armstrong truly didn't care, you know what I mean? I mean, when you see him, here's a guy, you know how like certain people, they have this, this, this person that they want you to think they are, and then, and then every now and then, they'll slip and this other person that they don't want you to think they are, you know, they lean over and it falls out, that person falls out of their pocket on the table, and it has their face on it, but it's looking a way that they don't want to look? And so, they try to cover that up, right? They go, "Oh, ..." get you to look over there. Louis Armstrong wasn't like that. On any level, I mean, whether it was anger, 'cause every now and then, something would happen and here you see him, something would come out of him that's different too. And, and, and the thing is, you also see, the trumpet is a sacrificial instrument. It's the most difficult of the wind instruments to play, it's the most demanding, and he played it with a power that it never had before, and has not had since. I don't mean people don't play higher than he played. But the sheer force, and power that he played with, nobody's, I mean, he was like the, he was it.

You said, that the music expressed the bittersweet song of the American heart, which is the song of the world…?

Well, see I think, about him?, in regard to him?

Well, see the thing about Armstrong is this, see, when you hear him, you hear everything from, you hear everything that takes place in the world. See, that is is that he can sing, when he sings "Mack The Knife," see, it doesn't sound like these other people, 'cause see, he grew up around people like that. You know, he saw 2 women go at each other with razors and slash, slash e..., slash each other, you know, into bloody messes, you know. He saw a guys that, that, you know, stuck people with ice picks and knock people in the head with bricks and all, so, he grew up with all of that. He also saw those incredibly elegant parades, you know, he saw that. And he played in those, he played at those, those occasions where these, where, where these, where these girls would come out in their white dresses in the park, you know, with the, with the, with the black tie kind of thing that they wore in those days, and he played those things for them. You know, just like Buddy Bolden did. And he was, and he was, he, he played at these wakes, you know, and he played at the..., you know, he played these funerals. And he, he played for, for royalty and he played for scumbags, and he saw that when they, if, if enough alcohol has been consumed, the only way you can tell the difference between'em is by their clothes, is by the cost of their clothes, because once, you know what I mean, so he knew all of that. And

so, he, so when you hear him, you get this, this, this Olympian sense of the world. And it also has that what I, he has a thing in his music that, that Thelonius Monk has that, too, which is this kind of Olympian sense of humor. I was reading a book about Breugel and it was saying that when Breugel was painting, there was this idea that the world was so ridiculous that the most important thing that you, the, the, the best response that you could have to it was to laugh at it, right? So there was this idea that in order to really see the world correctly, or have a, have the right response, you would have to have a few people who did nothing but laugh at the world, right? But if you wanted to be absolutely accurate, you had to hire some other people to laugh at them. You know? It's kind thing that, that's the kind of thing you get in Armstrong, too. It's not that he doesn't understand this, but there is this cosmic joke that's been played on all of us you know, and every great once in a while, we get angry when we say, "I'm the butt of the joke." But then sometimes, you know you say, "Well, I'm the butt of the joke, but it is funny, though."

How American is Louis Armstrong?

Oh, I think Louis Armstrong is about as American as you can get because... Well, I mean, you know, if you go to Africa, you can really see how he's, how American he is because, for instance, just the way he, his, his, his physical rhythm is an American physical rhythm. It's not an African rhythm. Now, he would, he's probably looks as African as you probably will find anybody in America looking. But the way he moves, and his gestures and stuff, that's not, those things are American things.

You want to say something else about Armstrong.

Oh, yeah, I think there, that we understand how American Armstrong was by how many things he affected that would, that would not necessarily be connected if they weren't related to him. For instance, you wouldn't have a connection, say, between Bing Crosby and Billie Holiday if Louis Armstrong wasn't the glue that brought them together through his influence. You wouldn't have a relationship between ,say, Chet Baker and Miles Davis if Louis Armstrong hadn't put something in there that connected them. You wouldn't have a relationship between Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, endless hotel bands that wanted to try to get a little swing going, great. See, when every..., when everybody turns around try to say, "Let's try to get a little swing going guys," it's Armstrong. So, see, that, that thing that he had, it's it, the American-ness of it is shown in the fact that he connects all of these different people and in, in music, in and out, in, in jazz and outside of jazz. Frank Sinatra says his biggest influence was Billie Holiday. Billie Holiday comes from Louis Armstrong, you know. Tony Bennett points out that all of those guys, being Frank Sinatra, him, they all come from Armstrong, that he said that up. So, a lot of times people will be hearing, even I remember once, I was listening to Bing, Ding, Dean Martin, whom I never even thought

of as connected to Louis Armstrong, and he was singing some, he was singing some tune, and maybe he sang a phrase, and I said, "Wait a minute. He heard Pops, too." So, that comes down, I even heard Elvis Presley singing some, some kind of, some, some ballad late in his career, and he, and he turned a corner, rhythmically, in a way that didn't have anything to do with that rock-a-billy thing that he came from. And that's see, now I don't even know that he was thinking about Armstrong but when it's... You know, it's like, it's, it's, it's s.., his, his feeling, his, his rhythmic feeling was so pervasive that it ends up going in all kinds of places, For instance, if you listen to the way Marvin Gaye phrases "What's Going' On," that comes from Louis Armstrong. When he sings "Mother, mother..." all that, that, that's straight from Pops, so the thing I mean is that, that's what makes him so purely American is that he can connect all of these things.

You said that Duke Ellington is the D.W. Griffith of jazz…?

Well, I've, I, I've often said that Duke Ellington is, is to jazz composition what D.W. Griffith is to film. Now, people had... All of the raw materials were there when Griffith arrived, but he was the one who came up with the, the, the most refined and, and influential realization of the close-up and the cross-cutting. See, in a jazz band the close-up is like the solo, that's the featured solo, OK? The, the, the, the, the, the cross-cutting is like the, the way that the arrangement works, the way that the, the, the brass and the reeds are used. And so, there's, so, so what, what Ellington did was that he figured this extraordinary relationship between the featured soloist and arrangement the way that he, the way that he put the musical cross-cutting around the solo, the around the soloist or the, or the musical close-up, if you will. But also, see, Ellington, Ellington had a lot of things in his music. I mean, I, he, there's a certain of, of quality. For instance, like if you, if, if... A tune like "Mood Indigo," for instance, has a sensibility to it that's very close to what I've, I associate with the feeling of some of Ernest Hemingway's stories. You have some of these things that are really very insightful kind of, of cynical un..., kind of a cynical understanding of power, and how people are overwhelmed by it that, that, that make him much like Orson Welles, if you will, because that's what, that's what... Welles only thinks about one thing, really. And he said it himself. He said, "I only have one thing to say: "People can't handle power, and so, well, that's what it is. So that's the only story I tell. I tell it over and over. If you don't want to see that story, don't look at my movies, because, if I make the movie, it's going to be about that."

Now, that's one of things Ellington is very good at talking about, too. He also has this, this this idea of, of using these, these mul..., this, this, this, the, the, these, these languages, these musical languages that he, that he pits one against the other in the way, for instance, in, in, in, in Moby Dick. A lot of what Moby Dick is about, is about how much contrast you can get from one chapter to the other. So, that, for instance, in the opening of Moby Dick, Melville is has this, this, there's a, a bar-keeper in there who's an Irish guy,

whom he never says is Irish. But the way that words are set up , you can tell that's what he is. And so, he, he does all these different things with the form, very, which is one of the things that is Ellington was, was about that he really loved to wrestle with forms. He was, and he, he has, he has in a lot of his music too, he has that, that beguiling combination of the lyrical and the percussive that we associate with dancers like Bill Robinson, Fred Astaire. He, excuse me, he's a very, he's a very expansive universe in terms of human subjects, and also he's, he's, he does a lot of stuff, he has a lot of material too, that takes place in a dream world. So that you know, a lot, so that he, see, and I, I think that, that, I think he probably was a guy who was very influenced by a lot of those dream sequences that, that were very, that appeared in a lot of the movies of the 30's and the 40's and the, and, and Ellington had, I think he had that kind of a mentality any way. But, I think he was also influenced by that. And so, he has these, these pieces that have that kind of feeling.

What was his background?

Well, Duke Ellington was a the son of a, the son of a butler, I think his father was... I think he was a butler or something like that. And, his mother seemed to, the way he described her, she was very, a very refined woman and they grew up, they h..., they lived in Washington DC and he was from what you would call the Negro middle class. And he, but he, well see, he was a guy, see, he, see, he he was like Miles Davis, in that he was attracted to the night life world and, and, and you know, and the fast women, and, and those, that, that secret universe that ends, it's behind those doors in those places that they don't let everybody in. He liked that too, but, see, he, but see, he never wanted to be one of those people. He just liked to be in that, see, so it was like, so Miles Davis, for instance, wanted to be one of them. Duke Ellington didn't want to be one of them. He just wanted to actually be able to sit at a table with pimps and gangsters and this and that, talk to them, just like he would talk to some other arranger about, you know, how you voice a major 7th or something, and so, yeah, he's, he, he was a guy who like to know how people were and be around them and he credited himself with being able to be, you know, be with Al Capone one week, or some, you know, upper class, you know, 400 hundred years in the running Connecticut family the next week, that was him. So that, so that when you hear his music, he's always calling upon this extraordinary range of people that he got to know. See, he was the kind of guy who, if he went in a place, right?, that was real bucket of blood, a real dangerous place, if something was about to happen, one of these thugs had like a big razor cut on his one cheek and something on his neck where you seen a guy that tried to cut his throat, he would have slid over to Duke Ellington and said, "Look here, young man. I think you better get out of here." "Well, what do you mean, I should get out of here?" "I think this is not a place for you; you better get your stuff and get out of here. Leave me." You know, "I know what this is." See, he was the kind of person people looked out for. You know, see, because he had

that, he had the quality. See there's certain people, we don't know why, there's people whom we always respond to the same way we respond to children. Not because they are children but for some reason when we come around them, we feel the same responsibility toward them that we feel toward a child.

Would you paint him for me, just physically...?

Duke Ellington was over 6 feet tall. He claims to have been a good athlete when he was young. Was a very handsome guy, I think he was what they used to call some kind of a, a cafe au lait or something like that. Well, now, I don't know what that is. I always blew that one, but you know, he was that, he was that color that when you put a certain amount of, of, of milk in some coffee. It's not brown. It's on the way toward, it's on the way toward yellow, but it's not there yet. So he was around that color. And he was extraordinarily articulate guy. He had, he had very great taste in clothes, and he had a, he had a, he had a very, he had a very interesting ability to to personalize any exchange he had with people. For instance, one time I saw him standing up, signing these autographs, and so ev... and so, all of these women in this line, you know, young ones, old ones, some w..., in-between ones. And every one of the, he had something to say that was specific to her, that, and he never, never repeated. That's see, 'cause he couldn't repeat 'cause they were all, you know, the one behind her had heard what he said to the last 3, so he, he'd have blown his program.

The thing that impresses me so much is that he kept his group together so long.

Well, I think one of the things that distinguishes Ellington is that he, he had his own band for longer than anybody, almost 50 years, I think. And, it may be 50. Anyway, he had these guys, and he kept a lot of these guys in the band for a very, very, very long decade after decade after decade. And people tended to stay in his band for long periods of time, even if they didn't stay for 40 years, they would stay for 4, for 5, for 6, for 7, sometimes for 10 years. See, normally, in bands guys only stay in bands 2 or 3 years. You know what I mean, like if it's this, it's not, they just don't, if they stay in band 5 years, that's a long time. Every now and then, people will have bands that stay for, stay together for a while but that's very unusual. Because of personalities, the travel, the, the desire to try to be a star yourself, or whatever that is. But Ellington was able to keep these with him for, for a long time, and see, one of the reasons I think is that see, he, he incrementally became greater than all of them. See, when you hear the early recordings, see, he actually is not on a level of Johnny Hodges and some of these guys; they actually are p..., superior to him, see, but as time progressed... See, it was like, see, they were oak trees, and he became a sequoia. And see, I think that, and also see, see that created comp..., you know, complex resentments on their part, to different people. But, I mean they didn't, they

stayed in the band, or sometimes they left and came back. But, see, a lot of people, see, very few people have to addr..., have to deal with that. You know, it's like they, they don't have to, to be superior to some, somebody at one point. It would kind, would kind of be like if, I guess, if if at some point, say, Michael Jordan were playing basketball on a team and he actually was the saddest on the team, right? Competent, but not heavy, right? And then these people had the t..., and the team stayed together, right, say like they, say like if, if he got on this team when he was 18. Then he became Michael Jordan on that team, right? See, and all those people were on the team, see, that would create some psychological devastation for certain people because... But at the same time, Ellington was so good at smoothing things out and you know, making you feel important one day, but see, he also understood something else, too, which is that see, he understood that people are very insecure about liking you, for whatever reason, so like all people who have control over people, he understood the sado-masochistic relationship that actually make, draws people closer to you. See. In, in Leon Forrest's book, Divine Days, is this cult leader explains that if people love you, they don't feel comfortable about that. They feel kind of embarrassed about it. So, if you torture them every so often it makes them feel better about it. And Duke Ellington knew that. He knew how to do that.

He wrote 2000, 3000 compositions in his lifetime. How do we calculate his genius, his contribution?

