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JON HENDRICKS
NEA Jazz Master (1993)

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Zimmerman: Today is August 17th. We're in Washington, D.C., at the National Portrait Gallery. Today we're interviewing Mr. Jon Hendricks, composer, lyricist, playwright, singer: the poet laureate of jazz. Jon.


Hendricks: Yes.

Zimmerman: Would you give us your full name, the birth place, and share with us your familial history.

Hendricks: My name is John – J-o-h-n – Carl Hendricks. I was born September 16th, 1921, in Newark, Ohio, the ninth child and the seventh son of Reverend and Mrs. Willie Hendricks. My father was a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the AME Church.

Zimmerman: Who were your brothers and sisters?

Hendricks: My brothers and sisters chronologically: Norman Stanley was the oldest. We call him Stanley. William Brooks, WB, was next. My sister, the oldest girl, Florence Hendricks – Florence Missouri Hendricks – whom we called Zuttie, for reasons I never

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really found out – was next. Then Charles Lancel Hendricks, who is surviving, came next. Stuart Devon Hendricks was next. Then my second sister, Vivian Christina Hendricks, was next. Then Edward Alan Hendricks came next. Then I came. Then my brother James Hendricks came. After him, my brother Clifford Jiles Hendricks came. After him, my brother Robert came. After him, my youngest sister, Lola Mae came. And then the doctor stopped coming.

Zimmerman: A pretty large family. What was life like in the Hendricks family?

Hendricks: Spiritual. Very spiritual, because the first thing that we had to do every morning when we got up was to kneel down by whatever object was handy, a chair or a table, and have my father say the morning prayer, which lasted always much too long for us. But the length of the time it lasted depended on what he thought needed adjusting and needed God's attention that day. Then we lined up to go to the bathroom for the morning toilet, and we soon figured out a way to do that. My father figured that it should be done by age, the youngest first. So the youngest ones would go first, the older ones would help them wash up in the morning, and then the rest of us would stand in line by age. So the oldest one would be last.

Zimmerman: You must have started pretty early.


Hendricks: Yes. 6 o'clock was our starting time.

Zimmerman: Take me on a tour of the Toledo of your childhood. What are some of your memories of Toledo?

Hendricks: I don't have regular childhood memories, like most children, because I was in show business. When I was seven I started singing with my mother in church, because my father, although he was a wonderful preacher, could not sing. He had a voice like a wounded bull elephant. In fact they had a singing contest amongst all the preachers, and he was so bad they gave him the cake. They said, Reverend, you deserve this cake. So that was my first memory of standing up in church and singing alongside my mother, who used to lead the singing. That was at seven. Then I started to sing outside of church at about seven-and-a-half. I found out I could make money. People liked my voice. They liked the way I sang. They would give me tips. People would give me money to sing. I found – that was a very handy thing to find out, because in the Depression I practically supported my whole family.

Zimmerman: Did your father also travel as a minister?

Hendricks: Yes. I went to 11 different schools in about six years. We would be moving all the time. They shifted him around quite a bit.

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Zimmerman: So he was a full-time minister?

Hendricks: Oh yes. Yes, except during the Depression he had to work as a barber in order to eat, because times were tough during the Depression. There are a lot of jokes about that, but they were. It was incredible. It was – if I hadn't lived through it, I don't think I would have believed it. That was really a bad time. There was the march on Washington of the unemployed, which is now being shown on television, when MacArthur and Eisenhower fired on the people who came to get relief from the unemployment. A very dark history in their military careers. It was very bad. I remember standing in line, under President Hoover, just to be fed, to get a few cans of government beef and stew and things like that. Very degrading to have to stand in line to be fed. It's not a good feeling for any soul. It would be better if you would be given a job and at least the illusion that you were earning your own living, which is exactly what Franklin Roosevelt did when he was elected. The economic situation in the country didn't change. There was no real economic relief. But he gave people jobs. Their job was to go out and tear up the street that they lived on, and then re-pave it. They made 14, 15 dollars a week. But they had a feeling of a dignified soul who was working hard and supporting his family. Psychologically, a very, very great thing to do and a wonderful thing for him to do, because he came from a class of people that had no feeling for the mass of people or the working people. They're still mad at him for that.


Zimmerman: So your dad was a pretty important figure in your life.

Hendricks: Very much. He was a magician of a sort.

Zimmerman: How so?

Hendricks: I saw him do things like – we were in a place in Kentucky called Greenup, outside Paducah [editor's note: but Greenup is on the opposite side of the state from Paducah]. He had a little church there. He used to sit on the porch every night and talk with the local white preacher. He'd always come by and sit down and talk with my father. They'd have a cup of coffee. One night – I was always near my father, because of all his sons – he had 12 sons – I was picked to succeed him. So he kept me pretty much near him. I'd always be somewhere nearby. So one night this preacher came by. They got to talking. Somehow the subject came around to race. This preacher said, "Reverend, you know I like you," he said, "but I just can't help feeling that my people are superior to your people." My father said, "Brother, do you believe in God?" The man said, "Reverend, you know I do." He said, "Then what's your problem?" That cracked me up. I thought that was so great, because that just ironed out the whole thing right there. They just sat in their rocking chairs and kept rocking, and they rocked until the guy got up, said goodnight, and went home. That just answered everything.

Zimmerman: Did he ever come back?

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Hendricks: Oh yeah, he came back. He kept coming back. That I thought was so succinct and so right on, because I've since thought about that many years of my life, and I've come to the same conclusion.

Zimmerman: What's that?

Hendricks: To be a racist, you have to be a person who does not believe in God, because if you believe in God, then you must know that God is no respecter of persons. St. Paul says it. It's right – it's in the book. So if God is no respecter of persons, how can a person created by God be a respecter of persons? It's impossible. So that makes that remark that my father made even more cogent and more right to the point.

Zimmerman: Your mom was a singer.


Hendricks: Yes, and she was also a lyricist. She wrote lyrics to spirituals.

Zimmerman: What influence did she have on your musical development?

Hendricks: Total. She was my agent, because I always was in the kitchen with her too. I was very close to my father and my mother. All my other brothers and sisters developed their own little outside interests. My sisters, they were always older. They were in the 15s and 16s. They had discovered boys, so they were always talking about this one and that one, but I was always right around my mother and my father. I saw my mother do a most remarkable thing. A man – we lived on the railroad tracks. People used to come by. At that time, people rode the rails. They didn't have money to travel. So they rode the rails. There were a lot of people who traveled by rail without money, called hoboes or tramps. Josh White was one of those. He used to come by the house all the time, because he was from Richmond, like my father.

Zimmerman: Josh White, the baseball player?

Hendricks: No. Josh White, the folk singer. He used to stop by all the time. But one time this man in the town we were living in at the time, which was Kenton, Ohio – a guy named Whitman Red, they called him. He was ne'er-do-well and a thief and a gambler and a pimp-type person – that kind of guy – shot and killed a man on the railroad tracks. It was a big thing, because it happened right outside our house. All the neighbors were just astounded by this murder that took place. The police were there. They were measuring things off. They had the thing all taped off, the area. It was a big – it caused a big ruckus. So they came over to my mother's house. "Oh Sister Hendricks, isn't that terrible what Whitman Red did? Isn't that awful, that terrible man. That murderous, no-good scoundrel. I knew he was no good. I knew nothing would ever come of him." Talking like this. I'm sitting there in the kitchen on my stool. I'm listening to all this.

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Then they all left. My mother was washing the dishes. She looked out the window at the police still there, walking around. She must have forgotten that I was there, because she said, “Poor Red.” And I thought, poor Red? He’s the murderer. My mother had compassion for the murderer. I’ve since understood that that is a very high spiritual thing to do.

Zimmerman: Absolutely. To be able to forgive those who are . . .

Hendricks: Yes. But I had no understanding of it then, because I was just a little kid. But I began to look at her. I would watch her much more closely. I never saw her do anything bad to anybody, and I never heard her say a bad word about anybody.

Zimmerman: What type of music did she sing?


Hendricks: Church music. Neither my father nor my mother ever heard me sing in a place where liquor was sold. They would not come. My father won a car in 1939. A car. Nobody had a car in 1939. He won a car in a raffle and would not go into the theater to get the car. One of my older brothers got so mad. He says, “What is the matter with you?” My father knocked him down and told him, “Go to bed.” He says, “I’m a grown man.” He says, “You don’t get that old in this house.”

Zimmerman: Sounds like my dad. Did he ever get the car?

Hendricks: No. He would not go into the theater. You had to go into the theater, present the ticket, and get the car. My father would not do that.

Zimmerman: What were some of the songs that your mom sang?

Hendricks: I remember *Nearer My God to Thee*. I remember *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho*. I always thought – I was always an English major. I always thought, *Fit*, that’s wrong. The past tense of fight is fought. But then I realized that, listen, these were slaves who came from Africa and had no English training and had to learn to this language. So how poetic that is: *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho*. Of course he fit the battle. What else? I thought that was great. Then I begin to – as I begin to become a lyric writer and admire all the great lyricists – W. S. Gilbert and people like that, Oscar Hammerstein the Second – I really love him – Lorenz Hart, I love, although he’s pretty brokenhearted in his lyrics. Cole Porter, who never could write a really romantic lyric, because he never really cared that much about romance. Johnny Mercer was my favorite. But then I realized that none of them had the true poetry of those nameless, faceless slaves who wrote the lyrics to the spirituals. What is any more poetic and beautiful than, “Heaven, heaven, everybody talking about heaven ain’t going there”? That’s a great line. You’ve got to be hard pressed to think of a better line than that one. That’s a great line. All those songs. Then that led me into Paul Laurence Dunbar. There’s a poet. What a guy. This guy could write

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– he wrote in the Shakespearean mode. He wrote in the Shelley and Byron mode. He wrote that poem about art and love. It’s gorgeous. But when he wrote in the slavery manner, the idiomatic manner of the slaves, he was superb, like that line where he talks about going . . .

Zimmerman: “Liza, Liza, bless the Lord. Don’t you know these days is broad? If you don’t get up you scamp, there’ll be trouble in this camp. Think I gonna let you sleep?” It goes on. I remember my grandmother’s very favorite poems.

Hendricks: I like that line where he says, “They set down to some unskun coon.” Unskun. Of course skun is the past tense of skin.

Zimmerman: You got me.

Hendricks: That’s great.

Zimmerman: Your mom said that you were blessed. What does she mean by that? Also, tied to that, you were picked as your father’s successor. Is that sort of biblical? The seventh son?

Hendricks: Yes, yes. They knew more than I understood that they knew, because I’m the ninth child and the seventh son. 9 and 7 are 16. I’m born the ninth month on the sixteenth day, and 1 and 6 are 7. So that’s mysterious too. I think they knew more than we ever knew that they knew, but it was of a spiritual knowledge, so it wasn’t anything that they ever talked about.

Zimmerman: Did you ever receive any voice lessons while you were coming up?

Hendricks: No, no. I never – even to this day I never studied. My wife just said to me this morning, before I came here – she said, “Dianne Reeves, I talked to her at the Hollywood Bowl. She has voice lessons every week, twice a week, and she practices every day.” She says, “You never practice and you never had any.”


Zimmerman: That’s incredible.

Hendricks: No. I just – I’m the only one in my family of 15 surviving children – we had 17. Two died – but I’m the only one that had any musical talent at all.

Zimmerman: Really?

Hendricks: Yeah, the only. It’s like a finger pointing: that one. Because . . .

Zimmerman: Sort of like Daniel.

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Hendricks: Yeah. It was not that I had some aptitude. I really had a true bent towards music. It was always – I was working practically from birth. As I told you, I never had a childhood. While other kids went to play baseball, basketball – went junking, we called it: gathering up old pieces of wire and metals and taking them and selling them for enough money to go to the movies, I would very seldom have a chance to do things like that, because I had to go to Art Tatum’s house when I was in junior high school. I had to come by his house and rehearse for the shows that we were going to do that night. We did two shows a night for two years I sang with him.

Zimmerman: Tell us about that experience.

Hendricks: It just came about. I knew the Tatum family all my life. They lived five houses from us. Sister Tatum and Sister Hendricks were sisters in the church. We just knew each other. I knew his brother Carl, who later became his manager. He hung out with my brother Stuart. They always went around and did little – what kids do. Stole stuff from the 5 and 10, went down to the theater and sneaked in. They did all those things. I knew Art all my life, because we were – we did a lot of amateur shows, and we would be on the same shows a lot. Sometimes he would win, sometimes I would win, and sometimes we would perform together, and then we would win.

Zimmerman: What were some of the songs that you two did together?

Hendricks: The big hit that we had was called *Mighty Like a Rose*. Did you ever hear that?

Zimmerman: No.

Hendricks: That’s a very old song. [Hendricks sings:] “Sweetest little fellow. Everybody knows. Don’t know what to call him, but he’s mighty like a rose.” Then it went on. It was a great tune. But then we did popular songs of the day, like *Love Letters in the Sand*. [Hendricks sings:] “On a day like today, we pass the time away, writing love letters in the sand.” There’s a lot of good popular songs.

Zimmerman: It’s beautiful.

Hendricks: Yeah, it was really a lot of pretty stuff. I took after Gene Austin. I liked Gene Austin. He was on the radio every night for half an hour. He had a high tenor voice like I had. So I used to sing a lot of his songs.

Zimmerman: When did you start listening to him? When did you recognize him?

Hendricks: I recognized him before anybody, because he was singing, and I was always interested in that. I also liked Russ Columbo. Russ Columbo was very handsome. Italian extraction, I think he was. He got killed in Los Angeles. He was a very handsome guy, good singer. He was, I thought, better than Bing Crosby, but his life got cut short.

Zimmerman: What made you want to sing to emulate him?

Hendricks: I liked the songs that he chose. I used to sing a lot of the songs that he would sing. I heard Russ Columbo do [Hendricks sings:] “Alone from night to night you’ll find me too weak to break the chains that bind me. I need no shackles to remind me. I’m just a prisoner of love.” I love that song. To this day I love that song. That’s great song. He’s the first one I heard sing that, ever.

Zimmerman: That’s beautiful. I can’t think of whom I remember singing that, but . . .

Hendricks: Billy Eckstine sang it. It’s a great song.

Zimmerman: By age 11 you were performing on the radio. I have a quote that said that – it’s quoting you – it says, “I was a pro at age 11.”

Hendricks: Yeah. Oh yeah. I was making \$125 a week. That was about \$10,000 a week today.

Zimmerman: That’s incredible.

Hendricks: It was a lot of money.

Zimmerman: That’s a lot of money.

Hendricks: Sure. I was a rich kid.

Zimmerman: I bet you were. A singer, and rich. I bet you had all the girls, too.


Hendricks: Oh yeah. I didn’t know what to do with them, but I had them.

Zimmerman: What station?

Hendricks: It was WSPD, Toledo.

Zimmerman: What was the context? In what time of day did you perform?

Hendricks: I was with another group of guys. We were called the Swing Buddies. It was four guys – three men and me – because I was really a kid. They used to take care of me

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very well. Like when they went to have a drink, they never did it around me. When they went to have whatever else they had, like cigarettes with no names on them, they never did that around me. I was very well protected. It amazes me now how people can do what they do around children, and even now they dispense stuff like that to children. It's amazing.

Zimmerman: Yes it is. This is something I know very little about, but it intrigues me: after high school, you lived in Detroit and sang with your brother-in-law. Is it Jesse Jones?

Hendricks: Jesse Jones. They called him Juice Jones for obvious reasons. I almost never saw him sober. He was a drinker. In those days, that was the dope of choice, alcohol. Alcohol should be proscribed as a narcotic, incidentally. They're very loathe to do that, because the liquor companies spend a lot of money lobbying, but that stuff should be proscribed as a narcotic, because it's caused the death of so many people and so many great artists, and it's completely useless. It has no real use.

Zimmerman: A mind-changing substance. What did you perform with Juice Jones?

Hendricks: I performed whatever were the popular jazz songs of the day, like *Nagasaki*. Have you ever heard that?

Zimmerman: No.

Hendricks: [Hendricks sings:] "Hot ginger and dynamite. That's all they serve at night. Back in Nagasaki where the fellers chew tobaccy and the women wicky wacky woo." That was a big hit I think for Cab Calloway. He did that. It was a great song.

Zimmerman: Approximately what year was that?


Hendricks: Let me see. I'm bad chronologically. I'm very, very bad, because I never think in terms of time and years.

Zimmerman: '35?

Hendricks: To me it's 1937 right now. There's no difference in my mind in time. But it was about '35. '36, I think. '36 would be nearer.

Zimmerman: Were you also playing drums then?

Hendricks: No, I hadn't started playing – I didn't start playing drums until after I came back from World War II, which really was World War II. Whoa, what an experience that was. Good Lord. I couldn't believe what was going on. In the first place, I couldn't

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believe that I was in the army. Then when I looked up, I was in a segregated army. Then this segregated army was being sent to Europe to fight Nazism, but segregating an army was Nazism. I thought, how incongruous – and in the Senate too, not to mention the House of Representatives. We were over there. I couldn't believe that. That really got to me. I said, whoa, wait a minute. There's something really wrong here, because that must have made the Germans feel wonderful.

Zimmerman: Were you stationed in Germany?


Hendricks: I got to Germany, but I went through Scotland, Wales, and England first. We had race riots all the way – constant fights with American white soldiers, Southern or Northern, but mostly Southern, because in England or Scotland or Wales there was a shortage of black women. So if we had a date, it was a Scottish or a Welsh or an English girl. To the Southern whites and the northern American whites, that was just something that we were not supposed to do. The fact that we were outside the United States of America and had no choice, never occurred to them. They just would attack us in full force and with weapons. It caused a lot of – it caused some deaths and a lot of woundings. A lot of blood was shed over this, because this went on all the time. So we took to carrying guns in our waist bands. When we had a girl – we had a date – and we saw some of them coming, we'd open the button of our jackets – you know the Eisenhower jacket – and show the butt of this pistol, so that they would leave us alone. It got to be that bad. It was really stupid on their part. In the first place, it was not their business. They're not monitors of the world's behavior. That's the first thing. In the second place, what did they expect us to do?

Zimmerman: Don't want to give that a thought.

Hendricks: No, I don't want to even think about that. But that was the first part of the experience. In other words, we were veterans at fighting by the time we met the Germans. We had fought white American soldiers and their officers, who were definitely behind everything they did. So I really got in a lot of trouble, because I would always protest. I would go to the commander of the area and protest. Of course I would immediately be transferred into another situation like that. So it was pretty bad.

Zimmerman: Did you perform any music while you were in the service?

Hendricks: Yes. In England I put on shows for the USO. I had directed shows in my high school. They had a yearly show called Scott's a Poppin'. I used to write, produce, and direct that, so I put that on my resume in the army. So they picked me to do the same thing. When they would send USO shows to England, then it would be several acts. It would be a juggler, perhaps, a vocalist, and some girls dancing, or sang. I would have to take all these acts and put them together in a coherent show with one of them going on first and the second and third and then the star act at the end.

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Zimmerman: So while you were in high school, were you not only involved in music but in theater as well?

Hendricks: Oh yeah. I was doing shows at least twice a year. Then I did the big yearly thing. Scott's a Poppin', we called it. I went to Scott High School. I did that for three of the four years I was there.

Zimmerman: I'd like to go back to Detroit for just one moment. While you were there playing with Juice Jones, you were singing jazz.

Hendricks: Yeah.

Zimmerman: Who were some of the more well-known Detroit musicians that you met or played with during those times?

Hendricks: Hank Jones.

Zimmerman: The pianist.

Hendricks: Barry Harris. Barry Harris was working at a place called the Bluebird, I think. Tommy Flanagan, too, was there – were there.

Zimmerman: All the great pianists.


Hendricks: Yeah. There were some wonderful musicians in Detroit. Wardell Gray, Billy Mitchell. Some wonderful horn players too.

Zimmerman: A trumpet player, Billy.

Hendricks: Billy Mitchell plays tenor. There were some good trumpet players. There was a family of bass players. Doug Watkins was one of the younger members of that family. I forget some of the names, but there's always – there were some great musicians working around there. It was really wonderful. It was a great time for me. I had a wonderful time.

Zimmerman: How did that affect your life? Did it reinforce where you were going?

Hendricks: Oh yeah. By that time I was a professional artist. There was nothing else for me to do. I wasn't – I was always doing well in school. I got all A's. I was an English major, as I told you. I got all A's in English. My minor was history, because I always was interested in the history of this terrible place where we lived in here, called Earth. I don't know what in the world was going on in this place. I always asked, why am I here? I

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never quite understood what the devil I am doing in this place. I've asked myself that from the time I was one year old. Without speaking, it would be in my mind. I would look around and I would say, what am I doing here?, because it looked so dumb to me. It looked like the dumbest place in the universe.

Zimmerman: I tell you. You've made a lot of sense out of it.

Hendricks: I think that was a matter of survival.

Zimmerman: At what point in your life – you just mentioned you're 14 years old, you're in Detroit, and music is your life.

Hendricks: I was 16 when I was in Detroit. That's right. It must have been not '36 but '39, because that's when I graduated, and I couldn't have left until after I graduated. I wish I had a better sense of time. My wife knows all these things. I usually ask her. When someone asks me so-and-so, I say, "Hey Judith, when was this?" She knows when my mother died. I don't know when my mother died. I don't know the dates. I remember the day, but I don't believe in time. I think time is a man-made thing. In the spirit there is no time, and I'm always in the spirit of things.

Zimmerman: When did you feel like you had come into your own? At what point – when did you realize that this was something – this was who you were? You were a singer, a lyricist.

Hendricks: I had that feeling at 7. I knew that at 7.

Zimmerman: Was there something that told you that? Was there some experience that you had, and you just knew that you had something pretty unique to offer?

Hendricks: I always heard music in here. Even before I could talk I heard music. It was always something playing in my head I can hear. Right now I hear music. I hear music all the time. That's the blessing, I think.

Zimmerman: That's a wonderful thing. After you returned from the military – Mr. Hendricks – your dad was from Virginia.

Hendricks: Yes, Richmond.

Zimmerman: Were your grandparents also from Richmond?

Hendricks: I don't know, because my father was a runaway. So he never talked about his life. He had a sister that we looked for almost all our lives. I think she was finally located

in New Jersey, but by that time he had died. So we never knew much about where he came from, where he came to Virginia from.

Zimmerman: How about your mom? Where was she from?

Hendricks: My mother – we trace her ancestry pretty good. She’s the daughter of a woman who was 50% Cherokee, whose mother was full-blooded Cherokee and married a son of the biggest slave-owner in Virginia. James McGaffick, Sr., owned more slaves than anybody in Virginia. Lived in Wythe County. He had my great-grandfather by this woman who was his favorite, much like Thomas Jefferson. He had a great regard for his son. He took care of his son and sent him to school, educated him, but he sold his mother. So his son was furious. So he ran away from the plantation and married my great-grandmother, who was the daughter of this Cherokee chief. The Cherokees were an East Coast tribe, up and down the East Coast, down as far as Florida and the Carolinas, before they moved them west into Oklahoma, areas like that. They were the musicians and the poets of the seven tribes. So my grandmother lived up in West Virginia and married my grandfather, who was a slave who had been given his freedom. His name was John Carrington. I was named after him. They had six daughters, one of whom was my mother. So it makes her one-fourth Cherokee. Makes me one-eighth Cherokee. My daughter is after me now to go back and get photostats of all those records, because they’re in the courthouse at Huntington, because if you can prove one-eighth Cherokee, you don’t have to pay any more taxes and you will be eligible for some money for the lands that they took before they moved the people west.

Zimmerman: Your grandmother’s name was?


Hendricks: Carrington.

Zimmerman: And your grandfather’s name was?

Hendricks: Yes, his name was Carrington. That’s how she got that name.

Zimmerman: Tell us a little more about Fats Waller and his relationship with your dad.

