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

***AHMAD JAMAL***

***NEA Jazz Master (1994)***

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| **Interviewee:** | Ahmad Jamal (July 2, 1930 - April 16, 2023) |
| **Interviewer:** | Anthony Brown with recording engineer Ken Kimery |
| **Date:** | November 8-9, 2011 |
| **Repository:** | Archives Center, National Museum of American History |
| **Description:** | Transcript, 94 pp. |

Brown: Today is November 8th, 2011, and this is the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History interview with NEA Jazz Master pianist, composer, arranger, educator, bandleader, and musician's musician Ahmad Jamal in his house in Ashley Falls, Massachusetts. This interview is conducted by Anthony Brown with Ken Kimery, and this is a glorious afternoon on a November. How are you feeling, Mr. Jamal?

Jamal: Those are a lot of titles you came up with.

Brown: And I probably missed a few.

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Jamal: I feel great. We have this wonderful day that you chose for New England. The Berkshires, the weather's just gorgeous today. It's supposed to be this way for the next week. You just missed a nor'easter. And we're still recovering from a nor'easter. In fact, we have some outages in some of the areas still, but Ashley Falls escaped that. We didn't have any outages at all. We had power during the whole nor'easter event. But the snow was so heavy, we had trees, trees, trees with broken branches. So, very interesting but you picked a great day. The weather here is wonderful. I just got back from St. Louis, doing a concert. That's one of my towns too, St. Louis. You know, I had a bandleader, George Hudson was originally from Pittsburgh, but he moved to St. Louis. A lot of people claimed him to be a St. Louis person, but he's a Pittsburgher, and he's the one that made me leave my happy home when I was seventeen I joined his band, so I was in St. Louis last night playing a concert.

Brown: Great. Last night?

Jamal: Sunday night.

Brown: Sunday night. Okay, yeah, well, recently enough. Well, before we explore your relationship and tenure with George Hudson and your ties to St. Louis, let's start at the very beginning, if we could. If you could state your birth name, birthplace, birth date for the historical record.

Jamal: July 2, 1930, Mr. Jamal was born in the wonderful city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. It's one of my favorite cities. Rich with music and other things, to say the least.

Brown: And if you could, could you tell us your parent's names?

Jamal: My parent's names? Why do you want to know my parents' names?

Brown: That's part of American history.

Jamal: Part of American history? It's part of my history, too.

Brown: Absolutely.

Jamal: My mother's name was Lottie. My father's name was Robert.

Brown: Your father's last name was Jones, is that correct?

Jamal: My father's last name allegedly was Jones.

Brown: Okay. And [your] mother's maiden name?

Jamal: Wilson.

Brown: And were they also originally from Pittsburgh?

Jamal: No. My father and mother were from Virginia, and I think my mother's hometown, in fact I'm almost sure it was Lynchburg. And my father [was] in close proximity, if not Lynchburg itself.

Brown: And do you have any siblings?

Jamal: My siblings have made their transition. I had one brother, two sisters. They've all made the transition. Of the four of us, I'm the only one remaining.

Brown: And the birth order of the four of you?

Jamal: I'm the youngest. My oldest sister passed away just a few years ago. My brother was next to her, and my other sister was next to me. I'm the youngest of four, and the first one to leave home. I left home at seventeen. I'd mentioned before George Hudson made me leave my happy home. So, I was the first one to leave Pittsburgh.

Brown: And your father's occupation?

Jamal: Steelworker. Steelworker and 23 years open hearth. It's a tough, tough job. I have a different perspective on my father and what he went through when I visited the steel mills. Post-war, they had the families come to see where their fathers worked. That's where he worked, open hearth. Many times he saw men fall into that open vat of molten steel. And the funeral was a just a dip of that in a box. That was the funeral. 'Cause it's were just a puff of smoke when you landed in there. So my father, God bless him in the spirit world, was an open hearth steel mill worker 23 years straight. Never missed a day. Never missed a day unless he was sick. He fell down the steps and hurt his head, and we wondered where he was. He was in the hospital. Other than that, never missed a day of work. I wouldn't have lasted in there for two minutes.

Brown: I understand. What part of Pittsburgh did your family live when you were born?

Jamal: We call it East End. East Liberty called by many, but East End we called it. It's where Gene Kelly comes from, the dancer. He's another Pittsburgher. So, we lived at East End, East Liberty. Erroll Garner… I went to school in Homewood, though, but I lived in East End or East Liberty.

Brown: It sounds as if East End or East Liberty was an integrated neighborhood. Is that accurate?

Jamal: Always. I didn't know any different. It was predominantly Italian and Afro-American.

Brown: Is this where you were basically raised throughout your childhood?

Jamal: I was raised until, as I said before, George Hudson made me leave my happy home. I left at 17, but I was born on Stoebner Way. A place called Stoebner Way. Went to Armor Elementary School. Same school that Erroll Garner, and Dodo Marmarosa went to. A lot of people forgot Dodo Marmarosa. He was one of the great pianists. You would know him. You would know *of* him. "Relaxing at Camarillo," those early records with Charlie Parker and "Summit Ridge Drive." He's playing harpsichord, one of the first records with harpsichord with Artie Shaw. So we all went to Armor Avenue Elementary School, and then we moved when I was three years old to Dean Street, which is further east, and that's where I grew up until I was 17.

Brown: Historical record shows that at age three, your uncle Lawrence challenged you at the piano. Can you talk about your Uncle Lawrence?

Jamal: Well, you've been reading! [laughs] Your reading precedes you, Dr. Brown. He was a chef, not a pianist. He discovered my ability and the rest is history. He sat down at the piano one day, I was walking by, three years old and he said, "I bet you can't do this." He was playing something. I sat down and played note by note, and that's the way it's been ever since. I've been sitting at the piano for how many years now? A few years. Off and on 78 years now. 78 years. Three and seventy, I think my math is correct, makes 81.

Brown: Correct.

Jamal: I think that's correct.

Brown: Now, let's talk a little bit more about that episode with Uncle Lawrence. After he discovered that you had this aptitude, what happened at that point, as far as you either exploring or becoming involved in music?

Brown: So again, after your uncle Lawrence discovered you had this musical aptitude, what was the progression of your musical involvement at that point?

Jamal: Well, about the time I got to kindergarten, teachers were fainting, cause I was playing everything. Five years old, whatever that was, age that is, that you started, I think it was five at that time. And my kindergarten teacher said, "You have to take this boy to a teacher right away." She found me one of the best teachers, my mother, found me one of the best teachers in the world. Mary Cardwell Dawson, who founded the only Afro-American opera company. There's

not one since. She was responsible for putting the first Afro Americans in the Met. In fact, they still honor her on occasion, "The Met: Remembering Mary Cardwell Dawson." She was fabulous. So, I studied with her for many years until she moved to Washington. Then I had to get another teacher. He was fabulous, too. James Miller was my second teacher, who studied with the same master that Earl Wild studied with. Earl Wild is one of our great pianists from Pittsburgh, too. He just passed away. So after that, my college was on the road with George Hudson.

Brown: Before we get to George, before we get to your leaving Pittsburgh, let's talk a little bit more about your schooling. You mention your early schools. What other schools did you attend as far as grade school, junior high or high school?

Jamal: Westinghouse High in Homewood.

Brown: Westinghouse High. And who were some of your classmates? Were there other musicians that you were associating with at that point?

Jamal: Grover Mitchell was in the band then. We didn't think he was ever going to be a musician. He ended up conducting the Count Basie Orchestra many years later and was a section man before that with Count Basie. He was one of the guys in the junior orchestra—Cadets was the name of the band—and there are some others that may come to mind, but he's certainly one outstanding example of what happens in my hometown.

Brown: Were there any other subjects that you were interested in in school?

Jamal: I was a very good typist, but I was very good and advanced in my grades [so] that the last year of my high schooling I only went to three classes a day. I had enough background to work at night with some of the leading musicians in Pittsburgh. I was working with guys 50, 60 years old by the time left high school because I knew the repertoire. My Aunt Louise had sent me reams and reams of sheet music, so this young man at 14 years old, even before that, I was working with Honey Boy Minor, one of the great drummers, Leroy Brown, one of the great saxophonists in Pittsburgh. I had a steady job with them before I left high school so the administrative staff said six months before I graduated, all I had to do was attend one class. Study class, English, then another study class, and I went home. So, I only did three classes a day in school and two of those were study classes because I was way ahead of the game with my grades. And I was busy playing music by then, so I was able to combine working with my last six months of high school.

Brown: It's almost like practicum.

Jamal: And I was able to get a little rest, too, because staying up late, having to get up early to go to school was not the easiest thing in the world. Taking your algebra papers to do in between sets, it was 40-20 sets we used to do. But that I was doing before my 6 months left in high school. I was doing my homework on the gigs prior to that.

Brown: If we could go back and look at your early piano training. Apparently, or presumably you are being trained in western concert classical traditions. So you're learning technique, you're learning basic repertoire. Were you at this time, at the same time that you're learning formal piano studies, are you using your ear to pick up popular music or learning music outside of your formal studies?

Jamal: We didn't do that in Pittsburgh. Our approach was music, good or bad. As Duke Ellington used to say, "There's only two kinds of music, good and bad." So, all the Pittsburghers were just as fluent in Mozart as they were in Count Basie or Art Tatum. We knew the best of both worlds. We knew the European body of work and the American body of work. So, we didn't separate that. We didn't have that separatism as exhibited even now. "Oh, I play classical music." Well, we play classical music too. We play the "American Classical Music," it's a phrase I coined some years, and we play the European body of work too. And that's how most of us work in the field that I'm in. George Shearing can play the concertos and he could write "Lullaby of Birdland." So, we're multidimensional fellows: the Brubecks, and the McCoy Tyners, and Jamals and the Oscar Petersons. So, Pittsburghers knew the best of both worlds. I was playing Franz Liszt, "The Étude," at 10 years old for example. But I was also playing Art Tatum.

Brown: Now, were you able to play that music for your teachers? Were they encouraging you to play other than the Western concert tradition?

Jamal: Well, we had possibly one of the first so-called jazz bands in the country at Westinghouse High School. [15:50] Mr. McVicker was our teacher then, and he was very, very open to all forms of music, so he formed the Cadets. I have pictures of that band. That must have been one of the first jazz bands in existence in high school, if not the first. So, I was very fortunate. I worked with the beginner's orchestra playing all the Sousas, and the Mozart and Beethoven stuff, and the junior orchestra, and advanced to senior orchestra, and the Cadets. I was the only male pianist in school. All the other pianists were female. That's a challenge right there, to be the only male pianist in the orchestras, because you had to take turns. There'd be three or four of us involved in all these complements: juniors, beginners, seniors, Cadets. So, he was very, very open, and it was very good. He was a very good professor, a very good teacher.

Brown: Do you recall any of the titles of the compositions or pieces that you played in high school in the Cadets band?

Jamal: I wrote an arrangement at 10 years old, but I never wrote again because I didn't transpose for all the instruments. And what a shock it was when he raised the baton! [Laughs] I was 10 years old when I made my first big-band arrangement. I'm still writing now, but I'm not an orchestral writer. I'm an ensemble writer. I was writing for my group. When I started my group, I used to write out all the parts. I'm still writing. In fact, that's what I am. I am a composer, as well as a pianist.

Brown: I think I listed that as your second or third title. Did you have any other formal music training other than piano technique? Did you have either composition, theory, musicology?

Jamal: Only piano. No theory. No composition. And of course, my goal was to attend Juilliard to pursue those aforementioned areas, but my Juilliard became George Hudson's orchestra. That's it.

Brown: In looking at the historical record, I see three different dates for when you joined George Hudson. One reference says '47, one says '48, one says '49, they all say after graduating from high school. So, could you for the historical record tell us when you join George Hudson, and what were the circumstances of your joining his group?

Jamal: I joined George Hudson in '48. I finished high school in February '48. I think I had a winter graduation, I think it was, because I joined George in Atlantic City. We did Atlantic City in the summer. It was the only club Afro-Americans had, one of the few clubs, the biggest club, Club Harlem. That's where we worked, and I worked there all summer. George came through town, and I think he heard me in the musicians union. We had these incredible jam sessions. Local 471, the union I join when I was fourteen. I joined underage. You're supposed to be 16 before you could join. Of course, the president looked at me, he said, "He's not 16 years old," but he let me join. So, I joined at fourteen. I think George heard me at one of the jam sessions there. And that was it. He was determined to have me join the band that's why I joined in Atlantic City.

Brown: In joining the union, was that something that was necessary for you to work at that time? What inspired you to join the union?

Jamal: Well, I was working with union musicians. They wanted me, and encouraged me to join the union. And that's how I got in the union. All those 50, 60-year-old musicians were unionized, so I had to join the union if I was going to continue working with them.

Brown: And, the repertoire, the type of music that you were playing professionally, i.e., being paid, what type of music was that?

Jamal: American Classical music. I worked with William Hitchcock's orchestra. I worked with Joe Westray. In fact, one of Joe Westray's grandsons worked with Wynton Marsalis. We often

exchanged stories about his grandfather. He knew I worked with Joe when I was a kid. Joe Westray, William Hitchcock, and a great saxophone player, Carl Arter. I did jobs with him, just saxophone and piano–no bass, no drums, nothing. Carl Arter was a fabulous musician and his father was a pianist. Some worked with Carl Arter–A-R-T-E-R. I worked with so many of the great musicians in Pittsburgh.

Brown: And what type engagements were they? Were they dances, social clubs, variety, weddings?

Jamal: Proms, dances, in Uniontown and Aliquippa, all around, old veterans buildings, I forget what they're called.

Brown: VFW, American Legion?

Jamal: American Legion. That's it.

Brown: How about the Elks club?

Jamal: That's it, you got it.

Brown: So, you did the full gamut.

Jamal: And nightclubs.

Brown: And nightclubs at 14?

Jamal: Yeah, 14, 15, 16, 17. I was a full-fledged musician, so to speak. Well, when you join the union, they consider you a professional musician at that point.

Brown: How long were you with George Hudson?

Jamal: I was with George long enough to tour all over the country. In fact, I was at the Apollo Theater in 1948 with Billy Eckstine looking at me from the wings, seeing what I was up to. That's Pittsburgh. Pittsburghers check on Pittsburghers. Billy Eckstine, one of the greats, was watching me from the wings. Staying at the Braddock, which is no longer there, the Braddock Hotel. Working at that was my first job at the Apollo Theater. Ravens, Dinah Washington, and others, to say the least. Butterbeans and Susie, one of the great vaudeville acts of all time. And the chorus lines in Atlantic City. I think Sonny Payne's father was playing across the street and in the front lounge with Wild Bill Davis. Wild Bill Davis was really, really packing them in. Unbelievable. Wild Bill Davis, one of the guys who flew his own plane along with Jimmy Lunceford. Professor Wild Bill Davis. He's the guy that gave the Basie band a second wind. One

more time, "April in Paris," that's his arrangement. I used to hear him play it in 1948 in Atlantic City. People four-deep at Little Graces across the street from Club Harlem. So, Sonny Payne's father was in Atlantic City, too. Sonny Payne was one of the great drummers to. You know Sonny Payne. Great drummer.

Brown: As you were developing not only your pianistic technique with your teachers, you were also keeping your ear to the music of the day. So, who were the pianists you were listening to, and which ones who you feel were the most influential in the development of your personal piano style?

Jamal: My great influence was Erroll Garner. My mother knew his mother. But not only that, he was one of the great pianists of all time. Still underrated, but he was very successful. He was one of the most successful players in Pittsburgh before he left for New York. Martha Glaser started managing him at that point, and of course, Saul Hirob [?] the great impresario, had these ballets and all these companies out of Russia. He started putting Erroll, by way of Martha Glaser's pressing the buttons, in all these great venues throughout the world. Salle Pleyel being one of them in Paris. So, Erroll was one of my major, if not my most, influential pianist.

Brown: Was that through recordings? Did you see him in town?

Jamal: Erroll came to school once while I was still in high school, and played for us. I just marveled, cause he played on all the black keys, it seemed. He played in all those extraordinarily hard keys–so-called hard keys. 'Cause he performed in any key it didn't make any difference. And he was such a composer. So, Erroll came to high school, but I really didn't get to know him until after I had left, and formed my own group. He used to come in the Embers. He was the first person I saw drink Perrier water 'cause he had been in Paris. And he came back with all these things he had been subject to, including Perrier water. He used to come in the Embers to see me perform. So, I got to know Erroll later on. I knew him much better after I had left home, and he had made a name for himself. Erroll used to work in a place in Pittsburgh where we couldn't go in. Mimi Waters, another pianist, and Erroll, they [were] the only pianists in that room, solo pianists. So, he was working the top places in Pittsburgh before he left. He was always successful, always. When he went to New York he [made] a big exposure. Made records with Boyd Raeburn. A lot of people don't know he made these records with the big bands. Georgie Auld's Band, featuring Erroll Garner. His first great hit was "Laura." That's what made him. Savoy records, I think. I think that's his first record. Big, big record on Savoy, "Laura." Mr. Erroll Garner. Still a great player, and the records are phenomenal. Played all kinds of things. Then, Art Tatum was an influence, of course. Art Tatum influenced everyone. And Nat Cole. Those are the three main role models. Erroll, primarily, Art Tatum, and Nat Cole.

Brown: You say music chose you, you didn't choose music. After being with George Hudson for how long?

Jamal: I was with George [from] '48 until maybe, about a year, until I went back home. And I stayed at home for a minute or two.

Brown: Why did you leave?

Jamal: I joined a group called the Cardwells out of St. Louis, a song and dance team. The great pianist that succeeded me – I was his predecessor – Ray Bryant followed me after I quit that group. They got Ray Bryant.

Brown: Are you talking about George Hudson's group?

Jamal: No, the Cardwells.

Brown: But why did you leave George? Was it to join another group, or just to go home?

Jamal: I went home. For some reason I went home. I think I went home because I was the pianist for the Four Strings. After a while, I joined the Four Strings. Their first pianist was Sam Johnson, a great pianist. In fact, he was neck and neck with Erroll Garner. Sam Johnson and Erroll Garner, they were the two pianists in Pittsburgh at the time. And Erroll got all the breaks, and Sam ended up tuning pianos in Philadelphia. When he left the Four Strings, I joined them, and I think that was another reason I went home because the Four Strings was one of the most important groups around Pittsburgh, Joe Kennedy's group.

Brown: I'm going to come back to your relationship with Joe Kennedy, Jr., but I wanted to ask you little bit more about the George Hudson experience. This is your first time with the touring ensemble.

Jamal: I worked with big bands all coming up. Jerry Elliott had a big band, a great trombonist from Pittsburgh.

Brown: But, what I'm trying to get at is a touring ensemble, so your life is on the road.

Jamal: Of course, this was the first time.

Brown: So, how was that as an aspiring musician? That's why I brought up your original quote of "music chose you." Did you feel like this was something that you wanted to do? Once you got into this milieu of the so-called "jazz tradition," was that something that seemed to suit you?

Jamal: Well, it was exciting. I left home at 17. I worked with some phenomenal musicians. Ed Bachman in the first chair. This is the band that Clark Terry came out of. This is the band that Ernie Wilkins, a great writer came out of. I used to see Ernie write scores on a bus. We were touring on a bus at that time. We had to dress on the bus most of the time. We certainly couldn't stay in the hotels at various times because there was a very, very terrible ethnic division going on, to say the least. I watched Ernie many a day write scores on the bus. That was a product of George Hudson. I was a product, Clark Terry, and we had some other great players [come] out of George Hudson's band.

Brown: So the repertoire, did you find it particularly challenging?

Jamal: Oh yeah it was. And intimidating.

Brown: There are stories I've read about Duke Ellington, and how the new member of the band is basically shunned by the older ones. You have to get acclimated on your own. Was there camaraderie among the musicians in George Hudson's [band]? Did they take you under their wing? Here you are 17. Did they nurture you? Was it not a very nurturing situation?

Jamal: I think that's one of the great things that is missing today. Camaraderie, that's what we had. I think that's the missing ingredient today. There are many other distractions, but certainly one of the missing things is the camaraderie we shared. In fact, I still have a pair of cufflinks that Ben Webster gave to me somewhere. I met Ben Webster years later, but Sid Catlett came and sat in with us. Louis Armstrong came to the Club Harlem. Louis didn't sit in with us, [but] Sid Catlett did. So, the camaraderie was a wonderful thing and certainly was necessary in the formation of a young artist's career. That's very, very important because certain things are handed down through camaraderie, and unfortunately it's disappearing now.

Brown: So, you felt that you were nurtured in this environment, that these folks were looking out for you and were encouraging you?

Jamal: George Hudson was certainly one of the most protective bandleaders ever. He protected every one of his men. And Billy Daniels was… the feature singer and Johnny Hartman was the added attraction. He was in Atlantic City at Club Harlem. That's when I met Johnny. But, Billy Daniels was the main singer there, and Johnny Hartman was also on the bill. I think perhaps I was overplaying, and Billy Daniels was complaining about my overplaying or something. George Hudson was very protective, would not let him talk to me. He said, "You speak to me about my pianist's overplaying." A very, very wonderful family unit, to say the least.

Brown: That's good, I'm glad you brought that up for the historical record because, as we know, today this music has lost that fraternal nurturing relationship. So, let's go back to Joe Kennedy.

Where did you first meet Joe Kennedy Jr., and how did you become a member of the Four Strings?

Jamal: I met Joe Kennedy at Mary Cardwell Dawson's school. She had a school on Apple Avenue, her music school, and that's where I met Joe. She surrounded herself with all the great young players. Philippia Schuyler, who was down in the Vietnam War. She was performing in Vietnam, and she was killed in a plane crash. A very talented lady, Philippia Schuyler. She [Mary Cardwell Dawson] had people from Germany, personalities from Germany and all over the world used to come there. Joe Kennedy was one of her students. That's how I met Joe. One of the great masters, and professors, one of the great orchestrators and composers. What a talent he had. Related to Benny Carter, you know. He's one of Benny Carter relatives, and Cuban Bennett was his uncle. Played 1st chair with Jimmie Lunceford. Cuban Bennett was Joe's uncle.

Brown: How old were you when you two met?

Jamal: I must've been all of seven years old when I met Joe. I have some pictures at the Kimball piano that was taken at my wonderful teacher's house on Apple Avenue. In fact, I wrote a composition called "Apple Avenue." It's in one of my CD's somewhere. That's where I met Joe. Because she had a gathering of talent; she surrounded herself. As I said before, she had formed the first Afro-American opera company. She had all those people around her then. She played in various places including The Met. Remarkable woman.

Brown: Can you talk about her background? Where she from and what her training was?

