

Eddie Locke

Eddie Locke was born in Detroit on February 8, 1930. He traveled to New York City in 1954 as part of the duo "Bop and Locke" and stayed to become part of the active jazz scene. Eddie has been the drummer of choice for some of the most celebrated artists in jazz and he is proud of his long association with Roy Eldridge and Coleman Hawkins.

Eddie was interviewed in New York City on January 13, 2001, by Monk Rowe, director of the Hamilton College Jazz Archive.

MR: My name is Monk Rowe and I'm very pleased to have Eddie Locke here with me today in New York City for the Hamilton College Jazz Archive. I've been looking forward to talking to you because when I talk to people on the phone I get a certain vibe, and you seem like an interesting guy.

EL: Well you know, the music business has been nice for me. Great. I always tell people, I said if I never played any more jazz, or if I never played any more music, my soul has been satisfied. Because I was very lucky. You know I played with Coleman Hawkins and Roy Eldridge. That is something, to be that lucky at the young age that I was. To play with one of them would have been good. But I played with both of them individually and I played with both of them together. It was like being fulfilled, jazz, music-wise, always jazz, and they were such good people. Wonderful human beings.

MR: That really goes along with their legend, doesn't it?

EL: Yes.

MR: Just the fact, I mean they were great players but also great people.

EL: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The things they did with that quartet that we had with Major Holly, Tommy Flanagan, myself, I mean he treated us like a family almost. And I tell people, they would believe it but we must have made about ten albums. We never, ever rehearsed. Not one time. Not once. Some people don't believe it but we never did. That's the part of jazz that I think that people don't understand. It's more than the rehearsing and the technique, the music is about the people. And especially — I think any music — but jazz especially, because it's not — the technique thing is not necessarily the means. You make the music. Let's make some music together.

MR: Are there certain bass players that you've experienced that like right away it really clicks?

EL: Oh yeah.

MR: Or the opposite.

EL: Or the opposite, right, yes, absolutely. The time thing is very elusive. It's not like — as Papa Jo Jones used to say, jazz is something special just like classical music is special in

40 its idiom, but jazz is just as special because it's different. And the time thing is
41 completely different. And when you're playing jazz, oh I don't know if it was an old guy
42 or a young guy that always told me — I told these kids up at this college I went to — a
43 lot of people have never heard about the pendulum. And the time. It's a pendulum. You
44 know you can go from like 1-2-3-4, like that, or you can go 1-2-3-4, you get there the
45 same time. But this part down here is where the swing is.

46 MR: Oh I like that.

47 EL: I know. A professor told me that at this other school, he said he had never heard that
48 before.

49 MR: I've never heard that.

50 EL: An old guy told me that a long time ago.

51 MR: Yeah? Uh huh. That's where the swing is.

52 EL: You're getting there the same time. Most guys play like this. Boom-boom-boom-boom.
53 But if you play this, that's the swing, that's the time, and that time is the same place.

54 MR: Yeah. Wow. Well let me take you back a little bit if we can.

55 EL: Okay.

56 MR: You're — a lot of great musicians came out of Detroit.

57 EL: Oh boy, it was quite an environment. It was wonderful. It was sharing. You know, they
58 said, I heard a guy say one time, I don't know what his name is, I always mix him up
59 with, he played, in Malcolm X he played the larger Muhammad. I could never — he
60 teaches out at Howard University. I can't think of his name though. I always mix him up
61 with the other famous black actor that gets all the Oscars and everything. You know who
62 I'm talking about. He was in "Driving Miss Daisy?"

63 MR: Oh, Morgan Freeman.

64 EL: Yeah but this is not him.

65 MR: Oh that's the guy you mix him up with.

66 EL: But I think he's actually older. But what I was going to say, what we was talking about,
67 he said a guy was telling him how much he was a great teacher. And he said "you know,
68 you can't really teach anyone anything," he said "you just create an environment and
69 they will learn." And that's true. Because that's the environment we had with the quartet.
70 It was a wonderful environment. And so the music was wonderful. The environment
71 created all the music. Because I've been around these great, musically great musicians,
72 but the environment didn't make the music. It didn't make the music. But Detroit was a
73 great place, and you know all those people that were there. To think that many great
74 musicians came from one place is just astounding sometimes to me.

75 MR: Was there people in your high school even?

76 EL: Oh yeah. Because it was a big area, my high school, Miller High School, that's where I
77 went, to Miller High School. It was the same school Bags went to, Milt Jackson went to
78 that high school. And Kenny Burrell went to it, Oliver Jackson. Of course Detroit was a
79 big area. It was very spread out. There must have been seven, eight, nine high schools
80 there. Of course Tommy Flanagan went to a different one, Roland Hanna. Roland Hanna
81 and Tommy went to the same high school. Barry Harris went to a different high school.
82 We used to play amateur shows together. I always tease Barry Harris about that. It's a
83 place called the Paradise Theater, it was like the Apollo. You know we had our band, he
84 had his band. But Barry Harris has always been an organizer, even when he was young.
85 Because I said to him, I said "man, we had the best band," because after everybody
86 played then the guy would go hold the card over your head and then the people would
87 clap. And you know, he held the card over our head and the people clapped. When they
88 held the card over Barry's head, boy the theater went crazy. I said well he wasn't that
89 much better than us. Oh yeah? They had on their high school sweaters, and he had every
90 kid from that high school was in the audience. But that's the kind of fun we had you
91 know. You know Elvin and I were very close when we were in Detroit. And Oliver
92 Jackson. Well you know that's how I came to New York. I had a song and dance team.

93 MR: Yeah, Bop and Locke?

94 EL: That's right.

95 MR: Tell me about Bop and Locke.

96 EL: Huh?

97 MR: Tell me about that.

98 EL: Well, did you ever hear of Red and Curly?

99 MR: I don't think so.

100 EL: They used to travel with Lionel Hampton. But the first time I saw them they were with
101 Erskine Hawkin's band. They had a drummer act like that. And they were tap dancers.
102 They were basically tap dancers. Ours was the exact opposite. We were drummers and
103 jive tap dancers. But we did this all ourself you know, and I think we must be the — we
104 rehearsed for about two years putting this act together. And Tommy Flanagan and all the
105 guys used to accompany us and help us. Pepper Adams, they'd put bands together and
106 play our music for us you know. That's the way the guys were in Detroit. And we
107 decided we were going to try to make it with this act. And we probably would have been
108 better but it was at a bad time, when we got that act together, that's when Vaudeville was
109 dying. That's when Rock 'n Roll came. That's when all the tap dancers and everything
110 went like kaput.

111 MR: Help me out with the times here. Maybe '48?

112 EL: Well we came here in '54.

113 MR: Okay.

114 EL: But we got booked into the Apollo Theater which was unheard of. That was one of the
115 biggest Vaudeville houses that's ever been. And we didn't have no name. We only had
116 played once in Detroit. And this agent saw us there. And we played at the Colonial
117 Theater. And then he submitted us to the Apollo. And they accepted us. And that was
118 really something you know, just to come right from Detroit to the Apollo Theater, in New
119 York City like that, it was like astounding for me.

