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Funding for the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program NEA Jazz Master interview was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts.

**MOSE ALLISON**  
**NEA Jazz Master (2013)**

**Interviewee:** Mose Allison (November 11, 1927-)  
**Interviewer:** Ted Panken and audio engineer Ken Kimery  
**Dates:** September 13-14, 2012  
**Depository:** Archives Center, National Music of American History,  
Smithsonian Institution.  
**Description:** Transcript. 107 pp.

**Panken:** I'm Ted Panken. It's September 13, 2012. We're in Eastport, Long Island, with the great Mose Allison, for part one of what we're anticipating will be a two-session oral history for the Smithsonian in honor of Mose Allison and his Jazz Masters Award. Thank you very much for being here, Mr. Allison, and making us so comfortable.

**Allison:** Thank you.

**Panken:** Let's start with the facts. Your full name, date of birth, location of birth.

**Allison:** Mose J. Allison, Junior. Date of birth, 11-11-27.

**Panken:** You're from Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, near Tippo.

**Allison:** Yes. It was just a crossroad. I was born on a farm three miles south of Tippo.

**Audre Allison:** It was called the island. Tippo Creek.

**Panken:** We also have with us, for the record, Audre Allison. You've been married over 60 years.

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**Allison:** Yes.

**Audre Allison:** 62, it will be. Or is it already 62?

**Panken:** So I guess you're qualified to act as a proxy.

**Allison:** Ok.

**Audre Allison:** Well, how much... When I just think that he leaves something out, I should fill in? I don't want to take over the thing.

**Panken:** Why was it called "the island"?

**Allison:** It was a creek around the island. Tippo Creek was... It encircled the island.

**Panken:** So the farm was on the island.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** How long had your family had the farm? When did they settle...

**Allison:** I don't know. It was...

**Audre Allison:** I think it was in 18-something that they first came there. Right?

**Allison:** Well, I don't know... They came from Cascilla, I think, originally...

**Panken:** Cascilla in what state?

**Allison:** Tallahatchie County.

**Panken:** I see, Cascilla is a town in Tallahatchie County. Got it.

**Audre Allison:** But the farm was more than an island. The farm is what, 1400 acres?

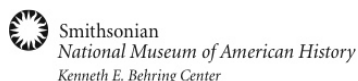
**Allison:** I don't know.

**Audre Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** So a big farm.

**Allison:** No, it wasn't big...

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**Audre Allison:** Well, it's not considered big for Mississippi. It's not one of the really big farms.

**Panken:** But 1400 acres on an island 3 miles south of Tippecanoe, Mississippi.

**Audre Allison:** No, it wasn't all on the island. The island was part of the farm, and still. Still there.

**Panken:** What was grown on the farm?

**Allison:** Cotton. Well, they used to grow cotton. But now they grow soybeans. But at that time we're talking about, it was cotton.

**Panken:** So when you were a kid, cotton was still the crop.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** And you think your grandfather was the one who established the farm and cleared the land and so forth?

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Audre Allison:** Yes, that's what I've always heard, that it was... I mean, there may have been some part of it that was (?). But they kept clearing...

**Allison:** Well...I don't know how much was cleared, and how much was there originally.

**Panken:** Did your father inherit the farm from your grandfather, or was it... I gather from an interview that your grandfather married three times, and that your father was from the second marriage. So I'm wondering how the farm came to him...

**Allison:** Well, my uncle and my father inherited the farm.

**Audre Allison:** He also had five daughters who didn't inherit the farm. That's how it was then.

**Allison:** Right.

**Panken:** So it got passed down to the males.

**Allison:** Yes, to the men.

**Panken:** But I gather your father had other interests as well. He liked music and he had a player piano.

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**Allison:** Yes. He had a general store in Tippo, and... I think my grandfather had that originally, but it passed down to my father.

**Panken:** So he had the store that everyone in the community would come to purchase provisions. Was it like a commissary store?

**Audre Allison:** Blacks were furnished there. Right?

**Allison:** It was sort of a focal point. But it was across the street from the service station.

**Audre Allison:** Yes. Those two places were... In fact, I think that Mose's mother always said that the men gathered at the service station.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Audre Allison:** Which they also owned.

**Panken:** So your family owned the general store and the service station, and a 1400-acre farm.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** A very self-sufficient lifestyle.

**Allison:** Yes. It was pretty much that...you know...

**Panken:** I'm referring to some interviews here... I understand that people would socialize and come together at both the service station and the general store. I think you said that the service station had a jukebox?

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Something incomprehensible to northerners. Can you talk about that?

**Allison:** Yeah. Well, that's where I heard the country blues, and early. I used to go there when I was working at the general store, and I used to go over and listen to the jukebox. It had a lot of blues players...

**Panken:** I think in one interview you mentioned Tampa Red.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Memphis Minnie.

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**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Big Bill Broonzy.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Now, could you identify them at that time for who they were? Were you listening on that level, or was it...

**Allison:** I didn't know anybody... I didn't know about them.

**Audre Allison:** Mose left Tippo... You were very young when you really moved out, once you went to college. Right?

**Allison:** Yes.

**Audre Allison:** And you went to the Army before that.

**Panken:** But a lot happened between those events, and I'd like to discuss that if we can. Here's what I know from the interviews, and just tell me whatever you can, however you can flesh it out. First of all, we've only been talking about your father here, but your mom was a schoolteacher, I gather.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Do you know what grades she taught?

**Allison:** She taught 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I think, at Tippo Elementary. We didn't like the... They had the school, and they would teach 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade or something like that...

**Audre Allison:** Your mother was not really happy with the school.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** It was a tiny little building. Because there was hardly anyone who lived around there.

**Allison:** Well, I don't remember it being a tiny little building.

**Audre Allison:** It looked tiny to me.

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**Panken:** I guess it's all relative. You're from St. Louis originally.

**Audre Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** There's an oral history with your mother on the internet, which I came across yesterday, and I figured it had to be your mother. She said she came to Tippo in 1926.

**Allison:** I don't know...

**Panken:** She saw an advertisement that said the position paid \$150 a month, which is why she went to Tippo. But when she got there, she found out it only paid \$100 a month.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** In any event, she arrived in 1926, she met your father, they were married in February of '27 and you were born in November of '27.

**Audre Allison:** [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** What was your father like and what was your mother like?

**Allison:** My father was well known around the area. He was an exemplary... He was known as somebody that was nice to the blacks. He dealt with them...

**Audre Allison:** I remember that he put plumbing into the manager's house, and a lot of people around there thought that was a bold move, that they might have to do the same or something like that.

**Allison:** Oh, well...I don't know...

**Audre Allison:** He was really highly regarded. In that BBC documentary, one of the old black men who had been manager on the farm talks about him. They put up a sign in Tippo a long time ago, not the historical marker, but a tin sign that said, "Mose Allison was born here," and he said, "That should have said 'Mose Allison, Senior, was born here.'"

**Allison:** Yes.

**Audre Allison:** So your dad had a really good reputation.

**Panken:** So he was an enlightened man.

**Allison:** Yeah.

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**Panken:** Before I ask more about him. I'd like to know something about your mom. She was a teacher. You have a degree in English and philosophy...

**Allison:** Well, I don't know... She went to Mississippi State. That's all I knew about her. I used to know her by a schoolteacher...

**Audre Allison:** Also, what about how you remembered what she said that time that made you feel proud of her when she was talking on the porch about how people made their money down there? She said "You all have to remember that what you made, you made from the sweat of their backs" or something like that. They were talking about black help, and I remember that you were impressed that she reminded them...

**Panken:** Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** some other folks around there.

**Panken:** So not necessarily the typical views of a Mississippi landowner in the 1920s and '30s and '40s, for sure.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** She also was world-traveled. She had a map of the world in her foyer with pins everywhere she'd been, and we had pictures of her on a donkey, on an elephant, on a camel...

**Panken:** She did this after you were born...

**Allison:** She went to India... Well, I think so...it was later.

**Audre Allison:** Some of it before, because your grandmother, Mom Ollie, kept you a lot. You stayed with her. Originally on the island, it was your grandparents' house they lived in.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah.

**Panken:** Do you remember your grandfather at all?

**Allison:** No. I remember riding in his buggy.

**Panken:** I gather that electricity didn't come to Tipppo until you were 13.

**Allison:** Right.

**Panken:** You grew up with a wind-up Victrola, no electricity, no radio. The center of the world

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was the general store and the filling station. And you had a piano.

**Allison:** Yeah. Well, the piano was in my grandfather's house. My father learned how to play the piano from the wind-up....

**Panken:** The player piano.

**Allison:** Yes. The player piano.

**Panken:** I gather he favored ragtime, and Scott Joplin and things like that.

**Allison:** Yeah. Well, I don't know whether he knew about Scott Joplin. But Fats Waller, I remember...

**Audre Allison:** That's right. He did like Fats Waller.

**Panken:** Well, he certainly wasn't alone in that. I gather, again from reading the interviews, that you showed an aptitude for the piano very young.

**Allison:** I took piano lessons when I was 5 years old. I took them for three or four years. But the teacher was...

**Audre Allison:** Miss Jimietta(?—17:37).

**Allison:** Yeah. Miss Jimietta(?).

**Audre Allison:** She played piano at the church.

**Panken:** Was it a Baptist church?

**Allison:** I don't know...

**Audre Allison:** Methodist Church. Mose used to say when they wanted you to go to church, at least when you were married... The kids would say, "Daddy, aren't you going?" You'd say... "Why aren't you going?" You'd say, "Because it's against my religion." The church was the community, which was...

**Panken:** In the area, I guess there was a black church and a white church

**Allison:** Yeah. Well, the black church was...we didn't have much to do with that.

**Audre Allison:** And it's still that way.

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**Allison:** Yeah. It's still that way.

**Panken:** In your church, did they do anything at all like the black church procedures, the singing... Or was it totally different?

**Allison:** I don't know. I only heard the music, the singing from the black church, from the front of the black church. I remember hearing it, and...

**Audre Allison:** Are you talking about the black church, honey?

**Allison:** Yes. I remember hearing the black church, the singing, you know...

**Panken:** That must have been a pretty powerful thing.

**Allison:** Yeah. Well, I don't know how early I heard this, but it didn't...I didn't think of it as powerful or as any way... I didn't think of it any way, you know... I don't remember... This is all mixed up in my head.

**Panken:** But I also want to know this. Were there any people locally who would be playing the blues?

**Allison:** No.

**Panken:** Or itinerant musicians coming through.

**Allison:** No.

**Panken:** So for you, hearing the music of the black church was a live experience, and hearing the blues...you heard them on records.

**Allison:** Yeah, I heard the jukebox on records. There was a local player that was a blues player, and he moved out several years before I was... I met him one time, and... So I don't remember much about him.

**Panken:** As you got older, when did the piano start to become something that you didn't have to be coerced to do? Was it something you always liked doing, or did it develop...

**Allison:** Yeah, I think. Victor Buchanan talked about that. He recalled standing outside the window and listening to me playing the piano.

**Audre Allison:** Victor Buchanan was the black manager at the farm. Also, I remember he said that your dad...

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**Allison:** He was...my dad's farm.

**Audre Allison:** Your dad's farm. He said that your dad used to ask him to teach you stuff about farming, and that he would take you out in the fields, but you would always end up under a shade tree. He said, "All that boy cared about was this."

**Panken:** It was a good way to get out of the fields, too.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** I think I read a quote that your father was determined to teach you the value of a dollar, so he had you out there in the fields.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** So Mr. Buchanan was being generous in his assessment of your motivation.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** So as a kid, you're picking up all of these musical cues, it sounds like, just in a very natural way. Were you a reader? I guess if your mother was a schoolteacher...

**Allison:** I didn't learn to read...

**Audre Allison:** Not music. He's talking about reading.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah. Well, I don't know when I started reading.

**Audre Allison:** Well, you read a lot always when I knew you. I remember that you were always recommending books to me when we wrote.

**Panken:** I'd imagine that if your mom was a schoolteacher, the ABCs were right there in front of you.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Did you stay in Tippto all the way through high school, or did you move to a town?

**Allison:** No. I took the bus from Tippto to Charleston, 14 miles. Charleston High School was in the hills. The Delta went to the hills 14 miles... That was the beginning of the hills, at Charleston High School. I don't know... I used to ride the bicycle to... I think that Charleston...I don't...

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**Audre Allison:** On a gravel road?

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** You would sometimes ride a bicycle to school.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** 14 miles. I didn't know that.

**Allison:** Yeah, well...I don't know...

**Audre Allison:** It was a rough road. I remember going with your mother 60 miles an hour on that road!

**Panken:** 60 miles an hour on the gravel road.

**Audre Allison:** Oh, yeah, absolutely. Anybody on that road down there... Until it got really big ruts. Then they'd come and put more gravel down.

**Panken:** A place where you could really use a four-wheel drive.

**Audre Allison:** I think they had Oldsmobiles or something, and they were worn out at 50,000 miles for sure.

**Panken:** Still gravel roads in the '50s. But in the 1930s and early '40s, you're going to Charleston High School, and I gather that once you got... The radio would have arrived in 1940 or 1941—you mentioned getting one when you were 13.

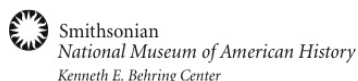
**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** That probably would have expanded your listening and access to hearing a lot of music?

**Allison:** Oh, I don't know... I just remember having the radio. I used to listen to that. I used to get the Duke Ellington band... They were playing broadcasts for War Bonds.

**Audre Allison:** I remember all the stories that your aunts would tell about...at your grandmother's house... There was a lot of music in the house. They used to roll back the rugs and dance, and your mother played ukelele...

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**Allison:** No...

**Audre Allison:** Yes. Well, you don't remember, then.

**Allison:** I don't remember that.

**Audre Allison:** When I was down there, I talked to all his aunts all the time about that, and they said when she first came down she would sit up on the piano and play that ukelele... They really at first didn't like her because she took their handsome brother or something like that.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** But they talked about...that was what they did for entertainment. So there must have been a lot of music.

**Allison:** Well, I remember my parents used to go to the riverboat, to dances. That was about 40 miles away, something...

**Panken:** Was that on the Mississippi River?

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** So you were 40 miles from the Mississippi River. Well, you must have been doing some serious radio listening at 13 or 14, because I gather you wrote your first song when you were 14, called "The 14-Day Palmolive Plan."

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** So you were listening to the commercials, and you put together this parody lyric...

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** So you must have been some reading and writing if you were doing that then.

**Allison:** I don't know... Maybe. I'm not sure.

**Audre Allison:** You said that you always played the piano and sang, I think, at dances... I mean, when you got together. Because that's when you first found out that girls would pay attention to you.

**Panken:** You wouldn't be alone in that motivation amongst musicians I've spoken with.

**Allison:** Oh yeah. I used to go to parties and play the blues at parties. That's how I learned

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that...the feminine thing... The blues attracted... I used to sing the local...the... [LAUGHS] The blues were risqué, and I used to sing them at parties.

**Audre Allison:** Like what one? Name one.

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Audre Allison:** Well, ok.

**Panken:** I think Memphis Minnie had a song that you liked.

**Audre Allison:** "Doin' The Bo'hog Grind" or something.

**Allison:** No.

**Audre Allison:** Yes, that was one. You talked about it. Somebody once came up to you and said, "Did you ever find the Bo'hog Grind?" I remember that.

**Allison:** Well, I didn't find it. I asked John Lee Hooker and several other people, and they said they'd heard it, but they didn't know who wrote it. I think it was Memphis Minnie.

**Panken:** I'm going to ask you a very specific question. Maybe you remember, maybe you don't. Right around the time you got your radio, the King Biscuit Show started broadcasting...

**Allison:** No, I never heard that.

**Panken:** I was just interviewing James Cotton, the harmonica player, and he said that when he was 6 years old, around 1940, he'd hear it on the radio, and he memorized Sonny Boy Williamson...

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** I know you'd covered one of Sonny Boy Williamson's tunes, so I wondered if you'd listened to King Biscuit Time.

**Allison:** No, I didn't listen to the King Biscuit Time show. I never heard that until later. I heard about it.

**Panken:** So I'm not the first to ask you this question, obviously.

**Allison:** Yes.

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**Audre Allison:** Where did you hear Sonny Boy Williamson? Was it in Memphis?

**Allison:** I heard him in Memphis at the Beale Street Auditorium. He was on a show there. It was dancers and comedians and everything, and Sonny Boy came out by himself, and played a couple of tunes on the harmonica. I was impressed by him.

**Panken:** But this is when you were older, after the Army.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** So I'd like to hold that in reserve for a bit. Here's a quote that you said to someone, I don't recall who. You said, "In the Mississippi Delta, nobody says anything straight out."

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** "Everything is exaggerated or understated, and there's a lot of humorous sayings and all that, so I was introduced to all that early."

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** That's a quality of your lyrics and songs.

**Allison:** Yeah, I think so.

**Panken:** After you wrote "The 14-Day Palmolive Plan," did you start writing more songs?

**Allison:** No, I don't think so. I wrote a few songs. I was listening to Nat King Cole at that time, and I... I don't know.

**Panken:** While you were in high school you were listening to Nat King Cole, when he had the trio and...

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** So that was a sound and approach that you... It wasn't a particularly blues-influenced style.

**Allison:** Well, he sang the blues, and... I started listening to the King Cole Trio early, and I was influenced by them a lot more so than the blues. I went back to the blues later.

**Panken:** In high school, were you performing at all?

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**Allison:** No.

**Panken:** I gather you did do...

**Allison:** Well, I did a couple of tunes at... I played a Fats Waller tune at the assembly, where everybody got together... Jimmy Brazier won the thing, the “Washington and Lee Swing.”

**Panken:** I believe the Fats Waller tune you played was “Hold Tight.”

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** At the time, when you were in high school, did you know a lot of repertoire?

**Allison:** I don’t know. I don’t know where...

**Audre Allison:** You said that you played trumpet also in high school. That’s when you started playing trumpet.

**Allison:** Yes. I played trumpet in the band, in the high school band.

**Panken:** What sorts of things did the high school band played?

**Allison:** I don’t know. Souza.

**Panken:** Marches and so on.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** So it wasn’t “hot music,” as it was called then.

**Allison:** No. I used to play licks, you know, from the other stuff, in the band...in... I don’t know.

**Audre Allison:** Was it in high school that Mariana introduced you to jazz?

**Allison:** No. Introduced...

**Audre Allison:** To records. That she had records, your cousin...

**Allison:** Elizabeth Staton.

**Audre Allison:** Elizabeth Staton, it was. Not Mariana Staton. Elizabeth.

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**Allison:** Well, Elizabeth Staton had a wind-up Victrola with Earl Hines and...oh, a lot of other people. I listened to that for a while.

**Panken:** And obviously listened closely.

**Allison:** I just remember Fats Waller from that area. I did a tune by him, “Hold Tight,” and “Foo-ra-de-ack-a-sa-ki. Want some seafood, Mama.” I played it at the high school auditorium, and I lost the contest...

**Panken:** To the guy who played “The Washington and Lee...” Now, before you went in the Army, you spent a year or six months at University of Mississippi.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** You were studying initially mechanical drawing and mechanical engineering?

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Were you interested in the sciences or mathematics when you were in high school or as a kid? Did you have a proclivity for that?

**Allison:** No. I found out that it was a good thing to take, because chemical engineering, you went all over the world.

**Panken:** So you thought you could get yourself out of Tippo.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** So at a certain point, you were thinking like your mother, like you want to get out of this place once in a while.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Did your father like to travel, too, or did he like to stay at home?

**Allison:** No, I don’t remember him traveling. We used to go to Booneville, which is a different part of the state. Booneville is where my mother was born, and we used to go there every...

