

Interview of Evelyn Freeman
UCLA Library, Center for Oral History Research, University of California, Los
Angeles Interview of Evelyn Freeman

Transcript

Session 1 (April 6, 2007)

00:00:13

FREEMAN:

-- was not to waste time. Now, [inaudible] be in a place for six weeks, get right into the school, and get right into the studies.

00:00:19

PATTERSON:

Yeah. And she carried that with her -- I mean, obviously she had experience [inaudible].

00:00:36

FREEMAN:

So after acting school, and [Willie Coleman], we went to -- after high school, she decided she's going into singing. I said, if I'd know that, I wouldn't have spent all that money. (Laughter)

00:00:38

PATTERSON:

[inaudible], right?

00:00:40

FREEMAN:

Yes, it did. That's what so very --

00:00:41

PATTERSON:

I remember that, yeah.

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FREEMAN:

That's what she learned at the Coleman, Willie Coleman. He was famous at that time.

00:01:00

PATTERSON:

OK, so April 6, 2007, with Evelyn Freeman Roberts. I guess we should start at the beginning. Born, family...

00:01:03

FREEMAN:

OK. That's why I gave you that paper, so I wouldn't have to go through all of that.

00:01:11

PATTERSON:

Oh, come on, it's an oral history, Evelyn! (Laughter) We got to talk about it. All right, where were you born?

00:01:11

FREEMAN:

Cleveland, Ohio.

00:01:11

PATTERSON:

Cleveland, Ohio.

00:01:55

FREEMAN:

It all starts with my dad. Yeah, he was -- luckily, he went to Tuskegee. Both of my folks were from North Carolina. So how do we wind up in Cleveland? Well, he bought a \$.50 flute from the catalogue, taught himself to play, then he walked all the way down to Tuskegee, Alabama, from North Carolina. So when he got down there, they found out where he came from; they just welcomed him, "Come on in, come on in!" So he played with the Tuskegee Band, and they traveled all over the country, raising money for Tuskegee.

00:01:59

PATTERSON:

So he went into the school as a musician sort of self-taught.

00:02:02

FREEMAN:

Self-taught with his \$.50 flute.

00:02:02

PATTERSON:

How old was he?

00:02:08

FREEMAN:

Oh, he must have been late teens or early 20s.

00:02:09

PATTERSON:

But he knew that's what he wanted to do.

00:02:17

FREEMAN:

Well, he wanted to go to school. And that's what got him in.

00:02:17

PATTERSON:

So he stayed at Tuskegee --

00:02:50

FREEMAN:

He graduated from Tuskegee. But one of the towns they visited was Cleveland, and he liked Cleveland very much. And he had a cousin, a first cousin, that was living there. So after he and my mother got married, and he had to go into the Army as a musician, playing the flute, and when he came back, of course, by that time I was born. I look so much like my father that there was no mistaking. (Laughter)

00:02:55

PATTERSON:

Really? Do you have pictures of -- we don't have to get them now, but do you have a picture of your mom and dad?

00:03:00

FREEMAN:

A have pictures of them when they are much older. You can see them from here -- right, see?

00:03:04

PATTERSON:

Oh, up on that mantle. And your mother, was she musical?

00:03:35

FREEMAN:

A wanna-be. She was -- you know, it was the custom back in those days, people who had money would send their kids to boarding school, [inaudible] hanging around with the riff-raff in the town. And she would take piano in the school, but then of course in the summer, when she was home, she had no lessons. Now she could play things, play little hymns and stuff like that. But they started me on piano when I was about four years old.

00:03:36

PATTERSON:

You were the first-born?

00:03:38

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:03:40

PATTERSON:

So four years old, you started on piano.

00:03:49

FREEMAN:

Yeah, but before that, I went with my father everywhere, he took me everywhere. And he was -- since he was the only black flute player in Cleveland, it kept him pretty busy.

00:03:53

PATTERSON:

What would he play? Jazz bands, or with the church, or --

00:04:00

FREEMAN:

No, any time they had something that they needed an artist in, they needed a flute player, he was it.

00:04:04

PATTERSON:

Did Cleveland have an orchestra? Like a --

00:04:04

FREEMAN:

Symphony orchestra?

00:04:05

PATTERSON:

Yeah, symphony.

00:04:09

FREEMAN:

World-class.

00:04:15

MONTENEGRO:

Evelyn, I'm going to turn your chair a little bit.

00:04:27

FREEMAN:

Yeah, they had world-class -- as a matter of fact, I remember when I was small, they built that Severance Hall. And Rodziński I think was the conductor at the time, so yeah, they had a world-class orchestra.

00:04:29

PATTERSON:

Did your father play with them?

00:04:32

FREEMAN:

No, no, no, no.

00:04:33

PATTERSON:

Blacks couldn't -- they wouldn't let them play?

00:04:36

FREEMAN:

Oh, shoot. (Laughter) That was out of the question. They didn't even think about that.

00:04:39

PATTERSON:

Oh, that's terrible. (Laughter)

00:05:07

FREEMAN:

I don't know if he would have wanted to. But every time they had any kind of production where they had the orchestra, he was -- and then he played with the jazz bands, because they were very popular during the early '20s. Like the rich people would have the ballrooms at the top of the -- the third floor would be a ballroom, and they had big dances and parties and stuff.

00:05:09

PATTERSON:

And he'd be hired, like house bands --

00:17:09

FREEMAN:

Yeah, with the band, yeah. So he played the saxophone in the band. 00:05:12

00:05:15

PATTERSON:

Oh, so he played flute and sax.

00:05:29

FREEMAN:

Yeah, I guess the sax and stuff came later. And by about 1923, the bottom dropped out of everything. They had -- I guess it was a terrible depression.

00:05:31

PATTERSON:

So he didn't have as much work.

00:05:36

FREEMAN:

Not as a musician. That's when he went to work in the foundry.

00:05:43

PATTERSON:

OK. And do you remember -- I mean, was he playing in the house at that time? Was he playing music around you?

00:05:47

FREEMAN:

I went with him everywhere. I'd sit in the seat right next to him.

00:05:49

PATTERSON:

OK. Did he play at home too?

00:06:05

FREEMAN:

Not at that time. But I was surrounded with music. And every Sunday, St. John's AME Church, they had an orchestra for the Sunday School, they played for the Sunday School. And I'd be right there sitting right next to him.

00:06:11

PATTERSON:

Now, how is it that you were going with him to all these places? Did your mom -- she didn't mind; she was like, "OK, just go ahead, wherever you gonna go with your daddy"?

00:06:14

FREEMAN:

I think my dad was so proud of me. (Laughter)

00:06:16

PATTERSON:

Pretty little girl, his little --

00:06:22

FREEMAN:

Yeah. (Laughter) And my mother used to curl my hair every day.

00:06:23

PATTERSON:

Yeah. So you were hearing all this music.

00:06:44

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. I was surrounded with music. And then he was a bandleader for the Elks, and then I got to participate when they had the parades, and I did that until I got so [inaudible], and my mother had to kind of pull my father's coattails. (Laughter)
"Hey."

00:06:51

PATTERSON:

It's time. (Laughter) So you started playing the piano at four years old.

00:06:54

FREEMAN:

I started taking lessons at four.

00:06:57

PATTERSON:

Well, did your dad teach you, or did they have somebody else?

00:07:01

FREEMAN:

No, no, no. They had the church organist.

00:07:03

PATTERSON:

Do you remember who that was?

00:07:06

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Kathleen Holland Forbes, I can't forget that.

00:07:15

PATTERSON:

Kathleen Holland Forbes. And so you started playing -- was she classical, [inaudible].

00:07:24

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah, yeah. And then on top of that, by the time that I was eight, I was playing for Sunday School at St. James.

00:07:27

PATTERSON:

Were you beginning to read music? Did she teach you to read, or were you playing by rote, mostly?

00:07:57

FREEMAN:

No, no, no. I was reading music. And then on top of that, as I got older, we used to -- my brother had started on the violin, and every Sunday morning, we would sight-read overtures, because at St. James, the Sunday School was in the afternoon, at 1:00. And so before we went to Sunday School, we'd spend an hour sight-reading these overtures.

00:07:57

PATTERSON:

Your brother Ernie.

00:07:59

FREEMAN:

Yeah, and my father.

00:08:05

PATTERSON:

So by then, Ernie was born. How long before Ernie -- how old were you when Ernie was born?

00:08:05

FREEMAN:

Well, Ernie's three years younger.

00:08:09

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. And he started learning music just like you did.

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FREEMAN:

Oh, he had the perfect pitch also, yeah.

00:08:17

PATTERSON:

So did he start playing an instrument young, like you did?

00:08:20

FREEMAN:

He was about seven, I guess, when he started.

00:08:21

PATTERSON:

What did he play?

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FREEMAN:

Violin. He was an excellent violinist; he got -- I opened a door at the Cleveland

Institute of Music, because there weren't too many black people that went there. And I got a scholarship there in piano, and that's when I learned that I really didn't know anything but what I learned from Mrs. Forbes. (Laughter) I practically had to start all over, with the whole mental turnaround.

00:08:51

PATTERSON:

Why?

00:09:21

FREEMAN:

Because I hadn't learned any of the fine points, all the little nuances and stuff. It was on the music, but I didn't know what it was. But I excelled in harmony and ear training. As a matter of fact, I went to Martin Lewis, who was head of the theory department, and complained that I wasn't learning anything from that teacher. (Laughter) He put me in the next class.

00:09:23

PATTERSON:

You protested, huh? (Laughter)

00:09:34

FREEMAN:

I sure did. It was so boring. Because she was a book teacher; she would say, "And the book says.." I got so sick of that "The book says."

00:09:37

PATTERSON:

So you were feisty.

00:09:40

FREEMAN:

Oh, I was terrible.

00:09:43

PATTERSON:

And here you were surrounded by a white student body, right?

00:09:54

FREEMAN:

They could play rings around me. But I could sight-read. And pretty soon, I was playing for the head of the voice department and the head of the violin department.

00:09:58

PATTERSON:

So this was a special gift that you had that saw you through.

00:10:02

FREEMAN:

All that sight-reading we did as kids, going around sight-reading those overtures.

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PATTERSON:

Just for fun. Now imagine that. The kids sight-reading for fun.

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FREEMAN:

Yeah, it was fun. And don't make a mistake.

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PATTERSON:

So it was like a game for you and your brother, to sight-read.

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FREEMAN:

Yeah. Oh, don't make a mistake.

00:10:22

PATTERSON:

Uh-huh, it's like, "Ah-hah, you made a mistake!" I got you. So you weren't outside playing; you guys were sight-reading.

00:10:25

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, I had to practice so many hours a day.

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PATTERSON:

Was that because of your mother and father?

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FREEMAN:

Because my mother sat down with me. She crocheted many a doily. You remember how the people used to put doilies all around everything? Oh, she crocheted many a doily.

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PATTERSON:

While you'd be practicing.

00:10:48

FREEMAN:

While I had to practice. Kids would say, "Can Evelyn come out and play?" "No, Evelyn has to practice."

00:10:52

PATTERSON:

So they had a vision for you, from the time you were a little girl.

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FREEMAN:

I told you, my mother was a wanna-be pianist.

00:11:01

PATTERSON:

And obviously your father loved that you loved music.

00:11:19

FREEMAN:

Oh, I was so proud, the first time that I was able to accompany my father on the flute. I even remember the song that we did: it was a serenade by Schubert. Beautiful on the flute. And I was just so proud when I could play for him on the flute. Oh, that was great.

00:11:30

PATTERSON:

And I'm sure he was proud, and your mom. But a lot of little kids, they don't want to do their music lessons; it's not fun for them. You didn't have to be forced.

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FREEMAN:

Well, I had no choice. (Laughter) I had no choice.

00:11:37

PATTERSON:

Just how the household is set up, this is what you do, right?

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FREEMAN:

Yes. I had no choice.

00:11:45

PATTERSON:

But you found it fun, also. Parts of it. You liked sight-reading, that was fun.

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FREEMAN:

That was fun, yeah, playing ensemble. And then we were the Freeman Family, and we would play at all the social functions.

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PATTERSON:

Oh, as kids, you and Ernie and your dad?

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FREEMAN:

Yeah. Well, you know, it was [inaudible] -- I don't even know where the -- it was the custom at that time to have teas on Sunday afternoon, and they were mostly held at the funeral home, because funeral homes have the beautiful -- well, funeral homes were beautifully furnished anyway, and they had the beautiful tea set and all everything, all the accoutrements to go along with it. And we were booked just about every Sunday I guess, and my mother kept a record of everywhere we played. The date, and who is was for, and everything. When I was about to graduate my last year in high school, my mother told me to go and see the school counselor, see if I can get some scholarship, go to college. And she more or less asked me, how did I merit that? I came home to my mother, she gave me all this stack of books --

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PATTERSON:

[inaudible] your resume.

00:13:18

FREEMAN:

I took a pen to --

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PATTERSON:

"Is this enough for you?"

00:13:44

FREEMAN:

Well -- Mrs. Mercurter, that was her name. She sent me everywhere to try to get scholarships. And I went to a school that by the time I graduated was about nine-tenths black, but when I started, I started in the 7th grade -- it went from 7th all the way to --

00:13:46

PATTERSON:

What school was this in Cleveland?

00:14:01

FREEMAN:

Central High School. Oldest high school west of the Allegheny Mountains. Rockefeller had gone there, John Rockefeller, and he had donated a huge tower with a clock; you could see that clock for miles.

00:14:04

PATTERSON:

Oh campus.

00:17:09

FREEMAN:

I wouldn't call it a campus. (Laughter) 00:14:07

00:14:09

PATTERSON:

Well, high school -- on the high school.

00:14:15

FREEMAN:

Yeah. We didn't have all the property that high schools have today.

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PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. But you had that tower that Rockefeller donated.

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FREEMAN:

Yeah. Rockefeller donated it.

00:14:22

PATTERSON:

So it was nine-tenths black when you graduated?

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FREEMAN:

By the time I graduated, yeah.

00:14:31

PATTERSON:

So it was in the black part of town. Was it like a black community around the high school that you all lived in?

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FREEMAN:

You know, the evolution of what the school went to, it was -- when I first got there, I would say it was 75% white. And in those six years --

00:14:49

PATTERSON:

Wow, that's fast. So there was an influx of blacks coming into the city?

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FREEMAN:

Well, whatever it was -- because I remember when they elected the first black class president.

00:15:00

PATTERSON:

Now this was like -- in the '30s, early '30s?

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FREEMAN:

This would be in the '30s, because I graduated in '36. And during that six years, I saw the whole school just completely change.

00:15:14

PATTERSON:

Wow. That's a lot; that's a big change just for six years. So that means that the city was changing.

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FREEMAN:

Yes. But we had a whole migration from the South.

00:15:20

PATTERSON:

Yeah, from the South, they were coming up.

00:15:57

FREEMAN:

Yeah, people -- what made my parents so individual was that people from North Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia, they took the seaboard, up the coast to New York. People in Kansas City went to Chicago. But he wound up in Cleveland, which is quite unusual. We also got a lot of people from Mississippi, and they had a strong alumni association, Tuskegee. The Tuskegee Club, yeah.

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PATTERSON:

They're in Cleveland as well.

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FREEMAN:

I got to tell you this -- because I was a complete nerd up to the time I graduated from elementary school. I couldn't add two and two. I was so bad in math, and my mother couldn't understand it, because she was so good in math, she could do sums. She could add up a sum about as fast as you could do it on the calculator, and she couldn't understand why I couldn't do any math. But we had -- you know, a -- and I can't remember whether it was a [inaudible], I think it was, something like that, about measuring your IQ. And when the results came back, the teachers seated everybody in order according to their scores. I was third.

00:16:59

PATTERSON:

In spite of the math thing.

00:17:51

FREEMAN:

And I was third, and she still couldn't understand it. She would just shake her every time she saw me sitting there, shaking her head. But I had sense enough to know that when I got to the math course, there wasn't no point in me even [inaudible]; I just skipped it entirely. But I was an avid reader. I just read everything I could get. I used to read books by the authors. I'd go through the whole -- all those in one section, and then I'd go back and take all the authors, and I read all the fairy tales, all the sci fi, all the backwoods stories, and I read them in order. So therefore, all -- I got all those questions, and still came out third, and didn't touch the math.

00:18:03

PATTERSON:

Because you probably went right on and just did what you knew you did best, and so you could excel and it balanced itself out. That was smart right there; you strategized your exams.

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FREEMAN:

Well, there wasn't no point in my trying -- shoot, [inaudible].

00:18:09

PATTERSON:

[inaudible] no sweat on it, huh?

00:18:40

FREEMAN:

Not going to waste my time, so I couldn't finish the rest of the stuff. But anyway, that was a big boost to my ego, that I was smart. And what happened was, when I got to the seventh grade, they had all the kids who had the highest IQs from several elementary schools, and they put them all in one class. And we had to take Latin; we started out in Latin. I took six years of Latin.

00:18:41

PATTERSON:

In junior high.

00:18:50

FREEMAN:

Junior high and senior high. And that was a boon to me, because I really learned English by studying Latin.

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PATTERSON:

All the roots, and the --

00:19:08

FREEMAN:

Everything. All the conjugations and all the adjectives, the conjunctives, the adverbs, all that stuff. Because most people don't get that kind of grounding, but we had to get that in Latin.

00:19:12

PATTERSON:

Were you taking music? Were you involved in music in school, or just out of school?

00:20:07

FREEMAN:

Kind of periphery, because I played for -- when I got to high school, I played for the music department; they had all kinds of choruses and stuff. But I still think that they should still keep Latin in schools, because people have the capacity to learn it should learn it. That was wonderful to me, because I still remember conjugating the verbs and all that stuff, and people just don't know that these days. Their English is atrocious. Even the television -- listen to the television newspeople. And I say, "That's so-and-so, you turkey. You don't even know the English language; that's terrible."

00:20:09

PATTERSON:

And Latin really gave you a foundation to English.

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FREEMAN:

Oh, it did, it did. And I took two years of French, and my teacher must have been awfully good. [Sadie Arro], she was from Austria. And because when I went to Montreal, people thought I had learned my French in Paris. (Laughter)

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PATTERSON:

So you caught onto that as well.

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FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. I was very good at languages. And in Latin, we did Caesar, Cicero, and Virgil.

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PATTERSON:

You read them.

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FREEMAN:

Read them in Latin. And our teacher in high school was Helen M. Chestnut, and she wrote the definitive book on Latin grammar, but that was way after I had graduated. But her father was the great Charles Chestnut. Now, you're looking at me like you don't know who that is. He was one of the first recognized black authors.

00:21:18

PATTERSON:

Oh, Chestnut. Chestnut. OK. So that was a distinguished family then.

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FREEMAN:

Yes it was. Yes, she was.

00:21:39

PATTERSON:

So at home, you -- the family was playing as a unit in the community. And then when you got to high school, you were also playing, in addition, you were playing at school. So you were getting all this experience. Were you accompanying, or -- go ahead.

00:21:56

FREEMAN:

I wanted to go to football games for free, so I borrowed my father's piccolo, flute and piccolo, and I picked that up on my own. I wasn't that good. But I was good enough to get in the band, because I wanted to go to the football games.

00:21:58

PATTERSON:

So you said, "Well, I'll play this too." (Laughter)

00:22:02

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Oh, that was fun.

00:22:04

PATTERSON:

And so was Ernie playing in school as well?

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FREEMAN:

When he got to high school, he played in the orchestra as well. He was a good violinist.

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PATTERSON:

And violin's hard, a hard instrument. I always hear that; I don't know anything about the technique.

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FREEMAN:

Well, it's not easy. And you have to have an ear to play the violin, because you have to tune those four strings up.

00:22:30

PATTERSON:

Yeah. So when you were playing in the community, you play piano, he played violin, and your dad played the flute or the saxophone?

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FREEMAN:

Yeah. No, the flute.

00:22:35

PATTERSON:

Just the flute.

00:22:58

FREEMAN:

And then we started adding instrument, then people came in. By the time I was -- I was a couple of years out of high school, I guess, at the Cleveland Institute of Music; we must have had about 20 people rehearsing in our house. And my folks had taken up the rug off the floor and put down linoleum. (Laughter)

00:22:58

PATTERSON:

Mm-hmm, so it was like a studio; it was a music studio.

00:23:06

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Put down linoleum, and we had to have lots of newspapers to accommodate the horn players.

00:23:07

PATTERSON:

Oh, yeah, when they --

00:23:11

FREEMAN:

Spit. (Laughter)

00:23:13

FREEMAN:

So now there's this -- what was it called again?

00:23:14

FREEMAN:

And it was the Freeman Ensemble.

00:23:18

PATTERSON:

Freeman Ensemble. And working around Cleveland, making a name.

00:23:38

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And we played a lot of -- for free. But then we were playing classical music, and that was a wonderful experience for the fellows, because they had to play all the cues.

00:23:39

PATTERSON:

And they were all reading.

00:23:42

FREEMAN:

Yeah. They had to learn to read.

00:23:46

PATTERSON:

So were these arrangements that --

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FREEMAN:

I'd go to the library and get the music, classical music. Get the scores and everything.

00:23:57

PATTERSON:

So what role did you play with all these -- now these were adults, and you were still kind of a young girl --

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FREEMAN:

No, these were all kids.

00:23:59

PATTERSON:

They were all kids?

00:24:05

FREEMAN:

All kids, all except my father. He was still playing flute with us.

00:24:08

PATTERSON:

And were you like the leader, or --?

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FREEMAN:

I was -- I ran that organization.

00:24:13

PATTERSON:

And these were guys --

00:24:16

FREEMAN:

These were all guys.

00:24:29

PATTERSON:

So you early on got a taste of what it was to be a leader as a woman, a young man, you were really a young girl, with all these guys around. And I'm sure there were egos flying at times.

00:24:42

FREEMAN:

Oh, listen. I ran that with an iron fist. They told me later, said, "We were scared to play around, because you'd give us the look." I'd turn and look at them -- (laughter).

00:24:45

PATTERSON:

When did you realize that you had perfect pitch?

00:25:39

FREEMAN:

We used to look at a program called [Major Bowles' Show]. And I say look at the program, I mean that literally, because we would gather around the radio every Sunday night, 8:00, to look at Major Bowles on the radio. And they had this young fellow that came on, and they were making all this to-do of his being -- over his having perfect pitch, and they were playing the notes and he's naming the notes. Next morning I went back to school, and my homeroom teacher was the music teacher. And I said, "You know, they had a guy on Major Bowles last night, and they were making all this to-do about perfect pitch; I don't see what's so hard about that. I can do that." And she [inaudible]; ooh, she got so excited. She sent me to the back of the room, and she went to the piano and started plugging out notes and stuff. And that's when I found out that it was a deal.

00:25:40

PATTERSON:

Did your dad have it?

00:25:45

FREEMAN:

I don't know, but he might have, or close to it.

00:25:46

PATTERSON:

And did Ernie, you said?

00:25:49

FREEMAN:

Ernie did.

00:25:51

PATTERSON:

So -- I mean, is that unusual, to have two children with perfect pitch in the family?

00:25:54

FREEMAN:

I don't know. My brother Art didn't have it.

00:25:58

PATTERSON:

He came later? He was the younger?

00:25:59

FREEMAN:

He was the violin player.

00:26:02

PATTERSON:

Ernie -- I thought Ernie --

00:26:03

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:26:04

PATTERSON:

Did you say Art?

00:26:04

FREEMAN:

Art's my younger brother.

00:26:06

PATTERSON:

Oh, he came after Ernie.

00:26:08

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

00:26:13

PATTERSON:

And he didn't have perfect -- he was a musician as well. Now when was he born?
How old was Ernie?

00:26:14

FREEMAN:

I was ten years old --

00:26:16

PATTERSON:

You were ten?

00:26:17

FREEMAN:

-- when Art was born.

00:26:20

PATTERSON:

And he started playing as well, eventually.

00:26:23

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Well, he was around music.

00:26:26

PATTERSON:

But that wasn't his love like you and Ernie.

00:26:42

FREEMAN:

He had intended to be an engineer, but because of the times, they wouldn't let him go into that field. And after he couldn't go in as an engineer, he just said, "Well, OK, I'll go into music."

00:26:44

PATTERSON:

Oh, it was a second choice.

00:26:54

FREEMAN:

Yeah. But you know, back in those days, black people were not encouraged to go into the technical ends of everything.

00:26:58

PATTERSON:

Even if they were inclined and smart enough to do it.

00:27:02

FREEMAN:

Yeah, he was -- that's what he wanted; he wanted to be an engineer.

00:27:03

PATTERSON:

So there was a disappointment there for him

00:27:09

FREEMAN:

It was a disappointment to him. But he became a first-class clarinet player.

00:27:11

PATTERSON:

So he did excel with music.

00:27:12

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

00:27:19

PATTERSON:

I see. So when were you first introduced to jazz? Was there only classical in the house, or --

00:29:11

FREEMAN:

Yes, it was. Although my father had played in bands in the early days, there wasn't any -- I didn't know who the jazz players were. But my last year in high school, I had gone to Sunday School every year, and I was way ahead of everybody -- I could have graduated in January, which would have made me graduate at 16, but I wanted to wait until June, because that's much more fun, graduating in June. And I really didn't have too much to do, and one day I decided I was going down to the Palace Theatre on Friday, when the bands came in, and I guess they'd been coming back on Monday, talking about what they had seen on Friday -- I had never been there; I had never seen a stage show. I'd never skipped school either. So I skipped class that day and went down to the Palace and saw Duke Ellington. I was enthralled. I was so enthralled, I decided right then and there, I'm going to be a bandleader. And I went backstage, and they had all these groupies waiting around. And you know when you graduate and

you have these little cards with your names on it, you know? I gave my name to the elevator boy; he took it to Duke, and Duke invited me up. I really didn't have anything to say. (Laughter) I was just so tickled just to meet him, and he had his son with him, Mercer. So I asked Mercer, was he going to be a musician like his father? Mercer said, "Oh, no. I'm going to be an engineer." Famous last words. And that was my introduction. Duke really changed me completely around.

00:29:23

PATTERSON:

Just by seeing that performance, him perform there. So then you started buying the music, or you started going to the shows, or how did you proceed?

00:29:25

FREEMAN:

[Trianon] Ballroom.

00:29:26

PATTERSON:

Which ballroom?

00:30:25

FREEMAN:

Trianon Ballroom in Cleveland. And that's where all the big bands came. And that's where my brother and I would sneak out the house and spend the night just listening to the band. Oh, my goodness. I saw Count Basie's band, when they had Lester Young, and Herschel Evans -- Herschel Evans was on this side, Lester Young was on that side, and it looked like they were battling -- I didn't know they were friends; it

looked like they were battling each other all time. It was very exciting. And they didn't play that much organized arrangements, and a lot of head stuff. Like Lester would set the riff of saxes, and Buck Clayton would set the riff of the brass section, and you know, we were taking all this in.

00:30:35

PATTERSON:

You mentioned you and Ernie would go see shows, were these some of the shows? What shows would you and Ernie go to together and get up in the stage with them and look at their music?

00:31:09

FREEMAN:

No, we didn't get on the stage, because the saxes were on the floor. We'd go behind and read the music. But we didn't do that, basically, we would just stay down front where we can hear all of it. Duke Ellington never came to the Trianon; I think that's the one band that didn't come. But Lunceford did; Lunceford had a good band. And in those days, we knew all the names of the band people. It's like you know all the basketball players? We knew the names of everybody in the band.

00:31:11

PATTERSON:

You and your brother were close then.

00:31:41

FREEMAN:

Very close, yeah. Well, music made us close. And one of the things that we did was,

when we got through rehearsing the classical music for the ensemble, then all the guys wanted to get together and jam. And fairly soon, you know, we said, "Well, we going to jam, we might as well put them together." And that's how the Evelyn Freeman Swing Band came about.

00:31:44

PATTERSON:

So how old were you when that started?

00:31:47

FREEMAN:

I was still in my teens.

00:32:02

PATTERSON:

So these were the same musicians that played classical music in your house in the floor with the newspapers, and after you played your classical bits that you would play around town maybe for another people, or you would just practice together, and then afterwards --

00:32:06

FREEMAN:

Yeah, that was probably another difference, when you say jamming --

00:32:16

PATTERSON:

Yeah. No, I'm saying the jamming came later, but initially, you come together to play the classical music. And then after you went through doing that, then you would gather to play --

00:32:21

FREEMAN:

Then the guys would jam.

00:32:22

PATTERSON:

And you would play jazz.

00:32:39

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And then we organized it, and my brother, by that time, had become adept on the saxophone; he found an old saxophone that belonged to my father back in the closet, hid back in the closet. He found that saxophone and taught himself how to play.

00:32:41

PATTERSON:

Now, is this Ernie or Art?

00:32:41

FREEMAN:

This is Ernie.

00:32:46

PATTERSON:

Wow. So he went from violin to saxophone, because now you're going to swing.

00:33:08

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And most of the guys in the band, in the Ensemble, as a matter of fact, when to Central High School. So Mr. Lee, who's the orchestra teacher at Central High, had to check with us and make sure he didn't schedule anything on our schedule.

00:33:08

PATTERSON:

So you could play.

00:33:15

FREEMAN:

Well, he'd be missing half his band players.

00:33:20

PATTERSON:

So the word got around. Evelyn Roberts Swing Band.

00:33:20

FREEMAN:

Evelyn Freeman.

00:33:31

PATTERSON:

Evelyn Freeman, I'm thinking -- yeah, Evelyn Freeman Swing Band. So what did your dad think of all this? When you began to do this sort of transition?

00:33:39

FREEMAN:

I don't know what he thought of it, but you know, inside the two years, we were outplaying everybody, all the older bands, all the musicians.

00:33:49

PATTERSON:

Wow. And so here's this little teenage girl hanging with the musicians, the guys, and leading, actually leading them.

00:34:04

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, I was their mentor. As a matter of fact, my first trumpet player, [inaudible] Roberts, I caused him to win first place in trumpet in the Cleveland competition, which included all the schools, all the high schools.

00:34:20

PATTERSON:

So there was an impulse to teach from that time. How would you describe that relationship between you and the guys? You say mentor, but did you teach, did you guide them --

00:34:24

FREEMAN:

I really did, and it wasn't intentional.

00:34:27

PATTERSON:

It was just, "This needs to be like this, and so this is the way it should go."

00:34:30

FREEMAN:

Yeah. It was not intentional.

00:34:33

PATTERSON:

Did they respect you though?

00:34:41

MONTENEGRO:

[inaudible], this way so you're facing --

00:34:47

FREEMAN:

I didn't find out until years and years and years later that all of them had a crush on me. (Laughter)

00:34:51

PATTERSON:

Ah-h, so that's one of the other reasons they held together with you.

00:34:57

FREEMAN:

[inaudible], hey, I was taking care of business.

00:34:57

PATTERSON:

Did they try to date you?

00:34:59

FREEMAN:

No, not really.

00:35:14

PATTERSON:

They respected you. What was one of the things that stood out in your mind as far as a challenge with working with these young musicians?

00:35:23

FREEMAN:

I didn't see it as a challenge. In fact, you know, these are my guys. I had mentored them from junior high school on up.

00:35:31

PATTERSON:

So you knew them and their abilities, and what they did well and what they didn't do so well. And they wanted to play with you.

00:35:33

FREEMAN:

Yes.

00:35:35

PATTERSON:

Did you start taking jobs around town?

00:36:22

FREEMAN:

Yes, we did. We played a lot of dances, and there was -- we didn't have any ballrooms of our own, no black ballrooms, and they had one right at 55th and Euclid, which is like kind of the outskirts of the black community that went this way, and the white community went that way. And I talked to Old Man Oster, into opening up the ballroom on Sunday night. And so we had the dance there for black kids on Sunday night. And I'm telling you, I have never seen anybody dance so hard. They used to scare me; I thought they were having a heart attack.

00:36:25

PATTERSON:

But you were playing the music that made them want to move.

00:36:31

FREEMAN:

I guess so. I did; I thought for sure they'd have a heart attack. It scared me.

00:36:36

PATTERSON:

So you guys were taking solos, and really performing for them. Or was it more like background...

00:36:36

FREEMAN:

No, no, no.

00:36:37

PATTERSON:

Were you on stage?

00:37:05

FREEMAN:

We were a show band. As a matter of fact, the first music I ever bought was Count Basie's 1:00 [Jump]. And that was our closing number, because the fellows really cut up; they would -- the trombones would be doing the -- everybody would stand up and the trombones would be going off, and the trumpets had their [inaudible], they'd be doing this -- oh, it was a show.

00:37:09

PATTERSON:

Wow. Did you ever have any vocalists?

00:37:30

FREEMAN:

We had a couple. Edith Jordan, I remember, she was -- and what was so funny about Edith was, she sang with us like on Saturday night, and on Sunday, I worked at her church, briefly, and we would work to see how many people we could get to shout. We were terrible.

