Music at MIT Oral History Project

Richard Orr

Interviewed

by

Forrest Larson

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Lewis Music Library

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Contributors

Richard Orr received three degrees from MIT in electrical engineering, B.S 1962, M.S 1963, PhD 1973. An accomplished trombonist, he played with the young high school aged Chick Corea, and has played professionally with Herb Pomeroy, Buddy Rich, Rick Henderson, among other. He was a member of the MIT jazz band, known then as the *Techtonians*, soon after Herb Pomeroy became director in 1963. For much of his engineering career he has been with ITT Industries (formerly Stanford Telecom).

Forrest Larson, Library Assistant at the Lewis Music Library, has attended training workshops in oral history methodology and practice at Simmons College and by the Society of American Archivists, and is a member of the Oral History Association. He is also an active composer and violist.

Interview conducted by Forrest Larson on May 3, 2003, in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 1:09:48.

Music at MIT Oral History Project

The Lewis Music Library's *Music at MIT Oral History Project* was established in 1999 to document the history of music at MIT. For over 100 years, music has been a vibrant part of the culture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This history covers a wide variety of genres, including orchestral, chamber, and choral musical groups, as well as jazz, musical theater, popular and world music. Establishment of a formal music program in 1947 met the growing needs for professional leadership in many of the performing groups. Shortly thereafter, an academic course curriculum within the Division of Humanities was created. Over the years, the music faculty and alumni have included many distinguished performers, composers, and scholars.

Through in-depth recorded audio interviews with current and retired MIT music faculty, staff, former students, and visiting artists, the *Music at MIT Oral History Project* is preserving this valuable legacy for the historical record. These individuals provide a wealth of information about MIT. Furthermore, their professional lives and activities are often historically important to the world at large. Audio recordings of all interviews are available in the MIT Lewis Music Library.

1. MIT degrees and current professional work (00:00:48)

FORREST LARSON: It's my distinct pleasure this afternoon to have Richard Orr for an interview. It's May 3rd, 2003. I'll let you give your class years, because you have more than—than one degree from MIT. The reason that Rich is here is part of the—the 40th anniversary of jazz at MIT. There's a concert tonight and a reunion. And I really thank you very much for coming for—for this interview this afternoon.

RICHARD ORR: Okay, well, uh, I thank you for inviting me, Forrest. I appreciate the opportunity to be here and talk about remembrances at MIT. I think most of those are pretty good ones, so I'll be happy talking about them.

I came to MIT in September, 1958 as part of the class of '62. Managed to stay in that class, and so I have a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. That's '62. And then I have three other pieces of paper from the Institute, so I think I have one of everything they have to offer in electrical engineering—a master's in '63, and then I went out to work for a while, and came back, and got in the doctoral program in 1968.

And when I had accumulated enough hours, I got the ubiquitous electrical engineer degree, which I guess is either the—I always view it as either a Ph.D. program, flunk out present, where you got your master's degree plus course hours, and you could apply for this degree, or just a—a fat master's degree. But in the process of being on the Ph.D. Program, I just applied for it and got it, and then in 1973, I got my Ph.D., all these in electrical engineering.

FL: Wow, wow. Um, and you're currently with ITT Industries. Is that correct?

RO: That's right. I'm with ITT Industries in Reston, Virginia. Um, that company was formally Stanford Telecom. They were purchased by ITT in December of 1999. I had worked for Stanford Telecom for 11 years, left for 10 years, and my boss invited me to come back when the guy who took my position was retiring. And I happened to be annoyed at my other employer at the time, and I—I didn't even take a New York minute to say yes. So I've been back there another almost six years now.

2. Early childhood musical experiences (00:02:31)

FL: Wow, fantastic. Um, so can you tell me where you were born and where you grew up?

RO: I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I grew up in that area, stayed in the same house from the time I was born until I left for college, something that's probably not the case for a lot of kids these days with the mobile society we have. This was in the suburbs of Pittsburgh.

FL: What suburb was that?

RO: That was in Bethel Park, Allegany County.

FL: I love Pittsburgh. I have a friend there, and I go see him.

RO: Yeah. So the South Hills area.

FL: Uh-huh. Wow. Um, tell me a little about your—your family, and, um—

RO: Okay. Um, I was raised as an only child, although my father had been married once before. His first wife died of pernicious, uh, anemia just before they found out that things like eating a lot of liver and such would get the red blood cells back up. But they didn't know that.

And then he married my mom, so I have a brother and—an older brother and sister. My sister is deceased. My brother's alive in Florida and is a U.S. Army general. Was, he's retired.

And my father was a reporter in the Allegheny County court system. He took court cases by shorthand, and then came home, dictated them onto wax cylinders, and my mother would sit there with headphones on listening to the cylinders and do his transcribing for him, and that was the family business.

FL: Oh, my gosh.

RO: And, uh, one time I used to get paid two cents a cylinder for shaving the cylinders, and that was a good business until the day that I accidentally shaved one where my father had recorded a radio program that he really wanted to keep, and I didn't get paid for that one, and I heard a lot about that.

FL: Wow. Were either of your parents musicians of any sort?

RO: My father, uh, actually had a passing acquaintance with vaudeville in his—in his young days. I should say that he was born in 1890, so he goes back a ways, and he actually was a vaudeville performer. My mother could play the piano some, and she liked to sing and listen to music. So there was—there was music in the house. Nobody had done anything professionally except these early things my father did when he was a young man.

FL: So your father, obviously, was a singer. Did he also play instruments?

RO: Um, he would sing. He didn't play anything other than the ukulele, which he taught me to play, and so I could probably play four strings of a guitar to this day because of that. And then he got me a baritone ukulele, which I thought was my guitar, so that was kind of fun.

FL: So what kind of music did the family listen to growing up?

RO: The pop music, the big band, swing era kinds of things. I use to listen to the "[Your] Hit Parade" when I was a kid, the Lucky Strike Hit Parade. I knew all the songs. I would sing them all. I guess—this is from before I remember. I was told that I did this, so this was four years old or—or perhaps younger. But I knew what all the songs would be, and all the words, and I could sing all of them, and I really was interested in that. And so, the idea of the swing era and the big band music was something that was in my blood.

FL: Did you go to dances and stuff like that?

RO: As a kid?

FL: Yeah.

RO: More I played at dances instead of going to them.

FL: How about your parents? Were they dancers at all?

RO: Um, they—they had been somewhat. What they were more than dancers was bridge players. They had played—they were tournament bridge players, and they loved to do that. I guess I interrupted that when I came along. [laughter]

FL: Wow. Um, so it sounds like—one of the questions I had was about your earliest musical memories. It sounds like you were involved in music even before you can remember?

RO: Yeah, pretty much. I guess, you know, I always had the ear for it. And there was a piano in the house, and I just started fiddling around with the piano as a—as a youngster. And I think I started piano lessons at about age eight.

FL: Have you continued to play piano?

