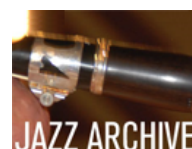


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## Shelly Berg

*Pianist Shelly Berg was born in Cleveland, Ohio on August 18, 1955. He majored in music at the University of Houston. Currently he is the Chair of Jazz Studies at USC and is Past President of IAJE. Shelly has composed and arranged charts for numerous commercials, film soundtracks and pop groups, and finds time to perform and record with his own ensembles.*

*Shelly was interviewed in Scottsdale, Arizona on April 15, 2000, by Monk Rowe, director of the Hamilton College Jazz Archive.*

- 11
- 12 MR: We are filming for the Hamilton College Jazz Archive in Scottsdale, Arizona. My name  
13 is Monk Rowe and I'm very pleased to have Shelly Berg with me at the festival, and you  
14 seem to be a guy who wears a lot of different hats.
- 15 SB: Yeah, my life is about hats. Yeah. Educator, doing a fair bit of composing and scoring  
16 and traveling around and playing, and so yeah, it's a juggling act.
- 17 MR: Do you favor one over the other?
- 18 SB: It's an interesting thing. I think when I look at myself in the mirror in the morning I see a  
19 jazz piano player. I think that that's how I define myself. But if you think of the playing,  
20 the teaching and the scoring maybe being the order of fulfillment, if you flip it upside  
21 down that's the pay scale. So it's just one of those interesting things about life.
- 22 MR: What's on the top of the pay scale?
- 23 SB: The scoring job, in terms of the money per hours.
- 24 MR: Is that right?
- 25 SB: For instance if you're doing a network 30-second spot for a commercial, it may take you  
26 two hours to score the whole thing, and yet the pay can be a lot. Or working doing an  
27 orchestration for a Rock star or something like that, per hour, that's probably the highest  
28 in terms of pay of the things that I do.
- 29 MR: Great. We'll have to talk more about that. At what point in your young life I guess, did it  
30 seem like music was going to be your thing?
- 31 SB: At my earliest recollection.
- 32 MR: Yeah.
- 33 SB: No I mean literally my earliest recollection is that music was going to be my thing. I  
34 don't recall a time in my life ever that music wasn't going to be my thing. I started  
35 picking out tunes at the piano when I was a toddler. And my parents came in when I was  
36 about five one day and I was playing "Alley Cat" with two hands. And so they decided it  
37 was time for lessons. So it's always been me.

38 MR: This begs a trivia question. You might be one of the few people who knows who the guy  
39 who recorded “Alley Cat” is.

40 SB: Oh no. I wasn’t able to read the liner notes at that age.

41 MR: All right. I’ll tell you later. It’s an interesting name. So they recognized your talent?

42 SB: Yeah.

43 MR: Did they help you out in that regard?

44 SB: Yeah, my dad is an avocational jazz trumpet player. And he was also a classical French  
45 horn player. So the music was always around me. There were always jam sessions at my  
46 house when I was a kid and if people were in off the road they usually ended up at our  
47 house a jam session and dinner. So yeah, they were very encouraging.

48 MR: Where was home?

49 SB: At that time it was Cleveland, Ohio. And I think by the time I was ten or eleven my dad  
50 had pretty well scoped out that I was a potential live-in accompanist for his jazz trumpet.

51 MR: Oh, okay.

52 SB: So he was bringing me along quickly. That was good.

53 MR: Yeah. Do you recall the first time you played out?

54 SB: Oh yeah. I started to play out doing shows and things when I was ten or eleven doing  
55 little paid gigs just kind of playing things that I’d worked out. And then by the time I was  
56 thirteen I was trying to go to jam sessions with my dad, and getting kicked off the stand.  
57 You know they’d let me play a half of a tune or a tune and then say now go, you’re done.  
58 But by the time I was fifteen I was in at the jam sessions I was playing.

59 MR: Well how did you make the transition from just playing what was on the page to  
60 expanding that, to comping and all that?

61 SB: All right, well when I was about ten or eleven my dad, as I said, he was figuring out that  
62 this was somebody that he might be able to play tunes with some day. So he started  
63 showing me basic chords and — don’t ask me why, the first tune he taught me was  
64 “That’s All.”

65 MR: That’s a bit of a challenge.

66 SB: Yeah. Well he taught me the first three chords, basically playing up from F minor, G  
67 minor, A minor and just back down. And I did that for a while, then he taught me [scats],  
68 so my mother must have gone crazy for about two weeks, I just played that up and down  
69 the piano, the first four bars of “That’s All” until he finally taught me [scats], and I got  
70 that other chord, and that was the next couple of weeks. So it was a slow process. That  
71 was the beginning. As I said there was always music in the house. My dad, whenever he  
72 was home there was always a record on. He had a big, huge collection and so he was  
73 sitting me down with Art Tatum and Oscar Peterson, Bill Evans and Bud Powell and Red  
74 Garland and Cannonball Adderley and Milt Jackson, from an early age. I mean sitting me

75 down and saying “listen to this, what are you hearing,” and really just mentoring me  
76 along. And he still does.

