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JIMMY HEATH
NEA Jazz Master (2003)

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Molly Murphy: It is January 9th, 2010. I'm Molly Murphy and we are sitting here with Jimmy Heath, Professor Heath. Just to document this Jimmy, your birthday is October 25th, 1926, you were born.

Jimmy Heath: That is correct.

Murphy: So you are 82.

Heath: 83.

Murphy: 83? Apparently I don't know how to do my math, okay.

Heath: This was...we're going into ten. I'll be 84 this year.

Murphy: Right, man.

Heath: I know.

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Murphy: And we are just a couple weeks away from the release of a very important composition, yours. A little bit different in nature, and this is your book. Tell us a little bit about your book and how you approached it, and why it took twenty-five years.

Heath: Well, it took twenty-five years because I've been very busy doing different things. I always want to get everything in, which I found out when it was completed, I still missed some things I've done since then. That was a misnomer; I thought I could get everything in. But, I did go back from the beginning up until a year ago, I would say.

Murphy: And the title is, "I Walked with Giants."

Heath: "I Walked With Giants"

Murphy: And how did you structure it?

Heath: Well, it is a compilation of all the giants who are still here, and some who are gone, their words endorsing me in a lot of cases, or speaking of experiences we had together. In doing so, I was very fortunate to have a few words from John Coltrane, from Dizzy. Those who are past on [such as] Art Farmer, and others, that I've come into contact with, and performed with, and had good times or bad times with.

Murphy: Well, it's a lot of time to cover so I imagine, you know, [it was] no small task. Is it something you've worked on sporadically over the years or have you been diligently putting it together?

Heath: It's sporadic because it was initiated by a young lady, who was my student from Wisconsin, named Coleen Forrester. And she said...she wrote down a few notes about what I had achieved up until that time; she was a saxophone student. I just put that aside and later on I would add things. My wife, Mona, is a documented and I am also. I had a lot of things laid on the side. When I finally decided to put it all together another one of my students, by the name of Joe McClaren, was one of my flute students at the Jazz Mobile when I was teaching there many years ago, and he was... at that time he was trying to play the flute, as I say, a flute student. But, he gave the flute up, went to school, and became a professor at Hofstra. He's still there; he's a professor of English. He's a very strict chronologist and editor. He bugged me everyday about something. You know, "if Dizzy said something was at such and such a date, why did you say it's on this date?" So we had a lot of disagreements, but we finally came to an agreement on most things. I was able to use another person who's a great documenter, and that's Louis Porter, and another one from England, a man named Ken Vail. He did a lot of diaries for the daily actions Miles, or Dizzy. I could always go back and verify with Ken Vail, what dates were necessary to verify. I had a lot of people who were great researchers, and that helped me a lot to get the chronology and everything together.

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Murphy: A monstrous project. Who is the publisher?

Heath: The publisher is Temple University Press. My friend and the great comic artist, Bill Cosby, does a foreword for the book; Wynton does the introduction, Wynton Marsalis. That's pretty good.

Murphy: That's wonderful. Well you made reference to some of your students. Perhaps we should talk about education and your involvement in music education, first. Since the original Smithsonian Oral History on you, which took place in 1995, you have left your position at Queens College. You had an eleven-year tenure, is that correct?

Heath: That's correct, I went there, I think in '86, not '85. I left in '90...

Murphy: '98?

Heath: '97, '98. Bill did my...up at the Lincon Center, "Cosby King." He was the emcee for my retirement.

Murphy: Was that to endow a chair?

Heath: Yeah, that was happened. They endowed a chair in my name at Queens College, the Aaron Copland School of Music, that is.

Murphy: And were you director of jazz studies? What was your position?

Heath: Yeah, I was basically that. I had...I was probably the first one that was put on a tenure track. Frank Foster and Bud Johnson, the tenor saxophonist from Earl Hines days who was great composer and saxophonist, was there as an adjunct before I got there. But, I was the first one hired full time at the Aaron Copland School of Music. After I was appointed I think I got Dr. Donald Byrd over there, and Sir Roland Hanna. Since that time, I was instrumental in getting Michael Mossman; he's the head of the program now. My student is the saxophone teacher, and that's Antonio Hart.

Murphy: Yes, if a student is a reflection of his teacher, you've had some very good students.

Heath: Yes, he's a wonderful young man, very respectful. I can't get him to call me Jimmy, it's always Mr. Heath. We hang out, play with the Dizzy band, do recordings together, and everything, "Mr. Heath, Mr. Heath," but that's him. So I wrote a piece for him called, "Like A Son" That's putting it kind of exaggerated, because my kids don't call me Mr. Heath.

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Murphy: What you wish a son would be like, right?

Heath: Yeah, he's a wonderful person.

Murphy: Can you talk a little bit about your perceptions of how we're doing in jazz education today, how things stand?

Heath: Well I think there are more examples, and institutions that have more jazz programs now than ever. I find that...how would you say it...incongruous that there are not many gigs out there but there are more musicians coming out. I think they should--well you know, like they did in my time, if there's a will there's a way. We would go and try and initiate gigs and stuff. But back to education thing, they're turning them out in droves every year. I was very shocked my first time to visit North Texas State, and they had three big bands. All these students learn how to play, and they all can play well enough to be professionals out here in the world. I wondered about where they are going to work in a climate that's not so jazz-oriented. But, you know, we have to go on with that and I still do master classes when with we go around with the—I'm in the Dizzy Alumni Big Band besides playing Heath Brothers, which is now reduced to two out of three because my brother Percy passed 2005, the elder. But, master classes are still one of the things I like to do. There are a lot of anxious young people out here to learn the music we call jazz.

Murphy: Well, I'm sure any student today looks at your experience and is so envious of the fact that you lived during the so-called "Golden Age" of jazz, where there were gigs a plenty everywhere you turned. You know, what advice do you give to young people who maybe have the skills but, as you said, the gigs aren't really there? How do they drum up gigs for themselves; how can one approach that problem?

Heath: With so many of the musicians, they have to be very versatile today, and not only be a player, you have to be a composer, you have to be a teacher. There are many ways to make a living, and make a life in American music, African American music, which has become very international in scope. Thank god there are other countries like Japan and Europe in having jazz performed. A lot of them are starting out and they're beginning to travel, and getting the experience of going around the world and being respected. Plus, they will become teachers, as my student Antonio is a wonderful teacher. Teaching is wonderful from the standpoint that you learn so much as a teacher. You're always learning, so it keeps you in the game as a professional, and when you're teaching... You know, I remember when I was teaching at Queens College I would give these assignments. I'd tell people, "Well, you've got to play this backwards and you've got to play it from the center out, and you've got to play this." I would say, "Okay. I haven't done that myself, let me go home and do this before I come back next week because

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they're going to have it down." So, the fact that when you teach you learn so much, and you explore and you do research yourself. That's another thing young people can do. I have other students than Antonio who are teaching different places. You know, saxophonists, and other students who studied in my composition class, and they're teaching composition in different places. So, that's one of the other things they can do, is teach. That keeps them in it, as I said before. But, performing, you can go...you know where we started was in taverns, in bars. You can still go around and hit on somebody at a bar, "I'd like to bring my group in on the weekends and see if we can make that a go. You can give me this, and if I make more and more, and the more I make, then you can up my salary." You know, you can do that.

