Jon Hendricks

Location: N/A
Date: N/A

Louis Armstrong. Major, major figure in jazz history. Tell us about his singing.

I think what made him a great anything was his heart. You know, his heart and his soul and his spirit was in everything he did. You know, he was what we call soulful. He had no voice comparable to real singers, you know, like Elizaless, Elizabeth Schwartz-Kopf, Maria Calais or Tony Bennett, you know, he had no voice compared to people like that, but his heart was so big and so full of love for humanity and his spirit so broad so all-encompassing that every word that came through that gravely, uncultured, untutored voice was beautiful.

Do you want to talk about scat singing?

Yes. Well, Louis Armstrong invented scat singing. There's an apocryphal story that which of course means it could or could not be true. I think it was true. That during the recording of a song called "Heebie Jeebies," the music slipped off the music rack and onto the floor and time in the studios in those days was so precious that that there was no stopping and re-taking, so he just started to play the words with his voice like he would with his trumpet and that that ended up being called scat singing.

What is scat singing?

Well, according to the Clariy brothers and Tommy Maken, it's also extent in Irish music, they they they call it mouth music. I performed scat singing with them on stage at the Abbey Theater in Dublin to a standing ovation, I might add. And they, they call it mouth music. They have a way of singing their music without words. I think it's in some form or other in every culture, but, but in jazz, it's the voice taking the place of the horn and kind of playing a solo vocally, you know. Like on "Bye Bye Blackbird" if you don't want to sing it, you'd say bap bap da dee dee dee bedup doo dee da da ba da doo dee

bup ba be doo dee doo, you know give it your own slant on the melody, you know, it's like a horn player improvising.

How do you what syllables, what sounds to say?

Completely arbitrary, completely individual, for me, I like Louis Armstrong, he is the quintessential jazz singer, every jazz singer has learned from Louis Armstrong. But I also like the tenor saxophone, so when, I when I scat, I usually hold my hands like a tenor saxophone. And so do some of my my students and people that I've influenced like Jarreau, when you see Al Jarreau, he's doing his hands like a trumpet and Bobby McPheron does a little tenor thing. And it depends on what you hear in your ear, what sounds you're going to make.

Like the air guitar being the bastard child. Reminds me of rock & roll fans... Louis Armstrong was more than a singer, more than a trumpet player, he was an icon in our culture. Distinction between art and entertainment.

I think he wanted to make the people feel good and if and if you want to call that art or entertainment or art and entertainment, then okay, those are those are arbitrary evaluations that come after the fact. But the first thing he wanted to do was make everybody feel as good as he could.

And did he?

Yes, he did. And that brings up another very important point. The purpose of any kind of endeavor where you appear before the public, is to entertain and it is it is a part of jazz that it is a music of public entertainment. Which brings up the fact that a lot of modern jazz musicians have lost the ability to entertain because they have come through the tremendous impact made by Miles Davis who had a throat operation and couldn't talk, he talked like this, so he didn't want to come out and say, "Good evening ladies and gentlemen," so he just said nothing. And this took the entertainment value of jazz away but it belongs, it belongs, that it's no crime to entertain people, in fact, it's more a crime if you don't entertain them. You know, Satch was an entertainer. He would come out and say, "Good evening everybody!" And you'd say, "Yeah." Right away, he had you feeling very very happy and receptive to what he was going to do. That's show business.

Since you brought up Miles, it wasn't just because of his throat was it?

I think it was basically because of that.

You did?

I think if he had not had that, that botched throat operation that made his voice the way it was, he would never have felt the necessity to develop the personaround that affliction which is what the rest of him became, you know, I think he would have been like like Dizzy, like Hot Lips Paige, like Louis Armstrong, like all the good jazz musicians, he would have been an entertainer.

Art Tatum - an enigma - tell us a little bit about what it was to watch him play.

