

Music at MIT Oral History Project

Herb Pomeroy

Interviewed

by

Forrest Larson

December 14, 1999

Interview no. 1

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Lewis Music Library**

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Oral History, Tapescribe, from the audio recording

Transcript Proof Readers: Lois Beattie, Jennifer Peterson
Transcript Editor: Forrest Larson

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Note on timing notations:

Recording of this interview can be found either as one continuous file or as split up over two audio CDs. Timings are designated in chapter headings in both formats, with the timing on the full file preceding the timing on the CD version.

Contributors

Herb Pomeroy (1930-2007) was the founding director of MIT Concert and Festival Jazz Bands (1963-1985). He was a noted band leader, trumpeter, composer, arranger and music educator, teaching at the Berklee College of Music from 1955-1995. In his early career he played with the Lionel Hampton Band and Charlie Parker. The Herb Pomeroy Orchestra was an integral part of the New England jazz scene. His later years were devoted to solo and small ensemble performances. Three interviews: 12/14/1999, 4/5/2000, 4/26/2000

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 December 14, 1999, in the MIT Lewis Music Library. Duration of the audio recording is 1:22:10. First of three interviews. Second interview: April 5, 2000; third interview: April 26, 2000.

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. Family and early musical experience (00:18—CD1 00:18)

FORREST LARSON: I'm delighted to have with me today Herb Pomeroy, who was director of jazz bands at MIT from 1963 to 1985. And also sitting in is Fred Harris, who is director of wind ensembles at MIT, currently, and also director of the various jazz ensembles here as well. I'm Forrest Larson. It's December 14th, 1999, and we're in the Lewis Music Library. Thank you, Herb, for coming. It's very generous of you.

HERB POMEROY: My pleasure. Being on the campus again reminds me of that long span of my life at that time. It's a pleasure to be here.

FL: So, tell me about your early musical experiences, with your family. I know that your mother was a musician. Just talk about real early stuff.

HP: I was born into a home where my mother, as you just mentioned, had been a professional musician. She was a piano player in the older jazz, stride piano style of the 1920s. She had gone to the New England Conservatory, I understood. She did not graduate; I think she went there for a couple of years. That was most of her formal training. One teacher that stands out that she always used to mention was a man named Joseph Dustin [spelling unconfirmed]. Other than that, I don't know much about her specific training.

My dad was a dentist, as was his dad, and there was in our home, from the earliest years that I have firm memories, a pulling and tugging—not a serious one—about whether the first son, and actually the only son, and I have two sisters, and I have one, two, three, four—including my two sisters, there were seven grandchildren, and I was the only boy. And so my grandfather, Irving H. Pomeroy, Sr., who named his son, my dad, Irving H. Pomeroy, Jr., then they together—I presume the old guy had something to do with it [laughs]—named me Irving H. Pomeroy III, with the idea that this very dental-oriented family would have someone to carry on.

And it was extremely dentally oriented, in that my dad's brother—there were three siblings—my father had two siblings—there were three in all. His brother, Richard Pomeroy, was a dentist, as my dad was. And my aunt, who is a hygienist, went to Forsyth [The Forsyth Institute, founded 1910, Boston, MA], one of the very first classes. She is now 102, going to be 103 in March, and she's one of those people—she's still in great health—who looks like she's going to have lived in three centuries. She was born in 1897, and she's just a few days away from being a three-century-er! But she was a hygienist. So then in reading a book that I mentioned to you gentlemen a couple moments ago, this history of my great-grandfather, who I never knew, who died, I think, right around the turn of the—the past century turn. There were nine children there, my grandfather's siblings, and four of those nine were dentists. So it was just dentistry, dentistry!

Now, I am the first male in three generations to have broken this [laughs] non-dental life! So I kind of got a little long-winded, talking about the pulling and tugging. And my mother was a professional musician. When I was young—three, four years old—she would be giving lessons in the house, and my father was very interested in music. He was not a professional musician, but he was an amateur

musician, played the clarinet in the local Legion band, and things like that, and loved jazz music.

FL: And this was in Gloucester?

HP: In Gloucester, Massachusetts, right. I was born in 1930, so this is—we're talking about, let's say the early- and mid-thirties, where my first memories are still—that I can draw upon them. So there was this pulling and tugging. And music was always in the house. My mother would play in orchestras, and they'd come to the house and rehearse. Maybe I started to get my rehearsal techniques developed there, when I was three and four! [laughs] And I can remember seeing the high school ROTC marching band march by the house, and boy, I'd get in the window and look out and watch this thing!

So I was intrigued by music from very early, and had it all around me. And it was a period where music was very important in people's lives. Now being the son of a dentist, we didn't suffer during the Depression, during the thirties, in the sense of no coal for the furnace, or no food, but times were difficult then, as anybody knows. And music was one of those things that seemed to bring everybody together. And I had a sense that the world around me, by the time I started to go to the first grade in 1936, that there were a lot of families in a lot of trouble, but whenever music seemed to come into their lives, it seemed to give them great joy.

And to jump way ahead just for a moment, in my early professional years in Boston, the older musicians who I played with in the Colonial and the Schubert Theaters used to tell me that financially, the greatest period in their professional lives were the years of the Depression. Where—you know most people were on the streets with their pencils and their apples, and these guys are running four, five, or six gigs a day! From a—[stops] Every radio station had anywhere from a six- to a ten-piece orchestra, studio band. They'd run from a morning radio show to a rehearsal later morning to— All the Chinese restaurants then had live orchestras at lunchtime. And then they'd go back to the theater for a matinee, and then they'd come out and they'd do a radio show at supper, back to the theater, and then play a breakfast dance at midnight. And these men were making five hundred dollars a—and you know what five hundred dollars was worth in the thirties! More than they ever made later, after inflation was back in.

Again, I'm digressing, but this thing, that music has to bring people to, I saw—or bring people together—I saw this as a very young person. I can remember getting up before my parents would get up in the morning. This was preschool age, when I was only five, and we had one of those old-fashioned radios. And I'd go, and there was a radio station that I had been able to find. I don't know whether I even knew the number, but I knew how it looked on the dial. And at about five o'clock in the morning they would play marches! And somehow, I got hooked on this martial swing, so to speak. And I didn't know it at the time, but there was one march that I loved! It was called "El Capitan" [by John Philip Sousa, 1854–1932].

FL: Mm-hm.

HP: And you know the march? [sings]

FL: Yeah, yeah.

HP: It starts out in six-eight [sings], and then when it goes into the trio section, in two-four, it is swinging! Not like a jazz swing, but [sings].

FL: Yeah.

HP: And at five years old, I'm not supposed to be up, with my ear in this radio, listening to this six-eight, going to two-four! Now I had no idea it was six-eight going to two-four [laughs], but I'm saying, "Ooh, is this lovely!" So I was surrounded by it at these early ages. Then the typical negative started—my mother started giving me piano lessons. And I didn't want my mother teaching me piano at all! They were very unsuccessful. So she then sent me to another teacher, to another teacher beside herself, and I think I was the only boy there, and there were probably eight or ten girls. And they were older than me; I was seven, okay? And I can distinctly remember hating this situation!

And there would be the annual Christmas party, and they would play games, and to be able to take part in the games—they'd be numbers games, and it required knowing long division and multiplication. Now I'm in the first, second grade, and I'm just getting one, two, three, four, five. And these girls were so PO'd that I was causing the teacher to bring this game that they could do, long division, back to just numbers, you know! So I had all these reasons for not wanting to be there. I didn't want to be playing the piano. And that didn't last very well.

It was when I was eleven that the thing really happened to me, and this [unclear] 1941, and I was in about the fifth grade in school. And I went to see a movie with my mother. My mother, all this time, she's pushing. I think she wanted to vicariously live through my music, which she claims that I was the reason that—she claims she played professionally until she was seven months along in her pregnancy with me, playing with a shawl. And she says that's where I got my good time. And when I met with the Lionel Hampton Band. "I helped you be able to go with this Lionel Hampton Band," she said, "when I'd be playing on the piano bench at seven months pregnant with you!" [laughs] So she was always pushing.

And she took me to—my father used to go deer hunting early in December every year, something I never have gotten into, hunting. But that's a totally different subject matter. And as soon as my father left for this week—he went out to the Berkshires, from Gloucester—she'd get me, and we'd go into Boston, and she would rent a room at the Parker House Hotel. And at that time, there were three or four theaters in Boston with stage shows, with bands, like Cab Calloway's Band, Xavier Cugat's Band. And every night she'd have me at a different one of these stage shows, Vaudeville—you know, the comedian, the dancer, the flame thrower, whatever it is, the flame swallower, and a good hot band on the stage. And she'd take me to a different one each night! And I remember one time we went to see Cab Calloway one night, and I think, in retrospect, as I've looked at it historically, Dizzy [Gillespie, trumpet] was playing with Cab Calloway at that time.

FL: Wow.