00:37:34

PATTERSON:

So you were doing the same kind of -- bringing that energy into the church.

00:37:36

FREEMAN:

Swinging, swinging, swinging, yeah.

00:37:40

PATTERSON:

And what did the church think about this? How did they respond?

00:37:43

FREEMAN:

We were swinging on the religious music, and that's what they were after.

00:37:43

PATTERSON:

So they liked it.

00:37:45

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

00:37:46

PATTERSON:

And was this an AME church, or a Baptist church, or a church --

00:37:55

FREEMAN:

It was an AME church, but it was more like a Baptist, in how they approached their service and the singing.

00:38:01

PATTERSON:

So it was freer, because I understand, if I'm right, that the AME was a little more conservative?

00:38:07

FREEMAN:

Very. Because since we went to St. James, you couldn't even say amen too loud in there.

00:38:09

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. So what church was this? This was not Saint James.

00:38:16

FREEMAN:

No, this was not St. James. I don't remember the name of the church, but it was a much smaller church.

00:38:17

PATTERSON:

So you had them jumping too.

00:38:22

FREEMAN:

Oh, knock down drag out.

00:38:24

PATTERSON:

So how many pieces was the band, the swing band?

00:38:44

FREEMAN:

We had -- at one time we had 13 people, I remember it was 13, because the union came and asked us will we join. They made us a special dispensation, \$25 a person. Because they were anxious for us to join, (laughter) 'cause we were running everybody out.

00:38:46

PATTERSON:

So you were getting known around town.

00:38:48

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

00:38:57

PATTERSON:

And you were just kids though, really. So you were competing, out in the community, with adults, more adult experienced musicians.

00:38:58

FREEMAN:

Listen, we were blowing them out.

00:39:02

PATTERSON:

Why was that? Was it just the energy of youth? Or --

00:39:09

FREEMAN:

Not only the energy and the pizzazz, but all that enthusiasm, yeah. And they were good players.

00:39:12

PATTERSON:

They were good players.

00:39:21

FREEMAN:

And then my brother was lead alto, and boy, he could play that saxophone. He loved that saxophone.

00:39:21

PATTERSON:

So he put the violin down, and he --

00:39:26

FREEMAN:

No, he didn't quit the violin, because he was a scholarship student at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

00:39:31

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. So he had these two worlds going for himself, the classical violin and then the saxophone.

00:39:39

FREEMAN:

Yes. Well, so did I. Yeah, because in 1936, I got the scholarship to the Cleveland Institute of Music.

00:39:44

PATTERSON:

So you're playing classical and school, and swinging at night.

00:40:01

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. And then we got a job at the Circle Ballroom, which was a white ballroom. And we also broadcast from there, over at WTAM Radio, which was an NBC affiliate.

00:40:06

PATTERSON:

So did you think about recording?

00:40:59

FREEMAN:

You know, that wasn't even in the mix. I don't even know if they had a recording studio in Cleveland. I'm so sorry that we didn't. But a Navy recruiter came in one night to the white ballroom, heard the band player. And the war had just started, 1941, of course, in Pearl Harbor. And he made the boys an offer they couldn't refuse. He offered them a chance to enlist as a group. So they came to me and said, "Well, what are we going to do?" I said, "Hey, they're going to get you one at a time. You might as well enlist as a group." And that was the end of the Evelyn Freeman Swing Band.

00:41:01

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. Were you disappointed? How did you feel about that?

00:41:09

FREEMAN:

I wasn't really disappointed, because the draft was on, and they were gobbling up everybody.

00:41:11

PATTERSON:

So you kind of expected it.

00:41:25

FREEMAN:

Not only expected it, but the fact that they could go as a group, I thought that was marvelous. And the biggest body of water they saw was the Wabash River in Indiana, Peru, Indiana

00:41:28

PATTERSON:

So they didn't have to go fight; they were able to stay musicians.

00:41:31

FREEMAN:

They didn't. Nope, they stayed there for the duration.

00:41:33

PATTERSON:

That was fortunate then.

00:41:35

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:41:37

PATTERSON:

What happened with you? What did you do when they went off to war?

00:41:43

FREEMAN:

Well, I stayed at Oster's Ballroom with six pieces instead.

00:41:47

PATTERSON:

Did you exchange -- I mean, did you have to go out and recruit other musicians?

00:41:48

FREEMAN:

Oh, I didn't have to recruit them; they came to my house.

00:41:49

PATTERSON:

They just came to you.

00:42:11

FREEMAN:

And one of those people who came to my house was a well-known -- world-known trumpeter named Benny Baley. I knew them at that time as Ernest Bailey. Little scruffy fellow. And he couldn't read music; I had to teach him to read music so he could play with my band.

00:42:15

PATTERSON:

Were you writing the arrangements out?

00:42:17

FREEMAN:

Yeah. We had to have something.

00:42:24

PATTERSON:

And they were all readers, or they couldn't play what you needed them to play.

00:42:30

FREEMAN:

I had to teach him how to read. So every now and again, I hear a mention of him; he went over to Europe and made a big name for himself.

00:42:35

PATTERSON:

Anybody else that you worked with that stayed in the professional arena?

00:42:58

FREEMAN:

Yeah. My first trombone player who went with Dizzy, and then later on went with Moody, James Moody. That's when I told you he was playing, and they asked him what he was playing, and he says, "Well, I'm playing what's on the music." They had never heard it before.

00:43:03

PATTERSON:

So they were trained musicians, coming out of the Evelyn Freeman Band.

00:43:45

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And my first trumpet player, Howard -- I think he was with Lionel Hampton, and we were on -- Tommy and I were traveling with [inaudible], and we saw him in some little town in Virginia. I don't know whether it was with -- let's see, who was he with? Oh, I can't think of the guy's name; he had a magenta-colored Cadillac. But anyway, we got tired -- when Howard got tired of being on the road, he came back home and got his degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music in voice.

00:43:48

PATTERSON:

So you mentioned one singer you had with you -- what was her name?

00:43:52

FREEMAN:

Edith Jordan.

00:43:59

PATTERSON:

Edith Jordan. And anybody else start singing with you? Did you have a take on a singer that stayed --

00:44:04

FREEMAN:

No. We had a couple of other singers, but nothing ever happened in there.

00:44:08

PATTERSON:

You preferred instrumental performance then.

00:44:14

FREEMAN:

No, it wasn't that at all. These were incidental.

00:44:25

PATTERSON:

What else were you doing, besides music? Or did music just take up everything in your spare time, your fun time? Anything else you loved doing?

00:44:48

FREEMAN:

No, that was about it. I got a job at the -- oh, what was the name of the organization -- Caribou House. And that was a training place for actors. And at that time, they weren't the big organization they are now.

00:44:50

PATTERSON:

What were you doing for that?

00:44:55

FREEMAN:

I taught piano, and played for their different productions.

00:45:05

PATTERSON:

Still music, huh. Everything was music. Did you know you were going to be a professional -- that that was your calling, and that was what you were going to do with your life? Did you know that?

00:45:49

FREEMAN:

I knew, when I graduated from the Cleveland Institute of Music, that I would never be a concert pianist. In the first place, I didn't have the disposition for it. You know, talk about dog-eat-dog? That is a terrible dog-eat-dog competition. And I didn't want to teach school. And at the time I came along -- you have to remember, this is back in 1940, '41 -- '41 I graduated. And the only jobs for females was, you could become a librarian, a teacher, or a social worker. That was it. Or a nurse.

00:45:52

PATTERSON:

And what was on your mind?

00:45:58

FREEMAN:

I didn't want to be any of those.

00:46:01

PATTERSON:

So what did you do?

00:46:26

FREEMAN:

So, hey, I was still playing music, and I met Mr. Tommy Roberts. He had just come off the road with -- he had been with -- oh, the trumpet player's name; I can't even think of it now. It'll come to me. Anyway, he was looking for somebody to do some arrangements for him.

00:46:28

PATTERSON:

So this was his show; this was Tommy's show.

00:46:50

FREEMAN:

No, he had been singing with the big bands. But he had been with Wings Over Jordan before that. And of course, he was very arrogant. (Laughter) Coming back to Cleveland, a small town.

00:46:53

PATTERSON:

Where was he from?

00:46:59

FREEMAN:

His folks lived in Cleveland, but he was originally from Georgia. Joh-h-ja.

00:47:04

PATTERSON:

Joh-h-ja. I can hear him saying it.

00:47:40

FREEMAN:

Anyway, he's coming back to the small town of Cleveland, and wanted me to do some arrangements. So I told him, well, I really need to hear what you sound like. So he was appearing at the Bluegrass, which was one of the biggest black clubs in Cleveland. So I went up to see him, and he was singing, and all the women just ooh-ing and ahh-ing and going on. So when he finished his set, he said, "Well, what do you think?" I said, "You don't sound too bad, but I just can't stand to look at you sing."

00:47:46

PATTERSON:

(Laughter) I know he didn't expect you to say that.

00:48:06

FREEMAN:

I did not -- in those days, I did not bite my tongue. Well, he said later -- he told me later, "I was so mad with you." (Laughter) Well, that was the style then; singers made all these grimaces and faces and stuff when they sang.

00:48:10

PATTERSON:

So did you go ahead and do the arrangements for him?

00:48:47

FREEMAN:

I don't think we ever did do any arrangements. I never did do any arrangements at that time, but he had some songs he wanted to put down on paper. And he had been burned pretty bad when he was with the big band -- Cootie Williams, that's who it was. Cootie Williams had been the trumpet player with Duke Ellington. Eddie "Cleanhead" Benson was the star of the band, because he had this new record out called Cherry Red. It was a big hit. Anyway --

00:48:53

PATTERSON:

So was Tommy one of the singers with the Cootie Williams band?

00:49:42

FREEMAN:

He was the band singer; Eddie Vincent was the saxophone player. But anyway, they used to go and jam in hotel rooms, and they would sing Tommy [inaudible]. He was out there, you know, and he didn't know what they were talking about. He says, "Listen to those [passing tones]," and they would sing him to death, and all his ideas. And next thing he knew, his ideas were being recorded by other artists. And one of the songs, one of his ideas, was recorded by -- was it Thelonius Monk? I think it was -- "Roun' About Midnight," which was a famous jazz.

00:49:48

PATTERSON:

So Tommy really had the original idea for "Roun' Midnight"?

00:49:49

FREEMAN:

"Roun' Midnight," yeah.

00:49:58

PATTERSON:

'Cause you had -- Thelonius Monk gets the credit for that. So how did that happen, though? Tommy -- who took it to Thelonius Monk?

00:50:10

FREEMAN:

He was ever dawdling in the crowd of musicians when they were jamming. And I told you [inaudible] in the hotel room. Snooky Young, all those guys.

00:50:28

PATTERSON:

Wow. So he was singing ideas and melodies, and they were listening -- so he had these ideas for songs that he wanted you to maybe put down so he could -- with an eye to copyrighting them then?

00:50:30

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:50:33

PATTERSON:

And he needed to get them down to do that, so he needed sheet music.

00:50:46

FREEMAN:

And we argued all the time. Because here I am, I'm a conservatory graduate, you know, and these ideas are just so far out there, you know, we couldn't get it together.

00:50:51

PATTERSON:

Did you finally get something copyrighted?

00:51:03

FREEMAN:

We finally did, and amazingly, we came out here in 1956; we had several songs that were published, we had sheet music for it, and recorded by some big artists.

00:51:11

PATTERSON:

So he managed to get some songs down, and you were developing this connection with him, like a professional connection.

00:51:11

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:00:00

PATTERSON:

So did he settle back down in Cleveland? 00:51:14

00:51:38

FREEMAN:

No. What happened was, I was so sick of Cleveland -- Cleveland's like a little fiefdom. And the most closed-minded people I ever saw in my life, they don't do

anything but gossip about each other. And my daughter lived there for ten years, and she says they haven't changed. (Laughter)

00:51:42

PATTERSON:

I have a friend that just moved from there.

00:52:03

FREEMAN:

Well, you ask her, and she'll tell you the same thing. I tell you, when people got into your bedroom and gossiped about what happened in your bedroom, that was just too much for me. I wanted to get out of that town so bad. I bought bus tickets to Chicago; that's all I had money for. (Laughter) Closest big town.

00:52:05

PATTERSON:

Just get out of here, huh?

00:52:57

FREEMAN:

Get out of there. I had bought my bus ticket, and I was ready to go. And Tommy talked to Reverend [Settle], who was the director of Wings Over Jordan. He talked Reverend Settle into hiring me to arrange for the Wings Over Jordan. Now, Wings Over Jordan had never had an arranger, per se. And what they were doing, they were having a town hall debut in New York, so they wanted something special. They had to do an Easter program at town hall; they wanted to have something special. He talked

the Reverend into hiring me as an arranger. Well, I had to sing, too; I had never sung in my life. And -- but they were going to New York. That was the magic word.

00:52:59

PATTERSON:

Had you already gone to Chicago though?

00:53:00

FREEMAN:

No, I had my bus ticket.

00:53:01

PATTERSON:

You just had the ticket but hadn't gone yet.

00:53:16

FREEMAN:

Had my bus ticket, hadn't gone yet. I had to go and get my refund from the ticket, and off I set to New York on the bus. Oh, that was exciting.

00:53:20

PATTERSON:

Was -- now, was Tommy going to go to New York as well and work with the Wings Over Jordan as well?

00:53:21

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:53:38

PATTERSON:

So here he is starting to factor into your career, in kind of a partnership in a way, or an association, a valuable association. So then did he go to New York at the same time, or did he go ahead of you?

00:53:40

FREEMAN:

No, no, no. We all got on the bus together.

00:53:44

PATTERSON:

Got on the bus together, so here you go to New York. The big city.

00:54:17

FREEMAN:

Yup. Now, I had been reading about all this stuff going on in New York, because even though we're in a hick town, we still got downbeat. So I knew every note that Dilly Gillespie played. To this day, I can still sing those melodies. It's amazing; I remember them. I can still sing them, because that was our -- oh, that was our standard.

00:54:22

PATTERSON:

What was Ernie doing when all this exciting stuff was going on for you?

00:54:39

FREEMAN:

Ernie had just gotten out of the Navy, and his wife and family were going to Los Angeles. So they went to Los Angeles; I went to New York.

00:54:44

PATTERSON:

And when he finished the conservatory, did he want to stay in --

00:54:47

FREEMAN:

He was two years at the conservatory, and was inducted into the Navy.

00:54:50

PATTERSON:

I see. So he didn't get to finish.

00:54:53

FREEMAN:

He finished at USC.

00:54:54

PATTERSON:

I see. Oh, so he came out to LA.

00:54:55

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:54:59

PATTERSON:

Now, your parents: what did they think of all this stuff? As you guys are growing up and going on --

00:55:01

FREEMAN:

I don't know.

00:55:04

PATTERSON:

That wasn't the issue for you, huh? (Laughter)

00:55:06

FREEMAN:

I don't know.

00:55:09

PATTERSON:

OK. Was your dad still playing music?

00:55:45

FREEMAN:

No, I think when the Freeman Ensemble was disbanded, I think that was about it for him. And the way they were disbanded was, we had a faction on our street -- our street didn't -- the houses weren't as big as these, but it was like, we had three streets together, 80th, 81st, and 82nd, all -- I would say 90% [inaudible]. And there was a faction that didn't like our playing music.

00:55:46

PATTERSON:

Was it too loud for them, or --

00:55:48

FREEMAN:

I don't know. I think they just wanted --

00:55:49

PATTERSON:

This is classical music.

00:56:21

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And there was another faction that came out on their porches to listen. And the faction that didn't want us there -- but I think what they were trying to get rid of was the Evelyn Freeman Swing Band. And they took us to court, but what they didn't realize, that the Evelyn Freeman wasn't going to quit. Because we could rehearse anywhere; we were making money. But that was the end of the Ensemble.

00:56:27

PATTERSON:

Because both types of music were going on in the same home.

00:56:37

FREEMAN:

And you know, that street was never the same after that. It just -- a complete divide.

00:56:40

PATTERSON:

Mm-hmm. That's interesting.

00:56:43

FREEMAN:

Yeah. They were never the same.

00:56:46

PATTERSON:

Does your mom and dad still stay out and live there on that street?

00:56:49

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:56:55

PATTERSON:

So they said goodbye to their little girl. How old were you when you got on that bus to go to New York?

00:56:59

FREEMAN:

I was about 22 or 23, I guess.

00:57:01

PATTERSON:

Did you feel any trepidation, or were you just excited?

00:57:04

FREEMAN:

I was excited. Going to New York?

00:57:08

PATTERSON:

Yeah. You weren't the scaredy type anyway.

00:57:11

FREEMAN:

I guess I wasn't.

00:57:15

PATTERSON:

So -- and what was your first impression?

00:57:32

FREEMAN:

My first impression was, when we got to that cloverleaf that goes into New York -- I had never seen anything like that. And that was exciting enough. And then we stayed at the Theresa Hotel, and I saw Etta Moten in the lobby.

00:00:00

PATTERSON:

Etta Moten. 00:57:35

00:57:37

FREEMAN:

And that name doesn't mean anything to you. (Laughter)

00:57:39

PATTERSON:

No.

00:58:05

FREEMAN:

Well, she was the star of Porgie and Bess, when Porgie and Bess was -- yeah, Etta Moten. And then she was in a couple of movies, too. I remember a movie where they did the carioca, and they had a white dance group that came out and danced, and when her troupe came out and danced, I thought -- all of us, we just erupted. They were so good.

00:58:09

PATTERSON:

Really? So she was a singer and a dancer.

00:58:13

FREEMAN:

Well, yeah. She was a stage person. Etta Moten.

00:58:16

PATTERSON:

So that was the first place you all stayed in the city?

00:58:30

FREEMAN:

Stayed there, yeah. And I went around the corner and saw the Woodside -- that was the famous song by Count Basie, "Jumping at the Woodside," that was a hotel around there.

00:58:33

PATTERSON:

So you were at a place in town where there was things happening.

00:58:36

FREEMAN:

125th St.

00:58:39

PATTERSON:

125th St.

00:58:42

FREEMAN:

And St. Nicholas.

00:58:45

PATTERSON:

And did you all start working right away? Did you take a --

00:58:49

FREEMAN:

Yeah. The first thing we did was a concert at Madison Square Garden.

00:58:55

PATTERSON:

Wow. Right away. 'Cause, well, Wings Over Jordan -- and you were arranging for that?

00:58:57

FREEMAN:

Not yet.

00:59:02

PATTERSON:

What did you do with them first? What was your first encounter with that ensemble?

00:59:18

FREEMAN:

I had to sing with them, and like I said, I'd never sung before in my life. And I'm trying to find out what they're singing, and the harmonies were awfully muddy.

00:59:18

PATTERSON:

Pitch-wise, or --

00:59:19

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:59:20

PATTERSON:

-- or arrangement wise?

00:59:33

FREEMAN:

I couldn't tell what they were singing. I couldn't put the harmonies together. So I asked the conductor, you know, "Well, what is it they're singing here?" And he thought I was trying to put him down; I didn't know he didn't know.

00:59:35

PATTERSON:

And he got nervous when you asked him what it was.

00:59:43

FREEMAN:

Oh, I tell you. I think he started, right at that point, to start getting me out of there.

00:59:47

PATTERSON:

Were there other women? What was the balance with women and men?

00:59:58

FREEMAN:

Oh, there were -- yeah. And all the women -- there were about four women there that were divas, and they gave me a hard time.

00:59:59

PATTERSON:

So how many people were there altogether?

01:00:01

FREEMAN:

20.

01:00:03

PATTERSON:

20. And how many women?

01:00:04

FREEMAN:

I'd say about 10 or 12 women.

01:00:17

PATTERSON:

10 or 12 women, and four of them were divas. And they turned around and looked at you, and you were this confident and feisty -- how did you interact with them? What happened with that?

01:00:27

FREEMAN:

Well, they gave me a rough way to go. But I didn't know that ten years later, they'd be working for me. (Laughter) In the Exciting Voices.

01:00:29

PATTERSON:

They would never have guessed.

01:00:31

FREEMAN:

No, I would never have guessed that, no.

01:00:40

PATTERSON:

So did you learn to blend in with them musically, or did -- that was always tough, because the music was --

01:01:06

FREEMAN:

No. But I found out later that how they did that -- and now this was unusual, you might appreciate this -- each section did their own part. It wasn't like in a chorus -- what's the word I'm trying to say? -- they didn't really --

01:01:09

PATTERSON:

So the harmony -- it was more like they did their own melodic flow.

01:01:09

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:01:13

PATTERSON:

So it wasn't stacked harmony.

01:01:13

FREEMAN:

No, no.

01:01:20

PATTERSON:

I see. I know what you mean. That's interesting.

01:01:21

FREEMAN:

It was very interesting, especially for me --

01:01:28

PATTERSON:

I think some African groups do that, some African ensembles. It's more like a horizontal harmonic partnership.

01:01:30

FREEMAN:

Yeah, they kind of interweave --

01:01:37

PATTERSON:

Yeah, rather than that homophonic, stacked up -- that's very interesting.

01:01:44

FREEMAN:

Actually, like with the basics, it was very consequential. They're doing a lot of stuff --

01:01:45

PATTERSON:

Yeah, like that. (break in audio)

01:01:48

PATTERSON:

-- we could practice; I would love to speak Spanish fluently.

01:01:50

FREEMAN:

I would too.

01:01:52

PATTERSON:

And I like it; I like Spanish so much. I just want to --

01:01:54

FREEMAN:

My problem is that French jumps in.

01:01:57

PATTERSON:

Oh, does it?

01:02:00

MONTENEGRO:

It makes sense, yeah, for it to get all mixed up.

01:02:11

FREEMAN:

Because the French -- I know the phrases in French. I can say "por favor, s'il vous plait." (Laughter)

01:02:18

PATTERSON:

Like a lot of kids; it's amazing how they speak what they call the Spanglish. Some of

the phrases, some of the words in one sentence may be English, and the others Spanish; it's just funny.

01:02:23

FREEMAN:

And my teacher's always getting on me, because instead of saying "day," I'm saying "deh."

01:02:41

PATTERSON:

Oh, the pronunciations. Maybe I'll get Adriana to help me a little bit. Yeah, I need to speak with you more. Are we in? OK. So we were talking about the harmonic structure, or the way that they built vocals in Wings Over Jordan.

01:03:01

PATTERSON:

It was amazing to me, but the one thing I remembered, my composition teacher at the Institute always said, if it sounds good -- and it sounded good. I said, you know, this is all wrong; they're doing all the wrong harmonies, [the voice leading the right note]. But it sounds good.

01:03:04

PATTERSON:

And they just instinctively get it?

01:03:04

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:03:08

PATTERSON:

So was it SATB, soprano-alto-tenor-bass?

01:03:10

FREEMAN:

More or less.

01:03:15

PATTERSON:

So each section came up with their own melodic flow.

01:03:24

FREEMAN:

Their own take on the harmonies -- what they wanted to sing in this song.

01:03:26

PATTERSON:

Wow. Did they record at this period when they were arranging themselves this way?

01:03:32

FREEMAN:

Yes, they did. Oh, they were famous, yeah.

01:03:37

PATTERSON:

So you can identify this stylistic sort of uniqueness that they had in those recordings.

01:03:39

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:03:41

PATTERSON:

Who was leading now?

01:04:07

FREEMAN:

A fellow by the name of King. I've talked to -- I'm trying to think of his first name. His brother, Luther King, was a famous tenor, but he was lesser known. He sang also,

but not as good as his brother. But I didn't realize he didn't know -- you know, he's the conductor; he's supposed to know -- he didn't know.

01:04:10

PATTERSON:

So he wasn't a trained musician.

01:04:15

FREEMAN:

Well, whatever his training was, it didn't accommodate --

01:04:24

PATTERSON:

Nothing you understood to be music, right, musically-trained. Now the Reverend Settle, how did he --

01:04:25

FREEMAN:

He was the founder.

01:04:32

PATTERSON:

He was the founder, and then this King was directing at the time.

01:04:38

FREEMAN:

[inaudible]. It'll come to me.

01:04:51

PATTERSON:

So how did he do this? He didn't tell the sections what to sing then. He was allowing them to construct their own part.

01:05:06

FREEMAN:

Well, each section had people who figured they knew music. Like the bass section, they had a modicum of understanding, and the bass section was very good. I still, to this day, enjoy a choir with a good bass section.

01:05:17

PATTERSON:

Me too, Evelyn. Me too. That's why I like the South African choirs; they have this really big emphasis on bass. So then the divas were over here --

01:05:44

FREEMAN:

Yeah. One, Riola -- Riola Bosh, that was her name at the time, out of Chattanooga,

Tennessee. And she had one of those soprano voices that was outstanding. Full and rich -- what do they call it, full-bodied? And then Dorothy Clark was the alto in the group that was -- she was the solos also.

01:05:48

PATTERSON:

So they led their sections.

01:05:49

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

01:05:52

PATTERSON:

And so you were in the alto, or --

01:05:55

FREEMAN:

I was in the alto.

01:06:07

PATTERSON:

And so you were working with Dorothy Clark, trying to blend in there, really being a pianist. (Laughter) So this was new for you. So how -- were you frustrated?

01:06:37

FREEMAN:

You know, the first place we performed was in the Madison Square Garden, and they were singing a song that Dorothy, the alto, had a solo on, and do you know, I would stand up their singing, she missed the cue, and I instinctively knew she was going to miss the cue, and I came in and sang that part. And nobody said anything, and I didn't say anything either. But I knew, when she didn't take the breath to come in, I knew that she was going to miss it.

01:06:41

PATTERSON:

Wow. And that was your musical instinct as a leader also.

01:06:46

FREEMAN:

Well, I didn't feel the breath. You know, what they call the anacrusis?

01:06:50

PATTERSON:

Yeah. And how did it feel, you sang the solo -- so this is a solo line?

01:06:52

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:06:56

PATTERSON:

And you're not a singer, but you were a musician that knew that this is what needed to happen right then.

01:07:01

FREEMAN:

Yeah. I just jumped right in there, and nobody said anything, and I didn't say anything.

01:07:03

PATTERSON:

And even afterwards, she didn't say anything?

01:07:04

FREEMAN:

No. Nobody said anything.

01:07:05

PATTERSON:

She wasn't embarrassed?

01:07:06

FREEMAN:

I don't know whether she was or not.

01:07:09

PATTERSON:

Moving right along, it's done.

00:00:00

FREEMAN:

It was over then. It was done. But what happened was, when we did the town hall thing, I arranged special Easter music for the group. And CBS was there, because we were broadcasting on CBS; all the big shots in New York from CBS was there.

01:07:28

01:07:29

PATTERSON:

And this was in Harlem this is taking place?

01:07:31

FREEMAN:

No, this was at town hall.

01:07:41

PATTERSON:

Town hall. So you were in a white environment now with this.

01:07:43

FREEMAN:

Downtown, I guess, yeah.

01:07:50

PATTERSON:

And so the TV crews were there. Now, CBS -- now, let's see, what year was this?

01:07:52

FREEMAN:

This would be about '45, I guess.

00:00:00

PATTERSON:

So this wasn't television. 01:07:54

01:07:55

FREEMAN:

No.

01:07:57

PATTERSON:

CBS Radio.

01:08:04

FREEMAN:

Uh-huh. We were a mainstay on CBS Radio.

01:08:05

PATTERSON:

And you were still singing with them.

01:08:07

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:08:09

PATTERSON:

But you were now also arranging.

01:08:14

FREEMAN:

I arranged a special group of Easter songs.

01:08:19

PATTERSON:

Was this your first real performance -- this first performance of your arrangements with them?

01:08:22

FREEMAN:

Yes, and the first time I'd ever arranged for voices.

01:08:29

PATTERSON:

How was that different? How did that feel different to you as you challenged that?
Was it just natural?

01:08:45

FREEMAN:

No, it wasn't natural. But I have an appreciation for what the voices could do, which was -- I think what was good for me down the line is I did more arranging, and became known for my vocal arrangements.

01:08:50

PATTERSON:

Vocal arrangements. So coming in as a singer set you up for that, did it?

01:08:54

FREEMAN:

No, not really.

01:08:58

PATTERSON:

But being in that kind of an ensemble -- because you never really arranged for voices before.

01:09:01

FREEMAN:

No, I didn't.

01:09:05

PATTERSON:

So now you're in this whole vocal environment. What was the accompaniment like for the Wings Over Jordan?

01:09:05

FREEMAN:

A capella.

01:09:06

PATTERSON:

It was -- oh, wow.

01:09:08

FREEMAN:

A capella.

01:09:15

PATTERSON:

So truly, truly, purely vocal. And were you pleased with the way that it was performed?

00:00:00

FREEMAN:

Yes, I did a good job. And not only that, but I got some of the accolades from CBS and everybody else. That faction then, they started working to get me out of there.
01:09:27

01:09:29

PATTERSON:

Really?

01:09:29

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

01:09:32

PATTERSON:

They were jealous of the fact that you got attention --

01:09:34

FREEMAN:

Whatever.

01:09:37

PATTERSON:

Wow. So was it coming from everywhere? Did you get any support?

01:09:40

FREEMAN:

No, it was just one faction.

00:00:00

PATTERSON:

OK. Was it King? 01:09:44

01:09:51

FREEMAN:

He was a part of it, yeah. I guess they figured I was a bad influence.

01:09:56

PATTERSON:

But here they were looking good, right? Based on singing the pieces that you arranged.

01:10:28

FREEMAN:

Yeah. But I was a bad influence, though, because on the concerts, on the intermission,

the -- remember that the choir would have to come out and be hucksters for these pictures; you used to sell these pictures for a dollar to the audience. I thought that was terrible. You know, here they're supposed to be stars, and they're out here hawking these pictures.

01:10:30

PATTERSON:

They expected you to do that as well.

01:10:31

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

01:10:32

PATTERSON:

And you said you didn't want to do that.

00:00:00

FREEMAN:

[inaudible], I said this is ridiculous. And then the divas decided that they didn't want to do it. (Laughter) So I was a bad influence.

01:10:50

PATTERSON:

There again, you were feisty and had a leader kind of personality. So you weren't intimidated by all these people that had been doing this for a long time.

01:11:00

FREEMAN:

No, I just thought it was terrible. We were supposed to be stars, and we're hawking the pictures. (Laughter)

01:11:01

PATTERSON:

So you had your dignity intact.

01:11:10

FREEMAN:

And besides, my feet were hurting. (Laughter) I wasn't used to standing that length of time.

01:11:38

PATTERSON:

So this was a marker, then, in your run with the Wings Over Jordan, this Easter show. And the recognition that you got afterwards, it affected your relationship with the group, and it also gave you sort of an independent sort of place that you would begin to build in -- now there was an Evelyn Freeman inside of Wings Over Jordan. Now what was Tommy doing? Was he singing -- he was one of basses?

01:11:43

FREEMAN:

He was in the bass section, and also a soloist.

01:11:51

PATTERSON:

So what happened then? After the -- did it change the way you all performed? Did you continue to arrange, or --

01:12:07

FREEMAN:

No, that was it. And -- because that was just history. But I think when they figured that they'd fire me, Tommy would stay and I'd leave. And that didn't happen.

01:12:11

PATTERSON:

So you all had this relationship where you were loyal to each other by now.

01:12:12

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:12:13

PATTERSON:

Was he like your boyfriend yet?

01:12:17

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Proximity.

01:12:23

PATTERSON:

So he was tough enough to handle you as a feisty young thing.

01:12:35

FREEMAN:

Yeah, I look back and I'm like, I must have been something, in retrospect. But anyway, we left the group in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

01:12:38

PATTERSON:

My daddy was born there.

01:12:59

FREEMAN:

And what is so remarkable is that everybody came down to see is catch the train. Everybody. Even the divas, Reverend Settle and his secretary -- quote-"secretary." Anyway, I thought that was amazing. After all that trouble to get me out of there, they all came down to see us off.

01:13:02

PATTERSON:

Well, was it good-natured, somehow?

01:13:04

FREEMAN:

Yeah. I mean, to come down and see us off?

01:13:10

PATTERSON:

So it wasn't -- there wasn't malice, they just -- they were intimidated by you, or...

01:13:13

FREEMAN:

Probably.

01:13:31

PATTERSON:

I supposed you had a more -- or a different kind of background and training than most of them. You had the classical background; you knew what it was to actually read and know a repertoire, a classical repertoire, read music and arrange.

01:13:56

FREEMAN:

You know, I was privileged to not only the piano repertory, but I also knew the violin repertory, and I also knew the vocal repertory. Brahms and Hugo Wolf and all those people that I wouldn't have had access to ordinarily. But I was a fairly well-rounded musician.

