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BEYOND CENTRAL

Putter Smith

Interviewed by Alex Cline

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

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BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Putter Smith

Jazz Recordings Include:

Alan Broadbent Trio: (with Frank Gibson)	Pacific Standard Time Away From You Everything I Love Better Days Over the Fence Personal Standards Continuity
(with Joe LaBarbera) Alan Broadbent/Putter Smith Duo	
Walter Norris Trio: (with Larance Marable)	Love Every Moment
Karrin Alison: (with Bob Cooper and Sherman Ferguson)	Home Cookin'
Putter Smith Quintet: (with John Gross, Gary Foster, Dave Frishberg, Joey Baron, Patrice Rushen, and Peter Donald)	Nightsong Lost and Found (with John Gross, Gary Foster, Kent Glenn, Gene Stone, and Dick Shreve)
Threeplay: (with John Gross and Larry Koonse)	Threeplay
Mose Alison: (with Joe Farrel, Phil Upchurch, and John Dentz)	Middle Class White Boy
Karen Hammack/Paul Kriebach (with John Gross and Tony Banda)	Lonesome Tree
Jon Crosse: (with Clare Fisher and Luis Conte)	Lullabies Go Jazz
(with Freddie Hubbard and Carmen Macrae)	Peter and the Wolf Goes Jazz
Sam Most: (with Will Bradley Jr.)	But Beautiful
Bill Perkins: (with Frank Strazzeri)	Live at Dino's

John Tirabasso:
(with Gary Foster and Dave Koonse)
Dave and Larry Koonse:

Diamonds and Lace

Jazz Guitars

Warne Marsh:
(produced by Toshiko Akiyoshi)

Warne Marsh Meets Gary Foster

Also recorded with Willie Bobo, Lee Konitz, Conte Condoli, Dick Cary, Ron Eschette, Betty O'Hara, Gary Foster Quartet, Lenny Breau, Charlie Haden/Brad Meldau, Abe Most, etc

Performed with:

Thelonious Monk Quartet, Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, Duke Ellington Orchestra, Billy Eckstine, Diane Schurr, Sheila Jordan, Sue Raney, Herb Geller, Bruce Forman, Harry James, Artie Shaw, Jackie and Roy, Percy Faith Orchestra, Carmen Macrae, Bob Dorough, Rio Hondo Symphony, Joe Diorio, Tootie Heath, Bill Berry, Blue Mitchell, Art Farmer, Marlene Dietrich, Burt Bacharach, Gerry Muligan Tentette, Judy Niemack, Buddy Rich, Sherman Ferguson, Danny D'Imperio, George Van Epps, Dave Frishberg, Claude Thornhill Orchestra conducted by Mark Masters, New American Symphony conducted by Jack Eliot, T-Bone Walker, Cecilia Coleman Quintet, Sticks Hooper, Russ Freeman, Ray Charles, Jack Sheldon, John Faddis, Auckland Philharmonia, John Mayall, Barney Kessel, Scott Hamilton, Lew Tabakin Toshiko Akiyoshi Orchestra, Steve Huffstetter, Shelly Manne, George Duvivier, Tommy Newsome, Jean Francois Prinz, Roy Mcurdy, Kevin Tullius, Art Pepper, Jake Hannah, Joe Pass, The Beach Boys, Elmo Hope, Eric Von Essen, John LaPorta, Tim Hagens, Chris Turner, Bill Holman Orchestra, Lennie Niehaus, Manny Albam, George Gafney, Dexter Gordon, etc-

From age of 24 to 29 did a lot of commercial recording. Recorded many of the Phil Spector dates including "You've Lost that Lovin' Feelin'" (which was named by ASCAP in 1997 as the most played {on radio} recording of all time), Marin Denny, the TNT show (with artists such as the Byrds, Joan Baez, Donovan, Ike and Tina Turner), Mason Williams, Tiny Tim, Johnny Mathis, Petula Clark, Don Randi, Sonny and Cher, did the shows Hair, Jesus Christ Superstar, Tommy etc. Decided at age 29 to no longer play commercial music.

TEACHING

Has taught regularly since 1972.

1972 to 1982 at Gary Foster's teacher's collective NOVA STUDIOS in Pasadena.

1983 to present at the MUSICIAN'S INSTITUTE in Hollywood where he developed and teaches a methodical approach to sight reading music. He also teaches improvisation and walking bass there. He taught counterpoint for two years in the degree granting program at the institute.

Taught improvisation workshops at the Pasadena City College for 5 years (1989 to 1994). Currently holds a Life Credential to teach in all community colleges in California.

He regularly teaches Charlie Haden's improvising class at Cal- Arts Valencia when Mr. Haden's busy touring schedule takes him out of town. He has taught classes for John Clayton at USC as well as conducting several workshops and lectures on reading music there.

He has held college workshops and seminars across America and Canada with Bob Brookmeyer, Lew Tabakin, Gary Foster, and Toshiko Akiyoshi. Artist-in-Residence at Christchurch Polytechnic Jazz School in New Zealand.

Theory Study:

1953-57	Hindemith Harmony Studies Bach counterpoint analysis
1955-56	Jazz harmony with Bob Enevoldsen
1957-58	Schoenberg: Structural Functions of Harmony with Leonard Stein
1994-95	Studied Counterpoint (Gradus) and taught counterpoint at Musician's Institute for 2 years-

Private Instrumental Study:

1956-7	Paul Gregory: Principal Utah Symphony
1957-9	Herman Reinsagen: Principal under Toscaninni
1964-5	Milton Kestenbaum: Principal with Pablo Casals
1969-72	Nat Gangursky: Principal Chicago Symphony
1980-1	Barry Lieberman: Co-Principal Los Angeles Philharmonic
1989-92	Peter Rofe: Assistant Principal Los Angeles Philharmonic
1993-4	John Clayton: Principal Amsterdam Symphony
1994-5	Paul Elison: Chairman string departments of USC and Rice University (Houston)
1996	Tim Echard
1997	Ida Bodin
2001	David Young: Principal Los Angeles Opera Company

Recent Highlights: Performed Gil Evan's version of "Sketches of Spain" with Tim Hagens for the American Jazz Institute under direction of Mark Masters. Also for the AJI a tribute to Lee Konitz and a tribute to Jack Montose. Performed with Bob Brookmeyer and big band his tribute to the late Gerry Muligan "Celebration" for the KLON big band festival. Toured west coast with THREEPLAY, a trio with John Gross and Larry Koonse. Played bass on the STARDUST album with Natalie Cole (conducted and arranged by Alan Broadbent) which won the GRAMMY for best writing in 1997. Performed a 4 day tribute to Warne Marsh with Lee Konitz and Gary Foster. Performed Mozart's Requiem in festival at Cerritos College. 2002 Recorded a tribute to Clifford Brown and a tribute to Lee Konitz for AJI. Also played Duke Ellington/Billy Strayhorn variations on Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker Suite" in concert with the Pasadena Pops Orchestra with the Pasadena Jazz Orchestra, part of the project being led by the incredible Paul Lines-

'Left Coast', Smith's band, performs in concert in the LA area, and is preparing for their first recording.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Alex Cline, Interviewer, Series Coordinator, UCLA Center for Oral History Research; Musician.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Smith's home, South Pasadena, California.

Total number of recorded hours: 12.5

Persons present during interview: Smith and Cline.

CONDUCT AND PROCESSING OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is part of the "Beyond Central" series, which extends the UCLA Library's Center for Oral History Research's "Central Avenue Sounds" series and preserves the spoken memories of musicians who were active in the jazz scene in Los Angeles from the 1950s to the 1970s. The series includes a broad range of interviewees, some of whom are well known and others; who may be less known, who were chosen to document their specific point of view, contribution, role, or experience. Particular areas of focus include the African American musicians' community and the development and emergence of the so-called jazz avant-garde in Los Angeles.

In preparing for the interview, Cline consulted jazz histories, autobiographies, oral histories, and relevant periodicals, listened to recordings, and viewed personal archival materials when made available.

TechniType, independent contractors, transcribed the interview and edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling. Words or phrases inserted by the transcriber or by the interviewee have been bracketed.

Smith reviewed the transcript. He verified proper names, made minor corrections and additions, and provided the résumé at the front of the transcript.

Mark Villegas, editorial assistant, prepared the table of contents and guide to proper names. The interviewer compiled the interview history.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Library's Center for Oral History Research.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

JULY 30, 2003

CLINE: Today is July 30th, 2003. This is Alex Cline interviewing Putter Smith at his home in South Pasadena [California]. This is session one, tape number one.

SMITH: All right.

CLINE: Good morning, Putter.

SMITH: Good morning.

CLINE: Thank you for sitting down to talk to us.

SMITH: Oh, thank you, Alex. Thank you for inviting me.

CLINE: As is traditional with these interviews, we start at the beginning. So my first question to you will be, where and when were you born?

SMITH: I was born in Huntington Park, although I didn't grow up in Huntington Park, California, a little town east of downtown L.A., actually two miles from Watts. January 19th, 1941. I grew up in Bell. I lived in Maywood for a few months and then grew up in Bell.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, right. Which is still there.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. They're all still there.

CLINE: That's right. And who were your parents?

SMITH: My father, Carson W. Smith, had grown up in— He grew up in Utah and had a very difficult childhood; his mother [Jessie Sprinter] had died very young, and then had been passed around between relatives. He had three or four sisters that he was very close to, although I only saw one of them once in my life. Maybe I saw

another one once, but very, very young. He was close in his feelings to them, but they were scattered around.

I had a rich uncle who was president of Standard Brands, very nice man. He would come to town every once in a while, a very nice man.

CLINE: What was his name, do you remember?

SMITH: Cecil Hudnall. My father's sister, Billie, who was his wife, had an unusual career. She was the first woman conductor of the San Francisco Symphony, and we used to get Christmas cards every year with a song she had written, latest song. I guess they were very nice people. Cecil was a very nice person.

My father despised the Mormon Church, which he was raised in. He had a lot of respect for certain aspects of the people, but he didn't want them coming around. When he was dying in about 1980, I went into his room and he had been crying, which was very unusual for my father, and I said, "Dad, what's wrong?"

He says, "Oh, my half-brother," who I had never heard of, "wrote me ten years ago and I never even answered him back."

I said, "Why didn't you answer him?"

He says, "I didn't want the goddamned Mormons on my neck." [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: His father was a very unusual guy. At one time he owned the Kern County oil fields.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: Lost it all in the late twenties, and was a wild man, married and remarried and wives died. He left his last family in Utah to run off with a black woman in San Francisco, which was really out of the question in the thirties.

CLINE: No kidding.

SMITH: I feel kind of good about that. That's my grandfather who I look almost exactly like from pictures.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Do you know what his name was?

SMITH: Carson Oscar Smith. My father's middle name was Warburton.

Then my mother was Irish, San Francisco Irish. Her parents had actually come from Ireland and she was raised in San Francisco. She was very depressed and died when I was very young. She had what they called a nervous breakdown, and was sort in bed from the time I was about seven until she died when I was about thirteen. I was unable to deal with any of that, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, that must have been really hard.

SMITH: Well, it was just what it was, but I just was unable to deal with it, like they do in the movies. I just sort of hid out, and that's one of my later regrets in life is that I was unable to help her or do things, I would like to say now, but that's the way it is.

CLINE: And so little was known about that kind of thing then as opposed to now.

SMITH: Yeah, but even now what does a kid know, you know?

CLINE: Right. Right. Indeed. And you had siblings.

SMITH: My brother Carson R., Carson Raymond Smith. He was my hero. My father was a baker and he worked for a company called Log Cabin, and bakers have unusual hours. They get up at three in the morning and work and they work on holidays. They get the day before the holiday off. That's the way it works. And so I hardly saw my father until my mother died, and then he took a real big hand in raising me, the rest of it, and encouraged both of us to be artists, Carson and myself. Carson's ten years older than me.

My father loved music. We had music in the house all the time, and I grew up with Stravinsky, Kabalevsky, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker in the house.

CLINE: Wow, that's unusual.

SMITH: I remember hearing Charlie Parker when I was four or five, and I remember the sound of it so clearly, and then it wasn't until I was sixteen that it spoke to me; until then it was a sound. But then after I became involved in music and got to the level where I could understand it, suddenly it spoke to me. I was just blown away.

CLINE: Now, this was in the fifties, then?

SMITH: That would have been '57. Maybe it was before that, '56. I was fifteen or sixteen, I remember the first time I heard a voice speaking to me.

CLINE: And this was still in Bell, now?

SMITH: Yes.

CLINE: Your father had a bakery there?

SMITH: No, he worked for Log Cabin.

CLINE: Oh, that's right.

SMITH: He was a dough mixer, which is like the equivalent of a quarterback. You have to work real, real hard and cover all these mistakes.

CLINE: Where was this that he worked, it was in the area?

SMITH: It was in Lincoln Heights, it was across the street from the Lincoln Heights jail.

CLINE: Oh, really.

SMITH: Yes. They would make a thousand pounds of bread at a time. It was a factory, you know. But he was a staunch union man, and so I grew up with that in my mind.

CLINE: What do you remember about your neighborhood, growing up?

SMITH: Well, most of the kids, I mean, a lot of the kids were from Oklahoma, around there, Indiana. Bell is where the Judds [the family in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*] settled. They're good people, and we were really out of place in the neighborhood, having classical music and jazz and stuff like that in the house.

But I remember my neighborhood, the guys I grew up, Sammy Miller and David Miller, his sisters Joanne [Miller], Laverna [Miller], Carl, and there was a kid named Punky up the street, and Rodney and Perry Davis and their sister Pasty [Davis], who was retarded, and Melvin Cottrel. The Sammy bunch, they were all the Millers. There was a guy named Elmer King and his beautiful sister. Jack Foate lived up the street, and another beautiful chick named Jolene.

But Sammy Miller was a standout. I think of him all the time, he was so funny. He had such a natural— And his mother had died and his father was a very taciturn farmer. Except for his father being very overweight, he was just like

American Gothic. I mean, he was like— Never smiled. I never saw him smile. I don't know where this kid got this incredible sense of humor, and things that he did and said still make me laugh and I still use. All these sayings like, he would say, you know, "Come on in, make yourself homely." You know, and stuff like that and just on and on, and he had physical gestures that were unbelievable. It must have been his mother; he must have got it from her or some grandparent or something.

CLINE: Or some deep need to balance out the taciturn nature.

SMITH: Well, he was a funny dude. He was a funny dude. I haven't seen these people in fifty years. You go away and become involved in your thing, which I was so— I mean, classical music was out and jazz was— They had no idea. Elvis Presley was just coming in, and I couldn't believe that people could dig this, you know. The first Elvis I heard— I mean not the first, but on the radio, he sang "Blue Moon" and never sang the bridge.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: I couldn't believe it.

CLINE: What do you attribute your family's advanced taste in music to? Do you have any idea?

SMITH: Well, they were San Franciscans, and my grandfather, Carson Oscar, had been a piano player. But my dad loved the opera, and when he died, I found in his suitcase, you know, the old man's suitcase, poetry he had written when he was a teenager, and I was shocked. Because he had raised Carson, and I was ten years later. It was like we were different families.

In fact, I related to my brother as more like a father, because my father was gone most of the time, and so Carson was sort of my hero and I had a scrapbook on him. He was very famous by the time I was eleven. He was very famous. They were writing about him in articles and stuff like that, so I think that propelled my interest in jazz. But I had grown up, as I said, with very good music all the time. Of course, this was before TV.

CLINE: And this sounds like kind of the typical World War II, post-World War II neighborhood of people who'd come out after the war or around that time for work and for the better climate and all that out here, your neighborhood. What was the racial composition of your neighborhood?

SMITH: I don't think I saw a black person live until I was— One day in San Francisco. My mother would take me up there, we would go up there on summers, and I must have been six or seven, and we were crossing the street and this black guy, who must have been, you know, twelve or something, and I was six or something, "How you doin', son?" And I always felt so warm, so warm for that.

Then in Bell a black person came in about 1953, and it was like the whole school was looking at her, and I only saw her from about a hundred yards away, and it was like a phenomenon. I was raised with no prejudice in the house. I never heard any prejudice, prejudiced words, never anything negative.

In fact, I had an episode, I was working with Sid Levy and Ed Rubin in about '58, and we were playing at the old Troubadour. We were outside walking down the street for some reason, and these guys start talking about this "Hebe" and that "Hebe,"

you know, and they said it a couple times, and I finally said, “Listen, you guys,” I said, “I really rather you wouldn’t use that kind of language around me.”

They both go, “Don’t you know we’re Jewish?”

I had no idea. And that’s the kind of ignorance of it, that I didn’t know that Levy was a Jewish name. So I’d never had a word of that stuff in my house, nor anything about black people, except in sympathetic adulatory. And even having these Duke Ellington records and Charlie Parker records, I never heard anything negative. I think that my father instilled in me a realization of the suffering that these people were having to endure, so I’ve always had that built-in respect. You know, it’s an individual thing; when somebody starts out an idiot, then they’re an idiot, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, that’s true.

SMITH: You know, whoever they are.

CLINE: Some things are more universal than others.

When did you start becoming interested in playing music yourself? What form did that take?

SMITH: Well, my brother had left a half-size bass. He went to New York when I was eight. He was gone for a couple of years and came back, and he had left a half-size bass there, and so I used to just fool around on it and mess around on it.

Then when I was about ten or eleven, I started playing along with his records, just by ear. I had listened to him practice for years. I remember laying, drawing and doing puzzles and stuff while he was practicing, so I knew all the material subconsciously, the study program for the bass.

I had never thought about being a musician, although I was playing in the band and orchestra and stuff at school, playing tuba. I played tuba and French horn and something else, glockenspiel and cymbals and bass, but I had never thought about it. And somebody approached me when I started going to junior high school, Bell. Bell had a six-year high school, seventh through twelfth. So this guy comes up to me and says, "Are you Carson's brother?"

I said, "Yeah."

He says, "You play bass?"

I said, "Yeah."

He says, "Well, you got a job Thursday night."

It paid something like three or four dollars. I only had three strings on my bass, and I said, "Okay."

I just went there, and somebody drove us. In those days, the level was so low that a person like that could just get up there, they were playing completely on, like, a garage kid now, you know, just not even knowing the names of the strings. I was right away getting people going, "Yeah! Yeah!" Astonishing.

CLINE: How old were you?

SMITH: Well, I was thirteen. When I worked my first job I was thirteen. I remember I felt really good about that.

CLINE: Let's talk a little bit about your brother Carson.

SMITH: Okay.

CLINE: Obviously, you were very young when he was evolving his own musical pursuits. What do you remember about his early development as a musician, if anything?

SMITH: You know, of course, I wasn't on the scene with him at all, but at home he went through all of the standard study, which I later discovered. He was studying with Reinsagen, Herman Reinsagen. He was Charles Mingus' teacher and many others. He had been principal bassist under [Arturo] Toscanini, and he was a great guy, and one of the best teachers I've ever had, and he was my second teacher. Anyway, he was Carson's teacher, so when I went in to study with Reinsagen, I already knew all the material in my head. I didn't know how to play it, but— So I just recall that.

CLINE: Right. You weren't able to go here and play or anything, because you were so young.

SMITH: The only time I heard him play was— I mean, I heard him play many times later, but at that age I went to see him play at the Civic Auditorium in Pasadena with the Gerry Mulligan Quartet. I was eleven at the time. Dave Brubeck was there. The Duke Ellington orchestra was there. I can't remember who else. But by then I was way into Dave Brubeck, too. I didn't get to meet Dave Brubeck, but I saw him that day outside, and Carson told me that he was a great guy.

Anyway, Carson spent— I think he went to New York when he was eighteen and was there for a year and a half and worked in a machine shop or something, and practiced every night and went out and tried to play and had no success at all. He came back here to L.A., and the first night he was out playing, he met Chet Baker and

they became friends right away. They were same age, same appearance and everything, and started their heavy hanging.

Then Gerry Mulligan's Quartet came into being. You hear so many different versions of how it started. One I heard lately was that it was supposed to be a quintet with Jimmy Rowles, and when Jimmy Rowles found out Chico Hamilton was on the band, he refused to show up, and I don't know why, because I thought Chico was a nice guy, myself.

CLINE: Yeah, very interesting and kind of exciting player at that time.

SMITH: I loved him and he was so nice to me. I mean, I used to see Chet Baker; he'd come over to our house. And Russ Freeman was there once. I was just a little kid, you know, I was ten or eleven.

CLINE: Anticipating another one of my questions, if any of these people came by the house.

SMITH: Yeah. Not much, but some. I recall when I must have been five or six, I remember Carson playing "Jack the Bear" and "Ko-Ko" over and over and over and over. Those are two Ellington that featured Jimmy Blanton with solos, and so those I know inside out from listening to them. It still sounds so good.

He said at one time that that's what he wanted to be, was like Jimmy Blanton, and he described it as being on top of the beat, but not nervous, and having that legato sound. And what I listened to when Carson died about seven years ago, I pulled out some of those old records that I hadn't listened to in thirty-five, forty years, and he was truly a marvelous a bass player, I mean head and shoulders above most at the

time. And you listen to these things, and one thing, the rhythm section gets almost no credit in history.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: You know, I've been reading biographies for the last ten years, autobiographies of musicians, and they all say, "Yeah, we were in an old joint outside of Kansas and Wardell [Gray] was there and Dexter [Gordon] and Lester [Young] and so-and-so was on piano and so-and-so was on drums, and I can't remember who the bass player was." You know, over and over again, "I can't remember who the bass player was."

I saw this show about six months ago of Gerry Mulligan and showing the Gerry Mulligan Quartet, and never did they mention anybody but Chet.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And when you listen to those records and you hear the big difference is the rhythm section.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: That's the big difference, is that when you hear Carson playing with that, it's the Gerry Mulligan Quartet, and when he's not there it's not really; it doesn't have that essence. And what I'm trying to say is, Carson was one of the great, great bass players, and I know that history will bear me out on this.

CLINE: Yeah. And that group changed drummers after a while, too.

SMITH: Oh, yeah, they changed drummers.

CLINE: Yeah. And it's true people don't talk about any of those people much.

SMITH: No.

CLINE: People don't talk about, for example, the fact that Larry Bunker was in that band for a while.

SMITH: Right. Right. Right. And the same thing with Charlie Parker. I mean, you don't hear anything about—I mean, a great, great bass player Tommy Potter, you hear nothing about him.

CLINE: That's for sure.

SMITH: You know, and one of the reasons is that when you listen to the quality of the recording, the bass is just not recorded well. You just can't hear the way it really sounded. But Tommy Potter is marvelous. A lot of those guys.

CLINE: So Carson was certainly a very close and immediate and accessible role model for you.

SMITH: Oh, yeah, he was. He was. And he gave me a couple of lessons when I was about fourteen, fifteen, and the things that he told me have informed my playing ever since. One is that “we're not really playing; we're singing,” you know. I can't recall— He just showed me how to hold my hands. I remember he was telling me, this is about the same time, '55, '56, we got on the subject of drummers and he said, “Here's the most exciting drummer in jazz,” and played me Art Blakey playing with Miles Davis, “C.T.A.” He says, “But the problem is he's so loud.” And then I got to play with Art Blakey twenty years later for a week, and the volume of music has changed so radically that he was really relatively quiet. He played about the volume of Billy Higgins, and yet in '54, he was disagreeably loud.

CLINE: Right. Yeah. Before Elvin [Jones] and Tony [Williams], all those guys, too.

SMITH: Yeah, all the rock, you know.

CLINE: Well, certainly, yeah. Everything is louder now. But who were some of the other bassists that you were inspired by that you listened to?

SMITH: Well, after my brother—and I almost had blinders on for years—Red Mitchell was the first soloist that I tuned into, and then my brother got me turned on to Oscar Pettiford, who is really the father of modern bass soloing, really and truly. He's a giant.

CLINE: Did you ever hear Red Mitchell when he was here in town?

SMITH: Oh, sure. Yeah, I got to know him and he's really a great guy, a great guy. I never could figure out why he changed the tuning on his bass. It was like, why? Why? It's already too hard to play. Why start over?

Let's see. I really dug Doug Watkins. Doug Watkins really killed me. When he died, was killed, and when Paul Chambers took his place on the scene there, I was kind of like— You know, I think the younger you are the more conservative you are. I mean, generally speaking, of course, unless as you get older you get richer, then you become more conservative. But I find my taste broadens the older I get-- First of all, I couldn't listen to anybody but my brother, and then when Doug Watkins died, I couldn't accept that anybody could, you know, step into his spot. But then I grew to really love Paul Chambers and he's one of my favorite walking players and Ron Carter, you know.

Then Scott LaFaro had an influence on everyone. He was a truly experimental player. You know, to me what experimental means is to try an idea out. It's not just to try to sound weird or to try and be different, but to actually try things out. And Don Cherry used to come over to my house and we'd play, and he was talking about— And

I knew Scotty, too. And Don would say, “You know, when I work with Scotty, at the beginning of the night, we’ll say, ‘Sixteenth [note]s are out.’” So they would play the entire night without playing a sixteenth note, or the next night it would be “Triplets are in,” and everything would be triplets. And you can hear that kind of playing when you listen to the Bill Evans Trio. You can hear that Scotty is actually implementing those ideas, and to me that’s playing experimentally and seeing what you get. And then the people that followed him are playing in the style of Scotty LaFaro. It’s like the—
What do they call it in art? Decadence?

But like Chuck Israels’ playing sounds more like Scotty LaFaro than Scotty LaFaro, and it’s more beautiful, really. But Scotty is the creator, you know, the true creator.

Anyway, I know we kind of got out of chronological—

CLINE: That’s okay. So these guys were all in town here. People in the rest of the world sometimes forget that there was a period where, you know, here was Charlie Haden, here was Scott LaFaro.

SMITH: Yeah. Well, this was when I was sixteen, they were all here, I knew Charlie then and he’s been a lifelong friend of mine, and Scott LaFaro. We had several very interesting conversations about the bass. And Don Cherry and Ornette [Coleman], of course, and Paul Bley was here, and Carla [Bley].

CLINE: I’m going to get into this more, but before we get too far, obviously you went to Bell High School, you said.

SMITH: Right.

CLINE: You were playing in the orchestra. You were playing these various instruments. Did you, at some point, forsake everything else to just focus on playing jazz bass before you graduated from high school?

SMITH: Yes.

CLINE: You were playing these gigs?

SMITH: Yes. I was working gigs and when I was fourteen, I hooked up with a guy named Fred Stillman, who's a trumpet player, and we were just playing any gig.

CLINE: Yeah, I was going to say, what kind of gigs were these?

SMITH: Any gig. Anything. Anything at all, it didn't matter. He had this book of— Kind of like a Guy Lombardo book. And this is an aside here. When I was working at Shelly's [Manne-Hole] in the late seventies, there was a pamphlet out there, and a Black Power group had published this little pamphlet, you know, and I was reading it and they interviewed Louis Armstrong, and in it Louis Armstrong had praised several white musicians, unbeknownst to the interviewer, you know, which I thought was pretty funny. They said to Louis, "Who is your favorite band?"

And he said, "Guy Lombardo."

I thought he was putting them on, and then a few years later I saw the films from 1931 of Louis in Copenhagen with his own septet, and it sounds exactly like Guy Lombardo, except with this incredible trumpet player. Have you ever seen those films?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Oh, my god.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Unbelievable. They you'll understand when they talk about Louis Armstrong being a genius. That's the one. There was some stuff in there he played what I thought was Sonny Rollins licks. It turns out that Sonny was playing Louis Armstrong's licks. Unbelievable. Unbelievable.

But where were we?

CLINE: You were talking about these gigs, Guy Lombardo.

SMITH: Oh, yeah, so he had this Guy Lombardo book, and so he started— He suggested to me I should begin booking gigs, and he gave me his list of phone numbers, and he had about five hundred phone numbers of things like NCO clubs in Long Beach; that's noncommissioned officers' clubs on army bases. So I just began calling and I was just very persistent, and I called VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars]. Every place that used bands. In those days it was a different story, you know, all these places had functions where they needed a little band.

I found that if you just kept calling and calling and eventually they would give you a chance, and then if it worked out, then you'd have the gig, and then whatever they had, if they had three a year, you'd do those three. And it got to the point where I was working all the time, like five or six nights a week.

CLINE: And going to school?

SMITH: Some nights I'd have three or four gigs on the same night and hiring all these musicians. You know, I was like a booker by the time I was fifteen, and I was making about twice as much bread as my dad.

CLINE: Oh, no.

SMITH: And then one day, I think it was just about sixteen, and I looked down and I saw my hands were shaking and I was so nervous about— Because I had so much going on and I said, “I can’t do this anymore,” and I just stopped and I never did it again.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah, I just let it all go. But about the same time I was also getting very serious about playing. I was playing with some guys who were already serious, Dave Koonse and a guy named Ronnie Hoopes, who just retired as being the music chairman of Weed College in Shasta. That’s a great name for a college.

CLINE: Yeah, isn’t it. [laughs]

SMITH: Weed. Weed College.

CLINE: What did he play?

SMITH: Piano, and he was very good and very original, and a very deep thinker and quite studied, counterpoint and all that stuff. I think he had a master’s, not that that means much anymore, but then it was quite an accomplishment.

CLINE: Yeah. So you were playing with these guys.

SMITH: Yeah, and we were getting really serious about playing. One of the friends had a recording system and we’d go up to their cabin up in the mountains and play and get serious. Then one night we were playing and I had this realization that this is what God wants me to do, that I really actually do have a creative gift, and this is what I’m supposed to do. In other words, I got the call.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: So I've just remained true to that, although I don't live in a condition of having the call. I mean, it's pretty work-a-day, you know. When you play forty hours a week, it's kind of like being a plumber, you know; that's what you do.

CLINE: That's right.

SMITH: But I have tried to answer that call. I had a period of four or five years where I had an opportunity to go into commercial music and went there, and then realized it was not my right path.

CLINE: I want to talk about that, too. It's an issue very strongly present in this particular geographical location, the commercial music scene, always there to create an interesting opportunity.

SMITH: You are going to edit like 80 percent of this out, right? [laughs]

CLINE: Oh, no.

So when you graduated high school you were a musician. You were already working; you were making money.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. I began working at sixteen. I was working at a club called Mangold's. It was my first steady gig. It was five nights a week. It was a club in Compton. In those days, when you got a gig, it was five nights a week for a month with a month option, that was what a gig was, and they'd pick it up. And so I'd work at Mangold's for three months. I was working with Pete Aplan, who's still playing, still playing very well. His girlfriend was JoAnne Grogan, who is now JoAnne Brackeen, and Reed Vaughn, drummer, and that was our gig. We worked there for three months and that was my first steady gig.

Then I began working next door in a place called the Club 88 and that was with Dave Koonse and Ronnie Hoopes. It was in the middle of that that I got the call.

CLINE: You had the realization. What do you remember about some of the clubs at that point around the area? What were some of the happening places?

SMITH: It was always a disappointment. Every club was like “ew,” you know. You’d go into it, you’d heard about it. I can’t remember, there was one called the red something or other, the Red Carriage or the Red Barn or the Red Feather or something. It was on Florence [Avenue] and Vermont [Avenue], somewhere around there, and you go in and, ew, it’s ugly and it smells bad and everything is out of line and dark, and you get up and the stage is funky. It’s just like it is now.

CLINE: Yeah, I was going to say, so it’s the same.

SMITH: It’s the same; it was just awful. Relatively, the bread is about the same. I think at the time I was talking about, when I was booking gigs, I think three or four dollars was what a gig paid. I remember that New Year’s Eve was twelve dollars. And then it got up to fifteen and twenty. I think we were making ten bucks a night at Mangold’s and Club 88.

Let’s see. What other clubs were around? Well, it used to be, getting a couple of years after that, the Renaissance, which is now the House of Blues. And you’d go in there and Lenny Bruce would be standing there, there was a pay phone on the pillar and he’d be standing there on the phone, or welcoming people. Clubs are almost always a disappointment. Yoshi’s in San Francisco is very nice.

Let’s see. I’m trying to think of the time. I’m going to have to dig through my books and see what I can—

CLINE: What about some of the other clubs in Hollywood? Was this a time when places like Sherri's and—

SMITH: Well, I worked at Sherri's later. I worked there for three years with Don Randi. That was in the middle sixties. That was '63, '64, '65. Well, before that, let's see. I used to work with Bobby Hutcherson at the Pandora's Box.

CLINE: Oh, yes, on Sunset [Boulevard].

SMITH: That was a little different. That was like the folk thing. And there was a place called the Unicorn; I used to work there with Paul Bley.

CLINE: Who would be on these gigs with, say, with you and Paul Bley?

SMITH: It'd be a duo. Sometimes I would work late at night with Les McCann.

Alonzo Garibaldi was the drummer; I played a lot with him. Let's see. Where else? What are the clubs that were actual places?

CLINE: Now, two of the places that were mentioned around this time period that I believe only Don Preston has talked about in his oral history interview, were the Digger and Georgia Lee's Caprice out in El Monte.

SMITH: Sorry. Yeah, of course. Of course.

CLINE: We can talk about those, if you remember anything about them.

SMITH: Yeah. The Digger was East L.A. across from the [California] Highway Patrol and it was a late-night session place, they had a lot of sessions. And I think that was very close to the time of the use of Benzedrine. I mean, there was like all these sessions all over the place. Places that would start at two, places that would start at six in the morning. I think that was the golden age of speed, you know. Not speed, but that other stimulant before that.

I played at the Digger a lot and I didn't like it. It was noisy and had a bad sound. I played with a lot of people there. Ray Graziano I remember was kind of like the fixture. You know, he was one of the sweetest people. At first glance he would look like somebody that should have been a hit man in *The Godfather*, but he was just one of the sweetest people. His girlfriend sang. I can't remember her name. What was her name? My wife [Verna Rose Smith] will remember. But she was a fixture there, too.

CLINE: I'm going to turn the tape over and continue.

SMITH: Okay.

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JULY 30, 2003

CLINE: Okay. We're back on. We're talking about people playing at the Digger in East L.A.

SMITH: Yeah. I can't remember all the people. There were regular— Kind of like regular session dogs that were—

CLINE: Do you remember who was sort of running the show there?

SMITH: Oh, that was Ray Graziano, he was running the show. That's the place— Only one of the few times I've ever felt threatened is, I actually had played the gig and was outside in back and everything was closed down. I can't recall, it must have been that they had the sessions on the weekends, the after-hours thing, and I was one of the other nights. Everything was gone, I was waiting for Dave Koonse to pick me up; he was going to pick me up from another gig. And a car came in the back, this car comes around and it's got these four guys in it, you know. The Digger's in East L.A., you know. And these guys are trying to start a fight with me. You know, he says, "Hey, man, we were in tonight, and there was something really lacking in the music, you know."

I go, "Yeah, I know." I'm sitting there with my bass, you know. "Yeah, I know. I know."

"No, I mean there was something really lacking, man, you know."

"Yeah, I know. I know."

They were just— They were working themselves up and working themselves up, and I didn't know what the hell to do. And then just as they were getting to a fever pitch, Dave comes driving up and they just cut. Whew, thank you, God.

CLINE: Yeah, really.

SMITH: Nick Martinis used to play there.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: Jesus. I can't believe I don't remember so many people. Well, I'm going to have to go through my books.

CLINE: We can pick up on this.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: And what about Georgia Lee's Caprice?

SMITH: Georgia Lee's was kind of a step up from the Digger. Okay. Lenny Bruce used to be there a lot. Charlie Haden was there and Walter Benton. I used to see Walter Benton there a lot, and Joe Albany was the house piano player. He was an amazing musician who was so messed up, they used to call him "Rubber Bands," because it was like that was the way the mood swings. You know, it's like tight, loose, tight, loose. He's an astonishing musician who hasn't begun to be understood yet. Astonishing musician. He had a terrible reputation as having been a— I mean, he was a real old-time junkie. You know, in those days what that was, it was just awful and his nervous system was completely messed up. He had a terrible reputation as having been a fink. In New York City he used to be going and stealing coats off of hat racks. That would be the thing. He'd go in and put five or six coats on and go off and

sell them. He had this terrible reputation, and he was another person who was so sweet, you know, but that demon, that terrible demon.

Now, see, I was lucky. The generation before had been junkies, and we saw what a disaster that was. Almost without exception, their nervous systems were destroyed. The exceptions were so rare. So many dead and so many ruined and turned into winos and stuff, that I steered clear of it totally, and everybody I knew did. Just like, “pppssshhh,” that’s out, you know, forget that one.

Actually, there was a thing, though, that you sort of envied about junkies and that was that they seemed to have a power. I later read a book called *Compassion and Self-Hate* [:*An Alternative to Despair*, by Theodore Isaac Rubin] it’s by psychiatrist in New York, and this guy explains about self-hate. And when you read the book and understand what he’s talking about, you realize that the power of junk is that it turns off the self-hate.

CLINE: Sure.

SMITH: And then you’re able to do anything. So it kind of gives you the same power if you— To me it’s like if you could be like a sociopath with ethics, that’s the perfect condition.

CLINE: Right. What, if anything, was being consumed, if people weren’t doing junk?

SMITH: Well, a lot of bennies, Dexamil and that kind of stuff, and a lot of uppers and marijuana, you know. But that’s all I knew about. I really wasn’t—I just don’t think there was a big junk scene going on, or a big heavy kind of— That kind of addiction

thing. I messed around with that stuff [uppers] myself for about three or four years and then just stopped it entirely.

Well, yeah, at Georgia Lee's the drummer was Freddie Gruber.

CLINE: Yeah. That's one of the things I wanted to ask you about.

SMITH: I got to know Freddie there, and I've known him ever since. He's the one you should— That's the guy you should interview.

CLINE: See, now, this is something I've wanted to do.

SMITH: He has the most extraordinary memory and knows everything, except it's not L.A. I mean, he has some part of L.A., but he's really a cool dude.

CLINE: Yeah, I know he was only here for a little while. Well, he's a famous teacher now. He's one of *the* drum teachers in the world now.

SMITH: Oh, man, I was going to go film him. I was going to do that. Not doing this kind of stuff at all, but I thought, boy, somebody's got to capture this guy.

CLINE: Where is he now?

SMITH: He's here in L.A.

CLINE: Oh, he is?

SMITH: Yeah. Total recall. Total recall all the way back to 1930. Total recall.

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: He was on the scene with Buddy Rich when they were both child prodigies, and Freddie was better. I used to work at Buddy Rich's house, you know. When he would have parties, he would call and I would play his gigs, and Freddie was always there. He was always— They were dear friends. Buddy really respected Freddie.

CLINE: Wow. And what do you remember about Freddie's playing back then?

SMITH: Freddie had a problem; he had become a terrible junkie in the early forties and kind of had a ten- or fifteen-year run of that. I mean, he's told me the stories, and the most he got down to the bottom level of, you know, robbing drugstores and shit like that, and his system had been destroyed and he really couldn't play. And I understand that he is, on the [practice] pad, the greatest drummer that ever lived, you know, but somehow getting the connection between—

CLINE: The various limbs as the integration has been lost.

SMITH: Something. Something that prevented the thing from connecting.

CLINE: That's sad.

SMITH: But I would sure hate to have him ever read that, that I said that. I mean, really.

CLINE: We can edit that out if you like. You'll get the opportunity to do that.

SMITH: Okay. Well, that might be kinder.

CLINE: Who are some of the other musicians you remember playing over at Georgia Lee's?

SMITH: Well, Dave Koonse and I used to go there all the time, and Dave was the hottest guitar player on the scene, you know, in those days.

CLINE: I had heard that, for example, Ornette Coleman and some of those guys used to go down there.

SMITH: I never saw Ornette over there. I never saw him.

CLINE: No. Or at the Digger either?

SMITH: No. No, I never ran into him. The only time I ever saw him was I went to see him with Scott LaFaro at Jimmy Madden's joint where Hollywood [Boulevard]

and Sunset [Boulevard] cross. Used to have a jazz club there. It was another rotten place. And it was right after— Two years after Ornette had hit big and it was— I mean, he was in the press and articles and everything, and I went in there and there was nobody there. You know, living in New York, he'd come out here and there was nobody there. Here is Ornette Coleman, Don Cherry, Scott LaFaro, Billy Higgins. Nobody. Nobody. Two people in the audience--

CLINE: Amazing.

SMITH: L.A.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Well, you read the interview of Sonny Rollins a couple years ago when he was out here.

CLINE: No, I didn't.

SMITH: You know what a fine gentleman he is, and they asked, "What about L.A., Sonny?"

He says, "Well, L.A. is very difficult. When I play in Tokyo or Paris, two thousand people come to see me." He says, "When I play in Medicine Hat, Canada, or Wichita Falls, five hundred people come to see me." He says, "When I play in L.A. twelve people come to see me." [mutual laughter] Somehow, that was very reassuring.

CLINE: Or something. Wow. Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: So many of the musicians who are probably a little bit older than you remember hearing Ornette when he was living in L.A. and working on his thing.

SMITH: Dave [Koonse] remembers him coming in on the scene, and everybody thought he was absurd.

CLINE: Right. With his white plastic alto [saxophone].

SMITH: And his not being able to play the changes.

CLINE: Play the changes.

SMITH: Yes.

CLINE: And yet you mentioned you were playing with, say, Don Cherry.

SMITH: I played with Don Cherry quite a lot. See, I really think Don Cherry was the real guy, myself. I saw him many times playing in scenes. There was a club, I can't remember where it was; I used to go over there. I remember seeing Gerry Mulligan and Lorraine Geller, and I can't remember who the drummer was, but Don Cherry was up there and he just blew everybody away. He was playing so out and yet totally related to the form. See, I don't hear Ornette that way.

Walter Norris was a very good friend of mine. I got that album [*Something Else!!*] and I listened to it every day for six months to try and get it, and I just never got very interested in Ornette soloing. Tunes are really lovely, and occasionally Ornette would play something, but I really feel like he isn't a master of the art, you know, of the art.

Recently someone sent me a CD of "Bird" [Charlie Parker] in 1942, and before he was fully Bird, you know, and he was playing with some— Sounded like a rhythm guitar player, perhaps in Kansas [City] or something, they did three or four songs, including "Cherokee" and Bird is not fully Bird, but he's mastered everything that's gone before. You can hear everything. You can hear Jimmy Dorsey, you can hear

Lester Young and Ben Webster. Even Rudy Weidoff. You can hear everything totally mastered, and if he had never been any better than that, he would have been one of the greatest. I mean, you can hear it's Bird, you know, and every once in a while there'll be a Bird lick. I mean, it's funny. You'll hear some funny stuff in there [sings rather old-fashioned swing melody]. You know, he plays something that's—

CLINE: Really corny?

SMITH: Really, like, corny, but still sounds spirited and beautiful. It's corny, but not corny, you know. It's sincere. It's sincere. So that's, to me, that's kind of the way it's supposed to be. You know, it's like Picasso was a master of perspective and color and then went out. So that everything's informed by that previous mastery, you know, be on top of it, really, just kind of building a thing on a good foundation, you know.

CLINE: So like when John Coltrane started to take things out, I mean, we knew that he could do everything else before he started to do that.

SMITH: Yeah, right. Right. Although he went too far for me. I mean, I lost interest because of— I mean, it's more than just playing; it's texture, and there has to be a rhythmic interest besides just intensity. You know, when you hear him play with the Miles Davis quintet, you hear rhythmic texture, it's not like nonstop eighth notes or sixteenth notes. It's a really varied texture.

You know, my own opinion, I feel like he got messed up with speed and juice at the end, you know, and just it became all about energy, you know, rather than melodic invention, which for me, you know, that has to be there. You know, like I love Lester Young, you know. Yeah.

CLINE: Well, it's interesting, too, because I don't know if you ever heard what turned out to be his last known recording session, which was actually released just a few years ago, it's very, very posthumous, really, it's called *Stellar Regions*. Did you ever hear this?

SMITH: No.

CLINE: And the thing that's interesting about it is it still rhythmically ended up the free thing with Rashied Ali and Alice Coltrane and that group, but he had really returned to much simpler melodic material, which seemed to be the direction he was going back into before he died.

SMITH: There you go.

CLINE: So there really was nowhere else to go except back to that, I think at that point. Even though that seemed to always inform what he was doing, it seemed like he'd said, "Okay, I've done this, you know. Back to melodies."

SMITH: Great. Great. I'd love to hear that.

CLINE: Yeah. And he's using more vibrato, and it's very, very different.

But anyway, to return to the period we're talking about, you're playing at these clubs, all of which are clearly not lovely places to play.

SMITH: Oh, yeah.

CLINE: And you're starting to get more work and get more involved in the scene here. You mentioned that you were playing with people like Dave Koonse and Paul Bley and some of these people. Who were some of the people you were working with the most at this particular time from the late fifties into the early sixties?

SMITH: Well, I worked for six months with Carla Bley at a little club on Highland [Avenue]. It was like a little coffee shop. We were standing in the window.

CLINE: Was she playing piano then? Was she was playing piano?

SMITH: Yeah. Oh, yeah, it was piano. Very interesting player. Really, man, what a talent. Boy, it was really interesting. She and Paul together were quite an interesting item, too. And Paul is one of my favorites, you know, to play with him. God, I loved the way he played. He was so far advanced. You know, the only thing I picked up on was the plus sharp fives on a major seven chord, so he used a lot of that, you know, and, god, gorgeous player. Gorgeous player.

Of course, everyone had a condescending feeling about the West Coast, you know, even people who lived here. It was always— Which is ridiculous, you know, because it's all just one. I think the thing about New York is the support you get from the community, which you don't get here, you know.

Jeez, I was working all sorts of different gigs. For one thing, being Carson's brother, everybody knew who I was right away. You know, that's a real important thing that people in the room remember your name. My real name is Patrick, and so people would— Not everybody called me Putter at that time, and somebody would say, "Hey, you're Carson's brother."

"Yeah, yeah," I said.

"Hey, come over here, I want someone to meet you," and there'd be somebody who had been a friend of my brother's. They'd say, "Hey, I want you to meet Carson's brother, Pat Carson." And I was introduced as Pat Carson hundreds of times.

CLINE: How bizarre.

SMITH: Well, I don't know hundreds, but at least a hundred times.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: Yeah, I was working all these gigs. I played with Art Pepper when he first got out of jail. And with Shelly Manne. That was a New Years Eve gig. I guess they were really hung up to call me. You know what I mean?

CLINE: About what year would that have been?

SMITH: '57, '58, you know. I'll have to look it up in my book, if I have that book.

CLINE: What was it like playing with those guys?

SMITH: Oh, I was so inadequate, it was just embarrassing, you know. I mean, I didn't know the tunes. I didn't have the repertoire. You know, I knew blues and ["I've Got] Rhythm" [chord changes] and a couple of songs, you know, but I had a good ear, but that's not enough when, you know, you're playing with masters. You've got to really know it.

Let's see. Now, I'm talking about still before I'm eighteen, you know. Let's see. Jesus, I'm really going to have to look this up.

CLINE: Okay. We can come back to more of these people. I wanted to, first, since you mentioned Art Pepper, various people have weighed in on what he was like as a person, and you also mentioned Chet Baker earlier, and your brother's friendship with Chet Baker. Both these guys have certain reputations, shall we say. What was Art like at that point as a person?

SMITH: Well, he was real nice, and I think he went back to jail after that, and I met him again right after he got out of jail and he was very nice then. But then when he got strung out again, he became, you know—I think of it as a defensive egomaniac,

you know, they're like aggressive and really out of touch with what's really happening, you know, because I mean, you don't need to be aggressive like that. I mean, that's kind of like a choice.

But it's a terrible thing, drug addiction. It's just terrible. It's like a struggle to find out who you are, you know. I mean, that seems to be the struggle. And years of adulation take their toll, too. You know, they talk about power corruption and all that, you know, and you begin to think that you really are a genius, you really are something special. And nobody is. I mean, you know, everybody— We're just all here—

CLINE: Either everybody is or nobody is.

SMITH: Everybody has their story. Everybody has their value, and to think that the guy, just because he's homeless, doesn't have deep thoughts is a real mistake, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Now, Chet I knew as a kid, and everybody's nice to a kid, you know, so he was just very shy, I thought, and quiet, and so was I. He was real nice and everything. Then I talked to him in New York about three or four years before he died, and he was a different person, you know. He was bitter, you know. "What do you got to be bitter about?" Well, you know, you've been high for forty-five years, Jesus Christ, you had more fun than anybody, you know. I mean, you know what I'm saying?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: You know, he's bitter and he started talking about my brother, and like he hadn't seen Carson in thirty-five years, and he says, "Oh, yeah, he's in [Las] Vegas

having a big time, you know.” God, why are you mad at him for? You know, what did he ever do to you, you know?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But that’s that anger of drug addiction. That’s just about it, you know, you’re high or you’re angry, you know.

CLINE: Right. Right. What was Shelly like to work with?

SMITH: Shelly. Ah! Well, I didn’t play with Shelly much. I only played with him a couple times in my life, that one being the Art Pepper thing. You know, when people die, then people die, you know, you feel bad that they die, and some you occasionally miss, and Shelly, every time I think of him, I miss him. He was one of the real catalysts of this town. He did more for music and musicians than anybody I can think of, and he was so supportive, and he was out on the scene all the time.

And with Shelly, him having known me from the time I was sixteen till I was fifty, you know, or in my middle forties, I can’t remember how long ago he died, but that he saw and acknowledged my progress, and it meant so much to me. And he was such a soulful, beautiful, beautiful guy. When you realize that, I didn’t even appreciate it when I was, you know, twenty, what an effort it took to have a club like Shelly’s. I mean, they have Miles plus nineteen for two weeks, and to have those giant groups there and you know they’re not making a nickel, you know, they’re just struggling and struggling.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: We don’t have anybody like that, you know. He’s somebody I actively miss, you know. [Looks heavenward] “Yeah, Shel.”

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, he had a heart. He had a heart.

CLINE: And this brings up something you touched on, I thought very interestingly not long ago as we were talking, which is the whole perception that still persists about so-called West Coast jazz. One of the things that I've read that is certainly amusing, if not ironic, is that Shelly, I guess, used to frequently, if not constantly, announce his band members from the stage by where they were all from, since all of them, virtually all of them were from New York or from the East Coast, during the height of the so-called West Coast jazz phenomenon.

And there's still a real strong perception of what people define as West Coast jazz versus other types of jazz. What are your thoughts on this thing? You said a little bit about it already, but what are your thoughts on this and what do you think it says? How can we look at it now all these years later?

SMITH: Well, I'm still evolving my thoughts, but I worked with Lennie Niehaus a couple of times in the last four years, and we've had some conversations, and the first time I played with him he did a transcription of *Birth of the Cool*, one of the charts from *Birth of the Cool*, and I said to him, I said, "I'm just kind of shocked by that and I realize how close it sounds to the rest of your writing, this so-called West Coast writing."

And he said, "Oh, yeah." He says, "Well, that's all we were trying to do, is we were all trying to write *Birth of the Cool*." He was talking about Shorty Rogers and all these guys.

And you go, my god, that's right. That's what it is, it's *Birth of the Cool*. It's exactly the continuation of that thing, and it gets you thinking, well, who are the West Coast guys? Well, Zoot Sims, okay. I mean, a New Yorker, right?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Lester Young, West Coast guy.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But not thought of as West Coast jazz, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And all these guys. Charlie Mingus, East Coast guy, born in Watts, you know, born and raised.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Dexter Gordon, the father of John Coltrane. Okay?

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And vice versa, you take the— You know, Shelly Manne, New Yorker. You know, Russ Freeman, a New Yorker, I think. And on and on and on. It's really one big musical scene and it was a convenient handle, because there was a popularity of West Coast jazz on the West Coast for a minute that they were able to— The critics were able to pigeonhole it. The critics are some of the worst influences in music.

I mean, you know, I'm digressing here, but the whole thing in the early sixties when free jazz became— And nobody liked it and nobody likes it, and I don't mean nobody likes it and I don't mean that there's not anything good about, but I mean it is impossible for it to have a success. People just are not moved by it. You know, it's like, eh, a bunch of angry guys up there, you know.

Yet I feel like the critics were afraid that they were going to miss the boat on Ornette like they missed the boat on Charlie Parker. I mean, I read a Leonard Feather review of the 1948 Carnegie Hall concert, it was Bird and “Diz” [Dizzy Gillespie], and he talked about how Bird was playing chaotically and not making any sense and blah, blah, and you listen to the record, and it’s top, greatest Bird ever recorded. Just absolutely spectacular, you know. And I think they were all afraid they were going to miss that boat, and so they perpetuated this Ornette thing and consequently lost the audience, you know. Records are coming up that nobody wants to hear, you know.

I mean, I’m not putting all that stuff down. To me it’s like a spice, you know, not a main dish, but a very good spice, and, sure, let it influence you. To me, the whole music itself is further evolution of counterpoint and the introduction of the African blues scale and the concept of rhythm and the complexity mixed with already— Well, you know, the thing that had been lacking in classical music for about a hundred years, or fifty years, had been participation of the musician on a creative level. Up until, I mean, all of the baroque musicians were all improvising. You know, they were reading chord charts, (figured bass was just another version of chord symbols).

And the birth of, first of all, large audiences. You know, Mozart’s largest audiences were 150. Then they started getting to where they could make some big money with audiences of 500 and more. Everybody was into music at that time, that they would really appreciate when somebody came and played a concerto from memory without having to use music. So it became like a circus act, you know; you had to have all this material memorized, you know, and then it kind of like got

solidified into this rigid thing where musicians were no longer taking part in the music, they just more or less—I mean, they're more craftsman.

CLINE: Right, interpreters at best.

SMITH: Yeah, they didn't have a creative input. So, jazz is the return of the musician into the creative portion of the program. But to me it's the big river of counterpoint marching on, you know, and this African influence. I mean, it's more than influence, it's this 50 percent that comes in and that's the march of music and it's going to keep on going. To me, that's what jazz is, melodic invention with the addition of the blues scale and the groove, the concept that time itself has a feel, you know.

Anyway, I forget where we started with that.

CLINE: Well, you were talking about the West Coast jazz thing.

SMITH: Oh, yeah, free music. Free music is sort of like abandons melodic invention. It abandons structured dialogue. It's like a group of monologues going on at the same time, you know. I mean, it's not really like we're reading on the same page and together, so like we're all just— And as I say, it can have a good influence, it can be a step, an additional flavor. Like Schoenberg is a flavor that can be used, you know.

You know, you cannot live on Schoenberg.

CLINE: Right. And the critics still tend to be very supportive of the avant-garde of a lot of other things.

SMITH: Oh, yeah.

CLINE: Despite its obvious lack of popularity.

SMITH: Yeah. And good. But I guess I'm just getting old. Thank God. I mean, you know, consider the alternative.

CLINE: So do you think there was something that could be called West Coast jazz, or do you think that was purely a critical invention?

SMITH: Well, to put a handle on it, sure, you could have called it anything. It was called West Coast jazz, but I mean, there were a lot of guys playing bebop out here. I mean, the guys I was playing with, at that time I was involved with a bunch of guys playing Lennie Tristano kind of music, you know, and I was playing with guys that were playing hard bebop, but I was also playing that sweet West Coast thing, too. And I love it all. But I think it's all music. You don't have to be rigidly in one or in the other or put them down.

And the guys fall for it, too; the musicians fall for it. They fall for it. Man, if you can't dig Lester Young, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, you know. Or if you can't dig Mozart, you know, too bad, I'm sorry you can't dig that, you know. And like Bird, if you can't hear Bird, you know. And yet, you know, how different can you get? Chet Baker's not that different from Lester Young. I mean, it's all of a piece to me. But there was a West Coast—

CLINE: Aesthetic.

SMITH: —scene and there were West Coast recordings. Just like there's the Blue Note [Records], you know. I mean, are they all the same? Are they all the same? Well, they're pretty similar, I mean, except there's Horace Silver, who is one of my favorites, who was one of my favorites then. I first heard him when I was fifteen and I was just completely blown away.

CLINE: Right. There's also a certain amount of experimentation going on with using different orchestral voices, different sorts of instruments, instrumentation in the West Coast groups that was seen as being unique to jazz at the time.

SMITH: Stan Kenton, four French horns and strings.

CLINE: Well, I'm thinking of groups introducing flutes, introducing double reeds, introducing some of these more, quote, "exotic," unquote, instruments at the time.

That was perceived as another identifying element of so-called West Coast jazz. Do you remember seeing much of that?

SMITH: No. I mean, I know that Stan Kenton was using that kind of stuff, but then you look at Gil Evans' writing, you know, and Claude Thornhill and all that, and gee—

CLINE: There it is.

SMITH: —there it is, yeah.

CLINE: Yeah, exactly.

SMITH: I mean, it was real clear who was a West Coast player and who was an East Coast player at that time. It was real clear who they were, but getting it from this end I see that it's not clear at all. You know, I mean, very clearly the Gerry Mulligan Quartet was West Coast. Shorty Rogers was West Coast. Bud Shank. Although, see, Bud's playing much better now than he was then, you know, but at the time it was sort of weak, you know, sort of wimpy, you know. Bud Shank and Charlie Parker, hmm, let's see, what do you think? I don't know. Which one do you like, you know? But really it's a matter of mastery. And I don't think anybody's ever played better than

Chet Baker or Gerry Mulligan. I mean, if you want to compare how many notes per second, you know, or level of volume, how do you measure technique?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Michael Brecker versus Lester Young, I don't know, which one is the better sax player?

CLINE: Yeah, right. It's really pointless.

SMITH: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

CLINE: What about the approach in the rhythm section? What do you say, there was a way of approaching the music that was more predominant here, that you can recall?

SMITH: Well, the West Coast thing, and again, almost everybody would present themselves as being into the East Coast thing. I mean, that's the way the players were, you know, [adopts gruff speaking manner] "Yeah, man, I'm not into that pussy shit," you know. But you know, there's Kenny Clarke, you know, burning on the brushes, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: You know? I mean, yeah, there were the rhythm sections that were much more, I would say, to the taste of Lennie Tristano. There's not much happening in that percussion. Bass is pretty similar. I mean, you listen to Carson play and he would be just as at home anywhere. Well, he was; he did play with Bird. You know, the bass is the same. Wherever you go it's exactly the same. You know when you're playing four-four and stuff like that.

You know, when you talk about the West Coast, I mean, Scott LaFaro and Charlie Haden were the West Coast guys, and now they're East Coast guys. Right?

CLINE: Yeah. And do you remember hearing Gary Peacock coming up?

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, he was a lot slicker, you know. He had a lot of chops. You know, a lot of chops.

CLINE: People don't often remember him as being an L.A. person either.

SMITH: He was from here, right?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, that's what I mean is so mixed up, you know.

Everybody who lives in New York used to be here, and vice versa, you know. I was born here, of course.

CLINE: You've mentioned a couple of times Charles Mingus. What about Charles Mingus? Certainly one of the more famous figures to emerge out of L.A., and someone who plays your instrument.

SMITH: Well, he's never been an influence to me, except his bands. I really liked a lot of the music. I liked the *Pithecanthropus Erectus*. In fact, that really had a big influence on me, that kind of playing. Most of Charles Mingus that I'm familiar with, I don't care for, but I'm still vastly impressed by what he did. But like *Jazz at Massey Hall* where he overdubbed his own bass playing, he just practically ruined the album and it was just awful what he put in there. I had some Zoot Sims that he and Dannie Richmond played on, and they were obviously jacked up; they were rushing real bad.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I mean, you know, fame is one thing. You know, a person gets famous and they become the guy, you know, and so people mention Charles Mingus, but he's never been an influence on me as a bass player. I'd say probably the biggest influence

on me is Oscar Pettiford. And then I'm still being influenced. Like Eric von Essen was a late influence on me. Just killed me, you know, and I just, whew, just tried to like, "I'm going to be Eric von Essen." I mean, it's not like that, it's like--

You know, what I read in Miles' autobiography [*Miles: An Autobiography*], he talked about some people have the nerve to say that Chet Baker influenced him, and I had never thought of that until I read his denial, and then when I read that, I realized that it was true.

Miles played in the old bravura style, he played like in—You know, with a little touch of Roy Eldridge, you know, in bravura style, and I think the peak of that period was the album he made with Thelonious [Monk] and Milt Jackson, Kenny Clarke and Percy Heath, and he's just playing wonderfully, and then here's come Chet Baker.

Now, Carson told me that Miles, when they went back East, that Miles was in the club every night, every night, every night, and then shortly after that, Miles emerges with this incredibly personal style. And it's not a matter of he began to imitate Chet; it's that he assimilated a concept, you know. Like it's okay to be so sweet. It's okay to be feminine. I mean, whatever the concept is, it's okay to do that. Not that Miles ever sounded like anybody but Miles, but that's what I mean by an influence and that's what I mean by Eric von Essen with me, because I just went "Ahhh. Whew. Okay, okay, you don't have to push. You don't have to push. You can just let it float." I mean, not that I'm playing like Eric von Essen did, you know. I wish I could. Boy. Boy, what a— Whew, what an incredible— Eric was a West Coast guy.

CLINE: Yeah, right, born on the East Coast, though.

SMITH: Really?

CLINE: Connecticut, yeah.

SMITH: I didn't know that.

CLINE: But grew up here, yeah. Going back to the rhythm section thing, there started to be a real revolution in the way rhythm sections were approaching the music, and some of this would be called a so-called East Coast phenomenon, but music's getting louder, drummers are getting louder, bass was always one of the most technically challenging instruments to deal with, not just to carry around, but to be audible. What do you remember— And I'll have to change the tape soon, but what do you remember about the changes in what we could call the technology of dealing with the bass?

SMITH: Do you want to change it?

CLINE: Yeah, let's do that, because we've got, you know, steel versus gut strings, we've got mics, we've got all these fun things to talk about. Hang on.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

JULY 30, 2003

CLINE: Okay. We're rolling. This is, once again, July 30th, 2003, Alex Cline interviewing Putter Smith at his home in South Pasadena. This is the first session continuing on tape number two.

We were talking about the period that we were discussing, being the late fifties, early sixties. You're still basically a teenager. This is a time when the bass is not only changing in terms of its capabilities technically and its role in the music, but in terms of having to meet the demands of the ever-changing musical situation, one of them being volume. What do you remember about having to cope with the challenge of things like audibility, particularly as drummers are starting to get louder and technology is gradually changing?

SMITH: I'd like to come back to the changing concept of the bass' role, but later— Yeah, I began using— I was using gut strings when I started. I mean, everybody was. That's all there were and they were real cheap, eight or nine bucks a set. Now they're \$250 a set.

Then I heard about this guy who had built the strings, he and Oscar Pettiford had designed a set of strings, and this was a guy, I can't remember his name, he was on Bleeker Street in the [Greenwich] Village, and I would send him a ten-dollar bill and he would send me back a set of strings with change in the envelope. That was for a couple of years, and they were lovely strings.

The problem with gut strings is they didn't have any volume but they were really sweet. They would take about three days to break in and then they'd be wonderful for about four or five days, and then they would begin to die and then they would become unusable, and they'd break and things like that. So you had to put a new set of strings on about every three weeks. Okay.

Then metal strings first started coming on and they had tremendous volume, but they sounded snarly and they were like piano strings and they were very, very thin when they first came out, but they were good for six months, you know, a year. So the economy was incredible.

CLINE: Did they tear your hands up when you first used them?

SMITH: Yeah, at first. Yeah. Yeah. But, you know, everything does when you first start playing. I didn't start using an amp until 1966, '67, I didn't start using an amp 'till '68 maybe. My hands used to bleed all the time. I worked for a couple months with Billy Eckstine [in 1959], and the first chart, of the set ["I Apologize"], would be blood spattered, completely blood spattered, because you'd play that first couple notes and [makes theoretical sound of blisters exploding], you know. You'd have a callus that's five inches long on the tip of your finger up until almost to where your thumb meets that Y there between the thumb and the first finger, and you're playing with your whole hand, and playing as hard as you can. I actually destroyed my left hand trying to play, and my middle finger's been broken down for thirty-five years. I mean, I'm dealing with it.

So when I first started using an amp, it's just going through one thing after another, one thing after another, trying to find something that doesn't feed back, something that reproduces the sound of the bass.

I have a special hearing problem, and this isn't pertinent to everyone, but my hearing problem, one, is that I have a hearing loss in the 6,000 [hertz] range, which is off the end of the piano, but it's where consonants are in the language. Okay. And it's been explained to me your mind fills in the blank, you know. Like you'll hear somebody say, "I murdered my wife last night," and then you'll respond, thinking they're kidding, and you'll say, "Well, what did you use, a knife or a gun?" And what they said was, "I ordered a new bike last night." You know?

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: And they certainly look at you like you're crazy, because you've just talked with a non sequitur, and so it will actually allow— How a person's personality will develop around these certain things, you know.

Anyway, the other quirk in my hearing is that I don't have a drop-off on the lower end. Most people have a roll-off, and I don't, so the bass sounds very loud to me. Okay. And so my problem all my life has been turn up, turn up, turn up, you know, it's already too loud.

Now, I don't know how much you want to hear about this, but the technical way sound moves, you know, per second, it's moving at the speed of sound, and that also includes the back-and-forth oscillations. And so if you're playing like a low A and it's going at a hundred, it's moving a hundred times per second, and it's moving very, very wide arcs, because it's moving at the speed of sound. Okay. Whereas, a

trumpet playing C above [middle] C is doing a thousand, a thousand times, so the arcs are much, much shorter. So what the length of sound indicates at a certain rate, so if you took the string and you pulled it straight out a mile, they both decay the same amount in a mile, but when you push it back and the bass arrows have gone back at this wide thing, the bass arrow who has only gone thirty yards and the trumpet arrow's gone a hundred yards. So someone at fifty yards can hear the trumpet very clearly and cannot hear the bass, and on the stage they're playing at the same volume.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: Okay. So that coupled with the fact that the bass already sounds too loud to me has been a real problem. Okay. But stuff has gotten better and better and better and I've gotten deafer, deafer and so now I'm not getting so many complaints.

CLINE: When did the higher-frequency hearing loss start, or have you always had that?

SMITH: I think I was born with it. I didn't recognize it till I was in my thirties. I mean, I didn't know that I had a problem. I thought it was everybody else. So, I mean, that's weird, you know.

CLINE: And you compensate in the lower end.

SMITH: Yeah, right.

CLINE: You've got more of that. Interesting.

SMITH: Right. Right. Well, I don't know if that's something that happens because you're a bass player.

But let's see. I've gone through all sorts of equipment and right now I have about a dozen amps and I have about twenty speakers back there, and I find that every

bass has a different combination that works for it, and you just have to go through everything you can find until it sounds like itself, and that's what I want is to sound like the bass. Now, when I began playing, bass was not the prominent instrument.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Now in rock and roll, bass is actually the leading instrument, so many younger people think that's where it belongs. They say, "I can't hear the bass," you know. In those days you wouldn't hear the bass, except when it soloed.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But even so, I mean, Woody Herman's band, which is famous as being a loud, blasting band, their favorite drummer was Davey Tough, who only used brushes.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I mean, that's how much it's changed.

CLINE: Yeah, exactly. So when you would have to play either acoustically or at times with a microphone on the bass, can you describe what it was like having to be able to hear yourself while you were playing? I mean, what was that like?

SMITH: You mean before I was using the—

CLINE: Before you had an amplifier.

SMITH: Well, everybody played quieter, that's just all there was to it, everybody played quieter. I mean, at that time, before that was stuff was in, I never got complaints about people being able to hear me. Once that stuff came in, and I hadn't gotten into amps yet, and already people were playing much louder and I'm still back at the old thing, you know. Yeah, now I can't play without an amp.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: I mean, even in a completely quiet situation it just sounds— It has the wrong sound. I've come to depend on the amp—

CLINE: Reinforcement?