Well, Art Tatum was, was, was my neighbor, he lived five houses from me in Toledo and he and I used to participate in shows together, you know, amateur shows and sometimes I would win and sometimes he would win and I knew him practically all my life. His ambition was not to, to play the piano originally, his ambition was to be a classical violinist. He wanted to, his real ultimate ambition was to outdo Yasha Heifitz. That's what he wanted to do. And so to help him along with that, his mother who scrubbed floors on her hands and knees at the First National Bank building, bought him a second hand baby grand piano, to help with his violin. And he sat down to that piano, and I say he hasn't gotten up yet. It was just amazing and his technique was flawless in the beginning, but it it was increased by, strangely enough, his relative lack of sight. He couldn't see all that well. He could see a little bit out of one eye, like this eye, if he raised his head, he might recognize you, you know, but this one was totally gone. And his mother bought him a piano roll made by two people. And he didn't know it was made by two people, so he learned it. And with two hands played this piano roll. That's the most amazing thing because from that, he stretched himself out, to you know, to be able to do so many things and play semi-classical tunes, like Griggs, "Eligy" so beautifully like the whole symphony orchestra was there, like everything was there, you know, you heard the ripples and the rattles, and while the left hand was was amazing. I used to have to come by his house after school every night when I was fourteen years old, I was in Jr. High school and I got a job playing in the Waiter's and Bellmen's Club, that was a club of waiters and bellmen because at that time in the life of the American Negro people, two of the highest positions you could reach, employmentwise, was to be a waiter, or a bellman. The only thing higher than that was to be a pullman porter on the train, you know. So the Waiters' and Bellmen's Club was a place where everybody came to see the show, they had a new show every week. And they had a chorus line for lovely ladies and a band I was billed there as Little Jonny Hendricks, the seefee of Bobby Breen and I was accompanied by Arthur Tatum. And I'd go by his house and he would play these impossible runs on the piano. And I had already found a way to earn money 'cause this was in the middle of the great depression and that was really hard times. And it was a nickel to play the jukebox, so I would learn all the songs on the jukebox, every song, all the riffs and everything and I would stand in front of the jukebox and someone would come to play and I'd say, "Wait a minute, what are you going to play?" And they'd say, "'Yard Dog Mezerka' by Jimmy Lunsford." And I'd say, "Okay,

gimme the nickel, I'll sing it." And this was so audacious and unusual that they would give me the nickel and I would sing, "Beedle ee oop boo bop boo bop, deedle ee oop bo bap bo ah. Duh da uh uh uh, boodoo be oop doop dedoo doo dum." Everything, the saxophones, the trumpets. I would sing the solos, and that's how I would earn twenty cents, you know, dime for the movie, nickel for popcorn, nickel for a bar of candy.

Art Tatum liked to go into a club and see show and stop against other players.

Well, there's an album out called "God is in the House." Which is what they used to say when he would walk in. You know, he'd come in and they'd say, "Oh, here comes God," and in saying this, I must for the for the for the listeners who may think this blasphemous, that that that this comes from people who's whole lives were spent in the church because jazz is the secular version of American Negro church music. So we're all very reverent towards it and we, there was no disrespect meant by this, it was just an acknowledgment of a man so much more talented than all of us, or anyone we had ever heard of that he approached the status of the Deity himself. So they laid this on him, so to speak. You know, hear comes God, because he would come in and everybody in the house that played piano would just shrink back, you know. There's a story that Sweets Edison told me, when Oscar Peterson who is the modern version of Art Tatum, first came down from Toronto where he where he lives, all the pianists got together and had a little party at someone's house. You had James P Johnson there, and Willie, the Lion, Smith, Fats Waller, Lucky Roberts who's another great Harlem stride piano player and wrote "Stardust," incidentally. And all the guys were there up to Bud Powell, you know, and Earl Hines was there. You know, peop, I mean I mean people flew in for this event and they're all played, everybody played and then it came Oscar's turn to play and he played and blinded everybody with his brilliance and his technique and then Art Tatum was called upon to play and he said, "Oscar, that was very nice," he said, "Now, I'd like to play this song for you." And he played "Little Man you've had a Busy Day." And to this day, if you want to get Oscar Peterson's interest, request of him, "Little Man you've had a Busy Day." And he'll probably say, "How did you know that?"

No one ever played better than him.
Bebop, bop whatever you want to call it.