00:00:00

PATTERSON:

So you kind of are culturally a little different from maybe them. But Tommy saw that you had something special. Was he writing along with the Wings of Jordan? 01:14:08

01:14:11

FREEMAN:

No. He couldn't write a note of music.

01:14:15

PATTERSON:

When I say writing, I mean composing songs, like ideas.

01:14:24

FREEMAN:

Oh, I guess he had plenty of ideas. And some of them I was able to translate.

01:14:28

PATTERSON:

So here you are, they're seeing you off, waving goodbye in Tuscaloosa.

01:14:30

FREEMAN:

And we're going to New York.

01:14:31

PATTERSON:

And you're going back to New York.

01:14:34

FREEMAN:

Not back to New York; I'd never lived in New York.

01:14:37

PATTERSON:

Well, now I thought the first place you performed was in New York with the Wings of Jordan.

01:14:40

FREEMAN:

I know, but we weren't living there; we were in the hotel.

01:14:46

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. So now you want to go to New York to actually live there. So that was a different kind of engagement with the city.

01:14:46

FREEMAN:

Yes, yes.

01:14:51

PATTERSON:

So now you're entering New York to live.

01:14:53

FREEMAN:

Yes, and work.

01:15:00

PATTERSON:

And work, and now are you and Tommy -- what was your connection there? Were you professional; did you plan to work together now?

01:15:00

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:15:02

PATTERSON:

OK. In what way? How were you going to do that?

01:15:07

FREEMAN:

Well, he was a singer and I was his accompanist and arranger and conductor.

01:15:10

PATTERSON:

Did you have a name that you worked with them?

00:00:00

FREEMAN:

No. 01:15:11

01:15:15

PATTERSON:

Just -- did he have some jobs lined up?

01:15:31

FREEMAN:

We did. The first place we went was to see Dave Fox, who was head of AGVA. We had to join, that's the American Guild of Variety Artists. We had to join as members of Wings Over Jordan.

01:15:36

PATTERSON:

Oh, so you had to use the name Wings Over Jordan to join.

01:15:35

FREEMAN:

We had to --?

01:15:39

PATTERSON:

You used the name Wings Over Jordan to join, or you had already joined while you were with them?

01:15:55

FREEMAN:

No, no. I was a union musician, but as a member of Wings Over Jordan, I had to join AGVA, because we were concert artists.

01:16:00

PATTERSON:

So when you came in, he started to get gigs, some gigs around town.

01:16:25

FREEMAN:

We met Dave Fox. That's one of the first people we met. We went to CBS, and this woman asked us, could we do German lieder. Here we are, coming from Wings Over Jordan, and she wants to know about German lieder. I thought she was ridiculous. What has that got to do with German lieder?

01:16:26

PATTERSON:

What -- was she -- did you work with her, or did you --

01:16:29

FREEMAN:

No, no, no. Immediately --

01:16:31

PATTERSON:

Well, she didn't know who you were, obviously.

01:16:34

FREEMAN:

Wings Over Jordan, she knew who that was.

01:16:35

PATTERSON:

Well, then, what was she --

01:16:42

FREEMAN:

I don't know; she got rid of us in a hurry. Tommy, at that time, he didn't know what German lieder was.

01:16:46

PATTERSON:

But you got paid.

01:17:09

FREEMAN:

Well, we met Dave Fox, and we introduced us to lots of people, agents, and we got to work with Loews Theatres and [Archio] Theatres had vaudeville shows all weekends. And this is where I learned to arrange in a hurry, because we had to have a different show every week.

01:17:12

PATTERSON:

What materials were you arranging?

01:17:16

PATTERSON:

Broadway songs.

01:17:17

PATTERSON:

And just piano arrangements, sort of --

01:17:20

FREEMAN:

No, orchestra arrangements.

01:17:21

PATTERSON:

So he had -- you were hiring a band.

01:17:27

FREEMAN:

No. The orchestras were with the theatres, because they had the vaudeville shows going.

01:17:37

PATTERSON:

Right. So you were arranging for the orchestras for them. But they were your charts, and so you'd move with your charts from job to job. How did you like that circuit?

01:17:42

FREEMAN:

Oh, it was all right. It was kind of hectic.

01:17:43

PATTERSON:

Hard work?

01:17:53

FREEMAN:

Not really. I was kind of lazy; I would write the arrangements out from my head, and wouldn't write a chart.

01:17:56

PATTERSON:

Well, how would they play it?

01:18:07

FREEMAN:

Well, I mean, I wrote the parts out from my head. But I had to stop doing that, because if I lost a part, I had to start all over again.

01:18:10

PATTERSON:

And how was it to work with these bands?

01:18:11

FREEMAN:

Some were good.

01:18:12

PATTERSON:

Were they -- what was the ethnic mix?

01:18:15

FREEMAN:

They're all white.

01:18:22

PATTERSON:

And how did they feel working with this little black girl? They didn't really care. It was all professional.

01:18:43

FREEMAN:

The only people I had problems with was the conductors. We were still on the radio,

and we did some radio shows, and I'd bring in my music, and the conductor would say, "Oh, this is all wrong." And the guy says, "Hey, looks all right to us; why don't we play it through first?"

01:18:51

PATTERSON:

Did you feel nervous about going up against these white dominant male types?

01:18:55

FREEMAN:

The only time I felt nervous was when we went to do the Ed Sullivan Show.

01:18:58

PATTERSON:

Now, when was that? Was that during that first --

01:19:00

FREEMAN:

No, that was with the Young Saints.

01:19:05

PATTERSON:

That was much later. So how long did you do this circuit? Archio, the vaudeville...

01:19:09

FREEMAN:

We did that for quite a while, and then we got into the club dates.

01:19:13

PATTERSON:

Now, just for a time frame, what year was it when you came back to actually live in New York?

01:19:15

FREEMAN:

'46.

01:19:19

PATTERSON:

OK. And so you did the vaudeville circuit for about how long, would you say?

01:19:22

FREEMAN:

Oh, I don't know. About maybe six or eight months.

01:19:24

PATTERSON:

Oh, not long. And then you started doing the clubs.

01:19:29

FREEMAN:

Doing the club digs, what you call the club digs, where you work at the big hotels, doing shows at the big hotels.

01:19:34

PATTERSON:

And did they already have their house bands as well? And you arranged -- you brought in the arrangements --

01:19:35

FREEMAN:

I brought in my charts.

01:19:42

PATTERSON:

And so now you're making more like -- you got over the lazy spell and started making real charts that you could keep --

01:19:43

FREEMAN:

Yeah, I had to do that.

01:19:47

PATTERSON:

And how was Tommy received as a soloist?

01:19:51

FREEMAN:

Very well. We were always second banana.

01:19:52

PATTERSON:

He was opening the shows?

01:20:16

FREEMAN:

No, no. Second banana is always the second -- the first banana is the guy -- is the headlining act. But we were always the second act. They usually had dancers that opened up the first act. Usually was dancers and then we were on. And we were hard to follow, because he was good.

01:20:18

PATTERSON:

Yeah. A real dynamic guy.

01:20:24

FREEMAN:

Yeah, he was very good. In his prime, I think he could out-sing anybody.

01:20:26

PATTERSON:

Were there any recordings of that?

01:20:44

FREEMAN:

You know, I have some recordings that we made ourselves, on vinyl. And I haven't touched them, because I'm waiting to have them done up professionally.

01:20:46

PATTERSON:

Oh, wow. I'd love to hear Tommy sing in the band.

01:20:49

FREEMAN:

Oh, I tell you, I'd be amazed.

01:20:55

PATTERSON:

So did you ever play any clubs like the Cotton Club, or --

01:21:07

FREEMAN:

No, but we did play Café Society. We played Club Elegante, which was in Brooklyn. And we played Town and Country, which was in Queens. Those are the big nightclubs.

01:21:12

PATTERSON:

So you were playing for white audiences and black audiences?

01:21:13

FREEMAN:

Not as a rule.

01:21:15

PATTERSON:

Just white.

01:21:18

FREEMAN:

We were a white act. We were designated as a white act.

01:21:23

PATTERSON:

Was the money good?

01:21:22

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:21:27

PATTERSON:

So you never really had to starve in New York. You always came in with something going on.

01:21:32

FREEMAN:

Well, another thing was that we bought a house in the Bronx.

01:21:38

PATTERSON:

What was the Bronx ones like that time?

01:21:45

FREEMAN:

The Puerto Ricans were just beginning to move in. It hadn't become as bad as it got.

01:21:49

PATTERSON:

So it began to be more run-down? Or more poor people came in?

01:21:53

FREEMAN:

Well, it hadn't begun to be all the gangs.

01:21:53

PATTERSON:

The gangs --

01:21:57

FREEMAN:

Yeah, the knock-down-drag-out.

01:21:58

PATTERSON:

I see. Were black people here too?

00:00:00

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. But it was mostly white. And the reason we got the house as cheap as we did, \$7,000, because it was on -- what do they call that? -- rent control. And it was three houses in a row, 163rd St., between Washington and 3rd. And rooms were like \$5 a week, and the woman who owned it was an Indian woman, a very cutting edge rogue. (Laughter) And we had gone over to her house, she had a room to rent. And she was talking to the agent who had taken us over there; she said, "I've got this house in the Bronx, and I need t get rid of it." [Inaudible] "How much you want for it?"

01:23:05

PATTERSON:

So he knew he wanted to buy a house, and he had some money in his pocket to do it.

01:23:39

FREEMAN:

No, didn't have no money in our pockets. But she wanted to get rid of the house, because it had all these poor people, poor white people living there, paying \$5 'cause

of rent control, and she wasn't making any money. So the first thing Tommy did when we got over there was, he went out in the street and found the blackest people he could find, moved them in, and all the white people moved out.

01:23:40

PATTERSON:

Moved them into the boarding house.

01:23:46

FREEMAN:

They moved out. (Laughter)

01:23:53

PATTERSON:

And he'd already bought it, and so there were all these renters, "Uh-h..." (laughter)
And what happened to her?

01:24:15

FREEMAN:

She died of cancer. Skin cancer. When I met her, she had these big splotches on her face, and I was curious, I asked her, "How did you get those?" She said they'd go to Coney Island every day, in the sun, but I don't think she knew that it was going to take her away from here.

01:24:17

PATTERSON:

West Indies, she was a black woman?

01:24:18

FREEMAN:

Uh-huh.

01:24:20

PATTERSON:

Interesting. Unusual.

01:24:32

FREEMAN:

Yeah. That's the first time I became aware that the sun could kill you. So anyway, we had it pretty good. We had a house --

01:24:34

PATTERSON:

But you had roomers in the house.

01:24:47

FREEMAN:

Well, we took up the first two floors, and the two top floors we rented out. So we always had money whether we were working or not.

01:24:49

PATTERSON:

Because you paid for the house outright.

01:24:50

FREEMAN:

No.

01:24:51

PATTERSON:

You had a mortgage.

01:24:52

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:24:54

PATTERSON:

But you had enough to cover the mortgage and whatever else.

01:24:55

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

01:24:58

PATTERSON:

Well, that was -- so you never did struggle in New York.

01:25:00

FREEMAN:

Oh, we struggled, but we weren't --

01:25:02

PATTERSON:

-- destitute.

01:25:08

FREEMAN:

We never went without a roof over our heads, let's put it that way.

01:25:10

PATTERSON:

So you're doing the clubs -- how long did you do the club circuit?

01:25:14

FREEMAN:

We did a lot of traveling on the road.

01:25:15

PATTERSON:

Did you have an agent?

01:25:15

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

01:25:22

PATTERSON:

So the agent was booking you in New York and putting you on the road. And what kind of circuit did you travel on the road?

01:25:26

FREEMAN:

Nightclub. We [inaudible].

01:25:30

PATTERSON:

Mostly in the East, or Midwest, South?

01:25:33

FREEMAN:

We worked nightclubs all the way from New York to North Dakota.

01:25:36

PATTERSON:

Did you enjoy it?

01:25:38

FREEMAN:

Yeah, most of the time.

01:25:43

PATTERSON:

What was the best thing about those years?

01:25:43

FREEMAN:

Well, we had the kids with us.

01:25:47

PATTERSON:

So you started having a family.

01:25:52

FREEMAN:

Well, by the time we got there, had Anita, Ernie, Claire, and Lisa.

01:25:58

PATTERSON:

So you had four children during those years. When did you -- let's see, Ernie was your firstborn, you named him after you brother?

01:26:00

FREEMAN:

Anita.

01:26:04

PATTERSON:

Anita was your first born.

01:26:12

FREEMAN:

And also, you've got to remember that another good place of employment was the Borscht circuit in the summer.

01:26:15

PATTERSON:

The Borscht circuit.

01:26:17

FREEMAN:

You've never heard of that. That's the Catskills.

01:26:22

PATTERSON:

The Catskills. I started to say that must be the Catskills.

01:26:34

FREEMAN:

Now, that I enjoyed, very much. We'd go up on the weekend. And so Tommy put the kids in the act, gave them a little song to do.

01:26:41

PATTERSON:

OK. So as soon as you started having children, they became acclimated to this show-biz life.

01:26:43

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

01:26:52

PATTERSON:

Anita. How old was she when she first got musically involved?

01:26:54

FREEMAN:

Well, they were all working together; Lisa was about three.

01:27:01

PATTERSON:

Lisa was three. You started having your family -- when was Anita born?

01:27:02

FREEMAN:

Well, see, I had a husband before Tommy.

01:27:06

PATTERSON:

Oh. Well, we missed a whole part of this. Was this in Cleveland?

01:27:06

FREEMAN:

In Cleveland.

01:27:15

PATTERSON:

Oh, you got married before you left town. Oh, OK. Well, who was this person? Was it a music -- somebody --

01:27:18

FREEMAN:

No.

01:27:19

PATTERSON:

So Anita -- when did Anita come?

01:27:22

FREEMAN:

'41.

01:27:27

PATTERSON:

OK. So Anita was coming along with you guys.

01:27:28

FREEMAN:

No, I left her in Cleveland.

01:27:29

PATTERSON:

Oh, she was with your family?

01:27:35

FREEMAN:

Uh-huh. And as a matter of fact, all three of them -- I tell you, I was desperate to get out of Cleveland.

01:27:44

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. So you had your family in Cleveland, actually, before you left to go to Wings Over Jordan. OK.

01:27:50

FREEMAN:

I don't know if you can understand how I needed to get out of Cleveland. (Laughter)

01:28:00

PATTERSON:

Yeah. Well, you have ambition. You have ambition to music, or -- what was the impulse?

01:28:22

FREEMAN:

Well, there wasn't too much you could do in Cleveland. But I'm glad I went to New York first, rather than Chicago. I think I would have more opportunities in New York. And besides, the union in New York was not segregated.

01:28:35

PATTERSON:

So New York was progressive, when it came to musicians and black people, with black people really beginning to make some noise, so to speak, in New York. So they were respectful.

01:28:42

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And then it wasn't any problem getting a job; I could always get a job.

01:28:45

PATTERSON:

So then you got the kids later.

01:28:46

FREEMAN:

Yeah. After we bought the house.

01:28:49

PATTERSON:

Then you brought the kids.

01:28:51

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:28:54

PATTERSON:

And how did they feel to be in New York?

01:28:55

FREEMAN:

I think they liked it.

01:29:03

PATTERSON:

Was it exciting for them? Now, did they have any musical stuff going on, before they came to join you and Tommy?

01:29:04

FREEMAN:

Oh, not really.

01:29:07

PATTERSON:

So it just started to happen when they came to join you.

00:00:00

FREEMAN:

But Lisa was a natural. Yeah, we had -- he taught them a little dance -- a little song and dance routine to "I Got Rhythm." And there's a spot, and when they did the second bridge, and they had a turn to make, and the people would always scream. But I was never sitting in a place where I could see what they were doing. I tell you, one day I had to be sitting with the orchestra in front of the stage, and when they get to that turn, Lisa made that turn, and I'm telling you, the audience just screamed.
(Laughter) 01:29:45

00:00:00

PATTERSON:

So she had that agility, that dancer's ability.

01:30:33

FREEMAN:

Oh, she had that -- whatever it was, she made that turn, and oh, I tell you -- and then on top of that, by the time she was four, and up in the [boy's] circuit, you know, they bring a lot of kids up there, and she was signing autographs, she'd write her name, L-I-S-A. And I remember -- I'll never forget this, a couple brought their little kid, they had him in their arms, I guess he must have been five or six years old. And they were so excited, Lisa had elicited a response from the kid, he must have been autistic. And the kid had never spoken before.

01:30:57

PATTERSON:

Wow. So she was really -- she had a strong charisma. She's just a little thing. And so Tommy then embraced the kids, and got involved in helping them become performers with all of you. So here again you're in a family performing ensemble, like you were when you were a little girl.

01:31:12

FREEMAN:

I hadn't thought of that, but that's true. But you know, you do what you have to do. And we had to work, and it wasn't like we were living for the kids; the kids joined us. And this was what we did.

01:31:23

PATTERSON:

So they were involved -- I imagine that it was good for them to be able to travel with their parents, to be in a family unit and all together.

01:31:40

FREEMAN:

Yeah, we traveled -- the band traveled in one limousine, and we traveled in another limousine. It was kind of nice, because we could roll up the windows, and everybody had a seat by the window. And so there wasn't any fighting over who sat by the window.

01:31:44

PATTERSON:

Did the kids go to school then in New York?

01:31:47

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And they went to school wherever we were on the road.

01:31:50

PATTERSON:

Now how did that work?

01:32:01

FREEMAN:

It worked very well. They learned one very, very valuable lesson: you didn't have time to fool around; you got in there and got your work done.

01:32:07

PATTERSON:

So they came along as truly show business kids.

01:32:14

FREEMAN:

And we were at the very beginning of television, and so they were on television a lot with us.

01:32:18

PATTERSON:

How did that start? When was your first engagement with television?

01:32:36

FREEMAN:

Our very first engagement with television was with the old DuMont station. You never heard of that. They were first, and they were making television sets, and they had a studio in the basement of Wannamakers. You heard of Wannamakers?

01:32:38

PATTERSON:

I mean, I've heard the name, I don't know.

01:32:40

FREEMAN:

Yeah, department store at 14th St.

01:32:48

PATTERSON:

Yes, yes. So the DuMont Television Broadcasting Company was in the basement of Wannamakers?

01:33:00

FREEMAN:

That's where the studio was. And it was several years before RCA and CBS got involved in television.

01:33:01

PATTERSON:

So DuMont was one of the early ones.

01:33:02

FREEMAN:

It was the early one.

01:33:08

PATTERSON:

And that was in New York. So it started in New York.

01:33:08

FREEMAN:

Well, DuMont did.

01:33:10

PATTERSON:

Was there any other --?

01:33:11

FREEMAN:

I don't know.

01:33:14

PATTERSON:

And Wannamakers, what part of town was that?

01:33:15

FREEMAN:

That was downtown, 14th St.

01:33:22

PATTERSON:

14th St. So how did you get involved in DuMont?

01:33:28

FREEMAN:

Well, we did a show there. They had a show called Stairway to the Stars.

01:33:31

PATTERSON:

They had seen you somewhere perform?

01:33:38

FREEMAN:

I don't know whether an agent -- I don't remember. I just remember there was the hottest lights I ever felt in my life. Ooh, those lights were hot.

01:33:42

PATTERSON:

And there was the kids and you and Tommy --

01:33:42

FREEMAN:

No, no, just Tommy and myself.

01:33:46

PATTERSON:

And you recorded -- now what was the show that you did?

01:33:47

FREEMAN:

Stairway to the Stars.

01:33:52

PATTERSON:

Stairway to the -- I'm sorry, Stairway to the Stars. And that was a regular like series?

01:34:29

FREEMAN:

Uh-huh. But then after the other -- the big boys got involved, that kind of wiped DuMont out. So we did a lot of television in the very early days, when they had shows like Live like a Millionaire, and different shows. But it was so biased. We had the kids on with us, but it was so biased they began to see the bias. It was just that blatant. And so we finally had to stop doing that, because it wasn't good for them to see that.

01:34:34

PATTERSON:

What would they do to you? How would they --?

01:35:09

FREEMAN:

Little things. Like for instance, some of the times it would be a competition, and I remember one time the director wanted the television, one of the prizes, for his mother. And Tommy said, "No," and do you know, they decided that thing so that the other group won. And the kids began to see that; they began to see so much bias.

01:35:11

PATTERSON:

Racism?

01:35:14

FREEMAN:

Racism, whatever you want to call it.

01:35:17

PATTERSON:

Was it upsetting to them?

01:35:20

FREEMAN:

It was, so we stopped doing those television shows.

01:35:22

PATTERSON:

Were you still doing the clubs, traveling?

01:35:25

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:35:31

PATTERSON:

When did you start doing -- now, obviously you started doing TV again later.

01:35:52

FREEMAN:

But that was much later. Much later. Oh, I've got to tell you something about the TV. When we first went on television, it was Tommy and myself, and my folks would always go to somebody's house to see the TV; my dad was too stingy to buy a television. But when the kids came on television, he went and bought a television. (Laughter)

01:35:57

PATTERSON:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, he couldn't pass that -- I know he couldn't pass that up.

01:36:00

FREEMAN:

He didn't want to go to anybody else's house to see his grandchildren on TV.

01:36:03

PATTERSON:

That's right. So they were proud of you guys.

01:36:03

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

01:36:17

PATTERSON:

Well, that's pretty special. Early television -- television had to be very exciting at this point in time, in this country, and to be seen on television.

01:36:35

FREEMAN:

Oh, I've got something here to show you, because this is one of the early things of our -- I don't know if I can find it fast enough. I'll have to forego it for later. I have a --

01:36:39

PATTERSON:

OK, well, we'll go through all this; we want to go through all of that anyway.

01:36:48

FREEMAN:

Yeah, while we were talking about that, I just wanted to show you a little thing that we had with us on TV, I don't see it right now.

01:36:51

PATTERSON:

Yeah, well, we'll have to for sure.

01:36:56

FREEMAN:

And the little kids, the kids with this -- oh, yeah, [inaudible] television shows we did.

01:36:59

PATTERSON:

Did you keep any tapes from those shows? Did you ever have access to any of that shows?

01:37:01

FREEMAN:

No.

01:37:11

PATTERSON:

I suppose not. That's interesting. And you also were traveling and doing circuits that some of the other jazz bands were doing?

01:37:11

FREEMAN:

No.

01:37:15

PATTERSON:

It was a completely different subject.

01:37:18

FREEMAN:

We were a nightclub circuit, and we were all white nightclubs.

01:37:25

PATTERSON:

And the big bands, the black bands were doing black circuits --

01:37:39

FREEMAN:

Yeah. They have a special circuit for them. When Tommy sang with Sy Oliver, our circuit was the Howard Theater in Washington, the Royal Theater in Baltimore, and then New York, the Apollo.

01:37:47

PATTERSON:

That was yours. The Apollo then, what was the Apollo like?

01:37:48

FREEMAN:

Very exciting. Hard work.

01:37:48

PATTERSON:

Yeah? Why? How so?

01:37:53

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, you'd have five shows a day, eight on Saturday.

01:38:00

PATTERSON:

Really? Eight shows? So there was shows all day, or were these all night? Oh, OK.

01:38:04

FREEMAN:

This was not the Palace two a day.

01:38:07

PATTERSON:

Wow. That's what, eight shows?

01:38:09

FREEMAN:

On Saturday.

01:38:16

PATTERSON:

So what were they -- how were they organized? Was it like revues with lots of different acts?

01:38:48

FREEMAN:

Yeah, but not that many. When we were on there, I think at one time we were there with -- oh, what's his name? Canadian Sunset, I think, was the hit he had at the time. And they also had a big record of [inaudible]. Almost had his name. Piano player. And then different -- we always shared the bill with different acts.

01:39:14

PATTERSON:

Did you feel like you were treated differently from some of the acts that worked in the black circuit? Did you have any -- well, I know you were subject to some racism and bias like with the television, but you were working in white environments. And some acts didn't work; some black acts didn't work in white environments, they worked in the black environments. How did that happen? Why is that you were working the white environments?

01:39:17

FREEMAN:

Because we could.

01:39:20

PATTERSON:

Because they wanted you, they asked for you.

01:39:26

FREEMAN:

We were a dynamite act.

01:39:30

PATTERSON:

Any film or anything of you from then?

01:39:31

FREEMAN:

No.

01:39:41

PATTERSON:

Oh, Evelyn, I would love to see. Speaking of film, was there any film industry things going on in New York?

01:39:44

FREEMAN:

There probably were, but not for us.

01:39:54

PATTERSON:

This was all live. Now, during that time, you were doing arrangements for Tommy's pop songs. Did you do any composing in that period?

01:39:59

FREEMAN:

No, not really. Not really.

01:40:04

PATTERSON:

Were you happy doing this? Was there something you wanted to do that you weren't able to do during that time?

01:40:25

FREEMAN:

Well, I didn't get a chance as a musician. For instance, when Tommy recorded with Sy, or he recorded with MGM Records, nobody invited me to be a part.

01:40:34

PATTERSON:

Now, so these are recording projects and contracts that Tommy signed, initiated, and somebody else accompanied him?

01:40:38

FREEMAN:

We had somebody else who was the band leader and did arrangements and stuff.

01:40:43

PATTERSON:

And that had to be hard, because you worked so hard with him --

01:40:45

FREEMAN:

Well, hey, that's the way it was.

01:40:46

PATTERSON:

Yeah, but you weren't happy about it.

01:40:49

FREEMAN:

Well, what could I do?

01:41:01

PATTERSON:

I know, but it was still a legitimate feeling. So how did the -- did you manage it in the relationship OK? Or did Tommy feel like he would like for you to have been more involved, or --

01:41:13

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, my feeling was this. If he made it, I'd be there, so I didn't worry about it.

01:41:19

PATTERSON:

And there was a period, I'm sure, you began to think about maybe branching out or doing something else, after you'd done circuits?

01:41:20

FREEMAN:

No, not while we were in New York.

01:41:40

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. So you were happy doing that. Well, I'm sure it had its ups and downs, but that was your life, and you figured you would just do that throughout it, that would be your career. What changed? Did something happen to change that, when you moved away, or -- because I know obviously you're here now.

01:42:41

FREEMAN:

Oh, one thing I've got to tell you, because like I said, we went -- we weren't destitute, and we always had -- because really, good money during the club days; we worked places like Hotel Astor and Hotel -- the Pierre Hotel, and the Waldorf Astoria -- all those big hotels, the club dates. But there was a place on 49th St. and Broadway called the Turf Club, and on the corner of the 49th St. side they had a take-out, a little take-out window, and you could get a bowl of beef broth for \$.15, and they had [Oysteritz] on the side; you could get a handful of Oysteritz and put it in that bowl, you had a meal. And we fed many a musician. Were you with us when we did that show at the Forum for Billy Mills when he was running, and Harry Belafonte was the headliner?

01:42:42

PATTERSON:

I don't think so.

01:43:03

FREEMAN:

We did -- Inez remembers it. We did Theatre in the Round, because the -- anyway, we were there rehearsing, and Belafonte was sitting over in the corner, so Tommy went over to Belafonte and said, "Hey, man, it's been a long time." And Belafonte said, "Yeah, you used to buy me soup."

01:43:04

PATTERSON:

Oh, wow.

01:43:09

FREEMAN:

He's the only one who ever owned up to it.

01:43:12

PATTERSON:

At that place, it was near the Waldorf?

01:43:13

FREEMAN:

No, that was at the Turf Club.

01:43:14

PATTERSON:

Near the Turf Club.

01:43:20

FREEMAN:

At the take-out window. We fed many a musician. Because you know, it gets cold standing there on the corner of --

01:43:22

PATTERSON:

Mm-hmm, in New York, huh.

01:43:28

FREEMAN:

Yeah. We used to get dressed and just go down to hang out.

01:43:43

PATTERSON:

Yeah. Now here you are, the wife of a handsome, dynamic singer that has -- I'm sure there were a lot of ladies in the audience that were always very impressed by Tommy. Did that make it hard for you?

01:43:44

FREEMAN:

Nah.

01:43:50

PATTERSON:

Not at all? You were queen; you were the queen. (Laughter)

01:43:55

FREEMAN:

Yeah, I had too many other things to worry about.

01:43:56

PATTERSON:

Yeah, yeah. So then --

01:43:59

FREEMAN:

You want to know how I wound up in Los Angeles?

01:44:02

PATTERSON:

Yean, so here you are in New York, and everything's going along. Something happened, right?

01:45:47

FREEMAN:

Yeah, we were a success in New York. We were well-known, and worked on whatever it is, big clubs in New York. But my brother was out here in Los Angeles, and he was just on the verge of making it as an arranger. When he first came out here, he couldn't get a job as a violinist, couldn't get a job as a saxophone player. He finally wound up getting a job as a pianist accompanying some singers. I think first one was Lita Grey Chaplin, then Dinah Washington, and Dorothy Dandridge. And the funny thing is that he had never really played the piano. When we were at the Institute, I

used to run, because he never went to his piano lessons, and if I saw his teacher, I'd run the other way, because she'd just -- "Where's your brother? He didn't show up for his lesson." And he wound up playing the piano, which he had never really spent any time on. Anyway, he kept calling me, calling me, "You got to come to Los Angeles." And I didn't have any reason to come to Los Angeles. And so finally, to get him off my case, I said, "Well, you know, it would cost money for us to close up the house and get packed and everything to come." He said, "Well, what would it cost you?" And I threw out -- I said, "Well, maybe about \$1,000," figured that would slow him down. The next day, here comes Western Union. He had sent the money. So I said to Tommy, "What are we going to do?" Tommy says, "We're going to pack up and go to Los Angeles."

01:45:51

PATTERSON:

He didn't have mind, it was just -- even though he had never thought about it.

01:45:51

FREEMAN:

No. (Laughter) And that's what happened.

01:45:58

PATTERSON:

Just like that. Wow. And did you sell the house then? Or you just closed it?

01:46:13

FREEMAN:

We just closed it up because, you know, it was in the air, but we lost the house

because somebody had slipped on ice when we were gone. He left it in care of a cousin, and the cousin never did or didn't take care of business.

01:46:16

PATTERSON:

Well, what year was that, that you came out -

01:46:17

FREEMAN:

'56.

01:46:32

PATTERSON:

'56. Here you come, Los Angeles, with the kids. And Ernie all this time had been moving through his musical life, and his musical career. And so what was the first thing that you all did when you got here?

01:46:54

FREEMAN:

Well, I had to help him with his arrangement, and he had a big blue station wagon; I will never forget that time we were driving, Ernie and I sitting in the back and trying to finish up the music for the session. And sometimes we would get there, and the music still wasn't finished, and I'd sit in the back where nobody could see me and try to finish it up.

01:46:55

PATTERSON:

So he was scrambling, huh?

01:47:03

FREEMAN:

Oh, it was nerve-wracking. It was nerve-wracking, because he hadn't learned how to pace himself.

01:47:15

PATTERSON:

And you had that discipline because you'd been working in New York, in the clubs, and doing that vaudeville circuit, having to be tight with all that. So he needed you and that time.

01:47:21

FREEMAN:

And a lot of the albums that he did, I'm on the album; I never got any credit, but I'm there.

01:47:25

PATTERSON:

And how did Tommy find LA? Did he --?

01:47:52

FREEMAN:

He fell in love with LA; he fell in love with the whole cowboy thing, because in New York, he had to wear his expensive suits and everything. I'm making my own evening clothes, and he's wearing Brooks Brothers, but he came out here, he got the tall cowboy hat, and walking to the Brown Derby with his jeans outfit.

01:47:55

PATTERSON:

So he just took on the persona of a Western man.

01:48:01

FREEMAN:

Yes, he did. He loved it, and never went back.

01:48:07

PATTERSON:

Yeah. Spontaneous kind of person. And he was always buoyant.

01:48:16

FREEMAN:

I mean, he could walk into the Brown Derby and just disrupt the whole place.

01:48:19

PATTERSON:

Did he start singing around town?

01:48:31

FREEMAN:

We did some. Not too much, because there wasn't too much to do. After you did Crescendo and a couple of other places --

01:48:31

PATTERSON:

Here in town? Crescendo?

01:48:34

FREEMAN:

Yeah, that was it.

01:48:41

PATTERSON:

I never heard of that one. Oh, that used to be right across from [Cirro's].

01:48:42

FREEMAN:

Yeah, right across the street.

01:48:49

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. Crescendo. So you did do that, and then it's sort of the same kind of format that you worked in New York.

01:48:49

FREEMAN:

Mm-hmm, the two of us.

01:48:54

PATTERSON:

Did you get an agent here, or did he get an agent?

01:49:17

FREEMAN:

This whole place was a whole lot different. They weren't as open; nobody was. I remember going to the union and they practically laughed in my face, asked me if I wanted to get a job in one of the strip clubs, practically laughed in my face. But it wasn't like that in New York.