HP: I didn't know that, of course. And then the next night we went to hear Xavier Cugat, that, you know, South American. And I liked Xavier Cugat better than Cab Calloway, and my mother was furious! "You're not supposed to like this better than that! You're supposed to like that jazz music!" [laughs] So she pushed. She pushed. And in this particular fall of '41 visit to Boston for a week while my dad was away hunting, we went to see a movie, and Louis Armstrong [1901–1971, trumpet and singer] was in the movie. And I got hooked! I said, "I want one of those!"

I had really been diddling. I hadn't taken piano lessons for, say, four years. I would play my father's clarinet in the cellar, just taught myself the fingerings. And all of a sudden, whether it was because I was now old enough to understand more than I was when she was pushing me at age seven, I said, "I want one of those!" The next day, she had the local high school band director bring a trumpet to the house [laughs] to buy a trumpet for me! And there it was.

I was age eleven—fifth grade, I guess, maybe sixth grade; no, it was the sixth grade—the trumpet in my hand, and this old Italian bandmaster. He'd been in the Italian Army band in World War I, in Italy, and came to the States and became a tailor, and then became active locally in Gloucester, and was the director of the high school ROTC band. And from that point on, I just—I ran with it, it ran with me. [laughs] Fred will love to hear this! It was—within four or five months I was leading my first band! [laughs]

FRED HARRIS: Wow!

HP: You could see what was on the horizon. And we'd get half a dozen grammar school kids and call them up, and we'd come—we had these funny books where all C instruments play, all E-flat, all B-flat, those kind of things, you know, playing *Liebesträum* [possibly *Liebesträum* No. 3, by Franz Liszt] or "The Band Played On" [music by Charles B. Ward, lyrics by John F. Palmer, 1895], or some of these really funny little tunes. [laughs] We weren't playing "Bird Gets the Worm" [by Charlie "Bird" Parker, 1920–1955, saxophone] or anything like that, at that point. But, and then playing in the junior high school orchestra, junior high school band.

And an interesting thing happened. I had a very unusual embouchure—unusual in the sense of bad! Maybe nobody has ever gone as far in a career as a trumpet player with the embouchure that I have! [laughs] But anyway, I was quite ill in the seventh grade. By now I've got my own band, and I'm playing grammar school assemblies and graduations and little weddings, and all this stuff, in the seventh grade, with this funny little band, which my mother was the rhythm section. She played piano, and we had two trumpets, two clarinets, and a trombone. Funny instrumentation, playing out of these little funny music books.

FL: Did the band have a name?

HP: I guess it was the Herb Pomeroy Orchestra already! [laughs]

FL: Wow!

HP: I don't know if we did have a name. I was the bandleader. I was giving orders. Beyond that, I don't know whether we—I guess we did.

FH: I'm sorry, I'm fascinated. Can you recall maybe what was in you that felt as though, "Well, I could, in fact, lead"? Obviously, the music was strong enough in you, even that music, that something kind of felt, "Well, I want to control this," to a certain extent.

HP: Oh, that word is a great word. I hope that wasn't the control aspect. But it probably is. I've always—until I retired from Berklee [Berklee College of Music, formerly Berklee School of Music; originally Schillinger House, founded in 1945 by Lawrence Berk] in 1995, and disbanded my own professional band for good in 1993, I was always very good at organizational details, organization of people. And then, I'm comfortable saying organization of their talents, within each person, and bringing them together. And somehow, that was probably a part of me, not really knowing it, you know.

I think that original thing, though, in forming the band had to do with my mother was the piano player. And she was—I mean, I did the organizing, the phone calls, and all that stuff, and the going to the music stores. But she, being an adult, and a respected professional musician playing piano for us—going boom-chick, boom-chick. That was the rhythm section. No drums, no bass, just piano was the rhythm section. I think her presence, her existence on the scene, so to speak, allowed me to become the leader, you know.

FH: Yeah, that's great.

FL: Wow! Going back just a little bit, tell me about some of the local music in Gloucester when you were growing up. You mentioned some town bands and stuff like that.

HP: Yes.

FL: Tell me about some of that.

HP: Well, there was the Gloucester Legion Band. There was the Rockport—the adjacent town to Gloucester—Legion Band. There were some pretty good swing-oriented dance band activity prior to World War I. Let's say—the musicians started to really be drafted after Pearl Harbor, so let's say up through '41, I was aware of—my mother would take me to dances where my memory is there was pretty good dance band music. I was not involved at all. Then we get to the point where I'm in high school, a freshman in high school in 1944, and most of the professional musicians of that era, at least the ones from eighteen to forty, or whatever the particular ages were—were in the service.

So I had a very unusual, positive opportunity. I was playing professionally, with adults, at age fourteen. That would not have happened if it hadn't been in wartime. It drained the supply of young and early middle-aged musicians. So there was this activity. By the time I was a junior in high school—and it was one of the reasons that my folks took me out of high school and sent me to prep school, away from Gloucester, after my junior year—I was playing seven nights a week. I was still maintaining my grades; I was an A, B student at Gloucester High School.

But I can remember the pattern of the week. The Monday night would be the Gloucester Legion Band. Tuesday night we had a high school dance band, led by a local postman who was 4F, who was a very good musician. He was the first fellow to

teach me arranging. We rehearsed Tuesday nights; it was called the Musical Serenaders, was the name of the dance band. Wednesday night, the Gloucester High School ROTC Band rehearsed, which I was a member of. Thursday I would go to Rockport, the next town, and play with the Rockport Legion Band. Friday and Saturday, generally, I would have gigs, you know, the little high school, YMCA, local teen canteen-type. We'd make five or six bucks a man, you know.

And then Sunday night, there was a club in the town of Essex, which is also adjacent to Gloucester, called the Skyway, and that's where my real development took place. I would go to sessions, and this was the first time that I would play with musicians outside of the Gloucester circle of musicians. Now I'm playing with the North Shore guys, the Beverly, Salem, Lynn, which was another, really a step up the ladder, as far as these people were really jazz musicians, whereas the Gloucester people, most of them were at best competent dance band musicians. Now I was reaching out into adult jazz world. So I was playing seven nights a week in these circumstances, you know.

FL: Wow!

HP: And it would not have happened if it hadn't been for my coincidental time thing, meaning it was during the war.

FL: Now you mentioned a high school bandmaster, this Italian gentleman.

HP: Yes.

FL: Were you taking lessons from him?

HP: I was—very [laughs]—you know—

FL: What was his name?

HP: His name was Anthony Gentile, G-E-N-T-I-L-E, and we all called him Tony Gentile [possibly Antonio "Tony" Gentile]. There was a bandstand at a glorious park in Gloucester, called Stage Fort Park, which is high up above the harbor and looks over the harbor. And I was appointed on a committee back in the mid-eighties by the Mayor to be part of the committee, an ad hoc committee, to build a bandstand in his memory. And I play there a Sunday night every summer with my group: John LaPorta [1920–2004, clarinet, saxophone] and myself, Donna Byrne [no dates found, singer], and my rhythm section. And it's a very strong experience for me, because it's in Gloucester, and then my initial teacher, named for him, dedicated.

But he was purely a martial-type, martial music. He did play in local dance bands, but he was very, very stiff rhythmically. He just understood the world of marching music, and played very well. But he was my first trumpet teacher. And I started with him right after that Louis Armstrong movie. Mother brought him, and he brought the trumpet, a Buescher trumpet; it cost a hundred dollars. I remember that. It came from Carl Fischer's Music Store, here in Boston. And this Tony Gentile, who spoke quite broken English, he referred to Carl Fischer's as Carla da Fish. "I got the trumpet at Carla da Fish," he said. [laughs]

FL & FH: [laugh]

HP: And I studied with him until probably about a year and a half, until in the seventh grade I had a four-month period of being ill. They tell me they almost lost me, some viral thing that they didn't understand back in the early forties like they probably do now. But I was out of school for four months. I was in bed for two, and then recuperating for another month at home, and then my grandfather, who used to winter in Florida, I spent a month with him. And this was in the seventh grade. So I stopped studying with this Tony Gentile for, actually from the point when I became ill, until I went to audition for the high school band.

And it was in this period, from middle seventh grade until auditioning going into ninth grade, where, totally unbeknownst to me, my embouchure, which started with him, in the center, symmetrically, slipped over to the left. See, I found this place between the eyetooth here, where I could get a great grip, okay? But it slipped in a totally non-symmetric way, and it's still here now, a hundred years later. I play out of the side of my top lip and the center of my bottom lip. So I'm like this when I play, which means if I don't play a lot and keep in shape, this side, the seal—actually, our lips have to be sealed or the air—my seal breaks very easily on this side because I've got this screwed up thing here.

And if I play a physically hard—a Ted Herbert gig [1915–2006, bandleader], playing second or third trumpet parts on Ted Herbert's bandstand, but with all the hard blowing—at the end of the gig, the knot in my necktie is damp from all the dribble that has come down over my chin, under this knot. I mean, I'm giving a lot of, you know, side details, but you've asked for it! [laughs]

FL: Yeah, certainly!

