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SONNY ROLLINS
NEA Jazz Master (1983)

Interviewee: Sonny Rollins (September 7, 1930 -)
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[Start of Tape 1]

Appelbaum: Hello, my name is Larry Appelbaum. Today is February 28, 2011. We are here in the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C., and I'm very pleased to be sitting at this table with Sonny Rollins. Good to see you again.

Rollins: Good to see you again, Larry.

Appelbaum: Yes. Let me begin by just asking some basics to establish some context. Tell us first of all the date you were born and your full name at birth.

Rollins: Oh, I was afraid you were going to ask me that. Ok, my full name at birth was Walter Theodore Rollins, and I was born September 7, Sunday morning, 1930 in Harlem, America uh on 137th Street between Lenox and 7th Avenues. Uh, there was a midwife that delivered me, and that was my–how I entered into this thing we call life.

Appelbaum: What were your parents names?

Rollins: My father's name was Walter uh my mother's name was Valborg, V-A-L-B-O-R-G, which is a Danish name and uh, I can go into that if you want me to.

Appelbaum: Tell me first, where were they from?

Rollins: Yeah well, my father was born in St. Croix in what was then the Danish Virgin Islands. My mother was born in St. Thomas, which was then the Danish Virgin Islands. And uh, since the Danes of course–Valborg was a Danish name–and um, so uh she was given that name. Um, my great-grandfather was a doctor in Haiti–Dr. Solomon–that was my grandmother's wonderful husband–she was married several times. And um, let's see, I think that's a, that's about as much as I know about my, you know, immediate heritage, you know.

Appelbaum: Did you know your grandparents very well?

Rollins: I knew my grandmother very well. Uh, my grandfather I never knew. He remained in Haiti and I never met him or anything. My grandmother I knew. My grandmother I stayed with often 'cause she was in the United States, also. You know they all–

Appelbaum: This is your mother's fa-, mother's mother?

Rollins: My mother's mother.

Appelbaum: I see. Okay.

Rollins: My father's mother I met, also. Uh, uh but she wasn't living in the States. I think she was living in St. Croix, and she came to the United States one time, a couple of times, and I met her, you know.

Appelbaum: I know your immediate family. You have a sister and a brother who are both musical. Where do you think that musical ability came from?

Rollins: Well, that's very interesting. I–my father told me that he played clarinet at one time. I never heard him play clarinet. I have the feeling it wasn't something he was doing regularly, you know. I never heard him play, and so I don't know. But other than that uh I think it's probably uh further back. I think my grandfather on my father's side was a singer, I believe. That's what I was told, and they were from St. Croix. And my sister used to show–had pictures, and she said I resemble him very much. And he was a singer. He was also a lothario, and she gave me these stories about him being chased out of–jumping out of windows when guys would find him with–this kind of stuff. I'm not like that, but uh I may have gotten my musical, you know, thing from him. It's possible.

Appelbaum: Do you think having an ear for music is genetic?

Rollins: Uh, gee, that's a question I...Well, I, I think so. I think–see you're asking me this question, this is a big question: environment or genetics. I think to play music you have to have–be born with–I mean I know that because when I was growing up all my friends wanted to be jazz musicians. We all wanted to be jazz players, because those are

guys that were always show up and play it, you know, had a lot–but they all couldn't do it. I was the guy that had enough natural talent to be able to play music, so, I was the guy that did it. So, in that–I feel it's genetic, in that, you know–it's not environmental, because if it was environmental we all would have been playing. So, I think you have to have a good–and yeah it's genetic, probably, there's some percentage, probably, the preponderance that would be–think genetic.

Appelbaum: Uh, what was your brother's name?

Rollins: Valdemar.

Appelbaum: Okay, and he played what?

Rollins: Violin.

Appelbaum: And he played well.

Rollins: He was very well. He played very, very well. And uh–

Appelbaum: Is he older or younger?

Rollins: He's five years my senior. So, I listened to him as a boy in bed, I listened to him practicing, and I enjoyed listening to him practicing I, you know, I liked music as a child myself, everything, but I, I really uh enjoyed listening to him practicing. He was very good, by the way. And as I may have said he was considered uh to go with the Pittsburgh Symphony. This was a black kid in Music & Art High School [The High School of Music & Art] at the time, which was sort of the uh big music high school in New York. And um, he was that good, you know–talking about that, I don't know if it would have happened but he was considered that, so I know he was that good. And um–

Appelbaum: Did he make his living as a violinist?

Rollins: No, no, he became a doctor. He went into–he was a doctor, and he's, he's retired. He'll be at the ceremony at the White House, by the way. So uh you know, if you're around I'll introduce you to him. But um, he became a doctor, you know, but he still, you know, plays for uh recreation, you know.

Appelbaum: Did he literally show you things?

Rollins: No. He was–you know, five years is a big difference especially at that of your life, so, we didn't uh you know, associate that much together.

Appelbaum: But you heard him, and you absorbed.

Rollins: I absorbed it.

Appelbaum: How about your sister?

Rollins: My sister played piano and uh, she sang and all this stuff. So uh there was always a piano in the house and she played piano, and she–um, so she was, you know, she had a musical talent, also.

Appelbaum: Uh, what was her name?

Rollins: Gloria.

Appelbaum: And younger? Older?

Rollins: She's older. I was the youngest.

Appelbaum: You're the youngest.

Rollins: I'm the youngest.

Appelbaum: Tell me a little bit about the neighborhood you grew up in, and how that informed your choice to become a musician.

Rollins: Well, okay, I was born, as I said, in uh what would be called "Harlem Proper," because Harlem is expanded somewhat uh but Harlem, 137th Street, would be sort of right–the mecca, I think, Old Harlem was the mecca, but uh the centerpiece street was 125th Street. And the uh another big street was 135th Street, and that was the street they have the famous Harlem Y, YMCA, in which a lot of cultural events and so on occurred there. Um, 125th Street was the, uh commercial center, and um, there were all, there were a lot of–125th Street was sort of, you know, the big shopping street and there were things happening there, as well, you know. There was a very famous bookstore, um, that I, I've seen written about in history that a lot of these black national people at that time used to go to this bookstore. I forget the name of it now, but it was on 125th Street and 7th Avenue.

Appelbaum: Was it run by Garveyites?

Rollins: Garveyites were prevalent, you know. Uh, my grandmother was a Garveyite, and um, it–yeah, I would imagine, yeah I think everybody was sympathetic to Garveyites, you know. But I don't know if they, if they would call themselves, technically, some of these people, but [Marcus] Garvey was a very sympathetic figure, among the, especially the lower, middle classes. You know, he had problems with the upper, middle-class blacks, W.E.B. Du Bois, and so forth, they had their clashes, you know. But uh among the sort of lower people–I hate to say that because I would–although, my father was a

career Navy man we were, we didn't live in any, we were right in the middle of uh you know, that, the poor area, I guess I would have to say. And uh, now I'll explain to you what I mean. My father was very close friends with a man named Admiral Radford, Arthur M. Radford, who was the head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, you may remember the name. Admiral Radford and his wife came to our house in Harlem. And uh, my father was a very sort of a proud man, and he was very uh stern, you know this kind of stuff. And [chuckles], and so he was sort of, you know, when he's, when he brought, Admiral Radford came by, I think my father could have been coming there the first time also, because my dad was in out of, you know, he was traveling all over on these ships. So, um, it might have been the first time he came home, and I could say that he was sort of chagrined because of the neighborhood. I mean, it looks sort of like uh what's this place in Porgy & Bess where everybody lived?

Appelbaum: Catfish Row.

Rollins: Catfish Row. It's sort of, you know, people all–and here comes my father, you know and here was Chief, you know, he called him Chief. And so he was a little bit, you know, and I think he chided my mother after that for not, you know, the place not, but I mean, you know, this is where we lived. This is what, I guess, we could afford, you know. But anyway, I'm saying that to say that–I was talking about Admiral Radford, and somehow I forgot to point now.

Appelbaum: Um, I, I really wanted to get, generally, at how your neighborhood informed your decision to become a musician.

Rollins: Right.

Appelbaum: But even before we continue with that: your mother and your father, who did you take after most?

Rollins: Well, I have no idea. My moth–I was with the family more, because my father would be away, you know.

Appelbaum: Yeah.

Rollins: Uh...

Appelbaum: Maybe it's better to ask: What did you get from your mother, and what did you get from your father? Which qualities?

Rollins: Well, my mother was a very, I would say a very soulful, in that she loved music, she was a, she was a hard-working person. She went to night school as we were kids, as little kids, she was going to night school.

Appelbaum: To study what?

Rollins: I don't know. I, I don't know. And uh, she was, um, she was very gentle. She had a very, I mean I use the word soulful, but that's not–she was a very kind person, I feel. It's something, it's another word. She was a very, and something I think I have from her, she was a, she was a person that would be uh kind, because I remember when, I remember when I was a youth and sometimes some of my mother's friends would come by and I would sit in the front room, you know, and with them, and they would, the friends would sort of be, "Well, geez, why doesn't this kid go to bed?" you know, "so we can have an adult con–," you know, with my mother, you know. But I would sit there, because, I mean this is funny. I really loved my mother, by the way. Every time my mother went out, I didn't care where she went, I'd have to go and kiss her goodbye. You know, anytime, anyplace, anyplace she went. So, she, you know, but anyway, that's a funny thing I would do. So, I'm sitting there, these guys I know and women and things they would, you know, "Why doesn't this kid get out of here so we can–," you know. But she would never tell me. She would never make me go. So, I would sit there and just 'til they finally left, you know, the evening was over. But I mean, that's the kind of thing she had. Whatever that is, I don't know how to describe that, but she, she had that, she wouldn't be, you know, so strict or–

Appelbaum: Does that mean your father was strict?

Rollins: Yeah. My father was strict.

Appelbaum: Disciplined?

Rollins: Uh, I would say so, yeah, and being in the Navy, you know, my father wanted everything–when he came home the house had to be–I mean that's military, this is military. The house had to spick and span, and you know, and like that. But I mean, I uh I loved my father and I went uh when I got older–I was about uh 9, 10, 11–I used to come down to Annapolis where my father was stationed. My father was the uh head of the uh Officer's Club. You know, he was like a chief steward, which was sort of the highest a black could aspire to at that point. And uh, so daddy would uh I'm calling him "daddy," I'm going back into that time when we all called him "daddy." Um, dad–I would go down, I would want to, "gee, I want to go down," so I would go down and daddy would, you know, so I'd go spend the summer down at the Officer's Club at Annapolis, you know. So, I got a little bit of uh insight looking at Annapolis and all this stuff. I mean, there's a lot of little incidents happened while I was here. I mean uh anecdotal things, you know. But uh–

Appelbaum: Can we assume that, um, first of all to achieve your level in music requires a certain amount of discipline; and can we then assume that that discipline comes from your father?

Rollins: Well, yes and no. I...I'm not the world's greatest musician. I'm more of a "primitive," see? So, I...I had discipline, but not in–I had discipline to the things that I wanted to do. I mean, I practiced 15 hours a day with not any thought about it. But I wasn't a person–I never went to uh, uh conservatory and all this stuff, see. And uh, I remember when I was in school studying music in high school uh I wasn't the favorite of my high school music teacher, you know.

Appelbaum: Because?

Rollins: Well, see, I don't know. She just didn't like me. Her name was Mrs. Redmond, and Mrs. Redmond didn't, didn't like me and she'd always tell me, "Oh, you didn't get your parallel fifths right, and your harmonization." And my friend, he was, you know, he got everything right. I just couldn't get this stuff, you know. But anyway, so that's why I say that. I'm not, you know, my–Yes, I'm disciplined, but I consider myself a "primitive." You know, that would–I'd feel, I feel happy in that character–categorization.

Appelbaum: A very sophisticated "primitive."

Rollins: Well...but a "primitive."

Appelbaum: Okay. What drew you to the saxophone?

Rollins: Well, I uh that I was almost destined, you know? I, uh...my first really hero was Louis Jordan, the alto saxophonist, and he played tenor, also. But um, he drew me because we had his records at home, and uh...it's sort of a weird circle the way these things happen. I used to go to school, elementary school, on 135th Street, 135th Street, as aforementioned. And um, right across the street from my school was a night club, I think it was Elk's Rendezvous, a night club. So, in that club there was–Louis Jordan was playing there. So, coming home, I used to see this picture of Louis Jordan–8x10, glossy, you know–and he had on his cutaway and really beautiful King alto saxophone, and you know, I said, "Wow, that's what I want to do," you know. But I think I had heard him before. I'd heard him before, as I said I heard the records by him, I'd heard records uh at home and at my uncle's uh house. So, I think that uh I had heard him before, but then when I saw the picture just, you know–it was around the same time, I was around seven years old or so–but all of this stuff was just like I was destined to be a saxophone player. So, after that, that's what I wanted to play: saxophone.

