Terri Lyne Carrington

Drummer Terri Lyne Carrington was born into a musical family in Boston on August 4, 1965. She has performed and recorded with a diverse list of artists, including Herbie Hancock, James Moody and Robin Eubanks. Terri was the house drummer on both "The Arsenio Hall Show" and "Vibe." Her first album as a leader is entitled "Jazz is a Spirit."

Terri was interviewed in Toronto, Canada on January 9, 2003 by Monk Rowe, director of the Hamilton College Jazz Archive.

MR: My name is Monk Rowe and we are in Toronto for the Hamilton College Jazz Archive and I'm very pleased to have Terri Lyne Carrington with me this morning.

TC: Hello.

MR: Welcome. Quite a scene here at the IAJE, isn't it?

TC: Yeah, it's always quite a scene, I mean you never know who you're going to run into, especially depending on what city it's in. Last year it was in Los Angeles and so I was able to go most of the days because I live in that area, and it was amazing how many people you see at these events, that you don't run into just maybe once a year at something like this or a lot of times you run into people at the North Seas Jazz Festival in the summer. But IAJE has a way of really bringing people together. I know a lot of people just come to hang out at this point that aren't performing, I mean musicians. I know Kenny Barron came this year and Ndugu Chancler, and I don't think they're performing they just came.

MR: That's really great. And people get to meet and greet, especially the people that live on one coast might not see the New York people etcetera.

TC: Right.

MR: You know the material I've read about you seems like your career path was decided fairly early in life? Is that true?

TC: Well this may have something to do with it, as far as decided early, we have a lot to do in the way of fate but we can I think help direct it but there is also sometimes some universal power that directs it for you. So for me I never really saw anything else for me to do with my life other than play music and play drums because I started so young.

MR: What was it in your household that helped direct you down that path?

TC: Well my grandfather played the drums but he passed away shortly before I was born. And my father plays saxophone and drums a bit as well so he would set up his father's drums every now and then and I would just start playing sometimes. And I think the first time I

was able to keep time immediately and he said well let me help mature and develop this because it seems like she may have some talent.

MR: Did he play recordings for you?

TC: Oh all the time. I mean I grew up listening to jazz. My father was a very well versed musician in the jazz community in the Boston area. He was the president of the Boston Jazz Society. His father was a great drummer in the Boston area as well. He would play with different musicians when they came through town. Like if Duke Ellington came through maybe in the forties and didn't have a drummer for some reason he would call him. Or Fats Waller same thing. And Chu Berry. So then my father went to college and started playing with the rhythm & blues bands at that time in horn sections, with Ruth Brown and a little bit with James Brown and different people. So music was really in my household. And I'd listened to jazz since I can remember.

MR: And was it mostly swing-based jazz that you were hearing?

TC: I think a lot of times it was blues based jazz, like organ trios, Gene Ammons, Cannonball, that kind of stuff. My father really, his style of playing is Gene Ammons is a big influence on him.

MR: I see.

TC: So a lot of that style.

MR: What about public school? Did you get an opportunity to play in the public school system?

TC: No. I wasn't very interested in playing in school because growing up I started playing at seven and by the time I was ten I was sitting in with a lot of people when they came through, like Clark Terry and Rahsaan Roland Kirk was like one of the first people that I played with. And I think before I even started playing he got me shaking a tambourine on stage with him and I think saxophone — I played saxophone for a minute when I was five or six. And then the drums. So when I was playing with people like that I wasn't so interested in going through the music program in elementary or junior or even high school.

MR: I can imagine that. It kind of spoiled you I guess. What was it like, do you remember the experience with Rahsaan?

TC: Well he died when I was still pretty young. I remember various things. It's funny what things stick out in your mind. I remember asking him a lot of questions about being blind. Because I was young and it was curious to me. And that he would shoot baskets at somebody's house, they had a basketball hoop in their backyard and they would tap the hoop with a key or something, a piece of metal, so he could hear where it was and he would shoot. I don't remember how good he was or not, but just the fact that he was doing that was pretty incredible to me at the time. And I would watch him eat, you know,

just small things that intrigued me. I don't know why this stands out in my mind but I remember he was eating a turkey sandwich and I think it had like maybe it was shortly after Thanksgiving, and he had cranberry sauce inside of the sandwich. And I had never seen that before.