RO: I can still play a little bit. My fingers don't always do everything my brain tells them to do, but I use it as, uh, for fun, and sometimes in writing music, I'll sit down and improvise at the piano, and work things out. So—so I still do that. I never got to be a great technician. I was more interested in how to do a good double play at second base then than I was in practicing piano all day, so—

FL: So what led you to play the trombone?

RO: Um, basically I wanted to be in the band, in the marching band, by the time I got to high school, and I had heard Tommy Dorsey and the Glenn Miller Band. Glenn didn't play much by himself, but Dorsey, of course, did, and I was highly impressed with that. So I probably credit Dorsey as being the real influence that got me interested. And then in—probably in about sixth grade—fifth or sixth grade—we had the old instrument demo where somebody came out and played all the instruments.

FL: Yes!

RO: And when the guy picked up the trombone and played it, for whatever reason, I was sold. That's what I wanted, and so that's what I got. My parents were a little shocked by that, I think. I don't know what they expected, but—

FL: Uh-huh. Wow. Wow. Did you play any other brass instruments?

RO: I have a trumpet and a flugelhorn. Actually, I just sold the flugelhorn to a high school kid. I have a trumpet that somebody left in my house who stayed there for a while, and I could play those a little bit. I play the—the alto horn. I can play a baritone horn. I have an alto trombone that I play.

FL: Uh-huh. I used to play baritone and euphonium. Yeah, yeah.

Um, so it sounds like jazz and swing music was a big part of your—your music in the household?

RO: Yeah, it was. And the transition between big band music as listening and dance music versus jazz as something like an art form, or whatever a kid's view of art form was, happened, uh, probably when I was about age 12 or 13. There was a record company

called the Jazztone Society. It was a mail order thing, and my father signed me up because he thought I liked this stuff.

And I guess the first record that came along had, uh, Coleman Hawkins on it, and I just never heard anybody do anything like that. And through that, I heard Roy Eldridge and Eddie Bert on trombone, and then they had some older things, probably with people like Wardell Gray on tenor sax. And that music just all of a sudden clicked with me immediately. I didn't have any problem understanding what that was or why I wanted to do it, so I started figuring out how to do it.

FL: And did your father—what was his remark about that change from kind of swing band into—to jazz as a—

RO: Well, they didn't understand it very well. When I was in high school, we went out and took our little group out, and played for a school dance, and we played things that sounded like the Gerry Mulligan pianoless quartet. And we didn't go over very well, and came home all dejected. And my parents says, well, you just have to give up that jazz stuff.

[laughter]

FL: Wow.

RO: That's only one piece of my parent's advice, I guess, that I didn't take.

FL: Uh-huh. A question that—that I asked Herb [Pomeroy] about was the—when bebop came along, and that kind of revolution, how did that strike you? And when—because for a lot of people, that's when they—they really got kind of disoriented by—by that change.

RO: Yeah. And I didn't have that kind of experience. When I first heard Charlie Parker, I knew that everything he was doing was right. I understood that right away. And I hear a lot of people say, you know, man, it took me 10 years to get used to what Bird was doing, and I heard that right away. It just was in—in my ears. So, uh, to me that was music stepping back a few years from what I was listening to, but it was so much more advanced musically than the other things, and I just latched onto it right away and loved it.

FL: Wow. Did you have much—what kind of musical training did you have before you came to MIT? Lessons and—and groups you played in, and stuff like that?

RO: Well, I had the piano lessons for a few years. I've forgotten exactly how many. Probably from about age eight up to twelve or thirteen. And then when I started the trombone, and with school work, I didn't think I could keep up both sets of lessons, so I took trombone lessons probably up until about my junior year. Took some lessons with a school teacher, and then finally with a private teacher, and played in the high school marching band and concert band, and stage band to the extent that they had. They did have something. Nothing like what kids have today, but we did have a beginning stage band program.

FL: Was your trombone teacher also a jazz player?

RO: Uh, not really a jazz player. He didn't train me anything along those lines. He, uh, was a guy who just went out and took whatever job there was in town and could play competently. The person who gave me the ear training, and I'll never forget, was the piano teacher. My parents were not sure what they were paying for sometimes, because in the piano lessons, uh, they would hear me sing something, then they'd hear me play it on the piano, then they'd hear "scritch scritch scritch" where he made me write it down.

So that was—that was valuable training. He could see that I had the ears and not the piano chops, and he chose to develop me in that way, and I really appreciate that he found that out about me when I didn't know who I was musically. He found something out I didn't know and pushed me in the right direction.

FL: Wow. Tell me a little bit more about this piano teacher. He sounds pretty interesting. What was his name, and which kind of career did he have?

RO: I don't know much about his career. His name is Frank McQuown, and he had a lot of students. We did recitals together and things like that. Some of my—one of my other really good friends in high school, a fellow named Ron Leibfried, also studied with him for a while. Ron was a better piano player than I was, and he played trumpet. We—we switched off on our bands.

But the piano—the teacher, you know, I really don't know his background very much. That's kind of—if I did, it's kind of lost on me. But I think he just, uh, you know, kind of jobbed around town and maybe played some things with some of the universities. He was a pretty competent player, and I was impressed with what he could do.

FL: And the fact that he was teaching ear training says that he's something different than a traditional piano teacher.

RO: Especially, this is, you know, around 1950 when this is happening, and I think so, yeah. I think he had a good feel for what students could do. Because I know other students that he had who were more, you know, budding technical geniuses on the piano, he knew which way to take them too, and I don't think he wasted time—quote unquote "wasted time"—on ear training. He just got their fingers working right.

FL: What was your trombone teacher's name?

RO: Um, trombone teacher, his name was Bruce Burleson. He had a son who played drums in one of the other high schools, and I think we worked together a little bit too once in a while.

FL: So your early experiences with jazz was just kind of learning it by the seat of your pants, then?

RO: Uh, yeah. There weren't any formal programs of the kind that people can get at now. I never had an improv teacher or anything like that. But, Um, one of the early things I did was I used—I discovered that I could hear things on records and write them down, so I used to write out Paul Desmond's solos on some of the Dave Brubeck numbers. And then we had a sax player in our group who was not an improviser, but he loved jazz, and he would play—he would learn how to play these written solos—

FL: Wow.

RO: —and either myself or my friend Ron would sit there and pound on as many keys at the piano as we could, trying to imitate Brubeck. So that was—that was good training that I was doing, not because anybody told me to do it, but I just, uh, started to do it, and I'm—I'm glad I did.

3. Coming to MIT (00:14:55)

FL: Wow. That's—that's tremendous. Um, what led you to MIT, and how did you decide to come here?

RO: Well, I had thought about a music career long and hard, Um, but I got out in the world pretty early. At age fourteen, fifteen, I was out playing in places that sometimes my parents weren't too happy about me being in. And I saw—on the army bases and things like that—I saw a lot of seamy side of life there, and I got this idea maybe music could be better as something to do if you don't have to count on it for a living. Maybe it would be more fun that way.

