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LORRAINE GORDON
NEA Jazz Master (2013)

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Brown: Today is July 7, 2012, and this is the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Interview with NEA Jazz Master Lorraine Gordon, in her home in New York City. It happens to be a very hot but beautiful day in New York. Good afternoon, Lorraine Gordon!

Gordon: Hello. Thank you for coming on this hot day.

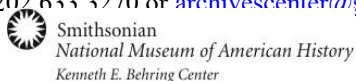
Brown: And thank you so much for your incomparable hospitality. Ken and I are having a wonderful time. This is Anthony Brown, and Ken Kimery is here, to interview Lorraine Gordon, who, if you do not know who Lorraine Gordon is, she, over the last approximately 70 years, has been a mover-and-shaker in jazz, starting first at Blue Note Records, and, in the last fifteen years, as the owner and, shall we say, preserver of the greatest jazz club in the world, the Village Vanguard. So, Lorraine, where do you want to start this odyssey of your life in jazz? Do we start in Newark?

Gordon: Why not? That's almost where it did start. I mean, that's where I was born, although I would like to be somewhere else—but I wasn't.

Brown: So you're a Jersey girl!

Gordon: No, I liked Newark. It was ok. When you're a kid, you don't know where you're growing up.

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Brown: What was the neighborhood like?

Gordon: Well, there were so many. We moved a lot in those days. This was during the Depression. I was a Depression maybe, actually, and we did live in neighborhoods, more than one. But they were all the same, more or less, in that part of Newark. It was an enclave, and it had a lot of Jewish people—which I didn't even know existed. It had nothing to do with me.

I was there, and I grew up, and I had a lot of fun. I grew up as a real kid, skating, sledding, soccer ball. Everything the guys did, I did. I was a tomboy, and I hung out with the guys. My brother especially, who was my best buddy.

Brown: Phil, correct?

Gordon: Phillip, yes. He was my buddy.

Brown: He was three years older?

Gordon: He says so. I thought he was two. He keeps insisting it was three.

Brown: Ok. According to this marvelous book by Barry Singer, *Alive At the Village Vanguard*, which you claim as your memoir, you credit Phil with perhaps introducing you to jazz.

Gordon: Not really. No one introduces you to anything. You listen. If you like it, you accept it. I mean, if you look at art and you like the painting, you say, "That's it; I like that; I'll collect some." Or for anything. He didn't, no. But we liked it together. I liked to share... Well, of course he was older than me, so maybe he knew something I didn't know at the time. That's quite possible. But I accepted it as a *fait d'accompli*. I loved it, and I'm glad he was there to be with me through all our jazz life, which was a long one. But we did it together, and he was great. I miss him.

Brown: Your love and passion for the music actually became a social phenomenon. You created, along with some of your friends, a Hot Club. Can you talk about forming the Hot Club?

Gordon: Right! The Hot Club of Newark. You see, it wasn't just a passing fad. My brother could have introduced me, and I could have gone in another direction. But I was there for the whole thing. We took the name, The Newark Hot Club, because in France they had the Hot Club of France, and we listened to all those French records with Django Reinhardt and the great artists there—and that became our name, the Hot Club of Newark. We had a little meeting-house that we rented for hardly anything, around the corner from where I lived, and we used to run concerts there. Oddly enough... I hate to bring up Jabbo Smith's name, but he lived in Newark at the time, and we got him to come and play there. Because he was a legend. He'd just disappeared from the whole panoply of jazz, and lived in Newark. That's what he did. But we had concerts. Artists would come from New York, and come and play there. We had 20-25 members, if you want to call them that. They came and they went. But that was our little contribution to Newark, New Jersey—the Hot Club.

Brown: This is while you're in high school. Correct?

Gordon: Yeah. Really in high school! I mean, we were wonderfully brilliant young kids who just wanted to hear music—jazz. We gave each other assignments. They'd say, "Ok, tonight when you come, you do the life of Bessie Smith." I'd sit home, getting all of Bessie's records out, notating... I said, "Oh, I can't do that. Whoo..." Whoo, I loved Bessie. She was my favorite at the time. She taught me about life in the South. She taught me a lot. You have to understand. Her lyrics were not just bawdy or off-color. They were about LIFE, about floods coming up to her door, about poverty, about discrimination. I learned so much from Bessie Smith. I fell into it. I listened to her. She was words of wisdom for me—beside having a great voice and being a great singer. I learned a lot from Bessie Smith.

Brown: What other artists did you like at that time?

Gordon: Well, of course, everyone loved Louis. How could you not love Louis? But when you loved these artists, you went out collecting their records. You had to find every record they ever made, be it Louis Armstrong, or Bix Beiderbecke, King Oliver... The whole history of jazz, you wanted to know if you could find it on records, where it was. If they were lost, you had to find them in someone's house or some record store. You were putting together a collection of the history of jazz. We were doing that without knowing it. We were doing it because we were following the art form of each artist. Where did they go from here? What city did... Where did they wind up? Where did they die, and how? We knew their history and their music. Very important.

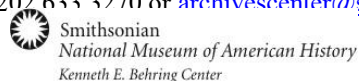
Brown: You talked in your book about going to the black neighborhoods to try to find records. So, were you living near a black neighborhood at that point?

Gordon: Well, yes, I was. In Newark, we were, without me knowing it. I didn't go to the black neighborhoods in Newark. My brother did that. I'd go with him once in a while.

I lived in Atlanta, Georgia, where I went to the black neighborhoods. Honey, I know what a rail looks like. I was almost run out on one. I did go to the black neighborhoods. I took my father's car, and I drove around there. I lived on Peachtree Street at the time, and I really was not happy there. But I got some records, and I did go talk to the people. We rented this apartment from a woman who warned my parents that I was out of control by going into black neighborhoods. I said, "What are they talking about? I want to buy a record. I pay for those records. I'm in business." My life was so different from theirs in Atlanta, Georgia.

I also had a job in Atlanta, Georgia. My father, who was there (that's how I got there; he was working there) got me a job in a fancy dress store there. I was young...20 maybe, at the most, I think. I have to think back. Maybe 18. I went in there cold turkey to sell clothes to people. A woman walked in, very nice, very elegant, very beautiful, picked up some dress, she'd

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like to try it on. I said, “Sure.” I showed her into a dressing room, and I said, “I’ll wait for you outside,” which I did. Then I came out, and I saw a big bunch of salespeople over in that corner. They saw and called me over. They said, “Do you know you put a black lady in the white dressing room?” I said, “What?” This was a revelation to me. Whoever thought of such a thing. I cannot say what I said on the air here, but I turned around and I walked out, and I never went back again. I never got over it. And I left Atlanta, Georgia, and came back to the wonderful North...which had no discrimination at all...

Brown: Yeah... In this book again (and I’m going to keep referencing the book, because this is your story), you talked about how your brother, Phil, introduced you to Ralph Berton, the jazz deejay. Am I getting that right?

Gordon: Ralph Berton. Yeah, Ralph. Well, Ralph was a big influence on everybody’s life, female or male—mostly female. That’s where Ralph was coming from. But he was very charming, luckily, with it all. He had a radio show on WNYC, which still exists, right down the street here now. We listened to him like religion. He played all the great jazz records, and not only that, he sang along with Louis Armstrong. He was so into it, and of course we fell in love with him. He had a charming stutter that was all the more exciting. Anyway, I met him one night, when my brother brought him to our house. He was lecturing somewhere in the neighborhood. We drove him to New York City, to Hudson Street, where he lived. But Ralph was a big influence in jazz in those days. He gets no credit today at WNYC. They should do a show about him. He did more for jazz in those days at least for me than I like to talk about.

Brown: Well, another person whom you met that obviously had a great impact in your life was Alfred Lion, who you later married. Can you talk about meeting Alfred, and how you guys came together. Obviously it was the music that brought you together. But talk about meeting Alfred.

Gordon: Well, I can thank Ralph Berton for that, because he was playing Blue Note records on the air. Nobody else in this whole town ever played them. He played the 10-inch and the 12-inch. I was fascinated by those records alone. I would sometimes come in to New York from New Jersey with a girlfriend, looking around. Ralph Berton one night took me, for the first time in my life, to 52nd Street, which was my dream. But I could not go alone, and Ralph was a wonderful person, and he took me to Jimmy Ryan’s. I remember there was a clarinet player there, a very handsome guy with a big scar down his face, Joe...Joe...Joe...it will come to me... I know it when I hear it.

Brown: Was that Joe Marsala?

Gordon: He was very beautiful and played very well. Anyway, I sat on this little side banquette, and Ralph’s sitting next to me, and he finally said, “Right across the room there, that’s Alfred Lion.” I said, “Really?” My eyes popped up. He said, “I’ll introduce you.” So he did take me over, and I met Alfred Lion for the first time in my life, sitting there, I assume, with Frank, who I did not know at the time—Frank Wolff, his cohort. We met. We talked. We got married. [LAUGHS] Not then and there, but... There were interludes. I would have to need another book to write them all.

Brown: Then that launched your actual hands-on involvement with creating jazz records. Is that a fair way to portray that...

Gordon: Alfred was brilliant. He was European. He left Hitler's Germany, thank goodness, and came to New York, and he had a huge jazz record collection that he brought with him from Berlin. He lived over on First Avenue. He acclimated himself very quickly. He got a lot of buddies around him. He bought Frank Wolff over from Germany. The two of them were like inseparable buddies. And he met all kinds of jazz people. And he met me. And I introduced him to the whole Newark Hot Club. So I formed the whole liaison between Alfred and myself and...mostly Alfred and myself.

He had offices for the first time on Lexington Avenue, 767 Lexington, right across from Bloomingdale's. Wow, was I lucky! I'd go up to visit him there. And one day, he filled up two albums with every record that he had made so far. 12-inch records. They were expensive, like \$1.50 in those days. And he gave them to me. Wow, I was overwhelmed, I must say. That was a true test of love. And then we got married.

Brown: And he was in the Army when you got married.

Gordon: Yes. Well, that's what did it, so I could say I was a war bride. And we weren't ready to get married prior to that. We were just enjoying each other, listening to jazz. That's all we did. And he was recording people. Sidney Bechet! I mean, I met Sidney Bechet through Alfred, who was Alfred's good friend. Alfred adored him. I adored him. All the women adored Sidney. He was a beautiful, wonderful guy, in spite of what other people say... I've read some things.

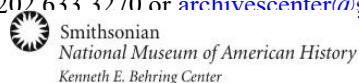
But yeah...so...yeah... He got drafted into the Army, and he was sent to Texas, to William Beaumont General Hospital in El Paso. Of course, he kept writing to me, "Let's get married, I may be sent overseas," the whole story. I said to my mother, who couldn't bear to lose me... My mother and I were very close, and she did let me go, and helped me go. I took a plane. Got so plane-sick, I thought "I'll never go on a plane again." I don't think I wanted to get married. I don't know what happened. I was sick as a dog. When I got off that plane, Alfred didn't recognize me. I was green. And the two pilots from that plane were standing out in front to say goodbye to the passengers, and I said, "Thanks, Orville." [LAUGHS] "Thanks..." What was the other guy's name of those brothers?

Brown: Wilbur.

Gordon: That was some trip. I was a mess. I'll tell you. But I pulled myself together, and we got married. Again, that's three times we got married.

Brown: You got married in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Gordon: Ah, Las Cruces. Yes, Alfred wanted something beautiful and charming. I didn't even
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know what Texas was. I just got into the pool at William Beaumont General Hospital. It had a huge swimming pool. He said, “We’re going to go to Las Cruces.” We took a couple that were his friends on the base, and they had a baby—we took the three of them. They were our witnesses. And we got married, definitely.

And then an edict came through at that time to the Army, that anybody who suffered any kind of disability through working in the Army... Now, Alfred worked in the offices. He didn’t even know what a gun looked like. Absolutely a babe in the woods. He had a big problem with one eye, where he began to lose his vision. Because he was doing very...typing, typing, typing all the time, on histories of the soldiers. That’s another story. But he was losing his eyesight on that eye. They issued this edict, whatever you want to call it, dismissing, honorably discharging anyone with this kind of problem—and Alfred was one of them. He was discharged from the Army. Whoa! We didn’t believe it.

We took a train back to New York, a troop train. We stood all the way back to New York practically. Filled with soldiers. We loved it. It was kind of great. We didn’t know what was happening. We got back to New York. There we are. Where are we? We’re in Greenwich Village, looking for a place to live. Anyway, we did manage.

Brown: So what happened to the record label while he was in the Army?

Gordon: Oh, well, Frank Wolff, who was the buddy he brought from Germany to New York apparently... Their friendship was so intense that I didn’t need a mother-in-law. I mean...no, they weren’t gay or anything. You know, Europeans have a different kind of male friendship than Americans have with men. They were very good buddies, and they both loved jazz. And Frank was a fantastic photographer. He took a lot of pictures of me just to do something.

But Alfred and he took an apartment together on First Avenue, before we were married. They were at 1133 First Avenue. They lived there in a little two-room apartment, and it had tons of records, one wall covered with records, and all their buddies would come up and sit around all night, listening to Bix Beiderbecke or King Oliver or Louis or... Jabbo didn’t enter the picture then. That’s what they did, until I came along and broke it up. That’s when Alfred and I had to get our own apartment, which we did.