Murphy: Do you think that young people today need to be, I don't know, willing to embrace other kinds of music and, I don't know if you want to use the dreaded word, crossover...

Heath: They do.

Murphy: ... in order to get in front of audiences do you have to be flexible—more flexible—today.

Heath: They do. I have a student now, she's a great saxophonist, and she's playing with Beyonce. She's been with Beyonce, Tia Fuller, her name is. [She's a] great saxophonist. I met her when I went to Spellman College, and then she left Spellman and went to somewhere in Colorado to another college. She can play jazz, but she's playing what is necessary with Beyonce in order to make a living, and she's doing quite well.

Murphy: Two of your students, in '97, I see, placed first and second in the Monk competition. That's pretty amazing.

Heath: That was very interesting year because it was on my birthday when they...we had a reception at the state department when Madam Secretary Albright was in at that time. With the Monk competition, we always had a reception somewhere in the Vice President's house or the State Department, or...cause they are all connected to the music during the Clinton days. Even during the Bush [era] we had a reception at one time when Quincy was there, and Colin Powell received us. So, back to the two trumpeters who won first and second in the Monk competition. You know, I was very pleased and I have a picture of that at the State Department with Madam Albright. A couple of years ago, Vaclav Havel, he's a polish poet. What was he? He was the head of development there, but he was friend of Dizzy's and he wrote poetry or something. So, they had his birthday here. He was doing some teaching at Columbia, or something. They had his birthday celebration at Birdland, here in New York. Tom Carter, from the Monk institute, invited me and Ron Carter, and others. Madam Secretary Albright came, and I had the picture, I

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showed her the picture when I was down there at the State Department. I don't know if she remembered but she acted very gracious about it. You know, the people you meet...like there was another...I don't mean to get off course but the connection with Washington is very important in my life. I did a... my agent called me and says, "Well, you were at the White House and played on the lawn when Bill Clinton, and that's a long story. First of all, when Bill was running for a president, he being a saxophone player and liking music, we played here at the Hilton Hotel for one of his rallies. He said to Al Grey, Elanor Jaquette, myself, and maybe Red Rodney. Anyways, he said, "If I get elected president, I'm going to have jazz on the White House lawn," and when he did, he did have it on the lawn twenty-five years after Jimmy Carter had jazz. Having met him then, and I have a picture of that particular thing at the White House where Bill Clinton is pointing at my saxophone and he is talking to me about having one of the same year, or the same time, cause mine is old. Then, about two years ago, when my agent calls me and says, "Bill Clinton knows you." And I say, "Yeah." And he says, "Bill Clinton is getting the four freedoms award at the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Museum up in Hyde Park, New York," and I had a gig at Yale the night before. So, he says, "Can you go over there and play something when Bill Clinton gets the award." My friend from Princeton, the religious...

Murphy: Cornell West?

Heath: Dr. Cornell West got the freedom of religion award. Tom Brokaw got freedom of the press, or something. And a lady was there...I can't think of her name but she was head of the American Red Cross, but she had been an admiral, or something, in the Navy. She got an award, and then Bill Clinton got an award. So, when they announced Bill Clinton, he got ready to speak, and they said, "Mr. President, hold on a minute. We have a special guest," and I came out playing "There Will Never Be Another You." He grabbed me and hugged [me], and all this stuff. I remember very vividly they had lunch, and I was at the table with Bill and Hillary and there was another person there, a black guy. I looked at the names on the...and oh Lord I was shocked. His name was Joe Louis Barrow Jr., he was a friend of the Clinton's or something, Joe Louis's son. I said, "Oh wow." All of these things I had to put in my book because coming from a separate, but not equal, high school in North Carolina, as is indicated in my early talks with Louis Porter about my life, and to get to sit with Presidents, and Secretaries of State and people of that yok, I said, "Oh, that's pretty good!"

Murphy: That's pretty good.

Heath: That's a pretty good life.

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Murphy: While we're talking about Washington, just briefly, what are your feelings about this current administration, and are there going to be opportunities for jazz musicians, music?

Heath: Well, I think my president has a lot on the table, right now, to get through. He does have, I've heard from the grape vine, he does have an advisor, who keeps him up on, and he does know about everybody. Coltrane and everybody; he's a listener too.

Murphy: I hear he has a lot of jazz on his iPod.

Heath: Yeah. A man of that intelligence; how could he not?

Murphy: Do you think he put jazz on the iPod he gave to the Queen?

Heath: I don't know. (Laughs) I don't know.

Murphy: He must have.

Heath: I'm sure, once he gets past the health thing and all these problems: all these wars, and things; he'll get around, if he's still in office, he'll get around to doing something for us. In fact, I met the first lady. You know, Bill Cosby just did a show at the Kennedy Center where he was honored by...what is it...an award from...

Murphy: Yeah, I caught a little bit of that. It wasn't like NAACP or anything right?

Heath: No, no, no.

Murphy: Yeah, I know what you're referring to because I caught just a tiny bit of it.

Heath: Yeah, I have to look.

Murphy: Do you know, Ken?

Ken Kimery: I don't.

Murphy: Anyways.

Heath: Wait a minute.

Murphy: Okay, go ahead.

Heath: What was it called? He got the award for comedy, what was it called?

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Murphy: Was it the Mark Twain?

Heath: That was it!

Murphy: Right, that's what it was.

Heath: Bill got the Mark Twain Award for comedy, and he invited me to come play, and I did. It's a PBS documented program that was, oh, there was a lot of great people. A few I knew, like Dick Gregory, who I had met, and Bill Russell, and I met Steven Wright, a young comedian. [He's a] deadpan kind of guy. Sinbad, I had never met, and that performance...Wynton and myself played with Willie Nelson. We played "Cal, Don't You" with Willie Nelson, that was my first time to meet Willie Nelson. He is an icon for some people. It's not easy to get a rep[utation].

Murphy: So you're setting a good example for your students to embrace all types...

Heath: Well, yes. I did that back from my son. My son, named Mtume, he had big hits. I played on some of his...on the T.V show he had in New York, "Undercover" I played on a couple of his recordings, he played on some of my recordings. So, I have a son that's ... who's very famous in the, what he calls, funk ballads with Roberta Flack and Donny Hathaway. "The Closer I Get To You" was one of his big songs with Stepanie Mills. He's got about five or six gold records, my son. Also, at this time, he ended up making me great. I said, "I always wanted to be great." So, I got four great grandchildren. They are...you know.