**Audre Allison:** To see her sister.

**Panken:** Even that was a long trip for your dad.

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**Allison:** Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** He liked staying home. I know she liked to travel.

**Panken:** Where I'm gradually heading with this is how music progressed from being a kind of hobby to your life's work.

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Panken:** We'll get there.

**Allison:** Well, I wrote arrangements for the Mississippi band, and...

**Panken:** Before you entered the army, or after?

**Allison:** Yeah, I think so—before I went. I don't know. It was later. I remember writing arrangements for the Mississippians.

**Audre Allison:** Yeah. They still use some of them.

**Panken:** Dance arrangements?

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** When you wrote those arrangements, were they informed by listening to dance...hot bands?

**Allison:** Well, they were listening to bebop!

**Panken:** In 1945?

**Allison:** Yeah!

**Panken:** Wow. So those records made it down to Mississippi before you went into the Army.

**Allison:** Yeah...I think so.

**Panken:** I'll name a couple of records. Tell me if you heard them. "The Jumping Blues," Jay McShann...

**Allison:** No, Jay McShann I made later.

**Panken:** How about "Salt Peanuts"? That was recorded in 1945. That's why I'm asking.

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**Allison:** Oh, yeah, I remember “Salt Peanuts.”

**Panken:** “Red Cross,” which Charlie Parker made in 1944.

**Allison:** I don’t know.

**Audre Allison:** When I met you, you liked Lester Young and Dizzy Gillespie. There were a lot of people you liked then.

**Allison:** Yeah, well...

**Panken:** Well, by then it was 1950...

**Audre Allison:** ‘49. [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** I gather that when you were in the Army, you did your basic training at Fort McClellan in Arkansas, where Lester Young not so long before had had his horrible experience.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah. Well, I didn’t know about Lester Young at that time. But I spent basic training at Fort McClellan. It was a small town, and I didn’t like it there.

**Audre Allison:** Well, Mose, who were the musicians you were introduced to early that were from outside of Mississippi?

**Allison:** I don’t know...

**Panken:** Well, you were playing trumpet. How about Roy Eldridge? Were you listening to him then?

**Audre Allison:** I remember one time, when you came to visit me in St. Louis, before we were married, he was playing and you asked if you could sit in, and you outplayed him, I thought. They kept going on together. It was pretty stunning.

**Panken:** So you had some chops on the trumpet.

**Audre Allison:** Oh, yeah.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah.

**Panken:** Harry James. Were you listening to Harry James?

**Allison:** I was listening to Harry James, but not extensively.

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**Panken:** Were you listening to Louis Armstrong's records?

**Allison:** Yeah. Louis Armstrong made an indelible... The band he had, Hot Five, and those bands, I listened a lot to them.

**Audre Allison:** And Louis Jordan.

**Allison:** Yeah. I listened to Louis Jordan on the jukebox.

**Audre Allison:** And you liked Stan Getz. Stan Kenton, too. Didn't you like that kind of stuff, sort of?

**Allison:** I don't know...

**Audre Allison:** [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** It might be a good idea to agree here... I'm just joking. So you were in Fort McClellan. Then you go to Colorado Springs, and you play in the Army band there. I gather you were associated with the trombonist Tommy Turk, who later would play with Charlie Parker.

**Allison:** Yes. Tommy Turk was a great trombonist, and I used to play with him... I was playing piano in his band, and we used to play at officers' clubs and around. He was a great player. I knew it at the time, but I later met him when he was with Jazz at the Philharmonic...

**Audre Allison:** I think the Army really changed you a lot, probably, because of music. Your mother has a famous story that when they went to meet you at the train you were dressed in a zoot suit, and that's not how she sent you off.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** So at some point between 1943 or so, when you're in high school, and by the time you're discharged from the Army at 20 or 19, you're a musician.

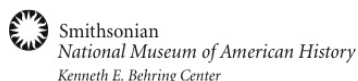
**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** You're not going to be a chemical engineer any more.

**Allison:** Yeah. I took mechanical drawing, and I did well in chemistry, but...

**Audre Allison:** He was a good painter and drawing.

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**Panken:** So you had a kinesthetic skill.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Then you go back to U-Miss and you go for your degree... Did you get your degree there?

**Allison:** No, I didn't get a degree...

**Panken:** Oh, you transferred to LSU, excuse me. What brought you from Oxford, Mississippi to Baton Rouge?

**Allison:** Well, uh...

**Audre Allison:** We got married. He had started playing around in Louisiana and different places...

**Allison:** I went to LSU, and I remember applying to LSU... An English teacher got me into LSU.

**Panken:** I guess you had the G.I. Bill, too.

**Allison:** Yes, I had the G.I. Bill.

**Audre Allison:** He wrote terrific short stories. Really good ones.

**Allison:** I don't remember that

**Panken:** Do they still exist?

**Audre Allison:** Yeah. Somewhere they're still... We never threw them away. I remember that we had a little apartment, and you had a short story due every Monday, and I was always like amazed... Because I like to write. He would sit down with a pencil Sunday night and write the story.

**Allison:** I don't know...

**Audre Allison:** Then your English teacher wanted you to get an agent in New Orleans, but you said no, you were going to do music instead.

**Allison:** I don't know... [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** Do you remember some of the writers you liked then?

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**Allison:** No. I didn't know about William Faulkner at that time...

**Audre Allison:** Yes... Mose, I hate to keep interrupting you, but you met William Faulkner at Ole Miss...

**Allison:** Yes. I met him later.

**Audre Allison:** Oh, after we were married and we went back. I thought... You used to tell me stories about how they called him "Count No-Count," when he'd be hanging around the town.

**Allison:** Yeah. They used to call him that. He started out working at fuel consumption something...I don't know...at the University of Mississippi... I don't know anything about him. I used to see him sometimes at the beer place.

**Panken:** So before you went to LSU and after you return from the Army, when you come back to Tippo in the zoot suit, and you were playing around... What sort of playing were you doing? Just locally around Mississippi?

**Allison:** Well, yeah, I was playing... Bill Bennett had a club in Jackson, Mississippi. He had several clubs. I used to play with him. Then I started taking my own band at Bill Bennett's, so... I don't know.

**Panken:** Who was Bill Bennett?

**Allison:** Bill Bennett was a musician. He had a band that I was with temporarily. I don't know... I remember playing with him a couple of times.

**Panken:** But during those couple of years, you're doing various gigs—Mississippi, perhaps Memphis, because you've spoken about starting to go to Memphis in '47-'48, not so far away from Tippo... Are you dividing your time between the piano and the trumpet?

**Allison:** Well, pretty much. I considered myself a trumpet player at that time, and I was playing piano now and then.

**Audre Allison:** Now, when you traveled around Louisiana before, in little towns in Louisiana, you had a trio, right?

**Allison:** Yes. I had a trio, and...

**Audre Allison:** And Texas? I remember Texas.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah. We played in Odessa.

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**Panken:** So all over the Gulf states, it sounds like was your circuit.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** In other interviews, you've spoken about being in Memphis, and I'd imagine it's before you met your wife, because of the proximity to Mississippi. You've spoken of getting to know B.B. King's manager...

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** ... and the Mitchell Hotel...

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** ...and the Beale Street Theater, and seeing Phineas Newborn's father's famous orchestra, and checking out that amazing musical scene in Memphis. It seems to have had a huge impact on you, a big effect on the way you were thinking—from these past interviews. Is there anything you can tell me about being in Memphis, or playing in Memphis...

**Allison:** No. I can't tell you anything... I used to sit in with B.B. King's band... Who's the guy you mentioned?

**Panken:** Just now, did I mention someone?

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Phineas Newborn, Sr.

**Allison:** No.

**Panken:** I spoke earlier about Sonny Boy Williamson...

**Allison:** Well, I met the blues player that was in charge of B.B. King, and... I can't think of his name right now.

**Panken:** But you were sitting in with those bands.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah.

**Panken:** Now, was that an uncommon thing, for a white musician to be sitting in with a black band in Memphis at that time?

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**Allison:** I used to sit in at the Mitchell Hotel. I remember sitting in... I'm trying to think of the name of the guy who was from Winona...

**Panken:** Perhaps we can take a break now and look this up, and get some facts and figures together, and when we resume we don't have to scuffle looking around for the names.

**Allison:** All right.

**Audre Allison:** I remember that when you came to St. Louis, anywhere we ever went, I was always like shocked that you would just go up and say, "Can I sit in?"—and they would always let you. Then they would always love it. I'd never seen that happen before with anybody. And as shy as Mose is, he's pretty...

**Panken:** A pretty reserved gentleman.

**Audre Allison:** Yeah. The fact that he would always do that surprised me.

**Allison:** I don't know...

**Audre Allison:** And in Denver... And you often got work that way, too. Cedar Walton, wasn't he...

**Panken:** Oh, you met Cedar Walton in Denver?

**Allison:** Yeah. I used to play in a band with him.

**Panken:** You played trumpet in that band?

**Allison:** Well, Cedar and I used to trade pianos. Shelly Rym was the name of the guy that we worked for. Shelly Rym. I remember him. [LAUGHS] I wrote arrangements for him for a small band that his wife sang in.

**Panken:** So you were all-purpose. You played trumpet, you played piano, you wrote arrangements for various size ensembles.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** And you had listened to a lot of music. I gather that when you were at LSU, you started listening seriously to 20<sup>th</sup> century classical music also.

**Allison:** Yeah.

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**Panken:** I think you mentioned that Bartok's *Hungarian Sketches* was kind of the basis for the *Back Country Suite*

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** So let's take five or take ten, and then come back for part two.

[END OF SEPTEMBER 13<sup>TH</sup>, PART 1]

**Audre Allison:** I know. When she wanted to do it, Mose kept saying, "I don't want anybody following me around, asking me a bunch of questions." I said, "Mose!"

**Panken:** For part two of day one with Mose Allison, I'll read into the record a quote at the beginning of Chapter 2 of a biography of Mose Allison called *One Man's Blues: The Life and Music of Mose Allison*, by Patti Jones. It was published in 1995. Mose told her:

"I left Ole Miss as a naive provincial, and when I returned I was a fledgling hipster. When I went back to Ole Miss after the army, I had become a bebop fanatic. Bebop was my crusade, Dizzy Gillespie was my hero, and I wrote arrangements for the dance band which were not particularly well received by the student body."

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** "This was my period for the 'pathetic' exaggerations of youth. I followed Dizzy's big band all over the southeast. I heard them in Jackson, Mississippi, Jackson, Tennessee, and even at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. That was one of the most exciting bands ever. I would go up to Memphis on weekends and try to sit in at the black clubs when possible. There were some good musicians there at the time, both black and white."

That illuminates some of the things we were discussing towards the end of the first segment. First of all, when you heard bebop. It sounds like you heard it when you were in the Army, and then embraced it.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Elsewhere in the chapter, you speak of how being in the Army changed your perspective and your view of the world, reinforced your *wanderlust*. You'd majored in chemical engineering partly because you thought it might give you a chance to get out of town, and now you'd seen the world a bit, and it sounds like you came back transformed somewhat. Is there anything you can say about that, the way...

**Allison:** I don't know. What should I say about...the Army?

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**Panken:** About your personal-intellectual evolution? Or the changes in the way you thought about things, from the Army...

**Allison:** Well, I don't know. I can't... I don't know about that now. But...

**Audre Allison:** Well, I remember that when I met you, you wanted me to read Jean-Paul Sartre, Camus, Aldous Huxley, all those writers. I remember, I had to run to the library and get all those books.

**Allison:** Yeah. Well, I don't know...

**Panken:** You talked a little more about your trumpet playing in the book. One trumpeter we didn't mention earlier was Buck Clayton, who you cite here as your favorite trumpet player.

**Allison:** Buck Clayton. Yeah.

**Panken:** So you must have been listening to the Basie records.

**Allison:** Yeah, I was listening to the Basie records...

**Panken:** So you knew about Lester Young already.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah.

**Panken:** We already spoke about Louis Armstrong. But would you say that listening to swing music when you were a teenager also had a big effect on you?

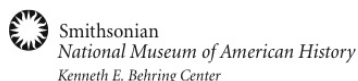
**Allison:** I don't know. It's hard to say what has an effect on you. [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** Sure. Do you remember what it was like for you when heard Dizzy Gillespie's band for the first time, or when you first heard bebop?

**Allison:** I didn't hear the band at... Willie Cook was playing the lead trumpet, and they had a lot of good musicians, and... I just remember hearing that band, and taking a liking to it. I don't know...

**Panken:** You mentioned that being around Tommy Turk in the Army... Here's a quote. You said: "He was the first serious hipster that I had met, and I was very conscious of being the yokel." It seems that at that age, you're 19, you're in the Army, you're on your own, and here's this worldly guy from Pittsburgh, a great player, and it sounds like something you were starting to aspire to.

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**Allison:** Well, I don't know. I don't remember... Well, I remember I liked Tommy Turk a lot.

**Audre Allison:** Well, you knew that you wanted to be a musician, that that's what you wanted to do with your life. Did that happen then?

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Panken:** Well, when you got out of the Army... You received an Honorable Discharge in August of '47, and you were a Technician 4<sup>th</sup> Class. You returned to the University of Mississippi for the fall term, and you went back as an economics major this time, which could probably take you far, as well as chemical engineering.

**Allison:** I took economics because of my father. He wanted me to take economics.

**Panken:** Did he think it would help in managing the farm.

**Allison:** Oh, I don't know...

**Panken:** You continued to play dances with the Ole Miss band, and off-campus jobs. You say here, "I don't think I was very rebellious about home until I left and came back to Mississippi. When I first went to Ole Miss, I was just your average Ole Miss freshman, but when I went into the Army and came back, by that time I had become interested in bebop and seen the world a little. It was the whole idea of being a musician, and cool and different from other people out there. Stuff you'd read about musicians and the romance of a musician's life was part of it. I think everybody that's interested in something that doesn't exist where they live goes through that. My folks began wondering after I came back what was happening to the boy. I was 20 when I came back to Ole Miss. I had the long hair, slicked back with the DA, was trying to talk hip talk, and spent most of the money I saved in the Army at the Beale Street tailors in Memphis on zoot suits."

**Allison:** Yeah. [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** I was a bit of an embarrassment at that point. I've seen two or three generations of that now, so I believe it's just part of the sequence of things." So the Army did change you.

**Allison:** Yeah. That's...

**Audre Allison:** Absolutely true.

**Allison:** But it's a rundown on the way I was. At that time...

**Panken:** There's also information here about Memphis. I'll read it into the record. These are

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your words, so we'll let it speak for itself. Once returned to Ole Miss, you took weekend trips to Memphis. In '47 and '48, you went to various clubs. You met Phineas Newborn, Jr. You met Don Brooks, a white alto player in the city. And you met B.B. King's bass player, Shenny Walker.

**Allison:** Yeah, Shenny Walker. I was trying to think of him. I used to go around to his house to jam sessions.

**Panken:** Patti Jones writes: "Walker provided an important entree into the black music world, sneaking Mose into the black clubs on the chitlin circuit and passing the white Allison off as his 'cousin' when necessary."

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** "He also held sessions at his Memphis home and invited Allison to sit in. But for a white boy in Mississippi already interested in the blues, a monumental 'whites only' musical event sent him reeling back to his musical roots." That was the concert you recall by John Lee Williamson, the first Sonny Boy Williamson, which you described before at the Beale Street Auditorium.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** So you witnessed one of his final performances, because was killed not long thereafter. Patti Jones also writes that in '47, you heard a group called Tuff Green and his Rocketeers, which you have called "the first rock-and-roll."

**Allison:** Yeah. Tuff Green and his Rocketeers had a band that I heard at the community house in Oxford. I was taken with them, that... I call them the first rock-and-roll band. I kept going there, you know, and... [HESITATES]

**Panken:** Here's what you said then. "Tuff Green and his Rocketeers played a tastier version of what became rock-and-roll later. Their big number was, 'We're Gonna Rock This House Tonight,' and at the Mitchell Hotel, which was a black hotel in Memphis, I heard a black singer do a slow drag version of 'Rock Around the Clock.' I also started listening to B.B. King at the Mitchell Hotel on Beale Street in 1947. It turns out B.B. actually made his first recording with Tuff Green and his Rocketeers on Memphis' Bullet label."

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** So it made a big impression on you. Then in '48, when school ended, you drove to Illinois, drove north, you went to Chicago. You did some jobs around Chicago. You met some people from the Lionel Hampton band. You learned Tadd Dameron's "Half Nelson." Then I

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guess more of the same when you went back to Mississippi. Then, in the summer of '49, you were hired full-time to play piano and trumpet, and I guess sing as well, at Lake Taneycomo in the Ozarks, which is where you and your wife met.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** there's a photograph of that here. You also met a bassist with whom you'd be associated over the next decade, Taylor LaFarge. You met, and you were writing arrangements for the dance band, which may or may not have been popular with the student body for their progressive sound...

**Audre Allison:** But the musicians in the band really loved your arrangements.

**Allison:** Yeah. They loved me, but...

**Audre Allison:** they acted like they idolized you. I remember. I was always stunned.

**Panken:** It's a word that's probably not accurate, but there are some people who are just natural musicians. Music is like talking. And it seems like you're one of these people...

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** ...who was able to express themselves in a very natural way, at a high level of fluency, through music, almost as though it was inevitable that you would be a musician.

**Allison:** Yeah. I think so. Probably.

**Audre Allison:** I think your whole family...they always talked like that was all you ever wanted to do, was play the piano. So I don't know about economics. Why your dad ever got hopeful, I don't know!

**Panken:** Well, we know how that goes. But actually, you did a course called Cotton Economics in 1949-50, that explains it right there.

**Audre Allison:** Right.

**Panken:** However, you state in the biography that this experience changed your philosophical attitude around. I'll read the paragraph, and you can tell me whether it's accurate or not, although I'd assume it is. "A percipient witness to the plight of sharecroppers, black and white, Allison was already familiar with the human condition of the African-American in Mississippi. His black neighbors for the most part led impoverished, physically demanding lives. In Cotton Economics, Mose learned for the first time the full extent of the economic deprivation his neighbors in the

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Delta actually experienced. The course taught him that for every dollar spent on cotton products in the marketplace, the men and women toiling in the Delta cotton fields received only two cents of the profit.” You were to the realities of the economic relationships that you’d probably taken for granted all those years before.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Not long after that, you decided to hit the road and to try playing music professionally. Now, to your recollection (and Audre can comment with accuracy, too, because you were now on the scene), was there a real connection between...

**Allison:** Well, I went to... Taylor LaFarge had a... We left the University of Mississippi, and we were on the way to Texas, and we came across Lafayette, Louisiana, and that’s where we got the Nat Garner Trio.

**Audre Allison:** Well, I wrote to Mose during that period. I was still in St. Louis. I just remember re-reading your letters, that he always seemed kind of morose about things, about the way of the world, and I was so young, I thought that was so much more interesting than the boys I was dating, who were all thrilled about basketball trophies and things.

**Panken:** Although you were a football fan.

**Allison:** Yes, I was a football fan.

**Panken:** Did you play football, too?

**Allison:** Yeah, I played in high school.

**Panken:** From your build, I take it you were a running back.

**Allison:** Yeah. I made one touchdown, and it was called back.

**Audre Allison:** In one of those things there’s a picture of him in a football uniform...in one of those disks that I gave you. You also played in the marching band for the same game.

**Panken:** You have to be efficient in a small town, I guess. So you left school in January 1950, and were headed to Houston, but in Lake Charles, Louisiana, you stopped to eat in a local roadhouse, and I guess the quality your wife described of shedding your shyness when it came to asking to sit in or to play, took hold because you became the regular band at the place, with a six-night-a-week...

**Allison:** Yeah.

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**Panken:** Do you remember what kind of place that was?