I don't know. I mean, just, see, see, see, Elling..., see, see Ellington is one of those people who, see, he's one of those turn-of-the-century types like John Ford. But it's, there's something about them. They, they, they, you know these people arrived at the end of the Eliza..., you know, like the end of the Victorian era, just about. And they, they, they, they embody that, that thing I was saying about the frontiersman and the builder of a community, and the person who develops the law, say. He was kind of like those guys, you know, those, those Englishmen in the 18th century like, like Stern, who I think, I think St..., I think Stern was the one, and he'd write all these, he'd write these, not Stern. Not Stern. It's another English novelist who wrote these novels, he was a judge. I think he was a mayor. He did all these different kinds of things, you know, I think he wrote some law. And you just say, "Wait a minute, man. How can you do all that?" And so, Duke Ellington was kind of like that. Those kind of people just, they, see, we, we, we understand them better in the, in the Victorian era, because there were a lot of people like that. See, in our century, it's hard to understand somebody who could handle all of these complicated personalities, deal with the, deal with the roller coaster complexities of, of show business, right?, meet all of these different deadlines, write music for singers, write music for, for different kinds of instrumentalists, write in all these different keys, write long pieces, short pieces, write for movies, make, you know, do all of that kind of stuff, and, and have such a high batting average in terms of the quality. They just kind of, those people are hard to understand. Well, they're not hard to understand; they're not to be understood. Did, you know, you just appreciate

it. You know, so, you know it's like those people, it's like well, if you go to, it's like, if you, if you know the person who makes the best lemon meringue pie on the eastern seaboard, now, you can everybody and their momma in the kitchen, and they can show them, this is what I do, right? And sit down, and they're all, they're not going to get it. ..?.. it's going to be something that they don't get. And so, the best thing to do is you say, "OK. Now, we know what the ingredients are, but they don't tell us anything, so the best thing to do is just appreciate it." Just cut you a piece of it, and eat it. And Duke Ellington's like that. I mean he's, just can't explain it. See, I mean, you can see the context, because he drew from everything that was happening. From the movies, from Broadway, from religious music, from the blues, from Louis Armstrong, from King Oliver, from Jellie Roll Morton, from the competition with other bands, you know like somebody coming with a little something he'd hear over and he'd say, "Oh, that'll be good. I'll take that." Put it over here and turn it into this. And then somebody'd hear his version and they'd say, "Hah! Well, I'll take that back, and I'll turn into this!" Then he'd say, "Oh. Well, that's not a bad idea and I'll take that." And so that was going on, too. And so like sometimes you'll see these filmmakers, one'll make a certain kind of movie and the other will say, "Huh. Oh, you think I don't know how to make Westerns. I'll show you." And then they'll make one, right? Or, guy makes a gangster movie and said, "Oh. You think you're the only one in Hollywood can make a gangster movie - I know how to make a gangster movie, too!" So, so, so, so, with the competition, plus see, Duke Ellington was an extraordinarily self-propelled person who, see, he was man who was, see, he was the definition of instant, of a person obsessed with instant gratification. See, he always says, right?, repeatedly, "Why do I keep a band? Because I can write some music tonight and hear it tomorrow morning," right? Now that's, instant gratification to a 'fair-thee-well,' right? To have 15 people that you pay so that you don't have to wonder what your music sounds like, you know, hear it, right? So, he, he, he... And see also, it did..., see, he also had this magic quality to him, which is that, and see, it's very difficult, see, see, Negro Americans are not predisposed to follow people. They really aren't. They really aren't. See, that's why there's always a certain element of chaos in, in, in the Negro world, because see, I think from slavery forth, we just didn't like ..?.. No! So, somebody telling you over and over, "You got to do this..." You know, "I'm not doing that! Just 'cause you said that?" Say, "Yes, but it's right." "I don't care. So what if it's right. I ain't doing it anyway. Why am I not doing it? For the same reason that Dostoyevsky said I'm not going to do it. So I'll tell you that I exist. So, I'm just going to mess your stuff up." Right? Now the fact that Duke Ellington was able to get these knuckleheads to play like these c.., to cooperate, and see, that there he would do stuff like this: see, he would start fights between people, right. He would go to one guy and say, you know, "So and so said you're not really playing, that you're ..." And then, he'd go to the other guy and say, "You know, ... he said you're duhduhduh..." So then, these guys will get furious at each other, right? Then he would write a piece with both of them in it, and they would be so furious at each other that they would actually work and work and work on the piece to make sure that they played

it better then the other guy, right, and then in the process of playing it, they would both sound so good that that would resolve the argument. And then he had 2 guys who got along again and he had a great performance.

The Cotton Club, can you talk about that...?

Well, Cotton Club had, Cotton Club had 2 realities, we have to remember. One was a radio reality, which was essentially people hearing Duke Ellington's band. The other one, from what I've read about it, was, that first it was a club that black people essentially couldn't come in to, unless they were extremely well-off, like this guy that was a numbers runner, Casper something, spent a ton of money. Jack Johnson, those kind of people went in there. And there were all of these kind of silly production numbers, with, you know, the African motifs, you know, and scantily clad girls, and so they were of kind of like forerunners of rap videos, I guess you'd say, you know. The only difference, see, if you, if you look at a rap video today, the way that they have these, these black women depicted as, you know like these big-butt-slut-hussies, well, that was what it was. That's apparently was the Cotton Club, except, I don't think the slut thing was as thick as it is now. But it was, the whole thing was to go over there and watch, look at these, these Creole-looking girls, these yellow girls, you know, kick their legs up and then, Duke Ellington wrote all of this music for those, for, for those occasions. And so, at the same time, so, it was kind of like, actually, what he achieved was somewhat like what happened during slavery when the, the, the, the spirituals would als..., would also be used as signals for the underground railroad. So, on the one level, you had something that allowed people to get free, and they created, you know, great American songs at the same time. So, in a certain sense, that's kind of what he did, it seems to me, aesthetically. He was in this dumb situation, right?, and he wrote this great music. So, it's to me it's like singing "Steal Away to Jesus" on the plantation.

Can you talk about "Black, Brown, and Beige" as a composition...?

Well, "Black, Brown, and Beige" is kind of like, in terms of Ellington's music and what he was doing with it, it's kind of like the "Fifth Symphony," Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony" because .. Let me start over. "Black, Brown, and Beige" is kind of like the "Fifth Symphony" of jazz, I would say. Because that opening motif is what the whole piece is built on, and part of it goes: "Buh buh babadah dah duh..." you know, "Doodoo dooby doo dee dah", that's see, that, the whole piece comes out of that. All the themes in there come from that. I mean, all the way to the end, they all come from that, and, well, you know, I've heard people say, "Wow, you know, it's just not organized." They don't know. What they need to do is keep that in their head every time they hear one of these new themes; they'll see something that they didn't get. That's it. And so, he uses all of these different musics to tell what he calls, I think he calls it a tone parallel to the American Negro, so it's

supposed to be, start off with work songs. It ends up, I think, on "Sugar Hill Penthouse," something like that, and so by that time, it's, we're a long ways from the cotton fields back home. But, he was, and he's got all kind of stuff, and he's got West Indian stuff in there, he's got stuff about the church music. Got a lot of different things. He was trying to, and so, it's kind of, it kind of foreshadowed what a number of people like Mingus and others, including Marsalis do, where they use these different styles to, so, which again, which again goes back to the Melvillian precedent in Moby Dick. See, the thing is is to see is the per..., see the, see the prejudice in the academy is what keeps people from dealing with the fact that Moby Dick is the, is the bridge between Lawrence Stearns' Tristram Shandy, and James Joyce's Ulysses. See, they don't want to give that up. But that's what it is, and so, I think that, that Ellington's, that "Black, Brown and Beige" does stylistically, in terms of way, it's the way the form is manipulated, with these contrasting styles. Something very similar to what Melville was thinking about in Moby Dick.

Sidney Bechet.

Oh, Sidney Bechet, see, he was a, Sidney Bechet was just a little bit below Louis Armstrong. Just a little bit below Louis Armstrong. But se, I don't know if his, see, I don't know if he had the breath that Armstrong had. But, but in terms of, of, of talent, see, Sidney B..., see, Sidney Bechet was, had pure talent, plus he was a real street thug. If pushed the wrong way. You know, I mean, if he, if he, if he... 'cause a guy told me a s..., a very interesting story about Bechet. Now, this is near the end, right?, this is near the end. This is after he's ***Sidney Bechet***, and so, he sees Bechet and Bechet has gotten a Mercedes, right. So this is sometime in the 50's and so, Bechet says to him, he says, "Well," he says, "what," he said, "What do you think of your house, how 's you car ..?.. ?" He says, he says, "I'm going to show you something about this car," he says. "Now if they come at me while I'm driving it, I've got a pistol under here, right? Now, if I'm not driving, if I'm sitting over on the passenger side, if they come at me from that side, see, right under here, I have a pistol and I'm ready for 'em." He said, "Now, if I'm sitting in the back seat on the right side, if they come at me from there, I'll reach under here, I got a pistol and I'm ready for 'em." Said, "If I'm sitting behind the driver and they come at me from that side," he said, "I've got this for 'em." He said, "Now, let's say I've had a flat and I'm getting, and I'm, and I, and I've opened my trunk, and they come at me while I'm going in my trunk," he said, "I have this in here for them," right? So now, that's Sidney Bechet, see? Total paranoid, ready, but, but ready. But ready. Now, see the other thing that's, the other, the other Bechet story that's extraordinarily important is that Bechet got in a gunfight in Paris during rush hour. Not, I'll meet you here at midnight, right? Nothing like that. If you gonna a gunfight in Paris as a person who's not French, it would seem to me that you would want it to be as late as possible so as few French people as possible might see you. Not Bechet. Now, now, I've heard one of, one, one story Bechet tells one story in this book, which he claims that these people from Chicago were making fun

of him and so, then he went home and got his stuff and then he came back, and then the guys were coming out of the joint and then he opened up 'em, right? So, some woman got shot, they killed a horse in the street, and so the French, of course, went totally insane. The only thing probably that drove them as mad as that was when Roland Kirk, who was blind, went in of these hotels and mistook the bidet for a toilet. So that was another thing. But, Bechet, see, he, he, he c..., he comes, n... No, this is... Alright, this is the other story about the gunfight. He's supposed to be playing with this piano player, and the story goes, this piano player says, "Bechet. That was a D-minor 7th. You playing the wrong chord." Bechet is supposed to have pulled a pistol out and said, "Sidney Bechet never plays wrong chords." And that's supposed to have been the way it started and then the guy said, "I don't have my stuff. Come back when..." and they got the gunfight. So, so, he therefore, right, is exactly like one of those characters that we've, that, that we're accustomed to in these Westerns. You know, can..., cantankerous, you know, beat people up, shoot people up, short-tempered, etcetera, but when called upon to do the right, when the right, when it's time for the right thing to be done, like pick up that soprano saxophone and start seriously smoking, he could do that.

What is it about the saxophone...?

Well, see all the one.. well, see, I think the saxophone, I don't know why, see, I think the saxophone has a... Well, first thing, women like the saxophone. Now, don't ask me why they like it, but they like them some saxophone. If you get a bunch of women in a room, and you start playing records for them, right?, instrumentals, saxophone, that's the one they gonna like. Now they might like trumpet some, they might like the piano, they might like trombone, whatever it is. But when that saxophone, somebody like Ben Webster pick up a saxophone, says, you know, "Voovoovoovoo.. voovoovoovoo..." They going to say, "Play that again. I like him." You know, now, when I used to teach the history of jazz, I found it out. You got a bunch of women, you know, they'd be women in the class, I mean, you know some of them were rich white women, some of them were rich black women, some of 'em were Mexican., some of 'em were from India, some of 'em... That saxophone, they like that saxophone. So, now, we, so some folks, I don't, maybe we have to go to "Ms" magazine and ask then why they like the saxophone. Some woman's named Ireland, ask, that's what next time she speaks somewhere, I going to stand up and say, "Would you ex..., please tell me one thing - what is the feminist explanation for the love of the, of the saxophone by females?" Now, I don't know what it is. They like it.

What was the kind of place Harlem was that Ellington was in...?

Well, yeah. For, well the thing is that see, Ralph Ellison says about the, the, the Harlem that was still in existence when he arrived in New York in the 1930's, he describes it as "our version of Paris" and that it was a place that was integrated. People of various races came together uptown. He said it was a gathering place for the avant garde in music, you know, new music was being made. People were talking about all kind of different social policies and stuff. People were very style-conscious, dressed beautifully, often, and see, now Harlem had such a, such a deep groove that I have been told by people who lived at that time that that black people who passed for white downtown, right, and could therefore have lived somewhere else, couldn't wait til 5:00 to get back to Harlem. That's how swinging Harlem was, at that time, was that, you know, I could even, I could cross the line and don't want to cross the line. Just let me go out and make me some money; I'll be a white man from nine to five and a Negro from, from 5 o'clock to midnight, right?, in Harlem. Have me a good time.

What was happening?

Well, just, there was the clubs, that was, there, there were clubs. There were, you know, there were dance halls, There was this, this, this extraordinary vitality that, that, that we, it's difficult for us to imagine today, because in those periods... See, segregation had, segregation had created something very unusual that no longer exists. See, in, in, in the 1930's, right?, Bill Cosby, Michael Jordan, all those people would have lived in Harlem. See, if they were in New York, that's where they would have lived. So, in other words, like a guy said to, like a guy said to me, he was explaining something to me about segregation ..?.. said, he said, "Segregation was a drag, he said, "but there was something to it that no longer exists." I said, "Well, what do you mean?" He said, he said, "Well, I'm a kid playing the drums, right? He said, "Because of segregation," he said, "when I'm on the road," he said, "if I go in hotel," he said, "everybody black is a, who's important is in the hotel." "You know," he said, "So, here, I could be like a kid, 19-, 20-year old drummer," he said, "and," you know," he said, "you know," he said, "you know, Thurgood Marshall is there. Jackie Robinson is there. Adam Clayton Powell is there." S.., you know, and he just went down the list, you know, Ralph Bunch, this one, that one. So, so, so, in other words, all of the vitality that was in Negro, that was, that, that was in New York, at that time, in terms of, of Negro Americans, they all lived there. So, you could see the best musicians, the writers, painters, educators, politicians, everybody was there. So, the idea that, that, that, that, that, the idea of anything like cultural, what's that..., culturally deprived, or cultural deprivation, that was s..., that was not true at all.

I want to talk about Charlie Parker...?

Well, Charlie Parker was a, he was one of the 5 or 6 greatest of the improvisers in the history of the music, I mean. And he, he, he changed the way, or he, he... 'Changed the way' is not the right term. He added another way to what was possible, that people already understood. He had another kind of melody line that he could play. He played through chords in an other kind of way and his rhythms were unexcelled. He was, and he had a, see, he had a, he had a, he had a certain kind of an intensity that he brought into the music that was different because it had a, it had an odd combination of, of a of a jaded quality, a kind of a... It was almost French in that respect, that sense of like, you know, that thing with the French go, "Phuh!" You know, like, well, yeah, so, is that, they. Oh, they really think this is it? Huh." You know, so it's kind of... And you know, he, he, he, he had read Villion. He had read Villion and he knew Beaudelaire, too. And so, he, Dizzy Gillespie told me that he, that Charlie Parker used to talk to him about Beaudelaire. So, he was kind of taken by that, that, the corruption of life and so, see, and s..., and at the same time, though, he was an idealist. See, if you listen to him play and his music is a very idealistic line that moves along through the music, and then there are these, these corrosive, corrupt qualities that come in, too. Not so much that they're part of his corruption, but it's they're his recognition of corruption. Now, beyond that, Charlie Parker was also a man who could never, who could never outrun his appetites. His appetites always outran him. So, his appetites were kind of like a, a wagon that he was tied to, that dragged him down the street at different velocities. If they dragged him slowly, he didn't get, he didn't get too cut up. If they dragged him quickly, he got badly hurt. And he was a guy whose health was always on a roller coaster because he, he, he didn't have any conception of, of limits. You know, if he, if, if there was a quart of whiskey, he would drink it all. If there was an 8-layer cake, he'd eat all of it. If there was a, a gallon of orange juice, he'd drink it. Ev..., every drop. He, if there was a, you know, if there was, if there as a huge, if there was pot of stew, he would eat the whole pot. That's the kind of guy he was, so, and he, but he had the same voraciousness in his playing. He had the same appetite for absolute conquest, but see, since he was a paranoid, too... See, his, as I described him or something once where I've said that his, see, he, he learned who to play, and everything how to play, he learned how to play it all the keys right? No matter how difficult it was, he learned how to play it in all 12 keys, so he could play it anywhere, right? And everything he learned, he learned it in all the keys, right? Not so that part of it was, part of it was that he wanted a certain aesthetic flexibility. The other part of it was his, his interest in conquest, and a third part was self-defense, because he was always wondering whether people who didn't like the way he played, or who didn't like him, would try to put him in a situation musically where they could (smack!) get him, right? So, he wanted always to be able to, "Hah, no, not this time! You can't get me." You know, and so he was, so, and when you listen to him play, see, he's a very elusive guy, see, see, and he, and he, he's, he's a player who, if you don't really pay attention, he can turn you around, you know. And mess you up, see, so he, he, so, so, he's, so you you get all of these different kinds of things that, and see, to me, he's kind of like

the, the first truly Europ..., kind of bohemian, a Bohemian-like character, emotionally speaking. You know, and see, he didn't, see, and Charlie Parker was another, another thing about him was, see he didn't, he really hated show business. He didn't like the people that ran the business, see? He really resented that, see, he didn't think they should be able to tell him anything, you know. So, he, and he, so he was a guy, see, he didn't introduce..., he, he tended to not introduce songs. He didn't, he didn't have much banter with the audience, he didn't like to do that. When you listen to a lot of the recorded sets, he played a lot of stuff real fast, so you know, that was a kind of a disdain for the audience. Not disdain, but "I'm not going to... I'm not necessarily going to make this easy for you." So he had a, so he had a lot of these qualities, but see, those were qualities, see, see, there's something that happens in American history over and over which is that, you see, there's a certain kind of, of rebellious Negro that appears always during and after a major war. They always come up, you know. People that they're in the middle, by the time the war is the, the mid..., in the middle of the war, these people start appearing who say, "Never mind, I'm not going for that. Don't like that." And so there were a lot of people like that. See, Charlie Parker wasn't the only person like that, see, there, the, the, the whole Billy Eckstine band was, Billy Ekstine was like that. See, Billy Eckstine was known to knock crackers out, you know, to say it's something wrong with him, I mean, he didn't like, you know, he wasn't, you know... Now he could, and you know and so, these guys they, they appeared at this point. Not now, not now, let's not get too far with the people like Ben Webster was always like that, who was part of the other generation.