Brown: You mentioned also that I believe your first recording session was James P. Johnson. Is that correct? That you actually were in the control room?

Gordon: I don’t know that. The first?

[PAUSE FOR PHONE CALL—20:48]

Gordon: Yeah, but it was not the first one.

Brown: That you participated in?

Gordon: Not necessarily. I don’t remember, quite honestly. No. Wait a minute. There was one

with James Hamilton, the Duke Ellington... No-no-no, it's not the first one... Maybe it was! First of all, I adored James P. Johnson...

Brown: I'm going to read from the book.

Gordon: Yeah.

Brown: It says: "The first session Alfred produced upon our return were, in November and December of 1943, a pair of very important solo performances by James P. Johnson."

Gordon: Oh, good. Then it's true. Well, you know, I don't remember what I had for breakfast.

Brown: But do you remember the recording session?

Gordon: Oh! "Keep Off The Grass..." I'm going to remember the names. "Keep Off The Grass." "Carolina Balmoral." I may not be able to remember all... It must have been 12 different numbers that he did. "Carolina Balmoral." "Keep Off The Grass"... I can't remember all of them. But I adored James P. Johnson. I mean, James P. Johnson was like the peak of jazz artists who were not going to live very much... He was not a young man at the time. So he was an idol to me. James P. Johnson. Yeah, I loved him, and his funny face—he had a big, wonderful, funny face. He was so sweet. Yeah, but I can't remember all the... I could look them up and see if I've got it.

Brown: I'm more interested to find out what happened. Did he just sit down and play? Did he do several takes?

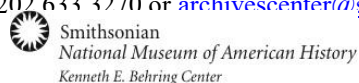
Gordon: Oh, I see. I should remember all that. Now, apparently, Alfred talked to the guys beforehand, had meetings with them... I don't know if I was present or not. I assume I was, because Alfred didn't go very far without me at the time. We were still very much involved with each other. So if I came along, I was just there, sitting. Alfred was the spokesperson. But you didn't talk very much to artists like James P. Johnson. You'd just say, "Sit down, man, and play!" You don't need to tell THEM what to do. They'll say to you, "Get out of my way; give me the mike" and that's it.

And this was one of the great artists of all time for me, James P. Johnson. Whoa. Everybody learned from him. He's so original. These are the pure spirits of jazz that I fell in love with myself. Each and every one of them meant a lot to me. I mean, like, if I was an artist painting some fabulous something on the wall, these were the guys I was painting. They were gorgeous.

Brown: You wanted to be an artist. Is that correct?

Gordon: Well, I did want to be, yes. I could. I had some talent. But my mother never... No one encouraged me to do anything. I was dying to go to art school. My brother went. The boy was always, you know, the *uber alles*, heh-heh... No, mom didn't care. Mom said, "I'm making

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clothes for you. That's enough." My mother was a great couturier. She made all my clothes. I never bought anything in a store. "Stand still and let me put this on you." That was it. Nobody thought I could...I had a future. Well, maybe I didn't. But I never pursued it. That was it. I pursued the men. Alfred was the first one.

This is not recording...

Brown: You didn't say anything I think was incriminating. It's all right.

Gordon: Oh. Well, it's okay. Better that way.

Brown: There's more in the book than you just said anyway.

Gordon: Oh, I didn't know. I thought you'd turned it off.

Brown: Good, you're comfortable. So Ike Quebec...

Gordon: Oh, yeah. What a dear man. Ike was I think the first friend that Blue Note Records really had as a musician and a friend. Most musicians were pals, but Ike was a friend. He was dear. And we loved his playing, because Alfred recorded him constantly, and I swooned because he had that great big sax sound. That's so sexy. It was gorgeous. I thought Ike was the greatest. He never quite made it, unfortunately, but I still play his records today.

Brown: Art Blakey was also somebody who recorded early on with Blue Note as well.

Gordon: Yeah. Well, these were all artists who were not even known outside of the small jazz...little whatever we were living in. It was a very small jazz world compared to junk or pop or crap that we have today. But Art was an up-and-coming drummer, and he was ferocious on the drums, and we loved him just for that. I think Ike brought him along.

Ike was the mentor, in a way, for Alfred, by bringing us into areas of jazz that we had not been allowed to explore. There were great black musicians. Alfred was a great white entrepreneur, but Ike was a path for him. He was very generous in showing us around.

Brown: That seemed to be a group with Ike Quebec, and then he brought in Art Blakey, and then Tadd Dameron came into the fold as well to record.

Gordon: Who?

Brown: Tadd Dameron.

Gordon: Oh, Tadd! Tadd Dameron. These names are so beautiful to me. Each one of them was so great in their own way. Each one was representative of their own art. Tadd was a great arranger and wrote gorgeous songs. What was that gorgeous song he wrote... Oh, it's so gorgeous I can't... I know it when I hear it.

Brown: “On A Misty Night”? Is that it?

Gordon: No.

Brown: “Our Delight”? “Dameronia”?

Gordon: “Our Delight” is an upper tune. No, one ballad. But when I hear it (and they always play it), I say, “All right, Tadd.” Anyway, there’s so much music that went by my ears, it’s hard to extract it all. But the names bring back a flood of memories of how great these artists were. [THE TUNE IS PROBABLY “IF YOU COULD SEE ME NOW”]

Brown: What was he like as a person, Tadd?

Gordon: Tadd. Well, he was a very round-faced man. He had very short-cropped hair, I remember. Very...mmm...caramel-colored skin, and very sweet. He was very introspective. You didn’t get a slap on the back or a hug from him. He was cool. I guess he’s one of the first cool musicians I really got to know a little bit. And very serious and deep-thinking. Professorial, I would say. That’s how I got to know him. That was his persona to me. And his music was very much like him. It was cool, and very original, and very personal. That was Tadd Dameron. “Our Delight,” yeah, I remember that. I loved that name. It sounds like candy.

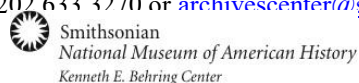
Brown: Then somebody that died so early, but you had a chance to meet and get to know him: Fats Navarro.

Gordon: Oh, yeah, Fats. Well, you see, all these musicians were suddenly crowding into the Blue Note area. Because Alfred learned more and more, met more and more, got more and more involved, and all these great artists started arriving. Fats was a fabulous trumpet player. I mean, he was what his name is—Fats. He was adorable.

I didn’t go into anything but musical experiences with these men. Some would come home and be friends with Alfred and me, and some were just artists who played for us. That was it. “We want your music.” There was no particular kinship outside of the warmth of recording together, and discussing what Alfred, the producer, wanted from the artist, or what the artist said “this is what I’m going to give you; don’t argue with me.” And Fats was one of them. I don’t have a real... I have a great memory of him, but not that we had dinner together or anything personal in our relationship with records.

But Fats was one of the great, great artists. He died very young. Very young. All those things saddened me. Because I became involved with them and their music, and what each instrument they played... You know, they were all in categories. Bechet... There was only one of him. There’s no category. Anyway, Fats had... Thank God a lot of these records have been reissued, so if one takes the trouble to try to find them, one will hear great trumpet playing. It doesn’t exist any more, for me.

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Brown: Do you feel his playing reflected who he was as a person? His soul? What was Fats like as a person?

Gordon: Well, it's hard for me to tell you, because a lot of the musicians didn't talk to me. They didn't see me at all. Who was I? I was Alfred's wife. "What is she doing here?" [LAUGHS] There was not a lot of communication outside of, "Hey, man, how are you?" No, I can't say that Fats and I developed a friendship of any kind. We were very civil to each other. I was largely ignored...in a sense. Not that I was ignored, but I was not necessary to his trumpet playing. I was just sitting there. I'm the listener.

Brown: Let me bring up another musician who has a relationship with Fats Navarro but also with Tadd Dameron, and he started recording in 1952 for Blue Note, and that is, of course, Miles Dewey Davis.

Gordon: Oh, ho-ho-ho...

Brown: And you had a much more interpersonal relationship with Miles. We're not talking about romantic. But you visit him in his apartment, and you knew his wife Frances. So Miles in 1952—my goodness.

Gordon: Miles... I had two lives with Miles, one with Alfred Lion and one with Max Gordon. And they are two different Miles for me. The first ten miles I went with him was with Alfred. We were buddies. We were friends. Man, Miles and I would talk...well, we would just talk like he wanted to talk, and I would respond the way he wanted because I liked it, and it was fun. And he was sweet and terrific, and he liked Alfred. They really got along. Well, who was Miles in those days, when Alfred was recording him? He was brilliant. He knew he was, but nobody else knew. But Alfred knew it, and exploited him on the records—why not? Because he loved him.

See, Alfred made a big advance, too. Alfred was no longer back there in the early '20s and '30s and '40s. Alfred himself was advancing, and Miles was pulling him along, and things were changing all the time for us. You'd no sooner get through with that recording than a new thing came along that, "Wait, we've got to listen to that." Man! Miles!

But Miles was just playing sweet and beautiful music. He wasn't muting everything and growling, straining through that mute. That mute always made me feel like apple sauce being strained through the strainer.

But Miles was gorgeous, and we were friends. He had a brownstone somewhere on the West Side, and he had a gym in the basement. I remember he used to take Alfred and I there, and he used to show him how to hit the thing that was hanging from the ceiling. He would do punching... He was trying to build up that little scrawny body. But he could play. He was funny.

We used to go eat at a certain fish place on Third Avenue there. King of the Sea, it was called. Every kind of fish in the world was a big picture up above. We'd sit at the counter and eat. We loved that place on Third Avenue. Best fish ever. But Miles was there. He drove there. He had a car half the size of the block out in front. Was it an Aston-Martin? I don't know. But

when we left, he told me, “Get in there. I want to see you drive this car.” I could drive, but we had a little old Pontiac or something. And he said, “Let me see if you can drive...” Anyway, I got behind the steering wheel, and he said, “Push down the accelerator.” Well, I couldn’t. It was so heavy! I mean, come on! I could not push that darn thing down.

Anyway, that’s where Miles was. He already had the car. He already had the punching bags in the basement. He already had the brownstone. And he already had Blue Note Records and Alfred, and we loved him, and I loved him. And he had a couple of wives. I know Frances was there at the time, because he loved Frances—and I did, too. Frances was adorable. A lovely woman. And that’s it, I guess. At that point. I don’t know if I switched husbands then and met Miles Davis at the Vanguard now, when he was playing. That transition is a little hard to remember.

But Miles was a buddy and a friend. And easy to live with. He was not a smart-ass. He was just interested in his music. He loved the trumpet. We loved him and the trumpet that he played. We just couldn’t wait to get together to do another recording. We did a lot of recordings. That was our life together, to do a recording, get the music together. What do you want to play? Who do you want in the group? All this kind of maneuvering and thinking and talking culminated...

We used to go to a studio, WOR Studio, 1440 Broadway, up there. We did all our recordings up there at the time. There was a wonderful young man who was the engineer, Doug I believe his name was. We just felt very relaxed in that recording studio. We didn’t know any other... I don’t even know we got there. But it was good. Real good. The vibes were good, from the recording studio to us to the engineers. It was nice. Never any hardship of any kind.

Brown: So you were in the control booth during the recording sessions.

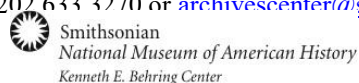
Gordon: Yeah. I was listening in. Not that I could tell them what to do or what not to do. But I was there to hear if anything went wrong, that I could throw up my hands in despair or something.

Brown: But also, you and Alfred would go home with the tapes.

Gordon: Oh, the tests. The test pressings. My gosh. Yes, we would take them home. Ike would come over very often and listen with us. We sat in our couch in our little one-room apartment down there on Grove Street, and we listened to those early... They weren’t tapes. They were acetates, big acetates. And we had a little skimpy box we played it on. When I think of the equipment today and what we listened on! It was a square box. It had a radio on the bottom and a turntable on the top, and we put the records on there, and we hovered around that box, listening to every sound. It was beautiful. We didn’t know anything better. We thought that was great.

Brown: But you were selecting the master take.

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Gordon: Yes, the takes, the takes, the first... Very often we didn't do a lot of takes. Sometimes it was a one-take. We didn't believe in three and four and five takes, as some people did afterwards, who exploited all those takes, which I don't agree with ever. No. We would do at the most three takes. At the most. That's what you should do. One take is...if you're lucky, it can be fantastic, but you're never that lucky. Take 2 is a good warmup, wow, you're into it. And take 3 is IT. As a rule. And that's how it did work.

Funny. It works that way in clubs today, too. I know opening night, sometimes...well, by accident, it can be so sensational, you wish the world was there. But generally, it's a warmup. The second night is pretty good. But the third night, wow, it's the best. It takes time to get all the musical pieces together for each musician to feel each other out. It's a complicated art. It really is. People don't realize that.

Brown: You credit Ike Quebec with introducing you to Thelonious Monk.

