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KENNY BARRON
NEA Jazz Master (2010)

Interviewee: Kenny Barron (June 9, 1943 -)

Interviewer: Anthony Brown with recording engineer Ken Kimery

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Brown: Today is January 15th, 2011, Saturday morning. This is the Smithsonian National Endowment for the Arts Oral History Interview with pianist, composer, leader, and educator Kenny Barron in his house in Brooklyn, New York. Good morning, Kenny.

Barron: Good morning.

Brown: It's been a while since the last time I sat on a piano with you. You were trying to school me on the evolution of bebop piano. We were looking at Bud Powell. You said, Teddy Wilson, Teddy Weatherford, Billy Kyle, and so on. I did my homework. So you schooled me right, sir.

It's a pleasure to be able to be with you for this interview. If you could – for the record, if you could state your full name, your place of birth, and the date of birth.

Barron: The full name is Kenneth Barron, born in 1943 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Brown: And what date? 9 June is correct?

Barron: Yeah, June 9th.

Brown: Do you know where you were born?

Barron: I was born in Hahnemann Hospital, on Broad Street.

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Brown: Broad Street. My wife's from Philly. So I know it.

What neighborhood did you grow up in?

Barron: I grew up in – it was north Philly. That's where I grew up. We live in an area – it was definitely the ghetto. But it was cool. I didn't know it was the ghetto. It was a pretty – I don't want to say impoverished area, but it was working class, definitely a working class area. We had a little small house. We were comfortable.

Brown: What were your parents' names? And any occupations, your father's occupation?

Barron: My father's name was William – William Barron, Sr. He worked in a steel factory in Philly – not steel, but a place where they made metal files, called Nicholson File Company. My mother was pretty much a housewife, homemaker, although I do remember her working one time at the Goldman Theater in Philly, cleaning. During that time, I used to get to go to the movies with her for free.

Brown: And her name?

Barron: Her name was Rella – R-e-l-l-a.

Brown: And a maiden name?

Barron: Her maiden name was Bradley.

Brown: Do you know where your folks were from originally?

Barron: South Carolina.

Brown: Where?

Barron: My mother is from a place called Abbeville, which is – Abbeville, South Carolina, which is maybe a couple of hours from Savannah, Georgia. My father's also from South Carolina.

Brown: We have that in common too. My father's from South Carolina. This is wonderful.

Siblings: of course, Bill Barron. You've mentioned him, and apparently Junior – William Barron, Jr.

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Barron: Right.

Brown: Any other siblings?

Barron: Yeah. There was five of us altogether, two brothers and two sisters.

Brown: Where are you in that sequence?

Barron: I was the youngest. I was the baby. Bill was the oldest.

Brown: I'm going to return and talk about Bill, because of his involvement in this music as well. But if you could give us a portrait of what your childhood was like, growing up in north Philly, the neighborhood, its schools.

Barron: We moved once. But the neighborhood, when I was born – as I say, it was a small house. I wasn't – I hadn't started taking piano lessons at this point. No, actually, I had. I started when I was six. We had an old upright piano around the house. So I started taking lessons around my sixth birthday. I really didn't like it. I liked music, and I liked playing the piano. At the time, I had a fairly good ear. So I could go to the piano and pick out little things. But I didn't like taking lessons. As it turns out, my very first teacher was actually Bill's girlfriend at the time. Ruth Isaacs was her name. She was my very first teacher.

Brown: Not related to Ike Isaacs?

Barron: No. I don't think so, no. When we moved – we moved to another area in north Philly – that's when Bill discovered that I was playing, because he didn't really know. I used to hear my sister – because everybody had studied piano. You didn't have to continue. But I heard my sister, Barbara, playing some blues chords on the piano. "Wow, that's nice. I like that." That must have been like 8, 9, somewhere – yeah, about 8, 9. So I was sitting down at the piano, playing them, and Bill came home from work, from his day job. He was surprised. He said, oh really? Actually, I was a little older than that. Yeah. So we started talking about music. He was testing me. He would play a chord. "Is that a minor chord or a major?" I identified them all. He called up Mel Melvin, said, "Look. I got my little brother here." So I started working in the same band with him.

Brown: That was an r-and-b band?

Barron: Yeah, basically, but rhythm-and-blues meant something totally different then. It really was music based on the blues and *I Got Rhythm* chords. Yeah, *Rhythm* and blues. That's what it is. It was basically dance music, shuffles. It was basically dance music. We used to play at what was called cabarets. Those would be dances. People would bring their own alcohol and food. You'd play for a show. I mean, you'd play for dancing, but
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you would also have to play for a dancer, like a shake dancer, singers, comedians. So you had to – there's a lot of stuff you had to do. For me, being young, it was a really great experience.

Brown: You're probably still in high school. Maybe you were in junior high school.

Barron: Actually, I was in junior high school the very first gig.

Brown: Your parents allowed you?

Barron: Bill was looking out for me. The first gig, I think my father came to pick me up. It was at the Elks Lodge in south Philly.

Brown: So you got early training into the business of it, too.

Barron: Oh yeah.

Brown: I guess you didn't have to audition, since you had your brother's endorsement.

Barron: No, but I made several glaring mistakes. I remember one of the tunes they called was *What is This Thing Called Love?* I didn't know it. I'm listening to it, trying to hear it, and I started playing a blues, a minor blues. They looked at me like this and started calling out the changes to me.

Brown: How large of an ensemble was it?

Barron: It was maybe a quintet. Mel Melvin never played. He had orchestras, but scattered around different places. This particular band, I remember the drummer, Jimmy Griffin. I remember the bass player. His name was Winston. There was a saxophone player – well, Bill. And myself. So it was basically just a quartet.

Brown: Really?

Barron: Yeah, it was a quartet.

Brown: How long was your tenure with Mel Melvin's band?

Barron: I think all through – pretty much, the junior high school and maybe a little bit of high school.

Brown: Looking at your entry in the *Grove Dictionary*, it says, "When he was 15, he worked with a rhythm-and-blues orchestra." So, did you work with the orchestra? Or was it just the quartet.

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Barron: On occasion it may have been larger, but it was never a full orchestra or big band. It was always a small group.

Brown: You say you were taking piano lessons. Did you have musical education in schools as well?

Barron: In junior high school I started taking theory and stuff like that, and in high school as well.

Brown: It says here you played double bass and tuba.

Barron: Yeah, I did.

Brown: What was that? How did that come about?

Barron: Strangely enough, I don't know. I know that I played tuba in the marching band.

Brown: So it would have been a sousaphone, actually.

Barron: Sousaphone, right. It was sousaphone.

Brown: Wrapped around you.

Barron: Yeah. I still have the mouthpiece.

Brown: Before they started making them plastic, right? You had all that metal.

Barron: Right, metal. I used to carry it home on the bus, people laughing at you.

Bass, I started playing – I guess I was in high school. I don't know what drew me to the bass. I know I liked it. I started studying with a – it was a bass player from the Philadelphia Orchestra. His name was George [?Inni], I remember. I used to go every Saturday morning to – Girls High School, I think, was where they had the lessons – and took lessons. I had to walk – I could walk a pretty decent bass line. But after a couple of choruses, I was finished.

Brown: Could you name a couple of schools that you went to, your high school and/or junior high school?

Barron: The junior high school I went to was Roosevelt Junior High School, which was in Germantown, the Germantown area. Then I went to Germantown High School as well.

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Brown: Any teachers who impressed you or had any influence while you were coming up?

Barron: Not so much. There was the music teacher. I remember Mr. Evans was his name. He formed a jazz band at school. He allowed students to bring in – if they thought they could write – to bring in arrangements of tunes. He let me bring in a couple. They didn't – they sounded horrible. But he gave me that opportunity.

Brown: So you were already composing by high school? junior high school?

Barron: Trying to. Yeah, trying to compose. Bill had moved – when I was in late junior high school, or high school, Bill had moved to New York. Periodically, I would send him some of my tunes. He would write me back and say, yeah, they played this tune, played this song, and they really liked it. So that was always very encouraging.

Brown: We talked off-mic about the disparity in age, difference in age between you and Bill, 17 years, but he obviously had some influence in your musical development, if nothing else than finding the gig. Was there much contact, growing up with Bill, if we can go back and talk about him?

Barron: Not growing up, other than seeing him at the dinner table. It's like I say. In the beginning, before I started playing, we didn't really – he was my big brother.

Brown: But he was already playing horn when he was still home.

Barron: Oh yeah. He was already playing.

Brown: Was he playing records at home?

Barron: Yeah, and that was another thing that was a big influence. He had a great record collection, 78s. He had Charlie Parker, Fats Navarro, Dexter Gordon – people like that, and I used to listen to them. So that was a big influence, as well as Philly also had really great jazz radio stations. So, those two things.

Brown: It seems that music was emphasized in the house, since you said everyone had piano lessons. What were your parents listening to? What music did they play in the house, if at all?

Barron: That's interesting. My mother used to watch t.v. She'd watch Lawrence Welk. She loved Lawrence Welk. I think my father – he never went out that much to listen to music. But he – I remember he used to come home sometimes, and he was always whistling this song. It used to drive me crazy until I moved to New York and discovered what it was. It was *Jumpin' with Symphony Sid*, Lester Young. He was always whistling
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that song. Like I say, he didn't go out and hang out and listen, but I think he appreciated the music.

Brown: Coming up, were there any other either friends or school associates that were also in music, that went on to be successful?

Barron: To continue to play?

Brown: Because we know Philly is a hotbed for musicians.

Barron: Oh yeah. I had – when I was in junior high – no, high school, actually – I had a little trio, but I think I was the only one who continued in music. But in the marching band, there was a saxophonist named Byard Lancaster who was – we were in the band together. He went on. He took a different direction, but he continued in the music.

Brown: I'm looking at your biography. Philly Joe Jones, 1959, when you sat in with Philly. So that would have put you at 16, 17, maybe?

Barron: Yeah. That was my last year of high school.

Brown: How did that come about?

Barron: He came through Philadelphia. My brother was in the band at the time. I guess whoever – the pianist at the time was a gentleman – I think passed away now – a gentleman called Dick Katz. He was the pianist. Something happened. He wasn't able to make it. So Bill told Philly Joe about his kid brother. So I made the gig.

There was also a bass player who I met when I was studying, named Arthur Harper. He had his lesson right after mine. It turns out he was also the bass player on this gig. We worked at the Showboat in Philly.

It was a good band. There was a trumpet player who also passed away, unfortunately, named Mike Downs, from the Bay Area. It was great. It was a great experience.

Brown: How long was that?

Barron: It was only a week – a week at the Showboat with Philly. That was the only time we were in the band together, my brother and I. Then I worked with Philly many years later, when I moved to New York. But at that time, that was a big thrill.

Brown: I can imagine. What was the interaction? Did you have much interaction with Philly? Did he talk to you? Do you have any recollection?

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Barron: No, not really. I remember – Philly had a reputation, which I didn't know, for being a little slick sometimes. God rest him. On pay night, he was paying us – paying me, and all of a sudden he says, "See, we have this tax, workmen's comp. We have social security has got to come out, and federal tax." I'm saying, what? So I was left with very little money. I didn't really say anything, because I didn't know.

Brown: Paying the dues. It seems like it's in the tradition. People working in Hamp's band, boy, we – it seems to be a tradition.

Barron: That doesn't happen any more, but . . .

Brown: Then, from there – you're in high school. So you're already determined? You want – this is what you want to do, make a career in music?

Barron: Yeah, the die was cast. I was definitely deciding, I want to play music. Plus I had met – by that time I had met my peers, so to speak, guys who were my age, because when I was working with Mel Melvin, they were all much older. They were in their 40s. Then I was like, 14. I had met the guys who were playing from my generation around Philly. So I was starting to work quite a bit. Sonny Fortune was among those. He was a couple of years older, but he was around. We were playing. And a saxophone player named Jimmy Bass. Quite a few others. I started playing a lot. Reggie Workman, who's also a few years older. He was back and forth between New York and Philly. That was a great time.

Brown: Jimmy Heath?

Barron: Jimmy I met when I was 17. I started working with him. He had just gotten out. That's no secret. He tells everybody. He had gone to prison, and he had just gotten out. I met him. I was on South Street. I was working with a saxophonist named Sam Reed in Philly. He and Jimmy were very, very [?]. Sam introduced me to Jimmy. "This is Bill Barron's brother." Jimmy was surprised. "Oh really?" So I started working with Jimmy. He had had – his first record, Riverside, Orrin Keepnews, had come out. It was called *Really Big*. It was a small big band. So I started working with him, playing those arrangements. I still know those songs. So that was great.

We used to play a lot – one of the things Philly had at the time was after-hours clubs. We used to play at a lot – all these after-hours clubs with Jimmy and different people. The Northwest, the VPA. It was the same thing. You had to play a show as well. You have to play for dancers – not dancing, but for dancers, a comedian, singers. It was great.

Brown: Boy, baptism by fire.

Then it says, working in Detroit with Yusef Lateef, 1960.

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Barron: Yeah. That was the year I graduated from high school. I worked in Philly at the Showboat. Yusef came through Philly, and his pianist missed the flight, because they had a matinee. We had a matinee in Philly. The matinee was like 4 o'clock. His pianist – I think his name was Abe, Abe Woodley – missed the flight. So he called Jimmy to ask Jimmy if he knew anybody who could come and do the matinee. Jimmy gave him my number. I went and played the matinee. It was just the matinee.

Apparently it was cool. A couple of months later he called me – I think I had just graduated from high school – and wanted me to come to Detroit to play at the Minor Key with him. My mother was a little reluctant, but she finally gave in. This was my first plane trip. I went to Detroit.

The drummer was from Philly also. It was a guy named Ronald Tucker. They called him The Flame.

Brown: The what?

Barron: The Flame, because he had red hair. So Ronald Tucker, and one of the McKinnays from Detroit, Ray McKinney, was playing bass. We worked at the Minor – I think it was like 10 days. It was 10 days, two weeks, something like that. But also that was a great experience, because Yusef was doing some, for me, unusual music.

When the gig was over, Yusef said, “I have a record date coming up, and I’d like you to write something.” I was flabbergasted that he would trust me that much. He hadn’t heard any of my writing, but I think maybe, based on the way I played, he thought maybe I could write. So he asked me to write a composition and to arrange one. He sent me the music – sent me the piece he wanted me to arrange, and he told me the instrumentation. It was a little different. He was playing the tenor. It was baritone saxophone, bassoon – which was unusual – and then two trumpets.

So I went to New York for the session. It was at – there was a studio over the top of Radio City at the time. I can’t remember the name of the studio, but it was right over the top, the top of Radio City, the building. It was Clark Terry and a trumpet player named Richard Williams. I think the baritone player’s name was Tate Houston. The bassoon player’s name was José Taylor, who I – I have not seen him since. I don’t know whatever happened to him. And Ben Tucker and Lex Humphries. I didn’t play. Joe Zawinul, who was with Dinah Washington at the time. I didn’t play. I just went to observe. Since it was my music, I wanted to hear it, and he invited me over. For me, that was – I was in heaven. I was 17. I hadn’t even moved to New York. I was 17 years old. For me, that was a great experience. The record, when it came out, it was called *The Centaur and the Phoenix*, on Riverside.

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Brown: I know you put in some years with Yusef. So we'll come back to that. But before we ask about what influences you received from Yusef, at this stage of your development, who would you say were your major influences as far as your piano?

Barron: At that time, I think I would have to say Tommy Flanagan. Tommy Flanagan and Hank Jones.

Brown: Detroit.

Barron: Detroit, yeah, which is strange. I heard Tommy when I was in junior high, I think. Yeah, junior high school.

Brown: You mean live?

Barron: No, I never heard him. I didn't hear him live until I moved to New York.

Brown: Okay, so on the record.

Barron: On record, yeah. A friend of mine had a recording. It was a Miles [Davis] record. It was either – I think – I don't know whether it was *Collector's Items*, maybe? But it wasn't Tommy's. I think it was Miles's record. Anyway, they did *In Your Own Sweet Way*. I remember, boy, I really – Tommy, the touch, the way he touched the piano, and the ideas. I fell in love with him. I didn't get to – like I said, I didn't get to meet him until many years later, at Bradley's.

Brown: Oh, that's many years later.

Barron: Yeah, that's many years later. He had – when I moved to New York, he was always on the road, traveling. He was with Ella Fitzgerald and Tony Bennett. So he was never in New York. When I finally got to hear him, I was – yeah, I was floored. And he was such a nice cat – gentleman.

When I moved to New York, I remember going to the Five Spot. One of the first people I met was Doug Watkins. He said to me, “Wow, man, you look like Tommy Flanagan with hair.” Of course I don't have any hair now. So that was – I said, “Oh, great. Thanks.”

Brown: I got the look.

Since you are writing and now arranging, do you have any influences that you can credit as far as your conceptions at that point?

Barron: Not at that point, no. I was just trying things. See if this works and that works. I think Horace Silver was one of my favorite writers at the time. I just liked the way he
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wrote. Everything was so melodic and catchy and memorable. Everything was memorable. It wasn't too slick. Everything was very memorable.

Brown: So you moved to New York.

Barron: Yeah, I moved to New York in '61. I moved – actually, I'm next door to Bill. There was a bass player I had met in Detroit, named Vishnu Wood. His name was Bill Wood then. We worked with Yusef for a minute. I met him in Detroit. It turns out he had a place next door to Bill. I wound up staying with him and sharing the rent. He was hardly ever there. It was great. It was a great block to live in. Across the street were a bunch of guys, another bunch of guys from Philly: Reggie Workman, Tootie Heath, Spanky DeBrest. They all shared an apartment. Up the street from them was Ted Curson, from Philly. So it was a great block. Then I could walk to the Five Spot, the Jazz Gallery, which were owned by the same brothers, the Termini brothers. So I got to hear Sonny Rollins, and Freddie Hubbard when he first came to New York. It was great. That period was great.

Brown: So you're working. Are you working at this point? It's your first gig.

