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An Interview With Max Roach [transcript]

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HOWARD UNIVERSITY JAZZ ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Drummer, Max Roach

Interviewer: W. A. Brower

January 28-29, 1985

BROWER: I'd like to begin with your early days in the Carolinas and how that experience bears on your development.

ROACH: Well, I was born in northeastern North Carolina in an area we called "Newland". It was on the fringes of Dismal Swamp. Dismal Swamp covers certain sections of northeastern North Carolina and ah, on up through the eastern part of Virginia. Ah, the Norfolk Navy Yard is there and ah, it's also the area that Nat Turner, ah...had that major struggle with, ah...with the forces that were the pro-slavery group. And the final battle, I believe, culminated in the Dismal Swamp area and many of the men who were fighting...who fought with him at that time escaped into this swamp area, Dismal Swamp. Dismal Swamp is now a national preserve and ah... the houses...since it's below sea level, the
houses are all built up on stilts or bricks is what you might say. And, as youngsters, we used to play during the dry seasons, ah, underneath the houses. I guess my earliest, ah, music associations came by way of the church. My grandfather was minister of the church down there. It's called Mt. Carmel Church...and, ah, it's located about fourteen miles east of Elizabeth City, North Carolina. And, ah,...it was there, I guess, you know, I heard much of the old spiritual music, which later influenced my work. And, ah, of course there were, ah...many of the blues singers, people who just were travelers, who would herald, I guess, the community happenings or national happenings. They were street singers, so to speak, during that period, who, ah, with a guitar and with poetry and song, would describe things that were going on within the community and sometimes outside the community. Ah...my family came to New York just prior to the Depression...I guess about 1928. And, ah, New York, at that particular time...especially Harlem and other Black
communities around New York...Brooklyn and... Bedford Stuyvesant,
where I grew up, during the depression, that is...there were
"store-front" churches that permeated all the neighborhoods, just
about every block, I might say. And these churches were sources
of a lot of musical activity. They were also, ah...I guess you
might say, day-care centers for the children, so that the mothers
and fathers and the rest of the adults in the family could go out
and seek work during that period. This is, the early thirties.
Of course, when you spent your time in church, you were engaged
in all kinds of extra-curricular activities. As a small boy, we
sang in the choir during the day. We were taught how to use
musical instruments—piano, percussion instruments—which were a
dominant part of the services of these store-front churches in
the Black communities, I would imagine around the country,
especially in New York City. And, ah, these churches also were, ah...support institutions for the families. The families would
contribute to the church, and the church would, ah...in turn,
would help families who needed their rent paid, perhaps, or need
some food, etc... But, ah... and, ah... and so my first contact
with any musical instruments, after leaving North Carolina at a
very early age, about four... I was about four years old... was
actually in these store-front churches where they had pianos and,
a I said, drums and so forth. And during that time, the early
thirties, they had, what we call "house rent parties". The men
in the community who could not find work, often times, would
organize bands or some of the professionals in the community
would donate their services to... ah... entertain at someone's
apartment or house... ah, to help them raise money to take care
of some of their bills. Ah, when I was about eight years old I
joined the marching band in Concord Baptist Church. That was in
downtown Brooklyn at that time. My first instrument, in that
band, was a bugle. And I had problems with that and later I
switched to the marching drum. I continued on that, and ah... oh,
along with that, actually, while visiting some of the young friends whom I grew up with in my neighborhood, around Brooklyn, at that time, whose parents had...ah...would rehearse these bands during the day for these "house rent parties"...they would have a set of drums and a piano and a bass violin and a guitar. And as youngsters, we would, in imitating our elders...would ah, teach ourselves and they would help us to learn these particular instruments. This is when I first became familiar with the trap drum set as well as the piano.

BROWER: What did the trap drum set consist of at that point?

ROACH: During that time, the trap drum set consisted of a snare drum, bass drum, a ride cymbal...and that was about it. Some of them had a foot cymbal as well. But along with that they also had piano rolls at that time. And as small children, we would use the peddle on these piano rolls. And these piano rolls were...piano rolls that were, ah...had the likes of people like Jelly Roll Morton. They'd simulate Jelly Roll Morton's piano
solos and Ammons and Johnson and all the early great pianists. And we would use the peddles on the piano slowly so that we could... ah... use our... so we could find the chords and the melodies they were using in these piano rolls. And this helped us learn a little bit about Black music at that time, along with the church services, and, in the store front churches, the piano rolls and the house rent party bands. It was a fairly good education as to, ah... what the music was about as a youngster during that period. Ah, and so we learned some of the rags on piano. We would learn instruments. For example I... with the marching drum especially was my instrument at the age of eight, nine... and then when I ah, graduated from grammar school at twelve, my father brought me a set of drums. And ah, during that same period, you see, folks from the south, a family... the... a family would move up north and then, when they became established in some sort of way, then other members of the family would come up. And, ah, we moved into an apartment where ah,
the folks who had been evicted during that period could not move their piano out. So we had a piano. When my aunt, who played piano for the church in the south at that time—her name was Clarky Hinton—she moved into our house with my family. And she taught my brother and myself how to read piano music from ah...from hymnal books. So if you put it all together...there was a lot of activity. There was my aunt teaching us how to read music from the piano. There was...this piano was a piano roll piano that we could use the peddles and learn the chords that were being played by...and melodies that were being...ah...that were put on these rolls by people like Jelly Roll Morton and so forth. And then there was the marching band in the church...ah...and I guess this was the earliest part of my music...of my contact with music. It was all kind of self-contained and kind of family oriented, that came out of the church, the house rent parties at the time, and, ah...and the
marching bands. And, of course, coming into New York, during that period, there was a lot of musical activity. You know...streets of New York and the streets of the Black communities around the country and Harlems and the Bed Stuy areas...there was always singing in the storefront churches of church music...there was always house rent parties going on and there were street singers, up and down the streets, who would stand on corners, go from block to block, and from corner to corner. And this is the way folks made a living. They used music at that time. And a youngster, of course, our sensibilities were saturated with it to the point where, ah, at an early age, if you were inclined, you wanted to be a musician. Plus, at that time, they had a lot of theaters, that the big band during that period, Duke Ellington, John Kirby, and all those folks. Of course, I didn't start going to those places until I was thirteen or fourteen years old. But at that time...now I had become interested in ah...the trap drum set and learning as much
about...ah, just the inner workings of jazz as far as ah,...and playing some piano and learning about chords and reading, what, at that time, we called "stock music". Stock music was, ah, published arrangements of the recordings of the like of Count Basie and Jimmy Lunceford's band and ah, Fletcher Henderson's band, and all the popular bands of the day...John Kirby's band, so, ah... And also at that time, I began studying drums formally. At about ten, I began to take lessons as to how to read music in that area. Of course, my aunt, who was teaching us, ah, from hymnal books...gospel books how to read piano music...you know. I guess all this had an effect on, ah...me to the to the point where I had made up my mind at a very early age that I was going to try to be a musician. And then, of course, when I got a little older--say twelve, thirteen years old--I ah,... began to go to the theaters and see and hear the big bands like Count Basie. This was the early, mid thirties. That really fascinated me to the point where, ah...
BROWER: Were you going in Brooklyn or over in Manhattan?

ROACH: In Manhattan to the Apollo Theater in Manhattan and also, we had an Apollo Theater in Brooklyn. The bands would play Manhattan, then they would come to Brooklyn or come to Brooklyn and then play Manhattan.

BROWER: Was it called the Apollo Theater in Brooklyn?

ROACH: It was called the Apollo Theater in Brooklyn as well. It was in a Black community, right in the middle of the Bed Stuy neighborhood...you know? It was on Fulton Street and Avenue. I believe it was, at that time. That was our Apollo, the Brooklyn Bed Stuy Apollo and the Manhattan 125th Street Apollo. So, ah, actually growing up during that time, you were exposed to different areas of the music, the church...at least I was...the church and ah...house rent parties, the theaters...and I began to study, formally, the drums, that is, in the New York Schools of Music. The lessons were twenty-five cents for a half an hour.
That made me familiar with certain percussive techniques. I, ah... and the young people that I grew up with had the same interests. There was Ray Abrams, who was around Brooklyn at that time, Leonard Gaskin, ah, Leon Abrams... We had bands, the Clarence Berry Band and different bands that emulated, by these stock music charts. We'd have a band that sounded like Jimmy Lunceford; a band that sounded like Count Basie... and you, you kind of... you played with all of these bands.

BROWER: These were like teenage bands that you were in?

ROACH: These were teenage bands—high school bands. We would play intermission during the basketball games and different sporting events during high school. And we also had these... we also had small bands in the school that we'd organized ourselves. These were extracurricular activities. We also... I remember during that period, rehearsed with the Brooklyn Symphony Orchestra at the Brooklyn Museum. That's when I became interested and, ah... in ah, classical music and ah, I dealt with
tympani during that period. I was trying to play tympani in the orchestra and so forth. But I guess what I'm really saying is that New York offered, at that time, for a young person who was really interested in the music, a variety of musical outlets...from classical music, church music, ah...music that ah...for house rent parties, marching music—and I just became involved in all of it. I carried that on through high school prior to the time that I met people like Charlie Parker and folks like that. Also during that period—it was before the "jukebox" came into vogue—every street corner bar had a piano. And usually on weekends there would be jam sessions at these little corner bars. Later on I learned, of course, when I started traveling around the country at a very early age with bands, that this was just about the norm for all the communities. Then, it was a segregated community. The country was highly segregated at that particular time, so the communities that we played in during the periods that I did travel, ah...we dealt with all Black
communities. But all the Black communities had bars and pianos...and being a rhythm section person, a person who played a trap drum set, you would be called upon because they'd have a drummer, maybe, and a bass player and a pianist and then, maybe hire one horn and everybody would just join in, sort of. Clubs, of course...these bars were open at that time from, say, nine o'clock until four a.m. in the morning, so everybody had a lot of opportunity to play. Drummers would "trade up" and different drummers would play different sets and... It was, ah...a wonderful learning experience for me because occasionally someone like a "Kenny Clarke" would come in to play or Big Sidney Catlett, or ...and you'd have a chance either to observe and listen or maybe even have them listen to you and maybe just a smile or a pat on the back was enough encouragement to send you home to practice. In any case, I got completely involved in all aspects of the music to the point, I guess, from the very
beginning, I had never done anything else but music. I had one job during one summer in a fruit market, after school, and that was to buy a new set of drums. I must have been about sixteen years old at that time. But, ah, I've never been involved in anything else, other than just music, itself, and especially this music we that call "Jazz".

BROWER: So, when you were in high school, you weren't interested in being on the football team or interested in sports?

ROACH: Yeah, I was engaged in some of the things like field and track. But that was along with...still, you know, dealing with music and thinking about it constantly and, ah...studying. Ah...but field and track was about the only other interest I had in school, and other than just trying to my school work done, which was a requirement of all the families at that time... You had to do that. I had to get that done before I practiced. I remember that, ah, when my father brought me that first drum set, my drum seat...I'd set it up in my room and my drum seat was the
side of my bed, so that I'd get up in the morning and sit immediately at the set. But I couldn't go to work on it during the week—only on weekends—until after I got home from school and finished my homework. I was involved with, as I said earlier, the ah, you know...ah, track and field events.

BROWER: What did you do?

ROACH: I was a 220, ah...100 yard...I was a sprinter and a standing broad jumper at that time. I didn't take it any further than that. I guess, from the very beginning, my aspirations were to be involved in music. So, all my friends around me from, the age of eight on up until now, were musicians...predominantly musicians...you know, people who would...who were either trying to learn it or who were really in it and ah, we could learn and we could study from. I was inquisitive, like just about everybody at that time. And, ah, I listened to as much music as possible. And they...it was a period of a lot of live music as well. It wasn't, as I said earlier... Let me get back to the
jukebox. Jukeboxes at that time weren't like they are today, you know. Today you go into the majority of places, they do have a jukebox, where you put a coin in and you hear records. Then, there was just a piano on the scene. So everybody played a little piano and you heard a lot of live music and you...and, ah...It was prior to the whole ah...now days, of course, the recording industry is how we become acquainted with music. But in those days, it was live performances that you became acquainted with music.

BROWER: You're mentioning some of the high school bands and some of the associations. You mentioned one band, I think the Berry Band. Were there other groups you participated in at that time?

ROACH: Oh, yeah. There was the Al Lundy Band. We had bands in our community that would spell just about every band that was recorded... And this was also how we learned to arrange. We'd listen to records and either copy the solos or try to copy the
complete arrangement. Some of the people I grew up with...Cecil Payne, we went to high school together. As far as I know, Cecil, ah, along with Ray Abrams, Lee Abrams, Leonard Gaskin, and ah, ah...Leonard Hawkins, and, Rainey, Franklin Skeet, and all these people... we never did anything else but deal with music. We grew up with music as young kids in ah...

BROWER: Was Randy Weston a part of that?

ROACH: Randy Weston was part of that group.

BROWER: Ray Copeland?

ROACH: Ray Copeland was a part of that group. That was the Brooklyn contingent. So, all we did, was deal with music, from the time we were young men, on up until ah...on up until today.

BROWER: What were the schools that you went to?

ROACH: I Brooklyn, I went to...well during that period, you know, it was ah...it wasn't easy and many time you moved from one apartment to another for one reason or another. Either you couldn't pay the rent or your family had to move because the
family was expanding. But I went to several grade schools in Brooklyn...PS 3, PS 44, PS 45, ah...and then high school, I went to Boys High and then later on, I went to Manhattan School of Music.

BROWER: Was Boys High an academic high school?

ROACH: Boys High was an academic school. Cecil Payne was in Boys High as well, at that time. It was a preparatory school for college, if you wanted to go into, say, ah...to be a school teacher or even take further into other areas, if you wanted. It was a preparatory school for college...if someone wanted to go into medicine or whatever. But, ah...our main thrust was always music. We had orchestras. We had bands. And, as I said, as extra-curricula activities, we had jazz bands in the school.

BROWER: Ah...did Brooklyn years...places...let's see, you mentioned...there is a place called the Putnam Central Club....

ROACH: The Putnam Central came a lot later. Ah, the Putnam Central was after I'd worked with...the first stint with Charlie
Parker...because I left Brooklyn right after I finished Boys High School. When I say I left Brooklyn, I meant, I came over to Manhattan to Harlem from Bed Sty...

BROWER: That would be about thirty-nine or so?

ROACH: No, let's see. I graduated from Boys High School in 1942. And, of course, during the time I was in high school, I'd spend as much time as I possibly could, running from Brooklyn to New York to rehearse with the different bands. Like Steve Pulliam Band in Harlem or just, you know...whatever bands you could get involved with. It was only a stones throw from Brooklyn to Harlem. So, ah, this is how I first became familiar with Minton's Playhouse. I guess I must have been about sixteen or seventeen...and the Monday night jam sessions. My family was, ah, was...a church-going family, but they were liberal as far as I was concerned. I wasn't a kid who got into trouble or things like that. I tried to do what they required me to do as far as
my school work was concerned and things like that so...

BROWER: Were you a good student?

ROACH: I guess I was a fair student, you know. I got through high school and, ah...went on to Manhattan (School of Music). I was always very serious about being involved in music and, I guess, most anything. I wasn't a bad track and field person either...you know, I was very serious about what we were trying to do. I loved the music and was affected and moved by the music that began early in my career...early in my life, as I said that came out of the church. The church always has kind of a stirring music that evokes a lot of things in people...and when you're young and you're around musical instruments and you have people who want to show you things, you just carry that kind of feeling and that ah...and that desire to be a part of something ah...with you...you know. That's something that I have never lost when I still...when I hear the kind of singing that ah...is personified, I guess by people like Mahalia Jackson...even Aretha Franklin,
you know, it's still very moving to me. But all that, you know, becomes a part of you and you just...you know, you just keep it and try to develop yourself in it.

End side A of tape #1

Begin side B - Tape #1

ROACH: I might try medicine or something like that. But, ah the more I became familiar with what was going on in the musical world, the further removed from anything else...any other profession, I...I...got.

BROWER: Going back to the days when you first started going to theaters and seeing the bands, were there any particular drummers that excited you during your first exposure to the big bands?

ROACH: Yeah, there were first...there were the drummers in Brooklyn. You know, Lee Abrams and folks like that.

BROWER: How was he, relative to your age...about the same age?

ROACH: About the same age as I was. He was also, ah...he had, ah... and of course the drummers in the marching bands, you know,
that, ah...I was always excited by people who had done...who I thought at that time, could do things well or better than I could. So it sent me home to work and practice at it, whether it was trying to deal with piano or deal with drums or whatever...or even trying to sing in the choir. You know, it was always...I always enjoyed it and ah, always tried to do it as best as I possibly could. Then, when I began to go the theaters and listen to "heavyweights", the earliest drummers who influenced me, I guess you might say, would be like Rass Mitchel of the Savoy Sultans, and, ah...O'Neil Spencer with John Kirby...and then I heard Chick Webb with his band. That was perhaps the most exciting...that really turned me on...and when I got old enough to the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, I'd stand up in front of these bands...Chick Webb's Band, Count Basie's Band, Jimmy Lunceford's Band with Jimmy Crawford, Count Basie's Band with Joe Jones. I'd just stand in front of the ah, bandstand all night and just
observe and listen and enjoy the bands, and especially the drummers. I guess my earlier... and ah, they also broadcasted during that period because during, ah, while in high school, I remember Cecil Payne and myself used to stay up late at night to listen to Count Basie coming from Chicago or broadcasting from one of the hotels in New York City. When you played with these different bands and you played stock arrangements... if the band brought a Jimmy Lunceford stock arrangement, you'd play like Jimmy Crawford. If they brought a Count Basie stock arrangement, you'd try to play like Jimmy Crawford or you'd try to play like, ah... Papa Joe Jones. If it was a Sovoy Sultan stock arrangement, you'd try to play like Bass Mitchel. If you could afford, and you had an opportunity to go see them at the Apollo Theater or, if you were old enough to get into the Savoy Ballroom... I remember one of the... I guess you might say, I got a lot of encouragement from the musicians I grew up with. I remember once, I was jamming in little bar in Brooklyn, ah, one evening
Cecil Payne came in and took out his saxophone and he said...with a smile on his face, he said to me, "I knew that was you playing before I walked into the club". I didn't realize then that he was telling me that I had...perhaps he was telling me that there was a little something different...maybe because I played louder than someone else or whatever, but he knew that was me. That was like a shot in the arm and maybe I was on the way to dealing with something. This was when we were in high school of course. He and I were in high school together and we played in many of the local bands around. We did a lot of studying together and ah, just playing duets, just saxophone and drums. We used to practice all of the time...as much time as we could possibly...we'd finish whatever chores we had to do for our family or something like that, all we did was practice.

BROWER: Did he live close to you?

ROACH: He lived very close to me. Around the corner from me.

In fact, you know, Al Lundy and his band, B. T. Lundy and all
these people, who were all young people who were interested...and we are still playing music today...were, ah, we lived, like, in the same block most of the time. We'd go right down the street. Many of the bands were just made up...small bands, a lot of them made up of just people in that one block area in Manhattan or Brooklyn, you know. We had so called "battle of the bands", you know. We'd pull our Jimmy Lunceford chart out or Count Basie chart out and this...the guys in the next block or a few blocks away would have their bands. As I recall, there were a lot of people who were really interested in music. I...ah...there wasn't much work during that period because it was coming right out of the depression. Later, I learned also, that ah, the government had this...well when the government did have that "Works Program Administration" thing, the WPA, you could study for almost nothing...music. That's when they subsidized, ah, the artist. Professional artists then were teaching, not only music,
but all the other arts...writing and...I imagine a lot of writers that we know today who came through that period who are around the same age, Jimmy Baldwin, everybody else, must have tasted some of that, studying with some of these wonderful folks. Because when I began to study formally...when I started really studying, I guess you might say formally, just piano and learning how to write music and all, the lessons were really inexpensive, twenty-five cents...

BROWER: Was this a part of WPA?

