

Carl Allen

Carl Allen was born on April 25, 1961 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and is a powerful role model for the twenty-first century young jazz musician. He has found success and fulfillment as an educator with the Juilliard School; as a producer with his own company, Big Apple Productions; and as a performer with over 200 recordings to his credit. In 2012 he received an honorary degree in Humane Letters from Snow College. Carl created The Art of Elvin tribute band dedicated to Art Blakey and Elvin Jones, and currently leads The Carl Allen Quartet.

Carl was interviewed in Atlanta, GA, on January 4, 2013, by Monk Rowe, director of the Hamilton College Jazz Archive.

MR: My name is Monk Rowe and we are at the JazzEd Network Conference in Atlanta. And I'm pleased to have Carl Allen with me this afternoon. And if you were at a party and someone who you didn't know asked you, "well what do you do for a living —"

CA: How would I answer that?

MR: What's your short answer?

CA: Oh boy, well first of all there is no short answer.

MR: That's why I asked.

CA: Well, I'm a musician. And what I do for a living is that. I mean I play and produce and record, but I'm also the Artistic Director for the Jazz Studies Program at the Juilliard School. And I tell people, particularly as I try to convince my wife, that it's really two full time jobs. Because as a musician, I'm an active musician. It's not like this is something I used to do. And then, but the two are intertwined in a very creative way in that a lot of what I do as a musician I've used that to fuel and create new things for our program, which is also part of what I ask our faculty to do, so that it's not two separate lives completely. But your experiences as a musician really went back to the classroom. Because nowadays I feel that the classroom — there's nothing that will replace the bandstand, but it's almost like the classroom is the new bandstand in a sense.

MR: Yeah. Are we getting jazz professors who've had jazz professors who've had jazz professors — well we're getting to a point where some of the jazz professors didn't really have gigging lives?

CA: Yeah, that's true. I mean I think historically when you look at the inception of a lot of jazz programs, a lot of those guys who were running programs, and I give them a lot of credit, but a lot of those guys were, they were either, they had backgrounds in education and so they went from elementary school straight up through a doctorate program to running a program, without having any performance experience on a high level

40 consistently. Or the other thing that's starting to happen is that guys were coming off
41 Buddy Rich's band or Woody Herman's band, Stan Kenton's band, with no teaching
42 experience, and then went into the classroom and started forming programs. And so I
43 think with the combination of those two you had, in some cases, either people who
44 taught, because they couldn't play or that was the mindset, or those who played because
45 they couldn't teach. And nowadays of course that's all changed where you have people
46 who are teaching who are great players. And it's no longer solely an issue of people
47 teaching because they can't play or don't have gigs. I think there are a variety of reasons
48 why one gravitates toward that. I know for me personally, you know, I got to a point in
49 my life where I felt I needed to get back. And a lot of people that I had played with and
50 spent time around from the Freddie Hubbards to Jackie McLean to Art Blakey and Tony
51 Williams and those kind of people, who were either passed or kind of in that twilight
52 phase of their life, I felt like they had given me information that needed to be shared. But
53 it was also a point in my life on a personal level where my son was six at the time. He's
54 now nineteen as of January 1st. But he was really having a hard time with me being on the
55 road. He was cutting up in school and other things, because his dad was gone. So you
56 know, when the Juilliard program started and I got the call that said we want you to come
57 in at the ground level, you know, I was not artistic director at that time. And so for me it
58 was just something for me to do while I was home, and allowed me to be home a little
59 more, you know, with the family. And this is my fifth year now, as Artistic Director. So,
60 you know, the point is is that I think a lot of people who are teaching are doing it for a
61 variety of reasons and I do see the value of being able to give back. It's not easy.

62 MR: And economics has to be part of that issue. Is it even possible these days to make, to just
63 be a gigging musician?

64 CA: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

65 MR: Yeah?

66 CA: Absolutely. I mean I know I have a lot of friends who aren't doing just that. Someone
67 joked recently that if you don't have a gig in some way or fashion affiliated with the
68 school, you're not working. Because most guys now have, whether it's a couple of
69 students here or there, or some kind of regular position. But a number of my friends are
70 doing just full time. But even those guys, I think they're still involved in some kind of
71 way, whether it's a master class here or there, or something. But it's certainly possible.
72 It's not as easy now as it once was, say fifteen years ago or ten years ago. I was telling
73 someone recently, you know, we were both joking about how we remember the days, not
74 too long ago, where every day you fall in line for a gig. And you remember many, many
75 days when you just were begging for a day off because you had two or three gigs a day
76 and record dates and all of that. And that being said, I would not say that to say that the

77 scene is dying. I'm not one of those. I'm more optimistic than that. I think things just
78 change. And it's just different. I think as we get older, the scene has changed from our
79 eyes, because we're not doing the things that we once were doing. Hopefully you're not.
80 Hopefully you progress and you do some other things. But I talk to some of my students,
81 and they're busy working all the time. But it's a different scene, particularly in New
82 York. There are different scenes. So you find yourself doing different things for different
83 people.

84 MR: Okay. We're going to come back to that. But I was curious, you were born in 1961. Do
85 you remember the first music that seeped into your consciousness?

86 CA: Oh yeah. I'm the youngest of five kids, and I grew up in the jazz capital of the world, as
87 you know, being Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

88 MR: I did not know that.

89 CA: I keep telling myself that. But we were raised just by my mother. My mother was a
90 gospel singer. And growing up, my mother, we were brought up in the church. And so
91 when I was really, really young, I remember we were not allowed to listen to anything
92 other than gospel music in the house. Of course we did, and of course during certain
93 times of the day when we knew it was time for her to come home from work, different
94 people had watch out duties. And we were listening to Parliament Funkadelic, you know,
95 all this R&B and soul, and so all of a sudden, "Ma's coming" and you'd put on Mahalia
96 Jackson you know. So that was considered devil's music. You couldn't listen to that. So
97 of course a little later she kind of eased up a little bit. But I remember the first music that
98 I listened to that really touched me was Mahalia Jackson. And then Mighty Clouds of Joy
99 and Blind Boys of Alabama and Aretha Franklin and all that. And then later on, with the
100 R&B stuff, you know, Otis Redding. And my brother that's next to me in age, Eddie
101 Allen, he got into jazz before me. And it really was just he and I that were really into
102 jazz. My two older brothers played for a bit and they stopped. My sister never played, she
103 just talks a lot. But I remember when my brother got into jazz I must have been around
104 eleven or twelve. And I couldn't really hear it. I was like man, I'm not really feeling this.
105 And so I remember he put on Ramsey Lewis Trio, "The In Crowd," and I was kind of
106 like okay, well that's kind of got a vibe to it.

107 MR: It's got a backbeat, right?

108 CA: Oh yeah, yeah. Maurice White.

109 MR: Yeah, that's right.

110 CA: And then later on he started to explain to me, really this bridge. And he said, "well man, I
111 know you say you don't like jazz, but if you check out this Kool and the Gang tune,
112 they've got sus chords in them." And I'm like oh man, I've got no idea what he's talking
113 about. Sus chords are big in jazz. And so he was trying to get me there from that route.

114 And so I'll never forget, when I was twelve I bought a record. It was a Benny Carter
115 record. I bought it for fifty cents. And I hated it, because I didn't understand it. And so I
116 was just pleased that I sold it to him for a dollar. So I got my money back, and I had
117 enough money to buy some candy. So I was really straight. But yeah, but I think the first
118 thing that I heard was gospel music that really touched me. And I think from that I really
119 started to understand the importance of music — the feeling of the music was important.
120 At that time it was never about anything else. Because in church, if it didn't feel good,
121 you couldn't touch people. I mean, you know, when people are falling out and doing
122 other things, and what we used to call "getting the Holy Ghost," and all of this — it was
123 anointing with the music and all these other things that were happening. And so I just
124 grew up understanding, from people that I had been around who could play, you've got to
125 make people feel something. So it's less about you, more about music, more about the
126 people who are listening to the music. So it wasn't about me, me, me, it's about, you
127 know, you're serving people through this music.

