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An Interview with Billy Taylor [transcript]

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Dr. Billy Taylor
BROWER: In this part we want to proceed chronologically starting with your birthplace and what you can recall of that experience---at that time in your life.

TAYLOR: Well, I was born in Greenville, North Carolina in July 24, 1921. As best I can remember I think I was born on Sunday morning. I was a very big baby, my mother tells me. I was very heavy and she was in Greenville, North Carolina because my father's best friend...a doctor name James Babble, who was practicing there...my dad thought it would be a great idea to get down and practice...to have joint offices with this good friend. And they evidently got along very well for a couple of years, but my mother really didn’t like Greenville, it was a tiny little southern town...it was a tobacco town in those days...and it wasn’t much to do...it wasn’t very much of a challenge. She had
wanted to be a school teacher and she just felt that he was full filling his desire to be a dentist...and she wanted to be active...not just as a mother but maybe do a little teaching or something...and it didn't seem to be the place to do that. So they moved to Raleigh, and for a couple of years and this is all when I was one or two years old. Then she didn't really relate to that and I think that he felt that he could build a better practice in Washington, D.C. where his father had moved...and many of the other members of the family were then living. So we moved back to D.C. which was my mother's home...she is from Washington, D.C. And my father was from Hurtford, N.C., and most of his family were North Carolinians. So I moved to D.C. about the time I was ready to go to school. So I went to Lucretia B. Mott School, over on Forth and W, I guess it is for a few years...and we lived on Flagland Place...and that's where...it was at that point in my life that I begin to really hear my first jazz...because I had two uncles...no everybody in my family was
musical...my father was not only a dentist who was building a very nice practice, but his father was...my grandfather was a baptist minister who had found the Florida Avenue Baptist Church...and my father was the choir director...because everybody in the family sanged. My grandfather sanged...all of his children sanged and most of them played the piano, and other instruments. So piano was always a busy instrument in our house...and we had a nice old player piano...that you could pump...you put a piano roll in there and pump...and you would just hear glorious sounds...I mean all kinds of good stuff on that...and it sounded like four piano players sometimes. At any rate I had this one uncle...my father played the piano but I don’t know...his playing didn’t knock me out that much...he had a great baritone voice, but his piano playing wasn’t all that great...and all of his brothers though could and his sisters could really play. They played Mozart...they played Bach...they
played all of the European classical stuff...and I had this one uncle who was an artist...his name was Clinton Taylor...and Clinton was a visual artist, I mean he painted and...

BROWER: I just want to stop here so in effect there is a sort of a thing with North Carolina Blacks...come to Virginia...come to D.C...come to Philadelphia...go to New York...so your fathers side of the family was is that stream?

Taylor: Right...and he came to Washington and made their home here...everybody kind of found his own or her own place. So my uncle in the process of going through art school...played a lot of a kind of a stride piano...you know it was very nice...but he was rather limited in...because he didn't stay in Washington...he went away to Syracuse and to other schools. I didn't see him that much...so he wasn't as much of an influence as the next brother...whose name was Robert...well my uncle Bob was the guy that really, you know, I would hear him play, you know, Fats Waller type stride piano and all this stuff...and he...
just knocked my out... and we got very close... and he gave me my first Fats Waller record... and took me to see Fats Waller at the theater and...

BROWER: You told me that you saw Fats at the Lincoln Theater.

TAYLOR: Yeah, this was later... Fats... my uncle took me to see him first and then Fats Waller came to the Lincoln Theater to play a solo engagement. Now the Lincoln Theater was up on U Street, up by Thirteen Street, and they normally didn't have shows there... it was usually just a moving picture house... they had the usual main feature... a serial... comedies and new reel and all of that stuff. They didn't have a show... Howard Theater was where all of the shows played... so I was kind of surprised. One day I was going to my grandfather's house... he lived around the corner on Thirteenth Street and I saw this sign it said Fats Waller... I said my goodness and so I went in thinking there would be a whole show and it wasn't... it was just Fats Waller playing the piano and playing the organ... it was fabulous... I mean I loved it...
went, in those days you know, you could sell or take ginger ale and coke-a-cola bottles back to the store and get two cents or five cents as the case maybe and get enough money to go to the movies, which cost about fifteen cents...so thats what I did...you could stay all day...now they didn't run you out...but on this particular day I had been selling papers so I was rich...I had about a dollar...so I went into the theater and heard Fats Waller and I was just amazed...I sat very close to him and kind of checked him out. I was amazed at what he did with his feet on the organ...I had never noticed that before, you know, the fact that some other stuff going on, instead of the hands he was playing some other notes with the feet...I had heard it but I had never focused on that before. So after the show...I said oh gee I have got to meet this man...so I rushed back stage and stood out there...but when he came out...he is a big guy...I mean he is fat, you know, he is very heavy...rotund. He looked
large on the stage, but to me as a young guy he just looked
gigger than life when he came off...I lost my nerve...I didn't
have enough nerve to say anything to him...so he came on and kind
of grinned at me and went on down the alley and went around the
corner to a hamburger joint...so I followed him and sat down on
the stool about two stools away from him. Well obviously in
between shows he would do this all of the time and soon as he
came in the guy was making hamburgers...and he must have eaten
thirty or forty hamburgers...well they weren't big
hamburgers...they weren't big macks...I mean these were small but
he ate a whole lot of them...I mean I had never seen anybody eat
like that...because what he was doing...I didn’t realize that he
was eating so much because he was telling jokes...he was laughing
and telling jokes...and kidding with the guy and as long as he
sat there the guy just even put another sandwich up there...and
he would talk and say "Oh yeah, so and so, so and so..." he would
tell another joke and everybody in the place would laugh...and he
would eat two more of them...and you know, it was fascinating, you know, I am sitting there with my mouth open watching this guy. So finally he said "I have got to go back and do a show", and he went on back...and I paid another fifteen cents and went in to see him again...and that was the only time I ever actually was close to Fats Waller. And he was really the first major influence on my piano playing. I mean I desperately wanted to play the piano like Fats Waller...I mean I thought that was the epitome of jazz and good playing and clean...the clarity...the rhythmic feeling...everything that he did seemed perfect to me...I just thought that boy to play the piano like that would be marvelous. So he remained my favorite pianist for many years...I mean I heard Earl Hines...I heard many great players at the Howard Theater...they came to. Fats played there...Mary Lou Williams came through with the Andy Kurt band and just a host of others...

BROWER: You are talking the thirties now?
TAYLOR: Thirties right, this is...

BROWER: Thirty-four, thirty-five?

TAYLOR: Yeah, earlier than that...earlier than that yeah...cause I really began to listen...well I begin to listen really hard when I was about eight years old...eight or nine years old and...so I am talking early now...I am talking about the late twenties. I had listened to Duke Ellington...well Duke the first time I went to...saw him...to see him...the first time I went to see him at the Howard Theater, immediately I was struck by the drama of his playing. Now a friend of his who was a visual artist use to do all of the posters and all...they use to have big signs out in front of all of the theaters...all of the Black theaters...they were owned by a man named Litchman...and he owned the Howard Theater, the Republic Theater, the Lincoln Theater, the Booker T...there were about five broadway theaters...about five theaters that he owned right here in town...all in the Black
BROWER: All in the U Street, Ninth Street, Seventh Street area?

TAYLOR: Right, that's right...the Broadway was down at Seventh and P Street, the Howard was at Seventh and T, the Lincoln was at Thirteenth and U, Republic was just up the block between Thirteenth and Fourteenth and the Booker T was between Fourteenth and Fifteenth. So he owned with in that area...he owned all of those theaters and they all had a different, you know, like a different point of view...one would have double features...another would have a stage show, you know, so one was kind of family entertainment, whatever. So I got to see a lot of the...all of the great bands...I mean because every week they would change the bill at the Howard Theater...so Friday would be the day of the show and it would last until the next Thursday...and I got to see Fletcher Henderson, and Don Redman, Miles brothers, the Inkspots, you know, like everybody that came through...Ella Fitzgerald with Chick Webb...I mean it was

neighborhood.
fabulous...I never saw any one play the drums like Chick Webb...I
mean hear is this guy that would be playing...and look like his
hands were up in the air and I heard all of this noise...and I
say what is he hitting the drums with...you know he had a
fabulous foot...he could do very interesting things with his
feet...and a great showman. It was really an education every
week just to go to the Howard Theater. And then they had amateur
nights and so I was on amateur night a couple of times...I
won...first time I was on I was playing guitar with the young
fellow by the name of Cooper Gibson...who was a very fine young
guitarist in those days and never really achieved very much fame,
but was a fine instrumentalist...just one of those guys that kind
of got lost in the shuffle from not because of lack of talent,
but just because of the way it happens like that some times. So
we went on with two guitarist and he was kind of carrying me, I
wasn't much of a guitarist. But the next time I went on, I went
on playing the piano and I did a little better, I think that I
won second prize or something...and finally after several tries I won first prize...and got to play with the Lucky Millinder new band. I mean Lucky Millinder there and The Blue Ribbon Band was...

BROWER: Did he let you jump off the domino?

TAYLOR: Ha, ha, ha...I watched him do that. I didn't do that. That was my first real indoctrination of what I had better get together.

BROWER: When was this? Can we date this?

TAYLOR: This was in the thirties...ah...had to be early...about 1934 or '35. I was still in high school.

BROWER: Were you about fourteen or so when you did... Did you get to play a whole set or song?

TAYLOR: I to play a whole song. But I got to follow one of the guys that I had been listening to...this must have been 1935, '36...because, ah...no...maybe it was a little earlier...I'm
trying to...because Billy Kyle was a piano player and Billy Kyle later played with...in John Kerby band, so I guess that was around thirty-six or thirty-seven...so it had to be a little earlier than that that he was playing with Millinder...and Billy was a superb pianist...I mean he was out of the Earl Hine tradition...but he had his own very cleanly, articulated style and it was very dynamic...and had a lot of vitality you know, and the thing I liked about it was...it wasn't as...it didn't seem as complicated as Earl Hines to me in those days...it was but it just seemed there was more lyrical line to what he did...nice lean lines and Billy was quite an influence on Bud Powell. I mean anyone who listen to some of the stuff that he did with John Kerby and some of the groups that he recorded with at that time can hear where Bud got----------------------left hand, some little stuff that Bud use to do with his left hand...was right out of Billy Kyle...and anyway that's a long way to come around to say that when I won this amateur show Lucky Millinder put me on
Billy Kyle's solo...now Billy you know, I had heard...

BROWER: That was a reward.

TAYLOR: That was...you get to play with the band...it was the money too...I think it was about ten or fifteen dollars or something like that which was very nice...but I got to play with the band. You know, when you are very young you don't have sense enough to be scared...I had no idea that playing behind a guy who was a thorough professional and who was really at the top of his form, you know, and here I am a teenager you know, follow him...but I just went on and shot my best shot...did what I could do...but I was very aware of how well he could play, you know, and I said boy I wish I could do that...he gave me something really good to shoot for. He was very nice...I had met him then and many years later...he had remembered that...and he said...I was freelancing around New York and he really gave me enough work to keep me busy all year just in record dates that he couldn't make, I mean he was so busy in those days as a freelance
recording guy...working with Cy Oliver and a whole lot of other folks and doing broadway shows and of that stuff that he would just call me. He would say "Well Billy I can’t make this...go and make this record date or make this rehearsal", or do whatever it was...he was just over booked...and he gave me enough to keep me ...I mean he was my agent for that year man which was lovely...but he was in addition to being a very fine musician. One of the older generation...people of the older generation that I model myself after in terms of attitude...I mean cause...

BROWSER: ---------------------------?

TAYLOR: Yeah, I mean Billy was always...he dressed very well and he always looked very neat...I mean with out being ------- because he was fairly conservative in his dress, but he always looked well dressed and his playing was like that...and I just said well if you are going to be a pro this is the way...you are supposed to look that way...you are suppose to check you
out...and his whole...he played cleanly...talked with out going...he understood and certainly could use all of the slang of the day...but that wasn't the only way he spoke...and he was the kind of guy that was very nice and supportive of a younger musician...now he had every reason if he were insecure or jealous or anything...he had every reason to block and could very easily block any progress that I wanted to make by just saying this guy doesn't play well. Now you know and the people that he was talking to would have believed him. But instead he would say "Hey why don't you give the kid a break he play nice", so he and Joe Jones and a lot of those old guys who were a lot of times man gigs were coming up and I didn't know where they were coming until after I had got to New York...and Tatum was recommending me...Joe Jones was recommending me...Sid Catlett you know, all of these guys that...Billy Kyle...and that was something that they did. Somebody called and said------------------------Billy Taylor...I mean they could have said Hank Jones or Jimmy Jones or
any number of people and then on many occasions you know.

BROWER: In other words what you are talking about is that they were secure enough about themselves...they tried to make a way for other------------------maybe an obligation even that they felt.

TAYLOR: Absolutely, they felt...they seemed to feel well hey you know, I'm alright...I mean lets bring the kid along and make it a little easy for him...and that really impressed me I think more than the music...more than anything else...that kind of feeling really has stuck with me all of these years because it's almost I feel the same obligation now and I feel it because...

BROWER: That was maternal in a sense...that attitude.

TAYLOR: It was, it was because one of the reasons that I don't drink any more than I do...I mean I only have a social drink and you know, I can handle whatever it is that I drink, but I don't drink because in many cases in those days I was going to the White Rose Bar and they were all over the city in those days...it
was a chain and you would get cheap drinks in there...you would get double for thirty-five cents and all of that...it was a lot of musicians that went to the White Rose. And I would go in, I wanted to be a big man and say "Hey Sid have a drink with me", you know, something like that and they would run me out of the bar, "Get out of here", not only wouldn’t drink with me but wouldn’t let me drink. So really I would take Art Tatum out after I had got to be kind of his protege and we would go to after hour places, where they had all kinds of everything you know, and he would order...he would say "I’ll have a Pabst and he will have a coke." Now I was over twenty-one then, I could have...you know, I was legally old enough to drink...he wouldn’t let me drink. He would say "One of us have got to stay sober", so that’s it...

BROWER: Yeah, do as I say not as I do.

TAYLOR: That’s right...that’s right...so you know, in those days
of formative years of going to the theater...as a matter of fact right here in D.C. one of the nice things about becoming...I became a professional when I was about thirteen years old and I was playing in a place called Harry’s Blue Bird Inn...

BROWER: Where was that?

TAYLOR: It was out by the airport...out where National Airport is...it was a road house and they had hookers and shake dancers and all of that kind of stuff...as a matter of fact the first naked woman I ever saw in my life was right in there. And she came out of the place...I mean Virginia was south and I mean Black musicians could not only fraternize with the people, but I mean you played your set then you went into the bandroom and stayed there...I mean you know, unless you had to go to the bathroom or something. Well I had to go to the bathroom...so I came out to go to the bathroom and this woman was for whatever reason going from one room to another...she didn’t have any clothes on...and my eyes must have jumped about four feet out of
my face...and she laughed, she said "You have never seen a naked woman before", and I got kooled man...ha ha ha...cause I hadn't.

But that whole experience was really a very special one...I mean these were older musicians like Redd Briscoe, Julius Pogue...some of the really top jazz musicians in the city in those days...and it was a big deal for me...I mean I played that one gig and it was a long time before was able to work with them again because first of all I was in school and I couldn't do it and then there were just too many piano players around...I mean there were a lot of excellence players.

BROWER: Who were some of the other players at that time in Washington. At thirteen we are talking about once again thirty four or thirty five, but who were some of the people that you were sort of looking ahead at, and who were some of your peers?

TAYLOR: Well one of my peers on piano was Johnny Malachi and Johnny Malachi is a little older than I am but he had a little band in those days and he had O.C. Johnson playing drums...and he
had I think Frank West was in the band...Charlie Rouse was playing alto in those days...I don’t know whether Leo Parker was playing at all...he was a little younger...there was another guy named Bob Holly who was a pianist and those were the guys who were along with me. As a matter of fact Frank West is the reason I don’t play tenor saxophone cause we both went to high school together and he played tenor...and I figured if the saxophone is suppose to sound like that then I am doing something wrong...so I went back to the piano with a vengency. You know, to try to do what he was doing...cause even as a teenager phenomenal musician.

BROWER: Let's go back for a second, I want to ask you about the church, what impact the baptist church is known to have, real serious music, what impact did that have on your formation as a musician?

TAYLOR: Well my grandfather was a progressive and certainly a very understanding and synthetic person. I didn’t realize that
at the time, but he encouraged me to play in the church. Now some of the older members of the church didn't think too much of that because I am going to play jazz, you know, we are not in the front of the church but we are in the back where they have the plays and the other activities other than on Sundays. So he encouraged me to play for some of these occasions and to do what I did and...but I had heard the thing that impressed me most was something that would happen on Sunday if you are a member of the minister's family...you know, when you go to stay there all day Sunday...I mean you don't have too much...you don't get out of church too much...we go to Sunday school, then we would go to church...then we would go to Art's house who lived near by or my grandmother's house...then we would come back and then go to the B.Y.P.U., it was a whole lot of church. But every now and then I would be...seems to me that the service at around three o'clock in the afternoon...it was an hour or so after the eleven o'clock service which is usually over about one...then the B.Y.P.U. was
about six...and so this was somewhere in the middle and I can't recall what the occasion...it didn't seem to happen as I remember regularly but quite often there wouldn't be neither my uncle or my aunt would play...so there wouldn't be an organ or a piano playing and they would sing some of the songs which were led by some of the older members of the church and man they were beautiful...they were gorgeous...I loved those...that's the only part of the service that I liked...cause these weren't the choir...these were just old people who knew some of the songs. These were the songs that were very meaningful to them and I am ashamed to say that I never had the presents of mind to learn any of those pieces or even to try to...

BROWER: ------------------------------------------

TAYLOR: Yeah, well it obviously these were some of the spirituals that had not gotten in the books. I mean they were not popular enough or well used enough to necessary be in the book, but there seemed to be a large group of people that knew them...and these
were mostly the older people in the church...somebody would start...like a leader would start singing and then everybody would kind of chime in and they would do the harmony...they were gorgeous man...and now that I think about it many of them were kind of ----------------------sounding you know, and I recall one time...the reason that comes to mind because I recall one time listening and saying gee I can play that on the black keys of the piano...so it had to be a kind of a -------------------feel you know, and they were gorgeous, they were really lovely songs...and very emotional...I mean there is that African element in the Black voice that has to do with how you approach the note...you know, how you scoop into those notes and the certain quality when you are holding the note and everything...there is a whole lot of that in those pieces. As I said it was many years later when I begin to look back at that part of music and I am just so sorry that I didn't take more notice of it, so that I can really say
that's what it was.

BROWER: ------------none the less do you think that had any kind of influence on your playing wise?

TAYLOR: Absolutely, absolutely, I mean it has come through in more resent years, more than in my earlier years. In some of the music that I have written, you know, "I Wish I knew how it would to be free" is directly out of that experience...it is a matter of pride which is the first movement of my peaceful warrior is with that in mind...and there are several jazz pieces that I have written that are not obviously in that...as a matter of fact one of them that I am thinking of right now I used for a commercial when I had company that made television commercials...and that is exactly what I had in mind...I mean I just...I was looking for something to use and I just drew back on that church experience...and this is what came out of it. So yes it had a very definite experience. And for a long time I didn't think that...I separated that...that wasn't a part of my jazz...I

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mean I didn’t...I consciously weeded that out of my playing, you know, I wouldn’t...that wasn’t a part of what I was trying to do.

BROWER: -------------------------------?

TAYLOR: Yeah, I would not and then the more I became interested in Ray Charles and listening to what he did and it sounded so right for what he was doing...so I said well it is nothing to be ashamed of...I mean if I could do it that well... I would do very well to put some of that back into my playing.

BROWER: I am wondering a couple of things that this discussion raises, one is sort of hear that was an attitudinal thing that was occurring at that time, I guess it is still in the Black community about jazz musicians...the Sunday world and the rest of the world...was that really-----------I mean not sort of something unsaid, but something that was real obvious where lines and effect were drawn?

TAYLOR: Oh yeah, oh yeah, jazz musicians and show people were...

BROWER: Is that a class, was that a middle class ------------
or was that a church, non-church division, what was it...

TAYLOR: It was both, it was both and it was especially true here in Washington, because you had several levels of prejudice within the Black community. You had a color prejudice which stems from slavery days, which the lighter you were the closer your hair was to that of the White...

Tape-1 Side B cont.

TAYLOR: -----------as a matter of fact in the community when I grew up, straight hair was called good hair...you know, obviously the hair that is kinky is not good hair...and there were many things that were...cause this was the south...I mean Washington was as far south as Alabama...I mean that when I grew up here I could go to the Woolworth store and buy a hot dog, but I couldn't sit down and eat it...and I couldn't shop in many of the stores downtown. There were some stores that I could shop in...other stores I...you know, it like an unwritten...there were no signs,
but you knew that you could go in Goldenbergs or you could go in Hechts, and you could not go in Garfinkles, you know...

BROWER: You could go in Hechts, but you could not work in Hechts?

TAYLOR: Yeah, thats right...you could go and buy it or something but you couldn't work there. Most of the guys that drove the streetcars were White...the firemen were White...the police were White... so it was a very tight community and you knew everybody in the community and everybody knew you. As a matter of fact the Washington that I grew up in...the expanded family was very important to my development. I mean any one...if I got out of line, any adult could chastise me and slap me or whatever...and if I was stupid enough to go home and tell my mother, I got another one.

BROWER: -------------------------------I also have a sense that you have a very strong family tradition, that is the images in your family...the men in your family...the women in your family...
represented a really strong kind of tradition...in a sense you had to live up to...I don't know whether that was the pressure. Do you want to comment on that?

TAYLOR: Yeah, it's exactly true, I mean everyone in my family and in the extended family was expected to achieve. I mean my grandfather was a minister...my father was a dentist...that was a big deal in the Black community...and my mother was a former school teacher...so not only were they educated...but I didn't even know what the depression was...I lived through the depression...I didn't know there was a depression. Now I am sure in retrospect that there were times when my father didn't have as much money as he would have liked, and couldn't do some of the things that I would have liked to have had done or my brother would have liked to have had done...but I never knew that...I never felt hey we are poor or things were rough or anything, you know...

BROWER: ------------sister or one other brother or were
there more?

TAYLOR: I grew up...I am the oldest of two sons...my father remarried...my mother is still alive...they were divorced and my father married...I have a half sister who lives here in Washington. So there are three of us, you know, who are brother and sister, but I grew up with a brother who is five years younger than I.

BROWER: His name is?

TAYLOR: Rudolf, he is a real estate man in D.C., and very active in public politics and does a lot...he is a very successful business man...he has got a place not far from here as a matter of fact, and he has built a new office or something, so I am very proud of him...he is doing quite well. Its funny speaking of having to live up to things...I was always the cross that he had to bear, because I was always five years older...and he followed me in school...and everyone said "You know, boy it is a pity you
are not as smart as your brother." Now I wasn't all of that
smart but you know, they layed that...they used that on him...and
he was always Bill's brother. Many years later I came back, he
was the president of the D.C. Realtors Association...and I was
introduced as Rudolf's brother...and that was a big deal...and I
am very proud of him cause he has made his own business and he
has pulled himself up...nobody helped him...he really did what he
has achieved on his own which is terrific.

BROWER: So the Taylor family was an important family in the
Washington community. How did it relate to the intellectual and
cultural community that was around Howard University...what was
the reaction there?

TAYLOR: Well, my father was a Howard graduate, he had gone to
dental school there and so many of the...he is kappa and all of
the Kappa brothers, you know, everybody knew one another and he
was a professional person, so he and Stud Green and many of the
other doctors and dentist and lawyers would get together for
various kinds social events and so forth...

BROWER: That was around-----------------------------?

TAYLOR: Yeah, and my parents had many friends who were on the faculty of not just Howard University, but in those days, since you...most of these people were doctorates and so forth couldn't get into schools like Harvard, and places where they should have been teaching. They were teaching in Dunbar High School, and they were teaching at Armstrong, they were teaching at Cordozo...

BROWER: Ph.Ds?

TAYLOR: Yeah, we had five Ph.D. at Dunbar when I was there. Now it's ludicrous for a high school, you know, but we benefited because these were brilliant people, and they taught us.

BROWER: Let's go back to musical training and...I know you mentioned that you played piano and guitar and saxophone...how did your involvement with those instruments coincide with your development as a pianist and at what point did you begin to have formal training?
TAYLOR: Well, my first introduction to music was formal training on the piano, and I told my father that I wanted to play like Uncle Bob, and he said, "Fine." Then he sent me off to Elmyra Streets, who was the local piano teacher, down on Tenth Street, right across the street from what was Garnet Patterson Junior High School. Actually I did with her...my brother studied with her, and everyone thought that Rudolf was going to be the pianist, because he worked at it and he played...he always practiced his lessons and everything...and I had only practiced if we were going to give a little recital or something. Then I would get my little thing together and then I practiced, you know, to get a show in I was going to practice...get it together...but if not nothing happened, you know, I was lazy and so I didn't do what I should...cause quite honestly like a lot of young kids today...I wanted to play right then, and I didn't want to go through the discipline of scales and----------------------I
just wanted to whale...I wanted to get into it. All of this European stuff, that wasn't where I wanted to go anyway, I mean I want to play like Fats Waller...I mean this wasn't...I couldn't see that one thing getting me to the other. So it wasn't serving my purpose in my view...so I fooled around with the guitar...I fooled around with the saxophone and the drums, and all of these things trying to get into the jazz thing, and it was only...

BROWER: So this was in your head really at an early age-----------------got into that?

TAYLOR: Oh yeah, I wanted to be a jazz player, I mean because that said something to me and it was reinforced every week by going to the Howard Theater...I mean that was...its difficult for me to say how important that was...because the images that I got of these terribly creative people doing exciting stuff in the spotlight, you know, everybody is looking at them...everybody is relating...everybody is laughing when they tell a joke...everybody is applauding when they do a great dance
step...I mean this is great communication, you know, and that was fascinating and I wanted to do that. And you would go to see Earl Hines...here is this guy with the slicked back hair...he is sharp man...I mean this guy is tall and slender and looking good...and all of these pretty ladies around him...and he is playing...kind of facing the audience...looking out at the audience, you know, a big diamond ring on his hand and everything...grinning...I mean this guy is the epitome of show business. Then you go the next week and here is this really regal guy conducting the orchestra from the piano...Duke Ellington, and he has got all of these...everybody in the band is a star...I mean everybody...and everybody knows he is a star...I mean you have got Johnny Hodges...and you have got Cootie Williams...and you have got Sonny Greer, and you have got all of these...everybody is just...you know, he would spotlight anybody...it just seemed to me he would just point to somebody...anybody at random...point to somebody. This guy
sounded marvelous you know, I would say wow!...I have got to be there. So, every week something like this was going on and I wanted to do that.

BROWER: Miss. Streets, how long did you stay with her...I mean you sort of said that you sort of played at it?

TAYLOR: Well, I studied with her for about two or three years, and learned the basic of scales and and how to read music and so forth...and then I really...I didn't get serious...I mean I fooled around so...you know, I trifled with the music in such a way that my father got really exasperated, he said "Look I am just not...don't go...I mean you can't...I am not going to pay for those lessons because you are not serious about this...and you either are going to play or you are not going to play." And this is when I began to fool around with all of these different instruments on my own...and it wasn't until I was...oh about eleven or so, or something like that...I guess by the time I
got...no, I know exactly when it was...and when I was in junior
high school...I was at...we had moved up to Fairmont Street...and
I went to...ah, I can't remember the name of the school now...but
anyway...Monroe, James Monroe School...I graduated from there or
at least I came out of...I don't guess you graduate from
elementary school...but I had left...

BROWER: ---------------------------------------?

TAYLOR: Yeah, and went there, and then when I had left
elementary school, I went to junior high school...and the first
day that I was at Shaw Junior High School...a guy named Frances
Madison was playing the piano in a music...they had a music room
there...and during lunch period man, all of the girls...everybody
was crowded around the piano...this guy was in there and he was
whaling man...he sounded good...I said gee this sounds nice you
know, and he played...and then I had met another guy who played
the piano pretty well...and both of these guys were self
taught...and they both played by ear...and they both played in D
flat...I mean they could only play in one key...and I said well hey thats neat...I mean you know, I can do that...so I kind of checked them out and began to do that and I found that pretty girls did indeed come and sit on the piano stool. So, my interest in the piano was revived...I said listen...I have got to get to that...and I use to play in the assemblies...and ah...at that time I was playing both saxophone and piano...saxophone and a little bit in the orchestra...and some of the school plays...and stuff like that. That was really when I got serious about studying and I begin to study...I studied with another teacher who name I don't remember now, but my mother would probably remember her name...she lived a few doors from my grandfather on Thirteenth Street...and I didn't last too long with her...I didn't like the way that she taught...but I really got serious about studying...and the one thing that I learned that I could kind of work through some things on my own...and I found that the man who was the director of bands in high school and who was director who
I visited my junior high school on about once every two weeks or so was named Henry Grand. Henry Grand was the first musician that I ever met who really...that was the beginning of my serious study of music...I mean because he was a great composer...a great arranger and studied...one of the few people that Duke Ellington studied with and he was a neighbor...he lived across the street from me. So, I used to study piano with him...he introduced me and caused me to love forever Debussy and Ravel and showed me the relationship between the kind of harmonies that Debussy and Ravel used with ninth and thirteenth chords...and how that related to Duke Ellington and some of the people that Jimmie Lunceford, and some of the people that I like.

BROWER: So this guy Grant really is a real, sort of a real important background figure.

TAYLOR: Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely...

BROWER: I imagine he was a part of some of that stuff to do...so
he knew where it came from.

TAYLOR: Oh yeah, yeah... he did... as a matter of fact in "Music is my Mistress" there is a very lovely full page picture of him when he was a young man, handsome fellow with kind of a grayish hair and a find musician... I mean he, he... to give you an idea of the kind of music that he wrote, that he arranged... he scored for a weird ensemble... its just a conglomeration of instruments that were available to him... you know, whatever the kids played... thats what he wrote for you know, and he scored some Christmas carols... and they were so beautiful that is April we would say Mr. Grant can we play the Christmas carols... I meant cause it was just pretty music... we wanted to play it. But he was really a very patient and a very knowledgeable and one of the best teachers I ever had. There have been teachers like that in almost every city thats turned out a lot of musicians... I mean there is one in Detroit... there was one in Chicago... there have been a couple in other towns that... that...
BROWER: You mean Chicago like----------------------?

TAYLOR: Right, right, absolutely the same kind of figure----------------------

BROWER: How does this intersect with or how does this relate to amateur contest time...does this proceed doing amateur contest?

TAYLOR: Yes.

BROWER: Does this proceed working the Bluebirds?

TAYLOR: No, it is kind of around the same time...I mean I begin the interest in ah, ah, Henry Grant made it possible for me to do those things...you know, I had to get to him to begin to get the kind of facility that I needed to begin to work through some of the problems of listening to music, and playing it, and reproducing it.

BROWER: Now was his emphasis on the classical repertoire?

TAYLOR: Yeah, he taught me the traditional piano repertory and taught me the beginning of my interest in harmony and theory.
BROWER: But he------------------ related to do-----------------
what was happening in contemporary music so you could see how to
get...what would get you to the other place.

TAYLOR: He was not a jazz musician...he was one of the great
Black musicians...he is not as famous as some of...James--------
and some of those people...but he was on that level...and he was
of that school and he knew them...he was one of the founders of
the famous organizations of musicians...which ah...of music
teachers which still exist now...I forget what it is called...but
its an organization that exist today...that has its credo...the
presentation of Blacks who write and perform in the Europeanian
tradition...and who do it extremely well...and who also do the
church work...I mean those two things kind of went hand in hand
with many of those artist.