Jamal: She must've studied at the New England Conservatory in Boston because all of her books that she gave me were from the New England Conservatory. A lot of the books were from the New England Conservatory. I think that's where she graduated from. Her major was the oldest instrument in the world: the voice, that's her major. But, she also was a pianist. A first rank lady, educator, impeccable dresser. She always was dressed for her students. "Dressed to the nines," or whatever the expression is. You can hear her come down the steps, a spiral staircase. She had a mansion that she rented from one of the successful Afro-American businessmen in Pittsburgh. She rented from him; I think he was related to Lena Horne. She had [this] spiral staircase she descended. When you heard her heels making a noise on the stairs, you better have your stuff together. [Laughs] 'Cause she would let you know if you didn't.

Brown: So she was a strict disciplinarian?

Jamal: Oh yeah. I think her background was New England Conservatory. I don't know if she got all her degrees from there or she did her graduate work there. I have no idea.

Brown: Before we go back to the Four Strings and how you got involved with that group, you said you wrote your first arrangement at age ten. But, according to the historical record, you wrote "New Rhumba" in 1948. So, you were eighteen when you wrote that.

Jamal: Yeah. I also wrote "Ahmad's Blues." Another one of my . . .

Brown: So let's talk about… before we get to the Four Strings, since I want to try to keep it chronologically here. So, you're already starting to compose, you're already arranging, what were your influences in your early compositions? Was it just sitting at the piano and coming up with some ideas? Did you hear something and it influenced you? Can you recall your compositional craft, how that developed?

Jamal: Billy Strayhorn, Maurice Ravel, Duke Ellington and a lot of other influences. But here again, Pittsburgh was very unique because we studied and worked in the European body of work, as well as the American body of work. So repertoire-wise, my aunt Louise was responsible for me knowing enough repertoire to work with guys 50 and 60 years [old]… She sent me reams of sheet music, so I knew all the tunes the 50 or 60 year old guys knew at ten, eleven years old, by way of my aunt Louise, who the sister of my uncle Lawrence. She was an educator in Wilson, North Carolina. We have a lot of Afro American, great educators from Wilson, North Carolina and in other parts of the country too, but I'm concerned with where I got my source from: Wilson, North Carolina. My repertoire certainly comes from there, a lot of it. The rest of it comes from Mary Cardwell Dawson and James Miller, who had me in the European body of work. We were multidimensional. Coming up in Pittsburgh, we studied everything.

Brown: What was the inspiration for "New Rhumba"? We're not dealing with Ravel. We're not dealing with Strayhorn. What you're dealing with is still involved with the American Classical music tradition, but may be another genre since we're dealing with rumba. We're talking about something that's coming from the Caribbean, whether it's rumba coming from Cuba. So can we talk about how you came about writing a rumba? We know about "Ahmad's Blues," that's a blues.

Jamal: I wrote that when I was with the Cardwells. I was 18 when I wrote Ahmad's blues. I don't remember the date I wrote "New Rhumba." But I thought it was post-leadership; I formed my group by then. By 1951, I think I had formed my group, and I wrote "New Rhumba." "Ahmad's Blues" was done in 1948, that's when I was working with the Cardwells. It was on Broadway for two years in the show, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* But it was Miles Davis' recording with Red Garland playing piano. It was not my recording, but later on I had the late Bob Williams do lyrics to that, and Marlena Shaw did the first vocal recording and Nat Cole. Going back to when

I composed "New Rhumba," I don't remember if I did that post my leadership role or not, but "Ahmad's Blues" was done before I became leader [in] 1948.

Brown: Let's talk about the Four Strings and your continuing relationship with Joe Kennedy Jr., please.

Jamal: Well, the Four Strings is responsible for me coming up with the concept of "Poinciana," which was my biggest record because that was part of our repertoire. I think I was introduced to "Poinciana" through Joe Kennedy. I'm almost sure. Then I developed my own arrangement, which became worldwide in acceptance. In fact, I still play some of Joe's things. "The Fantastic Vehicle," I recorded it, I still play it. He wrote a song called "Somewhat Eccentric" that I would love to get his widows to send me, if I don't have it in my archives here somewhere. Joe Kennedy was the first Afro American to conduct the Cleveland Pops [Orchestra]. That was my condition when the Cleveland Pops wanted me to perform with them. I said, on condition that my conductor is Joe Kennedy. He wrote the arrangements [for the] *Suite for Trio and Orchestra* as well. A phenomenal man, great master, great violinist. Years later, he came to Salle Pleyel in France in Paris, made a record with me there, performed with me there and passed a few years later.

Brown: The Four Strings, how long were you with this group, and why did it disband?

Jamal: I was with the Four Strings [in] '48, '49 '50. We couldn't get any work, that's why. We went to Chicago. We got one agent that gave us some work out of Chicago. I think it was somewhere in Ohio. After that, Joe decided to go back to Pittsburgh and got involved in the educational system there, became superintendent of schools in Richmond, Virginia, music department rather. The group disbanded and became the Three Strings, thanks to me. I became the leader of the Three Strings. That's why it was called the Three Strings because without Joe, there's three of us. But, we disbanded because we couldn't get work. That's why. Staying in one room in Chicago and a basement and couldn't get work, so Joe decided to call it quits and went back to Pittsburgh.

Brown: Was the Three Strings able to get work?

Jamal: Yes, we got work. Thanks to my hustling and going from club to club, we got work. John Hammond discovered us and got us a recording contract with Epic Records. That's what started it. The rest is history. In 1951, I made some '78s for Okeh with Ray Crawford, another great Pittsburgh musician, who was one of the leading saxophone players, but had to switch because of lung problems. He learned guitar while he was recovering from his ailment, and I made this record with him. I think it was Israel [Crosby] or Eddie Calhoun.

Brown: Eddie Calhoun in the Three Strings?

Jamal: I think it was Eddie Calhoun, who became the last bass player for Erroll Garner before Erroll passed away… The bass player was Eddie Calhoun, Kelly Martin on drums and Erroll. But, he was my bass player for that recording session and worked with me for a long time, Eddie Calhoun, Red Crawford and myself.

Brown: So, through John Hammond's connections you are able to record for the Okeh label?

Jamal: Yes, correct.

Brown: Do remember what it was like to do your first sides?

Jamal: Interesting [laughs]. In fact, someone gave me the promotional copies. I have them framed. Ned Arter gave me those some years ago. He brought them to me in a paper bag. He had bought a collection of 78's, and in that collection were my promotional copies of all things, not copies for sale. How he got them, I don't know. Ned Arter. He does some of my calligraphy too. He's a great guy and brought me these promotional copies some years back. My first disc with Okeh Records, and I had them framed. They're somewhere in this room.

Brown: This group seemed to have lasted at least several years. John Hammond allegedly discovered you, at least signed you to the Okeh label in '51. So, you are putting out sides, you're working. Are you touring? Are you doing any national tours?

Jamal: Well, John was more than just interested. He had a keen sense of music, period. John brought Bob Dylan.

Brown: Billie Holiday, a lot of folks.

Jamal: Count Basie. Benny Goodman was married to his sister. One of his favorite bass players was Israel Crosby. So, when Israel joined me, John was even more enthusiastic about his interest in the Three Strings. In 1960, John took me to Steinway Pianos on 57th Street, Steinway Hall. Fritz Steinway on my right, John Hammond on my left, and that's when I became a Steinway artist, 1960. Only two people on the roster in our American Classical field. That was Hazel Scott, Adam Clayton Powell's wife, and John Lewis. They were the first two American classicists to go with Steinway. They had Rubinstein, of course and all those, but then there is only Hazel Scott and John Lewis. I became the third in that area of expertise.

Brown: We're looking at two Steinways behind you right now.

Jamal: I've been with them since 1960.

Brown: When you play, you spec, they have to have a Steinway. Do you have a particular Steinway model that you spec at this point? Do you have it in your tech rider?

Jamal: No, I just use 669, which is a great piano. I go and select when I'm in New York. I selected for my latest recording that I just did October 6th, 7th and 8th at the Avatar Studios. I am very thrilled about it, and I went down thanks to the wonderful organization they have there [with] Vivian Hsu, Irene Radowski and Ron Connors, the technician. Great people. I wouldn't go with any other company. There are some great pianos, but to me, Steinway's the instrument that stands out above the rest. I have two, as you can see.

Brown: If we can return to the Three Strings and a couple of historical events. One, it becomes renamed the Ahmad Jamal Trio, and secondly, Ray Crawford is replaced with a drummer. We can talk about that evolution of the group.

Jamal: Well, 195, the Three Strings [are] working places like Harry's Show Lounge, the Pershing. When I went to the Pershing, where I made my famous record, it was run by Sonny, an ex-Globetrotter basketball player. He ran the Club Pershing. I couldn't get a job in there. I worked there one night, I think. So, I went there to Harry's Show Lounge. Not the front one, the [poppa guy???] room—the room in the back. Eventually, we graduated to the main room. That's the last time I saw Nat Cole; Nat Cole came to see me there. I could still see him looking over the bar at me and I think it was Israel and Ray. Eventually, Sonny Boswell was his name, [who] owned the Pershing. He eventually sold it to Miller Brown and Grant Smith. Two men about town, may I say, in Pittsburgh. I became artist in residence there.

Brown: In Pittsburgh or Chicago?

Jamal: I'm sorry, Chicago. I became an artist in residence there in 1955. By virtue of the fact that I got disenchanted with New York City. I went to New York City in 1955 at the Embers with Ray, Israel, and myself, playing intermission. Someone sat a glass of wine on the piano. I think they wanted a request or something, and in placing that, the wine spilled all over the keys. The red wine against white keys made me leave, not only the club, but I left New York. I jumped up from the piano, went downstairs, put my coat on, and Israel and I drove all the way back to Chicago. Ray stayed in New York. No more New York for me.

Brown: How long had you been there? How long was that engagement before you left, and for whom were you providing intermission entertainment? What was the main act?

Jamal: I think the main group was… Milt Hinton was in the group, Buck Clayton, Papa Jo Jones, who became one of my drummers later on, and a famous East side pianist who had the group,

Joe Bushkin. Joe Bushkin, he was the darling of the Eastside crowd. Very busy place, the Embers, very noisy place, very successful.

Brown: Where was it located?

Jamal: 54th and 3rd Avenue across the street from one of the very famous clubs in New York. The Embers was owned by Morris Levy, Moe Lewis and Ralph Watkins. They owned the Embers. They owned Birdland. They owned Basin Street East. They owned the Royal Roost. They owned four clubs.

Brown: How long was your engagement?

Jamal: I was there long enough to jump up from the piano and say, "No more," and they said, "He'll never work New York again" [laughs]. "He'll never work New York again." And a few years later, after [what] we had at the Pershing, they were begging me to work in New York. Hardly ever say never because you don't ever know. "He'll never work New York again. The nerve. He jumped up from the piano, he went downstairs, he put on his coat, and never returned." Didn't ever return, that night! I'm using never, but I'm saying he didn't ever return that night! I came back under a different setting after that monumental recording we made at the Pershing. So, I drove all the way back to Chicago with Israel. Ray stayed in New York, I think he made some records with Gil Evans later on. Ray was a great guitarist. A great man. I still miss him. One of the best recordings of "Poinciana" was made on Epic [Records] in 1955 with Ray Crawford, Israel, and myself. That is some "Poinciana," but the one that really captured the audience was the one done at the Pershing. But, the other one was a jewel, '55 on Epic. A jewel! Ray, Israel, and myself. So delicate, so finely crafted, and when I came back, I had to procure the services of a drummer.

Brown: Why did you feel you had to get a drummer?

Jamal: Well, the Three Strings and I thought it was a little subtle for venues, big or small, because that's a very subtle thing. Oscar [Peterson] did it for a long time and Nat [King Cole] did it for a long time. But Nat eventually added the great drummer, Lee Young. That was his only drummer from start to finish—Lee Young, fabulous. He produced my only record for Motown, Lee Young produced it. Lee Young was a great drummer and fabulous family, and Lester Young, his brother. Fabulous career, Lee Young. But, anyway I said, "Well, I'll have to change." I tried a guitarist, the same configuration to complement for a while. I said to change it to drums, but I want a special drummer, so it took me a long time to get that special drummer because that special drummer was very, very busy. His name is Vernel Fournier. Special drummer. He was so busy working with Tom Archer at the El Mocambo. He was busy. He had a store that he ran.

He was working at the post office. Busy man. Finally, I got Vernel to join. But before that – I'm jumping ahead – I was Israel's pianist. That's how I met Israel. At a place called Jack's Back Door on 59th and State. That's before I could get in the union.

Brown: Before you can get in the union?

Jamal: Transfer-wise, in Chicago. You had to put in a transfer [and] work six months before you could work steady. So, I worked on the weekends with Johnny Thompson, who died a tragic death, and Israel was the leader. He had that job, and he hired me as his pianist.

Brown: Who else was in the group?

Jamal: Johnny Thompson, tenor saxophone, bass and piano. Extensive repertoire. The three of us played everything. Great learning experience with Israel. One of the great bassists of all time. Remarkable. So, eventually when I formed my group, it took me a time to get him in my group, both of them, because he was with Benny Goodman off and on, and this person and that person, Trying to get him and Vernel was quite a Herculean task, to say the least.

[End of disc 1]

Jamal: The transition to me is very interesting. Kind of historic, too. We went from Okeh. Danny Kessler was the A&R man then, that's by way of John Levy's—John Hammond's pressing the button. I have John Levy on my mind. He is my first manager. He would be 100 years old. I just got a letter from his wife announcing same, asking people, if they will, send letters. That's how I thought about John Levy, that's my first manager. Great bassist too, John, one of the premier bassists. Anyway, John Hammond took us to Okeh. I made, how many sides? "Ahmad's Blues," "Will You Still Be Mine," tune by Matt Dennis, "Surrey With The Fringe On Top," and "Gal In Calico." Then, we went to the subsidiary also of Columbia, Okeh. Here again, Israel, Ray, and myself. That's when we made that first version of "Poinciana" in 1955. One of my favorites, too.

Then, an interesting transition to Parrot Records. A lot of people don't know about Parrot Records. Owned by Al Benson, one of the premier disc jockeys, or radio personalities I should say, in Chicago. A very dominant radio personality. He had a label called Parrot, so I went with Parrot, and those masters were bought by Leonard Chess later on. That's how we got Chess, Checker, and Argo. That's when my association with Leonard began. Leonard had four principal artists: Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters, and myself. Years later, he sold the company for $52 million. Of course, I had my biggest hit on Argo. He had bought Masters from the aforementioned Al Benson and that's how I got with the company. That's how it started. I went from the 113 Club to the Pershing and became artist-in-residence after the incident in New York when the guy spilled the wine on the piano. Ray stayed, and Israel and I drove back. I ventured

into looking for a bass player. I used guitar for little bit, looking for a drummer, rather. I used guitar for a moment or two, but then I procured the services of Vernel, and the rest is history.

Brown: well let's talk about that history… Because we have a lot of time I want to talk, because we just played your latest release, one selection off of that. What I hear is this consistency in Ahmad Jamal's sound: transparent, subtlety, sophistication, judicious use of space, balancing space, using virtuosic passages as a spice, not as a staple. I hear more expanded harmonic vocabulary now, as opposed to sixty years ago, but that's to be expected of an artist who maintains a vision. How did you come to form this piano trio sensibility? When I listen to your live recordings, that's what I usually focus on, *Live At The Pershing*. I hear a telepathic interplay among the musicians. You are credited with the arranging of these pieces. Can you describe that interpersonal musical dialogue that goes on with your group? When I listen to something from 1958, this predates a lot of the focus that was on Bill Evans in creation of his piano trio, but that wasn't until he got Scotty LaFaro and Paul Motian that he had what I would consider very similar kind of interplay and near telepathic exchange. How did that develop? If you can explain how the concept came to be, of an ensemble sound where everyone seems to be [in] almost an equal role. When I listen to your recordings, because you leave so much space, the other musicians are able to contribute a lot more. Even though you're the leader, I still feel that it is a dialogue, rather than a monologue, that's being supported. If you could talk about how you came to this conceptual approach to your ensemble.

Jamal: It's very interesting. All Pittsburghers have a unique approach to music. We come from a great town, but all of us are different. Be it Billy Strayhorn, who wrote all of Duke's major hits. In fact, Duke's signature song, "Take The A Train," [was] written by Billy Strayhorn. Mercer wrote one, "Things Ain't What They Used To Be." Duke had some great compositions, but Duke's biggest hits were written by Billy Strayhorn, including "Satin Doll." Here is another Pittsburgher, unique. Who's writing "Lush Life"? Erroll Garner, Ray Brown. Who plays bass like Ray Brown? Art Blakey, Kenny Clarke. Roy Eldridge comes from Pittsburgh. Did you know that? Earl "Father" Hines comes from Pittsburgh. You knew that. Roy Eldridge. George Benson, Thomas Turrentine, my ex-roommate. I got him in George Hudson's band. That's before the emergence of Stanley.

Brown: I thought Stanley was older than Tommy.

Jamal: No.

Brown: Because I know both of them played with Max [Roach] in the sixties.

Jamal: Tommy, I got him with George Hudson's band. He was a great writer too, you know. He taught me how to play a flatted fifth chord. It was Tommy who introduced me to the flatted fifth. He was my roommate on the road. We have so many that come from Pittsburgh and as many greats that have stayed that have left. My concepts come from Pittsburgh, from my hometown. I grew up with that orchestral sense, and of course I don't call my group a trio anymore. I just call it my small or large orchestra. In Salle Pleyel, I had seven pieces. I had Joe Kennedy, George Coleman, Yoron Israel playing drums, and so forth and so on. I had seven pieces there. I call it "my ensemble" whether there's ninety pieces or two pieces, it has to be conducted. All the music has to be conducted. So, that's what you hear, you hear my attempt to orchestrate everything. All my things can be adapted to big orchestras, as was the case of Gil Evans. Not easy, but very skillfully, he just converted the trio parts—if I may use the word trio—from small ensemble to big ensemble. That's how he did the arrangement of *Miles Ahead* with the orchestra and Miles. Gil Evans, who was skillful, was writing for Claude Thornhill years and years and years ago. That's where Gil came from. He's a skillful writer, and Miles caught hold of that. He had an uncanny knack of picking the right musicians at the right time, Miles. And I've been able do that, too. That's another thing you have to have. You have to have the musical philosophy that I get from my hometown, first. You have to pick the guys who can implement that, and I've been able to do that. I've had some great players. The late Art Davis, one of the great bassists of all time. Richard Davis worked with me, and of course Israel, Eddie Calhoun, Wyatt Reuther, Johnny Pate was one of my bassists. Johnny Pate is a great writer. He did the score for *Superfly* with Curtis Mayfield. So, I've had all the great bass players and drummers. Papa Jo Jones later came when I went back to New York. My intent was to go to Juilliard and follow my original plan after I'd finished high school. It was interrupted by my career, my time with George Hudson. When I went back, got off the road again, and stayed in Chicago. Left my restaurant in 1960. I was going to go to Juilliard and pursue my visions of going to school that I had in my youth. But I started performing again at the Embers. My group then was Wyatt Reuther and Papa Jo Jones at the Embers again. The place where they said he'd never work… My stint at the Embers took the place of my going to Juilliard and pursuing my studies.

Jamal: To answer your question again, you have to have the musical philosophy first, but you have to have the people to implement that. My philosophy comes from my hometown, and my implementation, my ability to do that, comes from picking the right players. Very important.

Brown: In your answering that question, you unearthed probably another three or four hours worth of discussion, bringing up Gil Evans, Miles Davis. Let's talk about that relationship, your relationship with Miles. As the historical record corroborates in many different sources, Miles Davis obviously is influenced by you because a lot of his repertoire comes from your repertoire, was recorded by you before he recorded it, i.e. "Ahmad's Blues," "Surrey With The Fringe On

Top," "Billy Boy," "Green Dolphin Street." These are all tunes that Miles, his recordings get a lot of credit, but his arrangements are based on your arrangements. How did you come to meet Miles? Could you just talk about that relationship?

Jamal: It there was a mutual admiration. I never hung with Miles, and Miles never hung with me. We lived in close proximity for number of years. I lived at 75th Riverside Drive and he lived [at] 77th Riverside Drive between West End Avenue and Riverside Drive, just two blocks from me. Around the corner was Harry Belafonte, Lennie Hayton, Lena Horne, Johnny Nash lived in the neighborhood. George Wein later came in and started an office in that same building. That's where they filmed the first *Death Wish*, Bronson, in that building. Later on, I moved out of that building up to Mount Vernon and George Wein moved into my apartment I had on the sixteenth floor. The close connection I had with Miles was living in close proximity, but we never hung out.

Brown: … Almost wholesale borrowing.

Jamal: Well, actions speak louder than words. I was in Chicago I got… some notice from Columbia Records that they wanted to record "Ahmad's Blues." That was one of my first indications of Miles' being influenced by us and what we did. But also, he used to come to the Pershing. Everyone came to the Pershing: Billie Holiday, Sammy Davis before he had that accident that caused him to lose his eye. He was in the Pershing the night before, or two nights before, or whatever. Miles used to come to the Pershing, and in fact, Miles worked downstairs. That's when I first saw the great bassist Paul Chambers. He was so young when he came to Chicago with Miles. I was working upstairs. Miles was working in the room downstairs. So, that was the first exchange…

Jamal: The last time I talked to Miles, I was in Dr. George Butler's office. That was last time I talked to Miles. Miles was a fan of mine like I was a fan of his. It was a mutual admiration society, but we never hung out. We never had any lengthy conversations. We just knew each other professionally, and there was never any attempt for us to work together. Although, there was some talk about a collaboration, a recording with Miles, Cannonball, and myself. That never happened because I was busy leading, he was busy leading. So, in fact, we are contemporaries. He may be a smidgen older than me, but we're contemporaries. I was busy with my group; he was busy with his. I had no desire to work with Miles, and perhaps he had no desire to work with me. But, we admired each other, and he recorded a lot of my concepts and one of my songs. That's the short and long of it.

Jamal: He used to come to top of the Gate. That was my room when I went from Chicago. I wanted a room similar to what I had in Chicago. I told Art D'Lugoff, "Look, I want another

room I can I can go in and out like I did when I was in Chicago. I moved to New York now I want another room." So, that was the Top of the Gate story. I was there for a long time. Miles used to come down there. In fact, he came down there during the time he was not working. There was a period of time when he didn't work, you know. And George [Butler] went every day to get him back in the studio. Every day he went to his house, every day. That's what got him back in the studio.

Brown: You're talking about back in the seventies.

Jamal: That's right. He wasn't working at all, but he came to see me. I also remember I was working the Pori Festival in Finland. That's another one of my last encounters with Miles. When he got out of the limo, or the car, whatever mode of transportation got him to the hotel, the first person he came to was me. A crowd of people was waiting, but the first person he came to was me. He had a strong feeling about my music. I had a strong feeling about his. He's one of the really historical figures. Hanging out with Charlie Parker and Dizzy. I think more with Charlie Parker than Dizzy. I stayed in an apartment that he rented from a very popular radio personality in Philadelphia. Jocko was his name [Douglas "Jocko" Henderson]. Charlie Parker and Miles had rented the apartment the week before I was there. I rented the apartment subsequent to their being there. What happened with Charlie and Miles, there was a marching band doing a parade in Philadelphia, and they joined the marching band [Laughs]. They became part of the band. So, Miles had a very close connection with Bird. There are many stories about Bird and Miles, many stories, as you know.