SMITH: Yeah, the bass, the upright bass, if you drew a picture of its sound pattern, it's like a large thump, and an immediate and quick decay [mimics the sound of a note with a loud transient attack followed by rather rapid decay].

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Whereas Fender bass, it's loud, which retains, like a trumpet [mimics the sound of a note with a loud transient attack followed by a long decay], like that. But the bass is [repeats the approximation of an upright bass attack and decay]. And the amplification makes it not decay so fast.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And so I've come to depend on that as part of my sound, and when I play without an amp or when I hear these guys playing without one [It's become popular, many guys don't use it], it sounds really old-fashioned to me in that sense and kind of frumpy and I don't care for it.

CLINE: Yeah. Not as lyrical a sound.

SMITH: No. No. No, but that's— You know, you're stuck with your own thing, you know.

CLINE: Right. Right. And what about the changing role of, in this case, the upright bass, the acoustic bass, in jazz during the— Particularly as we get into the sixties?

SMITH: Well, I recall, backing up even before that, when I was already a player in high school, and I was playing a lot of broken time, you know, it would probably be

common to play on [beats] two and four [of a four-four bar] for sections, you know, and stuff like that, and I was playing a lot of broken time, and getting complaints. At that age you know you're right, so you don't change to accommodate theirs—you know, "forget it."

I remember seeing a bass player [I have no idea who it was], from another high school, at an assembly at our high school play, and he was playing like that, too. So I mean, I felt like it was in the air. It was this thing like, well, we all know what "bom bom bom bom" [referring to quarter-note walking bass] is. Now we can infer that and play on top of that.

Then Charlie Haden and Scott LaFaro sort of got credit for that, but I think it was in the air already happening, and I kind of got it knocked out of me by the guys I was playing with. They were kind of insisting, you know, like, "Play some time, man. Don't stop like that." They didn't want to hear it. You know, I'm sorry I did. I'm sorry I went that way, but I developed, you know, that way, the Ray Brown kind of way of playing, and kind of forsook the other due to all these events that happened. You have to make a living. You know, all sorts of things.

CLINE: Right. Sure.

SMITH: The people that you love and play with, remember Ronnie Hoopes, the guy I mentioned earlier, you know, really asked me not to do that, not to play broken time, and he was somebody I really respected, and so you go along with it.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: There's a noncreative portion of— And I don't mean to get into any kind of racial thing here, because we'll talk about that later, but I have since then had a lot to

do with the black community and gotten to see that there truly is a different culture, and one of the things that's marvelous about the black community is the encouragement of creativity. It's encouraged. I mean, you go to the church and little children are encouraged to "Do your own thing," and it's like encouraged, nurtured, and cherished. And not to be a stereotype, but in the white community's it's not. It's like "Fit in, toe the line, and don't do that now," or something. So I kind of feel like I was discouraged from my own natural creativity, you know. But, hey, I'm sixty-two and I'm in pretty good health, I'm not complaining.

CLINE: Yeah. Yeah, really.

SMITH: I'm just trying to just say what happened, but I'm not unhappy.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Anyway, I felt like it was in the air, and then when Scott LaFaro consciously— He had done consciously did this thing of we're not supporting you, we're doing a dialogue. You can hear it so clearly and that's what they were doing, the truly experimental thing.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: You know, "Let's try this idea." And then, of course, Charlie, the wonderful things he and Billy Higgins did in that thing, and that was so swinging and had such a good sound, and Charlie is such a charming person, you know. He is just absolutely charming, and occupies the spot of the innovator, which he was.

But it was in the air. It was in the air. A lot of people were doing that sort of thing. Just like Charlie Parker, it was in the air and there were glimpses of it everywhere, a little bit of this and a little bit of that. It just sort of— He was the one

that became the— (Sorry, Charlie). I'm not comparing Charlie Haden to Charlie Parker. I mean, I love Charlie Haden and I respect what he does, but, you know, I'm not putting him on the same shelf as Charlie Parker.

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Sorry, Charlie. Sorry. You know I love you. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: I don't think he'd have a problem with that.

You mentioned the African American community, and at this particular time when you were playing on the scene in L.A., how would you describe the racial picture? Was there a sense of interaction? Was there a sense of segregation?

SMITH: No, it's segregated, just like it is now. There are just a few very unusual white guys that go into the black community predominantly, and a few very exceptional black guys that come out into the white community. I would say that people are a little stupid about that, because it's— I mean, the black guys in the white community are beloved and I think the white guys in the black community are beloved, too. And it's just sort of the way it goes. It's a very segregated town geographically and that has a lot to do with it.

Stupid news programs, you know, they make it seem like— I mean, I remember I was with Willie Bobo for three years and I was down in South Central all the time and never got the slightest vibe, you know. My wife [Verna "V.R."] is in a black gospel choir and goes down into— Way down into South Central a couple times a week and never a problem. It's just on the television, you know, television they choose to show this— I guess it's interesting. Violence is interesting, you know.

CLINE: It makes people watch, I guess.

SMITH: It's still a very racist country, although the great thing about America is that we're dealing with it. I mean, other countries aren't even dealing with it. They don't even know that they have a problem. I was in England twenty years ago, and there was a black guy and there was a panel and they were talking about racism [on TV] and, "Oh, we have no racism. There's no racism in England."

And this guy was almost crying. He says, "You guys are blind. You have no idea."

"No, we don't have racism here." In other words, they didn't even see it. At least we're dealing with it.

CLINE: Yeah, they haven't even solved their classism problems in England.

SMITH: Oh, that's ridiculous.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Ridiculous. Yeah, that's a tough one. Well, we're creating that here.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: That's what I think.

CLINE: Yeah. Well, in so many of the European countries now, they're only just beginning to have experiences with this, so they're going to have to deal with it, figure out ways to deal with it.

SMITH: Well, I remember the first time—I mean, I was always able to—I mean, I met some— When I was fifteen or sixteen, I began to meet black people, and when you'd meet an old person, at the time I would think fifty or something like that, you know, and they would shake hands with you and they'd say something to you like,

“Don’t worry. It won’t rub off.” It was very like that, you know, “Don’t worry. It won’t rub off.”

You go, “God, I wish it would.”

CLINE: I was going to say, “Could it, please.” Yeah.

SMITH: Well, it does. It rubs off inside, you know. But I remember— Well, I mean, I remember meeting Buddy Collette for the first time, and I was about thirteen. I had gone down to see the Chico Hamilton Quintet with my brother [Carson R. Smith], who was playing with them. And here comes Buddy Collette marching over there, and I mean, I didn’t know anything about this, but I knew— I mean, I would describe him now, he came marching over like a true warrior, and I don’t mean angry or anything; he just had pride, but not ego, you know. And I knew I was in the presence of a great chief, you know. I mean, I would not have used those words to describe it at the time. I immediately respected and loved this guy, you know, and that’s never changed. He’s one of the great, great people.

But I remember that there used to be a look that wasn’t— Buddy didn’t have that, and most of the musicians didn’t, but most black people had a certain look and it was extremely wary. I remember the first time I saw a young man who was completely California casual, a young black man who was completely California casual, and I remember noting it in my mind, “Thank God, it’s getting better.” Yeah. And that must have been in the late sixties.

CLINE: Yeah, things were definitely changing at that time.

SMITH: Yeah. It’s changed so much, but so far to go.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But we're dealing with it.

CLINE: Yeah. Good for us.

I think if it's okay with you, we'll stop here.

SMITH: Excellent.

CLINE: And we'll pick up again next time with some more details about specific musicians you were playing with during your late—

SMITH: I can't remember this stuff without using my books.

CLINE: Late teens, early twenties, getting into the sixties, and talk about the changes in the music.

SMITH: Okay. I'll make notes of the people who were real important to me.

CLINE: Yeah. We want to know what was going on here in town during the sixties in the jazz scene.

SMITH: It will help me, too. I thought it would just all [points to brain] click on and— I don't know. [laughs]

CLINE: Well, that's why we're doing more than one interview. I'll be following up on things from this session next time.

SMITH: Okay.

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: All right.

CLINE: Thank you very much.

SMITH: Well, thank you.

[End of July 30, 2003 interview]

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 6, 2003

CLINE: Today is Wednesday, August 6th. This is Alex Cline interviewing Putter Smith, tape number three. This is our second session. We're at Putter's home in South Pasadena once again.

Good morning.

SMITH: Hi.

CLINE: I have some follow-up questions from our last session, which I listened to and enjoyed, by the way. First of all, I wanted to ask you some things about your early experience taking up the bass, since we were talking about how you got into the bass and particularly stories relating to your brother, Carson [R.] Smith. One thing I wanted to ask you, since you've mentioned that you've tried a lot of other instruments, or at least had experience playing some other instruments when you were in school, bass being one of them, was there something particular about the bass that you related to or did you immediately take to it, or how much was your brother's influence part of your decision to focus on the bass, versus these other influences?

SMITH: Yeah, I think everything was because of my brother, that that was the complete impetus. Also the aspect of "that was what you got called to do"; that sort of pulls you in there. All of a sudden you're working as a bass player, so it kind of drags you in that direction. I've thought times that I should have played something else, tenor saxophone or something, some melodic instrument instead of the incredible drudgery of being a time player and playing all the time and all the time. Also I have

a melodic sense, so it would have been better served being on an instrument that was easier to play, but such is fate. Such is fate.

But I would say it had everything to do with my brother, absolutely everything. I don't even know if I would have been a musician if he hadn't been. I had no thought of being a musician. I loved music and I still do, but I could have gone in many different directions.

CLINE: What were some other directions you think you might have been interested in pursuing?

SMITH: Doctor.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah, I was built like that. That was really the only thing I actually thought of that I can recall right now.

CLINE: Were there studies in school that you were particularly good at it or that you enjoyed, particularly, other than music?

SMITH: Math. I loved math. I loved algebra and geometry, when I had good teachers. And then when I had bad teachers, it was impenetrable. Yeah, unbelievable. Unbelievable.

CLINE: Which is how it was for me, I'm afraid.

Do you have any sense of what your brother's feelings were about you taking up the same instrument as he was already playing?

SMITH: Well, he was proud of me and he was very supportive. He kind of fell into bass-playing as a fluke, too. At the time he was in school in 1946, '44, '42, '43, they had big orchestras in all the schools, I mean actual eighty-piece orchestras and stuff,

and people would start off with nothing and they'd name out the— What Carson told me, “Who wants to play trumpet?” He kept waiting for a better instrument and finally there was nothing left but bass, and that's how he became a bass player.

CLINE: I have gathered that that's not all that unusual a story, actually. Was he a fairly sizeable guy, too, at the time?

SMITH: No. No, he was normal.

CLINE: Oh, okay. Because sometimes that has something to do with it; they take the big guy and stick him on the big instrument.

SMITH: Right.

CLINE: Another reason that probably taking up tenor saxophone might have been easier for you, cartage.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. But who knows? As Miles [Davis] said in autobiography, “One thing's for sure; we'll never know.”

CLINE: [laughs] Indeed. And also there's something that I wanted to follow up on that you mentioned at the very end of the interview, and this goes back to your youth and follows up on a question that I'd asked you about West Coast jazz being associated with unusual instrumentation at time, and that's the Chico Hamilton Quintet, which your brother, of course, was the bassist in originally, and which did have unusual instrumentation in that it had a cellist, Fred Katz, and Buddy Collette, who played a lot of flute in that group. You, I believe, had some memories of— You mentioned meeting Buddy Collette, but what were some of your other memories of hearing that group when you were younger?

SMITH: I can't recall how old I was, I might have been thirteen, I might have been eleven, going down to the Stroller's in Long Beach and meeting all the guys. And I told you about my meeting of Buddy Collette, and Chico was very nice to me, and they were all very nice to me. Jim Hall was the guitar player. So I didn't have much to do with them. I was just a little guy that everybody smiled at. I wasn't little.

The story behind Fred Katz is that he had a— Did I tell you this?

CLINE: You mentioned it off tape, and I wanted to make sure we got this.

SMITH: Okay. He had a serious, very serious heart attack. He and Chico had been lifelong friends, I believe, and Chico said, "Well, what do you want to do, Fred?" He was a piano player.

And Fred says, "Well, you know, I've always wanted to play some cello."

So they said, "Let's start a group." It was kind of an act of friendship. At the time Fred had, they figured, six months to two years to live. Okay. And so they started the group was a big hit and it still— You see here it is background music.

CLINE: Right, "Blue Sands."

SMITH: Establishing— I saw *Boogie Nights* and they were playing Chico Hamilton in the background.

Forty years later they did a reunion tour of Europe, and Carson couldn't make the first rehearsal and so I went in. And there's Fred Katz forty years later in great health and everything. And I brought some pictures of myself at the time so they'd remember who I was. But it was a great— One of those things where a path crosses and then recrosses later in a much better place— Well, not better, because it was wonderful at the beginning, but it was a great feeling for me to play, actually play with

those guys and to see them still kicking. John Pisano was playing guitar on the reunion.

CLINE: And a number of interesting and eventually historically important figures, actually, came through that band over time, including Eric Dolphy and Charles Lloyd. Was Albert Stinson at one point in that group?

SMITH: Yes.

CLINE: Do you remember Albert Stinson?

SMITH: Oh, yeah. I used to do his taxes for him.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Oh, yeah. I was the wizard of the out-of-work musicians and I would do everybody's taxes and I wouldn't charge anybody.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: There were about, I mean, five or six guys. I did [Jim] Keltner's and Albert Stinson's and several guys, Bill Plummer. I enjoyed it. You know, I enjoyed it. It wasn't a big thing. Get them all their bread back. And when they started making— You know, had more involved things, now you got to go somewhere else, until finally I don't even do my own.

CLINE: Right. Because Albert Stinson is another one of those people, another name that's kind of been lost in the scuffle of history.

SMITH: In a way, but he's still highly revered and highly thought of and he was *the* great talent of the time, I believe as much as Scott LaFaro. Fantastic. Fantastic, the things he did and they still sound great, and he was recording with Herbie Hancock and people like that in the fifties.

SMITH: I remember he beat me out of an audition one time. Terry Gibbs was having an audition. I went down there and they went with Albert and I was very disappointed.

CLINE: What was he like as a person?

SMITH: Very shy, very quiet, soft-spoken, not any kind of belligerent or aggressive or even forward. I can't think who to relate him to. But it seemed to me he would be content just to sit somewhere and sort of watching the world go by and never say anything to anybody.

CLINE: The classic introvert.

SMITH: But I wasn't a close friend of his. Jim Keltner was a very close friend of his. He got extremely messed up on drugs and, you know, absurd. It's like when people get into it really young, they just— They have no control and they can't say, "Ah-oh, I'd better stop here and cool and chill for a minute." And he just went all the way out. When he died, I went to his funeral, and that's the first time I was ever mad at somebody for dying, for throwing away all that huge gift and opportunity and everything. He just threw it away. But people are helpless when they're in that condition.

CLINE: Right. We were talking a little bit about the drug scene at the time that you were coming up, and you had said that there wasn't as much heroin use at the time, but perhaps more indulging in things like various forms of amphetamines, and yet we also talked about Ornette Coleman's group and, of course, most of his group were junkies at the time, Charlie Haden, Billy Higgins. And you, of course, were friends with Charlie and—

SMITH: Well, I wasn't a close friend of Charlie at the time. I'm much more a friend now than then. We would associate and at one time he came up to my house, after the Digger, and I didn't really realize that there was that much junk on the scene. I just wasn't part of that. I may have known a little bit about it and just avoided it. I mean, I knew Don Cherry very well and I had no idea that he used it, you know. Are you sure he did?

CLINE: Well, I know he did at various times in his life. I know he started to have a problem with it again later in his life, which is very tragic. And you mentioned that you had a working association regularly with Don Cherry. What do you remember about young Don Cherry here in Los Angeles?

SMITH: Fiery. I remember his playing was marvelous. He was into the same stuff I was into, and that is Art Blakey and Charlie Parker. Very inspiring, energetic. I still can't remember who that alto player was. Did I tell you about that?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: We used to play these concerts with an alto player, and I want to say George Coleman, and I know that that's not his name. So it's either George something or something Coleman, and not Ornette. And we played with a piano player named Don Batcho, and I can't remember the drummer's name. Then Don would come by my house when I was living near L.A. [Los Angeles] City College, and we'd play, just the two of us, and talk. Extremely motivated, fine person.

Then shortly after that, I saw him play several times where he was playing solo abstract, but never losing, never losing the thread or playing—I mean, if a note was

way out, it would be answered by another note equally way out in some other place that would bind it all together.

I went to a session where Lorraine Geller was playing and Gerry Mulligan and possibly Stan Levey, and typically of all, I can't remember who was the bass player was. Ridiculous. It might have been Monty Budwig. I don't know who it was. And Don Cherry just blew the place away. It was four in the morning, five in the morning. Just astonishing.

CLINE: Do you remember ever hearing his predecessor in Ornette's band, Bobby Bradford, when he was in L.A.?

SMITH: Oh, I know Bobby. No, I never heard him at that time. I didn't meet Bobby until the seventies or eighties.

CLINE: Okay. What about a couple of those other names I mentioned, guys would have been older than you, but had their brief and early beginnings of ascendancy here in L.A.? Eric Dolphy, of course, a local.

SMITH: I never knew Eric Dolphy. First time I heard him— I think he was enough older than me that we wouldn't have been on the same scene— Was in Charlie Mingus' *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, and I was just killed by that; I loved that. It's still an inspiration to me, even though, as I said, Charles Mingus is not particularly a big figure in my whatever you call it up there.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Skull.

CLINE: As a bass player. And do you remember when Charles Lloyd was getting going around here?

SMITH: Oh, yeah, I used to play with Charles all the time. He was a different kind of cat, you know. He came from big bread, you know, and the family was—I don't know what they did, if his dad was a doctor or something like that, but I know they had property and land. He was quite what would be seen as arrogant, but I never sensed him being rude.

One time we had a confrontation over a chick, and from then we were actually pretty friendly, you know. And then he called me in maybe '71 or '72 to go to Europe and tour Europe, and the bread was insufficient and I just could not because I had a family. If I hadn't had a family I would have crawled over there, but I had two children and I couldn't bring myself to abandon them.

CLINE: Where was this confrontation? I didn't catch the name of the—

SMITH: Which?

CLINE: With Charles Lloyd, you said, it sounded like chick or something.

SMITH: Oh, there was a place called the Dragonwyck in Pasadena, you know. It wasn't a confrontation, it was just a real clear— We were both interested in the same chick, and I wasn't going to back down and he was kind of surprised. But he was a very special guy, and of course, a very special player. The first time I played with him, I think it was just the two of us and he quoted from *The Rite of Spring* [by Stravinsky] in his solo and so I quoted right back at him, you know. But I was knocked out that somebody else knew that music. At the time it was still kind of unknown. [Sings fragment of opening melody].

CLINE: Right. That opening melody.

And also you were talking a little bit about some of these clubs and how it seems that clubs are never-changing as far as places to play go, but what do you remember about the audiences for these gigs you were doing when you were younger here in Los Angeles? What kind of people came?

SMITH: Well, the ones that were— Let's see. It seemed like a place like Mangold's or the Club 88, those places in Compton that was just a bar, and that happened to have jazz, and it was people that really weren't into it, they were just there and it was jazz background and it was hip, and they were smoking and drinking, like that. I can't recall anyplace that had a real audience, like the Jazz Bakery, other than Shelly's [Manne-Hole].

CLINE: [inaudible].

SMITH: Yeah. But they were the same as they are now; they just completely ignore you. If they left you alone, it was great.

CLINE: So it was a mix of people, would you say, male, female, black, white?

SMITH: Yeah. Yes. Yes, yes. I think at Club 88 would be a very rare black person. The Digger less so, I mean, there would be a few more, and there would be Hispanic people there, too. Georgia Lee's [Caprice] was sort of, really kind of— Is the word *egalitarian*? I'm not sure. But that was a good mix, a good normal future American look.

CLINE: [laughs] Right. Some other musicians we talked about last time, we just covered Don Cherry, and we talked a lot about Scott LaFaro, but I wanted to know if there were any more thoughts you had about him as a person, as well as a musician.

We talked about his contribution as a bassist, but what do you remember about him as a person?

SMITH: Oh, he was very clean-cut. He looked like Scott Colley. Everybody was wearing Ivy League jackets and ties. Everybody was wearing that all the time, and it was normal. He was like— I'm trying to relate to an actor. I would say he was like— I'm not sure. In appearance it would be like Steve McQueen or something. Well, of course, you can look at the pictures and figure that out. But how to describe his— Calm, very intelligent, very aware, interested, and not excessively wordy, like someone sitting here. Great guy. A great guy.

He actually had some— I don't know if we talked about his— I asked him one time, when I went to see him with Ornette there at Jimmy Madden's, and I said, "You've never had any lessons, have you?"

He just looked kind of embarrassed and like somebody had caught him or something, and he said, "How do you know that?"

I said, "Well, you're playing stuff that nobody plays. I mean, the way your hands are moving. What are you doing? What do you work on?"

He said, "Well, I work on arpeggiating," and of course, at the time, I can hear now that he was working on the modes, which I was completely ignorant of, and he said, "I've got it down to where you cross strings and you play a third, and a major third is 2-1 and a minor third is 3-1, and so I just work out the arpeggios."

So it would be, starting with the E string, it would be the C/E, 2-1, and then let's say a C7, because it mixes it up, C/E, 2-1, and then on the A string G and B-flat on the D string, 3-1, and then jump up on the D, you're on the D string and you go up to 2-1

and you play D/F-sharp. Okay. Now, I don't know if this is going to be incorporated at all, but it's a very unusual look, and I began practicing that stuff. I think because he had been on the East and he was exposed to the George Russell thing, which I had heard about, but had no idea what it was, and years later I worked out this whole system of the modes, and John Gross told me— I said, "John, I can't seem to make a move forward."

He says, "Go study the modes," and that was it. So I spent about five years working out the modes and finally made this incredible discovery. It was like, "Oh, my god, each chord has its own mode and all you have to do is really practice them." You know, it was exciting. And every book I would see on jazz— I know we're digressing here, but a "how to play jazz" book, it would have three or four things right, and then the stuff they'd just kind of slip through and slide through. See, none of them have it together. The system that I discovered, which is the way I felt about it, I didn't create it, I just discovered it, was already there. None of them had it completely, you know.

Then about ten years ago I picked up *Lydian Chromatic Concept*. I found the George Russell thing, and it's exactly the George Russell thing, from a completely different angle, but it comes to the same result. I was just blown away, and I wrote to him and told him of my labor in the dark and if I had only known about his thing, I could have saved myself five years. But I could see that that's what Scott LaFaro was working on, incorporating those modes, and it's all ability.

CLINE: Yeah, revolutionized the vocabulary of the piano trio.

SMITH: Well, he did truly innovate. I mean, those guys that you hear, like Bud Powell, totally changed the piano, and Bill Evans. I mean it's totally added a new thing.

CLINE: Right. Thanks, Bill. [laughs] And you also mentioned Paul Bley. I wanted to get your take on the young Angelino, Paul Bley, when he was playing.

SMITH: Well, to me he wasn't young. I think he was—I don't know what his age is, but he was, you know, me being sixteen, I think maybe he might have been thirty, but I'm not sure.

CLINE: Younger anyway.

SMITH: Yeah. And he was a very, ooh, a very— He had a lot of what appears to be arrogance, you know, but I mean, he was never rude to me or I never saw him be rude to anybody. It's almost like an aristocratic aloof arrogance. And a great artist. A great artist. But I mean, I don't mean that he was ever mean or anything; he just had this— Like if he'd been, you know, Baron Rothschild, I wouldn't have been surprised. But it's really unfortunate that he never got the fame he deserved, because he is one of the great, great players. He was very inspiring. We played together a lot, and he used to go to the Digger and he came to my house a few times at four in the morning, five in the morning, to play. Then, of course, that incredible wife of his, Carla [Bley].

CLINE: Right. My next question. You played with her, too.

SMITH: Yeah, I played with her. I had a gig for six months with her.

CLINE: What was that like?

SMITH: Well, she was a real— She's an autodidact and extremely unusual, and everything makes sense that she writes, even though it's so unusual. I guess she's

writing—I kind of like relate her to Eric Satie, you know, like somebody that doesn't really know anything, but comes up with the stuff, whereas Paul really, obviously, is based in knowledge.

CLINE: Yeah, tradition.

SMITH: She's an astonishing talent and a great lady. We had a lot of fun.

CLINE: What was the music like that you were doing with her?

SMITH: It was all her music. It was all her songs.

CLINE: Where was this?

SMITH: It was on Highland [Avenue] a little bit north of Hollywood [Boulevard] on the East Side, and I really wouldn't know—I guess I could go by there and see if I see it. But it was one of those places, kind of coffeehouse, except it had a big plate-glass window in the front, which is where we were.

One time we both decided at the same time we could not do this anymore. I would pick her up for the gig. That was the drill;, I'd go by and pick her up and we'd go to the gig. At one time we both, at the same time, said, we can't sit in that goddamn window anymore, so we went home. I took her home and I went home, and the next day I got a call from Paul and he was really mad, because, I mean, money was a real factor. He was really mad and how could I do that, encourage her, you know, not say, "Okay, the show much go on." We didn't do it. I don't blame him. I don't blame him.

CLINE: And this brings to mind something I wanted to ask you about since you last time brought up Carla Bley and also JoAnne Grogan, who became JoAnne Brackeen,

and you just a little while ago mentioned Lorraine Geller. What about women musicians around this time? Do you remember very many?

SMITH: I don't remember many. Janie [Jane] Getz was another one. Let's see. She was quite an interesting player and went on to have a pretty interesting career in New York. She's back here now. I've played with her a few times; still sounds terrific. Who else?

CLINE: So far we're talking about piano players. Do you remember anyone playing anything else?

SMITH: No. No, I can't recall. I'll try to.

CLINE: Okay. I remember there were a few people coming out of more of the Central Avenue era, people like Clora Bryant and Melba Liston and people like that.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Was Melba from here?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I didn't know that. I didn't know that, and I didn't know Clora at that time.

CLINE: Right. But not a lot of them.

SMITH: Right.

CLINE: Still aren't a lot of them. And this brings to mind also somebody who I think a lot of people don't recognize as being from here and somebody you mentioned playing with early on; that was Bobby Hutcherson. What was that like and what were you doing with him?

SMITH: Well, he was part of the Pasadena scene, Herbie Lewis, Jim Keltner, Albert Stinson, those guys. There's another great guy named Jack Fowlkes, played tenor [saxophone]. Bobby Hutcherson was like Charles Lloyd, but Hutcherson didn't have

any kind of an aristocratic arrogance, you know, but he was like a college guy. He was like he had a college brain and he was obviously going to do something and he wasn't going to fall down somewhere. So he always had that. And he was really a lovely player. He used to work at Pandora's Box and I occasionally played with him at the Dragonwyck, that same place. So that's where I first met Mike Romero. Do you remember that name?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Okay. He was the young up-and-comer drummer. He was Freddie Gruber's star drummer and he became a habitual speed user, and poor guy. So I think he's still around, but I don't know what he's doing, but he had a tremendous everything, chops and strong time, and for a while he was working all the gigs and traveling out and doing stuff, and he kind of snapped.

CLINE: Never heard of him. Another drummer whose name has come up a couple of times in my talks with people from this period was someone named Art Mardigan.

Does this name ring a bell to you?

SMITH: I just know the name from records, but I never met him.

CLINE: He's somebody I guess that some people still remember very fondly, but I don't know what happened to him.

SMITH: I don't either. Somehow Washington, D.C. is in my head, but I'm not sure if that's right. Kent Glenn has talked about Art Mardigan, what a great player he was.

CLINE: Don Preston, as well, is mentioned here. Do you remember Don Preston from those days?

SMITH: Oh, god, yes. Oh, yeah. I mean, we were hot-and-heavy-type cats, you know. I first met Don, there was a club— It had a Swiss name [Villa Frascato], on Sunset, right across from Pandora's Box, and Paul Bley had a Sunday night gig there and I played that gig with Paul. That was a regular gig. Then one night Don Preston was there, and that's when we became friends and I began playing with him a lot and going to the sessions he had and started playing with his free band, you know. Don would do stuff like put a toy train on the piano and untune a guitar to play it, and play the spokes on a bicycle all this stuff, and plus all the incredible stuff that he wrote. He is the most astonishing of all. I cannot believe what he plays, and he really doesn't have a musical education. I mean, he's the true autodidact of all time, you know, but incredible.

So I was playing with these guys, the two brothers, Bunk and Bruz and—

CLINE: Oh, Bruz Freeman, the drummer.

SMITH: No, no, there's two brothers. One played tenor and the other played trumpet.

CLINE: Oh, oh, Buzz and Bunk Gardner.

SMITH: That's right. That's right. I can't remember who the drummer was, but there were four, five, six people. And I've never been very interested in free music, but I just dug the scene. Rowena [Blincoe, Preston's first wife] was a great drawer, artist, and she hadn't yet lost her mind completely and was extremely eccentric, but hadn't gone completely away.

I guess we got together for months, you know, a couple of months, and it was just something for fun for me. I wasn't serious about it and I thought anything happening was— And then one day he said, "You know, we found this guy in San

Diego, you know, and he's got some great ideas, you know." Don was living down in Chavez Ravine at the time. I don't even remember if Dodger Stadium was there or not.

CLINE: That was built in the early sixties.

SMITH: Yeah, this was, well, the late sixties. No, no, it might have been—could it have been the fifties? I'm not absolutely certain. I might have been right around 1960. This guy was there, I can't remember what his name was, and he had a very dark countenance and I didn't like him at all. I mean, I was, "Oh, man, I don't like this guy. He's got a bad vibe," you know.

Next thing you know, they've got an audition at ABC [American Broadcasting Company], you know, through this guy. So here's this guy and he gets up there in front like— And he's doing all the stuff that Don was doing, playing the bicycle spokes, and he says, "Now, I'm going to untune my guitar." Exactly the same stuff Don, you know, did.

Then some of the executives at ABC, one guy came over and said, "You know, sometimes I don't understand about modern art, and my son can explain to me what's good in there." And he says, "Can you tell me what's happening with this music?"

I said, "I don't have a clue, you know."

Anyway, it was Frank Zappa. He changed his name and became Frank Zappa, and he was a dark guy, and I didn't want to be involved with him. I didn't care for his— I just sensed an untrustworthiness or something, which was borne out in the fact that everybody got taken and some of them ended up living on the street, you know. I had a very cruel vibe from him. Of course, they had great experiences and went on

and all that stuff, but I would say that Mothers of Invention was 90 percent Don Preston. I mean, really, all the credit that this guy, whoever his name was, he called himself Zappa, and I know that people that are into Zappa are like, he's like a god.

CLINE: Yeah, fanatics.

SMITH: But having personally met god, I didn't like him. I didn't like him, and I'm glad I didn't get involved. But I was glad to see Don be in *Life* magazine.

CLINE: That's right, I remember that, that picture where they're holding all the babies.

SMITH: Yeah, just killed me. Just killed me. Of course, if they'd had sense, you know, they'd have set themselves up for life.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: If they had sense, they wouldn't have been playing in that band in the first place. I'm sorry.

CLINE: I know, but Don still plays a lot of that music.

SMITH: But Don is something else. Don is something else. He's a real genius. You know— And what a sweet guy.

CLINE: Yeah, he's a very unusual human being.

Do you remember anything else like that happening around town in terms of these sort of free sessions, sort of the more avant-garde activity around that time?

SMITH: There was a guy named Howard Small, piano player. Jeez, isn't that far out; this conjures up a whole bunch of pictures. He had kind of out music, you would say [Thelonious] Monk-ish or Herbie Nichols kind.

CLINE: But there was still time and stuff?

SMITH: Oh, yeah.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: No, the free thing came after Ornette, sort of, as I recall, and I really didn't get involved in that.

CLINE: Right. Things got more experimental.

SMITH: I played a gig last night where we played free.

CLINE: Oh, really.

SMITH: Yeah. Steve Lockwood.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, I've played with Steve. Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, "Stormy Night." You know, marvelous, marvelous stuff, but, you know, it loses my—I lose it. I have to force myself to stay awake while playing it, and it's like "Take it out, man. You can't do twenty minutes of this." But that's another interview.

CLINE: Right. Right. I think one more question before I turn the tape over here. I don't want to get in trouble. Since you've mentioned Pandora's Box and some other venues, what do you remember about the then emerging and eventually very, very happening Sunset Strip scene with some of these clubs, and, of course, the eventual takeover of the popular music, rock and roll and that sort of thing in that location?

SMITH: Well, that location was interesting. I was there when they had the big riots. I was working with Don Randi and the place was filled. There must have been ten thousand on that corner. What was that, the anti-[Vietnam] War stuff? I remember Don and I were standing in the doorway of Schwab's and this police line starts coming up, you know, and these guys are shoulder-to-shoulder, you know, and they start

shoving, and I said, “No, wait a minute, we’re working at Sherry’s.” Then the policeman was just as embarrassed as we were. I mean, he was real nice and the guys say, “Okay, okay,” so they just passed us by.

I mean, I saw some— As far as that goes, you know, you’d see a young marine or something and he was a nice guy and everything, and then pretty soon there’d be twelve people around him yelling at him. It wasn’t quite fair. Of course, that whole scene wasn’t, but that’s not what we’re here for.

CLINE: That’s history, though.

SMITH: Marv Jenkins was working across the street. There was Sherry’s and then on the little island there was Pandora’s Box, that’s the corner of Crescent Heights [Boulevard] and Sunset [Boulevard]. And then there was a little island there, it was Pandora’s Box, a diamond in the middle of the street and that’s where it was. Then across the street was— It was the Villa Frascati, and that’s where the thing with Paul Bley and Don Preston and later on Calvin Jackson worked there for years.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: And up the street was Marv Jenkins’ group, and he was there for a long time, and Louis Large was his bass player, and Albert Stinson played with him for a while.

Let’s see. The drummer, Donald Dean.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: And I’m trying to remember who else. They had different jazz groups in there, too. I saw Buddy De Franco’s group with Bill Plummer. I don’t remember who the piano player was. Could have been Ron Jefferson playing drums, but I’m not sure.

Then farther up was Sneaky Pete's, which is a place I never frequented. I can't remember who was working there. Marty Harris, maybe. A lot of people worked there, I know. That's all I can remember on Sunset.

Then you'd go down Crescent Heights, and at the corner of Crescent Heights and Santa Monica [Boulevard], I believe, was a big club, and I can't remember the name of it. It was a big club and it was obviously, you know, the mob or something, because it had a real hard edge, but they did big business. Eddie Cano worked there and different bands.

Let's see. I'm trying to think on Melrose [Avenue]. I can't remember.

CLINE: And there were some clubs and things on La Cienega [Boulevard], too, as I recall.

SMITH: Oh, yeah, the Losers. I think there was a place called the Rounders, but I might be wrong about that. The Losers, I played in there for a while. One night Erroll Garner came and sat in, which was nice, and played. Then somebody says, "Play 'Misty.'"

"Ahh, no way. I hate that song."

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: I think I have made notes on that later.

CLINE: All right.

SMITH: When I played there at these clubs, there were a group of people that came in, there was about eight of them, and they included Johnny Mercer and Billy Daniels and a comedian named Paul Gilbert, and several other guys, and they would come in like the Rat Pack, you know. It was later. They weren't trying to emulate anybody;

they were just who they were, but I had no idea who Johnny Mercer was. I mean, I knew the name and I knew he was a songwriter and he sang with this kind of husky voice. I came to realize later one of the greatest songwriters that ever lived.

CLINE: Okay. I'm going to turn the tape over.

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CLINE: All right. You were talking about Johnny Mercer.

SMITH: Yeah. Well, just that I was too ignorant to know what a giant I was playing with, which is not unusual for a young person. Like meeting Charlie Parker, “Oh, yeah, I’ve heard of you.”

CLINE: You’ve gone back and looked at some of your datebooks and things from long, long ago, and one of the things that I’m interested in having you discuss a bit is some of the musicians that you were working with around this time, particularly those who you thought were particularly good that have been, perhaps, forgotten by time and changes in people’s sort of life histories and things, sort of the unsung of the L.A. jazz scene around the fifties and early sixties.

SMITH: Well, I’m sure that every city of any size has people in it who are really potentially great and that fate has left them out of the mix. Ronnie Hoopes, someone I met here, and a truly great musical intellect, never got the slightest opportunity. Just a great guy, great original player, and I’ve played some stuff of his for Alan Broadbent last year and Alan was— The first thing he said, “Oh, this is very original,” and coming out of the mainstream. He was a Whittier [California] person. There was a group of guys from Whittier.

Dick Shoop was another great tenor player. Ronnie was a piano player. Dick Shoop was a great tenor player, played like Sonny Rollins in 1956, ’57, he was playing. He was tall, six-foot-two, white kid that weighed about 110 pounds, and I’m

not kidding, and nobody ever knew about. He worked a lot in Orange County area. You know, it's fate. It's the confluence of things. Louie Shapiro was a great player, tenor player.

Sometimes people are just beaten down by the system and the lack of money, and that can lead you to desperation. I saw real early that there was no money, and so I tried to prepare and do things that would help. I decided early on I didn't want to use music to make money, but I looked for other things, you know, starting with small investing, making a plan. I think most people aren't fortunate enough to have that thought, and then you have to be sort of relentless in your sticking to the plan.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Then Louie— Louie was a great tenor player. He's still on the scene. I still see him every once in a while out and about. Let's see. I'm looking at this list of guys here. Richard Rehwald was one of the great players and he was a great bass player. He had everything, absolutely everything. He was phenomenally accomplished technically. I saw an old teacher ten years ago, some heavyweight guy.. I can't remember his name. Ray Siegel? Is that right? He was a very prominent classical bass teacher. I was there to buy a bass or something, and he asked, "Did you ever hear of Richard Rehwald?"

I said, "Oh, yeah. Yeah, I see him every once in a while."

He says, "Man, he played like a gypsy." He goes, "I couldn't believe the way this kid played the bow," and he [Richard] was working classical and jazz. And he was good-looking and charming and witty and intelligent and everything. He did

something like a five-day fast or something and then took acid—this was in the sixties—and he never came back.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Really. Never came back. So there's something into this thing of "Just say no." Because you never know how it's going to affect you. But of course, a five-day fast.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But I still see him from time to time, and he's sort of out of his brain.

Don Ellis, of course, went on to fame, but he used to be on the scene all the time at the Caprice.

CLINE: Playing trumpet?

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, before he recorded.

CLINE: What was he sounding like at that point?

SMITH: Brassy. [mutual laughter] Brassy, not particular— Nothing particular that stood out. Let's see here. I'll put my glasses on. There was a guy, Bill Lucas, he was an alto [saxophone] player in the Compton area and Lynwood and played, for the time, wonderfully. He had a younger brother, and his younger brother had a friend who is now a millionaire, alto player, horn player. You see him on all of the rock and roll things. I can't think of his name, but he's one of the prominent ones, like, with the Blues Brothers recordings, and that movie, and he was on all the sessions.

At one time Bill and I were sitting in the front room, and I was about fifteen, and we were listening to this conversation that his brother, who was about twelve, was having with this other guy, who was about twelve, and he was saying, "Yeah, yeah,"

he says, “you know, the way you improvise, you’re in a key and you just wiggle your fingers in that key.” All right. That’s the first sign of knowledge, the first awareness, and so that guy wiggled his way into fame.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: There was a guy, Louie Garcia, and he was a very talented alto player, extremely talented. He had a scene at his house, and it was like a playing scene, and he was involved with the guys that played, one of which was a trumpet player named Mike Conlin, a very talented hard-edge player.

If Bud Powell had played trumpet, I think he would have played like Mike Conlin, a real aggressive, beautiful thing. He actually ended up working with Ray Charles for a few years. He did some hard prison time and then he died. I don’t know what it was, but I think he was one of the early AIDS guys, and that was from drugs.

You know, there’s a room that when I— As I said, I was using bennies and stuff like that, and coming to the end of the program, I mean, it was like either you go on and become a derelict or you stop, and thank God I stopped. I was sitting around a room with a bunch of these guys, and there were about ten of us and we were all sitting around in a circle talking, and like about four hours go by and I realize that nobody has said anything, just [makes blabbering sound], like that, you know. And all those guys now are pretty messed up or dead, with the exception of maybe Richard Aplanalp was there.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, and he's okay. He's okay. But Mike Romero was there, Richard Raywald and Mike Conlin. I can't remember who else. But it was like within a week of that time that I was through with it.

CLINE: Interesting.

SMITH: Yeah, it was a gift. It was a gift.

Let's see here. I'm looking down the list of unsung— Steve Goldman, piano player, and he was on the Troubadour scene. I'm talking about when the Troubadour was on La Cienega. Very wonderful piano player, but really didn't pursue the— His case was he didn't pursue it; he went another direction. But he never got any accolades, and should have. He was on the scene with Sid Levy and Eddie Rubin and those guys.

Somebody who used to come into the Troubadour to play was Charles Brackeen. That was the first time I heard anybody who was heavily influenced by [John] Coltrane. I was the first one on my block to dig Coltrane. The first time I heard him was on Miles' "Cookin'". It was at Long Beach. There was a house we used to play at and they had a huge record recollection. This record recollection later became the foundation of Ray Avery's Rare Records, and they had a whole wall of LPs and they kept them and they were fastidious. I mean, if they'd had rubber gloves at that time, or latex gloves, they would have used them. They had that Miles with Coltrane, and I heard it, and I went, "Oh, my god, that guy's great."

And several people said, "You like that? You like that? Ew, it sounds awful. Are you kidding?"

"God, it's wonderful. It's wonderful."

It was a few years later and everybody was there, you know. It still remains my favorite Coltrane, like the quintets, Miles' quintets, whew, god. One thing about it is, Coltrane sounds so sensitive and he's not dead positive of everything, you know. You can actually hear him stopping out of confusion and deciding to go another way, and I love that, and the texture, the rhythm of texture. I love that. I love to hear that, hear the brain thinking.

CLINE: Right. It's interesting contrasted with the incredible confidence and fluidity of [Julian] "Cannonball" [Adderley], when they were both in the band together. He just sounds absolutely like he knows everywhere he's going all the time.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

CLINE: So what else about Charles Brackeen do you remember then? Because he's become a bit of an elusive figure, to put it mildly.

SMITH: And Charles was very— He had an air of "I'm above it all," and not angry or anything, but just "I'm above it all and it's cool, man, it's cool," you know. He played his fiery beautiful way. I saw him again after— I used to go over to his house after that, after he and JoAnne were married, and we played for months and go by his house and there was a regular session. Again, I can't remember who the drummer was, who'll really thank me for that, and different people.

And there was a guy in there, another guy I just remembered, Tom Pelletier used to be there. Tom was kind of an out player, of course, and Charles was also sort of out, and JoAnne, of course, was very out, you know, and got outer. She was an amazing person. Did I talk about her before?

CLINE: No, we've mentioned that she was around, but we haven't talked about—
She was someone I was headed towards on the list here.

SMITH: Well, if you want to come back to her, I've got a lot about her. And then I don't know what happened with Charles. They went to New York together. But you know, one person makes it and the other one doesn't, and I'm not sure that he had the skills to survive as a musician. You know, sometimes someone who's developed something— Like Don Preston, you know. I mean, if he had to depend on working in the music scene, forget it, you know. You put a chart in front of him, forget it, although he'll write these incredible things. To a large degree, success is being able to do the gig when you get called to do it.

Again I'm digressing, but I was working with Jim Keltner a lot and we played together a lot, we used to play at my house and we worked some real terrible gigs together, went to Lake Tahoe together, shared a cabin with a far-out alcoholic. The guy was playing piano in the band and was twenty-five or thirty years older than us, thirty, maybe thirty-five years older. We were early twenties and he was fifty. We would play cards and he'd stick a bottle of vodka, a quart bottle or whatever those big bottles are, and every once in a while we would notice that it had gone down an inch, and neither Jim nor I ever saw him take a drink. And that bottle, I don't know how he did it, and it was never— The liquid was never moving. I have no idea, and we both just wondered, "How is he doing that?"

Anyway—

CLINE: Charles Brackeen.

SMITH: Well, yeah, back to the skills and music. Jim and I were working with Don Randi, and one time he got a call and he said, “I don’t know if I should do this or not, you know, it’s rock and roll.” And it was Gary Lewis, Jerry Lewis’ son.

I said, “Jim, go ahead and do it.”

He says, “They were talking about paying big money,” which it might have been \$200 a week, I don’t know, at the time.

I said, “Go ahead. Go ahead.”

So he did, and the rest is history.

CLINE: Yeah, that’s right.

SMITH: I mean, he just went— And I was doing his taxes at the time, you know, and so I was really—

CLINE: So you would know.

SMITH: He’d call me up every month and tell me, he’d say, “Man, I can’t believe it.” You know, one month he’s making this much and the next month is twice— It’s doubling every month, you know. At one point I said, “Jim, I can’t do your taxes anymore. You got to get somebody real, you know.”

But the fact is, is that he is a tremendously skilled musician, can read anything, play anything, and all that stuff, and so he was ready when the knock came he was ready for it. Because we all get opportunities, you know, and so if you’re ready to do it, and so if a guy like Charles Brackeen, wonderful player and everything, gets called to play do a rehearsal band in New York and can’t really read, you know, that’s the end of that story.

CLINE: Right. Right.

SMITH: And there's a thing about not reading that sort of diminishes one's reputation all over. "Oh, he really plays good, but he can't read anything." I know this from having learned to read when I was in my thirties.

CLINE: Yeah, I was going to say, rhythm section guys are the ones who usually can get away for a long time without having to read, as a rule.

SMITH: Yeah, they can survive career-wise, but to get to the upper levels you've got to be able to do that.

Okay. So, Charles Brackeen.

CLINE: While we're on this, let's talk— Why don't you say some things about JoAnne Brackeen before we leave the Brackeens.

SMITH: Okay. And that's why when I saw Charles again it was when I worked with JoAnne here at Catalina [Bar and Grill] is the last time she was here, three or four years ago. Oh, it was Ralph Penland who was playing drums. He took off on the weekend. He should never have done that. Carl Burnett came in and played, and her material is so difficult that it's not fair to anybody to take off like that, but that's show biz. Also, just incidentally, Ralph Penland is one of my favorite players. Wonderful player.

JoAnne. Okay. Well, she would be the absolute picture for a spinster lady in those days, and she wore black dresses, but it looked Victorian, but not in a hip way or not Gothic; they just were terrible. She had no sense of taste.

CLINE: A square.

SMITH: They would be up to the collar, buttoned, and she had this elfin librarian look, you know. She was very slender, and seemed to have inexhaustible energy. I

used to see her at Frank Patchen's house on Highland Park up on Mt. Washington. Some of the names there Lloyd Morales, a drummer. Richard Boone, great trombone player and singer. JoAnne had studied with Frank Patchen, and he would have these recording things and we'd all be there and they'd say to her— She had perfect pitch, okay, and she also had this other thing, "JoAnne, what time is it?" She would look off into the distance and say, "It's 10:37 and thirty seconds." And she had a perfect sense of exact time.

CLINE: Weird.

SMITH: Now, is that far-out? It really used to freak us out. I mean, "Yeah! Yeah!"

CLINE: Whoa.

SMITH: And then she was going with Pete Aplan which I first met her, who is Richard Aplanalp's older brother.

CLINE: Oh, I see. So he shortened his name.

SMITH: Yeah, back in the days when everybody did that. No "vich"es allowed, no "mini"s allowed, you know, on the end of the names, everything, you know. After *The Godfather* all the Italian guys' names got longer, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, they reinstated it.

SMITH: John Terry is somebody that I was going to talk about later, and he became John Tirabasso, after *The Godfather*, you know. Great guy, wonderful character.

JoAnne. She would play all the time, and at the time I think she was going to— There was a school in downtown L.A. I can't remember if it was Westlake or L.A. Institute of Music.

CLINE: I was going to say Westlake, maybe. Los Angeles Conservatory [of Music]?

SMITH: That's where I think she was going. Then she would be at places like the Digger and the Caprice and playing all the time, playing all the time. She wound up at my pad a number of times, playing. Then she hooked up with Charles, okay, and then next thing you know, they got a kid and they got a pad, and so I'm going over there to play with them and they're playing all the time and she's coming out on the gig. At the Troubadour, I remember her bringing her baby in, in a little basket, and putting the baby under the piano while she played. She was relentless; she was not going to not play. Then they ended up going to New York, and of course, you know from there.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Then she was here about fifteen or twenty years ago and she was at Donte's and I called her up, I couldn't come in, but I called up to say hello and everything, and she didn't remember anything, which was far-out. I mean, wow, far-out. I said, "Do you remember the thing you used to do with the time?" She couldn't remember that. Wow.

So then somehow we got hooked up about three years ago when she was at Catalina's and I worked a week with her, and she's quite a different person. She's very extroverted and dresses in a completely different style, you know, has a completely different sense of herself. She was, of course, very disappointed in the audience of L.A. She says, "When I play a little club in New York, there's always sixty people there."

But there you go. That's what I know about JoAnne. She's quite a success.

CLINE: Yeah. And how about some of these other folks?

SMITH: Okay.

CLINE: The unsung.

SMITH: Joe Gordon died too young.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: He was on all the scenes.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And he used to come to my house a lot and play, and he was a very burning, angry person and would exhibit great reticence. He would be— You had to make all the moves. He wouldn't institute any conversation or anything like that. Even someone as clearly his friend as me, you know, it was the bitterness of the racism thing, which I understand. I mean, Christ, how do you deal with that, you know?

The thing about racism, we all experience it, you know, but as white people in America we can go somewhere else, you know, and when we experience it, it's because we're doing something we've chosen to do, and it's not that often. Okay. And the thing is, with the black person in America, it's relentless and there's no place to go and it's every day. That's a different load, a different load to carry. And how people carry that load and how they teach their children to deal with it, you know, it's— Very often you'd have to be prepared, like you have to be the aggressor, start off, you know, and that's how you're going to survive. Don't be surprised, you know. Fortunately, as I said before, we're dealing with it.

CLINE: Right. Do you happen to remember when Dupree Bolton was in town here?

SMITH: I only knew him by name. Gary Foster was a friend of his, I think. Oh, no, that was Carmell Jones. But I didn't know him.

CLINE: Okay. Just another highly elusive flameout sort of figure.

SMITH: Yeah. Well, that's the story of Joe, and you know he died in a fire.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Cigarette, falling asleep on the bed, I guess.

SMITH: Yes, he was known as a junkie, but I never saw him nodding or sloppy or anything like that.

Dick Whittington was a real good player, piano player. Have you heard of him?

CLINE: Sure.

SMITH: Yeah. Well, we used to work together with Dexter Gordon. I can't remember the name of the club. I could call him and find out. Of course, he went on to become a teacher in San Francisco, and then he and his wife bought Maybeck [Recital] Hall and created that whole thing.

CLINE: That's right. Yeah.

SMITH: He's back playing again.

Let's see. Let's name these names. JoAnne Brackeen. Fred Mathis was a real hard Sonny Rollins kind of player, tenor player, and more like in Orange County, but very, very good. I always thought he was Italian, and I see his name is Fred Mathis, and I picture him and he's sort of olive-skinned and chunky. I don't really know what happened to him. I think I heard something good about him, but good in a way that he was no longer a wino. So many guys stopped playing, and that's the secret, is don't stop.

CLINE: Right. You got to be left still standing.

SMITH: Right. I've talked about these guys. Guys that were great players, well, two vibe players, Merv Kennedy, and he played wonderful vibes. He was sort of a military bearing and nice guy. I don't know what happened to him. I ran into him fifteen or twenty years ago and he was still playing. I think he'd come back to playing or something, but he played very well.

Then Gary McFarland was on the scene, too. He was a L.A. City College guy and playing, and also a very good player. Said he felt he had something to offer and went to New York. That was his words, "I think I have something to offer." He went there and offered it.

Gary LeFevre, great tenor player. I ran into him the other day. I was subbing on a Stan Kenton festival thing. He was a great player and he was here in L.A. for quite a while. In fact, I think that's where I met Janie Getz, was with him, they were playing. I recall— This is again, this is when I was very young, and he was talking about how great Paul Chambers played, you know, and I disagreed, you know, because I was still like "My brother's the one that can play," you know. I mean, I was still in that thing.

When I saw him at Stan Kenton, I recalled that to him and he didn't even recall it, but in my mind, you know, it's one of those things where you wake up in the middle of the night and go, "What an idiot. What a stupid thing to have said." It looms large in your own mind, and they don't even remember it.

CLINE: Right. Not even a blip on the radar. Amazing.

SMITH: Yeah. Don Sleet is also, he and Gary LeFevre. Don was a marvelous trumpet player, marvelous. John Guerin and he were tight. I didn't know John Guerin

at all. I used to play with Don Sleet. I played with all of the jazz guys— That's when I was established as jazz. He just was torn apart by drugs. He killed himself with it. God, terrible.

Gary Fromer was another great drummer at the time. He was also a guy that was in and out of jail and everything. He was a very good drummer and on the scene, and he was kind of like Frank Butler.

CLINE: Yeah, I was about to ask you if you've ever played with Frank Butler.

SMITH: Yeah, I played with Frank. You know, that junk thing is— He was the worst, I think, you know. He was legendary for borrowing a set of drums and then selling them.

CLINE: Right. Right.

SMITH: You know, Jesus. And what a player. Have you heard that *Summer Night*, Miles' recording?

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Yeah, I mean, gorgeous, gorgeous.

CLINE: Yeah, he used to do those solos with his hands and use his fingers and stuff on the drums. Pretty unusual.

SMITH: Lynn Haliday was out here for a while. He was the first great, great tenor player I ever played with, and he was a giant. He was a giant. He came out and stayed with Walter Norris. And Walter— I've got to spend some time on him. This guy was unbelievable. He was so far above anybody else that I'd ever heard in L.A. or played with, and man, strong, but the real true junkie, true junkie. He was on the scene here I don't know how long, couple of years or something like that, and then left

town and, I heard, cleaned up and became an insurance salesman. Then I heard that he returned to playing and then I heard that he died, but I'm not sure that that's all true.

He was associated with George Morrow, and they were running buddies. I used to see them every once in a while, and they were all- You know, those kind of junkies are— They're always in a hurry, you know. They got to be somewhere and they're looking— You know, they're never resting. Always a hotbed of activity in copping and that stuff. I think that's part of the charm of it for those guys.

CLINE: It keeps you busy.

SMITH: Yeah, it keeps you off the street.

CLINE: But no. [laughs]

SMITH: And there was a guy named Bob Messenger, and he was marvelous. He had all of Stan Getz's stuff together. I first heard him when I was fourteen or fifteen. He was a marvelous tenor player, and everybody knew he was the best. He used to play at Mangold's. He had a collapsed lung, so he couldn't play tenor anymore, so he took up the bass and he ended up playing with the Carpenters, I think, for years and went that direction. Fate. Fate. I mean, he would have been like Stan Getz or something, you know.

Bill Plummer was another great player here. He had a band called the Cosmic Brotherhood. He played with everybody. He played with Miles. He played with everybody out here, and he had giant chops. And a great guy, great guy. He had kind of a pad that was the social center. The cops came in one night, and there was a little roach in the ashtray and he went to jail, and all this stuff. It was something idiotic like a quarter-inch roach, you know. There was no heavy drugs going on or anything.

There was a lot of white-black intermix, you know; I mean a lot. And the cops didn't like that.

CLINE: That's what I hear.

SMITH: You know, they didn't— L.A. cops are very different from other cities.

When I first went to Chicago, I couldn't believe it. The cops were just regular guys and come in a bar and have a drink, you know, and say, "How you doin'?", you know. Out here they're like *Cool Hand Luke*, you know.

CLINE: Yeah. Where were a lot of these guys living? You've mentioned these sessions happening at various people's houses, playing late at night. Where were some of these people living?

SMITH: Well, I was living up on a place called Fenn Street, and it's at the end of a dirt road about a mile long at the top of Montecito Heights. If you went up Montecito, that's in Highland Park, to the top, and then there's a radio station. Just before the radio station there's a dirt road. It's not gated. If you go down there— And I had sessions there every night for about a year and they'd start at midnight. Warne Marsh was there every night and then everybody else in town. I mean, not everybody, but you know, frequent visitors included Walter Benton.

There was a guy, Jeff Kaplan. Now, he was a stellar talent, piano, guitar and he sang, and he was the first guy I ever heard that had a real heavy rock influence that I could sense the depth of the vibe, you know. He also was playing Bach like Glenn Gould. He was a heavy talent.

I ran into Big Black the other day. Do you remember that name?

CLINE: Yeah, sure.

SMITH: He came into a club about two months ago and I mentioned, because I knew he and Jeff were friends, and he just, you know, “Ah, man,” you know, he’s talking about what a beautiful talent this Jeff Kaplan was, and it was cocaine that got him. Heart attack or whatever it is, you know, at the age of twenty-seven. I don’t know the exact age. But he was a major, giant talent. He should have been a star and would have been.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Where were we?

CLINE: You mentioned some of these other people. I just curious where they were living, like the Brackeens.

SMITH: Let’s see. Where were the Brackeens living? It seems to me it was on the West Side, maybe around Jefferson [Boulevard] and La Brea [Avenue], but I’m not sure exactly, but it was in that direction.

CLINE: So people were living kind of all over the city?

SMITH: Oh, yeah.

CLINE: It wasn’t concentrated in any area?

SMITH: No. No, that’s the problem with L.A. That’s the problem. No, there was not an area where musicians lived, like there still isn’t.

CLINE: Yeah, really. Right. Except, I guess, parts of the San Fernando Valley which were during— Especially for studio players, famous for being concentrated in areas.

SMITH: Yeah, studios. Yeah. I can’t think of where else. Did I mention some other places?

CLINE: No. I mean, you may have, but I'm just curious, sort of. Really what I wanted to know is if there was any sort of central—

SMITH: Bill Plummer's pad was like around Crenshaw [Boulevard] and Adams [Boulevard] area. I'm trying to think of other session pads. But, see, I always had my own session pad, so I didn't go out that much.

CLINE: And you said Don was in Chavez Ravine for a while?

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, he was there and then he moved to kind of like East Hollywood, East Sunset [Boulevard], that area, kind in around that area.

CLINE: Yeah. So are there some other names you have there?

SMITH: Jay Migliori, Migliori. I first met him in about '57, '58, and he was a session hound. He would be everywhere, it seemed, all the time. I never heard him say a bad word about anybody. He was playing at every rehearsal band he was on and he was out playing sessions all the time. He and James Mooney used to have a band and very good. Jim Crutcher was the bass player. Of course, James went on to begin operating Sage and Sound [Studios].

CLINE: Yeah, that's right.

SMITH: He was just trying to record his own band and that's how he got into it.

CLINE: I didn't know that.

SMITH: Next thing you know, people are calling him. Jay was a beautiful guy.

Of course, Chiz Harris was on the scene. Do you remember that name?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Well, he was Jerry Lewis' drummer for forty years or so, and Chiz was a real kind of hard-edge curmudgeon kind of guy, like, I don't know what he was, but he

kind of came off like a tough little Irishman, you know. Great guy. Great guy, and all he wanted to do was play all the time, twenty-four hours a day. You'd see him at all the sessions. There was a session place called the Cascades, and I was trying to remember the name of it and found it in the book, in Belmont Shore and that was one of those six-in-the-morning places, Sunday morning, you know.

CLINE: Way down there.

SMITH: Vince Wallace was one of the mainstays there. Do you know that name?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Okay. Well, he was an extraordinary player, Sonny Rollins school. An amazing player and never got the break or whatever it is that it takes. He came back to town twenty years ago or so and had a band at the Studio Café, when they first opened, and was there for about two or three years, and eventually had a falling-out with the owner. There was a huge plate-glass window, and when they had the falling-out, Vince went out in the front with his tenor, and somehow had a hammer and he just threw a hammer and broke the plate-glass window, and that may be the key to the aspect of his personality.

CLINE: Yeah, it impeded his—

SMITH: Success.

CLINE: Was this the Studio Café in Balboa or the other one in Corona del Mar?

SMITH: Balboa.

CLINE: Because they had two going for a while.

SMITH: Yeah, and the owner of that had— Not Kovak, but the other guy, the guy that ended up going to prison for murdering somebody, his wife or something, had

been a fan of Vince Wallace's, and that was one of the things, he wanted to open up a club and have Vince Wallace play there.

CLINE: I see. Wow.

SMITH: So Kovak ends up with a million dollars. There was a guy, Jim Gordon on the scene.

CLINE: The drummer Jim Gordon?

SMITH: No, not the drummer.

CLINE: Oh, another one.

SMITH: This guy was tenor player and piano player. He was also a guy that had way too much intelligence, and he would play kind of like the pianist I mentioned that played "Misty."

CLINE: Erroll Garner.

SMITH: Yeah. He also played clarinet and tenor and stuff. I don't know what happened to him. I know he got involved in rock and roll. He was one of those, you want to say nervous, except he wasn't nervous, but I mean, he had an air of too much brain power, you know.

CLINE: Synapses firing a little too rapidly.

SMITH: Let's see. I mentioned Jim. There was a guy, Bill Wogan, trombone player, who was very, very, very good and he came down with multiple sclerosis, but he would have been a big player, a sweet player, beautiful.

We talked about Joe Albany, right?

CLINE: Not probably in the sense that you're talking about people now. You've mentioned him.

SMITH: Did I tell you they used to call him Rubber Bands?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, yeah. That's the one.

CLINE: Right. Paul and Carla. Richard Boone. Oh, up on the hill there by Frank Patchen— And Frank Patchen was sort of the center of a lot activity. He was a teacher. He had been a player, recorded quite a bit with the West Coast bands, and a writer. He had a field of students, one of which was JoAnne. Just up the hill from him lived Bob Dorough, who was sharing a small house with Gene Gammage, drummer from Washington, D.C., who played with Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown, those guys. They had regular sessions up there for a while, and I used to go up there and play. Every once in a while I'd see another drummer there, Lloyd Morales, and people that lived in the area and different horn players. I think that's how I met Richard Boone, and then I think through Richard Boone I met Frank Patchen.

CLINE: I see. Now, when they had these sessions are people just playing tunes?

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, just playing tunes.

CLINE: And that was what you did?

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: As a rhythm section player did this turn into one of these things with endless horn solos?

SMITH: Oh, no. No, it would usually be, you know, an invited few. It wouldn't be like an open jam session in a club.

CLINE: Right. Where you'd have six guys all taking thirty choruses each.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah. Lord.

Okay. Here. Don Cherry. Bobby Hutcherson. Herbie Lewis, a sweetheart.

He went on to have— He was on the Pasadena scene.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And he had so much enthusiasm and goodwill, and he was so encouraging to me and he loved my brother's playing. He used to talk about Carson all the time.

“Man, that's what playing is. That's what playing is.” Then he went on to New York and made all those records with those guys and everything, and when he came back here, he had lost his youthful charm. I mean, there was still a lot of love, but he was dark and something happened to him there and I don't know what it was exactly, but something happened. Now, see, he didn't have any skills. You know, he couldn't read. I think that's why I encourage young musicians to learn to read, just so that you can, you know. You get in a situation where you come into town, everybody wants to use you and then they find out you can't read, and you're relegated to the derelict state.

CLINE: Okay.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 6, 2003

CLINE: This is tape number four, Alex Cline interviewing Putter Smith, August 6th, 2003, at his home in South Pasadena.

You were just talking about the benefits of learning to read so that you're not relegated to, what you've said, the derelict state. I hope that part got on the tape before it ran out there. That's why I wanted to mention that.

SMITH: Yeah. I read all these biographies. I look through HamiltonBooks.com. I don't know if you know that.

CLINE: I've heard of it.

SMITH: Yeah. So I just buy these jazz biographies. They cost three dollars or something. And it's fascinating stuff, especially the ones that are obscure guys. There's a trumpet player— And it's surprising that these, you know, traditional Dixieland players, that you think of them as— I don't know why you think of them as unschooled, but they aren't [unschooled]. They're very fine musicians, and it's just the style they play in and the time feel they have sounds old-fashioned, so you think— Well, you know.

But this one trumpet player, I can't remember his name [Lee Celling], and I will look it up, if you really want to hear. It's a guy that you would say, "Oh, yeah, I've heard of him." And he was on the same scene as Louis Armstrong and all those guys, and they said the reason he never made it was because he couldn't read very well. I was, like, very surprised, you know, like, you mean King Oliver knew how to

read, you know? And all those guys. they were all fine musicians and very, very schooled in all that kind of stuff.

I mean, I tell my students, I teach reading at the Musician's Institute, and I'm evangelistic about it, because I didn't learn to read until I was in my thirties, so I can see what it did for me. I said, "You know, you'll hear people that don't know how to read and say, you know, they don't want to learn to read because it ruins their playing, but you'll never hear anybody that knows how to read say, 'I'm sorry I know how to read.'"

A bass player that was on the scene at Mangold's and was a very good— A guy who was maybe twenty years older than me, Wally Spangler, and he was a very strong good bass player and just never recorded, I don't think, never went that way.

Chuck Berghofer, who was on the scene, he was always a standout player and has become, I would say, the most successful studio musician, and never lost his sense of great music and who he was and all that stuff. Marvelous player.

CLINE: Continued to play jazz all the time.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Actually, he and I were on a recording together last year with Charlie Haden and we were playing bowed bass. It's that American something or other [*American Dreams*].

CLINE: Yeah, right, one of the things with Alan Broadbent's arrangements?

SMITH: Yeah, Brad Mehldau and Mike Brecker playing in it, and Brian Blade. So it was a real thrill for me to record with Brad Mehldau. But of course, Charlie— Chuck Berghofer and I have done several things. But he said, "You know, as long as I'm able, I want to keep my hand in it," talking about music. Beautiful, beautiful.

Anyway, he's real good, in great shape, you know, physically and everything, but mentally, "pshew." He's a beautiful player.

Another guy on the Mangold's scene, another of the Sims brothers, his name is Tootie [Sims], who played valve trombone and he had a clear talent, just like his brothers, Ray [Sims] and Zoot [Sims], but he had no chops. No chops at all, but a real neat guy. I didn't know Zoot at all, but I worked with the Beach Boys for a while and one of the brothers, Dennis Wilson, had this kind of— You instantly liked him, you instantly know he's a good guy, rough and ready and speaks his mind. Tootie Sims, I mean, I remember, that's probably another case of where you remember somebody's name and they stand out. We've talked about that before. If it had been Tootie Horowitz, you know, the name would have stuck in my mind, I'm sure.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Boy, I can't even read what this says. B. Lloyd? B. Boyd? I can't read it. I said I played with Les McCann at L.A. City College. And Billy Higgins, I used to work with Billy, and he was on some of those Don Cherry gigs, and we worked around town here and there. It was the first time we worked at a place called Baces Hall. It's B-a-c-e-s. This is '57, '58. A couple of guys got up and made some comment about "What are you doing in this part of town?" You know, racist shit, you know. Billy just stood right up to them, you know, he got visibly angry— You know, and stood his ground. I was so impressed and I had never seen that before. He was a very strong person and sweet, too.

CLINE: I heard that, you know, in almost stark contrast to his later extremely sunny, sweet disposition, that as a youngster he was kind of terror, kind of a tough guy.

That's when he was really, like, a kid.

SMITH: I never heard that and I never saw that, but he was certainly not afraid to stand there and tell these guys they were morons. I didn't have that kind of courage.