128 MR: Wow. That's a good statement. Did the — I have a particular favorite in Cannonball
129 Adderley, and the soul. The late sixties, you know. I wonder if that's something that you
130 got into.

131 CA: Oh man. I got into it and didn't really know I was into it. Let me tell you how I got into
132 it. Well from — I went to hear Cannonball in 1974 in Milwaukee, before he passed away.
133 And I remember, they did a clinic at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. And my
134 brother was there, and he didn't know I was there, I didn't know he was there. And so we
135 were both there on like these field trips. Different schools. And so during the clinic I
136 raised my hand. You know, they asked did you have any questions. But you see prior to
137 that I always wanted to play with my brother and my cousin and his friends, and they said
138 I was too young, right? So that's a whole other story. So anyway, he said, "any
139 questions?" I raised my hand and I said, "what do you do if you want to play and people
140 won't let you play with them?" Right? So, I'm thirteen, right? So he says, "well young
141 man, you just find other people to play with because somebody'll let you play at some
142 point. Next question." I was like, oh, okay. But the thing that always struck me with that
143 is that when Cannonball would play, it was so warm and so groovin', and it still had this
144 triplet thing but it had this groove thing. Now from that point on, there was this, I was
145 kind of on this mission to figure out this whole — beyond soul jazz. Growing up in
146 church, you know, I always loved gospel music, but I always loved jazz. And I've always
147 wanted to find a way to bridge this gap. And all of my records, they're that kind of
148 bridging of the two genres. And I remember at some point in the nineties I did a record
149 with Donald Byrd called "A City Called Heaven," and Bobby Hutcherson, Joe
150 Henderson, Rufus Reid was on it. And so we were doing this tune and we're taking a

151 break, and I'm talking to Byrd and I said, "Byrd," I said, "listen man. This record, man,
152 that we're doing, is kind of what I've been trying to hear and I'm just trying to figure it
153 out." He says, "what do you mean?" I said, "well it's not soul jazz like Cannonball, it's
154 kind of like that but I'm trying to — I'm hearing like this jazz gospel marriage thing."
155 And he says, "well let me tell you something about Coltrane," he says, "because I think
156 that will help you in this direction. He said, "a lot of people used to say Coltrane's music
157 was spiritual. But people use the term very loosely in the generic sense." He said, "but
158 Coltrane's music was spiritual in a literal sense because Coltrane grew up in church,
159 playing hymns, and a lot of his tunes, and even during a lot of his solos, he would quote
160 different parts of these hymns." I went like wow. And so he says, "that's what you're
161 hearing, man, just keep searching, you'll find it." You know he said, "now I don't want to
162 point you in a direction because it may not be in the direction." "But," he said, "I think
163 you're on to what you're trying to hear." And so one of the lessons that I learned from
164 that, which is something that I try to do when I'm speaking with young musicians, is just
165 the importance of encouraging people to find their voice. You know, Dizzy told me once
166 after a concert in Japan, he said, "Carl, the way that all great artists created is that you
167 have a foot in the past and a foot in the future, so you're moving forward with a sense of
168 tradition." And so what he was talking about was not getting stuck in just tradition and
169 the past. You've got to be aware of what happened before you, but don't get stuck there.
170 Seeing what's happening now, and trying to move it forward. And if you think about it,
171 that was his life. That's 'cause this whole thing came up because I had made a comment
172 to him about how I wish I had been around when bebop came about. And that's when he
173 told me that. But, you know, when dealing with young musicians I think it's real
174 important, particularly now, is to give them permission to really explore what they have,
175 but understand, to really know and understand the tradition. You know I think it's
176 unreasonable for my generation to assume that 17- and 19-year-olds are going to be about
177 Byrd or Blakey as we were. So I think we have to find a way to help them bridge that
178 gap. There are always gaps we have to bridge. So I think it's fully incumbent on my
179 generation to help do that.

180 MR: Who would the 17- and 18-year-olds be passionate about, in your experience?

181 CA: Robert Glasper. A lot of the young kids are really into Glasper. Vijay Iyer. Lionel
182 Loueke.

183 MR: Wow. I guess I would have guessed, well it probably speaks to my age, but maybe even
184 like the Michael Brecker generation.

185 CA: Oh. A lot of those kids don't even know who he was. It's interesting. You know we had
186 an experience at Juilliard recently, something that happened that really hurt me. We had
187 did a concert. One of the things that I try to do in our program, from a programming

188 perspective, is, you know I look at music that I think the students should know. And I try
189 to deal with something from a traditional perspective, something a little bit more modern,
190 you know, because I often think about my experiences when I would visit colleges and
191 universities to do master classes and concerts, and I'm dealing with jazz majors, and they
192 don't have any jazz in their book. And I ask the instructors, I say, "well why is it you
193 have all this pop/hip hop stuff in their book?"

194 MR: You mean like big band arrangements of —

195 CA: Yeah.

196 MR: Okay.

197 CA: And my thing is they say, "well the kids don't want to play that." I say well man, okay,
198 so what's happening is that you're having people get a degree in jazz, and in some cases
199 have never learned, they've never played Basie, they've never played Monk, they've
200 never played Duke, they've never played Stan Kenton. And so, part of my concern is that
201 that continues. And now those kids are now teaching. And so now you have generations
202 of people with degrees in jazz that have never played jazz. It's kind of hard to imagine it
203 happening but I can see that happening. And so yeah — but, so we had a concert a couple
204 of months ago, the music of Cedar Walton. And I've always loved Cedar's playing. He
205 always had a very strong concept about writing and the way that he plays. And so, you
206 know, I called Cedar and I said, "look, Cedar, we're doing this concert of your music,
207 and I would be honored if you just came to the master class before the concert. Just give
208 the students insight into your music and how you go about writing and playing." So he
209 says, "my first response is no, but let me think about it, because I know I can't tell you
210 no, but let me think about it." So he calls back the next day, "Sir Allen, I can do it, but
211 I'm not comfortable." I said, "well what's wrong?" He said, "well it's Juilliard, man, I've
212 never been a part of an institution of higher learning." I said, "Cedar," I said, "listen, all I
213 want you to do is just come and do you, whatever that is, just do you." And it was really
214 wonderful, because he came, and all of our students had did arrangements of his music.
215 So he got a chance to listen and play some of the tunes with them and correct a couple of
216 notes in the melody and some other things. And so after the concert one of my faculty
217 members had overheard some students saying, "man, you know, I don't know why we
218 have to do this music. Why is that music important? Why can't we just do our own
219 music?" And you know, my thing is — what do you say to that? You don't really know
220 enough. But the bookend to that is that I sent Cedar a copy of a CD a couple of weeks
221 later and he left me this message that was just — because people started calling me to
222 say, "Carl, man" this is so-and-so, "I just want to say thank you." I'm like well "you're
223 welcome, but for what?" They said "I saw Cedar man, he was blown away that you guys
224 did a concert of his music." Like five or six people called me and said he was just really

225 touched by that. And he called me and he said, “Carl, man, I got the CD a couple of days
226 ago and I listened to it, man, I just couldn’t compose myself to call you until now, I just
227 want to say thank you. And I was just so touched that you guys honored me that way.”
228 And I was like, “no, man, I’m honored that you have created such a body of work that
229 allowed us to do this. But, you know, I constantly tell myself, and I tell my faculty as it
230 pertains to these young people, quite often when we see things that they do that we’re not
231 in agreement with, my initial reaction is to be upset, and you know, all of these emotions.
232 And I say that quite often it’s not because they don’t care, it’s just that they don’t know.
233 They just don’t know. Sometimes they’ve not been told.

