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ANNIE ROSS
NEA Jazz Master (2010)

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Brown: Today is January 13th, 2011. This is Anthony Brown. I'm in the home of Annie Ross in New York City, in her home in – where are we? 54th Street.

Ross: We're smack dab in the middle of New York City.

Brown: Right. This is the Smithsonian Institution National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Oral History interview with Jazz Master, vocalist, actress, author, and chef . . .

Ross: Lyricist.

Brown: Lyricist. Arranger?

Ross: No, I don't arrange.

Brown: Okay, lyricist Annie Ross. Annie, it's so great to be able to be here with you in your home.

Ross: Thank you.

Brown: And it was so great – I didn't get to meet you at the recent event two days ago at the Jazz Masters ceremony, but wasn't that a wonderful evening?

Ross: It felt like being in a family. It was a lovely, warm feeling. And it was so good to see everybody there. It was just – a warmth exuded from the people on stage and from the audience. I was very happy with it. And what an honor.

Brown: It's amazing, stellar company, and you are in your rightful place in that company.

Ross: Thank you.

Brown: Annie, I've been listening to you ever since my father first put on *Sing a Song of Basie,* and I went, whoa. Then when I heard *Twisted,* I – whoa. Then when I got a little older, then Joni Mitchell did *Twisted,* I went, wait a minute, I've already heard that.

Ross: Exactly. A lot of people thought Joni had done it.

Brown: Right. But that's not really the case. Then she came back and did *Centerpiece,* and I said, I already heard that too. So Joni was mining the wellspring of . . .

Ross: Yes she was.

Brown: Let's start from the beginning. If you could for the record tell us your full name, your birth date and place of birth.

Ross: My real name is Annabelle McCauley Allan Short. My mother and father were vaudevillians in Scotland. They were on tour. I was born outside of London, in a place called Surrey.

There was a tradition in our family – there were five of us in the family, three girls and two boys. As soon as we could walk, even before we could walk, when we were about four weeks old, my father would cradle us in his arms and take us on stage to show the people the latest addition. Then, when we could walk, we were incorporated into the act. My father was a producer. He had one leg. He lost the other leg in France during the first World War. He played accordion, he composed, he directed, and he did sketches and things like that.

I was born in a house outside of London. The house was called Loch Lomond, which was weird, but there it was. When I was about two-and-a-half, I would participate in the

sketches and stage things that they had. I often wonder, was it the exposure that I had in the theater? What was it that made me want to go in? I think it must have been.

I was a brat. I was very precocious. I used to hang over the wings, which are – how do you explain the wings and the atmosphere of the theater. It's where you make your entrance and your exit. I was awful. I used to go around to the dressing rooms, like the magician. I would take his goldfish out to see if they'd move after a while. I would tell the audience how the man who sawed the lady in half did it. I was a general busybody.

Then my mother and father got an invitation from an aunt, who was a singer who was based in New York. Her name was Ella Logan. She was a wonderful performer. We came over, steerage, which wasn't great. There were three [*sic*: four] of us: my eldest brother, me, and my mom and dad. We were terrified on the ship, because it took a long while to get here – I forget how long – and we were told, if your papers aren't in order, you're sent back, never to return. I was terrified. At that time – I don't know if they'd still do it – there was a small ship that would come in with the customs men aboard. They frightened me to death. I had this – Ellis Island was weird. It was frightening, because it meant that you were entering the land of opportunity where dreams could come true, and if you were rejected, who knows when you might be able to try again to get into America? So that was a very disturbing feeling.

I remember vividly – I remember the Grand Hall, that big hall where you lined up and you went to – I think they had about six or maybe eight people who were at desks, who would examine your papers. Everything seemed huge. The ceiling of this hall, I remember.

Then we were released, all but my dad, because something wasn't right with the papers. He had to stay overnight. I went immediately to join my aunt with my mother and brother.

We stayed with her. She knew a lot of musicians. She had an apartment, I think, in the 50s – 54th or 55th [Street]. I can't remember. I used to have a little girlfriend to play with in the lobby. She said to me one day – I always dressed in a kilt, and I had a very thick Scottish accent – she said to me, "My father has a radio show." I said, "Oh, I should be on it." She said, "Why? What can you do?" I said, "Everything. I can dance. I can sing. I can tell jokes." I really sold it, at which point a very portly man came into the lobby. This was my little friend's father. I said, not being hesitant to go forward when I could – I said, "You have a radio show." He said, "Yes." I said, "I should be on it." Again, I was asked, "What can you do?", and I recited everything. He gave me a piece of paper which I promptly lost. It had a number on it. I was a kid. What did I know? I was four.

One day, the phone rings. My aunt, being a singer – my aunt picked it up, and this voice said, "Is Annabelle McCauley Allan Short there?" My aunt said yes. He said, "We're waiting for her. We're in the studio – broadcasting studio at a child's competition, and she's supposed to be here. Is she there?" My aunt said, "Yes, she's here, but she's taking her nap." He said, "Could you get her up, get her dressed, get her down to the studio?", wherever it was. My aunt said, "Okay. By the way, who is this?", and he said, "Paul Whiteman." He had been a huge bandleader, and he had very famous musicians in his band.

So I got dressed, and my father gave me a joke to tell, which was, "What do you have on, little girl?" I'd say, "That's my kilt." He said, "What's that thing around it?" I said, "That's my sporran." He said, "What's a sporran?" I said, "That's where a Scotsman keeps his money, and you'll notice I said, he keeps his money." Ha ha ha. Then I sang a song that my father wrote. I won the competition. The prize was a token contract with MGM. It was a six-month thing. It didn't say you were going to be in the movies, but you were signed to MGM for six months.

My aunt was going out to L.A. to do a couple of movies. She took me with her, with my mother. We went to L.A., where she had rented a house. I remember going to MGM and meeting Louis B. Meyer and various people in authority. I never did make a film for MGM, but I had a real good time.

My aunt, she must have known that I was musical, because she played me a record. She gave it to me. It was the first record I ever had. It was Ella Fitzgerald singing *A-tisket, A-tasket.* I didn't know what it was. I had no idea what it was called. But I knew I wanted to sing like that, which I did. I learned the song, and I'd sing it at the drop of a hat.

I went to school in Beverly Hills. I had a lot of famous classmates. One of my little friend's father was Harold Lloyd. He had an estate in L.A. that was unbelievable. And Edward G. Robinson's son, and Wallace Berry's daughter, etc., etc. It was a beautiful school, right on Rexford Drive in the middle of Beverly Hills.

Then I got a call saying, would I come and do a film for *Our Gang*? It was all arranged with my aunt. I didn't know anything about it. But I did go on the set. I sang a jazz version of *Loch Lomond.* It's available on the *Our Gang* collection. It was wonderful, because I got lots of hugs and kisses and pats on the head. I don't think there was ever a doubt that I was going to be in the music business.

I continued just going to school until I was – I think I was about 11. I did a film with Judy Garland in which I played her sister, but I didn't really get to know Judy Garland. She was a star, and I was just a bystander.

Then, after that, my aunt said, "No more films. Go to school. You don't have the magic to be a singer. Why don't you try set designing?" Whatever she said, I was against it. I said, "No, I want to be a singer."

I had come from a family – it must have been very traumatic to see my mother get on a plane and leave. They told me that I tried to climb the mesh gates. They took me there to see her leave, which I thought was cruel. I was raised, really, by nursemaids, nannies, one of whom was horrific. She used to beat me every week, because I didn't have any family out there. She would never do it when the place was full. She did it when the place was empty, which was often, because my aunt was coming to New York and doing shows. So I never wanted to be a kid, ever. To me, being a child was cruel, because I used to get beat and etc., etc. I couldn't wait to be older. I started smoking at 13.

I knew all the pop tunes, but I didn't like them as much as I liked what I learned was jazz. Things got to such a pitch that my aunt decided to send me back to Scotland. It was always a threat. "If you don't behave yourself" – I don't know what I did that was so terrible – "If you don't behave yourself, I'm going to send you back to Scotland, which is horrible. It rains all the time, there are no streets, and there are cobblestones." I just thought, get me out. I don't care where. I don't care how. I don't want to be here.

So I was sent back when I was 16. I got off the plane, and I thought, "These must be my family, because they're the only ones left on the airstrip." It was raining, as my aunt had told me. I was the last one off the plane. It was case of "Hello, pet. This is your mother. This is your brother. This is your brother." I knew the other brother. "This is your sister, and this is your aunt, this is your aunt, this is your aunt, and this is your aunt." I thought, I got to get out of here as quickly as possible. I don't like this. I don't know these people, and I want out.

So I went back to – they were real vaudevillians, and they were vaudevillians in the sense of the word that meant that they played in very poor theaters. They had a great following, but the first two rows were leather. After that, there were wooden benches. I said to my dad, "I can't stay here. I have to go." He said, "Where are you going to go?" I said, "I don't know, but it's not here."

He must have felt that I felt very lost and alone. So he said okay. He took me in the living room, which was the front room. You never used it. It was for company. He pulled back

the carpet, and he lifted up a board. That's where he kept his money. He gave me about £30. He said, "Let me call your mother's brother. He lives in Brighton," which is a seaside town, outside of London. So he called, and my uncle Bill said, "Okay, fine. She can come and stay with me and my wife. Make all the arrangements and let me know." I said okay.

So I went down to Brighton. My uncle was an actor, but he also had done other things, like he was the road manager for a famous band called – oh shoot. What was the name? The famous band – anyway, I was supposed to meet this guy with my uncle in a club, because he had a big band, but he wasn't employing his big band. He said, "I think I can get you a job in a club." He called – oh, what is the name? – anyway, he said, "Come over here, 4 o'clock." So we went to Grosvenor Square, which is a very fancy neighborhood, and we met this guy, who was in a smoking jacket. He said, "Sing for me." I said okay. Without accompaniment or anything, I sang, and he was very impressed. So he rang his friend, the club owner, who said, "Okay. I'll try her out for a couple of weeks."

It was a private club, and nothing is more snobbish than an English private club. I mean it was – I couldn't even sit in the room when I wasn't singing. I had to go and sit downstairs with the ladies' room attendant. I bought a second-hand dress and a pair of shoes. It wasn't a bad little band. It was about 10 pieces. I was doing a lot of Rodgers and Hart, and Cole Porter. They had never heard that. After a while, a coterie of people grew and grew, who would come in to hear me sing. They finally gave me – like Marilyn Monroe in *Bus Stop* – they finally gave me a switch, so that when I got up to sing, I could switch the light on and get the spotlight.

I had one room. I thought it was heaven. You would put shillings in the meter to get heat. My window was broken. I didn't care. I had a ball. I loved it.

Then I got into a show. I read a part for a show which was a famous Broadway hit called *Burlesque.* I read for Jack Hylton, who was also a famous bandleader, by this time, an impresario. He said, "How can you be so" – he should have said "hip," but that wasn't a word then – "How can you be so talented, and you're only 17? I can't give you the lead in the show, but I know what I'll do. I'll make you the understudy of the lead." The lead was a 45-year-old woman. So I said, "Great." He said, "We'll put you in the chorus." I said, "I can't dance." He said, "You'll be the one that always makes the mistake, and that'll be funny." I said okay.

We rehearsed. There were a lot of high kicks, I remember, like the Rockettes, and I had about four jokes with the leading man, which distinguished me from the chorus. I had a speaking part.

The leading lady saw it, and demanded that I be relieved of my dialogue, because I was younger. You know. Her name was Marjorie Reynolds. She was a famous Hollywood star. So I went down to the basement of the theater, and I cried. A woman who was in the show – because it was quite a large cast – came down, and she comforted me. She said, "Honey, when you've been in the business as long as I have, you get kicked in the face so much that you don't even feel it." I've never forgotten that. I was heartbroken, but I loved – and I was the youngest in the show.

Then I got a telegram from Hugh Martin. Hugh Martin wrote *The Boy Next Door, Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas,* innumerable hits, *The Trolley Song.* The telegram said, would you like to come to France and join an act consisting of me, his boyfriend, and Hugh? The idea was that Hugh would play the piano, and we would all sing. There were very hip arrangements. Who, at 17, wouldn't want to go to Paris? I was in London after the war, where everything was rationed. You couldn't get eggs, and you couldn't get milk. So Paris was a dream. I went there. I ate steak for the first time in a long time. I had beautiful omelettes. I had strawberries and cream. It was just fabulous. I knew a little bit of French, but I learned more and more and more.

Than, as we were going to leave on a so-called tour, Hugh got an offer to write *Ziegfield Follies,* which never went on, but he was contacted and asked if he wanted to do it. He came to me, and he said, "It's something I've always wanted to do. I have to go back." I said okay. He said, "But I'll set you up, and I'll give you some money, because I know you have none." I didn't – I've never had a lot of money, ever. So I said okay.

I had met two people, mother and daughter, who said, "We'll take you to Balmain and get you fitted for a dress well." They were very rich. So they would go to Balmain a lot. They took me there, and they said to me, "Pick out two dresses that you want." There's a very famous woman called Ginette Spanier, who was the head of the house of Balmain. I picked out two dresses. I went back for my first fitting, and I said, "These two dresses aren't what I picked." She said, "You're only 17 once. These are the dresses you should have." She was quite right. I chose ridiculous, sophisticated stuff.