Gordon: Well, yeah. I credit Ike with lots of things. Yes, he was a good friend. And yes, he did. He literally took us by the hand and said, "I want you to meet..." We didn't know Thelonious Monk, quite honestly. I didn't. If Alfred did, he sure didn't tell me. He didn't know him. He took us to his apartment in Hell's Kitchen...at the time. Now it's so fancy, you can't live there. Hell's Kitchen, on East 65th, I believe [sic: East 63rd], in a brownstone...a tenement, not a brownstone... A tenement building on the left side of a dead-end street. We drove there. You could park. You didn't have to worry.

Brown: Is that near where Lincoln Center is?

Gordon: Well, Lincoln Center is on the verge of that. By the way, they have named the street he lived on Thelonious Monk Thoroughfare or Plaza or Esplanade. I can't believe it. Whenever I drive there, I see his name up on a street sign. I say, "For God's sake, nobody knew in their life that this man lived in this dead-end corner of a tenement building, in the back of the building." You didn't go upstairs. You came in the front door, and walked down a long hallway to that apartment on the first floor, where Monk lived with his mother, his sister, his sister's husband, and there may have been someone else—I'm not sure. Those are three I remember explicitly. And that was where Monk lived, with his mother and sister. We would come to this apartment, open the door, and you walked into a kitchen. The first room that hits you is not a living room—but that was the living room, the kitchen. To the right was a small bedroom, which was Monk's, and over that way was his sister's husband's rooms... I guess there were two more bedrooms. I never got beyond the kitchen and Monk's bedroom. I really guessed...I could see on my way out that those were other rooms.

But that was it. Ground floor level. Unpretentious. Hard-working people. Nothing grand or glorious there. Monk had an upright piano, of what vintage I don't know, and one long bed, a bed along one wall. This wall was the bed. There was the piano; here was the bed. There was a window. There was a closet. It was like that. I always say like Van Gogh's bedroom I remember from a painting. Nothing in it but Monk and that piano and his little stool.

We would line up on the bed, against this wall, with our feet out...our backs against the

wall, our feet out like this—Frank, Alfred, and me, Monk there at the piano...and just sit—and he would play. He played and played. And what did he play? Did I know that it was “Ruby, My Dear,” “Round About Midnight,” “Well, You Needn’t”... I didn’t know what the names were. They had no names at the time. He just played everything, and I fell under his spell. It was one of the great experiences of my musical listening life. It really was. You listen to a lot of piano players, yeah, it’s great, that’s great, you know... Yeah, I like him; it’s ok. But this was different. It was different because it was not like any other piano player I’d never heard before. And it was quirky and funny and difficult. It was not easy, exactly, to fall back and say, “Whoa, this is flowing, great piano that you like.” No. This is tough. But it’s good. I was captivated by it because of all of his different attitudes towards the piano, toward what he was thinking, toward what he was doing, towards his composition... Well, he was different. He was a different guy. I never met a different piano player before. It was different for me, too.

That’s how I fell in love with Thelonious and his music. Alfred did, too. We both did. I was more voluble about it, because I was...wow, knocked off my seat. So we recorded him and recorded him, and all those great masterpieces were recorded. Thank you, Alfred, for doing that. And Monk was on his way. In a small way, but on his way.

Brown: His first recording session was on your birthday in 1947. October 15, 1947.

Gordon: Because Monk’s birthday was very close. I think Monk’s birthday is a few days before mine. (Oct. 10th). So yeah, we kind of did a birthday thing together, but I chose my birthday. Since I was still in a position to choose.

Brown: Blue Note was the first label that he recorded for.

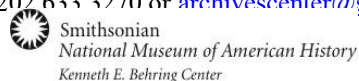
Gordon: Well, absolutely. Well, he did that little thing up at Minton’s, but he was just a sideman. You could barely hear it with Charlie [Christian]... That’s a great record. I treasure that record. But that’s not a recording-recording; that’s a knockoff. But this was his first major recording.

Brown: As a leader. Because he had recorded with Coleman Hawkins earlier.

Gordon: That’s right. As a leader. That’s how much we believed in him. Nobody else believed in him at that time, except musicians—some musicians, not a lot. No, he was nothing. No-thing. In the eyes of the public, he hadn’t even...he hadn’t begun to arrive. But to me, it was a catalyst. Walked in. Man, he’s too much! I flipped out. I really did. But so what? Nobody else did. Exactly my kind of people, listeners...not artists... Not yet. It takes time. It doesn’t come overnight.

Brown: So you championed Monk. Because of the records on Blue Note, you wanted to help him get exposure. You wanted the world to know about him.

Gordon: Well, yeah. Look, I had no artistic anything, but I could type, and I sat at our office on
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Lexington Avenue there, 767 Lexington, up above, typing-typing-typing letters to various critics, newspapers, blah-blah. I wanted everyone to hear him. When I'm enthusiastic, I want other people to hear it. I've got to reach those people who will make other people hear it. So I wrote a letter, I remember, to Ralph Ingersoll, who was the editor of a new magazine called *P.M.* Oh, gosh, I can't find that copy. It was such a cute letter. I love it in retrospect. But I did say to Mister Ralph... No, I don't know if that's the one. There's another one, where it opens up, "There's a genius living in this city..." Is that it?

Brown: No, that's not it. But that's quoted in here.

Gordon: Oh. Well, that's the letter. I wrote, "there is a genius living in this city, and nobody knows about him but me, and I would like to tell you about him." And I go on for a paragraph, telling him about Thelonious Monk. I cannot find that letter, although I know I have it somewhere. I just don't know where. But it was a letter that opened the door, because Ralph Ingersoll called me up and said, "Yes, I have your letter; we would like to send a reporter over." I was like gaga. First time I was involved, like, doing something really positive in the sense of getting a person... Anyway, yes. "I'm going to send a reporter; let's make a date." And we did, and he did this send this reporter. I went and got him in my car, I think (because I remember I had my car), and I drove him to Monk's apartment on West 65th, 66th, 67th...the 60s there... I'm trying to remember the reporter's name...who I know very well...it will come to me...

Brown: Peck?

Gordon: He was a very important guy at the time. He came with me, and we got to the door, and he jumped out and I jumped out, and he said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going with me." He said, "Oh, no, no, I don't have anybody come with me." I said, "Well, he's not going to talk to you." He said, "You can't come with me." I said, "Ok." Well, I went and sat back in the car. I said, the guy is not going to make it. Sure enough, ten minutes later, he back. He said, "There is no story there. What are you trying to do?" I said, "I told you, this man does not just talk to anybody; he has to have the friend with him, and I am the friend." He said, "there's no story—goodbye," and he left in a huff.

Well, I called Ralph Ingersoll, and I said, "Sir, the man does not understand that you cannot go in and talk to a genius and expect him to embrace you." He sent the reporter back, with me, and there was the writeup. Two middle, full pages with the kitchen first in view, with the big refrigerator, which was the main piece of furniture in that room, and then the whole story about Monk and the mother and blah-blah-blah. It was big, double-page, middle spread.

Monk's mother got ahold of me (I'll never forget) when I went back to the apartment, and she said, "What have you done to us?" I said, "What do you mean?" She was enraged that they wrote up the *Frigidaire* as being a main source of architecture...or whatever... It embarrassed her. I said, "Look, Mrs. Monk, you have to understand something; your son is going to be very famous someday; you have to put up with things that you may not approve of—but that is the way it works." I went on and on and on. But she was not mollified by me at all until maybe many years later, when she got some money back from royalties or something. But I'll never forget how enraged she was at me. I was a little innocent, so happy to get this article, and WOW,

and she's saying, WHOP, WHOP...

Anyway, that was the beginning. Then I took his records, and I traveled around the country, trying to sell them everywhere. In Harlem. I couldn't sell them in Harlem. I went to the main, big record store... Well, it wasn't a big store, but it was a good record store on 125th Street. I'd take a subway up there with my packet, and I'd say to the conductor (they used to have conductors on the subways then), "Is this 125th?" He'd look at me and say, "Why do you want get off there?" I said, "None of your business." Everybody was so protective of us. Then I went to the record store. He said, "Mmm...no. The guy has got two left hands, lady." I said, "You wait and see." I was forever threatening people with waiting to see. "You're going to see someday, he's a genius." That's how that worked in the beginning, until he became a genius, and I couldn't talk to him any more.

Brown: But you were close.

Gordon: Very close.

Brown: Why do you think he felt that way with you?

Gordon: Why what?

Brown: Why do you feel you created this connection with him, that he could talk with you?

Gordon: Oh. Well, because I talk nonsense, too. [LAUGHS] So we would get involved with subjects like Something is Nothing. "Yeah, something," he would say, "is something." I'd say, "It's nothing." He said, "It's something." I said, "It's nothing." This would go on for 20 minutes or so. Brilliant conversations like that would take place. To him, it was very important, because he meant it, and I didn't know what the heck he was talking about.

But we could talk because, outside of some girlfriends he may have had, I don't believe there was a woman he was talking to in the jazz world who was recording him and understanding his music and liking it, and you know, questioning why he did this or why he thought of that, and why this title... The titles were so crazy. "Ruby, My Dear."

Brown: "Crepuscule With Nellie."

Gordon: Yeah. Crazy things like that. I mean, I'd go look it up in the dictionary. "Well, You Needn't." Wonderful things that just come out from the brain like... Shooting stars, I'd call them. Grab it. I liked all that.

Brown: "Epistrophy."

Gordon: Oh, "Epistrophy." That one really tongue-tied me for a while. Yeah. "Well, You Needn't." What a statement. But "Ruby My Dear," I was... He didn't have a title at the time, and for additional information contact the Archives Center at 202 633 3270 or archivescenter@si.edu



he would be playing that for me at home. He said he doesn't have a title...it's a girl's name or something. I kept saying to him, "Gee, I wish you would call it 'Lorraine, My Dear,'" but I said, "I already have a song, 'Sweet Lorraine,' so forget it, you're not going to get it." But I kind of was hankering for that one. "Ruby, My Dear." I love that one. And what about "Round Midnight"? Did you ever hear such a blues like that? And then they put words to it. Everybody embellished everything he did. He was a true genius—for me. Beside Bechet and a lot of other geniuses. James P. Johnson, he was outstanding. Different. So different. Come on, one of a kind. You can't ever duplicate a person like that. And look what he's made. Look what's become. He's a landmark. Good for Alfred Lion, I say.

[END OF PART ONE]

[BEGINNING OF PART TWO]

Gordon: ...pounds. I'm shrunk myself, but I was 5'5" and 115. I don't know where she got a *monter*(?) like me. And my father was like him, and my mother was this little petite thing, and so adorable. I loved my mother really a lot. Anyway, she died in California, and she was very sad. But I didn't write in my book I had another lover there who I met in California. That's not in any book yet. Whoa, that was my big love affair. No, let's...

Brown: It's ok. It's actually in the book.

Gordon: It is? Jesus Christ, I should read that. Not in the book, yeah... Well, that's when I left Alfred, because of that other guy. I still wonder where he is today. He's probably dead. I'll outlive 'em all! [LAUGHS] Oh, well, it was fun while it lasted. At least I got to Catalina with him, and that was great. I have pictures of... I have so many pictures of my life. I don't have to say a word. I could just rip out these photographs of the whole fuckin' 89 years. I didn't miss a year or a minute. Wow! Like anybody's life.

Brown: So you wanted to have children, but Alfred didn't.

Gordon: More or less. I wasn't dying to have children, but I was getting older, and that's what determines your life, in a way, as a woman. I say, "Well, look..." My mother would say, "So? Vat's happening..." No, she didn't have a Jewish accent. Not at all. No, my mother never said a word. But I basically, as a female, thought you've got to do everything in life—have a kid, for Chrissake. What is life if you don't have children? If you're a woman, if you're able. Alfred and I had a cat. He was crazy for cats, and that's what I had, was the cat. I didn't press him to have children, but it was gnawing on me as each year went by, and I'm now...what am I, almost 30, I guess. You're over the hill, baby. Forget it. Now you can adopt a baby if you want to. I wanted to have a baby. That was just normal.

I was a normal young girl. I was not looking for glamour or money or riches or celebrity. I just wanted to marry a nice guy, have a couple of kids, fool around on the side, and go out and go to the movies. A normal life, that's all I wanted. And what did I wind up with? Two husbands...

Brown: Involved in jazz.

Gordon: Yeah! Those were my children. All those musicians were my babies. It was raising them, and raising hell. Funny. Because I had no aspirations of anything. I was (?—3:24) and dumb and... I was not very interesting, I don't think, to myself. I may have been to other people. But to myself, I was very boring. I had no real... You know. What did I have? I wasn't beautiful. I was good-looking but not beautiful. I don't know. I must have had some moxie. Moxie is what they called it.

You're not recording this.

Brown: I'm going to ask you some questions now.

Gordon: Well, give me fair warning, because I'm talking out of school.

Brown: Your encounter with Max Gordon. Actually, you initiated that. You saw him in a bakery in Fire...Blue Belle Bakery in Fire Island... Can you tell us that story?

Gordon: Well, yeah. Somehow, I got out to Fire Island, which is a delicious little island out there, and... Yeah, I must have gone with some friends. And I did go into this bakery one morning, and I did see Max Gordon sitting at a little round table. How did I know it was Max Gordon? Well, I had been to the Vanguard earlier in my life, and I remember he tried to throw me out once with my friends from the Newark Hot Club because we only bought two beers and passed it around five people, and he said on the side, "Get rid of those kids." So I remembered him quite vividly. And I swallowed my pride, and I went up to him, and I said, "Mr. Gordon," with my little plastic bathing suit... Lastec is what it was called. He looked up and down. He said, "Have a seat."