HP: So I'm auditioning for the high school band, and this has happened. And now I'm playing, for an eighth grader, pretty well, you know. So I got to the audition and I hear, "What-a happened to you-a?" And I said, "What do you mean?" and he said, "Look at your lips. It's all messed up!" He said, "You're not going to play trumpet in the band next year. You'll play mellophone in the band your freshman year." Forrest, you know the mellophone parts?

FL: Yes!

HP: Oom-pah, oom-pah, oom-pah, oom-pah, you know. And he said, "Then, beginning of your sophomore year we'll go back to the trumpet and we'll fix this all up." Whereas I, who had always been, and still am, a rather pleasant, easy-going person—Fred, I think, will agree—said—now, mind you, I've yet to enter freshman year in high school. This is the summer going into freshman year. I said, "I play trumpet better than anybody in your high school band right now." I said, "I think I'm just going to stick to the trumpet." And in retrospect, I can't believe, knowing myself! And maybe that's the one place in my life that I really am proud of myself! Maybe there's some real hidden meaning about what I am as a person here. But, he said, "Okay." Now, I don't know that I was. There was one guy in the band that really played better than me, I'm quite sure. His name was Dick Morrow [possibly Dick Morrill, trumpet], and we were good friends; we played together a lot.

But I just did not want to be—I didn't want to put a year aside. I wanted to keep straight ahead, you know. And by my sophomore year I was far and away the

best trumpet player in the band because none of them were very good, actually—not that I was that good. But I remember that thing about going to this audition and him saying what happened. “What-a happened to you-a?” or however you say it. So he was a very important figure.

And then the man who led the high school dance band—this had nothing to do with—it was not an official school activity. It was high school in the sense that we were all high school students. His name was Shorty Perry—Francis—[Francis “Shorty” Perry, 1915–1998, trumpet], and the nickname Shorty, because he was 6’5”, a mailman, who couldn’t get into the service for whatever reasons, and a very strong influence, musically. A dance band musician who loved jazz but was not a jazz player.

But he took—we had this little dance band of kids in high school on our own. We played at the Teen Canteen [possibly refers to the YWCA-sponsored youth gathering place]. And he walked in there one night and he listened, and he said, “This is the worst thing I have ever heard in my life!” He said, “This is terrible!” He said, “Would you like me to take you guys over and help you?” And we all said, “Yeah, sure!” You know, because he was about twenty-three, and we were fourteen, fifteen. He just did marvelous things. He was a fine musician. He wrote an entire book for the band, fitting the instrumentation, the skills, the range limitation.

FL: Wow.

HP: All of our negatives were hidden, our positives were brought. And for a high school age level band, it wasn’t too bad. But he was a strong influence. But that was still mostly dance band. First, the trumpet player with the martial music, then the trombone player, then when I got to be about sixteen and started playing these jam sessions on Sundays, then I began to meet the jazz musicians, who became very important influences in my development, musically.

FL: Did you ever play any classical music during that time?

HP: Not really. Not more than what we’d call concert band music, I would say—never any symphonic. There was no symphonic type of orchestral playing, except I played in a brass quartet in the summers. A fellow from Gloucester named Chester Roberts [Francis Chester Roberts, b.1927], a wonderful tuba player—do you know Chet?

FH: Yeah, I know of him.

HP: Yeah, yeah. He played in the Pittsburgh and the Cleveland Orchestra, under George Szell and Fritz Reiner, and those people [George Szell, conductor 1946-1970; Fritz Reiner, conductor, 1938-1948]. And in the summer we would play—there’s a Saint Peter’s Fiesta, where they bless the fishing fleet every summer. And we had a quartet with this Shorty Perry playing trombone, Chet playing tuba, and two trumpets. But I wouldn’t call it really classical. I mean, it was, you know, liturgical music and all, but no, not really, no.

And as a young person—I have to be honest with myself—I really didn’t like classical music. I mean, I was just young and frivolous, and wanted to swing, and all that sort of stuff. And actually, I learned about it relatively quickly as a young adult.

But it was all martial music, dance band music, and then starting to become small group jazz music by the time I was about sixteen.

2. Education and musical training (24:14 – CD1 24:14)

FL: Wow. So you didn't have a lot of, kind of one-on-one lessons? You were learning a lot from just—

HP: I did not. A year and a half with Tony Gentile. This Shorty Perry gentleman gave me arranging lessons. Then in the summer of '48—I left high school after my junior year, having to do with the music activity, and also, maybe this doesn't need to be anything you write down! [laughs] My high school girlfriend and I were getting very tight, for seventeen. I mean, this will not be on the written sheet, I hope.

FL: Yeah, do you want me to—I can turn the tape off, if you want me to.

HP: Well, just, we were very involved—too involved for that age, okay. Wondering about where's the rabbit, and all that sort of stuff, you know. So my parents whisked me out of Gloucester, which was devastating, because I was very involved with this young woman and had this literally music career going on. And at the end of my junior year in high school, that all—my Gloucester music career and my relationship with this young woman—who later became my first wife, and I had two children by her.

But I was whisked away to Williston Academy, out in the eastern part of the state, at Easthampton [Mass.]—wonderful school. I didn't want to be there! I can't say that I fought, because I knew that once—my father had gone to school there, and the whole thing, and I knew I was gone. And I'm telling you all this to get us to the private lessons situation. It was the best educational experience I've ever had in my life. The two years at this prep school were magnificent! I went to Harvard after it for one year, and my freshman year at Harvard could not compare to it. Granted, if I had stayed at Harvard, I'm sure my later years there I would have contact with wonderful men.

But this was a great educational experience, and it didn't take me too many years out of there to look back and realize what I had learned. The level of teaching by these men, who most of them were, I believe, professionals who at age fifty or sixty had enough of the big-time college scene and wanted to go to some little New England town and settle down. And they were marvelous. They were so much more than teachers; they were men who taught me so many values that have been part of my life through my entire life.

But I went there—I had to go two years. Even though in Gloucester High School I had been doing well, when I took the entrance exams, I had to repeat my junior year there. And so I actually had five years of high school, in that sense. Between the fourth and fifth of the five high school years, between, let's call it, the junior and senior year at Williston, I can remember how it happened. We were driving home from Williston. My father and mother came out to pick me up, and my

belongings, to come home for the summer to Gloucester. And my mother said, “I’ve been hearing on the radio about this school that combines mathematics and music,” she said.

Now I had always been very good in math in high school, and at Williston, I would win the Algebra II prizes and the Trigonometry. It just, again, that sort of organizational thing that you need for numbers. And also, at that point I knew I was pushing away from dentistry, but I was pretty sure it was going to be difficult with the family to go into music. So I was thinking engineering, and matter of fact this old, old aunt I was telling you about, who’ll be a 103 in March, her husband was the chief engineer at the Chicago stockyards. And my father would take me out there for a week, and we’d watch him engineer, you know.

So my mother said, “I heard about this music school, this Schillinger House School of Music,” she said. And my ears immediately—woo! So I called there, and I arranged to take, one day a week, three private lessons: one on the trumpet, one on piano, and one on arranging. And so the duration of that summer we’d come into Boston from Gloucester, and of course the one day take three one-hour lessons—well, maybe the trumpet and piano were half-hour lessons. A trumpet player named Fred Berman [d. 1954], who was the brass instructor at Berklee, who had been lead trumpet player with Paul Whiteman [1890–1967, bandleader] back in the twenties. This was only the forties, so that wasn’t that large a gap.

A piano player who had been—[stops]. Larry Berk [1908–1995], who was the founder of Berklee, he had a partner in the beginning. His name was Harry Smith [1927–2003], and I studied piano with Harry Smith, and an arranging teacher named [Victor]Vic Hogan (Jr) [1926–1999]. So I had, to this small degree that summer between junior and senior year in high school, some one-on-one training in those three areas.

FL: And you were studying jazz and popular music?

HP: Yeah, I would say, with the trumpet teacher, just to get into studying the instrument. And he made no attempt at changing embouchure.

FH: Hm!

HP: And I regret that I didn’t go along with the mellophone. In hindsight, I could have been a better trumpet player for the rest of my life if I had done what Tony Gentile wanted me to do in 1944. I regret that Fred—again, he probably heard that I was playing pretty good already and didn’t make any change. At age twenty-three, to jump ahead just a bit, I did go to see John Coffey. Do you know the name John Coffey?

FL: Mm-hm.

HP: He was a bass trombonist with the Boston Symphony and one of the great, legendary characters of the Boston—history of music in Boston. If you ever brought in any brass players who ever had anything to do with John Coffey, or if you know a brass player of that era, just say, “Tongue and blow, kid, tongue and blow,” and they’ll know what it means. Because John Coffey, no matter what your problem was, he’d say, “Tongue and blow, kid!” [laughs] I went to John at age twenty-three. Now I’m a

professional, supporting a family in music, and I said, “John, I’ve got to fix the embouchure.” Because both range and endurance, there was a limitation because of this terrible thing I’d got and still have to this day. And I would say—I lasted about three weeks. He didn’t want to change me.

