

MARTIN WILLIAMS AND THE ARMSTRONGIAN PROPHECY

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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This study examines the place of Louis Armstrong in the work of the jazz critic Martin Williams. By tallying Williams's lasting interest in Armstrong from his teenage years to his last projects, the study shows that the critic's focus on Armstrong's rhythmic innovation depended on the argument that this particular aspect of Armstrong's art was the major axis in the development of jazz history, an axis crucial to the emergence of other jazz musicians deemed most significant by Williams. The study further shows that Williams's approach was most heavily influenced by the literary criticism of T. S. Eliot and the foundationalism of André Hodeir, and that Williams's persistent interest in aesthetic lineage could be traced to the ambivalence he felt toward his own parentage.

DEDICATED TO EARL HINES

In different hours, a man represents each of several of his ancestors, as if there were seven or eight of us rolled up in each man's skin—seven or eight ancestors at least—and they constitute the variety of notes for that new piece of music which his life is.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conduct of Life*, 1860

Every great human being exerts a retroactive force: for his sake all of history is placed in the balance again, and a thousand secrets of the past crawl out of their hiding places—into *his* sunshine. There is no way of telling what may yet become part of history. Perhaps the past is still essentially undiscovered! So many retroactive forces are still needed!

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 1882

It is a commonplace that the great figures also outline and suggest many more possibilities than they are able to develop in their own work.

—Martin Williams, *Evergreen Review*, 1962

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I am grateful for the help of Bryant DuPre and J. R. Taylor. Bryant has not only created the most significant primary source for this study, he has also become my mentor on jazz oral history. J. R.'s liner notes on *Louis Armstrong and Earl Hines 1928* remain my favorite work of jazz "concrete criticism"—a term I learned from him. That I was able to meet J. R. for this study made the work especially worthwhile.

I would like to acknowledge Joe Peterson of the Institute of Jazz Studies and Alice Flowers of St. Christopher's School for their Herculean efforts in locating key documents for this study. Thanks also go to Tad Bennicoff of the Smithsonian Institution Archives and Janet Harper of the Center for Black Music Research for putting up with my visits.

And I thank Bill Bennett, Rob Bamberger, Krin Gabbard, Gary Giddins, Cynthia Hightower, Cindy Hutchins, Dan Morgenstern, James Morris, Paul Kahn, Larry Kart, and Jane Sapp, for their valuable comments.

ILLUSTRATIONS

- p. 34* Martin Williams was elected to be the Secretary of the Junior Jackson Literary Society at St. Christopher's School in Richmond, Virginia, 1935 (*Raps & Taps*).
- Williams's actor's headshot in New York, where he studied acting, played in the Cornell summer stock, and worked as an extra in two movies (Smithsonian Institution Archives).
- William's masthead portrait in the St. Christopher's student publication *The Pine Needle*, where Williams contributed columns on jazz for three years, 1942 (*Raps & Taps*).
- Williams was considered a "veteran player" in the Dramatic Club at St. Christopher's. This is from a scene in J. B. Priestley's play "Laburnum Grove," 1942 (*Raps & Taps*).
- p. 53* Interpretive transcription of *West End Blues* (1928).
- p. 54* Transcription of *Basin Street Blues* (1933).
- p. 55* Transcription of *Sweethearts on Parade* (1930).
- p. 56* Transcription of *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (1932).

CHRONOLOGY

- 1924 August 9: Born Martin Tudor Hansford Williams in Richmond, Virginia.
- 1930–32 Attends Mrs. Talbot's School in Richmond.
- 1932–42 Attends St. Christopher's School in Richmond.
- 1935 *Lynchburg and Its Neighbors* published.
- 1940 Hears Count Basie and Lester Young in Richmond.
The Vanishing Virginian published.
- 1940–42 Writes in *The Pine Needle* at St. Christopher's.
- 1942 *The Vanishing Virginian* released in theaters.
- 1942–43 Attends the University of Virginia.
- 1943 Attends the Midshipmen School at Notre Dame.
- 1944–46 Ensign, deck officer on attack transport, in the Pacific, United States Navy.
- 1946 Hears Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie at Billy Berg's.
Hears Kid Ory in L.A.
- 1946–48 Completes B.A. from the University of Virginia.
- 1949 Hears Sidney Bechet in Philadelphia.
- 1949–50 Completes M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania.
- 1950–56 Doctoral candidate at Columbia University, no degree.
- 1952 Begins writing for *The Record Changer*.
- 1952–56 Lecturer and Instructor at Columbia.
- 1954–72 Writes for *Down Beat*.
- 1955 Editor at Macmillan's school texts department.
- 1957 Liner notes for the Twelve-LP Jelly Roll Morton set published.

1957–69 Writes for the *Saturday Review*.

1958–70 Writes for *The American Record Guide*.

1958–61 Editor of *The Jazz Review*.

1959 *The Art of Jazz* published.
Meets Martha Patton Coker.

1959–60 Editor at the *Encyclopedia Americana*.

1959–63 Writes for the *Evergreen Review*.

1959–64 Hosts weekly radio program *The Scope of Jazz* on Pacifica Network.

1960 Marries Martha Patton Coker.
King Oliver published.

1960–63 Hosts daily jazz program *The Art of Jazz* on Heritage Network.

1961 Twin sons, Charles and Frederick, born.

1961–64 TV critic of the *Village Voice*.

1961–69 Lecturer at The New School.

1962 *Jelly Roll Morton* published.

1962–76 General editor of the *Jazz Masters* series.

1963 Third son, Frank, born.

1964 *Jazz Panorama* published.

1966 *Where's the Melody?* published
Researcher for WCBS-TV.

1967 *Jazz Masters of New Orleans* published.

1969–1970 Acts as an extra in two movies, including Streisand's *On a Clear Day*.

1970 Death of Williams's father.
The Jazz Tradition published.
Jazz Masters in Transitions published.

- 1971-81 Director of Jazz Program at the Smithsonian Institution.
- 1972-75 Member of the Jazz Panel in the NEA Music Program.
- 1973 *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* released.
- 1976 Death of Williams's mother.
- 1977 *The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics* published.
- 1978 Receives the Guggenheim Fellowship.
- 1980 Divorces Martha Patton Coker.
- Griffith: First Artist of the Movies* published.
- 1981 *A Smithsonian Book of Comic-Book Comics* published.
- 1981-83 Works in the National Museum of American History.
- 1982 *TV: The Casual Art* published.
- 1983-91 Editor at the Smithsonian Institution Press.
- 1983 *Big Band Jazz* released.
- 1984 Wins Grammy Award for *Big Band Jazz*.
- 1985 *Jazz Heritage* published.
- 1987 *Singers and Soloists of the Swing Bands* released.
- 1989 *Jazz Piano* released.
- Jazz in its Time* published.
- 1990-91 Director of an M.A. program in music criticism at the Peabody Institute.
- 1991 Retires from the Smithsonian.
- 1992 April 9~13: Williams dies of prostate cancer.
- Jazz Changes* published.
- Hidden in Plain Sight* published.

PROLOGUE

The Critic in Context

In 1924, D. H. Lawrence's book *Studies in Classic American Literature* was published in London. Opening with a chapter called "The Spirit of Place," Lawrence invited his English readers to wonder if they had condescended to American speech by seeing it and hearing it as juvenile. "We like to think of the old-fashioned American classics as children's books," Lawrence began, without excluding himself.¹ In a tone that was at first glance satirical, but also pleading, he pondered the American psyche, asking whether, by leaving the Old World, Americans were really trying to escape from their own selves. In the ensuing eleven chapters, Lawrence surveyed the works of eight American authors, going from Benjamin Franklin to Edgar Allan Poe, then ending with Herman Melville and Walt Whitman. In his final chapter on Walt, as he called the author of *Leaves of Grass*, Lawrence considered him the poet who opened the road of literature. One literary critic has called Lawrence's criticism of Whitman "the most illuminating criticism that ever will be written concerning" the poet.²

In August of that year, Martin Williams was born in Richmond, a city that just four decades before had led the southern efforts to secede from the Union. When Williams began to listen to jazz quite seriously, his mother—raised by an "Aunt Nancy" her family had owned from before Emancipation—told him that his taste in music did not befit someone with a Richmond upbringing.³ After returning from the Second World War and studying English literature in college, Williams decided to live above the Mason-

¹ D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 7.

² Harold Bloom, "Introduction," *Leaves of Grass: The First (1855) Edition* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), xl.

³ Rebecca Yancey Williams, *The Vanishing Virginian*, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1940), 17.

Dixon line, moving first to Philadelphia, then to New York City, where he would live for over twenty years. There he wrote *The Jazz Tradition*, a book first published in 1970 that could be considered the jazz equivalent of *Studies in Classic American Literature*.

In its opening chapter, titled “a contemporary art” and subtitled “a question of meaning,” Williams tallied some pitfalls he saw in contemporary discourse on jazz. He cautioned readers to not project their grievance and resentment, however sincere, into an art as profound as it was abstract. Jazz went deeper, Williams wrote, “than the outer circumstances of poverty and denigration.”⁴ It was a music created by black Americans, Williams noted, not to escape, as was often the way white Americans in his time had heard it, but to know and accept the range and dimensions of the modern self.⁵ In the ensuing fifteen chapters, Williams surveyed over sixteen major figures in jazz, beginning with Jelly Roll Morton and Louis Armstrong, moving through Duke Ellington and Charlie Parker, and ending with John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman. In his chapter on Armstrong, he singled out a 1927 recording, *Twelfth Street Rag*, where Armstrong had virtually rewritten a familiar tune by saturating each note with melody, in a performance that, Williams noted, “opens up the jazz tradition.”⁶ One musicologist has called *The Jazz Tradition* “one of the great works in American music history.”⁷

In the fall of 1971, on account of this book and a career of criticism, James Morris, the head of the Division of Performing Arts at the Smithsonian Institution, hired Williams to create a Jazz Program the division. It was the second time, since leaving the Navy, that Williams was on the Federal payroll, but it was the first time he was presented with the prestige and resources of a major institution. There Williams worked on many projects, on jazz and on other aspects of American culture he deemed worthy of critical attention.

⁴ Martin Williams, *The Jazz Tradition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 12.

⁵ Ibid., 13–15.

⁶ Ibid., 51.

⁷ Richard Crawford, *The Sonneck Society Newsletter*, Vol. XI, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 55.

By the time he died in his home in Alexandria—about thirteen miles south of downtown Washington D.C.—at the age of sixty-seven, he had worked at the Smithsonian for over twenty years. And he had, as great critics often could, placed a permanent challenge on all jazz scholars who came after him.

In terms of stature, Williams's equal would have to be found outside of the jazz press and in the film critic James Agee. Writing in 1944, W. H. Auden called Agee's column "the most remarkable regular event in American journalism today."⁸ David Denby, one of the great film critics since Agee, also attested to the way in which Agee challenged the critical limits of journalism: "What those of us who know Agee's criticism almost by heart read over and over, however, is the reviews that appeared in *The Nation*. Some of them are no more than a few sentences or a phrase."⁹ Quite similarly, the jazz critic and biographer Gary Giddins remarked once that he had "practically memorized," by the time *The Jazz Tradition* was in print, "the contents of many of its essays when they were published in the *Evergreen Review*."¹⁰ Ever aware of intellectual lineage, Williams himself cited Agee as one of two critics who influenced him the most—the other was T. S. Eliot.

Scope and Arguments

This study begins with a sketch of Williams's family background and upbringing, including his parentage and his education in Richmond, his exposure to literary criticism, his life in New York, his marriage to Martha Coker, and his career at the Smithsonian. The second chapter deals with Williams's intellectual profile, including a discussion of the major thinkers who influenced him, and with his theory of jazz history and jazz criticism. The final chapter, titled "Armstrongian Prophecy," deals with three approaches that

⁸ W. H. Auden, "A Letter to the Editors of 'The Nation,'" *Agee on Film*, (New York: McDowell, Obolensky Inc., 1958), front matter.

⁹ David Denby, "A Famous Man," *The New Yorker*, January 9, 2006, 85.

¹⁰ Gary Giddins, "Father and Son: A Jazz Genealogy," *Village Voice*, August 2, 1983, 36.

Williams used to discuss Louis Armstrong's contribution to jazz: Armstrong's range, Armstrong's challenge of limits in jazz, and Armstrong's rhythmic innovations and their prophetic qualities.

Biography is important in understanding Williams's jazz criticism because jazz had taken on a personal meaning for him early, and his personal development coincided somewhat with development in the music.

To Williams, there were three significant revolutions in jazz—Armstrong in the twenties, Parker in the forties, and Ornette Coleman at the turn of the sixties—and Williams lived through two of them. Though he saw Parker live at Billy Berg's in 1946, it took him years to recognize the altoist's importance.¹¹ Once he did, the course of jazz became clear to him. Parker was his critical-historical torch, shining backward and forward. Williams's training in literary criticism also happened at a time when American readers were ready for sustained, critical discussion of art. Instead of becoming a Professor of English, he could marry his education in literature and interest in jazz into a kind of music criticism for a new generation of Americans, a generation who, after the Second World War and amidst the counterculture, were in need of new meaning in a native and maturing art.

After his success with *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*, which sold more than three million copies, Williams recognized that he could, with the backing of the Smithsonian, extend his critical reach into other fields.¹² To Williams, jazz was not the only American art that demanded critical attention by intellectuals and academics. The best of radio broadcast, comics, children's literature and some other American arts had been neglected and could be dismissed, or forgotten, if they were not properly appraised. At the Smithsonian Institution Williams cultivated his ultimate, generalist ambition of

¹¹ Bryant DuPre Oral History Interview, Appendix II.

¹² James Morris, *Smithsonian Impresario*, (Charleston: James Morris, 2010), 143.

becoming an American critic. But jazz was his starting point, through it, Williams found something unifying the American arts. In his last book, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, he noted, “I did not think that anyone could truly understand jazz without understanding the other American vernacular arts.”¹³

The Sources

In addition to interviews with Bill Bennett, Rob Bamberger, Cynthia Hightower, Larry Kart, Dan Morgenstern, James Morris, and J. R. Taylor, the study relies on documents in two archival collections: the five boxes of Williams’s office documents in the Smithsonian Institution Archives in Washington D.C. and the Martin Williams Collection in the Center for Black Music Research, at Columbia College Chicago.¹⁴

These two collections contain correspondence, memoranda, contracts, and manuscripts that reveal a vulnerable side of Williams. Many of his projects, before and after he joined the Smithsonian, failed. He was sometimes attacked, accused of bigotry and snobbery—often for the way he dismissed the works of other scholars. And he grew resentful of the fact that, even after his appointment at an institution as prestigious as the Smithsonian, he did not get the respect he felt he deserved.

They also show an idiosyncratic side of Williams. He kept copies of hundreds of his own published articles and edited even ones that were not republished. On a picture of him that appeared with the *Bystander* columns he wrote for *Down Beat*, he redrew his hairline.¹⁵ Taken together, these documents reveal the ambition and vision of a critic who

¹³ Martin Williams, *Hidden in Plain Sight: An Examination of the American Arts*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5.

¹⁴ Records, “Smithsonian Institution, Press, Editor, Special Projects,” accession 96-029, 1971-1995, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

¹⁵ Martin Williams, *Bystander, Down Beat, Jazz pieces—mostly unused*, Box 1, Martin Williams Collection, Center for Black Music Research Library and Archives, Columbia College Chicago.

planned to bring—and arguably could bring, had he lived longer—critical recognition and historical awareness to some of the other native arts of the United States.

The study also relies on two revealing sources that have been faithfully reproduced in the appendix: the fourteen columns that Williams wrote for *The Pine Needle*, the student publication at St. Christopher's School, where Williams was a student for ten years; and the oral history interview that Bryant DuPre conducted with Williams, the transcript of which is the spine and sinew of this study.

The *Pine Needle* columns (Appendix I), written when Williams was sixteen and seventeen years old, reveal someone who was a little more than an enthusiast. He wrote to educate his peers—and to the local community, where the paper circulated—on the nature of the blues and of boogie woogie, on the debt that the “swing” era owed to Fletcher Henderson, on the effects that commercialism had on Bennie Moten's output, and on the brilliance of Ellington's orchestration.¹⁶ These documents also present Williams in a unique, historical light. They were written in the early forties, before Williams had studied literary criticism in college, and before he had heard Parker.

The Bryant DuPre oral history interview (Appendix II) took place on a Tuesday in February 1989. By then, the sixty-four-year-old Williams had been at the Smithsonian for seventeen years. After agreeing to an interview request from DuPre, they met in Williams's home in Alexandria, Virginia and talked for more than three hours, leaving us the longest and most personal portrait of Williams. After the interview, DuPre handed the cassette tapes to the Institute of Jazz Studies; the appended transcript has been made from those three tapes. DuPre had known Williams for a long time. In 1972, when he was still a high school student, he worked as a volunteer usher for the first season of jazz concert that Williams produced. By 1989, DuPre had conducted two interviews for the

¹⁶ *The Record Column*, Appendix I, .

Jazz Oral History Project.¹⁷ In the interview, Williams spoke candidly about his family and about the influence his upbringing had had on him. As we shall see, his hometown, Richmond, was the past that was not even past.

Finally, I should note that there are a number of sources that I have not been able to reach for this study. They include Williams's son Charles C. Williams, of Falmouth, Virginia;¹⁸ the Rebecca Yancey Williams files at the University of Virginia library; and the tape recordings of the radio program *The Art of Jazz*, which Williams hosted in the early sixties; many of these tapes are at the Stanford University library. While the current study stops where it does, the sources above suggest where the research could advance on Williams, an important critic of an important American art.

¹⁷ With Leonard Phillips (January 1983) and with John Malachi (May 1983).

¹⁸ "Martha Coker Williams," Obituary, *The Washington Post*, July 9, 2003.

HOMeward CHANGELING

Toward Americanness

In his 1961 study *The Beer Can by the Highway*, the English professor John Atlee Kouwenhoven tallied a number of things he found quintessentially American: Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, jazz, chewing gum, and the Manhattan skyline constrained and defined by the island's grid of lined avenues. Kouwenhoven could have also included the rocking chair, an invention by Benjamin Franklin that was initially considered as vulgar as chewing gum, but, in its grind, also seemed to address some invisible need of this new people. When Martin Williams's mother Rebecca Yancey was a little girl, she remembered first learning about this "vulgar American innovation" in a fashionable magazine, which told its readers that "no sophisticated family ever has a rocking chair in the home."¹⁹ Yancey surveyed her home and found these chairs all around, and she looked on in horror as her mother Rosa Faulkner Yancey rocked on them, seemingly all at the same time.

Williams's relationship with his family and their past was a well-defined ambivalence. While his determined love for jazz made him a changeling to his family, his tie to Richmond was strong and, in his last years, he returned to the city often. The person who influenced him the most was his mother. According to J. R. Taylor, Williams's colleague at the Smithsonian, Williams could recall hating his father even as a small child while, as a contrast, he attributed his high self-esteem to his mother.²⁰ But Williams broke with his family on race. Not only did his Virginian family, on both sides, have deep roots in the

¹⁹ Rebecca Yancey Williams, *The Vanishing Virginian*, 196.

