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RON CARTER
NEA Jazz Master (1998)

Interviewee:	**Ron Carter (May 4, 1936 -)**
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Levy: It's May 16th, we're sitting in the home of Ron Carter, Jazz Master, to get the oral history for the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Project. Ron, this is your story so please feel free to take it in any direction that you want as I go.

Carter: I'll follow the questions.

Levy: Okay. Well, we might as well start at the beginning. I know that you were born on May 4th of 1937 near Detroit. Tell us … you came from a large family …

Carter: I'm from a family of six girls and two boys. I'm in the middle, I guess. Several of them have passed away in the intervening years. I have a sister who plays piano and flute. I have a sister who played viola, one who played violin, who passed away. I'm the only one who decided to try to make a living at this foolishness. Family of ten.

Levy: That's a big family. Was it a struggle in those times financially? Was it comfortable?

Carter: I think when you're that age – ten, twelve – you don't know those issues. I can assure you that my father, who had to work around the clock in those jobs given the racial tenor of the times, managed always to make sure we had plenty to eat, healthy foods. We didn't want for anything that I knew we needed 'cause it seemed to be all provided. So we were okay.

Levy: And how did music play in the home in your childhood?

Carter: Well again, everyone seemed to have a talent to play something. I'm the only one who decided to try to make a living at this foolishness. My father made a ukulele out of a cigar box and a stick of wood and some rubber bands and tried to do that. In general I was the only one who spent the time to try to develop, as it turns out, this talent.

Levy: I read that you spent as much as eight hours a day practicing in your childhood.

Carter: Well, you know, my father instilled a good work ethic in this. While he didn't have to insist that I practiced those kind of hours, it just seemed to me, the only way you get better is by putting in the time. When you have all those siblings; the chores were split up evenly and it was a pretty good time. There wasn't, of course, the distractions that we call them today available. There was very limited television. There weren't the conveniences that you have: the iPod and all those modern devices. No computers. So it was actually easier to focus because there weren't too many things to make focus not possible.

Levy: Friends? Sports? Movies?

Carter: They were all available to us. I was a pretty good baseball player. When I went to college, I played one year freshman basketball. But those things really were an interest, but they certainly couldn't get in the way of time to play good enough to be competitive. Right now, they're just my interest. I don't have the time, you know, and the physical wherewithal to go out there and pound the ball with those guys on the playground, you know. Couple of years ago, I joined the [Musician's Union Local] 802 softball teams. I've been doing that.

Levy: Did you?

Carter: Yeah, but I've been so busy touring the last couple of years, I just haven't had, again, that kind of time to … time for those guys to have great outdoor fun.

Levy: As a kid … how early on did you think you knew that this was something really serious for you? The desire to be that good as a child, did you …

Carter: Well, I think you aren't interested necessarily in how good you're going to be. That doesn't seem to be a focus until you get into the teens when you have a really competitive environment. You play in the school orchestra, you see seven, eight other cello players, you know, you see other kids over here, you know, and clearly if you are instilled with this discipline to do your best at whatever it is, you don't think about anything but what it takes for you to get that. I had good teachers along the way who … they were encouraging of my ability and made sure they assigned the kind of music exercises and etudes that would increase my skill level. And my job, if you call it that, was to take advantage of this learning opportunity. I had a paper route so I went out and peddled papers in the morning and with that money, I bought my own instrument and paid for most of my own lessons – with parental support, of course. But I think

you don't think about being good in terms of being good, you just want to do the best you can, whatever that means. You never know that level until you get into a competitive environment.

Levy: When did it get competitive for you?

Carter: When I got to high school. That'd be like sixteen or so. There's a place called Interlochen Music Camp upstate Michigan, and I was one … probably the first African American to be a part of that group at the age of fifteen. It was representing my school, not me or the music. And that was okay. We were coming from a small community, a small African American community, an all African American school, so I was representing the school and the African American community rather than my family or the music or the instrument. So you get to that kind of physical environment where you see what's going on around you, and you know what level is possible to either reach their level, if you think you're not there, or get better than them to practice long hours is part of the process.

Levy: It sounds like your observational skills and your ability to assess situations and people were pretty finely honed even in your youth.

Carter: That's something that's kind of … someone gives you a coat and what this coat does is give you those kinds of odds and ends and the kind of reviewing perspective, you know. But again, I think the idea that those young ears is … how well can you play this instrument, not necessarily can you play better than this person or can you play better than that group or can you fit into those groups. That's really not a focus. I think you don't really get that kind of fine tuning until you get seventeen or so. When I went to Cass Tech [Cass Technical High School], the orchestra was fabulous, like junior college on the high school level. Again, all the players were great, they all went on to do major things in the music world. While that wasn't necessarily my goal to be competitive enough to fit in that spectrum of musicians and music, I thought I could play as good as them, but to do that, it takes some extra work. Okay, let's get this done.

Levy: About … I think you were fourteen and this is in your biography, you went to see the French cellist with the Detroit Symphony.

Carter: Georges Miquelle. Fabulous musician. I said, "Okay, if he can do that, I can do that."

Levy: So that was the impact on you?

Carter: Yeah, great sound, the orchestra sounded fabulous and this huge building that I'd never been in this size before, with all these people around. Just the whole musical air was really crisp. They were … there was no fooling around. They were really intent on doing this particular solo piece. I think it was Dvorak's "Cello Concerto." I said, "I can do that. That's … whatever it takes, you know."

Levy: So, you had a lot of confidence right from the get-go.

Carter: Well … (sighs) I'm not sure confidence is necessarily the word. More like I could be equal to that task, and if I could get the sounds that I thought I heard in my ear at that young age, I could be … be … I be comfortably competitive in that market.

Levy: Talk about sound for a minute because I was fascinated by your first cello … that it was aluminum?

Carter: Yeah, but it had a great sound. As a matter of fact, they still make those things. According to one of the events in the past two years, Yo-Yo Ma was playing outside, like in a White House event, with an aluminum cello equivalent to that. He's endorsing it the best. Fifty years late for me, because I was already there.

Levy: You said in the book, too, about this particular cello that it had an ability to have an aggressive sound and that that was great for you because it gave you a balance to your personality in some way.

Carter: When I said the sound is the kind of sound that I would not mind being responsible for. I tell my students today that once they settle on the sound – on the instrument that matches what they hear – then their primary job is to make sure when this instrument comes out of the case, that they find that same sound. I do that up to this moment. Back then, I know to get that kind of sound, it takes some effort. I know … I knew how weather affects strings. That's kind of the early science. And then the rosin and the kind of air [?] you have on your bow and the kind of strings you use. This is not so much musical talent, it's just the ability to be purist about what makes this thing work.

Levy: I want to jump for a minute because I was absolutely flabbergasted to learn that today you don't travel with your own bass.

Carter: Well, the airlines have kind of made that not possible … to the degree that it's taken over even that part of the airline budget. But for me, when I go to these gigs and concerts and going without my bass, then my job is to see how quickly I can make this bass sound like me. You have twenty minutes to do that or less. So every concert's a lesson: how's a bass set up, what kind of strings do they have, what kind of notes don't work, what kind of neck does it have, what kind of sound, what kind of pick-up do they have on it, does it go tall enough for me, is it too short for me. I take all these gigs and I say … uh … I'll wait to learn more about the instrument. But the fact of the matter is, even when I was taking my own bass, and if bass players are really honest with themselves, when they took their own bass on these gigs in Europe, they would never always feel that they got the best sound. Either the concert gear was outdated, the microphones were not the best ones for the bass, play on these big opera stages, and they go high and deep and you can't get your sound because it's going around in the air so much, a trio becomes a quartet with the sound man manipulating the sound … So again, I think the fact of the matter is they aren't losing a whole lot when they play these strange basses. They're losing something, there's

no question. But I think that if you're whining, you're gonna play equally terrible. So my job, again, is to make this bass sound and feel like mine within twenty minutes. I like that challenge.

Levy: Your early years – to go back to where we were in your school days – this was classical training and this was classical music you were playing.

Carter: Yeah. Yes.

Levy: When did you start listening or even being exposed to jazz and what did it do for your ears?

Carter: Well, when I was in high school, I realized that the opportunities to play at small conferences and small PTA meetings, they would always hire the local high school band, orchestra, or chamber group to be kind the music in the background for these conferences. And I thought that I wasn't getting the calls that my talent was worth. I thought I played as good as those guys who got the calls. At the time – 1950 … '53, '54 – there was really a lot of starting to … undercurrent of racial unrest was really all over the place. When you tune into that stuff, you get really sensitive to things that you think along that racist kind of line. And while maybe no one who hired these orchestras and bands were acutely aware of that, I just thought that when you got this great high school string orchestra that you gotta have somebody African American in the band or orchestra, or what's the point of doing that? So I noticed the bass player was graduating in January of 1955 and he was the only bass player in the orchestra. So I said, "Well, the solution is pretty simple: If I'm the only bass player in the band or orchestra, and I had the orchestra to do these conference background music, then you gotta hire me." So that was my solution. The cellist at the Detroit Symphony Orchestra was Georges Miquelle was also on the staff of the Eastman School of Music. After I switched to bass during my senior year in high school, I got a teacher. He thought that if I could keep my focus and keep the discipline I had developed on cello to the bass, perhaps I could get a scholarship going somewhere in the music school. So I was made aware of the auditions through the school that Eastman was having at these local high schools in Detroit. So I … my teacher introduced me to Georges Miquelle and he said to come audition this day, what time it is, you know. So I got the information and prepared a little piece on bass, and he thought that I had enough talent to recommend me to a full scholarship to the Eastman School of Music. My first summer back from Eastman, my neighbor – who's a saxophone player – was a Paul Desmond fan. At the time there were a lot of fraternities in Detroit and boat rides that hired quartets and trios for boat music, you know. He said, "Well, why don't you come make this gig?" I said, "I don't know the library, I don't know the tunes." He said, "Well, here's a list of tunes we're gonna play; here are the lead sheets; you have two days to learn this stuff." I said, "Okay, I can do that." So, between my daytime job in Detroit during the summer – this summer was working at the Parks and Recreation at the Detroit Zoo. I was like a maintenance man, you know. It was okay. I figured the money earned from this job can make it easier the second year at Eastman because they only paid for a limited amount. They paid for room and board, maybe some books. But in college, you need clothes, you need books, you need instrument repair, you need transportation money, just stuff you need that the

scholarship didn't cover. Coming from a large family, there was not the family vault to dig into to cover those expenses. So again, being a scientist in mind, it seemed a reasonable swap would be … okay, if I could make these gigs, I can cover my own expenses myself and my folks won't have to be so concerned about how I'm getting through the semester. So I learned these eight or nine tunes. The piano player was into Bud Powell and the drummer was into Max Roach, the saxophone player was into Chet Baker and Paul Desmond, so I learned eight or nine tunes. So I can do this … I'm picking my own notes. So I did that for the summer and returned to Eastman the following Fall, and decided this was a possibility too. Kind of started there.

Levy: Let me just backfill to two or three little facts for the record. Before you went to Eastman, you were playing … soprano and alto? Were you playing clarinet? You played many instruments.

Carter: I played saxophone in the marching band and E-flat clarinet in the concert band.

Levy: Wow. Okay. And you were a cellist.

Carter: Yeah.

Levy: And then we get to the bass.

Carter: Yeah.

Levy: Okay. Let's talk just for a minute about Cass because there are some people who had preceded you there. Did you know some of the people who became your friends later?

Carter: Not at all. Not a chance. I knew … actually I knew Kirk Lightsey. He was in my graduating class. Because he was working a day job and an evening job during the course of the school year. We had the same home room. And he would never have his homework done. So I'd say, "Give it here, I'll do it." So whatever the homework was, I'd do his part. He's the only musician that I really had contact with that I met later on in New York.

Levy: Because everybody else was a few years older. Roland was like that one year too late … for …

Carter: Yeah. And Paul, and Kenny Burrell, Yusef Lateef, and Curtis …Curtis Fuller and Louis Hayes and … they'd all gone on to New York before I even got to visit the clubs in New York.

Levy: Okay. So '55, you're off to Eastman, you do your first year, you come back, you work summers …

Carter: Once I worked as a Parks and Recreation guy. My job was to get to the parks like 8:30 and take out all the gear: the softballs, the basketballs, put the volley ball nets up, put the

horseshoes out, and just kind of monitor, not just the use of the gear, but behavior of the guys around there. Detroit was still a rough town back in '56, '57, you know. I said, "All I'm going to do to earn these guys' respect is that I have to show them I can do something better than them." So that meant I had to learn how to play better horseshoes than those guys did. My father played good so …

Levy: Oh. Okay.