Barron: A little bit, a little bit. My first gig in New York was, I think, a Monday night at Birdland with my brother and Ted Curson. That was my very first gig in New York. But I was starting to do little things, like coffee shops and things like that. I didn't really start working – I think Dizzy [Gillespie] was my very first real – I won't say real gig, but . . .

Brown: James? James Moody?

Barron: Yeah, with James Moody. Prior to that, I did do some time with Roy Haynes.

Brown: Oh. Let's talk about [?].

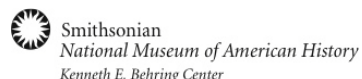
Barron: That was incredible. I don't think I'd even gotten married yet. I had just come to New York. That was one of the first gigs: Moody, and then Roy Haynes. With Moody, it was a sextet, and we were doing a lot of music by Tom McIntosh. He had a really great band. It was Tom McIntosh; Steve Davis, who was Trane's bass player; Dave Burns, playing trumpet; Edgar Bateman was the drummer. It was great.

Then, with – who? My mind is leaving me. The other band we just mentioned.

Brown: You said Moody and then Dizzy, and then what was – yeah, that's a good question.

Kimery: Roy.

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Brown: Oh, Roy.

Barron: Roy, yes.

Brown: Thank you. Boy, there's something in the water out here.

Barron: Wow. You see, you're starting to have it. Roy Haynes, yeah. That was also a great gig, because Henry Grimes was the bassist. Frank Strozier. So it was great. And playing with Roy was – wow, what an experience. We even had uniforms.

Brown: What? Roy Haynes had uniforms?

Barron: Yeah, he went and bought us blazers, navy blue blazers. We did quite a few gigs.

Brown: And Roy was the leader.

Barron: Yeah, Roy was the leader.

Brown: What was that like, working for Roy? And what was he as a leader?

Barron: He was great, and he was so full of energy. Wow. That was just . . .

Brown: He still is.

Barron: Still is. That's right. I got a chance to record with him many years later on this very record there. I hadn't played with him in a long time. Then I think he was 70-something.

Brown: Yeah, that's '94.

Barron: Yeah, he was 70-something. When he sat down to play, I couldn't believe it. I said, he plays like he's 15, with energy and also, so hip.

Brown: Right, and still taking chances.

Barron: Still taking chances, yeah. So I say, I want to be like that when I grow up. So that was a great gig, working with Roy.

Brown: Your apprenticeship was top drawer, a launching pad.

Barron: Yeah, I feel very blessed to have had those experiences. Lou Donaldson was another one I worked with just briefly before Dizzy.

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Brown: Is it time to talk about Diz?

Barron: Yeah.

Brown: Okay. So, Moody hooked that one up for you?

Barron: Yeah. They were working at Birdland. I had just got married. They were working at Birdland. I just happened to run into Moody on Broadway. He mentioned to me that Lalo Schiffrin was leaving the band and asked me if I would be interested. Are you kidding? Of course. So I went down to Birdland to talk to Dizzy, and he hired me without ever hearing me play, just based on Moody's recommendation. But I also think the fact that I was married may have helped. I think that he thought that maybe being married, I was a little more stable. Some of the musicians of that era sometimes – I think that was an extra little bonus there, the fact that I was married.

That was a great experience. The first gig, I remember, was in Cincinnati. No rehearsal. The rehearsal was in the taxicab. "This goes like this." Chris White, who was the bassist, was a big help, pulling my coat to this tune and that tune. I managed to get through it. After the first week or so, everything was fine. But it was a great, great, great gig. I learned a lot. The thing about Dizzy is that Dizzy knew a lot about, number one, about rhythms. He would often tell Rudy Collins what he wanted and could – "Play this with your right hand. Play this with your left hand. Do this with your right foot." So forth and so on. He knew. And he was also a very good pianist. If he had a particular voicing in mind, he could go to the piano and show me. Many nights, if the second set or the last set – if it wasn't crowded in the club, sometimes he would just chase me away from the piano, and he would sit and play a tune or two with Moody playing saxophone. He could play. I was there for four years. There was a lot of great experiences.

Brown: Diz's repertoire is all over. You got all the Latin stuff. You got – so I guess that was just on-the-job training. You just learned it there.

Barron: Oh yeah.

Brown: Did you come in with any conceptions, any of those kind of Latin conceptions or anything?

Barron: No, I learned a lot of it on the job. The first time I played a bossa nova was with Dizzy. We used to do *One Note Samba*, and we used to do *Desafinado* and *Chega de Saudade*. We used to do that. Those were the three Brazilian songs that I knew. My interest in Brazilian music actually grew as I listened more, as I heard more of it, from other sources. I really fell in love with it.

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Brown: So about four years with Diz, touring all over the place.

Barron: Everywhere. My first trip to Europe was with Dizzy.

Brown: Touring. What were your recollections of touring?

Barron: One thing that was nice with Dizzy: we were guaranteed to work 40 weeks out of the year. That was guaranteed. It was a lot easier during those times, because most of the clubs you worked at, you were there for two, sometimes three weeks. We would start out – Birdland, for instance. We were always there for two weeks. Then we would go to Chicago. We'd work the London House for three weeks. Go out on the West Coast. Do the Jazz Workshop for three weeks. Go down to the Lighthouse for three weeks. Those kind of things. And places in between, also, in the middle of the country, two or three weeks. Seattle, two weeks. So you couldn't help but be tight after that – I mean, the band couldn't help but be tight after that. Also, one of the things that happened is that you really made friends, because you were there long enough to do that, to unpack your bag. You started to see the same people every time you went back to a particular place. You became friends with a lot of people. People that I met with Dizzy, there's some people I still know today, who are still around and still listening to the music. We're still friends. So that was a great thing about that.

Also I got to hear a lot of great music. Traveling with Dizzy, often we would run into Duke's orchestra on the road. We would be on the same concerts together. I got to hear Coleman Hawkins and people like that, Ben Webster. For me, that was really great.

Brown: The band was pretty cohesive, not that many personnel changes in Dizzy's group.

Barron: No. For the first three years, anyway, it was the same. And like I said, we worked a lot. It sounded like a big band almost, because it was so tight. Then, my last year there, both Chris White and Rudy Collins left. I stayed. The band became – it was different. We hired an electric bass player who couldn't really play, unfortunately. I did that for a year. Then I just – I couldn't take it anymore. So I turned in my notice. What was interesting, my very first day of work with him was November 13th, 1962. My last day of work with him was November 13th, 1966. It just worked out that way. We were in Minneapolis. I just couldn't take it anymore. So I gave him my two-week notice.

Brown: Take it anymore, because the music wasn't . . . ?

Barron: Probably it was the bass player.

Brown: Really? That's enough to do it, huh?

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Barron: Yeah, yeah. He really – he drove Moody crazy too. So I just – plus my wife was having another baby. So I needed to stay at home now for a while. I did. Then some other things – like you say, when one door closes, sometimes another door opens. Being young, I didn't save a lot of money when I was with Dizzy. I wasn't thinking along those lines. I had a rough time for a minute, trying to freelance and stuff like that. I had some gigs. I was about to see about getting a day job when I started getting calls from Freddie Hubbard and people like that, who ended up living around the corner from me. I started working with Freddie, Stanley Turrentine. Things started to happen, which kept me from getting a day job.

Brown: Thank goodness. Are you interested at this point – maybe thinking of doing more arranging, to bring in the bread? Or any of those kinds – branching out rather than just as a performer?

Barron: At that time, I'm still just thinking performer. When I was working with Yusef, he would play a lot of my music, but I still didn't think of myself as a composer or an arranger, as such.

Brown: By – it sounds like you're freelancing. You mentioned Stanley Turrentine, Freddie. But you get back with Yusef not too long after that.

Barron: Yeah. I don't remember what year it was. It was a band with Tootie Heath, Bob Cunningham. This was after Dizzy, a little after Dizzy. Again, it was fun. It was a lot freer than working with Dizzy, because with Yusef, I could – you could play – in terms of your musical expression, you could almost do anything you wanted, within reason, of course. But it was very loose. Musically, it was very loose, and I really appreciated that, because it was a big difference. Working with Dizzy, after a while, you knew what to expect, which can happen in any band when you're there for a long period of time. But it was like this. Working with Yusef was like that. With Freddie, also, it opened me up a little bit more.

Working with Yusef, it was just such a – musically, it was so interesting, and on a personal level as well. He was honest to a fault. If he said, this is the way it is, then that's the way it was. You could trust his word about something. You could really trust his word about something. One incident really made an impression on me. We were in California, in San Francisco. We had driven from – I think we had driven up from L.A. Tootie's wife at the time was with us. Somebody had mentioned that – I don't know. There was the Black Panther Party or – had a place where we could stay reasonably cheap. So we went there. They saw Tootie's wife. They said, oh, no, she can't stay here. So Yusef said, "Well, we can't stay here, because I feel like she's my sister too." That made a big impression on me, that he would – he said that. "She's my sister too." I always feel very highly about him, think very highly of him, on a moral level.

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Brown: He was a very spiritual man.

Barron: Yeah, he really is. He encouraged – at one time he had everybody in his band at the time – he had encouraged everybody to go back to school, because he was a big believer in education. At one time, myself and Tootie and Bob, we were all at Manhattan Community College. I was taking flute lessons with Yusef, and I had math, math like I had never had before. I had English, and African history. I made the Dean’s List.

Brown: Supernumerary.

Barron: He was very encouraging that way. It was like, self improvement was always very important. So, in addition to music, that was another avenue for me, another way that he influenced me.

Brown: That tenure, according to the historical record, was from 1971 to 1975, with a brief, shall we say, detour in ’74 with the Buddy Rich sextet.

Barron: Oh yeah.

Brown: Which I have that recording. I meant to bring it. I wanted to say, “Yeah Kenny, how about this one?” Do you want to talk about that experience? From Yusef to Buddy, that’s like two ends of the spectrum.

Barron: Yeah, it is. It definitely is. When he called me – it was actually his manager, Stanley Kay, called me about it. Yeah, Buddy Rich. He was opening his club, Buddy’s Place, which was on Third Avenue, I think. It was great. We never had – I heard all the horror stories, but we never had – I never had any problems with him. He went through a lot of bass players. The bass player he really loved was Anthony Jackson, electric bass player. He really loved Anthony. In the band was – Sonny Fortune was in the band. There was an Italian saxophone player that passed away.

Brown: Italian saxophone player?

Barron: Yeah, he was Italian. Boy. I think he was from Rochester. I can’t think of his name. But he was really – he was incredible [Sal Nistico]. And Jack Wilkins. It was a good band. We played some good music.

He was – I remember one night at his club, there was – it was prom night. There was some kids talking. They were high school kids. So he put them out. And they were loud. But he put them out. You – but it was his club.

I did a little bit of touring with him. Not a whole lot. We played at another club in New York after he gave up that club. I think there was a fire there. I’m not sure. Then he
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played at another club that didn't last for long. It was on – in the Village on Sixth Avenue. But again, that was – all gigs are great gigs. You can learn something from them, and I did. He allowed me some space to play.

Yeah, that was – Thunderfoot. He was 4/4 on the bass drum. And I think that was the problem with a lot of the bass players. They weren't strong enough, or they couldn't keep up with his foot. I think – I don't remember some of the other bass players, but anyway, we went through about 4, 5, different bass players while we were at the club. Anthony was the one that he really loved. But it was a great experience. Again, a great experience.

Brown: I'm sure it enhanced your versatility.

Barron: Well, yeah, everything – you can learn something from every experience.

Brown: As long as we are bringing up the subject of versatility, you go back to Yusef. Yusef, to me, always had this huge conception. He seemed to embrace music influences and cultural experiences from everywhere.

Barron: Oh yeah.

Brown: So that is coming out in the music. How did that impact you? Or did it?

Barron: It did. It did, because it opened my ears to the same thing, the use of different kinds of scales that I would never have thought about using, what Ron Carter calls Lateefian scales.

Brown: Yeah, that works.

Barron: Lateefian scales, and using other instruments. He used to play – he has this instrument called the shenai, an Indian instrument. Wow, oboe, playing blues on the oboe. Used to do *See See Rider*. He used to do that on oboe. So, yeah. Then sometimes he would make various sounds by – like he had played these wooden flutes, and he would make this sound by tapping the open end on his hand at the mic. Or sometimes he asked me to put my foot on the pedal, and he'd blow into the open – it would be like an echo. He was very much into that.

Brown: There are a couple of tangents I want to take off on. I know you're in school in the '70s. You get your degree, and you also start teaching at Rutgers. Let's put that – I want to talk about being in New York in the '60s. So much is jumping off. For me, this is the golden age of modern jazz, because you have – by the – not even the early '60s, you already got Trane's quartet setting the standard. Then, soon after that, you got the second Miles Davis quintet. I know that's got to be heavy. Then, on the other camp, you got

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Ornette making waves. So you got the free. You got these two giants, these two pillars of the '60s, and you're living right in the middle of it. So what . . . ?

Barron: That's exactly what I was doing. Yeah. It was just great, because, first of all, there were so many clubs, coffee shops, from downtown to Harlem. You could just go anywhere and hear great music. And there were all kinds of bands. That's the thing that was important. There were many, many working bands at this time, like Cannonball [Adderley], Miles, Dave Brubeck, the Three Sounds, Ramsey Lewis, the Jazz Crusaders, Dexter Gordon, oh, Art Blakey – did I mention Art Blakey?

Brown: No, you haven't. Horace Silver.

Barron: Horace Silver.

Brown: Ahmad Jamal.

Barron: Ahmad Jamal, Monk. There was just so much music, and a lot of it was in New York. Any given night, you could go to the Village Gate, the Vanguard, the – yeah, the Village Gate. The Blue Note hadn't come into being yet, but the Five Spot, the Jazz Gallery. Coffee shops that were popular then: there was Cafe Wha. I think it's still here.

Brown: Is it?

Barron: I think. There was Cafe Wha, Cafe Bizarre. That's where I think I heard Cecil Taylor for the first time, playing a duo with a trumpeter named Clifford Jarvis. It was incredible. All these clubs. Uptown, Club Baron, Small's. There was a chicken and waffles place, uh

Brown: Pink Tea Cup?

Barron: No. This was up in Harlem. But anyway – Wells. Wells Chicken and Waffles.

Brown: They had music there?

Barron: Yeah. Count Basie's. There was music everywhere, and good music. Minton's – Minton's Playhouse. So there was good music everywhere, and I got a chance to hear a lot of it, an awful lot of it.

Brown: We just . . .

Barron: No, go ahead.

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Brown: I was going to say, we just interviewed Bobby Hutcherson a few weeks ago, and he talked about coming to New York, and always – you had this relationship with Freddie Hubbard, but Bobby got into the more progressive avant garde. I was just wondering. He was talking about hooking up with Grachan Moncur and Jackie Mac [McLean]. So that's a whole 'nother . . .

Barron: That's a whole 'nother thing.

Brown: I was just wondering if any of that caught your ears as well?

Barron: Oh yeah. It did. Yeah, it definitely did. I did a record with Bobby during – I think it was during the '60s, called – I don't remember. But anyway, it was – Joe Chambers was on it. It was different, yeah.

Brown: I think I brought that up. We talked about that during the interview.

The other thing I wanted to talk about – and this is the envy of every musician not from this particular city, but y'all from Philly seem to have a real serious camaraderie. Look at Trane's group. He's drawing everyone from Philly except for of course Elvin. But wherever I go, Philly, Philly. Y'all keeping each other, pulling each other, keeping tabs. So, was there something special there, some sort of Zeitgeist?

Barron: I don't know. There was a camaraderie. Even when I was living there, there was a group of us that hung together all the time, Sonny Fortune, a bass player named Don Moore, Jimmy Bass, and a few other people. We looked out for each other. Even when I moved to New York, it was the same thing. I wound up living with – after I left where I was staying next door to my brother, I wound up moving to East 11th Street with a bunch of guys from Philly: Reggie Workman, Arthur Harper, and a saxophonist named Bob Ralston. We just looked out for each other. Eventually I got married, and I start to drift apart after a while, a social thing. You still saw each other musically. Then, eventually, situations change. But those were great days. I don't know what it was about Philly, but, yeah, guys always – they hung out together. You played together. So all somebody had to do was say "A jam session," and everybody would be right there. It was great.

Brown: I remember every time Philly Joe Jones came out to the West Coast, he had Bootsie Barnes. He always had Philly cats.

Barron: Oh, Bootsie, yeah.

Brown: Y'all really stick together.

Barron: Bootsie's still around. I see him occasionally. I went to – there is a saxophone player that I grew up with, Tony Williams, who – he's older. I used to play with him. But For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



he does this festival every year for – it's a – to benefit – it's a charitable event. He does it every year. I would always see Boot – I did it a couple years. I always see Bootsie. He was always there. It was always great to see him.

Brown: The other digression was the education. You went ahead and completed your degree. '78. Is that correct? Or was it earlier?

Barron: I'm not sure of the year.

Brown: Okay. We'll leave that alone. But you did complete your degree.

Barron: Yeah.

Brown: A bachelor's in arts?

Barron: Yeah, a bachelor's.

Brown: But you had already started teaching at Rutgers before that

Barron: Yeah.

Brown: Do you want to talk about how you got involved with Rutgers?

Barron: It was through Larry Ridley. Larry called me and asked me about coming down to teach as a co-adjutant, just part-time.

Brown: Not even an adjunct. You're co-adjunct.

Barron: Co-adjunct, right. It's something I had never done before. I taught at Jazzmobile, but that was a different situation. This is teaching in a university. I had to go and give a presentation in front of the Provost, which was unnerving, but it was cool, obviously. So I started teaching just one day a week, maybe. It was teaching theory, harmony. I team taught a class with some other people. This was at Livingston College. It wasn't just jazz. It was classical. It was primarily jazz, but there was some classical. There was some world music, all of that.

Brown: Hmmm. Who was teaching the world music?