ROACH: I imagine it was. I wasn't too familiar with it. But I can imagine it was. Because they were all good teachers who were very generous with the information. Books cost little or nothing. Arrangements for big band were about seventy-five cents for a complete chart with a score and all the parts and even the solo was written out. So we had an opportunity to learn how to read music, ah, and to ah, learn how music was...how arrangements were written, voicing for different horns, and thing like that.
So you had an idea and this was across the board. I'm sure all across the country was like that. Because when Mingus, who was on the west coast, came to New York, his early beginnings were the same way. Charlie Parker probably the same way. We didn't talk much about it because at that time, now we were being asked to record and to do something now on our own. When we all met, we had some experience out there. We had traveled a bit. We had worked the theaters and were working with bands. I had already been working with Coleman Hawkins prior to my meeting Charlie Parker...see. So we had a little experience at that time. So when we all came together, I am talking about that ah...musicians from that period like Bud Powell and ah, Charlie Parker, and Dizzy... Of course Dizzy and Bird and Monk were catalysts. They weren't much older than we were, but they were forerunners, you know. They had gotten their ah,...had been traveling...Dizzy was with Cab Calloway. I would watch Dizzy when I was in high school. We hadn't heard about Charlie Parker
until after we came out of high school...from Kansas City. Because I think ah, Charlie Parker made his first records, at least we heard them in New York, around 1943, 44, when he came...when he made his first records with Jay McShann. But my earliest influence as far as drummers are concerned would be people like Chick Webb and ah, Joe Jones with Count Basie and O'Neil Spencer with ah...John Kirby and ah, Jimmy Crawford with Jimmy Lunceford and Big Sidney Catlett, who was with Louis Armstrong and Baby Dobbs, prior to that, who was with Louis Armstrong, people like that.

BROWER: Were there specific things that you got from each of their ways of playing or was it just their command of the instrument and their overall demeanor and professionallism, what was it? Well, if you would go drummer by drummer or person by person.

ROACH: Well, ah, Chick Webb was a master soloist. He fronted
the band. He was always a favorite because he was a great drum soloist and he put the drum out front, which was always, ah, inspiring for a young instrumentalist, a young drummer especially. I'm sure that Chick Webb probably inspired all the major drum-leaders who got a chance...opportunity to hear that band work during that time. Jo Jones was ah, an innovative drummer, a very personable on the stage, who could handle the set. And also he would always introduce things that, I guess would be...they were unconventional. He broke rhythm. He'd play without the bass drum, he was a master of brushes, and so forth. O'Neil Spencer was...a fantastic small band player because John Kirby had a quintet with Charlie Shavers and those great players at that time and he was just a master, who played with a small band. He was particularly ah, astute with brushes, I had never heard anything like that. Cozy Coles, who was with Cab Calloway, was also a great soloist and a technician. And, ah, Big Sidney Catlett was just all around, one of the ah... one of the
ah...most ah, impressive drummers I had ever heard, because he did everything so well and did everything...and he was very musical and very warm as a drummer, as well. You know, they just were all just great people that you just got something from. You...no matter which one you saw, you...if you wanted to, ah become a drummer or you were interested in playing jazz drums, you would enjoy anyone of these people at any given time, even though they were completely different. And it was during a period where ah, individualism was what you got credit for. You didn't get too much credit for sounding like somebody. All these people had different personalities and distinctive personalities. When you heard Cozy Coles, you knew right away it was Cozy. When you heard Sidney Catlett or Chick Webb or O'Neil Spencer or Rass Mitchel, you knew that was who it was at that time. It wasn't that much, and ah...that seemed to be the order of the day. I remember, ah...you know, they'd have sayings, little parables, I guess you might say they'd use, you know. Say, for example, when
I first...when Lester left, ah, Count Basie...Lester Young, that is, and I had an opportunity to work with him, and you might assume that you should play like Joe Jones, because he was the drummer with Basie...Pres. They had an affinity that was unbelievable when these two men worked together...Joe Jones and Lester Young. So, you might try to play a little bit like Joe and Lester would say as ah...he would say things like...you know, you'd say "goodnight" to him and you felt as though you...you hit it that particular night--because we're not people to complain, but they had a way of teaching that was profound, at least to me--Lester might say something like...you say "goodnight Pres" and he might say, "Well, you know, you can't join the throng until you write your own song". Which really meant that you...it's ok to play like somebody else, but you have to find your own way out here before you can really be recognized. That would let you know that...that the way they came up was ah...was
you only got credit for being who you were and not because you could, perhaps do someone else's thing better than they could, you know... and this is evident when you go back and listen to some of that music. The reason why Lester's so different from Coleman Hawkins, and why Lester stuck out, was because, while everybody else was trying to deal with Coleman Hawkins, he went the other way, just as you find out with most of the great innovators.

When you look at Charlie Parker, as he came from ah, Johnny Hodges or Benny Carter and so forth... but, ah... or, say, John Coltrane, Lester Young or something like that... but it was a time, ah... and the way they taught was sometimes, ah... it was immediate. That's all I can say. You had to get to that kind of individualism or find something almost immediately to deal with in, ah, recording session or any kind of musical situation that was peculiar to you, you know.... ...We're jumping ahead of ourselves. Just to talk a bit about the earlier period... I remember when I ah... My brother, who was two years older than
myself... I wanted to always emulate things, perhaps, he would do.

At the age of...

BROWER: What was his name?

ROACH: His name was Alphonso. He was a junior. He died earlier, from pneumonia, when he was about, oh, twelve, thirteen years old. He was two years... so I must have been about eleven.

But, I was eight at that time, so when we... when he got a bugle in the marching band, I wanted to ah... I brought home a bugle as well, from church, that is. I had a little problem just getting a sound out of the instrument, so my mother suggested that I try another instrument. And this is how I really came to pick up... to become... to playing the drums. Because then... the next instrument was, of course, the drums, the marching drum. I didn't have to... it wasn't difficult for me to latch on to that and then make the marching band. I guess that marching band... we must have just played every parade that would come up in New York City at that time. Because I'd come home with a big welt on the
leg that the drum would just bounce off on. But I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the competition that goes on with marching bands. And I learned a great deal, because some of the bands, the players had a different kind of technique that they dealt with than what we would come up with in our community or our church. Ours was, ah... almost a laid back way of dealing with rudimentary playing in march music. And then when we'd run up against some of the other bands from other areas of town, there's was much more militaristic, so to speak. We'd talk and compare and try to do some of the things other bands did. That was the beginning of developing and learning about different rudimentary aspects of just the snare drum alone. When I did...finally get my first drum set, at the age of twelve, I began to realize that...there were added techniques to dealing with the jazz drum set, because now you began to deal with all four limbs. With not only just
the hand, say, that you'd use with a marching drum, but now you'd have to deal with both feet, on a foot cymbal and a bass drum. This posed, believe you me, a lot of problems. But, I guess, when you come up and you listen to something at an early age, you don't realize the problems until you start trying to show them to other people. And then you begin to say well, yeah, you know, this is important in dealing with this instrument. It's good to have fine rudimentary technique, but now you have to learn how to keep time and play with other people and the incongruity of what a jazz band was like at that time, of a string instrument, of a piano, and maybe a brass or a saxophone and a drum set with cymbals and bass drum and things like that. To mesh this together and get a good sound, wasn't just a piece of cake, you know. Especially for young drummers, you'd always either play a little too loud, and someone would look at you and tell you. Because you have to learn how to play with the string instrument, the bass violin or the piano or, that you're
dropping the time or racing the time. These were all just little problems you grew up with that would have you always thinking about how to deal with that, as a drummer during that period. Then there were some drummers who seemed to just latch on to that kind of thing, naturally. And I must say that, during that period—growing up in Brooklyn, oh, thirteen, fourteen years old—that there were some fine young drummers, who were the same age of myself, who could really cut it. Sometimes I say to myself that ah, the competition was so...that during that period, to me, was so heavy, that I just practiced, maybe more than most. Then some of the guys, as they got a little older, dropped off into other areas. They, maybe, went into Civil Service jobs, because that was ah...those kinds of jobs were secure and they just stopped playing music. Some of the best musicians I grew up with, kind of just dropped off the scene. I was sorry about that in some instances, but some of the drummers, who were really...whom I thought would have been perhaps history makers,
just kind of went into Civil Service work and things like that.

BROWER: Could you name some of them?

ROACH: Oh, goodness... There was one particular young drummer with Steve Pulliam, who I just thought a great deal of, and I can’t think of his name right now. It’s been such a long, time ago. And then there was Eddie Daugherdy----, out of Brooklyn, who was ah... just seemed to me, at that time had it all together. He knew how to make the total set sound in harmony, both feet and both hands. Everybody around Brooklyn who, at any session, would love to play with Eddie Daugherdy---- and we all aspired to play like Eddie. Eddie, of course, was a little older than us and he got married sooner. So those responsibilities just took him off the scene. But I thought Eddie would have been one of the giants and great contributors. There were people like that, who were on the scene, who would make you just work at it and work at it and work at it. But, ah... you know, I ah... maybe, I was just lucky
too because, ah, as I said, you know, I never had to do anything else. And all through...coming out of grade school into high school, I was involved with music and bands. And right after high school, of course, I went into New York and started working with people like Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker and Coleman Hawkins... Just right after, I just fell right into it...so I must have had something going. Then when I got involved in that, of course, this was the big time, and ah, you really worked hard. I hated to sleep. During that time, of course, they had all these after-hours spots...but I'm not going to jump ahead...they had these, ah... From the marching bands, to the bands...jazz bands in high school, studying formally, reading charts, learning more about playing the piano, coming out of high school. Then, the theaters that we frequented in Brooklyn, as well as in Harlem...in the Bed Stuy area in Brooklyn and Harlem. Then, becoming acquainted with the after hour clubs in Harlem, while I was still in high school. These were clubs that opened up at 4
am in the morning and went on until 8 am the next morning. Then, the house rent parties would follow these afterhour sessions. In some ways, it was really a healthy environment for someone who wanted to become involved in this music.

BROWER: The kinds of things, at that point, you would have been playing, you would have still been basically playing in the Basie or Lunceford or any of those traditions in these after hours type...

ROACH: Well, you played shows. During that period, there were clubs, whether they were after hours or whether they were during legit hours, from 9 to 4 am in the morning...would be the legit hours and from 4 on until 9 o'clock that evening would be, I guess you might call afterhours. You played shows. You played for chorus lines, and for singers. You played for comedy acts. You played for solo dancers. You played dance music of all kinds...

BROWER: Are we talking about tap dancers...
ROACH: Tap dancing. You played for tap dancers. You played also just for community dances. You played dance music, for people to dance by. This would be all kinds of music you'd play. You would play whatever was required. During the high school period, I played in ah, "Dime-a-Dance Halls". This was during the war. This was like forty, forty-one. Where the young women...the men would come in and maybe buy a dollar's worth of tickets, they'd get ten dances, ten cents a ticket. You'd play maybe one chorus or two choruses. The band would stop, and then you'd play, the girls would pick up the tickets, and then you'd play a couple more choruses. Maybe you'd play a waltz and then you'd play, what they call a fox trot, and you'd play a ballad, or you'd play what ever...a tango, or whatever. But all these things, you did, and it was a part of the development. All of us did that. When Charlie Parker came to New York, I'm sure he was involved in some of the very same things. He also played for
shows...and so... There is one thing about a rhythm section player--a rhythm section, of course, is the pianist, the bassist, the drummer, and sometimes, the guitarist—they had an opportunity to be involved in any kind of...any and all kinds of musical situations. You know, you might play a bar mitzvah. You'd play anything. Your task was to accompany and be involved in any kind of musical situation whether I was Latin, a polka, or whether it was a fox trot, or whether it was jazz dancing, whatever. You know, you worked more often than most people, but you became involved in a variety of ah, styles and musical cultures because of that. Most drummers and rhythm section people have an opportunity to learn about different musical cultures more often than not, than people who may just play a instrument and they have to...they're especially involved in say, jazz, per se, or this or ah, waltz music, per se...but usually percussionist have to kind of spread...they run the gambit, I dare say. So, most percussionists can play in all kinds of musical situations, and
that's what you do to make a living, actually. You become especially involved, and it's something to say "I've finally got a job with a band that I can work with, like, say, with a Benny Carter, or with a Dizzy Gillespie, or someone like that, where you could now develop your ideas. But, prior to that, you work in a variety of musical situations. You know, you would play, maybe, tympani in an orchestra and play some Beethoven or something. Or then you'd leave there and run to a gig and play for some "shake dancers" or a chorus line. And you might leave there and get a gig...someone will call you up...you play a polka gig or something like that. Then you'd sit down and just do marches...maybe play marches. I know I did all these things. I believe that just being involved with the instrument itself, I was learning about the instrument, and no matter the musical situation was, ah, I enjoyed playing drums. I just enjoyed it, and I learned from any kind of musical situation.

End of side B- Tape #1
BROWER: You're talking about the climate of the period.

ROACH: Yeah, during that period, you know, we're talking about the marching bands and how our church marching band would get involved into all kinds of situations. They would call upon the marching band whenever there was a parade. Garvey was one who had parades in Brooklyn and in New York City at that time. So we would be parts of that, we would also be part of the American Legion parade. We would be a part of that... it seems as those every kind of parade...

BROWER: So you saw Marcus Garvey?

ROACH: I must have, I was very young but I know that we were called on to march in parades like that. So I must have even though some of the people that I grew up with, the young men whom I grew up with like Cecil Taylor...

BROWER: Cecil Payne?
ROACH: Cecil Payne...I’m sorry. Cecil Payne and Fred Brathwaite and folks, their families were all involved with the Garvey movement. And although I can’t say whether I saw him in person or not...

BROWER: Were they all West Indians?

ROACH: They were West Indian at that time, yea they were West Indian and they were involved. But there were a lot of American Blacks who were also involved because he had such institutions that were comparable to credits unions and things like that. They were comparable to that, where during that period you needed some kind of an organization that you could put something in and get something out at a later date. But Father Devine was around during that time. It seems to spawn those kinds of people during that period. And these were all people who had parades and you got involved in these things as a musician. Paul Robeson was on the scene at that time. Pretty much like it is today there was always political and a lot of political and social activity among
and in the Black community. We were always addressing some kind of grievance that was happening to us. Police brutality was always there, you know young men and being put upon by the police or forces of authority... It still exist today. That hasn't changed that much and we were always addressing one issue or another and to attract people to the speakers, of course, would be the parades And of course we were interested in the parades at that time and I don't recall having...all the Black communities were contained you know. You went to school in the Black community, your church activity and a lot of activity came out of the churches. And the contact with the outside world was minimal except when you went to school and you competed in sporting events. And when you, of course, if you got involved in some of the parades, the American Legion and things like that. But pretty much you grew up in an atmosphere where everything that touched you culturally came out of the Black continuum. Gospel music,
church music that is, the secular music for entertainment, it was all a product of what we called...that was segregation. Even the radio, the records, the race records that were prevalent during the time. So my early beginnings...when I look back at it, was predominantly, I'd say...was predominantly Black as far as the music was concerned. The people who I learn from as far as playing the drums were concerned the Black people...the Jo Jones', Chick Webbs, Sidney Catletts and folks like that. Because this is what was in your communities. This is what you saw. And occasionally we would have battles with, say, white high school bands, and they would, naturally, play the stock charts of Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw, and stuff like that.

BROWER: Earlier, you were talking about drummers in Brooklyn. You cited some peers. Were there, besides your teenage peers, and guys a couple years older than you, were there some adult musicians in adult bands that were around Brooklyn that were an inspiration to you or were influential to you? In other words, it
would have been the equivalent of looking at a Count Basie Band as opposed to a band that was made up of your own peers...were there older, adult-type bands that were important in Brooklyn where there were with guys that would be role models as men or as musicians?

ROACH: Well, the role models really came out of the, you know, out of your family, I would say. The music that you learned from, was the music of the big bands of the period. You know, they were the Count Basies.... Saxophone players were listening to Lester Young and Coleman Hawkins. Guitar players were listening to Charlie Christian. Singers were listening to the Ella Fitzgeralds and the Pha Terrells and that. Our bands around in the local communities were basically learning from the people we saw in the theaters who were traveling on the road, blues singers and stuff like that. If you wanted to learn how to play an instrument, you would try to emulate those people, because they were the role models. Around the community, there were
people who were your peers, who could teach and show you things because they got there first. They would say, even if they were drummers, they would say, "Oh, you should hear Jo Jones" or "You should hear Sidney Catlett". They would steer you right to where the information was. Even though, as I said earlier, in the Brooklyn community, there were some fine musicians. There were people who could play rings around what I was trying to do—who were my age and a little bit older. And we were always kind of exchanging ideas and things like that. If I got a chance to go the Apollo Theater and heard Chick Webb...and whatever I could get out of seeing him that one day, I'd come back and show it to all the drummers. Whatever I could get, that kind of information, but it was always...Chick Webb was the man, you know. You aspired toward that. The bands in Harlem, like Steve Pullium's Band comes up to my mind. They were the musicians from New York City. When they'd come to Brooklyn or we'd go from
Brooklyn to Harlem at a basketball game or something and hear them during intermission or play opposite them during intermission at a basketball game or sporting events or high school dances, it was always something. Because they were right in it. You know, Harlem was the center. So, the drummers would have a chance, maybe, to have heard Chick Webb more often or Sidney Catlett more often than the guys in Brooklyn. Because, when they played the Apollo Theater, they probably lived in the Theresa Hotel and come around and perhaps play the local bars in jam sessions, so to speak. So they seemed to be a notch ahead of us. That's why, when I left high school, I just moved right into Manhattan.

BROWER: All the way uptown?

ROACH: Yeah, I was up around 114th street and things like that. You just naturally gravitate there. I went to school there. That was the center where I met people like Bud Powell and Allen Tinney and Victor Coulson.
BROWER: Who was Allen Tinney? I saw the name.

ROACH: He's a pianist, who... In that first New York band that I worked in, that Charlie Parker later joined, when he first came to New York and heard that band...that was the house band for a club, downtown New York, called the "78 Tap Room"...and for the afterhours club that was owned by Clark Monroe, called "Monroe's Uptown House".

BROWER: He had both places?

ROACH: Yeah, we worked the 78th Street Tap Room, that was Georgie Jay's. That was a white owner. That was downtown on West 78th Street. And then when we finished playing there, at, say three o'clock in the morning, we'd move uptown to Clark Monroe's Uptown House. That was an afterhours spot. Basically the format was the same. They had comedians and chorus girls and things like that in both clubs. So you played a show and you played a couple of specialty tunes. When you finished the afterhours spot...you finished about eight or nine a.m. in the
morning and you'd go look for some places to jam in. These places were, like, house rent parties and that's where you might hear an Art Tatum or Sidney Catlett, close-up. You know, in a small room, where Sidney Catlett, would perhaps play brushes on a serving tray and Art Tatum would be playing an upright piano. It would be crowded with people. And people that you'd seen in the theater would be hanging out after-afterhours. These were great learning experiences. You know, you could imagine what it was like for me to look over Sidney Catlett's shoulders while he's just playing brushes on just a small serving tray and Bud Powell looking over Art Tatum's shoulder while he's playing an old upright piano. So we were young...then those...were... So we'd leave these places...

BROWER: We're talking about '41, '42?

ROACH: We're talking about '42, '43 now...about '43. Imagine when we left these places... Well, around '42 I would imagine,
because we were both in high school...last of high school now.

Then we'd go home to, maybe, Bud Powell's house or come over to my house, where there was also a piano and we'd try to emulate these people and talk about them for the rest of the day.

BROWER: When did you meet Bud Powell?

ROACH: Ah, about that same period...

BROWER: When you were traveling back and forth from Brooklyn to Harlem?

ROACH: From Brooklyn to Harlem, Brooklyn to Harlem. When I graduated from high school, my father, who would pick me up with my drum set with his car...his gift to me for graduating high school was to get me a car.

BROWER: Sounds like he gave you a lot of support.

ROACH: Yeah, my family gave me a lot of support. Well music kept you out of the street....if you had a young son, who grew up in Harlem or Bed Sty. You know, they stayed home all day just practicing and doing that and was interested in something like
that. You know, your family encouraged you...

BROWER: What did he do?

ROACH: My father worked in a garage. He pumped gas. When we came from North Carolina to New York, it was right after the boll weevil situation. I was born on a farm. My parents were farmers. And so he's a farmer. He didn't know anything about city life. So when he came to New York, it was because of...the whole economic structure was turning over in the twenties, during that period. Because I was born in 1924. During that period, during all that time, unbeknownst to me, the whole country's farm crop were being attacked by what we called they the "Boll Weevil Period" and all that. Also, the big corporations were coming in, like Atlantic & Pacific and all that. They were the precursors to the big supermarkets, A & P and all that, that exist today. So, the small farmer...my father was telling me the reason they left mainly because if you were in North Carolina in a segregated society, say, if you got credit for fifty dollars
for the year for feed for your animals, which was a lot of money in those days, and for stuff to plant with, and maybe a plow and a mule or something like that... Well, if you needed fifty dollars from the company store or general store, which was owned by whites during that time...you farmed and everybody worked...by the time you harvested what you farmed on your acreage, the little acreage you had during that time, you took it into market to sell, they'd buy all the small White farmers produce first and the Black farmers would be the last that would be able to sell their produce. So, if you were fifty dollars in the hole, probably the most you could get would maybe be forty dollars, for example. So, you were always ten dollars in the hole year after year after year. You could never catch up. This happened to small White farmers as well...when all the crops were attacked by the boll weevil during the period, I would imagine. That's when we all came up north.
BROWER: We always caught the worst hell, first.