Murphy: I think the last time I spoke with you, you were talking about some of the songs that they sing, something about milkshakes.

Heath: Oh yeah! (Immitates popular song) "My milkshake is better than yours!" What I was talking about, in reference to that song, was that I had another student and he became a teacher at Jazz Mobile, Kenny Rogers, not *the*. But, he's a baritone saxophonist, who's daughter who is Kelis, the one that married Nas. Nas is the son of Olu Dara, he's a jazz and blues trumpet player from down south. What happened was, Nas had sampled me on one of his big records called "One Love" It's listed as one of the top 100 hip-hop records of all time. Anyway, when Nas and Kelis got ready to get married, they had the Heath brother's come down to Atlanta and play for their...before they got to dancing, of course. We played while everybody was getting settled in the place, cause they had this fabulous tent they had put up in Atlanta in this...with all these people, and all this food and all this stuff. So, by me knowing Kenny Rogers, and Olu Dara, their children ended up getting married and they both had hit records. So, the connections go on, it doesn't stop. You know, I can't help from...there's good and bad in everything. There's certain, some of

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the hip-hop people I can take, and I like okay, but some of them I don't. It's the same with Western Classical music—I don't like it all. I don't like all jazz; you know what I mean. I'm pretty open for an old man. (Laughs)

Murphy: You made reference to the Heath Brothers. Since '95, you guys really got together again and started recording, and touring. After a while, maybe 15 years, you hadn't so much. IS that right?

Heath: Well, yes. The Heath Brothers got together at the end of MJQ with Percy.

Murphy: So that was...

Heath: When we did, I think we had been together and made records for Columbia, and CBS, and that was a time earlier. But then we did record twice, and that was in '97 and a record called, "As We Used To Do" Still, we got dumped by Columbia and then we got to record for Concord. Then we did another on '98 called, "jazz Family" And we proceeded to tour and play together, and go to Japan, Europe, whatever, and play in the states. We were doing okay with the Heath Brothers as the three of us. Then in 2004 we were playing in Kensington, California and the guy who was instrumental, and has this beautiful house, he used to be folk music, and he produced concerts with people like Joan Bias and people like that. So, he decided he wanted to make a DVD of the Heath Brothers. So, we went to his house and his house is just so big and beautiful. I'll never forget, he got a redwood tree in his yard, and I had never seen a redwood tree that close. Right in front of the tree is a carpet on the ground, and he has a graded seats up there and he has concerts outside of his home, which is a mansion. His name is Danny Sherr, and Danny made a DVD of the Heath Brothers in 2004.

Murphy: That was timely.

Heath: Yeah. It was very timely because the next year Percy passed away. We had a gig in New Orleans at the New Orleans festival and I remember my sister-in-law, June, called me and I had been to see Percy and he was giving up; he was very sick and he was giving up. June called and said that Percy had passed that morning. So, we got to the gig and before we started to play I announced, "Ladies and gentleman my brother, Percy, the one from MJQ from thirty to forty years, and the most famous in the family, passed away this morning." (Imitates crowd gasping) Everybody gasped and we continued to play. Since that time, we've, the two, my brother Albert Tootie on the drums, we've still been performing. We recorded, most recently, on a recording dedicated to Percy and its titled "Endurance"

Murphy: And that was just this past year, 2009.

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Heath: Yes, endurance. That's what we are doing; we're enduring. Tootie happens to be 73, or 74. He's nine years younger than I.

Murphy: And you were how many years younger than Percy?

Heath: Three, three years younger than Percy. Percy was born in '23, I in '26, and Tootie, I think, in '35.

Murphy: When you guys, in '97, decided to record, as we were saying, can you talk a little bit about who's idea was it to get back together, so to speak. Not that you were ever really apart.

Heath: We were playing; we were playing around. I forgot just who, from Concord Records, who wanted to record us. I do remember that on the record, the first one, I had Sir Roland Hanna on the piano and Stanley Cowell, who is a regular pianist with us, on some tracks. I had Thaddeus, John Thaddeus, and Slide Hampton on a couple of tracks. I really don't know how that one came about, but we signed a contract for two recordings, we made two and then we were out of there.

Murphy: Can you talk a little bit about the dynamic between you guys?

Heath: Yes. Percy was Taros the bull. He wouldn't change if you paid him to change. He was strict about what he liked, and he tried to keep us, so-called, "pure" which is not possible. Tootie was very flexible, my youngest brother, he was ready to go with anything that was current; he didn't care. He could already play jazz, he's played with everybody. He had played with 'Trane, Sonny Rollins, Benny Golson, [Art] Farmer; he had played with everybody. He was ready to change and I was always, kind of, in the middle as I am chronologically. I'm the composer in the family, and we had played some commercial type things with CBS, that's how we sold more records.

Murphy: And you were the first of the brothers to decide to, you know, go down a professional path of music, weren't you?

Heath: Yeah, I was the first one to be a professional musician because of...Percy was everything, Mr. Everything. In high school he was the president of the class, he was the president of the North Carolina State High Wire club—I don't even know what that is.

Murphy: (Laughs)

Heath: ...But everything, you know? Then he became a Tuskegee Airman Second Lieutenant. Oh my god! He's so grand. While he was in the Air Force I think I went out in Nebraska to join a dance band. I was the first professional, but he, when he begun to

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play the bass he got with the MJQ and the rest is history. They became one of the most popular groups of their time and stayed together for forty-something years. Tootie was around the house playing first a trombone...

Murphy: Oops.

Heath: ...because he couldn't get the drums. Somebody else had the drums in high school and so he grabbed the trombone. He later gave that up because he said, "That was too nasty, too much spit coming out." He's the comedian in the family, not just me (Laughs).

Murphy: You know, you all are.

Heath: We are all because my father and mother were very funny (Laughs).

Murphy: Well, the three of you together touring, you were like three complete stand-up comedians.

Heath: You were there, you remember.

Murphy: You were cracking everybody up. I have to imagine that that kind of love, and humor, and that energy, that conveys to the stage when you're playing too, musically.

Heath: Musically, I think it did. Some of the other serious, serious musicians say we could have been a comedy team. I say, "Yeah, well that's all good. That's life. People are too serious, standing up like statues not moving. People don't understand all that stuff that you're doing. C'mon! Be human! Tell them a story, tell them about what you're doing, why you got the title of this song, where it came from, what it's intended to relay," there's a lot of things to talk about. Duke Ellington used to talk to the people.