**Allison:** It was a small dance floor. We got a set of drums for the... Dale Hampton, who was a trombone player. We got a minimum set—snare drum, sock cymbal, whatever. But we played there for six weeks, I think.

**Audre Allison:** And then when you went to Texas, what was that weird club you played in? I mean, I never saw it... There was something about the owner of the club in Texas. What was that story?

**Panken:** Maybe we'll come upon it. I'll proceed through the book, because these times are very interesting. The place was called Sammy's Restaurant and Bar. You played swing music and ballads, "Body and Soul," "I Can't Get Started," "Stardust." Taylor LaFarge said that you hadn't started composing by that time, so I don't have to ask you that question...

**Allison:** Yeah...

**Panken:** Or maybe I do.

**Allison:** Yeah. Well, I don't know...

**Panken:** And you called yourselves the Nat Garner Trio, after your two musical heroes, Nat Cole and Erroll Garner.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** We hadn't talked about Erroll Garner before. We talked about Nat Cole. Anything to say about Erroll Garner as a musical role model?

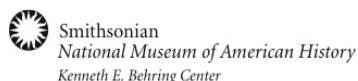
**Allison:** I first heard Erroll Garner when I was at Rockaway Beach, Missouri. I remember liking an Erroll Garner record there.

**Audre Allison:** I remember that you told me about Erroll Garner when he came to St. Louis, and I went to hear him.

**Panken:** Well, after that, you went to Lafayette, Louisiana, and you got a three-week job there. Then the trio broke up. Then you went to Panama City, Florida, and you took a job there, and stuff happened. You played trumpet and piano, and the pianist Walter Norris was also playing piano—who would wind up playing with Ornette Coleman on his first record, and settled in Europe, and was a first-class jazz concert pianist.

**Allison:** Yes.

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**Panken:** All sorts of adventures throughout the South. Then you got a job with a territory band led by Bert Massengale, also playing a lot of trumpet, but later moving to piano. Then is when you met Bill Bennett, in Jackson, Mississippi. That was mid 1950...

**Allison:** Bill Bennett? Yeah.

**Panken:** It says you spent a lot of time playing at Bill Bennett's club, among other places, until you moved to New York in 1956.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Whilst playing at Bill Bennett's club, I think the day after New Year's Eve in 1951, the two of you are married, and you then applied to LSU, and enrolled there as an English major, and you made Baton Rouge your base for the next number of years. It seems that your experience at LSU was crucial in forming your mature sensibility, crystallizing a lot of the different threads you'd been working with while perhaps not really thinking about it.

**Allison:** Yeah. Well, I was working with Lee Fortier. He had lots of bands.

**Audre Allison:** You also worked a little club on weekends. Feets or something like that.

**Allison:** Who was the trombone player?

**Audre Allison:** I don't remember.

**Allison:** God almighty... Well-known trombone player.

**Panken:** Well, here's another quote, at the start of another chapter, about LSU. You say: "I tried to use the blues as a way of expressing myself. I had aesthetics in college, and before I began performing full-time, I already had an idea of how I wanted to approach my music. I picked up ideas from a philosophy of art course, such as the difference between the artist and the entertainer, and the difference between the betrayal of emotion and the expression of emotion. These influenced me." At this point, can you speak to the difference between the artist and the entertainer?

**Allison:** That's all from a book, Collingwood...

**Audre Allison:** Where is that Collingwood book? But you used to talk about it, what it meant to you.

**Panken:** The book was *Principles of Art*, by R.G. Collingwood, and it's a book you immersed yourself in through an aesthetics course at LSU.

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**Audre Allison:** We still have that book, and it's all underlined.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Audre Allison:** What did you say when you accepted that award at LSU? You said something about the influence it had on you.

**Allison:** *Back Country Suite* was all I remember from that... Mispronounced.

**Audre Allison:** Oh, you mean somebody at that ceremony said "Black Country Suite" instead of "Back Country Suite."

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** I'm just talking about what Collingwood said about art, what art is, kind of fired you up, that what you were doing was art.

**Allison:** I don't know. I don't remember...

**Audre Allison:** You used to say something like "the honest expression..."

**Allison:** I haven't thought about this in a long time.

**Panken:** Of course. So it's good that we have the book to refer to. You spoke to Patti Jones about a quote from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century English writer Walter Pater, "Art is the removal of surpluses, the removal of excess," and that this reading and these studies seemed to bring out in you ways that you could apply these principles to musical expression, based on your various experiences over the years.

**Allison:** Yes. Well, I think so. I remember that quote... Who was it from?

**Panken:** Walter Pater.

**Allison:** Pater. He was...I remember that, and it had an effect on me. It guided the way I looked at music.

**Panken:** There's another quote from the Collingwood book that you cited that really resonated in you, which references your quote of being aware of the differences between the artist and the entertainer, and the betrayal versus the expression of emotion. "When an emotion is aroused for its own sake as an enjoyable experience, the craft of arousing it is amusement, or, for the sake of its practical value, magic. Collingwood asserts that neither amusement nor magic holds any true artistic value, because each exists simply to entertain an audience." I'm not going to go too much

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more deeply into this, but just... “Conversely, a work of ‘art proper’ can stand on its own merit, because by itself, the work represents the expression of true emotion.”

**Allison:** Yeah, well, I...

**Panken:** But you were starting to write lyrics by this time. During the years when you were reading this, you start to write the songs that become the *Back Country Suite*, which was your first recording 5-6 years later, which is why I’m discussing it on this level of detail.

**Allison:** Yeah. That’s later.

**Audre Allison:** Not much later, though. That was a real heavy period for you, that you really knew you were going to be a musician and you were going to be an artist.

**Allison:** Well, we went to New York in ‘56. It was a lot...that was later.

**Panken:** However, in one of the interviews I read on the Internet, you stated that when the opportunity to come to do your first recording, George Wallington, the distinguished pianist from New York, offered to introduce you to Bob Weinstock from Prestige Records...

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** ...and you had these pieces. You said, “I have something for him; I can give him this stuff.” You’d been writing them over the intervening time between reading Collingwood and starting to crystallize these ideas. This is the reason why I’m mentioning these things now.

**Allison:** Ok.

**Panken:** So the trombonist you played with maybe was Carl Fontana?

**Allison:** Oh, Carl Fontana!

**Panken:** In Baton Rouge. Lee Fortier, who you mentioned.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Anything else to say about those years in Baton Rouge?

**Allison:** I remember I played tennis with Carl Fontana...

**Audre Allison:** What about Brew Moore? He used to...

**Allison:** Oh yeah, Brew Moore.

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**Panken:** The tenor saxophonist.

**Allison:** I met him in New Orleans. I originally hired him... Brew Moore? Does it have anything about Brew Moore?

**Panken:** In this book. Yes, right here.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah. [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** It says here also that you played at a black club called the Blue Moon in Baton Rouge with a guy named Joe Houston, who had a trumpeter named Walter Miller, who you think played with Ray Charles later. So again, you were moving back and forth between these worlds.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Audre Allison:** Wasn't that when you first heard Ray Charles also? What was the name of that song...

**Allison:** I don't know...

**Audre Allison:** A girl with the red dress on... What's the name of that? That was a real early one, and it was on a jukebox down there.

**Allison:** Yeah. Well, I don't remember that. But it was called "Baby, Let Me Hold Your Hand," I think.

**Audre Allison:** No. The one that you dragged me someplace to hear it on a jukebox, and it was "I see the girl with the red dress on, she can show that thing..."

**Allison:** Oh, yeah. That was later. That was later!

**Audre Allison:** Ok.

**Panken:** Also, in the summer of 1951, you went to New York for the first time. You made your first...

**Allison:** Oh, yeah.

**Audre Allison:** Mmm-hmm.

**Panken:** You were thinking about going to NYU, which, had you done so, you would have entered with Wayne Shorter, because he entered NYU right at that time. But in any event, you

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stayed with your cousin, Mariana Staton, who lived on Park Avenue and 96<sup>th</sup> Street, and you spent some time there, but you weren't comfortable in New York at that time.

**Allison:** No. I went back to... I thought about southern colleges, with the trees and everything, and the... Well, southern colleges, you know...

**Panken:** The gracious living.

**Allison:** Yeah. Ok.

**Panken:** Or some believe so. But you were a bebop devotee by this time.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Here you are in New York, it's 1951, and there's Birdland, and bebop is somewhat diminished from what it had been a year or two before... But did you go to hear music? Did you explore the scene at all that summer?

**Allison:** Oh, yeah. I went to hear music. I went to Birdland, and I remember hearing Miles Davis there. He was working weekends, one night a week, with a band that was later...it was not his band, you know... When I went back to New York, I heard he had progressed to the level of an entertainer...

**Panken:** A leader. He improved.

**Allison:** Yes. He was a leader, and he worked at the Village Vanguard opposite Al and Zoot...

**Panken:** Well, these are people with whom you'd be playing with five or six years. They'd be hiring you.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Did you meet any of the people you'd subsequently on that first trip to New York?

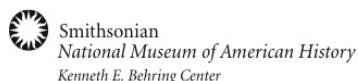
**Allison:** No. Not at the moment. I met them... I met Frank Isola at the 34<sup>th</sup> Street loft. We used to go there and play.

**Panken:** This is when you moved to New York for good.

**Audre Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Did you ever sit in with people during this first trip to New York? Did you go to jam

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sessions?

**Allison:** No. No, I didn't sit in.

**Audre Allison:** That first time you went, you didn't.

**Allison:** No.

**Audre Allison:** I think maybe in '51, I didn't go with you. Or else it was for a very short... I remember Mariana's apartment, but I don't think I stayed there.

**Allison:** No. You stayed on 60<sup>th</sup> Street, at ....(?—35:47)....

**Audre Allison:** Oh, yeah.

**Panken:** In the biography, you related that being in New York was discouraging for you in terms of wanting to pursue music. There's a quote that you "saw many jazz stars out on the corner trying to borrow five dollars."

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** You thought you might have better career prospects if you went back South and got a degree, and maybe you could be an English teacher and play music on the side, or something like this. So you returned to Baton Rouge, and B.B. King's first musical director, Bill Harvey, called you.

**Allison:** Oh, Bill Harvey! That's who I was trying to think of. Bill Harvey was from Winona, and I met him early, and he became B.B. King's musical director. He used to let me sit in with them before B.B. King came on, you know...

**Panken:** Well, he approached you about recording... There was a company that wanted to record a white blues singer, and he referred you to them, I believe, for some sessions in Memphis...

**Allison:** I didn't go.

**Panken:** Elvis went, but you didn't go.

**Allison:** Yeah!

**Panken:** But you composed a couple of numbers for those sessions, Patti Jones writes. You said they were in the style of Charles Brown.

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**Allison:** I don't know about that.

**Panken:** In any event, here's a quote from you that talks about where you were at then, and let's put it on the record. "I just happen to have been one of the people that came out of the New Orleans African-American style which was developed mostly by Southerners and Midwesterners who were active in the 1920s, '30s, and '40s. It started with Louis Armstrong, then went to swing with Count Basie and Lester Young, then to bebop with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. There were also the country blues people, like Muddy Waters, Lightnin' Hopkins, and John Lee Hooker. This whole thing is the bedrock, the foundation for all the music that is happening now, and I just happen to be one of those people who learned it from the ground up in the Mississippi Delta. I was doing it before it was big business.'

**Allison:** Mmm-hmm.

**Panken:** I'll read the rest of it. "After one of my first records, John S. Wilson of the *New York Times* wrote a review that said I did the country blues so authentically (the phrasing was "so authentic) that I could turn the raw country blues into a commercial item. I laugh every time I think about that, because not only was it turned into a commercial item, it became a billion dollar business. It turned out that I wasn't the one who turned it into a commodity, although I was one of the people who was doing it first."

So you received a Bachelors in English in 1952 from LSU. I believe you skipped graduation to play at Bill Bennett's place in Jackson.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** You heard people like...Percy Mayfield came through, B.B. King was coming through... For the next four years, you went on the road with a band... Was Jackson your base of operations, or Baton Rouge?

**Allison:** I went all over.

**Audre Allison:** And I was with you then, in those years.

**Panken:** So you were traveling with Mose.

**Audre Allison:** Mmm-hmm.

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Audre Allison:** Well, that was after you graduated, yes.

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**Panken:** The book states, “Audre accompanied her husband on the road...”

**Audre Allison:** I got a job in every city we stopped in. I was going to say that’s what made a difference in New York, was...I worked. [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** Here’s some of the itinerary, from the book. “Without the trio, Mose made it as far west as Denver, Colorado, in 1953 and 1954.” You mentioned this—you played piano in various clubs with Shelly Rym, the drummer...

**Audre Allison:** Alissa was born there. In 1954 in Denver.

**Panken:** You also played with Latin bands, which you haven’t talked about. It states, “always drawn to the music of Mambo bands,” you played with Latin bands there.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah.

**Panken:** I guess that’s fairly natural for someone from the Gulf Coast...

**Allison:** Yeah, ok.

**Audre Allison:** In fact, I remember I was working one day, and you said, “Let’s go to Mexico,” and I quit my job immediately and we drove down. That was before Alissa was born. We drove down that old highway to Mexico City.

**Panken:** What happened in Mexico City?

**Audre Allison:** In Mexico City you kept asking everybody... You were trying to be understood that you wanted to hear the Mexican version of American jazz, what was equivalent to jazz, and they would send us to clubs where they had American jazz. And then we found Chocolate...

**Panken:** Chocolate, the trumpet player?

**Audre Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Chocolate Armenteros?

**Allison:** No. Antonio Diaz.

**Audre Allison:** No, honey. Chocolate. I remember him. With a whole bunch of...all different rhythm instruments. It was wonderful.

**Panken:** Might it have been Perez Prado’s band. He was based in Mexico City?

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**Audre Allison:** It wasn't anybody that famous.

**Allison:** It wasn't anybody that famous.

**Audre Allison:** But it was really exciting and it was really good music. I really enjoyed it.

**Panken:** You told Patti Jones, "I think Mose thought that once we had a baby, we had to start thinking about how we were going to get to New York for him to determine if he could play for a living." You had to find out if you could make it in New York or not.

**Audre Allison:** Yes. You said, "either we have to go to New York or I have to sell shoes."

**Panken:** Was that one of your various jobs?

**Audre Allison:** No. Or HE would have to do it. Which meant there was no way we were just going to New York. I guess in there... Is there something about when you worked at the club that those two football players started, and that's where we saved \$800 to come to New York.

**Panken:** Was that a somewhat rough-and-tumble club?

**Allison:** That was in south Florida, at a racetrack.

**Audre Allison:** It was Jo-Jo D'Agostino and...what was his name...the other big football player from Chicago. Caseres or something like that?

**Panken:** Rick Caseres.

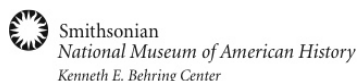
**Audre Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** He was a fullback.

**Audre Allison:** Yes, and he and Jo-Jo... Jo-Jo D'Agostino's father owned a big restaurant that was real famous, and his father set them up. It was the R.J. Reynolds... There was a big clubhouse and a racetrack where they used to do sulky racing, and it was empty, and they rented it, and they opened a club, and of course it attracted all kinds of women because of these two football players. But they weren't good at running their business... It was like a little hotel. We had rooms upstairs. We had Alissa then. I would put her to bed, and I would run down, and I would be a waitress for a little while, and then I'd run upstairs, and then I'd run down. We saved \$800 in a suitcase under our bed, and when we had \$800 we went to New York.

**Panken:** Taylor LaFarge was talking about the sound of the trio. He said, "We were on a kick

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one time about Erroll Garner, and Mose could play a lot like him, usually good standard swing tunes. The style was strictly swing era. It wasn't very progressive jazz, and it didn't go off the deep end. Of course, the blues was one of our biggest deals. We had group vocals, and learned Spanish songs. When we played in the Spanish bars, especially down in Texas, we sang in Spanish. We learned the songs. The music was great down there, like Tito Puente, because we loved that kind of music, too. We also really tried to sing like the Nat Cole Trio. We did group vocals like 'Call the Po-lice,' one called 'I Got Fish For Supper,' and 'Route 66.'"

You got the piano solo, so you were the feature...

**Allison:** Mmm-hmm.

**Panken:** Then various other things happened, and occasionally you were writing songs you'd written, so you were starting to perform these songs perhaps... Do you recall whether, while you were traveling, Mose was starting to sing his...

**Audre Allison:** Well, yeah. Absolutely you were singing songs then. I thought you were going to ask me about his writing songs. I was almost unaware of his writing songs. They just appeared. But you were doing a lot of your songs then.

**Allison:** Well, I don't know...

**Audre Allison:** Maybe not a lot. But I know some.

**Panken:** In the book, Jones talks quite a bit of your working with Latino music and mambo contexts, especially in Texas, and that you had a fluency in the idiom. Before we get you to New York City, we should put in some of these stories. There was one place in Mississippi, in 1954, where someone got shot. Do you remember that?

**Allison:** No. I just remember...

**Panken:** They had illegal gambling in the club.

**Allison:** Yeah. I remember a football player got shot. I was working with Bill Bennett. That's all I remember.

**Panken:** You played in San Antonio... You traveled all around the Gulf Coast. Then it's 1956, and you get to New York. Here's what you said about what finally decided you on moving. You said: "Dave Brubeck got on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1954," and jazz is getting a certain amount of attention, the cycle is starting in the media. "When the jazz boom started, there was a lot of national publicity about it, and people who were struggling before were finally making a living playing jazz. I decided I wanted to go where the action was, just to see what I could do.

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When I worked the small towns in the South, I learned that unless you have a lot of publicity, you could only go so far. Going to New York was an attempt to put myself in a better position for surviving. I got tired of working cocktail lounges and saloons down south, and I needed a change.”

According to Taylor LaForge, you and he appeared rather respectable. He said, “I know wildness is associated with jazz musician, but we weren’t wild. I personally never was interested in raising hell, so to speak. We were weird enough for those days. We wore moustaches, goatees, and zoot suits, and tried to look like the guys we admired. This was an eye-catcher to the populace in itself. I guess they thought we were pretty far-out according to their standards. But we did wear suits, white shirts, and neckties. Even though we had long hair, it was always groomed.”

So, New York City. I’ll read one more quote, then I’ll stop. You said: “When I first came to New York, some people thought I was salable as a ‘colorful rustic.’ I didn’t cooperate in that role. I had a person approach me when my first record came out, someone in the promotional field, and the implication was: ‘If you want to go on and stress this thing about being from Mississippi and being a colorful rustic, we can do something with that. But, if you want to play like everyone else, develop yourself, we can’t do anything like that.’ I have no complaints.”

I gather that one New York connection was through Madelyn Moore, Al Cohn’s wife, who you met on a gig in Galveston, Texas.

**Allison:** Yes. Well, I went out to Al Cohn’s place in...

**Audre Allison:** Great Neck. For dinner.

**Allison:** Great Neck? Yeah. Joe Cohn was on the floor, crawling around. Marilyn Moore, I had met her in Galveston and played behind her. She was my connection with Al. Al took me on right away, and he started giving me gigs. He wasn’t working much at that time. He was writing mostly on Broadway musicals. I later worked with Al and Zoot at the Half Note, but...

**Audre Allison:** That was one of the things you enjoyed more than anything else, I think, was working with them.

**Allison:** Yeah. Paul Motian was there, and we made a record with Phil Woods and...

**Panken:** Yes. In 1959. Knobby Totah was on bass.

**Allison:** All right. Yes, Knobby Totah... Totah, we used to call it...

**Panken:** Apparently, it was a struggle at first. For one reason, there’s a six-month rule before

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you can work steadily when you come from out of town. So you struggled for a while. I guess you moved into an apartment on 103<sup>rd</sup> and Central Park West?