MR: I see. It is interesting the things we remember, but I remember seeing him live a couple of times and one of the things I remember is just the way he would negotiate finding his instruments. And they'd be all around him. Or hanging around his neck. And that was interesting to watch.

TC: Yeah he was an incredible spirit. Steve Turre you know was playing with him and I used to see Steve every so often, and he always reminds me about when I would sit in back in those days when I was eleven, ten, eleven, twelve. And he said Rahsaan would sit there and say "Terri Lyne, kick it off." And I would like start playing some time or something and then we would go into a tune. But yeah, it was a great experience being around such spirited musicians at such a young age, and such amazing musicians, you know, innovators and the people that made this music what it is. Clark Terry gave me my first professional gig when I was ten, just as a special guest with him in Wichita, Kansas at the jazz festival and I think, let's see, yeah it was 1976. And Dianne Reeves was a special guest as well, and she was still a teenager. I was ten, I think she was around eighteen or nineteen. And we met and became really close friends and she still is one of my best friends to this day. Experiences that make you who you are, sometimes you take them for granted but when I really sit and think about all the great experiences that I've had and all the relationships that I've forged through the years, it's pretty amazing, the people that have gone on. Like on my record I pay tribute to Papa Jo Jones and I used to go visit and it was shortly before he died and I tape recorded a conversation with him and so I put it on my record and I played solo drums underneath it. Stuff like that.

MR: Was he — gosh I guess I read near the end of his life he was cantankerous? Is that a fair statement or was he not with you perhaps?

TC: Yeah. Not so much with me. I just found a way to try to pull out the positive energy and you know, him and anybody else that I was around. It's funny when I listen back to the tape there were definitely some things that were said that I would not have been able to put on the record or really maybe even play for too many people, just, you know, him being a little bitter. You can hear that he was a little bitter, even with what I did put on the record. Because he felt like nobody came to visit him when he was dying. And I had to say "well I'm here, and I came to visit you with Max Roach, and I came to visit you I believe with Jack DeJohnette so I know that they came." And while I was sitting there Billy Higgins called him, while I was doing the interview. I mean well not really an interview, but while I was talking to him and recording. So you know there were people

that were there for him but he felt like nobody was there for him. And it was really sad to see how he passed as far as his living conditions. You know he had I think not really a nurse but a careperson coming in maybe once a day. I don't know how long they stayed but it didn't seem like a very comfortable situation for him.

MR: That's part of the business nowadays that I guess has changed for the positive where fellas like him were not putting aside any money and they weren't getting retirement I suppose.

TC: Yeah the pensions, and I mean unless you were in the union and doing those kinds of — I mean I'm not even sure when the union really got serious about — I'm not sure what years the union got serious about pensions and all that. But unless you're playing shows or studio work, live gigs aren't normally like that even today unless you make your own pension or somehow if you do it through a corporation you contribute to your own pension. But people don't think about all that.

MR: Yeah. How did he feel about his place in jazz history?

TC: You know I'm not sure. I mean I was also very young, I was eighteen I believe when he passed. So that's actually many years ago. It's funny my goodness. But I'm not sure. I would never start to try to answer that.

MR: Okay. Well you've had experiences in both more acoustic-based music and also with fusion and electronic music. Do you feel your role changes from one to the next?

TC: The role?

MR: The role of drums. I noticed a statement you had made about the role of the bass and the drums in let's say a swing-based format as opposed to Rock 'n Roll.

TC: Do you remember what that statement was?

MR: Yeah I think it was more about the bass drum in Rock based music being much more important whereas the jazz is the ride cymbal.