Murphy: I was chuckling when I was reading about your first trip abroad with Howard McGee, with Percy. I tried to imagine that experience and how far you've come and how much you travel the world now.

Heath: Well, you know Percy was getting me through the fright of being on my first flight to Paris in 1948, in May. I was scared to death, especially since I'm looking out the window and there's fire coming out the back of the engines. This was a—what do you call it—Constellation was the name of the plane. It wasn't a complete jet at that time. I said, "Percy, it looks like that thing is on fire." "No James it's cool." He was always the big brother, he tried to be the big brother and tell everybody what to do. I'd tell him every time, "Percy, I'm a grown man and I will make my decisions. You cannot tell me what to do." Percy Heath, but I love him. That was him, and now Tootie and I have a great time.

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I'm always talking about how Tootie played with someone, and so he played with someone, and he'll haul off on the drums, "Yeah, but I played with you longer than I've played with anybody!" I've been buttering him with all his achievements and he said...but, yes he's played with me. That's my first recording, which was in '59. He's on that. So, I guess he has played with me longer than anybody else, because Percy was away with the MJQ.

Murphy: I think, somewhere, you characterized the contribution from the three of you. If you add up all the years of performing it's something like 150 years of experience.

Heath: Oh, more. Now, cause I started in '45 and this is 2010 and I'm still in, 2010! I guess its when you say you were born in the 1900's that's getting weird now to some kids. "Oh, I was born in 19—" and "Whooo!" I remember when Yougi Blake used to say that.

Murphy: He lived 'till what, 100?

Heath: He used to say, "I was born in nineteen and two and I don't think any of you were around in nineteen and two." He wouldn't say "o-two" just "nineteen and two."

Murphy: How much of the year are you on the road?

Heath: Well, you know, it's not as much as one would think but it's enough.

Murphy: How do you feel about the travel part?

Heath: The travel is getting ridiculous because they...

Murphy: In the 9-11 world it's a different story than it was in '95.

Heath: And they bother you about your instruments! Now, my wife, who I will have been married to...well we met over 50 years ago in May of '59 so February the 4th we will be married 50 years. So Mona goes on the gigs with me just to take one of the horns (Laughs). They don't want me to bring two on board the plane. That's her excuse, she's like an American Express card, I never leave home without her. I mean, 50 years man! That's like a family, as role models, my mom and pop were together like that. Percy was together 50 years with his wife. Tootie has been together with two wives about 35 years or more. I can't imagine people not having both of their parents. I feel so special to have had both of my parents. I tore my butt and made them mad, and cried, and all that. They would always accept me back, prodigal son. But to have one parent and to make something of yourself Alan Witchcomb did it, Obama. Speaking of that, when you asked me before, I had a friend who told me that when he made a speech at the democratic

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convention before, when George Bush got his second, at the Democratic Convention, I forgot who was running. Was it Kerry, John Kerry, or something? Anyway, Obama had made a speech, and this is a friend of mine named Karen who is an African American married to a white guy. They've been together a long time too. She said, "That guy is going to be the next President," three or four years before he became [the President]. When it happened, I was sitting on the sofa in my house with my big 51" TV. When they said that Obama was the one I didn't cry, but I jumped up and screamed for nobody but me and my wife. Being married interracially, I still wonder, I am still overwhelmed by that, and I'm still, by him being President of the United States. I've been married interracially and they never say anything about his mother! They say he's the black president! His mother wasn't black! They won't give that up. I don't understand that, because if you're a mixed kid, a lot of people are mixed with something, and why don't they acknowledge that? That goes to show you that puts a stigma on him, "He's the first black president." Well, he's also white; black and white, like my daughter.

Murphy: You have to watch the comedienne, Wanda Sykes, on that matter.

Heath: No, she's not one of my favorites.

Murphy: She's pretty hardcore.

Heath: Well that's okay.

Murphy: She speaks on that matter of who will claim him based on how he's doing.

Heath: Yeah, well that's a good observation because if he does well they say "Oh yeah, he is mixed." But if he does poorly, "He was a black! I told you we should have never elected that guy!" (Laughs). When he was made the president it was a lot of young white people voting for him also who were looking for something better than they had. He was such an intelligent, great man to me. Like I told you earlier, Bill Clinton was a great man to me too, and so was Obama. I'm looking forward to something good happening if it's possible, but you know these people are nuts, they go for the look. Sarah Palin, she looks cute.

Murphy: I want to touch, a little bit more, on the Heath Brothers. Since Percy's passing in 2005, that obviously changes the dynamic of your group immensely. Can you talk a little bit about Jeb, who plays piano, and the bassist who is trying to fill those very large shoes on stage?

Heath: Well, now the Heath Brothers, as today, the group we have consists of Jeb Patton on piano. Now, Jeb Patton was my student at Queens College and he studied in my composition class, and he studied with Sir Roland Hanna, was his teacher. He was

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Roland's number one student. He was an incredibly brilliant young man when he came to Queens from Duke. He's been with the Heath Brothers for about twelve years now, or thirteen. Percy loved him, and at the end of Percy's life he was getting a little drunk and he would get lost in some of the songs and Jeb would follow him. (Laughs) And Percy would say, "Yeah, I owe you eight bars" (Laughs) It was crazy, but there was a love and respect for Jeb Patton, from Percy. Now, me, I've always admired this kid. He's a kid to me. But, he's a grown man, and married, and all that. You know, he just put out his own recording and I play one track on it for him, and he just had his release party up here at the place called Smoke. I played a couple of songs with him and Tootie, my brother, he's on a couple of tracks. But, Jeb, on the recordings that he's made with us, he's always been incredible. He's on the "Jazz Family" one that we made before Percy left. Now, this one that we have now, "Endurance", we searched around for some bass players to replace Percy, and we miss Percy. Percy used to play the cello and he got a great response from playing that, besides the big bass. I called it the baby bass because it was an instrument with a cello body but strung up like a bass, so I called it the baby bass. He could play the blues, and he could play be-bop on it, and people loved that. So, we haven't been able to replace that feature of Percy's performing. But, we were very fortunate to find a young man that is Ron Carter's student, who went to Julliard and studied classical music. He decided that he was going to play jazz, and his name is David Wong. David's mother is Jewish and his father is Chinese. So here we are with the real America. David is so good, he's the most sought after, after Ron Carter being the most sought after bassist, and Christian McBride maybe, but David is the most sought after young bassist around. I first heard him with Roy Hayne's group, and he still plays with Roy Haynes. So we have to juggle when we're going to have him.

Murphy: You have to fight Roy.