Appelbaum: And how old were you when you got your first one?

Rollins: I think–I was either seven or eight. I'm not sure...when I had, I got a uh a uh alto saxophone from my cousins who played uh saxophone. I think he took my mother to uh a place where, you know, we could get a uh second-hand alto saxophone. And–

Appelbaum: Do you remember what brand it was?

Rollins: I don't remember. I don't remember, but I, I have–there's a picture of it that I saw recently when they did a story. I don't know where they got that picture, but I don't remember what it was. But this reminded me to go dovetail back to my mother. My mother was very–she took me to music lessons. She was very–and when I wanted to play saxophone, I mean she was right with me all the way on that, on my wanting me to be a musician and to play. I mean she was 150% with me, you know, that's a characteristic of hers. When you were asking me to try to describe, you know. But uh anyway she got me the saxophone, and uh, that's when I started. And um, I was uh you know. So, the saxophone was it for me. I was destined. It was fate. It was, I was destined to play saxophone, and I knew it at that early age. I mean, I felt that my life was unfolding in a way that was predestined, you know.

Appelbaum: Very few people are able to pick up a saxophone the first time and start to play it. So, clearly you had to have lessons. Who taught you the fundamentals?

Rollins: Well, I uh my mother took me–there used to be a place on 125th Street. Now, this is the mecca block I told you about. I think "mecca" is the wrong word. This was the stem, this street, you know, in Harlem.

Appelbaum: The main stem.

Rollins: The main stem. And uh, there was a uh music school there, and it had I think it was 25 cents a lesson. They had a list: saxophone, clarinet, trumpet, trombone, xylophone, piano, harp, blah, blah, blah–everything. Somebody there that taught, whoever it was, they had a teacher for any instrument. I was out there 25 cents a lesson. So, that's when I first started to get to go, that's when I got my first lessons. I used to go to the uh New York schools of music, 125th Street, 25 cents a lesson.

Appelbaum: And what would they teach you? Just scales, or...?

Rollins: Well, yeah, probably how to hold the horn, where to put your fingers and all this kind of stuff, you know, just...I didn't stay there long, but uh very basic elementary things, see. And nothing, you know, I don't think the guys there were–well who knows, I shouldn't say that, because probably a lot of those guys played a lot of different instruments. One guy probably played three or four instruments. So, I shouldn't talk about each teacher, I don't know, but I learned basic saxophone, you know.

Appelbaum: You mentioned that you feel you were predestined–

Rollins: Right.

Appelbaum: –for the saxophone.

Rollins: Right.

Appelbaum: Did you take it very seriously in the beginning, or at what point did you become really committed to it?

Rollins: I was committed to it, I was wanting it from earlier before I got one. I'd been listening to Louis Jordan, as I said, and all that. So, when I got it, I would go in the room and I'd be in there all day playing, see. And my mother would have to come in, "Sonny, Sonny, come on we want to eat dinner. Time to eat dinner," you know. "Come out," you know, and I'd be in there playing in my reverie.

Appelbaum: So, she didn't have to encourage you to practice?

Rollins: No. Oh no. No, no, no...no, no, quite the contrary. I was uh you know, she was, as I said, she would have to call me if I had something to do, but which was, she– I don't mean to say she was in any way against...no. But I mean like eating dinner, like that, that's what I mean. Not in a bad way, just, "Okay, Sonny, come on let's eat." Something like that, you know.

Appelbaum: So, your brother was like that, also? Just constantly playing?

Rollins: Uh...I don't know. I don't know. I heard my brother practicing a lot, you know, but I don't know...I, I don't know if his, uh...he had the same...I shouldn't say "dedication." That might be selling him short, but uh...I, uh...I heard him practicing a lot, so he may have, you know–he did practice, I know that. But uh...I think what I did was different than him, because, as I said, I would get in a reverie, and I could be there forever playing my saxophone. And that is a trait which carries over, has carried over all my life.

Appelbaum: Can you tell me a little bit more about this "reverie?" Is it a kind of meditation?

Rollins: Well, it's funny you say that, because when I went to India many years later in the 60's uh the fellow, the swami at this ashram I was at, uh...I was telling him, "Swami, you know, I have a hard time..."–I was studying yoga, because I was very much interested in yoga'd principles. And uh, so the swami, I told the swami, "Well, you know, it's hard for me to sit down and meditate, you know, quietly and nothing happening and..." just all this stuff. So, the swami said, well he said, "Sonny, you know, when you play your horn that's a form of meditation." And when he told me that it really was good, because it removed an obstacle. I thought that I had to be sitting down in the lotus position completely still, and like that, which is hard for me to do, because, you know, my mind, you know....uh, and when he told me that I said, "Wow...right, that is a form of meditation." And that was, this was a big thing for me. It's one of the,

uh...things I went to India for, that I got. When I look back, this is, this–well, I know it was, because after that I was ready to come back to the States. You know, I mean, that was, I learned enough, not just that, I learned certain things I wanted to absorb. But that was a biggie, see. So, he said, "Sonny, when you're playing that's meditation. You're meditating." And that was great. So, yeah, I was meditating all the time.

Appelbaum: And you didn't even know it.

Rollins: And I didn't even know it.

Appelbaum: Huh, that's the best kind.

Rollins: Yeah, yeah. Right, it's not forced. You're not, like in zen in Japan you sit down and you have to kind of make yourself–okay, that has things too, but like he said, you don't even know it. It's just natural what you're doing, and yeah.

Appelbaum: I meant to ask, um...how did you acquire the nickname "Sonny?"

Rollins: Well, "Sonny" is sort of a name that they give to a lot of the, uh...usually maybe the youngest son might be called "Sonny." You know, in the–

Appelbaum: So, your parents started calling you "Sonny?"

Rollins: I think so.

Appelbaum: Your grandmother?

Rollins: Yeah, I think so. I think so, yeah...yeah.

Appelbaum: And you like that name?

Rollins: Well, I was, I was too young to really object [laughing] you know, but everybody called me "Sonny" so I was "Sonny." Which was okay, you know. There was a lot of people named "Sonny," you know...but uh...

Appelbaum: There's a famous song called Sonny Boy...

Rollins: Sonny Boy...I made a recording–

Appelbaum: ...which you recorded.

Rollins: Exactly. It's a nice song, too. Uh...

Appelbaum: By the way, what's nice about it? What do you like about it?

Rollins: Well, I like the melody. I like the, uh...melody, chord structure, and I like the sentiment, you know. Something about, "I'll always be Sonny Boy"–I mean, it was a sort a...sentiment.

Appelbaum: Are you a, are you a sentimental person?

Rollins: Uh...that's a, that's another complicated question you've asked me here. Um...I, I, if, if I look at my career, yeah I, I...I've been a, I've been a sentimental person. I say that, because very recently I'm beginning to get a different view of "sentiment," "being sentimental." That is that...I mean, I'm a guy that can uh well let me get uh I'm a guy can think–you said I had a good memory. Okay, some guys that I grow up with, grew up with, we could, certain guys we, we'd meet, "Hey, man," we can talk about things we did a long time ago, and you know. "Oh, we used to go to this show" and "We used to go to Theta," "Oh man, remember when we went here?" and you know. So, I guess that's sentimental in a sense, right? Would that be sort of?

Appelbaum: Yeah, but that's also nostalgia.

Rollins: Nostalgia. Okay, so uh now there's a difference, you mean, between them?

Appelbaum: Eh, sometimes. Sometimes they overlap.

Rollins: Yeah, well then I'm thinking of them more as overlapping, but anyway...I mean how else would you describe being–

Appelbaum: I just mean being "sentimental" in terms of connecting with your feelings, as opposed to thoughts from your brain. It's, it's more heartfelt, and then you sort of um...explore that more deeply: the feeling side of things.

Rollins: Well, as I said, I'm a "primitive." So, I'm going with my feelings more than my brain anyway. I mean, I'm going with...that part of me is going to go first. When I'm acting, you know, or reacting, whatever, uh...you know–

Appelbaum: But as we get older...

Rollins: Right.

Appelbaum: ...it seems to be natural to, um...get deeper into feelings, to have this warmth associated with feelings, and to be more compassionate with people around you when you're–well, I don't want to dwell on my thinking about this.

Rollins: Well, no but I need that to know exactly what you mean.

Appelbaum: Yeah. Well, well, when you had said that a certain song is sentimental, and that's why I asked, is, are you, in general, a sentimental person?

Rollins: Uh huh.

Appelbaum: Do you like to connect with that side of yourself, more than maybe other aspects?

Rollins: Well...I like, yeah, I like, I think it's a, you see, I think–I think about my mother, for instance, and my, and my deep love for my mother, and and this is sort of a sentimental feelings, I guess. But uh...I mean, I don't want to get into Oedipus here, but...I do feel that I like things that are...away from the brain. I like things that make you, you know, "Wow! Gee, I love my mother. I love–" uh...rather, "Wow! The music of that song gives you sentimental feeling. I have long gone far away. The chord structure, everything gives me a..." something. It excites something within me that makes me feel, "Wow! Yea, I can relate to this." So, in that sense I probably am a sentimental person, you know.

Appelbaum: And...you find yourself in a sentimental mood?

Rollins: Is that a pun? Or is that...[laughing].

Appelbaum: Okay. Um, you mentioned in your home you had recordings of Louis Jordan.

Rollins: Right.

Appelbaum: What other music was around the house? Do you have other favorite recordings other than Jordan when you were coming up?

Rollins: Uh–

Appelbaum: That's the big-band era, right?

Rollins: Right. That would be the 30's. Uh...

Appelbaum: So...yeah.

Rollins: Yeah, I'm sorry.

Appelbaum: Go ahead.

Rollins: No, I was just going to say Duke Ellington was also a big uh uh, player. I remember my brother coming home, and uh, you know, oh, he was so excited about uh

[scatting melody of I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart] I Let A Song Go Out Of My Heart, and all this stuff. And uh, so, we liked Duke Ellington, uh...uh, my mother had calypso records, you know. So, I heard calypso records. Um...I heard stride piano records, because in those days we always had a piano, but they had these piano rolls, you know. So, all the pianos had rolls, and these rolls were generally by people like James P. Johnson, you know, piano rolls, and uh, that was ubiquitous. And in those days there were a lot of people that were losing their apartments because of the economic situation. I think they called it "The Great Depression." And there were always pianos out on the street from people whose, who had to move–evicted from non-payment of rent. So, there were always when you'd go walk down the street, here's a piano, there's somebody who's evicted. And uh, all these pianos had rolls. They all were rolled, you know, piano rolls. So, I heard a lot of that, and I loved that. Fats Waller, in fact, was sort of one of my earliest people that I remember.

Appelbaum: What did you like about Fats Waller?

Rollins: Well, he had such a ebullience-y about him, and everything was so...like sunshine when he, you know, but his playing, I mean it was just...it, I mean, he, he wrapped the whole thing up for me. I said, I knew I wanted to play jazz. I knew that jazz was something which was good, you see, which is a theme which I sort of try to reiterate all the time. Jazz is good. It's not just, uh...uh, it's lecture music, it's not uh uh, you know music, shake your booty music, and all that stuff. It has, it, it's everything. It has everything to it, and it's a positive. It doesn't make you feel like fighting. It makes you feel that there is a God, and that things are okay, see. And that's, so, I've always, uh–he was one of the first, he was the guy that, sort of...woke that up in me at an early age. And uh...

Appelbaum: Did you hear these things on the radio?

Rollins: On the radio, yeah. Radio was the medium.

Appelbaum: Do you remember which stations you listened to?

Rollins: Oh boy, uh...there used to be a show that I used to listen to, we used to listen to every Wednesday night on I think it was WMCA, but that, you know, I could be wrong. Uh, and it was amateur night...uh, at the Apollo, and that came on every Wednesday night uh coming from the Apollo. The, the uh emcees were a guy named Willie Bryant–

Appelbaum: The bandleader.

Rollins: The bandleader, and then later there was a guy named Ralph Cooper, who was there a long time. And uh...anyway, the, uh...they would have, it was amateur night. They would have amateurs coming out, you know, but they also had the band playing. So, you heard it, they had the orchestra from the theater, as well as accompanying these

amateurs, you know. So, that was a big, a big program that we liked. And uh...I also used to hear uh a show you all listened to, um...Wings Over Jordan, which was sort of a gospel show. It came on Sunday, and any place you'd go in Harlem Wings Over Jordan was on the radio on Sunday. That was an extremely popular show. In fact, one time I was in, um, Kansas City and uh, I was talking to a guy there, and uh, he would say, he'd say, "Oh remember Wings Over Jordan?" I said, "Yeah, that was in New York, you know. They'd broadcast that every Sunday." And uh, there's also another show that I uh enjoyed a lot uh the Golden Gate Quartet, who also had a Sunday morning show, I believe. And uh, I was, I was a big fan of the Golden Gate Quartet, you know. I mean, I almost fancied myself as being able to sing with the Quartet, but don't ask me. But uh I really enjoyed those groups, you know, those shows.