Carter: I had to play baseball better than those guys; and I did that pretty good. I played basketball. I had to play as good as those guys. So I was becoming a Rec … as in Recreation Leader. I was their man. So it wasn't a problem to get along with them socially because they understood that, although we were the same age, I had a little more than they did. It was okay. It wasn't that stabbing kind of environment; it was just kind of mouthin' off. "Can you do this, Man?" "Yeah, I can do this." "Show me." "Okay." "Now can you do that?" "No. Well, let's sit down and talk about this." So it was that kind of environment, you know. But it was a nice experience to be outside all day, man, from eight o'clock in the morning to six o'clock at night. Man, it was great.

Levy: Certainly different from what you ended up in.

Carter: Well … I'll take it. (laughs)

Levy: At Eastman you obviously were getting a little bit of a taste of the difficulties you might face in employment, but you still really thought maybe you would end up in a symphony seat, or …

Carter: Yeah, I thought that … one of the rules of the game is if you play good, you get the job. That seems to be the United States mantra, you know: If you do good, man, you get this job, you know. Okay, I buy into that. I bought into that. When they put together a group called the Eastman Philharmonia which was a group made of the top music students in the school, I was playing the first chair bass, much to some of my compatriots dismay.

Levy: I'm sure.

Carter: So that gave me definite proof that it's possible. Then when the orchestra had some students fill in for the orchestra because of whatever reasons … they wanted the students to do that, I was one of the bass players that was in the orchestra for my senior year in college. So it seemed to me that those options were still available. I didn't have a real rude awakening until I was told by a conductor, one of the guest conductors, he'd love to have me in his orchestra but he thought that the board of directors where he had the orchestra were not ready to accept an African American with some talent in the orchestra. I said, "Okay, that's what that is."

Levy: And that was a major maestro that told you that.

Carter: Yeah. He was honest and …

Levy: Stokowski?

Carter: Yeah. He was honest, he was blunt, you know. While it wasn't a new feeling to have .. to hear this, it was kind of a drag because you'd put all this time in in this industry, call it orchestra playing, and to hear that one of the items on the hiring peoples' list is what race you are, it just seems to be what a waste of effort and energy on their part. It seems to me that music sounds great when great players play them. Whatever color they are. But when you are eighteen, you don't think that philosophically; you just get pissed off. You say, "Okay, that's what that is; what choices do I have?" And at the same time this was going on, I had joined the house band at a place called the Ridgecrest Inn, a very famous night club. It was on the train line from Canada to New York, ___[Niagra?] Falls, Herkimer, Rochester, Syracuse. All the bands, at some point, stopped in those places to play a concert. So during my senior year in college, I went by the Eastman Theater which had the big shows. This particular show had Lambert, Hendricks & Ross and their band, Dave Brubeck, Miles Davis and Chico Hamilton. I met all those guys because I was … "Hey man, what you doing up here?" They knew the scene, you know. We had a lot of white musical environment, and here's this one black cat walking around the school like he belongs there, you know? And so Chico Hamilton, at the time, was in the process of looking for a cello player because the one he had was gonna leave when they got to New York, which was some time in the Fall. So I said, "I can play that book, man, give me that book." So I played the book and he said, "Okay, when you come to New York, call me and if the guy has not left … if he's left, then if you're still interested, join the band." I said, "Okay." During the course of the evening conversation after the concert, Miles and Red Garland and Paul had no way to get to the train station from the concert. I had a 1950 Ford, and so I piled them in my car and took them to the train station.

[Phone rings]

How can we do this?

Kimery: You want to get the phone? We can stop.

Carter: You can stop for a moment? Yeah.

Levy: You were just beginning to tell us a little bit about the jazz scene in Rochester …

Carter: Yeah, I was in the house band of Joe Close, piano player who ultimately went to join Ernestine Anderson out in Seattle and Don Manning, the drummer. What we would do, we were the intermission band between the jazz acts that came in, and sometimes they would come as a single. So I'd played with Sonny Stitt as a single, for example, Slim Gaillard as a single, so I had a chance to get involved in that environment, learn some songs and watch guys do what they do,

you know. I met Sam Jones, met Ike Isaacs who was playing with Carmen McRae at the time, Teddy Kotick with Horace Silver at the time. So I had a chance to kind of look at what they were doing as well as listen. They assured me in New York, a good bass player can always find work. So, sounds like a plan. So I graduated from the Eastman School of Music in June of 1959 and moved to New York August that same year. When I got to New York and went down to Birdland as Chico was working, the cello player decided to stay but the bass player, Bull Ruther, decided to go back to Seattle which was his home. So he's looking for a bass player. So they needed a bass player. I said, "I can do that book too." So I went to the dressing room and read parts of the book and he said, "Okay, we're leaving." And that was the beginning of it.

Levy: Wow. Now at this point you're married.

Carter: Absolutely. My wife moved to New York before I did and found a job as an airlines reservation person. American Airlines, I think.

Levy: Okay. So you're a young man, married, in New York, and about to hit the road.

Carter: Yeah.

Levy: One last thought about the classical, did you ever regret all the time you spent …

Carter: Absolutely not.

Levy: Why not?

Carter: Well, I learned a lot of things. I learned what intonation is, I learned the instrument probably quicker than I would have learned on my own. I learned a whole library of music that I might not have had a chance to discover on my own, I learned not just the importance of practice, but how to practice. I learned how to listen. I don't regret those experiences at all.

Levy: Okay. Did the job with Chico that you took first off … it was a tour, right?

Carter: Yeah.

Levy: Was it the Jazz for Moderns tour?

Carter: Yeah.

Levy: That was a long one. It was five guys on the bus for a long time. What … tell us about a young guy on his first tour.

Carter: I didn't know those guys so I was kinda by myself. But it was okay. I'd had … I didn't socialize much with anybody other than the band to find out what the library was like and how

the arrangements …I was more into the group. Eric Dolphy played saxophone and flute, Dennis Budimir, guitar player, Nathan Gershman, cello player and Chico and me. I wanted to learn how the library was working, how the songs were put together, what's the form of this tune. So my chance to be a part of the bigger picture … it was limited to being a part of this quintet. Those guys couldn't tell me how to play the bass book. And they didn't know Chico's music, so they couldn't really help me along those lines. I knew how to socialize; I didn't need those kind of lessons. How does this band work? How's this music work? What's the dynamic range of the bass? What kind of dynamics does the band have? Are there difficult keys? Is it the right key? Is it the wrong key? Is this too fast, is this too slow? I used that time to find out on the bus. There was no time to rehearse because we were in and out of the bus all the time. So it was okay. I have no … I don't have any regrets about not being one of the guys in the bus. I was just a guy, just a country boy.

Levy: What was it like for a country boy to tour on a bus in those years, in those places?

Carter: Well, it was eye-opening. One of the stops we made was in Washington, D.C. and we pulled up at Howard Johnsons and everyone got prepared to leave the bus and the bus driver went in first and came back and told us that they weren't serving Negroes in the front of the hotel, that we had to go around to the back. So that was my … my first large confrontation with that issue. The others were always one-one-one or rumor or innuendo, feeling that there's something wrong here. But that was my first in-your-face situation with that issue. Everybody grumbled and they did what they did and we ate our sandwiches and got out of town. That's what it is.

Levy: Among the lessons you were gathering was what I need to do for me, Ron, to make this work for me?

Carter: Well … probably on a less personal level but that's part of the issue … always survival, you know. Today … same … some kind of survival mechanisms in place and you figure out how to deal with it and get on with your life.

Levy: Where else did you go? Do you remember any of the hotspots on that tour?

Carter: No, man, I know I was glad to get off. (laughs)

Levy: It was five months of mostly one-nighters?

Carter: Probably one month of one-nighters and a week in California at the club in L.A., my first trip to L.A. … those kinds of … it wasn't always kind of the chitlin' circuit one night routine. There was a nice club in L.A. and we worked in San Francisco for a minute, you know. So it was not the one-nighters that we envision those places at the time to find work. Chico had a nice circuit worked out for himself. He was a well-known guy, he was a famous musician, everybody liked him, and he would find a way to, with an agent … Jack Whittemore, I think, to

be able to find the gigs that were not always one-nighters. You could sit down for many … and rest, so to speak, and get the band to another level.

Levy: Looking back – or maybe at the time you were conscious of it, I don't know – but did you … do you think you were influenced in any particular way by that experience – watching Chico as a leader, as a musician … you're young. What's soaking in, besides just how can you make the sound the way you want it?

Carter: Well, I think I'm a pretty observant person and I've worked with enough as a sideman with band leaders to kind of figure out what they do that makes their band work. I wasn't concerned with the business side. That wasn't any of my concern, or picking a library … that was not my concern. Just how do they manipulate the music and the musicians to get the maximum out of them. That's always been interesting to me. And I worked with enough bands as a sideman to be able to catalogue these things. I feel like I can use that device or that attitude or that posture or that mindset to get the band to where I think they belong musically. I just turn to that page.

Levy: So you have your own library.

Carter: Absolutely. Yeah.

Levy: Talk to me a little bit about band identity because in those days you were with a group for a lengthy period of time, the sound grew, there was a group sound. It wasn't just … only to play this one night with this one group, and that's that. There was a growth of groupness, I guess, if you want to call it that.

Carter: My kind of approach to a successful sideman is that when you leave that gig, the band leader has to feel that the band won't sound the same without you. Whatever that takes … within musical constraints. That whatever the job is, you need the guys to feel that you belong in this band … whatever band it is. When I make records as a … ringer, they call it, a guy who's not part of the band but he's in there, I have to make that guy feel that I'm bringing something to his band that nobody else can bring. And that I belong in that band. That's my job. I felt that all along that I gotta make this guy feel that I play good enough because whatever it is I bring to the band he feels is necessary to complete his sound.

Levy: When you have the … I'm going to use the word luxury; I don't know if it's the way it felt then or if it would now … but the luxury of working night after night with the same guys, you get to both give and get something from each other that evolves over time …

Carter: Um Hmm

Levy: … so is that long-term association something that you like? Is it something that maybe we should wish was still more possible than it seems to be in the current …

Carter: Well, I think it's necessary. I think the longer a band stays together, they develop a lot of things. They develop a library. They develop an approach to the library. They decide who really belongs in the band and who doesn't over a period of time. They decide what places they sound better in. They decide which is the best way to order; they put the music in the same performance order. They get to know club owners and what those demands are. They get to know rooms, what those room demands are – in addition to individually raising their personal skill level. I think one of the things that's unfortunate today is that there are not those kind of long-term bands that can allow a band to become a group. And I think that for a bass player, that's really critical because he can understand … has a chance to understand how groups develop their harmonic base or their rhythmic interests or their compositional skills, as well as their personal relationships internally. And because those kind of bands are not available right now, I think the younger guys are missing that … that physical and musical connect with the music and musicians. Develop endurance. I worked in New York eight weeks in a row with different bands for two weeks at a time and during that time I developed a good physical contact with the instrument, I developed some physical endurance, I developed some mental endurance, I was able to see a band leader work his band and the club for two weeks to see how he handles the situations – if the crowd is too loud or the bartender's making drinks during a ballad. I mean, you see how these guys … someone talking real loud all the time. You get a chance to see how the various band leaders handle the situations. And of course when this is happening, you decide, "Well, that's not how I would do that. Or maybe if he'd done that it'd been better, you know?" I've been on the bandstand when the leader stopped the band and made a speech about the behavior patterns. That's one way to solve that issue. I'm not sure at that time I would have used that approach, but it worked for him. And it became part of their persona on the bandstand. People began to kind of expect this kind of verbal explosion. But that's not my … my … my style. When you work this kind of gig, you can see all these things take place. And you say, "Well, how would I do that? Would I have responded? Maybe if the band had played softer for about four choruses, would the audience have understood that something's goin' on here. It's just kind of … or maybe you hope that someone in the audience tells his neighbors just … just shush. So I learned all those things and I tried to put them in place and I think they're necessary in groups that I have.

Levy: So after the long tour with Chico, he stayed in California. You and Eric came back …

Carter: Eric and I … I had an apartment already here; Eric moved to New York.

Levy: And you came home to your wife; I'm sure she was missing you at that point. You worked with Randy Weston.

Carter: For almost a year.

Levy: Including …

Carter: Plus.

Levy: Plus. Okay. And then too there were some long gigs, specifically like … was it eight weeks at the Five Spot?

Carter: With Sonny Rollins and … just a trio: saxophone, bass and drums. Every night for six to eight weeks. It was great. Those gigs don't happen anymore. I think it's unfortunate that the bands, personally and physically, don't get the chance to work out all the things they can work on eight weeks if they have to work out in one … or three nights, you know. At the early stage of your career, I think you need that kind of on-the-job training to make it possible for you later on in your career to be able to do those three-night gigs and have everything already in place that you learned ten years ago working a gig that you had for six weeks.