And I don’t know, I kind of—I don’t resent it or hold it against him. But somehow they didn’t see clearly enough that this was going to hold me back for my entire professional career, whether they didn’t want to bother to get into such a major reconstruction project—I don’t know just what. I didn’t push hard enough? For some reason, that should have happened then, at any one of these three times: entering high school, Fred Berman at Schillinger House in ’48, and John Coffey in ’53.

But what would happen—at this point I was working maybe four, five nights a week, supporting a wife and two children with the trumpet playing. I’d left Schillinger House by this time. And I would practice two or three hours of the day with this new, symmetrical, correct structure. Then I’d go to the gig that night and have to revert to the other one to play the gig! So what I’d accomplished during the day, I would undo. And then I would go back for the lesson the next time, and it wouldn’t be very good.

So when I would practice during the day, that would make my playing of the gig less good, and the playing the gig would make the progress I made—so after about three weeks John Coffey and I said, “The only way you can do this is stop playing professionally for six months.” And I could not do that at that point, you know. So I kind of jumped ahead there from about 1948 to ’53 to talk about the lessons. I forget. You can keep me chronologically in order here, Forrest! [laughs]

FL: That’s fine. Tell me a little bit more about the Schillinger House, because that led into the Berklee College.

HP: It was an enormous part of my life, no question. When I began to study there in 1948, the school was three years old. It was then at the corner of Newbury and Gloucester Street, where Charlie’s Saloon is now. It was, at the point that I went, in the summer of ’48, as I said, three years old. It was only the front building.

The buildings on Newbury Street that happen to be on a side street like Gloucester, it would be about four buildings deep, from Newbury back to the alley that would go in between Gloucester and Boylston Street there. At this point, it was only the front building, and they were in the process of breaking the walls down that summer to go into the second, and eventually went into the third building. Then he eventually got the building next door and just kept expanding.

But it was very small, and it was—I don’t know the percentage, but I think it might be safe to say ninety percent of the students there were people who had been in the service during World War II and were there on the GI Bill of Rights. It had somewhat of a reputation then of being a jazz school, but the truth of the matter is, it was more of like a jazz-oriented dance band school. Now there were some very fine jazz musicians, for instance, Charlie Mariano [1923–2009], a marvelous jazz alto saxophonist. So I think the school got its reputation in these very early years as being jazz-oriented because of some of the musicians who were students there, more so than

the actual teaching. It really was more like—I may be safe to say there was no real jazz instruction, as there would later come to be at the school.

But my association, it was great there because now I was associating with people five, ten years older, who many had been on the road in dance bands and had come back so that they could maybe live at home with their wife and kids and get the income from the GI Bill and go to school, or whatever their reasons for being back in Boston. But there was—it was a national student body, even though it was small—I don't know, maybe a hundred, hundred and fifty students—people from all over the country, many of whom had been in service bands or who had been on the road. Maybe not the major bands, you know, like [Edward Kennedy “Duke”] Ellington [1899–1974] or [William “Count”] Basie [1904–1984] or something like that, but the next level of dance bands that were popular in the thirties and forties, some of these men would, to learn arranging, or just to get off the road.

So I had an association with a number of musicians. There was a band in Boston then by the name—a piano player by the name of Nat Pierce [1925–1992], who had a band that eventually evolved into my band in the mid-fifties. And I was very—I'd go to all their rehearsals, and I became friendly with a lot of the men in the band. And Dave Chapman [1929–2010], who played lead alto in my band right up till 1993, was the lead alto player in there. And Charlie Mariano was the jazz alto player. And a number of people, probably half of the band I formed in '55, had either been regular or substitute members of this Nat Pierce Band. So when I was supposed to be at classes at Harvard, I would be over on Washington Street, in the terrible part of Boston, at a club called the Mardi Gras, listening to this band rehearse and socializing with the guys who were in rehearsals, and all that.

So, but Schillinger House was not what a lot of the outside world thought it was. They thought it was a jazz school then, and it was not. And it was called Schillinger House because of Joseph Schillinger [1895–1943, composer, music theorist, composition teacher], and Larry Berk had been one of Schillinger's—disciple may be a strong word—student, as [George] Gershwin [1898–1937] had, and Glen Miller [1904–1944(MIA)] had. And those are name people, but there are a lot of other composers who came from that.

FL: There were some classical composers that were quite taken with Schillinger House, too.

HP: Yes, I think Stefan Wolpe [1902-1972, composer] was one of those who I think was involved with that. And I don't know much about it because, truthfully, I would not want to elaborate on it. When I went to Schillinger House full-time, when I left Harvard in spring of '50, and in the fall of '50 went to Schillinger House full-time, it was still called Schillinger House School of Music. It was required to take—each semester you would study a various book of this Schillinger's composition system. And it totally turned me off. By that point my thinking that math and music should come together, I now knew: get rid of the math, and get into the feeling, and the emotion, and the expression, and all that.

So drawing all these graphs and graphing them, the climaxes of the melodies, and saying the pitch-time maximum, meaning the note that lasts, that the ear hears the

most for eight bars, or consider this note. If there's twelve beats of this note in eight bars of music, we'll call it the pitch-time maximum. Anytime the melody goes up and away from it, that will be the primary this, and if it goes down, and the emotional effect you'll get from this—and I'm saying, "Oh, no, no, no thank you! That's not where I'm coming from." [laughs] And then the permutation of rhythms, actually—that was one of his things. "Oh, permute this, do that!"

Anyway, the school was very much into that. Larry Berk, I think he was a very smart businessman and a wonderful man, a dear, warm human being. I think he just sort of saw he could tie the GI Bill of Rights, Joseph Schillinger—the mystique of Joseph Schillinger—and some jazz orientation, and put it all together into this thing. And he did, and he succeeded just beyond anybody's idea. But I only stayed there for five semesters. Yeah, five semesters. Because when I told my dad, during my one year at Harvard, that I was going to leave Harvard, he, "Okay, but you're on your own." So now at Schillinger House I'm paying my own tuition, and I've got a wife and a couple of kids. I had the first child in '51, the second one in '53. So I didn't stay there to get a—they weren't even granting a degree at that point; it was just a diploma school at that point.

More important to me then, and [laughs] I'm going to say it, but hopefully the powers that be at Berklee won't hear it—it was more important then, and it's the same now—what you get out of Berklee is not what you get in the classroom as much as it is the environment that you live in—every minute of it you can play, and meeting people who have played. And that—almost you can call it an environmental college in that sense, you know, rather than a music college! [laughs]

FL & FH: Yeah.

HP: And I've said this publicly and on radio interviews and things. I know they're thinking, "That son of a gun! He spent forty years here, and now he's saying these things!"

FL & FH: [laugh]

HP: But I believe them more, every day that I live, unfortunately, that you can't teach this kind of music. You can teach the instrument. You can teach specific facts. But music is so non-factual that it's a very hard thing to teach. And I get loads of wonderful arguments from that. So I was a part of that environment for five semesters. Learned more about arranging from getting scores. This fellow Nat Pierce I speak of, he wrote for Woody Herman's band in the early fifties [Woodrow Charles "Woody" Herman, 1913–1987, bandleader], and for Count Basie. And whenever he came back to town—we were good friends, actually—"Give me some of these scores!" I learned more about arranging from studying scores of existing music that were written for the name bands than I ever learned from the arranging class! And there used to be some pretty good stock arrangements of the Basie and the Gillespie bands, and I would take these and transfer the parts back to concert so I could study them. [Ed. Note: use of "concert" in this context is unclear.] And that was my real learning process, as far as arranging. Not to put down, so to speak, the arranging classes, but they were not going in the direction. They were still dance band oriented, they really were.

FL: Were there ensembles there, or was it mostly classes?

HP: No, the ensemble was a large part of it. And my first contact with Joe Viola [1920–1972]—marvelous saxophone teacher, really considered one of the great saxophone teachers of the world—he would lead student ensembles, and I would play under him. And he was not a jazz musician, just a marvelous saxophonist. But he understood jazz, and when he would lead ensembles, he would make comments about what to do with the music that would draw jazz out of it. And learned a great deal from working in his ensemble. I would say, as far as contact with teachers, maybe that contact with him, playing in the ensembles that he was directing, and in those ensembles just getting to meet people. Like Quincy Jones [b. 1933] and I would play together in trumpet sections there. Ray Santisi [b. 1935, piano] was going to school, and Charlie Mariano was there at this time. Bob Winter [pianist] was—Bob and Ray and I were all in the same entering class.