Barron: There were some composers there. There was a guy named Philip Corner and another guy who was a pianist who was what you might call a minimalist, and there was a clarinet player, Dan Goode. They had some very unusual ideas. But that was just part of the mix. I team taught the harmony class with Dan and Phil Corner, the three of us, and then, as it became more concentrated, I started teaching jazz piano. I taught keyboard
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harmony for non-pianists for a while. And then ensembles, gradually, as it became a bigger program, and jazz harmony and composition. I think I must have taught everything there was to teach there.

Brown: Were you one of the – was this when Larry was just launching this program?

Barron: I started, like I say, as a co-adjutant. Basically then I was just teaching harmony, and I had a few piano students when I first started. As time went on, it became more concentrated in terms of jazz. I started to get more students and teach more, different courses and things. But in the beginning, it was just basically a few piano students and harmony. Also, it was more European harmony. I was teaching figured bass and things like that. So I had to do a lot of research and learn more about it myself to teach it. But it was great.

Brown: Other than you and Larry, were there any other jazz instructors?

Barron: Yeah. It was me, Larry, Ted Dunbar.

Brown: Oh. So he was already there.

Barron: Yeah, Ted was there. He was there when I got there. Then gradually Larry started hiring more and more, getting more and more people involved. He got Bill Fielder, who passed away just last year.

Brown: Is it last year?

Barron: Yeah, I think it was last year he passed away. Larry's brother taught there for a while, Michael, the big band. Frank Foster was there. Michael Carvin taught drums. Gradually it got bigger and bigger as more resources became available.

Brown: By the time I got there, it was at Mason Goss School of the Arts. You had a jazz department, and then you had your own wing. You had the classical over on the other side. So it continued to grow.

Barron: Before you got there, we were just at Livingston College, and it was much smaller. Then, at that time, it was always a fight for – Larry had to always fight for resources.

Brown: When I was there with the first masters program, which is masters in music, I mentioned to somebody else working within Anthony Davis's group – it was the bass player, Mark Helias – he said, "I went there. I was at the Livingston campus."

Barron: Mark, yeah.

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Brown: He said, “I was the first graduating class from there, and you’re going to be the first graduating class coming out of the masters.” So we had the hookup. We all come through you. On that note, we’ll go ahead and change the tape.

Kenny, if we could talk a little bit more about your experiences as an educator, your approaches and methodology, pedagogy. What is the Kenny Barron method?

Barron: I’ve never thought that giving a student 100 voicings for C7 really does anything. So I would encourage – I would give students the possibilities. These are the things that can happen on a dominant-seventh chord. You go figure it out. You tend to remember the things that you figure out yourself. That was my thing. You figure it out. You discover it. This is a way of doing it. These are the possibilities, and then, this is how you can move from one chord to the next chord. These are the ways that you can do that.

Then the other thing is, I’ve always been fortunate enough at Rutgers and at Manhattan School of Music and now at Juilliard, to have a studio with two pianos, two grand pianos. I find I can learn a lot about what a student needs. We play together a lot, and I find I can find out a lot more about what a student needs doing that. You can hear more of a – you can discover what their weaknesses are in an actual performance situation, as opposed to, “Okay, play this exercise. Play that exercise.” I found that it’s an approach that works for me. It may not work for everybody. That’s the one that works for me. Especially with piano. So we do a lot of playing. Then I can say, “Okay, this – you need to work on your touch,” or “You’re playing too hard,” or “Change your attack,” or “Make your lines a little bit longer,” “Play a little bit more melodic,” things like that.

Then another thing we may do is look at the styles of various pianists, like Monk. What made his playing so unique? Or what about Tommy? What made his playing so unique? I’m not a believer in transcribing, but I do believe in learning solos. The thing is, with transcribing, you only get involved with the notes, but if you learn it by rote, then you get more involved with that person’s – if it’s a pianist, you get more involved with that person’s touch, the way they touch the piano, as opposed to just the notes, because if you’re talking about somebody’s style, you have to get involved with all aspects of it, not just the notes. So, again, that’s an approach that works for me. I’ve had some success with it. One of the greatest compliments I had – at Rutgers, there was a student there, who came in there, and he was kind of like a cocktail pianist. But by the time he graduated, in four years, he had – no, actually it was two years, because he was a masters student – in two years he had become a jazz pianist, not a cocktail pianist. That was one of the – I remember one of the other teachers saying “Yeah, when he came in here” – that’s the word he used – “when he came in here, he was a cocktail pianist. Now he’s a jazz pianist.” For me, that was a big compliment.

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I think that's from playing, because a lot of times students don't have the opportunity, especially these days, to actually play in performance as much as I did growing up, or as people did years ago. Sometimes the only playing they may do in a week is in their lesson. So that's why it's important to play.

Brown: You've been doing this for, now, since '73. What does that make it? Almost – going on 40 years. You've gone through Rutgers, Manhattan School, and now Juilliard. What about dealing with administration? This is educator-to-educator talking now. What have been the impediments or any of the facil- . . .

Barron: I've been fortunate in that I haven't really had to do that, except there was one year when – I don't know if you were there – Larry took a leave of – Larry was the chairman. He had taken a leave of absence. This was at a time when they were trying to put all the schools together, at Rutgers. I was acting chairman. I was so happy when he came back, because I wouldn't – it's not my cup of tea.

Brown: The politics?

Barron: Yeah. Some people thrive on that.

Brown: Yeah, they do.

Barron: Some people are very good at it. I was just not good at that. I could teach, but administrative stuff, no, because it's a lot to think about and a lot to do. It leaves little time for a B-flat. It's not something I would want to do.

Brown: You've been – of course you've had tremendous success. The track records of the students who studied with you are a testament to your educational acumen. Is there anything that you think you could suggest or recommend as far as jazz pedagogy, insofar as now it's been – the music has been institutionalized. We have to be honest about it.

Barron: Oh it is, yeah.

Brown: And the majority of the players are coming out of these institutions, academic institutions. Musicians of your age, your generation, even my generation, the one right behind you, we're looking at a whole change in the sensibility of the musicians and their approach to this music we call jazz. Do you have, like I said, any recommendations or suggestions on how to maintain some of that – for lack of a better word, the humanity and the legacy of this music?

Barron: I don't know. That's an interesting question, because one of the things I notice, good and bad – there's good and bad about what's happening now at institutions – players will come out – I look at players who are the same age as I was when I – and For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

they're much better prepared. They are really much better prepared. They got chops that are unbelievable. They can sight-read anything.

Brown: So technical facility.

Barron: Technique. They have all of that. But I'm – they can play those odd meters like it's nothing. But one of the things I think is lacking sometimes – you mentioned the humanity. Sometimes I think it's just the ability to tell a story. That's the one thing that I think is lacking sometimes. It's music that makes you do this, uh-hmm. It's music. It's interesting. But it's not music that – sometimes it doesn't pull on your heartstrings. That's the difference. I could listen to Trane and just be amazed, and it would move me. Wow. Very little does that to me now. I could listen to somebody who's really incredible in terms of technique. Ooo, yeah, I like that. But that's as far as it goes. It makes me do that. But it doesn't do that [Barron taps his heart] to me. I don't know. Maybe it's just a matter of more experience, because they're younger and younger. So it may just be a matter of experience.

Brown: But they couldn't have got too much younger than you. You're coming out – junior high school you had your first gig. You were already ready to be pro when you graduated from high school.

Barron: Yeah, but it's different. I think learning out there is a little bit different.

Brown: There we go.

Barron: Yeah, it's a little different from learning in an institution. I guess there's good and bad, like I say. Learning in an institution, you would definitely be technically prepared. Emotionally, I don't know, in terms of telling a story, I mean, in terms of being able to tell a story and to have all your notes mean something. I think that's the biggest difference. So it may take a little longer for players – young players – to reach that point. That's all. There are some exceptions. There are definitely some exceptions to that rule. That's what I hear. I hear a lot of great technique and amazing stuff, but nothing that makes me – nothing makes me want to cry, the way I could hear Trane hit one of those high notes on a ballad. That's so pure. Or to hear Miles just play that one note. So that's the difference, I think.

Brown: You're a pianist, and you're referring to horn players who were touching you. What about the pianists? I'm not trying to put you on the spot. I'm just – as a pianist, how do you get – how do you impart that to your students, so that they don't lose that? Or they can gain that? – forget losing it. How do they gain that? That's the essence of the music.

Barron: I think with piano students, because they have such prodigious technique, the thing to get them to do is slow down. One of the things I used to do, for instance, is –

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with piano students, we'd play stuff real fast. They're all over the place. Then, "Okay. Let's do a ballad." Sometimes it would fall apart, because you can't play – you can't fill up every beat in a ballad. There's a lot of space. You have to know what to do with that space, or let it be. That's the thing that happens. It's like learning what not to play or when not to play.

Or another thing I would do, for instance, sometimes – I accompany my students when they play, okay? So there's another thing I could do. We were playing. I would drop out, and then you discover, oh, they've got time problems. They're playing by themselves, and the time is like that. Those are the things that you discover when you play together. That's one of the things that happens. You just go, oh wow, they've got time problems, or this. For me, I think it's a better – if there's a way to marry the two, learning in school and learning in real-life experience, that would be ideal, but right now there are very few opportunities for real-life experience for students now. There aren't the venues. There aren't the bands. Occasionally you go to a place like Smoke or Small's and play. You need to do that a lot. You need to do that every night to really get that kind of experience.

Some of them who are ambitious, they do that, but there are others who don't. Those are the ones who – I don't know. Those who do that, who make every attempt to play as much as possible out there, I definitely applaud them, because that's what's needed. You need real-world experience, not just what you get in school. As a matter of fact, I was thinking your education starts when you leave. Your real education starts when you leave.

Another part of the problem is, you have all these music students now, graduating. Where are they going to work? There's a finite number of gigs. But some of them are – some of the students are very enterprising. "Okay. Maybe I need to do a recording." So they'll figure it out and get the money together to do a recording, things like that. But then the recording industry is down the toilet. So it's a real Catch 22 thing. If somebody were to ask me today, say, "Do you want to be a jazz musician?", if security was on my mind, I would say no. But sometimes you don't really have a choice about that. If you want to play, you're going to play.

Brown: Because of having had the opportunity to go to Rutgers, which was a masters in music which was performance oriented, I was always thinking – and I saw all my fellow students, all my colleagues, we were all – we were playing as much as we could. When we couldn't find gigs, we'd play together, 12 o'clock midnight in the practice room or something. But I always thought, well, shoot, if what's missing is the performance opportunity, we should encourage – if we're going to have a jazz institute, we should have either a club or some sort of facility where the students have that opportunity. If this is really vital and germane to their education, why is that not set up for them? So, like, at the student union, to ensure that there's an opportunity for the students to have that.

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Barron: Yeah. I think that is important. I know at the Manhattan they have a situation where the students – jazz students – perform pretty much every night, in addition to in ensembles and stuff. But they have kind of – I don't want to say nightclub, but like a coffee shop situation. The students perform there.

At Juilliard, there are a lot more opportunities. Some of the students actually go out and travel. Sometimes the administration finds jobs for them, like pianists who work in solo situations, or to work in certain kinds of gigs and things. Then the school also provides opportunities for – I had this group called the Artist Development Group, which is coached by myself and Carl Allen and Rodney Jones. They went to Brazil a few weeks ago – just before Christmas, actually. They performed there, and they did master classes for a week. So, situations like that. They go every year to Aikens, South Carolina, to do the same thing, or I think it's Park City, Utah, to a university there. They teach, and they play. I know Juilliard does its best to provide opportunities like that.

Then there's – they did a big re-do over at Juilliard just recently, and one of the things that we have now, that we did not have before, is that we have our own space – spaces. So there's – one of the rooms that they use for students to give performances is Room 340. They call it Club 340. So the students can – they have to sign up, and they give performances, and faculty can do the same thing, give performances. So, as much as possible, the school tries to provide opportunities. But, again, it still has to be – you still have to get out in the streets sometimes.

Brown: One of the – when I reflect on my experience at Rutgers, one of the highlights was working in your ensemble, your graduate ensemble, because you would play with us. It wasn't that you would direct or anything, but you were there playing with us. I remember you bringing out some Wayne Shorter. You said, "Let's play this." To me, students playing together is great, but when you played with us, that was the closest approximation in the academy of being out there, because, like you, you served your apprenticeship with the masters, and the only way to do that is to be able to interact with them. So, for me, I felt that that – if I am ever in a position where I could dictate or reconstruct what's going on in the academy, I would insist that that's it, because that's the closest thing you're going to get to the real thing in the academy, is have that master there, so that you have that experience of interacting with him or her. So that's – I'm totally grateful for that experience, but it has always remained in the back of my mind that this is essential to this education, instead of somebody just directing, saying okay, you students do this. "Here's some charts". Because that was the way it was prior to coming to Rutgers. The jazz instructor would "Okay, you do these charts, and I'll check you out and see how you're doing." But maybe it might have just been our lack of ability that he couldn't engage. But just not being able to – I think just the opportunity to interact with students.

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Barron: To interact. I think that is important. First of all, they need to see their instructor – you need to see your instructor doing the things that they’re teaching about. I think that’s important. If your instructor’s teaching about playing, then they should definitely be able to play. I think that’s important.

Brown: Could you repeat that for the record?

Barron: I think that’s important. I realize that sometimes the students first come to college and what they learned in high school, coming out of jazz programs in high school, is not too great. I just last week, or a couple of weeks ago, I had to listen to tapes of 30 piano students.

Brown: Audition tapes?

Barron: Yeah, audition tapes. Based on those tapes, they’ll be asked to come in for a live audition. Very few of those made it past that pre-audition screening. These are students who are – we’re talking about masters students. But a lot of them were also high school, and you could hear the deficiencies, especially when you’re talking about coming to a school on that level, Juilliard, because right away you’re expected to participate. First of all, everybody has to participate in ensemble. That’s a must. You have to participate in ensemble. At some point you’re going to be in a big band – at some point. So you have to be able to do all of that, which means your reading has to be up to snuff. You definitely have to be able to solo, right off the bat. Those are the things I was listening to, because I was the only one who did this particular thing. I was listening to that. They’d send in stuff with various groups, groups that they’re playing with or – and you could hear. It sounds amateurish sometimes, high-school-like. The thing is, I’m sure that in their high school, they were probably top dogs. But sometimes you’re being coached by professors who don’t – or teachers who don’t really play, who play on the weekend or something like that. That’s – I’m not casting aspersions. They don’t necessarily – the teachers themselves don’t necessarily have the experience that they can give to their students in terms of playing, playing experience. So that’s another part of the problem, is where are they getting it from? I think the education has to start much earlier, but where are you going to get it from?

There are a few schools I know about where – like, in Seattle, there are two schools, Garfield and Roosevelt High. The students that come out of there are really, really great. The schools in, I think, Houston, where Roy Hargrove – there’s a performing arts school. Certain schools are really incredible. But they’re geared towards that. Or the school down the street from the Juilliard, LaGuardia High School of the Performing Arts, they’re geared for that. So students that come out of there are really incredible. But just an ordinary high school? Sometimes the teachers are – they aren’t there. But the music is still in good hands, I think. I think the music is still in good hands.

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Ben Riley put it perfect, talking about the young people who – they have great technique, but they can't tell a story yet. Ben Riley said, "Yeah, well, they haven't had their hearts broken yet." It was well put. That's when they will be able to have something to talk about. They have something to say when they have their hearts broken, when they live life, essentially.

Brown: I wasn't expecting that this interview was going to change the direction of jazz pedagogy, but at least for you, having been in the trenches for so long, to be able to offer your opinions and your insights into this process, because it's going to continue. It's not coming out of the academy, and the academy of the streets is shrinking. So, like you say, Catch 22. How do we make sure that it remains in good hands?

Barron: Like I say, students, they're equipped. They know their instruments. So it's just getting that other kind of experience that's difficult for them now. But it will happen. I have faith.

Brown: How long have you been at Juilliard now?

Barron: I've been there since they started the program. So, 8 years maybe?

Brown: So as soon as you got out of Rutgers? You left Rutgers in 2000.

Barron: Yeah, and I went right to Manhattan.

Brown: Manhattan first.

Barron: Manhattan, yeah. Then for a while I was doing both, Manhattan and Juilliard. That's when I decided I needed to give one of them up.

Brown: I thought you had retired from Rutgers.

Barron: Yeah. I thought so too. But as soon as I made the decision to retire, I got a call from Justin DiCioccio at Manhattan. I said, "I'm not going to any meetings."

Brown: "Not serving on any panels. I'm not going to any meetings." Yeah, I got it.

Barron: I told him what I wanted, and he agreed. Then, after that, I got a call from Victor Goines, who was the head of the thing at Juilliard. They were just starting their program. Yeah, sure, why not? But after a while it got to be a little bit too much. I was at Juilliard on Wednesdays and Manhattan on Thursdays. Let me give one of these up. So I gave up Manhattan. I had more students at Manhattan. Juilliard only takes a certain number of students. For instance, now I only have two piano students. But there are other teachers

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there. Fred Hirsch is there, and Frank Kimbrough. Right now I only have two students, which is fine for me.

Brown: Undergraduate or grad students?

Barron: One is undergrad, and one is graduate. One of them is – I don't know if you know Jonathan Batiste, who's from New Orleans, who's an incredible young pianist. He's the graduate. He will be graduating in May. And an undergraduate from the Bay Area whose name is Samora. What's his last name? Kenderhughes, or something like that – Pinderhughes.

Brown: Pinderhughes. Oh yeah.

Barron: You know him?

Brown: I know his name. I'm teaching at The Jazz School out there.

Barron: Yeah. He's very good. He's one of the students I have, for instance, who can – he knows how to play a ballad. For me, that separates. He can play a ballad.

Brown: The litmus test.

Barron: Yeah, for me it is, actually.

Brown: It goes back to Herbie [Hancock] talking about his audition with Miles. Miles said, play a ballad. He said – you probably know this – Herbie said he didn't say anything but “nice touch.” That was it. He got the gig.

