



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

ART FARMER
NEA Jazz Master (1999)

Interviewee: Art Farmer (August 21, 1928 – October 4, 1999)
Interviewer: Dr. Anthony Brown
Dates: June 29-30, 1995
Repository: Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Description: Transcript, 96 pp.

Brown: Today is June 29, 1995. This is the Jazz Oral History Program interview for the Smithsonian Institution with Art Farmer in one of his homes, at least his New York based apartment, conducted by Anthony Brown. Mr. Farmer, if I can call you Art, would you please state your full name?

Farmer: My full name is Arthur Stewart Farmer.

Brown: And your date and place of birth?

Farmer: The date of birth is August 21, 1928, and I was born in a town called Council Bluffs, Iowa.

Brown: What is that near?

Farmer: It across the Mississippi River from Omaha. It's like a suburb of Omaha.

Brown: Do you know the circumstances that brought your family there?

Farmer: No idea. In fact, when my brother and I were four years old, we moved Arizona.

Brown: Could you talk about Addison please?

Farmer: Addison, yes well, we were twin brothers. I was born one hour in front of him, and he was larger than me, a bit. And we were very close.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: So, you were fraternal twins? As opposed to identical twins?

Farmer: Yes. Right.

Brown: Could you state your mother and father's names?

Farmer: My mother's name was Hazel and her maiden name was Stewart. My father's name was James Arthur.

Brown: Is that S-T-E-W-A-R-T?

Farmer: Yes.

Brown: And that's the same spelling for your middle name?

Farmer: Right.

Brown: Were you the oldest children of this marriage?

Farmer: Yes, I have a sister who still lives in Arizona by the name of Mauvalene Thomas, and she's two years younger than I am. That would make her 64. I have a half-sister in Los Angeles. We share the same father, so that's why she's our half sister. And that's the closest family I have.

Brown: Do you have any recollections of your upbringing in Iowa?

Farmer: [chuckles] Not really, 'cause I was so young. When we moved, I was four. The recollections are like playing with the babysitter or something like that when I was just a little kid.

Brown: What were the occupations of your mother and father?

Farmer: My father died in an accident. He was working in some kind of a steel foundry in Omaha, and there was some accident there, and he burnt and died a few days later. My mother worked as a... what's it called? Those people that fix feet.

Brown: A podiatrist?

Farmer: Yes, right. That's where she worked.

Brown: So, she was a medical doctor?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: No, I mean like, not as a doctor, but someone who takes corns and calluses off the feet. Not a doctor. She also worked as a teacher's help when we moved to Arizona.

Brown: What precipitated the move to Arizona?

Farmer: My mother and my father separated, and my grandmother was suffering from some kind of sickness like asthma or something like that, and she was advised to go out West where it's very dry, for some reason, so we moved up there, moved to Phoenix.

Brown: When you say "we" that's at that time...?

Farmer: That's my mother, my grandfather, my grandmother, my brother and my sister and I.

Brown: So, this constituted the family that you grew up in?

Farmer: Yes.

Brown: What were the names of your grandparents?

Farmer: My grandfather's name was Abner Stewart, and my grandmother's name was Mattie, until they got married of course. And my grandmother, her mother was Indian.

Brown: Which tribe?

Farmer: I'm not sure. I would just make a guess, but I have no real foundation to say.

Brown: 'Cause in the previous interviews, you've claimed Blackfoot.

Farmer: Yeah, I've said that. It seems like I heard that somewhere, but I don't have any documentation for that, really. All I know is that the way the story came down to me was that my grandmother's mother was a member of an Indian tribe, and she was so mistreated by the white people, that she went with the black people. And that's the way everything started.

Brown: What did your grandparents do? What were their occupations?

Farmer: My grandfather on my mother's side was a minister in the AME church, and my grandmother named Mattie, she was like a teacher. So I heard, she was the first black woman to get a degree in Iowa.

Brown: Is that a college degree?

Farmer: Yeah, it wasn't called college, it was called normal school.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Brown: [chuckles] Okay.

Farmer: [chuckles] Yeah, okay.

Brown: So, perhaps you can talk about your earliest recollections in Arizona. What town? Was it in Phoenix?

Farmer: Phoenix, Arizona.

Brown: So, you were in the city? I guess it was a city by then.

Farmer: Yes, well, it was sort of a town. It was a nice little town. I remember the town, Phoenix, at that time had wooden sidewalks in the center of the city, like where the jail and the courthouse and all of that was. Wooden sidewalks just like in Western movies. It was a peaceful place. Like I said, we moved out there when we were four years old, and you could still see Indians walking around. They would come to town from the reservation, and they had a certain attitude about property. They would come by, and if they felt like sitting down, they would sit down right on your doorstep. They figured, well, everything is free, nobody owns anything. That's the way they felt about land.

Brown: Did you talk to them?

Farmer: No.

Brown: Any interactions with them?

Farmer: No, I had no relations, but I remember when we were in high school, this was in the 40s, the schools were segregated. So, we went to the black high school, and we liked playing football, but we got the hand-me-down uniforms from the white school. We couldn't play football against the white school. We played football against the Indians, and they were like, most of them were grown men [chuckles]. And the playing field was like a field that had previously been a cotton field, so it had stalks sticking up from the ground. So, like, if you get tackled, you'll hit the ground, those stalks will tear you up. That's the way we grew up there. It was like in the South.

Brown: A very conspicuously segregated society?

Farmer: Yeah, I wouldn't say intentionally conspicuous, but that's the way it was. Like if you wanted to go to a movie, you had to sit in a certain section in the balcony, what we called the "crow's nest." If the movie didn't have that section, then you just didn't go in there.

Brown: How large was the black population in Phoenix?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: At this time, it wasn't very large, but I couldn't give you any number that had any meaning.

Brown: Was it separated white, black and Indian?

Farmer: Yeah, basically the segregation was white, black, Indian and Mexican. The Mexicans went to the same school that the whites went to, and the Indians had their own school on the reservation. So, we had our school, like Booker T. Washington Grammar School and George Carver High School.

Brown: And were the teachers in the school black?

Farmer: Yes, they were all black.

Brown: So it was a black run school?

Farmer: Yes, black teachers, black principal. The first white teacher that I ever saw was a lady that used to come by the grammar school to give piano lessons once a week. She was very nice.

Brown: Was the black community a close-knit community?

Farmer: Close, yes.

Brown: It was? So, you knew basically everyone?

Farmer: It was based around the church, as usual.

Brown: And your grandfather was...?

Farmer: He was a minister. We moved out there because he had been assigned to a church there.

Brown: And where did you live?

Farmer: We lived in the parsonage. The parsonage is always next door to the church. We lived there until he died. After we had been out there for three or four years, he died.

Brown: If you left when you were four, it was when you were seven or eight?

Farmer: Yes, right.

Brown: So, essentially, the head of the household became your grandmother?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: Yes, my grandmother.

Brown: Did this have an adverse impact on your livelihood at that point?

Farmer: I don't know. No, because I was still very young. When he died, I was like six or seven, less than ten years old anyway, so I wasn't doing anything but getting up and going to school. So, it had no effect at all.

Brown: Do you remember suffering any of the indignation of segregated society or racism at an early age?

Farmer: At that early an age, no. I just remembered somehow you get this knowledge that you're not supposed to do this, you're not supposed to do that, and whatever people tell you at that age, there's a tendency just to ask why, maybe, but you'll just accept it or something. It didn't have any real impact on me until I got older.

Brown: What part of town was the so-called black section of town? Where were you located? North, east, south, west?

Farmer: There were two parts. The city was separated by a street called Central Avenue, so the east of Central Avenue was the east side, and west was the west side. At one time, when we first lived there, we lived on the west side, and then we lived on the east side. It was a pretty close-knit community of people, like I said, based around the church mostly.

Brown: The church figured very largely in your young life?

Farmer: Yes, very largely. We used to go to church on Sunday like two, three times a day.

Brown: Whoa.

Farmer: I had to go to Sunday school in the morning and then the regular church at 11 o'clock, and then the evening church at 6 o'clock.

Brown: How about Wednesday night prayer meeting?

Farmer: No, we didn't have to do that one.

Brown: What was the denomination? Was it AME?

Farmer: AME, yeah.

Brown: Like others, was this where you began your musical career, or was it in school?
For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: Well actually, I began my musical career out of school because this was the time of the WPA, and everybody had a job. If you were a music teacher and you didn't have a job, then they would give you a job teaching the kids. No, I'm jumping the gun. Actually, my music studying began in the grammar school where this white lady came by once a week and gave lessons on the piano, gave us an assignment to work on for the coming week. That was my first lesson.

Brown: Was that your choice to play piano?

Farmer: Yeah, because we had a piano. Actually, my mother used to play for the choir before I started school, and I would go from the house to the church because we didn't have the piano in the house at that time, we'd go to the church, and she would practice the hymns for the coming week. I would sit there with her, and after she got up from the piano, I would sit down and try to play them too.

[End of disc one, track one]

Farmer: I had said that my first experience with music was trying to copy my mother when she practiced Sunday's hymns for the next church service, and I was very amazed and saddened when I put my hands on the keyboard and the sound that came out just didn't add up the way it did when she was playing. Then I found out you have to take lessons, which I was very glad to do. That's how it all got started. But, actually, in my family, especially on my mother's side, it was sort of tradition to learn how to play the piano. There were a lot of people in the family, regardless of what their work or profession was, who started the piano just for their own enjoyment. A lot of them grew up to be lawyers or doctors or whatever middle class thing they wanted to get into, but then they would play the piano for their own enjoyment. Mostly classical music, but then there was one who used to play the trombone with the Earl Hines Orchestra. He was called "Preacher" in the band because he always sounded like a preacher. He said that he went in the band because he couldn't get any money preaching, and he had a family to raise. At that time in Chicago, there were places like the Sunset Terrace where you could go in, no the Grand Terrace, where you could go in and work for months. The Earl Hines Band worked there for years, and they would go out on a tour once a year, but other than that, they were right in this club. That was very convenient for him. He was the only pro. The other ones, say like I have a cousin in Detroit, and she's some kind of doctor, and she says, "Well, you know, we're Stewarts, and we always think about the bottom line" [laughs].

Brown: [Laughs] Okay. What was the name of the uncle?

Farmer: Kenneth. He played with Earl Hines and another band named Sammy Stewart...

Brown: Not related?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: No, no. Just another bandleader around Chicago. But he was there at such an interesting time, like he went to high school with Lionel Hampton. I asked him, “What kind of guy was Lionel Hampton?” ‘cause I worked with Lionel after that, and he said, “Oh, he was just as crazy then as he is now” [laughs].

Brown: [Laughs] So, you were learning music both taking lessons and hearing it in the church, what other music were you hearing growing up?

Farmer: The radio. At that time, dance bands were on the radio all the time, like Benny Goodman and Duke Ellington. There was always some broadcast going on, on the radio. Dance music was the pop music of that time, speaking of the 30s and the 40s, so that’s what everyone was listening to.

Brown: Do you remember where those broadcasts were coming from?

Farmer: They were coming from various places, wherever the band was playing. I remember hearing Duke Ellington’s band was coming from a place here in New York called the 400 Club.

Brown: And you were hearing that in Phoenix, Arizona?

Farmer: Yes, Phoenix, Arizona. I heard Stan Kenton’s band coming from a place called Balboa Beach somewhere around Los Angeles. There were a lot of places that were having broadcasts, so you could always pick up somebody on the radio. Other than that, you just listened to who came into town.

Brown: Were you dissuaded, or was there any bias against secular music or dance music, as opposed to classical or sacred music, church music?

Farmer: Not much, but one memory that I have, which will never leave me, was the principal of my school in Phoenix, and he meant well. He said, “So, you want to be a musician?” and I said, “Yes,” and he said, “Well, just don’t be one of those barnstormers like Louis Armstrong” [laughs]. He didn’t realize how great Louis Armstrong was because there was a certain stigma attached to jazz in any middle class society, black too.

Brown: Since you bring up the issue of classes in the society, in the black neighborhood where you grew up, were all economic levels represented?

Farmer: Uh, yes, yes, from the doctors on down to the hard carrier, you know, the normal manual laborer. Sure.

Brown: So, they constituted the congregation of the church?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: Right.

Brown: You had contact with a variety of people?

Farmer: Yeah, really, 'cause I used to sell papers. I remember I sold *The Chicago Defender* and *The Pittsburgh Courier*, and there was one part of the town where the migrant workers lived. They had little, small houses that they lived in, and I would go around and sell them papers. After they got through work in the daytime, I could hear them playing their guitars and singing the blues. That was my introduction to the blues, was hearing these people sing and play. They were doing it just for the love of it. They weren't thinking about getting a gig somewhere because their gig was picking cotton or something like that.

Brown: You were talking earlier while we were taking a break about some more details about your family about the other professions that they had, that they were doctors, again, you mentioned that there were ministers in your family. You also mentioned that your grandmother established a school?

Farmer: Yes, she had a night school in Phoenix teaching black adults how to read. A lot of them would say, I can't read, but I can read the Bible, or I can't read, but I can count. But that wasn't real, so she had classes every night for them. Of course, she was getting paid to do this by the WPA.

Brown: And your mother also worked in school.

Farmer: My mother worked in school as a substitute because she had gone to school in Iowa, but she had not graduated, so she didn't have her papers. When one of the regular teachers didn't show up for work, she would work in their place, like a teacher's helper or something like that. A lot of the families in Chicago and Detroit, they went to school there and they all got good educations somehow, and they become the real what you would call middle class professionals.

Brown: That's where your mother's family is from, the Stewarts?

Farmer: Yes, right.

Brown: There was mention of Cincinnati. What's the connection with Cincinnati?

Farmer: My mother was born in Cincinnati. Her father's name was Stewart, that's where the Stewart comes into my family 'cause my father's name is Farmer. Somehow, the Stewarts had a knack of getting into schools...

Brown: Speaking of schools, looking back, how would you evaluate your grammar school education?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: I would say it was good. Actually, in Arizona, in Phoenix, the education was better there than it was in Los Angeles. When I got to Los Angeles, my brother and I finished high school in Los Angeles, and we just breezed through it, but the stuff that they put on us in Phoenix, I would get a headache, that math and stuff [laughs].

Brown: [Laughs] When you were first starting to play music, you were imitating your mother, what other music caught your ear? You were listening to jazz?

Farmer: Yeah, listening to dance band music on the radio. That caught my ear.

Brown: Did you attempt to play this music by ear?

Farmer: No, at this time, because I was just playing the lessons that the teacher gave me on the piano, but a few years later, first of all, someone gave me a violin, which I practiced and studied on that from another WPA teacher for a couple years. Then, there was a Catholic church in the neighbor, and the priest in charge of the church was a very socially conscious person, very active, started all kinds of programs. He started the marching band, so I was in the marching band, and I started on the bass tuba. That's the thing that wraps around you...

Brown: Oh, the sousaphone.

Farmer: Sousaphone, right. First of all, I heard the guys jamming before the rehearsal started, and that seemed so exciting. I wanted to be a part of that, but there were no horns available but the tuba, so I took that one. Later on, the Second World War started and guys went to the service, so I was able to take another horn. That's how I started on the trumpet.

Brown: Do you remember the name of this priest?

Farmer: Yeah, his name was Father Emmitt McLaughlin. He was a white man, but in this black neighborhood, he had a mission, let's say. He started a hospital, a nursing school, and a housing project. This band was just an offshoot of other activities. It was very beneficial.

Brown: Do you remember any of the names of the teachers you had, your piano teacher or any other music teachers?

Farmer: I remember the name of the man that I used to take violin lessons from. I know his name was Mr. Reynolds. He said when you hold the violin, you have to hold your left hand like you're clutching your pear from the tree [laughs]. That's gonna stay with me forever. I thought that was very poetic. But like I said, there was a certain stigma to playing music, playing jazz. Some people say that's the devil's music.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Brown: You actually heard people tell you this coming up?

Farmer: Yeah, they'd say that's the devil's music.

Brown: So, there was some biased against it?

Farmer: Yeah, in the black community, that was the devil's music. You could only play music to praising God, for the praise of God in the church.

Brown: Like any precocious youngster, that probably inspired you to want to play it [laughs]. Do you remember when you first, well, you said you heard the jam session, heard the band playing...

Farmer: Yeah, I heard the kids jamming, I said, that's great.

Brown: That's what turned it around for you. You knew what type of music you wanted to play at that point.

Farmer: It was so exciting.

Brown: What age did you start music, and what age, at this point, did you hear this band?

Farmer: I started the piano when I was either six or seven. When I heard the band, I must have been about thirteen.

Brown: By this time, you were playing piano, violin, and now sousaphone.

Farmer: Yeah, gradually, I was able to grab a cornet. That was the first horn available 'cause the guys were getting drafted. But before I had the cornet, I was playing the sousaphone, and the other sousaphone player was a man named John Henry Lewis, who used to be world's light heavyweight champion. He was retired, and we were sitting up there and he was playing the tuba too. It was a nice time.

Brown: Was your brother, Addison, at this point also involved in music?

Farmer: Yes, he was involved in music too. He was playing the baritone horn in this marching band. When the guys went to the army, I was able to get away from the bass horn and get a trumpet. Me and my brother and some other guys our age, we organized a dance band in the high school, and that's when things really got started.

Brown: What kind of engagements did you play, school dances?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: School dances and normal dances. We played in little bars and lounges and things.

Brown: Did you have societies like Elks Club or Masons?

Farmer: Yeah, we played in Elks, Masons.

Brown: Were you playing for predominately black or did you play for white audiences too?

Farmer: Yes. Some, some. I remember the main dance hall there where all the big bands came to play on the one-nighters, we played there. One night, a very nice band lead by Artie Shaw came and played, and they played from 9-1, and then we played what's called the "swing shift" from 1-5. So, we were up there playing, and all these guys from Artie Shaw's band were standing around listening to us, and we thought, well we must be really good [laughs]. Roy Eldridge was a member of the band, and he came to the little joint where I was playing. He'd sit around a while, had a couple beers, and then he got up and played the drums. He was enjoying himself so much, he went to his room, he was staying in the doctor's house 'cause there was no black hotels, he went and got his horn and came back and played. Now, here's one of the greatest trumpet players in the world coming in and playing with me. I was 99% sure ignorance, but that's the way people were. It was great.

Brown: Did you talk to him about playing trumpet?

Farmer: Yes, I talked to him. I asked him whatever I could ask, not so much 'cause you have to know something to even ask the right questions.

Brown: Do you remember anything he told you during that first encounter?

Farmer: No, no, I just remember the first question I asked was, "How long have you been playing the trumpet?" He said, "As long as baseball" [laughs]. But he was not a very nice guy.

Brown: [Laughs] Okay. So, that must've been the first time you heard a professional jazz band live, is that correct?

Farmer: No, the first professional band I heard was Jimmie Lunceford. When I heard the sound of that trumpet section, that changed my life.

Brown: Do you remember when they played and what year that was?

Farmer: It was in the early 40s when they played in this place called the Riverside Ballroom in Phoenix where all the bands came to play.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Brown: Was it a segregated audience?

Farmer: No, not really. Anyone could come into the dance. Later on, I played in segregated places with Lionel Hampton's band where one night was for white and one night for colored. Or else there was a rope going down the dance hall, but in this case, it wasn't like that. Segregation was in the schools and the theaters and the churches.

Brown: So, Lunceford's band came through, Artie Shaw's band...

Farmer: Jay McShann, Buddy Johnson, [and] some others. I can't remember the name right now. The main ones, the great bands, like Jimmie Lunceford, is one of the greatest bands that ever had been. Artie Shaw's was a great band. These are really fantastic people.

Brown: When you were with this band, did you go on tour? Were you able to leave the Phoenix area?

Farmer: Well, yes. We would stay in the state of Arizona and go around to other towns and play a dance here and there, like the Elks or something like that, but we didn't leave the state of Arizona. We were like 14, 15, 16 [years old]. There were a couple of guys who were older than us, but they had day jobs, and they couldn't be going around. We went and spoke to Jimmie Lunceford, who was a great, big time bandleader, and we told him that we had our band and we wanted to go on the road. He said, "You do? Alright, practice and improve yourself. Here's the name and address of my booking agent."

Brown: He was very helpful.

Farmer: He was gracious enough to give us that information.

Brown: Did you follow up?

Farmer: No, we didn't do it.

Brown: Who handled the management of the band, and if you recall, how much were you making?

Farmer: The person who handled the management was one of the members, the trombone player, who was one of the older fellows. He was probably between 5-10 years older than we were. He would make the negotiations, get the money and split it up. We might have made something like \$5 a night.

Brown: \$5 a night? That's not bad for a high school band?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: Yeah.

Brown: Were you a record collector at this time?

Farmer: No, I wouldn't consider myself to be a record collector. We would just buy the records that we really wanted to hear, like Jimmie Lunceford, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Jay McShann, Billy Eckstine, [and] Earl Hines. Earl Hines had a great band with Billy Eckstine singing, then he started his own band, which was at the beginning of the bebop time.

Brown: What tunes were you playing in the band?

Farmer: You could go to the music store and buy an arrangement, what was called a "stock arrangement." It cost 75 cents, and you would get an arrangement written exactly the way the bands recorded it, like Duke Ellington's "Take the A-Train." The whole arrangement is there, plus the solos are written out, so if you can't think of anything to play, well just play what's written there. That was the start to me.

Brown: Were you already starting to improvise?

Farmer: Trying to improvise, just play whatever comes to your head. I didn't have any idea of what the ingredients were required to play within the harmonic form of a piece. I just played whatever came to my head.

Brown: Who were some of the trumpet players that you favored at that time?

Farmer: The first trumpet that I favored was Harry James because he was the one that you could hear on the radio all the time. We didn't hear Louis Armstrong on the radio, not in Phoenix. But Harry James was the most popular trumpet player in the United States, and Miles said he favored Harry James too because that's what we heard. Then later on, you hear other people, like Roy Eldridge came to town. But Harry James was a good player, and I'm not gonna put him down 'cause he was white.

Brown: Do you remember anybody that was in the Lunceford trumpet section or in that band?

Farmer: Yeah, I played with some of the guys later, Snooky Young, lead trumpet player. Gerald Wilson, I played with his band out in California. Trummy Young, trombone player, I played with him on the jazz festival in New York. James Crawford, the drummer, I played with him in the pit band here in New York City years ago. That's like playing with your idols.

Brown: Anything else we could talk about before we leave Phoenix and talk about your first trip to California?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: No, we were waiting to get some jobs outside of Arizona, but they never came, so my brother and I decided to go to California. That's when that part of our life started. We went to California one summer. We had told our mother we were going on vacation for two weeks, and that's what we thought it would be. But when we got there, there was so much going on. There's no way we could go back to Phoenix.

Brown: How did you get there?

Farmer: My brother went on the train because he had the bass, and he had it in a big wooden case. I went by car with another guy. We got to Central Avenue, and it was really jumping.

Brown: Do you remember the day that you got there?

Farmer: No, I don't remember. We would've gone a year earlier, but they had the Zoot Suit Riots.

Brown: That would've been the summer of '44?

Farmer: Yeah.

Brown: So, you went in the summer of '45.

Farmer: Yeah, that sounds like it. Everything was so happening, we couldn't go back, so we just stayed there and managed to survive while you could still get a job because a lot of guys were in the army. We would get jobs playing, [and] if we didn't get jobs playing, we'd get jobs doing manual labor. We finished our last year of high school at Thomas Jefferson. I remember my mother said if that's what you wanna do, but just finish high school at least. So, I promised her I would do that, and we did it. Funny thing was that the school administration thought we were staying over there with our parents, but we were just staying by ourselves, so we would write our own excuses [laughs].

Brown: Where were you living in Los Angeles?

Farmer: We would rent rooms. People would have a spare furnished room. We managed to keep that together. I remember when Charlie Parker came out there with Dizzy Gillespie. He stayed over in our place 'cause he was a nomad.

Brown: [Laughs] Okay, well we'll get to that because I know that's gonna be a story. How did you find work as a musician if you had not been to Los Angeles? Did you have any connections?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: No, but you just hang out on the street and meet guys your age, first of all. And then you go around to sessions and play some, and people hear you, and the word goes around. I remember I was in high school, and Fletcher Henderson's brother, Horace Henderson came by the high school one day and asked me did I want to work with him.

Brown: He came to the high school recruiting for his band?

Farmer: Yeah.

Brown: Amazing!

Farmer: Because a lot of guys were in the army, and big bands could still get jobs because people still hadn't lost their jobs in the factories and war jobs. My brother got more jobs than me because he was a bass player. [In] a lot of places, they would have a trio or duo. They'd always have piano and bass. But at some places, it was kind of hard to get jobs as a trumpet player, unless you're with a big band. They had blues bands, but the blues bands always had a tenor and a guitar.

Brown: Do you remember where your apartment was or where you were located? Were you on Central Avenue?

Farmer: Yeah, when we first went there, we were on Central Avenue. We stayed at a place called the Dunbar Hotel, which was a famous place. All the big time people stayed there. Since we were twins, we checked in as one [laughs], so we didn't have to pay for a double. So, we checked in as just one guy, and we would go in separately.

Brown: [Laughs] You guys worked that!