BROWER: Like the Henry T. Berger type------------------------?

TAYLOR: Right, absolutely, absolutely...that statue.

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BROWER: Did he operate out of his...did he have sort of a mini academy or operated out of his house or how did he--------------?

TAYLOR: No, he operated...he was...Dunbar High School was his main teaching job...and so much of what he did was there, but he also taught privately in his house.

BROWER: Since you mentioned Dunbar, would you describe what that environment was like, and how the school functioned in this community, and what impact it had on you.

TAYLOR: Dunbar was like an academy...I mean that the academic standards were very high...you were expected...you were programed to achieve. I mean there were three high schools in those days...Dunbar was the academic...if you went to Dunbar...you were expected to go to college...you were expected to become a professional of some sort...you were expected to do things which would reflect well on you, your family and your ethnic group...and you were expected to be a leader. I mean you were told this in every possible way and you were shown examples...I
mean I thought Marian Anderson, and Dorothy Maynard, and Paul Robeson came to everybody's high school...they came to mine you know, and I mean you know, we met these people and they talked to us...and they gave us inspiration...told us how lucky we were to be studying with some of the people who were on the faculty in those days...and we were...and they were very supportive. The other schools in their own way were just as good, but they had another focus...Cardozo was the place where you went if you were going to go immediately into business...and you know, really try to go right into from high school into the business world, which was possible in those days. So, you took typing...so you got the skills that were necessary for that...if you were skilled with your hands, and could do things which required manual labor and so forth, you went to Armstrong. And quite honestly we were chauvinistic about Dunbar...I mean we thought we were better than the others, because we were the academics...and we were going to be the leaders...and we were programmed to do that. Ah, ah, I
was kind of a Mavarick because many of my best friends went to the other two schools...because they happened to be musicians...ha, ha, and so, you know, I kind of went...I played dances at all of the schools...and I met folks from all of the schools...and some of the parents didn't think too much of that...they thought that was beneath someone that was going to Dunbar. You know, as I said we had our own prejudices in those days.

BROWER: Who were some of your peers at Dunbar?

TAYLOR: Ah...Eddie Brook, the former senator.... He was a senior when I was a freshman. And, ah...Frank Wess was along with me. I think Osie went to ah...Osie and John Malachi went to Armstrong if I'm not mistaken.

BROWER: That was the craf---- school...

TALYOR: Yeah...and ah...

BROWER: Did you know Tommy Potter?
TAYLOR: Yeah, very well. We played together a lot. Yeah.

BROWER: What was he?

TAYLOR: I don't remember him in high school. I just remember performing with him. Ah, he was kind of working as a professional earlier...much earlier than I was.

BROWER: Do you remember a group called the "Tommy Miles Band"?

TAYLOR: Very well. Yeah. That was the big band and it was the best...there were two or three big bands around. There was Bill Baldwin's band, which played the dances at the ah...Lincoln Calanade. And, ah...but Tommy's band that played the shows. They would play most often at the Howard Theatre when they needed a band that could cut the shows. So the guys tended to be better readers. They tended to be, ah...on a level a little above...it wasn't...I'm cutting it pretty close because many of the guys played in both bands. But generally speaking, as a band, Tommy Miles had what was considered perhaps of the best Black band in
Johnny Malachi put together a band of young fellows and, ah, that was the band he modeled it after. Because, I mean, that was a hip band. I mean they were playing all the good charts of those days. And, ah, Tommy Miles had Jimmy Mundy writing charts for him...I mean before he wrote for ah...

BROWER: Earl ----?

TAYLOR: Earl, yeah..."Swingtime in the Rocky's" was a theme of the Tommy Miles band...one of the things they used for a theme. "Cavinism", which is credited to Earl Hines, was a tune...I don't know whether Jimmy wrote it, but one of the guys in Tommy Miles band wrote it. It was a terrific band.

BROWER: Do you remember some of the people who in that band?

TAYLOR: I cannot. It just, ah...as we were talking, I was just trying to picture some of the people and ah, at this point I can't remember who was...the only guy that I can think of, ah,
was a guy named Washington, who played the, ah, trumpet...who was very good, who's first name escapes me at the moment. But, ah, there were some legends here in town among the professional musicians. There was a guy named Toby Walker, who was a self-taught pianist and who would not get up from the piano stool for anyone but Art Tatum. I mean he would challenge any living that came into where he worked, and wipe them out! I mean he was one hell of a piano player! I mean he was really phenomenal. Another pianist, who was comparable to him in those days, was a guy named Harold Francis, who later played with the Ink Spots, but never really recorded or... Harold was one of those guys that...he was...ah...Art Tatum was my idol, but Harold was a guy that I knew and he was closer and I could learn from him immediately. So, many of the things that were "Tatumesque" that I learned, I learned from Harold because had learned how to do that. And I could look over his shoulder and he would show me,
You know. The woman that I mentioned earlier, Norma Shepeard, was, ah...

BROWER: That was when when you went into the Three Deuces and the lady kind of grabbed your shoulder...

TAYLOR: Yeah. Norma Shepeard was a tremendously talented pianist. She comparable to any male pianist. She was one of the best pianists in town when she lived here. And she played all the best gigs. She played in the nightclubs, she did all of the things and she was respected as a "first-call" player for the gigs. She was very nice. She would let me sit in, she would let other guys sit in, you know, on her gigs and everything. You know, in those days, those kind of players were ah...they helped you a great deal...Harold and many others.

BROWER: Did you know Trummy Young?

TAYLOR: Yeah. When he was here. Played with Tommy.

BROWER: In what context?

TAYLOR: Ah...well...
BROWER: Jam sessions...?

TAYLOR: Yeah, only jam sessions. I never worked with him in those days, but he was just a bright young guy that was playing a trombone...I just remember him playing the trombone high...I'd say, "Gee, that's almost up in the trumpet range. How can you do that?" you know. And he was really, phenomenal...really phenomenal.

BROWER: Did you know Eckstine, here?

TAYLOR: Yeah. Well Billy was the ah, most influential singer of that day. I mean even when he was a kid he was singing with Tommy Miles. But everybody...if you wanted to win first prize at the "Howard Amateur Night", you'd go in and sing like Billy Eckstine...knock them out, knock them dead. There were two or three young singers who emulated him. You know, who were maybe four or five years younger, but they had those deep voices and they would emulate him...every... If I knew they were going to be on the amateur...I wouldn't go on, because they had to win,
BROWER: So, his concept was established as a teenager, very early on...

TAYLOR: Yeah, very early.

BROWER: And the whole ------, the whole...was there.

TAYLOR: Everything...I mean was there. Yeah he was...ah...If Billy had been White, he would have been much bigger than Sinatra, because he flowered earlier. I mean when he was a kid, his was what it...I mean it was really ah... The only...ah, Cab Calloway was the popular Black singer/band leader of that day. And Billy was a kid. I mean he was, you know, like a teenager and people were saying, "Well, man he's better than Cab Calloway. You know, that's a voice!" That was the kind of acceptance he had at an early age. And they were comparing him with Herb Jeffries, and, you know, much older men, in experience, you know.

BROWER: We've talked a bit about some of the theaters, how they
were the community. Prior to going away to advanced training, did you participate in any of the club life that was around...nightclub life? If so...or could you reconstruct what that was about...how that related to the other ------

TAYLOR: Well, ah, yeah, I played a lot of gigs in clubs. I remember playing in a place called "Republic Gardens". That was the first time I ever saw a woman take a half a dollar off a table without using her hands, ha, ha.

BROWER: They were really doing that then?

TAYLOR: Yeah, it was pretty raucous. Some of the clubs...there was a club called the "Bengazi---", there was another club called the, ah..."Green Parrot"...

BROWER: That was on "U" Street------------------------?

TAYLOR: Yeah...the Green Parrot. Ah, Jelly Roll Morton brought a piece of a club...ah, he had an interest in a club called "The Jungle Inn" right down the street from the Lincoln Theatre. So,
I played a lot of those clubs...primarily as a substitute. There were some clubs over near 7th and "T" that I played also...Spotlight, a couple of others. But, ah, I didn't play clubs a lot. I played mostly dances, because I was in school and I couldn't, ah...you know, my parents wouldn't let me...I could play weekends but I couldn't do too much during the week.

BROWER: Did you know Jelly Roll?

TAYLOR: I met him once. I met him, ah, during the period when he was living here making the records for the Library of Congress. I've related this story on many occasions: Johnny Malachi, I ran into him on the street one day and he said, "Hey man, there's an old dude up at...playing at the Jungle Inn, just came in. He's supposed to be a heavy New Orleans player. We ought to go check him out." So I said, "Well, man you know I'm already into Tatum and Teddy Wilson and, you know...real stuff. I mean I don't need to go back, you know into that old ante-bellum stuff, you know. I don't need to hear that. What could
he do that I'd be interested in, you know?" So, John said, "Well, you know I hear he's pretty good. We ought to see what he's into" So he convinced me. So about four or five of us went over, this guy, Rob Holly, John, and somebody else, and myself. We were all sitting at the table and somebody told Jelly Roll that we've got a whole table full of piano players. So he looked over there...came over and kind of sneered at us, you know, and said something to the effect that, "You punks can't do this." And we couldn't! He got into some of that New Orleans, man where both hands are going in different directions and he's playing in "E" and "A" and playing in some of those unfamiliar keys, which were unfamiliar to me in those days. I mean he's playing stuff that had a different kind of form...and you know, I said, "Wait a minute now." So, I began to really listen with other kinds of ears. That was the beginning of my respect for older forms. I mean, prior to that, like most young people, if it wasn't of
tomorrow, I didn't want to know about it, you know. But, once I heard this guy, who was obviously a master, and he was obviously some things which were older than I was and doing it with such verve and sensitivity, and certainly, facility, that I said, "Well, hey, you know. Let me go back and check this out, because that's a whole area that I don't know anything about, ha, ha, you know.

BROWER: Was this just one encounter or did you go back to the club?

TAYLOR: I went back... and, you know... very respectfully, ha, ha, ha and checked him out a couple more times. But, I couldn't go there very much. It wasn't... it was a dump. It wasn't a great place and my parents didn't take too kindly to my going too often to places like that. I was still under age and so I really had not business in none of those clubs, but I went. I was big for my age, so I got away with it.

BROWER: We talked about deportment among musicians. What was he
like in terms of values? I've heard many things about him...

TAYLOR: Oh, he was a very arrogant man and very egotistical and we would...he was not very considerate. He wasn't at all like most of the other players.

End = Tape #1, side B
Disk #1 full
TAYLOR: He was ah...I remember talking to Mary Lou Williams one time and I was asking her...we were talking about Jelly Roll Morton...because she had seen the thing that I did on the ah, "You Are There." So she said something to the effect that, "Well you surely made him a lot more sympathetic character than he really was". So I said...

BROWER: You were acting out the part...

TAYLOR: The part of Jelly Roll Morton, yes. So I said, "Well, you know I did...that was my reading of the character". I said "I had met him and ah, you know, I knew him to be arrogant and so forth, but...I don't know...in that particular context it didn't seem to be necessary or at least I didn't want to play him that way, you know..."

BROWER: What would have been the point?

TAYLOR: Well, ah...I guess, for those who knew him, I should
have... to be more true to the character that they knew, I should have come on stronger, you know. As an actor I should have...

The piece that I did was saying, "This is how I (Jelly Roll) wrote 'Tiger Rag'. I did this, I heard the Muzurka and I did this and so and so and so... Then I played this part. Then I added that and so forth". And Mary Lou, what she was saying was that he would have come on a lot stronger than that. He'd say, "Look, man I did this and it was so easy...", ha, ha, ha. I mean that was the kind of guy he was. She was right I probably should have played the character that way, but at the moment I just felt it would have made him... it didn't seem to fit the context of what I was... The story was the closing of Storyville. And the focus of the... it was a half-hour program and the protagonists were interviewed by Walter Cronkite, by Mike Wallace, by... CBS guys who were active as reporters on CBS in those days. It was directed by Sidney Lament. I mean it was fantastic, you know. The script was very well written. As a matter of fact, my part
of the script...I had about seven minutes of the script out of a
half-hour show. The reason was that they wanted me to take this
development of "Tiger Rag" to show the importance of this
particular character. So as a pivotal in the piece...I guess I
wanted him to be sympathetic. I didn't want him to be a drag,
you know, ha, ha.

BROWER: Yeah, ah...you've talked a good bit about your
experiences in Washington. Are there any other areas that you
didn't touch on? In terms of experience. In terms of people.
In terms of formidable experiences. In terms of influential
people...are to be covered in terms of talking about your
development...your formation as a young man in Washington.

TAYLOR: Yeah... I was listening to a lot of music from the
twenties. I had a friend named Wallace Conway, who I had
mentioned earlier, his father was the person who painted all the
signs for the Lichman----Theaters and...who did all these
things. His father was a very close friend of Duke Ellington.
So he had a remarkable collection of Ellington records. I'd go...he was a neighbor of mine...I'd go over and listen to records at his place. I heard a lot of music I couldn't afford to buy in those days and it probably wouldn't have occurred to me to buy it because I didn't know the music. I heard a lot of Ellington, I mean really...stuff like "Don't Mean a Thing" and some of those things..."In a Sentimental Mood" and a lot of those things. And, ah, I met, when I was in junior high school, a young man whose name was Billy White. He was an "Ellington freak." The thing he that he wanted to do more than anything was work with the Ellington band. So he practiced and wrote and went to Juilliard and did all kinds of things to get to this position. And I think he did, at one point, work a short time with Ellington. But where Billy didn't seem to grasp what Ellington needed was that he was patterning himself after Hodges and some of the people who were already in the band and Ellington always
He didn't want another Hodges. He didn't want another Bigard. He wanted someone who did whatever he did in his own way, you know. And so, he was really not as aware of that as perhaps he should have been. So, he only worked with the band, to the best of my knowledge, for a short time. I met Mercer Ellington during that period. ... There was a musician named Jimmy Murphy who was a bassist. Big tall guy...went to Howard University. And it was he who that I used to visit a lot in that hall that I was talking about, which ah...on Howard's campus. I'd go over there and jam a lot in the men's dorm. I was in high school. A lot of the folks thought I was in college because I was hanging out with all these college guys. And Jimmy was like the number one Jimmy Blanton fan. I mean he just thought the sun rose and set on Jimmy Blanton. He learned his solos and he wanted to play like that. Well, if I was going to play with Jimmy, then I'd have to get out of his way so that stuff could be heard and that was what really sent me in the
direction of looking at other aspects of how to play.

BROWER: In other words we're talking about the left-hand

stride------ -----...

TAYLOR: Right, uh huh...

BROWER: ...or the circumstances which led you away from...

TAYLOR: ...from playing "stride piano"...developing a style

which is...only included playing stride piano. So Jimmy and I

and a guy named...who actually was my best man when I got

married...a guy named Buddy Bowser, who was a comic...a kind of a

M.C. in the Willie Bryant and Ralph Cooper tradition. We played

at a club called "Dykes", which was out in, what was then

Deanwood part of Washington. It was nice...Dykes Stockcade, a

little place kind of...almost in what was the country in those
days. We use to go out there...I couldn't wait to get to work.

I mean it was a lot of fun. There was a vibraphonist, whose name

I don't remember. His professional name was "Peter Rabbit", for

some reason...you know. But he was a good vibraphonist, he
played, you know, in the Lionel Hampton tradition...very excited, crowd pleasing kind of thing. And so the band was Jimmy on bass, me on piano, ah, a girl singer, Buddy and Peter Rabbit, who the guitar as well as the...and the accordion as well as the vibraphone. It was very interesting. I enjoyed that...those days.

BROWER: Does this bring us to a point in which you’re ready to go to college?

TAYLOR: Yes.

BROWER: You went to, I guess, Virginia State?

TAYLOR: Yeah.

BROWER: Was that out of family tradition?

TAYLOR: Exactly. My father was a graduate of Virginia State and so... I wanted to go to Juilliard...and ah, he said, "Well, I think that it may not be possible for you to earn a living as a musician, so you really ought to go to school and get a general
education. Get a degree...take liberal arts education. From liberal arts, you can go anywhere you want to go. ...But you should start there." So I went to Virginia State as a sociology major. I spent two years taking all the required courses. All of my electives were in music, so when I reached my junior year my harmony and theory teacher called me into her office one day and she said, "Taylor, what is your major?" I said, "Sociology." She said, "Wrong." So, from that point on, I was a music major.

That was Dr. Undine Moore, who is a very fine composer and certainly...probably a continuation of the same kind of influence on me that Henry Grant did.

BROWER: What kind of things did you do with

TAYLOR: Well, I was ah...Virginia State was a very musical campus. I mean from my freshman year, I was involved in playing music. I mean I wasn't on campus two weeks and heard about a band that was composed of musicians...mostly...there were two main bands in the area. One was called the "Johnson Happy Pals", 

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which was a regional band...a very well known regional band. And Benny Layton's----band. Benny Layton--- was a student and had been a student a Union. He had put together a band that played...he was a saxophone player...and he put together a band that played all of the popular stuff of the day. I mean, we played "One o'clock Jump", we played "Take the A Train".

whole arrangement. Remember these were the days of the "78's" so the arrangement was only about three minutes long...or less than three minutes so it wasn't a long arrangement but the whole thing cost a buck. The solos were all there...I mean Count Basie's piano solo and Lester Young's solo...it was all in the music. You know, somebody had transcribed all that stuff and they were terrific...well transcribed. So we played a lot of those stock arrangements. It was fun. That was like really going to school. That's when I first began to arrange and to be concerned with writing things down.
BROWER: Did you play with the Johnson Happy Pals----?

TAYLOR: Yeah, briefly but that was later. That was ah...I guess I was in ah...when I was in my junior or senior year...well, I guess it was in my junior year, because once I changed my major to music, my father said he wasn’t going to pay for my schooling. He said, "You know, if you want to make a fool out of yourself, you pay for it yourself. I’m not going to support your idiosyncrasies. I mean, if you want to be a musician, fine. You pay for it." And so, I didn’t know that he had called some of his friends on campus and said that if I defal ted, on my payments, he’d take care of it. But he led me to believe that I was on my own. So, I did...that’s why I was playing with Benny Layton----, with Johnson Happy Pals and the school band. I re-organized the "Virginia Statesmen" and began to use that as a group, solicit jobs. I had my first radio show on WPID down there. I was doing all kinds...I was hustling. I was determined that...the only thing I knew was music so I had to parlay that
into some kind of money.

BROWER: Were there musicians there that were important to you as peers or that we would know now in the musical world? Who were some of the people on the scene then?

TAYLOR: There were several but unfortunately I don't think their names are meaningful at all. There's a man named Warner Carter, who was from Washington, D.C., who had family down there. He was a fine trumpet player. And there were several others but none of them did... they didn't go into... Some of them... Warner and others worked with some the regional bands, you know. But, I don't think they ever went with the Basies and the Lunceford and people like that.

BROWER: So there were kind of two levels of activity...

TAYLOR: Uh huh.

BROWER: ... the kind of training that Dr. Moore provided you in the European tradition and then this parallel activity, which was
playing with dance bands and quasi swing jazz...

TAYLOR: And there was another...I had a lot of help in the dance band area because there was a man named Soloman Phillips who became, like the ah, faculty advisor for a lot of the things for band music and so forth. I really couldn't score anything. I mean I could barely write down what I wanted...I knew the sounds I wanted to hear, but I didn't know how to distribute them into the orchestra so I would dictate to him some of the things that I wanted. He would score it for the orchestra. Then I'd look at what he did, then I would begin to get an idea about how I could give the reeds this or give the brass this or mix it up in that way and have an ensemble thing. But he was very helpful also and he was a faculty member.

BROWSER: So, did you end up with a degree in music, or...?

TAYLOR: Yeah, a bachelor of science. I was going to be a music teacher. Instead of a B.A., I got a B.S. I found that, ah... the first job I applied for a couple of jobs after coming out of
school...I found that the first job that I was offered would have paid me less money than I earned as the leader of the band playing weekends. I said, "Wait a minute, that's not going to make it." So, I came back to Washington...

BROWER: You were looking in that immediate area...

TAYLOR: Well, I was looking anywhere...anybody that would hire me, but that was the only job...I think the job was in Maryland or in Virginia somewhere. But it was a very poor paying job, so I didn't take it. Instead I came back to Washington. I thought I was going to be drafted, but I wasn't so, I came back to work for a short time in Government, awaiting my call from the army, you know. I figured there was no point in going to New York and beginning to establish myself and then having to leave, so I'll hang around, get drafted and after the army then I'll go wherever I'll have to go. But, the fact of the matter is I was never drafted, so I became 4-F because in the last couple of years I had beat my health up so badly that I really was on the verge of
collaps and didn’t know it.

BROWER: Behind trying to meet your academic requirements and doing all this other...

TAYLOR: Yeah, I was getting...ah, two and a half hours sleep was. a good nights sleep for me, for about two years. Even though I was very young, I mean...you know...I was the same height that I am now and I weighed...I'm about 195 now...I was weighing, dripping wet, I weighed 145, ha, ha, ha. You know...ha, ha.

BROWER: When you came back to Washington, did you actually go into Government?

TAYLOR: Yeah, I worked at the Pentagon as a matter of fact. It was funny. You know, they had just built the Pentagon, then. It wasn’t even finished... The one thing that you learned from Dunbar High School...that I got from being a college educated person...was that I had been programed to be a leader and I mean I couldn’t see myself just slaving away as a clerk so, I
immediately started...

BROWER: (Inaudible) you didn't start as a messinger?———

TAYLOR: ...No, I started as a clerk. And that wasn't good enough. So I took the test, did very well on the test. They put me in charge of a section because it was hard to get men. Most of the men were drafted. ...You know, male chauvinist...they put men in charge of...there were women who were more qualified than I was, but I was a man so they put me in charge of some women, you know. I went up scale fairly quickly. I didn't go all that far, but...I had some responsibility...didn't make a whole lot of money...I had more responsibility. It was very interesting. I knew then that that was something I did not want to do for the rest of my life, ha, ha, ha.

BROWER: ...You knew you weren't going to be drafted, so that was enough to tell you to go to New York?

TAYLOR: No...the doctor scared the hell out of me. When I found out I was in such bad physical condition... ...I graduated in
1942, so I stayed around for several months...my mother fatten me up and I just kind of cooled it for a minute...then I went to New York. I hadn't saved a hell of a lot of money because, you know, I wasn't really working at that point. But, ah, I went to New York with my father's blessings. He gave me about a hundred bucks or something like that and said, "Okay, let's see what you're going to do." He was kind of ambivalent. I mean, I was his oldest son and he really had a special feeling for me but, like any other parent, he said, "Damn idiot, I mean, you try to give him the best...he won't take...I've got a good practice, he won't take that. You know...what am I going to do with this guy?" You know... As a father...

BROWER: (Inaudible)...

TAYLOR: ...He won't be a preacher...he won't be a dentist...you know...he's got all these...ha, ha, ha, ha. So, you know, it was frustrating for him and I can understand that now. I couldn't then. So with his kind of half blessing, I went off to New York
and began to try to establish myself as a musician.

BROWER: Okay...we've gone over some of this, but I think to get
-------(inaudible)----- I think we're going to have to go over
some of it again. Let's deal with Ben Webster and ah, ---
(inaudible)----------------- sequence of events.

TAYLOR: Well, I went to New York and...it had to be the luckiest
think, I mean the whole idea of being in the right place at the
right time. I just dropped my bags and went right to Minton's
and the whole idea of being in this place that I had heard so
much about was terrific. And to be able to jam with the New York
players and everything. So, I got there about nine o'clock and
talked to the piano player and said, "I'm from Washington and I
sure would like to sit in." And the guy said, "Okay, you know,
fine." But all night long other guys came in that he knew...you
know, he knew they were good, he didn't know what I sounded like,
you know. So, he let them play. I knew I was ready for New York
because I had come to New York as a student. When I was a college student I had come to New York and gotten wasted in a jam session. I went over to a place...my father had a friend whose name was Bill Garrett. Bill Garrett was general manager of a place...a nightclub, a bar in New York. They had the bar up front and in the back they had a trio. So, I went in and I said, quite brashly to my father's friend, "My dad told me to look you up and here I am. I'm going to the Savoy. I'm going over to the Golden Gate. I'm here to check out all the good music in town and everything..." That must have been 1938 or something because it was the World's Fair...I had come up for the World's Fair. I had to be just out of high school, I really wasn't in college yet. Anyway, I went in...he said, "Yeah, your father said tells me that you play piano, come on in the back and play something for me." I said, "Okay." So we go back, he introduces me to the guys. He said, "This is the son of a friend of mine. Let him play one." The guys said, "Okay." So, I sat down and played
"Lullaby in Rhythm". I noticed the piano player kind of looked at me funny when I went into this, but I thought it was because I was playing so good. I said, "...I've got my stuff together. I'm ready for New York even though I've got to go to school...I mean, I could come up here right now...hit it!...I got it together." So after I played that and played another tune and everything. So, the set we over and the guy said, "That's very nice kid". He said, "Look, ah, why don't you come on around the corner with me...you really play very well. I've got a couple of guys I'd like to have listen to you." I said, "Sure." So, I said, "I'll see you in a little while Mr. Garrett, I'm going around the corner with the young man here." And, ah, I still haven't caught this guys name and I'm too embarrassed to ask him, you know. He's got one leg shorter than the other and he walks kind of slowly. So we go around the corner and ah, we go into this brownstone. We go in, there are several guys at a table, there's a piano in the corner...several at a table playing cards.
So he says, "Hey fellows, I got a piano player here." Everybody kind of looked up. So he says, "Play something." I said, "Okay." I sat down...shot my best shot again, you know. I played something...China Boy or something like one of the tunes everybody was playing in those days. I got about half way through the second chorus and one of the guys got up to the piano and said, "That's...that's nice. Let me try a little of that?" I moved up, this guy sat down and had a left hand like I had never heard. I said, "Oh my...wow! Wait a minute." You know. So, the upshot was that everybody in the place was a piano player and one of them was James P. Johnson, one of them was Thelonious Monk and the others...I don't remember all the other guys. I think one was, ah..."The Beetle"...ah...and there was somebody else in there who...

BROWER: Who walked you around there?

TAYLOR: The guy who walked me around to the slaughter was...
Clarence Prophet, the guy who wrote the piece that I had played when I sat down. He thought I was choosing him. I mean his name is out front. I got to know this is the Clarence Prophet Trio and I come in on his gig and play his tune at him! Ha, ha, ha, ha. He said, "Oh yeah?"...I said, "Okay", ha, ha, ha. That was really the first time I had heard Monk...and he played...all the guys played. And man, I mean I have never got such a whipping in all my life 'cause all these were New York players. You know...I wasn’t ready for this, at all!

BROWER: We’re talking about deportment quite a bit and this is very interesting, because it’s come up before when we talked with Blakey, he just went on for a half and hour about Earl Hines. The impact...just looking at Earl Hines and what kind of impact he had. Ah, what about James P. Johnson in that regard?

(Inaudible) ---------.

TAYLOR: He didn’t impress me in that way. He was more of an "elder statesman" type. On this particular occasion, rather
reserved. ...Oh, I know the other guy was Willie "The Lion", yeah.... Ah, he was reserved and the reason I remember that is because Willie "The Lion" wasn't. I mean...Willie was the one that came over and said, "Hey son, let me try a little bit of that...get up!" ha, ha, ha. I got to know Willie later...much better than James P. ...But they both were...they commanded my respect. I mean, they were sitting there in shirt sleeves and relaxed and everything...it was not a formal occasion...but I would say..."Mr. Smith and Mr. Johnson." I mean it was not about, "Hey, Willie..." ha, ha. It wasn't about that at all, I mean this is "respect time"...before they played...I mean, I don't even know they're playing yet. But these are obviously some people that I should have some respect for...

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: ...Yeah, deference too, right, yeah.

BROWER: How well did you get to know Willie? What was the nature of that relationship?
TAYLOR: I...(inaudible) him quite well...he was really, ah...

BROWER: How well did you get to know "Mr. Smith", ha, ha, ha.

TAYLOR: "Mr. Smith" that's right, that's right... He was...over the years I would hear him play at Jimmy Ryons and I'd hear him play in many of the, ah...Central Plaza and many of the places where he tended to play. And because he was friendly with Ellington, I got to meet him in that context. On one occasion I co-produced a piano workshop for George Wien out in Pittsburgh and ah, Duke Ellington...it was a wild combination of piano players... The people that George provided for me were Willie "The Lion" Smith, Earl Hines, Duke Ellington, Mary Lou Williams, a Pittsburgh pianist named Charles Bell...and Ahmad Jamal was supposed to have made it and for some reason or another he did not make it. There's a record out on RCA Victor of that particular occasion...

BROWER: It's out of print, of course...
TAYLOR: ...It's out of print, of course, but it was made and ah, Duke Ellington played "Second Portrait of the Lion." And he's sitting there playing and "The Lion" is in the wings (of the stage)...and that's who he's playing to. I mean it was fabulous! I loved it. ...It was one of the best workshops I've ever done because we responded...it took about...it was about a three or four hour workshop. And we asked questions...answered questions from the audience. Willie was going back in his history and telling people the way it really was in the early days and all that sort of stuff. Charles Bell was kind of the "Cecil Taylor" of that context and he was explaining what it was in more abstract music that was the reason that attracted him and the reason he wanted to express himself in that way and so forth. It was very interesting.

BROWER: It's interesting, I heard Charles Bell at a community center in Akron when I was a sophomore in high school... I was listening to music (inaudible) had never heard of him. I
remember...I guess he had a lot of real angular
(inaudible)...real stark...

TAYLOR: Uh huh...yeah, right...

BROWER: ...you know, with a lot of force. (inaudible)...a
tutorial program and they gave some concerts and the Charles Bell
Trio came. I think probably the first musician I heard was
Rahsaan, which was interesting because I saw him (inaudible)
Villege Gate and I saw play manzello strich --------- (inaudible)
which sort of...you know...

TAYLOR: What's going on...

BROWER: (inaudible)...that combination (inaudible) of the
saxophone sound...he was inside... It was like, "I love that" so
that was...

TAYLOR: That's your point of reference ha, ha, ha.

BROWER: ...my point of reference. My point of reference wasn't
"Body and Soul"...(inaudible) at one time or blowing "nose
flute"...you know it's like... It left a lot of things open
but...(inaudible)...Charles Bell (inaudible), but it’s interesting. Ah...being a Minton’s and you got a chance to play and Ben Webster came in and he invited you down to the Three Deuces and you got the gig. Across the street was Dizzy Gillespie. Can you tell me what that did...

TAYLOR: Ha, ha, ha...that lost me my gig is what it did. Well Dizzy, I had met...Dizzy and Bird when they with Earl Hines. A fellow from Washington, D.C., Benny Harris...

BROWER: Little Benny Harris...?

TAYLOR: ...Little Benny Harris had introduced me to them. He was around my age and so...he was a big deal...he’s already playing with one of the great orchestras of all times...so I go backstage...

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: ...Yeah, yeah, so I go backstage to say hello to Little Benny, you know, hoping that...the Howard...to say, you
know...introduce me to some of the...Earl Hines and some of these great musicians. So he said, "Well, yeah I’ll introduce you to Earl, but here are a couple of guys you should know...Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker." Well, the names didn’t mean anything but...they were in the band so straight ahead, okay, that’s great...there was somebody...I can’t remember...I think Shorts...

BROWER: Eckstine was in the band too?

TAYLOR: O yeah, sure...but I knew Billy...

BROWER: That was no big deal...