234 MR: Is it possible to get them to understand that as a musician who wants to work, that
235 sometimes you are required to play music that you may not care for, but you have to play
236 it well if you want your phone to ring.

237 CA: That’s the process. And I’ll tell you, one of the things that I realize is it’s a natural
238 process that there’s nothing that we can do to change or speed up their process, that we
239 have to let life happen. Because I can’t tell you how many of my former students have
240 come back and said, “you know what, Mr. Allen, I have to tell you something. When I
241 was here I didn’t really like you that much.” Somebody told me this recently. I said,
242 “why?” He said, “man because you used to make me record rehearsals and make me be
243 on time, and I said man, but you know now, all of those things have helped me, and I
244 thank you.” And so many of them have said that, to where you realize that when they get
245 out of school, when you’re playing with Pat Methany and you’re playing with this
246 person, Branford Marsalis or you’re playing with — they’re not accepting you being
247 twenty minutes late because the train was late or because of whatever. They’re not
248 accepting the fact that you don’t have the music together. And see because like for
249 instance, when we have guests, I always tell the guests I say, “listen, we’re doing your
250 music. Quite often we’re doing students’ arrangements or your arrangements of your
251 music. And I don’t want you to play down to the students. I want you to let them rise up
252 to your level.” And I remember we did a concert some years ago, Christian McBride.
253 And there was this fuzzy-haired guy standing in the back of the concert hall, standing up,
254 jeans on, you know, hair all crazy and stuff. And so afterwards he comes to the dressing
255 room. He says, “Carl, man, I’m just really, really impressed.” I said, “well I appreciate
256 that, thank you so much for coming, and man, if you ever need me for something, you
257 know I live a block or two away, I can always come and do a master class or something
258 like that.” So he says, “you know I’m impressed not only with their musicianship but the
259 presentation.” Because when we do small ensemble concerts, all the music is memorized.
260 And he says, “Carl, man, I’ve got people that I pay that I can’t get them to memorize

261 music. How do you do that?" I said, "well maybe you should start giving your guys a
262 grade." That helps with me.

263 MR: Oh, it was Pat Methany.

264 CA: It was Pat Methany. You know and Pat came after that and did a master class for us, and
265 it was great. In fact, that student that I said that he was not happy with me is now playing
266 bass with them. And so now we have a great relationship you know. But I just told him, I
267 said, "listen man, the music requires you guys to be accountable. You can be upset with
268 me all you want, you can call your momma and tell her I'm jive or whatever you want to
269 do." "But," I said, "the music requires us to be accountable." Art Blakey told me, he says,
270 "this is grown folks music. You want to hang out with grown folks, you've got to do
271 what grown folks do." You know, so that means when you show up to the gig, you know,
272 Art used to say, "people see you before they hear you." So you've got to look
273 presentable, you've got to show up on time, you've got to, you know, Betty Carter used
274 to say that people forget this music is still about entertainment. Art Blakey, again, he was
275 one of my mentors, I reference him quite a bit. But Art used to say, "music is supposed to
276 wash away the dust of everyday life." You know? When you go and hear someone you
277 want your life to be transformed, from the time you get there until you're going home.
278 Otherwise, why come? Stay home. So trying to get young musicians to understand it's
279 your job, it's a pretty awesome task that we have as musicians.

280 MR: The life lessons that the Art Blakey generation passed on, I've heard referenced many
281 times. Now you're a generation or two beyond him, and your life lessons are different.

282 CA: Not much.

283 MR: Not much.

284 CA: And I'll tell you why, personally not much. Because I play with a lot of people who
285 played with Art. Art had such a strong personality that a lot of the guys who played with
286 Art took on his personality. Freddie Hubbard, Jackie McLean, Benny Golson, Terrance
287 Blanchard, Donald Harrison — a lot of these guys that I played with. And their
288 philosophical approach to the music and to the bandstand, and that was, first and
289 foremost, highest level of respect for the audience. That's first and foremost, that you
290 don't disrespect the audience by not being prepared. You don't disrespect the music by
291 not giving a hundred percent every single time. And Art and I became very, very close. In
292 fact I got my first record deal because of Art. A guy in Japan, I was on tour, the first time
293 I was in Japan with Terrance and Donald, and a guy approached me and he says my name
294 is so-and-so, and "Art Blakey told me I should give you a record deal." "Really?" My
295 first time in Japan. 1987. He said, "yeah, I was speaking with Art and he says he thinks
296 that you're going to be the one to try to carry on his tradition." And it's interesting,
297 ironically, 25 years later I'm still doing business with that guy in Japan, producing

298 projects for him. But Art was very, very influential for me, musically and personally. So
299 the lessons that Art taught, I think go well beyond just the guys he played with. You
300 know, because, like I said, playing with Freddie Hubbard for eight years, his approach to
301 running a band I appreciate so much more now than I did when I was in the band.
302 Because he was not the kind of bandleader who was very hands-on. Like I think in eight
303 years I was with him we had five rehearsals and three of those were for record dates.
304 Because his mindset was we've got a gig, learn the music, and I'm going to call it and
305 you just better know it.

306 MR: How did you learn the music?

307 CA: We did the records.

308 MR: Okay, he was playing records from —

309 CA: See that's the thing. See when I was coming up, and I really sound old when I say that,
310 Jesus Christ, but they quite often they weren't giving you lead sheets. For instance, the
311 very first gig I had with Freddie was November 12, 1982, in Greensboro, North Carolina.
312 And we had a sound check that day, that lasted maybe an hour.

313 MR: You were 21?

314 CA: Um hum.

315 MR: Okay. I just wanted to, that was cool.

316 CA: So I'll never forget, one of the highlights, there was really two highlights in rehearsal.
317 One, to see how he was dressed. He'd come to the rehearsal with jeans on, a short olive
318 green suede jacket with a silk scarf around with beige suede cowboy boots and a hat. And
319 I was like, God, he's clean. This is just a rehearsal, right? He was clean. He was casual,
320 and real clean. So it was my first day in the band, and the other cats had been in the band
321 for a little while. And so one of the other highlights was getting to see him curse out the
322 rest of the band, because they couldn't remember some of the tunes. Freddie was like,
323 "this young boy's first day on the gig drummer, he know all these tunes — how you all
324 not remember these tunes?" I was like, "yeah, tell 'em, that's right." And what I learned
325 for the next eight years Freddie's mindset was if he called a tune one time and you played
326 it with him one time, your job was to never, ever forget it. And that was kind of how I
327 was raised musically from playing with Freddie. Now, he might call a tune today and
328 might not call it again for two and a half months. And the problem with that, I guess
329 some of it seems a little unfair. Freddie had a lot of different bands. So he had an east
330 coast band and he had a west coast band. And so after a couple of years I was in both
331 bands. But he would play different tunes with the east coast band and the west coast
332 band. So we'd get on a gig and Freddie'd call, "Skagly." I said, "Freddie, that's the west
333 coast." "Why? They're supposed to know it." And these guys are looking at me like —
334 but his mindset was if you play it with me once he'll never forget it. If you say you want

335 to be in the band, learn the music. Because he wasn't going to rehearse. And so that's
336 just, it's different now. But a lot of that came from being with Art Blakey. A lot of that
337 came from being with Art Blakey. And so I'll never forget, man, the day that Art Blakey
338 died boy, I told my wife, I said, "you know what, the music will never be the same." I
339 cried for three months. Every day. I mean I could just be watching TV or a soccer game
340 come on and I'd hear Art's voice and it had a profound effect on me. It really tore me up,
341 man. He did so much for the music. Art's thing was more about — and I heard him say
342 this to guys many times — that he was more concerned with you growing up to be a man
343 than to be a great musician. Because his thing was you've got to be responsible. You've
344 got to do what you're supposed to do.