120 MR: Were you guys nervous?

121 EL: Whew. Was I nervous. When we got off the train, we rode the train here, we got off at
122 Park Avenue and 125th Street. And when we came down those steps I was scared. I never
123 had seen that many people. It was in July. I had never seen that many people on the street
124 before in my life. It was like wooh, I wanted to go right back up those steps man. I was
125 very, very funny to see. And I asked somebody, was it a parade? Because I'd never seen
126 that many people on the street at one time like that. And that was the beginning. And we
127 played the Apollo, and we made the whole week. You know after the first show at the
128 Apollo, Mr. Schifman, he always watched the first show. That was the guy that owned
129 the Apollo. And then if he called you into the office it was usually to tell you that you've
130 got to go. He would pay you, but he didn't want you. If he didn't like the act you had to
131 go. And after we did our first show, they had a little speaker system you know, they said
132 "Bop and Lock? this is Schifman's office." And all the other acts in the other show said
133 "oh, man, I feel sorry for you guys, man." Because usually when he called — but when
134 we went in his office, you know, he said "you know, you guys got a nice little act, I'll tell
135 you one thing though. Cut out those jokes." We had some terrible jokes. And you know
136 where we got the jokes from? We sent off for them, you know, years ago in the back of
137 comedy books and things, you could send off for a joke book. That's what we did. And
138 I've still got it.

139 MR: You've still got the book?

140 EL: Yeah, I've still got the joke book. Yeah.

141 MR: Oh, great.

142 EL: He said "you can stay, you can do the dancing and the drumming, singing. No more
143 jokes."

144 MR: So now you had to fill some more time.

145 EL: Well Tommy Flanagan, you know he used to accompany us and help us too. And one
146 time, you remember Leonard Silman?

147 MR: No.

148 EL: Smart Affairs? He used to sing. That's where Eartha Kitt came from, Robert Clarey. He
149 was called Leonard Silman. He would get all these young people, he would find these

150 “New Faces.” He called them like “New Faces” of 1949, then 1950, and every year he
151 would audition and then he would put a show together and take them around the country.
152 Eartha Kitt — all these people came from that guy, that “New Faces.” Robert Clarey, a
153 couple of those guys. But anyway, we auditioned for him. And Tommy was our
154 accompanist. And it was in a theater so comedy was like down in the pit and we were up
155 on the stage and he was sitting right there. So Tommy says “yeah, man, you guys came
156 out and you were singing and he was smiling and everything. You played the drums, he
157 was smiling,” he said “then you started telling those sad jokes, man” and he said —
158 Tommy always tells everybody that. He said they saw him scratch your name off.

159 MR: What were a couple of the tunes that you would have done in that act?

160 EL: Well we wrote the tunes.

161 MR: Oh you wrote the tunes.

162 EL: Our opening tune was called “Drummer Man.” We wrote that. And then we did things
163 like “Lover” for the drum pieces. We were synchronized drumming. Where we did — we
164 had two complete drum sets and each hand was doing the same thing. You know what I
165 mean?

166 MR: Yeah.

167 EL: Yeah. So it was not like today, people have got video. I sure wish I had a video or
168 something of it.

169 MR: Yeah, it would be nice.

170 EL: It would be. I’ve got some still pictures, a couple of still pictures, but that’s all.

171 MR: So now you are a young man in the big city.

172 EL: In New York. Well that couldn’t go anywhere because that type of show business was
173 dying at that time. You know Cozy Cole told us, “you guys were good, man, but you just
174 came along at the wrong time.” And so we started, first we just started trying to get little
175 gigs. We had a few other little jobs with the act, but nothing really to sustain us. So we
176 both just started kind of trying to play the drums. And we met Papa Jo Jones, who took us
177 into his apartment and kept us for about — we lived with him for about two years.

178 MR: Is that right?

179 EL: Yeah, on 44th Street in the Henry Hotel. Those guys were just special people. Yeah. And
180 we got jobs. I worked at Macy’s and did stuff like that. They taught me values about life
181 that were still great for me right now. See you’ve got to take care of yourself you know.
182 If you don’t care of yourself you’re not going to be able to play the drums. You can’t say
183 I’m a drummer and you’re not working you know. You’ve got to eat, you’ve got to take
184 care of your parents, all that stuff. Those guys were, I mean I learned so much, I’m still
185 living off of it.

186 MR: Neat.

187 EL: So we lived with him for about two years. Two years.
188 MR: And he was with — he was on the road some of that time?
189 EL: Well that was still the time of the Jazz at the Philharmonic, he was doing that kind of —
190 this was like '57, '58. Right about the time that big picture was taken.
191 MR: Oh yes. A Great Day in Harlem.
192 EL: A Great Day in Harlem. So that's why I'm on the picture. That's how I happened to be
193 on the picture.
194 MR: Right. Oh because of him?
195 EL: Jo Jones. I used to carry his drums to record dates and set them up, and carry his drums
196 and get coffee for him and all that stuff. Like an apprentice, which the young guys won't
197 do that now. I learned so much that it's just like you took him of college. That was like,
198 you know, just watching him play in all these different venues. I'd carry his drums, set
199 them up, take them down, you know what I mean, take them home for him if he wanted
200 to go somewhere else. And he told me one day, he used to say "well meet me here."
201 That's all he would say. I couldn't ask him no questions about it. And when I got off the
202 train at 125th Street and I was walking down the street, and I saw all these people
203 standing out in front of this apartment I said God, did Jo Jones invite me to a funeral? I
204 don't even know these people. And when I get there and I see all these musicians, I was
205 like, I couldn't believe it. And so I didn't know many of them then. Later I played with
206 almost everybody on that picture. But at that time, and like I said, the way I was raised
207 and the way I came up, I wouldn't have dared went up to Roy or Coleman Hawkins and
208 say "hello, I'm Eddie Locke." You know, no, I would never do nothing like that. I would
209 never do nothing like that. And why I'm standing on the picture next to Horace Silver,
210 because Doug Watkins was playing with Horace Silver at that time, the bass player, from
211 Detroit. So I knew Horace because of that, to talk to. I knew who all of them were. But
212 not walk up to them and just start talking. So that's why I'm standing at that point, where
213 I am.
214 MR: Boy, I bet you're glad you went though.
215 EL: Oh of course I am. And that was the funny thing about — they couldn't identify me when
216 they got the whole layout done, they knew everybody and Esquire was going crazy.
217 Because I met some people later on that were there. They said "who is this guy?" And
218 they were calling all the studios and all the record companies and all the agents, but
219 nobody knew me.
220 MR: Is that right. Wow.
221 EL: And you know who identified me? The only person — Billy Crystal's father, Jack
222 Crystal.
223 MR: Really.

224 EL: He ran a place down on Second Avenue, where the college kids went. Every Friday and
225 Saturday night they had jazz. And Jo Jones used to play there and Roy Eldridge, Charlie
226 Shavers, Willie “The Lion” Smith. And I used to go down there every week with Jo,
227 whenever Jo played there, and just sit you know. And so he identified me.

228 MR: Great story.

229 EL: That was something. That was really funny. He said man the people were going crazy.
230 Because I met the people at Esquire later. They said man we done got this whole layout
231 done and the editor saying “how have you got this guy on here that you can’t identify?”
232 But I fit there now, I belong there, so it worked out.

233 MR: That’s right. You justified your presence for sure.

234 EL: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That was great.

235 MR: What was it about Jo Jones’ drumming for you—

236 EL: He was the most creative drummer I ever saw. That could create things, that I’ve never
237 seen anybody else do. He had this kind of mind about the drums. Actually the first time I
238 saw him, the first time I ever saw him play was in Detroit. They had the Paradise Theater,
239 just like the Apollo, where they had those theaters in all the big cities. And he was there
240 with Basie. And they did these things they called “Brushes,” where the big band is just
241 going [scats] and he’s playing with the brushes. And he never picked the sticks up. But
242 he always gave you that impression that he was, I mean always like it was going to
243 happen. And then he took a solo, and the band cut out, and he took this solo with the
244 brushes. And I had never seen nobody do nothing like that. It was like he was a magician
245 with those brushes. I mean I’d never seen anybody play brushes the way he could. He
246 was a magician you know. Yeah, he was something. Of course I remember at his funeral
247 Roy Haynes, when I was talking, and I said somebody had put some sticks on his body,
248 in his hands. And I said “boy,” I said “he was sticks,” I said “but those brushes, man.”
249 And Roy Haynes held his hand up and he reaches in his pocket and says “I brought
250 some.”