So the meeting of the people, the after-school jam sessions, the rehearsal bands that we organized on our own. During my first semester there, full-time semester in the fall of '50, a saxophone player and I organized a band, and we played gigs, and we both wrote for it. There was that sort of—the school itself was very encapsulated, in the sense that you're protected from the walls—you have the walls of education protecting you from the commercial world. And then, even if you did student activity on your own, outside of it, you were still somewhat protected. I used to always say to the kids at Berklee, "The walls of education are protecting us. We're doing things here musically that, I don't say the only value, but the major value is to open up our minds and feelings about this music. These are not practical, wage-earning things that we're doing here."

So, it was a wonderful period, a wonderful growing period, not so much for the classroom time as it was for the association with the other musicians. And meeting a couple of wonderful men. There was a teacher named Bob Share [Robert Share, Provost, Berklee School of Music, 1960s–1970s], who again was not a jazz musician, but I learned a great deal about music from him. Another fellow who was the dean of the school then, Richard Bobbitt [Dean, Berklee School of Music, 1960–1970s]—they were the two best classroom teachers that I had there, and my learning from them was not in the jazz genre, but more just about music.

FL: Tell me a little bit about that, some of the things you felt like you learned—musical values, and just whatever.

HP: The musical values, or—?

FL: You're saying you learned a great deal about music; it wasn't specific jazz.

HP: Well, this fellow Richard Bobbitt, who was the dean, he had studied with Stefan Wolpe. In studying with Wolpe—I hope my memory is accurate. Bobbitt learned from studying with Wolpe about voicing not through choosing notes because they are the root, the third, the fifth, the seventh, the ninth—but making most—I don't want to say all—most of the vertical structures, structures that are created because of the intervallic relationship between the notes, not because they are a function. Forrest, are you a musician?

FL: Yes.

HP: Okay, so you—and Fred is—fine. That’s insulting—I apologize, Fred. Just so I don’t get boring to you. So that certain intervals, you know, there are consonances or dissonances. If we want to get richer, or want to get darker, want to get brighter, the choice of interval between notes is more important than the function that the note is in the chord. Which will also—which, I sort of based a whole course on this, later on, after I started to teach—also will take away from the obviousness of the chords that have the root in the bass, from the chords that have the three-seven tritone that announce, I am this chord, and there’s very little you can do about it.

Instead of taking the notes because they are these very important, vitally important in certain areas of sound, but in this, if you’re looking to broaden—whether you’re a classical composer or a jazz composer—this approach to intervallic choice of notes, rather than function choice of notes, I got originally from Bobbitt, who to the best of my knowledge, he was teaching me as a result of his studying with Stefan Wolpe. And this was actually after I’d studied at Berklee full-time, after my five semesters, and another trumpet player and I—his name was Herbie Daigle—we used to study with Bobbitt after the school day was over, privately, just a class of two. Because I can remember Bobbitt would often come in having had maybe one too many drinks, and we’d have to, oh, swing with it! [laughs] But I learned a great deal from this man about this—the intervallic approach to vertical writing, as opposed to the function approach.

FL: That’s fantastic!

HP: It was for me. Even when it was—I’m saying to myself, “This is going to be valuable.”

FL: I wish I’d have had that in college!

HP: I’ll tell you, so many students that I had at Berklee—and I don’t mean to wave the flag here—have come back to me two, five, ten years after—not while they’re taking the course, after they absorbed it—and said that this course was one of the most opening things of anything they were studying in a school or classroom situation. It allows—and I have to talk about it in the jazz field, because I’ve been very remiss to have been as removed from the classical field as far as activity, playing activity, writing activity, and I regret it now. So I can only talk in terms of jazz. But most jazz ensembles, whether they be three or four horns and a rhythm section, or a whole band—the instrumental sound is pretty similar. I don’t mean the harmonic sound.

FL: Mm-hm.

HP I don’t mean the style of the players’ vibrato. The purely instrumental sound, when you hear, whether it’s four horns in like an octet, or you hear the twelve, thirteen horns of a full jazz orchestra—the instrumental sound, the layered effect of color of trumpets, color of trombones, color of saxes, in this function kind of harmony that we’re talking about, is the same. Whether you listen to Basie of ‘35, or you listen to Woody [Herman] of ‘54, or you come and listen to Mel [Lewis, 1929–1990] and Thad [Jones, 1923–1986], or ‘85—whichever of these bands. Nothing to do with rhythmic style, harmonic style, era—was it swing, was it bebop, was it whatever.

This layered—as I call it, the layered colors, and each layer really separated from each other, not entwined, just getting a richer sound, instrumentally, is the same.

Whereas if you use this non-function, this intervallic chord, and put the instruments together so you rub color against color, put a reed between two brass, rather than put four brass, and then four trombones, and then five saxes, and maybe one or two overlapping. I can hear a typical big band and it almost sounds like there were just the three primary colors, so to speak. I don't hear any sense of rainbow effect going on there. So these are some of the things that I learned from these teachers, which were not jazz tools, but they were music tools.

FH: Wow.

FL: Mm-hm, wow!

HP: Yeah, I knew then, and in hindsight I even thanked them even more. Because so many students—I mean, I've had many people who were professional writers in their home lands, directors of radio-TV studio bands, conductors of symphony groups who wanted to get into the jazz thing, leaders of big bands all over Europe, who came and studied at Berklee, and would take this course, and I could see in their faces while I was saying these things—I could see these looks, these—and that was very gratifying, to know that you—I did not invent this; I merely organized the thinking. People would say, “Oh, you created it!” No!

I just—maybe that mathematical mind from back in my teens, and all that, allowed me to organize—when you teach as long as I did, and stand in front of—the thousands and thousands, literally, hours, I have stood in front of bands and rehearsed them and developed an eye-ear relationship. I do not have a God-given, eye-ear relationship; I have a developed eye-ear. I can see the score, and hear it in my head. The number of hours that I was able to do that—and I feel very blessed—with my own professional band, with the Berklee band, and with the MIT band, and in clinics all around the country and the world, and all that. I don't think it's exaggerating to say it's thousands of hours that I've stood there, and heard it, and seen it. It's allowed me to perceive things about scoring techniques, or jazz orchestras, that I don't think many people have had the opportunity to do.

The only person that I've been able to have a close association with, who we've talked about it some, but I knew it from observing him, but Bob Brookmeyer [b. 1929, trombone]. I think Brook has this same sort of ability. And he's a marvelous friend. I don't know what kind of thoughts and things Gil Evans [1912–1988, piano, bandleader,] had in his head, and I don't know about Duke, and I tried to find out from Duke. I played with a band and would question him [laughs]—terrible! I said, if we were in a room and it was casual, I'd say, “Duke, come here. On this tune, in the first two measures, you do this.” And I'd play on the piano. “But I can't figure out what you do in the next two measures.” And he'd say, “Oh, you're doing it better than I could do it, anyway!” and just walk away. He wouldn't show me anything, you know! [laughs] So I kind of rambled there, but it's an important part of my musical life, no question there.

FL: Absolutely, absolutely.

(END OF CD1 48:27)

- FL: Backtracking a little bit, when did you start writing your own tunes and stuff?
- HP: When I was studying with this Shorty Perry fellow. I'd say that would have been '46. I'd write some for this high school age dance band that he was the director of. Prior to that I had tried to do some things on my own; I had no idea what I was doing. It was just laughable. And then my next training was with this teacher at Berklee, at Schillinger House, in the summer of '48, this man Vic Hogan.
- FL: Did you play piano much, professionally?
- HP: [laughs] It's funny. Talking about that just the other day! I've had a terrible cold sore on my lower lip, and I'm supposed to record with Kenny Werner [b. 1951, piano] and Bob Moses [b. 1948, drums] and John Lockwood [bass] Thursday in New York. I've never played with Kenny; we haven't had any association since we were at school. And he's just playing marvelously! He's a marvelous young—yeah, young!—middle-age piano player. And I've had this cold sore. Again, totally how poorly my embouchure is corrected—I played eight gigs two weeks ago and really tore my chops up. And the eighth gig was a five-and-a-half-hour recording session, live, in a club, where I really—[Café] Beaujolais in Gloucester, where I work, you know.
- FH: Right.
- HP: Guitar, bass, trumpet—we were doing a live CD. And I really tore them up. So last week I had five gigs, and I probably played as bad, professionally, as I've played in a few years, as far as the chops go. I could create, I could make the pitch sound, “bah,” and then it would die! I could not sustain beyond a half note because my lower lip was like a board from this cold sore. First you get a knot, and that messes you up. It swells your lip so the opening in the mouthpiece is closed off by this swollen piece of meat. Then you get the crust, the healing thing, and there's no suppleness, no softness, where you want to screw the mouthpiece into your flesh, you know. And I just, I called the fellow who was in charge of the session yesterday and said, “I don't know if I can play Thursday.” He said, “Well, I don't know if we're going to have the session. They're going to close all the bridges into New York.” You hearing of this transit strike that's supposed to take place around New York?
- FL: Oh, that's right.
- HP: But anyway, he and I talked, and I said, “I'll come, but it could be that you'll send me out to the car and send me home.” Now how did I get into this, about chops? There was a question that led me to this thing about this particular chop problem.
- FL: Oh, piano! I asked you if you played—
- HP: Oh, piano, right! [laughs]
- FH: We all lost it for a moment!

