An Interview with Jimmy Heath [transcript]

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Jimmy Heath
Unkn Male: Counting in background - 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 cue

Dr. Stone: We are here today at Howard University uh and we're talking with James Heath, a Philadelphia, P, native of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania who has had a very distinguished career, he's been a performer, a composer,

Unkn Male: (inaudible in background)

Dr. Stone: recording artist, he is now also adding to that list professor of Jazz Studies at Queens, the Aaron Copeland of Queens College in New York. (Inhales) And is I may, I'd like to focus on the, your earlier days in getting started into jazz uhm (unkn female - inaudible in background) ju, just how did you get started on a jazz career?

Jimmy: (Smacks lips) well uhm it's a pleasure to be been Reppard and uh, uh go back into the history a little bit. Uh my family is a typical uh jazz (pauses) family. Uh a lot of musicians came out of that kind of background. My mother sang in the church choir in a baptist church, my father played the clarinet in the Elks band whenever he got it out, out of the pond shop on the weekends he got, made his living as

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: his living automobile mechanic, but he would get
his clarinet out on weekends and put it back on Monday morning

Mm.

long enough to perform with the Elk's Band. And around my house, in Philadelphia, uh we were exposed by what you call at that time race records, uh that's the records by black artist. Uh Billy Holiday or Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins I had heard all these pe, uh people in my house when I was a kid, me and my brother, Percy, and my brother Albert, who came along nine years later, he wasn't exposed as early as we were. But tuh and my sister played the, uh was given the opportunity to play the piano, she was older then Percy, and Percy was given a violin, and he played violin (smacks lips) uhh before he entered the service, and I was given a uh, uh an option of what instrument I would like to play. So uh, I chose the alto saxophone and duh (pauses) at that time I had heard uh, uh Johnny Hodges, and Benny Carter, who were my idols at that time.

Right. Now in getting started uh y, you just didn't jump into this music first hand. Did you have to go take lessons or to s, learn it in school or somethin' to get going? How did you manage to get going?

(Smacks lips) Well (clears throat) Uh actually as
I said my father uh au, being an automobile mechanic he ran into some problems and we were uh, he was not making as much money as he (pauses) uh to s, to support the family, sustain the family. So I had a, uh his mother and stepfather had a grocery (emphasis) store in Wilmington, North Carolina and Percy and myself would go from Philadelphia to Wilmington, where Percy was actually born, and uh go to high school in the winter and then come back to Philadelphia in the summer.

Dr. Stone: Right.

So uh, my father sent me the alto saxophone, to Wilmington, North Carolina, at Christmas if I think, I think it was 1941 and uh (pauses [smacks lips]). I had asked him to get the alto and he got the alto for me and sent it to me in North Carolina and I immediately joined uh the band, the uh high school marching band for the football games at Williston High School, in Wilmington, North Carolina. And uh that where I got my first uh training in the high school an, and I would come home to Philadelphia in the summer and take lessons, privately, I took uh lessons maybe two or three summers. But tuh I would say on the whole I am a, a basically self taught musician.

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.
Dr. Stone: Uh, but tuh if I h, if you had had the teachers I had you could understand.

Laughing)

Dr. Stone: You know I was around the greatest jazz musicians in the later years who really uh brought out the music in me.

Dr. Stone: Right. (Inhales) Now uh, when did you get playing in the Philadelphia area?

Jimmy: Well uh I had a (pauses [smacks lips]) uh after high school, uh which was a separate but not equal school. I, I finished at the age of 16 from the 11th grade in the white school at New Hanover High, I went to the 12th grade.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: And uh so uh, when I came back to Philadelphia, I already had enough chops to uh play, read uh the little stock

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: arrangements that they had in the bands and I got with a trumpet players band uh named Calvin Todd and uh from that band I got another band in Philadelphia called Mel Melvin, and we took it on our own to go on tour of the South. And we bought a old school bus and took off and went down to North Carolina and played gigs and ate (pauses) uh spam, and peanut butter and stuff

Dr. Stone: (Chuckling)
Dr. Stone: (Chuckling)

Jimmy: But uh after that experience of being in that band with Mel Melvin, I went back to Philadelphia and one of the guys in that band, what's his name, uh Felix Leach, a tromboner, trombonist. And he went to a band in Omaha, Nebraska called Nat Tolls Orchestra, in 1945 and uhh, he uh told that when the alto chair got vacant, he told the man about me.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: And my mom didn't want me to leave, of course, I'm about 17 or 18 and uh t, took going to Omaha to spend time, uhm be away from home. But (emphasis) any way I went out there and I joined this band with uh Billy Mitchell, saxophonist, who later became famous with the Count Bassy Orchestra, he was the straw-boss of the band, that's the head man in charge