TAYLOR: ...yeah, you know we met, I didn’t know him well but I knew him. But I wanted to meet Earl Hines and...there was a drummer and a trumpet player...Short McConnel I think it was, that I liked. I wanted to meet him, you know. I wasn’t particularly interested in meeting Diz, I didn’t know Diz, you know. So, we were out getting a hamburger or whatever...
TAYLOR: ...there were about three or four of us. We went over to get a ham sandwich or hamburger or whatever it was and he was saying, "Hey man, you got to know about these two guys. They’re into some real strange music, which is very exciting..." He had his horn with him, you know. So right in the restaurant the guy takes his horn out, he sitting there...he said, "They’re playing some stuff like this..."... (Laughter)

BROWER: (Laughter)

TAYLOR: (Laughter)...I said, "Cool it, man." (Laughter)

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: ...that’s right. So...what he played was hip, you know. So, he began to talk and tell us a little more about the kind of thing they were interested in. He said, "Man, it’s very exciting because it’s different from anything." He says, "You know, it’s not Roy (Eldridge), you know...it’s not that Hawkins style...you know this is the real stuff." And ah, so you got to hear
this...this is really...they're playing what they play...this the embryonic bebop. ...They are playing in the context of a pre-bop band. I mean, this band is playing...they're coming from Swing, but they're beyond Swing at this point...so, this is transition music between...they're using more expanded chords. The chord are...

BROWER: The rhythm section, I guess...

TAYLOR: The only thing that hasn't changed is the rhythm, that's right...

BROWER: ...I mean the band...Hines(inaudible) was hearing, harmonically, more (inaudible)...

TAYLOR: ...He's hearing...

BROWER: ...the rhythmic syntax hadn't been changed...

TAYLOR: That's right, he's still basically a Swing band. And so...oddly enough, from...that remained with both Dizzy and Bird for much of the early part of their career. Because, if you
remember, their first records were with Sid Catlett. So they’re hearing what they’re doing against a very steady pulse, you know.

Even though "Klook" (Kenny Clarke) and later Max (Roach) are going to change that, they still...they need "1-2-3-4" to get their stuff together, you know. It was very interesting time. By the time I got to work with Ben Webster, Diz really had it together. He now has Max on drums, Oscar Pettiford on bass, who’s the next step from Jimmy Blanton. He’s got, ah...

BROWER: At the Onyx?

TAYLOR: At the Onyx, right. He’s expanded the whole...he’s playing all the bebop lines on the bass violin. And Don Byas is there because Bird is not available. Bud (Powell) was supposed to be the piano. He was either working for Cootie Williams...or for some reason or another he was not available, so they opened without a piano player. So, the band was Diz and Don as the front and the two man rhythm section. So, I would run over, and
I wanted to learn this material. Because they were playing the
tune, "Bebop", they were playing "Salt Peanuts", they were play
"Night in Tunisia" they were playing the real...ah, the first of
Dizzy's...the "trail blazing" compositions that everybody was
going to learn later. And, ah I still playing out of the "Tatum
Bag", you know, but I want to learn what these guys are doing.
So I'm running over there, sitting in, and he's got some little
lead sheets scratched out, you know, and I can hardly see it,
but you know, I'm trying to play it. It was just an experience,
I mean, they had a little rehearsal. ...The exciting thing to me
was that they would play...you know, play the tune "Bebop" very
fast (Taylor sings melody to "Bebop") you know play it about like
that. Everybody would take a chorus. And when they'd get to the
bass solo...now bass players, in a tempo like that, walk. Not
Oscar Pettiford! They'd say, "Hey man....!"....you know, I mean
all over the place (laughter). He was all over the place. I
mean I've never heard anybody do that on the bass violin. He was
remarkable...and swung. He swung as hard as Dizzy or anybody in that context. He was remarkable. And it was just...

BROWER: (Inaudible) ...was the first bass player to handle it...to be able to handle that?

TAYLOR: To handle the bebop lines, yeah...yeah, yeah. He was the quintessential bebop bass player. The only reason he took up cello was because he was in a...he was playing baseball...he was working with Woody Herman...playing in Central Park and broke his arm and he never re-gained...he must have broken it in a couple places. Because he never re-gained the...he had tremendous strength when he was young. After he broke his arm, he never re-gained that kind of strength, so he couldn't do what he wanted to do. So, even though he remained a great bass player, in order to do the solo thing he wanted...that's why he took up the cello.

BROWER: So, he was with Woody Herman probably about 1946-47?

TAYLOR: Yeah.

BROWER: So, are you saying there's a different Oscar Pettiford
on bass...like the records I would hear that he made at ABC Paramount...

TAYLOR: Oh yeah, oh yeah. That's after.

BROWER: ...different from, ah (inaudible)...from the first...(inaudible).

TAYLOR: ...Yeah, had he not broken his arm, you would have heard more of what Mingus later began to do...I mean in terms of speed and stuff like that.

BROWER: So, how did this end up with you loosing your job...?

TAYLOR: Well, I kept...you know, these guys...the music is exciting and the sets get longer and lost track of time and I kept getting late, so finally I got fired. I mean...Sammy Kaye, who owned the place, said, "Look, you'll have to get another piano player." ...I was destroyed, man. I said, "Oh god...my first gig, I've blown it...I'll never get another job in New York." But then I began to play solo stuff. ...Because I could
read, it was possible...I played for a Broadway show called "Blue Holiday", which had a fantastic cast. It had Timmy Rogers, Mary Lou Williams was starring in it with a trio, Ethel Waters...

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: ...It was a review. Ah, Ethel Waters was the star, Bernice Permice was in it, Willie Bryant, ah...

BROWER: He was another one of those non-playing bandleader types...

TAYLOR: That's right, yeah. Teddy Wilson was his piano player, man...was a marvelous...

BROWER: Now ah, this is a digression...we've talked about all these piano players, where does Teddy Wilson fit in this...

TAYLOR: Teddy Wilson was someone whose influence I should have acknowledged much earlier because, had I not been so taken with Tatum, he would have been an even bigger influence on me. I mean he was a very big influence on me. Ah, I heard him back in about 1936 or 37 playing with the Benny Goodman trio and man he wiped
me out! I mean he was playing "China Boy" and "Running Wild" and some of those things that they did and it was so immaculate, so beautiful. Then I brought all those records he did with Billie Holiday when he led those groups and everything. And I followed him with his big band with Ben Webster... As a matter of fact, at that time when I met Clarence Prophet, he was leading a big band at...I don't know, the Savoy of the Golden Gate...one of those places. Anyway, I went to hear him because it was...J. C. Heard was playing the drums...with Ben Webster...Shorty Baker was in band. He was really not only a first-rate pianist, but that was a very unique band. Teddy not only was an influence on my piano playing in terms of touch, but he introduced me to the third and final teacher that I worked with for piano. I said "final"...his name was Richard McClanahan. Around this time...we're talking about the Onyx, I began to do a lot of freelancing and I played all the clubs up and down the street, because having played with Ben Webster, guys would say, "Well the
kid can play" and piano players would show up...they didn't have that many guys around, so I got another job. I played for Billy Daniels in one of the clubs. I played in another club called the "Spotlight" and I found that in playing...I was...bad pianos, man, bad P.A. systems... I was getting corns on my fingers, man, because I was playing so hard, you know...

BROWER: Just getting the note out...

TAYLOR: ...Just getting the note out, you know. So, I said, "This is a drag." I went over to Teddy's house one day. I had gotten to know him fairly well. He had been working at Cafe Society and other places. I had gone up and introduced myself years before and I reminded him that we had met and so forth. So I said, "...Other things have always impressed me about your work...your 'touch' is just like little pearls. I mean I admire that so greatly. What do you work on. How do you develop that". So he said, "Well, I play Mozart. I play classical repertory and
so forth..." So I said, "Gee, that's great. What Mozart? What kinds of things do you..." He said, "Well, you know, whatever I work on with my teacher." So I said, "Who is your teacher?" He said, "Rich McClanahan." So I said, "Do you think he'll take me as a student because I'd like to develop it?" He said, "Sure, call him." So he called, set it up and I went...studied with Richard for several years. Richard McClanahan taught the Tabias-----Matae-----System of touch-tone-control which had to do with the weight that you use when you play the piano, how you distribute that weight. And his feeling was that everything you do to get the tone quality that you're going to get happens before you strike the keys. So, the manner in which you attack that key will determine whether you're getting a round deep mellow sound or whether you're getting an angular...whatever, a different control of the weight makes for different sounds. It worked for me, it helped me a great deal toward developing the sound that I use on ballads especially.
my respects, there's no place for me to sit."

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: I went to the bandstand and I said, "Hey Diz, how you doing? Good to see you and so and so and so... I just came in to say hello. There no place for me to..." So he said, "Right there" (laughter). Stayed there and played all night, you know. We have a mutual admiration society...he knows how highly I regard him as an innovator and as a guy who is has really structured the music and...he was the organizer. Bird was the guy...the melody just tumbled out of him... But Dizzy, even though he was as creative as Bird, took his creativity in more of an arranger's way. He would put it in a context. He'd say, "Okay, let's have this little interlude here" or "let's start here and go to there" you know. He really organized it to the extent that almost all of the organizing...the basic organizations of bebop are tracable to things that he did.
BRAOWER: You were talking about Minton's earlier. And you were saying how, at that point, you were Tatum's...you were influenced by Tatum, "stride" was very important to you, you were struggling with what to do with the left hand, recognizing that there was a change happening... I looking at what was going on at Minton's, how much a mix of styles was there? I mean, were you alone in those who were trying to struggle and adapt? Were there only two or three people who had really...had crystallized and a lot of people who were trying to figure out how to move from one point to another? What was...I mean...on that bandstand was it sort of like, sometimes, maybe the saxophone player was one place but the drummer and the bass player were still some place else? Was that going on, or...?

TAYLOR: Yeah, there was a lot of eclectic playing but it didn't bother anybody. There was a guy named "Jack the Bear" that used to play there a lot and he was a straight ahead Swing player. But all the "beboppers" like to play with him because he kept good
time and he had a good "feel" with what he did. Most of the bebop drummers were really trying to get their act together. And, with the exception of "Klook" and Max, not all of them were really as clean as they should have been. So...Roy Haynes was still in Boston so...

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: ...there weren't too many guys around who could handle that approach.

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: Right. Well, there was Junior Ragland, there were a couple of bass players, but most of them were not around New York either and most of the bass players that played in that context just played straight ahead. They didn't do what Oscar Pettiford did, he was out there by himself in that regard.

BROWER: (Inaudible)...Ray Brown...?

TAYLOR: He came a little later...I mean Ray...

BROWER: (Inaudible)...forties...
TAYLOR: ...Yeah, he came along after Oscar Pettiford and really became the rhythm player. I mean he really began to develop as a rhythm player and so did Percy Heath. Percy Heath was coming along out of Philly with that kind of solid playing...not anywhere near the technique of Pettiford, but certainly...

BROWER: (Inaudible)...but Ray...they really played bebop in a different way. They were more...dealing with harmonic ideas...

TAYLOR: ...And the "time". The "time" feeling...they were on top of the "time" feeling and playing those other notes rather than just the roots and the kind of thing, say a Walter Page or John Kirby of somebody like that would have played. They were playing a much more "looser" line. Because the whole weight of the bebop rhythm section is on the bass player's shoulders. The drummer's got to be free to do all this stuff and the bebop player's got to not only walk in the proper way, but play these other notes that are going to fall in the right place for these...
chords these guys are playing. I was quite a challenge harmonically and rhythmically.

BROWER: Two other people I think that you worked with in this period...early...

TAYLOR: ...forties...

BROWER ...forties period...Cozy Cole, Walter "Foots" Thomas.

Does "Foots" come later or is right in the same...?

TAYLOR: No...this is in the same period. When I began to freelance, I was available for record dates, I began to look around...who needs a piano player, you know. I was really very fortunate in that Benny Goodman's sextet was playing with Slam Stewart. Slam Stewart, Teddy Wilson, Benny, Gene Krupa. I think...I don't remember the rest of the group, but it was a sextet. And "Seven Lively Arts" was a very popular Broadway show that starred Beatrice Lilly and Birt Larr and...Alicia Makofer,---a very fine ballet dancer...with music written especially for the show by Stravinsky. I mean, it was a wild show. The first
half...

BROWER: Did you travel first class (inaudible)...

TAYLOR: (Laughter)...

BROWER: (Inaudible)...Charlie Parker (laughter)...

TAYLOR: That's right...(laughter) And so...that was the first time I'd really seen a ballet dancer up close and this woman, in those days was really marvelous, Alicia Makofe——. Anson Dolan——was the person she danced with. They were so beautiful. They opened the second half. The first half closed with Cozy Cole's group. We replaced Benny Goodman in the spot. We had these gold lame costumes. I mean they were sharp...looked like a circus or something, I don't know. At any rate, we were surrounded by what Billy Rose called the "Glamorzons". These were women who were very statuesque...I have never seen such shapely women in all my life...

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: ..."Glamorzons"... Almost all of them were taller than
I am and I'm a little over six feet and these were huge ladies, you know. I mean they really looked spectacular. I was very difficult to keep my eyes on...I mean I had to look at the keyboard to make sure I didn't fall off the piano stool, you know. But ah, it was really my first opportunity to play on the Broadway stage and to do something like this. ...It was about a seven minute, eight minute spot at the close of the first half. And...Cozy as the featured soloist...you know...just did his whole number and tore it up, you know. The band was Tiny Grimes on guitar, Don Byas on tenor and Billy Taylor, the bass player and myself...and they never got the "Playbill" right. I mean, whoever looked at it would say, "The guy can't play both instruments. What is this? Billy Taylor, piano and Billy Taylor Bass." (Laughter) Actually, they did get it right after a while, but the first couple...

BROWER: Well he's...that Taylor family is from D.C. too...
TAYLOR: Yes.

BROWER: Unrelated?

TAYLOR: Yeah. As a matter of fact ah, the reason I’m called “Billy” instead of “Bill”, I was “Bill Taylor” until I went to New York. Because my father’s nick name was “Bill” and I was “Bill, Junior.” When I went to New York, I went to work with Ben Webster and they said, “What’s your name?” I said, “Bill Taylor.” Well the guy assumed...I mean Billy Taylor was a very well known musician on the street and they assumed that I was his son. He had a son my age, who played the bass. But they assumed I was his son...maybe doubled from the bass to the piano, whatever, you know. So, I came to work...you know, they put everybody’s name out front...and so I came to work...I was there on Sunday, Monday was the day off. Tuesday when I showed up, my name was out front. It said, “Billy Taylor.” So I went in to say to Sammy Kaye, who was the guy that hired me, “Is Billy Taylor the bass player playing?” No, I said, “Billy Taylor is
here too, huh?" (Laughter) He said, "Go play the piano. What’re you talking about?" He thought I was putting him on or something and I realized that was what it was and the "y" never got off my name.

BROWER: Anything further you want to say about Cozy Cole and that experience?

TAYLOR: Well, Cozy Cole was not only a master showman, but he had come through those years when if you wanted to hold a spot in a band, Cab Calloway’s band or anybody’s band, you had to compete with jugglers, with pretty girls, with comedians, with singers. And, if the show lagged during your spot...for instance, if I were in that band and I was playing a piano solo, we had programmed a piano solo, and my piano solo just laid there, nobody applauded, didn’t think it was so hot, they’d cut that. I mean, I didn’t have a piano solo. They’d say, "That’s slowing the show up, out!" Nobody wanted his number cut, so everybody developed some kind of way of holding on to that spotlight...some
kind of gimmick so that you knew that it was going to go over, you know. Well, Cozy was a master at that. He had worked with Stuff Smith...in Stuff’s group that had Jonah Jones and some of the great showmen of all time. They would just cut each other with show biz tricks, you know (laughter). So, he was the perfect choice for the spot that we had in "The Seven Lively Arts". There were standing ovations. They just tore it up every night. He was a fine musician. He had a studio and he had a partner named "Foots Thomas", who used to be...Walter "Foots" Thomas was a saxophone player. They both taught...had students and they played different kinds of gigs. I did a lot of recording with Foots Thomas and ended up at one point playing with his group at a place called "La Conga", which was an Afro-Cuban dance club. Had a lot of shows. The group that was playing the shows was the Machito---- band. And I got to know Mareo Bowsa---and Machito----. At one point when their piano
player, Joe Loco, was drafted. I filled in until they could bring a pianist up from Cuba. They brought one of the seminal figures in that music here. His name was "Rene Hernandez", a marvelous musician, fine arranger, fine pianist and just a remarkable all-around well-trained musician, who understood perfectly the Latin tradition as well as the jazz tradition. As a matter of fact, he was considered by many Latin players to be like the "Afro-Cuban Art Tatum" because he was that much of a father figure for many of the players.

BROWER: Comment about the Afro-Cuban experience for a moment. How did your experience...I guess they had an influence on you in terms of you learning how to play that style (inaudible) when you recorded with Candido. How did this parallel with the stuff that Diz was doing and, I guess, what George Russell did in connection with Diz?

TAYLOR: Well, Diz and I got our instruction from the same master. Mario Bowsa----- used to sit next to him in the Cab.
Calloway band, you know. They were very close... Mario, was then and is now a remarkable musician. But in those days he played first trumpet and first saxophone. He could lead either section and did.

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: Yeah, he lives in New York.

BROWER: (Inaudible) Do you know how to get in touch with him?

TAYLOR: Sure, I have his number. I don't have it here, but I can give it to you. He is such an important figure in terms of having jazz musicians understand the importance of the Afro-Cuban contribution. And having Latin musicians understand how the Jazz concepts could best be integrated into the music they want. Much of the Salsa, much of what's going on right now is highly indebted to him and other people like him who came to the states and worked with the great jazz bands, learned what that tradition was about. And it was like learning another language. They are bi-lingual. They could do the Latin thing. They could do the
jazz thing, you know. They "married" the two concepts in a very special way.

BROWER: Did you know Chano Pozo?

TAYLOR: I met him. I didn't know him very well. But Dizzy introduced him to me and he also introduced Candido. I was working at a club called "La Downbeat", which is on 54th Street just off 8th Avenue. I had Earl May and Charlie Smith as my trio. That was one of the best trios I've ever had. We were cooking, we had a ball. So, Diz used to come in all the time. One night he came in and said, "Hey, 'B' I got a drummer for you." I said, "Come on, I've got a drummer...best drummer around, Charlie." He said, "Oh no, no, I've got a (inaudible) drummer for you." I said, "Okay..."

BROWER: This is (inaudible) after 1951?

TAYLOR: Yeah, about 1951, 52 something like that. Late 51 early 52. And so I said, "Okay." So this guy comes in with these
three conga drums. I said, "Oh, really..." He comes in...played one set and stayed for six months. I mean everybody loved him. Candido was not only a masterful drummer, but he was a showman and he was one of the most likable human beings I've ever met. I remember one time we went to...we drove—in those days I didn't have money to fly anywhere or take the train...so we drove to Detroit. Now, my Spanish is terrible. His English is worse than my Spanish. And we laughed all the way from New York to Detroit trying to make each other understand each other (laughter). We had a ball. He was just a great human being.

BROWER: Ah, another engagement...period...work experience that had was (inaudible) Kenneth Spencer. I'm not familiar with him (inaudible) what of that Cafe...

TAYLOR: ...Society. Kenneth Spencer was a...

BROWER: Was this also the mid 1940's?

TAYLOR: Oh, yeah. This was around around 1944. This was around the same period when I was doing all of this freelancing. I'm
BROWER: Let's talk about it. (Inaudible) what would freelancing...would it be playing rehearsals for dancers...

TAYLOR: It meant everything...anything I could get a gig. I had an interesting experience when I first started to freelance. I went down to the union. Now 802 was a merged union...in most places, Washington, D.C., most places I went, there were two unions, a Black and a White union. This was all one union. So I figured I had as good a chance to do anything as anybody else...this was my union, I pay my dues, everything's cool. So I went down to what they called "The Exchange Floor." I gave my name to the guy with the microphone and said, "I'm a pianist and I'm available for whatever. I mean dance, show, whatever. I'd like to work." So I sat around for about an hour or so. Guys were calling people up and guys seemed to be getting work. I didn't know whether any of them were pianists, because I didn't know anybody. Finally, the guy who was the announcer called me
over and he said, "Look son, you've been sitting around reading your paper and kind of walking around. You don't seem to know anybody here." I said, "Well no, I'm relatively new in town. I'm a jazz player, but I can play other things. I need work, you know." So he said, "Why don't you do this. Why don't you go up and see Tiny Walters." Tiny Walters was the Black delegate the head of Harlem. So I immediately get my southern act...I said "Wait a minute now this is what... I didn't play Harlem. I don't particularly want to play Harlem. They don't pay anything. The pianos are bad. What is this...what are you trying to do?"

So I said, "Well, I would really like to play some dances and do some other things." He said, "Look, you can sit here all day if you like. I just call the names, but I would suggest that...you look like a nice fellow...I would suggest that you see Tiny Walters. I mean, he might be able to help you. He may open a door or do something for you." I said, "Fine." So I walked down
and I see Tiny Walters. And sure enough he says, "Well, what
he's trying to tell you is that you're not going to get a gig on
the Exchange Floor because these guys... it's a click, it's this,
you know..." I said, "But, what the heck, it's just a Lester
Lanon type gig, I can play that. It doesn't have to be jazz. I
want to work, you know." He said, "I know." So enough, he got
me a gig in Harlem and... actually he got me my first Lester Lanon
type gig. Not with Lester Lanon but with a guy that did work
like that. I began to do a little of that. I played some
rehearsals. I played for singers. I did a lot of auditions.
Once I started playing for singers, they found out I was a good
accompanist, man it was years before I could get out of... before
I could get a gig with my own group and not play for a singer.
And when a guy would hire me he'd say, "Yeah, get Billy Taylor's
Quartet, he'll play for the singer." (Laughter) It took a long
time to get around that but it was a great experience. Out of
that I played "Blue Holiday" this Ethel Walters Show on Broadway.
I played for the Katherine Dunham Dancers who were in that.

Having had the Katherine...

BROWER: Tell me about that...what you (inaudible) about her because I...

TAYLOR: Well, she was gorgeous in those days (laughter). She was...just the most glamorous, most unusual woman...just elegant.

I mean, she was just a marvelous lady.
TAYLOR: ...played this...they had some very difficult music. It seemed to be based on, ah, Haitian rhythms and it was scored...and ah, it was difficult music. I was the pianist with the band and I was also the rehearsal pianist, so I had to play all that stuff so people could dance to it. It was one of the hardest jobs I've ever had. But I got through it and they seemed to like what I did. So...ah, I went to one of the people who was...the featured dancer in the show was working at Cafe Society Uptown. Well in those days, I was dating my wife, Teddy. So, I took her dancing...to see the show at Cafe Society. It was an elegant East Side nightclub...and figured, you know, this pretty girl, I take her, we'll dance, we'll see the show, have dinner, and, you know...a big deal, I mean it's a night out. So, sure enough, I took her there. The show was good, we enjoyed it, and...we were dancing. And during an intermission, the piano
player came over. I knew him...because he was from Baltimore and
I had met him in another context. He said, "How ya' doing
Billy? How's everything?" I said, "Fine...I sure enjoyed your
work...you sure sound good...." So he said, "Well, I'm leaving.
Are you interested in taking this gig?" So I said, "Well,
yeah...what do you do?" He said, "...Primarily, I play the show,
but next week Kenneth Spencer is coming in, so if you took the
gig you'd have to be his accompanist." Kenneth Spencer was
a...ah, a bass-baritone, like Paul Robeson. He had that kind of
voice. As a matter of fact, Robeson came to see him one night
and the reverberation from those two voices was unbelievable. I
mean, it was like the walls were shaking, you know. Kenneth had
been a formidable athlete out in Seattle, Washington or somewhere
on the west coast...football player and...

BROWER: Like Robeson...

TAYLOR: Yeah, like Robeson. As a matter of fact...I think,
perhaps, he was Robeson's protege at one point. He was a younger
man and really just...very brilliant...in many traits, very much like Robeson. ...Died a tragic death. I think he was killed in an accident or something. At any rate, my job was to play for him and to play the show...with the great New Orleans clarinetist, Ed Hall...Edmond Hall.

BROWER: Was he with you?

TAYLOR: No, it was Ed's band...you know...he had piano, bass, drums, clarinet, and trumpet. I don't remember the other members of the group at the moment. But, ah, it was a good band.

BROWER: You noted off mike (microphone) that you felt that Candido...was underestimated, especially his work on this particular recording playing the background...

TAYLOR: Yeah, this is one of the most...I guess he did more solo work in a jazz context on this particular record than any other record he did. I mean, he did several things under his own name.
Though they were fine records, and showed his talent off to a great extent, I don't think in jazz context he had this kind of space to do just a trio background and so forth. It really拖s me that people have not given him the credit for the manner in which he has added to the vocabulary that everybody uses. For instance, people have made a big deal about who started using conga drums. Well I'm not sure who started it, but I'm certain that I never saw anybody do it in New York until he did it. Now, he may not have invented it, but he certainly was the first to really use it in a practical sense...with jazz groups. Now...it's always good to note how things move from one place to another. Even if someone else invented that, he was the one who brought it to the attention of the broad audience. So, at least for that, he should be given credit, you know (laughter).

BROWER: Ah, I think we got through talking about Kenneth Spencer. ...Some more experiences that I want to ask you about during that period. You did work with a couple of violin
players...Eddie South and Stuff Smith. Where did those fall, in
time and would you talk about those experiences.

TAYLOR: ...I got a call...I was doing a lot of free
lancing... They tried to revive the Cotton Club in a location
downtown. As I recall, it was on...just off 57th Street...ah
52nd Street! It was literally right across from where the,
ah...one of the big hotels...7th Avenue and 52nd Street. It was
a big room and it had a twelve or fifteen piece band. Eddie
South was the leader. So I was called...I don't remember whether
Eddie called me or someone else called me, just to play the piano
for the show. It was a wild show. The guy named "Jimmy Smith"
who used to play the vibe...dance on the vibraphones.... ...This
was the wildest thing...he never became popular, but he played
"Star Dust" and "Body and Soul" and tunes like that with his
feet...I mean dancing on the vibraphone. Not the vibraphone, the
xylophone. It was like a floor...a huge wooden xylophone that he
danced on and, ah...
BROWER: Was this somehow constructed into the floor or was it a platform or something?...

TAYLOR: No, it was an instrument. It was a musical instrument that he had...constructed himself or had it specially constructed. He worked here in Washington, D. C. He played some of the clubs and I guess he played the theaters, but he...I'm amazed... I think if he had not been Black, he would have been one of those specialty acts that did all of the big theaters, but, ah to see him it was amazing. Anyway, he was on the show. Pearl Bailey was the headliner. They had some comics and there was the usual kind of Black show that one would see in any of the Black nightclubs like the "Delees---" in Chicago...any of those...you know, "Small's" in New York, you know. It was...a chorus line, a big band for dancing and to play the show, a couple of singers, someone who was well known as the headliner and so forth. So...I met Eddie there...he like me...and after
The gig was over, which was only about a week or two, he asked me if I wanted to play some gigs with him and I said, "Sure." I mean he was a formidable musician. So rehearsed at his house. He lived up in Harlem...the same building that Duke used to live in. I went up to his and rehearsed. He had all of this Gypsy music...he had quite a wild repertory. I mean, he was classically trained. As a matter of fact, he should have been a concert artist. He was trained in Budapest and he had many classical violinists and other musicians were really his colleagues, they came to hear him play. And on those occasions, he'd play a lot of the things from his concert repertory. He'd play them extremely well. I mean he would have been a fine concert artist. But being Black, he didn't get that opportunity.

Anyway, he spent all of his life in...

BROWER: So, the Wynton Marsalis thing is nothing new.

TAYLOR: No, oh no... ...As a matter of fact, Fats Waller gave a Carnegie Hall concert playing Mozart and all the
classical...Haydn...things out of his classical repertory. He played the violin also. And ah...

BROWER: Fats did...

TAYLOR: Fats did, yeah. There were so many people that ah, could play both back in those days. It was no big deal. I mean, many people studied European Classical tradition because it was good music and they wanted to play it. And play jazz because it was the music...the popular music of their community. It was something they wanted to say in that context. At any rate, I met Eddie and I got the greatest experience of my life working with him. He was one of the people that I learned to play a ballad from. I mean he would literally make people cry. I mean there is such emotion in his playing. I mean, they called him "The Dark Angel of the Violin." As a matter of fact, there was a very rich man who was a very big fan of his, and he would send Eddie a check usually for five hundred dollars or something like that, which was a lot of money. He liked for him to play "Suwannee
River" or something like that in a minor key. I don't know...some weird...it was a very simple thing to do for a musician, but you know, for whatever reason, he associated...some nostalgic reason... He would call Eddie from Seattle, Washington or from California or from Florida or wherever he happened to be and he would play it for him on the phone. (Laughter) I mean the cat would cry (laughter). The two of us, just Eddie and myself would play jobs where it would be extremely rich people. He had a lot of fans among the super rich in those days. It didn't help him with his career at all. I never could understand that, because they didn't do for him as some people do with Bobby Short today... Nobody ever set him up in a room or anything like that. But they would invite him to play for their parties and for special occasions and so forth. It was weird. I mean we would go in and, ah...I would make five hundred dollars! He had to be making lots of money to pay me that, you know. And
for me, a young guy that was a hell of a lot of money. And for one evening! We'd go in and we'd play this ah, what ever it was...a party...we'd sit around, sit around...eat and drink...

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: ...No we were in another room. We were not a part of the party. But, when time came for us to play, we'd come out...you know, a big deal, spot light or what ever..."Ladies and gentlemen..." you know, "The magnificent Eddie South!" And always the most flowery introductions you could imagine. Every superlative you could think of, because these people loved him.

BROWER: Who are these people...?

TAYLOR: I don't know. I would imagine...I had no idea in those days and I never met any of them, you know. I was just a piano player with him. I was just an accompanist. ...He kind of mingled with them and he knew them by name and so forth...

BROWER: Was this in (inaudible) or...

TAYLOR: Yeah, this would be...actually it was usually in New
York. It would be at the Waldorf. It would be at one of the swank hotels or it would be at somebody's East Side apartment, you know. I don't recall going out of town with him in that context except in Chicago. We went up on the North Side a couple of time and did a couple of things. But that was his home...he was from Chicago.

BROWER: Were there a number of artists who functioned at...

(inaudible) socially...that were...

TAYLOR: Evidently, in doing research, there were several. There weren't, ah...it dwindled as time went by. In the twenties there were many. Back in the heyday...the Harlem Renaissance and all that, it was a very special thing to do. You the line in "The Lady's a Tramp" about going to Harlem in mink and all that. That was a big deal among a lot of folks. So a lot of them would come up to the nightclubs and they knew there were a lot of people like Lucky Roberts and Willie "the Lion", who had played jazz for many of those people or had played popular things. And there was
a whole other group of people...Lucky Roberts was one of them, but there was a whole group of pianists...Arthur Bowie----
guys, especially pianists and singers who used to play for those folks. I mean they all knew them and they were all comparable to Bobby Short in terms of the audience that they were playing for and the way they were received by the audience.

BROWER: What about Stuff Smith?

TAYLOR: Stuff and Eddie were very good friends. I had heard Stuff when he had a six piece group playing on the radio. I loved him because he was so dynamic and so rhythmic and all the things he did were so exciting.

BROWER: (Inaudible) ---- players.