Brown: Oh, you were in a bathing suit.

Gordon: Oh, but of course. Who goes to Fire Island in a what...in a long dress... No. In a very little bathing suit. Not a bikini in those days. There were no bikinis. But this was better than a bikini. It was very shiny. Heh-heh... And tight. Anyway, it was a bathing suit, like people wear on Fire Island.

"Mr. Gordon." "Yes." I said, "Could I talk to you for a minute?" "Oh, yeah. Have a seat. Have a donut; have a cup of coffee." I said, "Listen, I want to talk to you, Mr. Gordon." "Yes?" "I have a great musician I think you ought to hear. He's a piano player, and his name is Thelonious Monk. I don't think you ever heard him." He says, "No, I never heard of him." I said, "Well, believe me, he is great, and you have a club, and I think you ought to hire him if you have room. Do you think you could think about putting this man in your club? He's got a trio or a quartet, whatever you want."

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He said, “Well, I just happen to have an opening in September.” This is now July or August.

“Oh,” I said. “Fine. Well, ok, we can arrange that.” Because Thelonious wasn’t doing anything. I had all year to book him. So he said, “Yeah, ok. I’ll book this man.” And something... That was it, I guess. I’m trying to remember what happened then.

Brown: Really? Because he didn’t know him.

Gordon: That’s it. He never heard of him.

Brown: He didn’t know you.

Gordon: No. He liked my bathing suit.

Brown: That was what persuaded him?

Gordon: Yeah, I have to admit. Because we did get married. I like to think, Thelonious, you were hired by a bathing suit, yellow and shiny. [LAUGHS] Absolutely! He couldn’t have cared less about Thelonious. He never heard of him. What does he know from a piano player with a name... What kind of name is THAT, Thelonious? Anyway, came September...

Brown: Before that: Did you sit and talk much longer? Once he offered the gig, did you guys get to know each other then?

Gordon: No. We had no contract. We didn’t talk money. We talked nothing. We shook hands probably. I got my hand back, heh-heh...and we made the date, September... Right after Labor Day, September 9th or something, for a week. And I did say, “Yes, he’s got a drummer; he’s got Art Blakey...” I must have elaborated on this, because now it’s refined itself to just the point of Thelonious. But there was Art Blakey, and Sahib Shihab on sax... They now were all adopting names from the Islamic society. I can’t remember them all. I think it was a quartet.

Well, eventually, the night did come, and eventually... Well, I did talk to Thelonious after that, and arranged to get him there opening night, tell him how many sets to play—the groundwork. Alfred and I came in, and we sat on a banquette on the left side, and Thelonious got up to play, and the place was empty. Very few people showed up. It was announced. It was advertised. No reviewers came. Not one reviewer showed up. No way. And very few people; it was a very slow night. Thelonious was up there on piano, and I’m happy as a bird to hear him play up there. Then he gets up from the piano at the end of a set, and he dances around a little bit, does his little two-step, three-step, and then he goes back to the piano and does his thing. Then he gets up to announce whatever...or else he did in the beginning: “Ladies and gentlemen, I am now...” What did he say?

Brown: He said, “Now, human beings, I’m going to play...”

Gordon: Oh, “Human beings,” yeah. Not “ladies and gentlemen.” That’s right. “And now,

human beings, we are going to play so-and-so and so-and-so.” Sat down. Max Gordon goes like this to me. He says, “Listen, what kind of an announcement is that? You are ruining my business. Look, there’s nobody...” I said, “Mr. Gordon, please. Relax. He’s a genius.”

[PAUSE FOR PHONE CALL]

Brown: Let’s pick it up with Max Gordon calling you over because nobody is in the club...

Gordon: Oh yeah. Max is angry at me. “What are you doing to my business?” he said. I’m towering over him, by the way, looking down. I wanted to say, “Listen, little man; watch out or I’ll pop you one.” But I didn’t do that. I said, “Mr. Gordon, please believe me—he’s a genius.”

Brown: What did Max say?

Gordon: He just was glad to get rid of him, I guess. He did no business. And what kills me is not one smart-ass reviewer showed up. I don’t care about the public. They didn’t know about him. But those wonderful critics who know everything...until he appeared at another club, and they showed up there. I resent that.

Brown: Were his records being played on the radio by then? The Blue Notes that he recorded?

Gordon: I assume they were. I have to assume. But I would say they were, and they were distributed in various record stores. But outside of Ralph Berton, I don’t know who else was playing any jazz on the air at that time. There were little out-of-the-way stations maybe. [IF THIS IS SEPTEMBER 1948, THEN SYMPHONY SID WAS DOING LOCATION BROADCASTS FROM THE ROYAL ROOST BY NOW...]

But I wasn’t there as a keen observer of what’s happening every minute with Thelonious. I was not running his life or his career. I was just trying... Yes, I was...running his career, not his life. But trying to get him some notice. Because I believed that he was noticeable, for good reasons; not just for being an out-of-the-way kind of character, but for valid artistic reasons. He was noticeable. That’s all I was trying to say. And that’s what I did.

Brown: So this is your first experience with Max Gordon, and you end up marrying him.

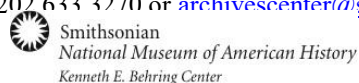
Gordon: That’s how I like my men. Stupid. [LAUGHS] Is that on?

Brown: We’re going to... So what happens after that? How do you and Max get together?

Gordon: Oh. Jesus. I wonder... I never thought of that.

Brown: You married the guy!

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Gordon: Oh. Max invited me one night, for some reason, to come to the movies with him to see something called *Red Shoes*, playing at the very fancy movie theater over on the east side. I was living now with Alfred Lion in Englewood, New Jersey. We moved out of the Village because I was getting cranky in that closet we were living in, and it really got on my nerves. So we did move to this little house, which my aunt had vacated, so we took it, in Englewood. I was depressed there. I furnished it, and it was adorable and beautiful and blah-blah-blah, but I was depressed. I told Alfred Max asked me to go to this movie. I took a bus and I went into New York, and I met him like 45 minutes late. He wanted to kill me already, as he's walking up and down in front of the movie house, sweating, "Where the hell have you been? And what is that outfit you're wearing?" First thing he said to me. Well, I had what I thought was a very snappy little outfit, a purple skirt and a chartreuse top. I liked it. My mother liked it. We both... And a beret on my head. I said, "What's wrong with that?" "The colors are terrible. And you're late." I said, "I'm here, Mr. Gordon. Shall we go in." And we did.

I loved the movie, *Red Shoes*, Moira Shearer and all that. We salivated over the movie. I don't know what happened after that. He didn't take me to dinner that I can recall. Maybe I had to go home. I left him at some point. What does it say in... What did I do next? I don't know.

Brown: That's why I asked you? The next jump... You talk about being at the club with Thelonious, and next you start talking about Max's life. So you don't talk about what happened after that.

Gordon: Well, I got captivated by Max Gordon, in a way, because he was so different. Different from what? Different from everybody. Everybody's different. But he was nice to me, and he apparently did like me. There's no doubt about that. I was bored living in Englewood, New Jersey, and I was bored not having the babies that I'm supposed to have, because time is running out. All those mediocre questions that beset a woman. Well, you know, they've got to face it. So there was a period there...I'm trying to remember it... I could go through my old diaries, which I never did. I don't know... I guess Max tried to see me more often, and I had to get into New York... And Fire Island came up! That was it. Oh, no, that wasn't it. That was before. Backtrack.

Brown: I can tell you, you had gone to Mexico at one point.

Gordon: Oh, thank you. That's my missing link. I knew there was a part of my life I forgot. Oh, Mexico! Si, si, señor. Well, yeah. I was getting depressed for human reasons, and my brother lived in Mexico with his wife, Gertrude. They had moved to Mexico. He was on the G.I. Bill, and there was a school... Before Mexico... There was this little town called San Miguel de Allende, in Mexico, where this little art school came up, and my brother had applied there for the G.I. Bill, and he was accepted, and he and his wife went to live in San Miguel. And I, who did not have any G.I. Bill under my belt, but I liked art and I liked my brother and his wife and I was getting bored at home... He said, "Come to Mexico for a while, and you think it over, cool out" or whatever—which I did. I did. And I did leave Alfred for a while. I said, "I'm entitled to a trip." And I went to Mexico, to San Miguel. I liked that. That was very cute and wonderful. I didn't meet anybody there that intrigued me. But I liked the people, and I liked living in a hacienda, and I liked the whole art world there.

Siqueiros... This very great artist, David Alfaro Siqueiros—who my brother was mad about, and became his assistant—was teaching there, and he brought a kind of electric attitude to everybody in San Miguel. Then when he left, my brother also left. They went to live in Mexico City, and I went with them to Mexico City. But I was like in...what do you call it...dry dock, wondering what to do next. Let's see...Max... What husband was I with then?

Brown: You were still married when you were in Mexico.

Gordon: To who?

Brown: You were still married to Alfred.

Gordon: Oh. He's saying to me, "Oh..." Wait a minute. What does...my mother dies in California...

Brown: Yeah. Your mother had already died.

Gordon: But I was in California when my mother died, and that's when I met the other man, and that kind of destroyed everything with Alfred. Ok, that was the dent. Then I'm in San Miguel de Allende, and then I'm in Mexico City, and then I have to come home. To who?

Brown: Well, you say, "I couldn't bear to leave him," meaning Alfred. You couldn't leave Alfred, but you wanted to be with Max.

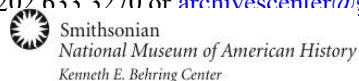
Gordon: Oh.

Brown: So you talk about...

Gordon: Oh, there I was. I was doing *Jules and Jim* then. Yeah, that was my *Jules and Jim* scene. I did respect Alfred tremendously. He was a charming, wonderful man. I was very interested in Max Gordon. He was another wonderful, interesting man. And I had to make a choice, and I did. I came back to New York, and I took a hotel room somewhere, as I recall, and Max and I got together, and I separated from Alfred officially and legally... Why? Well, the fact was that we did not have children, and I had a very wonderful judge who gave me the separation because of that. "You mean you're married and you want children?" "Yes, I want children." "You're not going to have them?" "Well, he doesn't want to." "Well, you're separated. Goodbye." It was very simple and very beautiful, and very painless for Alfred. I didn't want to hurt him, because I still was attached to Alfred... Anyway, we split amiably, but not... He was very upset. I don't blame him. What the heck? I had no valid reasons. Well, not for him, but for me.

Anyway, that was it. And then Max and I got together, and then we eventually got

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married, and we eventually had two daughters, and we eventually went on to live a very different life than I had lived with Alfred in music. Now I was in the nightclub world. Alfred had another club on East 55th Street...

Brown: Max. Max had another club.

Gordon: Huh?

Brown: You said Alfred had another club. You mean Max.

Gordon: Oh, yes. See, yes, I'm so confused. I always got them confused. I used to call Alfred "Max" and Max "Alfred." I had no pride. [LAUGHS] I'm sorry. Well, what the hell, they were both wonderful. If I could have had them both together... If we could have lived like Jules and Jim... But...ok...

There I was at the Blue Angel every night, meeting glamorous, wonderful people, and looking elegant, and raising two little daughters, and having a wonderful apartment on the Upper East Side. Living it up for the first time in my life, really, in a sense, without promoting the music... But I was promoting...what... Promoting my children and a life and a husband, and caring—which I did. I don't know what happened then. The book ended eventually. The thing is, this wine... I'm getting fuzzy...not fuzzy, but I can't remember what the fuck I did.

Brown: So you have your kids, and you have a real shift in your lifestyle. It seems like instead of being a working woman, you were becoming more of a housewife, raising your two daughters, and then you got involved politically.

Gordon: Oh yeah. In the peace movement.

Brown: Your daughters were born in the '50s, '50 and '52, I believe—Rebecca and Deborah.

Gordon: Well, I was never even... Yeah, I was a housewife in a sense. I also had a job. I was always working. I was a working woman on the side.

Brown: But not involved in the music business.

Gordon: No-no. No, I was not involved in the music business at all. However, the world was changing around me, and I was not a stupid woman, and I read a lot, and I was getting very unhappy about this war in Vietnam, and I was looking into women's rights, and I was looking into a lot of things that were disturbing me as a thinking person who sees a lot of things wrong around her. The Vietnam War was a big issue. But I really got involved before the Vietnam War in the women's peace issue...or was it the Vietnam War...

Brown: Well, you actually got involved in SANE, which was...

Gordon: Oh, yeah. Well, SANE I got involved with, but I wasn't in love with SANE. I got involved with a woman in Washington, D.C., named Dagmar Wilson, and she sent out a message

to women in New York through a flyer which I got in my hands somehow, a flyer that everyone meet at the United Nations under the wonderful...there's a statue...the part of the United Nations that says, "Leave your war shit" and all that... There's a little part of the United Nations where people gather to demonstrate... Ploughshares. Ok. That famous thing with the ploughshares. I did go on that demonstration for the... That was the first demonstration of my life. I went there with one woman who I knew, and she got a notice, and we went there to demonstrate. I'd never demonstrated in my life. And we marched around in a circle, and they gave us some signs... Bella Abzug was in that thing. I didn't know who she was. There was a woman with a big hat. Other women knew her. All those other women seemed to know each other, but I didn't know anybody except the woman I was with.