01:49:21

PATTERSON:

Why? Why would they -- the fact that they were a woman musician, a black --

01:49:42

FREEMAN:

No, I was black. I had a -- I used to do a lot of teaching, harmony and theory and stuff, taught a lot of musicians. And one of the musicians asked me, said, "You're so smart: how come you're not rich and famous?" I said, "Because I'm black and I'm a woman, in that order." (Laughter)

01:50:02

PATTERSON:

So it's -- you know, it's interesting that you came here as professionals, experienced professionals, seasoned professionals, capable professionals, and the whole landscape was completely different, but Tommy was OK; he just sort of adapted. You were helping your brother, so that engaged your time --

01:50:09

FREEMAN:

And he opened the door for me so that all the musicians knew me.

01:50:21

PATTERSON:

So that was really the way that you began to engaged LA, then, through working with your brother, meeting musicians. Who were some of the first musicians that you worked with then in your own right?

01:51:02

FREEMAN:

Well, my brother was working as an organist through the Backstage Club; that was right there on Adams and -- it was Victoria and Somerset, the first block from Crenshaw, going west. It was like a hole in the wall, but I tell you who was working there: Plas Johnson and Irving Ashby, and I think Jimmy Miller on drums. You might not know the name Plas.

01:51:03

PATTERSON:

P-L-A-S?

01:52:03

FREEMAN:

Mm-hmm. You've heard the Pink Panther? That's Plas. They had a tight little group, but he had to go into the hospital; he had to have an operation. It was a serious operation. And he blackmailed me; he said, "I am not going into the hospital unless you take over my gig." And I had never played the organ. I had to literally learn from scratch how to play the organ. So I was there practicing every day, and the fact was this guy who owned the bar gave me a key. (Laughter) So I was there every day trying to learn to play that organ. And -- but I had excellent musicians working for me. And then one day, Wild Bill Davis came in. Now he was quite famous -- you've never heard of Wild Bill Davis either?

01:52:05

PATTERSON:

Wild Bill Davis? I don't think so.

01:52:09

FREEMAN:

OK. He was a famous organist. Had lots of hits.

01:52:11

PATTERSON:

Why'd they call him Wild Bill?

01:52:47

FREEMAN:

Well, hey, might have called anybody wild. But anyway, he had a name; he had a name being a jazz organist. And one day -- and it was a Sunday evening, I will never forget that. And what happened that evening, we were in the zone, you know what I mean? You couldn't do no wrong. Everything was going right. And then somebody said, "Wild Bill Davis is in the house!" And my heart just -- zook. (Laughter) But you know, he never would go up and play. He never did.

01:52:50

PATTERSON:

He sat and watched you?

01:53:00

FREEMAN:

He never came up to play. They asked him, but didn't come to play. So I said, "Well, I must not be doing too bad."

01:53:05

PATTERSON:

So that was your first like memorable gig in LA was playing that club. And how did you like playing the organ?

01:53:10

FREEMAN:

I liked it fine; I was pretty good.

01:53:18

PATTERSON:

Now, were you starting to think about doing any recording on your own, or -- was that ever in your mind, to --

01:53:38

FREEMAN:

Well, things just kind of happened. Every time we made recordings, it was recorded for a company, it was because somebody needed something special, and you know, if they could get somebody else, they got them. But if they wanted something special that they couldn't find anyplace else --

01:53:51

PATTERSON:

Then they'd come to you. And they couldn't -- and so that started to build up, because you worked with person after person after person, eventually, they came to you.

01:54:00

FREEMAN:

But the only thing that bothered me was that they only came one time. And they got what they needed, then they didn't need to come back.

01:54:05

PATTERSON:

So was it all in all kind of frustrating to move here?

01:54:11

FREEMAN:

It wasn't frustrating, no, not exactly, because I got more opportunities here for myself than I would have gotten in New York.

01:54:15

PATTERSON:

Oh, I thought it was the other way around.

01:54:19

FREEMAN:

Tommy and I, but me personally.

01:54:45

PATTERSON:

So in New York, you and Tommy had plenty of opportunities, but here, you were going to get your opportunity, build a name for yourself among musicians. What was your -- so that first job was one of your -- it sounds like it was fun. And when did you really develop a relationship -- did you ever have a relationship with an artist and really work with them and develop something that was ongoing here?

FREEMAN:

I worked with a lot of artists. At one time, I was coaching singers. That's the front door. I worked with a lot of artists; at one time, I used to coach singers. And none of them really got to be famous, but there was one, Pat Stiles, I remember her because she was a dancer, and she had even done a movie with -- oh, what's his name? -- that did Singin' in the Rain, you remember that movie, Singin' in the Rain? What was his name? 01:55:28

01:55:34

PATTERSON:

Dancer -- um -- oh, it's on the tip of my tongue.

01:56:03

FREEMAN:

It's OK. I know, me too. That's all right. But she had even done a movie with him, but she was dancing in the clubs, and she wanted to add a song to her act. So I worked with her, and her song she was doing was, "I Could Have Danced All Night." She had to call me and said -- she was working at some club and a man came up and said, "You know, I don't know about that dancing, but you sure can sing."

01:56:06

PATTERSON:

And you did the music for her?

01:56:10

FREEMAN:

No, I just worked with her as a vocal coach. I did a lot of vocal coaching.

01:56:12

PATTERSON:

Did you?

01:56:15

FREEMAN:

Yes, I did.

01:56:26

PATTERSON:

I didn't realize that. So you were doing arranging and vocal coaching here. What took up most of your time? Was this a kind of a switch for you now that you were doing mostly vocal coaching?

01:56:43

FREEMAN:

Yeah, it was during the day. I had people coming in all day long. As a matter of fact, I was so busy, I didn't eat; one day I went to get up and couldn't move. I had to kind of reconstruct myself to make sure I ate.

01:56:53

PATTERSON:

So this became like a professional engagement for you. Well, it must have been good, because you had a family, too, so you were able to stay home?

01:56:54

FREEMAN:

I wasn't really staying at home.

01:56:56

PATTERSON:

When you were coaching, you were -- you had a place in your house?

01:57:00

FREEMAN:

No, that was just during the day. Remember I'm working clubs at night.

01:57:06

PATTERSON:

Oh, so you were working the clubs -- so this club over here on Adams, did that gig last for awhile?

01:57:12

FREEMAN:

Well, that finished up, I worked several other clubs playing the organ.

01:57:24

PATTERSON:

What was -- now, was Central Avenue still happening, or -- it had already passed by? Did you get involved with some television now that you were here?

01:57:41

FREEMAN:

Yeah, when we worked with -- let's see, we worked with Frankie Lane; we did the Steve Allen show. That's the time -- he was doing a thing called Rocks and Gravel, remember that?

01:57:43

PATTERSON:

I do.

01:58:11

FREEMAN:

OK, and I had to conduct the group, and we were sitting on steps, and I was at the bottom of the steps, and I had the back to the camera, because I was trying to do this surreptitiously, so they wouldn't see me, and everybody wanted to know, "Who is that kid in the ponytail?" (Laughter) I haven't had long hair since.

01:58:13

PATTERSON:

Oh, it made you want to cut your hair?

01:58:19

FREEMAN:

(Laughter) I didn't want to be the kid in the ponytail.

01:58:20

PATTERSON:

The kid in the ponytail. (Laughter) What year was the Steve Allan Show?

01:58:30

FREEMAN:

This would have to be '59 and '60, '61.

01:58:46

PATTERSON:

So a few years after you arrived. So Tommy must have had -- what was the connection with TV, how did that get started? Was it in agent that hooked you up, or just being social in town and meeting people?

01:59:01

FREEMAN:

I'm trying to remember, did we do anything before that? I think that's the biggest TV show we did; we did a lot of local stuff, we were over at Channel 11 and Channel 7 quite a bit. But that was all local stuff.

01:59:15

PATTERSON:

Now this is really beginning to put down professional roots in Los Angeles. So you were beginning to know people and make liaisons, but you didn't have a manager or an agent.

01:59:44

FREEMAN:

No. As a matter of fact, we were interactive with different agencies, some of the biggest agencies, like GAC and William Morris, and those big agencies. As a matter of fact, William Morris' agency put us together with Peggy Lee.

01:59:47

PATTERSON:

In what way? How did you work with her?

01:59:58

FREEMAN:

Well, we recorded with her, and also we did shows at the Moulin Rouge and at the Desert Inn.

02:00:02

PATTERSON:

So now you're working Vegas. Is Tommy like opening the act? Was he singing?

02:00:08

FREEMAN:

No. It was the Exciting Voices. We had a big hit record called In the Drain.

02:00:12

PATTERSON:

Now how did the Exciting Voices come to be?

02:00:58

FREEMAN:

Well, when we came out here, we were in the recording studios quite a bit. And we're going to be friends with Bob York, who was the head of RCA Victor out here. And he offered to give us \$4,000 to write something for Kay Star. So we went over to where she was recording to see how -- her manager was so obnoxious. Oh, he was terrible. And the [inaudible] conductor was one of the top conductors of Capital; he had a bottle of booze under the podium (laughter) so he could get through the session. Well, that was a lot of money, but we had to turn down the gig.

02:01:00

PATTERSON:

Oh, really?

02:01:27

FREEMAN:

Yeah. But while we were there, sitting there watching, she kept saying, "Where's the

bulls? Where's the bulls?" I knew what she was talking about. And she had a group of white singers, and so finally they turned to me, and I think it must have been the -- what do you call it, the -- not the leader, but the one who booked the white singers.

02:01:30

PATTERSON:

The contractor?

02:01:42

FREEMAN:

The contractor. She said, "Well, you're so smart, why don't you do it yourself?" And it was like a lightbulb went on. I said, "Oh?"

02:01:45

MONTENEGRO:

One minute of the tape left.

02:01:45

PATTERSON:

OK. All right.

02:02:37

FREEMAN:

So what happened was they had all these people from Wings Over Jordan out here, they weren't doing no singing. Got them all together and rehearsed them, taught them how to read music, you know, just like with the sofeggio and the whole bit, and before we knew it, we were in the studios recording with everybody. I mean, did this record, "Didn't It Rain?", the guys who -- Little Rick and company, right on La Cinema and Washington, called Bel Canto; they wanted to take something to do the stereo convention. And we did; we gave them "Didn't It Rain?", and it blew out the whole stereo convention. And then we came back and did the album. So we had a big hit record, and that's what we did on Peggy Lee's show.

02:02:49

PATTERSON:

OK. We're out of tape. That's a good place to stop; I hear about that some more -- the Wings Over Jordan, it's like they were very -- they're like -- the association with them --

FREEMAN:

It was the first -- END OF Freeman.

Session 2 (April 20, 2007)

00:00:09

PATTERSON:

I don't know if this is -- the sound sounds OK?

00:00:11

MONTENEGRO:

Good. Uh-huh.

00:00:13

PATTERSON:

OK. Shall I slate it? Is it ready?

00:00:14

MONTENEGRO:

Yeah.

00:00:38

PATTERSON:

OK. We're at April 20th, 2007, with Evelyn Freeman Roberts, our second interview. Hi. When we left off, we were talking about -- you had just recently relocated, you

and your family, to Los Angeles, and you were getting acclimated to the LA scene. It has your first gig over on -- was it Adams?

00:00:42

FREEMAN:

Adams and Crenshaw, yeah.

00:00:50

PATTERSON:

And you were working with your brother, who needed you to help sort through some of his arranging tasks and recording tasks?

00:01:00

FREEMAN:

Yeah, I had to kind of -- what was it called? -- The clean-up. (Laughter) Pick up the slack, whatever was left undone.

00:01:09

PATTERSON:

And meanwhile, Tommy found his Western look, with his cowboy hat. (Laughter)

00:01:12

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Oh, I'm telling you, that was something.

00:01:20

PATTERSON:

And he started working around town, right? Was he singing --?

00:01:34

FREEMAN:

That took a little longer. We just about exhausted all the little places around Los Angeles.

00:01:36

PATTERSON:

Were you living here on Wellington Road, in the beginning?

00:01:36

FREEMAN:

No, that came later.

00:01:39

PATTERSON:

Where did you settle first?

00:01:43

FREEMAN:

Well, the first place we settled was with my brother and his wife.

00:01:46

PATTERSON:

Was that on the West Side, or --?

00:01:50

FREEMAN:

No, that was at Jefferson and Wellington.

00:01:51

PATTERSON:

Oh, then not far from here.

00:01:59

FREEMAN:

No, they had an apartment. Not only was it crowded, but it became untenable.

00:02:00

PATTERSON:

Did they have children too?

00:02:03

FREEMAN:

One daughter.

00:02:05

PATTERSON:

One daughter. So it was a family affair, huh.

00:02:33

FREEMAN:

Yeah. So -- but he was just on the verge of really becoming -- not just famous, but in demand. He was just beginning to get people to write for -- who had some kind of leverage in the record business.

00:02:43

PATTERSON:

Ernie Freeman. And he was doing mostly live conducting or recording work, or both?

00:02:44

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:02:44

PATTERSON:

Recording industry --?

00:02:57

FREEMAN:

Well, yeah, at that time, recordings were live. You did some tracking, but tracking didn't become like universal until you got all these groups that couldn't record.

00:03:01

PATTERSON:

Couldn't play it through, had to stop [inaudible].

00:03:03

FREEMAN:

Yeah, they had to track, put everything on track.

00:03:04

PATTERSON:

Now what year was this about?

00:03:13

FREEMAN:

This was right after I came out here, '56, which is the reason we came out here, because he needed help.

00:03:23

PATTERSON:

So he's doing these in-studio conducting sessions with orchestras. Was it usually full orchestra, or was it a string session and horn --?

00:03:30

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, it started out with combinations, and as the artist got bigger, you know, the orchestras got bigger.

00:03:43

PATTERSON:

Got bigger. Who were some of the people that you all were working with at that time? '56.

00:03:52

FREEMAN:

Oh, boy. You know, right off the top of my head, I can't remember. I sure can't; I would have to stop and think about this.

00:03:55

PATTERSON:

Yeah, we'll come back to --

00:04:00

MONTENEGRO:

I'm going to stop you for a second, just because I'm fighting the reflecting of the windows on Evelyn's glasses.

00:04:05

FREEMAN:

Oh. Don't ask me to take them off. (Laughter)

00:04:10

MONTENEGRO:

No, we're just going to move over here so we're not facing the window. Karen, if you could move this way --

00:04:11

PATTERSON:

Sure.

00:04:18

FREEMAN:

You want me to move more this way? OK.

00:04:21

MONTENEGRO:

[Inaudible] light on her face, and we can see her eyes.

00:04:26

FREEMAN:

OK. How's this?

00:04:33

MONTENEGRO:

Yeah, that's a lot better. So Karen, if you could move even closer to the camera. I promise you won't be in the shot.

00:04:38

PATTERSON:

Now you know how I hate that.

00:04:38

MONTENEGRO:

Yeah, that's a lot better.

00:04:53

PATTERSON:

OK. All right. So we're like mid-50s. What was the entertainment scene like, your first impression? You're coming out of New York, which --

00:05:27

FREEMAN:

It was culture shock. I mean, just absolutely culture shock. Everybody was so laid-back. And it wasn't a hustle and bustle like it was in New York; everybody on a bicycle going like that. And we weren't used to that. It wasn't until three years later, we went back to New York and said, "Oh, my goodness. Did we used to do that? Yeah, I guess we did.

00:05:30

PATTERSON:

So you got used to it. Did you like it after that first three-year period?

00:05:33

FREEMAN:

Yeah, because I had more opportunities than I would have had in New York.

00:05:37

PATTERSON:

Oh, so there were more opportunities for a woman professional here in LA?

00:05:51

FREEMAN:

Only because my brother opened the door, and I did a lot of arranging for him. Of course, I didn't get any credit for it, but the musicians knew.

00:05:55

PATTERSON:

Why didn't you get credit?

00:05:58

FREEMAN:

You couldn't.

00:05:58

PATTERSON:

Couldn't your brother say, you know --

00:06:01

FREEMAN:

Aw, shoot. (Laughter)

00:06:03

PATTERSON:

He wouldn't.

00:06:03

FREEMAN:

Well, he didn't.

00:06:07

PATTERSON:

How did you feel about that at the time?

00:06:13

FREEMAN:

Well, it was -- I was just glad to have the opportunity to do that.

00:06:16

PATTERSON:

Was he able to compensate you financially, even though not with credit?

00:06:18

FREEMAN:

Oh, I got paid for my arrangements.

00:06:24

PATTERSON:

And he put his name on them, but you had done them?

00:06:28

FREEMAN:

I was -- well, you know, this whole album was his album.

00:06:31

PATTERSON:

It was his -- he was contracted for, but you were doing the arrangements.

00:06:32

FREEMAN:

Some.

00:06:35

PATTERSON:

He's doing the conducting and -- I see.

00:06:49

FREEMAN:

Like I said, I was the clean-up person; whatever was leftover, and he didn't want to do, or didn't have time to do. And like I said, I had a lot of respect from the musicians, because they knew what was going on.

00:06:50

PATTERSON:

So you went into the studio when the recording was going on.

00:08:35

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. And a lot of times, I was also playing the piano on these -- oh, I got to tell you this story. We did an album called 25 Pianos on Broadway. It wasn't actually 25 pianos, but it was about 15, 14, 15 pianos, which made for quite a scene for the piano players; I think every piano player in Los Angeles was at this session. Like Russ Freeman, who was Frank Sinatra's pianist, and different people like that. And Eddie Beal, who had a little name, Gerald Wiggins, and myself; we were the only black

people on the session. So I had come there ready to go to work, and I had my cocoa in my thermos, because I couldn't drink that coffee, because coffee made me sick like -- (laughter). So when they all came -- and everybody was all like -- they had never done anything like this before, and everybody was all up in the air. So they started assigning people to the pianos, different pianos. They had uprights; they had a couple of baby grands; they had what they call tack pianos; electric pianos -- just about all kinds of pianos. So they started assigning people to the pianos, and they had one grand, one grand piano.

00:08:37

PATTERSON:

Everybody rushed --?

00:08:56

FREEMAN:

No, everybody'd come in and rippled on the piano. But when they started assigning the pianos, I looked up there and there was only one seat left; that was at the grand piano. I didn't ask any questions; I went and took a seat. (Laughter)

00:09:05

PATTERSON:

Yay, Evelyn. (Laughter) Did they expect that you would do that? Did they actually -- you were the only woman.

00:09:06

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:09:13

PATTERSON:

And that was sort of the thrown, really, the queen -- that was the queen's seat.

00:09:17

FREEMAN:

Nobody questioned it.

00:09:22

PATTERSON:

Now how did it sound? Everyone was playing -- how did they work that, all those pianos. What was the --

00:09:31

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, I have the album here, and we'll play it sometime for you. It's a very beautiful album. And I did a couple of tracks on that too.

00:09:33

PATTERSON:

How was it arranged? Was it --?

00:09:45

FREEMAN:

It was orchestral background; we made the tracks first with the orchestra, and then recorded the pianos on top of that.

00:09:49

PATTERSON:

And so there were two blacks and one woman.

00:09:51

FREEMAN:

Three blacks and one woman.

00:09:56

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. And when was that -- how long had you been in town when you did it?

00:10:03

FREEMAN:

This is probably about the latter part of the '50s.

00:10:12

PATTERSON:

So you'd kind of gotten your bearings in the city by then pretty much. Were you working a lot by then? Just sessions as a musician?

00:10:22

FREEMAN:

I had learned to play the organ, and I did a lot of jobs, both recording and playing in clubs.

00:10:27

PATTERSON:

Who were recording albums like that? Were they religious albums, or --?

00:10:38

FREEMAN:

No. Jazz had become very popular. You had Wild Bill Davis, and a couple of other fellows who were very good.

00:10:46

PATTERSON:

So you were playing jazz. What was your favorite genre of music to play, as far as being an instrumentalist?

00:10:50

FREEMAN:

Jazz and classical.

00:10:57

PATTERSON:

Jazz and classical. OK. Did you ever do your own album?

00:11:11

FREEMAN:

I did a couple of albums. Of course you know "Didn't It Rain?", and I also did one called "Sky High." And the problem is that nobody called us unless they were desperate.

00:11:12

PATTERSON:

You mean called you as a pianist?

00:11:20

FREEMAN:

Called us, asked us to do it, any albums. That's why we only did two.

00:11:24

PATTERSON:

So how did you get a chance to do that? What record company did you do them with?

00:11:52

FREEMAN:

Well, the first one, "Didn't It Rain?", there was a small record company called Bel Canto. As a matter of fact, they had offices right on [La Sienega] and Washington. And they were going to Chicago for a big stereo convention. Now, you have to remember, at that time, stereo was just in its infancy, just coming in.

00:11:54

PATTERSON:

What year was this?

00:12:56

FREEMAN:

This has to be about '57, '58. And they wanted something to take to the stereo convention that would blow everybody out of the water. So we went in the studio with three musicians, and the Exciting Voices, and "Didn't It Rain?", and a couple of other things. And they took "Didn't It Rain?" -- this is before we even do the album -- they took "Didn't It Rain?" to the stereo convention, and of course they blew everybody out of the water, because it was so infectious. So then they decided to -- after they put it out as a 45", then they decided to do the album. But it got a lot of notoriety, because they banned it in Boston. Kids were dancing to it.

00:13:00

PATTERSON:

They banned it? Why did they ban it?

00:13:01

FREEMAN:

Because the kids were dancing to it.

00:13:06

PATTERSON:

And they weren't supposed to dance to it, because it was sacred?

00:13:09

FREEMAN:

Well, it was a spiritual; I didn't look at it as a religious song.

00:13:14

PATTERSON:

Isn't that funny how dancing -- how did dancing get to be bad>

00:13:21

FREEMAN:

I don't know. (Laughter) It depends on the time and the place.

00:13:27

PATTERSON:

So you were working with Bel Canto. Did they do also the second album?

00:13:40

FREEMAN:

No. The second album was a war buddy of our lawyer in New York. He's the one that set up our Morrisania music publishing company.

00:13:40

PATTERSON:

Morrisania.

00:14:00

FREEMAN:

Yeah. M-O-R-R-I-S-A-N-I-A. And he wanted to do a recording, so he recommended us. That's why I say we only did recordings on our own for people who were desperate.

00:14:05

PATTERSON:

And you did that here. Was that much later?

00:14:24

FREEMAN:

Yeah, that was quite a bit later. That was for -- oh, I almost had it. The same recording company that my brother had recorded his hits on. He had hits playing the piano.

00:14:29

PATTERSON:

Ernie did. So he was lead pianist, and then he's have the band behind him?

00:14:55

FREEMAN:

He had instruments behind him, yeah. Not that many. And it's so funny, because he never did really study the piano. I used to -- when he was at the Institute with me, the Cleveland Institute of Music, I used to run when I saw his piano teacher, run the other direction. "Where's your brother? He didn't come for his lesson today!"

00:14:57

PATTERSON:

But he liked the piano then, he got comfortable with it.

00:15:49

FREEMAN:

Not really. It was the only thing that he could get a job playing. Excellent violinist, and excellent saxophonist. Couldn't get a job at either venue. So he finally ended up with piano, and he got jobs playing for different people. Dinah Washington was one, Lita Grey Chaplin was another. Anyway, it was so funny, because when he started doing these big recordings for Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin and those kinds of people, sometimes he would write stuff in the violin section -- "We can't play this!" -- And he could take the violin and say, "You do it like this."

00:15:54

PATTERSON:

And he'd show them up. (Laughter) Did he continue with the violin as well?

00:16:00

FREEMAN:

No. He couldn't get a job playing the violin.

00:16:03

PATTERSON:

Did he miss it? I mean, did he play for his own pleasure?

00:16:06

FREEMAN:

I don't know. I doubt it, because he was so bus --

00:16:07

PATTERSON:

-- trying to work.

00:16:08

FREEMAN:

Yeah, I doubt it.

00:16:15

PATTERSON:

Did he start doing these solo albums like around the time that you were working with him as an arranger?

00:16:15

FREEMAN:

Which solo albums?

00:16:17

PATTERSON:

Well, you said he did some solo albums as a pianist?

00:16:27

FREEMAN:

Oh, no. This is before I can out here. That's the reason why he's in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

00:16:29

PATTERSON:

Oh, he was playing rock and roll?

00:16:30

FREEMAN:

Yes.

00:16:40

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. And that was sort of before he became the arranger that he became. So this was the progression for him. I see.

00:16:47

FREEMAN:

But you know how he got his start originally? Evelyn Freeman Swing Band.

00:16:50

PATTERSON:

Right, right, right. And then he came out here and took it away.

00:17:02

FREEMAN:

Well, he came out here and he got his foot in the door. And the next thing you know -- in the '60s, he was called "Little Old Hit-Maker." Everything he did for Sinatra was a hit.

00:17:12

PATTERSON:

So he worked with Sinatra then, arranged some things with Sinatra. So did he also travel to Vegas at that time? Now, was Vegas happening at the time?

00:17:13

FREEMAN:

No, NO.

00:17:16

PATTERSON:

It wasn't happening then.

00:17:32

FREEMAN:

We went to Vegas about '59, I guess. But we played in the lounge for -- that was the brochure, the little flyer I showed you. And we were at the Dunes Hotel.

00:17:37

PATTERSON:

So that was you and Tommy, and it was pretty much the same format that you had been working in New York, that format?

00:18:07

FREEMAN:

Yeah. It was very much the same format. Major Riddle, who was I think a major owner of the Dunes Hotel, he had made a bet with the pit bosses that he could come to Los Angeles and find a group that would blow everything away. And I don't know how he found us, so we put a band together and went to Vegas.

00:18:09

PATTERSON:

Did you take singers with you?

00:18:13

FREEMAN:

Found a singer in Las Vegas.

00:18:13

PATTERSON:

One singer.

00:18:15

FREEMAN:

One singer.

00:18:18

PATTERSON:

So Tommy was lead singer --

00:18:18

FREEMAN:

He was the singer.

00:18:23

PATTERSON:

The singer, and then there was this second support singer?

00:18:48

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Now that's a funny story. Now, we had some good musicians. And of course, the best of the musicians was Clifford Solomon. He just died this past year, but that was one grueling job. I tell you, I didn't know whether I was going to make it or not. 12:00 to 6:00.

00:18:51

PATTERSON:

In the afternoon?

00:18:55

FREEMAN:

In the PM to the AM.

00:18:58

PATTERSON:

What? Wait, wait, wait.

00:19:00

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:19:01

PATTERSON:

That's 18 hours?

00:19:01

FREEMAN:

Six hours.

00:19:07

PATTERSON:

Oh, I was going to say, you had to play all night? OK, so you were playing all afternoon.

00:19:11

FREEMAN:

No, we started 12:00 midnight.

00:19:16

PATTERSON:

Midnight, 'til -- oh, yeah, that's tough. And how many sets did you have to do during that?

00:19:54

FREEMAN:

You know, I really don't know, but we were playing opposite another very well-known group called the Dukes of Dixieland. And of course, they figured that they were the cat's meow. But we suckered those guys so bad. (Laughter) Well, the first night we opened, they couldn't get the organ to working, so I said, "Well, don't worry about it; I'll play the piano." The piano nearly killed me; one of the fellows had to massage my arms after every set.

00:19:56

PATTERSON:

Why was the piano harder?

00:20:02

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, it was grueling, putting all of that energy -- it doesn't take that much energy to play the organ.

00:20:10

PATTERSON:

Oh, because you can hold and sustain and all that?

00:20:25

FREEMAN:

The action is a whole lot easier. And -- but I play so much piano that they got that organ working. I don't know whether they were trying to sabotage us or not. They could have been trying to sabotage us.

00:20:31

PATTERSON:

Why do you think? Was it a racist thing?

00:20:54

FREEMAN:

No, I think since the major had made this bet with the pit bosses, but when we opened, Major Riddle was so tickled, he grabbed Tommy, and Tommy was full of sweat everything, and danced him all around the casino, because he had made good on his bet.

00:20:57

PATTERSON:

Yeah. How did Tommy like working Vegas?

00:21:28

FREEMAN:

Oh, he liked it fine. And what would happen was, we played opposite the Dukes of Dixieland, and of course they were very cocky. And when we finished our set, we would be swinging so good, they wanted to get in on it. And what we did was, they'd come up and start playing, and the musicians would exit one by one.

00:21:29

PATTERSON:

Your musicians.

00:21:37

FREEMAN:

Yeah. They'd exit one by one, and when they looked up, there wasn't anybody there. They were stuck out there on their own.

00:21:40

PATTERSON:

They had brought their instruments out with them?

00:21:41

FREEMAN:

They were playing.

00:21:43

PATTERSON:

They were sitting on the instruments.

00:22:04

FREEMAN:

They were playing, playing with us. But that's why I say we suckered them so bad.

Every time, they never got it. And then Tommy was playing with them, he got so disgusted with it, he would just shake his head. But we had such a swinging groove, they couldn't help themselves.

00:22:12

PATTERSON:

Were they playing traditional like collective improvisation kind of Dixieland, that kind of Dixieland traditional?

00:22:19

FREEMAN:

Whatever we were playing, they'd want -- I'm just dying to tell you, we were swinging so good, they had to get in on it.

00:22:20

PATTERSON:

Do you have any tapes of that?

00:22:46

FREEMAN:

No. We weren't -- nobody was big on making tapes at that time. But what he did was, the big room would break right in the middle of our set, and it was our job to get those people to stop at the gathering table. He went out into the Dust Bowl -- have you heard -- you've been to Vegas?

00:22:46

PATTERSON:

Mm-hmm.

00:22:52

FREEMAN:

You know what the Dust Bowl is? Oh, my goodness, [inaudible] I have to educate you?

00:22:54

PATTERSON:

Please.

00:23:17

FREEMAN:

OK. The Dust Bowl was the section that the black people lived, across the railroad tracks. And the Chinaman's Restaurant, that's where everybody hung out. They found a waitress there, and he put a red dress on her and had her out there kind of doing a little wiggle while he sang "Fever."

00:23:18

PATTERSON:

This is Tommy?

00:23:35

FREEMAN:

This is Tommy. Tommy's singing [inaudible], and she's in this red dress -- oh, she was stacked -- in this red dress, kind of wiggling. When the crowd came out halfway, they stopped. They didn't move any further.

00:23:37

PATTERSON:

They couldn't get past that.

00:23:41

FREEMAN:

They couldn't get past that. She couldn't sing and she couldn't dance, it didn't make any difference.

00:23:43

PATTERSON:

She just wiggled in that red dress, and that was plenty.

00:23:44

FREEMAN:

Wiggled in that red dress.

00:23:48

PATTERSON:

(Laughter) Tommy --

00:24:11

FREEMAN:

And he called her Brown Sugar. That flyer I showed you has all that on there. And about 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, when we were just about dead, we would turn Clifford Solomon loose. And people like Bing Crosby and Phil Harris came over every night just to hear this band play.

00:24:13

PATTERSON:

What was the band made up of? What did you have?

00:24:23

FREEMAN:

We had two saxophones, a trumpet, and drums. We didn't need the base, because I was playing base with the organ.

00:24:30

PATTERSON:

Wow. So you were covering base and the piano? I guess that's the advantage of having the organ.

00:24:31

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

00:24:33

PATTERSON:

No guitar.

00:24:34

FREEMAN:

Oh, no. Didn't need all that stuff.

00:24:37

PATTERSON:

Because you have that organ. (Laughter)

00:24:55

FREEMAN:

They had me. But after the Dukes of Dixieland, they'd leave smoking, and I'd come

on, on the piano, playing Clair de Lune, and completely wipe out what they'd been doing.

00:24:59

PATTERSON:

It's another kind of mood, that probably created a drama, if it came down --

00:25:03

FREEMAN:

Yeah, because everybody turned around and looked -- what is that?

00:25:05

PATTERSON:

What is that, yeah?

00:25:07

FREEMAN:

And then boom! -- Everybody gets --

00:25:11

PATTERSON:

(Laughter) That was a good tactic. How long did you play Vegas?

00:25:17

FREEMAN:

We were there long enough for my daughter Claire to graduate from junior high school.

00:25:19

PATTERSON:

Oh, it was a few years then.

00:25:20

FREEMAN:

No, no, no. A few months.

00:25:24

PATTERSON:

Few months. Oh, OK. So she went to school there though?

00:25:42

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah, the kids went to school there. And they had so many people from backwards places from the South, they had to make it a rule that everybody had to have Dotted Swiss graduation dress.

00:25:43

PATTERSON:

Why, what did --

00:26:02

FREEMAN:

So that people wouldn't come up with outlandish looking things, clothes. And I had to rent a sewing machine and lay the pattern out -- they even had their own pattern -- they had to lay the pattern out on the floor, and I had to run up there, and I had to make the dress for her.

00:26:15

PATTERSON:

Oh, you had to make the dresses for the kids. So she graduated from junior high school, and Clair -- where does -- your son is the oldest, right, and then Claire?

