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## **McCOY TYNER**

### **NEA Jazz Master (2002)**

**Interviewee:** McCoy Tyner (December 11, 1938 – March 6, 2020)

**Interviewer:** Dr. Anthony Brown with engineer Ken Kimery

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**Brown:** Today is the 7th of December 2011 and this is the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History interview with NEA Jazz Master, pianist, composer, arranger, bandleader, and humanitarian, McCoy Tyner at the Blue Note club in New York City. Good afternoon Mr. McCoy Tyner.

**Tyner:** Good afternoon.

**Brown:** And I also want to acknowledge that his wife, Aisha is present and this interview is being conducted by Anthony Brown, with Ken Kimery. So, if we could start from the beginning, if you could tell us your given birth name, birthplace, and birthdate please.


**Tyner:** I was born Alfred McCoy Tyner and I was born December 11, 1938.

**Brown:** And where?

**Tyner:** Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**Brown:** OK, now could you give us your parents' names?

**Tyner:** OK, my mother's name was Beatrice Tyner and my fathers name is Jarvis Tyner.

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**Brown:** And your father's occupation?

**Tyner:** My father worked in a company that made medicated cream. As a matter of fact, I got a job there. His boss got to know me and my father said, "Ah, let him come in on Saturday." And then I was putting the medication stuff in the jars (laughs) with the machine, it was nice, an actual job. I could go to the movies. It was really nice growing up in Philadelphia during that time period.

**Brown:** And your mother's maiden name?

**Tyner:** Beatrice Stevenson.

**Brown:** And do you know where your parents were originally from? Were they original Philadelphians?

**Tyner:** No, they were born in North Carolina, Murfreesboro, North Carolina, yeah.

**Brown:** Both of them?

**Tyner:** As far as I know. Both of them were born there, yeah.

**Brown:** And in reading your biography, you're the oldest of three children?

**Tyner:** Yeah, three boys.


**Brown:** Three boys!?

**Tyner:** Three boys and one sister

**Brown:** So there were four of you, you had three siblings?

**Tyner:** Oh, two, I'm sorry my facts aren't . . . too clear (laughs). That's right two. Two boys and one sister Gwen, yeah I forgot.

**Brown:** So there were three children total or four children total? Three children total. You're the oldest, and who was the next?

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**Tyner:** I'm the oldest.

**Brown:** And who was the next?

**Tyner:** Two brothers.

**Brown:** Your brother, and what was his name?

**Tyner:** Jarvis Tyner.

**Brown:** Charles Tyner?

**Tyner:** Jarvis Tyner.

**Brown:** Jarvis.

**Tyner:** He was named after my father.

**Brown:** OK.

**Tyner:** Jarvis Tyner.

**Brown:** Was he Junior then?

**Tyner:** Junior, Jarvis Tyner Junior.


**Brown:** And your sister's name?

**Tyner:** Gwendolyn Tyner.

**Brown:** OK. Now were any of them musicians as well?

**Tyner:** My brother studied drums, he had studied drums and that's about it.

**Aisha:** He was more involved in politics.

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**Tyner:** Yes, that's right. He played drums but he got involved in politics.

**Brown:** And your mother, did she have a job as well?

**Tyner:** She was a beautician. So her beauty shop was where I, as I got older and had been playing for a while, that's where I had my jam sessions.

**Brown:** OK.

**Tyner:** In the beauty shop (laughs).

**Brown:** Well let's go back and let's talk about the house that you lived in when you were coming up. Did you stay in the same house, did you stay in the same neighborhood? If you could identify where that neighborhood was in Philadelphia?

**Tyner:** I was there quite a long time actually, and then later on I met John Coltrane and met my wife Aisha Tyner and life just sort of grew.

**Brown:** And in what part of town in Philadelphia was your-

**Tyner:** West Philly.

**Brown:** West Philly. Do you remember the address or any of the street names in that neighborhood?


**Tyner:** May street . . . May and Fairmount.

(Break in the recording)

**Brown:** So let's pick it back up. We were talking about your neighborhood when you were growing up. We had identified Main St. and some of the other streets-

**Tyner:** May street, (spells) M-a-y.

**Brown:** M-a-y.

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**Tyner:** May and Fairmount. Fairmount was a big street, May was a side street, but we were right on the corner. That's where I wrote, "Blues on the Corner." (laughs)

**Brown:** So what was that neighborhood like? Was it segregated, was it integrated, was it middle class, working class?

**Tyner:** Sort of middle class, would you say, Honey?

**Aisha:** Working class.

**Tyner:** Working class, yeah.

**Brown:** And was it integrated or segregated at that time?

**Tyner:** Uh, at that time, I think it was, I would say there was other people living there . . .

**Aisha:** Different types.

**Tyner:** Different types of people, yeah. Americans from different groups, white American, black Americans of different-


**Brown:** So it was an integrated neighborhood?

**Tyner:** Yeah, kind of anyway, but mostly black.

**Brown:** Just on the forward edge of gentrification, because I know parts of Philadelphia were staunchly segregated through many periods of time.

**Tyner:** Yeah, that's true. Right, exactly. Because it was once a connected capitol kind of a thing. When the people landed on the ships that brought them from Europe, they would come up from Maryland, different places and then before you know it, they're building a kind of uh . . . the east coast was full of immigrants, so there were a lot of descendants from those people.

**Brown:** And the schools you went to, maybe the elementary school, or middle school or junior high school, were those in the neighborhood? Do you remember any of the names of the schools?

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**Tyner:** Yeah, West Philly High, I went to West Philly High. Sulzberger Junior High School.

**Aisha:** I don't know that one.

**Tyner:** Yeah, Sulzberger Junior High, West Philly High School. And I think I went to Martha Washington Elementary School.

**Brown:** And were those integrated schools as well?

**Tyner:** Uh . . . I don't know what the population . . . I don't think at the time I was going to school. I think maybe West Philly and I think Sulzberger Junior High was integrated, not on a big scale, but I think it was. I'm pretty sure we had people from different . . . because the neighborhood became more multi-racial as time went on. And it had nice students, people with a good upbringing, it was great, I enjoyed it.

**Brown:** Would you consider yourself a good student, were you a good student?

**Tyner:** Eh, well, good sounds . . .


**Aisha:** Good artist.

**Brown:** You're a visual artist? OK, Aisha said that you could draw.

**Tyner:** Yeah, I'm glad she thought so (laughs). I did pretty good, I studied a little bit of art, drawing. I mean playing piano was my major interest because I had an R&B band when I was teenager, before I had a jazz band I had an R&B band.

**Brown:** Well let's talk about your first interest in music. Was there much music played in the house?

**Tyner:** My mother loved piano, she was a beautician and her beauty shop became a place where I--when she eventually bought me a piano--that became the place where the piano went. But some of her clients, she did their hair, they were neighbors and about four of them had pianos--maybe more I think--had pianos in their home and my mom mentioned before she bought me a piano, she asked some of them, "Would you mind if my son comes and practices on piano?" Of course, they never turned me down because they wanted a good hairdo (laughs). So a lot of people had great hairdos and I had access to a piano (laughs) it worked good!

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**Brown:** Where was your mother's beauty shop located?

**Tyner:** It was Fairmont Avenue, May and Fairmont.

**Brown:** So it was walking distance from your house?

**Tyner:** Yeah, walking distance, well actually we lived above and behind the beauty shop.

**Brown:** Oh, OK.

**Tyner:** Yeah the kitchen was . . . the living room-it wasn't very big but it was right behind the beauty shop. And the beauty shop was a pretty large place because they had shampoos and they had these stations for people doing their hair. And then right behind that was that little small living room where we had the TV and everything. And then there was, after that, there was a kitchen, and then above all that were bedrooms upstairs; bed and bathroom upstairs. It was a nice location, and then my mother had to get in a cab to go any place. They drop her right downstairs (laughs) and that's where my piano was. So sometimes-you know I had an R&B band in the beginning and we had jam sessions. I had quite a few jam sessions in my mothers shop, and my mother would be doing hair and say, "Ah you guys go ahead play. It's alright, it's no problem". So we would be in there and the ladies would be under the dryer patting their foot . . . (laughs) a musical beauty shop!


**Brown:** So, they're sitting under those hair dryers patting their feet and you guys are jamming?

**Tyner:** Jamming!

**Brown:** Right in the same room.

**Tyner:** Yeah, we were in the same room. She loved music anyway and she loved piano. I think she might have felt as though that's what I was going to do. I think she saw the handwriting on the wall and so she didn't discourage me. I took lessons and all that and I used to practice a lot. And then when I got the band, but she was very willing to let us go ahead and do our thing. That's where I developed the skills of writing for other instruments.

**Brown:** An earlier account stated that your mom gave you the choice to either take voice lessons or piano lessons. How old were you when she offered you that choice?

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**Tyner:** Well I was in basically junior high school at the time . . . I think I was in junior high (laughs). Yeah because here's what happened, in the junior high school there was a lady there who actually became Jimmy Smith's wife. She told me about Jimmy and that's when I first heard of him . . . organ player and whatever.

**Brown:** Hm, what's her name?

**Tyner:** Joy Goines was her name. She was really great, she had a nice relationship with the students and everything like that. She formed a choir whatever you want to call it, chorus, choir whatever. She would conduct that and rehearse us in that respect, and at the same time I was taking piano lessons and Mr. Baroni was an Italian, elder gentleman who taught piano and so I studied with Mr. Baroni.

**Brown:** Do you remember what originally inspired you to want to play the piano?

**Tyner:** I think my mother liked piano. I noticed whenever we would go to someone's house that had a piano, my mother would tinkle. There were several of her clients, she'd do their hair and they had pianos, at least three or four of them in the neighborhood, so I knew that she liked piano. So she said look, "I'm going to get you a piano", and the biggest room in the house was the beauty shop. So I would be in there jamming with the R&B band that I had and she'd say, "You guys go ahead and play." My mother was very, you know, she complemented us.

**Brown:** It sounds like she was very supportive, that's wonderful.


**Tyner:** Yeah, she really was.

**Brown:** So before you could form a band you had to get proficient on your instrument, so when you first started playing piano and you started taking lessons-again could you name that gentleman? Was that your first piano teacher?

**Tyner:** Mr. Baroni

**Brown:** And how old were you when you first started taking piano lessons?

**Tyner:** I was thirteen.

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**Brown:** Thirteen.

**Tyner:** Yeah, well, in between thirteen and fifteen. Somewhere in there, I'd say thirteen.

**Brown:** And what types of lessons? Was he just working on scales, technique, what books did he have you working out of?

**Tyner:** We had Bach and Beethoven book, so I mean . . . I learned how to read that music and that's basically what we had a book of scales, that was very prominent, a lot of piano players tried it out, Hanon, you know books like that and it was good, he was very good. He wanted to see me at sixteen being able to read the music and being able to articulate what was on the page and I thought it was very good. From there I formed my R&B band and eventually a jazz band.

**Brown:** So how long had you been playing piano before you were actually starting to form your band or starting to perform I should say?

**Tyner:** Yeah, well I started when I was sixteen, so I'd say about . . . I'm trying to figure out . . . I'd say around sixteen or something like that and that's when I got gigs playing house parties sometimes you know . . . they heard about the band. We had a guy we called him Billy and he heard about our band and he would book some gigs, nothing very elaborate, but gigs, house parties, things like that. It all sort of came together. And then of course I met my wife and I met her sister who was a fabulous singer, Khadijah was her name. My wife's name of course is Aisha, Aisha Tyner. Her sister, Khadijah sang with the Calvin Massey Band. We called him "Folks" because he acted like an older guy (laughs).


**Brown:** Oh, I want to talk about Cal Massey.

**Tyner:** You know Bird wrote "Old Folks."

**Aisha:** I called him Folks; (Bill), John [Coltrane] and all you called him Cal.

**Tyner:** He would call him Cal. His name was Calvin Massey and he had some musical ability in his family too, but he formed this band and her sister, my sister-in-law was a singer in the band, and it was wonderful, she sang great, it reminded me of Sarah Vaughan, that kind of singing you know. What did you think? (to Aisha)

**Aisha:** He had a good band.

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**Tyner:** Yeah, It was a good band, she was in the band. So that was basically how I developed during that period and I had a few bands . . . I changed personnel occasionally.

**Brown:** OK, it's probably safe to surmise that the music you were playing was not the same music you were studying on the piano (laughs). So let's talk about the music that you ended up playing because you weren't getting that from your lessons. So what was the music you were listening to and how did you develop your style in playing that music? Because playing scales and playing Bach isn't going to prepare you to be playing R&B.


**Tyner:** No, well I was very articulate in terms of what I did play, because R&B . . . and then moving to a jazz type of approach to music, it sort of came gradually, and I always had my own imagination of how I would like to do things. It sort of just developed from the R&B, not necessarily to say R&B was a major thing because I wanted to explore other areas, other avenues of music. That's when I heard Bird, and Bud Powell moved around the corner from me when I was a teenager. He would walk by my mother's shop and when he heard music, sometimes I would catch Bud standing listening because she had these big picture windows-huge windows because it was a business you know-it was a beauty shop so people could look in. I caught Bud listening to us while we were jamming, while my mother was doing somebody's hair you know and then he would leave, he would leave. He was that kind of eccentric personality and he was going through I guess some whatever . . . he was just like that. Him and Monk kind of reminded me of each other, a lot of spontaneity in the way they carried themselves (laughs). So Bud came to New York and him and Monk became good friends, so I could see the influence there (laughs).

**Brown:** What about Bud's younger brother Richie?

**Tyner:** I didn't really meet Richie until he joined, I think Max Roach's band something like that but I didn't really . . . I think I met him later on when I went to hear Max's band because Sonny Rollins had a gig with Max too, and then I think I met Max around that time and you know, it gets to be a little bit . . . I'm trying to remember it all.

**Aisha:** You were sixteen when you met Max. Sixteen or so when you met Max.

**Tyner:** Oh yeah, sixteen, my wife says I was sixteen when I met Max.

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**Aisha:** No. Max told your son when he met him and he was sixteen. He said, “you are around the age when I met your father.” That’s how I remember it.

**Tyner:** Yeah I was a whipper snapper . . . young guy (laughs).

**Brown:** I’m just going to continue to-

**Aisha:** Anthony?

**Brown:** Yes Ma’am.

**Aisha:** He moved from May Street to Cedar Avenue.

**Brown:** When he was in high school?

**Aisha:** Yeah, he was still in high school.


**Tyner:** Yeah, Southwest Philly.

**Brown:** Let’s talk about . . . so you get together, your putting together your band, I want to find out what was your inspiration to form your own band playing R&B and what was the repertoire you all were playing? Who were you trying to sound like? There had to be somebody that was playing the piano that you had to model your style on initially.

**Tyner:** Well Bud was the first, Bud, and then Thelonious Monk. Because Bud moved around the corner from me. Richie was with Max Roach’s band I think and they had an accident with Clifford Brown and all that. I think Richie was in that.

**Brown:** Richie. Yeah, he passed with that, too.

**Tyner:** So Bud was staying in Richie’s place and he wasn’t far from me. He played my piano. I invited my hero and I said, “You want to play a few notes? Great!” (laughs) Because I loved his recordings anyway. He would be standing outside listening to the jam sessions we were having. My hero is outside listening and then he would walk away, he’d stay and listen. He was going through some psychological things you know, but he was a genius. So I learned a lot from his recordings. I listened to his articulation.

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**Brown:** So you were already listening to jazz pianists but you weren't really playing jazz you were playing R&B.

**Tyner:** I had an R&B band first and then some of the guys that were playing jazz in my neighborhood, they tried to encourage me to play some bebop stuff and deal with that; and it was some musicians who were already in that genre of music and they, I think they heard my jam sessions or whatever and they encouraged me to get into the music. And then Bud Powell moved into my neighborhood, what do you want? He was one of the great geniuses of jazz. Bud would stand there and listen when we had jam sessions and then he would disappear right quick and he was gone.

**Brown:** But he did play on that piano?

**Tyner:** He played on my piano. I didn't polish it for a long time (laughs). No, I'm joking.

**Aisha:** Also he took conga lessons, he played congas.

**Brown:** Really? So you were taking conga lessons.

**Tyner:** Yeah, I had to stop that though because what happens when you hit the rim . . . (of the drum) it hurts, so I had to stop that, but I did play congas.