Farmer: We had a lot of nerve.

Brown: You must have been, what, 16 or 17?

Farmer: Yeah, 16, I think. It was rough sometimes. We didn't have money all the time. If we didn't have it, we just went hungry.

Brown: What other kinds of jobs did you do?

Farmer: I remember we had a job in a cold storage plant stacking up crates of fruit and vegetables. That's all I can remember now, is that job. Other than that, we'd just wait on a gig. We might get a gig at least once a week, and sometimes for a whole week with a big band. Of course, sometimes you worked and you didn't get paid.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: Here you are in Los Angeles, you and your brother, sixteen, maybe seventeen, going to high school, supporting yourselves, trying to start a profession as a musician, that's amazing.

Farmer: Yeah, well no one never said you can't do it. As long as people say you can't do anything, you figure if you wanna do it bad enough, you'll do it. But I remember going to school hungry a lot of times, making the whole day and going back to the house. I figured it wouldn't last forever, and it didn't. As long as you know what you want to do with your life, you figure this is just a step in the right direction. Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't. You could be making mistakes too. 16, 17 year olds, what do they know? All you know is what you want or what you think you want.

Brown: That was the summer of '45. In the winter of '45, something very important happened in Los Angeles.

Farmer: Yeah, Dizzy and Bird came out there and played at Billy Berg's , and we were out there when the first note was played. They let us in; we were too young to get in there, but we were tall so we got in that night. The place was packed, and all the cats from Central Avenue were in there. We listened to the music. Of course, we were flabbergasted, dumbfounded.

Brown: Had you heard bebop or modern jazz before you heard it live?

Farmer: I had heard Dizzy on records with Billy Eckstine, and I heard Charlie Parker on records with Jay McShann. That's all I'd heard.

Brown: You hadn't heard sessions like "Salt Peanuts" or "Dizzy Atmosphere" or Shaw 'Nuff"?

Farmer: Yeah, "Shaw 'Nuff" and "Hot House," we heard that that first summer when we got to Los Angeles. That's true. That was a mystery. I was dumbfounded about where these guys got these notes 'cause they were different notes from what the swing guys were playing.

Brown: What about that velocity?

Farmer: Oh yeah, that grabs any kid. It sounded impossible, actually. It turned the whole town upside down, and all the kids tried to copy them. We got our little groups together and rehearsed.

Brown: Do you remember any of the details of that first night at Billy Berg's? Do you remember how the band came out, or what were [was] the sequence of events?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: No, because I wasn't there when the band first got on the stand 'cause Billy Berg's was in Hollywood, and we lived in what is called the South Central district now. We had to get a ride to go all the way out to Hollywood, and by the time we got there, they had already played a set. We just stood around inside and listened to a set, and then we had to go back to our neighborhood because we were dependent on our ride. You couldn't walk from Hollywood to South Central.

Brown: Did you go back any other nights?

Farmer: Yeah, we went back some other nights, but some nights we would go back and weren't able to get in because whoever was on the door would say you guys are too young or something like that. But because we were tall for our age, we were able to get in some nights. If we couldn't get in, we'd just go back to South Central and go to the clubs there. On Central Avenue, there were a few clubs that we could go to.

Brown: Some writers claim that that was not a successful gig insofar as critical attention and actually the attendance.

Farmer: That's true. It wasn't successful. They didn't do the whole period that they were booked for. Billy Bird paid them off, and I think the last two weeks they didn't do because business fell off after the first crowds coming out of curiosity. But then business fell off, so he paid them off. Dizzy went back East, and Bird stayed out there for a while. Bird sold his ticket and stayed out there. That's how I met him. It wasn't no big deal to meet these guys. They were part of the community, Dizzy, Bird, Miles. Nobody was like, get away kid! Nothing like that.

Brown: Do you remember that first meeting with Bird?

Farmer: Yeah, very well.

Brown: What was that like?

Farmer: By this time, Dizzy had left and Bird stayed out there. He was over to a friend's house, and he was staying there... He was a tenor player named Gene Montgomery. We used to stop by his house on the way to our house after school, and Bird was there. Gene introduced us to Bird, that's how we first met. He was a friendly, warm person. Very nice guy. One of my experiences was sometimes he borrowed money from my brother, who usually had a job, like maybe five or ten dollars. He said, "Let me have five dollars. I'll give it back tomorrow." And he always did. He developed a bad reputation, but I didn't see none of that. Later on, we rented this room that had two twin beds and a couch, and he would come there to sleep on the couch, just like anybody who didn't have a place to stay. He didn't have a place to stay, and he stayed with us, and then he'd go stay with somebody else.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: What did he show up at the door with?

Farmer: With his horn.

Brown: That's it? A suitcase, maybe?

Farmer: No, I don't remember seeing a suitcase. He had his horn and a black or blue suit on. He didn't stay there, like, for a week or something, maybe a couple nights. It was not a good time for him. One day, there was a black weekly newspaper called *The Los Angeles Sentinel*, and there was a lady who wrote the Entertainment section named Althea Gibson. She made a review of the band 'cause Bird had a band with Miles in it, and my brother was working in the band at an after-hours club called the Finale Club. She went over there and checked out the band, and her boyfriend was sort of a swing time trumpet player named Dukesy Williams. So, they went over and checked out the band, and she wrote the review in the *Sentinel* and said, "This Charlie Parker, he carries himself with the air of a prophet, but he's really not a prophet. And he has a little wispy, black boy playing the trumpet. He's got a moon-faced bass player with an indefatigable arm." She didn't have nothing really good to say about anyone. I bought the paper and saw that, and me and my brother went right over to where Bird was staying at James' house and woke him up. We said, "Hey man, wake up! Look here. You got to read what this bitch said about you, man!" He's still in bed and he read it, and he said, "Man, maybe she's okay. The wrong people got to her first." He looked very sad. Then he said, "You know, Dizzy left me out here, and I'm catching it." It was his choice to stay out there, but he turned it around that time.

Brown: Did you talk about music with Bird, or do you remember your conversations with Charlie Parker?

Farmer: No, we never talked about music.

[End of disc 1]

He didn't enjoy that at all, and he was very proud. I remember one day before Miles came out there, he showed me a picture and said, "This is my band," and Miles was in the band. They had played at 52nd Street before he came out to California. Later, Miles came out there with Benny Carter's band, and he came by the same house looking for Bird, but by that time, Bird had moved on someplace else. He said, "You know, I'd go any place where Charlie Parker is. I would even go to Africa" [laughs].

Brown: I guess Africa wasn't too popular back then.

Farmer: No [laughs].

Brown: So, that was the first time you met Miles?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: Yeah.

Brown: And you met him because he was looking for Bird?

Farmer: Yeah, he was looking for Bird.

Brown: Had you heard the records that he had recorded with Bird, “Ko-Ko,” “Billie’s Bounce”?

Farmer: No, actually “Billy’s Bounce,” no, I hadn’t heard that. I’d heard the records with Bird and Diz made, but I hadn’t heard Miles yet.

Brown: Did you talk to Diz when he was out?

Farmer: No, that time I didn’t talk to him at all. I didn’t get to Dizzy. I met him later.

Brown: Do you remember anything else about the meeting with Miles?

Farmer: No, for that first day is all that I can remember. I met him at the house, but I heard him talk one day at the musicians’ union. They have black musicians’ union and [a] white musicians’ union. As you come there with a band and you’re gonna play more than one week, you have to put in your card. You have to register with the local [union]. So, Miles was there. Next thing I know it was damn near like he was holding a press conference. All the cats were sitting around. He was telling them what going on back east, like this band and that band. I’m just standing there flabbergasted. Back east was like heaven if you’re on the west coast, mecca. He was cool. We didn’t ever get into any real conversations, we’d just run into each other on jam sessions.

I was a shy guy. If I wasn’t shy, I could’ve started more stuff. I didn’t know what questions to ask really. When I was just in the proximity, I would listen. That’s what I was really doing. I figured if you don’t know anything, keep your mouth closed and maybe you’ll learn something. That’s the way I looked at it. That was our meeting and ever since then, whenever I saw him, he was always friendly. He wasn’t the guy that the press said he developed into, as far as I was concerned. Somebody who was very anti-social, that kind of thing. No, not at all. He was a nice person.

Brown: You mentioned the black union. Was that someplace that you went very early on upon arrival in Los Angeles?

Farmer: When we were still in Phoenix, we heard about the union, so we wanted to be members of the musicians’ union. We went over there to the headquarters of the musicians’ union in Phoenix, but they had no black members. We said we want to join the union, and they said no. Then we wrote letters back to the headquarters of the union. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

and to the president saying we want to join the union and they're telling us we can't join. I don't remember whether we wrote to Chicago, Caesar Petrillo, and then he wrote back, "Don't worry, go over there and tell them again." So, we went over there to join, 586 in Phoenix. When we went to Los Angeles, the black local was 767, the white local was 47. We went to file our transfer, so we did. Guys were coming in. I saw Nat Cole there, Benny Carter, real big time people. If you come into the jurisdiction, you have to file your transfer, otherwise you can get fined. The union was strong then. When Taft-Harley came in to being, the union lost all of its power. They used to have force around, but they don't have anymore force now.

Brown: Where was the office located? The black union office.

Farmer: On Central Avenue.

Brown: Do you remember the cross street?

Farmer: It was like around 17th Street. The house next door was the house of the Young family, Lester's house and Martha Young, those people. Some of them were still living there. The union had an upstairs and a downstairs. Downstairs was where the offices were, upstairs was just for rehearsals. I rehearsed there a lot of the time, and that's where I first heard Gerald Wilson's band. They were up there rehearsing. It was one of the centers of the happenings for black musicians. It was unheard of to be a musician and not to be a member of the union, not like it is now. You were insane if you were not a member of the union. You couldn't get any work. No one would hire you. That's where I heard Miles telling the guys about what was going on, who was doing what. He seemed to just be a nice guy. That's all I ever saw [of] Miles. He was just another nice guy who liked music.

Brown: You characterize Central Avenue, or at least Los Angeles, particularly the Central Avenue scene, [as] vibrant, thriving as far as music... Can you describe the scene a little more, which clubs and which musicians you met?

Farmer: Yeah, exactly. On Central Avenue, there was a club called the Downbeat. When I first went there, Howard McGee had a band there with Teddy Edwards and another tenor player named J.D. King, who used to work with Howard with Andy Kirk's band. Across the street was a place called the Last Word that had a group that was lead by another tenor player named Jack McVeigh who used to work with Lionel Hampton's band. On the same side of the street as the Downbeat was a place called the Club Alabam that had big bands playing there, big shows with showgirls and all sorts of acts and things. Johnny Otis' band was playing there. Later on, I left California with Johnny Otis. On the same side of the street as the Downbeat was that hotel that Duke Ellington stayed in, the Dunbar Hotel.

Brown: Where you stayed too [laughs].

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: Yeah, where I stayed [laughs]. That was such an exotic scene to me, walking down the street. And the streets were crowded. People had money, and everybody had a job. There was no TV, so if they wanted some entertainment, they had to go out and hit the streets, 'cause they couldn't just stay home and watch the TV, there was no TV. There was a lot going on. These places closed at the normal closing time, let's say one o'clock. But then there are other places called "after-hour joints" that went on until four or five o'clock in the morning. There was one place called Love Joy's. Charlie Parker and I [were] one night walking the streets, and he had his horn. He had no money, and I had no money, so we went to a movie house. We saw there was a movie that we wanted to see, so we went to the usher and said, hey the movie is half way over, can't you just let us in the see the other half? He said okay, so we went in and saw the end of the movie. Then we went to Love Joy's. He took his horn out and started playing with a guy, like a piano player that you knew that really sounded like he didn't know anything. He just played whatever came to his ears. After that, we were walking back to our house, and I said, "You really surprised me, playing with people like that." He said, "Look, if you're trying to do something, you'll take advantage of any opportunity." That's the answer he gave me, and that's what I live by. Just because somebody is not the great Art Tatum doesn't mean you don't play with them if you're trying to learn something yourself. So, that really taught me a lesson. They had these other after-hours place called Jack's Bird in the Basket: The Home of Big Leg Chickens [laughs]. There used to be some heavy jam sessions there. A jam session would go on and on. That's where you learn. It's a battlefield but a classroom too. If somebody really humiliates you, then you go home, go in the woodshed and try to better the next time. But, Los Angeles was a very restrictive town as far as police were concerned. They really bothered us. Between the Downbeat and the Bird in the Basket, which was about a mile and a half, they used to stop us. We would walk from one place to the other, and one night I was walking, me and a couple friends, from one club to the other club, and we got stopped about two or three times to see if we had narcotics or a gun or something. Finally, I told the last pair of cops that stopped us, "We're going the same way you're going. You mind if we walk with you?" [laughs] Anyway, that was the lighter side 'cause I wouldn't think about carrying any kind of narcotics on the street in Los Angeles, not even then. I don't know what's happening now. But then just for one joint you could get 90 days, and I didn't want to spend 90 days in nobody's jail.

Brown: There are so many musicians who came out of Los Angeles that were active at that time, Charles Mingus, Buddy Collette, Britt Woodman. Did you meet any of the local budding musicians at that time?

Farmer: At that time, no, I didn't meet Mingus. I had heard about him. Buddy Colette, I heard about him, I heard him play. I heard Mingus. Britt Woodman, I heard him play. He was with a band that was also at the Downbeat sometimes when Lucky Thompson was playing (the tenor). Lucky came in there with Basie, and he left Basie and decided to live in Los Angeles. It was a great band, but I didn't meet the guys. My status, I was just a
For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

teenager going to high school and couldn't play either. There's no way that I'm gonna go up and say, "Hi, my name is Arthur Farmer." I'm just gonna stand there at the Downbeat and listen to them. That's what was going on. I worked with Horace Henderson, Floyd Ray, another big band, whoever else would hire me. Still, that doesn't mean I was in the same category as these guys who were playing with these small groups really playing some music.

Brown: You mentioned Howard McGhee earlier. Did you talk with Howard McGhee? Obviously, he had quite a reputation.

Farmer: This time no, I didn't talk with him. I saw him and I listened to him on a lot of nights, but I didn't introduce myself to him.

Brown: Did you go to any of the sessions that Bird did out in California with Howard McGhee...

Farmer: No, those sessions happened after I left. What happened was that when I was still there, Dizzy had left, Bird was still in town, and he did some recording, and something happened to him where he really flipped, and he wound up in a place called Camarillo. He did the sessions when he got out of Camarillo. By that time, I was back east with Johnny Otis' band. Next time I saw Bird was here in New York, uptown at Small's Paradise. He says, "Hey, Arthur Farmer! We're in New York, man! You can get anything you want in New York."

Brown: Let's backtrack a little bit before you actually leave. Was that your first professional gig working with Johnny Otis?

Farmer: No, that was my first gig on the road, but I worked around the Los Angeles area with Horace Henderson and Floyd Ray.

Brown: How big was Horace's group at that time?

Farmer: It was a normal big band like 14, 15 pieces.

Brown: Were you doing his charts and some of his brother's charts in the band?

Farmer: Yeah, right.

Brown: So, you got real good experience with the tradition right there.

Farmer: Very good, no doubt about that, because there were experienced players there.

Brown: Who else was in that band?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: I remember specifically one trumpet player named Emmitt Berry, who also played with Count Basie's band and was pretty well known around here as a swing trumpet player. He gave me some tips. With Floyd Ray's band, there were other players who had also played with Lionel Hampton's band. These guys were pros. They had been out on the road and [knew] what it was. They would tell me when you had to wear your white shirt on the gig, and after two or three nights, you turn it inside out [laughs].

Brown: There's not much written about Floyd Ray. Can you talk about him?

Farmer: Floyd had a band, and he recorded for RCA Victor. He came back east with the band, and Dizzy played some gigs with him, but the band never really caught on. Floyd was not a player himself. He could play a dirty alto part on his saxophone, but that was about as far as he could go. They had some nice music, but it never really caught on. That's about all I can say about him.

Brown: Was that the progression? You first worked with Horace Henderson and then with Floyd Ray?

Farmer: Yeah.

Brown: How long was your tenure with each band?

Farmer: This was all during one year, whoever had the gig.

Brown: You were already finished with high school?

Farmer: Yeah, I was still in high school. Whoever called me, I was there. Now, Johnny Otis had the band at the Club Alabam and that was his steady gig. We had been there for months, years or something. Then, he finally was able to put together some jobs back east, but some of the guys in the band didn't want to travel, so that was my chance. He asked me would I go with the band, and I said yes, a thousand times. The first place we came to was Chicago, and we had a booking for ten weeks at a place called the El Grotto in Chicago, which was owned by Earl Hines. We played there, and at this time, I had never had a trumpet lesson. So much steady work was the end of me. We worked here a week at the Apollo Theater, and he gave me my two weeks notice, which you had to give under the union rules. The competent players were coming out of the army, and he said, "When I hired you, I thought I was hiring a first trumpet player, but now you're unable to do the job, and I have to get someone who can. I hope you understand and that there are no hard feelings." I said, "No, there are no hard feelings." How could there be?

Brown: What was the problem?

Farmer: The problem was I couldn't play the parts.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Brown: You didn't have the endurance.

Farmer: I was playing what were called the "Strong-Arm Method," where you pushed the horn into your mouth to get a high note. This tissue can only stand so much of that, then it weakens and you can't get anything. That's what happened. So I said, "No, there are no hard feelings." I was here in New York hanging out. Everybody used to hang out on 126th Street and 8th Avenue.

Brown: What was there?

Farmer: The Apollo was on 125th Street. 126th Street was the stage door, so everybody hung out around there. I met a very wonderful trumpet player named Freddie Webster. I told him what happened, and he suggested that I come downtown to see a trumpet teacher, which I took his word and came down. The guy asked me, "What are you gonna do?" I said, "I don't have any jobs. I guess I'll go back to Los Angeles or back to Phoenix." He said, "If I were you, I wouldn't go anyplace until I learned something about playing the horn if that's what you want to do." So, I decided to stay here, and I got jobs doing other kinds of work, janitor, porters, stuff like that, working in theaters, cleaning out after they close.

Brown: What was this trumpet teacher's name?

Farmer: His name was Grupp, G-R-U-P-P. He doesn't live anymore, but he was very helpful.

Brown: And first name?

Farmer: Maurice.

Brown: What did he tell you to do?

Farmer: He would give me exercises. He would take the Arban's Book, which is the standard, the Bible for trumpet players and mark up [to] do this this week and work on this and then come back and see me next week. Go from one week to the next, and that's the way it went. Sure, I learned something.

Brown: Can I back up a little bit, and can you tell when did you leave Los Angeles with Johnny Otis?

Farmer: This was in the summer of 1946 when I left Los Angeles with Otis.

Brown: So, you had finished high school?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: Yeah, well, that's another story [laughs]. You see, what happened was that the year was coming to an end, and I was supposed to get my diploma. I know my mother wanted that diploma, so I went to the principal and told the principal, "What's happening is that I have this chance to start my career. I have an offer to go to work with this band, which I needed. But my mother wants to see the diploma, and the year is not over yet. I'm, asking you, what can you do about it?" He said he would write a letter to my mother saying that I was qualified to receive the diploma. I said, "Would you please do that and put the diploma in the safe with a copy of the letter?" This is the truth! I went back ten years later, and it was still there, and I got it. I went back ten years later. I was working with Gerry Mulligan's band or something, but it was still there. I figured that's the least I could do to show that I really hung in there. Anyway, I came back with Johnny Otis, and we worked at this place called the El Grotto in Chicago for ten weeks, and then lack of knowledge caught up with me and I couldn't go no further, so he fired me. Then, Freddie Webster told me to come downtown to see this teacher, Maurice Grubb...

Brown: Is this the beginning of your residence in New York?

Farmer: Yeah, I took lessons from him, and I was working as [a] janitor in theaters. I worked at Radio City Music Hall and the Alhambra Theatre uptown where Malcolm X's funeral was. A whole lot of places because the money was very low. I was making like \$28 a week, \$24 after taxes. I was paying \$6 a week for rent, and the lesson was \$8, so it was a slim budget [chuckles].

Brown: [Chuckles] Where were you living at this time?

Farmer: I was living on 126th Street paying \$6 a week for rent there. But, you know, you're a young man, what the heck?

Brown: When did you start working again, playing again?

Farmer: In the first two years, I got two jobs playing trumpet in New York, and I was so happy. But then what happened was, my brother was working with Jay McShann, he was on the road with McShann, and there was another trumpet player named Benny Bailey, who left McShann's band to go with Dizzy's band, so that left a chair open, and so I went with McShann. That got me back out to California.

Brown: McShann being from Kansas City at that.

Farmer: Yeah, it's all education. It's a school. Life is a school. I got out there, [and] by that time, I knew a little more about playing, so I was able to get jobs with people like Gerald Wilson and Benny Carter, Wardell Gray, Teddy Edwards, good players.

Brown: When did you join the McShann band, and when did you leave New York?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: I joined McShann's band around '48, and we worked our way back to California. I met the band in Birmingham, Alabama. Took the bus down there [laughs].

Brown: [Laughs] Down south.

Farmer: Sitting in the back of a bus.

Brown: I bet you probably remember that bus ride.

Farmer: Yeah, you know, that was it. You do what you can do. I was glad for the opportunity really, very glad. But when I got back to California, I was able to play a little better, and I was getting jobs with these guys, good players, Teddy Edwards, who was a great player, *is* a great player. Sonny Criss, and then Wardell and Dexter [Gordon], who were giants. True giants.

Brown: Those two years you were in New York from late '46 to '48 when you left with McShann, did you go to jam sessions?

Farmer: Oh yeah, I went to jam sessions, sure. I used to hang out on 52nd Street. I was working at Radio City Music Hall, and I was supposed to be there at a certain time, but many nights I was late because I was on 52nd Street. So, one night they fired me, so I walked right across the street to the RCA building and got a job there. This is the lowest rung of the ladder, cleaning up the theaters after the place closers. A migrant worker, you could call it. I would hang out there on 52nd Street all the time. I would sit in with Dizzy's band. Dizzy had a big band at a place called the Spotlight. I would sit in there, and next door was the Downbeat, and Bird, with Miles, was there. I would go and listen to them. It's hard to get to work on time [laughs]. Right down the street was my gig, but damn!

Brown: So, going to New York was probably more spectacular than the first time you went to Los Angeles?

Farmer: Yeah, listening to the giants across the street was Coleman Hawkins, and down the street was Art Tatum, Erroll Garner, all these people. What can be better than that? The only thing that could be better was my own head because I didn't know what to listen for really. When you're that age, everything sounds good, but you have to learn. That's part of it.

Brown: Which trumpet players were beginning to influence your style at this time?

Farmer: Basically, it was Miles and Dizzy and Fats Navarro. Then, after those three came Kenny Dorham. Those are the ones that really influenced me. I had heard nothing of Louis Armstrong. I had heard Roy Eldridge in Arizona, but I wouldn't say he was an influence because when you're a kid, the people who were most popular at that time, those are the ones that influence you. Roy had been superseded by Dizzy. Although, For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Dizzy was a disciple of Roy Eldridge at one time, but you know it goes. Dizzy came along with his new approach and things, and all the young kids wanted to hear Dizzy. That's all we wanted to hear. We didn't want to hear nothing by Roy Eldridge or Louis Armstrong or "Hot Lips" Page or Charlie Shavers, none of those great players. We couldn't hear that. That wasn't bebop. All we wanted to hear was bebop. I found out later that was an error.

Brown: Did you ever go to Minton's?

Farmer: Yeah, I went to Minton's.

Brown: Did you sit in?

Farmer: Yeah, I sat in there. There was a tenor player named "Lockjaw" Davis. He was like the session master. He would say who could play and who couldn't play. So, I jumped up there one night, and I knew he liked to play a tune called "Lover." He said, "Okay young blood, what do you wanna play?" I said, "Let's play 'Lover.'" He said, "Oh, you're a cocky motherfucker, aint you?" [laughs] We went ahead and played, and we became friends after that. Everything was fun. I worked with him at the Apollo, and I saw him a lot of times in Europe. I used to go over to Europe every year, at least once a year. He was a nice guy, but he was really for the straight and narrow 'cause he came into a club where I was playing in Copenhagen one night, The Montmartre and I had on one of those T-shirts, you know like you wear when you're going to play golf with the little alligator up here. He says, "What are you doing? You just got off the golf links, huh?" I said, "No man, I'm here making the gig." He said, "Well look, don't never forget that people are paying money to hear and see you."

Brown: [Laughs] Old school.

Farmer: He was a straight ahead guy.

Brown: Do you remember anybody else who was in the house band there?

Farmer: At Minton's? No, at this time, the only one I remember is "Jaws," the only one. Because the house band was some guys who had the gig, but a lot of people who always be sitting in. You could tell that he was the one who was running things. This was in the cellar.

Brown: You jump on the bus and join up with Jay McShann down in Birmingham, Alabama.

Farmer: Yeah.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: Do you remember that first gig? Well, first of all, you got in the band, you didn't have to audition?