TAYLOR: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. As I said, they were very good players and it was funny... When I worked with Eddie and we would go to see Stuff, he would...Stuff would play "Clair de Lune" and all the European classical things he could think of for
Eddie, you know. "Hey, check this out!" And when Eddie would come to see us, Eddie would play "The Saint Louis Blues", he would go into his heavy jazz repertory...playing all his funky stuff, you know. So, they had very friendly rivalry going, but no two people playing the same instrument could have been more different. Eddie was the epitome of the European trained concert artist who played jazz. Stuff Smith was the epitome of the jazz musician who dabbles with classical music, who had a fantastic ear, and who, indeed, played some of the first abstract music I ever heard. In 1944 when I first came to New York, I used to hang out with a guy named "Timmy Rosencrantz". Erroll Garner was there and a lot of other folks would come...after we'd finish on 52 Street...would go to Timmy's house. At first Timmy lived in the Village, then he moved up close. He moved up to 46th Street. He had a little "brownstone"...he had an apartment in a "brownstone." He would tape all of these things...not
tape... He had a disk recorder. He’d sit there and cut a record
while you’re playing his piano. A lot of guys went up there to
do it because they wanted to hear... you know... they wanted to
hear what they sounded like doing experimental stuff. It wasn’t
like you were being exploited... Erroll Garner did most of his
practicing there, they made these records, and he’d say, "Oh
yeah, I like that," "I don’t like that..." You know, it was
really very helpful in the formation of many aspects of his
style. There was a pianist from Chicago, whose name was Robert
Crum. He was best known for playing "Rhapsody in Blue" and
"Warsaw Concerto" and some of the popular "classical" kind of
things in theaters like the Roxy, you know with the chorus
standing around... You know... all those orchestras had big bands
with symphony aspirations. They had double reeds and violins and
tympani and things that you wouldn’t normally find in a jazz
band. And they all, periodically, would play Tchaikowsky
supposed to be kind of cultural, I suppose or something. Anyway, they did that in New York...at all of the bigger theaters in the bigger towns. I mean, in Chicago, in San Francisco, in L.A. at the larger downtown theaters that had shows. Most of them had house bands...house orchestras. Billy Eckstine talks about a Christmas that show he was in one time. He was working on the South Side and they needed someone with a bass-baritone voice. He almost got the gig, but he couldn't read in those days...I mean they put a part up in front of him and he couldn't handle it, you know. So, he didn't get the gig. But, they had a lot of things...a lot of opportunities for people in those days. At any rate, in this context of playing at Timmy Rosencrantz's house...

BROWER: Crum...

TAYLOR: Robert Crum and ah, Stuff Smith began to play really abstract things. I mean things what later used to be called "chance music." I mean, what ever you strike, you'd try to give it some form and some content and so forth. And really using
intervals that were not common... and twelve tone techniques and things like that. It was fascinating because Stuff didn't know what the hell he was doing. He was doing it all by ear. Crum, as a well-trained musician...

BROWER: (Inaudible)...

TAYLOR: ...yeah...he was doing things that were out of his background and his training, so he was structuring this thing. And Stuff would say, "Oh, yeah!" He was just reacting to all this stuff and it sounded great (laughter).

BROWER: I've heard the name "Timmy Rosencrantz". Can you give me some stuff on him? Who was this guy?

TAYLOR: Yeah. He was a member of the famous Danish family...the Rosencrantz family that Shakespeare wrote about... and other folks wrote about. He was the "black sheep" of the family. They paid him a stipend to stay out of the country. ...First of all he liked Black chicks...he was living with one. A woman named "Inez Cavanough." He was a very real jazz fan. He had a
tremendous... he wrote some articles and books on jazz. It's a toss up as to whether it was he or Inez... but the two of them really discovered Erroll Garner. I mean, when nobody was paying any attention to Erroll... he was working two or three jobs on the street trying to earn a living. I mean that literally... he would be working at the "Spotlight", playing for Billy Daniels... be working with a band in another club, as the piano player and maybe doing a single in a third club... you know, trying to earn maybe a hundred dollars or a hundred and a quarter or something like that. I mean, he really was scuffling, you know. And they heard this guy and they said, "Hey man, he is dynamite. He really has something unique." And he did, because when he came to New York, his style was formed. He had it together already. Most of us came to New York not quite together, but we had some ideas and we had something we were trying to organize. But he came here full-grown, musically.
BROWER: ...I mentioned your relationship with Slam Stewart. Is there anything else you'd like to reflect on that.

TAYLOR: Yeah...it was a great experience. We did a lot of traveling. My first big theater tour...I went to the RKO Boston, played on the same bill with Sally Rand...that was my first big theater. Then we went to...we did the circuit. You know, we played the Howard. We played all of the Black theaters...the Apollo...that's the first time I ever played the Apollo...with him. The next time I played the Apollo...it was a long time between drinks...the next time I played the Apollo was like ten years later with Charlie Parker and Strings (laughter). They were the only two times that I ever played the Apollo. ...I've forgotten I did that with Slam, I had been telling people that the first time (playing at the Apollo) was with Bird. It wasn't. It was with him. Working with him...I had some rather unusual experiences. We went down, just prior to playing the Apollo...we went to Texas. We played in San Antonio, Texas.
And, ah, it was weird. It was during the War...the Second World War. If you flew different places you stood the chance of being bumped off a plane for military personnel, who...if they had to get somewhere, they just took your seat...put you off the plane at some place and they took your seat and you caught the next plane or what ever. So, that happened to us. We were traveling from Texas to New York and they bumped us off the plane...Harold West, John Collins, Slam, and myself. So were were sitting around in this relatively small waiting room. You know, there were not a lot of Black people flying in those days. So there were no "Colored" and "White" signs. So they sent the guy from the kitchen in town or where ever was close by and he got a sign that said "Colored." So we were waiting...we had an hour or two hours or what ever it was...there was nothing to eat, there's nothing to do so we were amusing each other. Then the guy comes up and puts the sign down on the table. So, we looked at the sign and moved over to the other side of the room and continued.
our conversation. The guy came back in a couple of minutes and put the sign where we were. So, wherever we were was the "Colored Section." (Laughter) It was a very interesting association. Working with Stuff around that period, too, was ah, can substantiate the fact that I was one of the first to use the style of accompaniment that's normally credited to Red Garland and others, is a record I made, a live record with Stuff Smith. "Bugle Call Rag" and "Perdido" and something else. There were about three or four things that we played on a Town Hall concert. Though I had made other records with other people and I used these techniques...it's an expansion of what I was showing you at the piano when I was doing the Duke Ellington introduction to "In a Mellow Tone."

BROWER: Uh huh, both hands (inaudible)...

TAYLOR: Yeah... Actually, the expansion that I used was to use a chord, a ninth or a thirteenth or a major sixth chord. And to
use an octave, either with a three or four notes...three or four note chord, or just the octave and the fifth. So, you had sometimes, four notes in each hand. Sometimes only four notes in the left hand and an octave and another note, the fifth, in the right hand. But...that sound is the one you hear me doing on "Bugle Call Rag." I was, like, ten years later that Ahmad Jamal and others began to...I mean, they were playing...if you listened to what they did on records at that period, if they were recording, it wasn't that. They were doing something else. So, as I said, I didn't invent that, but it was my usage of it and the kind of influence that I was having among my colleagues that made it popular. And the manner in which I did it was, you know...came into very popular use in the fifties. So Wynton Kelly and all the pianists in that period...Hank Jones, everybody...were using that kind of thing. As a matter of fact, when we were working on the street, I used to show Hank some of
the things that I was doing and he in turn would show me some of
the things that he was doing in terms of transcribing some of the
Art Tatum stuff, because his ear was much better than mine. A
couple of things I was having difficulty with, man, and he would
say, "Hey, no, this is what I heard." I'd say, "Oh yeah? Right,
okay." He say, "What is that harmonic thing you're doing?" I'd
say, "Oh, that's this..." We'd get together in the Onyx or...in
the Deuces (Three Deuces) there were two pianos. There was one
on stage and there was one that obviously had the piano for the
club. But when Tatum and all those guys began to play, they put
a grand in there and they put this upright back in the back. So
a lot of times we'd go back by the ladies room where this piano
was just up against the wall and be talking about different
things. "Hey, what is this called?" "Oh, this is so and so."
"I heard Duke do this..." "I heard Tatum do this..." "He seemed
to go from here to there." "No, it seems like to me, he went
from here to there..." (Laughter) And you'd play it and a lot
of times you would come up with it could have...then you listen to the record and it could have been either one, you know. And both solutions seemed okay, you know. (Laughter)

BROWER: Since you raise that point. We can talk about influence, but you raise another point, which is kind of a peer co-development. Who were some of the other guys, during this period as pianists, that you had that kind of relationship with?

TAYLOR: Hank Jones, Jimmy Jones, Tadd... I guess those were the most lasting ones. A guy I would have liked to have that relationship with, because he had something very special, was Ellis Larkin. But I didn't get to know him until later. Ellis, in those days, had developed a very personal way of playing. The touch was unique... Here's another example of a guy who went to a famous school...over in Baltimore...

BROWER: Peabody?

TAYLOR: Peabody. And they wouldn't let him graduate because of his color. I don't think he graduated, but he was certainly one
of the greatest musicians I met during that period...just a formidable pianist. He could read anything, play anything, any style. The things that he did with the harmonica player, Larry Adler...some "third stream" stuff...I mean, that was way ahead of its time for their playing. Straight ahead classical stuff, "third stream" stuff, and jazz. So, he is the guy I didn't see as much as I would liked to. He didn't hang out like the other guys and I would run into him on occasion at some special place and we would talk or have a drink or something like that.

BROWER: During this time were there "watering holes" or places that the musicians congregated in order to get gigs or...outside of meeting on 52nd Street at night, but say during the course of the day, were there gathering points or different kinds of (inaudible)...?

TAYLOR: Yeah. There were a few. You know, many of the guys.... It would happen, in a lot of cases, at rehearsal. There was the
Nola Studios where...Tommy Nola or his father had a studio, which is the same building, I think as the union (musicians union) in those days. At any rate, it was on Broadway just off 52nd Street. So, a lot of musicians rehearsed there. That was the place where a lot of the guys got together. Then there was...a bar where all of the studio musicians...all the guys who did radio...there were a lot of radio bands and a lot of guys who were staff musicians at the theaters. Like the State Theatre and the Paramount and the Capital Theatres had house bands...the Roxy had a house band. So, even though there might be a Duke Ellington or somebody playing there, they'd have another band that was the house band that would play for the show or what ever special things that needed to be played. Sometimes that band would have a week off or something if they had a special show or something. But, normally they worked there about forty weeks out of a year. So a lot of those musicians would go to a place called "Jim and Andy's." Then there was "Beefsteak Charlie's", ...
where a lot of the Black musicians went.

BROWER: So you're saying most of the theater jobs were White?

TAYLOR: Yeah...there were many Black musicians who did a fair amount of that work...musicians like Specks Powell, musicians like Charlie Shavers, and Milt Hinton...and Billy Taylor, the bass player.

BROWER: Were they soloist (inaudible)

TAYLOR: Well they were constantly being made to prove...

End Side A, Tape #3
Begin Side B, Tape #3

TAYLOR: ...and this was the real coup, because I think Billy Taylor, the bass player, was the only Black person...he was already working with Raymond Scott...he may have gotten Specks the job, I don't know. But Specks had done a lot of free lance stuff, so it was recognized that he was an excellent musician...could read well, could play any style and so forth. Specks told me about some of the really petty things that they
did. Now here's a jazz drummer, a guy who can swing, who is a really good player as a percussionist. They had him playing vibraphones and all the melodic percussion instruments, trying to hang him up...figuring they'd give him something hard to play on the vibes or they'd give him something hard to play on the xylophone or something like that. Well, they didn't know that Specks' original instrument was the piano. So, all that didn't make any difference to him. A scale was a scale. He could play that just like...instead of using ten fingers, use two mallets or four mallets, you know. (Laughter) And he continued his studies and everything, so he could always meet any challenge they put on him. But that was the kind of thing...Clark Terry and all them, even later guys were always running into something where, you know, a guy would... Benny Goodman was a jazz musician who used to do that to guys. I mean, you'd come in...I remember one time I sat in for Hank Jones at a rehearsal and Benny looked over and saw me and pulled out a whole bunch of stuff with a whole lot of
piano in it, you know...just to see where I was coming from. I mean, they weren't going to play that, he was just auditioning me! I mean...(laughter). They did that more to Black guys than they did to White guys. Benny...I got to know him later...funny, I never worked with him. He called me several times, but I was never available when he was interested in having me.

BROWER: Another experience...I guess in 1946 you went to Europe with Don Redman...

TAYLOR: Uh huh.

BROWER: That band had Tyree Glenn, Quentin Jackson, and Don Byas (inaudible)...I guess that led to some recording with Don Byas...

TAYLOR: Uh huh.

BROWER: ...would you reflect on that trip, that band and particularly on Don Byas.

TAYLOR: Well...I had gotten married in June of that year. I was working with Slam Stewart...John Collins was the guitarist...
So, I got married and told Slam..."I'd like to take a couple of
days off and go on a honeymoon." He said, "Fine." So, he hired
Burle Booker and he and Burle got into a little light "romance"
there and I lost my gig (laughter). I came back, and I had no
job, you know. So, I laid off for most of that summer. My wife,
who was working...she was doing some part-time modeling and doing
some other stuff, supported me. I got...Timmy Rosencrantz put
this band together and asked me if I was interested in joining
Don Redman. Well, Don was a legend. I mean, when I was kid I
had gone over to the Howard Theater to see him. He had been on
the coast to coast radio show with Amos 'n Andy, been in movies,
great composer, a fine saxophonist... So I said, "Straight
ahead..." So, I took the job and Kenny Clarke was the original
drummer and he decided that...he was really trying to get his
bebop thing together in those days and he thought that Don was
going to put what was going to be a more contemporary band
together. He took a look at the charts and the charts just
weren't what he was interested in playing. It was more of a throw-back to some of the things from early Don Redman period, you know. A couple of Tadd Dameron charts were the most modern things in the book....Ray Abrams and a trumpet player named...can't think of his name right now, it'll come to me in a minute...White kid who played bebop. There were only about three of us who were interested at all in bebop and everybody else was either "swing" or "pre-bop" player. So, there was a little light tug of war going on. I mean, none of the older guys liked what Kenny was doing on drums, so they ended up with a guy named "Buford Oliver" from Detroit. He was a very fine young drummer in those days. Anyway, the band was a good band. There are some recordings now of concerts we made in Gaybee Hall in Denmark and some of the things we did in Switzerland and so forth. I have not heard them...I have not heard the whole concert, but several people from Europe have played excerpts from tapes and it sounds pretty good, for the time and the recording techniques and all
that sort of stuff...you had the "live" presence and we did get into something every now and then. It was a great experience. I was virtually unknown in the states. And I got off the plane in Sweeden and I was met with a band. All these jazz musicians met us at the plane and played us off the plane, the photographers are taking pictures...it was a big deal. I'm saying, "Wow!"

not only a great musician, but just a beautiful human being...a really nice man, and very generous as well as a very creative person.

BROWER: How about Don Byas?

TAYLOR: Don Byas had decided when he took the gig, that he was going to stay in Europe. So he went over saying, "These guys are going to pay my way to Europe and I'm going to stay." And he did. He had a ball. He met people...he was drinking an awful lot on that tour. He had been drinking quite a lot here in the States and he was really becoming very close to being an
alcoholic and it was really affecting his ability to get work.

So he went over there to try to get something else going, and he did. ...He still was drinking quite a lot, but with a guy like Ray Abrams, who was really like a young lion in those days, playing the other tenor...they had a couple of things where they had "tenor battles"...Don would have to sober up in a hurry, because Ray was breathing down his neck on a lot of the bebop stuff...playing something on "Rhythm" changes or "How High the Moon" or something like that. He'd really have to watch himself because Ray would be all over him if he wasn't careful. All of those guys had enough pride in their own playing, not to slip below a certain level. ...He might drink a lot, but boy if he just felt that he wasn't handling it...he'd kind of straighten up too...you know. That's what Don did quite often, so it was fun to play with him. That was the most I had ever played with him and it was a ball.
BROWER: What was his (inaudible) of thinking at that point?

TAYLOR: Ah, Don was the...he had been influenced by Art Tatum...he was one of the many people. He (Don) had phenomenal facility. ...His tone was closer related to Coleman Hawkins than, say, Lester Young. He had a vibrato and tended to be a little "breathy" on some of the ballads and so forth. But ah, he was the fastest tenor player that I ever heard in those days.

...drums, and John Simmons on bass. It was a mean band, they would be playing "Cherokee" and playing all those things and Don would be flying! He was like greased lighting. And Hawk would be checking him out and then he'd come back with his thing, you know, behind him. He was like a pacer for Hawk. He would get out there and burn through two or three choruses then Hawk would have to shape up because it was his band, you know (laughter).

BROWER: My gig...

TAYLOR: That's right. That was the kind of player he was. He'd
liked the challenge. He taught...Erroll Garner's first hit was "Laura". Don taught him that. He went out and bought the the sheet music, picked it out on the piano, because Erroll couldn't read. He said, "It goes like this" and played it through a couple of times for Erroll and he learned it and that was his big thing. But Don'd record...preceeded Erroll's record. It could have been a hit, I don't know, it was just one of those things, you know.

BROWER: The next thing (inaudible) came along was, ah, doing (inaudible) piano stuff (inaudible) at the Royal Roost. What was that about?

TAYLOR: Well, when I came back from Europe, it was still difficult. I tried to get a quartet together with ah, different musicians. I played the Cafe Society, the Village Vanguard and some of the old clubs in the Village and in Harlem and so forth. I didn't have any records. I didn't have any real visibility.
Besides, the War was over now, so a lot of the other piano players were back so there was no dearth of piano players. There were a whole lot of guys who played well who were around. So it was hard...it was hard to find a gig. I went around to one of the neighborhood places called "Wells" and talked the guy into hiring me at the piano, because he was...Joe Wells had this idea that he would have a piano, an organ, and a singer. The piano player would play, the organ player would play, and they would both play for the singer at some point...either one or both would play for the singer. He was having some problems because...the organist who was there was really a terrific organist. His name was Charlie Stewart. But he was self-taught. He played by ear and he could only play in two or three keys. So, a lot of times the singer wanted to sing something and he couldn't play in the key that the singer wanted to sing in. So, they needed a pianist of somebody who could handle that, so on that basis I got the gig. I did a lot of solo stuff. I would play some with Charlie
Stewart. Then ultimately, he got a gig in Canada or somewhere and he left. The guy who replaced him had been working across the street as a soloist in "Jocques", which is the name of the place where I told you I met Clarence Phropheht...I never gave you the name of the place...it was just called "Jocques" in those days. ...I had been over to see him and I was very impressed. I thought he was terrific. His name was Bob Wyatt. Here's another example of a guy who was a classically trained organist. He should have played organ concerts like Ethou Biggs------ and people like that all over the world, but he never... His big thing was Toccata and Fugue in the Bach Toccata and Fugue in E and he played it brilliantly. He ended up playing that kind of stuff on "How High the Moon"...you know (laughter)...and demonstrating organs and everything. Anyway, that's where I met him. I met him at Wells... BROWER: That's Harlem... TAYLOR: Yeah, right. Right down the street from Tom Tillman's...
place as a matter of fact. Wells was at about 132nd. Tillman's was about 133rd. It was about a block apart. Wells was right next door Count Basie's. Count Basies had a thing right on the corner many years later...had a club called "Count Basie's". Wells was right next door to that.

BROWER: (Inaudible) chicken and waffles.

TAYLOR: Well, that's what it was all the time. Originally it was...the thing they got famous for was chicken and waffles. It was a social place. You'd go to a dance at the Savoy and after the dance, everybody would go...because it stayed open twenty-four hours...guys would be in there with their tuxedos and the ladies in their long dresses eating chicken and waffles (laughter). And there was a place up the street call "Marraine's"... There were a lot of clubs in Harlem in the 1940's and the clubs in Harlem were hip because they not just drinking places, but they were places where a cross-section of
the Harlem social set went...I mean doctors and lawyers and all that. And Marraine’s, and Jocques, and Wells’, and a place called the "Elk Rondavous------" and several other places were places where...Eddie Haywood played there, Billy Eckstine sang...Small’s Paradise...that had some pretty big entertainment from time to time. But ah, I met Bob in this context and we did so well together, we decided we would see if we could make it as a team. We made a record for Columbia, which was never released. It's in the file somewhere I suppose. We played in St. Louis and we were on the program...when Billie Holiday first got out of jail, she gave a Carnegie Hall concert. It was really a big thing. They said, "Hey, we shouldn't do this thing just one night." So several fans of hers got together and put up the money and sponsored her in what really was kind of a review, a jazz review on Broadway called "Holiday on Broadway". Tony Scott was in the band, and Slam, and Cozy, and Wyatt and Taylor, the piano and organ act we had, and several other folks. It was
really a remarkable show. It only lasted a couple of weeks. It was really...she was singing beautifully!

BROWER: "Holiday on Broadway", was that Carnegie Hall for the run?

TAYLOR: No, no. It was at another theater. I can't remember the theater...a Broadway theater though...just off Broadway.

BROWER: (Inaudible) then you said, "Let's take it to Broadway."

TAYLOR: Yeah, let's take it to Broadway. So after that we had a little visibility in town, so we got a job at what was called the "Royal Roost". They kind of fooled around with the name. It was called "The Chicken Shack". It was called "The Royal Roost" by the time we got there. You'd go down in the basement. It was right underneath the Latin Quarter. So you go down in the basement... The guy was having a terrible time...Ralph Watkins, who later was one of the owners of both The Embers and Bop City...Bop City first, then The Embers...was like the main honcho. Ralph had been my boss over at Kelly's Stables, so I had
known him before...ex-saxophone player. He always had a jazz room or fronted a jazz room or something. He was the one that came up with the idea of Basin Street (a jazz club), then Basin Street East, which was on the East Side. So, for a while, he was very active in the nightclub business. And a very good entrepreneur for that kind of thing, but he was having a tough time with this Royal Roost business. ...It was kind of half jazz and half not jazz. They were trying to reach, what they thought was an East Side crowd. They wanted to catch that East Side crowd coming out of the Broadway shows and so forth...catch them before they went to the East Side. They had a group called "The Three Flames" with Tiger Haynes and, ah...I forget the other guy's name...a good little group...did a lot of radio shows and stuff like that...entertaining group, you know...piano, bass, and guitar, and sang. And they had us and had a lot of other kinds of groups. The room was kind of a morphosis...I mean, you didn't
know what it was. On one off-night, Monte Kay and Symphony Sid...Monday nights was their off-nights...convinced Monte that he, who always a jazz fan and always open to things like this...he said, "Why don't you let us put in this group that has just made a record. They haven't played anywhere, but it's a hell of a group and might draw a few people in." Well, the group was the Birth of the Cool group with Miles. Man, there were so many people in the club that night, that we had footprints on the organ where people had climbed up on the organ trying to see what was going on (laughter). I mean, it was a "mob" in there. They had a line out there. This blew his mind. He said, "Hey, wait a minute, jazz is it...cancel all this other stuff." So...

BROWER: (Inaudible) Tadd Dameron stuff (inaudible)...

TAYLOR: Right, they all went into the Roost and they began that policy, which ultimately led to Bop City and Birdland. And physically it was the prototype for Birdland. It was several blocks down the street, but...its setup was very similar to what
Birdland ultimately turned out to be.

BROWER: Which was?

TAYLOR: Well, you know, you go down...a basement room, utilizing almost the whole basement of that building. ...In the back, the cash register and all the stuff back there...bar, kind of up in the front, and tables. They didn't refine the peanut gallery part of it until they got to Birdland...that started with Bop City and then they refined it with Birdland.

BROWER: Somewhere in here you end up going to (inaudible)...

TAYLOR: Yeah. Ah, well, let's see, it was just before I went into the Harlem thing. It was during the period when I was just not doing very much. I was taking anything that came along. And a good friend of mine, a saxophone player, who I had met...actually through Foots Thomas and Cozy and all those guys, I had known his reputation for many years, he was one of those guys whose records I used to listen to, but I had not really met him...and it turned out my wife knew his wife very well...Budd
Johnson. Budd got this gig and he said, "Look, I'd like for you to use your trio or quartet or whatever it is you have as kind of a basic rhythm section. What can we take?" So I said, "The group that I have now is Lloyd Trotman on bass and John Collins on guitar and Charlie Smith on drums." So he said, "That sounds good." He said, "I need a trumpet player. Who can we get?" So I said, "How do you like Kenny Dorham?" He said, "I love him...terrific." Budd was one of those guys, though he was of an older generation, his ears were always open. He was not only a good arranger, he could play. He could play all the bop lines. It wasn't his style, but he could do it. Anything you put in front of him, he could deal with it. He just thought that would be the right thing to Haiti for this festival.

BROWER: (Inaudible) strawboss kind of a guy in big bands...

TAYLOR: Yeah, oh yeah. He was strawboss for Earl (Hines). He was strawboss of Billy Eckstine. He was Billy's room mate as a
matter of fact, when he was with Earl. He was always a take-
charge guy. But in this case we were co-leaders because he
was...he really didn't feel...it was a funny kind of
relationship... He felt that he needed a younger guy to make the
cultural points that he wanted to make. He saw me as a college
educated guy with professorial things that he wanted to get over.
Not that he couldn't do it, he just thought that he would rather
have someone else do it and he could just concentrate on the
playing, and he did. He never said this, but that was kind of
our agreement...that I was going to take that part and M.C.
(master of ceremony) and do the presentation of it. He said,
"You have developed to be very good at that." He was very
complimentary. Quite honestly, I hadn't done much of it at that
point. I was trying to do it, but I hadn't done a lot of it.
But he saw some value in it and was one of the first to give me
a shot at really doing that. So we were co-leaders and it was a
terrific experience. A tune that I play now call "Titoro"------
which is a drum solo for a Haitian drummer whose name is Tiroro----. Tiroto was a master drummer. He was the premier drummer of Haiti in those days. He came here on a couple of occasions with Haitian cultural exchanges. He didn’t like it and went home...but was a fabulous musician. So, we were there for an exposition which included many of the Caribbean countries. We were the North American part of it. We did this thing in an outdoor arena...outdoor place. We played solos and all that. And I said, "Hey, wouldn’t it be great, I’ll have this cutting contest between Charlie Smith and Tiroro----." Well I didn’t know what I was putting Charlie into. I mean this guy was like Candido or somebody. He was masterful! He had one drum, but he did more with that one drum than Charlie could do with the whole drum set. I mean, that was his thing, that was his life. It wasn’t just his livelihood. He got to doing all this other...this stuff that he was doing and he was pushing all kinds of buttons for the audience. The audience is reacting, you know!
And Charlie, who is a hell of a drummer, and used to getting his share of the attention, says, "Wait a minute. What's going on?"

He was sweating bullets trying to keep up with Tiroro-——. It was very exciting. We did about a week of concert presentations and then we played at a club...a thatched-roof club, which was very nice. We played kind of in between the dancing things...special concert presentations.

BROWER: You mentioned Charlie Smith (inaudible) the group that you had, I guess, with Earl May, and Charlie Smith...and that's one of the best trios you ever had. Give me some backgroud on Charlie Smith. Who was he? How did he come into your musical (inaudible)?

TAYLOR: Charlie Smith had the dubious distinction of having been fired by every major pianist in jazz. He was a brilliant drummer. He was creative. He was swinging. He could do more with brushes than most drummers could do with sticks. He was one
of the greatest percussionists I have ever met in my life in terms of what he does.

BROWER: Technical facility?

TAYLOR: Everything. Technical facility and ability just to play the job...what ever the job was. Have you ever seen the one clip that exists on Charlie Parker where he’s playing "Hot House"?

BROWER: Yes.

TAYLOR: That’s Charlie Smith playing drums. He’s a little, handed...little light kid who played drums left handed. He invented the thing... I made a record called "Cueblue" which was my first kind of pseudo "hit" about 1948, 49, something like that, for the Roost label. Teddy Reid got me to make this record. The premise was very simple. He had heard a record by somebody that had a kind of a funky beat and a conga drum. He said, "Man, that’s dancable. Can you do anything like that?" So I said, "Yeah." What it sounds like to me is that the guy has just taken the funky blues and put it together with the Cuban
feeling. So he said, "Can you do that?" I said, "Sure." So I made up this little line called "Cueblue". And we played it...2-4 bass...Earl May is playing the bass and Jo Jones is playing drums and Frankie Colan and Mundel Lowe, I believe, was on guitar. We went in, we did this tune, "Squeeze Me", and a couple of other tunes. They played it on juke boxes. It was a kind of little hit for me. So by the time Charlie joined me a little later, this was a tune in my repertory, but he didn't play the conga drum and I couldn't get the feeling. I said, "That's not the feeling I want on that. I'm supposed to have some kind of Cuban feeling against the jazz feeling." So he said, "What're you talking about?" I gave him the record. I said, "Listen to the record and you'll see what I mean." So the next night he came on the gig, he took a mallet and he was doing (Taylor vocalizing drum beat). It sounded like the conga drum, you know. I said, "Yeah, that's hip, okay." He was the first to ever do that because that was the way he... Well he used to say, "Well,
I don't play the conga drum." Later, he learned to play the conga drum and he recorded with me a couple of times on conga drums. But at that time, he used the mallet on the tom toms and got that sound. That was the kind of creativity that he had...

He worked with Erroll Garner. He worked with Oscar Peterson. He worked with Duke. He worked with just about every pianist you can think of and nobody had any complaints about his playing. He was a womanizer, he drank too much, he was so exuberant a lot of times, that he would over-play. I mean, a little trio, he would drown me out with brushes (laughter). He was the drummer in the group when I played... His last job with me was at ah, The Downbeat. Charlie Mingus was the bass player. I had to restrain Mingus on more than one occasion from just knocking him out on the bandstand. Because Mingus would get to wailing and he would be back there, "Yeah, right!", bearing down, but he would be playing so loudly that Mingus couldn't hear what he was doing.
So he'd say, "Come on man! All that noise. I can't hear!"...(laughter) As he (Charlie Smith) got excited, his volume would go up and Mingus, because they didn't have bass amps and all that, nothing he could turn up, he didn't have a pick-up or anything, so he couldn't hear himself, you know. So, they would get into a lot of arguments. He was...first of all, a musical drummer. He was a swinging drummer and he had the most creative approach to the instrument in terms of imagination, colors, and all that of any drummer I've worked with the possible exception of Eddie...Ed Thigpin. This is no reflection on other guys, it's just that they had a similar approach to playing.

BROWER: Are we up to like 1946, 47?

TAYLOR: Yeah.

BROWER: What's happening in that period (inaudible)...talk about...?

TAYLOR: Well, I'm now beginning to, ah, write books on bebop and I'm writing my first things for publication. I'm going to
Charlie Hansen, who is a publisher in those days...he came up to Harlem, heard me playing with Bob Wyatt and asked me if I could write any of that kind of stuff for Ethel Smith...he was handling her music and so forth. So, I wrote a couple of pieces...actually for her...she put her name on them as was the habit in those days and took half the credit for a composition, which she really didn't write)... But she was a very...the fact that she played it was...that was what was supposed to...

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: ...give her the half, you know, what the heck. So she play a couple of things..."Famapolka------", "Cuban Cutie" and a couple of other things that I wrote. I think she was recording for Decca or somebody in those days. Her records sold a fair amount...(she) put them in her publishing company and so forth. Then I wrote, for Hansen Music, several books...How to Play Dixieland, How to Play Ragtime...several "how to books"...little pamphlet books. In all, about twelve or thirteen of them...How
to **Play the Mambo** and so forth. I was delighted to be given this opportunity because what did was to...