251 MR: Wow.

252 EL: I mean I’ve never seen anything like that before. Every drummer — it couldn’t have been
253 no one playing drums nowhere that day, that evening. I’ve never seen that many — I’ve
254 been at a lot of those affairs, those funerals like that, you know, and I’ve never seen
255 nothing like that before in my life. Never. He had touched so many people. I can’t think
256 of no drummer that ever saw him play — if you’ve got any kind of brain you had to get
257 something. Because he just had so much. He just threw away so much stuff. I’m still
258 trying to get some of it you know. As Max Roach always said, “if I ever be that player I
259 owe that old guy five.”

260 MR: Wow. And the sound of the Basie rhythm section.

261 EL: Ooh.

262 MR: What about that?

263 EL: That thing was just like the wind. It was so smooth. And these drummers, the drummers
264 then, all the drummers from that period, as far as I'm concerned, and I've come up with a
265 theory about it. That all the drummers from that period had great touches on the drums.
266 The touch they had. Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, Jo Jones, Sid Catlett. They had this nice
267 touch. The sound that they got. And I've noticed that all modern drummers, a lot of them
268 have a lot of technique but they don't have no touch. The touch on the drums is not like
269 those guys' touch. And you know what my theory on it is that — this came to me one day
270 — I said some young guy was asking me when I was young, did they have plastic heads?
271 I said "no, man, there was no plastic heads," I said "it was calf heads." And I said every
272 place you played, the weather and the lights affected that head. You could come off the
273 stage one minute and you've been playing and when you go off for the intermission,
274 when you come back, they'd be different. You know? From the heat or the moisture or
275 whatever. And so you had to really learn how to use the technique. You couldn't do
276 nothing about it.

277 MR: You couldn't play the same way every time?

278 EL: No. You had to develop — because that thing wouldn't respond. You know, they would
279 get mushy. If you went someplace in where there was really hot and it started getting
280 damp, those heads would just get like pfew. It would get mushy, man. And you had to
281 develop some way to play on that. And it made you concentrate on that too. And every
282 drummer, and then I started really checking it out after I thought about it. I'd never
283 thought about it before. See because of plastic heads, they stay the same all the time. You
284 know what I mean? So now you're just beating on 'em. But you couldn't do that if they
285 were calf heads. I mean you could — and the thing wouldn't do nothing. You had to
286 know how to do something on it to make its sound. You had to play off the heads. You
287 couldn't play into it like that. Because it would just go booof. You know what I mean?

288 MR: So consequently they developed this excellent technique?

289 EL: They knew they had to — yes. It made you. You were forced to. And that's one of the
290 things that I really miss when I listen to a lot of drummers. They've all got a great
291 technique with the hands, but that part is — I don't hear that like I used to hear it. No
292 man, those guys had such wonderful touch, and ideas. My first good job was in the
293 Metropole. That was my first big time job, on Seventh Avenue. And they had music from
294 the morning — from noon, they had music from like 3:00 in the afternoon until 4:00 in
295 the morning. Two bands change. Like we played from three to seven. New band comes
296 out. Bigger bands. You know two. And I'll never forget when I first started playing there,

297 I thought I was pretty good. Of course, young, flying, right? Zutty Singleton was the
298 other drummer. “Face” he calls everybody.

299 MR: He calls ‘em “face?”

300 EL: “Face.” He called everybody face. And I found out why they did that, because you never
301 had to remember anybody’s name. Hey Face, the Gates, and like Pops. So you didn’t
302 know whether they really knew each other or not. “how you doing, Face?” You know.
303 But I said oh man, I knew about him but I really didn’t know him that well. So I was
304 going to go up there, I’m going to kill this old guy, right? Because they had drum battles.
305 That was a drum room. The Metropole. That was a drum house. Because you know there
306 are certain houses, it was a long stage.

307 MR: Behind the bar?

308 EL: Behind the bar, yeah. Everybody played there. So I go up there man and I was working
309 with Tony Parenti, it was just a trio. Tony Parenti playing clarinet and Dick Wellstood
310 was playing the piano, who I got very fond of. He was the only young guy that could ever
311 do that stuff. He really could do that striding stuff. He was one of the best young guys I
312 ever heard do that. So they had these little drum battles. And I’d do all my little [scats].
313 And he had little ratchets on this drums and he’d go [scats], and the people would go
314 crazy. And I said something is wrong with this picture here. You know? So I started
315 watching this guy, man, I said I think I’m tearing it up, tearing it up, and the people, they
316 paid me no mind at all. I said this guy’s killing me every night. So I got to be really good
317 friends with him, and just watched him. The presentation. That’s what those guys could
318 do you know. I would be doing all that stuff, and he would [scats] and you’d hear a little
319 bell — ding, or something you know. It was beautiful. And they were all so nice to me,
320 wonderful people you know. And that’s where I learned, watching all those guys man.
321 Like Buddy Rich played there, and all these guys you know. Buddy Rich, I could talk to
322 Buddy Rich because Buddy Rich knew I liked Jo Jones. And if you liked Jo Jones, you
323 were okay with Buddy Rich. If you didn’t like Jo Jones, I’m telling you, he loved Jo
324 Jones. You know that, though. He loved Jo Jones. If you didn’t like Jo Jones—

325 MR: Don’t talk to Buddy Rich.

326 EL: That’s right. Please don’t.

327 MR: That’s great. Tell me about — I’ve been waiting to get to the fifteen years you spent at
328 Ryan’s?

329 EL: Oh yes.

330 MR: Wow. That’s a long time for a—

331 EL: Well Roy Eldridge was my — well let’s see — he was my conscience.

332 MR: Yeah?

333 EL: Well he was like my — I don't know what to call him. I had a great relationship with him
334 and Coleman, but both of the relationships were very different. And Roy Eldridge was
335 the Godfather of my children, you know it was like my family you know. And those
336 guys, they never — you know what I really loved about them? They never, ever BS'd me
337 about what I could do. Do you know? He'd say "you're not great but you're okay. You
338 just keep doing what you're doing. You're all right." You know they didn't put that stuff
339 in your head like you're the greatest drummer I ever saw. You know, just to say things
340 like that. I think that's one of the worst things that happens to a lot of young musicians
341 today. They make a CD or a record or something, and somebody tells them that they're
342 the greatest thing that's been here you know, and they don't grow anymore. I'm still
343 growing. I'm better now — I can play better now than I could ten years ago. And you
344 know what I mean? And I think it came from that you know. I mean you knew they liked
345 you because you wouldn't have been there. But they never were just like polishing you
346 off all the time, how great you are and all you did. You know what I mean? You were
347 there, it's okay. And they treated you nice if you did what you were supposed to be
348 doing. Like as Papa Jo said, take care of the bandstand. That's another thing those guys
349 did. When they went up on the bandstand, it was a business for them. And they took care
350 of the bandstand. The music part, everything. And Jo did say "you've got to know how to
351 get on the stage, you've got to know how to get off the stage." "Don't wear out your
352 welcome" he said.

