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Conversations with Marco Eneidi

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Well, ha, I went there on a red-eye flight. The red-eye means you fly at night time. I landed in New York City at six in the morning, I was just gonna stay for a couple of months. I wasn't sure what I was going to be doing, but I was looking for Jimmy Lyons, I wanted to study with him. And so I went to the YMCA over on West 23rd Street, it's basically a gymnasium, Sporthalle. They also have rooms, you can rent them and sleep in it, right, a little tiny room, 18 Dollars a night. I got there six o'clock in the morning and payed for a room for a week and I went down to Washington Square Park. I had visited New York before a couple of times, when I had some friends from California living there but this time nobody was left there and I didn't really know New York so well. So I am

sitting there in the park, drinking my coffee and had a bagel with cream cheese, which is like typical New York. And I got the Village Voice because that's what you got then to see what's happening in town, musically, culturally, art openings, et cetera. I looked through the apartments for rent, just to see what the hell was there and what the prices were. In California, I had never paid more than 60 Dollars a month rent, which included everything, heating, gas, electricity, telephone. And I saw, here's this apartment for rent and hey, they're doing a showing. You go there and everybody goes there at this same one time, ten o'clock in the morning. It's across town over to Alphabet City in the Lower East Side which I had never been to before, past 1st Avenue. And so I went over there and looked at it with about thirty or forty other people and well, I had nowhere else to go afterward so I just hung out in this place and the people were leaving. The landlord, a guy who was couple years younger than me, came up and said: 'Hey, uhm, hang around a bit, I wanna ask you something.' I said yeah, okay. And eventually the other people left and he asked me if I wanted this place. I said yeah, okay. Then I got an apartment. I wasn't even there in the city for five hours and I had an apartment. It never happened like that again! Now I had a 300-Dollars-a-month-rent-apartment which was really a lot of money for me at that time.

I didn't have really proper work skills for the city other than as a laborer and so I started out being a foot messenger, then bike messenger and then taxi driver before moving on to all different kinds of construction type work. This was the typical job for musicians back then, bike messenger or taxi driver. The actors and dancers were all working the bars and restaurants. And yeah, also within the first few weeks I met a whole lot of musicians. It was just by luck that I ended up in the neighborhood where all the musicians and artists were, on the Lower East Side. The Lower East Side was the traditional immigrant neighborhood. Whoever was new in New York came to this neighborhood, that's where they went. It was like, these tenement buildings, these big apartment buildings with small little apartments. We had small apartments and toilets were out in the hall in many places.

At that time in Alphabet City during the early eighties it was mostly Puerto Rican and Dominican

families, before that it had been for a long time Polish and Ukrainian, and it had earlier been the Jewish neighborhood. Every block had a synagogue. But now it was the Loisaida (Lower East Side in Nuyorican slang). ‘Yo Papi, Wha’s up?’ Arroz y habichuelas, menudo, fried plantains, salsa blaring down the street, fried chicken wings and lots of cayenne and tabasco. Yeah, and some pretty shitty run down apartments, lotta rats, really the lowest quality in all New York was in this neighborhood. From Houston Street, which is like zero street up to 14th Street, from Avenue A over to Avenue D, and from First Avenue to Avenue A, B, C, D, and then was the East River and across the river was Brooklyn. Yeah and at that point of time – well in the seventies New York City went bankrupt and a lot of landlords burned their buildings, they torched them, to get the insurance and not having to pay the building taxes. So here’s all these buildings that were bombed out, many empty lots, it was looking like a war zone. They were all abandoned, so you got a lot of people squatting, homesteading, there were a lot of relatively cheap apartments. This was the cheapest place. The cheapest place was in Manhattan at the time. That’s where many of the artists were after having been forced out of what is now being called Soho and the neighborhood was only part full, with a lot of vacancies. So that’s where many of the musicians and artists really were. Now, that same apartment I had for 300 is renting for three or four thousand, and the neighborhood is now full of people, mostly kids whose parents are quite wealthy and can pay that kind of money. Back then it was really kind of calm and mellow. I mean not calm, it was also the main huge drug market for heroin. It was wild, open, it was like the Naschmarkt in Vienna but all heroin and just thousands of people every day. So it was kind of dangerous because of that. I had guns put to my head on several occasions and knives put to my throat. But I am somewhat dark skinned and it was summer and sunny and they all thought I was Puerto Rican, so I was kind of cool, you know. I didn’t get messed with too much. I was accepted pretty well into the neighborhood, invisible.

There was this old abandoned school, PS 64, which had been taken over in 1979, by Armando Perez and some others. They repaired and rebuilt the place and opened it up to community groups and artists for meetings, rehearsals, studio space, performances, movies, AA meetings, art shows, children’s programs, and more. It was a real community center for and by the Latin community.

There were several places like this, there was Cuando down on 2nd Avenue and 1st Street, and The Nuyorican Poets Cafe on 4th Street between B and C which was formed by Miguel Algarin and Miguel (Mikey) Piñero.