**End Tape #3 - Side B**

**Disk #3 - Full**
TAYLOR: ...I'd give a little historical background on the style, some examples of the style, and several pieces written demonstrating how you use that vocabulary...how I would use that vocabulary, and making suggestions as to what one would do in order to develop that facility. They were very successful...very well received.

BROWER: ...You did the twelve books. In what amount of time did this occur? Over the course of two years, three years, eight years...just, ah...?

TAYLOR: Ah, several years. I worked...

BROWER: It was an on-going...

TAYLOR: It was an on-going thing for many years and it really only began to break up when I began to get offers from other publishers... Robbins and several other publishers began to hit on me about doing things for them. Charlie Hansen said, "Look,
I'm a small company. I can't give you anymore money. I'll tell you what I can do. I'll set you up in business and we'll be partners. We'll start a company between the two of us and we'll put all of the stuff that you've written in that company, so that you will not only prosper as the writer, but you'll be part owner of the copyright as the publisher. You'll own half of the copyright." So, I said, "Fine, good deal." So, he set me up in my first publishing company, which was called "Sound Post Music". That partnership lasted four or five years. Then I realized that he had gotten very big, was world-wide, and had other interests. He had Quincy Jones publishing...I had introduced him to Quincy... It's funny, I had run into Quincy on the street one day...he had just come back from Europe. He was trying to get himself together...out of that Lionel Hampton Band. I sent him to Charlie and...recommended him and he did some writing for Charlie and did a lot of arranging and stuff like that. Ultimately, Charlie made him the same kind of thing...except they
weren't partners. Quincy just set up his own publishing company and Charlie distributed for him and he (Quincy) retained all the rights and so forth.

BROWER: So your relationship with this publisher ran into the mid 1950's, late 1950's...?

TAYLOR: Oh yeah, mid 1950's, sure... As a matter of fact it was ongoing for a long time. I still see him from time to time and he still has some things which he puts out on occasion of different, ah...he's got some of my things in a piano solo folio that are still available...

BROWER: So, there were (inaudible) transcriptions...compositions of yours...transcriptions of solos (inaudible) as well as instructional (inaudible).

TAYLOR: Uh huh... Actually the...I had a thing about transcribing solos. I felt that many of the transcribed solos left out too much in terms of...by that time I was playing quite differently, if I played with a bass violin or some kind of
accompaniment than if I played alone. So I wrote these out to be solos. So the piano solos that are in those books are meant to be played as piano solos and I wrote them so that could be played...you know... I said, "This is what you should do with your left hand and so forth. This will make it sound full even though you don't have an accompaniment." I look at some of the Bill Evans transcriptions and some of the other things. Without the bass it sounds quite different to my ear. That was exactly what I did not want to do in that case.

BROWER: You mentioned earlier...I know you (inaudible) you wrote some pieces for Charlie Parker and that you worked with him at the Apollo...I don't know what the circumstances were. Would you talk about that? (Inaudible) and your association with Parker.

TAYLOR: ...He was ah, kind of a mythical legendary figure for me because, though I had met him and was aware of the fact that he
was creatively involved in the music that I admired, I didn't see him a lot. I mean, he was into his bad habits and doing other things and I just wasn't traveling in those circles, so I didn't see him. I got a call from Al Haig one day. He said, "Look, I'm supposed to open with Bird tonight and I'm not going to be able to make it. Can you cover for me tonight?" Well Al and other pianist, we did this for one another. I had called him for a couple of things that he was interested in. I had been called by the guys so it was not unusual. So I said, "Okay, where's the gig?" So he said, "It's down at Birdland." I said, "Okay." So I went down...no rehearsal...just went down...it was Bird and Strings... When I showed up and Bird says, "Where's Al?" I said, "I don't know, I guess he's sick...he asked me to cover for him." He said, "Okay." So I sat down and played the charts. The next day they decided they were going to have a couple of rehearsals because he was going into the Apollo...he was going to do some other things, so he wanted... They had a new arrangement
by George Russell that he wanted to play and so forth. So he called rehearsal. ...He called the rehearsal...he said, "Look, I don't know if Al's going to make the gig but I have no way of getting in touch with him, so make the rehearsal." I said, "Okay." So I came in and made the rehearsal. I said, "Have you heard from Al?" He said, "No, I haven't. You'd better come down tonight." ...I came down...I made the rest of the week. Then the next week, they doubled into the Apollo. It was Bird and Strings and Sarah Vaughan...Stan Getz and the Four Brothers band...I don't know, some package, Symphony Sid put together. It was really neat...it was a good show. But we were playing both places...Birdland and the Apollo. Then the third week...Bud Powell was supposed to open with a group. He played the first night, drew some money and split. So the second night I get a call from Monty Kay saying, "Can you come down and play in the All Star group? Bud didn't show for the first set." So I said, "Okay." I came down and played the rest of the night...
TAYLOR: Birdland... To make a long story short, I filled in for him for the rest of the week because he didn't show anymore. One thing led to another. I stayed on...played a couple of weeks with another All Star group. Then Bud was supposed to come back. He did the same thing again. I filled in for him again (laughter). So Monty said, "Look, rather than my calling you every other day, why don't you just call me or come down or something and I'll let you know if I can use you because it looks like I'm going to need a piano player." So I said, "Yeah, okay." So I became the house pianist. I would just check in with him. He would say, "Well, you're with the all star group...or you're doing a single...or you doing..." Whatever it was you know. I was house pianist for two years. That was the greatest education...but it started with Charlie Parker.

BROWER: I want to come back and talk about Birdland
specifically, but are any observations about bop musicians. I know you said it was a limited interaction you had. But are there any other thoughts about that...about how you (inaudible)... 

TAYLOR: ...I worked with him on many occasions at Birdland...usually it was in an all star context either with him and Diz and Roy Haynes and Tommy Potter...Charlie Parker and whoever...just Bird and rhythm section, what ever he chose to do. On many occasions I worked with him. It's just that the first one was... And when I said I didn't have the kind of association with him that others...because I wasn't a junky. There were several guys I had great respect for, whose life styles were just so far from what I had in mind, really the only time I saw them was either on their gig or when I went to see them or, you know, in some professional record date or some professional capacity. Because I really didn't want to deal with some of the folks that were very close to them, you know.
BROWER: What would you assess to be the impact of drug use and particularly heroin use on the music of that period... on the musicians of that period? Do you think it altered the course of the music? Diminished the music? Or...

TAYLOR: It cut the creativity... at least in half... at minimum, in half. Charlie Parker on half speed was one of the remarkable musicians that I have ever heard in my life. But Charlie Parker with his whole head together, doing... working at full capacity, was a genius. I mean he just... it was just incredible what the man could do. I've told many student about... He liked to get on the bandstand and the first tune was always very fast. I mean way up in tempo. He would say if you could get through that, you could play anything tonight, you know. Max and everybody talks about that first tune. He'd come in and be cold and everything and Bird's talking about, "Here we go... uh, uh, uh uh uh uh...!" The tempo's gone! (Laughter) The tempo's gone, right through the roof. He also would turn to me a lot of times... he listened
to the radio a lot and he heard tunes that he liked. He'd say, "Hey 'B', do you know this?" And he'd play two or three bars of it. I'd say, "No, I don't." He'd say, "Well it goes like this." And he'd play the whole tune...the melody outlining the harmony on his horn, you know. Then he'd say, "Okay, here we go!" (Laughter) Wait a minute! (Laughter) I learned from just talking to him. A lot of times in Birdland you'd sit over there at the musician's table and just rap about whatever you wanted to talk about. And a lot of time we would just sit there... He was a very articulate man! He read a lot. He knew a lot about a lot of subjects, you know. He and Dizzy are really the reason that I do a lot of the things for the propagation of the music that I do. Because it was so frustrating to sit in Birdland and know that these two guys who had, that afternoon, been most articulate in explaining and teaching and really going into great detail about the philosophy and musicality of Bebop. Then I'm
sitting in the same booth and some guy from Life Magazine or something says, "Mr. Gillespie tell me about...what is this new music...this Bebop?" He'd say, "Do bop she bam" and he'd go into...he'd tell a joke and he'd go into... I'd say, "Diz, why do you do that?" He'd say, "Man, they don't want to know about that. If I tell them anything, he wouldn't understand it anyway." So he'd just do comedy. And Bird was the same way. Because they were convinced that it was useless... They had been so castigated by other musicians...older musicians, in print. And by writers who said, "all bebop is, is barrets and beards..." and all that stuff. Ed Condon had said, "We don't flat our fifths, we drink them." Everybody was putting them down, so they just said, "I'm not going to honor that with an answer. You guys just want me to say something so you can misquote me, so I'm not going to give you that opportunity." So they would do comedy on them, you know.

BROWER: It seemed that some of Bird's comedy...it would seem
that (inaudible)...maybe some of his habits put him beyond being
comedic...

TAYLOR: Yes...

BROWER: ...in terms of thing... It seemed to be an extension of
the same kind of point of view... an almost absurd thing he would
do... that he would have to know that it would be, ah... which led
themselves to misinterpretation equally as if he had said
something...

TAYLOR: Right. But... it's as though he said, "It's a self-
fulfilling prophesy. I'm going to do this... you're going to say
I'm a nut anyway so I'm going to show you how much a nut I am."
You know, it was that kind of rationale that he seem to use.

BROWER: Yeah. You think I'm a nigger, baby...(laughter)...

TAYLOR: Yeah, right, yeah... But the side of him that I would
like to see... and I have...

BROWER: This is real interesting because it's... musicians... Max
told me that Parker was an intellectual. I mean the guy was...
TAYLOR: In every sense...

BROWER: ...not an eclectic person who dabbled...not a dilettant but a real serious mind.

TAYLOR: That’s right.

BROWER: ...But that doesn’t come through in any of the biographies about him.

TAYLOR: Biographies are written by people who didn’t know him. They had the same kind of relationship with him that many writers have with other musicians and they see what they want to see. In none of the bios I’ve read on Bird do I see the Bird that I knew.

As I said...even as limited as our relationship was, I don’t see... I mean, number one...I was practicing for a music lesson one day. I was studying with Richard McClanahan and my music lesson was the, ah...two pieces written by Debussy...two piano pieces, one in E and one in A. They are called “Arabesques”. So, I’m there at Birdland, it’s early...before the place is
really open to the public and I'm practicing. So Bird comes and is taking out his horn and so forth... which is rare because he usually didn't usually get there early, but he happened to come in that night. He said, "Hey, man that's nice. I like that." So I said, "Yeah, it's a really nice piece." He said, "Yeah, I used to play that." I said, "Oh really?" He said, "Oh yeah... I really like that." I was playing the one in G. He said, "But I like the one in E." I said, "Oh, yeah?" He said, "Yeah, you know the part that goes like this (Taylor sings the melody)." He played it on his horn, you know (laughter). I talked to Sarah Vaughan about this. She said he used to be on the bus and he would be looking at a Stravinsky score. He'd look at the double reed part, like the bassoon part or the oboe part and say, "Hey man, that's hip." He'd play it. Then he play it retrograde... play it backwards. Then he'd look at it and say, "I wonder... suppose you took this part of the phrase and did this with it?" And he really would analyze what ever Stravinsky had
done in that particular place and see how that fit with the other stuff, you know. He might skip, play a little of that and say, "Oh yeah, this is going on at the same time" looking up and down the score at this...

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: Yeah... To be "just a saxophone player", if you will, that's pretty far a field from just playing jazz on the saxophone.

BROWER: So when you talk about the creativity in the music perhaps being cut in half, do you mean these guys didn't develop some of the creative options in the music because they were not able to function or...?

TAYLOR: If he didn't spend so much time being high or looking to get high, he would have spent more time doing more of this kind of musical research and musical analysis and probably would have developed some ideas which would have flowered even more...caused more innovative playing than he did. Anyone who's
analyzed any of his solos...you just look at his compositions...

He was one of the first guys in the bebop camp to break away from the A-A-B-A approach, where you have eight bars then that eight bars is repeated and then the third eight bars, so that would be A-A. Then B would be the bridge, then A the third time would be the same as the first two eight bars. What he did on "Confirmation" and other pieces was to have A-B-C-A. So he's got a melody...

BROWER: A theme.

TAYLOR: ...an expansion of that melody from a different point of view...a motivic development and a...second look at that first melody that he started with, just to give it some, ah...to tie it in, in a better way. The logic in which his melodies go is terrific. He starts in the middle of a bar but...where he takes it is just so logical and you look--harmonically, melodically--and you see, "Oh, that's what that is and it goes from here to
here." If he had not been hampered by a drug habit it's just...it's no telling what he would have done. ...and others.

BROWER: Well, not to belabor that but to expand that or to capsule that or to capsule that, beyond Parker, how extensive of an impact...would you say it touched most of the players in that period...?

TAYLOR: No...

BROWER: Thirty percent of the players in that period...?

TAYLOR: A large percentage, but not most of the players. As a matter of fact, I used to have big arguments...some of the most visible players, yes...some of the best players, yes...but I argued that one could point out as many people that didn't use anything...as a matter of fact, I said this at the Newport Jazz Festival. I said, "I'm willing to take on anything anybody from the audience, and if you name one junky, I'll name five people who are comparable to him...who are not junkies.

BROWER: So, do you think that this whole thing that has
developed around the use of drugs was media manipulation or just, in effect, a distortion or (inaudible) thing on its head or...

TAYLOR: No, it was accurate to an extent because there was, in the same way that many musicians of the twenties drank a lot, many musicians of the thirties and early forties smoked grass a lot and then as they got into the forties began to go into harder...heroin and harder stuff. There was some of that going on in those earlier periods and right straight on through, but...the majority of guys found whiskey the most available. The majority of guys, in addition to whiskey, found grass available than the majority of guys who were in that fast life or in that fast lane felt that heroin or (inaudible) whatever was the way they wanted to go.

BROWER: I want to talk about the two years at Birdland. I think you were beginning to say that was one of the very valuable concentrated period...

TAYLOR: I got to work with everybody. I mean...working at
Birdland, I worked opposite Stan Kenton. I worked opposite Duke Ellington. I worked opposite the Latin bands. I worked with all the groups... I played in groups which included the greatest musicians at the time. To work consistently with a rhythm section that included Jo Jones and Oscar Pettiford or Art Blakey and Oscar Pettifor. To work with...Clyde Lumbardi was a tremendous bass player in those days. To work with Roy Haynes, who was one of the most underrated and certainly one of the most creative innovators in bebop, and has never been given the proper credit for his contribution for a person who has really added to immeasurably to what the drummers do, you know. To work with Al McKibbon. To work with other musicians who were...you know...J. J. Johnson, Miles, Trane... Somebody just told me that...one of Trane's records that came out of one of those Birdland broadcasts and I'm on piano. I don't even remember that. I never heard it. I don't know what it sounds like. I currently looking for it.
(laughter). I don't know what it is, but it's one of those "Monday Night at Birdland" things that was broadcast by Symphony Sid. Somebody took it off the air and it's now a record. The whole period...there are a whole lot of guys...I've never worked with Stan Getz except in that context. I've never worked with many of the other musicians, you know, except in that jam session...you know, Terry Gibbs and guys like that I've recorded with them and stuff like that, but I haven't worked long gigs with them... But there I got to cut across style, to cut across...I mean I worked with Lee Konitz. I worked with...a whole bunch of guys that I would never have had the opportunity...and one after another. So I would get a chance to...

BROWER: One week...

TAYLOR: Yeah, right... It would be a band with Kenny Dorham and Fats Navarro. Then the next week it be Miles and Red Rodney. Then the next week it would be J.J. and Kia Winding or Bill...
Harris or who ever, you know.

BROWER: What was the club like from night to night. I mean, who was in there...who came in there...what was the ambience of it?

TAYLOR: Well, it was a club where a lot of Black people came because they were made to feel very comfortable. That wasn't always the case. When that space was another kind of club, you came into the club to see a show and though the show was a Black show, you got sat by the kitchen or by the door or somewhere. You were not made to feel that you were welcome. When the Birdland people took it over anybody who liked jazz and wanted to come, you were welcome...everybody was treated the same. I mean they made no bones about it. I mean "yal' come"...we're going to all check the music out and have a good time. That spread very quickly. About eighty percent of the audience was Black, which is quite different from what the jazz audience is today. They came, they understood the music, they liked it, they hung out, they knew, they knew the musicians...you know...who the side men
were... And in those days, Miles wasn't a big name. You know, he was...people who knew his work, knew he played with Bird and that was really his claim to fame. But...Fats Navarro was the man...Clifford Brown was the man. There were some other folks...Kenny Dorham was really a very well thought of player in those days, you know. This is not to denigrate Miles' playing. Everybody recognized he was a good player, but he hadn't really fully flowered in those days in the public's mind because he was a sideman with Bird and with other people.

BROWER: Do you remember the date that Blakey and Silver and Clifford and Donaldson and Curly Russell made...I guess it was in 1951...that became a...

TAYLOR: A Night at Birdland?

BROWER: Yeah.

TAYLOR: I was not there that night, no... But ah, yeah I do and it was typical to the kinds of things that Art was doing in those...
days. Art had had a big band called "The Jazz Messengers" with Ray Copeland and a whole bunch of other guys and this concept was carried right over into working with this new group of his. Ah, Stan Getz had brought Horace Silver down from Connecticut. Horace had played with him for a while and really needed to get with an Art Blakey or somebody that rhythmically was more suitable to the kind of funky piano that...he was really the only guy doing in those days. I mean that was a throwback to some early kinds of playing and people were not...you know that wasn't subtle enough for a lot of the audience. They were listening to Tristano. They were listening to some other things and they just thought that Horace was a little too earthy in those days. But it worked and the kind of thing...the rhythmic feeling that he generated with that rhythm section was...went on to be something that was more imitated than anything of that time period.

BROWER: Talking about atmosphere and ambience—to flash back a second—we talked about 52nd Street in terms of a couple of
specific places. How was it for the audience on 52nd Street, especially in terms of Black and White issues and what were the working conditions on 52nd Street?

TAYLOR: The working conditions were strange. At one point 52nd Street had been very prejudiced and as the Second World War began to cut into business and everything else, they, being business men became tolerant and 52nd Street became a place where, like Birdland, you felt very welcome. You didn’t get hustled at the bar. You didn’t get put at an uncomfortable table. You were treated with the same respect and deference that anyone else was in most clubs. You would run in, in Leon’s and Eddie’s, which was not a jazz club...you had some problems in the...the other club down the street—the Stark Club, you had some problems. I mean, they didn’t want Black people in there much less serving them. And that went on for a long time. I mean they were very prejudiced in that club. So it went to very prejudiced to very liberal.
BROWER: You raise the issue of the jazz audience today and as to how it was then—and this is an overview kind of question. There has been a change in who comes out to patronize the music. And I guess I want to know how much to you think that has to do with the factors like changing geography. The music physically moving from out of the Black community into downtown areas or into White residential areas or basically White community areas or how much do you think it has to do with factors like how people perceive they are treated? Like if there has been areas where Blacks haven’t been traditionally been accepted and the music moves there, would that tradition of atmosphere affect people’s patronage habits or how does factors like media figure into it and what the media...and what’s available through the media... How do those things come into play if you’re going to weight them in some kind of equation going back to your sociological structure?
TAYLOR: Well, the basic problem I think is that right up through "Kind of Blue"...when Miles recorded "Kind of Blue", jazz was speaking to and for a very large segment of the Black community. It was moving away from that community because as you got into the late 1950's and early 1960's young people were looking for something...Black and White...were looking for something to call their own. And we were running into, sociologically, a period where...

End Side A, Tape #4

TAYLOR: ...the solving of problems and so forth. Since many of the people who were being encouraged in this attitude, both by parents and other people in authority, didn't have a basis for making these kinds to decisions. A lot of things ran aground. Up until the late 1950's, Black radio was, ah...there were two kinds of Black radio. There was the kind of Black radio that played gospel, rhythm and blues, some Calypso or Caribbean kind of music, depending on where you were geographically, but played
to the Black community. They rarely played jazz. Some of those stations would have a jazz show at some point—on a Sunday afternoon...

BROWER: Three o'clock...

TAYLOR: ...three o'clock in the morning or something like that.

But most of them didn't have any jazz at all. The jazz radio was handled—from the 1940's—primarily by White disc jockeys, who would play the Benny Goodmans and the White jazz players out of proportion to their credibility in jazz circles. Not that they weren't fine musicians, but five Benny Goodman records to one Lester Young is not the proportion that one would hope to find on a jazz show. Anyway, that kind of exposure meant for a different idea of what the music was about. So you heard Tommy Dorsey. You heard Buddy Rich. You heard Artie Shaw. You heard a lot of different people. I know when I worked with Artie Shaw I was amazed at the difference in the audience that came to hear him as opposed to the audience right next door. We were playing a place
called "Ice Land"—right next door was Birdland. Here's a whole other group of people going there. Why aren't they coming to see Artie Shaw? Well, they aren't interested in Artie Shaw. I mean, that's music of another generation. Part of the problem was that radio stations that serve as the resource and gave the knowledge of what was going on in jazz to the Black community, did not do their job. So the Black community, for several generations, became more and more isolated from music they had created and less knowledgeable about it. On the other hand, while this is going on, the White community is becoming more knowledgeable about it. They're hearing the music on their stations—on the stations that they normally listen to. And they are hearing it in a context which is altering the importance of the music. So they're listening to the music from a different point of view. They are listening to it with Stan Getz in mind. They listening with Dave Brubeck in mind. They are listen... I mean this is
not an aesthetic of these people, it's just what is being heard.

I'll give you an example. Dave Brubeck and Charlie Mingus' group...Dave Brubeck's group and Charlie Mingus' group played a concert at Oberlin University. A record was released called "Brubeck at...Jazz Goes to College" or "Brubeck at Oberlin" or whatever it was. It skyrocketed him (Brubeck) with that audience in terms of "this is the kind of music we should listen to as college students." Mingus was on the same concert—no record came out on him, so you have no knowledge of the fact that he was even present.

BROWER: (Inaudible)...

TAYLOR: Yeah, right. So...that's one example. Another example...I was in a record store the other day and I saw "A Complete Bill Evans"—on Riverside. I have never seen "The Complete Cannonball Adderly" on Riverside. Cannonball Adderly brought Bill Evans to Orin Kepnews and told Orin Kepnews pretty much who, musically, were the people that he thought were worthy
of doing. And really educated Orin in terms of what that particular approach to music was. I have never seen that kind of continuity given on his (Adderly) contribution, you know. I mean, you do what you want as a business man and there are other reasons for that to come out. So it just seems to me that it's unusual that unless Norman Granz decides to document Art Tatum, he doesn't get documented. We have some very rich Black people...Motown and other people that are in radio...Inner City Broadcasting is a network of Black radio stations that plays very little jazz. So, there are a whole lot of things that we should be doing if we are serious about documenting our own traditions and our own history and keeping the community informed. Our basic problem in media is that we donot keep our Black community informed on the issues that are important to the Black community. BROWER: To kind of summarize what you're saying is that...let me just interject this and see if you think this is also a fact...at a time in which I think really you well put...the community was
Increasingly isolated from the music that they created. The music was also going through a lot of changes in procedures which led us to things like "Giant Steps" and beyond. Things like Ornette Coleman and beyond. Things like Cecil (Taylor) and beyond. Things like what Mingus ended up doing. Eric Dolphy and numerous other people... Ah, so that actually the gap is not say moving along in a arhythmatic progression but a geometric progression. In other words the gap is not moving along like one plus one but in some other more complicated progression, so that the gap is increasing between the music...or we could say the community ear—what they would even call "jazz" and what is actually occurring in the music. Do you think that's...

TAYLOR: Sure. What you're getting right now is kids—Black kids—who are into rock 'n roll. I mean seriously into Doran Doran and rock 'n roll concepts, and "punk", and things that they consider a part of today. And they consider themselves just like
their White counterparts. They don't see any reason that they
got to be for Micheal Jackson. As a matter of fact I talked to
several kids back in February during Black History Month
and...one little girl came up--she was in high school--and told
me in no uncertain terms--in Durham North Carolina--that she
loved Doran Doran. I said, "What do you think about Micheal
Jackson? and some of the Black entertainers...(she said)"Can't
use them." Now that's her right. I not saying, because she's
Black, she's go to like Black entertainers. But I'm saying that
here's someone who, musically, what Doran Doran and some of those
people are doing, is so far from the Black tradition--I mean it's
like clapping your hands on one and three. The stuff that
they're talking about is nois! Really, for me, the worst of what
the White community likes because there are aspects of rock 'n
roll which have some redeeming features--some content to the
melody, there is some interest in the music with the use of
modern technology. You know, the Beatles and some other folks
have done some fairly creative stuff. It's not where I would go as a musician, but I can recognize the creativity within the genre which that they have chosen. But that's not what these kids are talking about. They're talking about lifestyle. They're talking about what's important on a psychological and philosophical point of view and that's heavy. When you talk about Black kids that, in a sense, negating the spiritual and all the stuff that the Black struggle was about and say, "Hey, I'm assimilated." I mean, you're not assimilated. We lost the battle of the 1960's. I mean you're in a lot of trouble. And if you're going to be relating as a...

BROWER: Psychological level (inaudible)

TAYLOR: Yeah. Then you're loosing some of the possible strength that helped your forebearers survive. The thing that has cut a lot of the Black kids off at the knees--when they have gone to White universities and White colleges and been alone in White communities--is that they didn't realize that they had strengths
which were a part of communities that they came from that could be used as defense mechanism and stabilizing factors when things don't go the way you assume that they will go for you because they go that way for your White counterpart. We live in a racist country. There are people with all kinds of hidden agendas and they come down on young people in many ways that frustrate them. They (young people) can't understand it..."Why me? I'm here doing what everybody else is doing. I'm prepared. I'm here to do..." Not realizing that here's a guy who is smiling in their face and doing a number on them. It really is the one thing that I learned as a musician in the early days is that you take everything at face value, but you're prepared if something should turn out differently from what you assume—you're prepared to deal with it. I'm often asked if you have to be Black to play jazz. I say obviously you don't. I mean we've got Indians from Bombay that can play excellent jazz. You've got
Chinese...well not Chinese but Japanese, Russians, you've got all kinds of people. I mean Django Reinhardt, a Belgium Gypsy...one of the great jazz guitarists... So, no you don't have to be Black, but you've got to understand the context in which jazz is created and you can't—as many Europeans are trying to do now— isolate all of those elements that are African and say, "Hey, we put that out and it becomes 'European jazz'." It may be good music, but it's not jazz. To try to explain why is this different from Cecil Taylor? I mean, I'm playing abstract. I'm doing the same kind of textures he's doing and mine doesn't have a melody, his doesn't have a melody. Tell me the difference. Well, to me and to my way of thinking, the difference has to do with Cecil's point of reference because at least he's aware of what he is deviating from. He knows what Fats Waller sounded like. He knows what I sound like. He comes to hear me...we're good friends...and there is no similarity in our approach to music, yet he knows how I respect him and I know how he respects...
me. So, consequently when I'm doing a show on the air and I
play...I did an hour interview with him one time—just the two of
us rapping like this... It really was one of the most pleasant
interviews I've ever done because Cecil is a brilliant person who
understands many of the aspects of the society in which he's
working. I don't agree with some of the things that he says but
I don't agree with my brother. That has nothing to do with my
respect for him, you know. We discuss from his point of view why
and how he does certain things. A long way of coming around to
say that the responsibility of media is to make everybody aware
of what Cecil Taylor is doing, what Ornette Coleman has done—in
the context in which they did it, the time period in which they
did it, why it was necessary in an aesthetic way for them to make
the statement they made, the validity of that... We have not done
that. Black people have not done that in writing. There have
been others who have done it. As they have done it they have
taken it, they have taken, in many cases, the contemporary people
who perform in the abstract genre out of the context of the main stream. And, though I think it is a branch of the tree that goes perhaps in a different direction than the main trunk of the tree, it's an important branch and it's closer to the trunk than many people think. The kind of misunderstanding that we have... I compare in the piano show that I did on the history of jazz, I suggested to people what I suggest to my class. I say it is not difficult for most people to look at abstract painting or an abstract sculpture, why is it difficult for people to listen to abstract music? Your eye is as important means of getting information... a splash of color... all this stuff is going on... that doesn't make you go blind or necessarily want to turn away. So why can't you accept some of the sounds that are coming at you... being brought as an abstraction of some feeling or something like that and approach the music from the same idea of this as an abstraction as opposed to this as a realization of a
specific kind of emotional presentation or theoretical idea as say rendering of a flower in a pot, you know. An abstraction of that might look totally different. It wouldn’t offend me. I mean it wouldn’t look like that. I could look at it and say, "Yeah, okay."

BROWER: I’d like to flash back to the late 1940’s again. There’s a thing that’s been noted...a series call the “Three O’clock Hot Series” which I think brought you into contact with Dave Bailey, which has been a long and enduring relationship and partnership. Would you re-create or reminisce about that concert series and some of the people that were presented. I think Art Blakey and the Seventeen Messengers was one of the groups I read that was presented...

TAYLOR: Well, Art Blakey and John Collins got this idea that they were going to present some concerts. They presented Art Tatum. They presented Erroll Garner...

BROWER: Where were these done?
TAYLOR: At the, ah...ballroom where Malocum X was killed...

BROWER: The Autobon...

TAYLOR: The Autobon...in the same room, as a matter of fact...on that same stage. They had the idea that at three o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, there were a lot of folks in those days who would come to hear jazz, and indeed they did. Dave Bailey was one of the musicians who volunteered. He came up and sold tickets and put out the placards and did yeoman service in terms of helping to keep the thing alive. I knew him as a drummer in those days...as a guy who was around, a good swinging drummer. Once again here's a guy that, when a lot of folks in the rhythm section were into bad habits, was as clean as a whistle. There were a lot of guys around like that. So over the years when he was playing with (Gerry) Mulligan, when he doing stuff with Clark Terry, and over the years when he was producing his own records and all that stuff, we stayed in touch.

BROWER: So Dave wasn't instrumental in the concerts, he was,
like yourself, a person who came in and sort of pitched in to make it happen.

TAYLOR: Well, the main protagonists were Art and John Collins. It was their money. They put up the money and it was their idea...they put the money up. The rest of us just helped where ever we were needed...sell some tickets, watch the door or go for coffee or whatever, you know, we helped out.

BROWER: (Inaudible) Messenger's Band is something you see reference to...and probably it was a passing and minor thing, but do you remember much about that? Who the personnel on that was...?

TAYLOR: I don't remember the personnel per se because that was early Blakey... Seems to me Coltrane was playing in that. Seems to me that...ah, I know Ray Copeland was in it. I don't remember many of the other players... ...You couldn't keep a big band together and so the personnel changed a lot. Blakey had these
charts, he would call a rehearsal and half of the guys there last time wouldn't show up this time and a bunch of new guys would show up, you know. Depends on who was available and you couldn't really depend on any money from the gig. You had to it because you loved him and wanted to play.

BROWER: Moving out of...after the Birdland period, I guess is a point at which you established yourself, "The Billy Taylor Trio". Was the Downbeat your first engagement as a leader? And, what was that group?

TAYLOR: That was Charlie Smith and Earl May. Even in and out of Birdland, I was still dabbling with...the only reason I had a trio was because John Collins wasn't available.

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: I wanted a quartet. That's why I used Mondale Lowe and I used Perry Lopez, and I used ah...

BROWER: Perry Lopez was a guitarist?

TAYLOR: ...was a guitarist and...seems to me...not Sal...there
was another guitarist I used during that period, but...Carl Lynch I used. These were all fine guitarists but there was an element missing. The chemistry that John and I could get going at any point I couldn't do it as consistently with guitarists as I wanted to do it so after I found out that at that stage in my career I could make the same money whether I had a trio...three guys or four guys. I mean the Billy Taylor Trio could make "x" dollars, you know. So I said if I could make as much with three as four, why am I wrestling with this guitar idea? Let me spread the money around and try to keep these two guys that I enjoy playing with. And that was especially true when I got Mingus because Mingus was a guy that I admired a great deal. He was totally different from any bass player that I'd had. He was with me for about six months. Earl had been with me for several years at that point and...