Farmer: No, I was just hired on the recommendation of my brother, so I went down there to Birmingham and missed the band somehow. They had played there and gone on. Somehow, our schedules didn't match up. I went to the house of the parents of another young trumpet player who was in New York, and I stayed with them for a couple nights. I sent a telegram to my teacher back here that said I needed some money [because] I had missed the band. So, he wired me some money, and I caught up the band someplace else in Alabama. We traveled playing one-nighters to Los Angeles.

Brown: One-nighters?

Farmer: Yeah.

Farmer: Sure. One night, we had a night off in Oklahoma City, and I remember I was at a jam session with some of the guys in the band, and in walks an army officer . . . had the uniform on, and he took out a trumpet and played the hell out of it. I said, "Who is this guy? Jesus Christ!" He was like you call a warrant officer, that's what it is. "Jesus, who is this guy, man--damn?" Turns out, it was Thad Jones [laughs].

Brown: [Laughs] In Oklahoma?

Farmer: Yeah, Oklahoma City or Tulsa, something like that. Playing snakes. You never know. But anyway, we were in the band and we had a good time. We were young guys...

Brown: Who else was in that band?

Farmer: Nobody that ever developed a name. Just some guys from Kansas City or Los Angeles. But my brother and I had a great time since we looked the same. Like if he got a lady, then I got the lady too [laughs]. I remember one night one lady saw through this, and she got so mad, she took a beer bottle and broke it. She said, "You're not Addison!" She was coming at me with this beer bottle, and somehow we disarmed her. We called down to the desk and said there's a lady up here really becoming violent. Please get her out of here. So, they threw her out. We traveled across Texas, and it takes days to get across Texas, playing one-nighters here and one-nighters there. It's part of the whole gig. If you're like 17, 18 years old, which I was by that time, you don't take anything so serious[ly]. You don't take it heavy. You don't worry about tomorrow or next year. You just go to work and play your job and have as much fun as you can have wherever it is. I don't complain about none of that. I was glad to be there.

Brown: Sure. You didn't go back through Phoenix on your way to California, did you?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: With Jay McShann? No, I didn't go to Phoenix that time. Later on, after I had been in California, Roy Porter organized a band – Roy Porter is a drummer [that] used to play with McGhee – he had organized a band. I would say really it was primarily a rehearsal band. Eric Dolphy was in the band. Somehow, we got some gigs going to Texas, and the first night was in Phoenix. The second night was supposed to be in Dallas or someplace in Texas, but we had an automobile accident in Hobbs, New Mexico, so that was the end of the tour. Roy got a broken shoulder, and I had a concussion. The car turned over three times. It was a wonder we didn't get killed. That was the end of the tour, so I went back to Phoenix to recuperate and then back to LA.

Brown: Again, back to the Jay McShann, starting in Birmingham going all the way back to California, how long was that tour?

Farmer: Maybe three or four months.

[End of disc 2, track 2]

Farmer: When we got back to LA with the McShann band, that's when things really started happening. That's when I started working with Dexter and Wardell, Gerald Wilson, Benny Carter, people like that. But it wasn't enough for a livelihood, so I was working at the LA County General Hospital as an x-ray clerk in the daytime 'cause I never really felt like hustling or hitting on people, "let me have five," or whatever. I worked there, and in the meantime, I was working with these other people, whoever called me for a job, I would take it. It was not enough to put down my what you call "day hang" [laughs]. I was gigging with Dexter and Wardell; they had a group, two tenors and a trumpet. And also with Sonny Criss, Hampton Hawes, people like that, good players. It wasn't a bad time, but then Wardell got a chance to make a recording for Prestige Records, and he asked me to do it with him. I came up with a little tune, and we recorded "Little Blues Tune." It came back here, and somebody at Prestige told that the composer was named "Arthur Farmer," so they decided to call it "Farmer's Market," and that was the real beginning of my having a name in the jazz world. About two years later, I came back with Lionel and went over to the company and introduced myself. The president asked me did I want to make some records. I said sure. But I'm jumping the gun because after I recorded this tune, and I was still working at the hospital, Lionel Hampton's band came to town. Los Angeles was a great place for Sunday matinee jam sessions. I used to go to a place to jam, and I went over there one Sunday, and some of these guys were there like Quincy Jones and Buster Cooper and a couple others. We played some, and that week, I got a call. Somebody asked me would I be interested in playing with Lionel. I said sure. Then they said, "Bring your horn to the gig tonight." So, I went over there and had an audition, but what was an audition with Lionel was not sitting down in the band reading music, but just seeing how well you can play jamming on a tune. I got the gig, and it got me out of LA, otherwise I would still be there.

Brown: When did you arrive back there with McShann and when did you leave?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: I arrived back like around '49, and I left in '52 with Lionel and came back east. That's when I started making records under my own name in the summer of '53. Then in the fall of '53, I went over to Europe with Lionel's band. It was a great band with Clifford Brown, Gigi Gryce, --you know, the cats, --James Cleveland, Quincy Jones, Mark Montgomery, Alan Dawson, really good players. Very important times. I recorded here, and Quincy and Gigi wrote the arrangements for my first recording. I must have used about seven or eight pieces. Then we went to Europe, and by the time we got to Europe, I had made arrangements to record in Sweden for a Swedish company with Swedish musicians, Brownie and myself, and then the records would be issued here by Prestige. Gigi had made arrangements to record in Paris for a French company, the same kind of deal. So, we were busy. We had a great time, really. There was no such thing as "I'm tired."

Brown: I understand that Lionel found out about these moonlighting...

Farmer: He put it to us because we had our pianist named George Wallington, who a white guy, he came in the band, and he was naïve. He didn't know Lionel as good as we knew him. We never intended to tell [him] what our activities were, but he mentioned it one day, and Lionel found out and called a meeting and said, "Look, nobody can do this. I brought you over here, and I'm paying you. If you do anything like this then I'm gonna have you thrown out of the union, I'm gonna have your passport taken away, and I'm gonna take the return portion of your ticket, so you're gonna be stranded over here." And we said, "Okay, okay" [laughs]. We had to sneak out the back door of the hotel, and we recorded. We did everything we wanted to do. We recorded in Sweden, and then we got to Paris and recorded there. He found out about it. Somebody in the hot jazz club told him that they saw one of his boys in the recording studio, and he called another meeting, and he said, "Okay Brownie, I'm sending you home." And Gigi said, "If you send him home, you have to send me home too." He pulled out a list and said I did this on such and such a date, and this and this and this. So he said, "Okay, I'll send the whole band home, if everybody's been doing this. We're not gonna have the tail wagging the dog." I never will forget that. But, then his wife said, "Shut up!"

Brown: She toured?

Farmer: She was the manager, Gladys. She said, "Shut up, Hamp!" Because we had done the whole tour and were so successful that they wanted us to do the whole tour again without even coming back to the states. She saw that it was ridiculous. If he let the whole band go, he'd have to get a new band, start all over from scratch. That didn't work, so we stayed over there for three months, then we came back here and everybody, by mutual unwritten agreement, we all just sort of faded away.

Brown: You met Quincy at this time? ...

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: I met Quincy in Lionel's band.

Brown: How was he?

Farmer: He was a fine guy. He was straight ahead. I spoke to him on the telephone sometime. He seems to be the same guy. Of course, he's in another atmosphere now [laughs]. But, he's still Quincy. He's not like Mr. Jones, not that kind of stuff. I met Gigi in the band, I met Benny Golson in the band, Monk Montgomery, James Cleveland, Alan Dawson, good people in the band. That was a good time too. It was nice to meet these guys. We were like a family. Big bands usually develop cliques, so there were two cliques in this band. One clique was the people that were close to Lionel and his wife, and the other clique was the young cats that wanted to play [laughs]. We had a ball. We recorded with a big band in Paris and used everybody in the band but Lionel [laughs]. Everybody in the band, but Lionel. That's what he wanted to avoid because he wanted to use us in order to increase his price, but our claim was that we had a right to do what we wanted to do with our time when we fulfilled his demands. If he said, be at work at 8 o'clock and we were there until the job was over, then what we other than that was our own business. He didn't see it that way. He's a very reactionary type of person when it comes to people working for you and paying them. This didn't make any sense to us, so we had to sneak around and do what we wanted to do, so we did.

Brown: You mentioned your first recorded composition was "Farmer's Market." Had you already started writing before this? Had you started composing?

Farmer: Maybe I'd written a couple lines down, but nothing that we ever really used. When Wardell told me that he had this record date coming up, I was sitting around one day and the idea just came to me. I'm not a writer. If you can see something just like that [snaps] and write it down, that doesn't make you a writer because you can do it one time.

Brown: But you went on to write other pieces, of course.

Farmer: Yeah, a few others, but nothing like Gigi or Benny, Quincy...

Brown: That's what I was trying to lead up to. Now you're in a band with some very, very accomplished... Maybe they hadn't demonstrated it completely up until that point, yet they went on to be...

Farmer: They had really done some good work by then. My feeling then and now is that there's a whole lot of good music out here, but there's not that many players who are able to interpret it. Also, I was always catching so much hell from the horn. I spent my time trying to learn how to play the horn instead of trying to write. Quincy was the opposite. He never really learned how to play the horn, but he spent his time writing, and he became, as we know, one of the greatest writers. Gigi was a great writer, died too soon. That's a pity. Benny's a great writer. Brownie was rare because he was a great writer and
For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

a great player too. Brownie was a heck of a guy. That was another great experience for me, when Brownie came into Lionel's band. Before he came into the band, I was the trumpet soloist. Brownie comes into the band just before we go to Europe. Now, most bandleaders, they would take away some of my solos and give them to Brownie, but Lionel – I have to give him the credit – didn't do that. What he did was that he would open up the arrangement where I would go out and play the solo, and then Brownie would come right behind me. So, I'm going out to play my solo, and I'm thinking, damn I better play something [laughs]. 'Cause this guy coming behind me is gonna wash me away, man. I better do my damndest! That's the way it was 'cause he could really deal.

Brown: This was '52, '53?

Farmer: '52, '53, yeah. We were very close, Brownie, Gigi, Quincy, Alan Dawson, James Cleveland, myself. We all were, like I said, like a clique, like brothers. Big bands usually have these kind of things, hang out together [and] after the concerts, we'd [always] go to jam sessions someplace and play. Like I said earlier, it was nothing about "I'm too tired." We were young guys in our twenties. We didn't think about that. Just go out and have a great time and record and rehearse. It couldn't have been better.

Brown: That's your first trip to Europe. You went down from Phoenix to LA and were awestruck, then go to New York stupefied, now you're in Europe. What were your impressions of Europe?

Farmer: Aw man, it was great! Fantastic. We didn't play in London because there was a union problem there, so we didn't get to play there, but we played in Paris, Berlin, Stockholm and Copenhagen and Helsinki. We didn't play Rome, but we played there for like three months. We played North Africa.

Brown: You did go to North Africa on this first tour?

Farmer: Yeah.

Brown: What was that like? Did you think about Miles and his statement about Charlie Parker [laughs]?

Farmer: No, 'cause we were in the northern part, Arabs. We didn't consider that to be really Africa. I remember one time we took a plane from Europe, from someplace in France, to North Africa, part of the band went on one plane and the other part had to go on the other plane. We, meaning the cats, happened to be on the first plane, so we got to the town – Tunis, or something like that – and Lionel and his clique were on the second plane. So, we got there, and the theatre manager was pulling out his hair, "Come on, can't you start playing? People are waiting." We said, "No, we can't play until the bandleader gets here. We can't do nothing like that! He's the one who hires us and pays us." He kept on begging us, so we said okay we'll play if you pay us blah, blah blah. We went ahead

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

and played, and when Lionel came, of course he complained and we didn't get nothing [laughs]. The first tune with played was "Night in Tunisia." These ladies out there with these things on and all.

Brown: The veils?

Farmer: Yeah, yeah. We played "Night in Tunisia." They didn't know nothing about no "Night in Tunisia" [laughs].

Brown: [Laughs] Did they know they were gonna get a jazz band?

Farmer: They knew that they were gonna get Lionel Hampton, and he was very well known. His name was really well known all around by then because we had played all around Europe, and they had seen the name in the newspaper. I guess some people probably heard the records because North Africa was still basically French colonies at that time. This was like in the early 50s, and they hadn't gotten their independence at that time. Anyway, that was just another adventure.

Brown: The conditions of the tour in Europe, was it markedly different than what you'd experienced in America?

Farmer: Yeah, it was different because we stayed in first class hotels because we had to pay the rent. If you go on tour here down South at that time in the 40s, a lot of times you'd play in these little towns and there's no black hotel there. There was no black hotel, and you wouldn't think about staying in the white hotel because they wouldn't let you in there anyway. Sometimes, there were enough people in there that had vacant rooms that the whole band could be put up. If that wasn't possible, then you just get on the bus and keep moving. You play and get on the bus and drive right on to the next town. It's called a "hit and run."

Brown: Accommodations were better and the reception of the audiences?

Farmer: Lionel never had a problem with reception regardless because he's a real showman and a great musician. Even if you don't appreciate music, you got to appreciate this man with this boundless energy, jumping all over the place. Suddenly, the accommodations were better. We had some experiences down south that you would never have in Europe. I remember we played in Montgomery, Alabama and after the gig, we were walking around looking for a place to get a sandwich or something, and the police came up and said, "What are you boys doing?" and we explained to them that our bus was around the corner, and [they] said, "Well, get on it!"

Brown: Was this with Jay McShann?

Farmer: No, with Lionel.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Brown: After coming back from Europe?

Farmer: No, it was before going over there.

Brown: Stark contrast.

Farmer: It was like that. You go into [a] place, you play the dance, then you get finished with the dance and go out and try to find something to eat at a small place, greasy spoon. That's the only one that's open and it's jammed. It seems like everyone who was at the dance is there trying to eat. I remember sitting in the place one night and one of the locals sitting at the counter said, "Hey lady, you know this chicken isn't done?" They're cooking fried chicken as fast as they can. "This chicken isn't done, lady!" The lady says, "You better eat that chicken while you can still eat chicken" [laughs]. That's the way it was. It's not like now where you can go in the Holiday Inn at least.

Brown: Do you recall any mistreatment in this first tour in Europe? Any racism or mistreatment?

Farmer: No, I recall no racial, negative situations at all. None at all. We went to France, Germany, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Holland and Belgium. There was no negative stuff going on.

Brown: You said you hired a local rhythm section to do your session. How were they playing? How did they handle the music?

Farmer: Oh, they played good, yeah! Swedish guys, they were down with it. Jazz has a long tradition in France going back to the 30s. Benny Carter and guys like that were over there a long time ago. They were able to do okay. Of course, we had our guys too. I don't remember feeling like really in a problem. We just went ahead and did what we wanted to do. It was beautiful. I know when he [Lionel Hampton] toured in Sweden, he says, "Look, none of this recording stuff" and we say, "Okay man." Then, we played the concert in Stockholm that night, we had to sneak out and went to the recording studio and stayed there all night. Made some good records. The next day, we missed the train going to Gothenburg, so we had to take the next train. We got there, and somebody told us, "Lionel wants to see you guys." We went to his dressing room, and he says, "What happened to you guys?" I told him, "Man, you should've been with us. Man, we had these lovely Swedish ladies at this party. It was really something." And he said, "Okay, yeah Gates yeah, but from now on when the band leaves, everybody leaves."

Brown: He called you Gates?

Farmer: He called everybody Gates, either Gates or Pops. That from his being with Benny Goodman. I think Benny Goodman started this thing about "swinging like a gate" For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

or “pops” from some reason. So, Lionel was using that, but he didn’t want us to do anything on our own. He felt that he owned us, and naturally we didn’t feel like that. The reason why we went over there was to further our career, not just a matter of a job, though we were glad to have a job. That’s a big step [to] go over there and make records too. He didn’t care about us, and we recognized that and figure that as long as we gave him his time, then we should be free to do what we wanted to do.

Brown: Do you remember what your pay was with Lionel before you left?

Farmer: The pay before I left was like \$17 a night when I worked. When you don’t work, you don’t get paid. Out of that \$17, you had to pay your hotel rent and everything. It wasn’t much, but if you’re a young teenager or early twenties with no obligations, it was enough. And over there, it probably went up four or five dollars. But what happened before we went there, we were complaining about the money. We went to local 802, and we spoke to somebody in the administration and explained to them what the situation was, and the guy said, “You don’t have to worry. We’ll work it out.” So, we said okay, and we went there almost every day for two or three weeks. Then, finally on the last day, the guy said, “You got to go! That’s it.” We found out like a year later that Joe Glazer, who was the manager, the booker, was tight with Caesar Petrillo, who was the president, and they worked it out where we had to go. We were gonna go anyway, but we were trying to get the best terms we could get. There was no way we were gonna turn down that opportunity to go to Europe, come on! Just for five dollars more or something. We found out later that they were bragging about how they put it to the guys in Lionel’s band. Lionel always had a very negative reputation as far as paying people, very negative. But, if you’re that age and you’re ambitious, you just overlook that stuff. The funny thing about it, when he’s playing, you got to love him, no matter how bad he was. Other than that, when he gets behind those vibes, he’s really the king.

Brown: Did he play drums at all too?

Farmer: Sometimes on the show, he played drums. He’d jump up on the drums. He can’t do that now. Time takes it’s toll. But, he could really play.

Brown: Oh yeah, sure!

Farmer: He was genuine [laughs].

Brown: [Laughs] Who was the straw boss for the band? I guess, Gladys.

Farmer: No, there was an alto saxophone player named Bobby Plater. He was the lead alto player. When you say “straw boss,” that’s the one who stomps off the tempo when the bandleader isn’t on the stand. Usually, it’s traditional for the bandleader to not be on the stand if you’re playing say a dance date. The band usually plays two or three numbers to so-called warm up, and then here comes the maestro. The audience says, “Ahhhhhh!”

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

[laughs] But, Bobby was beautiful. After that, he went to Basie's band, and he stayed with Basie until he died. He was great player. He was a nice guy. We didn't have any problems with nobody really. The people were doing their job and trying to play the music too, get some enjoyment out of the music. Lionel, like I said, he was a great player. You could be angry at him for his ways, but as far as his playing was concerned, you couldn't criticize him, no way. We were playing at a place that used to be called the Band Box, which was next door to Birdland, we were playing there for two weeks, and we would always meet Milt Jackson out on the sidewalk hanging out on the break. Milt would say, "Tell Lionel I'm coming down to get him next week. Tell Lionel I'm coming down to get him next week!" And next week came, and Milt would come down there, and both of them played. Nobody took anything away from anybody though.

Brown: So, he wasn't joking?

Farmer: No, he was coming after him, but they were just two great players. You figure Milt Jackson was more contemporary than Lionel, but he didn't take nothing away from Lionel. Since then, I played a couple jobs with Lionel. I played one a TV gala in Stuttgart, Benny Bailey and I, because people who fixed the TV show they told me that they thought the band needed some more solo power for this TV thing, so they got Benny and I to play. Just a few months ago, I played at the Lionel Hampton Jazz Festival over there in a place called Moscow, Idaho. There's a university there that has a music department that's named after Lionel, a jazz school, that's what it is, Lionel Hampton's Jazz School. So, we played out there, Benny Golson and I, we played there on a jam session with Lionel. He was fine, but on those two nights, I got paid more money than I got in a whole year [laughs]. I told Benny Bailey, "Man, if Lionel knew how much money we were getting, he'd have a heart attack!" 'Cause he didn't have nothing to do with paying us. That's Lionel, he's a character. He had a reputation, and he earned it! [laughs]

Brown: You left the band. The whole band dissolved...

Farmer: We all left the band without no two-week notice or nothing.

Brown: That was in New York?

Farmer: Yeah, in 1953. I just stayed there and was freelancing. Things were jumping. I was making gigs with Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young, Monk. I was doing gigs on my own. Gigi Gryce and I, we had a quintet, Art Farmer-Gigi Gryce Quintet. We played Birdland sometime and wherever else we got a gig. It wasn't a matter of getting rich; it was a matter of surviving.

Brown: But you were working steadily?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: Not steadily, but enough. At least I was able to support myself working solely as a jazz musician. I wasn't cleaning theaters or working in the general hospital or anything like that, so that was a big step for me. To play with all these people, [to] play with Lester Young, mmm!

Brown: You wanna talk about that?

Farmer: Yeah, well that was great. He was a very gentle person and very funny. Everybody thought he wouldn't talk, but he talked to guys in the group. One night, we're standing on the bandstand, and he walks sideways on the bandstand, so he sort of slid over to me, and he said, "You know, Prez..." – he called everybody "Prez" – "You know, Prez, there's a bitch out there shooting me down, but she don't know that when the gig is over, all I want to do is go home and eat my sandwich and go to bed" [laughs]. I remember another funny time, I was playing a solo and he sort of sensed I was getting ready to stop, so he comes over to me and says, "I wouldn't stop now, Prez." He was a really nice guy. He was not at all withdrawn the way the general public thought he was. He just didn't want to be bothered with people coming around with a lot of silly questions, but he was friendly with the guys in the band. He was friendly with the people that worked in the club, the waiters and the bartenders and all that. He was just a normal guy. When I played with Coleman Hawkins, that was just a couple one-nighters. That was no steady gig. Somehow, my name had gotten around [and] he called me to make the gig.

Farmer: I played with Monk on this... Steve Allen was doing the Tonight Show on NBC, and there was one night that was devoted to jazz. So, I was on there with Monk's group. All kind of things like that was going on. I was doing a lot of recording, Prestige, Blue Note, Riverside, and a lot of just normal studio stuff with big bands. I developed a reputation of being willing to really try my best to play whatever music was thrown in front of me, not to be bitching and questioning this and that, but really trying to play it. People would call me for a lot of difficult stuff. It was to my benefit. I was glad to do it, very glad. I remember I did a TV commercial for a beer company called Schaefer's Beer. It was written by Billy Taylor. That was a big deal. I could do the thing, and then every thirteen weeks, you get paid again. The way we did it, we did about seven or eight different versions, so these checks were coming in for a long time. One time with a lady singer, another time with a man singing, another time with a trumpet lead, and one time with a saxophone lead, all sorts of possibilities. They went on and on. I hadn't even met Billy Taylor, but he called me because of my reputation. That's the way it went. We played at Birdland on a Monday night. Monday was the night off, so I played there a lot of times with the group with J.J. and me. Other than that, Lester had an agreement to play there so many weeks a year, and he didn't wanna play there with just a quartet, so he liked to have a trumpet player [and] he started using me. That was great. I came in late a couple times 'cause I was also working in the studios and stuff... he said, "You know Prez, the man is getting on me and I don't want to hear nothing. I don't want to hear that." I said, "Okay." I understood what he was saying. He didn't want the boss to be

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

jumping on him because somebody in his band is late, so he was telling me if I didn't straighten up, I would have to move on. He was fine.

Brown: He definitely had his own vocabulary too.

Farmer: He did.

Brown: What was "George Washington?"

Farmer: Oh yeah, that's the bridge. He had a whole lot of stuff, like if it was something he didn't like, he would say, "yettes." That's a word you never heard, "yettes." That means "leave it alone, leave it." He called everybody "Prez." We were working one night at Birdland, and the drummer had a solo, so he turned to me and said, "Watch him Prez. He's getting ready to go into his shit" [laughs]. And sure enough, the drummer's playing [and] suddenly, one of the sticks flies in the air like an accident. He said, "Did you dig that Prez?" I said, "Yeah, I dug it." Next thing, he keeps on playing with one stick, and then that stick flies in the air. "You dig that?" "Yeah." "OK." And then he's playing the drum solo with his hands, so that brings down the house. Prez says, "You see what I'm talking about?" [laughs]

Brown: Who was the drummer?

Farmer: This guy named Wesley Landers, and he was Lester's steady drummer. He played well, but this was his bit. You got to have your stuff together for the crowd, the show closer. He was a fine guy.

[End of disc 2, track 2]

Brown: This is tape two of Jazz Oral History with Art Farmer. We're talking about Lester.

Farmer: Yeah, back to Lester. We were playing the Birdland one time, and there was a little, very young white lady playing or singing. She was not so good. I don't know how she got the gig. Prez and I were sitting in a booth, and he said, "You know Prez, that's why I dug Lady Day so much." And I said, "Why?" "Because when she went to sing, she was not standing up there talking about 'Look at me. I got a pussy.' When she went to sing, she sang." What he was saying was she wasn't getting by on her sex appeal, she was just singing the song the way she felt it. That's the way he felt about it. He said he really loved Lady Holiday.

Brown: Did she come around to the club? Did you meet her?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: She would come around, but she never sat in though. She never sang. He said, "Some people say that I'm a fairy." I don't remember what word he used. I know he didn't use the word "gay" 'cause wasn't nobody using that then.

Brown: Faggot? Or Sissy?

Farmer: Faggot, yes. "Some people say I'm a faggot, but they oughta ask their mama" [laughs]. He was funny! You can't say that he wouldn't talk. He said, "I met this lady and she took me to her house. She was so fine, and she took me to her house. I took off my coat and I went to hang it up in the clothes closet, and I saw those nurses uniforms, and I put my coat back on" [laughs]. I said, "Why'd you do that?" He said, "Well you know, nurses, they work in the hospitals, and all those germs around there, Prez. Couldn't use it!" [laughs] He'd have everybody cracking up, giving his ideas about how things were. At that time, I had just started drinking. I said, "Sometimes I drink a half a pint in one day." He said, "Man, you must have something on your mind" [laughs]. I walked in their one night, and he was standing at the bar. I stood at the bar and ordered a drink, and he was standing there drinking and he talking. I said, "What you say? You talking to me?" He said, "No man, no."