And this school, this place, at that time they called it El Bohio, and they had a theater in there and stuff and in the front part there was, in the old classrooms upstairs there were a few people who had studios, Khan Jamal, Sunny Murray, and on the corner Jemeel Moondoc had a space. And I was walking by one day and I heard this music coming out through the windows and I just sat down listening and I said ‘yeah, wow, super, THIS is why I’m in New York’, because on the West Coast everybody was doing straight ahead white cocktail jazz (where the ultimate goal of *making it* meant getting a gig in Las Vegas). At least where I was, up in Sonoma County in the late seventies. And so I’m here in the shit, and it’s like post-Ornette/Dolphy sort of stuff, you know, some modern really hip sounds comin’ down. So I sat there listening, diggin’, and they all come downstairs and out the front door, you know, taking a break, and there was Roy Campbell, Denis Charles, William Parker, Jemeel and vocalist Ellen Christie. It was Jemeel’s band at El Bohio which was having open rehearsals along with a few other people. David Soldier, a violin player, also was there I think, and I think also maybe Jason Hwang, also a violin player, and maybe singers Lisa Sokolov, Jeanne Lee. And what happened, I saw Roy, he came up to me and said: ‘Hey, are you a saxophone player?’ I always carried my horn with me everywhere, you never know, and we started talking, and there was Denis, and so I met those guys and Roy invited me to come join in and so I started going to this once a week open rehearsal they had. I was in heaven.

El Bohio, that was on 9th Street, between B and C, closer to B, right by Tompkins Square Park. And on the other side of Tompkins Square Park, on the corner of 7th Street on Avenue A, there was a place somebody I met told me about, they had jam sessions on Friday and Saturday late at night and it was the University of the Streets. So I started going there and it was straight up bop and standards, you know, from the American song book. But yeah, through those guys, William, Denis, I met a lot of people and William found out that I was studying with Jimmy [Lyons] and he started, William

started, you know, having me in his larger groups that he was doing with his wife Patricia, the dancer. I met so many musicians. They were just walking down and around the street in the neighborhood and I met Don Cherry who was always around, Dewey Redman and Ed Blackwell, everybody. That's where everybody was. And in that neighborhood in the abandoned buildings there were open spaces, some places started up in the squat buildings, there were like clubs, not clubs but, you know, performance type spaces, the Shuttle Theater, the Neither/Nor Gallery, and other places that were operating as bars like 7A, Pyramid Club, kind of like what you see in Berlin now, all these places on the East side in Berlin. So there were things like that going on in that neighborhood and then I met this drummer at University of the Streets and he told me about some jam sessions up in Harlem and the Bronx and he brought me up there and – So here I was, this 25 year old white kid from the country down on up into the thick of things and going to all these Uptown black clubs and jam sessions. These uptown sessions were mostly organ/tenor trio groups and coming from a Swing/standards/Be bop/Hard bop traditional style, but really swinging hard and tough, real mean and driving. Real East Coast Jazz. Cats like Stanley Turrentine and Big Nick would be on it! I mean, like wow! Just tough as a nut. Places like the Salt-n-Pepper, Blue Book, Lickety-Split and if you couldn't cut it, well they let you know, I mean they throw you off the stand, so you go home and work it out and come back next time and try it again. And after a while, well they saw that I was trying and so many of them took me in and took me aside and showed me things and I was now being let into the inside, cause they saw that I was trying, and for real I guess.

In Tompkins Square Park where people were sleeping in the park still then, or just staying up all night playing or doing whatever. And there was this alto player, C Sharpe, Clarence 'C' Sharpe, he was from Philly I believe, and an older guy, Earl Cross, and Wilbur Morris, brother of Butch, older brother of Butch and Butch lived right down, Denis lived on 7th Street, between B and C, a couple of buildings down from him, it was Butch. Across the street from El Bohio there on 9th Street, Jerome Cooper had a place over on 9th Street, John Ore, Juni Booth. Also across the street there from Denis on 7th Street was this building where a bunch of musicians lived, people like John Zorn is in there still, Elliot Sharp, I think Polly Bradford might have been in there.

This apartment I got was a storefront, it was on the ground floor, what had once been a Bodega, and I had a big picture window that was the storefront, and so I could practice and rehearse whenever I wanted at this place. It was just a big room, this bodega, you know, it wasn't divided, it was one big long room, a railroad flat, where I was practicing, eating, sleeping. And people walking out on the street, this was on 2nd Street between B and C which was unbelievable. I had a curtain, yeah, or maybe the window was painted. And I came home several times with a bullet hole in the window. Not because of me but because they were just shooting on the street, you know, and I had a back door which went through a bunch of rubble onto Houston Street and there was a little trash-yard there and there was the main street and 2nd street was just, it was deadly. There was like 30,000 Dollars a day heroin business going on just on this little block. With the police standing right there and, because the police was taking the money too and – so right there in my front door step everybody was dealing. All the dealers had different names for their products like Toilet Bowl, or Red Star, Black Death, you know, they all had their brand of shit. There was always one or two guys in my door, yelling: 'Come on! Papi, taste this, got tha good shit man! Puro perico, works, works, clean works', full loud and I was hearing this, they were shouting out hawking their wares all day and night long, while I was practicing. Well, it was no problem to be heard on the street and well, one day there comes this knock on the door and it's – Also up the street the St. Louis gang was all around too, Joe Bowie, Luther Thomas, Luther Petty, Charles 'Bobo' Shaw; and so they knock on the door, and it was Luther Thomas and his partner Luther Petty. And so I started hanging with them a little bit and playing with Luther and they had a thing going on in this club on the corner of 7th and A which was right across from University of the Streets, but one night a week it was Bobo Shaw and the Human Arts Ensemble and he also had a jam session that happened on another night. Joe Bowie had his band Defunct playing which was also kind of an open session, you could sit in, and Luther Thomas had a night as well, Frank Lowe and Reverend Frank Wright were also around. So the neighborhood was just totally active and I was able to fall in with these guys and start playing and sitting in. I think the main reason that they let me hang and be cool was that I kept my mouth shut

and listened to what they had to say. You see, they were like 15, 20, 25 years older than me and I was there to learn and listen, not talk about my shit or my ego, I mean what do I know about music, I'm only 25 and learning, absorbing. There were all kinds of musicians, they were just walking, struttin', hanging on the street in the Loisaída. And you would meet musicians, either because you recognize them or you see they got a horn or they see that you got a horn and they approach you because they wanna steal your horn, or *borrow it*, haha. If you're stupid, you let them borrow it, which I didn't because I already knew the game.