77 MR: Great. Music college was in your future from that time on then?

78 SB: Yeah. I studied classical piano all my life and ended up with a master’s degree in  
79 classical piano and conducting from the University of Houston. And I still practice, and I  
80 really try to teach all my jazz piano students to love classical music and understand what  
81 it can mean to them as jazz pianists.

82 MR: You’re in good company then because Roland Hanna just said the same thing.

83 SB: Really?

84 MR: Yeah. He talked about the importance of being able to recognize what they did with  
85 harmonies and how they wrote for piano.

86 SB: Well there are just so many thousands, endless kinds of sounds and colors you can get out  
87 of a piano and I think working on classical literature is a really focused way to get to that.  
88 What I notice with my students who don’t work on classical music is their hands aren’t  
89 very supple, especially their left hand. It kind of looks like a club. And you want them to  
90 develop that beautiful suppleness to their hands and then you know that they have a  
91 freedom to really express themselves.

92 MR: Yeah. When did you first get into composing/arranging?

93 SB: Well my first professional composing gig was when I was I think twelve. There was a  
94 synagogue in Cleveland that was opening a new sanctuary, and I got commissioned to  
95 compose a piece for a youth orchestra to play at the opening. So once I figured out about  
96 transpositions, everything was fine. The first read through was a little rough.

97 MR: Uh ho. You were into atonality already.

98 SB: Yeah. Shoenberg had nothing on me at that point except for attention.  
99 [pause]

100 MR: You need to stop? What’s happening? Oh, okay.

101 MR: But that must have been a monumental thing to do for a first orchestration I would think,  
102 when you’re twelve?

103 SB: I think you don’t know it’s hard yet. I’d played a lot of classical piano and I kind of had  
104 some Alberti textures and boom-chuck-chuck kind of textures from the pieces that I  
105 played and I think I was just emulating kind of what I knew with a nice little Jewish-  
106 sounding theme, at least it seemed like to me.

107 MR: Cool. Does that score still exist?

108 SB: Yes it does.

109 MR: All right.

110 SB: In all of its pencil-written glory.

111 MR: Yeah, sure. And how do you write now? Do you use technology?

112 SB: The same. I have a mini-studio in Hollywood, and I use Finale and I use sequencing and  
113 sample, all the gear. But when it comes to orchestrating, it's me at a table with the score,  
114 a pencil in my hand. And the best way I can describe it is orchestrating or composing for  
115 orchestra is kind of you descend into a world where you can hear everything. I think at its  
116 best you don't want to be at a piano, you don't want to be hearing it back on a  
117 synthesizer. It takes fifteen, twenty minutes at least, to decompress yourself down to that  
118 world when suddenly you're hearing everything. And then once you're in that space  
119 hopefully the phone doesn't ring.

120 MR: I was just going to say you have to isolate yourself pretty well.

121 SB: Right. And that's how I write. And I can write really quickly once I get to that place  
122 because then the piece kind of happens.

123 MR: Wow. That's really interesting.

124 SB: Yeah, it's an interesting feeling.

125 MR: Do you think the tools that are available today — how should I say this — don't foster  
126 that kind of ability?

127 SB: It's a concern. It's great in that you can immediately hear in terms of trial and error and  
128 learning to hear and getting to hear back what you've written. It's a great tool, with the  
129 caveat that you're not really hearing back what you've written. And chances are it may  
130 sound a whole lot better or a whole lot worse in a real environment. So there's certainly  
131 some use to it. I find in the industry now everybody wants a full demo of any orchestra  
132 piece you write. And you can get it to sound so good that they think it's what it's going to  
133 sound like and yet it isn't and there's a really worry there. Because they might not quite  
134 get it from the demo and yet it sounds convincing enough that they think they're hearing  
135 the real thing. So it's fraught with those pitfalls. But yeah, I think that — you know there  
136 was an interesting column, I think it was in "Jazz Times" a couple of years ago. And  
137 what it said I agree with, and basically it said that technology makes it possible for  
138 everyone to create the atmosphere of great music. You can put on your Will Lee bass  
139 loop and your Peter Erskine drum loop and lock up the BPM and you've got then, and  
140 then you've got the greatest sampled sounds and this and that and the other, and you can  
141 basically put something together that the sounds sonically are first rate. That doesn't even  
142 begin to speak to what you are as a composer or what aptitude you have for that. But  
143 you've now created the atmosphere that you're doing it. And I guess the same could be  
144 said in graphics, with computer graphics and all those kinds of things. There is difference  
145 between artists who can really draw something and somebody who can just merge a  
146 bunch of stuff off of a computer program. So in some ways an interesting dichotomy has  
147 happened. With the explosion of media kinds of outlets, there is much more opportunity  
148 as a composer, but there is also much, much more competition from people who twenty

149 years ago could never have been in this business. And it becomes hard to separate them  
150 out.