Appelbaum: Did you every try, did you every try to sing a cappella or Jubilee's style?

Rollins: No, no, not really.

Appelbaum: Oh.

Rollins: I mean, in the bathroom. That's all, you know. In the shower, you know.

Appelbaum: Yeah. I'm a big fan of their's, too. I love that group.

Rollins: Who, the Golden Gate Quartet? Oh, that's great stuff. That's great stuff.

Appelbaum: Yeah. One of the reasons why I wanted to ask you about the records in your house and the radio...I'm trying to understand how you got such a deep knowledge of these songs; where you would have heard all these great songs, because, you know, there are many musicians who, who sort of work the same twenty-five standards throughout their life, and you have a much wider range of repertoire that you choose from, and things that seem to move you. And I'm wondering where you heard–did you hear it live? Did you hear it radio? Was it recordings? How did you get exposed to this wide repertoire?

Rollins: Boy, that, that's funny you say, because, um, you tell me you were just talking with Jimmy Heath recently. Well, Jimmy had sent me, he sends me some tapes sometimes. He sent me a tape of Benny Carter's band and they were playing a song–this would be from the 40's, probably–they were playing a song that uh I remember very well. I mean, I would know, I probably know the whole song. If I heard it wouldn't know completely, but I know most of it just from memory. I don't know where I heard it. I must have heard it on the radio, I guess. But at that time I, or the family, every family, would spend their Saturdays at the movies. That was our source of entertainment in those days. So, I was at the movies every Saturday, and uh, you know, as a kid, of course, you like the action-adventure serials with all this stuff. I mean, I could name you, I'm almost an expert on those, too, but we don't need to get into that I don't think.

Appelbaum: What, like Tom Mix?

Rollins: Tom Mix was a little–yeah, I knew Tom Mix. He was a little before me, but uh–although I heard him–but uh you know he was around then but he was just sort of fading. The other guys that I liked: Buck Jones and uh, Ken Maynard and Charles Starrett, the Durango Kid uh and the, the serial The Lone Ranger; um, Hoot Gibson, Tim McCoy. All of these uh before your guys' time. You wouldn't know what I'm talking about unless you read about them, but...and then of course the uh uh short serials, you know the–S-E-R-I-A-L-S–where each week you'd come back for the next chapter. You know, the guy would be falling off a cliff and then "BAM! Next Week See What Happened," you know. All the sudden next week he's okay, you know. But uh you know, but I spent every week at the movies. Every week. And everybody, that's how people, you know. So, I got a lot from the movies, because, besides the serials, I mean there were Hollywood mo–uh musicals and all that stuff there, too. You'd have to sit through, especially at the Apollo, I remember. I mean, I would go to the Apollo and if I liked the band I would stay there all day. They had about four or five shows a day. That means you'd have to see the movie four or five times, you know, and all this stuff, but uh but so, you know, I had–I was quite grounded in the movies. I had a great uh you know, so, some of these songs I believe, you know, they stuck with me. Um...and uh....that's the only place I could have heard them. And the radio, but the, but prob–well maybe the radio, too, but the movies and the uh you know, is where, is where I heard most of these. It's the only place I could have heard them.

Appelbaum: You mentioned the Apollo Theater. Certainly you would have heard live music there, and you mentioned the club where you saw the photo of Louis Jordan outside.

Rollins: Louis Jordan.

Appelbaum: So, what other places would you have gone to hear live music when you were really starting to get serious about music?

Rollins: Well...

Appelbaum: Were there other places in the neighborhood?

Rollins: There were places. Well, when I was really young there, well...you see Harlem was a place that, especially at that time, I mean there was music everywhere. There were a lot of–of course, I was too young. I mean, in the 30's I was, you know, a little boy going to school. But we used to pass by The Cotton Club, the famous Cotton Club on the way going to school, you know. The Savoy Ballroom...uh, which I actually was able, I grew up enough to go to the, The Savoy before it closed, you know.

Appelbaum: Did you see any of the "Battle of the Bands?"

Rollins: Uh, no. I went to, when I went to The Savoy, I went there, Dizzy Gillespie was there. And that was uh we were really into Dizzy, so, I was still fairly young. I was in my uh early teens, you know, when I went to The Savoy, and it wasn't long after that The Savoy uh closed, you know. So, I didn't see these "Battle of the Bands," but I heard a lot about them, but I didn't witness them myself.

Appelbaum: Was it expensive to go these theaters or the clubs?

Rollins: Uh, I, I don't recall, but I don't think it was prohibitive, you know.

Appelbaum: I mean, did you have an allowance? Did your parents give you money to do that, or did you have to work to make money?

Rollins: Well, I, uh...I started working when I was eleven years old. When I came out of school, I got a job uh delivering clothes from the cleaners, tailors. I used to do, do, do that when I was eleven. I'm very proud of that, because my wife would try to say, "Oh, you didn't start–," I'd say, "Well, when did you start working?" She said, "Oh, 14." I said, "I started at eleven." So, I'd have her. But um, I got money, you know. I, I got money and I worked, you know. I worked and got, got money, or got an allowance to do things. But yeah, I worked, sure. Yeah, from an early age.

Appelbaum: A lot of the most popular kinds of music at that time–and it could be jazz, or it could be big band–it was meant for dancing, and I wonder: Were you a big dancer?

Rollins: I, I used to do a dance called "the applejack," which was a singular dance uh that the guy did. Uh, you may have seen Thelonious Monk do "the applejack" sometimes on the stage. Um, but you know I, I was okay at dance. I wasn't, you know, I could dance, but uh you bring up something that just happened recently. I recently played a, it was just a little, small benefit upstate where I live at for a hospital up there, and my mother-in-law was in that hospital, as a matter of fact. And it sort of the hospital of my town...town. So, anyway, I did a benefit for them, and it was, it was, well it was a place called the, um, Helsinki Club. The Helsinki Club was a club in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and it, it had, you know, folk people like that, that's who came up–Odetta, or uh any of these folk people. That type of audience. That type of performer. Anyway, they moved to Hudson, which the town I'm talking about which is close to me uh because it's bigger. Their club was getting too, it was big enough for the people. So, they're at Hudson. Anyway, it's a nice place. They redid this big uh old uh ice house and something. Anyway, uh I did this benefit just February the 5th, actually. And um, it was a, it was the biggest venue they had in that town. I think it was about 300 people was the most, you know. But anyway, they, they had it by subscription, so some of the, it wasn't tickets. They had, people had to subscribe, and they guys–donors–guys that had

to pay a lot to be involved and all this. So, they made, they made a nice uh uh, you know, donation that went to the hospital.

So, anyway, the point is this–I had to give you that context, okay uh because I don't want you to think I'm saying, "Oh, I played a benefit." I don't, you know, that's not, you know, what the point is. The point is that it was a small club and they had a dance floor. And we played, after we started playing...maybe the sick–the people got up and started dancing. I mean, one person did, then other people did. Now, do I like playing for dancers? Yes. I grew up playing for dancers. That's how we played. We played for dancers. Later on, jazz became something people wanted to listen to and not so much dance, but I, I was actually there at the inception at this place called The Audubond Ballroom, where they had jazz guys were playing, but it was also a dance. It was a dance, but the jazz guys are playing, and what would happen the people that were into jazz would come up to the front of the stage, and they'd be listening, you know, to Miles Davis and Charlie Parker, all these guys, you know. Wow. But there were also people still dancing, okay? And so, I was on the cusp, I mean, I liked, I liked playing for dancers, as well as playing my horn. And uh, anyway, this place last uh February the 5th– this month as a matter, it's still February, right–uh, the people started dancing, and boy, I was really knocked out, man. It really, I felt so good, but I mean I couldn't, I didn't express this to anybody, because, you know, the musicians may be, I don't know, I had some of my musicians I don't know how they might have felt about it. They might have been insulted, because that's the, these days, you know, well, "How dare you dance? This is listening music," you know, art music. But anyway, uh...

Appelbaum: How does, how does playing for dancers inspire you?

Rollins: Well–

Appelbaum: Does it affect the way you play?

Rollins: Well, I don't know how it affects it, but it, it inspires me–yeah, because, uh...I like to see people happy, and having a good time. And so, sometimes if they're, you know, I don't, I don't think I'm looking at their movements to get me ideas, but the fact that it's creating an atmosphere, you see, that I am able to really get into myself. And I might play anything. That's, that's going to inspire me, see?

Appelbaum: Mmhmm.

Rollins: So, this is sort of how it works.

Appelbaum: Um, let me get back and and um, try and clarify some things. Tell me your first–do you remember your first gigs as a professional?

Rollins: I remember my first gig as a professional.

Appelbaum: Okay. Tell me more.

Rollins: Well, Larry, here's what happened. I was...I recounted this recently, because they did a story last year about, um, uh in The Wall Street Journal. This guy took me back uptown to where I lived. I don't know if you saw that. Anyway, I was about uh well...I don't know, I was around 13 or something like that. And there was, and um, where I lived at–I lived on 155th Street right near the old Polo Grounds–but there was a, and there was a what they call a "Hill," because that was the beginning of The Hill. The rest of Harlem was down below, and The Hill started coming up from 145th Street, and so, but at the time 155th Street there was–lower, that was lower. We were up on The Hill. Okay, this, there was a viaduct that went from 155th Street all the way down, sort of going down, The Hill, and uh, part-, part-, partway through the old Polo Grounds was a uh a subway–a shuttle sort of subway which has since been torn down. But anyway...I'm trying to set the scene here. You had to walk all the way down to get to the shuttle, which is uh was on, was on Jerome Avenue in the Bronx. That's where my first job was on Jerome Avenue in the Bronx. I had a, I don't know if I explained, but I have no idea who it was, but that's where I went when I had my first job. And after my first job, and I was coming home to this, this little shuttle in the middle of this viaduct which lead all the way up to Edgecombe Avenue where I lived at uh I got through, you know, and I was coming home after a game and I was coming home–and this is sort of late in the night–there was my mother, way up on the top of the Edgecombe Avenue waiting for me. So, you know, I said "Oh my, mom, you don't have to wait for me, you know. I can...I'm big enough to, to–," you know how guys would say.

Appelbaum: "I'm 13."

Rollins: [laughing] Right, right. Exactly, see. But there she was, and uh, it was so touching, man. I mean, you know, it was really nice. But you know, but anyway, I don't know how I got to that part of the story, but that was my first job, you know.

Appelbaum: Is it what you thought it would be? Meaning, you know, you imagined your being a professional–

Rollins: Yeah, well, sure. I mean, I, I don't, I don't, it was with older guys, I think were playing. Maybe not everybody, but it was, it was great. I was playing my horn. That was it, I didn't care. The rest of it was really inconsequential, really. I was playing my horn, and I was getting paid.

Appelbaum: Was it for dancers?

Rollins: Probably. Probably, yeah. I'm sure it was. I'm sure it was, because everything at that time was for dancers. That must have been around, uh...uh, 19–, uh...

Appelbaum: Early- to mid-40's?

Rollins: Early-40's, right, early-40's. Yeah.

Appelbaum: And when you play a gig like that is it arrangements, or–and if they're arrangements are they stock arrangements, or...?

Rollins: I don't know if they had, I don't think they had arrangements at that time. I think it was just–

Appelbaum: So, you just knew the songs?

Rollins: I think we–

Appelbaum: Everybody knows the songs?

Rollins: Everybody knew the songs, yeah.

Appelbaum: Ah.

Rollins: I don't think there was any uh stock arrangements. I don't, I think there's maybe five or six people, you know, musicians, so, I don't think we were reading any music. It was a few,a few people, really.

Appelbaum: Mmhmm. I think we need to take a very quick break, while we can–

[End of Tape 1]

[Start of Tape 2]

Appelbaum: Let's continue. When you're at a certain crossroads, you're playing the horn, you love this music so much, you know you're going to dedicate your life to it, but in terms of style, many people of your generation–horn players–sort of went either towards Coleman Hawkins or towards Lester Young. And I wonder if you ever felt you had to make a choice, and if so, how did you make that choice?

Rollins: Well, I started with Louis Jordan, as we've been through. Um, my idol was Coleman Hawkins, because that was the person that, uh...I was, I gravitated to him. He was really the man, you know. And uh...

Appelbaum: What does that mean exactly, "the man?"

Rollins: Well, it meant that he was the epitome of the saxophone. That Body and Soul had just come out, and Body and Soul you could hear on any street corner in Harlem,

from any uh bar on the jukebox–Body and Soul. See, and Body and Soul was saxophone-played. It wasn't Ella Fitzgerald singing, or...you know, it wasn't a big band uh–Duke Ellington playing some beautiful–no, it was saxophone solo. And uh, [Thelonious] Monk used to ask Coleman Hawkins, "Man, how did you make a hit with, with Body and Soul, and you didn't play the melody? How did that, you know, you never played the melody, and you did all this stuff." So, it was, it was miraculous what he did with this.