I did a short tour of Germany with a French group, where I would – they would say the program in French, and then I would translate it into English, to present the show. I came back, and I thought, I have to do something to help me get some money. So I better sing with a band. I met [?Belnari Ilda], his name was, who was a very famous band. We

played in Biarritz, in the casino. I wasn't old enough to go into the casino and gamble, but I could sing with the band.

Every Friday night they had gala evenings. That meant you would go into one room, into a huge room, very high ceilings. Every Friday night was a gala. You used to have maharajahs and all kinds of rich people, a full suite of diamonds or sapphires or rubies or whatever. Then we would go to a nightclub, which was about two floors up, and we would play until there were no people. Sometimes it was 2. Sometimes it was 4. I had a ball, and I was learning about French food and how to cook it.

Monte-Carlo – because I was at the Sporting Club in Monte-Carlo, which was very fancy. I just had the most incredible time. I met many, many people, many famous people. There was no-one around. It was Monte-Carlo unlike anything you see today. It was enchanting. It was wonderful. There was an area above Cannes, above Monte-Carlo, which is called Beausoleil. There was a woman – we would go there to eat. I tell you, the food was fantastic.

I did six months, I think, and then I came back to Paris. I always made Paris my base. I was living in a very small hotel off the Champs des Elysees. At that time in Paris, there was James Moody, who I made my first record with. That took place in Paris. It was a song that Moody had written. Had no words. It was just called *Le Vent Vert*, the green wind. I met Klook, Kenny Clarke.

Then, musicians would come over, like Dizzy [Gillespie]. By that time, Kenny Clarke and I were hooked up. He had to go out of town. He had a job. That was very unusual. He said, "I have to go, but Charlie Parker is coming in. I'll give you a note. You can go to the airport with Charles Delauney," who was head of the *Jazz hot.* By this time I was pregnant. "You go. You give Bird this note." I said okay.

We were so poor, we were living with another family in – oh, what's the name? – Pigalle, around Pigalle. We shared it with a saxophonist who was French and his wife and child and his in-laws. You had to walk up a round staircase. We lived at the very top. There was no money, but there was a lot of love.

Janis, who was the wife, she could make a meal out of nothing. She was unbelievable. All she had were two little stovetops, whatever you call them.

Brown: Burners? The hot plates?

Ross: Hot plates.

I'm trying to get this straight in my mind. I went with Delauney to meet Bird. Of course this was a dream, Charlie Parker. I loved all of his stuff. Through Klook, I learned more and more and more. I always had a good ear, because I think that's the base, listening. I listened to everything I could get my hands on. I remember the first time I heard Dizzy's *Things to Come,* I said, "Wait a minute. Play that again." I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

We came back, Bird and I. Went back to the apartment. Janis and her husband were wonderful. They were so hospitable. Bird had come from Scandinavia. He had tried to clean his act up. He said, "Do you have anything to drink?" I wasn't drinking, because I was pregnant. I said to Janis, "Do we have any alcohol?" She said, "No, what would we do with it? None of us drink." She said, "Wait. Wait a minute. My brother-in-law made some liquor in the south of France, and he brought it with him, but it's apparently very strong. So tell him to be careful." Tell Bird to be careful? She had a decanter. I went into his room. I said, "Bird, nobody has touched this yet, and it's very dangerous. Be very careful. Only take a little sip." So Bird said okay. He took the decanter, he put it to his lips, and then he just, glug glug glug glug glug, the whole thing. Said, "Is there any more?" I said, "No!"

I took him to a few little clubs. He had one song called *My Little Suede Shoes.* He learned – he didn't learn it correctly, but we went, and he sat. Musicians played for him. He eventually recorded it. It was heaven. The musicians couldn't believe that Charlie Parker had walked in. I mean, they were – it was unbelievable.

Eventually, I had my son. They called him, in the hospital, le petit Jésus coo-coo, the little coo-coo Jesus, because of his birthday, which was Christmas Eve. Then, when he was four months old, Dizzy got a telegram – I mean, Klook got a telegram from Dizzy, saying, would you like to come back and play with my band? He said of course. We didn't have enough money for me. So Klook said, "I'll take the baby back. I'll place him with my brother and his wife, who live in the projects in Pittsburgh." I didn't know what a project was. I said okay. He said, "So we know that he'll be cool." Fine. His brother was a railway porter, beautiful guy.

So they took the baby. Klook stayed in a hotel in New York with my son. But when he had stepped off the boat, he had my son in a little Moses basket. He handed him to a very dear friend of his called David Usher. David, in turn, handed him to a guy called Label, that was driving to Pittsburgh. He took the baby to Pittsburgh.

Then, about six months later, there was enough money for me to go. So I came to New York by ship, but not steerage, which was great. I got off the boat, and Klook said, "What are you doing? Are you all right?" He said, "Okay. We'll go and stay at Max's." So we drove to Max Roach's house, which he was sharing with a lady. My kid was still in Pittsburgh. He said, "Annie" – Bird had come over, and he said, "Annie, I want to show you New York." Well, I had been here many times when I was a child. Anyway, we got into Bird's car. I forget what it was, but it was big. Bird would say, "This is the Empire State Building," dah dah dah. I didn't tell him I knew what it was, because I was seeing it through his eyes. He was showing it to me through his eyes. They took me to meet everybody.

Then I got on a train, and I went to Pittsburgh. I stayed in the projects for about six months. I had my little kid. I've never felt such love. I had so much love. I remember coming out with my little boy in a stroller. There were two or three little girls. They said, "What are you doing here?" "What am I doing here? I live here." They said, "No, you don't." I said, "Yes, I do." They said, "You're white." I said, "I live here. This is my child." I was the only white person in the projects, as far as I knew. But I had a wonderful time. Klook's brother and his wife, they could make meals out of nothing, which we had to do, because nobody had money money.

Then we moved.

Can I just stop for a minute.

Brown: Annie, if I could, just to come back and fill in a few details and make sure the historical record is accurate, it's listed as – Mitcham, England, is listed as your birthplace. That must be in Surrey. So if you could explain.

Ross: It's – Surrey is a little town. Elton John was born there. That's where I was born, in a house. It's outside of London. That's about it.

Brown: But Mitcham? Mitcham is . . . ?

Ross: Mitcham, Surrey. I guess that's the postal address or whatever.

Brown: Then you mentioned the MGM film that you played Judy Garland's little sister. The title of that was *Presenting* – if you could fill that in, *Presenting* . . .

Ross: It was called *Presenting Lily Mars.* I was going to say – what was I going to say about – oh yes. When I was born – I was born after a matinee. My mother used to tape

herself up, because she had five kids. With each one, she would bind herself, so she wouldn't look pregnant, and go on and sing and do sketches. I was known as the Metropolitan baby. That was the name of the theater, the Metropolitan. Rumor has it that my father, after he came off stage, my mother said, "It's time, it's time." On the way to the hospital – no, I was born at home. On the way home, my father asked my mother, could she possibly do the night show?, and my mother threw something at him. I don't know what. But that was the way it was. You did what you had to do, by whatever means. So that was the Metropolitan baby.

Brown: Then one other thing that's listed in the historical record is that at age 14 you won a songwriting contest for a tune, *Let's Fly.* Is that correct?

Ross: Yes. I was 14. I was in school. There was a contest that was held for – a songwriting contest to be judged by Johnny Mercer, Dinah Shore, and Paul Weston, who had a great band, who later married – oh, come on – Jo Stafford.

Brown: Another vocalist.

Ross: Oh, a great vocalist. Never hit a wrong note.

I had a friend at school. He played a little bit of piano. He said, "Why don't we try out." I said, "Yeah, all right." So we got together. I always mention him. He didn't really contribute that much, but he was there. It won. The prize was a recording by Johnny Mercer with Paul Weston and his Orchestra, and the Pied Pipers, of which Jo Stafford was one, and I think about $100. I'm not sure. That's it there, hanging. That's the record, Capitol Records. So I can say that one of my songs was recorded by Jo Stafford. I'm very proud of that, and it's a good song.

But I used to make up songs all the time about things that I didn't even know about, like heartbreak. Well, I guess I did have heartbreak, but it wasn't a usual 14-year-old view of whatever. I never got the award, because I left.

Brown: Another entry in your biography is a trip in 1947 to see your aunt perform on Broadway in *Finian's Rainbow.* It says, "It awakened an enduring interest in musical theater for you." But it sounds like you grew up in it. So I'm not sure if that . . .

Ross: I grew up in it.

Brown: So I'm unsure if that was really a catalyst, or maybe just a reawakening.

Ross: I'll tell you something. She was a bad – in the theater, she was a very strange combination of charming the birds off the trees or cuttin' you down. But when I listened to her, I cried. She was a wonderful interpreter of lyrics. She did *Glocca Morra.* It's said that – it was said that Jack Kennedy, when he heard of his – it was some big event that happened. The death of someone, his sister or whatever – that he would just spend hours listening to my aunt sing this, about Glocca Morra, Ireland. It made him weep. She could do that to you. It was such a weird relationship. You loved her when she was good. But when she was horrid – when she was bad, she was horrid. She could cut you down to size in a minute. So that was a very strange relationship.

But she exposed me to a lot, which was wonderful. I heard things like the Spirits of Rhythm, Leo Watson. She sang with them. She was very hip. She scatted.

Brown: It also says at this time you were taken around to the various clubs, the 21, Stork Club, other things on that trip, which I guess only increased your infatuation and love for New York, presumably? No?

Ross: I shouldn't have been at those places.

Brown: You were young at that point.

Ross: Yeah. I remember going to the Stork Club and meeting Damon Runyon and Walter Winchell. I knew who they were. But what was I doing in there? I guess my aunt wanted to show me off, whatever.

Brown: Would you like to resume talking about Pittsburgh, where we left off?

Ross: Yeah.

Brown: Okay.

Ross: Like I told you, I had more love there, I met all of Klook's friends, and it was the world of August Wilson. If you ever saw *Fences,* that is the story. I never got to meet August Wilson, but I sure knew his work and where he had come from. Bull Ruther, a wonderful bass player, he lived in the projects. We'd have barbeques. It was a very happy time.

Nobody had any money. When I came to New York – I'm not sure if this is in sequence or not, but when I came to New York, I had to get a job. I wasn't qualified. I never went to high school. But I figured I could wait tables. So I got a job in a chain store called

Stark's. I met Mr. Stark. He said, "You get one complaint, that's it. Finish." I said yes, okay.

I started as a kind of "Good afternoon. Would you care to sit over here or would you like to sit over here?" Usually it would be a single woman – I mean a lone woman and a child, and the child would say, "I don't want to sit there. Arrrr." So I had to content with that.

Then they put me on the till. That was a mistake. I can't add or subtract. Friends of mine would come in, musicians. Their bill would be $3, they'd give me $4, and I'd give them $5 change. It didn't bother me that I did that. I thought that was the right thing to do. They didn't have anything, and Mr. Stark had it all.

I used to spend all the money by going down to Birdland and listening. Lester Young – it was heaven. I thought musicians were the most glamorous, romantic people. I worked and worked and worked. Well, it wasn't really that long. It just seemed like a long time.

There was a piano player called George Wallington. He composed *Lemon Drop.* His wife, Billie, had worked for a publicity agent, Virginia Wicks, who knew all the musicians. Billie, George's wife, said to me, "I think you should meet a producer I know." I said okay. So over we went to Prestige, Bob Weinstock. He said, "Do you know who King Pleasure is?" I said yeah. "Do you know who Eddie Jefferson is?" "Yeah." "Could you do what they do? Could you write words to solos?" "Yeah." If he'd have said, "Can you fly?", I'd have said yeah.

He said, "There's a pile of records. Choose some. Take it back to your place. When you've done the words, call. I'll review them and see what I think." I said okay. "When you've done it, call me." Okay.

The next morning I called him, because I was living – I don't know what they call it now, but it was like maybe three apartments that had been turned into one. Other people stayed there. You could use the communal fridge, which you never put anything in that you wanted, because it was gone. We shared the bathroom. It was basic.

I took a tune called *Twisted,* because the title suggested all kinds of things, all kinds of possibilities. So I had it the next morning. He said, "Yeah, we'll record it," which I did. I got paid for it. So I went to France. I received letters saying, "Come back. We have a gig for you. You can go to" – I don't know what it was. New Star, or something like that. I continued writing lyrics to other things

Kimery: We got about three minutes.

Ross: That was the first time that I had gotten anyone's attention in the music business.

I periodically went back to England. I lived there for a little while, but I would always come back to New York.

Brown: Let's go ahead and stop now.

Annie, if we could go back, for the sake of the chronology. If we could get the full name of your son, and his actual – the year of his birth.

Ross: He was born on Christmas Eve. Was it 1950? His full name was Kenneth Christopher Clarke, Christopher being one of Charlie Parker's names. Bird sent a telegram saying, "I still got lots of other names left." When I came from Pittsburgh with my child, we went and stayed with Bird, who was with Chan and Pree, the little girl who died. We all packed into this apartment. It was quite wonderful. There were a lot of kids. It was a lot of noise. Again, we had no money. Bird came home with a ham. Boy, a ham. I prepared it with everything and put it in the oven. After a couple of hours, it was hard as nails. I didn't know you had to boil it, and then you could cook it. I know when Bird – I said, "It should be ready now," and Bird went to get it, and it was like, ugh, granite, we just laughed, because that was the kind of humor we had. I think Bird went out and got some hot dogs, which was good. They were good.

