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**JOHNNY MANDEL**  
**NEA Jazz Master (2011)**

**Interviewee:** Johnny Mandel (November 23, 1925 – June 29, 2020)  
**Interviewer:** Bill Kirchner  
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**Kirchner:** Alright so this is April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1995, in New York City, on the 38<sup>th</sup> floor of a New York midtown office building and this is Bill Kirchner with tape one of our interview with Johnny Mandel. I guess the easiest thing to do is start at the very beginning, according to all the records you were born on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1925 is that correct?

**Mandel:** I'm afraid that's the awful truth, I sure was.

[They both laugh]

**Kirchner:** Where?

**Mandel:** Seems like only yesterday.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] Where? In New York?

**Mandel:** Right in New York on 85<sup>th</sup> and West End.

**Kirchner:** Wow.

**Mandel:** Um hm.

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**Kirchner:** So you lived on the upper west side then?

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** For your entire childhood?

**Mandel:** No, for my first seven years.

**Kirchner:** Let's talk about your parents a bit.

**Mandel:** Okay.

**Kirchner:** What were their names?

**Mandel:** Well, my mother's name was Hannah, my dad's name was Al. Al Mandel and Hannah Mandel.

**Kirchner:** What did your father do for a living?

**Mandel:** He was a cloak-and-suiter. He had a business downtown, Mandel and Shaft... And the depression and the new deal combined to force him out kind of. The NRA [National Recovery Administration] in specifically, although he remained a Roosevelt Democrat right up till his death in 1937. And he finally just said, well, he was a pretty successful cloak-and-suiter but he just couldn't, he just didn't want to do it anymore after. He was forced to hire a lot of people he couldn't afford to hire so he said, "What the hell, I'm gonna pack it in," and that's what he did. And when he did that, he took my sister, my mother, and myself to California and that's where I lived until after he died and I was twelve.

**Kirchner:** So he died in '37?


**Mandel:** Yes, he took us in '34.

**Kirchner:** Uh-huh. Where did you live in California?

**Mandel:** Lived right in L.A. sort of in the mid-Wilshire district around John Burroughs High School [It's a Junior High] in that area.

**Kirchner:** So you said, you had a sister.

**Mandel:** I did. In fact I did until last, the year before last.

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**Kirchner:** Oh, I'm sorry. What was her name?

**Mandel:** Audrey.

**Kirchner:** Was she younger than you?

**Mandel:** No, she was six years older in fact.

**Kirchner:** Was your family musical?

**Mandel:** My mother was very musical. She was an opera singer, a frustrated opera singer, 'cause she wanted to go for it and in the early part of the century, you know, girl from a nice middle class Jewish family just didn't do that. And her parents were very Victorian, they says, "You know the girl that does that sort of thing [stumbles over words] and succeeding has got to be sleeping with the producer." And it just made her gnash her teeth and I think she wrung her hands all her life. But, you know, it was a shame because that's what she wanted to do. And as a result she was very supportive of me; she never stopped whatever I wanted to do. Which was great. My father was tone deaf as was my sister but was a great lover of music. They all loved jazz; jazz was what I heard around my house, of various sorts.

**Kirchner:** Was this on the radio or records or both?


**Mandel:** Both, both. And there was a piano there, she could play it and had a brother, who was a very, they're all; my parents were from Chicago, originally. And they...

**Kirchner:** So they were both born in this country?

**Mandel:** Oh yeah sure.

**Kirchner:** Okay.

**Mandel:** Yeah, we've been, we were in this country for probably, oh God, six, seven, eight generations. And before that England. And my mother, my uncle, my uncle George was a composer, he was, he wrote shows, reviews and all that sort of thing. Music and lyrics, and he was very talented but never made it in this country. He had success in England in the mid-30s but World War two scared him back here. And when he grew up, he was growing up in Chicago he was part of the Austin High School gang, you know with Bud Freeman; Eddie Condon came in from Indiana, he and Eddie were very close buddies, so he used to have jazz musicians around. I can remember as a kid, Fats Waller coming over to play and people like that. You know it must have been in the 20s cause I wasn't cognizant of too much until about 1931, '32.

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**Kirchner:** What are your earliest musical memories?

**Mandel:** Pretty much those and all the records they had, you know, heard a lot of Paul Whiteman records, stuff like that, around the house. And you know there was always the latest songs being played on the piano and that sort of thing. I never got interested in song writing though strangely enough, in fact it sort of wasn't interested in music until I was about 12 years old, then all of a sudden I knew that's what I was going to do.

**Kirchner:** Is that when you first started playing?

**Mandel:** Started playing trumpet and writing arrangements.

**Kirchner:** At the age of twelve?


**Mandel:** Yeah, well, I started writing arrangements at thirteen. I didn't amount to much for about a year.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] You were a late bloomer, you played a whole year.

**Mandel:** A late bloomer, yeah. But I did start writing band arrangements, I mean swing band arrangements, you know Benny Goodman size band arrangements when I was thirteen. Because the very first teacher I went to was Van Alexander.

**Kirchner:** Ah-hah.

**Mandel:** And I saw an ad in, *DownBeat*, that he was taking students and I really leaned on my mother and she went for it. And he showed me right away in the first lesson how to write a score, how to write, not how to write a score but you know here is what the orchestra looks like, I was hung up in the alchemy of what makes an orchestra sound. I didn't know what it was; it's just that I knew from hearing different bands on the radio. And I'd hear one band play, you know in those days, you'd always hear, the radio was just filled with bands and remotes for instance or you know records of bands, although they didn't play records that much. Everything was pretty much live and you could always hear some band from high atop the hotel so-and-so in beautiful downtown Baltimore. And, I'd hear, I started putting it together when I was around ten years old, I'd hear some band play a song and I'd say, "Jeez I sure don't like that song whatever it is," and I'd get the name of the song, then some other band would come in and play that same song, 'cause in those days everybody played the same songs, unlike what goes on today. The song pluggers, something that doesn't exist anymore, would get out to all the bands and make sure they all played them, particularly if they were broadcasting, because that was the greatest

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form of advertising for a song and getting it around. And I said, “Hey I like that song it sounds pretty good, why is that,” and then the next band would play it, and in those days everybody played the song when it was on the hit parade, and agh, no, I don’t like that. Then I started wondering, something’s wrong with this whole picture and I realized that it was the way one band made it sound and the other band made it sound lousy and why does it? And it didn’t take long to figure out that’s the way the instruments were playing the music that was written and from that I sort of discovered there was a guy, a thing, called an arranger, the guy who actually wrote the music the band played. And pretty soon I got tapped into that’s what I wanted to do. I wanted to make a band sound like the way I wanted to make it sound, I didn’t know how to do it, but that was when I decided I want to learn how to do that. I was never interested in writing for the piano, it was the first thing that attracted me, I didn’t want to write for solo instruments either; I certainly didn’t want to write for singers. [laughs]

**Kirchner:** Which is ironic.

**Mandel:** Yeah. I didn’t want to write for strings or any of that, you know they tried to stick me with a violin before I ever got hold of a trumpet. I told them later, you know there was one in the family from an old aunt or something. I said, I thought it was a sissy instrument, Jesus Christ, and I still do.

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** Except when, Stuff Smith or Joe Venuti plays it.

**Kirchner:** So, by the time you were with Van Alexander you were in L.A, then?

**Mandel:** No, no, in New York. I had come back to New York by then.


**Kirchner:** Ah.

**Mandel:** See we came back when I was twelve.

**Kirchner:** Oh okay.

**Mandel:** My father was gone and sort of a void there and music just filled it up. I couldn’t think about anything else, coming to New York in 1938 was like the greatest thing that could every happen to someone who was in the kind of shape I was in, where all I wanted to hear was listen to bands 24 hours a day. That’s all I wanted to hear.

**Kirchner:** So just to get our chronology...

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**Mandel:** It's like bands everywhere in this town, everywhere! And, there was the biggest music publisher at that time was Jack, was Jack Robins. And he lived right down the hall from, where we move, we moved into the Essex house when I was, in 1938, when we came back to New York and I fell in with his son who was like about the same age as I was, Marshall Robins. And the old man, you know Jack used to, his work really consisted of going around to all these different spots at night, where bands were playing, peddling his songs. And he'd know the band leaders on a, you know he was the biggest guy in the business at that sort of thing, and even though he owned the company he loved to plug songs. So, he'd take us around with him and I was just like a, you know, how do you say a, this is the Smithsonian so I can't, you know...

**Kirchner:** Say whatever you like.

**Mandel:** I was happier than a pig in doo doo, you know, I really was.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] Don't worry about editing yourself.

**Mandel:** Okay, I won't, but that was, that was to me the greatest thing, I went and heard all the bands in person, I said, "Jesus," and up close because they would always give him a ring side table. So Marshall and I would be out like, until 4 in the morning or something and we'd both, walking around with circles, dark circles the next couple, next day or so. Then we'd go out that night again. So, but, I knew that's what I wanted to do, especially when I saw them turning all this music in, it was all hand written and everything. I'd sneak over to the band take a look and I'd say, "Oh that stuff isn't printed," you know, I'd seen printed music for bands and somebody wrote this, so by, by the time I got to Van Alexander I was ready to just suck it up like a sponge.

**Kirchner:** So you were thirteen?

**Mandel:** Yeah.


**Kirchner:** So just to get our chronology straight you went, you moved to L.A. how old were you?

**Mandel:** Seven or eight. Between, just before I turned eight.

**Kirchner:** And you came back when you were about thirteen, to New York?

**Mandel:** Yeah, when I had just turned thirteen approximately.

**Kirchner:** What were...

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**Mandel:** New York was quite a place then. God, it should be like that now.

**Kirchner:** That's what everybody...

**Mandel:** You couldn't get away from the music, it was just wonderful.

**Kirchner:** Talk about the bands that you heard that first impressed you both, on the radio and in person.


**Mandel:** Well, of course everybody was impressed with Benny Goodman, you know the Tommy Dorsey band, I'd go to the theaters and see them all and... I was listening not so much for rhythm sect... the things I listened for, have listened for, for the last thirty years anyway, I didn't listen for the rhythm sections and how the band swung or anything, I was interested in how the music was constructed. So, I got interested in bands like Glenn Miller for that reason because it was an arranger's band. I didn't even realize that the damn thing didn't swing [laughs] but I knew that, I mean, for instance it was a very interesting band when Bill Finegan wrote for it, it wasn't an interesting band when they had the formatted very slick sound, known as the Miller sound, that got old fast.

**Kirchner:** But like those charts Finegan did like, "Serenade in Blue," and, "On the Santa Fe Trail."

**Mandel:** Oh yeah! Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Those are the best things in the book for me.

**Mandel:** And the Billy May stuff, there was some good music in there. And I found it all interesting, though, because the instruments were all doing things and I was particularly focused on that, you know, what you did, how did they do it. I was into that, how did you do it and I was always trying to cop what they did and I had perfect pitch which is not something I developed, I was just born with it. So I could take things off of records and I knew what keys they were in and all that, and that's how really, basically how I learned to write, even though I went to people and studied. I just did it, I learned it by doing, 'cause I think that's really the only way you can learn it. And the most valuable thing I ever learned, I learned from Van Alexander in my first lesson and that was, he said, "So you wanna," he's looking at me up and down, you know and I was a little thing at thirteen, I was a small kid, "You wanna write for bands?" and I says, "Yeah, I sure do, in fact that's all I wanna do you know," and he said, "Alright," and he goes, he was a recording name band leader at that time and I knew of him he had done, Saturday Night Swing

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Sessions, he had written for Chick Webb. I didn't know anything about black bands in those days, but I made up for it later [laughs] And... he said, "Okay, you wanna learn to write music, I'll show you something," he goes over to the closet and takes back, reaches up into a big stack of manuscript and grabs down the first thing he grabs and it's a song that Harry Warren wrote about 1937 and it was called, *Hooray for Spinach*, I remember it like it was today. And he says, "Now I want you to look at this," he says, "This is what the whole orchestra does for eight bars, and that's all, you've got saxophones, you've got trumpets, trombones, piano, bass, drums, and guitars," that's kind of a thirteen piece band that was very prevalent then. I said, "okay," he says, "Now, that's what it looks like and here is what it sounds like," and he takes out a Bluebird record that he just recorded, it was like brand new, blew it off, it came out of the wrapper and put it on the turntable, an old 78, and I heard the thing and I'm looking at this stuff written out. I said, "oh my God," and I'm following it through on the arrangement as it goes down and then he gets to the place in the middle where the vocal always was and I said, "How come you changed keys there, why?" He says, "Oh that's the key the girl sings in;" [laughs] "the singer sings in," and so forth and then when he got done with it he said, "Now the secret of this whole thing is to be able to look at the music through experience and know what it sounds like, if you establish an association between the written note and the way it sounds you've got it made." And he told me that in the first lesson and it's still the most valuable thing you can ever teach someone. And he didn't teach me any theory, anything like that, he just said here's some paper go home and write something, he threw me in the water and yelled swim and it was the best thing you can do. And some of those first arrangements I wrote were pretty awful, had everything I knew in them, I did that for a few years, quite a few years. And I, without shame just copied people constantly, just partly to find out how they did it.

**Kirchner:** My favorite line from Van Alexander's first arrangement book is, "Erasers are cheap."

**Mandel:** [laughs] Well I don't think, I was writing with him probably, I was studying with him probably seven years before that book came out, at least, and I just instinctively being one of those people who edits themselves, and perfectionist, I'd throw three pages away for every one I wrote. And believe me; I used a lot of erasers. Even, a lot of times when I didn't need to but I didn't know.

**Kirchner:** Quick technical question, do you write in concert or transposed scores?

**Mandel:** I started off, from that day on, writing transposed and when I started doing television shows and movies, things like that, later on, like the, *Show of Shows*, I had to learn to write

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concert sketches because I'd find I'd get bogged down and would have a lot of, would have to call in help and it wouldn't be, I learned how to write in concert after that. Just so that I could work faster.

**Kirchner:** So in general you still do that?

**Mandel:** Now, now I just write in concert because I decided the hell with it, I've got, I've run into a lot of copyist who can copy from concert and I started figuring yeah, I wrote most a good part of my life I've written transposed, always did, and I started realizing why should I do that. I come into a date and I'm usually tired because I was up all night or on overload trying to get ready for the date, so I'd come in there and we'd start calling out notes if there were wrong notes for anybody, we'd call, we'd always call them in concert and I'd have to look at the score and transpose it again and transpose it back in my head. Especially when you start getting things like English horns, French horns, a lot of transposing instruments and you get into a song like, "Laura," that runs into a lot of enharmonic changes, which I won't bother to explain. And it bends your brain around, it's more or less like doing a double acrostic or, you know it's the kind of mental exercise that you really don't need because you haven't accomplished anything by doing it. So I said what the hell everybody calls notes in concert, I'll just keep writing in concert and that's what I've done ever since.


**Kirchner:** I've always felt that it's easier to visualize how the music sounds looking at a concert score.

**Mandel:** Well, for a long time I felt it was only visual, easy to visualize it looking transposed 'cause I was always a blower, you know I played B-flat instruments and I said, ah this shows you what it's like on the trumpet and was like playing a saxophone part, cause I played all those instruments... not very well, but well, I wanted to make sure I knew what it felt like to try and execute something.

**Kirchner:** Was that in a school situation or on your own, where you learned all this?

**Mandel:** Both. Both. Not in a school situation, no, I'd just pick up peoples instruments and start fooling around with them, trying to see what the physics were and all that, the mechanics.

**Kirchner:** Were you somebody like say, a Johnny Richards who eventually got at least a working skill on just about every instrument?

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**Mandel:** Well... enough, you know, not strings; I don't know anything about strings what-so-ever.

**Kirchner:** Except how to write for them?

**Mandel:** I really, yeah, but I don't know what it feels like to play a part, I've heard enough good string writing that I can, I can ape it, you know, and I know they can make impossible skips that you can't do on wind instruments and things like that. But when I write I scarcely plumb what the string player is capable of. I just try to write enough so they don't get bored.

[They both laugh]

**Kirchner:** That's probably the key to success, wouldn't you say?

**Mandel:** Maybe, I don't know.

**Kirchner:** [Laughs] You just keep string players from playing footballs.

**Mandel:** All the time, yeah.

**Kirchner:** Now, it said in Leonard Feather's encyclopedia [The Biographical Encyclopedia of Jazz] that you went to the New York Military Academy.

**Mandel:** Sure did, graduated from there.

**Kirchner:** Was that...


**Mandel:** I only went for two years, for my last two years.

**Kirchner:** That was like a high school level Academy.

**Mandel:** It was, yeah.

**Kirchner:** Um-hm, so where did you go to school before that?

**Mandel:** Oh, before that I went to a terrible school that my mother... when I had lost my father; well, I went to grammar schools, public grammar schools in Los Angeles. Actually, first in New York if you're gonna go all the way back, I went to PS9, where I majored in the Principal's office pretty much, I was not a too easy kid to handle. Mischievous, I wasn't really trouble, they'd find me out in the street directing traffic, things like that, this was when I was five and six. And, my mother got sent for every other day and then when we moved to California I went to the

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public school system, which in the 30s was just excellent, I mean it was the best one in the country, now it's second from the bottom I think. But, up until when my father passed away and we went, we came back to New York, they put me into a boarding school 'cause my mother had no idea what to do with a thirteen year old boy. And it was up in Tarrytown . . . it was a very good school scholastically but it was probably the most miserable four years I ever spent. However, by then I had gotten into music so much that I just tuned all that out and spent my time practicing and writing whenever I could, and sort of shining on the school thing except just to get by. Didn't get into any extracurricular, didn't like sports particularly, never have, so I never did any of that and didn't get into any intramural stuff or what-have-you and went and did that through my sophomore year and the last two years were at New York Military Academy, 'cause I finally told her I'm not going back there again.

**Kirchner:** So where was that academy?

**Mandel:** It was up in Cornwall, still is in fact, up near Newburgh, New York.

**Kirchner:** Oh yeah. Not far from West Point.


**Mandel:** About five miles, yeah, about five miles above West Point. It was like a prep school for West Point, and I went up there on a band scholarship. They had a very good band at that time, marching band and I had a dance band there, by then I had, that was great, I loved it there, I didn't go for the spit-and-polish and the military crap and all that, I wouldn't, I wouldn't have anything to do with that. But I was able to get, I could lasso people and get them to play my music. That was one of the first things Van Alexander ever told me, he said, "Get people to play your music," he says, "I don't care how you do it, but that's the only way you'll ever learn is to see what it sounds like," and he was right. So we were all living in dormitories and I'd grab them out of their rooms or anything and write for what I had and you know, start learning what worked and what didn't work, and I still am. [laughs]

**Kirchner:** So, let's talk about a little bit about, you mentioned going with Jack Robins to hear various bands live.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah. Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Do you remember any in particular that really impressed you?

**Mandel:** Oh, there were a lot of interesting bands at that time, like Charlie Barnet, I loved it, I really loved it. And I realized later on because I loved it probably because it swung and it felt

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loose, it was, it was the closest thing there was to a black band. Except I never had heard Count Basie and Jimmie Lunceford and Duke Ellington, in those days, and I realized later on why it was I loved Barnet's band. It was a, just a real good loose happy swinging band, it made you feel good.

**Kirchner:** Do you remember some of the players you heard with him?

**Mandel:** Oh gee, you had Bobby Burnet one time, trumpet player, you had Bernie Privin later on and Charlie himself was a, not what you'd call a great, great saxophone player or soloist but he swung and the rhythm section always felt great. And I like the way, you know the charts I didn't know who wrote them but it turned out Andy Gibson, Billy May, you know he had wonderful arrangers and that's why I liked the band.

**Kirchner:** Where did you hear him?

**Mandel:** I heard him at the Park Central, I heard Larry Clinton at the Park Central I remember at the time. Park Central which is now the Omni Park in New York, it was a, has a room, or probably still for all I know it's still there, it was up on the top.

**Kirchner:** It is, I think.


**Mandel:** Oh you mean, that room doesn't get used for anything I imagine.

**Kirchner:** I don't think so.

**Mandel:** It had a great bandstand and good sounding room. Lotta bands, bands played there all the times in the 20s, I think Ben Pollack was there with Benny Goodman and the band, Jack Teagarden. It was, it was a real good band spot. And we'd go to the New Yorker and hear bands, I heard Benny Goodman there, heard Tommy Dorsey up at the Astor Roof later. You know there were just a, and I'd go hear them at all the stage shows, the Paramount changed every few weeks, the Strand changed every two weeks, every few weeks. I'd go catch every damn show. I used to run around New York all by myself in those days, even, when you're a kid it was easy then.

**Kirchner:** It was totally safe.

**Mandel:** Totally safe and there was the [inaudible] state even then I realized was the graveyard of bands, but I went and you know, so you'd hear the 2<sup>nd</sup> rate and 3<sup>rd</sup> rate bands and you'd hear some people that were... I went to every damn place I could find, whenever, wherever there was

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a band, even the bad, I even went and saw some of the Mickey Mouse bands, like Sammy Kaye and those, and you know when you're that young, you don't censor that much. I drew the line at Guy Lombardo though.

**Kirchner:** [Laughs]

**Mandel:** I didn't realize until later on that he was a marvelous replica of a mid-20s dance band. That had never changed his style and to me it just sounded corny and weird and out of tune and everything but hearing it now, it wasn't atypical of what went on in the 20s at all.

**Kirchner:** The Tuba player.

**Mandel:** The whole thing, tuba was your bass; you know you had the tuba, you had the two pianos, you had like... it was a whole different feel. Banjo on the off beats and then later guitar.

**Kirchner:** And him waving his...

**Mandel:** And he stayed with the tuba.

**Kirchner:** And him waving his baton out of time.

**Mandel:** Yep. Oh, the whole thing.

**Kirchner:** Alright, so you were in the Military Academy for the last two years of high school.

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** And then you went on to music studies at a couple major places right?


**Mandel:** No, I didn't I went right on the road with bands, I went with Joe Venuti, immediately when I got out of high school I was with Joe Venuti, I mean immediately.

**Kirchner:** How did you get hired?

**Mandel:** They were so hard up for musicians...

**Kirchner:** This was in the middle of the war.

**Mandel:** The war, yeah, the war, all the good musicians were overseas, so a lot of us who, oh God that whole gang I came out with, like Al Cohn, Stan Getz, they were good, all of us, Zoot Sims, we were alright, you know we were pretty damn good for our age.

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**Kirchner:** And you were all the same age.

**Mandel:** Yeah, and I wrote too. And, Al wrote too, Al Cohn and I started, I ran into Al when I first started writing and he hadn't been writing that long, we worked in a non-union band together in New York, here, for a short time called, Paul Allen. And I was amazed by him even then, he was always good, he just wasn't ever not good. And, but, getting back to what I said, when we went into the bands, we went into a lot of bands like Muggsy Spanier, and Henry Jerome, bands like that. These were bands that we probably would have had to wait five years in normal times to get a job in. It just would have taken us longer than it took because we were young, slight below the draft age and all the good musicians were somewhere else. They were all overseas. So it speeded things up for us and then by the time we, by the time they came back we had gotten good enough to hang on. To be perfectly blunt about it. Of course I can't remember when Stan Getz was never good either. All these guys were good. When I was with Venuti I ran into Zoot Sims, he was playing with Bobby Sherwood up in Boston and I was working at the, Tick Tock, and he was working at some place down the street, it was Bobby Sherwood featuring Jack, "Zoot," Sims, I said who the hell is that and on an intermission I went over there and found out who it was. And he turned up with Woody [Herman] next time I saw him.

**Kirchner:** So you went with Venuti in about 1943?

**Mandel:** Yeah, I did. Our singer was Kay Starr.

**Kirchner:** Oh! That's right, that was that era.

**Mandel:** One of my favorite people. And a wonderful singer, really good singer. To this day.

**Kirchner:** Who else was in the band at the time?

**Mandel:** Nobody, nobody that... Tex Satterwhite, the trombone player was there but there wasn't, oh and he had a great guitar player, who was Jimmy Raney's teacher named Hayden Causey, great guitar player, we used to call him **Modak [unsure of spelling]** after an elephant that had just escaped from some fair in Illinois, this guy weighed some 300 odd pounds, he was gigantic, but Joe Venuti always kept good guitar players around, ever since he had Eddie Lang and this guy was a monster, he was a wonderful player. A lot of the... he was from Louisville, as was Jimmy, we went down and played Louisville and he says, "Hey I want you to hear this kid," and he brought Jimmy, Jimmy Raney down and Jimmy Raney looked like Stan Laurel, even when he was twelve. [laughs] And, he came in and played, "All of Me," and just tore the

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place apart, then! I said who the hell is this kid, he was playing like a kind of, both those guys played kind of a Charlie Christian style, that was the beginning of single string guitar playing then. But they also played good chord stuff, 'cause that's what Venuti insisted on. So, and oh Barrett Deems was the drummer.

**Kirchner:** Ah ha!

**Mandel:** Yeah, and it was a crazy experience, that's right Barrett Deems and we had Kay Starr, that was who was in the band, the rest of them were people who I think eventually ended up doing something else.

**Kirchner:** Do you have any Venuti stories?


**Mandel:** 100s of them.

**Kirchner:** Please?

**Mandel:** Well, some of my favorite Venuti stories were stories that happened when I wasn't even in the band. In fact they go back to Paul Whiteman, I think one of my very favorites is, he's working with Paul Whiteman for about a year and they are playing at the Chase Hotel in St. Louis, this is 1930, in the teeth of the depression and that's Joe's hometown. So, he was staying at the hotel, the band was making great money, even though everybody else was starving and he goes up to Whiteman while he's there and he says, "Paul I've been with you about a year now and I just want to tell you it's been the happiest year of my life, the music is wonderful, you're wonderful, the money is wonderful and I just don't know how to thank you. I'd like you to come to my suite tomorrow and meet my wife and mother, for dinner." He [Whiteman] say's, "I'd be honored," you know he was sort of a courtly gentlemen of the old school. So, Joe goes out and hires two hookers an old one and a young one, [laughs] and he coaches them in their parts and has the dinner catered in the suite and has arranged to have himself called down to the desk on some kind of business right in the middle of dinner, so he excuses himself runs down there, he's probably hiding outside and these two ladies converge on Whiteman and start tearing his clothes off.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** And he's panicked, 'cause he still thinks it's his wife and mother [laughs] he's really freaked and he ended up like in one of these old bedroom farces they used to make in the movies, escaping out the fire escape with his clothes under his arm...

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**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** Down the fire escape, 'cause he knew Venuti was coming back any minute [laughs] that's a good Joe Venuti story.

**Kirchner:** [Laughs] How is he to work for?

**Mandel:** Great! He couldn't have cared less about how the band sounded, to him, in those days to get booked, you had to have a big band, he hated big bands. He didn't hate them, he just didn't want to have anything to do with – he was like Louis Armstrong, he didn't want anything to do with running one.

**Kirchner:** Or Teagarden.

**Mandel:** I guess maybe Teagarden too, well Teagarden liked having his band I think.

**Kirchner:** Um-hm.

**Mandel:** For a while. 'Cause he had a good big band, he had good people and he had played in big bands a lot himself.

**Kirchner:** So, how long were you with Venuti?

**Mandel:** Oh... somewhere, six to nine months, something like that.

**Kirchner:** Did you write for him?

**Mandel:** Yeah, I wrote backgrounds and things, you know we were doing one nighters all the time, I didn't have much time to write anything. Now and then we'd sit down in the theatre... and yeah, I was always fooling around with something.


**Kirchner:** When did you learn to play piano? I mean, you...

**Mandel:** I never did.

**Kirchner:** Didn't you make, when you did your songbook that came out a few years ago, you included a piano tape with it right?

**Mandel:** Yeah, but I didn't make it.

**Kirchner:** Oh.

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**Mandel:** I wrote all the arrangements out so they would sound on the piano, they would sound well because you know if you play the lead sheet on the piano, it's always not voiced very well and is usually in the men's key and so it's usually too low on the piano. You can't voice it, so I put it up in girl's keys and voiced it out so it would sound good on the piano because I wasn't going to have any vocals on this tape. And I got Mike Lang in to play it.

**Kirchner:** Uh-huh, so you were with Venuti for less than a year?

**Mandel:** Also I wanted to make the tape so that people who tried to play it would have something to listen to, because nobody reads music like they used to at one time. Most people can't even read a Fake Book.

**Kirchner:** That's very true.

**Mandel:** You know, which is just a bare melody and chords over it.

**Kirchner:** So...

**Mandel:** So.

**Kirchner:** No, I'm sorry, go ahead.

**Mandel:** Oh no, so yes, I was with Venuti for that amount of time.

**Kirchner:** And then you left to go with whom?

**Mandel:** I had to, well I had to finish school. I had some, a couple of courses I had to finish up. So I went back there and then I went with Billie Rogers, the girl trumpet player and her orchestra.


**Kirchner:** Who was, before that was with Woody Herman for a while.

**Mandel:** She was with Woody, she had left Woody and organized her own band.

**Kirchner:** So, this is around '44?

**Mandel:** Yes, it was, exactly.

**Kirchner:** How long were you with her?

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**Mandel:** I was with her, through the end of the year; I think I left her around, somewhere around Christmas time of '44.

**Kirchner:** She was supposedly a good jazz player right?

**Mandel:** She was pretty good. She was pretty good and she was a wonderful singer. People don't know that, she's a marvelous singer. She had perfect pitch, she was a good musician, a very good musician and she could play, yeah.

**Kirchner:** Were they trying to make her another Ina Ray Hutton or someone like that?

**Mandel:** Well she wasn't a sex pot, you know she, she was really a big Montana cow girl kind of. And so she couldn't sell it like Ina Ray but she was, you know, wanted a musical band and this was in the days when they thought big bands would keep on forever. I don't think she kept her band very long after I was gone, either. It broke up, we had some people in it and people went through it a lot. I remember Sonny Berman played a couple of nights with us, we had Harry Babasin, the bass player, Roy Harte the drummer, and a lot of other people who I'm sure didn't stay in the music business very long.


**Kirchner:** Did that band travel much?

**Mandel:** It traveled all the time. And right after that I stopped playing the trumpet 'cause I realized by then I could not – I had finally started playing with professional musicians for the last couple of years and that I was never going to be a good trumpet player. And I had a tremendous yen to play the trombone at that time and took to it immediately. You know I switched over to trombone and practiced very hard for several months and at the same time had joined Henry Jerome, that's when I joined him. In fact I had played with Henry Jerome, the year before, before I went with Billie Rogers, I played a couple of weeks down in Newport News with him, or Virginia Beach or something.

**Kirchner:** He talks about it in, Ira Gitler's, *Swing to Bop*, book as a matter of fact.

**Mandel:** Oh really, I was playing trumpet in that band. It was a four trombone band and then meanwhile I had made, and then after Billie Rogers, I made the switch to trombone I went back with Henry playing trombone and because I guess of the trumpet experience I could always play very high on the trombone, so I immediately became the first trombone player.

**Kirchner:** This is slide trombone right?

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**Mandel:** Slide trombone, yeah. And slide trombone is what I played for quite a while after that.

**Kirchner:** So...

**Mandel:** And it was a really nice experience in Henry's band. He let us do what we wanted to and we were a bunch of crazy guys. I mean we had Jack Eagle who later became a comedian, but he was a nice comfortable lead trumpet player to play under, is he in that picture?

**Kirchner:** Yes he is.

**Mandel:** Jack was great to play with. And we had Allen Jeffreys who later became a good song writer and Norman Faye, might have been there and Al Cohn came into the band later, Bill Vitale was a good lead saxophone player and Lenny Garment was the original tenor player when I first came in the band, jazz tenor player, who ended up being Nixon's lawyer. He was really a pretty fair tenor player, you know he could play.

**Kirchner:** He still plays clarinet.

**Mandel:** I think he does, yeah, I don't think he's touched the instrument in a long time the tenor.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.


**Mandel:** He sat, sat in with Dave Allyn when we had a – David Allyn was singing in the band and that's where I first met David and a lot of us just went right to Boyd Raeburn's band. Gene DiNovi came into the band at Childs Paramount (restaurant, NY) before that we had Harry Biss, the piano player. And Tiny Kahn came in, played drums, before that we had Ellis Tollin from Philadelphia as the drummer. And a few of us just went right over to Boyd Raeburn's band in June of that year, we spent about six months with Henry.

**Kirchner:** This is June of '45 you're talking?

**Mandel:** Of '45, and that went into what turned out to be one of the revolutionary bands of its time. One of the great experiences of my life.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, I want to spend quite a bit of time on that but I wanted to talk a little bit about Henry's band.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

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**Kirchner:** Because...

**Mandel:** Oh, another one of our saxophone players at the time I joined the band was Alan Greenspan of the Fed and well, let me say that as a saxophone player Alan did one hell of a payroll.

**Kirchner:** [Laughs big]

**Mandel:** He did do the payroll for us and we always got paid on time. [laughs] And he was a beautiful guy, he's actually pretty much just like he is now.

**Kirchner:** Have you talked to him recently?

**Mandel:** Haven't no, I haven't, I talked to Lenny Garment.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, so do I.

**Mandel:** Great guy.

**Kirchner:** He's a wonderful guy.

**Mandel:** Yeah. They were always very funny, Lenny used to be, he was very much of a liberal in those days, he was, for all I know he still might be a little bit even though he's been into conservative politics, he always sort of laughed at the whole thing.

**Kirchner:** He claimed he was never a registered Republican right?


**Mandel:** I don't think he was either. He didn't even play like a Republican.

[They both laugh]

**Kirchner:** But, the way he talks about that band and David Allyn and Ira Gitler in Gitler's book, it's described as one of the early Bee Bop Bands that never got much credit.

**Mandel:** Very much so, very much. And Henry let us experiment all over the place and God knows I did, cause I was still, you know I was, I experimented with everybody I was with. The reason I changed bands a lot was because I'd get bored with the book, even though I'd written some of it, and I'd want to play new music, so, I'd change.

**Kirchner:** Did any of your music for that band get recorded or did that band record?

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**Mandel:** I don't think so.

**Kirchner:** Do you remember some of the charts you wrote?

**Mandel:** Not really. I did a lot of pop tunes of the day, you know, stuff like, we had to do. I did a few originals. I heard one of them, David Allyn played, I didn't realize how terrible it was, he played it recently at that reunion a couple years ago he had over at the Red Blazer Too. It was a, what it was, was we gave a surprise party for Henry Jerome and we all, Lenny Garment flew in from Washington and we got, Alan Greenspan tried to make it but he was up for hearings on the Fed, he was about to be reconfirmed for his next term. And he couldn't come, he sent a big telegram, David Allyn, we got as many people as had been in the band. And it was a very nice evening but David had saved one of those arrangements and he trotted it out and played it and God it was awful.

[They both laugh]

**Kirchner:** Let's see...

**Mandel:** I really was not very good, but at least I – you know people let me learn.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, well judging from what I've heard of you writing only a couple years after that, you learned very quickly.

**Mandel:** I'd better with the people I was playing with.

**Kirchner:** [Laughs] So...

**Mandel:** The war is still on and I realized it wouldn't be on forever and I didn't want it to be on either, but I was getting to play with good musicians and I started knowing what worked, what didn't work and also how well I did not play, so I worked very hard on the trombone and got better.


**Kirchner:** So by the time the war ended you were almost twenty, right?

**Mandel:** I guess so, yeah.

**Kirchner:** So you avoided, they didn't call you up?

**Mandel:** They lost my draft card.

**Kirchner:** Really?

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**Mandel:** Yep. They lost it, I wish we lived in that, well, you say you wish you lived in that pre-computer age now, something like that, they can still lose stuff on computers but then they really lost it, 'cause I was sweating it out. I just never heard from them again after I registered.

**Kirchner:** That's amazing.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** I've never heard a story like that one, that's great. So, around June of '45 you said you and several other players...

**Mandel:** Well we got offered the job and it seemed like he was going out to the coast and he was going to do this and that, he got a lot of army camps to play.

**Kirchner:** This is Boyd Raeburn?

**Mandel:** Yep, and I got on that band and it was like a roller coaster ride. It was just a wonderful experience.

**Kirchner:** Yeah. Talk about; I'm sure there are any number of players you could talk about, who comes to mind most immediately?