151 MR: That's true. If you go and you search CD Now and everyone has a web site, which you  
152 can say is a good thing because everyone has the opportunity. But how do you find out  
153 who belongs there?

154 SB: Right.

155 MR: I suppose in a sense the people who were in it before this technological explosion can  
156 tend to feel a little threatened unless they keep up with it.

157 SB: And it's difficult to keep up with it. If you buy the right magazines what it tells you every  
158 week is that you're behind now. Buy this.

159 MR: And it's hopeless. Wow.

160 SB: So but every time I sit down at a piano, it's a technology that hasn't changed in a long  
161 time.

162 MR: Yeah.

163 SB: And it's still revealing new things to me every day.

164 MR: Interesting. And these kind of situations probably reveal new things too, playing with any  
165 combination of people.

166 SB: It's fascinating. And I think some really great energies can happen. Some people, if  
167 they're traveling with their own bands lament well it's all going to be a jam session. But  
168 it's a very special kind of a jam session at a festival like this. And already today some  
169 really amazing things have happened. So I love it.

170 MR: Right. It doesn't look like anybody is out to make anybody else look bad, like there's a  
171 group thing.

172 SB: That's not the vibe here at all, as a matter of fact everybody is very encouraging. When I  
173 played my first solo today and Herb Ellis went like this, I thought okay, that made my  
174 year. He was either very angry or try to figure that out. No, everybody is pulling for  
175 everybody here, trying to — certainly as a rhythm section player my job is to, I say that  
176 what I do is kind of like the background to a painting, and the foreground is the soloist.  
177 So if the soloist is the Pope I try not to be hell. So I try to be the background that really  
178 puts it in its best light. So I think everybody in the rhythm section is working with that in  
179 mind. It certainly sounds like that way to me.

180 MR: Would you consider some years as dues paying years in your career so far?

181 SB: They've all been dues paying.

182 MR: They all are and they probably will remain that way?

183 SB: In some ways. I think if you talk to a hundred people you'll have a hundred different  
184 paths to getting where they are. I got married on my nineteenth birthday for the first time  
185 and worked my way through college, had a couple of kids by the time I graduated,

186 worked my way playing six nights a week Top 40 and Country music. Graduated college  
187 and took a job teaching at a community college so that I could get out of working every  
188 night at a wedding reception band. And so I couldn't afford to take very many jazz gigs  
189 because I could make more money with the wedding reception band. So that was a lot of  
190 dues paying. I learned a lot and I love music so I always enjoyed it, but it wasn't really  
191 until I moved to L.A. nine years ago that I started becoming seriously a jazz piano player.  
192 And a lot of that was precipitated by Bill Watrous, who came and was the guest artist in  
193 the late 80's at the community college where I taught in Texas. And the students were  
194 saying "oh Mr. Watrous you should hear Mr. Berg our director play." And so on the  
195 concert he said "you've got to play," and I said no, this is about the students. And he said,  
196 "no, no, just one song, just play with me." So I did and he hired me. So he really  
197 encouraged me to move to Los Angeles and my kids were getting older and life was  
198 changing and so these last nine years I've started to really be a jazz piano player.

199 MR: Well that's great. He's a nice guy.

200 SB: He's been great, a true friend and mentor.

201 MR: You mentioned writing for Hollywood and the studios. How did that come about? Do  
202 you need to meet people? Is there a way like ...

203 SB: My standard line is it's a business of relationships, and all it takes is one. That's another  
204 interesting thing is when you read interviews of film composers, well I was playing in  
205 some Rock band and so-and-so became a fan and I did their student film and then they  
206 made it, and I mean it's never I graduated from film scoring school and made phone calls  
207 and I got hired. Or they came and recruited me like lawyers. It's totally relationships.  
208 Every cool job I've ever gotten has been from some convoluted path. And what I  
209 encourage my students to do, and people I talk to, is just be out there, be a musician, be  
210 playing, be where you can meet people. Because you never know what's going to lead to  
211 what. I orchestrated an album for the Pop band Chicago because the co-leader, Jim  
212 Panko, the trombone player is a big Bill Watrous fan and always came out to hear the  
213 band, and heard the orchestrations I did with Bill and said we're going to do an album  
214 with a big band and I want you to write all the charts. And I'm going sure, like this will  
215 really happen. And it did. So it's definitely a business of relationships. Some of the movie  
216 things I've done have come from Rock things I've done, and the same Rock producers  
217 have gotten involved in the movie industry and I've gotten in kind of that way. So that's  
218 how it goes. There's no path.

