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LEE KONITZ
NEA Jazz Master (2009)

Interviewee: Lee Konitz (October 13, 1927 – April 15, 2020)

Interviewer: Bill Kirchner with recording engineer Ken Kimery

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Kirchner: So it is Valentines Day . . .

Konitz: [singing] Happy W'alentines, Happy W'alentines.

Kirchner: . . . Two thousand eleven, and we're in Lee Konitz's apartment in Manhattan, and I'm Bill Kirchner, and we're about to begin the oral history with Lee.

Konitz: Welcome.

Kirchner: Let's start with the most obvious possible thing.

Konitz: I was born at a very early age.

Kirchner: Most of us were.

Konitz: [chuckles]

Kirchner: We have that in common among other things.

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Konitz: [chuckles]

Kirchner: What was your date of birth?

Konitz: October thirteen, nineteen twenty-seven.

Kirchner: And for the record, what is your full name?

Konitz: “Leon” was my given name and “Lee” has become my second name. The fact is that I had two older brothers and I was supposed to be a girl, and my name was going to be “Leonna”. So I became “Leon” and then after a while my friends called me “Leo”, and then “Lee”, and it’s going to “Le”. When I get to “L” I think I’m leaving town.

Kirchner: [Laughs] As I understand it from Andy Hamilton’s book your parents were both born in Europe?

Konitz: Yes, my father in Austria, my mother in the Ukraine.

Kirchner: What were their names?

Konitz: Anna Getlin was my mother’s name, Abraham Konitz was my father’s.

Kirchner: When did they move to the States?

Konitz: I think in . . . the first decade of the twentieth century.

Kirchner: And settled in Chicago?

Konitz: They landed in Chicago, yeah.

Kirchner: What did your father do?

Konitz: For the most part, while I was growing up, he had a laundry and cleaning business, and I used to stand on the running board of the Ford, Model A Ford, and run in and say “howdy howdy” and throw a package of collars, on the floor, on the table. Things like that.

Kirchner: So that was your gig?

Konitz: That was my gig [Laughs]. But they were hard-working people that raised three sons and I was forever grateful for that. I somehow had a problem with

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communication because they were from another country and I was a little embarrassed that they were speaking Yiddish more, but they spoke English quite well enough, but I didn't bother to learn how to speak Yiddish and really understand it more thoroughly.

Kirchner: So you and your brothers were first generation?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: What were your older brothers' names?

Konitz: Solomon, "Saul" we called him, and Herman. Nine years for Saul and six years difference for Herman, so I was their responsibility, what do you call it? "the chain hanging around their necks". They had to take me, wheel me, to the ball game, things like that. Was that in the book?

Kirchner: No, that wasn't.

Konitz: [Laughs].

Kirchner: We're breaking new ground as we speak.

Konitz: Yeah. [Laughs]

Kirchner: Thank God we won't be just duplicating the book. Was your family at all musical?

Konitz: Just for fun, no trained music. My brother, older brother especially liked to sing spontaneously after a couple drinks, things like that but no formal music. I got it all out of the house, thankfully.

Kirchner: What was the first music you remember hearing?

Konitz: Probably you know, Glen Miller, and Harry James and some of those bands that were recording for the Chesterfield cigarettes' fifteen-minute program. My mother and I used to listen to them. Then in the evenings, listening to different bands broadcasting from areas around the States with the covers over the radio, and my head, and things like that. So that was very inspirational for me.

Kirchner: Did you hear music much around Chicago?

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Konitz: Oh, just with the kids, in school we had a band, Russo was in high school with me, and Sy Toff and there was a high school band.

Kirchner: What high school did you go to?

Konitz: Cyn . . .

[Konitz's home telephone rings in the background]

Konitz: Oh, lord . . .

[The interview pauses for 27 seconds to let the telephone ring]

Kirchner: I recall you saying somewhere that Benny Goodman was your first idol.

Konitz: Well, I was very moved by his band and his clarinet playing, more so than Artie Shaw . . . that was the reason I asked for a clarinet, because of his inspiration.

Kirchner: How old were you?

Konitz: About eleven.

Kirchner: So you started on clarinet?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: So did I, that's pretty common.

Konitz: That's recommended.

Kirchner: Yeah.

Konitz: That's a lot more demanding to cover those holes.

Kirchner: Right, exactly.

Konitz: [chuckles]. [I] tried to think of a fancy way of saying that's a fact.

Kirchner: That'll do.

Konitz: . . . Gotta cover them holes.

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Kirchner: Now did you take lessons at school or did you have a private teacher?

Konitz: Well, I had a private teacher. I just had whatever band situation in grammar school, actually. In fact in grammar school, and this might be in the book so forgive me for repeating it, I played a duet with a snare drum player of Ravel's Bolero.

Kirchner: [Laughs].

Konitz: And he went: "dim-dittlely-dim-dittlely-dim" and I went: "yeeaaa" and squawked every once in a while, but [then] repeated those melodies . . . it was not a sensation I remember, no standing ovation or nothing like that.

Kirchner: You were too hip for the room, probably.

Konitz: [Laughs]. I started out early [chuckles]. That's the rational of all time: being too hip for the room.

Kirchner: [Laughs]

Konitz: . . . well, anyway, I did work out in the school, the inspiration from fellow "worker-outers" and things like that. But then, as I have mentioned a few times over the centuries, I got a coupon book with the clarinet that my parents very graciously bought for me, and this is unbelievable as I think of it, but I think that book had two hundred free lessons in it and the clarinet only cost about a hundred and fifty dollars and I had a good teacher, Lou Honig, who supposedly, Eddie Harris and Johnny Griffin studied with at some point, so he knew how to . . . teach me the fingerings and read the Clousey (?) book and things like that.

Kirchner: Did he teach saxophone as well?

Konitz: Then when I got a saxophone I kind of continued that routine with him.

Kirchner: So you're in high school now . . . did you start on tenor or alto?

Konitz: Alto. Well, actually I got a tenor the next Christmas and played that for a while until I was old enough, apparently I played it for a while, if I was twelve when I got that, when I got an offer to play in a night club, which had to be a number years later, an alto chair was open. Something like that as I remember and I played the alto then. Maybe I just decided to stay with it then. But I don't remember exactly when the alto came in the picture. But I know that I bought an alto from my then teacher, Santi Runyon a fine saxophone which I play to this day, is going to out live me by a century or so, I think.

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Kirchner: The balanced action Selmer?

Konitz: The balanced action, twenty one thousand, for anyone who is interested in those numbers I just did two gigs in Boston and Toronto last weekend and played that instrument and it worked.

Kirchner: They're great horns.

Konitz: Yeah, the only thing is the top register of those horns happens to be a little bit higher than the bottom register.

Kirchner: Oops.

Konitz: So I learned to play the high sharp and I think that's part of the reason for my distinct sound.

Kirchner: Many years ago, by the way, you told me a great story about intonation and playing sharp, that you went to Joe Allard for that, do you remember that story that you told me?

Konitz: Not specifically.

Kirchner: You told me that you were having some problems playing sharp and you went to Joe Allard.

Konitz: Just in general I wanted to find out . . .

Kirchner: . . . and you said "Joe, I'm playing a little sharp and it's bothering me", and Joe replied: "Well, in Paris, A is up to four forty-two, so maybe you're just ahead of your time."

Konitz: Yeah, oh yeah, okay. I do remember that, I appreciated that very much. The only thing is when I'm in Paris I play at four forty three, at least. [Laughs]

Kirchner: Always ahead of the curve. [Laughs]

Konitz: Yeah, that's called . . . what is that called . . . "anti-social playing". [Laughs] I think of it as anti-social playing. There's a reviewer, someone reviewed . . . four guys reviewed a record I made a year or two ago and one of them, Paul de Barros, or something like that.

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Kirchner: Oh, in DownBeat [Magazine].

Konitz: Yeah, DownBeat. He said: “I’m tired of listening to this man playing flat”, and I said: “Well, what else is he gonna say if he got that wrong?”

Kirchner: And all these years I’ve never heard anybody accusing you of playing flat.

Konitz: Really? I mean I’d rather be dead than play flat. Not really but, I mean . . .

Kirchner: Sharp is a lot hipper.

Konitz: You know what I mean?

Kirchner: Louis Armstrong played sharp.

Konitz: Yeah. I remember a conversation, I was playing opposite Louis Armstrong at the Basin Street, Tristano came in and [he] was having a big conversation I found later, talking about Louis Armstrong being sharp, the last thing anybody said about Louis Armstrong. And, you know, cultivating a young alto player who played sharp, it seemed strange.

Kirchner: Well, you’re never too old to get a new accusation, apparently at the age of eighty-three somebody’s telling you that you play flat.

Konitz: Yeah, my goodness. But, you know, we get all these various reactions which we love, negative or positive, a reaction is what we hope to get, okay, not just this, giving a workshop and saying “does anybody have . . .” . . . that’s no good, so I appreciate when somebody sticks their hand up. Just last week I got a review of a concert I did with the group I’m playing with now, in the Seattle Day News, okay, it was one of the best reviews, the most detailed, meaningful, review that I can think of . . . so, he made up for Paul de Barros, or whatever his name is.

Kirchner: [Laughs]

Konitz: But he really didn’t like it, Paul de Barros. Everybody else gave it three and a half stars, something like that. It’s a nice improvised record. Nice young guys. What are you gonna tell them?

Kirchner: There’s just some things that are not answerable, apparently. You knew Bill Russo and others in high school, I just wanted to just touch on that a little bit. Did you and Russo play together in high school?

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Konitz: There was a band he was writing for and playing in also.

Kirchner: A “dance band” or small group?

Konitz: Yeah, a dance band. I don’t remember how many saxes, maybe four or five, and some brass.

Kirchner: He was writing charts for it?

Konitz: I think he was, yeah. I know I wasn’t and I don’t think Sy Toff was. Probably some stocks, you know, Jack Mason, I hope hipper ones than that.

Kirchner: Right, exactly. You also knew Jimmy Rainey and Lou Levy in high school right?

Konitz: Yeah, right. We went to different high schools but we played in one band, the Harold Fox, “Jimmy Dale” he was known as, the local tailor had a band.

Kirchner: They were supposed to have been quite good, right?

Konitz: It was good, yeah.

Kirchner: Both Jackie Cain and Junior Mance have told me about him, because they’re both a year younger than you are but basically came up at around the same time, so they both worked with that band, I guess, at some point or other.

Konitz: Well, not when I was on it, I think Lou was the pianist, but I’m not sure of that now. I actually sang the blues [in] that band.

Kirchner: Really?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Were you the quote, “boy singer”?

Konitz: Well, I did that, and I fancied myself with my pimples and shell-rimmed glasses and all that. At the Pershing Ballroom I looked at the clock and the clock struck one and the little girl standing there saying: “Qu’est-ce que c’est?”, [chuckling] and things like that. I never did that again.

Kirchner: You’ve recorded vocals. You and Harold Danko did a couple vocal things on a couple records, right?

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Konitz: Uh, I don't know if we did on a record or we did on a DVD.

Kirchner: I was looking through your discography. You and Danko did a scat vocal on one record, a duo record that you did in the eighties, doing "Lady Be Good" or something.

Konitz: Yeah, we did Lester Young's solo on "Lady Be Good", but [I don't] remember doing it on a record, wow.

Kirchner: When we go through your discography, probably tomorrow, we'll just touch on little things like that and see if [they] trigger any memories.

Konitz: What I did do though, was an Italian pianist that I was working with some time, invited me to record, after the fact, with a choir that he was coaching in Italy, I think a thirty-voice choir, I don't know if it was a church choir or what, but I got to the record date and put on the headphones and I heard a [imitates a sound] and things like that, and then background for [sings a melody].

Kirchner: "Nature Boy"?

Konitz: Nature Boy. [I] said "I'm gonna sing that and not play it". So I sang it and then there was a second one on "I Got It Bad . . ." which got me up [sings a melody in a higher register] and the engineer said: "my, you're better than Chet Baker", and I said "thanks a lot" but it wasn't really good because [it was] a little bit pitchy-pitchy and things like that.

Kirchner: Well "I Got It Bad" has got to be one of hardest tunes to sing.

Konitz: It was not easy but I have a proof of that some place. Every once in a while I, in the quiet of my chamber, I check it out with the earphones.

Kirchner: You've told me to this day that part of your practice routine is singing along with Sinatra records right?

Konitz: Yeah, I love to do that.

Kirchner: The first lesson I ever took from you, you gave me a Sinatra album and said take this home and learn one of these tunes.

Konitz: Did you give it back to me, though?

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Kirchner: Yes I did.

Konitz: Okay. [Laughs]

Kitchner: The very next lesson. I'm nothing if not honest.

Konitz: [Laughs]

Kirchner: It was the "Sinatra Songs for Swinging Lovers" album as a matter of fact.

Konitz: Yeah? I loved all of those songs.

Kirchner: As a matter of fact, I just exchanged an email with Ethan Iverson. He said: "You've been telling him he's got to do singing?" and I'm telling you yeah, you've got to do that and "he's very reticent about doing it".

Konitz: Yeah. We sat at, I think, the North Sea Festival a couple years ago, or last year. It was a bass player, a very fine bass player, from Cologne, and Jorge Rossi. We sat in my room, you know, singing chords together or taking eights or something, exchanging. It was very interesting to hear how all these guys articulated their word, their syllables.

Kirchner: Yeah, it tells you a lot about a player.

Konitz: And somehow I just realized when I was in Poland just playing on the flute and not having a horn to depend on or to need to warm up on. I just put on a Jamey Abersold record and sang along with it more seriously somehow than I did when I had the horn at hand, because I could depend on [the] horn. But, the idea being to sing until you feel like singing, like you're a musician, actually, since playing [the] horn we should have some musical ability besides [just] technical ability to press the buttons...It really adds up more and more to see how much of what comes out without thinking about that, comes out without thinking about that, if you know what I'm trying to say.

Kirchner: Just the music without the mechanics of it.

Konitz: Yeah. That's supposed to be what's essentially your musical ability at the moment, and then to try to get that feeling into the instrument would be the next step somehow, I would think. So that made a little more sense. Just doing these things until they register sometimes takes a long time for me, so all of the sudden: "wow, is that what's happening, thank you". I can go from there.

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Kirchner: I think you mastered that stuff a long time ago you just keep getting new insights into it.

Konitz: I think that way, yeah. Thank you.

Kirchner: When did you start playing professionally?

Konitz: Earlier than I was supposed to, legally. I don't know if that was under twenty- one. It had to be around seventeen or eighteen, I'm sure.

Kirchner: I recall reading, and it might've been in "The Book", that you were on a gig when you were fifteen and that was when you met Tristano.

Konitz: I don't know if I was fifteen. I was working with a ballroom band. I don't know if I could have done that at the age of fifteen very well, especially when I was probably looking fourteen.

Kirchner: But do you recall meeting Tristano under those circumstances?

Konitz: Yeah. There might be a couple years' difference in there.

Kirchner: Can you tell that story?

Konitz: I had a friend that was playing in the club across the street from the ballroom where I was playing that evening. I went over afterwards to hear Joe Puma and opposite him was [this] Latin band with Tristano in it, and I said: "wow, who is that?" . . . [I] heard him playing with locked-hands figures very interestingly, and against those rhythms. He (Puma) introduced me and he (Tristano) said: "why, you want to play a little bit?" and I played a couple tunes and said I would really appreciate getting some more information about this process, etcetera, and he invited me to come by for about five dollars a lesson or some figure like that. I was fortunately exposed to some of the real procedures in this music besides just reading exercises and things like that.

Kirchner: What are some of the things you talked about in the lessons?

Konitz: Basic theory, running arpeggios, scales, learning songs, learning to listen and hear the music you like, sing along, play along, and transcribe it. Here comes a tickle folks.

Kirchner: Go for it.

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[Konitz sips from a glass of water]

Konitz: I have what in German is called “Schlime” which is mucus in our language. Its hard to get rid of.

Kirchner: When you need a refill just let us know. Obviously, you studied with Tristan for years but how long did you study with him in Chicago?

Konitz: Well, I was twenty when I joined the Claude Thornhill band with the intention of coming to New York eventually, where Tristano had moved so I was with him until I was twenty which is two or three years probably.

Kirchner: You graduated from high school right?

Konitz: I didn’t.

Kirchner: You didn’t?

Konitz: I left high school to go on the road with a band, in my sophomore year, and for some reason my folks were too busy to remind me to go back and I thought wow, who needs it? But then I went to a college preparatory subject . . . for a couple semesters but I never got an official diploma.

Kirchner: What was the band you went on the road with?

Konitz: It was a band with Joe Puma, leading it a female leader, and some of my friends. We went to Port Arthur, Texas. That was the whole gig for a week or two. I didn’t go back to school. I think I just wanted to work and I convinced them [parents] that I should be independent. Unfortunately I missed that.

Kirchner: I read at some point you played with Gerry Wald?

Konitz: Gerry Wald, in the mid-forties, for a short period.

Kirchner: Playing alto?

Konitz: Yeah. Third alto. Good band. Gerry Wald was a fine clarinet player.

Kirchner: Kind of an Artie Shaw wannabe, right?

Konitz: Yeah. I don’t think I ever played a solo in that band. But there was a fine tenor player who kind of introduced me to Lester Young, officially by, you know, in

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the room getting stoned and all that kind of stuff, listening. I said wow, look at that. Because I'm sure we talked about it with Tristano but, somehow, that was another big impression. Probably heard some different tunes and things like that.

Kirchner: Did you hear the Basie records?

Konitz: Yeah, but maybe some others ones too, the Basie ones were the first ones I heard. I even heard and saw the Basie band at the, what was the name of the black theater in Chicago?

Kirchner: The Regal?

Konitz: Regal. I remember this guy with the tenor sideways and everything but I didn't really know the significance of that yet. I knew it sounded nice but [it wasn't] until later I found out who it was.

Kirchner: Did you transcribe any of Lester's solos or learn how to sing any of those early in the game or did that come later?

Konitz: Oh yeah, I mean, those were some of the first ones.

Kirchner: Do you remember any ones in particular?