Well, I can tell you what it, what it was like to me to hear it for the first time. I was on a troop ship coming home from Bremenhauer Germany to New York harbor in 1946. November of 1946 and I had won three hundred dollars or so shooting dice on the boat. So I was loaded with money and I suddenly heard this song over the ship's radio, you know. And it was frenetic and exciting and fast and furious and brilliant and beautiful and I almost bumped my head jumping off my bunk 'cause it was everything that I heard inside my head and everything that I had heard when I was with Art Tatum. So I jumped up,

ran up to the control room and said to the guy, “What was that?” He said, “What?” I said, “That last song you just played, the one you just played.” He said, “I don’t know.” I said, “Where is it?” He said, “It’s down there on the floor.” I looked down there on the floor, the floor’s covered in records. I said, “Come on. What color was the label?” He said, “It’s a red label.” So I begin to sort out and I would come across red labels and I would ask him, “Was it this one?” And he said, “No.” Finally I found it, it was a Music Craft label and it was called “Salt Peanuts.” And it was Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. And I gave him thirty dollars and I said, “Play this for the next hour.” And he did. Drove all the other men crazy. But I was in heaven. I couldn’t believe that the ideas that I could hear in my head from what I’d learned from Art Tatum were being played by other people. I was amazed. And the first thing I did when I got off the boat after we went through the, what is it, the processing that you go through getting out of the army. It was to go into New York and say, “Where are Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie?” And somebody told me they’re on the West coast. I said, “Agh.” So I went to the record store and bought up all the records of theirs that I, that I could find and listened to them and for the next two months I was just in heaven. It was heavenly music.

What were they doing?

OK if you take the R off, it was evolutionary actually, because they swung like, like, you know, the swingers had done, you know, Benny Goodman was the king of swing. They kept that swing, the swing stayed there, you know and the intense rhythm stayed there. But the top of that, the melodies that that they were playing had been altered drastically and the chords underneath those melodies had been altered drastically, for example, they used songs like, “Whispering da da deed a love you, da da da dee da da da da, wha da da dee dee da da da, “ popular songs, like whispering, but the way Charlie Parker would rephrase these songs, it became, da dup, da dup, badoo be doo be ooby doodley oo day dup, du bup da bup, be dooby doo whey bup etc. You know, you could see the strain of one flowing through the other. They used the chords and switched the melodic line. And they did that on a lot of songs. “What is this Thing Called Love?” What is this thing, called love, they called it Hot House, de doo dup etc. It was so exciting, so inventive, so creative, so artistic that your soul just swelled up with the possibilities for what you could do with it, with whatever limited aspect you had. For me, it was vocally, you know, and scat. I could scat like that and so I begin to listen and learn, because what you do is only what you hear, so if you ingest it through here, then it comes out here. If you can hear it, you can sing it. If you can sing it, you can play it.

What were they trying to say?

They were trying to say to the audience, look, lift yourselves up to where we are, we we’re not that far out there, you know. We’re just a little more hip than the average person so, come on, get hip, you know, dig this, dig this.

Take that wax out of your ears. That that's been put there, you know, for so many years and listen to what we're doing here, 'cause it's really interesting and it was, and it is. And always will be.

And were people able to listen to it?

Yes. Yes. At first, it took a while, you know, it took, it took a while. It took years, actually, you know, when Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker made that visit to the West coast which they were in the beginning of when I got off the boat, they died on the West coast. They absolutely died, I mean, nobody could unders, "Wait a minute, what is that?" You know, everybody was was trying to find out, "What is this? What is this?" Well, well, that's the first stage. You know, it's like a rocket trip. You know, there's a first stage, a second stage and a third stage. Well, that was the first stage, "What is it?" And then, repeated listenings starts to stir up ideas, "Well, yeah, actually, it's the same chords that I've heard before, but there's something on top of it that's different." And then you get into it and slowly, in time, you say, "Oh yeah. Right." You know and then bebop inculcated itself into the to the to the popular stream of culture so much that now you can't turn on on on the TV without hearing some or other strain of bebop in all the music that goes on. It's everywhere, in everything.

Let's talk about Charlie Parker.

Well, the first thing about Charlie Parker was, he was above normal intelligence. That that that's an evaluation I got when I was, when I was secretary to a psychiatrist in the army. And he was doing a psychiatry rundown of the soldiers that that that came in and one of them, his name was Dr. Jacobs. He had studied under Freud in Viennand one of these soldiers names was Freddie Jacobs. So Dr. Jacobs says, "How does zis happen that we haf ze same name?" And so Freddie Jacobs said, "Well maybe your great grandfather owned my great grandfather." Which of course is how slaves got their last names.

What is the most important thing I need to know about Charlie Parker?

He was a genius. He could discuss any subject you'd bring up. Nuclear physics. The quantum theory. You know, anything, God that guy was amazing. His favorite composer was Stravinsky and his favorite work was the "Sacre de Prenton." He loved that. He was, he was a real intellectual. Huge mind. This big.

Also a complicated person.