Brown: Let's return to you in Chicago with the small ensemble, with Israel and Vernel, and you record *Live at the Pershing Lounge*. If the historical record is correct, this is what launches you into national prominence.

Jamal: *6/28*, after seven years of recording, right. It wasn't a meteoric rise; it didn't happened overnight. Okeh, Epic, Parrot. Then, I went to Leonard and I said, "Look, I have something I want it on location, removed from studio." And he agreed.

Brown: Why did you want that?

Jamal: Because I'd been working at the Pershing as artist-in-residence. That's where it should have been recorded. That's where it was: two-track machine, one engineer, no A&R person. Max Cooperstein was there, one of the reps from the company, but not as the A&R. Just there having a good time. And the good time resulted in a million seller. At the Pershing, *6/28.* It still sells to this day. That's the reason I was in Istanbul because of the Pershing. Or anywhere else.

Brown: Did you have any inkling that this would be so popular, that it would capture the public's imagination?

Jamal: I knew we had something to the extent that I stopped performing the arrangement because I didn't want someone to jump on it. I was very impressed to the point that I stopped performing it at the Pershing until we recorded it. I thought I would have one or two listeners. I got a few more than that, and I'm very grateful for that. It's a wonderful recording and one of my favorites. I always say to people when they ask, "What's your favorite recording?" I say, "The next one," because I'm always looking forward, not backward. But it's a wonderful historical document. I think the most successful recording of "Woody n' You." Dizzy is contained in the *6/28* [*Live at the Pershing*] because it got a free ride. I didn't put any of my compositions in there, but I put one of Dizzy's in there, and that's his most successful recording of "Woody n' You." Because, as I said before, it got a free ride along with "Poinciana," "Surrey With The Fringe On Top," and all the other things.

Brown: We talked about you having to record "Poinciana" with your string small ensemble. You recorded it again live at the Pershing Lounge with, of course, the great, the inestimable, Vernel Fournier. How did he come up with that arrangement? Now, I'm asking you that because I've already interviewed him as part of the same program, and he talked about it. I'm just wondering if I can get your recollection of how that piece came together with his very trademark rhythm.

Jamal: Well, it took three components: Vernel Fournier, the bass lines of Israel Crosby, and what I was playing that complemented the aforementioned. So, there were three things involved there: what I was doing, what Vernel was doing, and what Israel was doing. It all worked out beyond the wildest dreams of what I thought was going to happen. I had great feeling, but instrumentalists don't get hit records. We get very few. There are just a few of us to get hit records. The singers—that's understandable—the oldest instrument in the world is the human voice. Once in a while, you get a record done by an instrumentalist, be it Herbie Hancock, or myself, or Miles, or some of the others who have had hit records. But, you can count them on two fingers—two hands, rather.

Brown: If I can return to this one more time because what Vernel said about how he came up with that pattern. As a drummer – you're outnumbered in this room at this moment – it was transformative to hear what he did. When he described it he said, "I just took that second line beat, with that offbeat cymbal ride, and just added—"

Jamal: You know something? What he was doing was so unique that people used come in places like the Jazz Workshop because they thought it was two drummers. I had a guy that came to the Jazz Workshop just to see if it was one drummer as opposed to two. What he was doing, had he

been able to patent it, he could've made millions because it's been used in every sector of musical society. Whether it's Hollywood films or Maurice White with Earth, Wind and Fire. What he was doing has been used in every sector of the industry. How unique was that? But this was a very unique man, not only with the cymbals, but with brushes. You see, hear some of his brushwork—unbelievable. But he's from New Orleans. And they have a unique thing like Pittsburghers, like people from St. Louis, and people from Memphis. Memphis is very unique, with Phineas Newborn. People have forgotten about Phineas Newborn, one of the most unique pianists in the world. And Jamil Nasser, another one of my great bassists. He came to New York with Phineas Newborn. So, you have these unique personalities that are found in communities in New Orleans, like Vernel Fournier, Idris Muhammad, Herlin Riley. All of these are unique. Herlin plays like Herlin, like no other. These are people that are akin to phenomena that you find in Pittsburgh. No one plays like Erroll Garner. He's widely imitated, but no one invented that style except Erroll. He was gifted, creative to come up with that. Amir Rushdan, or Vernel Fournier, he had a great gift, and one of the highlights of that great record is Vernel Fournier. But also, the lines that Israel was playing and what I'm doing, so it was just the perfect recipe for success. As I said before, if he could have patented it, that particular thing that he was doing – cymbal, that unique style, approach he was doing – he would've made millions. It's been imitated, emulated all over the earth.

Brown: Well, as he said, "I took the second line beat from them street bands and put it on the drum set."

Jamal: And what a humble personality he was.

Brown: Absolutely, true humanitarian.

Jamal: No arrogance at all. A great artist is one who is not a pushover, but has certain degree of humility. You can't play this music unless you have a certain degree of humility. Arrogance doesn't get it. You cannot play this music if you got an arrogant personality. It is not a gift given to arrogant people and people that think they are the greatest. There's no such thing as greatest. I hate this word as it applies to man. There is no greatest pianist. There is no greatest boxer. There is no greatest chef. There is no greatest drummer. They are great people, but there's no greatest. Because all of them have their own fingerprints, their own contributions, that you have to recognize as greatness. But when you say, "This is the greatest this, greatest that," that's wrong in my opinion, that's incorrect. Art Tatum's one of the great pianists. No one plays like Art, but he wasn't the greatest. He was one of the great… Phineas Newborn, that's another one. And you have McCoy [Tyner], and Oscar Peterson, Nat Cole. There's no such thing as the greatest boxer. Joe Louis was a great boxer. Muhammad Ali was a great boxer. There is no greatest chef. There are great chefs, but no greatest. So, as applied to music, there is no such thing as greatest.

Appreciate greatness, but don't confuse the issue by saying, "This is the greatest this, the greatest that." That's incorrect terminology, in my opinion.

Brown: We definitely agree. Through the success of the recording at the Pershing, according to the record, you went on to have your own club, The Alhambra. Could you talk about how and why you decided to have your own club?

Jamal: Mistake. [Laughs] Big mistake. That's all I can tell you. Forty-three employees, and I was talked into that. I bought the building, six-story building, remodeled the first two floors. Nightmare. I wouldn't do it again, I don't think. I wouldn't do it again. I stayed open for two minutes, so to speak. We were open for a while, then I closed it and moved to New York. As I said, I was going to pursue [for] some time going to school but, here again, I left my happy home again and went on the road.

Brown: You mentioned where you moved to New York. Being in New York, what were your aspirations at that point? Did you actually go to Juilliard?

Jamal: No. I took some lessons from a noted teacher at the time, for just a few lessons and I went back on the road. I don't recommend not going to school to anyone. I survived, but I recommend to the youngsters, prepare yourself aspiring to be a musician. It applies to the medical profession and any other profession you want to go into. You have to equip yourself with options, and the only way you do that is to go to school. The positives outweigh the negatives. There are some negatives in school, yes, in the higher institutions of learning. But it's too difficult. I was one of the fortunate ones. [It's] too difficult to be out here without options, because if a fire breaks out [and] you only have one exit door you're going to get trampled to death. What are the exit doors of music? If you have learned how to write, and you want to be a performer, [but] you can't perform in the arenas you want, you can orchestrate for while. If you want to be an orchestrator, but you can't get the venue for that, but you learned how to conduct, you can conduct for a while. And if you can't conduct, and that's what you want to, and you can't get the venue for that, then you can teach for a while. But how do you get these options? You got to get the education. So, you can be someplace because you want to be, not because you have to be. Being someplace because you have to be kind of is a death wish, and it backfires on you eventually. I was one of the fortunate ones to be able to survive in spite of my not furthering my education, going to school. But I have a Ph.D. in other areas, and that's how I survived.

Brown: It's often mentioned how your music has been used in other media, to include Broadway, I think you mentioned Virginia Woolf. Of course, later on Madison County used "Poinciana." Now, we're talking about your tenure in New York, did you aspire to become involved in other

media, i.e. theater or composing or working with dance companies or any other extra musical or adjacent disciplines?

Jamal: Never solicited any activity outside of my ensemble. My first assignment when I went with 20th Century Fox – that's another one of my ex-labels – was to do some of the music for the movie *Mash*. Johnny Mandel's one of my favorite writers. And that was one of my first assignments when I signed with 20th Century Fox. I've never solicited; it's always come to me. Because that's a different ballgame, a different animal. Writing for films, a few of us can do that. Benny Carter had that wonderful gift. He could perform, but he also could write a score for *The Snows of Kilimanjaro.* That's one of Joe's relatives, Benny Carter, one of Joe Kennedy's relatives. He remembers staying with Benny when Benny used to write for the Hip Hip Parade in New York, and what great experiences that was to see Benny writing at the last moment to get those shows done. Some of us are performers, and some of us are great writers, and there are a few of us that can do both. Benny Golson is one that I think can do both. Herby can do both. He can write, but his main thing is, I think, writing for small ensembles. I think that's where his strength comes, "Maiden Voyage" or "Cantaloupe Island," all those things he's done, "Watermelon Man." I think the majority of things that he's done, he's known for his writing for small ensembles and for performing, as opposed to filming… There are a few of us who do both, very few of us. I don't think Oscar Peterson did films.

Brown: No, but I'm thinking of somebody who we should not leave out, and that's Oliver Nelson since you mentioned St. Louis [laughs].

Jamal: Oh, Oliver Nelson was superb. In fact, he opened up the first concert at the new Lincoln Center when everything was faulty acoustically. I went to see Oliver there, the first performance at Lincoln Center I think was Oliver Nelson. He's a great writer. And there are a few others…

Brown: Quincy Jones.

Jamal: Johnny Mandel, for example. You associate him with writing, period, and not performing. He's one of the great writers. Johnny gets things out of orchestras that… unbelievable! And he wrote that "Here's To Life" with the great diva, Shirley Horn. All those wonderful nuances, effects, (the) timpani here that's so effective. But that's what he does; he writes. So, I hear all these things, but my thing is writing for small ensembles.

Brown: So, when you're in New York, you're continuing to work in your small ensemble. If I look at your discography, *Live at The Black Hawk,* do you recall that recording?

Jamal: Oh yeah.

Brown: Can you talk a little bit about that? I have a particular friend back in San Francisco, a photographer named Chuck Robinson, and he says, "Man, when you talk to Ahmad Jamal ask him about the Black Hawk."

Jamal: Chuck Robinson?

Brown: Yeah, he's a photographer.

Jamal: There's another photographer, Chuck Stewart.

Brown: Yeah, Chuck Stewart.

Jamal: His photograph's on my Mosaic release. I know Chuck Stewart from way back. Chuck Robinson, I don't think I know him. But the Black Hawk, first of all, it took some time for them to get me in there because… Black Hawk? Hyde and Turk (intersection where located)…

Brown: Yeah, in San Francisco.

Jamal: The old Black Hawk, that's the beginning of Fantasy Records. And it took them some time. I wasn't doing any nightclubs, but they wanted me to work there. They had a chicken wire back there for the underage. I don't know if you remember that?

Brown: Chuck Robinson told me about all that.

Jamal: The chicken wire for the youngsters who couldn't come into the main room. That's when the guy came to see if I had two drummers.

Brown: Oh, at the Black Hawk? [laughs]

Jamal: He wanted to see if I had two drummers, came in to see Vernel, cause he thought it was two drummers. He said, no one drummer could do that, what he was doing [laughs]. So, that's one of the interesting things about the Black Hawk, the beginning of Fantasy Records, and they had one artist, Dave Brubeck. And the rest is history. Now, they're doing movies. Then, they started doing *Amadeus* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, but they made their money in American classical music via Mr. Dave Brubeck. And Idris (Muhammad) became staff drummer for Fantasy Records later on. You know Idris had a band too?

Brown: Oh!

Jamal: Oh yeah! Idris had a lot of hit records, you know?

Brown: Oh yeah, he played "Blueberry Hill"!

Jamal: He had some hit records.

Brown: Well, with Fats Domino.

Jamal: No, his own group. He had some albums that did very well.

Brown: Okay, well, he hasn't come into the chronology yet.

Jamal: But Fantasy Records, this is all Black Hawk; those things occurred at the Black Hawk. They talked me into going into the Black Hawk, and I went in there and recorded there.

Brown: Good experience being in San Francisco?

Jamal: You know, I was very insecure at that time most of the time. I wasn't in love with touring. I'm more apt to tour now than I ever was. Also, it was easy to talk me into building a restaurant because I could stay home, I thought. But not with forty-three employees and cooks and waiters and this and that. I didn't have the perseverance for that.

Brown: You continue to record for the Argo label throughout your… what was the exact year that you went back to New York?

Jamal: I went to New York in 1960. I'd be with Leonard Chess, Argo /Chess, maybe from '55 onward, up until 1960 and beyond. I was still recording. I went to Europe and still made "Macanudo," the orchestral thing I did with Richard Evans. That's another bass player of mine. The head of the orchestral department at Berklee, that's Professor Evans. He's been teaching at Berklee for 17 years or more. That's I heard about Hiromi. She was one of his students. So, I was still recording for Chess, although I moved to New York. I did some vocal things with one of the great writers of all time, Hale Smith. This is a writer also. I was hoping you knew Hale or studied with him. He taught Eric Dolphy, you know.

Brown: I do know Hale. I actually conducted the oral history with him.

Jamal: At Oberlin, one of the great schools. I thought you were going to say you went to Oberlin 'cause that's one of the great schools.

Brown: I mentioned Olly Wilson earlier. Olly Wilson also taught at Oberlin. But anyway, Hale Smith, yes, we have interviewed Hale Smith as part of the Smithsonian Oral History Project. I have a personal connection to Hale Smith and Juanita.

Jamal: Did you do the oral history with Hale?

Brown: Yes, I did.

Jamal: After his stroke?

Brown: No, no, long before his stroke.

Jamal: Long before, okay. You were on that, Ken?

Kimery: Oh yeah!

Jamal: Yeah, he's something.

Brown: That was in '94.

Jamal: You've of course heard many of his things?

Brown: Oh, absolutely. I know Juanita, she'll play . . . "Okay, well this was Hale's latest."

Jamal: I just heard from his wife recently.

Brown: Juanita.

Jamal: Juanita, yeah. She wanted to know if I wanted a copy of something that he did, a series of things he did, I think I must have been involved in one of them. But I wanted to study with Hale, that's who I wanted to study orchestration with. I didn't ever follow through. And I knew he was teaching at Oberlin… was he teaching at Oberlin or Cleveland?

Brown: He was in Cincinnati, in Cleveland. I can't recall exactly all the places, but I know he was at Xavier. He's taught in many different places.

Jamal: He was the guy behind some of the great publishing firms in New York City.

Brown: Oh yeah, Boosey & Hawkes.

Jamal: One of the great writers. He was editing and doing things, unbelievable! And such a great man. I still play one of his songs called "Allison" written for his daughter. Hale was one of my favorites, and he put together my two vocal things I did for Cadet. That's how they came out. I used Hale and a great man with choral groups who assisted Hale in my two projects for vocals…

Brown: Was it Coleridge Taylor [Perkinson]?

Jamal: I wrote two albums for Cadet, *Cry Young* and the other one was *Nature Boy*, I think.

Brown: Let's go back to…

Jamal: No, *Bright, Blue and Beautiful*. I think that's what the other was.

Brown: We're going to come to those through the chronology. If we can return to *Macanudo*, how did that project come out where you're accompanying orchestras, orchestras accompanying you as you mentioned, directed by Richard Evans.

Jamal: That was the first commission Richard ever had. He joined Argo . . . shortly thereafter or just before. He had just come back from a tour with Paul Winter. He was Paul Winter's bassist. They did all the South American cities, Bogota and other cities in South America. So, I commissioned him. He decided to revisit musically all of the cities that he had toured with Paul Winter, so the outcome was *Macanudo,* a big orchestral thing… We did it at Rudy Van Gelder's…

Brown: State Department tour. December 1962.

Jamal: That's his first orchestral commission. I've had him do a number of things since then, *Jamal Plays Jamal,* some other things he's done, and he always remembers. I took him to Hollywood also to do the soundtrack for the movie *Mash*. He did that orchestration, too. That's the opening segment of the movie. I think I'm playing the Fender Rhodes 'though on that.

Brown: I want to talk to you about working with electronics, but I still want to continue on the chronology because I see you mentioned Cadet records, the first title under that label *Rhapsody*, which has a string section conducted by Joe Kennedy. So, if we could talk about that project.

Jamal: Joe Kennedy was one of the orchestral masters, one of the ensemble masters writing for ensembles. His son also is a great educator in music too, but Joe Kennedy was one of the great… He's also a triple threat man, violinist, orchestrator, writer, conductor. He did it all. I brought him to New York to do the Penthouse [Studios] project. He thrilled all the players. I took him to the noted symphony, the Cleveland Pops as well. But getting back to Nola's Penthouse Studios, I don't think that exists anymore.

Brown: I don't think so either.

Jamal: Yeah, 57th Street. He wrote those lovely things. That was Vernel too, Vernel and the historical rhythm section, Vernal and Israel. They could do anything.

Brown: On this one, in December 15-17, 1965, Nola Penthouse Studio in New York, it's listing Jamil Nasser as the bass player on that. Is that incorrect? 'Cause it's also showing Jamil was as early as 1963, "Naked City" theme…

Jamal: "Naked City," oh yeah, Jamil is on that.

Brown: And "The Roar of the Greasepaint."

Jamal: Is Vernel Fournier on the roster for *At the Penthouse*?

Brown: *At the Penthouse* is '65 May and then December, but…

Jamal: May of '65?

Brown: May of '65 is the *Extensions* album…

Jamal: Jamil is on that.

Brown: Jamil is on that one, and Vernel. But I'm saying that you said on *Rhapsody*...

Jamal: No, it's Frank Gant on *Extensions.*

Brown: Okay, so then this is incorrect.

Jamal: Someone got it mixed up.

Brown: Okay, so we need to correct that. So you're saying *Extensions* had Vernel on drums…

Jamal: No, *Extensions* has Frank Gant and Jamil Nasser.

Brown: Okay. Now, earlier in 1963 and '65, also for Argo, "Naked City" theme has Chuck Lampkin…

Jamal: Chuck Lampkin, that's right.

Brown: On drums, and Jamil. On "The Roar of the Grease Paint" has also Jamil and Chuck. So…

Jamal: Jamil and Chuck on "Roar of the Greasepaint"?

Brown: That's according to this. It could be wrong.

Jamal: That sounds like Jamil and…

Brown: Should it be Vernel?

Jamal: No, Jamil and Frank, I think, are on that. I have to look that up. I have a great discographer, John Prince. He's very accurate. He's out of France. He does all my stuff. He's on my webpage, so I have to look that up for accuracy's sake. He's got it pretty much nailed down.

Brown: Well, then I won't belabor this with personnel, but I want to look at some of the projects that seem to be benchmarks in your career because you're primarily focused on your small ensemble, piano, bass drums, and then you're doing what we just mentioned, these string projects, and then you mentioned the vocal projects with the Howard Roberts Chorale, *The Bright, The Blue and The Beautiful.* How did that project come about? There are two, *Cry Young*, which you mentioned, 1967, and the next year 1968, *The Bright, The Blue and The Beautiful.* So, how did these projects come about?

Jamal: All these projects were my brainchild. I controlled it. I had one of the few records contracts that are unique to the industry with Leonard. I controlled everything from A to Zed. Graphics, musical content, liner notes. Of course, it got out of control once Leonard sold the company, and these black market piracies come up. You get these bogus records out now. It's an assault on intellectual property, an assault on your intellect, to say the least. Some of this stuff is just crazy that's out here now. But then at that time, I had one of the few contracts where I had completely control over everything. No one dictated to me. I was the producer, long and short of it. I would consult when it came to marketing. I even had my own marketing house, my publicity firm aside from Leonard. I had my own firm that used to work for me…

Brown: Why did you develop that?

Jamal: Out of New York, I had a firm that covered those places that I thought the company didn't cover. I think you have to have all these things going… That's when that was a record business. You have to have a touring artist, for the most part, good record company, a good record, of course, and a good publicity firm. I had four; I had both of them.

Brown: Did you have a manager?

Jamal: I had a manager for a minute, John Levy…

Brown: Let's talk about that.

Jamal: He used to manage me, one of the great bassists. He was George Shearing's first bassist. And George had him start managing him, and later on he managed me and another wonderful diva from my hometown, who went to the same school, Dakota Staton. We had one of the biggest records in the country at that time, *Late, Late Show* and *Live at the Pershing*. The Apollo Theatre, lined up all around the corner. Carnegie Hall, lined up, standing room only. Ted Heath, Dakota Staton and myself. Standing room only, Carnegie Hall. I had a manager for a minute, John Levy, but I'm hard to manage [laughs].

Brown: [Laughs] Why do you think that is?

Jamal: Later on, John got Cannonball…

Brown: Nancy Wilson.

Jamal: Nancy Wilson. Her first appearance in New York was on my show. My singer was Gloria Lynne. She was an extra added attraction that John put on. Then John started managing her, Joe Williams, Cannonball, but first was George Shearing. John Levy – very successful relationship – then me and Dakota. That was ground floor John Levy, George, Mr. Jamal and the great diva, Dakota Staton. Then later on, Nancy, Cannonball, Nat, Joe Williams. I think he did some work for Shirley Horn, too. You know, I recorded Shirley Horn when I had my record company? Years ago, I still have the tapes on Shirley. She's one of my favorites, and I was hers. She told Johnny Mandel, and Johnny Mandel told one of my agents at the last NEA meeting that Shirley said, "My favorite pianist is Ahmad Jamal." Maurice came back to me with what Johnny Mandel had told him 'cause I sent him back to tell Johnny I couldn't stay. I wanted to tell him how much I admire his work, and when he went back and told him that, he said, "You know, our "Here's To Life" lady, Shirley Horn, Ahmad was her favorite pianist." But, I always knew that. The first person to play on her Steinway, she finally managed to get her dream to come true, a Steinway D in her home, I was the first person to play it.

Brown: [Laughs]

Jamal: After I finished at the Blues Alley one night in Washington, that was one of my places for 27 years, I worked Blues Alley. In fact, I did every New Years there, me and Keter Betts. One night, I went over to Shirley's place and played her brand new Steinway. She's one of the great divas of all time and could play the piano. She played for herself; she was her best accompanist, far as I'm concerned. She accompanied herself better than anyone. That's what John Mandel did. He just took those chords, the rhythm parts that she laid down, the small ensemble parts. "Here's To Life," one of the great recordings of all time. Shirley Horn and Johnny Mandel.