Hendricks: Fats Waller was just one of the children of Reverend Waller in Richmond, who was a friend of my father’s. So whenever Fats came through Toledo, which was quite often, because Toledo – Toledo, if you look on a map of the United States, the state of Ohio is shaped like a heart, something like a heart. It is in almost the heart of America. During that time, the mode of transportation was train. People traveled from the East Coast to the West Coast by train. They changed trains in Toledo. So it was an important town, because it was a switch town. So people got off, and sometimes they stayed there for two or three days. Caught another train out, and kept – it was a place to break up the trip west, which took a long time in those days – four or five days before the trains got

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faster and you could do it in three days. But it was a very important town for that reason. It was a lot of activity going on, a lot of illegal activity. Michigan, I think, was dry, so whiskey was being transported back and forth between Ohio and Michigan by the gangsters. In Toledo it was the Niccovoli mob. In Detroit it was the Purple Gang. I worked at the Chateau La France for the Niccovoli mob. I would have to spend my time back in the back by the kitchen door. I would watch this big pack of touring cars drive up. These four men would get out with the big overcoats and the big Bossolino hats. They would come in, take off their overcoats, take these big shotguns out from under their overcoats, and stack them in a barrel by the door. They would just come off of one of the runs, whiskey runs, riding shotgun for the trucks. Then they would go into the room and they would stop. They would rub my head. They said, "Hi kid." They'd rub my head, because it was considered good luck in those days to rub a nigger's head. That was the way it was put. I don't want these interviews to be amended, to be sanitized in any way. That was the way it was put. You rub a nigger's head for good luck. That was degrading, and it was awful. I would feel so mad. They would put this wad of money in my hand. I would look. It would be sometimes a \$10 bill, which was my family's rent and food for two weeks. So my anger would begin to abate.

Zimmerman: Pay you for your misery.


Hendricks: And my anger abated commiserately with the amount of money. So I learned a little bit about that kind of anger. I learned that perhaps it's not anything that you should be angry about, because if someone calls you a name, and you get angry about it, then isn't that anger an acceptance of the fact that you are whatever name it is they called you? Do you understand what I'm saying?

Zimmerman: Yes I do.

Hendricks: So I begin to realize, yeah, because I always had a logical mind. What are you mad at? He called you a nigger.

Zimmerman: That's not you, so why get mad?

Hendricks: That's not me. What are you getting mad at? Because if you're mad, then you're a nigger. I said, no, that ain't me. So then I learned, I'm not going to get mad. I applied that lesson to my son many years later, when he was in school in England. I took my four kids to London. We'll get to that later. He got kicked out of four schools. It cost me a lot of money. I finally asked him, "What is it? What is the matter with you?" He said, "He called me a nigger." I said, "Hey, I'm a nigger. So you are a nigger." I said, "But why don't you take pride in it instead of being ashamed of it? Why don't you take pride in the fact that everybody's playing and singing your music? The whole world is playing and singing your music. Why don't you have pride in that?" He thought about that. He says, "Yeah, that's right." I said, "Right." I had no trouble with him.

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Zimmerman: Which son was that? Eric?

Hendricks: Eric, yes.

Zimmerman: I read something that was interesting. Art Tatum – we’re going to get into I guess briefly . . .

Hendricks: I guess I sidetracked you with that last . . .

Zimmerman: You did, but that’s okay. I know we’re going to get back to that, the whole racial climate and your experience with racial animosity over the period of your life, because you’ve been a lot of different places and you’ve seen a lot of things.


Hendricks: Yes, yes, I have.

Zimmerman: But Art Tatum, when you played with him for two years – I think I read somewhere – I think that Art Tatum was playing in a restaurant and Charlie Parker – you can tell me the story – played in the restaurant? Played some music? Or was working there? He was working there, and he heard some of the things that Art Tatum was doing. He wanted to play as fast and as intricate as Art Tatum could play on the piano?

Hendricks: Yeah. He had come to New York out of Kansas City and Jay McShann’s orchestra. He was a good alto player, but he was – that’s what he was, a good alto player. He hadn’t formed the ideas that later became known as bebop yet. So he had a hard time in New York, and he got a job washing dishes in the Onyx Club on 52nd Street. Art Tatum was there for six weeks. So he was washing dishes, and he heard Art playing. That inspired him. Art was the father of what later became known as bebop. I know, because I was singing all those substitute chord structures when I was 14. He would say, “Sing this.” He’d play one of these chords. He’d play each note of it, and he’d say, “Sing that,” and I would have to sing that, that chord. I would say, whoa. Then I noticed that when he played, his eyes were closed, because – it didn’t really occur to me that that was because he was blind, his eyes were closed. They weren’t closed from rapture at his own playing like say, for example, Keith Jarrett, but that’s another story. So when he would tell me to sing these things, I would close my eyes, like he did, and lo and behold, it seemed I could hear them easier and I could sing them easier. So I got in the habit of doing that. When I got into show business more properly as a solo performer, it took my wife five years to get me to open my eyes. She’d say, “Open your eyes. You cannot contact the audience with your eyes closed.”

Zimmerman: I understand that.

Hendricks: Yeah, because you do the same thing.

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Zimmerman: I sure do.

Hendricks: Because you're so into the spirit of the song. You're out of this world, is what it really is. You're not in this world.

Zimmerman: And I find that I focus better with my eyes closed.

Hendricks: Absolutely, because music is spiritual, so you don't need your eyes.

Zimmerman: I really want to be one with the music, and hopefully the audience gets it.

Hendricks: Exactly, but you need to contact the audience with your eyes. Your eyes have a magnetism to them. A man has dominion over all the animals because of his eyes. A man can, through his eyes and the sound of his voice, tame any animal. A man should fear no animal. This is a natural fact. This is the story of Daniel in the lion's den. Daniel had the gift of dream interpretation and dominion over animals. The lions came. Daniel looked at them and spoke to them, and they lay down. That's why it's necessary, like they teach you in acting, to focus. You focus your eyes on your fellow actor. You make focused gestures. James Cagney was very famous for this. He would deliver a line and he would use his hands. He would say, "I'm not going to give nothing. I'm giving you nothing." But he's also pointing to you, to say, you got the next line. Now deliver it back to me. He was a great help to other actors because of things like that. They call them focused gestures.


Zimmerman: So Charlie Parker – excuse me. So Art Tatum, his technique helped you to learn chord structures and also . . .

Hendricks: Oh yeah.

Zimmerman: . . . heavily influenced not only pianists, but people like Charlie Parker. What is one of the key things that you took away from that experience.

Hendricks: It taught me that music is made up of melody, harmony, and rhythm, and it's played over chord structures – that each song has a chord structure, that it's not just *Lady Be Good* the melody, it's not just [Hendricks sings the first phrase of melody], but there are the chords that go underneath that that make that song. It made it fuller. It made a song not just a melody that I sang, but a chord structure that I hadn't even thought about, yet alone thought about singing. What scatting is is merely singing the chord structure to the song while you subconsciously have the melody in your mind.

Zimmerman: I thought we'd get to this later, but it's one of the things that intrigued me the most. It's very easy to say, sing the chords. But you have to know what they are. You

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have to hear them. You have to internalize them. When I listen to you scat, it is extremely musical and it's very percussive. I've seen you in any number of situations and heard you. You're equal to any instrument, any artist. When you're on the stage, like that Inn, I say there's something not only cohesive, but there's a story. Now this man doesn't read music. How and why – how does that fall into place?

Hendricks: I believe what Dizzy said. Dizzy said if you can hear it, you can sing it, and if you can sing it, you can play it. So I think – and then, if you really think about this – this is interesting – the music of the world is not made by people who can read music. Reading music is the intellectual approach to music. That is the way the intellectual approaches music. That's the way the intellect approaches music, is through the reading. The people who make the music cannot read. The great operatic arias of Giuseppe Verdi are taken from the folk songs of the Neapolitan fishermen. They can't read. They wouldn't know a note if you put it on a boat. So the world's music is made by people who cannot read. It's the hearing of the music that's the important thing, I think. If you can hear it, you can sing it or play it. Then, if you learn how to do it intellectually, you of course can write it. But the writing of it is not the execution of it. I know great symphonic musicians who, if you say, "Play *Stardust* for me," they can't play it until you go get a lead sheet and put it in front of them. Then they can play it. To me, that's not really – that's not a musician. That's a person who practices playing the art of music, but a musician to me is someone who can play any tune you name without looking at anything. That's a musician. The other person practices music, but that doesn't make him a musician.

Zimmerman: That's a different take on it.

Hendricks: Yeah, because the one who can't play it without the music is totally dependent on the intellect, and the intellect has never created any art form in the history of this planet.


Zimmerman: The intellect abominates the spirit.

Hendricks: Yes. In the Bible, the intellect is symbolized by King Herod, who is looking for the Christ-child that he's been told is coming, and so slaughters all the children. This is what the intellect does in the heart of the human being that engages the intellect over the spirit. The intellect is a great servant to the spirit, but it is a tyrant if it is used instead of the spirit. It will murder the Christ-child.

Zimmerman: That's heavy.

Hendricks: Yes, it's heavy.

Zimmerman: And that's from Freddie.

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Hendricks: Who is hairy. Yep. I learned that.

Zimmerman: Now I understand it. That helps make the solo of – the Coltrane solo on *Freddie Freeloader* more – I understand it better.

Hendricks: It's like the critics who criticize music. It is not often that they themselves have created any music. Or any art at all. The critics who criticize dance, who criticize movies, who criticize anything. It's very seldom that there's someone who has created any art.

Zimmerman: So tell me this. That being the case, how did you feel when you were in San Francisco as a music critic or art critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle*?


Hendricks: For *The Chronicle*. I felt at last I have a chance to bring to the criticism of art the attitude of a practicing artist. So I also brought to it the writing talent of a person who got the only A in my creative writing class in seven years. My professor, Dr. Milton Marx, wrote the textbook that was used in all the universities in the United States – Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Princeton. This was not an obscure man. He was a very famous man. He had not given an A in seven years, and I got the first one. So I can write, I'm a practicing artist, and now I was going to criticize. So I went back and read George Bernard Shaw's essay on criticism. Shaw says in there that the critic must be careful, lest he criticize the art form itself. In other words, don't murder the art form in your criticism of one of its practitioners. If you see a person dance badly, don't say dance stinks, because it's not dance. It's just that person, that night.

Zimmerman: Right, that night.

Hendricks: That night, because you go see him two weeks from now, and you may be transported into sheer heaven, because everybody has off nights.

Zimmerman: That's true. Did criticism ever really affect you?

Hendricks: No, because I knew whether it was accurate or not. Ralph Gleason, whatever he said, always affected me, because I know that it was true what he said. Even when he criticized Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross for the Duke Ellington album, I accepted it. I said, "You're right, Ralph. That's exactly right." And I told him when I saw him. I said, "Dead on," because he could hear, and he spoke the truth. But most of them, today especially, I find that they are abysmal, abysmal. They lack any literary ethics. They don't know what the craft of writing really entails – writing criticism, what it really entails. They perform hugely gross acts, like a guy named Peter Watrous in the *New York Times* reviewed Benny Carter's 84th birthday party at Lincoln Center. I got the only standing ovation. His review didn't even mention me. So I called him up, and I say – and

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I got this tape. It says, “Hello. This is Peter Watrous. Leave a name and your number, and maybe I’ll call you back.” I said, who is this little pompous jackass? I couldn’t believe it. So I said on the tape, I said, “Peter, this is Jon Hendricks, and first I want to tell you a little bit about myself. I was a jazz critic for the *San Francisco Chronicle* for two years, and not only was I a critic for two years – Alfred Frankenstein, the head of the editorial department, winner of the Nobel Prize, told me I was the best writer the paper ever had. So those are my bona fides, from which I speak to you now. How could you leave my name out of a review?” He called me back. He said, “Jon, Jon. Gee, I’m sorry about that, but actually I was saving you for a full column.” I said, “Really?” He says, “Yes,” which doesn’t excuse what he did. I said, “Okay, Peter.” That never happened. Now this is a man who is a disgrace to journalism and criticism, a disgrace, and he’s functioning on the biggest, most prestigious, and best-known newspaper in America.

Zimmerman: That’s affecting artists’ and people’s lives.

Hendricks: Exactly. I haven’t really addressed it, but when I get some time off the road and am relaxed, I’m going to call the editor of *The Times*, and I’m going to ask him for an audience. I’m going to tell him about that. I’m going to tell him, you have a little monster working on your paper here, because I think that’s disgraceful. That is a disgrace. And that’s just one example. That’s – this kind of thing happens all the time.

Zimmerman: I tell you what. Let’s get back to Charlie Parker. Skipping back and forth.

Hendricks: Yeah, please. You’ve got to watch me. I will do that, because something leads to something, and I’m gone.

Zimmerman: Yes. That’s okay. Now, tell us about your rendezvous with Charlie Parker.

Hendricks: First let me sum up that idea with Parker with Art Tatum. What Bird did when he got back to Kansas City was do exactly what he said. First thing he did was, he realized, hearing Art play, that he didn’t know the tunes that he was playing, because he was playing them only in one key. He realized that if he was to be said to know any song, he would have to know how to play it in any key. So he started by going back over his whole repertoire and playing it in all the keys and playing it accurately in every key. If he made any mistakes, that became his focus of his practice, so that he played every song in every key. Then he could say, I know that song, because only then can you really know a song. If you play music, and you only know the song in one key, you don’t know the song. You know the song in one key. Until you know it in every key, you don’t know it.

Zimmerman: Let’s say for you, you probably can do that, but just in terms of your range, whether or not you can actually hit all of the notes in a particular key – sometimes you can. Sometimes you can’t. But you would know the song conceptually.

Hendricks: Exactly. That's where the use of the chords come in, because if you can't hit the actual note, you can hit a note in the chord within your range, and it makes a beautiful improvisation. In a jazz singer, that's great. You know that works.

Zimmerman: Now I do. I'll be sure to use that.

Hendricks: Do you have a piano?

Zimmerman: Yes.

Hendricks: Good. You should practice chords all the time. I understand the importance of that now. I've got my wife playing. She's playing *All the Things You Are* now with modern bebop-type chords, which she couldn't do six months ago. She couldn't do that.

Zimmerman: You play piano by ear. Is that true?

Hendricks: Yeah, but I don't really play at all any more. I just hear the thing. I've just bypassed all the playing, because I can hear it faster than I can pick it out.


Zimmerman: I believe that. So, back to Charlie Parker. How did that occur? How did you meet him? Where did you meet him?

Hendricks: My meeting him – I was in University of Toledo law school, playing drums and singing every night with a local trio. He came to town. I was a star in Toledo. When we got off, we went to the dance. It was a breakfast dance, so they were still playing. It was Bird and – Kenny Dorham had just replaced Miles Davis. It was Tommy Potter on bass, Max Roach on drums, and Al Haig on piano, who was red-headed, a white piano player. That was – that caused a lot of attention. Everybody – “Look at that. He's got a white piano player.” Al Haig played. He was out of Bud Powell. He was a great piano player. Everybody says, are you going to scat with him, because I was known around there as a scat singer. I said, “Yeah, I'll scat with him, but somebody's got to ask him, because I'm not going to ask him.”

Zimmerman: Why not?

Hendricks: I was too shy. That's like asking Duke Ellington, can I sing with his band? I was terrified. I'm a very shy person. I really still am very shy. It took me three years to say hello to Ella Fitzgerald. She kept saying, “It's about time. I was wondering when you” I'm always very shy about things like that.

Zimmerman: I would never have known that. Your music is tremendously outgoing.

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Hendricks: See, I can do it with the music. But in person I'm terribly shy and really reticent, not at all outgoing. So my wife asked him, and Bird said, "Yeah. Tell him to come on up." He was beautiful. He was what I consider a true artist. He had no fear of anybody coming up on his stage. He didn't worry about it, because he was secure in himself. He knew that he was okay.

Zimmerman: Did he ask you what you wanted to sing?

Hendricks: No. They played *The Song is You*, and he just – he motioned to me like that. So after Kenny Dorham got through – no, after he got through, he was motioning to me. So I walked up on the stage, and I scatted on *The Song is You*. He heard me make those Art Tatum changes, because that's where he was from. After I was through, my knees were knocking. I was so nervous, I thought I was going to faint. All I wanted to do was get off that stage. Let me out of here. Because these cats, man – Tommy Potter, Max Roach, Al Haig – were burnin'. I never heard anything like that in my life. So I started off, and he reached – you've heard the expression, "he pulled my coat"? He literally pulled my coat. I stopped, and I looked around. He said – and he motioned me to Kenny Dorham's chair, who had started his solo, which was going to be about 10 choruses. So I set down next to him, and we had this bandstand conversation. He's looking out at the audience, smiling. He says, "Hey man, what'cha doing?" I said, "I'm studying law." Then he looked at me. "What?" I says, "Yeah, I'm a law student." He says, "Aw, man, you ain't no lawyer." I said, "Well, not yet, but I'm studying." He says, "No, no, man, that ain't for you. You ain't no lawyer." I said, "What am I then?" He says, "You a jazz singer." I said, "What do I do about that?" He said, "You got to come to New York." I said, "I don't know anybody in New York." He said, "You know me." I said, "Where will I find you?" And he said, "Just ask anybody." And I thought, what an egomaniacal cat this is. This is a guy who's got a healthy ego. Whoa. Just ask anybody in New York. Ten million, twelve million people, a million people pass through every day, just ask anybody? I said, whoa, man. I really started to look at him with a little bit of disdain. I started looking like this at this cat. I said whoa, man. So I said, "All right. I'll do that if I ever get to New York." He says, "Yeah, man." He says, "You come on." He says, "Don't worry." He says, "I'll take care of everything."

Zimmerman: Was that a milestone for you? How did that affect you?

Hendricks: It didn't affect me at all, because I had no intention of coming to New York. I was going to finish my law degree and offer my services to the NAACP legal department. That was my plan for my life. But I ran into some problems in Toledo after that, because I got a 3.5 average that semester. That was the highest. The person with the 3.5 was automatically appointed juvenile state probation officer. That means my job would be – I would be a member of the establishment. I would go around and get juvenile prisoners from other states and bring them back to Toledo jurisdiction. It would make me a part of the establishment of the Toledo legal and judicial system. But I was married to

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an Irish girl, and I had a son, and there was a lot of animosity against that in this legal-judicial system. These people would have to be forced to consort with me as an equal in their group, and they did not want to do that? So they sent this young guy to my house. He was black. He was the guy that I would be working for. He said, “They told me that if you don’t withdraw your name, they’re going to lean on me.” He had a wife and two children. So I said, “Okay. Withdraw my name. I don’t want to give you any problems.” He said, “Oh, Jon, that’s really great of you, because you could stand by it, and there would be nothing they or I could do.” I said, “I don’t particularly want to deal with people that are that stupid.” I said, “I don’t want to be around them.” I said, “They think they don’t want to be around me. They don’t ask me how I feel about it” – about anybody that dumb. I said, “So go ahead. It’s all right. You withdraw my name.” So he did. Everything was still okay. I was going to still pursue my law degree, but then lo and behold something happened that I did not even foresee. My G.I. Bill, under which I was in law school, ran out 18 months short of my law degree. So I was really caught. I didn’t know what to do. Wow. Okay. I remember that bandstand conversation. This was two years before. I remember that bandstand conversation with Bird. “Come to New York.” I said, I’ll pursue my music.


Zimmerman: There was just no hope of any other financing?

Hendricks: Not in that town, where they had their eyes on me now. So I decided I’d go to Canada. I’d go to Toronto, and I would pursue my musical career there. So I got to the Canadian border outside Buffalo, and they said I needed \$1,000 cash to emigrate into Canada. I said, “I don’t have a thousand. I have 400, but I can earn money.” They said, “No. You have to have at least \$1,000.”

Zimmerman: They – the police, or the border guard.

Hendricks: The border people. When they found out I wanted to live in Canada – I wanted to move to Canada. See, if I hadn’t said I wanted to move, I could have come in and just stayed there, but I was a straight-laced law-student person, and I just told them what I had in mind, which was disastrous, because I couldn’t do it for under – without \$1,000. So there I was, outside Buffalo. What to do? What to do? I had an old Buick, which was rattling by that time. Then my wife and my son, and my drums in the trunk. So I thought, okay, I’ll go to New York and look up Bird. Just the other side of Buffalo, the old Chevrolet gave out. The whole transmission just dropped out on the highway. I had about 50-some dollars and 300-and-some dollars in traveler’s checks. I got rid of the Buick. I sold it to a guy right there on the road, for junk, and took a bus into New York.

I got into the bus station. I called Joe Carroll, who had taken my job with Dizzy as his vocalist, because I was supposed to be vocalist with Dizzy’s big band, but I had moved. He came to Rochester looking for me, and I had moved back to Toledo. So he hired Joe Carroll. But I liked Joe. He was a beautiful guy. So I called him up. I said, “Where’s

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Charlie Parker.” No. First I asked him, “Where can I stay?” He said, “The Claremont Hotel across from Columbia University, 110th Street.” I said, “Okay. What does it cost?” He said, “\$16 a week you can get a room there.” I said, “Great. Where’s Bird?” He said, “Bird is at the Apollo Bar, 125th Street and Seventh Avenue.” This is two years and four months. I just started laughing like a crazy man. I just cracked up, because there he was, like he said. Just ask anybody. So I really – I just laughed for about a half hour. So my wife said, “What are you laughing at?” So I told her, and she started laughing. We just laughed at that. We went to the hotel. We’re laughing all the way to the hotel.


When I got to the hotel, I had about \$18. The guy said, “I’m sorry, but the rooms are \$18, but there’s tax. You’ve got to have 22”-something. I said, “I haven’t got it. I’ve only got \$18.” I said, “I could take my drums to the pawnshop tomorrow. I could pawn them and then I could give you the rest.” He said, “No. I can’t issue any credit.” Just then he turned around to the guy operating the switchboard. He said, “Have you found anybody yet?” The guy says, “No, but I will.” He says, “You’re leaving tomorrow. I need a switchboard operator by tomorrow. You’ve got to find somebody.” I said, “I can operate a switchboard.” Of course I couldn’t operate a switchboard. I didn’t know anything about a switchboard. He says, “You can?” I said, “Sure. When do I start?” He said, “He’s leaving tomorrow.” He says, “You start tomorrow.” I said, “Great.” I said, “Are you going to be working tonight?” He said, “Yeah. I’ll be on all night.” I said, “Okay. I’ll see you later.” So I gave him the \$18 that I had, and he said, “Don’t worry. We’ll just deduct the rest from your pay.” I said, “Okay.”

Then I went over to the club where Bird was. I walk in the club, and guess what he’s playing? He’s playing *The Song is You*. So I walked past the bandstand – the bandstand and the wall was only this much room – I walked past and he – in the middle of his solo, “Hey, Jon. How you doing, man? You want to sing some?” Two years and four months, ten minutes on the bandstand, and this guy remembered me. Roy Haynes said, “Aw, no, Bird. We don’t want no singing. We only got one more set.” I was so embarrassed at what Roy had said. Boy, that was a drag. So I went and sat down at my table. Then I looked back up on the bandstand, and there was Gerry Mulligan there. Looked like Ming the Merciless. Had this red beard, blood-red hair, and looked like he was going to die any minute. He looked like he could hardly hold up that baritone saxophone, it was so – he was so messed up. He was really out. Of course they were shooting stuff.

Zimmerman: What was the jazz scene like in 1952 when you arrived there?

Hendricks: Dope filled, dope filled, dope, dope, dope. Everybody was shooting stuff, because Bird was just inspiring everybody to be like him. He shot stuff, so everybody was shooting up. And everybody was playing amazing music. I never heard anything like that, before or since. Amazing.

Zimmerman: Was there a hierarchy of musicians there?

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Hendricks: Yeah. It was Bird and Diz on the bebop scene. Miles was kind of a crown prince. He was still in his Dizzy mode. It was Monk that told Miles, you better stop playing like Dizzy and get your own stuff, because Miles was playing like Dizzy, in that he began to – so Monk told me that Miles begin to play Dizzy’s best notes. I said, wow. Then I thought of – I was doing the words to *Round Midnight*, and I was doing the Miles version [Hendricks sings the introduction to that version]. Then I remembered Dizzy’s version was [Hendricks sings the introduction to that version]. Well, the best notes of that is [Hendricks sings the Miles Davis intro again]. Just like Monk had said. [Hendricks sings further on that]. That was the best notes of what Dizzy had played. I was amazed. Monk was so beautiful, because he was a great teacher and he was a faultless musician. He was amazing, amazing. He taught all the tenor saxophones. He taught John Coltrane how to make those two notes at a time and how to make that high note on his version of *Off Minor*, when he had John Coltrane and Coleman Hawkins on that date with Ray Copeland and Gigi Gryce. It was a note [Hendricks sings]. Ray went [Hendricks sings] a third up. John says, “I’m sorry, Thelonious, but that note is not on the tenor.” Monk said, “Put it on there.” John says, “Yes, but it isn’t there.” Monk says, “Aw man, look. Finger your G in the top, and in the bottom, finger your F.” So Trane did that, and that note came out.