And right there, also across from Tompkins Park on Avenue B, between 9th and 10th Street, was Charlie Parker's house where he used to live and this woman Judy Sneed, she was a photographer, lived there and she was an agent for Jemeel Moondoc and rehearsals were always taking place there and Dewey Redman and Ed Blackwell were there all the time and there on 7th Street was John Ore, bass player with Sun Ra and Juni Booth was around, and Billy Bang was just down the street on Avenue D. And Frank Lowe, Evelyn Blakey, Freddie Freeloader, and this was where everybody was. This is when I also first met Peter Kowald and Charles Gayle, both of whom were in the Earl Cross Nonette along with the great Will Connell and myself as well. I just ended up staying. New York was the place, that's where everything was. Back then you could play in the apartments, you know, I could not only practice in my apartment as loud as I wanted but I could have musicians over and do rehearsals, sessions, this wasn't a problem. I had my quartet which played on the street uptown everyday and we would be rehearsing in my place by night. Everybody was playing and practicing in their apartments. Now you can't, at all. You make one sound and they call the police, you know, it's just not possible. All the great musicians were there.

Jim Pepper moved back to town in the Spring '82 from the West Coast at the request of Don Cherry and also joined the Sahib Sarbib Multinational Big Band which I was in, as was John Betsch, Joe Ford, Roy Campbell, Mark Whitecage, Guilherme Franco, (both Guilherme and Joe Ford were also working with McCoy Tyner at the time) among others. And then Pepper, well he started playing up out on the street, cause that's what we did back then. I was also playing straight bop in the street

with my quartet to make money as well as hitting it on occasion with Denis and Evelyn Blakey, the singer, daughter of Art. And boy, could she belt it out baby! It was cool, I was lucky because I met all these people, I got a first hand experience from these guys from the fifties and sixties though. I mean, a lot of these guys were storytellers, you know, I heard all kinds of stories, Denis used to have stories about hanging out with Chano Pozo, Machito, up in Harlem, with all these Cuban musicians and guys from the forties and fifties, when he was young. So it's like a direct line, I could get the story from first hand. And this is not the same as going into the university and taking a jazz history class, taught by a teacher who doesn't know anything either. You read it in the jazz history book but this was the real thing, oral tradition, it's much better. Because these guys who write the jazz history books, I don't know where they get their information from but it's usually kind of skewed and biased, a euro-centric point of observation.

Cecil Taylor has some great stories, about Charlie Parker, Billie Holiday, there is a couple that he tells all the time to everybody, like first time he went and saw Billie Holiday. Some really interesting shit, I was really lucky actually. Because a lot of information people won't talk about, you know, it's secrets, special information, you don't tell everybody, and they told me, for whatever reason, well because they trusted me with the secret information. Too bad that I didn't record it and write it down. Sonny Simmons taught me about memory and the oral tradition. I spent many nights hanging out with Cecil in his house, just the two of us, just talking, the stories, this guy is like an encyclopedia. Denis Charles too, and all of 'em.

It was a good time and I just fell into it by luck. Just by luck I got a place to live and in that neighborhood. I could have been in any other neighborhood and, you know, where nothing was. And it was cool because they all, for whatever reason, kind of accepted me and a lot of the older guys took me under their wing and many of them had various vices and addictions and had problems and all, but they would never let me get anywhere near that shit, so I stayed clean, they really took me under their wing and protected me and also brought me around. There was still a lot of division in the city between the white and black music camps and well I didn't fit at all into the

white music scene and I'm not black. So, if you're square, you're not allowed in, but I was, you know, they brought me along into their circles. There was a few guys who got uptight when I was playing with Earl Cross, C Sharpe and Denis Charles, Tommy Turentine. So they, these non-musician hangers-oners were like: 'What doing this white boy be playing in the band?', but they said: 'No, he's with us and it's my band and I can have whoever I want', and so they were like older uncles, brothers. They were all twenty, thirty years older than me. And, you know, they liked me and they liked the way I played, I guess, I could barely play, but – And I didn't talk a lot, I kept my mouth shut and I learned and listened and people liked that, you know, because I respect my elders. I wanted to learn at that age, so I shut up because I'm learning, so I don't have nothing to say, listen to these older guys, what they are doing. Especially because lots of them were my heroes. I knew who Don Cherry was before I met him, I knew who Denis Charles was, and I had their records, you know, so here I am sitting with them hanging up, playing, I didn't had nothing to say, I wanted to listen what they have to say. So, they liked that, you know, that's also how I met Bill Dixon. I went and met him up in Vermont and went into his office and I didn't really say much and he was talking and talking and talking, well Bill Dixon. And couple of years later on he said: 'Well, the reason I hired you to be here in my band, is, because the first time we met, you didn't say anything, you just sat there and listened to what I had to say.' You're not supposed to be arrogant and egotistical.

But I had to leave New York a number of times. Things would get too hectic and crazy, and living in total poverty in NYC is a real drag, so I had to escape a few times and leave, pull myself together and come back. I did that a number of times and would go out to California because it used to be really easy to go there, and, just stay for a few months and make a few thousand dollars and then come back and be cool for a hot minute. But then coming back East and having to find a new place to live, well the rents were skyrocketing and being cool for a minute got cold fast.