TC: Well yeah, the roles are somewhat different. Obviously in creative jazz the drummer gets to play more of an out front role. The drummer gets to I think really direct the direction of the music a little more so than in music where the drum is keeping grooves and keeping the band together primarily like glue. You still have to do that in creative music as well and creative jazz, but I can paint when I'm playing jazz. I say creative jazz because to me all jazz is not creative, but so creative for the role of the drummer. Some people just want you to keep time pretty much and that's it. Some people have to hear the hi-hat on two and four or they don't feel like it's swinging. I like for the hi-hat to be able to be an accompanying part of the whole drum kit just like my left hand or my kick-drum, as opposed to having a role of having to click on two and four. So when I'm able to be free there is no better feeling to me, the freedom that you can have playing in a creative setting. And I really get to experience that with Herbie Hancock because with the

acoustic group a lot of times we used to start with nothing and not sure where we're going to go. And somebody plays something and somebody falls in and the structures are very, very, very open. And because they're so open it's not like you have a lot of songs with just a lot of moving changes. A lot of times we play themes and then it's open to whatever we want to do. And you have to have a lot of trust to do that and you have to play with people that can inspire you. I like playing groove music as well, and groove music in a bit of a jazz format is really preferable because there's more freedom than if I'm just playing commercial music. I mean that's not my forte. I've done that. I had the fortune of playing on two television shows. I figure most people don't get the opportunity to play on one so the fact that I played on two is a big deal and I figure I'll probably never get another one because three is — that would be too strange. But I've done "The Arsenio Hall" and the "Vibe" show, which was hosted by Sinbad. And I played in a really great band on the "Vibe" show with Greg Phillinganes, and he was the musical director for Michael Jackson for a while but he is on almost every record that Quincy Jones ever made and he is just an amazing musician. He has well obviously perfect pitch but what's it called — not a phonographic memory but I mean anything he hears he remembers.

MR: Photogenic or something. Okay I know what you mean. Anything he...

TC: Hears he can play and remember. I mean every song in the world. It's really amazing. So when we would play these commercial tunes, we would really be playing them like the records and like the people that made them, not really just playing our own little version of it. Because you don't have a whole lot of time to prepare. But when you know somebody like him is really playing the parts and playing everything like it originally was, you know you really get in there and do the same thing. And so I think that it was a really strong band. I enjoyed that immensely, that experience. And no it's not the most creative but it's very challenging and especially on a TV show you have to be quick and on a TV show you have to be able to play anything, really, at any given moment. And I think that I was strong at that. But I'm not a Pop drummer. I mean I don't think I'm the best call for Janet Jackson's gig or something like that. It's just not my strongest area. My strongest area is creative jazz. So I just want to say this, some people look at me more like well she does this she does everything, and you know, almost like a jack of all trades and I think I have enough talent and enough respect for these different idioms to do them decently, but for me I mean I'm a jazz musician first. And I don't resent it but I think that anybody that really knows me or really has paid attention to my playing over the years or even to recordings I would hope hears that first as opposed to thinking that I'm somebody that dabbles in everything.

MR: Yeah. That's not to your advantage usually, to be known as a jack of all trades.

TC: Right, exactly.

MR: When you play the creative jazz you've been speaking about, how important is it to like the people you're playing with? I don't know if "like" is the right word.

TC: I know what you mean though. There is a certain kind of camaraderie that is important I believe when you are on stage with someone, because I think that you have to be able to trust in order to really be able to reach the highest musical marriage on stage, there is a certain amount of trust that is important. I have played with people whereas we didn't necessarily hit it off offstage or maybe we just had some conflicts and maybe it was resolved. But still I'd give a hundred percent, and the other musicians that I know that's good does the same, so the music would not really seem to suffer. But say I can't look this person in the eye when I'm playing. You know? Until that real trust is there and you can look up and smile and look at each other, and I think that adds another level of intimacy.

MR: Right. As opposed to just kind of turning your head and you're still concentrating but it's more of an ear thing.