And I was always good in my math and science curriculum in school, and in particular, I had a high school chemistry teacher who was an amazing man. He's one of these people that follows up with his students after they leave high school, and I got notes from him for about a year during my freshman year at MIT. How you doing? How are things going?

And because of him, I was going to be a chemical engineering major, until I discovered electrical engineering, and I said, this looks really interesting. This is what I want. And I actually gave up a ChemE scholarship in order to—to pick what I wanted. Again, probably didn't go over real well on the home front.

FL: Did you know about MIT's music program before you came?

RO: I didn't. I didn't know anything about it. I'd had some interviews with students in the area who, you know, I guess probably sophomores or juniors who came back to Pittsburgh, and then would interview prospective freshman. But I don't think we ever really talked about that, and I didn't—I didn't think about it.

The only thought I had about music was if I go there, I'll be in Boston, and I know Boston's a great music town. So there would be something, but I didn't know what it was. I just figured there would be something. I knew about the New England Conservatory, and I knew about, uh—about the—about Berklee [College of Music], which was just really a few years up and running at that point.

FL: Right, right. So the music at MIT, it came as a pleasant surprise to you, then?

RO: Uh, it took a while for it to be a—a pleasant surprise. Yeah, I didn't just run right out and get involved in anything at MIT. I went to audition for the Concert Band in my freshman year, and they put music in front of me that went from 5/4 into 9/4 to 7/8. And I had never seen anything like that in my life. And I tried to sight-read this stuff, and I couldn't do it, and they said, "Thank you for coming." [laughs] And that was all

they wanted to have to do with me. I was not up to the level of what they needed. So I didn't do anything in any formal music program that year.

But I did do some very interesting things. Um, my roommate, my freshman roommate, was a fellow named Joel Karp [MIT 1962], also a jazz trombone player. They figured we deserved each other and put us in the same room. Joel was from this area. He was from, Um, Revere, Massachusetts.

And he said, we should put a little group together, and he says, "I know this piano player who's still a senior in high school. He's really good. He'll come down, and we can get a drummer, you know, we'll have a little group." And so we—we did that. We put this group together, and used the music room in Baker House, which is where I stayed for my first three years of undergraduate life.

Anyway, he brings the piano player in one day, and he says, "Rich, I'd like you to meet Chick Corea." So—so here was Chick Corea, a high school senior, playing piano like crazy. He also played good trumpet and drums in those days. So we had this little group during the freshman year, so I didn't need anything for MIT to provide any context for me there. We did our own.

Chick knew a drummer that lived over in Roxbury, a native here named Lenny Nelson. Lenny made—made a living playing down in the Combat Zone in very unfavorable circumstances, but he was a great jazz drummer, and he loved that. So he was really happy to come out on Saturday afternoons to Baker House and rehearse with us. And there was a graduate student named Ed Kane [MIT Ph.D. 1960] who played, uh, trumpet, and he could play some bass. So mostly, he played bass, and that was our little group.

We actually did a couple of concerts. Never at MIT. We went to the school in upstate New York, which I can't remember the name of now, where Ed had done his undergraduate work, and played for a concert up there.

FL: So did this group have a name?

RO: No. No, it didn't. No, we didn't go public. We just wanted to get together and do things. So Chick and I did some arranging for that, so we've known each other ever since those days.

4. The MIT Techtonians (00:19:27)

FL: Fantastic. Wow, wow. So this group called the Techtonians, Um, were they in existence when you—they were obviously when you came here, and how did you get to play with them, and what do you know about kind of the—do you know anything about the origins of that group or anything?

RO: You know, my recollections here are really kind of confused. I won't necessarily say hazy, but I read something on, I guess it was MIT website by a guy from class of '61, and talked about his experiences with the Techtonians. And I read that, and I said, I never had any of these. They played shows, they did things with the [MIT] Logarhythms I think, and I didn't do any of that stuff. I think what I must have been

affiliated with was mostly a kind of a splinter group that really wanted to play jazz more than what they were doing, which was the old Glenn Miller book—

FL: Right.

RO: —and the stock arrangements sort of stuff. So, for me to say I was in the Techtonians, I don't know if I officially ever was or not. I guess that was just the standard name for anybody playing that kind of music around MIT. But I remember just as a student-led organization, there was a drummer whose name I don't recall, that led it for a while.

Um, I remember a fellow named [Andrew] Andy Kazdin [MIT 1963], who was affiliated with a brass group here, and I've seen Andy's name as a producer on CBS records since then, so I guess that's what became of him. Um, I think Andy looked down his nose at this whole thing. He just—somebody had asked him to do it, and so he did it, but I don't think he liked what was going on with the jazz group. He had the same kind of reactions, probably, that Herb did when he first came in. Andy was a legit musician. I remember going to the piano and saying, "I'm going to write something for your brass group," and I played a bunch of jazz chords, and he says, "Oh no, you're not going to use those chords, are you?" [laughing] He was appalled at some of the ideas.

FL: Well, there's this story that Herb tells about coming to—he had been asked to take over the directorship of the Techtonians, and, Um, were you a member of the group at that time, and when that happened?

RO: Well, I—I played with the whatever we want to call the jazz band, the Techtonians, through I guess starting with my sophomore year. We did concerts. We were on the schedule, so I did those things. I graduated in '62. In spring of '63, when Herb came over here, would have been right when I was finishing my master's degree.

As far as I remember, I played with the band during that year, but I don't think I was at the—the famous first rehearsal. Um, Herb doesn't think I was there, but he's not absolutely sure of that either. He and I talked about that just last night. Neither of knows—knows the right story, but I think I do remember Herb being there, and maybe we'd gotten past our performances for the year and I just stopped playing, because I was finishing up my degree, and then I was going to be gone.

So, I didn't have an auspicious start with Herb, but a couple of years after my master's degree, then I wanted to get into the doctoral program, and first I took a couple courses over at Northeastern University, and then I started coming back here to take courses one at a time to pick up graduate level things just to get some hours under my belt and get prepared for that. So, soon as Herb found out I was doing that, he said, "That's good enough for me. You're an MIT student. Come play in the band." So I did, and I guess I never—never stopped after that.

FL: So it sounds like you had had some affiliation with Herb that he knew what kind of musician you were before you actually—

RO: Yeah. Herb and I knew each other outside of the MIT context before. I worked with some commercial groups in Boston probably my last couple years as an undergraduate, and he played in some of those. So we were actually on the bandstand together, so we—we knew each other.

FL: Uh-huh. Okay. That's how that is.

RO: And he had been told about me from a, Um, fellow by the name of Marty Lane, a saxophone player that I worked with, who heard me someplace and he said, "Hey, there's this kid over at MIT, plays some trombone, you know, and you got to get him in your band," or something. And I don't know what the story was, but anyway, Herb found out about me from Marty, and we've known each other since then.

FL: Wow. So this—this group that preceded, Um, when Herb was here, it was—it was student run, right?