353 MR: Terrific.

354 EL: And they could do so much with a little. They never ranted and raved a long time, and
355 that's another thing I learned from them was that's something wonderful to be able to do,
356 to get your little piece done, and don't wear the people out.

357 MR: Yeah. Two choruses instead of eight.

358 EL: Instead of eight, yeah, yeah. And do tell the story. Like I said before, I must have been
359 the luckiest — and I thank God for it. I mean I don't go to church all the time but I do
360 thank God for it all the time. Because that was really luck. You've got to be good but
361 you've got to be lucky too.

362 MR: Roy had quite a competitive spirit, didn't he?

363 EL: I've never played with anyone that loved to play as much as him. Never. And my greatest
364 story, every time I tell somebody this, they always, they love it, but I'm going to tell this
365 so this will be on film forever. I will never forget, we were playing in a place and there
366 was no one in the place, just like this room we're in now, with the band. We were up
367 there playing. And I was just like that [scats]. And he turned around and he leaned over
368 the drum set at me and he said "what are you doing?" And I said "well Roy" I says,
369 "there's nobody in here." He looked me right in — I mean he got closer — he said "I'm

370 here.” That was the scariest thing, I mean and the way he said it, you know what I mean?
371 But it made a difference in me. He said “I’m here.” Let’s play. Because that’s what he
372 did. I mean I’ve heard him play some of the greatest music I ever heard, in a room just
373 like this with nobody in it. He loved that horn. It was just like — that’s why at his
374 funeral, when Dizzy said, He said “y’all gotta find something else to do now,” he said
375 “because this is the only person that was ever named Jazz.” He said “he’s is the only one
376 who was ever named Jazz. And that’s what he was. I’ve seen him, I mean Jo Jones told
377 me, he said “one of these days you’re going to be playing with him, man, and he’s going
378 to take you out of that drum seat. He’s going to rip you right out of that drum seat.” I said
379 now that is really deep. I didn’t pay that much attention. But he did. Right up in Toronto
380 one time. Oh God. I had this feature on “Caravan” that we did, and when he got to the
381 bridge one time boy, I mean it was just like it was so dynamic. It was just like I couldn’t
382 do it. I couldn’t even play. It just took me away, I’m telling you. It was unbelievable. I
383 never felt nothing like that before in my life. It was just — his presence when he played
384 was just like unbelievable. Unbelievable. Like I said, I heard him every night. I never
385 played with him — you know how long I played with him — but I had played with him
386 before I played in Ryan’s. And never a night — he’s the only person I’ve ever been
387 around like that — it was never a night where sometime during the night I said “wow.”
388 Do you know what I mean? I mean he would do something that I’d never heard him do
389 before. Like this stuff so dynamic that it would be just like woah. That was amazing. He
390 was amazing.

391 MR: He made you play better than ever I would imagine.

392 EL: Ever. That’s right. Oh yes. Oh yes. Oh yes. Because he would just — he’d say, he would
393 tell you, “I’ll play the job by myself if you don’t want to play. And I can do it.” And he
394 could. Because he loved to play. When he got up there and got that — he was just like a
395 little kid with a toy you know. Just like a little kid at Christmastime every time he played.
396 When he was playing it was just like — I’ve never felt no one play like that. I see some
397 of these trumpet players now and I say boy. And I mean I’ve heard all trumpet — every
398 place that we played, all the greatest trumpet players in the world I’ve met. Classical
399 trumpet players too I’m talking about. And the one guy told me he said, and this guy was
400 one of those great Hollywood guys that did all those big films. He told me he said
401 “listen” he said “that guy defined the trumpet.” That’s something. And that never studied
402 it. You know he never studied. Guys used to come in and say “look at him, man, he’s
403 pressing the wrong valves and playing the right notes.” Unbelievable. They said “he’s
404 pressing the wrong valves and playing the right notes.”

405 MR: I’m curious, was he — what kind of physical shape was he in?

406 EL: Well he was in good shape until when his wife died. That was when he succumbed to his
407 age. You know what I'm saying?

408 MR: I'm just, you know, when you watch the films and there's so much energy.

409 EL: I've never seen — that's when I'm trying to tell you. I've never seen, I mean sometimes
410 he would start playing and it would just like — you couldn't believe that this guy could
411 keep building. That's another thing they told me about, building a solo. They built a solo.
412 They knew how to build a solo. These guys don't know how to solo like that now. They
413 would just keep building man, until he got to that peak where he wanted to get. You
414 know what I mean? And it was just unbelievable. I've never felt nothing like that, that
415 kind of energy. I could feel it in myself when he was playing. I mean he'd hit some of
416 those notes sometimes and you could just wooh. He was amazing. He was really truly
417 — and you know Dizzy always said that. He said that was it. Because he had this other
418 thing about him, that he loved it so much. That if you got on the stage with him to play, I
419 don't care if you was playing a Jew's harp or piccolo or whatever, when you got up there
420 to play, you were in confrontation. He didn't care nothing about — you had a battle on
421 your hands. You came up there to play with him. That was just it. And it was just
422 something like second nature to him. I mean he didn't plan it, but if you got up there and
423 started playing on the horn, I don't care what kind of horn it was. It didn't have to be no
424 trumpet, any kind of horn, you had some trouble on your hands pal.

425 MR: So he was not too shy about wiping people out?

426 EL: Oh that's all. He was oooh boy oh boy oh boy. He was just like fierce with that. One of
427 my stories I told at the funeral with Dizzy was Dizzy was coming down the street one
428 day, it was like at a festival time. It was like as a matter of fact this hotel's got a lot of
429 musicians around here. And it was summertime. And we used to stand out in front of
430 Ryan's on intermission, you know out in the street. And Dizzy had his horn and he was
431 coming down the street. He got up to him and he said "how you doin' Jazz?" and he put
432 the horn down on the ground. He said "listen, Jazz," he said "you know what?" He said
433 "I want to play." And he say "but could I play by myself?" He said "because man I don't
434 feel like that tonight." He said, "and you don't know how to act. So could I just play?"
435 And Roy say "yeah, you can go play by yourself." But that was just a beautiful thing.
436 That's what I'm talking about. He knows if Roy gets up there with him, he's going to
437 start that screaming and whistling and Dizzy said "listen, can I go up there and play by
438 myself?" He said "'cause you don't know how to act, you know that man? And I can't be
439 bothered with that tonight."

440 MR: That's good. You say your relationship with Coleman Hawkins was important but
441 different?

442 EL: It was completely different. But that's what made jazz so special. Because all these guys
443 got — character-wise they were all givers but they were different emotionally about
444 certain things you know. Coleman liked to listen to classical music you know. We'd sit
445 up in his apartment with Tommy Flanagan, Roland Hanna and all. He had a classical
446 collection that was unbelievable — operas — and he knew all that music. We'd listen to
447 more classical music in his house than we ever listened to jazz. He loved Rubinstein. He
448 got me on to the Rubinstein. I read both of Rubinstein's books and went to see him about
449 five times. Arthur Rubinstein was his piano player you know. And he knew all those
450 pieces. He knew all those pieces. If you made a mistake, he knew it, oh yeah. He knew
451 that music. And we'd sit up there and listen to that music and we'd talk about it. I learned
452 a lot about that music from him, you know just listening and how to listen to it. And he
453 loved the piano too. You'll notice on any of his albums, the piano player always plays a
454 lot. Any Coleman Hawkins album. The piano player always plays a lot. Because he loved
455 the piano. He loved to listen to it. And we had a great relationship also, but it was like I
456 said, different. He went down to — he loved big cars. And fancy things. Fancy suits and
457 shoes—