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: other than the leader. And uh, uh I got with that band, I stayed with them eight months out in Omaha, Nebraska. Then uh my brother Percy, who had been a pilot in the 332nd Fighter Group, uh one of the first black squadrons after the 99th the next group. He uh was about to come out the service when the war ended and he told me that tuh
he had met Dizzy Gillespie (pauses) and uh I had
heard Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie uh when I
was out there in Nebraska in the band. And I was
having some financial trouble with the man who,
uh, with the Nat Tolls, I say well look I'm gonna,
I'm gonna, 'bout ready to quite this band anyway,
he say "well man come on back because I heard this
new music called beebop" and I say me too man, I
heard Charlie Parker and I want to get into this
he say "and I'm gonna get me a bass now that I'm
uh out of the service" and duh as the story goes
uh, I quite the band, I came back to Philadelphia
and I started a Big Band. And I try to pattern my
big band after Dizzy Gillespie's band we were
transcribing some of his arrangements and I had a
ex-uh trumpeter from Dizzy Gillespie's band,
Johnny Lynch
(Inaudible)
uh Cal Massey on trumpet, Bill Massey on trumpet
uh, uh John Drew on trumpet and I had uh, had a
integrated band, had a couple white guys playing
trombone, Joe Steinburg and, and duh another
Willie Dennis, that married Morgana King. Uh and
duh I started this band pattern after Dizzy. I
had, Benny Golson was in my band and Coltrane came
to Philly after he got out of the Navy and he
joined my band. Uh, so that was uh the beginning
of my big band

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: association at that time.

Dr. Stone: Now is it uh, I heard somewhere along the way that Dizzy go, got a lot of musicians th, that where in this band with you with him.

Jimmy: No, that, that's not a fact only the piano player. Yeah uh, yea uh yes it is because uh (sniffs) uh four of us out of that band ended up going with Dizzy.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: That was Specks Wright, the drummer

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: uh and duh Hengates, piano player named James Foreman, w, a, that took the alias of Dizzy Gillespie

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: and had used on some recordings

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: Hengate.

Dr. Stone: Right, right.

Jimmy: And uh... Coltrane and myself also ended up playing with Dizzy and that's the irony of it because uh Percy told me he knew Dizzy and when I came back to Philly from Omaha, Dizzy was calling him lieutenant.

Dr. Stone: (Laughing)
Jimmy: Didn't even know his name

Dr. Stone: (Laughing)

Jimmy: you know.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: He just knew he was a lieutenant in the Air Force.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: And, I (emphasis) ended up gettin' with Dizzy's band and got Percy the gig.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: (Chuckles)

Dr. Stone: Uh could we focus in on that Dizzy Gillespie experience? Uh who contributed to the book that played?

Jimmy: The uh music was basically uh (pauses) Tadd Dameron.

Dr. Stone: (Repeats) Tadd Dameron.

Jimmy: And the orchestrations of Gil Fuller with Dizzy Gillespie's ideas

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: who uh, um Gil Fuller was wonderful orchestrator. And they had some music in the book, a couple things that John Louis had written. Uh and they had uh maybe one or two that George Russell had written "Cubano Be, Cubano Bop" and uh "Relaxin' at Camorello (ph)" that tuh George Russell had written.
Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: Uh but basically it was uh Tadd Dameron "Cool Blues" and uh "Our Delight" and that stuff and Gil Fuller's uh orchestration on "One Bass Hit" and "Monteca (ph)" and, and th, "Things To Come" and those things

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: like that.

Dr. Stone: Now during this period, where did you travel with that band?

Jimmy: Well I stayed with the Big Band until Dizzy had to uh give it up for financial reasons. And we travelled uh we played here, at the Howard Theater, of course, on a show with uh The Will Maston (ph) Trio, with

Dr. Stone: Mm, right.

Jimmy: Sammy Davis Junior, that's when I met him, when I was with Dizzy. Incidentally, he's born in '26 also.

Dr. Stone: All right.

Jimmy: (Laughing) uh...

Dr. Stone: _________ 1926, this reference to 1926, is (unintel noise) the birth year of a long (emphasis) list of jazz greats it was a vintage year for

Jimmy: Yeah.

Dr. Stone: jazz musicians, and you're of that year '26.
Dr. Stone: Right. (Someone inhales or sniffs)

Dr. Stone: (Inaudible)

Jimmy: So, so uh we travelled we played the Apollo, played uhh the theaters

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: uh played one in Milwaukee, uh Riverside Theater and we, we played dances uh I think we came and played also Turners Arena,

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: here in Washington. And uh, with the big band we, I don't think we got to the west coast with that big band when

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: I was with him, but I did, after he broke the big band up he kept a small group and duh (smacks lips) that was still Al Makemon (ph) was on bass first and uhh Specks Wright, uh Coltrane then switched to tenor,

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: which he had played tenor before he got with Dizzy

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: but Dizzy needed an alto player which he had also played too, so he went back there. Then after the, the big band broke up and he, and he formed a small group, it was Milt Jackson and Dizzy and uh Percy, uh Percy came in after Al Makevino (ph) Specks Wright and myself. So it was broken down
into basically I think as a quintet, without piano.