**Audre Allison:** Not Central Park West. It was between Columbus and Amsterdam. In fact, it was 106<sup>th</sup> Street. That fourth floor walk-up we lived in was on 106<sup>th</sup> Street between Columbus and Amsterdam. I know, because went to work every morning.

**Allison:** Five flights up.

**Audre Allison:** Five flights up, carrying groceries.

**Allison:** Walked up.

**Audre Allison:** Yes. It was a furnished apartment on 106<sup>th</sup> between Columbus and Amsterdam. \$150 a month, furnished.

**Panken:** That's not bad.

**Audre Allison:** I know.

**Panken:** Furnished.

**Audre Allison:** Furnished.

**Panken:** In New York at the time, \$150 would be expensive for an unfurnished apartment. I'd like to speak a bit, if we can, about the development of your piano playing. We've spoken a lot about your devotion to bebop. You mentioned that you loved Al Haig...

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** You loved John Lewis.

**Allison:** John Lewis, yeah. I worshiped him from afar. He was with the Modern Jazz Quartet.

**Panken:** By the time you arrived in New York, the MJQ was in full swing. And he'd played with Dizzy Gillespie's band, so you may have heard him on the road back in the '40s when you were in Mississippi.

**Allison:** Yeah, I might.

**Panken:** Al Haig... You mentioned also George Wallington, who would help you, and Monk and Tristano. When you arrived in New York the second time, apart from the struggle of living

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in New York and raising a family, what was your impression of being there?

**Allison:** We stayed with an aunt...

**Audre Allison:** Well, at first we did. But I think he's talking about musically.

**Panken:** I'm talking about music, and the artistic life in New York, and how you responded to it when you got there.

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Audre Allison:** You went to the loft all the time... You know that famous loft that I think they made a recording...

**Panken:** That's the loft on 28<sup>th</sup> Street and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, in the Flower District.

**Allison:** Yeah, that's one loft. But I ended up...

**Panken:** The one you're talking about was on East 34<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Allison:** 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Third Avenue. That was a friend of mine. Ralph Hughes and...

**Audre Allison:** I felt like you met a lot of New York musicians...

**Allison:** Yeah. I met a lot of musicians at the loft.

**Audre Allison:** Mmm-hmm, that's what I meant.

**Allison:** We played there every night, late. I met Henry Grimes there, and Frank Isola, and a lot of people.

**Audre Allison:** Isn't that where... Well, where did you meet George Wallington? I was thinking he was there...

**Allison:** We went to his house in Brooklyn. No, it was on the west side of Columbus Street...

**Audre Allison:** I remember that George said he would publish your music, and I was thinking, "Ahh, Tin Pan Alley" and that kind of... I thought it was wonderful. I didn't realize that we just had to pay \$10, and...

**Allison:** Ok....

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[END OF DAY 1, PART 2]

**Panken:** Part 3 with Mose Allison. Back to *One Man's Blues*, which is helping us through this conversation, your introduction to the jazz loft on 34<sup>th</sup> Street was through a fellow Mississippian, Clyde Cox, a trombonist who had taken the loft and started the jam sessions there. Clyde Cox had first met you in 1948, when he was in high school, attending a band festival at U-Miss-Oxford. You were playing trumpet. But he recalled your boogie-woogie piano feature as a show-stopper.

In any event, you connected in New York, and you started going to the sessions there. In the book, it mentions Al Cohn, it mentions Zoot Sims... You mentioned Al Cohn, but I wonder if you could offer any personal recollections of him, or of Zoot Sims, or of Stan Getz, whom you played with subsequently as a sideman before you were professionally a singer-entertainer.

**Allison:** Well, I met Frank Isola. He was playing drums with Stan Getz. He got me with the Stan Getz band. We played off and on for a couple of years...

**Audre Allison:** I remember that you used to say... I mean, you and Stan used to talk a lot, and there was something about, because he hadn't gone to college, he liked talking to you. I just remember that. Do you remember that kind of relationship?

**Allison:** Yeah... No, I don't remember.

**Audre Allison:** He was sick of (?)?

**Allison:** Well, he was married to...

**Audre Allison:** A princess. [LAUGHS] A Swedish princess? What was her name?

**Allison:** No, this was later. He was married to...a trumpet player's name...his wife... I don't know... I can't think of it.

**Audre Allison:** I just remember going to Sweden, and that wife. He thought Mose was really smart, and liked having him around to talk to.

**Panken:** Well, Al Cohn was a very verbal, witty guy, wasn't he.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** You must have had quite a time exchanging *bon mots*.

**Allison:** Yeah.

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**Audre Allison:** And you said lots of really nice things about Al, what a good person he was. Do you want to talk about him?

**Allison:** I remember we went out to his house, and he took me on right away. He supplied me with a lot of advice about New York.

**Panken:** What did he tell you? What sort of advice?

**Allison:** He was writing mostly for Broadway at the time...

**Audre Allison:** He means what advice did he give you? You said he told you a lot about... Do you remember what advice he gave you?

**Allison:** I remember him telling me how to arrange for Broadway, and I wasn't about to do that. But he told me how to shortcut arrangements, and what he was doing...

**Panken:** So he showed you arranging craft things...

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** According to the biography, your first job as a trio leader was at the Café Bohemia in 1958, which was on Barrow Street between West 4<sup>th</sup> and Bleecker.

**Allison:** Yes.

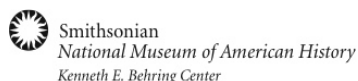
**Panken:** You had Paul Motian on your band, whom you'd already met, and Horace Silver and Herbie Mann were also on the gig.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah.

**Panken:** Do you have any memories... Patti Jones writes that you'd built up a strong network of eminent jazz player, you'd never abandoned your plans to lead your own trio, you continued to compose, and you kept up with your singing. "When the time was right," she writes, "he was determined to gather the right players together and work autonomously, as he had in the South. His New York network provided him with numerous outstanding players, among them bass player Addison Farmer," who is on a lot of your records, and Paul Motian, who you met playing with Al Cohn and Zoot Sims primarily, and who was also playing a lot in 1958, as I recall (because he once showed me his gig book), with Lennie Tristano at the Half Note, among other people. What do you remember about that scene, or about the Bohemia?

**Allison:** I met Lennie Tristano, and I shook hands with him. He had fat hands. I had shaken hands with Bud Powell, and he had fat hands. So I was wondering if my small hands would

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work. [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** They seemed to have worked ok. You have shorter, tapered fingers.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** there was a circuit of clubs in New York in the '50s, and modern jazz was starting to move downtown as opposed to uptown. The Bohemia opened I think in '55. The Five Spot opened in '54, I think, maybe '55. The Vanguard was transitioning from more of a cabaret policy to an all-jazz policy...

**Allison:** I used to work at the Vanguard a lot.

**Panken:** As an opening act?

**Allison:** As an opening act... Harry Colomby, who used to manage Monk, got me on the band...

**Panken:** On a tour, right?

**Allison:** No. He got me working as Monk's opening act. The Five Spot, I think. Is that the place that...

**Panken:** On the Bowery?

**Allison:** No, the Five Spot on 8<sup>th</sup> Street in New York.

**Panken:** So the second location of the Five Spot. So you did this in the '60s.

**Allison:** Right.

**Panken:** What was it like being around Monk? Did you get to speak with him at all?

**Allison:** I didn't speak with Monk. But I heard him a lot with his band. He was always a hero of mine.

**Panken:** I think you stated in an interview I read that you'd been listening to him back in the '40s, his early recordings.

**Allison:** Yes. I was aware of him in the '40s. He made the first record, I think, with Art Blakey, on the Blue Note label, I think.

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**Panken:** Yes, his early recordings were for Blue Note.

**Allison:** Yes. I liked him a lot. I heard him back then.

**Panken:** Well, at the time... Let's talk about your first record, *Back Country Suite*, which we've referred to a few times in the course of the conversation. As I understand it, you had started composing that repertoire after '51-'52, when you'd enrolled at LSU. You heard Bartok's *Hungarian Sketches*, and the idea of using folk music to create art music appealed to you, and you thought that you could do this with the vernacular blues that you knew, and you started writing these songs. In New York, you met George Wallington, you went to his house, played him some of these tunes, and he offered to introduce you to Bob Weinstock... Take it from there. What happened?

**Allison:** Well, Frank Isola and Taylor LaFarge had been playing with me at the 34<sup>th</sup> Street loft. We had gone over the *Back Country Suite* there. So I used them to make the record later. We had been around a couple of... I don't know how long Taylor had been there. But we had been on a couple of gigs with Stan Getz, I think...

**Panken:** So George Wallington heard you.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Do you remember your encounter with Bob Weinstock, the head of Prestige...

**Allison:** I don't think I ever met him. But I went with Prestige. I remember I had a low-income contract with them.

**Panken:** To be specific, \$250 apiece for the first two records, and \$350 for the remaining four.

**Allison:** Right.

**Panken:** He went with you to meet Weinstock. But as Patti Jones writes, "In retrospect, the money for the work was a pittance, but as a career move it turned out to be a good first investment."

**Audre Allison:** [LAUGHS] Yes.

**Panken:** You built a lot of capital on those recordings. Clyde Cox, the fellow who ran the loft, mentioned that you really had your own sound. There were a lot of great piano players in New York, both in the bluesy style that you played in and in other styles, but you had your own sound. He said you had your own sound as early as 1949, that he can recall. He heard you playing Denzil Best's "Move," which Miles Davis was doing with the Birth of the Cool Nonet, and you

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had your own treatment. He said, “He sure wasn’t playing like Miles; he was playing like Mose.”

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** You’ve mentioned also in some of these interviews that individuality is an extreme first principle for a musician.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Can you discuss that?

**Allison:** Individuality is one of the prime examples of... That’s who you are. That’s how you translate.

**Panken:** Is that something you nurtured in yourself? Did you think consciously about it?

**Allison:** I didn’t nurture it. I don’t think I was aware of it. I don’t know... But I just played the way I thought that I should play.

**Panken:** Meanwhile, you’re raising a family. You move from Manhattan to Jackson Heights in 1958, when your second daughter is born.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah.

**Panken:** Then you had twins, and you move to Smithtown, which I guess is where you lived before you moved...

**Audre Allison:** Yes. We lived there for about 45 years.

**Panken:** Audre, you were working in an advertising agency, it says here.

**Audre Allison:** In New York, I worked at an advertising agency.

**Panken:** Was it anything like *Mad Men*?

**Audre Allison:** Yeah. My kids said, “Oh, you have to watch this.” It really was a lot like that. When I got pregnant with the second one, I had to quit, because you couldn’t work if you were pregnant. Then I went back to school when my youngest went to junior high. Then I taught for 20 years.

**Panken:** What did you teach?

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**Audre Allison:** English. Writing. I teach writing workshops, one here and one in Hilton Head.

**Allison:** She got up at 5 o'clock and drove to Wading River...

**Audre Allison:** Shoreham-Wading River. Yeah, that's where I taught. A real good school with lots of money. They were building that power plant that they never allowed to open. When it was finished and I was teaching there... I mean, we had an endless amount of money. We could do wonderful things. When it was finished and they wanted to open, my son was one of the people demonstrating against it, and he made the front page of the local papers, with the police carrying him. But he said the police were really nice. He was with this New York environmental organization... He said the police put blankets over the barbed wire so they could climb over and demonstrate. I was telling him not to do it because they'd put him in jail and I'd have to pay to get him out, and my oldest daughter said, "I'll pay—do it, John." Then they came home and he said, "It was the most wonderful day of my life."

**Panken:** And you were both so proud.

**Audre Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** There's a quote in the biography where you say the way you were playing wasn't anything that... There were a number of pianists playing in a sort of bluesy, soul piano style, like Wynton Kelly and Hampton Hawes, and you thought you could be understood in that context. But when you started to lead groups after the Bohemia gig, and people started to take notice... There were a number of young singer-songwriters in New York at the time, all very witty, very capable, very verbal, like Dave Frishberg, Bob Dorough...

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** I guess Blossom Dearie wasn't playing piano...

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Oh, she was.

**Audre Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** I guess I associate that scene with Greenwich Village, and the kind of cabaret, quasi-theater meets jazz culture there... Is that something you settled into? Did you identify with it in any way?

**Allison:** Well, I used to work at the Vanguard a lot. I worked there several weeks. Colomby put me in there. I worked with a lot of different people there.

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**Audre Allison:** You never seemed interested in cabaret type performances. I remember Amy would always tell you should try playing in cabarets, and I remember you just played jazz clubs.

**Allison:** Well, I wasn't interested in anything that took me out of what I was into. I felt like I could maintain it in...

**Audre Allison:** I remember when you started really concentrating on developing your left hand as well as your right hand. That was a kind of major change.

**Panken:** In the '50s, this was, or later?

**Allison:** Later.

**Audre Allison:** Was it later?

**Allison:** I think so.

**Panken:** were you studying with a teacher, or just your own...

**Allison:** No.

**Panken:** Always by yourself. You're always doing this stuff by yourself.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Did the first success, the first public acceptance of you as a bandleader, spur you to write more? Did that...

**Allison:** No. I wasn't aware of that. I was never expected to write more. I don't think...

**Panken:** So when you had new record dates coming up... Well, I guess you did quite a few in 1958 and 1959 to fulfill your obligations to Prestige. But when you had deadlines, did you operate well on a deadline, writing new stuff...

**Allison:** No. I didn't have deadlines.

**Audre Allison:** What he did... You usually wrote a bunch of things, recorded them on a little cassette, and then gave the record company a call and said, "I have these." Isn't that how it was done? That's how I remember it.

**Allison:** I don't know.

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**Audre Allison:** Well, that's how it was done.

**Panken:** I think we've gotten you up to 1960. I'll conclude with reading another testimonial to you from Clyde Cox, from the Jazz Loft, and it will be a nice way to end today's session. Clyde Cox said: "Mose was always... I don't want to use the word 'gentleman,' because it sounds out of context if you say a jazz player was a gentleman. What I mean is that I cannot remember a single unpleasant incident ever involving Mose, and there were people who were unpleasant sometimes in terms of conduct. Mose has a wonderful sense of humor, and that was part of the loft. In describing the ambiance, 'fellowship' doesn't do it. 'A bunch of cats' doesn't do it either. It wasn't a bunch of damn fools sitting around trying to be hip. There were people who were serious about it, who loved to play music, and Mose seemed to be more committed and more serious than any of us about what he was doing. There was never any ego nonsense. He'd sit down and play with anyone."

**Allison:** Well, ok.

**Panken:** That's it for day one. The torture is over.

**Allison:** Ok. All right.

[END OF DAY ONE, PART 3]

[BEGINNING OF DAY 2, PART 1]

**Panken:** It's September 14, 2012. Ted Panken here, and this is the second day of a two-day oral history interview with Mose Allison, Amy Allison, and Audre Allison, who was here yesterday.

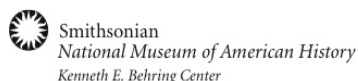
Before we pick up the thread and take this from 1960 to the present, more or less, let's pick up on a few other topics we were discussing yesterday. One, which Audre was suggesting, was to say a bit more about Mose's mother, Maxine Allison. She was a teacher. I read about how she came to Tippo, on the slightly false pretenses of a salary higher than she actually received. She liked to travel a great deal, and was a very independent woman. She lived until 89. Can you tell us anything more about her personality, her character, what she imparted to you when you were young?

**Allison:** I got in touch with Thad Cochran, who is a Senator from Mississippi, I think, and she complained to him about something...I don't know...

**Audre Allison:** Are you talking about when she was playing bridge?

**Amy Allison:** Did she end up being friends with him or something?

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**Allison:** No.

**Amy Allison:** No? Ok. Tell him what you were talking about.

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Audre Allison:** Well, there was one incident where she was playing bridge (is that the one you're talking about?), and the phone rang...

**Allison:** No. It's not what we were talking about.

**Amy Allison:** Well, think about it for a second...

**Allison:** I don't know...

**Audre Allison:** I know that she complained about... It is said that she got telephones down in Tippo, that she helped to get the roads paved, because she was real self-confident. She'd say, "You just have to take the bull by the horns," and she'd say that she made all the decisions because in the end it was always right for everyone anyway.

**Panken:** For the family, you mean?

**Audre Allison:** Whatever.

**Panken:** For all of Tippo.

**Audre Allison:** For anybody who was having a difficult time.

**Allison:** I don't know.

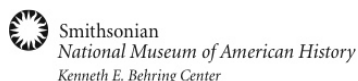
**Audre Allison:** Honey, I can't think of what you're talking about, about Thad Cochran.

**Allison:** She got in touch with a Congressman... I don't know what that was about. She wrote a column for the newspaper, and he took exception to something that she wrote, and she called him about it.

**Audre Allison:** The incident that I knew about was when Jamie Whitten called, because she had written something in her column. She said, "I can't talk right now, because it's me to go," which meant it was her to play the hand.

**Panken:** So she was an avid bridge player also.

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**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** She liked her bridge. Audre was saying that up until her very late eighties, she was riding a bicycle several miles a day, living by herself on the farm, and so forth.

**Audre Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** One theme that ran through all of yesterday's conversation was your passion for reading, for books. Audre said that when you met, you'd give her lists of books she had to read and so forth. Did your mother introduce you to books? Do you feel you got that from your mother?

**Allison:** I don't think so. Well, I don't know. She might have had something to do with it. But I don't know specifically what she had to do...

**Panken:** Were there a lot of books in the house when you were young?

**Allison:** No. When I was young, we were living in Tippecanoe, at a house that Elizabeth Staton used to come to every summer. So I don't know... I don't remember any books.

**Panken:** When you were in high school, did you do a lot of reading?

**Allison:** No. Well, I don't remember...

**Audre Allison:** Well, you always read a lot.

**Amy Allison:** But in high school?

**Panken:** Maybe not in high school. What I'm interested in is, if you didn't read in high school, when did the habit of reading begin for you? For example, when my father was in the Army, he was stationed on Ascension Island, which was out in the Atlantic in the middle of nowhere. He'd be 12 hours on as a radar operator and 12 hours off. All he did, because there was nothing else to do, was read a lot of the books in the Modern Library catalog...

**Allison:** I don't remember reading that much before.

**Amy Allison:** When did you start, do you think? When you were in college?

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Panken:** But by the time you met your wife, you were giving her... What were some of the books?

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**Audre Allison:** Aldous Huxley, and Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre... I was really impressed!

**Panken:** So you were reading highbrow stuff, things on the cutting edge of what people were thinking about in that time.

**Allison:** Well, nobody in Tippo was thinking about that.

**Panken:** But maybe some people in Oxford were.

**Allison:** No, I...

**Audre Allison:** At Ole Miss?

**Amy Allison:** Maybe V.P. Ferguson.

**Audre Allison:** Yeah, maybe V.P.

**Allison:** I'll tell you about V.P.

**Audre Allison:** Vernell Pennington Ferguson, the Third.

**Allison:** Vernell Pennington Ferguson. His father was an administrator or teacher or something at the university... Well, down South... I don't know.

**Amy Allison:** A different university.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Amy Allison:** Was V.P. your roommate?

**Allison:** Yeah. He was my roommate for a while, and he introduced me to a lot of stuff. He was a boxer. [LAUGHS]

**Audre Allison:** He was also Faulkner's handyman, sort of.

**Allison:** Yeah, he was Faulkner's handyman, but that came later.

**Audre Allison:** Well, that's when you introduced me to him, and he took us to Faulkner's house.

**Panken:** So not that much later.

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**Allison:** Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** Right. V.P. was an aspiring writer, and I know that V.P. was heavily into the French writers, because he left his family and went to Paris, and hung out at Café Deux Magots, and I guess he spent the rest of his life in Paris.