Konitz: Well I remember "Dickie's Dream" was one of my favorites and, oh lord, one after another. "Lester Leaps In" and his clarinet playing [on] "I Want a Little Girl" I think . . . I really learned a lot of those solos, and when I reviewed them recently I realized that some of them like "Shoe Shine Boy", I had to re-learn Charlie Parker's "Koko", things like that. I learned Charlie Parker's "Don't Blame Me" which is a masterpiece of virtuosity and more than that.

Kirchner: When you say "learn them" do you write them down first, transcribing, or just memorize them and learn to play them on the horn after you memorize them? What's your method?

Konitz: Just listening and enjoying them and deciding I want to know them, and then singing along with them, singing away from the record from memory, playing with the record, playing without the record, and then writing it down and checking it out.

Kirchner: So the writing down is the last part of the process?

Konitz: Yeah.

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Kirchner: Which is the reverse for a lot of people.

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: That makes a lot of sense.

Konitz: Yeah, I think so. I think I'd better cool it for a minute.

Kirchner: Okay.

[Interview recording is paused]

Kirchner: We're back. You also played with a big band, speaking of big bands, lead by Teddy Powell.

Konitz: Teddy Powell. That was for one month of my life before he, I don't know if he went to jail or what it was but there was some situation with the draft or something, I'm not even sure, but I took Charlie Ventura's place. And not only didn't I know chords that well, but I couldn't transpose the concert chords out of sheet immediately, things like that. So I heard that the first night I played a solo Teddy Powell was standing in the wings and he bumped his head against a wall and whatever condition the reason for bumping his head against a wall, but there was a nail in the wall so God punished him.

Kirchner: [Laughs]

Konitz: And he was reacting to my interpretation of Charlie's part.

Kirchner: Of all people to not sound like Charlie Ventura, you'd be high on anybody's list.

Konitz: Well I mean I wasn't even close, Christ, and I heard him play and I was very impressed with his upper register playing, things like that. So that was a strange month, but another experience.

Kirchner: So what is that, like around nineteen forty-six, something like that?

Konitz: Well I guess around that time.

Kirchner: You were just young enough to not have to deal with World War Two and the military service issue, right?

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Konitz: Well I was actually told in Yiddish by the psychiatrist not to worry, I won't have to go in, supposedly, because of my eyesight. I don't know why he spoke to tell me that in Jewish, but . . .

Kirchner: [Laughs]

Konitz: I appreciated the familial.

Kirchner: In any language that was welcome news.

Konitz: Yeah, right. "Thank you" [repeats in Yiddish]

Kirchner: When you joined Claude Thornhill were you hired when you were still living in Chicago?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: How did that happen?

Konitz: Well I'm not really positive how that happened. It seems I must've asked someone along the line and I don't think I ever heard the definitive answer. I would think that Gil Evans would somehow have heard about me in some way, I don't know why, I hadn't been out of Chicago, but there it was and he was traveling with the band and everything. He was the only one that I knew.

Kirchner: How did you meet Gil?

Konitz: On the band. I'd never met him before.

Kirchner: But somehow he'd heard of you then apparently?

Konitz: Someone had.

Kirchner: You got hired, this is nineteen forty-seven?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: How long were you in the band?

Konitz: About a year, ten months, something like that. Ten months, I think.

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Kirchner: There were seven reeds so the conventional numbering of the chairs doesn't work for that band. What chair were you playing?

Konitz: That was five saxes. I was playing third. Danny Polo was playing lead clarinet and lead alto.

Kirchner: I wanted to ask you about Danny Polo. You sat next to him, right?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: He was this legendary clarinet player who'd been around since the twenties with Jean Goldkette.

Konitz: Yeah, right. He was quite a gentleman. He tried to keep me behaving myself. Every once in a while if I spoke up he's try to quiet me down and things like that. I think he gave me the first Myer mouthpiece I'd ever played on, he wasn't using it and I liked it very much. He liked to smoke his little "weedie weedies" sometimes and, apparently got caught in Philadelphia one time and he wasn't able to make the gig and I played his book and when I reached back to get some parts out, there was a little bottle of pot that he'd forgotten. Red Rodney was on the band at the time so I think he might've been attracting some attention, I would guess, Red Rodney, in the drug sphere.

Kirchner: Was Danny's book all clarinet? Or was there some alto also?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Was it a lead alto book with a clarinet double or exclusively clarinet?

Konitz: Mostly clarinet. I can't even visualize him playing the saxophone right now. Weird. He had to play the saxophone also, I think.

Kirchner: How did you like his playing?

Konitz: I thought it was very nice, nothing special. After hearing Benny Goodman and all that, it was just kind of mediocre, I guess.

Kirchner: I heard somewhere that Mulligan wanted to hire him for the Birth of the Cool band.

Konitz: Oh really?

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Kirchner: You didn't know that?

Konitz: No I never heard that.

Kirchner: Supposedly, Mulligan wanted to get him on the Birth of the Cool Band, playing clarinet, but he was on the road with Thornhill, and then he died.

Konitz: Ah, and Miles wanted to get Sonny Stitt.

Kirchner: I don't want to get ahead of our selves but I'd definitely like to talk about that a little bit.

Konitz: Weren't you talking about the Birth of the Cool band just now?

Kirchner: Yeah, but I want to save that for a little bit later and stick with Thornhill for the moment.

Konitz: Okay.

Kirchner: Your first two recorded solos are with that band.

Konitz: Yeah?

Kirchner: On "Anthropology" and "Yardbird Suite". When Gil did those charts had you already heard Charlie Parker's record?

Konitz: Oh, of course.

Kirchner: You mentioned in the book that the solo Parker played on "Yardbird Suite" had a big impact on you. How did that affect your having to play the solo on the Thornhill record?

Konitz: For the most part, all of the influence that I was getting in studying these people, I tried to make it personal as quick as possible and not just review what I had learned phrase by phrase. So I just jumped in, in reaction to what the introduction, the exciting introduction that Gil had set up for me, and decided to play a lot of intervals of a fourth or something like that. Many years later I went into, this might be in the book, I went into the Sweet Basil club to hear James Moody, rest his soul, and he played one tune, and then, and I hadn't talked to him before, he spotted me and said: "I want to tell you folks that this gentleman is responsible for my learning how to play fourths". I said: "Wait a minute [unintelligible] he was good with fourths too." Anyway, solos were a result of whatever anxiety I was going

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through at the time. I just jumped in and that was it, I didn't get a second chance, I don't think, or did a second take or what.

Kirchner: Those [solos] made something of a name for you, early on in the game, right?

Konitz: That was right. That was a sound quality I was making and fucking around with the intervals and things like that.

Kirchner: Obviously you were doing something right

Konitz: Something like that, yeah. But I had to devote the rest of my life to straightening that out.

Kirchner: I have to ask you to tell the story that you told me years ago about when you and Mulligan were in Thornhill's band and he introduced you to strong pot for the first time.

Konitz: Right.

Kirchner: Please tell that story.

Konitz: We were playing in a theater in some place in upper New York and we were rehearsing the line on "Donna Lee" which there was an arrangement of.

Kirchner: That Gil wrote?

Konitz: Yeah. He took his pipe out and passed it over and I said that I had tried it but I hadn't really experienced it, so I took probably one "poke" and then we went down and at some point I had a sixteen bar solo on some tune and it was suddenly a very long distance to the microphone and I got there just in time, I might have been late actually. When I came back Gerry was hysterical, I remember that distinctly. I don't know if anyone else was.

Kirchner: And you hadn't played a note?

Konitz: I don't think so. [Laughs] or if I did it was probably a strange solo. In one other situation, I think that's in the book, I actually did not play a note for thirty-two bars. I was stoned and I was just fascinated by the rhythm section with the guitar player, you know?

Kirchner: Barry Galbraith?

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Konitz: Yeah. It was a nice . . .”wow” I said, “look at that.” Finally, I took a bow just to do my “hammy” thing: That was one of my better solos.

Kirchner: [Laughs] I read somewhere that Gil and Barry Galbraith and Joe Schulman, and Billy Eckstine used to rent studio time at Nola’s and just get together and play time.

Konitz: Yeah?

Kirchner: That’s all they did, just play time in the studio for their own pleasure.

Konitz: They sounded like they enjoyed playing together.

Kirchner: What was it like in general to play on that band, what was the feeling you got from it, especially from the ballad charts?

Konitz: It was “goose pimply” sometimes it was so beautiful, with the two French horns and the Tuba to add. I can’t believe there were five [saxes]. There was a baritone player, I know, two Tenor players, I know.

Kirchner: On some for those records, there are as many as seven reeds.

Konitz: That was before me, I think.

Kirchner: But definitely there were five when you were there?

Konitz: I’m pretty sure, yeah.

Kirchner: How was Claude Thornhill as a leader and as a boss?

Konitz: He was very non-committal. I think he just sat down and played, feed off the band every once in a while, but he was very quiet. I didn’t really hang out with him. He had a lovely wife that raveled with them. They kept apart pretty much, but he seemed always in good spirits. [He was] never too interested in stretching out or anything with whatever opportunity to play, just doing pretty much what was expected after I heard him the first time.

Kirchner: He wasn’t really a “jazz player” was he?

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Konitz: I think he had some of that experience, obviously, with different groups he had [or] had been part of. More, I guess, in the Teddy Wilson style or something like that, but never really developed to a high degree.

Kirchner: I've heard he was able to get the worst pianos, he encountered on the road, to sound good.

Konitz: Yeah, I never remember them sounding bad, but very typical. Somehow, he put his stamp on it immediately.

Kirchner: Did you and Gil hang out much when you were on the band? Was he traveling with the band?

Konitz: Sometimes, yeah. He was kind of the band philosopher, he and Billy [Eckstine], so we enjoyed hanging out and sharing philosophies and things like that. He was pretty much the leader of the band, especially when he was teaching the band how to play phrases, the bebop music.

Kirchner: How did he teach the band to play those things?

Konitz: Just by talking about the accent part of the articulation and the legato part of it as I recall, and pretty much just reviewing it enough times to get them to get some feeling for it. I don't remember any very intricate teaching methods, except that I mentioned.

Kirchner: I'm always stunned when I hear that chart on Donna Lee because he's got three trumpets and cup mutes and five clarinets all playing that head in unison.

Konitz: Really?

Kirchner: Do you remember that?

Konitz: No I don't remember.

Kirchner: Just to get five clarinets to play in tune, playing anything, is pretty stunning.

Konitz: Really, wow.

Kirchner: When and why did you decide to leave the band, what came up for you?

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Konitz: We arrived in New York, I kind of said originally I would stay that long and I didn't want to stay any longer.

Kirchner: So this is nineteen forty-eight?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Do you remember what time of the year was that?

Konitz: I don't remember that but I remember checking into a hotel and kind of running to Fifty-second Street which wasn't far away. I think the hotel was in the forties or something like that.

Kirchner: The Edison?

Konitz: No it was a smaller hotel. I forgot the name.

Kirchner: What did you hear on fifty-second street?

Konitz: I don't know if it was Charlie Parker, immediately, but one club after another. I had a choice. It was pretty exciting.

Kirchner: Did you get a hold of Tristano then when you came to town?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: What happened then with him?

Konitz: [We] got back together and talked about . . . I don't know if we talked about whether Warne was there already, but soon enough we were trying to play together as a band.

Kirchner: So this is including Warne?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: So it's you, Tristano, Warne, and who else?

Konitz: Billy Bauer, Arnold Fishkin, and Jeff Morton was one of his drum students at the time.

Kirchner: So he was the original drummer?

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Konitz: I think so, yeah.

Kirchner: Also around that same time you started rehearsing with Miles' nonet, right?

Konitz: That's right.

Kirchner: How did you get involved in that?

Konitz: Through the Claude Thornhill thing. Miles was friends with Gerry and Gil. [He] came to hear the band. That was basically Gerry and Gil's band, that's pretty clear. I think Miles approved of their suggestions, obviously.

Kirchner: Although as you mentioned, they were originally talking about having Sonny Stitt play alto. How did that end up in your favor as opposed to getting Stitt?

Konitz: I don't know what happened exactly but I think Gerry talked him out of that in terms of the balance that my sound would add to the ensemble. This was a chamber group.

Kirchner: The music sounds very much like its written with your sound in mind.

Konitz: Years later when they did it with Phil Woods, I never did hear that record.

Kirchner: I have.

Konitz: [It] was supposed to be different, it had to be different.

Kirchner: Phil played well, I mean he always does, but it's definitely not the original conception. You're one of the players it's really built around: you, Miles, and Mulligan's baritone sound, the French horn, and Tuba. I think those are the most important components of the sound of that band.

Konitz: I think Sonny Stitt would have blended in very musically but it would've still brought in another weight to his notes, I think.

Kirchner: Where did you start rehearsing?

Konitz: Probably in Nola's or one of those places.

Kirchner: How much did you rehearse?

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Konitz: Seems like a lot. It seemed like at every rehearsal there was someone different: Nelson Boyd. On piano, I don't remember it well; it was either John Lewis or Al Haig I think. The bass players changed: Joe Schulman. Nelson Boyd.

Kirchner: How about drummers?

Konitz: Well Kenny Clarke and Max Roach, basically. Different trombone players. I don't remember it well. I don't even remember Gunther Schuller playing on the band.

Kirchner: I think he was just on the last recording session, the nineteen fifty-one?

Konitz: I'm not sure of that.

Kirchner: Yeah, he was on the last one. Before that it was Junior Collins or Sandy Siegelstein and they were both on Thornhill's band, right?

Konitz: I don't think Junior was.

Kirchner: Bill Barber was there pretty much all of the time?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: A number of years ago I got a chance to look at the original scores for that music after they found all this stuff not only for the Birth of the Cool band but for the Miles and Gil records. They found them in a warehouse in Philadelphia about fifteen years ago and they brought them up here and a friend of mine was working at King Brand Music and called me and said "come and look at all of this stuff" so I got to look at it one afternoon. There were actually a couple of George Russell scores for that band in there that never got recorded. Do you remember those?

[Interview pauses so Konitz can adjust a lamp beside him]

Kirchner: Miles got two weeks for the band at the Royal Roost?

Konitz: This has never been clear to me. We did one of the weeks with the band. The second week was with a quintet with me, Miles, John Lewis, Al McKibbin, and Max. That's the history of the band working to my memory, but my memory has some stops and goes in it.

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Kirchner: I'm going to [unintelligible] your memory in a minute but I don't want to get ahead of us, I want to talk a little bit more about that. Do you remember much about playing at the Royal Roost? They've released the Boris Rose air checks.

Konitz: With Mike . . .

Kirchner: Schwerin, yeah. Do you remember much about that gig, playing opposite Basie?

Konitz: Yeah, I remember. Wow, that reminds me . . .

[Konitz asks Ken Kimery to hand him a picture from the shelf]

Konitz: I'd like to see if you recognize this picture.

Kirchner: Oh, wow.

Konitz: I think that's Miles' trumpet on the piano. I think one time we played opposite each other.

Kirchner: I'm going to tell you about this.

Konitz: Okay.

Kirchner: Let's do it now. Our Friend Sy Johnson tells me that in nineteen fifty the one other gig that the Birth of the Cool Band did was a one-nighter at Birdland.

Konitz: One nighter, maybe.

Kirchner: Opposite the Tristano Sextet and you were the only guy playing in both bands. Does this sound at all familiar?

Konitz: Yeah. I didn't think it was a whole week.

Kirchner: Sy was there. He would've been about twenty years old at the time. Sy was there with a friend of his and he told me, apparently, that the Birth of the Cool Band that night had Bud Powell on piano. Do you remember this?

Konitz: Kind of, yeah.

Kirchner: I'll just keep going and stop me at any point.

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Konitz: Please. I've been waiting for this.

Kirchner: Sy tells me that apparently the last tune of the set was "Move" and they opened it up to feature Bud and apparently Bud was at the top of his game and just tore it up and the whole place went nuts. That ended the set but Bud, at that time as we know, already had mental issues. He'd already been hospitalized in a mental hospital and had gone through electro-shock therapy so everybody in the band except Bud got off the stand and Bud was just sitting there on the piano bench staring ahead, blank stare, nothing happening. So Sy said that at that moment Mulligan got up on the stand, kissed Bud on the lips, gently took him by the hand, and led him off the bandstand.

Konitz: Wow.

Kirchner: Any of this sound familiar?

Konitz: I've heard this story before. I don't remember seeing it myself but I must've been there, anyway.

Kirchner: Yeah. My guess is that this [referring to the picture] was taken at Birdland and not the Royal Roost like the caption says: "The Royal Roost is a comparative newcomer to the club scene not aiming at glamour it offers the ultimate in Bebop to a youthful crowd."

Konitz: So what you're talking about happened at the Royal Roost?

Kirchner: No, [it] happened at Birdland in nineteen fifty. According to Sy that was the one other gig that the band did live.

Konitz: Okay so I'm right.

Kirchner: Does this jog any memories for you?

Konitz: I just remembered feeling kind of good moving from Tristano's band to the other band, just to be that active. I don't think my union time was officially up yet after coming to New York.

Kirchner: The six months.

Konitz: And here I was playing with two bands. I felt pretty good about that.

Kirchner: As far as the Royal Roost, you were working opposite Basie's band, right?

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Konitz: At some point, yeah.

Kirchner: Do you remember anything about that, like meeting Basie or getting Basie's reaction to the music or anything?

Konitz: Basie said "sometime I hope you can play with the band" or something like that. He was very kind.

Kirchner: I wanted to ask you about [how] you were pretty heavily featured on that band but as far as the written music you had to play I think the hardest thing ensemble-wise you had to do was on "Moon Dreams", playing that high F sharp.

Konitz: Oh yeah, oh boy. I have never lived that high F sharp down.

Kirchner: Well you nailed it and that's hard to do. At that point very few people were playing above the standard range of the alto, right?

Konitz: Thank you very much. [saying to Kimery about Kirchner] See how kind he is?

Kirchner: You did fine.

Konitz: Because of the nature of my recall mechanism I rationalized by thinking: "well, that was a high F sharp for me, that was why I was having a little trouble with it".

Kirchner: Did you have to learn a fingering to play that note or did you already know it?