²⁰ J. R. Taylor (jazz critic and producer, The Smithsonian Institution) in discussion with the author, February 2018.

Confederacy, but they hardly outgrew their bigotry. For them, black Americans were second-class citizen, and they assumed a form of bigotry which Williams considered paternalistic—they consider black men and women to be children who needed overseeing, and they congratulated themselves for being patrons, or keepers, of their slaves and servants.

Virginia, to Williams's family, was a fortress of traditional values that was gradually ceding its identity and cultural sovereignty to something foreign: northern tendencies that were threateningly perceived as "American." After the Civil War, Americanizing to southern ears carried the disturbing sound of war, even as the movement toppled old values.

This cultural rift unfolded generationally. To Williams's maternal grandfather, Robert Davis Yancey, his identity was closely connected to his land and community. When Rebecca Yancey wrote about her father, she referred to him somewhat ironically as the "vanishing" Virginian, because her generation was in many ways replacing his. She wrote of her and her siblings: "we belonged to the age when Virginia was just beginning to become Americanized, and our main ambition was to reconstruct ourselves into our conception of little New Yorkers."²¹ To Williams, who became a real New Yorker, the seat of his allegiance was not in geography, nor in familial kinship, but in an imagined community, in an Americanness that could serve as a refuge from his past.

While his New York aspirations could be traced to his mother, Williams's stated reason for moving to New York was idiosyncratic. In a 1986 interview with a Richmond weekly, Williams confessed that he moved to the city "because you can't interview Thelonious Monk in Richmond."²² It was a motivation that Rebecca Williams would

²¹ Ibid., 190.

²² Eddie Smith, "Martin Williams: Bringing It All Back Home," *Style Weekly: A Cultural Guide to Richmond*, vol. IV, March 4, 1986, 38.

likely have found ridiculous. But Williams didn't mind. As a critic-historian, Williams saw his career as a corrective to his family history.

Mother and Son

In September 1940, after Williams had turned sixteen, his mother Rebecca Yancey Williams's memoirs, *The Vanishing Virginian*, was published.²³ The book became a quick and steady success. Reviewing it in October of the same year, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* said the volume "promises to be a must on every book shelf for months to come."²⁴ The reception of the book was a surprise to the whole family. Her husband, John Bell Williams, had been a dental surgeon and hospital administrator in Richmond, Virginia, but it was upon the release of his wife's book, published by E. P. Dutton and Company, that they were received and entertained in New York City.²⁵ After the family had returned to Richmond, Williams said to his mother, "you and I understand that all this is just ballyhoo, but I think it's going to dad's head a little."²⁶

The success of the book did not end with positive reviews. Two years after its release, the book was adapted and released as a movie by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, starring Frank Morgan, who, just three years before, played Oz in the landmark film *The Wizard of Oz*; and Kathryn Grayson, who would play Magnolia in the successful, 1951 adaptation of *Show Boat*. By the time Rebecca Williams died, in 1976, *The Vanishing Virginian* had undergone twenty-two printings.²⁷

For someone as interested in film and musical theater as Williams was—he became an Oz scholar and wrote a puppet play based on *The Marvelous Land of Oz* for the

²³ Rebecca Yancey Williams, *The Vanishing Virginian*, 4.

²⁴ Fred G. Hyde, "Father in Hist Glory: The Virginia Yanceys," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 16, 1940, 15.

²⁵ Suzanne, Madame Chairman, *The Washington Post*, February 16, 1941, 8.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ "Rebecca Yancey Williams, Wrote 'The Vanishing Virginian' in 1940," *The Washington Post*, April 9, 1976, C8.

Smithsonian,²⁸ and in 1979 he directed a music theater production of *Show Boat*, also for the Smithsonian²⁹—he seldom commented on his mother’s book and the movie that sprung from it.

It could be because, to Williams, his mother’s work was a thing of the past, something not relevant to his career in jazz. In 1986, after Williams had become involved with a jazz program at a university in Richmond, a profile of him published in a local weekly referred to his mother’s book as “a nostalgic social history about the customs and mores of genteel Virginia. . . .”³⁰ And if Williams had made comments to the weekly on his mother’s influence, the three-page profile did not include them.³¹ The more likely explanation for Williams’s relative silence on his mother was that she did have something to do with his appreciation of jazz, but that something a cocktail of ambivalence and shame.

In his 1989 oral history interview with Bryant DuPre, Williams recalled that when he was a teenager, after he had collected some records of Louis Armstrong, he took to an especially beautiful solo by Armstrong and was compelled to share that piece with his mother. Though portrayed as musically gifted by Grayson in the 1942, film version of *The Vanishing Virginian*, Williams’s mother, as he recalled, hardly listened to any music. But, on Williams’s suggestion, the household acquired a phonograph, and she occasionally listened to classical music on it.³²

Convinced that his mother would enjoy the music as much as he did, Williams brought her before the record player and put on Armstrong. When it got to the right part, he asked, “isn’t that beautiful?” Skirting the question, she merely looked at Williams and

²⁸ *Oz Scripts*, Box 2, Records, “Smithsonian Institution, Press, Editor, Special Projects,” accession 96-029, 1971-1995, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

²⁹ Cindy Hutchins (Producer, The Smithsonian Institution), e-mail message to author through J. R. Taylor, March 13, 2018.

³⁰ Eddie Smith, “Martin Williams: Bringing It All Back Home,” *Style Weekly: A Cultural Guide to Richmond*, vol. IV, March 4, 1986, 38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 38–40.

³² Bryant DuPre Oral History Interview, Appendix II.

said, “Martin, you’ve got nigger blood.” The thirty-two-year-old DuPre, in an attempt to unwind this incendiary turn in the conversation, quickly said, “you should have said thanks.” Williams, not willing to let his deceased mother off the hook for saying the word, let alone its utterance in relation to Armstrong, snapped, “well, I should have said, ‘you ought to know.’”³³

It was not the first time Williams had heard that word from his mother. But, in times before, she had used the word only as a negative example, for what not to say. “I was instructed,” Williams noted to DuPre earlier in the interview, referring to his parents’ lessons to him, “that one would never use that word ‘nigger.’” These instructions, as Williams later realized, were governed more by class than conscience. That word, his parents taught Williams, belonged to the parlance of “lower class people.”³⁴

If, by breaching her own rule about the use of this word, Rebecca Williams was attempting to put an end to her son’s interest in jazz, it only had the opposite effect. Knowing now that jazz could be taken as a matter of familial rebellion, Williams found the handle to a problem he was just beginning to grasp. Gradually, jazz became more than a pass-time for Williams, but a way in which he could claim independence from his family and their ways.

Indirectly, and in a few ways, this Armstrong record was revelatory for Williams. It revealed to him that people could hear past the music—projecting whatever, and however, they might. It showed the blatant hypocrisy, perhaps latent, in his mother. And, retroactively, it cast his relationship with his parents in a different light. “. . . It was not a happy way to grow up, in some respects,” Williams said to DuPre, because “I was sort of supposed to be a tool of their social ambitions.”³⁵

³³ Ibid., p..

³⁴ Ibid., p..

³⁵ Ibid., p..

Whence did his parents' social ambitions come, and of what nature, color, and timbre? In addition to the DuPre interview, and Rebecca Williams's books—a second volume, titled *Carry Me Back*, consisting of diary entries from the 1910s, was published in 1942—there are also clues to these questions in a book written by Rebecca Williams's mother, Rosa Faulkner Yancey.

Mother's Mother—Rosa Faulkner (Yancey)

Rosa Faulkner was born in Lynchburg, Virginia in 1875, and she married Robert Yancey in 1892. He was thirty-seven, she was seventeen.³⁶ In addition to producing children, right away, for her husband, who served as the district attorney for the city of Lynchburg for thirty-five years, Faulkner, by then a Yancey, also read voraciously.³⁷ “Mother would go along sewing, mending, and directing the household quite industriously for a few days,” her daughter wrote in *The Vanishing Virginian*, “then she would get bored with it and she would slide into a moratorium.”³⁸ The moratoria, or suspension of activities directed toward her family, were enacted so Yancey could read and sometimes write. Rebecca Williams observed, with a level of sympathy that perhaps only writers shared, “she was simply in another world.”³⁹

With her own typewriter, Yancey wrote poetry and submitted many for publication.⁴⁰ In 1935, the year her grandson turned six, her book, *Lynchburg and Its Neighbors*, was published. It was not a collection of poetry, but a history of her city and a collection of genealogies of its inhabitants. It is there that we gain the first glimpses of Williams's lineage.

³⁶ Rosa Faulkner Yancey, *Lynchburg and Its Neighbors*, (Richmond: J. W. Fergusson & Sons, 1935), 295.

³⁷ Rebecca Yancey Williams, *The Vanishing Virginian*, 17.

³⁸ Ibid., 113.

³⁹ Ibid., 114.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

In a section titled “Faulkner,” Yancey traced her maiden name to her great-grandfather, James Faulkner, an Englishman who married an American woman from “a distinguished New York family” named Rebecca Hamilton—the likely source, or reason, for naming her daughter Rebecca Yancey. James Faulkner’s son, Isaac Hamilton Faulkner, was born “on the Eastern Shore of Maryland,” but eventually settled in Winchester, Virginia.⁴¹ There, Isaac Faulkner was “successful in business and became a man of large means.”⁴² It’s not clear what business he was in, but he did leave behind an inheritance for his son, J. William Faulkner, to open a pharmacy in Lynchburg, away from home. This son, Rosa Yancey’s father, received a detailed treatment in the “Faulkner” chapter.

He was born in Winchester in 1844 and “marched against John Brown” in 1859, when the abolitionist seized a military arsenal in Harper’s Ferry, about thirty miles northeast of Winchester. J. William Faulkner was only about fifteen then, so the “march” was likely symbolic, but, only two years before the start of the Civil War, his devotion to the southern cause was clear.

Just as the Second World War had defined the world of Williams’s life, so the Civil War defined the world of his great-grandparents’ life. A major difference was that they were on opposing “sides” of history, so to speak. By 1861, when the Civil War commenced, J. William Faulkner was old enough to join the Confederate Army, and he served under the Confederate General “Stonewall” Jackson during the General’s tenure from 1861 to 1863.⁴³ After contracting and recovering from pneumonia, J. William Faulkner specialized in medicine, and, when “the War”—that’s how Yancey referred to it in her book—had ended in 1866, he moved to Lynchburg, a city that was over 155 miles south of his hometown in Winchester. Yancey did not speculate on the motivation behind

⁴¹ Yancey, *Lynchburg and Its Neighbors*, 302.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

this significant move, but, geographically, and perhaps politically, it was a move away from Washington D.C. and from the north. The year he moved there, he married Rosa Adams, and, nine years later, their daughter Rosa Faulkner was born.

It's unclear whether Williams had ever read his grandmother's book. If he had, he could have figured out that there was no direct relations between his Faulkner line and the line that produced the novelist William Faulkner, who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1949—the year Williams pursued an M.A. in English literature at the University of Pennsylvania. But Williams admired the Mississippi-born novelist tremendously. On several versions of a résumé he created in the early nineties—found in both his personal files and in his Smithsonian files—he placed this paragraph directly below the letterhead, on the first page: “The American arts are worthy, often definitive expressions of the twentieth century. We live in a country which in recent memory has produced William Faulkner and Dashiell Hammet; Martha Graham and Fred Astaire; Eugene O'Neill and John Ford; Frank Lloyd Wright and Walt Kelly; Charles Ives and Duke Ellington; Leontyne Price and Sarah Vaughan.”⁴⁴

Faulkner also served as a bridge to another southern writer—and Williams's friend—Albert Murray. In 1974, after reading Murray's *South to a Very Old Place*, Williams wrote to him, “. . . if I know anything about English and American prose (and I do) this is the first time anyone has used a personal Joyce-Faulkner inspired novel style in informal essays. Hey, you've given the American language something to deal with.”⁴⁵

More important than direct kinship in military and political figures in the south, Williams existed in perhaps a stronger, aesthetic kinship with southerners like Faulkner,

⁴⁴ Martin Williams, Curriculum Vita [sic], *Resumes (new)*, Box 1, Martin Williams Collection, Center for Black Music Research Library and Archives, Columbia College Chicago.

⁴⁵ Martin Williams to Albert Murray, August 5, 1976, *Other Writers, Critics (Jazz)*, Box 2, Records, “Smithsonian Institution, Press, Editor, Special Projects,” accession 96-029, 1971-1995, Smithsonian Institution Archives. The paragraph was also printed in his last book *Hidden in Plain Sight*.

Hammet, Ellington, and Price. Williams's difference, or distance, from his family was also there because, in his southern world, a vocation in the arts was gendered.

As professionals, men in his family were merchants, doctors, lawyers, or politicians, whereas women, like his mother and maternal-grandmother, could be poets, historians, diarists, or memoirists. In Rebecca Yancey's second book, *Carry Me Back*, she accounted for her earliest introduction to world literature in a story about her mother.

She "had grown up in the Victorian tradition," the book tells us, and that made conversations about adult subjects difficult. When her daughter asked her about sex, she became "the Artful Dodger," someone who, in her case, resorted to the classics for instruction, for her inquiring daughter. "Here is a book I think you will find interesting," her mother would say, "It will throw more light on the subject you mentioned that I possibly could." Indirectly, this evasion into the classics helped acquaint the young Rebecca Yancey with literary classics:

Her method had a great deal to do with the number of books I read but, I am quite sure, it fell far short of informing me of the facts of life. For reading is like traveling: you have to carry some knowledge with you in order to bring a wider knowledge home.

In the back of my first diary I find an imposing list of books for any young girl to have read. All of Scott, of course, and almost all of Dickens. I had finished the majority of Shakespeare's plays and four of George Eliot's novels, and still I was in the dark. Nor had I seen the bottom of the well in *Les Misérables*. I had even read a number of plays by Ibsen and Oscar Wilde in comparative innocence! And beneath *The Idiot* in faded ink, is written:

"What a glorious writer is this Dostoievsky! He seems to have all knowledge, all wisdom and all compassion. I have cried my eyes out!"⁴⁶

While Yancey did not state in her books who built the family library, this collection of literary classics was likely maintained by her mother Rosa Yancey, who was identified as an avid reader so frequently in the original memoirs that in the movie version of *The*

⁴⁶ Rebecca Yancey Williams, *Carry Me Back*, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1942), 12.

Vanishing Virginian, Spring Byington, who portrayed Rosa Faulkner, could be seen dining with her family with a book in front of her.

Two Grandfathers

The men in Williams's family, on the other hand, presented quite a contrast. In fact, there is a representative, bizarre coincidence relating Williams's two grandfathers that involved inkwells in the courtroom.

In *The Vanishing Virginian*, the title of which referred to Rebecca Williams's father Robert Davis Yancey's exceedingly archaic southern ways, she wrote about a court case that her father took on. This anecdote is worth quoting in full because, in its buffoonery, its appeal to minstrelsy, and in its apparent tone of innocence, it demonstrates why Williams might have kept quiet about his mother's bestseller:

My father loved it when coincidence played a prank upon him. He took the prank to his bosom and naughtily used it for his own purposes—and not infrequently he overused it. I am sure there was one time when the judge of the court at Lynchburg must have thought he overused coincidence most outrageously.

It happened once that my father was trying a Negro man for murder, and this Negro had a very, very dark skin. Someone had upset an ink bottle on Father's desk and Father, being engrossed in making his argument before the jury, had happened to lay his handkerchief in the large pool of wet ink. My father was presenting his case in this wise:

This colored man, Silas, was known to be a bad character. He had been paying marked attention to a young girl of his race. The girl herself had seemed pleased with his attentions at first. But she belonged to a respectable family. Her father and mother had told her that she would have to give up her undesirable suitor. On the night that the girl was killed she had been in the house alone. She had locked the front door and she sat sewing in her room. Silas came to the house. He was furious at finding the door locked. Loudly he knocked upon the door.

Here Father paused in his exposition. The day was very hot, and Father reached for his handkerchief to wipe the perspiration from his face:

"You open dis door, Jane, and let me in," Father now rasped out, impersonating Silas. At this the jury began to laugh immoderately. Father had inked his face with his handkerchief and he was as black as Silas himself! But unconscious of this he continued, this time taking the character of the young Negro girl:

"Go 'way, Silas. I can't see you no mo,' my mamma and papa will whup me if I lets you in."

More laughter from the jury.

“Angrily Silas beat at the door.” With these words, Father vigorously began to go through the motions of knocking in a door, keeping up threats in the voice of Silas all the time—but before the door broke down, the jury was laughing so loudly that Father stopped short.

“Now, what is the matter?” he asked, giving way to a puzzled laugh of his own.

When the cause of all the hilarity was explained, Father was as amused as anyone else.

But the judge was irritated. He called for a pause in activities and he ordered Father to go and wash his face. Of course, the judge was right. But something in his tone provoked the rebel in Father and he refused to go and wash: There was no law which required him to present his arguments with a white face, insisted Father, and in this case he preferred black. He did not want to take unfair advantage of the prisoner. Here everyone except the judge laughed again. The judge refused to let the trial go on until Father had washed his face and Father would not wash. They had it back and forth.⁴⁷

This sketch, roughly two pages in the memoirs, became a nearly five-minute scene in the movie. The director Frank Borzage turned the “unconscious” blackface into a dramatic strategy that saved the defendant’s life, as if to ask dramatically, what if blackface saved a black man’s life?

Williams’s paternal grandfather, Samuel Walker Williams—who served as Attorney General of Virginia from 1910 to 1914—also had a story with a courtroom inkwell. This story was published on the front page of the *New York Times*:

CHARLESTON, W. Va., Dec. 9.—Gov. Glasscock to-day issued a requisition on the Governor of Virginia for the return to Welch, W. Va., of Samuel Williams, Attorney General-elect of Virginia, for trial at Welch on a charge of malicious assault.

Judge Williams was indicted some weeks ago by the Grand Jury of McDowell County as a result of a personal difficulty in a court room in which Joseph M. Sanders, former Justice of the Supreme Court, was struck by an ink well thrown by Judge Williams, who resented a remark made by Judge Sanders. Williams, at the time the indictment was returned, was the Democratic nominee for Attorney General of Virginia and was elected at that office on Nov. 2.

It was stated about that time that he would appear for trial at Welch, but since then it has been said that he would not voluntarily return there, inasmuch as he objected to the fact that negroes had on some occasions been allowed to serve on juries in McDowell.

⁴⁷ Rebecca Yancey Williams, *The Vanishing Virginian*, 221–223.

Gov. Glasscock has had the application for the requisition under consideration for several days.⁴⁸

The marriage between Williams's parents was therefore one between the children of a state attorney and a city attorney, two lawyers who couldn't handle ink in the courtroom.