219 MR: Is it a high pressure situation, writing for films?

220 SB: Yeah, it's an interesting thing, I had to orchestrate an hour's worth of music for a Warner  
221 Brothers film in about two weeks, all while I'm teaching and playing and doing all the  
222 other stuff I do. And it was just totally under the gun, and then the release gets delayed by

223 a year. And you wonder what all that was about. I think that the bigger the medium  
224 actually the less pressure in some ways. The most pressure is in commercials, in that little  
225 thirty second spot. I think advertising agencies, agencies rent offices and hire staff just for  
226 that one client and if they lose that client the bottom drops out. Tremendously charged  
227 and they try to disperse that pressure to everyone they work with. And then television  
228 seems to be next and then movies, once people have made it to that level it seems like  
229 they have more of a comfort level with what they're doing. And for me it actually seemed  
230 you were a little less second guessed in movies than you are in television, and a lot less  
231 than you are in the commercial world. So it's interesting. But in all those things you're  
232 dealing with people who probably are sticking their nose a little farther into your thing  
233 than what they have any business.

234 MR: Wow you just anticipated my question. Because you're usually dealing with non-  
235 musicians when you're doing commercials.

236 SB: Right.

237 MR: And do you have trouble trying to bring to reality what they're describing to you?

238 SB: Sometimes. You can think you're right on the wavelength and you're totally wrong. It's  
239 gotten to where sometimes I'll just say can you give me an example of something that's  
240 what you mean. Because they can say something and the words that they are using evoke  
241 a certain thing but it's really the opposite of what they want. There's a famous film  
242 scoring story of a well known composer, who the director said for this one cue, give me  
243 Debussy, I want Debussy.

244 MR: Yeah.

245 SB: Have you heard this one?

246 MR: No. I have not.

247 SB: It's a true story. He gets on the scoring stage and he's got LaMer nailed. And it's  
248 gorgeous and the textures, and the cellos with five different parts. And he finishes and the  
249 orchestra is all tapping their bows, and the director walks up to him and says "you know,  
250 I hate it. I just hate it." So at that point the director said "I want my mother" I think that's  
251 the quote, that's what he said, I want my mom. But he got with the director and what the  
252 composer found out was that the director really wanted Mozart. He just threw out the first  
253 classical name he could think of, which was Debussy. But the sound he had in mind was  
254 Mozart.

255 MR: It's all the same thing, isn't it?

256 SB: Yeah. So the second T.V. series that I wrote for I did a children's series for two years on  
257 ABC. And the very first episode there was a turtle in the episode. The kid in the episode  
258 had a pet and I wrote this little piece of music. And the producer comes in and I thought  
259 she was joking, she said "you know that music's not quite working, you've written land



260 turtle music and that's really an aquatic turtle." I thought she was joking. I said "well you  
261 had it in an terrarium, you faked me out here, I thought it was a land turtle. She was  
262 serious. I had to change the music and somehow figure out what she meant by water  
263 turtle music.

264 MR: It's really fascinating to watch the trends that commercials seem to jump on. Like I've  
265 been noticing lately a lot of commercials that have a female vocalist imitating Sheryl  
266 Crow. And this seems to be the hot thing. And I wonder how long that will last, until  
267 something else comes along.

268 SB: Well it's because one of them worked. And that's the big thing in the media these days.  
269 Anything that works, let's just do that because it's already proved itself. And it can be  
270 frustrating when you're composing because it puts you in a very narrow box. But it's a  
271 gig.

272 MR: Yeah, it's a gig. Drop some names on me. What are some of the Rock bands, let's see  
273 you did Chicago.

274 SB: Well I'm so pleased that I got a Grammy nomination for working with Kiss.

275 MR: Oh my, is that right?

276 SB: Played piano and orchestrated for Kiss on their recent Psycho Circus album. And Gene  
277 Simmons actually is an interesting guy and when we were working with him I had a  
278 writing partner and we asked him how are the rehearsals going for the tour? He said  
279 "what does it matter?" He said "we can suck and fifty thousand people will come to every  
280 concert." He said "the problem with you jazz musicians is you want to play good for  
281 seventy-five dollars."

282 MR: Great quote. Thank you, Gene.

283 SB: I worked with Richard Marks on a couple of albums, who is a great Pop star. I worked on  
284 an album for a guy named Eliot Smith that "Billboard" magazine named the number two  
285 album of the year last year, it was a really great alternative songwriter. So you never  
286 know. I mean I've worked with Mickey Gilley in Country music and I've kind of worked  
287 with a wide variety, there's some Japanese, I do a lot of work for Japanese superstars and  
288 they've got a whole sound. And I love that because this one guy I work with typically  
289 uses 80 or 90 piece orchestras on Japanese Rock tunes. So it's like doing a film score.

290 MR: Do you usually get the assignment musically after the fact, after they've laid down most  
291 of the tune and then, okay, now what can you do with this?