He would come back. I remember he used to wake me up and say – he woke me up once. He said, "Look at my hand. Look how swollen it is." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because I have a bad heart. I'm not going to last much longer." The next day I was so concerned. I said to Chan, "I don't want to spread rumors or anything like that, but Bird came to me last night. He said" – she said, "Oh God, did he give you that old story about his hand?" I said yeah.

He took me to meet – who was the piano player that was a big influence on people at the time? He was a white guy [Lennie Tristano]. I didn't care for his piano playing, and Bird nearly got in a fight with him, because he thought that this guy might try to record me while I was just sitting around, singing different tunes, and Bird wanted to record me. We never got to it.

But he was something else. He was a genius. To be able to execute, like Dizzy – to be able to think and execute at the same time, is genius, and at the tempos he did it in. It was extraordinary.

Klook had impressed on me, time. So when I would get together with he and Moody, it was all about ears. Even when I was in Paris, Moody used to come with Ravel or Debussy. He'd say, listen to that thing that Debussy does [Ross sings], and I could hear the chord change. So Moody was responsible for my enlarging my capacity to hear. It was a fantastic schooling.

I remember when I was living in Paris in this hotel, I went to North Africa with Hawk [Coleman Hawkins] and Klook and Moody. That wasn't bad.

Then I did a couple of records in Paris with Blossom Dearie. She and I had an act. We were roommates for a while in a terrible hotel in New York. We had this act. It was very free, we shall say, where she would come on and start playing the piano. "Hi, Blossom. What's happening?" "Oh, not a lot, Annie. You feel like singing?" "Yeah." "Okay," and we would proceed to do our act.

We opened in Paris. I don't know what year this was. I'm sure it's in the books. We opened Paris. There was an impresario there from London. He said, "You have to work at the club that I represent in London." "When?" "In a week." "What?" "Yes, you've got to come," blah blah blah. Bobby Short had just been at this club. It was another private club.

So Blossom and I walked on. We had to take all our gowns and leave them there. We went on, and we came off [Ross claps her hands once] to that. I said, "Blossom, we have just died." She said, "Don't be silly. You know these English people. They're so understated. They loved us." It was owned by two brothers. One of the brothers came back and said, "You can leave now, or you have to be here every night, ready to go on. I may put you on at 10:30. I may put you on at 11:30, maybe 1:30, maybe not at all. But in order to collect your money, you have to be here every night." That's what we did. We never got on. Never got on again.

So there were things like that, idiosyncrasies like we shared a flat, Blossom and I and a stripper who was about 6-foot 2. We would – we had hot plates. So we would take turns at making something before work. We were all working. Rusty Lane was the stripper's name. She was on 52nd Street at a club. I forget which one, but it had been a jazz club. Blossom was working somewhere on The Street in a jazz club. I had a wonderful gig. I used to come on and start singing. I used to come on to get everybody out.

By that time, Klook and I were living in Fort Apache, the Bronx.

Brown: One project to the next.

Ross: Little Benny Harris – it was owned by his mother and father, who were San Blas Indians. We were poor. Didn't have nothin'. We shared a bathroom. Everybody was out of it. Everybody was stoned. But his mother and father were sweet. If we didn't have money for the rent, it wasn't a huge thing.

Then we moved and stayed with John Lewis, in St. Albans, I think it was. Then Bird said, "Come on. Come and stay at my place," which we did. Things were quiet, but we always ate.

Then, what happened? I started doing solo gigs. I had a bit of work because of *Twisted,* but it wasn't really lucrative.

I don't know when this is in sequence, but I moved back to London. I got fabulous jobs. I did Covent Garden with the Royal Opera, and I did *The Seven Deadly Sins.* That was incredible. It was incredible just to go into Covent Garden. They had sent me this leather-bound score. I stood in a box. The orchestra was in the pit. The leader looked up at me. When I heard that orchestra, and Kurt Weill, it was very emotional.

I did that. I did – I'll show you a poster of it, for *The Threepenny Opera.* Vanessa Redgrave was in it, and Hermione Baddeley, and an American guy called Lon Satton. It was memorable. It was unbelievable. It was directed by Tony Richardson, who had been married to Vanessa.

Every Christmas I used to go to prisons to do a show, because that's the time where there are so many suicides in jails and things like that, because of the emotional quantity. Larry Adler used to do it, the great harmonica player. So I built up a prison following. I was with my musicians. We were in the bass player's car. He was going to drop me off, because I said, "I have an appointment with somebody." They said, "Who?" I said, "I think his name is Tony Richardson." "Oh yeah? Why?" I said, "He wants me to be in show?" "What show?" I said, "It's something with *Opera* in it." "You don't want to do that." "I've made an appointment."

When you play prisons, you play them about 5 in the afternoon, and you dress as if you're going to a gala, because that's all they want, is stimulation. So you put on the eyelashes and the whole thing. The guards disapproved. They thought it was unnecessary.

The first thing you do when you come out of prison is, you have a drink, because you need one. Then they drove me to this beautiful house, in back of Harrod's. It was Tony Richardson's house. He wasn't in. Meanwhile, I had gotten high. I'd smoked a joint. So I was feeling no pain. Finally, Tony arrived. He opened the door. I had on a full-length, to

the ground, white imitation fur. He said, “I’m so sorry I’m late, but I had a meeting and I was held up.” I said, “Well, I just got out of prison.” He took me in, filled a glass – a huge glass – with whiskey. He said, “I want you to be in my show.” I said, “I don’t want to do theater.” He said, “Why?” I said, “I’ve had a couple of bad experiences, and I don’t want to do theater. I don’t think I’m right.” He said, “Let me tell you a bit about it. Vanessa’s going to be in it.” Dah dah dah dah dah, dah dah dah. I said, “Who’s doing the arrangements?” He said – he named the guy, who was very prominent, and he said, “I will look after you. I won’t let anything happen to you. I’ll protect you.” I said okay.

That was a period that was unbelievable. On the opening night – we had four stage managers. Usually you only have one, or two at the most, but we had four. It was a huge production. The stage manager came up to me and said, “Lotte Lenya’s out front.” I was playing the part that Kurt Weill had written for Lotte Lenya. Hermoine got furious. She said, “How dare you tell her that! She’s about to go on,” and blah blah.

Tony gave a huge party. He had wonderful parties. He gave a huge party, and I said to him, “Could you introduce me to Lotte Lenya?” He said, “You haven’t met her yet?” I said no. He said, “Come.” We went. She was sitting, and I approached from the side. She was sitting with a suit on, and she was eating. There was another lady next to her. I walked up. He just said, “This is Annie Ross” and left. I said, “Miss Lenya.” She said, “I am not Miss Lenya.” I said, “Lotte?” She said, “I am not Lotte.” Oh shit. She said, “Brecht and Weill called me Lenya.” So I said, “Oh, okay, Lenya.” She said, “I give you half my crown. Not whole, but I give you half.” I just felt like I had floated up and gone to heaven. It was such an incredible compliment.

So that was an very happy period. After the show was over, Tony had a place in the south of France. He said, “I want you” – I was married by that time – “I want you to come down to the south.” Oh, he had a place. Everybody pitched in, making food, washing dishes. You did everything.

That was another thing. I had been engaged many times, to Vidal Sassoon, to Lenny Bruce, etc., etc., both of whom were extraordinary people. Vidal wasn’t Vidal yet. He was trying to get established. Lenny used to send me love letters on airsick bags. He was sweet and thoughtful and loving and funny.

There was a famous club in London called The Establishment. It was owned by the people who had been in a show called *Beyond the Fringe,* Peter Cook and Dudley Moore. They got a nightclub called The Establishment. Dudley used to have a trio. He used to play there. I was in there one night. I was sitting with the woman who had directed *Beyond the Fringe,* it was called. She had to go to the ladies’ room or somewhere. This

guy in a leather jacket came up and said, “Are you Annie Ross?” I said yes. He said, “I love you.” I said, “Oh, thank you,” and off he went. I said to Fizz – was her name – I said, “Fizz, I just had the most lovely thing happen. A guy came up and said, ‘I love you’.” That was it.

The next time I met him, I was sitting with Michael Caine, who I didn’t really know very well. He was talking about English actors. He said, “There’s some great English actors. This is one of them,” and in walked this guy who had a leather jacket and had told me that he loved me. He was now in a tuxedo. He walked in with another famous writer called Frank Norman, and there was a lot of commotion as to who should drop me off where I lived. Sean Lynch was his name. He won.

I just saw him around. He was very funny and very likeable. I then did another show, which didn’t even get to London. It was called *Wham! Bam! Thank you, Ma’am,* staring Marty Feldman. We opened in Oxford, and it was not great. [? .] Oscar Brown, Jr., was in it. Oscar and I sang a couple of songs. Very underrated, that man. Totally underrated. He was wonderful.

Marty and his wife, Sean and myself, went to a little island that wasn’t popular. It was called Majorca. We stayed there. We came back, again to no work. We came back to our flat, which was right near Marble Arch in London. My brother, who I adored – my brother had come to London and had moved in with his wife, which was fine. He opened the door, and he saw this guy, and he saw me. He said, “Are you getting married?” I said, “What?” He said, “He’s here. Are you getting married?” He was being really big brother. I said, “I’ve never been married. That might be good.”

So Sean decided to move in. He arrived. I said, “Where’s your – where are your clothes?” He said, “This is all I have.” He had piles of an anarchist paper and a guitar. He was an actor. I said, “What about clothes?” He said, “This is what I have. This is what I am,” a leather jacket and jeans. I said, “But you had a tuxedo.” He said, “I rented it.” He had nothing.

It was fine. We had a lovely wedding, and we were together for quite a while. Then that dissolved. That finished, by which time I had already been very, very early on in a show called *Cranks,* which was by a choreographer called John Cranko, who worked for the Royal Ballet, who was very well known and respected, and Anthony Newly, who was huge at the time, and two other guys. So it was four – three guys and myself. Puh, fizzled. It didn’t make an ounce of difference whether we were here or not.

In order to get a job in New York, they told me I had to audition for the William Morris company. I said, "But you brought me over here. How can you ask me to audition?" "That's the way it is." I said, "I can't do that. I've never auditioned." That was another little episode. That was at the Bijou Theater here, which they've torn down.

I always knew some writers. I always knew musicians. As everybody did, we used to jam all night long. I loved the people in the business. We worked with Miles. We worked with Moms Mabrey. We worked with Redd Foxx, and Sarah [Vaughan] a lot.

When I met Bob Weinstock from Prestige – I'm trying to get everything that I can think of – I worked in club called the Band Box. It was right next door to Birdland. Lionel Hampton was at Birdland. He came in to see, because I had Tommy Potter, Max Roach, George Wallington. It was good. So Hamp was there. He said, "I want you to come to Europe with me." I said, "Oh, that's nice." I said, "When?" He said, "Friday." I said okay.

So I left everything in this apartment. I had a habit of doing that, just picking up and moving on. I left a full apartment, with stuff in the fridge and all that. In this band – it was Hamp's band. It was really his wife's band, because she controlled it, Gladys, yeah – the trumpet section was Quincy [Jones], Art Farmer, Clifford Brown. It was something else. J. J. [Johnson] and George Wallington, Gigi Gryce. It was a powerful band.

We got to Norway. No, we got to Sweden, and Hamp made an announcement. You know about Hamp. He was – whew. "Hey, g-g-g-gates. You got any g-g-g-green? You got some money? Can you loan me $5 'til next week?" It was unbelievable. And "If any of you makes a record, you're fired." We all made records, because we weren't getting paid that much. He fired the whole band, which was hysterical. It was actually Gladys who did it. And she – when Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross was formed, she became a huge supporter. She used to be Marion Davies's maid. Marion Davies, who was William Randolph Hearst's love, left her all her money. So Gladys was rich. She was rich. But she had been her maid for years and years, and had shared her confidences, etc. That was that.

Oh yes. I left out the part where I had been – I had done *Twisted*, and Billie Wallington said, "You should have a representative." I didn't know what a representative was. She said, "You should have an agent." So she took me up to see a man called Joe Glaser. He was an ex-bootlegger from Chicago. His hobby was raising poodles. A more unlikely dog you couldn't find, than a poodle for Joe Glaser. He said – Billie and I entered this room. It seemed interminable, huge. There was a desk at the end of it. We were ushered in. He had a desk with millions of folds. He said, "Joe, get in here." "Yes, Mr. Glaser?"

“There’s a spot on the wall. Get it off.” “Yes, Mr. Glaser.” “You.” “Yes.” “They tell me you sing.” “I do.” He said, “How do I know if you’re any good or not?” “How do you know?” He said, “All right. We’ll try you out. See what we can do.” I said okay.