TC: Right. I mean it's always an ear thing. I mean I don't have to see anybody. It's great to be able to see the leader especially because obviously there's cues and little things that you may notice. That's important. But as far as seeing all the musicians while they're playing I mean the one player that stands out front, for the most part they don't see anybody. So you don't really have to see the person, but in the rhythm section sometimes eye contact is really great. So if you're not really having the best relationship at the time with someone else in the rhythm section, you know it might be hard to look them in the eye and smile and cheer each other one. Though my experience has been that the music has not really suffered it just may not have the same kind of intimate factor that you would have when you can do that.

MR: Right. You said about horn players it makes me think of Louis Hayes said something about he watched Cannonball and Nat's rear ends for years.

TC: Right, right, right, right.

MR: But he would get time from that.

TC: Oh really?

MR: It was funny.

TC: That is pretty funny. Yeah. Those guys were really close friends with my dad. So they came to my house a lot when I was young. Cannonball died when I was kind of young but Nat came over several times and he actually had me play with him in Boston when Jimmy Cobb couldn't. He played a week and I think Jimmy Cobb couldn't make a couple of the nights and so I played a few nights, and I was fourteen. That was a lot of fun.

MR: What struck you about him, anything in particular?

TC: Nat?

MR: Yeah.

TC: He was a down home cat. He was just almost like part of the family you know. They were just beautiful people. And the people that they surrounded themselves with were all beautiful people. It seemed like they had a real grasp on the fact that life is what is important and life inspires music. To me, depending on how you live and how you view life and your philosophies, you know, obviously that affects your musicality and your artistry and so people that like to have a good time in life and are warm, compassionate and engaging kinds of people, that's how their music is. And you can hear that in Adderleys music.

MR: They both were into engaging their audience through the music and also speaking.

TC: Um hum. Yeah. Definitely.

MR: Not everybody is good at it.

TC: Yeah this is true. There is, I mean everybody's different. I mean I don't have a problem with the Miles Davis — not approach — but just how he was. I might have a problem with somebody that's trying to be like Miles. But I mean Miles was naturally Miles. Wayne Shorter is naturally Wayne Shorter. He doesn't talk a lot on stage. Herbie Hancock talks a lot on stage. I think that you just accept people for what they're offering you and you obviously have the choice to embrace it or not.

MR: During this convention you're doing a clinic about spirit in jazz?

TC: A panel discussion.

MR: A panel discussion. Can you explain to me what that means to you?

TC: Well I think jazz music is a very spirited music and sometimes it's also very intellectual. So sometimes our intellect gets so involved that we may lose sight of the spirit of the music and this really all started — I mean I named my record "Jazz is a Spirit" and it really all started because Dianne Reeves told me that she did a panel discussion with Abbey Lincoln and they were asking what is jazz, and Abbey said jazz is a spirit. And it just — something about that just really wowed me and was something that I could not get out of my mind for a long time. I said that's something to really investigate. So I started asking people about their spiritual connection with music and with their artistry and it became a little theme that really interested me and I conducted a few interviews which I'll probably have to re-do because I can't find the tapes. But I have talked to Herbie, John Patitucci and Wallace Roney and Mike Stern and Kirk Whalum and Wayne Shorter, which I thought was a good start to really try to look further into this. But at the panel discussion today I will be asking some questions — well the people that will be there will be Nnenna Freelon, John Patitucci, Bobby Sanabria and I think Robin Eubanks will get there eventually. He performs before. And I tried to pick some people with a little bit of a

diverse spiritual background. John is a Christian, I believe Nina is Christian but I think they would have different viewpoints or different angles necessarily, but Robin Eubanks practices Buddhism, I'm very strong in that community. I've practiced Buddhism for years but I'm not as disciplined at it as Robin by any far stretch of the imagination. And Bobby Sanabria I would like to maybe get into some of the ideas about how gods and goddesses and maybe Santaria or Uruguay, how they relate to traditional rhythms and Cuban rhythms or — there's a lot of people that practice Santaria or Uruba but aren't necessarily from Cuba as well. I know a lot of percussionists especially get into that because the certain rhythms that they play on the drums are directly related to some of these gods.