CLINE: A couple of guys that you've mentioned that I wanted to maybe ask you about, are you ready for that?

SMITH: Yeah, sure.

CLINE: Is there somebody you want to mention first?

SMITH: Well, let's see. Let's see. I mentioned I worked with Ellis Marsalis.

CLINE: No, you haven't talked about Ellis Marsalis.

SMITH: Well, I didn't know anything about him. He just seemed like an old guy and he was playing stride [piano], and then they talked about he was at El Toro Marine Base, and he had seven kids.

But I worked for months with him at a place called— I think it's called Mi Casa in Santa Ana. It was a real low class Mexican bar restaurant that was a late night gig. I was in high school. You know, when you're young like that, these are places you just don't even go, and I see this old guy playing the piano, he must have been thirty, you know, and nothing— I can't recall ever having a conversation with him, and I was completely not interested in the way he played, although I knew he was good, but I was, you know, bebopping it, bebop.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Let's see. Who else in here should be remembered? There was a guy, Ernie Solani. He was a hard-edged tenor player and he was a junkie. And as I'm talking, I realize I did know a lot of people and there was a lot going on, but I completely avoided it, you know. I just didn't go there and I didn't want to be a part of that. It scared me to death. But he was very active, Ernie Solani. He played all the time. He was all over the place.

Then eventually I'm going to stretch out on these three guys here, but we'll go ahead.

CLINE: That was Walter Benton and—

SMITH: Walter Norris, Warne Marsh, and Joe Maini.

CLINE: Oh, yeah. Joe Maini.

SMITH: Who the hell is this? Oh, Bennie Arnoff. He was a piano player out here and one of the best players. He ended up going to New York. He was very refined, you know, an excellent, great player and knew what he wanted to do, and I think he ended up accompanying Peggy Lee or somebody like that, you know, went that direction.

CLINE: Right. This may not be the fifties, but since you mentioned it today, I wanted to, before we finish up, ask you about a couple of these guys. One you mentioned, Calvin Jackson. I wondered if you had any memories of Calvin Jackson.

SMITH: Well, I may have subbed one night with him, but I never played regularly with him. He was kind of like a guy that would combine classical and jazz and use a lot of pianistic flourish kind of player. He was really an entertainer more than— I

mean, he was a master of the instrument, but that was his shtick, you know. A big hand meant everything. Of course, it does to all of us. Right?

CLINE: Right. It can, yeah.

SMITH: Pandering is what I think of it as, but he was a very fine guy, but I didn't feel like he really swung at all, you know. But I didn't know him. I didn't play with him.

CLINE: And another one is a drummer who hung in there on and off for a while, and I don't know what's happened to him now, was Ron Jefferson, you mentioned.

SMITH: Yeah, I don't know what happened to him either. I know he was on the scene and here and there, and then he had a record come out about twenty-five years ago.

CLINE: *Vous Etes Swing*. Do you remember this about him? *Vous Etes Swing*. That was the name of his record, and apparently this was a thing with him, he'd say, "Vous etes--" And you were supposed to say, "Swing."

SMITH: Oh, okay.

CLINE: Yeah. Ron Jefferson. That was the name of his band, as well. But, yeah, I wondered if you remembered anything about him.

SMITH: No. No, I don't.

CLINE: And Donald Dean, another drummer.

SMITH: Oh, Donald Dean. Well, I worked with him a lot and I still see him, you know.

CLINE: I know he's still around.

SMITH: Oh, man, what a great player. In his prime he was swinging, you know, and a good guy. We were talking about grandchildren, you know, and I said, "Yeah, I've got a grandson," you know.

And he says, "Well, I have forty-seven," or something like that, some huge number, you know. I think he has nine kids and twenty grandchildren and probably half a dozen great-grandchildren and all that. He's driven.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: He's a great guy.

CLINE: Well, if it's okay with you, I think we'll call it for now.

SMITH: Okay.

CLINE: We'll follow up with Walter Norris and Joe Maini and Warne Marsh, you said, is that okay?

SMITH: Yeah. These, for me, are big.

CLINE: And I want to talk about then, of course, the sung, so to speak. We've had some unsung people, but we want to talk about some big names.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. There was another guy I really, really should talk about, it's Gene Stone.

CLINE: Oh, okay. I've heard that name.

SMITH: Well, Gene, at that time, was the most original and highly accomplished in every area, drummer, and very original. I mean, Jesus, you know, at one time we were playing in the Troubadour. They gave him a chorus and he took the entire chorus on the bass drum. It was just fascinating and interesting, you know. It was like a tour de force. You know, that's the kind of thing he could do, I mean, and not get bombastic

and everything. But he could play like Gene Krupa if you wanted. And he was playing with everybody and playing with— He recorded with Clare Fischer Trio, and so automatically you know the level he was at.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: Then he was part of the Topanga crowd, which included Dave Hayward and Sonny Simmons and Prince Lasha, all these people, and they were taking acid like all the time. I mean, all the time, you know. I went up there a few times and oh, my god, you know. Unbelievable. He still had this tremendous— You know, for a while, and then I think he kind of went into this “dark night of the soul” period, which has taken a long time for him to emerge from, and he has. He has. I played with him two years ago and he was back. I just, I was so happy for him, because I’d seen him literally walking in the gutter. I was driving by as he was walking and I stopped, “Gene, what’s going on, man?”

“Oh, man, I got to be somewhere.”

I said, “Well, here let me give you a ride.”

“Nah, nah, I can walk.” But really out, out, but he recovered and became real serious about trying to make a living and playing and all that. Last time I played with him, I was thrilled. I was thrilled.

CLINE: Wow. Where was that?

SMITH: It was a gig at some opening of a condo or complex down at the beach, you know.

CLINE: Interesting.

SMITH: Typical obscure jazz gig, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: There was a guy I wanted to talk about, too, Steve White. I'm sorry. You want to go?

CLINE: No, no, it's okay. No, keep going.

SMITH: Now, Steve White is a true legend of Los Angeles. Supposedly, all of Lenny Bruce's material came from Steve White, and he was a madman, and one of the greatest tenor players of anybody in the school of Charlie Barnet, Don Byas.

Amazing, amazing player. The real thing. The real thing. I heard him play a few years ago with Jack Sheldon, and that's why I'm sure of that. You know, if I'd only had the memories of forty years ago, I wouldn't be sure how he played then, but, man.

And he was a true madman, and everybody knew that he was the greatest player around and on every scene, and then he had a series of episodes. One point playing on the Academy Awards or something, you know, and he's standing in the corner, you know, and he's holding his cock in his hand, you know, and a chick comes by and he says, "Plenty more where this came from, baby." So they take him away, you know.

Then one time he was in the middle of the street guarding a pile of gravel, "Get away. These are my jewels."

All this stuff sounds very funny, you know, I mean humorous, and he was tremendously funny.

With Bennie Arnoff one time, [Steve White] called me up, says, "We got this job." He says, "It doesn't pay much. We can play whatever we want. It's ten bucks, but all you can eat and drink."

And Bennie Arnoff and I did it and we picked up Steve. We all met and went out together, and it turned out to be the opening of a Nash Rambler lot in Monrovia with coffee and donuts.

CLINE: Whoa.

SMITH: All you can eat and drink. Then he'd start raving and talk about his machines, peace machines. But supposedly many of Lenny Bruce's routines came from this guy.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Amazing.

SMITH: He may still be around, too. Yeah, well, that's the story of Steve. And he was a great. There should have been lots more recordings of him. I guess that's all I'm going to bother you with today.

CLINE: Well, that's great. This is exactly the kind of stuff we want to know.

SMITH: Oh, good. Okay.

CLINE: So, yeah, some big names I want to try to get into next time are Dexter Gordon, Art Blakey, Thelonious Monk, and people you mentioned, people who have had a large impact on your musical life.

SMITH: Terrific.

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: Terrific.

CLINE: All right. Thank you very much for today.

SMITH: Well, thank you.

CLINE: It's been great.

[End of August 6, 2003 interview]

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 13, 2003

CLINE: This is Alex Cline once again interviewing Putter Smith. It's August 13th, 2003, and this is tape number five. Tape number five, our third session.

Good morning.

SMITH: Good morning. Good morning.

CLINE: All right. As always I have some follow-up questions about our last meeting, and I wanted to cover those before we move on into the sixties, and who knows how much further than that today. One thing I wanted to ask you about for sure is you mentioned that these sessions that were going on, usually late at night at various people's homes or wherever, that one of the things that I guess occasionally attracted the police to these affairs wasn't just the music-making, but the racial intermixing, which the L.A.P.D. is fairly famous for not being very tolerant of.

SMITH: Right.

CLINE: Can you sort of paint a picture for us of the kind of people who were at this in terms of sort of the racial composition, the age mix, and were all these people musicians, or were there people who came who were also kind of hangers-on or fans?

SMITH: Well, the only place I can think of that actually had a mix like that would be the [Georgia Lee's] Caprice, Georgia Lee's. I was never there when the police came, and there was always sort of an undercurrent of drug nervous activity scurrying around underneath.

As far as who the people were, I just remember a few names here and there; Walter Benton, George Morrow, Charlie Haden and Joe Albany. I don't mean all of them, but many of them were drug users. So there was sort of a secretive underneath mystery like there is whenever there's some drug thing, an undercurrent of some subtext going on or inner urgency. Of course, I mean, I was there for the music or whatever it was I was there for, I mean being on the scene or checking out the music. I've always been drawn to the music. To paint a picture of it, dingy, smoky. I never cared for it much. I never saw the police. I never saw that.

CLINE: What about these private sessions, though, supposedly? I'm talking about, like, your home, you used to have these things, other people's homes that you'd have these late night—

SMITH: Okay. My home it was almost entirely white, although it wasn't entirely. But it was just the location, I think, and how to get to it was very difficult. It was the end of a two-mile dirt road. The police never came, although they should have. [mutual laughter] If I'd been in a populated area, they certainly would have because we were literally playing until six in the morning and carrying on. And that was, I wouldn't say dingy, but certainly not— It wasn't like a nice place.

I remember a guy who later on, I can't remember his name, went on to be the drummer for Jefferson Airplane.

CLINE: Spencer Dryden?

SMITH: Spencer Dryden. Exactly. He used to have sessions at his house that were late night. And it always surprised me when I would go to one, I mean, the first time I went, he was in the middle of a residential district, I mean, like in someplace out in the

[San Fernando] Valley, like Van Nuys or something, and just a regular street and a regular house. Oh, my god, what are they doing? And there were a lot of people there playing. But it was, you know, a little on the frenzied side. That didn't go on very long. I really missed the golden age of the hot playing. I was in the cracks; I was in between two milieus. Is that the word?

CLINE: Sure.

SMITH: I was not in rock and roll, and I was really a hangover from bebop and bebop was pretty much gone. There were just a few of us.

CLINE: Were there older and younger players then?

SMITH: Yes. Yes, there were. There was a mix of guys. I was in New York a few years ago and went into a club and a session kind of thing, it was that Russian trumpet player, Valentin, I don't know his last name, and that was just wonderful to see all these guys dropping in and playing. Jerome Richardson came in. It was just a few months before he died. The bass player was about eighteen, and Jerome Richardson, who was close to seventy, and that was a great thing to see.

I think when that sort of thing was happening in L.A., it was before I had got on the scene, because I really didn't become active on the scene till about '58, '59, '60, and everything else was very closed in. I was too young. I couldn't be going out to midnight sessions when I was fifteen or sixteen. That just wouldn't have gone down.

CLINE: That's for sure. And related to this, at one point you mentioned something that you called the Topanga crowd, and you mentioned, for example, Prince Lasha as

being one of these people. Can you say a little more about who they were and what was going on with the Topanga crowd?

SMITH: Sonny— What was his name? Sonny.

CLINE: Simmons?

SMITH: Yeah, Sonny Simmons. Him and Gene Stone and Dave Hayward. I still can't remember the bass player's name. Jim [Crutcher]. Do you know?

CLINE: Got me on that one.

SMITH: Yeah, a very good bass player. And they were all taking acid in huge amounts and had their little, it was almost like a commune there, a separate scene and they were playing a lot. I was just up there a few times and I just was not attracted to formless music.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: I just wasn't attracted. Not for extended periods of time or anything. I didn't take acid, so I was— Maybe if I'd done that, I would have been, you know, more attracted to it or could have got it.

CLINE: Who knows?

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: But this was actually in Topanga, then?

SMITH: Yes. Oh, yeah, right up there— I can't remember the address, but right at the heart of Topanga, in the middle of it. Gene had a place up there. I think it was around Fernwood, around that area.

CLINE: And about when was this, do you remember?

SMITH: Well, this had to be late sixties, I think. Maybe before that. No, it was before that. Sorry. It had to be in the early sixties, '62, '63, yeah.

CLINE: Right. Wow. Before the mellow rockers moved in ten years later.

SMITH: Right. When jazz was still hip. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Well, that's really interesting. Another thing that I wanted to be sure to ask you about, you mentioned the difficulty of making a living at playing this music, of course, and how you saw that early on and that you decided you had to make a plan. I presume this is some sort of a financial plan, in order to ensure that you had some kind of security financially, and you mentioned that very few people probably were able to approach this, or if they did, to stick with it. And I wondered exactly, you mentioned something about small investments or whatever, but I just wondered, for the benefit of those who are still coming up and playing this music now, perhaps graduating from college with a degree in playing jazz and have nowhere to go, what was your plan?

SMITH: Yeah. Well, first of all, I was just aware that there was nothing happening, but this wasn't until the seventies that I saw this. I never thought about money until I was so far broke that it was frightening. We had got our first house. Do you want to wait and do that later?

CLINE: No, you can just kind of generalize and we can go more into it later.

SMITH: Okay. Well, all right. Well, it was in the— Let's see. In the middle seventies— And I just ran across some references to some people that got me into it, but I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to do. We got down to where we had— I mean, at the time I had less than \$500 in the bank, no work, family, two children, and there was no work and there was no working coming. It was just

ridiculous. And I realized that everything I'd ever done had not paid any Social Security or anything. I had never thought about money, ever. I had never thought about it. I always had plenty, which wasn't much, but it was plenty for my needs.

We tried to get on welfare, we tried to get food stamps, and they told us we'd have to spend all the money in our banking account and put the house up for sale before we could get it. And I said, "My god, people have to really be totally impoverished before you help them. You can't help them before they get that way." I was so angry I said, "I'm never going to get to this situation again. I'm going to set myself up." I realized that I had to prepare.

I began looking for something and asking people who were successful what it is they did. This Elliot Thompson, who I was going to mention, who's someone I played with at Salt Lake Community Center, Salt Lake Park, that was on the dividing line between Bell and Huntington Park, when I was about thirteen, but I had later re-met him in the seventies at Mammoth Mountain. Dave Koonse took me up there, you know, my family, and he was a great trombone player who early on saw what the trouble was and went up to Mammoth and began managing condominium complexes. He's a great guy and plays all the time and plays beautifully. He has sort of combined this managing with music.

He gave me a book called— Something like, *How I Made \$100,000 in Real Estate With \$1,000*. I read the book, and it was very, very clear that you could do this without hurting anybody, without cheating anybody, and performing a service and not having to do it forty-eight hours a day.

CLINE: Sure.

SMITH: So I started on that plan, and it's just acquisition of property, finding a property that's very low priced that you can get into for very little money and because it has a problem that you see you can solve. Solve the problem and then sell the property and then take the profit from that and do it again and just do it again, until you have what's called a capital base, enough to actually buy something good, something decent. And then getting a two- or three- or four-unit place. I mean, you can continue to do that thing, but the real wise thing is to begin to hold it and never sell, and wait until it's producing enough a cash flow that you can borrow that money and buy another one. And if you're young enough, you can extend that until a point.

I set a goal for myself, which with our recent events was not enough, but it's a very, very conservative, safe investment of 6 percent, because it's not happening now. So the goal is having enough money tax-paid in the bank that that interest would provide you with sufficient living money. Okay. So that's all it is.

CLINE: Okay. It's good to know. I'm glad to know that.

SMITH: I don't know if you can do that any more with the price of real estate, but it is possible to be a landlord and have a real nice relationship and rent lower than the going rates. Hardly any problems so far, thank god.

CLINE: We would all love to have you as our landlord.

SMITH: Well, and you'd be a great tenant.

CLINE: Oh, I'm a home debtor, so there you go.

SMITH: There you go.

CLINE: Another thing I wanted to ask you, we wanted to talk a little bit more about some of these virtually unknown or unsung musicians, and we're going to come up to

some more of those, but among people that you mentioned last time, someone who is certainly “sung” now, but I think has very little available known about his earlier career is the drummer Jim Keltner, who you’ve seemed to be very close with. What can you say about Jim Keltner before he became the studio rock legend that he is now?

SMITH: Well, Jim is a very special guy. I mean, we talk every eighteen months or so, we have a nice conversation. He is Jim Keltner, he’s a very special guy, and he always was. He and Albert were really very thick; Albert Stinson. They hung heavy.

CLINE: Part of what you called the Pasadena crowd.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah. Herbie Lewis and Jack Fowlkes was one of those guys, Bobby Hutcherson. And funny, Charles Lloyd was sort of in that scene, although he was an ‘SC [University of Southern California] guy, but he was sort of with those guys.

Jim was always the way he is, you know. He always had time to enjoy and laugh, and lots of feeling, and he’s very interested in you and very interested in whoever he’s with. And he truly is. I mean, I don’t believe it’s artificial. That’s the way he’s built. He gets in there.

But he had this incredible technique of playing the instrument. I mean, he’s one of those guys that can do a rolling snare drum and it sounds like someone’s tearing a sheet of paper, that sort of thing. And exquisite rhythm, rhythm sense, and his taste, just beautiful taste, never bombastic. We used to play a lot and hang a lot and we did a lot of silly gigs. For a while we shared a cabin in Lake Tahoe and we were up there for a month or so.

CLINE: I think you mentioned that, with the guy with the vodka.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah. I got him on the Don Randi gig, and I think I told you about that before. We used to play chess every night on the breaks. We couldn't wait for the set to be over so we could play chess. Sometimes we'd have a single game that would go for two or three nights. We had a magnetic board.

But Jim is one of those special people in the world, utterly charming and guileless, open and honest.

CLINE: And he was obviously, I guess, playing jazz back in those days.

SMITH: Oh, that's all we were playing. That's all we were playing. Although the funny thing is, we did a gig with a guy named Rocky Rockwell up in [Lake] Tahoe, and this Rocky Rockwell was an Ishkabibble-type trumpet player from Lawrence Welk's band, and they had like an act, you know. It was a common thing in [Las] Vegas at the time, or that was in Tahoe or Reno, wherever the hell it was.

CLINE: Right. Somewhere where entertainment is the order of the day.

SMITH: Right, where you go on every three hours, you do a set, maybe two or three sets a day. That was the time of the Beatles first coming out, and "I Wanna Hold Your Hand" was the song that they did as the Beatles, and I remember noticing how damn good that felt every time we played it. I mean, really, it was, "Doggone, this feels great." Jim really got into that popular groove, I don't know what you'd call it, but it just felt wonderful to play that music with him, even though I'm not a rock player and I'm not too interested in it. But the rest is history.

CLINE: That's for sure. Wow, that's very interesting. Another person you mentioned that you played with, but you didn't say much about, is Les McCann.

SMITH: Oh, well, I played with him at L.A. City College, we were both students there, and they used to have sessions over there in one of those quad rooms. I don't know what they called them then; they were like bungalows. Alonzo Garibaldi was there and he was a drummer. It was always fun playing with Les. I remember playing "I'll Remember April," and he didn't know the changes. I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it. He was working around L.A. already; he wasn't singing, he was playing kind of like a funk jazz and very, very professional, very good. I used to sub for his bass player [Jack Bruce] occasionally.

Les had a crush on my girlfriend, and he used to always— He'd say, "Can I go out with her? Is it cool?"

I'd say, "Man, if she'll go with you, it's cool, you know." I mean, knowing full well that, I'm assuming, I think, that that was impossible, but we used to joke about that.

He came over to my house one time, and she had made a giant bowl of black-eyed peas, and I mean, I'm talking three-quarters of a gallon, and he ate the entire bowl at one sitting. It was unbelievable. It was unbelievable. Unbelievable.

CLINE: Of course, he wound up being a very large man. What was he like then?

SMITH: Oh, he was very large then. He's actually lost weight. I saw him a few months ago, he came into Spazio's and I was talking to him and he was talking to me. Very often someone will start talking to you and they know you and you don't really know who they are, and I'm about three minutes into it, "My god, you're Les McCann." I just was overjoyed to see him. He's a great guy.

CLINE: Man, he's had his success, as well.

SMITH: Oh, boy.

CLINE: Since we've hit on this a little bit, despite your mention of your girlfriend at the time just now, obviously an earlier stage, when did you settle down? When did you get married and start a family and all that?

SMITH: Well, I'm not actually settled yet. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: We've been married almost forty years. Okay. My daughter's [Minerva] thirty-eight, my son [Lambert] is thirty-seven, and that was '65.

CLINE: Okay. Mid-sixties.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, '65, '64. It really was a case of settling down. I gave up my old ways totally and became a family man and much more effective in my dedication to the art. I mean, you know, you stay up night after night after night, you don't get much done. It seems like you are, but you don't. You've got to methodically work on it.

CLINE: Yeah. Okay. Because one of the things I'll come back to as we get more into that period is what obviously is the challenge of being a jazz musician and raising a family and all that. Obviously, you made some decisions which I want to hear more about later.

Since we were just now talking about some of the unsung player or those who eventually became sung, there were a couple of other names that you wanted to maybe say a little bit about before we leave that area altogether, some names on the list there. One I wanted to ask you about right off the bat is a saxophone player named Dave Angel.

SMITH: Oh, Dave has the— Backtracking a little bit, the ingredients for success are so mixed. I mean, you have to be pushy and likeable and very good and lucky. If you tend to hang your head and be shy, people sort of feel there's a reason for that. You need to stick it out there and say, "I want this gig," and you know, be sort of aggressive without being obnoxious. As I said before, fate has such a tremendous role. It's almost like the lottery. I mean, duh, you have to buy a ticket, but that's about it.

Dave Angel is so self-effacing that, I mean, one would not believe it. There's truly a genius in there once you get familiar with his music. He really is. He is really in that category of writer. I mainly always knew him as a writer, although he's reminded me that we did play together back then in the fifties, along with a guy named Ron Gorrow, who also became primarily a writer. But I don't think Ron's writing at all anymore. He was a very shining talent. And the other ingredient is the ability to commit yourself to a long period of improvement, set yourself on a program of practicing and working and studying.

I played in Dave's band, I think— Maybe twenty years ago he had a rehearsal band at the union [American Federation of Musicians, Local 47]. Amazing music, very beautiful. I wouldn't want to say like Gil Evans, because it didn't sound like Gil Evans, but it was of that complexity and exquisiteness. He got called to teach in Paris, writing and orchestrating and stuff like that, and he's been in Paris and Switzerland for the last ten, twelve years.

He just happened to have come back two weeks ago for a month's visit and I've been playing with his sextet, his saxophone group. God, marvelous stuff, just

marvelous, and so complex, and yet sounding—I mean, it’s not too complex to listen to, but when you realize what’s in there, you go, “My god, how do you do that?”

There’s one arrangement of “Here’s That Rainy Day,” and the first whole chorus the saxophones are playing through it and it sounds like rain. I mean, it really sounds like rain. I mean, it’s unbelievable and beautiful, beautiful.

We’re going to be playing tomorrow night. We’re playing a session here at my house and we’re rehearsing Friday morning at the union with the saxophone band, which has been up here at Bill Perkins’ memorial. So I’ll be seeing a lot of Dave in the next week.

CLINE: Right. Okay. Well, you walked right into my next question, which is, since speaking of current events, we just lost Bill Perkins this week.

SMITH: Bill Perkins.

CLINE: And one of the people that I was hoping to be able to interview in this series before the budget dictated its longevity as being not too long. But what can you say about Bill Perkins?

SMITH: Well, first of all, I mean, he’s the bravest person I’ve ever known and ethical to a fault, and decided to use his life fully, regardless of the pain he was in, decided to live as long as he could and not just say, “Okay. I’ve got it made. I’ll just sit back.” But he actually began a program.

I think it was in the middle seventies I began playing with him, and I think he returned to actively trying to create a jazz voice. He had been, in the fifties, he’d been a beautiful player, sounding in the bag of Lester Young, okay, and so good, but then he got sidetracked. He got those gigs with the *Tonight [Show]* band and was involved

in electrical engineering or recording engineering, something, and it sidetracked him from that, and he let his voice go away.

So when he came back, he didn't have his own voice, and he didn't want to try to imitate his previous voice, but to build a new one, and it takes a lot of courage for a guy like him to try and play Coltrane kind of notes and stuff like that. He'd play them, and know that they were not right, and people would be mad, you know, "Play your beautiful way you used to play," but he was very stubborn.

In the last two years I think he really got that voice. In the last couple years when I heard him I was, my god, he's really done it. Here's this guy on the last twenty years of his life has fought the fight to get that out, and actually won, and to see him venue after venue, limping with a couple of horns on his back and struggling, and never a complaint. You know, never a complaint. I mean, if somebody asked him he'd say, "Yeah, yeah, my throat hurts," or something, but it wasn't where a guy collars you and tells you what the doctor gave him and all that stuff. He was just there for the music, and he was certainly an inspiration to me. I don't intend to emulate him, however. When I start hurting, I'm going to put that goddamn instrument in the corner. I mean, it already hurts. [mutual laughter] But God bless him.

CLINE: Yeah. He enjoyed such an amazingly positive reputation with all the musicians I know he played with. They'd say nothing but the highest most positive things about him as a person, as well as a musician.

Well, any other of the unsung that you want to cover here while we're on the topic?

SMITH: Well, did I mention Bill Pickens?

CLINE: Bill Pickens, no. I know the name.

SMITH: Okay. Well, he was a bass player that was on the scene. I don't know what to say much about him, except that he was there and he was on several scenes, the San Francisco scene, and I remember him from the Troubadour jazz scene. He was sort of a marginal character and not a very good bass player, but he was well known. He had a big personality. A lot of people knew him. He also had a pretty good ego, you know.

CLINE: Well, there you go.

SMITH: Sometimes that prevails.

CLINE: Before we move on, what else can you say about the Troubadour in the period you're talking about? Because I think anyone who reads this has no idea of the type of venue that you're describing since it's so different now.

SMITH: Well, it was on La Cienega [Boulevard] and it was right next to a little theater, which was the Coronet Theater; they shared the alley. They shared kind of an entryway. If you turned left it was the Coronet; if you turned right it was the Troubadour. It was like a coffeehouse of the time and flavor that is very dark, the room was very dark and I think it was dark wood and maybe dark red walls, but certainly not nice. I mean, it was funky and cruddy, and they served beer and some sandwiches.

Doug Weston sat behind this counter. The place was split down the middle by a wall and the jazz was in one side and then there was sort of a little seating area and food, and Doug Weston sat there in the corner and he was very, very crabby and very reluctant to give you anything. It was like you were stealing from him, you know. He

was supposed to give you food and drink and two or three dollars at the end of the night, which is literally what it was, two or three dollars. He really begrudged you that sandwich, and a second beer was like you were really stealing from him, you know.

Then, of course, when he became a multi-millionaire from his other one, he had a complete change and came out of the closet. No one had any idea, you know. The next thing you know, he's got a see-through bathtub in his front room, I hear, and he really became a notorious flamer. I'm not saying that in a negative way, but it was very surprising.

But the scene itself was very—There were a lot of people there, it was always full and it was mixed racially. There were a lot of black and white people there and there were a lot of hookers, you know. I think they hired three people; bass, drums and a horn player.

CLINE: Because it was a jazz policy at the time?

SMITH: I think that was what they hired, and then everybody else would sit in. We'd get a piano player that would sit in. There were plenty of piano players and there was a piano there. That was in the days when there were no electric pianos.

CLINE: Of course.

SMITH: Now if you go into a hotel they charge more for a piano than a band. They'll want \$300 to use the piano, and they call it a tuning fee, and it isn't even tuned. Is that absurd?

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: The days. Anyway, to get back to the Troubadour, very active. I don't remember ever it being empty. The sessions were organized in that there wouldn't be

twenty-five people on the stand at one time. I think it was like a limit of three, and then there would be a mix of people and it would get to where you would say, “I don’t want to play with that guy. I don’t want that guy to play while I’m playing.”

In those days bass players would sit in. They don’t do that anymore. You know, I think it has to do with the instrument. People are so sensitive to the instruments. In those days, nobody had any chops, you know; it was all brute power. There weren’t amps either, so you weren’t shocked when somebody had a bass that was hard to play, because they were all hard to play. I couldn’t possibly sit in on most basses now, because mine [referring to the string action] is set so low. It was frenzied.

I remember listening to— On the breaks they would play Clifford Brown and the song “Time.” I just loved that song. I could hear it over and over and over.

CLINE: Did you ever hear Clifford Brown’s group, Max Roach and Harold Land when they were here in town?

SMITH: No, I didn’t.

CLINE: What about the Lighthouse, now? It was still going.

SMITH: It was still going and I used to play there once in a while. I would go in and sit in for Howard [Rumsey].

CLINE: I was going to say, since the bassist was running things there, maybe not as much of an opportunity for people like you.

SMITH: Well, he really encouraged people to sit in, and also he is a great guy.

CLINE: That’s what I hear.

SMITH: Wonderful man and very generous. All his clubs, I mean later on, they always had a special place for the band. There was always a special place where you

were treated well, and money was always quite good. I sat in there with people, and I remember sitting in with a group of guys, and I don't remember who the piano player was, and he was mad because I was sitting down playing, you know. "Stand up like a man and play." What was I, seventeen, eighteen?

And I, "Nah, what are you talking about? This is what's happening now. This is how all classical guys play, sitting down."

You know, I actually played sitting down up until about fifteen years ago and then I started standing. Now my feet are all messed up. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: My second teacher, [Herman] Reinsagen, he had terrible feet problems. He said, "Don't ever stand up to play. Don't ever stand up. Sit down every time you play." And I followed that until I began studying with John Clayton, and then John Clayton sort of insisted that I stand up, I mean encouraged it, and I could feel it right away, I felt better physically. I mean, I felt better as far as having better time and more power, and so I've been standing ever since, and then about four years ago my feet started messing up. Thanks, John. But really it's been great.

CLINE: Were you ever able to go down to the Lighthouse just to listen to music? Do you remember seeing what that scene was like at the time?

SMITH: Well, I remember seeing Frank Rosolino there and Stan Levey. I sat in with him several times.

CLINE: What was that like?

SMITH: Oh, great. Great drummer. Jeez, great drummer. I understand why he quit playing, but sorry, sorry, he did. I can't remember who else was there at the time. It might have been—I'm thinking of Rolf Ericson. Is that possible?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: And perhaps Frank Patchen on piano, but he wasn't the one that yelled at me. That was somebody else. [laughs]

CLINE: Yeah, I suppose after all those sessions at Frank Patchen's house, he would have known that you sat down by then.

SMITH: Well, that might have been before then.

CLINE: Oh, wow. Okay.

SMITH: Yeah, that might have been before we did anything at his house. It runs together. I don't have it clear in my head.

CLINE: Right. That's okay.

SMITH: I don't remember.

CLINE: But this brings to mind something I always ask people, which is, you've mentioned how there was no central place where a lot of this music, or the social scene or anything was going on, which was so typical of Los Angeles, but when you think about really how spread out it was, to the point where the Lighthouse, at the time one of the most famous jazz venues going, was nowhere near anything. I mean, it still isn't anywhere near anything, down in Hermosa Beach.

SMITH: Right.

CLINE: What was that like? What was it like getting around? How did people do it?

SMITH: Well, automobile was the only way. The trip to the Lighthouse was over an hour, an hour and fifteen from up here.

CLINE: You'd just drive down Sepulveda [Boulevard]? How would you do that?

SMITH: You know, it had to be Dave Koonse driving.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: So I didn't even pay attention, but I would imagine you come down Figueroa [Street] to Pacific Coast Highway.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: I mean, or Atlantic [Boulevard] to Pacific Coast Highway and you take Pacific Coast Highway up to—What I know is it was unbelievable. It was like going to another country or another city. It was a long way. First of all, it's forty-five miles. That [Interstate] 105 [freeway] recently built makes it much easier. I've been playing down there in the club next door to it. It's now about forty minutes. Big improvement.

But I worked there with Willie Bobo in the late sixties and it was a minimum of an hour, even with the Harbor Freeway [Interstate 110]. I would take the Harbor Freeway to Torrance Boulevard and then take Torrance Boulevard to whatever it was, there's some kind of a—I can't remember now, a special cutover.

CLINE: Probably Artesia [Boulevard] or one of those.

SMITH: No, it was— You would take Torrance to— No, it was some other name. Some other name like Aviation [Boulevard] or something.

CLINE: Aviation, right.

SMITH: Is that it?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Okay. And that would take you right downtown.

CLINE: Wow. And yet there was a flourishing scene there. Any thoughts about how that was possible?

SMITH: Well, the beach scene is always active, and at that time jazz was hip. Now it's not, you know. It's like old folks' music, you know. I mean, in the popular mind.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: That's what made it work is that there was that beach crowd and they're always a bunch of young surfers and blondes, you know.

CLINE: Was that what the audience was like there?

SMITH: I think mostly, yeah. I think it was the local thing and there were a few people from around the city that would make the effort to get out there, because jazz was hip.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: It wasn't something they really knew what it was or anything, it was just that that was what was in and it didn't bother them as much as it does now. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: That was a serious commitment to drive down there at that time, I would think.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: But, okay, we've digressed a bit. How about any more of these musicians that you think we ought to recognize before we move full on into the sixties?

SMITH: I don't know if I mentioned Richard Williams. He was a drummer on the scene.

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Changed names three or four times.

CLINE: Oh, really.

SMITH: He was Lee Williams, Lee Brock, Richard Brock, Richard Williams, all the same guy. And he was an identical— He was absolutely identical to Jack Nicholson at the same age.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah. And he had a strange— He came from a— He was a twin that had been removed from— They had been separated at birth and nobody knew who the other one was, you know. So we always thought maybe he was, you know. And he was very active and he went to New York and he was on the scene all the time playing. He introduced my wife to me, so I have a special feeling for this guy.

Then he went up to San Francisco in the sixties and, I think, took acid and got involved in the hippie scene and all that, but never became a hippie. And he died because he'd gotten some sort of a disease, hepatitis C or something, hepatitis, in New York, and he died in the late sixties.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: He was a very special guy. I mean, the music abounds with very special people. You know, this music is— A lot of very spiritual people and special people, not even necessarily spiritual in the type, like, holy, but people that really, you look at them and somebody's looking back, you know.

CLINE: Right. Right.

SMITH: Those kind. A lot of humor.

CLINE: Do you remember, speaking of Williams, a bassist named John Williams around that time? Not John B. Williams, but another John Williams.

SMITH: No, I don't. I remember Jerry Williams.

CLINE: Jerry Williams?

SMITH: Yeah, but not well. I don't remember him well.

CLINE: Okay. I'm going to turn over the tape lest we run into trouble here.

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AUGUST 13, 2003

CLINE: We are back, and we are talking about some more of these unsung musicians from the area during the period of the late fifties and moving into the sixties.

SMITH: Okay. Well, one very, very large person here is Joe Maini.

CLINE: Right. And this is somebody, one of the three people you really wanted to talk about, I know.

SMITH: Well, his big influence on me was— This is a guy that could have a book written about him, or two. He's legendary for many, many things, an incredible sense of humor, but he and Lenny Bruce were truly the best of friends, and many of the greatest exploits of Lenny Bruce was with Joe. They had this incredible sexual reputation, you know, orgies and wild parties and dozens of naked women, you know, plus vast drug use.

But Joe was one of the very greatest alto [saxophone] players that ever lived. He was a very close friend of Charlie Parker. He had a huge heart, and a lot of people really didn't like him and were really afraid of him and everything. He was ten or twelve years older than me, and I was sixteen or seventeen, and he took me under his wing. He was like my big brother, you know, and he made me promise never to use heroin. And that can have a big effect when somebody you really respect, who is older than you, makes you promise, you know, because I never did, you know. "Don't ever do it. Don't ever do it. Messed me up. Messed me up."

He said the big problem and his big sadness was he had this wife, Sandra, who would do anything, and I guess she was some kind of a mad hooker or something. But I mean, she would just do anything. You know, like he tells of her being with these five guys and whatever. It was beyond my comprehension. I was never involved in any of these things. I don't want to give you the impression that I was. These are only things I heard about. I heard about things like him conducting Terry Gibbs' band with his dick. [laughs]

There was one where— This famous story of— I don't know if this should be in here or not, but you know there's so many stories, but this is one of the famous ones. It was at Terry Gibbs' reading off the big band, his band, he's reading off the band, you know, talking, you know, telling them what a bad job they're doing and dah, dah, dah. And he's standing in front of the band, and behind the side curtain, where the whole band can see, Joe's old lady is giving head, so the whole band can see. You know, it's like—

CLINE: Whoa.

SMITH: I mean, you know, like that's the kind—And that's all done in humor.

CLINE: Right. Sure.

SMITH: You know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: About what a bizarre absurd, you know, I mean, so far out that even today it's—

CLINE: It's still shocking.

SMITH: It would still shock the hell out of everybody, you know. But I never saw any of that stuff. I was not part of it, but I had heard about it all. But then here comes this Joe, and he's just like this big-hearted, very warm, caring Italian man, you know, and he for some reason was protective of me— And that had a huge effect on my life.

And then the other, Dave Koonse, you know, Dave Koonse is my main teacher of my whole life. I first met Dave when I was eleven, okay, and we're best friends. We're still best friends and I'm sixty-two, you know. But we weren't best friends right away. I saw him in school. I went to a six-year high school [Bell High School] and there was a certain little quad area where the Emperors, and they were the tough bad boys of the school, and they had these white jackets with penguins on the back and they were the mean guys, right. And Dave had on his jacket and somebody said to me, "That's Dave Koonse. He plays guitar," and introduced me to him, and that was that.

Then a couple years later, when I was thirteen we began playing together. Dave had come out here from Missouri scared to death, completely dislocated from everything and scared to death, and playing guitar like nobody's business, and somebody in the Emperors heard him play and said, "Hey, you want to be in this club?." So he joined a club for self-protection, and they'd go get in these fights and everything, gang fights, and he said there was another guy, and those two would always manage to get lost on the way to a fight, you know. I mean, you can't imagine Dave Koonse ever getting in a fight, you know, not that kind of fight.

Anyway, Dave was as extraordinary a guitar player in his time as Larry [Koonse], his son, is now. I mean, he was like an incredible talent and great mastery

of the instrument. I mean, there he was at 1956 playing in Bell High School sounding like Jimmy Raney, you know. So we began playing together and then really my whole impetus in playing was to try to play with Dave and try and play what he played and played stuff that fit with what he did. I consider him my first and biggest teacher.

We played together all the time and we used to go out and try to find places to play every day. One time we couldn't find anyplace to play, it was late at night, and we pulled over to the side of the freeway, and there was kind of a culvert and we went down in the culvert with our instruments and we were playing. It was two or three in the morning, you know, we were just playing, you know. I mean, this is how obsessive, you know, you get. After about an hour, he sees flashlights and it's the police, and one of the police had played guitar as a kid and he understood what we were doing. "No, you guys can't stay here. You have to go." You know, just let us go, they didn't shoot us or arrest us or anything, you know. They were very nice.

So we continued our relationship. Now, there's two incredible things that happened with Dave and me. We're still best friends. In fact, we're going to the movies tonight with our wives. We play together in all sorts of situations.

I was in Boston with Mason Williams and we were playing a Boston Pops concert, and there's some kind of a motel across the street, I don't know, the Hilton or some, whatever hotel, I can't remember. I'm coming down the stairs, and I get to the bottom of the stairs and someone has passed me going upstairs, and something in my head clicks, and I turned and I said, "Was that Dave?" I turned around and at the top of the stairs Dave's standing and we're both turning at the same time like, "Can you believe this?" You know, so we were like ecstatic, because neither one of us knew the

other was in town. He had been there the night before with George Shearing and I was coming in the next night.

Then maybe six, seven years later, I was in Sydney [Australia] with John Mayall's band, okay, and Cleo Laine and her husband, John Dankworth, were giving a party for all of the traveling musicians that were in Sydney. They had a big table and we were sitting there, and I was talking to somebody on my right, talking, talking, talking, food came, took a bite and everything. And I turned to my left and asked the person if they could pass the salt, and they reached over and turned to pass salt and it's Dave, and neither one of us knew each other were in town. He was there with Rod McKuen. We went crazy. I mean, can you imagine? I mean, sitting next to each other, just like crossing the stairs in Boston. It's like, what are the odds? And the odds of an incident happening once in your life, but the second time it was, like, unbelievable. So anyway, that's spectacular, but more than that, it's wonderful to have a friend for fifty years and someone who's such a great player and a great human being.

CLINE: That's karma for you. And someone who has certainly not gained the recognition that he should have.

SMITH: Well, Dave has fought it off. He's fought it off. He doesn't like it. He doesn't even like to have his picture taken. But I don't know anybody that isn't in love with Dave Koonse, and he's the dearest, dearest person.

Okay. Probably my biggest musical influence at the time and hence, as far as approach and commitment to study, is Walter Norris, and he's another guy— And he was a running buddy of Joe Maini and all those other guys, but he had a family, and so

did Joe, but Walter took care of his family. I don't mean to say that Joe didn't, but [Walter] was never out like those guys.

Walter said when he first got here from Texas— He's from Arkansas, but then he spent some time in Texas in the air force, I believe, and then came out here with a group. He and Lenny Bruce and Joe Maini had a job selling Bibles door to door. That's what they did for about a month.

CLINE: I'm surprised they lasted that long.

SMITH: Can you imagine?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: I mean, this is true. That's why I say you should do an interview of Walter on the phone. He lives in Berlin now.

CLINE: Oh, wow.

SMITH: Walter was always encouraging me about how to be— He was a very great teacher, a very great mentor, and again, it's one of those cases where here's someone that you have vast respect for in every way and they're actually taking an interest in you and taking the time to tell you the right way to be. We played every day. That was 1958, '59. '58. Yeah, I was at L.A. City College and living on Griffith Park Boulevard, and he lived across Sunset [Boulevard] up on one of those— Maltman [Avenue] or one of those streets.

CLINE: Right, the Silver Lake area.

SMITH: You know, right at the top. We played every day and he would give me little instructions in between about the right thing. "You're doing the right thing here. You need to—" But about living and about being committed to practicing and

studying and treating this like a great art, not just something you do like race cars. I mean, you know.

CLINE: It's not a hobby, in other words.

SMITH: Right. So it was commitment. And he had such an effect on me and he played in a very different way then. He played much more mainstream, although he's very recognizable. When you hear his early recordings, it's real clear who he is, and then he began to develop his technique and became sort of atonal, twelve-tone and has more technique I think than anybody who ever lived on the thing, in fact, to the point where he ruined his arms. He still says—I was in Germany a couple years ago and he was doing a concert with one of the orchestras and the music that he had had Alan Broadbent write for him featuring the piano. He was feeling very bad because he couldn't move his arm and couldn't play. He says, "I can barely get through it."

He got up and played, and you wouldn't believe what he played. I mean, it's just unbelievable what he played, and he felt like he couldn't play. Just so much technique and everything, and he went on and he's got a couple dozen albums out of his own trios and quartets and solo piano. He played with Thad Jones-Mel Lewis band for many years.

But I must say, he is one of the biggest influences in my life as far as being a serious musician and a slave to the art. He said early on, he says, "If you can raise the music up," and held his finger an eighth of an inch apart and said, "If you can raise music up that much, you know, then your life was worth it—," you know. I thought that was a pretty good goal, and he certainly has. I mean, you should mark the level and say—well, oh, my god, when somebody will hear him and understand what

they're hearing and then they'll go, "Oh, my god," and then they'll assimilate that. I really believe that his influence is yet to be felt, but that it will happen.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: He always said that he was shocked at the— His biggest claim to fame was that he was on the first Ornette Coleman album [*Something Else!!*] and he didn't even really—I mean, I don't think that he was there. I mean, he wasn't playing with those guys. They just got a different rhythm section because they wanted somebody famous. You know, nobody had ever heard of Paul Bley. At the time it was Paul Bley's band. Walter would sure never try to cut anybody out. It was whoever did the date did their thing.

CLINE: Yeah, I think Lester Koenig had hired him to make the session.

SMITH: Yeah, it's typical, but good for Walter. He certainly deserves—

CLINE: Immortalized.

SMITH: Right. Right.

CLINE: Yeah. Right.

SMITH: Well, that's as far as my memory goes. The only other one would be Alan Broadbent.

CLINE: And you mentioned Warne Marsh, as well, in this company.

SMITH: Well, Warne was a huge effect, and his way wasn't telling you, but actually a role model. You know, the fact of always playing, playing all the time, playing all the time, playing day after day after day every day, putting in three or four hours of improvising, and that was his life, that was the way he lived his life, along with some practicing and playing. More about that later.

CLINE: Okay. Good. And relating to all of these things as a basis, there are a couple of special relationships that you must have where a special sort of understanding, a rapport, is required. One is with pianists and the other is with drummers. You've played, obviously, with some of the best on both instruments.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Starting with pianists, who are some that you feel that you had an extremely rare or special sort of rapport with?

SMITH: Well, Alan Broadbent has to be at the top of any list. He's one of the most extraordinary combinations of skill. I mean, basic talent, first of all. He has a physical gift, but he also has put in years and years of very heavy practice on that thing. I'm talking about physical mastery of the instrument, and has put in years of working on the improvising part of it, and that is, there are some things that come out of the Lennie Tristano—who he studied with—school, of playing at very slow tempos and playing left-hand bass lines, and along like that and getting into the time. I mean, there are a lot of people that skim over the time and occasionally by mistake play in a groove, you know, but Alan was very conscious of that. Like Sonny Clark is one of his influences, and being in the groove is more important than anything else, and the attention to time, which was all transferred to me.

Now, different people require different things from a bass player. Somehow Alan and I, and I am still amazed that I can play with him, that I understand what it is that makes our effort, joint effort, work, because he's very particular about what he wants in a bass, and there's very few people that understand it. And it's really not

complicated; just notes that don't conflict and paying attention to the time, and that's really it. That's really all there is to it. But I do pick up on what he needs note-wise.

In fact, I mean, this may sound silly, but I read these reviews, there's a thing in one of the magazines, *Penguin* or something like that, where they talk about his things sound like he— "He's played so perfectly, it sounds like he's prepared his solos," indicating that they think he might. Well, I guarantee you he never does. I mean, it's all improvised, you know. But I also think that a great deal of that is because I'm playing notes that go with him so well. You know, I really hear him and I play those notes. Again, I'm talking about the bass players never get the credit, you know.

[laughs]

CLINE: Right. Well, it allows him to be comfortable enough to play with that sort of fluidity and spontaneity.

SMITH: Whoever he plays, he's going to play great. I mean, that's a fact. But I think that our recordings have a certain perfection in notes, because I'm really following his— You know, that's my goal, is, first of all, make him sound good. That's my goal. And there are many people you play with that you don't even think about the notes and it doesn't even matter, and that's really fun, too, I mean, to play with somebody and you can play any note and it's okay, and there are a number of guys I play with that like that. And who can I think of the name? Let's see. Who have I ever played with? But there are people you just don't have to think about the note and it doesn't matter if you play a G-flat and they play a G. It's another thing. I think that's our role as bass players and drummers. Our role is to make them comfortable. That's first. And sometimes you're comfortable, too.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But I don't believe that how you feel has much to do with how you sound.

CLINE: Yeah, that's true.

SMITH: You know, a lot of people say, "That feels good," or, "That was fun," and I go, "Are you kidding? Fun is a plate of ribs. That's fun, you know." [mutual laughter] "Yeah, that felt good," you know, that's a nap. You're talking about a nap, you know.

Jack Sheldon says, "You know you're getting old when happy hour is your nap."

CLINE: Yeah, right.

Any other pianists that you want to talk about in particular in that way?

SMITH: God, I haven't thought of those kind of categories. Who did I play with? You know, it's like they say, "What do you want to play?" and you can't remember any tune. You know, now I can't think of anybody.

CLINE: Well, we can come back to that, too.

SMITH: Okay.

CLINE: What about drummers, then?

SMITH: Oh, I have a list of great drummers a mile long, and every one of them fine. And the drummer is who I focus in on. I mean, I focus totally on the piano player, but rhythmically I assume— I mean, a kid asked me at— I did one of Charlie Haden's improvising classes, and he said, "Well, what do you when you play with a drummer who's got bad time?"

I said, “Well, don’t play with him again.” That’s how you handle that one, you know.

But, you know, there are very few of those. Only in college, you know, and stuff like that. I mean, you know, you’re not going to play with somebody with bad time.

But when I play, the drummer’s the boss. I mean, it’s like as if I were playing with the metronome, and they’re the metronome, you know. I mean, not that I’m not pushing it and pulling it and stuff like that. I don’t fight the drummer. That’s not my role, you know. The first thing I try to do is figure out where the drummer is hearing their time, if he’s centering it on the cymbal or the bass drum, you know. Generally, it’s one of the two, and then I try to—I just focus in on that like subconsciously, like that’s where the time is, you know, and you’re playing and that’s where you hear it. It’s surprising some guys are, it’s really mixed up, a lot of guys are right there on the cymbal click.

But some of my favorite drummers, I mean, Larance Marable, I mean, absolutely impeccable playing, and he’s centered in both places. He’s the only guy I’ve ever played with that he’s centered both. You can listen to either one and it’s the same one. He’s an absolutely impeccable time player and everything else. Jeez, the list, I’m afraid to leave anybody out, because I’ve got so many guys I love. Paul Kreibich. Kendall Kay. Ralph Penland. Guys that have left town. Willie Jones [III]. Jesus, man, I mean, I really do love the drummers, I just love them. I loved playing with Sherman Ferguson. Joe LaBarbera. I mean, just everybody’s list, you know, and there’s a bunch of drummers that are unsung. Alonzo Garibaldi has some of the best

time in the world, you know. Sweet. Of course, he doesn't even play anymore. I think he has sessions, but he doesn't work.

I'd have to go through the book and find the list of the drummers. That's a pretty good start, though.

CLINE: Sometimes bass players, they just have— You know, those people they feel like they really hook up with and I was just kind of curious.

SMITH: Well, I feel like it's everybody. I feel like I hook up with everybody, but that's why I'm not working, right? [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Oh, wow. Also, let's see. While we're in this area here, I wanted to ask you since I'm not sure on the chronology about this, explain, if you will, the direction that your other major role model, your brother [Carson R. Smith], the direction his career took eventually.

SMITH: Oh, okay. Well, I'm right now preparing a class on Duke Ellington, so I'm spending a lot of time listening to Jimmy Blanton, who I heard as a child. When you hear before Jimmy Blanton and after Jimmy Blanton, you realize who Jimmy Blanton was, and it's just a standout. It's suddenly, suddenly the bass is leading the band. I mean, it's really true. This guy was unbelievable, moved the bass up, and nobody came along probably till Ray Brown that could emulate him.

Carson was right there, and that was who Carson's role model was. I mean musical role model. And that's why [Carson] was so popular. He had great time. I mean, he had great note knowledge and played in tune and had a good sound, but he had that time, and that's what made him so popular. He got involved in drugs and he couldn't read, okay, or he could read just a little bit. He could read the way I could

read, you know. He wasn't a first class reader. And at some point that catches up with you, you know. We talked about that earlier.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: So it's sort like it used to be you make it in jazz and then you go gravitate to the studios, and that was like all those guys, Bob Gordon— Not Bob Gordon. I'm trying to think. Who was married to June Christy?

CLINE: Oh, yeah, I know who you mean.

SMITH: Wonderful tenor [saxophone] player [Bob Cooper]. So many of those musicians gravitated, they just automatically went into the studios, and that was the way it was and everybody, you just assumed that's what it was. First make it as a jazz player and then you go into the studios.

CLINE: Although those guys were playing in big bands and doing a lot of reading, too.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, that's right. But you can get by in a big band with not much, as a bass player, with not much reading, not much reading, but then when you do a movie score, you've got to be able to really nail that third whatever it is, the second sixteenth [note], you know. You've got to be able to put it right where it belongs. It's a different level of reading. That didn't happen for Carson. It's almost like, hmm, what happened here?

Then Ornette came along and everything sort of changed. A combination of [Carson] got involved with the drugs, and then his wife [Joan] made him stop. She said, "I'd rather have you be drinking than that." So he became an alcoholic.

Then he moved to Vegas, and I really think he moved to Vegas because— Did we talk about this before?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Because he could survive as an alcoholic in Vegas. Now, I'm painting a very bleak picture. I mean, he really had a lot of fun in his life. He had a lot more fun than you or I will ever have. I mean, his life was a party. I mean, he was partying hearty all the time. He would leave the set, you know, leave the band in the middle of the gig and not show up for three days, and it was okay because he was Carson Smith. You just can't do that here or in New York. You can't, because there's— In Vegas there were no other great jazz players at that time and here there's twelve, you know, or whatever, twenty-seven, other qualified players waiting for your gig. So I kind of feel like that's what happened; he found a place that he could survive in his lifestyle.

He came back here in the early seventies to try to make it here again, but he couldn't change his style, and quickly, quickly, people are not trusting him anymore. I tried to get him on a couple of jazz festivals a few years before he died, and even though he had stopped drinking, you know, for five years or something like that, I couldn't convince people to hire him. They didn't trust him.

I saw him all the time, couple times a year, and he just kept playing better and better and better. His soloing didn't develop to its fullest until he was in his thirties, and at that point he was one of the greatest bass soloists, greatest meaning interesting. Great. You know, technically quite good. He wasn't like a Scott LaFaro or Gary Peacock, but that wasn't what he was trying to play. He was playing Charlie Parker and Lester Young and Jimmy Blanton.

Somebody told me that there was some kind of a jazz festival in Vegas in the eighties, and Dizzy Gillespie came to town and he did his set. As he was slowly leaving, you know, talking to people as he went out, the next band was playing and Carson was playing, and when he heard the bass, he sat down immediately and he watched the entire set, and he said, "I haven't heard a bass player like that since Oscar Pettiford died." You know, and he didn't play like Oscar Pettiford, but he played that well, that melodically and that interestingly. And he was one of the great, great bass players.

When he died seven years ago, I pulled out some of those old records and listened to them, and oh, my god, no wonder. You know, the years go by and you think, well, I was listening, but it was my brother, but how good was he really, and he was the best. He was the best, and it stands up.

CLINE: Yeah, it's too bad.

SMITH: Yeah, it's too bad. Drugs are a problem. And I thought, I hadn't seen him in action, I thought maybe he would have been better off to remain a junkie, but probably not. If a person has no control, I guess they're better off as an alcoholic.

CLINE: It's a lot cheaper anyway.

SMITH: Well, I mean, you're not going to kill yourself.

CLINE: Yeah. Okay. One of the things that was a big change in the jazz scene here in L.A. come the sixties was Shelly's Manne-Hole. What do you remember about Shelly's and how much of an impact do you think that club had on the jazz scene here?

SMITH: Oh, well, there's no measuring Shelly Manne's impact and the fact that he supported that club. It was really the mecca. It was far more realistic than Catalina's [Bar and Grill]. I mean, there were really jazz groups, you know. Catalina is a lot of popular stuff, you know, and some real good stuff, too, but it was all good at Shelly's.

And Shelly himself— Because I've said these things before and I don't know if I've said them to you, but, you know, some people die and you miss them.

CLINE: Yeah, you did mention it.

SMITH: But he was a real force. The club was great once they knew you, and they knew me, they didn't charge you when you came in. You'd have to pay for a drink or something, or a Coke, or whatever it is you had, because I didn't drink at all for years and years and years. Again, I don't know if it was because I was around that stuff, you know, with my brother and everything, that I just had an aversion to drunkenness.

CLINE: Some of those Mormon genes, maybe.

SMITH: They have fun, the people who are drinking have fun, but, you know, you kind of have to be drunk to have fun with them. I just don't enjoy it, being around people who are drunk like that, or I haven't. You know, still room for change.

[mutual laughter]

CLINE: We hope not.

SMITH: Yeah. Shelly's, jeez, I mean, when you think of the people that were there, Miles [Davis] with his sextet. Miles and nineteen with Gil Evans, Bill Evans over and over and over. Of course, Howard Rumsey had that same kind of impact. Concerts by the Sea. Again, it was too far away to be centered.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Yeah, Shelly. Boy, if we had more of those people.

CLINE: What do you remember about the club itself?

SMITH: Well, it was kind of like the Unicorn. It was kind of like a coffeehouse. It was large. It wasn't immense. It was comfortable to be in there, even if there were just a few people, but it had a much bigger capacity than, say, the Troubadour, the one I'm talking about. The next Troubadour was too big.

Seating capacity, I don't know, two hundred, something like that. And it had different kind of wings. You know, there was sort of a room over here by the left side of the bandstand, and then a big room in front of it. And it seems to me there were sort of like bars, like shelves that you could stand at with a drink, but it was all stools on the walls, and tables. It seemed to me there were several levels, the floor. The back of the bandstand had what seemed to be gunnysack on it or something like that, you know. It had more of a coffeehouse feel than a regular bar.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: It was not slick, and there were mementos on the walls and different stuff, memorabilia, and it was very, very comfortable. Very, very comfortable. The dressing room behind the stand.

CLINE: What about the clientele?

SMITH: Well, it was right in the heart of Hollywood, so it had everybody in there, and it was fairly expensive to get in, so it kept the riffraff out. But they did allow the musicians to come in and you come in through the back alley there, and so there were always a bunch of musicians hovering around. Rudy Onderwyzer was the manager,

and he made sure you didn't take up any space that the customer might be in, which is fine. That's fine. I understand that. You've got to make money, or try to.

But my understanding is that he always lost money, Shelly, and it was through his tremendous studio career that he supported it, and I have no idea what dollars and cents would be. I'm shocked when I look back here and see that these gigs are paying \$7 and \$14 and \$25. One year I'm working at Donte's for \$25 a day, you know, and big money at the time. And I go, "What?"

CLINE: Right. And Shelly's only made it into the early seventies, but what are some of the other clubs that you remember during that time, during the sixties?

SMITH: Did they go out in the early seventies?

CLINE: Yeah. Well, it moved over to that new location and it lasted very, very briefly.

SMITH: Yeah. I was never even there.

CLINE: Yeah. I went there once. It was in a restaurant.

SMITH: Well, let's see. There's a place called the Spot. It seems to me it was in the [San Fernando] Valley somewhere. There was Donte's.

CLINE: Yeah, that started a little bit toward the end of Shelly's. There was a little overlap between the demise of Shelly's and the beginning of Donte's.

SMITH: Oh, was there really?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Okay.

CLINE: And you've mentioned Sherry's. What about Sherry's?

SMITH: Well, Sherry's was— It had sort of a hang. There's places that are jazz centers and then there are places that have their own sort of clientele, but they happen to have jazz there, and that's what Sherry's was.

CLINE: More of a piano bar kind of feeling?

SMITH: It was a piano bar, but it had a full-sized piano, and people like Pete Jolly played there, I think. I played there many times with "Hamp" [Hampton] Hawes. Of course, I worked there for two or three years with Don Randi, and that's right after I got married. A friend of mine, Boyd Poulson, who now makes violin bows, was the bass player there and he told me that Don was looking for a bass player, and I went in and played one night and Don hired me. It was right at that time that I had settled down, you know. Don and I became very good friends, and it was a great job and he was a great guy. He got me into doing a whole bunch of studio work and all that stuff.

CLINE: Which we will talk about.

SMITH: We had a lot of fun. We had just a lot of fun. We recorded with a whole bunch of people that are now considered classic. I can't understand why, because it was dreck then and it's still.

CLINE: Right. Well, we want to get a little bit into that, too. What about Hampton Hawes? What do you remember about him?

SMITH: Well, Hamp was sad. I mean, he was in kind of a helpless state, like you have to pick him up to do the gig. I mean, sure, he was this great, great talent that had sort of given in or something like that and lost his edge, not playing edge, he still played great, but he just sort of became helpless.

CLINE: Defeated? Sort of defeated feeling, not much drive?

SMITH: Almost out of it. Maybe he was out of it, I don't even know. I used to call him— When Don would have to take off, I would call Hampton first to do it, and I would pick him up.

I can't remember who all the drummers were. Jim Keltner; Will Bradley, Jr., for a while; John Clotter played drums. I think Gene Stone played drums for a while. I can't remember who all. It seems to me there were a couple other drummers in there, too. But Don was a great guy, a great guy. Great time feel and treated me right.

We went on strike. Did you want to go over some other—

CLINE: No, this is good.

SMITH: We were making \$84 a week, which was good money. Can you believe that? It was good money. Here I was with a wife, and we were about to have a child, and we were renting a three-bedroom house on the side of the hill in Highland Park and eighty-four bucks a week was good money. I mean, is that amazing?

CLINE: It is amazing.

SMITH: So we were there a couple of years, and we wanted to get a hundred a week and we went out on strike. This is kind of funny, you know. So we did, and after about two weeks, they came around and they were going to give us the hundred bucks. We went on strike for two dollars a day, okay. I had enjoyed not having to leave my house at eight-thirty at night, and enjoyed that so much during those two weeks, I said, "Don, I can't go back." I said, "I just can't go back."

And he understood, you know. He says, "Well, you know, that means no more studio work, you know."

I said, "I know. I know, but I just can't go back. I just can't go back."

Because I mean, all the work I did was because of him. It was like a little bonus, you know, quite a big bonus, actually. But I just couldn't take it.

So then I actually set off on a pretty fun career, had a lot of stuff happen after that, but that was a wonderful two years playing with him, and we had so much good fun. And we're still dear friends.

CLINE: What about some of the other clubs during the sixties around town that you remember?

SMITH: Well, we talked about Pandora's Box. Okay. Now, another thing there was—When I first saw Maya Angelou on TV, I thought, “My god, I know her. I know that face. Where do I know that face from?” Every time I'd see her, I'd go—And then somebody brought me some pictures, and she used to perform at Pandora's Box when I was there.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: And I used to see her in Pandora's Box, you know, when she was much younger. She has a very particular face, you know.

CLINE: Distinctive, yeah.

SMITH: That's Maya Angelou. Of course, that wasn't her name then, but whatever. I'm sure I talked to her, but I don't remember anything about her.

CLINE: What was she doing?

SMITH: Well, she was singing like a Miriam Makeba kind of act. You know, the Pandora's Box had jazz. I was working there with Bobby Hutcherson, and I worked there, I don't know, four or five times a month, different bands and stuff. It seems to

me Lou Rawls used to be in there, but I'm not sure of that. It seems to me he used to play in there, too.

I think we went through this last time, didn't we, where Marv Jenkins was playing up the street in another club?

CLINE: Yeah, a little bit. Yeah. Right.

SMITH: I can't remember the name of it, but I think we went through all the clubs that I know about.

CLINE: Okay. There aren't any others outside the—

SMITH: It's a remarkably small scene, L.A. Yeah, the jazz scene, very small.

CLINE: Right. And then the Lighthouse kept going, as well, although I guess by the time Shelly's closed, Rudy took over the Lighthouse when Howard Rumsey opened Concerts by the Sea.

SMITH: Rudy took over?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Rudy Onderwyzer?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Took over the Lighthouse?

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: I'll be darned. I didn't know that.

CLINE: Yeah. Yeah, before opening Hop Singh's in whenever that was, the eighties, I guess.

SMITH: I don't have that connection in my mind.

CLINE: I'm going to change tapes. I just realized—

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 13, 2003

CLINE: It's rolling. This is Alex Cline interviewing Putter Smith, and it's still our third session on August 13th, 2003. This is tape number six.

We were talking a little bit about the clubs in L.A. during the sixties. The sixties is the time when a shift happens in your life. You, as you put it, settle down, decide to settle down.

SMITH: Right.

CLINE: And it's also a time when you had a brief period of a few years where you were playing, as you term it, commercial music, doing some studio work, and really in that way, I suppose, leading the life that so many jazz musicians in L.A. did at the time, work in the studio by day, play jazz gigs at night. You just explained how it was Don Randi who introduced you into the studio scene here. What can you say about your impressions of moving into what had to be for you a very different sort of musical genre?

SMITH: Well, I was very happy to be taking care of my family. That was my overriding joy. I love my family and I love my children, and I was very happy to be able to pay the bills. We had our little life, you know, and we were actually watching *Ozzie and Harriett* on TV and stuff like that, and feeling very lucky. We were feeling very lucky to be safe and secure and have each other. I must say I have a very joyous marriage. I mean, you know, as the years go and you have this problem, that problem, everything, but we're still very groovy and we still laugh a lot.

When I left Don Randi, I left the studios, too. Okay. But then within a very short time I got a call to work with—Byron Olsen called me to work with Johnny Mathis. So I spent some time on the road there with Johnny Mathis, and I mean, I've done mixed in commercial work all through and into—I can't recall turning anything down that was fairly decent ever, you know. But, I mean, I am almost exclusively a jazz player at this point. The electric bass, now you have to be a master to keep playing that. That's what I was doing in the studios.

CLINE: Oh, okay. When did that start?

SMITH: At that time. At that time, Don said, "Get an electric bass and I'll get you some studio work."

CLINE: So, out of necessity—

SMITH: Yeah, that was it. It was just all fun, you know. It was fun.

CLINE: Okay. It says here in your résumé that from age twenty-four to twenty-nine you did a lot of commercial recording and there are a lot of things listed here, some of which we might talk about, but it also says, "Decided at age twenty-nine to no longer play commercial music." Can you sort of outline your thinking there?

SMITH: Well, I was on a Cher recording, and I was playing electric bass; Cher of Sonny and Cher, and they had an arrangement. I can't remember the guy. Gene [Paige], a writer, wrote kind of the Motown-ish thing and here was a fairly large group of musicians, and he had this great bass line on "Up a Lazy River." They had like a Motown kind of bass line and it was really— It was interesting, nice and very— And I'm playing it and everything, and then they come out and say, "Oh, can you, on this

part there, can you simplify that a little bit?” You know, and I’m playing what’s written.

“Well, okay,” you know. So I sort of like play the same style, but a little bit less.

They, again, “Oh, can we—?”

Anyway, to make a long story short, over a period of about forty-five minutes it got changed from like [sings funky sixteenth-note bass line], that kind of a bass line. I don’t know how you’re going to write that down.

CLINE: That’s my job.

SMITH: To dotted quarter note-eighths [note] [sings simple one-note bass line]. It got reduced to the very lowest form of elevator rock music at the time, and I thought— That was the moment that I said, “This is not why I became a musician.” I said, I am not— Because being a studio musician, at least the kind I was, which was definitely the lower end of music to me, wasn’t like Frank Sinatra kind of recordings—

CLINE: Chuck Berghofer was doing all those. [laughs]

SMITH: Right. Right. Well, he was also doing these, too.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: You had to hustle. It wasn’t just like you would sit and wait for the phone to ring, because it’s not like being a star or something. And it was just like any other kind of hustling, you know, you’re in a conversation with the producer and he mentions a date he’s going to do, and you say, “Man, I’d sure like to be a part of that. You know, that sounds great. I’d really like to be a part of that.” And then you call him two days later and remind him that you really want to be a part of that date, you

know, and pretty soon you've kind of like, you know, through accretion you're part of his date, you know. And that's an active hustle, and most of the guys, at least in that part of that music, they're doing that, actively hustling, actively grabbing out.