Konitz: I played the standard D sharp fingering. But I rationalized it by saying it was a higher note. When I later found out that it was only a D sharp, I thought, "Oh my."

Kirchner: Okay . . .

Konitz: But this record that I gave you, I think you're getting a "five minute notice" . . . oh, I shouldn't have said that [chuckles].

[Konitz takes a moment to remember what he had been referring to]

Konitz: The record I gave you of Holman...

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Kirchner: With the Metropole Orchestra.

Konitz: With the Metropole Orchestra. Oh, the piece that he wrote for me he called “A Personal Voice” and the fact is, I think, that’s part of the character of my sound: up on the line of the pitch, or over sometimes. I lived with that positively and negatively over the years, but that’s it. When I sat at the Village Vanguard one time at the bar, Cedar Walton played as a trio and then called Jackie McLean up. Larry Willis was sitting in front of me at the bar and Jackie was really sharp.

Kirchner: He was notorious for that.

Konitz: Larry turned around and said: “He can push it in or pull it out but don’t leave it were it is”.

Kirchner: [Laughs]

Konitz: Then I went back stage after the set and I said: “I meant to talk to you about this”. He didn’t want to hear about it. That was it.

Kirchner: He and Charlie Rouse were the ultimate sharp saxophone players.

Konitz: Uh-huh, Charlie Rouse. Bird was pretty sharp at the beginning, and Sonny Rollins.

Kirchner: But not like that.

Konitz: No. That was “flavorantly” sharp.
[End of first hour]

Kirchner: We’re back. You remember doing one week at the Royal Roost with the nonet and one week with the quintet and that’s it?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Then the band got the three record dates?

Konitz: I don’t remember that chronology. I didn’t know if it was before or after.

Kirchner: According to everything I’ve ever read and seen, the Royal Roost was September forty-eight, and then the three recording sessions were January and April of forty-nine and March of nineteen fifty.

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Konitz: And not another gig came out of that, isn't that strange?

Kirchner: Except the one night at Birdland. That's all.

Konitz: That's kind of strange because we usually followed it up with the release of a record but I guess Miles was into his own other thing by then.

Kirchner: Including being addicted to heroin by that point.

Konitz: You know the record he made with me?

Kirchner: Yes.

Konitz: Do you happen to know where that was in relation to those other dates?

Kirchner: Yeah, that's nineteen fifty-one.

Konitz: He was very much involved with the drugs then and had a borrowed trumpet at the date. He came by, I was using Billy Bauer's studio, and he wanted to rehearse my line on "High Beck". [He] decided not to play the line but he played a solo on the record.

Kirchner: Was the line too hard for him?

Konitz: I don't know. It wasn't exactly a "Donna Lee" kind of line. Lot of eighth notes, but a little more questionable in some places.

Kirchner: A way different interval.

Konitz: But I remember once being at that Lennox school and hearing George Coleman standing out in the woods playing that line, or in his room. I guess that was it. I passed by and he said: "Do you here this?" and he went [vocally imitates the line].

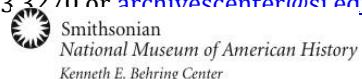
Kirchner: Now that you mention this it's a good time to ask you somewhere in this time period you got married, right?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: When did you marry your first wife?

Konitz: That was a short time before I joined the band, actually.

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Kirchner: Before the Birth of the Cool band?

Konitz: No the Claude Thornhill band.

Kirchner: So you met her in Chicago?

Konitz: Yeah, we went to high school together.

Kirchner: Do you want to talk about this?

Konitz: Not really.

Kirchner: Okay. How about talking about your kids, do you want to speak of your children just in passing since we mentioned Beck? That was your oldest daughter, Rebecca?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Is this something you want to talk about or should we just go back to the music?

Konitz: That was a bit of a problem, I'd rather not talk about it.

Kirchner: Okay. While you're playing with Miles' nonet you were also rehearsing with Tristano?

Konitz: Right.

Kirchner: And beginning in nineteen forty-nine you started recording with him. The first record date is for what was then called "New Jazz" which became "Prestige". I read that you were originally offered the date with Tony Fruscella. Can you talk about that?

Konitz: He came by my apartment at that time to talk it over and try some things. I made some suggestions that apparently offended him, I can't say exactly what it was, but it must have been with the selection of material that I didn't know and wasn't ready to play. He backed out and I suggested getting Lennie and Shelly Manne, and Arnold Fishkin . . . and Billy Bauer. I don't know that Warne was around then.

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Kirchner: For that one you had written maybe the most famous of all, certainly your tunes and maybe of all the tunes written by anybody in the Tristano school, "Subconscious-Lee".

Konitz: I still get royalties from that little exercise I did for my lesson.

Kirchner: So that's what it was? An exercise?

Konitz: Yeah. He said to write out a solo piece and that's what I enjoy doing and I still do that. I never carried it over into orchestration, per se, and pop tunes. These are more like "embellishment" kinds of things.

Kirchner: How about "Tautology" which also you recorded later that year?

Konitz: What was that based on?

Kirchner: That's "Idaho" right?

Konitz: Yeah. [chuckles]

Kirchner: Was that an exercise also?

Konitz: They were all kind of that idea. When I realized that they were playable I had that in mind certainly.

Kirchner: The first session you did was in January and that was put out under Lennie's name. I think you told Ira Gitler that you just wanted to do it as a sideman; you didn't want to be the leader on that. Is that so?

Konitz: I certainly respected Lennie enough to give him that title.

Kirchner: How did you feel about that date? Do you remember anything about how the date went down?

Konitz: I remember enjoying it. I don't remember how many tunes we did on that date.

Kirchner: I can tell you actually, having a discography in front of me.

Konitz: Thanks for coming along.

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Kirchner: You did “Subconscious-Lee” and you did “Tautology” and you did one called “Progression”.

Konitz: “Progression”. I think . . . that was based on another one. I think that was based on “Lullaby”, no not “Lullaby”. [sings melody]

Kirchner: “Lullaby in Rhythm”

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Then there are two other tunes that Lennie did solo: “Judy” and “Retrospection”.

Konitz: Wasn’t there a ballad on that first record?

Kirchner: No.

Konitz: These were ten-inch records.

Kirchner: Right, exactly. There’s a total of five tunes . . . “Progression”, “Tautology”, and “Subconscious-Lee” that Shelly played on. “Judy” is, I forget, either a solo or a trio record with Lennie.

Konitz: I think it’s a . . . I play a bridge on there or something.

Kirchner: I honestly don’t remember it’s been many years since I’ve heard that record.

Konitz: I think that’s “These Foolish Things.” I think I come in on the bridge.

Kirchner: So that was the first time this band, this nucleus of people, recorded?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Then you apparently got a contract with Capitol because then in March and May you guys did the famous Capitol sessions. Shall we talk about those?

Konitz: Okay. I wanted to mention one thing though, looking at your book recently . . . Ted Gioia, he really puts that music down.

Kirchner: Really? I didn’t get that feeling.

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Konitz: Oh my God, he said the “Cool”; it was unbelievably feeling less or something like that. He made a very strong point about that.

Kirchner: I know for a fact that he really loves that music.

Konitz: No way, man, I can show you when we’re finished.

Kirchner: Go ahead and show me but I know that’s not the way he feels.

Konitz: It was really insulting. He was trying to sound clever . . .

Kirchner: I think I know what you’re talking about and I think I know why you would interpret it that way but I know for a fact that he really respects that music.

Konitz: Making fun of the band, making clever ways of saying that it sucked is what he’s doing there and that’s doubly insulting I think.

Kirchner: We’ll have to look at it later.

Konitz: Yeah, okay. [saying to Ken Kimery] See? I got to show him something about *his* book. [Laughs]

Kirchner: Its only eight hundred and sixty-eight pages. [Laughs]

Konitz: Right. [Laughs] You did a good job, though.

Kirchner: I didn’t memorize the entire manuscript, though. Let’s talk about the Capitol sessions. As I recall, correct me if I’m wrong, but Pete Rugalo was responsible for signing you guys, right?

Konitz: He was in the booth. Whenever there was any reference that Lennie made to the people in the booth, I don’t know that he mentioned Pete Rugalo, but it sounded like there was some real executives in there that were horrified at the thought [of] playing totally free like that. Somehow it got accepted very reluctantly and released much later in the process I think.

Kirchner: *Intuition* came out a couple of years later and *Digression* came out a couple of years after that.

Konitz: Really? I think we did about four of those three minute takes so obviously a couple of them were wiped out or something.

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Kirchner: That's my understanding.

Konitz: Shmucks.

Kirchner: As I understand it the only thing about *Intuition* that was discussed before you did it was the order of entrances.

Konitz: Absolutely. That's all that was discussed. We had tried those at our get togethers at Lennie's house, usually having a little "pokie-wokie" and "why don't we try this" and having such a nice response to that kind of playing. We did it at a couple of our concerts and it was glorious. We enjoyed it. It ended up being more or less leaving a tune momentarily when it felt possible and then returning to the tune after some negotiating, or whatever.

Kirchner: You did some "free" playing in concerts or in clubs?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: What was the audience's response?

Konitz: It seemed very positive as I recall. We did some of this in Canada I remember. They were responsive in some way. There was no introduction or any setup. We just started playing like that. I remember we did a concert, I think Mary Lou Williams was on the other part of the concert, and I remember stretching out on that one in that way. It still happened, when we were stoned enough, but it was still the emphasis on just swinging, straight ahead.

Kirchner: Did the drummer play when you did these free things in concert?

Konitz: Yeah. I don't have a clear picture of how he played.

Kirchner: You don't remember whether it was actual time playing or just colors?

Konitz: I think it was colors.

Kirchner: As far as the more conventional tunes like "Wow", "Crosscurrent", "Marionette", and "Sax of a Kind", how much rehearsal went into them?

Konitz: I think we reviewed them each time we played and separately.

Kirchner: How did Lennie teach those to you? Did he write out lead sheets for you?

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Konitz: No. As I have stated in the book *Warne and I* would pick it up phrase by phrase as he played it and learn the whole tune before writing it down, which is a great way to learn a tune.

Kirchner: How did you work out the harmonies?

Konitz: They were either suggested by Lennie or Warne added harmony. I didn't usually do that.

Kirchner: You were playing the lead lines.

Konitz: Yes...but I think Lennie usually gave the harmony parts.

Kirchner: The Billy Bauer tune "Marionette"; did he teach that to you the same way?

Konitz: No, I think that was written out.

Kirchner: That's all unison. It's a different sound than the other tunes.

Konitz: On the one tune . . ."Fine and Dandy" Warne wrote the first thirty-two bars, and we played, and the last sixteen bars were mine and those were written out.

Kirchner: That was "Sax of a Kind?"

Konitz: "Sax of a Kind" based on "Fine and Dandy."

Kirchner: How many of the other tunes you recorded later, like "Two Not One," were tunes you had worked out at the time but just didn't get to record? How big was your repertoire at the time?

Konitz: "Large repertoire" was not the name of our activities. Our activities were making the most out of a small repertoire.

Kirchner: Other than those tunes you recorded how many other tunes were there?

Konitz: I would guess, I have to guess because I don't remember specifically, a handful at best. Neither of those guys wrote original tunes to begin with. I remember Lennie brought in a progression and we never played it. We tried it and the rest of it were variations on standard tunes. On one tune, "Crosscurrent," there was a different bridge.

Kirchner: That's altered Rhythm Changes basically.

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Konitz: Yeah, but the bridge was pretty altered. [There were] a couple changes on “Wow”, instead of two-five it was a major two. The emphasis was on solos. I had a feeling to write these things as I do everyday here pretty much. I just got a record of a school in North Carolina. They asked me to do something with the big band. I would send them some of my tunes and the students would make arrangements. It was really nice. I just got a copy.

Kirchner: Really. How did they turn out?

Konitz: Okay I think.

Kirchner: Do you know the Claire Fisher big band chart on “Lennie’s Pennies”?

Konitz: I’ve heard that, yeah.

Kirchner: That’s a really good big band chart that Warne and Gary Foster played on. This band worked somewhat doing live gigs for a few years?

Konitz: Somewhat at best, really.

Kirchner: How did you fill out an evening if there weren’t a lot of written themes? Just by calling tunes?

Konitz: We pretty much had a couple sets where [we called tunes], I think, then we just played the melodies . . . ballads and stuff.

Kirchner: How much did the band work?

Konitz: Not that much. More than . . . might have been thought compared to the Miles Davis band, but when I got a call to join the Stan Kenton band and accepted, I learned later that I was disrupting this band. I didn’t give it a thought too much; I was being offered the first steady job I ever had and I had to support five kids on one hundred and seventy five dollars a week on the road. That was the least I could do, and the whole group was putting me down for breaking up the band. I learned all of that later.

Kirchner: Was there a lot of mean spirited-ness about that?

Konitz: Yeah, really. Including Lennie telling a dentist who wanted my home number that “we don’t mention that name here”. I thought that was a drag because its traditional for the student to go out and test his wings along the way and I was

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totally immersed in his ideas of how to do things and I wanted to find out how to do them from my own perspective. All through the years I have been doing that in my way, trying to make it as meaningful as possible, giving full credit to his inspiration. But as I listen to Ted Brown still playing, I heard him the other night playing differently and I was knocked out. He was actually leaving rests and not just pouring out the “eighth-note boogie”. It was obviously Lester Young-influenced, the rests and some different ideas . . . Gary Foster just sent me a record of Warne with Red Mitchell and a drummer with an Italian name . . .

Kirchner: Peter Scataretico.

Konitz: Yeah. They started out with this tune at this tempo [taps a fast tempo] and [on] some other tunes I’ve heard Warne with Niels Henning and Al Levitt playing very fast tempos very flawlessly. Do you know the book this man in Australia wrote?

Kirchner: Safford Chamberlain, the biography of Warne?

Konitz: No, the man in Australia wrote a book called “Out of Nowhere” and assumed the voice of Warne Marsh, scarily so. He obviously knew Warne. He would have to [in order] to say the things he said . . . so close to home. But somehow or other, he had summed up that I had reached, as Warne Marsh, what I had set out to do. It’s like he was saying that he’s finished his work and now he could leave town.

Kirchner: Supposedly that was the last tune he played and then he had that heart attack right?

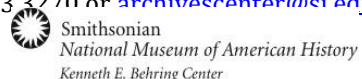
Konitz: Yeah. The way it was voiced in the obituary sounded a little bit like a put on of the “Tristano cult” playing their half a dozen tunes.

Kirchner: You were the one, more so that the other people of the ‘cult’, who went furthest from the nest and apparently that wasn’t appreciated.

Konitz: The idea was to stay at home and practice and play with fellow students, and get a day job. I wasn’t about to do that. I mean here I am playing with people all other the place who are enjoying sharing my experience and I enjoyed their enthusiasm, I’m getting paid so I can pay the rent and all that, so why are they putting me down? I’m pretty lucky.

Kirchner: You’re making a living as a player. What a concept.

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Konitz: That was the name of the game, ultimately. Enough people support you that you could keep moving around . . . be able to do it more than ever. Now they just want to know if I can get through a set.

Kirchner: [Laughs].

Konitz: And their very pleased that I can and I am too.

Kirchner: Let's talk a little bit about how, subsequently, in June or September of forty-nine, you and Warne did two more dates for the New Jazz but this time you got Sal Mosca. How did those dates come about?

Konitz: Bob Winestock was interested in me and Warne and wanted some more of that music. As of recently as today I usually accept those offers graciously. I talked to one of the people that I've recorded for over the years, Paolo Piangiarelli, from Philology Records, and he was complaining to me about this and I said: "How many records have I made for you?" and he told me . . . I made forty records for him. According to him, [I] don't sell any but he likes me . . . his three favorite players are Phil Woods, Chet Baker, and Lee Konitz. I said: "How come it's 'Phil-ology' and not 'Chet-ology', or 'Lee-ology'?" So the next record, on the bottom he put "Lee-ology Number One" . . . I was interested in recording and said "thank you". Some nice things came out of that I think.

Kirchner: Yeah. "Marshmallow", "Fishin' Around", "Tautology", "Sound-Lee". Were these things you wrote specifically for the dates or that you already had worked up?

Konitz: Pretty much what we were playing with Lennie.

Kirchner: In fifty and fifty-one you did some duo things with Billy Bauer that I've always found fascinating.

Konitz: Those were nice I think. "Indian Summer" . . .

Kirchner: That duet for saxophone and guitar . . . That's a fascinating record for me. How much of that is written and how much is improvised?

Konitz: Things that sound written are written put it that way. I can't tell you specifically. I haven't heard it for a long time but I think it's really beautiful.

Kirchner: Our friend Larry Cart asked me, I told him I was going to be seeing you, he said: "Ask Lee about Billy Bauer" because you and Billy seemed to have a special relationship where no matter what the setting you were in, either duo or with a

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rhythm section, there was just something about Billy's comping that seemed to inspire you.

Konitz: It was very inspiring. His solos were never that inspiring to me although they were very creative. He was very self-conscious about playing solos. The lack of self-consciousness was enhanced with the smoking. He was a "good smoker" as they say. I can talk freely about this because I don't smoke anymore you see. Regrettably because I enjoyed it very much. Somehow we were able to be in the situation playing the Russo music . . . "An Image", "Round About Midnight", and a few nice tunes of his. He had a very spacious kind of hit in his chords. It was a nice push. Never got in the way. Just always was a kick.

Kirchner: He seemed to have a harmonic concept that was unlike any other guitar player of that time that I know of.

Konitz: I didn't know him before that but I'm sure that was Lennie's influence. He [Bauer] suggested that he didn't really study formally with Lennie but they hung out and Billy was a very inquisitive guy, just trying to find out what was happening the best way he could . . . Incidentally his family, his son and daughter I guess, established a publishing company and put some of our various materials . . .

Kirchner: William H. Bauer.

Konitz: Yeah, they've continued. They just sent me a royalty check. I thanked them for doing that.

Kirchner: He spent most of the later years of his life living on Long Island and teaching. I actually had a student at the New School who studied with him fifteen years ago.

Konitz: I think he did a minimum of playing.

Kirchner: We talked for a moment about the date that you did for New Jazz with Miles as a sideman. Could we talk a bit more about that? George Russell wrote you two things. Did you ask him to do those things or did Winestock?