Levy: This may seem like a silly question and maybe there isn't an answer to it really, but when you work with, let's say, Chico and then Sonny and then …

Carter: Randy.

Levy: … all in a short period of time, for a non-musician, is there some things that, wow, this is … something where you can identify the difference in your … in what that gave you in experience?

Carter: I think it's hard to put that in words, especially after so much time has gone by. But clearly they all brought something to my table and I sat down with my knife and fork ready to take care of it. (laughs)

Levy: Did you feel there were stylistic differences or … was this part of … there are people that would say, "Call on Carter; he can play anything in anyway that you need."

Carter: They're right.

Levy: Yes.

Carter: Yeah.

Levy: So working with all these different people, was that sort of an exciting way to … start finding all of those pieces, or did you just think you were doing your thing every night?

Carter: Well, exciting is probably not the best word. I think it was a different laboratory. I just left the West Indies and my room overlooked some trees, huge trees, and I look out and I see the trees – the leaves are moving but there is no wind. So I look carefully and there's a salamander or an iguana or something like that climbing up this tree. As the tree limb goes from green with leaves to brown with the bark, this animal changed his color so he's now pretty close to the color of the bark. And as he goes to the greener part of the tree, slowly his color changes – the bark of

the tree, brownish to a green that camouflages the leaves on this tree. And I think I'm pretty good at playing the bass like that … with whoever the tree is. That's my job.

Levy: Do you think that your amazing powers of observation and perception, even more than the observation, is that then you reflect on it. Do you think the musicians around you are exhibiting the same interest or behavior? I mean, you seem so unique in this way to me.

Carter: Well, I think on some level we all have those attributes. It's just takes a certain combination of players to make them all feel that. Case in point: with the Miles band in '63, we were all like that to a great degree, to a level. Once we all got in the same laboratory at the same time, all these attributes begin to take their own shape because of the environment they're all in. It's just a matter of then having someone call the tunes because the ingredients were already on the table.

Levy: Okay. There were a lot of people … from then on you have worked...is there anybody you have never worked with?

Carter: I'm looking … I have a list …

Levy: Really?

Carter: Yeah. In my head. I was interviewed at some point and the person asked this kind of question: If you were to list of who you want to play with if you haven't, who's on that list? I said, "Okay, on this list, the top of the list is Oscar Peterson." About three years later, I get this call from Canada and it's Oscar Peterson. He said, "I hear I'm on your list." I say, "Yes, Mr. Peterson, you're on my list." He said, "How 'bout getting off?" I say, "Well, it's up to you." So I went to Montreal and did a wonderful concert with him. Ahmad Jamal is on my list. I'm tracking him down as we speak. I wish I'd had a chance to play with Ella Fitzgerald; I hear she was a very enthusiastic, energetic singer. She brought so much musical enthusiasm to the table. I think that's the only one who I really feel I missed a chance to play with that I would have been going to a master's class just because of her, what she brings to the bandstand.

Levy: In these early years … I'm just going to throw out a whole bunch of names and if there's anybody there that you want to say a few words about …

Carter: Sure. Okay.

Levy: Bobby Timmons, Betty Carter …

Carter: Stop … one at a time. You're going too fast.

Levy: Okay, good.

Carter: I miss Bobby Timmons. He died too soon. My first trio gig on the road with him and Tootie. Bobby was a really multi-talented person and he was just a real sweetheart, a sweetheart of a man. He knew a lot of songs. He was not afraid to tell me … or say to me, "Question: What belongs in this tune right here?" Or, "What did you play last night that you want to play again?" I said, "Bobby, last night it didn't work; let's try something different." He said, "Well, you're the best player in the band. Let's see what happens." That kind of casual encouragement that I felt that, this musician felt that I had the wherewithal not only to play something interesting, but to pick an idea from the night before and bring it to the table the following night and see if I could put it somewhere else, or a different set of chords. Betty Carter, she was totally in control of the band, and that always appealed to me. Not that I would want to do that, but she was really in charge of all the band. I'm not sure it was always to the band members' advantage. She would do things that I felt that if I was a band leader, I wouldn't do just because that's not how I respond to those circumstances. But she had her way of getting her musical point across and she was very successful at that.

Levy: Kenny Burrell.

Carter: A very shy person.

Levy: More so than you?

Carter: Absolutely. He always looked around for musical help and that's really great for me because I have all these ideas, I just gotta find some where to put them. And he welcomed those kind of things.

Levy: Eddie Hayward.

Carter: The first time I ever had a guy tell me I played too loud … with no amp. There's a club called the Prelude at 126th Street and Broadway. It's now something else, of course, all these years later. The drummer was Earl Williams who is the son of Paul Huckabuck Williams. We had a great time. They said, "Can you play softer?" And I thought he was talking to somebody else because it was just me and drums playing brushes and I'm playing acoustic with no pickup, no microphone. He said, "You're playing a little too loud." I said, "Mr. Hayward, are you really saying that?" He said, "Yeah, step back." I said,"Okay." It was probably my first awareness of … the … bass in the trio that had been too … too prominent. I don't say loud; that's a terrible word. We're in this club, the Prelude, and the drummer's just barely touching the drums, you know, and Ben said, "You're playing too loud." I say, "Wow, really? Okay, if that's what it takes, let's just take it again." And we had a great two weeks.

Levy: Don Ellis.

Carter: Interesting time concepts. That's my first exposure with playing what Joe Puma called a hat-size time signature – 7 ¾. John had some interesting concerts rhythmically, and I enjoyed

trying to play them. I'm not sure I played them enough to really get a handle on them, but I played them enough that he understood I was on the right track. We played some nice music together. I like that.

Levy: Jaki Byard.

Carter: Playing with Jaki was like playing with piano history. He could go from style to style, from personality to personality, in a heartbeat. It was interesting to be on the bandstand and trying to get these stylistic changes before too many measures went by. He played good alto saxophone, too.

Levy: You didn't say much about Eric Dolphy earlier.

Carter: Well I did say his name in this context earlier. Eric and I never made a gig together. We made only records. I'm not sure I could have enjoyed a gig with him because of our different harmonic views. And I thought that the only way for me to make his gigs work was if I played the form … I played the changes of tune without too many harmonic alterations. And I thought that this contrast of someone playing with those changes – and Eric playing pretty far from them – made his stuff really work great. Even at that time, I didn't feel it was a good idea for me to get hampered by having to do the basic stuff so the top stuff would work better. It's kinda like a piano player who only plays the right hand and doesn't give you any help for the left-hand chord he thinks he's playing. Unless I'm playing the changes at the bottom of the chord, up here, it's not gonna work for him. I don't mind those challenges but I think I had that already. Let me find something else I really can get into, and develop what I think's gonna work for me and the band.

Levy: There are many other people, but at this point you basically, I think this around when you were enrolled in Manhattan.

Carter: Yeah.

Levy: Why did you feel the need to go back to school … or want to?

Carter: I applied for a scholarship and I didn't think I was gonna get it, so I was in New York, let's just try to go to school again. So, I got the scholarship and I was supposed to enroll in Manhattan September '59. Well, I had a gig to be on the road, so I talked them into letting me delay the scholarship until January of '60. So I did my thing with Chico Hamilton and came back to New York, and I set up shop in Lower Manhattan in January 1960. I just thought that the school's okay, and I'm in New York, and New York was going to be there whether I'm going to school or not. So I can go to school and learn some more harmony and some more keyboard, piano, and learn some more compositional skills. And they had a good orchestra … they had a very good orchestra. I can do that and work my gigs on the side, I said, I can handle that kind of plate.

Levy: So it wasn't I need a master's degree because I'm gonna be a teacher or anything like that?

Carter: No … that's probably way back here somewhere in everybody's mind about an alternative employment, but that wasn't my focus. I just thought that I can go to school free, man, let's just take this gig. And it was a good school. It *is* a good school. It was then too. Third Avenue and 103rd Street, something like that at the time. And the bass teacher was also Robert Bernand.

Levy: Who was that?

Carter: He was first bassist with the New York Philharmonic. Wonderful teacher. He's gone too. But I learned a lot about the bass from him. So the lessons … the school was a … worth it if I could take lessons from him, it's all worthwhile.

Levy: Yet you would have quit to work with Benny Golson.

Carter: I hadn't gotten that far in my head. I had gotten a call from Benny Golson because he was putting together the Jazztet. I went to his house on 87th Street, I think, in the basement, something like that, and played the book well, and he said, "You got … if you want, I got this gig", and explained what it was, its personality. I said, "Oh yeah." So he said, "What are you doing now?" I said, "Well, I'm in my last semester at Manhattan for my Master's, and he said, "Well, that's a great school and when you finish, we'll get together." We did thirty years later. (laughs)

Levy: If he'd said, "Let's go, would you have gone?"

Carter: I'd have to think about it.

Levy: Okay. I'm not clear on the chronology, but at some point you began to do some – you were recording all the time – but I think you also got into sort of TV and commercial recording.

Carter: That came during the course of my time with Miles. At the time New York was bustling with recording. There were like twelve jazz labels or so. People from Japan would come all the time, they'd work with the musicians and then be off, and then there was just stuff to do. As my name became highlighted, I'd been in the Miles band, all the commercial writers who are into that musical zone wanted to get the rhythm section or one of us on their commercial. So it was … the only thing I had to do was go out and do the job.

Levy: I was fascinated to read about your disagreement with Harold Mayburn.

Carter: Yeah. That's … that's …

Levy: Tell us about that?

Carter: I don't want to spend a lot of time on that, but really … I guess that was my first real … real … um … real … determining factor on how I felt, how valid my view was on music. Knowing the challenge, what I did up to this point, nobody said, "That's not gonna work." I mean, I played in Miles' band which was The band of the times, I played with Cannonball on a tour, I had a pretty good musical CV behind me, and this guy's telling me that my notes don't work, he's not gonna do it. I said, "What!?" "No, you're gonna do this: one – six – two." I said, "No, you're gonna do that, but I'm not gonna do that." And it really got heated, you know, and ridiculously so. At my age I can say that now. I mean, it really got out of hand, and the more insistent he was that his way was right, the more it seemed impossible for that to be true to me. I mean you're playing the music, man, everyone's choice is okay until you prove it wrong. Well, [unintelligible] not right, you know. He thought I was saying that to him because I had two degrees in music. I said, "Hell, that's not the issue, man. That may be part of my background but we're on this bandstand every night playing these fuckin' tags all night. We can't keep doing this. I can't keep doing this." And cooler heads prevailed and for a long time we didn't speak for whatever reasons – either I didn't seek him out or we were both busy. As we got older, we kind of got over that and I consider Harold one of my dear friends, and I will look for a chance to play with him whenever I could, whenever I can. I'm sure if we sat down now, we would find some humor in that situation. But again that was my first real … hmm … How-Dare-You-Say-My-Notes-Don't-Work situation. You know, I'm hearing these notes and this guy is saying he's not gonna do that. I said, "What do you mean, you're not gonna do that, man?" So I thought I was now being called on the carpet to stick up for what I believed. "Do you believe this chord's not gonna work? Well, hear this: It's not gonna work? Well, here it is anyway." So that was kind of my – not rude awakening – but let me know that I don't want to go through this kind of conversation with this guy. We've gotta play two more weeks together. I must really believe in what I'm doing to take it to that level. And that's what happened. Prove mine wrong, just don't tell me it's wrong.

Levy: The story floored me just because of your personality, that you were ready to fight.

Carter: Absolutely. Outside in a heartbeat. It got out of hand and other things became the issue that had nothing to do with the music, and it's just a matter of two guys determined that their musical form was ready and that wasn't … that wasn't gonna work. We were gonna go outside.

Levy: I know I went a little out of sequence, but this go back, I guess, a heartbeat and tell me a little bit about Cannonball and the tour in Europe.