Zimmerman: Let’s go there for a moment. So Monk played other instruments as well.

Hendricks: He didn’t play them. He just knew them. He didn’t play tenor. But he knew what a tenor could do. He knew the range of it and what it was capable of.

Zimmerman: I heard you once use an expression called “musicianers.”


Hendricks: Yes, that’s what they called them when I was a child. They called them “musicianers.”

Zimmerman: People who were used to playing a variety of instruments, not just one instrument.

Hendricks: Oh yeah. The band I worked with at the Waiters and Bellman’s club, when I worked with Art Tatum – every one of them played two or three instruments. Like if anything happened to the piano player, the drummer or the bass player or the alto player could take over at piano.

Zimmerman: That was common among musicians then. I think there was a story about Art Blakey, that he was actually a pianist at one time.

Hendricks: He was a pianist, but there were a lot of good pianists at that time in Pittsburgh. There was Fritz Jones, who became Ahmad Jamal. There was Linton Garner,

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who was an accomplished piano player, and his brother Erroll, who was a great piano player but couldn't read. He told me that he would get up on the piano when his brother Linton was gone and start playing. They used to run him off the piano. His older sister and his mother would say, "Get down off of Linton's piano. That's not your piano." And yet Erroll was the one that was playing.

Zimmerman: Tell me. When you got to New York, and Bird I guess had put the word out about you . . .

Hendricks: Oh yeah. I had no problems. I met everybody. They all knew who I was.

Zimmerman: Did doors open up for you then?

Hendricks: Yes. He was the best PR man I ever had.

Zimmerman: This antipathy, as I think you described it, between musicians and vocalists – I'm sure that existed then. How were you tested? I'm sure everyone didn't just take Bird's word for it.

Hendricks: They didn't listen to me until I started scatting, because singing-wise, Billy Eckstine was on the scene. So there was no sense in just singing, because he had that. B had that, and he had a few clones around there, like Earl Coleman, who recorded those things with Bird and with Dizzy. Who was the other guy? Arthur Prysock. They all were Billy Eckstine stylists, type singers.

Zimmerman: Al Hibbler?

Hendricks: Al Hibbler was with Duke at that time. So when I scatted, then that's when the musicians really accepted me as one of them, because a lot of times I scatted better than they played.

Zimmerman: I believe that. Who were some of the musicians that you went to see while you were there? Who did you admire?

Hendricks: I liked Randy Weston. I worked with Randy at that time. Randy was very creative. At that time he did all of what I consider his best tunes. Horace Silver. I liked that group, because he and – his group and the Jazz Messengers were really the same group, because the original Jazz Messengers was Horace Silver on piano, Art Blakey on drums.

Zimmerman: Clifford [Brown]? Was Clifford there?

Hendricks: Yeah, he was there. That was the original Jazz Messengers. Then Horace broke loose and created his version of the Jazz Messengers, the Horace Silver Quintet, and Art Blakey stayed and remained with that format.

Zimmerman: Where did Randy Weston fit in there?

Hendricks: Randy really wasn't in there. He had his own style. He used Ray Copeland a lot on trumpet and Booker Ervin on tenor. That was a great tenor player, Booker.

Zimmerman: All of those guys, you wrote lyrics to their music. *Little Niles*. *Hi-Fly*. *Doodlin'*, which is one of my all-time favorites. Gosh. Who else was there?

Hendricks: I did things for Gigi Gryce and Benny Golson too: *Social Call* and *I Remember Clifford*. *Stablemates* and all those things.

Zimmerman: Let's see. I'm trying to think of the name of this other song. *Whisper Not*.

Hendricks: *Whisper Not*.

Zimmerman: Did you write lyrics to *Whisper Not*?


Hendricks: No. Leonard Feather did, and it was so good I just let it alone, because Leonard's lyric was great. That was a great lyric. Leonard Feather was an interesting man.

Zimmerman: He was. I had the opportunity to meet him once on a panel. I didn't know that he was a composer.

Hendricks: He composed two of the compositions and supervised Dinah Washington's first record date. He's got good bona fides. He's great. Leonard Feather is a real – he was truly capable of criticizing jazz music, because he could do it.

Zimmerman: So, in 1952 you're working in New York. Were you able to support your family at that time as a singer?

Hendricks: I had to take other outside work in the day. I had a day job for nine years. I was various kinds of a clerk. I worked in offices. I worked in all different kinds of offices, usually typing invoices. I was part of New York's office pool of workers. I hated the conversations that the people had in those offices. One of the questions that drove me mad was, "Did you watch the *Lucy* show last night?" I told the office manager one time, "Not only did I not watch the *Lucy* show last night, but I have never watched the *Lucy* show." She says, "What's the matter with him?" She got so mad at me. She was – she didn't speak to me for two days.

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Zimmerman: I believe that. How did you manage your time during that period? How did you balance your time between your job, your music, and your family?

Hendricks: When I was working, like on the nights when I had a job, I would come straight home from work and take my children out and make sure that they had a little time with me. I would take them on long walks. We'd walk all around the neighborhood. Anything that they wanted to show me, I was glad to see, and I would talk to them. We'd sit on the bench, and we'd talk. I'd buy them lollipops and ice cream and all that stuff. I tried to spend as much time with them as I could, because I knew later on, when they went to sleep, I was going to go to work, and I wasn't going to be able to get up with them in the morning, because I had to go to work. So I tried to spend as much time as possible with them.

Zimmerman: What part of New York were you living in then?

Hendricks: I lived in the Bronx: 201st Street and Gun Hill Road, just this side of White Plains, before it became Fort Apache. It was quite a nice place to live in those days. It was the Bronx, still.

Zimmerman: That makes sense. Jerry Gonzalez and Fort Apache- he was from that area.


Hendricks: It's what Damon Runyan called the Bronx.

Zimmerman: What happened that allowed you to become a full-time musician and not work another job?

Hendricks: I think that was my divorce. When I separated from my wife, and I no longer had the family duties that I had to perform, I began to devote all my time to music. Shortly after that I moved in with Dave Lambert, who had just started divorce proceedings. His wife was divorcing him. He had an extra room in his apartment at 22 Cornelia Street, which is now a newly decorated apartment building. I don't even recognize it, because we had a five-flight walkup. So I moved in with Dave after we did *Four Brothers*, and we began to plan *Sing a Song of Basie*, the album.

Zimmerman: You all just immediately struck it off?

Hendricks: I had heard him in my hometown. He was another one that had come out of Leo Watson's scat school, like I had come through Leo also. He had also come through Bird, which is like Art Tatum, so we were on the same wavelength. He and his partner Buddy Stewart made some records for the Keynote label called – things like *A Cent and a Half*, *Charge Account*, *What's This?*, which Nat Cole made a record to reply to, called *That's What*, where he scatted. Nat Cole was very hip.

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Zimmerman: I didn't know that. I didn't know – I know about his – more of his ballad-type work.

Hendricks: Oh no. He was a jazz piano player before he started singing. He started singing accidentally.

Zimmerman: I didn't know that.

Hendricks: He was one of the ten best jazz pianists. He could play. I met him, because I was working in Toledo with Art, and he'd come to see Art. That's how we met. But he was a great jazz musician, very hip.

Zimmerman: I guess this is – what? – in the '52 to '54 time period? You had written *Four Brothers*. I guess you were doing a lot of writing during that period.

Hendricks: I was writing for Louis Jordan. I was writing what I call unpopular songs. But I did write one for Louis Jordan called *I'll Die Happy*, which was chosen number one rhythm-and-blues song of 1957 by *Cash Box* on the cover.

Zimmerman: How does that go?

Hendricks: [Hendricks sings:] “I'm a real fast liver, trouble giver, whiskey taster, and a money waster, and the old folks say I won't live long. But I'll die happy.”

Zimmerman: Yes, yes, yes. And you also wrote *I Want You to be My Baby*?


Hendricks: Yes. I wrote that for Louis Jordan. He recorded that on Decca. But in those days they wanted you to get right to the vocal. Louis Jordan started playing that tune, that boogie-woogie blues riff. He blew three choruses and then sang the vocal, so of course the disc jockeys wouldn't play it. But a lady truck driver named Lillian Briggs in Pittsburgh heard Louis's version. She recorded it and got right to the vocal – from the introduction into the vocal. Then that sold a million.

Zimmerman: You also wrote *Messy Bessie*.

Hendricks: Yeah, I wrote that for Louis.

Zimmerman: Last night I was in Tower Records. I went to Louis Jordan's bin, and of all things, what comes up?

Hendricks: *Messy Bessie*?

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Zimmerman: No. It's "and you call that a buddy."

Hendricks: Oh. *Do You Call that a Buddy?* I love that. I love that song.

Zimmerman: I love it too.

Hendricks: It's a great song, and he used to sing it. Boy, Louis sang that thing.

Zimmerman: Did you write that for him?


Hendricks: No, no. I didn't write that. I just loved it.

Zimmerman: Yeah, it's a wonderful song.

Hendricks: I wish I had written that. That's a great song.

Zimmerman: What – in 1953 and 1954, what was the relationship between jazz and rhythm-and-blues during that period.

Hendricks: Very close. One evolved out of the other. Jazz was nothing but a more sophisticated rhythm-and-blues. It's like the city mouse and the country mouse. The country mouse comes to visit the city mouse, and he lives in a penthouse rather than on a farm. Rhythm-and-blues is like the country version of what the jazz people played. The blues are played a little faster. The chords are altered according to Tatumesque things and Bird and Diz's contributions, but it's the same source. The source is the same: the spirituals. As I say in *The Evolution of the Blues*, the spirituals are the mother of the blues, and the blues are jazz's mother, and you've got in trouble if you try to have one without the other. So the idea of there being a differentiation between rhythm-and-blues and jazz has come along since the Philistines that took over the music business begin to compartmentalize it and slice it up like a boarding-house pie and sell it by the slice. They're the ones that have destroyed the cultural unity of all of America's music. They are the intellectuals. Very destructive. Like in those days we used to work in shows with T-Bone Walker and Josh White. Nobody thought anything about it. It wasn't unusual. I talked to Bill Graham before he died. He was a fan of mine. He came to see me. He says, "Gee Jon. I wish I could do something for you." I said, "You can." He says, "What can I do?" I says, "Let me open for the Grateful Dead." He says, "Do you think that'll work?" I said, "They do. They've been asking me, when we can work together again?" I said, "There's no difference between music." You won't find any rock musician worth his salt who is not a jazz fan, because they know where they come from. They all started out to be jazz musicians. When I lived in London, the Monday night relief player at Ronnie Scott's was Elton John. He was trying to sound like Horace Silver. All those guys love jazz, because they started out to be jazz musicians. What became rock was the would-be jazz musicians playing the blues. That's what rock is.

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Zimmerman: I didn't know that.

Hendricks: Sure. So to make a difference between the two is just criminal and totally uncultured and messes up everybody's mind.

Zimmerman: So the tunes were just basically written for different audiences.

Hendricks: Sure. That's all.

Zimmerman: What were some – did you write other songs that were outside of the jazz idiom during that period, and for other people?

Hendricks: Yeah. I wrote *Social Call*, which it really wasn't outside the jazz idiom, but it was a kind of a swing ballad. At that time Ernestine Anderson was married to Art Farmer. And Art Farmer – she was having a child at that time. She was pregnant when she recorded *Social Call* with she and Art's first baby. Art and Gigi Gryce had the quintet – I think it was the Jazz Lab Quintet – together. Later it was Donald Byrd, but the first one was Art Farmer. I wrote *Social Call*, and she recorded it.

Zimmerman: What was the first song that you wrote lyrics for? Do you remember that?

Hendricks: I wrote a song a week for the group I was with in Toledo, words and music. When I told Johnny Mercer that I wrote a song a week, he said, "Man, you're crazy."

Zimmerman: Do you still work that hard?

Hendricks: Hmm?

Zimmerman: Do you still work hard like that?


Hendricks: Oh sure. But he couldn't believe that.

Zimmerman: That's tremendous.

Hendricks: He said, "Man, we take months to write a song." He says, "How could you write a song a week?" I said, "That's what they wanted." I thought, if they wanted it, that's what everybody did.

Zimmerman: How were you paid as a songwriter? Did you receive royalties?

Hendricks: Yeah. Well, I received whatever the publisher saw fit to give me, because they were robbing people blind.

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Zimmerman: Lillian Briggs sold a million copies of *I Want You to be My Baby*.

Hendricks: I'm still chasing those people. I'm still chasing them. I saw Churchill Coleman, who wrote *Cry*, in front of the Brill Building asking for \$2 to get back home to Philadelphia. He'd just had the big hit by Johnny Rae. He'd gone to the publisher. The publisher had told him that there were no royalties. His man had a number one song in America. He was a black man, and he had been told that there were no royalties. He was asking for \$2 to get back home to Philadelphia. So I gave him the \$2. That was a tragedy. The way they robbed people, and still do, in the music publishing business is something that's got to be addressed. It's just filthy to take a man's work and profit from it. I hate it. I hate it with all the passion I can muster.

Zimmerman: I think that's happened to you quite a bit.

Hendricks: A lot.

Zimmerman: Because a lot of your music is out there.

Hendricks: I'm still chasing the money.

Zimmerman: *Moody's Mood for Love*.


Hendricks: That inspired me. When I heard King Pleasure do that, I immediately wrote *Four Brothers*.

Zimmerman: Really?

Hendricks: Yeah. I had been thinking about it, because I could sing the whole arrangement. I knew all the solos and all of the – the whole arrangement. I used to sing it to myself. When I heard *Moody's Mood for Love*, I said, that's the answer. I don't have to stop at 8 bars, or I don't have to stop at 32 bars. I can go on and on and on and on. That's when I did that. I was inspired by that song.

Zimmerman: So what did this really do for your concept of music from that point on?

Hendricks: I started to lyricize orchestral arrangements, which is what Leonard Feather came to call "vocalese." That's when we did *Sing a Song of Basie*. Then that's when we recorded that. We had 13 voices. They were terrible. They were the Dave Lambert Singers. One of them was Annie Ross. They were so bad that we just took Annie and multi-tracked four times each to get the 12 horns in the Basie band – four trumpets, three trombones, and five reeds. So that's how that came about.

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Zimmerman: Had you met – when did you meet King Pleasure?

Hendricks: I met him when he – I was in the Turf bar at 52nd and Broadway. We all used to hang out in there, all the songwriters and performers. He came in. Somebody introduced me to him. I said, “Oh man.” I said, “You started me writing like that.” He says, “Yeah. That’s what I want to talk to you about.” I says, “What is that?” He says, “I’d like you to record something with me.” He says, “I have this Stan Getz tune that he recorded in Sweden called *Don’t Get Scared*.”

Zimmerman: “When you see danger facing you, little boy don’t get scared.”

Hendricks: I liked him, because he was not only a handsome man, but he was very intelligent and a well-spoken man, and very artistic. He did something that is unprecedented in my whole life. I’ve never seen anybody do that.

Zimmerman: What’s that?

Hendricks: He gave me the words to *Don’t Get Scared*, and there were no words to my solo, the Lars Gullin baritone saxophone solo. I said, “Where are the words to Lars Gullin’s part?” He said, “You write them yourself.” I never knew an artist to do that.

Zimmerman: Just give you the liberty of . . .

Hendricks: To give me the liberty of writing my own lyrics to what was his record date and his project. That was so big-hearted. I’ve never encountered it since.

Zimmerman: I love that song, and I don’t . . .

Hendricks: Yes, it’s a great song.


Zimmerman: There’s a little portion of it that I don’t understand.

Hendricks: Which one is that?

Zimmerman: It says something like, “Life is very funny every way. Got to ha-ha-ha-ha every day. Never be afraid. Now I know you’ve never read, but remember what I said. Any one so . . .”

Hendricks: “Anyone so tender he would easily surrender his all.” [Hendricks sings:] “I’m so sorry for him” – the little fellow – “but he’s better off dead.”

Zimmerman: Oh.

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Hendricks: Yeah. “Anyone so tender he would easily surrender his all.”

Zimmerman: I’ve had many people around the record player. Let’s listen to this. What do we have? It’s so hardy-fardy. I won’t even get into that. That’s great.

Eddie Jefferson actually wrote the lyrics to *Moody’s Mood for Love*.

Hendricks: To *Moody’s Mood for Love*? I’ve heard that, but I’ve also heard that his wife actually wrote the words. Now I can’t ask him which was which.

Zimmerman: Do you get a chance to know Eddie at all?

Hendricks: We were going to get together when he came back from that last tour. He was going to sing with me. We were going to form a group. He was going to be the male vocalist. And he got shot. So, they shot more than him.

Zimmerman: That’s true.

Hendricks: Whoever that man was that did that. He committed two kinds of murder. He murdered a great step in a cultural art form. That would have been a great thing. We both realized it. Both Eddie and I realized it. He says, “That’s a wonderful thing to do right now.”

Zimmerman: So did you have a bond or friendship for any period of time?

Hendricks: Yeah. Oh sure. I wrote a show for – what’s the station in Chicago? WBGH? Whatever it is. Chicago t.v. station – I wrote a show called *Sing Me a Jazz Song*. I had Leon Thomas, Eddie, Annie, and me. I’ve got a tape of that. I’ll make you a copy of that.

Zimmerman: I’d love that.


Hendricks: That’s a great – it really was a good show.

Zimmerman: I believe that.

Hendricks: But I love Eddie. He was a great person, real . . .

Zimmerman: He actually . . .

Hendricks: . . . big soul, big soul. I just did an interview in a paper in Los Angeles – a little paper in Los Angeles. The guy that did the interview with me opens the interview saying that he had talked to Eddie Jefferson just before he died, and he had trepidations about asking him about Jon Hendricks, because he had heard that Eddie felt that I had

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attained a popularity that he had never quite reached. So he finally, after going through the interview, at the very end, he asked Eddie, “What did you think of Jon Hendricks?” Eddie looked at him and said, “Greatest lyricist I ever met in my life.”

Zimmerman: It’s true.

Hendricks: Is that beautiful? What a guy.

Zimmerman: It’s true and beautiful.

Hendricks: But still, for him to . . .

Zimmerman: That’s great.

Hendricks: He was a big man. He was a big man. You have to be a big man to do that.

Zimmerman: Yes. That’s wonderful to hear.

Hendricks: He was a big soul. I loved him.

Zimmerman: I think we’re still in the ’50s.

Hendricks: I never get out of the ’50s.

Zimmerman: A lot of things were going on for you during that time. Michelle was two or three years old.


Hendricks: Yeah, that’s true.

Zimmerman: Is it true that you had your own vocal quartet before Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross?

Hendricks: No, I didn’t.

Zimmerman: What actually launched Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross?

Hendricks: *Sing a Song of Basie*. The album was number 13 in *Down Beat*. Dave and I were starving, literally starving. We were starving. Dave had an account at Joe’s Dinette. We went over there every night for dinner. Joe somehow knew we were going to be something one day, and he put it on this tab. The tab was about \$300 then. But we’d always go there every day and get one meal a day. That was our – that kept us alive, except when somebody invited us out to dinner. Then we’d leave Joe alone. Annie was rich. She was working on the Patrice Munsell t.v. show. She was making a lot of money,

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but she was coming down every day. She'd come down and hang out. After she'd get through shooting the show, she'd come down in her lovely dresses, looking all beautiful, every day. She used to come down and hang out with us. So one day I pick up *Down Beat*, and here we are. We got the number 13 album in America. I said to Dave and Annie, I said, "What are we starving for when we got the number 13 album? Why don't we go out and sing and make some money?" I saw the looks on their faces. They looked at each other like, this guy sure is – he's either naive or just plain dumb. I saw this, because I'm very quick. I just said, "Oh, well, okay." So I understood that they understood that this was America and that such a racially constituted group just didn't go out and sing. You didn't do that. But I'd never paid any attention to that kind of stuff. I've always known what my father said was true. He always taught us. Every man on earth is your brother, and every woman is your sister. We are all children of the living God, and that is your attitude. No matter what another person's attitude toward you may be, that is your attitude.

Zimmerman: That's great.

Hendricks: So he armed us against that racism thing, because I've always felt that. In fact if someone has made any racial remark to me, I've always felt more like – I don't know what word to use, but I've always felt a kind of pity for that person, rather than any pain to myself. I always felt, oh man, what a terrible way to go around looking at the world. I've always felt what a sadness in your life you must have.


Zimmerman: I'll tell you about a little incident that happened to me the other day afterwards, that just fit into that whole thing. It was incredible at this date and time, but it was pretty sad. But I felt the same way. He must have been a pretty sad individual.

Hendricks: Yeah, because it's the least of things. It's the least of things. If you're going to judge a man, you should judge him by anything else: intellect, or sports prowess. But not just because he's of a different pigment. That's the most ridiculous thing. I've always looked at that as the most truly ridiculous thing, and I still do. I'm amazed at that.

[recording interrupted]

Zimmerman: I'd like to go back and look at *Sing a Song of Basie*. That was a monumental breakthrough in music for you and Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross. Would you tell us about that?

Hendricks: It turns out that it was not just a breakthrough for us, but even, forgetting who did it, forgetting that I was involved in that or that I had anything to do with that – looking at that as an artistic piece of work, it changed the way jazz music is sung. It changed the way people record singers.

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Zimmerman: How so?

Hendricks: Because of the multi-tracking. People had been able to sing duets with themselves because of that. It started the idea of putting the words on the back of the album. We were the first to do that, because I had written so many lyrics to those songs, I didn't think anybody would be able to intelligently follow what had been written unless the words were put on the back, but I had no idea that that was breaking new ground, that we were doing something unprecedented at that time. We were just trying to create a work of art, is what we set out to do, but we ended up changing the whole recording industry, the way it records singers, and the way singers sing.

Zimmerman: How does that concept work, multi-tracking? How did it work then?

Hendricks: It worked then very primitively, because they had no 24-track – not even 12 tracks, not even 8 tracks. There were only 4. So what we had to do was pile everything on a master tape. Like we would record we three singing, and then on top – then we would record another tape of we three singing something else. Then we would put that with the tape from before. We did that four times until we had, like I say, the 12. But then we found out after months – it took us about two months to do that – we found out that the lead line and the most prominent harmonic lines, like the first, third, and seventh – the first three were lost, because they were buried under the last lines. When we listened to it back, it was a hodge-podge. It was gibberish. So we figured out that what we have to do is to record the least important lines first, and then put the lines on in their order of importance, and the lead last. So we had to start all over again and record it that way.


Zimmerman: How did you prepare for something like that? I recently . . .

Hendricks: We didn't prepare. We were totally unprepared. We were really pioneering. We were just figuring things out as we went along.

Zimmerman: But all of the layers of harmonies that went over – that were used to get that choral sound. It's just three of you all, but there are different voicings as you sing. Who did the arranging of the . . .?

Hendricks: Dave would pick the three most prominent voices. They usually were the first – the lead alto – actually, the lead trumpet. That would be Annie. Then the second trombone, because the first trombone will probably be doubling lead – the second trombone, and the second tenor. That would give us each a different voice. Then Annie would go on and do all the trumpets, the first, second, third, and fourth trumpets.

Zimmerman: What's going on? Did you have headphones at that time?

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Hendricks: No. We didn't record with headphones. We just recorded each three voices at a time. Then we would listen to them back. If somebody had made a mistake, then we would record them again, until all three of us got them without anybody making a mistake.

Zimmerman: Okay. So the first time you recorded with the rhythm section. When you went back, were you listening to a tape then, recording over that?

Hendricks: Yeah. We would listen to the rhythm section tape. That was taped and retained. We kept that, because that was the Basie rhythm section without Basie. Nat Pierce played piano on that. So we would listen to that. But then we had no other guides except what Dave had written out and what I had learned.

Zimmerman: That's amazing.

Hendricks: It was amazing. We didn't know what we were doing. We didn't know we were creating something entirely new in the recording industry. We just thought we were making an interesting album.

Zimmerman: How long did the whole project take, and how long did something like – what is it? I'm trying to think – what's on that album? I must apologize for that, because . . .

Hendricks: *Every Day, It's Sand, man, Down for Double, West End Blues.*

Zimmerman: *Down for Double.* Let's go there.

Hendricks: Okay.