[3:15] But, he was a real gentle person, and he could play and sing. He did whatever he wanted to do, and people didn't dig it, but that was too bad. I was very thankful for the opportunity to stand up there next to him. If I'm standing on the bandstand with Lester Young, and we never had one rehearsal, not one rehearsal. We played "Lester Leaps In" and some standard tunes, OK? So generally, unless it was something like "Lester Leaps In," some sort of rift type tune, then he would play the first chorus, and then he'd play his improvised solo, and then I would play standard stuff, and then the piano would take a solo and maybe the bass, then we might play some fours and take it on out. When he's playing, I'm standing there listening. I said, "Damn, I got to watch what I do after this." You just can't throw anything out there after he'd played. A lot of people were saying, well he's past his prime, which maybe he was, but I think he had gone into another room. I think he said you can't expect people to feel the same way and play the same way all their life. When you're one age, you feel one way, and later on, you feel another way, which seems logical if you're gonna be real. Because if you're a real entertainer, and you have your act together, you have to do your act. That's not what he was about. I feel that I was very fortunate to have the chance to work with him, one of the real giants. Like I said, Coleman Hawkins, I just worked with him a couple nights, but he was a great player too. I liked Lester more. I never worked with Charlie Parker. We would hang out, but I wouldn't dare get on the bandstand with him. That would be crazy! The best thing I could do was try to absorb what I heard instead of standing up there thinking, what am I gonna play now? That's not the time to do that.

Brown: Who else was in Prez's band with you? The piano player and the bassist?

Farmer: Great piano player, Wynton...

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: Kelly?

Farmer: Wynton Kelly, yeah. Joe Harris was on drums sometimes, or Wesley Landers. Bass player was Aaron Bell. Aaron played later on with Duke Ellington's band. Good players. There wasn't nothing wrong with that.

Brown: What happened to the drummer, Wesley Landers? I haven't heard of him.

Farmer: Wesley Landers, I don't know. I have no idea whether he's still alive or not. At that time, he wasn't a young guy. He looked like he might have been in his forties. This was like in the early 50s, forty years ago. So, probably not playing anymore at least.

Brown: That would've been after '53. Do you remember the year that you played with Prez?...

Farmer: Yeah, it must have been around '55, somewhere around then. Then, I started getting gigs with Horace Silver. Horace had been with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, which was a co-op group supposedly, with Hank Mobley and Kenny Durham. The bass player...

Brown: Doug Watkins?

Farmer: Doug Watkins, yeah, from Detroit. They didn't last. It was supposed to be co-op, but it turned out not to be co-op [laughs], so Horace got his own group and had me in the group. Me and Hank Mobley was in the group. We played around quite a bit. We never went out west, but we played Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Washington, all the places around this part of the world. Horace was a fine guy. I had recorded with Horace. I had used him on some of my records, Horace, Kenny Clarke and Percy Heath. That's one of the great things. I came to town, introduced myself to the people at Prestige, "you wanna make some records?" "Yeah!" I recorded one album, Quincy and Gigi wrote the arrangements. Then the next one, the quintet, I got the baddest cats in town, Sonny Rollins, Horace Silver, Kenny Clarke, Percy Heath, man, wow! I wasn't a big star, but these guys were available, so go ahead, go for it! Anyway, I worked with Horace, we had a great time. Horace was a nice guy, and Hank Mobley could really play. Then, Hank left and Clifford Jordan came into the band, who was another giant. That was all fine, and I'm still working wit Prez when he went into Birdland, and doing recordings too. It was great! Wasn't getting rich, not in the pocketbook, but in the head.

Brown: In the heart.

Farmer: Yeah, that was fantastic. I made these records with these guys, and other people would call me up to make records with them also. So, looking back on it, I was busy. I was busy enough and learning all the time. I didn't do any big band gigs. I didn't get any
For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

at that time in New York. Somehow, I managed to graduate from that. I worked at the Savoy Ballroom with Lucky Millinder, which I'm glad I did that because that was a historical place. It doesn't exist anymore, and that was an important part of our history, the Savoy. Being able to go there and really play there is a nice thing to think about.

Brown: How long did that gig last?

Farmer: Just a week, or something like that.

Brown: How was it working with Lucky?

Farmer: Lucky was okay.

Brown: There's some stories about Lucky too [laughs].

Farmer: As far as I'm concerned, he was just a guy who got on the bandstand and stomped off the tunes. That's all. I heard that he paid well. I don't remember what I got, but it seemed fair. We didn't have any negotiations. He just said, I'll pay you this, and I said okay, I'll take it. That's about it.

Brown: You haven't mentioned Addison. Last time you worked with Addison was in Jay McShann's band. At least, that's the last time you mentioned him.

Farmer: Well, we worked our way back to California with McShann's band, and then he got a gig up in the Bay Area, and he moved up there. He was working very much up there, and I'm in LA working at the LA General Hospital and whatever else I could get.

Brown: Do you remember who he was working with?

Farmer: No, he was just, what we call freelancing, whoever had the gig. But, he had some place that lasted a long time, but who they were with, I don't remember. That's what he was doing. When I came east with Lionel, he was still there in the Bay Area. When I left Lionel, he was still there. Then, I started working around here, and then he decided he would come back here, and he came back here, and he was taking lessons from the main bass teacher at Juilliard, a guy by the name of Fred Zimmerman. Zimmerman said, "You're a serious student. You have talent. I think you should apply for a scholarship. I'll tell you what to do." So, he told Addison what to do, and Addison did it and got a 100% scholarship for four years at Juilliard. He did that, and when he came out, he started working back with me again, but I was opposed to his going into Juilliard, and we had sort of a split. I told him this is not a case where I was right and he was wrong, I was wrong and he was right, but just the way it turned out, I told him the kind of music you're trying to play, you don't learn that at Juilliard. It's just not there. You can learn the technique, but to really get down to it is out here in the streets. He had a different mentality from me. He was more practical. He said, "No, I'm gonna do it this way." By
For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

the time he came up, he wasn't on the same level of the guys that were in the street, just for hitting it. He could read and all that stuff. So, that sort of put a split between us, which lasted for a while.

Brown: Which years was he in school?

Farmer: He was in school for four years. I would say '49 or '50 for four years. When Benny Golson and I organized the Jazztet, I got him in the group. He was in the group with the Jazztet, but he wasn't really into what the guys out here were in to.

Brown: While he was attending Juilliard, he wasn't maintaining jazz gigs?

Farmer: He was doing some local gigs, some, but he wasn't going out on a gig on the road. He couldn't do that. If you compared his playing to somebody like Doug Watkins, for instance, Doug was more into the street type of playing – that's the guy who was playing with Horace – and Addison just wasn't to that point. He would've gotten there, but he was at a different temperament from me. He was more methodical. He figured like he would like building blocks, do this and do that, get the first set and then the second and the third. The way I felt was to just jump right on in there and get what you can get wherever it is. We organized the Jazztet and it just didn't happen, so I let him go. We had a split; we didn't see each other for some time. Before the Jazztet was organized, and he was in school, I would still use him when I could, but he wouldn't go out on the road with me. I used him on record dates.

Brown: *Modern Art*?

Farmer: *Modern Art*, yeah that's one, and whatever else. I made another record called *Art for Contemporary*. Whatever I had, I would use him, but I always felt like he should be out in the streets. You can look at it either way because I know great players that were in school, so that's not necessarily a bad thing to go to school by far. My attitude can be really questioned too. Just trying to be as fair as I can be. Anyway, after the Jazztet broke up, I had a group, like a quartet, and Jim Hall was in the group, Pete La Roca was in the group, very fine players. I never got Addison in the group. He worked with us a few times, like subbing, but the bass player that was the most successful there was a guy named Steve Swallow. We had a very good quartet together. Then somehow, Addison and I got friendly again, and then he died. Thank god we were friendly when he died. Talk about a shock. Like from one day to the next, he was gone.

Brown: The aneurism. You had seen him that day?

Farmer: Yeah, he came by my house. This was like on a Friday evening, he came by my house, and then he left. He was going back uptown. He went back to his house. I was living on 20th Street. He was living on 95th, he went back there, and I took a nap and got a call from his wife saying that he was very sick. So, I went up there and he was still there. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

in the apartment. He said, “I have this terrible headache. I’ve never had such pain.” His wife said she had already called the doctor, and the doctor said call the hospital, and the ambulance came and took him to the hospital. I went to work down at the Half Note. I called to the hospital, and she told me that he had a high fever and they put him in ice. So, I finished the gig and went up there. She was sitting, and I said, what happened? She said he had just died. He had had a brain aneurism. I [don’t] know if it’s like this now, but then, when somebody dies suddenly and they’re not under the care of a doctor or nothing, there’s an autopsy. So, they gave him an autopsy and what the autopsy, the finding was that he had died from a congenital weak blood vessel in the brain, which just broke open. Had a brain hemorrhage, he was like 33 or 34 years old. I found out later that that can happen because that’s what happened to Quincy on both sides. He had one, and they said he’s gonna have the same thing happen there, so we should operate to avoid it. That’s what they did. You don’t get any indication of this being a problem when you’re just walking around [and] you feel okay. Nobody’s thinking about going and being examined. One time, I was talking to this writer named Gene Lees about this thing, and Gene has a sister in Canada who is married to a brain specialist, so Gene told me, “You ought to have a test because you and your brother are twins, and whatever was going on with him maybe is going on with you too.” I spoke to my wife in Vienna, and she said she didn’t think it was a good idea because people die from those things too. They shoot some sort of dye up into your blood vessels, and everybody doesn’t take it okay. You just don’t go looking for trouble, so if something’s wrong, it’s wrong [laughs]. What can you do? I’m sitting here, I’m 66 years old. Maybe if it was gonna happen, it would’ve happened by now. But, everybody can have a stroke from high blood pressure. I’m out here living in this world the way it is.

But anyway, that was a real blow, a heck of a thing. It was completely unforeseen. Nobody ever thought about something like that happening. We didn’t know anyone who had had that happen. People die of strokes and heart attacks, but not when you’re 37 years old. Generally speaking, he wasn’t living a real out life. He wasn’t the kind of guy who was into narcotics, alcoholic and all that kind of stuff, so he should still be alive. According to the autopsy, it was inevitable. It was like destiny because he had no way of knowing that something was wrong, and if you knew something was wrong, what could you do? Have an operation on your head to avoid something happening? Damn! Otherwise, live like a mummy, don’t do nothing. That’s one of those things, man. Naturally, that changed my life. When that happened, I saw then that if that can happen, then anything can happen. There’s nothing out here that you can take for granted. Nothing at all.

Brown: That was in February of ’63, correct?

Farmer: Yeah, right. February 23rd, something like that. So, you really can’t take anything for granted. You’re just out here, the whims of fate. You do the best you can do. Don’t be a fool and jump in front of a car and figure it’s not my time to go [laughs]. I’m just grateful that we had come back together before he died ‘cause damn, to think about us
For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

being on the outs and him dying. That would've been awful. [The] relationship between twins is so close; it's something you don't even think about. You just don't think about the "what if." A twin brother is like a part of your own body. Sure, you can have disagreements, but you can't conceive of being here and his not being here. I was born an hour earlier than him, so I knew him all my life, and I never even thought about the possibility of being here alive and he wasn't here 'cause that's just part of life just like your arm. So, there's no sharks. Anything can happen. Life is very precarious.

Brown: What did you do to change your life in accordance?

Farmer: Nothing. I didn't do anything.

Brown: But psychologically and spiritually, this was a landmark in your life?

Farmer: Yeah, this was a landmark, but I couldn't think of nothing to do. I couldn't think of anything that would be able to give me any security. What am I gonna do, join the church or stop playing music, start teaching school or get married? Well, I was already married. Or was I?

Brown: '63.

Farmer: No, I had been married. I was divorced.

Brown: [Laughs] Okay, well there are some gaps. We jumped all the way to the Jazztet. There's a lot of stuff going on, you and Gigi. Maybe we'll come back and fill in the rest of the 50s and bring it up to the Jazztet because, of course, that's a very significant group and a very significant period in jazz.

Brown: Today is June 30, 1995. This is continuation of the Jazz Oral History Program interview with Art Farmer in New York City. We've now changed location from his apartment due to construction in the adjacent dwelling to the Empire Hotel across from the Lincoln Center. We're resuming again, and as we closed up yesterday, we thought maybe we could go back and cover some of the areas and people and experiences in the mid 50s, since we had jumped all the way through the tenure of the Jazztet. I was wondering you mentioned you had met many people whom you continued lasting relationships with in the Lionel Hampton band. Of particular interest would be Gigi Gryce...

Farmer: Yes, I met Gigi in the band of Lionel Hampton, and I hadn't heard about him until then, but he was one of the young, oncoming giants. We got along well, and we did some recording together in Europe, and he wrote some arrangements for Lionel's band, very fantastic arrangements. When I made my first recording date under my name for Prestige, Gigi wrote part of the music and Quincy Jones wrote the other part of the music. Gigi was like a saintly figure. That's about the best way I can put it.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Brown: [Laughs] Okay, I know that's the best way you can put it, but could you say a little more about Gigi?

Farmer: He was for the straight and narrow. I think I mentioned yesterday that Coltrane and Dolphy were 99% music, and that's just the way Gigi was. That's all that he was concerned about, music, as far as I could see. I would say he was a prolific composer. He told me that if he didn't write a tune every day, he figured the day was a waste. Now, that doesn't mean that every tune that he wrote was played, but that's where he was. He was writing all the time. Out of the hundreds of days that he wrote tunes, some of them were recorded. People still ask me about Gigi Gryce, especially in Europe. He's like one of those unsung heroes that left the scene too soon to be noticed because at the time that he was here, there was so much going on. This was the peak period. Gigi just didn't stay around long enough.

Brown: The accounts show that Gigi was trying to organize musicians around the issues of publishing and publishing rights. Do you recall, what were some of the things he said?

Farmer: Oh sure, what was happening was that Gigi was one of the first young, black musicians to have his own publishing company. I made a contract with Prestige to record exclusively with them two or three albums a year. The contract said whatever originals there were would be published by the Prestige Publishing Company, and the publishing company would take 50% of the publishing fee and the composer would take the other 50%. Gigi was one of the first guys that was willing to buck that, Gigi and Quincy of my generation. Now, I think that Duke Ellington had his own publishing company, but that was along with somebody named Mills.

Brown: Irving Mills.

Farmer: Irving Mills, right. Gigi and Quincy come along and said, no let's try it another way.

Brown: How was this attitude received among the recording business?

Farmer: They didn't like it. I had a talk with Bob Weinstock, who was the president of Prestige, and I said, "Look man, why do you quibble about a penny here and a penny there?" He said, "That's what we're dealing in is pennies." He was saying like the royalties of the sale of one record that had your tune on it would be like one or two cents. It accrues in the long run, and most people didn't realize that, but that's what Bob Weinstock told me, "We're dealing in pennies." Of course, Bob Weinstock retired before he was forty [laughs].

Brown: Collecting all those pennies [laughs], which should have gone to the musicians since he had no creative input.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: A lot of them should have. Like I told you yesterday, I wrote this tune, which was eventually titled “Farmer’s Market.” It originally was in his company, and recently within the past ten years, I got it back and it’s in my company, but for all those previous years, it was in his company because they figured that was the right of power. If you want to get your tune recorded, you had to give in something. So, everybody did it that way until these guys come along like Gigi and Quincy, and say we’re willing to give it a try and buck the system. That’s how it happened.

Brown: Did they consult with legal counsel to try to firm things up?

Farmer: They consulted with legal counsel. There was one guy who’s still around, a judge, but I can’t remember his name right now, and there were a couple of lawyers that were active and helpful. Of course, you paid them the fee, but they didn’t overcharge you. They would give you advice, and they would tell you what you’re up against, then you make up your mind whether you wanted to go along with it or not. The thing was that a lot of the musicians had interest in money today. They needed money today, and they didn’t have time to fight no kind of battle that would string out over years to get something, so they would just take whatever they could get. Like if the record company [would] say I’ll give you \$100 right now, these guys would be glad to get \$100, very glad.

Brown: What was a more accurate fee for recording back in those days?

Farmer: No, I’m talking about for publishing, for the rights. The fee for recording was union scale, which, at that time, was \$41 for a three hour session. Of course, the leader would get more. If he was going by the union scale, he would get double that. Depending upon the clout he had, the double didn’t mean nothing. Take guys like Miles Davis and Sonny Rollins, depending on their needs, if they were in some sort of position financially where they could hold out for more, then they would get more. Weinstock understood that, and Frank Wolff and Alfred Lion. I’m not saying these were bad people. They were in the market, and you go according to the market.

Brown: Gigi Gryce died [a] mysterious death, no?

Farmer: No, basically, it was not really mysterious. What happened was that Gigi lived a very straight life. He never smoke or drank or did nothing like that, but he loved fatty foods. He loved ice cream. He used to eat a pint of ice cream every day. When I was in Europe, my ex-wife, who was friendly with Gigi’s ex-wife, she told me that Gigi was feeling bad. He went to the doctor and had a stress test where you have to run up and down some sort of stairway, and he told his ex-wife, “That test really did me in. I feel so bad. I’m gonna go down to Florida and cool off with my sister for a week or two.” And he went down there and had a heart attack. That was it. Gigi was a character. He was paranoid. He didn’t trust anybody. That probably had something to do with his short life. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

'cause he was not a relaxed person, not at all. As an example, when we were working with Lionel's band, Clifford Brown is there, Quincy is there, we're all very close. Gigi wrote a piece for Brownie called "Brown Skins," which featured Brownie. It was a heck of a piece, and Brownie played the heck out of it. It was beautiful! But, every night, Gigi asked us to pass in the parts on the tune 'cause he didn't trust that somebody wouldn't steal it. So, we played it and then passed it in. That's an example. He had a money belt, all of his money in the money belt. When time came to check out of the hotel, everybody else would go to the clerk and say, how much do I owe you? Gigi would say, I owe you this, and he had kept records of every Franc that he had spent. His records always were right. He was a compulsive person, which didn't show in the music somehow. That's the paradox. It didn't show in the music. If you listen to his tunes, the tunes were very musical and natural. They sound very natural, normal. It's not like a rigid character, but that's the way he was. I think that was a contribution to his death. You get the hypertension and all that. When we left Lionel's band, then Gigi and Quincy were the most prominent young composers around here, for sure. Quincy was more aggressive than Gigi was, and now Quincy's on the top of the mountain, which is fine with me. I have nothing against that, but I'm sorry Gigi is not around. I'm really sorry because he had so much to give that he didn't get to. He got fed up with the system. He always felt that people were gonna steal from him. That's why he said pass in the music, and he had the money belt, and he told the hotel clerks what he owed. That's the way he was; he was paranoid. He was always looking to be cheated. Finally, he got to the point when he formed his own publishing company – he and Benny had this company – he said, "They're out to get me." So, he left the music business completely and became a teacher. He was living out in Springfield Gardens in Queens, and his wife said that he built a room inside of a room in the cellar with big concrete bricks where he could go in there and nobody could come in there without his permission. He really went out. He thought that people were gonna go so far to come out there and go into that concrete room that he had to kill him or something. We're not talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars. The money that was going around was not worth nothing to nobody. It was worth something to us, but nobody like, not to the mafia. But, that's where he was. It was a tragedy. It was a pity. He had a lot to offer musically, but thinking just got in the way of it. So, he got out of music. The last time I saw him I was walking down Broadway like in the 50s, 53rd or something like that, and ran into him, and he said, "Yeah, I'm gonna get back into it," but he never did. A couple of years later, he was dead. That was it, tragic.

Brown: Being in that band with such great composers, as you said Quincy, Gigi and Clifford, did it inspire you to compose more?

Farmer: No, it didn't inspire me to compose more. It inspired me to try to play better because Gigi and Quincy were great composers, in my idea, but I figured that there were a lot of guys out here playing that weren't really playing the music, and that's what I wanted to do. I wrote some tunes, but like I told you, Gigi said if he didn't write a song every day, it was a day wasted. That's a composer. That's just like Picasso would sketch when he wasn't painting, and that lead to an oil portrait. That's the way Gigi was, but for For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

me, if an idea didn't come to me complete from beginning to end, I never could finish it, and I never developed myself to the point where I could hang in there and finally make something of it. I would write to a certain point and then couldn't go any farther. But, Gigi and Quincy, they could go farther 'cause they hung in there. In fact, they went to school up in Boston. That's where they met each other at what is now called Berklee. It used to be called the Schillinger House. That's where they met.

[Knocks on door]

Brown: We're back now, and during that short break, you were talking about the group that you had with Gigi.

Farmer: We organized a quintet. Freddie Redd was the pianist, my brother was the bass player most of the time, and Art Taylor was the drummer. We played a few gigs around town like Birdland, mostly on the off-nights, and places down in the Village. We managed to get a few things out of town like Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. We were booked to go to Chicago, but Gigi didn't make it for some reason. Then, that came to an end.

Brown: The repertoire featured Gigi's compositions?

Farmer: Yeah, 99% were Gigi's compositions, other than some standard tunes, but he was the writer. He would bring in tunes, and we would run over them. We didn't play everything that he brought in, but we made around two or three albums a year for about two or three years for Prestige. We had an exclusive contract, and that's the way it was. He was a great player. One day, Miles and I were talking, and Miles said, "Gigi can really play if he just had the projection of say like Jackie McLean," 'cause Jackie was straight at you, and Gigi was a little softer. That's the first time I ever heard someone say something like that. Gigi was a great player to my idea, and I'm just sorry he's not here now 'cause what he did then, I really imagine that he would be doing even better now with experience.

Brown: Yesterday you talked a bit about your freelancing career in the mid to late 50s prior to forming the Jazztet with Benny Golson. During that period, you also worked with George Russell, is that correct?

Farmer: Yeah, I didn't work in public, but we did some recordings. That was a very interesting thing to me because my first meeting with George was through a record date that I had done with an alto saxophone player named Hal McKusick, and George had written a couple tunes for that record date. The music was very interesting. It was the kind of things you just don't walk into the studio and play it. You had to get your music in advance and work on it. It developed to the point where George got his own deal with RCA and made his own record, but it took us about a year to make it because we would get together every Sunday out at Milt Hinton's house in Queens and have a rehearsal.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

During the week, we would woodshed on our parts. This is talking about good musicians like Bill Evans and Milt Hinton. These were top-notch people, but the music was very difficult. Finally, when we felt like we were ready to record three or four tunes, we would go in the studio and record them, and back to the woodshed getting ready for the next time. That's one of the things that I'm most proud about in my career was being involved with that music. It was on RCA Victor part of the Jazz Workshop series, George Russell, and Hal McKusick was playing alto, Bill Evans piano, Milt Hinton bass, and Joe Harris or Osie Johnson on drums. It was really a landmark. As usual, I ran into Miles some place, and he said, "Yeah man, I heard that record. It was really great. It was really nice." I explained to him how much time it took us and how hard it was. He said, "I know, I understand 'cause when I made that record *Miles Ahead*, I just told the engineer, 'Keep the tape going all the time.' If you get something right at the rehearsal, use it, splice it." He said it's not easy, and it wasn't. I made maybe two or three records with George. He always used Bill Evans and more or less the same people who were on the first record. Also, I did a whole lot recording around. People would call, and you just take your horn and go to the studio, unless it was something special, then I would ask them can I come by and pick up the music and check it out? 'Cause you don't want to get into the studio and have some surprise that's really difficult 'cause that's no fun.

Brown: What was it like working with George? What was he like as a person?

Farmer: George was great. George is a great musician, but the thing that really impressed me about him was that he was very patient, and he never got excited and said, "Damn, you guys are awful. You're messing up the music. Why does it take so long?" He never said nothing like that. It was always positive. He said, "Okay, let's take it again" [laughs]. I don't know how many times we would take it. Looking back, it seems ironic after spending weeks practicing alone, then you get into the recording studio and you still are not quite up to it. Then, you have to take one, take two, take three, take four. Finally, it's all over, and I can listen to it now, and it sounds perfect. It sounds perfect. There's no indication how difficult it was because this music was very hard. Later on, George got to the point where he got under the influence of Ornette Coleman where George would write a theme and then after theme, he would just let the soloists go free, but it wasn't like that then. Whatever the form of the piece was, that's what you had to base your solo on. Like if you wrote a piece that was nine bars of four-four and then three bars of five-four, that's what you have to improvise on, and it wasn't easy.

Brown: And at this time, he was developing his Lydian Chromatic Concepts.

Farmer: He had developed that, and I wound up studying from him, which was very beneficial to me, but that was just from the harmony. Dealing with these various meters and improvising on them, that certainly wasn't easy, I tell you. I don't care what anybody says, it's not easy.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: You were working with Bill Evans in this group. Maybe you can talk about the creation of *Modern Art*.