**Brown:** And who were you studying with?

**Tyner:** What do you mean? Congas?


**Brown:** Studying congas, you were just picking it up?

**Aisha:** Garvin Masseaux.

**Tyner:** Oh that's right, Garvin Masseaux.

**Aisha:** Saka Acquaye. Philly had a lot of things with dance, congas, and drums, a lot of culture in Philly. We grew up with a lot of culture.

**Brown:** What centers, were there community centers, where was this music being performed and rehearsed? Was there a community center? Where did it germinate?

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**Tyner:** In my mother's shop. We didn't have a hall.

**Aisha:** Bobby Crowder (had his own place) . . .

**Brown:** Bobby Crowder, the drummer?

**Tyner:** Yeah.

**Aisha:** Yes! He knew my sister, you know Bobby Crowder, conga player? Yes, Garvin Masseaux, yup. All them, they were all together.

**Brown:** So that was your musical fraternity.

**Tyner:** And then my hero moved to the neighborhood Bud Powell.

**Brown:** Yeah, you got that too.

**Aisha:** Philly had so much diversity, between dancing schools, Judamarn (?), Johnny Hines, you know just a variety of cultures. The Academy of Music was a place you go on Saturday to see different things.

**Brown:** So a very, very rich cultural center.


**Tyner:** Yeah, Philadelphia started out that way. It was the capitol of the United States for a while.

**Brown:** Right!

**Tyner:** So it had a lot of history.

**Aisha:** I wouldn't have wanted to grow up any place else, and he'd say the same thing.

**Brown:** You mentioned Cal Massey. Could you talk a little more about Cal because a lot of folks, I know Archie Shepp did a lot of collaborations, "Things Have Got to Change," things like that. Could you talk a little bit more about him because unfortunately he's not as--

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**Aisha:** He (Tyner) wrote a song for him also once and he recorded it in Japan, called “Folks”.

**Tyner:** “Folks” Yeah. We used to call them “Folks” because he acted sometimes older, like an older guy.

**Brown:** But he wasn’t actually that much older than you?

**Tyner:** Well, he was older, he was maybe ten or twelve years older.

**Brown:** And he was a trumpet player.

**Tyner:** Yeah he was a trumpet player.

**Aisha:** He wrote “Nefertiti Suite” and those different tunes . . . His son . . . his wife, Charlotte, they lived in Brooklyn.

**Tyner:** Clarence Sharp, we called [him] C Sharp, he played in Cal’s band as well. And then John (Coltrane) and Cal were friends. I’m trying to remember how their relationship came about. I think it was through Naima . . .

**Aisha:** I’m not sure how Folks and John met, but they were very close . . .

**Tyner:** And so it developed as it did and I had wonderful experiences and I learned a lot over those years. I can’t complain, and meeting John, that was a very historical moment for me.

**Brown:** Well, let’s talk about that meeting-


**Aisha:** Everybody says Coltrane, but we say John.

**Brown:** Right.

**Aisha:** That’s just like my sister and I called Cal Massey “Folks” and him and John and everybody called him Cal. Lee Morgan was also very close to him.

**Tyner:** Lee, that’s right, Lee grew up there as well.

**Brown:** So he was a childhood friend as well, or at least an associate?

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**Tyner:** Yeah he was like a child prodigy. Lee worked in Dizzy's band when he was like a kid. He was very mature in that respect, musically, he was a nice guy. Sometimes Dizzy hired him in his band and that was one of his heroes anyway, and then Clifford Brown of course. So it was a very historical city and very artistically rich.

**Aisha:** You were asking about Folks, we were close to them when we lived in Long Island and they lived in Brooklyn. In Philly, Calvin put on big shows, Folks, every week, big bands.

**Tyner:** He had an entrepreneurial spirit, he liked to put on shows.

**Brown:** In what venues? Where were these shows taking place?

**Aisha:** The one in Germantown, I forgot the name of that one, but he'd put them on in Philly at different halls.

**Tyner:** Yeah, different places.

**Brown:** You mentioned also that you would perform in house parties and rent parties. What other venues were you doing? Were you doing weddings, were you doing Elks Club or any of those kinds of shows or any of those social clubs . . . high school dances?

**Tyner:** I played at some of the Elks Club . . . yeah, I probably did because Cal got a lot of jobs and there were people that would contact him and I was in his band and he was friend of Coltrane, Coltrane was already out, he worked a lot. He started working with Miles of course.


**Brown:** Well, lets talk about your first meeting with John, how old were you and what were the circumstances of that meeting?

**Tyner:** Well I was what, sixteen.

**Aisha:** Because Khadijah was seventeen or eighteen.

**Tyner:** Yeah that's right, her sister sang in Cal's band, so I've known her a long time.

**Aisha:** She introduced him to John, to Coltrane because her and Naima, his wife, were very close, they lived . . . not far.

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**Tyner:** Right.

**Brown:** So you met in a social situation, you met on the bandstand, you met in a club?

**Tyner:** I met him through . . . well actually he was with Miles, but I think I met him after when he left Miles.

**Aisha:** When he was with the Jazztet.

**Tyner:** With Benny Golson and Art Farmer and Addison Farmer and what's his name that played drums . . . kind of nutty guy-

**Aisha:** Lex Humphries.

**Tyner:** Lex Humphries, yeah (laughs). Don't put that in. Erase that please.


**Brown:** (laughs) Why don't we just say he was idiosyncratic.

**Tyner:** Yeah that's it. That's the word I was looking for, see he's articulate, I didn't know it . . . anyway.

**Brown:** So again, I just want to try and figure out, you went to West Philly High. Now, back in those days they had music in the schools. Were you playing in the school band? Was your musical formative years, was it encouraged in the school?

**Tyner:** I think they had a pop kind of band that played. They had an orchestra that played a lot of the European classical music, strings and everything, but they had a sort of a band situation. There was one guy who really liked jazz who taught and he wasn't a guy that dealt with the strings and all that stuff, he just wanted to form a band with a jazz concept so I played in that band for a while, but I wasn't so interested in jazz as I was in my own pursuits in terms of jazz music. I learned a lot from the older musicians. Making gigs with singers, like my sister-in-law sang in Cal's band so I had a chance to have that experience of accompanying somebody who was singing. And things moved on and I met John and he went back with Miles and I think he was working [inaudible] for a while.

**Aisha:** And you were in the Jazztet.

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**Tyner:** Yes, the Jazztet with Benny Golson, and Benny was from Philly too. He heard about me and we kind of connected and that was before him and Art Farmer formed the Jazztet. But I told Benny, I said listen, you know Miles called John back in the band and I told him I am supposed to do something with John. Benny asked me if I would play a little while in his band and I said, “OK, fine.” That became the history playing with John, developing in that context.

**Brown:** Well let’s go back before we get into your tenure with John and or with the Jazztet and talk about your early encounter with John. I believe he recorded one of your pieces, “The Believer”, is that correct?

**Tyner:** “The Believer,” yeah.

**Brown:** He recorded that in the late fifties before you joined the band.

**Tyner:** Something like that. Your stats are probably better than mine (laughs). Well I wrote a book so it’s all in there, it’s not implanted deep in my psyche but it’s there you know . . . somewhere (laughs).

**Brown:** So did you exchange musical ideas, did you actually play with him before you joined the group?

**Tyner:** Yeah, I was in Cal’s band and Cal was a good friend of John’s.

**Aisha:** But you did play with him too, they used to have rehearsals at his house on 33rd Street and Fairmount, that’s where John lived, [across from] Fairmount Park.


**Tyner:** And she’s from North Philly and her sister sang with that band so . . .

**Brown:** And when we interviewed Benny Golson he talked about how in High School, John and he would get together and practice.

**Aisha:** What High School did Benny go to?

**Brown:** Ah, you got me, I’m sorry, I don’t remember.

**Tyner:** Welcome to the club! (laughs)

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**Aisha:** Lee Morgan went to Bartrum, he [Tyner] went to West Philly, I was in North Philly so I went to a totally different school, but I don't remember.

**Tyner:** It's hard to remember a lot of these things.

**Brown:** But yeah, he (Benny Golson) gave us a profile of where he grew up and his early encounters with John, but again, Philly is very rich. There are accounts of you studying formally, besides your initial piano lessons, so could we talk a little more about your training and your formal music studies?

**Tyner:** Well I went to the Granoff School of Music for a while.

**Brown:** It says that you took theory lessons at Granoff so you weren't studying piano, you were studying theory and harmony?

**Tyner:** Yeah more or less, harmony, theory that kind of thing.

**Brown:** And that was just on your own initiative that you wanted to do that?


**Tyner:** Yes, on my own because my piano teacher taught me some more of the European classics, books and thing, but that was a good way for me to explore things harmonically and deal with it in that way. Then when Bud Powell moved into the neighborhood that was wonderful. One of my heroes moving in the neighborhood . . . that was really something.

**Brown:** So you completed high school, is that correct?

**Tyner:** Yeah, I completed high school.

**Brown:** Got your diploma from West Philly? So if you were born in '38 that would put you at about, '56 you're probably getting out of high school or just finishing if you graduated when you were eighteen-although you were born in December so it might have been more in '57 when you graduated from high school. What were your goals at that point?

**Tyner:** I just wanted to continue my music, continue my music career, because I had already kind of established my name with some guys and Benny wanted me to join this band he was forming with Art Farmer which became the Jazztet. John hadn't left Miles yet, I think he was

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planning to and he wanted me to be in his band, so I was kind of torn between the two. I think I worked with Jazztet and we did “Killer Joe” and all those numbers. Then I told Benny, “Look, John has asked me to join his band.” Naima, John’s wife at the time was good friends with my wife.

**Aisha:** What did Miles tell you about John after you joined John?

**Tyner:** Miles was someplace and we were together and he told me that he was glad that I joined John’s band because he said that he knew that John was headed in another direction musically with cycles and all the things John was doing and he encouraged me. He thought it was a great idea. For some reason what I was playing kind of fit into what he was doing and I got more and more involved with that, cycles and what he was doing. That’s not everything, but it’s part of the system of exploration.

**Brown:** Before we explore your tenure with the John Coltrane Quartet, I just wanted to get a little more information about your experience with the Jazztet. Did you tour nationally, internationally?

**Tyner:** Yeah, I think we did.

**Brown:** I have the first recording, but did you do more recordings?

**Tyner:** I think we did a couple albums.

**Aisha:** How many do you have?


**Brown:** I have that very first one.

**Tyner:** *Meet the Jazztet?*

**Brown:** Yeah.

**Tyner:** I don’t think I did a lot of recording with them.

**Brown:** And touring-did you do national touring, did you have representation, was the business OK?

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**Tyner:** Yeah, we had a guy who booked us . . . George Wein. but I didn't stay long in the Jazztet because I wanted to be with John. When John left Miles he wanted to see what I wanted to do and I said I wanted to play with you. I think it was a good decision (laughs).

**Brown:** There was a story--and I'm going to ask Ken to fill in the details--but when we interviewed Benny, he said that you were driving on the turnpike and your car broke down and I think you called Benny and Benny couldn't come get you and I guess he arranged for John to come pick you up.

**Tyner:** Yeah, that's right, they knew each other because they were from the same part of town, North Philly. So they knew each other and for some reason he called John. I guess John knew that we had a musical relationship even though I hadn't joined his band yet, I was still with the Jazztet. But they knew each other, they weren't hostile toward each other.

**Aisha:** Did Benny stay on the turnpike leaving from Philly to go to New York?

**Brown:** Yes.

**Aisha:** I think I remember that.

**Tyner:** So who's that guy walking around the turnpike with all those bags!?


**Brown:** The way Benny tells it is, that's the way you hooked up with John because he came to get you, but I don't know.

**Tyner:** Every time John wanted to leave and form his own band, Miles would up his salary, I don't think Miles wanted him to leave. He wanted to form his own band you know, "Hold up buddy" (laughs) . . . I couldn't blame Miles for that, but John wanted to leave and start his own band because he had his own ideas.

**Aisha:** I'm surprised Benny remembered that.

**Brown:** Oh yeah, Benny can tell some stories.

**Tyner:** If you want an elaboration, he can do it, yeah he's like that.

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**Aisha:** You know who else was like that?-- Art Blakey! I told him he should have been a playwright. He was dramatic, he could hold your attention.

**Tyner:** Yeah he was something. If he showed up late--I worked with Art for a little while--he would say, "The subway ran into a bus."

**Aisha:** He'd tell the audience and when he finished he said, "and I'm the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Blakey and I will play for you as long as you want" and people forgot all about the hour and a half they waited.

**Tyner:** They start clapping.

**Aisha:** He could be dramatic but he knew how to draw people [in].

**Tyner:** Yeah he sure did, he knew how they thought so he knew how to manipulate the public, not just with music, he could talk to them . . . "The bus ran into the subway." Something like that, how's that possible? But he would throw it out there. "The bus ran into the subway, Ahh! And I jumped out the door!" (laughs). Yeah he was something, he was a great musician and he represented a school of music, a lot of great guys came out of his band. He was a nice man.


**Brown:** One last little detail before we get into the Trane era and that was, in working with Cal Massey, were Jimmy Garrison and "Tootie" Heath also in that? Or did you work separately with them?

**Tyner:** "Tootie" was in the band because he knew them from Philly obviously. Jimmy was working with Ornette Coleman for a while. He had a little spot with Ornette and I think John was looking for a bass player who had the ability to not necessarily get locked into form but could move away from that if he could hear what was going on. John would say "Keep moving, keep moving, keep going" harmonically. So that gave him freedom if he wanted to do some alternative things, and that was good.

**Aisha:** Steve Davis.

**Tyner:** That's right. And before Jimmy there was Steve Davis my brother.

**Aisha:** That's my brother-in-law.

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**Tyner:** So it was a family connection.

**Brown:** Is Reggie related to anyone in here too (laughs)?

**Aisha:** No, but I knew him well, and his first wife Lorraine.

**Tyner:** He was from Philly!

**Aisha:** Winard Harper, there are so many from Philly.

**Brown:** Well, that's the thing. In researching drummers-you know Philly Joe-all the jazz musicians out of Philly stay tight. It's truly a family and it lives up to that name of Philly brotherly love.

**Tyner:** Yeah, that's right.

**Brown:** But I've found that to be really true among the musicians. You continually stay in touch with each other, you're pulling each other in and it still seems to be going on to this day. OK, were going to talk about your impression of the music that's going on today and who you suggest we listen to, particularly anybody coming out of Philly. There are a lot of folks still coming out of Philly. Now, one account says that in 1957, there was a week-long engagement with Cal Massey's group that Trane participated in, do you recall that?


**Aisha:** Did they say where it was?

**Brown:** Well, it would have been in Philly but it doesn't say anything else. It says, "In Philadelphia he worked with Cal Massey, Jimmy Garrison, and Albert 'Tootie' Heath [and that] in 1957 this group had a week-long engagement with John Coltrane with whom Tyner regularly rehearsed."

**Tyner:** Yeah, I think it must have been a club for it to be a week-long because John and Calvin were very close; they were tight. I'm trying to remember because they had various clubs.

**Aisha:** It probably was true because they did a lot. I know The Tioga Theatre was one of them.

**Brown:** And then one other detail before you get to Trane. It says you also worked locally with Benny Golson, which you've already corroborated. It goes on to say Benny Golson took you to

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San Francisco for a three-week stand at the Jazz Workshop with Curtis Fuller, Leroy Vinegar, and Lenny McBrown and this turned into your first important engagement because in 1959, this led to the Jazztet.

**Tyner:** Yeah, Jazztet.

**Brown:** I mean that's my hometown, the Jazz Workshop so I just wanted to bring that up.

**Tyner:** I like San Francisco a lot actually. It has a very artistic vibe about it and I still like it. That's a great town.

**Aisha:** Yeah, that sounds right.

**Brown:** OK, so we'll keep that, again this is coming from the New Grove Dictionary of Jazz.

**Brown:** So you leave the Jazztet because you got the call from John.


**Tyner:** Yeah, of course. I knew John before. See what happened is, he said he was going to leave Miles and form his own band and he wanted me to play in the band, but every time he wanted to leave, Miles would give him some extra dough, so that would entice him to stay.