RO: It was up to a point. Now, my recollection is that there was—that Herb was not the first person—the first professional they called to come in. Um, there was another guy, and I keep thinking that it's Arif Mardin who was at Berklee at the time, I think, and went on to be a big producer at Atlantic Records, and an arranger, Um, that came over and did a few rehearsals, and I think finally said no, I can't take this, and quit.

And I remember being through those. I was at those, and so I—my guess is that happened some time in 1963, but I'm not sure about that anymore. And then finally, near the end of year, I guess he—this guy quit, and maybe the whole thing—I thought the whole thing had gone away, but they brought Herb back in for the first time to try to do something.

FL: So, what kind of charts did that group play?

RO: As I recall, there were a lot of stocks, Um, in that. I don't know where the—all the music came from. I don't know that I wrote anything, uh, for that group. It's hard to remember what we played.

I can remember one time, my roommate, Joel [Karp], was—played trombone in the band also, and there was a famous Miles Davis solo that Red Garland had learned and played back on one of Miles's recordings, and we used to laugh about that. We had a good friend who liked that, too. It was two choruses of blues, so Joel and I each learned a chorus of that, and we stood up in one tune, and we played that. And our friend was sitting in the audience, and I think he was the only one that got the joke. Nobody else knew. They just thought we were improvising. What tune that was we played it in, I don't know. It just happened to be in the right key.

FL: So what's your recollection as to how well this—this group played?

RO: It wasn't—didn't play well. There was never a good rhythm section, never a strong bass player or a driving drummer. None of those sorts of things. It was, Um, not well put together and certainly not well run, so the musical productivity that could've been drawn out of those players, I think, was probably very low, just because there wasn't anybody like an Everett Longstreth or a Herb to just start people at basics and built it up. And so, it wasn't—it wasn't very satisfying. I did it, but you know, it wasn't—wasn't something that I was highly eager about. It did it because it was better than nothing.

FL: How were members recruited for the band?

RO: Um, I don't really know how I found out about that. I really—I don't know. In general, I don't know, but I don't think there was any formal thing. I think it was almost underground.

FL: Yeah. So, I suppose people like you, who actually knew a bit about how to play jazz, kind of provided the musical leadership? Or how did that—how did that go?

RO: Um, I think at that point I probably would have known enough to be able to do the leadership, but I don't think I was put together enough psychologically or mature enough to—to say I'm in charge here, and then go out and do it. So I kind of laid back on it, and didn't go do a take charge position.

FL: When, um—from what I heard from Herb and—it was—when Klaus Liepmann was trying to get, you know, professional leadership for the group, that the students had suggested Herb, and he came in, and he's obviously a person who has very, very high standards, was—was that something that inspired the group, or was that kind of hard for them? Here's somebody coming in, and saying, "Hey, guys, you don't have it. We got to—we got to fix something here."

RO: Well, my recollection was there were some people that were a little shocked about that, and they were being asked to pull themselves up by their bootstraps pretty hard. And some of them didn't want to do it, and I think sort of faded away. But the real time when Herb developed something in that band was when I was not there. That would be between about '63 to '65 or so, and I was out at that—at that point, so it wasn't until I started taking graduate courses.

And by the time I came back in around '66—is what I guess is the year, maybe it was '65—Herb had the band playing pretty well. So, I—it was—it was a completely different thing than what I had left. So in those years, he did a lot, and I don't know how it—how it spun off on all the people.

FL: I'm hoping to talk to somebody who kind of went through that process. It would be really interesting to—

RO: I'd like to know that myself. Just those—those first critical years when he was doing the building thing, I wasn't part of what was being built.

5. Herb Pomeroy’s ideas on harmony, orchestration, rehearsal technique. Festival Jazz Ensemble repertoire (00:29:31)

FL: Yeah. Um, I've asked other people about some of his rehearsal techniques, but one thing I wanted to ask you about, since you also do composing and arranging, and you know something about Herb's theories about jazz harmony and how it's—how he's interested in intervallic note combinations and color, and not necessarily, you know, a function based on the root of a chord. Did that, Um, come out in rehearsal? Did he talk about harmony, you know, with the—with the band, and—

RO: No, not really. I wouldn't say that was part of his rehearsal techniques. Where I got attached to that was, now that he had the band playing better, I was interested in writing for it. I had done writing and arranging in high school.

So I started to write some things, and he played them, and after hearing two or three of them, he says, you know, what you really need are the two courses that I teach over at Berklee, if you could find some way to get over there and take those. And I said, well, you know, I don't know. I'm a full-time student. I don't think I could do that.

But subsequently, what happened was that I won a semester scholarship to Berklee at one of the college jazz festivals with the band, so Herb set it up that I could go over and take one course at a time. Those are two things I did. I took his two courses, I never went back for anything else, and I didn't—I'm not sure there's anything else there I wanted or needed.

And I would say that everything Herb taught in those courses, you know, maybe 80% of it was stuff I already kind of knew intuitively, but he had a name and a face and a category for everything. And his organization of things put it together for me in a way that I probably would have been a long, long time figuring out for myself. So, that was—that was my premiere musical education, was to go take his courses.

FL: Wow. That's—that's great. When the band was working on a new chart, did he have a particular way of, kind of, approaching that, or was it different for—for everyone, depending upon the issues involved in learning it?

RO: Well, the—the method was pretty much independent of what was going on. He would come in, as he did with the alumni band rehearsal just last night, put something in front of you, and most bands would say, well, let's just run this down and see what's there. And he already knew what was there. He wanted to make people play it. He knew where the hard parts would be.

So he would say, "Let's start at letter B with the saxes, and forget about starting at the top with the whole band. Okay. And we'd play that, look that over. Uh, trombones, you have a passage at letter D that you need to look at. Let's hear that. Oh, let's try that again. Okay, now you see what you're supposed to do. Keep looking at that. I've got to talk to the rhythm section about the introduction."

And he would go around and have you studying your stuff, and while you weren't focused—while your rehearsal wasn't focused on you, he would be getting somebody else in shape. And I've just never seen anybody that can use rehearsal minutes as efficiently as Herb. He's the master, just the absolute master.

And he always made people at MIT play over their heads. He had these kids who were all bright. They would remember things. If he told them something, usually they'd remember it. Some of them, I know, never took the horn out of the case between rehearsals. But he just was able to get them to play as an ensemble, which would cover up, you know, some multitude of sins in individual performances. But he got the ensemble sounds that he was looking for out of it. It's just amazing. And of course, what he can do with a professional group is remarkable.

FL: As a fellow brass player, did he have any particular ideas about jazz trombone that you learned from him?

RO: Um, I think I learned from—you know, I would hear him play sometimes. It was hard to get to hear Herb play. I used to go over to The Stables when his band was playing there on the Tuesday and Thursday nights my freshman—starting my very freshman year in college, I would hear his band and hear him play.