So when I decided that I wasn't going to do that anymore, I decided to stop doing that, and it was real easy. Within three weeks I was out of work.

CLINE: And was it a relief?

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, it was a relief, except that, as I said later, I had a real financial problem about 1973, and had really at that point regretted having no money.

CLINE: Sure.

SMITH: You know, when you see these people getting these checks for the phonograph recording fund, you go, "Oh, my god, I really screwed up." But I didn't. I didn't, because I developed myself. But I started getting other kind of work and I got called to do the Johnny Mathis, as I said, and then somehow it all leads one thing to another, and I ended up working for Bill Cosby's organization. It was like an old-time agency where they had half a dozen acts, you know, and they were bringing people out and setting up tours. It was big-time stuff, you know, a lot of money involved. I would play a week at the Troubadour, the new Troubadour, with one of their acts, and then go out and do a little tour, and occasionally something would hit and there would be more than that involved.

I played with Tiny Tim all over the country.

CLINE: Right. I was just about to say, and I would have thought that Tiny Tim would have been the death blow to your commercial career, but it—

SMITH: Oh, no. No. See, I was actively hustling for it.

CLINE: Right. I just thought artistically maybe that was when you had that light bulb go off, but no.

SMITH: No, I continued to work on the music. Although I had one entire year where I didn't play upright [bass], and the reason I came back—I mean, when you talk about people having a big influence on you, you know, it's always different things and different moments. Kent Glenn is who I'm looking for here on my list.

CLINE: Oh, okay.

SMITH: Kent came over and I had played with Kent in, you know, the sixties and stuff. He was a bebop guy from San Francisco, and we had a good friendship. Where are you, Kent? Well, I must have passed him up here. Yeah.

He came down. He moved down here to get me to play, and he begged me to play the upright bass. I said, "No, no, man, it's gone. Upright bass is gone." And he just— He'd come over and play, and he'd play. This is in 1970. He begged me to play. I mean, just begged me. And finally I said, "Okay, I'll play one tune." I mean, the bass was sitting right there in a corner, you know, and I had a music room like I always do.

So I picked it up and I played one tune and I almost started crying because there was all the emotional content that you can't get out of a Fender [bass], you know. It was like there it was, and I never put it down again. Immediately you got a new teacher. I got a teacher and stayed with that trip, Nat Gangursky.

Well, I've been connected to Kent Glenn ever since then, and then he brought John Gross in. John was a tremendous influence to me. We were playing three or four nights a week at my house and my wife was playing drums. She's got some of

the best time of anybody, you know. She doesn't play anymore at all, but she has marvelous time.

So Kent had a huge effect on me, you know, plus getting me back into it. Then Gross, later, my own band included Kent, Gross, and Gary Foster. Then my second album [*Night Song*], Kent had gone by then, but it was still Gross, and Gross has been a huge influence on me musically. He was the impetus for the book I've got out now on notes, and I asked him when we were going to some gig, the Studio Café, I asked him, "What can I do to—I can't seem to make any progress here. I'm doing all this practicing and I'm not having any breakthroughs."

He said, "Study the modes."

CLINE: Oh, yeah, you mentioned that. That was John Gross. Right.

SMITH: That was John Gross. So that set me off in a long study.

CLINE: He played in Shelly [Manne]'s band [Shelly Manne and his Men] for a while back in the seventies.

SMITH: Yeah, for a long time. Yeah. He and Mike Barone. No, Gary Barone, Mike's brother.

CLINE: Right. Indeed. And this was a time when jazz itself had gone through some real upheaval, going through the mid to late sixties and into 1970, to the point where a lot of the guys who had been moonlighting more as jazz musicians and working in the studios during the day oftentimes abandoned their jazz careers altogether, and some just quit playing, period. What do you remember about what was happening in the music at that time and what your feelings were about it?

SMITH: Well, it was pretty bleak. It was pretty bleak. I just was not interested in the modern stuff. I mean, I was not interested in non-chordal playing. I was interested in going as far as out as possible, but not abandoning the root thing there. I realized—I know that there was a period when I actually thought about quitting playing, because it was so bleak, and it had to do with the money and all that stuff. I'd look at my datebook and I'd go, "What are you doing? What are you doing?"

I actually had a ten-year period of just very poor, although there's occasional, when you look at the résumé, you go, "Oh, you played with this and you played with that and you played with that," but you know, you're talking about four or five things out of 365 possible things. [mutual laughter] And you know, just occasionally just enough to talk you into keep going, you know. It got very, very bleak and I got depressed, and somehow my early being instilled by, like, Walter Norris and different people who really thought of it as an art, Warne Marsh. You know, Warne Marsh cleaned swimming pools for three or four years. Here's one of the greatest improvisers that ever lived, most original, most advanced, cleaning swimming pools. It says a lot about our society here, I think.

CLINE: Yeah, certainly.

SMITH: Lee Konitz was painting houses at one point.

CLINE: I did that. [laughs]

SMITH: Yeah, but I'm saying, you, too.

CLINE: Sure, but I'm not Lee Konitz.

SMITH: But I mean, you're certainly at the level that should be acknowledged that here's a serious, accomplished musician. David Angel the other day was saying about

rehearsing, because he did something like six rehearsals for this gig, at the [Jazz] Bakery. We were all surprised that it paid \$50. We didn't think it would pay nearly that much, you know.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, right, and six rehearsals.

SMITH: Yeah, and six rehearsals. But you know, I could only make three of them. A lot of the guys couldn't make them all.

CLINE: Sure.

SMITH: He said something, "Oh, that comes out to five dollars a rehearsal and twenty dollars for the gig," or something like that, you know. He said, "You know, in Switzerland they won't rehearse. No one will rehearse for nothing." He says, "And they don't believe you when you tell them that they do in America." He says, "They can't believe it."

They say, "No, no, you're kiddin'."

I mean, because the state supports and people get paid for everything, you know, musicians. And once you're actually a musician, you know, and that's true subsidy of the arts, you know. Here we have to have a tax cut for Bill Gates, you know.

CLINE: Right. Did you ever think about relocating to someplace that seemed more friendly to the kind of thing you were interested in?

SMITH: Many times. It was a dream of mine for years to move to New York, but taking the family there was just— People get caught in their trap, and I was caught in mine and tried to make the best of it. I mean, you have wishes. You go, gee, you know, it's like remembering all those little girls in high school and you were too

stupid to realize. It's like that, you know. You go, "God," you know. But you get your— You know, here I have a family, I have to take care of this family, and you either believe that or you don't, you know, and I did. I thought that's more important than anything else I could— Whether I'm right or not, because then you have a guy like Warne Marsh, that's not the way he thinks, you know. His music is more important than anything, and you have to say that's laudable, but I'm not built that way.

CLINE: Yeah. Right.

SMITH: I don't know, because then it's like you get to a— You're involved in something and you wish you could be somewhere else, and then something really good happens and you go, "If I had done something differently, this would not have happened."

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And right now I'm very happy to be where I am and doing what I'm doing, and I'm doing marvelous music with marvelous people, and almost all of my jobs— I mean, I would say all my jobs are fun jobs, you know. I'd be 99 percent right, you know.

CLINE: Right. And yet it sounds like, at least for a little while, you were having to go on the road in order to keep working, which is the thing I think you probably didn't really want to do ideally in order to be with your family and whatnot.

SMITH: Well, I couldn't go out on the road and not have enough money to support them. I got called for several offers. Art Blakey asked me to go out to New York with him.

CLINE: Right. This is one of the things I'm leading up to.

SMITH: Can you imagine?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Can you imagine?

CLINE: When was that?

SMITH: That was— Let's see. I've got the date here somewhere. Where is it?

There you are. It was like '73 or '74. Yeah, '72.

CLINE: Okay. It was hard to be a jazz musician at that point, for sure.

SMITH: I just couldn't go, because I didn't have a family backup. I didn't have any money. We didn't have any family, anybody to back us up.

CLINE: How did you wind up playing with Art?

SMITH: Henry Franklin recommended me. Henry's always been in my corner. He's a dear, dear friend. I heard him play about a month ago at Jerry Rusch's memorial, and I'd heard him about six months before in a concert, and god, he's playing great.

CLINE: Yeah, better than ever, I think.

SMITH: Soloing like crazy. Gee. Great player.

CLINE: Yeah, he's one of the people we interviewed in this series, by the way.

SMITH: Oh, great. Oh, great.

CLINE: So where was the gig with Art?

SMITH: Oh, it was a place— I think it was called the Godfather.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Something like that. It was down in Compton. I won't say Compton. It might have been. I'm not sure. It was in South Central L.A. And that was one of

the— And the place was half empty. They had had— I think it was called the Watts riots, I'm not sure which was called which, but there had been a big riot there a few months before, burning.

CLINE: The Watts riots were in '65, so it must be something else then.

SMITH: Well, I'm not sure what it was, then. But there were almost no white people there. Art would get up and preach, he says, "You really messed up, you've scared them off, and we need the white people in here, too." I mean, he's preaching, he says, "You know jazz is not black; it's black and white." He says, "It didn't happen in Africa, you know. It's black and white. It's always been like that, and that's what it is, and anybody that—." And he's preaching against all racism, you know. And God bless him, you know.

I got to hang out with him in New York in the early eighties. I went back there with Alan Broadbent and played at Bradley's for a week, and I spent a whole evening with Art Blakey and we spent about an hour in conversation. What a fine guy. Yeah. Fine guy. I mean, isn't that wonderful, man?

CLINE: Yeah. And who else was in the band, do you remember?

SMITH: There was a tenor [saxophone] player that I had met when I was on the road with Nick Ceroli in 1958 or '59 in Niles, Ohio, and I can't remember his name. I was trying to remember it today and I can't remember his name. But George Cables was on piano and Woody Shaw was the trumpet player.

CLINE: Not bad.

SMITH: Yeah, Woody was great. God, Woody was great. He used to laugh at my solos. I'd play something and he'd laugh. You know, it was enjoyable. It was

really— Those kind of things mean so much, you know, when somebody that you really dig really digs something you do. “Yeah, okay, okay. Solid,” you know.

CLINE: Yeah. So you were not able to take him up on his offer?

SMITH: No. No. No. I mean, it was “Come to New York and be in my band,” which still meant making no money.

CLINE: Yeah, right. Sure.

SMITH: You know?

CLINE: He just stayed on the road all—

SMITH: No ticket. No ticket, you know.

CLINE: He just stayed on the road all year as a rule.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Amazing.

SMITH: Well, what are you going to do? What are you going to do?

CLINE: Yeah. You also played with Thelonious Monk.

SMITH: Yeah. Now, that was a bolt out of the blue.

CLINE: When was that?

SMITH: I believe that was 1969. Let me see if I have a— It might have been 1970. I see some pretty sad years here. Thelonious, October 13th through the 25th, San Francisco, 1970. And I was out playing a stupid casual in a tuxedo, and I got home and my wife was waiting up—this was before the days of the cell phone and pagers—and she said, “You just got called to play with Thelonious Monk and you better say yes.” [mutual laughter] And I did, and I flew up there.

And the reason I got the call is, first of all, Kent Glenn recommended me.

They got to San Francisco, and Jules Colomby, who was Monk's manager, Monk had just done a Japanese tour and was going back to New York. A bass player, I'm not sure if it was Bob Cranshaw or who, the tenor player that played with him.

CLINE: Charlie Rouse?

SMITH: Charlie Rouse had been enrolled in the Manhattan School of Acting by Bill Cosby, because they had told him they wanted to do some acting, and so Bill paid their way to start. And Thelonious got a last-minute booking at the Jazz Workshop in San Francisco, so he needed a bass player. He had a tenor player, Paul Jefferies, who now runs the Thelonious Monk Institute, and so they were looking for a bass player out here who knew his music. And I had transcribed all his music. I had met Hall Overton in Vegas in the late sixties and he'd shown me a couple of things, but I had transcribed several dozen of Thelonious' songs, and I was known as somebody that knew Thelonious' music.

So Kent recommended, to Jules, me and then somebody else, of course, they're out fishing, trolling, looking, and someone else said the same thing, a totally different source. And I don't know who the other person was. But the fact that they had two independent—

CLINE: Vouchers.

SMITH: So they got me and they said there would be no rehearsal and there's "no book." I flew in and I got a pad at the Gates Hotel, which is in the Tenderloin district, very low area. I mean, the gig didn't pay much, you know, a couple hundred, I think, a week. I wasn't able to talk to anybody. Just be at the gig, whatever, nine o'clock.

So I go in there and I go downstairs, and there's Thelonious and he's turning in a circle, smoking, you know.

CLINE: Right, which he did.

SMITH: Saying kind of cryptic things like "Two is one," and that was something he said the whole time I was with him, and I got to where it meant something to me. So at one point I just kind of entered the dressing room and I'm standing there like in my non-threatening, you know, just soaking-it-up mode, and he stops after a few minutes and he looks at me and he says, "You the new bass player?"

I said, "Yeah."

He says, "White is right." And then he started turning around again. And I just knew immediately everything was okay. I mean, it was like funny, you know.

You know, I had read an interview of him years before, not too many years before, but five years before, in *Down Beat* [magazine], and they had asked him— It was the time of Black Power and the rise of all that, and they said, "What about that?"

He says, "Well, you know, they start talking to me about it and I get to hating pretty good, you know." He says, "Then some nice white guy will come along and mess it all up." [mutual laughter] Isn't that wonderful?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Isn't that beautiful?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: So I knew that— You know, and then when he said that to me, everything's cool. So we had, of course, when I had gotten the gig, I had ten days or something

like that, so I had dug out every Monk record I had and called everybody I knew and spent hours and hours going through everything I didn't know and like that.

The first tune we played I had never heard. It was a fairly recent thing. It was "Ugly Beauty," and it contains a whole bunch of Monkisms, you know. So by the end of the second chorus I had it completely, you know, and I was in.

Then we played the half set or three-quarters of the set and he says, "Okay, bass solo," and walked off the stage. Everybody walks off. And that was sort of a thing they did in those days, you know, bass solo, feature the bass. And so I played a Duke Ellington tune. I played "In a Sentimental Mood" and he loved it. He really dug me.

And I never let him out of my sight. I mean, the whole time of the gig I would hang with him the whole break and we'd go up to Mike's Pool Hall and play some pool or have a bowl of soup or something. I was never pushing, but I was like, you know, just there like a little puppy dog. I mean, I felt very privileged, you know.

Then about the fourth or fifth night he says, "You want to play Shelly's with me?" I mean, talk about a puppy dog; I mean, my tail was wagging. It was such a thrill.

So I spent the rest of the two weeks there and then I spent about another week up there hanging with him. One day I sat down and played "Monk's Mood" for him on the piano, and I mean, he really did a double-take, you know, because I had his whole thing together, you know, on the piano. I played it and then he sat down and played it and corrected my mistakes. There were two notes I had wrong, and he corrected them, in the chords, you know. Beautiful. It was a great experience.

He was not a small-talk guy. I mean, “How you doin’?” “Hmm.” You know, he would never talk about the weather in California, you know.

I always wanted to call him Mr. Monk, but I knew I had to call him Thelonious. A lot of the guys called him “T.” I didn’t feel like I could do that, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Someone asked him, “Thelonious, what’s happening?”

He replied, “Everything.” He didn’t talk much at all. He had a tremendous sense of humor, but he gave off the sweetest, sweetest vibe, like a fountain of sweetness. But he was tremendously funny.

When we went down and did a couple weeks at Shelly’s, one night Candy Finch, who was Dizzy’s drummer. Dizzy’s band came in one night, and they were all backstage. There were people there every night, you know, Flip Wilson and all these people that wanted to see Thelonious. So they got in a conversation. Not Thelonious, Thelonious was just sitting there, you know, and all these guys are around and they start talking about martial arts, because Candy Finch was into martial arts, and Monk didn’t say a word. I hadn’t heard him talk or say a word in two days, you know. He’s just as present as anybody else, it’s just that he doesn’t talk.

They started talking about guns. You know, it went from martial arts to guns, you know, and then somebody says, “I heard that a bullet does a lot more damage from the back than it does from the front.” There’s like a slight pause and then Thelonious says, “I guess that means next time you’re running from the police, you should run backwards.” [mutual laughter] Everybody just falls out, but I mean, that’s

the way his mind—One night at the Jazz Workshop he was doing a set where he would play the melody and then he would get up and dance through the whole tune, you know. Never take a solo.

So we're playing his theme song, "Epistrophy," at the end of the set, and it's hard to do this in writing because the speed of the response is part of the thing. What happened was, he finished the tune and he stood up, and when he stood up, a woman in the front row says, "Monk, I paid good money to see you."

"Are you blind?"

It was just like that, and the whole place fell out, I mean, the entire club and the band and everybody. He had this wit, incredible wit, which is, of course, so obvious in his music.

CLINE: Yes, right, absolutely. Who else was playing in the band?

SMITH: Lennie McBrowne was playing drums up there. Paul Jefferies. That was it. Then when we did Shelly's, Ndugu played drums.

CLINE: Oh, really.

SMITH: His name was Leon.

CLINE: Leon Chancler, right. A kid from Watts.

SMITH: That's right when he was changing his name. I said, "Well, gee, Leon is really an African name, you know, already." He didn't want to hear that, you know.

One night— I mean, he just obviously had no idea about Thelonious at all, and I called him after the second night, I called him in the daytime, I said, "Leon, you know, why don't you go get a Thelonious record and listen to it, you know, because he

really has a real definite thing, Thelonious,” because Leon’s playing like Tony Williams and like that; very unsuitable.

Oh, he was so mad, and he got so mad that I said that. And then later somebody, Will Bobo said, you know, “I heard about that.” And he says, “You did the right thing trying.” But you know, but he took it as an insult, and I’m sorry, because it wasn’t meant that way.

CLINE: Yeah, sure.

SMITH: But I mean, if I were going to play with Jimmy Durante, I mean, I would want to— I mean, if you take the gig, you know, try to do the right thing. That’s the way I saw it.

CLINE: Sure. Definitely. And, of course, culturally there was a lot going on as well at this point. You mentioned Black Power, a lot of changes as far as awareness of race relations, and some of this came into the music in terms of thematic content and things, maybe not the music that you were interested in. But what do you remember about that, and do you remember anything changing in terms of the feeling among musicians at that point, or was it pretty much the same?

SMITH: Well, again, I just don’t think music is the right place for political— I mean, it’s okay for a musician to be political, but I think the music, that you have to leave it up to the news; that we can’t control it. And if we try to control it, then we’re killing it, you know. To go out purposely to express anger in music is like, hmm, you know, let’s set a time limit. How about two and a half minutes?

But I feel like, you know, like that was the early— We talked about this with Coltrane, you know, that when it became a political statement rather than a musical

statement. I mean, that's what I feel, is that the muse has to be in charge, and that means that we have to be a little bit out of control of it and let it happen, and let who we're with influence it. It's silly to be angry at the people who love you, you know, because that's the thing, because jazz musicians, you know, I mean, we're already all on the same side, and I hate to think of white and black as "them" and "us." It's us, it's all of us, and if we could get past that, you know, but we're dealing with it. We're trying to deal with it.

CLINE: And what about the development of the introduction of electric instruments and so called— You know, what later became called fusion music and that whole thing that was happening around now, too?

SMITH: Well, I realized not long ago, the last five years or so, that we were already playing fusion. We were already playing fusion and that's what we're doing; we are fusing the things that we have assimilated. I don't know if I said this before, but Van Gogh calls it assimilation and synthesis. Those are his words. Did I say that before?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Okay. That's in one of his letters, which I think it describes it perfectly.

CLINE: Sure.

SMITH: Try and say, well, we're going to take rock and roll and jazz and we're going to fuse them together. It's like arbitrary. What would that be? Let's see. Let's think about what that would be. But then the real thing is, is that when someone grows up with both, what they play is fusion, you know.

CLINE: Right. And do you think that's more what really happened before it became a more self-conscious sort of approach?

SMITH: Well, jazz is actually a fusion of African and European, truly. Then the thing of rock and roll trying to fuse— There's an openness to the muse in jazz that has to do with the rhythmical sensitivity and the openness and that [sings mechanical sixteenth-note rhythm], that doesn't have that, you know, to me. Maybe I'm just not getting it, but when you try to put those things together.

Now, I heard a band— I forget the guy's name. His father was the guitar player with Shelly Manne's band when—

CLINE: John Morell.

SMITH: And his son is named?

CLINE: I don't know his son.

SMITH: His son is one of the greatest guitar players I've heard in my life, and he had a band and it seemed to me it was about ten pieces. Justin Morell. He's written for this thing, and it's real true fusion. You hear it and you go, "Oh, my god, this is what— This is the real thing." This is a guy that grew up with both and is writing this stuff and it just would kill you. You'd go crazy. If you ever get a chance to hear this band [Justin Morell Quintet].

CLINE: I'll have to look for that.

SMITH: Justin Morell.

CLINE: Interesting.

SMITH: Man. Man. And to me that was real fusion, but it grew out of someone's real natural artistic vision and not a construct, you know, like "Let's make a plastic dolphin," you know. Oh, looks like a plastic dolphin.

CLINE: And, you know, Miles [Davis] and people like Tony Williams were kind of the early innovators in this regard and also, of course, the music, by necessity, was getting louder. We talked a little bit about the technology and its changes. And by the time you were— You'd given up on the bass guitar and you were playing the upright again. What was different about what you were having to use? I mean, you had an amplifier now; there were pickups. What was going on?

SMITH: You mean when I stopped playing electric or when I stopped playing upright?

CLINE: When you stopped playing electric and were going back to the upright and things were different, I assume.

SMITH: Well, yeah, there were amplifiers. I can't remember when I first used an amplifier, but I don't think I was using one with Don Randi.

CLINE: What about with Monk?

SMITH: No.

CLINE: No?

SMITH: Oh, no. Oh, no.

CLINE: Oh, wow. Or not Art Blakey either then?

SMITH: Yes, I did with Art Blakey.

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: Far out. So it must have been right in that little period there that I began playing with an amp[lifier], and that took a long time to get used to. And now I can't play without one.

CLINE: Right. Did you first have to get like a Barcus-Berry pickup or whatever was available?

SMITH: Oh, I think I went through everything. Barcus-Berry.

CLINE: Yeah, the early ones.

SMITH: Is that the one— There was one, Polytone something or other. I can't remember. I tried everything and the Underwood [pickup]. Now I have kind of a complicated setup, two pickups and stuff. But what it does is it tries to make the bass sound exactly like a bass.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Except there's sort of a compression in the extension of the notes. The notes ring along your—

CLINE: Right. The tape's getting low on this side here and we're getting kind of into the later time zone, but I have one more question I want to ask before we call it for today.

SMITH: Sure.

CLINE: Since you mentioned this Bill Cosby situation with these musicians wanting to kind of work on some acting, I had to ask you, you had an acting role during this period.

SMITH: Well, another thing that Thelonious said, somebody asked him, when we were at Shelly's, "How come your regular guys aren't with you?" And he said, "They're going to acting school." He said it just about that tersely. Then he said, "It seems to me if you want to be an actor, you should be in Hollywood." And then poetic justice; I get a gig through that.

CLINE: Right. It was through that.

SMITH: That was when the director [Guy Hamilton] of *Diamonds Are Forever* came in to see Thelonious, I stuck in his head. I didn't meet him or anything that day. But often, you know, there were almost no white people there, and one night the Black Studies group was sitting in the front there, and when I came up on the stage, the lady in front said, "This better be good." [mutual laughter]

But I mean, Thelonious asked me to play with him, so, you know, I went with that.

CLINE: Indeed.

SMITH: That was my strength.

Are you out?

CLINE: No, I'm cool.

SMITH: Okay. So about three months later, I got a call asking if I was the bass player with Thelonious Monk, and I said, yes, I had been. And they asked me to come down to Universal [Pictures], and I figured it was— I said, "Do you want me to bring my bass?" So I figured it was a sideline gig or they probably wanted a walking bass or some damn thing.

I walk in, and they give me a script and I couldn't believe it. I never acted in my life. So they said, "We just want you to read these lines."

I said, "You're kidding, right? You're kidding."

I mean, I was dressed in Levi's, an old Levi jacket, you know, like the standard that people wore in those days.

CLINE: Speaking of kidding, it was for the role of Mr. Kidd. [laughs]

SMITH: That's right. So they asked me to read that, and another person was sitting there and they read the other part [Mr. Wint], and, you know, I just read it and they laughed. They said, "Of course there'll be a screen test."

I said, "What? You're kidding. You're what? You're kidding," you know.

So I did a screen test with Paul Williams. He was the original guy that they cast for the other part, and they couldn't reach an agreement on bread or something, so they ended up getting the guy they got [Bruce Glover]. And the rest is history.

CLINE: Mr. Kidd, Blofeld's henchman.

SMITH: Well, I went with the idea that I really do believe that what we do as jazz improvisers is one of the highest arts, most demanding arts, and it requires great intelligence. I mean, if you recall the young jazz musicians when you were in school, they're always extraordinarily gifted people and very talented and very intelligent.

I had just come from being asked by Thelonious Monk to play in his band, so I had a tremendous amount of confidence, and I said, "I'm just going to go here on behalf of musicians everywhere," you know. So when they talk about the craft of acting on the Johnny Carson show [the *Tonight Show*], you know, we can say, sure, you know.

And I'm not disrespecting actors. I just don't think that jazz improvising musicians get anything like the understanding of what they do or how profound it is.

CLINE: Amen to that.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: All right.

SMITH: So that was my strength through the film.

CLINE: You're immortalized.

SMITH: Yes, immortalized in celluloid.

[End of August 13, 2003 interview]

TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 27, 2003

CLINE: This is Alex Cline once again interviewing Putter Smith. It's Wednesday, August 27th, at his home in South Pasadena once again. This is tape number seven.

Good morning.

SMITH: Good morning. Nice to see you again.

CLINE: Yes. We've missed a week, but we're back with maybe a shorter session, but we'll take all that we can get.

As always, I had some follow-up questions from our last session. You left off last time talking about your film role in *Diamonds Are Forever*, the famous James Bond film, in which you played Mr. Kidd, one of Blofeld's henchmen. I actually wanted to ask you a couple of things about that.

One is, did you, from that experience, even based on what little we said about it, I can sort of guess the answer to this, but I wanted to know anyway, did you consider any more acting work after this?

SMITH: Oh, sure. Sure. I mean, of course, you got people screaming at you, you know, and telling you to do it and everything. An agent signed me and nothing ever happened. It was about a year of nothing, absolutely nothing. Well, this is ridiculous, you know, why am I even thinking about this?

Then about ten years later, my wife [Verna R Smith], who was an actress at one time, a friend of hers, working actor, Pepe Serna, a friend of his became an agent and called me up and said he could get me some work. I said, "Why not?" So for

about a year I went out on interviews and I did about ten small jobs, and then he got enough money to buy himself a Roto-Rooter franchise in Las Vegas, and so now he's cleaning toilets in Las Vegas, which is a step up. [laughs]

CLINE: Right. Well, that's surefire money right there.

SMITH: So I thought, well, that's a perfect end to my acting career. I really hated the business part of it. The acting part, I mean, anybody, at the level I was doing, anybody could do it, you know. So you got like Erik Estrada or somebody that— Or Arnold Schwarzenegger, you know.

CLINE: Just what I was thinking.

SMITH: You know, it's really— The way they do it it's like rock and roll recordings; they can take anybody and have them deliver a line, not like a real actor that can give you an emotional roller coaster ride.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But it's not for me. You have to be passionate about it to endure the tediousness of the business.

CLINE: So you did enjoy the experience in some ways?

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Sure. Sure. I enjoyed the actual acting. It really tickled me to be carrying Sean Connery around on the lot, you know. The first scene we did was where we lifted him out of the trunk of a car, and I mean, I was just cracking up, you know. You know, here I am carrying Sean Connery. But it was nice. There was some real nice people. Jill St. John was a very, very nice person. It turns out she's a musician's chick. I mean, that's the kind of chick she is, and she was married to Jack Jones.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And so she was right in there and really, really cool. You know, I got to meet a bunch of those people. Sean Connery is everything you'd hope he would be and more, and more. A wonderful guy. Plays drums.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: I didn't know that. Wow.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Were you then recognized on the street, for example, because of this?

SMITH: Well, yeah. It almost drove me— It drove me crazy, because I couldn't go anywhere. And within a week of the movie being released, I was being mobbed, I mean literally. I mean, like twenty or thirty people would come around. And it just drove me crazy. I mean, it tickled me the first couple times it happened, and then it really got awful. I think there were four questions they'd ask, you know. "How did you get the part? How much did you make? What's Sean Connery like?" And "Have you done anything else?" It just drove me crazy and I began— I got really— I would deny it was me.

One time I was in the ocean a hundred yards from shore, and a little kid comes by on a raft, and I'm out there on a raft, you know, and he says, "Hey, you're that guy from James Bond."

I said, "No, that wasn't me."

He says, "Well, who are you, then?" [mutual laughter] He knew it was me. The kid was nine years old or something.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: I got real resentful like that, and then about four years later I was driving down the streets of— Didn't I tell you all this already?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: See, that was all the stuff I've told other people, so it seems like I'm repeating everything.

So I was driving down the street in Beverly Hills and I look over and there's Dick Van Patten, you know, who I'm not even a fan of particularly, and I go, "Oh, my god, Dick Van Patten." I got real excited, you know, like it's a star, and I realized at that moment what people were going through. You know, it's the persona and they're real excited to be in the presence of a persona, and from then on I just went on the trip with people when they'd come up to me. I'd go, "Yeah, yeah, it was really great," you know, and share the excitement with them, and it was really much better.

As far different as I look now, people still recognize me and I get the occasional "Aren't you Mr. Kidd?" It's fun. And every time it shows on TV, I get a couple of phone calls, you know. It's kind of shocking, you know, when you think of what people like a real big star, you know, like George C. Scott or somebody, when you see they got twelve movies on a day on TV. My god.

CLINE: You have a new sympathy for what these people endure.

SMITH: Well, of course they want it and they're ready for it. That was the thing, is I never wanted— I always valued my—

CLINE: Anonymity.

SMITH: Exactly. That's the word I'm trying to figure out how to pronounce.

You know, it's always been great as a musician, you know, you can be an observer, sort of in the background and watching, and that disappeared and that's what I really resented was I didn't really want to be the center of attention. I got over it, though. I got over it. Actually, I lost my shyness, so that was good.

CLINE: Oh, wow. Yeah.

SMITH: That was good. But a great experience. I recommend it. Say yes. Say yes when they come knocking.

CLINE: Okay. And I wanted to use this opportunity to ask you a question I keep neglecting to ask, which is you're credited in the film under the name Putter Smith, your name, but we still don't know yet how you got that name.

SMITH: Oh, yeah, that's a— Well, I was tremendously overweight when I was a child, and they used to call me "Putt-putt." There was a little motorcycle, it was called a Doodle Bug, it was about— Smaller than a child's bicycle. I mean, it was three feet long, a little tiny thing, and yellow, and it had a little bumblebee on the back and they called it the Doodle Bug, and it went [mimics the sound], like that. And they used to call them putt-putts. They said when I was playing baseball I looked like a putt-putt, so they called me Putt-putt, which was nice, a very affectionate term and everybody called me Putt-putt. Then when I was about eleven, some guys started calling me Putter.

CLINE: Really.

SMITH: Yeah. And that stuck, so there you go. There are still some real old friends from school and stuff that remember me as Pat; you know, Patrick Smith.

CLINE: What does Dave Koonse call you?

SMITH: Putt, you know, although occasionally he'll call me Pat.

CLINE: Pat and Putt's pretty close.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah.

CLINE: So this will put to rest any theories having to do with golf, for anyone who's interested.

SMITH: I took up golf ten years ago in self-defense, just so I could say yes to that question.

CLINE: Right. So, yes, you play golf and, yes, you were Mr. Kidd in *Diamonds Are Forever*.

SMITH: No, that wasn't me. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: I just wanted to say one more thing about that. You know, I got that movie through being with Thelonious [Monk], you know, and I called them occasionally just to say, you know, what was going on. I mean, Nellie [Monk] is such a sweet— She died two years ago, but she's such a sweet person. And you know, Thelonious always traveled with her. Actually, I got to meet their— When they came to town and I was leaving town, I went to see them before I left and met Thelonious [Monk] Jr., who was clearly a fine young man. I've never talked to him since that time.

But anyway, when I got this movie, I called Thelonious' house and Nellie answered the phone, Thelonious wasn't available, I told her what had happened and she said, "You know, whenever anybody works for Thelonious, something good happens for them."

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: Isn't that sweet?

CLINE: That's great. You said he was a kind of a magical guy.

SMITH: Well, yeah, and he had a magical wife, too. I mean, she was ying to his yang, or vice versa.

CLINE: So, yeah, we were talking about some of the people that you were playing with in the period from now moving from the late sixties and moving into the seventies, and Thelonious Monk, of course, being one of the big names, and Art Blakey being another. We had talk earlier about your rapport with, for example, drummers and pianists.

I wanted to return to this just briefly for two reasons. One, since we're talking about drummers, I noticed that you, for example, had played also with Buddy Rich and I wanted to know what that was like and what that situation was.

SMITH: Okay. Well, I had known him for many years, and I can't remember what I told you about it, but I never saw him on a gig without him practicing. He was always practicing.

CLINE: Yeah, we haven't talked about him at all.

SMITH: Oh, okay. Well, I first met him when I was playing with Billy Eckstine, and that was 1961, '60 or '61. I have it in here, chronological. He had been not playing for a year or two because he had a major heart attack and they told him if he kept playing he'd be dead in six months, and after a year or whatever it was he laid off, he said, "I'd rather just die than not play."

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: So he came back and was working with the Harry James band, and we were alternating sets with Harry James' band, Billy Eckstine's band. When I'd come off he'd be in there working on the pad. You know, exactly what you've seen on TV is exactly who he was. He was like a bright, brash New Yorker kind of guy. But they overplay the negative, you know, the famous bus interview and all that stuff.

CLINE: Yeah, the tapes.

SMITH: But that really isn't who he was. You know, he was really the greatest player of the drums possibly ever, and he was also very humble in his way, you know, to the music.

One time back there he was talking about the recording he made with Art Tatum, and he said—I can't remember if it was Lionel Hampton and Art Tatum and Buddy, just a trio. I'm not sure if it was that vibe player. He said they got set up and played the first tune and Buddy was absolutely flabbergasted at Art, just couldn't—"What can I play?" He said they finished the tune. Art turned to him and said, "Well, next time, Mr. Rich, you can play with us." [laughs] I mean, Buddy was, you know, showing himself in a humble light.

Then over the years I saw him— Well, that was a three-month period, that alternating sets, that was three months. And then over the years I would play at his house when they'd have parties. He'd call Frank Strazzeri and Nick Ceroli and I, and it always surprised me, why did you call me? I guess we played over there maybe three or four times for parties, and the whole family, and they were all vaudeville people, and at one point the whole family would get up and do their routine, you know, and tap dance and stuff.

CLINE: "Baby Traps."

SMITH: It was really, really nice. You know, it was like real old school stuff. And a person that was always there was Freddie Gruber.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And Freddie and Buddy had been child prodigies. Did I tell you this?

CLINE: Yeah, we talked about Freddie Gruber.

SMITH: Okay. Yeah. So that was kind of amazing. Then one time they called me, and Buddy was going to do the *West Side Story* feature in concert. He had his trio, I mean a trio, and then they were going to play the *West Side Story* with an orchestra, and asked me if I would call Alan Broadbent, you know, and I did, and we played a weekend with that. I actually played with him, although I had played with him many times with the Harry James band. I mean, very often Red Kelly would be late or something. One time Red went to the hospital and I played a couple of nights with the band, and then Buddy sat in with Billy Eckstine one night.

You know, the story about him not being able to read and everything, you know, which I believe it. But he got up and sat in and played a set with Billy Eckstine and he played every chart perfectly, far better than the drummer who was working with us, who I can't remember his name. But far better, and never the slightest thing of like, "Hey, I'm Buddy Rich," or, "How about a big drum fill here." It was just absolutely perfectly tasteful, you know, like you'd expect from Larry Bunker or somebody. Impeccable time, impeccable sound. Of course, when he soloed, you know, I mean, it was like machine guns and stuff. I mean, really.

I played with a guy, Enzo Tedesco. Have you ever heard of him?

CLINE: Oh, yeah. Sure.

SMITH: He reminds me of that. When he solos, he reminds of what it felt like to be with Buddy Rich.

Freddie Gruber told a story about when he was living in New York with Philly Joe [Jones], and he said there was one time, it was two years that he never left the apartment. He never left the apartment, not one time in two years. And Philly Joe was going out and copping for him and he had a bunch of chicks working for him. I mean, it was really low-life stuff, you know.

But anyway, Philly Joe came in and said, "I just heard Buddy Rich and I don't like what he plays, but he's got the machine under control." And he asked Freddie to teach him; I mean, not music. Freddie would say right away, "I didn't teach him how to play, but I taught him how to play the drums." I mean, Philly was already playing, but Freddie worked with him for several years practicing on a pillow, you know, that thing of his where he lifts off and stuff.

CLINE: Yeah. Right.

SMITH: And I totally believe it, you know. I thought that was perfect. You know, Philly Joe was Buddy's rehearsal drummer.

CLINE: Oh, really.

SMITH: Did you know that?

CLINE: No, I didn't know that.

SMITH: In New York City. He would have a drummer he hired to read the thing and he'd listen to the chart twice and then he had it.

CLINE: And then just go play it, yeah. Right.

SMITH: And Philly Joe was his rehearsal drummer. Isn't that amazing?

CLINE: That's totally—

SMITH: Isn't that something?

CLINE: It is, and it's especially amazing for me to imagine Philly Joe playing that music and trying, I assume, to play that style.

SMITH: Well, Philly Joe's a great reader.

CLINE: He's a great reader, and he's got great hands and everything, but you know, like the swing style with the bass drum [on each quarter-note] and all that stuff, you just wouldn't think of Philly Joe doing that, would you?

SMITH: No. Boy. Philly Joe, one of my favorites. High up there. High up there.

CLINE: Did you ever get to play with him?

SMITH: No, I met him at Bradley's in New York. One night Alan Broadbent and I went and played a week there as a duo, and I looked up on the bar and there's— Bradley's is a long, long bar, and at the corner of the bar about thirty yards from the door the piano's tucked in a corner, and then across, directly across is the curve of the bar, and standing at the curve of the bar with their backs to the bar watching us is Philly Joe, Elvin Jones, Art Blakey, and Billy Higgins. I mean, that was so thrilling and delightful to see them standing there, really, just taking it all in, and they stayed for the whole set. Of course, I'd known Billy from childhood. Well, not childhood, you know, early youth, and had met Philly, and then I played with Art Blakey, and I had met Elvin several times. I mean, they were all really nice guys. I mean, really nice people, really, although I think you have to be careful around Philly Joe, I think. You have to be careful. [laughs]

CLINE: And they were into music that had no drums.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, I was really thrilled.

CLINE: And you've talked about your gig with Art Blakey and the amazing speech that he gave and how he invited you to join his band. What was it like actually as a bassist playing with Art Blakey?

SMITH: Oh, it was just marvelous. I mean, man, for me it was like the bottom line; it was like being there, you know. I mean, it was. He had electric piano, which I didn't care for; I didn't care for the sound of it. But, you know, in bebop it doesn't seem to fit, but a great piano player.

CLINE: This was George Cables?

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, you know, you've listened to those guys, what, ten thousand times you listen to them and then you play with them, it's just like you're there, you're home, you know, there's no separation. No separation, just be yourself. Yeah.

CLINE: Right. Were there any surprises or was it really just the way you imagined it?

SMITH: No, just fine, no problems. The only thing, I didn't know the theme song. I couldn't— It was kind of like a "Three Blind Mice" thing, and I didn't know it. Al McKibbin came in one night and explained it to me, and I still don't remember it.

CLINE: Wow. Okay. And also we were talking about pianists, and at the time you said that maybe you would remember some more. You were having a mental block on some of the more— Other than Alan Broadbent, some of the pianists that you had a lot of rapport and a lot of musical— A strong musical connection with.

SMITH: Well, I did tell you about Paul Bley.

CLINE: You talked about Paul Bley.

SMITH: And Walter Norris.

CLINE: Walter Norris. And we talked about Alan. One guy I wanted to ask you about, because you remembered him coming over, I think, when you were young, was Russ Freeman. Did you work with him ever?

SMITH: No. Well, yeah, I played with him a couple times at Shelly's [Manne-Hole] in the sixties or seventies, whenever it was. I think it was in the seventies maybe. I don't know. I don't know. That was just fine, just fine, yeah. He was a great guy and always very interested. One time he asked me what changes I was using on "Stella [by Starlight]", which I thought was far-out. Russ Freeman had asked *me*. But he was a very decent man, you know, and highly responsible for a lot of the early success of Chet Baker, which he doesn't get credit for.

CLINE: He's a very underrated guy, I think.

SMITH: Yeah, and I told him this last time I saw him, you know. It was at my brother [Carson R. Smith]'s memorial, so that was eight years ago or something. Not that long ago; six years ago.

I had— You know how it is. You're listening to the jazz station, and I don't know, it used to be KLON, I don't know what it is these days, but you're listening and you hear somebody and, you know, they play for fifteen minutes or so different recordings, and if you want to hear who it was you have to stay in your car when you park. They were playing this band, and it was real obvious a young youthful black person playing, you know. I mean, I was just like, you know, there's no absolutely no

getting around it, you know, this is a black culture music. It's everybody's, but I said there's no getting around that kind of swingin' and groovin' and confidence and ease and natural.

I wondered who it is, you know, and so I'm hanging waiting for them to tell it, and they get back and it's Russ Freeman. [mutual laughter] You know, I mean, what a thrill it is to have your own stereotype or whatever. I wouldn't even call it a stereotype to think highly of people, you know. But there I was there, it was like, hey, you know, I'm just an old white guy, you know, and these guys are really—I thought Eddie Condon— There was a book he wrote and he talked about— And again, I don't like to think of it as us and them, them and us, because it's all us, but he's talking 1929 or something like that, and he's talking about swinging and he says, "We can learn it. We have to learn it." He says, "They're born with it. We have to learn it." I mean, I think that's the common belief, but I think we all learn it, you know, just some of us learn it much earlier, like you learn it in church, or we learn it in the mothers clapping the hands and it gets put in at a much earlier age.

CLINE: Or tap dancing as a child, in the case of someone like Buddy Rich.

SMITH: Yeah. That whole thing, that whole racism thing is so complicated. It's not simple; it's very complicated. But we're all human beings.

CLINE: Any other pianist human beings that you can talk about a bit?

SMITH: Pianists. Well, if you want to turn that thing off and I'll look through the list here what I've written so far.

CLINE: We can pause it. Okay.

[tape recorder off]

CLINE: Okay. Putter has consulted his list and now we have a plethora of pianists to discuss.

SMITH: Yes. Oh, and I just thought of another one, Elmo Hope. I played with him early. Kent Glenn had a tremendous effect on me. I mean, he's a tremendous writer and encyclopedic knowledge of bebop tunes. I mean, amazing. Amazing. And he had such—I mean, truly, he's one of those kind of people where you go, if he hadn't been there I'd have had a whole different life. You know, many, many little things that happened are big things that happened. You know, such as working with Monk and then going on and making the movie and etc., etc.

CLINE: Yeah, a catalyst.

SMITH: Yeah. It's like you can point and say this one guy, you know, if he hadn't been there. Of course, there's a number of people like that in your life, but he's really the big one, I think.

And Frank Strazzeri is somebody I've been playing with for years, wonderful player and completely recognizable when you hear him on the radio or something, you immediately know it's "Strazz." Great writer. His songs are wonderful and they're wonderful to play on. You know, that's one of the things about songs, is people write a song and then it isn't natural to play on or you have to stop and think at someplace, but his tunes are very, very playable. I know they're going to last a long time.

Ronnie Hoopes I talked about earlier, great original piano player.

CLINE: Right, and totally unknown.

SMITH: Yeah, right. I felt an immediate affinity with Patrice Rushen when I played with her. John Gross brought Patrice and Ralph Penland to my house, along with a

trumpet player, George--I can't remember his name--and he was like the essence of Miles [Davis], this trumpet player, and I don't know his last name. God, he was good. But I was really struck by Patrice.

CLINE: How old was she then?

SMITH: Jeez, I don't even know how old she is now. That was in the middle, late seventies, '77.

CLINE: Right. She would have been in her twenties still.

SMITH: I imagine. I imagine. It was the first time I had ever noticed cornrows in her hair. "Wow, I love your hair."

But she sounded like Herbie Hancock, you know, I mean, in her natural way. I was kind of surprised when she went into pop music, but certainly no more surprised than when Herbie Hancock did, you know. You know, never having been offered \$100,000 to do anything, I can't say I would turn it down.

CLINE: Right. Right.

SMITH: Amos Trice was a person I played with early, you know. He played like Bud Powell, and I loved playing with him. He was a great guy, great guy. Old school. Old school.

Who else? I really loved playing with Reggie Andrews with Willie Bobo's band. Great.

CLINE: Oh, okay, this is good, because I have down here, I wanted to ask you about when you're playing with Willie Bobo.

SMITH: Yeah. Well, Reggie did most of the arranging for that, I mean, he did all of the new arranging and they had the old tunes in the book, too, and god, what a talent,

Reggie, Jiminy Christmas. Strong, one of those powerful—I'm going to make him sound like a lumberjack. I mean, he's like, you know, just a real ideal kind of person, you know. He went on to dedicate his life to teaching, rather than—

CLINE: Yeah. And was, in fact, Patrice Rushen's high school band teacher.

SMITH: Was he really?

CLINE: Yeah, at Locke High School.

SMITH: I didn't know that.

CLINE: Patrice Rushen. I remember seeing the band when I was still in high school. They were about my age. And in the band at the time, now, Ndugu Chanler came out of that band, in fact, and he'd already graduated, but in that band at the time Patrice, Charles Meeks was the bass player, Fritz Wise was the drummer.

SMITH: Well, I'll be darned.

CLINE: Yeah. And Reggie was the band leader. There were guys who I don't know, they've disappeared, who were amazing horn players in that band; a trumpet player named Dathan Dedman and a guy named Duane Carter, also trumpet player, a saxophone player named Ricky Washington. Where they are now I don't know, but they were an amazing band. You never heard so many great soloists at that age in a band back at that time. This was before a lot of the high school band thing really took off.

SMITH: Well, see, that's what one guy can do. Reggie Andrews. John Renaldo's another one, you know, that did that.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: You know, we talked about all that, you know, but one person can make a huge difference, you know. I always think, like, teaching music to these people, sometimes you're—I mean, you know they can't all become musicians, but something about learning the process of studying music and seeing yourself improve imperceptively moment to moment, but clearly by the end of six weeks you've got something together you didn't have. I don't know, it does something for the mind when people realize, "Hey, I can get better and maybe go on to become— Not be put off by the thought of studying or going to school." You know, I think it's a great uplifter for everyone.

CLINE: Yeah. Right. And Reggie is back teaching again now down there.

SMITH: Is he?

CLINE: Yeah. Of course, as a result, he's not recognized for what he does in the world at large.

SMITH: Well, I haven't heard of him. I read an article about him, I don't know, fifteen years ago or something, and I phoned and left a message and, you know, volunteering my services if he needed it for anything, like, I mean, meaning in the community, but I never heard back from him. So there you go.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Art Hillary and I had, I thought, a real good connection in playing. I mean, you know, having lived under— Listening to Bud Powell and Art Tatum and Teddy Wilson and those guys, you know, then when I play with other people that have that same— That's where they came from; it's just like a natural thing. You know what it's supposed to feel like, you know. You just go into that groove. And that's how I

felt with Art Hillary, and of course, Bill Evans now, for me, too. When I play with somebody that plays like Bill Evans, I'm like, "Yeah. Yeah, we're back home."

CLINE: Right. Well, he changed everything.

SMITH: There's a great, great piano player in Orange County named Jack Reidling, and this guy is astonishing, astonishing. He does not have a bebop reference. I mean, he's not influenced by that type of music, and I don't know exactly how that can happen, but marvelous player. He's very original and plays— He's from Toledo, home of Art Tatum, and he has that kind of technique. He doesn't play jazz anymore, but we were together for five or six years and just incredible, incredible master of the piano. He's now doing classical concerts and going out and playing Beethoven whatever they are, you know, with symphonies and stuff like that.

CLINE: Concertos.

SMITH: He told me— He's also an incredibly interesting mind, reads all the time. One of his sons is a scientist. He's been the rehearsal piano player for Disneyland for years, I mean twenty-five, thirty years, whenever they have auditions, you know. He told me last time I saw him, he was on the stage of the Hollywood Bowl and they were bringing one up and another, and sitting next to him was Michael Eisner, you know. Jack is voracious reader, and he's reading and someone will come up and then he'd take the music and, I mean, he could just read anything, you know, and he'd come up and do the audition, do the thing, and then he'd pick up his book and everything. He said after a while he realized that Michael Eisner was getting really angry because he didn't like the idea of him reading while he's sitting next to him.

CLINE: Right. He thought he wasn't paying attention.

SMITH: Yeah, he wasn't paying attention to the boss bug. Now, there's a hateful man, Michael Eisner. A story I think that totally illustrates the corporate condition and him being the epitome, meaning most typical example of, is there was an alto player who died two years ago, Dave Edwards, here in L.A. He was a wonderful player and he played— Sounds funny, but he played lead alto for Lawrence Welk for a number of years, and then he quit that to become— He wanted to freelance around and concentrate on playing jazz and everything. He was the most—One of these true gentlemen and impeccable, you know, as far as respecting you, and just a very— Most decent sort of person.

And he got the call, after a few years, of a thing, to come down and become the music contractor for Disney World in Florida. Okay. And then Michael Eisner sent down a directive one year, you know, these pricks, bastards— I don't know if you can put that in there.

CLINE: Of course you can.

SMITH: These utter beneath-the-asshole-type guys. The way they make themselves look good is to increase productivity, which means fire people.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Okay. And so they were getting down to the bottom of the barrel, they couldn't find anybody else to fire, so he sent out a directive to fire 30 percent of all musicians. That was the job. That was arbitrary, just where there were twelve there will be eight; there was three now there's two, you know. I guess when there were two, there'd be one, you know, whatever.

So Dave Edwards found himself at a company party and there was Michael Eisner, and he went up and introduced himself to him and he says, “I’m Dave Edwards. I’m a contractor for Disney World.” He says, “I would like you just to consider the fact that—,” and I mean, I can see him gentlemanly and completely nonthreatening, saying, “—the fact that Disneyland has always been known for live music and that’s one of the very special things about it is that you see musicians everywhere and people love that, and it’s this very special thing.” He said, “I’d like you just to consider rescinding that order.”

And Michael Eisner says, “What did you say your name was?”

He says, “Dave Edwards.”

He says, “What do you do?”

He says, “I’m the contractor for Disney World.”

He says, “Well, Dave, you’re fired.”

CLINE: Saw that coming, yeah.

SMITH: And this is fact.

CLINE: I’m surprised that Mike Eisner even had any awareness of what was going on, it just seems so far from the top, you know, the absolute top of things. He just was that controlling?

SMITH: Oh, yeah. I mean, “Here, where can we cut? The musicians. Jeez, we got 1,200 musicians. Hey, now we’ll have 800.”

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: I mean, that’s the kind of a slimeball, you know, that’s running our country now.

CLINE: Sure. Yeah, of course. And it's not even remotely surprising. Interesting.

SMITH: Well, sorry for that rave rag. You can edit the shit out of that one.

CLINE: No, no, we like that.

SMITH: One more piano player, Steve Conforti. I think I talked about him before.

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Okay. Steve was a fantastic player, like Bill Evans, and just incredible, and very original, had some songs the likes of which I've never seen anywhere, so marvelous. There's one called "Sus Four Flat Nine," that's the name of the song, and I mean, my god, it's built on a tone row and just incredible. Incredible, incredible, incredible player. But he has a mental problem and he's extremely retiring, and I don't know if there's medication that could help him or something, but he'll hide out and disappear for years at a time. He called me and said— I've known him for a long, long time, and about fifteen years ago he said, "I want to record." He says, "Let's rehearse a trio."

"Okay." He asked me, and I thought Alonzo Garibaldi would be a really good drummer for him, you know, very sensitive. So we rehearsed for about three months once a week, you know, and I said, "Okay, Steve, it's time to go in now. We've got to go in and record this," and he just cancelled out.

"No, no, I'm not ready."

I said, "Steve, it's time. We've got to—." That was the project; we were going to rehearse for like twelve weeks and then do the recording. He disappeared.

So he called me about two years later, he says, "Well, I think I'm ready to do it again if we could rehearse now."

“Steve, I’m sorry, man, I just don’t have time. I don’t have time.”

It’s difficult enough to deal with sane people, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But I’m sorry. If he never gets recorded, that’s a real loss, because he’s really, really great.

CLINE: What can you do?

SMITH: There was somebody that— Did I mention Bram Sprazzo?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Okay. This is a drummer.

CLINE: Pretty cool name.

SMITH: When I was with Thelonious, he came up and introduced himself. He was—I don’t know, he could have been twenty at the time. Of course, I was, what, thirty? I don’t know. He says, “I’d really like to play with you.” He says, “I’d really like to play with you.” You know, I get that very often. I used to get that a lot more than I do now.

So I gave him my number, and he called me and I said, “Yeah, let’s get together and play.” He came over to play, and I think we had a horn player with us, or we might have just played the two of us, and I never heard a drummer like this. The closest thing I can recall is maybe Billy Mintz.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: But he wasn’t as weird as Billy. I don’t mean to say Billy’s weird.

CLINE: But he is weird.

SMITH: I mean, his playing was very, very clear. But we were doing a thing— He did a drum solo, took a chorus, where he kept getting— It started off we were at the normal volume, and through the whole solo it kept getting softer and more intense at the same time, and I had never heard anything like it. I was floored. The guy had great— You know, that big fat time like Joey Baron, just big, you know, and a smattering of current culture that I hadn't incorporated into my playing in a natural way. I was just like, my god, this guy is fantastic.

So, you know the busy life of a musician, and so about three months later I get around to being able to call some people for a session again, you know, "Let's get together and play." So I call Bram, I said, "Bram, I called to see if you want to come over and play two days from now," or whatever the time was.

There was like this big pause and he said, "Man, you're the first guy that's called me to play in three months. I can't get anybody to play." He says, "I'm leaving tonight," or he might have said tomorrow, but it was, "I'm leaving with my girlfriend and her two kids and we're going to New York, driving to New York."

I said, "Oh, my god, I hate to see you go, but I know you're going to do great there." And I know he would have been— And so about a year later I hadn't heard anything about him or anything, and so I called his mother; I mean, that was the phone number. I said, "Hey, I was just kind of wanting to call to see what happened with Bram." And there was a big pause, you know.

CLINE: Oh, no.

SMITH: And two days after I had spoken with him, he was killed in Phoenix by a truck. They were all killed, hit by a truck on the way back to Phoenix. But I mean,

this guy was, you know, the term “The light that never was.” It’s so precious. Bram Sprazzo.

CLINE: I’m going to turn over the tape.

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CLINE: Okay. We were hearing the sad story of Bram Sprazzo.

SMITH: Well, there you go, so maybe he was reincarnated as somebody else. Let's hope so.

CLINE: Yeah. Since you mentioned Willie Bobo, I wanted to ask you about how that gig came about and what that was like for you touring in a clearly somewhat different musical situation.

SMITH: Well, I played electric bass for, well, you know, a while, and Ernie McDaniels began calling me to sub on the gig, and Willie dug me immediately and I dug Willie, and I mean, whew, I just loved that music. It was an immediate affinity, and Ernie kept sending me more often, and it eventually came time to replace Ernie and I got the gig. Of course, I called Ernie and I said, "Ernie, you know, like, they asked me to be on the gig, you know, what's going on here?" I mean, because I don't like to do that kind of— You know, steal somebody's gig or anything like that.

He says, "Oh, man, that asshole." You know, I mean, it's such a— You know, and I had a thing, I can't remember if I can do it in order, but it was a thing I made up, it was the seven levels of being an employee.

The first one, "Man, you guys sure sound good, you know. If you ever need, like, a sub on a rehearsal or anything, you know, let me know."

The second level is, "Man, it sure is great to play with you guys. I just love it. I really, really appreciate Ernie sending me in, man. It's really nice."

Third level, “Gee, I feel real bad about Ernie, man. I’d like to— You know, I’m really— But I really love playing with you guys, but I really feel bad about Ernie.”

Fourth level, “Well, you know, I think the gig should pay just a little more than that.”

Fifth level, “Well, I think my name should be on the thing, too. I mean, my name should be on the poster, you know, too.”

Sixth level, “Fuck you, asshole.”

Seventh level, “Man, you guys sure sound good. You know, anytime you need a sub.” [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: So I just described the second and third level of—

CLINE: The Willie Bobo scheme.

SMITH: Well, no, I never did that with Willie.

CLINE: Good.

SMITH: But anyway, I did feel— But Ernie was just a beautiful guy. And Ernie was somebody I heard when I was twenty, and one of the people— I can still visualize it and it’s one of the most perfect time playing situations I remember. I must have been in Reno [Nevada] or something. I was just, “Oh, my god, that’s the spot I want to be in,” is that thing where the time is flowing, and it’s just beautiful, like a trancelike state. I think I talked about that before.

Anyway, Willie Bobo. Willie Bobo was a wonderful guy, you know, straight ahead and no funny business ever about anything, just straight ahead. The bread is

right there on the line; gig; never late; and everything is exactly what it's supposed to be. He taught me a lot. You know, when I would start to play too many fills, he would, you know, "Uhh," you know, straighten me out. And he had the most marvelous conga player, Victor Pantoja playing, and Victor was just, whew, man, I mean, impeccable. That's the word for these guys, impeccable. They're impeccable.

Art was the guitar player. He was fiery, fiery, like fusion rock, you know, but real good and fiery. Then Steve Huffsteter was the trumpet player and Ron Star was the tenor player and Reggie Andrews was the piano player.

We went through a number of great drummers. My favorite was Jimmy Smith. He was great. Jesus. Wow, what a player he was. And there were several other guys that played it, and none of them that were not good, you know, and I just can't remember. There was a guy they called "The Rev" and I don't know his name. Isn't that something? I never did get his name and here I worked with him. We worked all over L.A. I never traveled with them. I recorded with them three or four times.

Bill Cosby used to come in where we'd be playing. We'd play places like the Virginia Club, which was a real Latin dancing place. One time Bill Cosby and his wife [Camille Hanks Cosby] and Don Knotts and his wife [Loralee Chuchna] came in, they double dated, and they were dancing. Don Knotts, you see him out there, you know, I mean, these characters they play are nothing like what they are. Here he is the most suave, smooth, exquisite dancer, you know.

CLINE: I can imagine him being a dancer; he's kind of small and slim kind of guy.

SMITH: Yeah, but none of that shaky shit. You know what I mean? I mean, you go, wow, man, here's a real mensch, you know. Of course, Bill Cosby is such a fine, fine

man. Bill Cosby, when he would come out to our gigs by himself, would play a cowbell. He'd come up and he wouldn't play two or three tunes, he would play the whole night, just like a sideman and never say a word. He'd just be there and play the whole gig, you know.

Then when Willie got sick at one point, Bill sort of incorporated the band into his own band, and I was— One time Willie was sick, when he died of stomach cancer, and when Bill Cosby was coming in to run the band, he was going to bring his own bass player in, he was going to have two bass players, and I got all bent out of shape. You know, my pitiful little ego, you know, couldn't endure that, you know. I was too stupid, you know. Generally, when I think back about these things I just go, hey, I was way too stupid, you know. So I just didn't come in, and I'm really sorry I didn't carry through that, but, you know. Well, nobody's perfect.

CLINE: Ain't that the truth. There are a couple of other, a few other big or bigger, a couple of very big names that you played with that we haven't talked about yet, although a couple of their names have come up. One is Dexter Gordon. When did you play with Dexter Gordon?

SMITH: Well, I think it was in the sixties. I know that he came out of jail in the fifties, late fifties. He had gone in for a long time, you know, seven years or something like that. I went to the rehearsal with my brother the first time he was playing when he got out, and I think it was Russ Freeman, but I'm not sure. But I know it was Carson and Shelly Manne playing. I remember how warm and complimentary Shelly was to him. "Dexter, man, sounds beautiful as ever," you know, which, of course, is true.

Then I didn't see him for, it must have been five or six or seven years later. There was a club, and I don't remember where it was, South L.A. somewhere, and Dick Whittington was the piano player, and I played that gig. I don't know, I was a sub. I subbed on it maybe a dozen times or so. Dexter was just exactly like the movie *'Round Midnight*. I mean, that's who he is. He's loose and warm and pretty stoned.

I remember we used to laugh a lot, you know, little things, you know. Like I found a matchbook. I don't know, do they still have those things? Inside it said "The sorrow of psoriasis." You know, I said, "Hey, dig this," and I showed it to him and we just both started laughing. You know, that kind of humor, like that.

Of course, you know, Dexter Gordon— Again, I say these things and I don't know if I've told them to you or somebody else, you know. It's so clear that Dexter was one of Coltrane's biggest influences, Dexter. You know, when you hear Coltrane with Miles, it sounds like Dexter Gordon. You can hear that so clearly.

There was a teacher— When I did my work on the modes and discovered that these modes all worked, I mean, I didn't know, I didn't realize that, you know, and it took me about five years to work this stuff out and practice it and assimilate my playing and everything. Then I realized that all these guys were playing that already, that Dexter Gordon and all these guys were playing with this modal thing, you know. It's not just one mode, like "So What" and that stuff, I just mean that all of it, you know, all the music is modal and to know the right notes. And this guy Sam [Samuel] Browne was the teacher that taught all these guys, Wardell Gray and all those.

CLINE: Right. That's right. Jefferson High School.

SMITH: Okay. And then it continued, Coltrane went onto cop Dexter's thing and then put his stuff on top of it, and someone said, therefore, Coltrane is second-generation Sam Browne student, you know, which is really quite exactly true.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Shows you what a long shadow a teacher can cast.

CLINE: Right. Right.

SMITH: Go on and on and on and on. Now how many people are copying Coltrane? I mean, god, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, right. Indeed, very large ripples.

There are some other people I wanted to ask you about, but I also don't want to run into your time limitation too egregiously. One is Blue Mitchell, who is another local player kind of forgotten, I think.

SMITH: Jeez, isn't that a shame? Well, I first met Blue when I played with John Mayall's band when we were on the road for a month, and, you know, I saw him and hung out with him and ate and traveled with him for thirty days and got to know him pretty— You know, in a period like that you generally see all the sides of a person, you know, stress and all that, and he was just warm and delightful. Of course, always beautiful playing. He's from the islands down there, Trinidad— Not Trinidad, but St. Thomas, one of those places, St. Croix or what.

He was talking about his aunt, and the thing he loved, he said, she says, "If I don't know, I can't say, and if I can't say, must be I don't know." So it was one of his mottos, you know, and it was very, very good.

CLINE: Kind of Zen.

SMITH: Yeah, right. I guess he's from the same place Sonny Rollins is from.

CLINE: Oh, okay.

SMITH: Although I didn't know then that Sonny Rollins was from down there.

CLINE: Interesting. And this plays right into one of my questions, actually, which is you'd mentioned that during your sort of more commercial period you had toured with some of these people, John Mayall being one, Tiny Tim being another. Do you have any reflections that you'd like to share before we end today about the touring experience of that nature? In other words, more of a sort of a pop music touring experience. And this would have been during the sixties, as well, I presume.

SMITH: Yeah. Well, I'd say don't get used to it, because I mean when you're touring at that level and people are carrying you from place to place, it's like you're traveling by litter, you know. And people are opening doors for you and you're drinking bottles of fifty-dollar wine with dinner and you're complaining because your room doesn't have the right view, even though you've never looked out a hotel window in your life, you know. Don't get used to it, because when you return to L.A. it's such a shock, you know, returning to dog breath, you know. I mean, that's really— It's kind of the floating life, so it's fun.

When I was with the Beach Boys, you know, it was all limousines, and John Mayall was all first-class stuff. The airplanes weren't. John Mayall was personally, what a great guy. One night I thought I kind of nailed it. He's like a cross between Rex Harrison and Stan Laurel. I mean, he is a very funny, sweet guy, and also very urbane and witty and a completely together guy, you know, and he was very nice to me and everything.

I wasn't right for that gig. I mean, I'm not basically a blues player. That kind of music you really have to be able to play the same thing repetitively over and over and over again, and that's never been my strong—I think I could do it better now, you know, but that's what they all say. [laughs]

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah. And Tiny Tim. That was crazy. You know, that was crazy. That poor man, he was actually some kind of an autistic, you know. They'd say, "Tiny, we're going to be in Columbus [Ohio] tomorrow. What are you going to do?" And he'd name three songs and he would name the artist and he would do it in a dramatic Tiny Tim fashion, and he would give the number of the record. It was, "That was on OKeh Records and it was Nick dah, dah. He was called 'Columbus Crown of the Jewels.' This is record number 5X70707," you know, like that. I mean, it was unbelievable, you know. I think he was really— And yet he was sort of a sad, pitiful person, and I think we all saw it on the [Johnny] Carson show [the *Tonight Show*], and that's who he was. That's really who he was.

CLINE: Wow. Yeah. Well, very few people can claim that they toured with Tiny Tim.

SMITH: That's a fact. [laughs]

CLINE: Before we get through for the day, you also played with Gerry Mulligan.

SMITH: No, I never played with Gerry Mulligan.

CLINE: Oh, really? I thought I saw that name on your—

SMITH: No, I've had several conversations with him, but I've never played with him.

CLINE: Oh, I thought I saw his name on your list here. Okay.

SMITH: I hope it's not.

CLINE: Scratch that. But you did play with Duke Ellington's band.

SMITH: Yes, I did.

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: Okay. That was a thing where I was with a band with Nick Ceroli, the Johnny Hamlin Quintet, and we had traveled all over the country. I was seventeen going on eighteen, or had just turned eighteen, when we did a month at the Riviera [Hotel] in [Las] Vegas, and we were alternating sets, and there were at least three bands altogether and one of which was Duke Ellington. It was the first time they had been in Vegas, and here all these people, my youth, there they all were, you know, Harry Carney, Johnny Hodges, etc., etc. Although a lot of the guys weren't there, I mean, you know. Ray Nance was there.

The bit was continuous music, and they would finish their set with "Take the A Train" and we would take the instruments out of their hands and continue playing the song until our band had replaced their band and vice versa.

CLINE: Interesting.

SMITH: You know, that was the thing. So, you know, when I'd come up and take— Sometimes Jimmy Woode wouldn't show up, and we always called Jimmy Woode [pronounced "wood"] then, and now I hear people call him Jimmy Woode [pronounced "woody"], but it's Woode with an *e* on the end of it. A wonderful bass player. He and I became good friends on that, and he liked my bass and so he used my bass.

But several times he didn't show up, you know. The first time he didn't show up, I'm playing "Take the A Train," you know, and I feel this arm around me, around my waist, and I look over and there's Duke standing there with his arm around my waist, and I mean, can you imagine how I felt?

CLINE: No. [laughs]

SMITH: It was like, oh, my god.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: It was like the thrill of a lifetime. So when I say I played with Duke Ellington, that's what it was and that happened half a dozen times, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And Jimmy Woode asked me if I wanted to play a set with him, you know, but I was too scared. I didn't know the material, and like I said before, I could do it better now and wish I had done it then, but I didn't know all the songs. I had a lot of great experiences on that band. Nick and I, we watched every set of Duke Ellington, watched every set, you know, when we were there.