But Parker appears?

But Parker appeared in this, at, at this point, at this, at this w..., at this moment of the war. And, and his, and see, everything by the time, see, by the time he was 25 years old, and recording "Coco" I think in November of 1945, by that time, see, all of this was a fraud to him, on one way or another, see, 'cause he grew up in a town where it was run by gangsters, right? So the, so the mayor was a crook, he was hooked up with the gangsters, right? So well, there we have law and order, right? The deacon of one of, the, the deacon of this church around the corner, or near him, was sleeping with his mother, the deacon was married, right, so well, there we have religion, right? So, he, he, so, his, his sense of the world...

And the world had just blown itself up...

Yeah. Well see, he didn't get to that, before that, he was see, he, see, before the, the, the atom bomb, see, he had had all of this happen and he'd become a drug addict, right?, so then you have, well, there's medicine for you, right? So, all of these things he looked at 'em, he looked at the world in a very strange, you know, very different way than most people, because almost everything that people thought something was, as far as he was concerned,

it could be that, but it could also be this, you know. And see, he was guy, too, who had become very accustomed to being in pain. One guy told me that when he was in, when Parker was in the Earl Hines band, he, he came and he gave this pin to this guy, right?, and he told the guy to put it inside his jacket. He said, "What is this for?" He said, he said, "When I nod off and it's time for me to solo," he said, "just stick me in the leg with this pin." Right? So that's the way he was, you know, and the guy said, "I'm not going to do that." "Well, he did it Jay McShann band." He said, "Well, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to stick with a pin every this you're supposed to be playing." So, what I mean is this, I mean just the idea that this is part of his ritual, right? When I get ready to play, if I've got 8 solos, this, see, if I've got 8 one chorus solos a set, right?, say 4, 5, then I'm going, I'm prepared for a guy to stick me in the leg with a pin, right?, to let me know it's time to play. So, he begins, right, so, so, somebody else gets tapped on the shoulder, maybe, right?. So, he begins his entrance with the, with the pain of this pin being stuck in his leg, that's the way he starts to come in to play, right. So, and, so now, so a guy who lives like that, and whose, whose philosophy, as I've said at one time, you'd say, "Well, what was Charlie Parker's philosophy?" Said it just broke out in two words: "Me first." So, see, he wasn't a, he was a guy, who, you know, whatever it was, him first.

What was his appeal to the beat generation?

Well, I think he was, I think he was, his a..., his appeal to the beat generation was that he had a very naive conception of how you handle the world. See, I mean, in other words, the, see, see, Charlie Parker was like a trumpet player who doesn't realize that the mouthpiece doesn't give, your lips do. See, so he was a guy who was like going to just, you know he just played until they didn't work. See, you know, at a certain point, when your mouth starts to swell and it, the circular muscle in here, you just can't; it won't happen. Now see, all along the mouthpiece is not res..., there's nothing, see, see, nothing is happening to the mouthpiece. See, Charlie Parker wanted the, the world to be like a piece of silly putty that you could just twist it and make it go your way, right? Now, but his way was a way that was s..., a, a way of self-im..., immolation.

What's his genius?

Well, he was, the, the thing about him was that, see, he, he, see, as, see, see, the thing about Charlie Parker was that he.... As absolutely chaotic as his life was, right?, his music was the exact opposite. It's absolutely logical, perfectly controlled, you know. So, here you have a guy who, the moment he puts the saxophone down, he ... I mean, you h..., you can hear live recordings of Charlie Parker where he playing brilliantly at one point, the next he's off, duhduhduh... So, somewhere between the last show and the next time, the next show, he went off and did something where he's so high

he can't really play, right? So, so, he was paranoid about himself too, because then, he always had to play catch-up, right, because somebody said, "Oh, Charlie Parker, you sounded horrible!" So, then he's got to go back and say, "Oh, gee whiz." Now he has to go redeem himself so, so, he's the kind of guy who would screw up one job, at the end of the job, he's got another job, somewhere else, he'll come back to the one that he screwed up and miss shows at the other one, redeeming himself at the place where he blew it.

Can you talk about his..?.., what's in the ...?..

Well, Charlie Parker innovations are, Charlie Parker's innovations are, they work on a couple of levels. He, his rhythm was different. He played another, he, he brought another kind complexity into the rhythms that were played. He, his, he had a kind of jagged, angular quality to the melody lines that he would play. He was very, very well-equipped to play over-complicated kinds of harmonies. No more equipped than Don Bias or Coleman Hawkins, but it was just the way that he did it, was so startlingly complicated. See, the kind of, the kind of rhythms that Charlie Parker was playing, I mean, Coleman Hawkins and those people, I mean, they couldn't play anything like that. They were great, they were giants, they were wonderful. Geniuses, even. Coleman Hawkins. But not th..., but, t..., Charlie Parker put another kind of complexity in the music and see, see, see, I contend that it had to do with the fact that Charlie Parker was a guy who was obsessed with detail. See, he was a very ob..., see, he was a, see, he was the kind of guy who if he were in this room, right, and he, and, and say he would then, and there were a number of people in here who were involved in, in, in, in advanced technology... If he stayed in this room with them for 3 hours, he would learn an enormous amount about the, the specific way in which what they do is done. Now that was the way he was with the saxophone, for instance. Like, he knew the saxophone so well that he could do things with the saxophone that were bizarre. Now, for instance, Jimmie Nepper has a story about the trombonist, about Charlie Parker let him keep his saxophone after they would meet at these rehearsals. And so, M..., Nepper knew something about the saxophone, so he picked it up and he noticed that while, while they, while they were rehearsing, Charlie Parker would, it was, it would be either the rehearsal or performance, I don't remember, but anyway, Charlie Parker would move, had this strange motion, slight that he would put in every, every now and then. And so, he said that, he said, he thought it was just some physical quirk that was related to drugs, because, you know, during that period, people became very aware of different tics that went with different kinds of dope. So, anyway, when he was looking at the saxophone, he realized that the, the spring under one of the keys that makes it possible for the key to work had broken off. And so, what had happened was that Charlie Parker had figured out the exact amount of, of, of the, the, the exact amount that he had to lean over to allow the key to flap out, right, and then he'd hit the note. See, so that's the kind of guy he was. And so, he, so he was always, and so, was that, so, that's what his playing so remarkable is that it has this extraordinary command of detail; it's very great complexity.

We don’t appreciate how much he was different as jazz is moving along.

Well, the thing is is that see, he also, see, the other thing is that Charlie Parker’s, well, see first thing was his sound. See, he didn’t have the, he didn’t have that big creamy alto saxophone sound that you get from Johnny Hodges, Benny Carter, Willie Smith, those kind of players. See, he had a sound that had, his sound was hard, it was a brittle sound, you know, it was a sound that was, as they would say, devoid of pity. You know, so, his sound I think, was, I think that, I, I think his sound was the way he felt like it went. And also see, to play fast like he played, ‘cause s..., you know, a sound with a big vibrato, the notes would have gotten mushy. You know, you, if you’re going to say, you know, if you’re going to say “beeboo bee boo dahboo dip...” you know, if you’re using a real big vibrato, it’ll go, “bluhlululululu...” it won’t, it, you see, you can’t have that punch. See, so there was certain kind of percussive quality, his, his and, that his, that his line had. And also see, you, see, the, the thing about him too, was that he, he was a trickster and his playing is like that. See, he was a trickster, see, he was a, a, a... See, he, had he, had he been a boxer, right, he would have been like Willie Pebble, one of those kinds of guys that, you know, w... Willie Pebble won a round without even throwing a punch. I mean this guy, he made the other guy look so bad, without even throwing a punch, that the, that the judges gave him the round. And so, that’s what I mean - Parker was like that. He’d have been able to move, you know, now you see me, now you don’t sort of thing. That was the kind of guy he was. And so, those, so, so, so that when he, when, so that when he came out here playing and started working that out, and he had another kind of language that he was playing, he, what, what he and Dizzy Gillespie did demanded that the ensemble itself change to accommodate the way in which they played. So things had to, so the, so the rhythm had to loosen up, a certain kind of a way. And there was more, there was, there was a lot more detailed involvement between the drummer and the, and the horn.

Many people think that, though, that change bop, that killed jazz...?

Well, see, there, there’re are some erroneous statements that are often made about jazz during the bop era. See, Charlie Parker played plenty of dances. I mean, he played ‘em, and played the same tunes. I mean, one of his greatest performances, “Bird At Saint Nick’s” was at St. Nicholas Arena, up in Harlem. He was playing a dance. The photographs are all these people out here on the dance floor while he’s playing this extraordinary stuff. So, that’s not true. What it is, is that the, is that the, the, see, what really happened was that rhythm, was that Louis Jordan and the rhythm and blues thing began to take over the, began to become the popular dance music. See, it wasn’t, see, if you remove Louis Jordan from the equation, you might have had something very, very different. In fact, I was actually startled to

see a photograph of Miles Davis, with Coltrane, playing a dance somewhere in Harlem in like 1958, '59. So, so, I think a lot of that is not really true. Think that that the, that it's the, the other things happened.

What killed Charlie Parker?

Well, Charlie Parker was just a victim of his own ex..., excesses. He just, he couldn't get a grip. I mean, he just, see, I, the way I usually describe him is here's a guy who, you know, if you're going to stay off drugs or alcohol or cigarettes, or whatever it is, if you're in a situation where people will offer them to you, see you might have to have, you might have to be able to say 'no' a hundred times before the people who were trying to give you stuff will stop bothering you. They'll say, "Oh, he actually doesn't want any heroin!," you know, or he actually doesn't want any cocaine, or he actually doesn't want me to buy him a drink or he actually doesn't want one of my cigarettes, or one of my cigars, or, you know, whatever it is. Charlie Parker may have only had 99 'no's.' See, he did want to stop, but see, he was also th..., he also had that kind of personality.

I remember once, I was going with this girl who's, who had two, her parents were alcoholics. But the way they worked it out was this: if you went in and they were having a drink, you say, "Why are you drinking?" "Oh, I had a bad day." If you went in the next day, "Why are you drinking?" "I had a good day." Go in another day, "Why are have, why are you drinking?" "I lost my job." "Why are you drinking?" "I got a new job." You know, so, whatever happened, the alcohol went with it, so if you were happy, sad, anywhere in between, won at the racetrack, lost at the racetrack, have a drink. And so, Charlie P.., see, also see, his body, see, I've, I've often wondered, because he had been , see, he had been shooting dope since he was 17. He'd been an addict since he was 17. Now, he only lived to be 34, but, to, to, but the degree that, that, the, the sheer pressure he put on himself, I don't, I don't, I, I'm, I'm somewhat amazed that he, he made it as long as he did. Because his degree of dissipation was truly not, the usual, even in a world of dissipation. He was exceptional.

Didn't it become a little bit chic, though, to sort of emulate this?

Well, first thing we have to understand about drugs is this: drugs feel good. See, people, if drugs didn't feel good, you couldn't sell them, you know. Drugs, it's like prostitution, right, you couldn't have a successful whorehouse if sex didn't feel good. See, people go in there: "Huh! Well, I just went to... I just been to a whorehouse." "Yeah, well, what happened?" "Aw, it was horrible, as usual, but I'm going back tomorrow night," you know, that's not how people function, you know, that's not how people function. See, the thing, see, see, the problem like, one, one, one, one, one her..., one heroin addict told me, he said, he said, "If they would ever tell you what it was like

in front, right, that it actually was really something that was great but bad for you, that would be better than telling you it's just bad for you, you know. See, and so it's, so...

So we don't even try it once...?

Well, I don't know about once, but the thing is is that it just, but, it was, I mean everybody people liked it. So, see, the, people liked it then, they would like now. You know, I mean, Mother Theresa, if you shot her up, she'd like it, you know? I mean it's not a matter, just not having anything to do with anything. The problem, the problem, it seems to me, is that the, the, the, the world that Parker and these people lived in was what did it, was what did them in. See, in other words, if Charlie Parker had only shot drugs, right, if he had shot drugs, taken handsful of Benzedrine, you know, drunk enormous amounts of alcohol and did, done all of those things, if he had just tied up and shot dope, and had a doctor in New York that just gave him a prescription, he just got high every day, he'd live to be 90. Like Boris Karloff - he was supposed to have been a dope fiend, you know. Bela Lugosi, so obviously, it's not that, it's not the dope. But see, the way Charlie Parker lived, and he, he had to go out of here, 'cause he was too, he was too much, he was, he, he was too, he, he couldn't stop. You know, he couldn't stop anything. He would drink until he fell out. He would just, that's just the way he was.

You wanted to talk about...?

Oh, yeah, well see, there, there're a couple of things. One of the things is that, that... Many musicians have told me that just the pressure, the sheer pressure of traveling and playing and playing, and traveling and playing, 'cause people to always try to figure out different ways to wind down from just the sheer pressure of traveling in bands and going playing here, playing there, play... Plus, you have to remember that guys played a lot longer in those days. It was, it was a real, you know, today, it like almost a job, regardless of what musicians say. Then, it was a job. That is is that you played from 9 to 4. So that was a job. You actually were like somebody doing what people do during the day. You played what they call 40-20 sets. You start at 9, you play till 20 to 10:00, 10:00 to 20 to 11:00, 11:00 to 20 to midnight, midnight to 20 to 1:00, 1:00 to 20 to, you know... So, if you were the only band on, you played a long time. So, so, all of those, so, so a lot of the other guys drank. You know, so it's a question, so, so, so, to see it in real perspective, we have to figure out if all of these alcoholics, like Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Don Bias, all of these guys, all these guys are certified alcoholics. They drank alcohol all the time, right. Got drunk every day, to some degree. Not drunk beyond being able to perform, to give a professional performance, but they got plastered daily. Now it might not have been a heavy plaster, but they got plastered. Now, Charlie Parker's

generation, those guys, the ones who sh..., who, who became drug addicts, they were dealing with the same thing. Except that they couldn't get it at the bar, right. Secondarily, people have told me that heroin brings a certain kind of acuity to your, to your, to your, to your attention, that you can concentrate a lot more on certain kinds of things because, see, what happens is, is that the, see, see, the way the brain works in playing jazz is that, what, what the brain does is that it works the way that the brain works in moments of extreme peril. See, if you get in an automobile accident, for instance, your brain will speed its perception up so that everything slows down so that you can make the best decision to protect yourself from destruction. Now, when you're playing, your brain actually works like that, too. So, when a guy is playing, the music actually slows down in his brain because he's dealing with the peril of getting lost, or losing his place in the form, et cetera, et cetera right. Now, what the heroin does is it can slow it down even more. So, that, so that this, so that this quality that your brain has worked at all the time, when you use the heroin, you actually can slow that down a little bit more so you're actually able to deal with that emergency level of perception, again.