**Mandel:** Oh, Tommy Allison for one.

**Kirchner:** The lead trumpet player?


**Mandel:** No, he wasn't lead trumpet player; he was a jazz trumpet player and one of the most beautiful jazz trumpet players I ever heard. He was kind of a Bunny Berigan type of player except more modern and lived pretty much the same kind of lifestyle too.

**Kirchner:** With the same kind of end?

**Mandel:** What?

**Kirchner:** With the same kind of end?

**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah, very. He came and sat in one night with Joe Venuti, when I was with him, he had been with Joe years before that and I said, "Wow, who's this guy," everybody was telling me about Tommy Allison and then we became very fast friends. He was with Raeburn and the lead trumpet player was marvelous, Dale Pierce was his name.

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**Kirchner:** Oh yeah.

**Mandel:** Great lead, he was another one of those guys you loved playing with. He played a lot like Ed Lewis, Basie's trumpet player, the kind of guy that there is nobody more comfortable than that, playing with Ed Lewis or Snooky Young or somebody like that. And Dale Pierce was one of those players. And gee, who else did we have, we had Frank Socolow, who was playing tenor, we had Stu Anderson was with the band, he was sort of a very skillful Coleman Hawkins type of player. Very good, I first ran into him when he sat in with Billie Rogers and he was very highly respected. And later George Handy came into the band and that turned our heads around, he'd been in the band before but then he had gone out to write for the movies and he came in and with all those really wild charts and the two of us were writing for the band. First Johnny Bothwell was the lead saxophone player and he left and Hal McKusick came in in his place. And it was just, Boyd allowed, he was another one of those, Boyd Raeburn, he wasn't much of a talent musically but he, he loved notoriety so he wanted the band to be the flashiest, splashiest, kind of band it could be. But he let us play music, he wasn't like Kenton where Boyd didn't mind when it swung.

**Kirchner:** He had...

**Mandel:** We had Irv Kluger playing drums, we had, yeah it was a good band.


**Kirchner:** There was a drummer named Jackie Mills, later on.

**Mandel:** Oh Jackie, Jackie and I were roommates, yeah, that was later, that was after I left the band, Jackie came in. Jackie and I got to know each other very well later on. We were real buddies.

**Kirchner:** Was Serge Chaloff there or is that before your time.

**Mandel:** He had been there before me. Serge was in Van – Serge and I became very good friends, but he was always in bands I wasn't, except for Georgie Auld's band for a while. He was with Georgie when I was with Boyd and Georgie Auld and Boyd Raeburn and Buddy Rich were all bands that were sort of farm teams for Woody's band. That's how it always worked out and I was in all those bands but I never played in Woody's band.

**Kirchner:** And I guess Sonny Dunham's was too, right?

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**Mandel:** Yeah, Sonny Dunham's too, but that was earlier. That's where all the Washington guys, the great Washington players, like Don Lamond, Earl Swope, Charlie Walp, those guys, Charlie wasn't in...

**Kirchner:** Marky Markowitz.

**Mandel:** Marky Markowitz, yeah, wonderful players. I mean those guys were my idols for a long time, they still are, when I listen to them play now on records, I can't believe how good they were.

**Kirchner:** Angelo Tompros.

**Mandel:** Angelo Tompros, yeah, wonderful.

**Kirchner:** So, let's talk more about Boyd...

**Mandel:** Okay.

**Kirchner:** When George Handy came into the band and started doing things like, "Dalvatore Sally," and...


**Mandel:** That was later. I had left the band by that time.

**Kirchner:** When did you leave?

**Mandel:** Oh, I left in about, towards the end of the year.

**Kirchner:** Okay.

**Mandel:** It was a big mistake, leaving it, because I went with Jimmy Dorsey, playing lead trombone in the toughest book in the country actually 'cause it was written originally for Tommy and I'd been playing the trombone for less than a year. I didn't know any better and I went into that band after coming out of Raeburn's band and it was the most horrible experience I ever had as far as, it was like being in the most unswinging, uncomfortable band you can think of. Jimmy was a great guy to work for, but he wasn't really a band leader like his bro, like Tommy. Tommy Dorsey was a great band leader, Jimmy couldn't have cared less about being a band leader he wanted to be a side man, but he was a nice guy. The band, one of the only things good in that band was the rhythm section and they were only half, half of it was good. But they had what became later the, Soft Winds, Herb Ellis was playing guitar, that's where I ran into Herbie. I'd been told about him before and Herbie and Lou Carter was playing piano and they ended up

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writing all those songs like, “I Told You I Love You, Now Get Out,” “Detour Ahead,” and that was the most musical part of the band. But the band itself it was like playing in a cement mixer, it was like the worst of the big bands you could say. It was a nice highly paid band and the guys were very good, but it was like playing with a bunch of drill sergeants, you know it was a very stiff, unyielding kind of band. After playing in a band like Raeburn’s it was a real shock.

**Kirchner:** Did he still have Helen O’Connell and Bob Eberly then?

**Mandel:** No, no, he didn’t have any kind of a well known singer at all; he was going through singers at that time. O’Connell and Eberly I think were off on their own careers already.

**Kirchner:** Because it was...

**Mandel:** In fact Eberly, I think went in the service, a lot of those people went in the service. O’Connell was off on her own career.

**Kirchner:** Because I think a lot of people’s memories of that band are more for the singers than for any instrumental things they...

**Mandel:** Because it was a very – oh we had Sonny Lee in the band he was a good trombone player, but I didn’t realize it at the time. It turned out many of the things I loved, I used to have every record Bunny Berigan ever made ‘cause he was my hero, when I was growing up, that’s the guy I thought was the great trumpet player and I still do and Sonny Lee made all those great solos like, “Prisoner’s Song,” those things back in ‘37. I didn’t realize that was who was sitting next to me all the time.

**Kirchner:** Did you play lead when you were on Raeburn’s band?

**Mandel:** Yeah, I did. I did.


**Kirchner:** So by that time...

**Mandel:** I sort of followed Trummy Young.

**Kirchner:** That’s quite an act to follow.

**Mandel:** It sure is and Tommy Pederson before that. I couldn’t play like that, you know I really wasn’t that good, but for some reason I fitted.

**Kirchner:** And you had the high chops.

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**Mandel:** I had the high chops, yeah.

**Kirchner:** Well, so after...

**Mandel:** I couldn't play low worth a damn.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] So, after playing trombone for only about a year you were playing lead trombone in some of the...

**Mandel:** Biggest, best bands in the country.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** I didn't know any better. I should never have done it.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** But then I did it, what the hell.

**Kirchner:** And obviously pulled it off.

**Mandel:** I pulled it off, yeah.

**Kirchner:** Oh, about Raeburn's band, at that time what, Ginnie Powell was...

**Mandel:** Yeah.


**Kirchner:** The singer right, Boyd's wife.

**Mandel:** She came into the band and she was a good singer, good singer and a nice girl.

**Kirchner:** What are some of the charts you wrote for Boyd?

**Mandel:** Oh, gee, very little got recorded, very little, there were a lot of things on the records they put out that were credited to me that I never did, not only that, I didn't like the arrangements. Almost nothing I wrote for the band got recorded and of course, you know at that time there was a recording ban going on and yeah, very little. I wrote quite a bit but it stayed in the book.

**Kirchner:** Yea, I got to play that book about fifteen years ago when they did a concert over at the Smithsonian, so I remember there were a few of your things in the book but...

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**Mandel:** Oh yeah, did you play, “How Deep is the Ocean,” or some of those? Where’d you ever find that music, that got lost?

**Kirchner:** Oh there’s a guy who’s a good friend of mine named, Bill Schremp who lived in D.C. and he tracked the book down, half of it was with Bruce Raeburn, Boyd’s son, who is now the curator of the jazz archive at Tulane University.

**Mandel:** Oh.

**Kirchner:** The other half of the book was in two cardboard boxes, when Boyd in the late 50s had been evicted from a loft in New York, and he had given these two cardboard boxes full of manuscript paper, full of charts to this guy in Long Island for safe keeping and there it stayed until about 1979. And Bill Schremp tracked it down and Bruce and this guy in Long Island both shipped the music to Washington D.C...

**Mandel:** I’ll be damned.

**Kirchner:** And I was playing at the time with Mike Crotty’s band, Mike’s a very good arranger, who writes for the Air Force band, so we did a concert at the Smithsonian, we got David Allyn to come in, we got Mel Lewis to come in...

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** And played that book for the first time in decades, you know the George Handy charts, the Eddie Finckel charts.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** George and Eddie both came in for the concert.


**Mandel:** There were a lot of George Williams charts, which I hated playing.

**Kirchner:** Yeah they were the schlocky ones.

**Mandel:** And I was credited with them.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** George was a good enough arranger it was just a style I didn’t really care to take credit for.

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**Kirchner:** It's very vanilla.

**Mandel:** Very vanilla and a lot of Rup-up-up-pa shit.

**Kirchner:** Um-hm.

**Mandel:** You know, that kind of stuff. Lot of 16<sup>th</sup> notes, they thought was very hip, or he did.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** But he wrote correctly, I'll say that.

**Kirchner:** He later became pretty successful commercial arranger right?


**Mandel:** He was a commercial arranger then.

**Kirchner:** [laughs loudly] He just got more successful later.

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

[Interruption]

**Mandel:** Okay, alright, George was just a, I learned a lot about technique, just from playing his music, plus he was just – his ideas never stopped flowing. He really made it interesting. Yeah, fascinating, he opened up a lot of possibilities for me, he made the – all of a sudden all the orchestra colors that – you know a big band isn't really the greatest... instrument, when I say instrument, I think an orchestra is an instrument, not a single instrument but you know... a band is like, not an instrument... a means of making a lot of variety of sounds. A big band to me is at its best not when it's playing ballads or doing this or that, it's an instrument for swinging. Big bands I think are at their best when they are swinging because there isn't enough tone variation in it, you know you can have the saxophone playing all kinds of different doubles, and probably the one who gets more sound out of a big band and always did than any is Duke Ellington. And he transcended it. The limitations of a big band sonically. And George did it by using a lot of doubles, using flutes, the clarinets all that kind of stuff and I've tried many times doing that, I used to do it but I found after a while I'd run out of sounds so I started writing all the trumpets, each one in a different mute and all that kind of a thing. And the trombones in different mutes and you know when I was going through that, "The Song is You," period, like the one you know of. But I realized afterwards that, big band was a pretty limited form of expression, is a better word than instrument, cause instrument always seems to connote like a single performer or something but you know what I mean.

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**Kirchner:** Sure.

**Mandel:** Yeah. And, gee, but Handy was able to explore the palate of what a big band was capable of as thoroughly as anybody I ever heard.

**Kirchner:** He also had a really sophisticated, harmonic concept.

**Mandel:** Very much so. Yeah, he had a lot of technique, he had studied with Aaron Copland.

**Kirchner:** But not for long right?

**Mandel:** Not for long and quite a few other people, well not enough to ruin his style.

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** No, that isn't what I... that's an old joke, but no. You know George had a lot of classical chops, but, and you could tell he had done his homework, he really knew how to write lines, running in and out of each other and all that but I think he wrote them more, because he heard them rather than through formalized training.

**Kirchner:** Now when he, when you were in the band...

**Mandel:** I mean he heard them in his head, not that he heard them someplace else.


**Kirchner:** Um-hm, when you were in the band was Harry Klee, there already?

**Mandel:** No he came later. He came after I, after I'd left the band by then, gone with Jimmy Dorsey, that was when Boyd came into Los Angeles organized a whole different band. I think Si Zentner [Simon Hugh "Si" Zentner] took my place, he opened at a place called the, a place on Hollywood Boulevard, El Morocco or some kind of name like that and he had six woodwinds something I'd love to have had. He had Klee and some guy, Ralph Lee, a good player, who played all the doubles.

[Begin CD 2]

**Mandel:** And Johnny Richards was the arranger and by then they were trying to do more of a Kenton type thing. And that was when George had written, "Dalvatore Sally," and all those other things, those were written after I'd left the band.

**Kirchner:** Early '46?

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**Mandel:** Yeah '46, yeah that's right, cause the band broke up shortly after that. Boyd never really had a big working band again except for pick up dates and that isn't the kind of music you could play on pick up dates.

**Kirchner:** Oh, no.


**Mandel:** No. It was complicated music, but it was fun to play.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, I mean, when I played it decades later it still was really challenging and still sounded – especially the Handy charts, the Eddie Finckel charts were good, the Johnny Richards things I didn't care for too much.

**Mandel:** I never liked playing his music, it was incredibly hard but again Johnny Richards was one of those guys who had unbelievable technique. He really knew how to write his orchestra. I just didn't find it fun to play. I tried out for his big band once when I was still playing trumpet and just fell on my can and I'd asked him before, I asked the manager, "Is it a hard book?" He said, "It's the hardest book in the business." I said, "Oh, come on," [laughs] I found out it was the hardest book in the business. And I didn't read that well 'cause I played by ear a lot, I mean I used my ear to learn how to play, I'd hear something, I could play it. So reading was something I adapted, I became good at reading when I'd get a lot – play shows, and have a lot of strange music thrown in front of me. But as soon as I'd stop doing that and just play regular band music, I'd learn it very quickly and never take it out after that, so my reading would atrophy again. It's a strange thing about reading music, some guys can go without looking at music for years but they learn how to read correctly, which is several bars ahead of yourself. Stan Getz could always read around the corner, he is one of the great readers. I would have to keep, I would have to play a lot of music before I'd get any good at all and I never was a great reader but I could read, you know I read as well as I had to. Joe Maini was an incredible reader, same kind of reader as Stan Getz, except Stan had a photographic memory, he'd actually look at it and memorize it and never take it out again.

**Kirchner:** You know you mentioned just in passing Ellington and I know that you thought very highly of Ellington and Basie, we should talk about that.

**Mandel:** Oh, god yeah, Ellington and Basie were my big influences and, you know and one was for swinging, the other one was for just everything. There was only one Duke Ellington and nobody really still knows what he did 'cause he never let anyone see his music. He was highly secretive and he never left anything laying around, unless he wanted to show it as an example of something he wrote, like in a book or something, where he'd show you the tenor had the lead on,

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“Satin Doll,” but it wasn’t – I saw a couple of sketches of his once and they always look like their never gonna work, you say, “Jesus you see this, it’s gonna sound like crap,” it would sound wonderful. [laughs] He broke all the rules because he believed rules were made to be broken. And he’s right. If it sounds good, it’s the only criteria.

**Kirchner:** And he’s also writing for very individual players too.

**Mandel:** Yeah, where Strayhorn [Billy] was much more formally trained and wrote much more according to the book. Ellington was totally unstructured and really had great disdain for schooling; he never said so, but he did. He loved undisciplined musicians, he liked bands with... that were undisciplined as long as they could play. He sort of liked – and he liked keeping people on the edge of their chair all the time, throwing strange music in front of them and... he didn’t care for formal schooling at all.


**Kirchner:** When did you first hear him? You said when you were say in High School that you hadn’t heard him or Basie yet.

**Mandel:** I hadn’t and then I heard quite a bit of Ellington on records and I can remember one time I bought a new record of that magic band he had in the 40s of, “Ko-Ko,” and, “Conga Brava,” it was two 78, one on the back of each other and I heard it and I got so irate. I remember it was a cold winter night it was that school I went to in Tarrytown, I took the damn thing, opened the window and scaled it as far as I could see it on the snow, I just didn’t want to ever see or hear that record again. A day later I had to go out and get another one. You could get them for 35 cents then and...

**Kirchner:** What caused that reaction?

**Mandel:** I don’t know, it was sort of a violent reaction on my part, I might say cause I wasn’t given in to throwing things. It was the first time I’d ever heard minor blues and for a long time I did not like minor music of any kind. And I didn’t hear it, I couldn’t hear at first what he was doing with all those pyramids and cascading things and all. I realized what a work of genius the stuff was later, but that was my first reaction. That wasn’t the first time I’d heard Ellington but I’d heard the stuff that you know what you’d think of is Ellington, more. This was pretty bizarre music for 1941.

**Kirchner:** It was pretty dark.

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**Mandel:** It was dark it was the darkness I didn't like, I didn't realize what it was at the time. But of course I got to love that band, you know anything they did, it didn't matter, but the first time I was shocked.

**Kirchner:** Did you have much contact with Ellington and Billy Strayhorn?

**Mandel:** Never. Not even when I played opposite them, I was too much in awe of Ellington, in fact I didn't have contact with a lot of people 'cause I was pitifully shy. I really was, up until about ten, fifteen years ago, I would never get to close to people 'cause, I don't know I was just shy. And I missed a lot, and I missed meeting a lot of people because of it and I realized, I guess I finally grew up and got – I realized how stupid it was. But that happens you know, I see people act that way sometimes around people, you know friends of mine and you know kids and people and you want to say – I started to realize that the people I was idolizing didn't really want to know about that they just wanted to talk to you or just be, you know hang out. I didn't know that, I couldn't believe that Roy Eldridge just wanted to hang out you know, [laughs] not when I was a kid. So I never got to know Ellington, also, nobody ever got to know Ellington, or if they got to know Ellington, they got to know one part of him 'cause he never let anyone see the whole picture. That's the way he was, he compartmentalized his life very thoroughly and never let anyone see all sides of it.


**Kirchner:** There's a wonderful quote, that Gene Lees mentioned that you said that, "the Ellington band was either sounded wonderful or terrible but it was never mediocre."

**Mandel:** Never. God, I've heard that band sound like the worst high school band and the next night it would be the greatest band I'd ever heard in my life. The same band, same people, and you just wondered when they sounded bad you wondered how they ever were going to get it together. And Duke didn't care 'cause he always knew that when they had to they would.

**Kirchner:** And of course you've always been a big Basie fan.

**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah, I loved that from the very beginning. When I started hearing Basie and Lunceford I realized that's where it was really all coming from, that these were the innovators, not the white bands I was hearing which were really pale imitations. And in the days I started hearing them, you know in the 30s and 40s, they really hadn't learned to swing, like they learned later, the white bands.

**Kirchner:** Ah.

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**Mandel:** You know I'd hear Tommy Dorsey play Sy Oliver arrangements and I loved them, I thought they were wonderful and of course Buddy Rich helped a whole lot. And I thought that was a wonderful band he had, you know the band Sinatra was in, it really was the best band he ever had. But, Sy Oliver used to wring his hands when the band tried to play cause they couldn't swing like Lunceford's band did.

**Kirchner:** They couldn't get that two-beat feel that Jimmy Crawford could get.

**Mandel:** Not quite, although Buddy Rich you know, without Buddy Rich it wouldn't have had anything. Ziggy Elman [Harry Finkelman] was a damn good choice there too and Bunny before it, Bunny Berigan, those were trumpet players, they were very heroic trumpet players.

**Kirchner:** And there was, "Well, Git It!" with Chuck Peterson and Ziggy Elman.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

**Kirchner:** But, you got to hear Basie obviously say with, Lester Young and that era of players.


**Mandel:** I didn't get to hear him with Lester when he was first in the band 'cause he left about the time I became – he left in 1941 and I never heard him then. The first time I heard Basie in person he knocked my head off, but Don Byas was there.

**Kirchner:** Uh-huh.

**Mandel:** And then I heard it when Lester came back in the band, he had only been in a couple of nights when I went and caught him in the Lincoln in 1943 and there he was. You knew right away who it was, I hadn't really gotten in to Lester at that time, when I heard him, I said, "oh my god." [laughs] I'd never heard anything like it, and I really haven't since.

**Kirchner:** What grabbed you about him?

**Mandel:** Oh God, just the... sheer soulfulness of the sort that he projected unlike anyone else, the melodic, everything he played was a song. Something that later Al Cohn had in common with him, you know Al never played an unmelodic note. Lester was always so, totally melodic and the earlier you can get Lester on records, the better he was. He was a frightening player in 1934, '35 before he ever made records. He was incredibly fast, and people who have listened to Lester Young on records, unless they went way back, as far back as they could like old broadcasts had no idea that he sounded like that. 'Cause they hear the post-war Lester Young, who was a shadow of his former self, they had beat him so badly around the head when he was

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in the Army, even though when he got out he still played well, he went downhill very fast and he used to sound, he really couldn't get out of his own way for the last ten years of his life, as a player. Unless you hear him on a record when he was playing with Basie, like Basie at Newport, then he got it together, when he had Jo Jones and Basie back there, but I don't see how anybody could not play well when you have that in back of you, with Freddie Greene.

**Kirchner:** Or that record with Nat Cole and Buddy Rich, from right after the war, he sounded really good. The trio record with no bass player.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, well see, he had just come out and was still pretty good, he had made, "D.B. Blues," and those things, which stood for Detention Barracks blues. And he still played okay, but he was never the same like he was even before the war. I mean before he went in, he was playing marvelously, like on those records with, "After Theatre Jump," and the Sextet records he made with Basie who was Prince Charming on those records cause he had a contract with Columbia. These were Keynote records.

**Kirchner:** Benny Carter...

**Mandel:** Lester still could play then.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, Benny Carter claims that originally Lester was a really stunning alto player.

**Mandel:** That was his original instrument, well his original, the guys he loved – the black guys just never liked the way Lester played and very few of them copied him. I think Gene Ammons and Dexter Gordon were probably the two biggest disciples of Lester's.


**Kirchner:** And Wardell Gray.

**Mandel:** And Wardell Gray, correct. But you know... Lester's main man was Frankie Trumbauer when he was with Paul Whiteman. His favorite record was that, "Singin' the Blues," and you can hear it too.

**Kirchner:** Absolutely.

**Mandel:** Yeah. He loved that pure, it was kind of a pure sound, that's why Benny Goodman liked him cause he liked that kind of a saxophone player.

**Kirchner:** And Artie Shaw loved him.

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**Mandel:** Yeah, oh God, what he played stands up to this day. He was a phenomenal clarinet player, he wasn't a great technician but every note he played was right.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, and the sound he got on the instrument.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, a lot of times he was playing a metal clarinet too, it didn't matter.

**Kirchner:** So what effect did Basie have on you?

**Mandel:** Profound. Profound, I liked that band better than any band I've ever liked. To this day I still liked – I liked the early sloppy bands, much better than I did the one that was reorganized that I was in. Although I loved that, that was the best experience I ever had playing with anyone, but we'll get to that later.

**Kirchner:** Oh yes.

**Mandel:** No, I love all the Basie bands from the very beginning even when they had very little music. At first when I heard it they were playing all those heads, I got it, and I got the swing and I loved the way the rhythm sections sound but I was so arrangement oriented I wanted to hear more content. And then later on I said, "The hell with that, this is what is happening," because the music took on a life of its own without being written.


**Kirchner:** Eddie Finckel made an interesting statement about writing in the mid 40s and he said that, a lot of arrangers were trying, when they wrote for Raeburn, were trying to get what he called orchestrated Lester.

**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah we tried that. It was impossible of course, you know we're trying to do things like playing rhythmic one note things on the saxophone [sings an example melody of rhythmic one note playing] that kind of thing and you really couldn't quite orchestrate that [sings melody again] that kind of thing you could write it out in harmony but it wouldn't sound, it wouldn't sound like you pictured it. It was more like an old counterpart of what became super-sax later when they were just voicing out Bird solos.

**Kirchner:** Although, without getting ahead of ourselves too much that there's a record that you were involved in with Bill Perkins' Octet where they took some Lester solo's and voiced them right? From the mid 50s?

**Mandel:** Probably, I didn't have anything to do with that I don't think. I'd written a couple...

**Kirchner:** There's an arrangement of, "Just a Child," on there.

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**Mandel:** Oh, well that's an original I wrote, yeah.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, but on...

**Mandel:** That was before I knew I could write songs.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] But there's a couple of, what were the precursors of Dave Pell's, *Prez Conference*, really. There are a couple, I think like, "Song of the Islands," is on that record, I forget who did the charts, maybe Bill Holman did but...

**Mandel:** Could have been.

**Kirchner:** But they're Lester Young solos written out for a medium sized ensemble.

**Mandel:** Oh, well that's probably something Perk [Bill Perkins] wanted to do. Yeah. Probably the closest to Lester Young would have been the things that the heads that Lester laid out like, "Tickle Toe," and things like that in the early days. [sings melody] You know the whole section playing what Lester had, and it sounded like him.

**Kirchner:** So let's see, you said you left Raeburn, you went with Jimmy Dorsey and that was a physically hard experience.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, I got out of there... the end of '45, I went with Buddy Rich, I mean, in the beginning of '46.

**Kirchner:** And you were there for a while right?


**Mandel:** With Buddy?

**Kirchner:** Um-hm.

**Mandel:** I was in three different bands, I was in that band until around June, about 6 months, it was the very first band Buddy ever had. It also was a stiff band, not a pleasant band to play in. A high priced stiff band. With good players, thank God, that was my first exposure to Earl Swope and he blew my head off, I've never played with a better trombone player.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, talk about him, he hasn't been discussed enough I don't think.

**Mandel:** Oh God, I don't think anybody swung harder, he played, he had a wonderful sound on the trombone it was sort of a Teagarden type of sound but he didn't play anything like Teagarden. He had that extremely – he had a very strong sense of rhythm and he never played a

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note I didn't like. He was one of those. He was like Marky Markowitz on the trumpet and like Angelo Tompros, the Washington guys had something really special. Washington, D.C. and Earl Swope was really the leader of them as far as, he was a marvelous trombone player.

**Kirchner:** He struck me from the records, I've heard, as like the Lester Young of the trombone.

**Mandel:** Very much, yeah, he made the trombone... you know he was there before J.J. Johnson and people like that. J.J. really was a straight out bebop player but a real good one. Earl was a swing player, it was a different kind of a thing, I don't know anybody he played remotely like, he was a mutant he was a one of a kind. Probably the guy who copped the most from him was Carl Fontana, who I think there's nobody that can play like that. Carl Fontana is probably the greatest trombone player alive and has been for the last thirty, forty years.

**Kirchner:** Quiet as it's kept.

**Mandel:** What?

**Kirchner:** Quiet as it's kept.


**Mandel:** Well, yeah, I know, I know, but I don't think there's anybody that comes close. But he really honed in on what Swope did the best.

**Kirchner:** Which is what, do you think?

**Mandel:** Swung, and had that kind of a sound, Fontana has that kind of a sound. It's a wide open kind of a sound, with no real shimmer on it; it's a very honest way of playing the instrument. I don't know how you quite describe it. It was the Jack Teagarden approach to the instrument in terms of wide open brassy rural kind of sound. It wasn't smooth like a Tommy Dorsey or even Urbie Green kind of sound, it wasn't that approach to the instrument or Watrous; it was just a real bur in the sound, big round sound.

**Kirchner:** How would you compare say, Bill Harris to them?

**Mandel:** He's another one-of-a-kind, he was incredible, and he was the guy I was listening to before Earl Swope took my head off. So it was great hearing them in, The Second Herd, together, 'cause they loved each other. Bill Harris, nobody ever played like him, before or since, but he was different, he was a much more old fashioned trombone player than Swope was. But he was wonderful, nobody ever sounded like him, he was as unique as Lawrence Brown in his own way; another one that no one ever sounded remotely like. You know there've been

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individuals on the trombone, Tricky Sam Nanton, nobody ever could work a plunger like him. He had the most unique sound of all on the instrument, I have no idea what he sounded like open cause I never heard him, except I know he's a good open player because he worked well in the section. Jack Jenney was an incredible trombone player, as a soloist and as a first, well you know that solo he played on Artie Shaw's "Stardust."

**Kirchner:** [Sings the note] Up to that high F.

**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah. That's the guy.

**Kirchner:** That octave jump

**Mandel:** [sings melody of Stardust] Jack Jenney and Jack Teagarden were those kind of players. Wonderful trombone players. Tommy Dorsey in his day was, perfected that original legato style, it was square but boy did he play well, whooph! And he got a sound out of the instrument that wouldn't quit, but for jazz trombone players I guess there were, there's Jimmy Harrison, Jack Teagarden was probably the great white trombone player of the 20s and 30s.

**Kirchner:** And Miff Mole.

**Mandel:** And Jack Jenney. Miff Mole, great, terribly underrated. Then I guess, Tricky Sam, Lawrence Brown, you know all of Ellington's guys, Dicky Wells, wonderful player.

**Kirchner:** One of your successors with Jimmy Dorsey, Bobby Byrne.

**Mandel:** He was there well before me.


**Kirchner:** Apparently he took over when Tommy left.

**Mandel:** That's right, he did and he was a good trombone player, but he was kind of, sort of like Tommy in that way, you know he was a very good smooth trombone player. Very good musician.

**Kirchner:** And reputedly a better jazz player than Tommy.

**Mandel:** I didn't know – yeah, he wasn't a great jazz player, he had a real good sound though. That was a hard trombone book I'll tell ya, because it was always written for guys who played like Tommy.

**Kirchner:** So you were up in the stratosphere a good deal of the time.

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**Mandel:** That's why I could cut it.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** I took Buddy Morrow's place, Moe Zudekoff.

**Kirchner:** Oh. One of the world's loudest trombone players.

**Mandel:** Good trombone player.

**Kirchner:** Excellent trombone player.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, but...

**Mandel:** I mean those guys, if I had known what I was doing I would never have followed them.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** Yeah, Swope was a phenomenal trombone player, he had the same kind of time, probably the closest time, I could say he had was like Harry Edison's time. It was that, you know, he didn't need any rhythm section, he didn't need anybody else. Sweets was like that, like a one man rhythm section, that's what Swope was like.

**Kirchner:** Did you get to...

**Mandel:** That's why Buddy Rich loved him.


**Kirchner:** Did you two get to be pretty close?

**Mandel:** Very close. Oh yeah, we became very close.

**Kirchner:** Why did he move back to Washington eventually?

**Mandel:** All those guys except for Lamond moved back to Washington. There was something about Washington that kept those guys.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, because I got to be friends with...

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**Mandel:** And also you know there were... yeah, I guess he liked staying home and there was enough work to keep him home.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, I guess what, what did he die – I guess he and his brother died about a year apart in the mid 60s? Yeah, they were both...

**Mandel:** They liked to live.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** And... yeah, they were good partiers, and Rob was a good trombone player.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, Gerry Mulligan talks about having both of the Swope brothers on Elliot Lawrence's band and...

**Mandel:** That's right.

**Kirchner:** He said the unisons were phenomenal.


**Mandel:** Well I was with Buddy Rich first with Earl and then I was there with Rob. We also became very close. That family put out some great trombone players.

**Kirchner:** Were there any others besides those two brothers?

**Mandel:** Oh, there were the two brothers and there was a sister, Belle, I don't think she played anything that I know of. Charlie Walp was a real good trumpet player that came from there and his sister Beth played trombone and she played very well. She and Rob used to play duets all the time.

**Kirchner:** So, let's see, who are some of the other players on Buddy's band that you can recall, there were the Swopes...

**Mandel:** Well in the early band, there weren't any really great soloist except for, let's see, you know we had like, Bitsy Mullins was his trumpet player who was a very good swing style trumpet player of that time. But most of, . . . we had Louis Olds was a trumpet player there, there were a lot of all very good technical trumpet players. We had George Berg, was the tenor player, it was Aaron Sachs for a short time was his clarinet player. And then Tony Scott came in after him and you know Buddy Rich wasn't terribly easy to work for in particularly in those days.

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**Kirchner:** Or any days.

**Mandel:** We hated each other in that first band. By the time I came back to the band, a year later, in '47 after I'd gone to Manhattan School of Music and all, the whole band had changed, he had gotten some real good guys in the band and the whole feeling was different. I was in two bands after that. And we got along great and the last Buddy Rich band I was in was in 1948, when I left to go to California and get my card 'cause I always knew I'd live there. But that's getting ahead of ourselves.

**Kirchner:** Right, but not much.

**Mandel:** So, I was with that first Buddy Rich band, it wasn't a thrilling musical experience, except watching Buddy play, I mean it was just phenomenal in itself; and after that I went with Georgie Auld. I played with Georgie Auld in a number of bands in the spring of '46, summer of '46, then I went with Alvino Rey after George Handy had been there.

**Kirchner:** Now before we get off Buddy, I want to talk about that arrangement you did for him on, "The Song is You," which...

**Mandel:** We did that in the '47 band.

**Kirchner:** Which I think is an amazing arrangement.

**Mandel:** Thank you.

**Kirchner:** Which as you know we're going to use on that Smithsonian big band renaissance 5 CD set that's gonna be out in a few months.


**Mandel:** Oh.

**Kirchner:** The recording that the Joe Timer band did in 1953.

**Mandel:** Ah-ha, well, I was in a very experimental phase then.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, I'd like to talk about that in some depth because it's one of the first instances I know of polyphonic writing in a big band jazz chart.

**Mandel:** Well, that's when I was trying to get as much sound out of a big band that I could. You know I was into, I'd been studying a lot of symphonic scores and even though I didn't write that way I wanted to make all the lines make sense and the only way to hear the individual lines was

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to give everybody a different timbre. So, I'd have all the trumpets in different mutes and trombones in different mutes, I'd have saxophones over clarinets and all kinds, I just did everything. And I wanted to be able to hear the individual's lines moving around.

**Kirchner:** Um-hm, who...

**Mandel:** It's something you can't do when you have a bunch of trumpets and a bunch of trombones because the ear confuses them because the timbres are so close.

**Kirchner:** Who were the classical influences that prompted you to write that way?

**Mandel:** Oh, in those days it was Ravel, Hindemith, Stravinsky, just about anybody I could listen to. I'd been to Manhattan School of Music so I'd listen to a lot of Bach and Beethoven at that time and I was just listening to everybody... Prokofiev, I was being strongly influenced by everything but I don't think I ever copied anything.

**Kirchner:** No, it doesn't sound like it in that chart and you wrote that chart when you were 22 years old.

**Mandel:** I was? I guess so.

**Kirchner:** It's pretty impressive for anybody but for somebody that young it's staggering.


**Mandel:** I remember one thing about that chart, I spent a lot of time on it, but I figured out the whole last part of it when I was walking through Central Park, after getting off work. In those days, in 1947 you could walk through Central Park at four or five in the morning and I figured that whole ending out as I was walking through where the cross-town traffic goes. By the time I got to the other end of the park I had it figured, all I had to do was go home and write it.

**Kirchner:** Because just the modulations alone, you start out in D-flat, eight bars later you modulate to G.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** And then finish the first chorus in G. And then you go through a whole series of modulations, you go up to C then chromatically C, D flat, D, E flat, E.

**Mandel:** I didn't know that.

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**Kirchner:** And then that takes you half way to the second part of the bridge and the melody note is E and the chord is A-minor, which puts you back in the original key of D flat. And then you modulated G flat and then finally modulated again and finish the chart in F.

**Mandel:** I know I finished it in F.

**Kirchner:** I sat down about a year ago and just consciously figured this out and it took me a while to just find out exactly what you were doing, but once I did, it was just like, 'Jesus!'

**Mandel:** Well I wouldn't mind had having copies of a lot of things I did in those days, but in those days you never had copies, you wrote the original – that's why music is so hard to find because the Xerox hadn't been invented, there was no way to make a copy. And anybody that bought your stuff, owned it, so you gave them the scores and most of the time I never saw them again.

**Kirchner:** Would you believe I played with a band in D.C. fifteen years ago that had a copy of that chart.

**Mandel:** Somebody that actually took a score to that chart?

**Kirchner:** No, as far as I know it was the original copied parts, I think somebody maybe had made a Xerox of the Joe Timer Band's copy of it.

**Mandel:** Oh, uh-huh.

**Kirchner:** And as a matter of fact, I got this guy to give me a Xerox of the Xerox and then I gave it to my friend Bill Schremp so he's got a copy of it. I played the chart.

**Mandel:** I don't know whatever happened to the score, I think all those guys got their copies right from the parts, somebody took them out of the books and copied them over night and brought them back.


**Kirchner:** Right.

**Mandel:** I don't think they ever took it off the score.

**Kirchner:** Right.

**Mandel:** Although they could have 'cause I always wrote transposed in those days.

**Kirchner:** Yeah the score is probably long gone.

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**Mandel:** Oh, I can't imagine what happened to it.