Mmm hum.

Cause we had Milt Jackson playin' vibes and we all used to accompany each other. Uh I think uh that's where I began to learn uh from Dizzy about the importance of the keyboard and the piano and learning to chord and chords on the piano, which leads to orchestration.

Right.

and composing. Uh

Right. Duh, uh, it's, it's no secret that Dizzy Gillespie's was a great pioneer as (emphasis) a, an arranger and a composer and a, as, h, he was more than adequate to pass on a tremendous body of knowledge since he was somewhat older had gone through that tradition. And we might make a point here uh Dizzy Gillespie also has a Philadelphia background so (chuckles) uh that you had in common, a i, it almost ended up that that was an all Philadelphia group, the small group after Specks was

Yeah and

Percy

Percy an, and yeah, uh except for Milt and Dizzy

Right. (Laughing)

(Laughing) Yeah.
Dr. Stone: Uh (clears throat) now Philadelphia uh has always had a tremendous musical history. Uh now you've talked about the influence of uh people like Dizzy Gillespie, and Charlie Parker on your formative years. Who in Philadelphia, who were the musicians in Philadelphia that influenced you? (Pause)

Jimmy: Well, uhm there was a guy who could play the saxophone, trumpet and piano and composer, an arranger name Johnny A. C.

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: who ended up uh writin' some things for Dizzy also.

Dr. Stone: Mm, right.

Jimmy: Uh but when I had my band he was doing some of the arrangements for me. Uh there was a great saxophonist in Philadelphia, who is still there, uh who was a natural saxophonist uhh, he's never studied with anybody, he's just

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: picked it up himself and his mother-wit.

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: And he's a strong uhh improvisor, his name is Jimmy Oliver,

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: we call him Satin Doll (emphasis). And uh Coltrane and I and Benny Goldson used to go hear
Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: as far as improvisation is concerned and as far as performance is concerned. Uh he was an influence uh, he actually was in the mold of Lester Young, which is the same mold of Charlie Parker

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: because Charlie Parker says that his, said his idol was Lester Young

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: so it was all in that same line. I think they were the major influences

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: one in the composition area. Uh and there was another gentleman name Leroy Lovett, that wrote arrangements uh he had a sort of a pop group uhhh cocktail type group with Danny Turner in the band, whose now with Count Basie. But tuh, uh that was the environment, the environment was very rich in Philadelphia

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: at that time, because uh Johnny Cole w, was there Johnny Lynch who had uh played with Dizzy, trumpeter, Cal Massey came to Philadelphia and he was the uh, uh his head was into improvisation as
well as composition.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: So we all sorta bung out Coltrane and I hung out you know we used to go and uh listen to uh Western Classical Music uh in the Philadelphia library, we'd go put the head set on and listen to Stravinsky or something because we heard Charlie Parker was listening and carrying Stravinsky's chords.

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: So, for the harmonic uh, uh you know techniques Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: but uh not far as black music is concerned.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: Far as the improvisation, we still took it and put in in our genre.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: But tuh that environment, Benny Goldson, uh was there was uh another saxophonist named Sax Young, who could uh (pauses) could improvise very well James Young. Uh so uh ___ Coca, Philly Joe Jones, uhm Ray Bryant, was just a kid but, he was playing wonderfully uh, uh (pauses) it's a little early but tuh from that bec, because Lee Morgans and

Dr. Stone: Mm.
Bobby Timmons and Garrisons

Right.

and people like that.

Now uh I’ve noticed that uh you’ve had a long line
of compositions uhm original compositions and
these are not (pauses) new melodies to old tunes
they are original compositions.

Mm hum.

And you’ve also composed in the genre where you’ve
written new melodies to, to the harmonic body of
older tunes

Mm hum.

and you’ve had uh continuous output over all of
these years and uh (pauses) the quality of that
music is attested by the fact that so many other
artist have chosen those pieces uh to record those
pieces at other times. Uh when did you uh really
def to do your first record session on your own
here you could demonstrate your ability as a
composer and an arranger?

(Smacks lips) Uh I did not get a chance to uh,
well as a composer, it was quite early because uh,
uh when I left. Nat Tolls Orchestra I, uh I did
spend some time uh before I got with Dizzy
Gillespie’s band after uh, uh going back to Philly
and having this band Howard McGhee, trumpeter came
to Philadelphia and took the band on the road for
a co, a few gigs because he had a bigger name and a bigger reputation so I let him take the band. And uh, uh we went on the road and played with that band. And then from there I went to Paris with uh Howard McGhee in 1947 and I played with his small group and I think that's the first place that I had one of my compositions uh recorded was in Paris by Howard McGhee and he called it "Maggie's Draw", (DRAW - Jimmy spells the word).