**Aisha:** Because John had Steve Kuhn for some months.

**Brown:** Right. And then Elvin talks about how Trane came to get him because Elvin said, "Well you know Diz asked me to join his band the night before Trane asked me to join his band." He told John, "I just told Diz. . ." so John went to Diz and said, "I'd like to have Elvin in my band". So he (John) was the one who facilitated that, because Elvin was torn. He wanted to go, just like you, he wanted to go with John but he had already agreed to go with Diz. John is the one who went to Diz, so it sounded like John wanted you too, and he was going to get you one way or the other.

**Tyner:** Yeah, I was so young, seventeen or eighteen, something like that. I can't believe it.

**Brown:** So now you're with John Coltrane. You were born in 1938, we only got to 1960, that's why it takes a while, but we got a picture of Philadelphia. We know who the folks were that you were associating with.

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**Aisha:** You had Spanky Debreest, Bobby Timmons, all them were from Philly.

**Brown:** OK, now you brought something up, Bobby Timmons comes straight from the church. Now did you have any church influence? I saw one account that said your father sang in church. Was there much of an influence from the church, in either the house or on the piano?

**Tyner:** Yeah, my mother liked for me to go to church. Reverend Shepard was the Mt. Oliver Baptist Church minister. He was the head guy of the church. We used to attend the sermons there. Sometimes we would have guest ministers talk. It was an interesting place, they had a wonderful choir that would sing certain songs related to the church and I enjoyed listening to them. And then of course I left town after a while, John left Miles, he said what do you want to do? I said OK well I would like to get out there and join my friends out there who are playing music. That was the way it goes.

**Brown:** So, when you brought up Lee Morgan, Bobby Timmons, what I'm thinking is, that's a lot of blues . . . a lot of gospel. And when I look at your biography on your website, the first thing it says is, "Shaping modern jazz, Tyner's blues-based piano style." So were you listening to the blues early on, was that part of that foundation?


**Tyner:** Yeah, you had to because blues singers had a lot of the gigs. If you wanted to get the jobs . . . If people wanted to throw a party, they may use a local club to do that because there were drinks there and they may even get a caterer to cater to it. So all of that was a part of it and I enjoyed participating in that. People would come and have a good time, you know? And then I would do some gigs with Lee and Archie every now and then.

**Aisha:** Jimmy Vass was also another one. Him and Archie were close.

**Tyner:** Yeah, Sure were. There were a lot of young people . . . There were so many guys around, it's hard to name them all. In my mind, I have to leave some room for music, I think that's important! [laughs] All these dates, I mean they're fine but-

**Aisha:** But you're right about Bobby Timmons.

**Tyner:** Bobby was with Art, that's when he did "Dat Dere, all those tunes he wrote. I like composing myself and that's one thing John gave me the opportunity to do that. And then I was recording with Bob Thiele, he said, "This is a good time for you to do your own recordings". He

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had been recording John's quartet. He was the first guy to encourage me to record on my own, Bob Thiele, he was a nice guy.

**Brown:** So when you join John's band, you already know Jimmy Garrison.

**Tyner:** Oh yeah, I knew Jimmy.

**Brown:** You already knew John, so is this your first encounter with Elvin?

**Tyner:** John knew Elvin. I think he played with Elvin when he was with Miles or something, there was some kind of connection there and he told us about him. I'm pretty sure he discussed him with Jimmy. He liked Elvin's playing because it was loose and it let him do things rhythmically and harmonically. Elvin had Thad in his life, so he had all that music, Elvin came out of such a musical environment it was unbelievable; so he was perfect for the band. He would go with you in whatever you were doing rhythmically or harmonically.

**Brown:** Definitely a sympatico between you and Elvin.

**Tyner:** Yeah John knew, he knew what Elvin was about . . . He knew.

**Brown:** So what was it like? Do you remember that first time you played in that group? Do you remember sitting down at the piano, there's John, there's Elvin, there's Jimmy.

**Tyner:** Well, before Elvin joined that band we had Billy Higgins.

**Aisha:** Didn't he have a beautiful smile?


**Brown:** That's my man.

**Tyner:** Yeah, such a nice guy. He always enjoyed himself when he played. You watch him you couldn't help but say, "Geez we must sound pretty good because he's smiling!" [laughs]

**Brown:** So you actually played in the group before Elvin got there, is that what you're saying?

**Tyner:** Yeah. John knew Elvin.

**Aisha:** Billy was there first.

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**Brown:** So the original quartet was John, Jimmy, was it Jimmy?

**Aisha:** No, first it was Steve Davis, then Jimmy.

**Brown:** So Steve and then Jimmy, but you played with Billy Higgins?

**Aisha:** Yeah he played with Billy, traveled with Billy too.


**Tyner:** Billy played with Ornette Coleman for a while, so he knew how to play free-style, with no changes, he didn't play changes, that wasn't his instrument but rhythmically, he knew how to make fills and keep it interesting if you diverted from the regular way of doing things rhythmically. If you played a different rhythm he would catch it; Billy was . . . he was unbelievable. He was perfect for the quartet.

**Brown:** I think they were on tour, maybe in Detroit or the mid-west. I know Billy was based in Los Angeles but there was some reason why Elvin came into the group. Were you back in New York when you first had the group with Elvin?

**Tyner:** Well, John had told me about Elvin. I had heard of Hank as I said before but I really didn't know Elvin that well. I think I heard him on record but in terms of playing with him, no, I liked what I had heard on the recordings but I didn't really meet him or play with him. I loved Hank's playing . . . his playing was something.

(End of CD1)

**Brown:** The only reason I brought it up is because I do know that this is a very personal issue, but it is not something that I want to explore. I do know that people's religions, because as you said, ignorant people will use that against you, or use that to divide you, that's not the impetus here. I'm looking at that time in history, there seems to have been what they call a zeitgeist or a spirit of the times in the African-American community because we see that many Jazz musicians in the late forties, early fifties are converting to Islam. Many have talked about their reasons, but the people who have, like yourself or like Buhaina, you have your Arabic name but you continue to use your other name. I like to quote Malcolm X, he said "A man's religion is between him and his god." That's fine and I understand that and I agree with that wholeheartedly. I'm not asking anyone to put their religion on the table, but given the historical significance of so many African Americans in the jazz community converting to Islam, to me, is another sense of

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brotherhood and another sense of consciousness that we're reclaiming our heritage in the way that we want it to be claimed. So part of that is looking at the African-American evolution of consciousness and self-empowerment.

**Tyner:** And the thing is, I have been to Israel several times so I have been to . . . you know, I mean my music is excepted in Egypt, wherever I go it doesn't matter, they like my music, I'm very happy. It doesn't matter to me what religion. I have friends who are Jewish, friends who are Muslim, friends who are African religion, fine, I don't judge anybody according to that, I think that's up to you.

**Aisha:** I wanted to say that you are absolutely right. In Philly there was a very strong, awareness that was concerned with peoples consciousness, historically and in many many ways, religiously, all those things.


**Brown:** Off the mic you mentioned J. A. Rogers would come in.

**Aisha:** J. A. Rogers came every Saturday, I took classes with him. I was happy during that time. Dakota Staton's husband Taleb played in Dizzy's band for a while. When I worked in high school I worked for him in his office there, he had a place on 52nd and Gerard. He used to write to J. A. Rogers, he did tech, enterprising, he was her husband and he brought J. A. Rogers every Saturday from New York and we would have a small class. So those things-Philly was very open. Kwame Nkrumah, he had an international parade on the street and people shook his hand. And so far as the religion goes that's one of the places it came first, Philly. Because I've met people from other places who studied and they know that. Philly was very-I think even more so than New York during that time period.

**Brown:** To me it seems like Philly and Chicago were really the centers.

**Aisha:** Yes, those two. I completely agree.

**Brown:** One of the reasons I bring up spirituality and religion is because I see them as two completely or distinctly different things, because when we talk about John Coltrane, people talk about his spirituality, not about a religion because he never prescribed to any religion, he was more spiritually-inclined. That's the perspective I'm looking at, that's the way I see it but I think that John was real influential in bringing this concept because most people say well "he was a religious musician". Well John wasn't a religious musician, he was a spiritual musician and he helped to re-conceptualize what that meant, to be a spiritual person and not be somebody who is

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didactic or professing to a particular religion and trying to proselytize. He was just saying, spirituality is my guiding force. I'm wondering if that was something that was shared in the band? Was it even discussed or was it just through the music?

**Tyner:** It wasn't about a discussion. I think it was just a matter of your point of view, your posture when it comes to religion, because he saw the validity in a lot of different religious concepts. It wasn't like this one is better than that or I'm going to join this and forget that way. I mean he peeped in the door of all of them, he was a Christian, he was with Naima for so many years so he saw the Islamic concept and he went into the different religions that exist. He saw that there was a time for doing them. That's it, it was a universal concept because they all exist, differently and in different ways, but they exist. I think that's a good approach, that way you don't get locked into one way of thinking and you stay there regardless. I think that is one thing I like about the Islamic faith is that we don't--I've been to Israel, I've been here I've been there, I've been to Russia, I've been all over and I saw the pyramids and you know all of these things are connected. That's the thing, it's all connected, I don't think one is better than the other, I think we live in a world that defines the fact that you have a right to believe in whatever you want to believe in and if you have conviction in that direction, fine. Who's to say you're wrong? Can they prove it? No.


**Brown:** What you've just said underscores to me and I think to other people who know his music, that when we describe John's universal approach to spirituality, it's reflected in his music.

**Tyner:** Yeah, that's right.

**Brown:** He's bringing in all of these influences, so when you're coming in the band the first year he's doing India, he's doing Africa and he makes a statement, he says, well you know for me my music is to create brotherhood to bring in a common understanding in the human condition. I'm paraphrasing him of course, but that music had that force in addition to the virtuosity and the sheer enchantment of that music. I mean you are captivated when you hear that quartet, but there is a spiritual base to it and maybe it's not completely tangible but it's there if you're open.

**Tyner:** Exactly, if you're open. That's a good phrase for it . . . well it's guided my wife and I.

**Aisha:** The spiritual side is definitely there. That's what makes it so beautiful you know, because we could have been created all the same but the reason is, the difference is so that you can know one another, not hate one another. And this is what man with ignorance, and people do. You

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know all flowers are different, every star is different-but you're absolutely right, the spirituality in many, most of the things that people do.

**Tyner:** Well, they're sending rocket ships and several things up in outer space, so that made me wonder. Not long from now we will be taking holidays up there and that would be nice. I don't think it would cost that much, I mean the actual trip might cost but you would be able to get a free lunch (laughs).

**Brown:** All I could say is it took me five hours to fly out here . . . I don't know how long it's going to take to fly out there (laughs). But anyway, it's inspiring to talk about advancements in technology and hopefully leading to a better understanding of who we are so we don't destroy this planet and destroy one another.

**Tyner:** I'll see you on Mars! (all laugh)

**Brown:** Yeah they'll ship us off to Mars.

**Tyner:** Pluto! (Both laugh)

**Brown:** I'm looking at this book, *The Great Jazz Pianist Speaking of their Lives and Music*, Len Lyons. He was asking you about technique and you said, well technique serves an inner motivation to express yourself.


**Tyner:** Yeah.

**Brown:** Again, I'm paraphrasing because I'm not looking directly at it. That's interesting because when you first study piano, I know, I did too, it's all about technique.

**Tyner:** Yes (laughs).

**Brown:** It's about technique and it's about repertoire but you say, well technique is to serve what you want to express.

**Tyner:** Yeah, that's true. I think that's important because just the idea of attaining technical ability--I'm not saying that it's not important, but it's the ideas that accompany the technique. How can you use that element, technique, to express those things that you have in your mind and in your spirit? I think that's what's important. Otherwise you just rely on your basic abilities to

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play the instrument, but you want to grow, so I think that's why John practiced all the time. He practiced whenever he could, he used to practice all day. He used to be on an airplane, he would be in the hotel, I would walk past his room and he would be practicing on his horn because he was hearing something and he had to articulate it.

**Aisha:** And he loved singers that's how he played ballads. Played so beautiful. You can hear it.


**Brown:** We just interviewed Jack DeJohnette a couple of weeks ago and he talked about performing with Coltrane and he said at one point he put down the horn and started vocalizing and beating on his chest.

**Aisha:** What year was that?

**Brown:** This was after Rashied was already in the group so it would be in '66. He said he ran out of ideas on the horn so he figured out ways of expressing himself without the horn and that's back to the vocal, he went back to the basic instrument. Obviously we look at the evolution of John's musical output and there is definitely this drive towards something. Maybe he didn't articulate it, but it was something that didn't seem to be cohesive to keeping the group together because I know Elvin talked about leaving and then you left.

**Tyner:** Yeah, because harmonically I think he was going some place else and I didn't want to play like Cecil Taylor or Sun Ra, I didn't want to play like that. I had my own concept of what I wanted to sound like, but he was hearing those kinds of things and I think it's great. I had studied certain avant-garde approaches and I played like that with him so I knew where he was going but I didn't want to stay in that. That was never going to be my final approach to my music. That was his final--maybe he was seeing something. He has every right to go where he wanted and I defended that right when people asked me about that, I said, "Well, he has the right to do what he wants to do, let him go over there." Like people that discovered America, they came here on a ship and then they realize, "Oh, here's California or here's the east coast first, Washington, Philadelphia or whatever." It's all there, you have the right to explore that. You never know what you're going to find, so I applied that to everything, psychologically to music, so I understood. Ornette was doing a lot of stuff and a lot of guys were playing like Cecil and that was fine, but I didn't want to play like Cecil. That's fine, I understood because I had some books and that kind of gave you an idea of what that was about.

**Brown:** Do you recall any of those books?

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**Tyner:** It was some piano books, stuff that wasn't fixation in terms of the chordal picture, you weren't locked into that. So I had to do it my way; like Billy Eckstine says, "My Way." "My Way", Frank did that, so I'm in with the guys (laughs).

**Aisha:** We had a guy in Philly, when they talk about Cecil, Hassan.

**Brown:** Oh, Hassan, Max did a trio record with him.

**Aisha:** Yes, he used to come to our house all the time. Eight o'clock in the morning and he would stay until my father got home from work and then we would leave and he would just be up in bed.

**Tyner:** He was in her neighborhood, North Philly. And her sister was a great singer so . . .

**Aisha:** He was doing that then.

**Brown:** Well and then Elvin felt similar to you in what he expressed, he said he went to John early on and said, "I don't really feel like I'm contributing to the music", he says "than it is going to be my time to go." I guess he was out in San Francisco and he said to John "you know I just don't feel like--


**Tyner:** He had to do what he had to do.

**Brown:** Right.

**Tyner:** And whether it was chordal in terms of the approach or not, I mean you can extract the chordal approach from anything when it's improvised music, because if you stop and slow down some of the stuff you can hear the sound of it and say, "Oh wow that sounds like a C minor", but superimposed on each other, so you can go in a lot of different directions. I don't feel limited, I feel like I'm expressing myself. Like we all do, you put on some earphones, you might hear something else from him, he might hear something else from you, nothing wrong with that, I don't think. I could be wrong (laughs), I'm trying to be liberal.

**Brown:** Like you were saying, it's not so much about the theory or the concept it's more of the sound I think is what you emphasize.

**Tyner:** Yeah, the sound. That's what you are. That's what we are.

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**Brown:** All vibration.

**Tyner:** We're vibrations, and vibrations make certain sounds. You hit a piece of glass, if it's broken it's going to make a different sound than a bottle. If it's got water in it, it will produce one sound and if the water level is down here, it's going to produce another sound.

**Brown:** But if we could speak at least somewhat technically because, yes we can talk about sound, the production of sound, what goes into the production of sound, but as musicians--and you're playing the piano so first of all it's fixed temperament, it's not like you could slide between notes.