**Allison:** I saw him in Paris years later.

**Amy Allison:** Didn't he wear like kimonos around campus and stuff, Dad? Is that true?

**Allison:** Yeah. Well...

**Panken:** At Ole Miss, wow. That would make you stand out from the crowd.

**Amy Allison:** He sounds like he was an eccentric.

**Allison:** Yeah, he was an eccentric.

**Panken:** But it sounds as though when you left the Army and returned to Ole Miss for several semester, you, too, began to stand out from the crowd. You made that comment several times, that being in the Army expanded in the Army, and when you got back, you had your hair long, you were wearing zoot suits, you had listened to bebop, you were playing in integrated bands and so forth. You were doing a lot of things that might not have been the norm for, as your song title has it, a "middle class white boy" from Mississippi to do.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Anyway, it is what it is, I guess.

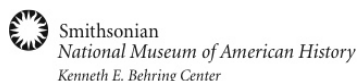
**Allison:** Ok.

**Panken:** I watched a couple of the movies that have been made about you... I'd like also to discuss a bit more about when you got to LSU and were introduced to R.A. Collingwood's book on aesthetics and art. Now, in a film I was looking at this morning, you said, "It made me aware that a lot of the things that I had been doing were artistic, or at least headed in that direction," and that reading that book and thinking about what Collingwood was writing helped you understand that black culture was art.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Whereas before it had just been what was around you.

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**Allison:** Yes, pretty much. I remember Collingwood stimulated me to a lot of thoughts about art. I remember he had a theory of art, he had a saying about art, and... What's that...I don't know...

**Audre Allison:** There's a book in there with all your underlinings in it.

**Amy Allison:** Shall I run and get the book?

**Panken:** That would be great. Let's see some of the things your dad underlined. But I know one thing that you paid attention to was Walter Pater's remark that "art is the removal of surpluses." That struck you.

**Allison:** Yeah. Well, that's one of the things that struck me.

**Audre Allison:** I remember you said to me at one time that it was the honest expression of an honest emotion, that it was really about no false...

**Panken:** Audre, you were saying that Mose was writing short stories at the time, that every week he had a short story due, and every Sunday night he'd sit down and just write it out in longhand?

**Audre Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Is this apocryphal, or did this happen?

**Audre Allison:** That's absolutely the truth.

**Allison:** I had a course at LSU, and I had to write a short story a week.

**Panken:** Did that filter into your songwriting, once you starting writing songs later?

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Panken:** Writing is like a muscle. The more you write, the more it spawns further writing.

**Allison:** Yeah. I wasn't writing songs at that time. I don't know...

**Amy Allison:** It might have warmed you up to it or something.

**Audre Allison:** Well, yeah, it might have, because the stories were really good. They were very southern.

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**Panken:** Do you remember what any of them were about?

**Audre Allison:** I remember one of them was about Mariana, but it was describing her in New York, in her apartment. They had wonderful phrases in them. I know I didn't throw them away; they are somewhere around.

**Amy Allison:** I've always wanted to read them, but I don't know where they are.

**Audre Allison:** Also one... I could tell, like, characters that they were based on. One was about Taylor LaFarge, the bass player, and about what his personality was like. Do you remember that? You had the short story...

**Allison:** Yeah. I remember that I wrote about Taylor...

**Audre Allison:** And Mariana and her cats in that apartment that you stayed in. She had all those cats.

**Panken:** 96<sup>th</sup> and Park. She was a cat person.

**Allison:** [LAUGHS] Yes.

**Audre Allison:** In fact, now she's still alive with 100-and-something cats in Pennsylvania. There are lots of Southern woman characters that were in his family.

**Panken:** It doesn't surprise me somehow. But perhaps a little later, we can review some of the Collingwood passages.

So you went to New York in '51 for the first time, you didn't like it, and you enrolled at LSU. We talked through these things to death yesterday. But one thing I wanted to pick up on was your path to Prestige. You went to a party at George Wallington's, you played for him...

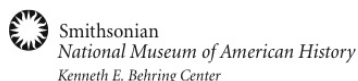
**Allison:** George Wallington. I went to his apartment somewhere uptown. He was married to a publicity director... Anyhow, they introduced me to... They said that they were going to help me get recorded. But...uh...

**Panken:** And you happened to have the material from *Back Country Suite*, so you'd been writing these songs since you were at LSU.

**Allison:** Yes. I played them for Billie...for George Wallington.

**Amy Allison:** Is it Billie who is his wife?

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**Allison:** Billie was his wife.

**Amy Allison:** Is he the guy who had Jazz Editions, Dad?

**Allison:** No.

**Amy Allison:** No. Oh, ok...

**Audre Allison:** Yes. Absolutely he was.

**Panken:** That's what I was moving towards. Because then he offered to publish your music...

**Amy Allison:** For a dollar.

**Panken:** It was an offer that seemed like a good idea at the time.

**Audre Allison:** It took us years and years... In fact, we just got the rights back. We got an attorney to get it back.

**Amy Allison:** Maybe he got Prestige to sign him, and then... Back then, I think, a lot of times when you were going to get a record deal, they'd also take publishing rights.

**Allison:** They'd moved to Florida, and we used to contact them in Florida, and they would never give the rights back.

**Audre Allison:** When the copyright ran out and you tried to renew it yourself, they said someone else had already... So then he passed it on to... He has an uncle, Pete Figlia, who lives in Brooklyn or the Bronx... When we finally got an attorney...you got an attorney who immediately got them back. I don't know why. We had other attorneys who said they couldn't do it. But Roberta got the rights back. Because she discovered that he really would have owed us a huge amount of money. We were supposed to be collecting half of European royalties...

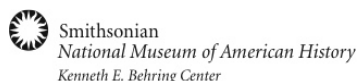
**Panken:** Mose has stated on public record that this is the case.

**Audre Allison:** Oh. Anyway, she just wrote him a letter and he quickly said absolutely he would.

**Amy Allison:** Just one of those old publishing deals, where it's 50%, and in good faith you have to give for a dollar... I have the original contracts that say, like, a dollar.

**Audre Allison:** Oh, you do?

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**Amy Allison:** Yeah. From 1957, and they were the first three albums worth of songs.

**Audre Allison:** And the songs that were on there—"Parchman Farm" and "Young Man Blues," all the things that were so popular.

**Amy Allison:** But I think back then, if you were going to get an album deal, somebody would say, "Oh, we're going to publish." It just kind of went hand-in-hand. And maybe...

**Audre Allison:** We thought it was wonderful.

**Amy Allison:** Yeah. It would have been if they'd paid...

**Panken:** Well, you did get six records out of it, and they were heard all over the world, and then it led to the events of the next 50-60 years.

**Allison:** I got some money out of Jazz Editions.

**Amy Allison:** Yeah. 50%.

**Audre Allison:** He would send a little note that said (?—21:06) 50%...

**Amy Allison:** Anyway, we don't have to go into...

**Panken:** Well, this is part of a musician's life, too, and it's an important part, being properly compensated for your musical production.

**Audre Allison:** I think there was a time when that didn't happen all the time.

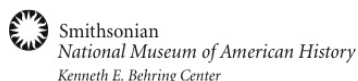
**Panken:** I think there's still a time when that doesn't happen all the time.

**Amy Allison:** Absolutely.

**Audre Allison:** I think he's very lucky to own 100% of all the copyrights now, which didn't happen for...

**Panken:** But you picked up on where I was leading with the George Wallington question. I wanted to talk about the publishing. That brings us to the idea that in 1957 and 1958 and 1959 and 1960, when these records are coming out... Once music is in the air, you can't control who listens to it, and people were listening to it who no one would have imagined in 1960 would be singing these songs in front of thousands of people three or four years later. That was brought out very clearly in the BBC documentary.

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Before we talk about that, I'd like to... I asked you this question yesterday, and I'd like to ask it again in a different way. Knowing that you had to put together a record every few months... Your discography shows you made a record about 6 months between 1957 and 1959, when the contract with Prestige ended, but also fairly frequently for Columbia... Knowing that you had something to write for, was any deadline pressure involved in putting things together?

**Allison:** No, there was no deadline pressure. But I managed to get the songs assembled.

**Panken:** Do you think you would have been writing some of these songs if you didn't have the contract?

**Allison:** No. I wasn't writing songs a lot then.

**Amy Allison:** But did having the record contract kind of motivate you to write?

**Allison:** No.

**Amy Allison:** Or would you have been writing anyway?

**Allison:** I don't know. I can't remember...

**Amy Allison:** Probably a little of both.

**Allison:** Ok. [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** Well, by 1959, you did have four kids, so you had to produce something. Do you have any memory of this, Audre?

**Audre Allison:** I was just thinking that when that first album came out, *Back Country Suite*, I remember that *DownBeat* gave it five stars. We were living in that apartment in Manhattan, that furnished apartment. I said, "You're going to be famous!" And then nothing happened. I thought that when critics wrote wonderful things about you, that would mean...

**Panken:** I think you were overestimating the power of *DownBeat*.

**Allison:** Yeah!

**Panken:** It was a somewhat limited circle in which it had influence.

**Amy Allison:** But when you get acknowledged, that kind of motivates you. I think that spurs you on. When you get some sort of like...that kind of gives you more creative energy.

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**Panken:** Well, one reason you moved to New York was to prove that you could...either you were going to do it in New York, or you were going to go back and do something else, is kind of how you put it yesterday. So there was some pressure, I'm sure. But also, and we also talked about this year, in 1958 you started working as a trio leader...

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** And your first gig was at the Café Bohemia, with Paul Motian and was it Henry Grimes...

**Allison:** I think...

**Panken:** Or Addison Farmer?

**Allison:** Addison Farmer.

**Panken:** Who you worked with all the time at that point.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Do you remember, let's say, on that gig and subsequent gigs at various spots around the Village, whether it was the Five Spot or the Vanguard or Birdland or the Village Gate, what the percentage was of instrumentals to songs, and how the percentage of instrumentals to songs started to change over the years? Anything you can tell me about that?

**Allison:** I don't know. I used to play several songs opening, and I don't do that any more. I used to play instrumentals a lot. I don't do that any more necessarily...

**Audre Allison:** Well, when you started... I think you were propelled by the fact that you had record contracts, come to think of it. Because they always wanted you to sing, because that's what a lot of audiences liked.

**Amy Allison:** That's what made you unique, too, probably.

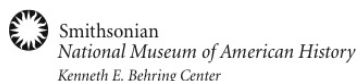
**Allison:** Well, Prestige put out a record after I...

**Panken:** After you left the label.

**Amy Allison:** *Mose Allison Sings*. Was it that one, Dad?

**Allison:** No. "Allison..."

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**Panken:** It's a black cover?

**Allison:** It's *Mose Allison Sings*. It was put out by Prestige later, after I left them, and it was... I still see that record all over.

**Panken:** And people think it's an original recording rather than a compilation of your songs.

**Amy Allison:** Of some of his songs, yes.

**Audre Allison:** There's another album, called *Greatest Hits*.

**Panken:** Well, you signed with Columbia and then went to Atlantic.

**Allison:** I was working for Teo Macero at Columbia. He kept wanting me to... When they asked for "Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer"... I left Columbia after that.

**Panken:** I see. They wanted you to do a super-commercial...

**Amy Allison:** They wanted... Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** Christmas.

**Amy Allison:** They wanted to make him a star.

**Panken:** You're quoted as saying that you were determined to resist anyone's attempt to turn you in those sorts of commercial directions. Which was probably a pretty smart move!

**Allison:** [LAUGHS] Well, I pretty much did what I wanted to all along.

**Audre Allison:** I remember hearing you say things like, "No, I don't do that; I'm sure you could get somebody else to do that better."

**Amy Allison:** I don't think you could have done that.

**Audre Allison:** I think that he didn't even consider it. He just always said he couldn't do it.

**Amy Allison:** He just did what he felt comfortable doing.

**Panken:** So in 1958 you have this first leader gig, and then I'd imagine that you started working more and more as a leader.

**Allison:** It was slow at first. The trio album...the trio work was slow at first. It later became

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more popular.

**Amy Allison:** Around when?

**Audre Allison:** I think what you always said, it was other musicians who got you work all the time. Musicians whom he played with... I mean, he was always getting calls from other musicians who had a club where they wanted to book him. I know that he always said that that's how he got known, was through word-of-mouth from other musicians.

**Panken:** So they recognized your voice, your artistic voice before the general public did, in a certain way.

**Allison:** Well, maybe.

**Amy Allison:** And your piano playing, too.

**Allison:** Well, the piano playing was part of it. That was always part of it.

**Audre Allison:** Well, and club owners liked you, too. Club owners always liked you because you were so dependable and so nice.

**Panken:** Personal, dependable, no bad habits...

**Allison:** Max Gordon I used to work for every so often, and he put me in there... Colomby got me in there.

**Panken:** Harry Colomby.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Although that happened a little later, if we're going to position this chronologically.

**Allison:** I don't know...

**Panken:** Reading Monk's biography, I think he got involved with Monk in the early '60s...

**Allison:** I was left out of Monk's biography. I played a gig with him at the Five Spot for a month, and it was left out of the biography.

**Panken:** Do you recall who was in Monk's band at the time?

**Allison:** He had the same drummer...

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**Panken:** Frankie Dunlap? He played with you, too.

**Allison:** Ah, shit!

**Panken:** Well, Monk didn't use that many different drummers...

**Allison:** Well, this was a guy who worked with me later on in Long Island. He worked with me at the Vanguard.

**Panken:** Would that be Frankie Dunlap?

**Allison:** Yeah...no, it was...

**Panken:** Because he played with Monk and recorded with you, too.

**Allison:** Well, it wasn't Frankie Dunlap.

**Panken:** Ben Riley played with Monk for years, but that began in 1964...

**Allison:** Ben Riley might have been who it was.

**Panken:** So you start to tour a bit in 1959 and 1960, and people know who you are because the recordings are coming out. I'm interested in how your career started to coalesce.

**Allison:** I remember that I had trouble getting jobs. I don't know...

**Audre Allison:** I don't remember your being actively involved in trying to get jobs, though. I just remember phone calls coming from people asking you to... He never had an agent. Never an agent, or anybody. Nothing. No publicist. Nothing like that.

**Panken:** all the way through.

**Audre Allison:** Yeah. Except he would take some jobs from people who were agents. He just wouldn't sign with them.

**Amy Allison:** He wouldn't do an exclusive.

**Audre Allison:** Because... What you said was, you wanted small club-owners to stay in business, and if you had an agent, they would just add to the expense. That's why you wouldn't sign with one.

**Allison:** Yeah. Well...

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**Audre Allison:** I guess he must have had a name of some kind, or agents wouldn't have called him.

**Panken:** He had a record coming out every year, maybe two.

**Audre Allison:** There was an agent, and I remember this, Mose... Do you remember? It was some big agency called, and they were saying things like they just wanted to make a million dollars for you, and you should make yourself scarce, and then have a big concert with a big audience. You said that was exactly what you didn't want to do. I remember... I was in the kitchen, and I heard you saying, "What you guys don't realize is that some people are motivated by things other than money." You just said it real nicely.

**Allison:** Well, I don't remember that.

**Audre Allison:** Well, I remember it. Because I thought, "Good for you." I thought that was really a nice thing to say. So there were agents... Sometimes you would go into town and you'd come home and say, "No, I'm not doing that."

**Allison:** Agents used to call me...

**Audre Allison:** ...with ideas about what you should do. Also, I know that you're going to say this, but I have even read that if you didn't think that a club sold out or made enough money, you gave them back some what you had made.

**Panken:** Really?

**Audre Allison:** Yes.

**Allison:** Yeah. I gave that back to a person in Texas...

**Audre Allison:** It was more than once. Anyway...

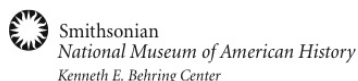
**Allison:** I gave back some of the money a couple of times. But usually I didn't do that.

**Panken:** Glad to hear that! I'm sure your wife is glad it didn't happen that often also.

**Audre Allison:** Well...

**Panken:** But it occurs to me that as your career is progressing, a lot of it is still happening in New York, and the folk music scene is starting to become commercialized during this time...

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**Allison:** Well, I used to work in Boston a lot, at the Jazz Workshop, on Boylston. I remember that.

**Audre Allison:** Do you remember in Manhattan when Bob Dylan came...before he was famous, he came to see you and gave us a copy of his first album? I remember I played it to some people, and they said, "It sounds like country music to me." Do you remember that?

**Allison:** No.

**Panken:** But you remember that.

**Audre Allison:** I do.

**Panken:** What club was Mose playing in then? Was it the Vanguard?

**Allison:** I was at the Village Gate. I used to play there a lot. Bob Dylan I gave a ride to my gig... Edgar Winter came in, and Bob Dylan left. [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** Well, Bob Dylan was spending a lot of time on Bleecker Street in 1962. With disclosure, I should add that I grew up across the street at the Gate. So when you were playing there, I was probably 6 or 7, looking out my bedroom window at the sign... But I'd like to continue on this theme, because it probably has something to do with why people became more and more enamored of your music...

**Amy Allison:** Songwriting.

**Panken:** ...and the songwriting—because of the diffusion of blues and vernacular folk music into popular culture in the early '60s, even prior to the "British Invasion," so-called. I'm wondering if there's anything more we can say about this.

**Allison:** No. I...

**Audre Allison:** Well, there were a lot of those people who said really nice things about you. I remember Joan Baez wrote to us. You were never very interested in performing with anyone, though.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Amy Allison:** I think singer-songwriters performing before... I think you were one of the first in that... Then the folk thing was a completely different kind of music, but kind of coming from the same... I don't know. I think they appreciated what you did.

**Panken:** But also you were writing original music based on these forms, which Dylan and a lot

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of these people were trying to do. I think in the interview you did earlier this year in Mississippi, you said that Willie Dixon was a model for you as a songwriter.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah.

**Panken:** In terms of the craft of writing songs.

**Allison:** I met him in Chicago, when I was playing in Chicago, at the Plugged Nickel I think. Willie came to see me, and I met him then. But I played with his band a couple of times at the Bottom Line and...

**Amy Allison:** But what about his influence... What did you like about his songwriting? Was that like...

**Allison:** Well, he wrote “The Seventh Son,” and I used to do a lot of his tunes. “I Love The Life I Live” and...

**Amy Allison:** Was there something you liked about him in particular.

**Allison:** I don’t know. There must have been.

**Panken:** You’ve also mentioned in the past that you admired Lightnin’ Hopkins, you admired Muddy Waters, you liked Muddy’s band with Little Walter—and one of your recent songs is based on “My Babe,” the “My brain” song... I think you told the gentleman in Mississippi that this one went back to Sister Rosetta Thorpe. So it seems as though in the ‘40s and ‘50s, you were investigating that music not just on an experiential level, but in a very analytical way.

**Allison:** Yeah. Well, I went to a blues promoter in Greenwood, in Mississippi, when I was down there one time, and I heard a lot of Willie Dixon and Muddy Waters and all of the...

**Panken:** In listening to that, were you breaking down the lyrics?

**Allison:** No.

**Panken:** Or was just an intuitive thing, like by osmosis...

**Allison:** Yeah, it was an intuitive thing.

**Audre Allison:** You felt you just liked it, and you didn’t analyze why you liked it or anything like that.

**Amy Allison:** You just related to it.

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**Allison:** No, I didn't question myself.

**Panken:** I guess why I'm asking is that it's interesting how those two components of your personality coexist, as a student of aesthetics and philosophy which requires that kind of analysis, and then how it comes out in your art. I guess it's a big mystery.

**Allison:** Well, I don't know. They say it comes out in my art. But I don't know.

**Panken:** Do you listen back to your recordings, or did you used to do so?

**Audre Allison:** If I had them...I don't remember... You never did do that. If I was playing one of your albums when you came in, you'd say, "would you turn that off?"

