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Clark Terry

Clark Terry celebrated his 75th birthday with an extensive tour of the world during 1995-96. His distinctive trumpet and vocal style along with his engaging personality have made him an international star in the world of jazz. He was born in St. Louis in 1920 and played briefly with Charlie Barnet and Eddie Vinson before joining Count Basie in 1948. From 1951-59 he traveled with the Duke Ellington Orchestra and toured Europe with the Quincy Jones production of "Free & Easy." Clark was part of the NBC Tonight Show Orchestra in New York City and has been a major influence on a generation of trumpet artists. He has been in the forefront of promoting jazz education and received an Honorary Doctorate from Hamilton College in 1995.

Clark was interviewed by Joe Williams on May 19, 1995 for the Fillius Jazz Archive at Hamilton College. Michael Woods also participated briefly in the interview.

- 17
- 18 JW: Africa. I will never forget the trip to Africa with Clark Terry.
- 19 CT: Oh, I shall always remember that too. It was marvelous.
- 20 JW: One experience I must talk to you about, because to me it was thrilling and the dichotomy
21 of it just killed me. The Africans decided in Lagos, after we did our concert, that they
22 were going to entertain us with the African orchestra there.
- 23 CT: At the Greener?
- 24 JW: Right. In Lagos. No it wasn't the Greener. No they were just going to entertain us. They
25 were going to play for us, the Africans.
- 26 CT: Oh, I see, oh yeah.
- 27 JW: And who was the kid that you had out of Westwood, on drums?
- 28 CT: His name was Adams.
- 29 JW: Adams, yeah. Here we were in Africa and I was in charge, and I went up to the
30 microphone and asked if Mr. Adams would come up and please play with the Africans.
31 Only in Africa. They couldn't find their drummer.
- 32 CT: This was a Caucasian drummer we had.
- 33 JW: You had a what?
- 34 CT: No, the drummer we had, David Adams, was a Caucasian drummer. He was the only
35 Caucasian in the whole group. He had a drumset. This is funny.
- 36 JW: Yeah, and the Africans were going to entertain us but they couldn't find a drummer. So
37 they wanted to know if they could borrow ours. So here we were in Africa and they were
38 entertaining us, only they had a white drummer who was very, very happy. And the man
39 there who was the ambassador I think he was to Lagos, right? And we did the television
40 thing. He asked if he could sit in. Playing trumpet.

41 CT: But the title of that was “He’s not our regular drummer.”

42 JW: When we got there, that was the cutest thing in the world. We were taken to a Holiday Inn
43 as I remember, and everybody got jugs of water, Evian water. And we went upstairs and
44 turned on the tap, and would you like to tell them what happened? For the next day or so?

45 CT: Yeah, it was a situation where one time during 24 hours, one period, for about maybe an
46 hour or an hour and a half, they’d turn on the water. And you had to wait by that time, to
47 make sure that you brushed your teeth, shaved, took a bath, flushed the toilet, and do
48 everything all in this short period of time. Because once that stopped, you’re off until the
49 next 24 hours when it comes back again. A drink of water, brush your teeth, whatever, it
50 didn’t matter. And there was no water whatsoever until that one period rolled around
51 again. And that was kind of a trying situation, wasn’t it? But we managed, didn’t we?

52 JW: Yeah. We survived it. In fact I mean your great sense of humor came in very handy.
53 Because he was writing, and he wrote to his family.

54 CT: They used it officially too, you know?

55 JW: I know that. I noticed that they did. In the journal that he was writing he wrote his family
56 and said “just call me Chief Funky Butt.”

57 CT: What else?

58 JW: In music, people don’t know it all the time, but if you hear [scats] —

59 CT: “Buddy Bolden.”

60 JW: Yeah, yeah, yeah [sings] “Funky Butt, Funky Butt, take it away.”

61 CT: Yeah. Happy times.

62 JW: I remember you playing in St. Louis years ago.

63 CT: Ah, I’ll never forget it.

64 JW: And, what’s that club?

65 CT: Club Plantation.

66 JW: Club Plantation. With Hudson’s band, wasn’t it?

67 CT: Yeah.

68 JW: George Hudson.

69 CT: You came through there with Joe Wilson’s band I think.

70 JW: I came through with Joe Wilson. With Ella Fitzgerald.

71 CT: We used to play softball in the park every morning. We’d get off at like four or five
72 o’clock in the morning —

73 JW: I wasn’t in shape.

74 CT: Yeah, you were in shape. You were hitting home runs until you —

75 JW: Pulled a muscle.

76 CT: — made a mistake at the plate, and relatively speaking about the size that we are now, he
77 was about that much more bigger than me.

78 JW: I wasn't that much bigger.
79 CT: I mean we were both smaller, but you were heavier than I was. I was about 130, 125.
80 JW: You were?
81 CT: Yeah.
82 JW: I didn't realize you were that small.
83 CT: I was thin enough to ride a rooster. And, I don't know is that the story you were about to
84 tell? When you swung at the plate and swung the ball at the plate and missed.
85 JW: And crumpled up at the plate.
86 CT: And I picked him up and carried him.
87 JW: In his arms. And carried me to his car.
88 CT: I thought about that Father Flanagan thing.
89 JW: Yeah. He ain't my brother — no, he ain't my brother, he's just heavy. Yeah, and then
90 took me to call the doctor, and the doctor came and taped me up and I went on back to
91 work that afternoon. I mean no, I went back to work that night.
92 CT: Yeah. We've been brothers ever since. But we were tight long before that even.
93 JW: Oh, yeah. I was thinking about, long before then I came through there with, let's see in
94 '43 I came through the first time, with Lionel Hampton. And then you, they was telling us
95 about this trumpet player who played lead and also was the best soloist they had, which,
96 you were doing it all about that time.
97 CT: Oh, with George Hudson's band?
98 JW: Yeah.
99 CT: Oh, yes.
100 JW: Yeah. You were doing the whole thing. I sat back stage. You didn't know I was back
101 there in the kitchen. They didn't allow us out front.
102 CT: That's right. If you were back there, you had to be in the kitchen.
103 JW: I wanted to hear the band.
104 CT: You came up the stairs in the back.
105 [off camera direction]
106 JW: You mean you don't want me to look hip? I had it up on purpose. That's the look. I'll tell
107 you what, you know why white guys play golf? So they can dress like black guys. Yeah.
108 This is it. Can you see it? Is it cool now? L'il Lord Fauntleroy.
109 CT: Yeah. You can never be too hip. Two hips are very uncomfortable. [sings]
110 [Clark Terry and Joe Williams sing a line]
111 JW: What am I to do?
112 CT: What am I to you?
113 JW: Jack Sheldon has that out now.
114 CT: Really?

115 JW: Yeah. What a good arrangement. You know he's got an excellent concept. I was thinking
116 about even before then, and also you were in the Navy during the war.

117 CT: Yeah. '42-'45.

118 JW: A great Navy band.

119 CT: Yeah, it sure was a good band.

120 JW: Did you go to Great Lakes at all?

121 CT: Yeah, that's where we were all the while. Period.

122 JW: Well you were up there with Gerald Wilson.

123 CT: Gerald Wilson, Willie Smith, Flocks McConnell, Big George Matthews, Joe Bardussen,
124 Ernie Wilkins, Jimmy Wilkins, Jimmy Kennedy, the whole smear, man. Paul Campbell,
125 super human. We had quite a motley crew there.

126 JW: But it was a great band, because you came through Chicago and played at the Grant Park.
127 I saw you there.

128 CT: Yeah, we used to do a lot of things in Chicago.

129 JW: And you broadcast from the Great Lakes and had the greatest football team in the world.

130 CT: Yeah. With Buddy Young and Motley.

131 JW: Marion Motley and Paul Brown was the coach. That was the first I heard of him. I didn't
132 hear of him while he was at Maslyn, Ohio. But I heard of him when he was coaching up
133 there.

134 CT: We also had great baseball, because we had Screwball Rollin and Robin, the pitcher?
135 JW: Roberts.

136 CT: Robin Roberts, yeah.

137 JW: Well that was before Robinson so I knew then, I knew more about the Negro leagues, and
138 I followed them very closely because of the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago*
139 *Defender* and the black publications that I read voraciously, as I read the white
140 publications as well. And the Cubs were perennial losers. And the White Sox was just as
141 bad over there as the Yankees.

142 CT: That's when they had Oreste Minoso, wasn't it?

143 JW: No, I'm talking about before that. I'm talking about during the war now. It wasn't until
144 1946 that Jackie Robinson became a Dodger and they began to draft fellows from the
145 Negro leagues.

146 CT: Well you know that's when we had two Navys, you know, we had the white Navy and the
147 black Navy. Remember that?