ROACH: Yeah, they'd have to stand out...until everybody else was sold and then they'd sell. So this is why they started going to industrial cities to work...where the problems were the same, of course. You fought for jobs. So, when he came to New York of course, he was green to what the city was like. But, you know, he made do because people who come from farms, they're people who work. And things that I got from my parents was that they worked. They were not afraid to work. They worked from sun up to sun down. It was a way of life to them to work...you have to work. So, you grow up in that kind of environment and that rubs off on you and it pays off eventually. So, he came up and he pumped gas, washed cars, and learned to be a "jack-leg" mechanic and learned something about cars. That's how I happened to get a car, I guess.

BROWER: Did your mother have to work?

ROACH: Yes, she worked too. She did the same thing. She did
"day work", of course. She was a country lady, you know. Many of the families who came off the farms down south, when they came up north, that was the extent of dealing with city life.

BROWER: Just get there.

ROACH: Get there, and try to make it the best way you can. And that's what it was. So it was manual labor, basically.

BROWER: So, at any rate, when you graduated from high school...

ROACH: But...back to that...coming to New York was godsend for a person that was interested in any kind of culture, I believe...

Because New York was not only the center, but the Black community was...even though it was a depressive period, was rich in culture. Because during that time, the atmosphere and the air in the Black community was permeated with great writers, Langston Hughes, and all that. Political thinkers, from the Paul Robeson's, the Garvey's. It couldn't help but rub off on you, regardless as to whether you was involved or not, the fact that you saw these these things, and heard these things, and read some
of these things, and were in the mist of it during that period, I'm sure had a great deal to do with the development of people, who came from that period which spawn, what we now look at now as "bebop"...the Coleman Hawkinses and all that great music and great poetry and great storytellers that came out of that period...

BROWER: Just on that question... Let's say 1942, among your peers, were you discussing the Robeson's and the movement of that time? Or are you saying that you were immersed and all these things that were around you and you feel that that shaped you in terms of your...?

ROACH: Yeah, you were involved in it. You were involved in what ever happened. Say for example, when Robeson was attacked at Peekskill, the whole community came up and you went out in it. When you were standing on the breadlines, during the early thirties waiting for your sack of meal and all that, you know,
your parents talking about what was going on. Just witnessing...being a witness to it, even though you didn't understand it, had a way of getting into your subconscious that helped to shape your personality. As I said, your images of authority and the teacher, especially if you were in the musical world, came out of your community. It wasn't a matter of you going to a conservatory and somebody teaching you music from Bach to Beethoven, etc., you learned music from the Black church and from Jimmy Lunceford, and from Mahalia Jackson and all that. It was contained. This was one way of preserving and perpetuating the music as we know it today, I believe. You know, like saxophone players learned how to play saxophone from listening to Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young. The drummers learned how to play drums from listening to Baby Dobbs and Chick Webb and Joe Jones and Kenny Clarke and folks like that.

BROWER: Well, you know as an aside... We've had about three or four interview encounters and at each point, ah, some
aspect of this has come up. Jumping way ahead, that's why in
1970, 1980's, we find that the Black community is not
substantially involved in "jazz culture" or any really serious
musical culture as such. And at one point when we were talking
about, why, for example, the difference between talking about
African-American music ...looking at jazz as Black music as
opposed to American music and a democratic art form. You felt
that we shouldn't isolate it...that we should recognize that, in
effect, that there are sociological and historical reasons why
Black Americans are at the forefront of creation of American
musical culture and that we should look at it as such. But at
the same time recognizing that, over a specific period in
history...probably starting from the late forties moving into the
mid fifties, there was progressively less and less involvement in
the Black community in terms of producing, promoting, and staging
the music, and in terms of being consumers of the music. And
trying to understand what is the historical process by which this
came about. I know, at one point you said, in effect, "Look, we've been here five hundred years and we should stop blaming racism for this, and examine ourselves in terms of that". That's one aspect of that... Another part of it seems to be that there are just certain, almost objective economic and social historical events that took place that changed the structure of how Blacks were involved in their own culture that we just haven't effectively adjusted to... that is the process of desegregation removes the music, in a physical sense, from the Black community. That is the whole self-contained society that we had no longer exists. We moved into a society in which our activity is much more diffused and in which media elements, we no longer control, dominate the ah... how can I say... transmission of culture and the marketing of culture. Not only dominate it, but determine and limit what it is that's going to be transmitted and...

ROACH: And who transmits it. BROWER: ... who transmits it. So
that there seems to be a whole complex of things involving the media and its development and its increasing dominance of how culture is disseminated and the whole problems of desegregation and changing in housing patterns and the whole economics of the entertainment industry, and how that's changed and the whole development of consciousness, and how that's shaped by media and changing living patterns and all that seemed to all add up to a process... this is very rambling and not focused but it is kind of hard to put in a neat fashion. Because it seems to be so many complex things that work here that brought about this diffusion of our culture... This is way off but this is something we seem to keep....

ROACH: You know, but it is rough when you look at the economic side of it, and when you look at the esthetic side of it, it is really a compliment to the power of Black imagination because the fact that we were so contained, we give a better record of what this society can produce culturally than anybody else because we
weren't touched, by say...we weren't touched by say...we had an opportunity to know what was going on in Africa or Europe. We didn't know anything about you know, Beethoven and Bach didn't come into our community. The great African musicians and sounds weren't in our community. It was in our blood say or something like that. But we didn't know, we weren't playing....

BROWER: It wasn't a conscious application of that kind of stuff...

ROACH: Yeah, so we were almost untouched, you know, by any kind... anything, so we had to come up with something. And what we came up with was what we saw around us in America and that is what has influenced all of America's music. Now when I look around and listen to most anybody, whether they will admit or not they have been touched by, and I mean profoundly touched, by what came out of the Black community culturally. That's what America is. It reflects the whole democratic aspect, improvisation. Collective improvisation is democratic. That's what jazz is
about. That’s what, when we go to the Black churches it’s about. It’s a group of people who just sing together and it comes out just beautifully, you know. So this has affected the whole culture you see. Even though now somebody has tapped in on it and said well this is new music so to speak. I know there are times when I visited overseas and gone to England and heard the English musicians attempting to use these systems of collective improvisations, especially in what they call rock music, or new wave music that comes, that’s now coming out of England. Some of the younger English musicians honestly believe it’s English until...They don’t realize that Chuck Berry and people like that were the stimulus to all this, or about where it comes from now. This is because...that’s the kind of diffusion we are talking about. But that’s only economic, it is not culture...It’s not esthetic or cultural. Still and all this whole form that has swept the world has come out of the fact that these folks who are
contained and what came out of the whole world had been influenced by it. When you listen to the instrumental music, improvisational music of today, people are trying to play like the Charlie Parkers, the Lester Youngs, the Louis Armstrongs, the Miles Davis, the Clifford Browns, the Kenny Clarkes, the Sidney Catletts you name it. That's what it is, everybody you can trace to some kind of Black influence if it is called contemporary music. The singers you will have to look at them the same way from Bessie Smith on up to Aretha Franklin and so forth and so on. When you hear it may not be done but the influence is so there that that's what it is. So in that area, of course, there is...it's undeniably because of that self-containment that came out of that group of people who were almost put into a glass and nothing could touch it and they had to come up with something that was completely ah different from anything else the world had heard or read or seen or acted like before. Now you look at America and people are dancing and sports people are doing the
Black power hand shakes... you see it all over, the whole system has been, if you will, colored by what came out of that containment. So actually I know it has been coopted and watered down to fit this and that and the other by the media and all of the other kinds of ways, but then it becomes economic and it is like okay now this group of people have come up with something that its like now we can all kind of feed on it and make money, money, money off of it. And so we are not a part of that. Like the Black community doesn't profit from that. They don't make the kind of money like say the Rolling Stones would make for example, who are influenced by this whole area of Blacks...this body of Black music that was produced because of that segregation and so forth and so on. You know it is something that you can be proud of on one hand to see how much influence and how you have done so much to change or add to the world body of music. And then on the other hand not to profit from it is just a drag.

BROWER: Not only a question of perhaps not profiting from it--
that's fundamental. But also, it seems that in the basic change from going from a rigidly...fairly or a society in which segregation was a very important force to a society in which there is some amount of mobility that our institutions--and maybe this is what you are talking about that once the people that ran the big entertainment centers, whether it is in film or whether it is in theaters, or whether it is in the record industry, or whether it is radio...

End side A, Tape #2
Begin side B, Tape #2

BROWER: ....records, and then through covering records, rock and roll or whatever. You know, it evolves on how its done. Once it went into a more open society, then the Black entertainment strips, the Black owned or at least controlled theaters, the Black controlled hotels...that whole focus of cultural activity in the Black community begins to disintegrate. Maybe in the media centers first. Maybe you go to Indianapolis
and it hangs on until '55 or '56. Maybe, in Harlem, it comes to 52nd Street in the forties and maybe that same process doesn't occur in Cleveland until some later date. But in a relative time frame, the whole infrastructure that supported entertainment, and thus was this whole learning thing that you talked about that was available to you as a youth is no longer there. So that in '58, when I'm ten years old, if there's a theater in my community, if I go there, what I want to see is not a stage show, but a cowboy movie. Maybe when you were ten years old, you went to see a movie, you saw a comedian, and you saw a singing group, and you saw a big band, and you saw a whole variety kind of complex, and you got immersed in the whole thing. And if you wanted to be one of these people, you could maybe walk around to that back door and you could see Sid Catlett or O'Neil Spencer walk out with his cymbal case and maybe ask them a question or whatever. When I'm ten years old, the only kind of music that's available is a very
limited span of Black music, "R and B" kind of stuff that you
would get over the radio. If there is music coming into the
community to be performed...like if it's a dance, maby...Count
Basie is doing something for the Alpha's or the Omegas or
something...But it's not like where I could get access to it. If
there is music for me to get access to, its a limited kind of
music and there is certainly no vibrant night life in the Black
community. No strip, no sequence of clubs, no theater around
which clubs are clustered. That activity is basically gone. By
the sixties, it's certainly gone. So the opportunity for a young
Black kid to physically and personally identify and be immersed
upon that, is not there. Futhermore, the way he's being
conditioned for culture at that point is different from the way
you were being conditioned for culture. Because now radio and
television are really dominant. I think its a very salient point
you made that live music was such an important aspect of your
coming up and it was so immediate to you. You could almost walk
out of the house and be confronted with it. By the time my generation comes around, it comes to you through media, which is either White controlled or if Blacks are involved, they are following the dictates of what Billboard or the commercial system is dictating..."gold records, platinum records". So you got a whole different kind of way of learning and getting in contact with culture. To me, that is as important in a different way...has an important kind of impact, as the whole economics of the exploitation of it. Because it has to do with how culture is transmitted and what culture you get and what happens to generations of people in relationship to their own culture. Because you still have these issues produced, but now they're a part of the world market. Max Roach is not accessible to me in the way that Jo Jones would have been. Elvin Jones is not accessible to me. Roy Haynes is not accessible to me. Say, I'm a young kid coming up playing drums, it's no way that I could go around my community and say that, yeah, Roy Haynes was here last
Roy Haynes, if he plays New York, LA, and few other major cities, that's about what it's going to be. There's no circuit in which to get contact with this stuff. That was a very complex thing that went down and it doesn't seem that the Black community was able to adjust to that—to renew its institutions. That when we went to integration, we lost all of our institutional infrastructure save the church. James Cleveland can still go any city and get a hundred voices who could do his music...you know, indigenous to the community. Duke Ellington, were he live, couldn't go to any city and find a hundred musicians who could play his music...maybe he could, but not organized, not rehearsed, not supported by a community institution which keeps them into it... You know, there might be like, in this town, Rick Henderson, who does Ellington music. But, it's like if he gets a grant and he can get the cats together and they are not doing other things. Its different that a choir...rehearsing
every Wednesday and every Friday and singing every Sunday. And
whose maintaining that whole self-contained kind of activity.
That’s changed and Black people didn’t adapt to that
institutionally, ah, in the way Jewish people do, who’ve had a
lot of experience in being assimilated...dealing in a society
where they were a minority and had to function as such, but yet
keep their thing in tact. They seemed to have like thousands of
years of doing that...of remaining Jewish, yet functioning as a
minority within society and keeping certain aspects of their
culture whole and keeping the transmission of that culture vital
within the community. We didn’t make that...
ROACH: When you are people who are dispersed...you are who you
are. You are Black anyway. You will always sound like, if you
will, Huddie Ledbetter or James Cleveland. You’ll always be like
"Dr. J" and whatever. No matter what society, there are certain
things that you are going to always do. Music and certain things
are certainly fortes as far as our people are concerned. In any
case. I look at the scene, even today, and the leading innovators that come up, no matter what, even with this so-called diffusion that we're talking about, somewhere down the line that information is there. I don't think it's that much different than the time, say, Louis Armstrong and them came on the scene. Because they still were overwhelmed by European culture. That's always been the dominant force, and it's less dominant now because of Black cultural influences. I think that the fact that the media is here, it's not that bad or hasn't been that harmful to what's been going on. Because it's through the media that you are still hearing Chick Webb's and the Coleman Hawkins and everybody else even though it may be coming from people who are not Black. They still have to say that when you hear American singers...there's no way an American singer like Peggy Lee or any of them...can not say they are not influenced by Billie Holidays and so forth and so on. We're still coming up with people who are leading the pact, so to speak, in every generation. From,
say, Miles to Freddie Hubbard to Wynton Marsalis. From Chick Webb to Kenny Clarke to Art Blakey to Elvin Jones to Tony Williams. It still is the same. I don't see that much being, ah...

BROWER: I think we still come up with the players...

ROACH: That's what I'm saying...the major influences. So what I'm suggesting, it's not that young Blacks are not privy to it, but they become privy to it now by new means of communication. For example, television or the recording industry is supplanted a lot of the live performances that I grew up with. But the recording industry has made all this available all over again. You know...you can still hear Chick Webb today. More people can hear Chick Webb than heard him when was alive, because of the recording industry.

BROWER: Yeah, isn't that the irony and the dilemma of it. More people can potentially hear him. But do more people hear him?
ROACH: Well, I think that's something...

BROWER: So maybe more people in society as a whole...but I am really focusing...and it's interesting that we still continue to develop creative players and young players keep coming up, but I think we've also hit on in the past, the fact that there's something going on in terms of the Black audience. Ok...I mean, Wynton is not representative of young musicians. Although it's true that, apparently in New Orleans as a whole, there's a whole crew of young players...Terrance Blanchard, Donald Harrison, this tenor player name "Toussaint", the Marsalis brothers, that came up under Ellis' wing and maybe some other influential people in New Orleans. But could you go to Baton Rouge and find the same phenomenon?

ROACH: You'll find the same phenomenon in Detroit. You'll find it in Chicago. You'll find it also in New York...and you find it right here in Washington, DC.

BROWER: Yeah, you find young players, but...
ROACH: Maybe there was a just a short hiatus of what the audience was like. We've always had what's been comparable to, if you want to use this terminology, our "art music" and our "secular music", if you want to say that. We've always had religious music. We've always had the art music and we've always had music for our entertainment, or secular music. We had the Ink Spots and all these wonderful groups along the same time we had Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker and everything else. So when I hear the popular music we have today, say, Michael Jackson, and so forth, you know, we still do have these wonderful musicians like Olu Dara and the World Saxophone Quartet. Being in it all the time, I'm constantly being amazed at...the new ideas and the new things that are happening with every new generation that comes up, you know. So the heart of it is always there.

BROWER: Earlier you talked about the Black genius...

ROACH: Yeah, it's just inherent. BROWER: ...It's testimony to
that. But it seems to me there's something fundamental that has changed.

ROACH: It is. I know what you're saying. But it reaches another level. In no community now, is the music accessible on a live basis as like it used to be. The TV has taken up a lot of that slack and now that you have "cable" and everything in New York. I turn on the cable, say in New York and I do hear Ken McIntyre. I hear people that you never hear, even on records. I see them and hear them on the TV because of the many, many channels that are coming about. Some way...

BROWER: You know, that's an interesting thing. Radio is the same thing. You can go from channel to channel. But people tend to self segregate themselves, and if they self segregate themselves to "Black stations", there are not going to get the breadth of cultural information, whether it's news information or musical information. It's true that I think there's a greater
potential. There's all the re-issues. There's the new potential of cable. There are a lot of things out there, that, as you suggest, could supplant what was done previously to transmit the culture, but there seems to still be some kind of a gap between those potentials and the exploitation of those potentials in terms of the consumer base in the Black community and the development of a broad consciousness about this culture in the Black community. It gets back to my feeling that we just haven't adapted...institutionally. We haven't made that transition. In fact Black newspapers don't exist anymore. Now it's true you have your Rasberry's and so forth that have filtered into the White media. But I don't dare say you can find, on a mass level, a Black intellectual focus finding expression.

ROACH: Not just Black papers, something happened in the society that changed everything around. The demise of Black newspapers, they weren't the only newspapers that went down the drain. A lot was loss in our society right after the McCarthy period into the
civil rights movement and so forth. I'm a firm believer that everything balances itself out. For example, now the culture is being preserved by the media, by way of people who are not necessarily Black. For example, when you go into a society, the evidence of a society being heavily influenced by people other than people who dominate the society in any way, is a mark of a victory in some strange way. For example, if you send in an army to conquer a society, the only way you can hold that society is by inundating them with your culture. Now even though Black folks were not conscious of the influence that they have and that has taken over, especially in the music, the whole American society and now has enveloped the world in some way. If you go to Japan, that is, if you go to the Far East, if you go to any part of the Americas, and of course Europe you will find some semblence, sometimes in different degrees. Like in England, the culture has been completely taken over by... has been influenced by Black musical culture, from their "new wave" to their "rock".
to everything else. You hear the rhythms. You hear attempts at simulating the different artists' in this country as well...especially in the United States of America. So to me, even though it may look bleak in a sense, I only see that from an economic point of view, which I don't believe is going to last very long...

BROWER: That's the biggest problem area.

ROACH: That's the biggest problem area, but as far as the culture is concerned, it's really living now, more than it ever has...on a much wider scale than it was when it was just contained in the Black communities. Now it seems to have come out, and it's enveloping every aspect of American musical culture. When I listen to the so-called contemporary minimalist or I listen to anything, I can hear it all the way through the music. In some way, that still has to be reckoned with or explained. Black folks have had a profound influence on the musical aesthetic of
the whole world today—much more, than I think, Black people realize. When you like at, for example, Micheal Jackson and you see the influence he has had over the whole world. It was so immediate, before anyone knew it, the world was captivated by this. This seems to happen more often now than it did before. There was Duke Ellington, who captivated. There was that period of bebop. There was that swing period. There was that New Orleans period. I think what has happened, in some abstract way, we're in better shape than we really realize. It's up to now to do more the same of what we've been doing and taking it other levels. I think it will turn itself around. Certainly, every time I turn on the media, I see myself represented in the aesthetic of it, not necessarily physically. It's always European. It's always the White American doing this, doing that, doing the other.

BROWER: What is the essence of it?

ROACH: The essence of it comes out of the Black experience. Of
course there's little cause to rejoice, because we are not enjoying the fruits of it...materialistically or even as far as credit is concerned in many, many cases. When I pick up the entertainment magazines or the musical magazines, we're still occupying small corners of it. But, if you go back historically to the early jazz magazines like Metronome and early Downbeat, maybe there were only two or three mentions of Black artists in these magazines at that time. I'm not sure we had any music magazines during that period either, ourselves.

BROWER: You would find most of the writing in Black papers. That would be the extent of Black music journalism.

ROACH: Yeah, but when you look at the earliest accounts of what was going on musically, you find more happening today than was happening even earlier. You find several dissertations on John Coltrane, on Miles Davis... I found a dissertation on myself by a student in Italy, who did his doctoral dissertation thesis on Max Roach, for example. You know, you find across the board,
there seems to more literature out here now, especially on the instrumental area or the art music that has came out of the Black community, than has ever been published before. The Black intellectuals spent a lot of time, and necessarily so, on the historical evaluations, on sociological implications of our tenure in the Americas, for example. They are just beginning to get to dealing with the artist, for example. Now you will find treatises by the Black intellectuals on the artists from Charlie Parker to Louis Armstrong. More and more they are beginning to deal with the arts. At least, as I see. Where that wasn't happening earlier. I know it looks strange, but we have to look beyond this strangeness...