**Tyner:** Yeah, I haven't tried that one yet (both laugh).

**Brown:** Go in and de-tune the piano while you're playing. But when somebody says, "Oh, McCoy Tyner"--as I was talking to Dr. Leonard Brown and he says, "well you know you put on any record and if it has Tyner on it, you are going to know within the first two or three notes." You know it's Tyner because of his touch, because of his approach to sound, his approach to the piano, but that's why I asked you so much about your early training. There was a series, I'm sure you are familiar with it, Steve Rowland did the five part series, *Tell Me How Long the Trane's Been Gone*. They talk about McCoy Tyner--and I teach at a university and we have to talk about what is technically happening. There is a spiritual dimension, there's a sonic dimension but technically, what's happening. You have talked about some of your influences, whether it's influences whether it's orchestration or just musical concepts. You mentioned Debussy, Ravel, and Stravinsky and I can definitely hear some of that language in your playing, but in this series, there is an episode in there where they're talking about the use of chordal, tetrachords, chordal and quintal kind of chordal structures, so getting away from the tertiary or stacking thirds. And then they mention Paul Hindemith.

**Tyner:** Hindemith, yeah.

**Brown:** Yeah and I haven't seen you mention him as an influence. I am just wondering if his music is something that influenced you?

**Tyner:** I don't think so. I studied Bach, Beethoven, and read some of Stravinsky, but I didn't get so involved that I wanted to copy them. I wanted to express myself and that's what I learned from playing with John and other musicians who were individualists; musicians who really had a

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direction they were going in. Even Monk you know, that was different, that's why I wrote songs for him. So I think that's important to find your own place. I don't regret playing European classical music, not at all, it's another direction you could go in and you can add that to your resume. But you don't want to stay there because the concept of improvised music is to keep improvising, keep going somewhere and see what you discover! That's what a person who is a discoverer does. He is all over, he's trying to find things that he can put stuff together and say, "Oh, that's why that maybe happened that way."


**Brown:** So if we follow your evolution, once you leave Trane and you said Bob Thiele encouraged you to do some recordings. So I presume that was the *Inception* recording with the McCoy Tyner trio. It says "Inception," but did you have a "conception" of where you wanted to go post Coltrane at that point, that early on?

**Tyner:** Yeah well, the thing is--not that I say I have figured it out because I don't do that so much--I'm not a technician to the point where I figure, "I'm going here, I'm going to do this". I just try to go in a direction that I think is right in contrast to what I've done. I don't want to do the same thing I did before. I try, I use the other thing as a stepping stone, the things that I've done prior to that.

**Brown:** So this first date, that's entitled--well I think it's been compilation because it's a CD release, but the original LP's, *Inception* and *Nights of Ballads and Blues* so these are your first two recordings as a leader on impulse. *Nights of Ballads and Blues* is recorded in April of '63. I'm trying to get the date of the recording of inception, but you were still with Trane, but the music you're performing here doesn't sound like the music you were playing with Trane.

**Tyner:** No, I didn't want to go directly in the same place he was going. I learned from playing that way because he was influenced by--I mean, he heard Ornette he heard Cecil, he heard a lot of people and he thought that's what he wanted to do. That might have been what he wanted to do but that's not what I wanted to do. I respected the both of them, but I respected myself for trying to do something that reflected my feelings and I think that you deserve that. Like when you write an article, you write a book, you write something, you want it to reflect what you think. You might admire other authors [and their] work, but that's not you. You can be influenced by them and I think that that's very important.

**Brown:** I think the historical record proves that in both your case and Elvin's case, when you both leave Trane and you become leaders, the music shows an influence from there, but it's not sounding anything like what Trane was doing in '65 when you all left.

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**Tyner:** Yeah, he had a right to go where he wanted to go, that was his right, but I didn't have to follow him. I didn't say, "Yes sir!" Like a soldier in the army. I used that as part of my growth. I learned from him because he was a very experimental guy and he came up with some brilliant ideas and that was wonderful, but I didn't want to say, "OK, let me play what I recorded with John three years ago." . . . It might end for you where for the other guy it might begin, like someplace where you're ending, moving on to another stage. That's what we're doing, we come and we go, but while we're here, maybe we can make a difference.

**Brown:** That's what we strive to do, endeavor to do, and hopefully we can make the world a better place for our kids and their kids.

**Tyner:** There it is, now you're talking . . . because we've got grandkids.

**Brown:** I do too. That becomes the defining force.

**Tyner:** That's right. They keep you focused don't they (laughs)?


**Aisha:** They sure do.

(End of CD2)

**Brown:** Today is December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and it's day two of the Smithsonian jazz oral history interview with NEA jazz master pianist, composer, arranger, bandleader, humanitarian and my hero, McCoy Tyner. Conducted by Anthony Brown with Ken Kimery and Aisha is here present as well. We are at the Blue Note club in New York and of course that's going to come up later in the interview, but I just want to greet Aisha and McCoy again and say, "Good afternoon."

**Tyner:** Thank you very much.

**Brown:** So we got through a lot of history yesterday. I would like to really focus on your role as a bandleader and your development as an artist, your artistic vision, the different kinds of projects that you undertook that show development, evolution, and progression in your career. I do want to come back and look at a couple of projects you did while you were still with Coltrane, and we have talked about your first recording as a leader, *Inception* for the Impulse label. In your early projects as a leader you were leading trios, if I look at *Inception* and *McCoy Tyner plays Ellington*--so you were basically focusing on that format as a leader, and then after you

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leave Trane we see an expansion of your role as a composer and arranger. I do want to look at not only these projects, but also look at some projects you got involved with either as a sideman or not as a leader upon your departure from Coltrane. When I look at the Grove Dictionary entry, there is a mention of you touring with Art Blakey and his Jazz Messengers and those included a tour in Japan in 1966 and 1967 and that was with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, is that accurate?

**Tyner:** Yeah that's right. I had a chance to spend some time with him. I met him earlier, after I left John and he wanted me to work with him. We sort of became friends, I admired his work. He said, "Why don't you come join us, there is a period here and I don't have a band and I'd like you to join my situation." I said, "Well I would love to do that," because I knew he had a lot of history under his belt and I knew I would be able to learn from him as I did playing with John. That was a wonderful thing. It was really interesting, I really enjoyed it, but I told him, when John left Miles, whenever he leaves Miles you know, I committed myself because when Miles asks him to come back and play with him or whatever I said, "Well it would be wonderful" to play with him on a steady basis. The rest is kind of history.

**Brown:** Well their discography doesn't reflect any recordings, do you recall any recordings, or maybe some of the personnel that were in the band while you were with them?

**Tyner:** That's a good question, it's been years ago.

**Aisha:** Jinnie Booth, Wayne Shorter.


**Brown:** Wayne was in the band? Oh, so while he was with Miles he played with Blakey?

**Aisha:** He did some tours with him, I know Jinnie was there.

**Tyner:** What was the name of the saxophone player? I'm trying to think of his name.

**Aisha:** He went to Japan but also went to California. I'm not sure exactly who was there when he went to Japan. I travelled with you (Tyner) when we went to California, not Japan, I went to Japan later, but Jinnie and who else?

**Tyner:** I'm trying to think who was playing Saxophone in the band. He was a young guy you know, not really experienced. I'm trying to think of his name. He was there for a while.

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**Aisha:** But I don't think there was any recordings.

**Brown:** No I didn't see any. OK, that's fine but at least you corroborated that you did work and toured with Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, that's good.

**Tyner:** I'm glad she's here. She's got a good memory.

**Brown:** I'm going to break with my own chronology and return to this album here, *McCoy Tyner plays Ellington* only because we know that Duke Ellington looms large in any jazz musician's concept. So maybe talk about your relationship with Duke's music and if you had a personal relationship with Duke.

**Tyner:** I didn't have a personal relationship with Duke but I admired his music so much. That's why I wanted to do this project of his music, because he is an icon in our music and a great man, a gentleman, very dignified and down to earth at the same time, it's amazing. He did a lot for American jazz and the African-American experience in music and I'm glad that he gets the credit that he was justly was due.

**Brown:** Did you ever get a chance to actually meet him, or talk with him?

**Tyner:** Yeah I think I met him once. I went to see him and I met him because I knew some of the guys . . . it wasn't Thad because he was with Count Basie's band, but I think we were on some shows opposite his band. The meeting was very short when I did meet him, I shook his hand, something like that, but I didn't really have a chance to sit down and talk with him which I would have enjoyed doing, but a lot of people wanted to talk to Duke Ellington (both laugh); I wasn't by myself . . .


**Brown:** Aisha were you going to say something?

**Aisha:** No, I was just going to say he really liked Duke.

**Tyner:** Yeah he recorded a lot of his music.

**Aisha:** And then John did the one with Duke, he didn't get to that date.

**Tyner:** Oh that's right, I didn't get to that date, that was with Duke and--

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**Brown:** Were you scheduled to be on that date?

**Aisha:** No.

**Brown:** But you probably wanted to go check it out? (laughs)

**Tyner:** (laughs) Yeah. I knew some people who were in Duke's band but I didn't really get a chance to meet him. I knew Stevie was Duke's nephew.

**Brown:** Yeah, Steve Ellington.

**Tyner:** Yeah, I knew him, because he loved Elvin. He played drums and he would come see Elvin. That's where I met him.

**Brown:** Elvin said when he left Duke's band that he got a call to join Duke in a matter of weeks in Europe. I think it was Steve, I'm not sure, but he got a call that said, "Duke wants you in the band . . . When? Now!" So when he left John he went to Duke (both laugh).

**Tyner:** Yeah, Duke was a school. How can you define a man with that kind of stature?

**Brown:** So again, looking at your discography, to look at those projects that are demonstrative of your growth as a musician, as an artist, I'm looking at *Tender Moments* recorded in 1967 and this one has a larger ensemble, your using more brass instruments. What was the inspiration for this project?


**Tyner:** Can you give me a few names?

**Brown:** Oh sure. Lee Morgan trumpet, Julian Priester trombone, James Spaulding alto saxophone and flute, Bennie Maupin--Tenor Sax, Bob Northern--French horn, Howard Johnson--Tuba, Yourself, Herbie Lewis--Bass, and Joe Chambers on Drums.

**Tyner:** Yeah, I enjoyed.

**Brown:** And then some of the titles, "Mode to John", "Man from Tanganyika", "The High Priest", "Utopia, All My Yesterdays", "Lee Plus Three" (both laugh).

**Tyner:** Yeah, he was such a nice guy, what a personality.

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**Aisha:** “Man from Tanganyika”, tell him why you wrote that. You know who it was for? He was involved in government. He used to come to hear the music he was some type of official with the governor, Tanganyika, yeah.


**Tyner:** So I think that’s why I wrote that composition.

**Brown:** Well we're going to see your music and your titles reflect more influences from Africa, particularly when we get to *Sahara*. I’ll just quote from the liner notes written by Leonard Feather, and this is you speaking, “This marks my first endeavor in doing this much writing. I’ve been doing some reading about orchestration and I felt that an album of this kind would represent an extension of my feeling in music beyond what I have accomplished with smaller combinations.” So there you have already documented what was the impetus, what was the inspiration to do this, but you said you had been doing some reading on orchestration or some study. Do you recall--

**Tyner:** Well, I think that I was looking at some books about orchestration; I don’t remember exactly what they were . . . and then also the physical aspect of actually sitting down and writing things. I had some inspiration from writing for smaller ensembles and I used that information from my personal experience to see what I could do. Instead of having two trumpets I might have three or four, you know like that, and then I formed a big band and Lee did a recording with us and that was nice. We knew each other from Philly and then got to be friends and musical companions. Then of course his experience working with Art and everything like that, he had a big sound. There were some other guys who joined my big band which was a lot of fun, I enjoyed writing for that. I was in the process of learning how to write for a large ensemble and the only way you do that is to actually do it. You can go to school and study, but actually writing those parts down and seeing what the voicing’s sound like. Did the best I could under the circumstances (laughs).

**Brown:** And then I’m holding in my hand now, McCoy Tyner, and this is a Blue Note re-issue, *Cosmos*. And this also has expanded ensembles insofar as beyond the trio and quartet format, I’m looking at “Asian Lullaby” and “Hope.”. Yourself, Herbie Lewis, Freddie Waits, Gary Bartz, which was a long-term association, Hubert Laws--

**Tyner:** Yeah, I like Hubert because he played in the symphony orchestra. He could sit down and play anything, he could play jazz, he could play classics, he was just so flexible and his tone was phenomenal and he was a gentleman, impeccable person, I really liked that.

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**Brown:** Seems you were in good company.

**Tyner:** (laughs) that's important.

**Brown:** You were in that number, and then Andrew White was on this on oboe and Andrew is a story in himself because I know he played with Elvin's group and Ken and I saw him in Germany. Andrew is a real character.

**Tyner:** Well, that's what some of us are (laughs) and some of us hope that we're not (laughs).

**Brown:** This period seems to be one where you're, you know Blue Note, Impulse, record labels, but Woody Shaw recalled that there was a lot of difficulty in getting work at this period in time. One of the biographies I researched said that you had actually played with Ike and Tina Turner during this period, is that correct?

**Tyner:** That's a big mistake.

**Brown:** A big mistake, OK?

**Tyner:** I forgot my tap shoes (laughs).

**Brown:** (laughs) I just thought you were returning to your R&B roots because that's where you started.

**Tyner:** Yeah, that's where I started.


**Aisha:** We heard that before.

**Brown:** See that's what we want to do, clear the record.

**Tyner:** Yeah, that was a mistake.

**Brown:** So that is a mistake, that is inaccurate.

**Tyner:** Tyner and Turner are two different . . . (laughs)

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**Brown:** (Laughs) so you think it was just a mistake of the names?

**Tyner:** I would have to change my name to Ike (both laugh)

**Brown:** “Ike Tyner.”

**Tyner:** Ike Tyner! (laughs)

**Brown:** OK, well I’m glad we cleared that up, but I do have a quote from Woody Shaw saying that there was a lack of work at this time because he was working in your group and I guess he said jokingly that they called your band the “starvation band.” I guess times were pretty hard at that point?

**Aisha:** What year was that?

**Brown:** Well I would say this is around late 60’s early 70’s before you got with Milestone, because Milestone, that launches a whole other epoch in your career.

**Tyner:** Yeah, Orrin [Keepnews] was a good guy.

**Brown:** So we’ll talk about that, but was that accurate? It was a rough time.

**Aisha:** Paying dues.

**Tyner:** She remembers that vividly (laughs).


**Aisha:** That’s right.

**Tyner:** [To Aisha] I’m sorry (laughs)!

**Brown:** And one other quote said that he was entertaining the idea of driving a cab. I know Sunny Murray went back to Philadelphia and drove a cab too so I thought, well maybe this-

**Tyner:** The tips are great (both laugh).

**Brown:** And you can call your own hours.

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**Tyner:** Exactly (laughs) No, I actually didn't get that involved with the cab driving, it was a thought.

**Aisha:** No, you didn't do it.

**Tyner:** Yeah, it was just a thought.

**Aisha:** You know that's a part of life.


**Brown:** Oh sure, up and down, just like the ocean. So let's talk about the high wave now, because when you get to Milestone and you're working with Orrin, that seems to be when things really start to take off, *Sahara* gets the Grammy nomination. So let's talk about how that relationship came to be with Orrin and Milestone because he was already in California by then.

**Tyner:** Yeah, he was with Fantasy, he was doing some producing with them and that's when I met him. He did some recording for Art Farmer, so he was on the scene, a lot of people knew him—he also produced Monk.

**Brown:** Yeah, Monk, Bill Evans, Wes Montgomery, Cannonball Adderley—Riverside Records.

**Tyner:** Yeah, he was a great producer, great producer, worked with a lot of artists and with guys that were history-making. That's what I like about him, a lot of experience in that direction. He enjoyed working with the artists, creative people. I enjoyed working with Orrin, it was quite an experience, especially when you're working with someone who has had a history of working with jazz artists. He would work with artists like Monk and be tolerant, I don't mean tolerant in a bad way, but he knew his personality; Monk might be playing, get up from the piano and go out, go around the block, come back you know, he was like that, that was his personality. So he was able to deal with all the idiosyncrasies that the artists had. He is a good guy, I really like Orrin.

**Brown:** So a very fruitful relationship, so I noticed that during this time with Milestone and working with Orrin seems to be a blossoming in a lot of different directions so we already see that you're going into orchestration in 1967 and this really gets developed in your tenure with Milestone, so let's look at this chronologically starting with *Sahara*. We talked earlier, I think Aisha mentioned, yeah you played Koto so I'm going to be interested in that, so how did that come about? Was that your suggestion or was that Orrin?