458 MR: Coats.

459 EL: Coats, pants and clothes. And he went down, right down here on Broadway and bought
460 an Imperial, this would be a Chrysler, the showroom right here on Broadway. Right not
461 far from this hotel, right there, Broadway around 55th Street or something. Chrysler
462 showroom. He went down there and bought one of those big Chrysler 300's. And he
463 didn't even have any license. And he had the guy drive it up and put it in the lot where he
464 lived up on Central Park West. They had a parking thing there. Put it there. You know
465 nobody ever drove that car but me. That's right. And he loved me that much. Nobody
466 ever drove that car but me. When he died I don't know what happened to it. I mean
467 nobody ever drove that car. That's right. Stanley Dance said "I called up Coleman
468 Hawkins" I said "man I want you to come down here at midtown and I want to talk to
469 you about something." So he says "well you want to call Eddie Locke up." "But," he says
470 "I don't want to talk to Eddie Locke, Coleman, I want to talk to you." He said "this guy
471 wouldn't come unless you came." He was, I mean that's what I'm saying, he loved the
472 way Roy did, but it was different. I mean nobody ever drove that car but me. It was a
473 beautiful car. And he was — anytime he wanted to know something — he'd be on the
474 road with Jazz at the Philharmonic. And they'd be talking about music or something.
475 He'd say "I'm going to call up Locke to see." He'd call me from on the road. The guys'd
476 say "what are you calling up Eddie Locke for?" He's got Oscar Peterson there and all
477 these different guys. "He's calling him up to ask him something."

478 MR: I'll be darned. Wow.

479 EL: Yeah, that was something. Just like I said it was just unbelievable.
480 MR: Tell me about how a typical recording session would happen for you guys, and then how
481 much time it took.
482 EL: Well when we used to go to those, all those records that we made, every one of them we
483 made with that quartet. We'd go there and a guy would bring us like — there wasn't no
484 arrangements — a song sheet. You know like you'd buy in the store. He'd give
485 everybody a song sheet.
486 MR: Which guy would give you the song sheet?
487 EL: Some A&R man, whoever got the date from the company.
488 MR: Oh they picked the songs?
489 EL: Yeah. Most of those songs, that's what was amazing about him. How he could interpret
490 those songs, and nobody believes, when I tell musicians, some young musicians this, they
491 don't believe it. Because these guys, they rehearse for months before they do a record
492 date. You know?
493 MR: Right.
494 EL: There was no arrangement. There was nobody that wrote no — a couple of things, in the
495 album "Wrap Tight" there are arrangements. But other than that, the one I love the most
496 is called "Today and Now" with the love song from "Apache" the movie. Remember the
497 movie "Apache" with Burt Lancaster?
498 MR: Oh yeah.
499 EL: Well we played the theme of that movie. The love song from "Apache" and they just
500 brought the thing there and we played it man. And it's so beautiful. I know that the
501 introduction Tommy played on that? I guy I knew, a young player did his thesis at Yale
502 on the introduction.
503 MR: Oh my gosh.
504 EL: It was so beautiful.
505 MR: Do you suppose the A&R guy or producer whoever was picking tunes that they thought
506 would help sell the record?
507 EL: I guess it fit the way he played. I guess that's what they were doing. Because he played
508 that song so beautiful man. I mean that's like one of my favorite albums that we made,
509 was "Today and Now." It's beautiful music on that. And that love song from "Apache" is
510 on there. There were some other things, "Quintessance," that Quincy Jones tune, and I
511 remember Monk used to always come up there. Because you know Monk loved
512 Coleman. He loved Coleman Hawkins. And he was different when he was around
513 Coleman Hawkins. I mean he talked and he asked questions, "do you like my shoes," or
514 "how'd you like my coat" or my pants. You know what I mean? And he used to come up
515 there, and one time he came up there and Coleman was playing this album. He said

516 “you’ve got some kind of secret music up here, haven’t you?” Secret music. And we used
517 to play opposite Monk all the time down at the Village Gate when it was really big. They
518 used to have two or three groups at a time. You know guys don’t even know about that in
519 New York now. And it would be like Monk and Coleman Hawkins, and Mingus’ band
520 sometimes. And Monk would always go up on the stage, you know, by himself first, and
521 [scats]. He was trying to coach — he wanted him to play with him, but he wouldn’t ask
522 him. Coleman would say “listen at him up there, you hear what he’s doing, don’t you?”
523 But he used to come up there, Coleman and him, they would be talking and it would be
524 wonderful to hear him talking to somebody that he loved Coleman so much. Because
525 Coleman did help all those young guys when they were young.

526 MR: Wow. I had not heard that before, you know like Monk being so kind of enamored of
527 somebody.

528 EL: Oh he was, oh yeah. He’d say “how do you like my shoes?” “how do you like my pants?”
529 “My suit?” You know they all dressed you know. All the guys of that period, those guys,
530 they loved to dress. And so these guys all picked that up from them.

531 MR: Did you call him “Bean?” Was that?

532 EL: Did I call him Bean? Yeah I called him Bean sometimes, and sometimes I called him
533 Hawk.

534 MR: There wasn’t, with the nicknames, I was curious if there was something like, you
535 wouldn’t use a nickname unless you were kind of like friends with them or in a circle?

536 EL: Yeah, well he was more than a friend. I mean like I said I was so close to those two guys
537 for somebody my age. When he died, Time magazine called me up. And you know what
538 they said? You know who told us to call you? We couldn’t believe it, because we called
539 Benny Carter to ask him something about Coleman Hawkins, and he said “man if you
540 want to know anything about Coleman Hawkins,” he said “you call Eddie Locke.” And
541 they couldn’t figure that out. Because he was a peer of theirs. So they figured if anybody
542 knew anything about him they would know more than I did. But I knew more about him
543 than a lot of people. Because I think, I’ve asked my wife and I’ve asked other people,
544 because I just treated him like another person. You know we did funny things together
545 and laughed and all kinds of stuff. I didn’t treat him like he was this idol. And that’s the
546 only thing I can figure why he really liked me to be around him so much.

547 MR: Yeah. He didn’t need that from you.

548 EL: No.

549 MR: I guess he liked to have a normal—

550 EL: It was a normal, buddy thing. And a little father, you know he was like, he always was
551 encouraging me. I learned how to write music — because I’d never studied music you
552 know — but I learned all the chords and all that stuff you know. And that’s another thing

553 about those guys. He'd be back in the kitchen in his apartment and I might just play a
554 triad, like a C, and he'd say "yeah, Locke, that's good." You know what I mean? But he
555 wouldn't be trying to B.S. me. And I got a book called, you know like those little — how
556 they take classical pieces and shorten them and put them in these books? And he had one
557 of them. And he said "you get one of these books." One of those chordal, Chopin things,
558 it's all chords you know? And he said "now you're going to learn how to play that." And
559 I said "I am?" And he said "yeah." And then when these — Tommy or Barry or Monk or
560 somebody — "I'm going to make you play it" and say "now look, here's a drummer can
561 play this." And I did learn it. I swear to God. It took me a long time, but I did learn it. I
562 could play it. It was all chordal [scats]. One of those things like that. I can't do it now
563 because that's one thing about that music, you have to practice every day. But for
564 someone to believe, that's what I always tell people, that someone that great believed that
565 I could do it. You know what I mean? And I did it. That's the environment thing that I
566 was talking about before. And I did it.

567 MR: Man. You have been with some of the greats. That's a great story. What do you think
568 people liked about your drumming?