Father—John Bell Williams

Williams's father, John Bell Williams, though not an attorney, was a medical doctor and administrator at Richmond's St. Luke's hospital for forty years, and he wanted his son to follow the example of the famous attorneys in the family.⁴⁹ Williams complied, for two months.

After receiving his B.A. from the University of Virginia in 1948, Williams attended the law school at the same institution. Soon, he recognized that law was the wrong field for him. He didn't enjoy the work, and often couldn't understand basic documents, even when, just months before, he was an English major. "Not only could I not read the books, I couldn't read the titles!" Williams told a Richmond weekly in 1986, "I just wasn't interested."⁵⁰ Amidst something that approached a personal crisis, Williams called his father on the phone and told him he couldn't remain in law school. And in a kind of dismissal that recalled what his mother had done before an Armstrong record, Williams's father simply said, "oh don't worry about it."⁵¹

On the other side of ambivalence toward parents and parentage was something that shaped Williams. His unhappy childhood, Williams noted in the DuPre interview, also gave him "a certain idealism and a certain sense of standards."⁵²

⁴⁸ "To Try State Officer: West Virginia Want's Virginia's Attorney General-Elect for Assult," *New York Times*, December 10, 1909.

⁴⁹ "Rebecca Yancey Williams, Wrote 'The Vanishing Virginian' in 1940," *The Washington Post*, C8.

⁵⁰ Eddie Smith, "Martin Williams: Bringing It All Back Home," 38.

⁵¹ Bryant DuPre Oral History Interview, Appendix II.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p..

While fostered at home, the “sense of standards” were also cultivated in his schooling. When DuPre asked, “what schools did you go to? Were they public schools, or private schools?” Williams denied the former possibility quickly, making clear how unthinkable that would have been for his parents. “. . . It was always private schools.”⁵³ Before he entered the University of Virginia, Williams attended two private schools. The first, called Mrs. Talbot’s school, was close to his home in the what’s known as the “Fan District,” near downtown Richmond. In 1932, when he was ready to begin third-grade, he transferred to another private school—farther away and more suburban—called St. Christopher’s School.

Personal Awakening

The school, originally called the Chamberlayne School, was founded in 1911 by Churchill Gibson Chamberlayne, a Richmond native who attended the Theological Seminary of Virginia.⁵⁴ In 1920, four years after Chamberlayne was priested in the Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia acquired his school and renamed it St. Christopher’s School, after the patron saint of travel. There Chamberlayne served as headmaster until his death in 1939.⁵⁵ Williams studied at St. Christopher’s School for ten years, from 1932 to 1942—third grade to twelfth grade—and it was there that he wrote his first pieces on jazz. In a fiftieth anniversary edition of the school’s year book, Williams wrote, “I consider my St. Christopher’s education to be the best I could possibly have received.”⁵⁶

Williams attended all three phases of St. Christopher’s curriculum, known as the Lower School, Middle School, and Upper School. In the first two periods, between third

⁵³ Ibid., p..

⁵⁴ “Dr. Chamberlayne, Educator in South,” *New York Times*, April 4th, 1939.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ “Martin Williams,” *Raps & Taps: 1942–1992 50th Anniversary Edition*, 1992, 27.

and ninth grade, he engaged in the school's football and baseball games. But it was in 1940, after he had entered the Upper School, that Williams began participating in the school's Dramatic Club, Cheer Leading Club, and began writing for the school's newspaper *The Pine Needle*.⁵⁷

It was also about this time when Williams began to attend jazz concerts in Richmond. He noted to DuPre that it was after he had gone to hear bands—including Tommy Dorsey's band, possibly with the young Frank Sinatra—with his girlfriends that he began to understand that his taste in the music differed from his girlfriends' tastes. While they preferred romantic ballads, he liked jazz instrumentals, but “not exclusively either way. . . .”⁵⁸ But in addition to white bands, he also got to see black bands, and the most significant performances that he saw in 1940 were ones in the basement of the Mosque Theater in downtown Richmond, about a fifteen-minute walk from his home. There he saw Ella Fitzgerald and members of Chick Webb's band—a year after Webb, the band leader, had died. He also saw the Count Basie band, which included Lester Young. The theater, sometimes called the Richmond Mosque, was a large auditorium that held black dances—called “colored dances” then, Williams noted—in the basement. Williams and his white friends would be “roped off right beside the band stand, segregated there. . . .”⁵⁹

This unique experience brought him closer to jazz and its musicians. Standing near Young, Williams looked at his sheet music, which was labeled with the letter “X.” Curious about what song the “X” referred to, Williams asked Young, “what was the name of that?” Young responded, “Well, that's X, we gon' call it Miss X.”⁶⁰ It was an experience that Williams cherished down to its details. As Williams recounted Young's remarks, he even

⁵⁷ “Ten Years,” *Raps & Taps*, volume XVII, 1942, 26.

⁵⁸ Bryant DuPre Oral History Interview, Appendix II.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p..

⁶⁰ Ibid., p..

feigned Young's tone and speech. And while it was around this time that Williams started writing for his school's newspaper about jazz, he did not write about this particular experience. But years later, when he wrote about Young in *The Jazz Tradition*, his words reflected the experience of someone who got to hear Young in close proximity, as if that small group standing in the Mosque Theatre basement were just a company of two. "His temperament was not universal. Indeed one sometimes feels he was gaily gentle to the point of deliberate innocence and innocent to the point of self-delusion. Yet his musical personality is so strong that, while one is in its presence, little else exists," Williams would write.⁶¹

Between 1940 and 1942, Williams also participated in St. Christopher's Dramatic Club. In 1942, the year Williams graduated from St. Christopher's and entered the University of Virginia—"The University," was the way the year book called it—the year book editor, presumably one of his classmates, recognized Williams's "droll sense of humor, which livens up any class he's in." The editor also noted that Williams's "performance is always good. . . . His pantomime [read "pantomime"] and the clever twist he gave his lines were outstanding. . . ." ⁶² It is likely that the editor was merely paying a friendly compliment to Williams, but acting had been a long aspiration of Williams's.

In the DuPre interview, Williams talked about how, before his career as a jazz critic was solidly established, he had wanted to become a professional actor. ". . . When I was a kid, the first thing that I was aware of wanting to be . . . [was] a comedian," Williams said, "but that was the only kind of acting I knew, because I knew it from radio, from comedians on the radio, the way they are now on television. And listening to them. And so what I really meant was I wanted to be an actor."⁶³ But the activity that most closely

⁶¹ Williams, *The Jazz Tradition*, 118.

⁶² "Ten Years," *Raps & Taps*, 26.

⁶³ Bryant DuPre Oral History Interview, Appendix II.

foreshadowed Williams's writing career was his work for the school publication, *The Pine Needle*. The same editor wrote that Williams was "an authority on swing and has a fine collection of records. Through his column he has been a big help in determining our taste for good records."⁶⁴

In the fall of 1942, Williams began attending the University of Virginian. His parents' original plan was for him to one day be an attorney, and likely stay close to home and their social circles. Even after graduating from U.Va. in 1948, Williams briefly adhered to his parents plans.

But Williams's experience in the Second World War, from 1944 to 1946, changed him. It helped him rethink the trajectory of his life. Having registered in the Naval Reserve, Williams left U.Va. to attend the Midshipmen's School in the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. There he took courses that would eventually help him finish his degree in his alma mater in Charlottesville. In 1944, Williams was placed on a Navy transport ship that assisted soldiers at bases in the Pacific theater. Though never in the front line, he participated in the Battle of Okinawa and Iwo Jima.

At the end of the war, Williams's ship docked at Long Beach, a major port near Los Angeles. It was about that time that the twenty-one year old Williams had the most interesting and illuminating jazz experiences. He noted to DuPre that he first heard *Shaw Nuff* in a car radio, but, at the time, he couldn't hear the underlying changes of the piece, and he also seemed to have found something unsettling in the music. At the time, Williams was still not sure whether that was a reflection of him or of the music. Soon he saw Parker and Gillespie perform at Billy Berg's, a legendary occasion whose significance for Williams remained that he was not "hip" to these two originators of the bebop idiom when he saw them.

⁶⁴ "Ten Years," *Raps & Taps*, 26.

It was also during this brief stay in Los Angeles, between the end of 1945 and early 1946, that Williams got to hear Kid Ory live for the first time. On hearing Ory, and being impressed by him in ways that differed from his experience hearing white musicians such as Eddie Condon, Williams began to find himself at a critical crossroads. What should he make of the popular white bands when the black bands that preceded them seem to appeal to him in a deeper way? And what can this tell him about his own experience with Parker and Gillespie? These questions stayed with Williams for years.

Williams returned home before the summer of 1946. This move, he told DuPre, was a mistake. He had wanted to stay in Europe to help relocate refugees, when countries were overwhelmed by implementing the international treaties that had just been ratified, and he had no desire to continue his university education. He certainly had early interest in literature, but his most intense study of literature did not occur until years later.

He also wished to stay away from his family. Williams was not explicit at this point with DuPre, but he had been trying to get away from his family gradually. The move to Charlottesville was indeed the first step. After he had graduated from U.Va., he finally decided to move north.

After receiving a B.A. in English literature from the University of Virginia, Williams was accepted into the law school of his alma mater. After two months of turmoil there, he decided to abandon law for good and, instead, work toward becoming a professor of English literature. It was a career move that his parents would oppose to the least.

Williams did not apply to a doctoral program directly. Instead, he applied to a one-year M.A. program in English literature at the University of Pennsylvania. There Williams took many classes, and while his grades were not very high—mostly Bs with the occasional As and Cs—he did gain admission in 1950 in the doctoral program at Columbia University to study Tudor and Stuart Drama.

Another major experience he had in Philadelphia was his experience seeing Sidney Bechet. It was a critic's awakening that went deeper than his teenage experience with live jazz.

In his interview with Terry Gross, he had noted that the music that "sold himself to the devil" was a trio record he heard on the radio that featured Teddy Wilson. But with Bechet, he came to understand jazz and its relation to jazz musicians in a new way. In Bechet, he heard something profound.

Twenty Years in New York

Williams studied at Columbia University for six years, from 1950 to 1956. According to his personal resume, he taught introductory classes at Columbia College from 1952 to 1956, when he declined reappointment.⁶⁵ Columbia College was at the time an all-boys college where senior faculty taught more advanced classes and graduate students covered introductory English and humanities classes. Williams, according to himself, excelled as a teacher. He noted that he had little patience for students who didn't understand him, but he taught the subjects thoroughly.⁶⁶

But he didn't move to New York City for this doctorate alone. He moved, as he noted in the mid-eighties for a Richmond reporter, so that he could be meet Thelonious Monk. Only two years after he had arrived in New York, he started writing for a collector's magazine called the *Record Changer*. These early entries were brief, and they were a continuation, in format and style, of what he had done in his early days writing for the student publication in his preparatory school. But now Williams wrote also with intentions to break into the jazz press.

⁶⁵ According to faculty records in Columbia University archives, he started teaching in 1953. This discrepancy could be a minor mistake on either end.

⁶⁶ Bryant DuPre Oral History Interview, Appendix II.

It was also in the early fifties that Williams published two pieces of literary criticism in two academic publications. The first, published in a small-format journal called *The Explicator*, was an essay on a poetry collection by James Joyce. The collection, called *Chamber Music*, told a story that for Williams represented the plight of the modern man. In structure, this analysis was formal, and it showcased a Williams who could write précis pieces of literature. But his commentary also intimated at something relevant to the modern world. James Joyce was by then a major literary figure, so it was no surprise that Williams took an interest in the subject. But Joyce did not belong to the focus of Williams's major at Columbia—Renaissance literature.

In another article, published a few years later, Williams tackled a subject closer to his specialization. It was the most academic article Williams had ever published. The article was on Christopher Marlowe, and Williams wrote to explain how even Marlowe scholars have failed to understand the background of a unique turn in one of Marlowe's stories. By going back to Greek and Latin sources, Williams demonstrated that he could write finely argued pieces on English literature.

But his time at Columbia did not go as intended. By the mid-fifties, Williams started to feel that he was not committing to his subject with as much enthusiasm and focus as he had done just a few years before at the University of Pennsylvania. Every year, just before the semester would start, he noted to DuPre, he would get a case of laryngitis. This was a sign for Williams, but it was a sign that he did not pick up right away. When it was time for him to take his comprehensive exam, he flunked badly. He noted to DuPre that he did not need to take the exam right away, but only did it because the decision was “goaded on by a love affair” he had at the time.⁶⁷ Reflecting on this period, he said it was

⁶⁷ Bryant DuPre Oral History Interview, Appendix II.

simply a sign that English was not the right subject for him, just as law was the wrong subject for him seven years before.

According to J. R. Taylor, another reason Williams quit the English department was that, according to Williams, in those days, to make it into the academic world of his speciality, he would have had to be a homosexual, and Williams was not comfortable with that as a soft requirement.

After he had quit the English department at Columbia, Williams began committing to writing longer jazz pieces. After Whitney Balliett was promoted to be a jazz writer at *The New Yorker*, his spot at the *Saturday Review* opened up, and Williams took that on. He did not become a staff writer, and he supplemented his income by writing for other establishments in the jazz press, and to book publishers. He had two duties. He reviewed contemporary records and wrote critical appraisals that took record reviews as starting points. He also began to work on longer, more biographic pieces on older figures who laid the groundwork for the music of the time.⁶⁸

In 1958, he started *The Jazz Review* with Nat Hentoff. With this publication, he wanted to bring a level of seriousness to jazz writing that had not been in print. His role at the publication was to solicit articles, and he received articles from critics he admired, such as Gunther Schuller, André Hodeir, Max Harrison, and from musicians such as Cannonball Adderley. The magazine did not generate enough money for the initial publisher, so his friend, a Chinese American jazz critic named Hsio Wen Shih, took on the role of publisher.⁶⁹

Shih was the son of a wealthy Chinese diplomat who represented the Republic of China before the Chinese Civil War. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he moved to New York.

⁶⁸ Bryant DuPre Oral History Interview, Appendix II.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

According to J. R. Taylor, who heard this story from Williams, Shih was an alcoholic who suffered severe blackouts. Once, he awoke from such a blackout in the cabin of a commercial airliner. Looking out the cabin window, he noticed that the plane was on the tarmac of an airport. He asked a flight attendant where they were and where they were going, and he was told that he was at the Hong Kong International Airport on a plane that was ready to take off for Beijing. As the son of a former Nationalist government official, Beijing would not have been a welcome site, and he got off the plane and made his way back to New York.⁷⁰

Shih served as the publisher of *The Jazz Review* until the magazine ceased publication in 1961. In December of that year, Shih became engaged to the harpist Daphne Bayne Hellman. They married one month later, but, in 1965, Shih left their home in New York and disappeared forever.⁷¹ The loss of Shih remained a shock and mystery to Williams, who had been working with Shih on a few projects.

Marriage to Martha Coker

In 1959, just after Williams had started *The Jazz Review*, he supplemented his income by working at the *Encyclopedia Americana*, and it was there that he met his future wife Martha Patton Coker. Williams told DuPre how he first met Coker in detail.

As an editor at the encyclopedia, he fielded inquiries from readers who needed scholarly references. After a young woman had written to ask about the nature of “patriotism,” he looked up the word in a compendium on political science and noted that the author of the article on “patriotism” was Francis Coker, a professor at Yale University. It turned out that that Francis Coker was Martha Coker’s father, and they started to talk.

⁷⁰ J. R. Taylor (jazz critic and producer, The Smithsonian Institution) in discussion with the author, February 2018.

⁷¹ Randy Kennedy, “Daphne Hellman, Harpist With Eclectic Taste, Dies at 86,” *New York Times*, August 8, 2002, A23.

They married a year later, in 1960, and in 1961, their twin sons, Charles and Frederick were born.⁷²

In 1980, Williams divorced his wife of twenty years. He had had difficulties with her for many years. According to Larry Kart, who visited Williams in his New York apartment shortly before he moved to Washington D.C. to work at the Smithsonian, while Williams shared an apartment with his wife and three children, they seemed to have lived in different quarters in the apartment.⁷³

The Smithsonian Institution

In the late 1960s, the Smithsonian Institution was looking to become a more lively place. It was readying itself for a major event: the bicentennial celebration of the founding of the United States in 1776. Before this, the Smithsonian was known chiefly as a consortium of museums and a repository of historic and historical artifacts such as airplanes and typewriters. To accomplish an institutional lively turn, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Sidney Dillon Ripley hired Julian Euell, a musician who studied with Charles Mingus, to be the institution's Assistant Secretary for Public Service, and James Morris to run a new division called the Division of Performing Arts.⁷⁴

In 1971, after consulting with Euell, Morris hired Williams to create a Jazz Program within the Division of Performing Arts. Morris saw jazz as a folk art, and he considered Williams an expert on this art, someone who would be able to find great jazz musicians to perform at the Smithsonian and someone who could build a research team that would produce education material on jazz for patrons of the institution. Williams began working

⁷² Bryant DuPre Oral History Interview, Appendix II.

⁷³ Larry Kart (jazz critic, *Down Beat* and *The Chicago Tribune*) in discussion with the author, February 2018.

⁷⁴ James Morris, *Smithsonian Impresario*, 91.

at the Smithsonian in late 1971 and produced the first jazz concert series in late 1972.

This concert series, called Jazz Heritage concerts, would run for nine seasons.

The first major product that the Jazz Program produced was the 1973 *Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*. The collection was originally Morris's idea, but he gave Williams complete control over the project. For Williams, this was an unprecedented opportunity. He had always wanted to create a set like *Classic Jazz*. To readers of his previous books, such as *Where's the Melody?*, *The Jazz Tradition*, and books in the *Jazz Masters* series, their experience with the music was removed. These books did end with discographic notes on what records the readers were encouraged to get, but for readers who did not own those records, the reading ended long before the listening.

The *Classic Jazz* set was an immediate success, an event so unexpected that the Jazz Program could not handle the initial demands. The reasons for the set's success was threefold. First, at under twenty dollars, and with eighty-four recordings, the collection was a steal. Second, the collection gathered material from seventeen disparate record labels, in an ensemble that had not been done before. It was the quickest way to survey jazz without repeated trips to a record shop, and, in many cases, selections from the set were not universally available. They could be found if one were skilled at locating records, but even jazz enthusiasts could find pieces they hadn't owned among the eighty-four recordings. Third and perhaps the most important reason, was that this set yielded an aesthetic density that resonated with even the most skeptical ears.