BROWER: So Mingus came after Early May?

TAYLOR: Yeah. Well I had Joe Benjamin... There several bass
players. ...In the context of putting groups together, Shadow Wilson was my drummer. I had Oscar for a short time...Oscar Pettiford. Other people like...I mentioned Joe Benjamin...Lloyd Trotman...I'm trying to think of some the early guys...Leonard Gaskin, you know. They are all good solid bass players, but I was going toward the kind of sound I was going to ultimately get with Earl May. Earl May was one of those guys that played the big long notes...the Ray Brown kind of solid swinging kind of bass and I really loved that. Ray Brown wasn't available to me. I had worked with him a couple of times when he had time off with Dizzy or whoever he was working with. Then I worked with him with Ella Fitzgerald, replacing Hank Jones for a short time. That was the sound...George DuVivauaia----was another guy who got that sound and Earl got that feeling. So that was my point of reference. When Mingus came in I wasn't too thrilled about a guy way up on the bridge doing all this other kind of stuff but I
recognized the validity of the kinds of almost duet qualities that he was insisting on getting and I wanted to deal with that on a musical level so for six months we had a good relationship then he went on to form his own groups and do things. I'm really proud of the fact that I had a big influence on at least a couple of things he did. One of the things he is best known for is...some of the compositions that he has written that have one chord and that have a drone effect or that have a kind of static harmonic progression. It always amuses me when I hear people postulating how he got to that point. The way he got to it...when he came to me I was very much into Latin music and the montuno—was something I liked to do and he hated it. He said, "There was nothing for the bass player to do (Taylor sings bass line)... That's all the bass player does. I don't want... I've got other things to do. I want to play. I don't want to be doing that stuff (laughter)" The drummer's doing all the work. It was very difficult for me to get him to do that but I kept
trying. I said, "Charlie, listen this is valid. It's not that
it's boring. I mean I realize you're playing the same thing over
and over but I've got a lot of things where I just play one note
or I hold a chord or I do something on the piano. All the
activity is up here. It's like a different approach so I might
do something with a whole lot of chords. I might do something
with one chord and that's the same as a guy who tells you funny
story and then tells you a sad story. I mean it's a different
point of view... everything is not the same thing all the time.
You want to play a fast tune. You want to play a ballad. There
are a lot of reasons to consider this as a device." We'd talk.
I'd take him home and we'd go into the park and we would argue
and everything. I could never convince him in the context of my
trio that this was a valid approach. Then when he began to
experiment with his workshop, the more he began to use this
concept. He was a neighbor of mine. We were both living near
135th and Madison. I ran into on the street one day--he was
coming out of a store. I said, "Man you're a jive dude! ...All this time I'm trying to get you to do the montuna----and you're giving me this hard time. Now I pick up a record of yours and all I've got on there is "one-chord tunes" (laughter). And he laughed. He said, "...You've got to admit there's more going on in the bass clef than...(laughter)." So I said, "Okay..."

BROWER: We talked about working with Machito and Candido. How (inaudible) with Latin music? What percentage of your repertoire at this period in an evening's performance would include Latin pieces...?

TAYLOR: At least three or four tunes in a two hour concert. I can't recall doing a concert without a Latin tune, I'll put it that way.

BROWER: What was the particular attraction? You just like the rhythmic feel of it...?

TAYLOR: The rhythmic feeling is very important. It's such an
expansion... Well I've made the point that if the drum had been allowed in this country we wouldn't have jazz. On the other side of the coin, since it was allowed in Cuba, Brazil, and the West Indies...the music that comes out of those areas is a different...is African music from a different perspective or African influenced music from a different perspective. When you put that together it's a natural joining point. If you recognize the rhythmic validity of each style then you can play a Calypso kind of feeling or an Afro-Cuban feeling or Brazilian feeling and it works in a jazz context. But you've got to know which of those rhythms you're fusing together.

BROWER: I'd like to reflect on some of the other players who worked with you. You talked about Earl May and what you appreciated about him. You talked about Mingus. You talked about Oscar Pettiford. Let's talk about bass players for a minute. Henry Grimes...the first time I heard about him he was playing with people like Albert Ayler. (Inaudible) What was
your work relationship with him? Was it brief...extensive...?

TAYLOR: Relatively brief. ...I used to get around a lot...listen to a lot of musicians. Then I had the advantage of being on the radio, so I heard a lot of guys on records...pulled my coat to a good player that I may have otherwise missed and Henry was such a player. I thought he was terrific. He had a very percussive sound. It was quite different from Earl May and some of the other guys that I like, but it was very unique. He was very personal and he is a good player...a lot of facility and he could really swing. He worked in the trio with Ray Mosca, an Italian fellow who plays drums. A very fine drummer who has worked with a lot of Black groups. As a matter of fact, Ray had worked with me earlier with Doug Watkins and...

BROWER: That's player person I was going to ask you about.

TAYLOR: ...we went south. At a time when Dave Brubeck was having all kinds of problems with having a Black guy in his group. I had no problems at all with having a White guy in my
group, because everybody assumed that he was a very light Black
dude (laughter)...he was passing, you know (laughter).

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: Yeah.

BROWER: What about Doug Watkins as a player?

TAYLOR: I first met Doug...

BROWER: Grimes would have been playing with you...late
1950's...?

TAYLOR: Early 1960's, yeah.

BROWER: Early sixties... Doug Watkins...

TAYLOR: Doug Watkins... We were playing at a club...Baker's
Keyboard Lounge in Detroit. This was the trio with Earl May and
Percy Brice. As a matter of fact I think that was when Candido
was out there with us at that particular time. Anyway, Earl
said, "Hey man, I went out last night and I heard these two young
bass players... They're outrageous... They go down to this
place and jam." I said, "Okay." So we went down and sure enough...Kenny Burrell's brother and some other guys and these two cousins, both of whom played the bass—Paul Chambers and Doug Watkins. They were playing some very hip things and I was curious, so I said, "Where did you get that idea of phrasing, man?" He said, "From Clifford Brown!" I said, "Oh, yeah?" (Taylor sings) Those guys were playing really lovely phrases on the bass violin...really an extension of Oscar and Ray Brown and all those guys...much lighter, much more swinging, much more contemporary in the rhythmic feel than the other guys—contemporary for that period. So Doug brought that kind of stuff into my group. He was a very pleasant kind of guy to work with...had some serious habits and was killed in a very tragic auto accident. But a guy that created in the places where we worked— a place uptown called "The Prelude", and worked at the Hickory House and several good places. So, a lot of folks got to see him....
End side B, Tape #4
Disk #4 = Full
BROWER: Leonard Gaskin...

TAYLOR: You know, actually, one of the things I really ought to do is talk about is what I think about bass players. I really was highly impressed by some of the early bass players like Walter Page and John Simmons and some of the guys that really played the straight ahead swing styles. I heard them playing with Teddy Wilson and with other groups like that. Then when Jimmy Blanton came along I became aware of something totally different. Also with Slam Stewart around the same period when he was playing with Slim and playing "Flat Foot Floogeey" and those kinds of things I began to hear another role for the bass player. So consequently when I began to search for musicians that I wanted to play with, Billy Taylor, the bass player was the person whose work I admired greatly and Al McKibbon and Leonard Gaskin—among the younger players of that time. Many others were around. Guys who that had a very special quality of playing...good sound, good choice...
of notes. Charlie Drayton comes to mind. He was the bass player with Ben Webster when I first joined Ben. He was a solid bass player, very very strong and very rhythmic. He didn't like to solo but could really play that instrument. In moving from that point to other areas I began to think about Oscar Pettiford concepts, the things I heard Junior Ragland do and some of the other people that had worked with Duke Ellington. One of the qualities that impressed me with Leonard Gaskin and some of the other younger players at that time was the fact that they had good ears. They could listen to some rather exotic harmonies...you'd play...harmonic passages without playing the roots of those chords and they could find the bass notes...by ear. That was good training. Then as we moved along, that seemed to be something that was lost. Not everybody could do that. For a while you had to kind of outline the bass. You had to give the guy the changes. I had a lot of arguments with
Charlie Mingus for instance about what note to play. He'd say, "Hey, it's in the chord. This particular note is in the chord."
I said, "Yeah, but if I'm playing this harmonic structure and you play that note, you change the context that I'm playing." If I'm playing...

BROWER: (inaudible) the right note...

TAYLOR: Well, if I'm playing "A, C, E, and G", which is an A minor seventh—if you have A in the bass. If you have C in the bass, it's a C major sixth. It's the same notes but the bass note changes the context in which you're doing. Or if it's D in the bass, then it becomes a D suspension or a D eleventh, so that would take you into the key of G—if you had D in the bass...same four notes in the right hand. It's not a matter of right or wrong. It's just a matter of where you're going, from this point to that point. Guys like Mingus were so sophisticated that they knew that, hey, a D could very well be in this chord or an A could very well be in this chord, you know. But they
weren't always hearing what I was hearing so sometimes there would be some discrepancy where he would say, "That's what that is and that could go here" and I'm saying, "That's exactly what that is but it's going here because I have another bass note in mind."

BROWER: What you're saying is (Inaudible) Why did that occur? Was that a trend enough to reflect something about how people were learning music or...?

TAYLOR: Yeah, it was a reflection on piano players for one thing because piano players were not as harmonically sophisticated as they had been in the past. Guys like Nat Cole and guys like that were very sophisticated harmonically. Bud Powell, when he was developing his long bebop lines was not nearly as sophisticated as, say, Thelonious Monk. Monk was not that much older than Bud. Then Bud became interested and began to work on his harmonic ideas also. But at one point he was very caught up in rhythm and melody and was not concerned about harmonic progressions. Guys
like Tad Dameron, Hank Jones, and others that were really exploring...myself...were looking into harmonic areas. Ellis Larkin and guys like that were really doing some very sophisticated harmonic approaches. You'd play something and quite often, the pianists I just mentioned, we would play the bass note because we wanted to hear certain things so we would outline what the bass note was. But you could listen to Jimmy Jones and John Levi and Jimmy never played the root. He would be playing something else. John always had that right note. So it made the playing much more subtle and much more effective in many respects.

BROWER: Did Levi work with you?

TAYLOR: Oh yeah. As a matter of fact, I had a working quartet in which the rhythm section was John Levi, Denzil Best and John Collins. That was one of the best quartets I ever had. I couldn't understand since we were laying off so well. We had no
prospects for a job for the next six months or anything like that. I couldn't understand why John and Denzil would go with George Shearing and make money and pay the rent a stuff like that. It didn't make any sense. I mean we could rehearse forever (laughter). John went around that time with Art Tatum and then he went on with Nat Cole from there. That was a group that I recorded on a label called "HRS". They are around somewhere. I'm delighted that nobody has heard them and can find them anymore because that's the only recorded example of me singing.

BROWER: Really?

TAYLOR: That's right (laughter).

BROWER: What did you sing?

TAYLOR: A couple of pieces that I wrote. I was very influenced by Nat Cole both his singing...I didn't sing like him as Oscar (Peterson) does, but the style that he had with the kind of hip little lyrics and stuff like that. I wrote a lot of those tunes.
When I was doing solo piano it meant... for instance when I was working at Well's, it meant another fifty bucks if I sang. So, believe me, I sang! (Laughter)

BROWER: Aaron Bell...

TAYLOR: Aaron Bell was... I've had the dubious distinction of preparing rhythm sections for George Shearing, for Duke Ellington, for Oscar Peterson, for Erroll Garner, for all of the guys... (Laughter)

BROWER: (Inaudible) with you before he went with Oscar.

TAYLOR: Yeah. He left me to go with Oscar.

BROWER: Aaron Bell was with you before he went with (inaudible)...

TAYLOR: Duke used to come into the Hickory House and listen to the group a lot and eat large quantities of ice cream. And he liked the way this bass player played so ultimately he hired him.

BROWER: What was the drummer in that particular group? (Inaudible) a bunch of drummers.
TAYLOR: There were several drummers. I'm trying to think... It may have been Dave Bailey. It may have been, ah... I honestly don't remember who was the drummer in that trio because...I played the Hickory House a lot and... I'd have to ask Aaron because he would remember. I really don't know. As a matter of fact I was looking for a picture of that group the other day and couldn't find it. I don't remember who the drummer was.

BROWER: Was he another bass player that you liked because of the sound that he got (inaudible)...?

TAYLOR: No, Aaron was different. I like Aaron because he is a swinger. He really had a good rhythmic feeling and that time--especially playing at the Hickory House--I was in kind of a rhythmic frame of mind. We were doing a lot of broadcasts and I wanted to swing. We were right around the corner from Birdland and a lot of guys were coming in to check us out. I wanted the music to have a certain vitality and he supplied that.
BROWER: What were their broadcasts about?

TAYLOR: They were the usual... In those days they had remote broadcasts. A guy would come in and stick up a microphone and you'd play. You didn't make any money on it. It was great publicity, but ah...

BROWER: What radio station was...?

TAYLOR: Yeah... WOR, WNBC, WABC... all the major stations did this.

BROWER: What was the point? To promote what was in the clubs? Was it fifteen minutes or was it...?

TAYLOR: No, the point was for the radio stations to get some free music. It was late at night. They hadn't sold the time, it was free time, it was good for them and it was good for the club. They'd just send a guy with some portable equipment and set up the lines—telephone lines—and some mikes and an announcer would say, "And now ladies and gentlemen from the world famous Hickory House we present the famous Billy Taylor Trio." I became famous
overnight...if you're on the air, you're famous (laughter).

BROWER: So there was no compensation...?

TAYLOR: Yeah, there was, there was some...five dollars, six dollars or something like that that the union negotiated...nothing. I rarely got it anyway, so...

BROWER: How frequently were you in situations where this occurred...?

TAYLOR: Actually it was a holdover from the old band days where the big bands would go into the Edison Hotel or something. They did it for exposure simply because that was a place where you were heard from coast to coast. We were on "Monitor" a lot. Many people come up to me now and say, "I first heard of you when you were at the Hickory House. I heard you on the radio and I came down to see you. You may not remember but we talked one night. You came over to my table." You know, all that kind of stuff. I would say that the basis...the largest number of die-hard Taylor fans are from three places: from Birdland, from
the Downbeat, and from the Hickory House. Because those were the places that I played for the longest periods of time.

BROWER: What was the situation at the Downbeat?

TAYLOR: ...Birdland was running full steam and Monte Kaye, who really had booked the club since its inception and he was the guy...

BROWER: That’s (inaudible) with your trio (inaudible)...

TAYLOR: Well...yeah, right. ...What happened was that I had worked with all of these groups and periodically I would bring in Earl May and Charlie Smith or whoever...into Birdland. Monte knew that I really wanted a trio and indeed, Jo Jones, who was kind of a mentor for me in those days, had talked to the people who were splitting from the Birdland contingent to open the Embers. He said, "Look, you ought to really make the Embers a place where Billy Taylor, Oscar Pettiford, and I could play. You
guys are always talking about how great that group sounds, why don't you put us in there. That would be good for the room."

They said, "Fine." And we were supposed to go in there and then they obviously got to talking to one another and said, "Hey, we've got to have some names...we've got to have this..." So, they went in a different direction. They brought in Art Tatum and Joe Bushkin, which surely wasn't a bad deal to open a room.

It was quite a long time before I ever got to play the Embers. The first time I really got to work with my trio for a long time...we stayed at the Downbeat for quite a long time...like steady, it was not like in a week and out a week. We were there for over a year...about a year I guess. ...That same trio went into the Copacabanna and stayed there for six months.

BROWER: That same trio being Jo Jones...?

TAYLOR: No, no. That same trio from the Downbeat which was Charlie Smith and Earl May. I never actually worked with Jo as a side man. I worked with him when he was a leader, but he never
worked with my trio per se. Except on those occasions when we
were at Birdland and I was the nominal leader.

BROWER: You say he was a mentor to you. In what ways?

TAYLOR: In every way. He and Sid Catlett were surrogate uncles
or fathers, big brothers or whatever. Jo Jones...he took a
liking to me when I was a student. The Basie band played in
Richmond...the great Count Basie with Lester Young and all these
great musicians, so the whole band went over...

BROWER: Was Herschel Evans in the band then?

TAYLOR: Herschel had died, I think, by that time and it was
ah...he's still around...Buddy Tate. I mean the band was
cooking. They sounded so marvelous. We went over and we were
just drooling at all this great music we were listening to,
hanging around the band and sopping it all up. So, the guys in
my band were...talking to the musicians and said, "Yeah, we're
student musicians. We go to school not far from here...so and
so..." So the guys in my band said, "Hey, we've got a hell of a
piano player. You ought to let him sit in." Well, that's too much to hope for...sit in with Count Basie...lot's of luck! You know. So, Jo Jones...my drummer was talking to Jo. He said, "Yeah, this kid can play. He really special." So Jo said, "Oh yeah? I'll get Count to let him sit in." He said, "Would you?" He said, "Sure." So he talked to Basie and Basie's talking to some folks and socializing and everything and he said, "Why don't you let the kid play one when we come back from intermission?" So he said, "Okay." So I sat in with the band...Freddie Green, you know, Walter Page, Jo Jones. I said, "Oh, wow!" I immediately became big man on campus. I mean that was the high light of my college career, sitting with the Basie band. But that was when I met Jo Jones and I...

BROWER: Do you remember what you played?

TAYLOR: Blues...some kind of blues. As a matter of fact it was a "head arrangement". It wasn't "One O'Clock Jump" or anything...
famous. It was just a head arrangement of some blues line that they played. But it would have mattered, because anything they had recorded I knew. I was ready. I mean all of the things because we had the stocks from the stuff that they'd made and some of the other stuff...but even the stuff that wasn't published, if they had recorded it we knew it because that was one of our favorite bands, you know. So it would have been cool, whatever they wanted to play. As a matter of fact I was hoping they would play something like "Moten Swing" because I liked the arrangement of that. Anyway, that was when I met Jo Jones and from that point on, he just kind of adopted me. He would look out for me. He put me in touch with my trio. He worked for George Wein...we were both working at Birdland...and he worked for George Wein one week and came back and gave me a call. He said, "Hey Billy I've got a call for you in Boston.

BROWER: Storyville.

TAYLOR: At Storyville. This was 1951. And he said you start
next week. So I said, "Fine." So he said, "I've got a trio for you." I said, "Well...okay. Who's the trio?" He said, "You're going to like the drummer. His name is Marcus Foster." I said, "I've never heard of him." He said, "I know, but you'll like him. He's a good drummer." I said, "Okay". He said, "I've got a new bass player for you." I said, "What's his name?" He said, "Charlie Mingus." I had heard Mingus with Red Norvo. I liked him in that context but I was a little nervous about what that was going to sound like with me because that wasn't my idea of where the bass was coming from, you know. He...Red and Tal Farlow were playing some very contrapuntal things and a whole lot of different lines going and everything and wasn't swinging too much. It was very nice...it wasn't...

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: ...from my point of swinging, it wasn't doing that. It was very interesting and I loved it. I went to hear them and I was really fascinated with what they were doing, but it was pretty
far, I thought, away from what I wanted to do. Well, I trusted Jo and he said everything was cool, so fine. We went up and it really worked. There's a tape which I bought, which was broadcast the...first night, I guess, we were there. Nat Hentoff was the MC. He was a disc jockey in Boston in those days. He introduced us, we played and Roost put out three of the tunes from that tape: "Beginning to See the Light"...I don't remember which ones they put out..."What is This Thing Called Love" I think is one the tunes. Anyway it's Mingus...it's the only thing that's been available on record with the two of us when he was with the trio.

BROWER: (Inaudible) that we talked about some of the things that you chose in terms of more of a modal concept or one chord kind of (inaudible). I've read something to the effect that he had influence on you in terms of how you...idea of how a trio could operate...the instruments could...
TAYLOR: Interact...yeah. Because he had such tremendous technical facility, he would...often play a duet with me. Instead of accompanying me, he would play a counter-line. It would be somewhat of a bass line but it would be a counter-line in the same way that he used to do with Norvo and Farlow. In those days I was using a lot of facility. I was really getting over the instrument a lot. I was practicing and really showing...this was my first chance to show that, hey, I'm a pianist to be considered along with everybody else so check this out. So I was getting a lot of opportunity. I was playing in places where a lot of musicians were coming. They were coming into. They were coming into the Downbeat. They were coming into...even the Copa when we were there, you know. It was really the beginning of my establishing a reputation as being a major New York pianist. When Mingus was playing, I was playing all these things. I would play a passage and he might even imitate that passage... I'd say, "Yeah, alright!" Sometimes it would
became kind of a challenge. I'd do things...see if I'd get a response from him and all that. It was a different kind of trio from what I normally was doing it was very (timely). Musically, it was quite different from any other trio around in those days. BROWER: Briefly...he (Mingus) has a personality probably as legendary as Parker's. Do you think that's a fair assessment of him (inaudible)

TAYLOR: He was a very tempestuous person and he was impatient with a lot of people. Oscar Pettiford frequently worked opposite us in various all star groups. For instance one of the all star groups that worked opposite my trio at the Downbeat was the Modern Jazz Sextet, which was the predecessor to the Modern Jazz Quartet. They had Jimmy Heath on tenor and I think J. J. (Johnson) on trombone, Miles I believe... I can't remember the entire personnel, but John (Lewis) was on piano. I don't know if it was Percy (Heath) or who it was...no, it wasn't Percy, it was Oscar in that particular case. Who was the drummer...? I can't
remember. Anyway...the things that he did—the two of them got into—for instance, we recorded a couple of hits with Oscar Pettiford. His famous piece, "Sonnyboy"—that’s my trio backing him up. That’s Mingus, Charlie Smith and Oscar. Oscar was working opposite us in the Downbeat when we made that for Roost. It was so funny... Mingus was not at all shy about taking solos or about getting into the spotlight, but on that particular date he wouldn’t take a solo. Oscar kept trying to goad him into taking a solo. He said, "Come on man, play." He said, "No, it’s your date." And he just played rhythm. Even when Oscar left the space for him, instead of playing melodic he just walked the bass line, you know. It wasn’t false modesty nor was intimidated to the extent that he wouldn’t play for Oscar because they often locked horns, but they had a peculiar relationship. He really had great respect for Oscar and his place as a giant of the bass. Though he wasn’t shy at all, it was just deference to a guy he had
great respect for and that was his way of showing it.

BROWER: That's an unusual side (inaudible)

TAYLOR: Yeah...

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: Yeah, absolutely. Well he and Oscar...oh they had some funny scenes. Earl May tells about driving them uptown in his car through Central Park. They were all going up to Harlem. They would be arguing with one another...to the point that of saying, "Stop the car, Earl! I'll knock this jerk out! Come on, get out! I'll dare you to get out!" (Laughter)

BROWER: We talked about bass players you said what (inaudible) without looking at bass players. What did you look for in drummers? Let's talk about specific drummers. What was your concept (inaudible) like?

TAYLOR: Well, my point of reference is Big Sid Catlett and Jo Jones. I mean, if you look at the old "Jamming the Blues" that Norman Granz produced many years ago, they both were in the
flower their careers. I mean they both were in absolute control of their abilities. Those were the two drummers that really gave me the perspective for what I wanted to hear...not stylistically, necessarily, but in terms of the concepts. For instance, Sid Catlett was the first drummer I ever worked with who would play solos based on the tune. So if it was a thirty-two bar tune, he played a thirty-two bar solo. If it was a twelve bar tune, he played a twelve bar solo. He played on the form of the tune, you know. He did that...Max Roach does that now. But Sid was the first one I heard do it. Any drummer that works with me has to do that because there are certain things in my book that call for him to play on the form of tune. The colors that Jo Jones was famous for. Those are the kinds of things I like to hear drummers do. I like to hear them—without sacrificing the time or the vitality—just do things that change emotional context of the piece or change the color that you present. If it's a moody piece, and so forth. One of the best at that is Grady Tate, of
course. Dave Bailey was very good at—not only swinging very hard—but doing that kind of coloring.

BROWER: You mean coloring, ah...

TAYLOR: Adding something...adding tonal qualities to what you do. This is not just time-keeping, I mean...it's not dropping a bomb per se, but it might be what he's doing with the cymbal at a particular time or the fact that he's laying out...that he's not playing at that point...that he comes in softly under something else that he's doing...that he has a certain "swish" motion on the drums with brushes...I mean, you know... This is a matter of taste and someone hearing you do certain things and say, "Hey, this would sound good...this accompanying that..."

BROWER: It's more a question of being able to really play an arrangement that developed, ah...

TAYLOR: It's more of a compositional thing. The drummer has to use his musical ideas and has to think of the drums, not just as
a percussion instrument but as a musical instrument. So that
he’s playing almost a complementary counter melody to some of the
things that I’m doing.

BROWER: So you’re not talking just simply about dynamics...?

TAYLOR: No, not at all.

BROWER: ...but deriving some tonal range out of his kit and then
distributing it throughout...

TAYLOR: And this happens more with some drummers than with
others. It’s not something you can orchestrate...say, "If you
work with me, you’ll do this..." Some guys are comfortable doing
it, some guys are not.

BROWER: What about Percy Brice?...who I guess worked with you
for...

TAYLOR: Yeah, he replaced Charlie Smith. The only reason I...

Well, Charlie is one of the few guys I had to let go, because
like everybody else, I just couldn’t deal with his instability.
I mean, I couldn’t depend on him for a lot of the things I
wanted. Percy was very dependable. I first heard him working in an afterhour place around the corner from Minton's. Earl May recommended him and brought him into the trio. He worked with us for a long time and it was terrific. I think some of his best work on records was with me. The Town Hall concert that we did together and a couple of the other things. He's on the Candido record...some of the things that we did during that period.

BROWER: Those were the Prestige records...?

TAYLOR: Right...that he was on.

BROWER: What was that place around the corner from Minton's?

TAYLOR: It was an afterhour. I don't think it had a name. It probably was just in a basement or either the basement of that hotel...the Cecil Hotel or the... It seemed to be connected to the same building but it wasn't Minton's per se. It was downstairs in the basement.

BROWER: What about Frank Gant?

TAYLOR: Frank Gant, I had heard working with Ahmad Jamal and I
liked what he did and I did a lot of school concerts and...once again he was a guy who had many qualities—individual qualities of a drummer that I liked...really different from many other guys but had his own personality which was terrific.

BROWER: Where does a drummer like Billy Cobham, which would seem to be way far away from the kind of subtleties that you might require in the music. How did he fit...

TAYLOR: Billy was...when he worked with me was a soldier. He was in the army...in the service. I'm not sure if it was the army or what. I met him when he was doing some things in Harlem. He was a part of a young group which had George Cables and somebody else, I can't remember personnel. It was a terrific young group and I said, "Hey, the drummer's dynamite." I was working at the Hickory House a lot in those days and he worked with me there. We did some school concerts...

BROWER: Is this in the sixties that you're talking about?
TAYLOR: Yeah, uh huh. We did school concerts and stuff like that. He was a very rhythmic and a very interesting drummer. It's funny...Hank (Jones) kept trying to get me to hire Elvin (Jones). I couldn't really hear Elvin in my trio according to what I was doing at that particular point. I then heard Elvin with...J. J. Johnson I believe it was, in a group...with Nat Adderly...

End Side A - Tape #5
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TAYLOR: ...It was around this time that I first heard Freddie Waits. I always was on the lookout for younger drummers and guys that were prone to do things that were an expansion or just different from some of the things that I was accustomed to. I was looking for that both in bass players and in drummers. As I said earlier, one of the most effective drummers over the years was Edmond Thigpen. The classic story about Edmond's work for me was...I was musical director for a TV program called "The Subject is Jazz" and on the final show, I had been asked, as musical
director to suggest something in which we could close on—the
title of the final program was "The Feature of Jazz". They said
we need something to demonstrate that jazz not only has a future,
but it's going in a way that's an extension of what we've been
talking about for the last twelve weeks. I said, "Fine. We
should get a hold of George Russell, who has just written a piece
for an unknown pianist named "Bill Evans", called "Billy the
Kid. We could get them to come in and re-create the record that
they did. It would save us rehearsal time because, though these
musicians could play the music, it was written for a particular
group of people. Why don't we just get them to come and do it?"
So he says, "Fine." For some reason or--I think O.C. had made
the record or somebody had made the record...and O.C. was the
original drummer on the show because for some reason or
another they hadn't allowed me to use Edmond...he wasn't
available. Edmond had to read the music at sight and George
Russell writes very difficult music, especially for drummers. He
had one read-through, a camera rehearsal, and we did it on the air. It was a dynamite performance. He's a masterful musician. I have great respect for him.

BROWER: ...Is that (inaudible) available?

TAYLOR: Yeah, yeah. It's in the Rutgers Collection. Dan Morgenstern has that. ...Marshal Sterns and Leonard Feather were two of the advisors on the show...or the two advisors on the show. Leonard has a copy of it. I have a copy of most them. I don't have them all. A couple of them got away from me over the years. I think all thirteen of them are available in that context and they are good shows. These are kinescopes, these are not tapes. The musical quality...I mean the sound was terrific.

had Toshico on it. We played the music of Afif Mardine, who was a student up at Berkley at that time. Toshico was a student then, too. We had Duke on it. We had Wilbur DeParis, Jimmy Rushing. Who else...? I have to think of the different shows...
Aaron Copeland. We had a wide range of folks on there.

BROWER: What was your role on the program?

TAYLOR: I was music director...and I played the piano. I had a seven piece group. The original group was Eddie Safranski...I just called his name--drummer--ah...

BROWER: Osie Johnson...

TAYLOR: Osie Johnson...ah, Mundell Lowe on guitar, Tony Scott on reeds, Jimmy Cleveland on trombone, Doc Severinsen on trumpet, and myself. That was the band. We recorded at Studio 8-H in NBC, which was the studio created for Toscanini to do the symphonies in...big studio...very nice--very dry studio, but very good for what we wanted to do. That was a hell of a show. We did...the second show was on improvisation. That was my first television opportunity to really talk about the process of improvisation and to really began to deal with that in a way that was not meant just for musicians.

BROWER: At some point I want to talk about your involvement in
television. How did you get into that position? Was that after some other activities or (inaudible) period in your development...?

TAYLOR: Well, by that time I had written...I made a conscious effort to go into...I had done a lot of guest stars...guest performances on radio and on television. I was becoming known...

I was writing articles for Esquire, for...Downbeat, for various magazines. So I was becoming known in the trade as a musician who could articulate what the music was about. That's what I was playing and the fact that I could play several styles was noticed. I was getting the opportunity to play some of the older styles and to relate to the musicians who were comfortable. It didn't hurt at all the Ellington, Basie, and some of the people who were super stars were very complementary toward my efforts in this regard.

BROWER: So the door just being opened...
TAYLOR: Yeah, uh huh...

BROWER: Let's go back to the trio. You talked pretty much about working in the New York area. First 52nd Street then I guess the Broadway situation and (inaudible). Did you tour nationally or regionally with your trio?