Farmer: That's where I met Bill was through George, and then I was doing some off-nights at Birdland. Interesting[ly], I decided one time I would call Bill and get him to make the Monday night with me. He came up to me after the first set and said, "Art, I'm not able to finish the gig. I'm gonna go home." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because some people were saying that I don't deserve to be here because there are black guys who play just as well or better than I do who don't have a job." And I told him that I called him for the gig because he was the one I wanted on the gig. This was no consideration about white or black. If that's what things were based on, we would really be in trouble. I said, "As a professional musician, you owe it to me to finish the gig." And he did. He finished the gig, and for a long time after that he reminded me about this. He said thanks, thanks a lot. But, that was nonsense, whatever people told him. I couldn't go along with that at that point in my life. I had learned better. After Miles made that *Tentet* record, then he came back out to California, and I met him and I said, "Man, what you doing recording with all those white cats?" He said, "I don't care what color anybody is. If they can play the music, they can be green," 'cause he's got Mulligan on there and Lee Konitz. I'm out there in California, and I know the scene out there was very anti-black, so I couldn't understand.

[End of disc 3]

[Out of order – beginning of disc 6]

Brown: Again, you were talking about talking to Miles about *Birth of the Cool* and dealing with racial issues.

Farmer: Yeah, I asked Miles, "What are you doing recording with these white cats in the band, like Lee Konitz and Gerry Mulligan?" He said, "I don't care what color anybody is." Later on, all this press about he's got to kill a white man before he dies and all kind of stuff like that, but as far as the music was concerned, he didn't care what color anybody was, and that taught me a lesson. The lesson was that if you're going for the music, you're going for the music. The color of somebody's skin doesn't mean a damn thing. What they're playing is what counts, and that's the only thing that counts, what they're playing and as long as they show up to the gig on time.

Brown: Well, I think this account shows the sensitivity and honesty of Bill Evans, his integrity to be able to come up to you and confide in you, and be very honest and direct about what it was...

Farmer: He was like that. He was direct and honest because in the fifties, there was a little jazz magazine around town for a short time, and somebody wrote a very derogatory article about a clarinet player named Tony Scott. Bill had been working with Tony, and For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Bill wrote a letter to the editor and really laid the guy out. It said, “How dare you do this?” And Tony Scott wasn’t nobody’s favorite, but the guy who wrote the article really cut him up, cut him into bits, and Bill just felt that it was going to far. That’s the way he was.

Brown: So, again, back to *Modern Art*, could you explain...

Farmer: *Modern Art* was done... the idea was created by Monty Kay. Monty was eventually the manager of the MJQ, but at that time, he was the vice president at the United Artist recording label, and he was responsible for jazz. He got the idea of doing an album that would be the poll winners. There was one year, that year that we did the album or the year before, Bill, myself and Benny Golson, we were in a poll called “New Stars” in *Downbeat*, and we came out on top in the categories for new stars, so Monty Kay decided to do an album like that. There was no idea about who was gonna be the top biller, who was gonna have top billing at that time, then he decided to put it under my name when it was done. It was Bill, Benny Golson, myself, Dave Bailey because Dave and I were working with Mulligan’s band at the time, and my brother was on the bass. It turned out nice.

Brown: It begins with an original composition entitled “Mox Nix.”

Farmer: At that time I didn’t know the proper spelling. I’d seen it in print, but I used to have a girlfriend out in Brooklyn that I’d go out to see sometime, and I called her up and said, “Look, I can’t make it tonight,” so she said, “mox nix.”

Brown: It kind of presages, yet very ironic that you end living in the country where German is spoken. I want to backtrack just a little bit because we talked about your work in the avant-garde, and there was a group that you were working with earlier on called New Directions.

Farmer: Teddy Charles, yeah. Damn, that’s when I first got here and working with Teddy was very beneficial to me because that’s where my reputation started of being a person that was sympathetic to whatever everyone wrote, and I was willing to do my damndest to play it the way they wrote it. I would take it home and study it and practice it. That’s where it all started, through Teddy, New Directions. We worked most of the time with a quartet. Mingus was in the group sometimes. I remember one time we were playing in Philadelphia at a place, and we’re playing this last tune on the set, and finally Teddy said, “Okay, take it out,” play the last chorus or something. Mingus was so disgusted, he sat down – there was a rail around the bandstand – he sat down on the rail and said, “Damn, I was waiting to play my solo, and you guys ended the piece. That’s really a drag because nobody plays shit!” He was really ticked off. He said, “Y’all weren’t playing nothing anyway, then you take it out and I couldn’t play!”

Brown: Who else was in that group? Who was on drums...

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: There was a drummer named Walter Bolden. Walter, Mingus, Teddy and myself, it was just a quartet. The jobs I made with Teddy were just a quartet all the time. New Directions, it never really took off. It never really left the ground. Certain devices like changing the tempo, speeding up and slowing down, contrapuntal stuff that later on became known as the new thing, we were doing that back then.

Brown: What year was that?

Farmer: This was like in the mid fifties, '54 or '55.

Brown: This precedes your work with Mulligan?

Farmer: Yes, it does.

Brown: Maybe there hasn't been enough written about Teddy Charles, is there something that you can add about Teddy Charles; what it was like to work with him or as a person?

Farmer: No, the only thing that I can say basically was that he was trying to find another area. He was content just playing the vibes like Milt Jackson or Lionel Hampton. He wanted to do something that was more advanced. There was no audience for it ... He's not in music now. He's has a yacht. He rents the yacht and takes people on cruises, and he's happy doing that, which I can understand.

Brown: Did you know or do you remember what inspired him or influenced him as far as his musical direction? Was he listening to particular things? Was he studying scores?

Farmer: I think Monk inspired him. I think that was the basic inspiration, Monk. Other than Monk, it was Charlie Parker, with more Monk than anything else.

Brown: Teo Macero's name is mentioned in relation...

Farmer: Yeah, he was a part of this whole movement. We did things like concerts, not a whole lot of concerts, but some things, and Mingus and Teo and Teddy were the basis for this whole thing, like a workshop type of thing where the guys would bring in music and we would play it. If we had a concert, various people would make contributions of their own compositions. I would say the peak of the whole thing, there was a concert that was done at Brandeis University and Monk was involved in it. George Russell did a piece and Monk did a piece, and Gunther Schuller was very much involved with it. It was supposed to be like three jazz composers and then there were three contemporary classical composers. It was a great concert, and that was supposed to show where music was at this time.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: This was, I believe, when John S. Wilson coined the term “Third Stream” to describe this music? No, this might have been before that, then ultimately there was what was called the Third Stream concert at Brandeis where Mingus... It’s kind of interesting when you mention what was going on in the New Direction’s group, these were some of the things that Mingus would later develop in the concept of a workshop, *accelerando*, *decelerando*. These are the things that really became associated with Mingus’ musical language.

Farmer: This whole concert was quite an experience to me because it was another case where you really had to work with the music and take it home and study it. There was one of the classical composers, and the whole piece was four-four, you know “ding ding ding ding ding,” so you figure well hell, how hard could it be? What happened, Anthony, the way this guy wrote, you had to read it and play it just like with your fingers in your ears because you if you listened to what the guy sitting next to you did, you’d get thrown off. I never will forget, the composer told us at the rehearsal one day, he said, “Now, I’m relying upon you guys to put the feeling in it” [laughs]. I was thinking, if I could just get through it, I’d be very happy. It was very hard. Everybody is playing something different. Like if you take a melody line and say you got three horns, and one horn plays one note and the next horn plays the next note, and the melody is jumping around from horn to horn, if you listen to what someone else does, you get completely hung up.

Brown: Do you remember the composer?

Farmer: Milton Babbitt.

Brown: Do you remember anyone else who was featured, the other two classical composers? I guess maybe Gunther Schuller would’ve been one of them, and then there would’ve been a third.

Farmer: Yeah, yeah. Actually, what Gunther did was he transcribed a piece by Ellington, one piece that Ellington had recorded with his band like in the thirties or forties. I don’t remember the name, but it was great. Mingus wrote a great piece called “Revelations,” so we had three pieces from the jazz side and three pieces from the contemporary classical side. To me, that was one of the things that I was so happy to be a part of because I thought it really had some meaning to it other than just a jam session concert, which is okay too, but this went farther than that. The fact that these guys were commissioned by Brandeis to do this gave them the freedom to do something that they wanted to do, which they probably would’ve never had a chance to do, at least not at that time.

Brown: Do you remember the year?

Farmer: It was in the fifties like around ’56 or ’57, something like that.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Brown: What was the reception, the audience reception and the press reception, to the concert?

Farmer: it was okay, as far as I can remember. I didn't see the press on it because it was not here in New York. The concert was up at Brandeis University, which is somewhere in Massachusetts, I think. I didn't see the papers, but usually at a thing like that, you can count on the audience because they've been told that this is something that's gonna be different, and that's probably why they're there anyway.

Brown: It seems that [at] this period of your career you were doing a lot of things different.

Farmer: Yeah, sure, I was right in it. It all happened because I had developed this reputation of being a guy who would take care of business: be on the gig on time, take the music home and really work on it, and hang in there. If people had something that was out of the ordinary, they would call me to do it. It was not because I was the best trumpet player around, but I would give it my best.

Brown: Perhaps best for that job. Can we go to your association with Gerry Mulligan's quartet?

Farmer: We have to go to Horace Silver first.

Brown: Please, go ahead. Let's get Horace in there.

Farmer: Because one lead to the other. When Horace left Art, he organized a quintet, and actually we were staying at the same hotel downtown, and he got the quintet. I used to go over to his room and practice the tunes with him with Hank Mobley. I worked with Horace for about a year, and I'd run into the drummer Dave Bailey on some jam sessions around town, and he told me that Mulligan was looking for a trumpet player because he had come back east with Brookmeyer. Chet had left, so he got Brookmeyer. He wanted to get Chet back again, but that didn't work, so he was looking for a trumpet player. It turned out that he hired me for the gig, and we had about two or three weeks of rehearsal before our first gig. The first gig was a place out in Long Island called the Cork and Bib in Westbury, Long Island. I got up there on the bandstand with this quartet – there was a bass player named Henry Grimes and Dave Bailey on the drums – and I felt like I was in public with no clothes on, this standard nightmare that many people have that you suddenly you find yourself walking down the street with no clothes on, and you try to look like everything is cool [laughs]. What had happened was that I had been playing with Horace, and Horace was and is a very dominant pianist. He plays very hard, and you have to keep up with him. If you don't, it's like you're gonna get run over by a herd of buffalo or a bunch of wild horses 'cause his rhythm is so strong. There's no laying back with Horace. That's what I had been dealing with, and suddenly I'm on this bandstand with Mulligan, the bass player and the drummer, and the drummer's playing with the

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

brushes damn near all the time. I didn't hear this piano pushing, and I just felt like, damn I'm really exposed. But, I got used to it and everything turned out okay. It was very educational to play in that type of situation, and I worked with Mulligan for a year at least. We played mostly concerts, but we worked in some clubs here in New York and in Chicago, LA, San Francisco, and we played a tour over in Europe, and then after a year, he said he wanted to organize a big band, which turned out to be called The Concert Jazz Band. I had no interest in working with a big band, so we just split up. That's when Benny and I formed a group, but with Mulligan, it was fun. We're still very friendly. We do some things together from time to time, like last year when I did this concert at Lincoln Center on the jazz thing, which was like one night, so Mulligan was on there, Mulligan and Benny and all the cats that I had worked with in the past. I mean, a lot of them, and he wrote a piece for me. Like I said, we're very friendly. I really think I learned a lot from him. He could be difficult personally, but he was honest. He wasn't saying one thing and thinking another thing, so you could deal with it.

Brown: I guess we'll return again to *Modern Art* because that was recorded in 1958?

Farmer: Yeah, I was still with Mulligan at that time when we did the recording, and that's why Dave was there because Dave and I were working together with Mulligan's group. Like I said, it was Monty Kay's idea to do it. Benny wrote the arrangements other than "Mox Nix," which I put on the paper. It turned out good, it turned out satisfactory, but it was like cutting teeth when you were doing it, or pulling teeth. It seems like in my whole career almost everything I did felt like giving birth. It was painful. But then, I found out no matter how painful it is, just hang in there and put your best effort in, and when it's all over, nine times out of ten it's gonna be something that you can live with. If you give up and say this is too hard, you're never gonna make it. I'm not a natural musician. I'm not a guy who didn't have to work at it. Some guys, it comes easy to them. It didn't come easy to me. I found out if you really hang in there, you can get something.

Brown: The recording received critical acclaim. It was well received.

Farmer: It was okay, yeah. But it felt very hard when we were doing it. We chose good tunes, and you have to do it according to your standards, until you reach the point where you know that you can't do it any better that day, and then you say, okay let's go on to the next tune.

Brown: Could one look at this as perhaps the impetus to form the group that you did with Benny?

Farmer: That was part of it. Prior to forming the Jazztet, Benny had left the Jazz Messengers and was living in New York. We had run into each other on various other gigs. We worked together with a band that was led by Oscar Pettiford, a great bassist...

Brown: Excuse me, who else was in that band?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: Sahib Shihab was on baritone. Jerome Richardson was in the band. There was a very fine trumpet player named Ray Copeland. James Cleveland was in the band. It wasn't like a sixteen piece band. Maybe it was like twelve pieces or something like that, I can't remember everyone's name. Hank Jones was there. Oscar was one of the monumental bassists in the history of jazz. Joe Harris was playing drums or else Osie Johnson playing drums. It was a good band, it was a positive experience really.

Brown: Did you work much? I mean, big bands in the late fifties...

Farmer: No, not much, but he had a deal to work in Jazzland so many weeks a year. Not Jazzland, I mean Birdland [laughs]. Excuse me.

Brown: Jumped to Austria already [laughs].

Farmer: That's about it. I think he might have played a couple one-nighters someplace, which I couldn't make 'cause I was working on something else when the dates came up, but we made a couple records for ABC Paramount. That was about it. Benny and I would run into each other on various situations, and then finally when I left Mulligan when Mulligan was organizing the Concert Jazz Band or Orchestra, then I'm thinking I would like to start a group again. I was thinking I was gonna call Benny and ask him would he be interested because I knew that he had left Art Blakey, and before I could call him, he called me. I said, "Man, I was just getting ready to call you!" We decided to form a partnership, and that's how the Jazztet came into being. Benny had been working for some weeks down at a place called the Five Spot, and he'd been using Curtis Fuller, and he said he'd like to have Curtis. He would like to have three horns instead of two because that would give him more possibilities to write. So, I said, "Okay, I don't have any objection to that." We talked about personnel, and we wound up using my brother and Dave Bailey, and then Benny said, "There's a young pianist over in Philadelphia. This guy's really something. He hasn't been out of town. He's really gonna make an impression." It was McCoy Tyner, so we got him. This was the time when the union was still very strong, so we said, "Yeah, but he's not in the union. If he's gonna work with us, he's got to put in his transfer and wait six months before he can take gigs and go out of town and stuff. What can we do about that?" I said, "I know a guy down at the union who is sympathetic," so I went down to talk to my man. He said, "Look, go to the ten cent store and get a rent receipt book. Make out some receipts for rent for at least six months and mash them around, make them look older than like you just bought them. Bring them back here with the joining fee, and we'll put him right in." He said I understand because I explained to him that we were starting a new group, and there weren't that many people around who could play what Benny was writing that were available to us. Hank Jones could've done it, but Hank was working on the staff at ABC. There were some other guys, but they were already established and doing well. For them to come with us would be going backwards. McCoy was a young guy, so he told us what to do and we did it. I said, "That's really nice of you. I really appreciate it. What can we do for you?" He said, For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

“Just bring me a bottle of Scotch. Dewar’s will be okay.” That’s nothing, but that was McCoy’s introduction to the jazz audience other than playing in Philadelphia. Now, it would’ve happened sooner than later anyway, but we were fortunate to have him because McCoy was McCoy.

Brown: That first album is a killer. Do you remember the name of your contact at the union?

Farmer: Glover, Henry Glover. I don’t think he’s alive anymore, but he was a nice guy. He was really nice because he had enough intelligence to make a distinction between union rules and people trying to be creative. Do you understand what I mean, Anthony? He figured this is the rule, but you guys are really trying to do something, [so] we’ll just have to go around it.

Brown: How did you get to know him?

Farmer: I knew him because I had been a member of 802 since when I first came here in 1946. If you’re a member of the union, every time you do a recording, then you had to go there to get your money, to pick up your check. You have to pay your dues, so I just saw him around sometimes. “Hello Mr. Glover” and “How are you?” That was it. He was sympathetic. Most of the guys were, generally speaking. Sometimes you’d fine yourself in a hard situation. I remember one time that I was working at a place uptown on 125th Street called The Baby Grand, and I hadn’t paid my dues for that quarter, and the union delegate came in and wanted to see everybody’s card. He saw that my card wasn’t stamped for that quarter; he wouldn’t let me finish the night, which was a drag. I said, “Look, if I had been working, I would’ve paid my dues.” He said, “That’s too bad.”

Brown: So, you had a bittersweet relationship with the union?

Farmer: Oh yeah, because that’s really rough. The bandleader would have to go along with the union man because otherwise he would’ve been in trouble himself. If he used somebody who was non-union, then he would’ve been up against it. This was prior to the time of the Taft-Hartley law, which says you can’t deprive a person of earning a livelihood because of being a member of the union. But, that’s the way it was then.

Brown: Had you known or worked with Curtis Fuller before you formed the Jazztet?

Farmer: Yeah, I had worked with Curtis not in clubs, but Curtis had made a record date under his name on Blue Note, and I played on that. That’s when I first worked with Curtis. Of course, he had to be exceptional otherwise he wouldn’t have gotten the chance to make the record date. That’s another story. I have to tell you during this time, which was the glory days of recording, every week I was in the studio, in Rudy Van Gelder’s studio because Savoy had Wednesday, Prestige had Friday and Blue Note had Sunday. I remember sometimes if Blue Note didn’t have anybody lined up by Saturday night to

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

record on Sunday, they'd be standing out on the sidewalk across the street from Birdland – that's where Coloney Records used to be – they'd be standing out there waiting to see who was gonna walk by [laughs]. But, they did a lot of stuff. Between those two companies, I was out there at least one day every week for some time, which was a great thing. That was a great period. I couldn't say everybody, but most of the people who were able to play anything were at least out there sometime recording for one of these companies or the other. Everybody had their chance. There was a great pianist named Sonny Clark, for instance. At that time, he was regarded as just another good piano player, but he did at least a couple albums under his name. He did one called *Cool Struttin'*, which is a big hit now. In Japan, somebody told me they were over there and they went into "Cool Struttin'" and the whole audience started singing along with him.

Brown: That first release by the Jazztet was on the Argo label?

Farmer: Argo label, yeah.

[End of disc 4]

Chess was a company in Chicago that was [a] very successful company for recording blues, people like Muddy Waters. Then, they started a subsidiary label called Argo to record jazz. The person in charge of Argo was a young man named Jack Tracy, who prior to that had been the editor of Downbeat Magazine. They were looking for artists, and we wound up going there. I guess we were involved with Argo for about two or three years, then we moved on to Mercury, and we did a couple albums there with the Jazztet, and Benny did one under his name, and I did one under my name.

Brown: This recording had quite an impact in the jazz world with the success of "Killer Joe"...

Farmer: Oh yeah, "Killer Joe" was a big seller. It was a very simple tune, but it was something that you didn't have to be very knowledgeable to appreciate it. It had a hook to it also.

Brown: The date featured, "I Remember Clifford," a beautiful ballad, and "Blues March," so this must have really launched this group.

Farmer: It did. It was a very successful record for us, certainly, with those tunes. Some of those tunes had been done before...

Brown: "Blues March" by Blakey.

Farmer: I had recorded "Clifford" with Oscar Pettiford first. Mark [?] recorded on United Artists, but then to put everything together to make an album with tunes that were already well known was a good thing at that time. I'm not gonna complain about that.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Brown: Your debut performance, that's another subject...

Farmer: Oh, you mean public performance?

Brown: Public performance.

Farmer: Yeah, that was something down there at the Five Spot. We opened opposite Ornette Coleman, and everybody who was anybody was down there because they had heard about Ornette being the new thing. Monk was down there, Leonard Bernstein, Miles Davis, all kind of guys. Everybody had to come down to check it out, and we got kind of lost in the shuffle because compared to what Ornette was doing, what we were doing was done well, but it was more conventional. It just didn't seem to be as adventurous, stepping out into the unknown like what Ornette was doing. Ornette got more notice than we did. I don't think we ever recovered from that. We stayed together for three years or something, but looking back on it now, Anthony, if we had opened there not opposite Ornette, we would've made more noise. What happened with the Jazztet was Benny was writing the arrangements, McCoy Tyner was the pianist, who was a very capable pianist, but then he was invited by Trane [Coltrane] to work with him. Trane left Miles and formed his own group, and they had gigged together sometime in Philadelphia. Tyner felt that he would be more happy with Trane, so he went there. We found it very difficult to get a pianist who could fill that seat. We really ran into problems trying to find people to replace the original people. Curtis went with Art Blakey, then we had a succession of trombone players, but nobody came near to taking Curtis' place. Benny's writing this music that's not so easy to play. It was demanding. You just can't call up a guy on the telephone and say, come to work tonight [laughs]. Just wouldn't work, so finally we gave it up after about three years. We were working, but I felt personally that we were spending more time rehearsing what we had done than moving ahead. That just didn't make sense. Benny felt like he would like to stay in New York, stay in town more and do more writing and get involved with various other things than just working with the Jazztet on the road and writing for the Jazztet, which I can certainly understand. It came to an end, but that opening opposite Ornette was really something.

Brown: What did you think of Ornette's music?

Farmer: I didn't think too much of it. I knew Ornette out in California in the early 50s before I left California with Lionel. We used to run into each other on jam sessions around town. He used to have a hairdo like, what we used to call, "croak in oil [?]." His hair was long, but it was fixed with a straightening comb or ones of those combs where you put curls in your head. It was all long, and we called him "Nature Boy" [laughs]. He was one of those guys that would get on the bandstand when he got there, [and] the other guys would just leave. Say you're gonna play a tune like "All the Things You Are," he'd jump up there, and he'd be playing the right licks at the wrong time. It just showed that he didn't know what the heck he was doing as far as harmonic form was concerned. Of
For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

course, he overcame that and jumped over that later on, and he came up with his own thing. He became a great influence, but what he did never really moved me. He would write good lines, but when time came for the improvisation, he abandoned the form that he'd written on and just went completely free, whatever came to his mind. The way I had learned music was that when you play a tune, you improvise on the tune. You just don't jump out there and do whatever you feel like doing. There's a certain order that you're supposed to stick to. That's the way I learned. When he came along just jumping out there in space, I just couldn't dig it. Anyway, he became a major influence and still is. He started something that is still going on.

Brown: How would you define that influence or describe that influence?

Farmer: Jazz had gotten to the point where composers like Gigi and Benny and Quincy and Gil Evans and George Russell were writing things that were more and more difficult. The harmonic form was difficult to deal with. It got to the point where you just couldn't jump up on the bandstand and play one tune based on "I Got Rhythm," and then the next tune based on the blues, and then back to "I Got Rhythm," and then back to the blues, and then "Honeysuckle Rose," a little simple song like that. They were writing tunes that you really had to know what was going on. If you're gonna play "Stablemates," things like that, you just couldn't jump up there... It used to be the thing going on where somebody [would] say, "What are we gonna play? We're gonna play such and such a tune. I don't know it. Well, you'll hear it." You won't hear "Stablemates." You have to know it. It had gone a little too far where people were feeling constricted by the harmonic form. So, Ornette comes along, and he never could deal with it, so he just went into another neighborhood, said the heck with it. Wrote a line, he had a good rhythm section, so they would play the line and then time come for the solos, they'd play whatever they wanted to play. A lot of people felt this is the answer to our prayers [laughs]. George Russell said – it was a paraphrase, I think, someone else had used it in a different way, but George Russell said – "avant-garde is the last refuse of the scoundrel or the untalented" [laughs]. Because if you're gonna play a tune and you don't have to cope with anything, just play whatever comes to your mind, that's much harder. If you're gonna jump up there and play tunes like "Stablemates" and "Whisper Not" and stuff like that, you have to know what's going on. "Round Midnight," tunes like that you have to know. You just hear it, you have to know it and in order to know it, you have to have studied it. You just can't learn it on a jam session. When Coleman came on the scene that gave a lot of people a new lease on life. We talked the other day about this place, Minton's. We used to go up there and "Lockjaw" was the session master. There's another place called the Paradise. These were the two places in Harlem, the main jam session places like in the late 40s, early 50s. There was one guy around there called "Horse Collar," and there was another guy they called "The Demon." Saxophone players, and these guys were like advanced Ornette Coleman. They were around before Ornette Coleman ever took a horn. These guys sound so weird [laughs]. The people who were really trying to learn music would say, what is that? This guy has completely disregarded everything that we were spending our life trying to cope with. Lockjaw wouldn't have none of that because [he] was very

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

strict. If you're gonna play a tune, then play the tune or else get off the stand. "The Demon" would get up there, and everybody else would get off the stand.