**Kirchner:** 'Cause in those days it was common practice of course for arrangers when you wrote a chart for a band, you gave the leader the score and the copied parts and if you were lucky you got paid and that was the end of it.

**Mandel:** Sure, yeah, you were lucky if you got paid. It reminds me of whatever happened to the score, when he was real sick, you know about the time just shortly before he died, Chauncey Welsch, he had played in the band, he wasn't with me but he went to see Buddy and they were talking about all the old days and Chauncey said, "God, sure was nice playing those Johnny Mandel arrangements," and Buddy says, "Sure was, I loved those," and he says, "You got them, you still have them?" And Buddy says, "sure," he points at the night table and says, "Right over there."

[They both laugh]

**Kirchner:** It would seem to me, if I were to pick a band that you would have written that chart for Buddy's was one of the most unlikely.

**Mandel:** Unlikely! I was just gonna write that chart, I didn't care where I was.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** And then Buddy, thinking in terms of showmanship had everybody when they had a part, stand-up and so it was the most ridiculous thing you ever saw. Anybody who had an entrance stood-up and when they got done playing the entrance they sat down. So it looked like musical chairs when they played it.

**Kirchner:** It must have looked like the Nairobi trio.


**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah.

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** But he played it.

**Kirchner:** Did he play it for dances?

**Mandel:** Yeah. It wasn't really very good dance music but that's what we did. No, I mean, it didn't go out of tempo, as a matter of fact it would have been better if I hadn't been so

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constrained by that, you know, that gave it kind of a stiff sound. But in those days you had to play for dancers.

**Kirchner:** I'd like to hear it with say a more contemporary rhythm section with a looser feel.

**Mandel:** Much looser.

**Kirchner:** So what else did you write for him?

**Mandel:** Oh, a lot of stuff.

**Kirchner:** Anything that got recorded?

**Mandel:** I don't know, I wrote a lot of things... I wrote some originals, I can't remember a lot of the stuff I wrote. You know people mention them to me and it sort of comes back and I wonder if I wrote it or dreamt it. The strangest experience, maybe you've heard this from guys like Ralph Burns, is when you send an arrangement in and you never hear it played live... if you hear it played back years later, it's the most eerie feeling in the world because you're not sure if you wrote it or you dreamt it.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** Very strange, it's like a totally incomplete feeling 'cause usually you write something and after I've written something I totally forget how it goes, until I hear it played back again at rehearsal, then it all comes back like boom. Even today when I record, I walk in the studio, I can't remember what I wrote but I have instant recall the minute I hear it played back, so if I don't hear it played back... For years, I used to send a lot of things out with acts, I'd send them out to bands when I stayed in New York, when I stayed here. I'd hear it back and it's a very strange feeling.


**Kirchner:** I can imagine.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Do you have a phonographic memory?

**Mandel:** No, oh you mean as far as if I've heard something once?

**Kirchner:** Um-hm.

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**Mandel:** I remember an awful lot of music from when I was five, six years old, seven years old. I remember the arrangements, things like that, I didn't know what they were then but then I started thinking back and I realized that if I heard something being played on the phonograph. In those days, rather than change records they'd play the same thing over and over. So I'd get to hear it without realizing it, this is when I was basically no more than an infant, I was a toddler when I was hearing this stuff. So I can very well remember 1928, 1927 arrangements from when I was a kid. I remember the key it was in although I didn't know that at the time, all that.

**Kirchner:** That's amazing.

**Mandel:** It's not something I tried to do, it just happened.

**Kirchner:** It's just natural talent.

**Mandel:** Whatever it is, yeah, I remember songs that haven't ever been heard since, I didn't know what they were but I could play them.

**Kirchner:** So you mentioned that sandwiched into your different stints with Buddy you went to Manhattan School of Music.


**Mandel:** Yeah, I decided there was just too much I didn't know, too many gaps and I wanted to get off the road. I did for the better part of a year. Went to Manhattan.

**Kirchner:** This is around '47?

**Mandel:** That's exactly when it was. After I left Alvino I just, that rounded out '47, that was the end of '46, that's right. And you know what, when I left Alvino that was right in the same couple of weeks when all the big bands broke up, the whole bottom fell out of the business.

**Kirchner:** Late '46.

**Mandel:** Benny Goodman, Woody, Charlie Barnet all these people gave up their bands within – all of a sudden it seems like the whole war-time thing, everybody coming home, everybody stopped going out to dances. And the whole band business fell apart, but that isn't why I did it, I was going to do what I did anyhow, by then I had decided I really don't know much of anything and I want to go to school. And that's when I went in and started filling in a lot of the classical music that I had missed and I always felt the first thing you should learn is jazz, at least for myself and I still tell students that because you can always learn the other but you can't do it in

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reverse. You can't start out as a classical guy and learn jazz it's not something you can learn I don't think. I mean I've seen people try to do a passable job of it, but...

**Kirchner:** That's as good as it gets, a passable job.

**Mandel:** It's not something that comes naturally.

**Kirchner:** Yeah. So before we get into that too much we skipped Georgie Auld and Alvino Rey.

**Mandel:** Yeah well... well Georgie Auld was a fun band to play in, it was kind of, again a real swinging band. Georgie had a very good book, he was fun to work with, he was a great player himself, we had a lot of good charts, Al Cohn, Manny Albam, Bud Johnson, all kinds of people. Fun stuff to play, Georgie was a good guy and then I went with Alvino.

**Kirchner:** When were you with Georgie?


**Mandel:** That period in '46 between that first Buddy Rich band and Alvino. And we were doing mostly one nighters, working out of New York going all over the place at that time. And I went with Alvino and stayed there for the rest of the year.

**Kirchner:** Do you remember a George Handy chart called, "Stocking Horse?"

**Mandel:** Sure do, well George got me in the band, he wasn't in the band himself but he wrote for it. Yeah, "Stocking Horse," and a few other things and there were so totally atypical of the band. It was another one of those bands that wasn't much fun to play in, except Alvino was a wonderful guy. Hell of a Spanish guitar player, and he was an inventor, he was at least as good as an inventor anytime as Les Paul. He invented the foot pedal guitar, that was his baby, never got credit for it and Alvino was one of these guys who always wanted to try everything so he'd let George write, I was playing bass trumpet by then, I'd picked that up alongside the trombone, so he decided he had to have four of them.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** In fact, that band we went into was his first pre-war band... it was a huge band, it was gigantic, he had five saxophones but he had ten brass and the whole idea of the ten brass was, he liked to go for color too. And he decided wouldn't it be nice, he had Billy May writing the early charts for him, I mean the early post-war charts, wouldn't it be nice if we had 5 brass section open, like 3 trumpets and 2 trombones and another one in mutes and they could all play together

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in ensembles we'd have 10 brass. Well it was like again, playing in a cement mixture, except some of the arrangements were good. It's always nice having 4 trombones. I never really liked anything less.

**Kirchner:** Was he influenced by Kenton's popularity at the time you think?

**Mandel:** No, Alvino was... Alvino was a guy that sort of was another one I've never met anything like. He loved novelties, I mean look, he had the King Sisters, not then, he had Luise, this was during the period when the King Sisters all had gotten married, were having their babies, all the people that became the King family.

**Kirchner:** Right.

**Mandel:** And...

**Kirchner:** And he married one of them right?

**Mandel:** Yeah, Luise and she played harp in the band. Great, great girl, they're all great people. And they're all from Iowa, Salt Lake City and that area.


**Kirchner:** From Utah you mean.

**Mandel:** Utah, I mean, yeah, from Utah, I meant. And, oh God, it was a funny band, we partied a lot. Alvino didn't, but Alvino... like when I joined the band, here's a typical, Alvino was really out there, but in a way I've never met before. I always thought of him as a little guy who played the Spanish guitar, you'd see these pictures and I wasn't prepared for what I met when I met Alvino, he was a guy about six foot five and his real name was Alvin McBurney, from Fremont, Ohio. I always thought he was like a Spanish guy, you know played the Spanish Guitar and all, not at all, and he was trying to learn how to ride a unicycle so that he could ride up to the microphone and announce numbers playing the guitar at the same time.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** So we'd be off in intermissions and all of a sudden you'd feel somebody grab you by the shoulders and that was sort of part of the band he was trying to like, you know, get support, he used to practice in-between sets. And everybody, it was a cause for a lot of laughing and Alvino was always a good natured guy, and sort of put an end to that by slipping a disc and that ended his unicycle riding career.

**Kirchner:** That'll do it.

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**Mandel:** But, you know, Alvino was out there, and he was a great inventor, he could take anything apart, he used to, we'd do remote broadcasts he'd set it up and mix the whole thing himself, cause the remote engineers were always terrible. You can hear some of those broadcasts that came live from bands and you realize how bad they were. Alvino always made sure they were right, he knew electronics inside out and he was a very good musician and a really good guy to work for. So, I kind of got tired of that music and decided to just go to school and that's what I did.

**Kirchner:** So how long...

**Mandel:** I learned about writing fugues and three voice counterpoint and things like that and kind of took what I wanted and didn't take what I didn't. 'Cause I didn't like the formalized kind of starchy atmosphere in schools then, Manhattan since then has had wonderful programs.

**Kirchner:** Oh yeah.

**Mandel:** Then they wouldn't even let me in because I hadn't had a classical grounding, the fact that I had played in all these bands meant nothing to them, I had to camp outside the school for two days. I'd said, "I'm just gonna sit myself on the doorstep and not leave, until you let me in," they let me in to get rid of me. Then I discovered there was another two jazz musicians in there, but they were, you know, good classical musicians. It was Dick Katz was playing piano, he was going, we became very friendly after that and Russ Savakus, bass player.

**Kirchner:** Was John Lewis there at the time?

**Mandel:** No. No one else had come yet.


**Kirchner:** But he went there shortly thereafter?

**Mandel:** Shortly thereafter, yeah. And then of course they got a jazz department and all the rest but not then, this was when they were way over on 3<sup>rd</sup> avenue, between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> on 106<sup>th</sup> street. And about September or so, I went to Juilliard for a summer session too and...

**Kirchner:** This is '47?

**Mandel:** '47, and in the fall I was starting to get restless again and wanted to get on the road again and Buddy Rich and all those guys said come on back and by then it was a totally different band. And I came back.

**Kirchner:** How long did you stay that time?

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**Mandel:** I stayed... I really stayed for about a year, until the end of '48. Not the very end, until about September or October, that's right, and... we came out to California with the band and played the Palladium, and played a number of places and went to San Francisco and I left after San Francisco only because I wanted to stay there and get my card. I didn't want to go back to New York.

**Kirchner:** Before we touch on going to L.A. I know that you were pretty heavily involved with that Gil Evans circle.

**Mandel:** Yes.

**Kirchner:** And I'd like to talk in some detail about that.

**Mandel:** In fact if I hadn't gone to L.A. at that time, I would have been on the original, *Birth of the Cool*, records. I would have been the trombone player although I didn't know it at the time somebody told me later.

**Kirchner:** Yeah Mulligan told me that recently.

**Mandel:** He told you that? That's...

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Oh, and you told me that, I didn't know that.

**Kirchner:** Uh, huh.

**Mandel:** Yeah, oh yeah, 'cause Gerry and I used to hang very tight.

**Kirchner:** Now at that time what you were playing bass trumpet you weren't playing slide trombone anymore?


**Mandel:** No I was playing slide trombone too.

**Kirchner:** Okay but...

**Mandel:** When I'd blow, I'd gotten so I'd liked playing bass trumpet better, at that time.

**Kirchner:** 'Cause Gerry said that they were preparing to have you play bass trumpet.

**Mandel:** Yeah, well I could move around a lot better than you could with a slide, you know.

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**Kirchner:** How would you describe the difference between a bass trumpet and a valve trombone?

**Mandel:** There is no difference except the way they are bored out, it's like trying to describe the difference between a trumpet and a flugelhorn. A bass trumpet as it turns out, I was young enough and dumb enough to try and play it. Cy Touff still tries to and he plays it very well.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** But, I found it later on to be terribly unrewarding instrument 'cause it's got so damn much resistance and it's bored out almost all, two-thirds cylindrical, one-third conical like a regular trumpet, except double the size. Too much resistance, it saps your strength and doesn't give anything back, whereas I have a marching trombone now even though I don't play which is like, Al Grey plays it, it's like a bass flugelhorn. It's a lovely thing to play and the valve trombone is a nice instrument to play. I'd say the valve trombone is by far a better instrument to play than the bass trumpet, that's why so few people played them.

**Kirchner:** So how did you get involved with Gil and that whole circle of people?

**Mandel:** Oh, strangely enough the first person to bring me around, I lived right on the other side of the block of Gil and I didn't know they were all there and I didn't know Gil or anything.

**Kirchner:** Gil was on West 55<sup>th</sup> right?

**Mandel:** Yeah and I lived on 54<sup>th</sup> and I didn't know it, I was still living with my mother at the time and... Blossom Dearie who I had been in Alvino Rey's group with, she came in as the lead singer. She had been with Woody before that and I just didn't believe her.

**Kirchner:** I can't imagine her as a band singer.

**Mandel:** She was, she was the lead singer in the group the, Blue Reys.


**Kirchner:** Really? With that tiny little voice?

**Mandel:** It was a wonderful pure voice.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** She was seventeen years old for God sakes, looked like a milkmaid.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

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**Mandel:** A little Norwegian milkmaid from upstate New York. She came out full blown, she could play the piano, she could sing, she had a very – her pitch was so great, that she was wonderful on top of the group. And yeah, that’s what she was doing first.

**Kirchner:** So she introduced you to Gil?

**Mandel:** She told me about Gil Evans, oh you gotta meet Gil Evans, I said, “great,” and I fell in love with Gil immediately.

**Kirchner:** You’d heard the stuff he had written for, Thornhill then?

**Mandel:** I had, but not a whole lot. I loved Thornhill’s band and I guess there was more Gil then I knew. Then I got to know Gil and Gerry and I had been hanging around since 1945, I met him when he was still with Krupa and had written, “Disc Jockey Jump.” We were with Georgie Auld’s small band together for a while in ‘47. There were a lot of bands interspersed in there, Georgie Auld for a while didn’t have a big band, he had a small band with Serge Chaloff and with Gerry and... I can’t remember everybody, it was like a nine piece band sort of like the Tentet. We were all experimenting with smaller instrumentations because people were finding it easier to get work with smaller groups than the standard big sized one. From about ‘47 on and... that’s right it was sort of also a forerunner of what became the cool sound, you know there’d be one trumpet, one trombone, three saxophone bands, you’d have a five or six man frontline.


[Begin CD 3]

**Kirchner:** So... we were talking about Gil Evans and...

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, so, I fell very much into Gil Evan’s orbit. I never wrote like him although there’re people who have compared us but it’s partly because I always liked to write across the orchestra and it turns out he did too because we listened to, I guess we listened to the same classical composers and liked mixing the colors. Don’t forget the palette of the orchestra, the whole idea of the alchemy that happens when you combine instruments is the first thing that drew me into music. And so I wouldn’t be surprised if that’s the first thing that got to Gil. So, we didn’t write similarly but we both had shared that particular thing of liking to write across the orchestra, Ellington wrote across the orchestra too, you know...

**Kirchner:** Sure.

**Mandel:** What I mean, writing across the orchestra in the traditional sense of writing for the orchestra in say the kind of tradition laid down, say, by the early practitioners like Don Redman,

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**Kirchner:** And he was writing for the sounds of the individual players.

**Mandel:** Sound of the instruments, he'd write them in unfamiliar registers that you don't usually associate that instrument with and all that kind of thing. And that was the first example in jazz of writing across the orchestra as opposed to writing the ordinary section answering. You know Basie's band always had sections answering sections in the traditional pattern of bands, like Benny Goodman's band. And Ellington was one of a kind, and I know Gil listened to Ellington and I certainly did.

**Kirchner:** Just to interject, what did you think of Eddie Sauter's writing?

**Kirchner:** Um-hm.

**Mandel:** The idea of combining, and not traditional classical, classical from late romantic to impressionistic on. Cause we were writing basically like the impressionistic painters painted, which of course was what Ravel wrote like and Debussy and Delius, and these are people I know Gil liked.

**Kirchner:** And early Stravinsky.

**Mandel:** And early Stravinsky, yeah.

**Kirchner:** And Prokofiev.

**Mandel:** Yep, that's right. And I was drawn to it, Mulligan was drawn to it, Gil was drawn to it, and Gil was a generation ahead of us 'cause I remember when I was in my early 20s, Gil was 39 years old. I said, "Good God how can anybody be that old?"

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** He's almost 40! I mean when you're 40, you're done. I remember saying that to him once, I said, "Gil," he says, "Yeah, I guess I got a year to go."

[They both laugh]

**Kirchner:** So did you hang out a lot with all those people who hung out in his apartment?

**Mandel:** You bet.

**Kirchner:** Behind the Chinese laundry?

**Mandel:** Yep, behind the Chinese laundry, exactly, below the Chinese laundry.

**Kirchner:** It was a basement right?


**Mandel:** It was a basement apartment, yeah.

**Kirchner:** So what was that like?

**Mandel:** Kind of dank and airless, but who cares, it went twenty-four hours a day, music played, Gil was a bachelor, he had nobody living with him but a cat named Becky. And we were there, you know he was sort of like a big den mother, he loved being with the younger guys, he didn't care about at all with being with his contemporaries, which was another generation really. And he was anything but a father figure.

**Kirchner:** He said of that period, I guess, that he wanted what he called, "musical companionship," because he said he hadn't had much of it.

**Mandel:** Yeah, he sure did, he wanted musical companionship and he wanted to hear what everybody had to say. That's the way Gil was, he was one of the most giving individuals I think I ever met, just of himself and of letting everything in, wanting everything in new. He was still writing for Claude [Thornhill] and he was doing all those... you know incorporating bop into the band, and it was a good band, people like Gene Williams was in the band singing, it was a good band.

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**Kirchner:** And Fran Warren.

**Mandel:** Yeah, Lee Konitz. He had some...

**Kirchner:** Barry Galbraith.

**Mandel:** Yeah, right, Barry, Billy Exner, he had...

**Kirchner:** Joel Shulman was the bass player.

**Mandel:** Joel Shulman, right, good bass player he was. He was with Buddy Rich's first band with me too, I forgot about him. Great bass player. Had a wonderful big round sound, he had just come back from being overseas with the premier Glenn Miller Orchestra, in the army band along with all those guys, you know.

**Kirchner:** I read somewhere a nice story about Thornhill's rhythm section with Gil instead of Claude would rent studio time up at Nola's and just go up there and do nothing but play time.

**Mandel:** We used to do that all the time, I mean I didn't do it with those guys but we spent our lives up at Nola's, just paying for rooms and rehearsing. Or having sessions, we'd rent a room and have a session.

**Kirchner:** So, just, let's talk more about the experiences you had hanging out with all those people at Gil's. Who were some of the people that you encountered?

**Mandel:** Oh, funny thing is I never crossed paths with Miles, in those days. We were just never there at the same time. But God, all the guys from Claude's band, Blossom of course, Gerry all the time and I got there as much as I could... I really just wanted to be there. I can't think of, Russ Savakus, the bass player used to be there all the time, he later played with Claude.


**Kirchner:** John Benson Brooks?

**Mandel:** Yeah, John Benson Brooks for sure. Dave Lambert.

**Kirchner:** Who was Sylvia Goldberg?

**Mandel:** Who?

**Kirchner:** Mulligan mentioned in notes he wrote to a reissue of the, *Birth of the Cool* album, he mentioned a Sylvia Goldberg who was part of that.

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**Mandel:** I didn't know her, but don't forget I was in California by that time, that's how I missed the album, I was getting my card.

**Kirchner:** So, how well did you get to know Gil? Or what did you talk about with him?

**Mandel:** Everything under the sun, of course in those days I really never talked about anything much but music. I still don't really, much. I like to talk about music.

**Kirchner:** Was Charlie Parker in and out of there?

**Mandel:** Now and then, now and then, it wasn't that he would have been, when he was in town he would.

**Kirchner:** Right.

**Mandel:** But Charlie was, you know, really partying pretty much all the time. And he was a serious erudite kind of guy, Charlie was, and he was funny, he was serious but he was funny; but Charlie never really hung. He wasn't a hanger like we were hanging, we were like still kids, really. Gil was the only elder statesman...


**Kirchner:** Charlie was a little older...

**Mandel:** And some of the guys like Billy Exner, and those guys were older but we were all in our early 20s you know, it was day and night with us. We'd sit down there, listen to music, get stoned, play music, smoke a lot of pot, that's all we did. I was just gonna say, ending this whole thing that Gil was – it was sort of like a hot house, Gil was very, such a nurturing influence and he just let everybody be and if it wasn't in his apartment this whole thing probably wouldn't have come to fruition. Gil liked to have that sort of thing around him.

**Kirchner:** So, I get the impression from that time that it was, that several composers, well like you, like John Lewis, like Gil, like John Carisi, like George Russell and there was just an interplay between all of you and...

**Mandel:** Very much so, George Russell was another one that was down there all the time and John, yeah John Lewis. Although John was on the road with Dizzy's big band quite a bit then. Yeah, that's, we were all there, we were, that's who was there. Diz would come around once in a while and he was one of those guys like Gil too, he nurtured people, he was so open and giving himself and it was just wonderful to be around these people.

**Kirchner:** If you could put a finger on it, what do you think you got from all of that?

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**Mandel:** Cross-pollinization of ideas, from different people.

**Kirchner:** Anything that particularly comes to mind?

**Mandel:** No, no, just being in a very good time and place for music.

**Kirchner:** Now we were just talking about something that you said you'd like to get down, we were talking about Sonny Berman.

**Mandel:** Well Sonny Berman, you know was with Woody's First Herd, and he was – not the band that played the blues but the, you know the first Bill Harris band, that band that...

**Kirchner:** Flip Phillips.

**Mandel:** We used to call the, Wild Root band, you know, had the Wild Root commercial radio show at that time. And it was the first big Woody Herman band that was really happening, you know, "Your Father's Moustache," "Northwest Passage," "Caldonia," band.

**Kirchner:** "Apple Honey."

**Mandel:** "Apple Honey," all that stuff and Sonny Berman was in it and he was one of the early stars. And he was the first one of the group to ever die from – and it's like I think everybody goes through this, the first one of your crowd in high school or in college that, you always think you're immortal until one of your own dies. And Sonny was the first one to go and all of a sudden it became, you started realizing *that* was possible and... I don't know, everybody remembers Sonny as the first one but they also remember him as a marvelous trumpet player and extremely funny man. No telling where he would have gone, he was just a great showman.


**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** He was a comedian, tremendous comic.

**Kirchner:** Do you think there's some people who were deterred from hard drugs because of what happened to him, whom might otherwise have...

**Mandel:** I was, that's for damn sure, I never got close to them because... I just saw that it had to be terribly tempting stuff because of what it was doing to people and what they were giving up to do it. And it's probably the only smart thing I ever did, I said, "I'll take their word for it."

**Kirchner:** [laughs] So in the midst...

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**Mandel:** And that was, you've got to realize too now, we're talking here in 1995. Drugs were not--especially heavy IV [intravenous] type drugs,--were not parcel of jazz and the band business except for a very short time. Starting from about 1943 and going maybe for another ten years max. There were people who were into it longer than that, into the 50s and 60s but really, no, it sort of had run its course and run through the music business and got out on the streets and by then jazz musicians really stopped using drugs. Certainly those kind of drugs, they didn't do that kind of thing at all after a while. It ran through the whole music business like a plague and it was a terrible thing to see happen but it did come and leave like plagues do. It's not typical of what jazz has been all its life...

**Kirchner:** No.


**Mandel:** At all, it was just an anomaly that happened for that period of time. I mean let's face it jazz musicians really were always good drinkers, and...

**Kirchner:** A number still are.

**Mandel:** They are, and jazz flourished and was born in that atmosphere, not drugs, per se. Jazz started off being happy music and liquor done in moderation was always happy stuff. And, I mean generally, you know except for people who couldn't drink, and those kind of drugs are not happy, they make people depressed, IV drugs. So, you know, thank God it came and it went and it would have been better if it had never come 'cause it ruined a lot of people.

**Kirchner:** Absolutely. So in the midst of all this you decided to go out to L.A. and get your L.A. union card correct?

**Mandel:** Yeah, when I first went there when I was eight, I'd always hated New York but I didn't realize it, and when I got there I said, "My God, there is such a place as this, there's grass and there's trees, and it's nice and I want to live here when I grow up," it was simply like that. And by the time I went back to New York though I was so enthralled in music by the time I was thirteen or fourteen, I didn't care about what New York was, 'cause I didn't have to play in the schoolyard anymore and that sort of thing. I went away to school and came back to New York and I'd just, it was music all the time, so I didn't mind the noise and the dirt so much. But I always knew I'd live in California later on when I could... So, you know in those days getting a union card was a big deal, now people wonder what you're talking about, in the 40s what they call your first union is your home local and in those days when you wanted to come into New York say and become a New York musician and going to California and become a California musician say if you were from Omaha or something, the unions in both those places and in

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Chicago which was the national headquarters of the musicians union, they were all very protectionist because they had the top jobs the real plums, the theater jobs, the radio station jobs and in California even worse because the movie studio jobs. And they didn't want anybody coming in from – they wanted to make it as hard as they could for anybody to come in from other towns. And when you came, you couldn't work at your profession for six months, and then you could only in the first three months you couldn't work at all and the second three months you could take casuals but you could never take a steady job. So, at first guys used to come in with bands, put in their union card and leave town and pretty soon they got wise to that so they used to send goons around, I'm not kidding, they sent people around to check at your house. And I remember two days short of getting my card I had a job with Skinnay Ennis' band, which was a real nice band, Bud Shank was in it, and a few people like that and I couldn't take it because it was two days before my six months were up, so I couldn't leave town with the band. And they were really rigid, but I got the card and heard the *Birth of the Cool* sounds, which freaked me out at the time I couldn't wait to get back to New York to see what was happening.

**Kirchner:** So you had spend just the six months in L.A. just long enough?

**Mandel:** Yeah, the minute I got my card, I left town because I knew I'd use it later, and I did.

**Kirchner:** So you went back to New York, say, early '49.


**Mandel:** Yes, exactly, yeah around March or April, immediately got a job in Chubby Jackson's band up at Bop City with Tiny Kahn, you know a real swinging band. And that was, Woody was in-between bands at that time, he had broken up the Second Herd, the First Herd and hadn't... wait a minute...

**Kirchner:** The end of '49 he...

**Mandel:** I'm wrong about that, he had the Second Herd in '47, 'cause that's when they made, "Four Brothers."

**Kirchner:** Late '47...

**Mandel:** Because Al Cohn left Buddy Rich when I was with him in '47 to go with Woody and the Second Herd had already started, which I think was really one of the best bands I've ever heard play at any given time. In fact it came out to California to play the Empire room while I was getting my card, and I wasn't able to work so I wrote for the band, that's when I wrote, "Not Really the Blues," and a bunch of those things.

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**Kirchner:** Was that the only one that was recorded?

**Mandel:** That's the only one that was recorded but I wrote quite a few others, but boy when that band played your music. [whistles]

**Kirchner:** Supposedly, "Not really the Blues," was one of the band's favorite charts.

**Mandel:** And they didn't play it, Woody wouldn't play it for about a year or two years 'cause Bill Harris didn't want to read it, couldn't, Bill was not one of the great readers. And he knew it so he had a complex about it and it looked like a lot of notes, but I was a trombone player so I knew it laid, I knew it was an easy thing to play on the trombone cause the trombones had the ball for the whole first part of the song. In fact the faster you played that song and I tailored it that way when I wrote it, the easier it was to play, it was really meant to [sings trombone part] it's supposed to go as fast as, "The Champ," if you remember that? That's how fast it's supposed to go. They pulled it out and recorded at a much slower tempo, and it wasn't nearly as good as it could have been, but that was one of those that I never heard until years later on the road, I mean, you know after they recorded it.

**Kirchner:** Right.

**Mandel:** They started pulling it out after Woody left for the night, like the last set Sam Marowitz used to call tunes and they started calling that, and they really liked playing it and Woody recorded it later.

**Kirchner:** Supposedly John Carisi originally wrote, "Israel," for that band.

**Mandel:** He did? I didn't know that.

**Kirchner:** That's what he said, in Gitler's book as a matter of fact. Apparently they never...


**Mandel:** It would not have fit that band at all.

**Kirchner:** They never played it, so he rewrote it for the, *Birth of the Cool* band.

**Mandel:** And it was perfect.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** I mean it was wonderful anyway but it wasn't the kind of thing Woody was into, he was into much more of a straight swinging kind of thing. Mulligan was writing more

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esoterically too, which is why he and Woody never really hit it off. I mean they probably hit it off as people but, you know, we were all much more interested in experimenting then. And Woody allowed you to do things but if stuff got too linear and too... that's why Woody and Eddie Sauter never hit it off, whereas Artie and Eddie Sauter did. The strangest thing was Benny and Eddie Sauter but that was kind of shotgun wedding, it just so happened that it was Benny's new band in 19... when was it?

**Kirchner:** '40, '41.

**Mandel:** Yeah I'd say '41, '42, the Lou McGarity band that Peggy Lee came into and Mel Powell and it was just a good atmosphere and they gave Sauter a lot of support.

**Kirchner:** Did you get to know Eddie at all?

**Mandel:** Never got to know Eddie and I was always such an admirer of his, he was wonderful.

**Kirchner:** I did, I interviewed him for this program 15 years ago.

**Mandel:** I think I met him once through Manny Albam but I was shy you know, and it was just in passing, I never really got to sit down and talk to Eddie.

**Kirchner:** You two would have enjoyed that, you know, you were kindred spirits.

**Mandel:** I bet we would have.

**Kirchner:** I'll tell you more about that on our own time.

**Mandel:** Ah-ha.


**Kirchner:** But take my word for it.

**Mandel:** Listen anybody who wrote like that... really quite something.

**Kirchner:** The interesting thing about Woody although he might not have liked linear things eventually got to like Bill Holman a lot.

**Mandel:** Yeah well Bill Holman is the only guy who could write linear like that and have it swing madly. Bill was one of swingiest writers of all.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

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**Mandel:** But he's the only one that got away with all those unisons and all those lines cause he knew how to make them, they sounded improvised the way he wrote them. Holman has the most – he's a hero of mine too, I just love Bill Holman's writing, --and nobody even begins to write like Holman, he's totally different.

**Kirchner:** Yeah totally unique, although I think he got a lot of inspiration from hearing Mulligan's charts on, "Swing House," and, "Young Blood," for Kenton because...

**Mandel:** He very well might have, "Young Blood," was a marvelous chart...

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Good God.

**Kirchner:** Because Bill said in print that, apparently, he was playing in Kenton's band at the time and after Mulligan brought those two charts in and also, "Walking Shoes," and...

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** And Kenton recorded, "Swing House," and, "Young Blood," that kind of opened his eyes, Bill's eyes about what could be done for Kenton that wasn't along the lines of what had already been done.

**Mandel:** Yeah, but Bill... I never heard anybody that could swing lines like Bill Holman can. They just sound so natural, Mulligan loved Holman too.

**Kirchner:** Sure, absolutely.

**Mandel:** Why not?

**Kirchner:** Yeah, kindred spirits again.

**Mandel:** Yeah... we were all kindred spirits in those days and everybody loved Tiny Kahn and Al Cohn.

**Kirchner:** Well, this is probably a good time to talk about Tiny Kahn in depth isn't it?

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** You met him with Henry Jerome originally right?

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**Mandel:** Uh-huh.

**Kirchner:** So, you met him again on Chubby Jackson's band?

**Mandel:** Well I met – no, there wasn't a big gap there, Tiny and I from 1945 on we all got very close. Tiny was writing arrangements and starting to write arrangements and he played some piano and he played drums and he was the most natural musician I've ever known. Everything he did swung he just didn't know how not to, and everything he wrote was just right. Never wrote a bad note, I don't know how he learned to write for the orchestra, he was just a natural.

**Kirchner:** Just totally self-taught right?

**Mandel:** Totally self-taught, just a marvelous drummer and one of the funniest men I've ever known, one the nicest guys I've ever known, he was just a giant of a man.

**Kirchner:** Literally.

**Mandel:** Yeah, literally and in every way. They say that of Big Sid Catlett too.

**Kirchner:** Um-hm, so how close did you and Tiny get?


**Mandel:** Very, very and we all hung out twenty-four hours a day in those days, you know, it was we were on the road a lot and you know in different bands, we just... I don't know, Bird [Charlie Parker] and Diz used to hang out like that when they were together, you just... we literally inhaled music all our lives, all of us.

**Kirchner:** What do you think you and Tiny got from each other?

**Mandel:** He liked the way I voice led and I liked the way he swung and I picked up a lot rhythmically from him, I think... a whole lot, and we were both Count Basie freaks.

**Kirchner:** I'll tell you a short interesting story that I think will illustrate something. A few years ago a friend of mine just did a blind fold test on me and played me an aircheck arrangement of, "Over the Rainbow," for Charlie Barnet's 1949 band and my friend said, "Who do you think wrote that chart?" And I said, "Johnny Mandel," and my friend said, "No, but you're close, it was Tiny Kahn."

**Mandel:** Um-hm. Thank you, whoever said it. Yeah... yeah, we had an affinity for one another musically, we really did.

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**Kirchner:** And the two of you and Al Cohn ended up writing...

**Mandel:** And Al Cohn too.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, the three of you ended up writing for Elliot Lawrence a lot.

**Mandel:** Yeah, and all played with him too.

**Kirchner:** How did that come about?

**Mandel:** Elliot wanted us.

**Kirchner:** And could afford to pay all three of you I take it?

**Mandel:** Yeah, well, we were in the band, I started writing for the band and then later joined it. It was a nice band, Elliot let us get the guys we wanted, eventually got Al Porcino in there, got... you know Buddy Jones was playing bass, it was a nice band. We had Tiny and Buddy Jones was good we never really had a rhythm section though 'cause Elliot was no help. Best thing Elliot ever did was conduct; he was a very good conductor.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Hell of a good conductor, that was his real talent, and a neat guy...

**Kirchner:** Later on...


**Mandel:** But we didn't have a guitar and that band needed one, it should've, you know we needed a guy like Turk Van Lake or Sam Herman, somebody like that.

**Kirchner:** Oh, I...

**Mandel:** 'Cause the kind of music we played, I think Woody's band really should have had a guitar. There's a lot of guys that are very hardheaded about three-piece rhythm sections though, that I still argue with Terry Gibbs that he should have had in the Dream Band, he should have had four rhythm. He said, "Nah, it was a bebop band, I like three rhythm." If you had the right guitar player it wouldn't matter, if you're playing that kind of big band jazz music.

**Kirchner:** If you had a Barry Galbraith.

**Mandel:** Yeah, if you had the right guy, if you had you know, Freddie Green, anybody like that, it's only going to help. But still everybody was into not having the straight four-four, you know

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the drummer's all had their foot in their hip pocket. Tiny didn't, but a lot of the others did and they wanted to be hip and they thought for a long time the guitar was thought to be very un-hip, from about '44, '45 on. That's why Woody dropped it... the guys in the Second Herd didn't want it, but as good as that band sounded, I think it would have even sounded better with the right guitar player and I think that's the best white band that ever played music, I really do. Stan Getz was telling me not too long before he died, he said, "You know something, that band, from the very first note we sat down and played, was just right." Everybody immediately fell in love with that band, 'cause it was right from the very first note... and I can see that, 'cause every one of those guys was perfect. I mean look, you've got Stan Fishelson, Bernie Glow, Shorty [Rogers], Conte [Candoli] and...