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**Tyner:** Well I've been to Japan and I brought a Koto back with me, we have it in the living room; we still have it right?

**Aisha:** Yeah.

**Tyner:** I like the sound of it. It was considered the Japanese piano before they started making pianos themselves. I enjoyed it, and I heard a lot of it when I was in Japan, so it was fascinating. Fooling around with it, I would pluck it. I didn't study the instrument so I couldn't say I was going to play it. I use it on some recordings on the intro. Anyway, it was very fruitful experimenting with different things.

**Brown:** So I look at your long tenure, a lot of your projects you bring EJ, Elvin Jones back in, there's that sympatico, that very close relationship you have with him. When I think of *Sahara*, now you have Alphonse Mouzon.

**Tyner:** Yeah (laughs) he was quite a character, he was a good guy. He was a character in a lot of ways, I liked him, he was eccentric, but it was good, he didn't mind trying things. You know, he'd say, "I got an idea," he would jump in there and do it, you know, he was very musical in his own way. There were times maybe, I didn't restrict him but, "Chill here a little bit, we'll work on it and get it." He was willing to work with you, he wasn't the kind of guy that was like, "Well my way is the best way," he wouldn't do that in anyway to me, he had too much respect. But he was a nice guy and he worked with Chick and some other people--

**Brown:** Weather Report.


**Tyner:** Weather Report, that's right, Joe Zawinul.

**Brown:** Yeah, and Wayne.

**Tyner:** Right, so he had a lot of . . . he was very musical he really was. He was a nice guy he had a lot of respect.

**Brown:** He's from South Carolina so he's got to be a nice guy.

**Tyner:** Yeah, well my people are from North Carolina.

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**Brown:** There you go, the Carolina's

**Tyner:** Only a few miles away (laughs).

**Brown:** So with *Sahara* you get some national, critical recognition. You get a Grammy nomination, Azar Lawrence is in the group, is Jiunie Booth? Who was the bass player at that time? I could look it up but-

**Tyner:** I'm not sure.

**Brown:** Because when we get to-and then Azar Lawrence- because when we get to this album, this album changed my life when I heard this when we get to *Enlightenment*, that's the Quartet, Azar Lawrence, Jiunie Booth, and Alphonse Mouzon and this one of course was recorded in Montreux. I think I actually saw the footage of this and that's what turned me out, I had to go buy the album when I saw this on TV, I think I saw this on PBS and I said, "Oohh-wee."

**Tyner:** Well, I'm glad you enjoyed it.

**Brown:** This one [*Atlantis*] unfortunately, Alphonse had left by this time and this was recorded live at the Keystone Corner--probably one of the nights I wasn't there.


**Tyner:** Alphonse was very flamboyant, he liked for you to watch him when he was playing. "Yeah, comb your hair later, watch me" (laughs). No, I shouldn't document that on tape, that's not nice, he might get mad.

**Brown:** So he left, for whatever reason, I don't know if that is something you want to discuss, but Wilby Fletcher is on *Atlantis* which is your next record; and these are both live albums so I think they capture that energy and that spirit and just that sheer force of the music. I've seen you live a lot of times at Great American Music Hall or Keystone or wherever and just to see you live is such a presence, such an exhilarating presence and these albums seem to capture that. Orrin is smart to go out and record you in your element.

**Tyner:** He was a good producer.

**Aisha:** Excellent.

**Tyner:** Wasn't he excellent? Who was his wife?

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**Aisha:** Lucy.

**Brown:** Oh Lucy, right.

**Tyner:** He had a good relationship with his family, but he was a great producer.

**Aisha:** He knew the music.


**Tyner:** Yeah, he definitely knew the music. He had recorded a lot of people.

**Brown:** So while you're with the Milestone label and you have this great working relationship with Orrin, you really start to expand, you start to go beyond the quartet and of course we just talked about *Enlightenment* and *Atlantis* really featuring your quartet, a working group, real solid, a very cohesive unit. Other recordings coming up in the year, so *Atlantis* in '75 and then in '76, *Focal Point* and on this one you had a variety of players, but what was important for me was you bring in Eric Gravatt on drums.

**Tyner:** Yeah, Eric (laughs).

**Brown:** So can we talk a little about Eric? Because it seems like you had Alphonse Mouzon coming out of Weather Report and when Alphonse left Weather Report, Eric Gravatt came in. Alphonse leaves your group and you have Wilby Fletcher for a minute, then all of the sudden here comes Eric Gravatt, and then Eric Gravatt keeps appearing later on. So let's talk about that relationship with Eric.

**Tyner:** Eric is a fellow Philadelphian and he had a good reputation. He was with Weather Report with Joe Zawinul, but as a person I really enjoyed having him in the band. He was very creative rhythmically. I mean he studied African music so he could play any of those rhythms from any of those tribes in Africa. He was very ethnically orientated, so that was great because I liked the African rhythms as well, so we kind of came together and we created an atmosphere rhythmically and harmonically as well because he was a good listener and he responded very well, that's what I liked about him. Some drummers are trying to--but he knew African rhythms, he knew them, so it worked out well. I enjoyed having him in my band and as a friend, he's a very nice guy, very nice person; very respectful. Him and Joe got along very well, Joe was a great musician so it was a good marriage.

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**Brown:** Now when you say Joe, are you talking about Joe Zawinul or Joe Ford?

**Tyner:** Joe Zawinul, oh yeah that's right, we got a lot of Joe's here (laughs). This Joe that Joe.

**Aisha:** Wilby passed.

**Brown:** Oh is that what happened?

**Aisha:** Yes, Wilby passed recently, but you also liked Wilby a lot.

**Tyner:** Yeah, Wilby Fletcher.

**Brown:** Yeah he's featured on *Atlantis*. So he had to come behind Alphonse . . . I mean that's a hard act to follow, I know.

**Tyner:** Yeah Alphonse was very dramatic.

**Brown:** But Wilby held his own, I mean he's right there and then Eric comes in.

**Tyner:** Yeah.

**Brown:** So on this album *Focal Point* you have an expanded front line. You have Gary Bartz, and Joe Ford on reeds, and also Ron Bridgewater, I guess he is related to Cecil and Dee Dee.


**Aisha:** That's his brother, Cecil's Brother.

**Brown:** And then Charles Fambrough on bass, so you keep expanding, now you've got a broadened front line coming out of this. And then when we get to *Inner Voices*, now this one also is a departure so, composed and arranged by McCoy Tyner plus horns and voices, so what was the inspiration for this project?

**Tyner:** Is there a lot of voices on there? *Inner Voices*. Yeah I guess that's why I named it like that.

**Aisha:** Bill Fischer did that.

**Tyner:** Bill, Yeah

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**Brown:** Yeah, conductor.

**Tyner:** It was good working with him, he knew how to deal with different types of ensembles, vocal things, instrumental situations, he was very developed in that way, conducting.

**Brown:** A project like this, did you have an idea and then took it to Orrin, or did Orrin bring an idea to you? How was that? I imagine it was a very fluid relationship?

**Tyner:** Yeah we had a good relationship and we sort of let one project be a gauge in which to do something else. I think I did some things with strings and some things with vocals was a good departure, but related in some ways. I guess I had my way of not necessarily letting one particular situation dominate the other. If I used horns then I would maybe add voices to it and I liked that, or strings, whatever. I try to come up with different combinations to make it good for me too, give me . . .

**Aisha:** You and Bill worked well together.


**Tyner:** Yeah, Bill Fischer and I worked very well . . .

**Aisha:** He knew voices, and Orrin, all three. Yeah because he (Bill) was close to Orrin too.

**Tyner:** He (Bill) did great conducting.

**Brown:** Let's go back to--well we are going to talk about *Fly With the Wind*--but also *Song for the New World* because I remember that one also expanding, more orchestral, and Alphonse is on that one; also another landmark album. I'm looking at McCoy Tyner starting as a leader doing piano trios and then continuing to expand, adding horns, changing concepts, adding voices, so there seems to be this constant search and continuing to go beyond the comfort zone.

**Tyner:** What I liked about working with Orrin was that he looked forward to that. If you had something--I could call him and say, "Hey Orrin, I was thinking about this, so and so" and he would get back to me and we would talk more and more about it and then we start picking out the instrumentation. He was that kind of guy, he would work with you, not opposed to you doing something and then he'd say, "Ah I like this better." He was the kind of guy, he would consider what you were doing and he would work with you and we would get the personnel

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together; and Hubert could play any kind of music, you could play symphonic music, a lot of different stuff.

**Brown:** So on this album *Inner Voices*, some tracks have Eric Gravatt, some tracks have Jack DeJohnette. Now we've talked about Jack, and he's going to keep coming back up because he keeps coming back into the fold, just like Elvin, and Eric Gravatt comes back. So you had this special relationship with drummers. I guess because on the piano that left hand is another drum.

**Tyner:** I had to fire the left hand because it was dominating (laughs). I'm sorry, but I like to laugh. He's a good guy.

**Aisha:** Watch out for that plant behind you.

**Tyner:** Oh, gee wiz.

**Brown:** That's OK, don't worry about it. Don't worry about that plant, it's not going anywhere . . . it's not even alive (laughs). Maybe it is but I think it's going to be OK. Again, I would be remiss if I didn't mention *Fly With The Wind* because strings . . . orchestrating for strings. We both know, as an arranger myself, that's a different animal writing for strings. So how did you prepare for a project like that?


**Tyner:** I wanted to do something like that and I think I mentioned that to . . .

**Aisha:** When he did the strings on *Fly With The Wind*, Bill did that didn't he?

**Tyner:** Yeah Bill Fischer, because Bill's experience was very broad.

**Aisha:** He's from Louisiana.

**Brown:** Oh, OK, so I need to do some more homework on William Fischer. When I think of some of the other projects that you did going into the '70's, now we're kind of in the mid '70's, and there's a project that really caught my ear at the time and I came back to revisit it and that was *Trident* because here you're not only back in the trio format with Elvin Jones again, but here you are also exploring some other sounds, in this case the harpsichord and the celeste. Was that your idea too? Was that one of those, "Yeah I'd like to try this" or were they just in the studio, or was this preconceived, how did this come about?

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**Tyner:** Well I wanted to do something in contrast to what I had been doing and you know harpsichord, they were keyboard instruments so I figured I would try something different. I enjoyed it actually. I was very open, if the producer said something I didn't agree with I would let him know that's not the idea I had in mind. I wasn't super egotistical, or trying to put my point across no matter what happened. I wanted to balance things out. I didn't want to do something I did two projects behind. I wanted to do something different and the way of doing that is to try to come up with new ideas. That's why I liked Hubert because he could play all kinds of music, he could play jazz, he worked with symphony orchestras. I like guys like that, and it helped because I studied myself, certain composers and I had books on different European composers, it was nice.

**Brown:** I know I mentioned earlier, because my research found that you mentioned of course the impressionists Debussy and Ravel, and Stravinsky. Were there any other composers that caught your ear? Maybe Bela Bartok or anybody else? I know you played Bach and Beethoven, all the piano repertoire, but as far as orchestration.

**Tyner:** I didn't get too involved in the concepts of some of the composers, it was a little bit out there for me and I didn't want my music to stretch in that direction. I didn't want to read somebody's music to the point where you could hear these guys in my playing, I didn't particularly want that. Some of them are very very interesting to play. I didn't want to get technical, "Oh man he played something here that I remember from my book." No, I didn't want to do that, because this music is a very creative art form and I wanted to keep the creativity going and not necessarily be a guy that studied and-I mean I studied, I didn't mind that, had a good teacher-but I didn't want to get too involved in the technical side of it.

**Brown:** Now when you say you studied and had a good teacher, did you study with someone for orchestration and arranging?

**Tyner:** Not for orchestration. That was, "get in there, give it a good shot, and hope for the best." I had books that give you the range of instruments, which is important. You don't want to write something out of the range of an instrument, having him playing in a register that he is struggling and straining to be in. You want to put them in a range that they are comfortable in and then if you go beyond that, something like that, do it in a minimal way. As opposed to having a guy screeching for high C two octaves above where he would, you know, give it to the strings or something else that can do it.



**Brown:** I'm going to just backtrack because we are talking about orchestration and arranging and I know that Eric Dolphy was credited for arranging the *Africa/Brass* session when in fact I know that it was your arrangement and Eric did the orchestration based on your arrangement so just wanted to verify, is that the case?

**Tyner:** Yeah he didn't write arrangements for me, but he had good ideas if I wanted to know something about flute or anything, I could ask him and the range--I never wanted a guy to struggle you know, playing two or three octaves above what he could do. Eric had a lot of experience playing different kinds of music and I tried to get guys that had that kind of ability, they play other music that taught them something and I would ask them, "If I do that, and I put it a C above C, how high or whatever" and he would tell me one way or another whether or not that would be comfortable.

**Brown:** Now we interviewed Bobby earlier and he talked about Eric because they're both from Los Angeles

**Aisha:** Bobby Hutcherson?

**Brown:** Yeah, Bobby Hutcherson.


**Aisha:** That's his (McCoy) buddy.

**Brown:** We're going to talk about that, but could we talk a little bit more, because Bobby talked very highly of Eric as a person, not just as a musician, although that was above any critique. I mean he was definitely a musician's musician, but as a person that seemed to impress Bobby and I think John talked about Eric, about his personality. Did you have a good-

**Tyner:** Yeah he had a sense of humor as well. He was a nice man, really really good man and a great musician.

**Brown:** Well you know I'm from California, we're (Ken and I) from California so Eric, you know Eric and Mingus and Ornette you know those are our folks. You got Philadelphia, that's all we got is California.

**Aisha:** And Bobby Hutcherson, yes.

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**Brown:** Let me just pull that out for the record (*Manhattan Moods*), this is one of my favorites. I play along with this record because there is no drummer, I get to be the drummer with Bobby Hutcherson and McCoy Tyner.

**Tyner:** Oh yeah, Bobby. Look at that smile! That smile is captivating.

**Brown:** Yeah. So I want to go back to the comment you said about exploring and bringing in other influences. We know John Coltrane reflected that in his music as well as in his titles.

**Tyner:** That's why he got Eric in the band.

**Brown:** I'm sorry?

**Tyner:** I think that's one reason he got Eric to play with us for a while.

**Brown:** Because?


**Tyner:** I think because of his ability to stretch out and the fact that he had multiple experiences playing European music and so I think that his musicality was pretty broad in that respect. He was learning a lot playing with John as well, you have somebody at that level. It was really nice because his foundation was more European classical thing and John's was different, but the two came together, he was able to do that. John liked the sounds that Eric would get--Eric would get sounds out of the horn and that flute that were . . . different (laughs) you know.

**Aisha:** Yeah he did. He did "Aisha" when John recorded it, Eric's solo on there.

**Tyner:** So if we could look at some of the other inspirations and extensions of your music, the other influences, again I was referencing Africa, *Sahara*, "Man From Tanganyika" although they are, as you said earlier, some direct references to that and direct inspiration, but now you talked about Eric Gravatt having studied African rhythms. Now did you also study African music and if so, what types and how?

**Tyner:** Well the thing is, I'm trying to think . . . Saka Eque.

**Aisha:** Saka Eque. Yeah you, Saka Eque and Bobby Crowder, yeah they had a good school. Johnny Hines had a dance school and he played conga drums for a while and Garvin Masseaux.

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**Tyner:** And I studied a little bit of dancing myself. I didn't want to mention that.

**Brown:** Well please do, that's important (laughs).

**Aisha:** (Laughs) He did.

**Tyner:** I did some ballet and African . . . we had some people from Africa that taught African dancing. They needed some male dancers so I volunteered (Aisha and McCoy laugh). [To Aisha ] Well, you could dance that's the thing, you studied dancing.