148 JW: No I don't.

149 CT: Well our camp was Camp Robert Smalls, and all of the black enlisted men in the Naval
150 services were relegated to this camp. And there were six other camps, Caucasian camps
151 you know, so we were all there in our little space you know, in our little camp, Camp

152 Robert Smalls, and we had a commander who was a banjo player, who was the most
153 notorious banjo players of that era, by the name of Eddie Peabody.

154 JW: Commander Peabody.

155 CT: Commander Peabody. Now he —

156 JW: He could play.

157 CT: Oh, yeah, he could play, but he was still sort of in development in those days. And he had
158 the grand idea that since he was there surrounded by all these black musicians that it
159 would be a good idea to start a minstrel. So he wanted us to —

160 JW: He was going to start a minstrel?

161 CT: Yeah. And we rebelled, almost to the point where we were going to be charged with
162 treason.

163 JW: Treason — or mutiny.

164 CT: Or mutiny or whatever. He wanted us to do all this you know, with the white gloves and
165 the big bow tie.

166 JW: And the black face.

167 CT: Yeah. And we refused to do that.

168 JW: Eddie Cantor and the guys were still doing jokes and that kind of thing.

169 CT: It was funny though. We had one commander who literally hated black people. He came
170 through the barracks every night to make sure that everything was in order. Anything that
171 was out of order was referred to as a “holiday.” If there was a speck on the window he’d
172 say, “get that holiday off of there.” If there was dust on the floor, that’s a holiday. If your
173 boots weren’t laced right, it was a holiday. So he’d come through looking for holidays.
174 And any little thing that would go wrong, in the middle of the night, they’d say, “all right
175 hit the deck.” Everybody would have to get up, go out on the grid iron, and march you
176 know. So one time he was an ex-pug, you know. And he was so into what he was doing,
177 and he hated black people so much, he made the mistake of choosing one of the guys that
178 picked him out, he said “you” it was a big dude, and so he thought he could just kick him
179 around. So he just realized that this guy was one of Joe Louis’ sparring partners. So he
180 said, “you! You think you’re tough, come on over here. Put the gloves on here.” He put
181 the gloves on and he started, and he gets it, and the whole barracks was [cheers], we
182 poured water on him.

183 JW: How we won the war.

184 CT: The Battle of Great Lakes. Sometimes he would make us go out in the middle of the night
185 to march just for the heck of it because it was his way of getting back at us. And we had
186 figured up a little way to escape. Because we would walk to the end of the grid iron and
187 there was a little hole we cut in the fence, so every trip around, one or two would
188 disappear and go up to Waukegan.

189 JW: Oh, my God.

190 CT: And have a great time. But by the time he was finished marching us around he'd end up
191 with maybe 16 troops or 18, you know, out of the whole barracks.

192 JW: I think you should write that story sometime, man. I mean — Daddy what did you do in
193 the war, you understand? Yeah I fought prejudice.

194 CT: Fought the Battle of the Great Lakes.

195 JW: But I'll tell you something, I've got a story for you though. It's funny how experiences
196 and things that you do come to you. I was working at a place called The Silhouette, which
197 was on Howard Street, with the northern boundary between Evanston and Chicago,
198 Illinois. The Silhouette, all the Naval officers from Glenview Naval Air Station used to
199 come in there all the time. And occasionally some merchant seamen would come in. But
200 the Glenview kids, they were in all the time. And there was one young redhead Irishman,
201 he used to sit there at the bar and his head would be down like this, and he'd listen to
202 what we were doing. It was with Adam Lambert and the Six Brown Dots as I remember,
203 or Five Brown Dots or something. And we'd finish and he'd take his drink and have a
204 drink maybe, look up, nod his head. That's all he'd do. He never was demonstrative or
205 anything. Some of the guys during the break would go back over the dance floor, and they
206 would practice diving. They would, you know, dive in the air and crash on their stomachs
207 or however they wanted to land, you know. But he wasn't very demonstrative at all. He
208 was very cool. So one day I walked in the club, one night rather I walked in the club after
209 I'd been out to get a bite to eat. And I heard this noise behind me and I turned and I
210 looked and there was a guy on the floor. And there was another one there. And he hit this
211 one too and floored him. And I dropped my coat on the floor, and nobody had bothered
212 me so I couldn't hit anybody you know. I was over there practically by myself, that far
213 north. And so I found out later what had happened. These two young men are from
214 Mississippi, and when I walked in one of them said, "what is that Nigerian doing in this
215 white man's place?" You know. Of course they didn't have enough education to know
216 how to say the word "Nigerian." And it all looks the same to them. "Ni-garr, Nee-garr"
217 and all of that, you know. And he said, "what's he doing in this place?" And this kid, who
218 I found out later on was a middleweight boxing champion as well as a Naval flyer, he got
219 up and floored both of them and sat down, and the next thing I knew somebody came and
220 drugged them out, and I said okay, all right. So I mean all of them didn't hate us. We had
221 the respect of quite a few as well along the way. Young men.

222 CT: You know, Joe, I think that some of the people who will be looking and listening to this
223 wouldn't believe some of the stories that we could tell them about the bigotry and things
224 that we have had to endure in our lifetimes in traveling in the south. And I'm not so sure
225 it was a good idea to bring it up or not. What do you think?

226 JW: I don't know about, as long as it's natural. I think of the positive things that happened.
227 There were negatives of course. I have been attacked. The night Joe Louis beat Max Baer
228 in Chicago I was attacked by four or five white guys with baseball bats and you know.
229 But they didn't run very well. I ran until I could only hear one set of footsteps behind me,
230 and I turned and looked. So I slowed down a little. Nobody ever caught me. But that's
231 one thing. But it never changed the way I am.

232 CT: There you go, absolutely.

233 JW: Because three years later at least, I was singing on 47th Street at the Warwick Hall with
234 Johnny Long's Orchestra. And when I came out, and it was about five in the afternoon in
235 the summer, and some white kid was riding a bike on 47th Street, and about four or five
236 black guys smashed him off his bicycle, and went and took the bike and rode off. And the
237 rest of them were beating him up on the ground, you know. And I walked across the street
238 and I stopped it. I said, "hey, leave him alone. Get up, kid, come on." And he walked on,
239 bloody, he walked on down the street. But he turned to look to see who it was that —

240 CT: That saved him.

241 JW: Yeah. You got his bike, what do you want? You got the bike, right? What do you want
242 now? And that was on 47th Street between St. Lawrence and Vincennes. It never changed
243 me, the fact that I was attacked by a group of other guys that didn't know what the hell.

244 CT: It never made you reach the point where you hated people, hated Caucasians, because
245 hate is too important an emotion, right?

246 JW: And not only that, really, I was just thinking this morning, I've got to go do something,
247 I've got to go down to the 700 Club to do a thing. And I was thinking of the many things
248 I've read that made me the way I am. For instance there was a book, I think it was called
249 *This is My Brother*, but I'm not sure, and on the first page of that book was — because
250 hate is legislated, written into the primer in the Testament. Shot into our blood like
251 vaccine or vitamins. You know? Because our days of time, and it goes on to say, because
252 our days of time and black timeless sucks us in without a prayer or with one long last
253 look. You see I need love more than ever now. I need your love because your face, or
254 your lips are warm, or something like that, and God is made for the eyes like yours. I need
255 your love more than ever now. You know, that kind of thing. Love has always been the
256 key. It was the key when I was a kid, when I was a kid going to school, going to church,
257 and the minister said "God is Love."

258 CT: Yeah, that's true.

259 JW: God is Love. Yeah. Okay. Now you can understand all these miracles that come about
260 because of love, man. The miracle of life itself, you know?

261 CT: But even before you figure that out, Joe, there was something —

262 JW: And we're supposed to be in His image.

263 CT: Yeah, that's true. There was something within you that motivated you to not succumb to
264 the principles or tactics that make you hate people. I'll give you a similar — relate a
265 similar incident. I'm traveling in the south, in Meridian, Mississippi, and I was with a
266 carnival act, Reuben and Jerry Carnivals. So we went in the deep south for winter
267 quarters. And while playing this show during the week, they always hired somebody in
268 the city as a hired hand to keep law and order on the midway. And the black show was
269 always at the end of the midway. So this cat comes through, now this was closing night,
270 and we are getting ready to go pack up the crew, pack up all of the equipment and the
271 crew puts things together, we get on the train and we have our own train and we went on
272 to the next place. So I'm waiting for the drummer, Marvin Wright, who was a good
273 buddy of mine, to pack up his drums, and while waiting for the drummer to pack up his
274 drums, he had met a lady during the week, and she was of fair complexion, and you know
275 what the situation down there with the —

276 JW: Almost white you mean.

277 CT: That's right. So I'm standing there with Marvin's lady friend, waiting on Marvin to
278 unpack his stuff because the Mills Blue Rhythm Band was playing in town that night, so
279 we're going to that. Well here comes this little cat, and I'm standing there. He said, "what
280 are you doin' standing out here after the lights is out, Nigerian?" So I said, "well I'm
281 waiting on the drummer, actually." "You with this here show, boy?" I said, "yes, I am."
282 He said, "what'd you say?" I said, "yes, I am." He said, "do you realize what you said?" I
283 said, "well you're asking me a question, and I answered it," probably, I thought. He said,
284 "did you realize that you said 'yes' to a white man?" And that's all I remember. I have a
285 blackjack at home right now, to remind me of this — one of those lead things, covered.