Tell me about the scene in Minton's…?

Oh, well that, well, the, well the, the scene in Minton's was about the fact that the guys could go in there and, and jam and Thelonius Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Kenny Clark, I think a bass player named Nick Fenton, they started on some new stuff here in New York before Charlie Parker came to New York, before he, he, they didn't even know who he was. But, see, what he did, see, this is the thing. They had the, the, Kenny Clark had invented a new drum style, right, there was another way you could play the drums, right? Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonius Monk had worked out these other ways of playing the chords. They had told the bass player how to walk the notes that would fit the way they wanted it to go, see? But they didn't have the phrasing. See, they had everything but the phrasing. And Charlie Parker brought the mortar, see. They had the bricks, they had the bricks, but he brought the mortar; that's his phrasing was what made the, the bricks hold together. See, before he got there they were just interesting bricks. When he came, when he put that rhythm that he brought from Kansas City and out of his imagination, in, and he, he, he locked it in together, because Dizzy said, that he said, "Well, we heard him... When we heard his phrasing, we knew the music had to go his way." You know, so they had all of that, they, they, that was what he did.

…The other thing too, about, as one guy pointed out to me in the 60's, he said something very interesting was that, that heroin is a, is a drug that's based on, it's, it's an introspective drug, and that people go inside themselves with heroin. Whereas, with something so that, so that it was a real inside kind of a thing, you... Including the nodding off, you know, guys... 'cause ...???... Now, it also provided a wall of a sort between the musicians and the various hostilities that they got either from the audience, the

business world, other musicians, et cetera. So, it was also a kind of a, it was kind an intoxicating suit of armor, as well. You know. And, and then, it was also pleasurable, but it had an interesting in..., influence on American culture because it, it, it created a set of mannerisms and speech patterns that people used who weren't high, right? So, in other words, so these junkies, they g...?.. "Hey man, you know, ehhh..." So, a whole bunch of people, now they're talking like that because they are high, right? Then, after a while, people are going, "Hey, man.... what's going on?" Now they're not even high, right?, but they've been around these dope fiends and have said, "Oh, that scene's hip. That's... the way they, I like the way they talk." So, you end up, say, with some guy who, who drove, who lives in Madison, Wisconsin, and drove with his buddy to Chicago to see whomever, and goes back to get some autographs, and they're all dope fiends, say, "Hey, kid... how you doing, boy... Yeah, ooo..." And they're talking like that. Then he goes back and takes that to Madison, and then you can have a whole little clique of jazz guys, jazz fans, right?, talking like these dope fiends without even, without the benefit of the high, if you want to call it the benefit.

What's the future of jazz…?

Well, I think that the, the... I think it's always difficult to, to figure out what, what is going to happen. But one thing I think is happening is that you have a group of, of, of, a, a, a growing body of young musicians who have no illusions about becoming pop stars, who are not interested in moving into the various clichés of popular music, show business, and have decided that they want to play, play as well as they can, based upon the way they have reacted to the music of Thelonius Monk or Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, or Dizzy Gillespie or Miles Davis or whomever it is. And I see that as an extraordinarily healthy thing because our is a culture that puts an incredible amount of pressure on young people to conform. So, if some kid is picking up the saxophone, trying to figure how to play like Ben Webster or Paul Gonzalves or something like this, this is a very strong person, right? Because, just first 'cause there's nothing in mass media or in his immediate environment that's telling him to go that way. And see, to me, when you have a growing body of young people, male, female, Americans, people coming here from Europe, from Japan, et cetera, who want to try to figure out how to swing, how to play blues, how to play ballads, how to play those, those, those Latin rhythms, which, which are what I consider the 4 basic elements that we see dealt with in jazz over and over, then I think the music has a good future. You know, I mean, the, the, the, the, the obsession with, with innovation as opposed to quality often to what Albert Murray calls novelty, not real innovation. So that, you have to try figure out if you have a... See, see, what, what, what makes a golden age is not a, is, is not a, a good, a great number of geniuses. It's, it's that the, the idea of individual involvement in something has such a, such a, such a, such a high standard that people go beyond what we are accustomed to them doing, right. You know, it's like the, like the s.., the story that I saw in a ad in "Time"

magazine, about 30, 30, 35 years ago, where this guy's a, a, these guys, these, these are bricklayers, right? This is during the Renaissance. So, one guy says, he said to one guy, he says, "What are you doing?" He says, "I'm, I'm doing what this guy... I'm doing what the foreman told me to do." The other guy, they go to the second guy and said, "What are you doing?" "See, I take one brick, I put some mortar on top of it, then I put a brick on top of that." Then they go to the other, the third guy and they say, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm building a great cathedral," right? Now, the third guy, right?, that's the guy. That's the guy. 'Cause he knows what the deal is. So, we've got a lot of people like that now, and so, if they build great cathedrals, it doesn't matter to me whether or not they are Louis Armstrong.

Dizzy Gillespie, can you paint him for me, playing, once you said he was the essence of the art of jazz.

Oh, well, the thing about Dizzy that was so important was that he, he was both an extraordinary intellectual and he was a guy who had this real love, love of life and great sense of humor and the unfortunate thing for him in the overage of his career was that, the fact that he seemed to have so much fun and tell so many jokes and dance on stage and all that caused people to, to not really realize that he had been the central organizing figure in the bebop era. I mean, Charlie Parker was a a great talent, obviously, in a monumental figure, but Charlie Parker was so hung up with his drug habits and alcoholism and hedonism and, you know, in irresponsible behavior of, you know, not showing up for work or just leaving town with somebody if he felt like it. He was a whimsical person. But Dizzy Gillespie was the kind of guy who would call rehearsals, teach the people the chords, show the bass players how to play the right notes for the soloist, teach the drummers how to play the, play the the the the rhythms that fit most with the style. He used to gather people at his house and teach them the chords and have the guys, teach the guys how to sing the intervals that fit. And so, his, his, his house on Seventh Avenue, his apartment on Seventh Avenue became kind of a spontaneous conservatory with all these people. If they wanted to learn what bop was, they went to see Dizzy. Now, out nights, so Dizzy did a lot of things. So he did that; he invented a new style for his, a new virtuoso style for for for the trumpet that had no real precedent, the way he played. And he forged the first, he he was central to the forging of the, of the big band language and the arrangements, so he, and he was an exceptional writer. So in a lot of ways, he was as talented just about as anybody we've had, you know. I mean who was, well, he was somewhat like Jelly Roll Morton in that respect that he was both a great trumpet player and and and and and a great composer and an organizer and an arranger and and and a teacher.

This sense of him being a mythic figure and the essence of his playing.

Oh, well the thing ab, well, Gillespie as a player, he was, he was an old-school hot player. He could never be put in the cool playing category. I

mean, he was a, he put, what he had this extraordinary ability to play would exp, with great power. He had, he played with far more rhythmic complexity probably than any other trumpet player in the history of jazz. He was the the most harmonically intricate, the the notes he played through the chords according to all the musicians I've talked to. A a much more intricate than what anybody else played. And he, and he, he he could lift a band. He had that, he had that ability that the, that the great players have. If if things started, if things started to ebb, he could pick his horn up and lift the whole band up. He could lift, the, Steve Lacy's term. And I think a lot of people have used it before. He could lift the bandstand. He had that ability.

Miles. If you could tell me what Miles's most important contribution to jazz.

I would say that Miles Davis added a certain kind of dimension to the fundamental melancholy that exist in the, in the aspect of the blues. In fact, a lot of Miles Davis's playing is is much deeper in terms of its recognition of human frailty, the the horrors of life, the the cutthroat terror of things, I mean, you know, I mean he he he has a thing that he did for that movie, "Escalator," I think it's called, "Escalator," or, "Elevator to the Scaffold." When he's playing the part after this guy has been murdered. Very few people in jazz could have played that, you know, like he played it. Because, you know, he has that kind of, he has this kind of, it's kind of a mortician's stoicism in a certain sense, you know. He actually can take the, he can, he can take the, the scalpel and cut open the body and take the bullet out and hold it in his hand, let you look at it, you know, so that you can see that blood, that bent piece of lead and the human hand that it's in, you know. 'Cause that's, that's, that's what his sound is. His sound is that human hand that holds that bullet that murdered that person. And that's the thing that he does that nobody else can do.

Tell me about his relationship to Parker and what did he get from Bird?

Well, I think that Charlie Parker, Miles Davis got, well he got almost everything from Charlie Parker in that Charlie Parker's ability to, to create an aura with his sound. See, see one of the things Charlie Parker had was he had, now the guys who came before Charlie Parker didn't like his sound and they've got a lot of things they say about it. That it was thin, it was brittle or it was that. But see, Charlie Parker's sound was, see Charlie Parker's sound was a reaction to, to urban life as he felt it. And so, Charlie Parker's sound is something like the, the, it's something like the the the the shell of the subway; it's a hard thing that moves fast, you know. But now that doesn't mean that there isn't great joy and vitality inside the subway car. But, but that's kind of what his sound was like. Now. Miles Davis's sound is not like that but he got that thing from Charlie Parker, I think.

Is it true that Miles couldn't play and therefore developed a unique style that was suited to his limitations?.

Well, you know, that's, I, I think one of the major myths in jazz is that Miles Davis was not really a good trumpet player and that he invented the style he invented because he couldn't play what Dizzy Gillespie and other people were playing. Well, first thing, nobody could play what Dizzy Gillespie was playing. Let's get that straight. Secondarily, the only person after Dizzy Gillespie who, who approached that kind of technique was Fats Navarro, so there weren't, there weren't these legions of trumpet players running around who could play like Dizzy and Miles Davis was the one who couldn't. None of them could. I mean, so what what what, see but what Miles Davis, see he also was attracted to Lester Young. See, he was attracted to Lester Young and to Billie Holiday who was a very big influence on him as was Louis Armstrong. So what he, and Thelonious Monk. So, so the style that he ended up developing was a style based on cutting things away, not adding. See, a lot of people, so so in other words like, like Dizzy Gillespie style is like the Dagwood sandwich where you got the ham, then you got pork, I mean, you got ham, then you got chicken, then you got this, then you got, got tomatoes, then you have these different kind of cheeses, then you have this and so you get this gigantic thing, right? Miles Davis, Miles Davis's style was like was it steak tartar, right? This raw meat with a egg on top, right? That's it.

We also have to remember in terms of Miles Davis's relationship to Charlie Parker is, see, Charlie Parker was a great blues player. He was the greatest blues player of the bop, of the bop era. And the only great trumpet, great trumpet player, great blues player who came out of the bop era was Miles Davis on the trumpet. Dizzy Gillespie could play some, but not like Miles Dav, none of those people. Clifford Brown, then you know, Fats, they were all, they were good. But Miles Davis could really play the blues.

What limits did he see in bop and what did he try to do to overcome this. Is it the subtraction you were talking about from the Dagwood?

Yeah, well see, I think that what Char, what, see, I think a lot of the key to understanding Miles Davis is the, is the direct, is the directness and the subtlety of great blues and see I think that what he, what he really developed was that, his, his sensitivity to blues and his stripping away led to him moving away from a number of the, of the clichés that we associated with bop. And so that, so that in a way, he, he used the blues as a strainer to remove the elements that weren't weren't weren't, that he didn't find with words expressive of what he wanted to say. As they were for other people. And also, we, we, we can never leave out the influence of Thelonious Monk, see Thelonious Monk, see Thelonious Monk, Monk had, I think, as big an impact on Miles Davis as anybody else. Because, see, from Monk he learned that you could use the new kind of harmonic ideas that had arrived but you could use them in the spare, telling way that Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong and blues singers and players used their material. So you didn't

need all of the the the the, you didn't need to use the the Baroque elements that you got in bop. You could just cut straight to the chase as the saying goes. So, 'cause he learned from Monk that whereas one guy might play seven or eight notes to tell a story, Monk might play three or two. But they'd be so tellingly placed that they would have the same impact, sometimes bigger.

Oh, what I think, see I think that there's a very strong connection between what Miles Davis got from Charlie Parker and from Monk. What, what Parker and Monk have in common although their styles are very, very different is they share an extraordinary audacity. And , and there's a real boldness in the way Charlie Parker plays and what they say take, in the what they say in the business they call taking these different riffs (risks?). Monk takes the riffs but they're different kinds of riffs but they, but they have the same, they, they share the same kind of boldness. And see, when Miles Davis began to develop this, this sparer style, that was a very bold moment in the evolution of the music because things had become so, so complex and intricate. And then when the guy would just say, he would just play something real simple and direct, it had that same kind of boldness and I think that, that in his way, he had, he had taken this, this audacity that he, he heard in these two guys and he fused it into something for himself.

Who is Miles?

Well, I mean, as a person, Miles Davis, who really knows? I mean, he, he seems to have been involved in in in wearing as many masks as Charlie Parker whom he, whom he says he never saw anybody, whom he says he never saw, wait a minute. Miles Davis seems to have been a man who wore many, many masks and he had that in common with Charlie Parker. Those who knew him said he was a shy person so a lot of that was protective coloration, so to speak, that he was trying to keep people at a distance. Also, I think that he understood that if you're going to give what he was giving on the bandstand, you had to avoid being drained by the different people who come to you if you're a person of that sort to try to, to rub some of the power off, you know. See if they can scrape something off and take it home and make something of themselves with it. So he tried to keep all of that in the distance. He also had a malicious, cruel streak in his personality. It was pretty obvious. I mean, the, the stories about him and women but also just sadistic things he liked to do with other people. See, 'cause he liked, he liked, he he he enjoyed playing with people's insecurities. He got a lot of, he got a kick out of making people feel uncomfortable. And als, some of that had to do with him because he was an insecure guy. He was short. A slow guy, and he also was a very dark-skinned guy at a period, in a period when that was, when that was not going to lead you to the kind of career that Wesley Snipes has. See, if Wesley Snipes had been born in 1920, when was Miles, what in 1926? If Wesley Snipes who's a dark-skinned guy had been born in the same year as Miles Davis, believe me, he would not have become

a movie star. See, so Miles Davis was a guy who, see, he resented all of that. He resented all that stuff about white, about light skin and good hair. He didn't like any of that. And so he was drug about that from a very early point in his life. Now one of his, his great idols was Billie Hol, Billy Eckstine who exemplified the, the the the matinee idol standers of the time. So he didn't dislike people purely on the basis of what they looked like. He wasn't that kind of person. If he, if you were white and he like you, he liked you. If you were Black, and he liked you, he liked you. He didn't care about any of that but the act, but the ac, the the ideas that people had about who you were or what you were about internally based upon skin color or class or any of that, he hated that.