Brown: There seems to be a history with saxophone players for having this kind of reputation. We know that Charlie Parker in Kansas City would hit those jam sessions...

Farmer: Yeah, Charlie Parker, well at least he learned to deal with it. He learned to play the tunes the way they were written. He just didn't play the melody and then go out.

Brown: Sure, but I meant in his early period, he was still struggling to understand to grasp the concept of the music. He went on to become if not the greatest improviser, at least among the greatest improvisers. Then, of course, Ornette went on to develop his own language, but what happened to "The Demon" and "Horse Collar"?

Farmer: "Horse Collar." I don't know what happened to those guys. This was years ago. They're probably not alive now. When they got up there, everybody else would say, "You got it man, you got it" [laughs].

Brown: It wasn't just squeaking and squawking, they were just actually not playing?

Farmer: There was a lot of squeaking and squawking going on. They were doing the best they could do.

Brown: This is 1959, 1960 and right around the corner, John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy. Had you seen Sun Ra because he was also pioneering new expressions?

Farmer: No, he wasn't around at that time. He was still out in Chicago. Sun Ra came around here like in the late 50s, and he brought some guys with him from Chicago.

Brown: What did you think of John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy when they played music that...

Farmer: Eric Dolphy and I were very close friends out in California.

Brown: Roy Porter.

Farmer: Yeah, with Roy Porter's band. We were trying to unravel the shit and figure out what we could do [laughs].

Brown: Was there any indication of Eric's direction that early on?

Farmer: No, not really. The only thing that I saw about Eric was that Eric was like Trane. He was like 99% music. Only indication was that to him any song could have some musical value almost. Like birds singing in the park, he would listen to that and that's
For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

what he would play that night on his gig. But then, he really found himself working with Mingus because until he worked with Mingus, he was just playing within the conventional framework, such as what I was doing and everybody else from our time. He applied himself, very concentrated to music and to the horns. Working with Mingus gave him the freedom to go whichever way he wanted to go. After Mingus, he hooked up with Trane, and they were two kindred souls really.

Brown: By the time the Jazztet had folded, McCoy had already spent a considerable period with John Coltrane, who was now starting to pioneer a new sound, or at least to expand his creative language. Did you talk to McCoy later?

Farmer: Did I talk to Coy?

Brown: McCoy, a little bit later?

Farmer: Not in any detail. We would run into each other sometime, – what are you doing, how are you feeling, what’s going on? – but nothing more pointed than that. We never talked about the music.

Brown: What was your opinion or impression when all of a sudden John Coltrane starts to expand his...

Farmer: When I first met Trane, he came out to Los Angeles with a group that Dizzy had put together. It was Trane and Jimmy Heath on the saxophone, Percy Heath was playing bass, Specs Wright from Philadelphia was playing drums, and Milt Jackson was in the group. They didn’t have a pianist, so everybody took turns playing the piano. I met Trane then, and that’s the first time I heard him play. He sounded fine, but to me, he was just another young guy like everybody else trying to get it together. By the time he organized his group with Elvin Jones and Tyner, he had it together then. At least, he sounded like he had it together to me because he was doing things in such a way that they had not been done before, not even by Charlie Parker.

Brown: Even before McCoy Tyner joined the group, John Coltrane had recorded *Giant Steps*. Did that have an impact on you? Do you recall hearing that for the first time?

Farmer: It had an impact on me in so much that I felt that it was out of my realm of possibility.

Brown: Even after working with George Russell and all of the other things you had been doing?

Farmer: Yeah! It was harder than George Russell--to improvise. I have to tell you, the joke about *Giant Steps* was that there used to be a great saxophone player and writer around New York named Al Cohn, and the story goes that somebody asked on a gig, “Al, For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

do you play ‘Giant Steps.’” He said, “Yes, I play ‘Giant Steps’ with my own changes” [laughs]. The changes in “Giant Steps” separates the players from the would be.

Brown: In the chronology, that brings us up with the first end [or] incarnation of the Jazztet in ’62, ’63?

Farmer: Yeah, it was around then.

Brown: Close up the camp.

Farmer: What happened [was] Sonny Rollins had spent his period on the bridge where he wasn’t playing in public. It was just in the woodshed, and he came back to playing in public, and he organized a group. He had the guitarist, Jim Hall, Walter Perkins was playing drums, and the bassist, Bob Crenshaw. The Jazztet played opposite them, and I really liked what they were doing because they were playing tunes, real songs, but then they would improvise on the songs, and it had a musical, warm, mellow feeling to it, whatever they did. Then, Sonny fell under the influence of Ornette, and he started to go that way and hired Don Cherry. That’s when Jim Hall bowed out. He said, I can’t make this. Jazztet fell apart, so I organized a quartet, and I asked Jim if [he] would like to work with me. He said yeah, so we worked together. I had made a record with a big band from Mercury that was arranged by Oliver Nelson and we had used Jim on the record, among a whole lot of other [big band musicians]. We had known each other for two or three years, and we had similar tastes in music, so we started to work with a quartet, which was very satisfying. I guess that lasted about two years. Jim was having a struggle with alcohol, and he felt that it would be less of a strain if he didn’t travel, if he just stayed here in town. He stayed in town and got a job with some kind of talk show band and straightened himself out. But, that was a good period also to me. ‘Cause Jim is the kind of player regardless of whatever you play, he’s so quick that he can justify it [laughs].

Brown: What period are we looking at, ’63, ’64?

Farmer: Yeah, in the early 60s, like ’63, ’64 ‘cause I remember we went to Europe in ’64, and we did a tour over then, and after that that’s when Jim decided to stay in New York.

Brown: Was this the first time you returned to Europe since the Lionel Hampton days?

Farmer: No, the first time I returned to Europe was with Mulligan say like in ’58, ’59 or something like that, just before we organized the Jazztet.

Brown: Was there any difference or what was significantly different in the reception of the European audiences since you had been there with Lionel Hampton in the early 50s and now returning with Mulligan in mid or late...

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: Returning with Mulligan, that took place around '58, and I had been there with Lionel in '53, but when I first went there in '53, no one had ever heard about me. In '53, we did the recordings in Europe, in Sweden and Paris, and then like '54, '55, I had started recording here in New York, so by the time I went back there in '58 with Mulligan, people had heard about me, so the reception was better certainly. The funny thing [was] when the tour was over, I went Gerry and said, "You know, I think I should've gotten more money on this tour." He says, "Okay, I'll talk to Norman about it."

Brown: Norman Granz?

Farmer: Yeah. Then, he came back the next day and he said, "Okay, Norman said alright. Here's the bread." No hassle. We got along well when everything was fair and square.

Brown: Great! That must've been unique [laughs].

Farmer: Yeah, I guess it was [laughs].

Brown: In the jazz world.

Farmer: Like, after the gig, because you're supposed to do your negotiations before you leave town, but here I am saying, after the gig, "Man, I think I should've gotten more money." It just worked out.

Brown: What about the tour with Jim Hall?

Farmer: We went over there in '64. That was a great tour.

Brown: Who went with you on that tour? What was the group?

Farmer: The bassist was Steve Swallow, and the drummer was Pete La Roca. Pete La Roca and Steve Swallow played so good together. The group would, what I would call, played sort of freely. We played tunes, but everybody was free to do whatever they wanted to do on the tunes. We had skeleton arrangements, but it was nothing that was so rigid that you had to do it that way. What we wanted was to be creative, have room to do what comes to your mind, as long as it didn't interfere with nobody else, go ahead and do it. So, we had a good time. We could play anything that we knew. We didn't have no arrangements written down that we were obliged to stick to. One of the experiences we had in Sweden, a Swedish pianist had made a record of Swedish folk songs, so we were there in Sweden, and there was a Swedish company that was kind of hooked with Prestige here. The guy comes to me and says, "How about you guys do an album of Swedish folk songs?" I said, "We don't know any Swedish folk songs." That was a big hit over there. He said, "Okay, I'll get the music," and he went to what looked like a ten cent store or something and got a little pocketbook full of folk songs. We just went through it and found the songs that sounded good to us. There were some nice songs. The For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

album was successful, very successful, *To Sweden, With Love*. Turning pages, we found one song that said like “Sw. Folk Song,” and so we thought that meant Swedish. We started working on that [and] we were gonna record that. We’re in the studio, and we had never seen the music before. The guy runs out and says, “Hey, stop, stop!” I said, “What’s the matter?” He says, “That’s not Swedish, that’s Swiss” [laughs]. So, we skipped that one and went on to another one. There were some nice songs to improvise on. Of course, with guys who were so loose like Jim, Steve and Pete, they were creative. You could give them a general idea, and they would just take it from there. Everybody got along well, so it was a good time musically. Then, after the tour was finished, Jim really felt that he should stay home.

Brown: Who booked that tour?

Farmer: Monty Kay, who was the manager of the MJQ.

Brown: So, you’ve had a lasting relationship with him?

Farmer: Yeah, that lasted for some years, until he moved out to California. He was one of the original partners of Birdland when it started.

Brown: Of course, mostly associated with Modern Jazz Quartet as the manager for them.

Farmer: Yes, right.

Brown: What happened after Jim Hall left the group?

Farmer: After Jim left the group, we got a pianist by the name of Steve Kuhn. He was recommended by Steve Swallow and Pete La Roca. We worked together for about a year. This is still in the sixties, around ’63, I guess. No, after ’63, because we went over with Jim in ’64, so this was around ’65 or something like that. I started spending more and more time in Europe, and I finally just decided I would stay there and visit here.

Brown: What informed that decision?

Farmer: You remember the sixties, Anthony, that we had going on in the United States, the Civil Rights thing. Here in New York, the places I played [at], the Village Vanguard, maybe once every two years or something, seldom in other words. Other than that, I was playing at a place called Slugs maybe two or three times a year.

Brown: In Chicago?

Farmer: No, Slugs here. I would play in similar places like in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and Chicago. It seemed like I was in a rut playing in these clubs, in these ghettos. I wasn’t playing no major concerts. I wasn’t playing no jazz festivals or nothing like that. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

It was just going from one little club to the next, and because of the civil rights thing, there was a lot of social stress going on, riots and fires and stuff. People were afraid to go out at night, afraid to go into these neighborhoods. I just felt like I wasn't getting anyplace. So, I thought I would get away for a year or two. I was presented with an opportunity, and I took it.

Brown: What was that opportunity?

Farmer: There's a classic pianist named Friedrich Gulda, and I ran into him in Berlin. On my off night, I went to a concert he was playing. He was playing a concert and had Ron Carter and Tootie Heath. The first part of the concert he'd play classic Mozart and all that, and then the second half was jazz. I had known him from a time that he visited here in New York, and I was talking to him on the break, and he told me about this thing that was going on, this competition. He asked me if I wanted to be one of the judges, and I said sure, why not. He had Cannonball, J.J., Ron Carter, Joe Zawinul, Mel Lewis and myself; we were the judges. It was called The International Jazz Competition. It was sponsored by the bank of the Central Sparkasse in the city of Vienna, and the winners got paid two or three thousand dollars on down, first place, second place, third place. The whole period of choosing the winner took about two weeks. After the two weeks, we played a few concerts with the band. The band consisted of the judges and some of the Viennese musicians. At that time, they told me that the Viennese radio was in the process of organizing a jazz band, and they asked me would I be interested, and I said yeah, why not. When I look back on what was going on over here, I figure, well I might as well be over there 'cause I would be free because the kind of deal they were offering was like to work ten days a month and ten months a year, and you would be free to do whatever you wanted to do other than that. It was a jazz band, so I said okay.

Brown: What would you do in those ten days?

Farmer: You were in the studio. You would record. When the thing first started, we were just recording jazz. That didn't last very long. We had a meeting with the people, what you would call the people who had the programs where they were playing records, and we would say, "Why aren't you playing more of our music?" They said, "Because it's not what the people want to hear. There's too much jazz." So, then we changed the format and started playing more accessible music. That became popular, and so instead of being there for ten days I found myself being there for more and more time, and it was cutting into my own ambitions. I finally had to put an end to it because I found myself more and more going to Klein Schuster. It felt like I had my hat in my hand, saying, "Can I get off next Saturday because I have a concert in Stockholm" or something like that, and he could say yes or no. I know one time Fritz and I went all the way to Bombay and didn't stay there 24 hours. We played three concerts and had to get back on the plane and come all the way back to Vienna to play on a recording session, background music for some singer.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: That was Fritz Pauer?

Farmer: Yeah.

Brown: Was he the musical director?

Farmer: No, he was the pianist in the band.

Brown: Who was the musical director?

Farmer: The musical director was a guy named Johannes Fehring.

Brown: What year was that that you finally made the decision to move to Europe?

Farmer: This was in the sixties, say like around '66, around that time.

Brown: That early? 'Cause I think it's showing '68 in most references.

Farmer: It says '68 because what happened was that I still had my place over here, but I had sublet it, and in '68, I let it go. That's when I started saying that's the time I really became a resident in Europe.

Brown: You were married at this time?

Farmer: No, I had met my wife because she was working for the Central Sparkasse. When I started living there, we were living together, then she became pregnant, that's when we got married.

Brown: I was gonna ask, but we don't have time on this tape, so I'll ask you about your first marriage...

[End of disc 5]

Brown: This is tape three of the Jazz Oral History interview with Art Farmer conducted in New York City on June 30, 1995. We were just talking about the circumstances of your move to Vienna, Wien, Österreich. I wanted to you, you had mentioned earlier that you were married...

Farmer: I was married here in New York City the first time in the fifties. I remember Gigi was our best man. I married a woman that was from South America, and we're still very friendly, and we have one child, Arthur Jr., who unfortunately died last year. The marriage didn't work out anyway because one of the reasons, other than my being very young and impressionable, she felt that the life that I was living was just nothing but parties. When I left town, it was just complete parties, and she was stuck at home with the For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

baby. This is something that's common. Women have this idea sometimes that they're at the house and the husband's out just partying, going to play the gig and then party all night long. There was nothing you could do to get rid of that resentment, so it just didn't work.

Brown: You were married in what year?

Farmer: This was in the fifties, maybe '55 or something like that. We stayed together for a year I think, or maybe a little longer. Then, I married a distant cousin of mine because I figured we have the same background. We're compatible; we have the same taste in things. That just didn't work out.

Brown: That's wife number two?

Farmer: Wife number two.

Brown: Any children from that marriage?

Farmer: No. Then, I went to Vienna and I met the woman that I married, that became my wife. She died in 1992 from cancer. I guess I never will really recover from that because we had been together for over 20 years when she died. We had one son who is now 22 years old. He's a bass student and player. He goes to the musikhochschule, not in Vienna, but in another town in Austria. But, he goes to the Music Conservatory in Vienna in the jazz section, and he's turning into a very good bassist. He's dead serious about it, so I think he's gonna do okay.

Brown: Take up the slack from Addison then, if he's a bass player.

Farmer: Yeah, that's right.

Brown: And doing just what Addison wanted to do, go get that formal education.

Farmer: Yeah, it's funny because his name is Georg, and he started studying piano when he was six or seven. As usual, I'd have to say, "Go down and practice your lesson now." He would go down, but you had to tell him. Then one day, he got it into his head that he wanted to play the bass, and you didn't have to tell him to go down and practice the bass, which is the way it should be.

Brown: Was he interested in playing jazz early on?

Farmer: He's interested in playing jazz and pop, whatever. You're not gonna find nobody that age that's not gonna be into the contemporary popular music.

Brown: He grew up in Austria.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: Yeah, he grew up in Vienna, and he says when he plays with classical orchestras – there’s an organization called Unis Musicala and they play tours during the summer and during the Christmas holidays – when he plays that kind of music, like a symphony, when it’s finished, he feels like he hasn’t done anything. Most of the time what you’re doing is playing whole notes. Every now and then there’s some song where you got to really move, but that’s seldom. So, he feels he hasn’t done anything. Well, I can dig that. But, if you’re playing jazz, you never feel that you haven’t done anything ‘cause you have to deal with whatever the situation is, and if you’re playing pop music, you have to put a certain kind of energy in it. I don’t think it’s so challenging musically, other than the fact that you got to have a strong rhythmic feel. These bass players, some of these things, they have a pattern where they play that thing for minute after minute three notes or something. To me, it’s a waste of time. I’d rather be playing in the symphony orchestra myself.

Brown: Is he bilingual?

Farmer: Yes.

Brown: Has he spent much time in America?

Farmer: Yes, quite a bit because he’s been coming over. Last year, he was here for the summer course at Berklee, and the year before that, he was at Eastman, and this year he’s talking about [how] he wants to come over to stay here in New York. I don’t know if he will, but he’s talking about coming to New York and attending the summer course either at the New School or Manhattan School of Music. Other than that, he’s been over to visit my relatives out in Arizona. He’s not a stranger to...

Brown: How about your German?

Farmer: My German is...

Brown: Mox nix [macht nichts].

Farmer: It’s embarrassing [laughs]. I can get through the day and the night, of course. I know people must, “This guy must be very ignorant if he can’t speak German any better than that.” The way you form the sentences and all that, gender, I never studied. Whatever I know I just picked it up at the rehearsals mostly because you’re rehearsing and the other fifteen guys speak German, then that’s what the conductors gonna speak. You have to grab it, grab what you can. I can deal with it, but a whole lot passes me by [laughs].

Brown: Were you the only American in the group?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: No, there was a bassist named Jimmy Woode. You've met Jimmy right?

Brown: Oh sure!

Farmer: He used to play with Duke's band. He was on the bass, and then when the group was first organized, the whole trombone section was taken from Kent State, like a year or two after that riot happened out there where a few people got killed. The band came over to play at the Montreux Jazz Festival, and I was the soloist, like the MIT orchestra came along and Benny Bailey played with MIT and I played with Kent State. North Texas band came down; I don't remember who played the solos with them. The Klein Schuster heard that we were looking for a trombone section for the Vienna orchestra, and the trombone section sounded so good that he asked them if they were interested, and they said yeah, so they were all in their last year anyway, so they came to Vienna. There was a pianist, a student conductor, a guy named Bill Dobbins, who is still around. In fact, Bill has the job as the musical director of the radio band in Cologne.

Brown: Which is bringing a lot of Americans over at this point. So, you were working with the radio orchestra – let me get the correct pronunciation of this, really tax my German – the Österreicher Runfunk. That's the Austrian radio. That was the ten days per month, ten months a year gig until that started to...

Farmer: The music went down, and then it became popular, so we had to stay there longer than ten days, and that cut into my own ambitions.

Brown: You were with that orchestra for how long then?

Farmer: Three or four years, I think, until I finally had to leave it.

Brown: During this time, you were working with the Clarke-Boland big band?

Farmer: Yes, working with Clarke-Boland's band and something other things too.

Brown: That reunited you with a lot of folks that you had known in New York.

Farmer: Yeah, 'cause Kenny Clarke and I were always friendly here. He used to play with me on records and at Birdland. The Clarke-Boland band was a great swinging band. Benny Bailey, who is a great trumpet player, was there, Sahib Shihab. A very great Swedish trombone player named Ake Persson was there. Johnny Griffin was there. You know, the cats.

Brown: Must have been kind of a study in contrast to go from playing with the Austrian band to go and play with...

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: The Austrian band was cool. What really was the bad side of it was we wound up playing not jazz but background music for singers and any silly thing that they felt that the people wanted to hear.

Brown: What were your impressions of Kenny Clarke?

Farmer: Kenny was a very great person. Personally, he was a man. He had lived. He had experience, and he never did anything that was not done in good taste. He didn't overdo anything. He didn't make any hassles with nobody. It was not like, "I'm Kenny Clarke," nothing like that. He was a good model, really. He could play, and he gave everybody else a chance to play. He didn't put anyone down. He didn't feel he had to drag somebody else in order to elevate himself, that kind of thing. I can't say nothing negative about Kenny Clarke. He could play. He had a concept about the beat that made you feel glad that you were alive. The beat is the foundation of life, starting with the heartbeat. When that's gone... Everybody doesn't have the same concept of where the beat is. Some people are a little bit on top of it, some people are right in the middle, and some people are a little laid back under it. If you're a little bit on top of it or if you can stay a little bit on top, but not rush it, not speed up, then that's a real life giver. If you're slower than that, then it starts dragging and you feel like you're tired. Kenny was always a little bit on top of it. This Kenny Clarke-Francy Boland band, there was another drummer, an English drummer, named Kenny Clare, and I remember one tune that we used to play that featured the saxophonist called "Sax No End," and this tune probably lasted about 20 minutes or something, and by the time it was over, Kenny Clare was panting. Kenny Clarke was like...

Brown: Just cool.

Farmer: 'Cause he had done what he was supposed to do, but that's all. He had maintained the level, but to him, it was the thing not to overdo it, but do what you're supposed to do, where he feels good and everybody else feels good. But, he wasn't going to get carried away with it. He played that beat, it was right on top but it never sped up. The piece ended right where it started, which was, to me, a miracle. He was just a nice guy to be around. When I first came here, left Lionel's band, the first record that I made for Prestige, like I said, I had Kenny Clarke and Sonny Rollins, Horace Silver.

Brown: Start with the best.

Farmer: He was a nice guy.

Brown: You're based in Europe now, and you're coming back to the States on a regular basis?

Farmer: I would say like for the first two years, I just stayed over there, but then after that, I started coming over – or maybe the first year – I started coming over each summer, For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

like the two months the band wasn't working I was free to come over here and started doing things over here. Clifford Jordan and I hooked up again. We had been working together years before with Horace Silver's group. Then, I started getting some gigs around here. No, first I had Jimmy Heath and Cedar Walton and Sam Jones and Mickey Roker. But then, Jimmy started working with the Heath Brothers, and I started calling Clifford, and that was a very great relationship. Clifford was an unsung hero as a tenor saxophone player. It's just too bad that he didn't live long enough to receive all of the rewards [that] he should've received. Not to take anything away from Jimmy Heath either, but they're two different people. I started making gigs in the summer months over here, and then gradually, I started coming over here more and more, especially after I left the radio band. I would come over whenever there was something that was worth doing, and at least making one or two records a year in New York City and working Chicago. You know, the usual places. Nothing big, but still doing the clubs. It was a very nice period, as far as the music was concerned. I was glad when the opportunity came to come over here because I was able to play over here with musicians of a level, especially rhythmically, that not too many times you would run into in Europe. You had to play with whatever was there. Say like you go to Rome, Hamburg, or whatever, the economic situation wasn't so that you could bring a group with you. You had to play with a local group. It gets better every year, but it was kind of shaky in some places. I remember one time, I was playing some place in Sweden, and I went to the owner and I said, "It seems hard to believe that you couldn't find better players than this." He said, "What do you mean? What's wrong with them?" [laughs] So, nothing I could say then.

Brown: If you have to ask, don't mess with it. Can't hear it, uh-oh [laughs]. Yeah, that is a trial. I saw you working frequently with Fritz Pauer over there.

Farmer: Fritz and I worked for years in one group or another. Now I have a group in Vienna that we're been working together [in] for many years. There's a saxophone player named Harry Sokal, a very good drummer named Mario Gonzi, a bass player who lives in Munich named Paulo Cardoso. He was born in Brazil, but he lives in Munich now. He plays very well. So, we have a good time. We play together in Jazzland about three times a year, usually the Christmas holiday week and one week in the spring and one week in the fall. No, the Christmas holiday week, one week in the spring and then one week in the summer.

Brown: I think that's the last time I saw you play over there was – I'm just gonna say this for the record, the Jazzland is in Vienna. Actually, I've played with Paulo Cardoso too in Vienna.

Farmer: Yeah, so our next gig is coming up in August, and then we're already booked. We play, like I said, between Christmas and New Years, we always play there.

Brown: Do you record with that group?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: Yeah, we've done recordings with the group for some Austrian-German label. I don't remember the name of it right now. In fact, I brought the group over here last year. We played a week down at Sweet Basil. There's an organization called the Austrian Cultural Institute. It's like some sort of a government organization, and I went to them and got the backing. I said that, "This is a good group, and it should be heard." Of course, many people come to Austria to hear classical music. They come there to ski and all that, and they think that that's all that's happening. I was able to convince the guy that he should back us, so they gave us the money to make it possible. Because to bring a group over, you have to deal with the cost of transportation and cost of the hotels and stuff, so it came to between nine and ten thousand dollars that they put in the pot. That made it possible. They were happy. The cats were happy. Fritz hadn't been here before. He'd been to the United States, but not to New York City, not to play. It was a nice experience. That's what I do basically, is that when I'm not running around someplace, I'm in Vienna in the woodshed and playing some gigs with the group, either in Vienna or we make short tours through Austria and Germany. We play some dates like Austria, Germany, Switzerland, that's it. We've been to Italy, but we haven't been to Scandinavia or to France.

Brown: Who books the group?

Farmer: People call me up, and that's it. We don't have a booking agent over there. They either call me or call Harry Sokal, the tenor saxophone player. Harry plays also with a group called The Vienna Art Orchestra that comes over here maybe once every year or so.

Brown: Mathias Rugg.