286 JW: He hit you?

287 CT: Did he hit me. Right here man. Bamm. And my head got so big, I don't know what
288 happened after that except what I was told by the train crew. Now this is an example, I
289 could have, that could have motivated me to hate Caucasians the rest of my life, but it
290 didn't.

291 JW: He could have killed you.

292 CT: But what happened, he left me laying in a puddle of mud and the work crew was all
293 Caucasian. They picked me up, took me back to the show trains, and by the time they got
294 back this dude comes back with about 20 people with axes and sledge hammers and
295 chains and saws and picks and shovels and everything. Said, "where is that Nigerian we
296 left laying down there in that mud?" And the Caucasian said to him, "oh he was some
297 smart aleck, we just kicked him in the pants and sent him up that way." So they ran up
298 that way looking for me where in reality I was back here in the show train. So that's one
299 hand washing the other. And this is long before I realized the importance of love and was

300 motivated by love after that, but this was something within me that helped me to balance
301 out decency and right from wrong.

302 JW: There's good guys and then there's other people who care. Most definitely.

303 CT: We're talking about [inaudible]

304 JW: You know we've had a lot of that stuff happen. But it never, it does affect the music in
305 one way —

306 CT: Makes you keep on keepin' on.

307 JW: Yeah, but if you are doing a sad song, a sad thing, I think it puts another feeling into what
308 you're doing.

309 CT: Absolutely.

310 JW: When you realize that they— for no reason —

311 CT: Do you know this is a very, very important ingredient in the perpetuation of the craft of
312 jazz, and this I got from, you just reiterated the same thing, that people have said, like
313 Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Budd Johnson, Buddy Tate, they all knew the lyrics to
314 every tune that they played. And they said that if you —

315 JW: Right. Lester Young.

316 CT: That's right. If you know the lyrics to the tune, you can express it in a much more
317 meaningful manner than if you don't know the lyrics. For instance, here's a kid going to
318 play "I Love You" well you says [sings] you wouldn't say to a girl [angrily] I Love Ya.
319 You think she's going to believe that crap? She ain't going for that. But she'll sit there
320 like, [sweetly sings] "I Love You" it might get across. It's very, very important.

321 JW: I think Roy Hargrove, ah, he thrills me. He's one of the young people coming along. I was
322 at the IJEA, the jazz educators you know, and he played [scats] "The End of a Love
323 Affair," and he got to the line like [scats] "and the songs that I request/are not always the
324 best/but the ones where the trumpets blare" and it was so soft and pretty like —

325 CT: He was singing the lyrics.

326 JW: I looked at Jon Hendricks, and I looked at the Judge [Milt Hinton], the Judge was there,
327 and we all, the three of us we were honored that year. I said, "where do these young
328 people get this kind of concept? Wait a minute. Hold it." You know? It brings tears to
329 your eyes and gives you goose bumps.

330 CT: Well you know he's a very special kid to me because my wife Gwen knows his mother
331 very well. And she headed up a program called STAR, Students Targeting Adult
332 Responsibility. And they were basically responsible for his education. They've gotten
333 funds from different sources, now even I kicked in a few bucks, and sent him to Berklee,
334 you know? And he's still at Berklee, so he came up the hard way, and he came up the
335 soulful way.

336 JW: Didn't he? Because it shows. Johnny Pate, whom you know of course, from Chicago,
337 Johnny lives in Las Vegas and he has a radio show on the UNLV station. And he plays
338 Johnny Griffin's thing with Roy Hargrove, often. And I'm so thrilled that he's getting
339 some airplay and some attention, because for a while there, I thought that Wynton was the
340 only trumpet player.

341 CT: Well there's several of them out there.

342 JW: I know.

343 CT: Nicholas Payton, that's my favorite.

344 JW: Yeah?

345 CT: Yeah.

346 JW: There's always been several people somewhere who could blow. And they'd rave about
347 everybody else and there you were in St. Louis you could blow, you know. As soon as the
348 Duke got you out there, expected you out front, said, "get 'em." But the first person that
349 Duke Ellington said, beyond category, and I have Duke saying this on tape, he was on a
350 radio broadcast and he said, "oh Clark Terry, oh yes, Clark Terry, Clark, yeah, well Clark
351 can play everything from way out bop, bebop to Dixieland. He can play everything and in
352 between there, and I just call him a man beyond category."

353 CT: Yeah, I remember when he used to do that, yeah.

354 JW: You were the one that he started that with.

355 CT: Yeah, that's a great subject there. We could talk forever on that one. I like to borrow one
356 of his favorite phrases, which happens to be one of mine. He was always very quick to let
357 you know how he evaluated a situation, and he would always say, "well you know me,
358 I'm the most easy person in the world to please. I'm very easy to please, just give me the
359 best." I love that one.

360 JW: And the other one I love of his, is, "I'm not going to let you or anybody else make me
361 lose my pretty ways. I will stay constant. Straight ahead."

362 CT: Yeah, he was always very, very pleasing when ladies saw him come around. The ladies
363 were always happy to see him because he would always make a lady feel great, man. He
364 would always walk up and say, "hello, whose pretty little girl are you?" Or if he saw her
365 the second time, "gosh you're prettier today than you were yesterday."

366 JW: My wife and I took a friend to see him, her best friend. And he pulled this on me, you'll
367 love it. The girls were sitting together and I was sitting on the aisle. Well Paul Gonzalves
368 was playing, he was what they call a strolling violin. He's got his horn, he's going down
369 now, and he's playing "Laura" on his horn. And so he gets to me and he sees me and he
370 goes — he's blowing and everything, and he gets back on the stage and he leans over and
371 he whispers, and you've got to know Paul and Duke Ellington. So he leans over to Duke
372 and [whispers]. And Duke says, "ah, yes, yes, yes, yes. What was that you said?" Now

373 Paul's going to get exasperated with Duke. That in itself is the situation that you're
374 looking at, if you know what you're looking at, he is going to get exasperated with Duke.
375 So he whispers, "Joe Williams?" "Ah, yes, yes, yes, uh huh. Joe Williams? You mean our
376 Joe Williams? Of Count Basie fame? You mean he's lending his aura to us tonight?
377 Where? Not really?"

378 CT: All the while he's doing the strolling violin bit?

379 JW: No he's through playing now, and they're supposed to get on to the next number. And
380 this is while they're trying to get to the next number. So Duke is stalling him, playing him
381 like a violin, really. Then, I mean he had a topper for it. And so then finally Duke looked
382 and he says, "where?" He says, "out there in the audience." He says, "ah, yes! You mean
383 the fellow sitting out there with Jill?" I fell in the aisle man. I laughed, man. And her best
384 friend Bitsy says, "if you think this isn't going to get back to England, you're sadly
385 mistaken." Oh I love it. So now we go upstairs and he's got this room, you've got to see
386 this bedroom. A canopy with a pink chiffon overhead and a mirror over the bed and like
387 that. And he comes out and he gets Bitsy by the hand and he's holding her hand you
388 know. He says "my dear, did they tell you why they brought you here tonight?" And sit
389 there and held hands with her on that couch you know, for the entire time that we were
390 there.

391 CT: He was something else.

392 JW: And they talked and everything, turned that charm back on you know. He was a monster
393 boy.

394 CT: He used to have another saying that I crack up every time I think about it. He used to say
395 to us that invariably all the weird and weirdest characters would seek him out, would
396 always come, so you'd see strange people coming around the bandstand, coming up
397 saying "hi there, which one of 'em is Dukey Wellington?" And, "what's the piano
398 player's name?" You know they would always seek him out, so he would always say,
399 "they come from miles around and they seek me out." And every time one of those
400 situations was about to happen, he'd hit a little of this [scats] and say, "miles around."
401 And we'd look up and there's a weird cat making his way to the bandstand. "Dukey
402 Wellington."

403 JW: Basie had his little thing too.

404 CT: Oh, yeah.

405 JW: Beep beep! Oh, Lord, they had their signals together, didn't they?

406 CT: Yeah, between those two beautiful people, we could write books and talk for ages. I have
407 to tell you my favorite Basie story, and I've told this many times, but when we were with
408 the small group after he broke up the big band —

409 JW: Yeah, yeah.

410 CT: Yeah, you know, what am I telling you? Well we're playing Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania,
411 and this was during a period when we were not allowed to stay in the big hotel, we were
412 relegated to the homes of Miss Brown, Miss Jones, Miss Green and so forth.