Konitz: We were talking when I would occasionally visit George and he introduced me to his good friend who was a Schillinger student and very much responsible for that whole Lydian concept mathematically or in some capacity.

Kirchner: Who was his friend?

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Konitz: I've forgotten his name . . . but he showed me that material before the date and I tried to learn it. Fortunately because it was very demanding at that tempo and Miles was in trouble so I had that in mind as a leader. I was pleased that it turned out as well as it did. But that ballad was quite exceptional too.

Kirchner: "Odjenar". That's pretty challenging too, with those intervals. It's a slower tempo but those intervals are tough.

Konitz: At a slower tempo I can fake better.

Kirchner: There's "Yesterdays" as well.

Konitz: I could've lived without that one.

Kirchner: Whose idea was that?

Konitz: I don't know but that tune was always difficult for me. As soon as I landed into that circle of seventh chords I got self-conscious. [sings a melody]

Kirchner: That was more of a favorite of Miles' than yours?

Konitz: I think so, yeah.

Kirchner: Jackie McLean told a story once about how Miles reamed him out because Jackie didn't know "Yesterdays" and Jackie said: "I'm young, I'll learn it later" and Miles just jumped down his throat. Apparently "Yesterdays" was important to Miles for whatever reason.

Konitz: Do you know that I heard Jackie at the Blue Note introduce the fact that he "is now going to play Charlie Parker's version of 'Lover Man'", the ill-fated "Lover Man" where he went to Camarillo.

Jackie McLean

Kirchner: That was after he fell asleep and set fire to the room and ran out into the lobby of the hotel naked and they came and took him to jail and then sent him to Camarillo. So he [Jackie McLean] recreated Bird's solo on that tune?

Konitz: He played that same sad-assed sound and everything. I'd say that was really weird.

Kirchner: You heard this?

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Konitz: I heard him, I was sitting there. I said: “What is he doing?” But it was very dramatic the way he did it.

Kirchner: Bird hated that record.

Konitz: Yep.

Kirchner: It was the worst record he ever made.

Konitz: He would never have appreciated that tribute.

Kirchner: Yeah I don’t think so, although, some people seem to think it sounds soulful or something. It sounds like a sick man.

Konitz: Yeah. To that extent it was soulful. We knew how sick he was but it wasn’t done to the heading of great music because everything he tried to play he could play when he was not sick and was not much better so it just sounded sad.

Kirchner: Exactly. Supposedly they were propping him up, literally, against the mic so he could play. His health was that bad at the point.

Konitz: Thirty-four years he lived. Amazing.

Kirchner: How well did you know him?

Konitz: Not really well but every time we met it was very friendly. We hung out once when we were doing guests on the Stan Kenton tour.

Kirchner: That’s fifty-three right?

Konitz: Yeah. He was very kind. My wife was having a baby soon and he came over to hang out: “You need a friend?”, you know. [He] took me to his hotel, we had lunch together in the room. I don’t know that we spoke a dozen words...he always said that he appreciated that I didn’t play like him and I think he meant that. The fact that I couldn’t was beside the point. [Laughs] “Its too hard” I said.

Kirchner: At least you had an alternative worked out. I don’t think I’ve ever heard anybody who knew him say they ever had a discussion about equipment or talking shop. He wasn’t into that.

Konitz: The only thing I heard about was that he and Sonny Stitt went to Santi Runyon, the man I was taking lessons from later. I was with him once and we went

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into a music store in some city and he asked for a particular book and then tried to get it for nothing, telling them he was Charlie Parker.

Kirchner: There's that one picture in your book of you and Bird hugging the propeller.

Konitz: I look like I was just Bar Mitzvahed and he looks like he's just going out to lunch.

Kirchner: Speaking of the Kenton tour that brings us to the point where you went on the Kenton band. Shall we move into that or is there something else you want to talk about first?

Konitz: Not really, no.

Kirchner: How did you get on the Kenton band?

Konitz: Stan called me.

Kirchner: Personally called you?

Konitz: Yes. I was very pleased and surprised. Apparently, Richie Kamuca was joining the band the same day. He said: "I'm trying for more of a jazz band now."

Kirchner: He'd lost his shirt on the Innovation band. He lost one hundred and twenty five thousand dollars in four months with that forty-piece band with strings and French horns.

Konitz: Johnny Richards, Bob Graettinger . . .

Kirchner: Yeah, and a lot of other people. Shorty Rogers . . .

Konitz: Pete Rugolo.

Kirchner: Yeah. All those guys wrote charts but apparently he lost his shirt on it. It was just too big of a band to support even if the music was popular.

Konitz: I think he got kind of a rough deal. He was trying to cover a lot of ground but he was really interested in playing some good music and he was also interested in paying for the salaries.

Kirchner: He put his money where his mouth was.

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Konitz: Yeah. Nobody plays his music on the radio that I hear. When I heard recently that Wynton was going to play next February, they've invited Bill Holman to come and asked me to play a couple tunes. They did some nice music especially Bill Holman's music, Gerry Mulligan's music, Bill Russo did some interesting things. I thought that was unjust. There seemed to be some . . . Dizzy seemed to be putting Stan on for some black and white reason I think.

Kirchner: Can I tell you a lovely story?

Konitz: Please.

Kirchner: At the Berlin Jazz Festival around nineteen sixty nine or seventy, Thelonious Monk was there and Kenton's band was also on the bill, and Monk overheard somebody, who'll remain nameless, putting down Kenton; a white guy as it happened. Monk turned to the guy and said: "what've you done compared to what he's done?"

Konitz: Good man.

Kirchner: There's Kenton music you can like or dislike.

Konitz: Of course "Peanut Vendor". We had to live with that as apart of his money making piece.

Kirchner: Or "Tampico".

Konitz: "Tampico". Those were his bread and butter songs.

Kirchner: But he hired a lot of good players and gave a lot of good writers their break like Holman or Lenny Niehaus, or Rugolo, or Graettinger, on and on. Let's talk about the experience you had.

Konitz: I had some kids by then so the thought of traveling was not the most tempting thing in one sense and probably tempting in another sense; that I was finally having a steady job with a situation, I didn't know yet but assumed, was going to have some kind of security in that way that I never had. I was pleased when I heard the band the first time in a theater in Chicago and seeing him [Kenton] do his "Andre Kostelanetz" conducting. It was very moving. Ten brass, wow. Then I was sitting outside in the seats in the theater. When I got the job I was sitting a few feet from those ten brass and I heard a 'wooshing' in my ears right now that I think I inherited from that sound. It was a group who're sharing their experiences together

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and sometimes it was very moving. He [Kenton] was very kind and tried to give everybody as much publicity and good words and featuring. The first night on a radio broadcast he asked me to play on an arrangement of something or other, “Blue Room” or something like that I had never played before, and I just stood there and played on the chords and things like that. I knew the melody. I was with that band for about a year and a half including traveling to Europe where we’d do two concerts a day frequently where they would present him with a huge bottle of brandy and they would sit in the back of the bus: Zoot, June Christy, and whoever else and get rid of that usually. Then he would be all combed and brushed and would meet the mayor of the next little city perfectly in control of the things that he had to do.

Kirchner: Art Pepper described him as being a real charismatic guy and if he hadn’t been a musician he would have been somebody like Billy Graham or somebody like that.

Konitz: I can’t imagine that: a drink and Billy Graham. [Laughs] He was a charismatic character. He was a good looking, tall man, talented man, a great ability to speak about this stuff.

Kirchner: Was it difficult for you from a playing standpoint to play on that band?

Konitz: Very difficult in terms of what I had experienced as a so-called improviser. With that kind of power behind me, and that structuring, all I could do was play what I knew. In that sense I learned how to do that when it was called for.

Kirchner: Do you think it changed your playing much?

Konitz: I think it made it stronger. Any intense playing experience is going to change your playing in a way.

Kirchner: Did you alter your equipment like use harder reeds or different mouth-pieces because of the setting?

Konitz: Not really. I used a heavier reed overall.

Kirchner: Eventually people like Russo and Holman started writing stuff specifically for you and the way you play. Did that make matters easier?

Konitz: It certainly gave me a voice in the band, not just playing on the conventional arrangements for two or three choruses.

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Kirchner: You were playing second alto right? Vennie Dean was the lead player?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Was Baldoni in there when you were on?

Konitz: No

Kirchner: He was later.

Konitz: I think so.

Kirchner: Vennie Dean was the lead player. He died not too long ago.

Kirchner: Really. I'm sorry to hear that.

Kirchner: I knew him a little bit. I think he died last year or something like that. He was a nice man.

Konitz: He was very nice.

Kirchner: That was a nice sax section. You, him, Richie Kamuca, and Holman was the fourth tenor player. Bob Gioga was the director?

Konitz: No, that was before. Tony Ferrina, and I think Gerry played a short time. I know he did with the Claude Thornhill band but I'm not sure about that.

Kirchner: But otherwise the band had players like Rossolino?

Konitz: Frank Rossolino, Conte Candoli.

Kirchner: Can I tell you a Joe Henderson story that you'll appreciate? About fifteen years ago Bob Belden asked me to do the liner notes for Joe Henderson's big band record that was coming out on Verve. I went down to his studio downtown where Joe was finishing doing little repairs on his solos. I was just sitting there in the studio with him and I heard a couple of the charts through the speakers and I asked him: "Do you like Bill Holman?" because his writing reminded me of Holman and he just started glowing and talking about how the early fifties Kenton Band with you guys was this big influence on him as a player and a writer. I told this to Holman and later on before Joe died the two of them got to meet. That band affected a lot of people.

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Konitz: I think so. The problem seemed to be that he didn't have many black players coming through the band. There were some, Ernie Royal.

Kirchner: Curtis Counce.

Konitz: Not significantly enough for the black guys. I don't know what disagreement Dizzy had with Stan but he really put him down strong.

Kirchner: But then later on in fifty-three Bird did that tour with the band, right?

Konitz: Yeah. Dizzy was on that tour also.

Kirchner: Can you talk about that experience?

Konitz: For me it was a big surprise when he asked me to do it and I asked who else was on it and he said Charlie Parker.

Kirchner: This was after you had left the band right?

Konitz: Yeah. I exclaimed and I don't remember ever hearing the reason for that, the justification for that. Why didn't he get a tenor player like Stan Getz? The fact was that I was playing the arrangements I played when I was in the band and Bird was playing new arrangements and for whatever state his health was in he wasn't terribly comfortable with Charlie Parker playing so I didn't listen to him, usually. How do you like that? As Miles Davis kind of indicted when he was standing next to him, he couldn't really hear him completely somehow because it was such a threat to him.

Kirchner: Miles said that he wanted to quit every night.

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Let's go back a bit though. I want to talk about some of the things that Holman and Russo wrote for you. You told me years ago that one of your favorites of those was "In A Lighter Vein". What were some other things that you were particularly fond of that you were featured on?

Konitz: Of Holman's?

Kirchner: And Russo.

Konitz: He wrote an arrangement of "Lover Man".

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Kirchner: They both did right?

Konitz: Later. I think Bill wrote his for Bird and I recorded that. A few that he wrote for Bird: “My Funny Valentine” and something else.

Kirchner: “Cherokee”.

Konitz: Yeah. “Cherokee”.

Kirchner: Lennie Niehaus ended up doing that one. There’s a Holman Chart on “Cherokee” that was done for Bird but then later on the “Contemporary Concepts” album Lennie Niehaus played the solo on that.

Konitz: Really? I thought I played all those arrangements. Bill wrote an original tune called “My Lady” and another one that was a kind of stretch-out piece, I don’t remember what that was called.

Kirchner: “Introspection”?

Konitz: No, something else. Then Russo wrote some nice arrangements with about four or five horn voicing themes. Some of his better so-called “jazz” arrangements.

Kirchner: Russo and Holman were kind of Yin and Yang for that band.

Konitz: Something like that, yeah. I remember I went to a record store in Boston to get that record of Holman tunes and I put it on and it was Russo’s tunes by mistake somehow or other. It was quite a different feeling.

Kirchner: I can imagine. Mulligan wrote a handful of charts like “Young Blood” that you played a solo on.

Konitz: His charts were always fun to play on the Thornhill band and on that band also. That was his forte ultimately. I don’t know the music he wrote for his own band over the later years. It always sounded nice but I don’t remember if it was particularly nice.

Kirchner: Do you remember the nineteen fifty-seven big band date that you played on with him?

Konitz: I just heard that again. It was really nice.

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Kirchner: One of those charts was originally written for Kenton. I think “All the Things You Are”. He wrote a handful of dance charts for Kenton in addition to “Young Blood”, “Swing House”, “Wee-Bidda-Bo-Bidda”, “Walking Shoes” and a handful of other things intended to be dance charts and then he re-wrote one or two of them for that date that you were on.

Konitz: That was nice. They did one of his originals; “Millennium” I think it was called. It sounded like a Monk tune a little bit.

Kirchner: It sounds like “I Mean You”. So over all it was a positive experience for you?

Konitz: I think so, yeah. I really felt a part of that band and I couldn’t sit in the back of the bus with them so I never got to really know and hang out with them. Again, this has been the story of a lot my situations that I didn’t get to know people that intimately from my shyness or whatever. I always regret that but he was very kind to me and I appreciated that very much. I think I won a Poll during that time, beating Charlie Parker. That’s how popular that band was, as an “avant-garde commercial” band.

Kirchner: So you stayed about a year and a half?

Konitz: I planned on staying a shorter, I’ve said, but by the time I was ready to leave during that short time I was already in debt to the band.

Kirchner: How so?

Konitz: I drew money for family needs, things like that. Imagine one hundred and Seventy-five dollars traveling on the road. That meant a lot. I paid about one hundred and fifty for my alto forty-five or whatever. Its really inflated since then nonstop.

Kirchner: If you multiply one hundred and seventy-five by ten that’s what it would be in current dollars.

Konitz: I can get probably ten thousand dollars for my horn if I add my name to it.

Kirchner: Anyone’s [Selmer] Mark VI will go for seven or eight grand now. The price of those horns just keeps going through the roof.

Konitz: I’ve been fortunate. I bought some horns over the years but I’ve been getting supplies for endorsing. Van Doren has been giving me things for years and they

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hardly use me for advertising. I went to get some pictures taken one time for that reason and it was going to support their new reed called “ZZs” and I had the perfect theme. I told the lady and she didn’t get it, but I said: “I love to blow Zees”. She didn’t get it.

Kirchner: Oh well. [Laughs]

Konitz: It had a lot of meaning for me. [Laughs] Too hip.

Kirchner: Too hip for the room once again. What prompted you to get off the band?

Konitz: I just had enough. I thought it was time to be home more and try to get my own situation going on with the benefits of whatever publicity I got from that situation.

Kirchner: Not long after you got off the band . . . I have a recording of yours that you did at Storyville up in Boston with Ronnie Ball and Percy Heath and Al Levitt. That’s one of my favorites of your records from the early fifties. There’s just something about the playing and how it’s recorded. Do you remember that?

Konitz: I do, yeah. I’m kind of disturbed with some of my playing on that record. It sounds pretty nervous to me. I was smoking and doing things like that with the idea of not sounding so nervous but there it was.

Kirchner: Could’ve fooled me, put it that way.

Konitz: It all has to do with using too many notes and not giving each note enough time to resolve. Just feeling the need through the influences I had all around me to play without taking a breath almost. I’m thankful that I can take a breath now and dig in a little deeper on the notes.

[End of second hour]

Kirchner: Today is February 15th, 2011, the anniversary of the sinking of the USS Maine just to give us some context, right?

Konitz: Why didn’t that stir me at all?

Kirchner: [Laughs] We’re here once again in Lee Konitz’ apartment in Manhattan. I’m Bill Kirchner and we’re going to continue our interview.

Konitz: Okay, shoot.

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Kirchner: Since we found out that Don Ferrara passed shall we just begin by talking a little bit about him because you worked with him quite a bit over the years.

Konitz: He was quite a lovely guy who was very much into trumpet music. He really picked up the great influence of Roy Eldridge. He was very promising. We made one record in Pittsburgh; I don't think he was on all of the tracks.

Kirchner: It's called *The Real Lee Konitz*.

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: You did another one with him in the studio called *Very Cool* after that. I have the discography so I'll give you the details if you like.

Konitz: You'll have to remind me because I've made thousands of records. Thousands.

Kirchner: We know this. You're nothing if not prolific.

Konitz: You know the great Mel Brooks line in "The 2000 Year Old Man"? He said: "Wow, you must have a lot of children." [the other says] "I have thousands of children and they never write and say 'How you doing, Pop?'"

Kirchner: Here we are, *Very Cool*. This is with you, Don Ferrara, Sal Mosca, Peter Ind, and Shadow Wilson from May of nineteen fifty seven.

Konitz: Oh yeah. That was at Rudy Van Gelder's.

Kirchner: It doesn't say. I'll take your word for it, although at the time, Rudy was still recording out of his parent's living room in Hackensack.

Konitz: Right. That was the last studio of his I was in.

Kirchner: You never went to the one in Inglewood he opened in fifty-nine I take it?

Konitz: Well, I'm not sure.

Kirchner: So that was a studio record you did and before that Don is on the album called *The Real Lee Konitz* which you did in Pittsburgh in February of fifty seven? . . . He's on two of the tracks.

Konitz: Two of the tracks, okay. But anyway, he was getting out in the world so to speak, for the first time playing with Mulligan's band and I think he did some things with Lennie.

Kirchner: And Lester Young I believe. I have an air check of him with Lester from Birdland.

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Konitz: I'd like to hear that.

Kirchner: I'll make you a copy of it. Loren Schoenberg gave me a cassette of it years ago. He was a Tristano student. He's the only trumpet player that I know of who went through the whole Tristano rigors.

Konitz: Probably so. There were some other guys I didn't know very well. I don't know if they studied with Tristano or one of his students, Sal Mosca or something. I met a trumpet player recently who studied with Sal. Don was talking about changing his embouchure so he could continue to play for a long time. That was the last promise that he made then he married this lady, Adora was her name, and moved to California and I hardly . . . One time I met him in California and we played together. We sounded good. That was the end of it; there was no more communication.