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: Uh, then uh the next composition that I had recorded was by uh Miles Davis uh when I was w, working with him, uh that was a, a song called "CTA". Uh then as far as uh (pauses) having other people record my songs that begun a little before my own record date. When I finally got my first record date as a leader, it was 1959 on the Riverside Label and that's when I did all the uh arranging.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: and composing and uh on that particular date.

Dr. Stone: Right. Uh could y, give us a sample of uh your music and uh we'll sorta cut away and let you play some and then we'll come back and talk some more.

Jimmy: Okay, I'd like to do that.

Unkn Male: Cut.

Dr. Stone: (Repeats) Cut, all right.
Jimmy: Yeah, watch your mic, watch your mic.

Dr. Stone: Glad you told me. (laughs)

Jimmy: You gone pull that guy... (unintch. noise) Yeah I'd almost forgot my man took me on the road, Bert, took me to Paris when I was twenty. (Unintch. noise [males laughing]) Howard McGhee...

Unkn. Male: (Counting) 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 (pauses)

Jimmy: (Piano being played), Jimmy Heath comes in on saxophone (pieces ends) all right, I played a ballad.

Unkn. Male: (Cleatrs throat [pauses])

(Piano being played) Jimmy Heath comes in on saxophone (piece ends).

Unkn. Male: (Unintelligible [pauses])

Jimmy: It's a pleasure for me to be here. Uh to talk about uh the importance of uh leaving a (unintch. female in background) reputation (pauses [unintch. noise]).

Unkn. Male: Ready, start over.

Jimmy: (Smacks lips) Uh it's a pleasure for me to be here and uh participate in this project that uh is a, it's aim is to leave uh for the archives the music

Unkn. Male: Inaudible in background

Jimmy: that was created here in America by black folks uh at the, a lot of sweat and strain and uh not much reward but tuh to have uh been a part of that
Unkn. Male:

history uh, is uh, is uh my reward. People say to me uh, uh Mr. Heath, why you smiling all the time? I say "well I'm rich". They say "what do you mean?" They think I got a lot of cars and homes and stuff, I say "no, I'm rich with experience and that's what makes me happy" uh I've been fortunate enough to be around some of the greatest jazz musicians or Afro-American Music musicians, as I prefer to call it, in the world

Inaudible in background.

Jimmy:

Billy Holiday, Charlie Parker, Coleman Hawkins, John Coltrane, Dizzy Gillespie, Tadd Dameron, uh Miles Davis and all of these people who are intimate friends of mine. So uh you see uh with that kind of experience uh it was nothing for me to do but continue in this uh direction, I'm glad that tuh there's someone that's uh documenting these things for history and uh I'm grateful to the person or persons doing that. Uh as an early jazz (unintel. noise) musician in my life, uh I found our the, the essence of the music is improvisation and uh in the beginning uh I think everybody has to learn on some of their predecessors uh to get a direction. And my first i, uh (smacks lips) idol was uh Benny Carter and Johnny Hodges. And they played with uh (pauses) uh lush, sweet quality of the saxophone it was
like a string instrument, it had the sustained quality and they could project very well and I was an alto player at first and that was my idols. Uh I hadn't heard Charlie Parker at that time, who came up with these uh, uh innovations of the new lines. Uh so when I uh first started uh, I was playing mostly ballads and love songs uh trying to emulate Johnny Hodges and people. Uh example would be uh something like uh "Warm Valley" by Duke Ellington (pauses [demonstrates on his saxophone]) and people like Ben Webster playing uh songs like "All Too Soon" (again demonstrates on his saxophone) and then I heard people like Lester Young. And Lester Young was the master of the so-called false fingerings but uh they are not false, because they are just different textures on the saxophone. Uh for example uh the "d" on the saxophone for the t, technical people is a dead not if you play the "d". so Lester devised a way of making the "d" sound as if he had muted it or _______ it (demonstrates on saxophone) uh that was some of the fingerings that Lester would use to change the texture of the same note. Uh later to be explored by people like uh John Coltrane and other, and using harmonics like this (demonstrates on saxophone). Okay uh, I uh eventually, when I uh learned and copied some of the solos of the
great masters before me and start to transcribe some from the records and write them out, I realized that the only way I could get to this and to create my own style would be to learn the ingredients that they put in this mixture to, to cook up (unintelligible noise). So uh, I say well there're a lot of scales and chords so I began to learn my scales and chords, and I found that uh the more I learned technically the more advanced my improvisation would become. Uh, I know that uh take a major scale and I heard Charlie Parker do this on a major scale, and I was wilded by it (demonstrates on his saxophone) I say well I got to learn those scales in order to, to tell my own story. And it took, a quite a while before I was able to find myself uh after learning all my sequences on different chords say even the uh later years and the Avant Guard saxophones and such as Ornett Colemand and uh learning some sequences they used. Uh diminished patterns and uh fourths (demonstrates on saxophone). Then I began to put it all together and try to form my own style and in doing so, uh I began to compose more songs. In one of my compositions that was recorded by quite a few people, was one called "Gingerbread Boy" it goes like this (almost inaudibly spoken [demonstrated on saxophone]). So
uh, you see uh with uh a lot of years of practice
and uh a lot of uh knowledge of the chords and the
scales, you will be able to uh perform uh and
speak your own uh language within the genre known
as Afro-American uh Classical Music or Jazz.
(pauses) END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO
Unkn. Male: Take (now counting) 9, 8, 7...(inaudible) 3, 2, 1
Uh back in Philadelphia when I had the big band
when I was about uh 20, 21 years old, uh I had uh
illustrious people in the band such as Benny
Goldson, John Coltrane, Johnny Coles, Specks
Wright, Nelson Boyd uh Bill Massey, Cal Massey,
Johnny Lynch and uh many others uh hen Gates on
piano. And uh the band was patterned after the,
the Dizzy Gillespie band and it was a group in
Philadelphia, a social group of uh young brothers,
uh called the Club Emanon named after Dizzy
Gillespie's uh composition uh "Emanon" which
happens to be no name backwards. (Pauses)
(Unintelligible in background)