Farmer: Yeah, right, that's it. The scene in Vienna is nice, musically speaking. There's various tastes. People play what they want to play. This guy Fuchs, he's running a place called Porgy and Bess. Porgy and Bess and Jazzland both get money from the city, what's called subvention. That enables them to bring people in that they couldn't afford to bring in otherwise. The audience gains, and the musicians gain to hear great players. Like Jazzland has the best people, Dexter Gordon, Lockjaw Davis, Eddie "Clean Head" Vincent, all kind of real jazz players come in there. Just this last week, I went down there and Ray Brown was there. He played one night at what's called the Musikverein, the big concert hall. He played a concert there with Andre Previn. I don't remember who was playing the guitar, but the three of them, and then next night, he was at Jazzland just jamming with Fritz and a local drummer. So, I took my horn and played some too. It's good for people to hear somebody on that level because there are no bass players around there that play like Ray Brown, who's one of the granddaddies.

Brown: Before we talk about the reincarnation of the Jazztet in 1982, I'm gonna ask you the question that anybody who'd familiar with Art Farmer would want to know because

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



now he plays flugelhorn. Back in the old days, he used to play trumpet and before that he was playing cornet, but the switch from trumpet to flugelhorn.

Farmer: That happened when I organized the group with Jim Hall. I figured that the trumpet would be too penetrating to play with a guitar 'cause Jim Hall is not one of those bangers. He never is a loud player. I figured the trumpet would be too dominating, and I had made this record that I had told you about, the big band that was arranged by Oliver Nelson, which I only played flugelhorn on. So, I decided to stay with that.

Brown: Had you played it before then?

Farmer: No, I had heard some other guys play it and I decided I wanted to give it a try. It had a mellow sound, laid back, which really fit into the concept of a quartet. What happened before I made the record with Oliver Nelson, I got the flugelhorn and I figured in order to make this record, I have to find out something about the horn, so I just put the trumpet in the case and I left it in the case, and I worked so hard with that flugelhorn. By the time I made the record, I didn't feel like going back to the trumpet. That's how the flugelhorn got started for me. I just hung with it.

Brown: For those other flugelhornists or budding flugelhornists, can you talk about your instrument? Mouthpiece, etc.?

Farmer: Yeah, the flugelhorn has a darker, wider sound than the trumpet. The negative thing is – as long as you stay within the perimeters of it, it's okay – but basically, I'm a trumpet player and sometimes I feel like I want to play in that range. But the flugelhorn doesn't work so well if you go into the high register. It sort of what we call pyramids, like if you're in a low register, it's this big, but the higher you go, the smaller the sound gets. So, you feel like somehow you're missing something there. A lot of guys, say like Clark Terry, they alternate, Freddy Hubbard too. They play some tunes on the flugel and some tunes on the trumpet. Somehow, the flugelhorn feels easier to play until you go into the high register, then you say, damn I'd like to hear it better. After playing the flugelhorn exclusively for years, then I decided I wanted to try the trumpet again. There's a trumpet player in the United States who makes very good horns. He made one for me, and I started back playing that. I think I made one or two records playing just the trumpet, and it was struggle getting back to it, but I was able to do something. Sometimes it sounded pretty good. Then, the maker said, "It doesn't sound really like you. I want to make you a flugelhorn." He called me up one day and said, "I made this flugelhorn and put it together very careful[ly], but it sounds awful. But, I have another idea. Can I do it?" I said, "Sure, go ahead and do it." What he made was a horn that is a cross between a flugel and a trumpet. He called it a "flumpet," like flugel trumpet. I said, "Man, you got to put another name on that 'cause that sounds like 'strumpet' or something. Everybody's just gonna laugh at it." But he decided that he was gonna stick with that. It's a good horn. It has a darker sound than the trumpet, but it has more projection than the flugelhorn does, so if you want to go up in the high register and really project, you can do it with the flumpet. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

more than you can with the flugelhorn. But, if you want to get a mellow sound like you can with the flugelhorn, you can do that with this, but you can't get a real mellow sound with the trumpet. Not compared to...

Brown: Is the shape more like a flugelhorn or more like the trumpet, or I guess a combination?

Farmer: First looking at it, it looks more like a trumpet, but it has a couple curves on it that the trumpet doesn't have. The bottom of it looks like shepherd's crooks.

Brown: But the bell is more the size of a trumpet bell?

Farmer: It's a little larger than the trumpet bell, and the pipes are a little larger, and it takes more air. It is demanding, but you get something for what you put into it. I like it better than the flugelhorn because of these qualities. If you want to do this, then you can do it. If you want to play like that, if you want to get mellow, you can get mellow. If you're playing the flugel, it has obvious limitations. That's why the guys they put the flugel down and pick up the trumpet, and I really hated to go from one horn to the other because when you put one horn down and it cools off, it goes out of tune. Then, you pick it up and start playing again, you have to warm it up before it's really up to the mark, up where's it supposed to be as far as the pitch is concerned. At this point, I expect that I'll continue playing the flumpet.

Brown: Who's the inventor of this?

Farmer: It's a guy named David Monette, and he's located out in Portland, Oregon. He comes here to New York City a lot. He's a real nut for Mahler symphonies. Mahler uses trumpets a lot. He travels all around just to hear those symphonies. He's a good friend of Wynton Marsalis also. Basically, he makes horns for classical players, like the Boston Symphony, Chicago. The principal players all play his horns. He doesn't make any real money, but he says as long as he's able to fly around where he wants to go, it's okay with him.

Brown: Is he making his own mouthpieces for his instruments?

Farmer: Yeah, he makes his own mouthpieces too.

Brown: So, this is your instrument of choice now?

Farmer: Yeah.

Brown: If I look on this album that's going to be released next, it'll say, "Art Farmer – flumpet"?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Farmer: Yeah, that's right.

Brown: How long have you been playing the flumpet?

Farmer: The one I have now, I've been playing this since '92, so let's say since '90 I've been playing the flumpet.

Brown: When you were playing the flugelhorn, what was your instrument of choice then?

Farmer: It was a French Besson, which has a reputation of being one of the best, the French Besson and another French horn called the Couesnon.

Brown: And choice of mouthpiece?

Farmer: When I play the Besson, I play the mouthpiece that was made by the Besson company also. It's important to match up the horn and the mouthpiece. You can have a good mouthpiece, but if it doesn't match the horn, then you might as well throw it away or throw away the horn.

Brown: What about if and when you play trumpet, what's your choice of instrument there?

Farmer: When I went back to playing the trumpet, I was playing a trumpet made by Monette, but years ago when I was playing the trumpet, I was playing the Martin trumpet. When I first started off, I was playing a school horn [that] didn't have no kind name, but then when I started buying horns, I bought Martins because that's the horn that the hip guys were playing. Like Dizzy was playing a Martin, and Miles was playing a Martin, Roy Eldridge was playing a Martin, so I figured that's the way to go.

Brown: Talking about your instrumentarium, I know I want to get to the reincarnation of the Jazztet in...

Farmer: The first reincarnation of the Jazztet took place because a Japanese promoter wanted to bring the group over to play a tour in Japan. When people found out that we were getting the group back together, they said why don't you play here first before you go to Japan? So, we played a few dates around in the United States then we went to Japan and played the tour there, and then came back here and played more dates. I guess it lasted about two or three years. The last date that we had I couldn't make because I had to have an operation and I couldn't play for a couple months. After that, Benny said that he felt that he just wanted to stay in town and write. This was about like four or five years ago. Here recently, he was approached by another promoter in Europe to do the festival tour this summer. Primarily, that's why I'm here right now, is to have rehearsals with the group because we play our first date on the 6th of July in Vienna, and then for the next two weeks we're touring around. That's as far as we have planned for the foreseeable. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

future. But, we always had in mind that we would get together from time to time if it made sense. When I say “make sense,” I mean financially. Somebody wants to hear it bad enough, then we’ll put it back together. Curtis Fuller is with us, but we don’t know how much long he can continue playing because he just had an operation also. He had an operation on his lung for lung cancer, and I think they took about one third of his lung out. I heard that he’s doing really well, but you know how that is, this cancer. They always say, “Yes, we got it all,” but the next thing you know somewhere down the line, they didn’t get it all or a little bit sneaked off someplace else. So anyway, we’re just taking it as it comes. There’s nobody around who can really take Curtis’ place ‘cause Curtis is a player that is a very personal player. It’s not just a matter of playing the instrument, but being a unique individual on the instrument.

Brown: And [he] is also credited with originating the name, is that correct, the Jazztet?

Farmer: Oh yeah, that was Curtis’ idea. Curtis is very talented with language also. He was just putting some words together, jazz, sextet. That’s what it was, a sextet. So, he left off the sex, Jazztet.

Brown: Who else is in the group now?

Farmer: The pianist that was supposed to make the tour was a pianist named Mickey Tucker, who was with us when we got back together a few years ago, but Mickey lives in Australia. His wife is Australian, and she finally was able to persuade him to come back to live there after living here for some years. But, he has a very serious back problem and he couldn’t make the tour in Europe because he couldn’t get the proper medication, you know traveling around. He sent a fax saying that the people who were booking the tour didn’t give him the information he needed in time to make the arrangements where he would get the medication he needed, so he just can’t do it. So, we have a pianist named Michael Weiss. Michael plays with Johnny Griffin every time Griff comes over here. Mike’s a good player, but he’s no Mickey Tucker. You know, you have to go with what you have to go with. On the bass is Buster Williams, who is certainly a fine bass player, no problem there, and drums is Carl Allen. Carl has been playing with me quite a bit recently because the two drummers that I had been playing with became unavailable because Marvin Smith has moved out to California playing on the TV show.

Brown: Right, the Tonight Show.

Farmer: And the other drummer Lewis Nash, he’s the number one choice. Everybody is calling him, so you have to call him like a year in advance or something. The only thing I was worried about was Curtis, but I hear that he’s doing very well, so we have a couple rehearsals next week and then go on over there.

Brown: Oh, so you’ll rehearse here and then go over?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: Yes, that's why I came over here basically.

Brown: Have you started rehearsing yet?

Farmer: No, not yet. We rehearse on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th and then we leave on the 5th.

Brown: You were doing a mix yesterday, a record recording? Could you talk a little bit about that?

Farmer: That was a record done for a company called Arabesque, which is a small classical music recording company, and they branched into jazz say like a year or so ago. This is my second record for them. It was a sextet with B, Slide Hampton, and a tenor player named Ron Blake. Ron plays for a trumpet player by the name of Roy Hargrove, who's very popular now. He's a fine young player. And Ron is great. Carl Allen was on the date on drums. On bass was a guy who's been playing with me with the quintet for about the past five years or so by the name of Kenny Davis from Chicago. He's a very fine player, doesn't have any reputation, but he's a very fine player. And there's a young pianist named Geoff Keezer. Jeff was the last pianist that was playing with Art Blakey. Geoff is phenomenal, I think. He's gonna really make a mark, I believe. Like I said, before he worked with me, he was working with Art Blakey. He was working with Art Blakey when he died, but he said that Al Foster, the drummer, who had been working with Miles, told Miles about him, so Miles called him up and said, "I want you to come to work with me." He told Miles he didn't want to 'cause he would prefer to work with Art Blakey because of the repertoire; 'cause Miles was playing this hip-hop and things. He said one night he went over to Miles' gig and introduced himself, and he's a little nerd looking guy, and Miles looked at him and said, "Damn, you look like you can't do nothing!" I had to laugh over that, but he can really play. Everybody raves about him. I think we have a decent record. We did the mixing yesterday. I think it's okay. I don't think it's the greatest record I ever made. I hope that it's not the greatest record that I ever will make [laughs]. But, it's still a good record, and we'll see how it is received. Sometimes you do something that you really think the world of, and everybody says yeah, okay. My favorite record is one that I made many, many years ago called *Art*. It was on the Argo label with Tommy Flanagan playing the piano, Albert Heath playing the drums, and a bass player named Tommy Williams, who was playing with the Jazztet at that time. This record was made when the Jazztet was still in existence, but it was a quartet record. Tommy's not living anymore, but that's the one I like the best.

Brown: Why is that? You're most happy with your performance or the music?

Farmer: No, with everybody in general. We had no rehearsals or nothing. We just went to the music store and bought some sheet music and passed it out, and we did it. But, nice tunes. Mellow. Nice standard tunes. Sometimes things gel, and sometimes things that should gel don't, and nobody can really anticipate it. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't work. In this case, it worked. At least it happens sometimes. For now, the record

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

that we just finished... When you make a record and you do take one, take two, take thirteen, take fourteen, damn! You feel like you should abandon it and go on to the next tune. Sometime you hang in there, and finally you get one that's not so bad. If you listen to it later on, a lot of times it's better than you think it is, so you really can't judge something when you're too close to it. I found out the best thing to do is to do the best you can, and when you reach the point where you feel you can't any better, well then you have to go on to something else because you're not in the studio just to record one tune. You're there to make an album.

Brown: So, part of what make the *Art* date memorable or very special for you, was it because you didn't have to do multiple takes?

Farmer: No, we didn't do a lot of takes. I would say a fair amount, like two or three takes on a tune. Sometimes you have to do one take just to get the sound right, do another take to run it down so everybody knows what they're supposed to do because this is all impromptu. You can't write down the arrangements for a four-piece group that's gonna have any spontaneity. People have to have room to be creative, but at the same time, you have to know what you're doing. You can't go in the studio and record the tunes that everybody's been playing for umpteen years. You have to find some different stuff to play. So, you have to figure on a couple rundowns just to get familiar with the material.

Brown: Thinking about what you're saying, it sounds as if you didn't do any rehearsals for those kinds of dates?

Farmer: At that time, this was back in the fifties or sixties or something, that was the peak period when a lot of recording was going on, and the most you would do for a rehearsal was just have one day where you would just run over the tunes. I think on this one I just went to the store and got the music. I chose the tunes that I wanted to do and went and got the sheet music. And with that caliber of players, you could do it. You didn't have to get together today and a next rehearsal tomorrow. It's not like with George Russell where it would take a whole year to make a record.

Brown: But you've done it all from hit in the studio to a year later, I think we've got it together to go in.

Farmer: When I started, there was the era of the big bands. I've been happy just to be a third trumpet player in the big band, but then the big bands faded away, and in order to be in the music business, I had to raise my level to the point where I could work in a variety of situations, small groups, bebop or whatever was going on. That's the start of it all.

Brown: Didn't you also do some pit orchestra work?

Farmer: Oh yeah, I worked here in New York City for six months on a Broadway show, which to me, was a positive experience. A lot of guys put it down, but I was glad to do it. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



There were nice people in the orchestra, Frank Wess was there and James Crawford who used to play drums with Lunceford's band. It was nice to me. I was still able to work in the clubs too because by the time the theater gig is finished, around 10:30 or something, I'd just grab a taxi and go to the club. I'd be a half hour late or something, but nobody's gonna holler about that if you got the rhythm section and the other horn there. There was a very nice conductor by the name of Elliot Lawrence. There were good people there.

Brown: The name of the show?

Farmer: "Apple Tree." It lasted for I guess a year or so. It was a decent Broadway show, good music. I got into it sort of... it just happened because there was a trombone player that came down to the club. I was working at the Half Note, and he come down and I said, "What you doing these days?" and he said he's playing there in the band at the theater. I said, "I'd like to do something like that sometime just for the experience of it." A couple days later, I got the call. He said "Are you serious when you said you wanted to do something like that?" I said, ugh [laughs]. But why not, yeah. One of the guys was gone on holiday. He was going on his vacation, so I said okay. So, I went and did it. It lasted for six months, and the conductor was so nice. As long as you could send it a suitable sub, you could take off. I would take off and go over to Europe for two or three weeks and everything was cool.

Brown: Was Hal McKusick in that band?

Farmer: No, he wasn't in that band. I met Hal through the dates with Gil Evans and Teddy Charles.

Brown: We didn't talk about the dates with Gil Evans.

Farmer: Gil was the one who was writing the music on either Teddy Charles' date or Hal McKusick's date, and Gil wrote the arrangements. That's when I first met Gil. I think I made maybe one or two other albums with him of the same type. In fact, some of the tunes that he arranged for Miles to play, we had already done them. That was the start of a certain sound. Hal was and is a very good alto player. We just played a date together about two months ago out on Long Island. I can't remember the name of the place where we were.

Brown: Sag Harbor.

Farmer: Yeah! That's right, Sag Harbor.

Brown: Looking back at your career, and I don't really like the term, but I'll use it anyway, as an expatriate, what would you say, if you can say, was the impact... First, let me preface it by saying, personally, I know that Kenny Clarke's reputation and memory, or at least his impact on the music scene, was considerably attenuated by the fact that he
For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

was overseas, that he had taken residence in Paris, the acclaim, the recognition. Of course, he traded, as perhaps you did and maybe this is the issue, graded quality of life for perhaps fame and relative fortune, whatever that means for a jazz musician. Can you compare and contrast having taken up residency in Vienna, Austria versus having pursued a career here in New York? What do you think were the benefits, and what do you think we the cons of that decision?

Farmer: Quality of life, that's one of the primary considerations. You gain on quality of life. You lose on being around the point on the sword, let's say, because it's here where everything starts. Whatever is happening in this music, it doesn't start in Europe, it starts here. If you really want to be in on it, then you should be living in New York, by all means. If you're a young cat trying to get into it and find out what's happening and be a part of it, then this is the place. Europe is the place you go when you have yourself together and have some kind of reputation. People know your name and you can get some work. But, if you really want to learn what's happening, it's here. That's the way it is. I'm not saying that to say that there's not good players over there, but it seems like always the beginning of something is over here. At the same time, you can reach a point in your life where you get tired of all the other hassles that are going on over here. The anxiety about will I have enough work, where am I gonna work next week? Where am I gonna work next month? Am I gonna get paid? All these kind of things, which we don't have to bother about over in Europe for one reason or another. If you have a reputation, people know how to reach you. The telephone is always gonna ring. If it doesn't ring today, it's gonna ring tomorrow with something for next week or the week after that. I get as much work as I want. And treated decently. Over here, sometimes you're in this take it or leave it situations. There's a lot of competition over here where some musicians will undercut you. They will go in, they will take something for less than you would like to work, but you have to be competitive, so you might have to come down. You reach a point in your life where you don't want to do that, to compromise. After you've paid enough dues, after you've been playing out here for forty years, you figure you would like to have some of that too, what the people [that] are hiring you are getting. It's beneficial to get outside the United States because when people here find out that you can make it over there, then they give you a little bit more respect over here, when they know that you just don't have to stay here. I found that out from experience that I get treated better living in Europe than when I was living here, and I can still play here and play in Europe. You know it is in Europe, you have access to more places to play. If you're in the United States, you play New York, Chicago, then you have to make that big jump from Chicago all the way to California. Think of all the places where no one goes to play. Who plays in Montana? Who plays in North Dakota, South Dakota, all those places that are close to us? Those are what you call "fly-overs" [laughs]. Nobody goes down to play in Atlanta. All those towns down South, nothing's happening there as far as jazz is concerned. I mean, as far as jazz is concerned enough to get us to go down there to play. There are kids coming up, but there's no market for what they're doing there. They have to come up here and play here. The United States is full of a whole lot of places where there's no work for jazz musicians. If you live in Europe, you can play every country

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

over there, even in Lichtenstein and little places like that. Play in little towns where there's only 6,000 people in the whole town.

Brown: And they all come out to hear you. Do you do any teaching over there?

Farmer: A little, yeah. A couple years ago, I did a master class at the Graz Hochschule für Musik in the jazz section for trumpets on improvisation. Other than that, what I do is consultations 'cause I don't want to get restricted by being obliged to give someone a lesson every week. Then that would cut down on my freedom to go out and play, and basically, that's what I wanna do, is play. So, what I do is like if somebody asks me to give them a lesson, I say yes, stop by the house and bring a tape with you, and then we'll listen to it and talk about what you're doing, and maybe I can give you some advice on it. That's as far as I go. You take some guys, say like, Clark Terry for instance, some people have a routine worked out where they can take a student and take the student from here to there within a certain amount of weeks, but I never worked out that kind of routine because my ambition was never to be a teacher. That's one thing I never wanted to do with my life. When I was a kid going to school, I was thinking that these teachers have the worst work to have to go to school everyday. I was thinking I want to stay away from that, I really do. You're so restricted as a player. But, there are some guys who thrive on it. They really live for it, so to each his own.

[End of disc 6]

Brown: Are you spending more time composing at this point in your [life]?

Farmer: No, the last time I composed anything was like when the Jazztet was last organized, which was a few years ago. I wrote a couple tunes for the Jazztet, but I haven't written anything since then. I don't bother with writing. Like I said, if you're gonna write, you have to write everyday. You just can't wake up one day and say, I'm gonna write a tune. So you can write a tune, but what's it gonna be worth? There's a whole lot of good tunes around here going back to the thirties, and there are people around who are very capable of writing good music. Why should I waste my time doing that? I think there's a place for interpreters. That's what I would classify myself as, being an interpreter, basically, of what other people have written. I find something that I feel comfortable in that I can put myself into and that's what I do, play it. I express myself through the music that someone else wrote. With the availability of so much good music, there's no reason to play mediocre music just because you wrote it yourself, which some people do. To me, it's not worth it 'cause if you make a record and you're getting your composer royalties on it, if the record is not a big hit, that's very little money anyway. It's just not worth bothering with. I think the most important thing to do is play good music no matter who wrote it. If you're somebody like Benny Golson or Horace Silver or Wayne Shorter [or] Gerry Mulligan, people who really write, well then that's different, Gigi Gryce.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: Billy Strayhorn.

Farmer: Yeah, yeah! Then, you have people who are horn players. Take someone like Roy Eldridge, for instance. Roy never wrote anything that anybody knew about, but he was regarded as a very fine player, and that's the way I would like to be. Take a tune and make it your own, with your interpretation. I think I could have become a writer if I had been willing to put the time into it that you have to put into anything to master it, but I was always hung up with the horn, so that's the way it is.

Brown: So, you're still hung up with the horn?

Farmer: Yeah, I'm still hung up with the horn. There are other trumpet players like, for instance, Gerald Wilson, used to play trumpet with Lunceford, a great writer. Quincy Jones used to play the trumpet with Lionel is a great writer; when he wants to write real music, he can do it. Sometimes you have to make a choice between writing and playing. In order to be a top-notch horn player, you have to put the time [in] on the horn, and if you really want to be a writer, you have to put [in] time on the writing. Like Gigi said, if he didn't write a tune everyday, he felt something was wrong.

Brown: Do you still have a daily routine? Do you still practice daily?

Farmer: Yeah, sure, I still practice. That's one thing that keeps me in Vienna since my wife died was that I can practice over there like I can't practice here because the house that we have... [has] a studio down in the cellar, so I don't have to worry about bothering anybody. I find that a very inhibiting thing that if you're gonna try to practice with the idea in your mind that you're dragging somebody else. But, if you have privacy, then you can do whatever you want to do when you want to do it. When I'm here in New York, the place that I live [in] I can't practice there because somebody next door is a psychiatrist.

Brown: You can practice there now because they're just messing it up [referring to construction] [laughs].

Farmer: Oh yeah, the last couple days [laughs]. So, what I have to do [is] I have to go over to a studio, which I can do. I have a key to a studio. I can get over there anytime I want to. I'm spoiled now because I'm used to taking the stairs down to the cellar.

Brown: You live in what they call the 18th District?

Farmer: Yeah, the 18th District.

Brown: Nice place. Good air.

Farmer: Yeah, very quiet. Good air, that's it.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: Gute luft! [laughs]. I remember seeing you walking your dog in your neighborhood over there back in the mid 80s. The experience of living in Europe now for close to thirty years, how's that shaped your perspective of not only your native land, America, but also has it shaped or informed your world view?

Farmer: Yeah, to a point, because if you just stay here, people here think everything is rotating around the United States, but that's not true. In Austria, people think everything is rotating around Austria too [laughs]. They think if it didn't happen in Vienna, it wasn't worth happening. But, if you live in Europe and travel around, then you find out that every place has its pluses and minuses, and you have to recognize that and deal with it. One thing you certainly can't do is to say, back in America, we did it such and such a way. They don't want to hear how you did it back in America. It's like I'm gonna come here and say, "I live in Austria now, and the way we do it over there is blah, blah, blah." They'll say, "Why don't you go back to Austria?"

Brown: Was it hard to adjust when you first got over there?

Farmer: No, it's not a matter of adjusting. I just felt kind of lonely because my family was here and my friends. When I saw friends, I mean people like Jimmy Heath and Clifford Jordan, Horace, Benny Golson, all the cats. They all were over here, so I felt really isolated to a point. But, the musicians were friendly, the jazz players they were friendly. They were never stand-offish, not at all. So, that worked out.

Brown: Well, I would say that of course the jazz musicians aren't going to be stand-offish because you're the source of the jazz, so they're gonna come to you. What about the neighborhood and dealing with "Österreichers" and the "Wiener volks?"

Farmer: You what know I do, I stayed to myself. The people that I have any real contact with are the people that are in the field. In the neighborhood, some people there I just don't recognize. Like you heard this thing about [how] all blacks look alike? Well, all whites look alike to me. So, I see these people and sometimes I speak to them and say, maybe I should say hello because maybe that might be the guy who lives next door [laughs]. I didn't want to give the impression of being a snob or something, so I'd say, "Gruss Gott, guten tag." Sometimes I would say that, and the people that I was saying it to would just look at me and wouldn't say nothing, and that really brings you down, so I'm really in a dilemma of whether to say something or not 'cause you don't want to not say something if you're meeting the guy who lives a couple house down the street or something. So, what are you gonna do? Sometimes I'd take a chance and say, "Gut morgen," sometimes I just don't say nothing and let them say it first 'cause it really drags me when you say hello to someone and they just look at you. That's really bad manners.