Kirchner: He kept a pretty low profile for about forty years or something.

Konitz: Whenever I asked anybody about him they didn't seem to know anything. I heard that she [Adora] is blind now. Apparently she was not a well woman and he devoted a lot of his life to taking care of her.

Kirchner: He's one of the relatively few trumpet players that you've played in a two-horn situation with. You've done Miles of course and Kenny Wheeler. A Swedish trumpet player named Yan Allen.

Konitz: Yeah, right. He was a good trumpet player.

Kirchner: How do you feel about playing in that kind of setting? Is it something you enjoy?

Konitz: I enjoyed playing with Kenny very much. We made another record [with] a few of our tunes and [some] standards. He was always kind of unpredictable in a nice way.

Kirchner: How so?

Konitz: He liked to improvise. He made some un-trumpet like sounds sometimes. He was a great writer, Kenny. That was a great feature of his. I just heard the Cologne Radio Orchestra, which is a fine orchestra, do a program of his music and it was really some nice writing.

Kirchner: His writing is really unique, his harmonic concept in particular.

Konitz: And looking at the chord symbols it seems like every chord is plus eleven, whatever it is.

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Kirchner: There's seldom a two-five-one. His harmonic concept is something totally other.

Konitz: Yeah. He studied with Russo. I don't know how much he had to do that. I don't remember Tristano talking about two-five-ones that much either. It was usually five-one.

Kirchner: Kenny I think said something about how he never mastered "BeBop." He talked about Bebop in the same way that you have, kind of facetiously. It was too hard, blah blah blah. Maybe his viewpoint is not dissimilar from yours.

Konitz: I don't think I ever heard him play really straight ahead like that. [It] always had a personal turn to it in some way. I think a lot of the "free" playing that he did had to do with the kind of freedom that he had in his harmonic playing.

Kirchner: Let's go back. In nineteen fifty-five you started recording both as a leader and as a sideman with Tristano for Atlantic [Records] which is kind of an unusual circumstance. Did that have to do with Nesuhi Ertegun? Did he approach you?

Konitz: I signed a contract with them for a number of records, I don't remember if it was two years or something like that. We just planned records together. I don't know [if] that was during the time I did the Chinese restaurant "Confucius".

Kirchner: Interestingly the "Confucius Restaurant" record is June eleventh, fifty-five. Three days later on the fourteenth you and Warne did the *Lee Konitz with Warne Marsh* album with Oscar Pettiford, Billy Bauer, and Kenny Clarke so those two records were only three days apart.

Konitz: I'm glad to have you remind me of these things.

Kirchner: Those are two landmark records. What do you remember about the "Confucius" record with Tristano?

Konitz: That was a very difficult situation for me. The record was with Art Taylor and Gene Ramey and they played beautifully for both of us but I don't think I ever spent an intermission talking to them. I was generally upstairs trying reeds or doing something to try to relax, you know? I don't know if I smoked to try to relax in those days. I kind of doubt it. I think that could've backfired on me, the way I was feeling. Then when I heard the record, finally, I was kind of disappointed in the way I sounded on the record, for many years. I can listen to my records and enjoy them pretty objectively, usually, but that one was bothering me until, I don't know how many years later, I listened to the record again and really accepted it. I was playing with the rhythm section, not as relaxed as I like to be but I accepted it . . . I couldn't relate to anybody personally and that really bothers me in retrospect.

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Kirchner: The funny thing is that . . . a lot of people consider that one of your landmark records.

Konitz: Really?

Kirchner: They only released about a handful of tracks at the time on that album, the “Black” album, with Tristano. But then the bulk of what you recorded didn’t come out until the early nineteen eighties on a two LP set. So unless they gave you test pressings or something of music that didn’t come out at the time, you weren’t even hearing most of what you recorded because it wasn’t released until twenty-five years later. That’s kind of a curiosity.

Konitz: Yeah. Incidentally, the record I made at the Half Note with Warne, Paul Motian, Jimmy Garrison, and Bill Evans I think came out seventeen years later. The thing with Elvin Jones and the second installment with Nick Stabulas came out some twenty or seventeen years later.

Kirchner: I want to ask you about all of those things shortly because I have questions about all of those. What about the date three days after the “Confucius”, with you, Warne, Sal Mosca, Billy Bauer, Oscar Pettiford, and Kenny Clarke? How did you feel about that one?

Konitz: I was very uncomfortable in that situation also because [of] the smoking that [was] inevitably involved in those days. I don’t think I smoked that day and I think Sal and Warne were well “fortified” and somehow you can’t penetrate that kind of structure too easily.

Kirchner: Well again that’s considered one of your landmark records and I know lots of people who love the way that you and Warne played on that.

Konitz: Some of it’s nice but just over all it was a feeling . . . of not being comfortable with anybody there, really. Not Oscar or Kenny. Kenny was always cool but Oscar was a difficult man for me although I played in his little band briefly.

Kirchner: The Little Big Band?

Konitz: I don’t know how big it was but we played a little club in the forties in midtown Manhattan and he had an arrangement of one tune . . . “Passion Flower” or something like that and Johnny [Hodges] came in I remember and I think I played it an octave higher or something. I didn’t know what to do with it. But anyway I sometimes closed up shop and that’s one of the times I closed up. I’m grateful that something remains but for the most part these days they’re all joyous experiences.

Kirchner: Do you think that’s because you’re no longer smoking pot or because you just changed your view of things?

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Konitz: I think that has something to do with it. I think that my playing is more coordinated with my feeling now. I was under that kind of Tristano and Warne influence trying to play the long, complicated lines. I love the possibility of playing more simply now and that's more satisfying, more easy somehow to attain.

Kirchner: When did that come about? Because when I met you forty years ago you already were talking like that . . . so obviously it happened somewhere before nineteen seventy-one?

Konitz: It's just been a gradual weeding-out process I think of it as. Lately I've been ecstatic like I used to feel when I got high, playing has been so rewarding for me. With sympathetic guys that I can relate to [and] somehow they can relate to me.

Kirchner: You're working with a lot of younger players . . . old enough to be your grandchildren. Do you think that has some bearing on it? Just having young cats?

Konitz: Certainly it does. Whatever insecurities I brought into the mess are absorbed in my age now; my experience, and I feel more confident as a player.

Kirchner: I want to talk about a couple of people. I'm looking through this discography and not long after those sessions you did some stuff in Germany with Lars Gullin and Hans Koller. You knew Lars Gullin fairly well right?

Konitz: Fairly well yeah.

Kirchner: And played his music more than once on records. What are your thoughts about him as a player and composer?

Konitz: He was a marvelous musician. Classical pianist, classical composer, and a very nice composer of jazz tunes, and a player I think that was very influenced by the Tristano people and I think particularly by Gerry Mulligan. He had that kind of sound and feeling I think in his baritone playing. I have a memory of him coming to my hotel room in Stockholm and looking around at my electric razor and whatever else I had out on the table. He said, "You have nice things." [Laughs] He was a sweet guy.

Kirchner: Unfortunately he has some terrible drug problems.

Konitz: That was the un-sweet part. I remember I had a pair of sunglasses that I had painted black inside so I could really stand up and not see when playing, because I usually close my eyes and don't see anyway, and I remember standing [where] I could see him on the bandstand in this club and I said, "try these" and oh man, did he like those glasses. He might've made a pair.

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Kirchner: Hans Koller was a saxophone player who was pretty influenced by you correct?

Konitz: I think he was very sympathetic with that music overall, Warne also, of course. We were very close for some years and then he asked me to do a project and I couldn't do it. I don't think I wanted to do it, something else was up, and he seemed to turn against me, and Russo too who he was very close to. He had some memorial concert and didn't play any of Russo's music or mine and we wondered, both of us, what had happened. He did something [where] Warne joined him and . . . well, I don't remember the outcome of that one, but I heard them play together and [there] was some nice things. I don't remember how that turned out though. But then I had occasion to visit him in Vienna and he gave me some of his paintings and a couple album covers from his paintings. My daughter in-law has one of them hanging in her apartment. He lost his wife and I didn't really see him much after that.

Kirchner: He's been gone now a couple years right?

Konitz: Yeah, a few. He was really quite an influential painter and his musical activities are quite broad. He played in many different creative situations and at first he was playing more straight ahead and more in the style of Zoot Sims maybe, and whatever Tristano influence, whatever of my influence and Warne's. But then he started to play very free music and playing soprano saxophone and some very nice things that he did.

Kirchner: Mangelsdorff kind of went in that direction too correct?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: He started out as a more traditional player then did more and more free playing. You knew him pretty well didn't you?

Konitz: Fairly well. I was told that he had a picture of me in his trombone case and in the early days a lot of those guys were interested in Tristano's music. That was the only, if you'll forgive me, "white" experimentation going on at the time. I played many situations with Albert in the early years with Attila Zoller. Some nice things we did, then he got very interested in the singing phenomenon.

Kirchner: Multiphonics?

Konitz: Yeah, and he really did that very well. We made one record that I felt like I was playing with a brass section. He played these nice little riffs. I tell this story in the book I think about the man at the MPS records, the head of the record [label] was in the booth. We were doing a duo record and after the first take which really felt nice, there was a dead silence and then I hear the voice saying, "nicht schlecht," [German] "Not bad." I thought, "Okay." He did that a few times during that day, after

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a long pause. The next day he wasn't there, his assistant was there, and we did the first take and immediately he said: "Fantastic" [in German] and I said, "That's what you're supposed to say."

Kirchner: [Laughs]

Konitz: There were some nice tunes to come out of that.

Kirchner: You recorded for Atlantic [Records] for three years basically. Fifty-five, fifty-six, fifty-seven, and then you went with Verve [Records]?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: What went down there? You're relationship with Atlantic just went the way of other things and Verve made you an offer?

Konitz: Wrong guy to ask. I don't remember. I just assumed that they didn't renew the contract.

Kirchner: I've found it curious that you recorded with Verve because you don't seem like a "Norman Granz" kind of guy.

Konitz: I was one of the people that he didn't come to the sessions which means . . . that he wasn't a fan of mine or whatever. But he did come to one session that Ralph Burns did.

Kirchner: That's in fifty-one, right? That *Free Forms* album that Ralph Burns did that you played on?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: It's kind of a "mood" music record.

Konitz: Yeah . . . that's before Atlantic?

Kirchner: It's before. That's fifty-one.

Konitz: [Laughs] Jesus.

Kirchner: That got re-issued in the late nineties. When Verve put out that record you did with Jimmy Giuffre and the sax section and to fill out a two-record set they put that Ralph Burns thing on and they put a couple of Giuffre's orchestral things that he did in Germany on it as well.

Konitz: *An Image?*

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Kirchner: Yeah, *An Image*. Which actually, we segue neatly, I wanted to ask you the first record you did for Verve in fifty-eight is *An Image* with Russo which a lot of people think is one of your great records too. How do you feel about that one?

Konitz: I liked it, that one.

Kirchner: Bill wrote all of that music especially for you. Did you feel comfortable with the string quartet and the rhythm section?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: So you felt more relaxed than some of the earlier records, with the *Confucius* record and the *Konitz and Marsh Atlantic* record?

Konitz: This is difficult in retrospect. I might have some exaggerated feelings of not being comfortable and everything but I remember that was a very stimulating experience with Tristano and that rhythm section playing so respectably. That's some of Lennie's most relaxed playing I think.

Kirchner: On which record?

Konitz: The "Confucius" record. I felt the effects of that, too; I just have whatever complexes I bring to the mix sometimes. I'm recalling those instead of the positive part.

Kirchner: But *An Image* is different . . .

Konitz: That was I think the first strings experience I had like that and I had deep respect for Russo's classical-type writing. I didn't love most of his jazz writing that much except those nice little arrangements he did for Kenton featuring a small ensemble.

Kirchner: But you're a natural for a string setting. You sound [like it's] a marriage made in heaven.

Konitz: Well thank you. I always appreciated that situation and wondered why Norman Granz never got that for Lester Young or a real situation . . . for Charlie Parker except that corny string writing that he played so beautifully over.

Kirchner: Yeah. Although the second "Bird with Strings" session he got Joe Lipman to do the writing who was much more of a jazz guy than Jimmy Carol who did the first one with "Just Friends". Apparently neither Bird nor Norman liked Jimmy Carol's writing.

Konitz: He sure liked the way he played on that.

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Kirchner: Yeah. He sounded wonderful on that but apparently they didn't like the writing very much so they hired Joe Lipman for the other dates. He was much more of a jazz guy.

Konitz: Why didn't they get a jazz guy? Johnny Mandel or all the guys that were around that could write jazz music?

Kirchner: I guess they just didn't know.

Konitz: Didn't they ask Bird or something?

Kirchner: I actually interviewed Joe Lipman about that Charlie Parker big band record he did in fifty-two and he did some of the "Bird with Strings" dates, and I asked Joe about that when I interviewed him fifteen years ago and he said Bird was just kind of strangely non-contributory. He just didn't make any requests. He just showed up for the date and did the date but didn't ask for any players. Didn't really contribute anything to the mix. He was just kind of passive about everything except for showing up and playing his ass off. When Russo was putting this together how much input did you have into the music? Did he ask you about certain things?

Konitz: No. I was pretty much passive about that. I just showed up and tried to make it work.

Kirchner: But he knew your playing so well that it probably wasn't necessary I guess in that case.

Konitz: Probably not and you know I don't know for sure that he wrote that specifically for that situation. Usually the writers have a little reserve of things that they can adjust.

Kirchner: There's one thing, actually I play it for my students quite a bit, the thing called "Music for Alto Saxophone and Strings" and the second part of that is like a medium tempo. I play it for people who say that classical string players can't swing because it's like you're playing in unison with them with a really even eighth-note feel and it really sounds "swinging" in a way that classical string players are not supposed to be able to do.

Konitz: I think a couple of them were known for being looser players. I don't remember their names.

Kirchner: Gene Orloff was on it, he was definitely the one who was more comfortable doing that, and a cello player named Alan Schulman.

Konitz: Yeah, right.

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Kirchner: They say the drummer and bass player on that are unknown. Do you remember?

Konitz: Milt Hinton.

Kirchner: Milt was?

Konitz: Yeah, and . . . oh lord what the hell is his name? I can remember during an intermission when I went out to get stoned he looked a little bit like me with glasses and we were teased. What the hell is his name?

Kirchner: Black or white?

Konitz: White.

Kirchner: Not Don Lamond?

Konitz: No.

Kirchner: Or Sol Gubin?

Konitz: Who? Sol Gubin?

Kirchner: A studio drummer of the time.

Konitz: I thought his name was Sol but I'm not recognizing [Gubin] but anyway he was standing at the microphone with my saxophone and I came in a little bit stoned and got kind of a shock. He reminded me of me.

Kirchner: Interesting.

Konitz: Sol Gubin. That must be the guy.

Kirchner: Okay. A mystery solved. They've been unknown all these years.

Konitz: The pianist?

Kirchner: Lou Stein.

Konitz: Lou Stein, right. Sol Gubin, that was . . .

Kirchner: Billy Bauer is on it.

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: That's definitely one of my favorites of your records. Now we move on . . .

Konitz: You didn't get to hear any of that Holman thing?

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Kirchner: Oh, yes. I listened to it last night, it's terrific.

Konitz: Isn't that nice?

Kirchner: I'm a Holman fan and that instantly became up there among my favorite Holman pieces.

Konitz: And they won't release it. I cannot understand that. He was certainly a favorite of that orchestra. They release Elvis Costello records and whatever. Well that's a different thing. Vince Mendoza is the man in charge now. He's a fine writer also.

Kirchner: Yes. It's wonderful playing, it's wonderful writing, you sound great on it, I mean, there's nothing not to like. It's really inventive writing.

Konitz: That's the best in and out of [the] jazz and classical connection that I've heard. It's absolutely seamless I think.

Kirchner: Yeah, totally. They're in trouble now anyway you know. The Metropole, the Dutch politicians, are looking to pull the plug on them.

Konitz: I talked to a lead trumpet player, a lovely guy, and he said it wouldn't be until [two thousand] fourteen or fifteen and he doubts that they'll cut it loose.

Kirchner: It's like the politicians there are like the politicians here. They have to make noise over something, to make threats until people get in their face and make them back off.

Konitz: Today's paper says that Bloomberg is contributing some thirty-two million dollars to the arts.

Kirchner: Okay. Toward anything specific?

Konitz: I didn't have my reading glasses on so I couldn't see. I was looking to see if [the] National Endowment was in there but [it's] probably the Grammys. Pop music.

Kirchner: Yeah, the Grammys need Bloomberg's money. The Republicans are trying to pull the plug on the NEA right now.

Konitz: Oh yeah?

Kirchner: Yeah, that's the latest Republican "throwing a piece of raw meat to their base" bid. They're trying to either eliminate the NEA [or] eliminate PBS. It's a Chinese curse. We live in interesting times. Let's talk about the "Half Note" records with you, Warne, Bill Evans, Jimmy Garrison, and Paul Motian. February of fifty-nine.

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Do you want to tell the tale about that? When Lennie released that on Revelation Records in the seventies with your solos cut out? What was that about?

Konitz: It was about getting to hear Warne and study Warne for the students of Warne's playing, obviously. When I heard it certainly I was offended that I was linking before or after, but I appreciated that. I wanted to study his solos also. That's a great way to just have a series of solos end to end.

Kirchner: So what he did was not originally intended to be put out as a record I take it?

Konitz: I don't know that.

Kirchner: Because Revelation Records released it that way in the seventies. The way the music was actually recorded didn't come out on CD until the nineties with that two CD set called *Lee Konitz at the Half Note*.

Konitz: It was recorded in fifty-nine?

Kirchner: Yeah.

Konitz: And released in the nineties?

Kirchner: Yeah. I have the two CD set. It was in the can all those years.

Konitz: Holy shit.

Kirchner: You've heard those things right?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: How did you feel about that situation? Were you comfortable with that?

Konitz: I loved that. I was a little bit disturbed that Bill was not terribly comfortable and not comping for me especially a lot and I concluded after close listening that I was sharp to the piano and that's possibly the reason. But I don't think he comped for Warne a lot either.

Kirchner: He did, yeah.