Brown: So, if we could return to your vocal works, how did those come about again? You said those were your ideas, but what inspired you to want to do…

Jamal: Yeah, my ideas. Well, I always loved… the oldest instrument in the world is the human voice. I wanted to sing but never did a George Benson or a Nat Cole, but I love the voice so much, so I said I'm going to do two recordings with the best voices in New York City, some of the best voices, and that's what I did. They're still great albums. In fact, that's part of the Time Life Series, "Beautiful Friendship," and after that, Stanley Turrentine recorded… I think "My Beautiful Friendship" was a catalyst for him recording our version.

Brown: As we continue through your career into the late 60s, you're still maintaining your small ensemble. Even though you seemed to have not favored touring, in 1971, *Fireflight,* recorded at the Montreux Jazz Festival, was that your first trip to Europe?

Jamal: No, my first trip to Europe was in '63, myself and the late Hampton Hawes at the ORTF Theater. That's the first time I went to Europe, in 1963. I stayed away for twenty years.

Brown: It was just the duo, the two of you?

Jamal: No, separate billings. He played his set, I played mine.

Brown: As soloists, or with your respective units?

Jamal: I think I played my ensemble. Hampton was one of the great players of all time, and I remember that very fondly. I didn't go back to Europe for twenty years . . . From 1969-71, I did no touring at all, very little. I had a record company on 57th Street, so I was producing records for three years.

Brown: What inspired you to form a record company?

Jamal: I was always wanting to stay off the road. I'm not a migrant worker [laughs]. I'm a homebody. My favorite venue is home, right now it's still home. I go out reluctantly now, but the conditions have to be right 'cause I'm 81 years old. I'm not doing any club work right now, only special events. I'm doing a special event in Paris, the 19th of this month. In fact, I leave this coming Monday to do some publicity on *Blue Moon*, which is my new album coming out. Then, we're going to debut it worldwide at the Châtelet in Paris in February of 2012. I had gotten a record business 'cause I was still doing my entrepreneurial things, trying to get out of the business of music. I attempted that several times. I had a pharmaceutical business in Egypt once. I had a sesame seed business in Somalia. I had a restaurant in Chicago with forty-three employees. But my most success and only success has come from those 88 keys and that

manuscript paper, that's my success. So, I finally wised up and said you belong in music and not in a restaurant, not in the sesame seed business, and not in the pharmaceutical business, and on and on and on. I was in the record business, and the mercantile end is different from the artistic end, a different animal altogether. And now, it's almost impossible to do a record thing now, to start a record company, because everything is computerized. You start your record company, [but] the recording studios are going out of business.

Brown: You had 57th Street Records, is that correct?

Jamal: Hmm?

Brown: The record company, 57th Street Records?

Jamal: No, I had three labels, AJP Cross, and Jamal Records, and I was producing for Ampex. They wanted all my tape product, and I kept my vinyl. Ampex gave me a tremendous contract. They were subsidizing all the small companies then, but they lost something like 108 million dollars. And when they looked up, Scully had invaded the market, so everybody doesn't know the record business. They had a few things, but you have to have a lot of stuff going to survive the record business, then and now. It's a different ballgame altogether.

Brown: If I could return to the already identified incorrect or flawed discography, from 1968 up until you signed with 20th Century [Fox], you were recording on Impulse. How did that come about?

Jamal: That is correct. Ed Michel, great A&R man, he produced a lot of stuff on John Coltrane, me. Just left you completely alone to do your thing, and that's what I did. I signed with ABC/Impulse for three years, I think. I stayed in New York that time and started my record business.

Brown: What precipitated your leaving Cadet? Did you get a better offer from Impulse?

Jamal: Geographic, the logistics change as far as my residence 'cause I had left Chicago and moved to New York. I recorded for them for a while. I still recorded for Cadet for a while, but the set of circumstances, long distance as opposed to being right in Chicago where Leonard was. Leonard passed away, I think had I left the company before Leonard passed away though.

[End of disc two]

Brown: So, in 1973, you are now recording with 20th Century and still working in your small ensemble format. Some of the titles were *Ahmad Jamal '73* or *'73*, *Jamaica*, and then *Jamal*

*Plays Jamal*, which all still feature, but then you added on the last title, the latter title, recorded in 1974, you added Azzedin Weston on congas…

Jamal: Those are orchestral things too.

Brown: Exactly, that's right.

Jamal: Both of those projects were done with Richard Evans. *Jamal '73* was a project I did on my own. I got the money to do it, not knowing what record company I was going to sell it to 'cause I was independent at that time. I was not contracted with anyone. A guy named Russ Regan heard it and made the deal right away. I got with 20th Century Fox then. They had some other artists that were selling a lot, but the most successful artist at the time with 20th Century Fox was a very, very popular singer, his name will come to me later. I signed with them on the strength of that project that Richard and I did. I got the money to do the orchestral thing, and we sold it to 20th Century. Russ Regan was president then, great record man. One of the only few record men left now, Russ Regan is one of them, Ahmet Ertegun [and] Neshui Ertegun, they're gone, Ralph Kaffel, Fantasy Records. I think Ralph is still around…

Brown: I believe so.

Jamal: So, that's a disappearing species, endangered species now, those guys. Russ Regan signed me right away, and that began my career with 20th Century Fox.

Brown: Now, the follow up in 1974, *Jamaica*, was that recorded at the same time as the *Ahmad Jamal '73* session?

Jamal: *Jamalca*, it's called *Jamalca*, I think the name of it is. It's a play on the word. *Jamalca.*

Brown: Oh, ah ha! [Laughs]

Jamal: That's all 20th Century Fox stuff.

Brown: Were those both the same session? I mean, to be able to hire an orchestra twice.

Jamal: Three different sessions. First session, I hired the orchestra, okay?

Brown: Right, so that one you financed?

Jamal: The second one, they did, *Jamal Plays Jamal*, which is one of my favorite records. Very, very rarely heard. Azzedin Weston is on that, as you mentioned before. One of the great percussionists of all time, Randy's son. You ever see Randy or Azzedin perform?

Brown: Yes, I have.

Jamal: Wonderful percussionists, one of the great percussionists.

Brown: And Randy, of course, is a wonderful humanitarian as well.

Jamal: *Jamal Plays Jamal*, that was an orchestral project under the auspices of 20th Century Fox.

Brown: Can we talk a little bit about *Jamalca*? How did you come up with that title, and is there some affinity with Jamaica?

Jamal: *Jamalca*, I don't even know who came up with that play on words, Dr. Brown, Professor Brown. I don't know who came up with that, but it's certainly professorial [laughs].

Brown: [Laughs, sings a drum fill] We'll spend some time tomorrow and go through and review all these album titles since you had artistic license on these. I'm sure the titles themselves tell a story, as well as the music.

Jamal: That's the only time in my career that I relinquished that position as exclusivity from cover to cover. I gave into a guy named Bones Howe, who was producing a lot of stuff for some noted singers. I gave in at one point to Bones Howe. I did one thing with 20th Century for him, an album called *One*. That's a composition I still play, "One" written by Abdallah Sigidi**,** a great composition. But Bones Howe produced that. I gave up one project and that was when I was with 20th Century Fox. Also, with Motown I let Lee Young produce, but Lee Young gave me all the room I wanted. He was just executive producer, but I did what I wanted to do. He hired a big band too, for that. That's a big band. You can only get that disc through Japan now. *Night Song*, you've never heard that, have you?

Brown: No, I haven't.

Jamal: That's an orchestral thing too.

Brown: Let's talk about you writing for orchestra. How can I say this as a composer? Composers usually come up with either a melody or a chord progression initially. Now, how that translates into many more voices, how that gets expanded, and how the colors, timbres, and the sonorities all become balanced and situated in so far as the proportions. When you write, directed by Richard Evans, but you actually did the orchestrations?

Jamal: I do all the rhythm tracks first, like akin to what Shirley did with Johnny Mandel. I lay all the rhythm tracks first. In fact, when I did the album, *Pittsburg*, I wasn't even in the studio when

they brought in members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Have you ever heard *Pittsburg*, dedicated to my hometown, my mother? Dave Bowler, James Cammack, myself, we laid the rhythm tracks, and then Richard Evans has an uncanny knack [to] skillfully put things together based on my arrangements. He writes around my arrangements, so the arrangements are all mine, in most instances.

Brown: So, he takes the rhythm track and then he creates the orchestration from that?

Jamal: Yeah, that's what he does… except with *Macanudo*, I followed his lead in that respect. *Macanudo* was different, but *Jamal Plays Jamal*, the rhythm tracks first, orchestration built around that. So, the arrangements are already done within the small ensemble. Then, what you do is layer around the existing thing I do with the small ensemble.

Brown: So, Richard writes the orchestration and conducts the orchestra?

Jamal: Yes.

Brown: Okay. That's great to clarify that process.

Brown: in 1975 *Genetic Walk*, there's another title for you! This is the first time in this discography where we see an expanded… First of all, the album '75 – it's still in LP – was recorded in 3 different sessions: in PS Recording Studio Chicago, Wally Heider in Los Angeles, and the Village Recorder in Los Angeles. You have a varied roster of personnel, which includes some folks that I know from the West coast: Calvin Keys on guitar, and Eddie Marshall on drums.

Jamal: Calvin Keys was my guitarist at one time, you know.

Brown: I love Calvin Keys.

Jamal: I just heard an interview he did with someone. Getting back to *Genetic Walk*, that was written for Todd Barkan. He used to own Keystone Korner. He was in charge of Dizzy's at the Coca Cola Room. That was written for Todd Barkan. That's what he based his dissertation [on] when he went back for his doctorate, Richard Evans. He based it on *Genetic Walk*.

Brown: So, the title, you said it's dedicated to Todd Barkan?

Jamal: No, it was written for Todd Barkan.

Brown: As a footnote to this discussion, there was a book just recently released about Keystone Korner by Kathy Sloane. She just released a book and she's a photographer.

Jamal: I know Kathy.

Brown: You know Kathy? Okay. She just got her book out.

Jamal: That's interesting.

Brown: Yeah, and Todd flew out. It was a book release at City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco. Bobby Hutcherson was there.

Jamal: It's called Keystone Korner?

Brown: The book is called Keystone Korner.

Jamal: That's interesting. Quite a place. Historic place. Did you ever go there?

Kimery: Oh yeah.

Jamal: Did you work there too?

Kimery: No, never worked there.

Brown: I did.

Jamal: You worked there? Who did you work there with?

Brown: With my own group. It closed in '83.

Jamal: You know Kenneth Nash then, don't you?

Brown: Kenneth Nash is in my group now.

Jamal: He's a great guy. He has a studio out there, does he still have [it]?

Brown: Yes, he does, in Oakland. I was just over there.

Jamal: Built one in his house, didn't he?

Brown: Yup. In Oakland.

Jamal: Yeah, Kenneth Nash. [To Kimery] You know Kenneth?

Kimery: Oh yeah. Saw him with Andy Narell first time.

Jamal: Great player.

Brown: Oh yeah! But Calvin, I've worked with Calvin, too.

Jamal: Calvin [Keys] did the Salle Pleyel concert with me when I had my seven pieces. He's the guitarist. And Joe Kennedy…

Brown: How did you get Calvin into the group?

Jamal: Calvin Keys and I go back many years. Calvin is a great player. One of the underestimated players. Great player, and a great guy. I don't know how we got together but we worked off and on for a little while. In fact, we still may get together to do some things in the future.

Brown: I'm sure he'd love that.

Jamal: He can play.

Brown: Oh, absolutely. When I talk to him, he's always talking about the gig with Ray Charles. I was going, whoo [laughs]. I know Ray must have been really tough. I know he's tough on drummers, ooh wee! So, you've got a lot of LA folks since you were recording some of the session in LA: John Heard, bass…

Jamal: Now that's a great bassist. From my home—a Pittsburgher, too.

Brown: A great artist, too.

Jamal: Sculpture. Almost too much talent, he has.

Brown: [Laughs] So, *Genetic Walk*, inspired [by] and written for Todd Barkan, recorded at three different sessions, a variety of personnel. Whose ideas was it to compile this?

Jamal: What year was it?

Brown: This was in '75 for 20th Century.

Jamal: '75. Well, I was all over the place then. That's why it was all over the place because I was all over the place. That's why there's so many different factions involved. It doesn't sound like a cast of thousands. Tell me again some of the places?

Brown: The sessions at PS Recording Studio, Chicago, Wally Heider's Recording in Los Angeles, and the Village Recorder in Los Angeles.

Jamal: Village Recorder, yeah. That's the late Geordie Hormel's studio. I knew Geordie not long, but we had a quality relationship. I just finished mixing in that studio for *Blue Moon*.

Brown: History comes around. Did you choose all the artists that were accompanying you on this? That participated in this project like Danny Leake, and as I mentioned, John Heard? Of course, you have your regular ensemble.

Jamal: John Heard was part of my rhythm section. He was working with me. John worked with me for a period of time. Also, overseas he worked with me. That's one of Count Basie's favorite bassists. John Heard, he was something else. He *is* something else, a great bassist. He is from Pittsburgh [laughs]. Now, the other people that you mentioned, who else was mentioned?

Brown: Roger Harris.

Jamal: This is *Genetic Walk*?

Brown: *Genetic Walk*, uh huh. Danny Leake…

Jamal: See, these are people also that Richard selected.

Brown: Did Richard play bass on this as well? Because it's got him in the discography, but this might be something we have to clean up. Also, Steve Cobb, Morris Jenkins, these are the drummers. Listed for the bass are: John Heard, Roger Harris, Jamil Nasser, Richard Evans.

Jamal: Hmmm, that's interesting.

Brown: And then for drummers: Steve Cobb, Morris Jenkins, Eddie Marshall, Harvey Mason, Frank Gant.

Jamal: I know I brought Harvey in for it. What other titles are on there, though?

Brown: It doesn't list the titles but Harvey Mason is only on one cut, Eddie Marshall's on only one cut.

Jamal: Umm-mm.

Brown: But here's something interesting, you had two different guitarists listed here: Danny Leake and then Calvin Keys. Calvin played on two tracks, and Danny Leake on one. I'll go back and research titles on that.

Jamal: That's interesting… 1975 vintage right? Because the rhythm section was intact before. It didn't take place just for the studio. It was John Heard, Calvin Keys, myself and who on drums?

Brown: Well, you have several, but Frank Gant.

Jamal: Frank Gant, that's who it was. Frank Gant, that's it.

Brown: To me, it sounds like this was a composite of a variety of sessions that was put together under one LP. And then the next one [in] 1976, *Stepping Out With a Dream*. This time, Calvin is listed. It's a four-piece ensemble, and so Calvin seems to be a fixture for a while in the discography. Of course, you started with Ray Crawford on guitar. Returning back to the guitar, was that a conscious…?

Jamal: No, that's in addition to drums, though. That's a quartet, right? Drums and guitar. I didn't just dispense with drums. I just added guitar along with the drums.

Brown: Right, but this happens many, many years, almost 20 years, after you disbanded the string trio now you have it, but with the drums. That small ensemble: piano, guitar, bass and drums. Was that something you had conceptualized at this point in your career, that you want to this is a your working ensemble?

Jamal: Well, I've always played in a variety of complements. My ensembles have varied many, many times. For example, it was Dizzy and I that first employed congas in the way that they're employed today. He had Chano Pozo. I had a man named Badr-Ud-Din in Chicago. But no one was using congas. I used to have a group that consisted of congas, bass, and piano—that's all. I did that in Chicago for a long time.

Brown: What year would that have been?

Jamal: I worked with tenor saxophone and piano, so a lot of people don't know I've worked with every type of configuration known, and unknown to man. Okay? [Laughs]

Brown: Let's set the historical record straight. When did you have these groups?

Jamal: Coming up in my young years, I worked with big bands, I worked with duos that consisted of tenor saxophone and piano—no drums, no bass. Then I worked as the accompanist, the pianist for a song and dance team. I worked for a big band outside and inside my hometown. So, I've worked in a lot of settings, orchestrally, too. I've worked with the big ensembles and when I was in great demand, I worked with the pops orchestras. So, I've worked in every configuration known and unknown to man. I have a 7 piece, had violin, I've worked with Joe's

group as his pianist: violin, guitar, bass and piano. And I did single for a while at Jimmy's Backdoor, I played single. Ike Day used to come in, the legendary Ike Day. You don't know Ike Day, but everybody, Papa Joe, I don't know if you ever heard of Ike Day. Legendary. He used to come and sit with me in Chicago at Jimmy's Palm Garden, Palm Tavern in Chicago. I was working at Carson Pirie Scott as a janitor there. I was working at Jimmy's Palm Garden also, playing single. I've done a lot of different settings.

Brown: I'm glad that you were able to explain that because when one looks at your discography it's usually with your small ensemble.

Jamal: Well, that's the vehicle that I use on numerous occasions, but before that, and during my formative years in the 113 Club, which we made so famous that they did *Raisin in the Sun* there. We weren't there we had left and gone to New York. But, we made that club so famous that they did Lorraine Hansberry's, one of the settings was the 113 Club. Not the 113 Club—the Kitty Kat Club on 63rd. The Kitty Kat Club, they had a segment in the movie *Raisin in the Sun* [at] the Kitty Kat Club. That's one of our clubs, too. We stayed there for long, long, long time. That's where worked with congas, bass, and piano. I worked there with guitar and bass, and piano, but I also worked with congas. I've used congas all my life. Uniquely enough, the person who initiated that was Ray Crawford. He used to get the conga effect on the frets of his guitar, and he was widely emulated and imitated. Oscar used to come in there with his group and shortly thereafter, they started doing the fret thing, his guitarist. Because he had Barney Kessel one time, he had his other guitarist that wrote "Detour Ahead," Herb Ellis. So, that's when they also did my arrangement of "Billy Boy." I didn't have sense enough to copyright the arrangement at that time because that's the public domain thing. All you have to do is copyright the arrangement, but I didn't do that. So, I lost a lot of royalties by not doing it [laughs].

Brown: You on that one, and Vernel on "Poinciana." Two missed golden opportunities.

Jamal: But, these are my configurations: congas, bass, and piano; tenor saxophone and piano, no bass; With Israel, tenor saxophone, bass and piano is another configuration. No drums.

Brown: Who was the tenor saxophonist?

Jamal: Johnny Thompson, was one of my tenor saxophone players.

Brown: and could you say the percussionist's name again?

Jamal: Badr-Ud-Din.

Brown: What was his ethnicity?

Jamal: Afro-American.

Brown: What happened to him?

Jamal: He passed away. He was working for the parks commission in Chicago and was running to get on the vehicle that they use to cut the grass, and he had a heart attack running to catch up with the car.

Brown: That's a name that doesn't appear much in the history of jazz.

Jamal: No, because he didn't do any recordings with me. No recordings, but he was part of my formative years. The fact is I've always used percussion in some sort of fashion. It's just like Manolo. Manolo worked with me back there then, but he was with Joe Zawinul and Weather Report for 30 years. But, he always was working with me before, too. He's one of the great percussionists of all time, Manolo Badrena. Great percussionist.

Brown: Well, we just heard him on *Blue Moon*.

Jamal: Yeah, he's something else.

Brown: "Rumba Mamá." [referencing a percussion duet Manolo recorded live with Alex Acuna on *Heavy Weather* by Weather Report, 1977]

Jamal: That's another difficult thing. Piano and guitar is very difficult. Nat Cole did it, but there can be a conflict, chordal-wise with piano and guitar. And also, conflict with percussions and drums. Big conflict. You really got to know what you're doing if you want to be successful using… You're a drummer, so you know what I'm talking about. Percussions and drums. You have to be very careful. You have to have a good chemistry going to make that work. Also, guitars and pianos because there could be a clash of chords. You have to be very well synchronized. I've used them both. I must say it's been a successful venture for me. But that comes from my training in my hometown, Pittsburgh. See, a lot of things are dependent on your roots. The foundations are very important. When you grow up in Pittsburgh, you do everything. That's very important. This business of piano and guitars together, and congas and percussion and drummers. Congas, percussions and drums, that's a difficult mix.

Brown: Yeah, it can be a challenge.

Jamal: Erroll did it a few times on his… Johnny Costanza, I think that's his name. He had bongos, percussions on a couple of his records with bass and drums and piano, of course.

Brown: So, your tenure with 20th Century lasts up through the '70s. The next one in 1978 is the one you mentioned earlier, *One*. Maybe we can talk about that, because that seems like a pretty substantial project.

Jamal: *One*, that's the one I relinquished my role as producer. I let Bones Howe produce that.

Brown: Now, as far as artistic control, did you choose the repertoire? Did you choose the personnel?

Jamal: I think Bones did a lot of the repertoire too. I said that's the first time I done that.

Brown: Let's look at the time in your career when you start to explore and utilize the electric piano. What precipitated that, and how did you feel about those projects?

Jamal: I had a record company then, I produced Sonny Stitt, one of the few organized sessions done on Sonny Stitt. I had a writer, I had Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, Bucky Pizzarelli and Grady Tate in my rhythm section.

[Phone rings]

Jamal: … How I got introduced to the electric piano. I was doing a session when I had my 3 record labels…

Brown: Why three record labels?

Jamal: … Jamal, AJP, and Cross. I may resurrect one of them. I have some projects coming up, and I may resurrect AJP. I was producing Sonny Stitt—one of the few really organized sessions on Sonny. I had a writer for Sonny, arrangements, I had Herbie Hancock and the rhythm section, Ron Carter, Grady Tate on drums, and Pizzarelli on guitar, the father, not the son. Herbie said to me, "You ever play the Fender Rhodes?" I said, "No." He said, "Maybe you might like it." So, I got one for Herbie the next day. And Herbie said, "Why don't you sit down for a minute, play it a little." And I did. And after the session, I called Harold Rhodes, who's a wonderful guy. Great educator, the late Harold Rhodes, the inventor. He and I became great friends subsequent to all that, but he sent me two pianos the next day. I endorsed the piano. He sent me one for Herbie and one for me. I kept one and gave Herbie one. I don't know if Herbie still has it, but that's when that was the only thing going then, the Fender Rhodes. The suitcase model. Remember that? And that's how I got introduced to it through Herbie Hancock.

Brown: What year would that have been?

Jamal: What year was that? That's a good question. '69 or '70. Sonny Stitt, *When Sonny Blows Blue*. Great graphics. That was licensed recently after 30 years to a Japanese company. They took the record, they didn't need the master. They said they'll take it from the record. That's what they do now, and that's what happened. I haven't made a million dollars from it, but I got a few things back. I did make a nice deal with one of my other groups with a company called, out in California, Stone's Throw Records. They bought a project that I produced and that did pretty well. After 30 years, I got some of my money back that I spent in the record business. Because I spent a lot of money in the record business.

Brown: I can only imagine. So, AJP must have stood for Ahmad Jamal Productions.

Jamal: That's it.

Brown: That's the one you're considering resurrecting.

Jamal: Yes.