Zimmerman: How long did something like that take?


Hendricks: Days. Each one of them took days. Weeks, really.

Zimmerman: It seems like it. There are just so many layers there in the way you just described it. It seemed like it would take months to do that project.

Hendricks: It took six months. At the end I came out, collapsed into a taxi, went to Bellevue Hospital, and had an operation. I almost died from my heart.

Zimmerman: Really?

Hendricks: Yeah. I was very sick from self-abuse. A lot of marijuana smoking, liquor drinking, general debauchery of all kinds. I just – we stayed up 48 hours at a time and

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worked day and night, non-stop. Also, it had to be done in secret, because the singers had cost \$1,250 that date. So that left us \$1,250 in the whole to Ampar record company, which was a new record company formed by ABC Broadcasting and Paramount Pictures. They weren't about to spend any more than that initial twelve-fifty. But the guy that was the A&R man, making his debut in the record business, was Creed Taylor, a young kid just out of college, fresh faced, green, and innocent as a baby lamb.

Zimmerman: Are you still in touch with him?

Hendricks: Oh yeah. We still talk, because we had a hand in a masterpiece. So there will always be some room for talk there.

So he had to keep it secret from the company, and we had to let the engineer in on it. The place closed at 11 o'clock. The studio closed at 11. So we'd all come back at midnight, the engineer, and Dave, Annie, and I, and Creed, would come back at midnight and secretly record until 6 am.

Zimmerman: Who was the engineer?

Hendricks: I forget his name. I have to find that out. That should be on the back of the album. He became a co-conspirator with us to keep it from the company.

Zimmerman: If it took six months to actually record the album, how long did it take you to write all the lyrics to those songs?


Hendricks: Oh, that was not long at all. It doesn't take me long to write. I can write lyrics like that, two a day. If I can hear it, I can write it.

Zimmerman: This technique, multi-tracking, really changed the whole music scene.

Hendricks: Yeah, it did. It revolutionized everything.

Zimmerman: But did you use it any more after that?

Hendricks: Oh yeah, we used it – when did we use that again? I can't remember, but we did a couple things. One of them was for a movie, and we used a multi-track thing. We didn't use it on the Ellington album, which is why Ralph Gleason panned it. That made me angry, because I was mad that Dave didn't want to do the multi-tracking on the Ellington album, because I was aware of the cultural position of Duke Ellington and Basie. Basie considered himself a student of Duke Ellington. Duke was the real first one. So to multi-track Basie and not multi-track Duke I thought was disrespectful, culturally speaking. But Dave Lambert was not of the culture, so he didn't even have any sense of what I was really talking about. So that made me angry, that that happened.

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Zimmerman: What studio did you do the recording in, and how was it set up?

Hendricks: It was the Ampar – ABC studio – down on 20-something Street in New York. I don't know exactly where it was. They owned this building down there. They had the – it was the first floor. It was just a big studio with room for the engineers and everything. It wasn't anything special about it. It had what most studios had in those days, which was very little, which wouldn't even be considered now a studio. It would be a practice room or rehearsal hall. It had almost no sophisticated equipment.

Zimmerman: Did you all sing around one microphone, or did you each have a microphone?

Hendricks: No, we sang around one mic. I still – to this day I don't like working on separate mics.


Zimmerman: Really?

Hendricks: No, because you can't hear what the other person's singing, so you lose the blend. Whatever blend you attain comes from the engineer. I think it should come from the singers. I don't agree with a lot of modern recording technique. I think it's good for the record companies, but it's not good for the art form that they're recording. I think it's destructive to the art.

Zimmerman: So you like being in close proximity?

Hendricks: Oh yes, and I like – I don't like the isolation of any of the instruments. I think that's barbaric and really good for the technical aspects, but we're not there to honor the engineers and the technicians. We're there to re-create a spontaneous cultural art form that's done openly and honestly and right out. So to go into all this stuff is just making the art a slave to the – what can I say – the techniques and the business. What are we doing? Are we doing art? Or are we doing technique? Why don't we just record the engineers? I think it's stupid, and I don't really like it. I don't like to record that way, and I have a fight every time I go in the studio. I have a big battle. I just did a track on Dave Brubeck's album. They had the drummer over there, isolated. The bass player was over here, isolated. The tenor player – one of the Brecker brothers, Michael, I think it was – in isolation over there. And me in the middle, between them, in isolation. So Dave and I just said, hey, why don't we at least get together? So Dave told everybody – he says, "Let Jon stand right by the piano, so we can feel each other and be together." They said it doesn't make a good recording. We finally did it. The first two guys to come out and tell us how great it was were the two engineers that told us it was impossible.

Zimmerman: You just seem so far removed from everything, it's . . .

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Hendricks: They take the life out of the music. The life of the music is in the proximity of the musicians to each other. That's where the life is. They take spirit and try to materialize it. They're not magicians. They should take the material and let the musicians spiritualize it. That can be done. But they go about things backwards. I hate them.

Zimmerman: One more question on multi-tracking. What effect did the use of multi-tracking have on live performance?

Hendricks: We had to be very judicious in picking the three lines that we were going to sing. That was the main thing. Because – this is something about music that all great musicians and all great arrangers know this – you don't have to sound a note for the audience to hear that note.

Zimmerman: Go on with that.

Hendricks: If you have more than one instrument sound their two notes correctly, the audience will automatically, subliminally, subconsciously hear the third note.

Zimmerman: They will hear the blend.


Hendricks: They will hear the third note in there. They'll put it in there with their ear. Their ear will put it in. It's like Ahmad Jamal does with silences. He has the bass, drums, and the piano play [Hendricks sings a syncopated one-bar rhythm] "doot doot doot." The bass goes [Hendricks sings the same rhythm] "boot boot boot." The drummer goes [again, with a wooden clacking tone]. The piano goes [again] "boot boot boot." Then all of a sudden the piano and the bass will lay out, and the drum will just go [again] "boot boot boot," but the audience will hear the piano and the bass that time when they lay out and there's only the drums, because they've heard it before and they will automatically, subliminally, subconsciously put it there. That's the way the human ear works. It hears what's not there if it's heard it there before. So you can make three – you can take three notes and you can voice them so that the notes in between each of them will be subliminally heard. They'll become six, and the six will in turn become 12.

Zimmerman: So you sort of have an orchestral sound.

Hendricks: Yeah. So you'll have the effect of the orchestral sound. That's what we did.

Zimmerman: That's pretty heavy right there.

Hendricks: Yeah. That's very deep. Music is endlessly occult and secret. It's a spiritual art form. All art is spiritual. Painting is spiritual. Painting and music and poetry and dance. Plato put them all together. He called architecture "frozen music." Painting is

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visual poetry. They're all tied together. The arts are tied together. So-called "civilized man" in the West unties them and separates them. That's actually primitive, because primitive so-called uncivilized people keep them together. Look what they've done to poetry. Poetry was sung. They've taken the music away. Now they have a composer and a lyricist. The true poet sang both the music and the words at the same time. So we haven't progressed. We've actually retrogressed in many ways.

Zimmerman: We touched on the racial climate and how that affected you. During those times, the country was going through a lot. It's difficult on a lot of people, with Jim Crow and segregation. How did that impact on you and the group as you traveled and toured?


Hendricks: I think that since I never had anything other than a spiritual approach to those things, the impact was minimal on me. I think most artists share this with each other. That's why I think I became an artist, because they don't look at things like race. They look at what you do, and if they like it, you're great. They don't look at the fact, oh, he's black, so I won't even look at him. They don't do that. They look and they say, whoa, that guy, he's tremendous. They look past the person into the spirit of what he's doing. So although this stuff was going on, and the people that were undergoing it, not having the spiritual base that I had, or most artists have, were suffering from it, we didn't suffer that much.

Ten years before the civil rights march we negotiated a contract to go down to Austin, Texas. They invited us down there. We were working at the Apollo Theater. The guy said, "They want you to come down to Austin, Texas." So Dave and I said, "Will they give a non-segregated clause in the contract?" As I say, this was ten years before the civil rights marches. The guy says, "Yeah, I think they will. We're going to go to Austin." So I said, "If they will, then we'll go." So we sent the contract down with the non-segregated clause, and they signed it.

One time Annie was talking to Basie. She spent a lot of time in Basie's dressing room. She was talking to him about our trip down through Austin, Texas. Basie said, "Don't go." So Annie was coming up and telling Dave and I, "I don't think we should go down to Austin. I really don't think." I said, "Why? They signed a non-segregated clause in the contract. They have become civilized because they want us. Now are we going to refuse to go? And if so, for what reason?" She said, "Basie said . . ." I said, "Annie, you know I love Basie, but Basie came up in an age of extreme racism and extreme separativeness on the part of white and black people in Kansas City. Basie doesn't understand modern racial attitudes like I have. He doesn't understand this."

Zimmerman: This is the '60s.

Hendricks: I said, "So naturally his view would be, don't go." I said, "Okay, he's not going. We're going." I said, "They've invited us. They've signed a non-segregated

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clause.” I said, “I don’t see how we could refuse to go. I don’t see why we would refuse to go.” I said, “If this thing is ever going to be broken down, it’s going to be broken down by people like us appearing. That’s how it’s going to be broken.”

Zimmerman: So did you always perform before integrated audiences?

Hendricks: Oh yeah. Sure. So we went. We had the time of our lives, and they had the time of their lives. They loved us. That was the result of it. So it shows, once again, that people create these monsters that they make you afraid of, and that in truth, nothing exists of any power stronger than love. Love is the strongest force in the universe. Mahatma Ghandi used Jesus Christ’s Sermon on the Mount and drove the British out of India. They’ve been trying for a thousand years to do that. Martin Luther King in turn used the Sermon on the Mount and changed the face of the South forever. You can’t fight love. See hate, they can fight that. They can lynch you, and they can kill you. But if you love them, they can’t fight you. You disarm them. It’s a very strong force, and it’s what Christ preached. Christ in the New Testament brought man from the Mosaic law into the law of the psychology, the psychological law. If a man hits you, and you say, “I love you,” you drive him nuts. He gets so mad he hits you again, and you say, “Why are you hitting me when I love you?” Then he just drops his weapon and starts to weep, because you call upon the essential humanity that is in him. He is, after all, a man and a human being, and you call upon this humanity. You call if forth past the beast that’s manifesting and beating you. You call him into being the essential him. That’s why . . .

Zimmerman: That’s so heavy.


Hendricks: That’s why they shot Reverend King, because he did that. They love it if you hate them. Then they can kill you. Look at the Black Panthers. They were going to fight back. In two months, 30 of them were dead. Love is the strongest force in the universe.

Zimmerman: I tell you. That is very evident for me in your lyrics. There are just so many different songs where love is the key word and the key feeling, the philosophy in those lyrics.

Hendricks: Absolutely. It always works. When I was in the Army, we were 18 miles from the front – I’ve got to go back to the Army now.

Zimmerman: That’s fine. Please.

Hendricks: I ran into this USO place. We could hear the German guns, the 88s, make a pop, like that. We could hear them all around. This place had blacked-out windows and dim lights. They served coffee and donuts. It was soldiers that were there from the front for a rest. They were having some coffee and donuts. They were going to go back. So I went and I found this one table. It had two chairs. I sat in one to eat my donuts and drink

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my coffee. This young white boy – he was maybe about 19 years old. He was a kid – he came in. He walks through the place, looking for a place where there were no black soldiers. The only chair he saw was mine. He passed my table three times. Finally, finding no other place, he sat there, but he thought he had to let me know. So he sat down, he looked at me, and he said, “I don’t like niggers.” I said, “Me neither.” Of course what this was was using the words of Jesus. If a man strikes you on one cheek, turn the other cheek. Agree with thine adversary quickly lest he deliver you to the sheriff or deliver you to the bailiff or delivereth me into . . . it was using the words of Christ. That guy got so upset, that kid. He looked like he was going to cry. He just didn’t know what to do. He was so taken aback. So he started to talk, and he started talking to me. We had a long conversation. We ate our donuts, drank our coffee. At the end, before he left, he said, “If you ever get to Mobile, this is my address.” He gave me his address in Mobile, Alabama, and asked me to come by. That’s the power of the message of Jesus Christ, which is love. It’s powerful, and it works. I’ve used it all the time. I’ve used it all the time.

Zimmerman: You do.

Hendricks: Yeah, I do. I do. It’s a great, great tool.

Zimmerman: Why did the group break up? Why did Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross break up?

Hendricks: We didn’t really break up. We were playing a one-nighter in Frankfurt. A half-hour before the concert, Annie collapsed. Annie’s been open enough with her own life story. She’s appeared on “Charlie Rose” and she’s told enough of her own life for me to say that she was using heroin. She was shooting heroin and drinking a lot and partying a lot and really dissipating quite a bit. This takes its toll. It just knocked her out. So the promoter came back. {Hendricks mimics a German accent:] “What could I do? What are we going to do? They are going to riot. There is going to be a riot. You must do something. You must do some . . .” I said, “Dave and I will do the concert. We’ll sing Annie’s part.” “That won’t – that will not work. It will not work. They are going to tear my theater apart. It’s going to be a damage.” We said, “Don’t worry. Don’t worry.” I said, “Just go and announce that Annie Ross has been suddenly taken ill and the concert will proceed.” So he did that. Finally calmed him down. He did that, and six people left. There was standing room. So Dave and I went out, did the concert, did Annie’s parts between us. We got a standing ovation. So we flew back to London. Annie had been put in the hospital and given six months to live. So we said, whew. We had university engagements back in America that were lucrative, a lot of money involved. We didn’t want to cancel anything. We tried to get in touch with Carol Sloane, whom I had discovered in Providence, Rhode Island, some years before. She had become a star, and she was now too busy. So a strange thing happened. I had a disc jockey show to go to that night. It was supervised by a Sudanese girl, Yolande Bavan. In her questioning me, she

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mentioned that she knew six Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross songs. I said, “You what?” She says, “Oh yeah. I’m a singer, and I know six of your songs.” I said, “Which ones?” She rattled off these titles. I said, “Can you come to a rehearsal tomorrow?” She says, “Yes.” I told her, “Okay.”

Three o’clock tomorrow at our hotel – I give her the hotel, and then I went back to our hotel. Dave was going to this big party. We were on tour with the Basie band at that time. There was a big party. Everybody was going, but Judith and I never – I’m the only one who brought his wife along on this thing. Frank Foster on the plane came and said, “Why do you bring a sandwich on a picnic?” But as it turns out, I was the only one that saw anything of London, because Judith and I would get up at 9 o’clock, have breakfast, and go to the British Museum, go to the Tate Gallery. We would go and see things. We’d go to – we’d go look up the Theosophical Society, explore Shakespeare’s writings, explore the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy. We were doing things like that, because we were fresh and rested. We didn’t go to these parties.


So this big party was coming up that night. Dave says, “Are you going?” I said, “No, no. I’m going to sleep.” So he went to this party. The next day he calls me. He said, “You know we’ve got a rehearsal at three.” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “I went to this party last night, and they were playing our album. When they got to *Avenue C*, this girl sang it along, and she hit that high note that Annie hits, that high f above c.” I said, “She did?” He says, “Yeah.” I said, “Did you get her name?” He says, “Yeah. I told her to come at 3 o’clock today. I says, “I met a girl. She was a disc jockey, and I told her to come at 3 o’clock.” So Dave says, “Okay. We’ll have somebody to look at.”

Three o’clock, the bell rings. I’m up in Dave’s room. It’s Yolande Bavan. Dave says, “Oh, great.” I says, “What do you mean? You know her?” He says, “This is the girl that hit the note at the party.” I said, “This is the girl that I invited.”

So we just hired her. When she sang those six tunes, we just hired her, which for her was great, because she had been trying for four years – four years – to get into the United States. This brought me into the realm of politics and the McCarran Immigration Act. You know what this act was?

Zimmerman: No.

Hendricks: 1,000 people could come to America from Ireland alone, but only 100 could come from all Asia and Africa. That was the McCaren-Walter Immigration Act. That way they packed the country with Irish people who were Catholic, so you were going to have a right-wing constituency there, which is why we’re in the political shape that we’re in now. You got these moral midgets like Newt Gingrich cropping up in Pennsylvania and going to Georgia, where they’re stupid enough to vote for him and have him talk

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about the morality of the country while he serves his wife with divorce papers after her mastectomy. These people are impossible.

But that's how they got constituency into the country, that act. Because Yolande had been trying for four years. So we went to the State Department and certified that we had gainful employment for her, and she got in. That's how that started. That's how we continued as Lambert, Hendricks, and Bavan for two years. Then I left.

Zimmerman: Then you left.

Hendricks: Yes. I got tired of the – [?] the performance. Dave was a drunk by then and just wasn't singing at his optimal. Yolande was never Annie. I was just disenchanted. I felt I was writing – I was casting pearls before swine, is the way I felt. I was writing great lyrics, but I was the only one singing.

Matter of fact, I got a job that way from Max Gordon at the Vanguard. When I lived in London for five years, I had to come back for the birth of my niece. So Judith decided, if I came, she had to come, and we both decided, if she came, our four children would have to come. So that means I had to take six people back to San Francisco. So I needed a stop in New York. So I called Max Gordon at the Village Vanguard. I said, "Max, I need a gig." He says, "What have you been doing? You've been living in England for five years." He says, "I haven't heard what you're doing." I said, "I'm still singing." He says, "Yeah, but do you have a group?" I said, "No. I'm singing by myself." He said, "I never heard you sing by yourself." I said, "Max, I was always singing by myself." He fell out. So I got the week, and that's how I was able to bring my children back and come back to America.

Zimmerman: That's beautiful.

Hendricks: It's amazing.

Zimmerman: Can we go back to one thing?

Hendricks: Sure.

Zimmerman: How did you meet Judith?

Hendricks: I was just telling him before you came in. I studied art for eight years. I used to draw every day. I would . . .

Zimmerman: Really?

Hendricks: Yeah. I still love painting better than anything. I like the Old Masters, though. I don't really gravitate to modern art. I think a lot of it is chicanery and just b.s. I think it's people who can't learn to draw and paint classically, creating a place for themselves. It's like the avant garde in jazz. They can't play the blues, so they're going to make not playing the blues fashionable, and they can't swing, so they're going to make that fashionable. They're going to set new standards where if you don't play the blues and don't swing, you're great. That's what I think of modern art. I think that these guys can't paint. It takes you years to learn how to paint a hand. They can't do that, so they're going to make not doing that, great. To me, guys like – what's his name? Jason – Jackson Pollack – are frauds. I think once again the intellect gets busy, because it can always explain these things. Well, it needs to explain these things, because they're bad art.

I hope I've offended everybody that's listening. But I don't like that kind of stuff. I like the classicists, because what they do is difficult to do.


I forgot what we were talking about in the first place.

Zimmerman: Judith?

Hendricks: Yeah. So I used to draw pictures all the time, and I would draw faces. I drew the face of this girl. I would always – when I got through drawing, I'd end up drawing this face. I'd always feel a stirring in my heart when I looked at that face that I had just drawn. Now I know that I was in love with that face. This happened for about five or six years. I drew this face, and I would say, ah. Then I met Judith, and there that face was. I almost fainted. I almost – when I met Judith, everything happened to me. My throat dried up. My eyes watered. I became deaf. My knees weakened. I started to itch. It was the most amazing thing. It was what they call in Sicily, the thunderbolt. I met her in Birdland. When I walked down in Birdland, there she was. I thought, God, that's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my life. That's my face. So I could believe Gavin Arthur, who was the grandson of President Arthur – Chester Arthur. He did our charts. He said, "I've got to show you something." He took my chart and laid it out, and then he did a transparency of Judith's chart. He laid the transparency of Judith's chart over my chart, and all the planets in our two charts went like this in every house. It was amazing. He said, "This marriage was made in heaven." I said, "Right." It's true. We're married 37 years. I feel the same way about her now as I did the first day I met her. It never abates. It never changes. It never gets less.

Zimmerman: How does this correlate to your biblical upbringing, the astrology in that? It doesn't . . . ?

Hendricks: Yes. Bacon had a very unenviable task when he took charge of translating the Bible for King James, because the Bible is very astrological and full of reincarnation, but James wanted all these things taken out. So Bacon had the task of disguising the

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translation so that reincarnation remained, but was hidden from the – it was revealed to the wise and hidden from the foolish, which is an occult rule. You don't ever reveal to the masses, because they are too foolish to have such knowledge. You reveal it so that it's revealed to the wise and hidden from the foolish. So how would you, in writing the Bible, put in astrological terminology and yet hide it? Let's start from the beginning. "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God, and the earth was without form, and void and darkness was on the face of the earth. And God said, 'Let there be light. Let there be a great light to shine by the day and a lesser light to shine by the night, and let the lights be for signs and seasons and days and years'." That's a picture, a word picture, of the astrological wheel. The signs are twelve: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius. The seasons are Aries, Taurus, Gemini, March 22nd, April 22nd, May 22nd, spring; Cancer, Leo, Virgo, summer; Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, fall; and Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces, winter. Those are the seasons. The days are 30 each, and once around is one year. There are the signs, seasons, and the days, and the years. And the greater light to shine by day and the lesser light to shine by night are the sun and moon. So that's – astrology is revealed to the wise and hidden from the foolish. James accepted the Bible.

Zimmerman: James accepted the Bible.


Hendricks: Accepted it. He was okay. He didn't see any reference to astrology in there, because it was hidden. And so was reincarnation. The only references to reincarnation are made in direct speech. Christ was asked why he spoke so much like Elijah. He said, "I am Elijah." That can only mean one thing. He's a reincarnation of Elijah.

Zimmerman: I've never heard of this before.

Hendricks: It's there. It's written there now, but it's not propounding reincarnation, because it doesn't even mention reincarnation. So it's revealed to the wise and hidden from the foolish. That's what occult writers do.

Zimmerman: What did you do once you left Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross? Actually, this takes us to another thing, because it would appear to me that you were doing a number of things at one time. You probably had to.

Hendricks: Yeah. I had married Judith, who is a very wise woman. She was studying astrology when I met her. She makes charts and reads palms and does numerology. She's very wonderful and close – she's a servant of God. She talks to God. She's in close touch with powers beyond the earth. She told me that I was going to go through a period of eight months of no work at all. I said, "Are you kidding? I'm the number one jazz singer in the world. I'm not going to be out of work eight months." She says, "Yes you are, and so starting now we are going to save our money." At that time I hadn't decided to leave Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross. I decided that about a month after she told me that. When

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I left Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross and went to Mill Valley [California] to be with my family, I was out of work eight months. But Judith, who knew it, had saved money. So we were able to see our way through the eight months.

She's very wise. She understands people. When we went to England, she saw the writing on the wall. She said we better leave here, because dope was in the schools in San Francisco. We were on the road forty weeks a year. The children were into that stuff. They would have all been junkies if we'd stayed on that level of operation. So we moved to England, where they don't have dope in the schools. The schools are private, although they call them public schools. What we call public schools, they call private schools. So we put our kids there for five years, and they got a chance to grow up without undergoing all that dope stuff. It's saving them. It preserved their sanity and so forth. It was a good idea.

Zimmerman: I can't think of exactly when that time was. That seems to be somewhere in the '60s.

Hendricks: We left our home in Mill Valley in 1968, and we returned in 1972.

Zimmerman: When did you move? When did you establish the home in Mill Valley?

Hendricks: Ah. That was shortly after – let's see. It was about '63 – between '63 and '64.

Zimmerman: Sort of right after Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, or as it was breaking up?

Hendricks: After it broke up.

Zimmerman: Now, interesting enough, during that time you wrote the lyrics to *Desifinado* and *One Note Samba*?

Hendricks: Yeah. That was very funny, the way that happened. It was hilarious. This publisher, Howie Richman, a very rich man now, a big thief, gave that lyric to Johnny Mercer, and Johnny gave it back. He couldn't figure out what it was. Then he gave it to Ned Washington. Ned Washington had won two Academy Awards, one for *The High and the Mighty* and one for *High Noon*. Benny Carter was a ghost writer for Ned Washington – for Dimitri Tiomkin, who did the music. Ned Washington wrote those lyrics, but Benny Carter ghost wrote for Dimitri Tiomkin. He actually wrote *The High and the Mighty*, the melody [Hendricks sings].

Zimmerman: I never knew what the name of that song was.

Hendricks: *The High and the Mighty*. Benny Carter. It won an Academy Award, but Dimitri Tiomkin's name is on it. It's like Quincy Jones arrangements are usually written by Billy Byers. But those people do that in that den of iniquity. I hate that place.