BROWER: Then, you think we've been looking at the wrong thing?

ROACH: No, we've been looking at it just like it is. What you say is absolutely true. There are no Black papers like the Chicago Defender and the earlier papers...even Paul Robeson was
publishing. There was much more literature. Frederick Douglass was publishing papers. But then society has changed...and we have asked for that, I dare say. We've have asked to be more a part of the society, more a part of the society, more a part of the society. And the more we kind of make in roads in it, even though the slightest, we have to give up something else, it seems.

BROWER: I keep using this word how to "adapt". I think this is moving from one status to another status—one set of social relationships to another set. ...and there's this famous phrase "you can't go home again". You can't ever re-create that past. I mean, that's part of the dynamic of our culture...the dynamic of America is that it's not going to be the way it was for Muddy Waters. Those blues ain't going to be played again It's not going to be the way it was with Charlie Parker, or for Max Roach in 1944, or for Max Roach in 1955. There are going to be some other...things are always going to be happening. This is sort of
being redundant but, for whatever reason, there's been an impetus within our creative elements at the musical level, to keep pushing things forward, however fitfully, with all kinds of things that have been disruptive and problems to musicians and all kinds of tragedies that happened and various obstacles. But somehow the music and the musicians keep moving forward. In another conversation we had, we talked about dealing with the music as a kind of intellectual discipline and how the engagement, be it classical concert music or serious improvisational music coming out of the tradition we're talking about, involves a kind of listening discipline and a kind of intellectual discipline which translates into other kinds of endeavor... That the lack of broad based interest in this music in our community could be a kind of an index, a kind of a cultural index, a kind of an intellectual index. And that if we were to compare this with to previous period, when the music had more of a popular base might suggest that the Black community
have gone backward in terms of its cultural focus in the musical area. Or maybe it hasn't.

ROACH: Intellectually and, and...

BROWER: Yeah. You know all change is not progress.

ROACH: Well, then you can also say that the Black community has spread out. You know Harlem...

BROWER: So both things could be true at the same time.

ROACH: For example, Harlem was, say what, 110th Street to, say 155th Street, at one point. Or, Bed Sty was between Bedford Avenue and Styvesant Avenues and continuing in that area. Now, when you go into Brooklyn, Bed Sty has flares out into Flatbush. And as far as you go in Brooklyn, the community has become Black. Now granted there's less work, but there are more houses being owned in areas like that. The population has grown and the culture has spread out into not just simply...now there's a strong Caribbean influence. There's a strong gospel influence.
It's not...and it is too...that these small cells were contained, they've just spread out and spread out, and spread out. Here in Washington, DC, for example, it used to be around 7th and T and the Howard Theater. Now it has grown and grown. I think it works both ways, as you say. We've become more involved in some other things as well. But the culture has not lost itself. I don't think it has lost itself. In fact to me, when I listen to the innovations that are coming out today with groups that I see like the World Saxophone Quartet, the young musicians out of New Orleans, the Marsalis brothers, and these wonderful folks, and the musicians that came out of Chicago with the Muhal and that crowd...

BROWER: AACM.

ROACH: Yeah. It's growing, but it has to come through now...

BROWER: A different way.

ROACH: It has to come through a different way. We have the television thing here. As far as the Black newspaper is
concerned...

BROWER: That's just precisely the point. Now, if you go to Dayton... If you go to Cincinnati, for example...a friend of mine...very involved in music...He raised the point that, "Look if you go to Cincinnati and you say the name David Murray or you say the name Oliver Lake, or if you say any number of people, they're not going to know who in the hell you're talking about. They're up to... as far as maybe Coltrane". Even musicians...saxophone players he talked about he said, "Well, you know so and so, they're still talking about Coltrane '62, '64. I mean anything really past that hasn't been communicated, hasn't been available on the records. The records aren't in the record stores, the radio stations don't play it. Now they hear about Wynton Marsalis, because in this instance a huge entertainment complex, CBS Records, was able through own power and through their power to elicit the media, to project this man to the extent that he gets two Grammys. I mean, you have to not be in
America to miss the phenomena of Wynton Marsalis. It's almost like Michael Jackson. Wynton Marsalis hasn't reproduced itself. Polygram records hasn't decided to make a Wynton Marsalis and MCA Records hasn't decided to do it, and Warner Electric and Atlantic haven't decided "let's compete with what CBS did and let's find us a saxophone player or trumpet or what ever and allow him to play within his tradition and project him and let him be forceful and articulate". Hasn't happen. So, I think it's true that the community is diversified, that the influence has permeated the culture as a whole, and that there are new opportunities presented by all the new technology in the media. The question is "When are we going to use those opportunities to effectively reduce that gap?", because I still feel that once you get beyond the most sophisticated Black communities in the Black community, like Washington or New York City, and then only on a superficial level, will you find a consciousness of advanced Black musical
culture today. I think in the forties, it was much more likely that innovative players would have known about...and I'm not going to say these people are the same as Charlie Parker, but...much more likely that the young lions of the forties would have some kind of impact, by the late forties on the national Black community. With the exception of a Wynton Marsalis, which is be kind of an aberration I mean I don't see that being reproduced.

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ROACH: You see, not many of the younger musicians, regardless of what persuasion they are, has gotten what Wynton Marsalis has gotten at this point in time. As I listen to you talk... Then, at the time that the Black community was aware of the Charlie Parkers and all of us as young players during that period, it was prior to desegregation, where they had a circuit. We played every single Black community, practically, in the country, north, south, east, and west. That was the form of entertainment. It wasn't TV... it wasn't the big monster as it is today. Radio wasn't the big monster that it is today. The record industry wasn't what it is today. So the Black community had a chance to experience us because, one, segregation; two, the communities were still self-contained to the extent that Black artists played Black communities. Benny Goodman didn't necessarily play in Harlem. He played downtown at the New York Paramount, not at the
Apollo Theater. He didn't necessarily play the Howard Theater.

BROWER: He'd play the Capital Theater here...

ROACH: He would play the Capital. The Howard Theater was like the Apollo Theater and theaters around the country that were in Black communities. They played Black acts or Black bands or Black music. So, it was a different time. Now, it's just a different thing. In the mean time though, except for Louis Armstrong, who was phenomena during that time...who crossed all barriers, because of the films that he was in and so forth. There were very few. Duke Ellington, perhaps was another one. Lena Horne was another one. Billy Holiday reached out. But nowadays you got a Micheal Jackson and you have a Miles Davis thats crossed over into...all kinds of barriers and things like that. But it was a different time. I think we have to deal with 1985 as what 1985 is. We have to understand the past, so we can deal with the present. Perhaps, in dealing with the present, we can
effect what may happen in the future...there's no guarantee of that. We have to deal with the past. But we can't stay there and assume that, as you say earlier, that 1955...that Bird is going to come back or that Brownie is going to be back here to deal with what's going on. Now we have to deal with what we're dealing with today. The fact that David Murray and them are not in these communities, is something else... But I remember when in New York City on Black radio, on "The Make Believe Ballroom", Saturday night was the only time you heard Black bands. I hear more Black music on the radio today than I heard then. It might just be possible that the Black artist today, even though they've got a long, long way to go as far as ownership and control and dealing with all the media is concerned, is making or made more money than they made during that period when they were just dealing with these Black communities where they were always almost economically depressed. The Black communities never were powerhouses in the economic structure of this country. If they
were, we would have banks and all the other things to show for it from that period. But that doesn’t exist, at least now. People like...Diana Ross and folks like that certainly are making much more money than people like Billie Holiday or Ethel Waters and that crowd because of record sales and because of thing that they have done. We didn’t have a Barry Gordy or some of the things that are going on today. I know that things may look bleak, and they are. Because when I look in the Black community...when I say this is 1984 or 85, how often do I play an exclusive Black community...I don’t. When I play a club in an area like Georgetown here in Washington, D.C. or Greenitch Village in New York City, and these places are packed, there are more Black people in these clubs than there were during the forties in these same clubs on 52nd Street.

BROWER: Maybe four or five years ago, we had a similar conversation. Are you saying that 1984, there are more Blacks coming out to hear you than there were in 1979, or 1980, or 1981,
or 1976?

ROACH: No, I'm just saying that...as I see the Black community now it has spread out, more Blacks are now just beginning to realize that this is an integrated society. I personally don't believe that we should just stay in the Harlems, but we should spread out...to the rest of the world. Why not?

BROWER: Is this more of a case for example, as for as I am concerned...

ROACH: It is happening naturally anyway...

BROWER: I will go anywhere there is somebody I want to hear. But I know that there are guys maybe a little bit older than me, they will say to me, "Man I don't go to Georgetown to listen to music". Because they would socialized to hear music in their own communities and these were guys that turned me on to records. I think that I have got all of whatever records they'd say "Man have you heard this"? And they'd take you back into this
collections and you go around them and this is what they are about. But they don't come out and they don't go into the white world to hear music.

ROACH: That's political though...

BROWER: It's a political decision on their part... Some of them are conscious. Some of them are just like it is just like they are not use to it and they don't do it. As opposed to maybe people that came up in my period which is the generation that kind of was phased into an integrated society or more open access society.

ROACH: Through your education...

BROWER: We are not so hung up about it.

ROACH: Through your... Now, how many Black universities or colleges are in the country? Totally Black? Howard use to be all Black. But Howard also has a White student contingent I imagine...doesn' it?

BROWER: Especially the graduate level.
ROACH: On the graduate level... yeah. That's right so it isn't like where this is a black school and it was totally Black. Now everything and this is something else that we asked for which came down in the 1954 Supreme Court decision... Things that everybody else fought for and it is there. It is interesting when you said that people that you learned a great deal from will not go to Georgetown. There are people that I learn a great deal from in Bed Stuy who would not come down to the village to hear us play. But Bed Stuy is a community that can't support a club... I can't support a theater. But this is also... it goes with music in general. There is no New York Paramount... There is no more Capital Theater... there is no Howard Theater... there is no Apollo. That's something else... there is no 42nd Street. Something else is going on here now and if artist in the United States of America now are working in areas where the area supports that kind of activity. You know there is no theater in Harlem you know, that working theater... It is downtown New
York. The working theater here for Black actors, as well as...for Black actors—it has always been for white actors have had an opportunity—but for black actors to participate in theater they have to go into the "downtown" areas of any city. And they are actually...they are directing. They are doing theater. They are writing. You see the Negro Ensemble has to survive downtown.

BROWER: As part of the general arts community as opposed to...

ROACH: Yeah, as opposed to saying, "Okay, we are gonna stay...We are not going to..." They can stay in Harlem and there are theaters in Harlem, if they like. But there is no reason why they can't come downtown too. Because there is... economically there are people downtown who can afford to support an arts community per se. You know without grants or anything like that, necessarily—but who could perhaps support the community. So downtown, if we worked the Village Vanguard, you know, you are
assured of an audience in a sense. Because the people that can frequent those places are the middle class White and, if you will, middle class blacks.

BROWER: You know this is one last thing, I have always resented the thing I have gotten from the media and I hear it from musicians too—that black people don't support the music. And this is what I mean about looking at the wrong things. It seems to me that—and it gets back to the economic question—that what we have to talk about is they don't support it in certain forms that maybe economically conditioned. But those aren't the only measurements by which you would say what is support... It's like if you go by the standard of "Do they come out to Blues Alley?" then you would have to answer no. But if you use some other indexes you may come up with a different answer.

ROACH: Records... If Michael Jackson came into D. C. he would have play stadium which is not necessarily within the Black community. If he comes to New York he would have to go down to
You know, that's an economic thing... and also T. V. If we look at our community today I don't see that much going on a local level supporting say small clubs... like the Village Vanguard, like Blues Alley or the like of that, all over the country. If we go to San Francisco, it's the same difference. We don't work within the Fillmore district. We have to work in the area where restaurants and clubs and people are coming out to that kind of thing. We have to work the Charlie's like in Washington, D.C. That's what it is. And the people who support them are middle class folks, be whether they are Black and White. And ninety percent of the middle class is what?

BROWER: Is White.

ROACH: Right.

BROWER: In other words, you've got to be prepared to spend sixty dollars that night.

ROACH: Thirty, forty, fifty...yeah.
BROWER: Well, I was thinking Sarah Vaughn at Charlie's...twenty-five, thirty dollars, advanced reservations...

ROACH: Per person.

BROWER: Per person. So, it's fifty dollars to get in the door. If you have a couple of drinks, you're up to sixty dollars. If you want to come to Max Roach at Blues Alley, it's probably fifteen...you know, twelve to fifteen dollars per person. So that's thirty dollars and a few drinks. The economic...it's really a big factor. In the middle seventies, when I was trying to get involved in this kind of work, if McCoy Tyner would come to town, I would go there every night; but I wasn't paying a cover charge. If I had to pay a cover charge, bring my wife out one night, pay some baby-sitters, you know I might be able to come see one act a month. So then someone comes and looks out into the audience and say "Well, I don't see any Black people. Black people must not like jazz." I just felt that was a
negative thing on a whole generation that had nothing to do with the reality of what it had to do to consume...to go and to enjoy some music.

ROACH: It's a period we're into. We're in a funny period. We're in a period of transition, in a sense. The recording industry...at this point in time, there's more jazz coming out on records than has happened in a long time. During the forties, when that was that period where Charlie Parker and Miles and all of us were spawned, musicians weren't making as much money, if you want to look at it, as they are making today. Charlie Parker did not make anywhere near the kind of money that musicians are making today. Of course it's a different times. It's inflation and all this kind of stuff. No where near could he have afforded the kind of things that we see today. I'm not talking about wasting money on just partying either. You don't waste that much money on partying. It's just that there wasn't that much money available. Even though everybody in the Black community knew us
and we worked on 52nd Street. And we were just being introduced to the so-called "White community". With Bird's group, for example, in Chicago, we broke the color line, I guess, in the north Chicago area. But we still played the south side of Chicago. We still played the bottom of Detroit. We still played this area here in Washington, D. C., where Black folks were around...the Howard Theater, 7th and T I think it is, in that area. We still played... But New York was where we worked downtown...we worked 52nd Street. The money on 52nd Street was no where near like the money that is being made by musicians now in places like Sweet Basil's and Charlie's and places like that. The Howard Theater didn't pay Charlie Parker the kind of money that people are making today. When we look through...when Miles and I worked with him... When we look at the contracts that Bird had, that has been revealed in that book, ah...To Bird, With Love...They have pictures of contracts of his. I had no idea of the kind of money he was getting for working the Howard Theater,
at that time. The kind of money now that, say, Cannonball’s group made on the World Saxophone Quartet, it’s much more than what we made during that period. Even though we might have been more popular in the so called "Black communities"...but the Black community was where we were allowed to work, I might say...yeah. You know, we didn’t work White communities at that time.

ROACH: You know, I was interested in field and track and music during the time I was going to Boys High School, Brooklyn. To these events, my dad, who worked in a garage, during my tenure in high school, would pick me up to go to track meets and then take me to my little gigs in the evenings. So, when I graduated from high school, he surprised me with a little car...second hand car. So I could then take...run around myself with my drums. This is all I needed. That meant that I could get to Brooklyn and Harlem, as often, as much as, I possibly could. It was during that period, I met people like Victor Coulson, who was the straw
boss of the Clark Monroe Band. I got a gig with Clark Monroe's Band. Clark Monroe was the brother in law of Billie Holiday, who at that time was married to Jimmy Monroe. The Monroe Brothers had been a song and dance act. Clark Monroe who, of course conducted the band and hired people for the stage shows...they had singers and dancers and chorus lines and things like that at that particular time. He also had the band and was the "MC". And he directed the band something like the fashion that Cab Calloway directed a band... And you'd have what we called a "strawboss" and Victor Coulson, the trumpet player, who played cornet and also played violin, was the man who would rehearse the band and prepare the band for the shows. And then Clark Monroe would come out and conduct us and introduce the acts and so forth. We worked downtown at the 78th Street Taproom on West 78th Street downtown. After we got off, we'd go uptown and work Clark Monroe's Uptown House... I believe it was on 133rd or 132nd Street in Harlem. They had separate unions at that time too...
No, unions had just merged during that period. Because Clark Monroe was like a person who put us all in the union so we could work at the West 78th Street Taproom. This band...I guess I was about eighteen or nineteen...when we played uptown at his place, many of the stars who worked the theaters, the Apollo theater and some folks from downtown as well, would come up to this after hour place... That's when I first worked with people like Lester Young...ah, jammed with people like Lester Young. When Charlie Parker came to town with Jay McShann and decided to stay in New York, he joined our band. I'll never forget when Victor Coulson, who was the strawboss of that little band, told us the night before he introduced us to Charlie Parker, he said, "Tomorrow night I'm going to bring in one of the greatest musicians in the world"... And the next night he came in and Charlie Parker sat in with us and he joined our little band. Charlie Parker and his winning ways just made friends. Everybody loved him immediately. Not just as a musician, but as a kind of,
ah...person that he was. Because he had been traveling with Jay McShann's Band. He came from Kansas City, with its glorious history of jazz music at that time. You know, Coleman Hawkins came from there, Lester Young, Count Basie's Band, that was hot at the time with Joe Jones and all these wonderful folks. So, Kansas City at that time was like a mecca, and playing with someone from Kansas City who could play like Charlie Parker was a pleasure for all of us. In the band at that time was Ebenezer Paul, a bass player, Victor Coulson played cornet, and Charlie Parker joined us on alto saxophone. We had another saxophonist too...his name was Hawk. We called him Hawk. He played alto, as well. Allan Tinney was our pianist. We played shows downtown and shows uptown. And Clark Monroe sang and danced and led the band. Out of that relationship, I met Dizzy Gillespie. Now, that I'm out of school, Monday nights I could go to listen to the people at Minton's Playhouse on 118th Street, where people like
Thelonious Monk and Nick Fenton, a bass player. And people like Harold West, one of the great drummers of all times, who dealt with just quarter notes mainly with his playing... It was so fascinating the way he dealt with accenting quarter notes. And Scotty, tenor player...they were the house band at that time. And on Monday nights, all the folks would come to Minton's. That was really very educational, because you got to hear all the great musicians of the time. Sometimes you'd go in and there'd be Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, Ben Webster, Kenny Clarke, and Big Sidney Catlett. You had an opportunity to hear all these people perform. Sometimes even get a chance to do a little playing yourself and maybe have someone comment on it or look at you like you were okay. And that would send you home to practice the rest of the day. Some of the constituents that were with me whom I grew up with during that period of my life were people like Bud Powell. And, of course, Bird was leader of the pack of that young group of musicians at that time. Dexter Gordon came
to New York. Leo Parker finally came up from Washington to New York. These were younger musicians. I guess you would call us the "Young Turks" at that particular time. Dizzy Gillespie, I guess you might say, was the catalyst during that period. Because when he heard me play at ah...at ah...Monroe's Uptown House. I believe it was...he was still with Cab Calloway...he said that when he left Cab, he was going to start a band and he hoped that I would work with him. He was the one who called me for my first recording date with Coleman Hawkins in 1943. This is when we did "Disorder at the Border", and "Woody'n' You" and pieces like that. And when Coleman Hawkins... In fact, he had not too long been in the country, and he was riding on the success of that great recording of his, "Body and Soul". So he was now recording in New York and he got Dizzy to, I guess, organize the band. And this is a modern band, and Dizzy called me up for that. And that was my first recording session.

BROWER: What was the difference between what went on at Minton's...
and what went on at Monroe's Uptown House?

ROACH: Well, Minton's Playhouse was where they had a quartet. On Monday evenings, there would be a jam session. They perhaps would have a singer there and an intermission pianist. But, whereas, Minton’s (Monroe's Uptown House) they would have a show. They'd have dancers, singers, like they had in Ma----- or Small's Paradise during that period. Not on the same scale, but it was a club where we played to acts and then we'd play a specialty tune. And then around seven or eight o'clock, musicians might come in an sit in with us. Like Lester would come in and be hanging out...he might do something or Billie Holiday would come in and she would sing something with a group of people. So you had a chance to experience and share the bandstand with these great people. The difference was, that Monroe's was like a show place where they had singers and dancers...

BROWER: But there wasn't a chance to interact...
ROACH: There was a chance to interact, but it wasn't as open as Minton's was.

BROWER: Were both of those places kind of "incubators" for modern jazz? Or, was Minton's more the place where that exchange took place that might have led to more modern ideas?