One night when the gig ended at four in the morning, they had a rehearsal and we watched their rehearsal. It was amazing. They'd bring in a new singer and say they wanted to get his charts together, and they played it through the first time and it sounded like a bad high school band. And then they'd play it through a second time and it sounded just as bad, and they'd play it through a third time and it sounded like Duke Ellington. I mean, it was a miracle. It was a miracle.

At one point during a rehearsal, Duke said something to Johnny Hodges. I guess they'd been, you know, snapping at each other for years.

CLINE: Feuding.

SMITH: He says, “You can’t play with a big wad of gum in your mouth like that.”

And Johnny says, “Well, I can’t be playing a rehearsal at four in the morning.”

I mean, they really snapped at each other.

They had, at that time— One time Nick and I were backstage listening from behind and, you know, had been listening to this. There was this medley. They’d do eight bars of about twelve different tunes, this medley, the Duke Ellington hits. After listening to it for a couple of minutes, I said, “Nick, just listen to this, like, there’s about six of these songs that the first two changes are exactly the same in every song. It’s like in the key of C, like a C chord and then a D chord.” Like “Take the A Train,” and “I Got It Bad, and That Ain’t Good,” and a whole bunch of them were all like that, you know. It’s also the changes to “Girl from Ipanema.” And [demonstrates], that song that Michel Legrand— Anyway, I said, “Look at that,” you know.

And then I hear a voice say, “I didn’t know that,” and we turn around and it was Duke backstage, too.

CLINE: [laughs]

SMITH: I remember one time Billy Strayhorn came in and played one tune, you know, and he gets off stage, and, “Oh, Mr. Strayhorn.” You know, Nick and I are saying, “Oh, Mr. Strayhorn, that was wonderful.” And he goes, “Eh.” Like a typical musician, “Eh,” thought he’d played terrible.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But, you know, I got to see a little bit of racism, real racism. They wouldn’t let the band out in this casino, and believe me, these guys who were stars in Europe

and all over the world, all over the country, and now they can't go out in the stupid casino. Pricks. So Nick and I were running around getting drinks for them, you know, we'd go out and get drinks for them and bring them back. Johnny Hodges was drinking stingers. [mutual laughter] They were real nice to us.

One night I'm standing in the hallway, you know, there were three bands so sometimes we'd all be off at the same time, and the third band would be in there, and here I am seventeen going on eighteen, and I'm talking to some people, "Yeah, yeah, I better get off the road now, because, you know, you can't get anything done on the road." You know, here I am well under thirty, you know. "You can't get anything done." And I feel this little vibe or something, you know, and I turn around and look up and here's Carney, he's about— You know, there's Harry Carney, he's about six-foot-four, you know. I mean, this guy's been on the road for forty years and he's certainly accomplished something, you know. He was actually about six-foot-eight, but after I said that and I looked at him, I think I saw him feeling about three feet high.

CLINE: Yeah, yeah, right.

SMITH: Like what a stupid thing to say, you know. I mean, duh. You can't get anything done on the road, here you're playing with Duke Ellington's band. God, what a moron. But I do better now.

CLINE: Yeah. That's what experience will do for you.

SMITH: Yeah. Are we going to have another—

CLINE: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

SMITH: Okay. Okay. Because there's some guys here I really want to say something about.

CLINE: No, we're going to try to get everybody you need to discuss. One more I wanted to ask you about, though, since we talked about Dexter, who was one of the products of this city, was Art Farmer. I noticed that you had worked with him.

SMITH: Yeah, I worked with him down in San Diego, subbing for Bob Magnusson. I played a weekend with him. You know, he's always been such a great player and everything. He's a fairly acerbic person, I thought. It's funny, when I played with him, you know, because when you hear him you almost always right away know it's Art Farmer, and when I played with him, I was kind of shocked at how flat he played.

CLINE: Oh, really.

SMITH: It was very flat, you know. I was talking to Carson about it afterwards, you know, and Carson says, "Yeah." He says, "You know a lot of these people, you don't realize how far one way or another they are in the intonation and then you hear them recorded and it's absolutely who they are." So that's Art Farmer's sound, is a large degree of being so flat, you know, like B.B. King is so sharp.

CLINE: Yeah, or Jackie MacLean has always played sharp on a lot of those early things.

SMITH: Yeah, that's part of the recognizability of them. That's where they hear it, you know. It was a nice gig. I think Jim Plank was playing drums. Probably Mike Wofford playing piano, but I'm not sure. I can't remember. It was one of those hectic things where you try to get the material together. Like my résumé, like many people's, a lot of these things look a lot better than they actually felt.

CLINE: Right. Right. But his brother was also a bassist.

SMITH: Yes, and that, right away he felt like he knew something about the bass, Art Farmer, you know, so he kind of— You know, there are people that they have a particular person that they like to tell what to do, and I mean, like Willie Bobo was the drummer, he would always rag on the drummer. No matter who it was, he would rag on them. So right away Art is ragging me, you know. I mean, you know, you know about these things. You know, if like somebody comes in, you know, because the fact is, you're not going to change anything with anybody. The only way is if they ask you, "What can I do for you?" and then you tell them, you know. But if somebody doesn't ask you, all you do is confuse them, you know, then they're confused. Like, is everything wrong that I've ever— Is everything I'm doing wrong? You know.

CLINE: Right. And that's always a guaranteed way to get a great performance out of somebody, too.

SMITH: Yeah, right. Right.

CLINE: Yeah. Okay. Well, you have to go get ready for a recording session, and I don't want to impede that.

SMITH: Thanks.

CLINE: So let's call it for today.

SMITH: Okay. I'll get down to this list of guys here.

CLINE: Yeah, we'll talk more, I hope, next week.

SMITH: This one guy, especially, Modesto Briseno, I want to be sure that he gets mentioned.

CLINE: Wow. Another name I do not know.

SMITH: Yeah. But everybody who was around him, will go, “Oh, yeah, Modesto, man, could he play.”

CLINE: All right. Thank you.

SMITH: All right.

[End August 27, 2003 interview]

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 3, 2003

CLINE: Today is September 3rd, 2003, Alex Cline once again interviewing Putter Smith at his home in South Pasadena. This is tape eight.

SMITH: Good morning.

CLINE: Morning. We had a somewhat abbreviated session last time. You were talking about some more of these frequently utterly unknown and underappreciated musicians from your jazz musician past, and we will get up to the present at some point, I think fairly soon. But we still have a lot more people we want to talk about, but I do have some follow-up questions from last time, as always.

First off, since we were talking about pianists last time, you actually mentioned that you had at the last minute sort of neglected to add to a list of people you wanted to discuss, Elmo Hope, and then we never got around to discussing him. You played with Elmo Hope at some point.

SMITH: Yeah, real early. It was before I was twenty. He probably died before I was twenty, so I was probably seventeen or eighteen when I was playing with his band and stuff. It was pretty far over my head. He was the real thing, the real New York edge, and he was a very angry and bitter guy, and very angry. He was very angry. It just like emanated from him. I mean, he would call me to play and everything, and he was still angry. I don't blame him. I mean, at that time those guys, you know, they really were geniuses and here they're living in this terrible— It's like where everybody's your sergeant, you know, and you're in the army, you know. I mean, being a black

person in 1960, '59, can you imagine? I mean, I always thought that the greatest of minds of black people went to jazz because that was the place that they could go, you know.

I read a conversation, or an interview, between Thad Jones and Mel Lewis, and they were talking, and this is in the seventies, I think, and they were talking about that there weren't that many black musicians anymore and that there were just 10 percent, which at the time the guys, they said, were, you know, trying to get good musicians and they said about 10 percent of the guys are black. And when I read that, I mean, at that time it corresponded to the demographics; they were 10 percent of America. But once things freed up, even though there's still a lot of racism, now a black person can become a doctor, can become a lawyer, without having to be an extraordinary genius. They can just be a regular person, and if they've got some drive then they can— So consequently we lost the fact that all the greatest of all the minds went to music, you know, because that was the only place to really go and excel.

Anyway, I'm sorry to digress again, but that's Elmo Hope, and I can't imagine being that intelligent and having to suffer that kind of daily indignity.

CLINE: Yeah. And going back to your work as a so-called commercial musician, you last time mentioned one of your commercial gigs, actually touring, it sounded like, with a group that has to be one of the most sort of, I don't know, an American icon of sorts, the Beach Boys.

SMITH: Oh, yeah.

CLINE: What was that about?

SMITH: That was a lot of fun. Didn't we talk about this before?

CLINE: We were talking about some of your touring and you mentioned John Mayall and we talked about Tiny Tim, and you mentioned the Beach Boys, but you didn't go into any detail.

SMITH: Well, the Beach Boys was fun. It was a lot of fun, because it's fun music. I mean, even if it's sort of silly, it's fun, it's not angry, you know, rock. Big audiences, that's always a thrill. Of course, I knew every minute that it wasn't for me. I mean, I never ever made that transference like "Here they're applauding for me," because I was just a guy in the background. It was a regular gig and the Wilson brothers [Brian, Carl, and Dennis Wilson] were really, really good guys, but they were all, all of them were kind in arrested development. They didn't come from a great family like the Kennedys or something like that; they were just ordinary people, and then had become multimillionaire stars before they were fifteen or sixteen, you know. So they sort of were stuck there.

I thought at the time I was reading about some kind of a salamander that gets stuck in adolescence and they call it neoteny, and that's what I thought they were, neotonous. [mutual laughter]

Surprising, the infighting among the guys. It was kind of sickening, you know.

CLINE: Yeah. That certainly became well known, notorious.

SMITH: Absurd. Absurd. And to be so tight with a buck, you know, when you've got so much excess. But it was fun traveling with them. It was fun.

CLINE: What period was this then?

SMITH: I think it was eighty—

CLINE: All right. No, let's see. Wait a minute, it was '73, '74, '75.

CLINE: Okay. Right.

SMITH: Right in there.

CLINE: So, yeah, well into their more inharmonious personal period.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I never met Brian; he was never on the scene.

CLINE: Yeah, he was off in his sandbox, I guess, at that point.

SMITH: Yeah. You know, and those tunes were all harmony exercises that he had done. I don't know if we've talked about this before, but Stevie Wonder also studied harmony, and just before the time that he wrote *Innervisions* and those three great albums, those are all products of classical harmony study, which to me really shows the value of it.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: It seems to be completely lacking in most modern rock.

CLINE: Yeah. We didn't actually talk about anything in detail about what you were just saying, about harmony, Beach Boys, Stevie Wonder. Is there anything else you want to say about that, then?

SMITH: You know, that's all a result of the six or seven hundred years of counterpoint, which when I learned counterpoint just a few years ago, ten years ago, you learn it from the beginning. You learn the first rules and the time when it was, and you see that this whole construct of European music and harmony is all scientific artificial construction. I mean, it's marvelous and everything. And the things that we think of that are intuitive, it's just because we've heard it, but we're hearing counterpoint, and the music is all counterpoint and it's just sort of been thrown away.

A lot of that stuff is people learn three hand positions on the guitar, and that's the basis of their—That's what they study. They don't know anything about voice leading. It won't be abandoned forever; it will reemerge because of the strength of it.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But I don't know, it's amazing to see the big-band era was seven years long and rock and roll has lasted--Jiminy Christmas--fifty years now.

CLINE: Yeah, it's amazing.

SMITH: Yeah, it is.

CLINE: It's an interesting phenomenon to see a lot of the popular music of, say, the time we're talking about now still being appreciated and consumed by younger and younger generations of people, the Beatles being, obviously, a perfect example of this, where people just keep discovering their music, no matter how old or young they are, and it seems to have a timeless appeal.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, those are very well-produced records, musical.

CLINE: Yeah. There's some harmony going on in there, too.

Another thing you mentioned in the last interview, which I think you thought we had talked about before, but we hadn't gone into in any depth, was you were talking about playing time and you were saying about the groove, so to speak, and you mentioned something that you referred to as a trancelike state that's associated with good time playing. Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

SMITH: Hmm. Well, time, the African concept of time as opposed to the European concept of time, I mean, I'm talking about old, before the 'twain met.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: That time itself had a feeling in the African music that just somebody beating on a log would give a feeling, and a very intense feeling. It's sort of a trancelike state. I mean, the thing about improvising and playing time is you need to be in both places at the same time, and if you're too far into the thinking, it's hard to get into that feeling. I mean, my image is there was an old film of a bunch of Pygmies in Africa literally beating on logs with sticks and deep into it, you know. And that's it, that's the stuff, you know. I think of the time as a spirit, and it's there and you just get in with it. It's like a pole or something and you just hold onto the pole.

But there are a lot of things you can do mechanically to make it better. I mean, one of the things is to play a lot. But in practicing, there is a machine, a Dr. Beat 66, okay, and I've been touting this for years. I don't know if anybody else does this, but I figured out how to do it for myself, where you would, say, set like a nice medium blues, it'd be about 116, and so you play along with the metronome, playing time on the bass, you know, [sings quarter-note walking bass line], until you're really totally playing the time right with the metronome and you're there. Then you stay in the groove and you reach over and you put it into this— Slide a button and it becomes silent and goes into a tap mode. But all this time you're keeping the time.

Then you go back and you play and keep playing time until two or three minutes have gone by, till you really are on your own now. And then you keep the groove going and you tap in and see what your tempo is, okay. And if you're within two, you're fine. You know, if it's one-sixteen or one-fourteen, you're fine. But, say, if it's one-twenty-six, then you start over again and you realize that you've been

putting pressure on, and then you just try to take the pressure off until finally you're nailing it.

I did that at three different tempos, and then when you take too much pressure off, it would get slow, and then you have to put a little more pressure on it. It was as if the perfect place was neutral; you could actually achieve neutral then you were there. It's like the time has to be happening automatically and then the notes are— It's like the time is the feel and the notes are the thought.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: You know?

CLINE: Yeah. Okay. Well, that's good.

SMITH: Well, I don't know how clear that is, but—

CLINE: Clear to me.

SMITH: Good.

CLINE: As we're moving into the seventies now, one thing I wanted to ask you about is that some other jazz players from around here, who were interviewed in this series, commented on how they felt that once the early seventies hit and things started moving into the seventies, they felt that things got a lot more difficult, as far as playing jazz here in town went. And I wondered if you agreed with that or not, and if so, how would you assess changes in the jazz scene here come the seventies?

SMITH: Well, I agree, only until you said that, I thought it was just me. [mutual laughter] I had sort of put the blame on the fact that I did that movie [*Diamonds Are Forever*] and I got a lot of flak about that, and a lot of people stopped calling me because of that.

CLINE: Oh, you didn't say this before.

SMITH: Oh, I didn't?

CLINE: No. Well, they just decided you weren't a serious jazz guy anymore?

SMITH: Well, I was surprised, because when I did the film, I did it with— My thought, the thing that got me through it is I want them to know what jazz musicians, that we're— This is what a jazz musician can do. I really think that being a jazz improviser is one of the highest places you can be, except maybe for being on the cutting edge of research science or something. You know, that it's really an incredible— You know, like it's an incredible place with a lot of incredible requirements. I saw that *A Beautiful Mind* and you see how these guys think in physics and they're carrying out these long, long thoughts. Well, that's what we're doing. We're carrying out these long, long thoughts and experimenting and coming up with these marvelous things out of art.

So that was my driving, that was my strength. So I never had any intention of becoming an actor, you know; that was okay. "I'm just going to do this because, first of all, you're not going to ask again, and I'd better do this."

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: I was doing it on behalf of musicians, and I came back and there was a tremendous amount of— At the time I couldn't— I just felt of it as anger, but I'm thinking it must have been some sort of envy or something, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But I was very hurt, and I would call people and say, "You know, how come you're not calling me?"

“Oh, man, you don’t need any gigs, you know. You’re a big star now.”

I mean, people actually said that to me. I explained and I said, “You know, I never— That was just trippin’, dude.” [mutual laughter] But it was really amazing, you know.

Then there were other people that were calling and they were very congratulatory and stuff like that, but they didn’t give any gigs. [mutual laughter]

But looking through this period, that was the period when Playboy Club outlawed upright bass.

CLINE: What?

SMITH: Well, yeah, I mean, like the upright bass was classed with accordion and clarinet.

CLINE: Squaresville?

SMITH: Yeah, like old guys and everything. You know, I really don’t think it started really coming back until— I mean, myself, I, you know, as I say, Kent Glenn got me back to playing upright and I’m never going to stop this now.

But when Sting began playing with the Police, playing upright bass, that really brought bass back.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: It really did. I mean, now they’re real common and a lot of people see it and it’s hip, you know; it’s not square anymore. Which is silly, you know. Well, around this time, in the middle seventies, I had the bass in the car at the time when you

could— In a way that you could see that it was a bass, and I was driving down through San Marino, and this little girl, who might have been six years old, saw me in the car and saw the bass and started doing the imitation of what bass people do, where they pluck one hand in the air and they're bobbing their head down. And I thought, everything's all right. Everything's cool. Here's this little girl that's going into the automatic, you know, mocking the bass. Not mocking it, but—

CLINE: It hadn't been forgotten.

SMITH: No. It's almost like an instinctual response, you know, "boom, boom, boom."

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: You know, it made me feel real good. The seventies were a terrible time for jazz, terrible, terrible, terrible.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: And then Miles [Davis] was experimenting with all that stuff. Even Miles, oh, my god, Miles, the electric bass, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: When I was playing with Thelonious, somebody asked him about electric bass, you know, "wrong sound." That was it, "wrong sound."

CLINE: Right. Interesting. Yeah. You know, a lot of guys here in town who were playing in the studios and such, some just decided to go and stay in the studios and give up playing jazz gigs altogether. Some gave up playing altogether. But evidently you kept playing.

SMITH: Well, yeah, I had a spiritual attachment to it. I mean, like I said, I had a call real, real early and I've tried to honor that, you know, in between making a few bucks here and there. I just tried to honor that, go as far as I can with it.

CLINE: Well, one of the venues that sustained jazz in L.A. through the seventies was Donte's, which sort of became the home, one of the main homes, for straight-ahead jazz in town here. Did you play at Donte's very much?

SMITH: Yes, I did.

CLINE: What do you remember about it?

SMITH: Well, the carpet. [mutual laughter] I mean, the place was dingy, dirty, you know, and the bar, the Formica was worn through so you could see three or four layers. You know, I don't think he did anything until— Do you have any idea what year it closed?

CLINE: I'm trying to remember, but I thought it was in the early eighties or so.

SMITH: Yeah. Well, he never did a thing to it. And the bread remained constant, you know, for years.

CLINE: No cost-of-living increases?

SMITH: No. And it was almost impossible to get paid and you had to fight for your money, and a lot of people didn't.

CLINE: And when you say "he," now, you're talking about?

SMITH: Carey. That's his name, I think. Is that his name, Carey?

CLINE: It sounds right to me, but I can't come up with the last name. [Leverett]

SMITH: Apparently, there was somebody there, Sonny or somebody who was—

CLINE: Right, a Persian woman.

SMITH: Yeah, she was helping and then she moved off and he took over. I don't know the inside dope on it at all.

But in the early seventies or middle, you know, '74 or something like that, I went in there and saw Fred Atwood playing with some guys. Fred is a bass player. He was doing that route, playing that route, the jazz gigs with the guys, and I thought, you know, that's my goal in my life is to do his gig. That was my goal at that point. If I could get to that place I'd really be happy, and I did and I was happy for a while.
[mutual laughter]

Actually, he left town and I sort of slipped into his spot and, you know, I was working there all the time, couple nights a week. John Heard was playing there all the time, and different guys. I probably played with almost everybody that was on the scene. Notably, one time I played with— Well, I mean, that's not important. Really, I mean, it's as if— I mean, you want to know about other guys.

CLINE: Well, I want to talk about— Whoever's noteworthy we want to know about.

SMITH: Yeah. Okay. Well, one night I played there with— What's his name? The drummer, Louis Bellson, with Joe Pass and Zoot Sims, and that was kind of neat. You know, that was real neat.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I can't remember, it might have been Dave Frishberg playing piano, but I'm not sure. I'm not sure. But I began playing with Dave Frishberg a lot at that point, through Tommy Newsome. I can't remember how I got to be playing with Tommy Newsome; it was probably through Gene Estes.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, I think Gene, because Gene really took a liking to me when we first played. He immediately liked me and began getting me on different situations. The first time I met— When Tommy was having these sessions at his house, and I went there and I said, “I know you.”

He says, “No, no, we’ve never met.”

“No, no, I met you in Lake Tahoe.” I mean, I didn’t have any idea who he was.

CLINE: That he was on the *Tonight Show* band or anything?

SMITH: Yeah, I had no idea. Even though I watched that show, but it just didn’t— You know, nothing registered, you know.

I said, “No, no, I met you in Lake Tahoe.”

He says, “I’ve never been to Lake Tahoe.”

Then a couple days later somebody told me who Tommy Newsome was, and the funny thing is, I met Johnny Carson in Lake Tahoe. Now, isn’t that a bizarre thing where your mind—

CLINE: Yeah, a juxtaposition.

SMITH: Yeah, I mean, it’s in there, even though you don’t know it, you know.

CLINE: Indeed.

SMITH: I met him [Johnny Carson] when I was playing with Billy Eckstine. Stoned out. He was stoned out. One of my favorites of all time, Johnny Carson. Yeah. Nothing like him.

CLINE: Yeah. But anything notable about Donte’s that you want to say before we move on?

SMITH: Donte's.

CLINE: Apparently a lot of musicians also just came and hung out there and listened, especially later in the evening. Do you remember anything about that?

SMITH: Yeah, but it was still mostly empty and, you know, hardly anybody. I played there with— Who's that Gypsy guitar player [Lenny Breau], killed himself.

CLINE: Gabor Szabo?

SMITH: No. He ended up in a swimming pool here.

CLINE: Gypsy guitar player?

SMITH: Yeah. He's a big hero.

CLINE: Obviously not Django Reinhardt.

SMITH: No, no.

CLINE: I mean, I was going to say I can't believe you would have played with him.

SMITH: They found he was strangled and thrown in the pool.

CLINE: Gypsy guitar player. Wow. This is something I didn't know about this person. He's a young guy?

SMITH: Yeah, he was, you know, thirties or forties or something, from Canada, I believe. Very highly thought of.

CLINE: I think I know who you mean.

SMITH: Well, every time I played there— I played there with him about a half a dozen times. The name will come up.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Every time I was there, there would be, you know, a dozen young guitar players and all would come with cassette recorders. You know, on every table there

was a cassette recorder. And then one night, I didn't even know it, I got a call a couple weeks later that Emily Remler had been in with— I believe she was married to Monty Alexander. Is that his name? Piano player.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah. Anyway, she called me to work with her and she'd seen me with this guy, and I didn't know that she'd been in there. Now, there was a terrible loss; Emily.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah. That was another person—I told you I was mad at Albert Stinson, I was mad at her, too, when she ended up dead from heroin. I was just like, goddamn it. You know, it was like here's this beautiful, beautiful physical person and beautiful talent, and sitting in the place you could sit, you know, famous, all the work and just throws it away. It's like "duh," you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Duh. Yeah, it made me mad. I'm just mad at her.

CLINE: And so few female jazz musicians who really achieve that kind of stature.

SMITH: Right. Right. Who get that kind of a break.

CLINE: Yes, exactly.

SMITH: You know, Stacy Rowles is as good a musician as anybody I've ever met and is creative and great a player. Betty O'Hara was another one, as great as anybody— She used to play with Tommy Newsome and these guys. I mean, she was right there. And Tommy Newsome, it's not known what a great player he is. He's like in the same league as Al Cohn and Zoot Sims. He is that good. You know, reading these old books about, I mean, these bios or autobiographies and stuff about

these old guys, you know, they didn't differentiate between show business and music. You know, it was like they didn't think anything about it, you know. Jack Teagarden, Louis Armstrong, you know, "Sure. You want me to sing a song? Sure, I'll sing a song." It was, like, cool, you know.

So, you know, a guy like Tommy, see, I mean, I have the artistic—quote, quote—thing in my brain, you know, that I'm an artist and that's my choice, that's who I choose to be, and then there are other people that don't see it that way. They see us as like, "Okay, I'm going to work on the *Tonight Show* and I'm going to make a hundred grand a year and that's a good thing." And I don't see anything wrong with that.

CLINE: Sure.

SMITH: For them, you know. I'm not built for that stuff. I don't have the right nervous system for the studios and that kind of playing.

CLINE: Nor I.

SMITH: I get really pissed when somebody wants me to do something I don't want to do. I'm just not built for it.

CLINE: Right. There were some other female musicians that kind of came on the scene. We mentioned Patrice Rushen last time, and you mentioned Emily Remler and Betty O'Hara and some of these people, and you've worked with a lot of these people. A couple of names that come up, I know this is more recent, we're kind of diverging a bit here from the chronology, but Karen Hammack and Cecilia Coleman, both piano players.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Well, Karen is a swinging— She's got some great time, very musical, very musical. Yeah, terrific.

And Cecilia, a great writer, you know, and marvelous player of the piano. We've done a few things for the American Jazz Institute where she's reading, and I'm astonished, you know. Here's this wispy little girl, shy, you know, and—wham!—she hits these block ten, you know, ten note chords, reading, sight reading, and my god, I had no idea, you know. I loved her quintet. I loved it. I'm sorry that she stopped, that she left town. I subbed on it, I don't know, a dozen times maybe.

CLINE: Have you seen any changes, any differences over the years in terms of how women are able to integrate themselves into the jazz community? Is it improving? Is it different?

SMITH: Well, I never seen a problem with it. It's really all about level of playing, although there's somebody— There's a drummer girl around, Megan Foley, plays great, you know, and I never hear a word about her.

I ran into Kathy Rubico the other day. She's a piano player from a long time ago. She's had a very successful career.

And there was a piano player, Joselyn Sardo, I ran across her name in my book, and she was quite a good player, and I don't know what happened to her.

It has to do, I think, with— Mark Twain said the reason women— At the time they didn't have any rights. The reason they're so weak in law is because they're so powerful in nature, you know. It's like that's a fact, you know. I mean, very few men get raped by women, you know. I mean, I don't think that's probably something you should say in there.

But part of the drive is to succeed, you know. Part of the drive to make yourself better is to succeed, you know, and underneath all that is, you know, wanting to survive and everything. And then the role of women is, you know, generally is they get taken care of. So it's pretty easy to go, "Hey, this is cool. I'll lay back here. I don't think I want to go out and—." You know, you see very few women that have that kind of drive. JoAnne Grogan, JoAnne Brackeen, had that kind of drive. Nothing was going to stand in the way of her playing. Jeez, I think I told you she used to come to those jam sessions with her baby in a little carrying thing and stick him under the piano. Bug [Brackeen]. That was Bug; that was the little baby. I saw Bug a couple of years ago, you know, a really nice kid. You know, real normal.

CLINE: Considering he spent his formative years under a piano.

SMITH: Yeah, you know.

CLINE: Another Joanne I wanted to just ask you about, maybe you didn't play with, but who never seems to get mentioned anymore who used to play around town, was Joanne Grauer.

SMITH: Oh, yeah, Joanne Grauer. Now, I first played with her when I was thirteen and she was going with Carl Randall, an alto [saxophone] player.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: Gee, I mean, they were big time to me. I don't know how old they were, you know, seventeen or something, and I was like— They were like, you know, the elite. I've always thought she was a great player, and she's been out of town for a long, long time.

CLINE: Yeah. I don't know where she went.

SMITH: She called me to work at the Money Tree one time, and this is a story. A lot of guys— Gerald Wiggins loves this story. One of his favorite stories. I had never worked at the Money Tree before, and she called me. It was a duo. So I parked in front, unloaded all my stuff out of the car and put it on my cart, and I opened the front door and there's a pillar right there, and a cart can't go through there. So I take all my stuff off the cart and hand-carry it through the little pillar thing, load it back on the cart.

The piano's at the back of the room, and I'm about halfway, thirty feet to the back of the room, and this big, tough, uncharming Tony Soprano type, I mean, Tony Soprano with no charm, okay, comes over, and he says, "Hey, take that shit around out the front and come in through the back."

I have a little hearing problem, you know, and I said, "Excuse me, did you say you want me to take my stuff back out the front and bring it around the back?"

He says, "You heard me right."

I mean, it was unbelievable. So I took my stuff out, took it off the cart, through the pillar, back on the cart to my car, put it in my car, and drove home. [Cline laughs.] And I felt so bad about leaving Joanne, but I just could not do that.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: I mean, if he'd come up and said, "Next time come through the back," you know, but who cares. Who cares, front or back? I mean, there was nobody in there anyway, you know.

CLINE: I was going to say, it wasn't like there was anybody in there to be bothered by your carrying your gear through the place.

SMITH: That joint.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: Then I heard a few months later that this guy wanted to have my legs broken, and then a few months later I heard that he got put in jail for twenty years for some kind of—

CLINE: Violent act?

SMITH: Sneaky fraud of some kind, you know.

CLINE: Wow. Lovely.

SMITH: But anyway, Gerald Wiggins just loves that, you know, because that story went all over town. But I felt really bad about Joanne. I felt like I'd really—

CLINE: Yeah, stood her up.

SMITH: But what could I do?

CLINE: Wow. Well, good for you. Was she understanding?

SMITH: Oh, yeah, sure. Sure. Sure.

CLINE: Well, that's good. Well, we'll return to all these musicians that time and humans have forgotten, and last time you left off with a name you didn't want to forget to mention, Modesto Briseno.

SMITH: Yeah. Now, Modesto was— He played like Lester Young, Stan Getz, at that level. He was a great, great, great player. I think he worked with Red Norvo for a while, because I mentioned him to somebody the other day, said, "Yeah, he was with Red Norvo." Just a marvelous player and real sweet guy, and knew everybody's name. You know, one of those kind of guys.

CLINE: Yeah, yeah.

SMITH: Then he took a gig at one of those hotels, Russ Morgan or one of those horrible gigs. Do you know who that is, Russ Morgan?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Well, these guys were all good at one time, but when you work in a hotel, you know, band, dance band, you know, it's like a prison.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, the kiss of death.

SMITH: Prison, you know. Then he came down with muscular dystrophy or multiple sclerosis, I'm not sure which, and the next time I saw him he had lost all his hair, you know, and his eyebrows. And I thought it had something to do with the gig he was working, and the next thing I heard, he had died. He was a young person. He wasn't thirty; you know, just disappeared. But he was one of the great ones. Yeah, he was one of the great ones.

CLINE: How about some more of these.

SMITH: Well, the guys, as I said, I worked with Paul Estrada, the Rhythm Kings, when I was thirteen. We did all these gigs in East L.A.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: They used to call me "El Gavacho," you know. I'd say, "What does that mean?" I asked one guy, "What does that mean?"

He says, "Oh, you know, man, like Davy Crockett." [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: You know, so I know now it means "the gringo guy," but at the time, "Eh, El Gavacho."

My best friend on that band was John Subia, played tenor. He was a lovely, lovely tenor player. I ran across him a few years ago. He had stopped playing many, many years ago and was working at Ford [Motor Company] or something.

Then there was Ray Black. Did you ever hear that name?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Tenor player, and he was a marvelous tenor player. He was living with Janie Getz, and he was a buddy of Paul Gonsalves, and they studied with the same guy in New York. He was a junkie. His famous story, he was with somebody, Lionel Hampton or somebody, in Paris, and he called Janie collect and passed out in the phone booth and didn't hang up, and she got a bill for, you know, \$800 or something.

When you were asking me about piano players that I had an affinity with, one was Steve Goldman, and he was on the scene at the Troubadour, and he was a lovely player. His favorite player was George Wallington. He had a very beautiful touch, and he became very serious about being a songwriter, and I believe he's had several good money-making songs, but I really don't know. I talked to him the other day, asking him about names, and he just said the same names I knew. But I played with him about two years ago and he just still— Lovely touch. I mean, people that have that thing, you know, they don't lose it.

There was a conga player named Chuy Castro.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, I know that name.

SMITH: You know that name? Yeah?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: And he was a great guy, and he threw me a bunch of work during that period. I'm talking about the seventies. When nobody was giving me any gigs, he did, you know. He was kind of a rough-and-ready kind of guy, you know. I like these kind of guys, you know. He'd help moving that refrigerator here, you know, that kind of guy.

Of course, at that time there was Carmelo's.

CLINE: Carmelo's, right.

SMITH: Chuck Piscitello. Chuck Piscitello, he was a very good drummer, a very good drummer. One time when I was, you know I was younger and stupider--I mean, I showed it more than I do now, I hope--we were having a drink late after the thing, and I said, "Chuck, man, you know, if you would work on your chops, man, you'd be a great player, you know."

And he got really mad, you know, like, you know. I mean, I was trying to be, you know—I didn't realize he had a bad heart condition and all that. We went to his funeral, my wife and I, and they had an open casket and she said, "He's still the best-looking guy in the room." [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Whoa.

SMITH: He was real—

CLINE: A handsome guy.

SMITH: A very handsome guy, but not in a Hollywood way. He was a real good-looking guy and a good guy.

Which reminded me of a similar name, Joe Piscitelli, and he was a piano player, played like Oscar Peterson. He was real great, and he was a real New York

Italian kind of guy, you know, small, and you know, kind of like remind you of the character that Dustin Hoffman played in *Midnight Cowboy*. That's the kind of character he was, you know. He was on the scene in and out, a great player, irrepressible.

Let's see. What are these other names I have here? Oh, these were piano players you asked me about, and I think I already went through that whole list. Yeah.

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: And then Jim Szyalagi was on the scene at that time.

CLINE: Don't know him.

SMITH: Yeah. Well, he's a real nice piano player and he's been in the under— You know, he never got much— I think for a while he was working with Sergio Mendes. I'm not sure about that; somebody like that. He had a little period there. He had a serious accident. He got hit on the freeway from behind and messed him up.

CLINE: I'm going to turn over the tape and we'll continue with these.

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, SIDE TWO

SEPTEMBER 3, 2003

CLINE: We're back on. We're talking about some of these unsung players from the jazz scene, now moving into the seventies.

SMITH: Okay. Well, Richard Thompson, did you know that name; piano player?

CLINE: I know a different Richard Thompson. I don't know this Richard Thompson.

SMITH: Okay. Well, he was a piano player, and I actually first met him when I was playing with Paul Estrada and the Rhythm Kings; we rehearsed at his house. He had a house that you see in commercials and movies all the time. It's up on Vermont [Avenue] where it goes up into Griffith Park there. It's a great big brick mansion kind of thing. That was his mother's house and that's where we rehearsed.

CLINE: Nice.

SMITH: These fifteen *vatos* from East L.A. and one *gavacho* come marching in, you know, to this upscale neighborhood. But Richard, I knew him for many years in and out, and he was always a very good player and he was involved with, I think in the seventies, with Wolfgang Melz.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, the bass player.

SMITH: And there was sort of a crowd of people that were around "Buckwheat." Do you know the name Buckwheat?

CLINE: I mean, not in this gig.

SMITH: Well, I don't know, I think his name is David Wheat, "Buckwheat." And I never was on that scene, you know, and I don't know what to say, but I believe he was like a major coke dealer back before it was what it is now with the Nazi machine guns and stuff, you know. There were a whole bunch of people that congregated around him, Buckwheat, but I was never involved in that scene.

But I saw Richard all the time, and he was a great player and one of the kindest people. I saw him perform some acts of kindness that just touched me, you know; a very warm-hearted person. Came from big bucks and was like a regular guy, a lot of real class, not unlike yourself.

CLINE: I didn't come from big bucks. [laughs]

SMITH: Well, you've got a lot of class, I'll tell you that.

Okay. Around this time I met Kim Richmond. Kim has developed into one of the most original, wonderful, complex writers. Beautiful. Beautiful.

What's this name? [Don] "Sugarcane" Harris.

CLINE: He's a violinist.

SMITH: Yeah, I played a few gigs with him and a guy named Paul Lagos.

CLINE: Oh, yeah. Drummer, right?

SMITH: Yeah. And they were connected with Jeff Kaplan, and I knew Paul for many years.

CLINE: I haven't heard that name in years.

SMITH: Well, he kind of aspired to be Philly Joe Jones. Kind of went on the rock scene. He was connected with Joe— Who's that disc jockey that— He's actually a Greek guy; he's very famous.

CLINE: Oh, oh, Johnny Otis.

SMITH: Johnny Otis, yeah. Paul's quite a character, quite a character.

Let me look at the rest of these names. I talked about [Frank] Strazzeri before.

At this point I worked for several years down there at the Studio Café and, again, that was built for Vince Wallace. I don't mean built for, but that was the idea, was that they were going to work there. They were working there, I think they started off seven nights a week and then they went to six and had one night off. Did I tell you about him throwing the hammer?

CLINE: The plate-glass window?

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: That's how that ended up, you know.

Bram Sprazzo, Warne Marsh. At this point I'm playing with Warne Marsh again in the seventies. Then here it's showing the beginning of the movie [*Diamonds Are Forever*]. Frank Severino.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, sure.

SMITH: He was a lovely drummer, funny guy, and he got me the gig with Carmen McCrae and I worked with her for a little while. I had the same experience everyone else does or did with her, you know. God.

CLINE: Wow. Can you elaborate?

SMITH: Well, she's just an extremely selfish, unreasonable, mean person. Aside from that, she's wonderful. [mutual laughter] You know, it's shocking how somebody could be so stupid with so much talent, you know, because, to me, that kind

of stuff is stupidity, you know. It's so inefficient to be rude, you know. It's just completely inefficient. It's like dumb.

CLINE: Well, I know this is kind of maybe moving a little forward past the seventies, but since you mentioned Carmen McCrae and we're talking about drummers like Frank Severino, a drummer that you'd mentioned in the last session briefly, glancingly, who actually came out here to fulfill his dream of playing with Carmen McCrae—

SMITH: I know exactly who you're talking about.

CLINE: —is Joey Baron.

SMITH: Joey Baron. Yeah.

CLINE: What about Joey Baron?

SMITH: Well, my wife came home— There was a place called— I think it was called the Couch. Maybe that's what it was called, but it was some jazz joint where they had couches. She came home and she said, "I saw this drummer tonight, and you're going to love this guy, and I told him you're going to love him and he's going to love you," you know. He was working with Dave McKay, Joey.

So, of course, we hooked up and she was absolutely right. One of the most delightful, funny, loving guys, talented. He was the first guy I saw that actually had fused real rock and real jazz, you know. There's a rock time, you know, this big loose time, it's not that "yadda, dada, dada, rata, dada, dada, dada." You know, that "yadda, da, yadda, da, yadda," you know. That concept of rock.

CLINE: Right. Yeah.

SMITH: It's the real stuff, and he could do both and fuse them.

CLINE: Right. Rock and *roll*.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: I think the roll has been missing for a long time. [laughs]

SMITH: Right.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I don't know if we talked about—I'm digressing, but when I was a kid, I must have been eleven or twelve, and the thing came out by the— It was a black group and it was "Sh-Boom."

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: It had a lovely feel, you know. Lovely time feel, groove and everything, and then a year later this white group did a cover thing and they went "sh-boom, sh-boom, yadda, yadda, yadda, yadda, sh-boom," you know. It was just awful, and everybody loved that. All my friends loved it. I said, "How can you compare it?" It's like, "Are you kidding?"

And then I found out, I was telling someone this story just a few months ago, and they said, "You know Larry Gales was in that first group of singers."

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah, he was one of the singers on "Sh-Boom," the first one.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: Isn't that wild? I didn't even know that, you know.

CLINE: That is wild.

SMITH: God, I wish I had known.

CLINE: It seems like the bass player sort of grapevine of—

SMITH: Yeah, apparently he was a very good singer.

Anyway, Joey Baron. So we played together on a number of things, and I immediately— At the time I had a quintet. I had a quintet going for about five, six years. “Joey, you’re my drummer,” you know. We had a lot of fun and we recorded, we made an album.

CLINE: Right, which I wanted to ask you about.

SMITH: Yeah. And then, you know, we were playing on all sorts of different scenes. I don’t remember how— I guess he hooked me up with Lew Tabackin and I subbed on that band with— Peter Donald was the drummer, though. So I don’t remember. Then Joey and I did three or four small tours with the trio, Lew.

CLINE: With Lew Tabackin.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Which was the first group I ever saw you with.

SMITH: Oh, really?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: My word. Where was that?

CLINE: At the Maiden Voyage.

SMITH: Oh, that’s right. That’s right. That’s right.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Then we both got on Toshiko [Akiyoshi]’s, on the band, Toshiko’s band, and I did several tours with them. God, what a great band.

CLINE: Yeah, well, this was one thing I wanted to kind of lead up to since Joey is also a common denominator here, that band, the Toshiko Akiyoshi-Lew Tabackin Big

Band became one of the real centers for high-quality musical talent in town, and I think also became quite internationally known at a time when big bands were hardly the going thing and at a time when players on the West Coast were hardly the hot item either. How would you assess the importance of that band from the seventies into the eighties here in town?

SMITH: Well, I think you've said it exactly; it was the hottest thing going and it was great. They used all studio-quality musicians and great players: Bob Sheppard, Gary Foster, John Gross. I mean, those are some of the greatest players ever.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: John Gross is probably the most underknown player in the world. I mean, he is absolutely top.

CLINE: Yeah, you won't get any disagreement from me on that one.

SMITH: Boy, he is a spectacular player.

CLINE: One of the guys who survived, who cleaned himself up and went on to survive.

SMITH: That's right. That's right, he survived, and, man, he was so far at the bottom of the barrel. I mean, I was his friend through that whole thing and I hung with him even at the lowest, but I saw him at the lowest and it was really sad. He was really, goddamn, bottom, and for him to pick it up then you know that anything is possible. It was amazing.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Toshiko's writing was just so interesting and so good and powerful. I mean, she wrote powerful. And I think most of the stuff she wrote while she was a student at Berklee [School of Music], you know.

CLINE: Right. And here's another woman musician, by the way.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, you know her story. I mean, she's remarkable. She was going around New York, I guess, in the late fifties wearing a kimono. You know, I mean, like—

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: You know what I mean? It's like "You're going to remember who I am, aren't you?" Playing for Bud Powell, you know, incredible, and she's great, she's great, you know. Always got something interesting to say and interested in what you have to say and wants to know what you've been doing. Marvelous person.

Marvelous person. And of course, Lew is— God, he's the sweetest guy, you know, with his pipe.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: He gives the air of a very relaxed English gentleman, sort of, you know, but he's one of the most intense of all people I've ever known. I don't mean tense; I mean intense.

CLINE: I think that's pretty perceptible, though, when you see him play.

SMITH: Oh, man, I mean, it's unbelievable. Unbelievable.

CLINE: Yeah, and he's one of the few guys I've heard who kind of brought Coleman Hawkins up to the present day.

SMITH: Yeah, he told me some very interesting things, you know, about Coleman Hawkins and those guys. You know, it's the time feel that turns people off. He says he's playing the same notes that [John] Coltrane was. You know, you listen and you go, "My god, that's right." He was playing really interesting stuff.

Yeah, Don Byas is another favorite of his.

CLINE: Right. Right.

SMITH: See, he gave up all that, the *Tonight Show* and all that stuff, you know, but I think that his quality as a musician is a great deal responsible for the quality of the musicians that came onboard. And it's a fact that people that are working the *Tonight Show*, that people want to know them so they can become subs. There's a whole thing to it, you know, but it's really the real thing, it isn't just—Not just jive, but there's good musicians, good music, and a chance of a good gig.

CLINE: Right. Who are some of the other musicians you remember from the band?

SMITH: Bruce Fowler. Yeah, Bruce.

CLINE: I was waiting for that one.

SMITH: Bruce is on there, and he and Gross were quite a pair. I think they're both non-drinkers now, but they were certainly— My lord, they could really put it away.

Bill Byrne, a real character, you know, a real character. And Buddy Childers was on the gig.

CLINE: Was Phil Teele in the band when you—?

SMITH: Yes, Phil Teele.

CLINE: What about Doug Wintz? Do you remember that name?

SMITH: I remember that name and he might have been on there.

CLINE: I guess he gave up playing after a while, but he's been forgotten.

SMITH: Yeah, too bad. Trombone.

CLINE: Great player.

SMITH: Yeah. Trombone, man, that's a tough one.

CLINE: What a trombone section in that band, though.

SMITH: Yeah. There were two other trombone players. One of the guys was famous; I can't remember his name. I think Bill Reichenbach was on the gig. But there was another guy that played the— That did the [Richard M.] Nixon routine. Do you know who I'm talking about?

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: He kind of like had a sort of resemblance to John Cleese.

CLINE: John Cleese. Yeah, I know the guy. He's a big, tall guy.

SMITH: Funniest routine.

CLINE: Yeah. I know.

SMITH: He did this whole thing about he was Richard Nixon and everything, and he'd pick up the trombone and play something real syrupy, and it's just hilarious.

CLINE: Yeah. I'll have to call Bruce for the name of that. I can't remember his name.

SMITH: But they would get on the bus— When we were traveling, dark after the gig, and, "Joey, Joey, do Mr. Rogers." And so he would get up and get on the bus driver's microphone, you know, and he'd do the voice of Mr. Rogers. He'd do these hilarious routines, you know, something about "There's Phil wearing his lederhosen. Can you say that?" Yeah, this whole thing, and so funny. He had all these routines of

imitations of people, you know, how they play and how they stand, you know. One of them said, “Do Putter. Do Putter,” to him, and he says, “No, no, I never do people in front of them because sometimes they get weird.”

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: He had the thing of Charlie Haden and Ron Carter, you know. I saw Joey a couple of years ago in New York. I mean, what a success he’s had.

CLINE: Yeah, he’s done quite well.

SMITH: Yeah. And I saw him out here when his band [Killer Joey] was here at Rocco when it was up on the hill.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, right.

SMITH: Just marvelous.

CLINE: Right. I wasn’t able to go.

SMITH: He had two guitar players. I can’t remember the two guys’ names. I mean, one of the guys was—

CLINE: Steve Cardenas.

SMITH: Yes, Steve Cardenas. And a bass player, man, this cat killed me. What’s his name? Darn. [Tony Scherr]

CLINE: Now, this is an upright player from New York?

SMITH: Yeah, from New York.

SMITH: He didn’t have much chops, but, man, what he played was like—oh! Some of the greatest bass playing I’ve ever heard. Just killed me. Kind of rocky and stuff. I got his name written down and we had a long conversation, and then I went to see

them again in town. I went over to LAMA [Los Angeles Music Academy]. They did a concert and I went to see them again, and we talked again.

Man, this guy. I mean, I went up to him and I said, “Man, you play like an animal.” He smiled. He knew exactly what I meant, you know. Man, so good. So good.

CLINE: Yeah. Well, that’s great. And now I hear Joey’s living in Dallas, but I don’t know—I haven’t had any confirmation of that, but, yeah, I mentioned that to you.

SMITH: Okay. Then that’s where I heard that.

CLINE: I have to do a little research on that. But anyway, yeah, so Toshiko’s band and all these great players.

SMITH: Yeah, that was real nice. That was the eighties, I think.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: And then when she went to New York, when they decided to go to New York, somebody agreed to finance them in the purchase of a three-unit building, and they just couldn’t say no. And they said anybody that wants to come to New York, they’ll be in the band there, and Joey went with them.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And I didn’t. That was my third opportunity to go, which I didn’t go, so I guess it’s my own fault.

John Tirabasso.

CLINE: I think that name has come up, yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, okay. Well, he was John Terry.

CLINE: Oh, right. Yeah. Now, here's a question. All these Italian guys, what's your theory on the profusion of Italian jazz players, especially here in— You know, from the fifties all the way up to the present?

SMITH: Well, there's a hotbed, you know, Rochester, Albany, and all up in there, where they seem to all come from. I mean, there's a vitality to the Italians. There's a real vitality and a love of music, you know. So I mean, that kind of describes jazz right there. But some of the greatest players come right out of that area. Frank Strazzeri. A guy named "Mouse" Benati. Did we ever talk about Mouse?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Well, Mouse is one of the great, great greats of all time, an alto player, and just a guy that never got the breaks. He was up in that area and then immigrated to New Orleans at the same time— And Frank lived in New Orleans, too, at the time. Apparently, that was kind of a good place for a while and they were working gigs around there. Mouse always messed around with drugs and got busted, and he was on probation, and when Dizzy Gillespie was forming his big band, the *World Statesman* band, you know, I guess it was probably the late sixties, you know, not his early band, he called Mouse to be the lead alto player on it. The probation wouldn't let him leave. He should have left anyway. Phil Woods took his place. That would have been Mouse Benati.

CLINE: Okay. Wow.

SMITH: And Mouse is as good as anybody you ever could hear. I mean, he was like Charlie Parker or something like that. Just a great, great player. There are so many

players from there. I just assume they're from there. If they're Italian and they play good, I assume they're from upstate New York, you know.

CLINE: You were about to say Joe Lovano.

SMITH: Joe Lovano, and I know Ray Pizzi here in town.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: Those guys that played on Woody [Herman]'s band, a tenor player. I can't remember his name. A guy I used to work with when I said I was working with Ellis Marsalis down there at the— Sal Nistico. That was the guy with Woody's band.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But this other guy was a high-note trumpet player, and I want to say that name, but that's not the name either, but it's another well-known name, as well known as Sal Nistico.

Yeah, that's my take on it. I don't know. My wife's Italian and, you know, I mean, you know, not to sound, you know, again, racist, I mean, race-conscious, I guess, they mixed with the Africans, you know, and so they're like about half African, you know, already, and that may have something to do with it. I don't know. I don't know.

But my wife, her dad was a boxer and he was in the same— He used to spar with Jack Dempsey, a big, rough, warmhearted guy. Somebody came up to the house in around 1950—I mean, this is the story I've heard—and he says, "You Frank Bianchetti?"

He says, "Yeah, yeah."

He says, “Hey, you know I’m so-and-so and so, and we’re like twenty-fifth cousins or something like that.”

“Come on in and have some coffee.”

This guys says, “Yeah, you know, I got interested in genealogy and all that stuff.”

“Oh, no kidding.”

He says, “Yeah.” He says, “I found out that like five hundred years ago that we were blacks and that we were slaves and that we intermixed,” and dah, dah, dah, dah.

He says, “Get out of here you son of a bitch.” I mean, this is like the old days, you know what I mean?

CLINE: Yeah, right. Archie Bunker.

SMITH: I’ve seen my wife standing next to a black person and they’re identical, except for the color of the skin. Identical. This is thirty years ago. If they’re standing facing each other, looking at each other and saying, “Where do I know you from? Where do I know you from? God, I know you. Where do I know you from?”

And I said, “From the mirror. You guys are like identical twins.” And they both got real embarrassed, like, [gasps]. Just, like, shocked them, but it was true, you know. But I don’t know if that should go in your book.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, sure. I mean, this is one of the things that— It’s sort of just an interesting trend that occurs.

SMITH: So now the Italians are going to kill me.

CLINE: Well, let’s assume not.

SMITH: Yeah. What do they call them on Tony Soprano?

CLINE: I don't watch it [*The Sopranos*], so I don't know.

SMITH: You know what I mean? They're very racist, so they probably wouldn't appreciate hearing that.

CLINE: So, more of these unsung cats.

SMITH: Well, Dave Parlato.

CLINE: Oh, Dave Parlato, the bass player.

SMITH: The bass player, yeah.

CLINE: I've met him, yeah.

SMITH: Very good bass player. He was playing with Warne Marsh's band in the seventies with Gary Foster and John Terry, Tirabasso. And I was jealous as could be. A real nice guy. Then I think he became an avid book collector, wall-to-wall books everywhere, and then left town, something or other. I don't know if he plays. I don't think he plays anymore at all. His daughter [Gretchen Parlato] came to town a couple of years ago.

CLINE: Yeah. I'm actually on a recording [*O Shenandoah Be Not Telling Me This*] with his daughter.

SMITH: Oh. And what's her name? Grace? Is it Grace?

CLINE: No. I'll think of it in a minute.

SMITH: But a wonderful singer.

CLINE: Yeah. They live in Albuquerque.

SMITH: She is just incredible, I mean, I thought. She just killed me.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: You must have been playing there that night, then.

CLINE: No, this was a recording she was doing with a poet who used to live here in town, Mark Weber. They were doing a version of *Shenandoah*, believe it or not. She was singing.

SMITH: Well, I could believe anything she would do would be just fine.

CLINE: It was one of those things where, you know, I walked in, she was there, we met, we recorded the thing, and it was over. I got the CD in the mail later, but consequently I can't remember her name.

SMITH: I love that. Yeah, I love that.

CLINE: It's like Gail or something. I can't remember.

SMITH: It'll come to us.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: It's right around this time that I first met Jimmy Rowles.

CLINE: Yeah, I was going to ask you if you ever played with Jimmy.

SMITH: Well, I played with him this one time and one or two other times, and he never cared for me, you know. I think towards the end he started liking me a little more, you know, but I was never on his list of guys. As I say, it's taken me a long, long time to get the role of support bass player together. Really, it's only been maybe the last ten years.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah. I mean, in my own opinion. I've always respected him greatly and enjoyed him a great deal, but I just wasn't the right guy, you know. But it's right around the time I met Chuck Domanico.

CLINE: Oh, I see.

SMITH: That's why I was subbing for Chuck on some kind of a benefit, and Chuck was one of the sweetest guys and a marvelous, marvelous player. It was so easy for him, he couldn't understand why it was hard for somebody else. You know, he kept trying to get me to play Don Ellis' band, and I said, "Man, I don't know what to do on that, you know."

He says, "Oh, there's nothing to it." Gee, you know, 18/4.

I did play with Don Ellis for a while. I toured with him later on, and I don't know how I got through it, you know. I was counting like him, you know, 1-2-3, 1-2-3-4-5-6, 1-2-3-4-5-6-7, 1-2-3, 1-2, 1-2, you know, and I'm actually counting like that, you know, which is absurd.

CLINE: Yeah, it's brutal.

[tape recorder off]

CLINE: We're back on.

SMITH: Okay. Ira Shulman. Ira was a very good tenor player and played on a lot of the bands and stuff, and he got involved with the ICAP program and played the school concerts, two or three a day for twenty-five years. He used a lot of guys on that. He was kind of a nervous Nellie, you know. But he's still around and still kicking. I don't know if he plays anymore at all. Last time I saw him, he looked a little too shaky, but he's getting up there; he's got to be in his seventies, you know. He gave a lot of guys a lot of work.

You know, it's a common thing with a lot of people, I mean, to try to control too much. You know, it can't be controlled, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, that's true.

SMITH: It just can't be controlled, and if you just sort of like nudge it, it works, you know. If you try and fit it through a little circle, it kills it.

Richard Gastineau, piano player, had a lovely feel, everything, and he was hit driving a Volkswagen and got crippled. I doubt he even could talk, and he lived like that for a couple years and then died. That's why you shouldn't drive a little Volkswagen, you know. I mean, seriously, it's like 50 percent of people involved in accidents are not at fault, you know, and if something big hits something little, something little loses.

CLINE: That's right. Especially these days there's so much big stuff on the road.

SMITH: Oh, that stuff. Those people should be excoriated and rolled in salt.

CLINE: Yeah. [laughs]

SMITH: Julius Wechter. He made a fortune in music, but he was also a very good jazz player.

Kent Glenn brought me over to his house for about a year, once a week for a year, and we just played, and he had a lovely big house and probably next door to Michael Jackson or something, you know, but it was lovely. He played beautiful vibes. Part of the thing of succeeding is needing to succeed, and he'd already succeeded so well financially with the Baja Marimba Band, that the thought of carting his vibes into Donte's was repugnant. Where I was saying, "That's all I want to do is take my stuff into Donte's," he was like, "Ick."

About that time I played with Gene Harris, and he wanted me to go on the road with him. I didn't want to leave town, and again, I wish I had.

I met a guy who had been a famous name in my— And he isn't jazz. His name was Sol Babbitz, and he was a primitive classical, baroque, one of those guys that wants everything played the way it was.

CLINE: On the original instruments.

SMITH: You know, like you use real catgut and that kind of stuff, you know. It's kind of a silly trip, but interesting. I played at his house and he had a houseful of all these incredible instruments, but he was sort of a sad character. Of course, he was late in his life. But he was very famous when I was younger.

Let's see. Anita O'Day.

CLINE: Anita O'Day.

SMITH: I think we talked about that, didn't we?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Oh, we didn't?

CLINE: I have a whole separate category here for singers, but you already hit on Carmen McCrae, or should I say you didn't hit on her. You mentioned Carmen McCrae and now we've got Anita O'Day. So let's go with it.

SMITH: See, somebody said I was getting ready to do the gig with Anita at the place that's now the [Club] Lingerie on Hollywood Boulevard or Sunset [Boulevard] or something.

CLINE: Yeah, it's Sunset Boulevard, yeah, near Wilcox [Avenue].

SMITH: It used to be called something else and it's gone through a whole thing, and that's where they started amateur strip night there. This was just beginning when I worked this gig with Anita.

Hersh Hamel. Do you know that name?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, okay. Well, Hersh is a famous character. He was famous when I was a little kid. He was like a character, you know. He had an unusual voice, you know, and several guys have good versions of it, sort of adenoidal. And he complains a lot, you know; he complains a lot. He says, “Oh, man, Anita, man, she’s awful, man. She’s really mean. She’s really bad.” You know, telling me what a drag she was and everything, and I went on the gig and, god, she was great, you know, just treated me great and was very cool. Sang so good. Strazzeri was playing that gig. It was her husband playing drums or whatever he was, John Poole.

But at that point, that was when I learned that you can only go by what you experience, you can’t go by anybody else’s thing, because you go in there expecting to be dumped on, that’s foolish, you know. It doesn’t matter who it is, you know.

CLINE: That’s right.

SMITH: Words to live by.

Okay. Les Brown we talked about. Gene Estes. Jack Reidling.

There was a place called Hungry Joe’s down at the beach, a club, and that was kind of a center of jazz for a while. Dave Pike worked there for a long, long time.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, right.

SMITH: Don Ellis, again, he was—I really loved the music he did. I thought it was terrific, you know.

CLINE: A lot of great guys came out of his band.

SMITH: Oh, boy. Oh, boy. I was so surprised that they called me for that.

CLINE: About what year was that?

SMITH: Well, middle seventies, '74.

CLINE: This would have been the period when he had guys like Glenn Ferris in his band?

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

CLINE: Milcho Leviev?

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, Milcho was there.

CLINE: Ralph Humphrey maybe on drums?

SMITH: Yes. Yes, all those guys. And I'm there going 1-2-3-4, 1-2-1-2, 1-2-3-4, 1-2-1-2. God, that took a lot of energy.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I had a great experience right at this time. It was Tommy Newsome and Herbie Harper called and said the Bolshoi Ballet, and this was like their first or their second trip here, and it was really a big deal, Russians, it was all closed. They said, "The Bolshoi Ballet is having a little get-together," at one of these modern houses over in Silver Lake, a famous old modern [Richard Neutra] house, "and they would like to hear some authentic jazz."

So we went there. It was about midnight, and played a set. They were wonderful and they all smoked, heavy smokers, you know, these princelike-looking, you know, very manly guys. I mean, the guys— And the chicks, of course, are just gorgeous, drop-dead gorgeous. There was one chick there that was one of the ballerinas, and she had her bathing suit and she wanted someone to take her to the ocean that night. "My god, I sure wish I was single." [mutual laughter]

CLINE: There's an opportunity.

SMITH: You know, I mean, it was like, lord, you know. Lord, you know. But that was a great experience to be with all those people, and they loved it. I mean, they really, really dug it. It wasn't like, "Yeah, we're going to like it because you're Americans." What a great bunch of people.

CLINE: Interesting.

SMITH: Played with Richard Maltby for a while. He was kind of getting back into it and he had a rehearsal band for a while, and I was doing it for a while. I couldn't read well enough, though. His stuff is really tricky.

CLINE: Okay. Maybe we'll take a detour here. This brings up something I wanted to mention. You mentioned in a previous session how you decided you had to teach yourself to read when you were in your thirties.

SMITH: Okay. Yeah.

CLINE: Maybe you can talk a bit about that and explain how you managed to pull that off.

SMITH: Well, no, I didn't teach myself.

CLINE: Oh, you didn't?

SMITH: No.

CLINE: Oh, you decided you had to learn how to read.

SMITH: Well, I had always wanted to learn to read. I mean, notes were no problem. It was anytime it was a sophisticated rhythm, involved rhythm, I was out to—I couldn't do it and I couldn't memorize anything that complicated, you know, frankly. It was just pathetic, you know. If it was fifty bars, I'd mess up the second bar, or I

might mess up the forty-ninth bar, but there was no way I could make it through. And 80 percent of the music, I mean, like there was nothing in the Les Brown book that was difficult, you know, and I'd say that you could play any band, you know, Duke Ellington or Count Basie or Ray Anthony or any big band, and it would be nothing; you would hardly have to be able to read at all and you'd do fine, you know. But to play something like Kim Richmond or modern rock writing—

CLINE: Don Ellis.

SMITH: Don Ellis, or even though that was— You know, I could get through that using his stuff, but basically being able to go in and do a movie call, you know, and ace it, you know, and ace it. Gary Foster says— Now I can't think of the right word, but in the studios it has to be perfect by the third time and every time thereafter. Okay. So that was impossible.

An old trumpet teacher came to me, and he was a fan of mine through jazz.

Gary Foster had a studio, Nova Studios in Pasadena.

CLINE: Which I wanted to ask you about.

SMITH: He was the teacher there, and he came to me. His teeth had fallen out and he wanted to learn to play electric bass because he wanted to keep playing a little bit. His name was Bob Rithaler. His other students included Nolan Shahzed. At the time his name was Nolan Smith, who later played lead on Basie's band. He taught a whole bunch of Motown guys and a whole bunch of guys. Jay Diversa was one of his students.

So the second week I'm showing him something and I play something off the music, and he looks at me and he says, "You don't know how to read, do you?" He has one of these irritating voices. I like characters like that.

I said, "You know, I've never been able—People just tell me, 'Keep working on it; you'll get it,'" because I asked, you know, I'd ask people. Because you'd see four trumpet players on a break, you know, and they're sitting out there talking about the chrome on their fenders and stocks, and they go back in and nail the whole thing, I mean, perfectly. I'm like, what's wrong with me? Something's wrong with my brain.

He says, "Well, I'll show you." So he showed me the ancient method of how to read trumpet, you know, and it's this whole subdivision thing. I'm sure you're totally involved in it. He showed me the two ways you tap your foot, one for purple and one for triple and then the two subdivisions you do clicking, and you do it all externally.

Anyway, I knew right away this was the missing link. And within six months I was a very good reader, and within a year I was fantastic, and a year and a half I was the best reader.

CLINE: Oh, man.

SMITH: Okay. Water seeks its own level. That's not really what I do; I really am a jazz player.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But for a while there I was doing all the stuff, all this heavy reading and everything, and then I got to, "This is not really what I want to do. I want to be able to

do it, but this is not what I want to do day in and day out.” It made such a difference to me to have an organizing tool like that and to be that confident.

CLINE: Well, the confidence thing, if nothing else.

SMITH: Yes. Because very often, you know, you play a gig with somebody and everything is— You’re playing everything by ear, whatever, and then they’ll throw one chart down, and if you don’t nail that chart, you go down in their eyes. “Well, he’s good player; can’t read, though.”

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: So now I’m a very good reader. I’m still a very, very good reader, and I just love that. And it made such a difference in my life that I became like evangelistic about it and I wanted to teach everybody this and show them, because it was like, “I couldn’t do it, and I tried for twenty-five years and I couldn’t learn to read. Now I’m a great reader.”

Well, if you don’t read at all, don’t read notes, it’s going to take you a little longer than a year and a half, but to me the most difficult part is the rhythm part. When I was teaching at G.I.T. [Guitar Institute of Technology], B.I.T. [Bass Institute of Technology], whatever you call it, the Musicians Institute [M.I.], I was jockeying them to let them teach reading, let me teach reading, you know, and I just bugged them and bugged them and bugged them, and then finally they let me put my reading program in. I’ve taught maybe fifteen hundred people how to read, and maybe a hundred of them really became great readers, you know. I’ve had guys come back to me years later, “Man, I didn’t know what you wanted me to tap like that for, but I was

sitting there and it was something real hard, and suddenly I realized I was doing it,” you know, and it was working.

You know, I attack it like— I explain to them how it works and everything, and then I tack it as a motor skill and just drill and drill and drill and drill.

CLINE: Yeah, get it in your body.

SMITH: Yeah, that’s what I’m saying. You have to do this three times a day, this routine, you know, and then I’d start each class with a routine. Now I only have them for six months, but when I started, I had them four days a week for a year. Now I only have them for two days for six months, you know.

But like this last class, the class that’s just finishing now, marvelous. Marvelous. The best class I’ve had in years, you know. It’s so good to see them out there. Anyway, that’s my holy work. Thank you, Bob Rithazer.

CLINE: I’m going to put in another tape and talk about two more topics I wanted to hit today.

SMITH: Okay.

CLINE: Which relates to what you were just saying, teaching and Gary Foster.

TAPE NUMBER: IX, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 3, 2003

CLINE: Okay. We're continuing with an interview with Putter Smith. This is Alex Cline. It's September 3rd, 2003, and this is tape number nine.

You were talking about learning to read, and you mentioned your teaching. I wanted to ask you, first off, when did you start teaching and what were you teaching when you started?

SMITH: Well, my first gig, my first lesson to someone, who just asked me, came up to me and said, "I want to learn bass," was '67, 1968, and I gave a lesson and I was terrible, and it was like that for a few years. Then I'd have an occasional student and they'd come for three weeks or something. One thing, I've always been a student, I've always had a teacher, although I don't have one right now. I haven't studied for about a year, but I will. But I study and keep going back.

This story about Jack Nicklaus, the golfer, once a year he goes back to his first teacher, whose name is Jack also, and he says, "Jack, I'm thinking about taking up golf. Show me how to do this." [laughs]

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: You know, and that's about the way it is. "What am I doing wrong?"

CLINE: The fundamentals.

SMITH: I believe that anybody who's a musician can look at anybody else who's a musician and watch them play and have some good notes for them. The thing is, you have to ask. They have to ask.

CLINE: Yes, indeed.

SMITH: So I began teaching. Gary Foster, I think— No, Gary wasn't managing.

There was a store called Berry and Grassmuck in Pasadena. They were a very highly rated music store in school. They weren't a school, but a collection of private teachers. But they were a music store and they were highly thought of in Pasadena for years and years and years. Gary taught there, and Warne Marsh taught there, and John Terry [John Tirabasso] taught there. I taught there for a few months until they went out of business. Then I think a few years later Gary decided to open up his own thing called Nova Studios.

CLINE: Now, what years are we talking about here? Do you know when this place closed and when Gary started Nova Studios?

SMITH: I'm not sure, but I think you might safely say '73 to '82 or something like that, but it might have been— That might be the years, but it was a ten-year run.

That's when I started to become a pretty good teacher, and mostly it was all electric bass, then I had a few people studying upright. And then, yeah, it was right about— That must have been right about the years, because that's about the time I started at Musicians Institute, because after they ended, I started working at the Musicians Institute, and that was because Bob Magnusson sent me as a sub for three months. He was out with Linda Ronstandt or something, three-month tour, and they kept me on. I mean, I didn't take his place; they just hired me in addition to him.