Brown: Well, I'll keep my eye out. Back to the *One* project. The reason why I brought that up is that you're listed as playing piano and clavinet on this one, and Mike Melvoin is playing synthesizer. Again, you said you turned this over to Bones, but…

Jamal: Yeah, clavinet is not my cup of tea. Not my cup of clavinet.

Brown: But, it sounds like there's a lot of funk on it.

Jamal: Digital piano, and the Fender Rhodes, and the Steinway—that's it for me. I remember Bones doing something with the clavinet on something.

Brown: The next entry in here is 1979 and it's *Intervals* on 20th Century, Sierra Pacific Studios, Los Angeles. It only lists you, and nobody else in this discography, so we'll research that. Do you have any recollection about that project?

Jamal: I know the graphics is an abstract design on the cover. That's about all I can remember about *Intervals*. Nice cover, and I don't remember the musical content.

Brown: 1980, *Live at Bubba's*. Who's Who In Jazz, that's the label that's listed. Bubba's Jazz Restaurant, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. So, that might have been the time you tried relocating to Fort Lauderdale?

Jamal: I'm still trying to collect on that one. That's one of our errant producers on that. Bob Schachner is his name. He used to put on the MIDEM concerts. He used to put on the music at

MIDEM. That was done at Bubba's. I'm still trying to collect on that one forty years later. What year was that, about forty years ago, right?

Brown: That was 1980.

Jamal: 1980. That's thirty years ago. Just a thousand dollars for every year, that's $30,000.

Brown: So, the personnel again, it's a small ensemble. Three players: Sabu Adeyola, and Payton Crossley.

Jamal: Great men, great players, both of them. Sabu Adeyola a great bass player, wonderful sound. And Payton Crossley. One of the few musicians that can fly a plane. He went to Wall Street. He's out with Ron Carter a lot now. He went back to the drumsticks. The last time I saw him he was in Italy or somewhere, we passed each other. Ronald had worked the previous night. You know Payton Crossley? He's a great drummer, great guy. He was on the organic foods way, way ahead of time. Eventually, he went to Wall Street. He's one of the few people that perceived 9/11 to the extent, he walked down all of the flights of steps. He was on one of the top floors and walked down. He was a runner. He used to run every day. He would run from Uptown all the way down to where he had a loft in SoHo. He used to run, not jog. He ran. So, he got out of the building before it was hit. Payton Crossley, great drummer. They were with me a while. Sabu Adeyola, he's a great educator up in Buffalo. Great bass player. And I think he was the first bass player with a noted group, I forget the name of the group. They've been around for years. I think he was with their formative years. But, he was with me and recorded at the Great American Music Hall.

Brown: San Francisco.

Jamal: *Great American Classical Music* is the name of that LP that Laura and I produced. I first met Laura. She produced that at the Great American Music Hall. Sabu Adeyola, Crossley, and Fig Newton playing percussions. Seldon Newton was on there as a percussionist. Is he mentioned there?

Brown: We're going to get to that one when we get to chronology. The next one in the chronology is the one you mentioned before with the Lee Young Motown project, *Nightsong*, October 1980. I bring this up because it has, as you said, Lee Young hired a horn section, large band.

Jamal: Jamie Jamison is on the record . . . "The Famous Motown Bassist," right? Is he on that?

Brown: On this one it says John Heard, Kenneth Burke. I saw him listed on an earlier project. Chuck Rainey, John Heard, Scotty Edwards. That was on *One*, but on *Nightsong*, as listed here, again, this could be inaccurate, Gil Askey is also on keyboards, Oscar Brashear [34:26]…

Jamal: Gil Askey is the writer. He's the person who did the arrangements.

Brown: So, he should be credited with arrangements.

Jamal: He used to write for Diana Ross. Great writer.

Brown: Is he still alive?

Jamal: I don't know if Gil is still alive or not.

Brown: I'll do some more research on that.

Jamal: Also, it should be a drummer, the nephew of a writer who was married to Natalie Cole. He should be on that. He was married to Natalie Cole.

Brown: This could be incomplete. It's only listing Chester Thompson on drums. But again, obviously on Motown… How did that record do, as far as sales?

Jamal: *Nightsong*? It didn't do too much. That's why we sold it to Japan.

Brown: I'm a little bit reticent to bring up the next one, *Live In Concert,* '81. This is at MIDEM. This one lists you and Gary Burton and Sabu and Payton.

Jamal: Yeah. That one I'm still trying to collect from Bob Schachner too.

Brown: Let's talk about your relationship with Gary Burton because in '80s you guys collaborated.

Jamal: That's the only relation, the only contact. One appearance, that's it. He was one of the original educators at Berklee. Gary, and the great drummer up there but, he was one of the ground floor guys at Berklee.

Kimery: Alan Dawson.

Jamal: Alan Dawson, right. [to Kimery] Did you know Alan?

Kimery: I didn't know him personally.

Brown: I tried to go study with him, but he left Berklee in 1975 when I got there and tried to go study with him.

Jamal: Is he still alive, Alan?

Brown: No, Alan's gone, but I ended up studying with the person who took his place and that was Keith Copeland, Ray Copeland's son. 'Cause Alan groomed him to replace him at Berklee. There's another live concert featuring Gary Burton, *Churrascuro*, 1981. This one is listed as having DVDs, so you know about this one?

Jamal: Oh yeah, I know the DVD. I'm trying to collect that.

Brown: Yeah, because it's even listed in the discography as "bootleg."

Jamal: It's listed as bootleg, it is bootleg.

Brown: Then, 1982, *Goodbye Mr. Evans*, recorded at Great American music Hall, perhaps with Seldon.

Jamal: Laura and I leased that to a company in London somewhere.

Brown: Shubra?

Jamal: Shubra is Laura's company.

Brown: So, that's the one that's listed in the discography. How did that come about? That Laura was producer, you said?

Jamal: She put up the money for that. We had just met. This is before we got married and she wanted to produce Mr. Jamal, and that's what had happened. I still have that available on the Internet, but they're very expensive. I just did a list for $300 each on the Internet.

Brown: Oh, because they're collector's items, out-of-print collector's items.

Jamal: We sold one at the auction at [the] Lovely Theater in Rockport. They were raising money for the theater, and I let one go up there for $100. The vinyl, I only have a few left, only about 30 copies left, so they go for $300 on the Internet on my website.

Brown: Great American Music Hall, I've performed there. I probably performed that same month in July '82. Lee Brenkman was probably the engineer on that. He's the sound man for Great American Music Hall.

Jamal: What's his name?

Brown: Lee Brenkman. A guy who used to have a long ponytail and glasses.

Jamal: So, you performed there as well? Many times, or one time?

Brown: Many times.

Jamal: Did you enjoy working there?

Brown: Yes, it was a nice club. By '82 the Keystone…

Jamal: Was that the Mitchell brothers that owned that?

Brown: That's next door. It's Tom Duncan? I can't remember his name [Tom Bradshaw].

Jamal: The engineer?

Brown: No, the owner of the club because he also managed Betty Carter.

Jamal: I know that connection. I think I remember that.

Brown: I was just trying to figure out how there must've been on arrangement to record there, at the Great American Music Hall.

Jamal: Oh yeah, Laura did all that.

Brown: Now you appear on Atlantic. How did that come about? From 1982 to 1985, there are no entries in this discography.

Jamal: No, that was a period of time I was in semi-retirement. I moved to Fort Lauderdale. I was in retirement, and the guys I met down there, some associates, asked me to make one record for their company, and we called it *Digital Works*. They wanted to make an 800 number, oldies but goodies, my hits they wanted me to record, and they were going to market it on the television some kind of way. Instead, Atlantic bought the masters. That's how I got with Atlantic. They sold the masters to Atlantic, and I signed with Atlantic. Atlantic liked what they heard, and I did some stuff with Atlantic Records for a while. I was with Atlantic for a little while.

Brown: Working with the Ertegun brothers, you mentioned them earlier. I don't know of too many artists that complain or have anything negatively critical about them.

Jamal: They are great people. Ahmet Ertegun, Phineas Newborn, Modern Jazz Quartet, they are record people. Arif Mardin came from Turkey as well. Complete success story. My daughter went to school with Arif's daughter, United Nations school. We knew families [and] interacted for a long period of time. I was in Istanbul when they buried Arif. They wanted me to say a few words, which I did. They came down to my sound check. I was there when they buried him, in Istanbul. They took him back to Istanbul. But, what a great writer.

Brown: Great arranger. I love him.

Jamal: What a success story. All those wonderful things, Aretha Franklin.

Brown: Roberta Flack.

Jamal: He was something else. Arif was a writer. I think Quincy Jones was instrumental in bringing Arif to the United States, just like Cannonball was instrumental in getting Lalo Schifrin. Or Dizzy. Cannonball was instrumental in getting Joe Zawinul. But Joe Zawinul worked with Dinah Washington. He has a history that people don't know about. He was a very clever writer, very smart, very good.

Brown: Did you know him personally?

Jamal: I knew Joe a little bit. Joe wanted to do something with me, but we never got together. I admired Joe quite a bit. Some classic things he did. Great orchestrator, great writer. He had some big hits for Cannonball, "Mercy, Mercy."

Brown: Great hits for Miles too, "In A Silent Way."

Jamal: Well, Miles had that knack. He had a lot of the players now. Their reputations were preceded by tenures with Miles: Herbie, Wayne, Tony Williams, Keith Jarrett, Jack DeJohnette, whom you're going to… So, Miles had a lot of them.

Brown: But, you had that same gift, too.

Jamal: I was leading.

Brown: The ability to identify talent and bring it in and to maximize the talent.

Jamal: We have parallels when it comes to that. Choosing personnel, we have parallels.

Brown: Well, I'm almost remiss to continue on, after you talking about all these projects that you're still trying to collect on, but let me continue anyway. In 1985, you worked with Atlantic.

The next one is another live album, *Live at the Montreux Jazz Festival* in 1985. Actually on *Digital Works* in 1985, that's when Herlin Riley is in your group.

Jamal: *Digital Works*, that's right. Larry Ball playing bass.

Brown: And you have a percussionist could you pronounce his name?

Jamal: Iraj Lashkary.

Brown: How did this group get formed? Because, as you said, you were in Fort Lauderdale. Had you relocated by 1985, had you left Fort Lauderdale?

Jamal: No, I was still in Fort Lauderdale. I just did that one project, and I got the people that were available, and maybe after that I might have went on the road. I don't know. It was my first engagement, I think I was doing the Fairmont in San Francisco after that. That personnel was assembled just for that record.

Brown: So, *Live at Montreux*, this must have been your touring ensemble.

Jamal: *Live at Montreux*, I had retired yet. I was touring with Jamil and Frank. This is *Live at Montreux*?

Brown: This is *Live at Montreal Jazz Festival.* Sorry, I misread that. 1985. This is when you see James Cammack and Herlin.

Jamal: It should be Dave Bowler.

Brown: Okay, so this is wrong again.

Jamal: It should be Dave Bowler and James Cammack and Seldon Newton.

Brown: So, we're staying on the next few titles, were still on Atlantic. By 1986… when did you relocate out of Fort Lauderdale? Did you come here, to upstate New York?

Jamal: No, I was living, 26 years ago, here in Ashley Falls when I retired. 26 years ago, I moved to Fort Lauderdale. I left Ashley Falls and moved to Fort Lauderdale.

Brown: Do you remember when you left Fort Lauderdale, where did you go?

Jamal: I left Fort Lauderdale and started touring again. I think I went to, as I mentioned before, San Francisco. First job was at the Fairmont in San Francisco.

Brown: Which I believe still features jazz.

Jamal: In fact, I used the drummer, Eddie Moore. I think Eddie's gone now.

Brown: Papa Moore, that's my idol. Eddie's gone. Eddie died playing drums on Yoshi's stage.

Jamal: In Yoshi's? He had a heart attack? He was very heavy. That's what I did, I left Fort Lauderdale and went to San Francisco started working again.

Brown: And when you say the Fairmont, that was an extended engagement?

Jamal: That was a week. I did a week there.

Brown: Who else was in the group? Who did you have on bass then?

Jamal: Fairmont? That's a good question. I was using Othello Molineaux then too.

Brown: On steel pans? So, you had a quartet?

Jamal: I had Othello Molineaux, he's brilliant. One of the foremost players, as far as I'm concerned. [To Kimery] You worked with Othello, right?

Kimery: No, but I've seen the Word of Mouth Band with Jaco Pastorius.

Jamal: I've had Othello, and who was playing bass? James Cammack was playing bass, Eddie, and myself. That's the configuration.

Brown: I wish I could've seen you with Eddie Moore. I remember seeing him playing with Sonny Rollins at the Jazz Workshop [in Boston]. And Eddie was in the Bay Area. We had the two Eddies: Eddie Marshall and Eddie Moore. Obviously, you worked with both, but now they're both gone Eddie Marshall just died last month.

Jamal: Eddie Marshall passed away?

Brown: Eddie died last month. He died in September well, now 2 months ago . . .

Jamal: How old was Eddie?

Brown: He had to be in his late 70s, I think 78 or 79, 76, I can't remember exactly [73]. He had heart problems, so I think he died from a heart attack. Just remember I was on stage when I was told I was getting ready to play at Yoshi's San Francisco, and somebody came up and said, "You know Eddie Marshall died." That put a damper on the whole gig.

Jamal: Yeah, he was something. I didn't know that. You see Bobby Hutcherson?

Brown: Oh yeah, we interviewed Bobby a year ago, it was in December. It was an incredible interview. You know he plays with oxygen.

Jamal: Yeah, I know. Maurice Montoya, my agent books him. He has to take some breaks sometimes.

Brown: But he came to Kathy Sloane's book party. That was just a few weeks ago.

Jamal: I haven't seen Kathy in a long time.

Brown: I'll tell her that her name came up in the interview. I'll send her an email tonight.

Jamal: She's very active around the area. You know Kathy, Ken?

Kimery: I don't.

Brown: Actually, as long as we're speaking about Kathy, she did a film about Hiroshima, and I did the soundtrack for it.

Jamal: She's a filmmaker?

Brown: One film. She made just this one film.

Jamal: Successful?

Brown: It's called "Witness to Hiroshima." It's about a soldier who was deployed to Hiroshima right after the bomb.

Jamal: Based on a true story?

Brown: Absolute true story. He talks about that experience.

Jamal: And she made this film?

Brown: She made the film.

Jamal: Wow! Was it in the theaters?

Brown: It's an independent, short film. It's got tremendous acclaim for short documentary. I'll get you a copy, since you know her, so you can see her stuff and hear my music. I might even have a copy. I'll bring it to you.

Jamal: So, you did the score? Good for you.

Brown: I have a copy. I'll bring it tomorrow. But this ain't about me, this is about you. We're still in Atlantic in the 80s…

Jamal: No, it's about us [both laugh].

Brown: Just you and me, just us, justice. There's a recording, *Crystal*, Normandy Sounds in Rhode Island. I didn't even know that had a recording studio in Rhode Island. James Cammack, Dave Bowler, and Willie White. Can you talk about Willie White 'cause I'm not familiar with him?

Jamal: Willie White playing percussion. I've had so many players, and Willy is one that stayed with me. I took him to Tokyo with me. He toured in Tokyo with me. Wonderful man. He's on that record, as you've just reminded me. A great percussionist from New York, of course. I don't know what Willy's doing now. I think he's very actively working for dance companies. A lot of percussionists work for dance companies because the dance companies can use just the percussionists alone and they're straight. I think that's what he's doing now, working for dance companies.

Brown: The next title, 1989, *Pittsburg*, again on Atlantic, and this brings back orchestrations by Richard Evans. You mentioned this earlier. Go ahead and fill in some more details on that project.

Jamal: *Pittsburg* is one of my favorite. I have one of Jimmy Heath's songs that I claim as my own. Jimmy says, "That's your song now," "Melodrama." That's on there. Jimmy Heath's one of the great writers. He's a remarkable musician. I have Jimmy Heath's song on there. I have "Bellows," one of my songs. "Pittsburg" one of my songs. Orchestrations by Richard. It's a great album. Done with members of the Chicago Symphony. But we did the rhythm tracks first, and I left the studio and left the rest for Prof. Evans to put together. It was done for Atlantic Records, too.

Brown: It was recorded at Universal Studios in Chicago. Where were you living at this point in 1989?

Jamal: I was living in New York. What year was that?

Brown: 1989. Maybe that's when it was released. I'm not sure when it was released. No, it says "recorded in 1989" as well.

Jamal: In ’89, where was I living? That’s interesting because I had left Fort Lauderdale. That’s a good question. I have to think about it. I’ve had a few places I’ve lived at in my life, but I don’t think it was Fort Lauderdale. I don’t think I was living in Fort Lauderdale then. I had left Fort Lauderdale.

Brown: What’s interesting is the project is called *Pittsburg*, it was recorded in Chicago, and we don’t know where you were living at that point.

Jamal: No, I don’t know where I was living. I really don’t know.

Brown: So, now we get to the ‘90s. I told you it was going to take a little while to get through this extensive and illustrious career. *Live at Blues Alley.* So, you said you had 27 years?

Jamal: *Live at Blues Alley*, that’s a project I did for them. I have one of my favorites by Curtis Mayfield on there, “The Pusher Man.” One of Curtis’ classic numbers, such philosophically true, too. A lot of lyrics are very philosophical. That’s one of them, “Pusher Man.” That was from the movie.

Brown: *Superfly*. And who was the other person involved with that? You mentioned his name earlier doing the orchestration.

Jamal: Seldon Newton, is that who you were talking about?

Brown:  Now I was thinking of the *Superfly* soundtrack, you had mentioned someone earlier.

Jamal: Johnny Pate. He wrote the score. That was the last time I saw Bobby Timmons because he was an extra in *Superfly*. He was on the side as an extra.

Brown: Talk about Bobby Timmons.

Jamal: He was phenomenal. Great player, great composer. I think he was working with Art Blakey at the time.

Brown: Oh, so we’re back in the ‘50s, late ‘50’s.

Jamal: And he wrote a lot of things that were recorded by Oscar Brown Jr. “Dat Dere,” Bobby was brilliant.

Brown: “Moanin’,” all those. Bobby brought all that gospel in, too.

Jamal: He was brilliant. He could play too, play and write. That's the last time I saw Bobby, it was in the film, *Superfly*. But I think he worked at least one theater with me when he was with Art because Art was on the bill when I bought my show into the Regal in Chicago, Ahmad Jamal with Strings at the Regal. I think Bobby Timmons was working with Art at the time, as well as somebody else was on the bill. In any case, the last time I saw Bobby was in the movie, *Superfly*. Quite a guy.

Brown: Also, very distinctive, very unique.

Jamal: Great writer, great player, great musician. I've seen a lot of them in my life.

Brown: How about the ones coming up now? Has any one of them caught your ear?

Jamal: There are so many that are great technicians and doing so many things now. I, along with the Yamaha Music Foundation and Laura, who co-manages Hiromi, I do a couple of things managerial with Hiromi. I presented her and Esperanza (Spaulding). I was musical director for the Olympia Theater in Paris, and they wanted me to present music there for a few days, and I put Esperanza and Hiromi in the Olympia. Hiromi for the second time. I brought her there the first time as a soloist because she can do both. She can play ensemble and solo. I put Esperanza, and both won Grammys seven months later. I booked them at the Olympia seven months before they won the Grammys. Esperanza won as "Most Promising Artist" or something. Hiromi won with Stanley Clarke. She was playing with Stanley at the time. Those are two very, very talented ladies. You're asking me to reflect on some of the youth, those are two. "Esperanza, by the grace of God," I told her, " you have almost too much talent." Because she sings, she plays the bass, she writes. She's something else. And Hiromi is equally as talented. She is something else. Hiromi is something because that lady can play singles, she can do ensemble things. She's out now with Simon Phillips and Anthony Jackson, and also Steve Smith. The Hiromi Trio Project, she calls it. I've been instrumental, I took her to one of the biggest festivals in the world. That's the Marciac Festival. Have you done that one, Ken?

Kimery: No, I haven't done that one.

Jamal: A very, very big festival. Have you done Marciac?

Brown: No, where is it?

Jamal: It's in Marciac, France. It's a 5000 seater. It's big, but very well organized, they have the tops there. I took her to The Vienne Festival. That's another big one. So, I push buttons sometimes for Hiromi. I introduced her to George Wein, I took her to Umbria years ago for the Winter Festival, Orvieto. You've been to Umbria? Cala Piñata (?) and I, we're old friends. I talk

to him about Hiromi. He says, "Okay Maestro, but you have to play, too!" "I don't want to. I'm not going to work." "You have to work!" So, I took a few days and performed there, but my purpose was to introduce Hiromi. She's worked at Umbria several times, the real big one. Umbria Festival. The winter is in Orvieto. That's a smaller version, but subsequently she's done Umbria and Perugia, which is one of my favorite places. I wrote a song called Perugia. I was going to live there for a while, but I changed my mind.

[End of disc 3]

Brown: Today is November 9th, 2011. It's the second day of the Smithsonian Oral History interview with NEA Jazz Master pianist, composer, arranger, educator, bandleader, ensemble leader, and humanitarian, musician's musician, Ahmad Jamal.

Jamal: You voiced all those titles yesterday. Encore, huh? [Laughs]

Brown: [Laughs] I added another one after yesterday's interview.

Jamal: I hope I can follow that encore.

Brown: If anybody can, you can. So, what I was able to do last night was, because we had so many discrepancies in one discography, I went back and consulted with the Lord's discography, which I want to share with you a little later. But, in going back through it – I'm actually going to flip this around 'cause I want you to be able to see it – this is called "The Lord's Jazz Discography."

Jamal: The Lord's?

Brown: L-O-R-D. Just like "Dear Lord."

Jamal: That's a person?

Brown: Yeah.

Jamal: A he or she?

Brown: It's a he. I think he's based in Canada, I believe. Tom Lord. Every year, he updates it. I have an older copy, but this is the first entry.

Jamal: Is he comprehensive? He does many, many, many artists?

Brown: Yeah, it's probably the most comprehensive jazz discography in existence. There's a printed copy, but this is a DVD copy, or CD-ROM copy. So, this is the very first entry. You can see how they do it; they give you the personnel, location, date and then they give you all the different labels that it was issued on.

Jamal: What's unknown?

Brown: That's what I was going to ask, that's the reason I flipped this around. Because it says "unknown: bongo player, 1951" and you mentioned that you had percussionist.

Jamal: There is no bongo player. You know what that is? That's Ray Crawford playing on the frets.

Brown: There you go, see.

Jamal: He was playing on his frets.

Brown: Right, and I remember hearing this, and both Ken and I were going, "Dang!"

Jamal: He did a percussive sound on his frets. He's very unique in that regard, and had many imitators, many people who took that over as their own. And he says, "bongo."

Brown: See? That's what I'm saying! That's why these interviews are so important.

Jamal: Is he still around?

Brown: Oh yeah. So, what I'll do is I'll let him know that through this interview with Ahmad that there was no bongo player. That was Ray Crawford's guitar. But, we want to continue to correct the record.