00:26:16

FREEMAN:

No, Anita.

00:26:22

PATTERSON:

And then Anita, then Claire and Lisa. And so how did they like Vegas? How did the kids do with it?

00:26:27

FREEMAN:

I think they did all right. That's where we had that picture made.

00:26:33

PATTERSON:

In Vegas. So were they by now pretty used to traveling around? I know in New York they traveled.

00:26:40

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. They'd been all over the country. Went to school there wherever they went, wherever we played.

00:26:53

PATTERSON:

How did the kids adjust to the showbiz schedules? It's a show business family; how did they do with that? Did any of them do better than others?

00:27:08

FREEMAN:

They did pretty well, because they learned very early on that they didn't have time to fool around, because the minute they got into the school, they had to get right into the studies. They learned that early on. So that was good.

00:27:11

PATTERSON:

Yeah. And they had each other too; I guess it was easier than if they were just --

00:27:21

FREEMAN:

I had to learn math, and I was terrible in math, but I had to learn enough so I could help them with their homework.

00:27:31

PATTERSON:

So here you were, working 12 midnight to 6 in the morning, and then would you have to come home and get the kids off to school, or would they do --

00:27:35

FREEMAN:

I fixed breakfast and that was it.

00:27:39

PATTERSON:

Yeah. And they'd learn to take care of themselves and get themselves together and get on to school.

00:27:44

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Well, they knew what they had to do.

00:27:58

PATTERSON:

I imagine that if they naturally had that sort of behavior where they knew how to take care of themselves, because it had to be a big responsibility for you to have all the kids there plus be working like you were. And I guess mothers have been doing that forever.

00:28:00

FREEMAN:

You do what you have to do.

00:28:03

PATTERSON:

-- What you got to do, yeah.

00:28:09

FREEMAN:

We had to make a living, and we couldn't leave our kids.

00:28:16

PATTERSON:

So here you're coming back to LA after doing this run in Vegas. What happened after that, when you got back?

00:28:56

FREEMAN:

Somehow or another, we got hooked up with Frank Sinus, who had two nightclubs. One was a huge club called the Moulin Rouge, and it later became -- what was the name of that big production -- not Hair --

00:28:57

PATTERSON:

The Aquarius Theater?

00:28:57

FREEMAN:

Aquarius.

00:29:00

PATTERSON:

Because Hair went there.

00:29:00

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Aquarius Theater.

00:29:08

PATTERSON:

Oh, it was Moulin Rouge before the Aquarius Theater. This is on Sunset, just east of Vine St.

00:29:09

FREEMAN:

Yes.

00:29:12

PATTERSON:

So you worked there, as a nightclub.

00:29:14

FREEMAN:

Well, we went there first with Peggy Lee.

00:29:16

PATTERSON:

Did you open the show for Peggy Lee?

00:29:22

FREEMAN:

No, we didn't open the show. We were a feature in the show.

00:29:32

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. So how did that work? Did she come out and sing, and then you would -- you and Tommy would come and perform, like woven into --

00:30:06

FREEMAN:

We had the Exciting Voices. You know, we first auditioned -- not auditioned, really, but we went and did a showing for William Morris Agency, and I've been trying to remember the guy who was the agent at the time -- it will probably come to me, pop in my mind when I'm not thinking about it. But anyway, I remember that time we were in this little room, and had all these singers, and Nat Cole was there. I don't know why he was there. But anyway --

00:30:08

PATTERSON:

Was this at the office?

00:31:02

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Anyway, one of the things we did was "When the Saints Go Marching In." And after that, we got a call; he wanted us to do a show with Peggy Lee. And one of the things that she was going to close the show with was "When the Saints go Marching In." And she didn't ask me to write the arrangement, because I could have; she asked a white guitar player, Howard Roberts -- I'll never forget that. And he came to me and said, "I know you can do the voices better than I did, so anything you need to change, you change it." Which I did; I was changing music up almost until the time we left.

00:31:05

PATTERSON:

Was it that he didn't write it appropriately --?

00:31:16

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, most instrumentalists don't write for vocalists; they write for instrumental. So I had to change a lot of stuff to make it singable.

00:31:20

PATTERSON:

He was a guitar player, so he had to get used to something else.

00:31:29

FREEMAN:

Yeah. But he had good ideas; there's nothing wrong with that. But then we had to go up to her house and rehearse.

00:31:29

PATTERSON:

Where does she live?

00:31:45

FREEMAN:

She lived in Beverly Hills, on Sunny Ridge Dr. And I think her idea was that she could get the best out of us if she got us drunk.

00:31:51

PATTERSON:

(Laughter)

00:32:05

FREEMAN:

She had these big tub glasses, (laughter) and just kept feeding us Scotch. I tell you, it was a wonder we didn't kill ourselves coming down off that hill. (Laughter)

00:32:11

PATTERSON:

So here you are drinking your Scotches and trying to sing -- did she have a piano player there?

00:32:54

FREEMAN:

You know, I don't remember. I don't remember. But I do remember going to her Christmas party, and I met the guy, the founder of Religious Science. He had put out a lot of literature, and I had read some of it, so I was very impressed. His name was Ernest -- almost had it. It'll come to me. Because at that time -- it was the late '50s, around '58 -- at that time, he was quite famous for his writings.

00:32:55

PATTERSON:

Was Peggy Lee a follower for this science?

00:33:05

FREEMAN:

I don't know. Probably she had dabbled in it. But I remember that very well.

00:33:11

PATTERSON:

At the Christmas party. Was there live music at the party?

00:33:14

FREEMAN:

(inaudible).

00:33:17

PATTERSON:

Did she ever sing in her parties? Or did she sing --

00:33:17

FREEMAN:

No.

00:33:20

PATTERSON:

How did you find her, working with her?

00:33:22

FREEMAN:

How did I find working with her?

00:33:23

PATTERSON:

Yeah.

00:33:27

FREEMAN:

Very insecure.

00:33:27

PATTERSON:

Really?

00:34:17

FREEMAN:

Very insecure. She had a huge entourage, and I found it kind of suspicious that she had a doctor traveling with her. But -- and of course, they were always fawning over her, you know. I was very matter-of-fact, and in fact, I didn't bite my tongue when I should have. We did an album with her, and it wasn't quite selling, and I opened my big mouth and said she wasn't swinging. Tommy jumped all over me, said, "You can't tell somebody like Peggy Lee she's not swinging!" I said, "But she isn't swinging." Peggy got so upset; she got in the middle of our group to make sure she was swinging.

00:34:20

PATTERSON:

So she got in the middle of the singers so she could --

00:34:22

FREEMAN:

Got in the middle of the singers.

00:34:25

PATTERSON:

-- So she could feel what they were doing.

00:35:05

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And when we did the shows, at the end of the show, when she was exiting the stage, oh, her entourage would be just, "Oh, Peggy, you were so great; you were this, you were that and the other." And she would always stop and turn around and look at me -- I'm still standing there with the group -- and she'd look right at me. And if it was a good show, I'd nod my head, and she'd go on perfectly happy. If it wasn't so good, I didn't say anything. (laughter) But you know, she never missed a show, and she had a reputation for missing shows. She might show up and she might not. But she didn't miss a show.

00:35:07

PATTERSON:

With you all.

00:35:07

FREEMAN:

No.

00:35:09

PATTERSON:

She enjoyed performing with you.

00:35:37

FREEMAN:

Oh, it was a blast. And we sang -- well, when we came on the stage, we came on in the dark. And the spotlight would hit the feet -- you remember we did this? -- that's the first thing the audience saw, and as the lights came up, oh, we broke it up.

00:35:41

PATTERSON:

Did she sing her famous "Fever" during the show?

00:35:50

FREEMAN:

Probably did, but we didn't sing that with her, but we did sing some other songs. We sang, "Well, All Right," that was one of the things we did with her.

00:35:51

PATTERSON:

So then that was a good run for you.

00:35:54

FREEMAN:

It was very good.

00:35:55

PATTERSON:

How long did the show run up at the Moulin Rouge?

00:36:10

FREEMAN:

Oh, we was at the Moulin Rouge maybe two or three weeks. That was kind of the break-in. That's one of the biggest stages I've ever seen in my life. That's big enough to put World War II on it.

00:36:11

PATTERSON:

I remember that stage. I remember how that stage looked.

00:36:18

FREEMAN:

I think they had elephants at the time. That was one huge stage.

00:36:21

PATTERSON:

Did she take her show on the road at all?

00:36:25

FREEMAN:

That, she went from there to Las Vegas.

00:36:27

PATTERSON:

Did you all go?

00:36:52

FREEMAN:

Yes. We were an integral part of the show. And we went to, of all places, the Desert Inn, which is known to be very prejudiced. And we went there, we got there, a long

day of rehearsal; we couldn't even eat in the kitchen. (laughter) Everybody was starving, starved to death.

00:36:54

PATTERSON:

Did you expect that, or were you --

00:37:00

FREEMAN:

Not really. I thought we could -- we should be able to eat in the kitchen. They couldn't even hand any food to us out of the kitchen.

00:37:02

PATTERSON:

So let alone the restaurant.

00:37:05

FREEMAN:

Oh, we didn't even consider the restaurant.

00:37:07

PATTERSON:

Wow.

00:37:18

FREEMAN:

Yeah. So the choreographer, Nick Castle, he gave us \$50 to go ahead, and we went to the grocery store.

00:37:20

PATTERSON:

And you couldn't stay in the hotel, then, huh?

00:37:21

FREEMAN:

Oh, no.

00:37:22

PATTERSON:

Where were you staying?

00:37:44

FREEMAN:

Dr. West, over in the Dust Bowl. He owned a lot of property, a lot of houses, and that's where most of the entertainers stayed. So we rented three houses from him, and we had one house with us and the kids, and one house for the fellows, and one house for the girls.

00:37:47

PATTERSON:

How many singers were with the Exciting Voices?

00:37:48

FREEMAN:

We had 12.

00:37:51

PATTERSON:

12 singers? Evenly divided, male and female?

00:37:59

FREEMAN:

I think we had more girls than fellows. But we had a very strong group.

00:38:06

PATTERSON:

Yeah. And so you were -- the performance of the singers was woven in and out of Peggy Lee's show?

00:38:16

FREEMAN:

When we did our bit, which of course was "Didn't It Rain?", then of course we sang a couple of things with her. And "When the Saints Go Marching In."

00:38:17

PATTERSON:

The finale.

00:38:19

FREEMAN:

That was the closer, yeah.

00:38:21

PATTERSON:

So how did you do it in Vegas?

00:38:23

FREEMAN:

I told you she didn't miss any shows.

00:38:26

PATTERSON:

Didn't miss any shows.

00:38:28

FREEMAN:

Didn't miss a one, not a one.

00:38:29

PATTERSON:

Two shows a night?

00:38:30

FREEMAN:

Two shows a night.

00:38:31

PATTERSON:

Dinner the late show.

00:39:32

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Now, when we were there, waiting to get to the call to come to the hotel to

come to the opening, they called and said, "Well, we're ready for you to rehearse." And Tommy says, "Are our dressing rooms ready?" And there was a long pause at the other end of the line, and there was a long pause at the other end of the line, and then the voice says, "We'll call you back." They called back about a half hour later and said, "Your dressing room is ready." What they had done, they had taken the band room for the fellows, put the musicians out of the band room, and then they had a small little room for the girls. And those fellows, they put so much mess going on that the band started coming in, and the fellows in the dressing room couldn't keep them out, there was so much --

00:39:34

PATTERSON:

That was the place to be.

00:39:37

FREEMAN:

That was the place to be. There was so much stuff going on.

00:39:42

PATTERSON:

So it was more exciting to be with the singers.

00:40:26

FREEMAN:

Oh, yes. But the bad thing is, we followed Pearl Bailey into the Desert Inn. Part of what -- Pearl Bailey had to dress in a trailer in the back of the hotel, and the production that she was doing was House of Flowers. And she got so mad with us, I'm

telling you, she was fit to be tired. The fact that we had dressing rooms in the hotel -- and then she bad-mouthed us, saying that we were bringing down the whole race, singing spirituals. (laughter) I thought we were a couple of notches about House of Flowers.

00:40:28

PATTERSON:

Well, what was House of Flowers like?

00:40:30

FREEMAN:

It was a story about prostitution.

00:40:34

PATTERSON:

Oh. (laughter)

00:40:53

FREEMAN:

It was a big Broadway play, don't you remember that? It was done first with Asian people, and then had to throw it at their production at the Desert Inn. Nothing wrong with the production, but I mean, shoot, talking about we were bringing down -- (laughter)

00:40:54

PATTERSON:

Because you were singing spirituals?

00:41:06

FREEMAN:

Yeah. (laughter) She talked about us so bad, you couldn't go anyplace without her bad-mouthing us.

00:41:07

PATTERSON:

It was jealousy then.

00:41:11

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. We had dressing rooms. That's the first time that ever happened.

00:41:15

PATTERSON:

So rather than be happy for you, and see it as a sign of change --

00:41:24

FREEMAN:

Yeah. I don't know if anybody else had dressing rooms after that, but with Peggy Lee, you know they weren't going (inaudible).

00:41:26

PATTERSON:

So she stood up for --

00:41:53

FREEMAN:

I don't know whether she had to; I don't know whether she even realized what was going on. But the weekly open, they must have had about 60 security guards that day. I don't know what they thought we were going to do. But we would get there just in time to dress and be ready for the 8:00 show, and then we'd leave and come back for the 12:00 show.

00:41:57

PATTERSON:

So you'd go all the way back to the Dust Bowl in between shows; you couldn't hang out on the strip.

00:41:59

FREEMAN:

We didn't have out.

00:42:01

PATTERSON:

Could you have? Were there places that black people could go?

00:42:12

FREEMAN:

We probably could. They had dressing rooms for us; we probably could have. But we didn't want to. And after the first week, they went on back to the regular two security guards.

00:42:16

PATTERSON:

They figured you weren't going to cause a race riot. (laughter)

00:42:29

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, [Rover Clark], he was the owner of the Desert Inn. And he actually, on stage, said that we were one of the best-behaved groups he'd ever had in the Desert Inn.

00:42:32

PATTERSON:

Based on what they may have expected black people to do?

00:42:39

FREEMAN:

Probably so. So we made sure that they had no complaints.

00:42:44

PATTERSON:

Yeah. How about the audience? How did the audience accept -- I guess they're used to black performers, but just not --

00:42:52

FREEMAN:

I don't know. No problem with the audience.

00:42:51

PATTERSON:

No problem at all.

00:42:54

FREEMAN:

Besides, it was terrific show.

00:43:14

PATTERSON:

So they would be entertained. What was the Dust Bowl like when you got there? How was your impression of it different from the Strip? People think of Vegas as just Vegas and the Strip; they don't think about the fact that there are neighborhoods there.

00:43:39

FREEMAN:

The first time we went there, we were at the Dunes Hotel. I had never seen so many -- sex, and disreputable-looking buildings, with air-conditioning and a Cadillac parked in front.

00:43:44

PATTERSON:

Well, you do what you can. (Laughter)

00:43:48

FREEMAN:

That was amazing to me.

00:43:50

PATTERSON:

Were there places of entertainment, or little gambling places on that side of town as well?

00:43:54

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

00:43:57

PATTERSON:

So were there entertainers that were working in the Dust Bowl?

00:44:04

FREEMAN:

Yeah. As a matter of fact, the white entertainers would, when they finished their gigs, they'd make it to the Dust Bowl.

00:44:05

PATTERSON:

To go watch the shows there?

00:44:08

FREEMAN:

Yeah, and join in, if they could.

00:44:17

PATTERSON:

But most of the -- well, I guess the more well-known black performers were performing on the Strip.

00:44:19

FREEMAN:

Yes.

00:44:24

PATTERSON:

Who were some of the other people that were playing Vegas around that time? Other black performers?

00:44:38

FREEMAN:

I don't remember, at that particular time when we were there at the Desert Inn. But while we were there at the Desert Inn, we really integrated the whole Strip.

00:44:40

PATTERSON:

Really? How do you mean?

00:44:56

FREEMAN:

Well, no, that was when we were with Louis Prima; we went back to the Desert Inn with Louis Prima. And what we did was, we would have like an open house; we had a nice house on the hill, big house where everybody could stay --

00:44:57

PATTERSON:

In the Dust Bowl.

00:45:13

FREEMAN:

And it was on a little -- kind of like a little hill, nice surrounding grass and stuff. And we would have a barbecue, and invite everybody on the Strip, in the afternoon, and they would come.

00:45:19

PATTERSON:

So the whites came to the Dust Bowl to hang out and have barbecue.

00:45:23

FREEMAN:

Yeah. This is when we were with Louis Prima and Keely Smith.

00:45:27

PATTERSON:

What year was that?

00:46:13

FREEMAN:

This would have to be -- after Frankie Laine; this would have to be maybe 1970, '71, something like that. And one day Keely came, and she had a young fellow, and we didn't think anything of it. But everybody had such a good time, and a lot of them had never even seen -- hadn't even met the people in the other hotels. So they had a wonderful time getting together. So after we finished that stint and came home about six weeks later, I saw this young fellow's mug on the FBI's Most Wanted. (Laughter)

00:46:17

PATTERSON:

Keely -- now who was she to Louis Prima?

00:46:22

FREEMAN:

She headlined with Louis Prima, and they were married at the time.

00:46:27

PATTERSON:

Oh. But she was dating somebody else, and this was the ex-con, or the --

00:46:31

FREEMAN:

I don't know. He was a young fellow; she just brought him.

00:46:36

PATTERSON:

And you saw his face on TV, one of the most wanted. Well, you had a little bit of everything at that barbecue, huh?

00:46:43

FREEMAN:

That was kind of scary, though. That was kind of scary.

00:46:49

PATTERSON:

In the '50s, the late '50s -- you were there in '59 with Peggy Lee?

00:46:50

FREEMAN:

With Frankie Laine, yeah.

00:46:54

PATTERSON:

Oh, with Frankie Laine, but with Peggy, you were there in --

00:46:55

FREEMAN:

I was there -- probably '57, '58.

00:47:05

PATTERSON:

With Peggy. And then you went back in '59 with Frankie Lane. How was that show different? How did that come about, the Frankie Laine situation?

00:47:25

FREEMAN:

Well, we knew Major Riddle. And when he saw us with Peggy Lee, he asked us, would we do a show with Frankie Laine? Now, they had a contract with Frankie Laine for three shows. Frankie Laine had already done one show, and it's like they would have three people in the audience.

00:47:31

PATTERSON:

Well, he had had his hit record, didn't he, by then?

00:47:51

FREEMAN:

Audiences are very fickle people, and so they just said, "I need to put you two together, because Frankie has two more shows to do for us." But Frankie was not happy, having to do a show with us.

00:47:52

PATTERSON:

Because of the race issue?

00:47:54

FREEMAN:

No.

00:47:55

PATTERSON:

Just 'cause he was just his own (inaudible).

00:48:02

FREEMAN:

And he didn't want to share credits with anybody.

00:48:12

PATTERSON:

Was it the tradition to have an opening act in those days? Because I know now, Vegas has the opening and then the main act. So did he have an opening act or not at all?

00:48:14

FREEMAN:

Probably did, but --

00:48:15

PATTERSON:

Nothing that confronted his ego.

00:48:28

FREEMAN:

No, but hey, when you're doing a big room like the Dunes -- and that was a huge room -- and you got three people in it? Somebody gets nervous.

00:48:29

PATTERSON:

So he needed some help.

00:48:36

FREEMAN:

So we did get together with Frankie Laine, and went to see him at his office, went to his house.

00:48:38

PATTERSON:

Here in LA?

00:49:01

FREEMAN:

Mm-hmm. He lived in Beverly Hills, right off of Sunset. And we had just recorded [Angelical Man]; I don't know if you remember that or not. So Tommy put the music, gave him the music in the demo, and he put it in this case and probably forgot about it.

00:49:06

PATTERSON:

Did Tommy intend that he listen to it to perhaps record it?

00:49:23

FREEMAN:

Yeah, because it was right down his alley. And Frankie Laine's brother came across it,

and that's how I got in Frankie Laine's album, because we had to do the album with Frankie Laine, called Frankie Laine Balladeer.

00:49:33

PATTERSON:

So he discovered this song -- his brother discovered this song and convinced him to record it, so he called you all in to do the recording with him.

00:49:32

FREEMAN:

Well, we were already --

00:49:37

PATTERSON:

Planning this show together. So you did the recording here in LA?

00:49:49

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And also, the Major wanted him to do "When the Saints Go Marching In." And Frankie refused to do it unless Tommy joined him.

00:49:54

PATTERSON:

(Laughter) Was he insecure about the performance of it?

00:50:05

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. And what he did was, Tommy had to join him and all the modulations, you know how he goes up a half step; Tommy had to come in on all the modulations.

00:50:07

PATTERSON:

Was it because vocally, he wasn't strong enough?

00:50:24

FREEMAN:

I think he was scared to do it. But anyway, of course Tommy's very happy to oblige. I got pictures of Frankie and Tommy together onstage.

00:50:30

PATTERSON:

And this was in '59, so you're back to Vegas. How long was the run? How long was that thing?

00:50:30

FREEMAN:

How long was he there?

00:50:31

PATTERSON:

Yeah.

00:50:32

FREEMAN:

Probably four to six weeks.

00:50:36

PATTERSON:

Four to six weeks? And did it bring in the audience for Major Riddle?

00:51:21

FREEMAN:

The audience was -- the place was packed. And I tell you, Vegas is a funny place. You get your audience from all of the people who worked there, the maids, the housekeepers, the bartenders, the waiters. People in the hotels would say, "Well, where's a good place to go?" And you get your best hotel -- best show reviews from everybody who works in Las Vegas. We were there in August, and it was 119 in the shade, and the air conditioning went out.

00:51:23

PATTERSON:

Oh, no.

00:51:27

FREEMAN:

People just took off their coats and nobody left.

00:51:33

PATTERSON:

And you all were just working through this heat. But it was a success.

00:51:35

FREEMAN:

Very successful.

00:51:38

PATTERSON:

How was it to work with him?

00:51:50

FREEMAN:

Very non-committal. Because he never even rehearsed with us, not like Peggy did; he never rehearsed. Just on the day that we opened, he showed up and said, "Well, where do you want me?"

00:51:54

PATTERSON:

Was it -- do you think there was some racism there, or was it just --

00:51:55

FREEMAN:

Oh, I don't think so. I think he was just miffed.

00:51:56

PATTERSON:

Professionally.

00:52:06

FREEMAN:

Yeah, he was just miffed to have to share credits with the group; he couldn't do it on his own. That would hurt your ego.

00:52:11

PATTERSON:

Yeah. Where was he in his career at that point, recording-wise?

00:52:13

FREEMAN:

He was on --

00:52:14

PATTERSON:

The downslope.

00:52:21

FREEMAN:

Yeah, I think so. I think he had peaked by that time.

00:52:24

PATTERSON:

So now you've got this good solid relationship with Major Riddle.

00:52:25

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:52:30

PATTERSON:

And how did that go? Did that continue?

00:53:12

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. He and Tommy talked all the time. But one thing -- the same thing happened with Peggy's management that happened with Frankie Laine's management. They figured that all they needed to do was to get some black singers together, and they didn't need us. And that's what happened -- that's why we didn't do any more interaction with Peggy, because she did Hollywood [Bull] soon after we left the Desert Inn, and they got their own group together.

00:53:15

PATTERSON:

For money reasons? They could pay them less?

00:53:19

FREEMAN:

Probably could pay them less, and didn't have to be bothered with us. (Laughter)

00:53:21

PATTERSON:

Well, what was the bother?

00:54:54

FREEMAN:

The bother was that we were too successful. But what they didn't realize was that our group was well -- not only well-rehearsed, but they could read music, because I taught them *sofeggio* myself. And they could conduct; they knew how to do all those things. And also, the fact that I didn't [cow-tow]; I'm not a cow-towing kind of person. And they wanted me to come in and say, "Oh, good evening, Miss Lee. Miss Lee, how are you doing, Miss Lee?" "Hi, Peg." (Laughter) Christmas Eve, we were doing a special show; everybody was in the audience. Frank Sinatra was in the audience. Frank Sinatra was there, Pearl Bailey was there, Louis Bellson was there, Harry James was there. Everybody was in the audience. They're waiting on Peggy Lee to come out on stage, and she's in our dressing room, and won't leave, because we were singing, and won't leave. They took her, trying to -- boy, she's strong as a bull. Miss Lee.

00:54:57

PATTERSON:

She knew it was time to go to the stage --

00:54:59

FREEMAN:

She was having a good time.

00:55:02

PATTERSON:

So here she was enjoying working with you.

00:55:13

FREEMAN:

Enjoying, in our dressing room. The only way we could get her out of there was Tommy finally sang "God Bless You." (Inaudible)?

00:55:14

PATTERSON:

Yes.

00:55:19

FREEMAN:

We sang "God Bless You," and then she was ready to leave.

00:55:22

PATTERSON:

So creatively, she enjoyed working with you. Why would she want to stop?

00:55:25

FREEMAN:

It wasn't her, it was the management.

00:55:26

PATTERSON:

It was the management.

00:55:45

FREEMAN:

It was the management. But it was a fiasco; we went to the Hollywood Bull just to see what was happening. Oh, it was such a fiasco. But what they didn't realize was, when I gave them the music back, I gave them all of the original music back; I didn't give them the changed music back.

00:55:48

PATTERSON:

The changes that you had made, that made it spicy and --

00:55:52

FREEMAN:

That made it singable.

00:55:56

PATTERSON:

Oh, yeah, yeah. Because the guitar player's arrangements were not as singable. Well -
-

00:56:08

FREEMAN:

And that poor group, poor black group trying to sing -- and they had all the black singers in Los Angeles. But, you know -- it was so bad.

00:56:11

PATTERSON:

I mean, I wonder -- if it ain't broke, why fix it?

00:57:25

FREEMAN:

But they didn't know. They didn't know that they had trained singers who were used to singing together and could sing together, and all they had to do was get a group of black people and they had it made? Uh-huh. That wasn't it. So Peg could never work with singers after that; that was the end of her working with singers. We -- she wanted to do something with the Young Saints, in the '80s, I guess it was, it could have been in the '90s. I've got the ad that she put in the paper. But she chickened out at the last minute. And the same thing happened with Frankie Laine; he had another show to do, and the manager (inaudible) Frankie didn't need us; all they had to do was get some black singers, and they had it made. So wrong. In the first place, they didn't realize that the Dunes is so large that the stage is like across the street and the orchestra is here. So you know about time lag. I had to watch the conductor, and when his arm came up, my arm came up.

00:57:29

PATTERSON:

So they didn't have it set up where there were monitors, so there wouldn't be much of a time lag.

00:58:12

FREEMAN:

They didn't have anything set up. I just had to keep my eyes and ears open. So we went to see the second show, the last of Frankie Lee's show; we took a trip to Las Vegas just to see what was going on. That group was so bad, they had to put three guitars on the stage in front of the group to keep them in time and pitch. (Laughter) And I laughed; I said, "No better for you," and Frankie never worked with singers again.

00:58:18

PATTERSON:

Not after that. That's just -- it seems like it was more headache than it was worth to change the singing.

00:58:34

FREEMAN:

They didn't know that. They just thought that all they had to do was get some black singers together, and they had it made. But that wasn't it. (Pause) Changing tape?

00:58:34

PATTERSON:

Mm-hmm.

00:58:35

FREEMAN:

Oh, good; I can go to the bathroom.

00:58:38

PATTERSON:

OK. (Break in audio)

00:59:18

FREEMAN:

You asked me a question about Peggy Lee, give an example of how insecure she was. One night, the stage was struck so that the piano was not quite in the right place, because her opening song, she sang like right in the crook of the piano. And I knew what was wrong, it was just off like maybe an inch or two, but you know, she sent all the way to Florida for her stage designer to come back and fix the piano.

00:59:19

PATTERSON:

And it was just a matter of moving the piano?

01:00:06

FREEMAN:

They had struck it in the wrong place, yeah. And her choreographer, Nick Castle --

now, I found out then why choreographers have assistants, because he couldn't remember anything from one time to the next, the steps he gave us. So what we would do, we would take the steps that were doable -- because remember, none of these people were dancers. So we'd take the steps that were doable, and then everything else, we'd cast out. And the next night, he wouldn't remember. So we kind of did the choreography ourselves. (Laughter)

01:00:08

PATTERSON:

Now when you went with Louis Prima, this was some time later.

01:00:09

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:00:13

PATTERSON:

Right. So maybe 10 years later -- 20 years later?

01:00:17

FREEMAN:

No. It was right after Frankie Laine.

01:00:19

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK.

01:02:34

FREEMAN:

And what had happened was that on the strength of their doing Frankie Laine's show, this group that I said was so terrible, they were rehearsing with Louis Prima, and they were so far -- the music was so far over their heads, they were having so much problem with it. The guy who was running the studio is a friend of ours, Joe Rotunda, he called Tommy and said, "You need to get Louis Prima right away." He says, "This group that's been rehearsing: they're terrible." So the next day, we went to Dot Records, which was right there -- Randy Woods -- I can't think of his name right them. He was the head of Dot Records. But anyway, Louis was on Dot Records; he probably had an office there. Cornered him just as he's coming out of Dot Records, and Tommy says, "I got to talk to you about your next show." And so Louis says, "Well, walk with me." So they did, and the upshot was that we got to audition, and the guy who had written the vocal music -- of course, he wrote it so -- hard, instrumental vocal music. But our guys, you know, I had taught them sofeggio. And so we had this audition, and I look down the row, and all of them are just (laughter) (inaudible), I said, "Go on now." And the arranger -- oh, he got excited. He said, "They're just sight-reading it, and already they're better than the other group." But they had one song, and it was one of Louis' hits, called Robin Hood. "Many long years ago," -- it was a hit for Louis Prima. And they had just such -- for the tenors that went up to major seventh and down to minor seventh and up to major seventh, down to minor seventh. I was the only one who could sing that consistently.

01:02:37

PATTERSON:

Well, it doesn't sound easy.

01:02:43

FREEMAN:

No, it wasn't easy. And they couldn't do it. So I sang the tenor part and gave the tenors something else to do.

01:02:48

PATTERSON:

You could always sing in the part; you were just jumping in all the time. I remember that.

01:02:58

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Well, you know, when we did the Andy Griffith special, you know what we did for that? I changed all the music -- you don't remember that, do you?

01:03:00

PATTERSON:

I don't remember.

01:03:18

FREEMAN:

You were the only one who could sing a high C consistently. And Anthony was the only one who could sing a high C for the tenors consistently. And we had [Segrave] was the only one who could sing low C. So I let them stay on those parts, and I change everybody else's music.

01:03:27

PATTERSON:

Well, you understood voice leading, and most arrangers that weren't working with voices, it's a completely different ballgame.

01:03:31

FREEMAN:

Not only that, but you remember that I studied in school; I'm a school musician.

01:03:48

PATTERSON:

And so a lot of these arrangers weren't -- they were just musicians that knew how to write; they knew from experience. So then Louis Prima must have been happy to have you all.

01:03:50

FREEMAN:

Yes. Well, Louis was a trip.

01:03:52

PATTERSON:

How so?

01:04:06

FREEMAN:

I don't know if he ever said two words to me. But if he came into the room and I wasn't there -- "Where's Evelyn? Where's Evelyn?"

01:04:07

PATTERSON:

What was that about?

01:04:10

FREEMAN:

I don't know. Male chauvinist, I guess.

01:04:16

PATTERSON:

You must have had to deal with so much stuff.

01:04:40

FREEMAN:

I can't even go into it. I'm at a recording studio recording with the orchestra, and the producers come in, and the minute they see me sitting there at the piano -- "Oh, she's playing it all wrong. It's wrong what she's playing." And the conductor would have to say, "She's not even supposed to be playing right now."

01:04:56

PATTERSON:

You were wrong before you'd even done anything. Oh, God. How did you manage that, though, Evelyn? I mean, you always seemed calm and in control and confident at all times. Did you never get rattled or ruffled by this kind of concept?

01:04:58

FREEMAN:

Oh, what good would it have done me?

01:05:01

PATTERSON:

It doesn't do any good, but it would be understandable.

01:05:21

FREEMAN:

But you know, the musicians always stuck up for me. A lot of times, I would go into the studio with my music, and the conductor says, "Oh, we can't play this," and the guys say, "Hey, it looks all right to me. Why don't we just play it through once first?"

01:05:28

PATTERSON:

Yeah. Good, so that kept you going, just working with the guys and the musicians,

because that's where the heart is anyway, how the musicians themselves -- the other ego stuff doesn't --

01:05:37

FREEMAN:

Yeah, 'cause when we did the Jonathan Winters shows, that guy had me crying, crying tears.