Konitz: He did comp for Warne?

Kirchner: Yeah, consistently. But almost nothing for you which is really curious.

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: And you sound fine. You don't sound "sharp" or anymore so than you . . .

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Konitz: A couple times when he did come in I felt the upper register a little bit conflicting.

Kirchner: But everybody plays great on it.

Konitz: Twenty-one years between the recording and the release. Thirty-one.

Kirchner: Yeah. It came out in the mid-nineties.

Konitz: Wow.

Kirchner: Yeah like ninety-four, ninety-five. I remember when it first came out. But as I understand it that was normally Tristano's gig?

Konitz: Apparently he took off Tuesday nights to finish his teaching thing. I don't know how many weeks we were there to make a special situation like that where we had to have a special night off to see his students.

Kirchner: He took his teaching seriously.

Konitz: Well obviously. But I think Bill was a little uncomfortable in that role but he does some great playing on that record.

Kirchner: He does indeed.

Konitz: So that's the final litmus test.

Kirchner: You and Warne sound as good together as you always did.

Konitz: Sometimes, yeah. Paul and Jimmy Garrison sounded great and we never played with Jimmy before and I don't remember any discussion about tunes with original lines like that and he plays through them like he'd been playing them a while, you know? As did Gene Ramey. I don't know that he ever . . . maybe when they were sitting in the restaurant he was talking about some changes or something, Lennie with Gene, but otherwise he's playing through it like a total professional.

Kirchner: Yeah. Most of those tunes even the Tristano lines were on changes that good professional players of that era were expected to know.

Konitz: Yeah, but for the first time on a record I don't remember that we played before the actual recording session. To do one of those can be quite confusing to play familiar changes with an unfamiliar melody like that. At least sometimes if you play "How High the Moon" first and then do the line you can clue them in a little better but that was right on it.

Kirchner: But playing "Lennie Bird" on top of that is another matter.

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Konitz: Right, but they did great.

Kirchner: Jimmy Garrison isn't the type of bass player that I think of as a "tune player" in that respect. That's a facet of his ability that a lot of people don't know about. They think of him playing either with Coltrane or playing with Elvin or of playing with Ornette. But not somebody playing on standard changes so much.

Konitz: Well, he could do it.

Kirchner: The next record is a few months later in May of fifty-nine. *Lee Konitz Meets Jimmy Giuffre and the Saxophone Section*.

Konitz: Yeah that was a nice one.

Kirchner: How did that come about?

Konitz: I think Norman Granz had some suggestion about that. That's all I really know about that. Jimmy suggested it and created it basically.

Kirchner: Did you decide who was going to be in the section? Because it's Hal McKusick, Warne, Ted Brown, and Jimmy Giuffre. Were those your choices?

Konitz: I would think Warne and Ted would've been. I didn't know Hal that well but its possible. I would say Hal was probably suggested by Jimmy. I had nothing to say about the rhythm section I remember.

Kirchner: The rhythm section, by the way, is Bill Evans, Buddy Clark, and the now legendary Ronnie Free.

Konitz: Ronnie Free, yeah.

Kirchner: That's one of the few records he's on.

Konitz: Yeah. Someone just gave me regards from him.

Kirchner: Oh, that's right. He lives I guess in West Virginia. The last I heard he was living in that resort down there, the Homestead or something. By the way I want to talk to you about him a little bit because . . . he was king of the Sixth Avenue loft in those days. He was living there and he was playing a lot of the sessions that were happening in that loft.

Konitz: Is this Hall Overton's loft?

Kirchner: Yes. Eight twenty-one, Sixth Avenue at twenty-eighth street. There were a lot of players who were in and out of there in those years. Were you there on occasion?

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Konitz: On occasion. Not that frequently I think. I think Zoot was kind of a standard player there. Jim Hall, Jim Rainey, and those kind of guys.

Kirchner: Bill Crow, Brookmeyer, and Warne I guess on occasion. There was also a radio series a year or so ago on WNYC, a friend of mine, Sara Fishko produced, and they did a ten show series on the jazz loft and they did a whole episode on Ronnie Free.

Konitz: Really?

Kirchner: He was so much apart of that. He lived there and he was the drummer everybody loved to play with. Did you know him very well?

Konitz: No. I don't remember him being part of the scene.

Kirchner: Because later on that year there's a picture in your book with Andy Hamilton. There's a picture of you, Tristano, Warne, and Ronnie Free . . .

Konitz: In Canada?

Kirchner: Yeah, from that Birdland tour. I guess he got on that gig somehow.

Konitz: Birdland tour?

Kirchner: Yeah.

Konitz: I don't know. Is that what it's from? Because we did something in . . .

Kirchner: From Indiana I think. Let me just get the book if you don't mind. I'll find the photo.

Konitz: While you're looking at that I'll try to find that Ted Gioia.

Kirchner: I looked at that last night, we can talk about that if you want.

Konitz: Am I right in saying that?

Kirchner: I think it's one of those things where if we stop we're both right but I'll talk to you in a minute about that. Let me find this photo.

Konitz: I know which photo it is but we did a concert independently in Canada for a guy named Dick Watum and I thought that's what that was. I also thought that was Al Levitt. Are you sure that isn't AL Levitt in that photo?

Kirchner: I can't find it but I remember distinctly it was Ronnie Free. It's in Indianapolis.

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[Kirchner passes the photo album to Ken Kimery]

Kirchner: Let me address what you talked about last night, the Ted Gioia thing. He came to a conclusion that I don't agree with that the Tristano-style music was "frigid" or something.

Konitz: Frigid, yes.

Kirchner: However he also uses terms such as "extraordinary body of work" and "visionary artists." That ain't bad. I understand what you're saying . . .

Konitz: He's just saying that all of that might be true but "I don't dig it." That's what it sounds like to me.

Kirchner: Maybe. I don't want to pretend to read Ted's mind and I don't agree that music is "frigid" but I think he does respect the value of it. I think what he's saying in large part is that the biggest influence was on other musicians rather than on the listening public. Do you agree with that or disagree with it?

Konitz: Of course. That's a fact.

Kirchner: As far as being more of an influence on musicians?

Konitz: At some point, I think when we had the professional picture made in uniforms, there was a thought that this might be a working band. So that's obviously a truth. It wasn't a working band.

Kirchner: I never got the impression that Lennie really wanted to have a working band. Is that a fair statement?

Konitz: At that point I thought he did. Then I realized that [it] was too difficult for him to move around even with his boys. Later on we did that European tour where Lennie played either with the Connie Kay duo, or solo, and I was playing with Bill Evans.

Kirchner: When is that? Sixty-five?

Konitz: I don't know the years too good.

Kirchner: When you and Bill played together that's sixty-five.

Konitz: Yeah. Bill, Niels Henning, and Alan Dawson. Bill was in bad shape and we ended up playing as two separate trios and just under the contract we played that last tune as a quartet. But that turned out great for me because I stretched out and enjoyed playing with those two guys a lot.

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Kirchner: What was Bill's problem? Was it drugs at the time?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: So how was that affecting his playing?

Konitz: It was affecting his attitude. Sitting around in the dressing room [I'd say] "What do you want to play?" [he'd say] "I don't know what do you want to play?" He'd suggest a tune and I'd say okay and then when it came to the tune I couldn't remember how it went and I'd say "you start." That Herb Ellis tune "Detour Ahead". Incidentally, I played in a club with Herb Ellis in Paris and we finished "Body and Soul" or whatever and I said "Do you know 'Detour Ahead'?"

Kirchner: [Laughs]

Konitz: [Herb said] "Yeah I wrote that you mother fucker".

Kirchner: "Just checking."

Konitz: I didn't say that word, he did.

Kirchner: Anyway, just to finish off the record with Giuffre and the sax section, you said you don't remember how the rhythm section got hired for that?

Konitz: Yeah. I didn't suggest [it]. I didn't know the bass player I don't think.

Kirchner: Buddy Clark was from LA

Konitz: Buddy Clark, yeah.

Kirchner: He was from LA mostly.

Konitz: I don't know what the connection [was]. I guess Giuffre knew him from someplace.

Kirchner: My favorite cut from that record is that long chart on *Cork and Bib*, "The Blues". It's an amazing chart and an amazing performance. Just the concept of that sax section is just so different from standard saxophone section writing and I think it just jibed with the way you played and the way Warne played there's just something very special about it for me.

Konitz: Jimmy was certainly sympathetic with that music.

Kirchner: Now the next record. The one called *You and Lee* with a brass section and Bill Evans, Sonny Dallas, and Roy Haynes that Giuffre also did in October of that year.

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Konitz: Boy, I haven't heard that one in a long time. I don't know if I own that record.

Kirchner: That one, I confess, I haven't heard. It looks promising certainly, with the players and the writing.

Konitz: It was nice. Apparently Sonny Dallas was very uncomfortable with Giuffre. I heard him really criticizing the way Giuffre treated him. Bill Evans was reading the paper between tunes.

Kirchner: [Laughs] Okay.

Konitz: Like Ron Carter was doing at a date that he did with us.

Kirchner: The *Spirits* album?

Konitz: With Sal Mosca and Mousie Alexander.

Kirchner: I want to talk to you about that in a little bit. The next major record is *Motion* in sixty-one. You did two days of recording with Sonny Dallas and Nick Stabulas and then you decided for whatever reason to shelve all of that and hire Elvin and do another date with Elvin which became the record.

Konitz: Wait a minute. I don't remember that happening. The date was with Elvin. Nick Stabulas was after the fact.

Kirchner: Not according to the dates. The dates they give, you and Sonny did two days with Nick: August seventeenth and August twenty-first.

Konitz: Which year?

Kirchner: Sixty-one, and then the date with Elvin was a week later, August twenty-ninth and all the stuff that went on the record was the stuff with Elvin and the stuff with Nick stayed in the can until the late nineties when they put out a multi-CD set with everything.

Konitz: I don't remember it that way.

Kirchner: What do you remember?

Konitz: I remember that there was a date with Elvin and Sonny. I had asked Max [Roach] to do it and he's said he couldn't do it and he suggested Elvin. That's the way it started. Then I wanted to do another day with Elvin and he was traveling so I asked Nick.

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Kirchner: That's very curious because there's much more stuff with Nick. There's about, oh god, fifteen to twenty titles with Nick from two days of recording.

Konitz: I think those dates are wrong.

Kirchner: Okay. That's certainly possible. Discographies are far from engraved in stone.

Konitz: With my faulty memory you kind of verified that "Birth of the Cool" thing. I was told so many times that there was a gig here and a gig there in addition which I couldn't remember. So that was verified and this must be verifiable.

Kirchner: It's very curious to me because the stuff with Nick to my ears sounds fine.

Konitz: I like that, sure.

Kirchner: The stuff with Elvin is great too, it's just two very different kinds of drummers. It's understandable why the stuff with Elvin perhaps came out first, the original *Motion* album, because Elvin was hot at the time and he played great for you and you sounded great on the record.

Konitz: You noticed he used a middle name on that?

Kirchner: Elvin "Ray" Jones, yes. Why was that?

Konitz: I think it had to do with color maybe.

Kirchner: That was his choice then?

Konitz: I don't know whose choice it was but why all of the sudden a "Ray" Jones somehow not wanting to identify with that situation.

Kirchner: What do you remember about those dates? About the way you felt playing? How did you feel about playing with Elvin?

Konitz: Great. I was looking forward to doing some more as I'm suggesting. The man in charge then . . .

Kirchner: Creed Taylor?

Konitz: Creed Taylor, let me go, canceled my contract after that record, I believe.

Kirchner: He was eliminating a lot of people's contracts at the time.

Konitz: I was one of them. I don't know when the Nick Stabulas one was but I think it was connected soon enough not like years later when we found out Elvin wasn't available.

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Kirchner: Actually, in the liner notes to the three CD release that came out in the late nineties of *Motion*, Sonny Dallas was quoting on saying that Nick's playing wasn't up to his usual standard which was why Elvin was called. That's what Sonny said for what it's worth.

Konitz: There's no way to verify that except through some kind of examining of the books.

Kirchner: Yeah, by looking at the original session logs. Those are the dates they give: August seventeenth and twenty-first with Nick and August twenty-ninth with Elvin. Go figure. So after that you're out of a recording contract and basically . . .

Konitz: How long was I with Verve?

Kirchner: Fifty-eight through sixty-one.

Konitz: Three years again.

Kirchner: Yeah. The *Image* record was your first one and the *Motion* record was your last one for Verve.

Konitz: Just incidentally, Norman was very kind. I'd asked for a weekly stipend as an advance on the royalties and that helped a lot, a hundred dollars a week or whatever he gave me. I always appreciated that.

Kirchner: He treated you well even if he wasn't a big fan of your music.

Konitz: Right. That Ralph Burns date I think I was with Atlantic at that time. [He] said that . . . I'm not supposed to play any solos. Norman said "That's okay". He wanted me to play some solos on that record and I did. Same thing I did with Mingus. He wrote out a solo for me.

Kirchner: That thing called *ESP*?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: That you did for Debut [Records] and then re-did with the big band twenty years later.

Konitz: Right.

Kirchner: I remember that.

Konitz: The story briefly is that . . . he wrote a solo and wanted me to get my "behind feeling" so he started a sixteenth note phrase a sixteenth note before the beat, something like that, and it made it very difficult to read so I kind of flumped through

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it. He just had to write it as it was . . . evenly, and I would've played it behind the beat anyway. He didn't have to go to all of that trouble. Then many years later with the big band with about eight saxophones he brought out that arrangement and everybody looked and Mingus said "follow Konitz". I had no clue then either.

Kirchner: I was at that concert and actually almost twenty-five years later Bob Belden asked Sy Johnson and me to help him produce the CD reissue of that concert with all of the unreleased stuff including the train wrecks. There were some things from that concert that night that as you recall were several train wrecks.

Konitz: I'm not remembering that.

Kirchner: Sy talked about it in the liner notes he wrote quite extensively. Teo was conducting and some things fell apart and there are some pretty audible train wrecks on there.

Konitz: I remember having dinner with Gerry Mulligan before the concert and having a wine or two and when I got up to play my first solo I started to get dizzy I remember.

Kirchner: [Laughs]

Konitz: But I got through it all right.

[End of third hour]

Kirchner: We are back. Now after your contract with Verve was not renewed, or dropped or whatever, the next time you were in the studio for any practical purposes, other than a couple of dates here and there like "Music Minus One" type things. But the next major record you made was the *Duets* record six years later.

Konitz: The Japanese record?

Kirchner: No, the duets record . . .

Konitz: Milestone [label]?

Kirchner: Milestone. That's sixty-seven so you have a long drought recording-wise.

Konitz: I'm sure I snuck in a couple Italian records or something. I'm not sure but it seemed like it.

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Kirchner: There's stuff from the tour that you did with Bill Evans, Niels Henning, and Alan Dawson from sixty-five that came out after the fact much later. As I understand it you moved to California for a couple years right?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Let's talk about that. What prompted that? When did you do it?

Konitz: I was living in Lennie's house with my then wife and she came from Alameda, California. Her parents were there and we just decided that it would be a good idea to get out of the situation and get a perspective on what was happening so we lived in Carmel Valley for a year and just enjoyed that environment. I didn't play very much. At some point Lennie contacted me to play at the Half Note and I wasn't really ready for that but I finally . . . I think I missed one flight because I didn't want to go just in fear that I wasn't up to it. Then I went and that was the last time we played together. Sixty-four that was.

Kirchner: Yeah. I want to talk about that in a minute because that was the . . . but just a little bit more about California. How were you making a living? Were you doing day gigs?

Konitz: Some little painting [of] a bathroom, doing some garden work, things like that. I had an occasional teaching afternoon in San Jose sometimes. I would drive there and play some little gigs but nothing regular. Nothing terribly significant.

Kirchner: There was a thing in Ira Gitler's book "Jazz Masters of the Forties" where he talks about [how] you told him there was a point where Miles was appearing with his band at the Blackhawk or something with Frank Strozier and Miles asked you to sit in. What happened there?

Konitz: I just didn't feel like doing that.

Kirchner: So basically after a couple years out there Lennie calls you and you finally get back and he puts together the quintet with Warne, Sonny Dallas, and Nick Stabulas right? That's the band that's on the "Look up and Live" broadcast.

Konitz: That's sixty-four, that broadcast?

Kirchner: Yeah.

Konitz: Okay.

Kirchner: Which is now on you tube. You can see a lot of it on you tube. I tell my students to go look at that because that's the one chance you get to see the old Half Note. The legendary old Half Note.

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Konitz: And hear Lennie playing great.

Kirchner: Yeah, and everybody playing great.

Konitz: I don't think I was visible in that.

Kirchner: You were.

Konitz: I was off to the side kind of in the dark. You could see kind of a silhouette.

Kirchner: You could see a [profile], yeah, kind of a silhouette. You're not totally invisible. You're not in full profile to be sure.

Konitz: That was kind of a nice presentation. The religious connection made some sense the way the man talked about it.

Kirchner: You did some other gigs at the time with that band correct? A handful anyway.

Konitz: In sixty-four?

Kirchner: Yeah.

Konitz: I thought that was the last one.

Kirchner: Okay. There were no others other than the Half Note?

Konitz: I'm not sure.

Kirchner: But at that point the band basically fell apart or Lennie didn't want to continue or what happened?

Konitz: I don't really know why it broke up.

Kirchner: But it did?

Konitz: Yeah. I was thinking I had moved to Europe but I really hadn't permanently then or semi-permanently.

Kirchner: When did you move to Europe?

Konitz: I was married about ninety-seven or ninety-six and shortly after that.

Kirchner: Didn't you live in London for a short time in the early seventies was it?

Konitz: I did, yeah . . . it was the early seventies. I had started Scientology and . . . I think I worked at Ronnie Scott's club once and walking through one street I noticed there was a Scientology place and that the rates were a lot cheaper . . . I got a nice

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apartment there through some guy who wanted me to make a private record for him and he paid for the apartment. Things like that. That was a few months only.

Kirchner: By the way when did you meet Tavia? His second wife for those of you watching this who don't know who Tavia was.

Konitz: It was in the beginning of the sixties I believe.