Heath: Yeah, cause Roy is about to take him to Europe for three weeks and we got a gig and I'm going to miss David. But, some other things we have and Roy looks for him and we have him. He's like Ron and Percy, very dignified, he never comes to the gig without his suit and tie, proper, and he can arco the bass so beautifully. On the new record, "Endurance", that is dedicated to Percy, I wrote a piece that I played on the soprano saxophone at Percy's memorial at the Church, at the Reverend Butts Abyssinian Baptist Church. It was full of people, and I played this song and everybody liked it. So what I did, is to let David arco, because he's such a great performer with the bow from studying classical. So he plays it on "From A Lonely Bass". My niece, who writes poetry, had written a song about the bass standing in the corner and Percy not being there to play it. So, I figured I would write the song and use her words from "From a Lonely Bass". That is one of David's fortes, that he can arco, that he can pick pizzicato, too. He's a great bass player, I wish we could have him full time.

Murphy: And "Big P," is that a composition on that album, too?

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Heath: No, “Big P” is way back.

Murphy: Didn’t you play that on that album, no?

Heath: Huh?

Murphy: I thought you played it on that album.

Heath: On the new one, “Endurance”?

Murphy: Yeah.

Heath: No, that’s on the big band record. About five years ago, four or five years ago, I made a big band recording.

Murphy: This is “Turn Up the Heath”?

Heath: Yes, and it was mixed by my son Mtume, and it’s a very good record. But on that one I played a new arrangement of “Big P”. I wrote “Big P” in 1960, when Percy was still with the MJQ and I recorded it with him on a Riverside record called, “Really Big”. I had ten pieces and I called it, “Really Big”. I had Cannonball, and Percy, and Tootie, Cedar Walton. You know, French horns, and a lot of other instruments, Nat Adderely, and Clark Terry, but that’s when “Big P” was written. This is the one that’s dedicated to Percy now. When I did the big band record, “Turn Up The Heath”, for a company who...it’s a guy named Tom Bellino that I did that for. Anyway, that happened since the nineties, I did some big band things. And incidentally, I’ve been writing some things for the Dizzy big band. I’m playing in the Dizzy Alumni Big Band, and I still have my own big band. We’re going to the Bluenote this week, February 2nd of this year, February 2nd of 2010. Antonio, my student, plays in the band, Jeb, David Wong, Louis Nash on drums. Tootie doesn’t like to play big band music.

Murphy: Can you characterize some of the many challenges in running, and operating a big band these days?

Heath: Well, the biggest challenge in operating a big band is transportation. You can’t take them anywhere. So I do big band concerts with college bands. I send my music, and I do concerts, like I’m doing one in June here. I started another band called Queens Jazz Orchestra that I’m in charge of. I’m doing that in June, and I’m also going to Amsterdam in June with the Concerto Bau Orchestra. I’ll send my music over and just play with them. So that’s the closest I can get to maintaining my big band writing. To travel with a

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big band anywhere, you've got to be well connected like Wynton and Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra.

Murphy: Your going to... Say that again about the Concerta Bau. You're going to play jazz things with the Concerca Bau?

Heath: Well, they have a jazz orchestra in Amsterdam. Yeah, I played with them once.

Murphy: So at the Concerca Bau?

Heath: Yeah, I played with them once before, honoring Benny Carter. It was Johnny Griffin, and Toots Thielemans, and Roberta Gambarini, the singer that was in the Monk Institute. She won, and came in second or third in the Monk vocal competition. But she sings on her own and with the Dizzy Alumni Band. I've been writing a couple of things for that band and for my own band.

Murphy: Hold on one second. Do you want to just pause and such?

Ken Kimery: Yeah, why don't we do that.

[Question is not heard. Heath is looking at his awards]

Heath: November 22nd, is that right?

Murphy: If its on paper, that must mean...

Heath: I put it here. Presented to me by Sigourney Weaver.

Murphy: Oh really? You know, one award that we should certainly mention, is you were the first jazz person to receive an honorary doctorate from Julliard.

Heath: That is correct.

Murphy: That's quite something.

Heath: Yes, and then I got one from Queens College.

Murphy: And that was in what year?

Heath: I have three. That's why I bought this! I have all these awards...The Jazz Masters, when was that?

Murphy: That was in 2003.

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Heath: Yeah, with Elvin Jones and Abbey Lincoln. Let me see, “Turn Up The Heath” was on Planet Arts, is the name of the company. That came out.

Murphy: With “Turn Up The Heath”, I understand the seed money from that project came from your Jazz Masters fellowship. Is that right, or part of it?

Heath: Yes, that’s right. I sponsored my own...let me see now. Oh, Don Redman. That was interesting. Me and Hank Jones, goodness. What were we talking about, the other award?

Murphy: The honorary doctorate, that one?

Heath: Yeah.

Murphy: I think that was in 2002, perhaps, then Julliard. Yes, 2002, one of the strongest music institutions around, it really took a long time to acknowledge jazz.

Heath: Yes, that was May 24th, 2002. I got it here, Benny Golson Master Award [from] Howard University. Here’s the Governor’s Award from real tacky, I mean Governor Pitaki.

Murphy: (Laughs) You guys have names for everybody, too, don’t you?

Heath: It’s in my book; I got 200 in there. Unique names, I call em.

Murphy: **Gonzala Rubolcabra**, he was my favorite.

Heath: Yeah, Blueberry Cobbler. I called him that, he didn’t mind. I saw him at the ASCAP ceremony. We got the Julliard was in 2002.

Murphy: Can you talk a little bit about the experience? That’s a big deal for jazz at large.

Heath: Yeah, well what happened was, when they started the jazz program before they invited me, I had retired from Queens, they invited me to Julliard to have a meeting with [Joseph W.] Polisi. I think he plays obo or bassoon, the man that runs the school. They were asking me if I would be interested in heading the programs, and I told them no, I had just retired and I wasn’t ready to do that again. I just wanted to play and write, now. So, I turned down the gig and low and behold when it came to the gift...Wynton got me there because they figured I would be a good person to start the program, then I turned it down and next thing I know they send me this letter that I’ve been chosen to get this honorary doctorate. I said, “I should have...” You know, because at the meeting what

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happened was they were asking me, “Did I think that Julliard could have a jazz program?” And I said, “What do you mean? You’ve got one of the most prestigious music schools in the world. Sure, you can have a jazz program!” They said, “Yes, but one hears...” And I say, “But this is Julliard isn’t it?” I said, “But you finally got around to accepting this music.” So I said when I got the honorary doctorate, I said, “I should have cut them up earlier.” (Laughs) Maybe I would have gotten that early. I kind of put them down for not having respected jazz up until Wynton got there. Wynton has a lot to do with that, with them having a jazz program. It kind of has an affect where it’s like a feeder band into Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra.

Murphy: Didn’t Victor Goines takeover?

Heath: Well, they appointed him afterwards but I had given the first refusal.

Murphy: You know, speaking of Wynton, I think that’s about the same time period, 2003-2004, when jazz at Lincoln Center made their move to the Time Warner bulding and set up their compound. How has that institution affected the landscape in jazz, in your opinion?