Jimmy:
And here's an example uh of what happened uh in
1947 uh, here's a flyer that says "by popular
demand the Club Emanon presents an Autumn swing
session featuring Jimmy Heath and his seventeen-
piece orchestra plus Johnny Lynch, trumpet, James
Sax Young, tenor saxophone," uh "Jimmy Heath,"
myself "on alto sax, Jimmy Thomas, vocalist. Friday night, November 14th, 1947, at the O. V. _____ Auditorium at" tuh "16th and Fitzwater, in Philadelphia, dancing 9 until 2, admission 75" cents (emphasis) "before 10 and 85 cents after." (emphasis [laughing])

Unkn. Male:  
(Unintelligible in background)

Jimmy:
Uh that was a time when, as you know, Coltrane wasn't the name that he uh eventually became and uh, uh some of the other gentlemen in there. But uh that was the way it was during those days, uh since that time uh, uh I think I've come a long way, it is a long time and duh it now, i'm uh, presently uh the head of the uh Jazz Department on faculty at the Aaron Copeland School of Music at Queens College in New York. Uh I have uh travelled extensively during those years and played with uh a lot of the greats, as I mentioned before. Uhm, my, m, the culmination of me being at Queens College is the fact that tuh, uh I've been uh a saxophonist-composer and arranger and on April 17th, uh I am performing uh, uh, this is uh 1988, April 17th, uh I'm performing with the Queens College Symphony Orchestra, my first orchestra piece with a jazz quintet and the full symphony.

Unkn. Male 1:  (In background - cut, cut)
Unkn. Male 2:  Cut.

Unkn. Male:  (Unintelligible)

Unkn. Female:  (Laughs) Unintelligible (pauses)

Unkn. Male:  Ten seconds, counting 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 - unintelligible.

Jimmy:
Over the years uh as a compose I have uh composed about a 100 compositions, uh 50 of which have been recorded by other jazz greats. Uh I also wrote a extended uh work called the "Afro-American Sweep of Evolution", at which time I tried to go through the uh different eras of black folks in America starting out with uh african section of it uh coming over on the slave ships and uh through the field hollers, the spirituals, the uh ragtime, the boogie woogie, the swing uh, uh the beebop, the uh, uh spiritual, of course, was earlier then that uh and the uh. From the beebop to the Avant Guard and uh culminating in this last effort uh with the orchestral piece uh have a full symphony and jazz group. So I am privileged in my life to uh, uh my peers to appreciate my uh efforts uh musically and to record my compositions I think that is one of the greatest uh (pauses) accolades a person can receive in their life is to have their peers approve of their music. This is a, two books of uh compositions, 31 in each book, so uh these books haven't caught up with my uh, uh ability to
Unkn. Male: compose, I'm still at it. (Pauses)

(In background - cut [pauses]) counting 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 4, 2, 1, cut).

Dr. Stone: I'm continuing a conversation with James Heath, saxophonist, composer, arranger, artist, teacher.

(Clears throat) Uh, I'd like to zero in on some of the, your associations with some very important jazz figures. I know that through the years you've had an association with trumpet players, they've been the other voice as a part of sextet or quintet format. Uh, could you site some of these people

Jimmy: (Smacks lips)

Dr. Stone: and ______ their role in your career and development?

Jimmy: (Smacks lips) Uh, yes uh the first one of importance was uh Howard McGhee, who uh came to Philadelphia and took me on the road with him and took me to Paris on the first jazz festival to Paris in 1947. Uh, uh that was before the year that Charlie Parker and Kenny Dorham and Miles went, I was on a tour with the headline of being Le Grande, Coleman Hawkins and we went over on a (smacks lips) constellation plane that took 17 hours to get to Paris.