413 JW: Oh, those were the good old days. "Have you had your breakfast?" "No, M'am."

414 CT: So we were in Miss Green's or Brown's or somebody's home, and she said "well I've got
415 one room left and I've got two beds in it, and one is a big bed and one is a little bed, and I
416 can take two of 'em." So he says, so Basie and I are the only two left. So I'm going there
417 with Basie, and the big bed is in the middle of the room, a huge bed and he's got that.
418 And my bed is a little slab up against the wall you know? So I said okay, it's beautiful. At
419 least it's some place to sleep other than the basement of the police station. So here we are,
420 now Basie can't get to sleep with the light out.

421 JW: I know, yeah.

422 CT: He had to have that light on. And he had to read his comic book every night and he'd
423 laugh, ah, ha, ha, ho, ha, ha. And so I said, well I couldn't go to sleep with the light on.
424 So I said well I know what I'll do, I'll just play possum and wait until I hear the comic
425 book hit his belly. Then I'll know he's asleep. Well I should preface this by saying that
426 it's always customary for people when they go to bed, they do, we all do, empty our
427 pockets on the dresser, you know, and undress and put the pajamas on and go to sleep. So
428 I had put all my things there and Basie put all his things on the dresser. We didn't have
429 that far, just the little table top that we put our stuff on. So the light is right by this little
430 table top, and so I had to get up and go over, and when I heard the book go "plop" on his
431 belly, I eased over to the light and grabbed the chain and pulled the chain. Now the
432 minute I pulled the chain, before I released it, he starts turning in the bed saying, "put it
433 back." I was never sure whether he said put the lights back or whether he [inaudible].

434 JW: Oh Lord. "Put it back."

435 CT: "Put it back."

436 JW: Roommates. Sonny Payne, when I joined the Basie band, because I had a lot of
437 roommates. I had Snooky Young while we were in St. Louis. Snooky and I were
438 roommates and we shared a bathroom with Melba Liston, who had the next, she had like
439 the adjoining door and the bathroom on her side and on our side.

440 CT: Like the Southway in Chicago.

441 JW: Oh, God, the Southway in Chicago. I mean when the Southway was really the Southway,
442 it was all white.

443 CT: Oh yeah?

444 JW: Oh, yeah.

445 CT: The Southway Hotel?

446 JW: Sure. In fact everything —

447 CT: 60th and South Parkway?
448 JW: Oh yeah, it was all white.
449 CT: I didn't know that.
450 JW: You know they didn't build that for us.
451 CT: No, but I didn't think that came into existence —
452 JW: No, we get hand me down... do you think that the Braddock in New York — no, we'd
453 never have — the black man didn't build no — if they did, they did it in Chicago like
454 Ford built Roberts. But the rest of what we had was hand-me-downs, you know like the
455 white folks moved out —
456 CT: Yeah, that's true.
457 JW: And we moved in, you know? All of that.
458 CT: Urban renewal or Nigerian removal.
459 JW: Or whatever. Yeah, whatever, you know. But we had nice places though. We had very
460 nice places and they kept them very nice. Because in its time I remember South Park was
461 Grand Boulevard, and it was beautiful.
462 CT: That's where the Grand Terrace was. That's why they call it Grand.
463 JW: The Grand Terrace was on Grand Boulevard, between 39th, not 39th, Oakwood
464 Boulevard and 40th Street.
465 CT: Yeah, which is where the DeSalvo was. Oakwood.
466 JW: That was down —
467 CT: Toward the lake.
468 JW: Toward the lake, yeah. That was heavy. But even those, and the Pershing, all those were
469 white hotels. And so anyway, you were talking about the Southway, that was, I lived at
470 61st and Indiana in the new apartment block, and we had white janitors and what have
471 you, because no blacks were in the Superintendent's Union, you see. But the Southway
472 Hotel, oh, none of that was — it was really south, deep south. And the school I attended,
473 Sexton, which was between 61st and 60th Street on Champaign on one side and Langley
474 on the other, and I graduated from Sexton. I tell you I think it was Austin Otis Sexton,
475 A.O. Sexton, that's right, Austin Otis Sexton Grammar School. And when I went to that
476 school, I think I was the only bro' that was there. The only black cat that was in that then.
477 Later on I was getting, of course, in some neighborhood change, and finally Lurlean
478 Hunter wound living across the street from the school.
479 CT: Lurlean was my cousin you know.
480 JW: Yeah, I know. Lurlean lived across the street from me at 6153 Indiana. She lived across
481 the street in the building the [inaudible] is on, and she lived upstairs with her mother, and
482 I forget, I was ten years old or something like that, but I chased her in the house one day,
483 upstairs. Because we called her String Bean.

484 CT: Yeah, she was skinny.

485 JW: So we get in there and her mother is in there and she says, “hi, darlin’, what’d you want?”

486 And she says this to Lurlean. She says, “what are you going to do to Lurlean?” I said,

487 “I’m going to hit her.” And she says, “oh, baby, don’t” and she put her arms around me.

488 “Don’t ever go to somebody’s home and frighten them like this.” I said, “no, Ma’am?”

489 She said, “no.” I said, “okay.” And I said, “Lurlean, see you outside.” Silly.

490 CT: That was her big downfall. She was such a mama’s girl, she couldn’t leave mama. She

491 was a great little singer. Most people will remember her will remember back to the

492 Campbell’s Soup commercial, “mmmm good, mmmm good, that’s what Campbell’s

493 Soups are, mmmm good.” Remember that?

494 JW: You know it took me a long time to figure out who ... she sounded like an extension of

495 Ivie Anderson, you know, really, a real extension, because she was smooth. We sang with

496 Johnny Long’s band together you know.

497 CT: Did you?

498 JW: Yeah. We did the dancing, we’d dance in between numbers when we weren’t singing,

499 we’d dance together.

500 CT: I thought you were going to say Les Hite. She used to sing.

501 JW: No. I worked with Les, but she wasn’t with him. He had let’s see what is it, Bobbie

502 somebody was playing piano with him, a girl, a black girl named Bobbie something. And

503 I’ve forgotten the girl singer he had, but when he came to Chicago, he had T-Bone

504 Walker with him at the Regal Theater I remember, but I worked with him up in a place in

505 Delavan, Wisconsin called Lake Vaughan during the summer one summer he was up

506 there. I was the head waiter, I was a waiter up there at night, and in the daytime I was the

507 porter, and I was cleaning up. I was going through a bad time with a love affair.

508 CT: L’il Mama.

509 JW: No, no. This was my first lady, my first love man. She was putting me through it and I

510 was going for it. So I was working two jobs, saving money. I learned a lot, oooh, the

511 lessons I learned from that man. You know like my parents, they laid it on me during that

512 period because I had two or three hundred dollars, this was 1940. And I had two or three

513 hundred dollars of my own, so I gave the money to them, “here, hold this money for me.”

514 And they told me, keep my own money.

515 CT: It’s a good lesson.

516 JW: Go ahead.

517 CT: When you mentioned that Lurlean sounded a little bit like Ivie Anderson, it made me

518 think Duke Ellington always said that his idea of the perfect singer was one who sounded

519 like Ivie Anderson and looked like Lena Horne.

520 JW: Yeah. But he dressed his ladies for us. God, those shear sheaths they used to wear, with
521 no decoration at all, not even pearls. There was nothing. And it reminds me what his
522 father, I understand used to say, “my, you sure make that dress look pretty.” That kind of
523 thing. His daddy was slick too. He knew what to say. But that was Duke Ellington. Of
524 course we could talk for a year.

525 CT: Oh, what a marvelous person he was. I learned so much from him, I’m sure you did too,
526 we all did. Just in the process of osmosis, being around him there’s so many things that
527 just rubbed off on you that you wouldn’t even have been aware of at that particular time
528 until you needed the situation, and you’d say, what would maestro have done in this case,
529 bing, it comes in just like a tape.

530 JW: I had him, I had Andy Kirk as well.

531 CT: Oh, Andy, yes.

532 JW: And I’m talking about smooth as silk. I heard Andy say, “well, I don’t think I need pot,
533 you know.” I said, “I think I like this cat man, I don’t think I need pot,” because about
534 that time there was a joint party every day. You know, every day. And just like that, he
535 did the same thing with tobacco, though. Yeah, one day I said well I think I’ve had this. I
536 finished this pipe, put the pipe in the ashtray and I haven’t had any tobacco since either.
537 One of these days I’m going to do that with girls.

538 MW: I’d like to ask you a couple of questions. You’ve been saying some things for particularly
539 for the students in my class I think is absolutely marvelous, incredible, because you talk
540 about experiences not once have I heard you mention anything that’s got to do with music
541 theory.

542 CT: Music and theory.

543 MW: It seems like the music comes from some place much deeper than that. Then it eventually
544 will involve your note choices.