No, not complicated. Simple, but a junkie, yes. That made him comp complicated because, you know the first thing a junkie wants to do is to find

some dope, you know. Then he can be whoever he is. But before that, he's this. He's looking, looking for that stuff and so that's what made him seem complicated. He was just looking for the means to be normal. 'Cause to a junkie, you know, getting high is his approach to normalcy, you know. It's the nearest to normalcy he's going to get. That day.

And he was able to make this great music.

Well, that comes from God. God doesn't care to whom he gives talent.

But you have to use that talent, you have to practice

Herbert Von Carrigon was proof that.

Paradox of drugs. Did this music happen in spite of the drugs?

The music really has no motivation and it can it cannot be the cause of anything or the effect of anything. The music is itself. The music is like money. Money is not evil. But the love of money is the root of all evil. Money's neutral. The music is neutral. It's the force in which everyone is involved. Now how they use that force, what they do with it, that's that's where the individual assessment of what it is comes in, or isn't. What it is or isn't. It's itself

Writer had talked about when they were high, they heard things differently.

Of course. I'm sure they did. I'm sure they did because I never got high on heroin, but when I was high on marijuana, for example, and or cocaine, I could, I could hear things that I didn't hear in, in my normal state which is the state where, when you're not high. Yes, I'm sure that they, the very essence of what dope is that it heightens whatever attributes you have. Hearing, seeing, feeling, thinking, running, if you 're running. You know, which is why athletes are so often examined for dope, you know. It enhances whatever properties or propensities the mind or the body has, originally. That's what it does. And it also takes you out of the body and out of your mind. Being high is a phase that derives from the fact that the highest part of your body is your head and you go higher than that, you know. You rise above that, you go into another another world. Because junkies will nod, like this so that their bodies will be asleep. But when they're turn to solo comes, they wake right up on the chord. Which means that mentally they're in touch with where the music is even though their bodies are asleep. It's a phenomenon that I studied many, many days watching John Coltrane, with Miles Davis, and waiting for him to miss an entrance and seeing that he never did miss an entrance. So that he was out of his body, but his mind was functioning clearly and took over his body when it was needed to. Instantaneously, like that. It's a phenomenon.

There's a lot of junkies out there, Doctors, etc. But they're not like Charlie Parker. What's the other side of it?

Well, it also shows the warped mindedness of the arbiters of American society. He's absolutely right. Number thirteen on the list of people who were junkies were jazz musicians. Doctors were first, lawyers were second. Writers were third. You know, and so on down the, and we were thirteen, but we got all the publicity. This the only country that systematically degrades its own culture, you know. Even, even today. With all the power that that we have and the might in the world. We're still the only country that systematically degrades its own culture.

It's, it's a leftover from slavery. You know, slavery can only exist if you dehumanize the person being enslaved. So you create a monster there. Because in dehumanizing these people, when the slavery period is over, you can't expect the society to all of a sudden accept these already dehumanized people as equal human beings. It's not fair to what their psyche can absorb, you know. It's just too much for them, you know. You have to do it incrementally by generations. You know, like the Jesse Helmses and the Strom Thurbers will take those hatreds that they learned at their mothers' knees with them to the grave. They don't have the mentality and the compassion and the true Christianity to drop them and get rid of them, you know. They're powerful things. You've got to be taught to hate. Rogers and Hammerstein, it's a wonderful statement they made, you know. In the *King and I*. It's sadly true. You know. So well, that's a difficult subject.

Bring it back to the music. It also transcends.

Well, to bring it back to jazz. That being the reason that that the music is, is given second class status, you know. You begin to wonder, well , it how is this, how how is this going to be redressed? How is this going to be corrected? You know. And the only way I know, is with the truth. You know, six thousand years ago, Buddha wasked, "What is wrong with the earth?" And he said, "Ignorance." And he was then asked, "What is the cure?" And he said, "Knowledge." Well, if you, if you if you understand the truth that man is the child of God. That we are all God's children, that there is no man that made a man. That we are all equal in the sight of our Father, which is in heaven. Then, all racism disappears from your psyche. You cannot be a racist and believe in God. So the idea of Christianity in a racist society is a lie because it it's, if it's a racist society, then it is not Christian. So you've got, you've got to go through that evolution, you know. Before you can even get onto the subject of what we're trying to talk about. Before jazz musicians are going to be accepted in this country as the great cultural artists that they are, they must be accepted as the as the normal human beings that they are. That's why the cop could beat Miles Davis on thead in front of Birdland, you know. And feel justified in doing that. And making Miles rich.