345 MR: Where did he learn that from? Do you have any idea?

346 CA: Well I think, you knew Art grew up, he was an orphan, and he grew up I think kind of
347 rough. He spent a lot of time around gangsters and all kind of rough folks, where he had
348 to grow up fast. Now the irony of it is that you know, if you put his life on a plaque or a
349 piece of paper, you wouldn't say, oh that's a great example of a positive role model,
350 considering how many kids he had and all of that. But Art was, he really did a lot for a lot
351 of people.

352 MR: Isn't there some anecdote about him trying to play piano in some club and the club owner
353 said, "get on the — "

354 CA: It was Earl "Fatha" Hines was there.

355 MR: Yeah, okay.

356 CA: And he said, "no, he plays piano, you get up. Why don't you go over there and play those
357 drums?" But it's interesting because let me tell you how great a musician Art was. Art,
358 and I remember Ray Brown telling me this, he said, "Art could remember" you know he
359 played with Ekstine's band when he was 16. And they said Art could remember every
360 person's part in every arrangement. He could sing it to you. And about a year or so
361 before Art passed there was this big concert in Leverkusen, Germany, a jazz festival,
362 where he had several editions of the Jazz Messengers. Golson was there, Wayne Shorter,
363 Curtis Fuller, Freddie, Jackie Mac, Cedar, all this. And Jackie told me this story, Freddie
364 told me this story, Golson told me this story. At one point toward the end of the concert,
365 they finished a tune and Art just tells everybody to leave the stage. All right?
366 Unrehearsed. So everybody's like, "well what's going on?" They think he's going to play
367 a drum solo. He sits at the piano and starts playing, "For All We Know We May Never
368 Meet Again." And that was his message to the guys that I won't be around much longer.
369 And all of those guys said man, everybody backstage were on the ground crying. They
370 were like little boys. But that was like Art's way of saying I brought you all here for a
371 reason, for us to be together, because I'm getting ready to make a transition you know.

372 Well Art was really something man. I mean I could talk about Art Blakey all night, but he
373 was really something. He was really special.

374 MR: Well you speak of him very well. I'm glad you did. Your anecdote about the students and
375 the Cedar Walton, and also what they're not aware of, makes me wonder about the
376 internet and with — everything is out there. Is there too much out there so that they don't
377 know how to sift it?

378 CA: It's too easy. And you know, I find it even strange to me, hearing myself say that,
379 because I love gadgets. I'm a techie you know. But I think one of the down sides that has
380 come with that is that people in general have a much shorter attention span. You know,
381 the way that we had to get to the music, people don't have to do that anymore. People
382 look for shortcuts. They want everything much quicker. I mean, you know, when I was
383 coming along, everybody I knew who was serious about music had a period in their life
384 when they practiced six to eight hours a day, every day, for two or three years. I
385 remember a couple of years ago I told one of my students, I said, "man, right now, at this
386 point in your life, you should be putting in five, six hours a day." And he looked at me
387 and he said, "why, Mr. Allen, what did I do wrong?" Like he thought I was punishing
388 him. I said, "well what do you mean what did you do?" "Why are you telling me I need
389 to practice so much?" I didn't even know how to respond to that. Because, you know,
390 people — and part of it, and it's again not faulting these young people — but part of it is
391 that we're living in a time where there are so many distractions. And I tell them, when I
392 was doing that, this is before the internet, I know it's hard for a 19-year-old to even
393 fathom that. But you know, in Green Bay, Wisconsin, where I went to school, you look
394 out the window and you'd see deer, they're looking at you, you're looking at them. So
395 it's like okay. I can look at you and I can get back to this tympani. Get back to some Saul
396 Goodman here, you know? But it's interesting because, you know, the music programs in
397 this country have been really kind of taken away. So whereas when we were coming up
398 you had band in school and all of these different things, it was an integral part of your
399 education. And now it's not that way. I remember when my son was in high school he
400 was in band, and I had to take him to school and he had to be at band at seven in the
401 morning. He had to take it before school actually started, you know? But it's very
402 different now. But I think people just don't have the patience. It's not that they don't
403 have the patience. I don't think they understand that it's important for them to put in that
404 kind of time. And when you're young you don't understand the breadth of your time.
405 You don't understand how short time is, and that the time that you put in now is going to
406 help you, you know, when you're fifty, sixty years old. And I told some students once
407 about, you know when I used to play with Bobby Hutchison, Bobby, he used to hate
408 travel days, because he said it interrupted his practice time. And this was ten years ago or

409 so, he was practicing six hours a day. I said, “Bobby, what do you practice six hours a
410 day?” He said, “well three hours of scales, the other three I’m just trying to find
411 something.” Can you imagine that? He’s been playing fifty years and he’s still practicing.
412 And times I’ve been on the road with Dizzy and J.J., eight o’clock in the morning they’re
413 doing long tones. They’d been playing fifty, sixty years. And the 26-year-olds, they’re
414 still in the bed. So who do you think is going to sound good on the bandstand that night?
415 You know? So it’s difficult to get the young students to understand that along with the
416 fact that their sense of validation is not coming from the older, established musicians.
417 And that’s what we looked for. We looked for those musicians to tell us, “you’re doing
418 well, keep doing that,” or do this and do this, and what-have-you. You know, I referenced
419 Freddie before saying how I understand the way of his leading the band now more so
420 than then. Because Freddie never told me what to play. If I played something he didn’t
421 like he would just say, “try something different.” And I understand now the value of
422 having that freedom to be able to explore, to try things. But the kids now, their sense of
423 validation comes from how many hits they get on YouTube. So it’s like well man, but
424 you’re playing the wrong changes. “Yeah, well I put this video up and I got 6,048 hits.”
425 Okay. All right.

426 MR: And a hit means I’m good. It’s positive.

427 CA: Yeah. And it’s not a hit from a sense of people buying it, it’s a hit because somebody
428 looked at it. You know. And like my son, he does video stuff, and he says, “Dad,” — he
429 does video editing, some crazy stuff he does — he says, “Dad, you don’t understand. In
430 this world I’m hot.” I say, “what do you mean hot?” He said, “all my videos on YouTube,
431 I’ve got half a million followers.” Okay. That means something to them. But, what can
432 you say. But it’s hard when you’re dealing with some of the younger generation of folks
433 trying to get them to see that this music requires a certain level of seriousness. You’ve
434 got to put the time in. Playing out of tune is not acceptable. Playing wrong changes, not
435 acceptable. Playing bad time is not acceptable. And I remember Ron Carter, who teaches
436 for us at Juilliard, before he started teaching I had him come up and do a master class.
437 And this same bass student, Ben Williams, he had called him up. You know, he was
438 calling people up. And he said, “well play something for me.” And Ben was already
439 getting to his thing. He got maybe three notes. Ron said, “stop.” He says, “what?” He
440 says, “every one of those notes were out of tune. Each one of those notes were out of
441 tune, so we’re going to start from the beginning. Just play me a B flat in quarter notes.”
442 He was like, “oh God.” And so I asked Ron later, I said, “man, Ron, I’ve heard stories,
443 man, of guys studying with you for six months and all they’re playing is the B flat blues.”
444 He said, “well if they got to a blues, a whole chorus, in six months, they’re doing pretty
445 good.” He said, “we’ve got to get the first note, and then we’ve got to get the first bar,

446 and then we've got to get bar by bar." But, you know, you've got to respect the diligence
447 that it takes to be consistent with something like that. So the way I see it is that I want to
448 be worthy to be on the bandstand with people that I idolized.