01:05:39

PATTERSON:

Really? I've never seen you upset, Evelyn.

01:06:11

FREEMAN:

Oh, I'm telling you. Pete Candoli, one of the top trumpet players -- he had played with the Third Herd -- what's his name? -- I can't remember anything anyway. I'll think of it in a minute. And he came through here and said, "Hey, don't you worry about a thing; you're one of us." So the musicians always stuck up for me.

01:06:16

PATTERSON:

I guess that kept you going, then. I mean, it had to be hard.

01:06:18

FREEMAN:

It was very hard.

01:06:26

PATTERSON:

And you don't complain about that part, but still, I mean, it was a field that women got beat down and out of.

01:07:00

FREEMAN:

When we went in to do the Ed Sullivan Show, and I'd already heard from my brother Ernie and from Renee Hall, who did a lot of arranging for -- it's gone again. Anyway, they'd already warned me that going in to do the Sullivan Show, the conductor was already against you, because he was from California.

01:07:02

PATTERSON:

There's all kinds of prejudices going around.

01:07:41

FREEMAN:

Yeah. You're from California. So I went in there with great trepidation, taking my music, you know. And when I got up to the podium, all of a sudden I saw a hand go up, and it was my friend Hank Jones. He was the piano player for the orchestra. The guy's name -- Ray Sinatra was the conductor for the orchestra. I had no problems with

him. None whatsoever. In fact, Hank and the bass player and the drummer stayed behind on the break to make sure that they had my music right.

01:07:43

PATTERSON:

They were supportive.

01:07:44

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:07:46

PATTERSON:

Yeah. So those kinds of things get you through.

01:07:50

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

01:07:54

MONTENEGRO:

(Inaudible) -- The other way, Karen, to your right.

01:08:02

PATTERSON:

OK.

01:08:11

FREEMAN:

Yeah, I think a lot of times, they just hated to see a woman coming in. They just hated to see a woman coming i with authority.

01:08:20

PATTERSON:

What does that -- it makes them feel like they'll look bad in comparison if the woman is competent? What is that?

01:08:24

FREEMAN:

Chauvinists. It's chauvinistic, and that's the only thing you can say for it.

01:08:49

PATTERSON:

It doesn't have any reason or rhyme. There's no sensible reason. So meanwhile, how are the kids doing? I know Lisa loved -- she was, from a little one, a performer by

nature. So I guess she went through her school time and that, but was she continuing to sing? What was she doing?

01:09:17

FREEMAN:

She wasn't even thinking about singing before the Young Saints. But I had sent her to acting school, and I had played for her dance studio, and she did very well in the dance studio, and remembered all the dances she learned in the dance studio -- it just amazed me that she would retain all of those routines.

01:09:36

PATTERSON:

That was the one thing I had a hard time -- I could do the step, but couldn't remember the sequences. But I remember that about Lisa, is all the steps -- she always remembered the sequences, when we all forgot them. So she loved dancing through that time.

01:09:42

FREEMAN:

Yeah, well, she -- that was kind of a formal training.

01:09:44

PATTERSON:

But not the singing part yet.

01:09:48

FREEMAN:

No. She hadn't even gotten interested in singing.

01:09:57

PATTERSON:

And what about your other two daughters, Anita and Claire? What were they doing? What did they love to do?

01:10:36

FREEMAN:

Anita, when she graduated, she was in office management. And she worked for a foot doctor; I think she liked the job very much. Claire has had a very high-profile job; she was assistant deputy for HUD in Washington under Jack Kemp. She was in charge of the \$13 billion budget.

01:10:36

PATTERSON:

That's a lot. (Laughter)

01:11:29

FREEMAN:

That's a lot. And the way she got the job was, before that she was at the Pentagon, and she was the highest-ranked civilian in the Pentagon, and she instituted a lot of changes, especially good for women. Because women, wives, had nothing going for

them, and she instituted a lot of changes that were beneficial to women. And as a matter of fact, the head of Defense of that time, I can't think of his name -- she got a special medal or commendation or whatever it was before he left that office, for all the work that she had done in the Pentagon.

01:11:34

PATTERSON:

Well, that's gaining a little bit back after what you had been through.

01:11:34

FREEMAN:

(Laughter) Yeah.

01:11:36

PATTERSON:

You know, to have a daughter who is doing that kind of work.

01:11:49

FREEMAN:

And then she got -- the headhunters came after her for taking over the reins at the Cuyahoga Metro Housing Authority in Cleveland. That's a mouthful.

01:11:53

PATTERSON:

Yeah, I'm going to have to ask you how to spell that later.

01:11:55

FREEMAN:

You know how to spell Cuyahoga?

01:11:57

PATTERSON:

I'll have to find that out; I'll figure that out --

01:12:05

FREEMAN:

Yeah, C-U-Y-A-H-O-G-A. That's the county that --

01:12:05

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. Thanks.

01:12:11

FREEMAN:

It's a good thing they didn't call Cleveland Cuyahoga.

01:12:15

PATTERSON:

And how is Ernie doing at the time?

01:12:15

FREEMAN:

My son?

01:12:16

PATTERSON:

Mm-hmm.

01:12:41

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, he died several years ago. It must be maybe -- about 15 years ago, I guess. And Anita died about -- a little after that. She just lay down on the couch to take a nap and never woke up.

01:12:41

PATTERSON:

She hadn't been ill?

01:13:06

FREEMAN:

Oh, she'd had health problems, but nobody expected that. Just like Lisa had congestive heart problems, and nobody knew it. And she was under the doctor's care, under several doctors, and nobody ever brought up the fact that she had a bad heart.

01:13:09

PATTERSON:

With all the tests that they must have done --

01:13:17

FREEMAN:

It's just amazing. I don't know how in the world they missed that.

01:13:25

PATTERSON:

So when you went to Vegas with Louis Prima, you worked with him more than one time.

01:13:50

FREEMAN:

We did two -- I want to say two tours. The first show was a show called the Roaring

'40s, and it was more instrumental than -- and they did all kinds of things, like -- all the big hits of the '40s, the bands, whatever.

01:13:54

PATTERSON:

So you just had small singing things that the group did throughout that.

01:13:59

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And we had a smaller group; we had about eight people, I guess.

01:14:05

PATTERSON:

What about the singers through these years? Were there a lot of changes, with personnel, and --

01:14:05

FREEMAN:

Oh, yes.

01:14:16

PATTERSON:

-- Ensemble? And they -- what was their process? You found that most of the singers were local Los Angeles people, and they would audition to be part of the group.

01:14:23

FREEMAN:

Well, yeah, they came into the group. If they didn't fit, they didn't last long.

01:14:28

PATTERSON:

So what were some of the criteria that you had besides just the voice?

01:14:28

FREEMAN:

Just the voice.

01:14:31

PATTERSON:

Just the voice. If they didn't know how to read, you would just help them along with that.

01:14:34

FREEMAN:

I would teach them.

01:14:39

PATTERSON:

And then the other sort of professional (inaudible) --

01:15:20

FREEMAN:

They all had to go through a kind of a training period, because we had certain criteria, as far as professionalism went. I just got a picture in my mind of Frankie Laine's show; he did a song called "The Girl with the Green Hair," something like that. And one of the sopranos had a very high soprano voice, and they put her on a ladder up high, and when they turned the lights on her, she was actually green. That was amazing.

01:15:20

PATTERSON:

That was a vision.

01:15:28

FREEMAN:

Yeah, she was green. And she was a very dark girl. Pretty girl, but very dark.

01:15:43

PATTERSON:

So you had some changing personnel, but the group remained part of your professional ensemble for -- how long did you keep that, the Exciting Voices, under that title, the Exciting Voices?

01:15:53

FREEMAN:

Just 'til Peggy Lee's show, I think. We changed it after the Peggy Lee show.

01:15:56

PATTERSON:

So you changed the name of the ensemble then?

01:15:57

FREEMAN:

Yes.

01:15:58

PATTERSON:

What were they called then?

01:16:01

FREEMAN:

The Tommy Roberts/Evelyn Freeman Singing.

01:16:09

PATTERSON:

And that's with Frankie Laine and then Louis Prima. Would you ever work, you and Tommy, without them? Or was it now --

01:16:11

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah.

01:16:12

PATTERSON:

Did you do Vegas?

01:16:15

FREEMAN:

No. After that stint at the (inaudible) --

01:16:16

PATTERSON:

Lounge --

01:16:24

FREEMAN:

That was it. No more lounge.

01:16:28

PATTERSON:

So but you were working here in town, or maybe doing more recording, or --

01:16:53

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, when we finished the last Louis Prima show, which we had to write, we sat down in February, went to Louis' house, took of my shoes, because he had this shag rug on the floor, and we sat down and planned out his whole show.

01:16:53

PATTERSON:

Yeah, this was the '40 --

01:16:55

FREEMAN:

No, this is the second show.

01:16:56

PATTERSON:

But was was the name of the first --

01:16:57

FREEMAN:

The Roaring

01:17:00

PATTERSON:

The Roaring '40s, and then this show was called --

01:17:21

FREEMAN:

I don't know, but the main focus of the show was on the production that we wrote; it was the Shadrack Production. And Keely hadn't planned to come back for the second show, and they showed her the script and she liked it, and so she came back and did the second show.

01:17:23

PATTERSON:

So there's a lot of vocals in that then.

01:17:46

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. And a whole lot of banter back and forth. And like I said, the people who work behind the scenes in Vegas, they really are the ones who hawk the best shows and where to go.

01:17:49

PATTERSON:

So you had good turnout then for that, for the Shadrack show.

01:17:50

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:17:55

PATTERSON:

And so at this point, Major Riddle was --

01:17:58

FREEMAN:

No, Major Riddle had nothing to do with this.

01:17:59

FREEMAN:

01:18:00

PATTERSON:

So this wasn't at the --

01:18:02

FREEMAN:

This is the Desert Inn, the second time we were at the Desert Inn.

01:18:10

PATTERSON:

I see. So was Louis Prima still standoffish with you throughout all this.

01:18:15

FREEMAN:

Not standoffish; he just ignored me.

01:18:17

PATTERSON:

How was he and Tommy?

01:19:01

FREEMAN:

Oh, like two peas in a pod. Tommy had a very rare gift of knowing how to handle these people. Did you do the show in Vegas with Danny [Kay]? Do you remember the time that Michael Foley -- you remember when everybody took turns going out and doing the high five when you brought the stool out? [Marca Poley] came out with the stool during the high five. He hit Danny Kay so hard that he peed his pants.
(Laughter)

01:19:06

PATTERSON:

How in the world did that happen?

01:20:53

FREEMAN:

Michael was -- he had a couple of screws loose anyway. And Danny Kay was so mad -- I remember Herb Bonus coming down and saying, "Oh, you're all going to get it now." Tommy got you all out of there fast. He got you out of there. And so Danny Kay's in his dressing room taking off his makeup; Tommy comes in there and sits down next to him, and starts fooling around with Danny Kay's powder, and he puts some on his face, and he says, "This stuff don't work on me." And Danny Kay says, "You son of a bitch." He had (inaudible). So we came to work the next night and everything was fine. One time on the stage with Louis Prima, because he and Keely were -- they were having a lot of issues going on at that time, because she was divorcing him. And he came in on stage, and he was so mad, and he started railing at a customer. And you don't do that to customers. So Tommy -- like he was in the middle of the stage, and we're over on the side, and Tommy says, "Hey, man, what's wrong? Did you hurt your home?" "Did I hurt my home? What's he talking about?"

01:20:56

PATTERSON:

Is that to like turn the attention away from the whole -- yeah?

01:21:07

FREEMAN:

Oh, he was good at doing things; he could do things like that. He could handle those guys. And it was amazing, it was amazing to me; I just watched him manipulate.

01:21:12

PATTERSON:

And that would save the day, I suppose. It would save the day and keep the show going.

01:21:30

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. Because I'm telling you, it was terrible. But the minute he says, "Did you hurt your home?" and he had his trumpet in his hand -- and you could see the wheels turning in his head -- "What's he talking about, hurting my home?"

01:21:42

PATTERSON:

And see, those are kinds of things I imagine that the head of the venue is glad for too, when the show disturbances happen, it can take away from --

01:22:02

FREEMAN:

Yeah, Desert Inn was so prejudiced that one day I saw a black man in the audience; I said, "Who in the _____ is that?" It was Rafer Johnson. So I said, "Well, now I know; they'll let celebrities in -- maybe."

01:22:07

PATTERSON:

Did you ever have conversations about the racist environment when you were in it, with any of the venue owners, or --

01:22:10

FREEMAN:

Oh, no.

01:22:10

PATTERSON:

They wouldn't talk about it.

01:22:19

FREEMAN:

Well, yeah, what was to talk about? They ran the place the way they wanted to run it. It was their place.

01:22:30

PATTERSON:

It's like sort of the 800-pound gorilla in the room, when you're being treated less than equal. But it was just so normal that it wasn't talked about?

01:22:40

FREEMAN:

It wasn't normal, but you knew it was there. It is what it is; you deal with it.

01:22:42

PATTERSON:

Did it ever make you angry?

01:23:01

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah, lots of times. I know we worked in a place -- I think it was Dayton, Ohio -- and when we came in, the man told us he didn't want us fraternizing with the customers. So we finished the set; we'd go in the back. Next thing we know, everybody from the front is coming in the back. We couldn't get away from them.

01:23:17

PATTERSON:

You can't hold it back. But you saw the change from the -- before the Civil Rights era made integration legal, and after.

01:23:19

FREEMAN:

It was slow. Yeah, it was slow.

01:23:21

PATTERSON:

But it was more gradual, it wasn't all of the sudden --

01:24:05

FREEMAN:

No. There were hotels in Las Vegas, like the Sands, that everybody could go to. I know one time -- somebody was throwing a big party at the Sahara -- you know what it is, right at the corner of Sierra and Las Vegas Boulevard. And Tommy called the management, and said, "We've been invited to this birthday party at the Sahara, and I want to make sure that we are welcome to come there." And the man said, "Well, come on in, I know you." But see -- so I don't know whether that applied to everybody or not.

01:24:13

PATTERSON:

Yeah. What about in Los Angeles? Did you feel much racism in the environments here, the professional environments here?

01:25:08

FREEMAN:

Yeah. New York was much more open. Much more open. Because you could get -- like you'd go to the musicians' union, and they would tell you what agent you could get who would give you work. And you could just start work anyplace. We worked at Café Society a couple of times, and we worked at a huge club in Brooklyn called Town and Country. And we worked at a beautiful club in Brooklyn called Club Elegante. But coming out here, I went to the union, and they practically laughed at me, because I wanted an agent who could put me in some of the Hollywood spots? Oh, shoot. Like I was asking for the moon.

01:25:15

PATTERSON:

Well, Nat Cole was working some of those spots. Had he started working them before that?

01:25:16

FREEMAN:

Could have been.

01:25:20

PATTERSON:

But it was still just only a few, only rare.

01:25:33

FREEMAN:

Yeah. I didn't feel the same attitude as they had in New York, but I think they had been integrated much longer in New York. Integration at that time was still very new.

01:25:37

PATTERSON:

What were some of the clubs that you would like to have worked in (inaudible) .

01:25:42

FREEMAN:

Well, they had a lot of little supper clubs in Hollywood.

01:25:47

PATTERSON:

Was it Ciro's, a good club you were working at them?

01:25:47

FREEMAN:

Well, we did work at Ciro's.

01:25:49

PATTERSON:

Yeah, I thought you mentioned Ciro's.

01:27:12

FREEMAN:

But that was because we knew Frank [Sentus]. When we finished up the second show with Puis Prima, we -- all of us, Louis Prima, and Sam Butera, and the Witnesses, and Tommy and me, we all came over to Ciro's and put on a show. And so they asked us to put some musicians together, which we did, and we had a drummer who had worked with Treniers, and he had a whole set of what they call pancake drums, just little shells. And he'd play so hard, he had to have buffalo skins so he wouldn't break the drums. Louis and Sam, they were so freaked out over these drums -- they were funny. Louis packed up his horn and went home, and that's how we started working at Ciro's, with the band. And it was my band.

01:27:20

PATTERSON:

How was that? Now, that's an LA environment, and the crowd was mixed, or mostly white?

01:27:22

FREEMAN:

Mostly white.

01:27:27

PATTERSON:

And you were playing jazz?

01:27:39

FREEMAN:

We were playing some of everything. And at the twist has just come in.

01:27:43

PATTERSON:

So this was the '60s, the early '60s.

01:27:43

FREEMAN:

Yeah, early '60s.

01:27:46

PATTERSON:

Yeah. So you played some of that?

01:27:49

FREEMAN:

Oh, we played a lot of twist music.

01:27:51

PATTERSON:

Was there a dance floor where they were dancing?

01:28:23

FREEMAN:

Yeah, the same floor that they put the shows on, where people like Soupy Sales were in almost every night. One of the most famous horse jockeys -- Shoemaker. He came in like two, three times a week. His wife was a big, tall woman.

01:28:26

PATTERSON:

Who else used to come out to see the show?

01:28:56

FREEMAN:

Well, when we played for dancing, Tommy kept those so entertained. He would get one of those huge napkins, huge dinner napkins, and he'd throw all -- he'd throw out them, and they stood all around the place, and his famous phrase was, "Keep your motor running." I even heard that phrase on some television shows, "Keep your motor running."

01:29:02

PATTERSON:

So he was influencing people in all kinds of ways.

01:29:22

FREEMAN:

And he was such a good MC, he had those people going. And they were having so much fun, and Lisa came out one Sunday, and she wanted to know when was the show going to start. (Laughter)

01:29:25

PATTERSON:

It was just so natural, the merrymaking.

01:29:59

FREEMAN:

Yeah. When was the show going to start? And people would come and ask for requests, and now we had one white fellow, [Charley Blair], and they would naturally go and ask him because they thought he was the leader. He would have to point to me. I think he stayed because he was having too much fun, and getting paid for it, because there was something going on all the time.

01:30:04

PATTERSON:

So what was the performers' organization? I mean, how many pieces did you have --

01:30:05

FREEMAN:

(Inaudible) four--piece.

01:30:08

PATTERSON:

So there was a trumpet player --

01:30:09

FREEMAN:

And a saxophone player.

01:30:13

PATTERSON:

And then you, and --

01:30:14

FREEMAN:

And the drums.

01:30:17

PATTERSON:

And then Tommy would sing.

01:30:45

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Well, he was mostly clowning, keeping stuff going. But you see, what I did was, now that had orchestras there, nine, ten pieces, orchestra. And I made that four-pieces sound like a whole orchestra; that's how I arranged music, so that the trumpets on the top, the saxophone's on the bottom. And I would fill in the middle.

01:30:49

PATTERSON:

Were you on piano or organ?

01:30:48

FREEMAN:

Organ, yeah.

PATTERSON:

That organ then was pretty handy, and cut down on the parts you had to have for a fat sound.

Session 3 (May 4, 2007)

PATTERSON:

Well, how are we doing? Are we ready?

00:00:05

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Where are we going from?

00:00:05

MONTENEGRO:

Yes, we are recording.

00:00:24

PATTERSON:

Well, I think that we can start moving into actually how the Exciting Voices became the Young Saints, or if that really has -- can I slate it? OK, we're March 4 -- are we March 4? March 4, 2007, with Evelyn Freeman Roberts.

00:00:28

FREEMAN:

Where'd I put my water?

00:00:28

PATTERSON:

What are you looking for?

00:00:32

MONTENEGRO:

Oh, I moved it, because it was right behind your head in picture. It's right behind -- here, I'm going to get it.

00:00:34

FREEMAN:

Oh, I see it.

00:00:38

MONTENEGRO:

I got it. I can get it for you.

00:00:38

FREEMAN:

OK.

00:00:51

MONTENEGRO:

I'm sorry about that; I didn't realize it was the water you were drinking. But it was like right here, so it was in the frame, right next to your face.

00:01:23

PATTERSON:

I thought we would start with how the Young Saints -- the Young Saints were such a major organization in your professional life, in yours and all the people who participated it and Los Angeles. And so I thought we would talk about how it actually became Young Saints from -- you said that you were working with an ensemble that you called the Exciting Voices. Is that how the Young Saints came to be?

00:01:25

FREEMAN:

No.

00:01:26

PATTERSON:

OK.

00:02:51

FREEMAN:

No, these are all older people; they were remnants left over from Wings Over Jordan. And when we came out here, they had settled out here and were working out here, and

none of them were singing. And we were in the studio all the time, and there were always white voices that were doing the background work. And so we got them together, and I had to give them some training, because they had no formal training. And when we did "Didn't It Rain?", a small record company called Bel Canto -- that was when stereo was just coming out, and they wanted to go to the stereo convention in Chicago and have something that was going to really stand out in the convention. So we went in the studio with three musicians, myself, and the Exciting Voices, and we saw a guitar player that we knew, Rene Hall at Capitol, and we got him. So we had four musicians, and we did "Didn't It Rain?" and a couple of other songs. But anyway, they took it to the stereo convention, and it blew out the convention. So then we came back and did the whole album.

00:03:02

PATTERSON:

So you had this sort of -- and I supposed the outgrowth of taking an ensemble to Las Vegas and doing all that was sort of the continuation of the Exciting Voices.

00:03:15

FREEMAN:

Well, we went to -- the Exciting Voices went to Las Vegas first. But Tommy had been working with kids all along; we started with our church there at Cloverdale and Adams.

00:03:19

PATTERSON:

What church was that?

00:03:40

FREEMAN:

Terrible, I can't even remember the name of it. And we were there for years, all the kids went there. It's a Methodist church, the corner of Cloverdale. Anyway, we started with kids' individual, and pretty soon there was too many to work with individually, started bringing them in in a group. And that's how they started.

00:03:48

PATTERSON:

That's how the Young Saints started. So how did you happen to start calling it the Young Saints?

00:03:51

FREEMAN:

That was Tommy's idea.

00:04:00

PATTERSON:

So gradually, these individual students, he would just call them and say, "Well, why don't you just all come together to," -- wherever, where were you working with that? At your apartment, or --

00:04:02

FREEMAN:

No, Right in the back there.

00:04:09

PATTERSON:

Right here. And so now you're at Wellington Road. So where were you -- I remember you mentioned an apartment, before you were here.

00:04:12

FREEMAN:

Oh, that was when we first came out here.

00:04:14

PATTERSON:

And then you moved to Wellington Rd. when?

00:04:16

FREEMAN:

1959.

00:04:21

PATTERSON:

1959, you moved here. And you had a space in the back that --

00:04:24

FREEMAN:

We had a three-car garage.

00:04:30

PATTERSON:

And so you began to ask these individual students, because you were also working with students, vocal people.

00:04:31

FREEMAN:

No, I wasn't.

00:04:33

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. I thought you were giving vocal lessons, you mentioned.

00:04:37

FREEMAN:

I was, but these were professionals.

00:04:40

PATTERSON:

I see. So that was a different activity altogether.

00:05:02

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. These were people who were already singing and working, and I did a lot of (inaudible). But these were all professionals. And I also worked with musicians, with -
- because I taught harmony and theory.

00:05:12

PATTERSON:

So that was a separate activity from -- I guess the pool of students that became the Young Saints came from the church activity?

00:05:16

FREEMAN:

No, actually, they came from all the different high schools.

00:05:19

PATTERSON:

How did he --

00:05:19

FREEMAN:

Word of mouth.

00:05:21

PATTERSON:

Word of mouth.

00:05:30

FREEMAN:

Somebody was telling me -- somebody said, "We got to go over the Wellington Road; I got a singing group going on over there."

00:05:36

PATTERSON:

And Tommy just decided, as that began to grow, that he would call them the Young Saints.

00:05:42

FREEMAN:

He said there's no such thing as a bad kid; they're all good kids.

00:05:46

PATTERSON:

So he must have had a way with the kids, too.

00:05:48

FREEMAN:

Well, you should know. (Laughter)

00:06:04

PATTERSON:

Yeah. But I mean in the beginning, right from the start, to build it. Because when I came in, it was already flourishing. And where all would they initially come from? You said the church, some came from the church --

00:06:16

FREEMAN:

When we started working here, I don't think we ever got any from the church. But these are all kids who wanted to sing, wanted to dance, wanted to write music.

00:06:19

PATTERSON:

And word of mouth brought them in.

00:06:26

FREEMAN:

But music was the unifying factor. Everybody wanted to do music.

00:06:38

PATTERSON:

So how did Tommy -- how did he decide what he was going to teach and how he was going to teach it, and put everything on a schedule, and really get it organized? Did he just come up with what he wanted to do, and just let the kids --?

00:06:40

FREEMAN:

I guess so.

00:06:42

PATTERSON:

So you weren't involved at first.

00:06:48

FREEMAN:

No, not at first. I came in, Lisa and me both, we came in later.

00:06:51

PATTERSON:

So your daughter Lisa wasn't involved right away either.

00:07:04

FREEMAN:

No. Kathy and Ynez were in the group before Lisa was. But we did a big concert over at the Wilshire Ebell Theatre; that's what -- after that, she joined the group.

00:07:34

PATTERSON:

So the Young Saints did a concert over at the Wilshire Ebell. OK, so by then they were doing pretty well; they had pulled it together where they were professional enough to really start working. So what would Tommy -- what was his process? He would call them -- they were schoolkids, a lot of them, so they would come over in the evening initially, right from the start, so it wasn't a weekend thing, from the very beginning. Now what year was this when he actually started the Young Saints?

00:07:45

FREEMAN:

It would have be in the early '60s. Yeah, it would have to be in the early '60s.

00:07:49

PATTERSON:

And it would be in the evenings, one day a week, or --?

00:07:52

FREEMAN:

No, they were here every day.

00:07:55

PATTERSON:

Every day, they were coming.

00:07:58

FREEMAN:

They were just having so much fun.

00:08:08

PATTERSON:

And what did you think of it as this started to happen, here at -- in your home environment really. What -- how did you feel about that?

00:08:15

FREEMAN:

I really don't know if I had any -- I probably was rather ambivalent about it.

00:08:29

PATTERSON:

Yeah. So it didn't disrupt your family life or anything of that? You're used to music and dance being part of your world, so --

00:08:33

FREEMAN:

Yeah. It was just something else added.

00:08:40

PATTERSON:

So what did Tommy actually start -- how did he start bringing it into a professional arena?

00:08:43

FREEMAN:

Well, we started performing all around the town.

00:08:47

PATTERSON:

So you decided -- did he ask you to come in and be involved?

00:08:52

FREEMAN:

Well, I tried to stay out of it, but I got sucked in. (laughter)

00:08:55

PATTERSON:

You got sucked in. (laughter) so reluctantly then?

00:08:59

FREEMAN:

Yeah, because I was doing other things; I was doing a lot of recording.

00:09:01

PATTERSON:

But Tommy wanted you to be involved.

00:09:08

FREEMAN:

Yeah, I got sucked in. I lost a lot of recording days.

00:09:14

PATTERSON:

Fooling around with the Young Saints. But he -- so you would say it was out of Tommy's passion to help the kids get it together.

00:09:20

FREEMAN:

Yeah, he was the motivating figure behind the whole thing.

00:09:22

PATTERSON:

So the Wilshire Ebell, you would say, was one of the first --?

00:09:26

FREEMAN:

That was one of the first big concerts the Young Saints did.

00:09:30

PATTERSON:

How many Young Saints were working with that?

00:10:18

FREEMAN:

Oh, we had a bunch of kids on that stage, and a huge orchestra. As a matter of fact, I got a thing right here, and I could tell you exactly who took part, show you the caliber of musicians we had. We had a number of -- Maynard Ferguson, does that name ring a bell with you? We had Shelly Mann, and all the greats, like Buddy Collette, and Bill

Green -- you just name them, we had a whole cadre. And then we had my brother Ernie, and it was something.

00:10:26

PATTERSON:

So you put the band together for the Young Saints to perform. Was it exclusively for the Young Saints to perform, or were there other performers that they were playing for?

00:10:47

FREEMAN:

No, it was just the Young Saints. And we did a whole -- we did a whole bunch of stuff. I had to do all the arranging, and we did a whole medley of show tunes, like from South Pacific.

00:10:51

PATTERSON:

And this was just kids from everywhere and nowhere. I mean, no professionals; they were just kids from --

00:10:55

FREEMAN:

No, they were just from the various high schools.

00:11:14

PATTERSON:

And you trained them to be able to perform this caliber of show with these professionals, and pulled it off. What would you attribute that success, that -- how did they --

00:11:24

FREEMAN:

They were eager to learn. And I had to teach them solfeggio first, so that they could read the music. You know what solfeggio is? Sight-singing.

00:11:29

PATTERSON:

And so they caught on pretty well, most of them?

00:11:36

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. And you know, nobody was ever asked to leave; they just kind of washed themselves out.

00:11:47

PATTERSON:

If they couldn't hang in there with what was required. So you were teaching ear training and sight singing, and also movement.

00:11:55

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And then he had professional people come in and give them some instruction also.

00:12:14

PATTERSON:

So they were actually developing in the early '60s as a professional group, and then went from there, from the Wilshire Ebell, to other professional jobs. So what came next after that? That was really the opening. Now was Lisa involved?

00:12:17

FREEMAN:

Lisa didn't do the program, the concert at the Wilshire Ebell.

00:12:20

PATTERSON:

Did she help train?

00:13:16

FREEMAN:

She wasn't even involved. But it was after that big program, and it was a huge program, that she wanted to be a part of it. And she also -- let's see, what happened

after that? We went to a little program that they gave out in Watts, and Leon Sullivan, Dr. Leon Sullivan, he was a part of OIC, and I don't -- something industrial something or other. But it was a big deal. And Lena Horne was there, and you know, I remember, you never turn down one of these things, because you never know who's going to be there.

00:13:18

PATTERSON:

Now, what was this, this was a show that you were --

00:13:23

FREEMAN:

This was a program we went to.

00:13:23

PATTERSON:

You were performing at.

00:13:50

FREEMAN:

And performing there. And in the audience, it looked like we were in somebody's garage or something, (inaudible) it wasn't a big to-do. But there was an agent from one of the big talent agencies. And when he saw them perform, he got excited and brought us into this agency.

00:13:51

PATTERSON:

What agency was it? Do you remember?

00:13:58

FREEMAN:

I'm trying to think of the name of it now. It eludes me.

00:14:02

PATTERSON:

So he decided that he would like to work with the Young Saints.

00:14:14

FREEMAN:

And at the agency, they couldn't get over -- "Where in the world did you find this group?" And that's how we did the Jonathan Winters Show.

00:14:22

PATTERSON:

So he hooked that up, this agent. He hooked up the Jonathan Winters Show with Tommy, and he decided that you should start doing television at CBS.

00:14:43

FREEMAN:

Well, the Jonathan Winters Show was looking for something, because they had done the first season, and they were on the way out. We did the last two shows of the season.

00:15:05

PATTERSON:

And so what was the preparation for that like? Because he working with students that weren't -- still were getting used to the idea of being professional, where were some of the challenges? It was just these, these high school kids that had never been professional, didn't have the background, say that Lisa did; she was from a professional family. Was it like pulling teeth? (Laughter)

00:15:23

FREEMAN:

No, not really. We had some problems. On one show, some of the fellows -- Roger was one of them -- some of the fellows didn't want to shave their facial hair. (Laughter)

00:15:22

PATTERSON:

They didn't want to shave.

00:15:39

FREEMAN:

They didn't want to get this -- because you know, you go to the makeup; they do all that stuff for you. And they got an ultimatum; either you do or you don't be on the show. And immediately, Tommy started replacing them with other people. They all came around.

00:15:44

PATTERSON:

They didn't not want to do the same.

00:15:49

FREEMAN:

No, they did not want that to happen; they didn't want to be put off the show.

00:15:52

PATTERSON:

But professionally, they were able to make the grade enough.

00:15:54

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:16:01

PATTERSON:

And so the rehearsals, I'm sure, got strenuous, and they had to do the professional schedule and all of that.

00:16:20

FREEMAN:

Oh, it wasn't that bad. We just went in, and we were all -- listen, our productions were already prepared, and all the studio had to do was to make sure of the blocking, and put the costumes on them. That's all they had to do.

00:16:31

PATTERSON:

So here we are, these young kids with no professional background, suddenly on a major network television show.

00:16:59

FREEMAN:

We got -- that first year we did, we got more letters coming in than any other single group in CBS history. Now CBS didn't tell me that, but I got that from Abby -- what was her name? -- I was about to say Abby Lincoln, but it wasn't Abby Lincoln. She was one of the people on the show, along with the guy that played Festus on --

00:17:00

PATTERSON:

The Addams Family?

00:17:02

FREEMAN:

No, no, no.

00:17:04

PATTERSON:

I mean -- Festus. I'm thinking Uncle Fester.