Dizzy Gillespie

Dizzy Gillespie, a genius. A master musician and a great and compassionate teacher. Not just of students who c who might have come to him, but everybody in his path. He could be walking down the street and see a bunch of kids dancing and singing and he'd come in there in the middle of them and end up teaching them steps, and teaching them rhythms and was just a natural teacher and so full of musical ideas and so free to give them forth, you know, to the world. Was a beautiful, brilliant man.

Explain in terms people can understand What was he doing on the trumpet?

Well, he said that not having had any lessons on the trumpet, he didn't know what he couldn't do. So he did whatever he felt like doing and he extended the range of the trumpet about two octaves. You know, because all the books will tell you how high you can go, and then than that you can go no higher. Well, he went two octaves past that so Maynard Ferguson now goes an octave above that, you know. So there are no limits, that's that was, I think, his greatest, one of his greatest contributions, that you have no limits. The only limits you have are the ones you place on yourself. You can do whatever you want to do. Everything for which he's known are things previous to him that were said to be things you cannot do.

Out of sound

SR 103 Side B

When he came through Toledo, it was to find out

CR 221

And did I have a joint?

Nat King Cole was a great piano player. People don't realize that today.

I know, because it's been so overshadowed by his beautiful

What kind of piano player is Nat King Cole?

Well, Nat King Cole was one of the ten best jazz piano players of all time. But this pianistic ability was completely overshadowed by his gorgeous singing. And, to the point that he ended up standing up and singing and not playing too much, you know. But he's very very wonderful piano player and was that exclusively until some guy came in the club and asked him asked him for "Sweet Lorraine." So he played "Sweet Lorraine." And the guy came up and

said, “No, no, no, no. I want you to sing ‘Sweet Lorraine.’” He says, “Well, I’m not a singer.” And the guy said, “Well, sing it anyway.” And gave him ten bucks. Which in those days was a lot of money. So he sang “Sweet Lorraine.” And he sang it so well that the rest of the trio says, “Hey, man, you ought to keep that in,” you know. So he kept it in. And then he branched out into other songs and the next thing you know, he was singing and playing and finally just singing.

Tell me about his singing in terms of jazz singing.

Well, all of, all of his singing was jazz singing. Everything he did he did it with a jazz flavor. You know, the phrasing that he used was strictly jazz, you know. It was like, it was like the tenor saxophone of Coleman Hawkins, you know. When he said, when he would say, “I just found joy. I’m as happy as a baby boy.” You know, that’s like boo doo doo do, ooboo de dooboo doo doo doo. It was like a horn playing. It was a very instrumental singing. But it was gorgeous. It was simple. But yet very complex underneath. It was a simple complexity. Or a complex simplicity.

Let’s talk about Sarah Vaughan

Sarah Vaughan. Well, first you got to realize what what the we can’t talk about any singer until we make clear, that they all came out of the church. The instrumentalists and the singers, ‘cause jazz is the secular version of the American Negro church music. The spirituals. The spirituals are the mother of the blues. And blues is jazz’s mother. That’s what we say in our evolution of the blues. And all these, all these people, Nat Cole’s father was a Baptist minister in Montgomery, Alabama. My father was a minister in the African-Methodist-Episcopal church in Toledo. And his friend was Reverend Waller in Richmond where he was from and his son, Thomas, Fats, used to have to visit my father whenever he visited Toledo. And I’ll tell you more about that later, but it's it’s in the church that these people learned the soulfulness of their art, you know. Singing, especially, Sarah sang in the choir in New Jersey, you know. She came out of the choir. She had such a beautiful coloroturro type voice that that her family thought she should study opera, but she was in love with jazz music. So she brought that operatic coloroturro type Maria Calais type of Lily Pond’s type voice of jazz music and became the divine Sarah Vaughan, you know ‘cause she also played piano, she was relief piano player in the Earl Hines’ Orchestra. Well to be relief piano player with great pianist like Earl Hines, you had to really play the piano. You couldn’t just you know, you had to know what you were doing. She was his relief pianist who sang occasionally.

Ella Fitzgerald.