TAYLOR: No, I did very little touring. One of the reasons I didn't do it was because I didn't have any records that were...jazz records just weren't selling except in...they would sell in Washington and Baltimore and New York. Those Prestige and those kinds of records, in those days, didn't seem to help very much in terms of national tours. As a matter of fact, I had kind of a joke in those days. Trying to put a trio together, I would get out to Chicago and I couldn't get any further west than that. I mean I never went past Chicago. I never got to Kansas City or any where beyond Chicago. That was frustrating because I wanted to go. We had kind of a circle. One of the ways I got out of town was because I would go into a club in New York and
stay so long that it bugged the Joe Glazers and the other...agents, because they couldn't get their people in there. I mean, I'm spending a year in a great club. I mean, they've got trios and quartets and things, they want to get those folks in there for the same kind of exposure. So Joe Glazer I think just got the idea...he put about four or five of his people on me and said, "Look, get this guy some jobs out of town...at some money that he'll take them for." So they booked me...we worked at the London House...in Cleveland at a couple of clubs. Then we worked in Detroit. So we worked several places and it did get me out New York for weeks at a time (laughter).

BROWER: But it wasn't a real consistent kind of thing...

TAYLOR: No. I mean I didn't do...I never got to the west coast to play and I never got to a lot of places that I wanted to play.

BROWER: The one other musician that I'm interested in that I you had some connection with that we haven't talked about that I'm aware of is Slim Gaylord. Would you talk about your connections
with him?

TAYLOR: Well, I first met Slim working at Birdland. I was house pianist and they brought him in with his own group. I was playing with the all star group. Ultimately he hung around, stayed around...they loved what he did...

BROWER: So he was playing opposite you?

TAYLOR: At first. Then he was so well received at Birdland that they kept him on. He broke up his group and stayed in New York. So I would work with him for weeks at a time at Birdland. He'd work Birdland then he'd go and do other things probably with a pick-up group or something then come back to Birdland. He was a big favorite. All the jazz people and everybody loved him. He was really a genuinely funny guy plus he could swing the blues. When he stopped fooling around and played the blues...I mean he really played the guitar in that style. We did a couple of records together. He's funny. I remember going on a record date
with him one time and he had this music case. One of Norman Grantz's records... And he came in and took out his...opened the case up, took out his lunch--took some fruit and a sandwich and some coffee. So I said, "You got some music or something?" He said, "Oh yeah." So he went back in there and pulled out a piece of paper with some changes written on it and that was the first tune we were going to play. We played that and he made up some lyrics on the spot. Then he said, "I've got to make a phone call." We stopped and were listening to some playbacks or whatever. He goes into the control room and makes a phone call. A little while, two or three singers show up. He said, "This is the choir." Then he gives them some words that...some non-sense words that he made up all the time. They sang in unison and did some kind of harmony to back him up on something. It was just like a trip working with this guy because you never knew what he was going to do. I remember we were at the Downbeat on time working together. He was a very muscular guy. A big chest.
He's the only guy I knew that could do finger stands. He could push himself up...Slim must have been—I guess he must be about six feet three or something six-four or something...a big guy—and could push himself up just using his index fingers on both hands.

BROWER: Push-ups, you mean?

TAYLOR: Literally put his feet higher—like six or eight inches up on the little platform that we had for the bandstand—put his feet up on that and get down on the floor so that he's resting on his chest, take his fingers and push himself up! (Laughter) I said, "Oh yeah, okay, you got it!" (Laughter) He exercised and did a lot of weight lifting I guess but he was very very well built. At any rate, he always had some stuff going. I remember one time Jane Russell came in. I don't know if he had known her before or just knew her from the movies or what. He began to sing...make up these lyrics about Jane Russell and how gorgeous she was, what a glamorous lady and great her movies were and so
and so and so... Then he got off the stand and went over and talked with her for a long time (laughter). I mean he was always into that kind of stuff. It was always fascinating to work with him because you never knew what he was going to do.

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: Yeah.

BROWER: Ah, switching...we were talking about Henry Graham and you mentioned some of the things that he showed you in terms of Debussy and Ellington. Talking about influences outside of the jazz tradition, what particular composers or periods in classical music have you found to be the most interesting to you? The most useful to you...?

TAYLOR: Well, basically the Impressionistic composers, Debussy and Ravel crop up time and time again in my ballad work especially and then in some of the other harmonic concepts that I use. Johann Sebastian Bach turns up quite a lot in the
contrapuntal things that I like to do. So I would say that those composers—perhaps more than any others—although there's some Mozart—some things that have kind of rubbed off from Mozart and other...and Chopin. I still and finding...I hear things that I do and I know that the source for that particular thing was Chopin. For instance I was warming up. One of the things that I've learned from Chopin is a kind of a stretch mechanism that I use to warm up. It's from one of his etudes. It's a paraphrase from one of his etudes that I've found very useful in a quick warmup. When I haven't played for a while, it kind of helps me get started. So, there are many composers whose work I admire but... For instance I admire Bartok and Schonberg but I've never incorporated any of the things that I have learned from their music into my work—consciously, anyway.

BROWER: Uh huh, why is that?

TAYLOR: It just didn't seem to fit the context that I was working in.
BROWER: So it would seem that, in the case of Bach, it's a question of a strictly a technical usage as opposed the a...

TAYLOR: Yeah. I used the device but I don't...I try very hard not to make it sound "Bachian." Nothing bores me more...

BROWER: (Inaudible) Debussy you can feel more the spirit of the music in your music...

TAYLOR: Right. That's right. It's two different approaches. You're right, yeah.

BROWER: You've worked kind of in two areas as a composers. I don't know (inaudible) tune you've written...three hundred or so or more I guess song form type pieces...

TAYLOR: Uh huh.

BROWER: ...and then a number of symphonic type pieces, I don't know what the exact count on those are but (inaudible). When did you begin to get interested in extended composition as an aspect of your work?

TAYLOR: I was interested in it very early but I resisted that
because the only...I was turned off by the attempts of people that I really respected very much as musicians. It just seemed that they were being apologetic for the fact that they were jazz musicians. I know this isn’t true, but that’s the way it came off. For instance John Lewis I think is one of the great composers in jazz and has written some really significant pieces of music which have expanded the vocabulary and the repertory greatly. But in his music I heard the uses of polyphonic techniques and other European classical devices that were almost identical—the manner in which he used it was almost identical to the way the composers that I was familiar with, Haydn or Mozart or Bach would use that device. I felt that though that was valid and the music certainly was creative, that wasn’t the way I wanted to go. I didn’t hear things like that. I wanted to really maintain the jazz spirit and I used as a point of reference people like Scott Joplin who wrote in the longer forms
but the content didn't change the...I mean the form didn't change the content. Because he was writing in a form used by Mozart and people like that, it was still a ragtime piece. He used the vocabulary that was important for him to say what he had to say. Duke Ellington, when he used the longer forms, it was still Ellington—recognizable Ellington. James P. Johnson, when he wrote some of his more extended works, you could hear the old James P. stride or whatever aspect of his musicality he chose to present. So that was my point of reference as to many friends of mine like Calvin Jackson and others who were tremendously well-schooled classically...in terms of the European classical tradition. I heard those devices being used as though Bach was being jazzed up or as though Bartok or Schonberg...one was adding a beat to their music. Once again, that's a valid approach. I have no problem with it but it wasn't what I wanted to do.

BROWER: So what was your idea...?

TAYLOR: My idea was the basic jazz approach. When I write for
symphony orchestra, it's just a super big band that has strings
and double reeds and other things. It's not, "Hey this European
instrument that must have this kind of association between the
violins and the flutes and this kind of hard usage and so forth."
I don't have any problem with the tradition but it has to serve
my purposes.

BROWER: Let's talk about some of the specific pieces that...ones
I know about and reflect on those (inaudible). One called "For
Rachel" Let's start with this one. I guess the piece called
"Impromptu" which I guess started out as a piano piece. I guess
this was the piece (inaudible) Arranger's Workshop. I think
that's right.

TAYLOR: Un huh.

BROWER: We start out as a piano piece and then grew into...made
into a symphonic piece. Give me the history on that.

TAYLOR: I wrote it with the intention of scoring it for a big
jazz band. So I wrote it in two parts—the first is a fast Latin
kind of feeling and the second is a kind of slow bluesy feeling.
It was written as a piano solo. When I originally conceived it,
I could hear the piano doing all of these things with the big
band accompaniment—a super, show-kind of jazz piece. When I had
an opportunity to do something for symphony orchestra then this
was my first choice because it was natural piece for that
context. It was the first piece of music that I actually played
with a symphony orchestra. What I did was to write out a sketch
score and Manny Albom orchestrated for me. That collaboration
was so good—or so satisfactory from my point of view—that when
I was asked to compose... When I was commissioned to write a
piece for the Utah Symphony, which would feature me as guest
artist, then once again I did the same thing. I wrote a sketch
score saying, this the structure of the piece, this is what I
want...I want all of these things in the piece... I sketched out
all the things I wanted and he filled in the holes.
BROWER: That's the "Suite for Jazz Piano and Orchestra"...

TAYLOR: Right. How did that initially come about? Did someone just call you and said that we'd like you to do something? (Inaudible) some association or...?

TAYLOR: Yeah... I was on the National Council on the Arts and one of the people that I sat next to and had great respect for was Maurice Brofinel who was one of the most important musicians in the state of Utah. He convinced them that they should do many artistic things that they would not have done had he not put the weight on them. He was a musician from a very conservative state...very symphonically oriented. Maurice had been the musical director of "The Seven Lively Arts" but I never knew him then because I didn't play with the orchestra. I had no contact with the orchestra...

BROWER: (Inaudible) Cozy Cole?

TAYLOR: ...Yeah, with Cozy, so I never met him. He didn't remember me because we never came into particular contact. But
we talked a lot about Stravinsky and about other people and we got to know one another on a social basis. We went on a retreat out in Minnesota—the whole Council. We were there for about two or three days. On the third day they had a farewell party. I was asked if I would play—by Nancy Hanks. I said, "Well, Nancy I haven't practiced. I haven't played in two days. I've been sitting around the table talking about government policy on the arts and how we're going to deal with it all that and grants and stuff like that." I said, "You know, I'm just in another frame of mind. I'm in no shape to play." She said, "Oh, you can play. Please play."

BROWER: (Inaudible) in the jazz tradition...

TAYLOR: Yeah, right, fake it, you know (laughter). So, I said okay. She's a very convincing lady and she convinced me. I went to the piano and I played... She...a flowering introduction and the whole thing and I sat and played. I played a couple of original pieces because...I said I'm certainly not going to play
anything anybody can recognize in case I screw it up (laughter) you know. So I played a couple of original pieces and then as I played...I played some Ellington—once I got to playing it worked out okay. When I finished Brofinel came over to me and said, "Billy, I had no idea that you played like that. You know we’ve known each other for about two or three years at that point..."

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: Well...he was right, there were many people there who had other...who, though they were considered artists in their field, that wasn’t their strength—their main strength, you know. And I could have very easily been one of those people. So he said, "You know that’s really delightful. Could you write anything like that for symphony orchestra?" I said, "Of course...sure" as though I did it all the time. We talked some light talk and went on to enjoy the rest of the evening. A couple of days later—I’m back home in New York, he’s back home
in Salt Lake City—I get a call from him. He said, "Look, I was serious. I want you to write something and come out here and play it with my orchestra because that was really delightful music."

So I said, "Well...okay." I figured, what the heck, I've got four or five months or something like that. I should be able to come with something in that time. But I hadn't written anything in years, you know. So once again I called on Manny. I said, "Look, I'm never going to be able to meet this deadline. I know I'll write the piece, I just need you to help me. I can't orchestrate it fast enough." So he said, "Okay." I wrote the piece and indicated all of...and it's a jazz piece. It has many places for improvisation. As a matter of fact one of the jokes that I tell when I introduce the piece is that I sent the score out to Maurice Brofinkel and there was nothing on the piano score, you know, there was no piano score. So he said, "What are you doing? What are you playing?" So I said, "Well, I'm going to improvise." He said, "Yeah, I know, but all I see is a melody"
here..." I said, "That's what I'm going to improvise on."

(Laughter) He said, "Yeah, but how will I get my cues and everything?" I said, "We'll work something out." What he was really talking about is there were long spaces in that piece where I play—for instance there is one spot in the second movement that is two bars. This is the way you write in jazz...it's shorthand, you don't have to worry about it. The two bars is played...first the trio plays it then the percussion section enters and the trio makes that two bars phrase about an eighth bar phrase. So already you've changed it. You're looking at two bars and these guys are playing eighth bars (laughter) you know. You play it four times, okay. Then there's a cue for the percussion section to come in. After the percussion section enters, then there's a staggered entrance with woodwinds and strings and so forth. It's very complicated. You really do need to have it explained to you (laughter). I have a tape on it we've recorded for broadcast. We've broadcasted it on several
occasions with different orchestras but we have not done it on commercial records. I recorded the piece with the trio version, which is totally different from the orchestral version. I can give you a tape if you’d like to hear it.

BROWER: Yeah, that might be an interesting thing. The piece called "I Think of You" for voices and trio that was done at NYU in 1978. How did that one...

TAYLOR: Now that was another commission. It was commissioned by a group called "Jazz Voices, Inc." They invited several composers to write music especially for them. It was an eight voice group. I wrote this piece which has, ah...like a nice little melody in fourths. As an exposition of some of those ideas, I wrote out some improvisations or some lines on the blues. So they scat...the whole group scats in unison, this line that I wrote...then they come back to the words and music of "I Think of You". It's very nice. I don't have a tape on it but I
have...as a matter of fact I've got to find that tape...someone gave me a tape at one point. I have to see if I can find it again.

BROWER: The (inaudible) that was (inaudible)... How did that one come about?

TAYLOR: I was commissioned by the Atlanta Symphony. It's really significant that one of the most conservative aspects of a southern town...or a conservative organization in a southern town would commission a work like this for one of it's not so favorite sons a few years ago. Dr. King (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.), though he lived in Atlanta, was castigated by a lot of conservative element of the town because he was viewed as a trouble maker and so forth. For many years he was not looked on with favor. I think it's an indication of the complete—one hundred eight degree—turn that much of the south has made as a result of the efforts of the sixties (1960's). And the fact that once they were convinced that this wasn't in their own best
interest, as it was in the interest of the Black colleagues, they just said, "Look, this is really something that we shouldn't be doing." And they honestly set about to change it, which I think is commendable because in the north I think we still get people who have duality of thought in that regard and they give you a lot of lip service. Yet, when the chips are down, they don't want you in their neighborhood and they don't want you to marry their daughter and all the old cliches crop up, you know (laughter).

BROWER: Has this piece been documented...recorded in any form.

TAYLOR: Yeah. Once again...there was a tape made of one of the early performances. I was disappointed in the tape. The first night...the premiere performance was...I wish I had a tape of that. It was one of the most electrifying performances I have ever been a part of in my life. Even with the technology that we have today, you're going to have to have technicians that can handle it and the people doing the taping couldn't handle a one
hundred voice choir, a full symphony orchestra and jazz percussion. They just couldn't make any kind of sense out of it at all in terms of... I wish I had brought my own people down to record it because if we had gotten a recording of that first night... it was just electrifying. I have a recording of the second night. We were trying to compensate for what we knew was one of the problems of sound. So as a result, the performance is down. It's not the exhilarating performance that we did on the first night.

BROWER: What was the structure of that piece?

TAYLOR: I took two themes that—words and music—that were inspired by Dr. King. The first first movement is called "It's a Matter of Pride"...
TAYLOR: ..."His Name Was Martin" is a principal underlying theme. It kind of goes off into something that I was...Dr. King was a jazz fan...so there's a musical joke in the second...two musical jokes, as a matter of fact. One is a reference to the Count Basie-type brass section. Everybody lays out and just the brass of the symphony orchestra plays. They play, like a Basie-type shout course. And that leads into a very gospel-like theme played by other members of the ensemble...my working title for which, was "The Right Reverend." That's not on the music but that is what I was thinking about--Dr. King being the Right Reverend for, ah...it's a play on words. The old people would introduce someone as "The Right Reverend Taylor" or "The Right Reverend...you know"...

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: ...You're right. That's exactly right. So...you come
out of "His Name Was Martin" and you go into the jazz feeling, into the gospel and then the whole thing reverses itself. opposite way, you know. It works out nicely. I'm delighted...that's my favorite part of the piece. That goes into what I call the "Heritage" section. I took the symphony orchestra percussion section and had them play in simulation of some African rhythms, indicating the heritage of Dr. King and Black people in general. And showed how...that goes into a drum solo, which is contemporary. The contemporary drum solo goes into a melody which is played in five-four time. All of this is just supposed, in my mind, to show the continuum...and how there's a direct line between the kinds of things that the Blacks did with the drums and so forth and how it goes directly into the some of the things we're doing now. The work concludes with a piece which is actually on that David Frost record that you have, called "If You Really Are Concerned, Then Show It." It had a
lyric. The only reason I put it on there—the Frost album—was because it’s just a melody that I...the line comes from Dr. King. It was something that he said once that I picked up. So the title and the opening line (Taylor sings melody). That’s my making...puting a musical line to that statement. So it was a perfect ending for the piece for me.

BROWER: Did you know King personally?

TAYLOR: Yes.

BROWER: Well?

TAYLOR: Not well, but we were...he would come to hear me. He was a fan of mine. He would come to hear me at the Hickory House as a matter of fact...he and Andy, the current mayor of Atlanta...Andy Young. It was really...on many occasions...I’m not a marcher, I’m not non-violent, so I couldn’t participate in some of the marches and things that they did. Having been born in the south and having grown up in Washington, it was just not...
possible for me to go into that at that stage of my life. I mean, I would have had to fight back. If someone did those kinds of things to me, I would have gotten hurt. I couldn’t just stand by and let them do it (laughter) you know. So I didn’t participate in that but because I was caught up in his spirit and the things that he wanted to do, I participated in many of his fund raising...Lena Horne and I and Mercer Ellington went down to Atlanta and did a benefit for him. I went to Birmingham, did a benefit. Several things that happened here in this area—one here in Washington, D.C.—I was at the March on Washington... So...I did what I could do. I played the piano, I raised money and tried to support the people that had more fortitude than I when it came to doing that.

BROWER: A number of the pieces that you wrote would fall in we could say the "song" category (inaudible) whether it’s the song form or not. Yesterday we talked about the point at which your church experience and background came into your music in
(inaudible) a piece like "I Wish I Knew How It Feels to be Free."

Related to that there are a number of pieces—I thought of that when I was listening to the Frost record and pieces of the last movement of the King work. But there are other pieces that you wrote that...were titled in such a way as to sort of deal with the some kind of consciousness or some kind of awareness of what was going on. ...From what you've just said, you were involved and concerned about the movement at the period of it's great crescendo. I guess those things that fall in place are certain thrusts in your composing perhaps of getting back in touch with a certain part of your musical heritage and your concern about civil rights or human rights or racial struggle. You want to comment on how those things came together at that point in your career? Which I guess would be from the early 1960's on.

TAYLOR: Actually before. It started in the 1950's. I really wanted to write things...I felt my strength was in music. As a composer, I wanted to make some kind of statement. I wrote a
tune called "Don't Go Down South." There's never been a lyric to it but when I wrote it, that too came from something was a paraphrase of something Dr. King said. ...Somebody was talking to him...the guy said, "I really would like to do what I can for the struggle and I want to come down south and really knock some heads together and get those people thinking right...straighten up." So he said, "Where are you from?" The guy said, "I'm from Connecticut." So he said, "You have sufficient problems in Stanford, Connecticut to handle. You don't need to come to south. We welcome you and would take all the help we can get in terms of bodies and money or whatever, but you have a formidable job right here that you need to address. Don't come down south, do what you got to do right here and maybe we can be of mutual assistance." I said, "Yeah, don't go down south unless you've cleaned it up at home." Several of the other pieces that I wrote--I wrote some pieces that don't have titles. For instance,
I was doing a series of commercials for Cold Power. The Fifth Dimension were the people who were singing...that I was writing for. I wrote about four or five things for them and it really changed their style. They were singing one way before I wrote this commercial for them—the had a little difficulty with the commercial, but they were all good musicians, they were hard workers...Rene Denight who was their musical director really drummed it into them and they liked it. They said, "That’s hip!"
The next things that they did were reflective of that more church oriented, rhythmic kind of thing that I had done in this commercial. Now, part of that was generated by the fact that my timing was right. I had heard that both Billy and Marion McKoo were kind of leaning in that direction anyway. So when I began to think of what I was going to write in this commercial, I said I know they could handle it because I know Billy likes to do it. He’s got that kind of harsh, rough quality to his voice when he wants to use it— that one hears in Baptist or in the gospel.
choir. So I wrote some things with that in mind and they did the
hell out of it. So a lot of the things that I have written—a
thing I did for Campbell Soup at one point. The working title of
that was "We're Really Going to Change Your Mind." But it's very
much in that same kind of feel.

BROWER: Is there somewhere a listing of all of your pieces?

TAYLOR: ...There are several lists, but I'm not sure there's any
definitive list. I've never bothered to really put it all
together. I've got lists and lists and everytime I look at one I
say such and such is left off or... Some of the things that I've
written don't have any titles. They are just "a piece of
music"...snatches of piano work or something else. Yeah, there
are lists that are fairly complete.

BROWER: That might be a useful thing to get a hold of or to
arrive at as a kind of addendum to this. ...What were the
problems... Your approach to working with a symphony was as you
said to make and expanded big band...more colors, more
instruments, more possibilities, but in that tradition. How do you get those musicians to understand a concept like "swing." Or to get rhythmic kind of feeling or buoyancy that's in the jazz feel?

TAYLOR: The problem is not in the musicians. It's usually the conductor. The conductor, in too many cases, will pick the wrong tempo--it'll be too slow or too fast to get the kind of feeling you want. I usually take my own rhythm section, which is the trio (Billy Taylor Trio). The premiere of the "Suite for Jazz Piano", I went alone. I did not take the trio. My idea was to use the percussion section as the jazz percussion section. To use the bass section as the...in the way I would use the solo bass. It didn't work. The feeling of time--for them to compensate and play with one another, it became just too sluggish. I couldn't make it swing. Even on that occasion, I brought one of the bass players out of the section, put him close
to the piano, had one of the percussionist to bring a drum set, put him close to the piano. So in a sense, I built my own trio within that context to tried to make it happen. It didn't happen to the extent that I wanted it to because I wanted they were not familiar enough to with my work to be as loose as they would have been as a trio had they worked with me two or three nights or something like that. They were fine musicians and they felt the music, but there wasn't time enough for us to get it together. So from then on, I took my own trio. At least the rhythm is set. We don't have to worry about that. The only problem is getting the flow from the ensemble to happen the way that I want. As I said, there are so many musicians and so many orchestras around the country that have had jazz experience. They either have played in jazz bands. They did it in school or they're still doing it or what ever, but that's not a problem. The problem really is getting the older members of the group that are so imbued with the European spirit—the principal conductor or...a
lot of concert masters don't want to play the jazz concerts because that's beneath them. They don't want to do that, so they let the assistant concert master take over for that occasion. I don't care. You probably get a better performance. I don't care who plays it as long as they treat it with the same seriousness that they treat their own music. Most of the players in the orchestras find it delightful because of the challenge. It's stuff that they don't get to play. They're not just playing whole notes, they're playing music and it's good music. The style is different. We've been invited back time and time again by specific orchestras. I'm delighted about that. We've been to Denver several times. We've played with the National Symphony a couple of times here. We've played with the Youth Symphony. If we play with them once, the chances are that we'll come back at some other point and play with them which is very nice.
BROWER: This afternoon we're talking with Dr. Billy Taylor as part of the Howard University Jazz Oral History Project. Dr. Taylor has a career that spans over forty years and is one of the most important musicians and composers in the course of modern jazz. That's why it's kind of ironic that we would--well in a decade of music--have an album titled "Where Have You Been Billy Taylor?"

TAYLOR: (Laughter)

BROWER: You want to kind of elaborate on the meaning of this title?

TAYLOR: Well, back in the sixties I had several turn table hits. I was recording for Capital Records. I had records that--Oliver Nelson had written some big band charts for me and I was working...
at radio station WNEW and it was a very imitated station in those days. All the guys on the stations said, "Hey, this is dynamite. We love it." Everytime they would have an affair at Madison Square Garden or something, I’d put together a big band and play. The big band sound was the sound of that kind of middle of the road station. So the activity...it was the most exposure I’d ever gotten on radio. I just knew my records were going to sell like hot cakes. Here I’m on a 50,000 watt clear channel station and all the other stations are playing my records and everything.

the records. People would write to me and say, "Where can I get the record?" I’d say, "Go to the record store." They’d say, "I did and they don’t have it." So I got frustrated. I was living in New York and they were on the west coast. I took a trip out there and said, "Hey, what are you guys doing?" Nothing! They had discovered the Beatles. So everybody was hurting. Not just me...Nat Cole, George Shearing, Peggy Lee, Stan Kenton. A lot of
good folks on the label and we were all hurting because they were pressing nothing but Beatles records. That was kind of the last and final straw for me. I had been having problems with the record business. It bothered me that Jazz records...a good Jazz record would sell 6000 copies, 7000 copies. This is ludicrous! More than that...more people than that in New York want to buy the records, you know. Yet, they always claim, "No, we can't sell anymore. People are just not buying it. Can't get it on the juke box. We can't do anything." I just felt the record business was not capable of handling jazz. With the exception of a few labels like Blue Note and Fantasy and some of the west coast labels...World Pacific Jazz--they didn't do a very good job.

BROWER: In a sense what you're saying is that you made a career decision...well, I've read this--you made kind of a strategic decision about how to direct your career. Not to focus it on the record industry per se.
TAYLOR: Right. I was afraid to. I was thinking that, "Listen, if these guys are messing up this badly, they can ruin my career as they have ruined many other people." I think of someone like Kenny Dorham, who should have been recorded much more and much more effectively than he was because he was very creative. He wrote pieces of music—"Blue Bossa" is just one many tunes that guys like to play of his. But he never got the kind of attention that Lee Morgan got. Lee Morgan was great, but why only Lee Morgan. Why not Kenny also. Why not other guys. So I felt that either I develop my...take all my time and fight that, or I go in another direction so I went in another direction.

BROWER: In other words it was something structural about the record industry that would only let "X" number of musicians, no matter how big the talent pool was, only certain people could get through the eye of that needle at a given time.

TAYLOR: Right, right. For ever reason. Many people say it was a conspiracy...that the White power structure didn’t want to let
that many Black guys through. I don’t believe that. I think it was just stupidity. They didn’t know what they had. They didn’t know how to work with it.

BROWER: What about the possibility of...I think the question of tastes--I guess taste and stupidity might be related, but what also the possibility that maybe certain structural problems in the business of marketing records... I know right now working in the record business, when there are six or seven different labels and they put out eight or ten at a time, you’ve got a marketing problem. How do you expose that amount of music? How does the public hear that amount of music? How is that amount of music absorbed? How long does it have to be in the market before you can say that people will have a reasonable opportunity to be exposed to it? So, could there also be just some structural problems in marketing that limit the number of success stories that you can hear?
TAYLOR: Absolutely. Number one, many companies release...I remember when I was a disc jockey I would get twelve records, fifteen records from the same company. Well, that ludicrous, why would you do that? ...You didn't record all fifteen at once.

what ever it is getting that together. Give him the opportunity to have people really focus on something that he spent a lot of time and a lot of creativity and a lot of effort on. I think there is something absolutely wrong with that approach.

BROWER: I'd like to maybe reminisce about some things in your recording career. I think your first recording was done with Atlantic Records...

TAYLOR: Actually, my very first record was for Savoy Records.

BROWER: As a leader.

TAYLOR: As a leader. This was for Savoy Records. I was working on 52nd Street and Herman Labinsky came in and heard me play. He said, "Boy, you play very well. Would you like to make a
record?" I said, "Sure." I had already recorded some as a sideman, but I had never recorded with my own group. So I got Al Hall, who was a marvelous bass player, Jimmy Crawford, who I was working with—used to drum with Jimmy Lunceford—two very solid rhythm guys. And I went into the studio. Now I had something very definite in mind that I wanted to do, but when in the studio—between the time that Labinsky heard me play, he heard Erroll Garner, Erroll Garner had one of those marvelous styles. His style was fully developed in those days and he was just tipping. It was beautiful. So I go into the studio getting ready to do what I do and the guy says, "Yeah that's nice, but could you make it sound more like Erroll Garner" (laughter). I mean, you know, your first record date...that really threw me a curve...There were things about the date that weren't as steady as I would have liked to have been as the leader of my first, ah...

BROWER: What kind of material did you play on that date?
TAYLOR: Pop tunes. I did "Alexander’s Ragtime Band", "Night and Day" and a tune that had written, which was kind of a pre-bop tune--was called "The Mad Monk". It was dedicated to Thelonious. And a couple of other things like that. It was just a four record date.

BROWER: Do you remember that "Mad Monk" tune? Do you know that?

TAYLOR: Oh, sure.

BROWER: Well when we get to the piano, I want to hear a little bit of that.

TAYLOR: Okay...

BROWER: But can you recall this Atlantic date?

TAYLOR: Oh, very well.

BROWER: Because...one of the things about this was the role that I guess John Collins played.

TAYLOR: Yeah.

BROWER: Because the guitarist...I've heard you comment about that, but if you go back to this date. If this is one of
the... first really satisfactory encounters you had in recording.

Talk about this...

TAYLOR: Well one of the frustrations that I had... there were several years that past in between, ah...

BROWER: When was the Labinsky date?

TAYLOR: That was in 1944.

BROWER: So... you've been in New York like two or three years then?

TAYLOR: No, I'd just gotten to New York...

BROWER: 1943 you came to New York...

TAYLOR: Yeah, I had been there for a year.

BROWER: So, you're twenty six, twenty seven (years of age)...?

TAYLOR: Yeah... No, I wasn't that old. I would have to go back and figure it out. The idea of making my own date... the Savoy date... I was trying to get a quartet together. One of the groups I had worked with, I replaced Erroll Garner.
BROWER: Slam Stewart...

TAYLOR: In Slam Stewart's group. It was a trio when Erroll was there. John Collins was just getting out of the army and Slam loved his work so he came with the group and made it a quartet at the time when I joined them.

BROWER: So what was the personnel when you went with Slam?

TAYLOR: John Collins was on guitar. Harold "Doc" West was the drummer and Slam of course on bass. That was my opportunity to focus on the tremendous harmonic ideas that John had...how advanced he was for those days. I knew he'd played with Art Tatum, so immediately I was..."Hey man what did Tatum do!" He had of these things that he did, which were just really so beautiful. Until today, he has never recorded or been recorded to the extent that he should be.

BROWER: People talk about guitar players in that era. You really don't hear them, in a sense, on the record. Is it more in the dynamic of how they help realize the group sound, that they
are important? Where does that fit...?

TAYLOR: The best thing that I can say is that John was a master of the style that he later played with Nat Cole. Irving Ashby at that time was the guitarist with Nat Cole. Before then...Oscar Moore. The harmonic kinds of things that they were doing were based on the same concepts that John used. Each of those musicians had his own personal approach to that. But technically it was the same thing—six note chords using all six strings and really getting a full sound with the guitar...as opposed to doubling notes and playing things, which sounded more like a banjo in terms of the harmonic structure than it sounded like a guitar.

BROWER: It cut through more...

TAYLOR: Absolutely...yeah...

BROWER: You hear more. It doesn't contribute as much to the group in a sense.

TAYLOR: Actually it contributed a lot. The only reason that
John and Irving and some of those guys didn't do more was because the guitar, for a short time, fell into disfavor. So when they began to cut groups, they cut the guitar out of the rhythm section...they began to cut the large groups down and one of the first musical instruments they cut out was the guitar. They said we've got somebody playing rhythm...piano, you know. So, you didn't hear guitar. You didn't have the opportunity. It was rare for me...that was the only time, except for a couple of other groups that worked in around New York, that I had to work with guitarists. I worked with Mundale Lowe, I worked with some other guys but that was my choice it wasn't because the instrument was popular.