I was really stirred up. I mean, I really wanted to teach and I really wanted to teach this reading thing, and so I was very fired up. I feel like I'm a very good teacher of that. Bob quit about eight years ago. He had taught all the upright students, and so

I inherited that. It took me about two or three years to get that together. At first I had the attitude of it's just kind of like handy hints, because none of these people really want to be bass players; they just want to be able to— So my goal was just to give them a little bit, you know, so they could handle a bass on stage, you know, and then ten weeks and they're out of here.

CLINE: Now, is this because of the peculiar emphasis over at Musicians Institute?

SMITH: Well, they're all electric bass players. Nobody comes there as an upright bass player.

CLINE: I see.

SMITH: They decide they want to take a little— Although we do get occasional people that have had some background. So I began— When I'd send in subs, I would get classical teachers to sub for me, you know, and so it made me start thinking about— And I'd see what they would do. So I began to really get hardnosed, and the results are much better. Like, “No, no, hold your hand like this. No, hold your hand like this. No, hold your hand like this,” you know.

I took some lessons from Paul Ellison, who is the preeminent bass teacher of our time, and it was like he had this one little thing he wanted me to do with my right hand, you know, and he would not let up on it. He wasn't like, “Oh, well, okay,” you know. It was like, “No, no, I'm not going to let up on it.” Okay. So I'd start playing and he'd say, “Now your left hand. Now your right hand. Now your right hand.” And it was as if someone is kicking you in the calf of your leg just enough to annoy you, you know, but never stopping. At the end of the lesson, I mean, I actually— My hand was working and I understood this is why he's the greatest teacher, because he's

relentless. Not mean, not mean at all, just relentless. So I try to be like that and I get very good results.

Right now my goal is very limited. I just want them to be able to play a chromatic scale on the bass in tune, just with two positions. If they can do that, then they do anything and can go on from there.

Every one of my teachers has been a great player. You know, the common thing of, if you can't teach, you know, if you can't do it, teach. Bullshit. Pardon me, but that's— You know, that's not it, because all music teachers, I mean all the ones I studied with and I've studied with many, twenty, twenty-five, have all been great players. I was brought up to believe in music, that that's part of being a musician is passing on what you know, and that one of the philosophies, I mean, part of the philosophy, I should say, is give everything. Don't hold anything back. Give everything, and when anybody asks, tell them the truth.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: You know, if they don't ask, don't say it, but if somebody asks you, tell the truth. And I say that because I have asked and not been told the truth. When you're asking, it's because you want to know.

CLINE: Right. Right.

SMITH: Anyway, that's my philosophy of teaching. My students love me and I love my students, you know. But I try to keep it down to where it's not the major thing I do, you know. I'm doing twelve hours a week of that, you know, and that's more than enough. It's exhausting to teach, and I think if you're really a good teacher that it's

harder than practicing, because you have to be inside where they are and figure out what they're doing wrong and what to do about it and be relentless.

CLINE: I take it this helped augment your income to some degree, as well.

SMITH: Oh, yeah, double, doubles my income.

CLINE: This period that we were talking about through the seventies, you said things were getting harder. You mentioned a few opportunities you had to leave town that you didn't take because you didn't want to leave town and go out on the road. We know you had a family and we know you were dealing with that. How were you making ends meet during this period when work was scarce? I presume it didn't pay particularly well. You were starting to teach.

SMITH: Yeah, right. I didn't really make pretty good money in teaching until the eighties when I started at Musicians Institute, and that's compared to, you know, the normal— All that stuff is still way under. I make about \$12,000 a year teaching and about \$12,000 a year playing music, you know. Before, we were getting by on the \$12,000 playing, and that hasn't changed in years and years and years. I total it all up at the end of the year and it just amazes me; it's always the same, you know.

CLINE: Yeah. So I mean, if your goal is to be able to walk in and play jazz gigs at Donte's, I guess you have to know economically what that means.

SMITH: Yeah, it's a disaster. [Cline laughs.] Someone was asking— I was with somebody and they said, "What's the most important thing you need to be able to do to be a musician?"

And this guy says, "Learn to live without money." [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Yeah. But you were able to raise your family and—

SMITH: Yeah. The thing of, if you're making \$12,000, you know, you're scraping by, but then if you double that, then it's like, "Wow, this feels so good." Even though you're only making \$22,000 or whatever it is, it still feels great.

Well, what I was doing in the seventies, I got involved in real estate speculation.

CLINE: This was your plan, your financial— The beginnings of it.

SMITH: Well, I didn't really formulate the plan till in the middle sixties. I started about '73, '74, and bought and sold maybe a dozen houses, you know, and was making between five and fifteen thousand dollars on each one, you know, and so that really, really helped. Then I saw the picture about, god, if I still had those dozen houses, wow, you know. They're all here in South Pasadena. I mean, you know, wow.

CLINE: Yeah, really.

SMITH: Whoa, dude, you know. I'd be worth six or seven million dollars.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But anyway, so I made my little plan, which I told you about before, but augmenting that. Musicians— I mean, bass players—and I know some drummers do, too—you know, you're dealing a few instruments here and there and you're buying. You see an instrument, a pretty good instrument for 800 bucks and it's worth \$2,500 and you sell it for \$1,500, you know, give somebody a great buy, that's all part of— To me, that's part of being a musician and all of the teachers that I— They always had a bass or two sitting around for sale, you know, and they're making a buck on it. So nothing— It's not like you've got a music store or anything like that; it's just all part

of the hustle, you know, the hustle of being a— That's one of the things I love about what we do, is we've really got our ears to the ground. I mean, we know what's really going on. People that get in and work at Allstate [Insurance Company], you know, and they go in and they think they know what's happening and all of a sudden they're laid off and they don't have any idea how to survive without money.

CLINE: Yeah, you have to really take responsibility for your own life, your own well-being.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah. It's kind of fun when it works, when it's working. But it's not for everyone.

CLINE: But you survived.

SMITH: Well, so far.

CLINE: And one of the people who evidently employed you for a while at Nova Studios was Gary Foster, who I think it's clear just from looking at your résumé that this is a major individual in your musical life. What can you say, at least for starters, about Gary Foster?

SMITH: Well, Gary, I said before, is my idol. He's my mentor. To call him my colleague would be— I mean, I'm not up to his league. I mean, I feel like when we play jazz together we're colleagues, but I mean, he's such an incredible musician on the highest levels of performance, playing for those orchestras and stuff like that. I mean, he is just the tops in every way, and as a human being he's impeccable. You know, he's very warm. He's always got time for everybody. I don't know how he does it. And generous and very giving. When I've asked him for help in a way of— I

don't mean financially or anything, but in a way of— I asked him for instructions on how to— “Gary, how do you get so good?” Now, did I tell you all this before?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: I didn't?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Okay. Well, this is right at the beginning of Nova and I had already known Gary for quite a while at that time, and believe me, I'm not the only one that feels this way about Gary, you know. “Gary, how do you do it? I mean, how is it that you're so great and that every time you pick up your instrument it's just beautiful?”

He says, “Well, the first thing you got to do is, you got to do is you've got to establish your routine, a routine.” He says, “There might be things that take you six months to get together, and then it only takes you, you know, four minutes to go through the routine.”

I now tell my students the same thing, and I use the thing of if I tried to do a push-up right now, or say you—I couldn't—and say maybe you could do three. I don't know what kind of shape you're in. And the next day you'd hurt and everything and you'd do two or three, and by the end of a month you're doing ten, you know, and then by the end of six months you're able to do fifty push-ups in two minutes. Okay. At the cost of two minutes a day you can maintain that, okay. Your routine is built up, and he says his routine is about an hour and a half, built up of a whole collection of things like that, the different parts.

My routine is, first I have an intonation exercise, which took six months to learn with somebody else. Peter Rofe gave it to me. That takes two minutes. Then I

do a thing [by Gary Carr] called the vomiter, and that takes about two minutes. These are all things that took months and months to get together. Then I do all the scales up and down; that took several years to get together, and it takes me about three minutes, six minutes, I don't know. But it's a whole series like that, and that's the routine.

Anyway, that's what Gary says, first you have to get yourself a routine and work on building your routine, you know. It's like your routine gets you back to where you were yesterday, and then the work you do after that forwards you.

So he said, "When I have a date at MGM [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer], an eight o'clock date at MGM," we're talking about eight in the morning, you know, he says, "I'll get up at two o'clock and I'll brush my teeth and get a cup of coffee, and then I'll practice my flute for about an hour." He says, "Then I'll take a shower and then I'll practice my—." Whatever instruments he's playing that day, and he's a doubler.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: So he plays all these woodwinds and they call him for specific ones. He'll take his clarinet and he'll play forty-five minutes on the clarinet and then he'll— I may have it out of order. Then he'll sit down and have a light breakfast, and then he'll go back and play whatever instruments he's playing that day, then he'll work on those for about an hour. Okay. Then he leaves for this eight o'clock gig at six-thirty, and he pulls up in the MGM at seven-thirty and he's already played three hours, more stuff than most people play in a lifetime, I mean, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And so that's why he sounds great every time he picks up the instrument, and he says, "I never the leave the house without doing that." He says, "So if I don't

have a job until three in the afternoon, I'll sleep in and do that later, but if I have an eight o'clock call, I'll get up at two-thirty," or whatever it is, three o'clock. And he's somehow maintained and done that.

CLINE: Wow, that's some discipline.

SMITH: So that became an inspiration to me, and I've tried to do that and I haven't done too badly, you know. I maintain my routine. I had a period of, at forty-nine I was watching someone play, some young bass player, and I said to myself for about the fiftieth time, if I had those kind of chops, I could really say something with them, you know. Like somebody was [indicates an empty display of technique].

CLINE: Yeah, just playing a bunch of whatever.

SMITH: For some reason at that time I said it, I just went— The penny dropped, and I said, "The reason I don't have those chops is because I haven't put that work in. Even though I've done all this work, you know, I still haven't put that work in."

Right around that time I also had read an old Art Tatum interview. Art Tatum is like, I mean, he's like Niagara Falls, you know; he's just like a phenomena, you know. He's a phenomenon. And I had never thought of him as practicing or anything, you know. And this guy asked the question— Of course, he [Tatum] was long dead; this was a reprint. He said, "How much do you practice a day?" I was shocked at the question.

Art's answer was, "I'm very fortunate." He says, "Most people to play at my level have to practice three hours a day." He says, "I only have to put in an hour and a half." And he's talking about Art Tatum playing Hanon and stuff like that, and it just blew me away. Of course, one thing I'm very aware of is that I'm no Art Tatum, so I

have to start putting in three hours a day, and I have to find someone that can show me how to play this high-end stuff.

So Peter Rofe came up to me at a party, saying how he liked my playing, you know, and I said, “Oh, you’re a bass player?” “Yeah.” You know, cool, principal of the L.A. [Los Angeles] Phil [harmonic Orchestra], and I told him of my quandary, and he said, “I’ll give you lessons.” So I stayed with Peter for two years, and then from him I went to somebody else. I can’t remember the order of guys, but I ended up at one point with John Clayton, and this was all in this part and I’m putting in three hours a day minimum of practice every day.

Have I got them there, listed there [referring to his biographical outline]?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Okay. Well, it would be after Peter Rofe. Oh, there he is. I worked on Peter Rofe’s stuff for— I mean, I continued to work on it for years. I went over to USC [University of Southern California] to give a seminar on reading, and I saw one of my old bass students practicing under a stairwell, and he was playing this— I mean, it was stuff I had never heard before for bass, you know, arpeggios. I said, “What are you playing?”

He says, “[Francois] Rabbath,” you know.

I said, “Never heard of it.”

He says, “Yeah, John Clayton gave it to me.” He says, “You know, you ought to take a lesson from John Clayton.”

And I go, “Yeah, sure,” you know.

And then he, like, locked his gaze on me and he says, “You should take a lesson with John Clayton.”

I mean, you know, I believe my students, you know, so I called John, and John turned me on to Rabbath and a whole bunch of stuff. Then after a period of time he said, “I can’t show you any more. I’ve shown you everything I can show you. You need to go to my teacher, Paul Ellison.”

And so I went to Paul Ellison for a while, and I spent nine years working on this stuff and I got it, and I can say I do have those chops and I can say I know how to play the instrument. But I’m very proud of that. I’m sorry I didn’t develop my chops when I was fifteen like you really should. Like a lot of people. But I did do it, and so I firmly believe in study and all that stuff. I think being a student makes you a much better teacher, you know, because you’ve got sympathy.

CLINE: Well, I imagine you must learn from your students.

SMITH: Oh, my god. Oh, god. You know, when they asked me to teach counterpoint at the Musicians Institute, I had a class in counterpoint in L.A. City College, you know, and I didn’t know anything about it, but I wanted to teach it. They say if you want to learn something, teach it, you know. Man, did I learn something in counterpoint. It turned me on.

CLINE: But also now to return a bit to Gary Foster, let’s just say a little bit about him as a player since you’ve worked with him as a jazz musician, and in fact, he appears on both your own recordings, as does John Gross, whom we talked about a little while ago.

SMITH: Right. Right. Well, for a long time the two guys I played with on completely different scenes were John Gross and Gary Foster. I was forming my own band and working gigs and I didn't know who to use, you know, I didn't know whether to use Gary or whether to use John, you know. V. [Verna] R. [Smith], my wife, says, "Use them both." And they had never played together. And I thought about it, "That's weird, you know."

Anyway, I put them together and it was just beautiful. It's like whipped cream on a banana split or something, you know; it's like perfect. They're such different flavors, and yet they're both the highest kind of musician. I think Gary got John Gross on the [Toshiko Akiyoshi-] Lew Tabackin [Big Band] gig after that.

Anyway, Gary, I mean, he's impeccable. He's impeccable, and as I said before, he's always at the highest level and playing at a high emotional level and sparkling. I think of that as sparkling, like when someone has that kind of—it's a certain kind of technique. It's not just technique, but it's sparkling. You know, he's obviously highly influenced by Lee Konitz, you know.

CLINE: Whom you also played with.

SMITH: Yeah, perhaps to a lesser degree Paul Desmond, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But he's of that— Those extended phrases and extended over the bar line kind of stuff, although he never actually studied the [Lennie] Tristano thing, like me, I never actually studied it, but I just know about it and I played with those guys. The band I have now [Left Coast], let's not go there.

CLINE: I was going to say, yeah. You also used Kent Glenn in your band, so you had some of your real mentors and very influential people playing in your group, yet I imagine here you are, it's your band, you're calling the shots, so to speak. What was the experience like being a band leader and how did you arrive at the desire to be one? Because that's a whole other ball of wax, as they say.

SMITH: Well, I first began leading bands when I was fifteen or fourteen, and then, as I told you, I had that Rolodex thing and I was the leader, you know. So I always had an eye for the audience. I don't mean—I mean, at that point I was pandering, but it's not that anymore, although you might say it is, except it's not the lowest kind of thing. But it's having a sense of changing the texture, a sense of the audience, how they're feeling about it, you know. A sense of presentation, okay, and I think a lot of—Most people don't have that, they don't have a sense of presentation, and I do. I'm not always correct, but I do have a sense of it. So I usually feel like I'm the worst player in the band, which is what it should be, you know. That's what it's supposed to be, you know, like get everybody, the best guys you can get and the guys that you love and you know that are on your side. They always dug it, you know.

I write out the solo orders. I mean, I'm talking about control, being too controlling, and I am a little controlling, because I write out the first solo, who gets the first solo, or the solos, and I try to vary everything. It's not always a melody and then the trumpet and then the tenor [saxophone] and then the piano and then the bass and the drums, you know. Once it becomes totally predictable, it's tedious. At some level it's tedious, you know, so I try to mix it up and mix up different tempos and everything, you know.

I get real confident, and you know, I'm terrified. I'm confident in my ability to give a good presentation. There's another one, "Why are you so confident, you moron?" You know, but somebody's got to do it.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I mean, I get on gigs and I don't say anything, but I think, "Oh, my god. Jesus, you know, don't you have any idea that, you know, like you're doing the exactly the same thing every time, the same tempo, the same tunes, same shit," you know.

CLINE: I do know.

SMITH: Well, anyway, I like texture, I like to be interested, I like the audience to be interested.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: I mean, that's what we are doing. It's a circle, you know. We're recording where we're sort of— That's what we're doing, we're recording so it can be heard, you know, so we're still dealing with what we think is going to be an audience. But when we're dealing with an actual audience, that's what we're doing. And if they love it, I don't mean that that's— I mean if it's really good and they love it, that's wonderful. I don't mean that just that they love it doesn't make it good, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But there's nothing more enjoyable than to put out really good stuff and have it really well received, you know.

CLINE: Indeed. All right. Okay. Unless there's somebody you think that you really want to mention before we turn the tape machine off for today.

SMITH: Well, I think I talked about Dick Cary before, right?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: No?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: God.

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: Well, Dick Cary, I first met him through Gary Foster. We played a gig down in Newport Beach or something with a big band, the guy that was doing Artie Shaw or something, and Dick had done most of the arrangements. He immediately loved my playing. I played with his band for about five years. He was called by many people, by some people, including Gary Foster, the Bach of our times. Okay. He's been dead three or four years now.

He was a player and started off in the early thirties. In the forties he played piano for Louis Armstrong. He's a cornet player, but he also played great piano of that style. That was his milieu, that was his thing, but his writing went all the way from 1910 up till the day he died. He'd write anything and he would have— For a while he'd have a regular, sort of a regular kind of band, you know, three trombones and five saxes and four trumpets and a rhythm section, and he would write.

Every week you'd go in there and he'd have written two or three new arrangements, every week. They'd play those arrangements and go back through a few of the others, and everything was being recorded on the primitive recorders, and the very best people in town are playing. There was Tommy Newsome and Abe Most and all of these pantheon of guys, great big band players, you know, guys that have

spent years on the *Ed Sullivan Show* and stuff like that. All these names, these famous names of that time, and most of them I had never heard of.

After he wrote about a thousand arrangements, then he'd disband it and start up a new group, a new thing, and write for that for about a year or two. When he'd have about a thousand of those, then he'd write another one. So there's a room the size of this room that's filled with his books, his things, and people are still rehearsing every Tuesday, they're still rehearsing his band.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah. Right now they're doing the low brass band, I think it's a tenor— Two tenors and a baritone sax and a trombone and a cornet and a rhythm section. You know, they're going through all that music. There are guys that have been doing it for years. Ernie Tack, who played with the *Tonight Show*, bass trombone. Betty O'Hara did it. It's still going.

Well, he was one of the great geniuses, I mean a true genius, and his music two hundred years from now will be being performed. Marvelous. Original. I mean, he would write stuff that was like Duke Ellington, and then he'd write stuff that was like a combination of Prokofiev and Duke Ellington, and these twisted little— Strange little melodies, beautiful thing like a total fantasy, you know. He'd sit in his chair and he'd hear something on TV, he'd be writing it, and he'd watch tennis. Lived in a rat hole and he smoked cigars, and it was just foul atmosphere and it looked like a rat's nest. He had this beat-up easy chair in front of the TV and he's just there and write, and the piano, and everything was in piles and piles. Then there was the back room where the band was, you know. Then when he got sick, it really got funky.

But anyway, he was a real character, really a curmudgeon of the first order. I did a thing with him for Thrifty Drug [and Discount] Stores, and they wanted a Dixie-sounding band. We're playing through the thing, you know, and there's twelve, fifteen people on it, and the headphones. Somebody in the booth says, "Dick, we talked about it, and you were going to take those four bars out, because we need that ten seconds."

He goes, "You were serious about that? That's the dumbest thing I ever heard."

We're going like, this is why Dick Cary has never been a big-time moneymaker, because he's just crusty and rusty.

CLINE: And uncompromising.

SMITH: And stories, man. Stories. And fortunately, they're all recorded. You know, stories and stories and stories of this and that. Told about these guys, Mez Mezzrow, and all these characters in his story. Funny stuff. Funny stuff. It was quite an experience.

CLINE: Okay. Well—

SMITH: Well, let's see. I'm just going down this list. Dick Cary, I can't believe I didn't talk about him before.

Terry Jones had a big band for a while. One of the featured players was Ray Reed.

Do you want to wrap it up now, or—

CLINE: Yeah, I think we'll call it now.

SMITH: We're still not out of the seventies.

CLINE: To be continued. You know, we got a little bit into the eighties. We'll continue into the eighties.

SMITH: Okay. There's Janet Jones. That's another lady piano player.

CLINE: Oh, don't know her.

SMITH: She's quite good and a lovely, lovely person. She played with groups like the Platters and stuff like that, and she was a really good player around the scene and just as sweet and dainty as you could imagine, you know, playing this rough music.

Okay. Well—

CLINE: Okay. We'll try to bring it up next time through the last twenty years or so up to the present day.

SMITH: Okay. What's today? Nine-four?

CLINE: Maybe we might even be able to finish next time.

SMITH: Okay. I'm just going to make a mark here where we stopped.

CLINE: Where we left off. Okay. Well, I'll see you next time, and thank you very much for today.

SMITH: Well, thank you. Thank you for doing this. This is very satisfying.

[End September 3, 2003 interview]

TAPE NUMBER: X, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 10, 2003

CLINE: Today is September 10th, 2003. This is Alex Cline interviewing Putter Smith at his home in South Pasadena once again. This is tape number ten.

SMITH: Oh, my god.

CLINE: Good morning.

SMITH: Hi.

CLINE: We're going to try to bring things up to the present, if we can, today and this will take us through at least the eighties and nineties, and maybe we can kind of generalize a bit. I do have some specific things I want to ask, and, of course, I'll have some questions that are follow-ups from our last sessions or from our last session.

One I want to ask before I do anything else, because I've been meaning to ask it ever since one of the early sessions. During your commercial music days you were, among other things, the bassist on "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling," was it?

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: A hit, big hit song, produced by Phil Spector.

SMITH: Right.

CLINE: Was Phil Spector present when you were actually recording?

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

CLINE: What was that like?

SMITH: Well, he's sort of a mousy little character, I mean kind of like the Dustin Hoffman character in *Midnight Cowboy*, who I referred to about somebody else, but he had that—

CLINE: Ratso Rizzo.

SMITH: Yeah, Ratso look, and he seemed to be a very nice guy. I mean, he seemed, I mean, way out of his league to be such a big producer and everything like that. So much of that stuff is luck, but they do have a way of falling into it, you know. But I mean, there was no spectacular talent there or anything. It was just— I mean, most of us just thought it was all stupid. I mean, I did twenty recordings with him on different stuff.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I was one of the first subs. In those days there was so much work and he used four basses on everything. He had an upright [bass], which is what I would play, and electric.

CLINE: Yeah, a wall of sound.

SMITH: Yeah. Larry Knechtel was usually playing electric. Well, maybe Lyle Ritts, or Lyle Ritts would be playing *guitarron* and Carol Kaye would be playing Danelectro, and then he'd have four guitar players, and he'd have four drummers, and the four drummers would be playing the equivalent of a trap set.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And then he got four horn players, and that was his big secret.

CLINE: That was his concept.

SMITH: Yeah, and it was just—

CLINE: A lot of reverb.

SMITH: —unbelievable. Unbelievable. And we just all were like “This is ridiculous,” you know. I mean, there are so many really good musicians. But he was always okay with me, I mean, but it’s just a real kind of a lower class of music and a lower class of intelligence. I know that everybody that makes millions is supposed to be a genius, but it ain’t so.

CLINE: No, it ain’t. Okay. I’m glad I asked that, because Phil Spector’s name does come up and certainly lately has been in the news.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. That’s far-out, you know. That’s far-out. It must be drugs of some kind. Too much money. Too much money. Too much power, too much money.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: He’s become Caligula.

CLINE: He and many like him.

SMITH: I wish him well. Believe me, I do. I hold no bad feelings toward him at all.

CLINE: Okay. Yeah. We also talked a little bit about some singers that you had worked with, specifically Carmen McRae and Anita O’Day, and there were some other singers you worked with that are in your résumé. The names Sheila Jordan and Diane Schuur come to mind. I wanted to ask you about working with singers and what your feelings are about working with singers and if it necessitates a particular approach or a change in the way that you, say, accompany a singer.

SMITH: Well, no, I accompany a singer just the way anybody else. If they’re really great— I mean, one of my favorites is Billie Holiday with all those records from the

fifties, you know, with Ray Brown and Ben Webster. I mean, I love it. I love a good singer. I just love it.

Some of my favorites, Karrin Allison. You have to be sure to pronounce it— The first word is like a car. Karrin Allison, she's wonderful, and one of her great things is she's really improvising up there as far as tunes and all that stuff. Like you'll have a rehearsal and rehearse for three hours, and then have a long list, and then you'll get up and won't do anything that you rehearsed or anything that was on the list.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But that's great, you know.

CLINE: Right. Spontaneity.

SMITH: But she features the guys to their strengths. You know, she won't give somebody— I mean, for example, she won't have a super fast tune and have that be my featured solo, you know. She'll pick something with nice changes that's medium tempo and let me shine, and I love her for that.

CLINE: Well, that's good band leading.

SMITH: Yes, absolutely. The better you look, the better I look, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: You know, that's the right way.

CLINE: Any other singers of note that you'd like to mention?

SMITH: Well, Diane Schuur's marvelous and a great piano player, you know. I was playing with her up in Fresno, and I got up there and I was just kind of fooling around playing "Moment's Notice," and all of a sudden she starts playing it, and I mean

playing it, you know, and a spirit like, great spirit, great spirit. She's a real, real great talent.

Who else you got on that list?

CLINE: I mentioned Sheila Jordan.

SMITH: Oh, yeah, she was marvelous to play with. Just marvelous. I mean, full out. You know, when she sings, she's singing full out from the whole body, you know, and that's so great.

Another great singer, Mark Murphy. Astonishing. I mean, he's just amazing. Then you find out these people all play a little bit of piano, so that's how come they can sing right notes.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: When people try to scat sing with no musical knowledge whatsoever, that's what it sounds like, you know.

CLINE: Right. A couple of others here. I mean, you've mentioned Bob Dorough in a previous session, but you didn't say anything specific about him. And vocally somewhat in the same category as someone else you've mentioned before who's also a fine pianist, Dave Frishberg.

SMITH: Yeah. In fact, I think they're coming to town. I went to see them last year or whenever it was, two years ago, when they were here together, and they're coming again this year. Yeah, I would put them together, guys with no voices, but Dave Frishberg has great refinement, you know.

Bob Dorough was rough and ready, and more feeling than anything else, I think. He's written some nice tunes, and clever. Nice guy, really a nice guy. Then he

had tremendous success in New York, *Sesame Street* and all that stuff. But he was fun to play with. He was fun to play with. But, of course, I haven't played with him in forty years. Is it possible? How old am I again? Yeah, over forty years. Yeah.

CLINE: Wow. Do you find—I mean, we talked a little bit about the experience you had playing with Carmen McRae. Sometimes singers have reputations for being kind of temperamental or maybe more emotional. These days people toss the word *diva* around rather cavalierly. What were your experiences sort of generally working with singers? Were most of them just like any musician or did they have a different temperament?

SMITH: Well, a lot of them are like that, diva. At some point they become a “chick singer,” you know. A lot of them don't. Carmen McRae certainly does. I mean, although I would say she's kind of unique in her venom and everyone has a story, I mean, and I do, too. But I just will not endure abuse on the stand, you know, and she started to get into it, you know, and then she turned around and looked at me, and I was going to shove her off the stage if she said one more word. Somehow she stopped and turned around and looked at me and shut her mouth.

CLINE: She knew somehow.

SMITH: Well, because, I mean, I was really going to do that, you know. See, if somebody wants to have a conference afterward, great. Let's, you know, scream, whatever you want to do, that's fine, but on stage there's got to be respect, you know, period.

CLINE: Were these musical issues generally, or was there some extramusical stuff?

SMITH: Yeah, musical. Well, I mean, it all comes down to— With her it was all extramusical, but she focuses it on the music and uses it as a— Or did, you know. I loved her singing, but I grew to despise her, like most.

CLINE: Like most of her side people.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But hopefully she's in a better place.

CLINE: Yeah, getting some perspective.

SMITH: Yeah. With her new life as a cockroach. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Also I wanted to ask you, since we were talking about drummers in some depth in a couple of these sessions, there was a drummer that came up in an earlier session who is a local guy who has had quite an interesting career and has played with a lot of important people, but is probably destined for a certain amount of obscurity, if for no other reason due to his own eccentricities, and that's Sonship Theus. I wanted to know if you had any reflections on Sonship and his approach and the strong personality that he brought to what he did.

SMITH: Oh, I just thought it was marvelous and completely over the edge and, you know, I mean, that's what I think we all want; we want to be sociopaths with ethics. I think I've said that before.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And he just went completely over. I saw him one night, I mean, he just got up in the middle of a solo and started chanting to Allah, you know, and then got back down, I mean, and it was so real and it just was so moving.

You know, one of the images I have is of when Woody Hayes, the football coach, at his last game, you know, he was the tough and fighting coach and everything, and I'm not a football fan, so I don't know exactly what I'm talking about, but the other team got the ball and was running to the touchdown, and he ran out and tackled the guy, and they took him away in the— The men in the white coats took him away. But I thought, now, that's what we're after, that degree of involvement, beyond any judgment, you know. And that's what Sonship was to me, just a marvelous player.

CLINE: Did you play with him?

SMITH: Did I ever play with him? I really can't recall if I did. I may have at that time, but—

CLINE: Yeah, he used to play regularly with Henry Franklin's band, for example, and you've mentioned Henry before.

SMITH: Yeah. Well, that's where I saw him do that.

CLINE: Yeah. I wondered, because Henry always kind of gave him full rein.

SMITH: Well, that's what he should have.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I don't know what he's doing now.

CLINE: He's a Christian minister now.

SMITH: Oh, well, that makes sense. Christian?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, because he was sort of into a Muslim thing then. Maybe or maybe not. Just because he said, “Allah,” I assumed that. Well, he’s a marvelous, marvelous person.

CLINE: He’s had a lot of health problems, too. He developed some kidney disease and he’s been on dialysis for years, which affects his playing, of course.

SMITH: Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.

CLINE: But, yeah, he’s struggled a lot.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: He had a hard time keeping gigs.

SMITH: Well, I can understand that, but he could have my gig. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Yeah. In fact, I remember seeing him in— Oh, it must have been in maybe the late eighties, but since you’ve mentioned Cecilia Coleman and we’ve talked a little about Eric von Essen, who I think will come up again today, I saw him play with trio with Sonship and Cecilia Coleman and Eric von Essen.

SMITH: Wow. How was that?

CLINE: That was wild.

SMITH: Wow. And did Eric and Sonship—

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: They clicked?

CLINE: Yeah, it worked fine, because he loved drummers, you know, so he knew how to deal with it.

SMITH: Well, god, I mean, had anybody ever had time like that, like Eric? My god.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah. Okay.

CLINE: Since the name Eric has been touched upon, I wanted to ask you someplace I was headed— In fact, I see that upon arriving here you're fully prepared for this question. I wanted to ask you about Linda's.

SMITH: Oh, Linda's.

CLINE: Linda's, a restaurant on Melrose [Avenue] that for many years featured mostly piano and bass duos, from my knowledge, and it started sometime in the eighties, I think.

SMITH: Let's see. I have it written down here. It's '85 and it looks like it ended in '90. So that's six years.

CLINE: Yeah. Who'd you work there with and what can you say about Linda's?

SMITH: Well, I worked there with Alan Broadbent for years. I think we started off with one night and we worked a year or so like that, and then three years of two nights, and that was great. That's where I first met and heard Eric.

CLINE: Yeah, I think a lot of people first heard him there, actually.

SMITH: But I'd heard of him long before that. Safford Chamberlain had told me, he says, "There's this great bass player you should hear." You know, and again it was like somebody telling about the guy, said, "You should take a lesson from John Clayton," and go, "Oh, yeah, yeah," you know, and sort of ignore it because—

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But, I mean, he really insisted on what a great player he was, and then when I finally heard Eric two or three years later, I was kicking myself for not having tuned into this cat earlier.

CLINE: Do you remember who you heard him with the first time?

SMITH: Well, probably with Lou Levy.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, at Linda's?

SMITH: Yeah. Or it might have been with George Gaffney or it might have been with Jimmy Rowles.

CLINE: Right. I know he played with all of them.

SMITH: He played with all those, yeah. He became like the bass player of choice right away, you know, because of his marvelous time feel and tremendous originality, and also what a lovely person. When I first heard him, I mean, I was immediately just blown away. I mean, here's this guy with seemingly limitless technique, which is not the big thing about it. Technique is not the big thing; it's the music. It's just so—oh! His rhythmic—I mean, I think have to think about the time, you know. I have to think about it and pay attention to it, and then there are guys that seem like they're standing on a huge deck, you know. That's each beat, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, I know. Right.

SMITH: And that's where he was, and plus he has that— As I got to know him and, you know, knew that his mother [Mehda Yodh] was a classical Indian ballet or classical dance, I guess, not ballet, and that the people that came to his house when he was a child, and he listed seven or eight people, and about sixth on the list was Ravi Shankar, and all these other Indian guys who in his mind were— You know, like Ravi Shankar was like—

CLINE: Yeah, a friend of his mom's.

SMITH: He was not the high one on the list. I mean, he spoke in awe of three or four of these names, of course who I've never heard of, and then he says, "Oh, yeah, Ravi Shankar, too." You know, like, of course. Burt Bacharach, you know. I mean, I'm not trying to say that, but I mean, I'm just saying that the people he had around him were so high up there.

CLINE: Yeah. He started playing tabla, I think, when he was young, you know, the Indian hand drums. So there you go.

SMITH: See, having that background and that rhythmic thing and the whole concept. Anyway, that's a damn shame that he's gone. I got to be friends with him, good friends, and I took some lessons from him. And he was embarrassed; he said, "What can I show you?" Like how to play the bass, you know. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: He loved my playing. He used to surprise me; he would call me to do recordings when he was recording. I mean, "Gee, *you* want *me*?" The maestro wants me? Came to my house? You know, that old joke, right?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah. Okay. So one time I told him, I said, "You know, you're the most original, greatest bass player I've seen since—Scott LaFaro." And I let him know that I had known Scott.

CLINE: That must have blown his mind.

SMITH: Well, yeah, it blew his mind that I knew him and then when I said that, you know, "Then you're the best one since then," he says, "There's something in the way

you're saying that that makes me believe you." I mean, which is like— Yeah. He was so brilliant. He was a brilliant, brilliant flame.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: It's a shame. And that's a real testimony to the danger of drugs.

CLINE: Yeah. Which started very early for him, I think.

SMITH: Yeah, and it's too bad. It's in spite of drugs that they do it, not because of drugs.

CLINE: Yeah. Yeah, right. Yeah. Not to mention the fact he could play piano, guitar, cello, chromatic harmonica, and compose.

SMITH: That's right. That's right. And I heard he was in Sweden or wherever it was, but I had recorded with him before he'd left playing piano, and it was pretty much like Gil Evans' level of— You know, better than an amateur, but not much. Then I heard recordings he did after being there for a year or something, and he had gotten quite accomplished on the piano, but I feel like his instrument was the bass. That was his soul instrument. Bass is such a brutal, painful instrument that it's real easy to understand why somebody would not play it, you know. But I'm sorry he stopped, because that was his soul act.

CLINE: Yeah. Well, he didn't take it up till he was in college.

SMITH: Whew. It's disgusting.

CLINE: Yeah, he already played piano and guitar and tabla before that.

SMITH: Well, he just really— He really had the— He was amazing. Amazing. Like on the level of Jimmy Blanton or something like that.

CLINE: So, more about Linda's, if you can tell us a little bit about what that scene was like and some of the people.

SMITH: Oh, the Linda scene. The Linda's scene was a— First of all, it had such good-tasting food, you know. And Linda was really what you'd want somebody really cool to be, like she really was cool. It wasn't "I'm pretending to be cool," you know. She would sing two tunes every set and never annoy anybody, and she sounded kind of like a cross between, to me, Judy Garland and Al Jolson, and those are both great singers, you know, of a long time ago. That was her milieu, I guess.

She just treated us great. It was very, very loose, never— You know, get started, never looking at the watch, and she had very good musicians there. I mean, Jimmy Rowles had a night and George Gaffney. I just got to work with George for the last four years before he died and learned so much from him. Jesus, what a monster musician.

CLINE: Very unsung.

SMITH: Now, there's a guy that no one will ever know.

CLINE: Yeah, Eric loved him, too.

SMITH: Yeah. Just an amazing musician, you know. He's one of those guys, and I told him this when we'd start playing, I said, "You know, I've been listening to Brad Mehldau, and," I said, "the thing you realize about Brad Mehldau is he can play anything he can hear, and that's exactly how you are. You're not playing in the Brad Mehldau style," but anything George heard or thought of, he could play it, and it was always different. Amazing, you know. He was more like in a Nat King Cole style, older style, but, nevertheless, you know. Creativity transcends all style.

CLINE: Yeah. For sure.

SMITH: Let's see. Jimmy Rowles I never did get to know, although, I mean, I got to know him a little bit, but I was never on his list of guys, you know. Well, that's understandable, you know.

CLINE: Well, he was, I guess, quite the cantankerous character, too, kind of curmudgeonly.

SMITH: Well, that's what I hear. I think he was probably really a sweetheart guy, you know. I'm playing with his daughter all the time, Stacy [Rowles], and we're very good friends and she's delightful.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Delightful. Let's see. Who else was there? Chris Dawson. The first time I heard Chris Dawson, just blew me away when I heard him. Here's this young kid playing like Teddy Wilson, you know, a cross between Teddy Wilson and Bill Evans.

CLINE: Whoa.

SMITH: You know Chris, don't you?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Oh, god, he's wonderful. Wonderful. He's got some of the best time, and everything about his playing is wonderful. He's not playing like McCoy Tyner, you know. He's not trying to do any— This is what he hears.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Beautiful, beautiful player.

CLINE: What about some of the other bass players?

SMITH: Well, that's where I met Darek "Oles" [Oleskiewicz]. He came in there the first week he was in town. He had just won the Thelonious Monk something or other, the thing where they go back, or something he had just won.

CLINE: Yeah, right, some award.

SMITH: He came in, and, of course, right away, you know, I mean, I asked him to sit in and oh, god, "Darek, please, leave town now. Please." [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah. And let's see. Who else was in there?

CLINE: Didn't John Heard play there a lot?

SMITH: Oh, yeah, John Heard was there all the time. Yeah. Yeah, I saw John all—
John's always been one of my favorites.

Let's see. Who else played there? John Leftwich was playing there for a while, you know, while he was playing. I think he's probably mostly producing now. He was a phenomenal player. Musical, very musical.

I'm trying to think of who else. Can you think of any?

CLINE: No. I've run out of my names, and you had some I didn't know.

SMITH: Okay. That's about it. They were very picky, all those guys, they were very picky, you know. They'd call you up and they'd say, "Can you come in tonight? Eric can't make it," or something.

You know, I'd say, "No, I can't. How about—?"

"Nah."

"How about—?"

"Nah."

“How about—?”

“Nah.”

You know, extremely picky, you know. So it was kind of an honor to be on the list, you know.

CLINE: Right. Right. Well, it speaks to that whole connection between the pianist and the bassist, and the understanding and rapport that has to be there or it just isn't comfortable, I guess.

SMITH: That's it. That's it. Strive for chemistry.

CLINE: And if that's what you've got is just piano and bass, it makes all the difference.

SMITH: Yeah. Oh, and people used to come in there. It became a real inside hang, because it was never a snooty place. David Bowie used to come in all the time and he would bring in people, like one time he brought in Guns 'N Roses, brought the whole band in.

One night— There was the main room and then there was— You go back towards the bathrooms and there was a little hallway, and you'd turn left in there and there was a telephone, a pay phone there, and then next to that was the entrance to what you'd call a dressing room, which was actually a storeroom with a couple of milk boxes. Right at this time there was a guitar player with Guns 'N Roses, Slash, is being in the press about, you know, this rude and terrible person, spitting on people, you know, and this monster, you know. So I turn the corner, and Slash is on the telephone, you know. At the time tattoos weren't that prominent, so you immediately recognize him because of his tattoos, you know.

I'm going to the dressing room, and passing right next to me, he says, "Excuse me, sir, do you have change for a dollar?" You know, very polite, nice guy. [laughs] "Excuse me, sir," you know. That's beautiful. I loved that.

One night— What's her name, the daughter of Judy Garland?

CLINE: Lorna Luft or Liza Minnelli?

SMITH: Liza Minnelli came in with George Hamilton. That was far-out. George, man, what a tan, you know. Beautiful. Beautiful. Amazing.

CLINE: That's the [inaudible].

SMITH: Huell Howser used to come in.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: There were quite a few people, and a lot of them you'd be surprised. Pee Wee Herman used to come in all the time.

CLINE: Oh, yeah. Paul Rubens, yeah.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Wow. Cool.

SMITH: Of course, nobody recognized him without his—

CLINE: His little suit?

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: But it was great, and the food was really good and the music was really good.

CLINE: Was it hard to play essentially in a restaurant while people were eating, or were you used to that?

SMITH: There was something that made it tolerable. Sometimes it got really blasting, but, I mean, Alan is a very, very particular guy, you know, and he endured it for, whatever, three or four years. So it was feasible because there was certain attention. There were enough people actually sending the vibe back, I think, that made you feel like you weren't just wasting your time, you know.

CLINE: Right. Exactly. So let's talk, if we can, a little bit about some of the other places and people, places you worked, people you were working with now, during the eighties and moving into the nineties.

SMITH: Okay.

CLINE: And then if you can maybe tell us if after the kind of the desert of the seventies, if things were actually improving here in town, as far as playing jazz goes.

SMITH: Well, as I say, I'm going through my books, and when I hit the eighties it just seemed to get real busy. It looked real good. It's not particularly anything striking, you know. Well, I mean, there was Linda's and it was all local stuff, but it seemed to get very busy.

Once I worked with [Bob] Brookmeyer, something changed inside for me. I worked with him four or five gigs, including a tour and everything, with Mike Stephans, and Theo Saunders was on for a while and then Joe Diorio did some of it. But there was something that gave me an inner feeling of okay, everything's all right, you know, and I've been like that ever since then. My work started getting— Like I said, I had no work there for a period, and then I actually decided to quit practicing, and the next day I got the Brookmeyer call. And once I got that call—

CLINE: Oh, okay. Now, you haven't told me at some point you quit practicing.

SMITH: Oh, I didn't tell you that?

CLINE: No. You'd better back up and tell this one.

SMITH: Okay. Well, I went to Japan around 1980, '81 or '82 with Andy MacIntosh, a great alto player who had been playing lead on Toshiko [Akiyoshi]'s band [Toshiko Akiyoshi-Lew Tabackin Big Band], and his father's Ken MacIntosh, who was a famous— Like the Les Brown of England. He was a marvelous player. He played like [Julian] "Cannonball" [Adderley], really, really burning. And Barry Keiner, a piano player that killed himself on the bus with Buddy Rich's band. He had shot up heroin and had been dead on the bus for four hours before anybody noticed it.

CLINE: Ouch.

SMITH: And he was an incredible talent, but a complete— I mean, what's worse than neurotic?

CLINE: Psychotic?

SMITH: Well, I mean, he wasn't, but he was— Poor fellow. It was tragic.

CLINE: Hard time coping with life.

SMITH: He was in deep shit, you know. Over there, of course, there was no drugs, but it was drinking, you know, and the whole band drank like a fish. I was the only one that didn't drink. I was very lonely. It's boring, you know, to be around a bunch of drunks. It's very boring unless you're drunk, too. Anyway, I don't mean to call them a bunch of drunks, but I mean, that's— Because they were all great musicians.

And Danny D'Imperia was a drummer, marvelous drummer.

CLINE: I don't know him.

SMITH: Most extraordinary person. Just extraordinary. There's a whole bunch about him. But anyway, those are all New York guys, okay, and they had picked me up here in L.A. because of Andy, and we went over there. So I was playing eight hours a night. You know, when you go to Japan you don't realize what you're in for, you know. I was there for three months, and the first month we played seven nights a week, and then they started letting us have a night off.

But when I came back, I was burning. I was at the top. I mean, just burning. And I called everybody to get something, and three months went by and I had worked one dumb gig.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: I just was so depressed, because here I am at my peak and I can't even give it away. I got mad, I got deeply mad, deeply angry at music, you know, my muse, and I said, "I'm not going to practice anymore."

And the next day I got called for the Brookmeyer gig. But I mean, I decided not to practice. "I'm still mad at you, music, and I'm not going to practice for a whole year." I marked it down in my calendar. I didn't practice for a year. Great. Then I started playing again and even more so.

But working with Brookmeyer and having him like my playing, you know, and he really does, and I saw him last year and he came up and hugged me and thanked me for being a good player and all that stuff, and that's stuff is so good for your soul.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: But when that happened, something inside me it was at peace finally, and I was kind of like on the road to becoming a good player then, finally.

Okay. So where were we?

CLINE: So we were talking about places you were playing in the eighties and who you were playing with.

SMITH: Okay.

CLINE: Now that you're feeling better about things.

SMITH: All right. Yeah, I started getting a whole bunch of work. I'm just going to run through here and see if there's anything that you need.

CLINE: Really important, something that stands out, perhaps.

SMITH: Yeah. Don Ellis we talked about. It was around this time that [Frank] Rosolino killed himself, and that was such a tragedy to me.

CLINE: So many of these guys I've talked to knew him and played with him.

SMITH: We talked about Betty O'Hara, right?

CLINE: She's come up a couple of times.

SMITH: Okay. Well, she's like Zoot Sims. She's a marvelous player. Walter Urban is a bass player on the scene. This kid comes up to me, I'm at Stein's [Stein on Vine] about two years ago and he says, "You're Putter, aren't you?"

I said, "Yeah."

Did I tell you this?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: He says, "Well, my dad was Walter Urban."

I said, "Oh, really?"

He said, "Yeah." He says, "Yeah, I used to be under the piano at the session and you'd guys would come over on Sunday and play the session."

I said, “Well, what do you do? Are you playing bass or something?” Because he’s looking at the bass.

He says, “Yeah. Yeah.”

I said, “Well, are you working?”

He says, “Yeah.”

I said, “Well, who are you playing with?”

He says, “Well, I play bass with the Red Hot Chili Peppers.”

And I said, “Oh, I’ve heard of them.” [Cline laughs.] I had just heard of them, you know.

Anyway, he was real nice, and we talked. I said, “Tell your dad hello.”

So I got home and asked my daughter if she’d ever heard of the—

CLINE: So it was Flea?

SMITH: Yeah, it was Sting. I mean Flea. Flea. Not Sting.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: My daughter jumped up and down, you know. She’s probably still jumping up and down. If only we knew. Anyway, that’s kind of one of those things.

CLINE: Wow, I had no idea.

SMITH: Okay. I mentioned all these names before, Amos Tryce and Henry Franklin and Pat Britt. I don’t know.

CLINE: Pat Britt hasn’t come up yet.

SMITH: Pat Britt was a producer of records, an alto player, too.

CLINE: Right. I knew he played alto.

SMITH: He did a whole bunch of records in the seventies, Catalyst Records and Vee Jay Records, and got a lot of stuff down, a lot of stuff that wouldn't have been there. Did a lot of good.

We got taken to the union [American Federation of Musicians, Local 47], everybody that was on one of those albums or on three or four of them, and so I'm sitting in the room there, Marl Young [the union representative] and all these musicians, Alan Jackson and probably Dolo Coker. There were about ten of us. You know, Frank Strazzeri. This guy [Marl Young] starts badmouthing Pat Britt, you know, and I said, "Now, wait a minute, you know. You know, this wasn't union and everything, but this guy gave us work when nobody else is, so, I mean, I really don't want to hear you badmouthing him."

So I got called up before the national board. I was the only one. And they were going to fine me a thousand dollars and all that stuff, you know. I said, "Come on, you know, I'm not a studio musician. God, I'm out there making \$50 a night, you know. You know, show a little mercy." When I said that, it was like I had said— Like they were a bunch of vampires and I'd held up the cross, you know, the word *mercy*. "Mercy, oh, god." But they did, they let me off the hook.

CLINE: You mentioned in a very early session that you had had some feelings, a change in feelings regarding the union. Is this where it started, or is this— This is something I have on my list to ask you, so—

SMITH: Well, there's been a number of things. I grew up as a union man. My father was a strong union man. There used to be a thing here called the Helms [Bakery] trucks, and they were panel trucks. That's where the Jazz Bakery is.

CLINE: Right. I live right near the Helms Bakery.

SMITH: Okay. Well, they used to go through the neighborhoods and they had a two-note whistle, and they'd go [demonstrates].

CLINE: Yeah, I remember them.

SMITH: So when they'd come by, my dad would run out and he'd go "Scab!" because they were non-union.

CLINE: I see, and he was a baker.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, that's right. Yeah. So my feelings have always been pro-union, and I always will be pro-union because I think some union is better than no union, but our union is not built for the working musician. Right now it only covers the studio guys and what's left of that.

CLINE: The guys that play in orchestras.

SMITH: They have these totally unrealistic rules. In order to qualify for anything you have to—"Well, just tell them you won't do it unless it says union contract." Come on.

CLINE: You'd never work.

SMITH: Ridiculous. I mean, jiminy, you know. But there should be some way that we could all self-pay and somehow get in it. You can't even buy insurance through Local 47, you know. It's really a closed community, and it seems to be more or less largely for the benefit of the employees of the union, you know. Hopefully it will change sometime.

I did tell you about the AFTRA [American Federation of Radio and Television Artists] scale? You know, in the many little things you do, I somehow got

contracting— Actually, there was a guy here from Japan, his name was Bob Sakama, and he's now the conductor of the Nagoya symphony [Nagoya Philharmonic Orchestra] and an amazing talent, great writer, great guy, played decent piano.

Anyway, somehow we hooked up and he would have me contract people for his gigs, you know, and there weren't that many, but one of them was an ad for Thrifty [Drug and Discount Stores]. It was union. It was a jingle, and I got four musicians and three backup singers and a lead singer. Okay. And the musicians were through Local 47 and the AFTRA was the singers.

The backup singers get 350 bucks every thirteen weeks as long as it plays, and the other person got 500 bucks every thirteen weeks. Okay. And the musicians get 50 dollars, period.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: I mean, that's the difference in the unions. See, and one of the unions, AFTRA, is run by professionals; I mean, you know, administrators and stuff, and our union is run— Well, my cousin is the president of the Local 47, Hal Espinosa. We found out we're cousins. We're both related to Dona Espinosa, who is the woman that— She used to have a rancho out here and she was the one that sheltered Jouaquin Murieta.

CLINE: Yeah. I know the name, yeah.

SMITH: Okay. Well, I mean, with me it's a very distant, and of course, with me, too, I'm sure, but his name is Espinosa. We were at a Les Brown band together and I said, "Have you ever heard of Jouaquin Murieta?"

He says, “My grandmother used to—.” You know, “My great-great-great-grandmother used to hide him out.”

I said, “Wow. Mine, too.”

But I mean, it’s really— I really had no blood there, it was an uncle, but nevertheless, I felt like we’re cousins, you know.

But Hal Espinosa is completely untrained as an administrator, you know. I mean, we really should have— [Peter] Ueberroth should be running the union or somebody like that, you know.

CLINE: Right. Right.

SMITH: Yeah, because we’re total victims, you know. Like I worked at Music Center [of Los Angeles County], I did this *Bix* show for three months about Bix Beiderbeck, and the scale was \$800, and they went to the union and said, “You know, we’re a nonprofit group. Can you give us a break?”

And so they said, “Sure, you can get it for 600.”

So they gave away 25 percent of my bread, thinking that nonprofit somehow means a charity. That’s how ignorant they are.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: I mean, god, one of the wealthiest associations in the world, that Mark Taper Forum and all that, I mean, they’ve got property all over. Everywhere you look there’s a new Mark Taper Forum something or other, and you know, that’s—Well, anyway.

CLINE: I’m going to turn over the tape.

SMITH: Okay. I’m sorry, I don’t mean to go on and on.

CLINE: This is good. We like this.

SMITH: Just go like this and go [gestures] or go like this [gestures].

CLINE: No, no, that's all right. One moment.

TAPE NUMBER: X, SIDE TWO

SEPTEMBER 10, 2003

CLINE: Okay. We're back. I know you would have been very young, but do you remember anything about the amalgamation of the two unions [Local 47 and Local 767] that used to be in L.A.?

SMITH: No. Only what I've read.

CLINE: Okay. Because, of course, people like Marl Young—you mentioned Marl Young—he was one of the key figures in that whole thing.

SMITH: Well, it's funny, it's like when you read about when they had the Negro Baseball League, and it's almost a shame that this all gets lost. It's like they'll just call the best and take them and put them in the white team, and now there's no more Negro Baseball League, which was marvelous, you know. But I don't know, it's very difficult. Very difficult, you know.

All those people, they're highly able, you know. When they joined the two unions, then they have half as many jobs for the people. I mean, Elmer—

CLINE: Elmer Fain.

SMITH: Yeah, Elmer Fain. I think he did work for the union, but these are guys that were, you know, capable guys and sort of cutting their own throats by amalgamating.

CLINE: Yeah. Yeah, it's a strange dilemma. It's a little bit like when the housing covenants were abolished in L.A. and now, of course, African Americans can live wherever they want, which is great, except that then, of course, their central place of their own culture then deteriorates, gets lost.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah.

CLINE: It's a double-edged sword.

SMITH: Yeah, the middle class leaves.

CLINE: Yeah. It's a very difficult thing.

SMITH: Well, I'd like to see what it's like in a thousand years. Probably be like Iraq.

[mutual laughter]

CLINE: Any other people during this time period that you want to take a look at?

SMITH: I'll just run down the list here.

CLINE: I know there was a lot of people you played with.

SMITH: Alan Jackson, one of my favorite bass players. Fidel Pontrelli. Did I talk about the Pontrelli brothers?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: There was a family and they were all musicians. There was an uncle that had a Pontrelli Ballroom or something, and they were all combination business-teacher-musicians and incredibly— Fidel's one of those incredibly talented people. He was in the army with Cannonball and they became real close friends. And they used to come over. Cannonball, man, he just loved it, because they were these Italian "Let's eat for like days," you know.

CLINE: Food as religion.

SMITH: I mean, god, a lot of food. They had a Pontrelli Sausage Company and a Pontrelli this and a Pontrelli that, and Pontrelli furniture.

Anyway, the Pontrelli Ballroom was kind of a mainstay. I worked a lot with Fidel around that time, just an incredible talent. Could play anything. Could play anything.

CLINE: Trumpet?

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, he could play like Raphael Mendez, you know.

Mayo Tiano, a great trombone player, moved to Chicago.

Let's see. Bob Sakama I mentioned.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Let's see. I think I'm just wanting— Now, I'm here to 1980. Mike Stephans. Steve Solder, drummer. Real fine drummer.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Do you know Steve?

CLINE: Yeah, I remember Steve, yeah. Speaking of some drummers with health problems.

SMITH: Yeah. Boy, he was fun for me to play with, and we worked around for quite a bit and then sort of drifted apart. Jack Coan, great trumpet player, played like Clifford Brown, really, really and truly.

CLINE: Before we leave the drummers, you mentioned Mike Stephans, and he's somebody who kind of fell off the scene for a while, but is kind of selectively working his way back. What can you say about Mike? A very unusual, I think, guy on the scene and not very well known.

SMITH: Yeah, he's a poet, too. He's responsible for me playing with Brookmeyer, so I'm deeply indebted to him. Back in those days he played real loud and he had

such good time, but he played so loud. When he reemerged, he's not playing loud anymore, so it's really easier to play with him. He's sort of betwixt and between right now, you know, playing and teaching and writing poetry and like that, but a dear man and a great talent, but he's got too many drums, though. [laughs]

CLINE: Actually I just saw him a couple of weeks ago and he had like a little four-piece kit.

SMITH: I'll be darned.

CLINE: There you go.

SMITH: There you go.

CLINE: He was playing with Bobby Bradford, in fact.

SMITH: Wow.

CLINE: Yeah. Well, they teach at the same institution, I believe, now, over at Pasadena City College.

SMITH: Pasadena City College, yeah. '80, Brookmeyer. My band [Putter Smith Quintet] was working around town.

CLINE: Okay. Perfect opportunity, because I have this on the list here. You recorded a couple of albums and you were working as a band leader. How did the opportunity to document your music come about? How did you get these recording things in the works?

SMITH: Well, I think it came through by way of Kent Glenn from Pat Britt. Kent was associated with Pat Britt, and Kent has always been very encouraging with my music. I'm doing a tour with him in about two weeks, going up north and we're going to do a five-day thing here. He's bringing a couple of young people out from New

York, a tenor player [Grant Langford] and a drummer, and the drummer's a lady [Lucianna Padmore]. So I'm looking forward to that. He says, "Now, be sure to bring some original material," you know. He's a great songwriter. I mean, whoa, man, beautiful. Beautiful. Have I talked much about Kent?

CLINE: You talked about him, yeah. Well, you said he's, among other things, responsible for you returning to the upright bass.

SMITH: Yes, and Kent is a guy that can make diamonds out of mud. I mean, he will go somewhere where nothing's happening, and within a few months there'll be a big music scene happening. This happened in Fort Bragg. I saw it. I mean, there's nothing up there.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: You know, there's no one, there's nothing. Pretty soon he has a morning, nine o'clock everybody who can play anything and they have an hour of playing Bach, you know, and they're all reading the same music, it's unison, you know, or there might be two parts or whatever, and before you know it, he's got like nine people doing this. You know, a flute player and a clarinet player and a trumpet player and this thing. And then he's finding all these talents that are hidden under these places, you know, and he comes up with this girl who plays baritone [saxophone]. It's unbelievable. This chick can play all of the "Bird" [Charlie Parker] tunes from memory.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: It's like unbelievable, you know. He gets this big scene happening, quartets and trios, and if there's enough people he'll have a big band, and then time will— You

know, he'll move on. He'll move on. He's been in New York for ten years now, and he kind of gets the underdog people, you know, the underling people who are— Like he was talking about when he was back there he was working with Joey Schildkraut, and he named a whole bunch of people he's working with, and you've sort of heard of most of them, you know. And he's always been an admirer of Gil Evans, and that's kind of the way he writes. But what a force. He's a force in music. And he remembers everything. Everything. He remembers what time of day, you know, who was there. There's a guy that—

CLINE: Somebody needs to interview him. We'll get Columbia University on the case.

SMITH: Well, hopefully. Okay. Did I follow through on what you were talking about?

CLINE: Well, we'll still talking about the recording.

SMITH: Oh, mine. Okay. So that's it. So we went in and recorded. I think we did it in two days, maybe a couple of false starts on some studios and stuff, but we ended up— It ends up you have to go to a good studio and that's what it ends up being. We went to Sage and Sound [Studios] and got the product, and then I went back in a few years later and started on the next project [*Lost and Found*], which didn't get released for almost twenty years.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: And recorded bits and pieces of it over the next twenty years and then it finally got out. It had two different bands on it.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: The first one got great reviews all over the world; didn't sell anything.

CLINE: Yeah, of course.

SMITH: But it got really good reviews. I was amazed. Then I used— You know, I got into the thing of making a press kit, you know, Xeroxing everything and, you know, all that stuff, and I started working at the Pilgrimage Theater and the Music Center Plaza and the ARCO [Towers], those kind of gigs, you know, big concert gigs. Small bread.

CLINE: Right. Right. Sometimes nice—

SMITH: Oh, \$150 or something like that.

CLINE: But nice crowds.

SMITH: Yeah, you're actually playing for an audience.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: So I got on a pretty good— That was for five years, and I was working one gig a month. That was my thing, was to get one gig. And every time we worked I would lose between fifty and a hundred bucks.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: That's every time. Then we played Father's Day at the Pilgrimage, Ford Theater, is that what it is?

CLINE: It's now the John Anson Ford Theater.

SMITH: Yeah.

SMITH: Who in the hell is John Anson Ford?

CLINE: Oh, some city council person or county supervisor.

SMITH: Unbelievable. And this one drummer, who shall remain nameless, had been begging me to play with the band. You know, “Let me play with the band. Please let me. Please, please,” you know.

And I said, “Okay. Now, all right. Now, we’re going to have a sound check at one-thirty, gig starts at two, and we have to be there ready to play at one-thirty.”

Because that had become essential to me, is a sound check. He shows up at ten after two. Ten minutes after the concert starts, he shows up, “Something came up.” Well, your career didn’t come up, as far as I’m concerned.

Now, at the same time two of the guys, the horn players, I guess who should remain nameless, although I’ve talked about them before, and they had just gotten back from Japan, and this guys are chronic unemployables at the time, chronic unemployables, you know. Both are marvelous players. Well, it was [John] Gross and [Bruce] Fowler, you know.

CLINE: Yes, I think we could have deduced from this last session that it could have been them, yeah.

SMITH: Yeah. They’re both hungover from twelve hours on the plane and probably twelve hours of being drunk, you know, or twelve days of being drunk. They’ve both got like this thing, you know, and says, “We came home for this?” you know, on our break.

So the whole stress thing, factor, combined and I said, “No more. I don’t want to be a band leader anymore.” You know, like they don’t appreciate it at all, you know, and I can use the extra grand a year.

CLINE: Right. If it just becomes another gig to these guys, yeah. It’s like “Ehh.”

SMITH: Yeah. You know, I'm sorry I did that. I'm sorry I gave in to that stress, but I did, and I'm sorry I didn't just keep going. I started up again about three years ago, and it really satisfies a deep something in me, that I feel so good when I work on my own music. I can be real messed up in a whole bunch of ways, you know, and go back and start working on my writing and stuff, and I come out exhilarated. Then when I rehearse it, it's like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." There's a lot of problems.

CLINE: Yeah. Let's talk about who is in your band [Left Coast] now and how things are going with that.

SMITH: Well, John Whinnery is the alto player and he's a most unusual player for these days. He has a sound that you'd compare to Paul Desmond. So at first thought you say he sounds like Paul Desmond, but he's actually playing like Warne Marsh, you know. Very melodic. And of course, Warne Marsh came out of Lester Young. So it's very beautiful, you know, that kind of stuff. I love that. It's similar to Gary Foster's playing.

Kendall Kay is the drummer. You know, he's just wonderful. Theo Saunders is playing piano, a very exciting piano player and great guy to hang with.

But I mean, there are problems that emerge, you know, like, "I want you to play this. I don't want you to play that." You know, and it's so hard to tell people how to play, you know. It's not to tell them what to play, but, you know, "I want more balance. I don't want you to stick up. When this guy's playing, I want him to stick out." Try to lead them around, you know, just make them sound good, you know.

But it's real exciting and I love it, and it surprises me how fast the book gets big with a lot of stuff, but I still need more.

CLINE: That's great.

SMITH: They're going to feature my music at the American Jazz Institute.

CLINE: Oh, really.

SMITH: Yeah, next month down there at that Pickford Auditorium, you know.

We've been doing LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] and different little concert venues around. I tried working in a club and it just doesn't work for this band.

CLINE: It requires concentrated listening.

SMITH: It requires people listening. You know, there can be some conversations going on, but I worked at Spazio and it was like, oh, Christ, you know. We ended up just throwing the book out and just blowing; that was the only thing that made any sense. You try to play a delicate arrangement and it's like a waste of time. You feel like a fool, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Well, you know, I mean, you do, you feel foolish because here you are trying to recite poetry to the freeway, you know. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: It doesn't make much of a dent.

CLINE: No.

SMITH: And then Ruth Price called me last month and asked me to bring the band into the [Jazz] Bakery. I was completely shocked, I mean, that she even knew who I

was. I mean, the band, you know, because I don't use my name in it; I just call it Left Coast.

CLINE: Yeah, the Left Coast.

SMITH: Yeah. Although in her ad it's got Putter Smith's Left Coast.

CLINE: Right. Well, it helps draw the people.

SMITH: The secret's out. Yeah, they'll be coming in droves, you know.

CLINE: Right. To see you.

SMITH: We got a bus rented, a shuttle to the airport. [laughs]

CLINE: Right. So if you can, if you have any theories, what do you attribute the improvement in the amount of work and maybe even the quality of work that you started to see in the eighties and the moving up to the present day?

SMITH: Well, it may be the inner thing that happened to me, that I told you about, feeling better about it. And it may be that not only did it happen for me, but then when other people heard that Bob Brookmeyer was hiring me, that even though Thelonious Monk had hired me, and during the problem after the movie [*Diamonds Are Forever*], that maybe it was like, "Oh, he's really going to stick it out. You know, he really is a musician." Maybe enough time had gone by, and maybe I just got better, enough better. Maybe it finally started paying off, those three months in Japan or whatever, you know. I don't know. I don't know, it just really got better and has stayed really good. I mean, I can't recall a dry period since then. But I'm still afraid to take off, because I look at my book and three weeks from now it's white.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: You know.

CLINE: Empty squares.

SMITH: Yeah. I mean, there'll be a few things here and there, so that's why you take everything, because the future is so uncertain. That's one of the great things about being a musician like ourselves, is that we really know, we really understand what the future is. I mean, these people that are working at wherever they're working, you know, Occidental Life Insurance [Company] or something, they don't.

CLINE: The RAND Corporation.

SMITH: Yeah. Or Enron. Yeah. "Hey, I'm straight. I'm at Enron. I'm all set. I've got this huge pension," and they're out on the street and they have no idea what they're going to do.

CLINE: Yeah, right. What about some of the work you did with Alan Broadbent? I would have thought that would have sort of, you know, tipped people off as to what you'd been up to musically.

SMITH: Well, the jazz scene here really isn't that great. I mean, I feel like I have a lot of respect. I mean, I sense that people like my playing and are glad to see me, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But basically there is no living to be made in jazz here, you know, without traveling and I'm not—I guess I'm the wrong age or something, you know, and I'm too young and too old at the same time. I mean, I'm too young to be a legend and too old to be in the hot young band, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But I don't know. You know, when you're dated, your music is dated, even though you're in the fires of creation, you know, when somebody else will hear it, they'll go, "Oh, yeah, man, I like that old stuff," you know.

You said, "Old stuff? This is being born as you see it, you know."

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But that's what it is. It's the way I play as opposed to the way Darek plays, you know. I mean, he's a modern bass player and I'm basically an older, you know, middle-of-the-road bass player. I don't know what you call it, because I'm certainly creative. I mean, I know that. But I try to fill the bill of who I play with, and if I'm playing with Lou Levy, I want to play what Lou Levy wants. Of course, I won't be playing with Lou for a long time.

CLINE: No, let's hope not.

SMITH: But Alan, Alan and I have, aside from that period where we had Linda's, we've never had any kind of steady work. We'll occasionally go out and do a short tour or do a concert. You know, we're going to New Zealand in December for ten days with the Auckland Philharmonic, and that's great. Marvelous, you know. He's involved in writing and conducting and stuff like that, and these people have their own— You know, when he conducts for Diana Krall, I mean, John Clayton's got it sewed up. [laughs]

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: They're all like that. They all have their own people, you know, the singers. I'm not that trustworthy, anyway. I can't help it. I can't be stiff. I just have to kind of

go with the way I hear it. Sometimes they get very rigid, want it to be exactly the same.

CLINE: Yes, right.

SMITH: I remember the first time I ever got fired on a gig for notes, and I was nearly thirty, and I realized that I had finally begun to come into my own, because I couldn't tell the difference between what they wanted and what I heard. I couldn't hear that what I was hearing was unsuitable. "Are you kidding? I mean, this is beautiful, what I'm playing," and then I realized, going home, I'm actually hearing my own thing here.