545 CT: You’ve got to remember, Mike, excuse me for interjecting this, but you have to remember
546 that years before people who came into this field, years before they knew anything about
547 theory or harmony, composition, counterpoint, etc., they gave in to their feelings. And
548 they were indulging in, for lack of a better term they called it “get off.” This is long
549 before the term “improvisation” was coined, you know before it was in the dictionary,
550 pertaining to playing music you know. They used to call it “get off,” which simply meant
551 that the first chorus you played a melody, and thereafter you’d use the melody as a
552 guidewire to simply superimpose extemporaneously a melody around this given melody.
553 So that’s what it became “get off,” so you “get off” the melody. Even then the guys were
554 giving vent to their feelings and expressing themselves and they would use certain things
555 that would help them get from point A to point B. First of all the one thing that we teach
556 our students today, and I’m sure you do too, regardless of how much theory or harmony

557 or counterpoint or composition will get in their brain, they've got to know when to use it.
558 They've got to listen for when to use it. Or how to use it. But there's a zillion educated
559 fools walking around the street today. Heads loaded with something they don't know how
560 to use it, don't know where to use it or when to use it. So this is a lesson that we try real
561 hard to get our students to understand. Back in those days, they didn't know anything as
562 you mention about these technical terms. They had nobody around to teach it. But they
563 were determined to give in to their feelings and express themselves, and "get off." So
564 what'd they do? They played the blues as the main vehicle, they played the blues, and
565 they played the standard tunes, and then superimposed melody around it. But on the blues
566 they figured out a good way to give vent to their feelings is that somebody had to change
567 the melody, even without knowledge, to figure out, there's the tonic, that's the one; then
568 you go up the scale, one two three, that's the third, they'd lower that a half-step, that's the
569 minor third; you go up one, two, three, four, five, lower that, so you've got a tonic, a
570 minor third, a flatted fifth, and they didn't know then that it constituted a half diminished.
571 They couldn't care less, you know. All they knew is they called them the "blue notes."
572 "Man you've got your blue notes?" "Yeah, baby I've got 'em down, I'm working on F
573 sharp now, but I'm going to have that tomorrow." But they looked at them as the blue
574 notes. And right today, you take a class, and you take your rhythm section or your just
575 play the bass along and tell them to play one note. [scats] Any kind of rhythmic pattern
576 they want. Then the next, you tell them to take the two notes, the tonic and the minor
577 third [scats], then the next time, take the flatted fifth and the minor third [scats]. Now you
578 can't pick out more beautiful and important notes in playing the blues than those three.
579 Then you go into your seventh. And pretty soon they reach the point where it's almost —
580 we use this for discipline, too. That's all. Just that one note, those two notes or those
581 three. Because after a while they begin to hear all of the relative notes that constitute the
582 scale, you know, and then they're going to hear the four, they're going to hear the flat
583 five, some people call it the augmented seventh the flat sixth, the major seventh, the nine,
584 the flat nine, the thirteen, and all of them, they'll hear the whole scale then. But after a
585 while, for a period of time, they're going to be involved with playing those blue notes.
586 The blue notes. The tonic, minor third and the flatted fifth, and they got it. And if you
587 find a cat whose pretty well-endowed in playing the blues with those three things in mind,
588 he'll listen to these things, all these things.

589 JW: Yeah. But you sing that thing and play that. And while that's going on, another cat says
590 hey, let's do this thing over here.
591 [scatting]

592 CT: Yeah. Now that's after a while they can hear all that, 'cause then they've got them to take
593 it to what the saxophone has in mind. You can hear all of that.

594 [inaudible]
595 JW: But muted though. [scats]
596 CT: Discrete. Any kind of rhythmic pattern they want. False fingering, or octaves or shakes,
597 fall offs, or riffs or doits or whatever, a lot of the things that are incorporated in the Italian
598 diction we can't use in jazz. They won't express it very well. You can't hardly say to a cat
599 on the bandstand "let's play some 'largo blues.'" We have some far more descriptive
600 terminology that we use.
601 JW: What is it Ed would say? Hey, let's do our thing, and he says "listen."
602 CT: Yeah, that was his pet word, listen. He would use discord to get your attention, and then
603 say, "listen." So we used to figure, does this cat think we're deaf or something? And
604 pretty soon he would let us know. All he was concerned about was total listening. And he
605 would say it isn't funny. He wanted to make sure that you are aware of everything that's
606 going on, what your little part that you're contributing to the overall performance, what it
607 means. I use this joke as a good way of relating to people to get them to understand what
608 Ellington meant by listening. Two tuba players met in the supermarket one day after their
609 day off. And one said to the other, "what did you do last night?" He said, "oh, the old
610 lady dragged me out to the opera." "Yeah, what'd they do?" "They did 'Carmen.'" "Yeah?"
611 he said, "yeah, that's the one we enjoy so much in measure 356 where we go
612 'boom, boom, boom, bo bo bo bump.'" He said, "yeah," he said, "do you know what the
613 rest of them idiots were playing?" He said, "no." [sings the "March of the Toreadors"].
614 So that is a good lesson as to how, they were so concerned about how this cat didn't even
615 know that that was the harmony, you know? All he knew was boom boom. And so often
616 we go through scenes like that where we are totally oblivious to what is going on with —
617 what their little part means to the overall performance.
618 JW: That's my first statement when I go into schools to talk to a class. If you can't hear
619 everybody else in this orchestra, you are playing too loud. And they'd look at each other,
620 what? Because it opens up a whole new vista for them, and a whole new world. That's
621 my opening statement. And I use his, I use Clark's words so many times in talking to
622 students. I tell them and I quote him, I say, "Clark Terry said —" man when we went on a
623 tour together and we were doing the school and he had a high school group then and he
624 said "listen, don't be afraid to imitate somebody. All of us started by imitating
625 somebody."
626 CT: Absolutely.
627 JW: You see you go from imitation to assimilation, from assimilation to innovation.
628 CT: To innovation. We call them the "ation stages," you've got to go through them "ation
629 stages." Everybody imitated somebody as the first step. The first cat didn't hear nothing

630 but railroad tracks. He imitated that [scats]. Or whatever. You've got to imitate
631 something.

632 JW: He brings expression, and it sounds like a train. Now, what else do you want?

633 MW: Oh, the thing I was going to say that I thought was so fabulous is that these sounds find
634 their way into your repertoire of expression, and the emphasis is expression rather than
635 execution. You know there's a lot of people today, because there's a lot of method books
636 written on jazz, who can play the notes, but no authenticity seems to arise from those
637 myriad of notes. You know, it's not about just your ability to how fast or how loud that
638 you can play.

639 CT: Absolutely not.

640 MW: And one other thing I wanted to ask you all is where do you see anything in our present
641 American culture and particularly African-American culture, that seems to be spawning
642 new life to breathe back life into this aural culture. And you mentioned Roy Hargrove,
643 and I'm pleased by that too.

644 CT: Well there's a lot of young players who are doing it.

645 JW: Josh Redman.

646 CT: A lot of little Nicholas Paytons or the little guy that wrote what's his name's book —
647 what's that guy that wrote that, the little black director.

648 MW: Spike Lee?

649 CT: The cat that wrote the score for his — what was his name?

650 MW: Blanchard? Terrance Blanchard?

651 CT: Blanchard, Terrance Blanchard. People like him. There's tons of them out there. And I
652 have an opportunity to run into them being involved in jazz education, I know a lot of
653 them. So I would like to say that the whole situation, people used to say that jazz was
654 dead, it never was even sick. People's minds were. It's very, very much alive.

655 JW: Yeah.

656 [pause]

657 CT: Joseph, I've got a Basie story.

658 JW: Count Basie?

659 CT: Yeah. I don't know if everybody knows about this, but when I was with the Basie band,
660 and when I left the Basie band to join Duke, you know I left, well we had kicked it around
661 a little bit and he had sent his scouts around, John Sully, Al Sully and Evie, all the people
662 would come around, and Joe, his little — Joe Morgan. He said "you want to join the
663 band?" And I used to like his little hat that he used to wear. And he said "I'll get you a hat
664 like this if you'll join." So finally we talked about it long enough and I finally decided
665 well I think I'd like to join Duke's band. This is when, at this time, Basie was down to a
666 quintet. So we were working in Chicago —

667 JW: At the Brass Rail.

668 CT: At the Brass Rail, right, yeah. So Duke finally he comes around and he says “yeah, I’d
669 like to discuss things with you.” So he says, “okay.” He says, “but we can’t do it out in
670 public, so later on I’ll have to come to your hotel.” So I says, “okay, I’m at the
671 Southway.” He says, “all right, I’ll come by and I’ll call you when I get in the lobby and
672 I’ll hurriedly get out of the lobby and meet you in your room.” So I says, “okay.” So he
673 comes to the hotel, and he calls up and I says, “oh, all right.” So he says, “I’ll meet you on
674 your floor and I’ll meet you at the elevator and show me where it is.” And I says, “all
675 right.” So Duke gets off the elevator about the same time I come out my door. And just as
676 I walk out of my door and Duke steps off the elevator, and next door to me is Freddie
677 Green. Freddie Green opens his door and steps out. He says, “woah,” and went back and
678 slammed the door. So of course Duke and I went on with our business. But that night on
679 the gig, Freddie, I walked in and you know, Pep would look at you like this, he didn’t
680 even say hello. “If you don’t you’re a fool.” So the funny thing is, the conversation with
681 me and Duke, he says, “well now we’ve agreed on the bread and everything,” and for me
682 it was a big bread in those days. ‘Cause I was making with Basie \$125 a week, and the
683 last part of my stint with the Basie band I got a raise, \$15 raise, so I’m making \$140 a
684 week. And Duke says, Duke would give me \$225 a week.