What I learned overall—maybe not right then, but over the years—with Herb is that it's not multitudes of notes or technique or any of those things that count, but it's what—what you're actually saying musically and how to express yourself. And that's not a question of did you fit into the chords or the scale exactly, but—but getting an expression that means something. And that's the main thing I learned from him. It wasn't trombone-specific. He really didn't teach me things there. There were other people in this town that did.

FL: Um, I know that his idea about orchestration is very much on the [Duke] Ellington model of instead of having a trombone section sound, Um, he was more interested in individual voices. But how did he approach the trombone as a section? Can you talk more just about how he dealt—what your memories are how he dealt with that?

RO: Um, he—he would, you know, on any kind of concerted trombone passage that we had to play together, he would rehearse those passages. I played lead a lot of the time. Sometimes we had other people who could play lead, but, uh, he had me playing the lead part because I probably had a better interpretive skill. Maybe not the best lead chops in the world at the time, but I understood what to do with the music. So he would talk about where to put the accents and try and get, uh—how to get the section in balance.

And I learned things about how to not—if you have a minor second between two voices, don't let that top voice get too low, and don't let that bottom one get too high, or else you have half of a minor second, and it really squeals. And that's something I teach anytime I run an ensemble now, because those things are—are very important. So he taught us how to behave under different kinds of spreads of voices, how to—sometimes in those days, we didn't even have a bass trombone player, I don't think, for a while. Now, of course, every band has one, so that was an additional thing is making the bass trombone player be part of the section sometimes and be an independent voice.

And he would always let know—let people know what they're doing. You know, okay, bass trombone, you're with the baritone sax, here. So, you know, you're not playing the same stuff as the rest of the section, so, you know, your focus is elsewhere. And when it was a section passage, he would try to get the articulations and the sounds to—to really work together.

FL: When he was rehearsing, Um, a piece, and say you're working on—on the head of a tune or a main theme, was he very particular about how an individual was to play it? Or was he—was it kind of a dialogue with them? Or was he fairly specific, saying play it this way?

RO: I think that would mostly depend on whether it was something that was orchestrated where everybody had to play it together, or whether it was an individual thing. If somebody had a solo melody, then he wouldn't tell you, you know, what you had to do with that, unless somebody had to come in with the ensemble at a certain point, and they had to be aware of that, and maybe it wasn't marked on the part. He'd make sure that got written on the part. But he would always let people just play and do—do what they wanted with—with things. He still does that.

FL: So it's not like—there's a collective creativity that goes into the—the end result, and not just him dictating, kind of, what, um—what the end result?

RO: Herb doesn't—in that kind of a situation, where he can't be a classroom teacher, he doesn't try to put it into you. He tries to get—whatever you've got, he tries to get it out. So that's what he does. And if it's not there, well, that's unfortunate. It's not going to happen, and there's not much he can do as an ensemble director to create musicianship where it doesn't exist. But if it's there, he'll get it. That's what he does.

FL: In my interviews with Herb, he talked a lot about spending time with the rhythm section and giving it, you know, an idea of swing. Do you remember his, um—do you have any recollections of that, and just your memories of his rehearsing those kinds of stuff?

RO: Well, I certainly remember that he did spend a lot of time with the rhythm section, because he understood that if the rhythm section wasn't happening, really there wasn't anything that the brass and the saxes could do to save that.

FL: Right.

RO: So he would try to get time in the right place. Um, very conscious of what the rhythm section had to do with the band or against the band, and try to make sure those players always knew what they were doing and what they expected to hear from the rest of the band that was kind of different than what they saw on their parts. So that it would all end up integrating.

Because probably in jazz music, rhythm section parts are the most poorly written things. So if you have great musicians, that doesn't matter. They can look at it, know what the idea is, and they'll hear what's going on. But with students, you can't do that. So I think he put a lot of content into things, and would go over and scribble—on the bass part, he would go down on the bottom line, put the bass drum or a drum figure in that was going to be happening in a certain bar, if the arranger hadn't notated that, so that they would know, or—and getting piano players to comp behind solos, as well, too, and not to play all over the piano, but to play some tight little voicings that didn't get in the way of the soloist. No Chopin behind the soloist.

FL: Do you remember if pianists, um—if they were given the liberty to do kind of core substitutions, or did they pretty much need to stick with what was in the chart?

RO: Um, I think if they did the right kind of substitutions, he wouldn't—wouldn't object. A lot of these charts coming from people at Berklee were written by people that had been taught by Herb, and so they knew how to mark the scales, you know? They would do things that other—no other music would say G flat aeolian scale on it. It would say G flat 7, and add the flat this and sharp that. And they would give it to you

that way. But Herb taught the modal—modal system for chords, and so I took up writing that way. And he would try to get people to look at things that way.

So some of these charts were very specific, uh, in terms of what you needed, but yet you can always do substitutions on those. So I think it was up to the ability of the player. If he heard somebody had the ears to do that, he would let them do it. And if not, I think he would ask them to, you know, make sure a certain voicing emphasized certain notes or deemphasized other things.

FL: Yeah. The reason I'm asking some of these questions is just to get a better sense about—some music directors are quite dictatorial and want to control everything. And there's just so much about—about Herb, and the way that he was bringing up things from people, and not telling them always what to do.

Um, did he work with you much on improvisation? Would he, like after rehearsal, kind of play chords for you and work on solos for stuff?

RO: Um, not with me. I think maybe he did with some other people, but I think by that point, he probably was giving me credit for enough years to get through the things that I needed to do. But I know sometimes we would talk about the kind of scales that would go against a certain chord in an arrangement and try to make something different out of it than maybe what—what it looked like on the paper.

FL: These, Um, charts that you got from some of the Berklee composers, they've been, you know, described as innovative. Um, are there some that stand out in your mind that you remember, and can you just briefly describe? I know it's hard to talk about music with words. It's kind of ridiculous, but—

RO: Well, actually, one of the things that I remembered for years was, Um, you know, in my opinion, Herb is a great arranger. He taught it all these years. He's taught some of the very best arrangers that exist in the world, in jazz, the last 30 years, and I think he stopped writing, and I attributed it to a little bit of, you know, the students have outrun the teacher kind of phenomenon. I don't know if that's correct or not. That's what I always thought it was.

But he—he wrote an arrangement, and it's being played in the concert this time on a Bill Evans tune, "How My Heart Sings." And I remember when he brought that in, that was just so great to hear the colors and the things that he put into that, and it had a nice, high—high note trumpet passage that the fellow—a crippled fellow named Sam Alongi could play at that time. He was in the band.

But he—he showed us things by—by example there, so my—if I had to pick one thing that I remember most of all, it's actually Herb as a writer, which was a rare thing in those days. And when we—when I went to the FJE [Festival Jazz Ensemble] rehearsal on Thursday night to prepare the one piece I'm doing with them, I heard one of the sax players playing "How My Heart Sings." And I went up to Herb, and I said, are you going to play that arrangement at the concert? And he says, yes. Well, I almost—if there had been a music stand there, I'd been on stage, I would have fallen off of it, I was so glad to hear that. So to me, that's—that's worth the price of admission, just to hear that one thing.