Barron: If you can play a ballad, for me, that's key. And he can do that. I had Gerald Clayton, who came from California to stay with me for a year at Manhattan. That's one of the things I loved about him right away, is that he had mad chops, like Oscar Peterson, but he could play a ballad, plus he's young enough to also be into other areas of music. He's listening to more spacey kinds of stuff, but he could play beautiful ballads, nice touch.

Brown: Probably a credit to his father too.

Barron: Oh yeah.

Brown: Your kids – how many children do you have?

Barron: I have two.

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Brown: Any of them musicians?

Barron: My son was for a while. He was in the first graduating class from LaGuardia Performing Arts. He played saxophone. But he's not playing now. He's the manager at Bergdorf Goodman's Men's Store. He's been into retail for a while.

Brown: So he's not struggling. He's not a starving musician.

Barron: Exactly.

Brown: He probably learned quick. "Dad, this is great, but I got to live."

Barron: My daughter, she works for the Brooklyn district attorney. My granddaughter, however, plays vibes. She went to Berklee up in Boston. Her major was music business, but she played vibes up there. She wants to get back into it now. So we'll see what happens.

Brown: It seems like you've always understood – maybe it's just through your experience – that being a jazz musician required more than just being a musician, performing musician. I'm referencing now the liner notes for the very first Sphere album, where you said, "Things remained in the talking stage until early 1982, when we began to take some positive and concrete steps to make the group a reality. First, we incorporated as a legal cooperative business entity." This is signaling, to me, Professor Barron, that there are some other dimensions to being – the career of a jazz musician. "Under our corporate umbrella, our publishing company and a recording company." So, when you launched this project Sphere, you were going for the entire gestalt.

Barron: Oh yeah.

Brown: So this to me tells me of somebody who has the big picture and understands all the pitfalls and all the – whatever it takes.

Barron: Yeah. It was interesting, because our model was the Modern Jazz Quartet. In terms of that, we talked with Percy [Heath], see how they ran their stuff, because they were a cooperative group. Of course they lasted much longer than we did. But because of that, these guys have summer homes, and John Lewis had a house in the south of France. Percy lived in Montauk and went fishing all the time. Financially, they all did very well. I don't know who was responsible, either management or they themselves, just because of business, knowing about the business and how to deal with things. I think that's important.

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Brown: What triggered this is you saying that your daughter was looking to go – daughter or granddaughter was going into music business at Berklee. Obviously somebody had let her know, this is vital. Or maybe of interest to her as well.

Barron: It's important, yeah. But she decided that that's what she wanted to do. I don't know if she said, I don't want to starve. It was funny, because as soon as she graduated – she graduated in May – she got a job right away. She works for Sony now, the copyright department. She has a set of \$5,000 vibes upstairs that I bought her, if she were to start playing.

Brown: Since we brought up Sphere, in the chronology that we've been following as far as your career development, we just took these few little tangents, but I felt it was necessary to really talk about the education, because that seems to be inextricable from the music now.

Barron: Oh yeah.

Brown: Whereas it wasn't that way when you were coming in.

Barron: No, not at all.

Brown: So, Sphere. This – the pictures – I know this is not Kenny Barron. I know this is not Ben Riley. But you knew that, right? The way they mislabeled you guys?

Barron: Oh yeah. Wow. I forgot about that. I think people who knew us, they knew.

Brown: But, for me, this was important, because I was already into the music in 1982, and when Monk died, it was a blow to everybody for years, psychic and spiritually. You guys, you recorded this the day he died.

Barron: The day he died, right.

Brown: This was – as you say in the liner notes – these are great liner notes. Everyone gets a chance to participate in this. But this was something many years in the making, or at least conceptually – months. Let's just say months, because you guys already had the trio. You, Buster, and . . .

Barron: And Ben.

Brown: . . . and Ben had already had the trio. For me, this was important. This was one of – this album and – this was key in my development. So if you could let the public know about the development of Sphere and give us that story.

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Barron: It started out – as you mentioned, we had the trio, Ben Riley, Buster Williams, and myself. We had been part of the Ron Carter quartet, that rhythm section. When Ron broke the band up, we continued to work as a trio and also as a rhythm section for other guys who were coming to town, Eddie Harris or Lockjaw [Eddie Davis] and Sweets [Harry Edison]. We would be their rhythm section. So we said, maybe we should just get a horn player and have a quartet. It was Ben who came up with the idea of Charlie Rouse. He said, “Yeah, I just heard Rouse not too long ago. He really sounded great.”

We got a gig at – it was a place called Paulson’s. We got a gig and called Rouse. He made the gig, and it was a perfect fit. It just worked. Then, for the first record, we decided since we got two people in the band who had played with Monk, let’s do an album of Monk compositions.

One of the things we decided we wanted to do was make sure the money went into Monk’s publishing company. So we met with Don Sickler, who was handling Monk’s publishing company, found out which tunes were in his company.

We should stop the tape.

[unidentified noises; recording interrupted]

We got this gig at Paulson’s. Like I said, it was a perfect fit. Then we’re trying to figure out how to do this record. So we met with Don Sickler to find out which compositions were in Monk’s company, because a lot of them aren’t. Not a lot. Some of them weren’t. We wanted to make sure. So we found out which ones were.

Then it was a question of lining up a studio. Rehearsing, lining up a studio, and paying for it. We used our own money to pay for the recording. We certainly – we didn’t have to pay ourselves. We used our own money. We went over to Rudy Van Gelder’s so we – the best sound possible. I think we recorded it in four or five hours, because we had rehearsed. On the way home – I was driving Buster home – that’s when we heard on the radio that Monk had passed away that day, as we were recording.

After we did the record, then it was a question of finding a lawyer to deal with all the other stuff, which we found, and then somebody to approach the record companies. We decided – it was Elecktra/Musician. We decided to lease rather than sell. So we leased the tape to them, and they put it out.

Our very first gig, it was almost like an event, because our very first gig was at – it was a club called Lush Life. That was the debut of the band. There was a lot of hype. There was a lot of hype involved – good hype, but . . .

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Brown: Was that coming from the record company? Or did you guys have a separate publicist?

Barron: We had both. There was a lot of publicity about the band, about the upcoming gig, and about the record. So people were really psyched. We wore – had our tuxedos, first night. It was packed. Then we got really good reviews. I think that helped. We got really good reviews, because we weren't – one of the things that was key was that we weren't imitating his previous quartets. We had our own take on his music. We had our own arrangements of his music. But the essence was still there. I think it was great. We existed for a long time, until Rouse passed away, until he – he moved, and then he passed away. He went back to Oregon, I think. After that, we were out of business for a while.

But we had a good run with that particular band. Did a couple of tours of Europe and tours to California, stuff like that. Things were looking up. Then after Rouse passed, we – over 10 years, we didn't do anything. I would run into Ben. Ben started working with the trio. Buster had gone on to do some other things. But whenever we would see each other, people would say – people would always ask us, “Think that band Sphere will get back together again?” Because people really enjoyed the band. They really enjoyed the band.

We thought about it. Who would we get? We decided that we didn't want to get a young guy, because I don't think he'll have the same sensibilities about it. Again, I think it was Ben. He said, “I heard Gary Bartz. Really sounded great.” We talked to Gary. Gary said yeah. So we rehearsed. Same thing. We put our money together and did a record. This time it was Verve who decided to put it out. It was pretty successful.

Unfortunately what happened with them is that the same level of commitment wasn't there, because everybody had different schedules. With the other version of Sphere, that was our focus. But this one, people had different things going. So it was very difficult in terms of scheduling. We did a few things. I think we did a couple European tours. But it didn't last as long, unfortunately. One of the things from the first record, when we signed the lease thing, we got up-front money. We put it in the bank. We had an account for the band, and nobody touched it. We put aside X amount of dollars from every gig. I think that was the way to go. Everybody had a little stash when the band was – when Rouse passed away. There was some money there. There was some bread there for everybody.

Brown: Good foresight, good business management, good plan. Was that you? Were you the main . . . ?

Barron: No, no.

Brown: It was collective.

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Barron: It was all collective. It wasn't me. It was everybody, Buster, Ben, and Charlie. I think there should be more things like that happening. For managers, though, it's a disaster, because instead of contacting one person, they have to contact four people with the same information.

Brown: Nowadays it's easier with . . .

Barron: Yeah, computers and stuff.

Brown: Text message.

Barron: Yeah, exactly.

Brown: Let's talk about your first recording as a leader, because we talked about so many significant experiences as a sidemen. But then your first recording, how did that come about? And how do you feel about being a leader?

Barron: My first recording as a leader was for Muse, Muse Records, which was run at the time by two guys. There was a partnership, Don Schlitten and Joe Fields. It was Don Schlitten who contacted me. It was called *Sunset to Dawn* with – who is it? Freddie Waits.

Brown: Freddie Waits, Bob Cranshaw, Richard Landrum, Warren Smith.

Barron: Yeah. For me it was – wow, it was great.

Brown: What was your concept? Did you get the call? Or did you already have a concept that you wanted to get recorded?

Barron: No, I didn't have a concept. So I had to get music together. That was a big part of it, getting the music together. There were some originals. I think I recorded one of Freddie Waits's songs, *Al-Kifha*. It just worked. I think we recorded at A&R Studios, maybe? I'm not sure. Yeah, I think A&R Studios.

That was the very first record date as a leader. There was one before that. It was co-led, I think, with Jimmy Owens, called *You Had Better Listen*. But that was as co-leader.

That was fun to do. One of the things I learned is how – sometimes people make suggestions on records and they really pan out. We were doing *Al-Kifha*. Freddie's tune is really – it's very fast. I was playing the melody. Warren Smith said – you know, a drummer, percussionist – “What do you think about me playing the melody on vibes with you?” “Yeah, let's see what . . .” It was perfect. Just little things like that. He makes suggestions, and they really pan out. I think I played electric piano on some of it.

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Brown: I know you played some electric piano with Buddy Rich too, I think.

Barron: Yeah. I was very happy with it. It came out again, on CD.

Brown: Did they issue unreleased takes?

Barron: No, it's all – it's the same stuff all over again.

Brown: Muse is pretty – in the jazz world, it was a significant independent record label, but they didn't seem to have much budget as far as – or did they, for . . .

Barron: No, they didn't.

Brown: . . . publicity and distribution and all that?

Barron: No, they didn't have a big budget. But it was an important label, because one of the things they did is it afforded people who weren't big stars a chance to record and get their stuff out there. The same – they have another label now, the same people though. Actually I think Joe Fields's son is more involved now. S – Savant? S-a-v-a-n-t.

Brown: Oh, Savant.

Barron: Savant. Yeah, it's the – that's them. One of the things that musicians like about that label is that they get a pretty much . . .

Brown: Carte blanche.

Barron: Yeah, carte blanche.

Brown: You got it.

Barron: I mean, up to a point. Not financial carte blanche.

Brown: Artistic, at least.

Barron: But in terms of the stuff they want to record, it's pretty cool.

Brown: Could you talk a little bit about Freddie Waits? I mean, as a drummer, I know who he is. As a matter of fact, I stayed at his house over in Westbeth one morning. Now that he's passed, his son Nasheed is getting a lot of play, which is wonderful. But Freddie, he was – stayed below the radar in a lot of ways, but we in the jazz community know who he is. So if you . . .

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Barron: Freddie was – he was definitely one of my favorite drummers, and one of my favorite people. We first started playing together with Freddie, Freddie Hubbard. It was he and Herbie Lewis. That was the rhythm section. We just had such a ball, always. Freddie was always so open to different kinds of stuff and trying different things. I think one of the things I really appreciated was his energy. He had such energy when he played.

He was a happy guy. He had his moments of being serious, but when he was playing, he was happy. I love that. The same guys who – even though I don't smile a lot when I play, but I'm smiling on the inside.

Brown: Oh yeah. It's coming out.

Barron: But watching Billy Higgins play, that was – or Al Foster. It was the same thing. They just – they loved playing. The same thing with Freddie. Freddie loved to play. I used to go over to his house a lot, the same thing. Go over to his house a lot. We'd just listen to music and play and hang. He was a great guy, great drummer.

He told me he was on – when he was in Detroit, he used to do a lot of Motown stuff. He was on Stevie Wonder's first record. He used to record with Martha and the Vandellas, people like that. So for a minute he was like the studio drummer at – what do they call it? Hitsville?

Brown: Yeah, Hitsville, USA.

Barron: Yeah, he was like the studio drummer for a while there.

Playing with Freddie was fantastic. Just like I say, energy, all that energy. He was on one of my – I think the first trio record I did for Uptown Records, yeah, called *Autumn in New York*. He was the drummer on that.

I remember when Nasheed was born. To see him now – he's also an incredible drummer, who looks – he looks more like his mother, actually, more like his mother. One of the things I remember, when his father died, he took over – I think he was in Howard University at the time when his father died. But he took over raising his younger – he had his younger brother – raising his younger brother and making sure everything was cool. He did all of that. I take my hat off to him for being responsible. He's a great drummer, and responsible. He's a very responsible person. He's also a great drummer.

Brown: And then Freddie as composer, too.

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Barron: Yeah. I didn't play that many of Freddie's – I have to admit. I didn't play that many of Freddie's compositions, other than the one I recorded, *Al-Kifha*. I'm trying to remember if he brought any when we were playing with Freddie Hubbard together. I don't remember.

Brown: I'm just thinking of his contributions to M'Boom. So I know he was a composer, an active composer, Joe Chambers, Freddie Waits. For a drummer, if you're interested in that, those are our models, Max, the ones who were out there composing and drumming. But Freddie, unfortunately, never got the accolades that he deserved.

Barron: Yeah, that's unfortunate. That's another death that was totally unexpected.

Brown: What did he die of?

Barron: I have no idea. It was just suddenly. It was a shame, such a beautiful guy.

Brown: I'm going to go back down through your discography as a leader. Then, the next one, 1974, on Muse again, *Peruvian Blue*. You're bringing in your colleague Ted Dunbar, Dave Williams, Tootie Heath, Richard Landrum, and then Sonny Morgan. You always had a percussionist in there. You like – is that from Diz? Is that a Diz influence? What's going on?

Barron: I don't know. I just like Latin stuff. It was when I first came – I didn't hear a lot of it in Philly, but when I came to New York, I used to listen to Symphony Sid, and he had a Latin show. So I got to hear a lot of salsa and stuff. I really grew to love it. So, whenever I did a record, I always thought about using percussion.

Sonny – Sonny Morgan – I don't know what ever happened. I think he was from Philly too.

Brown: I'm telling you. Then the recording in 1975, which unfortunately I haven't been able to hear. I can't find it – *Lucifer*. You got your brother on it, Bill Barron. You got Billy Hart, James Spaulding, Charles Sullivan, Chris White. But you got Carlos Alomar. I know Carlos, having been in Philly with The Recording Academy. He only talks about having worked with David Bowie. He didn't mention working with Kenny Barron. So let me know about this project and how Carlos got into this one.

Barron: How did I meet Carlos? Saxophone, right?

Brown: No, guitar.

Barron: Guitar. Wow, that's interesting. How did I meet? I think it was through Jimmy Owens. Yeah, that's how I met him, through Jimmy Owens.

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Brown: I didn't think you could hang with Carlos. But this must be a funk record then, or something.

Barron: It's . . .

Brown: It's mixed, huh?

Barron: Yeah, it's mixed. It's not funk funk, but it's heading in that direction. I think one of – if I'm not mistaken, one of the things that happened on this record, we had gone to the studio. We were there in the studio, and they couldn't get things to work. They couldn't get the board to work. Yeah, it was weird. Rather than cancel, I think they decided to go to another studio. Yeah, we went to another studio and did it there. I remember the piano was a little out of tune. I think originally it was going to be at Generation Sound. The engineer was a brother named Tony May. Yeah, the board didn't work. So we had to go to find another studio. Nobody was too happy about that. But it worked.

Brown: To get a band like that in to prepare for a recording, obviously it means you had some rehearsals and pieces.

Barron: Oh yeah.

Brown: Is this the first time you recorded with your brother?

Barron: No. Actually . . .

Brown: Oh, that's right. You had recorded with him before. But this is you as a leader, bringing your brother in.

Barron: Yeah. It was fun to do, trying some writing, trying some things different for me. I don't know how well it turned out. Like the title tune, *Lucifer*. Now I don't remember how it goes at all.

Brown: Do you remember the inspiration for it?

Barron: No. It wasn't that. I didn't sell my soul.

Brown: No, I know that. We wouldn't be sitting here, probably.

Then the next one is a duet, you and Ted Dunbar, *In Tandem*.

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Barron: That was actually – that wasn't intended to be a record. That was a concert we did at Rutgers. We heard the tapes that the sound guy did, and we said, this sounds okay. So let's see if we can put it – I think there are only two tunes, if I remember.

Brown: Could be.

Barron: Yeah, I think there are only two tunes, because it was a record. So it was like 20 minutes on each side. There was a lot of exploration going on. It think it was only two tunes on there. That was on Muse, I think. Right?

Brown: Yeah, that was the last one listed here on Muse. Then you did one on Wolf, 1978, *Innocence*, with Sonny Fortune. Joel Dorn is producer. Do you want to talk about that one? Joel Dorn, what is it? The masked marauder? Was that his handle?

Barron: The masked announcer. He has some strange ideas.

Brown: Yeah, he's a trip.

Barron: But that – I enjoyed doing that. Again, that was my attempt to be accessible, or more accessible. I think there's some nice things on there. There's actually – I have a tape of – cassettes of some things that didn't get on there – that are also very nice, but didn't get on the record. That was fun to do. I did another one for them. It never came out, and the company went under.

Brown: It's called Wolf. Who owned that one?

Barron: Who owned it? I don't know. At the time, Joel Dorn was with it. I don't know. This was – it was called TK Productions. The company went under right after we did that. So this record never came out. I asked Joel Dorn where the tapes are, and he had no idea. We did it at Atlantic Studios, because he was involved with Atlantic at the time. Those tapes are out there somewhere. I have no idea who has them.