Appelbaum: What was his answer?

Rollins: Uh, I don't think he answered it.

Appelbaum: Uh huh.

Rollins: I don't think he answered it. You know, he just kind of smiled and said, "Oh...," something like that, you know. But no, I don't, I don't think he addressed it, you know.

Appelbaum: Did you memorize his solo?

Rollins: Well, that was a hard solo. It was, um...they had transcriptions of it. They had everything of it. People we're trying to play that, you know. I played some of it, but it was a difficult solo to really get. I don't think I ever played the whole solo, you know.

Appelbaum: What do you think it difficult about it?

Rollins: Well, just technically it's difficult. There's technically a lot of uh um, things that–you know, this is many years later, but at that time when that was made–1939, I believe–there were a lot of uh uh, ways that the saxophone was played, which were revolutionary at that time, and he was doing them. So, uh there were a lot of technical feats which he accomplished with that solo.

Appelbaum: Are you talking about intervals, or are you talking about harmonically, or...?

Rollins: Well, I'm talking about, um, technically: just playing the instrument itself. Now, as far as what he played, yes, what he played was also highly advanced. He was playing a lot of uh very advanced stuff, you know. And uh, but beyond that it was just so technical to play some of the runs and things that he made on the horn was, it was quite formidable.

Appelbaum: Hm. He made lots of great recordings...

Rollins: Yeah.

Appelbaum: Why do you think Body and Soul is the one that broke through?

Rollins: I don't know. Well, I'm like Monk, I don't why that one made it. How did you make a solo that got everyone's attention, and you were playing all this advanced music? [laughing] All this stuff, and there was no melody. There was no words. Just this really saxophone virtuoso, you know, playing. You know, I mean, how did it, how did it work, but it worked.

Appelbaum: I'm going to ask you more about Coleman Hawkins a little bit later. But for now, I want to get at–you know, clearly you had enough instruction, you learned how to play the horn...

Rollins: Yeah?

Appelbaum: But how did you learn how to improvise?

Rollins: Well, I think I was improvising when I got my first horn, way back when, I told you, when I was seven or eight years old, and I would go in the room and be playing all day–I think I was improvising then.

Appelbaum: Hm.

Rollins: Because I think I'm sort of a stream-of-consciousness type of a player. See, that's why I call myself a "primitive." I didn't know what I was doing, but I was still doing something which had some value, but I didn't know what I was doing. And that, and that's, uh–Ornette Coleman did an interview recently with the guy, and the guy said, "Well, gee, Ornette, gee you never went to music school. You never learned to read music," and all this stuff. And Ornette told him, "Well, gee, I'm glad I didn't, because if I did I wouldn't be Ornette Coleman. I wouldn't have gotten the acclaim that I had." See, so what I'm doing, Ornette was saying is, uh–so, Ornette, I would say, in a sense, is a "primitive," also. I mean, "primitive" isn't the same for everybody, but so we're not the same, but in that sense he's a "primitive." He didn't, he didn't do what everybody else was doing, learning music the way everybody else did, you know. And uh, I think I'm that person, because, you know, I think I'm that primitive, of a different stripe maybe, but I was playing, when I started playing in my uh the bedroom, my mother's bedroom, I'd go in there and shut the door–it was sort of the last room in the house, so it was the illusion of privacy, at least in my mind–and I would go in there and just play. Now, I think, so when you say, "Where did I learn to improvise?" I think I was improvising then.

Appelbaum: Can you teach that?

Rollins: Well, you know, Larry, the act of teaching would imply that...I don't know. I think that somebody–I don't know if that can be taught. I don't know. I don't know that. I'm not saying jazz cannot be taught, that's another thing, but playing intuitively that's, I don't know if that can be taught. I think jazz can be taught. I'm not saying jazz is something which you just have to have a–no, I think jazz can be taught. But stream-of-consciousness playing, that kind of deeper connection between something and your playing, that I think may be difficult to describe, even. I don't know how you would teach it, you know. It would be hard to say what it is that you're doing.

Appelbaum: And you just naturally started doing it?

Rollins: Oh yeah! I mean, I had heard all these...Fats Waller, Louis Jordan, but when I got the saxophone I didn't have to, you know, I was–whatever I was doing, I'm not saying it was good or bad, you know, it might, I don't know, but I was doing it, see. I don't know what it was but I was doing it.

Appelbaum: You also were drawn to art when you were young.

Rollins: Yeah.

Appelbaum: Did you always draw inside the line?

Rollins: What do you mean "inside the line?"

Appelbaum: Did–well, I, I guess I was trying to make the analogy between playing strictly and opening up to let your intuition and stream-of-consciousness go. And for artists, they can just stay in a structure kind of mode, or they can let their intuition go and paint outside the lines.

Rollins: Okay, I never knew that uh definition.

Appelbaum: [laughing] It's not really a definition.
Rollins: [laughing] Okay.

Appelbaum: [laughing] We're just talking.

Rollins: Okay. I, um, I used to do water colors...

Appelbaum: Uh huh.

SR. ...you know. And water colors lend, lend themselves to sort of you know, you can mix your colors. It's very creative. So, I did, I did, I did some oil painting, not a lot, a little bit. I know that I have talent, I know that, you know. I've been told that. I know if I ever did it, that, you know–well I'm an artistic person. Probably, the same talent that I

have in music would express itself, you know, in art. But uh I also used to do cartooning. See, I was a big fan of, um, cartoons.

Appelbaum: Which ones?

Rollins: Well, uh...the one I remember very much was a guy named Strong Man. It was a uh cartoon uh book.

Appelbaum: Like a comic book.

Rollins: Comic book.

Appelbaum: Yeah.

Rollins: So, I remember Strong Man, you know, very strongly [chuckling]. Anyway, I used to do that stuff, so, um...I used to have, you know, staple my pages together and I had my own characters, you know. I had some of my own characters.

Appelbaum: Tell me about the characters.

Rollins: I'm trying to think of some these guys that I had [chuckling], you know. Uh, I can't remember some of the names right off hand but uh...they were, you know, they were guys that would fight crime, you know, and–

Appelbaum: So like superheroes?

Rollins: Superheroes. Exactly. Yeah, yeah. Sure. And they'd be, you know–and all this was based on, um...these comic books I started reading. I mean, Superman began coming out around that time, but you know, it was in that period. You know, Batman. I mean, this is going back in the 30's now when these guys first–I don't know when Superman or Batman originally appeared, but it must have been the 30's. And if it wasn't there were other people that were, you know. I mean, I know all those guys–the Human Torch, Captain America, uh Steel Sterling–I mean, I had all these guys that, you know. I wanted to draw stuff like that, you know, and as I said, I had my own characters, you know.

Appelbaum: Again, in an attempt to understand the connection between your interest in art and your interest in music: do you hear in "color?" Like, do your senses cross?

Rollins: Well, in, in analyzation I can see, maybe.

Appelbaum: I mean, do you hear, for example, certain keys seem like a color?

Rollins: Uh, after the fact. You know, I once had a book uh some years ago that I was studying that had the correlation between keys and colors, you know. I mean, E-flat was supposed to be blue, I remember, and uh, uh green there was another, there was another key that is–but I thought about that. And I thought about that and some–yeah, they may be right, but uh, no, I don't, I don't–no. After I, after I do something musically you might be able to say, "Oh, that's blue," or, "That's orange," and I might agree with you, but as I'm conceiving of my music: no, I don't, I don't think of it in colors, no.

Appelbaum: Um, let's jump ahead a little bit, um, to your first recording session.

Rollins: Okay.

Appelbaum: I assume it was with the vocalist...who was...?

Rollins: Babs Gonzales.

Appelbaum: Yes, the expoobident one.

Rollins: Expoobidence.

Appelbaum: Was he expoobident?

Rollins: Well, Babs was a character, and people have different opinions about him, you know, very negative ones, et cetera, et cetera. Uh, most people have negative opinions about Babs, as a matter of fact. But uh...he gave me an opportunity, because he was a–Babs was a guy that just wanted to hear young guys play. Well, I was a young guy and had... "Wow, this guy can play," and he'd, you know. And I got a chance to work with a lot of great people. Babs would get a job, and he was good at getting these gigs, and he'd have all these guys–Dexter Gordon, and uh, Fats Navarro, and Wardell Gray and, you know uh, all these people of the period, and the real guys–giants–who were playing this music. So, I got a chance, he would get me on these gigs. I got a chance to play with all these guys. And uh so I, you know, Babs was, for me, was great, you know. And I didn't get too much involved with some of the other things that people...uh, negative things that he might have had–his business things, you know, people had questions about, and all that–I didn't get involved in, in, in that at all, you know.

Appelbaum: How do you think he heard about you, or knew about you?

Rollins: Well, he was living on The Hill, which is an area now, 155th Street, which was called Sugar Hill that was the area where all of the, um, upper-middle class blacks lived, maybe. You know, Duke Ellington lived up there. Andy Kirk lived up there. Coleman Hawkins lived up there. All the top-notch musicians lived on The Hill, and a lot of black politicians. On my block, there were people like W.E.B. Du Bois. Uh Thurgood Marshall. All those guys lived up on the corner from, on the block I lived at. And uh, so

it's sort of the upper-middle class. Now, we weren't upper-middle class ourselves, but Edgecombe Avenue was uh, bifurcated in that the upper part was sort of the higher-class income–or maybe they thought "class," too–and the lower part of Edgecombe was sort of the not quite as well-to-do. But you know, but we were able to get on The Hill. I mean, and not in the nice apartments W.E.B. Du Bois had, who lived on the upper part of Edgecombe Avenue. See, Edgecombe Avenue was one long block from 150th Street to 155th Street. It was one long block overlooking the park. It was, it was a–and the park was down below. There was a, it was a hill there. It was right–we could look over at Yankee Stadium and everything. It was a nice, exclusive area. But anyway, so that was the people that lived up there, see. And I remember, we used to–I lived on the lower part of Edgecombe Avenue–and I remember we would be playing ball and stuff, and I remember W.E.B. Du Bois, you know, he would be coming home every night, I'd see him coming home, and he'd see us up there playing up against the wall and stuff, and he'd sort of look at us and say, "[scoffing] Why aren't these guys in school or something?" You know, he'd have that real look like, "What's wrong with these guys? Why aren't these kids–," we were kids, you know. But he was a very stern guy, you know. And uh...

Appelbaum: As a kid, did you understand who he was?

Rollins: Oh yeah. Yeah, we, we, oh yeah.

Appelbaum: Everybody knew.

Rollins: Yeah, yeah. Oh no, they–he was very well known in the African community, oh yeah.

Appelbaum: You were talking about the neighborhood: Where did Bud Powell live?

Rollins: Bud Powell lived...uh let me see if I can describe this. In a sense, you see there, there was a park–St. Nicholas Park–and uh Bud Powell lived at 141st Street. Now 141st Street was also one long block from 141st Street to 145th Street. And Bud Powell lived on 149th Street on a hill coming up to–'cause that was still heading up, the topography was, you know, was going up on The Hill when–up by us it was even higher on The Hill on 155th. But he was sort of starting, The Hill sort of started almost around there. But so Bud Powell lived there, and he lived not really that much–although that block he lived in, Willie "The Lion" Smith lived on that block, also in, in, in a tenement building, you know. [inaudible].

Appelbaum: Willie "The Lion" Smith and Bud Powell lived on the same block?

Rollins: Uh, close to each other.

Appelbaum: Did they know each other?

Rollins: I don't know, I would imagine that Bud knew about Willie. I don't know if Willie knew about Bud. I mean, he may have, but I know Bud–'cause everybody knew Willie "The Lion" Smith, see–so, Bud knew that Willie "The Lion" lived up the street on St. Nicholas Avenue, yeah.

Appelbaum: So, you're a young musician, you're living in a neighborhood with many great, big, important names: Are young musicians, are they free to just go and knock on somebody's door...

Rollins: [laughing]

Appelbaum: And say, "Mr. Hawkins...?"

Rollins: Funny questions. Well [laughing] they're free to do it if you have the, the backbone and the will to do it. I mean, you're a kid, so nobody's going to...I did it.

Appelbaum: You did it.

Rollins: And, but I think I was disturbing them, you know. When I'd look I know I was disturbing some guys.

Appelbaum: Who, who, who would you, who would you disturb?