Jamal: Thank you very much. That's very, very important.

Brown: That's why I wanted you to see that.

Jamal: I agree with you.

Brown: Mm-hmm, it's important. Just the fact that he thought it was a bongo player.

Jamal: I know.

Brown: I know, because there wasn't one! That's why he's unknown.

Jamal: I saw that up there, thanks to my glasses. These are not my medicine glasses, but they work.

Brown: And then, the other entry that I wanted to – I'll turn this back around and we'll sit down – but when I got to the first vocal, the chorale project, it listed Hale Smith as the conductor. You talked about Hale Smith, but we didn't talk about how he came to be involved in that project.

Jamal: Hale Smith was not the conductor. What's his associate?

Brown: Was he the arranger?

Jamal: Howard Roberts was the conductor. What Hale did was take my ideas and structure the vocal charts accordingly. Howard Roberts and Hale worked very closely together. They worked on many projects. This is one of many.

Brown: *The Bright, The Blue, and the Beautiful*, Ahmad Jamal Trio with Voices, New York, February 1968. Here are the personnel: yourself, Jamil Sulieman, Frank Gant, accompanied by the Howard Roberts' Choir voices, and Hale Smith, conductor. So, you're saying Hale Smith was more the arranger?

Jamal: He's the arranger.

Brown: Okay, so that's what we want to correct. So, Howard Roberts brought Hale in? It wasn't through your association with him?

Jamal: No. Hale brought Howard Roberts in.

Brown: Hale brought Howard Roberts in!

Jamal: Absolutely. That's how that worked. I went to Hale first.

Brown: Talk to me about how you came to know about Hale, and what inspired you to go to him for this project?

Jamal: I don't know how Hale and I met. We met years ago before this project took place. Hale goes back when I had my… what year was this done?

Brown: This is February '68.

Jamal: I had my record company in '69, but Hale and I go back before then. That's why I called him. I knew his expertise as one of the great orchestrators in the world, as far as I'm concerned.

He certainly reached that plateau. I consider him one of the foremost authorities on the art of orchestration. And I think you know what I'm talking about.

Brown: Absolutely.

Jamal: It's just that he was undiscovered by many. I went to one of his concerts at Carnegie Hall done by one of our prominent orchestras, I forget what complement it was. The way he wrote was just unbelievable, and I wanted to never to study with him, but never reached fruition in that regard. He's one of the great composers, but I don't know how I met Hale. I know I met him before we did this project, and I went to him for this project. He went to Howard and got Howard 'cause he's one of the experts on voices, what they can do and what they can't do, along with Hale. So, it was Hale that procured the services of Howard Roberts. Just the reverse. So, let's set the record straight there.

Brown: Absolutely. So, Hale was the arranger, and it was through Hale that the Howard Roberts' Choir was involved in this project. That's one of the reasons for the oral histories, to correct the historical record. You have to go to the source. Okay, great. I wanted to continue on […] Now, the *Live At Blues Alley,* how long was that tenure of every New Years?

Jamal: We did about 27 years. I backed off a couple years, then I went back and did a couple more years. Now, I don't do it anymore. The majority of that time was with the great Keter Betts. We shared the New Years Eve thing for years and years.

Kimery: Steve Abshire on guitar…

Jamal: He had a guitarist that also was working Singapore and was back and forth. This guitarist also did some singing, I think, but not during the sets at the Blues Alley when the New Years thing took place. But I don't know, he used several guitarists.

Brown: A lot of your recordings are live recordings, and one of my particular favorites, of course, *The Pershing* is my all-time favorite, but my second is the one that featured, it was for your seventieth birthday, and I play this all the time.

Jamal: Oh, with George.

Brown: Could you talk about this 'cause for me it's very special. I use this as a comparison. You listen to the *Pershing Lounge*, that's Ahmad in the 1950s. We listen to this in 2000, so one in this century and one in the other century. Just the evolution of your style, all the hallmarks of your conceptual approaches are there, but your harmonic and rhythm vocabulary has definitely expanded. When we were listening to "Night Has A Thousand Eyes" or even "My Foolish

Heart" or "Autumn Leaves," which has been in your repertoire for decades, always fresh. On this recording, it was very fresh. For me, since the *Pershing Lounge* had a trio and this one featuring a horn, it just emphasizes to me that all this time he's been working in the small ensemble, but working with a horn player, there were times where you would just lay out and give the other three so much space. It's phenomenal to hear that much transparency in the music, so I was just wondering if you could talk about this particular date. Is it a memorable date? Was it a special moment for you? Again, I'm just emphasizing that it's one of my favorites.

Jamal: Well, you won't ever see a façade like that in the United States, a marquee like that.

Brown: Oh, I see! [Laughs]

Jamal: They don't do that with our American classical musicians here in the States. In France, they do. You see that marquee?

Brown: Mm-hmm, it's great.

Jamal: You won't ever see that on any of our artists, barring none, in the States, unfortunately. And television is done differently also overseas. You know, we're strangers in our own hometown sometimes, that's the case. I see Duke on television much more frequently than I see him here in the States. I don't see Duke, I don't see Art Tatum, I don't see any of the great players that made up this great culture on television, on the tube. Why? Pourquoi pas, as they say in France, why not?

Brown: What would be your theory about that? Why not?

Jamal: Lack of many things, disregard, insensitivity. Why are they cutting the NEA budget hither and thither? Music is supposed to soothe the savage beast. We're doing things that are raising the savage beast, unfortunately. Young people should know about the Billie Holidays, and George Shearings, and the Louie Armstrongs, and the Jamals, and the McCoy Tyners. This music attracts thousands of players from all over the world. At Berklee, you had people from all over the world studying there because of this music. So, there should be a greater emphasis. It used to be when they wanted to create a goodwill tour for the US, they had these State Department tours, what did they do? They got Benny Goodman, Ella Fitzgerald, and Dizzy Gillespie or Dave Brubeck to do State Department tours. What happened to that? "War, what is it good for? Good for nothing." You know that song?

Brown: Edwin Starr.

Jamal: War. Philosophically sound, right? What about this money transfer to raising our children to understand the only two art forms that took place in the United States? American Indian art and this thing called jazz. What about converting that money, just a fraction? Then I would see Duke on the tube, I would see Art Tatum on the tube, and I would see Stuff Smith and John Levy playing bass, 52nd Street. That stuff is in the archives somewhere. This is a commentary. You want to know the reasons? Just complete disregard, disinterest. Other things take priority, negativity takes priority on positive things. And that's negative to spend money on all this stuff at the expense of the education of our young people. If you don't give them the right things, they're going to take the wrong things. The right things are to know from whence this smattering of culture we have comes from. It comes from American Indian art and this thing we call jazz, American classical music. And that happens, unfortunately, in other places. But this is a young country compared to Egypt, compared to other cultures, compared to Greece, it's young. And we're blowing it! Somebody's got to take notice, otherwise it's going to disappear. What happens when a culture disappears? The civilization disappears because you cannot have a sound civilization without culture. It will not last. The two go hand in hand. Culture and civilization. Culture is how to take care of your mother and father, how to say hello, how to listen to great music, how to respect the Pavarottis, the ballet companies, and the things Mozart did, or the things that Duke Ellington did, or Billy Strayhorn's writing, his "Lush Life" and "Isfahan" and all those wonderful things, and the great work of Art Tatum, he was one of the masters. We got a lot to do. I hope this archival project succeeds in doing some of this because we have a problem. We have a cultural problem here. Music runs deep in the culture. Without it, the birds don't sing.

Brown: During the course of this interview, even just these few minutes and yesterday, the term "American classical music," when did you first conceptualize this term?

Jamal: Back in 1982.

Brown: What was the inspiration?

Jamal: I never called myself a jazz musician because I was playing the "Eroica" etude, I was playing Franz Liszt when I was ten years old in competition. I don't do it now because you have to specialize [and] make a certain decision, otherwise you have to specialize in the body of work coming out of Europe or the body of work coming out of the United States, so I chose the latter, and rightly so. I think it was the right choice, but I never called myself a jazz musician. I hated when someone comes to me and say, I play classical music. Get away from me 'cause you're really a jaded, distorted person when you say that. I study classical music, too. Duke Ellington is classical. Jimmy Lunceford is classical. Mozart is classical. Beethoven is classical. All of us are multidimensional fellows that are successful in this field. In order to be successful in this field, you have to know the best of both worlds. What you chose to concentrate on is another thing. In

order to be successful in this field that I've been in all my life, you have to know the best of both worlds. And this is what makes up the so-called jazz community. You will not find Wynton Marsalis anywhere but the so-called jazz community. You're not going to find him anywhere else. You're not going to find a similar thing if you go outside the jazz community, and it's a wonderful thing, Arturo Sandoval inspired by Dizzy Gillespie. You're not going to find this kind of revolutionary, Charlie Parker, for example, outside of the jazz community. And it transformed the whole musical world. Charlie Parker influenced the movie industry, soundtracks and this and that. Bill Cosby made a wonderful comment years ago, "If it hadn't been for Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker, I wouldn't be where I am today." And you can ask him to analyze that or explain that, but that's what he told me once. So, you see how far-reaching it is. I hope, as I said before, I hope this helps to soothe the savage beast that we're raising.

Brown: If I might infer what you were attempting to do by using the term "classical," classical meaning timeless, it sounds like you were trying to broaden this exclusivity when it had been only applied to Western European concert music to say that there are other musics that are classical. It's not just this one idiom or genre.

Jamal: What's the definition of "jazz"? Ever look it up in the dictionary? There's a PC computer [that came] out a couple of years ago called "jazz." It had nothing to do with music. If you look at Webster's Dictionary… I'm saying it's up to the practitioners to change the terminology of what they represent, the fields in which they represent. I can't change the terminology with the hierarchy in the medical field. They do that themselves. Now, I have to say "chairperson," I can't say "chairman" anymore. I don't have to say it, but you're better off saying it. Who did that? The Feminist Movement. There are certain ethnicities that you have to use when you refer to certain ethnic groups now. You can't use the terms that they used years ago. That's out, that's forbidden. So, it's up to the musicians to elect the term that they think fits their category. I chose to do it because I like the idea of this wonderful body of work being referred to as "American Classical Music." I was on the bill [for] Duke's 25th anniversary, Carnegie Hall, 1952 with Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker with strings, Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday [was] just allowed to return because of the illegal cabaret card they used to enforce on people in New York – the whole cabaret card was illegal, but they forced it on you – Stan Getz, and myself. I'm the only living headliner. And I never heard Duke call himself a jazz musician, that's my point. Maybe he did, but I don't recall.

Brown: Well, you asked me earlier what does jazz mean to me, so I'll just quote Duke Ellington. He said, and I'm going to have to paraphrase since I don't have the quote before me, but we used to use this on the brochure for the Oral History Program, "Jazz means the same thing it meant to musicians fifty years ago – freedom of expression." He says, "If I have to define it, I would say

its African music created in the American environment." So, you have that from Duke Ellington, and I actually witnessed in Kansas City at a panel with Billy Taylor and Max Roach, they got into an argument because Max did not want the term "jazz" to be used in describing his music, and he got very upset.

Jamal: Excusez-moi! That's interesting.

Brown: Very upset.

Jamal: Dr. Taylor and Max? That's interesting.

Brown: Max was unrelenting in that we could not use the word "jazz" to describe his music, and it got heated.

Jamal: So, I'm not by myself?

Brown: Absolutely not. And as Max is my teacher, you know I understand that. So, there has been a zeitgeist or a spirit of the times among musicians, perhaps instigated by your attempt to not allow the labels to be forced on us, but for us, the practitioners, to create our own labels to describe our music. That's what Duke told Diz. He said, again paraphrasing, "Dizz, it was unfortunate that you let them put a label on your music," meaning bebop or jazz.

Jamal: Who said this?

Brown: Duke said that to Diz. He said, "It's unfortunate you allowed them to put a label on your music."

Jamal: [Laughs] You know, let me be very clear, if I can. I'm not paranoid about the word "jazz." There's no paranoia here. I just don't call myself a jazz musician. You know why I'm not paranoid? Because we sophisticated it so much, the professors and universities, jazz departments from Jackie McLean to Jimmy Heath, so we sophisticated what was never meant to be, as far as I'm concerned, sophisticated. That's how strong and powerful this music is. So, I'm not paranoid about the word "jazz" because we sophisticated what was never intended to grow and what has never been really promoted, like other things that have nothing to do with music are. There's stuff out there that has nothing to do with music, but is called music. Here again, when you promote the falsities, you're going to stir up the savage beast, [and] raise the savage beast, as opposed to soothing the savage beast. So, I'm not paranoid about that word because we've sophisticated this art form. We have schools and institutions. Look what Wynton did, almost single-handedly. JALC, that building down there. That's what should be the case. That kind of a structure should house this music, Jazz at Lincoln Center. In fact, I wrote a song, a composition,

"After JALC." It's in my latest quiet time CD, "After Jazz at Lincoln Center." I wrote that post my appearance with Wynton with the Jazz of Lincoln Center Orchestra. It's not Wynton's orchestra, but the Jazz of Lincoln Center's Orchestra. That's the kind of structure that should house this music. I'm not paranoid about the word, but I don't call myself a jazz musician, and there are many things in the dictionary that refer to jazz that has nothing to do with music. Some of them are unmentionable. So, here we go again, call a spade a spade. Call a cat a cat, and not a cat a dog. I prefer the term "American Classical Music." And there are a lot of people who have taken me up on that, a lot of stations, journals, a lot of magazines that have started using this word.

Brown: What did they object to?

Jamal: No, they've adopted.

Brown: Oh, taken it up, meaning adopted. But have you encountered any criticism?

Jamal: No, not that I know of. I haven't gotten any, "This is crazy!" I haven't gotten any of that. I haven't been looking around for it because I don't care. [laughs] It's what I think that counts in this instance.

Brown: When we talk about the evolution of this music, and you say it has become "sophisticated," sophisticated by the practitioners bringing in their influences, their concepts, their intellect, their humanity to the music. Some people complain about the direction the music's going in today. Some people point [to] the fact that it's been institutionalized and that folks that learn jazz, or American Classical Music, in the institution don't really understand or aren't imbued with the essence of this music. I know as an educator myself, one of the things I insist on is that folks understand the cultural context from which this music came. For me, that's important. Is that important to you?

Jamal: You can't disregard the foundations. You can't disregard the things that you have to study into order to be a practitioner. You can't disregard scales; you have to respect scales 'cause they form a part of the formation of this artistic world. In order to be a practitioner, you have to learn certain things. So, the foundations of this music have to be respected.

Brown: When I say foundations, I meant, again, the cultural foundations, the cultural context from this music, not the craft itself, not learning the scales, as if in a carpenter, you have to learn how to hold the handle, why did carpentry even exist? Why [does] this music have such a level of humanity, that you expressed earlier, that can "soothe the savage beast"? Actually, it's "soothe the savage breast," but savage beast, to use your terms. What is it about this music that does that? And can that be taught in the university? For example, some of the criticism is [that] these young

players can play, the technique is off the charts, but are they saying anything? Have they lost the blues base? Any of these other things that come in as a critique that yes, you have students who are quite proficient at mastering the repertoire, at mastering the scales, at mastering the techniques of performing this music, and maybe even composing this music, but do they understand where this music came from and the humanity that has been at the basis of the music? Again, what I usually teach the students is the African American spiritual is the wellspring of our music and all American music because that is identified by James Weldon Johnson as America's first folk music. It is a music that was created here in this soil that, obviously, has origins in Africa, but it doesn't sound like anything that you could say that sounds exactly like something in Africa. It has been transformed through the American experience. So, again, what I'm trying to say is that a lot of young players now are technically facile, but they don't fully understand what was at the root, at the foundation of the creation of this music, not what scales were being used, but why this music is important, why this music [is] invested with so much humanity and can touch people across…

Jamal: I'm a stickler for higher education. I think it's very important. And he who tries to please everybody is a fool. There's always going to be some negativity, some comments, and everything depends on [the] knowledge that one possesses. There are some youngsters out there who are possessing that knowledge, who are exploring the roots of this music, [and] there are some that aren't. So, the ones that do, they come off with certainly a great(er) advantage than the ones that don't. Simple as that. My theory is when it gets too complicated, something is wrong. It's not complex to decipher who is gaining the advantage and who is losing because the ones that study properly, they'll understand the philosophy of this music, it's beginnings and where it's going. And they will make statements like the revolutionaries made. Who are the revolutionaries? Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong. Herlin Riley keeps a whole file on Louie Armstrong, he loves to watch Louis Armstrong, but look how he plays because he respects what Louis did. The persons that look into the beginnings extensively are going to excel, the persons who don't are not going to excel, simple as that. If you study the body of work… that's why some of the Russian pianists, spectacular because they study Horowitz . . . They have a young many now out of Russia who plays American Classical Music, Eldar [Djangirov].

Brown: Eldar, he was out in the Bay Area when we was eighteen and nineteen and playing all that Art Tatum.

Jamal: I have a friend, Andrei Kitaev, who's from Russia. He had a picture of me on the right, a picture of Herbie Hancock above his piano during his growing up years. There are people who study in the European body of work, the beginnings, and the American Classical body of work, they do an in-depth study. Those who do that excel, those who don't do that don't excel.

Eventually, if the ones who [are] exploring this wonderful musical territory properly, they're going to make some valid statements, like Louis Armstrong made, like Dizzy Gillespie made, like Jimmy Lunceford made, like Art Tatum made. There's nothing new under the sun. That's why I don't believe in the words, "we create." We don't create anything, in my opinion. That's another one of my things. I don't believe that we create; we discover. There's an expression, "There's nothing new under the sun." But, if you follow certain irrevocable laws, you will discover. And that's what man's about, discover. He can't create a gnat, he can't create a fly, but there are some people who discovered things in medicine. Insulin is one of the revolutionary discoveries, insulin, penicillin. In music, there have been some great discoveries, be it Billy Strayhorn or Art Tatum, the great voice of Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald. So, these youngsters, if they explore properly and explore the foundations, they will excel. The ones that don't explore properly, they're not going to excel. Maybe all you're going to hear is technique and no heart. Maybe that's what they're going to get. If you study all technique and no feeling, that's what's going to happen. You're going to have all technique and no feeling, simple as that [laughs]. But, if you study both, the feeling and the heart and the soul, the essence of this music, then you're going to excel. You're not going to be one-dimensional. The person who is only concentrating on one aspect of it is going to be one-dimensional. They're not going to excel. It doesn't get complicated to me. It's a simple process of being in tune with the forces so you can discover all these wonderful things.

Brown: Maybe what we're looking at is the process by which one undergoes the ability to be in tune to these. Back to the institutions, obviously you didn't learn jazz in the institution. You learned jazz through, what we say, "practicum." You did it by doing it, by the associations, the milieu, the social community that you were in. Whereas, if you go to an institution of higher learning now, it's up to the teachers…

Jamal: I'm one of the exceptions to the rule, and I tell young people don't do what I did. It's too hard, but I'm an exception to the rule. I tell young people if you want more than one exit door, go to school because if you have one exit door and a fire breaks out, you might get trampled to death. Only way acquire all these wonderful options, learning how to orchestrate, learning how to write, learning how to understand theory, learning how to do the technical aspects, learning how to perform, learning how to conduct, you have to go to the institution. I'm not saying that I don't have my Ph.D. in other areas 'cause I do, but I'm the exception to the rule. It's too difficult to do what I've done. You're not going to make it unless you have a strong, strong motivation and something that has caused you to capture what you may have lost in the institutions of higher learning. I was speaking at the oldest university in the world, Al-Azhar in Egypt in 1959, so I respect universities and higher education. But, I don't encourage youngster to do it the way I did it because they might not make it.

Brown: Let's talk about that trip in 1959 to North Africa. Could you talk a little bit more about that? What was your inspiration, and how long were you there, and what countries you visited?

Jamal: I had been planning that trip since I was eleven years old. I was planning that trip in high school because I knew it was something besides… As Columbus said, "The world I think is not square, it's round." I knew there was something that I had to do beyond the USA, and it's international. This is one world we live in now. If Japan has a tsunami, it affects the cows' milk up in New England here. We had thirteen states that were affected by the tsunami because the wind, the rain, the forces carry all these things. So, we're one world now. And I always thought in terms of something beyond what I was seeing in my neighborhood, so I was planning this trip to Africa since I was eleven years old. I was able to go as a result of the Pershing and success of the work of Mr. Fournier and Mr. Crosby and myself, the wonderful record company that worked with us, Argo. I was able to realize this dream at eleven years old, so I went to Egypt, not to play music. My host there was one of the foremost professors, Dr. Shahwatabi [?], head of the agricultural department at University of Cairo. He was my host, and I went from there to Sudan, Khartoum. My host was Sheikh Ali Abdul Rahman [?] the ex-Minister of the Interior. I had some very wonderful individuals that served as my mentors, in a sense, and showed me around these places. One of things I did [was] I spoke at Al-Azhar. That's the beginning of the university system. To make a long story short, or a short story long, that's a trip I planned when I was eleven years old.

Brown: How long was the trip?

Jamal: Long enough for the *New York Times* to put it on the front page [laughs]. I remember that article, front page, *New York Times*, "Mr. Jamal in Cairo." Why would I go to Cairo? I didn't play one note of music. I went there for other reasons.

Brown: You said you gave an address?

Jamal: I gave a short speech at Al-Azhar. I spoke in English, but Darshrobi [?] translated for me [in] Arabic. I've been around a few places and done a few things, and I'm still going around doing a few things by the grace of God. I'll be leaving this Monday for Paris. In fact, while you were here, you heard my associates call me. So, life is interesting when you're constantly discovering. We can't create, but we certainly can discover. I'm still discovering everyday. It's a great learning lesson everyday. You stop learning when you make your transition. You stop learning this area in which we engage in now when you make your transition and it's time to move on.

Brown: Are there places on this globe that you still want to travel [to] or that you have not been to?

Jamal: No. My favorite venue is where I am now, home, H-O-M-E. I have everything I want here in New England, but I go out if the conditions are right. If it's supposed to be, then I go. It is what it is . . . I was the same way, I haven't changed. I have not been a person who loved to travel. I'm enjoying travelling more now than I ever did in my life. That's why I built the restaurant. Well, it was at the encouragement of other people, but one of the things that caused me to build a restaurant and to think about it was because I wanted to stay home.

Brown: Let's talk about some of the things that as an entrepreneur you developed so that you could stay where you wanted to be.

Jamal: As an entrepreneur, I developed bills [laughs]. That's what I developed.

Brown: [Laughs] But in order to pay those bills, you got to procure some legal tender.

Jamal: The fact is, nothing ventured, nothing gained. I'm more the wiser because of my entrepreneurial un-skills or skills [laughs].

Brown: During the course of this interview, you've shared with us the many different things, starting in a club may not have been the move that you stuck with, but you did it. You started your own record label, *three* record labels. I'm holding in my hand your current business card, and it says, "Mayah Publishing." What are some of the other non-performing activities that you manage?