MR: What was it called, I'm sorry?

TC: Well Santaria and Uruba, and they're both pretty much the same thing. There's slight differences. That's why I say both names. There are slight differences and I'm not sure exactly what the differences are other than Uruba is more like people from different parts of Africa, really practice Uruba. And Santaria has a little bit more I think of a Christian or, I'm not sure if it's Catholic, maybe even Catholic flavor. Somehow they made some slight changes from Uruba to be able to practice it in a more Western community. And they added a few little I think Catholic ideas but it's the same thing and the rhythms on the drums are the same and it's even to the point where it's one drum, I forget which one now, that women aren't supposed to play. So anyway these are the kinds of things that I'll be asking about, how their spiritual affects their artistry when they improvise or when they write music. Are they thinking about a spiritual connection? Do they think that their talent — how much of it is God given? How much of it is pure work? How spirituality may even coincide with political beliefs and how that affects music. Because a lot of times people that are very politically active, especially in certain communities, are also very spiritual. And I think there's been — politics and like the church, you know, used to be in certain communities more politically active and I think that some of that, the blend between those two, I think has been lost. I mean when you look at like a Martin Luther King for instance, you know and a lot of political activists were ministers or pastors or have strong spiritual beliefs as well.

MR: Was your family active in the church?

TC: No. My father, his name is Solomon Matthew Carrington III and his grandfather was a minister, and I think maybe even his father, his great grandfather may have been as well. But I think both my parents were forced kind of to go to church as a kid every Sunday and I think when I was born they decided not to do that, and if I wanted to I could, if I didn't I didn't have to. So I would go to church sometimes but they have pretty much left that discipline.

MR: Was your interest in Buddhism, did it have anything to do with music or meeting people through music?

TC: Yes. Robin Eubanks always talked to me about Buddhism but when I met Wayne Shorter he really got me into the practice. He lived in California and Robin lived in New York and I was living in New York at the time. So once I really developed the interest I went back to Robin and, you know, tell me more. And he took me when I received Gohonzon which is a scroll that is used as like an object of worship.

MR: Would you mind spelling that?

TC: Oh Gohonzon?

MR: Yes.

TC: G-O-H-O-N-Z-O-N. And it's called — well now it's changed its name to Soka Gakkai International. And it's basically a Buddhist philosophy that's based on a man named Nichiren Daishonin and he was around about 700 years ago, and it's based on Sutra, that Shakyamuni Buddha, the original Buddha, he wrote many teachings and many writings over the years but — my stomach, you hear that? — but the Sutra that he wrote that this Buddhism is based on is the Lotus Sutra. And the Lotus Flower that grows out of mud and it's this beautiful thing that comes out of mud. And he only wrote one more Sutra after that, the Nirvana Sutra. So the thing is you have hundreds of kinds of Buddhisms because there were so many different writings and people will focus on maybe one area of what he had to say. But this was towards the end of his life and he said disregard my previous teachings. This is kind of what I've arrived at. So that's why, because some of the things that happened before are maybe things I didn't necessarily connect with or agree with. But when somebody says okay I've really learned and I've grown and this is what I have to say about life, and that's the one I connected with, to me it's obvious then to maybe disregard some of the earlier ones, which some people that focus on the earlier ones, and plus he traveled through India and China and Japan and Buddhism traveled through all these countries in the East and over the course of his life he did a lot of traveling so you have all these different people that picked up on what he had to teach at certain times in his life. So now you have like hundreds of Buddhisms. So anyway this particular one is Nichiren Daishonin. His influence, how he was received Soka Gakkai teachings and then he was kind of a Buddha of the later day.

MR: Interesting.

TC: There's not too many Buddhists three thousand years ago. So we're dealing with a lot of time. It's obviously older than Christ.

MR: Does it have an effect on how you handle hard times or stress?