Rollins: [laughing] Well, there was a guy that played drums with Coleman Hawkins named Denzil Best. Denzil Best lived on 156th Street, and his, his uh...somebody in my family knew somebody in his, that knew somebody in his family, some kind of way like that. But I was a big fan of Denzil Best, because I was a big fan of Coleman Hawkins, and I knew everybody in Coleman Hawkins' band, you know, including Denzil Best. So, when I found out Denzil Best lived right here, you know, I...boy, I mean, I'm so...I went up to, you know–you see, the things is these guys are working at night clubs, sometimes at three and four o'clock in the morning. That's how clubs would go then: you'd play 'til four–four or five o'clock, not three o'clock, three o'clock is early. You wouldn't get home 'til five o'clock, and if you hung out a little bit you might not get home 'til daybreak. Okay, so here's some guy...these guys are sleeping, 'cause they've got to go to work, you know that night, so these guys are sleeping. So, here I go coming by this guy's house, I would say maybe when i got back from school, maybe four o'clock in the afternoon. And I'm ringing Denzil Best's bell, you know, and this guy's trying to get some sleep, you know. And he doesn't, you know, he doesn't know me. I just know that, "Oh, this is Denzil Best," you know. So, I remember some incidents when uh...I'm ashamed about it now, because he finally did let me in, but he was, you know, he said, "What's wrong with this guy," you know, "I gotta get up, man." It was, you know, he's sleeping man, and so but that was one guy. There was another guy–Eddie Davis, Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis–who lived in the Bronx. He lived up on uh...Kelly Street in the Bronx.

So uh...I find out, "Oh yeah he's–," I find out where he lived, you know, and uh he was the same thing, man. I went up there, and he didn't answer at all, so I never got a chance to disturb him. But I ran his bell, you know, and probably just was sleeping. He didn't even respond. Denzil responded much to his uh, I'm sure, you know...but uh...that's the kind of stuff that, you know, a young guy who was just crazy bent for music and, you know, being with musicians does...did, you know.

Appelbaum: Did people do that with you after you had been established...

Rollins: Yeah.

Appelbaum: ...and became a kind of a star?

Rollins: Yeah some, some. I experienced some of that. Yeah. Yeah.

Appelbaum: And what do you do when somebody rings your bell?

Rollins: Well, because I knew the kind of guy I was, I was a little bit more sympathetic.

Appelbaum: Mmhmm.

Rollins: You know, 'cause I knew how I was, you know. So, I kind of went out of my way to not, you know, be gruff and all this stuff, you know.

Appelbaum: So, you're talking about the different neighborhoods, and all these musicians who live in these neighborhoods...

Rollins: Yeah.

Appelbaum: Did you ever sense that there was a rivalry, say between people in Harlem and musicians in Brooklyn, or musicians in the Bronx? Was there anything going on between these neighborhoods?

Rollins: I think there might have been, but not, not on a grand scale. No.

Appelbaum: Could you recognize where somebody is from in the city from the way they play?

Rollins: Uh...no. I never got to that point where I could do that, you know. No. And the guys in the Bronx–of course, Monk was in the Bronx...uh lived in the Bronx for a while, and Elmo Hope, my piano player...well, a piano player that I was associated with, he lived in the Bronx–and uh...a very fine um reedman, Eddie Barefield, he lived in the Bronx. He was my clarinet teacher, as a matter of fact. He was a splendid person. Uh, Eddie lived in the Bronx. So, I don't think there was any discernible stylistic differences,

you know, that you could say, "Oh, that's a Bronx sound," or something. I, I don't think I would say that.

Appelbaum: You mentioned, we started to talk about some of the places...

Rollins: Right.

Appelbaum: ...where people played. Were most–I'm not talking about the theaters, but the clubs

Rollins: Okay.

Appelbaum: Were most of the clubs mob owned...owned by the mob?

Rollins: Uh...let's see now. Well, the clubs that I started playing with uptown, I started playing, we played at uh...the club up on 155th Street we played around. The clubs right they were smaller scale clubs. They weren't mob owned. They were owned by people in the community, the neighborhood. Um...as you went downtown–and, of course, we all know that The Cotton Club was owned by Lucky Luciano, or some people in that group–those clubs were owned. I think the bigger-named clubs, the mob was involved with those, you know.

Appelbaum: Did you ever work those clubs?

Rollins: Uh, well, I worked at the uh...let's see. I think, I, I, I think they were uh...there was a club–The Cafe Bohemia–that a lot of guys played, I think there were probably mob people that had those properties, you know. And even the Termini Brothers at the Five Spot, I think there were mob people that had those properties, and they might have let the Termini Brothers operate them, you know. I'm not suggesting they were connected, but they were connected, I think, to that extent. And uh...some of those places um...I think 52nd Street there were a lot of so-called "mob connections" with some of the people. Um...but yeah, some, some of the players I would say. The local places, no, I don't think so.

Appelbaum: The reason I ask is because you often here stories about musicians who are exploited–either by record labels or by clubs or wherever–where you either don't get paid or you don't, you don't get paid what you're promised, or whatever. And I would assume that if the club is connected it's harder to make, um, a big issue out of this, because people feel intimidated. And I wondered if, if all the musicians knew which clubs to avoid?

Rollins: Well, I think that if the mob was involved to that extent, like I think they were on 52nd Street, those were pretty...they were involved because those were pretty established places where there was a good turnaround, good...

Appelbaum: I see.

Rollins: ...money coming in. So, that, I don't think you had to worry too much about that. if you were playing on 52nd Street in the Downbeat Club, or something, usually you could, you would get paid, because it was, you know, it wasn't a place, it was sort of a low-level, you know, that was sort of an established place like that. Even Birdland...uh...um...although the, the uh...ownership of Birdland was, was not the most people that you would want to, you know, have dinner with, or something like that, you know, you generally got paid what you were promised.

Appelbaum: I see.

Rollins: You know, the bigger places you got paid what you were supposed to get paid.

Appelbaum: So, if you work a smaller club, or you didn't get paid, what could you do?

Rollins: Well, um...as I said when you say "smaller club," I worked many places where I didn't get paid. I've worked places where my overcoat was stolen. I've worked places where uh...oh boy, I hate to, I've got a mental block so I don't have to relive those days, but I worked plenty of those places where I didn't get paid, for one reason or another. I mean, we just expected that as musicians, you know. Uh...I, I say that because well there's a place in Brooklyn that might have been a mob-owned, Tony–I don't know, it was called Tony's–but I remember the overcoat, because my mother had just gotten me this overcoat, you know, from Barney's. I mean, this is, I was young, you know. It was a nice raglan overcoat with uh tweed, you know. Raglan coat, you know, like the kind Basil Rathbone wrote in Sherlock Holmes, that type of coat. So boy I've, you know, after I got done playing and a fight breaks out. And once a fight break out: forget it. You're not going to get your money. You're lucky if you get your coat. And that's the way. Good thing you have your horn in hand, because that would've been...so, I've been in situations of that kind, you know.

Appelbaum: Hmm. We've talked earlier about how you learned to improvise...and you use instinct, basically, and I wonder: how did you learn to "swing?" Or did you have to learn? Did you, were you always swinging?

Rollins: Well, by "swing"...you see, that's hard. You have to define what you mean when you say "swing." You, you have to define that more...

Appelbaum: Um, it's an approach to syncopation that is a characteristic of a long of jazz. You can swing in many different kinds of ways, but its a kind of rhythmic displacement, or places where you put the accents, or a way to approach the bar lines, or anything like that. You know it when you hear it, yes?

Rollins: Right.

Appelbaum: So, is this something that you could always do?

Rollins: Well, I think it was something I could always do, because I was probably doing that, as I said, before I knew what I was doing. I was, I think I was "swinging," you know, in that sense. Uh...I would probably say that I was, you know, so I, I–it's not something I had to learn. I mean I just had a, it's part of my talents, such as it is, that I could uh...it was part of what I did, you know–everything. There's the placement of notes, and the notes themselves, the whole thing is really a package.

Appelbaum: Hmm.

Rollins: And that's what I did, so there was no, you know, demarcation– "Oh well, this is 'swing'"–no, it all was together. At least, in my experience.

Appelbaum: Um, a question about your talent: How much of it do you think is a gift, versus hard work?

Rollins: I think it's probably 75% a gift, and uh...um...and um...maybe 80% a gift. And uh...maybe 15% hard work, although I'm a hard worker, as I told you. I practice hours and hours, although I don't look at it as hard work. So, see that's why it's a...so, in a way, I can even say it's 90% a gift, because in that gift it involves hard work–what you would say is hard work is not hard work for me, because I'm...you might say, "Well, gee, Sonny your practicing on the bridge for 15 hours." Well, that's not hard work for me. It's just something which comes–

Appelbaum: But it, but it is effort.

Rollins: Well, effort not...[chuckling]...you see, if you like to eat ice cream is it an effort to go to the corner store and buy some ice cream? Probably not. See, so no, it's not an effort. It's not an effort.

Appelbaum: You have to take the spoon...

Rollins: [laughing]

Appelbaum: ...and dip it, and actually put it to your mouth.

Rollins: Yeah.

Appelbaum: That's an effort.

Rollins: Well, no, no. It's not an effort. You know it's not an effort. If you like ice cream, it's not an effort.

Appelbaum: Yeah, that's...[laughing]...true. Um, when you listen to music...

Rollins: Yeah?

Appelbaum: ...what are you listening for?

Rollins: Well, when I listen to music uh...I, you know, I guess I have to reveal that I, I haven't listened to music in years.

Appelbaum: Hmm.

Rollins: I mean, I don't, I used to listen to, you know...all, everyday to music, but uh...about 25 years ago I stopped listening to music. I mean, I'd gotten filled up. So, not that I don't enjoy music, especially listening to guys if I go out to a festival, or something, and there's a band and I hear them–no, I love that. But going home and putting on a record, you know, and listening–no, I don't do that for some reason. Maybe, I feel that I don't want to be influenced by something I'm hearing, or–you know, there's a lot of reasons why I stopped listening, you know. But uh...I love listening to music, though, but I just don't do it as a past-time anymore, or an instructional thing like I might have.

Appelbaum: There is a man who has collected many airchecks, soundchecks, recording of you over the years. What is his name? His name is Carl...something?

Rollins: Carl Smith.

Appelbaum: Smith, yeah. So, there's this big treasure trove of your stuff, and clearly you listen to something in order to make a decision what to release. What is that process when you're hearing yourself, how do you decide this is worth releasing...

Rollins: Excruciating.

Appelbaum: ...but this is not? But...take us through that process when you're listening?

Rollins: Well, because I'm a guy that–you're talking about two things: first, you're talking about music; now you're talking about listening to myself.

Appelbaum: Yes, I am.

Rollins: Okay. Myself, I'm one of these guys that's very conscious of anything I do that may be, that, you know, I'm a strict perfectionist.

Appelbaum: Hmm.

Rollins: So, I can hear something and I say, "Oh, god, why did I do that?" or, "Why didn't that...?" This kind of stuff. So, it's very difficult when I'm making a record uh...and I have to listen to myself. It's really the hardest part in trying to figure out what is acceptable to me, and, therefore, may be acceptable to the public, you know. So, that's, that's rough. That's, that's, that's rough.

Appelbaum: When you're in this...doing a studio session, do you generally go for first takes, or do you try and perfect it?

Rollins: Well...yeah, no. I, I, many years ago when I first started recording, that technology was not available. So, it was only first takes, or maybe second takes, maybe, but that was it. There wasn't a whole lot of takes. As years, technology advanced, then you had the–which was a curse to me, because then when I was, I remember I was at Fantasy [Records] and I used to do, we would just do take after take after take, you know, because I'm trying to get the perfect take. And it's, it's not going to happen. So, it became a very uh...you know, uh...I, I, I–the technology in that case didn't work on my behalf.

Appelbaum: Does this mean there is no perfection in studio, or in art, or in life?

Rollins: Well, to me, probably there is no perfection. Other people listen to something that I've done and say, "Oh, wow! Isn't that great?" But uh...so I wouldn't say there's no perfection in their eyes, you know. For me, there probably is no perfection. Like it's, it's like...it's like now when I'm, I'm, I'm working towards a way of playing and, and, and a way of getting my ideas together to create the kind of music that I want to do, that I think I can do. I'm not, I don't think I'm ever going to get it perfectly. I mean, I understand that. I'm not going to make the perfect solo, but I still feel that I can get closer to it. Close enough to it that it, that I can do it more often, and so on and so forth. So, I'm not giving up, but I know I can't–perfection, at least, for me, is, is something which is probably never going to happen. I, I, I accept it.

Appelbaum: It's–

Rollins: But I know that I want to get closer. I know that this...I can get closer to perfection.

Appelbaum: Hmm. It's elusive.

Rollins: Yeah. I'm not even trying to get perfection. I just want to get closer to it, because...right, perfection is–I mean, I don't think it's possible, you know, for me. I've heard other people play and I've said, "Wow! Perfect." So, that's, you know, but I'm

talking about myself. I've heard guys plays solos–Coleman Hawkins' Body and Soul–I'd say, "Perfect." But can I get there in something I'm doing? No, because I'm going to listen to myself and say, "Wow. No way. That was wrong. I shouldn't have done–," you know.