685 JW: All right.

686 CT: Oh, man, that was great big bread for me, you know, ‘cause there was cats in there
687 making three and four and five, but I didn’t know it. But to me, that was big bread. So
688 that day he says to me, he says, “well you know, it’s just not proper protocol for a person
689 to snatch somebody out of his buddy’s band. So we’ll have to strategically work this out.”
690 I said, “okay, what do you suggest?” He said, “well I’ll tell you what I think. I think you
691 should maybe just get sick and tell Bill that you’re going to go home and recuperate and
692 while you’re home recuperating I’ll put you on salary.” Yeah? Wow man. Ain’t no better
693 deal than that. So I went back and told Bas’ that I put my notice in, I said, “no Bas’, I’m
694 just not feeling good, I just need to go home and just get on.” And he said, “okay, well
695 when you get yourself together you can come on back, because this is always home for
696 you.” So I said, “thanks, Bill, I appreciate it very much.” So I went home, I’m on salary,
697 and right away the first check, wham, so before I get home, you know? So this went on
698 and on until the band just happened to come through St. Louis, three months later, I’m on
699 salary for three months, and they’re coming through St. Louis playing the Kiel
700 Auditorium on November the 11th, Armistice Day. And I just happened to join the band.
701 That was a big show with Sarah Vaughan, Peg Leg Bates, Patterson and Jackson and all
702 them from the big show. I don’t know if it was ‘51 or ‘52. But anyhow, I left and went
703 with the band. I stayed with the band for almost ten years you know? And years later, I

704 went up to the Carnegie Hall when Basie was already sick and he had to take a little side
705 elevator to ride up, this was before they installed the thing that they've got there now.
706 And I went backstage to see him and I'm standing at the top and he's coming up and I
707 said "you know one thing?" And he said, "yeah, so what's that?" I said, "I have a
708 confession to make to you, something that's been bugging me for years and years." He
709 said, "yeah? what is it?" I said, "when I left the band you know, I told you I was sick and
710 going home," I said, "I wasn't really sick." He said, "um humm." I said, "the reason I did
711 that is because Duke had made me an offer I couldn't pass up." He said, "um humm." He
712 said, "why do you think I took the raise back, you think I didn't know that?" All these
713 years I've been bugged.

714 JW: You're beating yourself to death.

715 CT: Yeah. Hanging out the window, and finally just gave up and let go and he was that far
716 from the ground.

717 JW: Basie. Boy it's funny. On the bus. That bus was something. I wasn't with the band at this
718 time, but John Williams who was still with the band told me this story. He came in after
719 Popsie you know. And he had the gig and was doing all right, when suddenly, Basie let
720 him go. And Charlie Fowlkes came back. So later on, he came back after Charlie died, he
721 came back to the band. So he asked me, "what happened?" He says, "really, me and you,
722 'cause you know I love you, and wasn't my work satisfactory?" And he says, "yeah, your
723 work was all right." And he says, "yeah."

724 CT: This is John, talking to Basie?

725 JW: Talking to Basie. So he says, "well, Chief, what happened?" And he says, "well you
726 remember the night on the bus when you all thought I was asleep, and you called me a
727 mother fucker?"

728 CT: He called him a melon farmer?

729 JW: A melon farmer, boy. Says, "Oh Basie that melon farmer." He said I didn't even move, I
730 just said um humm. So when he got a chance he said, "oh Chief, gee whiz." Basie was
731 full of them though. Cats would get on their high horse you know, the musicians.

732 CT: You couldn't pull no wool on him. He knew everything.

733 JW: Yeah. They'd get on their high horse and doggone it, they'd start talking crap. Basie
734 would wake up and stop the bus. He would stop the bus, and Basie would reach up and
735 get his little brown sack over his head, and get his fresh fruit, he had a little sack over his
736 head, or he might have a sandwich in there. Fruit, what have you. You know he'd reach
737 up and get an apple and go — crunch — take a bite or two out of it and go back to sleep.
738 But anyway Basie stopped the bus and he'd reach up and get his little brown sack. Then
739 he'd get off the bus, and say, "all right, you can go ahead now." "Oh, no, Bas', wait, wait,
740 wait a minute." "Oh? You mean me? Well I thought you best just go on without me, you

741 understand.” “Oh, no, Bas.” Shoot he’d just stop the bus and get off and say “you got it
742 — go ahead.” He was so funny. I, when I left him I got a group together you know. So my
743 mother had a stroke in Chicago, and I flew into Chicago to spend time with her. And I
744 checked into the Manor House, and who was in there but Basie.

745 CT: Yeah, that was his favorite place man.

746 JW: And I was in the room that he was in when I talked to him about joining the band. You
747 know? That’s a story in itself, you see, me coming and joining him. I talked to him and he
748 said, “why don’t you come with me and see what people all over the country think of your
749 work?” He said, “you’re the top singer in the Midwest right now, in Cleveland, Detroit,
750 Chicago, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis and Buffalo.” Even because I was working at the
751 Moonglow for six weeks a year or something like that. He said “but” he said “in a little
752 while, somebody’ll be saying, “hey, you hear Shorty over there singing? Shorty over
753 there, the men’s room attendant,” he said, “you heard him sing? man oow wee.” He says,
754 “somebody else is coming,” you know? He said, “why don’t you come with me and see
755 what people all over the country think of your work?” And, “I can’t give you what you
756 want or what you need, but I can give you something.” So you know what he gave me,
757 \$25 a week. But when I was working with you and him and the quintet, he would give me
758 \$50, which was something.

759 CT: I’ll never forget that period.

760 JW: As bad as me?

761 CT: Joe Louis and who was that —

762 JW: Ezzard Charles.

763 CT: Ezzard Charles was fighting for the heavyweight championship.

764 JW: So me and Basie, and Freddie Green, everybody —

765 CT: He was the only one that says —

766 JW: He’s ain’t got no business in there with that snake.

767 CT: Are you kidding, man, me and Basie and Freddie, we’d load his whole salary and more,
768 he’d load it up and we’d bet and Ezzard Charles creamed Joe Louis.

769 JW: Hey listen, and you know how I got paid? Each one of them. [whispers].

770 CT: We didn’t believe it. We paid him begrudgingly.

771 JW: Melon farmer. There was many melon farmers at that time. ‘Cause at that time, there
772 were two things that were mortal sins. One was Joe Louis and the other was the Yankees.
773 You were pretty safe betting money on any, in those days, they just took out whatever.

774 CT: That was the ‘40’s wasn’t it Joe?

775 JW: No, it was the ‘50’s. It was the late ‘40’s. Late ‘40’s when Joe began to decline. Because I
776 remember it was 1950, Christmas of 1950, or a week or two before that I left you guys

777 down there at the Brass Rail and I went to work at Club DeLisa for the first time. In
778 Chicago.

779 CT: Red Saunders.

780 JW: Yeah, with Red Saunders.

781 CT: Lurlean.

782 JW: Lurlean, yeah, she was there.

783 CT: Sonny Cohn.

784 JW: Yeah, Sonny Cohn.

785 CT: Nick Cooper.

786 JW: Jesabella. And that front line, he had Washington on saxophone and wound up with
787 [inaudible] playing lead.

788 CT: What was Mr. Low Blow's name? What was his name?

789 JW: Mack Easton, baritone player. Yeah. But he had Ed Cytouff playing in there, Johnny
790 Avant and Cytouff the two trombones, but two trumpets, two trombones, and four saxes.
791 Yeah, four, I think it was four. Four or three. And the piano, bass and drums, and guitar
792 sometimes too.

793 CT: What was the piano player?

794 JW: Washington.

795 CT: Washington, yeah.

796 JW: A very good piano player.

797 CT: Sure way.

798 JW: Arranger, too. He was really fine. But Basie, he was the cutest thing. As I tell you, I went
799 home, and this is 1961 or '62, because my mother had a stroke. And Basie was in the
800 same hotel with me, with us. And I had a phone call from the fellows, the musicians. It
801 seems going into Canada they'd been stopped and one of the guys they had Crip. Crip
802 said they went through all your luggage and everything. And he said man when they came
803 to that soap powder you had, they would buy Tide and put it in a plastic bag, instead of
804 having a box, they'd put it in a plastic bag and throw it in the bottom of my suitcase.
805 Because I washed my underclothes and my shirts. I had those shirts that you could wash
806 and hang up, wash and wear you know? And he said boy they found that and they said
807 "ahhh, what have we here?" You know they opened it up and went [sniffs]. But it turned
808 out that one of the — go ahead you wanted to say something?