FL: I'm looking forward to that. Now, FJE also did some pieces that you composed and arranged, right?

RO: We did, yeah.

FL: Can you tell me a little bit about, you know, some of those, and just what that was like for you?

RO: Um, I did some—I guess there's the pre-Herb and the post-Herb period in terms of taking his courses. Um, I did some early things based on just what I was hearing. Some originals. I had a waltz that I did that I still like, and we still play in other bands today. Um, I got an arranging award one time for—for writing an arrangement of a Bobby Hutcherson song called "8/4 Beat," which I remember featured a very angular kind of saxophone thing in the beginning that I arranged. Got people playing that well. That's probably why—why it came off well.

6. Playing with the Buddy Rich Band (00:44:20)

One of the things we're playing in the—in the performance is, uh, tonight is the "Seven Steps To Heaven" by Miles Davis. I originally wrote that—I should—I should tell this story. In the middle of my graduate program—I was in graduate school between '68 and '73—Um, sometime in November of 1970, I was working with another good band in the Boston area, the Jimmy Mosher-Paul Fontaine band, and we played up at Lenny's On The Turnpike one time as a front act for Buddy Rich's band.

Buddy had just come back from Europe, and he had a couple of fill-in trombone players for the night, but he needed people to go on the road with him for two weeks worth of work, Um, before he broke up the band for Christmas. So I was playing in Jimmy and Paul's band, so after our set, his band manager came up to me and said, would you like to go out with Buddy for the next two weeks?

FL: Wow.

RO: So I thought about it, and I said yes, I'll do that. So we're leaving on the bus the next night. He gave me the book, took it out, and he says, here, learn this stuff. I was playing lead trombone, which I probably was not really capable of doing well at that point. I didn't have enough chops for a professional, every night, you know, lead trombone chair, but I took it. And I went out and did the best that I could with it.

Well, while I was on the band bus, that's when I wrote my arrangement of "Seven Steps To Heaven." That was for Buddy's band. I didn't finish it on time, but I got it to, uh, the guitar player, Walt Namath, who was the rehearsal drummer for the band. When they had new music, he would sit there and read the charts, and play, and Buddy would listen. That's how he decided if he wanted to do anything—because Buddy didn't read the charts. He couldn't read, he just could play like crazy.

So they played this arrangement, and it went on and on, and the story I got was that they listened and said—Buddy was sitting down there, and nodding his head, saying yeah, oh yeah, sounds good, sounds good, and all this. It got to the end, and I

put a drum solo in 5/4 and Buddy cut it off when he heard the 5. He said, "That's it, get rid of that piece of trash." So they mailed it back to me and said, "You know, if you hadn't put the 5/4 in, then maybe you would have had a shot."

FL: He didn't like the—why?

RO: I don't know. I do remember when I was on his band for those two weeks, we went to Parkersburg, West Virginia, and played in a dance hall one night. This must have really been a fill-in thing between two open—you know, an open date between two nights. And people started, uh—there was supposed to be a concert format, not a dance, but people started dancing to the music. He got so annoyed at that he pulled out something in 5/4 just to confuse the dancers. So that's his idea of what 5/4 was good for. It wasn't music. It was something that you did to annoy people. So now I understood when they said, later on, that the 5/4 wasn't a good idea. I should have known that, but I didn't.

FL: My goodness. That's—

RO: So anyway, I brought the arrangement back to Herb, and we played it in the FJE, and then the version we're playing tonight is, uh, a revision that I did just maybe three years ago or so. Not a great revision, but I wanted to put it in to finale and just fix a few things. And I wanted to put a trombone solo in it. The one for Buddy didn't have a trombone solo. It had a sax solo for Pat LaBarbera to stand up and play all night. [laughs]

FL: Wow. With FJE, did you do many jazz standards?

RO: Yeah, I think we did. You know, it's hard to remember what some of those, uh—some of those tunes were at this point. But there was a lot of original stuff coming out of Berklee, and I think probably more of it was, uh, either jazz tunes that somebody had arranged, or you know, maybe fairly obscure things that I'd never even heard of, or original material. And I didn't always know who some of these people were or who the arrangers were, so I couldn't really tell you who did a lot of music that we had.

FL: Do you remember doing any bebop tunes? Herb kind of turned his back on—on bebop, at least the way he's described it to me. But did you do any—any kind of classic bebop stuff?

RO: Um, not really. He didn't drive the repertoire in that direction. So, we—we really didn't do a lot of that. He was into a lot of different colors and sounds.

Just recently, I got a CD of the band I mentioned before that I played in, Jimmy Mosher-Paul Fontaine. Somebody had taped us in 1969 at a club, and Paul got hold of this and sent CDs around to people. I've played it for my friends, and they all say, my God, that writing is awfully hip for 1969. And I said, well, you know why. These are all people that studied with Herb over at Berklee. So, all those colors that he was teaching, there were people out there doing those, and I think that's the same kind of music that we had in the FJE.

7. Her Pomeroy’s musical and personal values (00:49:20)

FL: Wow. This is kind of an unfair question, because it's broad and—and very subjective, but what are some of the lasting musical values that you learned from—from Herb?

RO: Well, I guess, you know, as I've said before, I think first of all, sort of on the technical side, his—his insights into music, and how to perform it, and how to get people to perform it, are probably the—the main things I learned from him that I'm not sure I would have run across anybody else in my career that—that had as much of that.

The other things I learned from Herb was just complete integrity. He was dedicated to the music, and nothing got in the way. Personalities weren't—weren't a factor. He kept people in line. Uh, Herb is a genius with names. He gets a new band in there, and then he knows everybody's name in five minutes, and he hasn't forgotten—doesn't ever forget. And that's a very nice personal touch.

He—he treats people with respect and dignity, and when he tells you something, and it's clear to you you're being told this because you weren't playing what you were supposed to play very well, it's always on the upbeat side. You know, if he wants to make a joke, he'll make a joke, but then he'll get into the serious—you know, he'll say, "You people sound terrible," or something, or—I met one guy at the—last night who said he had written down a lot of Herb's comments that he made to the band. That'd make a great little book. All the things he said in jest. But—but when he got serious about things, he really knew how to respect people's abilities and build them.

He didn't ask people to do impossible things. If he knew somebody was never going to do something, he didn't beat on them to make them do it and become a fool in front of other people. He would say, "Let's—uh, let's not play those eight bars. Let's give that to the piano. Let's move that—let's take the trombones out of that part. Let's not have the tenors play there," or something.

You know, he would find a musical way to cover the situation that didn't offend people. I'm sure people knew exactly why he was doing it, but he was never offensive to anybody. If there's anybody in the world that Herb has ever offended, I'd like to meet them and find out what he did, because I can't imagine it.

FL: Well, it's a rare quality in a leader to have high demanding standards, but yet, Um, not forget that he's dealing with people.