Then we had an assignment where we were going to go to the Russian Mission to the United States, and then we were going to go to the American Mission to the United Nations there, and demonstrate—and we did. Some of us went to the Russian Mission, and we all went inside, and we sat down, and there was a speech that was given to us by a Russian about American and United States relations, and the war... A lot of stuff that now, in retrospect, I'd say was important then, and I guess it did some good then, but I'll be damned if I can know what good it did today. Then we went to the United States Mission and made the same complaint. And there I was, with a banner in my hand, marching.

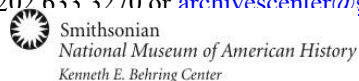
Then what happened? The war came in Vietnam, or was it there already...

Brown: Well, you had Women's Strike For Peace.

Gordon: So this organization of women began to develop. We didn't know who we were, but we were involved with the United Nations, and we did not want to be an organization. Although I did not know the women, I was marching with... A lot of them were from Long Island, from Great Neck, as I recall. I met those women and they became my friends. They were from all over the area here. But we began to form a coalition, but we didn't, as I said, want to be organized, so we called ourselves a "movement." "Let's call ourselves Women Strike For Peace." That's what we were. We wanted to say what we were doing. We were for peace. There was a war going on, there was no peace in the world, and we were going to fight for that. We had not women's rights, we had no rights, we knew that, but we just had a big banner, Women's Strike For Peace—and not an organization. You can do the thing in any city or town you live in, anywhere in the country. Do your own organizing. You can call yourself Women's Strike For Peace, it's ok by us, but we're not that organized. There's no president, there's no leader, there's no nothing. There's just US getting together for demonstrations, which we did.

And we became so big... Our leader was this woman, Dagmar Wilson, in Washington, who called the initial charge on the enemy, shall we say. We followed her. She was a lovely, lovely woman. We adored her. I especially adored her. We went all over the world with this mission, and we were all belonging. We went to Geneva. We presented petitions for peace to the Russians and the Americans when they had their big meeting with Zorin from the Soviet Union, and our American counterpart... We did all kinds of things to make ourselves known as leaders

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for a peace movement.

That's what I did for a long time. I held meetings at our apartment in New York. We now lived on East 79th. I was having everybody come there for meetings, and we organized, and we did...and things that I believe in—and I do to this day. Like, I believed in the jazz; I believed in the peace movement. And that's what I did for a long time. I went to the Soviet Union. I went to China. I went to North Vietnam before...nobody went there. I figured they'll arrest me. So what? I don't care. I'll tell them what I think—that we should not be bombing North Vietnam! And I saw the 79th Parallel, we were bombing, which we were not supposed to do. I mean, there were no laws saying... I saw all the terrible scenes in North Vietnam of mutilated people, and holes in the ground where we had to crawl when the sirens came, and the bombing, and the napalming these people in North Vietnam... I don't know what the hell we were doing, frankly, but I wanted it stopped. It stopped. Not because of me, but part of my organization, which was not an organization—it was an outcry. It was, "Please, let's stop it; it's enough." That's what I did for a long time. I lay myself down on the ground, and I had signs on me. I didn't care. I was for peace, even if it meant making people walk around you on the sidewalk.

Brown: Here it says: "We locked ourselves to the gate of the Capitol Building."

Gordon: Oh, yes. We had little plots. We were very sly women. We were very... You have to watch out for us. Ok, we put our mink coats, mind you, and we had handcuffs underneath, handcuffs under those mink coats, and we beautifully walked with our elegant coats, and our hats, and our high-heeled shoes, and our makeup along the gates of the Capitol there, and slyly took our handcuffs out of the mink coat sleeve and clipped it around, and threw the keys away, and there we were, clipped to the case. "Go ahead. Arrest us. We don't care. We've got something to say." But we did. I didn't land up in jail. Dammit, I always wanted to go to jail, but for some reason they never arrested me. I find that a great blot on my resume. No jail, baby.

Anyway, we did that. We did things that were... Well, look. Look what they're doing today on Wall Street. We were doing the same things as WOMEN, just women were doing the same outcry—lying down on the ground, locking ourselves to the gate. They're doing the same thing, those kids. I admire them, but I say, "I'm not joining you, because I did my thing; you do yours now."

Brown: That was in '62, so that was...

Gordon: Unheard of.

Brown: Fifty years ago. Fifty years ago you were leading the charge.

Gordon: Wow. Radical... We weren't even radical. We were just demanding for our children, the world's children, for generations to come, to stop this nonsense with this war. All the killing. It was just outrageous for us, as women, who do nothing... "Do something!" So we did something, and I'm very proud of it. It really makes me feel good. I want those kids to feel good, and to keep at it. Keep at those banks, because they're no good. Tell 'em I said so.

Brown: Oh, yeah. Just told them you...

Gordon: Especially Chase.

Brown: You just told them good. You talked off-mike about your trip to Russia. Can you tell us about that?

Gordon: Oh, yeah. Well, that's how I got to Vietnam, actually. I was invited to go to the Soviet... It was Soviet Union then, believe me. I had met a woman from the Soviet Mission to the United States, Madame...her name is in there... Madame... I loved her. She was a nice lady. Anyway, we had some conversations, nothing more than that, and I never saw her again. But one day, an invitation came to my home when I was living uptown... I was invited... Three people were invited from the Women's Strike For Peace, our non-organization, to come to the Soviet Union for the celebration for the defeat of fascism and the end of World War...which was it, III, IV, or V...? I forget how many World Wars we've had. A celebration.

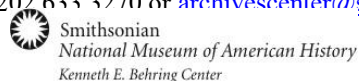
"Whoa," I said. I was busy on East 79th... At that moment, when the phone rang, I had a mop in my hand. I was mopping the floor. A huge kitchen floor. I was again depressed, mopping this floor, when the phone rang and the invitation came. I threw the mop away... [LAUGHS]

Who was invited? A friend of mine from California, Mary Clark, who was very big in the women's movement, and Linus Pauling's wife, Ava Helen Pauling, who was a lovely woman who I had known, Linus and her. Ava couldn't make it. My friend in California could make it. So the two of us agreed to go, with my husband's permission, shall I say, her husband...to go to the Soviet Union. But, before we went, we had meetings with our women's group. "While you're there, why don't you try to go to North Vietnam and meet the women there with our peace message, and tell them what we are doing, what we want to do for them, how we can connect, how we can make peace between us." We said, "Sure. Why not? Nothing to it. Just go..."

Anyway, we were given the idea, and we decided, "Ok..." We got to the Soviet Union. It was fabulous. We were wined and dined. I never saw more tanks in my life go by. There were big parades, and parades, and I met all the generals and all that... People came from all over the world who participated in that terrible war, all kinds of men with medals, beautiful guys, who fought. No Americans came. D'you know, Mary and I were the only two Americans there. It was shocking from my point of view. What, Americans didn't participate in this war? They could not send a representative? A general or a soldier or... No. Well, that's ok. We did our job. We're here.

And then we made the contacts to get to Vietnam. That took a lot of work. But we did work on that. We got to meet the liaison to North Vietnam that was stationed in the Soviet Union, in Moscow. Didn't trust us at all, because two ladies with mink coats are coming to go to Vietnam? What is this? It's not a summer vacation. What are you doing here?

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Anyway, through much manipulation and all kinds of arranging, we got permission. The Russians were not happy about this, by the way. They didn't expect us to go to North Vietnam. They invited us THERE. They're the hosts. Now what? We're going to go leave them. But they were...they did it for us, and arranged visas and all kinds of red tape and white tape and yellow tape, and people... We made it step by step... Through China. We had to go all through China. That was fascinating, and we did that—and now you've got to get to North Vietnam.

But you've got to go to Siberia first. All right, so we're in Siberia. We're there...it's beautiful, the sun is shining, children are playing. I didn't see anything terrible. I didn't see any camps. And then we had to wait in Siberia for a plane to come to take us... Wait a minute. I'm still in China. Where is China?

Brown: Well, no. You took a plane to China. From Siberia. You took a plane to China.

Gordon: Well, wait. Wait. Siberia comes first. Yeah, Siberia... Well, that's ok; that doesn't take long. From Siberia, we go to China. We're in a border town in China, a little town which is on the border of North Vietnam. They know we're coming. The women in North Vietnam are alerted to these two American ladies who are coming. Mary and Lorraine are coming with their good-will from America. We're stuck in that town. Why? Because the Americans are bombing north, where they're not supposed to be. There's a borderline...I forget...the borderline has a name, a number, 65th...

Brown: The 65th Parallel.

Gordon: Yes, the 65th. They're bombing there. Anyway, every morning at 6 in the morning, we're awakened, and we're taken to a little plane with a little propellor to go to fly to Hanoi, and it gets off the ground, it goes about a couple of miles, and suddenly it stops, it turns around, and it goes back to China. Why? Because the bombing had been taking place exactly where we were going, where it was not supposed to be any bombing in that part of the world.

So three or four trips went on like this for a few days, while we were stuck in north China, in China. Finally, one morning, the plane gets through to North Vietnam. We look down from the little plane, and we see these huge craters in the ground. We figure out that's bombs. We get there, and there is this huge limo waiting, with curtains on the windows, and in front of the limo are maybe 10 or 12 little ladies in long white gowns with their arms full of flowers, waiting for us. They went every day, and did the same thing in the same big car, waiting, and never... Anyway, we got together, and it was incredibly beautiful. I mean, they cried, we cried, we hugged. They put us in this big limo with the curtains on the windows (I'll never forget those curtains) and took us to a mansion of unbelievable beauty. Somehow they deposited us. We were exhausted. We were wearing heavy coats, and it's hot as can be there...

Anyway, there we were in North Vietnam. That was a trip, as they say. That was one big trip.

We met women, and they knew who we were and why we were there. There was no misunderstanding of what our reasons for going. We wanted to exchange feelings with the

American women, to tell them that we were working on this, we were working on ending this terrible war. We don't agree with it at all. Tell us what you want us to do to take back... We stayed for I don't know how long, a week or so maybe... They put us in this mansion, in the most gorgeous rooms you've ever seen, and they fed us in a dining room with the most incredible food I have ever eaten (just the two of us, Mary and I), on a table laden with the most exquisite silverware and dishes and FOOD... I'll never forget. I finally said to the person who was waiting... "who is the chef? Could you please bring the chef out? It's amazing." I said, "Oh, the chef is the Ambassador from some country who it was an honor to cook for us..." I'm telling you, it was a fairyland of incredible experience. I'll never forget that food.

They woke us up in the middle of the night. We had heavy clothes. "Get up. We have a tailor here." They dressed us. They measured us. Get out of bed, stand up here. Fabric... I have all the clothes they made for us that are here. Valdye(?—44:03), the long dress... They were unbelievable, those Vietnamese. They couldn't do enough to make us happy.


Then, after we calmed down and they had a day, they showed us the things to make us sad. They showed us the prisoners, they showed us the...not the prisoners, but the people who were wounded—one arm, no legs. All the horror scenes. The holes... When the sirens went off, we had to quick go down...rip up the man-covers, go down into the underground, the basement... They showed us all the horrors of what the war had done to this country. Well, we were devastated. Most of the time was not pleasant and wonderful. It was just horrendous.

But we built our relationship the best we could, and we loved the women. We had to leave, and we will correspond and we will do what we have to do—and that's it.

I came home, and Max Gordon met me at the airport with our children. He was furious at me. He said, "Where have you BEEN?" I wanted to say, "Shhh..." Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union, I had written many postcards to send home in advance, knowing I was not coming home when I was supposed to. I had taken another week off to go to Vietnam. I had told this person, whoever it may have been, "Send a postcard a day home." If they did, I don't know. I doubt it. But Max never knew where I was. I got in the cab and I said, "Don't talk now." I was like scared to talk after where I've been. I'll get arrested tomorrow. When I told him...well, he was partially interested. I'm just saying there wasn't anything... He was glad I was home. He was taking care of the kids all this time. I wasn't thinking about them at all. I was so busy thinking about a country that was being savaged, like... I saw it, and it was terrible, and I couldn't wait to get home to go back to work with the peace movement. That was it.

Brown: Can you recount how Barbra Streisand was also supportive of the movement?

Gordon: Well, Barbra was wonderful. Because, I knew Barbra when she was nobody. She did come to sing at the Blue Angel. Max knew her. We had a number of mutual friends between us when she was just starting to sing—and Max hired her. She only sang at the Vanguard that one night when Miles Davis was there, but Max booked her to the Blue Angel uptown, where she was a big success. So big that she immediately, from the Blue Angel, went into a show on
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Broadway, *I Can Get It For You Wholesale*, I believe, where she met her husband, who played the lead...who she married subsequently... I've forgot his name, but I remember it very well when I think... I remember it when I think of it!

Anyway, Barbra just got bigger and bigger and bigger. There was no stopping her. She was like a bullet shot out of a gun. So big.