TC: It's supposed to. All religions are supposed to do that. But sometimes, I mean I'm human like everybody else. Your brain says one thing but depending on what you're dealing

with at the time your heart may say something else. Sometimes it's really difficult to do the things you know maybe even in your brain that you should do. Practices that you should — whether it's meditation or whatever your practices may be, spiritual practices or if it's going to church or studying. Sometimes it's difficult to force yourself to do that in a crisis. Or that's when you go reach out to do it. So the idea is to try to make this part of your life on a more regular basis whatever that can be, so that you're more equipped when stressful situations come about. And I think that goes back to discipline. But that's definitely my struggle but I think it's a lot of people's struggle.

MR: Let me ask you about being a band leader. How practical is it these days to try to put a band together, and tour in support of an album perhaps?

TC: It's not very practical. It was very difficult to do. You figure out how you can do it and you decide how much you can invest into your career and hope that you are contributing to your longevity in the long run. But I don't think if you're trying to get rich you should be a leader or tour in support of yourself unless you're having just a huge amount of success at the time, and then you have to get in there and milk it.

MR: Right. I would guess that part of your life is juggling: being a side person, being a producer, trying to do your own recordings. Is that true?

TC: Yes I think right now I've been juggling mainly just being a side person and doing some things as a leader. I haven't been doing much producing lately. I would love to do more, it's something I really do enjoy. I did produce a record for Dianne Reeves called "That Day" and I'm very proud of that record and it was nominated for a Grammy award as well. But I haven't really done much since then.

MR: Have you ever had situations, studio work or where you really wished you hadn't got into, because you either dislike the music or the people, and how do you deal with that?

TC: It's so funny like when I get into a situation where I don't like the music my body reacts. Like my back starts aching and I'm like this. It's hard to sit up straight and just get into it. And everything starts to hurt. It is really funny. And as far as people, I get along with most people. I don't have any real personality conflicts with people so that's not normally very much of an issue. Because I think you have to take responsibility in your relationships with people and be the kind of person I think — you have to have a certain kind of attraction or magnetic attraction that attracts people to you as opposed to thinking that other people have to have that. I mean you can affect your environment, opposed to letting your environment affect you. That's actually a Buddhist concept. Person and environment have a oneness. And so when you get into a situation that's not optimal, rather than let that situation dictate your reaction or your response to it because it's not optimum, the better way is to get in and say well what can I do to improve the situation.

What can I do to influence it more positively. I mean that's how I try to be. So I don't have too many real conflicts.

MR: You said Herbie Hancock, going back to him for a moment, spoils you for playing with other people? Is that right?

TC: Oh God, yeah. I mean he's my favorite pianist. And he's just so open and so receptive musically. He just reacts. He's the kind of musician that I try to be as well so I really connect with his way because innately it was the same way I approached music even before I played with him. You know you're really reacting to what you're hearing. And you know you have the things that you can do but you don't really just resort to the licks, resort to oh I know I can play this so let me play this, as well as like inspiration of the moment, based on what's going on around you and then based on sometimes what you feel you have to do to inspire others as well at the moment. But not the kind of musician where I've developed this thing and I'm good at this thing so I'm going to kind of force this thing on you. That's why Jack DeJohnette is one of my favorite drummers and has been a mentor to me over the years and I kind of patterned myself after him in many respects, especially when I was younger. To me that's the kind of musician he is. He's not a lick drummer but you know it's Jack when you hear it because you know his sound, you know his touch, just his flavor but it's not the licks that he plays. You know there's a lot of drummers, they'll play something and you know it's them because they have signature things that they play.

MR: Do you think the proliferation of jazz schools has affected that thing you mentioned about being able to recognize people from their sound?

TC: Well I think that in jazz that was the one thing — well in any real — good musicians no matter what genre — have their own sound. But in jazz I think it was taken a step further when your sound was really the most important thing. And so when you look at all the great musicians they could damn near play one note and you'd know who it was because of their sound. And sound identity has been so important in jazz. And it's gotten lost. And sometimes people will pattern their sounds after somebody else and I guess after a while you sort of have to start doing that to some degree because it's hard to keep having an original voice when so much great music has happened. It's really difficult.