RO: Well, he—he made it high standards just because he came in and said, you know, here's something, we can do this. He let you know you could do it right away. And it was hard sometimes—hard to do it, but you could do it because he told you you could. And so, that's why people respond to that.

FL: That's just—it's so rare that you hear about people that are good music directors, but they treat the musicians so terrible. I am just really impressed with—with Herb that way. Did you ever play with—with Everett Longstreth?

RO: I never played in Everett's band, but I've known Everett well. I've played professionally quite a bit with him, so Everett and I are—are good friends. I was

really glad to see him yesterday. In fact, he's—took my name and address because he's coming to the Washington, D.C., area, and he has to put a pick-up band together, and he wants me to play in it.

FL: Fantastic, fantastic.

RO: So I admire Everett. Everett was, uh—everything Herb said about him last night was right. Everett was the right first step for people. Very disciplined, methodical, and he didn't push people too hard, so he provided the training ground for people to get ready for the—the level of sophistication of music that Herb was going to ask them to play.

FL: While you were at MIT—I mean, you mentioned the one short experience with the [MIT] Concert Band. Were there other MIT groups that you played with at all?

RO: Um, no.

FL: Like any of the pit orchestras for shows or anything like that?

RO: No. No, I didn't do any of that.

8. Musical work since MIT (00:53:24)

FL: Uh-huh. So, you've been quite active musically since MIT, you know, playing, composing, and arranging. Um, I don't know much about this, so I'm going to kind of open this up and have you kind of talk about kind of what you've been doing, some of the groups you've led and pieces you've written. Um, I hate to be, kind of, so broad, but kind of open it up for you to talk about that.

RO: Okay. Well, Um, I've—while I was—after I left MIT and was still in Boston, I was working, Um, professionally here, playing with some—some dance and jazz groups. Nothing too spectacular, but a good experience on those things.

When I moved to Washington, D.C., area, I met a lot of good players pretty early by going around and sitting in on some clubs, and got to be known. And I played many years in Washington in a band led by a fellow named Rick Henderson. Rick is an alto saxophonist and arranger, a Duke Ellington fan, and he had actually played alto in Duke's band a few times when Hodges went out. So he was the Johnny Hodges substitute in the '50s.

So he knew Duke's music and Duke very well, and he had a Duke-oriented band, and that was great. That band would sound terrible in rehearsal, and take it out on the job, and it would just light up. And sometimes we'd play concerts in the park for a week during the—the summer, and by Friday or Saturday night, that band was just burning.

Rick had—had good players that, um—he called it the Oreo Cookie Band, because the sax section and the trumpet section were mostly black, and the trombones were mostly white, sitting in the middle. [laughter] So I played in—in Rick's Oreo Cookie Band. Why his trombone players turned out to be white, I don't know, but—and I worked a lot of small group things, jazz gigs with Rick, so that was really very nice.

Um, I know a lot of the people in the service bands down there, you know. In Washington, we have the Airmen of Note, and the Army Blues, and the Navy Commodores.

FL: Oh, my gosh.

RO: I went to hear a Commodores concert last summer, and a couple of the guys that knew me came up and said, you live around here, don't you? And I said yeah. And they said, we're short a trombone player, could you go home and get your horn? So I—I'm now an honorary member of the Navy Commodores.

Uh, spent a lot of years with a trumpet player in Maryland by the name of Don Junker, who's a great musician, perfect pitch, good—plays lots of instruments. Is an excellent—excellent, uh, piano technician as well. He had a nice band, and we—we did many things, including having, uh, Bill Watrous come in and perform with us one time. That's one of the ways I got to know Bill.

Bill wrote the liner notes in my CD, by the way. That's something that I was proud of. He always told me he would do that if I—if I ever did one, so I did. I sent him a pressing, mailed it to him, said I'm going to take you up on your challenge, and in about a month, I got some notes back from Bill.

So that—I did the CD. I decided it was time to document something, so in 1999, I put together my quartet CD with a real good rhythm section. The drummer, Allison Miller, is now becoming a name in New York City. She's an amazing player and has done a lot of recording and a lot of touring, so I was in good hands there.

FL: So what's the instrumentation of this quartet?

RO: This is just trombone, piano, bass, drums.

FL: Wow.

RO: Uh, bass player is Steve Novosel, who is—lives in Washington, but has been in New York and has recorded with a lot of people. He knows everybody in the music business. He was with Roland Kirk in the '60s, I think.

The pianist is Dave Kane, who's a marvelous musician. He's just wrote his first movie score that just came out. He writes for National Geographic specials, so he's—besides playing the piano well, a very talented guy.

So I was very lucky to pick up good people and do that. I'd like to do another CD someday, but I have to wait until my wife recovers from the first one. [laughs]

FL: Well, I hope I can get a copy of that, because I'm really looking forward to hearing that.

RO: You will have a copy. I should—I guess there should be one in the library here.

FL: Um, so you've—you've—when you've been the, kind of, musical leader of a group, have they been mostly small groups, or have you led any big bands?

RO: I haven't led any big bands, no. I sometimes do the rehearsing on big bands, but they're generally not my—the bands are not my responsibility. Over the last couple of years, I've gotten back to writing more for bands. For a long time I didn't do that, just the pressure of time. But now, I'm feeling that I—I like to do that as much as or

maybe more than playing. Someday playing probably won't work out too well, but maybe as long as my brain's still in shape, I can write, so I'm trying to get the skills back. And I will tell you that every time I start writing, I take out the notes from Herb's courses and look at them again. They're timeless.

9. Music—Arts and humanities at MIT (00:58:35)

FL: Wow, wow. Um, a question in an area that I like to bring up with most of the people I've interviewed for this project, and it's—it's a difficult thing to, Um, to talk about, because it's kind of murky and subjective. But it's—for some people, it can be very compelling.

Um, the—maybe it's more so at MIT now than since you left, Um, where the arts have been really embraced much more—more fully, but there's a—there's an artistic and a creative climate at MIT that people find different from other universities. And—and the kinds of students that come to MIT, there's a particular kind of creativity that they bring. Do you have any comments about this, and, um—I mean, people have alluded to this many times, but do you have any comments about this? And if you don't, that's fine, because it's a hard subject.

RO: Well, I'll make a comment here that certainly isn't original with me, but I think in some people there's some pretty strong relationships between music and mathematics. Some minds seem to go that way. I think mine's one of them, and I'm sure there's a lot of other people around here that do that. That probably drives it.

I guess I will say that, yeah, the humanities were not emphasized very much when I was an undergraduate or even graduate student here. I remember taking a music course and having to write a paper for Klaus Liepmann on comparing a Mozart and Haydn string quartet, and I had no idea how to do that, and I didn't have the background, the preparation for it. I think I got a D on that paper. That kind of soured me on the music curriculum.

But the "anything goes" attitude that I saw with Herb, you know, in terms of bringing in new kinds of music, and working on things, and trying to develop personal expression I think spills over into the—the other arts. A lot of objects d'art sitting on the grounds of MIT that you probably wouldn't find other places. Architectural things. It's—it's so different from going down to the other end of the river and seeing what an Ivy League school looks like.