I signed with Joe Glaser. That was a huge deal, because he had people like Lady [Billie Holiday] and Duke [Ellington] and Louis [Armstrong] and all that. I went out and celebrated, wholeheartedly. I’m in bed the following morning. The phone rings about 9. I said, “Hello.” “Is that Annie Ross?” “Yes.” “This is Joe Glaser.” “Yes.” “I want you to get up to the Apollo.” “What?” “Have you got a gown?” “Yeah.” “Have you got music?” “Yeah.” “Have you got a piano player?” “I can get one.” “Get up to the Apollo.” I said okay. “Oh, Mr. Glaser, what am I doing?” He said, “You’re replacing somebody.” I said, “Who?” He said, “Billie Holiday,” and hung up the phone.

When I picked myself up off the floor, I did exactly what he told me. I got my music. I got – I called George immediately. So off I went to the Apollo. Duke Ellington was on the bill. I knew Duke, because my aunt, being a singer and loving jazz, always had musicians at her house when she came back from New York, and Duke had been there a few times. So he knew me, but not in this capacity, and I was a few years older by now.

He said, “Why are you shaking?” “I’m replacing Billie Holiday.” He said, “Have you ever met her?” I said no. He said, “Do you want to?” I said, “No, because if she said anything in a derogatory way, I’d just collapse.” He said, “Nonsense. She’s a beautiful lady. Come.” He took me down to the dressing room, and there was Billie Holiday. Something had happened to her jaw. She was so sweet. She said, “Baby, have you got a gown?” I said yes. “You got a piano player?” She said, “You can use mine.” I said, “No, I have a piano player.” “You got music, everything you need?” “Yes.” “Okay.”

So I have to be there and listen to Duke Ellington say – and that first show in the morning at the Apollo used to be the bellweather. They could either pay attention or not listen at all, especially when you had to say, “Ladies and gentlemen, I’ve very sorry to announce that Miss Billie Holiday will not be appearing for the first show.” The tough nuts, the real hard guys, a few of them left. They came to hear Billie Holiday. “However, we have a young lady,” blah blah dah blah dah blah dah.

What saved my ass was that I was doing things like *Twisted.* I was in that genre. I wasn’t getting – I wasn’t singing . . .

Brown: Ballads or . . .

Ross: Whatever. I was singing hip shit. I was so nervous, but as soon as I felt the reaction, I was okay. I walked off the stage, and in the wings was Lady. She just put her arms out to me. I wish someone had had a camera. Duke came over and said, "You two beautiful bitches. Go out and take your bow." The three of us went out, and we took a bow, and no-one had a camera.

That kept me up for months. She later became a very close friend of mine, and I was honored to look after her when she was really bad. I tried – J. C. Heard and I, we were at the Apollo, and we decided we'd go and see her. She was in the hospital, but we couldn't get in. New York killed her. She couldn't get a cabaret card. It was so terrible.

I remember she invited me. She said, "Annie, it's going to be my birthday, and I'm having a few people over. I'd like you to come." I thought, my God, this is my idol, saying she wants me to come. So of course I immediately went up. It was a sad gathering. Leonard Feather – he was the writer – said to me, "Don't ever let this happen to you."

I really did look after her. I remember she needed her hair washed. I said, "I'll wash your hair." So I got her into a bath. I said, "I'm going to – the only thing I know – I did give a process to somebody in Paris, years ago, but I'm going to do my" [*sic*: your] "hair just like I used to have it done as a kid." She thought that was hilarious. So I fixed her hair. I washed her hair. I knew that you had to get every trace of soap out. The only way that I knew to do it was with vinegar and water. She really thought that was hilarious.

We had wonderful times. We used to listen to *Lady in Satin,* because I think there's a whole life in that recording. And she loved Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross. So we'd sit there for hours, chewing on something.

But none of her friends came around. It was sad. It was terrible. We happened to be away, Jon and Dave and I, when she passed. We were on tour.

Sarah – Sarah Vaughan. I remember her coming into my dressing room at the Apollo, saying, "Teach me *Doodlin'*." Sarah Vaughan said to me, "Teach me"? I did. We spent so many happy times together. She made a suit for me. She loved to sew, and she could cook.

I remember Lady came to a tour – was on a tour that was emceed by Leonard Feather. It was the Beryl Booker Trio. They were staying at the top of the Étoile, the top of the Champs des Elysees. Lady had on a grey mink coat. She said, "I want to get some jewelry for daddy." Daddy was this awful man, that – well, she must have dug him. She was with him. He was not a nice man.

The two of us start out at the top of the Étoile. She stopped at every bar she saw. Now, this is my idol, so I'm going to do whatever she does. She orders – I think it was a brandy with a Pernod float. "I want one of those." "I'll have one of those." We proceed down the Champs des Elysees. She's straight as an arrow. I'm uhhhhhh. We get to a jewelry shop. She goes in. "Tell him I want to see some things for my daddy." So I said, "This lady would like to buy some jewelry for her husband," blah blah blah. The guy is thrilled, because it's Billie Holiday. He brings out velvet trays with jewelry on it. She picks through the whole thing. She says, "No. I don't see what I want." So he says, "One moment." He goes back. He comes out with another two trays. She looks through them. She says, "No. Thank you very much, but no thank you."

We go out. We're walking down the street. We get to like three blocks from the place, and she starts to laugh, and she brings out of her pockets all of this jewelry. She thought it was a great joke, and so did I, because I didn't even think about getting caught. I would have been a nervous wreck. But she thought it was hilarious. That was just Lady in Paris.

I have – the great thing about being in music, like this, is the perfection of the people who play it, and just being given the opportunity of learning from people. "Open up your ears." That's what Moody said to me, years and years ago.

And, I have a happy ending. I'll do that tomorrow.

Brown: I went back to check on a couple of details. I just wanted, for the record, to say that you recorded *Twisted* in 1952. Let me get this exact date: in New York on October 9th, 1952. So you wrote it the day before, I guess, or shortly before that.

Then also, the pianist that Bird was so worried that would record . . .

Ross: Lennie Tristano.

Brown: Lennie Tristano, right.

We only have a few more minutes left on this tape. We haven't talked about what brought you your greatest acclaim. That was your association with those other two gentlemen, Dave and Jon. If we could maybe look at just before that got formed and how you came to meet those guys. We can maybe get to discuss that.

Ross: Now?

Brown: Since you talked about being with Lady Day at the time of her death, that's after you'd already formed Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross.

Ross: I'd rather wait and do it tomorrow.

Brown: That's fine.

Ross: There's quite a long sequence.

Brown: All right. How much we got? About ten minutes?

Kimery: Ten minutes. But we can – if we need to stop now, it's fine. If we want to just . . .

Ross: I would like to stop now, because I've been blaaaaaaaaaaaa.

Kimery: That's fine.

Brown: It's great, though, because it's not really an interview. It's really you, just telling your story. It's the flow.

Today is January 14th, 2011. This is day two of the Smithsonian National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Oral History interview with Annie Ross, conducted by Anthony Brown and Ken Kimery in her home in New York City.

Annie, how are you feeling today? A little under the weather with this cold, I believe.

Ross: I've got a cold, but you know, people say to me, "How can you sing with a cold?" You learn.

Brown: Famous words to live by, you vocalists. So Annie, maybe if there are any things you want to add to yesterday's interview as far as the chronology or experiences?

Ross: Oh yeah. We had a party at my aunt's house, where I was brought up. She had come in from New York, where she was most of the time. So whenever she came into L.A., we had a party. At this party was Roy Eldridge and Duke. I remember I had the first copy of the sheet music of *Laura.* The musicians went crazy. Then my aunt asked me to sing for Duke. I was – I must have been about 14 or 15. I sang *I Didn't Know about You,* which was not known and which surprised Duke, because he didn't think he was going to hear – I don't know what he expected to hear from this 14- or 15-year-old. He was

amazed. He said, “Number one, nobody knows that song,” and he said, “At her age, that’s great.” So that was high praise. That helped me when I went to the Apollo, and it was Duke’s band. When he came into the dressing room, and he said, “Why are you nervous?” Why, indeed? But I was. And it went off great.

Brown: When you say you were 14 or 15, that would have put it in the mid-’40s. Duke was spending a lot of time in Los Angeles. Patricia Willard was working as his publicist. Did you know Patricia Willard at that time?

Ross: No.

Brown: Okay. But Duke was in Los Angeles a lot. It’s those chance encounters that served you well. That’s great.

Okay. We’ve got that on the historical record. Anything else? Or would you like to get to the events that helped you make those other two guys famous, who we know as Dave Lambert and Jon Hendricks?

Ross: Let’s go.

Brown: Okay.

Ross: I had gone to spend the afternoon at a friend’s house. His name was Bob Bach, married to Jean Bach, who was a mine of information, as far as jazz is concerned. She wasn’t there that day. It was just Bob and I. We were talking. He had a mini mini record company. I think they put, at the most, two records out. We were talking, and then he got a phone call. He said, “Are you busy?” I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “There are two guys. Do you know Dave Lambert?” I said, “I met him once.” He said, “He’s got a guy called Jon Hendricks. They’d like to come over and demonstrate an idea that they have, which is singing all of the Basie things.” Of course I was curious, and I said, “Yeah, I’ll stay.”

Jon and Dave walked in. They put on a record of Basie, and they proceeded to sing the solos. I thought that was very interesting. I’d already done *Twisted* and *Farmer’s* and all that.

So, the doorbell rings, and in walks Jon and Dave. They proceeded to demonstrate what they were doing. We said goodbye, and I went home. I thought, that’s weird, they didn’t ask me to sing on it. However, it wasn’t my decision. It was theirs.

About a week later, I got a phone call from Dave Lambert, who said, “We want you to come and sing with us, because we have” – I don’t know if it was six or seven singers, professional, who could read music. He said, “They hit every note, but they don’t swing. Can you come and teach them?”

I thought, shit, you don’t do that. You don’t learn to swing in an hour or a day, whatever. I was kind of miffed, because I thought, why didn’t they ask me in the beginning?

I went down to the studio. Creed Taylor was the producer. Boy, I heard the playbacks, and they didn’t swing. So I tried to give them a few accents and different things. It didn’t work. Creed was going crazy, because the money had been spent. There was no product.

I didn’t know what to do under the circumstances. Neither did Jon. But Dave Lambert said, “Wait a minute. I have an idea. Let’s just the three of us record” whatever tune it was. “If we can learn the other parts, we’ll add them on.” So instead of three people singing, it would be that much more.

We did that. That’s – one of the greatest moments in my life was standing in front of the speaker and hearing the basic track that we recorded, because I knew we had something great, at least I thought I did.

We – I think we recorded two or three other songs. Jon doesn’t read music. So we had no need for music, except what we had in our heads. But I knew, when I stood in front of that speaker, that it was innovative. I went home. I had a little tape. I called Miles [Davis]. I said, “What do you think of this?”, and I put on the tape. Less than a minute, he said, “Wait a minute. Mingus, Mingus, get on the phone.” So Charlie Mingus picked up the phone, and they both went crazy. Oh, it was unbelievable.

We got a gig. They offered us a gig in the banker’s club in Hollywood, New York. We went up by bus. We got up to this place, which had been a bank. Al Haig, I think, was playing opposite. The people went crazy. I was sitting with Jon and Dave afterwards – just before the intermission – and they said, “Yeah, we’re a hit.” I said, “No, we’re not. No.” I said, “We have to practice, because we’re not hitting all the notes,” and blah blah blah. We finished that night. I think we got 20 – $15 each for the night.

We went up the next week. We never rehearsed. We rehearsed on stage, while we were doing it. Our skills were such that the people didn’t know if we had missed a note or whatever, but we didn’t. We were really good.

After that, we worked at the Apollo a lot, especially with Sarah, Moms Mabley, Redd Foxx, unbelievable company. We stopped the show every time we were at the Apollo.

I'm not sure what dates we did, but we did a lot of dates. Finally we did the Newport Jazz Festival. That was the year of the riots. I think it was Oscar Peterson who couldn't get through the people who were protesting. I forget what they were protesting about. Don't even know. But they said to us, "Don't just do 15 minutes. You can do half an hour," which for us was incredible, because we were always being told, "You have 15 minutes" or 10 minutes, and we were just starting to stretch when we got to that point. So they told us to do a half an hour, which we did.

That's where I got a chance to dress with the Raelettes. Ray Charles was on. He was phenomenal. But dressing with the Raelettes was a trip. It was wonderful. They loved our music, and we loved them.

We went on and on. We played all over the place. We did a one-nighter in London when we were working in San Francisco. We flew over. It was for the ban-the-bomb or something. It was a worthy cause. It was amazing, because that's a long flight. But when we got up on stage, all tiredness vanished.

We played in Europe. Not enough. We should have had more exposure.

Jon would say, "I've just written words to" – and we'd get together. Jon would always come in with a crossword puzzle. I would come in loaded with newspaper, because I loved newspapers. Dave was busy writing down notes, musical notes. After about an hour and a half, we'd say, "Okay, let's try this." We'd do it. We'd clean it up. Then it was test time. We had to do it on stage, live, which we did. It was tremendous, because we swung. The guys, they were playing Basie arrangements. So that was brilliant.

What else? Let me just think for a minute.