292 SB: Right. Typically that's true. Depending. I mean obviously if you're doing a scoring thing  
293 then you're wide open but when you're working with Rock bands typically they've laid  
294 down tracks and then it's your job to come in. So it's an interesting kind of a straight  
295 jacket and yet you're still trying to create something.

296 MR: I would guess, and sometimes it must be a challenge to — how can anything be put over  
297 this? That would be my sense.

298 SB: Especially when it's heavy metal and then there's a ninety piece orchestra.

299 MR: Yeah. There's so much going on. Well. It's a challenge.

300 SB: It's another one of those challenges and one time this Japanese guy that I work with had a  
301 kind of a power metal ballad thing. And he said I'd like to do an alternate version with  
302 just the lead vocal and fifty strings, and write whatever you want. And so now all I had  
303 was a lead vocal and I wasn't married to the chord progression. And there was even about  
304 a twelve or sixteen bar guitar solo in the middle where now there was nothing. And I  
305 wrote like for Verklärte Nacht, Schönberg, for those sixteen bars. And the guy loved it,  
306 and he released that instead of the original version, with totally different harmonies, and  
307 it went to number one in Japan. So that was about the one time I ever got a clean plate.

308 MR: Do you do all your own business as far as contracts and all that kind of thing?

309 SB: Yeah I have a partner and he kind of manages the business of the office so I'm not having  
310 to fill out too many contracts or copy any parts or hire players. So it works out well  
311 because he's a great musician too but he's also willing to do that stuff.

312 MR: I get tired thinking about your schedule I guess.

313 SB: Yeah I mean I am the Chair of Jazz Music in the Thornton School at University of  
314 Southern California and that's kind of a full time job too. But that's a great job. I love it.  
315 We have wonderful students and incredible faculty. It's a real Who's Who.

316 MR: Well you must have an answer for people who say you can't teach jazz.

317 SB: I definitely have an answer for that. You can teach jazz. We must teach jazz. You can't  
318 teach talent. There's no question about that. But you can teach jazz. And what we've  
319 discovered is it's a language. And the way to teach a language is on different levels at the  
320 same time. You wouldn't want to take a language just out of a textbook, you wouldn't  
321 want to just learn it conversationally and not be literate in it. So the great thing about a  
322 university is it's an environment where if it's done well you can really do both. You can  
323 mentor on that kind of visceral, conversational level, and you can also then come in after  
324 the fact and teach the literacy, which I think is important.

325 MR: By that do you mean teaching some amount of learning the craft by ear and by gut? And  
326 then following that up or at the same time teaching chords.

327 SB: I think it's better when you follow it up. I think that's the way we learn to speak. We  
328 were talking for a long time before we were diagramming sentences.

329 MR: Well I really like that idea, and especially, I mean because I've seen other instances  
330 where people try to do it the opposite way, teaching all the vocabulary, the chord  
331 structure and everything and then trying to apply it. And I don't know if it works.

332 SB: I think it can be overload. You've got all this information and you just feel okay I have  
333 this information, what in the world am I supposed to be doing with this? It means nothing  
334 to me if my students can write every seven to third resolution for every chord change but  
335 then you play a chord and say sing the seven to third and they can't hear it. So I'd rather  
336 they could sing the seven to third even if they didn't know how to write it just yet, and  
337 find it on their horn and learn to play it, and learn, not only how to play it, but how does it  
338 feel? How does the tension release of that feel? What's the feeling you get by holding the  
339 seventh? What's the feeling you get by releasing it to the third? How can you work with  
340 that? How can you play with that? How can you create something with that? And then  
341 we'll get around to analyzing it so maybe you can use it as a writer, use it in other  
342 situations, use it more fully, figure out other things that go with it. So I think that's what  
343 we're trying to do where I teach and in a lot of places.

344 MR: Does everybody on your faculty seem to share that basic philosophy?

345 SB: We have a lot of different philosophies but the thing is, the sum total of that ends up  
346 being that philosophy. So we have John Clayton, a world class bassist and composer,  
347 who says to his students "burn your fake books. I never want to see a fake book in your  
348 presence. I want you to go out on the gigs and just use your ear and learn to hear and I  
349 don't want you to know what the changes are, I just want you to be able to sing them and  
350 be able to find them." And that's a crash course in developing your ear. And on the other  
351 side we have Tom Mason who is a brilliant jazz pedagogue, who is ripping it apart and  
352 analyzing it for the students. The composite is they get the whole thing.