**Amy Allison:** Yeah. I never knew you to want to...

**Audre Allison:** No. He never wanted... He always liked the live performance of it.

**Amy Allison:** Dad, you said it never sounded like it felt or something.

**Allison:** Yeah. It never sounded like it felt.

**Panken:** I know a number of musicians who don't like to listen back to themselves.

**Audre Allison:** Another thing I remember you saying, when you began listening to classical music, I don't think you ever listened to jazz or blues again. You always played classical music, and you said everything that's ever been done in music has been done in classical music.

**Panken:** When did you begin listening to classical music that seriously?

**Audre Allison:** At LSU, I think.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Audre Allison:** And then I don't remember you ever buying any modern music after that.

**Panken:** Not even jazz records.

**Allison:** Well, I used to listen a lot when we got to New York, when we were living...

**Audre Allison:** Live.

**Panken:** you'd be out on the scene.

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**Allison:** No. On the radio.

**Audre Allison:** Oh, on the radio. I forgot about the radio. But you never did buy them. I just remember the one you bought last was “Up ‘N Adam”...

**Panken:** Oh, Lester Young.

**Audre Allison:** ...by Lester Young.

**Panken:** That’s a 1950 or 1951 recording.

**Audre Allison:** That’s right. That was right when we got married that you bought that.

**Panken:** See all the information we can extract from seemingly random clues? Is there anything we can speak about your time at Columbia, working with Teo Macero?

**Allison:** No, I didn’t get along with him too much. He was a classical composer. That turned me off, I think...I don’t know. But when he suggested “Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer...”

**Amy Allison:** He was the one who suggested that?

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** But the records you made for Columbia weren’t particularly commercial.

**Allison:** No.

**Panken:** One has one of the best titles ever, *The Transfiguration of Hiram Brown*.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah. I liked that record. I made it with Jerry Segal and Addison Farmer, downtown in a big room...

**Panken:** The 30<sup>th</sup> Street studio?

**Allison:** Well, I don’t know. But that was Teo Macero. I remember he wanted to play on some record, and he got his saxophone out—and I didn’t let him.

**Amy Allison:** He wanted to play on one of the tracks?

**Panken:** Audre, you were saying that at a certain point Mose was working more on his left hand, and practicing... Was that in the ‘50s? Was that later?

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**Allison:** No, that was later, I think.

**Audre Allison:** Yeah. That's the only time I remember you talking about concentrating, some reasons why you wanted to develop the left hand... Up to that point... Of course, I was busy. But I don't remember your writing songs. I don't remember where it all happened, even. It must have been while I was at work.

**Panken:** While he had some peace and quiet.

**Audre Allison:** [LAUGHS] But you never talked about writing songs. They just appeared.

**Panken:** Well, lots of them appeared. I have your song-list here... Look at this. It might be easier for you to read. Lots and lots of songs, and some of them quite famous, and covered by some of the most prominent musicians of the last fifty years. Perhaps we can speak about that after the break. But a few more things about the early '60s. You're with Columbia a few years, that wasn't working out, you weren't getting along with your producer. But you were with Columbia before they signed Bob Dylan, so maybe your presence somehow gave John Hammond that idea when the time came. My impression is that the approach and aesthetic you were showing on these gigs in the Village in the late '50s were opening the minds of people who were in charge of hiring, though we can only speculate... Any memories of the Columbia days?

**Audre Allison:** I just remember that always, if someone had an idea about what he should do, it never coalesced with his idea of what he should do.

**Panken:** Did that phenomenon become more pronounced with Atlantic? You've said that there was tension between you and Jerry Wexler, because he had ideas like sending you to Muscle Shoals, and you thought it was corny...

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Let's talk about the years at Atlantic. You're on the roster with...well, Ray Charles isn't there any longer, but Aretha Franklin... So many people who became icons of American music are on the same label, and you're putting out records regularly for the next 15 years. Can you talk about how you were recruited to the label? You've said that you were friends with Neshui Ertegun.

**Allison:** I went in to talk to Neshui Ertegun, and he signed me right away.

**Panken:** He called you? Your contract was up?

**Allison:** No, he signed me right there at Atlantic Records. They used to be on...

**Amy Allison:** Columbus Circle?

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**Allison:** Columbus Circle, yes.

**Panken:** They used to have a studio on West 58<sup>th</sup> Street. Your presentation is similar... Even your first album, *Back Country Suite*, is conceived of as an album. Did you think about recordings that way, as a complete album that was telling a particular story?

**Allison:** Well, I started Prestige with *Back Country Suite*. But I made later *Transfiguration of Hiram Brown* on Columbia...

**Amy Allison:** But they were kind of grouped like an entirety...like the album was one work with sub... I think that's what he's asking. Did you conceive them as a whole, like the album was all parts of one whole?

**Audre Allison:** I remember that you had an idea of how every album should balance out, because of...

**Allison:** No. I don't remember that.

**Audre Allison:** Well, I remember your saying to an interviewer... He said, "Did *Young Man Mose* and *Young Man Blues*...was that like bookends?" You said, "No." Then he asked you if you had...something about what reason you had for writing it, and you said, "Well, I figured I needed a blues, and so I wrote it." It was just a simple thing like that. I know when you put sets together, you always have something in mind that you...

**Allison:** Yeah. Ok.

**Audre Allison:** He doesn't share those thoughts with us.

**Panken:** I think most artists when they're putting together the set, they want a blues, they want a ballad, they want a burner, they want something mid-tempo. But there's also a narrative quality to what you do because you're also writing...

**Allison:** I used to play a couple of instrumentals, and start out a set that way. Then I came on the vocals, and I finished the set that way.

**Panken:** As a writer, maybe there are just these threads going on that you intuit, and you're not conscious of them, and when you're done with the product, it somehow coheres. But the reason I'm asking is because, again, I'm interested in why pop artists, musicians who aren't improvisers but who are singer-songwriters or more commercial music, were attracted to what you did. And that's a concept you see much more commonly on pop records than you do on jazz records, which tend to be more abstract. So you probably connected deeply with people who heard your

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lyrics...

**Allison:** What are you asking, by the way.

**Panken:** I'm just making an observation, that's all.

**Amy Allison:** He's just making an observation, how all these young singer-songwriters, more commercial artists were attracted to your material.

**Allison:** Ok.

**Panken:** Let's take a break, and when we resume we'll pick up in the '60s, when people start seriously covering your songs.

[END OF DAY 2, PART 1]

[BEGINNING OF DAY 2, PART 2]

**Panken:** We ended part 1 in 1963-64, just after Mose signs with Atlantic and enters a pretty long contractual relationship with the label. Meanwhile, as we said in the first segment, some of your songs are becoming favorites of some groups in England that are becoming popular. In 1964, when you make the album *The Word From Mose*, and the year after Prestige puts out the compilation *Mose Allison Sings*, you do a concert in England opening for the Rolling Stones. Right?

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Probably the largest crowd you'd played for up to that time maybe...

**Audre Allison:** You know, that's not I remembered it. They turned out really well knowing him, I think. I remember that we were in a tent, and they came in to get introduced to you, and it was a small skinny guy in a t-shirt... So then I went out to hear them. I thought they'd played before you, but maybe I'm wrong. And I remember thinking, "Wow!" I was used to seeing big bands either all sitting down, or his trio playing suits, and he was running all around the stage like he always did, and I'd never seen anyone do that...and making funny faces and leaning over. I'm thinking, "this guy is going to get really big."

**Allison:** Who's that?

**Audre Allison:** That was Mick Jagger.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah.

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**Audre Allison:** And we'd never heard of him. I thought that he played before you, but maybe not.

**Panken:** That's very possible.

**Allison:** They played after me. It wasn't... Mick Jagger wasn't the star.

**Audre Allison:** Well, Mose, who was the star, then? He was the one I was watching.

**Allison:** Well...

**Panken:** You've previously mentioned that the drummer was the...Brian Jones was his name.

**Allison:** No, the guy with the long...

**Amy Allison:** Oh, you're talking about Brian Jones.

**Allison:** Yeah, Brian Jones.

**Amy Allison:** He was kind of like...in the early days he was the big...

**Allison:** He used to go down and shake his head to the teenagers...

**Amy Allison:** For the teenage girls. [LAUGHS]

**Allison:** He had long blonde locks.

**Amy Allison:** Well, he was a very big part of that...

**Audre Allison:** Mick Jagger was there, and I know that I saw him also, because then I remember...

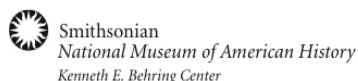
**Amy Allison:** But Brian Jones was...

**Allison:** Yeah. Well, he did a song.

**Panken:** Let me ask you this. Had you played in Europe before that, or was this your first time in England?

**Allison:** I'd played in Europe before.

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**Panken:** When did you first play in Europe?

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Amy Allison:** In Scandinavia? Early '60s probably.

**Audre Allison:** Let's see. I think I went the first time.

**Allison:** Georgie Fame was the first guy who did my material.

**Audre Allison:** Well, the Beatles were already out, because I remember we went to the Cave, or what was the name...

**Amy Allison:** The Cavern.

**Audre Allison:** The Cavern. And we also...

**Allison:** I played there with...not the Beatles...

**Audre Allison:** We still have those pins from the Cavern. We brought back one for all the kids. But I remember walking... Where was it that Georgia Fame was playing in? We walked in, and he was singing one of your songs and doing exactly... I mean, it really sounded like Mose, a lot like him.

**Panken:** In the BBC documentary, he said that he deliberately was holding his breath to get that tonal quality.

**Audre Allison:** Yeah, he was so close...

**Allison:** I met him. I went to his house one time. He was married to a rich person, who had a house...

**Amy Allison:** It was like an estate, like some sort of stately manor?

**Allison:** Yeah. It was like a long...

**Amy Allison:** Like the aristocracy. Like some sort of landed gentry.

**Allison:** Yeah. He was married to her at that time. Suffolk, I think.

**Amy Allison:** Oh, really?

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**Allison:** Yeah. I think it was Suffolk.

**Panken:** As the BBC documentary makes clear, your singles, like “Young Man Blues” and “Parchman Farm” were being played in British dance clubs at this time, and they were probably more widely known in England than they were here. Peter Townsend was very clear about that.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Did this surprise you when you got to London and saw people...

**Allison:** Yeah. I got a record from...a Jazz Editions statement, and \$5,000 was...

**Audre Allison:** \$7,500.

**Allison:** That was my part of the Who version.

**Panken:** “Young Man Blues.”

**Allison:** Yes.

**Audre Allison:** He said, “This is a mistake.” We bought Alyssa a car. I remember that.

**Allison:** No.

**Audre Allison:** Yes. I remember that.

**Allison:** Ok. All right.

**Panken:** When did the Who do their version? 1970?

**Amy Allison:** I think a little earlier. I’m not sure. They always said that “My Generation” was based on “Parchman Farm.” You can hear it a little bit.

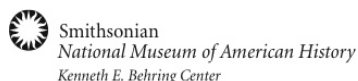
**Panken:** He broke that down on the BBC documentary actually.

**Amy Allison:** I know a BBC guy in Scotland, this guy who’s a friend of mine, who I know... He was the one who first told me that.

**Panken:** So in 1964, when you go to London, about how many songs had you written? Perhaps Amy can tell me that.

**Amy Allison:** Are you talking about with lyrics?

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**Panken:** With lyrics.

**Amy Allison:** Oh my God. I don't know. Like...

**Audre Allison:** Where's that list?

**Panken:** Here. But it doesn't have the dates.

**Amy Allison:** The first, I think, *I Don't Worry About A Thing*, was an album that had a mix, like half-and-half. I feel like that was the album where you did more, the first one where you... Well, that's not true. Columbia had some that...

**Allison:** Well, I wrote some of them, and I don't know...

**Amy Allison:** By 1964, he'd probably a lot of ones with lyrics, I think. What do you think, Mom?

**Audre Allison:** I think so. I don't know how many albums were...

**Amy Allison:** By the time *Word For Mose* came, that was all vocals. Wasn't it? *Word For Mose*. That was like '64 or '65. But before then, it was always half...

**Allison:** That was on Atlantic.

**Panken:** Yes. I think that was your first record for Atlantic, if I'm not mistaken. So for Atlantic is when you started presenting yourself fully as a singer and songwriter, it sounds like.

**Allison:** Probably.

**Panken:** And you were friends with Neshui Ertegun. You've said you liked to hang out with him and you liked him.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Was this something that he was encouraging you to do?

**Allison:** No. He didn't encourage... He came out to the Lighthouse when I did a record there with...I don't know... But I did a record at the Lighthouse, and Neshui came out for it, and it was a live album...

**Amy Allison:** Was that *Mose Alive*?

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**Allison:** I don't know.

**Panken:** That's a 1965 recording, I believe.

**Amy Allison:** They probably have it over there, in the cabinet.

**Panken:** Oh, you have all the records here?

**Amy Allison:** We have a lot of them. They didn't know, but I found them the last time I was here. Do you want me to get them?

**Panken:** That would be great.

**Amy Allison:** As a visual

**Panken:** According to the album list, *Word for Mose* is 1964, *Mose Allison Alive* is 1965, *Wild Man On The Loose* is '65. There's an album called *Down Home Piano*. *V-8 Ford Blues* is '66...

**Allison:** I didn't write that... That was a compilation.

**Panken:** *V-8 Ford Blues* is a compilation. But *Wild Man On The Loose* is one of your...

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** So as the '60s progress, you're touring a lot. You're playing larger rooms and...

**Amy Allison:** [RETURNS WITH AN ARMFUL OF LPs] A lot of duplicates, though. I just grabbed them. These are later. But *Western Man*, that was Atlantic. This is Columbia, *Mose Goes*. This is *Mose In Your Ear*, Atlantic, a live record. Here's *Hello There*, *Universe*. These were later—Blue Note. This is *Swingin' Machine*, Atlantic. This is early... I think this was before *A Word From Mose*...

**Allison:** This was...

**Amy Allison:** *I Love The Life I Live*. Was that Columbia, Dad?

**Allison:** Yes.

**Amy Allison:** So this might have been the first on Atlantic. Here's *The Transfiguration of Hiram Brown*. The notes are by Teo Macero.

**Allison:** We don't need that. *The Transfiguration of Hiram Brown*, we don't need...

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**Amy Allison:** We're just showing the albums, Dad.

**Allison:** Oh, ok.

**Amy Allison:** Yeah, we're just showing them. Here's the compilation from Prestige, *Mose Allison Sings*. This is later, Atlantic, *I've Been Doin' Some Thinking*. This is the one that has "Everybody Crying Mercy." Then the other one we were talking about, *The Word From Mose*, which was all vocals.

Then what about the one...I love that one... Oh, here's *Wild Man On The Loose*. But I love that one... *V-8 Ford Blues*, Dad. When was that? Epic.

**Allison:** That was a compilation.

**Amy Allison:** You know which one you don't have here, is *I Don't Worry About A Thing*. Which has a really nice cover, too. You're out in the woods, Dad, looking up, your eyes are really blue. *I Don't Worry About A Thing*—that's got "Your Mind Is On Vacation" on it.

**Panken:** there are some interesting quotes on the liner notes here, from a 1958 *DownBeat* article. You said in 1958: "My primary interest is in playing. If you play every day, you play everything you can write. I want to work with my trio some of the time, and also play with other groups. I like playing rhythm piano with a horn in the group."

You said: "In the south, I'm considered an advanced bebop type. In New York, I'm considered a county blues-folk type. Actually, I don't think I'm either. Maybe I'm a little of both."

**Amy Allison:** There's a lot of little quotes here, too. This is him talking about *Transfiguration of Hiram Brown*. It says: "According to Mose, his *Transfiguration of Hiram Brown* suite is a seriocomic fantasy based on a perennial theme. Hiram Brown is the naive provincial who dreams of a life of opulence in the city. He goes there, is overwhelmed and disillusioned, longs for his youth, realizes that this, too, is an illusion, despairs, goes through a crisis, and is transfigured."

**Allison:** This is according...it's *Transfiguration of Hiram Brown*...

**Amy Allison:** Right.

**Panken:** It sounds like a short story or an opera, folk opera type of thing.

**Amy Allison:** Both of these have tons of quotes. This one is: "You seem to be carrying on a tradition that is ignored by most singers. How are you able to work in this area, and at the same

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time continue to grow musically?” And you say: “I don’t do the tunes the way they were done originally. First of all, I always intend to swing. Then I try to change, based on what I hear now, and allow new things to sometimes complement and sometimes contrast with country blues. Of course, the singing is a pretty set thing. Playing allows me more freedom. My piano playing is always undergoing changes, and then, of course, I am always writing new tunes. ‘Back On The Corner’ and ‘Ask Me Nice’ are my tunes...” (This is talking about this record) “...but to realize my full potentialities, I must sing. I try to achieve a balance. The singing appeals to a lot of people, and the piano playing appeals to others. More people have access to my work when I do both. And this way, I have a lot of control of my material. A little blowing, a little singing.”

“And what factors determine your choices when you sing standards?”

“The standards I pick, like ‘Please Don’t Talk About Me When I’m Gone,’ ‘Hey, Good-Lookin’,’ ‘I Ain’t Got Nobody,’ ‘Deed I Do’ and ‘You’re A Sweetheart,’ have to have rhythmical phrasing and a certain harmony. When I sing, I use blues harmony, and standards have to fit.’ As you will hear in this album, the standards Allison chooses...”

But usually, all of his albums have quotes on the back. Like, this is talking about Western traditional music, and then you talk about Ellington.

**Panken:** That’s from *I’ve Been Doin’ Some Thinkin’*.

**Amy Allison:** What do you think, Dad? Should I read this stuff?

**Allison:** What?

**Amy Allison:** This is from *I’ve Been Doin’ Some Thinkin’*. It’s kind of long, but let’s see. Should I read it from...

**Panken:** We did long passages yesterday. It’s just going into the record.

**Amy Allison:** Ok. It says: “In his transactions with his total environment, Mose Allison brings some studied internalized thoughts about jazz. His perceptual acuity regarding several aspects of jazz, social, ethnic, temporal, and artistic, provide a view of Mose’s personal outlook. Continually striving to develop himself, he remains open and absorbent, allowing input that might change his style of composing and performing. Considering the basic position of the blues, Mose’s observations on the relationship of folk music from different parts of the world to the blues is of interest. Primitive blues players and early jazz players used bent notes. The use of thirds relates to blues scales...”

Anyway, it’s very scholarly. It says: “For example, Muddy Waters’ harmonica and the drone of Oriental music.” This is by Herb Wong. But there are some quotes. Let’s see, it says here, “One big difference between good and mediocre jazz players is that good jazz players

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exhibit that split-second accuracy, and the not-so-good players lack this precision.” Something like that. “Although the word ‘precise’ is not necessarily the best word, because Bach can be precise, too. What we need is a new realization of jazz and what is a good performance.”

“There is no such thing as a jazz vocalist. If you’re a vocalist, you know very well what you’re going to sing, and you never really discover anything by yourself. A singer absorbs techniques from many different areas, and the objective is to get it to work for you in a different way, your own way.”

“Every great jazz player has his own way of swinging. Each discovers a way he can swing, whether it’s from Mozart or some other musical precedent, because it was always there in some prior but different form.”

Then he talks about Duke Ellington. “Duke and his band are together one of the greatest things this society has produced. Although Duke is not a great pianist per se, he made the first significant and sophisticated attempt to bring Oriental music and its natural blues sources to his repertory. His band is truly exotic. It represents a genuine, beautiful blend of East and West.”

Do you remember saying that stuff, Dad?