**Kirchner:** Red Rodney.

**Mandel:** And Ernie Royal.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.


**Mandel:** I think... I think Red came in for Shorty or came in for Conte or something like that.

**Kirchner:** For Conte I think.

**Mandel:** Yeah and you know, first it was just, Earl Swope, Ollie Wilson, who was wonderful and Bob Swift. And then Bill Harris came back and that gave them four and those four trombones really sounded like something, and you had all those great saxophone players, you know it's just that band when they blew, they made a noise from note one that was just incredible. And you had two guys that you could always tune up to, one was Stan Fishelson and the other was Earl Swope, when you played with Swope, if you weren't with him, you never tuned up to him, you just played with him, cause they were both – he led the brass section, Swope did, without trying to. You just gauged on him, unconsciously you started doing it, 'cause he was so right you just went with him.

**Kirchner:** Was Bernie Glow or Stan Fishelson playing most of the lead trumpet?

**Mandel:** They split it, Stan Fishelson was a marvelous trumpet player, he was the best in his day, as a lead, like a pure lead sound, like that's the guy you hear on top in, "Early Autumn," for instance, just a wonderful concept. He's a guy I ran into in the mountains – I forgot to mention that whole thing, before I was ever with Venuti, when I was a junior in high school, I'd spend my summer vacations working in the Borscht Belt, playing up at the summer hotels and I first ran into Stan Fishelson up there, he was 16 and I was about 14. So I was really playing professionally from about 1942 or '41.

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**Kirchner:** Stan died pretty young didn't he?

**Mandel:** No, he died recently.

**Kirchner:** Really?

**Mandel:** Yeah, he became a big contractor in town here and before that in New York too. He sort of gave up, didn't give up playing the trumpet, he kept playing all his life but he really... from about the early 50s he started to lose his chops somewhat and just wasn't the trumpet player he was back in the 40s when he was such a giant. I think his interest focused more into the business end of the business and he was very good at what he did.

**Kirchner:** Because Bernie Glow became the king of the New York lead trumpet players.

**Mandel:** That's right, Stan went into theaters see. Stan followed the money... and that's not a put down, that's just you know...

**Kirchner:** No, it's what he chose to do.

**Mandel:** It's what he chose to do, that's all, but what a trumpet player.

**Kirchner:** How much did you hear that band live, the Second Herd?

**Mandel:** As much as I could. I never heard a band that was that good. Except in their own ways certain Basie bands and certain Ellington bands, but I'd say those three rank up there. I never heard Lunceford in their prime so I can't really say.

**Kirchner:** So we were talking about Tiny Kahn.


**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** And you and Al Cohn and Tiny did all that writing for Elliot Lawrence right?

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** How did the three of you interact?

**Mandel:** Oh, beautifully, you know 'cause we'd all known each other for a long time before that and were in other bands and all that sort of stuff. And we used to always play each other our arrangements on the piano and all that, you know, we hung.

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**Kirchner:** When did you start writing for Elliot?

**Mandel:** 1952, after I'd been on the, *Show of Shows*, and worked at WMGM which I did in, '49 and '50.

**Kirchner:** Well, let's talk about that before we get too much into Elliot then.

**Mandel:** Okay.

**Kirchner:** So when you got back to New York and you went with Chubby Jackson, then what happened?

**Mandel:** Well, Chubby's band petered out after a while. I went to work with, for a while then with Stan Getz I think, Bobby Brookmeyer was supposed to come in and he couldn't make it, he was tied up somewhere, he was with someone, so Stan said, "why don't you come out and play trombone," so we played, you know several weeks together. Bill Crow was in the band, it was great but I knew I was in fast company... and Stan, you know I kept bringing new music in I'd hear... you know Mulligan had come out with the piano-less band by then and I started writing all the things out for Stan 'cause he wanted them so much like, "Lion for Lions," all that stuff. And I'd bring in stuff of my own.

**Kirchner:** Like what, "Hershey Bar?"


**Mandel:** Oh he – yeah we'd done that a couple years back, for Royal Roost [Records] Stan was the first guy to ever record my music.

**Kirchner:** Are they things that you wrote out for him originally?

**Mandel:** Yeah I'd write them out, Al would write stuff out, everybody'd write stuff out.

**Kirchner:** There was what, "Pot Luck," was another one?

**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah, so anyways Stan was always very good to me and... Bill Crow writes something I don't remember at all but I must've said it, you know Stan was so happy with all the stuff that was coming into the band, music and all that he said, I think we were playing Baltimore at the time, that was the time I met Pops too, we used to go over in-between... any way he said, "hey you can stay if you want, Bobby can't come for a while and as far as I'm concerned the job is yours." And I said, "Oh, no, I got a get off the road I'm not getting anything done." [laughs] That's what Crow tells the story in, *Birdland to Broadway*, and I'd forgotten it totally, I'd never realized I said that.

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[They both laugh]

**Kirchner:** So you were doing those things with Stan and I read...

**Mandel:** In about 1949, then I got a job, I started getting into what was commercial music, I mean in the sense that I was curious about writing for strings and things and I got an opportunity to go with the last of the radio station bands. WMGM used to be here used to be at 711 Fifth Avenue and I became a staff arranger for them and was there through the beginning of 1950. And Billy Byers, I was leaving the job and I got Billy the job. He had come in from California, I had met him when I was playing there with Buddy Rich and we hung, Billy and I started hanging a lot when I was getting my card.

**Kirchner:** A fellow trombone player.

**Mandel:** Yeah, very much so. Billy played pretty credible piano in those days too... and yeah we became very thick during the 1949 period. And... Billy followed me into WMGM, that was a real education 'cause I started fooling around with strings, and oboes and all that stuff.


**Kirchner:** What kind of shows were you writing for?

**Mandel:** They were mostly sustaining music shows, that was back in the days when the band would still play like, half-hour shows with band numbers. Joel Herron was the piano player, he was the leader and we did some other things, I started writing dramatic music. It was the MGM radio outlet in New York and that was a time when MGM still owned theaters and was buying radio outlets before the Justice Department made them start divesting, all the studios divesting themselves of all this stuff. And we used to do the MGM "Theaters of the Air," which would be these plays, like the Phillip Morris Playhouse and that kind of thing, radio drama, you know the kind with the sound effects and I started getting my first taste of dramatic music, writing for those things using the second hand you know and all that. And... it was funny I got the basis for writing movie music by doing that, by doing that and then going to work, right after that I got a chance to do the Sid Caesar show.

**Kirchner:** *Your Show of Shows.*

**Mandel:** *Your Show of Shows*, Irwin Kostal called me and the two of us turned out the music there for a long time for that show. Irv did most of the work, Irwin not Irving, but everybody always called him Irv, he was just a miracle worker, doing that show was a whole other thing, it was very exciting.

**Kirchner:** It was 90 minutes a week right?

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**Mandel:** Yep, 90 minutes a week.

**Kirchner:** That's a lot of music.

**Mandel:** A lot of music, and...

**Kirchner:** And, it was all live right?

**Mandel:** All live, also we had to do it twice, once for the West Coast, that was before tape or film or anything like that. And so, I was with that show, it was a very stimulating experience for about a year, learned more about writing strings and writing all the doubles, the oboes and clarinets, that stuff. And also learned how to write for dancers which was the other part of what became my film writing experience, writing visual music, as opposed to writing music by the secondhand. This was, we'd write production numbers for dancers we'd have several of them each week and you'd catch kicks and then we'd write music for Sid Caesar where you had sight cues, you know you'd have to stretch the music if the skits ran long and all that kind of stuff 'cause it was comedy. So it was like writing vaudeville, a combination of vaudeville and Broadway at the same time, we did a new show every week, 90 minutes. What an education that was and when it started – all of a sudden I discovered when I started writing movies in the late part of the 50s, I was really scared, I'd never done a movie before and then I suddenly realized that I'd done everything it takes to write a movie. I just didn't know the film technique yet but all that business of learning how to write visual cues, working for dancers and then later on I did a lot of shows in Las Vegas in the 50s later on. And having – well I'll get to this in the movie part of it later on, but during those years in the early 50s I really got most of my grounding for doing film later on about 10 years later.


**Kirchner:** How much effect do you think that Sid Caesar being a musician had on what you did musically?

**Mandel:** Nothing, nothing in terms of that, but he was a hell of a good guy and a great comedian. And he used to come and jam with us, I jammed with him a couple times up in the mountains and he played kind of a watered-down Charlie Barnet style of saxophone. And he was always on himself, you know he just had a great inferiority complex about his abilities as a musician but he loved music and that's what he was originally a saxophone player.

**Kirchner:** Right. So you were doing, what was the year, what a year and a half you said that you did that?

**Mandel:** About yeah.

**Kirchner:** What years was that?

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**Mandel:** '50, '51 a little part of '52 and I went right from the WMGM to the, *Show of Shows*, and then brought Billy into that later when things got too busy, we had to have a third hand, or a fifth and sixth hand... needless to say. And it was after that that the Elliot Lawrence period started.

**Kirchner:** So, the three of you; you, Al Cohn and Tiny Kahn did much of the writing at the time.

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** And Elliot's band as I understand it wasn't a full-time working band.

**Mandel:** It was not a full-time working band, that's right, and therefore I started writing for Basie who had reorganized and was really sounding marvelous up at the Savoy and places like that and one day he called me to come in the band and that's when I was gone from Elliot. How could you turn something like that down, that you'd loved all your life? And playing in that band was probably the greatest playing experience I ever had in my life.

**Kirchner:** Were you playing lead once again, or was that Henry Coker?

**Mandel:** No, Coker was.

**Kirchner:** So you were playing second?


**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah I'd play second; I took Ernie Wilkins' brother Jimmy Wilkins place. And Basie called me one day and I just couldn't believe it.

**Kirchner:** Did you know him at all?

**Mandel:** Yeah, I'd been writing for him.

**Kirchner:** Okay.

**Mandel:** What a beautiful guy, but I had known him over the years you know, I'd be in bands and we'd come across each other. And I met him when I was a kid, when I was at the New York Military Academy, I used to come in and see the band at the Lincoln. And he said something to me then I remember, Earl Warren sort of, and Buddy Tate, and Sweets sort of took me under their wing when I was a kid and Earl introduced me to Basie and I told him how much I loved the music and the way they played it and that whole band, yeah I was still very arrangement oriented and he says, "Well you tell me anything you like and you can have anything you want,

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that we've got." I said, "What are you talking about," he says, "any music we play if you want it, I'll let you get a copy of it, you can have it." And I said, "Come on," and then he said something to me that I never forgot, he said, "It's not the music, it's the way we play it."

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** And I didn't know what he meant then, until later, "It's the way we play the music."

**Kirchner:** So, you went with him in, as I understand it June of '53?

**Mandel:** No, no, '52... well, I guess something like that, June... no, I went there sooner didn't I?

**Kirchner:** It depends on how accurate Leonard Feather is. According to the notes I have it was June to November '53.

**Mandel:** I guess it was, um-hm it was, we came to California and I stayed like I had planned to do originally.

**Kirchner:** So, you wrote at least one thing that got recorded right? A thing called, "Straight Life."

**Mandel:** Yeah, and I wrote some other stuff that didn't...

**Kirchner:** Anything else?

**Mandel:** I got something that was recorded from – I've had very bad track record of getting things recorded by bands, I've also had a terrible record of getting soundtracks for all the movies I've done, recorded. I have very little recorded history laying around, why, I don't know maybe that's my karma.


**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** It never particularly bothered me, I was glad for the recordings I did get. Some guys just can't do anything without getting recorded.

**Kirchner:** And it comes back to haunt them, in some cases.

**Mandel:** Yeah, I suppose, I don't know.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] Talk about if you like, about playing on Basie's band.

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**Mandel:** Well, I never played in Woody's [Herman] band, that band that I thought was so wonderful, I'm sure it might have been a similar experience in the sense that, usually when you'd hear bands and you like the way they sounded, when you got inside and started playing with them it started falling apart because it never felt like it felt when you were in it like it sounded when you're outside of it. And Basie is the only band that ever felt like it when you were in there. I mean we just couldn't wait to get to work every night, and the band was starting to get better. It took a while for that second band to start getting better, the second band, you know that he reorganized a year before in '52, in the end '51, the band was just – when I first was in the band it was getting one good night out of three then very quickly we were starting to get two good nights out of three. And none of us could wait to go to work, the band I was in, was just the one Joe Williams came into. We really were starting to cook and it's the only one that ever felt like it sounded when you were in it, mostly 'cause they had that rhythm section. I was never in a band with a rhythm section like that and I guess there never was a band with a rhythm section like that because Basie was the absolute best. When we'd rehearse the band, Basie had an inferiority complex about his reading ability but he had very quick ears so he'd sit out in the audience like we'd rehearse in clubs or anything. He wouldn't be in the audience I mean he'd be sitting out there in the empty chairs, there wouldn't be anybody in the club, it would be during the daytime we'd rehearse, as an example. And the band would finally yell at him, "Come on up here because we can make it without you," 'cause he was just that – he used to come into Buddy Rich's band, even that first band that was very uncomfortable, I used to talk about, Buddy and Basie loved each other and Basie would come up and sit in and the band would all of a sudden start sounding like another band. Basie in his own gentle way was one of the strongest influence, I've ever seen in a band, he'd just run things with his little finger; his time was just so impeccable and so solid that everybody went with him. He cooled Buddy Right down too; Buddy would start playing differently when Basie was with him. That was the good Buddy Rich, he didn't play that well with his own band and he didn't even enjoy playing in his own band he liked playing with Basie much better.

**Kirchner:** Was Gus Johnson with Basie when you were there?

**Mandel:** Yeah and was it wonderful.

**Kirchner:** And Eddie Jones was the bass player?

**Mandel:** Well we went through a whole bunch of bass players during the time I was there. When I came in Gene Ramey was there and that was great but Gene wanted to go home, back to Kansas City at the time and we started going through bass players. For a while Milt Hinton

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worked with us, but he didn't want to leave New York and we went through several guys, Al Hall, we went through, and then one day we got on the bus and we saw this electric bass sitting there and everybody said, "Oh God, oh no, who the fuck is this?" And it turned out it was Gus Johnson's cousin Leroy Johnson, I guess he was from Detroit and everybody rolled their eyes when they saw that electric bass. Well this guy played, he was wonderful, after the first night we just, you know, he knew how to pitch the amp just right and you know he got right in the pocket with Freddie Green and with Basie, and with Gus. Then our big problem is we couldn't keep him, he just didn't want to leave town.

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** So, finally Eddie Jones came in.

**Kirchner:** That's the first time I've ever heard of an electric bass with Basie.

**Mandel:** And probably the last time too.

**Kirchner:** Yeah because the only, I've heard that the first big band that really had an electric bass was Lionel Hampton.

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** Around the same time.

**Mandel:** He, I think he had played with Lionel as a matter of fact, before that it's just starting to come back to me now.

**Kirchner:** Monk Montgomery.

**Mandel:** But, he was good!


**Kirchner:** Yeah, he...

**Mandel:** Never heard him since...

**Kirchner:** Wow.

**Mandel:** But, we all were very impressed with him, Leroy Johnson.

**Kirchner:** That's pretty amazing.

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**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Although, I guess that in the late 60s when Norman Keenan and Harold Jones were with Basie, apparently when Basie did some of those commercial, you know like Beatles albums and things like that Norman Keenan would double electric bass on certain things.

**Mandel:** Well I guess you had to sometimes...

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** When you're playing that kind of music.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** So, we ended up with Eddie Jones and that's the section that stayed.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Jaws [Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis] was in the band twice while I was there, Lockjaw. The two Franks came into the band while I was there, Frank Foster and Frank Wess, the band just kept getting better.

**Kirchner:** In Feather's Encyclopedia you mention that Neal Hefti and Ernie Wilkins were two of your favorite arrangers.

**Mandel:** They were.

**Kirchner:** Talk about them if you like.

**Mandel:** Oh, well Ernie was my roommate as well, and a very close friend, and he was just a wonderful arranger, you know he just, the stuff just felt good and swung. It was good simple, straightforward writing. And Neal was Neal, you know, how do you describe Neal, nobody ever really quite sounded like him. His stuff was very easy to play, that's one nice thing about Neal and Al Cohn, and Tiny Kahn, their stuff always played very easily, it flowed. And Neal always swung too, in fact I wish, he never really wrote for his own bands as well as he wrote for Basie.

**Kirchner:** Although he had that one hit, "Coral Reef."

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**Mandel:** Yeah, but we played the same song with Basie and it was much better. I can't remember the name we had for it, but he originally wrote it for Basie and it was much slower and it got into that good, "Plymouth Rock," kind of feel. Yeah Neal was writing marvelously.

**Kirchner:** Ernie Wilkins said I guess that Neal wrote for the band more than anybody else.

**Mandel:** Yeah, he did, well Neal was very fast and he wrote everything in concert and he seemed to know every shortcut there was. He could write simply, he could write five arrangements in the time it could take me to do one.

**Kirchner:** Apparently Neal and Billy Byers get the speed demon awards, among arrangers.

**Mandel:** Yeah I think so.

**Kirchner:** Billy is legendary for it.

**Mandel:** He's legendary for his speed and the quality too.

**Kirchner:** Yeah. So, before we get to the point where you left the band and moved to L.A., I just want to, there are a couple of things about Elliot's band that I wanted to touch on.

**Mandel:** Go ahead.

**Kirchner:** I saw one picture of that band, where they had, who was it, it was Hal McKusick and Al Cohn playing curved soprano saxes.


**Mandel:** That was my idea.

**Kirchner:** Really?

**Mandel:** I tried to get – I was going through a period where I wanted to use two sopranos and two altos, written up higher like one of the old saxophone sections with two altos and two tenors. You know everybody had got so tenor happy, I was getting tired of that and I wanted to hear like, something more on the order of the older higher sounding sax sections. I was going through a reactionary bebop type of thing at that time. I'd gotten tired of writing – oh you know something, somewhere in there we forgot about Artie Shaw, that period.

**Kirchner:** Ooo, yeah, yeah!

**Mandel:** When, I was into that whole thing, that was about late '49, '50 in that area.

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**Kirchner:** Yeah, I've heard recordings of several...

**Mandel:** I keep forgetting about things I've done.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, well there's that CD that came out about five years ago of that band that had been kept in the can for 40 years.

**Mandel:** Yeah. We had Al Cohn, wonderful band.

**Kirchner:** Danny Bank said it was the best saxophone section he ever played in.

**Mandel:** Yeah, Herbie Steward, Al Cohn, Frankie Socolow, who was playing alto by then I think.

**Kirchner:** He was a second alto player.

**Mandel:** And I'm trying to think who the second tenor player is.

**Kirchner:** Zoot.

**Mandel:** Zoot, yeah that's right! That is the best saxophone section probably that Danny Bank ever played in. Herbie was playing lead alto, he turned out to be a wonderful alto player.


**Kirchner:** So we were talking about Artie Shaw's band, his 1949 band.

**Mandel:** Oh, yeah.

**Kirchner:** And the sax section.

**Mandel:** Yeah, Artie was coming back after having spent one of his periods away from music, this time he was a dairy farmer up in Dutchess County up in upper New York and, I think he went through another marriage or two by then and he decided to come back and try it again with the band and this was in 1949. And you know he used to periodically, all during his career, quit, give up his bands and leave and decided to come back and have a bebop band because Artie was kind of adventurous, unlike Benny Goodman, Artie liked change. He liked change a lot, he got very bored with music if it stayed the same, made him great to work for, for that reason, you know he'd let you do anything you wanted. And you know he didn't care if it was far out or anything, if he liked it he liked it and he didn't try to impose rigid guidelines on you like Benny. I never worked for Benny and that's probably one reason I didn't. I never even met Benny.

[They both laugh]

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**Mandel:** So, it was a nice, you know, a bunch of us started writing for him, there was... I don't think Al wrote for him... I don't think Tiny wrote for him. Who did write for him? I wrote for him...

**Kirchner:** George Russell.

**Mandel:** George Russell wrote a few things for him, Gene Roland wrote a few things for him, Eddie Sauter wrote some things for him. I can't remember if Al wrote anything or not, but he was sure in the band.

**Kirchner:** I heard recordings of, there's the one CD that came out in '89 that had never been released before and I heard three charts of yours; one called, "Krazy Kat."

**Mandel:** Oh yeah.

**Kirchner:** And, "Innuendo."

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** And, "I Get a Kick Out of You."

**Mandel:** I don't think I wrote that, though. Did I?

**Kirchner:** According to the credits you did, but credits have been known to be mistaken.


**Mandel:** It doesn't sound like me. I know I wrote a lot of other things for that band, you know ballads and things like that, "Some Enchanted Evening," I remember I wrote, "So in Love," I remember I wrote. I don't think he ever recorded those.

**Kirchner:** No, the band didn't record much.

**Mandel:** They were all vocals.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** I remember they sounded nice in rehearsal. Artie used to do one thing that drove me crazy but he had a good reason for doing it and that was when I'd write things for piano, you know in the band I'd give piano like certain things to play sometimes, as a part of the sound. He would take them and rewrite them for orchestra, he'd voice them himself because... it would

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drive him nuts if he ran into an out of tune piano, which is what you ran into most of the time on one-nighters but it never sounded like the way I originally conceived it.

**Kirchner:** No, of course.

**Mandel:** It wasn't orchestral music, it was meant to be piano music but I don't blame him, he had to live with the stuff on the road so he wanted to make sure he had something he could tune up to.

**Kirchner:** For a while Dodo Marmarosa was the piano player right?

**Mandel:** He always had good piano players.

**Kirchner:** Were you writing for him, with him in mind?

**Mandel:** Not in particular, no, I'd just write little passages within, you know, the ensemble or you know just as a part of the orchestra instead of just always comping and Artie would try to voice them out for the orchestra. He was a frustrated arranger anyway.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, he said that he apparently taught someone like Jerry Gray for example a good deal about writing.

#### [Begin CD 4]

**Mandel:** And he taught Jerry Gray to have him write like he wanted, he taught Les Robinson how to play lead saxophone the way he wanted too.


**Kirchner:** Although I guess, Herbie Steward as a lead alto player was much different from somebody like a Les Robinson.

**Mandel:** Yeah, but both of them were wonderful.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Mandel:** You know, had Les been born later he would've been just as wonderful, he was a great saxophone player, yet Benny and Les Robinson were like oil and water. So were Benny and Artie.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

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**Mandel:** They really didn't like each other at all, and they used to have to sit next to each other in the studio bands, back in the early 30s.

**Kirchner:** Two very strong personalities.

**Mandel:** Very much so, different as could be.

**Kirchner:** Artie the intellectual and Benny almost like the anti-intellectual.

**Mandel:** Well Benny was like a Neanderthal.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** Artie claims he's one of the stupidest men he ever met and he said, "If you don't believe just ask his brothers."

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** I was with Irving in Jimmy Dorsey's band, Irving's a good trumpet player and a wonderful guy and a very funny guy. And Harry was supposed to have been that way too and Freddie the younger brother, it was only Benny, and they said even Benny back in the early days with Pollack was like that too, he became weird later.

**Kirchner:** I guess success affects different people in different ways.


**Mandel:** Success and I guess responsibility, he was the oldest and had to sort of carry – felt that he had to carry everybody.

**Kirchner:** So how much did you hear Artie's band live, they only lasted that three months?

**Mandel:** Only in rehearsal, they rehearsed quite a long time before they went out. We rehearsed the band before Artie ever got there, he had a fellow from Buffalo, Lenny Lewis who was his manager and, in-fact Lenny had a band up there that a lot of the early Buffalo musicians, not early but you know like Mel Lewis cut his teeth in that band and a few others.

**Kirchner:** And that trombone player named Ange [Angelo] Callea.

**Mandel:** Yeah, that's right, yeah quite a few guys. So, yeah, so Lenny was sort of a half baked clarinet player himself and Artie Shaw was his idol and so the band rehearsed and by the time Artie came in he already had a somewhat polished band plus these guys didn't take much polishing. You know we had Porky Cohen, really you know a wonderful trombone player.

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**Kirchner:** Sonny Russo.

**Mandel:** Yeah right, Sonny Russo, it was a real good band, just a good all-around band. They had Don Fagerquist playing trumpet, we had Don Paladino playing lead, good trumpet player.

**Kirchner:** Dale Pierce.

**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah, wonderful trumpet player. Yeah, it was a real grade A band like Woody's good band was.

**Kirchner:** But unfortunately it came about in a bad business time.

**Mandel:** The worst. Yeah, the worst.

**Kirchner:** Because I guess during that period, Barnet had his bebop band and that folded, and Benny had his bebop band and that folded...

**Mandel:** That's right.

**Kirchner:** And Artie's folded.

**Mandel:** Yeah that whole 1949...

**Kirchner:** And then the Second Herd folded.


**Mandel:** That's right, yeah.

**Kirchner:** And Kenton had broken his band up and was putting together that Innovations band with the strings.

**Mandel:** That's right and then after Innovations he put together that real good band with Porcino, Shorty [Rogers] and Count and...

**Kirchner:** What Mel Lewis called the Bill Holman band.

**Mandel:** Yeah, real good band. Then later on Stan Levy came in and they had the, "Young Blood," band. Yeah, the Bill Holman band... well it was the Bill Holman and Shorty Rogers band, Shorty wrote a lot of stuff, you had Maynard [Ferguson] that was good band. The only thing it lacked was a rhythm section, Stan's never – but you know when you have a piano

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playing leader like that, like Elliot, it's the same way, you're gonna end up with half a rhythm section with a good bass player and a good drummer and nothing else.

**Kirchner:** Well apparently they got him to just get lost a certain amount of the time.

**Mandel:** Yeah, well so you had a piano less band.

**Kirchner:** That's when they had the electric guitar players who were more like the bebop guitar players.

**Mandel:** But they were comping, they weren't, you know playing...

**Kirchner:** Yeah, like Sal Salvador and Ralph Blaze.

**Mandel:** That kind of thing, yeah.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, who weren't Freddie Green style guitar players, they were...

**Mandel:** Well that was really out, the only one doing it was Freddie.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** And a couple guys around in New York who when they got work, like Barry Galbraith and...


**Kirchner:** And Steve Jordan.

**Mandel:** Steve Jordan was great he was with Boyd when I first joined, but then Boyd dropped the guitar.

**Kirchner:** For the same reason I assume.

**Mandel:** Same thing, everybody wanted to go with three piece rhythm sections; sort of like Dizzy's band and Billy Eckstine. Well, in those days most guitar players used to not be a good thing to have. I mean they didn't play like Freddie Green, they chugged away, like chug, chug, chug, chug and that did tie down a rhythm section, I'd've wanted to get rid of it too, even Billy Bauer did that.

**Kirchner:** Well a lot of the, like best rhythm guitar players were, either they played without amps or they turned it up just enough so that you...

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**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** It was just amplified a tad, but very little, you heard like, “chick-chick-chick” rather than...

**Mandel:** Barry did that, Herb Ellis was wonderful. Yeah, these were the good guitar players, Chuck Wayne was good.

**Kirchner:** Um-hm, but in any case that was...

**Mandel:** But Artie’s band, we had Jimmy Raney in that band so it was, yeah, it was just an all-around good band.

**Kirchner:** Which unfortunately hit on the worst possible time to exist.

**Mandel:** Yep, it was a good time for music but a lousy time for bands.

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** Yeah, it was really the end of the big band era, if it wasn’t for Basie, Ellington and some Woody bands and some Kenton bands, the big band era was over. Elliot’s band was never really a band, it just had a lot of talent in it for a while, but it was a high-grade New York pickup band. That’s all it was.

**Kirchner:** Now, we were talking about the curved sopranos, we didn’t totally resolve all that.

**Mandel:** Oh, I was on that kick for a while and was writing, I was looking for a different kind of sound. I was getting very tired of all the tenors, as a sound, as an orchestral sound I was getting tired of it. It was nice variety for a while, but everything started getting very low again, I started wanting to just hear higher, also you know the alto, and people were down to using one alto.

**Kirchner:** The alto, three tenors and baritone set-up.

**Mandel:** Yeah I didn’t like that sound because the high tenor usually had to play out in a not great part of the horn and the second...

**Kirchner:** Where a lot of guys play out of tune.

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**Mandel:** And I got so I really liked that second alto sound much better, and then I started wanting to fool around with sopranos 'cause nobody had used them and as a writer I wanted the extra range, I wanted to be able to go up as high as a trumpet. And I didn't like straight sopranos because they didn't sound like a real saxophone they didn't sound like an upward alto, like a – you know to me the ideal soprano player would sound like Paul Desmond. Which is a very light airy sound it just would sound like the alto going on up, 'cause the soprano was like a duck horn.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Some notes, especially – do you play the saxophone?

**Kirchner:** Oh yeah.

**Mandel:** Yeah, well, you know the left-handed notes all sounded like an oboe half the time, they sound weird and the low notes sounded like a duck, but a few notes sounded nice and that curve in the neck just seemed to make all the difference in the world.

**Kirchner:** What, you talked Hal McKusick and Al Cohn into buying them?

**Mandel:** No, no, we found them somewhere.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** In hockshops, I mean nobody was building sopranos in 1952, you just couldn't find them anywhere. You could find some French Selmers's but they were building straights and they didn't sound right as a lead player, as a sound they didn't match the rest of the sax section.

**Kirchner:** Well, they were Sidney Bechet horns.


**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Because he was popular in France at the time.

**Mandel:** And Bechet could control it and really play it, you know.

**Kirchner:** Plus he had a huge wide vibrato.

**Mandel:** I could listen to Sidney Bechet until a few years ago because of it, but if that vibrato; if I hadn't listened to the vibrato and listened to just what he played he would have sounded a lot like Johnny Hodges. That was Johnny's main man.

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**Kirchner:** Exactly.

**Mandel:** But Sidney was really the first great saxophone player, most people don't really realize that. Way before Coleman, not way before but before.

**Kirchner:** Several years before, yeah.

**Mandel:** Yeah, I mean he really took charge on that instrument, I just couldn't go past the New Orleans terminal vibrato, it used to drive me nuts.

**Kirchner:** Well apparently he was a big opera fan, I think a lot of that was his impression of 19th century Romanticism.

**Mandel:** Sure that's why the French loved him so much.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** But I've been able to recently get past that and just listen through it like you learn to listen to a lot of things that you couldn't stand when you were young, at least that's how it was with me. And what the man played was just pure gold.

**Kirchner:** Oh yeah.


**Mandel:** Early Hodges sounded a lot like that. You listen to Johnny Hodges on those Carnegie Hall things in the Carnegie Hall Concert with Benny [Goodman] if you didn't know who that was it would sound a lot like Sidney except it didn't have the big vibrato.

**Kirchner:** Exactly.

**Mandel:** Especially when he was playing soprano, that was just before he stopped playing it 1940.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, it was too bad that he quit.

**Mandel:** Well he claimed that he was just getting too many, he was getting a lot of lead – you know Duke used to like to write that saxes high and light too which was the thing I was trying to do later on in the 50s with Elliott and he was giving Hodges a lot of lead soprano and at the same time he was giving a tremendous amount of alto solo work and Hodges just didn't want to have to deal with all of that, he figured he'd deal with one of them at a time so he chose the alto and put the soprano away.

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**Kirchner:** And the clarinet too, apparently.

**Mandel:** I don't think he ever played the clarinet, I don't remember him ever playing the clarinet; even in the early Cotton Club days I don't remember him doing it.

**Kirchner:** I've seen pictures of the band with it, with a clarinet on the stand with him.

**Mandel:** That might've been show, I've never seen him pick up a clarinet.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** I don't know even know if he played the clarinet, the soprano was his first instrument.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Anything you can play on a clarinet you can almost play on a soprano unless you get into a low register.

**Kirchner:** Exactly.

**Mandel:** And you can't play as high either, you know the clarinet's three instruments, it's so much more of an instrument than the saxophone.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, the interesting thing about Sidney Bechet is that he was a clarinet player first and then I think he transferred all that clarinet conception to the soprano because it was, it was a louder instrument and he got through a lot more with it.

**Mandel:** He didn't really like playing with trumpet players, he wanted to be the trumpet player.


**Kirchner:** Oh he was competitive as hell.

**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah he was and the soprano allowed him to rule the roost, 'cause he could play real loud on it and he just happened to be a wonderful clarinet and saxophone player, he could play them both.

**Kirchner:** So how did your experiments with Elliott go?

**Mandel:** Oh, it was just something we did for a few tunes and then I dropped it and Tiny wrote some things and you know Al kinda laughed his way through it.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

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**Mandel:** I don't think he wrote anything for it but I kind of liked having the light sound for change, I was so sick of the tenors by then, you know the tenors were fine in the mid-40s and later 40s but everybody was tenor happy and I really didn't like hearing the one alto hanging out there.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, its interesting Bill Russo in one of his composing/arranging books years ago made a statement, he said that, "one of the biggest lackings in the jazz orchestra is soprano instruments."

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** That was before the soprano got really popular in the big-band writing, before...

**Mandel:** You know the flutes hadn't come in.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** And it was real nice when Basie's stuff, for instance, had the four flutes or three flutes and things like that.

**Kirchner:** And clarinets except for Ellington's band were passé.

**Mandel:** Passé, nobody wanted them, I used them, you could hear in, "The Song is You," and things like that, I needed that.

**Kirchner:** Oh yeah.


**Mandel:** Needed something that got up high, and from very early on I liked writing 5 and 6 ways, very much.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, I want to get into that with you later just, you know about things like that. Alright so we got to – unless you have anything more about Elliot's band, we get to the point where you got off Basie's band and move to California.

**Mandel:** Yeah it's a whole other beginning of a whole other phase really, so...

**Kirchner:** Which is the end of '53 right?

**Mandel:** Yeah.

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**Kirchner:** Now, if I'm not mistaken one of the first things you did when you got there was you did some string charts for Chet Baker.

**Mandel:** Yeah, I did.

**Kirchner:** I just...

**Mandel:** I did some stuff for the, Dave Pell Octet, is that good and I did some string charts, yeah that's right Chet Baker and strings. I still knew very little about string writing.

**Kirchner:** It was also a very small string section.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** It was about eight fiddle players.

**Mandel:** And the guys weren't all that great, and then later on I think a year or so later we did some stuff with just four cellos with Chet. And I don't like writing for small string sections, they just don't sound good.

**Kirchner:** You can only do one or two or three way voicing's or else it's too thin to amount to anything.

**Mandel:** Yeah, so I started writing them thinner so I could get more lines, more voices and that wouldn't sound good at all.

**Kirchner:** Now, how did you meet Chet in the first place?

**Mandel:** I think Dick Bock set that up. I had met Dick during the time I was getting my card, when I came back to town he and Woody Woodward grabbed me to do a lot of work. Those guys sort of, you know, getting started in California, especially in those days was very tough. I came in with sort of a New York reputation but no work and no connections at all and I'm not very good at that sort of thing.

**Kirchner:** What was your plan, did you consciously want to get into film writing or was that an afterthought?

**Mandel:** Well I had thought I had a way of getting into Warner Brothers, it turned out I didn't at all and then I was really kicking myself for having left Basie. I should never have done it, but you know I do those kind of things for 5 minutes and then go on to something else and forget about. And you know I was writing more and more and playing less and I'd keep getting worse

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and I really started thinking that with Basie, as much as I was enjoying myself that... somebody else really should be sitting there, that could really play and I'd just come to that point where you get the fork in the road and you really have to make a choice; one or the other and I was always pulled away from my playing by my writing. And I was just about 29 when I quit that and realized, that you know, they are both full-time jobs and everybody eventually has to do that, Billy Byers had to do it and he was good he kept his trombone and writing up and did them both very well; but almost everyone stops.

**Kirchner:** Bob Brookmeyer's one of the few notable exceptions.

**Mandel:** He's another one too. Bobby Brookmeyer is just miraculous, there's another great trombone stylist I completely neglected to mention earlier. There's only one of them too and as a writer as well.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, he's one of the few, well I guess Al Cohn didn't play much for years.

**Mandel:** He didn't play much for years and he didn't really start playing his best until he became a full-time saxophone player, is when he finally gave up writing, which I really hated to see. I used to beg him to keep writing but he had spent so many years trying to raise a family and writing music he didn't like and his eye, he only had one eye after 1949 or '50 and as a matter-of-fact he was out of the business for a while working for his father, who I think was – Dave Cohn was in the garment business at the time. And when he came with Elliot that was his first foray back into music, he had been out of music for a while, after his eye operation. And so he made it on one eye since then, and he used to do have to shows for Ralph Burns and you know he was just doing a whole lot of music he didn't like and...