My first apartment that I got in '81 on Second Street between Avenue B and C, burned down in late Spring '82 and I ended up spending several months sleeping on rooftops and in Tompkins Park.

Then there was a short stay in a place on Avenue A between 9th and 10th Street until the mafia-wannabe-landlord started shooting off a gun at his girlfriend on Avenue A while standing right next to me on the corner of 9th Street and I decided to split for Portland, Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. I stayed with my grandparents in Portland, which is my birth town, and went up to Olympia, Washington several times to take some lessons with Bert Wilson. Bert is an incredible saxophonist and plays all the woodwinds. Jim Pepper had told me about him and said that I should hook up with him. He was living in San Francisco and was a kinda of a guru saxophone teacher who had mentored Pepper, Dewey Redman, Sonny Simmons and Frank Lowe.

Then, that December '82, I went back down to the Bay Area and found a part-time job making relative decent bread and a place to stay rent free for a while when out of the blue Jim Pepper gave me a call from NYC to see how things were going with me. He asked: 'What the hell are you doing in California when you really need to be in New York? Come on back and you can stay at my place here in Brooklyn till you get settled'. So I said to myself: 'Well, New York is calling and so I have to head back. I stayed with Jim for about a month or so and then moved into a mostly abandoned homestead/squat building on 7th Street at Avenue D. The building had no water, no gas and the electricity was just an extension cord running through the hallway from the adjacent building. We paid 50 Dollars a month which went into the building for help with renovation supplies. My place was basically a pile of bricks, plaster and rubble three feet high. I used to climb over the fence at the public swimming pool on Houston and Pitt streets in the middle of the night to go swimming in lieu of a shower. I was playing in the streets everyday in midtown to make my food money. That summer of '83 was one of the hottest in history and it was miserable in my dusty apartment. One morning in early August I got up after another night of sweating like a pig and just said to hell with it, fuck it. I went uptown to the pawnshop, pawned my soprano saxophone and got enough money for some breakfast, a small bag of food and a one way ticket on the Greyhound bus back to California. Four days later I landed back in Oaktown. Once back in California I was able to get my part-time job back and decided to go to school at the North Indian Classical Music School of Ali Akbar Khan where I took vocal classes and musicianship with Khan Saab and studied tabla with

Swapan Chauduri which were both private and group tabla lessons. I lived in an abandoned car in the parking lot during this time along with several others who were also sleeping in the driveway and eating at the free soup kitchen for the homeless in downtown San Rafael. But being in Northern California, this wasn't so bad at all.

I used to have to escape New York a lot. And when the AIDS thing hit at that time, too, that wiped a lot of people out. It's a struggle there, I don't know, these guys, there's no money and everybody is like scuffling, hustling, and living in shitty conditions, not going to doctors because nobody has health insurance, so you just don't, you don't go. And so your health, it doesn't just deteriorate, it's deteriorating, but you don't know it until it just collapses. It's all very self-destructive and then just the whole thing, the pressure and stress can be so intense that it just breaks people, I don't know, because it's just constantly beating you down and finally you're dealing with it but after a while it just breaks you. Especially the bodies falling apart, due to poor health. A lot of these guys died, most of them died before their time. I have outlived most of these guys at this point now, many of my friends died before they made it to my age now.

But yeah, that's New York and the East Coast, it wasn't that stressful and desperate out on the West Coast, it's much healthier there. It got worse when I was there from '98-2004 before I came here to Vienna, things got wicked and tougher but it was still not as bad as being down and out in New York City. When the weather is nice, you can be kind of mellow there, ha, mellow, you can be kind of calm, you can be broke on the West Coast and not have any money and be kind of cool. In New York, when you're broke, it's a real drag, it's really a drag, you're trying to find a Dollar so you can get something to eat and a cup of coffee. Here [Vienna] it's pretty cool being poor, it's okay, it's not a problem, I mean, I'm cool. I have a warm dry place and food. I know how to live frugally and if all I have is a bag of potatoes, bag of onions, some broccoli, little bit of cheese, all I need is 15 Euros for a week of food, well, then I'm straight. And on the West Coast before I came here I had a horrible place to live that was really expensive and I was constantly fighting to keep the controllers from turning off the electricity, turning off the water, turning off the telephone, I was about to be kicked

out, and the stress, after a while, makes you need a drink, to relieve the stress, which only works once and then it's not working any more and you keep drinking. And they allow that shit to happen in America. You go in the ghetto, there's no food stores, there's nothing there, there's no banks, nothing, but on every corner there's a liquor store, you know. And they allow that, it's that way for a reason because it keeps people pacified, keep 'em drugged up and sedated so they don't have a fucking riot. And that's why there was so much heroin there on the Lower East Side too. People, you know, just keep 'em completely like zombies and sedated.

November 2004

I went out of my house in Oakland, that early morning, in the sun, my t-shirt, bare feet, picked some strawberries, Erdbeeren, went to the airport, came here and it was snowing. Yeah, I didn't know where the hell I was when I got here, I didn't know anybody, really, I didn't know if I will have a place to live or sleep, I came prepared to live in Kleylehof [farm outside of Nickelsdorf in Burgenland] for the winter. I came totally prepared, shit, if I have to camp out on the farm, I better bring my winter clothes and I did, I brought some really thick shit, totally prepared to sleep outside, because I didn't know, I hadn't heard anything about anything. And yeah, it was dark, winter was coming on, and I didn't know the city at all, I was lost, I didn't speak a word of German and I just kind of ended up here. Thomas Kaufmann, when I got here, I stayed a couple of nights at his place, because when I was here in the summer before I played with him at Miles Smiles [in Vienna] and I ended up spending a night or two at his house. And when I played with him in summer 2004 it also included Paul Skrepek and Vincenz Wizlsperger. Other than that I didn't know anybody really, except Hans Falb. I remember having met Ritchie and just a few other people from Nickelsdorf, Friederike, I didn't really know anybody. So I was lucky and Hans set up for me to stay at Anton Blattnig's place where he was living on Hamburgerstraße in the building next to and above Celeste,

with Ritchie for three months rent free and that was really a godsend.