Brown: 1980, *Golden Lotus*. John Stubblefield, and you brought in my colleague at Rutgers, Steve Nelson, to play.

Barron: Oh Steve, yeah.

Brown: Who's making his name with Dave Holland now, big time.

Barron: Steve, I always loved his playing

Brown: He must have been an undergrad at that point, 1980.

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Barron: Yeah.

Brown: He was still a baby.

Barron: We used to record in one of the rooms, the practice rooms, on cassette, just the two of us, duo stuff. He's always – Steve has always been amazing. He's always been incredible, Steve Nelson. I had a quartet at one point, and he was part of it, with Buster – Buster Williams and Ben Riley. There was a little club in TriBeCa, before TriBeCa was happening. It was called Salt Peanuts. We worked there. It was a great club. If they had been able to hold on, it would have been incredible. But, like I said, there was nothing around there then. Yeah, Steve is incredible. We're doing something coming up in the spring. It's a tribute to the Modern Jazz Quartet at Jazz at Lincoln Center. I haven't played with him in years. So that'll be fun.

Brown: He's – knowing Steve, he could be out in the ionosphere by then.

I guess we can go ahead and change the tape.

You have such an extensive discography. Rather than go through them one by one, maybe I'll just mention a few and see – or if you want to just discuss or mention the ones that you feel were benchmarks in your career.

Barron: I don't even know which ones I did.

Brown: Okay. Then I'll continue. You have – in '81 on Xanadu Records you have solo *At the Piano – Kenny Barron at the Piano*. '83, *Green Chimneys*. That's you and Buster and Ben, which is . . .

Barron: Oh yeah. That was fun. That was – we did that after a concert at the North Sea Jazz Festival. So it was like 2 o'clock in the morning. We had driven to the town called Munster, in Holland, to do this record. So everybody was really tired. But one thing I discovered: sometimes when you're tired, your defenses are down, and you play better, because you don't care. "Let's just play." You're not trying to impress anybody. So, from that point of view, it was probably one of my favorite records.

Brown: Then, another trio record after that, 1984, *I + I + I*, Ron Carter and Michael Moore.

Barron: Yeah. That's actually two duos.

Brown: Oh, I got it. Okay. All right. That's Blackhawk. So is that – that was Orrin [Keepnews]'s label?

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Barron: No, that was – oh. He’s a writer in the Bay Area. Wong.

Brown: Oh, Herb’s.

Barron: Herb.

Brown: It’s Herb’s label. That’s right.

Barron: Herb Wong, right.

Brown: That’s right.

Barron: Interesting story behind that recording. I was working at the Jazz – not the Jazz – Lush Life. This woman comes up to me. She’s got a mink coat on and dripping in diamonds and stuff, and she says, “Listen. You’re my husband’s favorite pianist.” I was, “Oh yeah. Okay. Nice.” “And I’m planning a birthday party for him. We live in Tulsa. I would love to you come as a surprise and play for my husband’s birthday.” I wasn’t too keen on that. “How much would you want?” So I asked for a lot of money, and she said, “Okay.” So I went out there. They flew me out there. As it turns out, they live in a house that was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. It was incredible. There was a small gathering. So I played. They were very nice people. I played, and then the husband says, “You sound wonderful. I love Ron Carter. Do you think you could get him to do a record?” So I called him. Ron asked for whatever he wanted to ask for. He said, “Yeah. Okay. Great.” This is before we recorded. Then he said, “I also like Mike Moore.” “Okay.” So we wound up doing – I recorded for two days, one day with Ron and one day with Mike. That’s what came out: *I + I + I*. There’s actually a whole other session somewhere. Again, those tapes disappeared. There’s a whole other session with other music on it, and I don’t know who has it.

Brown: Shall I go ask Herb when I get back to the Bay Area?

Barron: Yeah. He may have it. I don’t know.

Brown: I’ll ask him.

Barron: But I thought that was a good record. I liked that record.

Brown: The next one, 1985, is one you already referenced, the *Autumn in New York*, with Rufus Reid and Freddie. It’s Uptown Records. Then *Scratch*, Dave Holland and Daniel Humair, Enja Records. That must have been done – no, you could do them here and then just lease them to those guys over there.

Barron: Yeah, but that one was for Enja.

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Brown: Enja Records, right.

Barron: For Enja. No, that one wasn't leased. That was their – that was the company. That was their suggestion, to do that. I had never met Dave or Daniel before the studio. So there was no rehearsal or anything with that. I brought some music, and Dave had a tune. That's basically it. We just played. It was interesting, because it made me play differently, playing with those two guys. It brought out a different thing for me. That record actually won, in Paris, an award. So yeah, that was definitely a lot of fun to do.

Brown: Then, also on Enja Records, right after that, the next year, *What If?*, with Wallace Roney, John Stubblefield, Cecil McBee, and Victor Lewis, one of my favorite drummers.

Barron: Yeah, one of mine too. That record, I had gotten a grant from the National Endowment to put together a group and do some live concerts and stuff. That was the group. We decided to record, and we started to get some gigs for that. Wallace got busy. So I changed trumpet players after that. It was Eddie, Eddie Henderson.

Brown: Oh, okay. By that time, Eddie was out here.

Barron: Yeah, and then the bass player also changed. Cecil went. David Williams became the bass player.

Brown: The next one, 1989, *Rhythm-a-ning*. It must have been a duet with you and John Hicks.

Barron: Oh, yeah. That was done at the . . .

Brown: Candid Records.

Barron: . . .Park, the boat basin, I think. They had concerts outside. That was nice.

Brown: The next one – boy, you're so prolific. 1990, *Invitation* – and we're not even talking about your work as a sideman. These are just you as a leader – and then 1990, *Invitation*, Ralph Moore, David Williams, and Louis Nash, Criss Cross.

Barron: That was fun because – I forget who the producer was. But anyway, we did the record in something like three hours. Three or four hours, we finished. Whoever was the producer was astonished. One roll of tape, we were done. But I don't like doing 100 takes of a song. After that – after three or four, I'm done. If I don't have it by then – so these are mostly first takes. That's why it didn't take that much time.

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Brown: Then the next one is near and dear to my heart, 1990, *Live at Maybeck Hall*, because that's just up the street from where I live, on Concord Records. It's a nice hall. How did that gig feel? Do you remember that one?

Barron: It felt great, yeah. That was a hell of a performance space. Dick – the guy who lived there. He played piano himself.

Brown: Dick Whit- . . .

Barron: Dick Whittington. That was just – to have a place like that in your house to play in, wow. It looked like a cathedral, with real high ceilings. It was incredible.

Brown: Then back to the trio format, 1991 – boy, 1990 and 1991. You're just cranking them out. The only one, Ray Drummond and Ben Riley, Reservoir Records. I never heard of that company, Reservoir.

Barron: Oh yeah. There were the two doctors who owned Uptown Records. Then one of them split. I guess they dissolved their partnership. One still has Uptown. The other one started Reservoir.

Brown: 1991, *Lemuria-Seascape*.

Barron: *Lemuria-Seascape*.

Brown: Again with a trio. Then 1991, *Confirmation*. Barry Harris is with you on here.

Barron: Barry Harris. Yeah, that was a duo, but with a rhythm section.

Brown: Then another – boy, you're working these trios. '91, *The Moment*, Victor Lewis and Rufus Reid, Reservoir again. Then, here's one, 1991, *Quickstep*. This, oh yeah. I think I might have seen the group. John Stubblefield. I don't know if I saw this group, but man, John Stubblefield, Eddie Henderson, David Williams, and Victor Lewis.

Barron: Yeah, see, that's one of my favorite records. The writing on there – John did some songs on there, John Stubblefield. Victor Lewis did a couple songs on there. He did one that was actually – not a hit, but it became very popular, one of Victor's songs called *Big Girls*. Nobody knew what that meant, but we played it in Seattle, and all these big, big girls, boy, they started clapping. It was great. Victor is one of the drummers who writes

Brown: Writes, absolutely. I'm going to have to give him some [?].

Barron: He's an excellent composer

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Brown: Then, anybody who knows your career, your tenure with Stan Getz, knows the next recording, which is in a class by itself, 1992, *People Time*. I think that's your first Grammy nomination too, is it not? I'll go back and check.

Barron: I'm not sure.

Brown: But it definitely put – people talk about that record. Do you want to talk about that record too?

Barron: It was a great record. When we did it – it came about because Stan and I, with the quartet, sometimes he would end a set with this song that we played duo, called *Yours and Mine*. No, *People Time*.

Brown: *People Time* is the name of it.

Barron: Yeah. We would end with that song, which I think was a Benny Carter composition. I'm not sure. I think it's Benny Carter. But people started asking, "Why don't you do . . .?" – "You two guys should do a duo recording." So I guess he took it to heart. He hooked it up. We went back to the Montmartre, because we had recorded previously some radio broadcasts there that came out as recordings. Stan loved the sound so much – one was called *Anniversary*, and one was called *Serenity*, with the quartet. He loved the sound so much. So he got the same engineer, and he booked a three- or four-night gig at the Montmartre. That's where we recorded. We didn't rehearse with this. We did a gig a couple of days before coming to Denmark at – up in Boston – in Cambridge. We didn't really rehearse. We just played. You know this song? You know that one? That was it.

Also, that's when at that time he – that was the last time I played with him, because he got sick right after that. He was actually sick during that. The last day, he couldn't finish, because he kept saying his stomach felt like it was on fire. So he couldn't finish the last set, the last day. As it turns out, which he discovered later, he had a bleeding ulcer. We had another night after that, in Paris. So I wound up playing most of the night. He would play the melody and maybe a chorus – he couldn't – and then I would play. That was the last time I saw him.

He – I called him, maybe – that was in March, I think. I must have called him sometime in April or May, just to see how he was, because I didn't know he was as sick as he was. When I talked to him, he was planning the next tour. "Yeah, we're leaving on" such and such a date. The next thing I hear, a call from the guy who was our manager – road manager, Billy Hoogstraten. "Stan is on his way." He died, I think, in June. Yeah, he died in June. But he lived a fruitful life and an interesting one. He had a big impact on the music scene. Everyone thinks he was such a – but by the time – such a drag, but by the
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time I had started working with him, he had gotten over all his bad habits, substance abuse and drinking. He was fine, and he was a nice cat.

Brown: Can you talk about how you got in the band and talk a little bit more about that tenure, since that seems to have been important?

Barron: The first – I worked with him once, the first time. I don't know where he got my number from. But I took Chick Corea's place. It was kind of like a Return to Forever band, or whatever you want to call it. It was Tony Williams and Stanley Clarke. I guess Chick couldn't do some gigs. So he called me. I did – it was for about a month, maybe. We did some concerts. We played down South, in Raleigh/Durham and a few other gigs, the Left Bank in Maryland. That was it. Then I didn't hear from him for a while. Then I started getting calls from him after maybe more than a year. "Come out to California and play at Stanford." Things like that, just concerts here and there. Then he started calling me more. This tour for the summer, when there were still summer tours. They don't have them any more. So I started doing that.

The first group I think had – I used to just go out and do concerts with them – it may have been George Mraz and Al Foster. Then, when we started working a lot, it was Victor Lewis – who I worked with him before, also – it was Victor Lewis and Rufus Reid. And there were various other configurations during the time that I worked with him. At one time we had Ben Riley and Ray Drummond, and some other people, like Jeff – oh, I can't remember. Jeff – I want to say Smith. I'm sure that's not the right name. Winard Harper, various – Anthony Cox. So, a lot of different variations with the – it was always great working with them. The music was always good. He's such a beautiful – he was such a beautiful, lyrical player. That was my appreciation for him, the lyricism. He could really play ballads well. I loved working with him.

Brown: The record – the historical record's showing that it's from 1986 to – then *People Time* was 1991. Then some people say '92. I'm not sure if the confusions for that is – because when I went to go pick it up, there were two different issues. There was one that was a single CD. Then the one that was more recently released is a double LP with – so there must – you said there were two concerts. Maybe they released the stuff . . .

Barron: *People Time*?

Brown: Yeah.

Barron: Yeah, I think *People Time* was originally two CDs.

Brown: Was it? Okay. Because I – then maybe the new one has some other additions for . . .

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Barron: Oh no. It just came out again.

Brown: Right.

Barron: Seven.

Brown: Is it seven? Okay. That's what it is.

Barron: Seven CDs.

Brown: That's right, yeah.

Barron: They released everything, sound checks, everything. Yeah, it's seven CDs.

Brown: Have you heard that yet?

Barron: Yeah. Some of it – because, you know, there's a sound check. So you're not giving 100%. Plus they were also – they were messing with the sound, just trying to get the balance right. So you can hear the saxophone go up and down, or . . .

Brown: You've talked about it, but I'm wondering if there were any other dimensions to spending that much time with Stan, not so much any other extra-musical things, but just like when you were talking about with Diz, being a touring musician, I always liked when I was working as a sideman for somebody who had a name, because the amenities were much greater. You didn't have to share a room, for example. So I'm just wondering, what was the elevation in the standards when you were working with Stan, since you might have – he must have had . . .

Barron: Well, I don't know if there were any for the sidemen.

Brown: Okay. So we're back to the old school.

Barron: Financially, it was fine. In terms of the pay, the pay was good. Stan always flew first class, which was fine. When I was with Dizzy, he did that. He always flew first class. So I had no – that was not a problem. Sometimes he stayed in the same hotel. Sometimes he stayed in other hotels, because he had – like, we were in Nice. He loved Hotel Negresco, I think, which was on the Promenade des Anglais or whatever it's called. So he always stayed there whenever we – because that was one of his favorite hotels. We stayed somewhere else. But it was cool. [?] is nice. In Cannes he always like the Hotel Martinez. But that's another level. Where we were was also fine. It just wasn't like that. But it was cool. But other than that – we didn't really hang out a lot. It was mostly business. It was business, or an artist-sidemen relationship. But, like I say, he was fine. We had no problems. I never saw him get angry about anything. I do know that he was an

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alcoholic. He wasn't drinking at the time. Whenever we would go into a town, he would always try to find an AA, to go to the meeting – you know, Alcoholics Anonymous – to go to the meeting. He was very serious about that. He tried to make amends, from what I understand, to all the people he hurt over the years. He really did try to do that. I take my hat off to him.

Brown: Can we take a break?

Today is January 16th, 2011, Sunday, and this is continuation, day 2, of the Smithsonian National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Oral History Interview with Kenny Barron at his home in Brooklyn, New York.

Kenny, good morning again.

Barron: Good morning.

Brown: You said you went out last night to hear some music.

Barron: Yeah, I went out to hear the Clayton Brothers, because one of my students, Gerald – Gerald Clayton - was playing with his father. It was amazing. He's an amazing young man.

Brown: That's great. Where was the performance at?

Barron: At Dizzy's, Jazz at Lincoln Center.

Brown: You were talking about how it started at 7:30.

Barron: Yeah, 7:30. Finished at 8:30. 9:30 I was home. That's unheard of in New York City. But it was a great evening. The music was – it was very joyful music, very happy and good spirit. Everybody was smiling while they were playing. And not a forced smile. They were having fun. So it was good to see that.

Brown: Speaking of performances and speaking of Lincoln Center, Tuesday night, NEA Jazz Masters Award. For me, particularly, since that was my first time attending one of those events, to hear you and Hubert Laws in performance, the duo of *Stella by Starlight*, for me, was – that was it. That was the high point for me. Do you want to talk about that performance?

Barron: It was incredible, listening to Hubert. He called me. Well, he didn't call me. He called one of the people at Jazz at Lincoln Center and told them that that's what he wanted to do. He wanted to play a duet with me, and he wanted to do *Stella by Starlight*. So I was elated. First of all, I knew the song. So we had a little rehearsal the day before. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



for about an hour. He explained to me. He said he just wanted to play kind of free, just react to one another, and then he would start the melody. And that's what happened. So it wasn't really a rehearsal, as such, because you can't rehearse being free.

Brown: Take note, everybody.

Barron: So it was just – he had a concept. So we did it. I was very happy. I think I – it may be on their website. So I need to – I would love to hear it, see how it came out, because when you're involved in it, you don't really know.

Brown: It was to celebrate the incoming – what they call the Class of 2011, but of course you are already an alum. What does the NEA Jazz Masters Award mean to you?

Barron: As they say, it's the highest honor that a jazz musician can receive in the U.S. So it's a very high honor. When I was inducted last year, I looked around at who was involved, who the other past recipients were and the present ones. I was – wow. It was funny, because I think I was the youngest one, and I was 67. So that was interesting.

Brown: This incoming class obliterated that one, with the Marsalis family.

I want to be able to talk about a lot of things on this second half of your interview, because of the breadth of your career as an educator, as a consummate sideman, as a leader, and again, you're the heir for the Detroit school, Tommy Flanagan and Hank Jones. Yesterday, off mic, when we ended the interview, we started talking about the state of jazz today, and we started talking about the business and things like that. So those are some of the things that I'd like to make sure we cover today.

One of things that we can do is, we can continue with the discography, but I just want to afford you the opportunity to talk about any of the records that you feel are seminal and influential in your career. I can probably just jog your memory with a few titles. Again, these are for you as a leader. *Sambao*, which you talked earlier about your love for . . .

Barron: Brazilian music.

Brown: . . . Brazilian music. So here you are, then, turning right around and working with Brazilian musicians. This 1993 release, is that something you'd like to talk about?

Barron: Yeah. It was funny, because I was there with Trio de Paz, which was a self-contained trio. I had met them purely by accident. There's a Greenmarket in Union Square, Saturday. This is quite a few years ago. My wife and I, we would go every Saturday. One Saturday, we were hungry. We saw this place called The Coffee Shop. So we went in. There was music, Brazilian music. It was Trio de Paz. It turned out they played there every Saturday afternoon. So we wound up going every Saturday afternoon. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



We got to meet each other. I was saying, “I really would love to play with you guys.” So I got – I think the first thing was maybe a Jazzmobile or something. We played. It felt really good.