Carter: Well, Cannonball had the band of him, Nat, Louis Hayes and I think Victor Feldman. And Sam Jones played cello, one tune a night. And on this tune a night – I was the bass player for this one tune a night. We had a 2 ½ week tour of Europe. And I can't think of the song right now. I'm embarrassed to say that. But we made a record of it that's available on disc and it was just a nice tune. At this time I was still at Manhattan, just like April of '61. I asked, told the Registrar I had a chance to go to Europe with this famous jazz band, ya-de-ya-de-ya-de, and he

said, "But you have an audition; you have a jury." And the jury is what determines whether you play good enough to graduate basically. So we agreed that when I came back, I would do the jury. So I went to Europe with Cannonball. And I came back and the Registrar tells me that they had a change in plans and my jury is now due five days from this day. I said, "Man, I don't know if can find a library for … How am I gonna do that?" I said, "Okay, if you'll play the piano part on whatever piece I find, we can do this." He said, "Okay." So I went to the school library and found a Mozart bassoon concerto transcribed for string bass. I said, "Okay, this is what we are going to play." So I practiced a couple, three hours a day and worked at night and school … and we got to the audition and I play my ass off. He said, "Wow, Mr. Carter." I said, "Yeah, man, I told you I could do this" He's since gone but he was a really nice man. So that's the story of Cannonball when I was working. Actually, Cannonball heard me play for the first time in Philadelphia. Chico was working at one club called the Showplace, Showboat, and Cannon was working at a place called Peps. At those times, since Philadelphia couldn't sell liquor on a Sunday, they were closed on Sunday. So the tour of this particular gig, gigs, you work at a place called the Cherry Hill Inn in New Jersey, a matinee and night, on Sunday. Come to Philadelphia, a matinee in Philadelphia on Monday and Monday night and then sets Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and on Saturday another matinee and Sunday night, a matinee that afternoon, then Sunday night. Well, all this playing had Sam Jones' hands really beaten up. That's a lot of playing. And Chico's working over at the Showboat. It wasn't a difficult gig physically. So after one of Cannonball sets, Nat came over and said that he “Sam's hands” and stuff like that and would I mind playing the last set. I said, "I'll do that." So after my last set with Chico, I went over and played Cannon's, Sam's last set with Cannon and one of his favorite tunes was *Poor Butterfly*. Fun with that tune, man, that's nice. Yeah, we can do this, man, some blues … do your book. That was my first time playing with Cannon. I guess there was enough of an impression that he thought he could take me to Europe as a one-tune-a-night guy.

Levy: Wow. What a gig!

Carter: Lovely.

Levy: Yeah. We're at a place where we need to change the tape, so let's just take five.

Carter: All right.

Levy: While we're on the Sam Jones subject, you subbed again for him with Monk.

Carter: Yes, he had the flu or something and I get a call – I can't remember who called me – they said that Sam is sick tonight and could I do this concert at the Circle in the Square which was right across from the Village Gate. It's a theater, a small theater. And I said, "Yeah." So I went over to the theater … to the theater actually and met Specks Wright who was playing drums, and Charlie Rause, and Thelonious Monk, and he said, "Do you know any of my songs?" I said, "Well, most of them." He said, "Well, let's see the ones you don't know." So that's how it

started. The next week we worked in Philadelphia which meant that the only way I could do that Philly gig was that I commuted every night. And the Baroness drove, so we … picked me up at my house by 7 o'clock and get to Philadelphia about 9 for a 9:30, three sets. And drive back to New York about 2 o'clock in the morning, and I'd get up at 8 o'clock for my 8 o'clock theory class in Manhattan. That went on for a whole week.

Levy: Wow. Did playing with Monk at that time … after your musical perspective or I mean, was that like Wow, this is different? Or it's just another gig and another …

Carter: Well, again, see, I was going to school free and everyone knew Monk. At that time Monk's still was very popular. Miles' version of *'Round Midnight* was pretty hot and his version of *Well, You Needn't* from Newport was pretty … everyone played tunes. Everyone was playing Monk's music at that time. While I may not have played them, I'd heard them enough to be kind of familiar with the form and what key they were in, you know? So I just thought that this is my chance to go to school free and let's just get this going. I found out much later that he was so happy with my playing that he wanted me to go on the road with him, but he knew I was going to school, so he never asked.

Levy: This has gotta be roughly the same time frame as Wes' *So Much*.

Carter: Uh huh.

Levy: You've used the phrase that this was a milestone moment for you, but I would like to understand why and how so.

Carter: Well then, you know, he'd made records with other bass players: Sam and probably Percy. I never played with Hank Jones. I hadn't met Hank Jones before and didn't know Ray Baretto. I think I met Lex Humphries somewhere. But they're all strangers. And I know Orrin Keepnews had his cadre of musicians he always hired. I understood that. They know Orrin, they've got a budget worked out with the personalities, they know … they just had such a … a fit for them. But for me to walk in to this slot that used to be taken up by other people was quite a … quite an eye-opener for me. I mean, he could have called Wilbur Ware, he could have called Sam, he could have called other guys. But he called me for this particular session. I walk into the studio and there's no music. Now that's not new to me, play with, learning tunes on the date, you know. But Wes' tunes were Wes' tunes and they were a little out of the ordinary in terms of what I was used to working on in the studio with people. Never having played with a flugel player was really an experience. I knew who he was. I had seen him play at Birdland at the Latin Jazz Nights. But I'd never played with one. I didn't know the sound of the drum, I didn't know what kind of beats he was gonna play. I didn't know any of these factors. But it was a chance to go to school free one more time. But it really turned out great.

Levy: You started to mention some of the older bass players that could have been called and I'm wondering, in your still relatively early years, did any of the older bass players take you under their wing, did anybody act as mentor in any way? I'm thinking of people like Milt or …

Carter: Not really. At that time I was here and there was so much going on in New York. There were recording dates, there were jingle dates, there were … studios had bands in the studios at that time. Jazz was all over the place, so I think there wasn't that kind of camaraderie time in terms of what you mean. I met Joe Benjamin and at the time, my feeling is that every ten years or so, Broadway gets a conscience and they realize that there are not enough black people in the band. This was one of those moments. And Joe was doing a show called … doing a show called *Scotch Labor* with Larry Cart.
Boy, I remember that far back. And he was with Duke Ellington at the time. So when Duke went out on concerts, he called me to sub in the show for him. Well, I'd never done the show before, but … Yeah, I can do that, whatever it is, you know. So I went down and got the book in advance and spent time learning the book. I was turning the pages, learning approximate tempo, you know, and all that stuff. And in two weeks I did that show. And it was great. Another way of finding out the bass can make music happen. George Duvivier at the time, had a club uptown called the Bass Fiddle on St. Nicholas and 146th Street. I first met George playing with Lena Horne and Chico Hamilton had a concert at the … somewhere in New York – a big theater. Really impressive. Really, he commanded the instrument and because he did, the bass commanded everybody's attention. He was wearing yellow-tinted sunglasses. We became really good friends. I would occasionally stop by his club on the way to working downtown and hear Ray(?). Really great juke box. In this juke box were every jazz tune on a 45. So I walk in one night, he said, "Come here, young fellow!" I said, "Okay Mr. Duvivier." He said, "I'm gonna play this record for you and you tell me about it." I said, "Okay." And turned to something I was on. He said, "How do you do that?" I said, "What, man?" He said, "How do you make that sound? How do you find those notes?" And I said, "I'm still learning, man; if I find out, you're the first guy to know." He patted me on the back and said, "Let's have a drink." I didn't drink at the time so I had a coke or something like that. A really nice man. Because there was so much working going on, there wasn't the kind of spare time as you'd mean to mentor someone. But I used to call them both my uncles and they would recommend me for dates I'm sure they couldn't do because there was so much work going on in New York, so much need for a bass player. There wasn't the time for that kind of relationship.

Levy: This is also the time when – speaking of Duvivier – I guess, you did an album as a leader. It was your first.

Carter: Called *Where**?*** with Eric Dolphy, Mal Waldron, Charlie Persip, and George Duvivier. Nice record.

Levy: You referred to that time, somewhere in the book – you called it a new era in music. Do you know what you meant by that?

Carter: No, I'd have to see the book to tell you the context of that.

Levy: Okay.

Carter: I'll read that book someday. I just haven't stopped to do that.

Levy: Oh?!!

Carter: It's on my reading list.

Levy: (laughs) It's a pretty good book.

Carter: Okay.

Levy: Well, aside from it being new era music, whatever that meant at the time, it was also an era of family life because I figure it was right around the time your first son was born.

Carter: Yeah, Ron Jr. April 18, 1962.

Levy: Did that change your musical life in any way?

Carter: No.

Levy: Did you have any particular challenges in balancing family and music?

Carter: Um … Janet probably did. I'd come home from work at night at 2 o'clock in the morning and I would stop by a restaurant and get something to eat and wake up the kids and say, Let's have something to eat. That's not a good idea at 3:30 AM, I guess. (laughs)

Levy: But established a relationship.

Carter: They were good.

Levy: Worked good for your kids.

Carter: Yeah, they loved it.

Levy: Okay. And of course Miles was born just three years later.

Carter: 1965, yeah.

Levy: You were working with Art Farmer.

Carter: Yep, my friend.

Levy: How did you come to be in Art's group?

Carter: I'd done a duo record with Jim Hall at the Playboy Club sometime before that, I think. Art was in town and put together a band to go into the Half-Note which was on Spring and Hudson in those days, 1963. Walter Perkins who I knew, from working these little gigs around town … down at the Birdland, jam session Monday nights, Five Spot, Monday night jam sessions. I would see these guys. I didn't know them but I would see them, you know. Actually, you know, that was a very closed circuit at that time – the jam session nights. If the band leader or whoever is … they had to know *you*. A stranger couldn't just walk up there and play. That was just kind of out of the question. And as I was kind of the new guy in town, newer, less new than some but newer than other guys, of course, and I was not interested in doing that. I wanted to hear what these guys do. I wasn't interested in jammin' – I wanted to find out … see how does this stuff work. Anyway, Art called me, said he had this gig at the Half Note for two weeks. I said, Wow, two weeks in New York, man. Three shows a night whatever it is. So we never had a rehearsal, I think, and Art knew a lot of tunes that I didn't know at all. I'd never played *The Days of Wine and Roses*, *I Won't Dance*, and I never played *Chloe*. I knew the songs … I never played them. I heard them on the radio but I never played those tunes. I didn't know the changes because I hadn't listened to them that carefully. It was kind of like *Chloe* – da da dot da dot da dadada da da. da da da da da da … you know, I could hear it, man. So Art's such a, such a melodic player. His solo literally replaced the melody and we all hoped to do that. We all hoped that our solos make the melody not so important anymore because my solo, that solo is good enough to replace that melody. Well, for me, Art always played like that. So I never got lost because I could hear the melody in his solo, despite him not playing the melody. It was a great time. Walter Perkins and of course Jim is my all-time favorite guitar player. He played the chords right and I can … I won't get lost; I'm okay.

Levy: Now it was during that period that Miles came by.

Carter: Yeah.

Levy: Tell me … was it absolutely typical of everybody then, or did you have a particular extra measure of integrity to tell Miles, "Well, you know, I'm working with Art. I mean, you gotta talk to him."

Carter: You know, I wasn't concerned about anyone else's view. This is how my father taught me to be respectful. And if I'm working with Person A, it just didn't seem … I hate to say morally correct, but that's all I can think of right now … to jump out of this boat and get into another boat because the guy's got a better engine. That just didn't seem, just didn't seem to apply to me, those kinds of standards. So I said … and then rumor was out in town that the band was breaking up and at the time Miles was having different horn players. He had J.J. for a minute, he had Hank Mobley for awhile, and he had Sonny Stitt for awhile. He was just kind of floating

around trying to get another band together. Everyone under… everyone – it wasn't printed out – everyone understood that there's some change coming. At some point during this fog, Wes, who was really hot at that time, and was putting together a quartet to do Wes Montgomery. He had asked Miles' rhythm section to join him in this group formation. Well, they all said yes. Ultimately, Jimmy stayed for Miles' last tour. As a matter of fact, I think I may have played one night for Paul at the Half Note when he was sick. In any event, he was looking for a band and he came by the Half Note during the course of the first week there and said he was putting out a band, that Jimmy was gonna finish out his six-week tour with him and he wanted to know if I was … if I would go on the tour with him. I said, "Mr. Davis, I got a job. I'm working for Art Farmer the next two weeks. Now if you want me in your band, *you* have to go ask Art Farmer if it's okay. And if Art says okay, I'm up for that. If he says no, I'm up for that too." He said … "Okay!" So in the course of the night, he and Art got together and they worked it out and I think two things happened as a result of the conversation. I think Miles could understand that I was a pretty stable person and that I had some values that I wasn't going to give up very easily. And Art felt that here's this bass player in my band who got a chance to join The band, and he's willing not to do that if I want him to stay in my band. And I meant that. I'm writing tunes man, I'm having a good time, there's no piano involved – I'm really having a great time. Whatever Miles can bring to my level of experience and knowledge, it was very important to me. I'll have a gig right now with this guy. I think those two trumpet players' points of view of me stayed with them for a very long time. They put me on the map with them for different reasons, but important reasons for them. I had a chance to play with Art subsequently many times after that and it was always, always a great experience. He's on my record called *Etudes* with Tony and Bill Evans, the saxophone player. It's a wonderful record. And I had a great time playing with Art again. But Miles he kind of set me in a different space than him in that the other guys in the band, we would kind of talk about things that were non-musical related, and I don't know if he felt that they weren't mature enough to understand, to be conversant in the stock market, for example. Or if they were aware of the black politicians uptown, or if they' were interested in sports – swimming or golf – those kind of things, pretty far from the music page. And I don't know … and again, I say this with some trepidation because … I'm not … I hope you don't think I'm speaking for him. Or Art. I'm not trying to do that. But I think that put me in a different place in his head for me. If … if that meeting and my response to that meeting would be on a respect-ometer, the wheel would be on both of those guys. And it kind of stayed there. The respect-ometer – I got to invent one of those. (laughter) It comes to Peabody. (laughter)

Unidentified Voice: I don't know about that.