809 CT: No, I just was going to point out that one time I had a big sack full of dirty laundry, and
810 they were very inquisitive. And I said "look and see what's in there." And they were a
811 little bit unhappy after digging through my soiled underwear.

812 JW: Well that's standard operating procedure. Ladies know how to do that. They know how to
813 pack, you know? But somewhere or another they were traveling in Europe with a group.

814 And Norman Simmons tells that story, and the people stopped him, customs stopped him
815 and wanted to go in the bag. And he said this chick she opened the bag and starts
816 throwing out dirty, wet pants, and [inaudible]. And he says, “oh, no ... no, no, no, no, it’s
817 all right.”

818 CT: I’ve got to tell you one of my favorite Basie stories. You know Basie, he loved ham and
819 cabbages you know.

820 JW: Oh, Lord, I do too.

821 CT: Who doesn’t yeah. But he loved them with a passion. So one day when I was with Duke’s
822 band at the time, and his band was playing Birdland and we’re playing, remember the
823 club upstairs called the Band Box?

824 JW: Yes.

825 CT: And the same time. So we’re in the Band Box with Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington and
826 downstairs is Basie. You might have been down there with him. But anyhow, I used to
827 snitch a ride home every night with Catherine, Basie’s wife used to pick him up and they
828 had to pass by my house. So I’d ride home. So during the conversation on the way home
829 we’d talk about everything that had happened with the band over the years that I was with
830 him. So this particular day, and knowing that he loved ham and cabbage I said, “Bas’ I
831 hate to tell you this, man, but we had ham and cabbage today, man, and it was so good.
832 And I’m going to go home now and go upstairs and heat it up and wail on it before I go to
833 bed.” So he said, “um humm” and we started talking about other things. So when we got
834 to my house the light just was just before daybreak, you know, you know you get out of
835 there —

836 JW: Yeah, Birdland, 4:00.

837 CT: Yeah. So I get out at the corner and I walk across the street and I say “good night Katie,
838 goodnight,” and I walked across the street and I thought I heard a car driving, and all of a
839 sudden I heard [tapping nose]. He was coming across the street. I looked around and I
840 says, “you’ve got to go to the bathroom?” He says, “um humm.” He said, “if you think
841 you’re going to go up there and heat up that ham and cabbage without me you’re out of
842 your cotton picking mind.” He went upstairs with me man, and we heated up the ham and
843 cabbage, and he ate it and he put his feet up on the coffee table and went [snores — went
844 to sleep.

845 JW: Yeah, he could sleep around us. I remember another wonderful afternoon. We used to
846 play up in Philadelphia, we played Pipp’s. And we’d start there by playing a Monday
847 matinee. So you know we’d be off then for several hours before the evening performance
848 would start at 8:30 or 9:00, 9:00 at night started the evening performance on Monday. So
849 Earl Hines is home, in Philadelphia, with his wife and they had us over for dinner, the
850 Basie band. They had this long table set up man, with greens, corn bread and ham hocks

851 and corn and all kinds of marvelous things. And I've forgotten what the dessert was,
852 whether it was sweet potato pie or lemon cream pie or whether it was pie with
853 strawberries, but it was a delicious looking thing. We're sitting there eating, and here
854 comes Basie standing around, you know Basie, he had a drink, he had some scotch, he
855 used to drink scotch in those days, and he'd take a drink of his scotch and his dessert. He
856 always ate his dessert first. Oh they had beans too, red beans and rice. He'd eat his dessert
857 first. And we're sitting there eating dinner. Then he'd sit down and have his dinner. But
858 he'd eat his dessert first. He was the first person I saw to do that. It's not bad either.

859 CT: I never tried it.

860 JW: 'Cause you might, at least you're not too full when it comes to — you don't eat too much
861 either, maybe. But he didn't miss dessert. But anyhow, the guys were having problems
862 and they told him, one of the guys, in fact two of them, weren't even allowed to go back
863 in to Canada.

864 CT: Oh yeah?

865 JW: Well when they catch you up there on a narcotics charge, then you're not allowed back in,
866 that's all. Two of the guys had been through that. They shall be nameless, but like so now
867 I get this phone call, and I said well, I'll tell you what to do, call John Levy and tell John
868 to get ahold of Jimmy Jones and the bass player, Sproles.

869 CT: Victor.

870 JW: Yeah Victor Sproles and Jimmy Jones come up to sub for them, you know? And I hung
871 up, and I told Bas', because Basie's lying at the foot of my bed, I said, he said "what was
872 that?" I said, "oh the cats had problems up there, couldn't get into Canada where the gig
873 is." He said, "why don't you tell them to kiss your ring and get yourself a piano player
874 and go on about your business." He said, "you know, that's all you need is a piano player.
875 You don't need all that other headache."

876 CT: You mean to go into Canada?

877 JW: To work. Period.

878 CT: Oh. Period. Is that when you started the group with Jimmy DeForrest and them?

879 JW: No, no, no, no. I'm not calling any names. Jimmy DeForrest had nothing to do with it.
880 Jimmy went up, Sweets went up, I told you, we replaced the piano player and the bass
881 player. But no names. Didn't I tell you? Okay. And we went up there and did a week.

882 CT: One and one is eleven. I can figure that out.

883 JW: Anyhow, but Basie had said by the way, "you ought to tell all those people goodbye, and
884 get you a piano player and go on about your business at your concerts, and do what
885 you've got to do." And he was so right. But I liked that, I like to tap my foot and I love to
886 hear, I love to share the spotlight too, man. Somebody that can play. Somebody that can
887 swing. Oh my God, such a feeling. You can't, there's nothing, you can't express it.

888 CT: Absolutely.

889 JW: It just happens, you know, it lifts you completely off the ground. Levitates you.

890 CT: I see you've got your two iron there.

891 JW: Oh this, yeah. It's my traveling stick.

892 CT: How's your game these days?

893 JW: Lousy. But it's going to be better. I think my swing is going to be better than it's ever
894 been. Really. Yeah. You learn more.

895 CT: I heard about that game you played one day with, I think you and Billy Eckstine and all of
896 a sudden a bear came up and tapped you, you were just getting ready to drive when a bear
897 tapped you on the shoulder, a talking bear too, and said, "do you mind if we make this a
898 threesome?" And you and B. looked at each other and said, "I never played with a bear
899 before but okay." So you teed off and he teed off and the bear teed off, 450 yard drive, off
900 to the left, that far from the cup. You and B. couldn't understand it. And they didn't
901 believe it. So they got on in about three, and it came time for the bear to putt out and he
902 took his putter, 450 yards down way to the left. That's a lie of course.

903 JW: I know that's a lie. I have the greatest golf story lie that you ever heard in your life, you
904 know if you were to do that kind of thing. It's got nothing to do with Basie though.

905 CT: Well that had to do with you.

906 JW: Yeah. No this Scottsman, he comes to the clubhouse and he says "Stuart!" "Yes, Mr.
907 McGregor?" "Give everybody a round of drinks on me." He says, "what?" He says, "Give
908 everybody a round of drinks on me." He says, "begging your pardon, Mr. McGregor,
909 you've been a member of this club for 15 years and you never bought a drink for anyone.
910 Suddenly a round of drinks for everyone?" He says, "yes!" He says, "well what's the
911 occasion?" He says, "well today I'm 83 years old and on Thursday I'm marrying a young
912 girl, so give everybody a round of drinks." He says, "all right Mr. McGregor." So he gives
913 everybody drinks and about seven months later the old man comes in and says, "Stuart!
914 Give everybody a round of drinks on me." He says, "ah, Mr. McGregor, and what's the
915 occasion this time?" He says, "my wife just presented me with a seven pound bouncing
916 baby boy. Give everybody a round of drinks." He says "Mr. McGregor, don't you realize
917 it's just seven months since you said you were about to be married?" He says, "yes. Two
918 under par already and me with a wimpy shaft."

919 CT: I like it.

920 JW: They say the cats gave Basie a beautiful set of clubs, they cost a lot of money in those
921 days too, about four or five hundred dollars.