HP: Well, the summer of '50, the summer after my year at Harvard—and that was a period when I was really in flux, you know. Leaving Harvard; the family, at least the dental part, were not too happy. And anyway, I decided I'm going to give up the trumpet, and I played piano all summer long—a trio, alto, drums, and piano—at the Dugout, which was in the Hotel Edwards at Salisbury Beach. I mean, really a lowlife place, you know.

FH: [laughs]

HP: Although I made my best friend of life there, a drummer from Lawrence named Joe McGovern [spelling unverified], who is my dearest friend. We met there. I played piano all summer, horribly—so bad that [laughs] when I went to Schillinger House in the fall, by that time I had decided, hey, I don't play the trumpet as well as I want to, but I play it better than the piano. So that's the only time that I've ever really fought, for a little while.

Now, it's interesting you should ask this right now, because being the age that I am, and the trumpet being the violent physical act that it is, loving music the way I do—my wife saying to me, “I don't ever want to know you not playing music. You would be unbelievably impossible to live with if you don't have music in your life!” I've been looking around to get a nice eight or ten thousand dollar piano to put on the porch at the house because this isn't going to hold up. I've abused this, playing incorrectly. And there aren't a lot of guys in their seventies and eighties playing. Clarke Terry [b. 1920, trumpet] is still playing. Doc Cheatham [Adolphus Anthony Cheatham, 1905–1997, trumpet] played till ninety-one. But if you look around, you don't have a lot of seventy-something, eighty-something year old trumpet players because it is so—that opening that we're pushing that air in, that tiny opening, is ferocious.

So I have a feeling that that's what I'm going to end up at being, like a very mediocre—that's a compliment, technique-wise—playing the occasional gig, and playing at home, maybe doing some writing. Since I retired four and a half years ago, I've not written a note of music because I don't want to be burdened. I've had an offer for quite a few—quite a few!—half a dozen commissions. The money was always good, to write something in the jazz idiom. And I don't want to have that thing, when I wake up in the morning I know I've got a deadline, and two weeks from today I've got to have something there. As a teacher and a bandleader, I lived with—I can't do this.

I wake up in the morning now, and I have a very nice relation, my wife and I. We've been married eight and a half years, so we're relatively new to each other. We were both in our early sixties when we were married. We didn't come with a lot of baggage. Like most couples, if they get to sixty, there's so much baggage! We don't have baggage; we have a lovely marriage. And we have a lovely home in Gloucester. All the children are healthy; the grandchildren are healthy. I really wake up in the morning with a very clear head. I'm going to work in the yard today, or let's get in the car and go up to Vermont for two days, just check into a bed and breakfast. Or let's go to New York and visit the children and the grandchildren.

You know, I don't want to have this thing on my head: I've got to write! Probably, at some point, I will get back into writing, but it's the deadline aspect of writing that I don't like. And that's another interesting thing about writing, too—changing the subject, sort of. When I was somewhat active as a writer—and this I would pass on to students at Berklee all the time—if I had a week to write a piece of music: let's say as of Monday I was going to start writing something, and on Saturday morning I had to give it to the copier. And let's say I'm not working; I'm teaching at Berklee, but not playing at all. I get home at night and try all these tricky things, and hear all these, and change all these things. All of a sudden I say, oh, it's Friday night, and tomorrow morning I've got to give this to the copiers. I now sit down and write as fast as the hand will put the notes on the paper. And let's say I was fifty percent of the way through. I can't remember the time when that wasn't the case. Maybe once or twice it didn't happen. Invariably, the music that I wrote as fast as my hand could write it down was vastly superior to what I sat there and pondered, and oh, let's try this, let's try this.

FL: Oh, that's very interesting.

HP: You're just answering to instincts. And I would tell that to students. I'd see students pondering over eight bars, and perfecting. I'd say, "Don't do that. Let me tell you from experience of many years that as fast." And as a player I feel the same way. I feel I always play best on the first take, if we're going to record. I don't like editing my own thoughts. I believe instinctive musical thoughts, in most cases, are better.

And it's interesting. I find with fellow musicians, the older the musician is, the more they feel this way. The younger the musician—if I'm leading a recording session now, of jazz-oriented music, and I'm the person in charge, I will offer the license that nobody has to solo until the group or the band has the music totally in order, the engineer has the sound just where we want it, and we're ready to do what, assuming human frailties don't creep in and make mistakes, we can, this is going to be it. The older musicians always accept that. Fine. They'll just sit there, and if it's sixteen-bars solo, they'll rest for the sixteen bars. The younger musicians will leap in and play every time, you know! And there's all sorts of psychological reasons for this sort of thing happening.

FH: Yeah, wow.

HP: But that's sort of the idea. If I am playing on a job, and you get a request, a small group, playing. The third set you get a request for a tune you played in the first set. You played it in the first set because within the group we chose to play it. You honor the request for the person in the audience. Never do I play as well, that second playing, because it's still in my head, sort of, what I played the first time. And I start to play something, and I'm—oh, I've played that before. Well, let's go this way. And never is idea B as good as idea A. [laughs] I'm sorry for digressing so much.

3. Changing jazz styles and the significance of Duke Ellington (56:49— CD2 08:22)

- FL: Oh, that's great. Those are great digressions. You were growing up in a time, you got to see the birth of bebop and some of the more avant-garde jazz movements.
- HP: Yes.
- FL: What was that like for you and your fellow musicians when you saw this jazz moving away from its kind of dance orientation?
- HP: That's a great question.
- FL: Because it's a profound change.
- HP: Oh! More than just moving away from the dance band, I think it has moved away from the human, humanistic, elements of the music, or the human elements as I know the human elements. We used to play music that the average lay audience, non-musical knowledge person, could react to emotionally. And it seems that so much of what has happened the last half century, whatever, within the jazz field, requires some idea, some intellectual idea of what's going on, or you just can't get with it. It's just, there's too much going on in the head to allow people to do this.

A real good example is early in jazz, and even up into the forties, it was music that was played to be both danced to and listened to, which created such a much broader audience. We've narrowed, we've taken, we've stolen that audience. I was lucky enough to play with Lionel Hampton's band in the early fifties while this was still very much going on. People would come to hear the band, to dance to or listen to, and you would have the X number of rows of people standing in front of the band, listening, and behind that this wave of people dancing. Not only were you getting to two audiences, but it was inspiring you to play in a dual way. You wanted to be cooking, rhythmically, for these dancers, and you also wanted to be creative, and play arrangements that were interesting to the people sitting there, looking up, and listening, you know. And that dual audience hardly exists in jazz at all at this point.

- FL: When you're playing for dancers, it's a different way of connecting than if you have an anonymous sea of people sitting down.
- HP: No question. No question.
- FL: I've had that experience before, and when you look somebody in the eye and you know that what you're doing makes a difference.
- HP: Yes.
- FL: And they look you in the eye, yeah.
- HP: I can play for one person like that, if I'm playing in a smaller club. My order of—and again, I'm digressing—my order of musical integrity is first, here, second, the musicians I'm working with, and third, anything out there I get is frosting on the cake. And if I see in a small club one person that I feel that their facial expression, their body language—whatever it is—is getting into what I'm doing, I really work hard at playing for them.

But going back to your original question, which is just enormously important for this whole thing. I think this thing—and you said it exactly—it first started in the mid-forties with bebop. I think up until bebop people could pretty much follow what was going on. By people, I'm talking about your lay audience, either the dancing or the listening, and I guess we were talking somewhat more about the listening. They could become involved with the emotion of the music because the tools of the music had not become complex to the point that they have.

But by the mid-forties—which, I mean, that's right where I made maybe the major shift in my taste. My taste had been Louis Armstrong and the swing bands and Benny Goodman's band. And in '45, one of these Boston musicians, whose name I didn't mention, and I should—his name is Andy Boland [spelling unverified]; he's a drummer. He'd been in the Navy. He came home to Gloucester out of the Navy, and we lived in the same house, years ago, and his mother and my mother were friends, so I knew of him. But he was about seven, eight years older than I am, and when you're fifteen, seven or eight years is almost like another generation. I mean, a sophomore in high school, and somebody who's already been in the Navy—that's two different things. And he always had marvelous integrity, as far as what he believed in, and his taste and judgment was excellent.

And I'm at my house, listening to my—I was very much into the Dixieland players, the Eddie Condon people. I had all these old Red Label 78 Commodore records with Pee Wee Russell [1906–1989, clarinetist] and Wild Bill Davison [1906–1989, cornetist], and all this, and I knew all the tunes—could play, and played in Dixieland bands around Gloucester. Knew the tunes; I didn't know the idiom well, but I knew it enough to play. And I remember after school going to a local record store and buying, you know, Harry James [1916–1983, trumpeter and bandleader] records for the band, and Eddie Condon for the Dixieland, and that sort of stuff.