ROACH: Well, I think they all had a purpose. Because after Minton's, which would close up about four o'clock, you'd go to Monroe's Uptown House. Minton's, I guess you might say had the legitimate hours, from say eight or nine o'clock up until four a.m. Then, the after hour clubs was like what Clark Monroe's was. Monroe's Uptown house was about, say, half show and then people could come in and play with us. But we did play shows. We played for fire dancers or "shake dancers", maybe a singer. And then we had a chance to play and occasionally...not occasionally. But every night, after the two shows or one show was over, we'd have a chance to interact with other musicians, whoever came in. But it was a show place, because Clark Monroe
himself was a show person. Teddy Hill, who had Minton's, was a band leader. He had traveled all over the world with a band...

So him having Minton's, it was a different atmosphere in management. Whereas, Teddy Hill...musicians, Kenny Clarke, Monk, and all these people would play...where instrumentalists played and maybe a singer would join in or maybe they'd have an intermission pianist. I remember when Carmen McRae was intermission pianist there. Jam sessions...you know, people would come in and play because they had this dynamite rhythm section with Thelonious Monk and Harold West and Nick Fenton.

BROWER: Nick Fenton?

ROACH: That was the bass player.

BROWER: Tell me, did he die young or what happened to Nick Fenton?

ROACH: I'm not sure what happened to Nick Fenton.

BROWER: I mean his name appears and it just sort of disappears.

ROACH: Well, see, I remember Nick Fenton. He was a fine person
who worked with... who was in that rhythm section of Monk, Nick Fenton and Harold West up at Minton's. This was maybe 1941, '42, '43 at Minton's... And people would come in to play with this rhythm section. That was a hot rhythm section, really. Nick was a wonderful, wonderful musician... I don't know what happened... Because then Oscar Pettiford came to town... There was Jimmy Blanton. You had a chance to hear all of these people. Sometime or another, they'd come through Minton's and you would have an opportunity to hear them. Because Minton's was a place where, ah, more often than not, people were allowed to sit in. Whereas, Monroe's, there was a policy of keeping a band because you had to play for certain acts.

BROWER: This is the time you say the unions had merged, but it appears that Minton's was a place where musicians could have their own kind of comradery... sort of like an informal union house or ah...
ROACH: You know, it was a club. There were several clubs...like Kovar's-?-? There were several clubs in Harlem during that period. Afterhour clubs as they called them, where class musical acts performed. It served, more or less, to develop entertainers, in a sense. You know, singers and dancers, as well as musicians because you had arrangements and...

End of side A, tape #3

Begin side B, tape #3

ROACH: At this particular time, there was Small's Paradise, M------, of course the Apollo Theater, Kovar's----?...ah, and just places up and down 7th Avenue and Lenox Avenue. You know...those were the clubs, but there was Wells' place...Joe Wells' place... You know, it was much like the way it was in Brooklyn. On 135th Street, there were clubs. On 125th Street there was the club Baby Grand. There was the Do Drop Inn...places where people would have a ball and they'd have a band there. There were lots of places to work around town that
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BROWER: How were these places, physically? I mean, how were they appointed?

ROACH: They were lovely. They had a dance floor, a stage, tables, maitred. Like, Small's main room seated, maybe, two
hundred fifty people. They had chorus lines...M----raines was the same way; they had, maybe, eight-girl chorus lines, dressing rooms in the back. In fact, Charlie Parker married one of the girls from M----raines? when we were working there, Geri Parker. So did Charlie Persip marry Sophie, who was a good friend of Geri Parker during that period, who was working in the line at M----raines at that time. I believe Dizzy Gillespie's wife, earlier, worked in, maybe, the Apollo Theater in the line. They had big shows. They were like extravaganzas so to speak...you know, the opening...the curtain would come up, the band would come out, the girls come out and dance, the MC would be introducing one act after another, the chorus girls would come back, the band would get a special feature place, and so forth and so on. They were really vaudeville, they'd have comedians and every thing like that...Pigmeat Marham and all these folks were all part of it. I guess, what that did for us was to familiarize
most of the musicians about the discipline that goes with playing a show. ...This now manifests itself in TV shows. Most clubs, nowadays, you come in and you perform music...it's almost like, ah...it's like chamber music in a club, only in a different context. You walk into a club, you sit down, you listen to quartets, quintets, and so forth play. So, to use that word loosely, it's like a chamber setting. There's nothing wrong with it, but that exists as well. You just don't have that Vaudeville atmosphere that goes along with it; that has been transferred to TV shows and film that we see today. That kind of discipline...the musicians of today may not be privy to it, but they come to it by way of another thing now...because, what we hear in clubs today in many ways is a manifestation that came out of the whole bebop period, when small bands took the place of big bands and people came into these smaller clubs, sat down and listened to instrumentalists perform, like the Art Tatums and bands that I worked with...Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and
Coleman Hawkins. That became the order of the day. What we see today is an extension of that in the small clubs. Prior to that period, the accent was on like, ah... vaudeville, a show. You know, what you'd see at the Howard or...

BROWER: A floor show as opposed to... you know... the big shows in the theaters and then the floor shows in the clubs.

ROACH: Right. They'd have smaller floor shows. Where you'd have the same kind of format. You know, maybe you'd have dancers, a comedian, a singer, and a band. The band would do a feature and so forth. This was good training, I think, at that time. I know today, I listen to some of the musicians who haven't been involved with that, but I'm sure there would be no problem to get to that. Today, even if we hear a big band, it's usually in a club format; it's not where they're playing for tap dancers or dancers, per se. It's a different thing...

BROWER: Doing routines?

ROACH: Doing routines behind people, yeah. Although, this
happens in another way. I know that there are musicians who are writing for theater and, ah...and music is being added more to plays with music; not necessarily musicals. It's also happening in TV. I see J. J. Johnson's name and many of the people who are involved with jazz are doing scores for TV dramas; like Oliver Nelson and people like that. Quincy Jones has done a lot of it. Ray Brown, of course, has performed in these situations. The musicians that we see who are performing in these things, like even behind the Tonight Show are getting that kind of experience. I don't think that any of it has disappeared, it's just taken on another form, or it's being communicated by other means like television, film... If you want to see floor shows, you go to some of the resort places...most of them in the cities...Atlantic City, Vagas, or Reno. I'm searching my mind to see if there are places like that that prevail within the city. Most of it you'll see in theaters, off Broadway and the music is woven into the
fabric of the play or the dance itself. I have noticed that people like Alvin Ailey use a lot of the music by Duke Ellington and various other people when he choreographs his ballets, so these are things that guys are doing today.

BROWER: At this same time you talk about in Manhattan, does this approach, the period in which Puttem Central becomes a factor in Brooklyn or is it still later... what was going on in Brooklyn at the same time you were making your way at Mems and...?

MAX: Well Brooklyn we still had the Appolo Theater and we had the Brooklyn Renaissance Ballroom where it was comfortable to the Savory Ballroom is. In our community we kind of mirrored the Harlem community, we had ballrooms and we had clubs... the Barry Brothers Club, we had the Kington Lounge... we had various clubs and the Elks Home and places where we had our little shows, like they had at Mauraines and Smalls of Paradise... we had the operation of the Baby Grand as well, with the Baby Grand in Manhattan with----------------------------- to the
Baby Grand in Brooklyn. We would see and hear people like Nipsey Russell, and Baby Lawrence and folks like that worked in these places. It's like a circuit you know, it was like the community supported the performers... this was going on just as well so being a person that grew up in Brooklyn I would work sometimes in Brooklyn, but most often I stayed in New York because when I became involved with Victor Coosen and Byrd and people like that and Dizzy it kept me on the New York scene until I started school in Manhattan School of Music where John Lewis and people like that and the Quartet when they came into New York they also went to the Manhattan School of Music. It was the latter part of the forties... prior to my going into the fifties and starting that band with Clifford Brown which was about fifty... fifty-one.

BROWER: What was the... you are talking about the date that you made with Hawkins in forty-three, you want to tell us about that session... what it was like to work with Coleman Hawkins, what
kind of a man he was... what that session was like?

ROACH: Coleman Hawkins was easy to work with... at least for me, he played... his demands were that you keep good time and that you knew how to make ballads, and knew how to play tunes that were fast, and medium and had a sense of beginning and middle and that you had a sense of what music was about. At the time I started working with him I had been working on Fifty-Second Street and of course I had had that experience at the Seventy-Eighth Tabor Room and uptown at Mentons and the experiences I had had working all of that time in Brooklyn. It was a quartet that he had in the rhythm section so it was kind of, you know, all of the weight was on Mr. Hawkins... he would play rhythm section, introduction on somethings, and we would just go through, he would improvise and everybody get a chance to do something and he would take it out... so it wasn’t a complex involved arranged kind of a situation. He played a ballad that was really sweet,
cause you would just colored or did what you wanted to do and he was never the kind of person who insisted that you would do it this way or that way or the other... he just kind of flowed, he gave you the kind of freedom with in a certain context... naturally if you were playing something soft, he wouldn't want you to... if you were a drummer you just couldn't play like you are playing used sticks and just club the instrument. But, you know, he depended on your taste... I know Miles and I worked with Coleman Hawkins for a minute together. I also worked with Louie Jordan during that period, the Tempani Five... I traveled a bit with him. My environment doing that period was really Harlem and later down to Fifty-Second Street, and places like the Three Dueses and Onexy Club... The Spotlight...

BROWER: They have now pointed out historically that date with Hawkins is said to be the first bebop record... when you made that session did you think of it as such or was it just date with Coleman Hawkins?
ROACH: Well for me it was a date with Coleman Hawkins and of course the fact that Dizzy Gillespie was on and made it something very special, cause he did some of the writing for the date.

BROWER: "Woody and You" was his piece...

ROACH: "Would'n You" was his piece and I think that he might have done something else as well...

BROWER: Coleson was he on that date... Victor Coleson?

ROACH: He might have been on that date... Bud Johnson he might have been on that date...

BROWER: Bill Parker do you think he was on that date?

ROACH: He was on that date as well.

BROWER: Playing alto, Bud Johnson playing baritone...

ROACH: Bud Johnson played baritone.

BROWER: I am trying to think of who is playing piano on that date...

ROACH: Was it Clyde Hart?

BROWER: Clyde Hart played piano on that date. What was Clyde
Hart’s roll at Menton’s Uptown House kind of circuit?

ROACH: Clyde Hart he was in Louie Armstrong’s band for a minute wasn’t he... he was the pianist for one of the big...

BROWER: ------------------------------------------ traditional plays I am not sure-------------------------------------------------- or not.

ROACH: Clyde was just a wonderful pianist, you know, to my knowledge I guess Clyde was perhaps one of the fore runners of what Monk and Bud were to become later on, because Clyde was a pianist who was in demand during that period. When you look back at the recordings that were made even before I made my first one Clyde was on a lot of them with the earlier bebop, so called bebop innovators... you know, he had been working with Kenny Clark and Dizzy and I guess even before Monk had started... certainly before Bud Powell. Of course at that time New York had a pianist seemed to have a high profile during that period, there were pianist like Marlow Morris and you know, you would go to an
after, after hour spot because the world would be in the street uptown that Marlow Morris, Art Tatem and the heavy weights were at maybe some after, after hour spot... somebody’s apartment that had a small bar and a piano in it, so everybody would rush over there because they know that these pianist would just play for each other and then you would go in and maybe you would see Sidney Cadlett there... this would be nine...ten o’clock in the morning. You know, the excitement for us would be extremely high, to think that you would walk into a place and all of these folks would be there, who had been working down at some of the smart supper clubs down town and would come up town and would play... stay up all night and maybe just hang out at some of the after hour clubs... like Monroe’s Uptown House... Kovas and then go to some place and really sit down and just play. So all of this was educational, you know, to have an opportunity to sit down and listen to these people. Especially like myself and Bud Powell. You’d have the opportunity to run into people like Dizzy
Gillespie, who would tell you stories about people like Charlie Parker, who he had heard while he was on the road with Cab Calloway...or people like Oscar Pettiford. See, for me, Dizzy was the catalyst for a lot of the activity around New York. Lester Young was also integral to the whole so called "bebop movement". In fact, that whole group that came out of Kansas City, with ah, Hershal Evans, Joe Jones, and that crowd. I guess the difference between Count Basie and Fletcher Henderson to us was, Fletcher Henderson was much more orchestral than Basie's band was, meaning the orchestrations were more elaborate. Whereas, in Basie's band, the orchestrations...it's not that they were less sophisticated, but they were open for solo playing...which produced people like Lester Young, Hershal Evans, Harry "Sweets" Edison, Joe Jones, and all these wonderful soloists. That's, seemingly, what was transferred to us on 52nd Street...make an opening statement and the rest of the piece was improvisational solos. The virtuosity that was exemplified by
Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins, Harry "Sweets" Edison, Hershal Evans, Chu Berry, Hot Lips Page, and all these wonderful players, was carried on in small band form...by these small groups on 52nd Street, where the instrumentalist was the order of the day at that time. People came to hear instrumentalist play, not so much that you had a singer, dancer, or comedian in the club. In fact, 52nd Street was practically dominated by instrumentalists during that period. The block was 52nd Street between 6th Avenue and 5th Avenue; and a few clubs were between 6th and 7th Avenue. The majority of them, the Onyx Club, the Three Dukes, Jimmy Ryons—, and all those places were in the same block. The accent was instrumental. If a person like Roy Eldridge was on the street, he would sing and some of the other people would sing, who were basically instrumentalists...after Louis Armstrong. People often talk about the new music, so called, but it all came from something. When you talk about bebop, you also have to include
people like Coleman Hawkins...and even go back to Louis Armstrong, who was also a great, inventive soloist. Because bebop exemplified improvisational virtuosity that reached a very high level with people like Charlie Parker, Art Tatum, Bud Powell, and folks like that.

BROWER: You're talking about knowing Bud. It sounds as if, from what you've talked about so far, that you all were very close. Like you were sidekicks...maybe not inseparable...what was your relationship with Bud during this period?

ROACH: Well, Bud lived in Manhattan. I lived in Brooklyn. So, when we came to Manhattan, where I spent a lot of time right after I got out of high school, it would be to shack up at Bud's house. Bud had a piano... After we'd come in, say, in the morning from the after hours places, we'd sit up in Bud's house and jam. His mother had a rooming house...not a big huge one, maybe one or two rooms, and when musicians would come to town like Fats Navarro, Kenny Durham or someone like that, she would
perhaps rent the room out to them. That would mean that, during
the day we could all go to Bud’s house and sit down, exchange
ideas, talk about different musicians, analyze styles, and what
ever. So, we spent a lot of time at Bud’s house during that
period.

BROWER: Still the early forties, you talking about?

ROACH: Right.

BROWER: You know, I keep asking about this place, Putnam Central
Club, because it just comes up. Where does that fit in this
whole time frame?

ROACH: Putnam Central came up, I dare say, about the late
forties. That was when Mingus had gotten to New York. Mingus
and I had started a record company called "Debut Records".
Putnam Central was in Brooklyn and I knew the gentleman who owned
it. I had a studio...it was like a club that had three stories
to it, meeting rooms, like a lodge, like that. They had a small
ballroom downstairs and meeting rooms upstairs. I rented a room
up on the third floor, where I had a studio. I had vibraphones, a piano, and things like that. So, when Mingus came, we decided to start a record company and we'd give jam sessions downstairs in the ballroom on weekends whenever it was possible. We'd have people like Miles and Bird, we'd record them and that's how we started that company. I think the importance of the Putnam Central was that it was where we started Debut Records. Out of Debut Records, Massey Hall came about.

BROWER: Debut Records started in the fifties or late forties?

ROACH: Late forties was when we started that. I guess "Jazz at Massey Hall" was perhaps the biggest thing we put out.

BROWER: When does your experience with Benny Carter factor into this?

ROACH: Benny Carter came in before the Putnam Central period. That happen, I guess, about 1944, '45, maybe...that's the period I was with him. I left the band we had on 52nd Street...we were
at the Three Duces...and went on the road with Benny Carter. The drummer with Benny Carter, whose place I took, was George Russel. He decided to stay in New York, so he moved into my room in my house out in Brooklyn and I joined Benny Carter's band. George and I had become very good friends. It was while he was at my house where we had this piano, that George began to develop his ah, Lydian formula...that system...that system that is now a part of the history of the development of the music. My mother would say he'd stay at the piano all night and all day. He was writing then... at that time. When I joined Benny Carter's band, I wanted to travel. I hadn't really traveled that much and it was my first big time big band experience. That first tour was a tour that, when I left New York with Benny Carter, on the band they had...I mean, in that show, rather, was the Nat King Cole Trio, Savannah Churchill Comedians... It was really something very special. It was just before Nat had hit it real big. Nat was playing mostly trio piano then. He might sing one or two
songs while sitting at the piano. Then when we got to California, it's when he started making those wonderful records. He sat down and traveled and sang those songs for quite some time before he just stopped playing the piano and stood up...because King Cole was a fantastic pianist. You know, he was one of the giants of the piano.

BROWER: Who else was in the Carter band? Was Miles in the band at that time?

ROACH: No. J.J. was in the band. Freddie Webster was in the band at that time. I guess, Porter Kilbert, Bumps Myers...Fletcher was one of the trumpet players... Charlie Drayton, bass player....Gerold Wiggins, pianist, whose son is a very fine bassist now, young Wiggins out in California...Gene Star, trumpet player and singer. J.J. perhaps was ah...we became very close in that band. He left the band to join Billy Eckstine's band, when he had that fantastic band with, I think Dexter, Gene Amons, Sarah Vaughn was in the band, after he had
BROWER: The question I want to ask is, was Carter's band like Hine's band in some sense or place where some young modernist could kind of get some stuff together?

ROACH: Definitely! Definitely!

BROWER: It's never credited that way, it's always the Hines band and to some degree, Cab's band. But, Benny Carter's band is never somehow included with the big bands that sort of spawned some of the younger modernists.

ROACH: Well, J.J. Johnson came out of that band. But I know you're talking about...it wasn't evident on the recordings. Kenny Clarke played with Benny Carter. Dizzy worked with Benny Carter. Miles worked with Benny Carter for a moment there. So he had some people, but I don't think it manifested itself in the recordings that Benny made because Benny was a multi-instrumentalist, was, and still is a great orchestrator. He was
the first on that pioneered California studios as a composer and writer and paved the way for people like Quincy Jones and Oliver Nelson today...yeah, today...yes indeed!

End side B, Tape #3
End disk #3 --- disk #3 is full
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End side B, Tape #3
End disk #3 --- disk #3 is full
Benny Carter taught me a great deal about how to work with a big band. We'd split off into different sections. For example, the brass section would rehearse their portion of an arrangement, the rhythm section would rehearse theirs at separate times, and the reed section would rehearse theirs. Then we'd come together and play the entire arrangement. Benny did a great deal of the writing and he would share the information that he had developed and learned. Benny came from the Fletcher Henderson period and he did a great deal of writing for that band. That information, he would feed to the members of his band, who were interested in writing. Aside from the encouragement he would give a musician to explore his own individuality and the kind of discipline that he exemplified as a writer, composer, and band leader, it was a great learning experience to be involved with a person like him. Whereas, with bands like Earl Hines and
particularly Count Basie, where outstanding soloists were
developed...Lester Young, Sweets Edison, Hershil Evans, Joe
Jones, and all these folks. Whereas, in Earl Hines' band, when
Charlie Parker, Dizzy, and Gene Ammons were with him, they were
accomplished as musical personalities in their right at that
time. So, when they joined Earl Hines, they were already great
soloists in a sense and it was brought out further with Earl
Hines. Working with Benny Carter was like going to school in a
sense. I imagine working with Count Basie was similar to that,
where musicians had an opportunity to develop their individual
musical personalities. When I left Benny Carter, I came back to
52nd Street.

BROWER: Benny Carter seems to be a kind of urbane, very
polished, elegant gentleman when I've seen him. Was he that way
during the forties?

ROACH: Yeah, he was very serious. He encouraged musicians not
only to be fine instrumentalist... sometimes directly but
more times than not indirectly. You just watched him... you know, you learn so much from just being around people and watching the way that they did things... he was a very discipline man and I never knew Benny Carter to be a person not to take care of business... I never knew any of the leaders, Duke Ellington was of the same ------------------------------- they were men who as far as I know of any of those folks, sobriety was the order of the day and getting the job done was foremost... above all else music was the priority, they were dedicated to the proposition of creating music. This was an inspiration to watch that and see how that was being developed, you know, by the fact that there was always new music brought in by these people. There was always interesting solos and to see how they kept the band together, kept the band working... it was just a total education... the leadership and the musicianship.