**Brown:** Did you all dance together at any point?

**Aisha:** I dance with him now (laughs).

**Brown:** Oh OK.

**Aisha:** No we didn't dance together.

**Tyner:** See at my age I can't keep up with her, so it works out fine (laughs) and I won't embarrass anybody (laughs).

**Aisha:** But I think that helped to do the conga drumming. The rhythms, too that he does with the left [hand].

**Tyner:** But she danced very well. It helps when you have somebody like that in your life-


**Aisha:** African influence.

**Tyner:** African influence, and there were some other people . . .

**Aisha:** Saka Eque, Bobby Crowder-

**Tyner:** Yeah the drummers, and of course, what's his name . . . from Nigeria, conga player Babatunde Olatunji.

**Brown:** Yeah, *Drums of Passion*.

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**Aisha:** Yeah and he had the school in Harlem when we used to go because Coltrane used to give donations for that place. Olatunji and Amy was his wife.

**Brown:** Is she still alive?

**Aisha:** I think they moved to Georgia or somewhere a while back.

**Brown:** So Babatunde is still alive?

**Aisha:** I don't know.

**Brown:** Oh OK, I'll research that. So let's continue because you're going to be switching up on labels but we're going to look at the rest of the Milestone because again, it was a very fruitful period. You're now back out there, nobody is going to say this is the "starvation band" because you're working, you get very prolific.

**Tyner:** Starvation band (laughs).

**Brown:** (Laughs) Well that was Woody Shaw.

**Tyner:** I seem to have lost a little weight.


**Aisha:** Woody could play too.

**Brown:** Oh yeah, I loved Woody. Woody and Lee.

**Tyner:** Yeah those two guys.

**Brown:** So the inspiration behind this album that I'm holding in my hand, 1977 *Super Trios*, boy you got the killers, Ron Carter and Tony Williams. So you got that rhythm section and then on the other side you've got Eddie Gomez and Jack DeJohnette, there's Jack again, Jack is there, Jack is back. So, your idea to do this, Orrin's idea?

**Tyner:** I think it was a combination--I never let anybody make a total decision to use this guy, he can come up with a suggestion, but I make the final decision. I always wanted to do that because I'm physically playing with the guy so I never hire a guy to do a recording with me unless I get a chance to play with him or I've hear him or something like that. Most of the

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people I usually had the experience of, we rehearsed together you know, something like that or if I heard him with another band and said, “Oh that guy really sounds interesting, interesting ideas,” that’s the way I usually work.

**Brown:** And then another one of those, this one I got to ask about too is the *Milestone Jazz All Stars* another one of those, I mean I consider these super groups, super trio’s but then you have the quartet in concert, this is from 1978.

**Tyner:** Who’s on that?

**Brown:** This was Sonny Rollins, yourself, Ron Carter, and Al Foster. So I don’t know if you have any recollection of how this came together.

**Tyner:** I think Orrin had something to do with it.

**Aisha:** I think Orrin did that.

**Brown:** For like a Milestone label All-Stars.

**Aisha:** We toured during that album.

**Brown:** And how was the tour? How was that working in this aggregation?

**Tyner:** It was good.

**Aisha:** Yeah it was good.


**Brown:** Because in your discography not that many, if any other dates with Sonny, so that relationship with Sonny.

**Tyner:** Well Sonny was, yeah and also with [inaudible]

**Aisha:** Well, they knew each other from Philly.

**Tyner:** From Philly, yeah because I played with him actually when he came to Philly.

**Aisha:** When they come over on Rampart Street.

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**Tyner:** Yeah, that's where Aisha was born. Her sister was--

**Aisha:** Even with Dizzy, because him and Dizzy were playing together, him and Jackie McLean did it before, you know they recorded anything up until they did *It's About Time*. Jackie had one of those songs played at his funeral, but they had never done a lot of things together.

**Brown:** OK, I'm going to backtrack a little bit only because I'm reminded of this quartet I'm thinking-

**Aisha:** But Orrin did do that.

**Brown:** Yes, definitely, yeah he is producer, but I'm going to backtrack to this date and I bring this up because we're going to go back to *New York Reunion*-well before I do that let's talk about Al Foster, how was working with Al Foster? How was he chosen to be on this date as opposed to-


**Tyner:** I liked Al a lot. I think he worked with Miles for a while, but he was a natural player, his feeling you know, and he could swing. He was nice guy, every time you see him, he's smiling.

**Brown:** Yeah, he's got that Billy Higgins.

**Tyner:** Yeah, (laughs), so you could tell he loved what he was doing and it was reflected in his performances. Also his soloing was very creative and I liked that about him. I don't know what else I could say that would be pertinent to what we're talking about, but like I said, very creative guy. The thing is creativity has to be supported, you have to be able to listen in order to accompany somebody who might be very creative. You might want to throw a rhythm in there-like I liked conga playing but I stopped because like I said, I kept hitting the rim of the conga drum and it was kind of hurting I said, "No, I can't do that", but it was nice you know. I like playing with drummers who play that instrument and those who have a good knowledge of rhythms, I like that.

**Brown:** Another album recorded live, again Orrin really mining what he knew was a strength.

**Aisha:** Yeah, Orrin was a musicians' producer, he knew musicians and their music.

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**Brown:** So this one recorded in San Francisco at the Great American Music Hall entitled *The Meeting* and this one—there we go another one of those great drummers Sonship. Woody Theus on drums who recently passed.

**Aisha:** He was a good . . . he did pass?

**Brown:** A year or two ago because I know James Newton was working with him and he sent me a message.

**Aisha:** Because Charles Fambrough earlier this year, yeah and Wilby, but I didn't know Sonship had.

**Brown:** And this one you had George Adams, Joe Ford, Charles Fambrough, and Sonship. Now I bring this one up not only because it was a great album and very influential for me, but when I review your discography this one is unfortunately not listed. Well it's in there but it's listed as 1963 so was there another album that was recorded called "The Meeting," or "The Greeting?" That was just on your website.

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

**Brown:** That's on your website, so I'm just bringing that up so that whoever is your web master might want to change that because they got this album cover and they have it listed as released in 1963 so I just want to make sure that that's something I bring to your attention.

**Tyner:** Yeah I wonder who would do that.

**Brown:** Because it's definitely not from '63, and it's listed as a trio date.


**Tyner:** Really?

**Brown:** Yeah.

**Aisha:** But it's not?

**Brown:** No, but that's just one of those things that's just a technical issue.

**Aisha:** Thank's for bringing that up, it's good to have it corrected.

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**Brown:** Yeah, we want to make sure it's right. And then later on I want to talk about--because Jack and all of these people keep coming back into your life and you're bringing them back in and they want to be with you. So there is the album called *New York Reunion* where Joe Henderson comes back. I didn't mean to leave this out, but for me, and I think for any person who follows your music, *The Real McCoy* which we were talking about off mic before we actually started the interview, for me, was very influential. I think that this is one of those albums that when people think of McCoy Tyner . . . they always come back to this.

**Tyner:** Yeah that's right. Joe Henderson?

**Brown:** Yeah, Joe Henderson, Ron Carter, and Elvin. Ron is already in the mix early on--this is going to lead me to another question, but "Passion Dance", "Search for Peace", "Four by Five", I mean these have all become . . . "Blues on the Corner", these have all become standards. If you're coming up studying jazz in college you're going to be playing something off of this recording, it's part of the canon.

**Tyner:** Yeah, "Blues on the Corner" I told you was named for these guys.

**Brown:** For your neighborhood.

**Tyner:** Yeah for the neighbors, they hung on the corner. I told you, I told my sister I wrote a song, I recorded something and she said, "You didn't miss my name did you?" I said, "Yeah" (both laugh).


**Brown:** So I bring this up now, we're going to come back to this because you have the *New York Reunion* and Joe, but this relationship with Joe, Joe is very special, very special horn player, lived out in the Bay Area. That's not the only reason why I bring him up.

**Aisha:** Joe Henderson was.

**Brown:** Yeah.

**Aisha:** Is . . . was

**Brown:** was, yeah.

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**Aisha:** Our older son, when he first met Joe, he said Joe’s name everyday three or four times a day.

**Tyner:** “Joe Henderson”

**Aisha:** “Joe Henderson”, “Joe Henderson”, he was little, but that name stayed in his head. He loved that sound, “Joe Henderson”. We were laughing about that a couple of weeks ago. He was like two, but he heard him play and we would say the name and he repeated it over and over.

**Tyner:** Yeah, “Joe Henderson.”

**Brown:** What was it about his playing that--

**Aisha:** He liked.

**Brown:** Yeah.

**Tyner:** I have no idea, in baby terms I can’t say like “Ga ga, goo, goo”.


**Brown:** I’m talking about you. What was it that . . . if you could talk about Joe Henderson.

**Tyner:** Joe was a great thinker in terms of improvisation and he had a great sound, he had a distinguished sound. I could tell him from any other, like I could with John. Joe was a nice guy on top of it. Harmonically he was very, very intelligent, when it came to harmony and theory, he studied, but that didn’t affect his playing, he just had a natural way of playing, that was great.

**Brown:** I’m just going to drop in another, I didn’t want to bring up facets of your career as a sidemen, but since I have returned back to the Blue Note era, I want to talk about at least the two albums that you made with Wayne Shorter that, like *The Real McCoy*, those are ones that all the students who play jazz have to come up . . . *Ju Ju*, you have to play that, and then Elvin is back in. Wayne was smart, he was obviously influenced by Trane, because Miles says, “Well I got Wayne because he sounds so much like John”, and then what does Wayne do, he goes and gets John’s rhythm section when he starts recording. He’s smart, he’s a smart man.

**Aisha:** Wayne’s from Jersey.

**Brown:** Yeah, right, Newark, he’s a son of Newark.

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**Aisha:** But he also used to be at John and Naima's apartment on 103rd street.

**Tyner:** Yeah that's right.

**Aisha:** He had an apartment and Wayne would be up there constantly.

**Tyner:** Yeah John would be playing in another room and Wayne would be playing in the other room.

**Aisha:** Yeah he used to be there all the time because we used to go up sometimes, in New York on 103rd.

**Tyner:** I don't think John, he didn't mind that.

**Aisha:** No.

**Tyner:** He knew the continuation of the music was in the hands of the younger guys and he supported that.


**Aisha:** We used to go there because Naima and all of us would, you know and Wayne used to be there a lot. I liked Wayne.

**Tyner:** Yeah, he enjoyed John's playing very much and he uses that as inspiration and like I said, he's had his own sound. I think having your own sound is very important, even if you like somebody. Like I said, I loved Bud Powell, but I didn't want to try to--

**Aisha:** He sure does, but he has his own, yeah, he has his own.

[End of CD3]

**Tyner:** So we were in the decade of the seventies and we looked at a lot of the recording projects that you did that really show your development, as I said, the multi directional facets of your career at that point. When we get into the '80's, still continuing on in this, always exploring, but we mentioned earlier, *It's About Time*, Jackie Mclean. I think Aisha mentioned that, so maybe we could talk about that date if that's something that . . . if you would like to talk about that one.

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**Aisha:** That was with Bruce Lundvall.

**Brown:** Then I guess at that point you come back to Blue Note, or was it with Manhattan?

**Aisha:** That was Manhattan.

**Brown:** Manhattan right, OK.

**Aisha:** And what else? There was something else they called it too. See this is why I need my youngest son, because Mike Cuscuna was there too, with Bruce Lundvall right in New York, but I know Manhattan was a part of that.

**Tyner:** The thing is, my memory is the last song I wrote (laughs).


**Brown:** But you did leave Milestone, was that because you wanted to go to a different label, you had other . . . do you recall?

**Tyner:** I think so. I wanted to change producers.

**Brown:** So the opportunity to work with Bruce?

**Tyner:** Yeah, kind of change directions a little bit. And of course John was getting into the avant-garde kind of playing, you know, free kind of style. Actually I did that. I used to listen and wherever he went, I would try and do something harmonically without restriction, because he liked Ornette's playing and he liked playing out, so I said, "Well OK, let's give it a shot". Of course Elvin kind of liked the more time keeping thing, that's why I think Billy Higgins did a stint with us, that sort of thing. But it was good because I had some books that I hadn't really talked about; the atonal kind of concept, but the thing is you can't really rely on that when you're improvising and going different places, it's total freedom so you can change when you want. So the bass player, if you got a bass player there, has got to listen. You might be in one key and then a few minutes later you're in another key, or you're playing something different rhythmically, so it's challenging.

**Brown:** When we look at your discography we see so many musicians that you've worked with, but there are some that you continually maintain a close relationship with; of course Bobby Hutcherson, and we talked about Joe Henderson. But in the late '80's all of a sudden there

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seems to be a real solid connection with Avery Sharpe since we we're talking about bass. And then Avery and Aaron Scott seemed to be your rhythm section for a while. So I want to focus on, you know, here you are, you've expanded all this, you have all these-we'll call them the grandmasters collaborating with you, but then in the late '80's you start to refocus on the core of your group, that rhythm section, so Avery Sharpe and then ultimately Aaron Scott. I'm looking at *Bon Voyage*, that was in '87 and you have Louis Hayes, so Louis Hayes predated Aaron Scott. Can we talk about the formation of your trio, and you now really seemed to be focused on a working trio.

**Aisha:** You mean with Avery?

**Brown:** With Avery yeah, well first with Avery and then Louis. I mean Avery and Louis and then Aaron, Aaron replaced him.

**Aisha:** Avery was with him for a long time.

**Brown:** Yeah, Right.

**Aisha:** Twenty years or so.

**Tyner:** Aaron was living in Paris wasn't he?

**Aisha:** I don't know. Louis was because we went to Brazil and Sonny Rollins, all of us went with Louis, but Avery yes, they were very--


**Tyner:** Yeah Avery knew what I was doing.

**Brown:** And also Avery was playing electric bass. Now I don't have any recollection or any documentation of you playing any electrical instruments. Not expanding into even electric piano let alone synthesizer or any of that. So that seemed to be something that didn't interest you.

**Tyner:** Yeah well I had an electric piano but it was only so I could . . .

**Aisha:** Put earphones on.

**Tyner:** Yeah, use earphones with it. I could play at night and nobody would hear anything if I used earphones. If I had to write some music for a recording session and I didn't have enough

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time during the daytime, I couldn't do it because of where I was situated . . . those headphones have helped a lot.

**Brown:** What type of electric piano was it? Was it a Fender Rhodes or Hohner?

**Aisha:** Kurzweil.

**Tyner:** Kurzweil. Yeah that's right. Good memory.

**Brown:** OK. Avery is now using electric bass in your group so was that something that you accepted or was that something that you said, "Oh." How did that come about?

**Tyner:** Well see when I turned up and saw dancing and he's playing electric . . . it works good. Tell Aaron to do the backbeat, that worked well! The back beat and electric guitar (laughs).

**Aisha:** Avery put out a CD either last year or the year before called *Legends and Mentors*. Did you hear that one?

**Brown:** Yeah.

**Aisha:** Yeah with Yusef (Lateef), him and Archie Shepp. Yeah because he mailed one to us, but you want to find about the electric, go ahead.

**Brown:** Yeah, I guess that was OK, that was something that you either you accepted or encourage.

**Tyner:** And I had an electric piano in my mother's shop, beauty shop.


**Aisha:** Was that electric?

**Tyner:** Electric.

**Aisha:** No, it was a small acoustic.

**Tyner:** Maybe it wasn't. Oh that's right.

**Aisha:** It was a small acoustic, the Spinnet.

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**Brown:** Like a Spinet.

**Tyner:** I thought I had, didn't I have an electric and an upright? I'm trying to think of where the electric came in.

**Aisha:** He was saying why Avery played electric bass and you never used an electric piano.

**Tyner:** Yeah, well the only time I used an electric piano was in Ma's beauty shop. I mean sometimes I would have a rehearsal-

**Aisha:** Because you always had an acoustic, Steinway. Maybe in your apartment in New York?

**Tyner:** Yeah I know I had a Steinway, but I mean . . .

**Aisha:** Maybe in your apartment in New York.

**Tyner:** Yeah I thought I had one in my apartment.

**Brown:** So Avery served a long tenure with you.

**Aisha:** Twenty something years.


**Brown:** Yeah over twenty years, nice sympatico with him. We were talking off mic earlier, there is always a personal connection, not just a musical connection.

**Tyner:** He's a nice guy too.

**Aisha:** Beautiful person.

**Tyner:** Yeah, beautiful person, real nice, respectful, and he was very serious about what he was doing.

**Brown:** I've got in my hand now, this is your interest in big bands and maintaining a big band. Now I have an orchestra too and so does Ken and we know what the trials and tribulations are of running a big band. You really have to want to have a big band to do that.