Levy: I'm not gonna spend a whole lot of time on Miles. As important as it is, it's probably much discussed and much written about.

Carter: As it will continue to be. Good.

Levy: But I do want you to just give us a tiny bit of a non-musician's understanding of why you call that a laboratory band.

Carter: Well, I think that if you look at that kind of a … science-istic … scientist … analogy regarding experimentation, my view is that every night we're all going to the laboratory vis-à-vis Village Vanguard, and this … the head technician will come in with these various bowls of ingredients … of chemicals. And he would give us all our own bowl, you know, and each bowl would contain a different set of ingredients or chemicals, and he would instruct us to put these together and make something happen. Every night. And our job is to mix and match these ingredients until we come up with something that worked, whatever that was: a big band, a small band, a new color, fabric, rubber, plastic – whatever you could bring this bowl ultimately for the set, for the tune. This is what we come up with. So for me, it's like a laboratory every night.

Levy: How is that different from any other jazz group? I mean, isn't jazz a laboratory every night?

Carter: Yeah, it's supposed to be. They all aren't like that. [unintelligible), for some reason, the talent level was different, a library is different, the … the … the musicians' interests are different. The talent level is different. The interest in the experimenting is different, not just individually but as a group. I think that kind of combination with that band is pretty rare indeed.

Levy: Do you think that audiences – and this is actually sort of a question … something, I think, that Herbie was quoted as saying. He said, "The jazz fans loved it even if they didn't understand it." What is your sense of audiences in their appreciation for what you do? How … if they don't understand it, how do they appreciate it, or is it something that *has* to be understood?

Carter: I kind of avoid using the … for comparison, to answer your question, the classical analysis and the jazz analysis. But if you go to any opera house in New York, take New York, go to the Met, and they are doing Italian Verdi opera or Monteverde opera, there are two thousand people in the audience, right? I'll wager that there are 1750 who don't speak Italian. So they have no idea that the singer is singing the right shit or not. They don't have a clue, man. It wasn't until the past two years when they put the language on the seats in English were they able to determine what is this person singing? But no one questions the ignorance about the language. No one asks the audience, "What key is this in?" No one says, "The oboe player missed this passage. Are you aware?" No one says that to this classical audience. But somehow the jazz audience is expected to have this kind of musical acumen. I think that's a fair … pretty good analogy and unfair one at the same time. I really don't care if they understand physically what I do. I don't care if they don't understand how difficult it is, what we do. I just want them to go away, hearing the melody and appreciating our efforts. That's enough for me. They'll never understand what I do because they can't hear what I hear. They just see the results of my attempts. Sometimes I get it right, sometimes I get close, sometimes I don't get it at all. And I don't care if they don't understand that as long as they understand there's a melody taking place and these guys are creating something different every night … that's okay with me.

Levy: Do you desire to reach them emotionally?

Carter: I do that anyway. I mean, music does that. They want to hear, they want to hear some stories. Hostile, great, terrible, loud … they want some stories. And our job is to convey to them at least our story for the day … for the evening. I'm good at this stuff. (laughter)

Levy: You are amazing at this stuff, Ron. (laughter).

Carter: You know, while we're on the same track – and this will be the last Miles issue – unfortunately the sideman in the band that I'm involved with are often asked to explain Miles' moods. Why did he do that? And the most, the easiest thing for them to question is him facing the band. But the fact is that facing the band would be for only eight or nine measures. It wouldn't be for the whole night or for a whole tune. And those people who are snotty and have this chip on their shoulder, I just have an analogy for them. I say, Now look, when you go up to the next classical concert – and I hate to do this because this analogy's always kind of, kind of … silly – but when you go to the next concert of a symphony orchestra, if you can see the conductor's face while he's conducting the orchestra, then you have to leave because there's nothin' happenin'. (laughter)

Levy: That's true.

Carter: In fact when you're facing a sound that's coming this way, you hear it more directly than this way. And I'm sure at some of those times, Miles wanted to hear the band better, for the stage, the sound way before they had monitors on the stage … and all these factors, sonically, were in the way of the band. He always stood next to me because I had an amplifier and microphones … and he wanted to hear the bass so he stood next to me most of the time, or Paul, or whoever the bass player was, you know. So it was about hearing the stuff, not about, necessarily, image or a physical issue. They made it that. And he just did what he did, you know.

Levy: I have a question here and to this moment I don't know why I wanted… it's a very broad …

Carter: I'll try to answer it.

Levy: I wanted you to talk to us about trust, both on and off the bandstand.

Carter: That's kind of a broad question. I'll try to limit it for you, limit my answer to be as specific as I can. I just referred to the Miles band, in this case, for the first answer to the question. In that band, there was so much harmonic experimenting going on and rhythmic experimenting going on, and dynamic in terms of volume going on. It seemed all of us were having to say that someone has to be responsible for telling us where we are. Someone has to kind of help us temper these items, to temper … the substitute chords. Someone has to remind us where one is. Someone has to tell us where the bridge is. Someone has to do that, otherwise we'd have just pure chaos. When Miles plays a solo, he's off on his own over here somewhere. There he is. It's

just us. So it kind of, was kind of … it became my domain, that since I was playing essentially quarter notes, I was the marker for the band. And if I said this is the bridge, you guys get on it, this is the bridge. If I thought we were getting so far harmonically from the tune that it kinda … the tune didn't feel good to me … if we were getting kind of off-track, and that's okay sometimes, but you've gotta know how far is too far and still maintain the integrity of the song. That's my view. So if I was to start playing alternate changes, one-six-two-five, he would sense that "Wow, maybe we should do this for a minute." Or if I wouldn't join Tony in playing other rhythms and would play a quarter-note beat for four bars, he would say, "Whoa, let me just check this out." So they began to trust me as the guy who helped them kind of control their enthusiasm – without limiting their enthusiasm. And the two are not the same. I've kind of, kind of … later on, much later on than those records, twenty years later, thirty years later, forty years later, people are now listening to those records differently, understanding that now they have better sound on your stereo sets and re-mastering, that the bass player of that band, whoever it is, is actually in control of what's going on in that band. And I don't mind on the bandstand, telling them, I don't know what your beat is but trust Ron for this. Most of the time, they do. I don't feel more or less responsible, just playing what I hear and that the music I hear dictate the need or not-need to tell a guy, "You sure you mean that? I'm not sure you want to do that again because I'm not gonna allow it." I think, and you can put this at the very last part of my thing with you, I think – and I was asked this question a long time ago and I finally come up with an answer that's comfortable for me. On my tombstone, I would like the following words: He was a great bass player and I trusted him with my musical life. And people I play with feel like that. You can put that in, just slip it in.

Levy: I like that. That trust, I guess in a sense, is related to … well, what many people – including Creed Taylor – referred to you as the anchor. You were …

Carter: I never liked that word because I also think of an anchor as being something that's rusting at the bottom of the sea that's not doing anything. (laughs) I see it as holding back in a pejorative sense. But I can understand the musical term for that and I don't get bent out of shape anymore. I've kind of gotten over that kind of issue.

Levy: But you were a central, stable force.

Carter: That's a better definition than anchor. (laughs)

Levy: What does that mean to you to be that? You were really right center of everything that was going on at CTI in particular which was huge in that timeframe.

Carter: Well, you know at the time that's happening, I'm not specifically looking at me in that light. I'm seeing me as an important man in the rhythm section and I am assuming responsibility by making us all sound good together whoever the rhythm sections are. My mates in those sessions – here we go again – trusted my choices. Freddie Hubbard, who is not with us anymore, was asked to do an interview with the writer for my book. And they never got together for

whatever reason … whatever. One of the last things Freddie communicated to this person, before the book came out, was that he was sorry we didn't get together because he could tell him how many times I saved his ass on the dates he was doing. Again, you know, I'm kind of in a strange place right now because a question like that you're asking me, it would best … the best answer is to come from those guys who are receiving this. You're asking the giver of this trust. I think you get a much clearer answer as to how they feel about the trust and the results of the trust. I mean, to walk into the date and see me there, their worries are half over. It would be interesting for you at some point to ask these people who have been the recipient of this level of trust, what it meant to them to walk into the studio and say, I'm already set up; let's get this going.

Levy: Did you ever feel that this was a weight on you?

Carter: No.

Levy: I mean, why me? Why do I have to hold all of this together?

Carter: Devra, the bass is what it is …

Levy: That's what it is.

Carter: And if the guy who has a bass in his hand is aware of that and has some talent, has some harmonic daring, he has some other rhythmic interests, he's listening to where he is in this puzzle of these strange players to him, he's willing to sacrifice what he does, his thing, to make this music work. They can all do that. But I think the bass player is missing those items. They've kind of gotten caught up in the guitaristic-isms of the bass. And that's part of the progress of the bass, and I'm okay with that. But I think if they would just step back for a minute and see how much fun they can have really directing a band harmonically, or rhythmically, or dynamically in a way he thinks they should go, they would go home feeling really different. I'll tell a guy that I don't need to solo to be happy, man. If I can make you take a breath when you didn't want to do that, I'm good. (laughs) I'm doing my job.

Levy: You and … I'm thinking again about CTI and thinking about a lot of those recordings were heavily arranged – I'm thinking Sebesky and …

Carter: But, they were arranged based on the rhythm section tracks. That's a little different.

Levy: Ah. Explain.

Carter: They bring in a lead sheet and then some pencil parts for us to play. During the course of this tune, if the rhythm section – me, Herbie and Grady, and me, Herbie and Billy**,** if we thought that we could better on this sketch part than the arranger wrote, we'd play it differently. If we were successful, the arranger would then take our new rhythm section parts and write around that.

Levy: Ah. So you really did have the ability to direct.

Carter: Yeah, absolutely. Sometimes I did, sometimes I didn't, but it was pretty even and because there were … our successful attempts were much higher than our failure attempts, we were in pretty good stead.

Levy: Uh-hm. Any albums or projects at that time that just still tickle you, that stand out in your mind? Or is it just …

Carter: All of them do for different reasons. I'll give two examples and I'll stop. All those that don't get mentioned, they'll get mad at me and they'll probably send me some spam or … flatten my tires. (laughter)

Levy: Okay.

Carter: Stanley Turrentine's *Sugar*. The title tune, *Sugar*? The last chord is mine. "Stanley, you can end like this, put this chord right here." And that's what we did. And the other record is *Storm Flower*, Jobim's record, because when I first met him during these sessions, I didn't know. I knew who he was but I never had met him. And not speaking any Portuguese, I was just kind of really over my head, verbally, you know. And he spoke enough English that I felt really silly, you know? So I said, "Mr. Jobim." He said, "Call me Carlos." I said, "What do you want me to do with this?" He said, "Well, I like the way you play from what I hear, and I know you'll find the right notes and the right line to make it work." I said, "Okay, count it off. Let's get this sucker going."

Levy: Wow. Do you find producers being very different in having an effect on what's happening? I'm thinking, Okay we've got a Creed here, we have a Orrin, we've mentioned over here …

Carter: Well, I think those days the producers were wise enough to hire enough musicians who could direct and steer the music and complete the project without too much breaking down in the process. A lot of producers can't read music and so they can't tell you letter A or letter B. They don't know what changes are in a broad sense, so they can't say, "Man, that's a C-minor chord; you keep playing E-natural; what's wrong with it?" They don't have that kind of skill. They don't have that kind of direction. They kind of let the guys go off on their own, and those are pretty unsuccessful dates unless someone in the band says, "Man, will you stop playing that wrong note and get this sucker …." "What?!" That's when one in the band takes that initiative, who has the respect and trust of that person. Those dates all fall apart. I watched it take place. But Corea, and Creed, and Esmond Edwards, Orrin, they kind of put together enough of the guys in a group who could make the project work despite someone in the band not being of that mindset necessarily. I wasn't aware until just recently, a couple of years, that Creed had made me the centerpiece of the CTI. I just thought that I was playing good enough that I got called all the time. I was playing

good enough. And I was on time and I went out there … I'd go to Rudy's on off days and figure out how to record the bass. I did this several times. I had Rudy's high regard for my attempts and my interest in getting a good sound for the record. Now, experiment on this and that, plus Creed saw my dedication to get the bass sound right. They figured, he figured, that okay, if I put somebody in charge all the time without really putting them in charge all the time, maybe this is the guy who I can put in charge [unintelligible]. And again I'm speaking on their behalf which may not be the most propitious thing to do, but I already said it. (laughs)

Levy: Let's just play with some more names. A couple of words about … whoever.