BROWER: Did you tour alot with Benny Carter?

ROACH: Oh yes we did, we toured all over the United States in
the black communities at that time... all in the deep south, southwest, midwest... of course northeast and the west coast. And we crisscrossed the country, when we settled in California on one of our tours, I got a call from Dizzy that he was organizing a band and Charlie Parker was in New York... I left Benny Carter and came back to join Dizzy and Charlie Parker and I believe it might have been Al Hague in the band... no it was Dizzy, Charlie Parker...

BROWER: Was this the band into the -------------------?

ROACH: Into the ------------------------.

BROWER: Did George Washington?

ROACH: George Washington on piano, Oscar Pettiford on bass, Dizzy and Byrd... no, no, the band prior to... the band in the ------------------------- club was the first band before I went with Benny Carter and that band began with the first... was it Dizzy... the first band was with Dizzy I believe it was Don Bias,
George Wallington and Oscar Pettiford. Later on Budd Johnson joined the band... I left the band when Bud was with the band and Dizzy and Oscar and George went with Benny Carter... then when I came back we worked The Three Deuces and Charlie Parker and Dizzy had hooked up together then... Dizzy I believe it was and I think maybe at that time it was Al Hague was in the band... I am not quite sure... but this of course I recall the first, at least one of the small bands that Dizzy was really interested in putting together... was with Charlie Parker, Oscar Pettiford, Bud Powell and myself and of course Dizzy and this did not happen, that particular quintet never really worked together... we would really worked with each other, but we never really worked together until... all at the same time until, the closet we got to it was Massey Hall and of course Mingus was the bass player instead of Oscar Pettiford... Bud Powell and Charlie Parker were on it. That was the supposibly original band or one of the original quintet the Dizzy had talked about, even when we went
into the club... before I had gone with Benny Carter, he was after Bud to be the pianist... this was around the same period I did that first recording with Coleman Hawkins that has "Would'n You" and "Disorder at the Border" and pieces like that on it, which was claimed as the first bebop record. The music was never really named by the musicians themselves. We were just following in the tradition of the great players of the time, the Coleman Hawkins'... and the accent was on instrumental improvisational soloing, which produced virtuosos like Dizzy, Charlie Parker and Bud. It all still came out of something... and what it came out of was, the virtuosity that was exemplified by people like, for drummers, the Chick Webbs, the Joe Jones', Sidney Catlets... for bass players, the Jimmy Blantons... you know, Oscar was an extension of these folks. Dizzy was, of course, an extension of the great trumpet players from Louis on up through Roy Eldridge to himself. Charlie Parker, of course, was an extension of the great solo
saxophonists...with Benny Carter, Johnny Hodges, and those folks at the time. We were compartmentalize, so to speak, and the music tagged "bebop"...I guess, to explain that period that came immediately at the end of the ah, second world war, on up until people began dancing again. But still, what prevails in the music, even today, is the still great improvisational playing that just didn't start with the so called "beboppers". It started a long time before that because jazz has always been identified by the great solo improvisors...back to Louis Armstrong, and even before him, the legendary Buddy Bolden...stories they tell about his playing...and the Baby Dobbs and all that. The accent was on spontaneity and the fact that a person could get up and play an instrument or sing, or create form, design, and beauty...and exemplify energy and all that, spontaneously. There is a science to that...a complete science to it. You have to tuned into a lot of things,
particularly if you're into the melodic instruments, you have to involve yourself in creating melodies on set harmonies. If you're a percussionist, it's creating design using the elements of your instrument and coordinating all four limbs. It isn't just "at random playing". You ask most people about the art of improvisation and most times they tell you how difficult an art it is. That whole science is something that all jazz musicians strive toward, but it just didn't begin with bebop period.

BROWER: The emphasis on improvisation... Was the Benny Carter Band a popular band for dances?

ROACH: Yeah. His band came around the time that, ah...bands like Andy Kirk were on the scene...Jimmy Lunsford...that whole period of big bands. We played big dances and we played theaters. They were variety shows we got involved in...

BROWER: His was a band that had to emphasize the score and the ensemble sound. Whereas the Basie Band was a freer and swinging band. What was the kind of...did it have...
MAX: It was orchestral... I would say it might have been an offshoot of the style that Fletcher Henderson, if you will, might have exemplified. You know, orchestral playing with soloists. Where Basie would... the band was used to set up the soloist. Where, with Fletcher Henderson, the soloist played on top of the band...the band was always constant. The soloist in the Basie Band, I would imagine, had an opportunity just to stick out...because the band accompanied the soloist. Not that Benny Carter wasn't that, but the accent was on arranging. The accent that came out of the Fletcher Henderson school was also on arranging. I saw one poster in a Henderson bio book, where they had some pictures of the old posters where he was billed as the greatest orchestrator...the world's greatest arranger and things like that. Fletcher Henderson set up a lot of music that was performed by many bands. He wrote for a lot of bands...Benny Goodman... Out of the Fletcher Henderson Band came all those wonderful arrangers...Benny Carter was one of them.
BROWER: Don Redman.

ROACH: Don Redman was another. Writing and arranging was the hallmark of the band. Working with Benny Carter, you got a different aspect of what music was about. Whereas, if you with Basie, if you stuck out it was because of your solo playing.

With Benny Carter, we had plenty of room to play solos, but the emphasis was on writing. So, it was educational in that fashion.

J.J. Johnson wrote for Benny Carter's big band and a lot of the information he got from writing came out of Benny or just studying Benny's scores. Anyone that was interested in that aspect of the music, a band like Benny Carter was good for them.

Cootie Williams' Band was like that, more or less...Andy Kirk's Band. Now that you me, I imagine those bands did come out of the Fletcher Henderson mold. Basie was like another departure when he showed on the scene...the individual was dominant in the band.

You know, you went to see Basie because you could check out Joe
Jones, Lester Young, or Sweets Edison. The arrangements were great too... but the soloist were the ones who dominated the scene in Basie's Band... those open spaces where you could really hear a tenor solo without a lot of background, brass and reeds accompanying. Most the bands, Cab Calloway and them were highly orchestrated and arranged bands... Lucky Millander was like that... When you think of it, out of Cab's band we had Chu Berry, who was a dominant figure... but I don't know of any of the bands that produced as many soloists as Count Basie's Band. That seemed to have been something that came out of Kansas City. Maybe it was just an east coast kind of thing. Duke Ellington had some soloists as well as orchestrators in his band, of course he did most of the writing... but he produced people like Cootie Williams, Ben Webster, Ray Nance...

BROWER: Harry Carney.

ROACH: Harry Carney, Johnny Hodges...

BROWER: Going back to the first bebop band on 52nd Street, what
was the kind of impact you had? Was it sort of like the debut of
that playing or were people already well aware of it?

ROACH: No, I don't think folks were to aware. It was
considered, at that time, the "avant garde music". It wasn't in,
what would have been considered, the mainstream of what was
happening at that time. I was fragmented. The accent was on
smaller "orchestrations". It wasn't in the same mold of, say,
John Kirby's small band, which was still very highly arranged and
orchestral. Our band was loose as in the tradition of the Basie
big band. We'd play a theme, and from that point on, we'd
improvise until we came back to the theme. The musical lines
were different. The lines were linear,...the arrangements were
different...Dizzy thought differently...and of course Bird and
his lines were different. Some of the other prime movers of that
movement, you have to speak about as well. Coleman Hawkins' Band
created that first record date attributed to bop evolution to
that period. Hawkins would always involve himself with the
younger musicians around New York from that period. For example, Thelonious Monk, Kenny Clarke, and Dizzy worked with Hawk. They were people who were pulling us along as well. If Hawk brought in Dizzy, Dizzy would bring in me, say, for example, and so forth and so on.

BROWER: How about Charlie Christian?

ROACH: Now, I didn’t know too much about Charlie Christian, but he did frequent Minton’s Playhouse. My knowledge of Charlie Christian comes off the Benny Goodman records and Benny Goodman performances.

BROWER: In other words, he was there a little bit before you got out of high school and you were coming over to Manhattan, like 1939, ’40...just a shade ahead of you.

ROACH: Yeah, right, right.

BROWER: Ok. Were the young, imaginative, uptown musicians that were coming into, say, Minton’s, there must have been
musicians who were actually getting on the band stand and playing...there must have been other musicians there who couldn't participate...who were more listening than playing, would that be the case? Like, what White musicians came to Minton's, and which ones started coming down to the Onyx and later the Three Duces and what was the transmission point from the players that were establishing the style to begin to spread it beyond the, essentially, Black circle that developed that way of playing?

ROACH: Well, you know, the White bands had their soloists as well...great soloist, you might say. George All-- , for example, he would come to Minton's, tenor saxophone player. Before that even, people like Artie Shaw, Benny Goodman spent time in Harlem...participating with the musicians in Harlem...learning, exchanging ideas, and studying the musicians, like everybody else did. People like Buddy Rich would come uptown...they would come to the jam sessions. So, I imagine, there was a group that did come up...they were working with the big bands of the times.
themselves, like the Glen Miller and the Tommy Dorsey Bands.

Down on 52nd Street, with that group of young musicians I was mainly associated with, people like Allan Eager, Stan Getz, Stan Levey, Gerry Mulligan...Gil Evans was a part of that group...White musicians that became involved...Red Rodney, Al Haig, George Wallington, Teddy ...folks like that. They were involved in the small group playing. But, during that period, there were just small groups, if you remember. Because of one thing or another, that period also heralded the demise of big bands. Benny Goodman had a small band. Benny Carter broke his band down into a small band. This was right after the second world war...there were tax reasons and political reasons and the fact that, ah...

BROWER: How important do you think the tax were...the tax on dancing...

ROACH: I think the taxes had a lot to do with it. People just weren't frequenting them for one reason or another. Maybe it was
financial...like the Savoy Ballroom, Renaissance Ballroom in Brooklyn, and the ballrooms downtown waned...and the music just to smaller environments...to smaller clubs and the bands became smaller. The accent was now on solo playing. There were all kinds of influences on the scene...who dealt with the small band playing, both White and Black?...Bud Powell, Earl Garner, Art Tatum, and folks like that...Sidney Catlet. Big band people now were playing in small bands. That was exciting. Coleman Hawkins, when he came back from Europe, he worked with a quartet at Kelly's Stables. That was also on 52nd Street...he had Dizzy and Kenny Clarke in his band. Cab Calloway's Band was a small band as well...I think, he might have been directing a small band. The Apollo still flourish, though. I guess that flourished until the fifties. When people began to dance again and some of those war taxes for dancing were rescinded...on stage and off stage...then people began to dance together...communal
dancing or dance halls began to come back into vogue. When we saw this period of popular music coming back...the singing came back and became popular again...Rhythm and Blues, Louis Jordan began to come back...so the dance scene did come back after that.

I remember working...subbing, that is, for Shadow Wilson, who was working with Louis Jordan...I was on 52nd Street working with...I guess, Dizzy or Hawk, and I had a chance to work with Louis Jordan because Shadow, then was about to join Earl Hines' Big Band. That was when Charlie Parker was with Earl Hines...this might have been the late forties...I just coming out of Benny Carter's Band...when I came back to 52nd Street...

BROWER: You mean the middle forties...1945...

ROACH: Yeah, but then when Earl Hines formed that phenomenal band...I guess it was around '45, '46... During that period, I decided to go back to school and finish up. I went to Manhattan.

That's when I met John Lewis, who had come from, ah...New Mexico to New York. He was attending the Manhattan School of Music and
Joe Wilder, trumpet player; Coldridge Perkison was there...this was before Donald Byrd and them got to Manhattan... Miles had come to New York...he was going to Julliard. It was just a combination of things we had begun to explore when the music moved from uptown...

End side A, Tape #4

Begin Side B, Tape #4

ROACH: I guess there were reasons for that. I remember, we were working at ------raines up in Harlem, which was a club like Small's Paradise. A. Phillip Randolph led a march on Washington because of segregation in the armed forces during the second world war. One thing led to another and there was rioting across the length and breadth of the country because of a lot of things...just the grievances that Black folks had to adjust themselves to. Police brutality, joblessness, and all the other things came in after the war. Because of the upheavals in the Black communities across the country, people who did cross the lines and support the music, both White and Black, there was this
split. The work became more scarce in the clubs uptown because of the economic situation that was developing. After the war, people who had these jobs in war factories and war plants and things like that, there was no more work for them, so they couldn’t support the clubs. Also, because of the racial tensions that have always existed in our country, there would be upheavals, for example, to address ourselves to the grievances that were happening in the army and then after the army because of jobs and what not. If you wanted to work, you then moved downtown...52nd Street came out of that. Our association with the public that frequented the clubs at 52nd Street and the musicians we became involved with...now the music began to take on other personalities on both sides of the fence. Musicians who were coming to New York and younger musicians who were growing up were no beginning to deal with different conservatories around the country. In New York, in all probabilities, it was Juilliard,
where Miles went and Manhattan, where folks like John Lewis, myself and Donald Byrd and folks like that attended. So with that we began to write more for the bands. This heralded, I guess now, the "Cool School", so to speak, where the bands were integrated. White musicians like Gil Evans whose forte was arranging would come together with Black musicians whose forte was in improvisational solo playing. These two forces were meshed together, and something else began to happen. Out of that came the so called "Cool School". It was called Cool School by the critics, they had categorized to separate one thing from the other. They used, basically, the same people. As long as you're active in the music you take on different situations that come up in the music or new musical personalities or another generation, such as the way Coleman Hawkins took on Dizzy and Clyde Hart and them; the way Dizzy took on folks like myself and Oscar Pettiford; the way we would take on people like Clifford Brown and so forth. You just keep meeting new people and you
just come together. The music develops like that. I think one of the challenging and most rewarding aspects of this music is its fluidity. As long as you're active in it, you never seem to stop discovering and learning...not just from people who came before you and peers that you may have today, but also people who come after you...you see. You get something from them and I guess, what it boils down to, if you are serious about the aesthetic of the art itself, then you never stop growing and you never stop taking on and adding new things to what you already have that may come from people whom you meet later on in your life, who are younger, come another generation, or from another place in the world in fact.

BROWER: What was your course of study at Manhattan School of Music?

ROACH: Composition.

BROWER: You didn't do percussion?

ROACH: No. I played tympani in the orchestra. You had to carry
an instrument, so my instrument was tympani, but the accent was on theory and composition. I wanted to learn more about the inner workings of what music was about. In school...maybe you learn basically what instruments can do, what the possibilities were for what you can write for instruments that's comfortable for the player. But, then you move out into the jazz world with arranging, of course you began to add to the whole harmonic conception as well as, the musicians are playing what isn't generally comfortable for every player to deal with on the horn, like trumpet players began to play higher, so you could write higher...what we call "off the instrument". A lot of the things we hear done today...the drummers are playing faster, different meters are being introduced, different timbre/sounds were being introduced...so you just utilized all these. You didn't necessarily find these things in school books. In fact, there was no theory of improvisation in school when I was going to
school, that's something you just learned from listening, watching, and talking to people. People like the Coleman Hawkins', the Dizzy Gillespies, the Lester Youngs...mostly listening yourself, knowing what goes on underneath, and seeing how they applied creating new ideas on just, say, a blues harmony. So the art of improvisation is just trying to create new ideas within the same musical framework each time you repeat yourself. You try to stretch your imagination to that. So, going to school, you learn some basic things about theory of music.

BROWER: So, what kind of schedule did you have during that period?

ROACH: Oh, I was in school every day. What I tried to do was to jam it up and do everything in the shortest amount of time. So, I went during the summers as well as during the school year. It was intense because I was trying to do everything in two and a half to three years. This was the late forties into the early
fifties. I left Manhattan and went to California and worked with the Lighthouse All Stars. That was a band that was made up of ex-Stan Kenton musicians.

BROWER: Howard Rumsey...

ROACH: Howard Rumsey. Out of that band, I was asked by a record producer out there, Gene Norman...he'd come into the club occasionally...I had a six month contract with the Howard Rumsey All Stars...Bud Shank and people like that were in that band...was a good band. It gave me an opportunity to try some writing and record some things I had written for that band. Bob Cooper was in the band. He was married to June Christy at the time. I took Shelly Man's place with that band. Gene Norman would come in to hear the band occasionally and he would ask why don't I start my own band. I was at that time winning some of the jazz polls and popularity in the magazines...Downbeat Magazine, which was a relatively new magazine to Metronome Magazine, which was the old magazine during that period. So,
when my six month contract was up, I called up Brownie in New York City, who had been working with Art Blakey and J.J. Johnson, and asked him if he wanted to come out to California. That first band was with Clifford Brown, Sonny Stitt, Carl Perkins on piano, and ah...George Bl---so on bass. We worked a place called the California Club. Later, when Sonny Stitt left the band...he was in California doing a single...Teddy Edwards joined us in the California Club. Then, we were preparing to come to New York City with the band because we had now effected a contract with Murcury Records....and signed with Murcury Records, I should say. We were preparing to come to New York or come back east with the band. Teddy Edwards elected to stay in California and Harold Land joined the band. Carl Perkins, elected to stay in California. Richard Powell had come to California with Johnny Hodges’ Band. Johnny Hodges had left Duke Ellington for a spell to start his own band. In Johnny Hodges’ Band at that time was
John Coltrane...he was playing alto saxophone. Johnny Hodges' Band broke up in Los Angeles and Richie Powell joined us. Harold Land joined us...and that was the beginning of the first recordings we made...well, it was the second recording we made with that band...the first was made with Teddy Edwards and Carl Perkins.

BROWER: Looking back...we just kind of skipped over that period with Bird... What kind of impact did he have on your playing?

ROACH: Well, let's see...we go back to that first band at Georgie Jay's 78th Street Taproom, when Victor Co-son, who was the straw boss of that band that we had with, ah...Clark Monroe was the leader of the band...and, as I said earlier, he was an entertainer, a song and dance man, they called folks in the mold of Cab Calloway, for example. He would conduct the band, sing, and introduce people and so forth. Victor Co-son first introduced me to Charlie Parker...he came in and played with us and later joined the band. He stayed with the band for, oh...ah,
maybe close to a year, but he decided to move to New York. Charlie Parker, then. When he left that band, he got a call from Earl Hines to play tenor saxophone. I moved on to 52nd Street with Dizzy Gillespie and...Don Byas was in the band. Charlie Parker was on the road with Earl Hines' Big Band playing tenor saxophone. I left and went with Benny Carter. When Dizzy called me back to join the band at the Three Deuces, Charlie Parker was in the band. That band stayed together, I guess, off and on about a year or so. Dizzy started his own big band, I believe it was and I stayed with Charlie Parker and Miles Davis joined Charlie Parker's small band. We began to make records...Savoy Records...those early records. I guess that small band stayed together for quite some time, we made quite a few records, we traveled around the country with that band...Detroit, Ohio, Chicago, and of course New York City. In working with Bird's band, to give you some idea about the demands, when we were doing a recording, for example, sometimes Bird would just write one
part and that would be for Miles, the trumpet. Then he'd tell
the changes, chord progressions that is, to the pianist and the
bassist. He would transpose from Miles' part and he just simply
tell me to do what I felt like doing. The way he would say
it...I'd say "is there anything special you want me to do on
this particular piece Bird?" and he would just look at me and
say "well you know what to do". He would give me complete
licence to use my imagination...fit in what ever I wanted to fit
in. Charlie Parker could play drums and he played piano...those
are the two things I heard him play and he played well. Aside
from being harmonically astute on the instrument himself, because
you were forever asking about the chord progression on some of
the things he wrote or how did he arrive at certain lines in
certain standard tunes...where'd this melody come from?...how did
you happen to deal with it like this?...he would show you some
altered chords or something like that. I thought he played good
drums. He a musician who gave you a lot of freedom. Of course
the order of the day was freedom...he would never say "do it
exactly like I have written it"...even to Miles, do it your way.
This is the way Duke Ellington does things too. This is the way,
when you organize a band, you give as much
licence...responsibility to the person to interpret your music,
especially in a small group context like that, as possible, on
the assumption that perhaps, even though you have written an
arrangement that suggests what you wanted, you giving a person
licence to interpret what you've written in their own individual
way but not destroying the character of what you've written.
It's like saying to a person "play it like is, but your own way
in a way you know so as that a double meaning to just about
everything, which goes back to the early spirituals you know,
those songs that were written and they had double meaning most
times than now, well this is today you might say to a person,
well I want you to play it inside and outside, that means play
what you see but it out further than that as well, play what you see but don't play what you see, it's like that you have to understand what that means, that means that you are not going to corrupt what someone has given you to play, but you are going to try to add to it and praise it, so when you hear Bassie's band for example and this is through all of the music, when you hear Bassie's band you bring in an arrangement for Bassie and the first trumpet player interprets it... his interpretation of how he leaves that brass section, is in a Bassiest mood that's why he is in, and so when Bassie would play the same arrangement that some other band would play it would sound different because of the way he would allow people to deal with phasing the music. You play it as it is, but do something else with it... your own way so that... this is what makes you important to the group that you are involved with, so Charlie Parker's demands were... it was demanding because you had to stretch your imagination all of the time and of course sometimes he would do things not directly but
he would exercise... if we had like a... we did five to six shows a night, so in order to keep everything interesting not just to the audience or to himself but also to the musicians on the band stand. Each set he would approach his improvisation perhaps a little differently, maybe the first set it would be... his improvisation he may just use eighth notes, next he may just use sixteenth notes, the next he may just use a combination of all, and next maybe it will just be all ballads or next maybe it will be just high energy but it was always changes... there was always what's going to happen in the next set Byrd? He would always say well let's see, you know he enjoyed keeping things interesting and that's the way he kept things interesting... we never knew what we were going to deal with on that band stand until we hit it. And that was always fresh and stimulated your created juices so to speak.