Why are the birth of the cool sessions light-weight, your term?

Well, I mean every time I listen to those birth of the cool sessions, I can't *(laughs)* I can't, I'm always trying to figure out what, what's the big deal with this? I mean that stuff sounds like elevator music with some swing on it to me, most of the time. I mean, you know, some of the tunes are okay, but the idea that this was like this revolutionary pivot point in jazz, I don't get it.

What's the genius there in the small groups. What's he fusing that's so interesting?

Well, what made Miles Davis different from a lot of other band leaders was, see he really understood the weight of sound. And so he understood how the weight of the bass, you know, versus the weight of the sound of the cymbal. The weight of the piano chord. The weight of the, of the sound of the tenor player. The weight of his sound. And so, he really knew how to mix those together very, very well.

Help me understand in the late 40's and early 50's the emergence of hard bop. What was this music? Why was it called hard bop? Why did it appeal to young people, and who was most influential?

Well, well the so-called hard bop movement was just, was was was the kind of thing that periodically happens in the United States and I, I imagine in everything which is that when you get to a period of great, great intricacy, then some people say at some point, "Wait a minute. I just want me, give me a hamburger with nothing on it. Just give me a piece of bread, some meat and another piece of bread and I'll eat that." You know, so it's if somebody, so if a guy's been saying it's, this many choruses in this and that and it's, no, no, no, no, no, I don't want that, just give me a piece of bread and a piece of meat and another piece of bread and I'm happy. Now that's what bop, hard bop was in a sense. It was a kind of reaction to the, the, the kind, the kind of decadence that always lies in wait for a per, for for for a

moment when something has been made very elaborate to sneak in and even, and make it over-refined.

So it's in reaction to the Baroque?

Well, not to him. It was that, it was just, well, you know, you had a lot of different kinds of experimental things supposedly that were going on. And you had a kind of drifting away from the force and the power of the music with the and the so-called West Coast sound which came out of the birth of the cool. And I, and it was a very, it was one of those ironic moments that we have up here in America over and over which is, you know, this this this, in this particular case, this black guy organizes this band, right? And then, some kind of way, he gets every, he he he buys the bus. Puts the tires on, buys the gas, gets everybody on the bus and some kind of way along the ride, he gets thrown off the bus. So, in a little while, Miles Davis looks around and, you know, Chet Baker and Jerry Mulligan and this one and that one and you know, they all big popular and they're playing that kind of, you know, that kind of doo dee doo dee doo dee doo dee doo doot, dee dee dee dee deet, doo doo dee doo doot, you know that kind of you know, he's like, I know, I know he must call it, even though he was in the middle of that, it's some people say, "What? Not that!" So, you know, so then they just hit that Spit! Dodobedodit, bedobedodit. You know they just went back to this Pow! Let's get that off, you know, it's kind of, 'cause that stuff to them was kind of to them like cobwebs.

What were the cool musicians responding to and was that jazz music?

Well, look, all of it's jazz, now. See, see the one thing I, the one thing I'm convinced of is all of it's jazz. Whether it's good or bad. It's all jazz. The cool movement, so called swing era, Kansas City, New Orleans, it's all jazz. But what happens periodically is that the music, that that the music, the music takes these, these bizarre arra, racial terms. So you have just, you'll have just a jazz style, right? Then you'll end up with a white jazz style. And then the white jazz style so called and nobody says this, now. Nobody comes out and says this is white jazz. But what, what, what white jazz means is more of suburban. It's like a suburban emotion inserted into jazz. Which we don't associate normally, with jazz, with the force of jazz. In other words, the thing that everybody tries to get away from, you know, like the the, let me get this right. What the suburbanization of jazz tends to be is, is a softening of the surface and a, and a, and a draining away of, of the impact on the part of those who don't like it.

Really big point here. There are white people who can play jazz that don't need the adjective white.

Let me get this straight. When I say white jazz, what I mean is, is, is the insertion back into jazz of the kind of thing that the white guys like Jack Teagarden who could truly play, would try to get away from in playing jazz. You know, so it would be kind of, so, so, it would be kind of like if a guy, if a guy lef, if a guy was Catholic, right? Was Roman Catholic and he left Catholicism and embraced Judaism. And in the middle of that, one day he came in there, right? And there was the Holy Trinity and they said, "You know what we're going to do? We decided that that that the Virgin Mary is actually a very important person. And we've decided, by the way, Jesus Christ, we think he's great, too. In fact, we're embracing the New Testament." He'd say, "Wait a minute! That's, I left." You know what I'm saying? It's like that. That you get, that you get the thing you're trying to leave comes back at you from another side, you know. I think that's a little bit too out there. I don't know if people'd understand that.

I'm thinking about the public image of Miles in the 1950's, quintessentially cool guy. What was your image of him.

Well, you know, one of the things about Miles Davis and the development of his career that's very interesting is that he's probably the only major Black jazz musician who's career was, had, who had, who had pivotal moments in his career that were, were, were, were overt collaborations with white musicians. The birth of the cool business, his his relationship with Gil Evans that produced Miles, you know, the the the concert that that Evans wrote for him to feature him, that really became very, very popular. And I don't think anybody else has ever, see that didn't happen with Les, that wasn't true with Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Count Basie. Now you've had that in terms of managerial relationships. You know, you had business things in which the white guys and white guys were working together. But the, but the very nature of the way that Miles Davis was projected was was very different than other people. Now, he, now Miles Davis benefited from the, the reaction that people were beginning to feel in the 1950's against the, the suburbanization of the United States. A lot of mass, you know, a lot of mass packaging in a, in a kind of a projection of a certain sublime mediocrity, if you will. So people wanted something that was, that was, that that was elegant but that had a bite to it. And so you, so people like Miles Davis and Sidney Poitier and Marlon Brando at the time that they came forward, they were alternatives to what had been presented the, earlier.

And they were cool.

Well yeah. Well see the thing, one of the things that's always fascinated me about, about Marlon Brando was, see, I always found, thought that his acting was very influenced by Negroes. I always, see, I jus, he, the gestures and stuff that he uses, he always looked to me like a guy who had been in the so-called Black world and had picked things up that he used as an actor. Just as Charlie Parker liked to use the British accent that he heard from, you know, Charles Lorden or Ronald Coleman, so it's not a matter of any kind of

self-hatred, you know, even exploitations just I think that's just something that he liked. But also, if you look at something like, "On the Waterfront," "On the Waterfront" might be the first great civil rights movie. Because essentially what it is about is terrorist organizations controlling these people, right. On the waterfront, just as the Clan and other people did in the South. And you have this guy who rises up from the people who's an intimidated guy who's been, who's been exploited by this, by his brother, by other people. And who's, who's, who's nonviolence finally, finally the way that they win is not by the violence because when he tries to fight the guys, they just beat him up. But it's when all of these people decide like they did in the Civil Rights Movement, we're not going to do anything. You're not going to order us.

Do you like the Miles "Kind of Blue" sessions?

Yeah.

Talk to me about that.

Well, "Kind of Blue" session is a great session. I mean, it's a blues session, with this, with this vocabulary, this modal vocabulary that he was introducing. Inspired by people like George Russell and Mingus. One of the things about Miles Davis, too, is that, see he was the greatest popularizer of things. See, he didn't, the modal movement actually was started by people like George Russell. See, George Russell was one who really. . .

What is modal jazz?

Okay. Let me figure it out. Okay. Well, I guess the easiest way to explain what, what modal jazz is it's the difference between a, a suspension bridge that has a lot of little pieces of wood on it, right, that you cross and a suspension bridge that has as many, as many of those, those, those little pieces of wood removed as possible that still allow you to get from one side to the other. So that's essentially what it is. In the, in the bop era, people played it a lot. If we say that each one of those pieces of wood, right, is a chord, then the boppers had all of these chords lined up in the suspension bridge that you had to get from here to there. With the, with the modal style, you remove more and more of these so you end up, sometimes with only two or three, you know. So, so what happens is that you have to develop another kind of dexterity. So you, I guess you'd say you might have to to to to learn how to grab the sides of the bridge and swing forward to the next one and then swing forward to the next one and then swing to the other side. So that's kind of what it is and Miles Davis described it as something that created an opportunity and a challenge to be more melodic because you didn't have the chords to rely on to carry you, you know, because there were, there were so few there.

Take a favorite cut on "Kind of Blue" and talk to me about it.

Well, the first thing that you have to understand with the, with the Miles Davis band is that see, he, these guys were very much in awe of him. And we don't necessarily think about it that way, but I, in research I found him talking to people, see all these people were very much in awe of him, even Coltrane. Because see, he knew a lot and he had done a lot and, and Miles Davis was a very brilliant man see, and he was, he was, he was the kind of guy who was, noticed a lot of stuff. He probably would have been a great painter. I mean there's those things that he painted at the end, I don't know, but if he'd have started out as a painter, he might have become a great painter. 'Cause he had that eye for detail and contrast. So, in this, he brings this material to these guys and he's ready to play that, so, they'd been playing all of these tunes, you know, complex material. And then he says, "Okay, let's try this, right here, these simple forms." So when he, when he got them in the, in the studio to do that, everybody was walking through into, down another corridor, so to speak. And he was like the guy who had the, it's like it's a dark corridor and he was the guy who had the flashlight. Everybody said, "Okay, let's go down there; he knows where we're going."

What cut epitomizes that?

I guess, me, I mean, I don't know. To me, I don't have any favorite tracks, I must say. One of the things that the recording did, one of the things that the recording did and this is one of the things that, that, see the CD has made something very clear to us that was not necessarily clear in the, in the era of the LP which is that something is either a unit of music or it's, or it's a bunch of tracks, one following the other, right? The, the effect that the CD creates when you put "Kind of Blue" on is that it's an, it's, it's, one thing. It's an entire piece of music, even though the pieces are different. It has an overall effect as a unit. His first record for Columbia, "Round about Midnight" has that same effect. It doesn't seem like a bunch of tracks thrown together. And so, that was one of the things, too, that he had. Now this is a period when people didn't make records like that. They just went in and made, we got, we'll put this here, we'll have a ballad here, we'll do a blues here, we'll do that. But his, see, that's another thing, his records, see, Miles Davis, he had that other thing too which was he was a supreme organizer. And when you got one of his records, it was, it was an entire statement. He knew exactly what he was going and, oh a mouse, Wow.

One way to illustrate what modal jazz is versus the other more Baroque things is to give a little riff.

Well, well, you see it doesn't really work like that. I don't think they would get it. I think they'd get it better with just that, that image.

Okay.

The thing is you can't, what I'm trying to get at is that the, the, it's just that the problem, I think we'd be better sticking with that one. Someone along the way in this program, I'm sure, will come up with a good explanation.

What happened when jazz encountered rock and roll?

Well, the, see, jazz had always existed in a world in which there were other kinds of things going along. That it had outlived. So, I think what happened with with with jazz musicians when, when rock really took off with the Beatles was that you, was that jazz musicians found themselves in a, in a, in a pop world at that particular time where this form had arrived that wasn't going to go away.
…Before, before rock and roll, jazz was was was a form that moved along kind of, I guess that some filmmaker was making films and for a little while, you know, you have, you know you have something like these beach party movies, right. And rock and roll was like a beach party movie that never ended, you know. It stayed in the theaters week after week, year after year. And so, you know, and it didn't matter how old the people were in the bea, in the beach party movie. Because now in rock and roll, what you got, people, fifty, fifty-five. You got geriatric rock and rollers who still fill stadiums, you know, like the Rolling Stones. So, jazz had never, ever encountered anything like that. This form that just locked in so powerfully that, that everything became subordinate to it in terms of attention.

Did Miles sell out with the fusion?

Well, see, I think, I think what happened to him, see I used to think that he sold out from the start. Now I don't necessarily think that's initially what happened. What I think was that he got, he, he became so over-impressed by his own press notices about how he was always on the frontier, he was always on the cutting edge as they would say today. That he was an explorer, blah, blah, blah, right? So, I think he got to that. I also think he went through, I think he went through, he was always going through his version, the male version of the menopause, you know. See, I don't know if, in this feminist era I don't even know if they talk about that anymore. But because the dresses are so high now, who, who, who could say? But there used to be a period when if a woman started becoming insecure when she got about forty, forty-five, you know, the top of the dress would get lower and the bottom of the dress would get higher and then she would end up, you know, going to discos and stuff and jumping up and down and all of that, you know, because she was trying to battle time. Now I think Miles Davis, that's what happened to him, too. Just think, but that it's, so, it's, it's, it's because he was a very vain guy, too, you know. He was a very vain guy. He was handsome, had, you know, had, had sexual encounters with who knows

how many women, you know. Sometimes one, sometimes two, whatever was going on that he was interested in doing. So he was at this period when this, when they've made rock, when rock and roll becomes like the new powerhouse, sexual thrust, force, you know, in popular art. And I just think he didn't like that. I think he, he, I don't think he liked the idea that something was going to come up that was going to make him, what he was doing, seem like it was old. And at first, I think, he went into it he was actually looking around, looking for something to see if there was a place for him. And in "Felix Kilamenjaro,' for instance, in that recording, he has a piece called Mademoiselle Mavery which is an adaptation of Jimi Hendrix' tune, "And the Wind Cries Mary," which is a masterpiece, this particular thing. Had he stayed over in there, he would have actually invented something that we didn't know.

What happened?

I just think he got, I think what happened to him, I think what happened to him after a certain point was, I think he got, I think he got fatigued in a certain way. Because I think that he really, when he actually realized that he couldn't conquer this thing, that this thing was bigger than he was, that there was no way that he, no matter how much of a musical genius he was, no matter how great a trumpet player he was, no matter what, that this, that this thing here was not going to be defeated. I think he went into a deep depression and then he was swallowed up in it.

What happened to his public persona during this period?

Well I, well, see, well, see, part of what we have to, part of what we have to realize about all of these things is that we live in a puritanical country, the United States so we're always screwed up about sex. And we're always screwed up about honesty, you know. So that, so that, when somebody compliments something in this country, they always saying, "It's real. It's honest." Right? "It tells it like it is. They get down." Well, what does get down mean? Well that means something's up here and you go down there, right? And so that down there somewhere is the truth. Up there is the fraud. And so when when when that was translated in the pop music, then it became a whole bunch of of of anti-authoritarian stuff, super-sexual stuff. Everything was supposed to be freeing you from, from, from, from this bondage, this middle-class bondage, you know. So it was kind of like, it was a, it was an attempt to cut off the, the, the, the, to cut the chains of convention, I guess.

But we cut the chains of convention and you get free jazz. You get lost.