922 CT: Did he ever play?

923 JW: He never did play. Not one time. Freddie Green used to tell me about that.

924 CT: And his house in the Bahamas was right on the golf course.

925 JW: Right. Well you know where he got inspired to do that, don't you?
926 CT: What, buy the house?
927 JW: Yeah.
928 CT: Oh, yeah, I know.
929 JW: How?
930 CT: When he went down there, when Catherine went down on a junket and she saw ...
931 JW: No. He came to Vegas and came by my house, and he said "you son of a gun you did it,
932 didn't you?" 'Cause my house overlooked the thirteenth green and the fourteenth tee and
933 the fifteenth fairway going up that way and at the fourteenth was a water hole, but the
934 fourteenth going across the water that way.
935 CT: That's where you live now?
936 JW: And the fifth was coming across the water that way. No I sold that place. I sold that and
937 bought a bigger place.
938 CT: Well I thought he got the idea, he came, Catherine came down on a real estate junket and
939 I had bought a lot down there. So they were showing them around, right across from
940 Stone Crab. So they were showing them around and they said, "this lot over here, you
941 probably wouldn't know him but it belongs to a jazz musician named Clark Terry."
942 Catherine said "who?" So the next week she went back down there and they were having
943 a sale, and they were trying to put out all the undesirable characters. Findlay.
944 JW: Jimmy Findlay.
945 CT: Yeah. So all the undesirables had congregated there. They were going to make that the
946 dope center of the world, and they had this big fellow by the name of Skiboo, who was
947 like an alloy, he could pick up this table with one hand and throw it through that window.
948 And when they found out that this was about to happen, Findlay put all of them off the
949 island. And they had to sell whatever they had, or allow some bohemian to have 51%
950 control. So this guy had just built this beautiful house down there, with gold door knobs
951 and about eight bedrooms and so forth, with a small swimming pool right on the golf
952 course. And that's when the Captain saw this house and he said, "that's it." He bought it
953 for a steal.
954 JW: No kidding.
955 CT: Yeah.
956 JW: Isn't that beautiful?
957 CT: Yeah. Absolutely.
958 JW: He told me later on, he says, "yeah, I got one too you know." I said, "oh, yeah? Okay."
959 He's so beautiful. He was so special. You know what I loved about him, what I learned
960 from him? He'd sit there at that piano and the orchestra was here and the orchestra was
961 over here to his left really. With the bass here, drums up there and Freddie Green right

962 here, and the orchestra all right here, and the audience out there. And he'd be playing you
963 know? And somebody would make a stone bluey. Somebody would, and Marshall would
964 smile, and Basie would get up and say, "hey, how you doing? Good to see you." He never
965 heard it, never pointed, he never looked to see who made the mistake, and I loved that. I
966 figured, I said yeah — I'd watch him do that many times. He never saw anybody make a
967 mistake. But he heard if you contributed something that was unusual, that was good. And
968 you learned from that, I mean like it goes with — the good always outweighs the bad you
969 know?

970 CT: Yeah. We had a tune that we played, and on the end of it went like [scats]. Well Sweets
971 was really the one that went [scats] he hit that note, and Basie loved it. He said, "keep that
972 in, keep that in, devil."

973 JW: I know he cracked up, he laughed.

974 CT: Ever since then, every time we played [scats], Sweets would stand up and take his big
975 solo. But I'll tell you about this cat, Basie, he, although Ellington was more endowed with
976 harmony and theory and so forth, Basie was the king of the motherwar as far as tempo,
977 and he taught us all the greatest lesson in the world and that is the utilization of space and
978 time. All the musicians in the world, and they say he learned it through the medium of
979 just socializing at Kansas City at the Cherry Blossom and the little places where you
980 would have people sit, in a small room like this where you would have gingham table
981 cloths and he'd play a little bit with Jo Jones and Walter Page or Freddie and The Fiddler,
982 or whoever was there, and he'd go socializing. Bing-a-dink and he'd go over there
983 socialize, "yeah, baby, how you doing?" Bing-a-dink, go over there and have another
984 taste over there and have two or three tastes. Meanwhile Jo Jones and Biggun are still
985 going [scats]. And he'd come in and [scats]. So he was so endowed with rhythm and
986 utilization of space and time, so he knew exactly the way a tune should be before you
987 played it. Now the one, the best example is when Neal Hefti was writing for the band, he
988 brought in a tune and passed it out, and Basie played it and Basie shook his head. He said,
989 "what's the matter, you don't like the arrangement, Chief?" He said, "no." He said,
990 "what's wrong with it?" He said, "the tempo." Well the tune was about here [claps]. So
991 he said, "well what do you think it should be?" "About here" [claps slowly] Well the tune
992 was [scats]. He brought it in to be [scats].

993 JW: That was "L'il Darling."

994 CT: He heard it. Right away he said, "uh oh." And look at the result. If he'd a kept it up there
995 it would have just been another also ran too.

996 JW: And you're talking about [inaudible] I mean "Cute."

997 CT: Oh, yeah.

998 [scatting]

999 CT: Yeah, he was the king of space, time.
1000 JW: Yes he was.
1001 CT: We learned a lot from him.
1002 JW: Yeah. I remember the first job we played. The very first job we played when I joined the
1003 band. We left New York and we went down through Norfolk, Virginia. We stopped in
1004 Washington, D.C. and got some hot smokes.
1005 CT: Hot links?
1006 JW: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Hot links and half smokes. And by the theater there, and then
1007 continued on down to get Howard, then continued on down. And we got there and that
1008 night all this Navy brass was there and it was an officer's dance. And the old man sit
1009 down at the piano and started noodling, and finally opened up. And you know what he
1010 opened up with?
1011 CT: What?
1012 JW: "What Am I Here For?"
1013 [scatting]
1014 JW: You know? I said uh huh, okay. [scats]
1015 CT: I don't know if you remember this, but some years ago, right after the band had hit its
1016 lowest ebb, we were in the Strand Theater with, in those days, the picture got the top
1017 billing. "Key Largo" with Edward G. Robinson, Humphrey Bogart and Count Basie and
1018 Billie Holiday. It went down like that. So Basie's band was kind of in a bad slump
1019 because that was right after we had started back up after the small band.
1020 JW: With Mecks and Banter?
1021 CT: No, not at that particular time. Eli. Lucky Thompson was playing.
1022 JW: Oh, yeah?
1023 CT: Walter Peacock, Lucky Thompson and the [inaudible], and Woody Wood and a strange
1024 type of band. So he was saying "I need an alto player and a trombone player." So he
1025 would always come to me when he needed somebody so I said "okay." So he's in the
1026 steam, you know in the Strand Theater then had this big steam thing. He was in the steam
1027 bath with his head down there so he couldn't hear. So I made the phone call from his
1028 dressing room to St. Louis. "Hey Ernie, you want to come join Count Basie?" "Oh, man,
1029 don't be kidding with me." "No I'm serious, I have to do it in a hurry, because when the
1030 steam bath goes off I'm dead." So he says, "yeah, okay, yeah." So I says, "well come, get
1031 Jimmy." "Jimmy too?" he says. I says, "yeah, bring Jimmy too.
1032 JW: Trombone player too.
1033 CT: So he came and went to the flea bag where I was staying, there on 47th Street, and I
1034 checked them in. The next day I told Basie after he come out of the shower, I said,
1035 "Basie, I got your players all in line." I says, "they're out on the road right now, but

1036 they'll be back tomorrow." So I brought them in and introduced them and this was
1037 backstage at the Strand, and I said to him, I said, "this is Ernie Wilkins, an alto player."
1038 Ernie never played alto in his life. He borrowed an alto from a church player and it was
1039 all wrapped up in rubber bands and cellophane, but I knew that he read well enough and
1040 had good enough sound, and sitting next to Marshall he'd do good. So he — I introduced
1041 him to him and to Jimmy and I said "now this cat here, in case Mundy and Bootwhip —
1042 James Mundy and we used to call him Bootwhip —
1043 JW: Hardy?
1044 CT: Yeah. Buster. I said in case Buster and —
1045 JW: In case Sweets kills Buster?
1046 CT: Yeah. Sweets. I don't want to say that. But in case Bullwhip and Mundy, I call him
1047 Tuesday, in case they get too busy, I says, this cat can write, he can help him out. He says,
1048 "yeah?" So to make a long story short, he said well his first assignment was to write
1049 something for our new singer. So he wrote [sings] "Every Day" and the band, you
1050 remember that? The band catapulted from the lowest ebb back to the top and it's been
1051 there ever since. All because of that one thing that he wrote for you. Remember?
1052 JW: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's true.
1053 CT: That's a fact, yeah.
1054 JW: That thing, and the other side too, "The Comeback." Foster wrote that. Everybody stole
1055 from that.
1056 CT: Oh, yeah.
1057 JW: I used to hear commercials.
1058 [scats]
1059 CT: But I never forgot that. You put it right back up there, and it's been there ever since.
1060 JW: Yeah, that one lasted. It still, "Every Day I have the Blues" I do it now. All right. Clark
1061 Terry. The man that Ellington said — and Ellington was never wrong, believe me — he
1062 said he was "beyond category." And I am most grateful to be able to call him friend.
1063 CT: Well I'll tell you Joe, I've had the pleasure of being a friend of yours and very close
1064 associate of yours for a very long period of time, and I'm looking forward to continuing.
1065 So God bless you and straight head, and all the best to you.
1066 JW: Every Day.
1067 CT: Every Day.
1068 JW: All right.