BROWER: Well in considering how playing drums changed during
that period or begin or continue to evolve, what impact did Parker's playing have on your personal way of evolving the drum tradition.

ROACH: Well I had began to think about being an independent part of the musical situation... that meant that I could either try to create a rhythmic line using all of the elements to make up the drums, hit cymbals, bass drum, snare drums, tom toms and try to create patterns or some kind of design underneath what he was doing, to compliment what he was doing and to accompany him and this gave me a chance to even stick out more instead of playing like if... instead of playing unison things with him, his lines were rhythmically extremely complicated, you know, when you listen to things like "Most of Mouch" and things like that, "Anthropology" you know, the lines aren't conventionally like long lines, there are a lot of different rhythms that he would hook up together------------------------- a series of rhythmic phrases put to melody, so now you could do that and it would
work, but then if you create an undertone to that it means that you would have to add maybe another line you would come up more rather than playing exactly that, what was written so you know, I try things like that and he would never turn around and not say that it didn't work or ----------------- in fact he wouldn't say that it did work either but you know, you always felt okay I will deal with it the way I want to deal with it... since he says okay you do with it what you want to do with it... sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't for me that is, but he never signal one way or the other, he accepted what you did and just went on with it.

BROWER: Are there particular rememberable recording sessions that you can...?

ROACH: Yeah, "Koko"... at first...

BROWER: "Koko" is the thing that you use the brushes on...?

ROACH: And then the introduction and then go to sticks for his solo and the drum solo... and just the way the piece, the
Introduction lays, it's odd rhythmically and melodically. Often times Miles and I would say "you know, it's almost deceptive"...it sounds like the beat is going to be turned around. You know, you listen to the music and you think about the two and four, but when you get here you realize where the two and the four is. With these kinds of things it never was really turned around, but it sounded like "where is it?", but it was always there.

BROWER: It had a kind of rhythmic ambiguity...

ROACH: Yeah, but it was on. It was in and it was out at the same time...I try to explain that...what is it?...well it's there and it's not there...that's what makes it so wonderful...that it is there...you know, the beginning of a kind of abstraction that was challenging to all of us and we enjoyed playing because it was comfortable and after you fell into it, it just flowed.

BROWER: What was particularly memorable about the Koko session?
ROACH: Well, I had an opportunity to play a long drum solo, one thing. It was like open-field running. The introduction just set up the solos. So I start the introduction with brushes, and then...bam!...Charlie Parker...it was right into a solo. The introduction may have been eight, sixteen bars or something like that. After the solos, there was the drum solo and right back to the introduction. It was a piece that we would use to feature the drum solo and we recorded it. But all of his pieces were always challenges rhythmically...you know, you could do a lot with his music. From Benny Carter to Charlie Parker...well, this is all about the same time, you know they were...

BROWER: Overlapping.

ROACH: Yeah, overlapping...like Dizzy, Coleman Hawkins, Benny Carter, Charlie Parker...

BROWER: Did you go on the road with Dizzy's Big Band?

ROACH: Yes I did. That was ah...

BROWER: That was the second big band?...because the first you
said you, when you went out the first time you stayed...

ROACH: That was the small band.

BROWER: That was the small band?

ROACH: His first big band was a band that...that was some band... I think we only played one engagement...one or two engagements with that band. Bud Powell was the pianist, Oscar Pettiford was on bass, Fats Navarro, Miles Davis, Kenny Dorham, Freddie Webster was in the brass section...J.J. Johnson...it was an unbelievable band...Taswell was in the trombone section...Benny Green...in the reed section was Leo Parker, Charlie Parker, Dexter Gordon...it was an unbelievable band! We just worked around New York. Naturally, when the band had a job and had to go out on the road, a lot of those folks dropped out.

BROWER: That sounds almost like the Billy Eckstine Band.

ROACH: Yeah, similar to the Billy Eckstine Band, but we had Bud...we had a different rhythm section. It was unbelievable.
The brass section was Dizzy's favorite trumpet players and the trumpet players who favored Diz...you know when you look at that line up...Kenny Durham, Miles, Freddie Webster...Fats...

BROWER: Freddie Webster is a name that you hear...it's almost like a legendary type name, there's not much on record...everybody talks about this magnificent that he had...

ROACH: Right.

BROWER: What can you ah...recall about him...as a person and as a musician?

ROACH: Well, he's a man who was short of statue. Fine features, dark, who had just an amazing sound on the trumpet. Dizzy would use him to play ballads and when Tad Dameron came to New York City, Freddie Webster was the trumpet player, I think, he would use most. The way he felt and the way he dealt with music was something else... To my recollection, he wasn't "flighty" like, say, Dizzy was. When I say "flighty", he wasn't...
BROWER: Playing a lot of fast...

ROACH: Yeah, he didn't have the same kind of versatility that Dizzy had on the instrument...but he had this beautiful sound, so with one note, you know, you'd know it was Freddie Webster...he would sing out. I don't recall what big band he played with, but he also came out of the big bands...I'm trying to remember...it might have been Jimmy Lunceford, I'm not sure. When he came to New York and decided to stay and deal with that individualism that everybody needed to survive at that time in New York City. He was known for his sound, his tone, and his approach to playing ballads.

BROWER: Before I asked about Freddie Webster, didn't Dizzy's Big Band tour the south?

ROACH: Yes, that was the big band. I toured the south with that band. I think that was Dizzy's first big band.

End side B, Tape #4
End disk #4---disk #4 is full

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ROACH: I guess we were on the road for a couple of months with that band. The Nicholas Brothers were with us as well. That was also an experience. That was after I had come back with the Benny Carter Band. I now had experience with big bands and touring and things like that. I left New York City to go with Dizzy's Big Band. The second big band was with John Lewis and, think Kenny Clarke and them came in the band...after that, I think Joe Harris was the drummer with the band. Dizzy Gillespie kept a big band for several years. That's when I stayed in New York with Charlie Parker and Miles and we kept exploring small band performances. That during the time we made most of those records as well.

BROWER: For Savoy and Dial?

ROACH: For Savoy. The Dial series was made when Bird was in
Begin Disk #5
Begin Tape #5, side A

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BROWER: For Savoy and Dial?

ROACH: For Savoy. The Dial series was made when Bird was in
California...I stayed in New York. Miles went to California.

Bird had originally gone to California with ah, Dizzy Gillespie from that band from the Three Deuces. I stayed in New York then.

I didn’t go to California with them and Stan Levi...

BROWER: Why didn’t you go?

ROACH: I got busted during that time. The evening before they were suppose to leave. I was messing around with drugs. I guess this was about 1946, 47...the evening before they left, I got busted...they left and Stan Levi went with the band. This is where Ross Russell’s book begins...Bird Lives...and that Billy engagement in California. Dizzy came back and Bird stayed out there, then Miles went out to join Bird.

BROWER: What did you do in New York, while they were on the coast?

ROACH: I worked 52nd Street. I worked with Coleman Hawkins and just worked around New York mostly with many of the groups, and I began to start my own little things with musicians around New
York. John Lewis came to New York. J.J. Johnson had settled in New York. Dexter Gordon and Fats were in New York. Bud. I worked with...the Bud Powell Trio was developing at that time. There was a lot of work around town, so I stayed in New York. That was when we made, I suppose, those records with Bud during that period.

BROWER: 1949...the Trio things?

ROACH: Right. The Trio things with Bud Powell and the sessions with Dexter, J.J., Sonny Stitt, and Fat Novarro. You know, there was a lot of activity still in New York at that time. Thelonious Monk, of course, was in New York. When Charlie Parker did come back to New York, we started that band that had Duke Jordan and Tommy Potter...Miles came back as well. That's when we did those recordings, "Dewey Square" and things like that Klis----------

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BROWER: Where did that come from?

ROACH: I have no idea where he got that name, but that was just
prior to his leaving for Europe on that tour. When he came back to New York, Bird had received a lot of publicity from...he had a nervous breakdown in California...he was in Cammarillo... he wrote "Relaxing at Cammerillo" when he came back. So, when the band was put back together with himself, Miles, Duke Jordan, Tommy Potter, and myself, we then toured all over the country. We made our first trip to Europe...that was in 1949.

BROWER: Was that the Paris Jazz Festival?

ROACH: The Paris Jazz Festival. We also played some one nighters out of that festival. We went down to Marseille, places like that. Now Miles, had left the band...he came to Europe during the same period, but he worked with Tadd Dameron and Kenny Clarke. With Bird's Band then was Kenny Durham on trumpet, Al Haig was playing piano...I forget who was on bass...Curly Russell, maybe, on bass or Tommy Potter. I forget now. But, while we were in Europe during that 1949 period, that's when I
made my first date as a leader. James Moody was also over there, so that date was with James Moody, Kenny Durham, and the rhythm section that was with Bird. I think it might have been Al Haig and Tommy Potter...on a European label.

BROWER: Is that still around?

ROACH: Yeah, that record's around. My first date as a leader. I'm trying to think of some of the things we did on that recording... When we came back to New York from Europe, I still made some records and worked with Bird. Bird by this time...let me see, we're in the fifties...when I got busted and stayed in New York when Diz and Bird made that first historic trip to California with the band from 52nd Street, it was an awakening for me as to how I was dealing with my life. That's when I went back to school and I met John Lewis and those folks. This was a prelude to me starting my own bands. When Bird came back, we did get together again and I stayed in New York during that period, stayed in school, and when I came out of that, eventually I
started organizing little groups that included people who were coming to New York now. Mingus had come to New with Red Norvo's Band. They were working Kelly's Stables. We had met earlier in our careers when he was working with Lionel Hampton's Band. Miles and I were touring with Charlie Parker. I think the first time I met Mingus was in Detroit. We went by to see Lionel Hampton...he had this young bassist from California, who was also writing for Lionel Hampton's Band. To be able to write as well as be a virtuoso player, was like something special so whenever you heard of someone who was doing both of these things well you know, you would want to go and see them and in a sense be homage to them, just to say it is a pleasure meeting you and so forth. So Mingus came to New York and started and decided to stay in New York, since we weren't recording under our own names, we started our own record company. Then my second record date was with people like Hank Mobley and Wilson Davis on Davy records...

BROWER: And this coordinate again with the Putnam...
ROACH: This is when Putnam Central came in... Putnam Central was there...

Brower: Very few of those debut records are really available...

ROACH: No, no, what...

BROWER: You mean you can find the Massey Hall sections of the trio--------------------------

quartet session and maybe a couple of the Mingus records, the Davis record... maybe a Thad Jones record but how big was that catalog?

ROACH: We had pretty big catalogs, we gave sessions at the Putnam Central. When we recorded the sessions we would have trombone---------------------- that would have the likes of J. J. Johnson, Benny Green and Kai Winding, folks like that...

BROWER: Willie Dennis was...?

ROACH: Yeah, Willie Dennis, so we would have fairly... we
recorded some things with Charlie Parker, but what happened was
a lot of stuff was lost... the masters in a warehouse that they
were being stored in and that first... that second day that I did
and then later on of course I did even small band dates with
Debut. I don't know what happened to the masters to those things
and I may have a few of the albums tucked away in my storage room
in New York. Some of the stuff that we recorded because we did
seventy eights and... well not seventy eights but those forty
fives and singles... and we were really kind to push that company
but you know, as young as we were and as inexperienced as we were
and also we were trying to perform as much as possible... kept us
from really... at least kept me from really totally becoming
involved with... Mingus did stay in New York because just at the
time I was at the Putnam Central and working on Debut Records and
going to school at the same time I got the call to come to
California and join this group called The Lighthouse All Stars
which I did. I had finished my studies at Manhattten and so I
said well I am going to shoot out to California and do this and then from California started with Clifford Brown-----------------

And so when that band was put together we started traveling up and down the country side until that accident that took the lives of Clifford Brown and Bud Powell's younger brother Richard Powell. Debut was still working with Mingus was ----------------------- in New York and we were still recording and trying to preserve what we had recorded earlier at the Putnam Central... and after that fatal accident with Brownie and them of course, then I started doing other things with bands.

BROWER: You didn't record any of the stuff with Brownie on Debut then?

ROACH: No, when I went to California to join the ------------------

Lighthouse All Stars, I was asked by Gene Norman to record the first recording with that group... the first group was Gene Norman's record label... Gene Norman Presents... G. N. P. Also Teddy Edwards and from there we signed with Mercury Records, but

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I still was involved with Debut Records and supported it by way of what I was doing on the road at the time with the band that Clifford and I had. That band, as far as the personalities were concerned...the people working together...we worked hard, we rehearsed, and the compatibility was really wonderful...everybody got along...a group of clean musicians. We all were straight lifers and it caught on... it was just a bridge we were crossing over, I would imagine, just about the time of that accident.

BROWER: How do you mean?

ROACH: Well, you know, we were now...

BROWER: You getting ready to break big as an ensemble?

ROACH: I would think so, because we had been working all the clubs during that period...that accident happened in 1956, Bird passed in 1955...so from the period up until Brownie to about 1952, '53 until Brownie passed...until that accident with Brownie, that band was moving. We worked constantly. We worked
in the Black communities...that whole circuit...back and forth...across the length and breadth of the country. Just prior to that accident, we were booked in, what was then, the club in Chicago, where all the big bands...Duke Ellington worked, and so forth, that was on the near north side. We were on our way to that gig when that accident happened. That club...I forgot the name of it now...

BROWER: It wasn't "Kelly's"?

ROACH: No, it wasn't Kelly's...that was where Ella Fitzgerald would work. That club finally meant that we were breaking out and moving into that area...

BROWER: That echelon...

ROACH: Yeah...where Duke Ellington's Band played when they came to Chicago because music was now coming to the downtown areas of the city...it was becoming less and less accessible to the Black community...Louis Armstrong was becoming less and less accessible to our communities. So, we were moving into those areas. But,
that was a band that we worked at, more or less, scientifically.

We rehearsed, we had tape recorders, and we played jobs and sat
up and listened to ourselves, we'd plan our record dates and it
was really a working band...and a unit with a lot of discipline
in it...it was just that, ah...I guess you could say it wasn't
meant to be, you know. For me, that was one of the high points
of my development. There were times you'd get on that stage at
night, some mystical things would come out of what we were
doing...you know, the enjoyment, the energy, and the musicianship
would be such a high level, both with Harold Land in the band and
then when Sonny Rollins joined us toward the latter part of it.

BROWER: What were the circumstances of Rollins joining the band?

ROACH: Well, ah, Sonny was in Chicago. He was living at the
WMCA. Harold Land had decided to go back to California for
personal problems within his family. Brownie and I went over to
the YMCA to talk to Sonny about joining us, because Harold Land
had made his decision while we were in Chicago. During that time
you'd work clubs...we'd go to Chicago, and stay for six weeks, so we had time, you know. Harold Land says "I'm going to have to go home for a while because of what happening within my personal life. So, we walked over to the "Y", Brownie and I we had them call Sonny. Sonny was downstairs in the, ah...someplace...practicing with a young trumpet player...the young trumpet player was Booker Little. That's when we first met Booker, who had come up to Chicago from Memphis...he was studying in Chicago and he introduced Booker to Both of us. I guess Booker must have been about eighteen or nineteen at that time. I had no idea that we'd work together someday, but Sonny introduced Booker to us and said he was a fine young trumpeter player and Sonny joined the band. I figured he might have wanted to come back to New York because he was in Chicago and ah...that was that. The relationship that he and Brownie had was ah...perfect. I'd say...they complimented each other in many,
many ways.

BROWER: You mean Booker and Brownie or Booker and Sonny?

ROACH: Brownie and Sonny.

BROWER: Brownie and Sonny. I see. You mean when they were in the band together?

ROACH: When they were in the band together. That was a very creative period too, when we began to experiment with odd meters and different times. We had a lot of fun together. We enjoyed the music that we played and we enjoyed working with each other. It an unusual situation like that to find five people would just hit and was involved in trying to make something happen musically. We'd schedule rehearsals on the road and we were developing new material constantly. But when you can keep a group people together that length of time, travel, and work that often, then you develop much faster.

End of audio interview --- side A, tape #5 ends at #280
 Transcript of MAX ROACH Video Taped Interview Howard University School of Communications Studios

BROWER: This afternoon we have the opportunity and really important privilege of talking with one of the masters of modern music, Mr. Max Roach, a major force in the percussion in modern music, as a composer, as a band leader, as an educator, and as a thinker about what this very important culture means. Good afternoon Mr. Roach. (Roach plays drum solo)

BROWER: That was certainly a powerful introduction or hello if you will... I think the interesting thing about it is that statement is really related to your very earliest musical experiences, that underneath the elaboration, the complexities that you lay down are somethings that learned in your very early musical experiences in the church and in the marching bands. That drum and bugle corp experience that you had in association with the church, would you care to recapitulate that history for
us, that period in your life?

ROACH: Well Bill I grew up in the church, having been born in North Carolina, coming from a bible family, all of the cultural activities centered in the church... I was introduced to music by way of the church choir and a musical instrument by way of the church after school activities. The joist with my first instrument that I had occasion to play with the church marching band. The first things of course I learned were marches, it seems as though in every parade... this was in Brooklyn New York, that the citizens were organized in the New York City, Brooklyn and Harlem... our little marching band was asked to participate... and I guess you might say my earliest introduction to the drums was in the marching band out of Concord Baptist Church, Brooklyn.

BROWER: That included everything from Garby marches to American Legion marches, the whole gambit of things?

ROACH: Right, if you want to say we marched in Garby parades...

BROWER: Were there competition and things between you?

ROACH: We engaged in marching band competition as well... this however happened while in grade school and also in high school in the marching band, and we had an opportunity to exchange ideas with other marching bands in the city... White marching bands, other Black marching bands and we learned that our style was a bit more laid back and not as militaristic as perhaps as some of the other bands around the city.

BROWER: Could you demonstrate for us what that laid back style was and maybe some of the rhythms that you were playing, and some of the routines that you played at that time?

ROACH: Yeah, I believe I can, if I can remember some of those.

(Roach demonstrates some rhythms)
BROWER: Your early experiences in the church have been important to you both in terms of introducing you to the drums and learning the basic rudiments of the instruments, but also the vocal music that was happening in the church has had a profound affect on your work, subsequently in your career, the recording that you made in the late fifties and sixties that drew so heavily on gospel and the spiritual condition in the Black church and stuff that you did with the J. C. White singers... things that you did with Abbey... things that you did with Andy Bay... you know, all grew from that source, would you care to share with us just what that influence was and some of the other musical training that you had in addition to the drum and bugle corp experience, that you know, iminated from the church?

ROACH: Well, you know, as I said earlier the church was the fountain head I guess I would say of musical culture and singing was a domimant part of that... everyone sanged... we had the children's choir, young peoples choir, young adults choir and
choir after choir... everyone had to participate in that activity, other than just playing with the marching band and what other things that we did after school. When we finished school we would go to the church, it was like a day care center in a sense... when you grew up in the church... most of your days were spent in a church and so naturally the people who took care of the children while your mother or the parents, your mother and father went out looking for work during that time kept you busy singing, learning how to play instruments, etc. So most of us were well versed in the spirituals... most of us played a little piano... we played for each other... we took turns and we sanged for each other and of course we prepared programs for different occasions... Easter programs, Christmas programs, every Sunday we rehearsed for whatever program was going on with out choir as well. And often or not I had a case to play piano as well as sing and to give you some idea of some of the things that we were engaged in at that time, I will go to the piano perhaps sing some
for you and play as well. (Roach sings and plays piano).