Well, Ella is like me, we had a bond between us. It was a bond of ignorance, you know. We didn’t know anything, really. She never learned to read, I

never learned to read. She and I had had that in common. But we both had great ears, you know. We could hear around the corner. Mine due to my time spent listening to Art Tatum who was blind. And couldn't teach me reading, but would say, "Listen." So I would listen to what he played and hear it. Ella was with Chick Webb at seventeen and he taught her to listen to what the band was doing, to what the soloists were playing. And she learned that way too. So she was, she was a natural, she was a born musician. She thought she was a dancer and entered the amateur contest at the Apollo as a dancer. And stage fright paralized her, so she sang. But she was consummate in in her, in her ability to hear. And then, she was swinging along like everybody else, you know. Her favorite was Connie Boswell of the Boswell Sisters, a remarkable group. You know, great singing group that is totally unknown today, but everybody listened to them, they were very very hip.

You can hear, fine. But you have to have the instrument.

Yes.

So they don't always go together.

No. But you find that out in church. You know, you find out that you have an instrument, so she did. So did Dinah Washington and Sarah and everybody else.

Jimmie Rushing?

Jimmie Rushing, there again you have a, you have an alto player with Basie's band. He was he was the first alto player in the band, and at that time, there was no vocalist, you know, the vocalist was the one that got drunk first, "Ah think ah'll shing a shong, yeah." So he used to jump up and sing the blues and he got so good at it, you know, that Basie had to hire another saxophone player, so he just sang. But he just started singing for, that way, you know, just for fun.

How did he sing?

Jimmie Rushing style is indescribable. Because, if you look at it from the standpoint of say a Billie Eckstine, or a Frank Sinatra or Tony Bennett, he's you couldn't even admit him into the pantheon of singers. Because there's no partiular voice there. You know. There's a great strength in the instrument that there was there. There's no enunciation because there was never any any diction involved and there was never any lessons in such things as that. It was vulgate expression used throughout, "Your eyes are blue, your kisses too, I can't believe what you make me do. I can't believe that you're in love with me. I can't believe that you in love with me." That's not what you'd call correct English. But when Jimmie Rushing sang it, he said, "Yeah." Because of the feeling that was behind it and that swinging band in the background

there. So he's a singer I would say that made himself up. But what he made up, nobody's reached to this day.

Fats Waller.

Thomas Waller was from Richmond, Virginia. His father was minister in the AME church, the African-Methodist- Episcopal church, you know, I say that too because I think that African, okay I understand that, Methodist, that's John Weseley, Episcopal, I don't know who that is, but I think that what they really meant was African-Methodist-Episcopal Baptist, Hebrew, Roman Catholic, Muslim, Sufi, church. They were going to get into him one way or another. But all of it wouldn't fit on the marquis, so they just said AME, you know. But they were just taking in everything, you know, anything with a, with a spiritual bent, you know, they took in. Well, my father being a minister in that church and being from Richmond, he was a friend of Thomas Waller's father, Reverend Waller, so when Thomas came toledo, he had to stop and see Reverend Hendricks. It was a must. So, I was, I was a kid, I used to hang out with my father, pretty close to my father although I had eleven brothers and three sisters, I was the one he picked to take his place and become a minister. You know, so he kept me with him all the time and I used to pick passages out of the Bible to help him in his sermons. So I was there this day when Thomas came and at this time he was drinking a fifth of gin a day. Really a tragic example of alcoholism. And he knew he couldn't drink in my father's house so he paid one of my little friends fifty cents to stand by the window. You know, it was in the summertime and hold this gin. And so I was there, you know, like I usually was with my father and I was sitting there, I was about eleven and he said, "Just a minute Reverend." And my father would stop and he would lean out the window and take a swig of this gin. And my father would bow his head, you know. And I'm sitting there thinking, "Whooh, what kind of cat is this?" That was the funniest guy I ever saw in my life. And then he'd play things on the piano, you know, church songs. On the piano. You know, nothing, nothing jazz, but very beautiful, he was a wonderful piano player.

Jazz — what does it mean?

Jazz is the expression of a spiritually free people. When I say spiritually free, I mean the music that is the foundation of jazz came from slavery. There's not much freedom in that. But one of the things I've learned about about the slaves, my grandfather having been a slave, and in talking to him when I was a little child, you know, was that it was only their bodies that was enslaved, their spirits were freer than some people even today. Some people are more slaves than my grandfather ever was. People in corporate positions, you know, who can't move right or left or up or down and have to have every day to pay attention to this form of existence. They're more enslaved than my grandfather was.

Why do you think jazz happened in America?