Appelbaum: So you're self critical?

Rollins: Very much so.

Appelbaum: Why?

Rollins: Well, because uh...I think I've heard people like Coleman Hawkins [long pause].

Appelbaum: You did an interview with Arthur Taylor–very interesting interview–that was published in his book Notes and Tones. And in the interview, you say, "I don't have the greatest opinion of myself. I recognize a lot of my faults." And I guess, first, I need to, I'm obligated to ask: What do you think those faults are?

Rollins: Well, those faults are...numerous, but they're probably embarrassing to mention them. And plus, they would, they would, they wouldn't hold me in good stead, because some of my fans might say, "Oh, gee, I thought that was good. Now, Sonny is telling me that that's crap." So, I don't, if you–I'm going to desist from...outlining my many faults, in my mind. If you don't mind.

Appelbaum: Not–no problem.

Rollins: Because somebody else might think they're great.

Appelbaum: I understand.

Rollins: And that may color their view. They might say well, "Gee, I thought Sonny was really doing something great. I come to find out Sonny thought it was nothing," you know. So, maybe I'm wrong. So, I don't want to cut off my career that close yet.

Appelbaum: I gotcha.

Rollins: I still have a few more years, hopefully, to go.

Appelbaum: So, let's [chuckling]–many more. So, let's just leave it at the fact that you are somewhat self-critical.

Rollins: Yeah?

Appelbaum: And you're aware of your faults.

Rollins: Mmhmm.

Appelbaum: Are you able to easily forgive yourself? I mean, none of us are perfect. So...

Rollins: Well, you know, "forgive myself" to me means that I'm going to keep trying. If I keep trying then I've forgiven myself.

Appelbaum: Okay.

Rollins: And I'm going to keep trying.

Appelbaum: So, you don't ever, like, beat yourself up for making mistakes, or feel guilty, or any of that stuff? It's all moving on to the next thing?

Rollins: It's moving on to the next. Of course, when you have to hear this–when I say I'm, I'm making a record and I have to listen to something, or if I have to be someplace where a record is made that I'm on and I have to hear it, then I might beat myself up a little bit...which is why I don't like to listen to my own music. You know, 'cause I don't want to beat myself up so much [chuckling]. See, so uh, you know...

Appelbaum: You have very high standards. It sounds like it.

Rollins: Well...for what I think I can do, and, as I said, great musicians I've been around. Yeah, I've heard some great music. You know, I've, I've heard some great music. I've been around with the hierarchy, see. So, yeah, I want to get there. I want to be able to be on a level with stuff I've heard.

Appelbaum: Hmm [pause]. I'm just curious, if um, if Coleman Hawkins were sitting here with us right now, would you want to talk with him about these things? Or what would you want to talk to Coleman Hawkins about?

Rollins: Well, I got to know Coleman Hawkins a little bit. Um...I don't, I don't know if I would uh want to talk too much music with Coleman Hawkins. I think his musical statements speak for themselves. I mean, I don't think I'd want to uh talk shop with Coleman Hawkins.

Appelbaum: What would you want to talk about?

Rollins: Well...I remember I used to uh ask him, make sure he was uh...into health foods. Stuff like that. And that, you know...because there was one period there where he was drinking a lot, and the cats he was working with said, "Oh man, Hawk, you're not

eating," and all this. I'd want to talk to him about stuff like that, you know, that I got into around that time. I got into sort of more healthful living back when everybody else hadn't gotten into it yet. So, I would probably, in fact, I have talked to Coleman about that, you know.

Appelbaum: What, what did he say?

Rollins: I don't, I don't remember but his drummer uh...uh...uh...what's his, he just, he just left us not too long ago. Uh, he's in that picture, the Harlem...picture, Art Kane photo ["A Great Day In Harlem"].

Appelbaum: Yeah.

Rollins: Anyway, he, he was with Coleman and all them. He told me about some things that I used to, you know, tell Coleman about, or send him something, some, you know.

Appelbaum: Speaking of health, I–first of all, I'm very glad to see you're doing well. I mean, I think I'm not alone in that.

Rollins: [laughing]

Appelbaum: We, we all, we all are inspired by this.

Rollins: [laughing] Well, okay.

Appelbaum: So, here's the, here's the question...um: There was a time, especially late-40's early-50's, there a dark period for, not just musicians, but for a lot of people in this culture, you know. And there were people leading, let's just say, unhealthy lifestyles.

Rollins: Okay.

Appelbaum: And I wonder how you pulled yourself out, and um when so many others didn't?

Rollins: Well, I was fortunate. We, we, we all got involved with drugs when our hero Charlie Parker was involved with drugs. So, we thought, "Oh, gee, that's a great thing to do. Charlie Parker's doing it. Gotta be okay." So, uh...that was our, you know, he was the guy especially, Charlie Parker. And uh...a lot of guys didn't make it, but everybody was using drugs. So, uh I, my individual case, which I've told many times, is that Charlie Parker actually got me away from drugs by, kind of, you know, when I saw that he really didn't want to see me, who was one of his proteges, throwing away my life like he did. That really upset him. He got drugged, I mean, he was...despondent over that, because he didn't know...he knew I was one of his top proteges, you know. But when he found–I told him that I wasn't using drugs, and then he, somebody in this session ratted on me

and told Bird, “Oh yeah, we were just getting high,” you know. So, then I saw the reaction from Charlie Parker. So, that and some other things–I had already had a lot of trouble–but that and some, you know...I said, “No, I got to stop this.” I wanted to stop. I mean, my mother was–I wanted to stop for her, too, but uh...also, but I wanted to show Charlie Parker, who was my idol, my prophet, you know, I wanted to show him that, “Hey man, I got your message,” you know, “I understand. I’m through with drugs now.”

Appelbaum: And why do you think he really couldn’t lead a healthy lifestyle?

Rollins: Well, I don’t know. He was just uh...I guess he tried and he gave up. You know, Max [Roach] told me uh...Bird said, “Oh man, look at my body. I’m just, I’m just–my body is wasted. I can’t, I can’t fight this,” you know. He said, “I’m just...I can’t do anything, man. I’m over,” you know. So, you know, it was some sort of weakness. You know, addictions are tough to break, and uh...I don’t know why exactly that he couldn’t do it, but he certainly conveyed to me that that wasn’t the life, you know. That is a... “Don’t do this, man,” you know.

Appelbaum: Let’s switch gears a little bit, and ask um...I’m, I’m very taken with how you play ballads. I love the way you play these songs. I wonder whether lyrics of a song are important to you? You’re an instrumentalist: Do you pay attention to lyrics?

Rollins: Oh yeah, I pay attention to lyrics. Yeah.

Appelbaum: Do you learn them?

Rollins: Uh...yeah, some of them. I mean, the ballads that I play I know some of the lyrics. Maybe, the essential part of the lyrics. I, I don’t know, you know, lyrics from A-to-Z on many of the songs, but I know some of the crucial part, of the crucial parts of the lyrics, you know.

Appelbaum: You know the story of the song?

Rollins: Yes, sort of the story. Exactly.

Appelbaum: It’s funny, we were, I mentioned that we were with Jimmy Heath the other night, and he recounts a story of talking with Ben Webster and Johnny Griffin. And Ben wants to know the lyrics of these songs, because he wants to speak them through his horn.

Rollins: Right.

Appelbaum: And Johnny Griffin says, “I don’t need lyrics. I play notes.”

Rollins: Right, right.

Appelbaum: So, [chuckling] um you, I'm guessing you lean more towards wanting to know the story.

Rollins: I, yeah, I lean towards wanting to know the story. Yeah.

Appelbaum: Do you feel that you're a story...that you literally tell stories through your horn?

Rollins: Well...not enough, you know. I mean, I'd like to be able to really tell, and I'm practicing every day. I'm practicing right now, as a matter of fact, trying to perfect these things you're talking about. So, do I know them? Well, I'm trying to do that. I'm not, it's not, I haven't gotten it where I want it to be yet.

Appelbaum: Hmm.

Rollins: But yeah, I'm trying to tell stories. I mean, some of the guys that I...uh, my heroes, like Gene Ammons, these guys, I mean, they told a great story, and they were, you know. So, I, I've heard these people. So, that's why I'm hard on myself. I've heard people. I know what can be done in our music, see. So, until I'm doing it myself, I'm hard on myself, of course.

Appelbaum: Especially in your younger years–you can still play fast, you can play whatever you want, as far as I'm concerned–but in your younger years you could play blindingly fast. And I'm wondering, as a musician or as a horn player, how do you relax when you're playing very fast tempos?

Rollins: Well, you know, I probably don't play those fast tempos. I remember I was playing with uh...the great Dizzy Gillespie over at Wolf Trap, which is right near here. And uh, we were doing this big tribute concert to Dizzy, and I think in the band was the great Hank Jones, Dizzy, myself, I think was Mickey Roker and Rufus Reid. And uh, somebody told me those last two guys recently, 'cause we had been talking about that. But anyway, uh we were talking about the repertoire. So, Dizzy said, "No, don't play anything fast, man," you know, "I don't play–," as if to say, "Well, I don't play fast anymore." And okay, I, I know Dizzy used to play fast and could play fast, so maybe it might as you get older and stuff, playing fast might, you know, not be, you know, your ability to do that might diminish somewhat. Uh...not that that's any that detrimental anyway, because if you don't play fast then you play something else which is equally great, you know. So, I don't mean that, but there was some reason why he said that, and maybe it's true, now I see, you know, I, I don't play a lot of fast stuff. And it may be a technical reason after you get a certain age, you know, it might be–

Appelbaum: But do you recall the experience, when you were younger, of playing these very fast things?

Rollins: Well, I used to work with Max Roach, see.

Appelbaum: How about that?

Rollins: And Max Roach would play these fast songs, and we'd, we had a practice of discouraging young guys who wanted to come up and play with us. Anybody wanted to play, you know. A guy would say, "Oh, can I sit in with the band, Max?" "Okay, sure, man." Then he'd come and see and it'd be–BAM, [imitating fast drum beat]–you know. So, I had to learn to play fast playing with Max, you know.

Appelbaum: And is that just a matter of physical dexterity, or–?"

Rollins: Well, it's part. Physical dexterity is part of it, you know, which is why I said maybe Dizzy said, you know, "I don't play that fast anymore." So, that's, it's part of it, definitely. Uh...yeah, it's definitely part of it. Physical dexterity plays a part in it.

Appelbaum: Okay. Do you ever hear music in your dreams?

Rollins: Uh...I don't, I don't think so. I don't think so, but I have a bad habit of sleeping with the radio on, and occasionally I have a music, I have music on. And if there's some great music playing I wake up. For instance, I was sleeping one time, I remember, and they were playing Art Tatum, and wow I woke up right away, you know. Which, you know, but uh which shows I probably wasn't in deep sleep–or maybe I was in deep sleep, but it got me up right away. Uh, I don't think I hear music when I'm sleeping though. I don't think so. I mean, in my dreams that's what–yeah, I remember uh...you know, to recall really, "Oh yeah, I heard something." I can't recall anything in particular. But, I think that's close to the surface. The music is close the surface of what I'm doing when I am sleeping. I think it's close, and that, you know, it's, it's not like it's foreign. I think it's, you know, it's somewhere close there. Even in a dream, I think the music somewhere near.

Appelbaum: Was it always somewhere near even when you weren't playing? Like when you took your sabbaticals, or when you went to India, or...did you ever feel like, "I need to take a break from music?"

Rollins: Uh...

Appelbaum: Not, not the business, but I mean from music.

Rollins: Yeah. Uh...very, very seldom. I remember...very seldom. I remember a couple of times in my whole career when I felt I was, musically, I was up against a brick wall. I, I do remember, and I had to, I said, "Gee, man, I just can't, you know, go on. I can't think of anything." But that period didn't last. I kept my regiment, and then it passed

away, you see. So, maybe, I don't know, maybe it meant that: Hey, don't give up; always persevere. So, uh...you know, not, not often, but I have had periods when I've felt–maybe once or twice in my whole life–I remember uh feeling, "Gee, I don't know what else to play, or what else can I–what can I do now?" But it didn't last, you know.

Appelbaum: There's always more.

Rollins: There is al–that I know. I know there's, I mean, there's no doubt about that. So, since I know that, you see, I have hope. I can, I can practice and I know, because I know there's no doubt about that. There's more. There's a lot more, see. It's like when they started looking at the um Hubble Telescope, and they're looking and they're looking for the end of the uh universe. We're going to see all these things. And they looked up there and they said, "Wait a minute. We thought that was the end of the universe, but there's so much more stuff beyond that." There's so many more universes we thought, you know, we were going, you know, make a picture then. So, that's how life is really. That's how life is, and music. Anything that's real, there's no fine, fine, finite, you know. There's nothing finite about real things.