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**Aisha:** How many pieces?

**Brown:** Well my latest project was Coltrane. That was seventeen (laughs) so yeah that was a little rough.

**Aisha:** He talks about that a lot.

**Tyner:** Yeah you have to deal with a lot of personalities in a big band. You know a lot of guys want to solo they jump up. I used to like to point to a guy if I wanted to hear his instrument, but then another guy beats him and he stands up before him and I'm thinking, "I wanted to hear the other guy". He sees me pointing to the other guy but he jumps up first. He says, "No I'm next buddy" (laughs). A lot of personalities there (laughs).

**Aisha:** So you want to know how Duke and them did it all those years?

**Tyner:** Yeah well see he had-

**Brown:** You've got to really love it.

**Tyner:** Yeah well you're traveling all the time together.

**Aisha:** Dizzy had a big band.

**Brown:** Yeah, '45, '46, "Things to Come."


**Aisha:** That's right.

**Brown:** So this has to be a labor of love, you have to want to do this. So you must have said, "Well I want to have a big band" and you did it, is that how that came up? This is on Verve and this one is from '92.

**Tyner:** I think I heard some charts and-

**Aisha:** Who did the arrangements on that one?

**Tyner:** Was it Bill Fischer?

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**Brown:** The band is conducted by Bob Belden.

**Tyner:** Bob Belden.

**Brown:** And then Slide Hampton.

**Aisha:** Did they do “Fly with the Wind” again? Was Slide on that one?

**Brown:** Yeah, “Fly with the Wind,” Slide is on it.

**Aisha:** The conductor was somebody else.

**Brown:** Say again? Conductor was Bob Belden and then on “Angle Eyes” Slide Hampton conducted that one.

**Aisha:** Slide had a lot of good arrangements.

**Tyner:** He had some arrangers, yeah.

**Brown:** So you had Virgil Jones, Steve Turre, Frank Lacy, John Clark, so again, truly a big band, you even got Junior Cook . . . John Stubblefield, Joe Ford, so you brought in-


**Tyner:** The older guys.

**Brown:** The guys.

**Tyner:** Actually they didn’t want me to dispel the idea of having a big band, a lot of them wanted me to keep the band. Like what’s the name of the trumpet player cat, Earl . . .

**Brown:** Earl Gardner.

**Tyner:** Earl Gardner, he wanted me to keep the band. A lot of the guys, but it became a very expensive project. You got to transport a lot of guys around, you got to buy airplane tickets, to California from New York you know, it was just always. . . So it was quite an expensive endeavor and that’s why I guess why maybe Basie’s [drummer ?] and Woody Herman and some of the bands had sponsors so they could do that. It could be Pepsi or whatever, but you needed a

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sponsor to keep a big band going like that, so a grant from somebody. Considering all of that, I just didn't want to get involved in trying to support a big band.

**Aisha:** Do you travel with your band?

**Brown:** Yes I have. That's why I had to ask, because you have to really want to have a big band because it will turn you into a different person.

**Tyner:** It sure will! I agree with that.

**Brown:** Now I was fortunate enough to see your big band when you brought it to Yoshi's; the old Yoshi's, not the one down on Jack London, not the one in San Francisco, but the one that used to have the Mt. Fuji in the back, remember the beautiful Japanese-

**Tyner:** Oh yeah, was that in San Francisco?

**Brown:** That was in Oakland.

**Tyner:** Oakland! Yeah.


**Brown:** But I remember seeing this band and you all tore it up. It was exciting.

**Tyner:** See the thing is, you got a band and the guys want to be there. Leadership kind of position, it really is demanding because they might want to talk to you about something in their life that they think you might have some sort of opinion about. So you talk to them because they are like all under your auspices. The fact that you have the band, the guys are there, they might need somebody to chat with and . . . so it's a big responsibility. I didn't know all that, I had to figure that stuff out.

**Brown:** So rehearsing, you had a conductor, but that may have been just for the recording. I don't recall seeing a conductor when you came through, you were leading the band.

**Tyner:** Yeah that was for recording, right.

**Brown:** So now, what made this especially gratifying for me is I heard all those big band projects, "Fly With the Wind", "Song For the New World", but to see it performed live-because you do "Fly With the Wind" on here. "Passion Dance" which was originally, that's why I

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wanted to bring up the quartet first with Joe Henderson, now expanded for a big band, so again to me this is demonstrating this continual growth. Even though you're re-visiting older material, or previous material, it's recast now, it's now reflecting your sensibility at this stage in your life.

**Tyner:** Yeah, well see I never felt like I shouldn't record my own music in a different setting. I wanted to hear it with a big band, "Fly with the Wind" I did an arrangement with a band. "Fly with the Wind" I had originally done it for strings. So I think it's good, you learn about other instrumentation. I like the string version of "Fly with the Wind" too.

**Aisha:** That was it.

**Brown:** I remember because I remember Billy Cobham played on that too and he was playing like the wind. He was playing like the wind on that one!

**Aisha:** Yes, that's right! Yeah, they did things on *Inner Voices* but he did it at Carnegie years ago with him and Bill [inaudible]. But I love big bands.

**Tyner:** Yeah that's right.


**Aisha:** I like big bands. Maybe it's because I was around Cal Massey when I was young.

**Tyner:** Well Khadijah was . . .

**Aisha:** She sang.

**Tyner:** She was a great singer, she was in Cal Massey's band. Growing up in Philly was really a great experience, it really was.

**Brown:** And I know you've done solo albums, I mean *Echoes of a Friend* that's one of those classics that looms large in the history of jazz. I picked up this Telarc release, *Jazz Roots* because you made dedications to a lot of previous composers and pianists--of course you start off with Bud Powell and we understand that, doing "Night in Tunisia", then "Pannonica" of course Thelonious Monk, "My Foolish Heart" Bill Evans, "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" Duke, "Blues for Fatha" Earl "Fatha" Hines, "Sweet and Lovely" for the great Art Tatum, "Lullaby at Birdland" for George Shearing, "You Taught my Heart to Sing" that's for you, you did that one for yourself. Now was that the inspiration?

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**Tyner:** (laughs)

**Brown:** See I want to know, get the back story. Is this another Aisha influence, another Aisha inspiration?

**Tyner:** No, there's only one Aisha and I say that with or without guilt.

**Brown:** And "Happy Days", that one you dedicated to Keith Jarrett. Can you talk about Keith?

**Tyner:** I like the fact that whatever he tried to portray, he didn't limit himself. If it meant getting up and slamming something on the table or whatever, but he did what he felt was right for him and I have to give him pluses for having the kind of confidence to do that. That doesn't mean I want to do it, but I mean if he wanted to do it and it worked for him, great. We're creative people so a lot of times--a lot of times Monk would get up and start dancing. He'd be dancing while the rhythm section, bass player and drummer, would be playing. He would get up and dance around the stage. I didn't say, "What's he getting up for?" He was sharp as a tack, clean as a whip, that was just his personality. I think he got a lot of that from Duke Ellington because Duke was a big influence on him.

**Brown:** Well I'm going to go back and of course this project, for me, I said "Well I've got to hear McCoy play these different pieces." I mean this is the history of jazz piano on this one recording.

**Tyner:** What album is that?


**Brown:** This is called *Jazz Roots*, it's on Telarc.

**Tyner:** Yeah.

**Brown:** So this is from 2000, but if we could go back and look at, of course your decision to record these pieces, this project, to commemorate 20th century piano players. We haven't talked about Earl "Fatha" Hines.

**Aisha:** Yes!

**Tyner:** Yeah he was something.

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**Brown:** To me, that's Louis Armstrong's right hand man. You know, "Weather Bird" the history of jazz piano, you've got to deal with that, so could you talk a little about Earl "Fatha" Hines and his influence if you can trace that?

**Tyner:** In the time period that he came along I think he did a lot. He was animated, he was a very strong player in his genre, he was very creative. The stride piano was very important. I mean a matter of fact, a lot of piano players during that period . . . that was the band! You put a piano up here and you get a guy that can play the stride. You didn't have a bass player and drummer (laughs), it was just a piano; that was the orchestra and a lot of piano players worked under those circumstances.

**Brown:** And then "Sweet and Lovely" for Art Tatum of course we haven't talked about Art Tatum. We all know--

**Tyner:** Who that is (laughs).

**Brown:** When Fats Waller was entertaining folks and Art Tatum walked in he said, "Ladies and gentleman, God is in the house."


**Tyner:** That's right. He was something.

**Aisha:** Really?

**Brown:** Yeah that's true. Fats Waller.

**Tyner:** Art was something, he was blind but he could see anyway. It wasn't about his physical condition, he could play in all the octaves. Most piano players, we all look at the keys, but he didn't need to (laughs). He was playing these runs all up and down the keyboard, he was a phenomenon, he was blind! It's something when you think about it. Sometimes we glance down, you know, see where we are, but he didn't have to do that and you don't have to. I think you reach a point where you don't have to look down. You know where the octaves are, where this is, where that is and that's the way I look at it. You have to understand your instrument enough to know that you don't have to you know, "Oh yeah that's C and that's a high C, you don't have to, you know where it is.

**Brown:** Did you have the opportunity to see him perform? Art Tatum.

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**Tyner:** I think I did, I'm trying to think where though, that's the problem, I should know that. I know I saw him on TV, I don't know if I saw him in person, I don't think so. I think if I saw him in person I would remember where.

**Aisha:** You would have remembered.

**Tyner:** I saw him on TV and I had his recordings.

**Brown:** And another dedication you have here is to another blind pianist, George Shearing, so "Lullaby at Birdland". Did you know George, the person?

**Tyner:** I think I met George, I think I met him.

**Brown:** I mean there are a whole bunch of piano players but you choose these to honor, so I'm just trying to figure out what were the inspirations.

**Tyner:** Yeah I choose them because they all had an individual approach to the piano, and that's important. Whether I knew them personally or not is sometimes; you can excuse that because you can't meet everybody that you admire. I choose them because they came up with their individual style even if they were influenced by other great pianists, they had their own sound. Because piano, you can have your sound, it's not just a horn player, you can play keyboard, but your touch, everything can denote the sound that you're looking for.


**Brown:** What was distinctive about George Shearing's style from your perspective?

**Tyner:** I liked it because George played octaves and he could duplicate what he wanted to play and he was locking in his chordal concept . . . it was different. I like the way George plays and he was a nice man too, I met George once.

**Brown:** And also blind like Art Tatum. They didn't see anything they were playing.

**Tyner:** That's what I'm saying, they had their individual sounds. They didn't sound alike even though they were both blind. They had their own individual approach.

**Brown:** Well another one who is obviously very distinctive is Erroll Garner. You performed his signature piece, "Misty" so talk a little about Erroll Garner.

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**Tyner:** Yeah Erroll was something (laughs) he really was a band unto himself, and the way he played, gee whiz. The octaves would be . . . he was all over the piano, he was something man, he was an entertainer. He came up in a period where the piano was the band, that was it and a lot of those guys came up in that period but he really dramatized that. He was really something. And when piano players could work without having a five-piece band or without having a big band or sextet, that was a good period too. I made some gigs with just piano. If a guy couldn't afford a whole band he would hire a piano player to come in.

**Brown:** Now you have a couple here for pianist's but who are more known for their compositions, "Summertime" by Gershwin perhaps more of a tip of the hat as far as a composer, that's a standard in our repertoire.

**Tyner:** Yeah that's right.

**Brown:** And then "St. Louis Blues". "St Louis Blues," W.C. Handy. So could you talk about that? Obviously that's another one of those pieces that's a foundation in our music.

**Tyner:** Yeah, well you have to give those guys that kind of respect because the St. Louis Blues- and I had been to St. Louis.

**Brown:** Oh, you were talking about St. Louis yesterday.


**Tyner:** It was one of the bedrocks in terms of places for the music.

**Brown:** And of course I would be remiss if I didn't mention Thomas "Fats" Waller, "Ain't Misbehavin'." Now a lot of people, as you say, entertainer-

**Tyner:** Yeah he was classic.

**Brown:** But he--

**Tyner:** He could do it all, he could entertain you and tell jokes, he could do it all. He would be playing and, "Yeah! Johnny did so and so," he would crack a joke and still be playing (laughs) and stride . . . gee wiz he was phenomenal. The history of the piano is a phenomenal one, especially in America.

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**Brown:** I'll just wrap up a couple more that you have here. "My Foolish Heart" for Bill Evans. He was also in the Miles-he was also with Orrin at Riverside.

**Tyner:** Yeah that's right, he was also with Miles, that's with John, but I liked Bill's sensitivity in terms of the instrument and as a person. He was a very honest guy and I liked that about him and his touch. He had a special touch on the piano he could play ballads that makes you think internally what's going on. Yeah I like Bill, his voicing's were really good.

**Brown:** And then there's not one for Herbie but there's one for Chick Corea, "Rio" were bringing in the south of the border influence.

**Tyner:** I like Chick as a person.


**Brown:** Obviously Chick is indebted to you as is every pianist who has ever heard you is indebted to you, just like every drummer is indebted to Elvin and every saxophonist is indebted to John . . . so every pianist is indebted to McCoy Tyner. To me that seemed to be kind of a mutual thing. Well yeah acknowledge Chick, he is younger than you, he is your junior, but he's gone on to accomplish things; but obviously he owes a debt to you as well. For you to honor him, I thought was very-

**Tyner:** Well I appreciate his honesty he did say that and I appreciate it, that's very important, and if I added something to this art form, I am very thankful because I've learned a lot from guys who got me started.

**Aisha:** But you [Brown] worded that very well (laughs).

**Brown:** Now this one again was recorded in 2000 and continuing on in the Telarc catalog you had a group that seemed to be . . . at least the rhythm section, this is *Illuminations* which I believe garnered a Grammy award if not a nomination-I'll go back and double check that before I embarrass myself. But this one . . . Gary Bartz back in the fold now you got Christian McBride on bass and Lewis Nash on drums when I saw you in 2005 at the Coltrane memorial concert you had Lewis Nash and Gary Bartz. This is essentially the group I saw, but you have Terrence Blanchard on trumpet. Any recollections or any comments about this project?

**Tyner:** Yeah what are the titles of some of these songs?

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**Brown:** “Illuminations” is the title cut, “Angelina,” “New Orleans Stomp,” “Come Rain or Shine,” “Solstice,” “Blessings,” “If I Should Lose You,” “The Chase,” “West Philly Tone Poem” and “Alone Together.”


**Tyner:** (laughs) “West Philly Tone Poem”. . . who knows. Sometimes you get inspiration, you’re recording and then you sort of move on to the next thing. You got to keep moving and coming up with something.

**Brown:** Right, so I’m going to go and look at the awards that you have received for your-the critical recognition, because I’m about to lose my computer power here. First Grammy nomination we mentioned, *Sahara* you got your first Grammy nomination and then in 1988 the album, *Blues for Coltrane* actually got you the, you were awarded the Grammy for best jazz instrumental performance and that album included David Murray, Pharaoh Sanders, Cecil McBee, and Roy Haynes, so that was obviously a landmark recording and then in 1992 *The Turning Point* received a Grammy award for best large jazz ensemble performance, so we’re racking up the Grammys here. Then the album *Journey* in 1994 received a Grammy award for best large jazz ensemble performance, so apparently your working in that larger format caught a lot of the critics’ ear because it was not something that you had been associated with even though you had done all these projects, but it seemed to be something that folks--and then as I said in 2004 with this album (*Illuminations*) you received a Grammy award for this one for best jazz instrumental group. Then just continuing on, I’m looking at something here about Steinway and Sons in 2004 conferred a special gold medallion on you for your fifty years as a professional.

**Tyner:** They were very good to me, Steinway.

**Brown:** Yeah I wanted to ask you about that. Now Billy Taylor, Steinway artist, Ahmad Jamal, Steinway artist. What is it about the Steinway, and talk about your relationship with the Steinway Company.