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: I, I never forget it.
Then my next uh association with a great trumpeter was uh, uh being with the Dizzy Gillespie band, uh I was in that band about a year and a half uh from the big band to the small band. uh the next great trumpeter that I performed with was uh miles Davis, and uh Kenny Dorham. The Miles Davis affair uh repeated itself a couple of times. Uh I went back with him several times, uh kenny Dorham, I recorded with him in 1949 on a recorded, uh on Charles Mengasons (ph) company called Debut Records. Uh then I recorded duh with uh Clifford Brown uh on his first record date uh I think it was with Blue Note uh, uh with John Lewis and Percy and Kenny Clark and myself. Uh later on I became associated with Art Farmer and I performed with him during the time when the jazztet was uh separated and Benny Goldson was writing for television and Art was still continuing. Uh I've also played with uh, in '63, I think it was, I was with the Donald Byrd Sextet with uh, uh when Herby hancock was playing the piano before he went with Miles.

It was Sony Red, on alto and Donald Byrd and myself and duh, uh I performed with uh, after that
let me see uh, Lee Morgan and I had a quintet together. Uh so you see I've been through uh, uh just about all the great trumpeters. I've never performed with ______ Farrah (ph) but

Dr. Stone: (Inaudible)

Jimmy: but I admired him very much.

Dr. Stone: Now you've had some association with trombonist as well, haven't you?

Jimmy: Uh, yes, uh

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: that was when Clifford Brown was on that record.

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: Uh and I met and played with J. H. with the Symphony Sid All Stars

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: that consisted of Miles and uh and uh Milt Jackson and Percy and Kenny Clark and that was the time I did the record with Clifford Brown on J. J.'s record.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: And then uh I later became associated with Curtis Fuller on my first

Dr. Stone: (Inaudible)

Jimmy: record date,

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: Curtis Fuller was on it, a record called "The Thumper" on
Riverside 1959. Uh and over the recent years I've been playing and uh we just did a clinic out in Memphis two weeks ago uh, I'd been performing with Slide Hampton.

So uh I've been through all the trumpet players. Now I'm gettin' to the trombone players (laughs).

I'm trying to out live 'em all if I can (laughs).

Right. Uh it's interesting uh to those of us who know uh your repertoire that uh over the years you have had some very innovative, uh groups uh you, you've used things like a tuba player or a cello player on record since some of these uh recording, since uh stands as, stand as monuments in the, and all though you probably never took these groups out. Could you tell us something about some of these groups that you just put together solely for a recording?

Uh, yes, I have uh, uh they've put out a compilation on uh a Milestone Records called "Fast Company."

Right.

And it a two record est that uh, uh the names are on the back uh "Who's Who In Jazz", mm hum.
Jimmy: who _______ performed on these records with me.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: Uh Herbie

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: uh Freddy Hubbard, Nat Addely, Clark Terry, Cannonball Adderley

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: Uh (clears throat)

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: I've had Donald Byrd on records with me (smacks lips). Uh, I, as far as the instrumentation (emphasis) is concerned, uh I always whe, after becoming an orchestrator and uh being aware of these other instruments that are basically used in Western Classical Music, i've tried to adopt uh some of those instruments into the Afro-American (strong emphasis) genre and in doing so I used the cello on uh several p, uh records.

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: I used a brother named Bernard Finell on one and my brother Percy, he was playing uh, uh, uh cello,

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: uh baby bass that was tuned like a bass.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: And uh then the French Horn

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: is one of my favorite instruments I, loving the
sound of the French Horn. So I was using Julius Watkins and uh Jimmy Buffington and other people and uh up unto the record uh, uh before the last one I put out I even

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: I used a tuba and uh two French Horns and a trombone is a brass choir.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: So uh I'm always trying to get other sound uh using those orchestral instruments and uh I'm still trying to do that.

Dr. Stone: Now looking back over such a distinguished career, what would you consider the single most uh event that stands out in your mind? The greatest musical experience that you probably ha, have had?

Jimmy: That is a hard question. Uh I really uh, when I uh composed this piece it took me two years to write called the "Afro-American Suite of Evolution"

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: and I had that performed in Town Hall. That was one of the most important days of my life. Uh not to mention knowing and being in the company of all these uh fine musicians that I've mentioned before in this _______. Uh last year Dizzy Gillespie uh called me up and asked me to write a piece for his new big band and I wrote a composition for him
called "Without You No Me."

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: Uh that was a highlight because the tape, when I had on my phone answering service, and it said uh, uh "Jimmy, I want you to do somethin' for me, I want you to write a piece for me for my new band" and he said uh "the other people that are gone write one is Gerald Wilson, J. J. Johnson, Clyde Hampton, Ernie Wilkins and I uh, you."