Carter: Okay.

Levy: Joe Henderson

Carter: Uh … the phantom they used to call Joe. Joe, he never had enough music. And he was always two tunes short, ten minutes, and this is an LP, man, come on Joe. He said, "Hey, big brother, why don't you write me a tune right now?" I said, "Okay." So I wrote *Almost 1.5*. *Power to the People.* Did a couple of tunes like that for different projects. Joe had a great mind. I mean, really, really sharp. He didn't talk a whole lot so it's difficult to read him in terms of his emotion for the moment. He played great. It was a pleasure just to hear him play. I'm just sorry that there are not enough guys today who understood Joe's playing or spend enough time listening to want to carry part of Joe's torch in their saxophone.

Levy: Bill Evans.

Carter: Uh … you know, the piano player, you know before I met Bill, I heard a lot of stories about his habit and his propensities, you know. When I met him – we did a recording on Riverside Records. I'd heard him play, actually, at the Vanguard when he first arrived with Paul Motian and Scott LaFaro. I heard him on a couple of Miles' records but, you know, the piano was not my focus at the time. I just wanted to know harmony. What's going on with the drum sound, you know? So, while I knew him, I didn't really know him. So on the Riverside dates, it was just like another piano player who played great. I didn't feel all these stories, these rumors as a part of this process with him. We did a date with Jim Hall and Philly Jo Jones and Pepper Adams and Bill. So we had the studio on that. Of course five hours in a row, you know, and whatever his outside activities were, he didn't allow him to get in the way of being productive. But I felt that with him playing with a drummer, playing for Philly Jo Jones kind of time, and that floating like Paul was doing, and not quarter note, it came out differently. And I enjoyed the difference. I liked being a part of the reason that it played different. I never knew him personally outside of those experiences, but yet … the rumor mongers who are always on the scene … I never felt those things to be true in my case.

Levy: Jack DeJohnette.

Carter: Jack is a … uh … I just recorded with him last month as a matter of fact with a Japanese alto player. Jack gets a great recorded sound on drums. I mean, it's to die for … if that's still current in the lexicon of slang. Jack asked me to do a project with him. If I could have worked it out, I would do it in a heartbeat. I like Jack. We had good conversations, serious conversations, serious in that it's not bullshit. They're worthwhile for both of us. I was invited to his home several times, but I told him, " I need a lunch bag to get to your house." I said … "my lunch pail … I'll get up to your house because it's pretty far from me." I love him, I love Jack.

Levy: We mentioned Wes but not in this context, so just a few thoughts about Wes.

Carter: Uhmm… other than … amazing, and all caps in the word AMAZING, it's hard to describe him. You know, some of my friends are real sports fans, and basketball fans in this case. They always say … uh … to let me know how seriously they take sports – basketball. Michael Jordan, he's their icon of the basketball world. And okay, yeah. They say, "Michael Jordan, Michael Jordan," the guys play Michael Jordan. I say, "Wait a minute, man. I play Wes Montgomery." And there's not one guitar player on this planet who can do what he did twenty years ago. Now you find me a world of guys who try to do what Michael Jordan does and let them influence their game; then we talk about that. He's just a man.

Levy: Wes didn't read music.

Carter: Well, he read poorly, but he read. I mean, that … but … let's just put a pin right there. I know you're asking the questions as an interested observer with no opinion of your own; and that's okay. That's your role. But it always bothers me when that's called to describe the music of a jazz player … that he can't read music. I heard that about Erroll Garner. Well, I did a demo with Nan Grady and he … he read the tune, man, you know? I think the difference, Devra, is that jazz players have such great memories and such great ears. When you play it one time, they hear it. It's not necessary for them to have to study the page to get those notes. It doesn't preclude making reading essential because no one can hear everything. When I write a part, I want the drum to play it, I want them to tell me I'm gonna feel it. "No, man, don't feel it, feel this. Do this." And it always kind of takes me to a different zone to have to explain that, one: "Okay. So what? Did you play great? Did you play wonderful? Is he a nice person? Did he rob somebody in the street?" I mean, what, you know? And secondly, the fact that classical players who read well, they spend hours trying to get it right. Classical players aren't always great sight readers. But no one says that he's a great violinist but he's a terrible sight reader. I never heard anyone say that, man, "he plays great guitar but he doesn't read music." What?!

Levy: I kind of wondered if the inability or – maybe he read a little bit or whatever – but whether that *frees* someone from not feeling …

Carter: Doesn't free me.

Levy: No?

Carter: I want to know what the guy means. I want to know what he thinks he knows. And if he notates it on paper, I have an idea what he thinks he knows. And my job is if I can read this so it shows like: I *know* what he knows because he wrote out what he thinks he knows. So that's an illustration if you study hard, you lose your soul. That's … that's all … that's … that's classicals they say who can't do any one of those things, man. And the public looking for some kind of a … pin to help them define what this guy is or isn't, that's probably the list. He can't read. This guy has shitty technique. Wait a minute, man, wait … wait a minute, you know?

Levy: How about J.J. Johnson?

Carter: I miss him. We did a tour … I first met him when he had his band in Rochester with Clifford Jordan and then …Tootie Heath, had a great band. Subsequent to that, we did a tour with Friedrich Gulda, a Beethoven expert who had a big band, European big band, all-star band. And this particular band, including the Europeans were Mel Lewis, me, J.J., Freddie Hubbard and Sahib Shahab. Boy, J.J. Johnson, again, just fantastic. He asked me … we had a chance to talk and get to know each other, as shy as we both are, you know, and I explained to him that he is one of my influences on the bass, and he said, "Why?" I said, "I saw you turn all these notes and only go this far from the bell. You weren't always out here all night. You were here, you know, in this range." And I said to myself, "Now it's possible, given all the options of overtone series in each position, for him to not only hear these notes in a style that's his style and know where they are, is it possible for the bass player, in this case, me, to have that same kind of skill level and know where my notes are, going this way rather than like this all night? So his late wife, his then wife who has passed away, and my wife was passed away, got to know on this tour, got to be friendly, and she told Janet that J.J. came home one night from Birdland and said, "They're speaking his name, there's a band come from Detroit, he's gonna be the man."

Levy: Billy Cobham.

Carter: Boy, you got some great drums on that list. Billy and I go way back to his first CTI dates. Again, Billy knows how to record the drums. He knows how to get the engineer to record the drums. And he's trying to use a smaller set which is great for me because there's too much shit on the stage. And he plays all of them well. 'I just need a little help, Billy. I don't need, I don't need that much.' He writes well, he's a great organizer, and he's a great organizer here as well as here with his various bands. I was trying to get together for a project this Fall. Maybe it will work out; I hope it does.

Levy: I'm gonna throw one more drummer out there: Harvey Mason.

Carter: I love Harvey. Unfortunately, he lives in California. I don't get a chance to see him often enough and certainly miss the chance to play with him. Whenever I can, I try to take it. Again, he's another guy who gets a great recorded sound, and for me, when I play with him live, I can

hear the sound in front of me live, and he's got a great cymbal, he's got a great snare drum sound, gotta great bass drum sound, and he plays the form of the tune. And I like that.

Levy: Well, it reminds me that the last time I saw you play with Harvey was for Johnny Pate. I haven't mentioned Johnny in producers or whatevers.

Carter: Yeah.

Levy: So tell me a little about Johnny Pate.

Carter: Well, my exposure is really kind of limited because he was in Chicago all those years, and my exposure has been listening to his scoring. When I talk with him, I always … I'm always … uh … trying to ask a real slick question without embarrassing him or me about the voicing for a certain chord and the mood that I heard. I never heard him play but he was a good bass player. He always treats me with utmost respect, and I love that.

Levy: Let's see, who else do I want to throw out? Kenny Barron.

Carter: He's another … he was in my first quartet, two-bass quartet. He was one of the people, if he calls me to do a project with him, I will make me available. He's got a great touch and again, he trusts my judgment. Not just rhythmically but harmonically, he knows that my notes are not the root all the time, and he figures … he knows that this note is going somewhere else and he trusts my direction with this note – even if I don't get it right. He likes the effort. (laughs) Anytime with him, any time.

Levy: You've mentioned the two-bass quartet and I'm also looking at a note here that says the piccolo. Talk to me a little bit about those concepts. It was something different you did.

Carter: Well, when I wanted to be a bandleader, I just wanted to be in front of the band physically. My feeling was that if you walk into the room with a trio – piano, bass and drums – people automatically assume this is a piano player's trio. And that's what that is, you know. But I wanted an instrument that would put me in front of the band, and so I put a bass player in the band. So the choices were either stand in front of the band physically, way out here in front of the band, or have the band here and help me understand (?) this part of the band with a different instrument. So I ran into this guy who mixed instruments who lives in New Jersey, and I said, "Friend (name's Fred), I need a bass that's approximately half-size of a real bass but bigger than a cello. Not a cello. A half-size bass that's bigger than the cello and I want to tune it higher than the real bass so I get out of his range, and so he gets out of my range, and I'm high enough in the sound spectrum that you always hear this instrument playing." So he was sent home to figure out what to do, and he come up with this instrument that I called a piccolo bass … just to make … understand the difference between that and the rhythm bass. And we figured out what strings to use and how to tune it, and we spent a lot of time developing this instrument. So when I finally got this instrument to where I could play it outside my house (laughs), I put together a band. And

I've always loved Ben Riley's playing and I thought Buster was the kind of guy who would be able to accompany a bass player and not be bent out of shape because his musicality is so high. Buster's a great sideman, by the way. So, I said, "Well, let me get a band together," and I had known Kenny from playing two dates with him, with Dizzy and Yusef. Occasionally, Miles would work opposite those bands and we'd be a block away and I'd get a chance to hear them. Then there was late Brother Bill, the saxophone player. So when I put the band together, I said maybe I'd hire Buster and try to get Ben. I couldn't reach Kenny because he was out of town, working with a singer, Esther … something or other. Queen Esther, something like that.

Levy: Little Esther?

Carter: No, no, no. Different person.

Kimery: Esther Merrill?

Carter: Yeah. Yeah. So, when I finally reached him, he was curious as to how two basses were going to work out. I said, "Kenny, I got this girl … just get on this bus." And he said, "Okay." And we were together five, six years.

Levy: I didn't realize that the piccolo bass was your invention. I thought it was just an instrument I was unaware of until …

Carter: No, no, no. I just sat down … it's my invention in terms of what it does in a band. There are several electric bass players who play what they call the piccolo bass. Stanley has one and the guy playing guitar for Miles, for awhile, has one, and I'm sure you'll find guys who have it tuned high enough that if it's that … that … that word vocabulary of piccolo, you know. So I never thought of me as inventing an instrument. That's just something that invents me in front of the band. (laughs)

Levy: Sonny Rollins.

Carter: Again, anytime he'd call me, I'd be available. We worked together in New York at the old Five Spot for probably six, eight weeks with a trio: saxophone, bass and drums. Every night was like going to school because how he would manipulate the chords and how he would play the melody and how long he would play the tune to develop it, which he thought he could, for the space of time. Maybe a half hour of this tune and maybe twelve choruses of this tune, and maybe just a tune twice a night until he felt that he had kind of gotten all he could get out of it. He was respectful of bass players; he listened to bass all the time. Of course he had no piano. And I been promising myself I'd call him and just scare him by saying "hello" on the phone, but I haven't gotten the nerve yet. But I love hearing him play.

Levy: He does that to you once in a while. Calls you and …

Carter: (laughs) Startles you.

Levy: Every once in a while you'd work with a singer.

Carter: I've worked with some great singers by the way.

Levy: Tell me.