**Kirchner:** A lot of Broadway shows.


**Mandel:** When he finally got free of his marriage and a whole lot of other things and the kids were grown up enough, he decided he wasn't gonna write anymore music and his one eye was just killing him. He became a full-time saxophone player and that's what he ended up spending his life and when he started doing that and put all his energy in the saxophone, whoo man!

**Kirchner:** Yeah, really.

**Mandel:** He was always good before that but became more than good after that.

**Kirchner:** I think it's one of the small ironies of the jazz business that he ended up marrying George Handy's ex-wife.

**Mandel:** Yeah, Flo.

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**Kirchner:** Yeah, Flo, who is also a talented composer.

**Mandel:** Very, yeah and you know who's sister she was?

**Kirchner:** Ella Mae Morse.

**Mandel:** Ella Mae Morse's kids sister, yeah. I knew her from the time she was 16 years old, wonderful girl.

**Kirchner:** And a very talented composer.

**Mandel:** Very talented composer and a wonderful singer.

**Kirchner:** I'd heard that yeah.

**Mandel:** I loved the way she sang. Yeah.

**Kirchner:** So you're in L.A., you did the four string charts for Chet Baker, "You Don't Know What Love Is," "I love You," "The Wind," which was Russ Freeman's tune and, "Love."

**Mandel:** Yeah, I actually wrote the bridge to that, or finished the bridge for him.

**Kirchner:** Oh yeah?

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** It was interesting you used an alto flute on that.

**Mandel:** I guess I did, yeah.


**Kirchner:** With Bud Shank, that's about the first time I can remember hearing an alto flute on a jazz record.

**Mandel:** I guess I just needed something that went lower than the regular flute.

**Kirchner:** But that was pretty unusual for that time right?

**Mandel:** It never occurred to me then I don't think, and I always liked the way Bud played it.

**Kirchner:** Oh yeah, I love his flute playing.

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**Mandel:** I do too, I was...

**Kirchner:** It's too bad that he stopped.

**Mandel:** I was very distressed 'cause I wasn't able to use him anymore, he just wouldn't take flute calls and he was my favorite player.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, he was a terrific flute player. So also Chet recorded one of your tunes, "Tommyhawk."

**Mandel:** That's true, he recorded a couple different of my tunes, yeah, "Tommyhawk," that's right. You know more about me than I do, so read on.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] And I guess what a couple years later you did some charts for that record that Chet Baker and Art Pepper did together, *The Playboys of jazz*, it was a three horn...

**Mandel:** It was?

**Kirchner:** Thing with Chet and Art Pepper and Richie Kamuca.

**Mandel:** What'd I write?

**Kirchner:** I forget.

**Mandel:** Oh, you don't have it here?

**Kirchner:** No, I don't.

**Mandel:** Okay.


**Kirchner:** That's one thing I didn't find in the discography.

**Mandel:** Well if you can't help me, I sure can't.

[They both laugh]

**Kirchner:** But you did a fair amount, I guess all that was set up through Dick Bock then?

**Mandel:** Well some of it, and then one person tells another you know, and so forth.

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**Kirchner:** Did you get to know Chet, very much?

**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah, he was a kid still when I knew him, he was a nice kid, I liked Chet and what a musician.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** And a wonderful singer, he was just a natural.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Mandel:** He was wonderful you know, Gerry really came up with something when he came up with Chet, then after that when Chet left town, I graduated to Jack Sheldon and Jack Sheldon was quite something in those days, in the 50s still and the 60s. He did a great deal, we did a lot of work together and had an awful lot of laughs.

**Kirchner:** There is one story that I heard, that we might as well bring up now that when you did the score to, “The Sandpiper,” and you had him as a solo trumpet...

**Mandel:** Yep.

**Kirchner:** And I’m told you just wrote Miles on the top of his part.


**Mandel:** I might have. I was going after that thing there’s no doubt about it, that’s what I wanted because I heard it in conjunction with all the scenery in that movie, it just seemed like the perfect way to go, but I didn’t copy Gil [Evans].

**Kirchner:** No, not at all. Jack is a very underrated trumpet player.

**Mandel:** Yeah he is, well he plays a lot more trumpet now but he plays a lot of notes. He’s gotten into, he’s learned how to read, he’s really gone and studied the trumpet and he’s got total mastery of it but he’s still great, there’s only one Jack Sheldon.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, it’s funny the way his career went, for a while he was doing a lot of TV acting, the only jazz musician ever to be the lead on a TV sitcom.

**Mandel:** I know, what a funny guy, he and Joe Maini used to work together and they were hysterical. I don’t know, I’m gonna tell a story on tape here. Joe Mondragon was my bass player for a long time, I just loved the way Joe Mondragon played. He and Jack Sheldon used to work a lot together and [laughs] I don’t know if this story belongs on this tape or not but it’s – they were playing a dance somewhere and Jack, you know Jack cannot stop with one-liners and there was

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this girl who was more than fine at the dance and she was with her fiancé and Jack just kept zinging those one – he couldn't take his eyes off the girl, he couldn't stop, he just couldn't leave her alone and the guy finally really started getting hot and he goes over to Jack and says, "Look this is my fiancé, this is the girl I'm going to marry, I'd really appreciate it," he was very nice, "if you'd please stop, layoff." And Jack couldn't lay off, the night wore on, everybody got into their cups pretty well, finally Jack just went overboard and said something the guy hauls off and hits him square in the mouth and knocks him out. [laughs] And Dragon sees that and he runs, and this is the days before guns, he runs to his bass case and pulls out a gun, now I never saw Dragon with a gun before and in those days people didn't have guns, you know it wasn't like that. You saw a gun that was very unusual and he goes up to the mic and starts waving it, and he says, "Alright you guys, everybody it's all over, the dance is finished everybody get out, everybody, get out stop the music the dance is finished," and he turns to that guy, he says, "do you know what you did, you hit a trumpet player in the mouth, that is a mortal sin."

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** He says, "All right everybody out," I mean, you know he said, "I'd like to kill you, but you just don't realize what a terrible thing you did." He said, "Everybody gets out, go on out of here," and Jack is starting to come-to, and he opens one eye and he points, and he says, "She can stay."

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** Okay, you can edit that out because it doesn't really belong on the tape.

**Kirchner:** It's a great story.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Well Joe Mondragon is part Indian right?

**Mandel:** Yeah, not part, all.

**Kirchner:** All?

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Well I...

**Mandel:** Apache.

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**Kirchner:** And part Mexican too right?

**Mandel:** Well the Apache's are that far south...

**Kirchner:** Yeah, yeah.

**Mandel:** That I think that's Mexican Indian really.

**Kirchner:** Don't mess with him.

**Mandel:** No, what a wonderful man he was and what a great bass player.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, apparently he hipped Miles to the, "Concierto de Aranjuez," you know the...

**Mandel:** Yeah wouldn't surprise me at all.

**Kirchner:** First, "Sketches of Spain," he played Miles the original guitar recording and Miles loved it and played it for Gil, and that's where they got the idea to do it in, the "Sketches of Spain."


**Mandel:** I'm sorry I didn't know Miles a lot better.

**Kirchner:** How well did you know him?

**Mandel:** Not really well we were never in the same place at the same time. He was always in the East Coast and I was always on the West. I don't know, as years went out I moved away, in 1970 from Los Angeles in general and lived up north of Malibu ever since. And I just don't get in much and don't hang, and I miss it, that's why I hit the jazz festivals and cruises and things 'cause I gotta be with the guys. You know it's, I like to feel like I used to feel, I mean I'm very happy living the way I am now but once you're a road rat man, it gets in you and old musicians are like prizefighters, we'll get to all that later on. You know you like to get with your – or old baseball players you like to hang and rap, not necessarily live the old days, it's just there's a kind of bonding that goes on that, until you don't have it anymore you don't realize what you had.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, well it's one of the big tragedies of New York that there are no more Jim and Andy's or any places like that.

**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah, it was just one of the wonderful things about being part of the music fraternity and jazz musicians truly, really, love one another. You go see, "A Great Day in Harlem."

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**Kirchner:** Yeah I did.

**Mandel:** It's all very true man.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** These are all like your brothers you know, there's a kinship, jazz musicians share something that no one else shares with them.

**Kirchner:** And there are very few real schmucks.

**Mandel:** That's right, really, very few.

**Kirchner:** The ones that are, stand out.

**Mandel:** And usually they weren't schmucks, they'd just get difficult once in a while like Mingus and people like that, but they weren't really schmucks.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, but it's kind of a whole era that's gone.

**Mandel:** Yeah, like I don't know, it's not something I like to really dwell on much, you know you wonder how people like Benny Carter deal with it who is you know eighty-six, eighty-seven, eighty-eight, whatever Benny is, all his contemporaries are dead.


**Kirchner:** I think Woody Herman said something very wise, he said that, "You make younger friends because if you don't, you find out one day that you don't have any friends left."

**Mandel:** Absolutely true and that's what Benny does too, I wanted to – one day when I really got morose I wanted to call him up and ask him how he dealt with and I realized what the answer would be before I ever called him, I says, if I asked him how you deal with it, he says, "I don't, why should you, you know, where is that gonna take you?" You just keep making younger friends, that's it exactly.

**Kirchner:** I mean, I've gotten a couple phone calls from him just to call and say, "Hi how are you?" And it's like gee, Benny Carter's calling me, you know is God next?

**Mandel:** Right, yeah, because I still have that awe of him.

**Kirchner:** Sure. Let's see, just before you stopped playing, apparently you played with Zoot Sims at The Haig.

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**Mandel:** Yeah, that was really the last work I did.

**Kirchner:** Playing bass trumpet?

**Mandel:** Yeah, I played with Zoot and Jimmy Rowles and I can't remember who played drums, we worked at The Haig, that place where Gerry used to work. And we were there for a couple months and it was real nice but it was at that time I really, as wonderful as it was with Zoot, I just didn't want to play anymore, it was getting harder and harder to play and write and I knew I was having to become a full-time writer.

**Kirchner:** And...

**Mandel:** So, I just put the horn down and haven't missed it since, really haven't, when I hear a big band play I miss it, I want to become part of that, I want, you know – and when Basie would come around, I'd always, you never forget your part you know, on arrangements you used to play. And I'd see Benny Powell and he's say, "that's right, you never forget your part," you know. We'd sing right along with them, with our old parts 'cause you know you memorize everything, you don't read it. But that's the only time I'd miss it, being part of the section sound, being a soloist like I used to enjoy doing, was really just too frustrating because I couldn't play what I envisioned and what I heard. So when it got like that and I knew I would never be able to practice again like that, in order to do it, I said the hell with it, it was that time.

**Kirchner:** So was it after that, that Chico Hamilton made you an offer that you turned down, he wanted you to join his group.


**Mandel:** Don't even remember that.

**Kirchner:** It's in Ted Gioia's book called, "West Coast Jazz," apparently when he was putting together that group with Buddy Collette...

**Mandel:** Yeah, I gotta be honest with you I never was a convert to West Coast jazz, I always thought was a very kind of weak cousin to East Coast jazz; in fact I just never identified it as something in itself really. I always liked the way the east coasters played but I like living on the West Coast. I always thought there was something a little effeminate about the way they played, not that that's bad, it's just not something – you know you come out of Basie and some of the most hard swinging kind of things and everything else sounds so pallid next to it.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, I guess...

**Mandel:** You get spoiled...

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**Kirchner:** Sure.

**Mandel:** When you've had it that good.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, I guess it depends, like somebody like Shelly Manne for example, sounded...

**Mandel:** A wonderful drummer, but not a great big band drummer.

**Kirchner:** You don't think huh?

**Mandel:** No, I don't think, but I thought he was probably the tastiest drummer I've ever known and one who had the best sense of sound. You'd never have to write a part for Shelly, he would listen and always knew exactly what to play and what a guy to have man, there was nobody like Shelly, he was funny, he was just one the most marvelous men I've ever known.

**Kirchner:** But he sounded...

**Mandel:** And a hell of a drummer he just wasn't the big band drummer that...

**Kirchner:** Mel Lewis was.

**Mandel:** Mel Lewis or Tiny Kahn or Shadow Wilson in his day or, Papa Jo Jones, you know the great Gus Johnson the great big-band drummers, Sid Catlett, Cliff Leeman in his day, Buddy Rich, those were the big band drummers. Shelly was not that, he had so many other things.

**Kirchner:** Yeah he sounded very different in all those different settings like sometimes he would sound like, like you were talking about, quintessential quote, "West Coast jazz."

**Mandel:** Yeah, I just didn't like the West Coast jazz.


**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** But I never thought it really had much merit, it was watered down East Coast jazz.

**Kirchner:** But then he would have some of his own groups, you know and he would have people like Victor Feldman and Joe Gordon and...

**Mandel:** Oh he had some, he was a wonderful small band drummer...

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

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**Mandel:** I didn't mean that he wasn't a wonderful, he was a wonderful drummer.

**Kirchner:** Sure.

**Mandel:** I loved him in the small band settings.

**Kirchner:** I think his own taste tended to be more aggressive than some of the people he worked for.

**Mandel:** Um-hm, but I never thought he was aggressive enough in a big band, he wasn't a rock type of drummer you could drive a truck over and he wouldn't budge like Mel Lewis was.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** And his sense of sound I don't think made it for a big-band as well as it did for a small band. Whereas Tiny Kahn was never as great a small band drummer even though he did a lot of small band work as he was a big band drummer.

**Kirchner:** Well he and Mel Lewis were very close.

**Mandel:** Well that was Mel's original inspiration, Tiny, that's who Mel wanted to be like and he was right.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, they're not interchangeable, I mean...

**Mandel:** No.

**Kirchner:** You can tell one from the other...

**Mandel:** Oh sure, they're not alike at all.


**Kirchner:** I don't know, I hear a certain – there's an affinity of approach there between...

**Mandel:** It was the time sense that Mel had.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** That he loved about Tiny. Tiny was a musician with not much technique, just all feel...

**Kirchner:** The same with Mel...

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**Mandel:** He wasn't a great technical drummer, he wasn't a great technical arranger but everything he did was perfect.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, it's like...

**Mandel:** You know, 'cause taste is above all the arbiter of greatness I think. Count Basie was – nobody really realized how good a piano player Count Basie was in his early days, he was a terror if you listen to the Bennie Moten things from 1932 on. He played more damn piano than Fats on those records, which is really saying something and never did with his own band that much piano. But the man had such great taste that those few ideas he used to throw around, that if anybody else did you'd be sick of him within a few days, lasted all his life because he had taste like no one did and he had the best time. And Tiny was like that, Sweets is like that.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, Mel was like that too.

**Mandel:** Yeah, Mel had a lot more variety though in his playing.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** He could do a lot of things, especially when he got with his own band.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, the best drum solos I ever heard Mel play were in small groups where – I heard him one night play a brush solo on, "Body and Soul," done at ballad tempo that was just superb.

**Mandel:** Oh, that's the kind of thing Shelly did so well, that kind of thing, shading, and subtleties of playing. He might've been the best drummer when it came to dynamics.

**Kirchner:** And had wonderful time.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Let's see at this point...

**Mandel:** I don't remember the Chico Hamilton thing at all...

**Kirchner:** I'll have to, I'll make a...

**Mandel:** But thank you Chico, if you made the offer.

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**Kirchner:** [laughs] And you did a little bit of writing for – we talked earlier about that Bill Perkins octet record.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, um-hm.

**Kirchner:** Did you write, “Just a child,” specifically for that date or you had written that tune...

**Mandel:** I guess I did, yeah, that was when the tune happened and then Stan Getz recorded it later, something I never realized until I heard a documentary that they did on Stan after he died, I never realized he recorded that song and it was perfect for him.

**Kirchner:** Absolutely and then Bill did it again.

**Mandel:** Bill did it again?

**Kirchner:** Yeah, do you know that album he did that’s a totally Johnny Mandel album.

**Mandel:** Oh, that one, yeah.

**Kirchner:** With Victor Feldman and John Pisano.

**Mandel:** Oh that's right, yeah.

**Kirchner:** Around 1970.

**Mandel:** I guess so, yeah.

**Kirchner:** So at that point you did that, Hal McKusick did a recording of, “Tommyhawk,” on that Jazz workshop record.

**Mandel:** I guess he did, yeah, these are all, this is like seeing – this must be what dying’s like.

**Kirchner:** I hope not. [laughs]

**Mandel:** I hope so, I’m enjoying this.

**Kirchner:** I mean the janitor’s gone, if we have a corpse here [laughs] it’s gonna be awfully awkward.

**Mandel:** Yeah, but I mean your whole life flashes before your eyes.

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**Kirchner:** [laughs] Now you did part of the score for a Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis movie called, “You’re Never Too Young.”

**Mandel:** Oh, I’d just do production numbers, those kind of things, the big dance numbers, ‘cause I’d learned how to do that stuff when I was doing the *Show of Shows*.

**Kirchner:** Now, apparently just to interject here...

**Mandel:** With that particular movie I’m just beginning to realize I did some Basie like stuff, some you know, plus choreography and all but with a big marching band, a huge one that I’d beefed up to make sound, to swing better, with a rhythm section.

**Kirchner:** How did you get the call for that, for that movie?

**Mandel:** Well, through his piano player, Lou Brown, who also got me the WMGM job, Lou has always been a wonderful friend that way...

**Kirchner:** Was that your...

**Mandel:** And he still is.

**Kirchner:** Was that your first film?

**Mandel:** It wasn't really my film.

**Kirchner:** But a film that you had any association with?

**Mandel:** Yeah, you might say so. I never thought of it as my first film, ‘cause you know they had a regular film composer on that, I was just brought in for the production numbers, for the swing stuff.


**Kirchner:** I’m told by the way, I guess Frank Socolow met Jerry and became close friends with him when Jerry was playing up in the Catskills.

**Mandel:** Jerry Lewis?

**Kirchner:** Yeah, early in his career.

**Mandel:** Yeah Jerry’s a good guy actually.

**Kirchner:** That’s what I’ve heard.

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**Mandel:** Loved music, still does I guess.

**Kirchner:** Apparently when Frank and Joanne's son had a serious auto accident and was badly burned...

**Mandel:** Oh, he came through.

**Kirchner:** He picked up all the hospital bills.

**Mandel:** That's right, Jerry could be very kind when he wanted to.

**Kirchner:** So...

**Mandel:** Yeah, he really came through for Frank.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, absolutely.

**[2<sup>nd</sup> Day, April 21. Begin CD 5]**

**Kirchner:** Johnny we started talking about, *I Want to Live!*, but I was looking over my notes and it occurred to me before we got into that in depth, we neglected, or I neglected to bring up the subject of Stefan Wolpe.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, yeah.


**Kirchner:** And since you studied with him I thought that might have a bearing on your film writing that we'll be discussing.

**Mandel:** Well, it didn't actually, it really didn't not because – Stefan Wolpe was wonderful but I wasn't with him long enough to have him make a large – I moved from New York very quickly after I started studying with him. So, it wasn't really, you know a pivotal thing, like I was with him a year or two years or something like that.

**Kirchner:** When was this?

**Mandel:** That would've been 1950, '51, '52, maybe. I'm not sure of the exact time now, I'd say '51 would be closer.

**Kirchner:** It's interesting that you were one of several prominent jazz writers who studied with him, you...

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**Mandel:** Carisi.

**Kirchner:** Carisi, Eddie Sauter, Bill Finegan.

**Mandel:** Oh they did, both?

**Kirchner:** Yes.

**Mandel:** Oh, I didn't know that. Yeah, I went – Irwin Kostal was studying with him and I was doing the *Show of Shows*, with Irv, so I went down there too and he was wonderful.

**Kirchner:** What did you learn?

**Mandel:** I can't think of, you know, it's what'd I learn... I learned about how to write atonally quite a bit, but I learned a lot more later on from George Tremblay. But, I've done a minimum of formal study really, considering how many years I've been at it. I don't really digest information very well in a formal schooling setting, type of academic setting. I mean, I digest it alright but it's much better if it can be experiential in some way. I think that's, for me, that's really the way I've assimilated any knowledge I might have.

**Kirchner:** So...

**Mandel:** The rest sort of goes right through from one ear to the other.


**Kirchner:** You mentioned with George Tremblay, we might as well talk about that now it might be getting a little ahead of ourselves but not really. As I recall a number of prominent film writers have studied with him, is that...

**Mandel:** Oh yes, um-hm.

**Kirchner:** What's the attraction there?

**Mandel:** David Raksin did. Oh, he's wonderful, he was wonderful and he understood a lot, he understood about jazz, he understood about all types of music, even though he was strictly a classicist himself he was not all in the tradition. And he wrote gorgeous music that was atonal but tonal, you know it was sort of an Alban Berg type of approach to atonality, using rows, but it was very sensual music like Berg's was, or is.

**Kirchner:** So you basically delved into atonal writing with him as well then?

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**Mandel:** Um-hm, yes, I did.

**Kirchner:** How much has come out in your own writing of that do you think?

**Mandel:** It's hard for me to be objective about that, I don't know, you never know what comes out from what you may have rubbed off in different places. I really can't say, I don't know.

**Kirchner:** Now we started to talk about *I Want to Live!*, yesterday and it occurred to me overnight that one thing I guess we should explain for the benefit of anyone who hears this is that because the film was what it was in terms of plot and background there was a specific reason for having two separate scores and there was a reason for having Mulligan in the source music.

**Mandel:** Well it wasn't really, yeah there was – I must clarify that though there were not two separate scores. One album was composed of source music which is music you know that's not part of background music, it was actually used coming out of records or radios or whatever it might have been, like the way they use source music the way it – you know, now they stick songs in no matter what but back then you usually had to qualify why the song was there. And score which was background music. As far as this picture having jazz, Barbara Graham who was a real life woman, who was the first woman to die in the gas chamber ever in the state of California, was played by Susan Hayward and in real life she was a big jazz fan and Gerry Mulligan was one of her favorite people, so that's how we ended up getting Gerry for the film. Of course it's nice to have Gerry on anything and it was certainly a pleasure having him on this.

**Kirchner:** And he also appeared with that seven piece band on camera as I recall at a party.

**Mandel:** That's right, absolutely, also yeah, at the very opening in a club too, the very opening of the film.

**Kirchner:** So as far as the orchestral score that you did, my description of it would be a jazz orchestra augmented by certain orchestral instruments like E-flat clarinet, contrabassoon, contrabass clarinet that were pretty unorthodox and still are.


**Mandel:** Four French horns.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Yeah it was a very large-sized jazz orchestra.

**Kirchner:** You had total freedom as far as picking instrumentation?

**Mandel:** I sure did.

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**Kirchner:** Why did you decide on that particular combination of instruments, what was the attraction for you there?

**Mandel:** They made the sounds that I heard in my head in conjunction with this picture. So, I never ever decide on a bunch of instruments ahead of time and then try to write music to fit it, instead I try to make the noises I hear in my head. When I say noises you know, music and...

**Kirchner:** Sure.

**Mandel:** I think in terms of sound and whatever instruments that happens to be, that's what I end up getting.

**Kirchner:** There was one...

**Mandel:** I didn't want to use strings in this, so the closest thing I could get would've been a combination between a jazz orchestra and a wind band, so that's what I ended up using. But it was a jazz driven score, in fact it really was the first all jazz score that ever was for movies. You know different people used jazz in patches in movies up 'til then but when they got into real heavy emotional scenes they'd almost always revert to traditional underscore.

**Kirchner:** Like the...

**Mandel:** With the symphonic type, regular symphonic type orchestra set up.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, I can think of two instances of what you describe like that Alex North score for *Streetcar Named Desire*.

**Mandel:** Right.

**Kirchner:** And Elmer Bernstein's *Man with the Golden Arm*.


**Mandel:** Exactly, um-hm.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, but you definitely, you took it beyond that...

**Mandel:** Even Leith Stevens in, *The Wild One*.

**Kirchner:** That Shorty Rogers worked on.

**Mandel:** Yeah but Leith wrote the music.

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**Kirchner:** So what was the reaction that that score got?

**Mandel:** Oh, it was universally acclaimed?

**Kirchner:** And you got an Academy Award nomination or didn't?

**Mandel:** Sure didn't, got frozen right out, Hollywood did not take very kindly to jazz in those days. The old guard especially Dmitri Tiomkin and those people did not like something like this come along.

**Kirchner:** Wow.

**Mandel:** Did not. The guys like Alex North, David Raksin, Hugo Friedhofer, they were very enthusiastic, but the real old bunch – you know I was one of the interlopers, they didn't care to know about people like Hank Mancini and me in the late 50s, --not yet.

**Kirchner:** The irony was that that same year was the year that Mancini started doing the, *Peter Gunn*, scores for television.

**Mandel:** He was doing *Peter Gunn* the same time I did, *I want to Live!*

**Kirchner:** And how much did that really crack the ice as far as jazz oriented writing?

**Mandel:** Helped a whole lot, it really did. Hank was very good with it too.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, your writing especially for, *I want to Live!* was a lot darker in tone.


**Mandel:** Well the movie was a lot darker.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** That's why.

**Kirchner:** I remember the...

**Mandel:** I don't by nature write dark music, I tend to like happy music and/or soulful music, but I don't really like – that's another reason I don't particularly like movies and doing movies and I won't do background anymore cause I don't want to write – I don't like violence, I'm very, very opposed to it and I had just written too much music for violent scenes and I didn't want to be part of it, I don't want to be part of it anymore. So, I don't tend to write dark music just when I'm

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writing music at all, I don't dwell on that, it's probably one reason I never liked minor music in the beginning. I'm much more neutral about it now, I figured whatever it is that you need and you use and whatever it takes – you know tonalities and modes are really nothing more than another set of tools like whatever instruments you use or something like that and however you can best express the emotion you are trying to express that's what you use. But when I was a kid, for some reason I just didn't like the darkness of minor, I never liked it. But now I don't feel that way, after all a lot of my songs are in minor, "Close Enough for Love," songs like that but I – you know, "The Shadow [of Your Smile]," even starts off like that, you know what I always get into major on them, 'cause I find I like major music much better just naturally.

**Kirchner:** There's some very interesting colors I just wanted to talk about in passing and for certain segments of the score for, *I Want to Live!* like there's one segment where it's an all percussion thing.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, that was a chase, that was when they were arresting her... when they finally caught up with her. I thought it was about a seven minute cue and I thought it worked very nicely because it provided the momentum that we needed for that whole thing, to get you through that chase. You know the whole idea with the chase is to move a scene along and to gear you emotionally for whatever has to happen. I don't mean telegraphing though, I think that's one of the things in scoring I hate the most is telegraphing scenes, showing what's going to happen like they used to do in the old days. You knew who the villain was before he ever walked on the screen because of the music.

**Kirchner:** Diminished chord.

**Mandel:** Yeah, I don't, I never liked doing that. I'd much rather shock if necessary then try and telegraph something, but a lot of producers, particularly some of the very young ones and some of the old-fashioned ones insist that you do that. They want to make sure the people get it, believe me the people get it, people are pretty good about getting it, they are a lot more intelligent than some of the people who make movies think they are.


**Kirchner:** Yeah, we'll have to talk more about that later on.

**Mandel:** Okay.

**Kirchner:** We can talk about Hummers and things like that.

**Mandel:** Oh, all that stuff, yeah.

**Kirchner:** So you said you were hired to do the score because of Jack Lewis.

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**Mandel:** Um-hm, yeah.

**Kirchner:** So at that time I gather that you weren't really consciously pushing for a film writing career.


**Mandel:** I wasn't, I wasn't, I did everything else in this business first, before I did movies and I just kind of backed into them rather than was out there rushing for them and I was, you know, I was happy doing what I was doing.

**Kirchner:** So how much did this advance your career as a film writer or your desire to do it or the doors opening for you to do more of it?

**Mandel:** The doors didn't open again until the early 60s, you know 1963, '64, '65, then they opened wide but I had to wait five years. Then after that I did a couple of B pictures like, *The 3<sup>rd</sup> Voice*, I didn't enjoy them, I didn't realize I'd started off with a great picture, great cast, great crew, wonderful producer who was Walter Wanger, and a marvelous director who was very kind, who was Robert Wise. And they encouraged me and I thought, wow, I like this, this is great and then I discovered it wasn't like that out there, at all like that out there.

**Kirchner:** You might want, just for the benefit of people listening to it, would you mind just talking about the actual process of once you are hired to do a score, what goes down between you and the producer and director.


**Mandel:** Well generally speaking, let's say that there is no prerecording, you don't have to record any music say before the picture is shot, and you only have to do that in case something is visually sung or danced, or played on the screen, you have to record the music first before it's shot. Let's assume that isn't the case, generally I like being brought in as early as I can be brought in but very often they don't bring you in until the picture is finished, or they're into what they call a rough cut, you know, an assemblage of all the footage. It may be over length and it might be a very rough assemblage but it's an assemblage so you can get some idea of what the story's about and the whole thing. And, I like to quite honestly, you know I'll talk to the producer and talk to the director but before I make any musical opinions I like to watch the film by myself, not with anyone. And I like to run the film once or twice in the projection room and maybe make some notes maybe not just go for an overall feeling and then I'll make notes and then I'll go to the director and tell him what I think and how I feel about what I've seen. Because, I believe that the first impression is terribly important, that's actually the impression any audience is gonna get and if they don't like the film they may not see it more than once so rather than talk about the film and get my head filled with a lot of stuff by the producer and director which may or may not be important 'cause you gotta realize they've been probably living with the film for over a year and the most valuable thing I can give them is a fresh look by just coming in new and watching it at the stage they're at. So what I like to do is form ideas

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pretty much before, then I have something to talk to the director about. So, that's how I like to proceed, then when we start talking the general procedure is we decide where music should begin, where it should end, which is a process called spotting, we spot where music will be in the film. Then the kind of music it should call for, what we're playing that scene for, why is there even music in that scene and that's when it's sometimes you have to be a little diplomatic because the scene might quite honestly not work and so they want music in there to prop it up, sort of like a splint or a suture or something but the game of course is that you don't really tell them that because there's no point in it. They'll either want you off the film or it's gonna mess up your relationship for working on the film for the rest of the time. You know, you try to be diplomatic and say, "well it could use a little help here," and that sort of thing but generally speaking if you're not into that kind of B.S., it's what you do is decide constructively where music should be and once you've decided all that sort of thing and the kind of music you want to use, maybe even talk about instruments or something if there's a particular type of character you want to use, like if there's any kind of a Mediterranean influence of Greek or something like that you might want to use native instruments like a bouzouki or something like that. But whatever it is, once you've got that information you sit with the music editor and what a music editor is, he doesn't edit music per se, he's your liaison between the composer and the editor of the movie and the director. And he takes the information as to when it starts, when it stops and gives you a written breakdown of everything that's going on in the screen, timed to the thirtieth of a second and that's what I write from. I mean you see it broken down in seconds... actually the tenth of a second not a thirtieth of a second, some guy like to do thirds of seconds rather, I like to do tenths it's a little bit more precise. And the whole thing with – there's a lot of math involved in movie music but the trick is to make nobody aware of the fact of what you're doing you know, that your computing the music. You don't write the music mathematically at least I don't, but you compute as to where you want to go and how fast you want to get there and where you want to be when you get there. Like say there's an important part in the music, let's say it's a three and a half minute piece and somewhere, two minutes and ten seconds, there's some kind of a place where you need a climax in that section of music, so you plot your way to the two minutes and ten seconds and you work your way backwards. You figure out where you want to be and work your way backwards to the beginning and that's the way you sort of lay it out. And I'll write the music and orchestrate the music and will go in and conduct the music to the screen with various visual guides. We're watching the picture while we're recording the music with the orchestra. A very nice – if things work out nicely that can be one of the most pleasant experiences for everyone concerned during the making of the movie is when you marry everything; the music, sound effects and the dialogue. But putting the music in is one of the things normally that a director can often get the greatest pleasure out of. So, that's sort of the working procedure.

**Kirchner:** Let's talk a little but orchestrating because it's common knowledge that even the most skillfully skillful orchestrators often have to bring in help for orchestrating just because of the time constraints.

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**Mandel:** You mean the most skillful composers or the most skillful orchestrators?

**Kirchner:** Composers who are skillful orchestrators, such as yourself.

**Mandel:** Oh, sometimes they give you impossible – you know, first of all movies used to have better more leisurely schedules especially if there was a decent budget on the picture but television ruined that. Now they give you impossibly close deadlines, so very often you need people to come in and receive as much of the mechanical work from you as possible and if it's really impossible sometimes you have to actually get somebody to do some composing. In other words work things over, not contribute creatively but just to take some of the weight off of you, because they want the score yesterday and they just gave it to you. That happens and I don't like that at all 'cause I like to do all my own work if I can.

**Kirchner:** Bill Holman told me once that he had done some orchestrating for you.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** And he said, I mean to compare and contrast you to say somebody who is not a skilled orchestrator but who's putting his name on a film as a composer he said in your case you gave him very specific and very detailed sketches of what you wanted and then he orchestrated from those.


**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** As opposed to – well I mentioned the term, Hummers earlier, maybe this is a good time to discuss what a, Hummer is.

**Mandel:** Oh God, there's so many of them around Hollywood. Those are the guys who really can't even write down music but they get hired to do scores, and they'll hum some, like a little fragment of a theme to an orchestrator who'll take down the fragment of a theme and they'll say, "give me five minutes of music for that," you know, for this scene and another eight minutes over here and this and that you know. These are what you call, Hummers guys who were just very good politicians who have no idea about music. There's a lot of them in Hollywood.

**Kirchner:** Or maybe they're rock stars with hits.

**Mandel:** Yeah, that kind of stuff, you know, there's...you know there's also the kind of composer who is actually a good composer but is not an orchestrator, they think in terms of the piano. And they'll write a very good piano sketch but don't orchestrate, they'll give it to an orchestrator and he'll divine what they want or they'll talk about it but I just can't think of music since the first music I ever wrote was orchestral music I hear it all in my head. If I couldn't

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orchestrate it there wouldn't be – I'd have a very incomplete feeling because I think of it all as part and parcel, I hear a musical phrase in my head and I'll know what instrument's playing it, for any given occasion.

**Kirchner:** Now, for, *I Want to Live!* you did all your own orchestrating I assume.

**Mandel:** Oh sure, for everything I do.

**Kirchner:** Okay.

**Mandel:** If I get orchestrating help it's only because there's just no other way.

**Kirchner:** Is that, do you think that's still a pretty common attitude among say composers of your generation who got into film writing like Mancini and Neal Hefti and J.J. Johnson...

**Mandel:** I don't know.

**Kirchner:** Billy Byers, people like that...

**Mandel:** I can only speak to myself, Mancini always used an orchestrator but if you looked at his sketches everything was there. I don't think Neal did a great deal of film. J.J. I don't know what kind of film J. did, he's a wonderful writer though and Neal is too.

**Kirchner:** J.J. got in fairly late in the game I think, in around late 60s, 1970. As a matter of fact I'll just tell you a quick story. I was at a seminar last week that was given by somebody who's writing J.J.'s biography and he played a film clip from a movie that J.J. had done in the early 70s called, *Across 110th Street*.


**Mandel:** Oh, yeah, yeah, I remember that film.

**Kirchner:** And there was a percussion segment and it was very similar to the one you did for, *I Want to Live!* which I pointed out to J.J.'s biography and he was very intrigued by that. It was just, I won't say it was a copy but it was conceptually very similar to what you did.

**Mandel:** Uh-huh, I never heard this score so I...

**Kirchner:** It's quite interesting.

**Mandel:** But if J.J. copied anything I ever did, I'd be highly complimented.

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**Kirchner:** [laughs] So, after you did that score, you did quite a bit of television writing then subsequently.

**Mandel:** Only as much as I had to, I never liked writing television. I always considered it a far inferior medium to film, budget wise, schedule wise, quality wise, in every way. It was anytime you did TV it was like doing “B” pictures. In fact it took the place of, B, pictures, that’s what happened to, “B” pictures, in-case anybody wants to know.