Anyway, they gave it to Ned Washington, whose lyric had won an Academy Award, and he gave it back. Then they gave it to Hugh Martin, who had won for *Three Coins in a Fountain*, and he gave it back. So the guy actually called me up, Howie Richman. He's a very gross – he has no finesse and no sense of culture at all. He says, "I got this SAMba." I said, "samBA." He said, "Yeah, SAMba." So I just quit while I was behind. I didn't say anything else to him. Jackass. So he says, "Yeah, and it's a big hit. It's by Stan Getz. I think it needs a lyric. I gave it to these guys: Johnny Mercer, Ned Washington, and Hugh Martin. They all gave it back. They couldn't figure out what the hell it is." He said, "But I remember that you write lyrics to that other funny stuff," referring to Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross's lyrics. I said, hmmm. I said, "Yeah. Okay. I'll take it home." I took it home, and I wrote the words in ten minutes, because I recognized what it was, because what they called bossa nova is nothing but young Brazilian musicians listening to American jazz and putting their rhythmic conceptions to the bebop-type lines. Jobim's *Chega de Saudade*, which I translated into *No More Blues*, sounds like a Bird alto solo. [Hendricks sings the melody, and Zimmerman joins him.] Sounds like a Bird solo with the rhythm of the bossa antiqua like the – which was the [Hendricks sings the classic syncopated Latin rhythmic pattern] played in a new way, or a nova, or the bossa nova, like [Hendricks sings a related rhythmic pattern]. You put those together, the jazz melodies, and you've got bossa nova. That's all it was, Brazil being the same ethnic and cultural makeup as the United States. They imported more slaves than we did. So they have – Brazil is a mixture. The whole nation is a mixture of African slaves intermarrying with the native Indian and the European Portuguese. That's what the Brazilian people are. They come in all different shades. They come from pure white to cafe au lait to honey brown to coal black. If you ever go down there, you'll see. It's a magnificent . . .


Zimmerman: I really would love to go there.

Hendricks: It's a magnificent sight, and they all love each other. 92% of the population of Brazil can trace their ancestry directly back to Africa. It's amazing. It's an amazingly African-oriented civilization, and the music is amazingly like ours. So I wrote the lyric [Hendricks snaps his fingers] bam, like that, and it's a standard. It's now a standard song.

Zimmerman: *Desafinado*?

Hendricks: Oh yeah. It's one of the – it was the top song of its year.

Zimmerman: And then *One Note Samba* as well.

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Hendricks: Yeah. I did that too. And I met Jobim and all those people. I got very acquainted with them, well acquainted with them

Zimmerman: When did you go there?

Hendricks: The first time? . . .

Zimmerman: Yes.

Hendricks: . . . that I went to Brazil was for the jazz festival four years ago. The last time I went there was just before . . .

Zimmerman: Hold on now. Four years ago?

Hendricks: Yeah. They came here. The State Department brought all them up to New York when that song became so huge. The State Department took notice, because Vinicius de Moraes, who was the lyricist for Jobim to most of those songs, was not only a medical doctor, but a poet and Brazilian ambassador to the United States. So he alerted the State Department. Here – we have a great phenomenon here. So the State Department woke up and invited all those people up to New York.

Zimmerman: Did you sing on that concert?

Hendricks: No. It was only Brazilians. So they all came. The movie *Black Orpheus* had just come out. So the singer, Wilson Seminal, who sang in that – he came, and he sang. He's a wonderful singer, a great singer.

Zimmerman: Okay. We'll have to pick back up on this tomorrow.


Hendricks: Oh yeah. This is a rich area here.

Zimmerman: That's wonderful. I'm looking forward to this.

[recording interrupted]

Zimmerman: Good morning. Today is August 18th. I'm – this is the second day of recording the oral history of Mr. Jon Hendricks, the poet laureate of jazz, a wonderful lyricist, composer, and singer, and just a humanitarian. He's a wonderful guy. We're in the National Portrait Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution. My name is James Zimmerman.

Good morning, Jon.

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Hendricks: Good morning, James.

Zimmerman: We'd like to go back into your history and revisit the recording of *Four Brothers*. Could you tell me – could you just give us an overview of that and give us some details about how that happened. And if you wouldn't mind, would you hum a little of the melody?


Hendricks: Sure. [Hendricks sings:] “Take a seat and cool it ‘cause unless you overrule it we are ready to show you some blowin’. We’re rompin’ and a-stompin’ and a-having some fun. Four brothers who could blow in our horns.”

Zimmerman: Beautiful.

Hendricks: That was the one.

Zimmerman: Beautiful. Now how did that come about? You and Dave Lambert recorded that together.

Hendricks: When I did the *Don't Get Scared* thing with King Pleasure, it brought me to the attention of a young black guy named Teacho Wiltshire, who was getting into entrepreneurship in those days, which – there weren't too many. He had a little record company. So he came to me. I'd been seeing him on the scene around Broadway, spoken to him several times, but never really had got to know him. He came to me and said he'd heard the thing that I did with King Pleasure, and he'd heard that I'd written this lyric to *Four Brothers*. He wanted to know if I would sing it for him. So I went up to his office, and I sang it for him. He says, “That's incredible.” He said, “I think that should be recorded.” I said, “Okay.” So he started to set that up. Then he said, “Who do you want to sing it with you?” So I was a fan of Dave's back in Toledo, because he and his partner Buddy Stewart had done some recordings for the Keynote label. I had a lot of those. They reflected a lot of what I felt about scatting. They were right on. I collected as many of those works as I could. So I was very familiar with Dave. So his name came up right away. I said, “Yeah. Dave Lambert.” So he called around, found Dave's number, called Dave, introduced himself to Dave on the phone, and said that he had someone that he thought that Dave ought to meet. So he set up the appointment for me to go down to Dave's house at 22 Cornelia Street in the Village. So I went down there. Dave was there with an arranger named George Handy, who had arranged for the Boyd Raeburn Orchestra, which was a very avant-garde orchestra at that time. Boyd Raeburn was the Stan Kenton of that day, only he was much more hip than Stan was. He was a great orchestra, and John [*sic*: George] Handy had done most of those arrangements. He and Dave were there. They were high. Here I was, this nice little kid from Ohio, clean-cut and not high. I came in, and these guys were lounging around. “Yeah. What's happening? What's happening?” Dave says, “Yeah. What'cha got?” I said, “I got this lyric to *Four Brothers*.” He says, “Yeah, you got a lyric to *Four Brothers*.” So George Handy says,

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“I’d like to hear *that!*” They were kind of scoffing at me, which I understood. So I sang it, and they both – it’s like they emerged from their marijuana maze. They both set up. Said, “Sing that again.” I sang it again, and Dave immediately grabbed an arranger’s pad and started writing the arrangement for the voices. Just like that. Immediately. He didn’t even waste 10 minutes. Didn’t ask me my name again or anything. He just plunged right into it, which is the way he was. He was very moved by the music, like I was. The music was first. Everything else was second. He had that arrangement done in about 20 minutes.

Zimmerman: Was it arranged for just you and Dave, or were there other singers as well?

Hendricks: It was arranged for eight voices: four – let me see – six men and two women. Two of the men would be Dave and me. It was done so fast. I’m still amazed to this day. He just did it. Just wrote it out like you write a letter. He wrote that arrangement. It was amazing.

Zimmerman: Was Dave responsible for a lot of the actual vocal arrangements in Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross?

Hendricks: The vocal arrangements were taken from the instrumentals. We just sang the instrumentals. We sang the instrumental arrangements. But he took the notes down, so that those of the singers who could read had notes to read. Of course the notes meant nothing to me.

Zimmerman: You just heard it.


Hendricks: I just heard it. He had that *Four Brothers* thing ready in about 20 minutes, as I say. We began work then. George Handy was right in with us. He was in with the whole thing. He just couldn’t believe it. He says, “This is incredible.” They both were saying things like, “I never saw anything like this.” It was a new thing. It was the ideas of Eddie Jefferson and Eddie Jefferson taken into the orchestral form.

Zimmerman: Extended.

Hendricks: Extended, yeah. So we did it first for this guy Teacho Wilshire, and he came up with the idea that since it was such a fast song, we should do side 1 and side 2 and slow it down. I didn’t necessarily agree with this, but at that time I wasn’t prone to speak out. I thought the people that made these kinds of decisions knew everything.

Do you have a question?

Zimmerman: No, but whenever I listen to you, I have to think about the lyrics that I know, and I think of [Zimmerman sings] “I ain’t gonna let nobody tell” – *No More?*

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Hendricks: Oh yeah. *No More*.

Zimmerman: You speak to those kinds of things in that lyric, about taking charge, in a sense.

Hendricks: I became that way, from being completely passive, which is what I was when I first came to New York from Toledo. I was completely passive, because I was in a world to me which was awesome. I was actually able to look at and talk to Charlie Parker and Louis Armstrong, and Ben Webster and Coleman Hawkins. I could actually talk to these people. I couldn't believe it. I was like, wow. But after about a year or two, that settled down, settled in, and I got used to that. Then after listening to some other people's decisions which I hadn't agreed with at first, and then seeing them really be wrong, I began to become more assertive of what I thought was right, to the point that now, if I hear anything I don't agree with at all, right away I speak up. I say, "Wait a minute. Hold it. Let's talk about that." I begin to question right away, because I know that being too passive in things of that sort can be fatal to an artist.

Anyway, we got these singers, and we did this slow version of *Four Brothers*, which I never really liked and never really agreed with, because I think it's pandering to the audience. I always feel that if you give the audience a work of art as it's conceived, you give them a chance to rise up to it and to grow to like it, whereas if you cut it down and pander to them, you keep them in that position of low and limited conception and understanding. So you don't really help the audience when you do that, nor do you help the work itself. So I never do that anymore. I just put it out there, and people accept it. Monk said the same thing. He said, "Just do what you do, and put it out there, and if it takes 25 years for the people to pick up on it," he said, "that's okay." I believe that now. I don't mess with anything. I don't water down anything. I don't believe in it, because you keep the audience stupid instead of lifting it up – lifting them up. It's really the job of the artist, to raise the consciousness of the audience. That's his job. So if you do something that you know to be way over their head, you at least give them something that they can mentally aspire to, because they say, "What was that?", and they start thinking on a much higher plane than they do ordinarily every day. I think what the arts do now, especially in the movies, is to pander and play down to the audience so much that they keep the audience in a state of abject stupidity and ignorance and animalism. They don't give them something that lifts them up, forces them to rise up in their thinking process. I think that's the degradation of art and not the purpose of art at all.

Anyway, although I did this thing, and I let it happen, I've never really agreed with it. So it came out, and probably because he didn't have the proper distribution, it didn't do much. It just lay there. Nothing much happened to it. Except that Milt Gabler, who had always been a pretty far-looking guy, who had the Commodore label when he was 17 years old and loved jazz, he heard it, and he approached us about doing it for Decca. Both Dave and I decided we were going to do it just the way it was done by Woody Herman,

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straight ahead, no slowing it down. So we did that, and on the other side of it we put a tune called *Cloudburst*, which I had gotten off an album called Claude Cloud and his Thunderclaps, on the MGM label. It featured this song *Cloudburst*. There was a tenor saxophone by Sam “the Man” Taylor, who was the most recorded tenor player in the world at that time, because he was on every great rhythm-and-blues record made. Sam and his tenor are on records by every great rhythm-and-blues artist at that time. Bill Haley and the Comets, all the other cats, all the great black artists – Sam “the Man” Taylor’s tenor was there. He did this song, this *Cloudburst* thing, and it revealed that he could play, that he’s a heck of a jazz tenor player. So I heard this, and I thought, hmm. I said, who is Claude Cloud and his Thunderclaps? So I started to ask around the cats on the scene. They told me, that’s Leroy Kirkland. I knew Leroy Kirkland, because Leroy Kirkland was one of the guys that was always on the scene, always had his little briefcase or his guitar case. He had played guitar with Chick Webb’s orchestra when Louis Jordan was playing lead alto and when Ella Fitzgerald joined the band. He was the guitar player. He did a lot of work around, a lot of arrangements for a lot of people. Ruth Brown, a lot of her early stuff was arranged by Leroy Kirkland. He was a great writer, great composer. He got a job doing this album for MGM. They told him – they said, “Make us a commercial album.” He wanted to keep his rhythm-and-blues / jazz reputation, so he felt that he would make this commercial album, but he would change his name, so that his jazz and rhythm-and-blues reputation would not be tarnished by this crass, commercial effort, which is funny, because the album was a huge hit, and then when I put the words to this one song, *Cloudburst*, it became a worldwide phenomenon, and nobody knew who did it. So Leroy Kirkland, after struggling 20 years to get a hit, got a hit under the name Claude Cloud, who nobody knew. It was really one of the great tragedies of the business, because he was so saddened by it. He was – after that, he’d walk around very morose – very rich, but very morose, because nobody knew who he really was.


Zimmerman: Sure. That’s incredible. As a matter of fact, *Cloudburst*, I think, is one of the most incredible works that I’ve ever heard. I mean ever. It’s so fantastic. It’s kind of funny. When Federal Express came on the scene, and they had this commercial where this guy stood up and he talked for about a moment – about a whole minute or so without taking a breath and . . .

Hendricks: I remember that.

Zimmerman: . . . I thought of you. I said, hey, Jon could do that flat out, no problem. In fact, he does it faster in *Cloudburst*. I really enjoyed that.

Hendricks: Thank you.

Zimmerman: Let’s see. Let’s go back to New York, because you touched on it a moment, that Dave Lambert was one of the guys that you met. Who challenged you then? At that point you had won the respect of Charlie Parker, and that opened doors for you.

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But I'm sure that everyone didn't just roll over when you got to town. There must have been some challenges. Then again, the whole thing with the singers versus musicians. I'm sure you were put to the test.

Hendricks: I never felt that.

Zimmerman: No?

Hendricks: No. I think, because of my spiritual upbringing, I never felt competitive in the arts. I think that competition in the arts is indecent and low minded. I don't think a true artist ever feels competition. The ones that I met never did.

Zimmerman: Really?

Hendricks: Bird or Ben Webster or Coleman Hawkins. They felt a competitiveness, but it was like, "I'm going to blow you off the stand tonight, man," but they're talking to a friend. It was friendly, and it was with love. It wasn't with any animosity. I think that doesn't belong in the world of art. It's not real. I've seen it in the rock world. We did a gig at Ronnie Scott's in London. I was at a rock band. I said, "Since we're sharing the same dressing room, we ought to make each other as comfortable as possible." These guys said, "You just stay on your side of the room, and we'll stay on our side of the room." I said, "Hey, we're all in show business here." He says, "No. We're not in the same business you are." So I just understood I was talking to some ignorant people, completely ignorant of what show business was and with no conception of art at all. So I just let them alone.

Zimmerman: What were some of the memorable jam sessions that you had during that time?


Hendricks: I have a tape that somebody sent me of a time I went into the Downbeat Club. Billy Taylor, who had the house band there, had Clark Terry, Dizzy Gillespie, and Red Allen, three of the main trumpet players of the day, on the stand at the time. He called me up to scat with them. I got up. I think we did *Sometimes I'm Happy*. I have a tape of that. That was really fantastic. That was remarkable.

Zimmerman: I believe it.

Hendricks: I was amazed at how I sounded then. Not too much different from the way I sound today.

Zimmerman: Really?

Hendricks: I don't think I've really evolved. I think I just kept going.

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Zimmerman: That is amazing that you had all of the technique and skill that you have now, then. I'm sure it was even more remarkable then, because . . .

Hendricks: That was from Art Tatum.

Zimmerman: That is incredible.

Hendricks: I think I had a good basis, so I didn't have to struggle to improve it. Just keep on doing it and make it better. Hone it and make it better. Like Monk said, always try to make it better. I think I've done that to an extent, but basically, I haven't changed.

Zimmerman: What kinds of things were you doing to hone your skills, technique-wise? Did you work with the piano at all?


Hendricks: No. I would just listen. Duke Ellington said the same thing. I was very relieved when I talked with Duke. We went up to his suite in the Fairmont one night, just Judith and me. Duke talked to us all night long. It was the most wonderful night that I ever spent, because he said a lot of things that I felt in my heart. He said – like, Judith had always been getting on me. When I had to write something, I would wait until the night before, and then suddenly, in a spurt of frenetic – what do you call it? . . .

Zimmerman: Energy?

Hendricks: . . . energy, I would dash this thing off, and everybody would say, oh, it's great. In fact, at Monterey, when I did the first production of *Evolution of the Blues*, John Lewis was musical director. Jimmy Lyons was on stage making the announcement about this world premiere performance that they were going to have. All the acts – Odetta, Miriam Makeba – were assembled on the stage, and the musicians. I was walking up the steps writing on my pad. John Lewis was a nervous wreck. He said, "You mean, you're not finished?" I said, "It's okay. Don't worry. Everything's going to be all right."

Zimmerman: That's remarkable. I've seen you do that at least a couple of times. I just thought that it was amazing for you to walk up on a stage and pull out a sheet of paper and just began singing this very difficult song and hitting every note and just doing it perfectly, for me. I think that's . . .

Hendricks: I got reassurance of what I did by habit from Duke that night, because he said – I was saying to him – I said, "When you work, I've heard that you always work on the last minute. You don't ever have anything ready way before it's due." He said, "Oh no. No, no." He said, "The minute you put it on paper, it starts to die." He said, "As long as it's in your mind, it's alive." So he said, "The longer you keep it in your mind, the more it lives and continues to change and evolve itself." He said, "The minute you put it

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down, it's dead. So don't put it down until the last minute. Let the baby live." I said, "Wow, that's wonderful, because that's the way I am."

Zimmerman: So you don't go back and change the lyrics, or re-work it, or edit, and all those kind of things as you . . .?

Hendricks: Oh no. Sometimes I find a mistake that I correct, but I don't do any editing. Duke told me about this time that he was hired by Orson Welles, who was then working for Howard Hughes at RKO, to do the music for a film that Orson was going to do. So they flew – he and Billy Strayhorn – out to Los Angeles, put them up in a suite in the Chateau Marmont. Duke said they just partied every night there. People brought big pots of food, jambalaya, red beans and rice, and all kinds of stuff. People came and baked biscuits. Women brought cakes. They just lived and had a party for 28 days. They're waiting for this call from Orson Welles. Orson had told them what he wanted, what kind of music he wanted. But they didn't write anything. They just waited. Then, on the last weekend, on the Friday morning of the last weekend, Orson called up and said, "Duke, we need the music on the set Monday." So Duke says, "Strays, we have to go to work." That Friday, they started working. Monday morning, they had all that music at RKO.

Zimmerman: What was the name of the movie? *Anatomy*?

Hendricks: I forget. He told me something.

Zimmerman: *Anatomy* . . .


Hendricks: No, it wasn't *Anatomy of a Murder*. That was done for Universal. It was James Stewart. No. It was a movie that subsequently Howard Hughes put in the can, because he and Orson Welles got into a big argument, as they would inevitably. I'm not surprised about that. Howard Hughes did not have the kind of temperament that Orson Welles was going to put up with. But Duke said that they just lolled around for 27 days. Then the last three days, they wrote this whole thing. So that made me feel better.

Zimmerman: Who did the booking for Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross?

Hendricks: Willard Alexander. Willard Alexander was the booking agent for Count Basie and Benny Goodman's orchestra?

Zimmerman: Where were some of the places that you performed in the U.S. and around the world?

Hendricks: All over the U.S. in every possible venue that there was, I think. We performed in all the best rooms, at all the festivals. And the same in Europe: every festival of any repute, we performed at. We also hold the record for doing the longest

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one-nighter in the history of show business. We were working in San Francisco at the Hungry I. We got this call from Willard. We'd been invited by the royal family to come to London and do a command performance on Saturday – on that Saturday, and then fly back to San Francisco on the Sunday. So we left our job at the Hungry I. We got a substitute in. Enrico Banducci, who owned the Hungry I, was a show business person himself. So he understood that it was important that we do this. So he got another act to take our place. We left there Wednesday, flew to London. Got there late Thursday. Performed Friday. Left Saturday. Got back Sunday and came back to work on that Monday. It was very harrowing and difficult, but it holds the record as the longest one-nighter in show-business history.

Zimmerman: How many nights a year did Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross perform?

Hendricks: Judith could know this better than me, because she finally made me take a vacation.

Judith: I traveled with him from 1959 to maybe '60, '61. I said, "Jon, you really have to take two weeks off. People rest, actually." So maybe they had a couple of days between gigs, but Willard was a slave driver. He bought up everything he could buy up. They'd be at work and finish. They were always 52 weeks a year, always. I don't know how they did it, very frankly.

Hendricks: You said he bought everything.

Judith: All the offers, as agent. He took every offer. They just were back-to-back with all their stuff. Maybe sometimes they'd have a weekend or a few days off during the week, and stuff like that

Hendricks: When we would work Las Vegas, the Flamingo Hotel scheduled an extra morning show for us, because we were the favorites of all the stars that worked Las Vegas. Frank Sinatra loved us. He wanted to sign us to his Reprise label. Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis; all the comedians – Don Rickles, Red Foxx, Fatjack Leonard; all the singers – Peggy Lee, Pearl Bailey, Lena Horne. Everybody in show business loved us. We were their favorites. That was the thing that I was most proud of, that of all the world's great artists, that the world loved, we were their favorite act. We were the creme de la creme. When we got to this hotel in Las Vegas, the Flamingo scheduled this morning show so that all those acts could come and see us. That was wonderful, to see all these people sitting in the audience. It was great. It was just – I'll never forget it. It was wonderful to be singing for all these people that you've admired for so long.

Zimmerman: When you left Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross and struck out on your own – tell us about that. Why did you decide to perform as a single artist? And what was it

like when you stepped out on your own after several years of working with Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross?

Hendricks: I kept looking to my right and left for these other people. As I said yesterday, Judith was after me to open my eyes, because those years with Art Tatum, with his eyes closed, I got used to closing my eyes. I had to realize now that I was holding the stage by myself. So I had to learn to sing with my eyes open, which I still have trouble with to this day. I had to go back to when I had been a single artist, which was practically my childhood – when I was a child. After the war I came back and performed with a four-piece band. I performed basically by myself, but I was also playing drums at the same time. So I didn't have the focus of the performance. I had the drums to hide behind, more or less. But now . . .

Zimmerman: It's pretty difficult, also.

Hendricks: Yeah. I played and sang at the same time. Scatted bebop riffs. I did everything impossible, because I didn't know that you couldn't do it.

Zimmerman: Mr. Impossible.


Hendricks: I often tell people, the secret of my art is ignorance, because I don't that you can't do this and you can't do that. So I just did it. As I mentioned yesterday, when I told Johnny Mercer that I wrote a song a week, he said, "You can't do that." I said, "Yeah, yeah. I did that for six years." He said, "How the heck did you do that?" I says, "They told me that that's what they wanted." He said, "It takes us months to write a song. We work for months on a song. You don't write a song in a week. Good heavens. Nobody does that."

Zimmerman: You must have a heck of an archive.

Hendricks: I do. I do. But I just didn't know that you didn't do those things or that they couldn't be done. Most of what I do, I do because I didn't know you couldn't do it. I think that's a very valuable piece of information, because Erroll Garner didn't know that you had to learn to read and study to play the piano. He just climbed up on the piano and played the piano. Buddy Rich never understood that a drummer should know how to read music. Art Blakey doesn't read music. They just play. They didn't understand that you have to go to school and learn and this. They just jumped on the drums and played the drums. They were two of the best drummers the world has ever known. So I think there's a great spirit to art that transcends intellectual knowledge.

Zimmerman: Yes. You were saying that.

Hendricks: Yeah. I think that's true.

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Zimmerman: Where did you set up your headquarters at that time, when you went out on your own? Where did you go?