MR: I know. How can you keep innovating. It seems to be harder and harder to come up with something new. And jazz has moved so fast when you think about where it's gone in a hundred years.

TC: Right. The development of it. Yeah it's kind of interesting I mean because if you look at, you could relate it, I mean I just think that music also reflects society. And obviously African-American musicians played an extremely strong role in the development of jazz. But when you also look at African-American society over the years from the beginning of

jazz and how it grew and developed so quickly as well, it's I guess no wonder that the music did too. Because it wasn't that long ago that society was just so very different and that the freedoms that I experienced, you know, it wasn't but one or two generations for some of us that people didn't experience the same freedoms, the same chances to have a great life or play the same roles in society. And I'm not saying that — it's far from Utopia really in that respect but it's a hell of a lot different than it was.

MR: Is your father still alive?

TC: Um hum.

MR: And is he happy with your career?

TC: Oh he's just happy that I made my career in the music that he loves so much. He's happy that yes, I have had success. It's kind of like success for three generations. Success for him and his father. So yeah, he's extremely proud. I think that sometimes he wishes, you know obviously as any parent would, that it could be even better, which we all do. I mean I question too, sometimes, certain things. It's just difficult to always succeed in this business. It's not easy. You have to have a lot of tenacity, a lot of endurance, but in the end longevity speaks for itself, the people that survive or don't.

MR: Is it safe to say that you don't get into this music to make money?

TC: Well you don't get into it, I don't think, with that in mind. Who would ever pick this music if that's what they really only had in mind? But I think depending on your open mindedness, depending on maybe even how much of a purist you are, I think it's possible to make money and live a decent lifestyle for playing jazz. Obviously you have to be very good because you have to work a lot do to so. But everybody finds their way and their path. It's amazing. You know when people really decide they want to do this, I mean they find a way for the most part, to make a living. It may not be the greatest living but most of the times I think that most musicians are somewhat happy. And I think at the end of their lives if they haven't accomplished all the things that they want to they do run into some bitterness but for the most part when you're good at it you can live a fruitful life and you develop very strong relationships and it's the community that sometimes keeps you grounded and helps contribute to your understanding of why you do it in the first place. I think you have to find your happiness but happiness can't really be based on things outside of yourself. And if you really want to make money there's ways to do it and you figure that out.

MR: Let me ask you about this concept about playing ahead or behind the beat. Is there such a thing as that or is it something that people that write about music invented?

TC: Well there's definitely such a thing. To be critical of it is, I find that some people are very staunch about — I can't tell you if somebody plays behind the beat oh my God. There's a lot of people that feel like that. There's a lot of people that feel like rushing is such a

horrible thing or playing on top of the beat. For me I think that it goes beyond that. I try to look at it if you are a strong musician the beat can be elastic. Sometimes I purposely pull the beat back. Sometimes I purposely push it forward. But I had to become strong as a drummer, strong with my concepts and strong with well basically my convictions about music to be able to be comfortable doing that. Because sometimes you get into whatever the tempo is and you feel as a drummer you have to lock something into that tempo. Now if I'm playing groove oriented music yes you have to do that. That's part of that role. Sometimes though there's a slight — actually sometimes it's really slightly funkier if you just pull it back just a little bit. It's kind of a style of a funk or a groove. Sometimes it works when you have that forward motion. When I listen to like Earth Wind & Fire, it's a very forward motion the way the drumming style is in that music. Freddie White and then even some that played with them later, they still had very forward motion. If that dragged it probably wouldn't have felt as good. When I listen to Herbie's electric music from the seventies, the Head Hunter's Band, Harvey Mason and Mike Clark, the way they played, it was a busier kind of funk, really funky stuff but good for the drummer because there was a lot to do. But it had a forward motion. And if that stuff, to me, isn't played with that kind of forward motion it doesn't feel as good. But then when you listen to James Brown or some blues based music, there's a certain thing about just laying it back just a hair and just waiting. We're talking milliseconds. You know there's something about that that's just incredibly funky. So even in that style, yeah that's there. But jazz for me, sections of songs that I will push a little bit because of that section or I'll pull back a little bit, we're talking very subtle changes though, that most ears wouldn't recognized, but a musician might. But I think they would have to respect strong musicians enough to know that that's by design and Jack DeJohnette is like that and like Elvin Jones for instance kind of pulls time back. He plays with motion and sometimes the motion is like this to me. Roy Haynes. And to me Elvin and Roy are two of my favorite drummers. You know they're very, very different, they were around the same time. I think Roy came a little bit before Elvin but maybe not. But just his career with recordings and stuff I think Roy started recording a little earlier. But anyway Roy plays like with this kind of motion. Now which motion is more powerful? They're both moving. And it's just interesting that you can have these two totally different concepts and they both work and they're both great. So for me I don't pick really one. I kind of just be like elastic with time.