Well, see, but the thing that you always have to remember, too, about, about all of this is that, is that it was, see, an argument was being had on two different planes. See, white kids were rebelling against their middle-class background, you know, so, so you know, "Oh! You think I should look this way? Well, I'll look exactly not like that. I'll grow my hair long. I'll have a beard. I'll. . . drugs? I'll smoke, smoke a reefer and and shoot up some dope at the same time. And after I get finished with that I'll take some LSD and then after that I'm going to an orgy over at Uncle Bob's and we're going to so and so and so and so and I'm going to wear purple and green and it's together and I don't care what you say!" Okay, so that's their part of it. On the other side, you've got the, the, the race rebellion against, against, against white racism in the country on the part of the Black youth. So, so I think Miles Davis found himself caught between the tongs of, you know, caught on the tongs of these two things. On the one hand, both groups are rebelling against something that he didn't particularly like. But. but both of them got into that typical American disorder that that that actually leads to self-exploitation after a certain point. See, because you don't, see, once you buy into the idea that you, as a Black person, that this country is, this is the white man's country and it's not yours and all, you're only relationship to it is repression and if you're, you're, you're white, you will go in all this convention and all this is not the way the world is screwed up. Then you, then you make yourself vulnerable to different kinds of totalitarianism. One of them is a racial totalitarianism, and then there's just the pop totalitarianism of absolute bad taste, you know. And so, so Miles Davis is a very classy guy. He finds himself caught up in the middle of which, which way am I going to go on this? And so, you know, by the time he starts wearing these strange outfits, right? You know, these, you know, the snakeskin boots and these big scarves and gigantic belts and tried to wear an Afro, but see, he didn't have that kind of hair. See, Black as he was, his hair wasn't made for that. So he had, you know, he had, he had, if you will, a finer grade of hair, so if you saw him with, playing outdoors with one of these would-be Afros, his hair's blowing. He could have been , you know what I mean? It was, I mean, he could have been Jewish. You know what I mean? So, he's in there and he's got these big space wrap-around glasses and all this and he said, "What is this guy doing?" Right?

It took him over. It took him over.

How did Davis respond to the avant garde?

Well, the first thing about it is that the music that that, or that Coleman came to New York with was, was and is far superior to all the stuff that came after it. See that's the fundamental problem with the so-called jazz avant garde. It doesn't sound as good as Ornette Coleman's, "Shape of Jazz to Come" record which was made in March of 1959. I mean, that stuff decayed so fast into just chaos and noise and garbage and so Miles Davis, he could, he could hear what Ornette Coleman was doing. He understood that. But he

also understood that from his perspective, he wouldn't want to play like that all night. He just wanted, he would have used that as a particular color, not as something that you do throughout the evening.

Was Ornette Coleman a fraud?

No, I don't think Ornette Coleman was a fraud, at all. I mean Ornette Coleman is, Ornette Coleman is actually, Ornette Coleman and the people who were around him, from what I can tell are the only true giants of so-called free jazz. I mean, if you hear, if you hear a record of so-called free jazz and it sounds good, it's usually somebody that played with Ornette Coleman or, if it's not him.

What do we need to understand about free jazz? What was this music about?

Well, well, well the, see, Ornette Coleman, see, now they didn't gravitate to what Ornette Coleman did, see now that's the thing that's always got to be clarified. See, Ornette Coleman, see, Ornette Coleman was a real melodic. Was and is. He's one of the great melody players. And so, you know, if he plays something, if he has a melody like say, boo dee doo ee doo bee uh, way doodle ee boop bup bo do doo wee doo eee. Bo bee o bee eee duh. He's got another part I can't sing. But then when he, when he starts to play the part that goes, bo doo be ooh be dee uh. He'll say, boodee doo bee boodit. See, he'll play a variation on that. Ooh beedoo bee deedle eee dut. Oop boo deedle eee dee dut. Way doodle eee way doodle etc. See, he's always playing on the melody. That's what people don't get. You know, these people run around talking about chaos. His music is so far away from chaos it's a joke. Now, the people who came after him. See, to actually stand up there and make up a melody, that's hard to do. So they just went into wahp eere bereearetgh duh. You know, and they went out into the air. Now Coleman, there are no recordings of Coleman playing like that. Coleman never plays like that. He just, he I mean, something, see. Plus, Coleman could swing, hard. See, Ornette Coleman is a swinger. He's got a great lyric gift. See, the other thing about him is that see, his music, his playing has a certain kind of purity because, it, see, he has in his sound, the quality of real compassion which is always the proposition of actual innocence. See, that is that that is see, compassion for people you don't know, right? That's the, that's the, that's the only entré into innocence that you ever achieve after childhood from what I can tell. And so when you hear Coleman play, you know, he'll say "Ooooooh dee duh." You know. "Booo beee oooo deee." You know? "Dooobeee day oooo da da." You've got that thing in his sound. Other people can't do that. And, a lot of it, if it wasn't him, it would be corny.

Important that Coleman is coming out of something.

Oh, I think Ornette Coleman had a sound that was a direct reflection in his personality of the, of the, of the mood that arrived by the middle fifties with the, with the intercontinental ballistic missiles when another kind of paranoia came into the world and gee whiz. These guys are sitting in rooms and they just hit these buttons and kill all kinds of people at great, great, great distances. And so I think that that's in there and and and he also has a very, has this grand idealism that he inherited, I think, too, from Charlie Parker. See Charlie Parker was a great idealist. Now whether he lived as an idealist in the world is another thing. But in his sound there's this very elevated idealistic sense of how things ought to go. That's in Coleman's music, too. And then Coleman has this, and there's this, and he has, he has, he has something, something kind of ancient and backwoodsy to his stuff. I mean he's got a, you know, Ornette Coleman's a country Negro, just no if ands and buts about it. If you talk to him, you know it. If you listen to him, you know it. I mean, he's this, but, but, again, it's that complicated version of of of of he said it once in one of his, he called one of his pieces, I think, something like, "City Minds and Country Hearts." That's kind of like the way he is, I think. Really, if you wanted to say it. In one thing.

What's it like to talk to Ornette?

Talking with Ornette Coleman is quite an adventure because his, the way he talks is the way, it's like his music. He's, he has his own way of getting from one place to the next and you have to listen closely and you have to watch out. See, like walking, like talking with him is like walking across a field at night where there are a bunch of gopher holes. See, if you don't watch it, you're going to step in one of those and break something, you know. So, now, but he never steps in them. He never steps in them. You know, he never steps in them. But that's the way he, you know, he's an amazing man to me.

Ornette and Coltrane as charlatans as well as serious musicians.

Well, see, Ornette Coleman had, Ornette Coleman had a serious problem which was that what he was able to do with his musicians, nobody else in that arena could do. And he was very supportive of these people trying to do something different, but they couldn't really get over the way he was. And to this day, almost forty years later, they still haven't got it. If they didn't work in his band, the odds are very bad that they sound good. I mean, they just, that's just, that's just how it works. Primarily because, see, Ornette Coleman's music comes directly out of jazz, out of blues. Most of the guys who responded to the idea of doing something different. They were trying to figure out how much European music, twentieth century European music they could bootleg into jazz and call it an innovation. So it would have been somewhat like a a European composer who couldn't, who couldn't, who didn't have the imagination to to to go into the arena, to come up to the level of a Bartok, or a Stravinsky, DeBussey or anybody like that. So, what the guy

would do is he would write these regular European style pieces, right? And he'd just insert passages from Charlie Parker and Louis Armstrong and Art Tatum and Bud Powell and stuff so, suddenly in the middle of some piece, a saxophone player jumps up and says, "Ooble oobee ooo bee bee bup." And you say, "Wait a minute, that's Charlie Parker." "Oh no! That's innovation, nobody ever did that before." So, that's kind of what these other guys were doing around Ornette Coleman. They were going, or they just went into this pure noise. You know, they went into pure noise. And, and then you know, the, the conversation shifted to the degree that we started going toward where we are now. That is that what you say about what you do is supposed to validate it. You know, it's kind of like, it's kind of what I call the, it's like, it's like the the rock and roll evolution of of of culture. That is that you reduce, you reduce the the, the ability to such a low level that the conversation to justify its existence has to get bigger. You know, so it's, it's kind of like Andy Warhol, you have to have a big conversation to sell a soup can. You know what I mean? You know what I mean? So, that's what it ended up so then these guys started giving these interviews, they start talking about God and mysticism and, you know, race problems and a new world order, well they didn't call it that at that time. But it was just all of this verbiage. And then, we put on that record and they sounded sad. They couldn't play.

What did Coltrane get from that?

Well, see now John Coltrane is a, is a very fascinating figure to me because what happened to Miles Davis later happened to him first, I think. Except it happened within the arena of jazz. That is that, see Coltrane, the first thing we got to deal with is probably no one who's come forward in American music since 1950 knew more than him. At the height of his knowledge, I mean, this guy worked all the time. He was constantly absorbing material. He was, because, now, some people say he wasn't as talented as a guy like Sonny Rollins. So, you know, just innately talented. So, to some extent, Coltrane, then, if that's true, Coltrane's kind of like a weight lifter. It's that kind of the 97 pound weakling who just goes to the gym every day and you know gets thumped on the head and stuff by these big guys in the neighborhood and eventually, one day, you know, he comes out, his neck is like a barrel, you know, he. . . and he, you know, he can manhandle people if he wants to. That's what happened to him musically. He just, he just kept learning. Plus he went through the whole thing. He played in Dizzy Gillespie's big band and in Dizzy Gillespie's small group. Right? He played with, he walked the bar, you know, honking, boodoop doot doot, boodoop doot doot. He got up and walked the bar, he did all of that. He, he played with Tadd Dameron. He played with Miles Davis. He played with Monk. I mean, he was, he got the, he played with George Russell. He absorbed that system. So, Coltrane is like this, he's like this this this super force in the music by the time he came to himself, came to his power. But his power only lasted a few years, I think because, see, I think he, too, got tied up in being on the

frontier, you know, and so that's when he ended up by then, you know, he was just screeching and, you know, the last, last time I saw him in person, there were, in the audience, there were three people. And this is in 1966 in Los Angeles. My friend Earl Cook and I, one guy at the bar and the bartender. The club was empty. That's how far he had gone beyond his audience, if you want to say beyond them.

What did his music sound like?

Well, it was, he and Pharoah Sanders was, were, were, they were up there, you know, screeching. Now the thing is, I'm not sure that's the way Coltrane wanted to play, either. See, I'm not sure that's, I'm not sure what he was playing was what he wanted to play. I'm not sure of that. And because, see, he told, Freddie Hubbard told me that, that he was asking Coltrane about what he was doing at that period. And he s, and Coltrane told him, he said, "Well, you know, standing up there swinging with Elvin, Jimmy Garrison and McCoy, he said, "That takes a lot more energy than what I'm doing now." He said, he said, "But the way Rashied Ali plays, you know, there's no one or anything like that and the rhythm's just, you know, real nebulous." He said, "So I can play anything anywhere. And so that doesn't take as much energy." The interesting thing is, is that this music that he was saying took less energy was being called energy music. So, so, so, so but now, it probably was for other people.

See, for a guy like Coltrane to play like that, it was probably easier for him to play like that than it was for him to play the other way. Because he knew so much. So when he'd be in a situation with people who didn't know, it was easy for them. They never had swung in the first place.

Fusion. Does jazz always have to keep reinventing itself to stay alive?

Well, you know, I think that one of the problems with, with some of these dumb things they say like, today, like the tradition of jazz is innovation. Well, what does that mean? Because if the person who's, who tells you that believes it, who's a musician, right? Then when, how soon is he or she going to stop doing what's presently being done? I mean, does that mean that this innovative, how long does this thing you're doing remain innovative, right? Is it six months? Six days? Is it six minutes? I mean, when do you, when do you after thereby go to the next thing? Now, I don't think that, that we as a society have yet been able to to sort out as the saying goes, the difference between our on-going technological evolution, you know, which makes science fiction movies, say of the fifties, are jokes now because so many of the ways they thought that things were going to go. We've gone far beyond that, you know. So, so what I'm saying is that, I think that a lot of our, our problem as a society is connected to the fact that America is the first, is the

only country that that that was born, that grew up with the industrial revolution. See, no other major country grew up with the industrial revolution, they, they had been there for seven hundred years, eight hundred, whatever it was. America had been around for a very short period of time and then the industrial revolution kicks off so we're connected, you know, directly, to this machine evolution. Once, though, we begin to confuse who we are and what we're doing in the arts, with what happens in the world of technology, then we can pretentiously attempt to develop ourselves and make the, the unpalatable, the, the eccentric, supposedly express more than it really is expressing.

We see the relationship between jazz and American life and the heart of the American life is the sense of becoming. We're in the pursuit of happiness, we're not at an arrived at place. We're always growing.

Well, you know, we always have to remember, too, if we're going to us the scientific model that there's an omen in the scientific model, too, right? And that omen plays itself out in the world of, of, of nuclear energy. It plays itself out in the world of germ warfare. It plays itself out in the world of pollution. I mean, there are a lot of things that go with this. We're, we're presently in the middle of trying to re-assess how, how industrialism will, will, will function in the world right now. We know that we can't continue to do it the way, "Well, the world is inexhaustible, if pollute this one river, let's go to another one." So we know we can't do that. Now, what, what it seems to me we're, we're, we're on the edge of is attempting to, to, to align business, technology, the arts with human good on some level. Now, there's always the question of what is human good? Well, for one thing, it's not, well, let me see. The question of, the question of of of of human good and human curiosity, those are the things that are at the nub of what this difficulty is. Is the person who's curious going down a path that's, that's viable or is this person just, does this person feel compelled to go in a direction that actually is narrower. See, that's why Coltrane is such an interesting figure because when you look at him, you, you, you see the absolute, you see the absolute decay that can come about in a great person once this person em, em, embraces an, you know, an insubstantial philosophy. See, in other words, here you got a guy who could do anything just about, playing, right? And he ends up scream, you know, screeching and whaling at the end of career, you know, "Aaoch. Eeck. Oock. Aach." He was playing like that. Now, this is a guy who was a harmonic genius. It was a guy who was one of the great virtuosi of his instrument. This was a guy who had played in all kinds of forms, right? And he ends up in the end of his career not like the famous Japanese painter who said, you know, "Now I am," you know, "Now he can draw a straight line," right? "Or draw a line." 'Cause some people, see, see, that's the problem we have today. See, the central problem we have in the arts is what Proust points out somewhere in Remembrance of Things Past he says, "Both, both the beauty and the horror of language is that it can be, it, it can be manipulated to make anything seem reasonable."

Has jazz and the country reached that danger zone?

Well, see, right now, I don't see, I, I, I, I think we're in a very different period because see, part of what, part of of, where we're about to go, it seems to me is, I think we're, we're, we're about to go towards a reiteration of the affirmative. See, what has dominated American culture for the last thirty-five years or so is this obsession with rebellion. And see, what has happened, see, what happens in soc, what happens in society is, see the middle class is a very recent phenomenon in the world, right? So, it appears after the fall of the monarchies, right? So, then people begin to rebel against the middle class, right? Now, what they replace the middle class with is, who knows? But what actually, they couldn't work at that too well. So then they elevated these frauds who were supposed to be rebels, right? Into celebrities and they become like this, this, this, this Mount Olympus of third rate talents, you know and second rate people whom they worship. Now, what I think we're going to do, what I think is going to happen soon is that the idea of insubstantial rebellion is going to exhaust itself internationally. And I think that we'll then have something very different.

So where is jazz going?