Appelbaum: It's only the end of the beginning.

Rollins: The end of the beginning.

Appelbaum: Why don't we take this opport–

[End of Tape 2]

[Start of Tape 3]

Appelbaum: Okay. What do you think makes a good improvisation?

Rollins: A good improvisation...a good improvisation. Well, there are many good improvisations, like we were saying, "telling a story." That used to be, that phrase used to be used a lot more. Lester Young always says well, "Tell a story." And that's it: tell, tell a story. Make a beginning, an ending, a middle–whatever it is–but make a complete story. Say something...you know.

Appelbaum: Is there a particular reason why you like to wander when you play?

Rollins: Um...well, you know, that's interesting. I uh...I used to, I used to feel that different parts of the room, or different parts of any place when I was playing outside. This, if I played my horn right here I get a different sound. If I play is right there I get a different sound. If I play it over there it'd be different. So, that was one of my motivations for going around and seeing if I could get to a place that really had the

optimum reverberations, and this stuff. So uh...I think that's, that was my, one of my uh primary reasons for doing that.

Appelbaum: Again, a question sort of about process, and how you open yourself up to let creativity flow through you: Is there some way you can prepare to do that? Or...do you just, again, instinctively just know how to open yourself up?

Rollins: Well, I don't know what you mean when you say "open yourself up." I mean, how do you mean that?

Appelbaum: Well, let me rephrase the question: Where do you think creativity comes from?

Rollins: I think creativity comes from really the uh subconscious, which is why I, when I play, I try to forget the, what I've, the rudiments of a song, see. I mean, I try to forget the...after I've learned them I've assimilated it already. Then, after that, I want to forget that. When I get on the stage, if I'm playing *My Melancholy Baby* or something, I know *My Melancholy Baby*. I've got that already. So, I don't want to think about that when I get on stage, see. I want to let whatever *My Melancholy Baby* means to my subconscious come up. And that's, so that's where creativity comes from. Someplace, I mean, I don't want to sound too–like we were just talking about the universe–I don't want to sound too grandiose here, but it's got to be from something we don't experience everyday. That's where music comes from. I mean, the kind of music we're talking about, or, you know, music that can inspire and this kind of stuff. You know, it comes from someplace else. It has nothing to do with material things of any sort. It's completely opposite of material things, and so that's where I try to get. And I, it's easy for me to do this, Larry, because when I play, as I told you, when I started as a boy I would go in the room, I didn't know what the fuck I was doing, but I was doing something, see, and in...in playing this stuff. So, it's easy for me to get in that state, because I'm kind of a "primitive," as I've said. That's my new word to call myself: a primitive. I just do it. Automatically, I go to this part of me which is unexplainable, and I start from there I'm just doing stuff. So, creativity is about something completely unknown.

Appelbaum: Is it connected to...let's call it "higher power?"

Rollins: Well, you know, I don't want to sound too pretentious here, but, you know, because then you gonna lose people and people are going to think, "What does he know?" something like that. Nobody knows about higher–but let's say it's something different than what we experience, we're experiencing sitting here talking. Yeah, it's something else. It's not here. It's somewhere else. No, I don't know where. No, I don't know where.

Appelbaum: Does it always happy, or only happen, when you're playing, or do you connect with that feeling just walking the streets? Or...?

Rollins: There are times when get uh euphoric uh moments...thoughts and, you know, periods. But, I mean, that doesn't mean anything. That's just to me. When I play, that gives me a chance to express it for everybody else–the people, you know.

Appelbaum: Yeah, I, I guess the related question, you–there was a quote, yet another quote, where you referred to preparing for performance as "getting focused and ready for battle." And I wonder, who is it you're fighting?

Rollins: [chuckle] Probably, my own uh...inability to, to uh...play rudiments, and to master the technicalities of the horn, and all that stuff. You know, that, that's probably what I am fighting.

Appelbaum: And in that battle, who wins?

Rollins: Well, you know, it's interesting, because uh...sometimes you think you have the rudiments right and there's nothing happening. So, having the rudiments right and playing perfectly–no squeaks, no this, no that–doesn't mean that it's great, or that it's gonna reach people. So, I would say that I don't know who wins. The battle is something that you just have to uh focus on, and uh...we'll see, because I don't know. This I, I'm in–see, real playing, you're in, you're in another realm. You don't know what's happening up there, or out there, whatever way you want to characterize it. So, I don't know who wins. I, I, I don't know how to win. That's what I mean to say. I don't know how to win, see. I just have to keep doing it as I think is the...in sincerity, see. And...hopefully some–I have a gift, as we said, I have a talent–so then it's going to, something positive is going to come out of it.

Appelbaum: I have a feeling I know this answer to this, but I'm gonna ask it anyway: What's the best thing about being a musician?

Rollins: Well, uh...I would say there's nothing great about being a musician that's not greater than being an artist–a painter–or that's not different than being a...janitor. If you are...you see, it's the dedication and, and that...lots of people know janitors that they think they know, "Wow. What is this about. This guy, man. This is guy does great work, and he keeps the place clean and everything, and he's a real nice guy when I speak to him. Man, he always makes me–" See, I don't care if you're a musician or–it doesn't matter. Being a musician, okay, there's a lot of hardships to being a musician. Uh, so I don't think there's anything particularly great about being a musician. I think it's particularly great about having a proper attitude towards life in general. If you're–I was born with a musical talent, so that's what I do, but I don't think I'm better...put in a better place because of that. No.

Appelbaum: What are your favorite sounds in nature? And I ask this because you live not in the city, you live in the countryside.

Rollins: Well–

Appelbaum: What are your favorite nature sounds?

Rollins: Well, uh...I listen to birds, you know, and um...

Appelbaum: Do you ever play to them?

Rollins: Yeah, I do. I, I do play um...and I, and I am very–how should I say?–I feel very exalted when I hear them sort of playing with me. I mean, when I hear us, you know, what I play they–I can, 'cause you can hear that. You can tell whether they're squawking, or whether they're happy when you're playing. So uh, yeah, I, I, I, I like that, and I've done some of that. Uh, and they're certain birds that I really like. There's one bird that makes a whole tone sound, you know. And that bird, I was trying to find out what it was, so we'd–because that bird is really...those two notes, and see those notes can be–it's coming down and it can be a uh, it can be a ninth to a tonic. It could be a uh...it could be a sixth to a fifth, depending–[to someone in room] you're a musician, do you understand what I'm saying?

Appelbaum: He's a professor.

Rollins: Right, so you know what I mean. It's [imitating sound] baah-baah. That's a sound. [whistling the previous sound] So, I hear this guy, and he's really...yeah, well then that's–I'm hearing the theme: baah-baah, up to tonic. You know, baah-baah. That's a tonic. I mean, it's really, he's a hell of a cat this bird, man. I really like him, you know. And uh, but yeah, I, I, I enjoy nature sounds. That's about the most nature that I hear is birds, you know.

Appelbaum: Did, did you feel your life changed when you moved out of the city...to the countryside?

Rollins: Uh...no, not really. Not really, because these, things now that I've been exclusively in the country for a while, uh...I've always had them as part of me. See, I've always been a person that was conversant with nature. So, it wasn't a big deal to actually be living in the country. Even when I was in the city I was, I had nature sounds, you know what I mean. I was close to nature. It wasn't a big, a big uh change. So, no, I didn't, I didn't really notice a big, you know...difference between living in the city where I was born and lived most of my life, and then moving to the nice quiet country. No, it didn't really affect me in that way.

Appelbaum: You were one of the first musicians who made conscious statements about soft of what's happening in the world around you. And this goes back to the Freedom Suite, and Airegin and all kinds of statements that you made. And it even extends into

things like you're concern about global warming, for example. And I wonder whether you think um musicians, or artists, or people need to be more aware of the world around them, and not just focused on the music in front of them?

Rollins: I am not qualified to answer that. I did what I did because it was something that I felt strongly about. Uh...I don't think other people might feel that strongly about it. I don't think other musicians should make statements, or artists should make statements. I think uh W.E.B. Du Bois once said that, "it's the obligation of artists to be political." I don't nece–that might be true. It might be true. It might, it's something that I...you know, I mean it's possible that's true. But I am not sure that I would require that of anybody, you know. I mean, that's a big step to take. A person that's really into art then come into the secular world, that's hard to do. I did it because I grew up in that milieu. My grandmother was a Garveyite, and I was marching up and down for the Scottsboro Boys, you know. [As if protesting] "Free Tom Mooney and the Scottsboro Boys. Free Tom Mooney." Tom Mooney was the lawyer for the Scottsboro Boys famous case, which was, maybe people might not know about. Now, uh...so I grew up in that. That's why I did it. I mean, it was just something that was normal to me to do, and I felt, "Oh wow, yeah. I got a chance to put my political views–," yeah. But should other people do it? Maybe. Maybe, but I wouldn't, I, I wouldn't uh feel that they have to do it at, at all, you know.

Appelbaum: But it was important for you to make these statements. Did it make you feel more connected to the world around you?

Rollins: Well, it made me feel that I was worthwhile as a human being, as a living person doing my period. Yeah, it made me that I was uh outside of my specialty–music–I was also in the whole world. Yeah.

Appelbaum: And do you still feel that?

Rollins: Not in the same way. I, I, I have evolved in a lot of ways. I still, I mean, you, you would have to question me individually, because it's very complicated here. I've, you know, you, I mean, you, you would have to give me specific things–Do I feel this way about this? Do I feel this way about that?–before I can really give you a uh...

Appelbaum: Well, let me–

Rollins: ...real answer to that.

Appelbaum: Let me reframe the question: Do you think the world is coming together or falling apart?

Rollins: I think...I think that...now here's where we get back to, you said something about "higher power" a while ago, and I didn't want to touch that because it's, who

knows anything? But, when you ask me something about the world, then I'm gonna invoke higher power, to this sense: I believe in higher, a higher power created what we have here, known as the world. You're...My friend here sitting with the earphones on, you're asking me questions, my friend is over–I'm sitting here talking: things we know: this is the world. Okay. I believe that this world is not able, it's not able to get better or worse. The world is the way it is for a reason. Whatever that reason is, I don't know. I'm not that power. I don't know why, but it's not able to change, you see. It's made to be the way it is. All we can do–now, that might be, you might take it to say, "Well, wow. That's a very discouraging thing. We can't change the world." No. No. The answer to that is that...we do have something in our power. That is "us," individually, see. That's Sonny Rollins. That's Larry, you see? Me, individually, I can change myself, you see. And that's a big universe inside of me that needs to be changed, and I need to work on it, and be a better person, and not do things which I know are not right. That's where the change comes: individually. I can change myself. You can change yourself. Only you, see. That's where the change is. The world...forget the world. The world is made to be just the way it is. But all that's happening in the world, it's going to always be like that, because it was, you know, created by something we don't, can't conceive of. All we know, we were born, and grew up, and here we are living in this place. We don't know how we were born, or why we're here in this life, or why are we alive? This is life. We don't know that. You just got consciousness as a little boy, and you're growing up and here we are. But what–that's the world. We can't change that. I don't know what it started. I'm not interested in that. I'm not interested in changing the world anymore. What I'm interested in is changing Sonny Rollins, see. This is my time, my chance, this life that I have. That's all I can do, and that's a big deal, as we all know. Changing ourselves, that's the...you know it's easy to say, "Oh, let's see if we can change the world. Let's see if we can stop people from war." That's baloney. The world isn't gonna change. The world is here to be just what it is–ignorance, and hatred, and jealousy and all this–that's the way the world is made. But I can change myself. If I don't want to hate somebody, I can do that. I can do that, see. And this, this makes sense. I finally came to this uh enlightenment fairly recently in my life, because I would think, "Oh, gee, the world. Wow, what a terrible place," and "Oh, this guy is fighting, and look–" It's foolishness. The world is the way it is, man. We can't do anything about the world. Our world is us...you. I shouldn't say "us," I'm speaking about each person individually. See, your world is Larry, right? You can go inside yourself and say, "Well, gee, man..."–when you're shaving in the morning– "gee, did I, did I really do the right thing? Did I rush past that old woman? Yeah, I wish hadn't." That's where you're thing is at, man. And that's where each of our things, that's, that's why we're here. That's the short life that we have, we have to deal with that. The rest of it doesn't mean anything. If we're worrying about the world, that means we're invading our issues, see.

Appelbaum: With that in mind, what are the things that you feel you need to change within yourself?