MR: Have you ever worked with bass players who seem to be dragging to you and do you have to goose them, or do you try to go with where they're at?

TC: These are like such subtle things that you have to make adjustments with, very subtle adjustments when you're playing with somebody. A lot of times you haven't played with them before so it's like if you look at what you're doing like a computer it's constantly

moving and working and making these really miniscule adjustments very quickly to make a piece of music happen or not. And that's the amazing thing about musicians. That's the amazing thing about great musicians, how you can do that naturally, without maybe even being aware that that's what's happening. I play with bass players that rush and that tends to bother me. Trying to relax the music is a little harder than if somebody's a little behind and you're trying to push. That's a little easier and it sounds a little better to me. I can try to help move it forward when somebody else may be a little behind. But when somebody's really on top to the degree, and I'm trying to relax I just try to, it's like breathing. I try to play any way that helps then relax. So sometimes you're successful, sometimes it's difficult. But most of the time musicians are compassionate people, and most of the time you just work out something without even talking about it.

MR: What's in the near future for you?

TC: Near future. I'm doing some touring with Herbie Hancock coming up in a couple of months. Between now and then I'm mainly doing a few things on my own. In New York I'm playing the Jazz Standard and Yoshi's in the Bay Area. I have a clinic I think. Just various little freelance — you know I'm playing with James Moody a little bit. I think I have something coming up with Mike Stern.

MR: And you have an agent who — does she promote you or do you mostly promote yourself and the agent handles the phone calls? I'm not sure that I stated that very well.

TC: No I understand what you mean. I have basically managed myself for many years now. I had a manager in the late eighties, early nineties, and then when I didn't have a major record deal then that wasn't necessary anymore. And I've managed myself since then, say in the last ten years. And I've recently got management again because I was ready to propel my career to the next level and I have a record out, and I definitely needed help with making that happen. So because I'm used to doing everything myself I don't feel that I'm necessarily the type of client that you have to babysit or do everything for, and then I also have to work on relinquishing, you know, to let somebody else do things. So it's both. I mean I'm not necessarily — I've never been terribly aggressive with getting work. My phone rings and I kind of say yay or nay or now it's my — I have mail, say yay or nay. But so I think I definitely needed somebody to be a little bit more aggressive, especially when you're trying to be a leader. Because as a sideperson you don't really need a manager if you get enough because if enough phone calls come in you don't need a manager to try to get you sideperson work.

MR: Well it's been fascinating talking to you.

TC: Oh thank you.

MR: I really appreciate it and I plan on staying up late tonight so I can hear your group.

TC: Thank you.

MR: Who is playing with you?

TC: Gary Thomas, Mike Formanek, Ingrid Jensen and I hope Renee Rosnes.

MR: You're not sure yet?

TC: No. Actually we haven't rehearsed so definitely I need to rehearse, so maybe a sound check will allow enough time for that.

MR: Okay. Thanks for your time.

TC: Thank you, Monk.