Then I decided to put together a group with Trio de Paz. They knew a percussionist named Valtinho, who became a part of it, and one of my students, Anne Drummond, who plays flute. We started working. We did a record and did a couple of tours to Europe. We had a ball. It was a great experience.

To meet them, it was this – they’re all beautiful people, and they know a lot – obviously, they know a lot about the rhythms. Duduka da Fonseca, “This rhythm comes from the north of Brazil.” So I learned more than I knew. I learned a lot more than I knew about Brazilian music. When you play Brazilian music with somebody from Brazil, it takes on another flavor. Authenticity, I guess, would be the word. It’s really another kind of vibe.

Brown: Can you talk a little bit more about what distinguishes that vibe? Is it a rhythmic sense? Is it a phrasing sense?

Barron: No, I think it’s more phrasing, because you can find many jazz drummers who play very well. But maybe – it’s laid back. Maybe that’s what it is. It’s laid back. It’s not forced, and it’s not rushed. It’s just different.

Brown: Have you been to Brazil?

Barron: I’ve been twice. It’s not enough.

Brown: Where were you? Were you in Rio? Or did you get to Bahia?

Barron: Just Rio – Rio and Brasilia. Brasilia is a little strange – not strange, but it’s the capitol. It’s a very, very modern city that was created to be the capitol. So it doesn’t really have a – it’s not earthy at all.

But I love Rio. My wife has been to Bahia, which I haven’t been to. She said that’s the place.

Brown: That’s what I heard too. So hopefully you’ll go.

Barron: Yeah, I hope so.

Brown: Next on the list, as far as the discography: 1994. We talked – we referenced it yesterday, *Wanton Spirit* with Roy Haynes and Charlie Haden, also a Grammy nomination for that one. For me, that’s one of my particular favorites, because it reunites you with Roy Haynes.

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Barron: Yeah, that's one of my personal favorites too, because I just had such a great time. Playing with guys like that, with Roy and Charlie Haden, made me take chances. That's important. Any time you step out of your element, that's what's supposed to happen. You're supposed to say [?], and then force you to go a little bit beyond what you normally do. So I was very happy with that.

Brown: I think that spirit comes out in that recording. When I hear it, it's joyful music. It's joyful music, you guys are exploring, and the way you end – the way it's sequenced, with *One Finger Snap*, which – that, for me, is like, oh man. Without Freddie, having the original from Herbie, and then it's all you, and you leave Roy to do it, kind of the same sequence as the original, with Freddie and Herbie and then Tony, but you got it all up front, and man, you're just all over the place. I was just telling Ken. I said, "There's one point where Kenny hits this thing. It's like oooooooooooooooooo. I was going, oh man." So, for me, that's a very special recording.

Barron: Thank you. For me too. Believe me.

Brown: Are there any others that maybe figure – that you would consider also very important? Or that you consider very enjoyable?

Barron: Yeah, actually. There's a record, for instance, a duo record I did with Mino Cinelu, called *Swamp Sally*. That was unusual, because it was the first time I had ever done a recording using a lot of electronics. I even played acoustic bass.

Brown: Ooo – going back to your roots.

Barron: Yeah.

Brown: You didn't pull out the sousaphone, though.

Barron: No, no. I wasn't going to do that. But I played – also played keyboard bass. We did a lot of pre-production work in Mino's living room. I never worked that way before. It was interesting, and it was enjoyable.

Brown: In the chronology, that comes – that's the next one as a leader that you did, after following that one. Then, 1993, *Things Unseen*. It lists Eddie Henderson, John Scofield, John Stubblefield. This is the first time, I think, that I've seen you teamed up with John Scofield, maybe.

Barron: That's right. John was on that, John Scofield. There was also a Japanese violinist on there, I think, named Naoko Terai. Yeah, she was on there as well. This was her first record date. I heard her in Nagoya, in Japan, just hanging out at a club after the
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concert. She was playing. She played *Body and Soul*. I said, whoa. So I got her number. I got it and said I was going to call her. I don't think she believed me. When I got this record date, I called her, or had the company call her. They brought her to New York. She didn't speak a word of English – or very little English. But what happened, as a result of her doing this record, she is now a very big star in Japan, which is great.

Brown: Worked with Kenny Barron.

Barron: Which is great for her. I'm very happy. That was also a fun record to do. All records are fun records to do, actually.

Brown: So, Kenny-san, nihongo ga wakarimasu? I saw your book about Japanese phrases. I said, oh, I got to ask Kenny, if he speaks any.

Barron: Sukoshi.

Brown: Sukoshi. Great. Do you speak any other languages?

Barron: No. I barely speak English. I did attempt to learn – I had – I studied Spanish in high school. But last year or year before last I was taking Spanish lessons with a woman from Barcelona for about four or five months. It was – had a textbook and all of that, exercises. So it was a lot – it was very enjoyable. But then I got busy. So that couldn't continue. In lieu of that, I bought the – what is that thing with the tapes and the . . . ?

Brown: Berlitz?

Barron: No, not Berlitz. The other one. There's another one.

Kimery: Rosetta Stone?

Barron: Rosetta Stone. Of course I haven't put it in my computer yet.

Brown: Then, going back to – returning to the discography, right after *Things Unseen*, 1993, then the next one that's listed is a duet with Charlie Haden, 1998. I think you referenced that yesterday.

Barron: Yeah, that was done at Iridium.

Brown: Oh, okay, back in the old one, when it was across from . . .

Barron: Yeah, the old one, across from Lincoln Center. What was funny about that one is that the bandstand was just in front of the kitchen. So, as you were playing – as we were playing, we could hear pots. Somehow they managed to keep most of that out of the For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

recording. Most people really love that recording, *Night and the City*. They really love that recording, because I guess it created a certain mood. The cover, Charlie was explaining that he went through – it's Georgia O'Keefe, and he went through some changes to get permission to use it for the cover.

Brown: Then in the chronology we come up to what I consider a magical pairing of you and Regina Carter, the recording *Freefall*. Maybe you could talk about that, how that relationship came about.

Barron: I first heard Regina at Telluride. I had never heard of her before. She was on before me. I said wow, who was that? Because she was killin'. So I introduced myself to her. I said, we need to play together, and I'm going to call you. The same thing. I don't think she believed me. I had a gig at Sweet Basil. I called her. We had a great time. It was Regina and Greg Osby. Mino Cinelu played drums. I don't remember who the bass player was. It might have been David Williams. I'm not sure.

That started our relationship. Then she got a gig there and called me to work with her. We worked off and on together in different situations. One of my – I think it was this last recording – my last recording under this particular contract, I wanted to do a duet with Regina. We went into the studio just to try some things out. The first thing we did was *Freefall*. That wasn't intended to be on the record. This was, oh, let's just see what happens. It was that kind of thing. Then, when we heard it, oh no, that's going on the record, because it was totally improvised, and it just – it knocked me – we said wow. So that went on the record. Then, some of the pieces, I tried to find not necessarily unique, but different arrangements, like *Softly as in a Morning Sunrise*. One of my favorite pieces is a Sting piece called *Fragile*. I heard that piece just purely by accident. I fell in love with it. So we did that. And we did a piece of hers, a ballad, a beautiful ballad, called *Shades of Gray*.

What I like about playing with Regina is that wherever you go, she's right there with you, because her ears are so big. Her ears are so big. So she can follow you pretty much anywhere. And she's got a lot of imagination and also a lot of – she plays with a lot of fire and passion. And her classical training takes – makes it even more different. It was a great experience playing with her. And still have. From time to time we still play together.

Brown: It seems like Kenny Barron likes those violinists. That's great.

You also – in mentioning – incorporating, or being – Sting's music after years – do you listen? Do you have - you mentioned earlier your iPod too. So what does Kenny Barron have on his iPod?

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Barron: I have lots of different stuff, aside from jazz. I have Renee Fleming on there. I have Turtle Island String Quartet. I have lots of interesting stuff. Some pop stuff, like, I love Anita Baker. I love James Brown. That's on there, probably right next to John Coltrane. It's all good music.

Brown: To return to the chronology, in 2002, *Canta Brasil*, the Trio de Paz again, for Sunnyside. Then, after that, *Peace*, which I'm not familiar with. 2003, entitled *Peace*, DIW Records. So this must have been out of Japan. With George Robert [in American pronunciation].

Barron: Oh. Actually, George Robert [Barron gives the French pronunciation]. He's Swiss – Swiss-American saxophonist. It was just duo. It was recorded live, I think in Geneva. Geneva, yeah. We did a tour. That concert they recorded. He's a really great saxophonist, coming out of – I know he loves Phil Woods. He's coming out of that. But he's also a really good composer. So we did a lot of his original music. It's a really nice record. That particular song, the title song, is really beautiful, a really beautiful song.

Brown: Then, continuing on, in 2004, *Images* – or *Images* [again, American and then French pronunciation]. I'm not sure how . . .

Barron: *Images* [the American pronunciation].

Brown: It could be Debussy, for all I know. We're dealing with Kenny Barron. Who knows what he's listening to?

Barron: That recording, I had a group at the time that included – there's two female players. One was a drummer, Kim Thompson, and Anne Drummond, the flautist. Stefon Harris played vibes, and Kiyoshi Kitagawa [bass]. It was a fun group. I have this thing. **I love women who can play. That knocks me out.**

When I heard Kim, I was really blown away. I met her in high school. She's from St. Louis. I never – I didn't hear her play then. When I started teaching at Manhattan, she wound up coming there, and I still hadn't heard her play. I just would see her in the hallways, say, "Hey, Kim. How you doing?" Then I had an opportunity to go to Cuba. Ben Riley was supposed to go. He got sick. Wound up in the hospital. It was maybe a week before the concert, before the gig. I saw Kim in the hallway. Said, "Kim, do you have a passport?" She said yeah. "Do you want to go to Cuba?" "Yeah." Meanwhile, I was like, "Yeah," and I still hadn't heard her play. I didn't hear her play until we got to Havana at the soundcheck, and I said, whoa. It was her and Rufus Reid. We were both blown away. She's an amazing drummer. She's – most recently, she's been – the last couple of years, been one of Beyoncé's drummers.

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Anne – Anne Drummond, whom I met in Moscow, Idaho, at – she was a pianist at one of those high schools I mentioned in Seattle, Roosevelt or Garfield, one of those. She asked me about piano lessons. I said, “I’m getting” – this was just as I was about to retire. So I said, “No, I’m retiring.” Fast forward. I’m at the Vanguard, and she shows up again. This is just before school’s starting. She asked me again about lessons. I said, “No. I’m retired.” Then I get a call from Justin DiCioccio. “We’d like you to come and teach at Manhattan.” So we talk. “Okay. Fine.” He gave me what I wanted. The first day of school, there’s Anne. She’s one of my students. She played really great piano.

But one day she came in. She said, “I bought a new flute. Can we play some duets. I want to try it out.” “Okay.” I said, whoa. She had such a beautiful sound, she knew how to negotiate through the changes, and she was very expressive. She wasn’t just playing notes. She was making statements. So that’s where I started – we started playing together. I started hiring her, to play flute. But she’s an amazing pianist as well. That’s the story of that particular group.

Brown: Kiyoshi Kitagawa. You mentioned, I think, off-mic yesterday about how your current group, you had two Japanese folks in there. It seems to be you have this affinity for Japan or Japanese players, the Japanese violinist. So, could you talk about your relationship with Kiyoshi?

Barron: Kiyoshi is – he’s a wonderful bassist. Ben Riley was the one who turned me on to him, because there was a period where Bulldog – Ray Drummond – wasn’t available. So Ben said, “You got to hear this guy Kiyoshi Kitagawa.” He said he had done a record with him with somebody, and he was incredible. I called him, and sure enough, he was. We’ve been together since then. I love Kiyoshi. He’s straight ahead. He plays any kind of music. I’ve never – he said he plays electric, but I haven’t heard him do that. I never asked him to. But he said he started out playing electric bass. I love – he’s very adventurous, takes chances.

Brown: We were going to talk about what it is you look for in the rest of the rhythm section, a little later. I wanted to talk about *The Traveler*. That has a lineup that sounds very intriguing. It seems to be your last date as a leader for Sunnyside. Francisco Mela. I’m not familiar with Francisco. You had Steve Wilson, Lionel [Loueke]. Maybe talk about Lionel, because this is about the time that he started to come into the public’s eye.

Barron: Lionel I met at the Monk Institute when it was in L.A. He was – whoa. He was incredible. That whole class at that time, it was Gretchen Parlato, who is an amazing vocalist. I forget who the bassist was. But they all decided to move to New York, en masse. So I got to hear Lionel a lot. He and Grechen worked together quite often. They had some very unique stuff. She sings in African dialects and odd meters and things like that. It was great, being a part of that at the Monk Institute and seeing the beginnings of that.

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What were we talking about?

Brown: Francisco Mela.

Barron: Oh, right. I'm sorry. I'm getting old. Francisco is from – he's from Cuba. I met him in Europe. He was there with another group, and I was there with my trio. We met at – the presenter had a club. We met – and they have a jam session there. We met. We played together. Again, I was blown away. So I got his number. Some stuff came up, and I called him. We worked together for a while, over maybe two years, something like that. He's an excellent drummer, a lot of spirit, very animated when he plays. I really love that.

Brown: You've been pronouncing his name as Lionel [again, French pronunciation]. Could you pronounce his – because I don't want to butcher his name. If you could pronounce his full name.

Barron: Oh, I may have it wrong. But I think it's Lionel Loueke [Lou-ey-kay].

Brown: The last one on this list – I don't know if you've recorded anything since – in the last year – 2009, *Minor Blues*, a trio, you and George and Ben.

Barron: That was for a Japanese label.

Brown: Verve Jazz Japan.

Barron: That was just a relaxed trio thing. That's when I wanted to use Ben, and I love playing with George, George Mraz. When I worked with – we had the quartet, the quartet with Ron Carter, two bassists. The very first week of that band, Buster Williams wasn't available. So George Mraz made it. Since that time I've always loved George's playing. He's a sweetheart too.

Brown: I always heard a lot of him with Tommy Flanagan, come to think of it.

Barron: Yeah, exactly.

Brown: Let's now turn our attention to some of your work as a sideman with some of the more high-profile artists, beginning in – well, I don't – I'm looking at *The Kicker*. I know that came up earlier. But that recording, for us who are this generation of jazz, that's . . .

Barron: Oh yeah. Joe Henderson. Wow, what a – Joe Henderson was amazing. I was really flattered to get that call to do the recording. Again, it was just very, very relaxed. It was Ron Carter. I'm trying to remember who the drummer was – Louis Hayes. Yeah,

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Louis Hayes. And there was a trumpet player. I don't know what ever happened to him. His name was Mike Lawrence.

Brown: Hmm. Wow, yeah, that's a name that I'm not familiar with.

Barron: Yeah. I'd never heard any more after that. Yeah, that was a lot of fun. We did [Barron sings a melody]. What's the name of that? I can't think of the name of it. Boy, it's rough.

Brown: One of Joe's tunes?

Barron: Yeah, I think it was one of Joe's tunes.

Brown: I'm not – it's not *Tetragon*. I know that.

Barron: No, it's not *Tetragon*.

Brown: I'm messing up titles. I always mess up Monk titles too. So I'm not going to be . . .

Barron: Anyway, that was a great record.

Brown: Then, in that same mode, Bobby Hutcherson, *Now*. We referenced that yesterday, 1969.

Barron: Yeah. He had some interesting music on there. There was a Joe Chambers piece on there that was really nice, called – I think it was called *Hello to the Wind*.

Brown: Then you have a long relationship with Ron Carter. Maybe we can talk about that, because I'm looking at *Piccolo*, 1977, but the relationship obviously extends beyond that.

Barron: Oh yeah. That was – when he put together the band with the two basses, that was the first record. I think that was also the first gig. It was at Sweet Basil. I remember we wore tuxedos.

Brown: Broke you in for Sphere. Sphere's coming up later, with the tuxedos.

Barron: Yeah, but I do remember the piano was really bad. It was really out of tune. There was a tuner. He tuned it after each set. That's how bad it was. As it turned out, the tuner was Akua Dixon, who is a violist.

Brown: Oh yeah. I know – no, Akua is a cellist . . .

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Barron: Cellist. Cello, sorry.

Brown: . . . because his sister Diane plays violin.

Barron: Yeah, cello, right. But she tuned the piano every set, the day we were recording, after – whoa, okay. But when you – still, when you listen to it, it was just – but again, it was one of those records that the energy of it – it was a very popular record.

Brown: I think I even have the – yeah, I have it.

Barron: That band, we were together for a minute. Went to Europe and worked a lot around the country, when it was still possible to do that.

Brown: Footnote – we’re coming back to that.

Then, relationships with trumpet players. Marvin Peterson, *Naima*, 1978, and then *The Angels of Atlanta*, 1981. Then we’ll lead us to Freddie. But let’s talk about Marvin, because Marvin, I guess because he was an expatriate, that he doesn’t really have – he fell out of the public’s eye and ear.

Barron: He moved back to . . .

Brown: About this time, didn’t he? Because I used to see him in Europe when I was living there in the ’70s. He was there a lot.

Barron: But I think he was from Texas, if I remember.

Brown: Yeah, Texas, Mississippi. I don’t actually – but the South, down there.

Barron: I think he moved back there, because he was living in Brooklyn.

Brown: Oh, that’s right. He did. That’s right. Yeah.

Barron: He was living in Brooklyn on Gates Avenue or something like that.

Brown: And he changed his name.

Barron: Oh really.

Brown: I have a recording where he did something for Rosa Parks, and it was under a different name. But that was very recent, very very recent.

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Barron: He did call me maybe two or three years ago about doing something. I never did get to talk to him, whatever it was.