CLINE: So you didn't want to play with them anyway.

SMITH: Well—I was looking here in '81, and as you said that, I thought of the change I had about hearing Miles [Davis]-Herbie Hancock-Wayne Shorter band. When I first heard them live—

CLINE: Oh, the quintet?

SMITH: Yeah. I heard them live when they just started at the Hollywood Bowl, and I couldn't understand it at all. I thought they were being very cynical. Did I tell you this before?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: I mean, I thought they were purposely being cynical and rude and trying to sound as far-out as they could, you know.

CLINE: Purposely obtuse.

SMITH: Yeah. That's the way I heard it, like I was kind of offended. Then ten years later on the radio I heard "Nefertiti," which was recorded two weeks after that concert,

and it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever heard. [Cline laughs.] It just shows you that when you're ready to hear something, you know, and not before. Then I bought the album and listened to it in my car a couple of times a day for a year. I got to where I knew every note on the album. I know there's a place where the whole band comes in a bar late.

CLINE: Yeah, yeah. No, it's one of my favorite albums, as a matter of fact.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, I love everything about it, you know, Ron Carter's time. Beautiful.

CLINE: Tony Williams' rushing.

SMITH: I didn't even notice that.

CLINE: Yeah. I think it was on his tune ["Hand Jive"].

SMITH: Really?

CLINE: Yeah, he kind of starts pushing a bit. He did that a lot.

SMITH: I'll be darned.

CLINE: Pushing Ron forward.

SMITH: I'll be darned. Boy, Ron, whew.

CLINE: Yeah. Pretty stable.

SMITH: He's got that time like I was talking about like Eric, you know. Jeez, it's beautiful, ten feet wide.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: So that was the high point of 1981.

CLINE: So before I leave the Wynton Marsalis question, one of the things that's in more recent memory for many people was the Ken Burns jazz documentary [*Jazz: A*

Film by Ken Burns] that was so heavily sort of— Which so heavily carried the agenda of Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center jazz people in New York. Did you see it, and if so, did you have any feelings about it?

SMITH: I saw a great deal of it, yeah, and I really can't see what the complaint is. I mean, we all have— I mean, I could give you a list of things I think should have been in there that aren't and stuff, but the fact that it was done at all, and so much of it so well.

Then I saw an interview of Ken Burns and Wynton Marsalis by Charlie Rose, and, gee whiz, I mean, Ken Burns, I thought he was marvelous, you know. Both of them. They were talking about what they were trying to do. They were only trying to go to 1960. That was the—

CLINE: Yeah, I know. That was the biggest complaint is that they only went to 1960.

SMITH: And they left out a whole lot of stuff, but I mean, I'm tickled at that. I think that that has a great effect.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Is that what you meant?

CLINE: Well, yeah, that's an example, a more recent example.

SMITH: Yeah. That, I think, had a tremendous effect on popularity of jazz and the acceptance of it. The Lincoln Center [Jazz Orchestra] thing, I don't get it, you know. And Wynton Marsalis is a marvelous player. I mean, he kills me. Whenever I hear him solo, I go, man, this guy's great, but I'm just not interested in that. And I love Duke Ellington.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I love it, but it doesn't sound like Duke Ellington.

CLINE: No, it's like *Beatlemania*.

SMITH: Yeah, something.

CLINE: Do you remember *Beatlemania*? It was "not the Beatles, but an amazing
"simulation."

SMITH: That was before my time.

CLINE: Yeah, right. [mutual laughter] It's interesting, as it's kind of this harkening
back, you know, this recreating stuff.

SMITH: Yeah. Well, I like to see jazz be treated like classical music in a way. I
mean, there's certainly a lot of it. I mean, I think the Miles plus nineteen thing ought
to be performed in every symphony in the world, you know, that whole thing
[*Sketches of Spain*] as a piece, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Note for note, you know. I mean, that's some artwork, and so much of Duke
Ellington is the same way, right in the same period, too. Art Tatum, his stuff should
all be on the classical repertoire, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Jesus, I mean, you know, his stuff is note for note, every one is exactly the
same. I've got a twenty-year span of him doing "Yesterdays," I think. "Yesterdays,"
and note for note exactly the same. You know, 1930, 1940, 1950, exactly the same,
note for note, slight variance in tempo, but everything about it— So those are actually
all compositions, you know, or you might call them variations on a theme written by
Art Tatum. I mean, that's amazing. I mean, the body of work of that guy. And every

one of those pieces is a virtuoso, and no superfluous. I mean, people, sometimes they hear Art Tatum and they go, “Oh, man, he’s playing all this flowery stuff,” you know, but it’s not.

Okay. I’m sorry.

CLINE: Well, I have another question while we’re on this topic. In recent years, also one of the things that has changed in many ways has really continued or furthered the idea of jazz being more likened to classical music is the whole notion of jazz education, which has become pretty big in the last ten years especially. Do you have any feelings about how jazz is now being taught, and what are those feelings, and do you have any ideas about what this means for jazz music right now?

SMITH: Well, there are more people playing jazz than there ever were and there’s a bigger audience than there ever was, but that’s only because there’s almost twice as many people as there were. It’s a much smaller audience, relatively, than it used to be, but numerically it’s a bigger audience. But there’s still— You know, the combination of everything, the fact that you don’t make a— You can’t even get a record out and then you don’t make a penny on it if you do.

It’s a real personal career choice, and I think that it should be highly personal, you know. But there’s a lot of stuff you can learn, a lot of fundamental stuff you can learn about the music. I really don’t know how it’s taught, because, I mean, I’m not teaching jazz. I’m teaching reading and physical playing of the instrument. I have a few students that I show my stuff, you know, and they eat it up and love it.

CLINE: But certainly it wasn’t taught in college before, so that’s one big difference.

SMITH: No, no. Almost all music— Right now I'm teaching theory, Walter Piston's book on theory, and it's stupid. I mean, it's just—I mean, that's probably the wrong word. That's probably way too harsh. Way harsh. Way harsh, dude.

But it's like to take something like C7 and call it the five-two of the six, you know. Well, why don't you just call it C7, you know? And it's kind of real complicated arcane thinking and using, you know, the hirsute quadruped canine dear associate of the hominid, you know, when you could say *dog*.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: You know, I mean, it's like—

CLINE: Yeah. Right. That's academia.

SMITH: You know, fuck. You know, I object to that and I think that's in all— Pretty much all music, not just jazz, but all of it. They make a big mystery out of something that's— Probably because they don't really know. It's not that— I mean, it's incredibly complicated, but it's like fractal mathematics, you know. It's a group of simple things, and then if you try to think of it a certain way it becomes impossible to think about. The guy's playing a blue note and so they go, "Well, that's the sharp five of the—," dah, dah, dah. Come on, man, he's playing one of the blue notes.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: We let that in, you know. There are notes that can't be defined in the harmonic scheme, and that's where this Piston book falls apart. They're trying to define us. They're trying to define counterpoint as harmony, you know. It's a double appoggiatura.

CLINE: Yeah. And that book has been the standard for decades.

SMITH: Yes, that's why it's being used in this degree thing, is because, you know, they'll say, "Well, what did they work on?"

"Oh, they did the Piston book."

"Oh, that's good. *Das ist gut*, 'every good boy does fine,' 'all cows eat grass.'" You know.

You know, to me it's the same thing. There's a whole thing about parallel minors, relative minors, and it's all just— His whole book is written about that stuff, endless chapters, and it's, like, meaningless. You know, C-minor and E-flat, they're two different keys, you know, period. Why try to connect them?

Okay. I'm ranting now.

CLINE: Yeah, but that's okay. But I mean, jazz started out virtually as street music. I mean, this is something you certainly couldn't learn in school. Do you think this changes the music or the perception of the music in any way to have it taught academically or maybe in more of a formulaic way?

SMITH: I think it should be both. I really think that the street is an important part of it, and I think it's an important part of real classical music, too. The street should be there, you know. It should be the guy that's grabbing the instrument, doesn't know anything about it, beating, and you know, "Yeah." So that that's a foundation, you know, that that's the inner thing. All you've got is the muse, you know, and that should be always a prime concern, to have the muse in your corner. And then all the other stuff won't hurt you, you know. I mean, it'll help. You know, if you can play every note on your instrument, you're better off, and if you know how to go from

anywhere to anywhere, that's a big help, you know. But first the thing has to come from the muse.

Yeah, I'm reading—I've been reading these old biographies. Not old biographies; biographies and autobiographies and interviews of old jazz musicians. And it's fascinating, you know. First of all, like the guys in New Orleans, they're all studied, you know.

CLINE: Yeah. Yeah, you mentioned that earlier. That was pretty amazing.

SMITH: Good readers, you know. King Oliver, I've just read a thing, King Oliver was a great reader. And the guy who I was trying to remember, his name was Collins, something Collins. I wish I could remember his first name. I want to say Roy Collins. Anyway, that was the guy that never got real successful because he couldn't read. Remember I was telling you about that?

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: Yeah. Collins.

CLINE: Yeah, you'll get a chance to answer that query when you get the transcript. You can fill in the name.

SMITH: And Louis Armstrong, great reader. These guys are all accomplished, you know, and then they play with that sound, the same way that, you know, [Eddie] "Lockjaw" Davis, you know, could take a clarinet and play, you know, perfect C-major scale, you know. Then when he plays, you know, it sounds like a cross between Earl Bostic and Coleman Hawkins.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: One of my favorites, by the way, Lockjaw.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: There's an unsung giant.

CLINE: Yeah, that's true.

SMITH: Unsung. So original.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, so it has to sound— It's your own sound, but learning the instrument, I mean, you know, is applying learning how to do all these things that you do with the sticks, you know, and being real precise and then you go beat it.

CLINE: Yeah. Yeah, right.

SMITH: You know?

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And I liken it to working out on the— You know, you're working out with this punching bag and the bag and everything, and boxer, you know, and you're swinging a left-right and a left jab and you're practicing all that stuff and everything and you're getting really good. Then you get in the ring and somebody's trying to kill you, and it becomes totally a street fight.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: And it's just what comes automatically.

CLINE: Right. The combination of discipline and instinct in a way.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: I think it was Charlie Parker who said something about, you know, you study all these things and you practice and develop all your technique and then you forget all that shit and just play.

SMITH: That's right. That's right. Yeah, that's right. I mean, I think that should be the goal, is just, you know, abandon yourself to the— Like Woody Hayes, you know, give yourself all those chops, you know, as much as you can.

CLINE: Do you think— Let me see if I can phrase— How I want to phrase this question. What, if any, changes have you heard in recent years in younger players having or not having their own voice on the instrument in jazz music?

SMITH: Well, that's why I like John Whinnery, because I detect his own voice. I heard a real wonderful guy, Garrett Kobzev the other day, he sounded beautiful, you know. I don't know if he would be recognizable. John Gross is totally recognizable, you know. But there is a thing of having a beautiful— It's really truly the inner sound of the person. You can hear it, you know. Then there's the other thing where it develops into a recognizable style because of— Usually because of the quirks.

CLINE: Yeah, what starts out as maybe even limitations but become innovation.

SMITH: Yeah. To me, this is composition that we're doing, and composition is solving problems, and it's the way you solve problems. It's your choices for the solutions that give you the style, and I don't think anybody should try to create a style.

I worked with Mose Allison, and this '81 here, I've got down when I first worked with him, John Dentz. But I worked with him last year, and when I worked with him in '81 I had fun, although it was very weird, but John Dentz is such a great drummer that it was fun. And then this time I worked with him without a drummer and it was impossible; I just couldn't. But I love his songs, I love his singing, and when he improvises it's like— I have no idea.

Anyway, we were in the dressing room and he was talking about the

elements-- somebody was interviewing him--the elements required to be a successful jazz musician, and he kind of emphasized that you have to have your own recognizable style, and I thought that's what he's trying to do there. He's actually made a choice to do this sound. And I think that your style has to come out of the way you solve problems, that you can't say, "I'm going to be weird," or "I'm going to be—. ."

CLINE: It's not this external sort of force.

SMITH: Yeah, absolutely. I think it has to come to you.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: You know, and anybody that spends enough time, it will come to them. And enough time being forty years, in my case. [mutual laughter] I mean, if you feel like there's something in there and you enjoy solving the problems, then go for it, and at some point people will say, "I heard you. I recognized you." Great, you know. But, yeah, is it the word *organic*? It has to be an organic development.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Mose, I love his— God, I love his songs. There's a poet. Jesus.

Okay. Going through my notes here, just saying, Freddie Gruber, and at one point I was trying to interview him.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: He was very— First he was hot on the idea, then he got very cagey and edged away and everything. But one of the things he told me was, he was Lennie Tristano's first drummer.

CLINE: Oh, really.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: Isn't that something?

CLINE: I had no idea.

SMITH: I'm just looking for standouts here.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: Names. You probably know—I'm just going to say it, Tony Dumas.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: Remember the place where I met Joey Baron? The name of that place was Tails Out, with the couches.

CLINE: Oh, yeah. You were calling it the Couch.

SMITH: It's the Tails Out.

CLINE: Tails Out. Huh.

SMITH: Joe Roccisano, I played with him quite a bit here for a couple of years, mostly in quartet. I still hadn't learned how to read at this point, and I couldn't— His band was incredible. I rehearsed with them once or twice. He gave me a look like, "Are you kidding?" [mutual laughter]

At the same time, my quintet's working at the Music Center [of Los Angeles County] and stuff like that.

Mark Murphy. The first time I ever met Mark Murphy was Milcho [Leviev] got the gig and called me. So I'm out at Milcho's house and we're waiting for Mark to show up, the gig is that night, there's two or three nights or something. And where we were working I had seen an ad in the paper and it wasn't his name. So he showed

up, and he was very weird in those days. So he comes in and he's like hot and sweaty and with all this pancake makeup on, and maybe even lipstick, and a big fright wig, and he's driving an old trailer house, you know, old Winnebago or something, an old beat-up— He's living in, I mean, it's sad, you know.

So he comes in, you know, and I said, "You know, the paper says such and such."

He gets on the phone, and turns out that he was wrong and he had driven down from San Francisco or something in this fucking Winnebago. [mutual laughter]

And then I got to work with him in the last four or five years and, oh, god, he's so good. He's so good and much more together, you know. Still wears a pretty funny wig. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Yeah, wiggy.

SMITH: Let's see here. And this is the year I worked with the Buddy Rich Trio. I told you about that before.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: With the Long Beach Symphony [Orchestra], right?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: *West Side Story*.

CLINE: Yeah, we talked— I didn't realize it was the trio. Who else was in the trio?

SMITH: Alan Broadbent.

CLINE: Oh.

SMITH: Yeah, they called me and asked me if I could get Alan to do it, and I said, "Sure."

CLINE: Okay. While you're looking at your list, I'm going to put in a new tape so we don't lose anything here.

SMITH: Okay.

TAPE NUMBER: XI, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 10, 2003

CLINE: Looks like things are working. This is Alex Cline interviewing Putter Smith, and it's still September 10th, 2003. This is tape number eleven.

We were talking about some of the people that you were working with from the eighties, and bringing things up through the nineties into the present, some notables.

SMITH: Okay. Just I'm going to skim through here.

CLINE: You did mention the name Tom Garvin while we were off tape, and I wondered if there was anything you wanted to say about him, because he's another unsung pianist here.

SMITH: Oh, my god, he is so good and such a great accompanist, good writer, and I understand he does orchestration and stuff like that, and a real down-home character. You know, if you met him on the street you wouldn't even think he was a musician. A million stories about Tom, but I won't endeavor to— I'll leave that to someone else.

I'm just going to sort of skim and rattle on. Stop me if I'm—

CLINE: Okay. Go ahead.

SMITH: You were asking about lady musicians. Libby Jo Snyder, flute player.

CLINE: I don't know her.

SMITH: She was quite good. She's around town still and working around.

Another one is Jennifer Morris, piano player, and she was very active on the scene up till about ten years ago and really working hard to get it together. I don't

know if it's common or not, but got married and has a wonderful family, five kids, and she's very happy. She was very talented.

CLINE: Okay. While we're on the subject of female musicians, one of my questions I wanted to ask you is, earlier you mentioned, for example, you were going to be playing with a female drummer coming up soon, and this is an instrument, which, of course, has kind of been considered probably somewhat "manly" over the years, and now we have some pretty famous female jazz drummers, Terri Lyne Carrington and Cindy Blackman, for example, but not so many female bass players, and yet there were a couple here in town. I don't know how aware of them that you were.

SMITH: Oh, Nedra Wheeler.

CLINE: Nedra Wheeler.

SMITH: Yeah. Great time, great feel, strong player, reads good. I sound like her agent. [mutual laughter]

Leslie Baker, you know, she's very active. She was a student of mine, you know. When she was, I don't know, seventeen or eighteen she came to me. She'd tell me some gig, you know, and she said— I shouldn't say this on tape.

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: You know, I really shouldn't, but it was funny. I'll let you be the judge, you know. She was young, you know, she was eighteen or something, and she got offered a gig in Bakersfield, you know, and when she told me about it, I said, "Well, it sounds like the guy, just kind of like wants to get you up there and have sex or something."

And she goes, "Yeah," like, "What's wrong with that?" [mutual laughter]

I mean, that's, you know, that's kind of like the way I would have— When I was eighteen that's what— I mean, I certainly would have felt like that, too, you know. Cracked me up. But I don't know if that should be in there or not, you know.

CLINE: No. Okay. That's up to you.

SMITH: She's a married woman now. But she's a real sweetheart.

CLINE: Did you ever know Mary Ann McSweeney?

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Oh, she's great. Great player.

CLINE: She went to New York.

SMITH: Yes. She married Mike Faun.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Yeah, we played in a symphony together. Well, one time. She's great, really, really a good player. Of course, the best girl bass player I ever heard in my life was Jennifer Leitham.

CLINE: Oh, really.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, I heard her and I'm sure that there's going to be books written about her and her father, John. You know who I'm talking about; John Leitham.

CLINE: I know who John Leitham is.

SMITH: Yeah. Jennifer Leitham. It's John Leitham.

CLINE: Oh, really?

SMITH: You didn't know this?

CLINE: No, I didn't know this.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Well, gee, they've had several articles in the paper, a documentary.

CLINE: Oh, I missed this entirely. I played with John Leitham when he was still John. Wow.

SMITH: I had conversations with him. We met in an airport one time and had an hour conversation. I said, "Let me get your number," and he wrote his number down. I said, "Wait a minute. You're writing with your right hand. I thought you were left-handed."

He said, "No, no, I got inspired to play bass by Paul McCartney, and I thought that's the way you did it."

CLINE: Oh, yeah, I always thought he was left-handed.

SMITH: No, he's right-handed.

CLINE: Because it became a deal about him being left-handed.

SMITH: No, he's right-handed.

CLINE: Whoa.

SMITH: Isn't that something?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Anyway, he discovered—I mean, apparently for years has known that he's a woman, although I had never had any slightest idea myself.

CLINE: No, I didn't either.

SMITH: And I started hearing these rumors about three years ago, and, you know, these rumors about he's changing his name to Jennifer and all that stuff, and when I heard it for the third time, I said, "Now, wait a minute. I've got to call," because a rumor like that should be stopped if it's not for real. I certainly would appreciate anybody calling me.

CLINE: Yeah, true.

SMITH: So I called and I talked to his wife and she said, “Oh, yeah, Jennifer.” Oh, my god. She said, “Do you think that’s going to affect his work?”

I said, “Absolutely.” Absolutely, you know.

CLINE: Yeah. Well, jazz is a musical— Or I should say a realm which it’s still really hard if you’re gay, you know, so I can only imagine, you know.

SMITH: Yeah. I can’t understand. I don’t understand why a person would do that, but anyway, it’s something obviously you have to be so— Because you have to go through a year of psychiatrists and all that stuff.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Anyway, I saw her last year about this time, and just had the operation and played the Sweet & Hot Jazz Festival, could hardly move around and was playing, and I went to see her play and it was her. It’s her, not him. It’s her. And just played beautifully. I mean, it was astonishing, I mean, because you’re saying, “This is the best chick bass player I ever saw in my life.” You know, and there was really something different about it, you know, and it made me wonder at the time that maybe the reason the chick— It sounds terrible, sexist, saying things like that. But there has to be a certain obsessive playing and a continual playing, you know, like night after night after night after night for years to get to the level, and John had done that and Jennifer benefited. Jennifer actually played much better than John; a freedom, an ease of movement, and it was like—

CLINE: Yeah, liberated.

SMITH: —“Here I am. This is who the fuck I am,” you know.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: I mean, I was, like, very impressed, it's like, what courage, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Wow.

SMITH: You know, Jesus, you know. And is still working the gig with Doc Severinsen. I'm very proud of the jazz community for letting her, you know, do the hang.

CLINE: Yeah, really.

SMITH: I saw her at Bill Perkins' memorial. Looks much better a year later.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Looked like a chick, man. She's a chick.

CLINE: Whoa.

SMITH: A couple of bass players that I saw. Scott Colley, the first time I saw him, 1982, I've got it written down. It might have been earlier than that. Marvelous talent. The first time I saw him I was watching a marathon, telethon, and they had the Eagle Rock [High School] Jazz Band, you know, he was about fourteen or fifteen, and I just went, "Jesus." He was playing bass like Doug Watkins, you know. Like, oh, my god, you know, I've been trying to do this for thirty-five years. Then we became good friends. I'm glad he moved to New York, because I can use the work. [mutual laughter]

Cliff Hugo was a real student of mine, and I run into him every once in a while. He's had a tremendous, successful career. I was playing in Anaheim, it was about '78 or '79, a Fourth of July Festival, and they had something like twelve basses. This kid comes up to me and introduces himself and he says, "My name's John

Patitucci.” It didn’t even connect. I couldn’t even keep it in my mind. He gave me his number, and then I heard him play somewhere and I went, “Wow, this guy’s great,” you know. He was about sixteen or seventeen.

Then [Frank] Strazzeri, I was working with Strazzeri at the Studio Café in this period and I said, “There’s this kid I saw. He’s really, really good.”

“I don’t want any kids. Never heard of him. Never heard of him.”

I said, “Patitucci, man, he’s your brother, you know. He’s your soul brother.”

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: “Ahh, okay.”

So about a year later I see “Strazz,” and he says, “Yeah, man, I gave John Patitucci his first break.” [mutual laughter] You know, I mean, of course, everybody loves John Patitucci, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Okay. Standouts. Walter Woods. This is going back. It’s just something that made me remember to 1972. He wanted to know if I thought there would be a market for a small bass amp, and I said, “Absolutely.” And he got eight of us, we all put up three hundred bucks apiece to— And he got the parts to build the first eleven, and each of us got our amp for three hundred bucks and he had three left over, that was his profit, and then the rest is history.

CLINE: Yeah, really.

SMITH: I’ve used that amp my whole career and it’s still out in my studio. I have two or three others now that I use around.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But that's quite a good deal.

Loren Newkirk is a piano player I didn't mention that I associated with. You know, he's an unsung, very good musician. He went on to become a teacher.

The guitar player I was telling you about where the cassette recorders would come out.

CLINE: The gypsy guitar player?

SMITH: Lennie Breau.

CLINE: Oh, Lennie Breau.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Oh, wow, yeah. Sure. Yeah, he got kind of a second wind in his career because John McLaughlin started talking about how good he was and how he was an influence, and all these young guys had to go check out Lennie Breau.

SMITH: Well, he was something else, man.

CLINE: Right. Right.

SMITH: He was something else. He did a thing with harmonics that was beautiful.

And in 1982 a big standout for me, they had a big affair at Hop Singh's, the Musicians' Wives—it was an association connected with Local 47—gave V.R.

[Smith] and I a Humanitarian Award of the Year. And I just want to get that in there, because I'm very proud of that, and I don't like to toot my own horn, but that was something, and it involved a continuing contribution.

CLINE: Let's see. I thought of a question related to that and then it just flew right out of my brain. Oh, well.

SMITH: Well, let's see. '83, traveled around with Toshiko's band [Toshiko Akiyoshi-Lew Tabackin Big Band], traveled around with Lew Tabackin, did some traveling with Alan Broadbent, went to Cincinnati and played for the Taft family.

CLINE: Really.

SMITH: The Taft broadcasting family. That was quite interesting. On the way back we stopped at Oshkosh, Nebraska, where an old friend of mine lived who had taken advantage of the fact we were there and put on a concert. It was amazing. I mean, Oshkosh is— It's not Oshkosh—

CLINE: Wisconsin.

SMITH: No, this is Oshkosh, Nebraska. I mean, nothin'.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: You know, and people came out, there were about two hundred people came out from all, you know, eighty miles around, radius.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: It was marvelous. And then this friend of ours, his name is Nurdin, N-U-R-D-I-N, Young, he was kind of a magical carpenter and he took us out to a house he'd built on a lake, and it was like being in the Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' place. It was just amazing. This guy built a barn for Barbra Streisand later. It was marvelous.

 Around that time I was with Manhattan Transfer a couple of times. The guitar player with Willie Bobo's thing was Art Johnson.

CLINE: Oh, okay.

SMITH: Artie Johnson.

CLINE: Right, the real hot player.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah. I was working with the Bill Mays Trio quite a bit of this time, from '83.

George Van Epps, I got to play with him half a dozen times, and he's like the Art Tatum of the guitar, and no doubt about it. No doubt about it, the greatest.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: Chuck Piscitello died in '83. Willie Bobo died in '83. I played with Bob Crosby. I took up golf.

CLINE: Yeah, you mentioned you took up golf, but you didn't say what you thought of it.

SMITH: Oh, I love it. I love it.

CLINE: Do you get to play much?

SMITH: Not as much as I'd like. The first year I was destroying myself, taking lessons, and I would go out and put a support, a bandage on both ankles, on my left elbow and my left wrist, my right forearm, and one day I said, "What am I doing? What am I doing? I can't do this."

So now it's a three par, nine holes. Perfect for me. That's it. It takes about an hour. Perfect. Perfect. Great game. And to all those out there in reader land, take it up now. Don't wait. Don't wait.

CLINE: Oh, yeah. It isn't going to get easier, is it?

SMITH: Well, it's such a joy. Such a joy.

CLINE: So many musicians play golf. What do you think of that? What is your impression?

SMITH: Well, I learned a lot about how to study music from studying golf, because when you go take a golf lesson, you're working on one aspect. If you don't think about anything else, just think about your right ankle, you know, and put your weight on the inside, you know, when you go back. So you're doing that. Okay, now, you've done that twenty times, now do this. And I began to realize, jeez, this is just like studying an instrument. It's not about strength, you know. It's not about athletic prowess. It's all in the brain. It's like if you've ever swept a driveway or something, you get to where you're bouncing a broom, it's like that, you know, which I would think that percussionists would be perfect. Do you play?

CLINE: I don't play. I've never played golf.

SMITH: Well, if you come here next time, I'll take you out and we'll play nine holes.

CLINE: [laughs] Whoa. You know, even rock musicians are playing golf now.

These guys like Tommy Lee and these guys, they play golf; that's what they do.

SMITH: You get out there and here you are in this beautiful green, quiet environment and you're chasing a ball around, you know, and it's fun.

CLINE: Yeah. Well, leave it to the Scottish to come up with this wacky game.

SMITH: It's so fun. There they are.

CLINE: Also one of the things that was really interesting is many years ago, my first interview, actually, for the oral history program is with Paul Tanner, who was the lead trombone player in the Glenn Miller Orchestra and became one of the prominent leaders in jazz education in its infancy, actually wrote one of the first jazz history textbooks.

SMITH: I know that name.

CLINE: He became a studio player and then just went into teaching and now is retired. But he was saying in that interview how the swing bands, when they were on the road, their whole schedules were built around when to get to the hall and when to play the gig and when during the daytime they'd be on the golf course. They were all just playing golf at every opportunity when they weren't playing music. It already back then was really set.

SMITH: It's one of the few things that I've ever done where I'm absolutely certain I'm having fun. You know, there's no other reason.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: One day I was driving to the course and I was tired. I was meeting a foursome, and I was tired, and it was a little bit hot and it was quite smoggy, and I just didn't feel like it. And I got there and I parked my car and I said, "I don't feel like it," and I turned around and went home, you know, because I only want it to be fun.

CLINE: Yeah. Yeah, right.

SMITH: It's not my gig, man.

CLINE: Very wise.

SMITH: Okay. At this time I was playing with Eric Marienthal down in this area, and man, he sounded so good, you know. It was like he had a real Art Pepper kind of sound and real solid.

CLINE: And he went into another bag.

SMITH: Then about two years later he started to work—I worked with him maybe a dozen times down there with a piano player Dave [David] Witham.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, of course. I play with Dave.

SMITH: Oh, he's wonderful. Wonderful.

CLINE: Yeah, absolutely.

SMITH: And then a couple years later with Chick Corea and off to a—

CLINE: A whole other career.

SMITH: Off to six figures. You know, and God bless him, great guy, really nice guy.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Bradley's. I worked a week at Bradley's with Alan. I told you about that before. This is '83. I was going to mention a guy named Ronnie Brown. I don't know if he's—I did talk about Abe Most before.

Okay. 1984. I've got Eric Marienthal again. This time I was working with Joe Porcaro and Joe Roccisano. It was a quartet and we were doing a lot of work.

I sent a copy of [Charles] Bukowski to Dave Frishberg. That was kind of a high point. In 1984 is when that acting agent called me up and asked me to start going out on interviews and I did. I got about six gigs in the year, you know, but I really hated it.

The high point of '84, Larry Koonse did his senior recital at USC [University of Southern California] for his master's degree.

CLINE: Okay. Well, thank you for opening the door on that one, because I was going to say, we talked about Dave Koonse, Larry Koonse has come up, but let's talk a little bit about Larry Koonse, jazz guitarist. You've recorded [*Threeplay*] with him, so it was that trio with John Gross and Larry.

SMITH: Oh, yeah.

CLINE: And Larry's now teaching up at CalArts [California Institute of the Arts].

SMITH: Well, first of all, I've known Larry—I've known Larry in the womb. Okay. I mean, Dave and Elaine [Koonse] were my dearest friends and so, I mean, I was there from his birth, and I'm his godfather. He's my godson and I'm very, very—I love that. He's such a spiritual guy, I mean, you know, which is not my doing. He's a deep guy and a true heart. I mean, he's got so much integrity and soul and concern, you know, and the same doubts and cares that we all have, and maybe even more.

But it became apparent very, very early that he was so original. It used to be I could hear very clearly a Jimmy Wyble, I mean, first of all. It's like Jacob the elder and Jacob the younger, you know; one takes up where the other one leaves off. I mean, it's like a smooth transition, Dave to Larry, you know, and then as Larry has—So that's his underpinning, is all that.

Then he got the Jimmy Wyble influence in there, which is— Jimmy Wyble is kind of like Scriabin in a way. I don't mean tonally, but there's a thing about Scriabin that's, it's almost like a dual-personality thing, you know. It's grabbing into being insane, you know.

CLINE: I was going to say, well, considering how things went for old—

SMITH: But I mean, you can hear it in his music. It's real clear to me. It's like, ooh, he's going two ways at once, you know. Jimmy Wyble has mastered— He plays duets with himself, complicated duets, you know, and Larry learned all that stuff and assimilated it all. I mean, he's unbelievable, the power that he plays with, and I really think that there couldn't be a better guitar player in the world than this guy. He never does chops for chops, although I saw him just do a little display the other night, just to let everybody know that—

CLINE: Just remind them that he can be dazzling.

SMITH: You know, because he's going [indicates rapid guitar soloing with his hands] and then one of the other guys was doing a little bit of a showy thing, you know, and so Larry went [demonstrates], you know.

CLINE: Answered it.

SMITH: He tripled it, you know, in spades, as they said.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: Tripled in spades. He's astonishing to me and so original, so original, and so recognizable. I mean, I recognize him immediately when I hear him. That thing we did with Gross, it was very painful for him, and I said, "Larry, you're going to look back at this sometime," because we worked on that for months and months. I think we rehearsed a year and a half before we finally recorded. We actually recorded two, and one of them I'm not letting go of, because we didn't get anything for the first one and I really would like to get some money out of this one, because it cost us to do it, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: I guess it should go out, though. But I mean, people want you to give it to them.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: They want you to give them the rights.

CLINE: That's the way things are now.

SMITH: They want you to give them everything.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: Publishing and writing, Jesus Christ. But anyway, both Gross and I were just pulling out the— You know, like, “Let’s try this. Let’s try this. Let’s do this,” and we’d work for months on the thing, you know. I said, “Larry, you’re going to look back on this.” It kept making him nervous and it was too hard.

CLINE: And he’s very exposed, I suppose, in that setting as well, just guitar, bass, and saxophone.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah. So at one point he actually said, “I’m quitting.”

“No, no, Larry.” I said, “Look, you’re going to look back on this and you’re going to listen back to this music and later in your life and you’re going to go, ‘This is one of the greatest things I ever did,’” you know.

And I still think that. When I hear it, I go, “My god.” Some of the stuff we did was so hard improvisationally, where we’d— Just an example, we did a Ray Reed tune based on “You Stepped Out of a Dream.” What’s it called? “I’m Inclined.” That’s Ray Reed humor. Where we had divided up the song into sixteen phrases. Like the first bar, you know, [indicates], and then the sixteenth or seventeenth bar and then the second phrase and then—

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: You know, like that. And so what you do on your solo, I mean, we would all solo individually. I mean, we were soloing together in tandem and then when we’d hit these phrases, when we hit number one, we’d all play that phrase, and then continue on freely improvising and hit the next phrase, which would be fifteen bars or so later, and we’d all play that phrase. So we’re just interspersing all this freedom with phrases of the song and the concentration is—

CLINE: Brutal.

SMITH: Just trying to figure out how to concentrate on it, you know. I finally figured out how to do my part. But anyway, that's the kind of thing you just can't do, and it took us months to get that together, but it's all real good challenging stuff and it makes you stronger in other ways.

CLINE: It is a great recording.

SMITH: Anyway, Larry Koonse. I'm so proud to know him and to have had some part in his musical and other life, too. Great family. Our families are close. Although we don't hang, but there's a closeness. We get together once every two years or something, families. They really are— The Koonsees are truly like family, you know. Dave and I have been best friends for fifty years.

CLINE: Right. Right. Not many people can claim that.

SMITH: No, especially in a big city, you know.

CLINE: Right, and especially both playing jazz music. One of you didn't go off and become an attorney or something.

SMITH: Yeah.

Shelly Manne dies, '84. That's been a tremendous loss for me. I mean, I still miss him. He was such a great force in the music—

CLINE: Magnanimous, yeah.

SMITH: —in every way, you know. Socially, I mean, he would come out and he's encouraging everybody. A giant, a giant.

Marilyn Feldman died. Her maiden name had been McGraf [phonetic] and she married Victor Feldman. This is a girl I used to double date with. We were friends,

and she and Victor actually, when they were first getting together, it was a comedy of errors. You know, they were very attracted to each other instantly. I think the first time she saw him, she said, "I'm going to marry him," you know, before she even met him. Her father had been a piano player. She was a very attractive chubby little blonde chick, you know.

Of course, they had one thing after another, they couldn't get together, and then they finally were going to come up to my pad, and they actually had made a tryst and they were going to come. And they came in and went into the large room where the bed was and everything like that, and about three minutes later Victor comes out tears coming down his face, sneezing and everything. He's allergic to cats, you know. But they did end up getting together, getting married, having two children, and then he died of a heart attack and she died very soon after. It's a shame.

Tommy Trujillo.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: Do you know Tommy?

CLINE: Sure. Yeah.

SMITH: Okay. Good. Well, he's a giant talent, unsung.

CLINE: Yeah, what happened to him?

SMITH: Well, he's still living down here on Figueroa [Street].

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: I see him every once in a while. A tremendous talent.

CLINE: Yeah. He played with Charles Lloyd for a while.

SMITH: Yes, that's right.

CLINE: With Sonship [Theus].

SMITH: That's right. And he sings, too. A huge talent.

CLINE: Yeah. We're going to wrap it up, I think, maybe soon here and maybe we'll try to do one more, maybe kind of a shorter session where we can talk about some of the people you're playing with locally the last few years, if you have a chance to look over that stuff.

SMITH: Do you want to cool it for now?

CLINE: Yeah. I mean, it sounds like maybe this is a good place to stop.

SMITH: Okay.

CLINE: All right?

SMITH: That's all right with me.

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: So this is where we ended.

CLINE: Right. Tommy Trujillo.

SMITH: Okay. I'll make a note. Oh, wait a minute, I have one more—

CLINE: Well, go ahead.

SMITH: No, that's just Linda's.

CLINE: Linda's, right.

SMITH: That's the only thing I—

CLINE: Okay. We talked about Linda's, yeah. Okay. Thank you for today.

[End of September 19, 2003]

TAPE NUMBER: XII, SIDE ONE

OCTOBER 15, 2003

CLINE: Today is October 15th, 2003. This is Alex Cline interviewing Putter Smith back at his home in South Pasadena, after a brief break in service, as they like to say at UCLA.

We were talking last time about a lot of the notable musicians that you played with, many of whom are unsung, almost unknown, perhaps, outside of the general Los Angeles area or even among just the general Los Angeles jazz musician community. We also had talked some about your teaching, and we want to continue with some of the more memorable people you've worked with in gigs that you've done from, say, the late eighties up through to the present.

I guess, first of all, good morning once again.

SMITH: Good morning.

CLINE: Thanks for meeting with me.

SMITH: Well, thank you.

CLINE: And thank you for supplying the power supply that we needed to make this happen this morning.

SMITH: Yes. We have electricity now.

CLINE: Electricity is a good thing. Many things have happened, actually, since we met, not the least of which is we have a former bodybuilder and mediocre actor for governor-elect at the moment [Arnold Schwarzenegger].

SMITH: You talking about "Adolph Gropesanother"?

CLINE: [laughs] You'll have to spell that for us when you get the interview. Yeah, that guy. Many interesting things have been happening in the world, but we'll talk about music for today, at least at the moment.

One thing I wanted to ask you before we get back into some of these people of the present is that some of the people of the past, and I'm thinking notably of people like Paul Bley and Carla Bley, who left L.A. long ago and have gone on to their own illustrious careers, they've done a lot since those early days, and I wondered how closely you followed any of their musical developments or their career developments since you played with them back in the fifties and early sixties.

SMITH: Not really. I've heard some of Carla's stuff, and I heard a record of Paul, and he seems to have gone into a freeform kind of playing. That sort of thing doesn't interest me, I mean, much, you know, so I really don't know what else he's doing.

See, I'm just sort of committed to that group melodic invention and that's where I'm at, and to me that's a very interesting combination of minds working together off the same basic foundation. But the other stuff, as I've said before, it can be beautiful, but it doesn't maintain my interest, my narrow interest.

CLINE: Right. Okay. We talked about some of these notables and I wondered if, now that we're heading into the nineties here, if there are some outstanding artists that you would like to mention that you worked with, or some important gigs. You've certainly worked with a lot of really notable people. Let's look at the last, you know, ten or fifteen years here and see [inaudible].

SMITH: Well, again, I'll have to go through my list and see, because I've kind of lost chronological sense, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: When I go through these date books I say, “My god, was that twenty years ago?” And then, “My god, was that six months ago? I thought it was twenty years ago.” [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But there’s one I’d like to mention, is Mark Turner. I played with him—I’m not sure if it was this year. See what I mean?

CLINE: Yes.

SMITH: I think it was early this year, March or something, or February. He’s a young man who lives in, I think, Hartford or something like that. But a lot of people I’ve asked about don’t seem to know him, and then suddenly I’ll meet a bunch of people that idolize him. He’s an incredible player, tenor [saxophone] player, and he’s kind of assimilated a whole bunch of different schools, very notably Warne Marsh. And Jesus, that was so wonderful to play with him and to see this young man taking it and forwarding it.

CLINE: When you say young man, what are we talking?

SMITH: Oh, he might be twenty-seven, maybe thirty-two.

CLINE: So he’s young, all right.

SMITH: Yeah. Oh, yeah. But the only time the horn left his mouth was when we went out to eat dinner, and I mean, he just— You know, he’s just completely devoted to forwarding his studies. He was doing a lot of extended upward arpeggios, but they weren’t like regular arpeggios; they were things obviously he had together. But he turned on this range of the instrument. He’s really one of the greats, you know what I

mean, like in a league with Brad Mehldau. I was on a record with Brad Mehldau last year, pulling a bow across some strings, you know.

CLINE: This is the project with Charlie Haden [*American Dreams*]?

SMITH: Yeah, Charlie Haden. But it was really nice to be— I was standing right next to Brad. I've talked to Brad three times, and I saw him in New York and I saw him here at the Alex Theatre. That's your theatre. [laughs]

CLINE: Yeah, named after me. [laughs]

SMITH: Yeah. A very, very nice guy. I saw the band at the Village Vanguard and went backstage. It's not backstage; it's a room on the other end of the— Young, thin guy, you know. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Yeah. Rather wraith-like.

SMITH: You know, marvelous, marvelous musician.

CLINE: And one of the few who has generated a lot of notoriety already for his achievements.

SMITH: Yeah. I hate to see him talking about how good the Madonna album is. I just hate to see that. It's like, come on, man, you know, what about Charlie Parker? Of course, I guess that's—

CLINE: Maybe that goes without saying.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Yeah. One of the reasons I guess he's generated some attention for himself is that he does record songs by people like Radiohead and bands like that.

SMITH: Yeah, which is a very valid thing. I mean, people to incorporate their own milieu.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I just looked that up in the dictionary and you accent the second syllable.

Milieu.

CLINE: Yeah, Brad, he seems to be a success story at this point.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I don't think that he's Bill Evans. I mean, he does things that are more extraordinary timewise and everything. Because I listened to him for about three months, and— Did I tell you about all this dream I had?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Okay. Because when people— You know, when somebody really who you respect a lot tells you that this guy is great, you go, "Okay. I'm going to listen." So I got a CD and I'd listen to it all the time for three months, you know, and a lot of this, I don't know what you'd call it exactly, time where it changes, where the time changes, but it— Well, it took me a long time just to understand what he was doing and be able to listen to it. Like he'll play something in 4/4, 3/4, 4/4, 3/4, and then on the 3/4 he'll play four against three, and he'll play the eighth-notes over that. So he'll start an eighth-note lying in the 4/4 and continue it with the new kind of eighth-notes, and it's very disconcerting, you know. I mean, I thought I'd have to really be concentrated and sort of open to it, and it took me a long time to be able to hear it. Then I decided it wasn't emotionally grabbing me after about three months and I stopped listening to it.

Then about six months later I was dreaming. I was dreaming I was at a party with nice warmly tan-lighted room and a few people and it was very comfortable and everything, and the Brad Mehldau Trio was playing in the corner and it was just

beautiful, emotionally beautiful. And I woke up and I got up out of bed and put the CD on and listened to it, and it was exactly like the dream.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: So the emotional gate had opened for me.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Then when I went to see him in New York after that, I couldn't follow much of it. What do they call that when they change times like that?

CLINE: Well, there are tempo modulations and there's—

SMITH: Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

CLINE: And also like you're superimposing one time over another.

SMITH: Well, that's what it is, it's a rhythmic modulation.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: You know, the time doesn't change, it's just— I mean, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: And I found I couldn't follow most of it, so my feeling is, is that he's— That it's too hard, it's too hard so it's not going to really enter, but maybe I'm wrong.

Then also in the middle of listening to Brad Mehldau recently, I was really listening to it a lot, you know, really knew the record, and then for some reason I put on *Everybody Digs Bill Evans* and I realized that the difference between Bill Evans and Charlie Parker and between— I'm combining the two, Bill Evans and Charlie Parker as one, and Brad Mehldau is— Brad Mehldau is playing with a lot of head room, you know, and Bill Evans, at least Bill Evans on this, *Everybody Digs Bill Evans*, and Charlie Parker are playing at the end of their leash. It's like they're at the

ceiling and they're trying to break through the ceiling. They're using everything they've got, you know, as opposed to somebody that's playing well within, you know.

CLINE: Oh, right, I see what you're saying.

SMITH: So that kind of passion is what I like. I mean, don't get me wrong, Brad Mehldau is the greatest piano player living, I think, but that's— I want to be at the end of my leash, I mean, I want my neck to hurt because I'm bent up against the ceiling, you know. That's what I love.

CLINE: And speaking of piano players living—and I guess I'm justified in asking this—what about Keith Jarrett, since he's become somebody who's explored the standard repertoire now for twenty years?

SMITH: Oh, god, he's great. But myself I have never been like moved to go out and get one of his records and listen to it over and over and over. But he's wonderful. I don't care for those extended concert things, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, the solo stuff.

SMITH: Solo piano, all that. Although I love solo piano if there's something happening. I mean, not that there's nothing happening with him. I mean, I heard, while I was in Mendocino [California] I stayed with a friend and he put on this Tommy Flanagan record, one of his last ones, with Peter Washington. I mean, my god, he's playing so good, you know.

CLINE: Was George Mraz on it?

SMITH: No, Peter Washington.

CLINE: Oh, Peter Washington. Okay. I don't know Peter Washington.

SMITH: Well, he's another L.A. guy that went to New York.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah. Everybody in New York is from L.A. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Whoa.

SMITH: Yeah. I mean, I really, really love those trio records of Keith Jarrett. I'm not putting it down, I just never was—

CLINE: Yeah, I was curious. And everybody has their thing that grabs them and you can't understand how come it doesn't grab everybody else. The miracle of taste.

SMITH: Yeah, right, subjectivity, time and tide.

CLINE: Right. Right.

SMITH: I did tell you about my experience with the *Nefertiti* [by Miles Davis] album, right?

CLINE: Right, yeah. Yeah, exactly. Right.

SMITH: You have to be ready for it, you know.

CLINE: Well, yeah, and also it's very interesting that people, if they close themselves after their initial reaction to something, they'll never have that opportunity to re-experience it in that new place.

SMITH: Right. You should not, yeah, never be closed.

CLINE: Yeah, because you never know it can come back to hit you square over the head.

SMITH: When I was about thirty, you know, I'm thinking I had it together and everything, and I played with this young guy, John Rodby, and he was about nineteen or eighteen or something, you know, and he was one of these guys that was kind of stiff and he had— You know, he was trying to play and wasn't able to get in a groove,

you know. So you put him in that slot, you know. Then about four years later I ended up on a gig with him, you know, and I thought, oh, yeah, I need the gig and I'll be playing with this guy, and he had just blossomed into a marvelous player. So I realized at that time you could never— You know, you can never write anybody off, especially young people, but old people, too.

CLINE: Yeah. Evolution.

SMITH: Yes. Yes. Just stay open.

CLINE: We hope that people that improve, including ourselves.

SMITH: Including our president [George W. Bush]. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: That might be overly optimistic.

SMITH: Yeah, it might be.

CLINE: Yeah. So describe, if you will, now that we're sort of moving more into the present day, can you say if there is anything that has changed about the jazz scene here in Los Angeles? Has it stayed about the same? Are there more gigs, more opportunities, more venues, different venues? Anything noteworthy that you can describe that brings up into the present and gives a picture of where Los Angeles is now as a jazz city.

SMITH: I'm not real in touch with the younger guys. I mean, I see them as students and occasionally hook up with them. I mean, I don't go to Rocco because I'm asleep by the time they open.

CLINE: Well, it's closed now.

SMITH: Is it?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Too bad. Too bad. I talked about Justin Morrell before, right?

CLINE: Yes.

SMITH: To me that was like, yay, it lives. So I think this art form it's kind of like equivalent to poetry, you know. I mean, there's no market; there's just a lot of passion and commitment and in a way that keeps it pure, but it also keeps the field smaller than it could be. L.A. is a wasteland, you know. I mean, it doesn't have a center and you can't go to two clubs in the same night. Vast distances involved and the freeways are packed at all times of the day and night.

So there is this scene of young guys playing, and I get the flyers and e-mails and stuff and always want to go, but I'm working so much. As I look through my books, like 1985 was kind of a peak year for me. It's like I look at it and I go, yeah, that's when it really started happening, a great solid year of great work and everything. And then it tends to be, as I would work with somebody good, you know, then I would be working with them for the next twenty years. It sort of gets to be— It looks tedious, although I have a great musical life. I'm playing good music every night, but you look at it and it's like nothing particularly exciting. But I'm working so much I don't get out on the scene and see the young guys, but they keep emerging. But I think it doesn't have the vitality of— At least it doesn't have the numbers of New York, and all the people from New York say it's all different there, but I know there's a great many musicians there that live only to play, you know, and there's a certain respect for it.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: And the living is easy out here, except for the rents, but I don't know. I'm absolutely sure that the art is flourishing, but I think the focus out here is more money-based, generally speaking, and that's really a— It's almost like going to New York is a vote for yourself; you know, "I'm voting for myself as a jazz musician." But staying here is succeeding, and that's what I've done. So what the scene is in L.A., I'm absolutely sure it's better than ever.

But I know stars, and, in my opinion, now that marketing has discovered they can make a few bucks off of jazz, you know, you look at the lineup for the Playboy Jazz Festival and it's a joke. I mean, shh, you know, these gospel singers. And I'm not putting gospel down.

CLINE: Yeah. It's not jazz.

SMITH: I was watching *'Round Midnight* the other night, and in there they have this singer that comes on, supposed to be a jazz singer, and she's singing gospel soul kind of stuff, you know, with a light jazz beat. And then you listen to Billie Holiday, and Billie Holiday doesn't have anything like that, you know, and Louis Armstrong doesn't have anything like that. I mean, gospel is a whole other thing. It's not jazz.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But then here we go, jazz is a word, you know, a very subjective word only.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: You're going to edit this down to four words, right? Please. [laughs]

CLINE: Afraid not. Do you think that one of the reasons the music scene here, at least in terms of what we're describing, appears to be more mercenary in its emphasis

and ramifications is because of the studio scene and the whole situation here with production of pop records and production of Hollywood movies and all that?

SMITH: Yes. Yes.

CLINE: Have you seen that change in the years that you've been playing?

SMITH: No, it's always been like that.

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: Yeah, it's always like that's the final pinnacle, to get in the studios.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Whereas I see in New York there's kind of a— You know, to be a grubby, poor jazz musician is noble, it's seen as noble, and here if you've got the gig with Britney Spears, that's noble, you know.

CLINE: I see.

SMITH: You know, people, "Man, you're working with Britney, man? Whew," you know.

CLINE: So you're saying, perhaps, that people in New York are less apt to, when they meet you, ask what kind of car you drive?

SMITH: Yes. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Okay. Of course, if you had a car in New York, you'd probably be crazy.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: And would you say, then, that if you were to rate Los Angeles as a jazz city, that you would rate it the same historically as opposed to right now in the present, or would you say that there would be a difference?

SMITH: Well, that kind of— You know, I mean, there was Stan Kenton in the forties, and that was a tremendous influence and produced a great many great musicians and great music, which isn't very acknowledged, isn't much acknowledged, but it really was, it was really incredible stuff. Then the jazz West Coast phenomena, which was kind of sprung up, I guess it lasted six months or something, you know, were crowds. And they say Brad Mehldau draws a crowd, you know, but he draws a jazz crowd, which is 120 people.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: As opposed to 40,000 paying \$60 each. So it's very exciting to go to a jazz thing and there's 100 people there. It's like, "Wow, you know, we're really making it." And you compare that to Mozart, who was— I think I read recently that his largest audience was 150. Mozart, you know. So maybe that's what music should be, is small chamber style, where people can actually see the musicians and relate to everything about them.

But L.A. produces a vast number of innovative musicians and people that go elsewhere. I mean, Lester Young is considered a West Coast guy. Zoot Sims. I'm just— To think of innovators. Ornette Coleman, born and bred. This Peter Washington I'm talking about. Scott Colley. Eric Reed. These are all, you know— I mean, they go to New York and become New Yorkers, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: I had a thought, but I lost it.

CLINE: Do you still see as many, from your knowledge of young musicians developing their careers in New York as, say, there was in the 1950s or when people

like Eric Dolphy and Dexter Gordon and Charles Mingus, you know, went to New York and generated huge careers for themselves, do you see still that happening sort of at that level?

SMITH: Not at that level, and it's what I was saying before, it's marketing and they now take people, like, for example, the "young lions," [inaudible].

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And there's one or two of them that are pretty good, you know, but basically— I mean, you know, Joshua Redman is, you know, pretty good. And there's a couple of those trumpet players that are really marvelous, but there's none of them that are like the equivalent of Clifford Brown, you know.

CLINE: Right. That's for sure.

SMITH: And there's nothing original like Wayne Shorter.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: There's certainly no John Coltrane in there. They're really not top-rank guys, you know, and it's really about marketing. You know, they're all carrying—I saw Whitney Balliet at a thing, and he said they're all carrying press kits and it's very business oriented. I mean, Christian McBride, he's playing like Milt Hinton, you know. I mean, it's shocking, you know. They say, "Here's the greatest young bass player," you know. Bull. You know, I mean, he's really fun to watch, you know, I mean, but it's like— It's not creative music, you know; it's the jazz show.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Whereas you get a guy like Mingus and Dexter Gordon, I mean, they're completely committed to the art, above all.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: You know, and they're out playing all the time and they're doing whatever they can to make it happen, and it's not about "Here's my press kit," you know.

CLINE: Do you think that this change is reflective of just the times in general or also the evolution of the music as it's gotten older and had to sort of reinvent itself to stay alive?

SMITH: No, it's reinventing itself, but the audience, in general, doesn't see it. They don't see Justin Morrell's band [Justin Morrell Septet], which really is, you know, original and innovative and yet referring all back to everything. That other thing is show business, and it's almost real good, you know, but it's really not. It's not, you know, exciting about the music, it's exciting about "Hey, here I am, and look at my new suit," you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: It's a different thing. I think it's because there was never any way to market, or there hasn't been a way to market jazz for forty years. They had that West Coast jazz thing for a minute, and they could market that pretty good, but it's just that what happens when marketing gets involved, you know, and you get a bunch of business guys in there and they make committee decisions and don't know a goddamn thing. Pardon me.

CLINE: Yeah. Well, so much of the alleged rivalry between East Coast and West Coast jazz, even back then, was purely manufactured by people in the press and by people with record companies.

SMITH: Yeah, I don't even know if they consciously did it; they just thought it was— I mean, did we talk about that before, about writing and how it is, and these guys, these critics, you know—

CLINE: We haven't said much about critics.

SMITH: Well, first of all, you should never read a review of yourself. If they don't like you, you're going to feel bad, and if they like you, it's going to be for the wrong reason, you know, and you'll start going that way because they like it, you know. But, of course, I do read them.

CLINE: They can help you get gigs.

SMITH: Oh, yeah.

CLINE: [inaudible].

SMITH: Yeah. But I was asked by— I can't remember if it was *L.A. Weekly* or *L.A. Reader* about twenty years ago to write— To be a jazz critic, you know. I went in and talked to the guy and I said, "Well, let me think about it and let me write something." I found that, you know, I couldn't bring myself to be relentless, because these are the people I'm going to be playing with.

CLINE: Of course, yeah.

SMITH: You know, and one about in music, I mean, you should never bust anybody's balls for any reason, because they stay broken, you know. There's no way you can ever mend it, you know. I mean, I think if somebody asks you about something, you should always answer them honestly, but never freely offer a negative judgment, because, you know, first of all, it's like four years from now they might be Bill Evans, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I mean, and there's no reason to. You know, there's no reason to break someone's balls who's trying to be an artist. But the thing at that time, they would— You know, to write, I don't know, what is that, five hundred words?

CLINE: It depends on how big the words are.

SMITH: Well, you know.

CLINE: In a column, yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, to write a column, to write it with any polish at all is going to take you two or three hours. Then you have to go out and actually see them, and you probably should see two sets, and what they wanted was for you to see two people in each article, two different groups, and they're paying you \$40.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: Okay. And so what the critics do, the actual working critics, is they depend very much on the past articles. They don't go out and see them, or they just stop in and stand in the doorway just to say that they saw them, and then they write the article based on the other articles, so that they end up making \$10 an hour for the work. And that's why we get repetitions and repetitions and things are ingrained. There are very few real journalists writing about jazz.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: My line is, "A journalist is a failed writer. A critic is a failed journalist."

[mutual laughter]

CLINE: Ouch, man.

SMITH: Ouch. Other than that, I like them.

CLINE: Yeah. [laughs] Of course, what you're describing in terms of the marketing and the so-called young lions and people like this, and the whole attention that was put on a lot of these young musicians, maybe a lot of them before they were entirely ripe, was very much the doing of the jazz press, the jazz press itself being very generally East-Coast-centric, at least from my vantage point.

SMITH: Yes.

CLINE: How would you, if you were asked, which I'm now asking you, describe what should be paid attention to about the jazz in Los Angeles now and why?

SMITH: Whoa. Gee, that's a big question.

CLINE: You don't have to answer it either.

SMITH: Well, I mean, you mean, like, who would you go see and what would you [inaudible]?

CLINE: Well, yeah, if you were to give someone a general description, and I want you to be subjective, this is Putter Smith's point of view, you have your predilections, you have your— You described your—quote—"narrow" interest earlier, but if you could, say if you were to address one of these East-Coast-centric critics and say, "You know, you should be paying attention to some of what's going on in L.A. and here's what it is and here's why you should," what would you tell them?

SMITH: You know of an apartment I can get in New York? [mutual laughter]

Another reason to live in New York—I'm going back a little bit—is because that's where the jazz press is.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: That's another big reason for a jazz musician to be there, because you get some—

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I mean, John Gross has never gotten a good review in his life out here, not even noticed, and he's, in my opinion, the greatest living tenor player, most modern, most original, recognizable, and nothing. Then there's a young guy [Tony Malaby] from Arizona that copped his sound and all his stuff and everything. You'd know his name if I could say it. He moved to New York and they're writing about him all the time, and I mean, he will definitely acknowledge John Gross, but that's all he's doing is a little bit of John Gross, and he's being written about all the time, and that's what's happening there.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: What would I ask? I don't know. I don't know. It's disorganized here. There's not an organized scene and there's not an organized press, jazz press, and it's like people that are hungry to play find each other and play and develop, and if you're making a living here and getting along all right, then why leave, you know. Because that's really what it is, everything else is ego, you know, which I've got one, too. I wish it could be bigger. [Cline laughs.]

But it's searching out the art and finding it. There are only two places, L.A. and New York, and there's a tremendous opportunity here for people to play, and people either come here or New York. The depth of field of players is here and New York. So a person can develop as much here or more than they can in New York, but they have to work at it. A lot of people are here because the living is easier. I mean, I

can't imagine schlepping around New York with an amp and a bass. I can't imagine it. Criminy.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: You know, I can't hardly do it here, you know, and there's always parking here.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But I would just say that you'd have to— That the history speaks for itself, the people that are from here and keep going to New York, the high, high quality and the innovative equal to— Of course, it's equal to New York, but New York is the mecca.

CLINE: So if they come here from New York—you mentioned John Gross—who else should they check out if they want to get a sense of what's happening here that's noteworthy?

SMITH: Well, check me out. [mutual laughter] Well, I mean, Alan Broadbent is marvelous. Gary Foster. I'm trying to think of all the guys. Herman Riley. Herman sounds wonderful, you know, and sparkling. He has never given up the works. You see, there's not an organized scene here and there's really no cliques like— I mean, there are sort of small cliques of this and that, but there's not like the people that hover around Brad Mehldau and the people that hover around— Who in New York? I don't know. Different names, you know.

And I think that's the problem; there's really no club where all the jazz musicians go and hang out and have a drink, you know, like there are in New York, places where, you know, thirty or forty guys are all there at the same time moving

around. There's nothing like that here, you know. Catalina [Bar and Grill] charges musicians twenty-five bucks to come in and stand at the bar, you know. So consequently, there aren't any, you know, and that place, the back wall should be full of musicians.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: You know, and there's nothing like that. And Miceli's is just a bunch of old fucks—pardon me—you know, jive. I mean, yeah, I respect a lot of the guys that go in there, but, I mean, you know, it's a very ungenerous place. That's what we lack out here, a generous club owner somewhere that's succeeding enough, you know, that likes the music. Because everybody that's involved in jazz for any reason at all, it's a love thing, you know, because you could run a pool hall and make more money, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: All the writers, all the DJs, you know, all the interviewers, everybody, you know, all the players, it's all a love thing, you know. It's about the art.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Anyway, I don't know if I answered the question, but I talked a lot.

CLINE: That's all right. [laughs] What about Larry Koonse, for example?

SMITH: Oh, Larry Koonse. I mean, in my opinion, the most original, greatest guitar player living. Of course, I haven't heard at least two thousand of the others, you know. I can't imagine—I mean, he's just so original, so wonderful, you know. There are a lot of legendary guys. Jimmy Wyble, who is one of Larry's teachers, lives here. There are a huge amount of people here.

CLINE: Yeah. So here's another big question. So where do you think jazz is headed, either here in L.A. or just generally, or both?

SMITH: Well, I see it like counterpoint. In fact, I see it *as* counterpoint. That is that counterpoint is the creating force of European music and harmony and then a hundred years ago the African blues and rhythmic variation and subdivision and all that entered into it, and that the counterpoint continues to develop and that really counterpoint is like every forty or fifty years they get a new note. You know, if you start back at 1300, you know, and get up to the point of Beethoven or Ravel, and they're writing pure counterpoint. I mean, you're able to look at it as what they call harmony, too, but harmony is just a side trip, counterpoint is what it is, and all of the new notes have come from jazz.

I mean, atonality is just an experiment that has produced a few little spices, you know, but Charlie Parker's notes have entered the mainstream, and Coltrane has a note; he has one note that he's added. That's the development of the music, you know, harmonically, and I just see that as continuing to develop, you know. And I hear a guy like Justin Morrell's band and I go, "Yeah, yeah, it's going on," you know. And they're hearing— You know, as opposed to Schoenberg and Webern, where they're actually experimenting and they're trying to sound weird, you know, purposely twisting it for sound's sake or something, I'm not putting it down, that's just the way I see it.

But the other way is where notes enter naturally and they don't come dozens at a time, like they come one every ten or fifteen or twenty years there's a new note. I mean, I remember experimenting a long time ago, twenty-five, thirty years ago, with

like in the key of C-minor and playing a D-minor seven flat five and putting E-natural on it, and how bizarre that sounded and so good, but so “Ohhh, ohhh, look what I found,” and now it seems normal. It’s a normal thing and it doesn’t bother me at all.

I think I told you about the first time I got fired on a gig and I knew that I had reached some kind of an original thing, because I couldn’t tell the difference.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Yeah. And that’s how I see it developing, slowly and continually, and young people with passion and learning from discovering new things. I would expect to come back 150 years from now and there would be a slightly different accent or something, a few new notes, and it would take me a couple of days to get used to those notes. But I think it’s broad Mississippi-type river that’s just going to keep going.

CLINE: Would you say the same for specifically bass, bass playing, in jazz? Where do you see it going?

SMITH: Well, it’s going away from walking, although that element, I think, will have to be there subconsciously or something. I refer back to Dixieland, you know, and there was a time when I thought Dixieland was just cornball, you know. But now I realize that they’re very serious artists, many of those people, and very accomplished, and even though they have this funny sound, they can turn around and play like Raphael Mendez if they— Well, not quite, but I mean, they’re masters of their instrument, even though they sound rough and, you know, they sound rough. But that’s what they were hearing and that’s what they’re playing, you know.

So you get a guy like Coltrane, and they’re very, very rough. Very rough, you know, but they’re masters. They’re masters, you know. So the sound and everything

is something different than the mastery of the horn. I don't know what I'm trying to say here.

CLINE: You're talking about the bass get away from walking.

SMITH: Oh, the bass. Yeah, well, it's tending to get away from there and yet I've spent my whole life trying to learn how to walk, you know. And then I saw this band on TV, Eddie Coffin, and a bass player's playing— It didn't give names on the BET [Black Entertainment Television]. Nobody's names are ever there. I've been watching for you and it's never come up again.

CLINE: Somebody else told me they saw me on there a number of times, but I still haven't seen it.

SMITH: Yeah. If they ever play it again, I'm going to—They seem to play the same one for a week and then—

CLINE: Okay. Oh, man.

SMITH: And this bass player was playing— I could see that— When I saw Scott Colley last time, I saw him kind of playing with this, it's almost like funk sort of playing combined with the jazz feel, and this bass player was doing that. And the bass player that I was trying to remember with Joey Baron, his name is Tony Scherr.

CLINE: Yeah, I verified that name already.

SMITH: Oh, good. Oh, good. Okay. That's part of the list I had of all these names.

CLINE: Killer Joey is the name of the band, yeah.

SMITH: Oh, okay. I mean, I just love it, you know, and it's so free, but it's based on having the thing going inside, you know, the time going inside and then you're playing on it. You know, it's like Lester Young when he was playing in his late life,

some drummer was playing, you know, a modern drummer, and Lester turns around and says, “You know, ‘Prez’ [Lester Young] likes you to play on the bass drum,” like you to play four, you know.

See, that was his milieu and it’s like, you know, you hear these guys and they’re so spectacularly far ahead of the rhythm section, and then it seems like over the next five or ten years the rhythm sections adapt to be perfect for those guys, and so the new horn players that sound like the old ones and the new rhythm sections. You know, it’s like that. But the guys, the old guys, they want to hear the old thing. Lester Young really wants a Dixieland rhythm section. That’s really what he wants. He doesn’t want Stan Getz’s rhythm section, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: I don’t know my point, but—

CLINE: You see it evolving, continually evolving.

SMITH: Oh, yeah. And I think it does evolve like that. It’s the horn and then the rhythm section gets there, and then the horn and the rhythm section. Because if the rhythm section came out that was radically different, no horn player would want to play with it.

CLINE: Exactly. Right. Indeed. Well, I think what I’ll do is, I’ll take the opportunity to turn the tape over and that will give you an opportunity to go through your names there and we’ll try to make sure we get them before we call it. Okay?

SMITH: Okay.

TAPE NUMBER: XII, SIDE TWO

OCTOBER 15, 2003

CLINE: We're back on. It's side two.

To coin a phrase, walk us through, if you will, a few more of the notable artists that you'd like to mention that you worked with, taking us up to more of the present day now, over the last few years.

SMITH: Okay. I have, starting here in '81, that's where we left off.

CLINE: Oh, wow.

SMITH: Okay. I'll tell you what, maybe I ought to give you these notes.

CLINE: No, go ahead.

SMITH: Okay. Well, notable. Well, notable, you mean as to me or—

CLINE: To you and if you particularly think that there's a historic reason that these people should be remembered, that's good.

SMITH: Yeah. Well, all of them. Dick Berk.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: Okay. Well, he's a marvelous drummer, a real character, and he always create a scene around him, and he had a thing called the Jazz Adoption Agency here.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: He doesn't live here anymore, but I worked at the Music Center [of Los Angeles County] with him for three months with Dave Frishberg and Dick Sudhalter. Also on the gig were Dan Barrett [phonetic] and Bob Reitmeyer. Dick Sudhalter has written a few books, notably one about Bix Beiderbecke, and then he recently wrote

one about “lost white musicians” [*Lost Chords*] of jazz or something like that, you know. I don’t know what he’s so bitter about, but, you know.

Okay. ’81, [Bob] Brookmeyer. Lou Levy. Lou’s really a wonderful guy. He’s a real character and gentlemanly, looked like a prince, acted like a prince, and very special. And he was always very kind to me.