In 1974, Williams hired J. R. Taylor to run the Jazz Oral History Project.⁷⁵ The project was the result of the meeting of the Jazz Panel of the National Endowment of the Arts. In its initial phases, the New York firm Jazz Interactions run the project, which sought to preserve in oral history the lives of major jazz musicians. After Williams

⁷⁵ James Morris, *Smithsonian Impresario*, 119.

deemed the Jazz Program the right place to inherit the project, he called Taylor, whom he first met in 1968, to see if he was interested in leading the transplanted project. At the time, Taylor was a curator at the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University, a job he had had for about two years. But Taylor agreed, and he would work at the Smithsonian for nearly fourteen years.⁷⁶

Taylor, once regarded by Williams to be—along with Stanley Crouch and Gary Giddins—one of the three most important young jazz critics, had admired Williams since he was in high school. He was born James Richardson Taylor, in 1949 in Charleston, South Carolina. His father was in the military, and, as a child, he lived in a number of places before his family settled in McLean, Virginia, where he attended high school. Before he graduated from McLean High School, he had read Williams's articles in *Down Beat* as well as his *Jazz Masters* series. Taylor attended New College in Sarasota for three years and was known as the jazz person on campus. One year, when Ran Blake performed at New College, Taylor got to know Blake and asked Blake to introduce him to Williams. Taylor was newly given an opportunity to teach an introductory jazz history class at New College, but he wanted Williams's anointment. Blake made the call.

Taylor met Williams in 1968 at the latter's office in New York City. According to Taylor, Williams's parents had bought a studio apartment for Williams to use as his office. By then, Williams had already been married for eight years and were raising three sons. The office was where he could read and write away from his family. There, Williams talked to Taylor for a few hours, and played *Shaw 'Nuff* for Taylor, who was hearing it for the first time. Sure enough Taylor was ready, Williams assured him.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ J. R. Taylor (jazz critic and producer, The Smithsonian Institution) in discussion with the author, February 2018.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

With this powerful experience behind them, it was with great enthusiasm that Taylor agreed to join Williams's Jazz Program in 1974. In the first few years, things went as expected. Taylor helped to continue the Jazz Oral History Project by selecting interviewers he deemed appropriate, and by hiring transcribers to turn the tapes to text. Taylor also began working on producing records with Williams. After the success of *Classic Jazz*, which was released a year before Taylor's arrival at the Smithsonian, he wrote the liner notes for the *Louis Armstrong and Earl Hines 1928* two LP set, published in 1975.

In a few years, however, it became clear that working with Williams in person was not what Taylor had expected. Williams was a prima donna, and while his reputation as an author and jazz expert was hardly disputed in the Division of Performing Arts, his reputation as a coworker and friend deteriorated gradually, and not just with Taylor.⁷⁸

By 1981, Williams's disagreement with his boss James Morris degraded so much that Williams had to leave the Division of Performing Arts. He became a "Cultural Historian" in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. According to Taylor, Williams did not enjoy a good reception there either. He would go from one colleague to another making small talk, disrupting their work and forgetting his own.

In 1982, the Division of Performing Arts itself dissolved. The recordings program within the division was moved to the Smithsonian Institution Press, run by a man named Felix Lowe. The press was akin to a university press—in many ways, the Smithsonian resembled a university without students. While the press had mainly been publishing books on academic subjects, Lowe had worked with Williams on an Eric Dolphy book and on Williams's two books on comics.

⁷⁸ J. R. Taylor (jazz critic and producer, The Smithsonian Institution) in discussion with the author, February 2018.

In 1983, with help from Lowe, Williams returned from the American History Museum to the Recordings Program. That same year, working with Schuller and Taylor, Williams produced *Big Band Jazz*, which went on the sell almost as well as *Classic Jazz*, which was released ten years before. The following year, the *Big Band Jazz* album received the Grammy award.⁷⁹

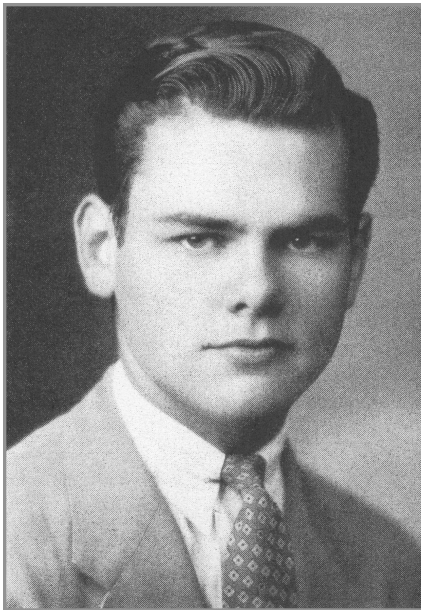
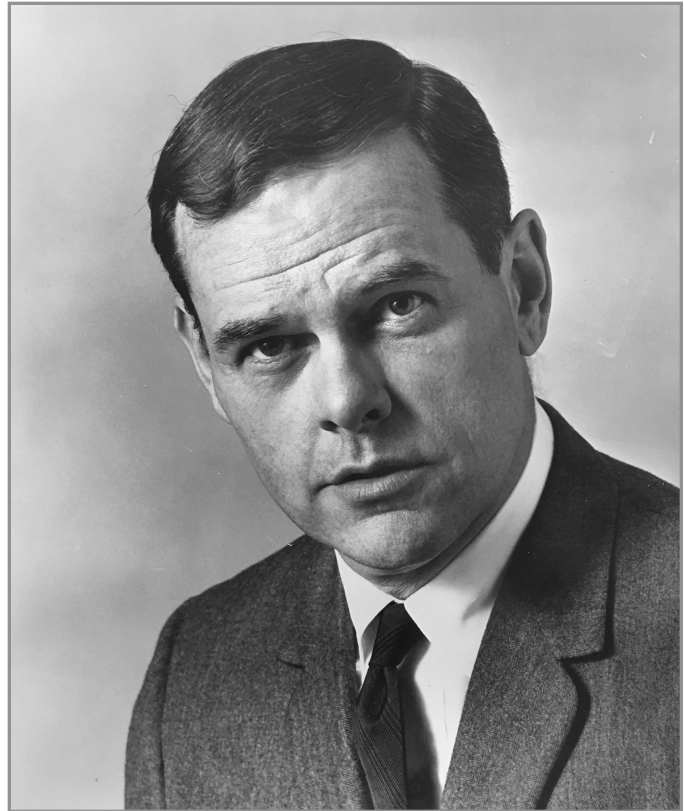
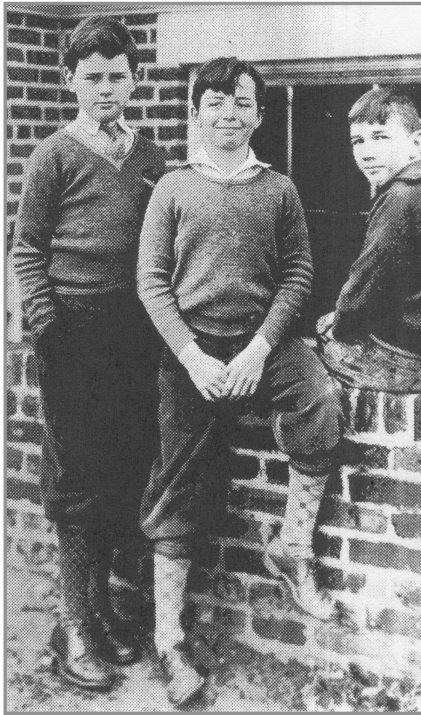
The success of *Big Band Jazz* justified the existence of the recordings program to Lowe, who until then had little experience working on music. At the press, Williams lost his title as a director, and he had no Jazz Program. Instead, he became an editor and turned his focus on publishing book and pursuing projects that he had been interested in for some time.

At the end of the DuPre interview, he asked Williams whether he could visit again in thirty years and do a followup interview. Williams, somewhat flattered by that thought, laughed for a bit, and said that he had indeed planned to live that long. Later that year, Williams learned that he had prostate cancer. Because of an earlier diagnosis of diabetes, his cancer treatment had to be delayed. Soon, he was told he had only two years to live.

By 1992, Williams was just about to finish work on *The Smithsonian History of American Jazz*. He sent letters to friends and contributors of the project, most of whom already knew of his illness. Because of his cancer treatment, his immune system had been weakened. In April, Williams caught the flu but continued to live by himself at home, and, when he died, no one knew. His body was discovered on Monday April 13. According to the obituary written by Gary Giddins, Williams could have died as early as Thursday the week before.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Bryant DuPre Oral History Interview, Appendix II.

⁸⁰ Gary Giddins, "Setting the Standard," *Village Voice*, April 28, 1992, 91.



Clockwise from top-left: Williams was elected to be Secretary of the literary society at St. Christopher's, 1935 (Raps & Taps); Williams's headshot in New York City, where he attempted a career in acting (Smithsonian Institution Archives); masthead portrait in the student publication The Pine Needle, where Williams contributed columns on jazz, 1942 (Raps & Taps); Williams was considered a "veteran player" in the Dramatic Club at St. Christopher's. This is from a scene in Priestley's play "Laburnum Grove," 1942 (Raps & Taps).

LINEAL CRITICISM

Aesthetic Genealogy

In the backdrop of an anxiety toward familial lineage, Williams had a vision of jazz that required a musical lineage—a mainline tradition in jazz. The text of this lineage was the sum of his writings on jazz, chiefly in *The Jazz Tradition* and the *Classic Jazz* booklet. The aural statement, or the flesh, of this lineage was the music of *Classic Jazz*—ninety-five selections, from Scott Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag* to *Steppin' by the World* Saxophone Quartet. Stripped of the body of music of *Classic Jazz*, the skeleton of this lineage is in three black men: Armstrong, Parker, and Ornette Coleman.

Williams's jazz project was fundamentally philosophical, and his view on jazz and its criticism is lineal—a belief in a central lineage, or branch, that threaded changes in the music. In theoretical outlook, his most important precursor was the French musicologist André Hodeir, who displayed the seriousness that Williams felt jazz deserved. Instead of anchoring studies of jazz musicians on personality expositions, as the majority of jazz writing at his time did, he recognized that the only way to pay respect to jazz musicians was to understand the genius of their art—an impossible task, even by the best music theorists, but a task worth outlining.

While it is true that Williams found intellectual sympathy and friendship in Gunther Schuller and Sheldon Meyer, Williams's critical wind came from Hodeir's jest in his book *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*. Hodeir noted that he wished his book to be “the *Discourse on Method* of jazz.”⁸¹

⁸¹ André Hodeir, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*, (New York: Grove Press, 1956), 19.

T. S. Eliot

Williams's career as a critic came at a unique time in literary history. His most important influence was classic English literature. When he wrote about Bix Beiderbecke's bearing of the "white man's burden," he was calling back to the English poet Rudyard Kipling's poem about the Philippine-American War. When he discussed Jelly Roll Morton, one of his first loves in jazz, he spoke the "poetic quality" Morton's speech in his conversation with Alan Lomax.⁸² When he conceived of the lineage of major figures in the jazz tradition, he thought in terms of musical geniuses like Bach and Brahms, but he also thought in terms of major literary figures like Shakespeare and James Joyce.

Three key sources provide insight into the thinking behind Williams's criticism. The first is Thomas Stearns Eliot, the poet, critic, and one time business mastermind behind the publisher Faber and Faber. The key document from Eliot that shaped Williams's thinking was a brief 1919 article titled, "Tradition and Individual Talent," published in the *Egoist* along with some of the first installments of *Ulysses*.

The second major source of insight into Williams's criticism is the film criticism of James Agee. The author of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* was a man who wrote about film for *The Nation* and whom W. H. Auden called the disseminator of the most significant journalistic events in the modern American press.

The third, and most welcome, source was an early article he wrote about criticism in *Down Beat* that was published in 1958.

By the time T. S. Eliot's essay "Tradition and Individual Talent" was published in September 1919, he had just turned thirty-one. His first major work, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," had been published four years before, and he was beginning to emerge as a strong voice in Anglo-American poetry. As he wrote his philosophic treatise,

⁸² Martin Williams, *Jazz Changes*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 134.

Eliot was also working on what became his most influential work *The Waste Land*, which emerged three years later in 1922.

On the surface, “Tradition and Individual Talent” was treatise on criticism, but it was also a challenge on the boundaries between literary imagination in general and the critical mode in particular. Is criticism something with which only critics concerned themselves with? Are critics writers of a lesser order than writers of other forms of literature, such as songs, poems, sonnets, epics, plays, novels, and philosophic dialogues? Are all writers also critics? These are questions that signaled a maturity of the genre of criticism, and also questions that Williams was himself trying to answer.

Eliot began his line of thinking by seizing on the idea of the “individual.” When we think of something as distinct, unique, or a new voice, what do we mean? “One of the facts that might come to light in this process is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else,” Eliot began, “In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man. We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet’s difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed.”⁸³ This tendency to seek uniqueness depended on, according to Eliot, a trivial misunderstanding of the new. The key for something to be unique, he suggested, was in capturing the essence of the old. Threading this thinking into Williams’s conception of the jazz tradition, the proper question to be asked about major figures such as Armstrong, Parker, and Ornette Coleman was not how they have completely invented a new language of jazz, but how they have captured the best of the styles before them. This view on the evolution of jazz also presumes—in a move that Williams borrowed from the German philosopher Hegel—the existence of a different

⁸³ T. S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” *The Egoist*, vol. VI, no. 4, September 1919, 55.

class of innovators: musicians, like Ellington and Monk, who transfigure those innovations to “preach” them by orchestration.

André Hodeir

Echoing the French philosopher René Descartes’s foundationalist approach on philosophy, Hodeir wished to rethink all jazz criticism that came before him. Williams, impressed by Hodeir’s approach, developed his version of jazz development on principles outlined in T. S. Eliot’s influential essay, “Tradition and Individual Talent.” While he was heavily influenced by T. S. Eliot, he knew that he could not export literary criticism to another art. Instead, he took the Eliotic framework and developed jazz criticism as the art demanded it.

Williams was sympathetic to a complete rethinking of jazz criticism because he was never satisfied with the jazz histories he read as a teenager. Earlier jazz texts charted the music’s development by talks of regionalism and tribalism, the kind of thinking that Williams found backward and unsatisfying. Music, to him, was not contingent on geography; instead, it depend on great figures, and comparably great followers. By Williams’s time, there had been some critical consensus about who the great figures in jazz were, but Hodeir’s book, published a year after Parker’s death, ambitiously and authoritatively declared the primacy of Armstrong and Parker.

At first, Williams was a moldy fig, someone who felt closer to older music. He was comfortable navigating the history of New Orleanian musicians, and his wrote first profile monographs on Jelly Roll Morton and King Oliver. Confronted with Hodeir’s declarations, he felt unsure about Parker, but Armstrong’s centrality was solidified in Williams. Yet, to be a critic, Williams had to learn to hear developments in increments. Even in this aspect, Hodeir was Williams’s first teacher. “I wouldn’t go so far as to state

that Louis Armstrong was the one who ‘invented’ swing,” Hodeir wrote, “but listening to these records might make one think so. Actually, I believe that the rhythmic sense of jazz musicians continued to grow finer as their art took shape. This sense matured slowly. Armstrong arrived at just the right time to pick the tastiest fruit of Negro-American music.”⁸⁴

Armstrong did not exist *ex nihilo*, nor did Armstrong’s primacy require that. But Hodeir’s metaphor of artistic ripening allowed Williams to relate Armstrong to his most successful followers. In Eliot, Williams found a mechanism for the transmission of genius. Whereas Hodeir placed Armstrong and Parker on nearly equal footing and compared the music and influence of each musician, it was Eliot’s insights that allowed Williams to focus on aspects of Armstrong that most heavily influenced Parker.

Gunther Schuller and Ornette Coleman

Osborn Duke, a novelist and Williams’s fellow graduate student at Columbia, was the first person to see that what Williams was writing in jazz was similar in spirit to conventional literary criticism. Williams admitted as such. Literary criticism by the time Williams was in graduate school was a familiar and distinct genre. But such a statement cannot be said for criticism of the many other arts. In film criticism for instance, there was widespread recognition of the excellence of the work of James Agee in *The Nation*, but film criticism had not become a genre in itself yet. However, as American journalism became more literary, and as the arts became more widely accessible, Williams found himself in a time where he could refine his skills into a new craft.

In 1959, Williams wrote the liner notes to Ornette Coleman’s groundbreaking album *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. Williams had met Coleman at the Lenox School of Jazz, an

⁸⁴ André Hodeir, *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*, 51.

institute outside the city of Lenox, in Massachusetts. More than a decade after failing to appreciate bebop in its genesis, Williams thought he had heard in Coleman the germ for another major revolution in jazz. When the album was released, Coleman was only twenty-nine, and the critical approval of Williams, by then thirty-five, gave the altoist a boost of confidence.

With his pull as a relatively well-known critic, Williams persuaded the owner of the Five Spot, a major jazz club in New York, to hire Coleman to play there, a move that brought Coleman's music to the New York audience. Speaking in Shirley Clarke's 1984 documentary *Ornette: Made in America*, Williams noted Coleman's music in relation to Parker:

And suddenly Ornette Coleman, up on the bandstand in the Five Spot during a blizzard, started to play the blues like Charlie Parker. And I have never heard anyone else, other than Charlie Parker, do that that way. And Charlie Parker has had many followers, and he's also had many imitators. That's a big difference. None of them has come near this. Ornette had the attack on the reed right. He was doing it like late Parker, too—the more virtuoso period of Parker's short career. It was absolutely uncanny, and he went on and on, doing it. And I said, 'man, why don't you do this more often? Why don't you do this on a record to show people that you really do know what you're doing? Those who won't listen to you and learn it that way.' And Ornette said something like, 'Oh I like to do that every now and then for fun,' or something like that and dismissed it that way.⁸⁵

As one of the first critics to defend Ornette, whose stature was not secure in the late fifties, Williams's tone was patronizing, but with just enough love to not sound utterly condescending. In 1987, Williams wrote a long letter to Ornette to encourage the altoist to learn more music theory. It is unclear whether Williams's letter was ever sent, or whether Ornette received it well.

Williams contra Ellison

In 1965, Williams wrote his most pointed appraisal of Ralph Ellison:

⁸⁵ Martin Williams, *Ornette: Made in America*, dir. by Shirley Clarke, 1985, documentary film.

Ralph Ellison has a reputation as an important American novelist on the basis of one work, *Invisible Man*. He also has a reputation as an important essayist, and that reputation is confirmed by his recent collection, *Shadow and Act* (Random House). On the basis of seven of the essays contained in a section called "Sound and the Mainstream" in *Shadow and Act*, Ellison might also have a reputation as an important jazz critic.

The pieces are in some sense autobiographical, and the first essay, "Living with Music," sets the tone for the group. In it, Ellison manages to elucidate upon a musical experience that includes Hot Lips Page, Beethoven, Kathleen Ferrier, Charlie Christian, John Philip Sousa, Ma Rainey, Ellington, Bartok, and Armstrong and make us understand.

The section ends with a critique of LeRoi Jones' *Blues People*, and I think that anyone acquainted with that book should read and ponder what Ellison has to say:

"... Jones wants to perform the crucial task which he feels someone should take on—as indeed someone should. He is frustrated by the restraint demanded of the critical pen and would like to pick up a club. ... He might have come much closer had he considered the blues not as politics but as art."