**Tyner:** Well they make one of the greatest pianos in the world. The way it’s constructed, the way it sounds, they really know what they’re doing and they have had years and years of opportunities to perfect the instrument. Steinway is a really great piano and it’s durability, the fact that you can play it for a long time and it will keep it’s tuned. The very terms of preserving the instrument should keep it tuned, otherwise once it gets so flat that the guys got to spend a long time-he can’t pull the strings up and back in tune in minutes, sometimes you have to do it and let it sit and then come back and bring it up a little more later the next day, something like that. It’s a great a instrument. I went to the factory in Europe before and it’s wonderful. They

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have a book I think Bill was in the book, I was in the book, some other pianists were in the book, maybe Keith, I'm not sure, but they honor artists, they make it Steinway artists. If you're stuck somewhere you can call a guy who has a franchise and he can't say, "No I'm not going to" because Steinway piano . . . you have a relationship with the company, so it works out some kind of way.

**Brown:** I remember when we conducted Billy Taylor's oral history back in '94 I believe, we actually went to Steinway in New York and he demonstrated the history of jazz piano on the Steinway. They were encouraging him to do that there because they knew that that would work for them too, he's documenting the-


**Tyner:** Sure, people would buy Steinways.

**Brown:** So it seems like most of the great pianists, particularly in the jazz field really seemed to favor the Steinway.

**Tyner:** Right, it is a great instrument. The way it's put together and the sound that they get, it's wonderful. They have been at it a long time, got a lot of history. I forgot the total history behind Steinway, when they came from Europe, brought that instrument over here, but you can get books on that to give you the details.

**Brown:** Now in 2005 that seemed to be a very significant time in your life because here we are sitting in the Blue Note Club and at that time according to Steven, he kind of came in and gave us the back story on how it came to be that you have Blue Note management and the record labels here. So could we talk about that relationship? We talk about the relationship with Steinway, now we talk about the relationship with Blue Note, talk about some of the business, so how did that come about? How is it that you ended up having Blue Note be your management and then now have a record label?

**Tyner:** Well I think Adam Hertz was living in Philly with Blue Note. Kay approached me about management and I said, "Well OK" I've had other people manage me, so I felt that the association with the club and with the music that it would really be nice, and also it's nice because I would be working in their club and it's been very good so far, good relationship. I try to keep things on a good business level as well, that side of my personality I don't go for anything, but they don't ask me to do anything ridiculous, so they know me well enough. Some people, they don't know the music, they want to jump in and be a promoter, whether it's a concert promoter or a club owner or whatever and you have to be a little careful about who you say yes to, or who you say no to. I enjoy working with them. So far so good.

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**Brown:** Yeah six years seems like a good relationship. And then you have a record label, the McCoy Tyner record label so McCoy Tyner records-I'm sorry my computer just died on me so I can't refer to that--so how did that come about, was that just part of the evolution of the relationship? Because they had the Half Note records here, so you formed your own record label, but I believe it's a subsidiary of Half Note and that seems to be a good working relationship. I know when we were talking about Ahmad Jamal, he talked about some of the missteps in his career like opening a restaurant.

**Aisha:** In Chicago, the Alhambra.

**Brown:** (laughs) In Chicago. And he said, "Yeah you know, I made some mistakes." He wanted to invest.

**Aisha:** Yeah, he was young. But Ahmad and him had the same agent, Jack (Whittemore) he did both of them, Ahmad introduced them to him, he was excellent, very individual.

**Tyner:** I knew Ahmad a long time.


**Brown:** What was his name again, Jack?

**Aisha:** Jack W-h-i-t-e-m-o-r. He was right on Park Avenue in New York.

**Brown:** Way back when you were coming in this business, you wanted to be a virtuoso in this music, you wanted to make sure you were part of the scene, but nowadays in order to be a jazz musician, you got to know the business, you've got to know the accounting, you've got to know everything. I know you have gone on record saying, "I don't want to be an educator or teacher", but what kind of advice would you give to a young musician starting out now when they, first of all, there aren't that many clubs, there aren't many jam sessions, they can't learn their craft. I remember when I got in the business back in the 70's you could still go to the jam sessions and learn from the masters and play with them.

**Tyner:** Get a lawyer (laughs).

**Brown:** Get a lawyer! (laughs) that's what Louis Armstrong said, that's exactly what Louis Armstrong said. That's the same question, "What advice would you give to a young jazz musician?" . . . "Get a lawyer" so that hasn't changed, that hasn't changed.

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**Tyner:** Because you have to know I mean there is a lot of people that want you to do this, want you to do that record, want you to do this-

**Aisha:** But what he said about the clubs, that is so true. You used to be able to sit in and play this and learn, uh-uh, it's totally different. Philly had all those sessions.

**Tyner:** Louis was a brave man, I mean for him to say that back in the day that means it must really mean something.

**Brown:** Yeah it means that things really haven't changed in that regard.

**Aisha:** Have you seen his home? They changed it into a museum-did you go?

**Brown:** Yes, over on Queens yeah, with Jimmy Heath out there.

**Aisha:** Jimmy Heath called, yeah that's how I found out. He called Lorraine, Dizzy' wife when I was there, when they were doing it, but I've never gotten out there. It's nice?

**Brown:** Oh yeah. One of the founding giants of jazz, it's very modest, the neighborhood, I mean that's where you say really down home and down to earth.

**Tyner:** Well he was from New Orleans, New Orleans is like that. Talk to Wynton Marsalis about that, Wynton will tell you.


**Aisha:** His wife wanted to move, but he didn't, he said "No". He was comfortable, he enjoyed where he was.

**Tyner:** And New Orleans was like that, a very down home kind of city.

**Brown:** Oh yeah, I love New Orleans.

**Tyner:** I think he had a place from him down there too, Louis.

**Brown:** Well I know they have the park, Armstrong Park, got a big statue. Yeah that's what it is.

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**Tyner:** Right, I think I saw that statue.

**Brown:** And then when you fly into the airport, unfortunately they have a statue of Louis but it's not very flattering, it's a little more of a caricature so I have issues with that--but how about you, your situation, business, everything seems to be comfortable for you now. We talked about those lean years, the starvation band in the late 60's, here we are in the new 21st century. Where is your home located now? And if you have more than one residence.

**Tyner:** I live in Manhattan

**Aisha:** Yeah an apartment, we have a home in Jersey.

**Brown:** Where in New Jersey? Where in Bergen?

**Aisha:** In Bergen County, Yeah that's where everybody lives. We lived there for years before, in the 70's we lived in Teaneck and moved to Connecticut moved back to Jersey, so Bergen County has always been, I like it.


**Tyner:** No addresses, I don't like to expose that. I don't want to do that. Know where I live, telephone number, knockin' on the door.

**Brown:** Oh of course, but you are based here in the New York area. I want to talk about another project that I think is such a departure from when we look--I mean I had all my LP's, all my CD's out, but when the project *The Guitars*, because I think that one--because it's such a departure from what you are known for and when you talk about guitar, that is going to open up a whole window for a bunch of . . . plus you bring in Bela Fleck on banjo. So how did that project come together? And it seems to have kind of been innovative in the way that you can actually go in and look and see which guitarist was playing in what session. That seems to be a major project, so if you could talk about that.

**Tyner:** Yeah, I have forgotten the little details. I think Orrin had something to do with that, I think he was the producer on that project.

**Aisha:** No.

**Tyner:** I don't know who was the producer.

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**Brown:** My computers dead now so I don't know.

**Aisha:** He is talking about something current.

**Brown:** That was in 2006 where you had John Scofield, Bela Fleck, Marc . . .

**Tyner:** Right, right.

**Aisha:** I think that was probably put together here.

**Tyner:** Yeah, sometimes I forget a lot of little things . . . (laughs) details.

**Brown:** No problem, but i am sure you didn't forget what happened in 2001, and that's the reason why we are here. the National Endowment for the Arts.


**Ken Kimery:** 2002.

**Brown:** Oh excuse me. 2002. What did I say 2001? 2002, I got it right here, I don't want to mess that up. So 2002 you receive the NEA Jazz Masters Awards. I mean you've gotten multiple Grammy's, Grammy nominations, you have been recognized by the city of Philadelphia, the NARAS chapter, gotten a lot of awards, but what did this mean to you? Receiving the NEA Jazz Masters Award?

**Tyner:** Well it's nice and it's recognition of this wonderful art form that developed here. It was brought here by people who were enslaved but able to make their presence known and really gave a lot to the culture here that makes America what it is. So that is very important when we get that recognition right here at home. So that's the way I look at it. I realize I have, in terms of this art form, I have been able to help motivate and promote what this particular art form is about and it's an American art form so I am very happy to be involved and included in the development and the fact that it's well known all over the world and it has taken me a lot of places. I am very thankful.

**Aisha:** It's our classical music.

**Brown:** Oh definitely. It's going to stand the test of time, it's enjoyed around the planet, it has brought more people together. This music is a unifying force.

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**Tyner:** It really is, that's right, you're right about that.

**Brown:** I mean we look at even the U.S government. When they want ambassadors, goodwill ambassadors, who do they send out? Jazz musicians. Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Dave Brubeck, send out the-because they know that this music has a power and a force and I think that is what they recognize in McCoy Tyner is that he is a living, breathing, continuing to bring the magic of this music to the people. So what can we expect, I know that in a couple of days, three days you're going to have your eighty-third birthday?

**Aisha:** Who?

**Brown:** December 11th.

**Aisha:** No, not eighty-third, seventy third.

**Brown:** Oh seventy-third, I'm sorry, I'm thinking about my father. I'm thinking about my father, I'm sorry.

**Tyner:** Do I look that old?

**Brown:** No no no, you don't look that old, that was me, I messed up on this date, I messed up on that date. Seventy-three, I've got too many dates.


**Tyner:** At least I'm in the front of the line, I'm not trailing.

**Brown:** Do you have any projects that you are looking forward to completing or undertaking at this point?

**Tyner:** I'm thinking about it, I try to do things in contrast, if I did a big band thing, I will try and do something small, solo, either quartet or quintet, something like that. I'm not really sure what I'm going to do next, but I will give it some thought and I will let you know for sure.

**Brown:** I do want to know, and if you come out to the Bay Area I will come and see you, that's no problem--Oh I'm sorry go ahead.

**Aysiha:** No, I'm just saying because we just got in from settling in from the trip and then before that, he had been in October and November. He came out your way in October.

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**Brown:** I was probably out here interviewing somebody, but I know that, I got this from Omrao Brown who runs the Caverns, Bohemian Caverns, reopened the Bohemian Caverns.

**Tyner:** In Washington, yeah.

**Brown:** Yeah, good brother. His father is Leonard Brown who was the one who brought you to Northeastern for the John Coltrane memorial concert. Anyway, so through them I found out about your relationship with Jose James, vocalist. So could we talk about that, because that seems to be the project that you were touring.

**Aisha:** Yeah he was their then, doing Johnny Hartman stuff.

**Tyner:** You can answer it.

**Aisha:** No go ahead, you do it.

**Brown:** Well how did that come about?


**Tyner:** I guess it was sort of a Johnny Hartman concept and I think he wanted to record something that was similar but not exactly the same, you can't anyway because everybody is not around, but I was eager to do that, I thought it would be nice, and Jose seemed to fit that bill and he is a nice guy and he sings well. So we were able to work it out and come up with a pretty good recording, but it stemmed from the old days, you know.

**Brown:** Well that album, John Coltrane, Johnny Hartman, I mean I don't want to get to something that's on the record, but I think I have had more success with women if I played that record because I mean Johnny Hartman, John Coltrane I mean if you were interested in any kind of romance, you can't lose. If something doesn't happen it's because you messed up. The music was there (both laugh).

**Tyner:** Yeah, that's a great album. I really enjoyed it.

**Brown:** You enjoyed the session, you remember that?

**Tyner:** Yeah, I enjoyed the session.

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**Brown:** And you know, Johnny Hartman, the voice he had, but he never really broke into the big time, do you have any understanding-

**Aisha:** Just like Austin Cromer was another one, and Sonny Rollins loved him and my sister also.

**Tyner:** Yeah, her sister was a great singer.

**Aisha:** And Loraine used to play Austin the one he did with Dizzy in 1955, but both of them, Johnny Hartman was, you're right. You have to not feel anything if you listen to that and you can't . . . really I play it all the time.

**Brown:** I know you remember that session but do you remember how it came about, who's idea was it to marry those two?

**Tyner:** I think it was John's idea.

**Aisha:** John loved singers.

**Brown:** Yeah, right.

**Tyner:** Like your sister.

**Aisha:** That's why he probably got more from him playing piano than my sister singing.

**Tyner:** Yeah, her sister was a great singer.


**Aisha:** That's why he played so beautifully, he was singing when he played the horn.

**Tyner:** Yeah John had a beautiful tone.

**Brown:** And that session just flows, it seems to flow. Was that the way it actually went in the studio?

**Tyner:** Yeah, actually, yeah.

**Aisha:** Played some beautiful stuff . . . oh gosh, you (McCoy) played some beautiful stuff.

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**Brown:** If anybody doesn't know McCoy Tyner, they need to go hear that record. They can hear anything they want with the other quartet but-

**Aisha:** My sister loved him so much because the way he played behind vocalists.

**Tyner:** Yeah, I did the best I could.

**Brown:** But you started, as you said, in those R&B bands; it was backing vocalists. So you've always relied on those foundations. You had Bud Powell early on, you had the R&B working with vocalists, then coming up working with Benny Golson--actually I went back and did some research and the very first recording you did was under Curtis Fuller's name.

**Aisha:** Really?

**Brown:** Yeah, according to the discography.

**Tyner:** I didn't realize that.


**Aisha:** It was under Curtis?

**Brown:** Yeah, it was the same personnel as the Jazztet but it was under Curtis, it was one of those things. The second album was, *Meet The Jazztet* and that's the one of course that everyone recognizes.

**Tyner:** I knew he didn't pay me enough! (laughs) No.

**Brown:** Now who was it that-I know Ken was talking about that. Now we interviewed Benny, I've interviewed Art Farmer before he passed and then Ken was talking about when they interviewed Curtis Fuller and Curtis said, "Well you know the Jazztet was supposed to be a cooperative band", but when the set list came Benny had written all his tunes on there, that was the set, so was that a cooperative band?

**Tyner:** That helps to write the music especially when you join [BMI] or any other companies like that, it helps. You just have to think of a lot of ways, you're not that prominent in the beginning but starting to get a name . . . the publishing is very important.

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**Aisha:** Where's Curtis?

**Brown:** Do you know where Curtis Fuller is? (to Ken Kimery)

**Kimery:** He's living here.

**Aisha:** He's in New York.

**Tyner:** Really? I haven't seen Curtis in a while. So he's living here? That's good, I might give him a call one day.

**Kimery:** I have his number.

**Tyner:** Yeah I appreciate that, just to say hi. We go way back, that would be nice. I think I saw him once since he has been in town, but it's been a while so I'd like to.

**Aisha:** Because we were talking about the trombone with Ahmer.

**Tyner:** Yeah, Che.


**Aisha:** Steve Turre, Curtis Fuller, any of them.

**Tyner:** Yeah, our grandson, he likes trombone, he plays trombone in school. He would probably like to meet Curtis (laughs).

**Brown:** So at this point I guess we can wrap it up.

**Tyner:** Wrap that up yeah.

**Brown:** I just want to say on behalf of the Smithsonian Institution and of course on behalf Ken Kimery and myself, Anthony Brown, this has been a dream come true to be able to share this time with you McCoy Tyner, and you Aisha. To be able to share your company, to be able to have your life story shared. I just want to say, McCoy Tyner, no matter what they say in the history books and all that--of course I can echo that--but what folks who haven't had the pleasure and opportunity to meet you need to understand is the breadth of your spirit, the magnanimity of your humanity, it all comes through. I am saying this because it comes through in your music as well as your person, and I just want folks to know that your music reflects the humanitarian spirit that you are, that you have, and that you continue to bestow on the rest of us. This feeling of

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unity, this feeling of exalting in our existence, being here on this planet at this time and I just want to say on behalf of everybody and the NEA and everybody else who has been instrumental in making this possible . . . I just want to say my heartfelt gratitude to you McCoy Tyner, Aisha, thank you so very much.

**Tyner:** I want to thank my wife, Aisha.

**Brown:** Yes, Aisha, it would not have been possible without you. Thank you so much.

**Tyner:** OK, thanks so much Anthony, I really appreciate it.

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