And he came to my house some weeks or days after he'd come home to Gloucester from the Navy. He had already spent some time in New York, on Fifty-Second Street, after he got out of the Navy. And he came home to Gloucester with a record of Dizzy and Bird, and on one side was “Salt Peanuts” [by Dizzy Gillespie] and on the other side was “Hot House”—a tune based on “What is This Thing Called Love,” [by Cole Porter]—a very complicated bebop [tune], by Tadd Dameron. And he came in and he said, “Take this crap off the record player you're playing. This is where it is, and this is where it's going!”

So I put it on, his 78 record, and listened to both sides. And I thought it was terrible! I didn't understand it intellectually; I didn't understand it emotionally. I didn't understand it at all! It was way over my head, and my ability to feel! And I said, “Get out of my house! I'm done with it. I don't want to listen to this.” I wanted to listen to what I had been listening to. But fifteen is a point in your life where you want to be a part of what's going on. You don't want to be a part of what went on twenty years before! If that ever changes, I think we have a serious problem! [laughs] So, it didn't take me too many weeks at home by myself, saying, “Oh, wow, I'm fifteen, this is the new—”

So, I became a dyed-in-the-wool bebopper. I mean, I left my Bunny Berigan [trumpeter and singer] and my Harry James and my Wild Bill Davison, records to get dusty, and just couldn't get enough of Dizzy and Bird and the beboppers. I think bebop is a very narrow music. I don't feel it's narrow emotionally, but the tools of bebop are very narrow to me. I've had to undo my bebop-edness in the last twenty or thirty years, so I could become what I feel is a broader jazz musician. I still, when I'm playing a fast tempo, resort to the bebop that I learned when I was fifteen because I can't create and execute, at the tempo, anything other than these licks that work, that I learned a hundred years ago. But they're very narrow licks, and the harmonic vocabulary. It freed us from the relatively simpleness of the swing period harmonies and created an almost worse box that it put us in, with these specific chromaticisms and these specific changes of keys. And I've worked very hard at getting away from that. I'm sort of really rambling, but it relates to the question to a point.

FL: Yes!

HP: And then, I've never become a part of any avant-garde movement, and I don't think I probably will. I'm sure I won't because if at this age, pushing seventy in a few months, you've not gone that way, I don't think I'm going to go that way. But that was the one big change in music that I took part in, and took part in to the point of a fault. I wanted to be part of what was hip at that point. For instance, I, going along these same kind of lines, I had no idea what Duke Ellington was all about at this point. I dismissed Ellington. I had Count Basie records, Stan Kenton [1911–1979, piano, bandleader] records, God help me! The furthest thing in the world from jazz—Caucasian Wagnerian crap, okay? And you can print that, if you want!

FL & FH: [laugh]

HP: And other bands—Woody Herman's band, Dizzy Gillespie's band, Count—let's say those three: Basie, Herman, and Gillespie, all of which were very valid, but none of which had the profundity of Ellington. And I didn't know this. Basie could swing magnificently. Dizzy's band, every time you heard it was all these new creative bebop licks and harmonies and arrangements. Woody's band, sort of a combination of the two.

And I can remember the instant—the instance—that a light went off in my head. I knew that Ellington—by the time I got to be about twenty-one, I knew that it was over my head. Something there—too many people who I respect say, "Listen to this." And I went to hear a battle of bands with Ellington and Basie, down in Rhode Island. It was a ballroom just outside of Providence; it was called Pawtuxet on the Rhodes [Rhodes-on-the-Pawtuxet Ballroom and Gazebo; Cranston, RI]. I think it still exists. But back in the ballroom days, thirties and forties and fifties, it was big. And I think I went primarily to hear Basie's band, and on this night, all of a sudden—and I was twenty-three at the time—something went off in my head. Oh! There's something more here than there is here. Basie, I was loving and enjoying it for the excitement, the swing, and the fire, and all that, and the rhythm section. But then, I started to see. And that for me was kind of one of these changes, like from the swing period to the bebop period change that I went through in the mid-forties.

FH: Can you recall what it might have been? The orchestration, the saxophone section?

- HP: To say now—let’s see, that was—what was that? That’s forty-six years ago. To say now, I don’t think would be an honest memory of what did happen in that very moment. It would be what I’ve come to know since then, and I started to talk about that! I want to say it had to do with that coming out of the Ellington Band was the sum total of fifteen or sixteen human beings, each being themselves. But I came to know that later! [laughs] So I’d like to think I reacted that way then. I probably was not consciously reacting that way, you know. I refer to it in my teaching that most of the other bands were sort of pushbutton bands. A leader said, “Do this, and do it to this level of competency, and you’ll get a week’s pay.” And that’s an awful, terrible way of simplifying it. With Duke’s band, he just says, “Okay, play.”
- FL: They’re all soloists.
- HP: Exactly, even within the ensemble.
- FL: Yeah.
- HP: They weren’t improvising as far as the pitches, but their feeling, their sound! I mean, with Ellington, within the sax section, it is not five saxophones trying to blend with the lead player. It’s five individuals, totally being themselves as far as expression, to the point that by certain standards of accurate section with the instruments playing, it was bad!
- FH: Mm.
- HP: But it allowed to be—the sum total of five people is so much greater than the sum total of five saxophones. And I don’t think I realized that. I think I just—something, at age twenty-three, I was beginning to open up to there’s more to what my previous eight years of semi-professionalism had been leading me to.

4. Music at MIT (1:07:54—CD2 19:28)

- FL: During your student years, were you familiar at all with—there was an MIT jazz band called the Techtonians. Were you familiar with them? And what was their reputation around the town?
- HP: I was not familiar with them until the first day I rehearsed over here. Which takes us ahead a little—it takes us to ’63. Maybe we can talk a little bit about that. The name Klaus Liepmann [1907-1990; first Professor of Music at MIT], historically, you know?
- FL: Yes. Yeah.
- HP: Did you know Klaus? No, you’re not that old.
- FL: I didn’t know him, no.
- HP: I was teaching at Berklee in the early spring, late winter of ’63, and Berklee was such a small little school then that there were phones in the corridors outside of many classrooms. So the phone rang, so the teacher would go out and answer it. “The gig, Ray!” You could hear them pounding the floor, “You’ve got a gig tonight, Ray!” on

the phone. Very family-oriented, small school thing. So the phone rang, and I answered it and this very—well, I guess Germanic, I guess Klaus was German, wasn't he?

FL: Yes.

HP: Yeah. I shall not try to imitate his voice.

FH: [laughs]

HP: He says, "I'm Klaus Liepmann, Director of Music at MIT. We have a band here at MIT that is so bad," he says, "I've told them to disband, or if they want to continue, do not use the name MIT to be associated with them." [laughs] Funny! Klaus was great! Klaus was very helpful. He didn't understand what I was doing, but I think he knew we were doing it well, or something like that! [laughs]

FH: Yeah, yeah.

HP: So he said, "A couple of the young men in the band said they would like to have the MIT music department hire a director, so that the band could get [indistinct]"—because it was student-directed then. There had been an adult director that I'll move back to in a moment, that they used to tell me about, some of the older students I met. But he said, "They'd like to have a director, and they mentioned your name." And at this point, I didn't know any of the young men who mentioned me. I had been active with my band from '55 to this point in the Boston jazz scene. So he said, "I'd like you, if you're interested, to come over here and, if you would, they rehearse on Sunday afternoons," he said, "for the remaining six Sundays of the semester, work with them. And then at the end of that period, tell me if you'd like to continue next year or if you wouldn't."

And I can remember what he told me. He said, "It'll be thirty dollars a session for these Sunday rehearsals." And I can remember that. It was a very important thing in my life, as it turned out, all the time I spent here. So I said sure. And I can remember sitting in my car on a warm, sunny April afternoon. You could drive in where the Chapel, the circular Chapel—you could drive in, park right by the Chapel, going into Kresge [Auditorium]. And I got there early, so I didn't want to go in before I was scheduled to be in there! [laughs] I wanted to wait until three o'clock, when I'm due! And I'm thinking, "Oh, what am I doing here?" you know. So I went in, and the kids were great! The night before they'd had their annual spring concert, so I figured they're going to be in pretty good shape—I mean, good timing, the day after they'd just had a concert. And at this point they're student led, no faculty, no adult leader. And I said, "Well, why don't you play something for me?" And I even remember the tune; I remember the arrangement!

FL: What was the tune?

HP: The tune was "You Took Advantage of Me" [by Richard Rodgers]. It was an arrangement by Nat Pierce.