We had a lot of fun. Relationships were good. When we started getting a little bit of a name, things began to change. My motto was, don't believe your own publicity, because you'll be in big trouble. Unfortunately, that didn't seem to be the rule for certain people. If you tell yourself something enough times, I suppose you get to believe it. But it wasn't right, all the time. Jon had a very annoying habit of telling any woman that he wanted to be with, "I'll make you a singer." It was awful. I'd have these hostile women saying, "I can sing. Jon Hendricks told me." I'm sorry. I cut that. "I was told that I could sing, and I will to replace you," which I thought was pretty lousy. It was usually when alcohol had been prevalent.

I'm trying to think of outstanding things. Oh, after we had done Basie, I left for Europe. I went to France on holiday. I kept getting letters from Jon and Dave. "Come back. We can do an act." I thought, they're nuts. How can three people get up, except with smoke and mirrors, and get up? How are we going to do this? Maybe we'll do it like Les Paul and Mary Ford, where they dubbed in their voices. "No, come back."

Willard Alexander, who was an agent, said that he could use us. He could place us. He loved it, because he was a big Basie fan. I just couldn't see it. But we got a gig. We worked out. We appeared. It was incredible. Like I say, we rehearsed on the stage. The Basie band used to come by, if they weren't playing behind us.

I'm sorry. I'm not making much sense. We played L.A., and then difficulties began to arise, because I had a very bad habit of heroin, cocaine, anything I could get my hands on. We went to Europe, to tour with Basie. We went to England. I knew that if I went back to America, I felt I would die, because I was a terrible junkie. I didn't know one thing from the other. So I used to mix all kinds of stuff. I never missed a gig. But it was awful. I was hearing voices and all that. I just thought, no, you've got to get yourself together. You're not going to do it in New York.

Before that, Jon and Dave called me up and told me to meet them at Willard's office, which I did. They said, Annie, we're going to put you in what is now known as rehab. There was no facility at the time, except they said, we're going to check you into this hospital. Your doctor will come every day and take you down, down, down, in your dosage. I thought, that can't be bad. I'll be in a kind of nursing home. I don't have to pack and take clothes, because there's nothing to be dressed up for.

So I went to this place. It's not far from here, on about 73[rd Street]. It's a famous place. Max Roach was in there, all kinds of people.

Brown: Bellevue?

Ross: No. It's another name. I'll try to think of it. Of course I got out of it before I went there. I noticed a girl checking in with her parents, and I thought, you have to sign in? All right. Then a member of the staff came, a woman, huge. We went up to a floor. We got out. The first sign I got of uh-oh, she had a bunch of keys. She unlocked this door. In I went, and she locked the door behind us. I thought, what is going on? I was shown into a tile dormitory. The girl that had preceded me, she came in, and they were holding her down. She was screaming, and I thought, what is this place? It turned out that it was a mental hospital. I had some weird stuff happen, because they gave shock treatment.

Everybody that was scheduled to have it would come into the communal room in their robes. Those were the people who were going to get the shock treatment. They would come back a few hours later like zombies. It was heavy.

I was in there once talking to this woman who reminded me of Rose Kennedy. She said – very beautifully dressed, and gentile – she said, "I'm not supposed to be here, you know." I said, "Oh." She said – there was a long table in the communal room, so that if anybody got flowers, they would put them on there to cheer up the other patients – she said, "I'm not supposed to be here. I live in a beautiful house." She described it all. Then she said, "What are they doing with my flowers? It took me hours to arrange," and I realized, she was nuts.

It was just awful. My doctor would come in. He'd give me a shot. I said, this is not working. I've got to get out of here. Well, I'm sure everyone who's in there, 90% of them say the same thing. Finally I was released. Of course I went straight to the man and continued doing what I shouldn't have been doing.

So when I went to England, I made that decision about coming back. My brother, who is an actor and a singer and an incredible guy, said, "Come on. I'm going to rent a place in Scotland. We'll go up there." He didn't know anything about what I – I mean about drugs. He had no knowledge. He said, "But before we go, I'm going to put you into a very fashionable place in London," which is for detox. That wasn't its prime concern, but that was what happened there.

The second day – I had an all-night nurse, and I said to her, "It's spring, and I want to go out and take a walk. I'm feeling so much better." She said, "Oh, okay. That's fine. That's a good sign." Of course I went out and went straight to the man. I came back.

Then, the doctor said I was cured, which I wasn't. My brother gave a party for me in a restaurant. Everyone's patting me on the back, saying, "Congratulations, you did it." I'm saying, "Yes, I did," lying through my teeth.

When I told my brother, "No, I'm still on it," he said, "Okay, we're going to rent this house up in Scotland," which we did. Unbeknownst to him, the woman who was treating me used to send me stuff. So I wasn't without anything ever, because I was getting it sent up from London.

There was a doctor up there, a wonderful doctor, who was a fisherman. He had been in the River Kwai. It was – a lovely man. He came to see me. My brother called him. He said, "Come and give me an evaluation," blah blah. He told my brother. He said, "I've

been in a prisoner of war camp. She won't make it. She's not ever going to stop. You've got to face it," blah blah.

My brother – I remember it was raining. We went outside. He said, "Annie, I have my own life. I can't do it anymore. You're going to have to do it on your own." I said, "All I really want to be is a junkie." He said, "Those are my terms, I'm telling you." He said, "I'll always help you out, but I can't stand by and see you killing yourself." That's what I was doing.

He left, with his wife. If I knew what made me stop, I'd bottle it and sell it. But I don't know if it was the humiliation, or what it was, or whether he had knocked the props from under me. I didn't have him anymore. He said, "I'm going to take you" – "I'm going to send you on vacation." He sent me to a little island called Majorca.

It was hysterical, because I got there, and I didn't have any stuff, but I drank a lot. I get to this place, in a town that wasn't even inhabited fully. I went downstairs to dinner. I'm sitting there at a table. There are all these people around me. I thought, God, it must be my hearing, but I'm hearing Scottish accents. The place was filled with Scots. My brother and my father sent me there, because they figured that I'd be looked after, and I was.

I came back to England. I thought, I've got to make some money. I remember they signed me to do a night on t.v. It was a big show, and I didn't have a man on either side of me, like I did with Jon and Dave. That was incredibly difficult. I was so nervous. That was my first gig without Jon and Dave.

I came back to New York. I decided that I had better get back here, because that's where my music was. That's where my heart was. We started working – I started working, alone. I thought, no. By this time, egos were blown out of all proportion. I knew I couldn't listen to the b.s. the people were talking, because if anyone founded the group, Dave Lambert did. He gave Jon the opportunity, and Jon had the talent. That's the way that came about. Finally I just thought, I don't want this. Nothing is worth this.

I know – but I'm a definite person. If I say something, I really mean it, and I abide by it. I knew that I had to stop all this messing around, which I did. I did it cold turkey. There were no facilities. Rehab was a word that wasn't even invented yet. But I did, and I worked my way back up, thank goodness.

I miss Dave, terribly. He was doing what he always did. He was helping someone change a tire, and a drunken truck driver came by. I listened to the rhetoric that's being given out, and I thought, no, that didn't happen. No, that wasn't the way it was. I've got a good

memory. I know I'm right. Jon is a tremendous talent on his own. So I didn't regret ever making the decision to stop. We stopped at our height. We were really getting to be more popular and more popular. But I just felt that if I stayed there, I didn't want to hear what was being said, because I knew it was b.s. I just wanted to sing on my own.

What do you have in back of you that says, you will do this? I've been in a lot of shows. I've been in a lot of plays. After I stopped with Jon and Dave, I met Kathryn Altman, who was Robert Altman, the great director, his wife. She said, "I want to introduce you to my husband." I said okay. She took me up to his office, which was on Park Avenue at the time. I met him. I was very impressed. He was, of course, his reputation, but he was so impressive looking. He was sitting behind a desk. Kathryn and I were talking in another part of the room. He suddenly said, "Annie." I said, "Yeah?" He said, "My next project, if it flies, you got a part." I thought, even if I don't do it, I've been asked. How wonderful.

Then I got a call – they went to California, and I got a call saying – from Bob – saying, "What are you doing?" "Not a lot." "Why don't you come out here and play." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "If you get here in the next two days, you'll have lines." I said, wow. He said, "I'll pay for everything. Stay with us."

I flew out to L.A. There was a long white limo waiting, with a sister who was dressed so great. She said, "Hi, Annie Ross. I'm going to take you to the set," whereupon we drove to the set. I was looking. There were people, famous stars. I'm impressed, as everybody is, by that kind of celebrity cult thing. I remember I said to this girl outside – I said, "Do you know where I could get a coffee?" She was very hincty. She said, "No, I don't know." I realized later it was Julia Roberts. Maybe she didn't want to be asked, did she know where the coffee was? It was *The Player*. That was the movie. It was full of stars, and really good actors. Tim Robbins, wonderful.

I was staying out in Malibu with Bob and Kathryn and having the best time. Then *Short Cuts* came up. I was thrilled, absolutely thrilled. That was one of the happiest times of my life, doing that, being there, having the opportunity of seeing different ways actors and actresses worked.

That was an enduring friendship. Kathryn is still one of my very best friends, if not the best.

What else? Oh. Then I came to New York, and I didn't know what I was going to do, where I was going to go. I had worked with Tardo Hammer a lot. We played a night at the Metropolitan Room. Tardo is remarkable. None of us use music. I can call a tune, and

he remembers the key. So I can do anything I want to do. I've been there for four years. I look forward to it every week. I can put anything in. I can say, "I'm going to sing something. Follow me." The ears are big enough. They listen. Warren Vaché, who is a darling, a delight. He and I communicate. Tardo and I communicate. We all communicate with each other, because we listen.

I was 80 on my last birthday, and I'm having a ball.

Brown: Do you want to take a break?

Ross: Yeah.

Brown: Annie, could you talk about your return to England, after you left Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross? You formed your own club. So maybe we can talk about . . .

Ross: Yes, and I did a show. I told you about meeting my future husband.

Brown: Mr. Lynch?

Ross: Yeah. We were sitting one day in my apartment, with friends. Somebody said, "Why don't you open a club?" I said, "Well, number one, I've never had a club, and number two, we don't have any money." They said, "We do." So Sean went to look for premises. He found space. It had been a Lyons tea shop. That's a famous chain of tea places. Sean came back, and he said, "I've got it. It's perfect. It's downstairs. It's across the street from the stage door of the Drury Lane Theatre." They went with him, looked at the space, and said, yeah.

Every weekend we would have a coterie of – usually Italian painters, sculptors. We cleaned the place up. Had it repainted, very simple. I planned the menu. One of the great things that I had on the menu was bread and gravy, because I thought, you're hanging out at night. What do you really need? You need something to sop it up.

I wasn't cut out to be a club owner. They fired the chef, and I cried. "You can't fire him. He's got children." They said, "Annie, come on."

We had Joe Williams. Jon worked there, Blossom, Stuff Smith, and many, many, many people. I don't want to leave anyone out. Basie came down. He never went to clubs, but he came. Erroll Garner showed up. It was a private club. Erroll Garner showed up and played in the New Year. So that was lovely.

It had a bar. You went down these stairs. You went in the bar, which had a big glass front. So you could see the show that was going on. But if you wanted to sit in the room . . .

I remember we were getting ready for the opening night. They were still hammering the stage together. We were totally booked out. Then word came that Judy Garland was going to arrive with about six people. Where to put six more people? But we did. We had a great staff. Apparently they used to try on my dresses after I went home. I took furniture from my own apartment and put it there.

I remember Mary Quant, who was a big name in the '60s, came in and said, "I want you to go to my store. Pick out ten pieces that you want." I thought, wow, nobody ever did that when I really needed them to do that.

One night on stage there was Jimmy Baldwin, who I met in Paris. That's a story. We might – Klook and I lived in this little hotel in Paris. It was across the street from the Club Saint-Germain-des-Prés. We were poor, really poor. Jimmy, who I knew as a writer who was working on books and stuff, he and I used to collect milk bottles, cash them in, buy some food. I just knew him as Jimmy.

Years later, I'm in London. I'm with Kenneth Tynan, who was a great critic, writer. He said to me, "I've got to go. I think I'm having dinner with James Baldwin." I said, "Oh God, I'd love to meet him." He said, "I'll send you a telegram," which people did in those days, "to let you know if we are having dinner. If so, join us." I said, great.

We met at this very fancy restaurant. Kenneth said, "This is Annie Ross. This is James Baldwin." I said, "Oh, I'm so . . ." – he said, "Annie!" and this was Jimmy. That was a thrilling night, to know he had achieved what he wanted to achieve, the great accolades. We remained close, even when he moved to Turkey.

Where was I?

Brown: You were talking about your club earlier.

Ross: Right. One night on stage, there is Georgia Brown, who was a great singer. There was Jimmy Baldwin, and another guy – Albert Finney, I think. We decided, because we'd had quite a bit of champagne, to get up and sing the blues. That's when Jimmy said to me, "Annie, I can't sing." I said, "Well, kind of talk it." We did.

It was like when I was making *Superman* III or IV, whatever it was, and Richard Prior, who I adore, was sitting talking while they were setting up the next shot. He said to me – he was recovering from that terrible accident. He was in pain most of the time. He said, "I've just got the rights to a story about Dizzy and Bird." He said, "I'll play Bird." I said, "No, you should play Dizzy." He said, "Really? Why?" I said, "Because he had a spontaneous sense of humor. He was so funny." He said, "Annie, I'm black, and I don't know about music." I reached over, and I patted him on the back, and I said, "I'll teach you." And then I thought, what! What am I doing? What am I saying?