[they both laugh]

**Kirchner:** It's interesting, I got to know, do you know Duane Tatro?

**Mandel:** Sure, good boy.

**Kirchner:** As you know he basically made his career writing for television and...

**Mandel:** A lot of guys did, never left television.

**Kirchner:** For some reason he was never able to crack film.

**Mandel:** Very hard to make the transition sometimes, that's why I tried to stay away from television, I did not want to end up in the television graveyards, plus I just didn’t like doing the work.

**Kirchner:** That was the same, the same could be said of Earle Hagen for example, he did mostly television right?

**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah he did, that’s true and very well I might add, very inventive composer, did a lot of those good things like, “Mod Squad,” and...

**Kirchner:** “I Spy.”


**Mandel:** “I Spy,” all those things, he wrote interesting stuff.

**Kirchner:** He used to give a lot of seminars for film and TV composers didn’t he?

**Mandel:** Is Earle still around?

**Kirchner:** I'm not sure I haven't heard anything about him...

**Mandel:** In years I haven’t...

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**Kirchner:** In several years yeah.

**Mandel:** Good man, he was a lot older than I was.

**Kirchner:** He wrote, “Harlem Nocturne,” in the late 30s.

**Mandel:** He did?

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** I don’t know why I always thought Alfred Newman did that, I used to get it mixed up with, “Street Song,” I guess, which was Newman's, or, “Street Scene.” They all had that 30s New York sound.

**Kirchner:** Right, with an alto saxophone.

**Mandel:** You bet.

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** Oh, so Earle wrote “Harlem Nocturne,” good piece.

**Kirchner:** So, for television you did something, I remember seeing some *Ben Casey* episodes...

**Mandel:** Yeah, I did.

**Kirchner:** How many of those did you do, quite a few?


**Mandel:** Oh, I don't know, I don’t know, I just never took count of those things.

**Kirchner:** And what else, *Mister Roberts*?

**Mandel:** Yeah, I did that. I didn't do much, I think I subbed for Frank Perkins a few times while he was ill, he was having an operation of some kind, but that was his show. He's the guy who wrote, “Stars Fell on Alabama.”

**Kirchner:** Ah-ha.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

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**Kirchner:** Yeah and you did some things for Andy Williams' variety show right?

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, in fact Dave Grusin and I, that's where we met and became very close buddies, we were on Andy's show for a couple years. That was a fun show to do 'cause you know it was live TV, we had a good band.

**Kirchner:** And a lot of music.

**Mandel:** And a lot of music and Andy was a wonderful musician and singer, you know, this is one guy who has probably the best ears of anyone around, probably from all those years of singing hard parts for Kay Thompson. He has laser ears, I used to make a game of trying to throw him with modulations and I never succeeded. I'd write impossible, outrageous things you wouldn't do to a singer, not for a singer to a singer is really...

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** And he'd never crack a smile, he'd just, he'd never flinch, you know, he'd just do it [laughs] because he knew I was doing a number with him. In fact I don't think we ever talked about it.

**Kirchner:** Well, Dave...

**Mandel:** Sort of a little like that, did you read the – well I won't mention that on this tape 'cause it's really not germane. Did you read Oscar Peterson's biography [*The Will to Swing*] that Gene Lees wrote?

**Kirchner:** Yes.

**Mandel:** You remember that scene when Ray Brown and Herb Ellis dyed their hair to each other's color and Oscar Peterson would never acknowledge that he noticed it.


**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** In all the years there've known him since.

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** This was sort of one of those kind of things.

**Kirchner:** Dave Grusin was Andy's musical director at the time, right?

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**Mandel:** Yes he was, no, first he was his piano player. I got knocked out the first time I ever heard him play, I said, “Good, God, what’s this, something new.”

**Kirchner:** Yeah, there are some film scores of his that maybe we should – there’s a technique he uses in his, some of his film scores like for, *Three Days of the Condor*...

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Where he does, I guess what you’d call motivic development...

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** Just starting out with a basic motif and developing it throughout the film.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Is that a technique that interests you in doing scores?

**Mandel:** Sure, I’ve done that, *Point Blank*’s a good example of something I did in, fact I wrote that whole – That’s totally a twelve tone score, I wrote it around a row and a motif, a tone-row and a motif.

**Kirchner:** When did that come out, I’m not familiar with that one?

**Mandel:** 1967. That was one of my favorite projects.


**Kirchner:** Does that show up on television or anything anymore?

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, all over the place, Lee Marvin, Angie Dickinson, a lot of good actors in there.

**Kirchner:** I’ll have to watch for that.

**Mandel:** Lloyd Bochner, a real solid bunch of Canadian actors, John Vernon. John Boorman film. A lot of fun to do that movie, work, but fun, that’s one of the more rewarding ones.

**Kirchner:** Before we... I don't get too far ahead of ourselves chronologically although I want to get back to your specific, other films later like, *The Sandpiper*, and *The Americanization of Emily*, and *The Russians are Coming*, but what I wanted to do is talk about some of the vocal albums you did in the late 50s with people like David Allyn and Sinatra and Jo Stafford and Mel Tormé.

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**Mandel:** Yep.

**Kirchner:** I guess first of all maybe...

**Mandel:** Peggy...

**Kirchner:** The David Allyn...

**Mandel:** Yep, go ahead.

**Kirchner:** Like the *Sure Thing*, and the other one that came out about twenty years after you did it, *In the Blue of Evening*.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, um-hm. Around the same time I did a Dick Hayme's album, which was good too.

**Kirchner:** I just think it'd be interesting to talk about how you collaborate with different singers and the similarities and differences of getting together a vocal album in far as say picking tunes, deciding on keys, deciding on orchestration.

**Mandel:** We sit down and decide those things, that's what we do.

**Kirchner:** For example with David you were doing an all Jerome Kern album with the *Sure Thing*.


**Mandel:** You know with most of those dates at that time it was what can we afford, how big of an orchestra can I have. We'd mutually agree on the songs and you tried to get the nicest orchestra you could and try and get the best mixer you could and record in the best studios you could. That was really the name of the game.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, the *Sure Thing* I think in particular is regarded by a lot of people as the record that David Allyn's best and most fondly known for and remembered for.

**Mandel:** It was a labor of love making it. I think we made it in about 1957, something like that.

**Kirchner:** Seven or eight right?

**Mandel:** Seven or eight, yeah, I guess so.

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**Kirchner:** And then there was the second one was done but Warner Brothers kept in the can for twenty years and then Discovery put it out in around '79 which is a mystery since it's a wonderful record.

**Mandel:** One of those record company decisions that we often fall victim to. I mean thank God for CDs.

**Kirchner:** Exactly.

**Mandel:** A lot of things have come out that never would've left the vaults as a result and a lot of things that have come out that maybe have been in the vaults fifty or sixty years.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Including a lot of old Bessie Smith records, you know it's just CDs have done that for us, because all of a sudden when they came out with this new format they were so starved for product we got treated to a lot of out-of-print items.

**Kirchner:** Absolutely.

**Mandel:** And they're still coming and I love it.

**Kirchner:** Oh, absolutely.

**Mandel:** Yeah, stuff that never would've seen the light of day again, absolutely not. And we were lucky if any of them were still in existence too, it's unbelievable how badly recorded material has been treated over the history of recording.

**Kirchner:** Oh, I've heard, I'm sure you know many horror stories too...

**Mandel:** Oh God.


**Kirchner:** Of just idiots going through the vaults and trashing things...

**Mandel:** Yeah!

**Kirchner:** Because they want to make room for...

**Mandel:** For filing.

**Kirchner:** On the shelves.

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**Mandel:** Having no idea what they were trashing and couldn't have cared less if they had an idea, absolutely true. We live in a time of cretins.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** A lot of them.

**Kirchner:** Now David's record was done around – you did those two with David...

**Mandel:** Yes.

**Kirchner:** Then there was one called, *Jo + Jazz*, with Jo Stafford.

**Mandel:** Oh that was nice, we got to use some good musicians on there like, Ben Webster, I mean all the records used good musicians, you know, I got the best guys I could but here we got to use a lot of guys out of Duke's band.

**Kirchner:** Like Ray Nance and Ben Webster.

**Mandel:** Didn't have Ray Nance, we had Ben Webster, we had Lawrence Brown, you know it was just great having these people, Harry Carney. And Duke was on one of his periodic European trips where he didn't take the band and I got to use them. And let's see, Hodges [Johnny] had come back, so he was laying around.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] Now to do that kind of...


**Mandel:** And having, "Rabbit," on anything was...

**Kirchner:** Sure.

**Mandel:** Oh, good God, my favorite player I think of all of them.

**Kirchner:** I would say that you could, that he was probably Ellington's greatest soloists, you know I mean some people would argue that, but you'd have to make a pretty serious argument.

**Mandel:** Well, he was another one that was the great communicator; it was like there was nothing between his brain and your brain. There was no saxophone, there was no pads, no mechanism, it just went like right from where he was thinking right to your brain. It was something very few have been gifted with, Stan Getz had it, Lester Young certainly had it,

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Charlie Parker had it and there's a few others but you know what, out of all the great jazz players there aren't that many that had that particular thing. Louis [Armstrong] of course had it.

**Kirchner:** Where you're not conscious of the physical limitations of the instrument.

**Mandel:** Yeah, there's absolutely no, there's no instrument between them and you and that's, that's I guess what I mean. You're not conscious of it unless they mention it, they're able to move you because there's nothing in-between.

**Kirchner:** Now for that album, was that your concept to use say, Ellington players with Jo?

**Mandel:** Well, it wasn't really my concept, it was Irving Townsend's concept, at the time, you know he was the A and R man there and god bless Irving, you know we...

**Kirchner:** This was for Columbia [Records]?

**Mandel:** This was for Columbia in the late 50s and...

**Kirchner:** That CD by the way, you can get that record, its out on CD now.

**Mandel:** Yeah, um-hm.

**Kirchner:** I think Jo and Paul Weston put it out themselves right?

**Mandel:** They did, on Corinth [Corinthian Records] I think, they bought the masters and put it out, I guess they liked that record.

**Kirchner:** With good reason.


**Mandel:** Yeah, great people, both of them.

**Kirchner:** So Irving came up with the concept then?

**Mandel:** He came up with the concept but Irving was wonderful at concepts, he was one of the great A and R men who have been forgotten. Not by me though.

[They both laugh]

**Kirchner:** Whose choice of tunes was it primarily Jo's or did you have some suggestions for tunes or did Irving?

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**Mandel:** I think it was mostly let Jo chose them, anybody with the kind of taste she has, shouldn't be told what to do.

**Kirchner:** And around the same time you did the Mel Tormé record, *I Like Duke, I Like the Count*. [*I Dig the Duke! I Dig the Count!*]

**Mandel:** That was a nice experience too. I honestly think that – Mel told me it's his favorite record.

**Kirchner:** Really?

**Mandel:** Yeah, he really likes that, one of the best he ever did.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, I think probably that one and the two with Marty Paich with the Dek-Tette.

**Mandel:** Oh the Dek-Tette stuff yeah.

**Kirchner:** Those are probably...

**Mandel:** He liked those too...

**Kirchner:** Yeah, those are probably his finest, from my admittedly subjective opinion.

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** Now somebody like Mel, is someone who taught himself to orchestrate and...


**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Does he get more involved with an arranger in terms of dictating what he wants or does he give you a freehand or how does he operate?

**Mandel:** He gave me a freehand, but he gave me some input here and there and I gave him a lot of input. I don't know, it was a very nice collaboration, it was effortless. We both agreed on what we wanted to do, if he had an idea here I'd write it down very quickly and do it.

**Kirchner:** And as far as the material it was probably a labor of love just because you were both Ellington and Basie fans...

**Mandel:** Right...

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**Kirchner:** For many years.

**Mandel:** It was just a matter of what did he want to sing.

**Kirchner:** Now the Sinatra record, *Ring-a-Ding-Ding!*

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Which was the very first record that Sinatra did for Reprise.

**Mandel:** Yeah, which was his company at the time.

**Kirchner:** Was that the very first Reprise record?

**Mandel:** The very first Reprise record.

**Kirchner:** So you were following...

**Mandel:** No one.

**Kirchner:** Well in terms of the people...

**Mandel:** [laughs]

**Kirchner:** Yeah right, true.

**Mandel:** For once.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] Although in a sense you were because, say Nelson Riddle and Billy May and Gordon Jenkins had been doing his writing.


**Mandel:** Oh, I'd followed all those great arrangers...

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Axel Stordahl...

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Oh, with Sinatra sure.

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**Kirchner:** Yeah, I've referred to that, to *Ring-a-Ding-Ding!* half facetiously as Sinatra's bebop record and I'm exaggerating for effect but my point in that is...

**Mandel:** I didn't write any bebop in it.

**Kirchner:** Not overtly.

**Mandel:** I was by then that was like ten years after I was writing those bebop arrangements for Artie Shaw and people like that, I didn't really write like that anymore if you'd noticed.

**Kirchner:** Right, but what I...

**Mandel:** I don't mind the way I wrote then, it's just that my head changed somewhat during those ten years. I got much more basic in terms of swing.

**Kirchner:** Although it's very subtle but I get it, like for example Nelson Riddle came out of the swing era.

**Mandel:** Much more so than I did.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Although we were both in bands at the same time.

**Kirchner:** Um-hm, and Billy May was...


**Mandel:** Much more, much more.

**Kirchner:** There's a very subtle but different flavor in what you wrote for Sinatra but at the same time I mean it's totally appropriate and he's totally comfortable with it.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** But there's just a different flavor just because of your orientation that the fact that you came on the scene a little bit later.

**Mandel:** Well I was much more of a jazz arranger than Nelson was too, whereas you can't say that of Billy, Billy was always this free loose swinging wonderful arranger who started with Charlie Barnet. You know which was one of the great white swing bands, truly and very undervalued from a historical perspective.

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**Kirchner:** Like for example on *Ring-a-Ding-Ding!*, just some of the soloist you use and the way you use them, like say with Don Fagerquist...

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Or Frank Rosolino.

**Mandel:** Yeah or Joe Maini or some... yeah.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, who was the lead alto player on that?

**Mandel:** Joe Maini.

**Kirchner:** It was Joe? I was wondering whether it...

**Mandel:** The best and I've never been able to replace him.

**Kirchner:** I can imagine.

**Mandel:** The best.

**Kirchner:** There is one, I don't know how much in detail you remember those charts but I was just listening to "A Foggy Day," the other night and there's a sax section background you write behind Sinatra's vocal that sounds to my ears it sounds like a five way voicing with a drop two. Do you remember? It's an unfair question to ask any writer what he did with specific voicing on a specific record but I can't help but ask.

**Mandel:** I generally favor five way voicing's, I'm not really one of those four-part harmony with a double-lead writers. I don't do that a lot, unless I want that particular effect, but that's not I'd say a general working tool for me. I like writing five ways very much, I like writing six ways, I love having six saxophones better than anything else but I found out if I make my records with six saxophones they sound wonderful on the record but the minute the singer wants to go out on the road with them, I have to re-voice them for five and that's a pain in the you-know-what.

**Kirchner:** Absolutely.

**Mandel:** I have to totally re-voice them then, and it's double work plus it just doesn't sound as good for five, so you know I'm sort of pushed into going with five but I sort of feel like five way writing has all been pretty well exploited to its maximum. I'd like having six or seven saxophones even because there's all kinds of ways to use them, that I can think of.

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**Kirchner:** Yeah, the five way voicing I was talking about on “Foggy Day,” reminded me... like the end of the 60s Thad Jones started using a lot of soprano lead.

**Mandel:** Yep.

**Kirchner:** And I mean the voicing’s you wrote for Sinatra were pretty high which is the reason I thought they were dropped twos.

**Mandel:** Dropped twos? What are dropped twos, that’s what I was starting to wonder?

**Kirchner:** When you take the second highest voice and drop it an octave, if you have a close voicing.

**Mandel:** Oh, I know what you’re talking about, you mean when you got six way... I know what you mean.

**Kirchner:** When you have a close voicing.

**Mandel:** You drop, yeah, you take the second highest and drop it...

**Kirchner:** An octave.

**Mandel:** So that you got – it’s almost like... yeah I know what you’re talking about. So you have a space between the first and third voice.

**Kirchner:** Exactly.

**Mandel:** Sometimes I’ll do that.


**Kirchner:** That was one of Thad Jones’ favorite saxophone voicings.

**Mandel:** I do that quite often, yeah.

**Kirchner:** Only...

**Mandel:** Whereas if you have six or seven brass you can just plain do it without leaving anything out.

**Kirchner:** Um-hm.

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**Mandel:** So you can do it with six or seven saxophones too.

**Kirchner:** Exactly. I think it works particularly well say when the lead alto line is pretty high on the horn.

**Mandel:** Pretty high on the horn yeah.

**Kirchner:** So, I mean it was interesting for me to hear that segment just because it was something Thad did a few years later with soprano lead, but you were doing it earlier with the alto lead.

**Mandel:** Um-hm, it's another reason why I like at least two altos, I don't like having that top tenor up there too much, I mean it's okay up there but it's a different sound.

**Kirchner:** And it's hard for a lot of players to play in tune up there consistently.

**Mandel:** I'd say so, and also the one alto sticks out. There's not something to blend it with, in fact if I have six saxophones, I'll use three altos, three, two, and one is a wonderful sound.

**Kirchner:** Have you heard the things Clare Fischer did for six saxes with two altos, two tenors, baritone and a bass on the bottom?

**Mandel:** Bass saxophone on the bottom?

**Kirchner:** Um-hm.


**Mandel:** No, I haven't but I don't think that's a very good combination because the baritone will have a dumb part.

**Kirchner:** Interesting, yeah.

**Mandel:** He's sitting up on the upper part of his horn and it's not a real good sound, in the section because the good notes are going to the bass saxophone, which is a relatively clumsy instrument.

**Kirchner:** Um-hm.

**Mandel:** It's a good instrument it's just, I used to use it a lot more than I do now, I like bass saxophone. But I'd use it in place of baritone if I just wanted to extend the range rather than having a baritone up above it. I never liked the Kenton two baritone set up either.

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**Kirchner:** No.

**Mandel:** ‘Cause the top baritone’s got the part nobody wants.

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** The bottom baritone has the best part in the band.

**Kirchner:** One of your characteristic woodwind voicing’s that to my ears is characteristic anyway is, having six reeds and having what sounds like two flutes, two alto flutes, bass clarinet and contrabass clarinet, like you used when I went down to see you do that Kevin Kline end title a couple weeks ago.

**Mandel:** Oh, yeah?

**Kirchner:** That sound is something that I’ve heard you use before say with Shirley Horn. Say on the Shirley Horn album I think you use something similar right?

**Mandel:** Yeah, I’ll talk about that to you a little bit later.

**Kirchner:** Okay.

**Mandel:** Great.


**Kirchner:** So, Johnny when we broke we were talking about just – we were into a little technical discussion about your woodwind voicing’s and when I went to that film that you did in town about two or three weeks ago with Kevin Kline, I noticed with looking at the score you had six woodwinds and you had two flutes, two alto flutes, bass clarinet and contrabass clarinet and it reminded me of some things I’d heard you do earlier, for among other people, Shirley Horn.

**Mandel:** The reason I used that kind of a voicing was basically to give the greatest amount of flexibility. For instance, if I wanted to get a clarinet trio down on the bottom I could break the clarinet loose and have him playing with the bass clarinet, and the contrabass clarinet. And by the same token I had four flutes apart – three flutes apart from that and... well no, wait seven woodwinds.

**Kirchner:** No you had six right? Two flutes...

**Mandel:** I had six.

**Kirchner:** Two flutes, two alto flutes, bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet.

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**Mandel:** Oh, oh, okay, yeah, in an instrumentation like that the bottom alto flute would swing to clarinet if necessary. The top alto flute would swing to flute if necessary, depends on how high or low everything was written and if I wanted to I could move the bass clarinet up to clarinet or if I wanted to get a five flute thing you could do that too. I'd get somebody on – that's the swing chair that bass clarinet chair, the contrabass clarinet just stayed with what he had. That was really the bottom, unless I got into something where I wanted six-way-stuff you know, then I'd break all six loose from the clarinets.

**Kirchner:** Now, you and Billy Byers to my knowledge use contrabass clarinet more than anyone else.

**Mandel:** I use it all the time, I don't do anything without it unless it's big band.

**Kirchner:** What's the appeal of it as a voice for you?

**Mandel:** Oh God, it speaks very – first of all it speaks beautifully, it can bark, it's got a total dynamic range of quadruple P to quadruple F. It's got a range down to F just above bass-E which puts it way down in the bottom octave of the piano. Those are good notes, they don't rattle around like a double bass clarinet, a double B-flat and...

**Kirchner:** So you use the E-flat?

**Mandel:** I use the E-flat always.

**Kirchner:** Otherwise known as the contra alto clarinet.


**Mandel:** No, just contrabass clarinet.

**Kirchner:** Okay.

**Mandel:** I mean it's almost never used except in symphonies that double B-flat.

**Kirchner:** Um-hm, yeah.

**Mandel:** 'Cause it's kind of useless, that sound unless you double it an octave above when you're doing a line that you want to bring out, which you can probably do better with a contrabassoon anyway. You know you're looking for real low voices in the orchestra. See that's one of my problems with jazz bands is that there's not only are you lacking soprano voices, they're lacking real good bass voices. So, you're limited really... from just about cello C to about G above high C which isn't... or F above high C which isn't a tremendous range. But it's

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okay and that's pushing it a bit, certainly for an ordinary dance band that's pushing it a great deal. But now that they have baritones with low A on it you've got the cello C.

**Kirchner:** And bass trombone.

**Mandel:** Yeah, that kind of stuff. But I always like to spread out and there weren't instruments that could do it which is why I started adding a lot of instruments in the case of, you know an E-flat clarinet up top, which is really not an instrument for general use 'cause it's a real interesting color but it's like a very cutting kind of color.

**Kirchner:** You used it really effectively in, *I Want to Live!*

**Mandel:** I wanted a chilling sound and it's a chilling sound. It's not a warm sound, but it's perfect for what it is.

**Kirchner:** That comes to mind, there was that segment, the gas chamber scene where you use the low register piccolo playing.

**Mandel:** Right, how do you know that?

**Kirchner:** Almost inaudibly.

**Mandel:** Did I write about it in the notes or something?

**Kirchner:** No.

**Mandel:** I might have.

**Kirchner:** Or maybe, there's a little bit of it in there about Harry Klee playing it I think.

**Mandel:** Yeah... the low register piccolo is interesting 'cause like low register flutes there are no, absolutely no, overtones to the bottom octave of those instruments. So it makes them sound an octave lower than they are, but also a low register piccolo sounds like a dying man gasping for breath, it's a very strange sound and it's not something you'd associate with a piccolo. In fact, on *I Want to Live!* I wrote all the instruments a great deal of the time way out of their registers either the high ones are playing very low or the low ones are playing very high. That was another effect I was trying to get, to try and submerge the identity of the instrument.

**Kirchner:** How did the players react to all these unconventional uses of their instruments?

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**Mandel:** They said, “Jesus, are you crazy,” no, they didn’t say that. [laughs] They were all for it, they liked it, they felt like they were doing something at the time.

**Kirchner:** It was definitely not a run in the mill film date.

**Mandel:** I guess not. You know I don't have perspective of a player ever because I don't have to sit day after day and play lots of different kinds of music. I'm in my own head and I know what I'm going to do, or if I don't know what I'm going to do I'll know what I've done by the time I get into the date. And I have no idea what they've looked at that day from other people or what they've had to look at all week and so I figure if they don't throw me out of there I am doing pretty good.

**Kirchner:** Now one of the key players on, *I Want to Live!* and you mentioned he played lead alto on the Sinatra record was Joe Maini.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah.

**Kirchner:** Let's talk a bit about him.


**Mandel:** He was one the most amazing alto players I've ever known and do I miss him, we lost him in the early 60s and he's the best lead alto player I know. All you have to do is listen to all the Terry Gibbs, *Dream Band* records. He was a wonderful soloist and he had great emotional appeal, he was not of the cool school and I'm not one who liked the cool school, particularly.

**Kirchner:** He was a very Charlie Parker influenced alto player.

**Mandel:** And he was one of the funniest people I've ever known and unknown to most people he was very literate. He was a professional ignoramus who pretended to be, it was an act with him, he was extremely intelligent.

**Kirchner:** I'm told by a reliable source that Lenny Bruce got a great deal of his shtick from Joe Maini.

**Mandel:** He got a lot of it but Lenny Bruce didn't need to get his shticks from anybody, he was the most creative comic I've ever heard, bar-none, and to this day nobody's come close to him and I'm sorry that they've missed him. It would be wonderful if there was a revival and some people started doing comedy on the level of his comedy, 'cause I think comedy these days is just stupid. It's as bad as comedy was in the 20s as far as the level it plays to, forgetting the scatological parts of it, they tell jokes and do old-time standup comedy is what they do and it's just not the kind of sophisticated comedy we had in the 50s and 60s.

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**Kirchner:** There's no place for a Mort Sahl.

**Mandel:** No, no, doesn't seem to be.

**Kirchner:** How well did you know Lenny Bruce?

**Mandel:** Pretty well, just thought he was wonderful. He was a wonderful self-destructive man.

**Kirchner:** He used to work a lot of jazz clubs right?

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, well he used to work a lot of burlesque houses too, don't forget his mom Sally Marr, Sally was the dirtiest comic I've ever heard. They thought Lenny was dirty, Sally Marr was a burlesque comic that's where, you know he came by it honestly, his mother was a burlesque comic and they are as raunchy as they come and she dated from the 20s. So, I mean she used to embarrass Joe Maini and Jack Sheldon, that took some doing.

**Kirchner:** I'll bet.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah.

**Kirchner:** So you used to hear – did you used to see Lenny work quite a bit?

**Mandel:** Yeah, whenever I could. Oh, he had us on the floor at all times.

**Kirchner:** How did it compare with the records for example? Do you know the records?

**Mandel:** Oh they're wonderful, they're classics.

**Kirchner:** But how close are the records to the way he really was?

**Mandel:** Oh, he never kept a show the same, ever. So who knows, he didn't do pat things, he was so wonderfully inventive that it was always changing. He didn't have a routine like so many comics do, where he froze it...

**[Begin CD 6]**

**Mandel:** And did it like it was a show. It wasn't like that with him at all, he was very off the cuff.

**Kirchner:** And very in tune with musicians.

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**Mandel:** Oh extremely, sure.

**Kirchner:** What do you think would have happened had he lived?

**Mandel:** Who knows? I mean who does know? He, if he hadn't self-destructed... see Lenny got so involved in defending himself in the courts that he stopped being funny, so it's hard to say, his life went in just totally different directions for the last few years of his life. And he was like Mort Sahl, that happened to Mort Sahl too, he got hung up on the Kennedy assassination and he became serious and, you know about trying to... disprove the prevailing theory you know and prove it was a conspiracy and all the rest of it. Lenny, was just trying to save himself in the courts as far as his arrests on narcotics, his arrests on obscenity. He was not an obscene comic at all, not really, even by those standards back then. These guys today are obscene.

**Kirchner:** Well it's the theory of shock for shock's sake, I think. That there's no substance below it.

**Mandel:** Yeah, he never used it for shock value and he was very much against it, he used to talk, he said, he'd never use scatological references for shock value at all and he thought it was dumb, the people who did it were pretty dumb. 'Cause there's no point in it, it's not funny unto itself, it's only when it's juxtaposed with something else that it becomes funny.

**Kirchner:** Now, we were talking about Joe Maini, I'm told he was a great strip joint tenor player.

**Mandel:** The best, it was when I first heard him playing in strip joints that kind of alto, real rye balled alto that I decided right then and there that was the perfect thing for, *I Want to Live!* For all those scenes, like at when she was arrested and screaming over crowds and all that stuff, that was the sound. And I heard him first do it in strip joints, exactly.


**Kirchner:** A lot of players used to play in strip joints in L.A. in the 50s right?

**Mandel:** Sure.

**Kirchner:** That was...

**Mandel:** That was, a lot of that work was there.

**Kirchner:** It was like another form of casuals.

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**Mandel:** Yeah, but you had to outplay the drummer in strip joints 'cause they were busy catching the kicks with the girls and all and tit wags and what else, whatever else, fanny wags.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** So you had to really be able to speak on the instrument, that was definitely not for West Coast jazz players.

**Kirchner:** So what else did you use Joe on besides, *Ring-a-Ding-Ding!*

**Mandel:** Everything, once I discovered him, I wouldn't let him out of my sight.

**Kirchner:** He was kind of for you what Art Pepper was for Marty Paich.

**Mandel:** I guess so, but I loved Art Pepper too but Art Pepper wasn't around a lot of the time.

**Kirchner:** Right.

**Mandel:** Art Pepper was a marvelous player, I used him on the Hoagy Carmichael album. I used to play with him in the Spanish bands, you know when I was playing in the Latin bands. We called them Spanish bands, they weren't Spanish, they were Puerto Rican or Cuban, that was in the late 40s.

**Kirchner:** How well did you get to know him?


**Mandel:** Very well.

**Kirchner:** Would you like to talk about him a bit.

**Mandel:** He was like a brother, he was like a beautiful pure soul, who unfortunately got loused up on drugs like so many. Chet was that way too, you know they were drug casualties, what else can I say. One of those unfortunate people who crossed paths with drugs, had they been born twenty years later or twenty years earlier, it would never have happened. Even ten years earlier or later.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, well like you were talking yesterday it seemed to have all happened in, the most intense drug period seemed to be say 1945 to '55 was when most of the people who were getting hooked got hooked.

**Mandel:** Yeah, '45 to '60, I'd say. Yeah and it really dwindled off in the 60s. Thank God, I mean it was just a terrible period, but it was a great musical period, I gotta say that.

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**Kirchner:** Yeah it's...

**Mandel:** It had nothing to do with – you know the great music had nothing to do with the drugs they just happened to have occurred simultaneously.

**Kirchner:** There has been nothing like it before or since, I mean there have been things as good certainly but there was something about that period that was just totally unique in terms of the music and the personalities.

**Mandel:** Yeah, I can't really say it had nothing to do with drugs really come to think of it because some of the great role models were junkies, like Bird but then there were a lot who never went near it like Dizzy. So... But even Bird used to say that drugs never helped anyone play and always tried to discourage people from using, he was not somebody who liked to see someone start taking up his habits.

**Kirchner:** Let's talk a bit more about the Sinatra album.

**Mandel:** Okay.

**Kirchner:** One thing that struck me as it being a particularly difficult assignment is there were no tunes that were ballads, there were no tunes that were really up, the most they seem to be medium slow to medium and it struck me it must've been a really hard assignment to write say ten or twelve charts all at approximately the same tempo.


**Mandel:** Yeah, there were a few charts in there that I did not write.

**Kirchner:** Oh really?

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Which ones?

**Mandel:** I didn't have time. Oh, I didn't write, "Be Careful, It's My Heart," I didn't write... I wrote only parts of some charts. I didn't write, "I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm," I don't think, oh I wrote some parts of it, you can recognize what I did, and what I didn't, I think if you're familiar with. When I'd really get in a hurry and I was so slow because Sinatra quite frankly had me psyching myself out because I wanted to do that job so right so badly that I took about three, four times as long on a chart as I should've and I ran into a lot of difficulty. And as a result some of it I had to farm out at the last minute just to get it on the stands and...

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**Kirchner:** How did you get the call for it in the first place?

**Mandel:** Oh, he'd heard some stuff I'd done for Vic Damone, he'd heard stuff for David Allyn, you know he'd heard about me. He'd go into nightclubs and wanted to know who wrote those charts and they'd be me, that kind of stuff.

**Kirchner:** He's one of the few singers I've ever heard in concert who announces the names of all the arrangers.

**Mandel:** Yeah, what a gentleman, God bless him because nobody does, does Mel Tormé? Does he announce himself?

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** You're right, nobody does, even Tony I don't think does as a rule.

**Kirchner:** No.

**Mandel:** No. I think Nat Cole did, you know as they say, "It don't cost you nothing," and it'd be really nice if more people would.

**Kirchner:** It's just a gracious gesture.

**Mandel:** It is, you'd think Natalie [Cole] would've listened to her old man but no. But she sure can sing.

**Kirchner:** How did you collaborate with Sinatra on getting the album together? Did...


**Mandel:** Oh, he told me what tunes he wanted to do, we picked out keys, he didn't like to rehearse, ever, he hates rehearsing. And it went like clockwork you know, I found him very easy and I found him to be a total gentleman all the way through.

**Kirchner:** Does he want to do complete takes or does he...

**Mandel:** Yes, yes.

**Kirchner:** No splices?

**Mandel:** The only problem we ever had with each other was when I made him do, "You and the Night and the Music," over. He wanted to go home, it was the last tune of the date and there was a huge fat clam in the trumpets, in fact Gozzo [Conrad] made it. And...

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**Kirchner:** So you couldn't hide it?

**Mandel:** I couldn't let it go and he already had two girls on each arm he's like, "Hey, come on let's go home and boogie, let's get out of here Charlie," and I said, "Ah-ah," and he didn't like that at all. He had to stay and do another take because – he didn't like it, because he puts all his energy into that previous take you know. He's a kamikaze singer, he can't really – he hates to rehearse because there's no pressure on him, he needs to have the entourage, not because he needs the entourage he just likes to have a lot of people really scrutinizing him on dates, he needs a crowd to work to. He sounds like a different singer when you've got him alone in the room and he's uncomfortable singing, it's almost like he doesn't really enjoy singing often, for its own sake. But when he gets up in front of an audience it's such a challenge that he mentally just makes it happen, you know, he's got that strong a mind that he could make the whole thing take place. You know only in the last several years or ten years or so, since the instrument's been failing him can't he do it, but you know he'd be in bad shape, hoarse and all that kind of thing and he'd get out there and sounded wonderfully and you knew it was strictly through mental control that he'd do it. And Streisand has much the same approach to singing in that way, they don't sing anything alike but she's just that strong, she's that strongly fixed mentally, she makes it happen.

**Kirchner:** Although ironically she got intense stage fright and didn't perform in public for twenty years.

**Mandel:** That's right.

**Kirchner:** That's the big difference between her and Sinatra.


**Mandel:** Well, that's true.

**Kirchner:** But as far as the mental processes that sounds very plausible with both of them.

**Mandel:** Um-hm, this happens to singers you know, one very fine singer who is very underrated because of the image that she cultivated was Doris Day, who got so paranoid about performing she used to – you know I knew her in the bands [laughs] it reminds me of a great line Oscar Levant used to use, "I knew Doris Day before she was a virgin."

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** And she was really a nice girl and a wonderful singer but she got so paranoid, you know every night she'd sing in front of bands, in front of all kinds of people and was totally uninhibited but something happened along the way to where she got so she wouldn't even sing

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with the band on record dates. She used to, as soon as they allowed overdubbing she would send everybody home and then do her vocals by herself and never performed in person. You never saw her going to Vegas and anything like that and she always could sing, she was very much of an Ella Fitzgerald type of clone. In fact Natalie sounds amazing like her at times, Natalie Cole.

**Kirchner:** Interesting.

**Mandel:** We made a record of, “The Christmas Song,” and she sounds like Doris Day on that thing.

**Kirchner:** Would this be an appropriate time to just talk about who your favorite singers are, you’ve been mentioning a few.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, Peggy Lee for openers. Shirley Horn, I like singers that sound like they are singing in your ear. I don't like belters particularly that's a personal... but I can admire belters, I just don't like being yelled at, especially in love songs.

**Kirchner:** They’re not much fun to write for either.

**Mandel:** Some are better than others but I don't see how anybody can get any intimacy when they’re singing that loud, it's an old tradition of singing, hit the fourth balcony type of singing. And some people think that's a great thing to do, well it's an endurance contest that's for sure, it's hard on the instrument. But I always like the Billie Holiday, Peggy Lee, Carmen McRae, good straight-forward singers that are very musical, Jeri Southern, I mean these are the kinds of singers that personally I like the best. Sinatra I don't think has ever had a peer, nobody even comes close. Sinatra, Tony, Bing Crosby was wonderful in his own way, he actually blazed the trail, he was the first really good microphone singer.