Brown: Was that the extent of any ill treatment there? Have you had to experience any other more blatant forms of discrimination or un-acceptance?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: No, not really. There have been some other funny experiences. Austrians and Germans, they have a certain lifestyle where they are prone to turn you into the police if you do something wrong. That's how Hitler came to power. My experience is one day I was driving a car. I had an appointment with the doctor, and I wanted to be there on time. I couldn't find a legal parking space, so I just parked in a space. I kept my appointment and came out and got in the car and drove home. Wasn't no parking ticket on there, so I figured everything was okay. A couple days later, the parking ticket came in the mail and said you had to go down to the station to pay it, so I went down to the station to pay the parking ticket, and I asked the cop, "How is it that I got in the car [and] there was no ticket there? Usually if somebody gives you a ticket, it's on the car. What's happening?" He said, "There was a lady in the house where you parked your car, and she saw you park the car, and she wrote down the time that you parked the car, and she saw when you left and wrote down the time when you left. Then she walked down to the police station and gave her name, address and date of birth."

Brown: [Laughs] That sounds very German and Austrian.

Farmer: Yeah, that's right. You know the UN is there now. Like people in the United States, they think the UN is here. This is just one third of it here, one third in Geneva and one third in Vienna. People who work for the UN come from all around the world, they get together and they share their experiences about living in Vienna. I was at one place one night, and a lady said that she had been in a little traffic accident. Some Viennese woman said I saw what happened, but if they ask me to testify, I'm gonna testify against you, and the reason why is because you shouldn't be here anyway.

Brown: Whoa.

Farmer: That's the negative things. Everybody doesn't feel that way. If you have the misfortune to run into that kind of situation, well that's it. A year ago, I got a medal from the city of Vienna, the highest honor that someone could get, for making a contribution to the culture of Vienna.

Brown: Congratulations.

Farmer: That's not a cheap thing, so that shows something there.

Brown: Anything else about Austrian culture that seemed to suit you? Perhaps the food or the diet there...

Farmer: I liked the food, but you can get good food here too. I liked the peacefulness of it, the lack of fear. Here, you have to keep your eyes open and be careful that nobody's gonna be robbing you or doing this, doing that. Over there, there's much less crime than there is here. That's an improvement in the quality of life. Your house can get broken into, but that happens very seldom. Our house got broken into one time, but they caught
For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

the people that did it. It's much more peaceful over there, but it's the smallest place. You know how it is. Due to the way that the system is set up socially, people are not going to starve to death. If somebody wants to work, they're going to be able to find a job because they have a theory of full employment over there, not like here. They don't want full employment over here. To my opinion, in some ways Austria is much better off than the United States. Austria is regarded as a rich country. Austria is number three, as quiet as it's kept. You take like Switzerland, Germany used to be rich until they had this amalgamation, but they're suffering now. They're gonna be okay in the future. A country like Switzerland is supposed to be one of the top ones, Austria, maybe Japan or something like that, but Austria is right up there with them. You see more Mercedes around there than any place I've been. They got Mercedes garbage trucks [laughs].

Brown: [Laughs] And the mailboxes have everybody's titles on them.

Farmer: Oh yeah, that's one of the idiosyncrasies of the lifestyle there, the titles. They have a lot of respect for education. Here, if you get a master's degree, you don't put that on your name, but over there, it's Magistar. Herr Magistar or Frau Magistar. If you get a doctorate, and no matter what that doctorate is in... You know like when you see Dr. so and so, you think that's a medical doctor. In fact, the only people that use that almost over here are medical doctors, but if you go over there, you can have a doctorate, no matter what you have it in, you're Dr. so and so. You use it, and everybody calls you that. Some people have a doctorate in two different subjects, so they're called Dr. Dr. [laughs]. I'm not kidding you! And the wife is called Frau Dr. Maybe she can't even read, which I'm not serious, but she's called Frau Dr. They have a lot of respect for that. If the person that lives next door to you has a doctorate and you don't have a doctorate, then you're regarded as inferior to him or her. You must always say "Sie" to them until they say "du" to you.

Brown: Formal versus the informal address, sure. Do you have any honorary doctorates? So, you can put "Herr Doctor Arthur."

Farmer: No, I don't have none of them yet. Last year, I played a concert in, I can't remember the name, a little town... There was a family called Esterházy in Austria and they were like the patrons of Josef Haydn, the composer. Haydn wrote the first trumpet concerto that was written, and they hired me to play this. I never had played nothing like that over there. That was a real feather in the cap also. I would never get a chance to do that over here, unless I'd had a background in it. Things can happen.

I never had run into no real intended slurs, other than people not saying nothing to do when you say something to them, but right now, there's something going on in Austria called "Letter Bombs." There's a fascist movement in Europe, in France, Germany, Austria, strong. There are people there that if they don't like what you're saying, then they'll send you a bomb in the mail [that] looks like it's a letter. These things are made so slick that you can take one of these letters and take it and put it on the ground and stomp

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



on it and it wouldn't explode, but soon as you take it and open it and pull it apart and take out what's in there, it explodes. The mayor last year lost three fingers. They've sent bombs to priests and everybody who advocates certain things. Since Communism fell within the Eastern countries, there are a lot of migrants coming from the East, and these ultra-conservative people, they don't like that. Anyone who says, give them a break, they send them a letter. It happens. People open the letter, and they get maimed or killed, so you have to be careful about that.

Brown: That reactionary conservatism over there seems to be mirrored here and maybe even other places around the world. What are your impressions of what's going on in America now?

Farmer: It's similar. There's a certain mentality in humanity that's universal. It's not restricted to any one place. You got the people here [who] think about their country the same way that people think about keeping the foreigners out, they're nothing but a bunch of thieves and they don't want to work. But that country is built by people from every place that they want to keep out. It's got people from Czechoslovakia and Hungary and Yugoslavia and Poland and Italy. There's no such thing as an Austrian race. They have some people from Germany, but there are more from these other countries than from Germany. If they're second or third generation, then they figure they're pure Austrian or something, so they want to send a bomb to somebody else. That's crazy, man. This mayor, 'cause his grandparents were from Czechoslovakia, he's not gonna say, keep the Czechs out. This is what this country's about, and sure enough, he got the letter. My stepson told me, "You should have an unlisted phone number" [laughs].

Brown: Do you actually feel a threat?

Farmer: No, I don't because I'm pretty inconspicuous, but there are people there that are crazy enough to... like if I was really flamboyant, if I was talking a lot and getting interviews in the paper and saying certain opinions that they didn't dig, they would send the letter immediately. Absolutely, no doubt about that. But, since I just go to gigs and play my job and go home and eat my sandwich and go to bed [laughs]. They don't see me hanging out in the bars hitting on a lot of chicks and stuff, so everything is cool.

Brown: Looking at things back here in America, given this perspective that you have, a fifty year career, maybe a little less, starting when you're 16 or 17, what are your impressions of what's going on with the music we know as jazz today?

Farmer: I think it's well. I think it's doing great. I'm not saying that I think it's gonna be better, but I think it's in an upward motion as far as acceptance by the general public. It's being treated with more respect than it was when I left here. That's one reason why I left because things seemed bogged down into a mire, like in the mud that you can't get out. It's doing very well. There's a whole lot of education going on. There's so many schools here where you can study something, even if you don't become a professional musician. For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

There's no way all these people can become professional musicians, but at least there's an educated audience. Some of the student's interest rubs off on other members of the family. They listen to the records too and say, yeah that doesn't sound so bad [laughs]. That widens the audience, and that's good for the music because the musicians can make a living and maybe learn something and improve and make a musical contribution, some of them can. I really think that's a positive thing. One contributing factor that has meant a great deal, I think, is public broadcasting. If you get in your car and you start driving from here to California, if you keep the dial in a certain place in the high 80s and low 90s on the FM, you can hear jazz almost all the way there. That wasn't happening when I moved over. Here and in the New York area, the universities usually have a FM station that plays a lot of jazz, like Columbia University has one, WKCR. Harvard has one. There's a university in Philadelphia, I can't remember the name, they have one.

Brown: Temple, WRTI.

Farmer: Yeah, there's a whole lot of places like that. These stations need to have an audience because they're supported by contributions. They just don't play a whole lot of dumb music. Generally speaking, it's good quality, so people are exposed to it and they get to hear it. TV is the weak thing. You hardly get nothing on TV. These things have really made a big difference, education and being able to hear music on the radio. I mean music that's good quality. I'm not just speaking about bebop, but going back to the beginning, like Jelly Roll Morton or whatever it is. There never will be enough work for all the people who want to be professional musicians. That's why there's like an industry just going to school. It's weird 'cause there's a National Association of Jazz Educators that have a meeting every year or something, and if you go to one of these meetings, you'll see what this industry is. So many people there are teachers, teachers are teaching kids to become teachers. There's no way they're gonna have enough work for all these kids. Like there's not enough work for all the kids who are studying to play classical music either. It's just not happening, so you have to wonder about it. It feeds itself, the industry feeds itself because the people who are graduated this year, in a few years they come back here and are teaching some other people. It's sort of ironic in a way, but what can you do?

Brown: We're sitting across from the Lincoln Center. What has been its role in the popularity or burgeoning reemergence? Well, I don't know, you left in the sixties, and now we're in the nineties...

Farmer: Lincoln Center was here, but I remember one guy then, a drummer around town named John Lewis, and he told me one day, "This is really a disgrace that they built this Lincoln Center here and they had one building for this kind of music and one building for that kind of music and one building for theater and one building for cinema, but there's nothing there for jazz, and that's the music of this country. Why didn't they build a building for jazz?" They have an occasional, only occasional, jazz concert until Wynton's prominence came into the thing. That's the reality of it.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: Which made possible your featured concert there.

Farmer: Yeah, that's a big deal. Have a featured concert at Lincoln Center.

Brown: What's your relationship with Wynton?

Farmer: We're friendly. He's in town, I'm in town, I'm not gonna call him up and say, "Hey man, what's happening?" [laughs] 'cause he's busy. He's doing his things, and I'm doing what I got to do, but we have respect for each other. Everything is cool.

Brown: When did you first meet?

Farmer: When he first came back here. I was coming over here from time to time making some gigs, and I had a quartet with a drummer named Akira Tana, Japanese cat, and he had spent the summer up at Tanglewood, and he said, "The trumpet player that was up there wants to meet you. He's from New Orleans." I said, "What's his name?" and he told me his name, and I said, "Okay, tell him to come by the hotel." So, he called up one day and said he'd like to come by, and he came by and we talked for a long time, maybe about six hours or something. I was smoking then, so by the time we got through talking, both of us were hoarse [laughs]. But, he was very outspoken and very critical. He quickly developed a reputation of putting everybody down. Some people say that Wynton couldn't say nothing nice about nobody unless they were dead [laughs].

Brown: Yeah, well, he couldn't even say anything nice about Miles after he died either so...

Farmer: But, he was very frank, and I hadn't heard him play. At that time I thought, he better be a good player, 'cause there are people who go around figuring that they can elevate themselves by putting somebody else down. There are always gonna be people like that. There's no question that Wynton can play the horn. He can play the heck out of the horn. There's this guy I know in Switzerland who made a test, he made a tape of trumpet concerto that I was telling you about...

Brown: The Haydn?

Farmer: Yeah, the Haydn trumpet, and he recorded on the tape one section, one of the most difficult sections of it, played by the top trumpet players of the world including Wynton, and then let people listen to it, let other local trumpet players listen to it without telling them who was playing what, and then asked them which one did you like the best. It was unanimous that they all liked Wynton's rendition better than anyone else.

Brown: Did they say why?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: No, I didn't ask him that question, but I would imagine because they figured he was more successful in playing the piece than anyone else. This includes Maurice André, Doc Schutzer in Russia, all kind of great players. He has that, there's no question about that. Nobody so far is disagreeing with that, any dispute about that. Far as jazz playing is concerned, a lot people say what he's doing, they don't like it. You're always gonna find people that don't like something. Everybody didn't like Louis Armstrong. Everybody didn't like Dizzy Gillespie or anyone.

Brown: Do you think that Wynton is an innovator, since you mentioned those two, Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie?

Farmer: As a horn player? I think he's getting to be one more because of his writing than because of his playing because the stuff he's writing is really stepping out. To be able to play that, you really have to be up there to handle that. When he first came around, his group sounded like Miles and Wayne. He's moved past that. He's into something else. I heard the group with the sextet, which he disbanded now, and it went farther than that. In my opinion, it went further. I heard them one time, they were playing at the jazz festival in Nice, and they played this long piece that lasted about an hour or something, and you could see the people in the audience, they were squirming, like, "Damn, when is this gonna be over?" [laughs] When they finished, everybody said [clapping], "Yeah! Hooray!" I felt like they were giving them applause because they finished. The music was good music though, and he's done some extended pieces around here that nobody criticizes these pieces, like some ballet, extended musical works. Like I said before, you got to be in control of your instrument to be able to deal with that, and it doesn't sound like Miles and Coltrane, or Miles and Wayne Shorter, because there's more of a New Orleans thing there. A lot of that is mixed in. I think that he's still capable of going farther.

Brown: How did the concert come about where you were a featured artist?

Farmer: That was in 1994. In 1993, they had the jazz festival here. One night, they had a concert that included all the up and coming young trumpet players, and after the concert was over, Wynton and a couple guys came down to where I was working, Sweet Basil. Me and Wynton were talking about how did it go and all that, and just of the blue, he said, "Hey man, would you like to do something there? What would you like to do? [You can] do anything you want to do. Anything." I said, "Sure, I certainly would." He said, "Okay, just think about it. Let me know what is it because I have to put it before the board as a formality." But, in so many words, he said whatever he went for, they would go for, so that's the way it worked out.

Brown: What did you finally decide?

Farmer: I decided that I would do kind of a retrospective. I did something that marked different period in my career, like something that I did with Horace, something I did with
For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

Mulligan, something I did with the Jazztet. Mulligan wrote a couple new pieces for me, Benny wrote a new piece, and basically, that's what it was. Jim Hall was there, Ron Carter, but it was a full concert. I played on every number for the whole concert, two hours. It was very well received, good critiques, and the audience was positively responsive to it. I just have to say it was a success overall. Nothing like that never happened in the past before. I played one concert here in New York that was my concert that was up at Columbia University, the Miller Theater, up there. They have jazz concerts up there every now and then. I guess that place holds around 500 people. It was a very nice concert, but it didn't get the attention that the concerts get down here. I mean, the place was filled, but it was just another going on in New York. You know how New York is. A whole lot of stuff happening. What happens down here is major. People notice it. You don't ignore it. If you're writing for the *New York Times*, you don't ignore here, you can ignore Miller Theater [chuckles].

Brown: How about in Europe, do you have opportunities to play concerts there?

Farmer: Yeah, I have opportunities to play concerts there. France has an Office of Culture, and they spend a lot of money on concerts, jazz and everything else. I have an agent there. I play about three or four concerts there in what's called Houses of Culture. It's not just music, but whatever has to do with culture, you can go there and get some kind of knowledge. So, the auditorium, it's not like 1,500 people. At the most, it might be 300 or something like that, but it pays well. That's France. In Austria, with the little group I have, we play little concerts around there. We play at Lichtenstein and Switzerland, some dates in Germany. I go to England once a year and play concerts there for about two weeks. That's a weird situation there; it has it's pluses, but it's hard work because you play a different place every night with a different rhythm section.

Brown: There we go again [laughs].

Farmer: Doing a variety, playing a group of places, there's always something to do. I'm happy if I have two weeks to stay in Vienna at one time. Usually when I'm there, I'm getting ready to make a record or something where I need to be in the woodshed. Like I'm gonna play some concerts with a big band and they send me some music, I have to get down with that. Well, then, I'm glad for the opportunity.

Brown: Looking at what's going on with jazz today, you have the path being blazed by Wynton, you have Donald Byrd doing his hip-hop...

Farmer: Yeah, Donald is my man. Donald is so funny. Donald is still Donald. He can play if he wants to. With all this funny stuff he gets into [laughs].

Brown: I take it that's not something you listen to [laughs].

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: No, that's some silly stuff, man. That's silly; hip-hop and scratching and all that. It's entertainment, and there's a market for it, but I'm glad I don't have to do it or I don't have to even listen to it 'cause to me it's a waste of time. It's one of those kind of things where, as far as I'm concerned, if I was listening to it, then I would pick up a newspaper and start reading it or something. It's not enough happening there to keep my interest. From my background, where I come from listening to big bands, where something was happening. To my opinion, something's happening. Maybe the guys who like hip-hop say, "What is that stuff, man?"

Brown: What do you listen to?

Farmer: I still like to listen to big bands, Duke Ellington, people like that. I listen to trumpet players, basically, so I can see what's going on 'cause you can't ignore what's happening out here if you're gonna be a professional musician, see what the competition is doing. When some new guy comes on the scene, I go and buy the CD and listen to it, check it out. That's business listening, but just for sheer pleasure, I listen to the bands. I love to listen to Miles and Dizzy, Fats Navarro. There are some things that I've heard so much so many times, I let them rest and try to find some rare thing, something from some jam session someplace. I like to listen to opera, especially by Verdi and Puccini and Richard Strauss, Richard Wagner. I enjoy that. I go to concerts.

Brown: Yeah, you have plenty of opportunities to see it in Vienna [laughs]. See it live. Any young artists that have come along that have captured your ear?

Farmer: [44:35] Like I said, they're all playing. There's all these guys I hear. I don't hear nobody that sounds bad. I'm sure there must be somebody that sound bad, I just don't get to hear them, but the ones I hear, it's just a matter of living long enough to have some experience of life that you can put into music. You just can't be born today and have it all. It takes some time. It does, and of course, for some people, it takes longer than others. The young people, generally speaking, are prepared to move on, to move up. Due to the availability of education, they don't have to waste a lot of time on hit or miss things. They don't have to waste time to try this to see if it works, and then try that and see if that works. They can go to school, and they can get guidance, or someone can say, "If you want to do such and such a thing, here's the way to go about it." So, they come into a point in their life where they are proficient. They reach that point at a very early age. If they are able to use that knowledge and proficiency for expression, then you have an artist, but until it gets to that, then you just have a technician, and that's the way it is. Now, if you're gonna sit in an orchestra like over here in the Philharmonic, you can just be a technician, but if you're gonna play jazz, you have to be an artist, you have to be creative, have personality, individual. You don't learn that in the school, you have to live it. That's the way that is.

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Brown: You were recently interviewed, or perhaps not so recently interviewed, but the film was recently released “A Great Day in Harlem” by Jean Bach, you wanna talk a little bit about that?

Farmer: I remember when that happened, and I felt very glad to be a part of it, I still do. It was a nice day, nice weather, and everybody was happy to see each other. When musicians get together, it’s usually for a funeral. With so many guys in one spot, and everybody was very happy to see each other. That’s what I can remember about it the best. Other than that, once it was done, nobody thought nothing else about it [laughs]. It’s ‘cause it was made for *Esquire*. Once the magazine came out and everybody saw that, well, throw the magazine in the garbage can. I didn’t think about keeping the magazine. So, I seen the picture, it’s okay but that’s the end of it. But, then this lady came up with the idea of making this short about it because it seemed like there was more and more attention given to this picture as more and more people that were in the picture dropped off the scene. So many that were in the picture are gone now. Maybe it’s about twelve left, or somewhere around there in number. So many guys. It becomes more dear. It’s like if you had a picture with a whole lot of great classical composers together at one spot. It’s rare to have all these people together at one time. The way it happened, somebody called from *Esquire* maybe like a couple months before the date [and] said, “If you’re in town on such and such a day, come up to such and such a place in Harlem. We’re taking a picture of every jazz musician that’s in town.” A few days right before the shoot took place, they called to remind everyone. Of course, everyone wasn’t there because people were out on the road. Duke Ellington wasn’t there, and obviously his band wasn’t there. Count Basie was there, but there were a whole lot of guys who were out of town. Miles Davis wasn’t there. John Coltrane wasn’t there, a lot of people. Whoever was in town and felt interested enough, they went up there. I look at the picture now, and I’m very glad I can see myself in it. Other pictures have been taken since then, yet none of them work. First of all, the photographer was able to take the picture in such a way that he could have all those people and you could still recognize the faces. Other places tried to take a picture like that and everybody’s so small, you can hardly tell who’s there. I just saw a picture that was taken on 52nd Street maybe two or three years ago. They named it “Swing Street.” You know how they do in New York. On the top it says “Swing Street,” and underneath it says “52nd Street.” They had a whole lot of guys there, and you couldn’t tell who you were looking at. They tried to make a picture like that out in Los Angeles, and they had everybody there who was in town, but the people on the picture, a whole lot of them I didn’t know. With this picture, the names are recognizable. There are names of people who really made a contribution who didn’t come after the thing. I was there, I hadn’t made a contribution, but Roy Eldridge was there and Dizzy was there, Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young.

Brown: Your statement in that picture is quite poignant and also very profound. Could you repeat it for the purpose of this interview?

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



Farmer: Yeah, it just happened. It just came out 'cause the lady said, "Say whatever you want to say." I said, "Oh my god, what can I say?" But luckily, my memory saved me because I remembered the thoughts that I would have when I looked at that picture when I was working there every night 'cause I worked there a whole lot. I always stood over there on that side of the bandstand. To think that I used to look up there and say, "Wow, he's gone and he's gone and he's gone." I said, "Wait a minute, he's not really gone. The music sounds just the same as when he was walking the street. And that's the way it's always gonna sound. And the people who learned from that, he lives in them." That's the way it is. You don't have to waste time with the sentiment that somebody is no longer there. In this sense, they are there. As far as their family is concerned, they're gone, but we're speaking from the music's stance. They're not there because they have a family. They're in the picture because they made a contribution to music. That contribution was something that doesn't end when they are no longer walking the earth. It goes on forever. It goes from one generation to another. It may change, but still the source is still the source. Think of all the people that were influenced by the people that were in that picture. Think about the people that they are gonna influence, and it goes down, down, down the calendar forever. Sometimes, you might say, "What does Ornette Coleman have to do with Coleman Hawkins?" Well, that's a hard one to match up, okay [laughs]. But, you can say, "What does Dizzy Gillespie have to do with Art Farmer?" It's easy to match that up. Lester Young was a major influence, Coleman Hawkins, Max Roach, Sonny Greer. We influenced kids, so it goes on. One night I was playing in Paris, and an agent told me, "Dizzy's in town. He's coming by to see you tonight." I said, "Oh wow, great!" 'cause I always loved Dizzy and we got along well. I was thinking, okay I'm gonna play some of my own shit [laughs]. I started to play, and when it was on my mind, [and] I was conscious, I said, "I don't want to play Dizzy's shit. He's coming here." I couldn't play nothing that I could trace back to him. It didn't sound like him, but I knew where it came from. That was the first time I really examined the situation so critically, but I knew where it came from. There's no way that somebody could listen to me and say, "Hey, that sounds like Dizzy Gillespie," but I know [laughs]. He was a funny guy. Great player, a great man, a real giant, human. He loved people, and people love him.

[End of disc 7, track 1]

Farmer: What I find out, most of the musicians that can play have a humanity about them that is very attractive. You might find someone who can be mean and ugly, but that's rare. That's really rare. If they are mean and ugly, I would say they were mentally bruised somewhere down the road. Something happened that put a negative twist on them. That's the way it turns out, but most of the guys are very considerate and were willing to help others. It's not like a dog eat dog thing. Some people might think it is. They think, you guys go to these jam sessions and everybody's trying to outplay everybody else and stuff. There's a certain competition there, but you don't want to be outdone. You don't want anybody to embarrass you [laughs]. So, if you're gonna get up there, get up on the stand, you try to protect yourself. If you're not ready to get up there, you shouldn't get up there,

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



unless you're willing to get a few... like as Clark Terry would say, "You got up there on the bandstand and got 'skint' up!" [laughs] So, how are we doing?

Brown: Doing great.

Farmer: 'Cause I'm about to run out.

Brown: Well, this is a good time to end then. So I'll just say, on behalf of the Jazz Oral History Program, thank you so very much, Art Farmer.

Farmer: Well, I'm honored to be here really.

Brown: You have definitely blessed this program with your contribution. Thank you very much.

Farmer: Thank you. I just want to say one more thing about the community of jazz, and that is you can go anyplace in the world and you have friends there that you never saw before, but you meet people that you have something in common [with], and they will treat you with love and dignity and respect because you all love the same thing. I don't know anything that has more of that than jazz music does, regardless of what you do for a living. People say, "Oh, you like jazz? What about so and so? Do you like so and so? What about this?" and then you get into conversation, and the next thing you know you have a friend there you didn't know you had. That's beautiful. I can't think of nothing any better than that, man.

[End]

For additional information contact the Archives Center at 202.633.3270 or archivescenter@si.edu