But yeah, that was – he was very different, very ambitious, in terms of big works, things like that. But on one of the records I did with him – it might have been *Naima* – it was direct-to-disc. That was unusual, because you couldn't stop. It wasn't like, okay, one tune, next tune. No, this, you had to go all the way through. So *Naima* is the whole track, because it was an LP. So that's the only song on that side. I forget what's on the other side. That's – it was a lot of pressure to record like that. You can't make a mistake. You make a mistake, you got to go back to the beginning. No cut and paste. You can't do that. No overdubs and inserts. You can't do any of that. You've just got to play from beginning to end. So that's weird. The only way to record separate tunes, you have to just record one, start the next one. So I don't think that lasted too long. That was for a Japanese company, I think. If I remember correctly, that particular one was for a Japanese company.

Brown: *The Angels of Atlanta* is probably another extended work.

Barron: Yeah. I think his sister was on that. She sang on that.

Brown: How did he get the middle name Hannibal or that nickname Hannibal?

Barron: I have no clue about that. I don't know.

Brown: Let's go on to Hub, Freddie Hubbard. I'm sure that relationship started long before you recorded *Outpost* in 1981. So you can talk about . . .

Barron: Oh, yeah. I started working with Freddie after I left Dizzy. He was my neighbor. He lived around the corner from me in Crown Heights. That's when I started working with him. The drummer – the first drummer was Louis – not Louis Hayes. Freddie Waits. We had a really good band. He had a sextet that could play straight ahead, out, all kinds of stuff: Freddie Waits, Bennie Maupin, James Spaulding. Herbie Lewis was that bassist. That was a great band. We could switch gears, which we did a lot.

I went through a lot of different bands. There was a co-op band. Only the leaders were co-op, though. This was – it was called the Jazz Communicators. We never recorded. It was Freddie and Joe Henderson, Louis Hayes, Herbie Lewis, and myself, which again was a really great band. We had two really great composers there, Freddie and Joe. So we were doing both of their – the compositions of theirs. We did – we went to California, I think, and played some club out there, Marty's on the Hill, or something? In L.A. Marty's.

Brown: In L.A. I would have known if it was in the Bay Area.

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Barron: No, it wasn't the Bay Area. I think we did play at – maybe it was the Both/And. Yeah, Marty's on the Hill in L.A. And there was a place up near Lincoln Center before it was Lincoln Center, on 60-something Street, called La Bohème. We worked there. But we didn't last that long, because there were contractual problems in terms of recordings. So it didn't last that long, maybe a year, if that much, if that long. But that was a really good group.

One of the last groups was a quintet, I think, with Spaulding and Freddie, maybe with Junie Booth at one time, but Louis Hayes was there, also.

Brown: Then, 1989, how was it working with Ella, for *All that Jazz*?

Barron: That was nice. That was just one record. I just had – again, it was another surprise call. I happened to be – I was working in San Diego and I got a call – are you from San Diego? Okay – I was working at a place called [Alerio's], actually in La Jolla, and got a call from Norman Granz. I guess he knew I was out in L.A. – I mean, out in southern California. He wanted me to come up on a day off, to L.A., and record with Ella. I said yeah, of course. So I rented a car and drove up there. We did the date in one day. It was Sweets [Harry Edison] and Bobby Durham, Ray Brown. So it was a lot of fun. She wasn't in the best of health. She was a little – she had just gotten over the flu or something. But I think that was the lightest part of it. I think there were some other health problems. But she still sounded great. I was thrilled to be a part of that.

Brown: Can you talk about how that session went, who was directing it, takes, and any of those kind of things? Rehearsal? Any of that?

Barron: I'm trying to remember. I don't know why I keep thinking Benny Carter was there, but I'm not sure. That was so long ago. What year was that?

Brown: '89.

Barron: '89. It was either Benny Carter or Ray Brown putting things together.

Brown: Like a musical director.

Barron: Yeah.

Can we stop for a minute?

Brown: Kenny, if we could return to the project *The Traveler*, because that seemed to be significant. You had somewhat of a hiatus as a leader, recording as a leader, and then you

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come out with this recording that very, very unique, with a lot of vocalists. Grady Tate's on it. If you could talk a little bit more about that project.

Barron: Yeah. One of the things I wanted to do, there's a friend of mine who lives in Tucson, Janice Jarrett, who's written lyrics for, oh goodness, maybe 40 or 50 of my compositions. I thought, why don't I record some of them, with the lyrics? So I chose three singers that I liked: Grechen Parlato, who I love; Ann Hampton Calloway, who a lot of people aren't aware of. She's – I made three or four recordings – three recordings with her. She's a great, great singer, great intonation and great phrasing. And Grady Tate. Everybody knows him as a drummer, but he's also a fantastic singer.

I picked three songs. They were all ballads, because that's what I was aiming for. It really worked. I was very happy with the results. I gave them the music ahead of time. When we got in the studio – funny – the one that Ann Hampton Calloway recorded, for instance, we did – just to run over it, because we had not gone over it together. We didn't rehearse. So we said, let's just go over it, dry run. When we listened back – I didn't know they had recorded it. Oh, that's it. No need to – they said, "Would you like to listen back?" "Oh, you recorded." "Yeah." It was perfect. So that was one take. There was no need to do it again. Most of it was like that.

She's also – she plays piano. So she's a great musician. The same with Grechen. Grechen is a good musician. Sight reads anything. So that makes it very, very easy. Grady is a great – he has great ears. He does sight read too. Grady sight reads too. But he has such great ears and then this deep baritone voice. So yeah, it was great.

Then, the thing with Steve – Steve Wilson played on a few tracks. He was an amazing saxophonist. And Lionel also. So it was fun, a fun date to do.

Brown: Ken handed me a list of some unissued recordings and radio broadcasts. Some of these – many of these I'm not familiar with. So I'm just going to hand you the list and see if there's anything – it starts here – if there's anything there that you feel should be discussed for the historical record, since they'll probably be ultimately released anyway. They'll probably get into the public, given current technology, maybe because of licensing, maybe not as soon as I expect.

Barron: Some of these I've seen, like Benny Carter. That's actually a recording – a video, which I've seen. *Stan Getz: Live at the Munich Summer Piano Festival*. I don't know. We did a concert there, I remember doing with Stan Getz, but I don't know why it was called a piano festival, because we had – it was several keyboard players. This was in support of a recording called *Apasionado*. It was me playing piano, and there were two other keyboard players, because that's what the record was, electronic keyboards. Terri Lyne Carrington was playing drums, and Alex Blake playing electric bass and acoustic bass. So that must be the one they are talking about, 1990.

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Club Date, yeah. I think I have a copy of that, actually. So these are all – *Chico Freeman at Ronnie Scott's*. Yeah, I've seen that, not in years. But the unissued stuff here, hmmm. Really? Okay.

Brown: That's from <jazz.com>.

Barron: Really?

Brown: So that's the source.

Barron: Marian McPartland. That's *Piano Jazz*. The Kenny Barron and John Hicks broadcast: that was a record, actually. That became a record. Marciac.

Brown: *Rhythm-a-ning*, right?

Barron: Yeah, that's *Rhythm-a-ning*. Now this set, I don't know anything about, this broadcast from Marciac with Stan Getz. And Sphere, the Northsea Jazz Festival. Oh, this I've never seen, J. J. Johnson and Stan Getz. It's a broadcast from the Chicago festival. And Wynton Marsalis – I don't – concert at Lincoln Center. I don't remember that.

Brown: Good. That's the kind of thing we want to do, is correct the historical record. But, maybe . . .

Barron: Yeah. It's probably something. My memory isn't the best. *A Tadd Dameron Tribute*, broadcast, Alice Tully Hall. I don't remember it, but it's certainly possible. Just because I don't remember it doesn't – Dizzy Gillespie. I remember that. Newport festival, '65 and '66. The Barron quintet, Iridium. Ah, okay, that was probably with Victor and David Williams, John Stubblefield, Eddie Henderson. And also the Northsea Jazz Festival. Hmmm. '94. Wow. Who does your research? Or do you do it? Wait a minute. Stan Getz in Yugoslavia. No, that's – I'm not on that, I don't think, not in 1988. I don't think so. Royal Festival Hall, yes, 1990. Wow. Okay. Yeah, there's some stuff I need to check out.

Brown: One of the things that prompted me was when I interviewed Al McKibbon – this is over 15 years ago – and I started mentioning, he says, "I'm not familiar with that." He says, "Can you give me a copy?" "Oh, okay." So that's why I thought, if I'm doing – and of course assisted ably by Ken Kimery – doing research for these, and then drop this on them, it's like, maybe we can help them – meaning the person being interviewed – to let them know that some of this stuff's out there, and are you aware of it?

Barron: Yeah, some of that – most of it, I am. There's some of it I'm not aware of and I would love to see. I don't know how it's possible to do that, though, but we'll talk. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: Again these were referenced at <jazz.com>.

Barron: <jazz.com>? Okay.

Brown: Yeah. That's very common. When I originally was contacted by them, Lewis Porter was involved. But then, Ted Gioia. I don't know.

Barron: I know Ted.

Brown: So I don't know who's handling it, but those are some of the folks that originally were involved with this web service.

Before we resumed, we talked a little bit about one of your most recent projects, a film score. You can talk a little about that, what that project's like and the process, the process of film scoring.

Barron: It was interesting. When I first got approached about it, I was a little reluctant, because I had never done it before. So I wanted to make sure that they knew that I was inexperienced, before I said yes, that I didn't have any experience doing it, and whatever it was going to be, it was going to be a jazz film score, because that's what I do. He said "Yeah, that's what I want."

They sent me a copy of the film. It was called *Another Harvest Moon*. It was Ernest Borgnine, Anne Meara, and Doris Roberts from *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and a few other people. I can't remember the names now. It was an interesting story. There was no music there. So I just looked at it and tried to figure out, where would I put music? So I wrote all these cues, which were very, very short. I wrote music for the opening credits, for instance, and music for various scenes which I thought might be appropriate.

Then we got into the studio and, sure enough, I was fairly correct in terms of where music should be placed, because they recorded it to film. So you could get a sense of what it was like, what it would be like. I spent a long time upstairs in my little office – I have a piano up there – just looking at the video and trying little different things, trying to create moods, because that's – it's like 20 seconds of music here, 30 seconds of music there.

I thought it came out okay. As it turns out, though, I was always wondering, what happened to the film?, because I never saw it and I never heard anything about it. Then somebody told me about this website you can go to, where you can find out anything about films, who's in it, when it was done, what year. Sure enough, it was there, and you could find out who was involved, who did the music, things like that. And sure enough, my name wasn't there. So apparently they decided to use someone else's music, which is

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okay, because they paid me very well. But it was a good experience. I wouldn't mind trying it again, just to – since I did it that one time.

I had the opportunity to participate in film scores that other people had written, like Terence Blanchard or Spike Lee – Bill Lee, Spike Lee's father. I did several of Spike Lee's first films, the soundtracks. That was a little different, because you had to watch the film and watch this white line move across. The music had to correspond. When the white line was finished, the music had to be finished. So that was interesting. I don't know if I could write like that. So, yeah, I would love to try it again and actually have it played.

Brown: Anything else you want to talk about? Your recording career? Or your work as a sideman on any records or anything? Because we didn't exhaust the entire discography. You have over 40 titles. It's a lot, but I tried to get some of the things that at least show up consistently in the historical record. But of course that may not reflect your values or some of the things that you . . .

Barron: I don't know. It's – in terms of sideman stuff, it's hard to say. I think I've been on – as I sideman, I think I've been on 400, 500 records.

Brown: There you go.

Barron: That's a lot of stuff. Some of it was really great. Some of it was not memorable, which is okay, because it's all experience. Sometimes you do things for friends. But you can learn something from all of it. There's some people, for instance, the general public might not even know about, for instance, a guy in Washington, D.C., named Buck Hill. You may know him.

Brown: Oh, I've played with Buck Hill.

Barron: Yeah, Buck is – but the general public doesn't really know that much about him.

Kimery: [?] mailman.

Barron: Your mailman. Right. He's incredible. We did – I did – I think I did about two records with him, with Buster Williams and Billy Hart. Wow. Because Billy Hart was the one who was instrumental in getting it to happen.

Brown: Yeah, well, coming from D.C., sure.

Barron: For me, that was a great record. That was really a great record. It was fun to do.

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There have been quite a few. I just can't think of them right now. Yeah, I can't think of it. There's just so many.

Brown: As a leader, or even when you're working as a sideman, or working with any group, you have the opportunity, particularly as a rhythm section person, you're working with the heartbeat, the foundation of whatever group it is. What do you look for? For say – you've worked with probably the pantheon of bass players in jazz. What is it that you feel most comfortable with when you're working with a bass player? What are the qualities or the stylistic elements that you look for in working with . . . ?

Barron: The primary thing is, I want somebody who's going to make my stuff work.

Brown: Oh, okay.

Barron: No, seriously, that's – somebody's going to make me sound good. What does that take? I like bass players who play – nice sound, good time. I don't like bass players who play in the upper register a lot, because it makes what I play sound thin. So that's not a requirement, but I like for bass players to play base, b-a-s-e.

Brown: Stay on the bottom.

Barron: Yeah.

Brown: Keep the foundation, right.

Barron: Keep the foundation, yeah, because if you're in the upper register too much, then it sounds like you're playing cello, and it makes – again, it makes what I'm doing, especially if I'm using rootless voicings, it makes it sound very thin. That's that: good time, good choice of notes, good sound. Those things are important for me.

Brown: Then, on the other side, drummers. You worked with – my gosh, if anybody looks at Kenny Barron's discography, he's worked with the drummers of our era. So

Barron: It's weird. With drummers, I like different drummers for different reasons. I remember the first time I heard – I played with Elvin maybe only a few times. But the first time I heard Elvin, with Trane, whew, he just blew me away. There's a certain freedom in that that I like, a looseness. But I also like drummers who swing, who can be tasty and delicate. I like that as well. So, I don't know. If you could find all of that in one drummer.

Brown: I think you have with someone like Victor Lewis.

Barron: Oh yeah, and . . .

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Brown: Ben Riley.

Barron: . . . Ben Riley, yeah. Ben, for instance, is a master with brushes. He's just – that comes from the experience he used to talk about that he had. He used to play – on the east side of Manhattan is a lot of trio clubs, trio rooms. You play for dinner, and the club owner didn't want you to play with brushes – I mean, didn't want you to play with sticks, because you can't play too loud, because people are eating. So he developed an art of playing with the brushes. A lot of people from that generation did. I remember one night at Bradley's, Billy Higgins came in. He had a *New York Times*. This was before Bradley's had drums. He pulled out his *New York Times*. He had a pair of brushes in his back pocket, and then played brushes on the *New York Times*. Sounded incredible. Things like that. That's an art, playing brushes.

The drummer who's playing with me now, Jonathan Blake, I especially like, because he's – with young drummers, one of the things I like is energy. He has that. He has that energy. But he can also play quiet and soft. He can play all these odd meters like it's 4/4. That's one of the things that young drummers have. They have this ability to do all those different things. They can play funk, whatever. They can do it all – pretty much all.

Brown: They'll learn it all.

Barron: Oh yeah. Victor Lewis. You mentioned Victor Lewis. One of the things I liked about – I really liked about Victor: because Victor's a composer, he knows a lot about form. So if you give him an open solo, it won't really be open. You can hear the form. You can hear – if it's a 32-bar song, you can hear where everything is. So there's no guesswork. "Should I come in now?" He'll just say, here it is, and he'll play something that leads you right in. If you're taking 8s or 4s or 16s or whatever, you know where everything is. Not that it's predictable, because it's not. But you know where everything is. That's what I love about Victor's playing. It's unpredictable, but it's reliable. It's definitely reliable.

Brown: All you young drummers, take note. You're surrounded by drummers. Here, both Ken and I are drummers. But you're brought up seeing Trane live. Anytime anybody says that, I want to ask them, what was that like? Please, whatever recollection you have.

Barron: For me, it was jaw-dropping. I was just – I had never heard anything like that, that kind of passion. Never heard anything like that.

Brown: Original quartet.

Barron: Yeah. It was – it wasn't Steve. This was with Reggie Workman.

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Brown: Okay. So you saw it very early on.

Barron: Yeah.

Brown: So probably early '60, before Jimmy became the permanent bassist in that group. I know Reggie and Jimmy traded off a little bit, but it was in that era.

Barron: It was that era, yeah, because at the time I was living with Reggie.

Brown: Oh, okay. Was it in Philly?

Barron: It was in Philly. It was at the Showboat, at the Showboat in Philly. That was the first time I heard Trane. No, I'm sorry. I apologize. The bass player was Jimmy Garrison. It was Jimmy Garrison.

Brown: Philly, again. There you go.

Barron: Philly, yeah, Girard Avenue, 29th and Girard.

Brown: Whatever you can say about that concert.

Barron: It was just like I said. It was like being in a trance. Songs would last a long time, for 20 minutes, 30 minutes, and you would not be bored, because there was just so much stuff happening. Just the energy was there, the energy, and also there's a certain kind of spirituality coming from Trane that was there – coming from all of them, that was there. It was just so – it was unreal, and it's difficult to put into words, because you really had to experience that.

I had the occasion also of hearing Trane's very first group, which was Steve Kuhn, yeah, Steve Kuhn and Pete LaRocca – yeah, it was Pete LaRocca – at the Jazz Gallery. That was his first group.

Brown: Probably a completely different presentation.

Barron: Yeah. I don't really remember that much about it, but it had to be. Knowing the players involved, it had to be. But I know that Trane had – he had McCoy, this agreement, that when McCoy was free, he would join him. But I think McCoy was with maybe the Jazztet or somebody like that at the time. So that's – he left Philly with the Jazztet, yeah. So it was an eye opener, definitely.

Brown: For our generation, mine and Ken's, we look at the '60s, the twin pillars. You got the John Coltrane quartet and the Miles Davis quintet. Did you see the quintet with Herbie and Tony and Ron and Wayne?