353 MR: What's the future for those graduates?

354 SB: Well that's the million dollar question. I'm glad I teach in L.A., in Los Angeles, because  
355 I think there's a lot of opportunity for my students and I've got a brilliant jazz piano  
356 student who got his master's degree who is touring with Christina Aguilera right now,  
357 and another brilliant jazz piano student who's touring with Big Bad Voodoo Daddy, and  
358 another one who's recording with Anthony Wilson and Ronald Muldrew and a bunch of  
359 guys like that and he's making it in the hard core jazz scene. Three of my recent  
360 graduates. So I think that it's important to realize that there's a big world of music out  
361 there and become the best musician that you can be and if you're a great jazz musician,  
362 you're the best musician you can be. And don't shun any opportunities. Don't shun the  
363 chance to do something that's a little outside the box for jazz because I think I'm living  
364 proof, I have a wonderful career in music and I get to play great music also, at times like  
365 this. So I think I get the best of all the worlds but so few are going to make it to that  
366 pinnacle where they can make their living all the time exclusively playing their  
367 instrument and jazz. So our methodology at USC is to help them see that there is a future  
368 and when they're in a place like L.A. it acts upon them and they start to get it in ways that

369 I could never explain to them. So it's fun. I hear from my former students and we always  
370 have a talk their senior year, where they have this look of panic, of what am I going to do.  
371 And they seek me out, they come to my office, now what? And I always tell them, I give  
372 them a little advice, talk to them, but I say basically I'm going to see you a year after you  
373 graduate and you'll be well into what you're doing. And that invariably is the case I  
374 think. They come back a year after they graduate and they're into whatever it is. And  
375 some good percentage of them are mostly playing and mostly playing jazz. But a lot of  
376 them have just found other things and they still play their jazz, like I do. I'm not on the  
377 road every week just playing jazz. I suppose I'd like to be maybe, I guess you've got to  
378 be careful what you wish for. But I could see at some point in my life doing that.

379 MR: I can see your partner calling you up and saying "did you wish for something last week  
380 because the phone stopped ringing, now what's going on here?"

381 SB: Well I'd be even more careful about wishing for doing that full time. Because they I  
382 couldn't play at all.

383 MR: Well I like what you just said basically about students having to be versatile or having to  
384 have the kind of mindset where they're willing to be versatile. Because if you said there's  
385 opportunities out there, they might not always be in that specific niche that the student  
386 thought.

387 SB: Right. And I'll talk to a young, talented student and they're out there, a tenor player, and  
388 he'll say "well I'm going to go to New York because I know there's a lot of great players  
389 out there, but I'm going to rise to the top, I'm going to be the one that makes it." And you  
390 don't want to rain on their parade because they might. But I find it easy enough to say  
391 you know there's only one Joshua Redman and he's smart enough to have a degree from  
392 Harvard.

393 MR: Ah. Isn't it nice to have someone you can pull on to make that example.

394 SB: But how many other people are in that world where they can just, a young player, make  
395 their living playing jazz? I hope it will be more and more. I hope that — there are kinds  
396 of music that enjoy ubiquity and yet they're obscure at the same time, and jazz is that  
397 way. It's everywhere and yet people aren't necessarily paying for it.

398 MR: Interesting, yeah. And you look at the audience that's here and I mean these people are so  
399 into it, yet they're all up there in age, and you're going to wonder like are there going to  
400 be replacements.

401 SB: I don't worry about that so much because what symphony orchestras discovered, they  
402 worried about that too, that the audience is getting older and they're going to just  
403 disappear. And what they discovered is that it's not that it's just this group of people in  
404 that age group, as people move into that age group their tastes change. So it's always  
405 going to be a lot of people in that age group that gravitate towards those more artistic

406 kinds of music. But I don't think that that's the total answer and I would like to see a  
407 younger demographic for jazz. I play at a jazz club in L.A. that is families and young  
408 people and college kids, and it's straight ahead jazz and the place is packed every night.  
409 So that's a hopeful sign. But if we can find a way to make people aware that that thing  
410 that's all around them, that jazz thing is something that they can be consumers of, we can  
411 do a lot better. And I was president of the International Association of Jazz Educators for  
412 two years. And that's an organization that's dedicated to building a new jazz audience  
413 from the ground up. And the idea is if we can get in and teach the teachers, teach the  
414 general music teachers who never had jazz in college to love jazz and expose their  
415 students to it. We've started an artist outreach network with IAJE to get the labels — well  
416 you've got these guys on tour, let's get on tour let's get them into elementary schools.  
417 Michael Brecker showing a kid what a saxophone sounds like and try to get those values  
418 imprinted early. We can build a bigger niche for jazz. And the jazz industry is getting  
419 smarter. They've been — Country music really took off when they started the CMA and  
420 they had their own advocacy group that all the labels paid in to and they started the  
421 Country Music Awards and they created a higher profile, and then Country really took  
422 off and became a much bigger piece of the market. Well jazz is now starting to do the  
423 same thing. And it's in its infancy but that has now, an organization like that has begun  
424 with label support. And who knows? Maybe over the next ten years that group will do, in  
425 some small measure, what CMA did for Country music. So it'll be nice. It could be  
426 better, maybe I'll have more gigs and my students will have more gigs, and there'll be  
427 more audience.