So, I—if I were in this area, I probably would have a lot closer involvement with what's going on with MIT in the arts. I don't, but I think MIT pulled a class act in 2000 throwing that birthday party for Herb Pomeroy when Berklee School of Music, where he taught for all those years, didn't do that for him. So, I think it's—it's a great place to experiment with a lot of things. And I think the attitudes about the arts are the same as the ones about the sciences, that MIT is pretty much, despite all the emphasis on theory, a hands-on place. Go do it.

FL: Yeah.

RO: And so, there's lots of labs, and I think the arts are some of MIT's labs.

FL: Right. And they don't put barriers up for students. If somebody wants to do something, there's resources for people to pursue things. And I've always been—been impressed by that.

There's one former MIT student [Karl Kornacker, MIT 1958] who I asked this subject. He's a biophysicist, and this relationship between kind of a scientific way of thinking and an artistic kind of creativity, um—and, I mean, for people, particularly, I guess, who are not scientists, you know, they often look at the kind of quantification aspect of science, and they see it as kind of antithetical to, Um, to artistic, or to even creative thinking, but there's a higher level from which that takes place. Do you see that as where there's that intersection between, Um, artistic creativity and, you know, mathematical and creative minds? Can you talk about, kind of, where there's that intersection between the two?

RO: Well, maybe I can talk about that a little bit. I'm not sure. I think I would answer "yes" to your question. I think that is where that—that intersection is. And, you know, a lot of people that have met me as a musician and then later on found out that I'm an engineer that went to MIT, the first reaction is, oh, so you must really be into electronic music and all that stuff. And they're always very surprised when I say "no." That part of bringing, you know, engineering to music never fascinated me, because it wasn't really, to me, part of the music making process. I think people have created some interesting instruments and sounds by doing that, and I don't put it down, but it wasn't, uh, a way that I wanted to go.

But I'm much more fascinated with the idea that could you train a machine to improvise like [John] Coltrane. To me, there's a great project in the intersection of the mind and technology, because I think there are absolutely structural things that every player does—every improvising player does—that could be captured into some kind of a knowledge base. And you'd almost think that some intelligent system could take those rules and—like an artificial intelligence was going to do for a lot of things. Hasn't really done it for many of them, but I think that if you could make a computer understand speech and answer you and things like that, I think probably, because somebody could figure out what's going on enough behind a Coltrane solo, or Miles or something, they get a machine to make the same kind of choices on—on a minute by minute basis. That's what it is.

And I remember reading in a—an autobiography of Bird [Charlie Parker] where he talked to some improviser, some young person—maybe, you know, Quincy Jones or somebody it was, I've forgotten—somebody said that it's just choice, choice, choice. That's what you're doing when you're improvising. I'm going this way now, or am I going this? You're choosing continually, and those choices, based off where you've been and where you think you're going, are probably something that scientific modeling could explain at some point.

I don't think anybody's doing it. I don't think anybody knows any new theory of music from 1900 on very much. That's what I'm looking for. I'd be happy if I could see a scientific work that says, how does [Sergei] Prokofiev do it? How did—what did [Igor] Stravinsky do? What was [Gustav] Mahler's genius? Where did they—

those things come from? I try to read those things. Anything I find—a book, anything on the internet—that even broaches those subjects, I say let me see. And I'm mostly disappointed with what I see. So I think there's an aspect up there that hasn't been quantified yet.

FL: Mm-hm. That's interesting, because there's some people who say that—are skeptical of the possibility of quantifying that. I find it interesting, particularly coming from a jazz musician who regards, you know, intuitive thinking very highly. And it's very interesting coming from you.

RO: To see that maybe you could get machinery behaving intuitively a little bit. I think, you know, you could go certain ways down that, but you're never going to replace the—the thinking, breathing player, but you might be able to do some interesting things with it.

10. Fred Harris and the MIT Festival Jazz Ensemble (01:06:29)

FL: Yeah. Well, to tie things up, I've been asking you lots of questions. There may be some, Um, a topic that you wanted to share, or a story, or anything dealing with—with Fred and the FJE that we haven't touched on, so I wanted to open that up for you.

RO: Okay. Well, the first time that I met Fred Harris was three years ago at the Herb birthday party. I'm highly impressed with him and especially the work he's done to put this year's event together. Um, I—what I would like to really hear is what is he doing with the FJE? And I can't say that I know that, because the two times that I'm hearing it recently, Herb is back in control.

But I listened to part of the new CD last night to see what kind of music Fred has been having the band play, and I think that's a very interesting direction. I'd like to go that direction, and maybe—maybe try to write some new music at some point, and submit that to Fred and see if the band would like to—like to do it.

FL: Fantastic, yeah. It's really good to see that, you know, the jazz program has continued, and Herb's comment yesterday, wishing that there was a—a kind of a second B band strength in the program would probably go a long way.

RO: Yeah. You know, another person that I've known for a long time is Mark Harvey.

FL: Oh, you have?

RO: Yes. Yeah. Um, I played in some of his bands up here when he had Claudio Roditi playing trumpet, so Marcus—Mark and I sort of go back. I've kind of lost track of what happened to him, and I haven't heard his Aardvark [Jazz] Orchestra. I'd like to hear that.

FL: Oh, you haven't?

RO: No.

FL: Oh, they've got some great CDs.

RO: I'm going to have to get a hold of those.

FL: Oh, I'm a dyed-in-the-wool Aardvark fan.

RO: And I'm a dyed-in-the-wool CD collector, too. Which brings up, you know, just one other thing is that to play this music, you've got to be in the mainstream of it, I think. A lot of people—I know professionals who won't listen to CDs, don't listen to other music. They don't want to be influenced by somebody else. They want to, quote, "do their own thing."

Well, I think it's—there's a lot more community to it than that. I don't like that idea, so I listen to everything that I can get my hands on. Classical, jazz, uh, maybe—it doesn't go too far outside of those two. I think that's—those are the only musics that appeal to me. But that's something I would recommend to anybody, is just listening, and to all kinds of players, and try and figure out what they're do—what they're doing, what different writers are about.

FL: So you mentioned Mark Harvey. When did you first meet him?

RO: Probably while I was an undergraduate. Maybe later. I don't remember the exact time. Somebody had me go over to rehearsal. You know, they dragged me, and they said, this guys needs a trombone player for rehearsal. And so we did, uh, we did some concerts together. I played in his band some. And I think it was through him that I met Claudio Roditi. I did some work with Claudio after that. Great player.

FL: Wow, wow. I had no idea that you knew him. That's—that's fantastic. Wow.

I want to thank you very, very much for coming here. Your—your insights are going to be invaluable, so—so thank you for your generosity in coming this afternoon and sharing your thoughts.

RO: Well, thanks for the invitation. It's a pleasure to do it, and I wish you the best with the project.

FL: Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]