But she and I became friends in that period, because when she was at the Blue Angel, I used to harangue her about the peace movement. I told everyone about the peace movement. I couldn't keep my mouth shut. The waiters. Anybody who worked at the clubs or within earshot of me got a full blast of what it's like to work for the peace movement and the Women's Strike For Peace, and the war, and 'we've got to stop it,' The whole megillah. Barbra became entran... Well, she and I got very talkative, because she was there every night, and she and I liked all the antique stuff that she bought at the thrift shops on Third Avenue. We'd go over. All of that. We became friends, and we liked each other, and I certainly thought she was a fabulous singer—my gosh. But who would dream that she reached the heights that she did?

The point is, we did become friends, and I involved her in the Women's Strike For Peace. And Bella Abzug—I got her involved there. Wherever I could put my magic touch or my mouth or whatever, "come on, let's get to work, let's do it." That's how it happened with Barbra. So she never forgot that, and I never forgot Barbra, and she kept on going on the right path as far as I'm concerned.

Brown: Can we go back and talk about that experience with Miles and Barbra, back, in the day when they used to have Sunday matinees?

Gordon: Well, you can talk about it, but I wasn't there.

Brown: Ok.

Gordon: So I have feedback from Max, and people who worked there at the time. Miles was not the... Now he was going through his unpleasant stage, Miles was.

Brown: Do you remember about when this is? Early '60s? Because Barbra's career is probably starting in the early '60s? Mid '60s?

Gordon: You know, you can forget about me when it comes to dates.

Brown: Ok, let's go. Continue the story.

Gordon: I can tell when I was born and when I'm going to die, but nothing in between. It's just that Miles was getting snottier and nastier, and not his laid-back self. When Max asked him to play for Barbra, because he wanted to hear her, and Miles was there, and why not let someone... "I don't play for no girls." He snarled, and... So he wouldn't play for her. But she did sing down there for... I think he did, later on that night, give in a little bit. I wasn't there. I've only heard this from the people who were there, who are still there, so they know. And I've heard it from

Barbra. Then Barbra went uptown. She didn't need Miles.

But Miles was not always so nice any more. I remember incidents with Miles, when he was not like the Miles I knew with Alfred. When he was at the Vanguard and other places, when he was bigger, he was not as nice as he used to be. I remember one night Max said to him at the bar, "Hey, man, how are you?" in this happy way. Miles said, "Don't call me 'man.'" I said, "What do you mean?" I was there. I was infuriated. I said, "What do you mean 'don't call...?' Would you rather be called 'boy'? What are you saying?" He was just so off-track for me. I didn't talk to Miles... Well, that's a more recent story. I didn't talk to Miles any more then. I didn't see him any more. He didn't need anybody but someone to dress him fancy, put on some fancy duds, or another wife, or... He was getting bigger and...not better... Well, he played great, but his attitudes were... Well, I don't know. He's an artist. He does what he wants. I have no way to figure that one out.

[END OF PART 2]

[BEGINNING OF PART 3]

Gordon: You know, it's just a normal young girl, growing up, meeting interesting people. That was my... Music brought me in to those people. Lucky me. Well, that's just the way your life goes. You never know which way it's going to turn.

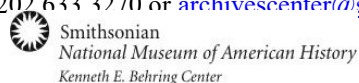
I loved Sidney Bechet. I was just reading in a book he was in Europe, and someone told him he played a wrong note, and he got up and he smashed that guy so hard in the nose, they put Sidney in jail, and they deported him from France. You know, he had a big thing in France where he was in jail. They just wrote about it, some incident. I was reading in a book. He doesn't play wrong notes, Sidney Bechet. Now, you never knew a guy like that. See, knowing a man like Sidney Bechet, to me, is one of the great experiences of your life that you will never forget. He played at a camp, upstate New York. I used to go up there to hear Sidney Bechet play. It was a Communist camp. I didn't know it at the time. Us kids from the Newark Hot Club would go up to hear Sidney Bechet play, with Vic Dickinson... Oh, man, what I did as a kid to hear jazz... That's what... There was Sidney.

He used to come to our apartment on Grove Street, and cook rice-and-beans (because we were lousy cooks, Alfred and I) in a kitchen as big as this table. He cooked for us. He brought his nephew. A picture of him...in the fireplace with him... He came all the time. He loved Alfred, and I loved him. They had such a rapport of love and music. Sidney was... I knew all his wives. The Indian wife, Laura, and the boat, and this wife... He had a wife every week, a different wife.

He was a fantastic artist. I mean, outside of Monk, Sidney is my other favorite wild man on the horn.

Brown: Did he ever talk about New Orleans, or do you remember when he talked about his

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days in New Orleans.

Gordon: I never talked about New Orleans with Sidney. I knew him in New York. New Orleans didn't exist for me except on records—Bechet or King Oliver or any of the early... Jelly Roll Morton, who I adored! Whooh! I was crazy about the blues, and the lower, the better! I just LOVED all that music. I still have it, and I listen to it. I listen to some stuff today, it's UCCH, sickening. Nothing! Well, you get older, you don't get the same kicks you got. But when you're young and you hear the real thing, what an impression that makes. It's unbelievable. So I am very grateful for having had that ability to hear it and love it and be a part of it, just to listen to it.

I loved Sidney. He was a real New Orleans character. But he left. He went to Europe. He went everywhere. Alfred found him... He made his biggest hit with Alfred, "Summertime." Man! When that record came out, we sold more records than we ever did. Because we were a little company, this big. Frank did the packing. We had a room for packing. He put all the records. Orders were packed by him. I answered the phones. I'm still answering phones today! Nothing has changed in my life. I'm the same person. We're just a different company! Can you believe it? That's what I did. Answered the phones and did the bookkeeping.

And Mezz Mezzrow. You don't remember Mezz Mezzrow. Well, Johnnie Mae Mezzrow I think was Alfred's girlfriend before I came along. This is inside shit. But Johnnie Mae, I loved her, I loved her face... She had a little son, this big, from Mezz Mezzrow—Mess, Junior. I used to love that boy. He would come to my office on Lexington Avenue, and I'd open the door and give him all the pencils and pens and pads; everything I could find, I gave to this boy. He was so cute. Johnnie Mae. I wonder whatever happened to her. Frank took some wonderful photographs of her. She had a wonderful profile. But I think Alfred was important to her at the time, before I got there.

But anyway, I didn't know what was happening around me. I was open-eyed and willing(?—5:29) to take it in. I enjoyed the atmosphere. Alfred...it was amazing to me that a guy who came... His mother, by the way, Margarita (who I met, gorgeous woman), she was supposed to have been one of the most beautiful women in Berlin at the time. She was a big party girl, and she had fabulous jewelry that was given to her by all the big companies like Tiffany and Cartier, to wear to the parties. Anyway, she left Germany, and she went to Santiago, Chile. I met her. She came to New York—or New Jersey, where I was living then. She was still beautiful. And you know what... I met her twice. She wanted us to have a baby. You know what I mean? It was Alfred's fault. He was scared. I wasn't. I didn't care who...heh-heh...

Brown: Before we took a break, you were talking about how...and you just described how you were hands-on with Alfred and Blue Note, where you weren't with Max and the Village Vanguard.

Gordon: Oh, right. No-no-no. Because Max came long before me. He had already made his business, his club, his... Alfred had just started. It was new. And I was new. And I was a nice person to have around to type. I was good at typing, as I said, and to do whatever dirty work had to be done. I was wonderful to have! But Max didn't want any part of me in the club. Well, if it's something...I don't know, if he needed something, he might ask me. And I never interfered.

Never cared one iota. Look, that's his club. It's like going into Chase Bank. "Hey, I'm going to run it now; tell me what to do." No way. I never interfered. The only time he needed me was when he was aching, and got older, and this hurt and that hurt, take him to the doctor, run in... "Could you go to the club for me today? I'm not feeling well." Yeah, I would go from the Brooklyn Museum to the Vanguard to help out. I never said no if I could do it. But that's what I was doing, and that was a transitional for me. Transitional.

But that's the only time he ever needed help. He never asked me about an opinion on a musician. I never told him what I thought. Maybe I did. I can't remember every detail. Certain artists I liked a lot. But he got very hip. And besides, musicians told him what to do. They'd say, "Hire this one, hire that one...hire me again."

Brown: As Max's health started to decline, and when he finally made his transition, and died in 1989, it seems as if you were not prepared to assume...

Gordon: Oh, never. Never-never, never-never, never. No, I never did anything in the club. I never even went to the club any more because I was working at Brooklyn Museum, and I was working a full day—and I got tired at night. I was not ready to quick hop out to the club. I just wanted to go home and go to bed to get up the next morning at 8 o'clock, which is not my hour, to force myself out, and have a car... I had two cars. Jabbo gave me a gorgeous car. (That's a whole story, with the car.) But I used to drive to the Brooklyn Museum, and whatever I did there, by the time I got home, I don't want to go out any more at night. I was not now nightclubbing. Max used to beg me to come, and I'd say, "I can't, Max; I've got to get up at 8 in the morning." Our lives were like, [MAKES NOISES]—that kind of thing.

In the early days, when I wasn't working, I'd go with him to the club at night. I went to the Blue Angel with him every night, because why not? That was glamour time, honey. I'd be a fool to stay away. And he wanted me there. I mean, I was not exactly... I think I was an asset in some ways. But I don't know. I just took it in my stride. I took it as it came. And I was raising the two daughters. And the peace movement... I mean, I haven't stopped, really. This is the quietest moment I've had in a long time.

Brown: You brought up Jabbo again, and the car.

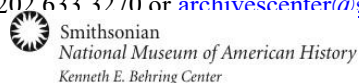
Gordon: Oh, Jabbo. Jabbo. How did I get involved with Jabbo? I don't know to this day. I know I'm cracked. I have a feeling there's something wrong with my brain. As far as I am concerned... Is this on?

Brown: Yes.

Gordon: oh.

Brown: Go ahead.

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Gordon: My Jabbo saga?

Brown: Well, when he comes back with *One Mo' Time*. I mean, you thought he was dead.

Gordon: Look... I thought he was dead forever. I never thought about him, except for his records... That set of records he made on Brunswick, I always treasured because they were so uniquely different than any other trumpet player I'd ever heard. But that was it. He DEAD, for God's sake. So you're collecting records, you've got his records—good idea.

No one ever talked about Jabbo, ever-ever-ever, that I know. Well, maybe my brother and I would mention him, by record. But nothing. I'm just sitting here at that same table that I can't get rid of, reading the *Times* on Sunday... The table is worth a lot, if people know the history of it, and I can't give it away! I'm reading it. There's a show opening at the Village Gate called *One Mo' Time*, and then it says, "guest artist, Jabbo Smith." Well, I mean, if the living dead were brought back, that was it. Jabbo, for God's sake.

Quick, I ran to the phone, I called my brother. He's still my best buddy when it comes to jazz. "Philip," I said, "you won't believe this. Jabbo Smith is playing here around the corner. Get over here tonight." We went to the club with his wife, Gertrude, sat at the long tables, and saw this show open in front of us, and sitting up on the left was a band with a trumpet, a trombone, piano, bass, drums...and a man blowing trumpet like I haven't heard in ages. It was Jabbo, blowing his head off! It was so unnerving and unbelievable that this man could play like that when nobody even knew he existed. Oh, wow. And the show was adorable. Vernell Bagneris, who wrote this play, was in it. It was the funniest... It was just a great show.

When it was over, I said, "We've got to go backstage and meet Jabbo," and we did. We got to the door with the curtain, and we asked, "Can we go in and see Jabbo?" They said, "We'll tell him you're here, but you can't go in." I said, "Maybe he could come out?" "Well, we'll see." So they went back, and sure enough, out came Jabbo, looking at us very suspiciously. Well, we're looking at him like an apparition. Where did Jabbo come from now... We couldn't believe it. It was like seeing King Oliver or Louis there in front of us. Well, we tried to introduce ourselves, but how can you? He doesn't know...

I said, "You know, Jabbo. I live around the corner. You have an intermission. You have another show. Come home and have something, and we'll take you back." He looks us over very carefully, very suspicious. Doesn't say a word. But he does come home, and he sits at that table that I can't sell. And I foolishly offered him a brandy, not knowing any of his habits, heh-heh...

Anyway, we took him back to the club, and he played another set, and I sat there enthralled, enthralled. They at the club...they got him a room in a hotel...well, it wasn't a hotel. It used to be, but now in a big apartment on Fifth Avenue down here. Because he was a star. He was the star of the show. The writeups came out big and loud about Jabbo. I have them all. "This great trumpet player..." He was blowing his head off! It was amazing. Amazing! And he got up and sang. He had a great voice, and he was very croony and bluesy and beautiful. He sang two of his own numbers, "Love" and "Yes, Yes, Yes." Whenever he did that, people adored him.

But then he was unhappy there, and he asked me would I... He didn't want to stay there. I said, "What do you mean you don't want to stay there? You're so lucky you can live there! Do you realize this is Fifth Avenue? Who are you? Are you crazy?" I started to fight with him on the street! "You stay there." Whatever. I started to take him over little by little, because he was cantankerous, and you know, he was still old Jabbo from, I don't know, Alabama, South Carolina, the South... He was not a New Yorker.