He was an exceptional guy. He knew who I was. He brought over a chef, and a barber, and bah dah bah dah bah. The day after I met him was my birthday. I went to my door after the bell had rung, and there were four dozen roses from Richard. That was a dear man.

At the time I was appearing in – what's the name of that Gilbert and Sullivan?

Brown: *Pirates of Penzance*?

Ross: *Pirates of Penzance.* So I was doing the show and filming at the same time. I don't think I had the club then. I think that was after the club. But what a time.

Brown: Some of the other performers who appeared at your club: your old roommate, Blossom Dearie . . .

Ross: Yeah, Blossom.

Brown: . . . and Anita O'Day.

Ross: Yes.

Brown: You mentioned Joe Williams already.

Ross: Oh, and I've got to talk about Mary Lou.

Brown: Please. That's right.

Ross: I was in Paris, and I was introduced to Mary Lou Williams. I knew all of her music, because my uncle – I had an uncle who was an uncle by marriage. He bought a record collection. It had Lady singing *Strange Fruit.* I mean, he had incredible things, this

man who did the collection, and he sold it to my uncle. So I knew *Little Joe from Chicago* and all those things that Mary Lou had done.

I think one of the reasons that I became so friendly and accepted by the whole jazz crowd was that I had great respect. I think that's what is lacking today, is the respect that you have to show musicians, anyone who sings or plays or – you have to have the love for them. You have to show them that you listen and you love. I think that's what they sensed from me, because there's nothing better in the world than a musician, and I loved them. I knew how hard it is, the struggle and the fights, and management selling you, giving you a price that these people will pay, and then finding out that it was more than they had quoted, and you were being gypped. Those people had no respect.

Brown: Still don't.

Ross: Still don't, absolutely.

Brown: What was Mary Lou like as a person?

Ross: Mary Lou was wonderful.

Brown: How could she not be?

Ross: Yeah, exactly. She was a great cook. She was very funny. One night she said to me, "I'm going to take you to hear Sidney Bechet." At that time in Paris, there was a huge gap between dixieland and modern jazz. I said, "I don't want to hear Sidney Bechet. He's, like, of the old school." She said, "Don't say things like that unless you really know. I want to take you to hear him."

We went, and I was amazed. He was something else. He used to collect emeralds, loose emeralds. Carried them in a little black pouch. I remember he gave Mary Lou two or three – could have been four. From then on I was a – I loved Sidney Bechet, because I listened, and I heard.

Mary Lou's laugh, that was something that I can still hear. She was a wonderful lady, so talented. In the time she came up, how difficult could that have been?

Brown: She came from Pittsburgh.

Ross: Yes, Pittsburgh. I always think of her with fondness and love.

Brown: Did you ever perform with Mary Lou? Or did you ever get a chance to sing for her?

Ross: Yeah, in Paris. Oh yeah. We found a place that was a restaurant. Downstairs they had a bar, a room that they didn't use anymore, but it had a piano. We used to go there. The waiters knew us all. We would congregate in this room, sometimes just a pianist and myself. That was wonderful. My ears were wide open.

Oh, and I want to tell you about when I was in Paris and Klook and me had a band. It was Don Byas. It was full of wonderful musicians. When I first arrived in Paris, I was all of what? – 17 or 18. Someone took me to Le Boeuf sur le Toit, which was a very famous nightclub. This was an afternoon thing. It was a jam session. I walked up to the guitar player, and I said, "You're good," with all the authority of a 17-year-old. He said, "Merci." I said, "No, I mean, you're really good." "Merci." I said, "What's your name?" He said, "Django Reinhardt." You knew that?

Brown: When you described this guitarist, it had to be Django.

Ross: It was. How did that relate to what I was talking about?

Brown: You were talking about how you were in this club where you used to go down, and there was a piano. Then you talked about your group with James Moody and your arrival in Paris at 17, and the group with . . .

Ross: Oh yeah. So, I'm in awe. I was so in awe of Sarah and Billie Holiday. Dinah [Washington], of course, but I didn't become friends with Dinah until later. Klook and Moody had the band. I think it must have been about 10 pieces, or maybe even 12. We were rehearsing in the afternoon. Klook had gotten hold of the chart of *If You Could See Me Now*, which I loved. I learned it upside down and backwards. I was sitting there in the afternoon, and Klook said, "Okay, get out *If You Could See Me Now*." I thought, oh, good, at which point Tadd Dameron walked in, and I nearly died. I thought – because I could hear Sassy's voice in my ear. What are you going to do? You have to do what you are going to do, and I had to sing it. But that was a memorable moment, to have to sing it for the guy that wrote it, wow.

Brown: Let's go ahead and pause there.

Annie, if you could pick it back up with Tadd Dameron.

Ross: Yes.

Brown: If you could talk about Tadd.

Ross: I was in awe. How could he hear all those beautiful harmonies and tunes and everything? When I met Tadd, that was in Paris, and he came into the rehearsal. Then I met him in New York. He was working with Bull Moose Jackson. I used to go up and sing with him. I can't even remember where. He was called Lady Dameron, because he was impeccable. He and his family, his brother Caesar, who was from where they make tires – Goodyear – Columbus, was it? Would it have been Columbus?

Brown: Ohio?

Ross: Anyway, I met Tadd and his brother. Tadd and I would just hang out. He would teach me things. I hung on his every word, because anybody that has ears that big deserves – necessity – to expound, should be listen to. I was there, listening.

He used to cook, and I used to cook. I think we spent a lot of time at the Alvin Hilton, which is what we all called it. Yeah, the Alvin Hilton. You'd come in there at night. It was across from Birdland. You'd go in at night. You'd see certain doors that were barricaded, because they hadn't paid the rent. It was something. But it was a lot of fun. Then you just have to go across the street to go to work.

I was also in Birdland the night that – who was the guy that ran it? Moishe.

Brown: I'm trying to think of his – the guy – I don't know.

Ross: I can find out from Dave.

Brown: Yeah.

Ross: Morris Levy.

Brown: That's who it was. Right.

Ross: The night his brother got stabbed to death. I was sitting out front with Herman Leonard and Woody Herman. We got out early after the police came in to question everyone. But that was a night. Ernestine Anderson was singing. I had replaced her in the Hamp band. I knew she was a very emotional creature. I knew that this must have just shocked her to death. So I went backstage. She was in a terrible state. Morris's brother was dying on the floor. It was a horrible night.

Brown: Do you remember what precipitated this incident?

Ross: Yes. Were you ever in Birdland?

Brown: No.

Ross: You went down these stairs. On the right were bulkheads and then some good tables. Over here was the bullpen, where you just could have a beer. Beyond that was the bar. We're sitting, and we're talking, and all of a sudden there's a scuffle at the bar. The doors backstage were like saloon doors. I saw Morris's brother lean into one, and of course the door went with him. Apparently some guy had come in with a girl and there was some exchange of language with the barman, who was Morris's brother. I don't know what went down or how it happened. I never knew if the guy got prosecuted or not, but he stabbed him, this guy. Then, apparently, he got his coat from the cloakroom and took his girl, and they walked out. I never saw any notice of the guy being tried or whatever, with his murder. It was an eventful night, awful.

Brown: You mentioned Herman Leonard.

Ross: Yeah. Herman I knew from Paris. He was very sweet. He was the toast of Paris. He took one – that's his, right there. We were friends until I did *Short Cuts.* Bob's – Bob Altman's son was the set designer. He had gone around, and he's gotten all these wonderful Herman Leonard portraits. He didn't ask permission. Herman wrote a letter to Bob. It was scathing. It really was not deserved. He accused Bob of being anti-feminine in his approach in movies. It was an awful letter. He – I think they had to pay him a certain amount for permission, because it had already been filmed. After that, I didn't keep as close touch with Herman as I had been in the past. He was a master. He was a wonderful photographer.

Brown: Do you see any in action in Birdland when he was photographing? Do you remember anything about . . . ?

Ross: No. I never saw him photograph. He had a studio in that lake. Is it Pontchartrain?

Brown: Yeah, in New Orleans.

Ross: Yeah. He had a whole collection there, which apparently he saved during Katrina.

Brown: Anyway, he ended up having to move. He moved back to Los Angeles.

Ross: I know he did.

Brown: Because he actually lost some of his collection.

Ross: He did?

Brown: Yeah. I don't know the exact. But anyway, he was heartbroken because of the devastation of Katrina, and he had – it was directly in – it directly impacted him as well.

This is a good time to come back and revisit – at least try to correct the chronology. Annie's Room, the club that you ran, your club, was from '64 to '65. Then the chronology lists more of your theatrical and movie involvement, doing voiceovers and . . .

Ross: . . . and dubbing.

Brown: . . . and dubbing, correct. Before we get to that, let's return to the theatrical production known as *The Real Ambassadors,* or . . .

Ross: *The Real Ambassadors.*

Brown: *The Real Ambassadors,* in 1961, with Dave Brubeck.

Ross: Yes. I remember going up to the studio. Dave was a lovely man. Still is a lovely man. We just went through it and then recorded it. Of course, Louis Armstrong – he was [?]. He used to say, "Annie, how do you get those notes? I don't understand." I loved him, and he loved me. Boy, he chased hard. Yeah. Big cigar. He would – he didn't really talk about the past all that much. I was close to him, not as close as he would have liked me to have been, but I adore him.

Brown: Did you ever see Louis and Sidney Bechet together?

Ross: Louis?

Brown: Louis Armstrong.

Ross: No. It wasn't – he was in America, Pops.

Brown: Okay.

Ross: No, but I'm so glad that I knew him and I recorded with him. He was very perceptive. He could see what was happening within the group.

Brown: Did he talk to you about it?

Ross: Kind of. Kind of. A lot of lies mixed in there.

Brown: Who else was involved in *The Real Ambassadors* production. I know it was Dave Brubeck's project. Louis Armstrong. Yourself – Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross. Who else?

Ross: Carmen [McRae]. That was about it.

Dave was always very sweet. When he came to England at one point, in Birmingham, England, he had me on a t.v. show that we did. But I wasn't in great health, I don't think. I was recovering. I just have to laugh, because I think of the term now that they use, self-medicating. Oooo. There wasn't no self-medication.

Brown: *Jazz Ambassadors* was in 1961. In 1962 I'd like to verify that Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross did receive a Grammy for best vocal performance.

Ross: I'd love to see that Grammy, because I was in Europe, apparently. I have never been told about it, or the receiving of it, or what. I wasn't there. But somewhere, there is a Grammy. I would like to have it. I wasn't even told about it. But you know, you say you don't go in – and I didn't go into this business because I wanted to get rewards. It was because I loved it.

I'm trying to invent new ways of doing songs, so that nothing is specifically planned, but I can just say, I don't feel like doing that. Let's do this. Or combining two songs, like *Here's that Rainy Day* and *Guess I'll Hang My Tears Up to Dry.* What I want – what I think is real, is truth – truth is very important to me, and I fear that if I can be free enough to do what I want, to invent, to interpret, like *Lush Life.* I love doing that song. Billy [Strayhorn] was in Paris and taught it to me. So, that's another reason why I love that song. To move people, that's what I want. But above all, it's truth.

Brown: It sounds like the two pillars that this music stands on are truth and respect.

Ross: Absolutely.

Brown: The Grammy was received for *Hi-Flying*, I believe, *The Way-Out Voices of Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross.*

Ross: That's a wonderful album.

Brown: It absolutely is, and that's probably why it received a Grammy.

After you – circumstances forced you to close Annie's Room.

Ross: The reason was that the people with the money wanted to tart it up and bring in gambling. I said no. They showed no respect for my husband, Sean. They were starting to book people that was not my taste. They wanted to make it all gold and red velvet. I said, uh-uh, it's time to go. That's what I did.

It was hard work, because I was there every night to introduce the performers. Not that it didn't give me great pleasure. Who was the lady that did "Broadway, Broadway, dah-dah-dah-dah dee-dah"? – Dakota.

Brown: Dakota Staton

Ross: Yeah. She was there.

Brown: Also from Pittsburgh.

Ross: No kidding. I didn't know that. I loved her, but she was a hard taskmaster. I remember the club used to go dark, and you'd only hear my voice saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, Annie's Room is proud to present Dakota Staton." She called me back into her dressing room and gave me hell. She said, "I am not Dakota Staton. I am recording artist" blah blah blah blah blah, the great, the magnificent, the wonderful Dakota Staton. I said okay. She said, "Do it for me." I said, "What?" I said, "No, I know how to do it. I'll do it."

Another one who did that was Anita O'Day. She said, "Now" – she sat me down at a table at rehearsal, and she said, "Now, how do you introduce me?" I said, "Well, the lights go dark, and you just hear 'Ladies and gentlemen.' They know who they've come to see. So I just say, 'Anita O'Day'." "No. First of all, the band plays eight bars of *Jordu*." [Ross sings the first phrase of the melody.] She said, "Then you come in, and you do it on the floor. You say, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, Annie's Room is proud and pleased to present" so-and-so recording star – whatever label it was – the great, the magnificent, Anita O'Day. So I said all right. She said, "Do it for me." I said, "What?" She said,

"Show me. Tell me how you're going to introduce me." I said, "The lights go down, and I come out. The band plays eight bars of *Jordu,* and I say" blah blah blah blah blah blah dah. Okay.