There, they're part of the human experience first, because at one time in man's existence, we've all been slaves. The English were enslaved by the Africans years ago. The Africans have enslaved each other for centuries. The Greeks had slaves. Some African countries still have slaves to this day. The Irish were enslaved. You could buy an Irish slavey in Boston as late as 1864. So slavery is a condition more common to humanity than than it's thought to be. You know, it's not a, it's not a particular condition of the African-American people, it's a human condition. We're, we're just the latest in, in a long line. But it took place on this continent and so what it left in its wake and what came out of it is a part of our culture. And the spiritual music is the artistic contribution and the secular version of that spiritual music, the blues and its instrumental counterpart which we call jazz which is a misnomer if there ever was one. It's what we have left of it. So it's all of America's cultural art form to share. It belongs to all Americans because all of us have inherited it from that experience.

Lester Young & his relationship to the meaning of these songs?

Well, Lester Young in the first place I must say was an angel. I mean we have angels, you know. People think of angels as human beings with wings flying around in the sky, you know, this popular conception, it comes from the fact that, you know, birds fly. And that thoughts and ideas are pictured as flying because that's the fastest we can conceive of moving, you know. But there are angels in the earth, there's a play, "Angels in America," I think that uses this idea. And I think that Lester Young was an angel. I think he was so spiritually motivated that it made him, that he transcended humanity and became angelic in his attitude. He never raised his voice, never had a bad thing to say about anyone, unless he said it to them. He was very hurt by peoples' actions sometime but he never took it out on on any anyone. He was angelic in that respect. And his music reflected that. He was soft, sweet and gentle and his style of playing, he played the tenor saxophone which Coleman Hawkins had in the first to play jazz on because it was invented by Adolph Sax and, in the late 19th Century. And Coleman Hawkins was the first person to play jazz on it and he played it with a rough and a tough and a manner and a big tone. And Lester Young, being the gentle soul he was felt that that way of playing the tenor didn't suit him, you know. He wanted to express his elfin almost fairy gentle self. So he played the tenor like an alto saxophone and in order to get the sound higher than the average horn was, he twisted it so that it so that the body of the horn extended outward and held it like this, and he had to bend his neck to accomodate that, and turn his mouth piece so he looked like this and he played like that. But the beauty that came out of that horn is ineffable.

Lester Young also knew the words to these songs.

He said, "How can you play a song if you don't know the words?" He admonished every jazz musician to learn the words to the songs that he's

going to play because when an arranger arranges horns together, it's called voicing and the best horn players are said to be singing. You've heard critics say, he sang through his horn. Well, of course. The original musical instrument is the human voice and the horn is an imitation of the voice, and the voice sings. And so the horn must sing and if you're going to sing a song, and a song has words, you must know the words.

So much of classic jazz was taken from popular songs, then the audience could relate to it.

Yes

Could you talk about that a little bit?

What the popular songs did was furnish the jazz musicians with repertoire other than other than the blues. Because previously that that's all they had was the blues and some European Machtishes and, you know, mastiches and dancing things from the New Orleans era. But the advent of all those popular songs. The Rogers and Hart songs, the, you know, the Cole Porter repertoire furnished them with interesting compositions with interesting chord structures, interesting melodies, interesting harmonies and gave them new repertoire to explore and some of the songbooks of great jazz musicians like "Charlie Parker Plays Cole Porter's" magnificent, you know, his improvisational creativity put to "I Get a Kick out of You" is fas fantastic, it's just brilliant, you know, and interesting and enriching to everybody including the composer and the lyricists and the bonafide jazz fan. They both got richer from this, from this marriage, you know and it was a natural thing because these songwriters hung out in the jazz joints of that time, they hung out uptown which was the origin of show business and the origin of musical publishing also was up around 127th Street, 125th Street.

Count Basie

Count Basie played piano in such a way that when Lambert, Hendricks and Ross first appeared with him at the Apollo Theatre, I told him, I says, "Boss, you're either the best pianist in the world, or the worst pianist in the world." And he laughed, you know, and then we we just separated. But what I meant that was, he was not a conventional piano player. He started out on the drums. He's a, he was a second cousin to Sonny Greer, Duke Ellington's great drummer and he started on the drums and Sonny says, "I don't think you're going to make it, man, you better, you better do something else." So, he liked Fats Waller. Fats Waller was playng in a in a movie theater in New York, so Basie came over from Redbank New Jersey and went to the movie theater and listened to Fats play the organ and got to know him and so Fats began to teach him things on the piano. But Basie

The End