The main body of Ellison's "Sound and the Mainstream" section in *Shadow and Act*, however, consists of four essays he contributed to *Saturday Review*, in the "Recordings" section, plus one essay on Minton's and the "Golden Age," written for *Esquire*.

There is an appreciation of Mahalia Jackson. There is one of Jimmy Rushing, which shows the understanding not only of a good listener but also of a friend and which has a superb next-to-closing paragraph on the import of the blues. The Christian essay is excellent.

Next—and for me one of the most interesting—comes the essay on Charlie Parker, for which Ellison uses Robert Reisner's book of interviews, *Bird: The Legend of Charlie Parker*, as his point of departure. I say "interesting," but I might almost say curious.

What occupies Ellison most about Parker is the myth of Bird—not only the myth as expounded by Parker's fans and followers, but also the myth as Parker actually took it on and lived it.

In Ellison's view, Parker, in an effort to escape the jazzman's traditional role of entertainer, became something which is in Ellison's words more "primitive"—he became the sacrificial scapegoat of his audience. He lived the myth, partly because of the influence of his own unconscious drives and partly because Parker was acting out what a psychologist would call the unconscious "projections" of others upon him.

I confess I do not understand why a sacrificial figure is necessarily more "primitive." In Parker, is he not actually more differentiated? In Parker, has not the bacchanalian reveler of earlier jazzmen taken a mythic step forward, moving toward the quest of Orpheus?

In any case, the myth of a sacrificial figure is not necessarily crude or primitive. A savior is anything but a crude figure; yet he is a refinement of the scapegoat. Perhaps it was as a savior that many followers unconsciously saw, or wanted to see, Charlie Parker.

I would venture to guess that Ellison's essential interest in jazz is in the music he grew up with—the music of Bennie Moten, of the early '30s, of Ellington, of Fletcher Henderson—and in the music that immediately followed it—the music of Basie, Lester Young, Christian—and in the music of basic and timeless stylists like Miss Jackson.

When Ellison speaks of the men from Minton's, or of Parker, his heart is not really in it, even when his head is; he talks about men and myths rather than music and musicians. But both his heart and his mind are in it when he discusses Rushing and Christian.

For Ellison, as for many American intellectuals, it seems that jazz is essentially what jazz was as he knew it in his late teens and early 20s. Or, if jazz is anything else, the jazz of his youth is the norm by which he measures the anything else that has come since. The lessons of T. S. Eliot's essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent" somehow do not apply to jazz, it seems.

For Ellison, it is not a bad norm. And he experiences the music as a participant (a former player and an intimate listener), who knows why it is there, and who feels it. His perceptions also go beyond a basic feeling about the music and its meaning. He understands, at the same time, the requirements of critical and intellectual discipline. These, it seems to me, are rare qualities in any jazz critic we have yet produced.

There is one quality I do not find in Ellison's jazz criticism and that I miss. It is a quality that I do find in other essays in this book, particularly in "Beating That Boy" and "The World and the Jug." It is a quality that goes beyond criticism, beyond intelligence and beyond perception; it is a quality rare in American life as a whole, and in American intellectual life as well. It is a quality that in a writer is at once personal and general—a quality that I am quite willing to call wisdom.⁸⁶

By referencing Eliot against Ellison, and by pointing out Ellison's reluctance to appreciate bebop aesthetically, Williams also projected—an idea he employed confidently—or betrayed, his own aesthetic challenge in appreciating bebop, at least as he first heard it in Parker and Gillespie in Billy Berg's in early 1946.

Sheldon Meyer's Sense of America

Williams's most important and compact statement on jazz, *The Jazz Tradition*, was a project he had worked on for nearly a decade. Before its publication in 1970 by the Oxford University Press, Williams had been proposing the book to the publisher of his

⁸⁶ Martin Williams, "The Novelist as Jazz Critic," *Bystander*, *Down Beat*, 1965.

previous book *Where's the Melody?* But it was eventually in Sheldon Meyer that he found someone who had a vision for what the book could be.

Meyer was born in Chicago in 1926, about two years Williams's junior. After graduating from Princeton University with a degree in history, he joined the Oxford University Press in 1956, the year Williams dropped out of Columbia. According to Meyer's obituary in the *New York Times*, the press in which he found himself when he started was one that could not see the commercial viability of books on subjects such as "baseball and Basie."⁸⁷ But Meyer's interest in American culture and history helped to bring a number of significant books to the press, including Edmund Wilson's 1966 book on the literature of the Civil War, and Gunther Schuller's 1968 book, *Early Jazz*, a landmark publication that made way for the publication of *The Jazz Tradition* two years later.⁸⁸

From Opinion to Knowledge

Taking cues from both philosophy and literary criticism, from Hodeir and Eliot, Williams's analysis of Armstrong did not end with only a map of jazz influence. In defining the essence of Armstrong's art as a persistent challenge to aesthetic range and limits, Williams also saw something uniquely American in Armstrong's art. In a Greek sense, Williams worked to turn his opinions on jazz into knowledge about art in the United States.

One of Williams's last projects, the one that resulted in his last book *Hidden in Plain Sight: An Examination of the American Arts*—Williams's answer to Kuowenhoven's *The Beer Can by the Highway*—began with a 1989 proposal Williams wrote to apply to the

⁸⁷ Margalit Fox, "Sheldon Meyer, Oxford Press Editor, Dies at 80," *New York Times*, October 18, 2006, C15.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Smithsonian's Regents Publication Fellowship. There Williams contemplated on the place of individuality in jazz:

...we would seem to allow, even *require*, an individuality in our great performing artists that goes even beyond what was traditionally required in Europe only of poets and painters. And it is in that requisite individuality, I think, that the truly democratic nature of our native arts expresses itself.

I also want to develop the idea that Afro-Americans have seized upon this democratic individuality and taken a leadership in it, particularly in jazz, of course. In that music, a high degree of individuality is a basic requisite for greatness. Those who can only imitate others do not achieve such greatness among their peers (whatever the public response to their work may be). Such emphasis on individuality goes beyond—indeed, goes counter to—any African traditions, where the effort is to do things as nearly like one's great-great grandparents as one possibly can.⁸⁹

These sentiments were excised from the resultant book, published the year Williams died, but they reveal Williams's hypothesis about the source of greatness in jazz. They also help illuminate Williams's criticism of Armstrong's art, a tuning fork for Williams's jazz history.

Critic as Publisher

For Williams, finding just the right pieces to represent jazz was his most important work. His major achievements at the Smithsonian were four boxsets and a manuscript: *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* (1973, 1987), *Big Band Jazz* (1983), *Singers and Soloists of the Swing Bands* (1987), *Jazz Piano* (1989), and *The Smithsonian History of American Jazz*.

Williams was so uncompromising, and his editorial control on this project so total and insulated, that *The Smithsonian History of American Jazz*—a textbook project on which he had tinkered for the better parts of a decade, enlisting the help from more than nine of his favorite jazz writers—died with him. The entire manuscript, which had been

⁸⁹ Regents Publication Fellowship Proposal, January 10, 1989, *Editorial Correspondence, 1989-1992*, Box 3, Records, "Smithsonian Institution, Press, Editor, Special Projects," accession 96-029, 1971-1995, Smithsonian Institution Archives.

meticulously edited and was nearly finished, remains collected in the frigid repository of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

Williams saw *American Jazz* as a textual companion to his jazz boxsets, which he considered “definitive aural statements” of jazz.⁹⁰ The manuscript contained fifteen chapters, twelve interludes, and an introduction. Of these twenty-eight sections, Williams wrote three: the opening statement, the closing one—in the form of an interlude—and a chapter at the center of the book: his Armstrong essay, something that, in a sense, he had been working on for over fifty years. The Whitmanian figure in jazz was Williams’s great subject. When he worked on his very first book and anthology, *The Art of Jazz*—published just three years after he abandoned the pursuit of a doctorate in English literature—he honored Armstrong by excluding him from the book, because, as of April 1959, he saw no essay in print worthy of Armstrong’s stature.⁹¹ That declaration made Armstrong his responsibility. Williams’s entire career, from his early columns, to the *The Jazz Tradition*, then to his Smithsonian records can be seen as a prolonged attempt to demonstrate Armstrong’s centrality in jazz, and to locate “the essence of Armstrong’s art.”⁹²

⁹⁰ Martin Williams, project proposal and budget, 1991, *Classic jazz / Swing Era videos*, Box 1, Martin Williams Collection, Center for Black Music Research Library and Archives, Columbia College Chicago.

⁹¹ Martin Williams, “Introduction,” *The Art of Jazz: Essays on the Nature and Development of Jazz*, (New York: Grove Press, 1960), introduction.

⁹² Williams, *The Jazz Tradition*, 13.

AMRSTRONGIAN PROPHECY

Pursuing the Essence of Armstrong

Williams wrote about Armstrong for nearly fifty years. His first attempts were articles published in *The Pine Needle*. There he promoted the early Columbian reissues and taught from his early readings on jazz. Beginning in the fifties, when he started freelancing for the jazz press, he used Armstrong as a backdrop to criticize Parker.

Reviewing *The Genius of Charlie Parker*, he wrote, “. . . no matter how much *we* are moved and amazed by this man’s creativity, we seldom have a feeling of ‘passion spent’ or order restored; we do not hear the finality with which an Armstrong, Hodges, Bechet, or Monk speaks. We may even hear impatience. Parker’s was a tremendous talent, but he never learned his limitations and therefore never really arrived at his own maturity and form.”⁹³ Two years after Parker had died and one year after the release of the English translation of Hodeir’s *Jazz: Its Evolution and Essence*, Williams was still hesitant to relate Armstrong to Parker, and was uneasy about Parker’s stature. On another record report, on Henry “Red” Allen, Williams used Armstrong to periodize jazz and its musicians: “Allen was one of the first post-Armstrong trumpeters to show a personal voice, and it is one still excitingly original (he could give anyone a lesson in effective use of dynamics and the range of his horn).”⁹⁴

Williams also wrote about Armstrong in *The Jazz Review*, which ran from November 1958 to January 1961. In an article titled “Extended Improvisation and Form: Some Solutions,” Williams related the way Miles Davis gradually shifted from a familiar melody to “a kind of ingenious disintegration,” to Armstrong’s art: “If one understands

⁹³ Martin Williams, “Recordings Reports: Jazz LPs,” *Saturday Review*, July 13, 1957, 36.

⁹⁴ Martin Williams, “Recordings Reports: Jazz LPs,” *Saturday Review*, November 16, 1957, 24.

Louis Armstrong's way of stating a melody with the slight shifts of accent and alterations of line which discover beauty and passion in triteness, he should have no trouble, despite the differences of tone, rhythmic and harmonic conception, and quality of emotional projection, with Miles Davis's opening statements of familiar melodies."⁹⁵

It was also in this same issue that Williams made his first grand pronouncement about Armstrong, in a language that would form his essay on Armstrong in the 1962 issue of the *Evergreen Review*. But before Williams could write long profile essays, he would take a record review as a point of departure and make a summary statement this way:

It is very well to talk about Armstrong's rhythmic conception, about his transformations of banal melodies, about the superb imagination on an harmonic variation like that in the 1938 *I Can't Give You Anything But Love*, about "the first great jazz soloist." It is also all very well to say that this *King of the Zulus* is not like the first. It happens to be better. On it, and on the other titles for which I have reserved comment, Armstrong is astonishing and astonishing because he plays what he plays with such great power, authority, sureness, firmness commanding presence as to be beyond style, beyond category, almost (as they say of Beethoven's last quartets) beyond music. When he plays the trumpet this way, all considerations of "schools," most other jazzmen, most other musicians simply drop away as we listen. The show biz personality act, the coasting, the forced jokes and sometimes forced geniality, the perpetual emotional content of much of Armstrong's music past and present (that of a marvelously exuberant but complex child)—all these drop away, and we are hearing a surpassing artist create for us—each of us—a surpassing art.

By "it is very well to talk. . .," Williams was alluding to the conventional wisdom, perhaps already then forming in some circles, about Armstrong's most notable innovations. It was a reference to Eliot's "Prufrock," as if "people come and go, talking of Armstrong's solos."

The Jazz Tradition

In the 1970, first edition of *The Jazz Tradition*, Martin Williams's chapter on Armstrong appears after a dense first chapter on the cultural meaning of jazz and a second chapter on

⁹⁵ Martin Williams, "Extended Improvisation and Form: Some Solutions," *The Jazz Review*, volume 1, no. 2, December 1958, 15.

Jelly Roll Morton, whom Williams believed summed up jazz before the arrival of Armstrong.⁹⁶

The chapter on Armstrong, titled “Style Beyond Style,” is thirteen pages long, and Williams begins by situating Armstrong in the context of New Orleans. The musical culture of the Crescent City, Williams notes, even before Armstrong’s arrival, was uniquely twofold. On the one hand, New Orleans musicians, more than their counterparts from any other city, made “a basically emotional contribution” to musical performance in their reliance on improvisation.⁹⁷ On the other hand, this meeting of “the downtown colored Creole” and the “uptown black performers” also produced a music of “European melody and harmony plus blues feeling.”⁹⁸ Armstrong, according to Williams, expanded on these two aspects of New Orleanian music and inaugurated “an even larger measure of the blues emotionally, rhythmically, and melodically.”⁹⁹ His expansion on the city’s unique musical tradition, is Williams’s first characterization of the Armstrongian innovation.

In the next two pages Williams discusses Armstrong’s early collaboration with King Oliver and the Fletcher Henderson band. With the former, Armstrong’s approach to phrasing helped him stand apart, and his musical personality cut through even amidst “the crudeness of the recording techniques and the complexity of the collective improvising.”¹⁰⁰ With the latter group, Armstrong’s “message” stood out among musicians who, in comparison, seemed “to flounder rhythmically.”¹⁰¹ But it is here in the essay that Williams leaps forward a little and compares early Armstrong and the mature Armstrong. The Armstrong of the early twenties was someone who “used a great many note

⁹⁶ Martin Williams, *The Jazz Tradition*, 20.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

doublings and triplings and other embellishments which have a primarily rhythmic function.”¹⁰² These embellishments were also called “rhythm notes,”¹⁰³ and as musical device they helped accentuate a tune’s rhetoric.

Even here, in a treatment of the early Armstrong, Williams carefully distinguishes Armstrong’s intent and certain legions of his following. These embellishments with rhythmic function, Williams notes, exemplified Armstrong’s pioneering instinct; they might be a way for him to “establish his idiom for himself as well as others.”¹⁰⁴ Williams then lists the others: Muggsy Spanier, Coleman Hawkins, Don Byas, and Roy Eldridge. This following of an Armstrong before his mature phase is already impressive, and the many others who were thus influenced were in good company. But Williams warned that, compared to the mature Armstrong, these effects could distract:

This [his rhythmic embellishments] often makes it appear as if his early playing has an excess of notes in comparison with his later solos. It is not that these notes do not fit melodically, but that the early solos do not have the sublime melodic ease of his later work.¹⁰⁵

The “sublime melodic ease” of the mature Armstrong, evident in a series of recordings from the late twenties to early thirties, was a characteristically unembellished description, but it illustrates Williams’s casual portrait of the core development of jazz: that from a teeming broth to a simmering stream. This portrait marks Williams’s second major characterization of Armstrong’s innovation.

Williams commences the next major part of his essay by discussing composer Euday L. Bowman’s 1914 piece, “Twelfth Street Rag.” By the twenties, Williams notes, the manner of the piece was already considered old-fashioned, and he adds that “it is still used today [the middle sixties] as a vehicle for a deliberately corny quasi-jazz.”¹⁰⁶ Out of

¹⁰² Ibid., 51.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

this material, Williams goes on to say, Armstrong created a “brilliant revelation” and, with it, “opens up the jazz tradition.”¹⁰⁷ Williams’s main point in describing the musical material with which Armstrong worked, as he goes on to explain in the next two pages, is that Armstrong’s taste in music—the way he selects which tunes to play and which not to—is, in a deep sense, related to how he approaches jazz performance. Armstrong’s major innovation, Williams suggests, is that his inventiveness is thematically agnostic, that Armstrong’s brilliance would shine through virtually any material he touched.

The Armstrongian Prophecy

Williams’s earliest statement about the Armstrong’s prophetic music in relation to Parker appeared in the 1962 essay published in the *Evergreen Review*. Speaking of Armstrong’s masterful deployment of his new language of jazz, Williams began wondering about how and when Parker might have heard Armstrong: “There is the 1933 version of *Basin Street Blues*, with the new idiom so masterfully assimilated that Armstrong can double-time with complete ease—surely Charlie Parker must have known this performance intimately, the basis of so many of his rhythmic ideas can be heard on it.”¹⁰⁸

In the next paragraph, Williams intimated at the Eliotic idea of a new artist taking from the heroic, most essential achievements from his predecessor: “I think that in the years 1928 to 1935 Armstrong found the highest expression of his genius. It is a commonplace that the great figures also outline and suggest many more possibilities than they are able to develop in their own work. And it is this Louis Armstrong—the Louis Armstrong of *West End Blues*, *Muggles*, and the 1933 *Basin Street Blues* that Charlie Parker

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Martin Williams, “Louis Armstrong: Style Beyond Style,” *Evergreen Review*, volume 6, no. 24, May—June 1962, 116.

developed.”¹⁰⁹ Here, three prophetic recordings were named, but *Muggles*, would be dropped from this list when this article was adapted to *The Jazz Tradition*.

Parker was born in 1920. By 1935, when, according to Williams, Armstrong had reached his creative peak, the young saxophonist was just turning 15. Williams’s grid of jazz history measured in the units of twenty years, just enough time for one generation to be raised in the influence of the previous generation. In the case of Parker, Armstrong’s great achievements only had to be played on a record player to be heard and learned.

In one of the folders labeled “The Jazz Tradition” at the Center for Black Music Research, Williams kept copies of an early draft of the key passage on what Parker took from Armstrong. The copy was typewritten with handwritten corrections.

As an expansion of the 1962 *Evergreen Review* article, the key passage read: “. . . Armstrong’s most innovative work can be heard in a select group of recordings which begins with *West End Blues* and includes, chiefly, *Sweethearts on Parade* (1930), *Between the Devil and the Deep Blues Sea* (particularly the faster “3” take, 1931 [1932]), and his second version of *Basic Street Blues* (1933). It is a commonplace that great figures outline and suggest many more possibilities than they are able to develop in their own work. But for any development, or even acknowledgement, of the brilliant ideas of phrasing and melodic rhythm in these Armstrong recordings we must wait for Charlie Parker the jazz of the mid-Forties.”¹¹⁰

The handwritten correction was added only on the last sentence. It became, “But for any development, or even acknowledgement, of the brilliant ideas of phrasing and melodic rhythm in these Armstrong recordings we must wait for Lester Young in the late Thirties and, even more directly, for Charlie Parker and the jazz of the mid-Forties.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 117.