569 EL: That's what I used to ask Roy. "Roy" I said — I knew what he liked, because my time is
570 good, it still is. Earl May tells me this now all the time. He says "man," he says, "none of
571 these drummers can do that thing on that cymbal like you, man." He said "I've played
572 with a lot of guys now, man, ever since I've been playing with you now," he said, "that
573 thing is something." He said "these drummers can't do it." And I've always had that. I
574 could always swing. That's why sometimes I say to myself if I hadn't had this natural
575 talent I might have studied more, you know how you reminisce about what you could
576 have— but I don't think that would have been. You know what I'm saying? I think things
577 happen just the way they're supposed to happen in your life. Because a guy called me
578 from Atlanta, his name is Hank Moore. He played tenor around Detroit, but he lives in
579 Atlanta now. And I haven't seen him in thirty years probably. But me, him and Doug
580 Watkins, you know the bass player that used to play with Horace Silver and all? We were
581 in a little band in Detroit, a blues band, we had a little band. And he said — this was just
582 lately in the last couple of months he called me. We were talking. He said "you know
583 what, Locke?" I said "what." He said "you always could swing." And so I guess that's
584 what they like. Actually, like I told you, I'm playing better now than I ever played.
585 Because I used to never practice. I started practicing. Arthur Taylor used to kid on me,
586 you know, before he died. When he moved back here we got to be very close. He said
587 "Locke, man, you don't practice." Some people like to practice. And he was one of the
588 guys that practiced all the time. But I never really liked to practice. And simply because I
589 had this natural ability to do things. But that will only keep you at a certain level if you

590 don't practice. But now, like I said, ever since he started me doing that, the last ten years
591 or fifteen years, I've been practicing. And I know the difference. But I'm glad I didn't
592 practice — maybe if I'd have practiced too much before I might have lost that thing that
593 everybody likes.

594 MR: Too much technique.

595 EL: Yeah. Well Jo Jones, here's the funniest thing I ever heard in my life, when I first met
596 him and I never heard nobody say that before, he said "you've got to unlearn yourself."
597 I'd never heard that before. It took me a long time to figure out but I understand it now.
598 You've got to unlearn yourself. And Leonardo DaVinci, because I like art too, I paint and
599 draw. And somebody gave me the Leonardo DaVinci notebooks. And somewhere in
600 there he said "never let theory outstrip the performance."

601 MR: Yeah.

602 EL: And that's what those guys always did. Performance. Papa Jo Jones, he used to always
603 say this, and I know what he meant now. Because he went to see one of these drummers,
604 or somebody'd talk to him, but he said "just let me get them on a stage. I don't care
605 whether there's fast hands or nothing like that." It's performance. That's what those guys
606 could do when they got on that stage. I mean I seen Roy Eldridge do things to people I've
607 never seen nobody else do that I've played with. I mean just ordinary people. He says
608 "it's no jazz fan." See they didn't think about it like these guys, the people that come out
609 here. "These are just people man, you make them feel good." All those guys were like
610 that. They make them feel good man, they'll come, they'll come back. They don't know
611 nothing about no jazz fan. They just played. Like when he went in Ryan's, when Roy
612 went in Ryan's, everybody says "Roy Eldridge is an old man, he's not going to make it in
613 a Dixieland place." You know what I mean? Roy never played no Dixieland music
614 before. You know what I mean. Man he swung that stuff man, like it was after you're
615 gone. That's what those guys could do, man. The music. They made the music sound
616 good. Anything. The music. You're making the music, whatever kind of song. A guy said
617 "I don't like this song." "Man, just play." That's what they used to tell me. They got me
618 out of all those bad habits. Can you play? If you can play you can play any song and
619 make it sound good. And that's what they could do. I don't care, anything. Anything they
620 played. It was amazing. I mean with Coleman, just like I told you, all those songs, we
621 made that music to "No Strings," you might have heard that. That show was on
622 Broadway for a little while. We made the music. Coleman had never seen that music, and
623 they brought the song sheets, just like I said. And I told a young piano player about that.
624 He didn't believe me. He said "man you guys had to rehearse that." I said "never. We
625 went right to the record date and we didn't even know what we were going to do when
626 we went there."

627 MR: That's quite amazing.

628 EL: It is. It is. Every time I think about it. Because every time I think about it, because now
629 when I'm around musicians and I see them and they're struggling with all this music all
630 the time, and I'm thinking about all the music I made with that guy and it never was no
631 struggle. It was never no struggle.

632 MR: You had to have an amazing empathy with the musicians and listening skills.

633 EL: That's right. Now there you go. That's it. That's it. But that's what makes the music nice
634 anyway. Just like we was talking about that rhythm section with Count Basie. That's
635 what that was. The empathy between the guys you know.

636 MR: You know you've seen jazz go through lots of things. Was there a time in your career
637 where you felt jazz was going in the wrong direction?

638 EL: Oh a lot of times I thought it was going wrong. And it's for the same reason that I think
639 that — it's not the kind of music you play, it's the way you play it that I don't like. Like
640 people play, I've heard guys play like the avante garde stuff. It wasn't so much that I
641 disliked what they were playing as it was the way they were playing it. You know, the
642 harshness they had with the music. They played ugly. You don't have to play ugly. You
643 could be creative and do all that stuff without being ugly too. You know if you want to be
644 far out or something like that. I mean Mingus did that, but he didn't play ugly. He was
645 way out there before anybody was doing all that stuff, you know what I mean? But it
646 wasn't ugly. He had beauty in the stuff. That's the part I don't like, when it's not pretty.

647 MR: That's a good observation. It's like almost the musicians, if they're going to get rid of the
648 harmonic limitations and the time, does that mean you have to play ugly?

649 EL: Right. That's the thing I don't like. That's the part. That's it. That's the thing. And I've
650 seen so many instances where, when they put names on the music, when they put a name
651 on the music then it tends to make younger guys that they should do something else with
652 the music. When they put a name on it. And I always remember Connie Kay telling me,
653 you know he loved Sid Catlett. He used to follow Sid. I never knew Sid Catlett, because
654 he died young. He was like Papa Jo, they kind of had the same approach to the drums.
655 And so Connie Kay said "I used to follow this guy around everywhere." So he said "one
656 day I was with him and he took me down to Birdland. And he went in there and sat in
657 you know, somebody's band was playing," and he said "he tore the joint up, Sid did. The
658 guy took me and he said 'come on boy.' So he took me and he put me in a car and he
659 drove down in the village, and he was going to into Nick's." Now that's a Dixieland
660 place, right? "So I asked him, I said 'what are you going in here for?' You know,
661 "'cause,' he says 'you're hip.'" So what is he going in this Dixieland place, you know
662 what I mean? So Connie Kay said "he went in there, he sat in, and he tore it up in there
663 too." Ding. Right? If you're good, that's it, right? He went to Birdland and they loved

664 him in there. He went down there. Connie Kay said “that was a great lesson.” You know
665 what I mean? That’s it. That’s what it’s about. That’s the thing about having this touch
666 and all this feeling for the music. It’ll fit anywhere. It’ll fit anywhere.

667 MR: A couple of different recordings I wanted to ask you about. You played with Earl Hines?
668 EL: Oh that was something. That “Live at the Vanguard.” That’s one of my favorite things
669 that I made. It was almost the same kind of thing. He was the nicest man. The nicest guy.
670 I mean whooh. He was the nicest person, oh man. And we never rehearsed. I never
671 rehearsed with him either. It was Budd Johnson and Gene Ramey, we played with him.
672 That was quite an experience. He was dynamic. He was so dynamic on that piano, it was
673 just like whooh. It was like a whole band. You never knew what he was going to do. You
674 had to really stay on your toes, especially a drummer, because his thing was, he was all
675 between the beat and all kinds of things when he played. I remember one time we went
676 down to Washington, D.C. and he was striding — his ring just came off his finger and
677 went out into the audience.