Carter: Shirley Horn. I did some early gigs in New York. She had a band of me, Billy Hart and her. Did a lot of gigs together. Blossom Dearie. She was kind of Miles' intermission piano player and she played fabulous chord progressions. Man, I just loved the sound of the piano she got. We had some work together; we had some gigs at the Top of the Gate …Al Harewood … Al Harewood and I. Helen Merrill. Wonderful singer. She really knows how to … how to play a melody in her voice. Made a nice duo record with her, a wonderful record. That record … Gene McDaniels called *The Outlaw*. Subsequently, he has his own little label so I did some records with him. They were really great music. He's got kind of a way of presenting the lyrics so the melody doesn't get lost. The most current one is with a Brazilian singer, Rosa Passos, a Brazilian record. And boy is she ever a great singer and a great guitar player, man.

Levy: So you don't share some musicians' antipathy for playing with singers.

Carter: It depends on what they do. I mean, I … oh, Sheila Jordan is another good singer.

Levy: Yeah.

Carter: I like playing with her.

Levy: You name some adventurous singers.

Carter: Yeah, because I like what they do. But I think when … and again I'm speaking not for the jazz community … but one of the reasons singers don't have their highest standing in the jazz instrumental community is they don't bring enough to the table. All those I spoke to … mentioned is they all play the piano. They have enough skill … Carmen McRae, I played with her. She's a great piano player, man.

Levy: She is.

Carter: I played with Sarah Vaughan and she's a good piano player. I think for a singer to really command the attention they feel that they're not getting … musicians … they sit down at the piano and show them they can play the song that they want them to play. They're gonna call my house now and say, "You said what?!" (laughs)

Levy: Let's do some lightweight stuff. Marsalis brothers.

Carter: Okay.

Levy: You grew … showed an interest in them in their beginnings really.

Carter: Yeah, yeah.

Levy: What did you hear? What …

Carter: Just two interesting kids from New Orleans. I had Raford (?) come by one day and play him some , uh … he was playing baritone or something like that with Hamp's band. He was torn between playing baritone and tenor, you know. I said, "Raf, come on to my house." So he came by and I played him some Don Byas and Slam Stewart, a 1944 concert at Carnegie Hall, and man, the eyebrows went up here. "I'm not asking you to play like that; I'm just showing you what kind of choices you have. And if you don't know Don Byas as a choice, just listen to him as a choice, you know." I had Wynton come by and he asked me about playing melodies. He wanted to know how Miles does that. So I said, "Well, Miles can do that because he understands what notes in the melody don't need to be there as to maintain the integrity of the melody."

Levy: Were you aware of or intrigued or impressed or anything else by Wynton's dual jazz, classical abilities that were particularly prominent?

Carter: No, 'cause I already did that. (laughs)

Levy: Well, then did you therefore appreciate it in a way that others didn't or …

Carter: I appreciate that it was done but I wasn't awed by the process of doing it and I wasn't stunned that someone had done it. I thought that was your question. I was not stunned that someone had done that because I had already done that. And I could tell you other guys – Roland Hanna – who'd already done that. They didn't get the fanfare or … maybe it was twenty years too soon but they already … they had already done that, jazz and classical players.

Levy: Do you think that others shouldn't do that?

Carter: No.

Levy: No? They're not missing something.

Carter: Well, they're missing the experience of doing it, but it's not critical for their career to be successful. Hubert Laws, that's another guy who does that well. But again, you know, there, he was doing it maybe twenty years too soon too. And it … not that the peak of doing that is here, was here. That's kind of down here and maybe some guy come along with a lot of money who is independent of everyone else's thoughts, and wanted to do Hubert Laws' jazz and classical record

with some good arrangements and some serious classical playing, you know. I did a record called Friends that has Hubert on it. I did an arrangement of Django and I had a harpsichord as an arrangement. And I had a classical harpist, harpsichordist to come in and play this part I wrote. Then I had another tune where the cello player was playing this melody, classical melody, and I wanted a classical sound. So I had a classical piano player come in and play this piece for us. So, it's still in the air, but I think if a jazz person doesn't do that, he needn't feel he lost out on anything.

Levy: All right. Well, we …

Carter: When are you going to see Jim, by the way?

Levy: We saw him. We did Jim.

Carter: How is he?

Levy: He's pretty good, pretty good.

Carter: Okay. Okay. He's got a big night coming up, doesn't he? June the 6th? I got a gig with him June 6th at the Blue Note, I think.

Levy: Oh. I forgot.

Carter: I think so.

Levy: Okay. Well, we're talking about classics so, you've conceived of some classical projects for yourself.

Carter: Uh huh.

Levy: In fact, if I'm not mistaken, is it the *Cello Suites*?

Carter: Yeah.

Levy: That was a gold record.

Carter: Yeah. Yeah. And in Europe and Japan that's … I got, they gave me a platinum CD. [unintelligible] copies.

Levy: Wow. What was your intent? Did you have a concept or a desire that you were fulfilling when you came up with … because these were different from everything else you do.

Carter: Well, it came along at the time when Wynton Marsalis' *Fresco* record … and George Butler who was in charge of the label at that time and whoever else was in his office thought that, Well, let's get on this bandwagon and have other jazz players record classical music. So they got Chick Correa to do one, they talked to Hubert about doing one. I'm not sure how far these projects … what happened to them. And George asked me would I do one. I said, "Yeah, I can do one." He said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "Let me get back to you, see what the library is cause there's a lot of stuff I don't really care for or doesn't interest me musically, but let me look around." And so I called him back a week later and said, "I got this … how bout the *Cello Suites*? I'll do only the dance movements." So the office approved it and so I spent six months, three hours a day every day for six months, no business at grandma's house, no holidays off. Learned this music and went out and recorded it with an assistant. And when they heard it, they liked it but they wanted to add something to it. They wanted to add, they wanted … because the chamber orchestra, chamber group in Boston, they wanted to call this person in and have him add some stuff to it. I said, "Well, George, the piece is supposed to stand by itself. That's the whole point of this thing, you know." Then he wanted somebody else to overdub some percussion. I said, "George, that's not the concept of this kind of music." I understand their intent, but maybe my name as a jazz player is enough. So they didn't want to release it. So I borrowed some money and bought it back. And then my friend who was recording who was a Japanese friend, producer, radio guy who came to New York for a festival or something. And I said, "I got this project; take a listen to it and see if you can find a person, a company in Japan interested in releasing this kind of music cause it's just bass, man." Bass sounded great that day, by the way, but it's just bass. He said, "Well, I don't know; let me take it." So he took it to Japan and Mercury was interested in it. So they gave me back what I borrowed and they issued it as *Ron Carter Plays Bach* record and they sold something like almost a hundred thousand copies. We're talking about thirty years ago. Subsequently, I've done several other Bach projects that have done very well in Japan, and I've been unable to get that kind of support for that kind of record in the States – company-wise. I did the Bach Brandenberg #3. I did Handel, Ombra Mai Fù, famous tenor opera, tenor aria. And I did a Bartok piece, and I did a Grieg piece on the same disk and I got a lot of play in California, but I couldn't get the support from the company to take advantage of that. So, again, just to backtrack about three paragraphs, I hope that the listener and the viewer of this document of yours doesn't feel that my commentary about the Marsalis brothers classical jazz attempts are being viewed by me as a non-important feat or a non-essential in music. That's not my view. My view is, Yeah but guys already did that. And someone is still doing whoever they are. They just came along at the right time with the right support from the company and it is what it is. Okay.

Levy: Tell me about teaching for a minute. You devoted a great deal of …

Carter: Still.

Levy: Yes.

Carter: Still devote time to teaching, except for next month. And then nobody's here but me. I think every teacher looks for students that he feels he can propagate his points of view on, whether it's a history teacher or an acting class, you know, any kind of historian. They're interested in having the student not only buy into their views, but expound on it at some level. It's certainly true for me in music. I'm interested in students who are, first, curious about the bass, 2) will practice what I ask them to practice; 3) will allow themselves to understand that this bass can help them tell their stories. But to do that, you need a certain skill level. And my job is to help you get that skill level. This is 1960 and I'm really happy to say that my students are all over the place in terms of non-jazz gigs. Some of them do Broadway shows. [interlude when phone rings and he answers reluctantly.] Umm, I've been teaching for a long time and I'm getting better at it. I've developed a little more patience. I've found new ways to give them information that they have to have. I found new books, I've written some books to help them better understand where I am and where I want them to be as far as the skill level of the bass. My students are all over the place, you know. Some are teaching school, some are in the jazz programs, some are working Broadway shows, some do open mike nights. I mean, my point with these examples, though, is that I've shown them enough skill levels of the bass to let them fit in in any environment and not limit their view to just being a jazz player. I explain to them, "Yeah, I wasn't always where you think I am in the spectrum of jazz. I worked with folk singers, I worked with Josh White, Jr., I worked with Leon Bibb. I was on call when Billy wasn't available, I was the folk singers' bass player. I've done Broadway shows, I did Peter and the Wolf at the Brooklyn Philharmonic about ten years ago. So you need the skill level that's comfortable for you in any environment, that you transfer this skill level here to here to here. I'm happy that I've been able to propagate that point of view to these young bass players.

Levy: Does the need for this skill level also encompass the facility in genres, in styles of playing? Brazilian, Latin...

Carter: Absolutely. If you have the skill level here, you can play any music. The difficulty is can you adjust your mind to the demands of this job. Not to limit your skill but opening your musical mind that this skill level can also work playing this kind of beat or it can play this kind of beat as to maintain your integrity and the integrity of the music. It's kind of like a guy plays Chopin all day, uses the same skill level to play cocktail music at night. He adjusts his head but the same skill level is required to do that stuff. Roland Hanna was a master at that.

Levy: Talk about Roland for a minute.

Carter: Again, another one of my friends who's gone way too soon. He had a group called the New York Jazz Quartet and several different personalities over the years that he had this group. And when I was there, it was me, either Ben Riley or Billy Cobham and Frank Russell, Hubert Laws and we did several of those three, four day tours, you know. I did some Japanese tours with Roland, with my band. He never ceased to amaze me how he would come up with these ideas and still have the sound with the Chopin-type technique to make them work with a jazz tune. It just fascinated me. And a very good writer, you know. And, my friend.

Levy: Richard Pratt was in that group?

Carter: Not when I was in it. What happened to him, by the way?

Levy: Don't know.

Carter: Big Fat Richie, yeah, ex-football player. He ended up doing Broadway shows for a while, and I kind of lost track …. As the commercial industry wound down to where it is now, a lot of those guys who were up here, they all took Broadway shows. So I'd never see them … they would do the shows during the course of the dates too but now that those dates are not there, I don't have that kind of contact with them, so I don't know who's doing what. But he was a good player, I heard.

Levy: Yeah, he was great.

Carter: He was an ex-football player who hurt his knee at a Giant's training camp one year. Hurt his knee and was out of sports forever.

Levy: Let's talk about Jim Hall..

Carter: [still talking about Pratt] About 6' 5" – 320.

Levy: Yeah.

Kimery: Big guy.

Carter: Yeah.

Levy: And gentle as a lamb.

Carter: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Levy: Talk about Jim Hall.

Carter: Jim Hall. I've known Jim almost forty years. The first record I heard him on was a John Lewis record, *Two Degrees East, Three Degrees West*. I think it was John Lewis and maybe Percy Heath and Jim Hall and I can't remember the drummer and the saxophone player. But the record had a little girl with an ice cream cone with scoops of ice cream on it. And the tune that caught my eye was a blues John wrote, *Two Degrees East, Two Degrees West*. It's a wonderful record. I'm not sure how I got to meet Jim actually, but our first real gig was at the Playboy Club when it was on 56th Street and 5th Avenue. We had a nice record from there. And from there to a club called The Guitar that was on 50th and 10th Avenue, and we worked there whenever we

could. And we went to Europe a couple of times and did the Monterey Jazz Festival and Concord Festival. I'm very happy to say that my appearances with Jim are documented, and there are some lovely records that came out of my association with him. And again, he's one of the people who he calls me at ten o'clock for a date at eleven, I get there quarter to the hour. We can make it work. Love and miss him.

Levy: When you have the ability over a period of decades to play with somebody, and you're here and years go by and you do it again, does it evolve, is it different, is it like putting on old slippers and feels cozy or is it a brand new day?

Carter: It's a combination of each, I think. With Jim for example, I haven't played with him in a real context in a long time. We did some things together but they weren't our environment, so to speak. They weren't our specific environment. So I'm working with him some time next month. Now when I walk on the stage with him, it will feel like we're at the Guitar emotionally, but we've both grown in the meantime. He's using a little pedal every now and then, put in sounds he likes, and I've gotten a better grasp on what notes make the chords change and I've gotten a really great sound, and I'm comfortable that it's gonna work. So between us growing musically and our really, really high regard for each other's abilities, neither one of us minds doing what we do now, knowing it's based on what we did then, and it's gonna work.