¹¹⁰ Martin Williams, Armstrong chapter, *The Jazz Tradition-misc.*, Box 1, Martin Williams Collection, Center for Black Music Research Library and Archives, Columbia College Chicago.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

By adding Lester Young as a landmark between Armstrong and Parker, Williams's map of influence was becoming more defined.

In 1975, five years after the publication of *The Jazz Tradition*, J. R. Taylor's liner notes on *Louis Armstrong Earl Hines 1928* was published by the Recordings Program within the Smithsonian's Division of Performing Arts. In the notes, Taylor formulated Williams's remarks by starting with an assessment of *West End Blues*:

To heap further praise upon *West End Blues* might embarrass greatness itself. Hadlock has cited it as "a perfect balance of all historical aspects of the Armstrong musical personality." Schuller calls it "certainly the crowning achievement of this date, and perhaps of Armstrong's entire recorded output." Martin Williams has lauded its alternation of "brilliant virtuosity and eloquent simplicity" and picked it, along with the second *Sweethearts on Parade* (1930), the faster take of *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (1931), and the second *Basin Street Blues* (1933), as one of four prophetic Armstrong recordings whose implications lay unnoticed and unexplored until the arrival of Charlie Parker.¹¹²

By paraphrasing a statement about the nature of influence, it was fitting that it was Taylor who had refined Williams's original statement into one of the lasting principles of jazz.

Four Prophetic Recordings

While it is true that the *Classic Jazz* selections could be interpreted as Williams's attempt to anchor the achievements of Armstrong in jazz history, he chose Armstrong selections carefully. Instead of including all four recordings he deemed prophetic, he included only two in *Classic Jazz: West End Blues* and *Sweethearts on Parade*. The other two, as he considered them were noted, instead, for historical purposes.

The opening cadenza of *West End Blues* (1928) presented a seismic graph of Armstrong's rhythmic imagination. The cadenza was about thirteen seconds, and while it makes way for an eloquent blues of Armstrong's scatting and Earl Hines's piano, the

¹¹² J. R. Taylor, *Louis Armstrong and Earl Hines, 1928*, The Smithsonian Collection R002, (Washington D.C.: The Smithsonian Institution, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1975) liner notes, 5 of 7.

cadenza itself, as cadenzas often were, does not follow the standard four-four time.

However, if we place a twelve-bar rhythmic grid over the notes—a rough analytical device that necessarily distorts the original time—we could see the shapes of some interesting rhythmic developments.

Interpretive transcription of West End Blues cadenza, (by author, with help from Professor Henry Martin).



From measures one to five, Armstrong gradually introduces triplets before coming to a rest in measure six. Between measures seven to ten, the rhythm picks up, creating a sharp contrast from measure six. In the performance of the cadenza, it's hard to tell where the double-time begins and where the quarter-note triplets begin. In the last two measures, the triplets became more clearly defined. The A-flat in down beat of measure eleven and the F in the next triplet announce their arrivals with a slight pause, while triplets in measure twelve heightens shortly before the final A-flat makes way for the blues.

“Jazz’ eighth notes, the ‘jazz’ triplet, are not the superficialities or the mere ornaments of a musical style; in jazz, they have always been among the fundamentals,” Williams noted in his Miles Davis chapter in *The Jazz Tradition*, “One of the unwritten (and undiscussed) laws of jazz has been that each of the great players has found his own way of pronouncing the triplet, expressed or implied, and Roy Eldridge’s triplet didn’t sound like

Louis Armstrong's; Miles Davis's didn't sound like Dizzy Gillespie's; Lester Young's triplet was unlike Coleman Hawkins's; and Stan Getz's is unlike Lester Young's.

Nobody's triplet is exactly like anybody's. And developing a personally articulated triplet not only has been an identifying mark for the great players, it has been an expression of the high individuality on which this music depends and which it celebrates."¹¹³

Unlike *Muggles*, which in 1962 as one of three prophetic recordings but was dropped in a few years, the 1933 *Basin Street Blues* remained in the lineup until the end.

Transcription of Basin Street Blues, (by author, with help from Professor Henry Martin).



In this performance, Armstrong had turned, as he had done in his previous renditions of the tune, a twelve-bar blues into a song in which he could improvise on a sixteen-bar solo. But his “prophetic move,” in a brief stop-time interval, or break, occurring in just over two measures, from two pickup notes before measure seven to a phrasal conclusion just after the the beginning of measure nine.

In the first two beats of measure seven, Armstrong plays eighth-note triplets, perfectly within the inaudible rhythmic grid of the break. In the third beat, Armstrong suspends a sixteenth-note, in the middle of the beat and begins gathering his breath for a grand

¹¹³ Martin Williams, *The Jazz Tradition*, second revised edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 207–208.

entrance into the fourth beat, which is itself evenly divided into two slim eighth-notes that begin and end perfectly on time.

The first two beats of measure eight begins with eight sixteenth-notes in succession, before ending on two evenly and sparsely-spaced sixteenth-notes in the last two beats.

Armstrong's performance in the 1930 *Sweethearts on Parade* was an exemplary demonstration of his command of micro-timing and the rhetoric of his rhythmic density.

Transcription of Sweethearts on Parade, (by author, with help from Professor Henry Martin).

The musical score is written in 4/4 time and consists of four staves. The first staff (measures 1-4) shows a sparse melody with notes on the first, second, and fourth beats of each measure. Above the staff are the chord symbols F and C7. The second staff (measures 5-8) begins with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 5, followed by continuous sixteenth-note runs in measures 6 and 7, and a final eighth-note pair in measure 8. Above the staff are the chord symbols F, C7, and F. The third staff (measures 9-12) continues the sixteenth-note runs in measures 9 and 10, followed by a triplet of eighth notes in measure 11 and a final eighth-note pair in measure 12. Above the staff are the chord symbols F and C7. The fourth staff (measures 13-16) features a triplet of eighth notes in measure 13, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes in measures 14 and 15, and a final eighth-note pair in measure 16. Above the staff are the chord symbols F, F7, Bb, Bbm, F, and (F7).

Armstrong begins his solo with four measures with few notes in between. Starting in measure five, he goes into two measures of tightly controlled one-noting. His piecemeal pronouncement of the C enters the down beat of measure seven and begins a sixteenth-note run that ends deftly toward the end of measure eight. Measures nine and ten employ nearly as many eighth and sixteenth rests as the corresponding system above them. Between measures eleven and sixteen, Armstrong deploys triplets again to balance his one-noting and phrasal turns.

With *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (1932), we have an example of an Armstrong solo that contained a looser, and more gradual rhythmic development. While this piece, like *Basin Street Blues* above, was not included in *Classic Jazz*, its importance lies in demonstrating Armstrong's art in the early thirties.

Transcription of Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, (by author, with help from Professor Henry Martin).

The image shows a musical score for the song "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea" in 4/4 time. The score is written on four staves of music, with measures numbered 1 through 13. Above the staves, the following chords are indicated: F, C7, F, C7, F7, Bb, Bbm, F, C7, F, F, C7, C7, F7, Bb, Bbm, F, C7, F, E7. The notation includes various note values, rests, and triplet markings (indicated by a '3' over a group of notes). The key signature has one flat (Bb).

Armstrong thinks in roughly two-measure hyperbars in this brief excerpt. The first two measures were devoted to a relaxed one-noting that alternates between eighth notes and a quarter note. Measure three contain pick-up notes for measures four and five, which are themselves pick-up measures for the stately run from measures six to seven. It is in measures eight to twelve that we see an example of what Williams considered prophetic in Armstrong. In doubling from single eighth notes between rests to the two pick-up eighth notes that jump suddenly to a two-beat sixteenth-note run, Armstrong's dallying rhythm seems to reverberate most in measure eleven, a reassuring answer, and passage to the returning of a familiar melody.

EPILOGUE

Responses to Jazz

If American jazz has really been as great as some people in the know have been saying, the inevitable comparison has to arise between this so called “explosion of genius” with the High Renaissance, a period that produced Leonardo and Michelangelo. The subsequent, necessary comparison has to then be between the first serious writers about jazz and Giorgio Vasari, who wrote *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. Fortunately, this study has not been written to prove that Martin Williams was the Vasari of jazz. The truth is there are dozens of Vasaries in jazz, and they are comparably admirable.

To Williams’s two friends, Larry Kart and Terry Gross, his stance could be appreciated in its own right. Kart, a critic and writer for both *Down Beat* and the *Chicago Tribune*, once wrote, “Williams performed one of the critic’s most useful functions in pointing out the existence of art in an area where many of us assume there can be nothing of the kind.”¹¹⁴ There, writing in the “lively arts” section in the *New York Times*, Kart was defending Williams’s criticism of television. But that sentence can be applied to Williams’s criticism on arts beside television and jazz, or even on artistic elements within jazz.

Terry Gross, the host of *Fresh Air*, interviewed Williams in 1979 and introduced him by saying, “it has always been explicit and implicit in his writing that jazz does not need elevation. It is an important art.” She went on to note that *Fresh Air* frequently played from *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*. Williams took in her remarks, paused for a

¹¹⁴ Lawrence Kart, “Groundbreaking,” *New York Times*, February 14, 1971, D19 & D33.

second, and responded, “thank you very much. I am a little overwhelmed by what you just said, so I—I don’t know how to be modest on this occasion, so I’ll just shut up.”¹¹⁵

The Smithsonian in Context

While the influence Williams wielded at the Smithsonian was extensive and unique, a cultural analogue can be found in another major American institution: *The New Yorker* magazine, and particularly in the movie critic Pauline Kael and the editor William Shawn.

While their prose and tones are distinct, there are a number of parallels between the careers of Kael and Williams. They were both educated in literary fields outside of the arts. Both entered their respective patron institution in their late forties, and they both wrote criticism that implied an aesthetic theory without ever explicitly outlining a program. Both took issues with artists that amassed a cult-like following: Stanley Kubrick in Kael’s case, and John Coltrane in the case of Williams. The cults, as they saw them, were self-indulgent. Yet the most important similarity between Kael and Williams was perhaps in the devotion of their own followers.

Kael had a “legion of acolytes,” an obituary once noted, and they came to be known as “Paulettes.”¹¹⁶ Williams had a smaller but no less intense following. Francis Davis, jazz critic and a Paulette himself—he also authored a book on Kael¹¹⁷—once wrote that to argue with Williams was akin to “raising my voice to father.”¹¹⁸ As critics, Kael and Williams were pied pipers who pulled readers toward their respective art, and critics toward their craft.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Martin Williams, *Fresh Air*, March 9, 1979, radio broadcast.

¹¹⁶ Lawrence Van Gelder, “Pauline Kael, Provocative and Widely Imitated New Yorker Film Critic, Dies at 82,” *New York Times*, September 4, 2001, C12.

¹¹⁷ Francis Davis, *Afterglow: A Last Conversation with Pauline Kael*, (New York: Da Capo, 2002).

¹¹⁸ Francis Davis, “Struggling with Some Barbecue,” *Village Voice*, July 21, 1987.

In a few ways Williams was also quite similar to William Shawn, who died in December 1992—seven months after Williams had died—after turning *The New Yorker* from a comic weekly to an influential school of writerly conscience. As editors they shared the fate of being highly respected by a very small group of associates, who admired their brilliance but also found their manners curious. They were both raised in upper-middle class families and grew to like music. Ironically, while Shawn played the piano as entertainment—occasionally with Whitney Balliett on drums, no less¹¹⁹—Williams, perhaps with too much respect for music, abstained from performing. Both liked to be impeccably dressed and carried an air of formality. Once, upon seeing someone accost a woman in an elevator, Shawn, who was also in the cabin, fled immediately.¹²⁰ While Williams was less prudish, he could be censorious. One time, sitting near a friend who was unwrapping a piece of gum, he snapped, “you chew gum?”¹²¹ They were men who felt surest in their own shoes, with their feet on the ground—both feared air-travel.¹²²

More essentially, they were perfectionists who challenged their readers. Shawn did not skirt complex, philosophical arguments in his pages.¹²³ Williams liked to integrate rhythmic and tonal theories in his texts, especially when they helped to explicate a musician’s difference. To them, their duties—editing, selecting, and curating—were an art in themselves; and, as art, the work demanded continual refinement. Just as Shawn might spend an unusual amount of time to scrutinize the placement of a comma or a semicolon, so might Williams on the assignment and order of recordings in the Smithsonian records that he produced. And as perfectionists in power often did, they exhibited despotic tendencies.

¹¹⁹ Edith Oliver, “Remembering Mr. Shawn,” *The New Yorker*, December 28, 1992, 136.

¹²⁰ Eric Pace, “William Shawn, 85, Is Dead; New Yorker’s Gentle Despot,” *New York Times*, December 9, 2012, B15.

¹²¹ Larry Kart (jazz critic, *Down Beat* and *The Chicago Tribune*) in discussion with the author, February 2018.

¹²² Editorial, “William Shawn,” Comment, *The New Yorker*, December 21, 1992, 6.

¹²³ Pace, “William Shawn, 85, Is Dead; New Yorker’s Gentle Despot,” B15.

Shawn and Williams were stewards to their standards, and they saw their intransigence as benevolent, to the people they worked with and, ultimately, to readers and listeners. Conveniently, while literary-cultural types tended to shun authoritarians in politics, they could be attracted to figures of similar temperament in the arts, presumably because, to them, high aesthetic standards were worthy of indemnity. One obituary writer called Shawn a “gentle despot”¹²⁴—“courteous tyranny,” was the way another writer put it.¹²⁵ Williams’s despotism was different. While he wanted total control and adherence to his vision, his rule betrayed a level of cruelty in him; even as he was courteous, he was not always gentle.¹²⁶

The Uses of Criticism

In a 2002 interview with the political scientist Harry Kreisler, the American philosopher Stanley Cavell talked about an interesting phenomenon in American culture: “It is a feature of American culture that it has produced two of the most admired and treasured forms of art, which can be called something less than high art, but which have served to question the distinction between high and low art: movies and jazz. American film has made its contribution to the world art of cinema, and it has been a puzzle to me that American intellectuals and academics have not wanted to understand and appreciate that fact.”

Kreisler did not push Cavell to explicate on the origins and reasons behind that “feature” of American culture, nor did Cavell go on to make clear whether movies and jazz could, as art, address the distinction between high and low art, a distinction more

¹²⁴ Ibid., A1.

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Drew, “The Genteel Giant: New Yorker Legend William Shawn,” *Washington Post*, December 9, 1992, C1.

¹²⁶ J. R. Taylor (jazz critic and producer, The Smithsonian Institution) in discussion with the author, February 2018.

philosophical rather than empirical. I sent Cavell's remarks to the American literary critic Harold Bloom, and Bloom responded, "I disagree with Cavell. A few movies are high art like the French *Children of Paradise* and *Chimes at Midnight* by Orson Welles. He's wrong on jazz. Armstrong, Ellington, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell, and some others are high art."¹²⁷

Occasionally, criticism is a matter of whether one can utter a string of names in one breath, one grammatical sentence, without flinching from the misplacement of one name or another. Another view of criticism, more Greek, might lead one to see great art as the Platonic sun, and criticism as the flickering midnight candle, a refuge by night, inheritor of the day's light, and something of its warmth.

¹²⁷ Harold Bloom, e-mail message to author, January 14, 2017.

APPENDIX I

The Pine Needle Columns

Between 1940 to 1942, Martin Williams wrote fourteen columns in The Pine Needle, the student publication of St. Christopher's School in Richmond, Virginia. The first six were co-written with Henry Manney, who graduated in 1941 and went on to Duke University and a career in journalism. Beginning with the October 8th, 1941 issue, Williams began to contribute longer pieces in his own editorial called The Record Column. The spelling and punctuation are reproduced as they originally appeared.—MTL

PAST RECORD RELEASES

November 1st, 1940

Since this column is just an infant, this being its first appearance (I hope), we will devote this one to worthy records of the past year.

Swing

Beat Me Daddy (C)—A truly great Bradley opus, with McKinley's drums and vocal, Joe Weidman's trumpet, and the rhythm section starring.

Number 19 (Bl)—Earl Hines' powerful swing led by the drummer and an alto.

Blues in the Groove (D)—Great Gavitt drive, kicked by Zulu Austin's trumpet.

Harlem Air Shaft (V)—Wilde Bigard clarinet, great rhythm. Hear the other side.

Sweet

Don't Want to Cry Any More (Bl)—Soulful Barnet with good vocal.

Whispering Grass (D)—Ink Spots, as usual, turn out a good one. Hear reverse.

Unclassified

Boogie Woogie on St. Louis Blues (Bl)—“Turn out de lights and we call de law right now!”

W. P. A. (D)—Great lyrics provide laughs. Hear other side.

Jazz

The Hot Record Society has released four items by Rex Stewart's Big Seven; namely “Diga Diga Doo,” “Cherry,” “Solid Rock,” and “Bugle Call Rag.” Fats Waller's rhythm does good work with “C Sharp Blues.” Also highly recommended are the Louis Armstrong records in Decca's album of New Orleans Jazz. The rest of this album is a mixture of good and poor showings. Finally, don't miss Ellington's “Cotton Tail,” and excellent example of the Duke's great music.

SOUND BOX

November 15th, 1940

Yea, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than to find a record everybody lies. So we please ourselves and save time.

Let's Do It (Let's Fall in Love)—Bl—Tony Porter sings a really amusing vocal, supported by a grand background. Hear the other side.

The Blues Jump—OK—Diz the fine alto and clarinet on this fine ridde by Al Donahue.

In a Mellotone—V—The Duke's saxes really shine on this side. The reverse is good too. Whatta man!

15-Minute Intermission—OK—Cab says "Whassamatta with cats, you look beat!" Musicians will appreciate this one.

Hep—Cat's Ball—D—Satchmo's trumpet, vocal, and ensemble show up amazingly well on this platter.

Only Forever—V—T. Dorsey stylizes a current hit nicely; Dorsey's trombone and Frank Sinatra's sly vocal staring.

Jazz

The most exciting news in a long time is the new Columbia reissues. There are albums by Bix, Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong, and Fletcher Henderson, besides many single records. Some have never been issued before, and many are from unused masters. There they are, pick your preferences. also hear Coleman Hawkins' "Jamaica Shout."

RECORD COLUMN

November 29th, 1940

If you keep your ears turned to the radio, chances are that you will hear several good pieces: instances being Glenn Miller's "Whatcha Know, Joe," and "Anvil Chorus," and "There's a Great Day Coming, Mañana, by an unknown orchestra. The girl vocalist sure puts oomph into her vocals.

Star Dust—V—Tommy Dorsey issues another masterpiece in the manner of "I'll Never Smile Again." Hear it, by all means.

Rhumboogie—D—The band that plays the blues takes to rhumbas (plus a dash of boogie) with good results. Sweet fans note the reverse.

Five O'clock Whistle—V or Bl—Take your choice of the Duke's or Hawkins: Both are excellent.