Dr. Stone: (Chuckles)

Jimmy: and I took the tape and kept it (laughs).

Dr. Stone: (Laughs)

Jimmy: I taped it off the machine because uh Dizzy Gillespie is one of my uh, gurus.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: Uh, uh another thing uh, I guess would be my first (smacks lips) time in Paris with Coleman Hawkins,

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: at the age of 21, being on the same uh, uh tour with

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: Coleman Hawkins is another highlight. Another one, I got to name them, uh Reppard I can't stop

Dr. Stone: (Chuckles) Go ahead.

Jimmy: because another one was being in a band in Philadelphia and loaning my horn to Charlie Parker every night for a week while he was playing at the
Dr. Stone: Down Beat Club with Miles Davis and Max Roach, Tommy Potter and Duke Gorden and then being him on that Sunday to come and perform with my band with Coltrane in the band, was another high-

Right.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: light. Charlie Parker

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: performing in, in front of my band with, with Coltrane in the band and I got a picture of it and that is, that is one of the big moments. (Inhales) The uh other one is 1985 when I received an honorary doctorate at the Sojourner (ph) Douglas College in Baltimore, Maryland.

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: That one almost made me cry (laughs).

Dr. Stone: I know that was very special for you because I was and...

Jimmy: Yeah (laughs)

Dr. Stone: ...and I ...

Jimmy: Yeah.

Dr. Stone: You were

Jimmy: That was

Dr. Stone: extremely touched.

Jimmy: Yeah.

Dr. Stone: Uhh, what has been perhaps the lowest point in your career?

Jimmy: (Clears throat) I think the lowest point is to, in
my life has been being a drug addict. (pause) Being addicted to drugs and being having to go to prison for that. For hurting myself

Dr. Stone: Mm mm.

Jimmy: and my

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: family,

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: I still had to go to prison for it, and that was a low point in my life.

Dr. Stone: (Inhales) Well uh that is very interesting. Uh you've made a terrific come back from that experience. Uh, did you do this totally on your own will or did you have help from someone?

Jimmy: Well what I did is after I spent uh four years and five months in Louisburg Penitentiary, in uh Pennsylvania, uh when I came home the first _______ that my brother, Percy, introduced me to the woman that is my wife now.

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: For twenty-eight years and I changed my whole life, and changed my whole environment, I uh, when I came home. I think it was a blessing in disguise that I did go to prison because uh some of the brothers who were my friends and uh constituents in the

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.
Jimmy: music business, didn’t go to jail and they’re all gone now.

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: Because they kept on doing

Dr. Stone: (Inaudible)

Jimmy: what they were doing and never had the shock therapy.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: This shocked me into reality saying now look

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: These white people ain’t gone let you do that so you better get off of (inaudible—as he laughs).

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: (Still laughing) So I stopped that.

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: And that was what tuh str

Dr. Stone: The

Jimmy: aightened me out.

Dr. Stone: this is very interesting because the time uh that you were inactive because of this the music sort of made a transition or innovations came in and, of course, I’ve heard you tell this story, but I’d like for you to repeat it here, of your experience with playing modell (ph) music

Jimmy: (Laughing)

Dr. Stone: and joining Miles Davis. Could you tell that story?
Jimmy: Yes. Uh and uh when I came home it was 1959, and my first uh gig was with uh, uh gill Evans at the Apollo. And I think I came here to Washington to the Caverns with Kenny Dorham.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: and uh, after that when I got back to Philadelphia. I got a call from Miles Davis and had gotten a card from Coltrane saying he was going to leave Miles and uh Miles, I had played with before I went away (emphasis)

Dr. Stone: Right, right.

Jimmy: in '53, and back in that time, so uh he s, asked me to fly to California and join his band so I had been away for four and a half years and I had never heard nothing like "So What"

Dr. Stone: (Laughs)

Jimmy: and that song with the, with the uh dorian mode (emphasis)

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: and I was a, at a loss, I couldn't uh, when I first got out and, Cannonball was still in the band he was preparing to leave to start is own band also and Jimmy, Kyle, Wynton, Kelly and Paul Chambers and Miles and myself. So uh (smacks lips) I had a problem with the modell piece I, I just didn't feel like I could find away to stop.

Dr. Stone: Hum.
Jimmy: Uh, I had been a person who played the uh two fives and the

Dr. Stone: (Chuckles)

Jimmy: the progressions that I know you get to the end of the cadence that's it

Dr. Stone: Right (chuckles softly)

Jimmy: and this continuing uh with the same uh modell vamp

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: kind of had me uh baffled for awhile, uh the songs that he was playing like "Green Dawber Street" I could jump

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: eat up.