00:17:40

FREEMAN:

Festus, he played Festus on -- come on, brain. But anyway, she was the one who told me, because it was such a big deal. People were writing letters on wrapping paper. It just flooded CBS. And the gist of the whole thing was that they were so glad to see young, bright, shining faces; they were so tired of these long-haired pill-pushers. (Laughter)

00:17:45

PATTERSON:

So yeah, that had to be a real novelty. And here, they're mostly African-American kids, right?

00:17:48

FREEMAN:

Yeah, mostly. I would say 90%.

00:18:01

PATTERSON:

90% African-American kids, just from high schools with no background, and yet they were telegraphing success in their faces. Wow. That had to be an anomaly for the --

00:18:04

FREEMAN:

Well, you were there. How did you feel (inaudible)?

00:18:31

PATTERSON:

Well, but this has got to be from your perspective, because being a little kid, you don't know what's really going on behind the scenes. There had to be this CBS corporate perspective on what that show was, and what all these little African-American kids meant to a professional show. And it had to be strange, an anomaly, something very different for them.

00:18:44

FREEMAN:

Yeah, I guess it was. Anyway, the show got picked up for the next season, but I personally had a problem with the orchestra conductor.

00:18:45

PATTERSON:

How so?

00:19:22

FREEMAN:

He wanted his arranger to do the arranging. And I got to thinking about that thing; I still had to lay out the arrangement. Why would I do that for somebody else to get paid for doing what I'd already done? So I refused; I did the arranging myself, and we had a running feud going on. That man had me so up in the air that I was -- he had me to tears. And the musicians, they rallied around.

00:19:24

PATTERSON:

As usual, the musicians always supported you.

00:20:07

FREEMAN:

The musicians rallied. Pete Condole, who's a famous trumpet player; he was with Woody Herman. And he's well-known and well-liked. And he came to me, and he said, "Don't you worry about a thing." He said, "You're one of us." And that was a big boost. But still, that was a big cloud over what we were doing. And so we started next season, did the first two shows, and he was able to get us out of there. And it got cancelled.

00:20:25

PATTERSON:

The show got cancelled. So they're getting that recurring problem of these musicians

and these conductors in position of so-called power that did not want you to have a place in their world.

00:20:42

FREEMAN:

And you know, the funny thing is, we were so happy to be on that show, they didn't pay us a thing for -- we didn't get any kind of money for having these kids all ready, the production's all set; all they had to do was jump on the stage.

00:20:45

PATTERSON:

Do you think that had anything to do with race?

00:21:28

FREEMAN:

Probably. And the fact that we didn't demand anything. I just demanded that I was going to do the arranging; that was my demand. And I got in trouble for it. As a matter of fact, remember when we did -- the group of spiritualists -- Motherless Child and that group of spiritualist? Well, we had a fantastic opening; I had the violins playing enharmonic, which is very high. (Inaudible). And to show you how ignorant the conductor was, he says, "Violins can't play this."

00:21:29

PATTERSON:

And they played it.

00:21:35

FREEMAN:

Of course, enharmonics.

00:21:36

PATTERSON:

So that made him even madder, probably.

00:21:39

FREEMAN:

Oh, (inaudible). He was already made.

00:21:51

PATTERSON:

He was already mad enough. So there was the issue that you didn't really get compensated like obviously you deserved to be, bringing them --

00:21:55

FREEMAN:

No, we didn't get any compensation. The only thing was, I got paid for the arrangement.

00:22:00

PATTERSON:

Why was there no compensation?

00:22:07

FREEMAN:

Because we didn't ask for it. And if we had, we probably wouldn't have gotten hired.

00:22:11

PATTERSON:

So they got free filler for their show.

00:22:18

FREEMAN:

Yes, they did. Of course, the kids, you had to join (inaudible).

00:22:26

PATTERSON:

So how did Tommy feel about dealing with this level of corporate red tape?

00:22:28

FREEMAN:

Oh, he took it in stride.

00:22:34

PATTERSON:

He took it in stride. He didn't feel the same kind of pressures -- I mean, because you had the pressures on the musical end; he didn't have any pressures on his end?

00:23:00

FREEMAN:

I don't think so. Not at that time. I know, if it had been a white group going in, the producers of that white group would have been paid. Because these kids were production-ready. CBS didn't have to rehearse with them; all they did was go in, and (inaudible) the blocking and the staging.

00:23:01

PATTERSON:

So actually, in a way, they exploited --

00:23:04

FREEMAN:

Yes, they did.

00:23:20

PATTERSON:

(Laughter) -- The Young Saints. But Tommy took things in stride and kept going forward. And the training for the Young Saints was invaluable for them, so everybody just kept moving, and staying encouraged.

00:23:23

FREEMAN:

What else are you going to do?

00:23:26

PATTERSON:

Some people yell and scream, and it undermines what --

00:23:38

FREEMAN:

(Inaudible) said, "If I got mad every time somebody did me, I would never produce anything." You can't be creative and carry a chip on your shoulder."

00:23:40

PATTERSON:

But racism has to be hard to deal with, especially when --

00:23:43

FREEMAN:

It is. It's always hard to deal with.

00:23:50

PATTERSON:

Yeah. So what happened after that, after the Jonathan Winters show? It got cancelled; meanwhile, the Young Saints are rehearsing all the time, as usual.

00:24:08

FREEMAN:

Well, then we got a chance to do the -- what's his name -- the man who played Matlock. Do you know who I'm talking about?

00:24:11

PATTERSON:

Mm-mm.

00:24:16

FREEMAN:

Well, anyway, he had this big special.

00:24:19

PATTERSON:

This is another CBS studio?

00:24:43

FREEMAN:

I think it was. Either CBS or NBC. And -- oh, and we did -- oh, and we went to Tahoe, with the -- or Reno, with Eddie Albert. And at that time, they had a strike going on. I think it was a musician's strike.

00:24:45

PATTERSON:

In Reno?

00:24:45

FREEMAN:

No.

00:24:47

PATTERSON:

Here in LA?

00:25:25

FREEMAN:

No, nationwide. And they had to call off doing this big special until that was settled. Though -- but they had us on hold, and we couldn't do the first Eddie Albert show; we missed out on the first Eddie Albert show, we did it later, after they had signed the contracts and everything. So we were kind of miffed about that, because they weren't doing anything, and we could have done that show.

00:25:30

PATTERSON:

But would you have had musicians to work with if they were on strike?

00:25:51

FREEMAN:

Well, that wasn't the problem. They had us on hold, and since everybody was going to do the show anyway, we could have done the Eddie Albert show. So then they changed their minds on what they were going to do. And they called Tommy to ask him if we'd be bought out. Tommy said, "No way."

00:25:54

PATTERSON:

Because there was a contract?

00:26:07

FREEMAN:

Not contract, but they had kept us from working from other shows, and then they're going to say, "Well, we're not doing that anymore, so we don't need to."

00:26:08

PATTERSON:

Well, how did you push it through if you weren't contracted to do it?

00:26:10

FREEMAN:

Yeah, we were contracted to do it.

00:26:12

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. So they couldn't push you out.

00:28:01

FREEMAN:

Yeah, they couldn't. So now all these singers had been working on this music for weeks. And -- I can't think of his first name; his last name was Brown. He did a lot of writing, writing for television. And as usual, it was written so hard that you had the top sopranos screaming their lungs out on high C, the tenor screaming their lungs out on the high C, and the bassist down on the bottom C, and so I completely arranged the vocals apart to make it comfortable. You were the only one who could sing the top C, and Anthony was the only one who could sing the tenor, and we had Seagraves who could sing the bass. But kicker was, when they finally sent us a vinyl, they had everything on -- the orchestra music on it. As a matter of fact, they even called Tommy to find a studio to record everything. He arranged for them to do it at a big studio over on La Brea and Sunset, I think it was, to do the pre-recording. Anyway, we got this disc with the music on it, and copies of the music. I had to figure out

where the music came in. I had to figure all that stuff out, because I had no indication on the music. Nothing in the music.

00:28:03

PATTERSON:

So you had to figure out all the logistics of how to get it --

00:29:28

FREEMAN:

I had to figure out everything, besides rewrite the whole thing to make it come from another singer. So what we finally got to go ahead and prerecord with the orchestra -- we went in as a group. And as we came in -- I think every professional singer in Los Angeles was there, and I recognized some of them. They're the ones that made all of the money, all the commercials and jingles. And they said, "Oh, here comes the Young Saints. They're going to show us how it's done." Now, they've been doing this music for weeks, and we had like two weeks. And we finally got it. So they start clearing off the piano; they had the coats and things on the piano, the grand piano downstairs; they start clearing the coats and stuff off the piano. And I said, "We don't need your piano; we're going to do it a cappella." And you could see their mouths drop completely. And I gave them -- I gave the guys the pitch, and we started. And then everybody else got (inaudible) with the music, come join us, what we were doing. It was funny. It was funny.

00:29:58

PATTERSON:

And you know, that's pretty found, actually. Here are these professionals that are acclaimed for what they do, and getting paid good money for what they do. And then here's a youth organization who's doing it out of just love of doing it, and being well-trained and having dedicated themselves, and just does the hard work and had excellence to compare with these professionals. Wow, Evelyn.

00:30:22

FREEMAN:

Maybe I shouldn't put this on camera, but it was funny. Tommy was upstairs with the orchestra, and he comes flying down the steps; he said, "It's all over the building. Niggers are down there singing a cappella." It went through the building like wildfire.

00:30:25

PATTERSON:

Couldn't believe it was going on.

00:30:59

FREEMAN:

So when we got in the studio, I went around and I told all you guys; I said, "Now, we're going to improve ourselves so you guys don't have to work so hard. Just take it easy; don't overexert yourselves." We let those other guys scream their lungs out. And when we finished those up, there was another song still left; I think it was "Rock of Ages." We wound up doing it by ourselves. Those other guys were so tired, they went home.

00:31:02

PATTERSON:

There were some good bass voices, too, on that. The bass part was great.

00:31:07

FREEMAN:

Yes. That was one funny experience.

00:31:11

PATTERSON:

Just tore up the studio; everybody couldn't believe it.

00:31:19

FREEMAN:

Yeah, because everybody just knew this was the hardest music, but they didn't know that I had rearranged it to (inaudible).

00:31:22

PATTERSON:

And it was well rehearsed and ready go.

00:31:46

FREEMAN:

Yeah. But we only had it for about two weeks. And as a matter of fact I had to cue the director where things had to come in, because by the time I knew where everything was on the disc, I had to figure it out, and I had to cue the director where things were coming in. I don't know if I really knew myself.

00:31:47

PATTERSON:

What was going on? (Laughter)

00:32:08

FREEMAN:

And the director -- oh, I remember him, a big, huge guy named Donahue, big, red-faced Irish fellow. Oh, I sure did. So you guys -- you finished up the recording all by yourself; those other singers packed up and left. All by yourself; those other singers packed up and left.

00:32:12

PATTERSON:

So what happened with this recording? Where did it go from there?

00:34:31

FREEMAN:

Well, it was shown on the air. Yeah, it was a big to-do. As a matter of fact, one of the groups that was on -- Andy Griffith, that's what it was -- on this special for years, that was there whole -- that was what they were advertising, "Oh, we were on the Andy Griffith special." I said, (inaudible). Because after we did it -- I forgot about that -- I'm through with that. The next thing was the White House. We had a friend, actress, Ruth Warwick. I don't know that you've ever met her or not. She was -- her claim to fame was, she was in Citizen Kane with Orson Wells. She played Orson Wells wife. But she'd been involved in other movies too. And she had a relative, I think, that was in the banking commission or something. But anyway, she sent a team of us to the White House, and they had seen us on the television show. So we were booked for the state dinner of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor; that was the event of the season. So this was 1970. But we had to get there. So Tommy got a friend in the labor department,

and he got the Amalgamated Butchers and Meat Cutters Union -- they donated us a bus. Not much more than that. We were really on a shoestring. And my son, Ernest, went along; he was the road manager, and Roger was the bus manager. Boy, he had you guys getting off the bus and getting back on the bus; he had it timed to three minutes.

00:34:33

PATTERSON:

I didn't go; I wasn't on --

00:34:36

FREEMAN:

(Inaudible). Oh, boy.

00:34:39

PATTERSON:

I know Roger was the taskmaster.

00:34:49

FREEMAN:

Yeah, he was. He would rehearse kids getting on and off the bus. But that was a great show.

00:35:03

PATTERSON:

Yeah. Well, how did that -- who saw the Jonathan Winters show and made that connection with Tommy? How did that happen? Who actually booked it with Tommy? How did that come about?

00:35:50

FREEMAN:

That was kind of circumvented, I think; kind of roundabout -- probably through the back door. The staff at the White House, (inaudible) Jonathan Winters Show, Ruth, through her connection, got the tape shown. And we had a friend, Arnie Mills; he was instrumental; his wife had a store, and she outfitted the kids. That's where the red and whites came in. There was so much going on, I wasn't privy to everything that went on.

00:35:52

PATTERSON:

Well, Tommy had to be busy getting all that organized.

00:36:01

FREEMAN:

Well, he went to the agency and said, "Well, we're going to the White House;" they said, "Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah." And they looked up, and we were on the way.

00:36:05

PATTERSON:

Oh, then this agent that you had mentioned earlier --

00:36:09

FREEMAN:

That got us booked on the Jonathan Winters show.

00:36:13

PATTERSON:

Yeah. He was surprised that this had happened, because Tommy actually arranged it; this came through a different channel.

00:36:24

FREEMAN:

Came through an entirely different channel. This is Ruth Warwick. But of course, she had her agenda.

00:36:24

PATTERSON:

Which was?

00:37:19

FREEMAN:

She wanted to go to New York and have a legitimate reason for being in New York. Oh, she has an old campaign from way back. And while she was in New York, she went to see -- almost had it, his first name was (inaudible) -- he had been the head of

ABC out here, the entire ABC in New York. She had a talking purpose for -- so she went in so she wasn't just there, you understand what I'm saying? She just didn't go to New York (inaudible), she was there because she put the Young Saints in the White House. And from that meeting, she was -- she got to be on All My Children.

00:37:21

PATTERSON:

So it paid off for her.

00:37:30

FREEMAN:

Sure did, big time. And do you know, after she got that job, we never heard from her again. (Laughter)

00:37:32

PATTERSON:

It served its purpose.

00:39:17

FREEMAN:

It served its purpose. She used us and left, very well. But anyway, we made two stops; we stopped in Phoenix and did a concert, and then we went to Chicago, and we were supposed to perform (inaudible) for the Butchers and Meatcutters Union. We got there and those guys were fighting. I mean, the union was in an uproar. And Tommy said, "Let's get out of here." He dragged us all back up on the bus, and stopped in Cleveland. Well, we had a lot of friends and family and stuff in Cleveland; we got the kids off, and then we did -- Sunday morning we did a program for Antioch Baptist

Church. That was funny. So our next stop then was in Washington; we stayed at the Y, YMCA or YWCA, one of them Ys. Got everybody (inaudible). I ate so much McDonald's I haven't been back since. That's too much McDonald's for me. And we spent three days in the White House to get the kids acclimated. And we had them doing the Lazy S, going all around, everything, just to make sure that they would be attending. And he was worried about the sound in the East Room.

00:39:19

PATTERSON:

That's where the performance was going to be?

00:40:41

FREEMAN:

Yeah. It's a larger room, but they had windows all around the mirrors, all around the room, plus the hardwood floor. And you got a reverb from the sound; the sound was terrible. And one night, he woke up in the middle of the night, and figured out what he could do to baffle that sound. And he called this -- the guy who was (inaudible), his name was Rex -- in the middle of the night, and said, "I got it. I know what to do." And they went down to the basement and got a whole bunch of rugs and stuff, and they baffle all of the stands for the musicians. Now, we've got the Marine Band, but we also sent for our trumpet player and our drummer, so we wouldn't take no chances. Paul Humphrey was the drummer, and Micky McMillan was the trumpet player. And so by doing that, the horns played into the stands, not across the stands, and by playing into the stands, it baffled the sounds. And you know, people were calling in for months after that to find out what to do for the sound.

00:40:47

PATTERSON:

Because that room probably sounded better than any way it had sounded for a musical event.

00:41:05

FREEMAN:

Oh, yeah. I took everything pretty much in stride, driving -- the bus pulled up in front of the White House, and the -- what are those guys that protect the President?

00:41:06

PATTERSON:

Secret Service.

00:41:41

FREEMAN:

And they're jumping on the bus going through everybody's credentials and everything. That wasn't so bad, but I'll tell you, when I'm sitting there, we had the organ like this and the piano like this so I could play both of them -- I'm sitting there watching the most influential people in the United States coming in for this program. Now, I could have gone to the dinner, but you know, I figured, my job was not to eat. (Laughter)

00:41:44

PATTERSON:

Although you probably could have stood to have some different food other than McDonalds.

00:42:54

FREEMAN:

Yeah, but I had more important things, and I was not interested in going to the dinner. I could have; Tommy could have. But we all rested downstairs; they had a huge -- I wanted to say restroom, but it was more than that. And we all just lay down on the floor and rested until it was time to get dressed and do the show. But to sit there, on the stage, and watch -- here comes the President and the Duchess. Then comes the Duke and Mrs. President. Then comes the Secretary of State -- no, the Vice-President and his wife. Then the Secretary of State and his wife, and right on down like that. One of the ladies, one of the -- I think it was Henry Ford's wife had on an emerald as big as a quarter. And you'll see all these people and know these are some of the richest and most influential people. Now that, to me, was exciting.

00:42:56

PATTERSON:

How did the Young Saints respond?

00:42:59

FREEMAN:

Oh, they were great.

00:43:03

PATTERSON:

These young little kids, little black kids from LA.

00:44:34

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And they're little white skirts and red tops. And every time would do

something, the Duke would punch the President in his side like that; I know the President, his side must have been sore. So after we finished our part in the show, then Bobby Short came in. And Bobby Short thought that it was his gig, but actually, it was our gig, because Ruth was trying to find somebody that she could couple with us for the show, and she remembered that the Duke liked Bobby Short, because he was a fixture there that (inaudible). And we taught him the last number, but when the whole show was over, we were all supposed to go onstage and take pictures. Well, the Duchess and the First Lady went onstage, and they were trying to get the Duke to go onstage. He wouldn't go onstage; they had to come over and talk to me. And I'm still there, humming behind that organ and the piano; I hadn't gotten out from behind that yet. The President was trying to stop in, and apparently couldn't stop in. Had him by his coattails and he was still coming.

00:44:36

PATTERSON:

Wanted to come talk to you.

00:45:29

FREEMAN:

He had to talk to me. And he didn't have anything to say. And somebody said, "Oh, Evelyn, take that picture of him trying to stop the Duke," and I said, "They wouldn't dare." (Laughter) But anyway, he and the President both finally had to come up to where I was onstage. And it was (inaudible); he said, "Oh, that rhythm." He was just so excited. He said, "You know, I used to dance!" -- He was walking with a cane at that time. That was a funny sight. I tell you, I will never get that out of my head. So finally, I said, "Well, you know we all have to go on the stage, we're going to take pictures." And the Duke says, "Oh, oh, all right. All right." So then he -- all three of us go on the stage.

00:45:33

PATTERSON:

Him too.

00:45:57

FREEMAN:

All three of us together go on the stage. See, because I'm way over here, and the stage is over there. But I had to come down from where I was and then walk over to the stage. So the three of us walked to get on stage. And he was still talking; he was running around talking to the kids. So finally the Duchess says, "David, shut up. The President wants to talk."

00:45:59

PATTERSON:

(Laughter) You have a picture of that, don't you?

00:46:01

FREEMAN:

Yeah, all of us on the stage.

00:46:05

PATTERSON:

Yeah. Is it right up there? Should we get it?

00:46:08

MONTENEGRO:

(Inaudible)

00:46:09

PATTERSON:

Here it is.

00:46:12

MONTENEGRO:

Yeah, if you hold it up there, maybe it will work.

00:46:28

PATTERSON:

It has a little bit of glare to it. There's Bobby Short in the middle, Tommy, Ernie, and Evelyn standing right next to Bobby Short, right in the middle, looking beautiful.

00:46:31

FREEMAN:

That's right, I'm standing right next to the Duchess.

00:46:38

PATTERSON:

And there he is, the Duke, and the Nixons.

00:46:48

FREEMAN:

They look like little Dresden dolls. They're small people; they weren't too big at all. Small people.

00:47:07

PATTERSON:

Can you see it? Get it a little bit? Pat and Richard Nixon. Didn't Bobby Short play a lot -- I thought he was a New York-based musician.

00:47:11

FREEMAN:

Yes. I think it was at the Algonquin Hotel; I think he was there for years, when he died.

00:47:17

MONTENEGRO:

Karen, can you point out who is who with your finger? I think that would help?

00:47:17

PATTERSON:

OK. Pat Nixon, Richard Nixon.

00:47:21

MONTENEGRO:

Hold on, hold on, hold on. OK.

00:47:46

PATTERSON:

Pat Nixon, Richard Nixon, the Duke of Windsor, Bobby Short. Here's Evelyn Freeman Roberts, and here's the Duchess, Tommy Roberts, and their son Ernie. OK. Yeah, that's a great picture.

00:47:49

FREEMAN:

Those photographers were fast. Oh, they were terrific.

00:47:50

PATTERSON:

They were everywhere, and --

00:48:01

FREEMAN:

They were fast. Most times, you take a picture, and you have to wait for them to get their seconds right; those guys were --

00:48:04

PATTERSON:

They knew how to catch it.

00:48:12

FREEMAN:

Oh, they were fast. So we left New York -- mean, we left Washington, went to New York, and did the Ed Sullivan Show.

00:48:19

PATTERSON:

In New York. New York City. Now, that's -- was that CBS in New York?

00:48:21

FREEMAN:

Yes.

00:48:36

PATTERSON:

So the Young Saints are hanging in there. What were some of the things that

happened with them along the way? Did they -- did anybody get stage fright, or get sick and couldn't do it, or no discipline issues; everybody's department was smooth?

00:48:39

FREEMAN:

If there were, I didn't know anything about it.

00:48:43

PATTERSON:

Yeah. That's quite a trip for --

00:48:51

FREEMAN:

Yeah. But everything was so disciplined, and Roger and Ernie both, they ran a tight ship.

00:48:57

PATTERSON:

So you're in New York, and I'm sure it was the first time for a lot of the kids.

00:49:15

FREEMAN:

Oh, it was the first time they'd ever been out of the state. What, are you kidding? First

time they'd been out of Los Angeles. As a matter of fact, we had to get coats; (inaudible) gave us winter coats for the kids. Going east, you know, in February, you know it was cold.

00:49:23

PATTERSON:

They donated them to the Young Saints? Wow. There's a picture up there of the Young Saints in New York too. We should get that --

00:49:25

MONTENEGRO:

(Inaudible), looking pretty good.

00:49:26

FREEMAN:

00:49:38

PATTERSON:

Yeah. Though it says -- "From Watts to the White House," and I think -- do you see that one? No it's in color --

00:49:42

FREEMAN:

Oh, that's at the bus. That's not in New York; this is at the White House.

00:49:43

PATTERSON:

That is at the White House.

00:49:45

MONTENEGRO:

If you could hold it up there.

00:49:48

PATTERSON:

Sure. Oh, yeah, let's see that one.

00:49:51

FREEMAN:

Right in front of the White House.

00:50:02

PATTERSON:

From Watts to the White House. So these are all these LA kids who some hadn't ever been out of the city.

00:50:07

FREEMAN:

Oh, by the way, the President kind of gave us an off-hand introduction.

00:50:11

PATTERSON:

How do you mean?

00:50:26

FREEMAN:

He said, "Oh, we have a group of young people from Los Angeles; I don't know who they are, but here they are, the Young Saints." And I said, "You just wait." You just wait.

00:50:35

PATTERSON:

And that's huge. That's historical. These kids, and what was accomplished to get these kids there that were not professional.

00:50:56

FREEMAN:

And we had a terrific article from Marlene Simmons, who's a writer for the Times;

she was there at the dinner. And she wrote a two-page article on us. It was tremendous.

00:51:28

PATTERSON:

Now this is Evelyn on the far right, and Ernie standing here behind Tommy. This is Roger who was helping keep everybody disciplined and in line. And the White House in the background. I see the Ed Sullivan Show was on the side of the bus.

00:51:30

FREEMAN:

Well, that was just to announce it/

00:51:46

PATTERSON:

To announce what was coming, uh-huh. Oh, here's Lisa, Evelyn and Tommy's daughter Lisa.

00:51:49

FREEMAN:

Do you see Ynez?

00:51:58

PATTERSON:

I see Stephanie. I don't see Ynez; I see Kathy. I don't see Ynez.

00:51:58

FREEMAN:

She's on there.

00:52:13

PATTERSON:

Is this Ynez right in the middle? No. This is great.

00:52:16

MONTENEGRO:

Great picture.

00:52:24

PATTERSON:

So in New York, what time of the year was it? It must have been wintertime.

00:52:29

FREEMAN:

It was winter. That's when we had to get the coats.

00:52:35

PATTERSON:

And what was doing the Ed Sullivan Show in New York like for everyone?

00:52:58

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, we stayed at the Y in New York. And I was locked into my room trying to get the music ready for the Ed Sullivan Show. And I had already heard from my brother Ernie and from Rene Hall that they weren't nice to musicians coming from California.

00:52:59

PATTERSON:

Why wouldn't they be?

00:53:06

FREEMAN:

Rivalry, bias. You know, give you a hard time if you came from California.

00:53:17

PATTERSON:

So once again you're in this situation where you may have to go up against getting hard times from the leaders of the musicians.

00:54:14

FREEMAN:

So I went there with my music in my hand with trepidation, and the conductor was (inaudible) Sinatra. (Inaudible), his last name was Sinatra. And I went in there, went up to the podium, and all of the sudden I saw a hand doing one of these out of the orchestra, and it was a friend of mine, Hank Jones. Are you familiar with the name? And I had known him since my Cleveland days. And because I was a friend of Hank Jones, I got no problems out of the conductor. None whatsoever. And as a matter of fact, he and the bass player and the drummer took that break to look through my music to make sure that --

00:54:15

PATTERSON:

They wanted to support.

00:54:17

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

00:54:18

MONTENEGRO:

We're out of tape.

00:54:24

PATTERSON:

OK. I'm going to put another tape in.

00:54:26

FREEMAN:

(Inaudible) bathroom.

00:54:31

PATTERSON:

OK. You want to unplug -- it's right here

00:54:37

FREEMAN:

As a matter of fact, Thad Jones, Hank Jones' brother, played drums with --

00:54:43

PATTERSON:

Yeah, I couldn't place which was -- Thad played the trumpet, and Hank played piano.

00:54:48

FREEMAN:

Yeah, the little brother, Elvis --

00:54:53

PATTERSON:

Elvin Jones is a drummer.

00:55:18

FREEMAN:

Yeah. But Thad and Hank were in the orchestra. And Thad told me, he says, "You know, this is like a breath of fresh air." Because, you know, he says -- and I wanted to know why, and he says, "Well, the same arrangers arrange the music for all these celebrities that come on;" the same arrangers, so they get the same thing all the time.

00:55:23

PATTERSON:

So you had something fresh and different. We won't get that on tape.

00:55:25

MONTENEGRO:

Were you able to unplug? OK.

00:55:32

FREEMAN:

If you need to go to the bathroom, it's right this way.

00:55:35

PATTERSON:

I'm hungry.

00:55:38

MONTENEGRO:

I'm sleepy.

00:55:42

PATTERSON:

You're sleepy? I didn't sleep well at all last night.

00:55:46

MONTENEGRO:

This week has been (inaudible).

00:55:48

PATTERSON:

Well, it's a good thing you had some rest last weekend.

00:55:49

MONTENEGRO:

No, it just feels like it was a year ago.

00:55:51

PATTERSON:

It's gone.

00:55:56

MONTENEGRO:

What weekend? What? (Inaudible)

00:55:58

FREEMAN:

00:57:06

PATTERSON:

Really? Yeah, I've got so much stuff that I've been crazy too. I want to more simplify life at some point, where I can just really feel like I have the freedom to do things. (Inaudible) This is great. Tell me when you're ready. OK, this is the program for the show at the White House, in honor of their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, the Nixon White House, Saturday, April 4, 1970.

00:57:08

MONTENEGRO:

Is there a date?

00:57:16

PATTERSON:

Yeah. April 4, 1970. You want to see the (inaudible)?

00:57:26

MONTENEGRO:

And could you hold it up a little bit? It's too close.

00:58:27

PATTERSON:

Do you want -- how about this? That's a little light. I think it's kind of interesting just to mention the repertoire. The Young Saints sang a medley of [Shindabaloo] and I Know A Place, Feeling Good, Wade in the Water, A City Called Heaven, Land of 1,000 Dances, 23rd Psalm, St. Louis Blues, Duke Ellington medley, a medley of Didn't It Rain, Oh Happy Day, and Shout, Shout, I'm A Young Saint, and Oh, When Those Saints Go Marching In. And then with Bobby Short, Jump For Joy and Give Me A [Big Foot].

00:58:32

FREEMAN:

(Inaudible), Give Me a Big Foot and a Volunteer.

00:58:43

PATTERSON:

And the kids are singing, these teenagers. (Laughter) Yeah. How did he like working with Young Saints? You all had a rapport already? You knew him?

00:58:45

FREEMAN:

No.

00:58:46

PATTERSON:

You didn't know him before? How was it to work with him?

00:58:59

FREEMAN:

But I knew his father and his brother, and two nephews.

00:59:03

PATTERSON:

Oh, OK. Now how is it that they were here and he was in --?

00:59:09

FREEMAN:

They also came to the White House; oh, they had (inaudible) on and they had dinner.

00:59:30

PATTERSON:

Oh, so they traveled from LA to be there that night, because their brother was there performing. Were they musicians here in LA? So here we are, we're back at the Ed Sullivan Show, and you saw Hank Jones and Thad Jones, and they supported you, and

--

00:59:34

FREEMAN:

Yes, they did.

00:59:44

PATTERSON:

And worked through the music, helped you work through the music. And then the conductor was more amenable to working with you because they were friends of yours.

01:00:10

FREEMAN:

Yes. That had to be all the difference in the world. And then the conductor (inaudible)

compliment; I didn't know how to take. He says, "Oh, at last, here's an organ player than plays in time." And I was saying, "I'm not an organ player." (Laughter)

01:00:17

PATTERSON:

So he hadn't been used to working with an organ at all; you had the organ particularly for this repertoire, the Young Saints repertoire.

01:00:21

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Ed was playing piano.

01:00:28

PATTERSON:

Yeah. And so it was a pleasant experience, then, for a change, working with the conductor; at least, it wasn't a bad experience.

01:00:33

FREEMAN:

No, it wasn't. And it's all because Hank knew me.

01:00:34

PATTERSON:

So that was a pleasant surprise.

01:00:39

FREEMAN:

Yeah, it was.

01:00:42

PATTERSON:

How did Tommy like working with the Ed Sullivan Show?

01:00:56

FREEMAN:

We were so busy, you know. And when we finally did the whole thing, we just stood in the back. Our work was over. It was up to them then.

01:01:05

PATTERSON:

So Tommy did all the pre-work, and then the show staff took over and staged everything.

01:01:11

FREEMAN:

(Inaudible), that's all we do.

01:01:27

PATTERSON:

That must have been nice for them. "These kids are a breeze to work with." So after the Ed Sullivan Show, what happened? Was there any further activities in New York, or --

01:01:54

FREEMAN:

Well, after a gig was a big problem, because usually everybody had to (inaudible). And we had to pay, without money, for everybody to join AFTRA. That didn't even take into account the fact that we joined in Los Angeles. So that took a big chunk of us, and as a matter of fact, we ran out of money.

01:02:06

PATTERSON:

And still had a whole drive to do back to Los Angeles from New York, set back financially with this paying dues.

01:02:19

FREEMAN:

And then the guy who ran AFTRA here, he wasn't a member at all; as a matter of fact, he didn't think we should be there. We shouldn't be doing television.

01:02:26

PATTERSON:

Why? Another racist --?

01:03:01

FREEMAN:

I don't know. Race, or maybe he was (inaudible). We worked with Danny Kaye in Las Vegas, we did Las Vegas top and (inaudible). Remember when we did the show in Las Vegas, he made us get cashier's checks for all the fees. Now, that's a lot of expense. We couldn't pay them with our company check.

01:03:15

PATTERSON:

That's unusual too. Most companies pay with their company check. What was he -- he had some idea there was an exploitation going on?

01:03:31

FREEMAN:

I don't know. I don't know whether he was suspicious, or thinking we weren't going to get us right. His money got paid, didn't it? Actually, union prices are out of the market.

01:03:32

PATTERSON:

Yeah. I imagine that had to be tough.

01:03:42

FREEMAN:

It was very tough. They really priced us -- they cost so much, for our kids to be on the show, they could get a celebrity for a guest.