And actually, that first couple of months I spent a lot of nights out there in Nickelsdorf, bei Hauna, I slept outside on the stage, I slept in his office a few times but mostly I went out on the stage, there's too many cats in that office, but yeah, I had a really good sleeping bag, it's meant for sleeping in the snow, it's not the best, but it works, you don't freeze to death and die. And Kleylehof is cool but you need transportation, it's a little bit of a walk.

In Vienna I eventually found a WG with some guys at Alserstraße, Gürtel, right there on the Ecke, young students, they were like architecture students, one guy was a trumpet player, actually, he was going to the jazz conservatory. He has never come here, to Celeste, I don't think he ever did, no, I don't remember his name – they were all from the same village in Niederösterreich.

And I started going to some of the jam sessions. The only one I went and actually played was Blue Tomato, I went to Porgy a couple of times to go play but I listened and laughed, same with the Tunnel, Cafe Concerto. Tunnel was like a nightmare, bad dreams of horrible music, except I wasn't dreaming.

I think the idea came from Ritchie, and Aladin, the Chief of Celeste, asked me and I said no, I don't wanna do a jam session. But I got these guys to do a trio for the whole fall and I thought okay, I do it for a few months, to have it as an opening group, this trio and a week before, less than a week before they both canceled. So I just got different specials, a different theme each week, whatever it was, Theatre, Dance, Poetry, Electronic/Techno, African. Hauna came by a number of times and Didi [Kern], Philipp [Quehenberger], Paul Lovens, George Gräwe, and I don't know, somehow the word got out to the other musicians, most important was trumpeter Thomas Berghammer, a few other musicians started coming, and then when Philipp Quehenberger started coming, he brought all his friends and Franz West came and, with his entourage of groupies and so called hipsters. And so after a few months I started to refer to it as a workshop as opposed to a jam session because I really wanted people to come and experiment and try different things than what they normally do.

The strangest thing for me here – which would be the same anywhere on the planet, I came to realize, in the whole world, but since I'm here, it's here, the first time I've lived away – it's really strange and different living in a mono-cultural, mono-ethnic society, it freaks me out sometimes and drives me nuts sometimes. I'm used to more of a mixture. I really feel, here, the effects of 1000 years of the empire and the Catholic church, especially the Austro-fascist catholic church. It's interesting what it's done here, it's really strong, actually, it's really powerful. All the people who left Europe, mostly, when they first were leaving, first going to America was to escape religious persecution. So the first thing they did, when they wrote the American Constitution was the 1st amendment, 'Freedom of Speech', so you can criticize the government without being executed and then the 'Separation of church and state'. Here is a separation, but it's still there and the Catholic church – I complain about all the religions, but since I'm here it's all catholic so I'll speak to that. So, in America we have this big mix of different people. You can come from anywhere in the world and go to America and become an American, right. I could live here forever and have kids and all but I'll never be Austrian, never.

We have that, you know, they call it this great 'experiment in democracy', which I never really thought much about. I learned a lot about America being here, being away from that scene, certain things. I see what America is about, what it is supposed to be about, what the intent was. Which I'm kind of proud to be a part of, actually. I never thought that before. There are certain things about it that I can see why they did it and how they did it. It's still fucked up, really fucked up because it's all corporate controlled, because it was also like you had to be white and you had to be male and you had to own land, and to own land, this was only one percent of the people, so it's for the wealthy, the upper class. But here in Austria, see, you got a socialist system, it's really good, it works. The State makes sure that nobody is left behind. And I also see why these right-wing Republicans in America complain about Socialism. They don't want it to be the way it is in Europe because in America it's like, you know, if you work hard, if you try hard and better yourself and there is

competition, you can get ahead. Here I think it kind of ends at a certain point. There are not really so many millionaires and that pisses off the wealthy class in America. You make a certain amount of money and you can't really get beyond that, and everybody makes it. I see that, it's like everybody is kind of on the same level, there's a little bit of separation, you know, but everybody has got a nice life, for the most part so it seems. And what I would call, from my perspective, a middle/uppermiddle class here in Austria, you don't have this huge divide between wealthy and poor. No matter how poor one is, one can live with dignity and self-respect.

Wie habe ich Deutsch gelernt? Ich spreche schlecht scheiße, trotzdem habe ich meine persönliche selbst Dialekt gemacht. I like to play on words and sounds. Well, shit, I thought, because Spanish and Italian was relatively easy for me, that I will come here and just pick it up, but that wasn't the case at all. And I was about to take a class and this one woman here told me: 'No, no, don't go there, don't take a class there, it's terrible'. So I didn't do it which was a mistake. Because then later she was teaching there too, actually. But then I took some classes, a private course – I need to do it again, it's been a while. The biggest problems? I don't understand anything. Well, the biggest problems, dealing with life, you know, with all the Beamter-shit, all the bureaucracy, which can be kind of thick in Austria, maybe it's thick in America too and I just don't know it because I don't have to deal with it. Sometimes the shit I have to do and go through with the Krankenversicherung [health insurance], and then with this Magistrat 35 for my Kunstlervisum, Bundespolizei – they're speaking this whole other language, you know, especially bei der Krankenversicherung, they be sprechen in Wien-dialect, or in Niederösterreich-dialect, or some other dialect, and sometimes it's difficult, especially if they are not willing to try. The last time I was in the Magistrat for my Visum, this girl, she hates on all the Auslanders, she is the one in charge of the visas but she hates all foreigners and she just refused to do anything for me, so I had to bring somebody with me, some Austrian. But I don't know, I can understand when I listen to the Fernseh or the Radio, ich war in Berlin, aber Österreich-dialect ist ein bißchen schneller, ich glaub', and people can't understand my English either. If you would go to

New Orleans and you spoke Oxford English, it would be like learning German and going to Vorarlberg or something, you know.