Kirchner: When I met you the two of you were living at one hundred and seventh and Central Park West.

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: I remember taking the train over there for lessons for a couple years. It was the two of you and Hugo and Luigi, the cats?

Konitz: Yeah, there were two cats.

Kirchner: Who were on the cover of the *Spirits* album with your upright piano that you had then in your apartment.

Konitz: Then we added this nice dog and the cats used to sit and swipe him when he walked by.

Kirchner: I remember the dog, yeah.

Konitz: It was kind of nice.

Kirchner: That neighborhood. Wasn't Paul Motian and Barry Altschul were in that neighborhood right?

Konitz: Paul Motian lived upstairs as he still does.

Kirchner: Barry Altschul was a couple blocks away I think.

Konitz: I don't remember that. I think Elvin Jones was a block or two away and Max. Maybe they lived in the same building or something.

Kirchner: That was quite a neighborhood.

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Let's talk about the *Duets* album from sixty-seven. This is your first major record after *Motion*. This is part of the beginnings of Milestone Records that Dick Katz and Orrin Keepnews started . . . That was an important record for them. That got a lot of attention and for you as well.

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Konitz: That was a nice project.

Kirchner: Whose idea was that?

Konitz: I think it was mine and [I] was probably encouraged by Dick Katz. We had scheduled it on the hour and on the half hour. Each situation didn't last more than half an hour and I'd say "next" and Elvin would come up or whatever . . . Eddie Gomez had some, ladies and gentlemen, Eddie Gomez had some pot and I smoked some pot on that record and it was nice. It was so nice that I played a duet with Elvin Jones on tenor. I took the tenor off the shelf in the closet . . .

Kirchner: So that's what it took?

Konitz: [Laughing] Yeah. That stuff works you know what I'm saying?

Kirchner: It's a good sounding duet, too.

Konitz: I was very pleased with it. I said "Jesus, don't sound like Coltrane but [it] sounds interesting" I thought. There were all those nice situations like I had decided that I just wanted to get to play duets with people and I called different people, unlikely people, like Ray Nance and he was quite nice about it and when I suggested playing . . . Marshall Brown said "You know, if you're playing with Ray Nance, play a Duke Ellington song or something like that." I said "Do you want to try something free?" and wham, he was into it. And at the record date, I went "da da" and he went to the next movement.

Kirchner: That's the most unexpected thing on the whole record, that duet with Ray. He's the last person you would've expected to do a free thing.

Konitz: He was right in there. I did a little tenor and guitar thing with Jim Hall that was kind of nice.

Kirchner: That piece he wrote called "ERB"?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: For Donald Erb the composer. How did you and Joe Henderson decide on "You Don't Know What Love Is"?

Konitz: I think I sat in with his big band at the Half Note one night and we did something and decided to play that tune. Maybe that's how.

Kirchner: And Richie Kamuca with "Tickle Toe".

Konitz: Oh Yeah.

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Kirchner: That's a natural.

Konitz: That was nice.

Kirchner: That record kind of got you a lot of attention. You got five stars in Downbeat.

Konitz: Really?

Kirchner: Dan Morgenstern said "If you only buy one record this year make this the one."

Konitz: Wow. I didn't see that.

Kirchner: He gave you a rave review and I think that's another one of your records that's still one of your "primo" records that still gets talked about a lot.

Konitz: It's very nice, yeah. Do you know the Japanese duet record?

Kirchner: No. When was that done?

Konitz: That's interesting, too. I play a free piece with Clark Terry and a free trio with Gerry Mulligan and Peggy Stern; no ego there. Gerry is just "Okay, let's do that", no questions asked.

Kirchner: This is from the nineties?

Konitz: Oh God, there you go with the dates again.

Kirchner: With Peggy it would be from the nineties because that's when the two of you were playing together.

Konitz: Yeah. Okay.

Kirchner: I could find it here probably but . . . it's definitely the nineties. That's when you were doing all of that stuff with her. So you're getting kind of back on the New York scene and people are starting to pay attention to you again after several years of . . . being out of the spotlight including . . . let me ask you about . . . in nineteen sixty five there's that Charlie Parker memorial concert where you played that solo . . . that was the first time you did anything solo on what became a record anyway. How do you remember that experience?

Konitz: Just a last-minute decision. There were you know, Roy Haynes and the fellow rhythm section. Whoever they were I don't remember but a good rhythm section was available and I imagined going out and trying to adjust to them for the five minutes that I was out there. I said "To heck with it". I had a "pokie wokie" and I

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just walked out there and stated something about “Jesus said to pray and Bird said to play”, something like that, and then aimed it at the balcony and it felt very fun, as they say now.

Kirchner: What balcony? What auditorium?

Konitz: Carnegie Hall.

Kirchner: It was at Carnegie. Okay.

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Well, you didn’t have to worry about acoustics.

Konitz: Right. It was a great feeling. I could hear people talking backstage while I did that. That’s you’re musician audience who couldn’t care less about the music.

Kirchner: I know that feeling. I’ve been in those kinds of situations. A little later [in] sixty-eight you did the first of a number of records with Martial Solal with whom you’ve had quite a relationship. Would you like to talk about him a little bit?

Konitz: He’s kind of like my French brother . . . Cohn (?) is his middle name. He’s been avoiding that, so there’s some Jewish connection there. He’s born I think one month before me or something like that and over the years it’s been a very “brother” kind of feeling with him. To play with him is such a unique experience because on the premise that opposites attract, which I don’t agree with quite a bit of the time, the more he would play the less I would play and that sometimes made a nice contrast. But it was always exciting to play with him. I always thought of him as one of my orchestra colleagues. Sometimes it really worked out nicely. Sometimes I was very intimidated by it but for the most part he was very “respectful” I guess is the word. He would really listen and try not to get in the way or whatever and so some nice things came out of that collaboration I think.

Kirchner: You’ve done more playing duo with piano players than anybody else I know. Not only with him of course but with literally too many piano players to mention, but lots of really great ones.

Konitz: I haven’t had the pleasure of playing with Herbie Hancock yet. I would like to do that once.

Kirchner: So would I.

Konitz: The only time I really played with Chick Corea was in the Scientology connection at different places.

Kirchner: Didn’t he write that one tune for you?

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Konitz: I was going to say. We did it at his studio as a duo and then he wrote strings and over dubbed string parts.

Kirchner: “Duende” right?

Konitz: “Duende” yeah. One time I was invited up to someone’s apartment with Chick, Dave Holland, Barry Altschul, and Anthony Braxton. I think Anthony and I were auditioning to play with the group called “Circle” and Anthony won out.

Kirchner: Really?

Konitz: Yeah. Later on when he wrote that “Duende” I went to his place and we played together. He, whatever the process is called, copied my sound; duplicating my sound on his keyboard. I forget what that’s all called.

Kirchner: Sampling.

Konitz: Sampling. That’s what it’s called. We played a little bit and I think he had a mind to try me out for his group then that the saxophone player, [the] other saxophone player, finally did very well.

Kirchner: Steve Wilson?

Konitz: No . . . not Ernie.

Kirchner: Eric Marienthal.

Konitz: Eric Marienthal, yeah. He was the right guy obviously.

Kirchner: For the Electric Band?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: I can’t imagine you in that band for all the world. That was almost like a fusion band.

Konitz: He couldn’t either.

Kirchner: [Laughing] That would’ve been a mismatch of historic proportions I think.

Konitz: I was curious with Weather Report. I wondered if I could find some niche in that kind of situation but it never occurred.

Kirchner: When you’re playing duo with piano players and I’ve done a number of situations like that with myself and it’s one of my favorite playing situations. I’m

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curious to get your views on when that's really happening. What do you get from the piano player that enables it to work?

Konitz: I get certainly a harmonic reality that I can only arpeggiate. I get the sound of the chord and without even worrying anymore about being able to identify what that sound is as it occurs, I am fast enough usually to react to it and this situation, I don't think you've heard the record that is coming out with Brad, Charlie, and Paul Motian.

Kirchner: No.

Konitz: That's coming out whenever it comes out on ECM. We recorded it at Birdland last December. From the previous experience I had where we recorded from the Bakery in California with a trio with Charlie. That was the only time we really played together. Once or twice after that. At Birdland after maybe the first evening or after the first set or whatever I suggested to Brad that he "please feel free to orchestrate and do whatever you feel like doing" because he was kind of very respectfully playing around and it was very enjoyable to relate to what he was doing. I wanted him to do more like Dan Tepfer sometimes does some very imaginative things and Martial certainly does some very imaginative things and he took it personally and thought that I was trying to tell him how to play and I said "please, I don't know exactly how to express this but I just want you to feel free to do whatever you want to do when I'm playing. The next night he came in and said "okay I got it" and the music went up from there. Some beautiful things we do together I think. Strangely enough though I invited him in to join me so I'm not playing "solos" and he didn't invite me in and once I jumped in on one tune, "All the Things You Are", and he criticized it. They all criticized it and didn't use that track and I was very disappointed because I thought there was some beautiful playing together on that. I'll play that for you sometime.

Kirchner: Yeah I'd like to hear that. I had Brad as a composition student twenty years ago at the New School so I knew him when.

Konitz: Okay. He plays like you've never heard him play before on this record.

Kirchner: I'd love to hear that. My experience, see what you think, but my experience with duo with piano players is that it works best when you have a piano player whose kind of an orchestrator who comes up with an orchestral way of playing the piano.

Konitz: That's the way I hear it when it's really working.

Kirchner: Harold Danko was like that. I recorded with Harold, Mark Copeland, and Mike Abene and they all in their very different ways have that ability. I played with

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Alan Broadbent at the Jazz Bakery a couple months before you did those records with him and Alan of course is the same wonderful arranger in addition to being a great player.

Konitz: I had a little problem with him reminding me of Lennie with the bass lines and everything.

Kirchner: I think he kind of just . . . I get the impression that he just kind of fell into that because being with you suggested that way of playing for him.

Konitz: I'm sure.

Kirchner: He did it great but I can understand why it must've freaked you out a little bit. But those are two very nice records that you two did.

Konitz: I enjoyed those. The current piano player in this quartet that I have is German, from Cologne, Florian Weber, is very imaginative. Wow. We just did a tour of California and every concert was different. Playing "All the Things You Are" and those standards, the four of them, of us, were reinventing that music. It was great.

Kirchner: Who is the bass player and drummer?

Konitz: Jeff Denson is the bass player. He's from Washington originally. The drummer is Ziv Ravitz from Israel. They've been together for about ten years and invited me to make a previous record with them, which was compositional mostly. But some interesting things and then we did a live thing at Birdland, at Vanguard.

Kirchner: Let's go back to the late sixties, early seventies.

Konitz: I thought we'd be in the two thousands by now.

Kirchner: We're going be drifting around for a while.

Konitz: We're not going to get together again, right?

Kirchner: Correct.

Konitz: I had to make this appointment . . .

Kirchner: Do you have to be somewhere at four fifteen?

Konitz: Yeah. Lennox Hill MRI section . . .

Kirchner: When do you have to leave?

Konitz: . . . four I guess, or something like that.

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Kirchner: Alright, [saying to Ken Kimery] Should we go until four Ken? Okay. I think we should be able to do some serious damage in the next hour.

Konitz: [Laughing] I wish I could help you with it. It's like I wasn't there or something. I can't remember all these dates and details.

Kirchner: It's a lot of music. It's a hell of a lot of music. The album you did for Milestone with Marshall Brown, Dick Katz, Eddie Gomez, and Jack DeJohnette: *Peace Meal*.

Konitz: That was a nice one.

Kirchner: I just listened to that the other day after not having it in ages. Whose idea was it to do the three things from the "Mikrokosmos"?

Konitz: Marshall Brown. He actually talked to Peter Bartok to kind of get permission. He said "fine". He couldn't care less. I don't know how Bela would've felt about that.

Kirchner: "Village Joke" is my favorite of those three. Do you remember that? That's the one where each of you plays a solo "solo". Each of you plays alone after playing the theme. But that's my favorite of those.

Konitz: Is that the [sings a melody]?

Kirchner: No. That's, I'm blanking. I can't sing you back the melody.

Konitz: I just looked through my Bartok book and saw a couple of those pieces.

Kirchner: Then you did "Subconscious-Lee" kind of as an even eighth note. Almost like a Rock even eighth note thing.

Konitz: On that record with Marshall Brown?

Kirchner: Yes. With an even eighth note feel.

Konitz: [sings melody]

Kirchner: Yeah and it worked well. Next is a record I find fascinating. The *Spirits* album with Sal Mosca which is half duo with Sal and then half quartet with Ron Carter and Mousie Alexander which is all basically Tristano-style material either Tristano tunes or a couple of yours.

Konitz: The duo. I think we each had earphones with a metronome ticking.

Kirchner: Oh really?

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Konitz: Yeah, and that disturbed Dick Katz and Orrin Keepnews a little bit but they didn't speak up about it. Because [when] left to our own devices, smoking and playing a duo medium tempo ended up being a ballad, et cetera.

Kirchner: That's like playing with a click track in a way.

Konitz: Yeah. The music sounds a little . . . I haven't heard that for years.

Kirchner: I just played it again after not hearing it for years and I thought it's a great record.

Konitz: I'd be curious to hear that again because it felt very interesting.

Kirchner: There are four tunes with Ron Carter and Mousie that sound really good. Who's idea was it to get them on there? It's a curious choice for a bass player and drummer for a Tristano-type record.

Konitz: Probably Dick Katz and Orrin. We played at the Village Gate once with Ron and a drummer named Brown. [I] forget his first name.

Kirchner: Sonny Brown?

Konitz: Sonny Brown; and Sal Mosca, did I say? I think Ron was calling Sal Mosca "The Shadow" or something like that. It didn't work out at all. Brown came late to the gig and I fired him and he brought me to the union and I didn't even bother showing up so they fined me and things like that. It was very unpleasant.

Kirchner: You said Ron was reading a newspaper on the date or something, you said earlier?

Konitz: At the recording session yeah. Very business like.

Kirchner: [Laughing] Okay.

Konitz: It's weird.

Kirchner: Is that the only thing you ever did with Ron recording-wise?

Konitz: I think so.

Kirchner: Mousie I knew. I played in Mousie's big band that he had for a year or two about thirty years ago.

Konitz: Yeah. I don't remember him.

Kirchner: Then he had a stroke and moved to Florida and died a few years later. He was a nice man.

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Konitz: Yeah. Very nice and a nice drummer.

Kirchner: He liked his weed too.

Konitz: Yeah. I know that Zoot and Al had a routine where they were presented with two shots on a tray by one of the Cantarino and I think . . . Mousie did a roll. When they finished the drink they threw the glass I think to a roll or some kind of routine.

Kirchner: To whoever was bar-tending?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: They would drop the shot glass right?

Konitz: Something like that.

Kirchner: And they would always catch it and Mousie would hit it with a cymbal crash or something. Apparently they never, seldom, if ever missed. Whoever the bartender was was good at catching the shot glasses.

Konitz: Yeah, it was a whole vaudeville act. More seriously was when Zoot was playing and starting to fall backwards off the stand and Al Kohn would grab him and he'd never miss a beat.

Kirchner: The Half Note was a strange . . . it was a wonderful club but it was a strange set up.

Konitz: Very strange.

Kirchner: For those of you who weren't there do you want to tell them what the set up was like?

Konitz: [A] small club with a bandstand . . . a high bandstand with a bar in front of it and kind of a room in back of it for tables. As I remember when Coltrane played there they didn't come off the stand during the intermission. They just sat there. Probably handed up whatever they were handed. It was a very family kind of affair there with the parents cooking meatballs and things like that. Going downstairs to the basement to get high. With Lennie we usually finished a set and he grabbed one of our arms and we walked out to someone's car and the club was filled with his students and they'd say, "Okay what are we going to expect next?" Things like that. Very strange.

Kirchner: Yes. I remember after they closed that place at Spring and Hudson and they moved it uptown, which was a bomb. It only lasted a year or two. It turned into a place they called "The Only-Est Place". Do you remember that? Because I

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remember hearing you there which just a bass. It might've been with Harvey Schwartz and maybe Jeff Williams. I don't remember exactly.

Konitz: This was after the life of the Half Note up there?

Kirchner: Yeah. Somebody bought it and renamed it "The Only-Est Place". I remember I met Ron Odrich that night. He came and sat in with you on bass clarinet. But the place tanked shortly thereafter. I didn't last long which is too bad. If the Cantarinos had bought that building and kept it they probably still would be there. They made a big mistake by moving uptown because as you know . . .

Konitz: Oh, if they bought the old building, you mean?

Kirchner: Yeah. If they bought the old building, which now is gone, which now is a Korean deli.

Konitz: Yeah, oh God, it's weird. They were offered to buy?

Kirchner: I'm told they had an offer to buy that building and turned it down and somebody talked them into moving up to West Fifty-Fourth instead and they went up there and you know what happened with that place.

Konitz: How long did that last?

Kirchner: Only a couple years. The whole vibe of the old place was gone. It was really expensive as they were doing double bills.

Konitz: But for a while I thought they were doing okay.

Kirchner: So did I but it just tanked. When I first met you and started studying with you shortly thereafter you were doing a gig I think at the Metropolitan museum with of all people La Monte Young.

Konitz: Oh Yeah.

Kirchner: Do you remember that?

Konitz: I do yeah.

Kirchner: Talk about that. That was La Monte Young the minimalist. How did that happen?

Konitz: Years before La Monte took some lessons from me in California as a saxophone player. He was an okay saxophone player as I remember, and so we connected again when I was here and he told me that he had another project where I could come in and play one note for a number of hours. A few other people were

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going to play another note and we were going to relate in some way with a sine wave. Is that what that is?

Kirchner: I don't know.

Kimery: Sound wave?

Konitz: No. "Sine" I thought . . . just a constant . . . Jesus, boy. Anyway there was a constant pitch that we were relating to that went twenty-four hours a day in the museum apparently the "wave". We related to it in different ways. So that was pretty much that experience.

Kirchner: That was an interesting gig. That was my introduction to minimalism. Shortly thereafter Mingus called you to do his big band at Philharmonic Hall.

Konitz: Right.