Rollins: Oh, boy. That's gonna take a long time. Uh...you know, there's a lot of things. I'm, I'n not going to be uh specific, but I'll admit: a lot of things. Uh, when I got up uh...when I was in New York and I uh...had to make my bed in the morning, and I was saying, "Ah, god, I don't want to make my bed." That's something...I, because I know that that's the correct thing to do, and I know that. So, I'm just putting that off [inaudible]–no. That's one little thing, but there are multitude of things of–maybe you may think of them more important nature–I, I, I don't know. That's inside yourself. But, that's one thing, but there's whole other things, man, that I need to change, and I'm not going to go into them, because, you know, but suffice it to say that there's a lot in me that needs, that's I know that I need to change, see. So, I'm working on that, and that's why, as we're saying this life is beautiful man, 'cause we have a chance to do something about our existences while we're here. This is a great privilege, man. We're all setting up here. We got [inaudible], we got [inaudible]. This is what it's, this is a great gift, man. And life is short, so don't think that, "Oh, it's gonna–" No, no, life is short. So, use it. And the only way to use it is not worrying about, "Oh, the world. Wow, what a terrible thing. Look at [Muammar al-] Gaddafi." I mean, to hell with all that. It doesn't mean anything. That stuff doesn't mean anything. It's what you're doing, that's what means anything.

Appelbaum: So, there's an external world, and then there's the world inside.

Rollins: Well, to me there's no external world. There is no external world. I mean, I understand what you meant, but that–forget about, just forget if even there is an external world. There's only an internal world. Don't even recognize that there is an external world.

Appelbaum: So, I, I know you're kind of short on time now. So, maybe it's time to wrap up with, maybe, one last question...uh, two questions. One: How do you like doing interviews?

Rollins: Well, uh...they're part of my job, you know. That, that's part of what I have to do.

Appelbaum: Do you ever learn from hearing yourself explain things?

Rollins: Well, you see, what's happening with me, Larry, is that...all of these questions are sort of...that question does–it's sort of changing now, because I'm getting more enlightened, now. I'm, I'm advancing in age, so hopefully that's a good sign. I know I'm not going to have five, or 100, more years to parcel out these problems. So, yeah, but no, no. I'm...I'm changing. My, my, my views of life is, are changing...you see? And this is...I've been–well, you try to do the right thing, but we all human beings, and we all have our problems. I have as many as anybody else, but I'm willing to see that I'm now getting to understand what my...purpose in life is, whatever it is, you see. So, I feel completely different. Like, when you say "interviews," well, I don't know how I felt when I was interviewed uh last year. Maybe I'm...that's–I'm understanding different

things now. I'm getting new enlightenment, finally...you see. So, I feel differently about a lot of things that I might have said before, or that uh, you know, you might have figured, "Oh, well, I know Sonny feels this way about X, Y, Z." Well, no, I don't think so.

Appelbaum: As of 2011, on this date–February 28th–what do you think your purpose is in this life?

Rollins: Um, my purpose, I think, is to make myself a better person. That's the only purpose I can have. And what is a better person? Well, again, that's between Larry and you, and my friend and him. I don't, I don't what a better person is to everybody–

Appelbaum: What is it to you?

Rollins: To me, as I said, "Hey, why didn't I make my bed?" "Why did I get lazy about this?" "Why did I uh...have a feeling of jealousy about something?" "Why did I uh...be...hateful or–" I mean, there's, there's a multitude things I, [chuckling] that's wrong with me, that I'm trying to deal with while I have this. Now, I understand what I have to do. You know, a multitude of things, but that's okay. I'm on the right track. See, that's, it's, it's not important uh...you know, how far you are. At least, this is my experience. I can't speak–it's not important how far. I know now that I'm on the track. I'm on the right road, see. All these revelations just came to me not long ago.

Appelbaum: What do you think triggered this, these revelations?

Rollins: Well, I've been, I've been into things all my life, man. I mean, I was brought, I was born a guy that had it, you know. I, I, I had a uh...there was a woman writing a book, I don't think it's ever going to, but...this is short. When I was a little, we used to go up on the roof of a house, and we used to, and there was a path where people would walk from one block–I told you that, that Edgecombe was one long block, remember? Okay, right behind it was another long block: St. Nicholas Place. If you lived one place [inaudible] you had to walk all the way around. So, there was a shortcut between the buildings that people would walk, so they could get access without having to walk all the way around these blocks. We used to, we used to think it was fun–I mean, I was eight, nine years old or something–we used to think it was fun to go up on the roof, and there was some loose mortar there, and as people were coming by, you know, this shortcut there, we'd drop the mortar down and scare people, you know. So, boy, that was a big joke. One day, I was up there and I said, "Boy, here comes a guy," and I dropped this mortar–and this was a heavy piece of mortar from, from the roofing–and it came down, and I saw that it was going to hit this guy. And if this thing hit this guy from six, seven stories up...okay? And I began to pray [pause]. And I began to pray, man, and I...you know. I prayed hard man, because I knew that, what would happen if it hit this guy. And I began to pray, and, I mean, I prayed hard, man. And BANG, it fell next to him. It didn't hit him. And I said, so that was, I mean, that was one of the earlier things. I mean,

I've always been a person that knew that there was some kind of inner...something, "conscious," whatever you want to call it. So, I was aware of that all the time. All my life. I'm a kid. And uh, so that's what, this is nothing new in a way. I'm just getting to the point where I'm able to, to access it, and to use it in my everyday life now, see.

Appelbaum: Um, there's...a word...that is often thrown around, especially in the professional fields, and that is "success." And I wonder, for you, as a musician, but also as a man, how do you measure success?

Rollins: Well [chuckling]...success, wow. Well, I hate to think in the terms of uh the world we live in, the material world we live in, but uh it's successful when I can uh...I feel that success is uh...uh being able to uh...take a town-car instead of having to uh take the train. Being able to do things of that sort. Uh, being able to buy the food that uh...whatever it is I want regardless of the price. I mean, it's no exorbitant, but going by, having the ability to do, in the material life. So, that's in a way, that's sort of, of a uh...what they call "success." I mean, all of these words and things to me, Larry, are so...inadequate, really, to talk about the uh...you know, the important things of life. I mean–

Appelbaum: Well, then let me ask it this way: What are those important things in life for you right now?

Rollins: It's being able to be a better person, myself. That's all it's about. Being able to be a better person. Not lie to myself. Not bullshit myself. Not try to bullshit somebody else. Not–all of that, that's all that, that's all that matters. That's all it is. The rest of it doesn't mean anything, man. If I'm doing that, then I am doing, what I conceive, the most any of us can do as individuals, born, human beings on Earth. That's dealing with ourselves. Dealing with your inner-self, man. Knowing what–'cause you know what's wrong or right that you do. Nobody–you, you know that. Addressing that yourself, that's it. That's the greatest thing...and trying to make, trying to make it uh better. That's all it's about now for me. The rest of it is, the rest of it is part of that. That's the thing. The rest of it all depends on my doing that first.

Appelbaum: I hope you will continue.

Rollins: Well–

Appelbaum: I trust you will.

Rollins: I mean, I'll continue as long as life, this life, continues here–sure. Because after all this–I'm 80 years old now, man. I'm 80 fucking years old. So, I had to learn something in 80 years, so I got that much. So, yeah, sure. I mean, there's, there's no turning back, you know. There's not turning back now. I mean, there's...

Appelbaum: I know that you have...an awareness of who you are, and you are, you have a genuine kind of humility in keeping your ego in check, but I just wonder whether you're aware of the stature that you have...for other musicians, for other people, how you inspire them?

Rollins: Uh, I try not to, and I've always–I mean, this is something before my recent realizations. No, no, I don't want to think about that. Again, because, Larry, I know what great people have done. I've been, I've been around [John] Coltrane. I've been around Miles [Davis]. I've been around Monk. I know what great guys have accomplished. So, I have to put myself against them and say, "Well, gee, now, can I be great?" No, it's a lot of bullshit. I, I don't, I don't care about...I mean, if people think that about me, "Okay great, great, that's fine." I mean, but I don't...I have no comment. I have no conception of their thoughts about me. It doesn't mean anything to me, see. I'm still living in myself, trying to get myself right before thinking, "Wow, gee...Jo Jones really thought I was a great guy. So, wow, maybe I'm doing something–" I don't care about who thought what. I care about what I know, and I know I'm still not there. I'm doing a lot of stuff I need to do, man...see. Once I get that done, I can worry about the rest, but, but...you know.

Appelbaum: The best thing you can be is who you are.

Rollins: Only thing you can be. It's the only thing you can be is who you are, and once you address that then you're going to be the best you can be, and that's all we can be. You want to be the best Larry you can be, see. I want to be the best Sonny I can be, and once we do that, man, we're, we're safe. There's nothing to fear. There's no, nobody can hurt you. Nobody can kill you. Nothing, man...'cause you're living for, you're doing what you have to do, man. It's, I mean it's, it's, it's so beautiful it's incredible. But uh...it's a wonderful gift, man. That's, that's why I say that we had be-, being born man, and being sentient beings here, too. I mean, this is...this is out of the world, man. See, that's why life is beautiful. There's nothing that can happen in life that would change–now, I'll just say this last thing. I say–I have these friends that have this saying "it's all good." You've heard that, "it's all good"–well, I believe that, too, and uh I'm gonna be tested on that. I'm sure I will be, because I say, "it's all good." Whatever happens to me personally, anything that happens to me personally, is good, because I...it's part of what I have brought on myself in some way, and I have to deal with the things that happen to me, you know. Without going too far into metaphysics and all that, but whatever happens to me–it's good. I deserve it for some reason...see. So, this is the test I'm gonna have to deal with, man, because something catastrophic can happen, then I'm gonna have to say, "Well, gee, is it really all good?" You know, then, then that's gonna be a test for me. I think I'm ready to say that, and I'm ready to be tested, man, see, because I believe that. Nothing can happen to me now that's "bad." Nothing can happen to me now, man, 'cause I'm–you know why? 'Cause I'm trying to do the best thing for me, and "the best thing for me" means I'm not hurting you. When you go out the do I'm not gonna say, "Wow, this guy's got a $100 bill in his pocket. Let me pull that out while he goes–" I'm

not doing that...to anybody, in any way, anything close to that. So, therefore, once I know then I'm, I'm cool, man. I, I don't care what–nobody can fuck with me or nothing. What can you do? I'm straight. I'm straight with myself. That's all it's about.

Appelbaum: There's a great old song, and I think it's appropriate for me to tell you: I'm Glad There Is You.

Rollins: Well...[chuckling]. See, now, he's gonna say, see that's, the problem with that is that you are making this ego thing again. "Well, gee, Sonny, you're...you're a good guy, and I'm glad–"

Appelbaum: I'm just sharing my feelings.

Rollins: Yeah, but I mean it's a, it's a, sharing in that way you are putting me under the test to say, "Well, gee, man, I'm gonna put it on Sonny now to say, 'Hey, man, you're really a good guy.'" Well, okay, but it's...I could, I could take the test. I'll take the test.

Appelbaum: [chuckling]

Rollins: Okay?

Appelbaum: Yeah.

Rollins: Because, I don't think, "I'm a good guy." No, no. I don't think that way. Inside of me: that's where I want to be a good guy. When I think that, then I'm cool. Other than that, if you say, "Oh, Sonny, you're really a great guy, man. Sonny, you're really a great musician." If I don't feel it completely then...you know, it doesn't, I got to feel it here. I've got do it here. I've got to be true to Sonny, and that's my uh 80 years on this planet have gotten me now, see.

Appelbaum: That's still...I'm grateful. That's all I'll say.

Rollins: Well–

Appelbaum: I'm not saying you're a great person. I'm saying you're a great musician–even though I think so–I'm not saying that. I'm just saying I'm grateful that you took the time to talk with us today...

Rollins: Okay, thank you.

Appelbaum: And I'm grateful for being able to tell you that.

Rollins: Okay, well, I, I, I, I hope I've said something which...you know, like my music you'd say, "I like–" Okay, good. I hope, I hope I have, my music says something to you,

and evidently it does, and I'm grateful for that. But, see, most of that is–90% remember?–a gift. So, I can't feel, "Oh, I'm a great musician." No. That was a gift, see. I was given that talent. I didn't work hard for it. I was given that. So, it keeps me in my place, too.

Appelbaum: Well, let's just say that I'm especially glad for the gift.

Rollins: Well, thank you. I'm glad for the gift of you asking me questions. I'm glad for the gift of my friend here. I'm glad for the gift of my–you see? It's all, we're all...

Appelbaum: It's all a gift.

Rollins: It's all a gift. And we all have it, man, and that's why when you said, "Do I want to–glad to be a musician? What does it feel–?" Anybody is, is uh, you know, the, the, whatever we're here for. Who knows what the fuck it is? I don't know, but I know that it's about inside of me. I know can't put it on the world, and say, "Oh, the world is fucked up?" No, no. I gotta make me straight. That's all it's about. I know that.

Appelbaum: Thank you.

Rollins: Okay. Thank you, Larry.

[End of Tape 3--Interview Complete]

(Transcribed by Matt Lodato)