Well all these past thirty plus years that I've been working on the music I wasn't working on the business end of it, as in trying to promote myself. I had to work straight jobs in order to survive, financially, to pay the rent. In America there is no money for any sort of creative arts except for a few of those who have somehow been ordained and selected. And back in the day it was all by telephone and good old fashioned post. I'm not very good at talking on the phone, I can't sell myself. Some people are really good, you know, but I'm learning, and one has to look at it as not that you are trying to sell yourself but you're trying to sell a product, you're selling some new toilet paper. The only problem, everybody has their toilet paper and once you find a toilet paper you don't wanna change, you know, you have your favorite toilet paper. So, and here you come with some new toilet paper, and first they have to know about it and then you have to make 'em wanna try it. And that's how I'm looking at it, I'm trying to sell something, some kinda product, only I'm not selling toilet paper, I'm trying to sell some decent food so they don't have to use all that toilet paper they be using and wasting their time with. I'm somewhat ignored by the concert promoters and record labels. For every one concert I do outside of here, several of my colleagues, maybe do thirty. I think I did seven concerts last year. It's really a pain in the ass and here in Europe, well, the promoters don't even have the decency to return a simple e-mail and just say no, I guess no answer means no concert. But it's still hard, and it's frustrating, so I just continue to do my work and I really don't care to play most of these places anymore anyhow. I've been around for too long now and have a body of work that speaks for itself and I don't need to bend over and smile for anyone.

We [with Didi Kern, drums and Philipp Quehenberger, synth] play for many of his [Austrian artist Franz West] openings all around Europe. Some of these events we've played, like the Venice Biennale, galleries in Zurich, or some of these galleries and museums here in Vienna, like the Albertina, Wittgenstein Haus, Atelier Augarten, private parties with all these high society art people.

This year, we are going back to Zurich for a big gallery opening and then in June we will once again be back at the artists private pre-opening for the Biennale in Venice. But quite often we are just ‘the band’. And all the people there, you know, I met this old lady, she had just bought a Picasso, for like eight million, and in this house we were in, I’m looking at all this art work around, the place was filled with art. It was, what was the guy’s name? Flick, it was his place, originally. And I’m looking at it, in the living room on the walls, and, oh, Andy Warhol, and over here was a fucking Jackson Pollock, Kandinsky. And outside in this big huge garden, this yard, it was huge, his house was huge, well it was designed by the same architect who did the Whitney Museum in New York, Marcel Breuer. Yeah, we were playing outside surrounded by all these huge sculptures while the people were eating their, you know, Schweinsbraten and stuff. We’re just the band.

Influences

I didn’t really listen to him [Captain Beefheart] so much, I had a couple of records back in the early seventies. When he was coming up to the Bay Area, I think that was around ’96, when he was coming up, I guess he was doing some gallery things in San Francisco but he was coming across the bay over to Berkeley as well. There was this little place, a little storefront place where they had performances once a week, it was like, different, you know, serious and he was coming by and he was doing performances – not playing music, but reading his poetry and there we would play, his poetry and stuff like that, nothing big. He was strange, he was a little funny and now that what he died from, I think that makes sense now, I understand what was up, that he was already having some symptoms of MS. At that point he was just starting to come back and do some stuff, but he wasn’t doing any music, but doing readings in public and stuff like that. He was coming up north to San Francisco where he was doing art exhibitions. Just recently, you know, I listened to some Beefheart, for the first time in quite a while.

The blues stuff that first influenced me and made an impression came to me from the San Francisco rock groups, which also included the English rock groups. Well, the big thing for me was Janis Joplin, the Allman Bros. and Jefferson Airplane who I really liked and they had a little side band, that was Hot Tuna, the bass player and guitar player who I really loved, Jorma Kaukonen, the stuff he was doing, finger-picking, was just great. And he had said that his major influence was the Reverend Gary Davis, so I checked out who Gary Davis was, which led me to all these Mississippi Delta blues players, and yeah, I used to go to these concerts at Winterland which was the place which happened after the Fillmore West had closed, it was all Bill Graham productions, and there be like three or four groups a night, maybe the opening band might be Ronnie Montrose or Jeff Beck, before he got famous, the closing band might be Emerson, Lake and Palmer or some other bigger name at the time, in the early seventies. And middle groups might be Muddy Waters or Clifton Chenier, or Chicago blues groups which were coming from the Kansas City style. Papa John Creach played a lot, he was the violin player with Jefferson Airplane but he had his own thing happening as well.