678 MR: Wow.

679 EL: I mean his left hand was just working so hard man. See that’s like when those guys
680 played, they were in it. And his ring come off. Oh, that was amazing. That’s why I say I
681 was just about the luckiest guy like that, that had those experiences with that caliber of
682 people, not only as musicians but as people too.

683 MR: What do you think about the — we’re in this building right now and there’s all these
684 things going on, this jazz, and a lot of people, lots of ways to teach being talked about
685 and so forth. How does it strike you?

686 EL: I don’t get it. Because see I don’t believe you can teach anyone to play jazz. You can
687 teach them how to play an instrument. I teach at a school here in New York myself. I like
688 kids. I’ve been doing that all my life. They talk about this education thing, I had the first
689 presidential scholar in jazz. A lot of people don’t even know that. That was written up in
690 the “New York Times.” I had the first presidential scholar in jazz. And they had
691 presidential scholars every year in academia, you know that, for high school kids,
692 seniors. And I had the first one in jazz. I went to Washington, D.C. and went to the White
693 House when Reagan was in office. But I never taught him jazz. You understand what I’m
694 saying? I just taught him about the music, to listen to the music. I never — and I teach at
695 a school called the Trevor Day School now, over on East 90th Street. I’ve been there for
696 eighteen years. Because the headmaster, his name is Jack Dexter, Dr. Dexter, he loves
697 jazz. So I’ve been there — Roy Eldridge has played there, Frank Wess, Roland Hanna,
698 everybody played there, to do concerts for the kids you know. That caliber of musicians.
699 And so I’ve always been around kids and I love kids. But I never tell a kid I’m teaching
700 them how to play jazz. And I’ve got a lot of them that can really play. But I just say

701 you've got to go find your own thing, what you want to play. I try to teach the
702 fundamentals of the instrument, whatever that is, and then you go find what you can play.
703 Go listen. Go look. Find. This thing with this building, what you were talking about, this
704 jazz, I think, what I believe myself, what I personally think it's just become a big
705 business now. It has nothing to do with jazz now, to me. This jazz education thing has
706 become a big, big business. Almost every big college now has got a jazz studies thing in
707 it. And some of these kids — Phil Woods wrote an article in the union paper about it too.
708 One time, a long time — in the American Federation of Musicians paper about what are
709 they doing with this stuff. Everybody can't play jazz, like everybody can't play baseball.
710 Or everybody can't — and you know what I mean? And they're giving this impression
711 that if you do this you can play jazz. That's not true. Jazz is a life experience also. It's
712 about your living, the way you live. As Jo Jones used to tell me, you've got to have
713 something to bring to the music. You've got to bring something to the music. You have
714 to bring something to the music. So you have to live a life to bring something to the
715 music. You just can't sit in no practice room all day long. I had a great experience — I
716 was out at one of those schools, I think I was out in Jersey where they've got a jazz
717 program and I met this drummer. So I played a concert with somebody, I don't
718 remember. And so we started talking to some of the students. And so he says "well I'm
719 trying to find something, where can I go play?" So I said "well you're going to school,
720 right?" I said "well why don't you guys play?" "No man, we don't play together. Most
721 times the guys are just in the practice room and they're just all practicing by themselves." I
722 said "well that doesn't make much sense. Because when you get out here — that should
723 be required that you guys all play together, because when you get out of here you've got
724 to play with somebody. You don't want to be playing by yourself." And it's a whole
725 other thing, so the only way you're going to learn it is if you're playing with somebody.
726 It's not going to happen in the practice room. Because you've got all these people now,
727 they're all different and now you've got to make this all fit together. That's what I don't
728 find these guys can do now, that study these jazz courses. When they get on the stage, it
729 don't work. It doesn't work together. Because they're working individually. But that's
730 not what jazz is supposed to be about. It's supposed to be about us making this thing
731 together.

732 MR: Having that empathy.

733 EL: Yeah, yeah. Hey, hey. It's not about how much better you can play than me or how much
734 more technique you've got than I've got, and all this kind of stuff, you know what I
735 mean? Just trying to make the stuff work. The guy said "well man, you guys—" with the
736 group that I'm playing with, he said "well you guys—" I say "we're trying to make it
737 work, man, that's all, that's why it's working. And that's what those guys. They made it

738 work. If something was going wrong man, they wouldn't just keep beating on it. You
739 know what I mean? They'd say "let's do something else man." You know what I mean?
740 And nobody can do everything. You're human. And you have your frail things about
741 yourself. Everybody's personality has some weakness in it. But you go to their strength,
742 instead of their weakness. You don't be telling him "you've got to keep doing this" if you
743 can see he can't do it. So why keep doing it. When I've got kids, when I'm teaching in
744 my schools, the kids'll be playing something. If he can't get it I say boom — I'll find
745 something else he can play. Let him play something. You don't keep telling him do it, do
746 it, do it. That's not helpful to nobody. I mean you can't teach anybody anything like that.
747 Every time he comes he feels when he leaves like he's like "oh I couldn't do that."
748 Always have something they can do good all the time. And I let them play that. And then
749 I'll add something else to it. And I've had very good success with that. And I'm not
750 trying to make them musicians, I'm trying to make them good human beings first of all.
751 That other part is up to them. I can't make them like that. And that's what those guys
752 taught me, by being around them.

753 MR: Well it sounds like you're still a lifelong learner. I know you're excited about a new
754 group that you've got going.

755 EL: I am, I am, I am. Because that's the way they were. I mean Coleman Hawkins, you know,
756 like Tommy or Barry would play a chord and he'd say "what is that you just played
757 there?" Even this guy, one of the greatest saxophonists, you know what I mean, he
758 always had that. "Ahhh," he said, "I heard that." You know what I mean? You would
759 think this guy would be, and Roy was the same way. He'd sit in the dressing room with
760 you man, you'd have some brushes or sticks, and he'd get his horn out, put the mute in,
761 and he was ready to — you know what I mean? Those guys had been all over the world,
762 they'd played with the greatest people in the world, and they were still like that. They did
763 all that, and that's amazing. They would play with anybody. They'd go to some little
764 joint man, and tear it up, some itty bitty place. Didn't have to be a whole lot of people
765 there. That's the difference. That's another part of it that's like — we had a record and a
766 half you know at one time down there. There used to be a place down on Spring and
767 Hudson Street. We stayed in that place for thirteen weeks. With Roy Eldridge. And
768 people would just come, and they were just lining up 'cause you know why, they were
769 just having so much fun. When they left — I remember one time we were behind the bar,
770 there were some steps man, and this man, he just ran up the steps and just got on his
771 knees, boy, like he was in church. He was so happy. That's what made jazz great.
772 Because it made people happy. You don't have to go to this now what chord is that
773 you're playing there? What kind of beat is that he's doing over there? Jo Jones — I said

774 “Jo,” I said “how should I hold my sticks?” You know what he told me? He said “any
775 way you can play with ‘em.” That’s great lessons I got.

776 MR: Well, listen, this has been — I just had a feeling this was going to be a great
777 conversation, and I’m just so happy. I think we may have to do Part Two here.

778 EL: Well I’ll tell you what — yeah, let’s do Part Two. And some day we may come up to
779 your school, man. Come to the school too.