428 MR: You don't see too much jazz in the video format on T.V. I suppose that would help too.  
429 In a sense I wish it wasn't necessary because I think jazz is enough for your imagination.  
430 But I suppose you have to do whatever you can.

431 SB: Yeah you have to play the hand that's dealt. And you can't ignore the habits of a  
432 generation. You can't turn a blind eye to the way that they're going to receive and are  
433 receiving their entertainment. So there has to be a changeover into that. We must have  
434 jazz videos, and I think BET is trying to accomplish that in some way with their Bet On  
435 Jazz channel. So pieces are there. There's an infrastructure that's in place it just remains  
436 to be seen what's going to be done with it. It's improving, I can feel that. I think that  
437 there's a greater awareness of jazz and we're starting to see jazz as an accouterment to a  
438 lifestyle that, if you're a little more sophisticated, maybe you're out of your twenty-  
439 something thing, and you enjoy a good glass of port and this kind of thing, well there's  
440 jazz then. You start to see that and then I think that's certainly speaks to the appeal of  
441 Diana Krall and some of ... you know she sold over a million CD's. Well that means that

442           there's some demographic now that's significant and is accepting this as a part of their  
443           lifestyle.

444 MR: I think of John Pizzarelli in that vein. He's found a niche there I think.

445 SB: Yeah and there's a whole hipster thing starting to happen with Curt Elling, Patricia  
446 Barber, people like that, that this melding of kind of a hipster appearance, a Hollywood  
447 kind of swinger's look with jazz, that also could be an interesting trend for us.

448 MR: Who are the jazz musicians that you aspired to, or just thought that these are the guys  
449 man.

450 SB: It's a long list. At the center of it all for me growing up was Oscar Peterson. That's why it  
451 was so gratifying to do this album with Ray Brown and that big band tribute album,  
452 because that was the motivation. And there was a time I was even going back and forth,  
453 classical music, jazz music, what do I want to do. And in one kind of astounding week,  
454 Vladimir Horowitz came out of one of his retirements and played in Houston where I was  
455 living, and Oscar Peterson came through and did a solo recital in the same hall. And I left  
456 the Vladimir Horowitz concert so enthused about practicing and so excited. But I left the  
457 Oscar Peterson concert saying that's what I want to be. And I was about 17 at the time.  
458 That's when it really hit home that I'm going to be a jazz musician, and I'll always love  
459 my classical music but this is it. But growing up my dad exposed me to a lot. He had all  
460 the original 78's, Savoy and Dial, all the Charlie Parker and Lucky Thompson and all  
461 those great — Don Byas and Coleman Hawkins "Body and Soul" he had all that stuff on  
462 78's. And my dad is a trumpet player so he had probably every Miles Davis album. And  
463 he was giving me big dosages of Oscar Peterson and Art Tatum. But I think to this day  
464 maybe my favorite player in history is Cannonball Adderley.

465 MR: I'm just looking at Tim because he knows that Cannonball is my guy.

466 SB: Really?

467 MR: Well let's talk about Cannonball Adderley.

468 SB: Let's forget all those other guys. Milt Jackson way up there too.

469 MR: Well I'm just so pleased you said that because that's how I feel too but I'm wondering  
470 why.

471 SB: Oh I know why.

472 MR: Okay.

473 SB: I know why. Because he's the perfect culmination of every attribute. Impeccable  
474 technique, impeccable time, as sophisticated harmonically and melodically as anybody of  
475 his day, and yet so incredibly soulful and bluesy. And you put all those things together  
476 and there's just no other player for me that's ever synergized all those things so well. And  
477 nobody's ever swung any more than that.

478 MR: I like this guy. Well said. I feel the same exact way. I'm a saxophone player, so he just  
479 like, he had it all. He had the tone, it was so vibrant and uplifting.

480 SB: Oh absolutely.

481 MR: And then, put on top of the fact that he could talk to people.

482 SB: Absolutely so.

483 MR: Which not everybody can.

484 SB: He was a school teacher.

485 MR: Yeah.

486 SB: And had his own talk show at a time when there weren't many African-Americans that  
487 had network talk shows.

488 MR: Yes. I've got to get a copy of those things. I wonder if they exist.

489 SB: I think Roy McCurdy, who I play with a fair bit in Los Angeles, has quite a few of those  
490 things.

491 MR: Oh, thanks for the lead.

492 SB: Because he played for that show and talks about it quite a bit.

493 MR: All right. I'll be giving Roy a call. I didn't know that until a while ago, someone else told  
494 me that, I was very fascinated by that. But you know the band he had in the 60's with Joe  
495 Zawinul and I mean that's it.

496 SB: We have some of those CD's in — both Julieann, my wife and I, in our cars we have  
497 Cannonball CD's in both our cars right now from that era. So wherever we're going we  
498 can always get right to it.