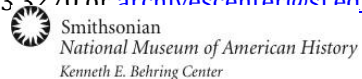
Kirchner: I was at that concert. Talk about that experience. Talk about Mingus. You already have a little bit.

Konitz: Long before that he had asked me to join his small band at the Vanguard. First of all you know he opened the original Half Note and went to the Vanguard and recommended me for the Half Note and I think I was there for thirteen consecutive weeks or something like that. Then he wanted to come back and I didn't want to leave. Somehow I finally left and he came back and then they started alternating more frequently and things. But he was very supportive, he was very interested in Lennie and I think informally studying with him some way. He came with me for a week to Detroit with Ronnie Ball and Al Levitt. The first night Al Levitt said something about the time and Mingus slapped his face and I said, "Charlie can we just play and not go through all this bullshit," and so he was cool from then on. About the last night he couldn't stand it anymore because all his cronies were there: Milt Jackson, Paul Chambers, and all the guys from Detroit. I don't think I've been to Detroit since then incidentally. Then he started out heckling Ronnie Ball about his playing and he started to heckle me about the way I played "I Got Rhythm" or something like that. Meanwhile playing his weird solos all the time. The "impossible" Mingus came to full flower for a while and then he called me a traitor for leaving the Tristano fold.

Kirchner: He piled on, too?

Konitz: Yeah. I said, you know "just trying to find out what's happening out there in the world" or whatever. Trying to justify why I was doing what I was doing to myself anyway. The time that I tried to play with his small band we tried a couple tunes and he ran to the telephone to call the tenor player, the white tenor player, Bobby Jaspar

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I think, or someone, to come in who knew the music. It was the trumpet player that played with him and me only.

Kirchner: This is in the fifties?

Konitz: Don't ask me dates. No. It was later than the fifties.

Kirchner: Are you talking about the early seventies with Bobby Jones the tenor player?

Konitz: Bobby Jones. Right.

Kirchner: It would've been Lonnie Hillyer . . . that's like nineteen-seventy, seventy-one.

Konitz: Okay. That [was] the time.

Kirchner: Because both Bobby and Lonnie played on the big band at Philharmonic Hall with you. They were in the band too. He called you for that gig and told you what it was about? How did that happen?

Konitz: The small band?

Kirchner: No. The big band at Philharmonic Hall with Mulligan, Gene Ammons, and all the eight saxs.

Konitz: I was just invited. Probably Sy Johnson called me. He was kind of in charge of all that. I was more than happy to try it.

Kirchner: How were the rehearsals?

Konitz: The one situation with "ESP," when it was falling apart, Gene Ammons and whoever else was in the sax section wasn't making it obviously and Mingus said, "Follow Konitz," and I was unable to be much of a leader in that. My wife, incidentally, sat in the booth with Bill Cosby and she didn't like him too much. She said he was a little bit of a drag.

Kirchner: He was the MC for the concert.

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: He was kind of not shy shall we say.

Konitz: No. Hardly.

Kirchner: What do you remember of the concert?

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Konitz: I remember it being very exciting in some way. Surprising and not identifying too much with Gene Ammons and Mingus doing the bluesy stuff, and things like that, feeling as usual kind of out of place in those situations.

Kirchner: Although you and Mulligan got to play a duet at some point I remember.

Konitz: I remember that was okay and Mingus was in a wheel chair then I believe.

Kirchner: No. He was playing.

Konitz: It was a recording session that I did with him after that.

Kirchner: After he got Lou Gehrig's disease.

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: That's a few years later.

Konitz: Yeah. Okay. I remember him sitting in the wheel chair with a cigar, offering me a cigar, and having a very kind of brotherly, friendly chat. At one point he said, "I don't care if you play Charlie Parker backwards, I dig it."

Kirchner: [Laughs]

Konitz: [Laughing] Something like that.

Kirchner: Let's move on into the seventies. Here are a couple of interesting records: Lee Konitz with Chet Baker and Keith Jarrett from WNYC TV "Jazz Adventures" broadcast.

Konitz: What year was that?

Kirchner: Seventy-four.

Konitz: Keith actually asked to be apart of that. It was just a quartet with Charlie Haden and . . .

Kirchner: Beaver Harris.

Konitz: Beaver Harris.

Kirchner: And Chet, yeah.

Konitz: It was the first time I heard Keith playing standards and I was very impressed.

Kirchner: Now of course he does it a lot.

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Konitz: Yeah. Made a career out of it.

Kirchner: Yeah. Then there's a record for Indian Navigation. A quartet record with you, Chet, Michael Moore, and Beaver Harris.

Konitz: Yeah at Ornette's studio. I remember Ornette standing there with a video camera filming some of that and Chet not being in too good condition for whatever reason.

Kirchner: He was just getting back on the scene then in seventy-four after being off for several years I guess getting new dentures and whatever and being able to play again.

Konitz: He didn't sound very comfortable.

Kirchner: What's your overall . . . actually, we never talked about [if] we go back to fifty-three, the records you made with Mulligan's quartet with Chet.

Konitz: That was an enjoyable and unique experience. I appreciated Chet for what he was doing then. Certainly [I] was pleased with Gerry for including me in that.

Kirchner: Whose idea was that? Gerry's?

Konitz: I guess so. He asked me to join him at Dante's on off nights of the Stan Kenton Band. We were at the Palladium. I think that's the period when all of that . . .

Kirchner: Was it Dante's or the Hague?

Konitz: Oh. I guess the Hague.

Kirchner: Okay. So he wrote some music to include you with the quartet right? And you made those recordings which are I guess considered classics.

Konitz: I even collected a few pennies [and] royalties over the years that he very generously awarded me. I heard . . . you know Tavis Smiley?

Kirchner: Yep.

Konitz: I love this guy and he was interviewing Randy Newman and asking him about his different situations with writing hit movie scores and things like that and Randy came off being very humble and still [with] the attitude of a student learning. Still with a long way to go and everything like that. They made mention to one of his hit tunes about Los Angeles and his reaction was "Every time they play that I get two hundred and eighty-nine dollars" or something like that.

Kirchner: We get to the mid-seventies and the Italians ask you to start a nonet.

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Konitz: The what?

Kirchner: The Italians asked you to start a nonet as I recall.

Konitz: The Italians?

Kirchner: Yeah. You told me this story, or Sy Johnson or somebody, that the Italian Communist party wanted you to put together a nine-piece band to do some concerts and you said “I don’t have a nonet, how about a quartet or a quintet or three trios?”

Konitz: Oh yeah. I remember saying something like that.

Kirchner: Is that factual? Have I got that right or what?

Konitz: Well, I really don’t remember those circumstances. I remember saying that though, in some context.

Kirchner: But you did put together a nonet that lasted for a number of years and did several records.

Konitz: I started a nonet across the street here.

Kirchner: At Striker’s.

Konitz: In seventy-three or something like that.

Kirchner: It was a little later I think seventy-five.

Konitz: I moved here in seventy-three so it was sometime around then but I don’t remember a Communist party being responsible for that.

Kirchner: I remember they made you an offer to bring in a nine-piece band to Italy to do some concerts. I remember you told me that a long time ago.

Konitz: It’s possible but . . .

Kirchner: In any case the band did begin and I guess Dave Berger had some charts.

Konitz: Yeah. Dave Berger was responsible for that instrumentation. He had charts and it was his suggestion for that instrumentation.

Kirchner: But then you met Sy Johnson or you already knew Sy but Sy got interested in writing for the band.

Konitz: Yeah. He wanted to co-lead the band.

Kirchner: That’s when it really took off in terms of material written for the band.

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Konitz: But that particular band never went any place. If I did something with a nonet it was a pick up band in Europe. I don't remember that.

Kirchner: You did several records. You did the one for Roulette, one for Chiaroscuro.

Konitz: But it was all New York stuff and all at Striker's across the street basically.

Kirchner: But one concert at the Smithsonian because I have a CD that somebody gave me of it. You did a concert at the Smithsonian including some of the *Birth of the Cool* charts that you'd gotten transcriptions of. There's the Roulette record, the Chiaroscuro record, the one for Steeplechase in seventy-nine. Actually the chart I wrote for you on "Footprints" is on and then there's another one called *Live At Laren* in Holland from seventy-nine with a New York band. Red Rodney, John Eckert, Jimmy Knepper, Sam Burtis, Ronnie Cuber, Bennie Aranov, Ray Drummond, and Billy Hart.

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Those are the four records that I know of. Somebody gave me a CD of the concert you did at the Smithsonian. That's early eighties.

Konitz: That one Laren gig was I think the only European thing I did with that band.

Kirchner: But it lasted a while. Then I remember you did the Vanguard with it sometime in the early eighties so it lasted for the better part of ten years actually. What's your feelings about it?

Konitz: I first of all never really felt like a leader because I was just lending my name to selling that band. As I say, it was Dave Berger and Sy Johnson. I remember I asked Teo Macero to write something. He brought in about three, four arrangements and I never played any of them. I didn't like them.

Kirchner: [For] one of them I was at the rehearsal. One of them was called "The Towering Pizza" because it was just after the movie "The Towering Inferno" had come out so he wrote some chart called "The Towering Pizza". That's the last I ever heard of it so it's as you say. That was the end of that. But I remember it was a rehearsal at Eddie Condon's, the new Eddie Condon's on fifty-fourth street. It was an afternoon rehearsal. That's when I brought the chart in on "Footprints".

Konitz: If we were rehearsing it must've been because we were going to play there right?

Kirchner: I don't know. I don't remember.

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Konitz: Okay. I'm glad someone else doesn't remember.

Kirchner: [Laughs] I do what I can. It's been thirty-five years, right? I do what I can.

Konitz: Been doing good.

Kirchner: But the band lasted for about ten years, off and on, to your credit. I remember some of the gigs at Striker's. Striker's was a fun club. Whenever I'm in that neighborhood I still think of that club but it's too bad . . .

Konitz: Right across the street.

Kirchner: It's too bad it went under.

Konitz: Yeah. She tried.

Kirchner: You used to play there. Chet Baker used to when he was getting his act back together. He would play there one day a week with Harold Danko and different bass players. I remember hearing him there.

Konitz: We tried. He tried to get us together.

Kirchner: Harold?

Konitz: Chet. I was teaching one day a week at a school across town and somehow we had talked about the rehearsing there and I was upstairs and he came into the main room and the director was at the reception desk and they got into a real ugly exchange because the guy told Chet that I was busy teaching but [Chet said] don't you know who I am and things like that and from then on I quit my job at that school as a result of that kind of dumb scene and obviously we didn't manage to get together. Bob Mover played with him.

Kirchner: I remember. I remember hearing Bob with Chet, Harold Danko, Michael Moore, and Jimmy Madison. I remember hearing them once at the Half Note up on Fifty-Fourth Street. That was a nice band. Because of time limitations I'm going to just try to touch on a few of the high points. You've been doing a huge amount of stuff in the past thirty years with a huge number of people.

Konitz: You have that documented in there?

Kirchner: Yes I do. I'll leave this stuff with you.

Konitz: I'll relive my past.

Kirchner: There you go. You might even want to start smoking again. [Laughs]

Konitz: No way.

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Kirchner: For example there are a few records that I haven't heard that I would actually love to. One record you did a few years ago with Mark Turner, the young tenor player for Chesky.

Konitz: Oh yeah, right.

Kirchner: And another one with Rich Perry a few years before that for Steeplechase. Do you remember those dates at all?

Konitz: Yeah I do. There were some nice moments with Rich Perry. Mark came into the session. I had asked him to play three tunes or something like that and I remember him coming in and taking out his horn and setting up a metronome and warming up.

Kirchner: Oh wow.

Konitz: I started to tap dance while he was doing that and he didn't notice me. He was very concentrated [on] the metronome. I asked him if he knew, I don't know, one of the lines [to] "Subconscious" maybe, and he stood in the corner and went through it okay. He had it. At least one more, I don't remember which one it was, but he knew that also.

Kirchner: Let's see if I can find it quickly. He's remarkable. Not only is he a really gifted player but it's remarkable that here's a young black player who is really into the whole Tristano music. When he went to Berklee, he I guess discovered that music by accident and nobody knew anything about it so he had to kind of learn it for himself. I can't find it off-hand. I'll keep looking.

Konitz: On that record when we improvised together he was very, you know, he's a very "note-y" player and he didn't play very "note-y" on that record. He was listening and we played at the Iridium just last year I believe and someone recorded two sets on one night and there were some very nice things reminiscent of me and Warne.

Kirchner: Yeah. Rich Perry. That would be a whole other thing. He's a great player but not in the same way as Mark. [He's] not into the Tristano thing at all as far as I know. There's another record that interests me, I haven't had a chance to hear it but, Daniel Schnyder did some string quartet things.

Konitz: String sextet actually, of Billie Holiday tunes.

Kirchner: He's somebody I have a lot of respect for as a writer.

Konitz: He's a very talented guy.

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Kirchner: A very good player. Good tenor player as well. How did you feel about that date?

Konitz: I enjoyed that.

Kirchner: It seems, especially that past thirty years, that people have been coming to you now for projects. For example they have you in mind and they propose you these projects, like the thing with the Metropole that you did with . . . Not only the Personal Voice thing with Bill Holman but you did a whole album called *Saxophone Dreams*.

Konitz: Yeah. That was a number of different sessions over some years.

Kirchner: All of standards?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: Whose charts were those?

Konitz: Different arrangers for the band. There's two of my tunes on that record.

Kirchner: That's right. "Subconscious-Lee" is there and . . .

Konitz: "Round and Round and Round".

[End of fourth hour]

Kirchner: You've had two partnerships I just want to talk about briefly. One was you did a number of things with Harold Danko in the eighties: duo things, quartet things. Actually I even remember a gig the two of you were playing in the Village one night that Michel Petrucciani came and was heckling you.

Konitz: Ooh. Wow, boy. He was a mean little guy sometimes.

Kirchner: Yeah. That was one of those nights.

Konitz: Really.

Kirchner: But you did a lot of nice records with Harold and a number of gigs both here and in Europe right?

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: How did you feel about that relationship?

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Konitz: That was one of the few times I felt like I had some kind of a band and appreciated that. Being at Nice one year with Rufus and Al Harewood was kind of the last time that George Wein hired me after that for some reason. I thought “Gee, I finally got a band and it didn’t work out.” I remember we opened for Wayne Shorter and while Wayne’s band set up he was humming the first eight bars of Billy Bauer’s “Marionette” tune and things like that. Very friendly contour there . . . it didn’t impress whoever was advising George Wein.

Kirchner: In recent years you’ve been doing a lot of stuff with Ohad Talmor. He’s been writing a lot of music for you.

Konitz: He invited me to send my lines that I was currently writing everyday, just as little exercises, and he orchestrated them, some of them. I appreciated that in a big band context, string quartet context, and a nonet context.

Kirchner: But a different kind of nonet, different instrumentation.

Konitz: Yeah.

Kirchner: With two bass clarinets as I recall.

Konitz: Just briefly yeah.

Kirchner: Actually I was at your eightieth birthday concert at Zankel Hall.

Konitz: That was a nice concert.

Kirchner: It was. In two-thousand and seven

Konitz: What?

Kirchner: In two-thousand and seven

Konitz: Will Friedland

Kirchner: “Friedwald”.

Konitz: . . . Friedwald said “Well, it might’ve been too much of a good thing but it was good to get out in the street at twelve o’clock and get a taxi” or something like that.

Kirchner: He brought that big band from, where was it, Portugal? But also you had Joe Lovano, Steve Swallow, Paul Motian, Ted Brown, Ben Monder; A bunch of good players that you’ve played with in different settings. That was a nice evening.

Konitz: Yeah. Great. I think George Wein was upstairs listening to Eartha Kitt.

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Kirchner: Well you're still here a she's not.

Konitz: Well, that's a fact.

Kirchner: Exactly.

Konitz: Don't know what it means other than that.

Kirchner: I guess at this point we can wrap. Do you have anything else that you'd like to tell future generations about yourself? Your music? Your legacy? What do you think you've, if you want people to remember you for anything in particular musically, what do you think that would be?

Konitz: That I was willing and able, at times, to compose on my instrument. I haven't been able to compose [or] orchestrate in that sense. I've always felt badly about that but I could improvise at times. I could then listen to it, that was always important to me, that I could listen to it after the fact and divorce myself from it to a large extent and hear it objectively as music and not just me playing the saxophone. That basically is my, I think, most accomplished musical practice so I identify with that.

Kirchner: Do you find self-evaluation easier now than it was, say, fifty years ago?

Konitz: Yeah. I think so. Being drug-free helps that a lot. All the validation that [I] have had as a result of these efforts certainly helped my confidence. I'm very grateful for that. Just having the opportunity to do it this long is really a blessing.

Kirchner: Thank God and "knock on wood" that you're now eighty-three, you're still in good health, and you're still playing great and people still want to hear you.

Konitz: When I ever call Carl Berger I say "How you doing Carl?" He says, "I'm still tryin' ". That's a good line. I kind of like that. I appreciate the interest in trying to get this together. I wish I was a story-teller so I could make this more a "story-telling" thing. Somehow all those things are just passing fancies. All the gigs I play people say "Don't you remember you played here?" No I don't remember that because we went in and out the next morning to go to the next place and things like that. The record dates were almost like that many times; just like a little concert. I'm so pleased that you are reminding me of all of these things.

Kirchner: I'll leave you with all of this stuff and you can bask in it. Before we wrap up, I would be remiss if I didn't say that of course you've been designated an NEA Jazz Master in the last couple years.

Konitz: I contested that you know.

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Kirchner: You contested it?

Konitz: I said I really don't feel like I qualify as a jazz "master" . . . the Italian people refer to me as a jazz "maestro" and I like that better. It sounds more friendly and more meaningful. But I looked up the word "master" and I saw "eminent" as one expression and that sounded like a Rock n Roll guy. I didn't like that one, "eminent." Then I got "note worthy" and I accept that as instead of being a "master" I'm "note worthy"; worthy of the notes.

Kirchner: I don't think we could have a better summation of this interview than that, do you Ken?

Konitz: [Laughs].

Kirchner: So why don't we at this point bid the folks *adieu*.

Konitz: Thank you very much folks and keep listening.

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