Hendricks: We went to San Francisco, which through coming to the Monterey Festival every year for five years, we would always talk the rest of the year – like we'd stay there a month. We'd do Monterey and then rent a house or some kind of cabin up in Big Sur or somewhere around there, spend the rest of the month there. We'd talk the other 11 months of the year about what a beautiful place San Francisco is, and what a wonderful time – finally, it occurred to us. Why are we living in New York and talking about how beautiful San Francisco is 11 months out of the year? Why don't we live in San Francisco and come to New York one month out of the year? Which is what we finally did. We took – the first thing we did was, we took a houseboat in Sausalito, which is in Marin County right across the Golden Gate Bridge north of San Francisco. It's a very famous place. We lived on that houseboat for a year. Then Judith, who does the books, added up the rent that we had paid on that houseboat and realized that we had spent the down payment on a house. So we begin to look for a house in Mill Valley. They showed us all these split-level, tract-type homes that were fashionable at the time. We looked at all of them and said no, no, no, no, no, no. So Judith says, "Don't you have anything old, something old?" They said, "We have this old house. It was built in 1905. It withstood the earthquake of 1906. It's a big, sprawling, old wood-frame house, but nobody wants it." We said, "Would you show it to us?" So the lady drove us into the driveway of this house, and without seeing the house – all we saw was the garage – we said, "We'll take it," because we felt this house. And it turns out, that's a great house. So we put our children in there. That's where they all grew up.

Zimmerman: One of the places that you performed during that time was at the Trident?

Hendricks: Yes. That was a restaurant run – managed by a guy named Lou Ganapoler, who had managed the Village Vanguard for 25 years. Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross had worked for Lou for at least five years. So we knew him. Knew him very well, as a matter of fact. He's a wonderful man. Lou Ganapoler is one of the great men of this business. He's not only a good manager of the club, but he loves the art, and he was a cultured man himself. He's an actor and a writer. He's the one that got the best performance out of Miles Davis of any club owner, because Miles at that time was making a reputation of doing one show and disappearing, probably because of drugs. So all the club owners were complaining that they had to pay this guy what was then fabulous amounts of money, and they might get only one show a night out of him. So Lou, when he hired Miles, said, "Look, Miles. I'm going to pay you per show." So Miles never missed a show. He got two shows out of him every night.

Zimmerman: It was a smart move.

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Hendricks: It was so simple, but it was brilliant, and it worked.

So I went to the Trident, and I saw this wonderful restaurant sitting right on the Bay, with yachts moored outside. I mean seaworthy yachts that could sail from there to Honolulu or even Tahiti. It's a beautiful setting, and right across the Bay, the most beautiful view of San Francisco you could ever imagine, out this huge window, before which sat a beautiful Steinway baby grand piano, with nobody playing it. So I said to Lou Ganapoler, "Lou, I'm just trying to figure out what I'm going to do for my career. I've practically decided that I'm going to do a single. So why don't you book me into the Trident?" He says, "What?" He says, "You see what we got here. We got a great restaurant here. It's making a lot of money." He says, "What do we need with music? We don't need music." He said, "You know I love you, Jon." He said, "If I had music, you'd be the first act I would book. But we don't really need it. We got . . ." – I remember that when he was managing the Vanguard, Lou and I would have great philosophical discussions. He was a socialist-minded man. He was a man that felt that it was incumbent upon corporations to put money back into the society that they function in, that businesses should support the arts. He had these ideas. So I said, "Look, Lou. You're making all this money off these people, and you're not giving them anything in return. You've got a Steinway grand there. Why don't you let me get a little trio together and just give them two shows a night as a kind of a way of saying to them, thank you for your patronage that's made us rich." He says, "Why are you doing this to me?" Because I had aroused what I knew was his great social consciousness. He says, "Why are you doing this to me? I don't need this." I said, "Lou, you owe it to the people." I kept pressing him on that. So he finally booked me. I started there, and I stayed there for months. I was there a long time. I launched the whole music policy there, because he subsequently booked Brazil '66, as they were known.

Zimmerman: Sergio Mendes?

Hendricks: Sergio Mendes and Brazil '66.


Zimmerman: It seems as though you attracted many other artists there too . . .

Hendricks: Oh yeah.

Zimmerman: . . . such as Al Jarreau.

Hendricks: Al Jarreau used to come in every night. I saw this handsome guy who reminded me of myself.

Zimmerman: How so?

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Hendricks: He looked like me. I said, “Look at this guy.” He was tall and a very, very handsome cat. He was looking at me almost like examining something under a microscope. He was watching me, almost clinically watching me, everything I did. So I started to talk to him. I says, “What do you do?” He says, “I want to be a singer.” He says . . .

Zimmerman: You sounded just like him at that point.

Hendricks: Yeah. He says, “I would like to be a jazz singer.” I said, “Oh. Why don’t you come up and sing something.” He says, “Oh, no, no, no, no. Not with you. Not with you.” I said, “Come on.” So I got him up, and he sang a tune. Then he asked me – he says, “How do you scat?” I’ve had people ask me that a lot. I had evolved my answer, which we talked about yesterday. I told him, “You know the melody.” He says, “Yeah.” I said, “Sing the chords.” Out of all the singers I had told this to, only two really picked up on it and did it. One was Al Jarreau. The other was Jack Jones. Jack Jones can scat. He took that idea right into John Coltrane, whom he also loved.

Judith: George can [?] too.

Hendricks: George could do it because he played. So he could do it anyway. But I’m talking about singers that didn’t know how to do it. George always could scat.

Zimmerman: What about Mark Murphy?

Hendricks: Mark Murphy was one of the 13 singers we hired to do *Sing a Song of Basie*. His eyes were always like this at what we were doing. He wasn’t particularly a jazz singer then. He had been an accountant, I think. He was amazed at the whole thing. He would come down to the house every day. Even when we had no rehearsals, he would be there. From what we were doing, and from just listening to Dave and I talk, and then me talking to him, he became a jazz singer, and he’s never turned his back. I’ve got the greatest respect for him, because this man never turned away from jazz singing. He always – his is right now – wherever you find Mark Murphy, you find a jazz singer. I admire him for that. I admire him highly for that.


Zimmerman: I make it a point to always see him as well.

Hendricks: He’s wonderful. He’s true.

Zimmerman: That is absolutely right.

Hendricks: He’s true to the art form.

Zimmerman: “This could be the start of something big.” You really turned that around.

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Hendricks: Steve Allen is a guy that, if he hadn't been such a renaissance man and been so adept at everything, he would have been a jazz lyricist. He could have written vocalese. He gave me a tape of his version of Coleman Hawkins's *Body and Soul*. It's brilliant. Steve Allen is a very brilliant and very hip cat.

Zimmerman: The part of it [Zimmerman sings:] "You're playing cards or out taking a walk."

Hendricks: I did that. That's original.

Zimmerman: Yes. Did you just do that on the spot? Or did you . . . ?

Hendricks: When Lambert, Hendricks, and Bavan decided to do it, I figured we needed some kind of arrangement.

Zimmerman: That's recorded with Lambert, Hendricks, and Bavan?

Hendricks: Yeah, live at – I think at the Village Gate or Basin Street East. Either one of those albums. Yeah. We did that. I felt we needed something for the second chorus of it, because it's a 64-bar song. It's a long song. I thought it would be repetitive to just repeat the melody over and over. So I made up that riff . . .

Zimmerman: It's a fast song too.

Hendricks: . . . and then put words to the riff that I had made up. That was really vocalese created from nothing, because I made the riff up first and then put the words to it, which was interesting.

Zimmerman: That it is. It's a remarkable song.

The Brazilian recording. How did you come into that? How did that come to you?

Hendricks: That came to me through hearing the João Gilberto version of *Desafinado*, tracing it down, and finding that there was a whole album of João Gilberto singing Brazilian songs accompanied by and arranged by Antonio Carlos Jobim. I found this album. I was transfixed by this album. I couldn't – I never stopped playing it. I played it all the time. It was so beautiful to me, and it was so hip. It had all the swing and the creativity of jazz music, and all the excitement, but yet it had the gentleness and the brilliance of a symphonic string section and that incredible bossa-nova rhythm that I think is one of the world's great art forms. So I just fell in love with it.

Then when this guy called me to do the lyric to this thing, I thought he was a damned fool.

Zimmerman: Why?

Hendricks: Because he kept calling it “this stuff.” He just treated it like a commodity for him to make some money from. He had no cultural interest in it at all. He couldn’t hear the beauty of it. He was so gross. This man, to this day – because, as I say, he turned out to be a thief, and of course a gross animal like that would be a thief. What else has he got to do but steal? Can’t create anything.


Zimmerman: I remember your description of him yesterday.

Hendricks: I would always rather be stolen from than steal, because when you’re stolen from, it means you have the ability or you have the gift of having something sent through you by God. So you have access to something. But when you steal, it means you are denied this, and the only way you can get it is steal it. So I’d rather be stolen from than steal. And I’ve had my wish.

Zimmerman: Where did you go? You went to San Francisco, but somewhere I read you went to London and you traveled and toured through Africa and other various countries.

Hendricks: Actually the trip to London was not a move, as we originally planned it. It was an escape, originally, to get away from the proliferation of dope in the schools and to keep our children safe from it. We planned to go to London, enroll them in private schools, where there would be no dope, and then come back to America and continue our career here. Then when school was out over there, book a tour and take our children, during the time they were out of school, on tour with us around Europe. That was the plan. I had no intention of staying in Europe when I went to London. I got a gig at Ronnie Scott’s for 30 days, which gave us the time and the money to put my children in school. Then we were going to come back. Then during the third week of that month, Ronnie asked me if I wanted to stay over another month, and I said yes. So I was held over a second month three weeks into the first month, and then two weeks into the second month, the *Melody Maker* came out with its jazz critics poll, and I was number one jazz singer in the world, Louis Armstrong number two, and Ray Charles number three. So I was just amazed at that. That was – I still have a hard time understanding that. I would never place myself number one above Louis Armstrong. That would be like sacrilege to me to do that. But the voters in that poll did that. So I accepted it. But I never accepted it in my heart. I never would feel that I was number one before Louis Armstrong, because he is my total influence.

But anyway, it was a gift, and I accepted it gracefully. Then I started getting calls from the BBC. Like at the time that Harry Belafonte did a guest shot on the Dinah Shore show,

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and they sang a duet with him in a circle over here, and she in a circle on this side of the t.v. screen, I was doing a guest shot on the Lulu show, with my arm around Lulu, singing a duet. That was the difference in the racial climate in London as opposed to the United States. So that made it also very acceptable as a place to live.

Plus the general artistic climate was, I found, much more healthy. They didn't compartmentalize and break up music like they did here. People who loved Louis Armstrong also loved Roy Eldridge and Hot Lips Page and Cootie Williams and Miles Davis and Kenny Dorham and every other trumpet player. They accepted art as a whole, and artists hung out with each other as a whole. You could find – I met Rudolf Nureyev and Margot Fontaine in Ronnie Scott's jazz club. I met – Nico Williamson came to see me five nights out of six in Ronnie Scott's jazz club. I found out he was a jazz singer. I met Peter Sellers, Spike Mulligan, in Ronnie Scott's jazz club. The artists hung out there. I met Peter O'Toole in Ronnie Scott's. All artists hung together. It isn't like it is here. The musicians hang out only with musicians. The dancers hang out only with dancers. That's indecent. That compartmentalization of the arts is indecent, because every artist can learn from every other. So I found that climate much better for me – much better suited. So I ended up staying five years.

Zimmerman: Some very interesting things were happening for you during that period as well. It seems as though I recall you recorded one with Thelonious Monk, *In Walked Bud*.

Hendricks: I didn't really record *In Walked Bud* with Thelonious Monk.


Zimmerman: You didn't?

Hendricks: I went into the studio. Monk was on the third floor. I was on the sixth floor doing a Mongo Santamaria album. Somebody said, "Monk's on the third floor." So the next break I ran down there to say hello to Monk, because I always loved Monk. We had a wonderful relationship together. Monk and I truly loved each other. That was the way it really was. So I went down to say hello to him, and they were waiting for Charlie Rouse, who was always late. So Monk says, "Why don't you sing something?" I said, "Okay." He says – "What do you want me to sing?" – he says, "Why don't you sing one of my tunes?" So I picked up this yellow pad and I said, "What did you have in mind when you wrote *In Walked Bud*?" He said, "That's when I was on 52nd Street with Dizzy's and Oscar Pettiford's band. They had Don Byas and Max Roach."

Zimmerman: Who is Opey?

Hendricks: O. P. That's Oscar Pettiford.

Zimmerman: Oh man. Okay.

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Hendricks: The band was co-led by Oscar Pettiford and Monk. They were the leaders of the band. It was the first bebop band on 52nd Street. Monk said there was this little cat from Philadelphia. He was 19 years old. He was quite mad at the time. Even at that time he was out there. He used to come in, and Monk took a liking to him, because he loved Monk. So Monk always wanted to let him sit in. Oscar hated Bud Powell and so did Don and all the rest of them. They didn't like the way he played at all. But Monk was the biggest, so he said, "Let him sit in," and he'd stand up. He's so big that they would let Bud sit in. But they would talk about it. They would talk about how much fun we'd be having, and all of a sudden in walked Bud.

Zimmerman: And the joint started jumping.

Hendricks: Now that's what I wrote, but they didn't say that. They said, "And then it was a drag." Monk let him sit in. So I wrote these words in about 15 minutes. So Ben Riley and Larry Gales – I sang it. I was singing it for them. I had no idea that the engineer had turned the switch on. I had no idea that it was going to be on an album. When I picked up the album and saw it was on the album, I couldn't believe it.

Zimmerman: That was beautiful.

Hendricks: Because it was take 1. Well, it was no take at all. I just sang *In Walked Bud*.

Zimmerman: The lyrics are great, and the solo is wonderful, too – your scat solo.

Hendricks: Thanks. I have to learn that solo.

Zimmerman: You have to learn it?

Hendricks: Because I have to do it for people. I'd like to do the same solo that I did, but it's hard for me to learn that. I have no idea what I did. It's like learning a new solo from somebody else. In fact it's more difficult.


Zimmerman: You said that Louis Armstrong was a major influence for you, as well as .

..

Hendricks: Oh, definitely. Definitely.

Zimmerman: How so?

Hendricks: I think there's not a jazz singer or even a good singer that hasn't been influenced by Louis Armstrong. Frank Sinatra said that. He said he influenced everybody. And he did. He taught everybody how to swing a song. If you want to know how to swing a tune, listen to Louis Armstrong, his scat. He swing *Blueberry Hill*. If I

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started out singing *Blueberry Hill*, I'd sing [Hendricks sings in a sweet ballad voice:] "I found my thrill on Blueberry Hill." But Louis put that percussion in there, and the swing [Hendricks imitates Armstrong:] "I found my thrill on Blueberry Hill." Who, man.

Zimmerman: Yes indeed.

Hendricks: He put that grease in there. He put everything. He just showed you how to swing a song. Everybody needed that. That's what all singers needed, is to know that you could swing anything. He did a version of *How long has this been going on?* that makes me cry. It's so poignant. He has no – his voice sounds like scratching on a blackboard. That's the vocal quality. But the emotion is so pure and so heartfelt, you just – tears come to your eyes. [Hendricks imitates Armstrong:] "As a tot, when I toddled in little velvet panties. [Hendricks scat sings the next line] and my cousins and my aunties. Hard to tell. It was swell. An inferno worse than Dante's." It's gorgeous. And then [Hendricks imitates Armstrong:] "I could cry salty tears. Where have you been all these years?" You say, boo-hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo. He breaks your heart. But what's breaking your heart is not the actual singing. It's the emotion that's put in that song. It's incredible, the amount of human emotion that guy could put into a tune, and every person on the earth acknowledges that.


Zimmerman: During this period in the late '60s you also recorded with Duke Ellington, the maestro.

Hendricks: Yes. Duke says to us – what he said to me – he said, "That's a wonderful album you did, that *Sing a Song of Basie*." I said, "Thank you very much, Duke. That's high praise indeed." He says, "When are you going to do an album of my things?" I said, "Your wish is our command. What can I do?" He says, "Do anything you want." So we got to work on that, but as I mentioned yesterday, I was very angry at Dave, because he by that time had gotten jaded and tired and didn't want to multi-track Duke Ellington. I knew it was disrespectful to multi-track Count Basie, who was a child of Duke Ellington and not multi-track Duke Ellington. That was one of the reasons I finally left, because good sense didn't any sense prevail, because there was no more awareness.

Zimmerman: When you left, did you and Dave stay in touch?

Hendricks: Yeah. We kept in touch. He advised me that he was doing a gig up in the Cape and that we ought to get together when he came back about maybe doing something with another girl again. There again, as in the case of Eddie Jefferson, he didn't come back from that. That's when the accident happened. So that was the second time, because there might have been a revival of at least Lambert, Hendricks, and somebody.

Zimmerman: Did that affect you at all, his death?

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Hendricks: Oh yeah. Very much. I still think of him, because he – when I start to try to find young jazz singers who can scat, I realize what an important presence he was, because he was one of the founders of the bebop school of scatting. In fact he was the one responsible for taking it into that area, the area of Bird, and he did work with Bird at the Royal Roost, and he recorded with Bird: *Old Folks* and *In the Still of the Night*, with arrangements by Gil Evans. So he was the quintessential bebop scat singer. When I try to search for people today, I realize what a great treasure this guy was. There he was. You didn't have to show him anything. He'd show you.

Zimmerman: Was there a big age difference between you and Dave?

Hendricks: I don't know. What was the difference in our ages?

Judith: [inaudible]

Hendricks: No much older.

Judith: He just had a gray beard.

Hendricks: He just affected . . .

Judith: [inaudible]

Hendricks: He just affected looking older. He liked to be a senior citizen.

Zimmerman: But you all just . . .

Judith: About six years.


Hendricks: About six. Not too much.

Zimmerman: But you all just dealt as equals.

Hendricks: Oh yeah. We were together 12 years. It was a great relationship, because I learned a lot from him, and I could hear him learning from me. In his scat I heard a change. I heard my influences on him, which was good.

Zimmerman: That's wonderful. Let's talk about, just for this moment – because I really want to get into vocalese with you – but I'm intrigued and I want to learn about *Somewhere to Lay My Head*?

Hendricks: *Somewhere to Lay My Weary Head*. That was done in Los Angeles during the run of *The Evolution of the Blues* at the Westwood Playhouse. This man came to me

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and outlined this idea that he had. It was about this hotel, the first hotel built by blacks for blacks, by a dentist. I forget his name. In order to get into what the Dunbar was, I took a tour of the hotel. We walked through the building. By that time the building was – it was a museum. It still is. It's been declared by the city a national monument, and it's still on the site that it was on. I walked through it. I got a lot of the history of it, especially the nightclub that was in it. All the movie stars used to hang out in that nightclub, especially Tom Mix. It was his favorite place.

Zimmerman: Tom Mix . . .

Hendricks: Tom Mix . . .

Zimmerman: . . . the cowboy.

Hendricks: . . . the cowboy. He was there virtually every night. They had him Tom Mix the cowboy, but he was from Cincinnati, he was very hip, and he loved jazz. He was there almost nightly. Clark Gable and Carol Lombard used to hang out there too. She was very hip. She was hipper than he was. She was the one that really liked the music. He was the hunting and fishing type, but she kind of civilized him. A lot of people hung out there, a lot of the movie people behind the scenes, a lot of the directors. A lot of the Hollywood writers hung out there. William Faulkner used to come in there. James Agee used to get drunk in there a lot. It was a great club.

Zimmerman: You won a Peabody Award and an Emmy Award for that as well.


Hendricks: Yeah, and an Iris too. It was a wonderful script that I fashioned, because I just told the story of the hotel. I told it in rhyme as I had done with *The Evolution of the Blues*. The thrill of my creative life – one of the thrills was when I went to the Peabody presentations. I was sitting up on a dias with Walter Cronkite, Mike Wallace, and Roger Mudd. I was really excited by that. That was a high spot in my life, because that's the highest award in the communications industry, and I was there with the people who were the highest. It was very important, I think.

Zimmerman: It's really remarkable. Those faces were in front of the American public almost every day, and there you were.

Hendricks: I found out that Walter Cronkite and Mike Wallace were big jazz fans. Walter had all my albums. In that voice, he said, "I've got all your albums." I was knocked out.

Zimmerman: When did you write *Evolution of the Blues*.

Hendricks: 1961.

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Zimmerman: So during the – the '60s was a very fertile period.


Hendricks: Yeah, it was. It was – well, that hasn't been reported yet. I told you that I studied law and my major was English and my minor was history. As a person interested in history, I'm amazed how that whole phenomena has not been covered by historians. It brings up again the true sickness that this country suffers from its racism. It prevents it from looking at life and seeing things as it truly is, because that whole rock movement, that whole exodus of masses of white children from their homes to receptive cities like San Francisco and New York and Chicago was nothing more than their children bringing black music into these white middle-class homes and having their parents say, "Get that nigger music out of here." The kids said, "Okay. I'll get the music out. But I'm leaving with it." And they left. That's what it was. It's never been reported. That's the truth of what it was. It was the spread of our music to the mass young white audience, which is what rock is. Rock is an elemental way of playing the blues, which is the basis of jazz and evolves from the spirituals. It's our heritage to this country. It's not reported because of the racism in this country. It drives me crazy, because it's so small-minded when it's such a big thing. But that's what this whole thing was. These children left their homes and took to this music with all their hearts.

To this day there's not a rock artist worth his salt that doesn't cite as his influence every black artist that ever lived. The Beatles. I saw when they came to this country and it was televised. They landed, and these 50 or 60 white American reporters asked them, "Who were your influences?" They start rattling off – all four of them – the names of all these black artists, and they didn't even write it down. I was so disgusted. They did not even write it down. The State Department sent Benny Goodman to Russia. Leonard Feather went with him. Leonard Feather told me, when they got off the plane, the first thing the Russian journalists said was, "Why didn't you send Duke Ellington?" In other words, they know what the culture is. But this country is so sick that it just refuses to face the truth of its own culture, and that is disgusting. If I do anything in my life, it's to try to redress this and at least bring it to people's attention. That's not asking for anything. That's just suggesting that an acknowledgment of what exists be acknowledged.

Zimmerman: Yes. It's important.

Hendricks: We have a President now who plays tenor saxophone and had the first in the White House in 12 years. That's a step forward. I would vote for that man. I don't care what his politics are, because he's hip enough to understand what the culture of the country is. George Bush wouldn't swing if you hung him. This cat had a country-and-western band for his inauguration. That is disgusting and disgraceful and racist.

Zimmerman: I agree with you there.

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Hendricks: I'm sorry to get so excited about it.

Zimmerman: That's okay. I understand it.

Hendricks: But I believe that if you don't get excited about these things, you're not interested in these things. I'm passionately interested. So I get passionately excited.

Zimmerman: One of the things that I'd like to see is to have, for instance, the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra or some other jazz orchestra to perform on the Fourth of July.

Hendricks: Of course.

Zimmerman: If you're going to celebrate America and American music, why not include jazz?

Hendricks: Include jazz? How can you have your celebration without jazz?

Zimmerman: They've been doing it for a zillion years now.

Hendricks: It's disgusting, and it's time somebody stood up and told them, "You are stupid," because that's stupidity. That's the kind of racism they all would get up with their mealy mouths and abhor. They would abhor such behavior. "Oh, that is so terrible." And they do it themselves. I hate that. I hate hypocrisy, because I understand what hypocrisy is. Hypocrisy is a denial of God, especially when you pretend to be a Christian.

Zimmerman: There's a lot of pretenders here.

Hendricks: It's like racism itself is a denial of God. How can you be a racist and believe in God?

Zimmerman: There have been many, many Christian denominations that have done that over the period of their lives.


Hendricks: They're not Christian. They're just denominations.

Zimmerman: Okay. Excellent.

Let's talk about vocalese.

Hendricks: Okay. If I must [laughter].

Zimmerman: Please. How would you define it and its origins?

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Hendricks: Having been in on its origins, I can say that vocalese is the name Leonard Feather applied to the taking of the contributions of Eddie Jefferson and King Pleasure into the orchestral form. That is what vocalese is. It is on that basis alone that I allow myself to be referred to as the father of vocalese. I will accept being the father of vocalese. But if someone referred to me as the father of setting lyrics to jazz solos, I couldn't accept that, because I am not that. I am a student of that. I was inspired to stretch it into the orchestral form by *Moody's Mood for Love*, which is both Eddie Jefferson and King Pleasure. I acknowledge them as my mentors. But since vocalese is the term given to that stretching of it into the orchestral form, I will accept being the father of that.

Zimmerman: No-one's done more for that concept than you. Absolutely. It's a remarkable thing.

Hendricks: Thank you.

Zimmerman: How do you go about your work? What is your methodology? Let's . . .