449 MR: I don't know if you can answer this question. Why do you think other musicians call you
450 to play drums with them, rather than a hundred other guys?

451 CA: Well that's a good question. I've often asked myself that. I think there's a couple of
452 things I think. I think — and this is based on what I hear from some of those musicians
453 — is the way that I make them feel and the way that I make the music feel. Again, for
454 me, it's about serving the music and the people, and it's less about me. I'm just a vehicle.
455 I just want to be a vessel for a lot of music to flow through me, you know, that's really
456 what my prayer is every day. And so I've never been one who was really that crazy about
457 soloing, even with my own band. You know, I've often felt that one of the greatest
458 compliments that I can get after a gig is if someone says, "man, that felt great." More so
459 than, "you sounded great." Because to me it's kind of like if they tell me I sounded great
460 and they leave it at that, it's almost like it gives me the impression that maybe I was
461 playing for myself. And I don't think they intend it that way, but I would rather for them
462 to say man it felt great. You know, playing music for me is very much like having a
463 conversation. And you know, I read once someone said we remember the things that
464 people said, and we remember things that people did, but we most remember how they
465 made us feel. And so, you know, I want to wash away the dust of everyday life, that's
466 what I'm talking about.

467 MR: Nice.

468 CA: And at this point in my life, I really, I have worked for many years to be in a position to
469 where when people call me they're not calling me because they need a drummer. They're
470 calling me because they want me. And initially I thought that sounded a little selfish, but
471 you hope as a musician to develop a voice to where people appreciate your voice as to
472 how you can contribute to their overall vision. You know when I play with someone, I'm
473 always open to ask them, how do you want me to approach this. Because my job is to
474 help crystallize your vision and maybe even help polish it a little bit. So I think maybe
475 that's why people call me. I'm hoping that that's why they call me.

476 MR: Well and going from Rickie Lee Jones and Ruth Brown to Jackie McLean, you've got to
477 have an attitude that you want to serve the music.

478 CA: Yeah. You know, I'll tell you something, there's a quality that I'm striving for that I wish
479 that I had it much earlier in my life, but I don't regret that I didn't because I think there's
480 a lot that I learned in the process in this journey, and that quality is just appreciation. You
481 know, at this point I am so appreciative and honored when people call me. I don't take it
482 for granted. I think when you're at that point where you're getting two, three calls every

483 day, and it's not even so much about the quality of the work, it's just the validation as a
484 musician quite often comes from the fact that people are calling you. It's not so much
485 what they're calling for, the fact that they're calling you. Because you want to know that
486 people think of you. A couple of days ago I get a call from Benny Golson. I've been
487 playing with Mr. Golson for over twenty years. And every time he calls me I'm honored.
488 Anytime anyone calls, I'm honored. Because I realize there are so many other choices
489 available, such great musicians, great drummers, and that they called me, irrespective of
490 where I was on their list, the fact that they called me. Because to me to create music is
491 one of the most intimate things you can do with someone. So it's not like I'm just calling
492 you because I need somebody to play some drums. It's like, no, we're going to do
493 something very personal and intimate together. Or, I'm going to do something very
494 personal and intimate and I want you to be the one to share that with me. That's how I
495 see it. I really see it like this is really special that someone called me. And it doesn't
496 matter — you know when I was much younger I used to also kind of look at it like, oh I
497 don't like this person, ah they don't swing. But you know now my perspective is very
498 different. Because as musicians we're really just trying to give our opinion of how we see
499 things, through this music. Everyone is entitled to an opinion. And I'm not in a position
500 to say one person's view or opinion is not valid. This is how they choose to express
501 themselves. And so whether it's Ruth Brown or Rickie Lee Jones or Sarah Vaughan or
502 whomever it is that I've played with, I'm just appreciative. I'm happy. I'm thankful.

503 MR: Does spirituality play a role in your life?

504 CA: Oh yeah. It's huge. I mean it's huge. Everything is connected to that. Everything is
505 connected to that — family, yeah, everything is connected to that. You know I think at
506 this point, Monk, you know, I'm a Mama's boy. And my mother passed away in 2001.
507 And every day I think about making sure I do something to make her happy. And I just
508 never want to embarrass her. And I never want to embarrass my son. I never want to
509 embarrass my wife. I always want to be someone they can look at and say that's my
510 husband, that's my father, that's my son, that's my brother, you know, that's my friend.
511 You know, I really want to have that kind of presence. So that's important to me.

512 MR: If you could teach that lesson to your students also, man.

513 CA: Yeah. Day by day.

514 MR: Yeah, yeah. That's be your Art Blakey thing.

515 CA: Yeah.

516 MR: Another hat you've worn is as a producer and record owner. I'm wondering what that is
517 like and is it changing rapidly.

518 CA: Yeah, it's changing. Well I'll tell you something, the thing that I've always tried to do,
519 which I didn't know this was what I was trying to do until a few years ago, a friend of

520 mine who is one of my mentors says that relationships and resources are cyclical. And
521 that relationships, the more relationships you develop, the more resources there are to
522 develop, and those resources will develop other relationships and the process just
523 continues. And my desire to get into producing records really out of frustration. I thought
524 about records that I had been on with a number of great musicians where the producers
525 there didn't understand their role. Because I didn't really know what they did. They
526 ordered food, some of them kind of paid attention to what we did, some of them didn't.
527 Some of them fell asleep at the control booth. And then we had to argue as to why it
528 takes five weeks to get paid. So I've always been one who felt that if you don't like the
529 way something is being done then do something about it. So I was at a point where I was
530 developing these relationships with a lot of labels, particularly in Japan. And I had their
531 ear and they had a lot of confidence in me, and I was very thankful for that. But I was
532 frustrated with the scene, because it was coming out of that "young lions" period, where
533 if you were young and looked good, or you had the look, then you would get a deal.
534 Talent was not a consideration. And so then you had others who were talented who may
535 not have been as young or may not have had that look, who were just kind of being
536 looked over by the major labels. And so I started producing records, initially my own.
537 And when I did my first record for this gentleman in Japan, I had no idea what I was
538 supposed to do. There was no model. All of the record dates that I had been on before,
539 you know, in pop music there's kind of a model, in classical there's kind of a — in jazz
540 there was just no model. So I kind of used as a model the things that I wanted to see but
541 didn't see, that I thought would help a section. You know, little things, like okay you're a
542 bass player or whomever, you come and now you're on a meter because you can't find a
543 place to park. So instead of you running out every 2-1/2 hours to feed the meter, I've got
544 somebody in the studio, an assistant who'll take care of that. Little things. When the
545 session is over, I'm going to pay you that day, so you don't have to deal with it. So my
546 idea is that I want you to be in the stage to where you can just focus on playing, on giving
547 me your best. And I'm going to take care of you in what needed to be done from that
548 perspective. I was looking at it from a perspective of how did I want to be treated if I was
549 in that position. And so I produced some in effect first recordings with Nicholas Payton,
550 Roy Hargrove, Cyrus Chestnut, you know, one of the first recordings with Dewey
551 Redman and Josh Redman together, Pharoah Sanders, Lee Konitz, and a number of other
552 people. And it all came because I was just thinking about who were some of these people
553 who were not really getting the attention that I thought they deserved. And so that's kind
554 of how I went about it. And it was interesting, because when I first started doing
555 something, I wanted to do something with Cyrus. You know, he and I played together
556 with Terrence Blanchard and Donald Harrison. And I remember calling a couple of the