Jazz

Bluebird has re-issued, on the race lists, two fine examples of New Orleans jazz. They are "Georgia Swing" and "Mournful Serenade" by Jelly Roll Morton's Red Hot Peppers. A new Victor Ellington issue features Johnny Hodges' alto improvisations on a slow theme. The title is "Warm Valley." Meade Lewis has recorded his famous "Honkey Tonk Train" in a twelve inch version for Blue Note. Finally, hear Jess Stacey's piano work on Bob Crosby's new Decca "Ain't Goin' Nowhere."

RECORD RELEASES

January 17, 1941

Victor has recently released a very sincere effort in "Blues In Thirds." The excellent playing of Sidney Bechet, Earl Hines, and Baley Dodds add up to a fine item for anybody's money. The second release of Columbia Hot Jazz Classic reissues presents a variety of recordings by the greatest of the greats. An album, presenting a collection of Duke Ellington gems accompanies the single records. Following suit, a new release of Bluebird jazz has appeared. There are six single records, look them over and take your pick. They all contain good jazz.

RECORD COLUMN

March 3rd, 1941

Columbia records have released two very important albums on their hot jazz lists. The first, an album of Earl Hines piano solos, we recommend to lovers of any kind of music. His lovely improvisations on simple themes could not fail to delight any listener—even one who does not understand the “jazz slanguage.” The second album is one of the important to date. It is dedicated to the genius of clarinetist Frank Teschmacher and features what is perhaps the most popular of all jazz styles—Chicago style. The records represent “Tesch” at his best in all periods of his style development. Naturally two albums by two of jazz’s greatest artists will bring a great response, so go to it—they’re waiting at your nearest Columbia dealers’.

Among the single records on Columbia’s new list are two sides by Clarence Williams’ Blue Five with Sidney Becket and Louis Armstrong, and two of the best of Frank Trumbauer’s records with the great Bix Beiderbecke.

Swing fans, have you heard Glenn Miller’s *Volga Boatmen*? If you haven’t, do by all means. Jazz fans *don’t* by all means.

DISK-DOPE

March 14th, 1941

The column is mostly jazz, but here are a few gems. By all means hear T. D. A.'s "Skin Beater Blues" and "Richmond Riot" (Fed). The good ride passages by T. D. A. himself, Edgar Amnions (piano) Liver-lip Mangum (trumpet), Pee-Wee Williams (clarinet), Lester (Kinky) Young (sax), Manney Higginbotham (trombone) and all around good ensemble work coupled with flawless technical work make these two sides tops. New out and really good is Woody Herman's "Blue Flame." Real low down blues. Also hear "Adios" by Tony Pastor. Also dig the other side of "Blue Flame," namely, "Fur Trapper's Ball," a not-as-good copy of "Woodchoppers Ball."

Jazz

A new Columbia features Louis Armstrong in more of his matchless and unbelievable improvisations [improvisation]. This one is *Beau Koo Jack* and also is a showpiece for Earl Hines' piano and Don Redman's alto sax. We call the attention of followers of the "Hot" to a recent Victor release. It's a trombone solo, *Dickie, Welles Blues*, and we recommend it highly, as unforgettable trombone work.

Incidentally, we wish "unmercifully to condemn" the editors for their use of the name of a type of jazz piano (Boogie Woogie) in such a trivial way. Although readily understandable, it is such absurd applications that make jazz one of the most misunderstood types of music. The public passes it over never bothering to discover what a great music *true jazz* is.

To anyone really interested in American art, we recommend Wilder Hobson's book *American Jazz Music*. For good examples of boogie woogie piano we recommend *Boogie Woogie* (Commodore), *Honkey Tonk Train* (Bluebird), and *Boogie Woogie Stomp* (Decca).

THE RECORD COLUMN

October 8th, 1941

This month's releases have been spotty. Some have been good and some very bad. The majority of them have run in the "sweet" groove, but a few platters of good jazz have managed to sneak through. Here are a few of the best, both sweet and hot:

Sheridan Square, Indiana

Red Allen (Okeh)

This great little Negro combo has been recording some righteous stuff lately. Their latest, "Sheridan Square," spotlights a solid rhythm section and some marvelous Allen trumpet. Also one of the most wonderful dirty clarinet solos (by Edmond Hall) that I have ever heard. The reverse is a great arrangement of the jazz classic, "Indiana."

Concerto for Two, Jim

Claude Thornhill (Columbia)

Since this fine arranger has put his talents to work for himself he has been making the music business sit up and take notice. His newest release is a popular version of Tchaikowsky's beautiful Concerto for Piano. Featuring the leader's excellent piano this tune looks like another "My Reverie." The kick-over is the best rendition of "Jim" that I have heard to date.

This Love of Mine, Neiani

T. Dorsey (Victor)

The sensational Gentleman of Swing scores again with a tune in the saccharine sweet style of his great recording of "Star Dust." Frank Sinatra turns in another top-notch so-

called “effortless” vocal. Maybe it’s because he wrote the number himself. The Pied Pipers pip in such a way as to make them the best vocal combo in the business. The reverse is Dorsey on a Hawaiian kick, namely Neiani.

I Don’t Want to Set the World on Fire, Mama

Horace Heidt (Columbia)

This platter also falls into the “slow and dreamy” category and would have been just another one of those “things.”

THE RECORD COLUMN

October 17th, 1941

On Boogie Woogie

A friend once said to me, "I sure do like this boogie woogie. You know all that loud brass and stuff." Well, let's talk about this "boogie woogie".

The boogie woogie is a type of piano music. The bass is simple repetitious figures and the treble is improvised twelve bar choruses. It all began among the Negroes who, more or less, taught themselves piano and therefore kept the bass simple. The twelve bar chorus came from the blues, but that is something else again. This music went through gradual development over a long period of time.

The greatest recorded example of boogie woogie is, strange to say, one of the very first. It is a recording by Clarence "Pinetop" Smith of his **Boogie Woogie** (now on Commodore). Pinetop invented the name from a sort of vocal version of one of his basses. His piece has been the inspiration (to put it mildly) of a great deal of later music.

Modern boogie woogie has come a long way from Pinetop into the hands of three truly great artists. First is Meade "Lux" Lewis. Lux has a creative mind with which few can compete. His **Honkey Tonk Train** (Bluebird, Decca, Blue Note) and **Yancey Special** (Decca) should surely be in every collection. The second of the trio is Albert Ammons.

His works show a world of thought. The best are **Boogie Woogie Stomp** (Decca, Blue Note) and **Shout for Joy** (Columbia). Pete Johnson is the third of the trio. Only in recent years has he proved his ability as a fine soloist. His great power is obtained by aiming straight and hitting hard and fast. Better examples of his work are **B. and O. Blues** and **Let 'Em Jump** along with many others on solo art.

Recently some other great boogie woogie exponents have come to the front. Robust solos by Jimmy Yancey have revealed another fine talent. He has recorded a great

composition, **The Fives**, of the solo type, as well as a fine album for Victor. Clarence Lofton is another artist whose recent records have proven great merit. His Streamline Train (Solo Art) is perhaps the most unusual boogie woogie composition of them all. Lofton doesn't bother with the regular twelve bar chorus; he plays one idea till he is through with it and then takes up another, making choruses of sometimes eight or fifteen or more bars.

"No, Sir, no white man alive can play the boogie like it ought to be."

(Any of the above records on private labels can be obtained by asking your dealer to order them from Commodore Music Shop, New York City.)

THE RECORD COLUMN

November 28th, 1941

The responsibility for modern swing music can be traced to one man. Fletcher Henderson, pianist, arranger, and band leader, is the real father of the bread and butter of the modern popular musicians. In New York, about 1922, Fletcher orchestrated the American music, Jazz. Until this time, Jazz had been pure improvisation. Fletcher arranged his music—wrote it all out. Not that he didn't give chance for "ad lib" solos; no, there were plenty of those. However, he achieved practically nothing of merit. It is true some of his records contain unforgettable works. Records like **Stampede** (Columbia), **St. Louis Shuffle** (Bluebird), **Variety Stomp** (Bluebird), **Sensation** (Commodore), **Sugar Foot Stomp** (Hot Record Society), and a few others, are great. He wrote some fine compositions such as **Wrappin' It Up** and **Stampede**. But, on the whole, the Henderson records are nothing but the commercialized type. But, on the whole, the Henderson records are nothing but the commercialized type.

Maybe you imagine this article should be about Benny Goodman and, in a way, it is. Benny had been playing Jazz around Chicago ever since he was in knee pants. Then he started out to make some money. He organized a big band, and for this band he bought arrangements from one Fletcher Henderson. It was these arrangements that caught with the public, "made" Goodman, and brought swing to its present place. The same was said about Henderson's band holds true for B. G. also. His recordings are practically meritless. True, Benny achieved some really exciting Jazz with **Pick A Rib**. Some very good solos can be found in the Goodman records. Benny, himself, is (or surely was) a great Jazzman. But his bands have been far from great Jazz bands, large or small. Harry James, who began with Goodman is a good trumpeter (in no sense the greatest, as the press notices say). **Hear Teddy Wilson's Just A Mood** (Brunswick — Columbia). Lionel Hampton's

work in **Jivin'The Vibes** and **Rhythm, Rhythm** (Victor) is very fine. These are by a pick-up band, under Hampton's name. The greatness of Jess Stacey's piano is a long story.

Ex-Goodman men like Hampton (the jive's got me), James (look how many notes I can play), Teddy Wilson (piano with decorations), Bud Freeman (at least my band's good), Gene Krupa (Me and Roy and make more noise), etc., have their own bands now. And so the trype [tripe] parade moves on.

THE RECORD COLUMN

December 19th, 1941

There is a kind of Jazz that the public likes. Of course, the public does not know anything about this, but "Kansas City Style" jazz is popular stuff. To define any of the numerous kinds of Jazz is just about impossible. In K. C. the extemporaneous ensemble and the hot solo are supplemented by highly rhythmic. Riffs may be called a short musical phrase, accenting the heat and time of the music, and repeated over and over. The band of Benny Moten featured K. C. Jazz years ago. Some of the records they left behind are fine examples and still sound new and fresh today. **Moten's Swing** (Bluebird) for instance sounds modern, although made almost ten years ago. Unfortunately the record companies commercialized Moten's music, and cramped his style. In addition, Benny tried to feature everybody, and some were hardly qualified to take solos, so most of his record have their bad spots.

Today, from the Moten band, has come Count Basie's orchestra. For the records, Basie's Decca series is excellent, his **One O'clock Jump** still being the best version yet of the classic. In fact, just about every Basie Decca is a fine disk. The late Hershall Evans, a tenor sax man, is featured. Also Lester Young, whose style on the tenon [tenor] is a bit too decorated, but nevertheless good, owes his fame to these recordings. The same goes for the superb Basie rhythm section, trumpeters Buck Clayton and Harry Edison, vocalist James Rushing.

Now, however, Evans is dead. Young and Edison have left, and the Count's piano sounds like tiddledly-winks. The band is featuring Harlem-powerhouse give, with a whole lot of noise, and peculiar, uninspired solos. So for the best from the Count, stick to his Decca series.

Another band of the K. C. school is Andy Kirk's, which also started a-way back. His band plays spirited music featuring very adequate soloists. The most famous member of the band is its pianist, Mary Lou Williams. Of late, however, her style has lost a lot of its exciting punch, because she is playing a little more piano than music. The early Deccas made by Kirk are the best example of the band's fine work, now available. See the Decca catalogue.

In closing we would like to mention one record that is a good example of the Kansas City style. It is by Pete Johnson's pick-up band on Decca; titled **627 Stomp**. Pete's non-boogie style, usually very weak, is better here. A tenor solo falls short, a clarinet ride ever shorter, the riffs are fresh and crisp, the atmosphere fine, and the performance highly spirited and rhythmic.

This may be a little off the subject, but do not forget to buy those Christmas cards from the school so you will be helping England and doing yourself a good deed. A Merry Christmas to all and be sure to listen to plenty of good records.

THE RECORD COLUMN

January 26th, 1942

Another of the “Styles”

The last stronghold of Jazz before the jumpin’ jive made hash out of a great music was the school known as Chicago Jazz. Many of the early Chicagoans are famous today. Men like Gene Krupa, Jimmy McPartland, “Muggsey” Spanier, Dave Tough, Georger Wettling, and others began their careers in the Chicago school.

When the Dixie music of New Orleans Jazz became famous most of the best players got jobs on river boats and drifted, finally up the river to Chicago and to even greater fame. Here in Chicago a group of youngsters heard, and liked, and tried their music. They tried the same—and different as the records show.

The guiding light of the Chicagoans was their clarinetist, Frank Teschmacher (rhymes with baker). Although he never was a polished musician (not half the musician) as were the New Orleans clarinetists whom he worshiped, he was born with one of the most creative minds that has ever been known in music. If a record does not have Tesch on clarinet it isn’t a Chicago record. That is the best rule to discriminate the music.

Teschmacher first appeared on records with Charles Pierce and his orchestra (added to the band for recording only).

It has recently been established that no other Pierce sides have Tesh. These records could hardly be called Chicago Jazz, but they show young Frank Teshmaker on the start of his career.

Tesh’s next record is the first Chicago Jazz record and contains his best solo. It is **Friars Point Shuffle** backed by **Darktown Strutters Ball** (Commodore), recorded as the Jungle kings. Next come the very find **I’ve Found A New Baby** and **There’ll Be Some Changes Made** (Commodore), both of which contain some of the most powerful

ensemble work and good solos on the recorded Chicago Jazz. The four most famous Chicago records come to our attention next. They are all included in Columbia's Teshmaker album; **Nobody's Sweetheart**, **Liza**, **China Boy**, and **Sugar**. Here again is great music. Most of the players are famous today, but to hear these men at their best, one must go back to such records as these where they play the music they love best.

There are few other Chicago Jazz records. The members of the school drifted apart, joined large bands for big money. They did make recordings still, some with small Jazz bands, but with the separation of its followers and the sudden death of Tesch, the Chicago School died out and left behind only the records. So far issued, there is only one other of these. This is **Jazz Me Blues** (Commodore), played with three reeds, including Tesch. The Chicago boys did make other records, but has yet these have not been issued or are not available at present.

(If your dealer does not stock some of the above records, he can order them.)

THE RECORD COLUMN

February 16th, 1942

In all Jazzdom there has been only one exponent of that music who could orchestrate it. Duke Ellington's band first recorded in 1926. This was the first proof of his success in the arranged, written ensemble augmented by the improvised solo. When he toured Europe those straight-laced critics across the sea compared him to Bach, Brahms, and the other masters of old. Americans in the music world hardly have the vision of their European counterparts, and probably never will. An Ellington symphony is to be found in **Reminiscing In Tempo** (Columbia), **Creole Love Call** (Columbia), or **Creole Rhapsody** (Victor). Such Ellington tone poems as **Morning Glory** (Victor), **Mood Indigo** (Victor), **Echoes of Harlem** (Columbia), and hundreds of others, are sure to entrance any listener. Such modern Ellington compositions as **Jack the Bear**, **Harlem Air Shaft**, **Cotton Tail**, **Take the A Train**, **Rumpus in Richmond** (all Victors), have dance appeal which is hard to equal, besides being just as good examples of great music as the others mentioned. But when one begins to list Ellington, he has a huge task. Any record by the Duke's men is a fine example—he has never made a bad record yet! What other band can you say that for? The quality of his music has not changed from 1926 to 1942.

The Duke's soloists are some of the finest bandsmen in music. Barney Bigard is of the New Orleans school of clarinetists, which is "nuff said". Johnny Hodges is the finest alto saxist ever to blow a note. Trombones Joe Nanton, Jan Tizol, and Laurence Brown make the most talented team ever to play in one band. The trumpeting of Rex Stewart shows well why he deserves the title "King Rex". "Cootie" Williams, who recently left the Duke, plays the country's top "growl" trumpet.

As a composer-arranger Ellington is head and shoulders above all the others put together. His orchestrations have a color and depth which no other man has been able to equal. As for originality—well just listen to one, any one.

THE RECORD COLUMN

April 10th, 1942

Miracles O "Jive"

The music being played by the "swing" dance band of today is nice enough trivia, but it has none of the depth, or the power, or the beauty, or the true value of jazz itself.

However, something, shall we say the law of averages, a performance will seep through the commercial clamor that is fine, beautiful, and sincere. Such, to go back to a beginner in the swing era, was Benny Goodman's quintet classic Pick A Rib (Victor). Beginning with part two, Goodman plays a short lower register introduction, then Teddy Wilson sarts a boogie woogie bass on the piano, Lionel Hampton begins his marvelous vibraphone work; and these three, backed solidly by John Kirby's bass and Buddy Schlit's drums, play in ensemble for three minutes of really inspired music, every exciting record.

For a long time the hand of Jimmy Lunceford has been sort of "grype" among collectors. That it had talent with playing a lot of those loud, complicated, jumpin' jive arrangements which do little more than provide an interlude of nerve-wracking noise. A record showed the talents of the Lunceford crew. It did come. Uptown Blues (Okeh) is a masterpiece of sincere effort. It shows what swell things the Lunceford boys can accomplish when they stop kidding.

Harry James is a young trumpeter they rave about. He can play a trumpet excellently, but so can any of Hans Kindler's boys. As a swing soloist he's good; that's all—good. His solo on Feed Draggin' Blues (Columbia) is, however, a real work. His choruses have all the feeling, delicate phrasing, and impetus which make great music. Unfortunately the rest of the record is trye [tripe], but those trumpet choruses are outstanding, one of the finest things done in the past years.

When Woody Herman let his guitarist Hy White star on River Bed Blues (Decca), following of “le hot” were in for a great treat. In what is without doubt Herman’s finest record, we are shown once again that when the swing band stops blasting, screaming, and jumping madly for the “bugs”, there’s talent there, real talent.

Congratulations to the men on these records for defying a jive-happy public and giving us some fine music. May their tribe increase.

THE RECORD COLUMN

June 1st, 1942

On the Blues

It's often been contended that every bit of jazz can be traced back to the "Blues." Without going into this question and without trying to define blues, a task perhaps more difficult than to define poetry or explain Relativity in a sentence, we want to discuss a few recent contributions to the blues library played by small bands.

Muggseu Spanier's *Relaxin' at the Turo* (Bluebird) has been acclaimed as one of the greatest records of all time by the critics. It would certainly be difficult to find a record with more taste or true feeling. Spanier's horn, Joe Buskins' piano, and Red Cless' clarinet are all inspired and are just about perfect.

A very interesting record is to be found in Red Norvo's **Blues in E Flat** (Columbia-Brunswick). Norve puts life into the unusual stilted xylophone and makes it a vital instrument of expression. The whole band is fine. To mention a few names, Bunny Berigan, the late "Choo" Beny, Johnny Mince, Gene Krupa, Teddy Wilson, and others.