Jamal: Mayah Publishing is solely music. I'm back to my roots. It's solely music. I'm, for the most part, 99.9% engaged in music. The other things I had to let go because they were very distracting and very expensive, to say the least, very costly. My love is writing, enjoying my house, sitting at the piano, and making discoveries.

Brown: A seeker.

Jamal: I was making a few discoveries before you arrived. I was at my other "B," the far side, making some discoveries. That's what I enjoy doing, but these are musical things. I have divested myself of most of these other things. Talking to my daughter every day, if she has the time to call me or if I have the time to call her, and we manage to find time to do that; talking to my grandkids. Life is very interesting when you're discovering everyday. That's what it's about. But, I'm not going to entertain distractions. That's another thing I tell young people. Duke

Ellington said a wonderful thing, "Music is my mistress," that's one of his quotes. Is that correct?

Brown: Yeah, that's the title of his autobiography.

Jamal: "Music is my mistress," and he's right. This is very demanding. You can't have all this other stuff. I tell these young men and women coming up, I'm not speaking in a condescending way, try not to have distractions, and they're inundated with distractions now. It's really tough. They have all this great technology and all these great advances in computers and this and that, coming out with new phones every day, but has the quality of life improved? This is my question. I go all over the world asking this question. We have all these technical advances. Has the quality of life improved? Just give me a yes or no.

Brown: Have you ever gotten a yes?

Jamal: I've gotten a no. "Well, uh, uh," I've gotten a lot of that. But I want a straight answer, yes or no. So, the young people now have a lot of distractions, and are we now producing politicians or statesmen? There's a difference.

Brown: What is that difference?

Jamal: Do you have statesmen or politicians now? Do you have debt or not, national debt or not in this country? Is there concern over the economy? Do you have a wonderful health system where old people don't have to buy cat food in order to have enough money to buy their medicine, or they're doing without medicine? Are there people still in the barrio or sleeping on the grates in Washington DC? When I go to Washington, there are people sleeping on the grates there. I've been going to Washington for years. They're sleeping on the grates there, I think. Unless I'm blind, [and] I don't think I'm blind.

Brown: They're still there.

Jamal: Okay, and are there wars going on? Every year I've lived, there's been some killing going on. Are people exporting death or importing culture? This is crazy. All these wonderful advances, has the quality of life improved? I just had a call, this gentleman called me from Aix-en-Provence, very close. He was the first man to bring me to Marseille, Seydou Barry. He was the one who produced my latest [album], *Blue Moon*. His father was one of 57 people on a plane that landed on a mine in Vietnam. Only seven survived, and the mines are constructed to affect your legs. That's why you see a lot of Vietnam(ese) little kids have no [legs]. There is one man who dedicated his life to getting prostheses for these kids. I don't know if you've seen that documentary. I think he won a Nobel Prize. But his father was one of the seven survivors. He

had 47 pieces of shrapnel in his leg, and over 25 years, they can only take out one at a time. He's had countless operations, just had one, and they're thinking about reducing his pension by 20%. He was willing to give his life for the country. So, you have it all over. Is Greece in trouble or not? Is Italy in trouble? Is Egypt in trouble? Is Syria in trouble? Yemen? All over the world, you have 750,000 grown ups, adults and kids in a refugee camp somewhere right now. They're trying to raise money to feed them, keep them from starving. Thousands of kids starving everyday. Has the quality of life improved? Are they discovering ruin or discovering culture? Culture is how you help others. First, you help yourself, then perhaps you can help others. This is puzzling to me. I'm puzzled. I'm just saying there are so many distractions for the young musicians. Getting back to the point, there are so many distractions now. The great camaraderie has disappeared. Where can they go and jam? Do they have jam sessions, plentiful amounts? Are there places where they can jam, like we did coming up and interchange with the older musicians? We used to get a wonderful thrill when Ray Brown used to come back to town because he had been out with the bands, and the great Joe Harris, another one of our wonderful drummers. Joe Harris is one of the spectacular drummers of all time. I don't know if you agree, but I'm talking about Joe Harris. If you see the DVD, *Things to Come*, Dizzy Gillespie, you'll see a spectacular drummer. Pittsburgher.

Brown: We interviewed him.

Jamal: He doesn't go anymore. He stays home. He doesn't have to stay home. Joe Harris, unbelievable what he was doing years ago! He didn't have the distractions though. Now, if they get out of here too prematurely, they're not going to make it. That's why I say, even with the deficiencies – and all the things that happen at institutions are not positive, there's some negativity there – but there are enough pluses to offset the minuses. I don't say that you get everything there. You have bad teachers and you have good teachers, but when you're young, you're impressionable. There's no way you can understand the philosophy of saying, "No, I'm not going to do that." You're not developed enough. So, get yourself in school and stay in school. It used to be impossible to get a Ph.D. almost years and years ago. Now, you can do it. You can get a Ph.D. now. There are a lot of areas that offer that, a lot of opportunities for that. With distractions, you're not going to make it. Even with the education system at your disposal, if you're not directed by someone like myself and you're going to listen to them, you're not going to make it. If you listen to just some of the things I say, you youngsters, just some of the things – actions speak louder than words – but if you listen and do some of the things, you're going to find some areas of satisfaction and success. 'Cause I've been through it and done it. Not done it all, but I've done a lot. I know a little bit about this living, not a lot, but a little bit. If I had had someone to talk to me like I talk to… "If," I don't like if's because it is what it is. You can't advance talking about if's. Just for a moment I'm going to use "if," if I had somebody to

talk to me, only for effect, like I talk to some of these young people, I might have avoided some of the pitfalls. But, I'm not complaining. I'm very thankful for what I've gained because there's ease after hardship. Unfortunately, there has to be some pain to appreciate pleasure. You have to know a little bit about pain. A person who knows nothing about trauma or knows nothing about struggle, I want to run away from because they're very shallow. If you have no struggle, no difficulties, no challenges… that's why it's great sometimes to do without food, so you know what they guy feels like who doesn't have food. You see? There's ease after hardship, so I don't complain because now I enjoy a bit of ease. I've been through a whole lot, but I tell young people, don't try and do it my way. Unless you have miracles going for you, and I hope they will have miracles even if they do it the proper way. But if you don't have miracles going for you constantly, and you're out there too soon, and with the distractions that they have today, you're not going to make it. And that's what's happening. How many suicides you have among young people now? And it's all over. It's not only here; it's in Japan. The suicide rate in Japan is high. I read about a suicide rate somewhere among the farmers in India. I don't know if you saw or are aware of that…

Brown: I did.

Jamal: Farmers in India because there's no appreciation for all the toil and the hard work. You have these big, big manufacturers that are taking over the farming industry, and farmers are committing suicide everyday. The poor farmers are committing suicide. So, we have a problem here in the world.

Brown: It seems like, as you mentioned earlier, that Greece, Italy, obviously they're struggling. We had the Arab Spring where we had [in] many countries in North Africa people rising up. Before I left Oakland, they had shut down the Port of Oakland, thousands of people in the city of Oakland, California shut it down. So, people all over this planet, to include this country, people are awakening to the fact [of] this very thing: what is the quality of life? We have all this technology, we have all this wealth, we have all these advancements, but we still have people, as you said, starving. You have people in this country, the richest country on the planet, who don't have healthcare. If they wanted to [and] had the political will to do it, they could. We have Medicare. What's the difference between extending that service paid for by tax money, not only to elders, but to anybody who needs it? It seems that this country, of all the countries, could provide that. Yet, we have thousands of people across the nation who are gathering to say, we are occupying, we are part of the 99%, and we feel that justice is not being served.

Jamal: With the young musicians [who] are coming up, whatever gender, they have all this great technology, but the musical statements that were made in the past by Duke and Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie and Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong and Art Tatum, and so forth and so

on, and the Horowitz's and Rubenstein's, Fritz-Chrysler's, and all the wonderful people that are engaged in the European body of work, is it happening now? Are we going to have these revolutionaries in music in the future? They're disappearing, endangered species. Why? Distractions. No discoveries. All you're doing is technology. You just mentioned the word. Shell, but no essence. Art Tatum had one of the finest technical approaches known and unknown to man. No one plays like him. Play like yourself. He wasn't the greatest, but he was one of the greats. Beneath all the technique was a wonderful warmth, a wonderful soul, a wonderful essence that went along with the technique. I tell people, youngsters, a prerequisite before you study this music – I don't care if you're a trombonist, or a cellist, or a pianist – Art Tatum's "Flying Home" with Tiny Grimes, Slam Stewart and Art Tatum, that should be a prerequisite if you're going to get into music. That's my opinion, my little two cents. I tell all the young people… it was a big old Comet record then, 12 inch Comet record, now it's probably on a compilation. Slam Stewart, Tiny Grimes [and] Art Tatum playing "Flying Home." End of story.

[End of disc 4]

Brown: Ken asked me, "Why do you think he has 2 pianos is in his room?"

Jamal: Because I always wanted two pianos. What inspired that [was] I went to Roberta Mandel, same last name as Johnny. I don't know if you know Roberta, [but] she had two pianos in her house. I visited her house, she had a Blüthener and a Steinway. I always wanted two Steinways back to back, so that's why. I can go from one to another. When I get tired of one, I go to another.

Brown: Does one have any other particular idiosyncrasies as opposed to the other? I'm sure all pianos…

Jamal: They're all different. Different personalities completely. This is a different personality, different fingerprint, that's different. All Steinways are different. They're all my friends.

Brown: A lot of mistresses. Are they identical models? What year?

Jamal: The first Steinway D I had brought from Chicago to Riverside Drive when I moved to New York from Chicago. I had my Steinway D shipped to New York. These pianos I acquired about 17 years ago. They're about 17 years old. I'm not going to do the math.

Brown: The listener can do the math. We've got other things to do. Looking back at your discography, here's a project on Telarc. We haven't talked about your evolution or progression to Telarc. But the title, *I Remember Duke, Hoagy, and Strayhorn*. Obviously, this must be an

homage recording to great composers. Would you like to share some of the inspiration behind this project?

Jamal: I did one project for Motown, one project for Telarc. Ray called me to participate on *Some of My Best Friends are Pianists*. I did that session with Ray reluctantly. But, out of respect for Ray I went down and did that. But, I wasn't prepared at the time. That's why I say reluctantly. This, I did at Joe Segal's room in Chicago. *I Remember Duke, Hoagy, and Strayhorn*. I did at Joe Segal's' place. That was the only project I did for Telarc.

Brown: Let's talk about some of your inspirations. And if you had personal relationships with [them]. Let's start with Strayhorn, since he's a fellow Pittsburghian? Pittsburghite? [Laughs]

Jamal: A fellow Pittsburgher.

Brown: I didn't want to use that because, auf deutsch!

Jamal: I still am remembered by the family because I sold papers to the Strayhorn family when I was 7 years old. But Billy had gone with Duke at that time. They remember me as a paperboy. Seven years old selling papers to the Strayhorn family. They lived within 10 minutes of me, so they were on my paper route.

Brown: Which paper were you delivering?

Jamal: *Pittsburgh Courier*. I only met, got to know Billy after I started touring with my group. Then I got know Billy. The last thing I remember about Billy was when he had that patch. I hated to look at it.

Brown: Because he had esophageal cancer. How would you describe him as a person, having been able personally to have contact with him?

Jamal: I didn't know that much about Billy. I think Lena Horne and him were very tight.

Brown: Yes, that's true.

Jamal: But, he's one of the great writers. One of my favorite songs of Billy's is "Johnny-Come-Lately." I think that's one of his copyrights, too. "Rain Check," "Isfahan," "Lush Life," of course. Did you ever look at the number of people who recorded "Lush Life?" Extensive. Unbelievable.

Brown: He wrote that in high school.

Jamal: Isn't that something? He was soda jerking in Pittsburgh, I'm told. He did the lyrics. I don't think he had ever been in Paris. He says, "A weekend in Paris." Isn't that part of it? I don't think he had been in Paris then, right?

Brown: No, he was only 17.

Jamal: Amazing.

Brown: Completely vicarious.

Jamal: And of course "Take The A-Train." What a Pittsburgher he was.

Brown: He ranks among my most favorite musicians of all time. Let's talk about his alter ego, Duke Ellington. Did you have a chance to meet Duke and get to know him at all?

Jamal: No, we worked his 25th anniversary, 1952. We worked Basin Street East together. Xavier Cugat's old venue, they took over Moe Lewis Harrigan [?], Ralph Watkins and Morris Levy, they bought that place. I worked there with Duke also, but I didn't know Duke well. I was shocked when I went to his place that Ruth kept all his memorabilia. I think it was on Riverside Drive. Is that correct?

Brown: I don't know the exact location.

Jamal: I was there. Ruth almost fainted when she found out that we were both born on the same day. Not the same year, but July 2. She didn't meet many people in life who were born July 2nd. She was born on July 2nd too. I got a chance to see all his awards inside the cases, etc. etc. I had a different perspective on Duke when I saw all that. I always admired Duke. When you see all the things he did and the awards he won, unbelievable.

Brown: When you mention the people that you feel are important enough and contributed so significantly to America's classical music, you consistently mention a handful of names: Duke, Strayhorn, Billie Holiday. How did you get to know Billie Holiday?

Jamal: I remember when Billie Holiday used come into the Pershing with her Chihuahua dog. He was very mean, so you didn't get close to Billie. The dog would bite you [laughs]. She used to come in there, too.

Brown: You also mention Louis Armstrong.

Jamal: Yeah. We shared the same manager. Joe Glaser was his manager/agent, and he was my first agent.

Brown: You mentioned Martha Glaser earlier in the interview.

Jamal: Martha Glaser used to manage Erroll.

Brown: But they're not related.

Jamal: No, not related. I don't think so.

Brown: So, you shared the same management.

Jamal: Interesting story about Joe Glaser. Joe Glaser came to my house in Chicago. I had bought a house at 4900 Greenwood, where President Obama lives now. I bought a house there years ago; 16 rooms, 6 baths, and a powder room. When I left Chicago, I wanted to sell the house, and Joe came to my house and said, "You know Ahmad, if I still lived in Chicago, I'd buy this house myself. I tell you what I'm going to do, I'm going to rent it to Sonny Liston." And he did because he was very big with prizefighters, knew them all. If you want tickets to any show in New York and you couldn't get tickets, you call Joe Glaser. Interesting story about Joe also, and he did rent the house to Sonny Liston subsequently. I think Sonny rented my house for 6 months, then went to Las Vegas and died out there. But Joe, when he met Louis Armstrong, he had a rental car business in Chicago. He was so captivated by this wonderful talent, he sold the car business and started managing Louis. That car business is Hertz Rent-A-Car. Special guy, Joe Glaser.

Brown: There are many stories about Joe Glaser, that's for sure. I didn't know that one.

Jamal: I knew Joe Glaser very well. Special guy. I remember when we walked together down in Art D'Lugoff's Village Gate, and there was a guy on the bandstand playing the guitar. He said, "See that guy up there? I'm going to make him famous." It was B.B. King. That's Joe.

Brown: Sounds like he had Midas touch.

Jamal: He had it. And his passion was raising poodles. There some other stories about Joe, but best get those from Oscar Cohen. I don't know if you knew of Oscar Cohen, but he took the company over when Joe passed away.

Kimery: I had lunch with him.

Jamal: You know who I'm talking about, Oscar Cohen.

Kimery: With him and Phoebe Jacobs at the Friar's Club.

Jamal: How long ago?

Kimery: Two years ago.

Jamal: I think Oscar's retired now.

Kimery: Yeah, his daughter's running the business.

Jamal: Yeah, his daughter was doing the business. So, the company still exists?

Kimery: Yeah.

Jamal: Oscar Cohen was also one of my early managers. He managed me for a few moments, and also Carmen McRae. This is before John Levy. He started as just a worker with the company and ended up head of the company. Associated Booking Corporation, I had a history with them. Fred C. Williamson in Chicago. I signed through Fred C. Williamson. Many years, back and forth with Joe Glaser. Colorful figure. The story that Oscar always tells people 'cause we used to fight too, all the time, Joe and I. But he was very loyal. When I needed something he was there. The first present that my daughter got when she was born was from Joe Glaser. He always wanted to be first. The first present my daughter, Sumayah Jamal got was from Joe Glaser. Oscar knew that we battled a little bit, so Oscar would visit the mausoleum on occasion. He said, "Ahmad, I've mentioned your name when I visited Joe's mausoleum and it shook a little bit" [laughs]. You ask if that's a true story and he'll say it is true. I had a long history with that company.

Brown: A pair of the others are Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Were you able to form any kind of personal relationship?

Jamal: Charlie Parker I didn't know. Dizzy I knew. The last time I saw Dizzy was when he was showing me how he composed "Con Alma." He came to Blues Alley in Washington one night, and when we got off he started playing. I knew Dizzy, but I didn't know him as well as others. I didn't know him like John Faddis or James Moody or Jacques Moelle [?], who just called me yesterday. I didn't know him that well, but he knew me because I recorded his "Woody 'n You" and that record sold a million copies. He always respected that.

Brown: And of course, someone you reference is a significant influence, Art Tatum. Did you get a chance to…

Jamal: I met Art Tatum when I was 14. Didn't know him like Oscar knew him. I was in a club called The Washington Club. I was working with Harold Holt, one of our great saxophone

players in Pittsburgh. Of course, then I was not supposed to be in the club anyway. I was only 14 when Art came through. We had a session, and Art played for us, so I met him then. Subsequent to that, I don't think I ever saw Art any further. Close encounters, I don't think so.

Brown: Was he friendly to you as a youngster?

Jamal: He was very gracious, but I was too shy to be aggressive in meeting these people. I wasn't aggressive at all around Duke or any of the players. I was too shy, so I noticed them from afar, all these wonderful players. Then my sister used to take me to the Stanley Theatre. We had a place called the Stanley Theatre in Pittsburgh, and all the bands came through there. Duke came, Cootie Williams came. That's when Bud Powell was playing piano for Cootie Williams. Altogether different from what he eventually started embarking on post-Charlie Parker era, Dizzy Gillespie. But before that, prior to his emergence as one of the exponents of that era, he played like Tatum, very fluid, all over the piano like Tatum. I used to see all the bands at the Stanley Theatre and Savoy also. Savoy is when I saw the great Joe Harris come in there with Dizzy Gillespie. I was just tall enough to reach the stage, and Joe Harris was playing with the band then. I think Hen Gates. You don't remember Hen Gates. One of Dizzy's first pianists, lovely guy, was playing with the band then. Look up Hen Gates.

Brown: I guess maybe John Lewis replaced him. I know John Lewis, when he came back from the war, he was in there, like Klook. Klook came back in the band.

Jamal: And of course, Ray Brown too. Look up Hen Gates.

Brown: I'll do that.

Jamal: Did you ever see the DVD I'm talking about with Joe Harris, *Things To Come*?

Kimery: Oh yeah.

Brown: That's textbook.

Jamal: Unbelievable.

Brown: It's now released with Billy Eckstine and the "Things To Come" with Diz. So, that's a two-fer that really is indispensible.

Jamal: You have a copy of that?

Brown: Absolutely. I think I have a DVD and the VHS.

Jamal: Oh, excusez-moi! [Laughs]

Brown: Let's talk about some of the other pianists. We haven't mentioned Thelonious Monk.

Jamal: Well you know, Thelonious Monk put that wall down after a certain… One of the great agents of all time,--he was more a manager than agent,--was Jack Whittemore. He managed Monk, he booked me, he booked Monk, he booked everybody, Miles…

Brown: What period was this?

Jamal: Jack Whittemore? He left Scottsdale, ground floor real estate, when he could've made a fortune in real estate. Scottsdale was just coming up then. He left it and went back to music. He booked Rahsaan Roland Kirk from start to finish. The entire length of his career, Jack Whittemore. One of the great people in our business. Look him up.

Brown: Can you tell more about [him]?

Jamal: Jack Whittemore had an office on 38th and Park Avenue, and he was my agent for many years. After I left Joe Glaser, he was my agent for many years. Also, he booked Stan Getz, he booked Thelonious. That's how it came up, you mentioned Thelonious. He booked a lot of us. He booked Oscar Peterson. Great guy. You have to look him up.

Brown: I will do that, yes sir.

Jamal: And your computer you got, your Google.

Brown: Yes sir, my computer right here.

Jamal: That's great technology. You got the Google [laughs].

Brown: Well, it beats carrying around a whole set of books right, encyclopedias and books.

Jamal: Oh, I Google, admittedly. It's got some great things that it's capable of doing, but it's also devastating when you have this assault on intellectual property, when you have one thousand postings that you never put up there. My lawyer called me the other day and said you know you have 1,033 entries on YouTube or Facebook, one of those things. I'm not responsible for putting one of them up. I don't twitter, I don't twatter, I don't squatter. Okay?

Brown: [Laughs] Well, we're not going to ask for any of those.

Jamal: [To Kimery] You like that, huh?

Kimery: I'm going to steal that one. I'm going to put that on YouTube.

Jamal: 1033 entries and I'm not responsible for any of them. Facebook. Benny Golson said I would never join Facebook. I never joined Facebook, but I'm up there. I guess they're doing community service or something. Yusef Lateef didn't, but he's up there. So, this is a dangerous machine in the wrong hands. It's done some wonderful things. If I want to know how many tablespoons of coffee per cup, I can go to Google and find out, like he found out about Mum Bet [Elizabeth Freeman of Ashley Falls, first slave to sue for her freedom, ancestor of W.E.B. Du Bois]. But it was a human source that was a catalyst for you going to the Google-ing, and the doodling, and the hoodling [laughs]. So, it's good for some things. I see you have a Mac too.

Brown: Oh yeah. I think most artists have Macs.

Jamal: Most musicians have Macs, and they're also unique to most recording studios, for some reason or another.

Brown: And even visual artists.

Jamal: I have three Macs, so I'm not against this. I'm just against the improper usage, and it has done some terrible things because of people. Because we don't concentrate on culture, we concentrate on civilization, and civilization without culture cannot exist. They cannot exist together. They can exist, but cannot last. What's civilization? When man devises means of moving goods from one place to another—that's what constitutes civilization in my mind. Whether it's by satellite or horse and buggy. That's what constitutes civilization in my mind. But, culture something else. Those great countries and civilizations that have been around for thousands of years they have a lot of culture behind them, whether China or Japan. When I go to Japan, I see the people running after the sumo wrestlers. You know why? They're the only ones that have the costume. They have the traditional dress. They're running just to feel the dress. Tradition, it's a wonderful thing when the tradition is right. Taking off your shoes before you go into the house—that's correct. But you have to go easterly to find that. We walk in all kinds of filth, and walk in our home with your shoes on. And little babies picking up. You know babies they have this micro-vision, and they're crawling around and picking up. It's culture, it's a difference. That's an example of culture. The kid's got a cold, they put on a mask. Am I right? You're Japanese, so you know I'm talking about. Culture. Polite.

Brown: Absolutely. Respect.