So, you like these guys and you find out, oh, they say, ‘Well, we’re influenced by so and so, we get our stuff from this’, so you go and check out where they’re coming from. Same thing you do with Jazz or any music that you find interesting and want to learn more about, you find who you like and then, so: ‘Where do they get their shit from?’ and you go back and find it. And then you try and figure out what is happening by doing some real active listening and analyzing, transcribing, imitating. That is the work, the process. A lot of people don’t seem to do that any more. I don’t know, a lot of younger players (by younger I don’t necessarily mean age), who are still in the learning process, they don’t do that, they just, you know, they don’t know the history, they don’t know where the music is coming from. They don’t. You have to research and look into stuff and find out, you know, the shit didn’t just plop out of nowhere, you have to find out what the influence is and you go back and that’s how you learn the history and the tradition. It seems to me that many of the younger players don’t want to do the work, they think that they don’t need to because they already know everything. I don’t mind at all if someone is a beginner, or where ever they are at, if they acknowledge that. But it takes a lot more than just going to some music store and buying a fancy shiny electric guitar to

becoming a musician.

The thing is, you know, the chances of being a genius are not very high. You have more chances of winning the super-doooper lottery. There's only a couple of geniuses at one time on the whole planet, you know, the chances of coming up with something new, it's like, you know, it just doesn't happen. A painter, you have to have a big pallet of stuff and you discover new colors so you can add them to your pallet. It doesn't mean you have to use all of them, but at least you know that they exist and you have them at your disposal. So you can use them if you want, or, just like Picasso, do one blue and really get into that blue and really see what is up. But at least you have the power that you know that these things exist because that's part of the process. You have to, at first, discover what it is that you don't know and then once you find out something that you don't know, then you can decide what you want to learn about it and use it, but if you don't know that it even exists – But I can understand that not everyone has a desire to become a musician and it is just a hobby for most, but even as a hobby one should at least explore or learn the basic rudiments and fundamentals, like learning the names of the notes and where they are on ones instrument, or if not learn notation, then play by ear, well, one must really work hard and train one's ear and have a great memory.

Music wasn't and isn't easy for me, I am not a natural musician by any means, I had to work extremely hard, slow and long, many long years of study and work and I'm still working on it. It would have been so much easier for me to have done anything else in my life, like in math and science. But no, I went for the most difficult thing possible and quite literally sacrificed my life, health and personal relationships to the music.

When I first went to California State University Sonoma, I took an African drumming and dance class for two years. There was a really good professor from Nigeria, Dr. Tunji Vidal, and after he left Sonoma and went somewhere east, Kwaku Ladzekpo came and took his place. Both of them were Ethnomusicologists as well as being master drummers and dancers. Then there was also a North

Indian classical vocalist, Tewari G., who had his Doctorate in Ethnomusicology from New Delhi University as well as from Wesleyan University. I took several years of vocal and North Indian classical musicianship classes with him. Then in 1980, I Wayan Suweca from Bali came and gave classes on Balinese dance and culture as well as leading a Gamelan orchestra. So I became very interested from the very beginning in ethnomusicology, culture, dance, musics from around the world – I always was interested in being a complete musician as much as possible and for me being a musician means that first, there is somebody who plays an instrument, and then, with a lot of work, eventually becomes an instrument player, somebody who just plays the saxophone. Then there is a saxophone player, you got to put a certain amount of time in it, like eight, nine, twelve hours a day for years and years, to actually begin to really learn how to play the instrument, become the instrument, the instrument becomes you. I used to know a tuba player who looked just like his tuba, he also played a mean kazoo. But being a musician entails, it's like the top level, you have to have all these things available, at your disposal, to be a composer and an improviser, and, being a musician you have to have all kinds of influences, it's stuff on your palette of colors, it doesn't mean that you have to use them but at least you explore them and you know enough to have this little touch, a taste, on your palette, you don't have to draw on it but it's there when you want it. Knowledge is good, I want to know as much as I can but you can't know everything so you have to explore things, find something, if you like something you can go into it or at least touch on it and be aware that it exists.

There used to be this club in San Francisco, the Keystone Korner in North beach, and it was run by this guy Todd Barkan and he had bands in, they were coming and staying for four, five nights in a row. This was the late seventies, and Monday nights were local groups like Eddie Henderson, Hadley Caliman, but mostly headline bands were coming for four or five nights and it was mostly the whole New York loft scene, so all these cats were coming through, from Chicago, from New York, and also Old timers from New York and Europe like Dexter Gordon, Johnny Griffin, Big Nick

Nicholas, Randy Weston, Henry Threadgill's AIR, Anthony Braxton. Cecil Taylor would come in maybe two or three times a year with a group or sometimes solo, and the best thing about this thing was, we used to go there every night when there was somebody around we wanted to see, like Sam Rivers for example, and the door was on the corner and then just down around there was another door that was split in two and you'd opened the thing just a crack, you know, there'd be a group of us standing right outside there because you don't wanna pay to get in, we didn't have any money, and so we could hear this, from the street. Yeah, we go in sometimes and we always had our horns with us, I had a soprano as well, and then we would go out down around the corner to Columbus Avenue and try and play what we just have been hearing, you know, imitate.

I heard Cecil there a lot of times. I remember this one time I was hearing him, his group with Jimmy Lyons, Sirone, Ramsee Ameen, I went like every night of the week, and I heard Jimmy, I mean, I heard him! I understood, what he was doing, and it just clicked, it made sense to me, and I just went and talked to him and met him the next day and had a lesson with him. He said: 'Yeah, well, if you ever come to New York, look me up', so, a year and a half later I went.