FL: [laughs]

HP: And they probably had gotten it through the Berklee Library or something. And it was horrible! I mean, it was just vilely horrible. I hope I'm not exaggerating. Let's

say this was a three-minute arrangement, all right? During this arrangement, I am deciding, am I just going to say, “Guys, I think this is not right for me and right for you, and I’m sorry for taking your time, but we won’t do this.” Or shall I say, “Yeah, let’s do something with that.” So in that three minutes, I made this decision that I ended up twenty-two years. And now you’re following through, as Jamshied did and as Jim did, you know.

But I sensed something. It certainly wasn’t quality music. I sensed something, and I don’t know what I sensed, even. But I’m hoping it wasn’t just a hundred and eighty bucks for six Sundays at thirty bucks a whack, or something like that. So I said, “Okay, let’s get into this arrangement,” and I stuck it out for the six Sundays. And I could then begin to see that I was going to learn a great deal about people because it was a different—not different level of human being, different level of where these young men were in their heads, from where Berklee students were, in their heads. I was going to—I’d be getting paid, but I was going to be learning. Because these people came to it as an outlet to get away from the stress of what they were doing the rest of their time.

The Berklee kids were coming to it every day with the stress of, “I hope I can make it in this field; I’ve got to make a living,” and all that sort of thing. And it was so totally different! It was almost like it wasn’t music with MIT music, with Berklee. It was like two different elements, two different situations, the way the people here brought themselves to the music. And it came to be not too many years that I was more proud of what I was doing here on a part-time basis, five hours a week, than I was teaching full-time at Berklee, because I sensed that these people, the point they were starting at, and the point they would end up at in a school year, was so great, compared to the point where the Berklee recording band started out, with all these world-wide professionals, getting a little bit better. And I could see that they, the MIT students and me coming together, were really doing something there. You don’t often in life get a chance to build like that!

FH: Wow!

HP: Yeah!

FL: Wow! Well, for the next interview, we’ll get more into the MIT thing, but that’s a beautiful lead-in. One more question—I know you have to leave at twelve-thirty here. The Boston jazz scene in the thirties and forties—is there any, kind of reflections, or anything you—would you want to kind of describe that?

HP: Of the thirties and forties?

FL: Yeah, yeah.

HP: Well, I didn’t know the jazz scene of the thirties at all, other than through hearing older musicians, older than me, later on in the fifties and sixties, talk about it. I remember going to a club in ’41 called the Ken Club with my mother, and hearing Hot Lips Page, a great old legendary jazz trumpeter, but I didn’t know much about it. I remember listening to the radio in the early forties. Do you gentlemen know of Nat Hentoff, the writer?

FL: Yes.

FH: Yes.

HP: Yeah, Nat was the jazz writer person in Boston, and had, on WESX, had a—I guess a weekly radio show. And if they did live radio broadcasts out of the Savoy, he would emcee it. Nat was important here in the forties in Boston, and I would always listen to his radio show. He would write columns. George Frazier was writing. Do you know the name George Frazier? Great old columnist, always stirring up things—wrote for the *Boston Herald*. The *Herald* was then a very conservative, Republican—nothing like it is now. I mean, now it's like, you know, a rag! But this is—there used to be the *Herald* would be in the morning, and the *Traveler* would be the evening paper, of the *Herald Traveler*. And then it was decades later that it joined up with the *Record America*, and then finally just became a, you know, whatever it became.

But anyway, he wrote for the *Herald*, George Frazier, and had a great column, and was very into writing about jazz. This was early forties because I can remember reading a column he wrote shortly after my mother bought me the trumpet. And I was really into Harry James, and he had an article in the *Herald* about that Harry James could not carry Louis Armstrong's trumpet case in the door of the gig! And I was ferocious because I didn't—I hadn't come to realize that Louis Armstrong is the single figure in American jazz to this point. If you have to say one guy has done it, he did it, okay? But at that point, I'm listening to Harry James playing [sings] "Ciribiribin" [composed by Alberto Pestalozza in 1898], dee dah, and the "Carnival of Venice" [theme and variations on a folk song for trumpet by Herbert L. Clarke], and all this kind of stuff, so I was very defensive. But Frazier was a great writer.

I didn't know the musicians personally at all. I was a high school kid and grammar school kid in Gloucester. I came to know some of them who were active in the thirties and forties when I became involved with the fifties scene. But by the time I became involved with the fifties scene, I was a bebopper, and these older musicians, the vast majority of them, if not every one of them, were still swing-oriented, and us beboppers were looking down our nose because we were playing the music of the times, and they were still playing that old stuff, you know.

I'm trying to think if there were any people, any musicians of that era that I knew personally. Well, Ruby Braff [cornetist, trumpeter] was in on the tail end. I remember hearing Ruby in the mid-forties at the Savoy. Ruby's about five years older, so when I'm fifteen, he's twenty, and he was playing with some of the older, [in the style of] the Vic Dickenson—types [1906–1984, trombonist]. They were not Boston people but they were national jazz people who'd come into the Savoy. The Savoy was sort of the leading jazz club back in the late thirties and early forties. And then it brought the national—I call them mainstream now—but the national swing era people, Roy Eldridge [trumpeter] and people like that.

But I really, my knowledge of the thirties and forties is one of hearsay, talking to other people, not taking part in. I mean, my having lived day to day very, very intensely as part of the scene is the fifties on.

FL: Mm-hm. Wow.

FH: That might be the place to start next time.

FL: Yeah.

HP: There's one name that we never got to. When you asked me about MIT and the Techtonians, the young man in the band that I took over in '63, who had maybe been in that band—and it was called the Techtonians; that was the name of it. We changed that fairly quickly to the—first we called it the MIT Concert Jazz Band, and then when we got into having the two bands, we made the distinction: there was the Concert Jazz Band and the Festival Jazz Band [Festival Jazz Ensemble]. [Ed. Note: Group performed under the name "Techtonians" at least through Spring, 1966.] Yeah, the Festival Band went to the various festivals. The Concert Band was Everett's [Longstreth, trumpeter and bandleader], band, which just played the concerts here.

FH: Okay.

HP: But the men who were in the band that I took on in '63—there were some grad students in the band then who had been in the band in the late fifties, talked about an ROTC instructor who, Major Somebody [name unknown], who led the dance band back in the fifties—whether it was mid or late—must have been more like late fifties, for these people that I was having contact with in '63. And they laughed about him because he wasn't really jazz-oriented. He was more like an ROTC guy, but that he led them in whatever way he did lead them. And they would, in the nicest of ways, would make fun of him—you know, he really didn't have any idea what he was doing! [laughs] I've forgotten his name.

Now somewhere deep in my archives—and I don't mean to tease you and then fail you—I have some programs that people gave me way back then or back into the fifties. And his name is probably on it, but I honestly don't know where to start. Our attic—you must remember, my wife and I have been married for eight and a half years. I had the house in Gloucester, which was a summer home, and then in '83 my son and I moved out of our Brookline [MA] apartment into there. My wife lived in an apartment in Arlington [MA], and when we got married we decided the way to start a marriage is not in my house or your house, but we got an apartment in the Pru [Prudential Tower, Boston], which I recommend for any middle-aged couple getting married. Don't live in his or her house; live in our house. It really worked. We have two very close couples got married the same time we did; they're both divorced. And we think it's part of it, that when we got this apartment at the Pru, which was convenient for me at Berklee, and she taught, or administrated, at Bentley [College], it was our place from the beginning.

So we had her apartment in Arlington, which she had to clean out. We had my apartment in Brookline we cleaned out. A lot of that went to the apartment in the Back Bay, and a lot of it went into this summer home that we came up with and I winterized in '83. And we have so much in our attic from these various houses that it is terrible! So I don't mean to tease you with it exists, but whether I can lay my hands on this stuff!

FH: Yeah, that would be fine.

HP: She had boxes and boxes of professional and personal clippings and stuff, and quite possibly in the professional boxes, if I ever have the—part of me doesn't like to go back. I love to live for today and tomorrow.

FH: Yeah.

FL: Yeah.

HP: I don't like to live for the past.

FH: Yeah, that's wise.

FL: Well, I want to thank you very, very much for this.

HP: Oh, my pleasure. It's fun talking about these things, it really is.

FH: Oh, it's great!

HP: And I look forward to some [unclear] in the spring.

FH: Yes, yes.

HP: If you wanted to do it once between now and when I leave, I'd be happy. I leave on January 9th. My wife and I go away for two plus months. So between now and the 9th, I'm sure sometime after, between Christmas and the 9th, I could get together again if you gentlemen want to. Or if you just want to wait.

FL: Yeah. I'll have to look at my schedule, and then I can get back to you. I think your—yeah, your phone number is right here, okay.

FH: The nice thing—you know, it might be tough to organize, but the nice thing about that is that in the springtime, with everything going on that we're doing, it could get a little tight. It might be nice to, if we only had to do one then as opposed to two.

FL: Right, right.

HP: Let me make sure I'm telling you the right date. I hate the end of the year; I have to carry two books with me. It's terrible! Yeah, we're leaving Sunday, the 9th of January.

[End of Interview]