Let’s see. Melba Joyce was a good singer. Have I talked about Dan Embrey?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Okay. Danny’s a guitar player who came from Kansas out here and he was a very hot player, and he worked with somebody for while, Sergio Mendes, and we did several projects. We started off a thing called Threeplay, with John Gross and he and I, and eventually Larry Koonse ended up doing it.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: We did record with that, and I’m very, very happy with that album. It’s been a long time. And Dan Embrey has been traveling with Karrin Allison for the past fifteen years or something, and they’ve made some marvelous recordings. I play with Karrin; I think I’m third on the list of— When she comes to L.A., if she doesn’t have her regular bass, Bob Bowman, with her, then she uses Tom Warrington. Okay. And if Tom can’t do it, then she calls me. And she’s just wonderful to play with. She’s one of these people that senses or learns what a musician’s strengths are and then features him on those.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: And it’s a great pleasure, you know, a great pleasure. I’d like to see her do a lot more standard material, you know, like classic stuff. She does a lot of oddball

stuff. It's good, and she's so good and she's a very good piano player, too. Swinging chick. She is a southern chick. And her boyfriend, Bill— I'm terrible with names.

Her boyfriend, Bill, happens to be the conductor of, I think, the Kansas City Orchestra, and a composer in his own right. I heard one of his pieces, and right in the middle of it he quotes a Thelonious Monk song, I can't remember, [sings opening melody to "I Mean You" by Thelonious Monk.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, right.

SMITH: Okay. Right in the middle of this symphony, you know, this thing comes up. Very good, and a very nice guy, unassuming.

Riner Scivally is the local guitar player who is so talented and a fine, fine gentleman. He's one of these guys that can't play anything without it being great time, you know, good solid sound like Wes Montgomery or something like that. Hardly known. His last name is spelled S-C-I-V-A-L-L-Y, which is probably why he doesn't work much; nobody can find him.

CLINE: Wow, yeah.

SMITH: Bob Hardaway, he was an older guy around town, a tenor player, played like Stan Getz, Zoot Sims.

In '81 I began working with Mose Allison for a couple of years, with John Dentz.

CLINE: Yeah, we talked a little about Mose.

SMITH: Okay. And Freddie Gruber, '81. I have written down here in '81 that he was Tristano's first drummer. Among many other things, he was also in the Charlie Parker experimental band of the early forties and then he became a terrible junkie.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Dave Pozzi, an incredibly talented tenor player who played with Dick Berk's band. There was a gig—I had a casual or something, and I didn't realize that everybody on the band was named Dave, except for me. I mean, I didn't even think of that, you know, and they all stand at the bar and I come over, "Hey, Dave," and they all turn around, and that's when I realized they're all named Dave. [laughs] That was Dave Snodgrass, Dave Pozzi, Dave MacKay, and Dave Koonse. It was certainly not on purpose.

It was about this time I met the great, wonderful bass player and person Tony Dumas. He is just one of the best.

What the hell does this say?

CLINE: Now, didn't he decide to pursue a career outside music after a while?

SMITH: He was investing on the side. He had discovered the day trader thing and had gone out—I talked to him a couple days ago and he's abandoned that, because it's become too weird. But I don't know, I think for a while he was finding it profitable to stay home and never going on the road.

CLINE: Yeah, right. I was going to say he wasn't playing as much for a while, I know.

SMITH: Well, I don't think he was traveling; I think he was playing. He's a very, very intellectual player.

'81 my own quintet [Left Coast] was going hot and heavy and I was playing at Music Center and at the Ford Theater, etc. I worked with Mark Murphy for the first time that year.

CLINE: Yeah, we talked about that.

SMITH: Who's this? This says Tom Garvin. Okay. I think that's what it says.

Anyway, Tom is— We talked about him.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And it's about this time I met Gene Estes. Did we talk about Gene?

CLINE: We talked a little about Gene, yes.

SMITH: Okay. This is the year I worked with the Buddy Rich Trio.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: That was fun. I had a conversation with Gene Chirico that year and I asked him if he'd ever heard of [Giorgio] De Chirico, the painter.

CLINE: Right. I just thought of it when you said the name, yeah.

SMITH: Yeah. And he said, "That was my grandfather."

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah. Your reaction was exactly like mine. He was very surprised that anybody knew who he was.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: Okay. There was a party that used to come on every year by Pat Britt, was called Cinco de Bop.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah, it was on May 5th, and there would be a big picnic out in the park and there'd be eighty musicians, and it was really fun. Pat Britt organized it.

CLINE: Which park?

SMITH: It seemed to vary from time to time. I think it was at— One time it was in Griffith Park and one time it was— I can't remember. I can't remember.

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: I remember they were going to play a baseball game and they were picking sides and nobody picked me. [Cline laughs.] I felt like I was back in school.

Mike and Lynn Palter are marvelous singers. She plays piano and he plays bass, and they sing. It's so good, it transcends the form, which is like cabaret, you know. It just transcends the form, you know. You go in there and they're apt to see Bob Dorough, Dave Frishberg, Alan Broadbent, Dave MacKay in the audience, you know. It's full of musicians. They're so special.

'83 I went to Chicago with Toshiko [Akiyoshi].

I worked with Bob Crosby [and the Bobcats], which was real interesting, down at Disneyland. It was Dick Shanahan playing drums. This guy plays 1939, but he plays it so good and he's sparkling. He's obviously never given up a couple hours on the pad every day and just— I mean, he's got the spirit of a young man. He's in his middle seventies. Anyway, at one point they did "Big Noise from Winnetka," which I had never played or anything, you know, and where the drummer plays on the [bass] strings, you know, like that— You know, like five years before or ten years before I would not have allowed that, but I just went along with the program, you know, because I had gained a respect for these guys. You know, they were in show biz.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Willie Bobo died that year.

There was a guy, Ronnie Brown, out here and he was here for years and years and years, and he was kind of a joke character, kind of like Peter Nero, only he wasn't as good as Peter Nero. He was trying all sorts of things, you know, and he was legendary. And he used real good guys. I couldn't stand playing with him because he had a real good time feel, although he would lose bars and stuff like that. But he had a real good time, but mistakes and everything. And one of the most prominent was one time he would—I mean, he was legendary out here, and then the poor guy ended up with Alzheimer's [disease] and he died a few years ago.

But one of the things he did in the sixties, I think, Boyd Poulson, bass player, had gone up to work with him in Reno or Tahoe and it was when *Goldfinger* was out, and so he billed himself as *Goldfinger*, and painted his hands with this gold paint and had a black light on them. So he was playing a piano with a black light. And about four days into it his hands all broke out and swelled up and rash and had to cancel the gig. It's terrible, but it's funny, because—

CLINE: The price of showmanship.

SMITH: Yeah. But he was a nice guy; he wasn't a bad guy.

Worked for a while with Joe Porcaro and Roccisano, Joe Roccisano. We had a little Sunday gig and we were playing and working up material. And Alan Broadbent. Joe, it shocked me because I had first met Joe probably around '66, '67 when he was playing percussion in one of these big pit bands where you— You know, Jules Chaikin used to throw me a few nice jobs, which I'm in his debt for. Joe was usually back there playing percussion. Nice guy. We always used to talk and everything. Great guy, you know, and I just figured he was a percussionist.

CLINE: Yeah, sure.

SMITH: I had no idea he played traps. And then when they called me for this, this is twenty years later, you know, he's playing like Philly Joe [Jones.] I can't believe it. The guy plays great, you know. I got to know a lot of his family and his son that died, you know, that was the band leader of Toto. What was his name?

CLINE: Oh, yeah, of course. Jeff [Porcaro].

SMITH: Jeff. And Jeff was such a sweetheart. I mean, he was such a sweetheart, you know, and so respectful of older guys, you know, like he was always so nice to me. I mean, here's this kid who's a star, you know, he's coming up in acting like, you know, like he's honored to be in my presence. Man, you know, I love that. I loved that guy. I played at his wedding. They had three or four bands and Alan Broadbent's trio.

A year before, or two years before, I'd played at the Wadsworth Theatre, some kind of a something honoring Henry Mancini, and I did another one just before he died, too, with him there. They gave me a couple choruses on "Days of Wine and Roses," and I had a particularly fortunate solo. I mean, it was like, you know, like, god, it was great, and a huge ovation, you know, and everything like that. And then I began to get some certain calls, and, of course, I was just not cut out to be in the studios. I just don't have that kind of thing. But I got some calls from that. But every time I would play and Henry Mancini was around, he'd always come back and hang out with me and Billy [Mintz]. I mean, it's surprising, you know, he just wanted to hang out with me and Billy, you know. We'd be sitting off in a little thing and he'd come out and sit with us, "You're all beautiful, man." That's the thing about being a musician, you know, you get to see all these people. You know, a lot of politicians are

like that, too, and actors, you know. “Yeah, man, finally I’m someplace where they’re going to treat me right,” you know.

In ’84 I started teaching at B.I.T. [Bass Institute of Technology], and I’m still there. I’m finishing my twentieth year.

Lenny Breau, we talked about.

Jessie Acuna is a singer here and he had just a wonderful voice and a wonderful everything. He sang with Hiroshima for a while, you know, and we recorded a few things here and there. But he was a great talent, and somehow nothing’s ever happened for him.

This was the year Shelly Manne died and it was such a shock. Such a loss.

Gerald Wiggins and Andy Simpkins worked at Linda’s. Gerald Wiggins was just one of the greatest. I mean, these guys, they swung so hard and yet they have the mastery together, like Teddy Wilson or something, but Gerald’s a standout. A standout. Wonderful.

Let’s see. Frank Collette, a piano player that fell into the piano player trap of working a solo gig, you know. I mean, like Art Tatum should have only played solo gigs, but all these other guys, you know, they fall into that trap, because they end up they can make— Instead of making a hundred and a quarter they can make a hundred and seventy-five.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: And it’s about this time that Paul Kreibich came to really develop, and I knew Paul from when he could barely play. I mean, when I say barely play, he had everything good, but he wasn’t finished at all. He began to develop at this time and

worked real hard and stuff. You know, then he spent a couple of years with Ray Charles and he is really a master drummer now. I mean, that's another case of somebody that starts off talented, but you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

All right. I was playing with Terry Jones' big band, which was a lot of the [San Fernando] Valley guys, and we had one of these free gigs, you know, big band that goes and plays for the door and everybody gets a beer, you know. So we go to this club, it's on Ventura [Boulevard] up around Vineland [Avenue], and the place is locked up, and here we're standing out here with twenty guys waiting to go, you know. "Well, what are we going to do?"

Somebody said, "Well, let's go up and see if this other club wants us to play."

So we went up to this place called the Sound Room, and the guy says, "Sure, come on in." So we went in and set up and played, you know, and three or four people came in. And this guy began a jazz policy right then and there. I mean, yeah, you get fifteen guys come in and play for nothing, "Whoopee," you know. "I'm in business."

CLINE: Do you remember the name of the club that was closed?

SMITH: No. No, but the Sound Room is the one we went to and then he started making a lot of money and everything and still not paying anybody, and then he bought another club, One for L.A.

CLINE: That's what I was wondering, if it was that, One for L.A.

SMITH: He bought that. He went from the Sound Room to the One for L.A.

CLINE: I see.

SMITH: But there was one before that.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: And the guys on that band were Paul Novros, quite a wonderful player and writer. Mike Altshul, he was sort of a legendary dope connection. Ralph Humphrey was on the band. John Garfield, the piano player. [Steve] Huffsteter. Gene Gogh was the name I was searching for before, trumpet player, and he was exquisitely talented as a player and as a writer and as a producer and everything, and he kind of went crazy. Larry Ford, trumpet player. He was on Toshiko's band [Toshiko Akiyoshi-Lew Tabackin Big Band] and died. Ralph Osborne was one of the fixtures, and I mean, I think he's been playing in big bands for sixty years. You know, he's a guy that sits in the back and he's just kind of like half juiced a little bit and grooving. You know, one of those guys that's just— His most prominent distinction is he's really hip.

CLINE: Wow. That's something many aspire to and fail to achieve.

SMITH: And easy to hang, easy to hang.

Jacque Ellis was on that band, trombone player. He's now become a paralegal company.

CLINE: Oh, really.

SMITH: Dana Hughes passed away. I was surprised. Bill Moffett, he's now a mailman. Trombone players.

Hart Smith. Hart is kind of a legendary player all over, many places, and right now he's living in Monterey [California]. And this made me remember about a guy, I don't know if you've ever heard of Steve Bohanon.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Do you know who he is?

CLINE: I certainly remember the name.

SMITH: Okay. Well, the guys all talked about him and, like, he was like *the* guy. He was the most talented. He played drums, and I think he was the first drummer in the Don Ellis Band or something, but he was complete— He had everything together.

CLINE: Yeah. It was my high school music teacher [John Magruder] who used to mention him, because he was in that band.

SMITH: He also played organ like in a jazz organ trio and stuff.

CLINE: Oh, really.

SMITH: So he had the whole thing covered, and everybody knew that they were in the presence of a giant with this guy, and then I believe he was killed in an automobile; he ended up railroad stopping or something like that. Anyway, he should be remembered.

And then, of course, we talked about John Heard, Marty Harris. Okay. I'm just going to see here. Scott Colley I began in '85, started using him as a sub, you know. Eventually he took all my gigs. [laughs]

I got to see Red Rodney at Carmelo's that year, and he's so wonderful.

There's a guy named Pat Longo who had a big band, and the joke was [Bob Hardaway was a tenor player] "Longo and Hardaway."

Karen Gallagher, a marvelous singer and lives in Orange County, and nobody knows who she is. She's one of the great singers, like as good as anybody. As good as Nancy Wilson or Ella Fitzgerald.

Peggy Duchanow is a piano player down in Orange County. She's also very, very good.

CLINE: Really.

SMITH: There was a Missy Hassen. Missy Hassen. She played cello and they had a little band together and she was good.

Renee Grizell, flute player and scat singer, but she scat sings like Sam Most or Chet Baker, you know; she actually knows what she's doing. And she is so good, so talented. There are these musicians that are tucked away. See, the combination that you need to succeed are, you know, it's not just how good; people also have to see you. You have to get around there.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Bob Bowman was out here. Doug McDonald is a player that's around here a lot, guitar player, and busy all the time.

In 1985 I got to play Stravinsky, *The Rite of Spring*, for the first time. At the same time I was playing with the Jack Readling Trio out in front of the orchestra and we were playing a Claude Bolling thing. Those things are just terrible. There's a section thing with the orchestra, you know, and then there's a thing it says "Optional, improvise or play what's written." So we got to that part and Jack improvises, you know, marvelous thing, you know, and the conductor goes, "Bravo, bravo, but play what's written." [laughs] Of course, he wanted to stand there and conduct it, you know, and we were playing a jazz trio, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, yeah. Oh, lovely.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: For him. [laughs]

SMITH: And we did this four or five times and I used to call it “Bolling for Dollars.”

[mutual laughter]

CLINE: Oh, man.

SMITH: Ed Slauson is someone that should be remembered, and I believe Ed was Bobby Hackett’s nephew, and he was a drummer and he played in like that old traditional style. He was real good and everything, a great guy, and everybody in that scene loved him and everything. He had some kind of strange form of cancer and just went out. I played with him about three weeks before he went out and, yeah, he was loaded on morphine, but it was great to play with him. But he was somebody everybody loved.

Nick Ceroli died that year. Nick and Alan Broadbent were very, very close. Alan was in New Zealand, and I had no phone number for him and so I called New Zealand information and I said, “You know, I’m trying to reach somebody named Alan Broadbent.”

She says, “You mean the piano player? I’ll find it. I’ll find it.” Yeah, it was the information operator.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, isn’t that great? What a beautiful country that is.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: I mean, really, it’s just so lovely.

That year I worked at the Mark Taper Forum with Don Preston for two or three little John Steppeling plays, and it was just so much fun. We just did the thing where,

you know, like we'd drag cans across the floor. We were behind a screen, you know, and we'd do all kinds of stuff, you know, just wacko sounds. It's just really fun. My favorite line from the play was, there were a couple of, like, borderline drug punk kids and their parents work in the studios, props, and they occasionally work as stagehands and stuff, but they're just bums, you know. A guy says, "Let's go over there."

He says, "No, no, I've got to show up at my dad's party."

He says, "Well, who's going to be there?"

He says, "Oh, you know, doctors, lawyers, shit like that." [laughs] I just love that line. I just love that line.

This is the year I started playing with Larance Marable.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: Okay. This is the year I began writing movie scores, you know, and I can't keep that up and do a little this and that, and you know, it's strictly small-time stuff and here and there occasional. But I actually did a couple of pretty good ones here in '85, and then I got called to do an ad for Singapore Airlines. Okay. You have to do all this thing they wanted and about twenty different little things and, you know, they could only pay \$500 for a complete buyout. I mean, they've been using that music for, you know, fifteen years and every time I go, "Oh, my god," you know. You see this ad with the big blue plane, you know, and you hear [sings sixteenth-note arpeggio], you know. Man!

CLINE: "Where's that check?"

SMITH: Yeah. All through this period I'm working with Gary Foster, Donte's and stuff like that, and Alan Broadbent, and as I go through these years I see Alan and I

have played so much together and continue to. I'm going to New Zealand with him in December. We've got four or five gigs in the next month. We continue to play together once a week every week, I mean unless sickness or somebody's out of town or something like that.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But, I mean, some of these years I play with him as many as 120 times in a year, you know, and we've been doing that for over twenty-five years. You can't buy that.

CLINE: Yeah. Nothing you can say about that.

SMITH: If you could, I would. Here I mentioned the gig with the four Daves.

Okay. I'm sorry. Are we going too—

CLINE: You're okay. No.

SMITH: John Crosse, I recorded with him. He wrote a beautiful set of music called *Lullabies Go Jazz* and we recorded with Luis Conte.

CLINE: Conte, yeah.

SMITH: And Clare Fischer.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: And highly successful. You know, it was a project he made up himself and marketed it through children's stores, you know, baby crib stores stuff like that. The thing is still selling and I have people come up to me, you know— I mean, somebody will say, "Putter Smith. My parents used to play this in the crib for me. Are you in that *Lullabies*?"

“Yeah, great,” you know, love it. And I just love the album. It’s just so easy to listen to.

I’m just going to try to pick the big guys here. John Bannister. Did we ever talk about him?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Okay. Well, John is a real character and he is the originator of the line that’s attributed to Al Cohn and it’s attributed to whoever takes it, but he actually created the line when he’s working at the Biltmore [Hotel] on New Year’s Eve, probably 1977 or something like that, and he’s standing out there smoking in his tuxedo, and this derelict comes up to him and says, “I’m going to level with you, buddy.” He says, “I need a bottle of wine real bad.” He says, “Could you let me have a couple bucks?”

And John says, “How do I know you’re not going to buy a hamburger and a cup of coffee with it?” [mutual laughter]

Denny Dennis, very nice player. He was the drummer with Jack Reidling. His son apparently is emerging as a great player. I don’t know his name.

Did we talk about Kevin Tulus of the L.A. Jazz Quartet?

CLINE: No. I mean, I know who he is, but no, we haven’t talked about him.

SMITH: Well, Kevin is one of the great, great talents, in my opinion, and he’s also a marvelous writer, you know, and he plays vibes and he scat sings and, I mean, he sings like a musician, you know, one of the great talents. He was one of the driving forces in that L.A. Jazz Quartet.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: I mean, I think fully at least half of the material was his, and just wonderful stuff and really original. But, you know, people get fixated on personalities and they—I think largely Darek [“Oles” Oleskiewicz]—I mean I like Darek, too, but they kind of got— They wanted to bump him [Kevin] out of the band, and I thought it was the dumbest thing that they could do, you know. When you have something that’s successful like that, come on, man. I mean, the guys in Duke Ellington, there were a lot of these guys on there for twenty years and they would not speak with each other. You know, they’d say one of the guys’ names to one another, they’d spit, you know. I mean, they’re sitting next to each other.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: You know, it’s so foolish to, I think, to get fixated on somebody’s behavior, not that Kevin has a bad behavior; he’s a really sweet guy, you know. I guess, I don’t know. I don’t know what went down, but—

CLINE: Yeah, I don’t either.

SMITH: Ridiculous. And he’s such a talent, such a heavy talent. I mean, he’s right up there with Larry [Koonse], you know, and—

CLINE: And the other guys in that band.

SMITH: You know, yeah. I guess then they ended up getting a drummer who lives in New York.

CLINE: Mark Ferber.

SMITH: Yeah, Mark Ferber.

CLINE: Well, he used to live here.

CLINE: Yeah. I mean, he's a marvelous drummer. I mean marvelous, but he really doesn't have anything on Kevin. They're different styles, but there's nothing— Well, I mean, for years Alan had a drummer that lived in New Zealand, and that was kind of ridiculous, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, really.

SMITH: I mean, just because of the space. Although Frank Gibson, Alan's drummer, one of the best drummers. I mean, if he'd been here, he'd been very successful.

CLINE: Yeah. Yeah.

SMITH: But, again, he was successful there so he— You know, I think a guy when he lives in El Paso, Texas, and he sees he's really good, he's inclined to go to New York or L.A., but if somebody's living in Dallas and you're doing pretty darn good, "Well, wait a minute, man, I don't want to give up—," you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Anyway, wish he had come over here, but he didn't.

Herb Mickman is a famous character here in L.A.

CLINE: Yeah, I remember about hearing him.

SMITH: He's legendary, a marvelous musician, and I think he's a great bass player. He also plays plenty of piano and he kind of settled into teaching, but when he first came to town, you know, he had a little ad in the paper, the musicians [union, American Federation of Musicians, Local 47] paper [*Overture*], "Instruction," and listed himself as Sarah Vaughan's musical director, you know. So right away, you know, he's working, he's doing all these gigs and everything, and I'm looking— In

the days when I used to read through the entire musicians thing, I'd go through and look at all of the trials and all things. It's when I had time in my life.

I began to see every month Herb was taking somebody to the union. You know, it was like he'd have— He'd be working for one of these [inaudible] leaders, and the guy was supposed to pay him an extra \$25 because they had made a move in the room, you know. So he'd take them to the union with that, you know. I mean, for about two years, you know, you'd see his— Every time, you know, and he even took Sarah Vaughan to the union, you know, and continued to use her name in his ad.

CLINE: Yeah, of course.

SMITH: Well, it's a quirk. I mean, he's really not a bad guy. He's not a mean guy, he just has this quirk, you know, and it's like he can't see the forest for the trees, you know. Then he can't understand why nobody's calling him.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: You know? "I wonder why nobody's calling me." Well, shit, man, you've taken everybody to the union already that you've ever worked with, you know.

CLINE: Really. I knew some former students that he had. Yeah. I guess they thought he was kind of wacky.

SMITH: Oh, well, he's a little wacked. He's a little wacked. But I've always appreciated him, and he's always been appreciative of my originality. He always comments on that. So, you know, of course, when somebody likes you, you like, I mean, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But I'm going to be taking him to the union pretty soon. [Cline laughs.]

Okay. There was a club called Loa for a while.

CLINE: Oh, the Loa, yeah, on Pico Boulevard in Santa Monica.

SMITH: And it had the worst sound, the worst sound of any club I've ever been in, just awful, you know. The Jazz Bakery is terrible, but this was worse.

CLINE: Wow. And it later became the Alligator Lounge.

SMITH: Do they still have music there?

CLINE: No. The Alligator Lounge went out years ago. But the Alligator Lounge mainly became a rock club, but became a big focal point for sort of the new music scene in L.A. for a few years on Monday nights.

SMITH: Well, I worked there several times. One time I worked with Johnny Frigo, with Joe Diorio, and Johnny Frigo was a violin player from Chicago. Wonderful, wonderful, and he's of the old school. Joe Diorio was playing. They weren't a very good match, because Joe's the new school.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Johnny Frigo did a style, and guys don't understand—Joe couldn't get it either—and I think of it as a George Burns kind of time. Okay. That's where he'll play something in time and then there will be a pause, you know. [Sings series of improvised melodies separated by marked pauses]. So everything they play is in time, but the spaces are formatted, you know. And I like that, where everything is free, the phrases stretch out and everything, but the phrases remain as if you're playing in time. It's just the pauses in between. It's very, very nice. And I heard he used to play bass.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: I remember I was knocked out, he had these snakeskin shoes and, god, for years after that I looked for snakeskin shoes, you know. “Yeah, I want some of those. They’re cool.” Isn’t that funny?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: There’s a piano player who lives in San Juan Capistrano, his name is Rex Thompson, and this guy swings. He sounds like a Blue Note [Records] player, just swings, plays so nice, and he’s been on the scene, a fixture, for fifty years down there, and, of course, no one ever hears him, you know. You hear these guys and you go, “Man, this guy is really good,” and who’s ever heard of him? But great guy, great player.

Arlette McCoy, she’s a swinging piano player. She married Monty Budwig, and she’s a great chick. I went to L.A. [Los Angeles] City College with her. Anyway, she’s been on the scene working and everything, and she’s a swinging chick piano player.

Okay. Jack Sheldon.

CLINE: Yeah. Well, there’s a fixture.

SMITH: Yeah. Boy, he’s a marvelous, most marvelous player.

CLINE: And one of the few guys of that whole scene who’s still around.

SMITH: Yeah, and a real nut. I mean, I was working the gig where he met his current body servant, and he’s got this girl, Dianne [Jimenez] that— I mean, it’s— Have you ever seen this situation?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Well, she carries his horn and sets everything up, and then she sits at his feet in adoration through the whole set, and he walks off and then she puts his horn away and all that stuff and carries it out to the car. And she handles all the calling and everything. I mean, it is such an odd, strange relationship. I mean, I wish I had one, you know.

CLINE: Yeah. [laughs]

SMITH: I was there the day they met. It was at the pier there. There was a gig on the pier at San Pedro. I can't remember the—I want to say passport or something, some pier there.

CLINE: Oh, Ports o' Call Village?

SMITH: Yeah, Ports o' Call, that's it. She seemed like a normal chick, you know, and she was thin and looked good, and now she's swollen up with him. They're both very, very heavy. But they entered into this strange and unusual relationship. I enjoy talking to her and I enjoy talking to Jack, but it's like whooo, you know, that's a weird one.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But I heard the other day the Huell Howser show was doing a thing on Avalon.

Are you running out of tape?

CLINE: I'm just checking. You can finish. Avalon in Catalina?

SMITH: Yeah, Catalina. At the end of the show they were playing— The trumpet player was playing, and I thought, "My," I mean, I was just stunned how great this trumpet player was. "Is that Lee Morgan? God, who is that?" It's so, I mean, as good

as anybody you ever heard and yet it wasn't any of those guys. It ended up being Jack Sheldon and Ross Thompsons, a duo.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I mean, I was floored. I mean, it sounded so modern and hip and everything, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, he did.

SMITH: Oh, my god.

CLINE: And now he does a lot of singing.

SMITH: Pat Murphy. Do you know that name?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Conga player.

CLINE: Yeah. I don't know him personally.

SMITH: Well, he ran a parade here for years. I'm not sure what it was, if it was the Reggae Parade or some darn thing, and he produced this thing every year and there were thousands of people involved and it was some kind of great thing. And he ended up, he's always been very politically active, and he ended up working for Jane Fonda. Maybe it's Turner Broadcasting [System] or something. I don't know. But he was a great guy and a very energetic guy. Nice conga player.

At this time I worked at the Wallenboyd [Theatre] with Don Preston and John Densmore. It was funny, because Don— You know Don's songs, you know, "Dead Babies Aren't Much Fun," or whatever it was.

CLINE: Yeah, I remember that one.

SMITH: Whatever. That wasn't the name of it, but it was something like that.

CLINE: "Dead Children."

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, so humorous, but very dark.

CLINE: Yeah. Actually I'll turn the tape, put in a new tape now.

SMITH: Well, the last day of this is Warne Marsh dies.

CLINE: Oh, okay. And he went out in action, so to speak.

SMITH: Yeah.

CLINE: Amazing. The way many of us would like to go, I think, mid-phrase, as it were.

TAPE NUMBER: XIII, SIDE ONE

OCTOBER 15, 2003

CLINE: This is Alex Cline once again interviewing Putter Smith on October 15th at his home in South Pasadena. I think we're on tape thirteen now.

We're continuing with some of the artists you worked with in more recent years that you find notable, memorable, important, or of interest.

SMITH: All right. All right. Got to work with Diane Schuur in '89. Wonderful. I worked with her two or three times over the next few years; marvelous piano player, marvelous singer, and a great chick. I mean, she is so cool. Fire. I mean, and it's amazing, you know, here's a person that cannot see, enters the room and dominates it, you know. I mean really a personality, you know. They used to call them— My dad [Carson W. Smith] used to called them a ball of fire.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: That's who she is.

CLINE: Wow.

SMITH: I got to play with Sue Rainey, who has never quite got the acclaim that she deserves. Wonderful singer. She's married to Carmen Fanzone, who plays real nice Chet Baker kind of trumpet. He's sort of gone into being a union administrator at [American Federation of Musicians] Local 47 a lot, and he used to play for the Chicago Cubs. He was a major league baseball player for seven or eight years, and his stories about why he quit baseball are hilarious.

CLINE: Well, especially if you're playing for the Cubs. I mean, aside from this year, perhaps, that could be frustrating.

SMITH: Well, I'll see if I can do this in one minute. He went back down to the minor leagues and he was playing in Hawaii for some team. They have these volcanic pebbles instead of sand, you know. He says, "They want you to slide into base because it looks better." You know, they want you to do that whole thing. It's like show biz, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: And he had slid in two days before and had a scab that went the entire length of his leg, you know. It sounds funny, but it's terrible. And so then he got a two-base— You know, he had to scurry to get to second and slid in, you know, and you have to be real relaxed to do that, and he said he knew he had this scab, you know, so he was like a little tight. He ended up breaking his foot and the entire scab came off. You know, I mean, we're talking about a three-foot scab. And he said that was the moment he decided "That's enough."

CLINE: Oh, man.

SMITH: You know, and stopped playing baseball. Anyway, that's pretty funny, I mean besides the pain and misery.

I played with Laurindo Almeida, and got to know him fairly well for a while, and learned a lot from him. He's one of those exquisite courtly gentlemen. He used to refer to his wife as "the warden."

1990 I got to give a speech about Buddy Collette, with him on the stand, and got to say how much I admired him. He was very moved. It feels so good when you're able to tell somebody something like that.

This is the year I began my heavyweight study with Peter Rofe. I began my seven years of upward thing, so I studied with Peter Rofe until John Clayton— Did I tell you about that?

CLINE: Yes.

SMITH: Yeah, okay. That student's name, by the way, was Jesse Murphy.

CLINE: Oh, okay.

SMITH: Yeah. He had been my student, and I understand he's now doing very well in New York. See, go to New York.

Played a Bill Evans tribute with Alan and several other groups, among them Mike Melvoin. I had met Mike Melvoin the week he came to town. He had come from playing with Philly Joe [Jones]'s quintet. And he was such a good player and so hot at the time. Of course, he had his sights set on the studios and doing good, which he has done so well. But I heard him this year, and I hadn't heard him in twenty years and he just sounds wonderful. He's one of the great players. I mean just wonderful.

The other player I was thinking about was Mike Lang, who's also a heavyweight studio player. These guys could have done big things in jazz, but they wouldn't have made any kind of money.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: I went to see Gary Foster was playing in *Nixon in China*, John Adams' opera, and I couldn't stop crying, I found it so moving. It just killed me. I just loved it. I loved it as much as I hated Phil Glass. [Cline laughs.]

Stephanie Haynes is one of the best singers in the world.

CLINE: Yeah, I've actually played with her once.

SMITH: Yeah. I mean, she's just an incredible, great singer. She's quite bitter, like a lot of— You know, just several other singers. Pinky Winters is another great singer. And they had a flurry when they're young. It's like anybody when you're young, they get some attention, you know, and then you've got to kind of bankroll it. And neither of those did and thought, "Well, it just will take care of itself because I'm so good," and they were that good, but it just didn't happen, and so now they're kind of bitter. And I hate to see that. I mean, I hate to see somebody that's able to be so good and then be bitter about it, because it's the doing of it. It's not who likes you. It's not the name in the paper. It's not the money. It's, we get up there and do it, you know. You're right there in the room with God. You know what I mean? That's it, you know.

CLINE: Yeah. Right.

SMITH: But, of course, if you're broke, it's a big drag.

I saw Don Randi that year, and I had worked with him when my children were born, you know, and we've remained real good friends, but we hardly ever see each other.

I began playing in the Rio Hondo Symphony with Wayne Reinecke, a conductor, and that's been a great experience. I've been doing that for twelve years.

It's about this time I started working with Ron Eschete a lot. We worked together. There was some club—I keep wanting to say the Blue Parrot, but that wasn't it. That was down in San Diego. It was over on Ventura up on the second story. He is such a great player. Ron Eschete is a great, great guitar player.

Julie Kelly. Julie always had the best vibe and really good material and great time feel, but she sang very out of tune. Then she took off for a couple of years and studied with an opera singer and came back, and now she sings perfectly in tune. It was so thrilling to have somebody— And I mean she's one of my very favorite people and one of my very favorite singers, you know, and having cured that problem, and she doesn't give any stiffness or anything like that from, you know, just her gut. And I'm so impressed and thrilled to see somebody solve a problem like that.

I met Sandy Astin and Paul Astin this year. And Sandy, I think, is at UCLA and he's high up in administration. His brother is John Astin, the actor.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But Paul Astin is his son, and Paul is a piano player who's now become a teacher. I learned to love music more by knowing Paul. Paul is one of these guys that goes into practically a trance when he hears music, and he just lets you know about it, how much he loves it, and he talks specifically about this thing and that thing. I mean, I got excited about music again through this guy.

Last year we worked a gig for about six months, it was Sunday evenings, three-hour gig, on a terrible piano, and he's not a professional player and he doesn't have the technique of Alan Broadbent, but he has more spirit of music than anybody I've ever known. I mean, I just soak it up, soak up the spirit, and say, "God, I wish

everybody had this spirit.” It’s more fun playing with him than anybody, you know, just because it’s so— You know, the muse, “Hey, here I am, the muse. I’m going to take you out now.” You know, Paul Astin.

Okay. Who else here? I notice I bought a car from a guy named Bill Yeakel that year. He had a thing called— This is kind of weird. Down at the El Monte Airport he had a thing called the Ugly Duckling Car Rental, and he would get these cars, and so he’s like a small-time car dealer and stuff and everything. I said, “Well, you know, do you remember the Yeakel brothers?”

He said, “That’s my dad.”

Yeakel Cadillac, I think it was, or something, had a show in the fifties, in the middle fifties, *Rocket to Stardom*, I think it was called, and it’d come on about one in the morning or something like that. This was show was famous because Lenny Bruce would go on and Joe Maini and all these guys and they’d do this outrageous stuff, you know. It was almost like the *Gong Show*, except it was live old-time television. So many things happened on that show, like Joe Maini and Lenny Bruce. It was legendary. Of course, the people had no idea what they were doing, what they were talking about, you know. Anyway, I can’t quote any of it; I’m just telling you about it.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I went to see the Christo umbrellas.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: Yeah. That was real interesting and two days later somebody was killed there.

Hirth Martinez is a great talent here. He plays guitar and sings and is very more towards folk music, but he sings his butt off. He's never gotten a break of any kind, although he's recorded with some pretty big stuff.

People to be remembered. I worked with Art Farmer. That was interesting.

CLINE: Yeah, you mentioned that.

SMITH: Okay. Dick Forrest, trumpet player, he's been on the scene for years. A wonderful, wonderful player, and, again, he's involved in helping people rehabilitate from drug use and stuff. He's connected with Buddy Arnold, who is another guy that at one point was a terrible junkie and has now become somebody that rehabilitates and does a lot of good.

CLINE: That's great.

SMITH: Ann Patterson. You know who she is.

CLINE: Sure.

SMITH: In '92 I went to see Billy Eckstine, who I'd worked with in the sixties, and he was coming back to play at Vine Street [Bar and Grill] and here he is seventy-five or something. "Man, I'm going to see 'Mr. B,' you know."

I went down there and he wasn't there. The police had picked him up for not paying his alimony to one of his wives way back. I mean, here they're putting a seventy-five-year-old man in jail, taking him off the stand where he's going to make a few bucks. I mean, isn't that ridiculous?

Anyway, I got to hang out with— Herb Jeffries was playing there, and I've worked with Herb many times. Now, there's talent. I mean, talent of— Extraordinary visible talent, you know. I mean, I think, this is talent, and you look at Mick Jagger

and you say, “This is not talent. You know, this is not talent. This is something, but this other thing is exuding talent.” Okay. I mean, I hope you’re— You might be a Mick Jagger fan. Because young people, you know, people that are younger—

CLINE: No, I liked him when I was, you know, twelve.

SMITH: Yeah. But going in and doing the audience thing and they put their hands in the air and they chant and all that, it’s a big group thing. It kind of reminds me of the Nuremberg demonstrations. It’s kind of a crowd—

CLINE: Yeah, it’s a mob kind of vibe.

SMITH: Yeah. But anyway, I got to hang out with Bobby Tucker, who was his [Eckstine’s] piano player for years, and Bobby played— He was Billie Holiday’s accompanist for a long time. Really fine guy. He’s the guy— He was one of these guys that has the Teddy Wilson touch, you know. Just absolutely impeccable musician.

Did I tell you about that, the first time I played on that band? Well, I was eighteen and, you know, we’re playing a thing like one of the arrangements and, you know, I missed a note and then I went to correct it, you know, which, you know, you never look back, you know, when you’re reading music.

CLINE: Oh, yeah, I think you did mention that.

SMITH: Yeah. And he turns and he screams, “Don’t do that!”

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: You know, I mean, realized, oh, my god, you know, this is what a serious musician is, you know. It’s like really important, you know. So I’ve never stopped paying attention. Yeah, I’m really grateful to him.

Jesse Murphy, '92, looked me in the eyes and said, "Call John Clayton," and I did. I began studying with John Clayton in '92. This was after three years with—

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: There's a character out here named Ace Lane. You ever hear of Ace Lane?

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Well, he had, for fifteen years or so, a big band that rehearsed one day. I was able to do it once, but when I began teaching at B.I.T. [Bass Institute of Technology] it was conflicting with the same day. It was legendary. I mean, it was like a regular hang for about fifteen, twenty musicians, and Ace was— He'd been a very good trombone player in [Las] Vegas and he had gone up to— I can't remember what they call it, but there's some town outside of Vegas, which is a bunch of brothels.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: And he'd gone up there, and he was on his way back and got in an automobile accident and then he was very crippled up and his nervous system was all messed up and everything, but he didn't give up. He couldn't play anymore, but he had this big band, you know, and he didn't write or anything. But people loved it. I mean, everybody just loved him and they loved the band and they loved the hang. It was an institution. Ace Lane.

And it's about this time I first heard Bobby Rodriguez, a marvelous player. He was playing with, I can't remember, Mike Stephans' band or something. God, he was playing so good. Then he started that Hispanic Jazz Society or whatever, and, of course, I joined. I joined the very first and the thing is, "Why are you joining?" You know, there was a question. I said, "Love and respect." You know, because these are

my brothers from when I was a kid. I grew up— That's who I hung out with at Bell [High School]. Bell now is almost entirely Latino, and at that time in the school of— I don't know how many people were there. Eighteen hundred or two thousand, I don't know, but there were about twenty Latinos. They all hung in this one quad, you know. I hung out with those guys. Those were the guys I hung out with. That's how I played with Johnny—because I was a musician—Johnny Subia, and he got me in Paul Estrada's band. But I used to hang out with these guys, you know. So that's why I joined.

Then I guess somebody made something— Put something on Bobby, as “What's this guy doing in our society?” You know.

CLINE: Oh, really.

SMITH: So I was kind of— There's a certain way that it's indicated to you that you're not welcome anymore. So my philosophy is, if I'm not welcome, I won't go there, you know, but I still have love and respect, you know. But it is very shortsighted for people to do that, you know.

CLINE: Sure. Wow. Yeah, be exclusive.

SMITH: Along with being illegal, you know.

CLINE: That's right.

SMITH: You know, I mean, I'm a member of the Older Women's League.

CLINE: Yeah, yeah.

SMITH: You know, it's just the name of it, and I joined when I was forty. [mutual laughter] They have some real great benefits for insurance buying and stuff like that, plus they're a great society.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But, I mean, we can all join anything. That's the law, but if I'm not welcome, I don't want to be there.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: But I still have love and respect.

Got to play with Don Trenner, who has played on that "Bird" [*Charlie Parker* with *Strings* album. I think he was Nancy Wilson's accompanist for a long time. He's a very, very good musician. It's so apparent, you know, you play with these guys, and you're like, "Ah, this is why this guy's a success, because he's so good."

I went to see Gerry Mulligan at the [John] Anson Ford Theatre. It was called "Rebirth of the Cool." It was nice, you know. Gerry didn't give anybody else any solos, you know, it was all him, but he's so good, but he should have given a few.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I think they should have called it "Afterbirth of the Cool." [Cline laughs.] I mean, that's a joke.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: I have to acknowledge Chuck Niles.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: I mean, Chuck, you know, man, what a help he is to everybody, you know. What a help. And he really loves the music, you know, he just loves the music. He doesn't want to hear anything negative about anything, you know.

And I love Helen Borgers' laugh, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: [Bob] Magnusson. We've remained good friends for years. He's one of the high guys in the world, a true family man. He and [Dave] Pozzi are similar, Dave Pozzi. I mean, it's the family first. You know, like they want to have children and they want to hang out with them more than anybody else, you know. To me that's like, wow. You know, I never wanted to have children. I mean, I have children and I love them, but it was a terrible hardship and I couldn't focus on that, you know. These guys, it's amazing they're just delighted to be with their children and, "Let's go to the zoo. Let's take a trip to the mountains. Let's spend the night on the beach," you know. I mean, god, you know, jeez, I wish I could be normal. It's so unusual.

[mutual laughter]

CLINE: Yeah, it's so abnormal to be normal.

SMITH: Yes. I saw Buster Williams around this time out here, but I had seen him before in Vegas with Nancy Wilson, and at that time he was the best bass player I ever heard. I mean, he just killed me. Just killed me.

CLINE: Yeah, huge sound.

SMITH: We have exactly the same bass. One night—this is in the sixties—we're in Vegas and I had all these guys in the room with Buster and the drummer, I can't remember what his name was, and Richard Boone was there, and that was a lot of fun being in Vegas with a bunch of great jazz musicians and watching Lawrence Welk on TV.

Jake Hannah, boy, here's another institution and swing and real and down to earth and so funny. He's got a comment on anything, you know. One of his more famous is, he heard Mel Torme, who probably had the largest ego of anyone who ever

lived, said— I mean, I’ve heard. You know, I met him once, but I don’t know him. I heard that Mel was going to write a book about Buddy Rich and Jake says, “Well, yeah, hope he mentions Buddy.” [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Jake is famous, you know. He was working with Tony Bennett, you know, and I mean, he’s a wonderful drummer, take care of business, brushes, got one of those liquid sounds. He was working with Tony Bennett, and Tony Bennett is kind of a legendary weird person. I hope I never get to play with him, because I love hearing him, you know. Anyway, he had decided to fire Jake, you know, and I don’t know if this happened before or after, you know, and they were having a meeting or something afterwards and Tony would say something, you know, and Jake was like, “Well, you’ve got to remember, Tony, you’re not a musician. You’re not a musician,” you know. [mutual laughter] I mean, in your face, you know.

CLINE: Whoa.

SMITH: In your face. Great. I mean, I’ve heard some bizarre stories about Tony Bennett, you know. But I don’t know if you want to put this in. Do you want to hear any of it?

CLINE: If you want. We’re kind of short on time now.

SMITH: Okay. All right. All right, I’ll just go on.

CLINE: Okay. Call Putter if you want to hear the stories of Tony Bennett.

SMITH: Yeah. Howard Alden, who I’d met at G.I.T. before, decided to go to New York and had a tremendous career. What a great guy. He had a problem with his head; I don’t mean psychologically. He actually had some sort of liquid in the brain

and they didn't know what the hell to do with it. I saw him three or four years ago and he had a shunt and it was draining, and he looked awful. And then I saw him last year or this year and he looks perfect, and he said he did it all through nutrition under some nutritionist.

CLINE: Really.

SMITH: Changed what he ate totally, and he's cured.

I worked with Wesla Whitfield and Mike Greensill. She's a wonderful singer. She was considered the up-and-coming star of musicals, like she was going to be—I can't think of her name now, but anybody you think of in musicals, your first thought, famous musical person, and she was the up-and-comer acknowledged. They were writing articles all over the country. She was walking to a rehearsal, and a random drive-by shooting, somebody shot her and got her in the spine. She lost the use of her legs and she gets around in a wheelchair. So she went on and developed her singing as a cabaret singer, and she just gets better and better and better and better. I worked with her last year. I first worked with her in '92. Mike Greensill is perfect for her. He plays sort of in the hints of Bill Evans' touch, and very, very musical. They're working all over the world now and she has a regular thing at the Algonquin [Hotel] in New York City, once a year I think she's there for three months. They live in San Francisco.

I worked with them a few months ago. Somebody brought her down for a party, a lot of money, you know, and so we're doing a sound check and I went out in front and into the backyard and she sang "But Beautiful," and I mean, she sang three notes and I was weeping. I mean, so much emotion, you know. Jesus, wonderful.

Okay. Dave Scott, '93. Dave is kind of an out player, but he doesn't have an out sound. He sounds real sweet and soft and real musical, and yet he's playing way out there, you know, free kind of playing, and I kind of like it. He moved to New York a few years ago and he's doing real well there. Dave Scott.

I got to play with Jackie and Roy [Kral] for a week, and that was fun because that was something I heard when I was a kid. I mean, literally when I was six or seven years old my brother had that Charlie Barnet, I think it's called *East of Suez* and they're on there. It used to just thrill me, that thing.

One night Roger Kellaway comes in to the— We're playing at the old Jazz Bakery, and he comes up and, you know, I find out he used to play bass with them. I didn't know he played bass. And he used to work with them; he was their bass player. CLINE: Really.

SMITH: Isn't that amazing?

CLINE: That's bizarre.

SMITH: Roger Kellaway. I saw him play at a concert at the Ambassador [Auditorium] and it was called "Fifty Fingers," so that would mean five piano players. Okay. Right? Yeah. And what they did was each one would play a couple of solo tunes and then they paired off into different duets, and Roger Kellaway was standout musical, everything. Goddamn, he killed me. I mean, every piano player there was great, but, you know, he killed me. And then he and Dick Hyman did a duet on "Chopsticks," but it wasn't until they were about five minutes into it that I realized they were playing "Chopsticks." But Roger Kellaway, you know, there's an original, amazing musical player.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Let's see. Got to work with Lee Konitz down at the Hyatt. That was nice. Played a Ray Brown tribute, and standing next to me was John Leitham.

CLINE: Oh, yeah.

SMITH: Okay.

CLINE: Yeah, we talked about Jennifer [Leitham], yeah.

SMITH: That will never happen again. I'll never stand next to John Leitham again.

CLINE: No.

SMITH: Okay. There was a real wonderful guitar player here, again, another case where nobody, you know— His name was John Paul Bjornson and he was from Iceland by way of Sweden. He was over here for ten or fifteen years, a wonderful player. He went back to Iceland or Sweden and now he's doing very well, which he should.

'93, this is the year I played at the Hunt Club, that's in Pasadena, with Dick Carey. I told you about Dick Cary.

CLINE: Right. Dick Cary, yeah.

SMITH: And they had a new doorman. They had some young kid as a doorman, you know, and so we're coming in, going in, and this doorman says, "Vendors go into the back."

And Dick Cary pushed his shoulder and shouldered the door open and he says, "We don't go in the back door." Yeah, cool.

CLINE: Wow. Yeah.

SMITH: Cool.

CLINE: Indeed.

SMITH: Yeah. “We don’t go in the back door, you dick.”

Okay. Someone I should remember, Richie Surnock, S-u-r-n-o-c-k. He was a big Russian guy. I mean, he’s American, but he’s a big soft-spoken Russian guy who played bass and was on the scene for years, one of the sweetest guys and a fixture for years. You know, nothing ever happened for him special, but he was a very loveable guy and patient, you know. He had a very sad underneath. I don’t know if that’s just a Slavic thing or what, but I know that everybody that ever knew him will think fondly of him.

And this is the year we played Henry Mancini tunes, when he got that pancreatic cancer, a month before he died. I mean, when you get that they say, you know, you’ve got thirty days or something and that’s what you’ve got.

CLINE: That’s right.

SMITH: I knew somebody else that happened to, and there’s not a thing they can do about it.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: So they did this big fête, you know, and Julie, the one in *Sugar-Coated Professor*, whatever her name is. Julie Andrews.

CLINE: Andrews.

SMITH: Yeah. She was there and she performed, all these people performed, and then the next to last performer was [Luciano] Pavarotti. They have a small orchestra and a stand, Pavarotti and Ray Brown was there. Then the final thing was the Alan Broadbent Trio, you know.

CLINE: Oh, interesting.

SMITH: But we weren't really— We were like the tail-end. Pavarotti wasn't opening for us.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: That was the end of the show and then we got up on the stand and played a couple of tunes, but I always say, yeah, Pavarotti opened for us. [mutual laughter]

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: But I gave this guy a ticket, you know. Frank Sinatra's his driver. You know, you've heard that old joke, right?

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, in various forms.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Again, we played a couple of Henry Mancini. It was pretty touching, very touching, because he was a great guy, and he was dead thirty days fucking later. I couldn't believe it. Thirty days later. Jesus. And he looked great. He looked great. I mean, he wasn't in pain.

Let's see. Names. Ben Clatworthy, great tenor player. England. His aunt was Gertrude Lawrence, and she was a great English comedian and apparently hung out with Picasso. There's a picture of her painted by Picasso. But Ben is one of the fantastic players, he plays like Sonny Rollins, and a great sense of humor. He's a little out of control.

Okay. Well, at this time I started studying with— John Clayton told me that he couldn't show me any more and I had to go to his teacher, Paul Ellison. Paul Ellison

is the preeminent bassist and technical player of the instrument, and a great teacher. I really learned a lot about teaching from him, even though I only had a few lessons from him.

There was a club opened here called Legends of Jazz, and this guy was so weird, the owner; he was just a complete fool. The first time he ever had an audience in there, he went around and tried to charge them an extra admission. Everybody left and nobody ever came back. I mean, you know, it's like insulting.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Let's see. Michael Moore came to town. I got to know Michael pretty well. I first talked to him with Bill Evans when he was here; I went in to see him a couple of times and we had nice conversations. And I forget, we were talking and he was going to show me something about playing the bass and then Eric [von Essen] occurred, I was going to ask if he could go and Jim Hirschman came with him, too. So the three of us, and I taped the whole thing, and Michael Moore, he thought he kind of got—I mean, I guess he has like a clinic or something he does, and so he sort of did the clinic. It wasn't really what my intention was.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Okay. What year are we? '94 and I can't find my '95 datebook. Isn't that something?

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: What a relief. '96 Joanne Brackeen comes back to town. I worked for a week at Catalina's with Ralph Penland.

I met John Mayer that year and, you know, continued to work with him.

There's a young bass player, Joe Plutschow. And it's Jiro, J-i-r-o, but he used to go by Joe. His father is Swiss and his mother is Japanese.

CLINE: Oh, is he related to— Oh, what's his first name? I think it's Herbert [E. Plutschow]. Anyway, Plutschow who's in the [East] Asian American [Languages and Cultures] Studies at UCLA?

SMITH: I have no idea. I have no idea.

CLINE: That would probably make sense.

SMITH: Well, I'll ask him next time I see him. But this is one of those wonderful cases where you see somebody that's got a whole bunch of blocks about their playing and they're struggling to get through and they have a lot of blocks and they go through a lot of changes, and yet keep struggling on, and he became a really good bass player, a really good jazz bass player, feels good, solos good and everything. That's one of the great success stories to me, you know, is Joe— Jiro Plutschow. I hope he does real good in his career.

About this time I start playing with Joe LaBarbera quite a bit, Of course, he's one of the great players. He's the guy that took Bill Evans to the hospital when he died. You know, "professional," there's his picture, you know, in the dictionary.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: My brother [Carson R. Smith] got ill this year [1996].

I spent about three weeks recording with Jim Keltner, Kent Glenn, and Chuck Manning. Jim was getting ready to do something with Bill Frisell, you know, get his jazz chops up again, so we actually got a whole bunch of stuff recorded there. I don't know how, one of them ended up on the Internet and I never showed it to anybody.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: So it must have come through— Kent took a copy of it, so somebody must have got that and put it on the Internet. It was so weird.

Ysla Eckinger, spelled Y-s-l-a. Last name is E-c-k-i-n-g-e-r. Bass player, trombone player, vibe player and all good. I mean, it pisses me off how good he plays bass. He had a great career in Europe. I guess he's, you know, middle fifties or sixty. And he has a great career now and he spends his time between, you know, going around the country and working around here, and he's absolutely without an ego and he's, you know, humble and everything, and plays great. Great. Anyway, he should be remembered.

I think I talked about Betty O'Hara before.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: This year, '97, my brother died.

Mike Barone, wonderful writer, and his brother plays trumpet. I can't remember his—

CLINE: Gary [Barone].

SMITH: Gary Barone, yeah.

Sal Marquez. There's a legendary character.

CLINE: Yeah, indeed.

SMITH: When I first played with him, I could not believe how beautiful he played, you know. The last I heard he was the voice of the Chihuahua on the Taco Bell.

CLINE: Really?

SMITH: Yeah. "Yo quiero Taco Bell." He is really a nice guy.

1998, Mike Garson. I couldn't believe this guy. It was like Niagara Falls. I mean, honest to God, unbelievable what this guy plays, you know, up and down, and quite musical. He seems to have the energy of about eight or nine people, you know. On the break he says, "Let's go out in the car. I taped it. Let's go out in the car and listen to it."

I said, "Man, that's not what a break is."

CLINE: Right. [laughs]

SMITH: Okay. Everybody here I mentioned before. One of my old teachers I just mentioned was Louis Kabok. I think I talked about him. He's one of the three guys that escaped from Hungary and the Iron Curtain with Gabor Szabo and Steve Heidig and Louis Kabok. They actually crawled under barbed wire because they wanted to come to America and play jazz, you know. And Gabor Szabo, of course, had a wonderful career.

Lou Kabok is one of these guys that's so humble in appearance and demeanor that I knew him for two years before I knew he played bass. I'm serious. I said, "What do you do, Lou?"

He says, "Oh, I work in a shoe store."

Then I come to find out that he had a career behind the Iron Curtain. He traveled all over. He was a soloist on string bass with symphonies, and I mean, man, that's saying something, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, really.

SMITH: I said, "Lou, I heard you play bass." I hadn't heard about this other thing. I heard he played bass.

He says, “Oh, yeah, but not like you. Not like you.”

You know, so you think, oh, well, the guy’s played in an amateur band or something.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And so I went to a Bass Club meeting ten years later or fifteen years later, and the guy that was supposed to show up didn’t show up and so one of these heavy bass teachers, Abe Luboff or somebody, says, “Hey, Lou, come on up and do some of your Hungarian improvisations or your gypsy improvisations.”

“Ah, no, no.”

Then a bunch, “Come on, come on, come on.”

“All right,” you know.

So he got up and he started playing, and I mean, you know, you talk about your jaw dropping, I mean, I was looking at the greatest bass player I’ve ever seen in my life and he could play anything. He could play anything and you could hear his entire instrument, and Jesus, I couldn’t believe it, you know. And here’s a guy I didn’t even— You know, he didn’t have the ability to project who he was. He’s still playing all over the place, but he never got any success as a jazz musician, which is why he came here. But I did study with him. I studied with him for three or four years a long time ago, and much of what I worked on and much of what I teach is what he taught me. Well, it’s another story of Los Angeles.

’99, there’s a piano player named Danny Grissett, a young guy, and he was a student of mine at CalArts [California Institute of the Arts], and he’s going on to

become great and he will eventually go to New York and become a great player. He's got everything.

Jazz Tap [Ensemble].

The year 2000 I went to Vienna with Alan and Gary Foster and Joe LaBarbera, and we played a concert at Mozart Hall and that was so nice. It was so wonderful. I only wish I'd stayed for two weeks. That was wonderful.

Somewhere around here I started doing stuff for the American Jazz Institute, Mark Masters. He's connected with Claremont Colleges and he brings all sorts of stuff together that you haven't seen before or have never seen. He brought John La Porta out and did all of his big band writing and John played with him, and I had no idea he was such a great player. We did *Sketches of Spain* and he brought Tim Hagens out, you know, and Tim, oh, wonderful. Then that guy Gary Smulyan came out and we did his record with strings, a hot baritone player. He's got some of the strangest glasses you ever saw.

Other concerts have been Lee Konitz, which is really nice, and we did a Clifford Brown thing where someone had transcribed it. Jack Montrose has done several. But this guy is doing a wonderful series of music. He and Paul Lines do something. Paul Lines has the Pasadena Jazz Institute, and this has all been created in the last couple of years. And these guys, you know, it's like where one guy comes in and he takes the gig from somebody else. You know, like somebody takes over as the contractor for Schubert Theatre, you know, and so they bring their people in, you know. So you got a gig you didn't have because you know this guy.

But what these guys do is create jobs that weren't there. They create all these venues and all these things, and that weren't there, you know, and that's just marvelous. If we had ten more of each of these guys, you know, then L.A. would be the hottest town, and that's what it takes. That's what it takes. It takes people that are willing to do the thing of getting it happening, but there's so much love involved with this, you know. I mean, you know, it's all—

CLINE: Right. Anyone that you can finish up with here?

SMITH: Yeah. Well, 2002. Oh, in 2001 I played with Nick Brignola for a week. That was hot.

CLINE: Yeah, I'll bet.

SMITH: I got to meet and hang out with Eddie Gomez. He used my bass for a week, you know, which I was happy he could play it. Jesus, what a player.

In 2002 I got to do that recording [*American Dreams*] with Charlie Haden, and Mike [Michael] Brecker was on it and Brian Blade and Brad Mehldau. That was really wonderful to be in the room with them, even though I wasn't actually part of the improvising.

CLINE: But you got to listen to Charlie improvise.

SMITH: Yeah. Who is this? Oh, I play another week with Mose Allison out here. What does this say? Oh, yeah, and then I played one day with Diana Krall, but again, it was a thing— But what a wonderful group they are. I mean, they play full out. You know, here's an audience of 20,000 sitting out there listening to real jazz. I mean, it was John Clayton and Jeff Hamilton and Anthony Wilson. And Anthony Wilson is as

good-- I mean, he's hot, high passionate player, wonderful. Wonderful. And his dad was there at the concert. You know, I talked to his dad afterwards, Gerald [Wilson].

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: Jeez, I mean, they're almost identical in appearance, you know, except for shade of skin, you know. Just wonderful, and he's very proud of him.

I got to play at the Greene Auditorium in Pasadena Duke Ellington's *Nutcracker Suite* [by Tchaikovsky] and that's where you play Duke's— You're sitting next to the symphony. You've got Duke Ellington's Symphony and they play the first movement, the symphony, and then we do Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn's version of it, and it was so good. I mean, it was so amazing. It was like mashed potatoes and gravy. I mean, it was just— You know. They were both better for each other.

CLINE: Wow, that's great.

SMITH: The other thing is I had seen, in the early fifties, Duke Ellington's band in the same place, the Greene. I had gone to see my brother play with Chet Baker and Gerry Mulligan, and in addition to them happened to be the Duke Ellington Orchestra, you know. But there I am.

CLINE: Nice deal.

SMITH: That was quite a nice recross.

CLINE: Nice [inaudible].

SMITH: The people I played with just last— Oh, also the [inaudible] gig, Cecil Payne was playing. A very, very original guy. A sweetheart.

This little tour I just got off, the young people from New York, Grant Langford, a tenor player, and, man, wonderful. Plays like— I mean, it's like kind of a thing like Sonny Rollins, you know, but he's very young and he's going to really emerge and be great. The drummer was a young lady named Luciana Padmore, and so original and so good. Apparently, she's working both rock and jazz and everything, you know, and so has all that stuff to carry.

Okay. That's the end of my names, and I'm sorry it was so damn long.

CLINE: Well, and we're at the end of the tape here, actually.

SMITH: Okay.

CLINE: And all I can say is thank you.

SMITH: Okay. Did I ever talk about my wife [Verna R. Smith]?

CLINE: You have. You said she plays drums.

SMITH: No, I mean, I never talked about how important that is.

CLINE: Okay. Well, let me turn the tape over so we can do that.

SMITH: Okay. Let me just do that, because that—

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CLINE: It's going. We were just finishing up. I wanted to mention, though, before you talk about your wife, one name that I knew you had mentioned that was on your list, but you didn't get around to mentioning on tape and that was Kate McGarry.

SMITH: Oh, Kate was a spectacular singer, very emotional, lots of chops, lots of energy, and when I say energy, I mean energy in the music. She does seem to be sort of frail, actually.

CLINE: Yeah, right.

SMITH: But there's a thing where you focus the energy in the music. That's the thing that surprises me, is how weak someone can be and then the music is so focused. Anyway, she's a great singer, I'd like to hear a lot more of her, and great material.

CLINE: And another one who went to New York.

SMITH: Yes, right. Right. Right.

CLINE: Okay.

SMITH: Well, you know, as far as overview of life, you know, I think people should surround themselves with people that want what they want. If it weren't for my wife, I would have given up. I mean, there were many times when I'd say, "Hey, you know, I'm going to go get a civil service gig. I'm tired of making \$40 and scuffling, and I can't buy a goldfish for my son, you know." This happened once where I went into a— He was four or five or something and went into an aquarium, you know, and he wanted this one fish that was \$5 and I couldn't afford it. You know, I had to buy a

goldfish for seventy-five cents, you know. He says, “Why can’t we get it? Why can’t we get it?”

The aquarium guy says, “‘Cause you’re poor.” You know, I mean, that’s kind of depressing, you know.

CLINE: Yeah, very.

SMITH: But it was true. But we were never poor in spirit or anything like that, but you do get depressed because you don’t have enough money. But we’ve always lived in beauty.

Anyway, because of her [V.R.], we’ve lived in beauty, and she’s always been first for the art, first support the art. And I told you what she said when Thelonious [Monk]— I got the call.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Yeah, so I did— Maybe I have gone through all of this about her.

CLINE: No, not really.

SMITH: Okay. Well, you know, it takes a very special person, man or woman, whoever you’re living with, to have dinner at six-thirty and then you brush your teeth and everything and then you say, “I’ll see you later,” and you get home at two-thirty or three in the morning, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: And then “Don’t wake me up until eleven,” you know, and so it can be very lonely for a person, you know, and a person that’s able to deal with that, you know, it’s very special. And when I’ve wanted to quit several times, she’s like, “No, no, no. No, no, no,” dah, dah, you know, and whenever it was a case of a real great musical

gig or a real great money gig, she would always be pushing for the musical. I mean, I really and truly— I mean, people say this, they say, “Yeah, I couldn’t have done it without her,” that’s true. You know, it’s a platitude, but there’s just no way. I just think everybody needs to find a good second half. I think it’s very important to find somebody that likes your music.

CLINE: For sure.

SMITH: You know, there’s a friend of mine right now and he’s involved with a woman and they have complete opposite musical tastes, and I’m going, “This isn’t going to work.”

CLINE: Yeah, I’ve seen it not work plenty of times.

SMITH: Yeah. But it might. It might. It might.

CLINE: It just depends on how important it is to them.

SMITH: Yeah. Yeah, get their own rooms.

Then the long-term musical relationships are so important, you know. It’s like burning a bridge is simply— It’s as valuable as burning bridges. I mean, a lot of good that does you, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: And hanging in through thick and thin, you know, because I think everybody that has a long-term relationship goes through love-hate cycles and pissed off and everything, and you should always remember to hang on to those who you really know that you love and love you.

I mean, I’m so grateful for my— I’ve had a fifty-year relationship with Dave Koonse, and we play and we play, and it’s just as precious, the music, to us when we

play, it's just as precious as it was when we were seventeen. And everything else is more precious about it, you know. We're dear friends, our wives are dear friends, and, jeez, what a fortunate— You know, how fortunate can you get, you know.

And then Gary Foster, being involved with him for thirty years, just, I mean, it's inspiring. It's inspiring. And then Alan Broadbent, you know, I mean, I owe more to Alan Broadbent than I can ever say. I could never express it, you know. I'm always trying to play catch-up, you know, with him. It's like, you know, back to the drawing board. Yeah, and we play together every week, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Kent Glenn is another long-term associate. For a long time Kent was mad at me and there was a period there he wouldn't talk to me for about six or seven years, and I never gave up because I love this guy and I appreciate what he's done for me and I knew that eventually he'd— Whatever it was, he'd get over it. It was a case of when you become the focus of someone's anxieties, and that's what it is, you know. There's nothing you can do about it. Rather than fight fire with fire, just cool out and let time go by, you know.

Abraham Lincoln said that "It's not whether something is totally evil or totally good, but whether it has a preponderance of good or a preponderance of evil." I guess he's a politician talking about compromise, you know, but it's very realistic and you have to weigh the cost against the value and not just weigh the cost against the fact that it's a cost, you know. I mean, some people will loan somebody \$10 and they'll forget to pay it back and then they'll hate them for the rest of their life. Well, say, that friend was worth \$10 to you, you know. I'll say, "Well, no, this friend is worth—,"

you know, they'd have to rip me off for about \$5,000 before I'd get really pissed, you know.

CLINE: Right.

SMITH: You know, I mean you just have to weigh the reality. You know, it's like where these kings, somebody disrespects them and they kill them, you know. That's not quite appropriate, you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: There's a lot of that kind of thought in people. It's surprising, you know, there's some petty little thing and they, "They could kill them," you know.

CLINE: Yeah.

SMITH: Well, wait a minute, is that really appropriate, you know. Anyway, that's what you should—I think in your relationships with people weight the appropriateness of them, because very often in this business you'll run across someone who's undependable or a drug addict or a small-time thief or something, and you have to weigh what good it is they're doing and then let the bad go and consider it a cost of doing business and not dwell on it, you know. What the hell, you know. I mean, you know, that's what you have to think about, am I willing to sell this friend for \$10? Am I willing to sell this friend for \$100? You know, and be real— And I feel like you need to err on the side of generosity, you know.

Okay. So that's about all I—

CLINE: And the mail has arrived.

SMITH: And keep breathing.

CLINE: Yeah, keep breathing, keep playing.

SMITH: Keep breathing.

CLINE: And clearly this is a story that is ongoing, it is continuing, and we're grateful for that and we're grateful that you sat down to talk to us about it.

SMITH: Well, you're so welcome, and it's been real inspiring to me for you to ask me to do this. It's actually given me a— Looking through my life here, you know, and I look at it, and I mean, there's some things, I go, "Hmm." You know, "Hmm." You know, maybe I should quit teaching entirely and not do any gigs that I don't really love, and just devote myself to this, because I see there's a lot of chaff in the book, you know.

CLINE: Think of it as balance.

SMITH: Oh, yeah.

CLINE: Yeah. But, no, really, I know we could, even with all this, barely scratch the surface and we'll never be able to talk about all those wonderful artists that you played with and get your points of view on them and your stories about them, but at least I think people now for posterity have some idea.

SMITH: Something, yeah. Not much. I mean, there's a lot of names in there, but, you know, each name is a book.

CLINE: That's right. That's right. And we can only do a few of those.

SMITH: Well, thank you for doing mine.

CLINE: You're most welcome. And we'll see each other around, I'm sure.

SMITH: Excellent.

CLINE: All right.

SMITH: Excellent.

CLINE: Thank you, Putter.

[End of interview]

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