Heath: Well, Percy, George Benson and myself were invited by Wynton, when they had begun that project. In fact, before that, I was invitied to somewhere in Manhattan when Mr. Giuliani was the mayor. They were announcing that they had agreed to put the jazz at Lincoln Center up there at Columbus circle. There was this architect, he’s from South America or something, but anyways, he was there, the architect that was going to do the building of the new Lincoln Center complex. Mr. Giuliani came in and almost stepped on my feet. I was sitting there, my wife and I, and Wynton and other people. I remember when they said they were going to build it. Then, the next move, Wynton invites me and...no, my chronology is wrong. I played a concert at Alice Tully Hall with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra and the Heath Brothers. Wynton had already raised 100 Million, and I think he said, “I have to raise 125 Million, on my part, for this project.” And the next thing was when he invited George Benson, Percy and myself. We put on hard hats and we went in this place when it was construction workers here, and the big steel beams, and all this stuff. We saw it before it came the Jazz at Lincoln Center building that it is now. I don’t know who else saw it, I don’t know who else was invited. That was a revelation. Then when they finished it and I went back to play, the first thing of importance was, I was on a cruise playing and I had written this piece. Wynton had commissioned me, he said, “I want you to write a piece, I’m going to commission several people. It can’t be more than twelve minutes.” I said, “Okay, yeah.” So, I started writing this piece on the computer and getting this music together and low and behold I get another call and they say, “Oh! We forgot to tell you the program is called, ‘Let Freedom Swing.’ This is the opening performance of the new Lincoln Center Building.” He says, “The only thing [is] you have to include the text of Lyndon Johnson because ‘Let

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Freedom Swing”... he did so much for freedom in this country and others, like somebody wrote a piece for Malcolm, somebody wrote a piece for Martin Luther King, somebody...you know different people. Mandela, Darius Brubeck wrote a piece for Mandela. It was quite a night, and I got back off this cruise in the morning and I went to Lincoln Center, this new beautiful building, all complete, and low and behold, when my piece came up to be played—They had played it two days before. They usually play these things three days [before]. And my piece, I called it, “Fashion or Passion?” And I called it that because although Lyndon Johnson had passed more laws to help African Americans than any other president, I was wondering if it was expedient because of political reasons or if he really had that in him. He starts out with, (Heath imitates Johnson) “I come in front of my fellow Americans with this heavy heart.” (Laughs) That speech resonates, and resounds with me now. Then when I wrote the piece and I go there and I take co-worker from Queens College, Maurice Perez, the symphony conductor. He’s a good friend; he helped me get to Queens College. Well, I sit down and they start playing these compositions, and they finally get to my composition. Guess who is narrating? Glen Close! Glen Close narrated my piece and it went very fine, people loved it. When I went backstage I met Glen Close; I got close to Glen for a second (Laughs). All the guys, and Wynton and everybody, they loved it. I had rehearsed it before I went on the cruise but I didn’t know who was going to narrate until I got there that night. People in the audience are like Kofi Annan from the U.N, and all these dignitaries. I said, “Wow!” It was another big night for me, all of the compositions were...Toshiko [Akiyoshi] wrote one too, I think she wrote on for Eleanor Roosevelt. So, that was another night about Lincoln Center that I’ll never forget. Then, this last one with...(Laughs) I was telling you about how it was presented by Sigourney Weaver. I was telling you, “Oh my goodness, from Glen Close to Sigourney Weaver presenting me with an award?” that’s pretty good for a guy who went to 11th grade in high school, and college professor and all of that. I’ve been working hard thought; I’m a hard worker. My orchestration teacher used to do the music for the Eleanor Roosevelt show. He was from Leipzig, Germany; his name was Rudolph Schramm. He taught me how to write extend compositions. I had been writing when I went to him, so I owe him a lot.

Murphy: Can you talk a little bit about your process when you’re composing? How do you write? Do you use a computer for anything?

Heath: I use a computer for everything now, except to get ideas together. To format everything I’ve been on the computer since I started teaching at Queens, ’86 or ’87, that’s when I got my first computer and got my first notation program. Now it’s really advanced, a program called Finale. Well, I get ideas together by playing on the piano, which Dizzy told me to do many years ago, “If you’re going to write some music man, you got to play the keyboard.” I get things together, harmonically, on the keyboard. I play my saxophone and get melody, ideas, and sing melodies to myself. There’s so many different ways that music is revealed to you.

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Murphy: That's a nice way to put it.

Heath: Yeah, because I've had some T-Shirts made last year that said, "Music is in the sky for everyone to grab some," because we get hung up on one person, the American media gets hung up: Coltrane, Miles, Bo, Bump, whoever. But it's a lot of people [who] got music, and a lot of people can get it. That's a way to encourage young people, they don't have it all, and they may have grabbed a whole lot. In some cases, John Coltrane grabbed a whole lot; Dizzy, Charlie Parker, Miles, Art Tatum, they grabbed a lot of music from the sky, or wherever. But, there is still some left, that you can get some. Whenever I'm teaching that's always in my mind, so when I'm writing something the hardest thing, now, is to find something that's original. Especially, being here so many years and hearing so much music, everything begins to remind me of something else. When that happens I have to, as my teacher Schramm taught me, I have to be able to change a note here or there to make it not sound like...It's an amazing thing that with all the music that has gone before me, and is still on going with the same twelve tones of the chromatic scale, there's still people coming up with a different sound and song. Some of them are junk, but some of them are good. It's amazing, just the twelve tones, a chromatic scale!

Murphy: Have you tallied up your compositions? Do you know how many compositions you have?

Heath: Yes I have, it's a hundred and some. All of this is in my book because I had the extended works. The last long piece, extended piece, was written for the Ciano Jazz Repertorio. It's supposed to be released this year. About a year or so ago, two years maybe, I wrote this piece called "The Endless Search" and it's a piece that went on, and on with the theme. I think I got about 15 extended works. In fact, for my 80th birthday, at Queens College, they replayed a piece that was not played very well when I first wrote it. When I first got to Queens College I wrote a piece for a five piece jazz group and the symphony orchestra. It's still my only symphonic connection, and they played it again. My friend Maurice Perez, the conductor, he put it together and rehearsed it real well and they played it for my 80th birthday. It's called "Three Ears" , and "Three Ears" is the mind's ear, the heart's ear, and the body's ear. People hear music with their body, some hear analytically with their mind, and the best music is heard from your heart. You know, if you can capture those three ears, that's what this piece is about. It's about a 25 or 30 minute piece

Murphy: I've always thought it must really be a remarkable experience to hear a composition performed for the first time. You spend so much time imagining while your writing.