Well, I think, well, see, see, one of the things that's very important about what's going on in jazz today is that young people involved in jazz are people who, who have real courage. See, see, see courage is some, courage is something you can't buy. Courage is something you can't sell. And when somebody actually takes a real risk, like these young people do who go into jazz knowing that they're never going to be like Puff Daddy Coombs, or Madonna, or any of those people. They're not going to get to that. That's not what's guaranteed in this. Or nothing even approaching that. So, so, so that assertion among young people of real courage, real aesthetic belief, that can only be, get good.

What do you think about the jazz scene of the last fifteen years? Some people have said that the guys who came up in the later years are just imitators, that jazz is an art form that is now dead.

Well, the first thing is this, I mean, I never understand people who, who, who think that, that, that the past is, is inevitably some form of disaster, you know. I, I don't get it. My feeling is this: as a writer, I know quite a bit about this and I can do this very well. But, I mean, every time, I was looking at Othello a couple of nights ago. Nobody's even close to being that good. Shakespeare. I mean, he just had another kind of thing. I mean, he just, he arrived with a certain kind of gift. And everybody who writes in the English language, when they encounter it, they have to go, "Yeah, well, I'm out here trying but. . ." See, all we see is his dust, you know. Like when you know, when, you know, when you're running track, you can, you can hear the other guy's feet hitting the, hitting the track. You can hear his breathing, right?

And you can hear the people around you breathing when you're in a pack. Nobody heard Shakespeare inhale one breath. That's how far away from them he is, you know. And, and so you can't, so that idea of past and, and present, they really don't play out. Further, none of the people who are so critical of these young musicians that I've encountered as writers are original at all. You know, I mean, it's like, you know, so the thing is, the thing I find fascinating is that that the people who are most critical of these people, they have a very small body of clichés that they say about any and everything. And so it's fascinating to me, you know, as the guy comes up to you, or anybody, and he says, "Burns, I'm going to tell you something. Something just hit me." And you say, "Oh, okay." He says, "This is new!" And you say, "Oh, okay." "The sun rises in the East and it sets in the West." Now that's, that's the level that these people who, who, who are critical of these, of these young musicians are on.

So these young musicians are going back and saying we need to know the past. We need to respect the Shakespeares. We need to look at the dust.

Yeah, well, the thing to me, see, see, I don't have any doubt that jazz is going to do, do, do quite well. See, because, see, jazz is, see, jazz is like, jazz is like, to me, jazz is like the history of the Negro. Not this, in other words, like you know, if you study Afro-American history, you see well some periods was horrible. They made some advances. Then it got worse. Then people came out of that. And if you look at the country at large. That's the story of the United States, you know. We had these peaks. We had these valleys. And every time, we, we're, we're sliding down, somebody'd say, "You all are never going to stop sliding. You going to slide out of existence." Well, it never has happened. See.

Because jazz is concerned with its roots, that it's somehow dead?

Well, see, I think that, see, I think that, that what a lot of people don't really realize is that we're in the middle of a, of a complicated renaissance that's taking place both in jazz and in other areas of American culture. I mean, you do have people who are coming out making these little inexpensive films that are good. You know, like, and, and those films are beginning to have a certain kind of penetration, I mean it's like "Fargo," that's not an expensive movie. But there's something human in it that was so refreshing that it got the attention of people. And I think that you know, there's that phenomenon as it worked just as you have, now those kinds of movies are, are not going to be, they're not going to make money like "Air Force One," and these various, you know, thrillers, you know, the boom, boom special effects type movies. But even those people, see if you went to a guy like Harrison Ford today with, with, with a good script that actually allowed him to act, and let people know he's really an actor? He would, he'd make it. Now you've got that same thing happening in jazz. That is that you've got these small groups

of people here and there, you know, in the United States, every so often, some kid arrives from Germany, some kid arrives from Japan, from Australia, from wherever, male or female, and what do they want to do? They want to swing. Now, they have the same choices that everybody else has, to try to dive into the, into the snake pit of MTV, right? That's not what they want to do. See, there's something human that they want to do that they can't do in that arena. And so, see, and there's so many of those, and those people, I think, are at the root of what is going to remake the United States and remake the world in the, in the way that art remakes it. That is that we get another set of, of, of, of, of, of human things provided to us that have some form that say something about, you know, what we can be. What we should do. What we haven't done. And these things are the same things that we always should do and haven't done. You know what I mean? I mean they don't change. I mean, you see, I mean, and and the fact that, that, to me, the fact that you have in a period like ours in which young people the world over are so inundated with superficial ideas about life that people would try to enter an art form that does not allow for that is inspiring in itself. See, we have to recognize one thing, see, the internationalization of mass media has created more, more anonymity. That's the reason why these, why these, why these pop starts become so big. Because mass media makes you an anonymous person. See, before that you were just a guy in a town. When you knew who you knew. And they know you. But once you get a TV and a radio, then you become part of the anonymous mass. And so you, so you change your anonymity by, by attaching yourself to this person who, who has achieved something that very few other people have achieved. That is freedom from anonymity. When you play jazz, right? You're free from anonymity by participating in it because your personality is what makes it work.

Is there a particular jazz recording that you come back to over and over again?

Well, I tell you, there's a recording that I come back to often because I, I like what was achieved on it which is the Duke Ellington "Jazz Party." The reason I like it is because Ellington has these, he uses his band. He has Dizzy Gillespie as a guest on one track. Guest soloist on one track which becomes one of, a classic Ellington track on the same level as the pieces that featured his great trumpet players in the late thirties and the early forties. And, and at the end on "Hello Little Girl," he brings in Jimmy Rushing who's, who's totally connected to the Kansas City sound of swing from his experience, from the recordings with Basie in the thirties and they do this great dissonant blues and Dizzy Gillespie comes in there and plays one of the great jazz trumpet solos on the blues. So, I just kind of like that here you have this cross-generational thing in which Ellington was able to bring these elements together. I mean, he's got some stuff they wrote for some percuss, for percussion ensemble. That didn't really gas me, but who cares, I mean, you know. When you're talking about people that great, it doesn't make any

difference when they drop the ball because they catch it more than anybody else.

Why are you drawn to David Murray?

Well, you know, David Murray is a very, David Murray is a very interesting character because, I've known David since 1974, I think, maybe it was '73, I think it was '73, actually, that's it. I met David Murray in 1973 and at that time, I was fumbling around with free jazz myself, right? Which, and so that's a period of my life I've repudiated. But I think that, see, see, David has a, see, he has a, see, he's a very gifted guy, he's a very gifted guy. And I think he's just now at the point where he's beginning to, to develop the gifts that he has. 'Cause, I think, 'cause he's tried a lot of different kinds of things. But he has something in his sound that's very unusual, you know. Something in his sound. He's got a real warmth and he has a real, he has real, he has real lyric abilities. He's skillful.

Where do you hear the future?

I think that, see, I think that jazz is going to, is going to develop in a diff, I think one of the developments that jazz is going to, to have is more in the direction of the kind of thing that Mingus was doing. Which is the kind of thing that Marsalis does. That is, that is, that is the presentation of various style together. That an overall continuity, and an overall feeling is, is achieved, through, through, through contrasting materials. Now this introduc, this, this arrived in American art in 1850 in "Moby Dick." I mean, that's what Melville does. I mean, he's, he, he foreshadowed this. And, and, and that's the same thing that happens in, what? James Joyce's "Ulysses." Each, each, each chapter is written in a different style.

Remembering that this is a family hour, can you tell me where Jelly Roll got his nickname?

You know, you know what? I've never really known, I mean, I know the, you know, you know, jelly roll is a, is a, is a, it's a description of a certain kind of erotic motion. You know, in other words, jelly roll means, jelly roll means exactly the kind of erotic motion and pressure that you would prefer above all others. So that's what that means.

And Coleman Hawking nickname of Bean.

Oh, yeah, well, Coleman Hawkins, Coleman Hawkins was nicknamed Bean according to Dan Morganstern and others because the term bean used to be a term that described head. And so, Coleman Hawkins is a very brilliant guy. So when they called him Bean, they were, you know, it was like calling him Brain, if that had of been his nickname.

Jazz… who we are as Americans.

Well, I think that the reason why jazz gives such a, such an accurate picture of the United States at its best is because it's, it's, it's a music that's made up of so many different elements. You know, it's got kind of a percussive preclusion that was derived from African music. It's got melodic lines that that that that go back into the spirituals which, which, which if you really listen to them, go back to pieces like, "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," too, you know. And a lot of spirituals, right up, if you listen closely to them up under them you hear boobee boodah u day boo day u bay boo bee, I mean that's in there. Now, so, it's got all of that, it's got the European harmonies. It's got the, and it, and it also, see, it also has a certain kind of an elegant idea about life and about romance that, that, that, that touches people because see, see, 'cause, 'cause the basic thing we want is that everything we do not be a drag. So, what great art does is it shows you that there is a possibility that these various things that you do can not only be good, but grand. And so, I think that when you hear Louis Armstrong play, there's a certain kind of a grandeur to it. There's, there's there's inversely, there's a, there's a grandeur to the intimacy that you get from a Billie Holiday or a Miles Davis. There's a grandeur to the verve and the swing and the rhythmic drive of, of, of a Dizzy Gillespie. There's a grandeur to the way that Art Tatum played the piano, or the way that Thelonious Monk played the piano. See, 'cause most of these people are, most of these people are, are functional idealists, I would say. When I say a functional idealist, that is somebody who is not naive.

I want to get a sense of - you called Duke Ellington an inventor of musical architecture.

Yeah.

Sense of how he responded to American life and how his music reflects American life.

Well, you know, one of the things that's very, very important about people like Duke Ellington and, and his generation is that they were at the exact opposite of what a lot of, a lot of Afro-American stuff is now. That is that, see, they didn't accept the idea that being Negro-Americans meant that they were supposed to exist in a world that was short of sophistication. They didn't buy that. See, in other words, they didn't buy that, what, what, what, you know, what these black kids today call, you know, "I got to try to keep it real." Which the comedian Chris Rock has described as, you know, keeping it stupid. Really, see. And so that, so, so , that idea that to be a Black person meant that you were supposed to be some, some intellectual suborder. Ellington didn't buy that. Nor that, you know, you were supposed to walk around barefoot looking for a cotton bale to sit on, you know. And a straw hat to fan yourself with. He didn't buy any of that. But neither did Don

Redman or Fletcher Henderson nor any of those people. So, there's, so, so what he represents is an assertion, if you will, on the part of, of, of, of Negro-Americans that all of this is ours, you know what I mean. And, and, and all of this is ours and all of this is everybody's. So, if it's a tuxedo, if it's a limousine, if it's a silk shirt, if it's a beautiful tie, if it's patent leather shoes, whatever it is, right? You have, you know, if it's good, you have as much, it's as much in your interest to look into that as it is anybody else's. So when you hear Duke Ellington, you hear what some, see, that's, that's why, that's why some of the European critics didn't like his music because they didn't think it was Negroid. See, because, to them, Negroid sounded a certain kind of way, that his stuff seemed a little bit too smooth and too, you know, you know, and it wasn't, see, it wasn't raw enough for them. Now, but, see, the thing is, Duke Ellington always had those elements in his music. I mean, you can't get any rawer than Cootie Williams, Ben Webster, I mean, these guys, you know, 'cause these guys have a really, you know, visceral, combatant, combative kind of sound. But those same guys can flip over and play an extraordinarily gorgeous, romantic ballad. So, you have a certain kind of complexity. And, see,, I would suggest that in Duke Ellington, it's that, that tension and release and the realization of these, of, of, of this, of this broad pl, of this broad body of, of, of human feeling that, that, that is inevitable in a society as varied as this one. See, see, in other words see, if you, if you live in the United States and you're a traveling musician like Duke Ellington, see, then you can have, you'll have, you'll have an emotional reaction to the word Oregon, right? Because there's something over there that you experienced. Or, of the word Chicago, or the word Los Angeles, right? Or the name Philadelphia, or, or the word Texas. All of those different things mean these many things. Now, one of the things we know is that, is that, Beethoven is probably the first urban-sounding European composer. Now, that is that his music tends to take in this sound of the city. Duke Ellington's music is, has that sound of the city as often, given to portraits about Harlem, but it also has the sound of the South. The sound of the southwest. Images of things he saw in Oregon, to that warm valley, he, the band was supposed to be going, going, traveling in Oregon and he saw something and that turned into a sound in his mind. And so, so I think that you get this epoch kind of a vision of the United States comes out of this music. But it's, it's, and it's an epoch, and it's an epoch vision that is both, it's both ethnic and all-inclusive. That's the thing about him that's so remarkable is that it's, that it's, it's, it's, it's Negroid without being exclusive. In other words if you can get to this, come on in. You know what I mean? In fact the world would be better if you all had the same attitude I got. You know, if you can get to this, come on in, you know what I mean? 'Cause that's always in the music, in Duke Ellington's music there's always, "Hey, come on in, you know." You know, all kinds of ways, come on in. Sometimes this, sometimes he'd grab you by the arm and say, "Come on in." Sometimes, "Hey, why don't you come on in here." You know what I'm saying? Anything from those, you know he's got those, you know he's got that, it's always that he's always trying to pull you into something, you know. And it's, so it's got that, so there's a kind of a welcoming quality that you associate with the highest form

of civilization, I would suggest. See, because civilization in a certain sense can be reduced to the word welcome, you know, in some sense it can be that.

Tell me about Ellington's sensibility about women.

Well, the thing, well Ellington knew that women are like everybody else, I mean, they can be great and they can be bitches. You know what I mean? That was the thing about him. I mean he didn't, he has these, see, he has these, when he knew, his portraits of women are usually very complicated and the layered harmonies and stuff are suggestive of the fact that this is not one thing. You know, because this, see, before the, before the dramatic reduction of, of the female wardrobe, the way women dressed, formally dressed in his period, see, he's the kind of guy, he was the kind of guy, as far as I can tell, who, see, he would have, see, all, all of those different elements, you know, the shoes, the, the, the hose, the, all, you know, the slips, the brassieres, this, all of that to him would also have been symbolic, symbolic emotionally and psychologically of how a person is, right? That each of these, that each of these textures and stuff, that they're different planes of being and I think that he was able to express that in his music. That, and see, that's why women liked the music. Because they recognized themselves in it. Or they recognized certain aspects of themselves in it. See, he also got to something that, that is a complex part of the lives of women in the twentieth century which is that kind of, it's a strange kind of isolation and melancholy that goes with both, with being, with being depicted as a fantasy on one level and ignored as an individual. See, he peeped that, so that, that, that's in his sound, you know. Because, see, that's part of the battle that people have in the United States is, since there's a media image of everybody, right? You have to wonder how often am I seen? And see, I think that there's that, that in Ellington's music when he's dealing with women he always, he always gets to that.

Why are there so many great instrumentalists but no women?

Oh. Oh. Oh. Oh there's one other thing. I'll get to that one in a minute. See, see, see, I think that, that part of what Ellington's charm was, on and off the bandstand, in music and with females is, see, what he, see, he recognized something that the kind of guy that he was would recognize. See, women are obsessed with something in men are not obsessed with unless men are in the arts. See, see, women are obsessed with actually being recognized as who they really are. See, what they want to do is drop the mask. See, they're looking for somebody who wants to see the other side. So they're obsessed with that. See, men admit, the obsession that men have usually is this mask working. See, that's what I want. Do you buy this? That's what guys think about. Every great once in a while they'll drop it and go aarghk, and put it back on. But *(laughs*) but that's not what men are interested in, they're interested in you buying their presentation. Women are not interested in

that. They'll go along with the presentation because that's the nature of the social ritual. But given their druthers, they'd be fuuut, you know, and I'm not just talking about erotically, they just want to be known. See, and so anybody who actually recognizes that like Ellington did in his sound and in his manner, they'll always like him. Now, as far as women. . .