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Barron: I saw that group without Miles. It was a matinee at the Village Vanguard, and Miles didn't show up. So they played. It was great. That's one group I wish I had seen. I didn't get to see them live, for some reason or another. I don't know why. But that's one I definitely wish I had seen. But I did get the chance to play. The other rhythm section with Miles was Philly Joe, Red Garland, and Paul Chambers. I never got to hear them, but I got to – one gig. This was a highlight for me. I did a gig at the Blue Coronet in Brooklyn with Philly Joe and Paul Chambers. I was in seventh heaven.

Brown: Because they made it so easy for you? Or because they . . . ?

Barron: Yeah. It was just so – it was just perfect. It's like driving a Rolls Royce. That was great. That was really great.

Kimery: We should change sides.

Brown: Perfect timing. There you go.

Kenny, in 1989, your brother Bill passed. Is that something we can talk about?

Barron: Sure, yeah. He – it was kind of a surprise. Well, not really a surprise. He had gotten sick some months before that. He was in the hospital. A couple of years before that, he had a heart attack. But that wasn't the cause. It was cancer, something with platelets. He had gotten sick in New York, and I went to see him in the hospital. He was explaining to me about the blood platelet and something. Then I went on the road. This was – he had gone home, back to Connecticut, and I was on the road when I was notified that he had passed. So it was – I wasn't quite prepared for that. I really wasn't prepared for that. But I remember somebody saying that when he was in the hospital in Connecticut, he was giving lessons. So yeah, that was incredible. He was very serious about music. He had a very analytical mind. He was always thinking about how to do this, how to do that, how to teach. He was an important person in my life and I'm sure in the lives of his students.

Brown: Absolutely. That's one of the things I was hoping that we could capture on this interview, was the fact that both of you have been consummate educators. Of course Bill Barron, for those who aren't familiar with his career, was at Wesleyan University and very instrumental in turning out, in touching the lives, in directing the lives of so many people. One in particular is Leonard Brown, who's now teaching at Northeastern. We just wrote a book. He was senior editor for a book, a collection of essays on John Coltrane. But every time you talk to Leonard Brown, he's going to talk about Bill Barron. As a matter of fact, when we played together, he'd pull out Bill Barron charts and we'd play those.

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But this whole – the education – did he have an impact or influence you as far as an educational career or being an educator? Because he was definitely there on the scene.

Barron: Yeah, he was there. I never saw him in action, teaching. Well, no, that's not true. At Muse, in Brooklyn, which was a community thing, I got a chance to check him out. Yeah, he was a really great teacher. Kenny Washington told me this story. Kenny was a kid. They had sessions there for young players. Kenny wanted to play. There was somebody who was hogging the drum set. So Bill said, "Come on. Get up. Let this young man sit down and play." Kenny never forgot that. Yeah, he was a great teacher, I think. Not I think. I know. He was a great teacher, very concerned about his students, making sure they got the right material.

Brown: He wasn't the only Barron that we know was a great teacher. The one sitting in this room is also a great teacher. Do you want to talk about any of the players that came through either Rutgers or Manhattan? And maybe now Juilliard it's too early to talk about them. But you obviously touched the lives of many of those, to include one of the ones in this room right now. What do you feel is important to impart to your students? We talked about technical things. We talked about playing in performance. But what about other things like respect for the music, understanding the history of this music, the humanity of this music?

Barron: Yeah, that – you just mentioned the humanity of the music. That's an important part of it, just being human, being humble, and realizing that music doesn't come from you. It comes through you. Kahlil Gibran said that, and I really agree with that. So, teaching the humanistic things about being a musician, and I think it's important, number one, to listen to the music, to love the music, and, as you mentioned, to really respect the music. Those things are important.

Some of the students I've had who have gone on, they all had that. They had a real passion for the music. They had respect for the music. People like Terence Blanchard, who I mentioned before. Ralph Peterson was a student there. Ralph Bowen, who I think still teaches there.

Brown: The whole original OTB.

Barron: OTB, yeah.

Brown: So all those. Mike Mossman was there when I got there.

Barron: Yeah. Mike is teaching now at, I think, Queens College, where Jimmy Heath was.

Brown: Bob Hurst, and then Harry Pickens.

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Barron: Harry Pickens.

Brown: He was your student. He was – we were in the graduate – masters program together.

Barron: I don't know if he's playing so much, Harry, because I saw Harry. I don't know whether it was Memphis or Nashville or somewhere like that. He's a motivational speaker now. But he was an incredible pianist, and I'm sure he still does play occasionally, but I don't think – not like he used to. There was Regina Belle – I don't know if you remember her – who was – had a bunch of hit records, pop, pop singer. She had a bunch of – a string of hit records. She – I remember her being in piano class, taking piano lessons with me. I think she was a – she wasn't a music major. I think she was accounting or something like that, something that had nothing to do with music. But I remember she wanted to sing with the band. So she asked me about putting in a word. I said yeah, because I could hear she could sing. At the first concert, she did some stuff. I remember her doing "Ooh, what a little moonlight can do." She's a really great jazz singer, although that's not the career – the path that she chose. But she was really a very good jazz singer.

Jeanie Bryson. I don't know if you remember her.

Brown: Yeah, now that you mention it. Yeah. I forgot about Jeanie.

Barron: She did several records. Then we did a tour. She was on a tour that I did in Japan for All Art promotion.

There have been a lot. At Manhattan – who was there? Again, I can't think of names off the top of my head. There were so many people, so many.

Brown: When you mention – of course, any pianists coming through your lessons and your tutelage are going to benefit greatly. You mentioned folks like Terence Blanchard. There's David Sanchez.

Barron: Yeah, David.

Brown: So, what are those folks – are you actually showing them piano? Because I know when we studied, it was more independent study. We were going over history, stylistic development, and things like that.

Barron: With people who studied piano, I mean, who were pianists, yeah, we talked about piano. But with non-pianists, it was more of an independent study like we did, like with David and Harry Allen, who was another fantastic saxophonist who also played
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great piano. That's one thing I always tried to stress to horn players. If you play piano, that's 95% of it. Most great improvisers, non-pianists, played piano well enough to play good voicings. I remember Freddie Hubbard playing some of that hard stuff he played on trumpet. He could sit down and play it on piano. Eddie Harris, those 4ths and things. He could sit down and play that on the piano. So I always tried to stress that to horn players, how important it was to be able to play piano. Most of them did that. Like I say, Harry Allen made gigs on piano, around New Brunswick.

There were some others. I just can't think of names right now. But the good thing is that I feel I've had an impact. Not all of them have gone on to become famous musicians, but they've all – they're doing something in music that they were trained to do. I had a student at Juilliard who was from Japan, Maiko. I saw her. I saw her last year in Japan. She's doing very well. She's doing what she was trained to do. She's working. She's making records. She becoming not a star star, but she's getting quite a reputation in Japan. That's important. I feel good about that, that I've had some impact on some of the younger players.

Brown: Oh yeah, definitely, a profound impact on many of them. We were talking also about some of the next generation of pianists coming up. Names that came up were Hiromi and Eldar [Djangirov] and others like that. I don't know, what do you think about this next wave that's coming up? Do you have any thoughts about that?

Barron: There's a lot of them. There's people like – again, another student of mine, Aaron Parks, who's been making records. He wound up working with Terence. Terence asked me if I knew any piano players. So I said, oh yeah, a young guy, Aaron Parks, who's very good. He's really good. He's very creative. When we had lessons, he would bring in all these songs, all these tunes he would bring. At the time, I didn't know it when he started studying with me, he was 16, in college. He was a presidential scholar. He's doing very well. He's definitely one of the people I like.

I like Eric Reed, who's not that young, but he's definitely somebody I really like. I like Benny Green. Anybody younger than me . . .

Brown: . . . is young.

Barron: Yeah, is young. I love Cyrus Chestnut, because he . . .

Brown: At church.

Barron: Yeah. He's not that much younger than me, but Mulgrew Miller. We've had the opportunity to do a lot of duo stuff together. He kicks my butt every time, in a good way. There's so many, so many young players. I know more pianists than I know other, like horn players.

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Brown: Yeah, but when we interview horn players, we can ask their opinion. You mentioned somebody, Sumi Toonuka. Maybe people aren't familiar with her. If you could . . .

Barron: She's from Philly.

Brown: Why am I not surprised?

Barron: I didn't know her in Philly. I met her in – I think I met her in Boston. She may have been going to Berklee. Then I got to hear some of her music. She's a really talented composer. I mean, she's a talented pianist, but her writing is really good. She's written for films. I have some of her stuff here that she's written for films. She sent me a copy of her latest record, which is with the woman who plays saxophone and lives up there in Wichita. Francesca Tanksley or something like that [Erica Lindsay]? It's really adventurous.

Who else? Helen Sung, who's – I think she's Chinese, from Texas. She's probably one of my favorites.

Brown: Is she out here now?

Barron: Yeah. She's in New York. She did this fantastic arrangement of one of my songs, *Voyage*, that was – I didn't know what it was until she started – finally she played the melody. "Oh wow." She started out as a classical pianist, and somehow she became fascinated with jazz. So she's able to do both things. On one of her more recent albums, she did a whole thing of this Spanish – the classical composer, Ibanez?

Brown: Oh yeah, *Concierto*.

Barron: Yeah, and then adaptations of some of his music. It was incredible. So she's definitely one of the people I really respect a lot. It makes me wish I were young again.

Brown: Have you been to China?

Barron: No, I haven't. That's one place I haven't been. I don't even know if they – yeah, because I've talked to people who have been there.

Brown: It's opening up more and more, Shanghai, Beijing.

Barron: I would love to go, but I've never been. Only in the airport. Well, not in Beijing. I have been to Hong Kong

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Brown: That's night and day compared to the mainland. Hong Kong is beautiful, though. I love Hong Kong. How about you? You had a good time when you were there?

Barron: Yeah, great time.

Brown: Did you play at the Cultural Center, that hall? Because that's beautiful.

Barron: I don't remember. This was with the Philip Morris tour. So this was 15, 20 years ago.

Brown: Maybe the hall wasn't even around then.

Barron: But it was great. There was actually a jazz club there that we went to, to hang out. It was called – I think it was called the Jazz Cafe or something like that. There was a group from Japan working there. No, I would love to go to China. I did get a call one time. or an e-mail, from somebody a few years ago about the Beijing Jazz Festival. But I was working at the time, so I couldn't. I sent an e-mail to the effect that unfortunately I'm working, but some other time I would love to do it. But I never heard back any more. I'll have my manager look into it.

Brown: Uh-oh, you done brought up the business. Let's talk about the state of jazz today. You were so candid yesterday, off mic, to mention the fact that your schedule was open, because you didn't have any bookings until April, and I'm thinking, damn. And then you also said, "I don't even have a recording contract. I'm thinking, damn, this is the premier pianist alive, and it's hard for him. The business is not there for him to support the continuation of this art form.

Barron: I don't know the answer to that. I'm not going to starve. But yeah, I would like to be working. It's not as grim as I painted it. I'm going to Israel this coming week, but for a day.

Brown: Wow. That's a hell of a one-nighter.

Barron: Obviously, the whole thing will take about three or four days, but for one concert. Then in February I'm going to London, just for a three-day gig. Then I have a recording session in February.

Brown: It sounds like you still have to leave the country to get work.

Barron: Yeah. In March, zilch.

Brown: Let's make sure we get this out, so he can get some gigs.

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Barron: But it's okay, because I'm going to spend the time writing. I have some projects I would like to do. So I'm going to use the time well, I think.

Brown: I see you're using the technology on your piano. You have some of your compositions, and they're all realized in Sibelius.

Barron: Sibelius, right. For me, that's – for me, it's a very steep learning curve, because I didn't grow up doing this stuff. My granddaughter, who grew up with it, this is nothing for her. She does the stuff like it's nothing, but I have to sit there with the manual. But I'm always thrilled when I'm able to do it. Every now and then you learn something. You're trying to figure something out, and there it is. Oh. So every time you discover something, it's a new thrill. Wow, I know how to do this now. It took me a long time to figure out how to do triplets.

Brown: Oh yeah. Especially quarter-note triplets that go across the bar line.

Barron: Yeah. But now I know how to do it. But it's nice to have it. What's great is you have – all the stuff is on the computer. So anytime I need copies, I can just press a button, and there it is. If I need to transpose something, press another button. There it is. It's a great tool. Eventually I would like to put all of my compositions onto computer, maybe even on a disc, so that I'll have it. I don't ever have to worry about it.

Brown: How about publishing? Are you getting your compositions out there in published formats?

Barron: No. Unfortunately, that's not something that's started to happen. I'm starting to get them recorded, which is important, especially the ones with words. That's one of the things. I want to get the things with words published – performed and then published in print. That's something I intend to work on. All it takes is one. I look at one of the – at the NEA thing, one of the inductees was Johnny Mandel, who's written some really gorgeous songs, like *The Shadow of Your Smile*, *Never Let Me Go*. Those are beautiful pieces. I'd love to be able to write music like that, that's memorable, with lyrics – I can't write lyrics, but somebody will write lyrics that really have some meaning. Like I say, all it takes is one.

Brown: Any other projects or things that you haven't realized, that you aspire to accomplish?

Barron: I would love to do a recording with strings, for instance. This is something I've always wanted to do. Not necessarily write the music myself, but just perform with a string orchestra. I would love to do that. I would love to write something for string quartet to perform with a trio. I know Billy Taylor's done that. Chick Corea's done it.

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Brown: Max [Roach].

Barron: Max, yeah. But it's something I've never done. It's something I would like to do. I've become really fond of the cello. So I would love to write something for cello, like cello and piano. I mean written music.

Brown: Through composed?

Barron: Through composed, or maybe some spots for improvisation. There are people who can do that now. Or through composed. Wouldn't it be great if I could get Yo Yo Ma to play?

Brown: Well, that's the way he's going to be able to do that. It's going to have to be written. But he can improvise.

Barron: He's very open. He did some Brazilian stuff.

Brown: He's doing some folk music, country, Appalachia. He's all over the map.

How about working in a non-Western music context? Anything in there? Working with maybe – well you – I'd say Brazilian, but maybe with middle-Eastern instruments? Again, I'm reflecting back on Yusef, because Yusef goes in those directions.

Barron: There was – I was talking with one of the people at Universal in France about a possible project with some African instruments, like cora and some other.

Brown: Randy Weston territory.

Barron: Yeah. Hank Jones did a recording with – I think it was cora. It was interesting, but I don't know if it really worked.

Brown: I'd have to hear it. What about any of the Asian instruments, working, since you have this affinity for Japan, any . . . ?

Barron: I love shakuhachi flute. I could listen to that forever. There was – I worked with – for a while there was a woman who played koto in New York. Her name was Fusiko? I don't know what happened to her. She did some gigs around New York with Frank Wess. She could improvise. And that's a sound I like. I like the sound of the koto. I have it on my – I have an electric piano upstairs, keyboard, and it has a koto setting on it.

Brown: Sampled koto.

Barron: Sampled koto.

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Brown: But it will expand your tonal palate. You'll hear those sonorities.

Barron: Exactly. Then you'll say, how can I use those sounds in my own stuff? That's what it's about. How can I utilize those sounds? Sitar. At one point I had my manager – because, speaking about projects, I had my manager, Karen, reach Shankar, Anoushka Shankar. She did reach her, but she was busy.

Brown: She was touring with the Pops.

Barron: But again, that's music that I really love. I remember hearing a recording of Ravi Shankar with Louis Hayes. This was a while ago. Louis Hayes and – it was with a jazz group. I remember that very well. So there's lots of stuff to do.

Brown: You're still a young man. There's still a lot to do.

Barron: Yeah, that's right.

Brown: Still got lots of energy.

Barron: Lots of stuff to do.

Brown: Got a lot of contacts. You're all over the planet. That's great.

Kenny, is there anything else you'd like to include in this public record, this interview, that will be heard by subsequent generations of aspiring jazz musicians, historians, cultural theorists, everybody.

Barron: No, nothing in particular, other than I think everybody should go out and hear some music, some live music. I think that's important.

Brown: Important in which way?

Barron: I think it's important, because records are nice. That's documentation. But I think it's important to go out and hear music live, because you can see how the musicians react to one another, how they react to the audience. And musicians need people, because when you're playing, you get feedback. When you're playing and you play for yourself, it doesn't really – you need feedback from your audience, whether there's one person or 10,000 people. You need that kind of feedback. I'm not talking about shouting and screaming. Not that, but just – you know when people are really listening intently. You can feel that. You need that. Sometimes that can spur you on. As a player, it can spur you on. Just knowing that people are really listening intently can spur you on. If you know that no-one's listening, then that's a whole 'nother thing.

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Brown: Do you start to play for yourself then?

Barron: I don't know. It depends on where your ego is. You may start to say, nobody likes what I'm doing. So blah. Or you may just go ahead and say, I'm just going to continue and do what I'm doing. I would like to think I would just continue doing what I'm doing, and try and pull people in, and hope that it works.

But I think it's important to just go out and listen to some music.

Brown: I think on that note – I can't think of a better remedy for helping humankind at this point. I personally, like you, feel that music is a healing force. It's a unifying force.

Barron: Yeah, very definitely.

Brown: The world that we're dealing with today seems to be much more contentious. I think your remedy, your prescription, would go a long way towards making people become more human.

Barron: I think so. I would agree with that.

Brown: If I did anything right, I can always credit Kenny Barron, because I got schooled right. I want to just say on behalf of the Smithsonian Institution and the National Endowment for the Arts, Kenny Barron, thank you so much for taking this time to be able to share your thoughts.

Barron: My pleasure.

Brown: And letting folks know that this music is important and you've dedicated your life to it. That tells me – inspired me to be able to follow in your footsteps and also embrace this music and make sure that it stays something that is rooted in the humanity of the people who created it.

Barron: All right.

Brown: All right, Kenny. Thank you so much.

Barron: All right. Thank you.

(transcribed and edited by Barry Kernfeld)

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