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Heath: Yeah, and then you can hear it on your machine.

Murphy: Yeah, right, kind of like a facsimile of the...

Heath: Yeah, cause the breath of life is not there. The machine is cool, that's what's so good about it. I'm wondering and admiring my predecessors like Duke, who didn't have the computer. He wrote all of this music, and Clark Terry told me he used to bring in some things, have it played and say, "Give it back!" and he'd tear it up. But when you got the computer, you can edit before you give it to the band. "Okay, that passage, that sounds corny. Let me re-write that." I say, "Delete" and I go and re-write again until I find something that I feel comfortable with in the machine that I know is going to be better when the breath of life, when them horns, when them people put their life in it. It's a different thing. The computer is always there now. I'm about to get into writing—I mean to doing another big band record. I have about 15 or 20 arrangements and compositions that have never been recorded yet. I'm going to play some of them at the Bluenote so I can hear, and prepare for the recording. I got a call yesterday from Wynton, his secretary asked me to do a piece for...he needed it in a couple of weeks. I said, "No, I'm going to have to pass on this one."

Murphy: (Laughs) That's Wynton's schedule huh?

Heath: Yeah, he was supposed to do another one himself, which is like a concert dedicated to the visual artists. If I write a piece for Picasso, or if I write a piece for Monet, or whoever they wanted be to write for... Wynton was supposed to do a mullasif and he got jammed. Wynton only took one lesson, or something. He took one lesson for me about writing and never came back. He said, "Man, you showed me so much in that one lesson," and now I say, "Well, can I get a lesson from you?" Wynton Marsalis is writing some of the best, and he writes so much. He's written, you know, to me, in my book I say, Wynton's "wisdom" that's my words for Wynton Marsalis. In my unique names, Wynton is "wisdom." He's so dedicated and persistent.

Murphy: He's tireless.

Heath: Oh man! Wynton Marsalis is an incredible young man to me.

Murphy: He only sleeps about four hours a night.

Heath: I mean he is a super-musician. His mind set, the way he speaks, integrity, is so on it. Even John Lewis, I remember John Lewis praising Wynton, because John Lewis had an idea to marry the Western Classical music and Jazz, and that was the MJQ's forte. But Wynton, after he won all the Grammys playing Bach, and Haydn, and all that, then he said, "Oh, no I'm not going to write that." Except, now and then, he writes something for

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a dance, Alvin Alley, or a dance troupe or something. Otherwise, he concentrates on jazz writing and he's incredible. But, I couldn't take him up on his offer.

Murphy: Recently, I think he had a concert at Dizzy's that was broadcast live on Facebook. They had something like hundred, and hundreds, and hundreds of thousands of people listening to this concert through Facebook. Do you follow any of that kind of platform?

Heath: No, I don't mess with Facebook. Youtube, yes. I don't have time to do all that. Facebook and Twitter, I didn't get to all that. I got to a lot, I got to the computer, online, email; that's enough. I don't go online looking around, except for Youtube. The music is on there, and everybody stealing all of our music and don't pay us. As a composer, your royalties get...cause people are stealing off the computer, they put it on the computer. Somebody just called me, Michael Weiss, the pianist, he just called me yesterday and said some guy gave him a copy of me at the Left Bank Jazz Society in Baltimore. Many years ago I had a band with Kenny Dorham, Cedar Walton, Sonny Redd on alto, and Pepper Adams on the baritone. I had never heard this; I just know that this was probably in the first part...I was the liaison person for the Left Bank Jazz Society in Baltimore, which was, before that, was called the Integrated Jazz Society because there were people of all races. They put out their business cards and had a little guy with the saxophone on the side, the image, and that was me because I'm the person who got everybody down there. They'd call me, "Hey Jimmy, can you get, do you know Coltrane's number? Can you get him to come down to Left Bank?" Everybody played the Left Bank Jazz Society in Baltimore, that was one of our favorite spots, and that's how I got hooked up. The guy who was one of the board members of the Left Bank Jazz Society, ended up going into the service, and he went to college and he became a doctor and now he's the head of the Sojourn and Douglass College. I just went back and played since '85 when I got my first honorary doctorate, which was a doctorate of humane letters, it wasn't music.

Murphy: Well, hearing you talk about Youtube, and all of the things that can pull up, all of these archival performances from people; do you spend a lot of time just listening casually to music? Do you listen to music at home?

Heath: Yeah. I've been stuck this year listening to Delius, Frederick Delius. He's like, for lack of another word, I like romantic, I like melodic. The romantic era: Debussy, and Ravel, he's in that bag, Frederick Delius. I've been listening, in retrospect, to, I've got some recordings by a company called Chronological Classics from France. I've got five C.D.'s of Jimmy Lunceford's band. I haven't talked to Wynton since we did the thing with Willie Nelson, with Cosby. I have to tell him he's been doing everybody but Jimmy Lunceford. Jimmy Lunceford had one of the greatest bands. Who's that? Tommy Dorsey, Glen Millis. In a book I got, by Gunther Schuller, he said that he had the best band; he was Duke's competition. But, I remember, Jimmy Lunceford's band, I remember hearing

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it when I was a kid. I heard all the big bands, I heard Tommy Dorsey when “I’ll never smile again” (Imitates Dorsey). All that, you know when Frankie was there. Being around the giants of music, and I told a lot of these stories that are going to be in this documentation, in my book. I told about Coltrane and I, with Dizzy and we’d go to the Riverside Theatre in Milwaukee. We were opening the next day, so we both loved Jimmy Dorsey’s alto saxophone playing because we were both playing altos, at the time, in Dizzy’s band. We went the night before we opened, and I was really taken aback because I said, “Oh man, look at him ‘Trane! He’s drunk!” (Laughs) I didn’t realize! Everybody does something. Somebody told me that, they said, “Yeah!” Getting back to that, one of my pet peeves is calling people stars. I don’t know if I mentioned that last time; I just don’t like that. I used to argue with my brother, Percy, “It ain’t nothing but a word.” I’d say, “Yeah, but stars are in the sky, these are people on earth, human beings; they screw up. The only way that they’re a star is that it blows up.” (Laughs) There’s other adjectives or something you can call somebody. You know, “Oh, Coltrane he’s a star,” get out of here.

Murphy: Well, “giants” is another word.

Heath: Giants is cool. Yeah, I like that one. There are a lot of words you could use, but that comes from Hollywood. Hollywood is responsible for that star and stardom, and people believe that. “Oh, he’s a star, she’s a star, and Britney’s a star, Elvis is a star?” What did he do? Same thing that everybody else did, the same shit—excuse me—that everybody else did. He used drugs, womanizer—look at a star! (Laughs)

Murphy: Was that your driver there?