557 major labels, and there were a lot of majors at that time in the States. And I said, “look,
558 you know, I’m producing some things for Cyrus, and I’m interested in doing a project
559 with Cyrus.” And three of the labels said, naaa, you know, I mean I like him but he
560 doesn’t really have a look. I said, “oh, okay, no problem.” So I produced three records for
561 him in Japan that all won what’s called “Gold Disc Awards” for “Swing Journal
562 Magazine.” So that was a big deal in Japan. And after the second one I get a call from
563 one of the labels that said, “Carl, you know, we talked a while ago about — maybe we
564 could do something now.” I said, “well no, he doesn’t have the look, remember?” I’ve
565 been cursed with a bad memory. I mean I’ve been cursed with a good memory. That’s a
566 bad thing. So I said, “no, he doesn’t have the look so don’t worry about it.” So and then
567 we did another one and then after that he did something with Atlantic. But, you know, I
568 was just looking at people that I loved and loved their music that I wanted to see them do
569 some things, and so that’s how the whole production thing started. To date I’ve produced
570 a little over seventy records. And for me, initially for the first forty-some records, I never
571 put my name on the records. I had a production company, Big Apple Productions, and I
572 just put “produced by Big Apple Productions” because it wasn’t about me. And not only
573 that, I didn’t want the kind of attention that I started getting once I started putting my
574 name on it, which is people calling and saying, “hey, man, why don’t you do a record on
575 me?” And sometimes people didn’t understand the business. A friend was calling and he
576 says, “Carl, you know, we’ve been boys for a long time, we could do a record on me.” I
577 said, “okay, let’s sit down, let’s have lunch one day.” So we sat down and I pulled out a
578 pad and a pencil. And he’s like, “what?” I said, “you want to do a record, right?” He said,
579 “yeah.” I says, “so give me your idea.” So we talked about it, put some numbers down,
580 and I said, “how much do you want to be paid?” So I put all this down. And he said, “I
581 want three days in the studio.” Okay, I put all this down. I said, “okay, now, this record,
582 without promotion, probably will be about 55, 60 thousand dollars. You might sell a
583 thousand copies. And this was during the time where you could easily sell five, six
584 thousand copies, but I said but you might sell — I said, “so, let’s look at the return on the
585 investment.” And he was like, “oh, man, I never thought about it that way.” I said, “yeah.
586 It’s a business. You’ve got to look at it like that.” So I think one of the things that has
587 happened with a lot of the majors kind of going under, and even a lot of labels in Japan
588 have folded, I think it’s made people a little bit more business savvy, business-minded
589 about what it actually takes. I think the challenge right now for the record industry is
590 trying to figure out how to move units. And of course the big thing is, “well I’ll just do
591 ‘em myself.” Anybody can start a label. That’s like nothing to do. The question is, how
592 are you going to get product in the hands. And so this other thing of, “oh we’re just going
593 to sell them off the internet,” no one’s figured that one out yet either.

594 MR: They're not really making money.

595 CA: Na. Digital downloads, na. People just don't buy — it's so easy to pirate stuff. People are
596 burning stuff. I'll tell you somebody who was a genius. You know the great Louis Hayes.

597 MR: Yes.

598 CA: Okay. Well I'm not calling him a genius, but he's got a cousin who's a genius. And this
599 cousin who's a genius did something that changed the way that sound scan operated and
600 calculated sales. Because what he did, he says, "every person that comes to my concert
601 will get a free CD." Now this is when he broke off from his label and had his own label.
602 And so now he's got 30, 50 thousand people every night at the concert, and everyone that
603 comes in, they get a free CD with the cost of a ticket. Prince.

604 MR: Prince is Louis Hayes' cousin?

605 CA: Yeah. So now you're talking about you're selling 50 thousand CD's a night. So I was
606 going to say woah, we've got to do this different. Can we change the rules? But that was
607 ingenious. So I mean I think that musicians have to be a little bit more creative about
608 stuff. I remember years ago, you know I do a lot of clinics, and years ago I would go out
609 and do these drum clinics. And I had this idea that I'm going to have T-shirts made up.
610 And I would sell maybe four or five T-shirts at a clinic, not a big deal. After about the
611 third year, because a lot of times I would go to the same places every year, you know, I
612 would tour them, and I would always put the year on it. And I would look out in the
613 audience and I'd see someone "Carl Allen on Tour, 1993." And I'd go wow, this is 1995.
614 "Carl Allen on Tour" again, "1994." Right? So what I realized after a while, people
615 would come and say, "Carl, I loved your clinic. I'm not a drummer, but can I get a T-
616 shirt?" I said, "yeah, sure." I said, "but what made you come?" "Well my friend came
617 and I saw his shirt and I wanted a shirt too, 'cause he came last year." So there's a
618 psychology behind it, you know? Because I would see people walking down the street
619 with Rolling Stones Tours, 1977. The tour'd been over twenty years and they're still
620 promoting that Rolling Stones tour. You know. So jazz musicians, we don't think like
621 that. We get so caught up in the art of it that we don't think about the marketing of it.
622 And when people say jazz doesn't sell, my comeback is usually you mean they can sell a
623 pet rock and they can't sell jazz? You're gonna get a rock, draw on it with a magic
624 marker and put a hat on it and name it and that's your pet? You can sell that but you can't
625 sell jazz? Really? So I always thought that that was interesting to me. So I've always felt
626 that I think as musicians, as creative as we are as people, we have to find a way to be a
627 little bit more creative in terms of getting this music out. And until we're able to do that, I
628 think there's going to be a challenge with business, with the record business. And we
629 have to figure that out.

630 MR: Are current musicians playing sellable music? That's a huge question.

631 CA: It is. Well it depends.

632 MR: I think what made me think of it is there was a recent article that got spread all over the
633 internet. And the guy was saying that the classic American songbook is killing jazz.

634 CA: I read that. Um hum.

635 MR: And so I'm wondering well, is that true and what should they be playing instead?

636 CA: Well I guess you have to know your audience. I think that's a big part of it. But I disagree
637 with the principle that the American songbook is killing jazz. Why? How could it be
638 doing that? I don't get that. You know the thing that's always amazed me is this attempt
639 to always want to recreate what jazz is. We don't do that with classical music. I mean we
640 don't say uh, Wagner again? Chopin again? We don't do that. It's like it's great music
641 why not appreciate it for what it is? I have personal theories about why I think some of
642 that happens, and I think part of that — when I look at some of the ways jazz has
643 changed, you know if we go back some years in history in music, it was kind of a music
644 that was for a very elite group. Because not everybody could swing. Right? So when not
645 everybody could deal with the triplet, then what do we do? Okay we start opening up a
646 little bit. Now it's free. Okay it's free, so just do whatever you want. No rules, right? And
647 so what I find interesting is that swing from the perspective of the triplet feel is very
648 difficult, very difficult. Not everyone's comfortable doing that. I won't go as far as to say
649 not everyone can do it, because I don't want to contradict what I said earlier, but it's very
650 difficult to do. And it's a lot easier to play straight eighth notes. And so when you kind of
651 open it up like that and say well you can do what you want to do and still call it jazz,
652 you've got a free-for-all. You know? And I'm a little concerned about that.

653 MR: And I just want to, as an aside, you use the word triplet with your students to define the
654 swinging eighth note — the first two notes tied together. Do you verbalize that to them?
655 How would you verbalize that to them?