499 MR: Isn't that great.

500 SB: I love the Nancy Wilson/Cannonball.

501 MR: That's the one album — you know you do the thing about well if you're going to be on  
502 the beach... that's on my list.

503 SB: We're going to be on the desert island, right?

504 MR: Isn't it curious if you buy the CD of that, they rearranged the tunes. And you'll find it  
505 very annoying. Because on the album they have instrumental, vocal, instrumental. Well  
506 what they did on the CD is they put all the vocals, and then they put all the instrumentals.

507 SB: It sounds like two different CD's.

508 MR: Yeah. And you get so used to hearing the one tune end and you know what the key's  
509 going to be for the next. And I have to program it the way it used to be. But that is great.  
510 Well you have good taste.

511 SB: Likewise.

512 MR: What's on the docket for you in the very near future? Writing assignments?

513 SB: Yeah, I'm doing some writing. I just wrapped up a couple of cool television projects. We  
514 did the Dennis Miller Millennium Special which was a blast. I did a Korean movie. So

515 you never know what the phone's going to ring, and so I've got some more of the  
516 Japanese Rock things to do and I'm doing a project with an opera singer who wants to do  
517 an orchestral album of songs. So it's just — if the door's open, interesting things come in.  
518 But I don't really gauge my life on the writing projects. To me it's what's coming up. I'm  
519 getting to play the Norway jazz cruise with my trio, so that's what's exciting for me, and  
520 I'm going to be working on my next CD this summer and there's three singers that I work  
521 with who are all wonderful who I'm doing CD's with this summer as well. And hopefully  
522 Bill Watrous and I will be doing another album soon. So I hope to be in the studio  
523 playing lots of jazz over the next six or seven months.

524 MR: Wow. You must have a couple of different calendars to make sure that you're in the right  
525 place at the right time with the right hat on.

526 SB: That's the hardest part. It's really the hardest part. You don't want to end up with a  
527 feeling that you're not quite nailing it, not quite taking care of business for the university  
528 or for the writing office or for the playing or for the family. So that's really the hardest  
529 part, because I don't want to disappoint in any of those areas, so I'm constantly trying to  
530 figure out that balance.

531 MR: Do you have any nonmusical hobbies or anything? I ask that because I don't and I just  
532 wondered if there's something that gets you out of that.

533 SB: See there's nothing that's more refreshing to me than to practice the piano. So whatever  
534 I've been doing, the best diversion would be to sit down and play. I do work out, I like to  
535 exercise, I think to do what I do and do it well it's a good idea to be in pretty good shape.  
536 And if I get a chance to play some softball or throw a football around, I love sports. But I  
537 haven't played golf in 17 years I think. I can't imagine spending four hours doing  
538 anything — if I had those hours I should be at the piano. I couldn't live with myself. So  
539 yeah I don't have any regular hobby. I'm lucky in that what I love to do best is what I do.

540 MR: Wow. Good statement. People ask sometimes like when do you know you've made it.  
541 But if you're doing what you love and being fairly successful at it...

542 SB: That'd be the only gauge. Because otherwise you're chasing something that doesn't have  
543 any definition. Because even if you've made it in other people's eyes, it may not have  
544 been the way that you intended to and so it feels like you missed the mark somehow. So  
545 I'm going to try not to ponder when and if I'll ever make it. I mean if I can play a nice  
546 chorus of "Cherokee" I've made it for that day.

547 MR: Yeah, you get one of these from Herb Ellis.

548 SB: I made it today.

549 MR: That was one form. Well this has really been fascinating.

550 SB: It's a pleasure.



551 MR: I appreciate your coming down and adding to our little archive here of information,  
552 because I think you had some really good outlooks on things that I haven't had before.  
553 SB: I'm honored to be a part of it.  
554 MR: Great. Thanks so much.  
555 SB: Thank you, Monk.  
556 MR: Oh you know what? I'm going to edit this out, because I wanted to do something here. I  
557 wanted to put on just a bit of this.  
558 [audio interlude]  
559 MR: Was this with the Watrous big band?  
560 SB: Yes. I tried to do something from many different Oscar Peterson projects that I love. And  
561 one he did, an album called "Busting Out" with the Ernie Wilkins Big Band, which was a  
562 great album. So I thought wouldn't it be fun to do one big band cut. So I wrote this piece,  
563 that's the title of the album, based on the Gene Lees book, "The Will to Swing." So this  
564 piece is "The Will." And I play with Bill's big band and I know that it doesn't get any  
565 better than that. So they came in, they walked in and thirty minutes later they walked out  
566 we had an incredible piece of music.  
567 MR: Does that flip you out or what?  
568 SB: Yeah. We had two takes actually. And I could have used either one.  
569 MR: Yeah. Nice.  
570 SB: That's the cats.  
571 MR: Okay, well I'll look forward to checking this whole CD out. And I'll say goodbye again  
572 so that we can put it in. So thank you.  
573 SB: Pleasure, Monk.