Just talk about where Ellington came from - wasn't born poor and he has a different racial consciousness.

Oh, yeah, well Duke Ellington is, Duke Ellington is like most revolutionaries, he's from the middle class. I mean that's just the way that goes, I mean, you know, when you actually study this stuff, very rarely does a real revolutionary come from the bottom. The real revolutionary actually is often able to see through the clichés that separate him or her as a person from those at the bottom, but almost never. Because to the, come from the bottom because there's almost always a theoretical proposition that has to be put in place, right? See, Ellington came out of a society of people who were aspiring to embrace the United States and to embrace quality. Now, those who were racist and and and extraordinarily uninformed Negros look upon that as pure pretension or fraud. You're not really like that, that's not really yours, etc. They didn't buy that. Another thing that makes Ellington fascinating, to me, is that he came from a town that was really obsessed with being light-skinned. What people call a pigmentocracy of, you know, of Black America, if you will. He's saying to me, from what I've been able to observe, in him in photographs and this and that over his career, he seemed to not care about that at all. He was a very unusual. And you know, I mean, in other words, he, I don't think he put that much store by, by that as a number of people have. You know, I mean, it's kind of like the, he, he was free of that, it seems to me. I don't think he cared about that. I mean, you know, I mean he might have at some earlier period of his life, when he was a kid, but as a grown man, I think he probably said, "Look, those who can do it, can do it and those who can't, can not." That's all it comes down to, yeah.

I'm trying to understand the early jazz criticism. I mean the thirties. What kind of agenda they had and how did that affect their view.

Well, the first thing you have to, you have to recognize about jazz writing and jazz appreciation is that that's primarily a white phenomenon if we want to put a color on it. I mean, basically, the the the overwhelming body of research, most important research, the most significant interviews, the best analysis, 97% if not 99.9 of that has been done, but, I mean, I'm talking about terms of the best has been done by white people whether they're Americans or Europeans. Now that's the, that's the fact of the matter. So those who would want to say that these people have only been exploited blah blah blah blah blah. Well, you know, better go back and look at those books and figure out who did them. But, but initially you know, people had to, they had to, they had to poke holes in their certain kinds of racial suppositions. And you know, as they developed, they got closer and closer to what was

going on, they got better at what is was about. See, the first thing is this, is that if you step into the arena of of of of art and an art that's dominated by any particular group, then, if you think that the, if you don't see the art as some, some, some, some extension of bird songs or whale songs or something like that, then you have to evaluate the relationship of this art to the humanity of the people who make it. Now, in the United States, we have to remember that many, many has been the year, many have been the years in which music made by Negros was seen as some order of birdsong, kind of, you know what I mean? They're not really people like us. So, so, so that next step to say, okay well this guy may not be as well educated as I am, but clearly, he's a great artist. That's a big leap. You know, especially when you go past the whole idea of folk art, see as long as, see, see, folk, in , in, in, in, in, in, in, in, in, in, the world outside of, of, of, of, of the left of the political left means something down there. You know, oh, it's like folk, quaint, you know what I mean, it's like those kind of, you know like those dumb fairs, county fairs that people go to, you know, and they'd put on a hat and pose by a dog, horse or something and then they go, "Yeah, well these people are nice," and they go home and they don't take themselves seriously, it's just a little adventure away. So, I think that, I think that, that jazz criticism is a real reflection of the evolution of race relations.

What's John Hammond's agenda?

Well John, John Hammond explained himself very well. He was a, he was a busybody and he said that he like his mother felt that he was, that he was, he was sufficiently gifted to be able to tell other people what they should do. And now, now see, John Hammond is a very interesting character because he, because see, he's, he's part patrician, part missionary, right? Part promoter, part discoverer. I mean, he did a lot of stuff. Now, you know, some people found him insufferable. Now, he was okay to me because the thing is, when you look at it, he did so much that was important, that was of monumental importance. That his shortcomings as, you know, a guy who grew up on 95th and Fifth Avenue and the colored woman took him to Harlem one day and then he saw them and after he saw them, he knew he had to see them some more. So, you know, that's fine. You know, that's fine. I mean, you know, there are probably a lot of colored women who took white boys up to Harlem to hear some music and only one of them turned out to be John Hammond. You know, riding through the midwest with this, with this radio that he had fixed up with some kind of way so that, so that he could pick up broadcasts from greater distances that a normal car radio, hearing Count Basie's band on that and driving to Kansas City. I mean, it's another kind of guy.

But do you find his criticism limited in tempos? Was he saying that Ellington had a role but he can't outgrow it?

Well see, John Hammond had a, John Hammond had a, see, one of the things about him is, when he was right, he was right like a, like a ball hit in the last inning of the baseball game, 700 feet. He was that right when he was right. When he was wrong, it was like Casey at the bat. You know, like, psst, it was over with. So "Reminiscing in Tempo" he hated, it was too long, it was pretentious, it was this it was that it was blah duh duh duh duh duh. Now, Helen, Helen Dance, Stanley Dance's wife, however, has a story of Ellington playing that same piece that Hammond hated and in some place called, I think, like the Panther Room, or something like that in Chicago a year or two later after the recording. Hammond was there and Hammond almost, almost suffered a stroke, almost had apoplexy that the music was so extraordinary to him and he sat there and he turned red and he started saying, "That's it. That's it. That's it. Don't, that's it." So she said she and Duke, Duke what was the name of that song? "Oh it's just a little something we threw together, you know. I'm glad you liked it, John." So, she said and he said so, so, so, so, well, so Helen, Helen told me that she and Duke used to laugh about that a lot.

Johnny Hodges.

Well, Johnny Hodges was a very interesting guy because he wasn't this great original from my perspective. That people say he was. Because most of what he's playing, Sidney Bechet already played, so he was, but, I mean, most of it. Now he had his little stuff he added, but it's basically Bechet. In fact, I remember once I was listening to "Jeeps Blues." Actually I had fallen asleep and I woke up and I had the CD player on and I, and as I was coming out of unconsciousness, I started saying to myself, "Wait a minute, I don't have a recording of Bechet playing alto, what is that. Oh no, that's not Bechet, that's Johnny Hodges." So Johnny Hodges learned from Bechet and he absorbed Bechet and became part of his personality. He developed one of the great sounds of the twentieth century in terms of instrumen, you know, instrum, you know, an instrumental sound. I mean, you can play him for anybody who plays an instrument and they'd go, "Oh, well he's one of the ones." And he, see, he was a great blues player. He was from Boston. You know, and he said, as I recall somewhere, he said that he, you know, had thought about being a pimp, earlier on, but then he decided, he realized that he could, he could, he could, he could make it with his saxophone. So that he gave up the idea of being that.

How did Duke …?

Well, Ellington used him many different ways, I mean, because if you put him out there on one of those ballads, he was invincible. He's also great at medium tempos, swing hard, great, singing swing, had a song in his swing, you know. And then if you put him on some blues, he could play the hardest of blues. And he, see he also had, see there was a great emotional solidity to him. You know, like when he, like you never hear him sound like he, like he,

like he's at a disadvantage. Now, it's just something in his sound, if fact, Coltrane said once that he would, he could play with the confidence Johnny Hodges had. Johnny Hodges picked up the saxophone and said, "Hey, man. You don't want me. . ." You know he was that kind of, he, he, as far as saxophone playing, he was like those people, those, those, those great Sushi chefs who could just take those knives and just, I mean, he just, you know, you watch them take one of those onions and they just peel it a certain kind of a way and I mean they don't even, I mean, you don't even assume that they ever cut themselves. You know, as sharp as those knives they're using are, or you just have this, you, you, you, they, they, they, make you feel naive enough to believe that they never cut themselves, right? Because and that's the way he sounded. He sounded like he could do it.

Could you give us your description of what swinging is?

Oh, uh, swing, well, let's put it like this, more than 99% of the music in the world does not swing. That's number one. Let's start with that. So, the second thing is, it's, it's, it's, it's it's a way in which the statement of the times seems to, to, to, to, to push into the next, it has, it has a propulsive effect. Now there's propulsion in all kind of music but there's something about the way that the time is played in jazz that is different that in other music.

Why did it happen in America?

Well, because, well, for one thing, I think that the reason swing exists in this is because of two things. One of them is the United States and the other is the Negro. And I think that the, and some people might say they're the same thing. In fact, that might be more accurate. But I think that the, see, I think that there's a a a, there's this, there's this thing in Negro-American music which is the the the way in which something can be transformed. Bad can be transformed into good through the rhythm.. See, in other words, if somebody, when somebody is swinging, that , that, that, that allows them to have a momentary victory often over the thing that they're talking about. In fact, I've been told that that's true in in ensemble music, too.
…Well, I think, see, I think that the element of swing, I think that the element of swing comes from a couple of things. I think it comes from the, I think it comes from Bach on one end. You know, there's that kind of exuberance, that's in Bach. I'm not talking about whether jazz musicians even listen to Bach. I just think that that's just part of the heritage of Western music. That that thing is in Bach. That kind of, "Yep, I don't care what's going on out there. We got this one working." That feeling. And you know I think there's the other element in it which comes from African-derived work rhythms. I saw a film once in which I saw these Africans and they were just bringing, they were a fisherman and they were just pulling in these nets, so they start pulling these nets in and after a while when one of

these guys got to, he he hooked up a step the way he pulled it in and other guys imitated that then one guy started singing, "Uhh dee uuuh deee uh de uh." And they, after a while, they had hooked this whole thing up and they had made it into a work and dance and singing and all of it and hooked up and they were having a good time and I said, "Wow, that was different." And, you know, that was one of the reasons why during slavery, some of the slave owners thought that slaves were crazy. Because they would get out there and after a while, they would get these songs going and, ". . . . Ready as a jay bird." They'd be out there and they'd be. . . So, so those elements, I think kind of fused in the the the the on-going fusion of these different elements in America and I think that those sensibilities fused and out of that fusion comes swing, that's what I think that is.

So why does the American Negro in the middle of the story.

Well, I think that the Negro is in the center of the story because the Negro first has been in the United States longer than, than the overwhelming majority of the white people. See the, see the see the Negro-Americans started arriving here in the fifteen hundreds. Near the end, near the end of the sixteenth century. So, all of this stuff and Negros were mixed with Indians, they, with white people, fought in all of the wars. Helped develop a cuisine. Were there when the different industrial transitions took place. Were central to the winning of the, of the Civil War. Went out with a lot of the explorers. Were very important in fighting Indians at a certain point. I mean, so the Negro-American story is from the very, you know, it's when America comes into, see, when America finally becomes America, that is, the United States, at that point, Negro-Americans had been in the United States over, you know, at that point in the 1780's, right? They had been in the United States over 150 years. Most of the white people sitting there signing those papers and stuff - they hadn't been there this long. You know, they were Johnny come latelies to the scene. Now I'm not arguing that that makes them better or worse, but I mean, it's a grand irony to the people who were enslaved are enslaved by people who were talking about freedom who have, who are late arrivals in the, in the American epoch as it were.

Possibilities and problems…

Well, I think that, I think that what jazz is, what jazz is about, particularly when you read what the older guys had to say, I'm not talking about these people running around today with different political agendas. When you actually read what Jelly Roll Morton, Louis Armstrong, James P. Johnson, a bunch of those people thought about him, what they liked. They liked music. It was just that their interpretation of it, came out sounding like this. In other words, Louis Armstrong and these guys, you know, they loved operas, they loved hearing classical coronet players. They loved concert piano players. They loved all of that music. But that wasn't them, so what they had to do was take from that what worked for them and turn it into what became

jazz. So it was a reaction to something that they loved but that it wasn't sufficient to tell the world who they as artists were. I mean that's usually what happens. No matter it seems like a James Joyce. He didn't do what he did because he didn't like other novelists. He did what he did because that was the only way he could be James Joyce. You know and that's what I think all of this is about. You know, it's like when you take a guy like Coltrane, this guy was like a harmonic, you know, thesaurus, if you will, harmony has nothing to do with African music on any profound level. So, you can't talk about him as an African musician. That's insane. You know what I'm saying? You know, this is a guy who just, you know, he, I mean this guy ate, ate harmony with both hands as cups. I mean he devoured that. So, all of these people are like that so I think that in a certain way, the grand statement about this is the, is the, is the way in which these different things can mutate and synthesize together that, that no matter what somebody's social origin might be that this music, right? Can create this equal playing field. See, in other words, like see, when you come on a bandstand, being white isn't necessarily going to help you , and being black is not necessarily going to help you either. See there was a whole bunch of people who got up on that bandstand and got their heads cut by Benny Goodman finding that out. Now here's a square looking Jewish guy from Chicago, yeah, well, right. You pull that clarinet out though, you're going to have to deal with something. Or, like Charlie Christian, you know, here's a serious country boy from Oklahoma City. In fact, Benny Goodman didn't think he could play because I think he had a purple shirt on and a green jacket or something like that. Benny Goodman looked at him and said, "Wait a minute, come on man." Charlie Christian got there, picked up that guitar and he said, oh, hm. So that's part of what I think of it.

So what do you bring? It's not being black and it's not being white.

Well, the thing that makes the final difference in being able to play is how well you are able to, to, to bring inventive and fundamental elements of the music which, which are, oh, I've often said are four-four swing, fast, medium and slow. The blues. The romantic ballad and Afro-Hispanic rhythms. Now, Afro-Hispanic rhythms don't necessarily always turn up in somebody's playing. But those, but Jelly Roll said that the Spanish teams was basic and you have heard those things reinterpreted. Those four elements reinterpreted over and over throughout the history of the music. So what, so what you bring to those,those bas, those four basic elements are the things that seem to me to be the things that determine whether you're a first-class jazz musician or not.

What is most misunderstood?

Oh, I don't know, man. I mean, you asked me so many things. I can't tell. But I'll tell you this, I was thinking about Coltrane when I was in the bathroom. The Coltrane story is, is fascinating to me because by the end of

his career, he he seems as though a guy, he seems to me like a guy who who is being, his sound. It seems as though a guy who's being, who's been convinced that he's supposed to let these army ants, these avant garde, right? All of whom are far smaller than he is, that he's supposed to lie there and let them eat him, right? And so I have, when I hear him now, I have this image of this, of this guy who's body is being eaten away by these, by these army ants. And that the sound that he's making in his music is a reaction to that thing that he's agreed to go along with.

What is the pitfall?

Well, I don't think that, I don't think it has anything to do with innovation. I think it has, I think it has to do with not being able to not necessarily tell what particular thing you should be associating your talent with. See, see Sonny Rollins went over in there and he looked at it for a little while and then he took out of that what he wanted and he went back to swinging, you know. Actually, he never really did stop swinging. But what, what, what he took from that, he just added it as another element of his saxophone playing. He didn't, he didn't like I was saying, he didn't lie down in a coffin like Coltrane did and let these people, let these, these army ants eat him alive. He didn't do that. So I think it was just a bad, it was a bad choice on Coltrane's part.

The End