656 CA: Well it's a triple feel versus a duple feel. You know, [scats rhythm] as opposed to [scats].
657 So that opens up a whole other thing — it can be Latin, straight eighth, funk, R&B, so, a
658 lot of other things. The triplet is hard man. The triplet is hard to deal with. But I think
659 what's killed the music is not so much the standards. In my opinion it's more it's losing
660 its dancability. A great friend a mine, a pianist, said something so hip I wish I had come
661 up with it. And if he wasn't such a great friend I'd probably say I came up with it and
662 wouldn't give him credit. But since he's such a great friend I have to give him credit.
663 Mulgrew Miller says, "the music is supposed to be singing and dancing all the time."
664 This music is supposed to be singing and dancing all the time. And I agree with that.
665 When you think about great jazz music, it's singing and dancing. The melodies are
666 singing and the rhythms are dancing. And it's infectious in that you can't sit still. You
667 know I think what has also changed, going back to what Betty Carter says, and we forget

668 that it's about entertainment. It's not an art form to where, like Christian McBride says
669 all the time he hates it when you play and people look at you like you're a museum piece
670 while you're playing. They're like, hmmm, trying to psychoanalyze it. That's not what
671 it's supposed to be. People are supposed to partake in the festivities. People are supposed
672 to enjoy it. Toes are supposed to be tapping. I tell my students all the time, your
673 barometer is look out there, if you don't see any toes tapping, something's wrong. You're
674 supposed to see some heads bobbing, some toes tapping. And I also tell them that you
675 want to have an experience, not that you can strive for this but you certainly can hope for
676 it, to have an experience to see where the music is changing someone's life before your
677 eyes. And I remember the first time I went to Russia. We were playing "Here's That
678 Rainy Day." Freddie Hubbard. No lyrics, Freddie's just playing. I looked in the audience
679 while we were playing and people were crying. I was like, man, that's when I realized the
680 power this music can have. When you're coming from a very sincere place and you're
681 just really trying to share your life through this music and you're being honest, man, it's
682 amazing. I remember being in South Africa, the first time I was in South Africa, and I
683 was in this little town, Grahamstown. And I was playing, and there was a family in the
684 front row, and the father had his son on his lap and the son must have been around eight
685 or nine, and he's bouncing him on his knee, and they were both so happy. I was playing, I
686 started crying. I was so happy to see the dad was so happy. You know what I mean? And
687 it's like that's what it's about. I'll tell you something. I had a — I always tell people, you
688 know, you want to have at least one life-changing moment in your lifetime. And I've had
689 a few. Ironically, two of them came from the great Billy Higgins. But I was playing this
690 club, now closed in New York, called Bradley's. And it was a Monday night. I'll never
691 forget it, because I was playing with James Williams and Ray Drummond. And Higgins,
692 they started Monday through Saturday. Every other club played Tuesday through
693 Sunday. So Higgins was on his night off between a two-week engagement with Cedar
694 and Ron at Sweet Basil's. So he had come over. And so we're playing, and I heard this
695 voice, all right, okay. It's New York, you're not paying much attention, right? Then all of
696 a sudden there's a stick on my cymbal. And, you know, 'cause I don't know who it is,
697 right? I didn't see anyone, I just see this stick. My first inclination is do I knock them
698 out? Because I don't know it's Higgins. And I turned around and it's Higgins. So I get
699 up. I swear to God, in eight measures it went from here through the roof. He wasn't
700 playing loud, he wasn't taking a solo, he was smiling, and all the love that he had was
701 coming through in the horizon. Man I sat there and I know I probably sound like I'm
702 going to — I keep talking — I sat there and cried like a baby. Man, waitresses were
703 coming over, cats coming over, "Carl, are you cool?" I'm like, "yeah, man." I was just
704 crying out of joy. People are like, "are you cool? Everybody's cool?" I'm like, "man, you

705 don't understand, man, you hear what Higgins just did to this music?" And in two
706 measures. Because the thing that was so great about Higgins was, man, how much love
707 he had for people, for music. And when I think about Higgins now, I just, oof, I lose it
708 every time, man.

709 MR: You got me.

710 CA: Higgins, man, was something you know. Higgins was something man. And see that's the
711 thing that people don't understand. That's what this music is about. That's what we're
712 trying to get to. We're trying to get to changing peoples' lives. I mean we're not talking
713 about a solo. You know what I'm saying? It's nothing about a solo. He just said [scats],
714 and he's smiling, and he's grinning. And I'm like, first of all, how do you do that that
715 quick? But, you know man, it was like that's what I live for, man, to be able to do that.
716 And you know, and the whole room lit up. The whole room lit up. The whole room was
717 like, everybody felt it. It was like yeah, God. If I could do that man, that's the Super
718 Bowl. That's like winning the Super Bowl man, if I could do that.

719 MR: It sounds like you've got all the tools to me.

720 CA: Well, you know man, I'll tell you, Monk, you know as time goes on I just want to remain
721 humble and just, you know I think about it more now with having to deal with these
722 young students, the responsibility that I have. I read something once, someone said to be
723 great is not always going to mean to be popular. You know, if you want to be great at
724 something, you want to effect change and have positive change, it's not always going to
725 be the popular thing to do, but you've got to strive for that greatness. And every day I
726 feel like I have Art Blakey and Higgins and Tony and Elvin on my shoulder saying teach
727 'em what you know they should know. Be truthful with them. Talking about the message
728 that we have to pass on to these young musicians. Because there are such — right now so
729 many people are just being placated and pacified and that bothers me, because it's just
730 like they're lying to them. That was the thing that I love and appreciate so much about
731 Rufus Reid, when I was a student of his at William Paterson, and to me, he laughs about
732 this, but I always tell him, I said, "Rufus, you will always be my teacher. You will always
733 be my teacher, I don't care how old we get." Because of the lessons that he taught me.
734 And one of the things that he was so great at is just being truthful with people. You
735 know, he would say, "no, man, that's not right." And I remember him saying, he said,
736 "you know, think about how upset you would be twenty years after getting out of school
737 and you realize why you don't have any gigs is because when you were in school people
738 didn't tell you the truth." So, you know, it might mean that your feathers get a little
739 ruffled, feelings get hurt because people are telling you — but you've got to be told. And
740 we have to tell them. And again, that's not about beating people up. You know, so it's
741 really about building people up and encouraging them, but you've got to be truthful about

742 this music. You really have to be truthful about what it means and what it represents and
743 what people have done to make it possible. I'll tell you, I talked about three life-changing
744 moments. And one was from Art Blakey, and I won't go through the whole lesson, the
745 whole thing that happened, but in short, I was playing the Blue Note and after the set I
746 heard him, I heard this voice, "meet me in the dressing room." And by the time I got up
747 to the dressing room he had kicked everybody else out of the room. And so I get in the
748 room and I never saw Art mad like this. And he's pacing the room. And he grabs me in
749 the collar and throws me up against the wall. And the short of it was he's telling me that
750 he watched me play the whole set and I wasn't serving the music. He said, "man, you're
751 looking in the mirror and you're trying to be cute, you're flirting with girls, you're not
752 paying attention to Freddie, you're not orchestrating, you're not playing dynamics,
753 you're not swinging." He said, "I'm going to tell you something, Carl, this music is what
754 my friends have died for, to enable you to make a living doing this." He said, "I'm not
755 going to let you disrespect us like this." He said, "you're in my fraternity now." And it
756 was one of the greatest lessons of my life. Because after that he and I hugged, both
757 crying, and I appreciate him so much for that. Because he didn't have to do that. He did it
758 because he cared about me. And so that was a lesson. And he told me, he said, "Carl,
759 listen man, you're here, and while you're here somebody else can't be here. So every
760 time you play it's important." He says, "I don't care if you're playing in front of two
761 people." He said, "I don't care if you're playing in front of twenty thousand people. It's
762 the same. Every time you play you've got to give everything you have. There's no such
763 thing as saving something, you know, now is when it is, now is what it's all about. Every
764 time you play is the most important time in your life." And so, like I said, we hugged and
765 cried after that, and it changed my life. He said, "every time you play it's important." He
766 said, "you don't know who's coming to have their lives transformed by this performance,
767 and for you to not give a hundred percent you're shortchanging somebody." I was like
768 man, you know. So, you know, I think it's those kind of experiences that have brought
769 me to the point to where it's much bigger than me. It's not even about how many
770 applauses I get, how many solos I get. If I can play and somebody's life is touched and
771 feels something, that's what it's about. That's what it's all about. That's the lesson we're
772 trying to pass on to the young people, if we can get them to get that.