Brown: But he never made that connection about the early days in Newark, when you would bring him over?

Gordon: No, I never talked to him about that then. Not then. This is a new Jabbo, who is dead...arisen from...arisen...arised...aroused...heh-heh... I mean, what am I talking to him about Newark. That's so far... Right now we're dealing with... He's in a show. He's a star. He's getting tons of publicity. I'm trying to help him do... And Vernell is asking me to help him, and the people who are running the show are asking me to help him, because he's difficult. He's a prima donna already. So I got sucked into it, little by little. I made him stay where he was, and took him to work or whatever. I got involved for I don't know how many years, until he died. Actually, it's got to be ten years or more, I helped him. Took him all over Europe. I mean, I did everything imaginable for this guy, who could not... He was great, but could never re-rise from his beginnings.

You know, Whitney Balliett is a great writer who died, who did all these wonderful stories about musicians, and he has a story here in a book I have about Jabbo, called "Starting At The Top," which is so true. Jabbo was a genius the day he blew trumpet and recorded. Nobody was like him. Louis was totally different. They were miles apart. Jabbo was radical! I mean, Dizzy Gillespie learned from him. Roy Eldridge learned from Jabbo. He was a radical, but beautiful trumpet player. That's what happened. He started at the top, and he did go down. But I tried to help him as much as I could, because I believed. Like I believed in Thelonious. I got hooked into Jabbo's art. It was a lot for me, because I was working the museum, I'm married, I have two kids, and I'm trying to help Jabbo attain his... I took him to Europe. I got him to the Nice Festival. Whatever I could do, I did. But he died anyway. So what good was it?

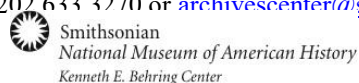
Brown: Jabbo died in '92. But let's go back to Max. I brought up Jabbo, because I knew that you had reentered tangentially into the music business by working with Jabbo. But when Max dies in 1989, the Village Vanguard falls in your lap essentially. So...

Gordon: The Village Vanguard what?

Brown: Well, when Max died, it became yours. It was his baby...

Gordon: Well, it didn't become anybody's. Max never left any wish, desire, need... "Lorraine, help me, take me to the doctor; you'll see that my toe is fixed" or something. But he never had a conversation with me about "maybe you're interested..." No. I never talked to him about it. I

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wasn't interested. To me, the Vanguard was Max and Max was the Vanguard. That's it. Because that's what it was. He built it, he made it, he did it, and it's hard to take his name off a place like that.

So he went up and died on me. My daughters and I were at St. Vincent's Hospital when this happened. We called his doctor, who was not there, but we left him a message, "Max is at St. Vincent's, and we don't know what to do." They're asking me, "Shall we operate or not?" I said, "What for?" I mean, I didn't bring him in for an operation. I brought him in for a sore toe or something, and suddenly they have him connected with wires and stuff, and I really didn't know what they were doing, or what was wrong. There was no real doctor like his own, and I had to rely on the doctor at the hospital to make a decision, with my two daughters. I said, "Look, I don't know. How desperate... What is this that he's got? I didn't bring him in with this."

Anyway, I don't want to go into that, because I've never talked about this. But they operated, and he died on the operating table, and I still to this day don't know why. I don't know. And I never heard from his doctor...until maybe two weeks or a month after... I was at the Vanguard, and the phone rang, and I picked it up, and a doctor... Doctor So-and-So said, "Hey, how is Max?" His doctor had called a month after Max died. I said, "I have no answers for you." Can you imagine the state of the medical profession today? I couldn't find him when Max was in the hospital. Now I'm supposed to find him after he died. Anyway, I was furious. But what could I do?

I was there, finally... The next day, I said to my kids, "Let's close the club tonight. I'm not going to... I'll open it tomorrow. Let me think." I went home, and they went their way. The next night, I opened the doors. Fortunately, Max had pre-booked. I don't know for how long. Maybe a week. There was an artist playing. I'd have to go back in my memories to see who was playing at that moment. There was someone there, playing. I opened the door. People came. Nobody knew Max had died, except the press knew, because there was a huge obit, which his doctor never read.

I had his funeral at St. Peter's Church. It was so packed with people. Everybody was there in New York except his doctor. If I could remember his doctor's name, I would publicize it, but I don't know his name any more. It was a beautiful... The Big Band played. Max Roach spoke for him. Various artists spoke. It was a beautiful, wonderful farewell to Max, with love, and people were all over the place. It was packed. And that was it. And I took a small group down to the Vanguard after that, where we just sat and drank and talked about Max—and that was it.

Then when I opened that day, people came... Well, they were customers. They didn't know about Max. Nobody knew he died except those who knew. And that's it. I did it from that day on, little by little, step by step, because I didn't know what I was doing. I mean, I answered telephones. I was always on the telephone, like that... It went on because the club was practically self-sufficient, with or without Max. People wanted to come to hear whoever was playing. They didn't make reservations then. They just said, "Who's playing?" "The shows are so-and-so." "How much is it?" Dah-dah-dah. There was no big deal. They just want to know, "Are you open? We're coming. Fine." No formalities. They didn't know about Max. They were customers.

Although those who knew did express alarm or concern, and “What are you going to do?” “I don’t know. I’m doing! I just doing. I don’t know what I’m doing. I’ll let you know when I know what I’m doing. I’ll tell you what I’m doing. Right now it’s a mystery to me—but it’s working.”

Max laid the groundwork, and it has not changed very much. But we do have credit cards. That’s changed. And artists have changed, because they all leave us eventually, and new ones come in. I’ve changed. I’m overworked. Tired. I need a vacation. But so did Max! We’re the same. Suddenly I’m taking on all his manifestations. But he was much sweeter than me. I’m not as nice. Except...it depends on to who.

Brown: Can you talk about the people you have working with you? Your team at the Vanguard. You have your daughter...

Gordon: Well, the nice thing about the Vanguard is, it was a family when...and Max didn’t know it was when he hired certain people... Of course, he fired them as soon as he hired them, because if you didn’t do it right, out you go. One he hired back, we fired a couple of times—Jed. Jed is still there today. And Jed is my left hand, and he’s terrific. He’s my memory. He remembers everything that happened there, more or less, and he’s been wonderful. My daughter, Deborah, what can I say? She’s our daughter, and she’s fit in like a glove, and she’s taken over more things that I wish she would let alone and let me do it my way...[LAUGHS] – that kind of thing.

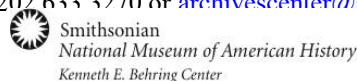
We have very handsome waiters now. We used to have only girls, who I got rid of a lot of them because they could not get themselves organized when we put in credit cards—they were back in the old days of cash-only. They’re gone, more or less. We just have the same crew. They are wonderful people. They love jazz, deep down. They love the Vanguard. They just love the... It’s cool. They know exactly what to do, how to do it—and no food. Just drinks, man. You don’t have to worry about send it back if the hamburger’s no good, or blah-blah-blah. No food. I don’t want that. I stopped that... Well, Max stopped it long ago, but I never incorporated it again. Don’t need that. You come here to hear music. Go eat somewhere else. Do me a favor? They ask me, “Got any good restaurants in the neighborhood?” I say, “No, they’re all terrible. Eat home and come here.” I’m not very hospitable, except if you amuse me, then I’m ok, but don’t bore me. It can be boring.

Brown: As Max did, and what few clubs do now is, you still hire for a week. You still hire acts for a week. That’s pretty rare these days.

Gordon: For a week?

Brown: Well, from Tuesday through Sunday.

Gordon: Yes. Generally speaking. 52 weeks a year you have to book the club. Well, that’s a lot of weeks, because a lot of your best guys have died on you! What do you now? I often book
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people I love dearly if I can get them for two weeks in a row, and they earn it because they're great, and they deserve two weeks. Well, everyone deserves... Even a week is great. There's no open mike there. Let me make this clear from the beginning. Any phone calls for open mike get hung up on immediately. It is one week. Of course, I look for...I don't look for, I hope new talent will fall in my lap that I like. I don't go out there to other clubs or other places. Look, I listen to a lot of records. I do listen. They call me and I say, "Send me a record; let me hear something." That's the only thing I can do. Or I hear about someone.

But there are other clubs in town. We all have the same...what shall I call it... We're using the same people in the world of jazz because... Rock and all that other stuff is billions of people playing garbage every night, who you will never hear of again in your life. But the jazz family is very much proscribed. It is not all over the place. It's very personal and very dear, and not large, so you have to pick from that and be sure you know what you're doing, because you don't want to overload it. What I'm trying to say is it's hard to find a person you want to play the music you want to hear. I keep avoiding... Even though they say it's jazz, I don't want it. It just doesn't appeal to me. I can't help it. I want to sit here and listen to it, and enjoy it. I don't want to just do it because it's hot at the moment. I don't do that.

Brown: You make all the decisions for who plays there?

Gordon: Oh, yes. I like to think I do. If anybody else does, I've got a gun here. [LAUGHS] Yeah, I do, I do, I do. And I often have to say no to people, and that hurts me, because they're good, but it's not what I want. I have to soften the blow if I can. It's very difficult to find... Look, I can't live in the past. I have to live in the future. I have to listen to the new artists who are coming up. They're worthy of listening to. A lot of them don't entice me in any way whatsoever. And I can't do that. I find what I want, and by gosh, the place gets filled, because the same people know what I want, and they're there. I say, "Thank you, thank you" to myself; "I am not alone in my thinking." That's all I say to myself.

Brown: The club is doing well. The Vanguard is doing well.

Gordon: Oh, my goodness, yes. Max would be very happy. He'd be smiling a lot. More than maybe. He did it many years in the past, when it was very rough and very tough. We sold our house on Fire Island. We had an adorable house. I don't have any of those trappings at all. In spite of what the union says, I am not living in luxury—if you read their ads. And we are not depriving musicians. Well, there's the big thing going on with the unions now. They are wanting the clubs to pay royalties. There are five clubs in the Village. What do you want from my gut? They're telling us we're living in luxury, while the musicians are starving. So I pay them the ultimate the club can pay. I don't think that's unfair. I'm pro-union, by the way; I'm not anti-union. But I think it is not up to me or the club-owner to pay the union. I think it's up to the leader of the band if such a thing were to happen. He has got to pay the union. They are just travelers who come by. They are not permanent musicians in the club. They are not people who play there all the time. They are one-shot acts, let's say, or whatever you want to call it.

This is an unformed opinion I'm just layout out to you, or anybody. I just don't think that the club has to pay the union dues, when I pay three different BMIs and all the money that goes

that you pay for musicians' compositions and stuff like that. Ok. But now to demand that five clubs in New York have to pay dues... We're not corporations. This is corporate kind of talk.

I don't know. We're in a flux about this at the moment, and even though I'm discussing it, I am not going anywhere with it at the moment. I do the best I can by my musicians. I love them, I pay them all my gut can get out; I wring it out, and I know it. It's a little club. It seats 123 people. I am not going to do any more bookkeeping.

Brown: You have special relationships with musicians. For example, somebody that we all respect, and that's Paul Motian. Can you talk about Paul?

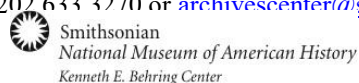
Gordon: Oh, yeah. You can't help it. You fall in love with certain musicians. I'm not talking about amorous love. I'm talking about your respect for each other. And Paul... I can't get over to this day that he just left me so fast. I didn't even know he was ill. Well, I knew he had... Everybody's got something bugging them. But he went so fast. In a way, I'm glad that he didn't suffer forever. I really am, for that alone. But he was very important to me. Paul, by accident, although he's played at the club forever, since...

Brown: Bill Evans.

Gordon: Bill Evans, yeah. [MOTIAN'S GIG BOOK SHOWED DATES AT THE VANGUARD THE LAST WEEK OF 1957 WITH LEE KONITZ, AND IN EARLY 1959 WITH MOSE ALLISON]

But interspersed over the years. He never played. Until he came into my viewpoint of things. We talked a lot about different acts that he liked. I said, "Do it." I gave him carte blanche. I said, "As long as you don't collide with your act, you can have anything (if I have the time) that you want. Just tell me what it is." And he did. He brought in all kinds of wonderful arrangements. Most of them worked. A couple didn't. But he was fantastic. I began to rely on him more and more, because he gave me what no musician ever has—a continuity of the club. He never wanted to go out of town any more. He was very happy to be in New York. He lived on West End Avenue. He loved the arrangement. He was familiar with the club, and he liked the carte blanche I gave him, and he used it very well. Boy, when he died, it just...I still think about it... I miss him a lot. He gave a lot to the club. He was very interesting in his arranging and the people he brought in, and how they reacted to him. They all played better when they played with him. He brought out their best. He really did. Paul was a unique guy. He came late in life to me, and I came late in life to the club and him. But he was perfect. Man, there's nobody like Paul for me.

So I do my weekly bookings. I have to do them far in advance, like everybody does. Sometimes I get stuck because I don't want the act that's playing over there... You have to separate everything. And you want to be different. You want to have your own kind of style, because that's what you've got. I have nothing else to offer except what I choose. I don't dance
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or sing up there. I would like to try, but they'll throw me out if I do that. I do ad-lib sometimes. I do one-liners. Sometimes they laugh; sometimes they throw a pie. But I do my best.