780 MR: Yeah. And I congratulate you on the part you had in the creation of all this great music,
781 too.

782 EL: Thank you. I did a little bit, but I did my little bit — I added what I could add, the little
783 bit, just like they told me, it was the truth. You just keep doing what you can do, and it
784 was true. That’s what’s so amazing. I didn’t understand as much as I do now. But what
785 you can do, man, that’s good. This other guy could do that, but what you’re doing is
786 good, now we like that. That’s what they used to always say. Coleman and Roy. They
787 would both say that to me at different times.

788 MR: Excellent.

789 EL: You know — I’m going to stop, because I’m running my mouth so much, but I’ll never
790 forget one time we went to a bar called the Copper Rail. It was right across the street
791 from the Metropole. There used to always be a lot of bars like that in New York where
792 the musicians just came. They came there because they knew, from the Metropole, when
793 the guys got off at intermission, everybody was going to come over there. [gap in audio]
794 Now I’m not going to use no names, but anyway there was a great drummer there and he
795 had went to Roy, I was playing with Roy and Coleman together at that time. And I asked
796 him could he sit in with them. He was a great drummer who I admired too. And it came
797 out of one of them, it was either Roy or Coleman says “man, you mad at this drummer?”
798 I said “no, no, Coleman,” I mean I don’t mind if he sits in.” And then about 15 minutes
799 later Coleman came over to me and he says “no, no, I’m not gonna—” You know what
800 he says? “I like what you’re doing, man, I’m not going to let him sit in. You come on
801 back over here.” Oh man, you don’t know what that did to me inside man. It just melted
802 me. That was like wow, “we like what you’re doing, man — you come on back over here
803 and play.” That was beautiful. That was like, that’s the kind of people they were. It was
804 wonderful and I was lucky, and like I said on every one of the records I made with
805 Coleman Hawkins and Roy, because I made some good records with Roy too. You know
806 that record I made with him with Oscar Peterson and Ray Brown called “Happy Times.”
807 You ever hear that one?

808 MR: Yeah.

809 EL: When he sings?

810 MR: Oh yeah, that’s right.

811 EL: You know what he told me? It's so funny. Because I was like shocked when he called me
812 and told me that he wanted me on this date with those guys. He said "well I just want to
813 see a friendly face." He didn't tell me you're so great and all this other — he said "you
814 know why I got you? I just wanted to see a friendly face." That's beautiful. You know
815 what I'm saying. And I wasn't even worried about it because I was with him. Because
816 that was heavy company to be in, Joe Pass was on there too, you know what I mean?
817 That's like getting thrown in the lion's den you know, because those guys were really
818 tight together. But I played with him, because that was my man. I knew he would protect
819 me.

820 MR: Right.

821 EL: And it came out good though. Because he was what I was with. But some musicians that
822 get you on dates like that, they try to intimidate you you know. A lot of people get
823 intimidated by people like that sometimes, and they do it on purpose sometimes. But I
824 knew I had my buddy, my friend, and it was a good record. But like I said before, thank
825 God I was just a lucky guy, man. And I tried to pass it on to other people, young people.
826 That's why I do things with young people. I try to tell them some of the stuff that — all
827 that knowledge that I got, you can't get it nowhere else. And that's — about the jazz
828 education thing? See they can't get that because they have never did it. You know some
829 of these people, when this jazz education first started the people who were teaching it,
830 most of them were jazz musicians that had played it. Now it's people that just went to
831 college and studied and they're teaching it from that perspective. But it's a whole other
832 ballgame. It's something else. I asked — when I was up at this school, I told you up
833 there, and this young drummer asked me when I was up in Schenectady at one of those
834 schools and this drummer was asking me about that thing you know. And so I asked him,
835 I said "do you know how to play 'The Three Camps?'" He said "what's that?" And every
836 drummer in my period knew what that was. That's like an Etude kind of thing for the
837 drum.

838 MR: Rudiments, right?

839 EL: Yeah, all five [scats]. You know, it's a story. And every drummer could play that. And he
840 didn't know that. So that's why he can't play the time. Because that's all of these things
841 that you learn, he doesn't have control of his hands. That's like in any instrument, man, if
842 you can't control the instrument, you've got to have control, that's what they call the
843 stick control. And you've got to learn from the basic rudimental parts of the instrument.
844 But don't forget the pendulum, when you go back to school.

845 MR: Yeah, that's right.

846 EL: That's something. Every time — I tell the teachers up there and they say "I never heard
847 of that before." I say I know, so that's what I'm talking about when I say that jazz came

848 from another place, not just from school. And another part about this education thing is it
849 makes me feel real terrible sometimes is the way they talk about some of this stuff now
850 like the musicians from the period that I came up in, the swing era, that I idolized, like
851 they weren't educated musicians. You understand? I mean the way they present it almost
852 like none of these guys can play classical music. And hey man, like Coleman Hawkins
853 was a very, very, very — I mean unbelievable educated musician. And a lot them was.
854 Buster Bailey that played the clarinet? He was a classical clarinet player. I mean these
855 guys, but they didn't talk about it like they do now. You know what I'm saying?

856 MR: Right. They didn't use all the terminology.

857 EL: The terminology like that. It's like weird. And because jazz is special. And just because
858 you can play the instrument doesn't mean you can play jazz. And that's what I don't like
859 about all this stuff, because they're taking jazz somewhere—

860 MR: Where it doesn't need to go.

861 EL: Yes, yes, yes. It's taking it somewhere where it doesn't need to go. And I miss all those
862 people because those people, you don't have that feeling with these people that learned
863 that way. They have a whole other thing about communication. They don't talk to each
864 other, they don't laugh. You know everybody's on the bandstand like — like they're
865 going to have an attack or something. And when I was on the bandstand with Roy and
866 them, man it would be so much fun, it was like woah. I'll never forget when J.C. Heard
867 was playing, when I first heard Coleman and Roy in the Metropole, J.C. Heard was still
868 playing. You remember him. He was a great drummer man. That was one of those other
869 kind of people too. And well I'll tell you one more story. When I went to high school,
870 you know he's from Detroit too. And when he was with Cab Calloway, the teacher that I
871 had had come from the school where he did go, but he had transferred, this teacher, so he
872 told the guys in the drum class, because we took it as a class. Everybody had a pad on the
873 desk and the guy was up there. And he said "I'm going to go down to the theater and I'm
874 going to bring the drummer with Cab Calloway's band by to do a little playing for you
875 guys." Oh man. And he did. He brought J.C. Heard. And I was like I mean I'd never
876 seen anybody so dressed up before in my life, only in the movies you know. He was one
877 of those guys that was immaculate. All those guys was sharp. It was like, I couldn't
878 believe it. I mean I loved the drums, but the clothes, it just had me like in — I went and
879 got a job in a restaurant washing dishes, and I went to this store downtown in Detroit
880 called Kingbrook, that had very expensive clothes. And I picked out everything, as close
881 as I could to what he had on, and paid \$5 every week on it until I got it. I copied
882 everything he wore. That's how much I was impressed. And that's the kind of thing that
883 you don't see happen no more. I think that's the kind of things that make you play
884 music. But that is the jazz part of it. But this is the funny part, now they're at the

885 Metropole, right? So he was playing with Coleman and them. And that's when I was
886 playing in the afternoon but I used to hang around at night to watch those guys play too.
887 And he came off the stage, and I told him I said "you know what, J.C.?" I said "man
888 when I was in high school," I said "you know man I got your autograph." He said "don't
889 you tell nobody that, old as you are."
890 MR: That's good.
891 EL: Don't you tell nobody as old as you are.
892 MR: Well this has just been the greatest time. I really appreciate you coming in.
893 EL: Well thank you for having me.
894 MR: It's been great.
895 EL: Thank you.
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