BROWER: Just a little note on Erroll Garner. When you got with Slam Stewart what did he expect of you? Was he looking for another Erroll Garner or he just wanted what Billy Taylor had to offer?
TAYLOR: No. I knew my work. I had played opposite him when he was with the Art Tatum Trio. I had played with Ben Webster so he knew what I played, which is one of the reasons he hired me. He liked what I did. He expected me to do what I did. I had to learn a couple of tunes that Erroll Garner had written...and that Slam had written. I was playing some of the same repertory but he didn't expect me to...do it as Erroll did.

BROWER: Anything about this date that you could...?

TAYLOR: Yeah...there were some very interesting pieces on it. This actually is two records. One was a ten inch record with John and other people. "Good Groove", "Willow Weep for Me" I guess, "Thy Swell"..."Somebody Loves Me"...those were things we were playing a lot. "Good Groove" was the tune I used as my theme song. It had a kind of a little question and answer--where I played something and John played something. That was pretty close to what we were doing as a trio...more so than some of the other material on the album...as the quartet, rather.
BROWER: So it's like reflective of the working sound was.

TAYLOR: Yeah, yeah.

BROWER: Going back to the period when you came to New York. Early in your development you were interested in Art Tatum's work.

TAYLOR: Oh, very much.

BROWER: I don't want to go into all of that, but did you have a chance to meet Tatum in New York...?

TAYLOR: Yeah, on my very first job. Well when I was living in Washington, D.C. my two biggest influences...my first influences were two uncles. My uncle Bob...my father's third brother. My father was the oldest so he had Julian...Clinton, who was an artist. Clinton lived with us for a while and he played and he played a kind of a stride piano. I liked what he did...

BROWER: This is Clinton...

TAYLOR: This Clinton. But I didn't get to hear him and I didn't
get to focus on what he did. My uncle Bob, who was the next
brother...he was into Art Tatum, he was into Fats Waller. He was
into the musicians of the day. He was very hip...like the
hippest brother (laughter). I really related to him. Not only
as an uncle but as someone who knew a whole lot of stuff that I
wanted to learn. I wanted to play like he played. He played
stride piano. So I used to bug him all the time. So he said,
"Why don't you listen to this record." He gave me my first Fats
Waller record. I began to fool around with that...began to get
into stride piano a little bit then I went back and bugged him
some more. So he gave me my first Art Tatum record. That took
me off his back forever! He gave me a record called "The Shout."
That is a mean record! I mean, today that is a marvel of the
piano style of the time that Art was playing. It's just the
phenomenal technical things he doing...in the stride piano style.
So those two people, first Fats Waller then Art Tatum just turned
me on. I wanted to play piano like that. I wanted to use those devices.

BROWER: You got to New York and I guess you were working at the Three Deuces with Ben Webster and Tatum was opposite.

TAYLOR: Right.

BROWER: But I understand that Tatum was viewed...almost in a "God-like" fashion...

TAYLOR: Absolutely.

BROWER: ...as a piano player and that he would hold court, so to speak after hours and there would be lots of piano players there. Did you go to some of those sessions?

TAYLOR: Oh yeah.

BROWER: Can you give us a feeling of what they were like and who might be there? What kind of interaction...was it a matter of observing him or did you have a mentor interaction with him? Where he would say, "Billy do this or..." or you could look over his shoulder. What was the nature of your relationship?
enough these stride patterns existed side by side with boogie woogie patterns (TAYLOR demonstrates). Some of the same figures worked with (TAYLOR demonstrates). Just a different kind of bass pattern. You would have (TAYLOR demonstrates). You change the feeling when you change the bass pattern. Many musicians like Pete Johnson were so good at both things that they would switch from a walking bass (TAYLOR demonstrates) to (TAYLOR demonstrates). It really was exciting to hear how much variety one pianist could get within a twelve bar blues pattern. It was very exciting to me to hear all of these things and to see that, "Hey, these are some possibilities that are existing for me as a young pianist to learn how to (TAYLOR demonstrates). I did things like that because I heard Fats Waller play but I heard a lot of things in stride that I couldn’t put a handle on. There was a very fine ragtime pianist who lived here in Washington, D.C. whose name was Louis Brown. I went over to Louis’ house on many occasions and studied with him and just asked him, "Show me
TAYLOR: Well...my personal relationship was both. I mean I could go to his house or I could go—in those days when he was here in New York—I would up to Tom Tillman's place...a friend of his named Tom Tillman had a bar called the Hollywood Cafe on Seventh Avenue...about 133rd Street. The guy had put a piano in there—an old upright because he was a friend of Tatum's and Tatum would come in and play sometime. Well, because Tatum would go there, all the other piano players would go there. What would happen was that, say on a Monday night, the place, around ten o'clock would begin to fill up with piano players. Everybody would come in and they would play at each other. One guy would sit down. Another guy would say, "Hey, that's nice. Let me try a little of that." It would be like a piano player jam session until about three o'clock or so then Tatum would come in. Everybody would say, "Right" and sit down (laughter).

BROWER: Assume their rightful position (laughter).

TAYLOR: That's right. The piano would suddenly get silent, you
know, until he chose to play. He'd stand around the bar and tell
stories and swap lies with guys and everything. Finally, when he
felt like it, he'd go in the back and he'd play something.
Everybody's looking over his shoulder trying to figure what he's
doing. On some occasions, someone would ask him specifically...
I remember on one occasion—there were a whole bunch of us
there—someone asked him, "Tatum, on 'Battery Bounce' you do a
thing on the blues. What is that?" I can't hear that." He'd
say, "Ah, it's nothing. It's just this." He did it slowly and I
guess, of the ten or fifteen pianist who were there, the only
pianist who heard it and could execute it was Clyde Hart. Clyde,
who is a very underrated pianist would say, "Hey, I
never...that's what that is. I wondered what that was!" He sat
down and he played it. I'd say, "What'd you do?" Then we would
all begin to try to figure what that was and try to do it. But
even knowing what the notes were it was hard to get the
articulation. He would on occasion...with people that he related to... I guess all of the ten or fifteen guys there were people were people that he knew very well. This was not just a bunch of piano players off the street. It was Marlow Morris, it was Clyde Hart, it was a guy named "Gippy" who was a stride pianist, Abbie Abbi... There were a couple of older pianists that were drinking buddies of his...

BROWER: What I want you to do...you said there were fifteen, I want you to name all fifteen of them (laughter)...

TAYLOR: I don't know if I can. It was a long time ago...and there were many nights that this kind of thing happened...

BROWER: Did it happen regularly on Mondays or could it be any night of the week or...?

TAYLOR: It could be any night of the week but it happened most often on Monday because that was the night that most of the piano players were off from their jobs. So they would kind of congregate there and if he were in town, chances are that he was
off too because Monday was the off night. He would just come up because everybody kind of expected him to come up. Usually something special would happen. For instance I remember one night...there was one guy who was kind of an instigator...I can't remember his name now...a very tall guy...kind of an amateur player. He would never play when any of the other professionals were around, but he liked the instrument and was an aficionado. He asked Tom Tillman, "Do you think Art's going to come in tonight?" He said, "Yeah, I talked to him early this afternoon. He says he's going to drop by for a minute." He said, "Oh, yeah...hmmm." So he went over to New Jersey...all the way over to New Brunswick or where ever it was and got a pianist who was one of the great stride players...kind of put him in the back. The guys name was Donald Lambert. Donald was famous for taking European classical pieces like "Enetra's Dance" and pieces like that and playing them in a stride style. But he had a really phenomenal left hand. It sounded like two people playing...or
one guy playing the left hand with both hands. It was very clean...

BROWER: Thunderous.

TAYLOR: Thunderous...absolutely. So he went over and got Donald. It was a restaurant and bar. They were back in one of the booths eating...eating some ribs and everything. And Tatum came in...he was in the front and he was talking. This guy had said, "Don't tell Tatum that Lambert's here." After a while Tatum came back. Donald was one of the old "Willie the Lion" type guys... He knew how well he played and what he did. All those guys felt that, "I do what I do and I don't care what you do. What I do, nobody can cut me doing that." You know. So Art sat down and played a couple of tunes. Donald kind of sashayed over to the piano and said, "That's nice. Let me try some of that." He sat down..."Liza" or one of the tunes that Art had played. And sure enough...he played and they got into a "stride
contest" that must had been reminiscent of some of the old ones.

He and Donald began to talk about old Will the Lion things..."Keep Off the Grass", "Carolina Shout"...some of the old cutting numbers that those guys...and each guy would play it in his own way...

BROWER: (Inaudible)

TAYLOR: Really...very difficult to play things..."Handful of Keys"...those kind of things. I mean they were going at. Everybody was kind of standing around saying, "Right!" It really was a lesson in how to play stride piano because they both were masters at it.

BROWER: I want to ask you to show us about stride in one second but, place this in time. Did this happen for a year...over the course of three or four years...?

TAYLOR: Oh, it happened over a period of years. This was a place that went on for at least for...I'd say eight or ten years that I know of...that I participated. It may have gone before
then, before I arrived in New York...

BROWER: So into the early 1950's it was still happening...

TAYLOR: Yes, it was still there.

BROWER: All the piano players you named basically were piano players out of the New York school or that would be associated with the big band-swing kind of feel with the exception of yourself and Clyde Hart, who I'd like to ask you about too, at a point because he's a very important figure. Did Bud Powell come up to this place...or Monk or any of those players?

TAYLOR: Not very often. Oddly enough, the first time I ever met Monk, he was in the company of James P. Johnson. He was playing very much along the lines of Tatum but by this time that I'm speaking of now, Monk had really isolated the elements of his style that he wanted to concentrate on. So he was kind of going in own direction. He and Bud were likely to be found on Monday night at Minton's because that's where bebop was happening.

BROWER: Did you also frequent Minton's and Monroe's?
TAYLOR: Oh yes. I moved to New York and moved to 116th Street because Minton's was on 118th Street and that was as close as I could get to it (laughter).

BROWER: Can you talk about what a Monday night might be at Minton's? Did you...sit down and take the keyboard there...?

TAYLOR: Oh yeah. I got my first job...I came to New York on a Friday night and dropped my bags and went right around to Minton's. I got there late afternoon. About nine o'clock I figured things were going to get started so I went over and sat at the bar. When the musicians came in I went in the back room and...I don't remember who was...for years I've been trying to remember who the piano player was. I can't recall who the piano player was that night. I'm indebted to him for the rest of my life so I should have forgotten his name. To make a long story short, what happened...I went up to him...and all the guys in those days were tremendously...they were so secure in their own
styles that they didn't feel challenged by anybody. I mean Tatum could come up...anybody, and the guy would say, "Yeah, you want to play? Fine...it's okay...you do what you do, I do what I do. I may not do it as well as you but what I do, I can really handle" you know. So I asked this fellow, I said, "My name is Taylor. I just came in from Washington. I'd like to sit in."

The guy said, "Yeah, sure...sometime this evening. A lot of guys are going to be playing tonight...so sometime we'll get around to you." Well the whole night went by. A couple of guys he knew better than me were invited up...good players...everybody knew them and wanted to play with them. They came up played. I'm sitting there saying, "Gee wiz, I wish he would ask me to play." I'd buy him another drink when intermission came around, you know...and say, "Hey, you know, I'd sure like to play." He said, "Oh yeah, we're going to get to you." The whole night went by. They're into the last set...I saying, "Gee, I guess I'm not going to get to play tonight"... you know. About the second tune in
the last set he says, "Hey kid, come one." I went up, sat down and we started to play. Well I was...

BROWER: What was the tune?

TAYLOR: I don't know. Probably "I Got Rhythm" or something. I knew a lot of tunes so that didn't bother me. They had sessions here in Washington, D.C. I'd been cut up and down and crosswise so I learned all the tunes I was supposed to know. I sat in and began to play. We were about four or five minutes into the tune and Ben Webster came in. I said, "Wow, right!." Ben began to play...tenor players kind of hooked up with him for a minute and everything. I played the rest of the set. After I got through, I went over and said, "Hey, it's really a thrill for me to play with you I've admired your work ever since you were with Ellington and so and so and so. He said, "Thank you very much." He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I just came into town." He said, "Oh really? Are you working anywhere?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, I like what you do. Why don't you come on down.
My piano player is leaving Sunday. Why don't you come on down.

Tomorrow's Saturday, so it's not a good night to have anybody sitting in on the street because it's wall to wall people." So he said, "I'm at the the "Three Deuces" so come on down on Sunday about the second set. I'd like for you to sit in. If you sound alright with the group, I'll hire you." I said, "Wow!" Saturday was the longest day of my life, man. Saturday never went by (laughter)...I mean, I couldn't wait. Sunday night I put on my blue suit and went on down to 52nd Street. Now, I'm so excited I don't notice who's playing. I just know that Ben Webster is there. I go in and--by the time I get there's nobody there, it's like an intermission. It's almost time for him to go on. He's standing outside with some other guys. So he says, "Do you want to play this set?" I said, "Yeah, I'd love to." He introduced me to the piano player...he said, "He's going to play the next set." The guy says, "Fine." So I go into the...
BROWER: Who were you replacing, do you remember?

TAYLOR: Ah...what's his name...Johnny Winnerie. Johnny was taking a job with Raymond Scott. He was going on CBS. It was one of his first studio jobs. Johnny was a formidable pianist...I mean a really great stride player...played all kinds of things...really a first-rate musician. I knew his reputation. He had already played with Artie Shaw and made some significant records and all that. So I said, "Oh yeah, I've got to shot my best shot." I go into the club and as I...the Deuces was a tiny little club--the basement of a Brownstone, so it wasn't too big. So, I'm walking down between the table and I feel somebody grab my coat. I turn around and it's a pianist from Washington, D.C., a woman named Norma Shepard. So Norma says, "Hey Billy, what are you doing in New York?" She had already moved to New York and was very successful...had her own television show...was doing some good things. I knew her from Washington as one of the better pianists here in D. C. So, I said, "Hey, it's great to
see you. I'm going up and audition, so I'll see you in a minute.

She said, "Before you go on let me introduce you to some of my friends. So and so, Mr. Jim Brown, so and so, Mr. Tatum, and so and so and so." I said, "Hi, how you doing, it's nice to meet you folks..." and I go up to..."Did she say Tatum? Wait a minute!" That was probably the worst audition I've...I don't know how I got the job. I asked Art afterwards, I said, "That night when I audition with Ben, how did that sound?" I'm kind of looking for a compliment from my mentor, you know. He said, "Well, you know, it was fast." (Laughter)

BROWER: That's almost like if you can't say anything good, you don't say anything at all.

TAYLOR: (Laughter) "He sure ran over all the keys."

BROWER: That's supposed to be, I guess characteristic of young musicians...playing a lot...

TAYLOR: Play everything you know in the first eight bars (laughter).
BROWER: I would like now, if it's possible—I'd like to ask you about maybe people like James P. Johnson and some of the people you've mentioned—Abbie Labble, some of the other people. Maybe if we can go to the piano, since we talked a lot about stride, we want to kind of focus in a sense on the transition from that music in swing into some of the more modern things you were involved in...if we could go to the piano now and hear a little bit of stride.

TAYLOR: Sure, okay.

End Side A - Tape #7
Disk #6 - Full
TAYLOR: Stride piano is a form of ragtime. When they say stride...when the term stride is used, we're referring to the bass pattern. Now the bass pattern (TAYLOR demonstrates at the piano) is a note...a chord...a note...a chord. So it's one-two-three-four...generally speaking. Now people like Scott Joplin (TAYLOR demonstrates)...they use that kind of accompaniment. Jelly Roll Morton, on the other hand, made his left hand sound like a trombone (TAYLOR demonstrates). So you got a feeling of a dixieland or a New Orleans type playing with his left hand. People like Jelly Roll Morton lead directly into the concepts which James P. Johnson...as a matter of fact, James P. Johnson's early version of "Carolina Shout" sounds very much like Morton on one of the old New Orleans players. But he developed his own approach (TAYLOR demonstrates) and in certain parts of the piece (TAYLOR demonstrates) where you would have what they used to call...
"back bass." So the manner in which the left hand accompanied the melodic passages gave a certain kind of feeling of three against four sometimes and gave a different kind of feeling of syncopation. Fats Waller and Abbie Abbi and some of the other pianist who were influenced—greatly influenced by James P. Johnson began to do more things, same kind of patterns but with tenths (TAYLOR demonstrates). So ten notes between that (TAYLOR demonstrates). So that kind of pattern...

BROWER: The interval is a tenth.

TAYLOR: The interval is a tenth. Yeah. Fats Waller would play (TAYLOR demonstrates). Those kinds of things, he played both the single note (TAYLOR demonstrates) and (TAYLOR demonstrates). So you would hear a kind of a counter melody in the left hand. It was a very effective way of playing, so if he played different kinds of things (TAYLOR demonstrates) he might do it that way or he might say (TAYLOR demonstrates). He had a lot of little
patterns that he liked to do, all very musical and all very pianistic. Stride piano evolved through three distinct periods where the early stride (TAYLOR demonstrates) that kind of thing, then the bass (TAYLOR demonstrates), and then into (TAYLOR demonstrates). So that you're playing tenths and you're doing other things with your left hand. Now, every time you change the rhythmic factor you kind of change a little bit what it sounds like up here (TAYLOR demonstrates). That sound one way (TAYLOR demonstrates)...that sounds a little different, you know. You use the pedal a little differently. You get into the kinds of variety that many of the pianists have. Musicians used old ragtime devices like the tremolo (TAYLOR demonstrates). Now Luck Roberts could do that and the whole piano would shake. He had such power the way he did that (laughter). The whole instrument just vibrated when he did that. Earl was a younger pianist who was influence by Lucky and many of the others. He, of course became famous for doing that on the "Saint Louis Blues." Oddly
some of those things that you're doing"...and he did. He was a very fine musician and he literally showed me the fingering of some of the stride things that I was interested in. He's the only one of the old musicians—older musicians, another generation—that I actually got that close to. I studied formally with him for a few lessons. If I'd known what I know now, I would have studied much more seriously and much longer with him because he was a repository of styles. He knew all of those styles and played them extremely well. But for me, I had to resolve a dilemma because by the time I got to New York, that style was on the way out—the stride style. They had gone through, not just stride with tenths...but Teddy Wilson, Clyde Hart and others were playing (TAYLOR demonstrates) playing tenths in four beats, you know. If you were playing the blues (TAYLOR demonstrates)...each beat was a different tenth...called a walking bass (TAYLOR demonstrates). Now, some people like Ken
Kersey and Eddie Hayward actually developed another approach to that, so they were (TAYLOR demonstrates). Once again you had the kind of pre-bop melody going—a long line—not quite bebop because the rhythm is not bebop yet, but a very rhythmic kind of bass line going, which was more rhythmic than (TAYLOR demonstrates) just playing one-two-three-four. My dilemma was how to put that together with some other things. I remember my first record date I played a piece which I wrote dedicated to Thelonious Monk was called "The Mad Monk." It did something that I had learned from Duke Ellington. I heard Duke Ellington play (TAYLOR demonstrates) which was his introduction to "In A Mellow Tone"...that (TAYLOR demonstrates) was played by Jimmy Blanton. I said, "Gee that's a great way to get out of the way of the bass player" (TAYLOR demonstrates)...those kinds of things. So I began to fool around with that as a means of accompaniment. When I worked with Ben Webster, he liked it. He said, "Hey, that's nice...that sounds good." He was a former pianist. He played
of opening it up for the bass players to come through and take a more prominent role.

TAYLOR: Absolutely. With Blanton and Slam Stewart and others, the bass was becoming more active as a melodic instrument. They were playing melodies, they were no longer...when the bass solo would play (TAYLOR demonstrates).

BROWER: The bass would be doubling what the piano would be doing.

TAYLOR: Sometime Walter Page or John Kirby would walk a line and, you know... (TAYLOR demonstrates) either went through the chords or went scalar (TAYLOR demonstrates). That was what most bass players did when it came time for their solo. Here comes Slam playing melodies, you know "Laura" (TAYLOR demonstrates). I mean he's playing the melody in the bass, you know. Jimmy Blanton recorded (TAYLOR demonstrates) and "Body and Soul"...

The bass player now is becoming a front line instrument. The
pianists had to begin to acknowledge that and to compensate or to get out of his way so that you wouldn't be interfere with...

BROWER: Of course that opens up other things for the piano play too.

TAYLOR: Absolutely. You didn't have to worry about the rhythm for one thing. You could go on and do some other things.

BROWER: More things in the treble and mid-range of the piano.

TAYLOR: Earl Hines had opened up the field for that because he didn't want to play this straight stride (TAYLOR demonstrates). He was an excellent stride player, but he decided (TAYLOR demonstrates). He's playing in octaves and doing things that will help him be heard over the band--ten, twelve piece band he had. They didn't have this kind of microphone so you couldn't hear...it wasn't as audible so he had to really play with a lot of force. He opened it up for people like Billy Kyle and other musicians--Nat Cole--to do different things.

BROWER: I want to ask about Nat Cole, but I want you to tell me
how this tradition feeds into an Ellington and feeds into a
Tatum. I know you’ve touched on it but...

TAYLOR: Well Ellington, all his life, was a stride pianist. You
know (TAYLOR demonstrates). Everything...you listen to what he
played and you heard Willie the Lion. You heard James P.
Johnson. That was really the style that he related to. But he
wasn’t content to do just that. He heard other things (TAYLOR
demonstrates). He heard other intervals and that was one of the
things that Monk liked in his work. Duke would be playing
(TAYLOR demonstrates). He would be playing different kinds of
intervals. You say, “What is that. That’s different.” I asked
him about that one time. I said, “How do you come up with some
of those sounds.” He said, “Well if you realize that, even
though it’s the same note on the piano, C sharp and D flat, those
are two really different notes... If you’re thinking D flat, it’s
got to go down (TAYLOR demonstrates). But if you’re
thinking C sharp, it’s got to go up (TAYLOR demonstrates).” So
he said, "That gives you another approach to harmony." And it did. I had never thought of intervals in that way. You listen to some of the things that Ellington wrote, you know (TAYLOR demonstrates), or (TAYLOR demonstrates). Very interesting use of intervals and his harmonies were straight out of the same kind of feeling of Debussy and Ravel (TAYLOR demonstrates)...with thirteenth chords (TAYLOR demonstrates). His whole approach to harmonic relationships (TAYLOR demonstrates)... His whole approach was so masterful and so all-encompassing that he influenced Tatum harmonically. He influenced many other younger pianists and arrangers who heard these marvelous sonorities that he would come up with, both at the piano and in the orchestra, and say, "Hey, I've got to learn what that is."

BROWER: We were talking about, before we started digressing... the adjustments you had to make in relating to the modern styles. I guess people like Clyde Hart is a pivotal
Taylor: Absolutely.

Brower: ...in that whole thing. Would you talk a little bit about him? And talk about how that transition occurred in the music from what we call swing into what we call bebop.

Taylor: Clyde was one of the people who, when Dizzy was formulating his harmonic ideas using (Taylor demonstrates)...using those kinds of chords. Clyde was the one who really understood the intervalic relationship of those kinds of things. Dizzy just didn't make this up (Taylor demonstrates).

What Clyde had done earlier, he had recorded pieces like this (Taylor demonstrates)...very sophisticated piece of music. It's called "Some Other Spring." It was written by a woman named Irene Higgenbottom. You listen to the harmonies in that and you can see how the pianist like Clyde who was very harmonically oriented could really get those sonorities to working. When Dizzy began to ask him questions, "What are you do with a seventh
stride piano. He said, "That sounds good. You ought to do that. That sounds like the old man." I said, "Yeah, okay." He encouraged me to do it as an accompaniment. He liked to hear it behind the tenor. So I began to develop a style of doing that and "Mad Monk" was the first composition that I ever wrote that used that. It went something like this (TAYLOR demonstrates). The first part is really just a riff out of any swing or pre-bop piece and (TAYLOR demonstrates) was a kind of a pseudo-bebop phrase that I was hearing a lot of in those days and I was putting the two together. In my record, sometimes I was playing (TAYLOR demonstrates)...I was playing stride and I couldn't make up my mind whether stride or to do something else with my left hand and let the bass player kind of come through. It was quite a dilemma and it took me a long time to work it out.

BROWER: One of the things that come up is that at a critical point in terms of changing how instruments related was the evolution—what was happening in the pianist's left hand in terms
chord. What do you do beyond a seventh chord?"... (TAYLOR demonstrates)... nine. "Okay what's another note that I can use?"

We can use this one (TAYLOR demonstrates). So you can alter any of those notes (TAYLOR demonstrates)... the famous "flatted fifth" (TAYLOR demonstrates). You can raise the ninth (TAYLOR demonstrates)... or you can use the thirteenth (TAYLOR demonstrates). You can hear how, when Dizzy began to work on that... (TAYLOR demonstrates). Dizzy says that when he discovered this chord (TAYLOR demonstrates). He said he immediately heard "Night in Tunisia". This is a thirteenth chord (TAYLOR demonstrates) with a raised ninth. So what he heard (TAYLOR demonstrates)... the melody is all in that chord. He and Charlie Parker and some of the other musicians were beginning to hear the expansions, a la Ellington, of the harmonic aspects of the music. But more important, their approach to rhythm was changing, so you would get (TAYLOR demonstrates)... playing off of melodies. Charlie Parker wrote a tune (TAYLOR demonstrates) that was the
first melody that I heard written by a jazz musician that used fourths (TAYLOR demonstrates). He wrote that back in about 1945, 1946. But he was hearing things.

BROWER: What's that piece?

TAYLOR: That's called "Red Cross." He recorded with Tiny Grimes...it was a Savoy record that he made. He and Dizzy did (TAYLOR demonstrates)...and they would come to rest in unexpected places for those days—unexpected places. People would say, "Gee, what's that weird chord?" (TAYLOR demonstrates)...It's not so weird these days because everyone has done it, but in those days it was very adventurous and the melodies that they used were totally different (TAYLOR demonstrates)..."Scrapple from the Apple." Many of the things that Charlie Parker was writing or Dizzy was writing...some of them were based on the harmonic structure of other pieces, but more often they were based on original harmonies, like this one (TAYLOR demonstrates).
Well, I began to listen to those kinds of things and I began to write my own pieces that had that kind of rhythm to it. I did things like (TAYLOR demonstrates)... using some of the intervals that I heard Dizzy using. Also doing some of the things that I heard Bird doing, like this (TAYLOR demonstrates). I wrote that for Charlie Parker. It's called...

BROWER: Is it called "Early Bird?"

TAYLOR: No, "Early Bird" is another one that I wrote for him. That's ah...it'll come back to me in a minute. "Early Bird" sounds like this (TAYLOR demonstrates). It has many of the things that I heard. I didn't play it properly, but...(TAYLOR demonstrates)...one of those long lines that I use to hear Charlie Parker do a lot.

BROWER: Where does Nat Cole fit into this equation?

TAYLOR: Nat Cole, coming out of the Earl Hines tradition, where he could play with a very swinging beat and just do (TAYLOR demonstrates). Now he was the quintessential pre-bop player. He
did not adopt the rhythms that were a part of bebop, but his harmonic and melodic language was very similar to what the beboppers were using. One of the things that he did was an expansion of what a man name "Milt Buckner" did. Milt Buckner, back in 1938, 39 was the first that I know of to record using this kind of (TAYLOR demonstrates). That's called the "locked hand style" or "block chords"... The simplest way to explain it is that if you take a major chord (TAYLOR demonstrates)...major seventh chord with four notes and double the melody, then you have the sound (TAYLOR demonstrates). What Nat Cole did was to double, not just the top note, but the top two notes (TAYLOR demonstrates), which gave his playing a heavier sound and he'd be (TAYLOR demonstrates). It was a very orchestral sound and a very swinging sound. He had the most influential trio of all between, I'd say 1938 to 1942 or 43.

BROWER: One other thing about that happened in the forties (1940's) that you had a role in, was the beginning of what we
call Latin Jazz or Afro-Cuban feel in Jazz. Can you give a
little background about how you got into that? I know you
wrote several pieces that reflected that. Give us a taste of
that as well.

TAYLOR: Well, I was working with Cozy Cole...I had done "The
Seven Lively Arts" with Cozy Cole... At that time Cozy had an
office with a saxophonist who used to work with Cab Calloway. His
name was Walter "Foots" Thomas. I did some records with Walter
and played some gigs with him. One of the gigs was at a club
called "La Conga"...the group that played the show and was the
featured group was the Machito Afro-Cuban Band...the most
exciting band I had ever heard in my life. Those guys were just
phenomenal. ...We were the intermission group...I'd stand around
and just listen to what they were doing. The piano player, Joe
Loco got drafted and Mario Bowsa, who was the...

BROWER: That's like generic piano..."Give me some Joe Loco
TAYLOR: Well, you know, actually... (TAYLOR demonstrates)...

That kind of montuno was what I played a lot of in those days. The mambo hadn't been named. They had been playing it, but it hadn't been called the mambo. I wrote pieces which had those kinds of rhythms (TAYLOR demonstrates). That was one and I did a lot of tunes that had (TAYLOR demonstrates)...had that kind of mambo bass. It was really an exciting thing for me to play the montunos and to play the kind of things (TAYLOR demonstrates). You would play (TAYLOR demonstrates). That was a big part of playing over one chord or those kinds of things. I remember the first time I was asked to play a montuno, Mario just pointed to me. Now everybody in the band picked up a marocco...

BROWER: So you were working with Machito.

TAYLOR: Yeah, I worked with him...between the time Loco was drafted and the next pianist could be brought up from Cuba... Rene Hernandez was his name. He was the seminal Latin jazz player.
He was highly influenced by Art Tatum. But he is the big influence on all of the contemporary players now. All of the Cuban players who play really hip, modern harmonies and...arrange in that way, are really highly influenced—whether they are consciously or unconsciously—by Rene Hernandez, who was just a phenomenal musician...well school musician and really just a tremendous pianist. ...I learned a lot of things just looking over his shoulder. He would come to Birdland all the time. They worked up the street at a dance hall. I’d go up to where they worked. They would come down to hear me. I’d listen to what he played, he listened to what I played.

BROWER: Moving into the fifties, your style kind of changed. You begin to focus more on ballad playing...a more delicate approach, a more lyrical approach. ...At this point, maybe some influences like Eddie South and Ben Webster were coming to the fore. In some ways this may have been a reaction to what might have been sort of a perversion to what was happening in bebop or
a cheapening of the innovations. You want to describe that phase
of your playing and the way you went into...?

TAYLOR: One of the reasons I got into playing ballads a lot was
because, as house pianist at Birdland, we would play endless
courses of any tune that we would played. So all I was doing was
comping for course after course after course. By the time Bird
or whoever was the leader turned to me and said, "Okay, you got
it" I wanted to play something I could hear, so I would always
play one of the popular tunes..."Laura" or some ballad that gave
me a chance to say (TAYLOR demonstrates). That gave me a chance
to explore some harmonies that I was interested in...some
clusters (TAYLOR demonstrates), those kinds of things. At that
time I was studying with a man name Richard McClanahan and was
very interested in touch and the kind of sounds I could evoke
from the piano so (TAYLOR demonstrates). I began to use a kind
of harmonic structure that was very peculiar to me...the sounds I
like... (TAYLOR demonstrates). It sounded harp-like and it got really the kind of impressionistic flow that I like.

BROWER: There are a lot pieces that you've written that are of that feeling, that I really like, that I've gotten kind of introduced to in putting together the research for this. Could we get to go out with a little bit of "Day Dreaming" or a little bit of "Blue Cloud" or one of those pieces that I think is an extension of what we've just arrived at.

TAYLOR: Sure (TAYLOR demonstrates).

End of Tape #7 Side B
End of Disk #7