Heath: I mean, I don’t mean to call no names. Everybody’s jumping on people but I’ve been around giants and they all have pain, and they all get sick and die. They are not stars, they’re talented human beings and I admire them a lot but that number one is a part of the stardom syndrome. If they say that this is the number one record, the lady from over there, that sings, from Ireland and she’s number one... There are a lot of people who are in church who have a voice as good as her! But, they get hooked on who is number one, and that means somebody else is number ten. What are you, chopped liver? What? What’s wrong with that? The Yankees, I hate them! Imperialists!

Murphy: Of the giants, who you’ve talked about, are there any giants with whom you did not get to play?

Heath: Duke Ellington, Count Basie... Well I played with a lot of the others like Gil Evans’ Band, Thad Jones’ Band, Dizzy’s Band, of course. Dizzy’s my favorite, he’s my mentor. I think of Dizzy Gillespie everyday, like my parents. He flashes through my mind at some time during the day. Miles, not as much, but he was talented. People ask

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me all the time, I got an email this morning before I came here. Somebody wants to do something about Coltrane and I said, “I’ve been talking about Coltrane for 40 years now, 43.” He passed when he was 40. Everybody’s talking about, “Well, you were with ‘Trane...” Well, yeah! Copy what’s in the other book! I said it, I’m not going to create anything new about Coltrane cause you want to create another book.

Murphy: Now you can say, “Just read my book.”

Heath: Yeah!

Murphy: Get it from the book, *the* book.

Heath: Yeah, cause why didn’t somebody write a book? That made me so mad! Why don’t you write a book about Milt Jackson, one of the most talented musicians ever? I guess he’s number ten, he ain’t number one; Miles is number one! (Laughs) I remember Pastor Berry used to kick Miles’ butt.

Murphy: I guess one thing we should touch on is, we are here over the next few days celebrating the NEA Jazz Masters, and this 2010 crop of Jazz Masters. You were named an NEA Jazz Master in 2003, so you have been part of this group for some years now, and you have attended some of these events celebrating the Jazz Masters. Can you describe the experience of having that title given to you and being part of that group?

Heath: I love the title, “NEA Jazz Master”, and I appreciate what Dana Gioia, the gentleman who just retired, tried to do to give us more visibility and some kind of an equal exposure of other types of music. The other thing is, I found it ludicrous that they call my hero Dizzy Gillespie, a Jazz Master, and would give him \$20,000 life achievement when some people are getting a MacArthur Award for \$300,000 genius award like Max Roach, or somebody like Ornette Coleman, or somebody like the soprano player that lived in France—I can’t think of his name now.

Murphy: Steve Lacy?

Heath: Steve Lacy. My government, the way that I pay all these taxes every year, and I’m sure Dizzy did, the way they give us \$20,000, a meager sum, and call it Life Achievement Award! Get out of here! I criticized them at a meeting, right after I got my twenty. I said

Murphy: Good timing, after instead of before.

Heath: Yeah (Laughs). I said the same thing that I’m saying on this microphone, “You’ve got to be kidding!” The Danish Jazzpar prize is \$35,000, which I missed getting.

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Tommy Flanagan got it; I was up for it. Then, the Japanese had just given Ornette Coleman \$150,000. I went to one other thing where Ornette got Carnegie or something? Me and George Wein were sitting together and they gave him \$200,00 or something, for another award. I'm saying to myself—and then my government is going to give me \$20,00 and I'm supposed to scream, "Great! Great! I'm so happy!" What can I buy? I can buy a car and then I'm done. So I worked all my life for a car.

Murphy: And then you didn't get the car, and instead you composed a piece for a big band and made a recording.

Heath: Oh, I got a car going on the Phillip Morris tour. That was a three-week tour, I came back and bought a \$20,000 car, you know what I'm saying? Now, my government is going to honor me and—actually I was given with...the proclamation is signed by George W Bush, and people in Canada knew I didn't approve when I read it and the proclamation said, "And President Bush." The Canadians laughed cause they knew he was nobody. So, anyways, at a meeting with the gentleman we just saw in the lobby, Duane Brown, I told him I said, "Look, this is a great honor to be named but I think the money is not enough. Life Achievement, if you didn't call it Life Achievement, it's okay. But somebody works all their life and you give them \$20,000. What is that, a dollar a year?"

Murphy: Depends on how long you live.

Heath: That's what I'm talking about! (Laughs) They went up the next year to \$25,000. I said, "Can I get mine retroactive?" They said, "No, Mr. Heath." (Laughs)

Murphy: They called you Mr. Heath.

Heath: Yeah, that's the story of my life—rejected. I stand rejected. I stand corrected and I stand rejected. (Laughs)

Murphy: Well, we have to wrap up pretty soon but one last question to ask you is how do you see the future of jazz evolving? Are you hopeful?

Heath: I think jazz will be here forever, I don't see it going anywhere. There's too many people, young people, that are playing the music and being connected with the Thelonious Monk Institute, as I am on the board of trustees for many years; I see musicians every year. I was very fortunate to be, not last year but the year before last, when a saxophonist John Irabagon won the saxophone competition. We had the concert out at the Kodak Center honoring B.B. King. This last year I was back in D.C. where they came back. The bassist, Ben Williams, won. They had all these greats, and even these 13-year old bassist that's a monster. So how are you going to stop it if these people are still

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learning in to play in that fashion, and learning the language of jazz and still wanting to do it? They'll find a way. If there is a will, there is a way. I believe it will survive. They said it was dead when I first started, "Oh, jazz is dead," but its not! It's people! All the people are dead. It never was the number one music of the world because it's, you know, we work on it everyday, all day, people who listen—they don't. They are not at the level, the education level is not the same, in this country in particular that it should be. You know, there was a time when Dr. Billy Taylor and the jazz mobile, when we went into the intermediate schools here in New York to play for kids, and they said, "Oh!" they loved it because we played an evolution kind of program from ragtime all through all the faces of this music. I played the theme from Sanford and Son on my soprano and all the kids loved it. They said, "Oh, this is so good!" In Brooklyn, in Queens and everything, cause all they do is bring in string quartets all the time, they never bring this music in. So kids, you now, we were doing that and Wynton, with his program for kids...I just got an email from this woman who has a program called Kids for Coltrane out in Long Island. She's teaching kids to listen to that music, so it's not going to die.

Murphy: Ken is there anything that you would like to follow up on, anything that we missed?

Ken Kimery: No, I think you've really covered it. I must say, we are all looking forward to getting a copy of—purchasing a copy of your book.

Heath: I know! (Laughs)

Murphy: Are you going to be coming through St. Louis on your book tour?

Heath: I wish I could, that's the home of Sarah Palin! What's the other guy? John Complain and Sarah Palin! (Laughs) There's the list!

END OF INTERVIEW

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Transcribed by Kyle Kelly-Yahner

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