**Allison:** Herb Wong?

**Amy Allison:** Yeah. But those were quotes by you, apparently.

**Panken:** Herb Wong is a pretty reliable guy.

**Amy Allison:** [LAUGHS] I mean, I’ve heard of him. I just...

**Audre Allison:** Well, he used to say really astute things about...

**Amy Allison:** This was a great way of describing...

**Panken:** So it wasn’t all intuitive.

**Allison:** Yeah...

**Amy Allison:** Here’s about *Transfiguration of Hiram Brown*...

**Audre Allison:** You had definite ideas about what jazz was and what improvisation was all about.

**Panken:** Amy, you’ve studied a lot of your dad’s lyrics, or you’ve just absorbed them...

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**Amy Allison:** I just know them.

**Panken:** What would you consider to be... Are there themes in common that they have? Are there certain registers or keys he likes to write for? Tell me whatever you care to analytically about...

**Amy Allison:** It's very specific, and it's very much him. And it's funny, and it's ironic lots of times. No?

**Allison:** I used to write for a scale, B-flat at the top. But I sang sometimes up there, but I used to... "Seventh Son" is in B-flat, and...

**Amy Allison:** But what about your lyrics? He was talking about your lyrics?

**Allison:** Well, B-flat was the top of my scale. I used to sing E-flat above that, and sometimes... But I remember writing for a scale of B-flat.

**Panken:** How complicated were your melodies? Did you ever put in things, for instance, that seem simple but there's a lot of complex information underneath that you make...

**Allison:** No, I didn't think about that.

**Panken:** Amy, let's get back to the lyrics. You know these lyrics probably as well as anybody. What are some of the constant themes you perceive in his lyrics, just as stories?

**Amy Allison:** Oh my God. I mean, it's hard for me to think about that. Themes. Hmm. They're very cosmic, kind of philosophical but very diluted, like really the opposite... Or it's very economical. And very pithy. Like, he would take really...find a really...

**Audre Allison:** Sort of refine from something more complex.

**Panken:** Distilled.

**Audre Allison:** Distilled.

**Amy Allison:** That's what I meant, not...

**Panken:** Like Walter Pater said, "art is the removal of surplus."

**Amy Allison:** That's what I always thought, is that he said a whole lot in a very pithy, concise, and powerful way, and it would be a lot of really deep things...

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**Audre Allison:** And a lot of things that don't refer to any specific thing happening in the world, because that's why, over and over again, people think, "Oh, he just wrote that song."

**Panken:** They have a timeless quality, don't they.

**Audre Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Like, Diana Krall could be singing two of his songs now, and they sound like...

**Audre Allison:** Like, "Monsters Of The Id" that he wrote in the '60s, when he sings that now...

**Allison:** "Monsters of the Id."

**Audre Allison:** You haven't heard "Monsters Of The Id"? That's one of my favorites. And when he sings that now, it's all...

**Allison:** Costello did that.

**Amy Allison:** He did it with me.

**Audre Allison:** Amy did it with Elvis Costello on one of her CDs.

**Allison:** On one of her albums, Elvis Costello is singing "Monsters Of The Id."

**Audre Allison:** And people love that now, and they think he just wrote it for the political scene. I mean, it's really... Well, you know all the lines to it.

**Amy Allison:** Oh, do you want to hear the lines? "Monsters of id / No longer stayin' hid / And terrors of the night / Are out in broad daylight / No need to lock the door..." No, wait a second. There's a lot of words. Dad... "No need to..."

**Allison:** Wood.

**Amy Allison:** Yeah, "...knock on wood / Don't stop to say a prayer / They won't do any good / They're multiplyin' in the air." Then you have, like, "creatures from the deep / Are going without sleep."

**Allison:** yeah.

**Amy Allison:** "And phantoms of the dark / Have their own place to park."

**Allison:** yeah.

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**Amy Allison:** “No need to cause a fuss / Don’t go and make a scene / They know what’s best for us / They’re fightin’ fire with gasoline.” Then there’s a really good one at the end. Let me see...

**Audre Allison:** “Toothless majorette...”

**Amy Allison:** No, I’m talking about the newest one.

**Allison:** 9. Uh...36.

**Audre Allison:** [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** That’s #36, huh?

**Allison:** Mmm-hmm.

**Amy Allison:** Oh, “The creatures From the swamp / Rewrite their own Mein Kampf / Neanderthals amuck / Just trying to make a buck / Goblins and their hags are out there waving flags / When will be rid / Of monsters of the id.”

**Panken:** When did you write that?

**Amy Allison:** ‘67. Maybe ‘68 or ‘69.

**Panken:** What a timely piece. Either year.

**Amy Allison:** Either year.

**Panken:** Well, it sounds like the late ‘60s.

**Amy Allison:** It also sounds like the Bush years.

**Panken:** Except no one would have been talking about the Id during the Bush years. Psychoanalysis was more au courant in the ‘60s.

**Audre Allison:** Well, that’s right. In fact, sometimes I wonder if people know what the Id is.

**Amy Allison:** Didn’t you get that from *Forbidden Planet*? Didn’t you say that the movie *Forbidden Planet* kind of inspired “The Monsters Of The Id” concept?

**Allison:** What?

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**Audre Allison:** The movie, *Forbidden Planet*, “Monsters of the Id.”

**Allison:** Oh, yeah. I got it from there, “Monsters Of The Id.” “Monsters Of the Id” was a hoot.

**Amy Allison:** It turns out to be in Man rather than an external monster. Right? The monster is inside.

**Panken:** Let’s do another lyric. What’s another lyric you can think of, not one of the early ones... That’s a very involved song, a much more involved song than you were writing in the late 1950s, for example.

**Amy Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** By this time, it’s the kind of thing Bob Dylan might write—except I think I like yours a little better.

**Amy Allison:** Well, I think even stuff where people would... Like, in the early ‘60s... I’m just picking any, like “Stop this world...” Certain opening lines that I think probably at the time were... Like,, “Stop this world / Let me off / There’s too many pigs in the same trough / Too many buzzards sittin’ on a fence...”

**Allison:** “Monsters Of The Id,” that’s it. It’s whole...

**Panken:** What’s interesting are the revisions you’ve made to the ending. “The goblins and their trolls are out there wavin’ flags...”

**Amy Allison:** “Out to rig the polls.” Right?

**Panken:** Yes, or “trying to rig the polls.” “Vampire in a...”

**Amy Allison:** “In a Volks”?

**Allison:** Volks.

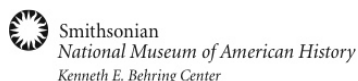
**Panken:** “In a Volks, a toothless...”

**Audre Allison:** Majorette?

**Panken:** “...majorette on the internet.” So you brought that up to date.

**Amy Allison:** He does that with a lot of songs.

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**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** If you're ok with it, I think it's a singular opportunity to go over some of these lyrics with you.

**Audre Allison:** Well, this one, "My Back Yard," Mose used to, at some time during every day, sit in the back yard. I called him "Little Buddha."

**Panken:** there's a nice photo of you sitting in the back yard with a book. Your legs are crossed, you're reading a book, you have a hat on...

**Audre Allison:** He used to sit like this, and stare at the trees and birds—a meditative kind of thing that I thought that song sort of came from.

**Panken:** Let me look at the song list, and throw it out there, and see what we come up with.

**Amy Allison:** Ok. You can just...

**Panken:** "Your Mind Is On Vacation." Is that based on your experiences in loud nightclubs, or...

**Allison:** Well, that was based on the Showboat in Washington, D.C. That's when I got the idea. People were talking during a performance, you know.

**Panken:** I guess you came up with a retort you can give them any time. Like that! "Your mind is on vacation."

**Amy Allison:** Just like that, there's that song.

**Panken:** "Wild Man On The Loose."

**Allison:** I got the idea for that...I was playing at Sugar Hill in '60. I think it was after '60... But that's the first time I played there. I don't know how much later was it...

**Audre Allison:** How did you come to write "Wild Man On The Loose." "Look out, stand back..." What were you... It wasn't him.

**Amy Allison:** No.

**Panken:** Nor was "I'm Smashed," I'm sure.

**Audre Allison:** Bill Patey(?—34:08), you used to call him...his nickname was "Wild Man."

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**Allison:** No...

**Audre Allison:** It was a compilation, I think, of people of a certain type that we all know.

**Allison:** No. I got the idea from a guy who had spent several weeks in the country, and...

**Amy Allison:** Well, it says that in this note. He'd been in the country for 30 days...

**Allison:** Yeah. "Been in the country for 30 days, got some money, got some hell to raise..."

**Audre Allison:** Something about "looking up that juice" or something...

**Amy Allison:** "Soaking up."

**Audre Allison:** "Soaking up that juice." Anyway, we have a friend who says that's his theme song.

**Allison:** Well, I don't know when that was written, but...

**Audre Allison:** This is different. I've turned to "Gettin' There," that I've always liked. "People ask me questions about the way I've spent my life, thirty..." Now, see, I've changed that to "sixty years in show business." He put it back to "thirty." He wrote that when he'd been in show business... "Thirty years in show-biz, only had one wife. Limousines and swimmin' pools, I didn't get my share, but I am not down-hearted. I am not down-hearted. I am not down-hearted, but I'm gettin' there."

**Panken:** Is that on the last record?

**Amy Allison:** No, that was a while ago.

**Audre Allison:** Yeah. That always gets...that's a big laugh line.

**Amy Allison:** Is it on this... No, I think, *Gettin' There* is the name of...

**Audre Allison:** "No matter how I'm feeling, I still propose a toast, almost successful..."

**Amy Allison:** It's on *Ever Since The World Ended*, 1987.

**Audre Allison:** "Almost successful."

**Amy Allison:** That's a funny one, "...(?)... the world." Those are later ones.

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**Panken:** You mentioned, for instance, in one interview, that “Foolkiller” was based on an Edna St. Vincent Millay short story.

**Allison:** I got that from a short story by...I don’t know who wrote it, but...

**Panken:** Well, you’ve previously said Edna St. Vincent Millay.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** That’s a good one...

**Allison:** I thought it was Edward Bernay...

**Amy Allison:** Edna St. Vincent Millay? I thought she was a poet, but...

**Allison:** Well, anyhow, I got it from a short story, and it was...

**Panken:** What’s the lyric to “Fool Killer”?

**Amy Allison:** “I was walking down a back street just the other night / Had a funny feeling that things weren’t right / Had heard some funny footsteps right behind / And I know it wasn’t just in my mind / Fool killer’s comin’, and it’s getting closer every day / I’ve got to try to make my getaway / I’ve been livin’ in this concrete anthill / Scraping and scrapping for that dollar bill / Eight million people you used to have living on the brink / Now you have livin’ on the make / Waiting for one big break / Got no time to stop and think / The fool killer’s comin’ / I do believe it’s true / Oh, well, the fool killer’s comin’ / I think he’s got his eye on me and you / If you’ve never been a fool, then you don’t have to worry / If you know you have, better get in a hurry / Just to be on the safe side / Get yourself a place to hide / Because the fool killer’s comin’ / Getting closer every day / Fool killer’s comin’ / Got to try to make my getaway.”

I have a friend who said he thought that was based on a short story by, like, a science fiction writer.

**Allison:** No. It was before that.

**Amy Allison:** We should google it.

**Panken:** Did you read science fiction?

**Amy Allison:** Not now.

**Allison:** I don’t read science fiction much. I might have read something, but...

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**Audre Allison:** I don't think you ever read much science fiction.

**Allison:** I don't seek it out.

**Panken:** Here's another song you made reference to in an interview. "Let It Come Down" is from a line in Shakespeare.

**Allison:** Yeah. Let it Come Down" is...

**Audre Allison:** And Paul Bowles wrote a book, *Let It Come Down*. That was another book he recommended to me.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Which Shakespeare play is it from?

**Audre Allison:** I'm trying to think of which play...

**Amy Allison:** I forget.

**Audre Allison:** It's one of the well-known...

**Panken:** So we have a wide pool of sources from which you're refracting your lyrics and stories. To me, it seems almost... Please forgive me for making these leaps, I don't know you at all, but when you were discussing the short stories, a lot of these lyrics sound like they could be a short story in... Each of these songs contains a complete world.

Amy, does anything else leap out at you from that list?

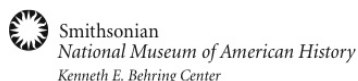
**Amy Allison:** "I'm not Talking." That's one that the Yardbirds did. That was "Don't ask me what I have to say / If I said things were splendid / Someone would be offended / If I said things were awful / It might just be unlawful / I'm not talking of just okay." That's one that is on *The Word From Mose*.

I always liked "You Can Count On Me To Do My Part." I like that one, because that's about...

**Audre Allison:** And how about "Numbers On Paper"? But that came later.

**Amy Allison:** Oh, that's much later, but that's a beautiful song, "Numbers On Paper."

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**Audre Allison:** I know some...did some mathematician in a Ph.D paper quote “Numbers On Paper”?

**Amy Allison:** I don’t know. But that’s the one that Frank Black from the Pixies sang on in the documentary.

**Panken:** There’s a famous song, “Everybody’s Cryin’ Mercy.” Do you remember what the source was for that?

**Allison:** Yeah. We got it in here...

**Amy Allison:** Do you remember what inspired it, Dad?

**Allison:** I don’t know.

**Audre Allison:** During the Vietnam War, wasn’t it?

**Panken:** Or just after.

**Amy Allison:** No, it was not after. That’s *I’ve Been Doin’ Some Thinkin’*. 1968. So that was during Vietnam.

**Audre Allison:** But that’s another one that people think has just been written recently, especially during the Iraq War.

**Allison:** “Let It Come Down” isn’t in here.

**Amy Allison:** Ok. I think that’s a great one.

**Panken:** We’re getting an empirical demonstration of how your conception of songwriting was evolving and becoming more complex, the more you were singing... And you were probably listening to what other people were doing, too, and absorbing that into what you were thinking about.

**Allison:** Yeah. Well...

**Audre Allison:** “All artists have modeled their style upon that of others, used subjects that others have used, and treated them as others have treated them already.” That’s one of the things in here...

**Panken:** You’re reading from the Collingwood book now.

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**Audre Allison:** Yes.

**Amy Allison:** I think a lot of them are very...they're universal themes and kind of philosophical, but they're funny. They're all kind of pithy remarks that are down-home and funny.

**Audre Allison:** Or surprising.

**Allison:** "Everybody Cryin' Mercy."

**Amy Allison:** Yeah. That's on this one, Dad.

**Panken:** Do you still sing "Everybody's Crying Mercy."

**Allison:** Yeah, I still sing...

**Panken:** What number in the book is it?

**Audre Allison:** What number is it?

**Amy Allison:** In the book. Do you know what number it is, Dad?

**Audre Allison:** For the bass player?

**Amy Allison:** Not in the lyrics. In that book...

**Audre Allison:** When you tell the bass player that you're going to play it...

**Amy Allison:** "If You're Goin' To the City"... You know, one of my favorites is "City Home."

**Panken:** "If You're Goin' To The City" is a wonderful song.

**Amy Allison:** That's true. That's a different one. But yeah...

**Panken:** One thing that's occurring to me, which will probably sound really pretentious, so forgive me... But you have a knack for finding archetypal images, which is probably why they sound so timeless, and without being too reductive about it, it's the kind of thing that a lot of Southern writers seem to be able to do, to find touchstones in their life that intersect with the broader culture around them that can resonate with everyone. It's something that's in the blues, one reason why the blues is so powerful. It's something that's in the Mississippi writers. For sure, Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor could do it. It seems like you've got that somehow in the way you approach lyric writing. Some of these later lyrics...

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**Audre Allison:** You love Flannery O'Connor.

**Panken:** Anyway, take that for what it's worth.

**Audre Allison:** You're absolutely right.

**Amy Allison:** Also, you would do stuff that sounded kind of... Like, "Your Molecular Structure," where it had funny but kind of science... He's always been kind of into science and...

**Audre Allison:** Oh, yeah.

**Amy Allison:** But make it really accessible and funny.

**Audre Allison:** All these books about the universe or...

**Allison:** I'm looking for "Everybody's Crying Mercy."

**Amy Allison:** It's coming up, I think.

**Audre Allison:** You don't have them in numbered order there...

**Amy Allison:** You wanted to read that?

**Allison:** Oh, here it is.

**Amy Allison:** You want to read it out loud?

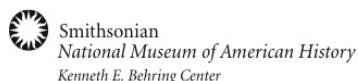
**Allison:** No. You want to read them...

**Panken:** How about Amy reads it, since I think you've sung it...

**Amy Allison:** I haven't sung that, but other people have. Bonnie Raitt and Elvis Costello. "I can't believe the things I'm seeing / I went about some things I've heard / Everybody's crying mercy / When they don't know the meaning of the word / A bad enough situation / Is sure enough getting worse / Everybody's crying justice / Just as long as there's business first / Toe to toe / Touch and go / Give a cheer / Get your souvenir / People running around in circles / Don't know what they're head for / Everybody's crying peace on earth / Just as soon as we win this war / Straight ahead / Knock 'em dead / Pack your kit / Choose your hypocrite / Well, you don't have to go to a movie / To see something plain absurd / Everybody's cryin' mercy / When they don't know the meaning of the word / Nobody knows the meaning of the word."

**Panken:** Thank you. This is going to sound like a stupid interview question. But how does it

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make you feel that all these artists, some of the most serious singers and songwriters of the last 30 years, Amy's generation, my generation, sing your songs and use them as models? Do you have any...

**Allison:** No.

**Panken:** You don't have any feelings about that?

**Allison:** No. I never thought about it.

**Audre Allison:** I know what you've said about.

**Allison:** What?

**Audre Allison:** As long as they give you credit.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** That's it.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** You have said...what did you say about Pete Townsend... You said he made "Young Man Blues" sound like an anthem. You said something nice about it.

**Panken:** Well, the Who made everything sound like an anthem.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Amy Allison:** I remember that you liked Bonnie Raitt's version of "Everybody Crying Mercy." He was always I think happy that people would do it.

**Audre Allison:** Happy that they did it, sure.

**Allison:** Bonnie Raitt did the first cover of my song, "Everybody's Crying Mercy."

**Audre Allison:** Yeah, that one she did.

**Allison:** I don't know when she did that, but...

**Amy Allison:** I think in the '70s probably.

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**Panken:** Perhaps this would be a good time for another short break, and we have part 3 and see how long it takes for us to get up to the present.

**Amy Allison:** I was just going to say that a lot of people before Bonnie Raitt covered your songs, Dad, like Bobbie Gentry and the Kingston Trio...no, not them... The Nashville Teens. All these little...

**Audre Allison:** The Kingston Trio did something that they never...

**Amy Allison:** The Yardbirds. Gosh, a whole bunch. I'm trying to remember who else. Johnny Winters. Didn't he do "Parchman Farm"?

**Panken:** this clip from *All About Jazz* states that "Parchman Farm" was covered by Johnny Winter, Cactus, Blue Cheer, Rick Derringer, John Mayall, and Hot Tuna.

**Amy Allison:** Didn't Bobbie Gentry do that one? Or did she do a different one? I think she might have done it, too.

**Panken:** So let's take a little break...

**Audre Allison:** You know what? I think I should run and get pizza now...

[END OF DAY 2, PART 2]

[BEGINNING OF DAY 2, PART 3]

**Panken:** ...the producer, whom you were with I guess from 1981 to 1997 maybe, and perhaps talk a bit about the most recent recording, which I can't remember the name right now...

**Amy Allison:** *The Way Of The World*.

**Panken:** Thanks. Which Joe Henry produced. And wrap up with perhaps some odds-and-ends.

**Allison:** Well, it sounds like a lot.

**Panken:** We'll do it in half-an-hour. It's not that much. For Part 3, I'd like to return to some quotes from the past. There's a 1972 recording called *Mose In Your Ear*. I thought this was an interesting remark. Ben Sidran, in his liner notes, draws out the comparison between your methods of operation and Thelonious Monk's methods of operations, which he perceives. There are a couple of things... Amy might have quoted this earlier, and forgive me if I'm repeating it. You said: "It's all a matter of accuracy," as far as working off your vocals... "It's all a matter of accuracy. Whether or not you get the change at the right split second in order to get that hypnotic effect that I'm after. Although I do have personal motivations for certain songs when I'm singing

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them, they are like cues for myself. I approach most of the vocal parts like an instrumentalist, and that's the reason it's important for me to play my own piano background, because it's all interrelated." Does that sound like a reasonable...