So it is packed, the club. The lights go down. I go on the floor. I do the whole thing. I say, "Anita O'Day." Nobody's there. I waited a while. I said, "Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Anita O'Day." Nothing. About five minutes later, she comes on, backing up, saying, "I'll see you tomorrow about four o'clock." Then she does her show. She was weird.

Blossom was somewhere else. She – I was doing a t.v. show at the time, the David Frost t.v. show. So I was working hard. I get a phone call from a friend of Blossom's, an American lady, who said – because Blossom had taken time off. She had a cold or something like that – she said, "I think you better get Blossom back." I said, "Why?" She said, "She's having parties" and blah blah blah. So Sean called her, and he said, "Look. This is an emergency. You got to come. Annie is tired. She's been in the t.v. studios all day." So Blossom appears. She gets on the mic, and she says, "I came down here, because I heard this is an emergency. Some emergency." I thought, uh-oh. So I said, "I'd like to see Miss Dearie after the performance." I said to her, "Blossom, you're working for me. We're great friends. But you can't do that. You don't disrespect me in my own club." After that, we were okay. But I'll tell you, sometimes your friends can turn the other way when you're associated with them on a business level.

But we had great fun. It was hell, because I had to be there every night, made up, dressed, to introduce the act. But that was fine. I didn't mind that. But every time that I thought, I'm going to cool it, somebody else would walk in the club and whoop, we'd be off again.

Brown: After leaving the group Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, you still continued to record. Some of the solo albums listed in your discography: *Sings a Handful of Songs,* 1963.

Ross: That was in London.

Brown: Then there's one listed here of Annie Ross and Pony Poindexter. Coming from San Francisco, we all celebrate Pony. So if you could talk about him and this recording, please.

Ross: Sure. He was something else. He was great, he was cute, and he was funny. Poor baby. He wasn't at all fluent with money. So he didn't have a very happy end. But he was

wonderful to work with. We had a great time, the only great time I've had in Germany. That was the best time.

Brown: This was in Berlin, correct?

Ross: Yes, in Berlin. Gildo Mahones, who played piano, beautiful person. And Carmen, who had been married to Klook, and then she married Ike Isaacs.

Brown: Whose trio backed up Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross on many – or some recordings.

Ross: Yeah. Carmen was weird. That was just her nature. She was – she could be a tyrant. But the way she sang was so beautiful. Somewhere deep in that soul was I think a frightened, insecure lady. She could sure sing and play. You hear the expression, the real thing. That's what I try to live up to, the real thing, telling the truth, no matter how hard. I listened to groups that followed Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross. They ain't got it.

Brown: Is anybody even close?

Ross: No. They try, but it's not what it was.

Brown: You recognized it was magic from the very first recording.

Ross: I really did.

Brown: Did you know Nina Simone at all?

Ross: Yes.

Brown: Can you talk about her? You talk about divas. Let's . . .

Ross: Nina was strange. I met her at a friend's house. There was a piano. She sat down. She played. She started calling me "Miss Annie." I thought, oh. She played the club. She was strange. She was angry and strange.

When I was living in L.A. – this is many years later, many years. I can't remember what date it would have been – I was staying in California with a friend, and I got a phone call from Nina, who said, "Listen, Annie Ross. You're a star, and I'm a star, and we should get together." I said, "Yeah?" She said, "How long are you going to be in L.A.?" She was in Holland. She was living in Holland. I said, "Oh, probably in about a week." She said,

"Okay, because we should get an apartment together." I thought, oy vey. Anyway, she said, "When are you – how long will you be in London?" I said, "A day." She said, "I'm going to call you, and we're going to get together, because we should be together." That was the last I ever heard from her. She died shortly after. But she – *I Put a Spell on You,* yeah.

Brown: *Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood,* the one the Animals covered, powerful, soul-searching kinds of – whew. I bring up Nina because my father played – that's the soundtrack of my youth, is Nina Simone, and Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, and Dinah Washington.

Ross: God bless your mother.

Brown: We mentioned Sarah, but we haven't talked about Sarah very much.

Ross: Sarah. That was a beautiful soul. Talk about cook, and talk about sew. She could sew a hat, and she could cook. I used to go out and spend time with her in her house in L.A. We'd just play music all the time. Sometimes she'd get on the piano. We had the same sense of humor.

I remember we went out – I went out to a place somewhere – it was on Long Island – where a friend of hers was getting married in the garden. So they had asked Sarah if she would sing something, which she did. The weather was bad. So I had to spend the night there. Sarah and I talked all night. Then she said, "I'm hungry." I said, "Me too." She said, "Let's go see what they got. We were staying in a friend's house. We went down to the kitchen and inadvertently set off the burglar alarm. We laughed. The police came.

Sarah did this thing where she would – do you know what I'm talking about? – where she would – it would be like little girls. You would stand there kind of yah dah dah dah. We laughed. We had such a good time, because I had such respect. She knew that. I wasn't trying to hustle her or do anything except gain knowledge of her as a friend.

When she died, I called her from here. She was in L.A. I think she lasted a couple of days longer. She said to me, "Oh Annie, I feel like the guy who jumped off the Empire State Building and missed." She was something.

Brown: When I think of Sarah, I also think of the tenure that she had with Fatha Hines and the other singer, Mr. B. [Billy Eckstine].

Ross: Mr. B. You see the color of this sweater I'm wearing, like a pale lilac? When I told you about B coming over and putting his head in the door, this was the color that he was wearing. It was so gorgeous. Because he was from Pittsburgh and he knew Klook so well, he was kind of like my caretaker. He always looked out for me, he and Bobby Tucker. He once said to me, "Annie" – with that incredible voice – "don't worry about anything. As long as I'm alive, you'll be okay." He was funny, a very dry sense of humor. We had an affinity because of his friendship with Klook and because he knew I had lived in the projects. So he knew I wasn't full of b.s.

Brown: Did you ever have to require his assistance at any time?

Ross: I would never ask for it. But he was beautiful, the prettiest man I ever saw. Like when Lady said that of Buck Clayton, "prettiest man I've ever seen," well, B was. You couldn't beat him.

Brown: Did you ever sing together?

Ross: No, not professionally. But I'd say, "Do you know this song, B?" He'd say yeah, and he'd come in on a note.

Brown: One of the other recordings on your discography that seemed to jump out at me – it's much later. It's in the '80s – is *In Hoagland.*

Ross: Oh, with Georgie Fame.

Brown: Yeah, Hoagy Carmichael.

Ross: I had met him, when I was a kid, at a party. He was impressed, because I was young and in Hollywood. I think he speaks about it in the recording that we did, because Georgie went out to L.A. and met him and got him to say a few words. But I remember him at this party when I was small. He played piano. I knew all his songs.

I did a t.v. show with Georgie. That was a good t.v. show.

But the greatest moment – one of the great moments – is standing in front of the Basie band. Wow. That was mind-numbing. It was so incredible, with Sonny Payne, who we called Funny Pain. That trumpet section, the saxophone section, the trombone section, and of course Eddie Jones on bass and Basie on piano. That was miraculous. Everything was done from the heart. What a time.

Brown: Can we talk again a little bit about the Ike Isaacs Trio, since they recorded with you?

Ross: Yes. Gildo – and who was on drums?

Brown: Jimmy Wormsworth, on this one, and – hmm. Good question.

Ross: Jimmy will do. He came over here, before you got here yesterday. He calls me big sister, and I love him to bits. He's a wonderful drummer. He was part of all that. Funny.

Brown: Did you like doing your t.v. programs? I know there was the evening with Annie Ross. Is working in t.v. much different than working for film?

Ross: It depends on who your director is. Doing a t.v. show is an art in itself. Movies, it really depends on your director, I think. That's why Bob Altman is so prominent in my life. He would let you experiment. He said to me the first day, "I want everybody to come to the dailies." I, like a lot of performers, hate to watch myself. I feel very self-conscious. I could have done that better or dah dah dah. I never listen to my recordings. I just don't, because I feel oh, that could have been, or that could have been.

But with Bob, I had such confidence. He chose songs that I wouldn't have chosen. Rather, Hal Willner, who was the musical director, he chose the material. I looked on it as a challenge, because the music that was chosen wouldn't have necessarily been my choice, but I did what I had to do.

Bob insisted that everybody go to the dailies. But he made it more like a party. There was all this food. There was drinks. We'd all sit down and watch.

Kathryn is incredible, Bob Altman's wife. She knows innumerable musicians, and she gets it, which is what I say about people who don't like my singing. "You don't get it."

Brown: The singles that are most associated with you are, of course, *Twisted. Skylark* is also one of the tunes, speaking of which.

Ross: That's a pretty tune.

Brown: *Farmer's Market.*

Ross: *Jackie.*

Brown: Are there any tunes that are particular favorites of yours or recordings of yours that some . . . ?

Ross: That's the most difficult thing. How do you choose your favorite song? I love *Lush Life.* I love – what I like to do is do almost a dramatic version of a song like *Lush Life.* I don't change any of the notes. *The Very Thought of You,* that's a beautiful song. Everything I sing, they're favorites of mine. So there's no way that I could say this is my favorite or – no. And it has to be different every time. It can't be the same, because that's boring, and one thing I don't want to be or have to act like is that I'm bored. I'm not bored. It's like Warren listens to me, and I listen to Warren and Tardo and Neal [Miner], Jimmy. It's creative. That's what I try to do, is to cut all the b.s. and just go with the real feeling of the lyricist.

It's funny. I was reading Margaret Whiting's notice from *The Times,* about dying. Her father was a great songwriter. She had a wonderful conception. She kept working. She was 86. I think she worked until she was 84 or something. Her father, boy did he write good songs. She was funny and strange.

Brown: You mentioned Georgia Brown earlier. She was another – go ahead.

Ross: Georgia Brown and I shared a flat in London. Georgia was powerful. She was totally powerful. She was also weird. I remember she said to me once, "Why" – I played her something that I felt proud about, and she said, "Why is it that everything you do sounds dated?" Boy, that was like, whack. She was a good girl, but she went out to Hollywood, and it messed her up. Values, I'm talking about.

What about Nellie Lutcher?

Brown: Whoo – *Fine Brown Frame.*

Ross: She was wonderful. And Dorothy Donegan.

Brown: Dorothy was powerful too. Shirley Horn?

Ross: Oh, my God. I heard her do – it was the Johnny Mandel album.

Brown: *Here's to Life.*

Ross: She was wonderful. I loved her. I just wished that so many of my friends didn't have such a hard time. If I had a lot of money, I'd give it all away to musicians, if you

can find them nowadays, and I'm sure you can. I thought Wynton was incredible on *The Shadow of Your Smile.* How beautiful. That really was something.

And what about Johnny Mandel? Unbelievable. I knew him when he was with the Basie band. We used to call him Johnny MAN-dul. Lovely man. What a heart. What ears. Boy.

Brown: Did you know Johnny Hartman?

Ross: Yes. Not well, but yes I did.

Brown: Whenever you mention *Lush Life,* I think of him.

Ross: I didn't even know he sang it.

Brown: With John Coltrane. There's a recording where it's the John Coltrane quartet with Johnny Hartman.

Ross: I had no idea.

Brown: If I had my computer here, I'd play it for you, because it's a classic as well.

Ross: Is it?

Brown: Oh yeah. I saw Johnny perform. I think it was on Greene Street. I forgot the name of the club. It was right next door to Rashied Ali's Ali's Alley. He had really no stage presence. He had this incredible voice, but he would just stand on the stage.

Ross: That's the problem with a lot of singers, especially male. It's hard to watch them and equate what you're watching with the beauty of the voice or their interpretation. But certain people we know had a difficult stage presence. They didn't know what to do with their hands. They were afraid of the audience. They – the audience intimidated them, which is not right. You can't do that. You've got to be in control, not to the point of – you have to communicate with people. I love looking into people's faces and saying, well yeah, I got that one.

Brown: Jimmy Scott.

Ross: Ah, he's lovely. Is he still working?

Kimery: Yes, he was actually in Washington about six months ago, Washington, D.C.

Ross: I love him. Little Jimmy Scott.

Brown: He's definitely a sweet man, very sweet.

Any other voices that you hear or have heard recently that caught your ear? Anybody coming along that you think has . . . ?

Ross: No, not that I've heard. I'm crazy about that girl, Esperanza Spaulding, bass player, singer. Wow. Looks great. But apart from that, nobody really that's original. It doesn't mean that they sing differently. It means an interpretation of a lyric. I haven't really heard that. There are people who sing and play. That's great. But if I am going to sit and listen to someone, they better be really good, because I don't suffer [Ross sings] "fools gladly."

Brown: Let's take a break here.

[recording resumes in mid-sentence]

. . . talking about so many facets of your career. Lately most people who didn't have the privilege of hearing you performing with Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, or performing solo, associate you with movies. Probably one of the more famous ones, the one Ken and I were talking about, was *Throw Mama from the Train.* So please, tell us about that one.