773 MR: That's a challenge.

774 CA: It is. And you know, to me, I'm not such a purist where, if it's hip hop, that's cool. If it's
775 country, if it's funk, if it's a hybrid of things, if you can get to that and you can be honest,
776 then we're good, we're doing something good.

777 MR: Very profound. I thank you for sharing that with me.

778 CA: Oh man, I'm sorry to get emotional.

779 MR: No, are you kidding?
780 CA: When I talk about those guys, man, it's hard not to, you know?
781 MR: Yeah. That's how I felt about Cannonball. I got to play in front of him once. You just
782 don't ever forget those things.
783 CA: You don't forget that, man. And it's like, you know, to me, I'll never forget when I was
784 15, I was in high school, and I was in this jazz competition with my school band. And my
785 band won, and I won best soloist. And so as best soloist the prize was I got a chance to
786 play with Sarah Vaughan that night. She was on the bill, right? So I got a chance to sit in.
787 So I came home and I told my brother, I said, "man, I got Sarah Vaughan's autograph."
788 He said, "okay, did you get her telephone number?" And I went, "what?" He said, "how
789 are you gonna call her with her autograph?" He said, "you need to call her so you can try
790 to get the gig." And I was like, "what?" I hadn't even thought about that, you know, I'm
791 15. I'm just happy I got the autograph. But we live, we learn.
792 MR: By the way, you mentioned Louis Hayes.
793 CA: Yeah.
794 MR: And this leads me — we're going to run out of tape here shortly —
795 CA: That's all right.
796 MR: I had this question that I sometimes ask about. Is there such a thing as playing ahead of
797 the beat or behind the beat? I've had drummers say no. The beat is the beat. And then
798 some of them say well yes. But I saw Louis Hayes once in a club. Holy God, he was like,
799 I felt, way on top of the beat. And I just wondered if that is a thing.
800 CA: It certainly is a thing. I've often said that there are three ways of time, aside from good
801 and bad time. There's down the center, there's behind the beat and there's on top of the
802 beat. Behind the beat is not the same as dragging. On top of the beat is not the same as
803 rushing. You know, you're manipulating the beat a little bit. But Louis Hayes plays on
804 top, you know, but I wouldn't say he rushes. Because he has great control. But see, you
805 know, one of the things that I learned — see the thing, when you talk about jazz and the
806 music feels good, and you talk about time, it's not about how great the time is from a
807 metronomic standpoint. You can have great metronomic time, in other words you can put
808 on a metronome and you're right with it and it feels horrible, right? Takes Miles Davis'
809 band, the quintet with Ron, Tony, Herbie. That time was like this. But it felt great. And I
810 asked Ron about it, he said, "well the difference was, they did that together." That's what
811 made it feel so good. They were aware of when it was going up, going down behind the
812 beat, you know, you're manipulating the time. They were very much aware of when it
813 was happening. And then I asked him about this, maybe ten years ago. And — no, maybe
814 about seven years ago. And so, maybe going back about nine years I remember doing the
815 Monk Competition, playing in the rhythm section. I'm having a conversation with Bob

816 Hurst, bassist. And he was saying when he first joined Tony's band, Tony Williams'
817 band, he noticed during, for the first couple of months he said it was really bothering him
818 because during Wallace Roney's solo, on a certain couple of tunes, the same tunes every
819 night, it felt like the tempo would change. So he went to Tony, he said, "Tony, I don't
820 know what I'm doing wrong, man, but it feels like the time — maybe when we get to this
821 spot —" Tony said, "no." He said, "Wallace feels the quarter note during his solo on
822 those tunes so we go with him." So now you look at what Ron was saying with
823 relationship to them playing with Miles, it makes total sense. But you realize how in the
824 moment you have to be to be aware of that? In 1991 I did a tour with Benny Green
825 opposite Tony Williams for six weeks. It was May 15, 1991, we were in the airport in
826 Philadelphia on our way to Atlanta, right? We're in the airport, and I'm talking with
827 Tony. So I said to Tony, I said, "Tony, what do you do, and I don't know how to ask this
828 question —" And Tony was kind of like, you know, when you talk to him everything was
829 about on his terms. So he was great, we had a great time. But I said, "what do you do if
830 there's a problem with the time?" And he kind of looked at me like, you talking about my
831 time? Like he was getting ready to pull a knife out or something. So I clearly said, "no,
832 no, not your times, just in general if there's a problem with time what do you do." And he
833 said, "Carl, let me ask you a question." He said, "if you were rushing or you were
834 dragging and you knew it while it was happening, would you continue to do it?" I said,
835 "no." He said, "okay." He says, "being aware of it while it's happening you're 75 percent
836 on your way to correcting the problem. The other 25 percent has to do with what's going
837 on around you." He says, "so it's about being in the moment." And so it just makes so
838 much sense as I put all those pieces of the puzzle together, about just really being in the
839 moment. Now, some guys do rush. Some guys do drag. I mean that's a reality. But Rufus
840 Reid plays behind the beat, but I wouldn't say that he drags though. He's got great time,
841 great pulse. But see then that question is somewhat relative. Behind the beat based on
842 what? Ahead of the beat based on what? So it's argument that will go on for the next
843 couple of hundred years.

844 MR: Yeah, sure. We don't want to solve the debate.

845 CA: I don't think we can.

846 MR: We've got to leave some mystery.

847 CA: Yeah, yeah. If you ever get a moment, you've got to talk to Louis Hayes, though.

848 MR: I did.

849 CA: Did you?

850 MR: Years ago.

851 CA: Oh, he's a character.

852 MR: He's a good guy.

853 CA: He's a character. You know, I've got to tell you a funny story. This was the first time he
854 went to European with Cannonball. They were in Paris. And they'd meet in the lobby for
855 a sound check, and there's no Louis. And they're waiting around for Louis. So here he
856 comes, after they'd been waiting about twenty minutes. He comes in the hotel and he's
857 just shaking his hands like — ooo. They said, "Louis, man, where you been? We've been
858 waiting for you." He said, "man, I went to take a walk, man, it's incredible man." They
859 said, "what?" He said, "you won't believe how smart the kids are here." And they go,
860 "what are you talking about?" "Even the kids speak French." My man Lou.

861 MR: All right. Well we used up the tape here. I thoroughly enjoyed this.

862 CA: Oh it was my pleasure.

863 MR: You are well thought of, and well spoken.

864 CA: Thank you.

865 MR: And I think your students at Juilliard are blessed to have you.

866 CA: Thank you.

867 MR: Good luck with your clinic tomorrow.

868 CA: I'm looking forward to it, it should be fun.

869 MR: Okay.

870 CA: All right. Thank you.