Hendricks: I hear something, and I pick up the pad and pencil. It's that simple. I hear it. I say, "Whoa." Phew. Gone. And it's written. I have lyrics that I haven't even shown anybody yet.

Zimmerman: Oh, I'm sure. Hundreds, probably.


Hendricks: Yeah, because I just heard the tune. I say, ooo-boy, and I write it down. I'm moved to put it down.

Zimmerman: You must have – what is it? I want to say a photogenic [*sic*] memory, but it's not that – but when you hear something, it seems to be captured. For instance, I don't know what – how did you work in the early days? When it – since there were tapes and there were albums, but I couldn't imagine that you always had an album to work from or a tape to work from.

Hendricks: Oh, no. I would work from what I heard. I would hear something. Like I used to make money to go to the movies. The movies was a dime. Popcorn was a nickel. So I would go to the local hamburger joint, Stanley's Hamburgers, run by Stanley Cowell, the father of Stanley Cowell, the pianist.

Zimmerman: Really?

Hendricks: Yeah. He ran a hamburger joint in my hometown. I knew Stanley when he was born.

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Zimmerman: I didn't know that.

Hendricks: Oh yeah. I would stand in front of this jukebox. People would come up, and I'd say, "What are you going to play?" They'd say, *Yard Dog Mazurka* by Jimmie Lunceford. I said, "Give me the nickel. I'll sing it for you."

Zimmerman: That is incredible.

Hendricks: They'd say, "What?" I'd say, "Give me the nickel, and I'll sing it for you." So just – they'd be so astounded that they would give me the nickel just to see if I could sing it, and I would sing the whole record. [Hendricks scat-sings the opening riffs of that song.] I would sing the whole record, solos and all.

Zimmerman: That's amazing. So you always wrote lyrics.

Hendricks: Yeah. I was always doing that kind of stuff.

Zimmerman: From your earliest years.

Hendricks: I didn't write lyrics to those things. I just learned them.

Zimmerman: Okay. So you scatted them, in a sense.


Hendricks: Yeah, I would scat them. That's why it was easier for me to put words to things later on, because I had been doing that. I would sing Erskine Hawkins's *Tuxedo Junction*. I know that trumpet solo to this day, by Dud Bascomb. [Hendricks scat-sings the whole solo.] I love that solo. That's one of the great solos of all time.

Zimmerman: It stuck with you all of these years.

Hendricks: Oh sure. I remember that. I remember a lot of great solos that I used to sing, that people would give me the nickel here. I'd get 15 cents. I had a dime for the movie and a nickel for a big box of popcorn. You got a box of popcorn this big for a nickel. That would be my movie money.

Zimmerman: Has your method changed over the years?

Hendricks: No. I just listen, and now that I've approached lyric writing to these things, I just – whenever I'm moved to do that, it just – it's easy. But the way I came about doing that is interesting. I was in this creative writing class. There was a guy, from Columbia Pictures's advertising department, back in Toledo because his mother had angina pectoris. She had heart trouble. So he came home. He was in the class that I was in that I got the "A" in. So everybody came and shook my hand and wanted to know my name.

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He wanted to know who I was, because I got this first “A” from Milton Marx, who never gave an “A,” wrote the textbook. So this guy told me – he says, “When you come to New York, why don’t you call me?” He says, “I’ll see what I can do to help you.” Because I wanted to apply my writing skills to the advertising world and write advertising copy, because I thought that was a good way to make money. So when I came to New York and I went up to his office at Columbia Pictures, he said, “Jon, you know I really like you, and I’d liked to help you out.” He said, “But you see that guy over there?” He pointed to this well-dressed black guy. I said, “Yeah.” He said, “His job is to go and get coffee.” I said, “Like that, huh?” He said, “Yeah.” I said, “Okay.”

So when I left that office I decided, okay, I’ll take my lyric-writing prowess, and I’ll apply it to the music, which I love anyway. That’s when I really decided to put my words to music that I heard. So when I heard *Moody’s Mood for Love*, I immediately wrote the lyrics to *Four Brothers*, which I had been singing for months.

Zimmerman: Did you have someone to copy that out with the music?

Hendricks: No. I just wrote the words to it, and I was able to sing it to the record. Dave copied it out so that the singers could see it and sing it.

Zimmerman: Vocalese always refers back to a recording. To what extent is vocalese a compositional process rather than an improvisational process?


Hendricks: I always felt that the next step in vocalese was going to be the completely spontaneous singing of lyrics to solos that the vocalist creates on the spot. In other words, you scat-sing and you create your own solo. I think the next step is going to be creating your own solo and the words to it at the same time, which sounds impossible, but some singers are doing it now. I saw a girl in San Francisco at a club called – what’s the name of that place we just worked in San Francisco? the supper club?

Judith: The Coconut Grove.

Hendricks: The Coconut Grove. What was that girl singer’s name? I forget her name, but she was singing improvised words to riffs that she had made up right then.

Zimmerman: Did it make sense?

Hendricks: Yeah. It’s what I think will be the next step. That’s what going to happen. I wish I had time to experiment with it myself and get into it, but I get bogged down in a lot of other stuff, because you need time to – you just need meditating time to evolve that, because the lyrics have to come quickly enough to fit the tempo of the song. So that really – it’s going to demand a great mind, a lot of mentality. This girl is doing it now.

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She's doing the germ of it now. I heard it, and I told her. I said, "That's incredible," because it was great.

Zimmerman: Listen out for her, whoever she is.

Hendricks: Yeah. She is good, very good, and a sweet soul too. She's wonderful.

Zimmerman: Does vocalese emerge out of scatting?

Hendricks: I think yes, everything emerges out of scatting, like scatting emerges out of the solos of the jazz musicians. I think everything starts and ends with the voice. The voice being the original instrument, the horns try to sing like the voice. In fact the process of arranging horns is called voicing. You voice the horns, because the orchestra is an instrumental version of the choir.

Everything comes from the church. All music is originally church music. What they call symphonic music, European music, was originally written in praise of God in the churches. The dukes that hired Bach and Brahms and Beethoven and those people hired them to write music for worship, because they had their own chapels. In fact Bach was fired by a duke one time for confounding the choir. He wrote stuff so hip that the choir says, "Was ist das? Das ist nicht . . ." This cat confounded the choir.

Zimmerman: How does vocalese differ from scatting?

Hendricks: Because of the addition of words, the putting aside spontaneous thinking of your own riffs and adhering to the riffs that the horn made. That really is the difference.

Zimmerman: When you compose, do you sing all of the parts? For instance . . .

Hendricks: Yeah. Yeah. I can hear the whole thing. And I can hear chords too.

Zimmerman: The harmonies.


Hendricks: I teach my pianists what the chords are.

Zimmerman: How do you do that?

Hendricks: I tell them what's not right until he hits the one that's right. Drives them crazy.

Zimmerman: So your process of musical notation – what is that?

Hendricks: It's badgering the piano player until he gets the right one.

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Zimmerman: How do you create a story? I heard once that – I didn't really understand this – but say in a 32-bar work, that you start at the end somehow and work your way forward?

Hendricks: I start from the title, and then from the title construct a story about that title. Like the Woodside was a hotel in New York where not only the Basie band, but all the bands – Andy Kirk, Jay McShann, everybody that came to New York, all the bands that came to New York – could check in, get rooms for the band, and rehearse. So many musicians and show-business people stayed at the Woodside that nobody was going to knock on your wall if you rehearsed at 3 o'clock in the morning. So from that title I constructed a story about what a great hotel this was and what a great thing it was to stay there if you were in show business. Then the horns became the characters in the story that commented in one way or another on their experience staying at the hotel. So you use literary form – the fact that I was an English major and studied literature and how to write stories was valuable because it taught me how to construct a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end – with a plot and a cast of characters, which became the solo instruments, and weaving a story that had a beginning, middle, and end, and came to a climax.

Zimmerman: How did that apply in something like *Freddie Freeloader*?

Hendricks: *Freddie Freeloader*, being who he was, I had to tell who he was in the melody. The melody, with the way the song is constructed on one riff repeated over and over [Hendricks sings the melody without words], you don't have much room to go into too much delineation, so you had to tell who Freddie was with those melodic designs. So [Hendricks sings the melody with words] “Freddie, Freddie, Freddie, Freddie, free booze, free blues, free dues.” That basically is what Freddie was. He was a guy that gave liquor away to jazz musicians. So he gave you free booze, free blues, and free dues, because you get the booze – first he gives you the booze, that gives you the blues, and you definitely will pay dues. So that's it. It's like Monk's song called *Evidence*. It's a series of single notes. [Hendricks sings the melody without words.] For that I did [Hendricks sings the melody with words] “Black, white, day, night, sunshine, bright, evidence, right, you dig it?” That's very hard to do – to write in those contexts. If you have a line to write against, it's easy to form a – but if you have to choose one word that says a whole lot, it's very difficult, because the word has to be well-known enough and important enough to bring up a myriad of ideas.

Zimmerman: That's wonderful. You're sitting here with a *New York Times* crossword puzzle. I just think of all the wonderful words that you utilize in your work. Now I see, to some degree, how you got that great command, because I guess for instance when you're making a story, you need a variety of words that may mean one thing, so that you can get a particular sound?

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Hendricks: Yes. And also, you have to express a thought. Words are the best methods that humans have for expressing a thought, but when you consider the thought seeking to be expressed, words are a very poor instrument. That's why, for what people want to say, they often say, "I just can't find the words," because thoughts are so much bigger and wider and deeper than words can express.


Zimmerman: I imagine also with the rhythmic expression, that you may have to find a particular word that matches a musical statement in a sense. I would again help to have a wide command of the vocabulary to make that happen.

Hendricks: Yes. And you also find out the true beauty of slang. Slang is beautiful. It really is beautiful. Somebody once said that slang is language rolling up its sleeves and going to work, because it is the best way that ordinary, not-well-educated people have of expressing themselves, and it has a beauty about it. It's really beautiful.

Monk was a good example of the use of common phrases to express himself. He used profane phrases, too, but on his lips, they were not profane. Like he used the word "mother," which is half a word, all the time. Once he used it in the presence of his 11-year-old daughter. We were riding in a car. He and his daughter were in the back. The guy that owned the club was taking us to a radio show. He and I were in the front. We were talking about the world situation. This was 25, 30 years ago. He says to Monk, "What do you think about the Chinese?" Monk says, "You got to watch those mother-Chinese," and his little daughter just looked up at him. Then when we to the radio station we were going to, we passed a Salvation Army band on the corner. There was two men and a woman: one man playing the bass drum, another man playing the trumpet, and a woman playing the tambourine. They were playing – the guy that was playing the trumpet was playing a song called *Abide with Me*. Now Monk opened his album *Monk's Music* with Gigi Gryce's arrangement of *Abide with Me*, but *Abide with Me* was written by William H. Monk. So that really was Monk's music. He heard this trumpet player playing that with no vibrato, very clear and very beautiful. It was beautiful. He stopped. He walked back to this Salvation Army band with the two men and this one woman, and he said, "Man, you mothers sound good." He was sincere, and they saw the sincerity on his face. So they all blushed. They turned red. And they thanked him. They said, "Thank you very much." But you see, his use of the vulgate English language, which we term slang, is so utile – it has such utility and it instantly communicates his true thought – that it takes on a beauty.

Zimmerman: You write in the vernacular a lot.

Hendricks: Oh yeah. I like to write in the vernacular. You can express yourself much better in the vernacular than I think you can in so-called literary terms. People nowadays, with the lessening of education, just don't know how to speak well. So more and more

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writing is being done in a more and more vulgate idiomatic English language. I don't think that's necessarily such a good thing. I think Duke Ellington was right: "To speak well is to live well." I think you should know how to speak well. You should be taught how to speak well. I think not to speak well is dangerous, because it lowers the level of the mind, and when your mind level is lowered, you're subject to the dark forces creeping in on you. You very seldom hear a junkie talking in high literary terms. He's usually talking in extreme profanity and the most basic and base language possible, because his tone level has been lowered so much that this expression is the best he can manage. I think it's good to learn to speak well and to raise your – at least your aspirations toward speaking well, rather than settle in with base and gross speech.

Zimmerman: Somehow not only does it communicate effectively, using the vernacular language, but also it seems to me – I think I've read this somewhere – where when you're singing as fast as you sing sometimes . . .

Hendricks: You can't be but so polite.


Zimmerman: Yes. Nor can you say the whole word.

Hendricks: No.

Zimmerman: You've got to infer, as you . . .

Hendricks: Yes, yes, yes. F-apostrophe becomes "for." You can't say "for." You haven't got time. That's what I have to teach my singers. They try to get the whole word in. It's not going to happen. You're not going to get the whole word in. You have to suggest the word by saying the first three letters. And people's ears hear subliminally as well as – what's the word? – audibly. So if you suggest the word, they'll hear the rest of it. It's like when we were talking yesterday about Ahmad Jamal's use of sound. If you have the bass, drum, and the piano go [Hendricks sings a syncopated riff], and then all of a sudden the piano and the bass lay out, and the drum goes [Hendricks repeats the riff with a more percussive sound], the people listening will hear the bass and drums [*sic*: piano]. They'll put it in there with their own ear.

The ear is a marvelous thing. The whole human body is such a – Bacon's expression of it, in the Shakespearean works: "What a work is man." What a work is man. Man is such a marvelous entity. Everything works so beautifully. The eye sees better when they're closed. The ears hear better when the eyes are open. Everything works together. Everything is interactive. What you don't say is heard louder than what you say, because man is such a beautiful, divine instrument, such a beautiful, divine entity. The idea that he's physical and mortal is a myth. It's a huge deception. Man is divine and immortal, and if he does not believe it, then he dies. He murders himself.

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Zimmerman: That's very profound.

Hendricks: Yes.

Zimmerman: You lyricize the works of many artists, composers, and orchestras, such as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Miles Davis, Randy Weston, Charlie Parker, Bobby Timmons. What is it about their work that speaks to you or inspires you to write lyrics.

Hendricks: I think it's the origin of the music. I think it's the religious origin of the music that I hear in their work. *Moanin'* to me sounds like a church song. Randy Weston's *Blues for Strayhorn*, I wrote as a church song. *Monk's Mood* sounds to me like a spiritual. So I wrote the lyric as a spiritual. [Hendricks sings:] "Hear me singing, oh Lord. Look down on me below. Too many stages. All of life's ages. I sing your praises." Something, something. I forget. But it's a hymn. It sounds like a hymn to me. To write a secular lyric to that song sounded sacrilegious to me, because it sounds like to hymn. I think it is a hymn. I think the origins of this music often creeps in to the composer's compositions. *Moanin'* is definitely a church song.

Zimmerman: I can hear it.

Miles Davis. There seems to be – he seems to be a source of inspiration and for others, but you in particular, I think, because I've heard several renderings by you of Miles Davis works.


Hendricks: Yes. I love Miles from a certain period. I think that he experienced a deterioration, but it doesn't erase him at what I consider his best period. What he created during that time is so brilliant and so beautiful, I think it will last forever. It will last forever.

Zimmerman: I think so too. I think your renditions of his work helps to make it endure.

Hendricks: I think he suffered the plagues of mortal man, though. You – "whom the gods would destroy they first make mad" is one of the things I think of when I think of Miles, what happened to him.

Zimmerman: How do you mean that?

Hendricks: I think it was madness of him to feel that he needed to go any further than what I consider his high point – not just I, but a lot of other people. I think there's a madness in that. For example, when you find good, how much further can you seek, and what else can you find? Good is God with another zero in it, and the zero is a sign of infinity. So when it's good, what can you find better than good? I think you can only find chaos and death, and I think that's what's happened to John Coltrane and to Miles. It's

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undeniable that they are dead, and I think they are dead because they both made that mistake. They tried to pass good. Life is something like a Monopoly game: “Do not pass good.”

Zimmerman: Monk said you were Monk’s lyricist.

Hendricks: He said I was the only mother he wanted to put words to his music, and I was very flattered by that use of that half a word to describe me.

Zimmerman: You’ve written a lot of lyrics to his works: *Hackensack*, *Crepuscle with Nellie*. One of my very favorites is *Monk’s Dream*.

Hendricks: *Trinkle Tinkle*.

Zimmerman: *Monk’s Dream*. “I dream of a light that was pure and true. I dreamed of a job only I could do. One gal beside me. We be a team. Man, that was a dream.” Was that Monk? Or was that you?


Hendricks: That was Monk. He married his childhood sweetheart, and they were together to the end of his life. He had two children. That’s the American dream.

Zimmerman: How does writing for Monk or Miles differ from writing for Duke Ellington?

Hendricks: There’s not that much difference between writing for Duke and writing for Monk, because philosophy is at the basis of what they both do, and one is a child of the other. From Duke comes Monk. They both are well steeped in a deep religious philosophy. So those two I would put almost next to each other as practically the same. With Miles there’s a more secular, hip, light, airy, whimsical, quixotic, affected way that you can take. It’s not as deep as either Monk or Duke Ellington is, but it’s cute, and sometimes it’s very pretty, like in the *Miles Ahead* things and *My Ship*. The way he sings “Bess, where is my Bess?” is heartbreaking, just gorgeously beautiful. He has great beauty about him, but the depth belongs to Monk and Duke. They’re the deep ones. Randy Weston also has depth, because he comes from Monk, which is the lineage Duke – Monk – Randy. So he has some of that depth.

Zimmerman: Tell me about scatting, if you don’t mind. Just the use of the various vowels and syllables and their relationship between the various musical instruments. Do you ever think about that at all?

Hendricks: Only in relation to what horn you’re going to be that time. Are you going to be standing up in the saxophone section and blowing? Or are you going to be standing up in the trumpet section? Are you going to be the trombone? Are you going to be the

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piano? Or are you going to be the guitar? What instrument are you going to be? That determines the sound that you're going to make.

Zimmerman: Is there a way of practicing that?

Hendricks: Oh sure. You try to approximate the sound the sound of a guitar. [Hendricks sings.] Then when you get to a saxophone, it's [Hendricks sings] a little more legato, and a trumpet is more percussive [Hendricks sings]. Sure, you try to approximate the actual sound of the instrument. The actual sound of the instrument determines your sound, because whatever you do to approximate the sound of the instrument becomes your sound, at the time, because you may want to change it. You may want to do a different instrument. Al Jarreau does that a lot. He does the drum. He does the guitar. He does the bass. And then he just scats. He's delightful. Bobby McFerrin also is very good at that.

Zimmerman: How does your background as a drummer impact on your work and your . . .?

Hendricks: Totally. It's very important, because everything you do has to swing. The drummer, as Duke Ellington said, is the bandleader. If he's swinging, the whole band will swing. If he's not swinging, the band is going to sound very ponderous. It's just going to be very, very, very bad. So the drum – the sound that you hear in your ear for the rhythm is very important, because that's going to underline everything that you do. That's going to highlight everything that you do. So it's best to have your own drum in your ear and to play from that, than to depend on the drummer who's actually working behind you, because they very seldom have the ideas that you have. So you should have your own drummer right here. I always have my drummer right here.

Zimmerman: Right in the ear.

Hendricks: Yeah.

Zimmerman: I hate to skip around like this, but just in terms of the preparation for Manhattan Transfer's *Vocalese* album, the album on which you won a Grammy for in 1985, somewhere I think I heard that you coached them during that process.

Hendricks: Yes I did. They had sense enough to make a little mini-tour around the West Coast, performing the things live in coffee shops and smaller venues, small theaters and things like that. Then every night I would give them a written critique of what I thought was wrong. Then they would try to correct that the next night. It did help a lot, although it wasn't as long as I thought it needed to be, because I . . .

Zimmerman: The tour?


Hendricks: Yeah. The tour wasn't as long, because there were things that were left uncorrected that I heard about later. I always hear about solos that I write words to. Usually, if I've sung them, I usually get a great congratulations from the guy whose solo I sang. But up at the North Sea Jazz Festival, after the Manhattan Transfer album came out, Lee Konitz, whom I've known 40 years, was very angry at me. I gave him a big hug. He was like a little pouting kid. I said, "What's the matter, Lee?" He says, "What did you mess up my solo for on *Move*?" I said, "Lee." I said, "I understand that you're very personally in that," I said, "but I only wrote the words." I said, "Tim Hauser sang the solo." He says, "Oh yeah. Well, I understand." He said, "But man, that cat, he messed up my solo." I said, "I know it. I know it as well as you do. But I didn't do that." So that made him feel better, because all he knew was that Jon Hendricks had written these words, and I'm usually associated with singing what I write. So he just assumed that I was responsible for the way that Tim sang that solo. And that was one of the things that I thought needed more correcting on the tour. I thought that that solo especially was not ready – not only Tim's, but Janice's solo that she did. That was – I think she did the Miles one.

Zimmerman: Which?

Hendricks: On *Move*. Yeah, I think she did. And I think that needed some correction. I think if Miles had paid any attention to it, he might have been angry too. At that time he wasn't listening to any more jazz anyway. So we escaped him. Because when Annie did his solo on *Four*, I was eating a steak up in Toronto. He moved me over, took the fork and knife out of my hands, and ate my steak. I said, "You ate my steak." He said, "You mess with my solos, I'll mess with your food." And mess wasn't the word. But these guys are very involved in what they did. They take a great pride. They don't want to have it – they don't want to hear it back messed up. I try to tell the singers that. They don't listen. It's very hard to get somebody that has enough of the respect himself so that you don't have to tell him. They do it right. It's hard to find someone with that respect for what it is they're singing. They're not just singing words to an instrumental. They're singing creations of living people who want to hear the creation back, with the addition of words, without losing any of the musical artistry and creativity they put into it.

Zimmerman: Yeah. What is it? One of the quotations that said that not only do you sing the solos, but sometimes you outdo the originals. I think that's fantastic.

Hendricks: I was paid a very high compliment by Zoot Sims one time. I came into this bar. I says, "Hey, Zoot." He says, "Hey, Jon. How you doin'?" I said, "I'm okay." He said, "I got to tell you." He says, "You make me mad." I says, "What'd I do?" He said, "I practice my horn five hours a day." He said, "Then you come up there, and you don't even know nothin', and you outblow me." I said, "Oh, thank you, Zoot." He says, "Thanks, nothin'. I ain't kiddin'." I was giving him a hug. But he was serious. But I took that as a very high compliment. And I think it was. I think that's a high compliment.

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Zimmerman: You're remarkable.

How do you go about – you've influenced many vocalists. I think that there's a lineage that certainly comes through you and goes on. How do you train other vocalists? For instance, I know, in your group, you've had different baritones – baritone singers. How do you indoctrinate them into the Hendricks concept.

Hendricks: I use what I said in my short jazz poem. I wrote the shortest jazz poem. You know that jazz poem. "Listen." I tell them that if you listen, and you hear the horn, and you sing what you hear, then I don't have to tell you anything. You got it right. One of the students that I've heard actually do that is Judith. Judith sang – she sings the solo of Wendell Culley on *Little Darlin'*. We played in the south of France. A man of about 60 years old came backstage and says, "Incroyable, incroyable. She sings ze solo exactly ze way Wendell Culley play it. It is incroyable." He really – he knew that solo, and she sings that solo right down to the tee. That's the way it should be done. Most singers are lazy, and they just approximate. That's terrible. I hate that, because that – you're only halfway through the work. Do the rest of it. Learn it and do it well.


Judith: He doesn't approve of anyone.

Zimmerman: You don't approve of anyone.

Hendricks: Hardly.

Zimmerman: Jon, the substance of your lyrics speak of life in its many manifestations. Leonard Feather once said that, "Beauty, truth, and humor have been the motivating forces in the musical life of Jon Carl Hendricks," and you've done a lot of living. I think your love of romance and its nature and beauty, and your understanding of humanity and human nature all come through your lyrics, as well as your religious background and study of the Bible. For instance, *Tell me the Truth* is a pretty profound composition, and that's yours. Tell me about, how do you utilize all of these various aspects of your life and how they impact on your lyrics.