Dr. Stone: (Laughs)

Jimmy: (Laughs) but tuh, I got tuh so that I got used to the, the modell playing too and duh I wasn't the only one who said they uh there's a famous uh, uh occasion where Coltrane was in the Apollo Theater, maybe you know that story, and uh they were playing "So What"

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: on the stage, and with Miles, and uh they would have uh the movie to come on and they had so many shows a day and it has to go down in precision. And Coltrane would play such long solos on, on uh "So What" and have is eyes closed til the stage
hands would get mad, mad at Miles and blinking the lights, say "man get that guy out of there"

Dr. Stone:  
(Laughing)

Jimmy:  
"get him out of there."

Dr. Stone:  
(Chuckles)

Jimmy:  
And Coltrane said the same thing I say, he says Yeah.

Dr. Stone:  
Yeah.

Jimmy:  
"well Miles say man why you play so long Trane?"
He say "well I couldn't find anything good to stop on."

Dr. Stone:  
(Laughing)

Jimmy:  
So Miles say "all you got to do is take the horn out your mouth" (impersonating Miles Davis).

Dr. Stone:  
(Laughing) Now uh is it true that Miles s, sorta helped you out by instructing you uh in playing "So What"? What did he, what did he lean over and say to you?

Jimmy:  
He told me says uh "James when you play that tune" say "play all the white keys on the outside and all the black keys in the bridge (impersonating Miles Davis).

Dr. Stone:  
(Laughing) Which were incidently, is a real clue to

Jimmy:  
(Inaudible-speaking with Stone)...

Dr. Stone:  
to how to approach it beca, uh because it is modell and of course it moves some white keys up to black keys
Jimmy: Right. (Laughs)
Dr. Stone: when you look at keyboard (as he laughs).
Jimmy: Yeah.
Dr. Stone: So which is uh, which was very instructive as well
and it gives some insight into out Miles had envisioned this modell kind of playing.
Jimmy: Yeah.
Dr. Stone: Or at that time (clears throat).
Jimmy: How rel, he related that to the keyboard.
Dr. Stone: Yeah.
Jimmy: Well Miles is another person that also I didn't
even mention when, when Dizzy, when I was with Miles we would always get to the piano
Dr. Stone: Right.
Jimmy: and play chords uh some the time of the Symphony Sid All Stars and
Dr. Stone: Mm hum.
Jimmy: even before.
Dr. Stone: Right.
Jimmy: Uh, that is, that is the key.
Dr. Stone: Mm hum.
Jimmy: Uh, if you get to that keyboard, you can see it all and it is very plan and if you a single note instrument player, you still need to get to the keyboard.
Dr. Stone: Right. Uhh, you've had uh, uh tremendous output uh of compositions but it seems as though uh
"Gingerbread Boy" has something about it that is so attractive to young musicians who are, who are just starting out learning to improvise and its not in really a beebop genre it was sort of like you made a departure with "Gingerbread Boy". Uh was anything unusual going on at that time when you composed that?

That was uh the, the, the, the uh song came about, the title uh the music uh I mean it was just uh like a series I mean I've been composing so long now and that was just one in the series (inaudible sound) particular. The title still came about from Jimmy Oliver the saxo

Dr. Stone: Mm hum.

Jimmy: phonist

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: in Philadelphia. Uh my wife was pregnant uh

Dr. Stone: Mm.

Jimmy: and uh he, he came over and pat her on the stomach and say "oh you got a little Gingerbread Boy"

Dr. Stone: Laughing

Jimmy: and uh hence I made the song

Dr. Stone: Yeah.

Jimmy: "Gingerbread Boy", uh

Dr. Stone: Yeah.

Jimmy: from that. But as far as the uh structure of the song, it was a blues but extended blues
Dr. Stone: (Inaudible)

Jimmy: it was a sixteen bar melody

Dr. Stone: (Inaudible)

Jimmy: that had a little extension. Uh, my main source of uh direction from that would come from the composition uh that, tuh Bill Dowgett used to

Dr. Stone: (Inaudible)

Jimmy: play called h, uh "Hold It".

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: It had the, the seventh with the raised

Dr. Stone: Unintelligible (speaking with Jimmy Heath)

Jimmy: ninth

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: in the (dunt, dunt, junh-demonstrating) something like that.

Dr. Stone: (Inaudible)

Jimmy: And uh that was the, the _______ of my inspiration for that. You know we all uh, uh, b, barrow from each other.

Dr. Stone: Right.

Jimmy: It, as composers you know that too uh, Duke said that all the, the melodies had been written now and its a matter of rearranging them.

Dr. Stone: Right. Its been a real pleasure to talk with you (inhales) and I wish you the best of luck in the future.
Jimmy: Thank you, thank you, thank you very much. (Paper being rattled)

Unkn Male: Counting

Dr. Stone: Thank you James (spoken with pleasure).

Jimmy: Ohh, (pauses [unintelligible]) I go, ohh

Dr. Stone: Wait a minute (unintelligible noise [chuckles]): you gotten, forgot about the mic

Unkn Male: (Unintelligible)

Dr. Stone: (Laughs)

END OF TAPE