Jamal: I won't go into that. Let's go forward, not backwards [laughs].

Brown: That doesn't leave much room to go back to this discography, if I can't go backwards [laughs]. I'm looking at *Live in Paris*, 1996, and I bring this up because you've got George Coleman, Calvin Keys, Joe Kennedy Jr. and you got one of my homeboys Jeff Chambers on bass.

Jamal: Where is Jeff? You seen Jeff lately?

Brown: Jeff moved to New York, but he'll go back and forth. I think he's in the Bay Area right now.

Jamal: He's a great player.

Brown: We used to have a trio together back in the day. Was this a singular performance with him?

Jamal: No, Jeff worked with me on other... He was with me for about four months.

Brown: He was working a lot [with] Marlena Shaw.

Jamal: Who?

Brown: Marlena Shaw, vocalist.

Jamal: I know Marlena Shaw. She recorded *Ahmad's Blues*.

Brown: He was her bassist of choice.

Jamal: She's a great lady, Marlena Shaw. Jeff Chambers, I know Jeff. He worked with me about four months.

Brown: Takes his shoes off, plays with his socks.

Jamal: That was the company my friend and brother, Jean-Francois Deiber, started. He was like a brother to me. He was the one responsible for getting me back to Europe after twenty years. Birdology Records. In fact, he had a Grammy-winning record, the one he released with McCoy Tyner. I think that was McCoy's first Grammy with Jean-Francois Deiber, Birdology Records.

Brown: Based in Paris?

Jamal: Yeah. I've only been recording, all my companies are based in Paris that I'm with now. For years, Jean-Francois Deiber, Birdology, as I said before, he was the one that got me back. He said, "Why don't you come back?" after 20 years, so I went back. And the rest is history. Then

we were distributed for a while there through Dreyfus Records, and when Jean-Francois didn't survive the liver transplant, Dreyfus and I got together. We made a deal and recorded project by project. No longevity, but project to project, contractually with him. Now I'm with Harmonia Mundi. Not with Harmonia Mundi, I'm being distributed by Harmonia Mundi, ACM, a new label started by my friend you heard call me from Aix-en-Provence today, Seydou Barry, whose father I talked about. He was the first man to bring me to Marseille. It's actually his company. He got a deal with Harmonia Mundi; he's going to be distributed and I'm very happy. That's a pretty good company. Have you seen any of their work?

Brown: No, but I'm holding this one in my hand. When you talk about Birdology and Dreyfus, both of those took care of the *Ahmad Jamal 70th Birthday*, which again was one of my favorites at the Olympia.

Jamal: Look for my forthcoming CD. It's coming out, *Blue moon.*

Brown: Let's talk about that. You were so kind enough to play one selection from it. I guess it was the opening track? Was that track one?

Jamal: Yes, "Autumn Rain."

Brown: Let's talk about that project. How it came about. I guess maybe you've already explained that, but how you chose the material and the personnel? Where did you record it? How many days were you in the studio?

Jamal: We rehearsed at Steinway Hall. I think we went in the studio, 5, 6 and 7 are the dates, of October. Three days. Herlin Riley, Reginald Veal, and Manolo Badrena on percussions. We had a great time. The send-out food menus were great. We had a phonebook of menus! That's New York for you. Avatar is a good studio. We had a lot of fun there.

Brown: Where is it located?

Jamal: 53rd Street. I met Michael Franks for the first time. Wonderful man. Manolo and him are very good friends. Manolo works with Michael Franks a lot when Michael goes out. Michael wanted to meet me, and I wanted to meet him. He came by, and it was great. It was very inspirational. Wonderful guy, wonderful man, very humble, just great. He put my recording of "Poinciana" in one of his lyrics. One of his most recent composition's lyrics mention "summertime listening to Ahmad Jamal playing 'Poinciana'."

Brown: Did you like the lyrics?

Jamal: Yeah, they're great I posted them on my website. You ever hear that? Websites? You heard of websites [laughs].

Brown: Well, I was going to ask you about your website because when I went to do research—

Jamal: Here we go back to computers. You see, they're good. I posted. Well, I had somebody post it.

Brown: Well, that's what I was going to bring up because when I did research at your website I was surprised that some of it's incomplete. So, I'm not sure is managing it, or who's your webmaster.

Jamal: It's incomplete?

Brown: Right, because there's one sentence where was talking about your he meeting John Hammond, but it stops off at John, so the rest of that historical account—

Jamal: Well, I have many, many websites. Some aren't authorized by me.

Brown: This is the official Ahmad Jamal website. I had to go to the official. I didn't want to get okie doke. Does this look familiar? Groove Pool Sample Store?

Jamal: That's it.

Brown: So, I'm looking at right here…

Jamal: Alright. Speak professor, speak.

Brown: I'm scrolling down here, and it says, "Ahmad join the musician's union at the age of 14 and began touring upon graduation from Pittsburgh's prestigious Westinghouse High School at the age of 17, drawing critical acclaim for his solos. In 1950, he formed his first trio, The Three Strings, performed at New York's The Embers Club, record producer John –," and it stops.

Jamal: Oh, excusez-moi!

Brown: Because I had read other accounts, I knew it was John Hammond.

Jamal: What's the continuing sentence? Or it just stops [and] that's the end of it?

Brown: It just stops. I looked through the entire site…

Jamal: You know something? You're so right. I'm going to look into that [laughs]. Thank you.

Brown: Before we resume this hour of the interview, we were talking about somebody else whom you greatly admire, and that was Benny Carter, and you were talking about the first time you had (a) "banker's hours" gig.

Jamal: Yeah, '55, Benny was out there in Las Vegas at the famous Moulin Rouge that they built because Afro-Americans couldn't go on the strip. Great America. Afro-Americans couldn't go on the strip.

Brown: Yet, they were brought in to provide entertainment.

Jamal: Okay? We had to have our own place, so they decided to build the Moulin Rouge and have Joe Louis as the host. And Benny Carter was in the show room; I was in the lounge. Earl Hines succeeded me. I had hours from 2-4, and Earl Hines – what's his saxophone player [that] I mentioned?

Brown: Wardell Gray.

Jamal: You know who the tap dancer was? Teddy Hale. You don't know anything about Teddy Hale.

Brown: I do know the name.

Jamal: Teddy Hale and Wardell Gray, they were doing something, and Wardell passed away in Las Vegas. But, Benny Carter, we all had houses, no landscaping so we had – as I mentioned before when we were having a touch of lobster or something. Benny had a house, we all had houses, but you had to watch for the scorpions because they were built out of the desert, and they hadn't landscaped. We were content. We had the banker's hours, 2-4…

Brown: That's it? One performance every day for two hours?

Jamal: Yeah, I think it was Ray Crawford and Israel at that time.

Brown: '55?

Jamal: Ray Crawford, Israel and myself. No drums.

Brown: How long was that engagement, if they're going to put you up in houses?

Jamal: That's a good question. I don't know if we stayed there two weeks or three weeks, but long enough to know [that] they had done things that were architecturally unsound because when it rained, which was very rare in Vegas, we had to leave because they had to put buckets all in

the casino to catch the rain. It was very, very ill conceived as far as a roof is concerned. So, a couple of times we didn't have to do the matinee, we couldn't, because it rained on our parade. Very interesting, great to see that historical figure, Joe Louis. He was something, our hero in the 30s.

Brown: The "Brown Bomber."

Jamal: He was something else. His former wife had a house right down from mine when I bought my house in Chicago at 4900 Greenwood. Marva Louis was in that neighborhood, too. Joe Louis, what a man.

Brown: What was he like?

Jamal: I didn't know. I wasn't going to go up to Joe Louis [laughs].

Brown: But he would introduce you. "And ladies and gentleman…"

Jamal: I was too shy. No, he was greeting people. He was a greeter. He didn't put the bands on. He was there as a greeter to promote business. A PR piece. And Hines, Hines and Dad. Gregory Hines, the other brother and their father.

Brown: Maurice Hines.

Jamal: Is that his brother?

Brown: And of course, there's Will Mastin Trio with Sammy Davis Jr. in '55, they wouldn't let black acts play on the strip, is that correct? Or they could play on the strip, but they couldn't stay in the hotels?

Jamal: No, they couldn't live there.

Brown: When did that change? Do you recall?

Jamal: You tell me [laughs]. I don't know. It's changed now.

Brown: Well, they tore down the Moulin Rouge.

Jamal: The Moulin Rouge, I think they rebuilt it. It wasn't torn down; it was shuttered for a while. But I think it reopened. Several years back, I think someone took it upon themselves to reopen it. Closed because it's rumored too many people were leaving the strip [and] coming to see us. Too much competition for the strip. That's rumored, I don't know. It could be true.

Brown: [Laughs] So, that's when they said okay, we better start putting some of the black acts over in the strip, but they can't stay at the hotel, they can't come through the front door. I know Lena Horne talked about, [she] couldn't through the front door, couldn't stay in the hotel, when you come off the bandstand you couldn't mingle with audience.

Jamal: That's the way it was. And that was only one place. It was that way all over the states.

Brown: It sounds like Apartheid.

Jamal: [Laughs] Yeah, but that's the way it was. We have to examine that history, and be sure to profit by some of those events that took place in that era. But that's why the Moulin Rouge was built because we had no other place to go. And Benny Carter, Platters…

Brown: Oh, you didn't mention that. You mentioned it off mike. So, who else was [there]? You said the Platters. Didn't you say they were just starting their career?

Jamal: That's where the Platters began, Las Vegas, Moulin Rouge. I forget who else was on the bill in the show room. The group I strongly remember is the Platters, and Benny Carter of course, because he was a legend already.

Brown: He had an orchestra?

Jamal: Yeah, he had the orchestra.

Brown: Now, did his orchestra back up the Platters?

Jamal: Yes, mm-hmm.

Brown: And what were his show times? Yours were 2-4.

Jamal: I don't know what the show times were in the show room, but I know I ran into Benny several times within our housing complex. That's how I remember that "writer's worm," they used to call it, because he used to blink his eyes from writing so much. But you didn't notice that when you went to his house, Ken?

Kimery: I didn't.

Jamal: You noticed the Rolls Royce, though [laughs]?

Kimery: Oh yeah!

Brown: Are cars anything that you're interested in? You interested in those kinds of cars? "Come see, come saw."

Jamal: Cars are cars. I'm satisfied with what I have. I have a BMW. It's new to me. It's got 80,000 miles on it, but it's new to me. It's a 2006. I have a Mercedes Benz in diesel. It has 293,000 miles. It's still running.

Brown: Whoa, what year is that car?

Jamal: 1982. I inherited that car from Laura, my former wife and present manager…

Brown: Whom we've had the pleasure of meeting and enjoying her hospitality.

Jamal: Yeah, she's a great, great lady.

Brown: Absolutely.

Jamal: And presently co-manages Hiromi along with the Yamaha Music Foundation. Possibly, the person responsible for getting the last contract… I told you yesterday. Did we express this in front of the viewing public?

Brown: Yes, we did.

Jamal: We went through that exercise, so I don't have to do that again.

Brown: What are you looking towards for your next project? You just completed *Blue Moon*. Do you have some concepts or any other aspirations…

Jamal: All the time. New discoveries.

Brown: Can you share? What is The Seeker aspiring to discover these days?

Jamal: What the black and white keys do.

Brown: [Laughs] Do you have any particular concepts or inspirations that might direct where your ten fingers lay on those 88 keys?

Jamal: I'm fascinated by my own exercises, my own chordal structures, my own exploration of a very extensive repertoire thanks to my Aunt Louise and Mary Cardwell Dawson and James Miller and the city of Pittsburgh. I have a very extensive repertoire. Still coming up with songs written before I was born. There are songs written before I was born, you know. Many things are embryos compared to Mozart. So, people ask me, "Poinciana" is not my copyright, but they ask

me don't you get tired of performing "Poinciana"? No, it's a baby compared to Mozart. We have 6,000 kids within a short distance of here trying to learn Mozart right now. You have conductors programming Beethoven for the next season, so there's no such thing as old music. It's either good or bad. That's the wonderful thing about music. Because the kids are still whistling "Bolero" on the streets of Morocco. My repertoire is very extensive thanks to my Aunt Louise and the aforementioned people. Some exploring some songs that people are surprised when they hear it, but are there because I learned them all. I'm still exploring the most important thing when it comes to writing, my own compositions. I have many, many compositions I write everyday. Some of them are trivia, so I don't commit them to manuscript. The things I think are meaningful, I sit down and commit them to manuscript. Sometimes I'll punch in my system that one of my favorite engineers taught me [who] engineered my session, but we lost him to Conan. He's out in Hollywood doing Conan, but he loves to still work with me. He'll be engineering for me at the San Francisco Jazz Festival come December 6th. He comes out whenever he can, and he came out to do this session for me. He finished the mixing yesterday, and he's going to master Friday. So, we're still actively engaged and working together. I'm excited about this and many other things. I got a worldwide release coming up when we do the Châtelet in Paris February 9th. The actual release date for *Blue Moon* is February 9th when we do that Châtelet. It's one of my favorite venues, too.

Brown: Before coming here today to conduct this interview, we met with Laura who said that the artwork for *Blue Moon* is incredible, so we were talking about [that]. Did that arrive with the FedEx that came yesterday?

Jamal: No, Jacques Beneich, one of my favorite photographers… In fact, he did the one with the Eiffel Tower that you see up there, that's Jacques Beneich photo, and the one that you see with the sunflowers as you come in. Seydou flew him over to do some of the shots for the cover, and he conceived of what he thought would be appropriate. He sent us what his conception is of what he thought the cover should demonstrate, and I like it very much.

Brown: His inspiration for the cover, was it after hearing the music, or just from his association with you?

Jamal: Yeah, after hearing the music 'cause he came to the session. He could only stay a short while because I don't allow people in sessions because it interrupts the flow of things. But they had to come, the photographers, Mevelute [?], one of the great filmmakers. He's originally from Turkey. He just worked recently with Danny Glover on some films. Great guy, he also came and shot for some moving publicity pieces. I think they call it a video [laughs]. So, he made a video that we may use, and the still shots were done by Jacques Beneich, most of which I've picked out. I already picked out the cover photo that I want to use, and of course, the great thing is that

Michael Franks coming by. We took some pictures; we're going to post one of Michael and I together. Lovely man. So, we're very excited about this release, to say the least. Jacques has proposed a cover that I like very much.

Brown: Could you just one more time say the name of the engineer?

Jamal: Todd Winmill.

Brown: As long as we're talking about some of the visual representations of your work, there's that iconic image of you with the dove.

Jamal: Oh, you like that?

Brown: Well, it's so striking. It leaves an indelible image.

Jamal: That's one of my favorite photographers also, Frank Capri. He took that picture, and he read my biographical material, and said, "You know, I would love for you to take pictures with some birds. I know a trainer. Unless you don't like that idea…" I said, "Sure. I love birds." And that's one of my favorite pictures.

Brown: Laura has the one that was on the album cover, or at least one that's popular, and she had another one of you with one in your palm like that.

Jamal: Yeah, that's downstairs on one of my walls. Frank Capri is one of the most talented photographers I know, along with Jacques Beneich. I've met some very talented people in my life. One of the great photographers of all time was Tracey Parks. You remember Tracey Parks?

Brown: Gordon Parks.

Jamal: Gordon Parks, yeah. I also recorded one of his songs.

Brown: "The Learning Tree"? Well, he did the movie. No, "Sounder"…

Jamal: "Don't Misunderstand." You know that song, Gordon Parks?

Brown: I know who Gordon Parks is and I know a lot of his work, but I don't know that [song].

Jamal: [sings song] "Don't misunderstand…"

Brown: Oh yes, I've heard that. Okay.

Jamal: Don't misunderstand my voice, but I had to sing so you could recognize the song.

Brown: [Laughs] Sure, sure.

Jamal: Gordon Parks, I never met him, but I did one of his songs.

Brown: Let's talk about some of your work methodology. Do you have a daily regimen as far as your discovering in the sonic dimension?

Jamal: Discovering how to sleep enough, as I mentioned before. Very erratic sleeper. I don't sleep enough. So, I'm discovering how to sleep by me moving into a new surrounding three years ago. When you move into a new surrounding, I don't think you sleep in the same manner that you might have in your previous place because you have to get familiar with the vibes. I've gotten to the place [where] I'm very comfortable here, so I'm learning how to sleep. I'm discovering the value of sleep because in order to keep going at 27 years old, you have to know when you fold them, know when to hold them. So, I'm learning how to sleep. I'm discovering the value of sleep because I'm a very, very poor sleeper.

Brown: You mentioned earlier the conditions of a recording project and how you don't want folks in there who are not actually participating in the project itself. Do you have a preference for either types of studios, times of day that you like to record? Are there any particulars that you have preferences for in the recording context?

Jamal: I haven't ever been one that went to the studio often. This is my first release in two years, much to the agony of some of the record companies, especially when we had the big, big record. I wouldn't go back in as often as they would have liked to see me do so. I have interesting discoveries about recording. The terminology, of course, is misleading. All recordings are live, but the remote recordings are the ones you don't do in the studio. That's the proper name for them, "remote recordings," the ones that take place outside of the studio. For example, Norman Granz made a fortune on remote recordings. Van Cliburn was introduced to the world by way of remote recording removed from the studios. I don't have anything against the studios, but sometimes the studios become too clinical, too surgical. You can cut away the mistakes, [but] when you're doing remote recording, removed from the studio, everything is there. George Benson's concert was a great hit for him, Greek Theatre, one of his concerts…

Brown: "On Broadway," right. *Live in LA* is what it's called [*Weekend in L.A.*].

Jamal: Is that correct? That's removed from the studio, remote recording. Those are some of your most successful. My most successful was a remote recording, removed from the studio. But I also enjoy recording in studio too. It has its advantages, so I like them both, equally as well. I like recording in the studio [and] I like recording remotely. I just like to have enough material. For example, we had 43 tracks that we selected from the *Pershing* session. I edited for over a

week, maybe more. I only used eight tracks out of 43. That's one of the reasons why it was so successful: carefully programming, carefully editing, not rushing to release, being sure. I knew all this, diametrically opposed to getting a record played. How [are] you going to release a record that is seven minutes, 35 seconds? In that day and age, you weren't getting any airplay on a record that long. I got all the airplay almost conceivably possible at that time, AM and FM. Seven minute, 35 second record, because it was the quality of what we recorded, what it produced and what people listened to. Eight tracks out of 43. "Woody n' You" is one of them, Dizzy's song. But the major thing on there was "Poinciana."

Brown: "But Not For Me" was also a success.

Jamal: Except that's its subtitle, *At the Pershing (But Not For Me)*. That was very popular, but not as popular as… And George Gershwin didn't need the royalties [laughs].

Brown: Who actually wrote "Poinciana"?

Jamal: Bernier and Simon. Like Fournier.

Brown: Do you know when?

Jamal: Two writers.

Brown: And when did you first hear that piece?

Jamal: With Joe Kennedy, the Four Strings.

Brown: Did he bring it in? Was that his choice?

Jamal: Most of the repertoire was done by Joe, and all the writing was done by Joe. He's another fabulous man when it came to repertoire. He knew some pieces, some great pieces, and he wrote some great pieces. Did Hale ever introduce you to Emil Boyd? I recorded one of Emil's songs, "I Love Music." Look it up in the discography. That's Emil Boyd and I met him by way of Hale Smith. I think Emil had a major handicap. I still have some of Emil's lead sheets.

Brown: I know when we did the interview with Hale Smith, he mentioned Boyd. In 1994, you received the NEA Jazz Masters award. What was your reaction to being selected for that award? What does that award mean to you?

Jamal: Who else got it that year? I think Carmen McRae got it. She didn't attend. Someone accepted her award.

Brown: There were three of you: Louis Bellson, Carmen McRae, yourself.

Jamal: Yeah, I should've stayed away too. I should've let my daughter accept on my behalf. That was a mistake, going, for reasons I don't want to mention, but I was very honored and very thrilled, and still am. That's a great thing. Whoever started it, certainly did the right thing by this great institution called NEA Masters, great institution, second to none. It's one of the great things that we've done culturally in this country, the NEA Masters. It should always continue, if possible. I was thrilled and still am. In fact, that's why I endeavored to go. I don't get out much 'cause I'm too busy, number one, and my leisure time I spend at home, but if they ask me to come, I always try and make it. I'm going to this one, if God willing. This is supposedly the last one.

Brown: This coming January 2012.

Jamal: I'm going to this one.

Brown: [To Kimery] You have the dates for that, don't you? Ken, you have the actual dates?

Kimery: Not on me.

Jamal: So, it's a great thing. It was a great honor and still remains with me as such.

Brown: We talk about the continued evolution of this music, music created in America, and since the late 1970s, there's been a new movement in popular music that's been now recognized called hip-hop. Much of your much has been used [and] sampled by some of the great hip-hop artists. When this first started happening, some of those include Jay-Z, Kanye West, but by the time they got to you that was already at the advent that sampling had become a phenomenon. In the early years, they had to create laws for the use of copyrighted material [in] the use of performance. How did you feel about your music being used in that context?

Jamal: I'd like to collect some of the money. "Swahili Land" is the most favorite nation. It seems to be the one they adhere to above the others, but the one record coming out, I predict a lot, a lot, a lot of sampling is going to be done, and I'm going to be ready [laughs].

Kimery: We're talking about Johnny Mandel ready?

Jamal: Yeah, I think so. What a great writer he is, and how successful he is when it comes to the moolah, So, I anticipate this is going to be sampled more than any of my works, this particular one that's coming out, *Blue Moon.*

Brown: From what we heard, I'd have to concur with that. The one selection you played for us, it's phenomenal.

Jamal: There's some others I didn't want to bore you with, but I'll be sure you get some of the copies.

Brown: There was another award you received from France. Could you talk about that, please?

Jamal: That's a special award, the Order of Art and Letters. Special category, special people. There are some people you know of that received that award, too.

Brown: I think Quincy got it, didn't he?

Jamal: It was a very moving experience. I have that on the wall too.

Brown: What year was that?

Jamal: The year? I don't know what year that was. But it's on the wall with my promotional disc for Danny Kessler and Okeh Records by way of John Hammonds, 1951. That's an award I sort of like, to say the least.

Brown: Is there anything else you'd like to discuss?

Jamal: No, we could spend two or three days more, but since you have to go and I don't have anymore lobster [laughs]. We say, "tout à l'heure." It's been a pleasure, really. I've talked enough, and maybe we'll cut out two or three hours of it and use the essence one hour. I have an album series called *The Essence Part I and Part II*, so maybe we'll used "The Essence Part One," and we won't twitter, twatter and squatter [laughs].

Brown: [Laughs] I don't know how to follow that. Let me just say, on behalf of the Smithsonian Institution, the National Endowment for the Arts – let me try to say this with a straight face – it has indeed been a personal pleasure of mine, and Ken Kimery's…

Jamal: It's been a pleasure with you two professors, Professor Ken and Professor Brown, thank you so much.

Brown: Thank you, sir.