Hendricks: I think that everything that happens to any of us, we attract. I think we attract what befalls us. Once we know that, we can begin to prepare ourselves so that we can attract less of what is bad and more of what is good. When you realize that everything of a terrible nature that has happened to you has happened only because there is inside you a force that is attracting this thing and saying, "Come here. Happen to me. I'm ready for this" – if you realize that, then you can begin to battle, because life is one battle after another. The bhagavad gita tells the story about Arjuna, who's constantly enjoined to fight, fight, fight. He says, "But I don't want to fight. I am a man of peace." "You must fight." This is the battle of life, so that you fight the forces that are arrayed against you

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and that come towards you, because of what is inside you attracting them. People tend to externalize these inside things. Like people who don't like laziness are people who have in themselves a propensity to be very lazy, and they dislike that in themselves, but rather than address it in themselves, they will develop a total disdain for lazy people and let the laziness in themselves persist and get stronger until it dominates their lives. That's the way life works. We are magnets. We are electrical magnetized beings, and we attract to us that which is going to do us harm, because we have, hidden and made subliminal by our subconscious mind, these thoughts inside ourselves. The whole syndrome of our life in the South can be shown through that. In the South, the people who enslaved us called us lazy, shiftless, and ignorant. But at the same time, who did the work while they sat on the porch and rocked and drank mint juleps? We did the work.

Zimmerman: Okay, but how did we attract that to ourselves as a people?

Hendricks: So where's the laziness? Jomo Kenyatta, when he was released from jail in Kenya after ten years – and they were going to kill him, but the people threatened such revolt that they let him live – but after ten years, when he was released, all the white people who had settled in Kenya says, “Are you going to persecute us now?” He said, “No.” That's why we went through the persecution that we went through. Because we persecuted people before. So we brought it back to ourselves. Because there is a law. As it says in the Bible, “Be not deceived. God is not mocked. As you sow, so shall you reap.” That is a true law. If you sow a thing, it is going to come back and hit you with ten times the force when you least expect it. So as I was saying about what happened down South, those people did no work. Yet we were lazy. They allowed us no schooling. Yet we were ignorant. We were neither lazy nor ignorant, but it was their way of externalizing what was in themselves. They were both lazy and ignorant. They were ignorant to impose on another man a life of slavery to them. That's ignorant. You have to be basely ignorant to think that you have the right to take a child of God and make him a slave of you yourself, the self that you have exalted in your own mind. That is very, very – that's – there are no words to describe what that is. That's very ignorant.

Buddha 6000 years ago said – when they asked him, “What is wrong with the earth?,” he said, “Ignorance.” They said, “What is the cure?” He said, “Knowledge.” The ignorance is ignorance of ourselves, our true selves, and the knowledge that is the cure for that ignorance is knowledge of our true selves. If we are ignorant of our true divinity, then we do totally undivine things to other versions of ourselves, which is what other mankind is. We are each other. If we know ourselves, then we treat these other selves – or other versions of us, which is what every man is – with the utmost dignity and honor and respect. So I try to reflect in what I do, these hidden truths, these basic truths. I try to uplift a situation. If it's an ugly situation, I may mention it, but I'll mention it with a philosophical tone that will try to correct it or at least give a true picture of it. It's easy to call a man evil because he does something. But it's better to call him ignorant if he does something. Because he doesn't in himself consider himself evil.

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The slaveholders never considered themselves evil. They considered themselves benevolent people. They will tell you, “We treated our slaves wonderfully.”

Zimmerman: They even use the Bible in some instances to support their activity.

Hendricks: Yes, completely ignoring the fact that the idea of holding another human as a slave is deeply ignorant and immoral, totally lacking in morality. So to respond to them with a lot of hatred is not the answer. To respond to them with understanding, with compassion, and with love, that’s the answer. That works, because Reverend King and the civil rights march was definitely the motivating force behind the National Baptist Council in the South, the largest denomination in the United States, apologizing to the negro people for slavery, which has never happened in this country.

Zimmerman: That was only recently.

Hendricks: That was a few months ago. So that’s the power of loving people who make mistakes and pointing out the mistake to them, rather than hating them and perpetuating their own mistake by forcing them to defend it. So in my lyrics, I’ll always try to mediate between the good and the evil with which all of us are beset. That’s my real ministry. I try to always find something uplifting.

Zimmerman: So you look at your work – it’s interesting. I think the quote said that “I never look for” – something – fulfillment, in a sense, or anyone to give you recognition outside of yourself. You say, “I just do the work.”


Hendricks: Yes.

Zimmerman: And would you see what you do – I think the answer is yes – as your calling, your embodiment of all of the things that you do as your calling in life?

Hendricks: Yes. It’s my ministry. It’s my ministry. I think to look for rewards for your work is vanity. I think that Salomon was correct when he said, “Vanity, vanity. All is vanity.” I think that those kind of things are vain. It’s better to do your work and pray that it helps someone else, than to look for rewards for your work.

Zimmerman: I find that interesting, because I just know – it’s kind of – what is it? I can’t even find the word for it – but, for instance, I think when I first had the opportunity of meeting you, you signed a fake book.

Hendricks: Oh yes.

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Zimmerman: You signed the cover of a fake book, and you said, “James. Short jazz poem. ‘Listen’.”

Hendricks: Yes.

Zimmerman: I thought about that. I still have that cover. But I thought about the fact that you don’t receive any royalties or anything – no-one does, that I know of – for this particular *Real Book*. It’s sort of an underground kind of a thing that everyone – that a lot of singers has. It’s a singers’ fake book. And it’s very generous of you, that you’ve put all of that out there, and I pray that it comes back to you, the reward from that. But there’s a lot – I just know that you’re not receiving any financial remuneration from it.


Hendricks: No.

Zimmerman: That you’ve given up – that you’ve given the world. I think that’s very admirable.

Hendricks: You have a choice. You can chase the money, or you can do the work. The money is a will o’ the wisp. It’s a ghost. Bacon said, “Fame is a large black bird that flies at night.” It’s not real. All you can just do the work. I feel if you do the work, you will have what you want, but you might not be in this particular vehicle to see it. But I believe what Jesus said: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” That’s what I feel. I feel that there are people not even born yet that are going to come across the words that I have written. So there will be their life. That will be their life. That’s a much better reward than a few years of financial reward in this lifetime.

Zimmerman: What other types of music do you like? Does the European classical music influence or inform your direction or practice?

Hendricks: I agree with what Duke Ellington said: “There are only two kinds of music. Good music” and all that other kind. So I listen to everything. I have many symphonic pieces. I use the term “symphonic,” because I think the term “classical” is elitist and suggestive that other types of music cannot also be classical. Like I think every solo by Charlie Parker is classical. The arrangements of Duke Ellington are classical. Scott Joplin is classical. So I don’t like that word as applied to one particular form of music, because it denigrates all other forms. So I use the term “European music.” But I have a lot of – or “symphonic music.” I have a lot of symphonic music in my house. Sometimes I get up and I put on – my favorite composer is Tchaikovsky. I think it’s because he has such a strong sense of melody. His melodies are so beautiful. I put him on, and it soothes me. I also like Chopin. I like his Etudes. I think he’s a very inventive young man and created some beautiful melodies that I think should be lyricized, in fact, like that one [Hendricks sings.] That’s a gorgeous – it’s an etude. It’s got a number. It doesn’t have a name. It’s Chopin’s Etude number something-or-other. It’s a beautiful melody, a gorgeous melody.

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I like to listen to that. Of course Chopin was every American composer's favorite. Leonard Bernstein liked Chopin. He used one of Chopin's etudes in [Hendricks sings *I Feel Pretty*:] "I feel pretty. I feel witty. I feel da-dit and da-dit and bright." Cole Porter used the same one for [Hendricks sings *It's All Right with Me*:] "It's the wrong time and the wrong place, and those lips za-zar. It's the wrong face." It's the same Chopin etude. So a lot of people use him as in . . .

Zimmerman: *It's All Right with Me.*

Hendricks: Yeah – as inspiration for their compositions. As well they should, because he's very prolific.

Zimmerman: Has that impacted you? Does it . . .?

Hendricks: I think so, whether consciously so or not. I think all the good music that you hear is utilized by you, if only to try to emulate in what you do its beauty and its harmony and its melody.

Zimmerman: Are there any contemporary composers whose work inspires you to write lyrics? For instance, Matt and I were just thinking, when you said that you always have music going on in your head. I just wonder, for instance, during these past few days or even last weeks or so – just in this time frame – what kinds of things are you working on in your mind?

Hendricks: Jobim right now.

Zimmerman: Really?

Hendricks: Yes, Jobim. I want to have English lyrics to all of his songs, because I think he is the Tchaikovsky of this age. He is the composer whose sense of melody is just so beautiful. Henry Mancini was another composer of that type. Richard Rodgers, of course. Their melodies are so beautiful that they cry out for words. Of course Richard Rodgers had some of the greatest poets. Because I think a good lyricist is a poet. I regard myself as a poet. Johnny Mercer is a great folk poet. His lyrics – I think he is the American lyricist with the most range in expression. He can write folksy, shoes-off, barefoot-type stuff, like [Hendricks sings:] "Lazybones, sleepin' in the sun. How you 'spect to get your day's work done? Never get your day's work done, sleepin' in the noonday sun." "On the Atchison, Topeka, and the Santa Fe." "You got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch on to the affirmative. Don't mess with Mr. In-between." And then "Dream when the day is through." "Moon River wider than a mile. I'm crossing you in style some day." That's a gorgeous poem. Then, "Laura is the face in the misty night, footsteps that you hear down the hall, a laugh that floats on a summer night that I can never quite

recall.” That’s gorgeous. It’s so poignant and so beautiful. I thank God I had a chance not only to meet him, but to become friends with him. He was such a beautiful man.

Zimmerman: Johnny Mercer.

Hendricks: Yeah. A great, great poet. We had a wonderful thing going on. We had a real mutual admiration society. I could never tell him how much I loved him because he was too busy telling me how much he loved my lyrics. It was so funny. This is a great lyricist.

And Oscar Hammerstein the second. “The corn is as high as an elephant’s eye.”

Zimmerman: “And it looks like it’s climbing clear up to the sky.”

Hendricks: What a picture. What a picture. See, this is how all the arts are one. These people paint pictures with words that make you see the thing that they’re talking about. I’m so in love with that. I love good lyrics. I think they’re just one of the staffs of life.

Zimmerman: I not only think of you as a poet, but I think of you as a storyteller, beyond a poet. I’m sure that a story gets told in a poem, it’s almost like – listening to you is like watching a movie. You can just conceptualize whatever it is that the words say. They have a life – it has a life of its own.

Hendricks: I’m a twentieth century griot, whatever a griot is.

Zimmerman: What are your rehearsals like?

Hendricks: What rehearsals?

Zimmerman: You have rehearsals. Let’s see. Who was I . . .? I talked to . . .

Hendricks: Oh you mean of the group?


Zimmerman: Yes.

Hendricks: They’re like a series of argumentation and debate. They’re fantastic. They deal with almost everything but music.

Zimmerman: Really?

Hendricks: Yeah.

Zimmerman: I talked to Miles Griffith recently. I didn’t get a chance to talk too much. I wanted to know, what are the rehearsals like? What do you rehearse? What do you do?

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He said, “We just keep going over the same thing until Jon says it’s right,” or something like that.

Hendricks: Yeah. That’s true. That’s true. I like it to be right, because then people will hear it. Because people already know these tunes that we do. They’re part of America’s culture, and I think if you do them wrong, people know. They may not be musicians. They may not have any real sophistication and be able to articulate their ideas, but their ears, I think, are good, and they know what they’re hearing. So I like it to be right.

Zimmerman: What are some of the projects that you have in the wings. For instance, several years ago you sent me a promotional package. In that was an outline of, for instance, bird songs. Then I think we talked. I know that at some point you’d like to do an album strictly of Miles Davis’s works. I would think that, since we’ve only touched on the tip of the iceberg, you probably could do an album of Wayne Shorter, Cannonball Adderley, and many, many others.

Hendricks: Yeah, I could. I could, if they had enough songs that I thought that I wanted to sing. That’s not always the case. Sometimes – Ahmad Jamal too, yes. I think – I’m working on his version of *Poinciana*.

Zimmerman: Beautiful. I love that.

Hendricks: I’ve already written his version of *But Not for Me*. That’s great. That’s really beautiful. And I sing now his *New Rhumba*.

Zimmerman: Okay. I read that somewhere. When I was 14 years old, that *Live at the Pershing* album, with *Poinciana* – that’s what I got for my birthday.

Hendricks: Oh wow. That’s a great album.


Zimmerman: Yes indeed.

Hendricks: All those tunes I would like to lyricize. Every one of them. That’s a great album. He’s a wonderful, wonderful piano player.

Zimmerman: Do you have any recorded works that are – what do you call it? – “in the vault”?

Hendricks: Yes I do. I have an album called *September Songs: Jon Hendricks with Strings*, which I did in London with the London Symphony.

Zimmerman: I listened to that the other day.


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Hendricks: I'm trying to get in touch with the estate of Rod McKuen to get that tape. But I think something's happening, because I call Rod's office, and the lady gives me the same answer every time. I give them the message, and I never get a call back. So I'm not sure what is going on. If I'm in Los Angeles long enough I'm going to make a personal trip down to the office, and I'm going to demand to know what is happening, because he may be ill. If he is, I'd like to know that, and I'd like to know if I can go and see him, because we're old friends. We go back a long time.

Zimmerman: Jon, what are your thoughts about jazz as an American national treasure and the whole arts environment and its impact upon American society?

Hendricks: I think that we – jazz artists, jazz itself – we're under attack. We're like a city that's being bombed, like Guernica in the Spanish Civil War, where the Germans used their new Stuka bomber just to test it out. Those people in that town didn't know what was happening to them. They didn't know why they were being bombed like this, because they were just in a little civil war that was not that big at the time. I think that we in the world of jazz here in America, we are under attack by those commercial interests who have taken over the music business, and when I say taken over, I mean just that, because when I was recording for Columbia, the head of Columbia was Goddard Lieberson, a singer and a dancer, a busker who had worked on the streets of London and worked in music halls in England, had a sense of art, married a great ballerina, was very well versed in the arts, and had the sympathy and the dedication to try to promote the arts as a means of civilizing people. I think that we have been taken over now by the accountants and the lawyers, who are mindless and soulless beings, who have no concern for the importance of culture in the life of a nation, who'd kill their own mothers if it profited them to do so, who are that venal. They are using art to make tons of money while they destroy the culture of the United States. This I think is a crime, and it's causing untold difficulty for truly cultured people who want to enrich and promote the real American culture. I think it's a form of genocide and it's a form of brutality that is just unspeakable. I love the way they always counter these ethical and moral arguments with great pronouncements like, "Look at how much money we made last year." In the long run, what difference does it make how many millions of dollars you have made, if in the world today the United States stands as the only nation that systematically degrades its own cultural art form? What matter the money? What does it really matter? It's like the strip miners telling you how much money they made from polluting the earth and causing the whole drought in the Midwest. What difference does it make, how much money we make, when the rainforest is taking away the ozone layer and causing our eventual destruction? What difference does the money make? That's the only argument they have.

Ahmet Ertegun, in a New York profile, actually said, "Mick Jagger is a better songwriter than Cole Porter." What he meant was, Mick Jagger makes more money than Cole Porter. These people are so base, they are so gross, they are so ignorant, and they are so

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destructive, that unless somebody understands this and begins to pay attention, jazz is going to disappear from the earth forever, because they have no respect for it. They use it. It's the foundation of all American popular music. There would be no rock music if there was no jazz music. So they're base and gross enough to utilize it, but they have no real feeling for it. This concerns me greatly. The record companies have violated the laws of the corporate structure, which is to – first, to serve the society in which it exists. That means, one of communication's first objective is to promote jazz music and see that living and surviving jazz artists are recorded and their records put on the market, and that their second priority is to make a profit. They have substituted the second for the first and allow jazz artists like Ben Webster to die in Copenhagen, 3,000 miles away and broke, while the total musical non-entities that they exalt and off whom they make millions, they praise. It's so odious that when Akio Morita, the president of SONY, bought out Columbia, came over here, and invited all the Columbia people up to his penthouse apartment, that fool Walter Yetnikoff talked through the whole dinner about his friendship with Janis Joplin, Sly and the Family Stone, the Stones, and the man went back to Japan and fired them all, because he played them two hours of his jazz collection. It's uncivilized, and it's base, and it's gross, and it must cease.


Zimmerman: That's succinct and profound.

You've been lately doing some collaborations with Wynton Marsalis. There seem to be a lot of arguments about Wynton, but I think that there's an affinity there between you and a great appreciation from Wynton for your music. How did this come about, this working relationship?

Hendricks: I think it came about from Wynton's innate sense of respect. Wynton is a very respectful young man. I've told him a million times, "Call me Jon. Call me Jon." He says, "No, no. No, no. No, no, Mr. Hendricks." He will not call me Jon. He will only call me Mr. Hendricks. And the same with Mr. Terry. He loves Clark Terry, but Clark tells him, "Don't call me Mr. Terry. Call me Clark." He says, "No, no, Mr. Terry." He is so respectful. He has such a deep respect that you have to admire that, because it's what a lot of the youngsters lack. I think it's from this respect that we just gravitated to a working relationship, because he told me – he says, "Any time you need me, call me, because it would be an honor to be on the same bandstand as you." I didn't take that seriously until I opened at the Blue Note with Clark Terry, Benny Golson, Al Grey, and Red Holloway to do that album that's now out, called *Boppin' at the Blue Note*.

Zimmerman: That's a wonderful recording.

Hendricks: Opening night, Clark Terry got sick. I called Wynton to ask him for the name of a trumpet player that he felt could come in and do the week. He says, "I'll do it, Mr. Hendricks." I said, "Wynton, it's a whole week. It's not one night." He says, "I'll do it." He said, "I'm not working this week." I said, "Great." So he came and did it. He

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wouldn't take the envelope with his pay in it. I told Judith, "Would you please put this in his pocket when he's not looking?" She slipped it in his pocket, and to this day the check has not been cashed. So he's a man who literally puts his money where his mouth is, because he didn't want to take that money and he never took it. I think that shows a remarkable morality and respect on his part that's just incomparable.


Zimmerman: That's beautiful.

Hendricks: It is beautiful.

Zimmerman: You are a part of a continuum or a legacy. How would you define two things? Let me see. How do I express this? Okay. For instance, you talked about the lineage of trumpet players through Louis Armstrong and Roy Eldridge and Dizzy. It goes on. Fats Navarro, Miles, etc., etc., on up to the present day in Wynton and maybe Wallace [Roney] and some others – Roy [Hargrove]. How do you see your lineage through vocalists, to not only who came before you, but who's come after you who you see following in your footsteps? That's one, as a vocalist. And then, your lineage as a musician, which might be separate, and the influences that impacted you and how you impacted others. For instance, I know your daughter would – Michelle particularly, I think, and Aria would follow in those footsteps. Could you just talk about that for a moment?

Hendricks: In the first place, I never regard myself as one of the singers in any lineage, because I never really regard myself as a singer. I'm a person who uses his voice to express the feelings of the horns. I'm really a person who plays the horn without the horn. That's the way I look at myself. I told Tony Bennett. I said, "You guys are the singers." Like he told me – he once said on "The Tonight Show" – he told Johnny Carson that one of his five favorite singers was me. I told him – I says, "You mentioned me as a singer. I'm not a singer. You guys are singers – you and Vic Damone, Mel Tormé, Joe Williams, and Billy Eckstine. You guys are the singers." He says, "Aw, come on, man. We all wish we could do what you do." But I never really think of myself as a singer. I think of myself as someone who uses what voice he has to express instrumental thoughts, or to express his heart through the medium of the voice. But even if I'm singing a ballad, I'm always thinking that I'm playing something, that I'm playing saxophone or trombone or something.

So I don't really think of myself as a singer. I think of the lineage of singers. I know who they are. I admire all the singers. They're all so great – every one of them. It's just awesome. I like Perry Como. He's kind of bland and he doesn't have the flash and the dash of a lot of others, but if I was picking a lead alto voice, I would pick him, either him or Andy Williams. Andy has the same kind of quality: a very clear tone, almost no vibrato, and adherence to the melody. He's very good. I would pick him to sing in a chorus like, say, the *Miles Ahead* album, if there was going to be. I would like to have

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somebody like either one of those guys in there. Rosemary Clooney is another one. She's a very good singer. Rosemary is a very good singer. Doris Day. I love Doris Day. When she was only a singer, I thought she was – I didn't see how she could do anything better than sing, but of course as an actress she became much bigger. But I still like her best as a singer. She had a quality to her voice. She – it turns out she admired very much Ella, which is to her credit. But I liked her. I like almost anybody that sings in tune and sings well.

Zimmerman: Was there ever a time when you and Ella ever contemplated a recording together?

Hendricks: Yes, Ella, me, and Frank Sinatra. I was living in London. Frank wanted me to write something for Ella and he to sing together, and then all three of us would sing something. I started on that project, but it never came to fruit. So I wrote a song called *Let's Get Together* for them that I did with Lulu. I ended up doing that with Lulu. That was my duet with Lulu. But I had written that for Ella and Frank.

Zimmerman: What are you most proud of in your career?


Hendricks: My marriage lasting 37 years. That's what I'm most proud of.

Zimmerman: That's beautiful.

Hendricks: I think so.

Zimmerman: I say that because I just look at you as a family man. I look at – one time, you were over at Kate's. There's Aria outside. She's furiously trying to learn this song. It seems like you gave it to her this afternoon. I think the show was going to happen in short order. She was out there, really working. I had the opportunity to see Michelle in concert and even on the panel discussion, and I said, that's beautiful, that they are following in the footsteps of their dad. I've seen you and Mrs. Hendricks in performance. There's a closeness. It's a family. The group is a family.

Hendricks: It is a family, absolutely. That's the way we treat it. Everybody comes to rehearsal gets fed, because it gets to be time to eat. So everybody eats. We do everything like a family, because I think that's the normal way to work. We're now screening girls to replace the guy that's working in our office who's moving to Seattle. We've already interviewed four very, very competent ladies. They all said, when they got back to the agency, that they've never seen a better office than that, because it's so warm. The environment is so nice. That's the way we think business ought to be conducted. It ought not to be cold and impersonal. It ought to be conducted in a family way. I think there'd be less chicanery in it, for one thing.

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Zimmerman: Last question, I think. It's sort of crazy, but people do this, and I'll say it anyway. Looking back, any regrets? Sort of a common question, but as you think about your life and career and how it's progressed, are there any things that you should have done or anything you shouldn't have done?

Hendricks: Oh yes. A lot of things that should have been done that weren't done, but, at the same time, to regret something long enough for it to really become something to speak about, I think is a waste of time. Because if you really get into regret, you're losing sight of the fact that what happened to you may be able to be applied as a lesson that can improve you in the future. So I think that's just a waste of time and effort. I think you should acknowledge, "This was a mistake, and I hope I never do that again," but that's it. Then keep on stepping.

Zimmerman: I don't think that was a good last question, so no regrets. I think this is better. What are some of your dream projects that you'd like to accomplish, that you'd like to implement?

Hendricks: I'd like to see *Evolution of the Blues* where it belongs, on Broadway. That's where it was headed when we interrupted it and sued the thieves who had stolen it and were producing it. So I would like to see that work, which I think is a divine work and a divinely inspired work, where it belongs, which is on Broadway. That is one dream I would like to see realized. Another one is to see all the ideas that I have, and some of which I've put forth, bear fruit. I would like to actually be in a studio, recording the entire *Miles Ahead* album or the *Porgy and Bess* album. I'd like to do these things. These are ideas I have. I suppose they're dreams until they're real. But they're more than dreams to me, because I will do them. They will be done.


Zimmerman: I like that.

Jon, it's been the fulfillment of a dream just to get a chance to sit and talk to you these past couple days. Really, it's meant a lot to me, and I just thank you – I thank God, really – for the opportunity to . . .

Hendricks: That's the one to thank.

Zimmerman: . . . that this has happened.

Hendricks: I think I told you this before, but I'll tell you again. You're the best choice for this, because when I speak to you, I know you know what I'm talking about, and that's not true of a lot of interviewers. I start to speak to them, and I see that they don't hear what I'm talking about. They don't get the sense of philosophy behind what I'm saying. So I feel it's just a total waste of time, and I revert back into my shell and just keep quiet. That's frustrating, when you really would like to speak what's on your mind.

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So for me, to really be able to do that these last two days, has been like a breath of fresh air. And also, I've probably written four or five chapters of my book, which is probably the only way I'll get it done.


Zimmerman: That's wonderful. And I know over time, when people listen to this tape, it will have a life of its own. It will gratify them and mean a lot.

Hendricks: I hope so.

Zimmerman: I just thank you again.

Hendricks: You're welcome. I thank you.

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