01:03:53

PATTERSON:

Had you ever considered at this point -- was the foundation in place, or being to receive donations for some of the things that the Young Saints needed?

01:04:40

FREEMAN:

1967, we incorporated. But that was the straw that broke the camel's back at the union. I was so mad with them I went through my (inaudible); I went through Tommy's (inaudible). I said I don't need to paying dues to this organization that's going to do us like that. And that's when Tommy decided -- he said, "If I can't get another way, I might -- if I can't sell it, I might as well give it away." He couldn't sell the group -- (inaudible). That's how we went over the Main and Gage and started the whole training program.

01:04:48

PATTERSON:

So -- but before that, backing up a little bit, there was another job, the Vegas job, with Danny Kaye.

01:04:51

FREEMAN:

That came -- yes, there was.

01:04:54

PATTERSON:

That was before the main engagement.

01:04:58

FREEMAN:

This is where the union did us in so bad.

01:05:02

PATTERSON:

So how did that come about? The Danny Kaye show?

01:05:23

FREEMAN:

I guess they had heard about us. His wife first came to see the kids, came right here; her name was Sylvia [Ply], she came to check everything else. Then his manager came, [Irv Kotis]. And the Danny Kaye came.

01:05:41

PATTERSON:

This is right here to Wellington Road, to hear the Young Saints perform. And then they decided, "Oh, well, this can go on our show," and so off to Vegas. But the union was beginning to make it hard, the LA union.

01:05:43

FREEMAN:

AFTRA.

01:05:46

PATTERSON:

AFTRA, American Federation of Film and Tele.

01:05:51

FREEMAN:

Of course, when went to Vegas weren't under their jurisdiction.

01:05:57

PATTERSON:

I see. So even though it was Nevada, the LA AFTRA union was still --

01:05:57

FREEMAN:

Nowhere under their jurisdiction.

01:06:07

PATTERSON:

Oh, you weren't under it. I see. So they couldn't say anything about that anyway. But they could hold up the action here with television work.

01:06:33

FREEMAN:

Yeah. We were priced out of the market, didn't do it. And when we came back from the last Danny Kaye show, Lisa and Kathy and Ynez had to count the money and pay the kids. (Laughter) Lisa said they were counting money for so long their eyes got crossed. (Laughter)

01:06:36

PATTERSON:

So it was an in-house operation. (Laughter)

01:06:41

FREEMAN:

Their eyes, says, "My eyes got crossed counting all this money."

01:06:56

PATTERSON:

But there was teamwork going on, a lot of teamwork, and a lot of things that were just done -- you know the Young Saints did them themselves, and sort of a self-contained operation.

01:07:42

FREEMAN:

Oh, there was a lot of things that went on. One thing was -- oh, I got to tell you this story. Two things that happened: one was, Michael Poley, you know, he was kind of [lightning], he had anyway, he had a couple of screws loose. They had a situation where every day, one person would come on the stage and bring Danny a stool, because he sat down and he talked with the audience. On this particular night, it was Michael's turn to bring him to stool. He brought the stool, and you know, he always did a high five -- he hit Danny's hand so hard Danny peed his pants.

01:07:49

PATTERSON:

Oh, that's right; you mentioned that. And he was mad. (Laughter)

01:07:49

FREEMAN:

He was fit to be tied.

01:07:52

PATTERSON:

Did he pee his pants onstage, where it was -- it couldn't have been --

01:08:39

FREEMAN:

It probably wasn't seen, but (inaudible); he hit him that hard. Another time, Michael fell down the steps going to the dressing room. This is like in the back. You've been in the casinos; you know you move through the back ways, and Anthony was trying to -- Anthony was getting his Master's in psychiatry, psychology and everything, and he was trying to work with Michael; Michael's laying there like he's dead. Tommy comes along and says, "Michael, get up!" And Michael gets up.

01:08:42

PATTERSON:

That's another kind of psychology, huh?

01:08:47

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Oh, Anthony was just outdone.

01:08:51

PATTERSON:

Anthony was always very formal, very correct. And Tommy knew what was going on.

01:09:06

FREEMAN:

Anthony was outdone. Here he is, this major in psychology; Tommy says, "Who you going to sue? You going to sue me? I don't have no money."

01:09:08

PATTERSON:

He got things done, didn't he?

01:09:12

FREEMAN:

Yes, he did. And he was a gentleman, too.

01:09:37

PATTERSON:

With a huge voice; he would fill up a room. Just his speaking voice. So we got back from -- now, so Danny Kaye is done, and so what happened then after the union priced out of the market. How did that change the way the Young Saints operated, just as far as the rehearsals and the forward motion?

01:09:56

FREEMAN:

It changed completely, because Tommy sent Roger out to find us a place. And this

was after the riots in '65, he found a burnt-out warehouse building on the corner of Main and Gage.

01:10:09

PATTERSON:

Now, there was a lot of years since the riot that Roger was out looking, but those buildings had not been restored; they were just sitting there since the '65 riots in Los Angeles.

01:10:36

FREEMAN:

And we also got a contract with the city for what they called Model Cities. And we started a whole different kind of program, (inaudible) training program, that concentrated not only on performance, but also in behind-the-scenes kind of thing; we had training and television, with the cameras and the whole bit.

01:10:38

PATTERSON:

Now, how did that happen?

01:10:47

FREEMAN:

We got this grant from the city to train in this particular venue.

01:10:53

PATTERSON:

So they funded it; the city began to fund what you -- did they also fund the rent for the location?

01:10:55

FREEMAN:

Yeah.

01:10:56

PATTERSON:

And they funded the equipment that you needed?

01:11:33

FREEMAN:

Yeah. We got the equipment from a company called -- (inaudible). But anyway, and they used as well, because they sold equipment to a lot of people in other countries, and their argument was, "Hey, if these kids from Watts can do this, then what's wrong with you?" So like I said, they used as well.

01:11:38

PATTERSON:

So did you have to do repairs on this building? It must have been taken --

01:11:49

FREEMAN:

Yeah, (inaudible), we had to build a stage. It was a huge building. And put lights up, put the grid up for lights and all that kind of stuff.

01:12:00

PATTERSON:

So now you're training not only in performance arts, but also in the technical, what it takes to film and sound and all of that.

01:12:19

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And you know, none of the kids got their SEC license, and at the time, they said, you know, "We didn't know we could do this." Nobody ever told them that they could do this. Schools didn't tell them that there was something else they could do.

01:12:28

PATTERSON:

Well, I imagine for teenaged kids in school, there weren't those kinds of programs that were available to them --

01:12:37

FREEMAN:

The teachers didn't show them there were things out there they could do.

01:12:42

PATTERSON:

So you're opening a whole 'nother world for them of possibilities.

01:12:50

FREEMAN:

Opening up a whole new -- just opportunities to show them that there are things out there that they could do.

01:12:59

PATTERSON:

So now it's a school, maybe more expanded, did more students come that you had broader -- so that you had more numbers to work with.

01:13:00

FREEMAN:

Yes.

01:13:20

PATTERSON:

And what about staffing? I know you and Tommy and Lisa had pretty much been doing a lot, and then the Young Saints themselves taking on extended roles as Roger

did. So now, were you bringing in more staff from outside to help? That was good too, to have this grant.

01:13:36

FREEMAN:

Yeah, we brought in television people, camera people. We got a lot of support; we had a cameraman come in from Channel 9.

01:13:36

PATTERSON:

To donate his time?

01:13:47

FREEMAN:

Yeah, and work with the kids. Because, you know, there are a lot of things that actual camera people do that's not in the books.

01:13:52

PATTERSON:

That hands-on experience that they could bring.

01:14:16

FREEMAN:

And so they were doing a segment called Young Saints Live, so they wanted to do the marquee, and they wanted to run it through -- somebody came up with the idea of putting letters on some saran wrap. (Laughter) So the cameraman said, "Well, yeah, I guess that would work."

01:14:19

PATTERSON:

So they were being innovative and figuring out ways to get things done.

01:14:44

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, you take what you have and you do the best you can with it. I remember the look on his face. "Yeah, what?" And NBC, we had a thing with NBC where we took the kids out, and they got to see all the operations, all the television operations at NBC.

01:14:59

PATTERSON:

Was it sort of -- now the program has expanded now, so you did have groups, sort of a cadre of students that were learning the technical arts, and then a cadre that was learning the performing arts, or did you break it up with singing and dancing, or were they mixed together?

01:15:04

FREEMAN:

Everybody would do everything.

01:15:05

PATTERSON:

So it was full, all-around holistic training.

01:15:29

FREEMAN:

And we did a lot of what we call mini-Broadway shows. (Inaudible). And we did Guys and Dolls; we did South Pacific; Porgy and Bess -- that one was our best one. And you know, we got tremendous audiences. People would just come and see that.

01:15:42

PATTERSON:

So you had auditorium space enough that people would come. So now you move from the three-car garage into a real, bona-fide performance space with a stage and space for audience.

01:15:50

FREEMAN:

And we also had our own camera -- we were helping Channel 30 with the news.

01:15:51

PATTERSON:

How so?

01:15:59

FREEMAN:

Well, we had our own remote on a truck, camera truck.

01:16:13

PATTERSON:

So these are like taking shots of neighborhood things that were going on, the students would do that, and contribute them to the station. Wow. Well, that had to be encouraging for them to be able to do that, to actually work with the station.

01:16:19

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And the worst thing in the world you could do is to give some kid or kids a camera.

01:16:22

PATTERSON:

(Laughter) Tell everything, huh?

01:17:03

FREEMAN:

They were filming, and you know, we'd just let them go. They were filming a segment, and they were -- they had a drug scene going on; they had somebody being

abducted. And as they were rolling, this being a big warehouse, they had this huge door with thing that comes down -- as they were rolling with the camera with this abduction scene, the police were coming down the alley. They saw the police, and they just calmly (inaudible).

01:17:05

PATTERSON:

Because this is a real crime in progress.

01:17:15

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And we found out a couple days later that the car that they used had been stolen. (Laughter)

01:17:19

PATTERSON:

The abductor had stolen a car? So the kids were in an environment --

01:17:24

FREEMAN:

No, they were filming what they knew. That was part of their program.

01:17:26

PATTERSON:

But this was a real crime, though.

01:17:28

FREEMAN:

No.

01:17:32

PATTERSON:

Oh, I was going to say -- OK.

01:17:38

FREEMAN:

That's why I said, they were filming it because -- it actually showed a guy shooting up, sitting on the toilet.

01:17:46

PATTERSON:

So they were creating some of the things that they knew were -- they did go on in their community, and they were telling that story. I see.

01:17:53

FREEMAN:

That's why I say, the worst thing you can do is give a ghetto kid a camera.

01:17:57

PATTERSON:

Wow. So did they keep these tapes and develop on these?

01:17:59

FREEMAN:

They're someplace.

01:18:06

PATTERSON:

Yes. That has to be valuable though. So what about teaching? Now, Tommy had done a lot of teaching, because you were teaching -- were you still teaching sofeggio?

01:18:11

FREEMAN:

We didn't have the same caliber of kids.

01:18:14

PATTERSON:

How did it change?

01:18:39

FREEMAN:

Well, I started out, I wanted to do that, but I had no point of reference. First I'm teaching ear training; they didn't know Mary Had A Little Lamb; they didn't know any of the little tunes that we used. And (inaudible), it would have been a lost cause.

01:18:45

PATTERSON:

And what is the reason for this? I mean, you're still working with the same age group; they're still kids from the city.

01:18:50

FREEMAN:

A different caliber.

01:18:52

PATTERSON:

Was it because of the locations they were coming from?

01:18:52

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And the schools.

01:18:54

PATTERSON:

And the schools. So now you're working more with South Central.

01:19:29

FREEMAN:

See, when you were in the Young Saints, we got them from Hollywood High, Belmont, Los Angeles High, Dorsey. But when we went down to the Main and Gage one, it was the school on San Pedro, high school, Locke High School, Markham Jr. High, those schools. And there was a big difference in what they knew and what they had experienced.

01:19:38

PATTERSON:

So those students didn't have the musical -- just from doing choirs and school, and they didn't have --

01:19:40

FREEMAN:

Not really.

01:19:46

PATTERSON:

So how the did it change? What were they learning? You had to start them in a different place?

01:20:01

FREEMAN:

Yes. Well, Lisa managed to isolate maybe about six or seven kids that she could work with musically, and she had them singing (inaudible). It was just something (inaudible).

01:20:01

PATTERSON:

So Lisa took on a major role --

01:20:05

FREEMAN:

Yes, she did.

01:20:07

PATTERSON:

When you went down to Main and Gage, and she became --

01:20:14

FREEMAN:

She became our main teacher for performing.

01:20:24

PATTERSON:

And how did she feel about what she took over? I know she was taking on a major role, but how did she feel? What would she say about working with the kids?

01:20:35

FREEMAN:

Evidently, she liked it; she was there. But she had trained her assistants that so when she went on the road, they had to do what they had to do so they could carry on the choir.

01:20:39

PATTERSON:

So she did have people that could step in and help teach.

01:20:40

FREEMAN:

Her assistants.

01:20:42

PATTERSON:

Those six people that she identified?

01:20:49

FREEMAN:

Well, she had a couple people who would take (inaudible), who could do the choreography and help with that.

01:21:06

PATTERSON:

So Lisa was on the road working as a professional singer, and also dedicated to the process over at Main and Gage. Did she have any other help? Did anybody else work in the same kind of capacity as Lisa? Or she was pretty much running the school?

01:21:19

FREEMAN:

She was running all of the performing arts part. But we had other people that were being paid to work with the other parts of the program.

01:21:26

PATTERSON:

Anything happen along the way that was a particular challenge with the Young Saints during this period?

01:21:46

FREEMAN:

Just the challenge of -- we even got people who had been in gangs that came into the program. We really had some -- what do you call them? -- knot heads. (Laughter)

01:21:46

PATTERSON:

Knuckleheads.

01:21:53

FREEMAN:

Knuckleheads, yeah. We really had some. But that's what the program was for.

01:21:56

PATTERSON:

So you saw some of the kids change and improve?

01:22:05

FREEMAN:

Some did. And I've had kids come by and tell me, you know, now they're running their own business, or they're doing such and such.

01:22:07

PATTERSON:

Did their parents get involved?

01:22:13

FREEMAN:

Some did, with the younger kids, they did.

01:22:15

PATTERSON:

So how young did they go?

01:22:19

FREEMAN:

Well, you know, we took them in from five.

01:22:22

PATTERSON:

And up through young adult?

01:22:25

FREEMAN:

Up through 20, 21.

01:22:34

PATTERSON:

And gave shows, you did shows and put on shows, and the families would attend and the community. And were they filmed shows?

01:22:58

FREEMAN:

Yes. We've got -- let's see if I can find the resolution from the city, in 1976, proclaiming there was a Young Saints Day. Why is it I can never find (inaudible)?

01:23:03

PATTERSON:

Are there some things that you want us to move over there so we can see some of the things on the piano you have? Let's do that.

01:23:07

MONTENEGRO:

Yeah. We have like half an hour of tape. A little bit less, 25 minutes.

01:23:22

PATTERSON:

OK. Let's look at some of these things on the piano. Look at this little kitty.

01:23:29

FREEMAN:

This is the article from the Times. "A long way from Watts to the White House."

01:23:32

PATTERSON:

This is what newspaper? Oh, LA Times, April 12th --

01:23:45

MONTENEGRO:

(Inaudible).

01:24:24

PATTERSON:

OK. "A long way from Watts to the White House: the Young Saints go marching in to give the disadvantaged a break. The Young Saints are predominantly black, and many of them come originally from Watts, as sort of a minority in reverse. Evelyn says, 'It takes guts for a white kid to relax and get into this thing, but they do, and soon it becomes a lot more than just a singing group.'"

01:24:35

FREEMAN:

Well, a lot of them weren't used to taking orders from a black person, a black person being in authority. And that was a big (inaudible).

01:24:39

PATTERSON:

For the white Young Saints; there were a few.

01:24:45

FREEMAN:

But those who stayed, though, they were very (inaudible).

01:24:55

PATTERSON:

And here's another image of the Young Saints. This was after the Main and Gage one.

01:24:57

FREEMAN:

At the Main and Gage one.

01:24:59

PATTERSON:

After it got started.

01:25:03

FREEMAN:

This was in the NBC studios.

01:25:04

PATTERSON:

Can you see this? Do you need me to move it?

01:25:16

MONTENEGRO:

No, that's good. I want to get up closer right now; it's just really nice to have it all (inaudible).

01:25:18

FREEMAN:

I thought I had brought it down.

01:25:22

PATTERSON:

NBC studios -- what production was this that they were doing?

01:25:25

FREEMAN:

Movin' and Groovin'.

01:25:25

PATTERSON:

Movin' and Groovin'.

01:25:31

FREEMAN:

We got a nice write-up in Billboard for that.

01:25:36

PATTERSON:

And Lisa is right here.

01:26:02

FREEMAN:

She did a step -- she sang The Look of Love coming down Dean Martin's staircase; that was really nice. What happened was, when we did -- we prerecorded the music, and when the guys in the studio heard the music, they started pulling out all kinds of stuff.

01:26:03

PATTERSON:

They wanted her to sing?

01:26:32

FREEMAN:

No, I'm going to tell you, after they heard the music, and they hadn't even put the voices on the music yet, and they could just hear the music; they started pulling out all kinds of props and stuff. Did you do that program with us at the music center? With -- what's his name -- played the trumpet, Dave (inaudible)?

01:26:36

PATTERSON:

Dave played trombone, right.

01:26:38

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Lester

01:27:15

PATTERSON:

Lester played trumpet. Here's Tommy and Evelyn; this was -- "Performing to old Broadway show tune Great Day, the Young Saints are used from the neighborhood; they include former gang members, street kids, would-be drop-outs, many of whom

would be dead or in jail." It's the calendar, the Los Angeles Times calendar, 1983. Let's see, what is this picture? This is a nice big one.

01:27:18

FREEMAN:

Oh, that's my high school (inaudible).

01:27:23

PATTERSON:

Oh, wow. Tell us about this picture, Evelyn.

01:27:33

FREEMAN:

Somebody sent that to me, and this is the high school orchestra; this is probably when we were graduating.

01:27:35

PATTERSON:

What high school is this now?

01:27:52

FREEMAN:

Central High School. Oh, here I am at the piano, hiding behind somebody.

01:27:57

PATTERSON:

Wow, that is a big orchestra.

01:28:01

MONTENEGRO:

(Inaudible).

01:28:02

PATTERSON:

So somebody from Cleveland sent this to you?

01:28:03

FREEMAN:

Mm-hmm.

01:28:14

PATTERSON:

That's great. Were you working on a production? That looks like a castle in the background.

01:28:16

FREEMAN:

Yeah, it's probably one of the productions.

01:28:37

PATTERSON:

This is Evelyn here at the piano. That's great. What else is in this bag of goodies? Here you are with Tommy, and who else?

01:28:58

FREEMAN:

Do you remember Diane Watson? I think this is Gwen -- oh, I can't remember her name. She was an accomplished person. State -- (inaudible) on the State Assembly. Diane is now Congress.

01:28:59

PATTERSON:

She doesn't look like herself there.

01:29:01

FREEMAN:

Well, she was much younger.

01:29:11

PATTERSON:

Yeah. Looks different. And what is this?

01:29:18

FREEMAN:

Are you too young to remember him? He was very famous. Billy Daniels.

01:29:21

PATTERSON:

Tell us about him and your relationship with him?

01:29:23

FREEMAN:

I don't know what this is --

01:29:24

PATTERSON:

Were you guys working together during this?

01:29:32

FREEMAN:

No, (inaudible) some places as a friend of ours. And this is one of the Young Saints.

01:29:33

PATTERSON:

And who is this?

01:29:40

FREEMAN:

You know, I haven't been able to figure out who that is, (inaudible).

01:29:49

PATTERSON:

Well, you looked happy, Evelyn. You look like you were laughing. What was the event?

01:29:53

FREEMAN:

I haven't a clue.

01:30:06

PATTERSON:

And there was another picture of your band in Cleveland that you showed me, and I want to get that out. Is this it?

01:30:07

FREEMAN:

No.

01:30:16

PATTERSON:

Oh, look, there's a picture of Evelyn. Pretty Evelyn. When was this picture taken, Evelyn? Do you remember?

01:30:26

FREEMAN:

It would have to be in the '60s, I think. Did you see this? This was something we had to do --

01:30:42

PATTERSON:

And this is Tommy, it says, "Tommy Roberts Quintet, starring Mr. Excitement himself, featuring Evelyn Freeman, and introducing beautiful Brown Sugar." Is that the one that had the red dress on?

01:30:48

FREEMAN:

Yeah. Oh, I hadn't seen half a dozen of these pictures.

01:30:53

PATTERSON:

So this is Evelyn and Tommy headlining at the Lounge.

01:30:55

FREEMAN:

This is the Jonathan Winters Show.

01:32:02

PATTERSON:

Is this the Young Saints? OK, this is the Young Saints. This is -- we just talked about the trumpet, Lester and David, Roger. Anthony, who was getting his degree in psychology. Lisa, Evelyn's daughter. And then here is another one; Evelyn's doing a solo. Lisa. And here is Evelyn and Tommy -- what was this event?

01:32:44

FREEMAN:

That was probably during the Young Saints. Probably playing for a luncheon or something. And this article, it says, "It was the Young Saints who really lifted the guests out of their seats. All high school or college students, the group trained by Tommy Roberts and his wife, Evelyn Freeman Roberts, presented a rousing program of songs, including Oh Happy Day, which David Eisenhower said he liked best, and When The Saints Go Marching In, Miss Julie liked best."

01:32:48

PATTERSON:

Where was this? Oh, that was from the White House? Oh, the Washington Post.

01:32:51

FREEMAN:

That's (inaudible).

01:32:52

PATTERSON:

The Washington Post.

01:32:59

FREEMAN:

It was reprinted. (Inaudible) Marlene Simmons.

01:33:15

PATTERSON:

Oh, this is the Morocco Club. Was this -- "Direct from Los Angeles, now, Mr. Excitement and the Gospel Train," El Morocco Club -- this is on Hope Boulevard, Montclair. So this was here in LA.

01:33:31

FREEMAN:

Yeah. You know where Montclair is. That's going up 60 or -- going east on 60. Or to San Bernardino --

01:33:31

PATTERSON:

It's a suburb out that way.

01:33:40

FREEMAN:

Going out, but not that far as San Bernardino. It's between here and San Bernardino.

01:33:41

PATTERSON:

OK. It was the El Morocco club.

01:33:51

FREEMAN:

Yeah, there I am with my hair long.

01:33:52

PATTERSON:

The Gospel Train. Now what was the Gospel Train?

01:33:58

FREEMAN:

Oh, we had dancers, and as a matter of fact, we played the Slate Brothers with the Gospel Chain.

01:34:01

PATTERSON:

The what?

01:34:06

FREEMAN:

We played the Slate Brothers; that was a famous club on La Cienega.

01:34:13

PATTERSON:

Slate Brothers. Like S-L-A-T-E, Slate Brothers? Was that an act also?

01:34:22

FREEMAN:

Yeah, they were; they were in the movies a lot. I can't find that --

01:34:46

PATTERSON:

What is this? Oh, that's the White House. So Richard Nixon actually signed this. "To Evelyn and Tommy Roberts, with gratitude and all best wishes, Patricia Nixon and Richard Nixon." "[Command] performance, from Watts to the White House, Tommy Roberts, Evelyn Freeman, and the Young Saints."

01:35:05

FREEMAN:

This is the 45, this is (inaudible) 1970, about Bel Canto; that was the name of the record. We did that and Oh Happy Day on the Ed Sullivan Show.

01:35:32

PATTERSON:

With the Exciting Voices. "Chorus and Orchestra conducted by Evelyn Freeman." Yeah, I still want to see that one with your band from Cleveland; it was like that sepia-toned older one? I just want to get that for sure before we.

01:35:35

FREEMAN:

Yeah. It's in one of those envelopes.

01:35:40

PATTERSON:

It is? I thought I'd looked at everything in here.

01:35:42

FREEMAN:

I don't think it's -- yeah, I think that's the envelope.

01:35:45

PATTERSON:

But I didn't see it in there, Evelyn.

01:35:52

FREEMAN:

Probably took it out. (Inaudible).

01:36:05

PATTERSON:

Oh, we just had it. Oh, here it is. I got it. This is -- tell us about this one, Evelyn.

01:36:18

FREEMAN:

That's when we were playing at the Circle Ballroom, which is a white ballroom in segregated Cleveland. And we were broadcasting over the radio, WTAN, and -- this is my brother, Ernie Freeman, who --

01:36:20

PATTERSON:

This way?

01:37:16

FREEMAN:

Yeah, this my brother Ernie Freeman who was very well acclaimed for his arrangements for Sinatra and Dean Martin and those people; he got a couple of Grammys. This is me, of course, on the piano, Van -- I got Van a scholarship at the Cleveland School of Music, and he went on to become one of the best bass players in Cleveland. And all of them are good; Howard Roberts got a name for himself, and Shepp played with Dizzy and James Moody; Howard played trumpet for a while with a lot of big bands, Lionel Hampton was one, and then he went back to the institute and got his degree as a singer. And he was a fabulous photographer for Cleveland Plain Dealer, very well known.

01:37:18

PATTERSON:

Circle Ballroom, September 1941.

01:37:27

FREEMAN:

Yep. Just before the war. Pearl Harbor was December --

01:37:29

PATTERSON:

December 7.

01:37:31

FREEMAN:

Yeah. And that was the end of the band.

01:37:38

PATTERSON:

When the war broke out. So this was just in the last three or four months they were together.

01:37:43

FREEMAN:

Well, they got a chance to enlist as a group.

01:37:46

PATTERSON:

Oh, that's right. Yeah, you told us about that, which was a benefit for them.

01:37:52

FREEMAN:

Oh, definitely.

01:38:00

PATTERSON:

That's a great photograph. I love that photograph. All right, anything else, Evelyn, that you would like to make sure we know about before?

01:38:06

FREEMAN:

Yeah, the Young Saints Day. And I knew I had that in my hand; let me go ahead and see if I can -- I probably left it upstairs, let me see if I can find it.

01:38:10

PATTERSON:

Can we pause the tape so that we can have a few more minutes?

01:38:14

FREEMAN:

I had it in my hand (inaudible), and I don't know how it didn't get down here with me.

01:38:25

PATTERSON:

Now, we do have a couple of pictures up here that we can -- how many minutes do we have?

01:38:28

MONTENEGRO:

Like ten.

01:38:40

PATTERSON:

I just want to get these two shots and her parents, so that's three. And --

01:38:44

MONTENEGRO:

(Inaudible).

01:39:20

PATTERSON:

This is Lisa. (Pause) I think I saw one.

01:39:26

MONTENEGRO:

I can't unplug it. (Inaudible)

01:40:12

PATTERSON:

Go ahead. We'll (inaudible). OK. We can go from this side, I'll help you. Stare over there. Oh, one moved -- there it is. OK.

01:40:15

FREEMAN:

OK, (inaudible).

01:40:30

PATTERSON:

Oh, great. OK. Yeah, let's get this. So we have ten more minutes, we're going to use this and then see a couple pictures on the mantle. OK, the Young Saints. What does this tell us about it, Evelyn?

01:40:35

FREEMAN:

That was Young Saints Day proclamation.

01:40:37

PATTERSON:

City of Los Angeles -- how did this come about?

01:40:52

FREEMAN:

Well, Tom Bradley was very supportive of us. I don't know what the occasion was, but there it is. (Laughter)

01:40:53

FREEMAN:

01:41:12

PATTERSON:

So through Tom Bradley, it says, September 20, 1976, signed by Tom Bradley. And it's a Young Saints Day in Los Angeles, established for the purpose of providing an outlet for the creative talents of young people.

01:41:15

FREEMAN:

That's quite a long proclamation.

01:41:38

PATTERSON:

Yeah, it is. It's thick. That's great. Lisa's in there; Thomas S. Roberts, Evelyn Freeman Roberts, and Lisa Roberts for their efforts serving the youth of Los Angeles, and extending my very best wishes for continued success with their future endeavors.

01:41:58

FREEMAN:

I've got some other pictures in here too of kids with the cameras. This is one of the instructors, and these two -- and this girl was so good that she went on to do other things with the camera.

01:42:06

PATTERSON:

So they were learning the technical part.

01:42:21

FREEMAN:

Oh, this is the -- yeah, that's Rwanda Louis (inaudible). This is a big picture. This was at the Main and Gage, the homemade stage.

01:42:36

PATTERSON:

So you brought your sign with you, "From Watts to the White House, the Young Saints --"

01:42:38

FREEMAN:

And this is one of the dance instructors.

01:42:59

PATTERSON:

And the Main and Gage facility. So the kids are learning modern dance. Great. OK, what else do we have? Don't want to run out of tape. This looks like Lisa.

01:43:10

FREEMAN:

Oh, this is one of our things where she was trying the Little Saints.

01:43:14

PATTERSON:

Little Saints, got her a bouquet. And this is Lisa.

01:43:19

FREEMAN:

I think they had a fundraiser thing there; she brought in the most money.

01:43:24

PATTERSON:

Teeny-Weeny Saints? You can't see the teeny part on the sign, "Teeny-Weeny Saints."

01:43:35

FREEMAN:

Weeny. Little Saints and Weeny Saints. The five-year-olds were weeny.

01:43:53

PATTERSON:

OK. Let's go to the mantle, and get some of the -- oh, we didn't have her mic on.

01:44:08

MONTENEGRO:

Let's do a little test. Could you just talk near --?

01:44:08

PATTERSON:

OK. Go ahead.

01:44:17

FREEMAN:

You know, if any kind of thing about this was really something, everybody didn't get a Young Saints Day.

01:44:23

PATTERSON:

We're fine? OK, let's go over to the mantle. I love -- yeah, take the mic with you.

01:44:31

MONTENEGRO:

Can't reach.

01:44:48

PATTERSON:

Is this OK? We'll be able to -- OK. I just want you to pick up this photograph; I love this photograph so much. So what was going on at the time of this photograph?

01:44:56

FREEMAN:

We were in Las Vegas (inaudible). I forgot who we were working with; it might have been Frankie Laine.

01:44:56

PATTERSON:

This is -- which one is Claire?

01:45:04

FREEMAN:

Claire is on the right, Lisa's in the middle, Anita's on the end, and you know Ernie.

01:45:11

PATTERSON:

Ernie. OK. And then here is Evelyn with her daughter Lisa.

01:45:23

FREEMAN:

And that's, in the background, we were at William's wedding; he's been my assistant for years and years. He grew up in the Young Saints program.

01:45:36

PATTERSON:

Wow. OK. And then these are your parents; I wanted to definitely honor them, and get this shot here. Your dad's name?

01:45:39

FREEMAN:

Ernest.

01:45:41

PATTERSON:

And your mom?

01:45:43

FREEMAN:

Gertrude/

01:46:03

PATTERSON:

Gertrude. OK. We probably have like five minutes. Anything else, Evelyn that you'd like us to know? Look at these little babies. Who's this?

01:46:06

FREEMAN:

That's Sky and James; that's when they were about --

01:46:08

PATTERSON:

These are your grandchildren.

01:46:17

FREEMAN:

Great-grandchildren. Right about six and three.

01:46:39

PATTERSON:

Weeny Saints. (Laughter) OK. All right, well, we're going to wrap it up. Let's see, anything else, Evelyn? I feel like there's so much -- we don't want to forget anything important. Anything else that you would like to make sure we know about, going forward? What are your plans; what are you doing now?

01:46:47

FREEMAN:

Well, I've started my book. And I told you, I'm getting my website together.

01:46:49

PATTERSON:

What is your book going to be about? An autobiography.

01:46:50

FREEMAN:

About me.

01:46:52

PATTERSON:

Autobiography. Do you have a title?

01:46:57

FREEMAN:

I was thinking about something about -- "It's All in the Journey."

01:47:01

PATTERSON:

And the website is coming, and it will be all about the music.

01:47:13

FREEMAN:

Yes. I've had a very remarkable journey. I've been privileged to have worked with some of the greatest musicians in the world.

01:47:14

PATTERSON:

And you among them.

01:47:15

FREEMAN:

Well -- (laughter)

01:47:18

PATTERSON:

They're raising their hands, "Hey, don't forget about Evelyn along the way."
(Laughter)

01:47:27

FREEMAN:

No, it's been a great privilege to have the respect of the musicians. That is so great.

01:47:48

PATTERSON:

All right. That was great. Thank you, Evelyn. That's great. OK. A book on the way.
I'm glad I asked you; I didn't know that.

01:47:48

FREEMAN:

PATTERSON:

Yeah. People have been asking me; it's been in my head for the last 13 years. "You've got to write that book."