You know, my aunt, who was a church pianist, was the first one to teach me and my brother how to read music. We learned out of hymnal books. One of my favorite books was "James Weldon Johnson’s Negro Spirituals" where you found, not only the popular spirituals like "Standing in the Need of Prayer", "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child", but you also found rare spirituals, and I'd like to sing one of these for you... This is called "Singing With a Sword in My Hand" and it was also a spiritual that, ah, was a militant or a spiritual of preparedness. All these songs had double meanings. It goes something like this... (Roach sings, "I'm Singing With a Sword in My Hand" accompanying himself on the piano)

BROWER: You mention, when you talk about the spiritual, the double entendre aspect of them. Yearning in a religious sense and yearning in an earthly sense, about freedom. You had a nice
l little line about what you felt that song was really saying.

ROACH: That's one of the songs that tells you to be prepared for any occasion...in whatever situation that you are in. The poet says "Singing with a sword in my hand" and then the next verse is "Praying with a sword in my hand", the next verse would be "Moaning with a sword in my hand". So, any situation you're involved in, the song says you should be prepared to protect yourself and whatever else. So, many of the earlier spirituals were loaded with messages that taught you much like the church does today...how to survive out here. These were not only songs of inspiration, but they were songs of preparation and songs of protection...and in many ways, it has helped us to survive to where we are today, no matter how critical the situations were for us as a people in the United States.

BROWER: Is that why you decided, in the late fifties, to go to this body of material in relationship to what was going on in society at that point in Afro-American civil rights and human
rights struggles?

ROACH: Well, that was one of the reasons. I thought...during the fifties and sixties, that period after the tragic accident that tore apart the band with Clifford Brown and Richie Powell, I became involved as most people did in the civil rights movement and of course the Martin Luther King was on the scene, Malcom X was on the scene, I guess you just couldn't help but be involved in it... it was so much activity and the whole country was involved in these issues freedom and hope and I ain't going to study war no more, thoughs kind of things. That was certainly one of the reasons and a very important one, but also I had always had the feeling that the intellectuals... Black intellectuals and the Black church, because jazz musicians made their livings in night clubs, theaters more often times, most often times neglected in their studies, so like the church we could play our march music, of course we dealt with spirituals, but instrumental music jazz was forbidden. So when I got the
opportunity and was asked for things to record by record companies, it was my desire to bring these two forces together. Why not use a gospel choir and jazz musicians, put them in a studio and develop some music that they both could live with... and the particular due to the fact it was the fifties and sixties... the kind of materials I used was something like we had just heard... "Singing With A Sword In My Hand", "Joshua Fit The Battle Of Jerico", "Members Don't Get Weary", "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord", was to me a spiritual that was a testament to a lynching and all of those kinds of things were the spirituals that we chose and we used the gospel choir and jazz musicians who improvised all through the arrangements. Incidentally when I made this record called "Lift Every Voice And Sing", that was the last record I did with Atlantic Records... I was signed with Atlantic at that time... and that was a funny situation, I remembered being called in by the people in charge
of artist and recordings. I had known these folks for years...
people who had started Atlantic Records. They started in the
forties with us on Fifty-Second Street and we were friends as
well as people who worked together to make this music and it was
just when the turn around was coming up... turning around I mean
political turn around and they were re-tooling... asking the
artist how to back off from what we call protest music and music
that spoke about not just Black artist, but all artist... the
Buffy Saint Marie people who were doing things at that time...
across the board, all of our pop artist... some of our best pop
artist were recording things like "Keep On Pushing", and all
these kinds of things. They called me in and said to me, well
Max you know you have been in the business quite sometime, it is
time for you to really make some money, so I said well I couldn't
agree with you more... I said how do we go about that? Well then
they were telling us that we had to retool what we were doing and
he gave me a stack of records of pop music, that related to
dance, to a pop culture... there is nothing wrong with that because I do believe that we should have... that our culture serves more than one purpose... it is for enlightenment, entertainment, its to relax with, its to think by and all of these things... its to worship by and so forth. But they gave me some pop records, strictly for dance and during that same period all of the artist were asked to retool, and not be as serious and as original about what was going on around us politically and musically the music just changed right into a total dance bag, and thats what was marketed... these are the things that were sold to the public. I remembered the last time I came here to Howard University, I was in one of the art professor's office talking and we had the Howard University's radio on and they were playing of course what was current at that time, same thing as WLIB or the sister station in New York... the music was being pumped out so that we could jump up and dance, and he posed a question as to how can you think and dance at three o'clock in
the afternoon and work and study at the same time... obviously it is being done. And then with all of the things that we as a group have been doing in this country... that have been facet on us... I see a surviving, you know, even though we were inundated with music that you would assume that might take us away from some of the real issues that were plaguing our people... I think we are coming back full circle now... because many of the artist I am beginning again to look at the world not through rose colored glasses so to speak, but from the reality that it is because there are no jobs, there are no things and they are beginning to speak to those things a little bit more than they were in the previous ten years.

BROWER: One of the really probably the classic record in terms of making a social statement that you could do... I mean the classic record of that type is the record that you produced was the "We Insist Freedom Now Suite" session... and it was so
important because it brought together so many things. It brought
you together with Coleman Hawkins with whom you had worked in
nineteen forty three and forty four and represented once again a
statement about the unity of generations and jazz... it brought
for us in a very profound way the kind of vocal things that you
were exploring with Abbey Lincoln, a freer use of the voice and a
kind collective improvisation with the voice and brought into
focus your experiments with meters other than four-four. It made
a broader statement. It also anticipated the current fuor that's
now going on about South Africa. You did the piece "Tears for
Johannesburg", which reflected upon --------- ----------, so that
was such a seminal record. Perhaps now we could listen to the
"Driverman Piece" from that and then go into some further
discussion of that record as a kind of a summation of a period
and a related statement that brought together many strands in your
career. (Recorded music of "Tears for Johannesburg")

BROWER: The interesting thing about that piece is that it shows
us the bringing the African element into the music and shows us a
time signature that was not often utilized, which is the six-
eight. Would you care to go to the drum set and just isolate
that signature for us? (ROACH plays drums - various meters)

BROWER: You are also credited for being the first one to actually
"swing" a waltz. Can you give us a little taste of three-four
and how you make it "swing", so to speak? (ROACH plays drums -
three-four time)

BROWER: The other signature that you worked in pretty
extensively would be five-four. Can we hear some of that?

(ROACH plays drums - five-four time)

BROWER: One of the other features of the "We Insist" session,
was the involvement of Coleman Hawkins. To illustrate how the
music is actually a continuum of musical culture. Let's listen
to "Driverman" and Coleman Hawkins' participation in this
session. (Recorded music of "Driverman" is played)

BROWER: Want to reflect on your association with Mr. Hawkins and
his participation on this session?

ROACH: Well, this recording...and the different levels that were
going through my mind, when performing it, was a recording that
grew out of a commissioned piece that Oscar Brown, Jr. and myself
had commissioned by the NAACP Youth Organization. It was first
introduced at the Philadelphia NAACP Convention to commemorate a
hundred years, in 1960, of the Emancipation Proclamation. The
piece..."Freedom Now Suite"...what we attempted to do was to
create a work that used dance, narration, film, stills, and song
to say that in one hundred years, from 1860 to 1960, that we had
attained freedom... Well, Oscar and I labored on this piece for
months. I'd be on the road...we'd work on it by telephone and we
never could finish the piece, because we knew in our minds and
hearts that we had not arrived at a place where we could say
"this is total freedom", hence, the last piece we did was called
"Freedom Day", and it asked a question..."Whisper, listen,
Whisper, listen. They say we're free, Whisper, listen, Whisper, listen, is it really true? etc., etc., etc. The piece ends like that. Involved in the piece, we brought in several elements musically. There was Michael Olitungi, who was from Africa, Ray Mont---ier, from East Harlem by way of Puerto Rico and South America; heritage wise, there was a Cuban percussion in it Pa----tato; then there were also, of course, jazz musicians.

Coleman Hawkins, the gentleman who gave me my first record date, I finally had the opportunity to ask him would he be kind enough...or disposed to record on a recording session of mine, and he was gracious enough to do it do so. It meant a great deal to me. We also had an opportunity to explore new forms, for example we used five-four, which is in the piece we just heard to create the kind of tension that was suppose to exemplify the ---- stuff five-four and odd meter would create in a work situation...to create some kind of unbearable musical tension, supposedly. Then we did some free form things... this is in the
"Triptek---- Piece", this is a duet between voice and drums, where the piece was created on images...not so much melody and changes, for example in "Triptek---", the three parts in triptek are "Prayer, Protest, and Peace". It's not a prayer of supplication, it's a prayer of preparation...it comes out of the church, you might say. The protest...follows what you prepare yourself to do...to go out and do it full force. So protest, is like, say, if you get yourself ready to do something and then you come out and do it "full-out" until you're just totally exhaust yourself, then you find "peace" in doing everything you could to satisfy the preparation that you were involved in prior to your "protest". The piece is not a piece that means that you have really won or lost something or whatever, it a piece that comes from you just extending yourself...and it's a round, because then you pray to prepare yourself again to go into another protest, to exert yourself, then you do that fully, then the "peace" is coming in...the "peace" means you have completely satisfied some
BROWER: That piece, also was an early example of what came to be known later as "free jazz", that is, jazz that did not involve a pre-set harmonic, rhythmic, or melodic framework.

ROACH: Elimination of the dominant seventh, so to speak?

BROWER: You told me that John Coltrane had an interesting reaction to this piece.

ROACH: Yeah, John's reaction to it was that it "substantiated" the direction that he was into and going into...you can deal with sound and completely eliminate the conventional structured aspects of music that would have been the perfect marriage of harmony, melody, and rhythm. That means that you could just deal with sounds itself and be involved with sounds, emotionally.

BROWER: Maybe what we can do right now is go to a portion of "Triep---" and hear what you are discussing. (a recording)

I am sure in the course of your career and making music of this
type, very powerful music... very direct music... music that
addresses itself to things that are maybe not as pleasant. You
know, you have been confronted with the question of the fact that
this music is not comfortable music... that this is music that,
its not like the kind of music you go into a night club, you
know, kick back with a scotch How so you address yourself to your
purpose as an artist?

ROACH: Well, it is theatrical, this film was made to this music
by an Italian film maker -------------------------------
he didn't put still and slides in this particular piece... the
first section which was the preparation of the ------------
you see what he did was you would see... say pan the camera or in
a group of people who looked like they were having a picnic and
it was a strange scene, you know, in the deep south... families
were standing around eating hotdogs or whatever, and then when it
got to that screaming section, the camera panned on a lynching...
so here was a group of white families... children and so forth,
and this film he got from via ---------------- the CIA of a group of citizens witnessing a black man being lynched... who was hung on a tree and so in directing it to whatever he was doing, she would be just a young black woman walking through the forest and all of a sudden she sees a man hung up on a tree with his neck broken... his privates cut off of his body and that reaction is what she would have hit immediately. So it is theatrical, but for us it was also to take a outside sound like screams and hollows and create some kind of musical texture... and to create a design with it... and this is what we were after in the whole piece.

BROWER: Another aspect in this recording is the statement that you made with respect to South Africa, "Tears for Johannesburg", do you want to talk a little bit about that piece?

ROACH: Well, the record itself got into South Africa because it was considered a jazz record okay, and the album notes was written by Nat Hentoff... I would say he is a social jazz
critic... speaks about this particular piece. "Tears for Johannesburg", was to commemorate the memory of all those young people who were killed in Johannesburg during a military insurrection on the students of Johannesburg at that time. A similar happened recently in Sweeto-. So, that piece was dedicated to them. Nat, when dealing with the album notes, would ask the artists "why did you write this piece?". I said that it was a dedication to all those students were killed in Johannesburg during that period. He wrote this in the liner notes. As I'm a jazz musician, the record got into South Africa as a jazz album, until they read the liner notes, and saw that it was really a protest album not only had to do with America and its sociological problems, but also with South Africa and her problem. So it was taken... it was barred from being further imported into South Africa, and it reached the National Press... and the record became... it almost reached the kind of popularity
that went into pop records because the times warned you, that it was during the sixties and everybody mind was on trying to do something with the world as it was today. With the war... with the Vietnam war, with the civil right movement, etc., etc... so it became a little light hit because of the fact that the press had noted that it had been barred in South Africa... the fact it still is.

BROWER: These kinds of recordings and I guess the recording "Its Time" and "Percussion With A Sweep" could be included with this sort of led to a lot controversy in your career in alot of debates and discussions about racism in jazz... and music for music sake, and music is propaganda in those kinds of things, what kind of impact do you think this had on your career and that discussion had on... that whole debate had?

ROACH: Well, you know, jazz was never the kind of a popular art form where... popular I mean you sold thousands of records of

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people on your concert, so it couldn't affect me in that way actually, but in fact it was just the opposite... I became a person who had ideals about things about the world... the political and sociological situations that go on in the world, especially in the United States of America. For me it was favorable... I was happy that I could for whatever music is worth in a situation like that I could speak against or speak out against some of the injustices through my music during that particular period. I was criticized because people say well art should not be used for propaganda purposes... or art is for the sake of art only and it stands alone and by itself. There are all kinds of arguments that of course these things I don't believe that's true anyway... for me disco is a diversionary tactic to... I mean just total disco, say if we just danced and danced and just had fun and partied all of the time we would never have an opportunity to look at what really is going on around us... we could be led into war, they could drop an atom
bomb, we could be jobless, but as long as we... as long as our culture can take us into that never, never land, and dream world souly... not that we shouldn't do that occasionally, but we should have something else to balance that on... some reality should sneak in once in a while, not just a steady diet of disco and jaws and extra terrestrial films and all of these kind of things... we get into a world where we can even... we don't even know what reality is anymore. You know, culture can be used just to correograph our mines... and take us from one place to another place and we can live in a fantasy world, and most of us do. How many people can identify honestly with a film like Dallas... but most people live vicariously that life, it's a popular show because the majority of the people watch it... so we are kind of living their lives vicariously and then going out into the streets where we have to struggle with all kinds of things as people, I am talking about all of people of the country. You know, these are the things that you question, so I didn't mine the criticism.
I got because I know that Dallas is also propaganda. If you can take me away from the reality and I can go to bed dreaming about the things that go on then, the luxury and all of the riches that these people are enjoying and I take that with me... get up the next morning and I go to my little position in society and sit down and I am still there... I am still living that life that I left last night on that tube. So I am not thinking about the fact that there is racism still exist, that there is police brutality, that there is joblessness, you know, just things that are plaguing us today and have been plaguing us... so this was an attempt to just... using music to give us another aspect of what the power of art is, I think that the things that Picasso did, I guess that were antiwar things... were powerful things and they evoked thought, you could think when I went his exhibition I saw some of the things that he did, it was meaningful to me and I think art, all art, everything is political.

BROWER: Let's talk about some of the players that in your
development were influential... men like Chick Webb, Oneal Spencer, Cozy Cole and Jo Jones... these were men that preceded you... that are your fathers so to speak in the continual... would you care to go to the drum set and maybe show us some of the things that you picked up from those masters... and also I would like for you to reflect on the great Kenny Clarke who along with yourself was a great innovator in this music in a modern period and just recently passed.

ROACH: Well, Kenny Clarke definitely was the father of the whole bebop period, he explored different uses of time in the sense of the way he dealt with the bass drum and with respect to what was being done with the drum set itself...broken rhythms, still in four-four time, and things like that. Another thing about Kenny Clarke that was also very important...you know drummers prior to people like Kenny Clarke were considered "drummers" and not necessarily "musicians"...Kenny Clarke was a fine musician, he
was a fine composer, he was a multi-instrumentalist...when he was in his early development, he played vibraphone as well as drums on one of his first recordings that he made Sweden when he was over there in the late thirties. He was an inspiration, not only as a great drummer, but also as a very very fine musician. So, his influence on me was very important in my own development.

You're not just a "timekeeper", but you also have to be involved in every aspect of the music as a composer, song writer, etc. All these things he did and he did them well. Chick Webb of course, was a great solo drummer who spawned the "First Lady of Jazz" as she is called, Ella Fitzgerald. He was important because he was one of the, I guess, first band leaders who made a lasting impact on solo drumming and I was very interested in that aspect of drumming. He put the drums right out there in front, as a band leader. The same as Earl Hines did the piano, Duke Ellington did as a pianist, Benny Carter, and others did as great band leaders and great soloists. Oneal Spencer was...I guess
you'd call him the premier drummer for small bands. He worked with the John Kirby Band that had Charlie Shavers and folks like that. He was a master of the brushes. Papa Jo Jones was one of the great inventors and innovators of all times...and what he could do with any part of the drum set. Cozy Cole was the consummate technician as far as dealing with all aspects of rudimentary drumming and making it swing. Cozy Cole was with Cab Calloway. Sidney Catlet was another consummate drummer who worked with Louis Armstrong, who did everything well, not only as an accompanist, but also as a soloist. These folks profoundly influenced my ideas about how to deal with the drum set. If I may, I'd like to just give an example of one of these folks, to give you some idea as to some of the things that they did, that's Papa Jo Jones. He could play any part of the drum set and make it sound musical. (ROACH plays the high hat cymbal)

BROWER: Would you discuss, in a little bit of technical detail, what you were involved with, right there on the high hat?
ROACH: Well, it proves that the drum kit has unlimited possibilities as far as sound is concerned. Drummers like Papa Jo Jones...that was something taken from his repertory. Papa Jo Jones was that great drummer who was with the early Count Basie Band when Basie had all those creative giants like Lester Young, Harry Sweets Edison, Herschel Evans, and that group of very very fine musicians out of Kansas City. Drummers from that particular school were highly individualistic. For example, I recall once we did a bebop versus New Orleans Style contests...this one of the very very early T.V. shows. We played a version of "Tiger Rag" and they played a version of "How High the Moon". On the end of "Tiger Rag", there's a drum break...and, instead of Baby Dodds playing on the instrument in the conventional fashion, playing all over the drum set, when they say "hold that tiger, hold that tiger", the band stops and the drummer takes this break, he picked up the snare drum and blew his breath on it...so
it produced the sound of a roar of tiger. So when we played the same piece...I'm supposed to be a modern person, what I did sounded conventional. That was really outside of the drum set, just like playing off the instrument. He used his breath to produce the sound that had a roar to it...when you blow your breath and make a sound very close to the snare head. They would always come up with things like that...that high hat thing is an example. You'd be playing, thinking that your speed is up, your feet are doing...you're dancing all over the drums, and all of a sudden, one of these men would just blow in the snare drum, or tremble with the brushes some place...They went for sounds within the instrument other than just playing and beating on the instrument itself. It causes you to think and it causes you to be inventive. Today, most musicians would get caught up in saying "I'm going to play fast or do this or do that like someone else"...but they were always full of surprises and that high hat demonstration was just a small example of the many aspects of
the drum set itself that people like Bab, Dodds, Big Sidney Catlett, Papa Jo Jones, Chick Webb, and Cozy Cole introduced.

Much of it is forgotten today.

BROWER: Probably the first point in you career, when all of these influences could kind of find a coherent expression as a soloist, was during the extensive period when you played with Charlie Parker, ranging from, I guess, around 1944 even up to around '52...intermittently you were basically Charlie Parker's favorite drummer. One of the classic pieces, is the piece "Koko", which I guess was recorded on your very first session with Parker. Would you like to discuss your association with Parker? Specifically talk about his impact in allowing you to develop and open up as a soloist...and maybe, give us a taste of "Koko".

ROACH: Well...it would be difficult to give you a taste of "Koko" because "Koko" was Charlie Parker. He was really instrumental in many ways in helping me to develop the drum solo
as I saw it, I had a lot of freedom working with Charlie Parker. He would, many times, write just one sheet of music when we went into the studio to record...he'd just write a part for Miles, a trumpet part. He would transpose his part from the trumpet part, because the alto saxophone is in a different key...say it's a B flat concert instrument, he'd write Miles' part then transpose it to his E flat instrument. But the rhythm section, the bassist and the pianist, he'd just tell them the harmonic changes that went with the melodic line that he created and he'd look over at me just tell me that I had the freedom to do what I wanted to do. I would find my own way. This gave me the kind of freedom that ah, helped me to develop the drum solo...and "Koko" was my first long drum solo piece.

BROWER: Well...I know that "Koko" is Charlie's melody, but you have a way of playing melody on drums through dynamics and design...can you approximate, like, what you would have played to
set up "Koko"?... or...you know...just give us that. I know you can make me hear it...I know you can! (ROACH plays drums)

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