**Kirchner:** Now you were talking about Shirley Horn, you came – Shirley is a relatively recent collaboration of yours so I’d like to talk about that a bit.


**Mandel:** Okay, we’re getting ahead of ourselves but that's all right.

**Kirchner:** Well we seem to be skipping around a bit...

**Mandel:** Sure.

**Kirchner:** But as long as I keep my druthers and cover what...

**Mandel:** Okay.

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**Kirchner:** Should be covered, I don't mind if you don't.

**Mandel:** I don't mind. Shirley was as recently as 1990, I think.

**Kirchner:** '90, '91 I believe.

**Mandel:** Yeah probably and I'd gladly do it again and so would she.

**Kirchner:** It's just that Verve [Records] has to come up with the appropriate budget of course.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** But I think the record you did for her, *Here's to Life*, is if she never does anything else like it, that's the record that's going to be what she's remembered for more than anything.

**Mandel:** I'd like to think so, I'd love to think so, although she's made many wonderful records. I love the, *Vine Street [I Thought About You: Live at Vine St.]* record.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Shirley is so special, you know you just, I don't see how you could do... well you could do her badly but I sure wouldn't want to.


[They both laugh]

**Kirchner:** Most of that was done with her laying down trio tracks and you writing right?

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, because she can't really divorce herself from the piano. We did two tracks without her playing and she's never recorded like that, except back in the early days when Quincy recorded her, he didn't let her play. And God anybody who doesn't let her play is a... well anyway when she did these two tunes, "Here's to Life," and, "Where do You Start," she didn't know what to do with her hands. She wears these little gloves that she plays with and she kept taking them off and putting them on, and she went crazy trying to not play and to sing [laughs] so all the other tracks on that album she did lay down her tracks and then I just took the orchestra and went everywhere that she wasn't, is the best way I can describe the technique I used for writing that. Stuff that would work against what she did but complement it.

**Kirchner:** And according to Joel Siegel's liner notes you had given her the tape, the Mike Lang tape that goes with your songbook.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

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**Kirchner:** So that she knew the voicing's that you wanted on your tunes.

**Mandel:** Not particularly, well I gave her the songbook.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** No, not particularly besides Shirley has her own ideas, very firm ideas about chords herself. We just happen to fortunately think quite alike when it comes to voicing but we disagreed quite a few times on chord choices but she is unswayable, you go with her. And it's right for her, if it's right for her it's right for me is how I feel about it. With some people I'll fight about things like that, with Shirley I won't because her instincts are so sound.

**Kirchner:** So she recorded as I recall what, three of your tunes, she did on that particular record...

**Mandel:** On that one, yeah.

**Kirchner:** "A Time for Love", "Where do you Start?" and my all time favorite version of, "Quietly There."

**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah.

**Kirchner:** Now as I recall Miles was supposed to play on that album but died before the date, right?

**Mandel:** That's right, he was supposed to play on, "A Time for Love," he was supposed to play all the places that Wynton ended up playing on, Wynton Marsalis.

**Kirchner:** So, that would have been your chance, the chance that you never had to work with Miles.


**Mandel:** Well Miles and I were going to do an album too.

**Kirchner:** Really?

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** When?

**Mandel:** Just shortly before he died.

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**Kirchner:** How much...

**Mandel:** We were finally getting together.

**Kirchner:** Really?

**Mandel:** Yeah, and it just never happened just like this never happened.

**Kirchner:** But tell me more.

**Mandel:** Well... it was gonna be another one of the type of Gil Evans type things that he had done and I was gonna be very careful that I wouldn't be the E-Flat Gil Evans you know, you don't want to, that's somebody... following Gil Evans you gotta be very careful because it was done right the first time. [laughs] And I wouldn't try to really do that, we weren't gonna remake any of that stuff, it was gonna do new stuff, it was gonna be a whole project unto itself.

**Kirchner:** What kind of material would you have done?

**Mandel:** Hadn't gotten that far.


**Kirchner:** It's interesting that he wanted to do, I mean at the time he was in the late 80s he was pretty much wrapped up with pop, with pop funk things.

**Mandel:** Well Miles as a person if you look at his career, he would go through a period, like he had the small band quintet, then he went through the Gil Evans period with large orchestras, then he went into more funk type quintet's later on and then you know into the Coltrane era and all that kind of thing and then got into the *Bitches Brew* period and in other words Miles never liked to repeat himself or do anything. But finally towards the end of his life even though we didn't realize it he was starting to – Quincy kept bugging him about this 'cause it was gonna be on Qwest and wanted to get Miles to – you know and Miles just never liked to look back, he wasn't that kind of a guy and that's why he shied away from doing things he had done before not because he didn't think there were valid he just liked doing new things. He was similar to Gil that way, to Gil Evans.

**Kirchner:** Now did you talk with Miles directly about this project.

**Mandel:** Really only had one conversation, it was over the phone, but we agreed, we wanted to do it.

**Kirchner:** When was this around 1990 or so?

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**Mandel:** Yeah, right about.

**Kirchner:** Oh, that's...

**Mandel:** I really wished we had done it.

**Kirchner:** That's tragic that that didn't happen.

**Mandel:** Well it is, but it didn't happen, so you know.

**Kirchner:** An unfair but interesting question, what kind of instrumentation do you think would you have used, would you use strings, what would you have used?

**Mandel:** It would have been dictated by what kind of material we did, what I wrote and all that. That would have dictated it. Yeah, chances are I would have used strings, might have used a similar type of instrumentation to what I used in *The Sandpiper*, or possibly on the Sanborn [David] album [*Pearls*] but it would have been a totally different kind of album. Probably a lot more esoteric, I'm not sure where it would have gone, which is why I can't say what instruments I'd have used. It's too early in the game when you don't even have your material to try and decide what kind of a setting you're gonna use for it.

**Kirchner:** Of course. Well speaking of *The Sandpiper*, why don't we jump back to say the early 60s.

**Mandel:** 1964.

**Kirchner:** Yes.


**Mandel:** Alright.

**Kirchner:** Or, in fairness that you said after you'd done, *I Want to Live!* you had done TV writing you had done a couple of, B movies.

**Mandel:** I did a lot of vocal albums.

**Kirchner:** And we've discussed those.

**Mandel:** And really... then did the Andy Williams, I was gonna say Andy Warhol, Andy Williams and right after the Andy Williams thing, I really got connected up with Filmways [Production Company] and got a shot to do *The Americanization of Emily*, a very good picture, a

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chance to write a song, something I hadn't foreseen. And my first song of any consequence, even though when I look back now I had written songs that could've been songs. But I never thought of myself as a songwriter.

**Kirchner:** “Just a Child,” goes under that category doesn’t it?

**Mandel:** Yeah, and stuff from, *I Want to Live!*, “Barbara’s theme,” you know several themes in that could've taken lyrics.

**Kirchner:** Oh, that reminds me...

**Mandel:** “Black Nightgown,” a lot of those could’ve taken lyrics.

**Kirchner:** Three of those tunes, “Barbara’s Theme,” and, “Black Nightgown,” and the theme from, *I Want to Live!* you did charts for Gerry Mulligan on.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** That Mulligan recorded with a concert jazz band.

**Mandel:** Yeah, I think so, right, yeah.

**Kirchner:** So he basically, he just called you and said I like all these tunes that I played on the score or heard on the score and I’d like you to do charts for my band?

**Mandel:** Yeah, it was it, and I was around New York at that time, so I went and rehearsed the band and all that stuff.

**Kirchner:** Apparently he brought Holman east to work in New York...

**Mandel:** That’s right; Bill was with us at the same time.


**Kirchner:** So you just did those three charts then? You didn’t do anything else?

**Mandel:** Yeah, that’s all ‘cause I’d left New York after that, went back home to California.

**Kirchner:** But he recorded all three of them.

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** And they all sounded terrific.

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**Mandel:** Great, well with those players, good God, you could've written stuff that wasn't very good and it would've sounded terrific.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, Stan Getz later recorded, "Barbara's Theme."

**Mandel:** That's another thing I didn't know, you have to watch Stan Getz at all times or he's libel to record something of yours.

[They both laugh]

**Kirchner:** Have you heard that record?

**Mandel:** No, I haven't.

**Kirchner:** It's going to be reissued shortly; it was on an album called, *Voices*, that was done with a rhythm section with Herbie Hancock and Ron Carter and Grady Tate.

**Mandel:** Oh, I'd like to have heard that combination.

**Kirchner:** And a chorus with Claus Ogerman arrangements.

**Mandel:** I'd really like to have heard that, a chorus and Claus plus strings?

**Kirchner:** No, no strings, just a chorus and rhythm section.

**Mandel:** Well if Claus wrote the vocal parts I would've liked it.

**Kirchner:** Yeah it'll be out in June.

**Mandel:** Sounds like a Creed Taylor production.

**Kirchner:** Definitely. From the mid-60s and as a matter of fact, what the only...

**Mandel:** Was it like a Blossom Dearie type chorus?

**Kirchner:** No its...

**Mandel:** 'Cause she was very good at choruses, you remember she had the Blue Reys over in Paris.

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**Kirchner:** Um-hm.

**Mandel:** She knew how to write for voices.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, it was hipper than say a Ray Conniff type concept, or something like that...

**Mandel:** Oh, oh, well, you know...

**Kirchner:** And they did some good tunes, well they did, “Barbara’s Theme,” although they mistitled it, “I Want to Live,” but they did that, they did, “Where Flamingos Fly,” the John Benson Brooks tune.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah...

**Kirchner:** “I Didn’t Know What Time it Was.”

**Mandel:** The one Gil Evans made such a magnificent record on with Jimmy Knepper.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** And one before that with Helen Merrill that he did.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, Helen Merrill I was in love with, not – I didn’t know her but just her singing. That’s another singer I used to love. Her, Jeri Southern, you know the kind of singer, Julie London in her day, I like those kind of singers, the understated ones.


**Kirchner:** That’s a dying art it would seem.

**Mandel:** You know, what amazes me is, I hear a singer like Sade, she does – if you look at the pop market, she does everything wrong. Have you ever listened to her particularly?

**Kirchner:** Yes.

**Mandel:** She’s a jazz singer, although nobody will call her that. She does everything, she sings like that, I like that kind of a singer. And for some reason she’s a huge hit and I don’t understand it, because a lot of other singers get out there and try and do that and fall flat. And yet she resorts to no kind of theatrics, she just sings like that. You know the records aren’t really great.

**Kirchner:** The material isn’t that great.

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**Mandel:** The material isn't that great but she's the kind of singer – another one is the new girl Sheryl Crow, good singer, of the Rickie Lee Jones kind, sort of. And I like singers like that, I like to hear someone new come along.

**Kirchner:** You've done some things with Diane Schuur as well.

**Mandel:** Um-hm, good singer, good musician, plays piano.

**Kirchner:** Let's get on those later, we just started getting into the film thing.

**Mandel:** Okay. Alright, so I got *The Americanization of Emily*, which was a very happy thing and started my songwriting career per se. And it was a good movie, lot of notes, I got to write – I finally got a crack at a wonderful large string section and knew that, that's when I really – I had gotten interested in writing strings before that, you know with the Dick Haymes album I had, there was quite a bit in the way of string writing. That was an album we made in 1955 called, *Rain or Shine*, and it was really one of the only good albums being made except the Sinatra albums and maybe the Farnon Albums, that I knew of, probably there were others. I'm sure Wally Stott in those days made some great albums, over in England. And Michel Legrand was making those wonderful albums out of Paris, like, *I Love Paris* and *Castles in Spain*, all those various different country on each album; those were magnificent albums for their day. Did you ever hear those?

**Kirchner:** Only in bits and pieces.

**Mandel:** Dazzling arranging you know, great show boat arranging but so well written.

**Kirchner:** I think for that I prefer the Farnon records.

**Mandel:** Totally different. It's a totally different approach to music.

**Kirchner:** Oh, definitely, yeah it's very French.

**Mandel:** Very French but probably as well orchestrated as anything I've ever heard and he still gets a sound out of strings I've never heard anyone get.

**Kirchner:** Talk about his orchestrating a little bit, that's a...

**Mandel:** He's one of a kind...

**Kirchner:** What does he do specifically that you particularly like?

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**Mandel:** He just knows how to use everything in the orchestra properly, he's a wonderful orchestrator. He is very thoroughly schooled, he knows how to write very transparently and he's very flashy and he's got great imagination. I mean flashy to me is not a great word for somebody but Michel knows how to do it, you know, he always had great taste within the parameters that he set. You know and his choices were all musical, they weren't based on commercialism and yeah, I was a big Michel Legrand fan.

**Kirchner:** So, say if we were to discuss...

**Mandel:** You can't compare him to Robert Farnon.

**Kirchner:** It's definitely apples and oranges.

**Mandel:** You can't compare anyone to Robert Farnon. Robert Farnon is simply the best.

**Kirchner:** What do you hear in Farnon's work that particularly appeals to you?

**Mandel:** Everything I've stolen.

**Kirchner:** [laughs loud] You don't mind if I tell Gene Lees these lines, he's – I think he actually might have mailed, he did a three part jazz letter on Robert Farnon...

**Mandel:** Well then you'll read that in there...

**Kirchner:** Oh, okay.

**Mandel:** I said my technique consists mostly of stealing everything that I heard of Robert Farnon's that I could capture.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** There's a lot of stuff I couldn't capture.


**Kirchner:** How about Marion Evans?

**Mandel:** Great arranger, I'm sorry he gave up music.

**Kirchner:** I don't think he is.

**Mandel:** He gave it up a long long time ago.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

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**Mandel:** And he'll never go back. I had dinner with him recently, he hasn't been in music since the early 60s, or the late 50s, he became just a wizard at computers and the stock market.

**Kirchner:** And has done very very well for himself.

**Mandel:** Oh yeah, yeah, but boy could he write. But there was still only one Governor, Robert Farnon.

**Kirchner:** Do you know him personally?

**Mandel:** He's the one that showed us all how.

**Kirchner:** Do you know him personally?

**Mandel:** No, I've never met him but I've spoken to him on the phone.

**Kirchner:** What do you hear in his approach that you think appeals to so many writers?

**Mandel:** He makes strings sound like they always should have sounded. He knows how to wrench at me, I personally respond a great deal to what he does, his choices of everything, his harmonic choices. I can only speak of my own experience, I don't know about what the other writers hear, but they probably hear the same things I like.

**Kirchner:** I would say so.


**Mandel:** It's a none-sensational approach, it's totally the opposite of Michel's, he never goes for shock or for effect.

**Kirchner:** I was going to use the word, "sober," to describe him as opposed to Michel's which is as you call it, "flashy."

**Mandel:** Michel is very flamboyant, Bob is not flamboyant or flashy, but it's so rich and it's, I don't know how to describe it, it's very sensuous the way he writes.

**Kirchner:** And his uses of woodwinds of course.

**Mandel:** Yeah. There aren't many who can write that sensually, one of the great sensual writers was Alex North, in some of his film scores. David Raksin could do it, probably still can, he's just joined the board of ASCAP [American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers] and boy are we glad to have him.

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**Kirchner:** I remember in the early 50s Miles said in print that he was raving about Alex North his, *Streetcar Named Desire* score he said that was something everybody should hear.

**Mandel:** Yeah, most people didn't really realize how great Alex North was, you listen to *Cleopatra*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* or *Spartacus* or any one of them they're just, they are masterpieces. And his orchestration is all like fine line drawing, he really knew his orchestra to.

**Kirchner:** He used Benny Carter on *Streetcar* didn't he?

**Mandel:** He may have, yeah.

**Kirchner:** I think the solo alto saxophone, I think Benny was the...

**Mandel:** He certainly was hip enough to do that.

**Kirchner:** Sure.

**Mandel:** I'll ask Benny, unless you probably know that to be a fact.

**Kirchner:** I remember reading...

**Mandel:** It never occurred to me who it might have been.

**Kirchner:** I remember reading it, somewhere, I forget where but I think Benny was the solo alto player.

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** Good choice.


**Mandel:** Oh yeah.

**Kirchner:** So let's get back to, *Sandpiper*, or *Emily*, first of all.

**Mandel:** *Emily* was great and it literally started my songwriting career, have we talked about that, did we talk about that last night?

**Kirchner:** Only peripherally.

**Mandel:** About songs?

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**Kirchner:** I want to get to that definitely.

**Mandel:** Oh, all right then...

**Kirchner:** I wanted to go through a list of your...

**Mandel:** Let's go through the movies first.

**Kirchner:** Sure.

**Mandel:** Okay, well, "Emily," was the first song, we'll get back to that when get on songwriting. Then I got *The Sandpiper*, after that. I was starting to say about Emily getting back to that, that was the first time I had like a really good fat string section from MGM, the MGM staff string section and a wonderful soundstage, the MGM soundstage of that time which was 1963, '64. And oh boy, you know when I started hearing all those sounds coming out, it was like all that time I had spent trying to make those sounds kind of finally paid off, I never realized that I'd have that kind of an opportunity. Where you have all those violins on a note, instead of just a couple of them and the stuff really sounded like you'd envisioned it. So it was wonderful being able to do that movie and people liked it which I liked too, you know the people I worked for. Which in movies is a really nice thing to have happen because often it doesn't go that way 'cause there are some very flaky people making movies, these days and even in those days that know nothing about music but they all think they do. And then after that I had a chance for the same producers to do *The Sandpiper*, and I used much more of a jazz type of approach for that. With kind of an extended large big-band kind of sound with strings, you know but with all the woodwinds and you know colors, I was able to go for colors because we were scoring a lot of exteriors of Big Sur and all the – you know it was a gorgeous picture visually so there were all kinds of things to go off of when I was writing.

**Kirchner:** And you used Jack Sheldon as a solo...


**Mandel:** Sure did...

**Kirchner:** Solo voice.

**Mandel:** Wanted something that sounded real outdoors, because so much of this was down by the ocean. And a trumpet's perfect for that, oboe's very good for outdoors, you notice I don't use oboe a whole lot but when I do it's almost always usually with outdoor type music.

**Kirchner:** So, *Sandpiper* of course was the film from which "Shadow of Your Smile" emerged.

**Mandel:** Yes it was, it was originally instrumental theme and then we got...

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**Kirchner:** It was, “Love Theme from *The Sandpiper*,” right?

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** When did they decide to add lyrics in?

**Mandel:** After I'd done it. Actually we had decided before that. I had the song in piano form and demoed it, 'cause they wanted to hear the theme before I ever put it to score, and that was when we decided to make a song out of it.

**Kirchner:** It's interesting, in the 60s as you probably know Clare Fischer recorded the tune on an album of his called, *Songs for Rainy Day Lovers*...

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** And there was a review of it in, *DownBeat* around that time and they talked about Johnny Mandel's, “The Shadow of Your Smile.” And Paul Francis Webster wrote an irate letter to *DownBeat* complaining about when you talk about these tunes you should list – he said, “Johnny Mandel did not write, “The Shadow of Your Smile,” however Johnny Mandel and Paul Francis Webster did,” and he talked about...

**Mandel:** He's right, all I wrote was [sings melody of “The Shadow of Your Smile”]

[they both laugh]

**Mandel:** It was Paul that came up with that title.


**Kirchner:** Oh really?

**Mandel:** And he had every, yeah, and he had every reason to be irate. It was like the old story with...

**Kirchner:** Oscar Hammerstein's wife?

**Mandel:** Oscar Hammerstein and, “Ol' Man River,” Jerome Kerns, “Ol' Man River,” and Dorothy Hammerstein got furious she said, “Mr. Kern wrote da-da-dada, Oscar wrote, “Ol' Man River.””

[they both laugh]

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**Mandel:** It's absolutely true, lyricists always get short shrift, with very few exceptions.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, look...

**Mandel:** And through the ages they have, Gershwin's it's always George it's never Ira and Ira was invaluable to George, as great as George was and believe me he was great.

**Kirchner:** Johnny Mercer might be the only exception because I've heard tunes referred to as Johnny Mercer tunes that were tunes where he actually wrote the lyric but not the music.

**Mandel:** And he wrote wonderful music when he wrote it. All of Johnny Mercer's music that he ever wrote was very good, as musical and natural as could be. I love his songs when he wrote both.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, a little later on I have a whole list of lyricists that you've associated with...

**Mandel:** Okay.

**Kirchner:** That I want to just talk with you about. So, "Shadow of Your Smile," won the Academy award that year.

**Mandel:** It sure did.

**Kirchner:** Correct? '66?

**Mandel:** Yep, no '65.

**Kirchner:** Were you, in view of your previous sliding by the powers that be in Hollywood, was this a surprise to you?

**Mandel:** No. It wasn't that it wasn't a surprise it was just by the time the Academy campaigns and everything heated up, you know winning an Academy Award is pretty much like running for office, to be perfectly honest. That doesn't mean to imply that there's anything fixed about the voting, there isn't, but in order to get your product—your product, --in order to get yourself heard and people be aware of who wrote what, you had to take ads, you had to go on shows, you had to do all those things. And you'd hire a publicist quite frankly and everyone did it, Mancini would do it, whoever was – you know had a song or a score that was in contention that had made the nominations. So, I didn't know it was going to win but I knew it had a very good chance. I had no idea it was really going to win and I was very delighted when it did, you never

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really know about the Oscars until the last minute. You can tell by the people, that's not acting, they're not giving academy award performances at the Oscars when they pretend to go into shock, they really are going into shock.

**Kirchner:** So what did this award do for you in terms of, I don't know, what's the term, credibility, visibility, how did it – did it enhance your career?

**Mandel:** No, it did not. The phone stopped ringing for the strangest reason. It was very bizarre and to this day I'll never know why, but I had a lot of work stacked up before that, so I did a number of pictures after it until they all ran out. But no, winning the Academy Award didn't hurt me but it sure never helped. And why it didn't, I'll never know because the song was hugely successful for a song of that time, it got over five-thousand recordings world-wide, you know that's including all the foreign language recordings. It was a very successful song.

**Kirchner:** It sounds like the Louise Fletcher syndrome.

**Mandel:** Yeah or the Rita Moreno syndrome when she won for, *West Side Story*. She had been getting all kinds of parts before that, then all of a sudden she got typed as a Puerto Rican. I didn't get typed, I have no idea to this day why that happened. People used to say, "Gee, maybe they thought your price went up to high." I said, "Nobody ever asked."

[they both laugh]

**Kirchner:** So, did you do, *The Russians are Coming*, shortly after that?

**Mandel:** I did, yes.


**Kirchner:** From which came another really great tune, "The Shining Sea."

**Mandel:** Um-hm, and before that I did a horrible picture called, *An American Dream*, from which came, "A Time for Love."

**Kirchner:** Yeah, *An American Dream*, I've only seen the title listed with the song, I never saw the film or heard anything about it.

**Mandel:** You haven't missed a thing.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

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**Mandel:** It was a dramatization of a Norman Mailer novel, and it was the most violent God-damn picture I've ever seen. And I was busy writing – but it did have a nightclub scene it, your usual cliché and I was able to get that song in there, for which I'm glad. And everybody on the picture hated the song, they said, "It doesn't fit the picture," well of course it didn't fit the picture, you couldn't write a love song to fit that picture.

[they both laugh]

**Kirchner:** How about...

**Mandel:** I mean, it's about a man who kills his wife by pushing her off the roof of a twenty-five, thirty story building and gets away with it or tries to get away with it. You know it's a totally repugnant, violent picture, the way it was shot, the dialogue itself which was Mailer dialogue, you know it was just not good Norman Mailer writing.

**Kirchner:** And so the film kind of went to well deserved oblivion.


**Mandel:** Oh immediately, if there had been cable then, it would have gone straight to it, if they had allowed it on the air.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] How about, *Harper*?

**Mandel:** Oh, *Harper*, I did after, *The Russians are Coming*. *Russians are Coming* was a very nice experience, that was with Norman Jewison, and Hal Ashby was the editor and Hal and I had been friends for many years before that so it was just a nice experience. Good actors, it was a good movie, very good movie for its day. Got to work with large choruses on that, where we had to sound – sort of ape the Red Army chorus for all the Russian parts of the picture. I had a huge chorus from UCLA and it was all the writing was in Russian.

**Kirchner:** Wow, so they had to learn all that phonetically?

**Mandel:** Had to learn it all phonetically, yeah. We got a bunch of students and we made sure they were very scared because we wanted them to not come in – we didn't use trained session singers, we used kids that we tried to psyche up to sing way beyond their capacity. Pretty much like soldiers who were having bayonets pointed at them, which I'm sure happened in Russia at that time. And that was the sound, you know they were singing for all they were worth, like their lives depended on it. I think we told them something stupid like if they didn't do well, or didn't know their part they couldn't sing on the track and they wouldn't get paid, or they couldn't do it. And they had the fear of God drilled into them by the time they got up there 'cause we wanted

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them to sing with that extra energy that you could only get doing that way, by being slightly frightened. So they gave a very good approximation of a large military chorus, well a Red Army chorus, there is no other chorus like that in the world. There still isn't.

[Interruption, D.A.T. recording switch to Tape 4]

**Kirchner:** Anyway, we were talking about, *The Russians are Coming*, and the Red Army chorus imitation and from that movie came, "The Shining Sea."

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** That Peggy Lee did the lyric for right?


**Mandel:** Right, that was done after the movie, we realized we had something that could be a song and Peggy Lee did an amazing thing, to me. She is a very intuitive lady, but I gave her this theme and I asked her, "Would you like to write a lyric to it?" And she said, "Yes," and she wrote it and it was written for – and I saw the lyric and I said, "How did you do that," she said, "how did I do what?" I said, "This song which I didn't tell you about was actually written for a scene that takes place in a movie called, *The Russians are Coming*, *The Russians are Coming*, and you described in that lyric exactly what takes place on the screen at the time this music is playing," I said, "how did you do that?" She says, "I don't know." And I said, "What are you doing tonight," and I took her to a private screening of the thing, we were still in the rough form, you know, or we were just starting to preview it. And her mouth just fell open, she said, "Oh my God," she said, "Well I don't know, that spoke to me in that way and you must have captured whatever it was," so I guess but you know she's the kind of lady that would pick that up.

**Kirchner:** So...

**Mandel:** So, that's how that one came about.

**Kirchner:** It's an underrated tune I think and it should be better known than it is.

**Mandel:** Um-hm, it's one of those songs that's a little, not obscure but it's... yeah, it's not very well known, it's one of those songs a little like, "You are There," in the sense that the two songs aren't similar but they tend to go in unproven paths. I just let that song write itself, I didn't try to construct any particular kind of song and the same with, "You are There," they just sort of came out that way and I let them go. Which I think is really the best way to write.

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**Kirchner:** I think Bob Brookmeyer said that, “a lot of times I don’t have too much control over these things.”

**Mandel:** It’s much better if I don’t.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** ‘Cause it’s the only way I can get out of my own way. “The Shadow,” came out all like that, I wrote it in about fifteen minutes, “Emily,” too.

**Kirchner:** Really?

**Mandel:** Yeah, sure, wrote, “The Shadow,” in an all night restaurant back in the good ol’ days before they had music everywhere. When you could go into a place and get silence.

**Kirchner:** So you wrote it in a restaurant, does that mean that you do a lot of your song writing away from the piano?

**Mandel:** Songwriting yes. I think that’s the best way to write your songs, I think a good song will hold up, a capella, a bad song will not. That’s one of the rules I have.

**Kirchner:** Yeah, now that I think of it, some of the songs I’ve written, I’ve written the melodies first and added the chords later.

**Mandel:** Yeah, I mean I used to do what a lot of other people did, get a chord pattern and then fit the melody over it, that’s what’s wrong with most pop tunes of the day. It’s, you know, they’ll get a riff, they’ll get a chord pattern and they’ll just bebop over it you know and write – and then the melody to fit the chords and such, that is not songwriting.


**Kirchner:** Now-a-days you’re lucky if...

**Mandel:** At least not by my kind of...

**Kirchner:** Now-a-days you’re lucky if the songs have chords.

**Mandel:** You’re very lucky if they have chords, or if they have more than two or three. Most of them don’t, I just decided never to pay attention to that.

**Kirchner:** Now, so, after, *The Russians are Coming*, came, *Harper*, with Paul Newman, from which came, “Sure as You’re Born.”

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**Mandel:** Um-hm, which was never meant to be a song but somehow became because that was the era where they turned everything into a song, they just put a lyric to it.

**Kirchner:** Do you think that the success that Mancini had with some of the songs that came from his movies had something to do with that? Things like, “Moon River,” and, “Charade,” and what have you?

**Mandel:** No, that started a long time ago in 1952 with the title song when Dimitri Tiomkin wrote, “High Noon.” The title song was really with us all through the 50s and it wasn’t necessarily a good thing but it was a good thing for song writers.

**Kirchner:** I guess even earlier with, “Laura,” for example.

**Mandel:** That was a freak ‘cause it started life as an instrumental theme, it wasn’t even sung in the movie.

**Kirchner:** That’s...

**Mandel:** And Johnny Mercer wrote a lyric to it later on.

**Kirchner:** Um-hm. So, after *Harper*, well the next one I know of was *MASH*, was there – what was in-between there as far as films for you?


**Mandel:** Well, some things, my memory is starting to fail me around then. I did... I’d have to go look at credits and things to remember.

**Kirchner:** But I guess the next major one would be, *MASH*.

**Mandel:** Probably, *MASH* was 1970. I’ve done some pictures I’d rather not remember, like, *Some Kind of a Nut*, and I did, *That Cold Day in the Park*, for Bob Altman before *MASH*. A picture with Sandy Dennis, it was what would be known in the trade as a, “little picture.” And then we did *MASH*, that’s right. I did a few pictures during – I did, *Pretty Poison*, that was one I did in about 1967, that picture made quite a bit of noise in its day, Tony Perkins, Tuesday Weld. I kept working right up through that time but the Academy Award did not help me. Then let’s see, *MASH*, yeah that was a great experience, I loved working on the movie.

**Kirchner:** Let’s talk about that, first of all, tell me how you wrote that theme.


**Mandel:** Convolution tale, we were – did you see the movie?

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**Kirchner:** Yes.

**Mandel:** You remember the Last Supper scene, when, “The Painless Pole” [Polish], the dentist in the outfit was going to commit suicide because he had not been able to get it up with a W.A.C. [Women’s Army Corp] the night before and he was afraid his ladies man reputation in the outfit was totally down the drain and life was over for him so he might as well do himself in? Well, this – we wanted to write a very stupid song for that particular sequence and that was what it was written for. And Bob Altman tried to write the lyric, I didn’t have any music or anything like that, we had to write the lyric first, he was sitting, we were sitting around and he was saying, “Painless, the painless Pole is going to commit suicide... suicide is painless, that should be the title of this thing.” I said, “Alright I can do it.” He said, “It should be incredibly stupid,” I said, “I can do stupid.” So, he went home, he said, “I used to write songs, I’ll see what I can do with it,” he came back, he said, “There’s too much up in this forty-five year old computer, I can’t do it, however all is not lost because I got a fourteen year old kid who is a total idiot, and he’s got a guitar and he’ll run through it in ten minutes.” And that’s exactly what happened, he dummied it to a Leonard Cohen song called, “The Gambler,” and I tried to – I knew... the only music was like some G.I. who knew a couple chords on the guitar in that scene, so you couldn’t have an orchestra or anything like that, so I had to write something that sounded very homemade with two chords or three chords, unusual for me. And that’s why the harmony in that song was like it was. And... I didn’t wait, I tried to write that damn... [fumbles over word choice] used as a temporary music a Leonard Cohen song called, “The Gambler,” that goes [sings melody to the song] you know one of those Leonard Cohen dirges those in minor, varied between two chords and it was in 6/8, I couldn’t get that damn thing out of my head it was very hypnotic. I finally had a few very stiff ones the night before and sat down and wrote what became the “MASH theme.” They liked it so much they stuck it up in the titles, I said, “What are you doing that for, it doesn’t fit over the helicopters and everything.” They said, “Well we like it.” I said, “What kind of an excuse is that?” Thank God I lost that one because it became my biggest copyright when it went to TV. So, that’s – what that is is a lesson, which is never throw anything away because you never know what’s gonna happen with a song. People had told me that before like... Jay Livingston and Ray Evans had a song in a C picture, it wasn’t even a B picture called, *Captain Carey, U.S.A.*, which was probably one of the worst pictures ever made and the song was, “Mona Lisa,” for which they won the Academy Award and it became just this gigantic song. You just, you never throw anything away [laughs] so that’s what happened with *MASH*. And doing the music was a lot of fun, I had brought the Japanese jazz band, I’d heard some records about 1949, probably the first Japanese jazz records that ever came out and they were so horrible and they were so funny because they were so horrible I just fell on the floor laughing

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and somehow I remembered that. And when I started seeing – you remember those things we did like the Pidgin, “My Blue Heaven,” and things like that. Well the early Japanese jazz records were just dreadful, they played them instead of [sings standard boogie-woogie] boogie-woogie was in 6/8 [sings boogie-woogie in 6/8]

[they both laugh]


**Mandel:** And they became wonderful jazz musicians later on but they hadn’t caught on yet in 1949.

**[Begin CD 7]**

**Mandel:** [laughs] And this was something totally new to them. So, I dug up some of those records by going down to Little Tokyo and I had seen some – there were a lot of very gory hospital scenes in that movie, you know in the – when they were operating under battlefield conditions and the lights were going out and I said, “Bob, you better have something to take all the... you know I’d like to have some music to go against this.” And I said, “I’ve got something in mind,” and I brought him this and he says, “It’s very interesting, how could we use it?” I said, “Well, why don’t you have it coming over Radio Tokyo,” now, we were having this conversation the last day of shooting. I said, “Look, before you tear down the sets why don’t you shoot some loud speakers, day, internal, external, interior, exterior, day and night so that you have them under every condition and we can have the stuff coming over Radio Tokyo,” and he says, “Yeah, that’s a good idea,” and then he starts coming up with – then his fertile brain starts taking hold and he starts coming up with the camp announcements; VD inspection, this and that, reading all the, tonight’s movie and reading the old FOX, literally reading the old advertisement’s off, which didn’t make FOX happy at all...

[they both laugh]

**Mandel:** ‘cause it was their movies. And so, as a result of that the speakers, the loud speakers actually became a character in the picture and in the TV show ‘cause they use those speakers every time they had to cut from one scene to another, that was one of the great cutting devices in that whole MASH thing. The speakers became a character in the movie and also the gong, sometimes I’d like I’d put a Chinese gong, a close-up of it. [laughs] And that got you from one scene to another and it’s nice to be able to contribute to a picture like that, also he allowed me to cut footage of the football scenes when we had music in them. You know we’d play Sousa [John Philip Sousa] marches or something like that and you’d see the doctors jabbing the opposing football player with a hypodermic and you’d sync the music to all that. Well we’d sync picture

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to the music in that case, Altman allows you to do things like that, which is wonderful. You don't get many directors that will ever let you put your hands on a picture, but he's free with that.

**Kirchner:** Is he your favorite director of all the ones you've worked with?

**Mandel:** Well, I have some directors I'm very, very fond of. He's one of them, I love working with him. I loved working with Hal Ashby, who you know did, *Coming Home*, *Being There*, so many good pictures. I loved working with Sidney Lumet when I worked with him. I've worked with some really good – John Boorman was wonderful, I've had good experiences – Oh, I did, *Point Blank* in 1967, that was in that area too. I did a lot of movies then, I keep forgetting what they were. So, that was *MASH*.

**Kirchner:** The next one I know...

**Mandel:** A lot of fun.

**Kirchner:** Sounds like it.

**Mandel:** He said, "Can you make the records that bad?" I said, "Don't worry, we can make them rotten."

[they both laugh]

**Kirchner:** So, well, for those things did you get authentic Japanese 1949 jazz records or you just try to duplicate that feel?