Levy: Any particular benefits, pro or con actually, with the duo situation? Jim or anybody else.

Carter: I think that if there's a pro, it's that there's only one other voice to consider for either side. There's no piano to fill out the chords for me, there's no drums to help Jim with the time. If there's a con, it's that you can't find a nice enough room to really do the sound of a duo justice … it's a battle. And we make it work because who we are, but the room is not a party of that. (laughs) The room is what it is. But good players make it work. That's their job.

Levy: What happens now when you have a trio? And you can … we should talk about your trio, talk about Stryker in this respect too.

Carter: Well, you know, again, people who are kind of new to that scene, say twenty years new to the jazz scene, they treat this as a real unique ensemble and I try to accept that newness for what it is and thank them. At some point I'll say, 'Well, the idea's not new; it's been around for a very long time; this is just a new version of the early Ahmad Jamal Trio and early Nat Cole Trio." And I've made records with a piano, with a drumless trio with Kenny Barron and Herbie Ellis before I put the Stryker Trio together. The idea itself is not new. I think what we're presenting here is three different physical approaches and musical approaches to this music. Russell doesn't feel like any guitar player I've played before. Mulgrew plays different than Kenny or Tommy Flanagan, and I'm still growing. What allows the audience to hear is maybe a cleaner view of a group without the drum overlay. It allows them to hear more specific what's going on without the drum sound as part of the sound. I think this transparency makes us maybe a little more cautious than we would be normally if we had drums to make up the slack in

volume or intensity or marking the form. But when you sit down to hear this trio with the musicality that it presents with Russell and Mulgrew, they are not aware that there are no drums until after the concert. And that's how it's supposed to be. If you get it right you don't miss the saxophone player or they don't miss a horn player or they don't miss drums. What they hear is a musical presentation of these three guys who are telling you the same story in different voices.

Levy: You refer to the trio as "fragile environment."

Carter: Yeah.

Levy: What does that mean?

Carter: That if at some point someone's off their game, it's like having a tripod with two legs. Someone's gotta make the third leg come to life and that's generally my job. Good! I can do that. Cause this trio trusts my judgment like I trust their's, and if any point any of us needs help, one of these other two guys gotta give us the help I may need or Russell may need or Mulgrew may need. I think it's this understanding of that kind of triad that makes the music great every night.

Levy: You *are* good at this, Ron.

Carter: (laughs)

Levy: What about a quartet? We might as well go from duos to trios to …. Talk to me about …

Carter: Okay. My current quartet is piano, bass drums and percussion. And again, what I do with this quartet is I segue between songs. There's no dead air, there's no announcements to rev them up or explain the tune or give them a story, and I explain to people for me to do that between songs is kind of like having call-waiting. You're on the telephone and – however it works – the buzzer comes on your phone and you've gotta … Hold on a minute. That's distracting to me. So what I'd rather do is have the band have this interlude, a musical segue that goes from this tune to this tune. And we do this for ninety minutes, a total of seven songs … eight songs maybe involved in this ninety-minute presentation. And when they're finished, when the concert is over, the two comments are: "Gee, we didn't miss a horn player" and 2) “We didn't realize we sat still for ninety minutes.” That's a great feeling to know that you've been able to tell the story in this period of time and not have them go off in their head looking at the iPad, looking at the telephone, or coughing real loud or shuffling their feet. And it's nice to know that this music ,that the four of us are responsible for is able to maintain their concentration. When [unintelligible] commercial on TV, you got intermission, you got the half-hour show to solve the issue of those big murder cases … I mean, it's just … everything is cut down so you don't need to concentrate long cause the solution is right here already. My point of this music is can we tell our story in our own language, and if you don't speak it and all the language at our own speed and maintain your interest and focus until you say, That's all there is. And it's very successful. We just came back from these concerts in the West Indies and people are still talking about … Man,

we sat there for forty … for ninety minutes, man, and we didn't even know it was gone. That's what I want. I want to be able to catch their attention. Let them feel the emotion of the story without these chopped up chapters to distract them and let them have their own thoughts. I want to have your thoughts on me, not on anything else. And it's working out pretty good. Now, I have a nonet.

Levy: I was … right here.

Carter: The issue of that is trying to find work for nine people. It consists of four cellos … [phone interrupts] It's Julliard. [pause tape]

Levy: Nonet.

Carter: The trouble is trying to find work for nine pieces. It's four cellos, drums, rhythm section bass, percussion, piano and me playing the piccolo bass. We have a great library and whenever we play it, people are surprised at how well the cellos fit into this clearly jazz environment. So what I try to do is find a gig in New York once a year with the non-net. Or find a gig where we can drive to Washington and Philadelphia that's not really far. Cause cellists want the cellos inside the plane and that's prohibitive, the cost is prohibitive. And I understand that. I'm not complaining about that at all. I've had a chance to take the band to Europe but that's really a lot of work, and it means being there two weeks early, trying to rehearse three cello players, one from New York, to get the concept, and it's just more work than I have the time to devote to it on the road. We've made some nice records and we've got a lot of interest, but the company didn't see that as an opening, not just to sell more records but to make this music more visible. I spoke to those guys and it's kind of like talking to this water glass. I said, "Yeah, right, okay, yeah, okay, yeah okay, okay," you know. The good thing about that for me about that group, nonet, is that every note the cello's playing I wrote. And every note in the part that Stephen's playing, I wrote. And every part that the bass player's playing, I wrote. I wrote the drum part and I wrote my part. It's a chance for me to hear live what I hear in my head that's more than one voice, the bass. It's really satisfying when I sit down and have a moment to play those discs – we made four of them – and say, "Boy, you did pretty good for an old guy." (laughs)

Levy: You've done some other writing. You did some movie writings or …

Carter: Yeah, yeah. I did a couple of song tracks and from what I've seen … I've been on a couple of bands because of orchestral background tracks for movies and as I hear these producers talk to the writer of the music and the process … it's just something I don't want to do, I don't want to do that, because they don't have the musical skill verbally. They don't know how to tell you what they want. They just say, "It's not quite right, we need this more orange or need more blue or purple …." Now wait a minute. So, now it's gotten so computerized that they want you to bring in the full score on the computer so they can put it to the picture. And whatever they approve, you hire the orchestra of a certain size to make that work. I'm not willing to devote that much of my time to do that. However, if someone will walk in right now with a movie of ninety

minutes and say, "Can you play with this for ninety minutes?" "Yeah, how about just bass and percussion for ninety minutes?" We can do this, and trust my sense of musical maturity and skill, I could do that. Those projects interest me. But you need new guys, need new filmmakers to do that, guys who are twenty five just come out of college who are not stuck into the Henry Mancini scores, which are great. At the time you had a cast of thousands on the screen and a cast of five hundred in the orchestra. Well that's all gone now. Right now it's all sampling and permission for five choruses from this record, and at the end of the film, you see eight minutes of credits of borrowed music that they rent for the film. Well, everything has changed, you know. So what's it gonna take from the … some guy who gets out of the NYU film school who's got this project and he's got, of course, no music budget. Can I help them out. (laughs) And the answer is Yes if you'll do this.

Levy: You actually won a Grammy for a composition …

Carter: Yeah, me and Billy and Herbie for *Call Sheet Blues* for the *'Round Midnight* picture. Nice melody, too, by the way. Yeah.

Levy: Do you ever concern yourself with the commercial demands or just the … do you ever think, Oh man, I've gotta do something to get a commercial or …

Carter: No. No. Devra, listen, let me tell you this. Every musician who makes a record hopes it sells, right? Isn't that commercial? He's not making it for his grandmother. He wants somebody to buy it. Do what? Buy it. Do what? Buy it. How many people? I don't care, man, fifty, hundred, thousand … buy it. So we all do … want those kind of records. That's our goal is to sell our music. So as you can tell, I get really bent out of shape fast when someone says to me, Hey, man, are you going commercial? Yeah! Since 1959, man.

Levy: You actually made some money doing commercial commercials in Japan.

Carter: Yes. I'm big over there in commercials. I did a …

Levy: How did that happen? I've never seen anything like that.
Carter: Well, about thirty years ago or so, Suntory was … it goes way back. At that time, 1960 or so, the people who were in charge of those decisions in Japan came up during the war and they were all jazz fans because jazz was the big music in Japan at that time. As they got older, they maintained that interest in jazz. Period. See footnote. Now those people are all gone. They're like my age and older and they no longer call the shots as to the music of the commercials. They've got younger guys in there who are not so jazz-oriented as their predecessors were, so you see snippets of this hit song and this hit song, you know. So go back up here at the top now. The person who was in charge Suntory at the time was a real jazz fan, and he had heard my music somewhere and thought that how about doing a jazz commercial with this guy; I like his music. So I was over there, went over there, did the Suntory commercial and it helped that Bach project sell so many copies because it got a lot of airplay. Since then, I've

done one for a vitamin company, done one for a life insurance company, I did a long-running one for a men's custom suit shop, I did one last year for a coffee company.

Levy: We were talking about seeing you in your sartorial splendor on billboards.

Carter: Yes! Big as this room. Yeah. On the side of a bus. Yeah.

Levy: Where do you get your sense of sartorial taste?

Carter: I've always been concerned that a guy my size can look nice too. (laughs)

Levy: Did anybody influence you?

Carter: I just got a pretty good eye. I know what combinations look nice and what colors to go on, and over the years I've kind of fine-tuned it, and I know how to pack two suits and some shirts and make it look like I got five suits and eight shirts. That kind of stuff you gotta do when you travel so much. One thing that always impresses the audience when I play with my bands is that we look great. We have nice suits, our shoes are shined, clean shirts with matching ties. People don't see that much from my community. Certainly not the other music communities available, you know, the rock and the pop. They've got what they dress … the hip-hop … they do what they do. That's their dress. Okay. That's their dress code. But when they come to a jazz concert – cause they have multiple interests in music – they say,"Man, you guys look great." "Hey, man, how do we sound?" (laughs) "I don't know, man, but you guys look great." Okay, I'll buy that.

Levy: What's next on your bucket list?

Carter: Well, the truest time to really work the summer … we're working next week in D.C. – this week. Oh wow. This week at a place called the Bohemian Caverns, a lovely room. And next week we're going to Europe for eight concerts in twelve days, and I'll come back from that and we go on tour from Australia to Japan to South Korea back to Japan. So we got eighteen days of that. So we're working up until July, up until June 26th or so. The band sounds great and people are interested in this kind of music so we try to make a nice presentation. We also wear tuxedos.

Levy: Any … if I have time, what I want to do is …

Carter: When I have time, what I want to do is go on a picnic and take some chicken and fish and grill outside and just sit down and smell the smoke. (laughs) That's my goal for the summer.

Levy: Sounds like a great idea.

Carter: It will take place the last of July if my schedule works out. That's my plan.

Levy: Any stops in California?

Carter:.Well, you know, we in New York heard rumors about the dearth of clubs, I don't know if Catalina's is still open, I don't know if Yoshi's is still open in Oakland, I don't know if the Jazz Bakery ever found a place to set up shop again. Unless you can find those kind of musical outlets, it's kind of tough to find any work going out there. Is the Catalina still open?

Levy: Catalina's is still open. Ruth is still doing the Moveable Feast.

Carter: Yeah, that's hard.

Levy: But next year, about a year from now, she'll be back in business. They've got a grant and bought a building.

Carter: Great.

Levy: They just have to build …

Carter: In L.A.?

Levy: In L.A. Culver City. So that will be back.

Carter: Are you in touch with her at all?

Levy: Yes.

Carter: Please tell her I think about her and look forward to getting out there and being part of the new venue of hers.

Levy: I will tell her that.

Carter: Be great. Nice lady.

Levy: Peter's still booking Yoshi's in Oakland.

Carter: Okay. I got word they were gonna close.

Levy: No, no.

Carter: Okay. How'd the one in Frisco do? That still open?

Levy: It's doing good, too. I think they're trying to differentiate a little bit in style so they don't compete too much with each other.

Carter: Okay, okay.

Levy: If I were you, I'd go back to the Oakland.

Carter: Okay.

Levy: But that's my uninformed …

Carter: Okay, we'll try to work something out for the Fall.

Levy: And then you can come to Altadena and have a picnic with John.

Carter: That sounds like …

Levy: That's what I was going for.

Carter: That sounds like a plan.

Levy: All right?

Carter: Sounds like a plan.

Levy: Is there any other message you want to leave for the Smithsonian future?

Carter: I'm done.

Levy: Okay.

Carter: Figuratively speaking. (laughs)

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Carter (reprise): I was asked this question a long time ago and I finally come up with an answer that's comfortable for me. On my tombstone, I would like the following words: He was a great bass player and I trusted him with my musical life.