Then there were all these other people, a little older than me, who had been at Madison University, Wisconsin, when Cecil was there for a year and then Bill Dixon took his place, and a whole group of people who had also been at Antioch, this is where Cecil went after Madison. So there was all these people who had been around Cecil, and then Sunny Murray started coming around New York up from Philly and I did some playing with him. So I was around all these people and then I started working with Raphe Malik, in '91, I had met him years earlier in New York City and we started working together a lot in Boston along with Glenn Spearman. And he was totally influenced by Cecil within his style and interpretation of the music and his writing and compositional technique. It was summer 1992, I was with Raphe Malik Quintet, we played in the Nickelsdorf Konfrontationen and word had it that Cecil was coming to play the festival in Saalfelden and Carlos Ward (alto saxophone) couldn't make the gig, so I knew that there was an opening and that maybe he needed another alto, so I got home and I called him and, that's how I got into the band. I already knew what was taking

place, more or less, I had a good introduction to jump into Cecil's music, and I could read the writing. By the time I started playing with Cecil, 1992, I already had ten years or so of preparation on his music, slow preparation, but, yeah, I am totally influenced by what he does with my playing now, in fact I'm more and more trying to play the stuff, that he is doing on the piano, on the alto. Cecil uses the Alphabet notation system and Raphe was also using that exclusively, as was Glenn. I first became acquainted with this method of writing from Jemeel Moondoc back in '81. Now I also exclusively use that method since 1995 myself. It's just another way of writing down symbols which are reinterpreted into specific pitches and sounds. Doing research for my Master of Arts thesis in composition I came across some compositions which look exactly like a Cecil Taylor written piece which were written back in 869 A.D.

Sonny Simmons, he told me once that he was totally influenced by Art Tatum. And I thought, that's weird, how does that work out? What's he talkin' about? And then I went and listened to Art Tatum again and I said wow, okay, now I see what Sonny is talking about, you know, I heard it, and now that's what I'm trying to do on the alto with Cecil Taylor. I'm playing these lines of Cecil's, what he's doing on the piano, contrary motion, juxtaposed tonalities, and I'm trying to figure out how to interpret that on the alto as a solo instrument, and I'm flipping these things, taking these lines of his that he does in contrary motion and these arpeggios and I'm doing the same thing but I can't do it at the same time so I'm like, breaking them, I'm taking these things, and I'm flipping them, back and forth and moving up and down and then changing keys on the same way, and also rhythmically I'm trying to attack it in the same way that he's doing it, and in kind of the same sort of swing. Musically I'm mostly influenced by Cecil, I would say, more than anything or anyone, harmonically, melodically, rhythmically, stylistically – I like the way he moves in public, too, it's kind of fun hanging out with him, and, a certain way of moving through the high society that he has.

I let everything inspire me. What I'm trying to do, I mean, the best thing I do for myself is just say silly little stupid things and make myself laugh, you know, just lighthearted, smile and laugh. It really

works, much better than the toxic chemical poison shit they were giving me a few years ago to kill something inside me which quite literally was about to kill me – and in the end didn't work, fucking two year nightmare. And I know people think that I was like really stupid, saying so many stupid things all the time, just anything to make me laugh and not cry. I'm just having fun, I feel so good and happy, I'm really enjoying myself, I'm really digging practicing and working on some new shit, that's really exciting, and I'm just having fun. And really now, for the first time in my life, I can truly say I'm totally at peace with myself, I feel really good, I just have peace. I made peace. I don't care about anything people try and say about me anymore. Ah, that's not true, but I just don't, I don't let anything bring me down, I'm not going to let anything or anyone, especially anyone, because they try to put you down, bring you down and destroy you if you let them, you know, especially if you are trying to do something different, play the wrong notes.

Because the more I look at the planet, it's really nice out here. And you get only one chance to live and when you're dead it's over. I am just trying to use my time as best as I can and get as much done as I can while I have the time. And have fun. No matter how fucked up it is, laugh at it, yeah, and people think you're stupid and not serious, maybe that's part of my problem. See, the problem probably I don't get over is several reasons, and I know this for a fact. That, well, I'm short, there's a definite factor of that, I look younger than I am and people maybe don't think I'm serious. The thing is, I'm really goddamn serious. I am really, I just don't feel a need to show it or have to prove it, my music and work does speak for itself as far as I am concerned. And I'm really serious about what I'm doing. Doesn't mean that I have to be dark, finster schauen.

And playing the horn, practicing, and working on the shit, it's like coming together, the more I'm doing it, it's just getting better and easier all the time, it's flowing, it's working, you know, when it's really on, it's just a pleasure and especially because the stuff I'm trying to do, the way I'm playing, it took a long time for me to develop the technique to get to know to do what I wanted to do, technically, and get the sound I wanted too. I worked on it a long time, just for getting the sound because I hate most alto saxophone players. They sound like they're playing a kazoo. And it's really

coming together, and I'm really enjoying it. Now I work on stuff, I mean, I work on real basic rudiments, still. I am practicing the same shit I was practicing 34 years ago, just the beginning basic fundamental beginner shit, you know. I'm just getting better at it. It's like, you know, martial arts, they have the ready position and from that position you can go anywhere and do anything. And yeah, now when I go for things and I try to do something, I can do it, most of the time, not all the time. But then, you have to push yourself to go for places and things that you can't do, to the new. You find out and push to the next level and you just, you know, it keeps going and going and you have to keep pushing all the time. You're trying to jump over a thing and setting it higher and hop, you know, to the next level. And it's getting easier. So that's really inspiring me and it's really fun to play. Sometimes it's really frustrating, it can drive me crazy, I yell a lot at myself when I practice, I can really curse myself out, but really I am just talking to myself and trying to work out the material: 'You goddamn mofo, what the hell is wrong with you!? No, no, no, that is not how to play the horn', fingers go on strike and mutiny – of course it's all in jest and fun, but I laugh a lot at myself too, yeah.