**Mandel:** I duplicated the feel, but I knew how to do it.

**Kirchner:** Uh-huh.


**Mandel:** You know, I just...

**Kirchner:** What did you tell the players?

**Mandel:** I played them a little of it and I said, "Play your own style." [laughs]

**Kirchner:** Kind of like, *Jonathan and Darlene Edwards*. [A Jo Stafford, Paul Weston comedy album]

**Mandel:** That's right, it was. You know, I said, "Don't try to be funny, just play it like this."

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[they both laugh]

**Mandel:** Sometimes we'd actually write it in 6/8 too, to get that feel.

[they both laugh]

**Kirchner:** The next film I know that you did and I'm sure there were ones in-between...

**Mandel:** Oh yeah.

**Kirchner:** Was, *Agatha*.


**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** Which is '79, something...

**Mandel:** Let's see, I did before that I probably did, *Summer Wishes, Winter Dreams*, which was *Death of a Snow Queen* in its original form with Joanne Woodward. Got a nice little song out of that, they wrote with Alan and Marilyn Bergman called, "Summer Wishes, Winter Dreams," fittingly enough. In fact they liked the – they changed the title of the movie to that. And then, God, you know I really forget what I do. Did *Agatha*, had fun with that, got a song out of it, "Close Enough for Love." Wonderful director on that, Michael Apted, great director, this man could photograph the longest master shots I ever saw. And I did a lot of good pictures during that time, not too long after that I did *Deathtrap* with Sidney Lumet. And I did some Rock n' Roll movies, I did, *Staying Alive*.

**Kirchner:** Oh, you did that one?

**Mandel:** Yeah, I did. Which was really, *Saturday Night Fever*, part two. And what else did I do, I don't know, I did a string of movies, I did another one with Sidney Lumet which was a nice challenge which was – actually *Deathtrap* was quite a challenge, the whole thing was written mostly in the style of Bach and I used two harpsichords with Ralph Grierson and Mike Lang on them. Wrote a lot of Baroque music for that and I'd do things, talk about strange registers for instruments, I did, I would write, I wrote for some big pipe organs, I wrote like the two foot stops, four foot stops on the harpsichord in the very low register, as low as I could get them and the sixteen foot stops in the very high register, you know I'd do it just the – I did that just the, you know would do things like that to get unusual timbres. And it was a very interesting thing to do, plus you know did the harpsichords – had a large orchestra too. Oh, let's see what else we

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did, did, *The Verdict* with Sidney Lumet in the 80s, that was with a large chorus and orchestra. Very nice lovely film to do.

**Kirchner:** How did you learn to write for voices? We didn't talk about that at all.

**Mandel:** I never did, I just started doing it. I'd look at – I'd listen to what other people did with voices and figure that out and just started writing myself.

**Kirchner:** Any vocal writing that in particular influenced you that you can think of?

**Mandel:** No. No. I don't have a very strong vocal style. I just write chorally like Mancini did and in the case of, *The Verdict* say, or... I went with the genre whichever you do, I was there I was writing almost Gregorian chants in a lot of cases. And in the case of like, *The Russians are Coming*, I was writing very modal and very Russian type of music. You know you go with what – there's a reason for using voices to start with, you're generally either dealing with a nationality or a period because I don't believe in using voices in movies I think they're death because there's nothing that will eat up dialogue faster and pull your ear away from dialogue.

**Kirchner:** It's competitive.


**Mandel:** Very, there's nothing as stirring or powerful in pulling your ear as the human voice. People just start listening to it, whether they want to or not. So...

**Kirchner:** Well, so then why are rock 'n' roll soundtracks so popular with movies now?

**Mandel:** Well, it's certainly terrible cinematic and also I'm discovering that more and more that the kids that are making movies now for the most part don't know what they're doing, there's no taste there and they're interested in – I'm trying not to sound like an old fogey, but the emphasis is more on the soundtrack album really than it is on helping the picture a great deal.

Occasionally you get movies where it works nicely like, *Sleepless in Seattle*, it's nice to see a main title and see like – hear Jimmy Durante doing, "As Time Goes By," you know it's, there's something very touching about it. The rock, most rock – you're finding, I'm finding less and less rock tracks now, they're going more towards older timey music and the thing like I did with Kevin Kline just recently on, *French Kiss*.

**Kirchner:** Where you arranged, "La Mer."

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**Mandel:** “La Mer,” yeah, the old Charles Trenet tune, which was also the thing Bobby Darin made a hit on as “Beyond the Sea,” back in the 50s. We didn’t do it that way though, we did it more a traditional way.

**Kirchner:** Do you get the impression that say the pendulum is swinging back a bit from say the mid-80s where...

**Mandel:** Everything was synthesized, yes.

**Kirchner:** The, Miami Vice trend.

**Mandel:** Yeah, back to... live orchestras and things like that, I find more and more of that yeah and I’m very happy to see it. The only problem is during the 60s, 70s and 80s they tore down all the large studios that we used to record that stuff in and it’s hard to find good big rooms. There’s only one in New York that I know of and that’s the Hit Factory. And also you have run into trouble, you know we’re doing a lot of, I’ve been doing nothing but large orchestra things for the last five years for people, you know whether it’s in movies, or whether it’s in making records with Natalie Cole or with Shirley Horn or Tony Bennett or anybody. And there’s only so many large rooms in town now, they need to build some more now that they’re starting to hire musicians and put synthesizer players out of work.

**Kirchner:** Well Sony has built a new studio, right? With a...

**Mandel:** Here? Yes.

**Kirchner:** That can accommodate a large orchestra?


**Mandel:** Yeah, but I don’t think they – I think they keep it for Sony artists, I don’t know if they let anyone else in there, do they?

**Kirchner:** I don’t know. I think you’re right.

**Mandel:** It would be wonderful if they did because we need rooms in this town and I hate to see one room getting all the business.

**Kirchner:** I hear there’s one in Astoria.

**Mandel:** Yeah but that’s a long way to go. A long way to go. Its one thing if you’re shooting there and you know need all the facilities to shoot, you need a sound stage, the things you can’t get in Manhattan but you’re not going to truck a whole bunch of musicians out there just to

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record. You know its one thing to do a jazz date out with Rudy Van Gelder, but getting a huge orchestra into Astoria, yeah, you can do it I suppose. I don't know what their recording facilities are like out there either, whether they're prehistoric from the old days 'cause you know the original film studios were out in those parts of New York before they moved to California.

**Kirchner:** With the scarcity of record and film dates now, I think if you told somebody that you had a date for them in Astoria, they'd be there.

**Mandel:** Well you know something as I was just saying what I said about travelling that distance, it's not really that far when you think of the distances we travel in California for God-sakes, just going from Burbank to Culver City is further than going from Manhattan to Astoria. Absolutely, and takes longer...

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Especially with the freeways the way they are. [laughs]

**Kirchner:** So, you told me recently that you basically weren't interested in writing, quote "backgrounds for films anymore."

**Mandel:** I am not, at all, I've done it.


**Kirchner:** When did you make that decision?

**Mandel:** I've been working towards that decision all through the 80s, even – I started getting very disenchanted with it in the 70s, I keep thinking of movies I did during that, as I talk about it, that I remember around the time I was doing, *Freaky Friday*, and, *Escape to Witch Mountain* out at Disney I was staring to really want to do records more and films, I'd have loved to have gotten rid of films. I don't like writing background, that much and developing – I've never wanted to personally write large works, symphonies, concert pieces or I'd have done it. 'Cause developing material is, I can do it, I've certainly had to do it enough for movies, but it's not really what I get the most satisfaction out of.

**Kirchner:** Because it struck me that you'd be a natural to do say what Mancini did and go out and do orchestra pops concerts and do your medley of hits.

**Mandel:** Yes, I probably will.

**Kirchner:** I hope so.

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**Mandel:** Um-hm. I probably will.

**Kirchner:** Because I mean, you've probably got as many great tunes that people are aware of as Hank did, if you were to go down the list of them.

**Mandel:** Well, it's growing and I'm happy to hear you say that. Hank Mancini is – left very big shoes to fill though, I'll tell you that. He was my ideal of what the perfect composer was for films for pops, for almost anything. He was so elegant in everything he did; he did it right and on top of it he was a marvelous human being.

**Kirchner:** He did everything he did with a lot of class.

**Mandel:** Oh he had class, indeed he did.

**Kirchner:** And I guess his success with, *Peter Gunn* and *Mr. Lucky*, really opened the door for a lot of writers in Hollywood.

**Mandel:** It sure did. It sure did. For a while there they were trying to put jazz scores to everything and it was quite laughable.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** Because jazz scores fit a very tiny fraction of the movies that people tried to put – rock 'n' roll really fits a very tiny fraction too. More of the pictures now are conducive to rock 'n' roll, you see a piece of film like, *Pulp Fiction*, and I couldn't envision using anything but rock 'n' roll in that thing.

**Kirchner:** Well as you got into the 80s and you decided to put film more in the background and recording more in the foreground...

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** Well some of the projects, we've talked about the Shirley Horn project, we've only talked peripherally about the Natalie Cole, *Unforgettable*, [*Unforgettable... with Love*] album.

**Mandel:** Yeah, that was a very nice project to do.

**Kirchner:** That you got a Grammy for right?

**Mandel:** Correct, yeah I did.

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**Kirchner:** For the arrangement for, “Unforgettable,” or...

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** How – you did several of the charts right?

**Mandel:** I did about nine of them, yeah.

**Kirchner:** And I think Bill Holman and Alan Broadbent also did some.

**Mandel:** Yeah they did some, I probably did the majority of the album.

**Kirchner:** Do you want to talk about your experience with Natalie?

**Mandel:** Yeah, she’s delightful to work with. She’s a total professional, comes in, knows everything, just sings like an angel. What more can you ask? She’s very talented.

**Kirchner:** And a nice person to deal with I’m told.


**Mandel:** Yeah. Yeah, Natalie’s fine.

**Kirchner:** Now the concept of her singing along with her father’s vocal tracks, who came up with that?

**Mandel:** She started doing it – I don’t know who originally had the idea, she started doing it in nightclubs as part of her act. A year or two before she – you know in her show she used to do a Nat Cole segment and then she found that she had this – she did have from his TV show a recording of, “Unforgettable,” on film and she started flashing it on the screen. Somebody came up with that idea, maybe she came up with it, I don’t know, she might have practiced it on TV first with a videocassette. And she discovered she could do this to, “Unforgettable,” and you could only do that because it was a song on which it sat on one chord for two bars, so you could get all those answers in. You couldn’t do that with other songs, that’s why that’s the only song it got done on.

**Kirchner:** There are more holes to be filled there.

**Mandel:** Well the holes, you could – it was a natural for answers because you had the same chord, you weren’t switching chords, you’d have F [sings F] A-flat diminished two bars, G-minor seven two bars [sings G-minor] B-flat minor six two bars, et cetera, et cetera, the whole song went like that. So, you’re limited on the songs you could do that with. But it worked on

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this one and it seemed to get a great deal of attention in the room when she did it in clubs, so I guess the natural thing to think about was when she decided she wanted to make an album of her father's stuff she – Natalie had heard the Linda Ronstadt, got Nelson Riddle and all that and then Nelson died so she couldn't get Nelson again like her father had so I got the call. And that's what we did.

**Kirchner:** Do you think that that particular CD had a great deal of influence on other people doing projects, say you know middle of the road pop vocal projects with large orchestras?

**Mandel:** Oh it must have yeah, I think everybody started trying to do 40s albums there for a while with the – but it was great because a lot – I think all these things like Linda Ronstadt, you know people were critical about at the time, they like to snipe at other people, particularly those who've been successful like, she didn't know how to sing the songs and all that sort of thing well nobody would tell you that quicker than Linda. She had to learn how to sing that kind of music, where Natalie didn't 'cause it was the most natural thing in the world for her. But for the first time they started, for the first time a lot of people had never heard the sound of a full orchestra like that. Particularly the kids and they liked it, they went out and bought that. You know they'd heard the full orchestra in the movies but they'd never heard it on records, unless they dug out old records. And most of that was their parent's music. So, yeah, it started putting musicians to work more and they started using it for end titles in movies, it wasn't just all synthesizers. And, worked out to be a good thing and we put a lot of synthesizer players out of work, at least two of them. Who are each busy putting fifty musicians out of work.

**Kirchner:** Wasn't that Conte Candoli's line?

**Mandel:** Oh, I think it's been used a lot of times.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] You did something – some of the credits you've been listed with lately have included what, well, the Manhattan Transfer Christmas album.


**Mandel:** Oh yeah, that was fun. I loved doing that.

**Kirchner:** For which you have...

**Mandel:** They're a great group to work for, with.

**Kirchner:** For which you have a Christmas tune on there.

**Mandel:** That's true, yeah.

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**Kirchner:** “All I Want for Christmas is You.”

**Mandel:** Well, that isn’t the name of it, it’s called, “The Christmas Song.”

**Kirchner:** Uh-huh.

**Mandel:** “A Christmas Love Song,” excuse me, “The Christmas Song,” is, “Chestnuts,” the Mel Tormé song.

**Kirchner:** Did you write it specifically for that recording?

**Mandel:** No, no, I just wrote the song and it came out sounding like Christmas, I didn’t try to write a Christmas song.

**Kirchner:** Um-hm.

**Mandel:** I said for some reason this sounds like Christmas, I don’t know what makes a song sound like Christmas, I probably wrote it in July or something and took it to the Bergman’s and they said, “Yeah, that sounds like a Christmas song.” And then Marilyn said, “What makes it sound like a Christmas song?” And I says, “I really don’t know and I’m afraid if I try to figure it out how I did it I probably couldn’t do it again.”

**Kirchner:** So you did that, you did part of an album with Diane Schuur, some of those arrangements.

**Mandel:** Yeah, I just done a bunch of stuff.

**Kirchner:** Michael Feinstein.

**Mandel:** Did produce that, I’ve produced all these albums you’re speaking of too.


**Kirchner:** Right, so your producing career kind of blossomed in the 80s right?

**Mandel:** Yes, it did. I’ve wanted to produce records for twenty years and it’s very hard to get producing work, for somebody like me.

**Kirchner:** How did you make it happen?

**Mandel:** What, how did it happen?

**Kirchner:** What buttons did you push, who did you talk to, who opened some doors for you?

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**Mandel:** I had to wait until they wanted the arrangements badly enough.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** If you want to know the truth and I just said, “Well, you gotta take the whole package.”

**Kirchner:** It’s nice that you had that kind of leverage.

**Mandel:** Well when it happened I definitely took advantage of it and I really like, I love producing records and particularly ‘cause I just like to run my own store, I like to conceive the song jointly with the artist, or by myself and take it right up through the mastering to the time the thing hits the street and leaves the studio. I like to do the whole thing and it’s frustrating to me when I deliver it to someone else and they take it and do what they want with it. That’s the kind of feeling you often got in movies, too. I hear the finished product and I want to get it as close to the finished product that I heard as possible in my head, initially. That’s why producing is really part of it.

**Kirchner:** That’s one of the reasons Marion Evans got out of the music business isn’t it, because he got so bugged with things being out of his control that he was – mixes that he was unhappy with?

**Mandel:** Probably, I just never discussed that with him, but I imagine that would’ve been one of the reasons. It’s you know, it’s something that happens to everyone and I can’t say that I enjoyed it one bit.


**Kirchner:** What did you do with Michael Jackson?

**Mandel:** Oh, I wrote quite a bit for Michael over the years. With and without Quincy Jones, he didn’t write I mean but... when Quincy was producing Michael I worked on the *Off the Wall* album, I worked with him on – I can’t remember whether I worked on *Thriller* or not. I worked on *Dangerous*, which he did by himself. Michael’s wonderful to work with, he’s the most professional man I’ve ever seen in the studio.

**Kirchner:** No kidding.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Why is that? What...

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**Mandel:** He just knows everything that's happening and never gets in your way and doesn't get in his. He's ideal, when he's in the studio he has absolutely no ego, he's considerate of everyone, he's great, everybody loves to work with him.

**Kirchner:** What do you do on those projects? What...

**Mandel:** Usually, the big string arrangements, or any time he wants kind of a lush sound for anything. I don't do all the synthesizer stuff.

**Kirchner:** It's interesting he...

**Mandel:** 'Cause there's plenty of guys who do that better than I do, although I use synthesizers all the time, myself, I like them as part of the orchestra.

**Kirchner:** I've noticed on the dates of yours that I've been attending at that you'll always have a DX7 [Yamaha Digital Synthesizer] there, even with a large string orchestra.

**Mandel:** I sure will.


**Kirchner:** What do you use the DX for?

**Mandel:** A number of things, I'll use it for – well it makes the best [inaudible] sounds for one thing. I'll usually have a full setup though not just the DX, I'll have the full complement of synthesizers. I'll use it sometimes when I'm writing a lot of, like big orchestra and I want to take all my strings up in the air, like I want the violins to play something, the violas maybe to play a counter line and so I've lost all my strings to play the sustaining type of harmonic support and a lot of times rather than use all the wind instruments for that 'cause I want them to do something else I'll very often, I'll do some magic and use – split my instruments up so I have some of it covered down there but I'll use the synthesizers for reinforcement but in a way that you never hear them, you just feel them. I make sure you never hear them because I don't want it to sound like synthesizers at any time.

**Kirchner:** With a smaller string section would you use a synth just to bolster the string sound?

**Mandel:** If I had to but I don't like it and I'll usually turn down projects like that if I can help it. Or limit the string writing into registers where they won't sound too terrible with a small section.

**Kirchner:** It's interesting, Michael Jackson has used you quite a bit for things of that nature, Prince uses Clare Fischer.

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**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** That's very little noted, that they use orchestrators of your and his caliber for their projects. I think...

**Mandel:** Jeremy Lubbock does tons of that stuff.

**Kirchner:** Yeah.

**Mandel:** And I've worked a lot with David Foster doing all those kinds of records.

**Kirchner:** So let's see, we've touched on a lot of stuff, what I'd like to do in the remaining time is just talk about, I've got a list of ever tune of yours that I could think of or you know conjure up in reference books, I'd just like to run them by you and get any comments that you'd like to make on any of them. Some...

**Mandel:** Okay.


[Slight pause]

**Kirchner:** Johnny, I'm just gonna run a list of your tunes by you in no particular order and some of them we've already discussed but any comments that come to mind fire away. "Just a Child."

**Mandel:** "Just a Child," I had a tune to write – that I wanted to write for a Bill Perkins album and I'd wanted to write a song of that kind and that's what I wrote at that time.

**Kirchner:** That's one of your earliest songs really isn't it?

**Mandel:** Yeah. I still thought of it in instrumental terms I never tried to get a lyric to it. I didn't even try to get a lyric to any of the, *I Want to Live!* songs but I guess I always really wrote songs kind of like Al Cohn did and like – what we wrote were really songs. Tiny Kahn, Neal Hefti, we wrote melodically, it was just that simple, so I guess, oh being born in the 1920s we were structured, however unconsciously to think of themes as songs because we didn't come for classical backgrounds and the popular music of the day made a big imprint on us. The thirty-two bar song, blues, and that sort of thing. So, I'd write an instrumental and it would tend – I would try to make it melodic just because I wanted to have some kind of an identifiable melody, but I didn't know, I never thought about whether I was good at it or not 'cause I was never interested in writing songs. To me the worst, the worst kind of existence was being like the guys I used to see around the Brill building [New York City] scurrying around with songs under their arms, I

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was so grateful I could arrange I just didn't want to do that. It seemed like, I probably couldn't – the idea of all that rejection did not appeal to me.

**Kirchner:** “Quietly There.”

**Mandel:** It's just a song that I wrote...

**Kirchner:** For, *Harper*, right?

**Mandel:** Yeah, yeah. I didn't really write it for, *Harper*, it's just something that I came up with and I put it into, *Harper*, as a piece of source music but it wasn't really written for that movie.

**Kirchner:** The lyric is by Morgan Ames right?

**Mandel:** Came later, yeah.

**Kirchner:** Is that the only song that you wrote with her?

**Mandel:** No, no. We wrote, “Unless It's You,” and we just now wrote something, just finished a song called, “Life in My Eyes,” brand new song.

**Kirchner:** “Emily.”

**Mandel:** “Emily,” was written for...

**Kirchner:** *The Americanization...*

**Mandel:** *The Americanization of Emily.*


**Kirchner:** With Johnny Mercer right?

**Mandel:** Right, it started with a motif that I thought fitted the character that Julie Andrews played. You know [sings Emily, Emily] I wanted to get kind of a sort of a purity in a nice ethereal way, type of feeling, it seemed to capsulize what she was to me at that time. And the song just kind of spun itself out one night.

**Kirchner:** Gene Lees tells a nice story about, The Singers Unlimited, recording of that tune.

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** Do you want to tell it?

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**Mandel:** I don't know it.

**Kirchner:** He wrote in a liner note to one of The Singers Unlimited albums that one day he wanted to know a couple of chords in “Emily,” so he picked up the phone and called you and you told him what it was and he wrote it down and you said, “You got that? Now throw those away and go to, The Singers Unlimited recording and use those changes.”

**Mandel:** Did I say that?

**Kirchner:** That’s what Gene said.

**Mandel:** Well, then I’m sure I did ‘cause I adore the way Gene Puerling writes. I was fortunate enough to work with him again on the – well not again but I mean work with him for the first time really on the Manhattan Transfer album we both wrote choral arrangements for that. In fact we split tunes, I’d write part of it, he’d write part, that sort of thing.

**Kirchner:** “Groover Wailin’.”

**Mandel:** Just trying to put – just wrote it for instrumental. It was a play upon the guy who used to in the 30s, for some reason don't ask me why, I had some strange titles in my time, this guy was Grover Whalen and he was the official receptionist for New York. He used to lead all the tickertape parades for all the heroes that came in and he was sort of like the, he was the big guy all through the 20s, 30s and even 40s. He was a well known name and people around who heard that title would have known who I was talking about, nobody would know it now. And it was written for the Cy Touff, Richie Kamuca album, I just needed some kind of a fast instrumental and that’s what I wrote.


**Kirchner:** And Bill Perkins recorded it later.

**Mandel:** May have, yeah.

**Kirchner:** “El Cajon.”

**Mandel:** I wrote something for Al Cohn and decided to title it that. El Cajon is the name of a pass outside of Los Angeles, what’s it mean El Cajon? The... cajon... I don’t know, it means something in Spanish but El Cajon Pass I always thought sounded like Al Cohn so when the time came to use it, I used it. And then Dave Frishberg wrote a very amusing lyric keeping the title.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] We talked about, “A Time For Love,” and, “The Shadow of Your Smile,” anything to add to those two?

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**Mandel:** No, I think I've said it all.

**Kirchner:** "Sure as You're Born."

**Mandel:** "Sure as You're Born," came to be called, "Sure as You're Born," it was originally the main title theme from, *Harper* and it didn't stay that way very long because before the picture was released Alan Bergman came up with a lyric. The Warner Brothers called them and had – I'd never met them before, I'd met them but never worked with them and all of a sudden there they were in the studio one day at an appointment with the lyric. And like everything they write it was – she never, they never wrote a word that didn't sing. They are one of the most professional lyric writers I've ever run into with the exception of Johnny Mercer.

**Kirchner:** They did, "Quietly There," as well, right?

**Mandel:** No, Morgan Ames.

**Kirchner:** Oh that's right, Morgan did. They did, "Where Do You Start."

**Mandel:** Yeah, we're still writing, we're writing all the time. We've got a brand-new one we just finished, which I would play you if I had a piano.

**Kirchner:** I'd love to hear it.

**Mandel:** Um-hm.

**Kirchner:** "Keester Parade."

**Mandel:** That was a play on Easter Parade, keester was a very popular term amongst musicians in the 40s – 30s, 40s and 50s for a girls derrière.

**Kirchner:** It's just as a simple blues basically.

**Mandel:** It basically is yeah.

**Kirchner:** "The Shining Sea," we talked about.

**Mandel:** Yes.

**Kirchner:** "Something Different."

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**Mandel:** The stupidest song I could ever think of, that should never have been recorded by anyone.

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

**Mandel:** It was written to see how far you can stretch a stupid little motif, it was, if you could hear it the way I originally played it on the piano, you'd laugh. Bill Perkins actually made a record of it and I was totally aghast when he did it.

**Kirchner:** [laughs] Theme from *MASH* we talked about. "Where Do You Start?"


**Mandel:** "Where Do You Start?" had a very interesting, that had a very interesting genealogy. A well-known playwright, who will remain unnamed, liked to write lyrics and one of them came my way and strangely enough this is another one of those things like the Peggy Lee story. He wrote a lyric about a breakup of his marriage or relationship, I guess it was autobiographical, I don't know. But I was asked, you know the lyric came my way and I wrote the music to it and then after I finished it, I said, "Gee this sounds like a pretty decent saloon song, but this is not much of a lyric, the man should stick to playwriting." But what caught my interest, was that it had a very different rhyme scheme, you know it was arrhythmic or asymmetrical... it caught my eye as a thing to write to. So I brought it to Alan and Marilyn Bergman 'cause I wanted a lyric and they took the song and came up with the identical subject material that I had evidently caught from the first lyric.

**Kirchner:** Wow.

**Mandel:** So whether I evoked it in the music or not I'll never know 'cause I never told them a thing about it. Then after they finished it, I mean right away when they brought it to me I said, "Oh, boy, this is the definitive divorce song," and then I showed them the original lyric and they did the same kind of like, the eyes bugged out and mouth feel open, you know they said, "Wow." [laughs]

**Kirchner:** Wow. "You Are There."

**Mandel:** "You Are There," is just one of those songs that emerged one morning, I was on my way to an appointment and I stopped the car and wrote it down, it all came out in one – it's the kind of a song that you'd never set out to write and I didn't know what to do with that song, I had five different lyrics to it before Dave Frishberg came up with the – and he wrote the last two of them. I got... three of them before and they just didn't make it, they didn't even come close.

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Frishberg took it, he wrote a lyric and he said, “Nah, I can do better than that,” so he wrote and then next one he wrote was, “You Are There.” And Dave Frishberg is one of the best lyricists I’ve ever written with, he can do anything. He’s as close to Johnny Mercer as you can get.

**Kirchner:** High praise.

**Mandel:** Indeed.

**Kirchner:** “I Wish I’d Met You.”

**Mandel:** I wrote that totally to a lyric, Richard Rodney Bennett sent me a lyric he had written, you know Richard Rodney Bennett’s a rather famous composer in his own right and a wonderful film composer. He had written, you know, *Equus*, also for Sidney Lumet, *Far From the Madding Crowd*...

**Kirchner:** *Enchanted April*.

**Mandel:** *Enchanted April*, he writes wonderful scores, even *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, I think. He didn’t get much to do in that, but you know he writes wonderful movie scores, ballets, hell of a good piano player, does a good cabaret act. Likes to sing and write songs, I never knew that about him...


[Interruption: Phone rings]

**Kirchner:** You were talking about Richard Rodney Bennett and his various skills and we were going to talk about the lyric he wrote for...

**Mandel:** Oh, yeah, he, Richard and a lyric writer he likes to write with sometimes Frank Underwood, who lives down in the village here. They sent me the song and they said we’d like to get a melody for this and I’d written some “Lovers After All,” previously with Richard and he heard the song and said, “Can I do that?” And I said, “Sure, go ahead.” And so he sent me this and he said, “We don’t have a song and also we don’t have a title,” and I said, “Yeah, you have a title, “I Wish I’d Met You,” [laughs] it was right there. And I just wrote the song from the lyric, I like working that way as I’ve told you.

**Kirchner:** Yes.

**Mandel:** ‘Cause it makes me go places I wouldn’t normally go. Even, *The Sandpiper*, the first shot of writing lyrics, I mean writing to lyrics, I wrote the verse to Paul Webster’s lyric. You know I wrote the melody first and then he said, “you know something, It’d be nice to have a

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verse for this song, explaining something, tying it into the picture better,” so he wrote the verse and I wrote the melody right over the phone with him. I phoned him back in about five minutes with it, it just worked out that way, I found that it was not a hard thing to do. And that's what I did with, “I Wish I'd Met You,” just wrote – and I wrote it to MASH too and a lot of other songs I wrote to lyric. The one we just talked about, “Where Do You Start,” to a lyric.

**Kirchner:** “Cinnamon and Clove.”

**Mandel:** “Cinnamon and Clove,” I'd just come back from Brazil and wanted to write in that idiom and that's what I wrote. And gave it to Alan and Marilyn and they just came up with, “Cinnamon and Clove,” which actually came from a Jorge Amado novel, a Brazilian, really great Brazilian novelist – a Brazilian writer, he wrote all kinds of things called... *Gabriela, Cloves and Cinnamon* [*Gabriela, Cravo e Canela*] which later on was made into a movie for which Jobim [Antonio Carlos Brasileiro de Almeida Jobim] wrote the music, you know, many years later.

**Kirchner:** “I Never Told You.”

**Mandel:** That was written, not to be a song, it was written as a theme for, *That Cold Day in the Park*, which was the first movie I wrote with Robert Altman, I mean that I did with Robert Altman, the picture with Sandy Dennis. And I said, “Well gee, maybe there's a song there,” 'cause that was the theme I used in the main title, as an instrumental with Bud Shank playing the flute and it was really nice, it seemed – it came out nicely so I sent it to Arthur Hamilton and it became, “I Never Told You.”

**Kirchner:** Toots Thielemans did a wonderful recording of it with Quincy.


**Mandel:** Oh yeah, with Quincy Jones.

**Kirchner:** Yeah. Let's see, that's all the songs I came up with, what did I miss?

**Mandel:** Oh God, I don't know, there's the one Lena Horne recorded recently, “I'll Always Leave the Door a Little Open,” in her most recent album. That happened exactly like, “I Wish I'd Met You,” Richard Rodney Bennett and Frank Underwood sent me the lyric they said, “We need a song, Lena wants to do this lyric,” I said, “great,” and I sent him the song.

[Interruption]

**Kirchner:** [laughs]

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**Mandel:** Alright it's really been a fucking drag these last eight hours, I don't know why we did this...

**Kirchner:** [laughs loudly]

**Mandel:** And I hope you'll burn it.

[they both laugh]

**Kirchner:** As a friend of mine once said, "Don't say fuck in front of the K.I.D.S."

**Mandel:** Oh, okay.

[they both laugh]

**Mandel:** It wasn't too long that I saw a woman when I was in New York, on a snowy day, step into the gutter and yell, "Oh shit, I just stepped in dog poo!"

[they both laugh]

**Kirchner:** You know the only thing I wanted to ask you, you've had the tribute of having a number of musicians and singers record all Johnny Mandel records. Sue Raney did one.

**Mandel:** Yeah.

**Kirchner:** Bill Perkins did one.

**Mandel:** Yeah.


**Kirchner:** Fred Hersch has a new one out.

**Mandel:** I know he does, does a wonderful job on...

**Kirchner:** I haven't heard it yet. I'll bet he does.

**Mandel:** He takes songs to a different place than anyone else would. It's very transparent and he picks different tempos than any else – you know that I would ever think of and it's wonderful to hear somebody take things and do something you wouldn't think of with them.

**Kirchner:** Who else has done records like that?

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**Mandel:** Actually not that many people, there are very few... albums of all my stuff, very few. Hopefully maybe someday they'll be more.

**Kirchner:** I would hope so.

**Mandel:** Tony Bennett said he like to do one of all my stuff. He's done an awful lot of it as it is. He made the definitive records on, on "Emily," on, "A Time For Love," on, "The Shadow of Your Smile." Did a real nice one on, "The Shining Sea," that's already a third of an album. He wants to do, "Unless It's You," he wants to do, "Where Do You Start?" I just wrote a brand new song for him with Alan and Marilyn that he won't do because the lyrics remind him too much of his ex-wife.

[they both laugh]

**Mandel:** You never know what you run into with singers.

**Kirchner:** It's highly subjective.

**Mandel:** Got a couple of more, several lyrics that he would like – several songs he'd like very much like, "I Won't Believe My Eyes," which you've never heard. There's a lot of songs I've got you haven't heard. And it's on-going, I've got several songs that I haven't uncorked at all yet.

**Kirchner:** You have one book published of...

**Mandel:** Yeah, oh, that's actually in that book, "I Won't Believe My Eyes."

**Kirchner:** Are you going to do any further books like that?


**Mandel:** Sure, if somebody asks me.

**Kirchner:** Who published the one that's out?

**Mandel:** Hal Leonard published that out.

**Kirchner:** That's right.

**Mandel:** And they're going to put it out again without the cassette, they found that hampered sales a great deal because you know the cassette is sitting right up in the front of the book and I did that on purpose because I wanted it to be partly a tutorial so that people could get their hands on the music more because nobody reads music now like they did back in the 20s and 30s and

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40s when everybody had a piano in the house and that was the cheap form of entertainment. Somebody in the family could always, usually, not often but more often than now could fumble around and had had some piano lessons and could pick out the popular song of the day in however rudimentary a fashion. Now people can't even read a fake book which, I think I might've said that yesterday somewhere along the line, which is just the bare chords and melody, like the most, you know basic way of conveying a song. They can't read that, there's even a book out on how to read a fake book. That is true.

**Kirchner:** In our...

**Mandel:** So, that's why I put the cassette in the book but the dealers hate to – you can't display it properly with the cassette, they can't what they call, "rack them." So, they're gonna put it out now without the cassette after several years, they figure the sales will do much better but I've written more song since then so I'd like to probably do an updated version sooner or later.

**Kirchner:** That would be great.


**Mandel:** Probably with Warner's, I'll go to them.

**Kirchner:** I guess the only thing I haven't asked you, is about who your favorite songwriters are and film composers are.

**Mandel:** Okay, well how many hours have we got left?

[they both laugh]

**Mandel:** Favorite songwriters, my God, you know the old phrase, "We stand on the shoulders of giants," there are so many giants and I'm fortunate enough to be on the board of governors of ASCAP, I have been for the past six years and you run into these giants, or their ghosts up their because it was founded, one of the founders was Irving Berlin who was really American music basically and has been for the last you know forty, fifty years. Oh God, Berlin, Jerome Kern, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart, I preferred the early Rodgers by far to the later Rodgers. I mean we had so many wonderful writers, Harry Warren, Johnny Mercer, Vincent Youmans, you know with everyone I name there's probably gonna be that many I forget. Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, you can just go on and on, Cole Porter, George Gershwin I haven't even mentioned. There's just – you know, what a tradition we have in back of us of songwriting and I'm sure I've forgotten a number of giants just right now and they're wonderful. Did I say Vincent Youmans? You know you can just go on and on.

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**Kirchner:** How about film writers?

**Mandel:** Alex North, Alfred Newman, Max Steiner was a real hero, Victor Young was wonderful, Hugo Friedhofer, David Raksin wrote wonderfully. The ones that are around now, Johnny Williams wonderful all around writer. Jerry Goldsmith, Hank Mancini for sure, Dave Grusin great, you know there's some good writers out there and again we are standing on the shoulders of giants. Bronislaw Kaper, I love and also a great songwriter. Wrote, *Invitation and Green Dolphin Street*, "All God's Chillun Got Rhythm." Broni who had quite a great sense of humor, I've heard, once on a talk show... the host was asking him, "You write these great symphonic scores and then you turn around and write a song like, "All God's Chillun Got Rhythm," how can this all come out of the same man?" And Broni said, "It's very simple, I'm a phony."

[They both laugh]

**Mandel:** So, I'll close with that I think.

[they both laugh]

**Kirchner:** So...

**Mandel:** Cy Coleman, who's on the board with me, there's a real writer. Burton Lane who's on the board with me, you talk about legends, you don't – it doesn't get any better than that. Jule Styne, you just left us, you know, you just go on and on. One great one after another.


**Kirchner:** Yeah, lets...

**Mandel:** Boy, it's wonderful just to be among all that and to be able to – we have such great literature to – you know this is the great treasury of American art, is the songwriting that has come out of this century of American music. And I'm just very proud to even however remotely, be associated with it.

**Kirchner:** Well, it's far more than remotely as any number of people I think would attest.

**Mandel:** Well, it's an honor I'll tell you that. And most of all to be able to have spent your life doing something you love, what more can you ask for? You know, that's the most anybody can ask for and I was lucky enough to have it, and it ain't over yet. Not by a long shot.


**Kirchner:** Unless you have something to add I couldn't come up with a better ending line than that.

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**Mandel:** I think that wraps it up. Thank you very much.

**Kirchner:** Thank you Johnny.

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