Ross: That's very funny, talking about that, because a guy came into the club the other night, and he said, "I'm amazed. I didn't know you sang." I went to audition, which everyone has to do, in order to see if I fit the part of a principal of a school. No, no, no, no. That wasn't it.

Brown: No, for *Throw Mama from the Train,* you were Mrs. Hazeltine, a creative writing student is what you're listed as a character.

Ross: Yes, right. I went in. I auditioned for the producer and Danny DeVito, who was starring in it. They're looking through my sheet, with my credits and stuff, and Danny said, "Annie Ross." He said, "Yeah, there used to be a singer called Annie Ross." I said, "Yeah?" He said, "Yeah. She was a good singer." I said, "I'm Annie Ross." Well, it turned out that his kids loved *Our Gang.* So, in showing it to the kids, he watched all the things. He said, "No, you can't be, because she was in *Our Gang* in" 19-whatever-it-was. I said, "No, that's me." It was fabulous, because he and Billy Crystal are great jazz fans, especially Billy, because of his uncle.

We had a – you talk about food. That's the best food I've ever had on a movie set. Wow, was it good.

Brown: Okay. Creative writing student. When I see that description – *Yanks* was one of the early ones. It listed you – in 1979 – listed you as the Red Cross lady.

Ross: With Vanessa Redgrave. I don't drive. I can drive, but not in traffic. So I only drive in movies and t.v. There was a scene where Vanessa and I are in a jeep. We have to go down this road, and we suddenly come across a huge area which is showers, and the guys are naked. Just before John Schlesinger, who's the director, said, "Action," Vanessa said to me, "I'm told you don't drive." I said, "That's right" – rrrrrrrrr. We did it, and it was fine. Then John said, "We're going to have to take another angle." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah, I want to do a reverse shot," or whatever. "So will you do it again? I'm going to be – we're going to build a thing on the front of the jeep on the left-hand side. I'll be there with a cameraman." All I could see were headlines: "Famous Director Crushed by a Jeep."

Vanessa was incredible. She was so instinctive. She could go right into a scene.

[recording interrupted]

She was wonderful, and Tony, Tony Richardson.

Brown: In *Short Cuts* you actually got to play a vocalist, called Tess Trainer. Can you talk about that one? Was that a more suited role for you?

Ross: I certainly knew what it was about. I got Wardell's wife a little part. I told her to come on the set. I introduced her to Bob, and he gave her lines, which entitled her to become a member of whatever it is.

Brown: SAG [Screen Actors Guild].

Ross: Yeah. I loved her. She – Jeru [Jeri] was her name. She was funny. I remember in Berlin at that concert we got booed at. She said to me – she was married to Niels Pedersen?

Brown: Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen was a bassist, but Albert Mangelsdorff was a trombonist. No, not him?

Ross: No. He was famous. He was from Norway or Sweden.

Brown: I'm sorry. I don't know.

Ross: Anyway, she said to me at this concert – after the concert, she said, "Here I am in Cologne – Berlin. Where are you going?" I said, "We're going to England. We're going to France. We're going to" dah dah dah. She said, "Guess where I'm going?" She had a very deep voice. I said, "I don't know." She said, "The laundry." Jeru, and what a cook. She was fabulous.

Brown: In a few minutes, when we start tape 3, we'll talk about you, Annie Ross, as a cook and author of a cookbook. Just to – because you mentioned the Berlin concert where you got booed, but we didn't – we talked about it earlier, but we didn't record it. So maybe this is the time to talk about that, since you mentioned it.

Ross: Yeah. Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, and Count Basie, we went to Berlin. We did a concert. There was very much an anti-American feeling. I didn't become a citizen until about 8 years ago. I couldn't understand the attitude of the people, why they were rude. They booed us off the stage. That was a terrible experience, because they weren't doing it as a kind of positive thing. It was very negative. You knew that they didn't dig what you were doing. How could they not? I mean, we swung the doors off. But it was a political thing. Terrible.

Brown: What did the band do? You left the stage? How many numbers did you play?

Ross: I think we did three or four. Whatever we had planned to do, we did. Ain't going to let a little booing stop [us].

Brown: It sounds like probably – is that the worst performing experience you had? Being booed sounds like the ultimate nightmare for an artist.

Ross: I don't think anybody likes it.

Brown: Hopefully that's the one and only experience where you had been booed.

Ross: Absolutely.

[end of tape]

Brown: This remarkable odyssey, known as the life of Annie Ross would never be complete without talking about your interest, passion, for food that culminated in a book and still continues to be a subject of dear affection for you.

Ross: Very much.

Brown: We're talking about food.

Ross: I love food. I love preparing it. What I love is to go into the kitchen and say, now what have I got, and what can I do with it?, and then do something that really is good. For example, Wardell Gray's wife Jeri, who was known as Jeru, gave me the recipe for meatloaf, which has – it's travelled to so many corners of the earth. It's very basic. It's ground meat, chopped onions, chopped green pepper, rice krispies, and beer. It's fabulous.

Brown: That truly sounds like somebody who was saying, "What's available? Let me put it together."

Ross: Yeah. Jeru told me about the Rice Krispies and the beer. I'm telling you. You don't have to be a good cook to do it. You just throw it all together and bake it. It's fabulous.

Brown: You have your cookbook in your lap there. Let's talk about some of your other favorite dishes. And how did you get interested in being a cook?

Ross: Because I love to eat, and I love tastes. The only thing I don't like – I'll tell you a story of how I came to like food. I came over from Scotland. I was four. My aunt, who had an apartment, who was a singer and very strict, very Scottish strict – so here I am at four years old – she said, "It's lunchtime." She said, "What do you want for lunch?" I said, "Cake and bananas." She said, "What? You're not getting that." I said, "I want cake and bananas." She served me a plate of stew. "I don't want that." "Why? What do you want?" "Cake and bananas." "You're not getting it." Dinnertime, same stew. "I'm no eating that." "Why?" "Cause I want cake and bananas." "Well, you'll just have to go to bed hungry, because you're not getting that." Next morning, stew. I said, "I'm no eating it." She said, "You don't have to. You're not getting anything else." 12 o'clock came. I said the same thing. I was stubborn and angry. At 6 o'clock dinner I ate the stew, and I have never looked back. The only thing I don't like are persimmons, but that's just, I don't like the texture.

But I've always loved food. I thought, the best thing to do is, if you love something, you should know how to create it, which is what I did. I got tips. I used to watch. I used to talk. And of course I was in Paris. So I had wonderful things.

The best meal I've ever had – did I tell you this? – was when I was pregnant. I was pregnant in Paris. Klook had to go and do a gig. He didn't have any money. He had enough to get into Belgium, where he was going. I went to every couch or every chair and looked in the corners. I came up with something like 6 francs, which is – I took it and I went and got a loaf of day-old bread. I came upstairs. I sliced it. I found a frying pan. In those days, people always saved the fat in the pan, to fry. I found some flour, and I found some water, and I made gravy. I had bread and gravy. That was the best meal I've ever had, as far as basic, great tasting, and I was hungry, food.

Brown: When you opened Annie's Room, you said that that was an item on the menu.

Ross: Yes, it sure was.

I've had some incredible meals. I went to a place once in – it was in the mid-south of France. There was a famous restaurant called Les Pyrenees. It was a star chef. My friends who lived in Paris, who were Americans, said to me, "Don't eat for a day before, because you're going to have about 15 courses." I said okay. So Sean and I went to this restaurant. The first thing they gave you was a kir royale, which was champagne with a blackbird currant juice. You put that in, and then you fill it up with champagne. Then it began. We had I forget how many courses. It was more than 15. The cheese course was unbelievable, the trays of different cheese, all at their peak condition. The hors d'oeuvres, the main courses.

What you would do is sit back. You would eat very slowly and then sit back and let it digest a little. Then the next course would come. That was an experience.

I went back there. It was on a trip where I met Wynton. Wynton had his little nephew or something with him. He was showing him Europe. I went back to Les Pyrenees. Maybe it was Le. But anyway, whatever it was, it sure wasn't the same. It had changed hands and wasn't the same.

I like all kinds of foods. I love awful. I love blood sausage, brains, hearts, kidneys, and pig tails. I really love good food. That's why I usually cook at home. I don't usually go out for meals. I certainly don't go out alone and eat, because I don't find that a very enjoyable experience. I'd rather stay home and cook up what I want to cook.

Shall I give you my recipe for meatloaf?

Brown: You talked about it already. How did the book come about?

Ross: There was a guy – is a guy in Paris called Dave Pierce, who's Canadian, who said to me, "Have you ever thought about writing a book?" I said, "Yeah, but I don't know how you go about it." So we collaborated. He would say, "What about fish?" I would say, "I think" blah blah blah. We went to see a publisher, and the publisher liked it. He put out a limited edition. I don't think you can get this anymore. But it's a good book, and the recipes in it are good recipes.

Also, my brother was married to Gina Fratini, who was a great – not dressmaker, because that's too nebulous a term. She was married to an Italian, and she could cook, wow. So I took a little bit from this person, a little bit of that from someone else. I don't think that any recipe is original. I think that they are all founded by a dish somewhat similar.

The best part about it is, when you cook it, you get to eat it.

Brown: The rewards of your effort.

Ross: I like very simple things. I once, with a friend of mine, cooked a goose, which was Julia Childs's recipe, which was goose stuffed with prunes, which were stuffed with foie gras and prunes. You take the pit out and fill it up with the foie gras and then cook it. My God it was work, but you know something? Worth every hour, every minute of effort. It was delicious.

Brown: Did you happen to see the movie *Julia, Julia*?

Ross: Yes.

Brown: Did it bring back any memories of Paris?

Ross: Um-hmm. Yeah. Nobody had big stoves. Everybody had little hot plates or a little old stove. You were lucky if you had an oven. But you learn all kinds of tricks, like some people in the South taught me how to grill with a hot plate. You take a hanger, and you bend it into handles out there. So you'd lift it up. You'd put bread or steak or anything. Used it like a grill, and it worked. If there's a way to do it – and necessity is the mother of invention. So if you're placed in a situation where you have to improvise and do something, I can do that.

Brown: Improvising on and off the bandstand.

Ross: That's life, improvise. Know how to improvise.

What else?

Brown: We started the interview talking about last Tuesday night, the Jazz Masters awards ceremony. You happened to mention, before we started rolling today, that after the awards ceremony, you went to your gig. Could you talk about your gig?

Ross: Sure, I'll talk about it. I don't know what I'm going to do. What I do is, I take paper and a pen. I go down, and I sit with the guys. I map out a program of what I want to do. One night I'll decide that I want to do *The Very Thought of You,* and the next night I won't do that. I'll do another ballad. The guys are very attuned to me, and I'm very attuned to them. The idea is not to sing a song the same way twice. That's a challenge, but it's worth working on. Someone came in and told me I was a method actress singer, which I'm very pleased with. I think that's fine.

Brown: I think that's in reference to the improvisation, I guess. Being there, thinking . . .

Ross: It's the interpretation, too, because there is a certain amount of acting that works for me.

Brown: Could you give us a little more background on the gig, where it's at? I know it's every Tuesday night.

Ross: It's every Tuesday night. I've been there for four years. It's on 22nd Street between 5th and 6th (avenues) in New York. It's called the Metropolitan Room. Like I say, I've been there four years, and I'm not bored by any means. I love my musicians.

Brown: Who are . . . ?

Ross: Who are Tony Jefferson on drums, if not Jimmy Wormsworth. On bass is Neal Miner. On bass is Tardo Hammer. On trumpet, it's Warren Vaché. That's it.

Brown: You put the band together?

Ross: Well, Tardo helped. There's nothing written. Everything is totally ad lib. That's what I think is the true test. I hate to see musicians with music, leaning over. Come on. You're trying to create. You don't learn creation from – well, I don't – from written

notes. If I go into another key, for example, to make it open up a little more, they're right with me. Like I say, I give them all the respect. I feel if there's a connection like that, that's a good thing.

Brown: It's a great thing. Are there any other things that you want to do, that you haven't done?

Ross: Yes. I want to make an album. I'm not sure, one guitar or two guitars. But you know how Lady did – no, how Ella did an album with –

Kimery: Joe Pass.

Ross: – with Joe Pass. I would like to do a similar thing. I think it shows the age, the aging, but I think there is – as we were talking about Lady – a whole life in that voice. That's something I'd like to come near to, if I could come near to that. I think that would be a good thing.

Brown: It would be a great thing.

Ross: Yeah. Just say, okay, two choruses of dah tah dah, and let's go for it.

Brown: Do you have any guitarists in mind?

Ross: Yes. I'm not saying who.

Brown: Okay.

Ross: Sure I do. Good guitar players, wow, unbelievable. Freddie Green, beautiful man. Russell Malone. How's that? Not too shabby.

What else?

Brown: I don't know. Let's save some time so we can do a tour of your house here and all the wonderful mementos on the wall. But before we do that, I just want to say, Annie, on behalf of the Smithsonian Institution and the National Endowment for the Arts, and Ken and myself, for you opening your door and letting us come in here, you sharing your life with us . . .

Ross: I'm honored. I'm truly honored. Thank you.

Brown: Thank you, Annie.

(transcribed and edited by Barry Kernfeld)