Brown: Any other musicians that have caught your ear lately, who you're interested in?

Gordon: Oh, yeah. There's one recently. It's very funny, because I was warned away from him. I'll bring that one up. I don't remember his name... I was warned forever, "He is not for you." I said, "I don't know why I have this strange feeling that I'm interested in him, and I'd like to find out for myself if he's for me." "No, no, you won't like him; he's so far out, only dogs can hear him." Anyway, I finally booked him. I booked him two weeks ago. I fell madly in love with him. Well, not madly, but a lot of my interest... He's fantastic, and he never disappointed me. He did what I was warned he would do, but I liked it. It was not so terrible. It was like the medicine I drank, and it was good. I liked it. I grew ten feet tall! He played some blues that was wicked, and I want him to come back. And what was his name...

Brown: Marc Ribot?

Gordon: I can't remember his last... Anyway, he was wonderful, and I do want him to come back. He was a revelation to me. I mean, he can do all the crazy things that he's capable of, but he doesn't do them at the club. Some artists can perform in any way they think they atmosphere demands of them or not. No, he was great.

No, I hear lots of new young men. They're usually in a band with someone. A leader will come in with a trumpet and a trombone, or a sax, who I don't really know. But I sit and I listen to them, and I remember them, and sometimes they become leaders. Lots of times, from out of a group comes a leader. Brad Mehldau. Lots of leaders come out of groups I have heard. There's a couple of others...a lot of others... But that's one.

There's something skirting around my mind, but I can't grab it...

The point is, a lot of sidemen become leaders, if I hear them good enough. Then I say, "Look, hey, you got a few guys you want to put together for some gig six months from now..." Separate it. Or they ask me, "Can I come in?" I say, "I don't know. Who you got? Who you got with you?" Or "You need a little help." That's all right.

Brown: Live recordings at the Vanguard are very special in the collection of jazz. How do you determine who gets to record at the Vanguard?

Gordon: Well, that happened long before I was there, because it was...not Coltrane...

Brown: Sonny Rollins was the first.

Gordon: Yeah, Sonny Rollins.

Brown: But how do you decide who gets to record?

Gordon: Oh, me. Well, this past week, who I'm talking about...what's his name...why is it escaping...

Brown: Marc Ribot?

Gordon: Marc, yeah. Marc, he was so happy playing at the club and so glad of the response he was getting... It was packed. He finally came and said to me, "I want to do a recording here." I said, "It's already Friday. When?" "Tomorrow. Saturday night." He has no engineers. I said, "Of course. Do you want to know what... You've got to pay. You've got to do a lot of things. You've got to get engineers. You've got to put wires..." "Oh. I didn't know that." I said, "Well, now that you know it, let's do Sunday, not Saturday. Ok? It gives you one more day." I decided he was worth recording there, and I even cut the price down, because suddenly he got poor. I don't want to argue about money. I'm not happy about that, and I don't quibble. So he did record for one full night, on Sunday.

There are lots of guys who want to record. I say, "No, you can't; I'm sorry; we're busy; I don't want to do it; I don't feel like it. Do you have a label?" This man has no label, Marc, but he will sell them, or I have labels I will tell about him, because I would see that gets brought out. I'm sure it's going to be good.

But generally speaking, the artist comes in and says, "We want to record here." Oh, for example, what's-his-name just recorded there, a piano player, Fred Hersch, some time ago. His record is coming out in a few months. But his record label is going to take an ad in my brochure to announce that his record is coming out. I say, "Fine." In the old days, I always used to make them...didn't make them, I'd ask them if they would like to take a back page to announce it. Then I forgot to do that; I'm not the biggest business-person in the world. This guy said from the record company, "I'd like to take that ad." I said, "What ad? I don't remember any ad." Well, he reminded me. I said, "ok, fine." So Fred Hersch recorded there. It will come out with an announcement. He has a record label.

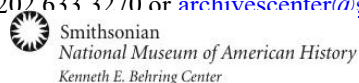
The record company will come to me and say, "We want to record this artist; is that ok?" I say, "Yeah." I rarely say no. It's when an artist comes and sticks a mike under the piano and says, "I'm going to record here." I say, "No, you're not; it doesn't work like that—unh-uh." So the basically legitimate recordings that are done either by the record company, or by the artist (he has to pay then) who has equipment that he brings in with engineers and stuff, for him to maybe sell at some point. I said, "It's ok, but you're going to have to use the words 'Village Vanguard.'" Well, why else would they want to do it there. Sometimes they forget.

Brown: What is a day in your life now, as the owner of the Village Vanguard?

Gordon: A day in my life now? Well, it's usually spent interviewing with someone for four hours. [LAUGHS]

Brown: Not today.

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Gordon: On my one day off, on a Saturday, when I could be out shopping for some clothes because I have nothing to wear! That's one thing.

Brown: Ok. Touché. You start your day what time, and when does your day end, as the owner of the Village Vanguard?

Gordon: Well, actually... You see, the Vanguard is open seven nights a week, seven days and nights, 24 hours day and night... There used to be days early where the fire alarm would go off, and they'd call me at 2 in the morning and say, "Lady, your club is burning down—get down there." Or whatever. "You've been robbed." Or some terrible tragedy. We've had a lot of tragedies there, I want to say. But so far, it's been calm, so I shouldn't talk about that. What was your question? I forgot.

Brown: when does your day start? When does your day end?

Gordon: Oh, ok. My day is backwards. Most people in this building are out to work when I'm just turning over in bed. If I am undisturbed and my mind is clear, I'll wake up around 10 or 11 in the morning, and not before—and don't call me in the morning. That's it. I get up. I make some what's called breakfast. Oh, the *New York Times*. I have to have the paper in the morning, and read of all the casualties, how many drones...today they hit 10 people... I don't like those drone planes, frankly. Bad news. Anyway, I check out on the news, and what's Obama up to, and who do I vote for, and how much money do I send to them? That's what I spend the morning doing.

The club opens at 3 in the afternoon. I am not the only one there. We all share our responsibilities. Deborah and Jed have certain days. Sometimes Deborah goes 8 in the morning, because she has a kid who has to go to school, and she's up anyway, so let her go to work, I say! She gets a lot of work done when nobody's around, and that's good. So that part is cleaned up.

Oh... Me. Then I go there, and I have a big chore. I have to answer phones. Everyone's taken over my job, so all I am allowed to do is answer the phones—and I do that very... Well, sometimes they hang up on me, or I hang up on them first. Then comes the bookings and the phone calls, and then comes the...the breakdown. Ok, the dishwasher breaks down, the air-conditioner breaks down. I'm a contractor. I get the companies to come in to fix this and fix that. General upkeep and wear-and-tear, and the bookings. The bookings are done very quietly and slyly on the side. Nobody knows about that.

That's it. Then you leave and you go home, and you eat. But you have to cook. If you're a good cook, it's fun. If you're a lousy cook, it's horrible. But I'm a fairly good cook. I like to cook. It's very relaxing. It takes all the tensions out of you to cook—at least mine. I do that. And then I...whatever one does...take a nap, read some more... Generally a nap. Naps get very important at this stage. Without a nap... Because you have to face the night ahead of you. That's it. Then I get dressed, put on some more fancy clothes, and go to the club, and sit down and enjoy the music. It's just my reward for the minutiae that takes place during the day. It's a drag, a lot of it. But at night, your reward comes with the music, and that's what I do.

I talk to people. They talk to me. We say hi. Or somebody has a complaint, they come to me or I go to them. It's a normal... It rolls very nicely. The people get up and leave when the show is over, "good night, good night," the next crew comes in, "good evening, good evening." It's become a well-oiled little monster. It does its thing very nicely. I must congratulate it. Thank you. It's sweet.

Brown: You start as a jazz fan. You become a person who's hands-on helping to create jazz records. Then, you now are a jazz club owner. So your whole life, at various stages, has been one that's been involved with jazz. You've been at the forefront, because of your association with Blue Note, of helping to bring these artists to the rest of the world. Thelonious Monk. Right? These people on the record. You received the NEA Jazz Master Award because you are recognized as having made an invaluable contribution to jazz. How did that make you feel, receiving the award?

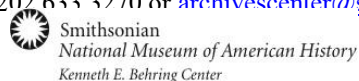
Gordon: Wow. That was the biggest shock in my life. I've had a lot of nice things happen to me, it's true. But this was the nicest. I mean, this was so inconceivable by me, so unthought-of by me, so out-of-the-question for me. I mean, I'm not a musician. What have I done? I open the club. I have keys. I sweep the floor. I wash the dishes. I wash the glasses. I don't cook there because there's no food. What... I want to tell you, I was so overwhelmed, I still haven't gotten over it. I keep saying to myself, "What I can tell anybody?" They said, "Shh, don't say anything until we announce it." I had to put a lock on my tongue. It was very difficult, because I'm a big talker.

Wow. I don't believe it. I think that is so dear and sweet of my government, my country to finally say to a lady who they don't even know... I've only been to Washington once in my life. [LAUGHS] Oh, you sat there and thought of me? Oh, how dear. That's better than any lover I've ever had... (Don't say that, heh-heh...) No! I mean, wow! Truly, it's overwhelming, and it's very hard to handle, because I don't think I should live through it all before it happens, that you ever deserved anything... But get to work on time! And answer that telephone! And don't talk back! That's all I think of. I don't think of the glory that has just come. That is the glory. Wow. That's beautiful. That's how I feel about it. I mean, I never in my whole life dreamed...from Newark, New Jersey...to such an honor.

Well, it is truly an honor, and it's been a lot of stepping stones, but one never thinks about it on the way one goes (where one is forced to go without knowing it!), that anybody cares except... Nobody. Except the landlord. Pay the rent. That's about it.

Brown: Well, I can say that we all care, and we are very grateful that you have helped to bring so much music and so much joy and inspiration to so many lives all across this world, with the recordings, with presenting jazz live, like you say, seven nights a week. This, I hope that you understand, is what we appreciate about what you have brought to the world, to make jazz something that people can enjoy. You have helped that. You have been actively involved with

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that since you were in high school. Since you were in high school you've been bringing jazz to people.

Gordon: Well, that's a dear... But you know, I share this with Max Gordon. He's a part of this. I always still feel it's his club, that I'm just the warden of the jail [LAUGHS], and all those prisoners I bring in who play instruments, I want to keep them there. "Do another week. Come back next week. You're not..." But at least he set the best groundwork for any club in the whole world. He said it. He didn't even know what he was doing, but he just normally had the instincts. That's what happens when you have real people who do things, that don't really know... They just have such taste, they have such perception, they just do it naturally without thinking. "It's great, what you're doing, man."

So what Max did was great. And what he didn't do was leave it to me... No, that's not true. I don't mean that. What he didn't... He did everything! I can't complain. He didn't ask me to handle it. He never asked me to do anything there. It was his baby, but I didn't care what he thought or anything. I had my own ideas. I did. Not that I intended to do it. I never thought he would leave me. I never had any ulterior motives of any kind. But when it presented itself... Huh! What am I supposed to do? Let this thing wither on the ground? People would be banging on the door to buy. The Japanese were there forever. I mean, it's been a wanted place, not for murder but for life! I like that. I have to save that line.

Anyway, thank you. I'm overwhelmed. Sometimes I get teary-eyed when I think about such an honor in my whole life. What the heck. I've waited ninety years. Why shouldn't I have it? There's a lot of other things I missed out on, but not this. And I thank my government for having perception. And keeping jazz alive. To me, I'm not interested in all the other aspects of music that play all over this city. Some of it is so horrible, it's not... Well, whatever. I'm puffing at it. But jazz is important. It's valid. It's there. It's for real. It's strong, and it's well. And it belongs. It belongs. It was born here. Let's not kill it. Let's keep it alive. That's all I say, and that I try to do to my best of ability. But the guys have to hang around, too. And the gals. There's a lot of great women out there—whom I support.

Brown: You brought Mary Osborne to the Village Vanguard.

Gordon: Mary Osborne. When I found her, she was dying of cancer at the time... I didn't know that at the time I got her in. She was very reluctant to come. She was a person from my youth, from my dreams. That's how I started. I started to look at my people, that I knew, that Max didn't even know. He didn't know anything about jazz, the way I did. I got her to come in. It was so touching. And she died shortly after that, but while she was there it was a great experience for me. I was very selfish. I wanted Mary Osborne. She was lovely. And she could PLAY! Anyway, there are a lot of good women that I've had. I'm not going to mention their names.

Brown: You continue to bring jazz to all the world, you continue to keep it alive, and you've been doing it since you were in high school. So that is why, I believe, you received the award, not just for the Village Vanguard, but your whole life has been involved in this music.

Gordon: Sure.

Brown: I want to say on behalf of Ken and the Smithsonian Institution, and I would say every jazz aficionado, we want to thank you, Lorraine Gordon, for keeping jazz alive.

Gordon: Ah, that's so sweet. I never thought about it, but I'm glad you have, and it makes me feel good that I wasn't alone over this long trip. Wow. It's been a long one. But a good one. But thank you. I'm totally honored and almost speechless—but not quite.

[END OF PART 3, END OF CONVERSATION]

Transcribed by Ted Panken

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