**Allison:** What are you asking?

**Panken:** I'm asking if that sounds like a reasonable statement of your intentions when you're playing and accompanying?

**Amy Allison:** That your piano playing and accompanying...

**Audre Allison:** Did you hear what he was reading?

**Allison:** No. I heard some of it.

**Panken:** You're closer to him. Would you read it. Bottom left.

**Amy Allison:** Ok. It says: "It's all a matter of accuracy. Whether or not you get the change at the right split second in order to get that hypnotic effect that I'm after. Although I do have personal motivations for certain songs when I'm singing them, they are like cues for myself. I approach most of the vocal parts like an instrumentalist, and that's the reason it's important for me to play my own piano background, because it's all interrelated." What do you think of that? Does it still apply, do you think?

**Audre Allison:** Do you believe what you said?

**Amy Allison:** Yes, I know. [LAUGHS]

**Panken:** Do you sing like an instrumentalist? When you're singing a song and phrasing a vocal, is it like it would have been sixty years ago when you were playing that song on trumpet, let's say?

**Allison:** No. I couldn't make the transfer from trumpet to piano?

**Audre Allison:** He's talking about your voice. Is that like an instrument when you're playing?

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Panken:** A lot of trumpet players sang. Louis Armstrong. Brass players...

**Amy Allison:** A lot of singers have sounded like horns, kind of.

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**Panken:** So I'm wondering if your idea of delivering your voice is similar to the way you're thinking about projecting an instrument or projecting your breath through the horn?

**Allison:** No. I don't get anything out of this.

**Panken:** Fair enough.

**Amy Allison:** What about if you were singing and not playing? Would that feel weird, Dad? Maybe playing and singing is interrelated? It's like part of the same thing?

**Allison:** I don't know...

**Amy Allison:** What if you weren't playing and you just sang? Would that feel weird?

**Allison:** Well, who knows?

**Panken:** Let me ask you this. Ben Sidran was saying that you like to rework and re-record a small number of originals and standards. (This was 40 years ago.) You said, "90% of the time, when I recorded the tune, it might have been the first time I sang it, so I wasn't satisfied. And after playing the tune for two or three years, you get to know how to play it. The point is not whether you've done the material before. That's got nothing to do with it. You might have done it 1500 times and still not do it right, or you might be doing it for the first time and it might come out great." Well, at this point, you've probably sung some of them 4500 times.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** How do you take one of your old songs and make it sound fresh? Or if you have a newer song, like the songs on *Way Of The World*... Talk about forming a point of view on the songs, and how you do it. Anything to say?

**Allison:** [LAUGHS] Well...I don't know... What are you asking...

**Amy Allison:** He was saying, like, when you take an old song and you do it, and you change it up to make it new, like when you've done it a million times...

**Allison:** I don't change those songs.

**Amy Allison:** Well, you do a little bit. They're always evolving, I think.

**Allison:** Ok.

**Amy Allison:** You'll change the tempo or the feel, some of the lyrics...

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**Audre Allison:** Yeah.

**Allison:** So what am I...

**Amy Allison:** What motivates you, or what are the factors...

**Panken:** Or forming a point of view on a song...

**Audre Allison:** For instance, "You Are My Sunshine." Look what a different take you did with that song.

**Amy Allison:** Well, he changed the melody.

**Audre Allison:** Well, he changed it more like a dirge instead of a happy song. You know?

**Allison:** yeah.

**Panken:** Well, we could say this perhaps. When you play the piano on those old songs, you're probably improvising something a little different anyway each time. You don't play the backgrounds necessarily the same way. So does the improvisational aspect of what you do pertain just to your piano playing and not your singing? Do you improvise when you're singing?

**Allison:** No. I don't improvise with my singing. I don't know whether the piano playing affects my singing or not. I don't know about that.

**Amy Allison:** Maybe when you were forming your style it was more kind of symbiotic, and now it's just kind of what it is.

**Panken:** You made a comment that you prefer to accompany yourself, that you prefer the sound of your own piano to, say, a big band or a string orchestra that someone might want you to play with, because of the interplay between what you're playing and the response of the vocal, that split-second thing. You stated that you preferred...when you sing, you're using what you're playing kind of as a springboard for what you're doing.

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Amy Allison:** I think whenever you're a musician accompanying yourself, you do it the way that you feel it. It's never going to be exactly the way you imagine with somebody else doing it.

**Panken:** Let me ask you this. There's a comment on another recording, *Ever Since The World Ended*, for Blue Note, where you talked about what you want from drummers, and that you have a certain rhythmic feel that is pretty distinctive.

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**Allison:** Well, I don't... Two-beat. I don't lapse into two-beat. You get that by a lot of ways. Sock cymbal... Drummers, jazz drummers play the sock on two, and I don't like that. So I try to get them to more of a 4/4.

**Panken:** Is there anything that you want your bassists to do in particular? Any idiosyncracies...

**Allison:** No. I just like bassists to play the charts.

**Panken:** Do you write out all the bass parts?

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** How about the drummers? Are you very explicit with them?

**Allison:** No. I don't write out the drum parts. But I just tell the guy, "Don't play sock..."

**Amy Allison:** Backbeat.

**Allison:** Don't play two-beat.

**Panken:** In your own accompaniment, are you thinking of the piano in an orchestral sense, like you're creating different parts, as though what you're playing on piano is the equivalent of a horn chart, or just lines...

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Panken:** Well, you've written a number of arrangements, and you've said it was a natural thing for you.

**Allison:** Well, I have a way of playing piano, and that doesn't have anything to do with arranging.

**Audre Allison:** But when you talk about improvisation, what happens on the piano... I've heard you describe what happens as you're playing.

**Amy Allison:** I think it's kind of orchestral. It's very dynamic. Your chords are beautiful. He has really unique chording and rhythmic things. I don't know. It seems like there's a lot going on, a lot of different colors...

**Panken:** Looking at some of the performance videos on youtube, you get into some really abstract, wild stuff on the piano.

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**Allison:** Oh, yeah. Well, I used to do that.

**Panken:** I was just referring to videos on youtube, things from the '70s and '80s.

**Allison:** Oh, I used to take it out more.

**Panken:** Always swinging, though.

**Allison:** Yeah. Always swinging.

**Audre Allison:** That was the most important thing. But you used to talk about what happened when you're improvising. What people...

**Allison:** I don't know.

**Panken:** You left Atlantic Records in 1980. There was a certain acrimony at the end. You wanted to be paid an advance commensurate with some of their other artists, and they didn't want to give you that advance, and you felt you weren't being promoted enough by then, and they felt you weren't compromising enough to do things that were commercial, and so on. They gave you the option that you should either accept your usual advance or be released from the contract, and you did. Then you signed with the Elektra-Musician label, which Bruce Lundvall had just taken over.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Panken:** Do you remember anything about Bruce Lundvall approaching you, or...

**Allison:** No. I liked Bruce Lundvall, and... He was a fan of mine way before...when I made "Baby, Please Don't Go" on Columbia. He became a fan with that, and he'd listened to that several times.

**Amy Allison:** How did you meet up with him? Did he approach you, Dad?

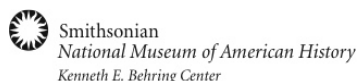
**Allison:** No. I don't know how I met him. I used... The guy we knew in Boulder, Colorado... Well, it wasn't Boulder.

**Audre Allison:** Denver?

**Allison:** No.

**Audre Allison:** Colorado Springs. Well, I don't remember how it started. I just remember that you've always really liked Bruce Lundvall, and he didn't ever tell you what to do.

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**Panken:** Seems very important to keeping a good relationship with you.

**Audre Allison:** Yes.

**Amy Allison:** ....(?—16:08).... you'd just call him up? Yeah, he was calling and saying, 'I want to make it when you're ready...'

**Panken:** You did "Middle Class White Boy," which became a very popular number for you, I think. Then, when that label ended, you did a number of recordings for Blue Note subsequently, one of them with a bunch of New Orleans musicians, like John Vidacovich and Tony Dagradi, up until 1997, with *Gimcracks and Geegaws*. Anything to say about that period?

**Allison:** Well, I played with John Vidacovich all the time, and Jim Singleton, I think....no, Bill Huntington was on the bass. I played with both of those guys for years. I got the guys that they worked with on the Blues Alley... No, it was...

**Amy Allison:** You mean, where you played there...

**Audre Allison:** In New Orleans?

**Amy Allison:** Snug Harbor?

**Panken:** But you played with those guys for so long, it sounds like they were giving you a feel you were looking for, a Gulf Coast thing...

**Allison:** Well, I didn't think about that. I just knew them both, and I knew what they could do.

**Amy Allison:** I think it sounded like you had fun with them all the time. Every time you played with different sections...they were distinctive, and it seemed like... I just remember, it seemed like you had fun playing with Vidacovich and Singleton.

**Audre Allison:** It had the New Orleans feel to it.

**Amy Allison:** Yeah. It was always high energy. It seemed like they were that kind of band.

**Panken:** And you kept writing songs through the '80s and '90s.

**Allison:** No. I don't write songs any more.

**Amy Allison:** But in the '80s and '90s.

**Allison:** Oh yeah. Well, I might have written songs.

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**Audre Allison:** Yeah, you wrote songs in the '80s.

**Panken:** What are your favorites, Amy?

**Amy Allison:** Of that period?

**Panken:** Of that period. The '80s and '90s.

**Amy Allison:** Gosh, I like all of them. Let me look at the list...

**Panken:** Well, "Was" is one you and your dad recorded together...

**Amy Allison:** Yes, I recorded that. That's a beautiful song. Then there's a lot... Like, "Numbers On Paper" is a beautiful one. I'd have to look to see.

**Audre Allison:** Georgie Fame did "Was." He said the first time he heard it, it made him cry. Susan and Ralph... Mose's cousin Susan married Ralph, who was his really best friend...

**Amy Allison:** "Ever Since I Stole The Blues" is funny. "Ever Since the World Ended"...

**Audre Allison:** ...(?—19:47).... Ralph (?).

**Panken:** Oh, it was about Ralph?

**Audre Allison:** Well, it wasn't about Ralph. It's just that it was a line, "Susan and Ralph looking at old photographs..."

**Amy Allison:** There are a lot of great songs that are not so well known. "Fires of Spring." "Perfect Moment." There are all these, like, "What Do You Do After You Ruin Your Life?" But I'm trying to think from the '80s... Like, "The Earth Wants You." That was another one from my period.

**Audre Allison:** Mmm-hmm.

**Amy Allison:** You know "The Earth Wants You," Dad. What was on that record? Oh, I might have it on my phone. I just realized.

**Panken:** Here's the lyric in the book. It's so beautiful. "When I become was / And we become Were / Will there be any sign or a trace / Of the lovely contour of your face / And will there be someone around / With essentially my kind of sound." Wow.

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**Audre Allison:** It's a really pretty song. It's on that doc... That's what they ended that NPR thing with.

**Panken:** Beautiful song. You recorded as recently as two years ago.

**Allison:** Well, I did an album for Joe Henry. He told me in Germany that he wanted to record me, and I played on a show with his band. We played it in Germany...

**Amy Allison:** He kept asking you to...

**Audre Allison:** You kept saying no. Mose would say "no," he had a lot of CDs out there, and they weren't selling... You said bad things about that.

**Amy Allison:** He just didn't want to do it.

**Panken:** You just felt it would be another CD that people would ignore or something like that?

**Allison:** Yes.

**Audre Allison:** But Joe kept writing...

**Amy Allison:** He kept writing to you. He was wooing my mother.

**Panken:** That seems to be a good strategy.

**Audre Allison:** Yes. [LAUGHS] And I...

**Allison:** Yes.

**Audre Allison:** But Joe is a good email writer...

**Panken:** I'm sure he is.

**Audre Allison:** It was kind of fun corresponding with him. Also, I just thought... Joe is a good producer, and it would be a different approach.

**Allison:** Yeah, I heard he was a good producer.

**Audre Allison:** He was going to let Joe set up everything. It was going to be the first time he let anyone produce, really.

**Amy Allison:** He was always saying he was just setting up the sound...

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**Audre Allison:** So you just flew out there, and you did it in the studio in his house.

**Allison:** Yes.

**Panken:** Are the pieces on that record things you'd written over the ten years before you made it?

**Allison:** Most of the songs were written before.

**Audre Allison:** Earlier. You didn't write any for that except "My Brain."

**Allison:** Yes.

**Amy Allison:** You did write "The Way Of The World," right?

**Allison:** I wrote another one... "How Does It Feel"?

**Amy Allison:** No. It was... Oh my God, why can't I think of it? "I Know You Didn't Mean It."

**Audre Allison:** Oh, yeah. That one that I... That's because that was not one of my favorites. "I Know You Didn't Mean It."

**Allison:** Yeah. "I Know You Didn't Mean It."

**Panken:** You 86'ed that one, I guess.

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** [LAUGHS] I wasn't crazy about... He wasn't really enthusiastic about doing that.

**Allison:** I didn't know any of the musicians except David Pitch...

**Amy Allison:** The bass player.

**Allison:** ...who was right next to me in the studio. He was in the next booth, and I was by myself at the piano. The other musicians were coming from the other room, and I didn't know any of them.

**Amy Allison:** So it was in the way...

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**Audre Allison:** How many times have you listened to that? Once? I don't know...

**Allison:** Well, yeah. A couple of times.

**Panken:** Here's a quote in the biography where you're speaking explicitly about your endeavor to strengthen your left hand. You were talking about this in the mid '60s. You said, "I got bored with the right-hand, single-note bop style where the right hand does all the work and the left hand just plays chords, and I felt like that style had gone about as far as it could go, and I needed to get something else happening. I started listening to piano sonatas to see how the two hands were integrated and to see what was possible for improvising. I just listened, got the basic idea..." Then you said, "I found techniques I could use. For instance, if I heard a single-note run in the left hand against three chords in the right, that would register. I'd realize that was something I could do when I'm improvising. When I started thinking in those terms, it opened me up a lot. The two Ives piano sonatas contain precedents for everything that has happened since in American music. Ives does something with 'Bringing in The Sheaves' in the First Sonata that sounds exactly like Thelonious Monk."

A couple of years later, you said: "I'm trying to learn how to play with more facility in the left hand, so I practice left-handed things. You have to think two-handed, though I don't know anybody who can think two separate lines at once. One has got to dominate."

I'm saying this, because I think it's getting close to time to wind up. I think that comment is illustrative of all the different cultural threads that enter what you do. I mean that in this regard. There's the folkloric music of your youth and the popular music of your youth, and there's very abstract jewels of our civilization...both are jewels, but the more abstract end of it as well. And both seem always to have come together in wonderful ways for all of us.

**Audre Allison:** I think you're right.

**Allison:** Well, I hope so.

**Audre Allison:** I think that's well said. He might have said that himself.

**Panken:** I don't have a good enough memory to have copped! But one other thing. Audre was saying earlier that when she was working, you used to make dinner and clean up every night.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah!

**Panken:** So apart from doing all those things artistically, it seems that your humanity is part of the equation as well.

**Allison:** Well, I used to cook when she was teaching school. I cooked every day and I cleaned

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up.

**Audre Allison:** I used to think, “that’s what it is to have a wife; it’s wonderful—to come home and smell dinner cooking.” It was really nice.

**Panken:** She said you made a mean cornbread.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah. I used to...

**Audre Allison:** You’d cook that up in no-time.

**Amy Allison:** For a while, he was doing that with every meal. It was good.

**Allison:** Instead of rising cornmeal, it...

**Audre Allison:** Buttermilk?

**Amy Allison:** Buttermilk, yeah.

**Allison:** It’s the main ingredient. That’s the main thing.

**Audre Allison:** It’s really delicious. Real crisp on the outside and...

**Panken:** She also said that you cooked a very healthy cuisine.

**Audre Allison:** Remember, we were trying to think of the original woman who wrote the books about healthy...

**Amy Allison:** Adele...

**Panken:** Adele Davis maybe.

**Audre Allison:** Adele Davis! Remember, you read her first book.

**Amy Allison:** I remember your making brown rice with vegetables and...

**Audre Allison:** Getting amino acids without meat, to have cheese and beans... Anyway, he had that cookbook, and then he had something about a natural... You had about three cookbooks that were all...

**Amy Allison:** *Diet For A Small Planet.*

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**Audre Allison:** Yeah. It's really good. One other thing that he really did well was paint. He did a lot of watercolors.

**Amy Allison:** Oh, we have some really nice watercolors in Mississippi.

**Audre Allison:** When we were first married and we had Alyssa, we were in Jackson, I didn't have anything to do, and I thought, "Well, I'm a pretty good painter," and so I got watercolors and paper and all that, and then one day when I wasn't there, he went out and painted all over Jackson, and I was dumbfounded.

**Amy Allison:** They're really good. Didn't you do sort of cartoon stuff when you were young?

**Allison:** No, I didn't...

**Amy Allison:** Well, that's what they told me. That's what Max...

**Audre Allison:** Yes. He's lying. When your mother played cards...

**Amy Allison:** You used to draw and do caricatures and stuff.

**Audre Allison:** You'd do caricatures of the people at the card table.

**Amy Allison:** He's a good artist, too.

**Audre Allison:** Anyway, he was a really good painter. He painted the Pearl(?) River(?) (30:52).

**Allison:** I used to draw them.

**Amy Allison:** Oh, you did?

**Allison:** Yeah.

**Audre Allison:** As the characters, yes. But that was the first time you ever tried watercolor.

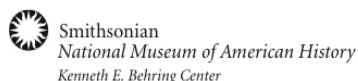
**Allison:** No. It wasn't watercolor.

**Audre Allison:** Yes. My watercolors I'm talking about.

**Amy Allison:** He's talking about when he was young. You're talking about later.

**Audre Allison:** I'm talking about when you took my...

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**Allison:** Later.

**Audre Allison:** Then all his friends said, “Wow” and I thought, “nobody says anything about mine,” so I quit.

**Panken:** I have one final question, which is your response to being designated an NEA Jazz Master. Any feelings you have about the award. Anything to say about it?

**Allison:** No, not really. I appreciate being a Jazz Master, and I know Lou Donaldson, and I’ve known him for a long time, and I know Max Gordon’s wife... I never met Eddie Palmieri...

**Audre Allison:** But you really like him.

**Allison:** We went to see him one time...

**Audre Allison:** In Westhampton, not too long ago.

**Allison:** Yeah. We went to see him there.

**Amy Allison:** I remember when we were talking about doing the Joe Henry record, you said, “there’s only one album I’ll make, and it’s going to be a Latin album, and I’m going to call it *Mosé*.”

**Allison:** Yeah. [LAUGHS]

**Audre Allison:** Yeah, that’s right.

**Amy Allison:** And that never happened.

**Audre Allison:** You said, “If I ever make another one, it will be Latin.”

**Panken:** Well, there are a number of New Orleans components in your style, that relate to clave and triplet feels and so forth.

**Allison:** Oh, yeah. It would have been simple for me to do a Latin album. I already played Latin beat sometimes...

**Audre Allison:** Yeah, with some of your songs, you do.

**Panken:** Well, thank you very much, Mr. Allison, and Audre Allison, and Amy Allison.

**Allison:** Thank you. Well, I haven’t been very...

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[END OF DAY 2, PART 3]

[END OF MOSE ALLISON INTERVIEW]

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