Sidney Bechet has been continually considered a fine clarinetist during his entire career. Earl Hines is considered one of the greatest, if not the greatest, pianist in all jazzland. There is one drummer who tops them all. Ask Krupa, Toughm Wesling. They'll tell you "Baby" Dodds is the greatest drummer that has ever lived. Well, you put these three together, Bechet, Hines, and "Baby," have them record a great tune, and you have a great record. Such is **Blues in Thirds** (Victor) by Sidney Bechet's trio.

Another great trio record, with the same instrumentation, is *The Last Time I Saw Chicago* (Commodore) by the Three Duces, "Pee Wee" Russel, Joe Sullivan, and Zutty Singleton. Here we have the kind of music that takes complete possession of the listener and leaves him breathless when the piece is through.

When Gene Krupa and the Bad Man first got together, Krupa had a recorded session under his own name. Out of this session came the classic **Blues of Israel** (Decca). It is unusual in many ways, mainly because it is unusually good. It opens with a few bars of typical blues introduction played by Israel Crosby on the bass! Then comes the trumpet, Jess Stacey's always outstanding piano, and the trombone, each contributing excellent solos in succession. The final chorus is an extremely good and very melodic blues chorus. It is played on the bass fiddle by Crosby (plucking—not with a bow)! This is not a good record because it is tricky, novel, or sensational. Despite the new idea of melodic bass solos, instead of usual percussive pounding we hear from the bass fiddle, despite its novelty, it stands as one of the outstanding efforts in recent jazz.

APPENDIX II

Bryant DuPre Oral History Interview

Three years before Martin Williams died, the New York jazz musician Bryant DuPre visited Williams in his home in Alexandria, Virginia and interviewed him for three hours, leaving us the fullest, and most candid, portrait of Williams. To preserve the tenor of the conversation, I have transcribed the interview verbatim. Editing is only done to resolve dangling syllables. Mr. DuPre has generously helped me improve the accuracy and clarity of the transcript. The original tapes are in the archives of the Institute of Jazz Studies.—MTL

Bryant DuPre: Start indeed. This is February 28th, of 1989. And we are at the home of Martin Williams. I am Bryant DuPre. And it's Martin T. Williams.

Martin Williams: Yeah, but I haven't used the "T" for a long, long time.

DuPre: That stands for?

Williams: In fact, there is even another middle name [chuckles].

DuPre: Oh yeah?

Williams: Yeah, certainly haven't used that for a long time.

DuPre: What are? What are the. . .

Williams: What does it stand for? Well, the "T" stands for Tudor, like the British Kings or the Welsh Kings.

***DuPre:* T-U-D-O-R?**

Williams: Yep. That's my mother's idea of elegance. And my father's to be sure. And the other name is Hansford, H-A-N-S-F-O-R-D. I mean anybody would think I was royalty. But I guess it's part of my story that, in a sense, they did think they were royalty. Or they acted like they thought they were. I guess you have to be a Virginian from a fairly well-to-do family to understand that.

***DuPre:* I know that's—that's quite a tradition in that state. Just like South Carolina, as opposed to North Carolina.**

Williams: Exactly. It's exactly—that's—you've got it on the nose. My parents both came from small towns in Virginia. All small cities. In my mother's case she came from Lynchburg, and my father came from a town out in the southwest called Wytheville. And. . .

***DuPre:* What is her maiden name?**

Williams: Yancey. Y-A-N-C-E-Y. And their parents were both prominent people: lawyers, professional people. And in—let's see—my mother's father was a city attorney at the city of Lynchburg. And my father's was a state's attorney, which is like the district attorney for the state in his town—his area. So they moved to the big city, and it's—it was a very high-bound, socially restricted city. And they had social ambitions and—and these delusions of aristocracy that a lot of Virginians had. And I—that's how I was raised. And I was an only child, and I was sort of supposed to be a tool of their social ambitions. And it was not a happy way to grow up, in some respects. But I think it did give me a certain idealism and a certain sense of standards. And—and—and those things are—have been

important to me. They are the things I don't want to shake—about it, you know—I've never been a—I've never wanted to get rid of. But where do you want me to start? When did you—when did you get interested in jazz?

DuPre: Well I—I think—I think that's—no—no I am very interested in that. Because I think that we should know what kind of people are doing. . .

Williams: Well you've got that.

DuPre: Yeah, I think.

Williams: Now what? Now what? Now what?

DuPre: Or that's something—okay. How long did they live? Or are they still with us?

Williams: No no no. They died—they died in the fifties.¹ As I remember—I have no head for small numbers and dates, most of the time. But they are dead.

DuPre: I see. I just wondered how far they saw the. . .

Williams: But they sent me to private school, for instance, a church school in Richmond called St. Christopher's. And the first time I wrote about jazz was in the—that little student paper there.

DuPre: You were sixteen years old in 1941?

Williams: I don't remember.

DuPre: I think that. . .

¹ They died in the seventies; his mother in 1970, his father in 1976.

Williams: No no. Sixteen, it must be. Yeah yeah.

DuPre: Yeah. The—one of the articles said that.

Williams: Right, right, right, right.

DuPre: So what was that article on? Now that we are mentioning it.

Williams: I have it here. I still have it somewhere. I think the first thing I wrote was out of the realization, my realization, that actually—that the—the typical archetypal swing band style, which is what we can call the Benny-Goodman style was actually not his, that it had come from Fletcher Henderson. And that came about because of the first crop of re-issues on Columbia Records, which was the work of John Hammond and George Avakian. And that—they did a four-record 78-album of several people, but in this case Fletcher Henderson. And I listened to that, and I said, wow that's where it came from. That was not my first consciousness of the music.

DuPre: Oh yeah you had earlier ones. No other brothers and sisters?

Williams: No no. Only child.

DuPre: You heard, of course, the Benny Goodman trio record of—was it *Body and Soul* with Teddy Wilson?

Williams: No it wasn't *Body and Soul*. It was one of the "up" ones. I don't remember what. It was like running wild, one of those faster ones. And I heard this—no I heard—I think they did it live. I don't remember whether the show was live or recorded, or both. But it was an RCA "plug" show on the NBC network. It was called *The Music America Loves Best*. And mostly it was kind of what was then called "light classical," soupy stuff. But they

would let on some of their popular artists, which is, you know, really what the swing bands were in their day. And my first awareness of really being involved with the music and being moved by it was this trio record by the Goodman group, and particularly Teddy, as I remember. Cause, Benny was adding to the excitement, if nothing else—what—but there was much else. I just was somehow more aware of Teddy, I think.

DuPre: Right.

Williams: And that sort of did it.

DuPre: Well, that was you—that's the beginning for consciousness. But you were—you were hearing other things if you went and saw Betty Boop cartoons, right?

Williams: Oh yes, of course. I mean as I . . .

DuPre: You were being primed for by other sources.

Williams: Well I don't know whether I was being primed for it. I mean I was hearing the same thing everybody else was hearing.

DuPre: Right. What did your parents listen to?

Williams: They pretended they listened to classical music. But actually they listened to nothing.

DuPre: Yeah.

Williams: There was no phonograph in the house 'til I bought a little cheap one.

DuPre: How about a radio?

Williams: There was a radio, but they didn't play it much. And I was an avid radio listener, not necessarily just to music. I listened to the popular comedians and the drama shows and everything.

DuPre: Yeah we—we will of course—if I'm allowed to read your résumé, I want to talk about a lot of things on there, later.

Williams: Well. Sure, you know. You can do it. You can do that.

DuPre: It's much more than jazz, in American culture, that you are into. So. . .

Williams: Well, that came gradually.

DuPre: I see. We might add—now you were born in 1925?

Williams: Twenty-four. August the ninth.

DuPre: Okay. And that was in Richmond, Virginia?

Williams: Yes.

DuPre: And was—was there's a series of homes? One home always?

Williams: No. One home, that I remember. When I was an infant, apparently, there was a move. But I only remember one.

DuPre: Where is that? Where is that home?

Williams: 1617 Hanover Ave, in what is now called, but what was not then called, the Fan District.

***DuPre:* Meaning?**

Williams: Well, it's—it's a way—the way the streets are laid out with triangular parks branching out. It doesn't matter.

***DuPre:* Okay. So you went to—what schools did you go to? Were they public schools, or private schools?**

Williams: No no. As I say, it was always private schools. Until the third grade I went to a little elementary school in the neighborhood—originally—called Talbot's School. And then I was sent to this—beginning with the third grade—I was sent to St. Christopher's Episcopal Preparatory School [chuckles], which was all the way through, every—every grade. And I stayed there until I went to the University of Virginia in 1942.

***DuPre:* Then on to Penn and then Columbia.**

Williams: Yeah.

***DuPre:* Well, back to the listening to Benny Goodman trio.**

Williams: [Chuckle] you're determined you're gonna do this by asking me questions and not let. . .

***DuPre:* Oh I'm sorry—no no go ahead.**

Williams: That's okay. No, go ahead. That's—if you want to do it that way. What I wanted to say was that it seems that from the beginning—and this is the way my mind works and always has, I guess, it's just something born. I was not—well there are two things about my interest in the music. First of all I was not only interested in the current hits. The idea that there were roots here, the idea that there were great figures from the past, and there

were great ensembles, and there were great styles before the time of the currently popular stuff always appealed to me.

I began to collect Armstrong and Beiderbecke records when I was still in my teens. I was curious about all that. And also, the idea that—you know that—if this was really artistic as a lot of people were saying. I wanted to know about that, I want to know how and why and what made it that. And I wanted, I think quite early, to be able somehow to discuss it as if it were artistic and not just a teenage enthusiasm, which was, seemed to me—I wasn't too conscious of this—but that was the kind of stuff I was reading, you know.

DuPre: You were reading that in other fields?

Williams: No, I was reading it about jazz, in so far as I read anything. In the magazine. . .

DuPre: You mean Charles Smith or. . .?

Williams: No no. Well—no in the magazines—in *Down Beat*, in *Metronome*, you know. And I didn't read a lot of that. But when I saw it—and in—in recording album notes. Some of them weren't that way, but I mean William Russell was writing, to me, more seriously—informatively of it—of it as if it were music. But not everybody.

DuPre: Right.

Williams: But the other thing that I really was aware of was that, when we went to hear one of the successful bands, my friends and I, and particularly girlfriends I had—we were interested—more interested in different aspects of that music. That is to say—I will put it in terms of the girls I was seeing—if they—if we went to hear someone like Tommy Dorsey, what they wanted was romantic ballads, more. What I wanted was—was jazz instrumentals, more. Not exclusively either way, but that's—that's the way it went. And. . .

DuPre: Were you at Chick Webb live?

Williams: I heard Chick's band when Ella had it.

DuPre: Oh I see.

Williams: Eddie—Eddie Barefield was running it at—at that point. I did not—I did not hear them when he was alive. That was in—at a black dance, a “colored dance,” as it would have been called then, in the large hall in the down—in the—in the—in the mosque—the basement of—which was a big auditorium in Richmond. But it was for blacks. And, you know, they would let us into a hall like that—“us” being the young teenage fans—and you know there would be three, five, six, eight of us roped off right beside the band stand, segregated there, and that would—they would let us in, and we could do that. And therefore we were standing next to the band [chuckles]. And I remember hearing Basie that way and talking to Lester Young, as a kid, you know.

DuPre: So which year—what year would have this been?

Williams: This would have been forty, forty-one.

DuPre: Wow.

Williams: I remember it was just after Al Killian came into the Basie band, so you could date it that way, I suppose—into the trumpet section.²

DuPre: What did he say? What did you say to him?

² Al Killian joined the Count Basie band in 1940.

Williams: Lester? I said, what was the name of that? Because I looked at his part, and it had “X” at the top. And he just said, “Well that’s X, we gon’ call it Miss X” [accented], or something like that, you know.

***DuPre:* So you were talking about your different friends and it would affect the way you would listen to a band, the women you were with on a gig. . .**

Williams: I am saying that was my response to the music. If, you know—and I’m talking about, if, you know—if we—if we went to a dance or a theater performance by one of the bands—in this, in this case, of course, it’d be a white band—what I was more particularly interested in was not what they were more particularly interested in. So.

***DuPre:* Well did you find any friends who were on your same wavelength?**

Williams: Yeah. Yeah, I did. We used to have a little band. I was an absolutely dreadful, totally incompetent clarinetist, who took a few lessons. And there was a band—a terrible band, with one very talented guy and one fairly talented guy in it. The trumpet player was a local friend of mine named Bill Mangum, and the drummer was Tommy Adamson. And he could play. If I tell you his favorite drummer was Sidney Catlett, I think—I think I probably [chuckles] indicated, you know, he was not a Krupa fan—which for him and in that day was quite something.

***DuPre:* He weaved through that.**

Williams: Yeah. And there was a pianist named Bennett. I forget his first name. And we used to pretend we were playing in the basement. But at that point when my clarinet playing—it was all will power—and embouchure, which I had no control over, but I would, you know—I would get notes by [chuckles]—just by sheer force of will. And

pretty much at that stage, when I couldn't hear very much, you know—cause I didn't know very much—I could play anything I could hear. And I never learned to read. And as I say I never got any decent reed embouchure. So what happened was when I got to the point I began to be able to hear things that I—hear more things, then I was lost. I couldn't play them. And I needed to go back and start all over again, and I never did. So my clarinet career was nothing. I was never paid for a gig or anything like that.

DuPre: When did you stop doing that? Stop play?

Williams: I guess when I went to college. Yeah, about that time. I—in fact I left—we used to play in Tommy's house—Tommy Adamson's house—in the basement. And I left the clarinet there [laugh].

DuPre: Forty-one? Forty-two?

Williams: Forty-two, yeah.

DuPre: You mentioned a little bit about some of the things you did in pursue—learning more about the music—William Russell's notes. Now what were some of the other things you did? Some of the sources you found for improving your. . .

Williams: Well [chuckles], I read *Jazzmen* and—some of it. I didn't—I read Wilder Hobson's book—what the heck was that called? *American Jazz Music*? No. Yeah—that was—I read it—add that—and I read the other one, the introductory book. Yeah, that was Wilder Hobson, I guess. Yeah. And that was a kind of how-to book with records. It's sort of—I guess I wrote my version of that in the later book that I did called *Where's the Melody*? I guess—unconsciously—I wasn't aware of it—I was sort of modeling it on that.

But I—I really—consciously I was modeling *Where's the Melody?* on Aaron Copland's wonderful book *What To Listen for in the Music*. I didn't come near that. But. . .

DuPre: And then—so that was. . .

Williams: You're making me jump ahead terribly, Bryant. But I'll—I'll. Why don't I just respond to your questions then? We'll do it that way.

DuPre: We'll do it that way later, I guess. Let me just be quiet for a while, cause I don't think I know all the topics.

Williams: Well. What I was doing was, of course, not approved of. It didn't have any kind of respectability to it. And particularly not in the southern world in which I was growing up. Now of course my parents were—were racially bigoted. But at the same time considering themselves aristocrats that they were very careful not to be vulgar about it, they thought. I mean, I was instructed that one would never use that word “nigger.” One didn't do that. That was lower class people. You know, that kind of thing. But, nevertheless, that's basically [chuckles] how they thought of black people. And my awakening to looking at that was—you know—I lived in a kind of contradiction for a long time. Trying to absorb their ways and my friends' ways of—of—of—of looking at racial questions. And then I was going into another thing myself, and I didn't work out the contradictions. I didn't feel—didn't feel the contradictions for a long time.

Anyway, I went to college and I was faced with the Second World War. And—so I took an economics course, having joined the Naval Reserve, and I was sent back to college in the V-12 program. And then I was sent off to Midshipmen School at Notre Dame, and then to a ship in the Pacific. I think we can get through that pretty fast.

The most interesting thing that happened to me during that Navy career was—we were coming out of Long Beach—which was near Los Angeles. Whenever we were in port, that's where we were. I—I had been out to sea. We had been at the Battle of Iwo Jima, the Battle of Okinawa. We had been all over the Pacific. We came—we began to come back more often to the West Coast. And I went up to LA, and I listened to jazz. And I went to the Jazz Man Record Shop, which was the collector's record shop. And I even bought a King Oliver Genette from Nesuhi Ertegun, who was at that time—Marili Morden was waiting at the counter. And he was talking to her through a talk box back in the stock room. And I didn't see him the first time I went in there, because all I heard was his voice on the talk box. You know, he was sorting records in the back room or something. It's interesting. But I've known Nesuhi that long [chuckles]. Ever since forty-five, or something like that.

Anyway, the live music I heard included Dizzy Gillespie's visit to Billy Berg's with Charlie Parker. And Kid Ory, and this was the first time I had heard a real New Orleans ensemble. I heard a lot of Dixieland, but I—you know—not a lot—but—you know—and which was by that time almost exclusively a white idiom. But here were the guys who were there in the beginning of this—almost—playing it still. And that was a revelation to me—because it seemed—it was very moving to me in a way that, let's say, Eddie Condon's groups had never quite been. There was a depth in it. And I heard Bird and Dizzy and frankly at first—and I thought I was pretty hip—I knew—thought I knew all about, you know, in my aural way what Lester Young was about. I couldn't make anything out of that at first. I mean I couldn't even follow the *I-Got-Rhythm* progression in *Shaw 'Nuff*, which was the first thing I heard [chuckles]. I didn't—I didn't, you know—I didn't know what was going on at all. Because the phrasing was so differently and the melodic rhythm was so different. Because that's really what makes it different.

DuPre: Did you hear them in person first or in a car?

Williams: I heard them in a—in a car radio playing Shaw Nuff first. Then I went to Berg's. And then saw—then I was—I befriended the other record shop, the Dial Shop, which was run by Ross Russell and—out of which Dial Records came. No, that was not the name of the shop. The shop was I forget the name of the shop, but that's easy to check. And I—Ross Russell was running it and I met him. And he just signed Bird, and I saw Bird in the shop, you know, once or twice. And all these hangers on, these young hip types.

And I was around—I saw Ross the next day after he recorded that first Dizzy Gillespie session, the one that Parker was not on, where he called Dizzy “Gabriel” because of the contract conflicts—conflicts. And—so anyway, I had that dual experience. I was still confused about bop. And I was not at all confused about Ory. Anyway, I got discharged. And I came back and went back to school. And I took the line of least resistance, which, again, would get parental approval. I studied English literature, and got a bachelor's degree with the idea that I was going to go to law school and be a lawyer, because they would approve of that.

DuPre: U.Va.

Williams: Oh yeah. And two months in law school made it very clear to me that—that was not going to—I couldn't read the casebook. I couldn't even read the “pony,” as we called it, you know.

DuPre: That was U.Va. Law School also?

Williams: That's correct. And I had—the first time I had a troubled and sleepless night about a decision. And I called up my father, and I told him I can't do this. And his response was not what I need—wanted or needed. He said, oh don't worry about it. As if my agonized night and the agony of the decision just was nothing. It was a trivial thing, you know. Which it wasn't at all, to me. Cause I didn't know what I was going to do. So I took the next line of parental approval, which was to go back in and become a college professor of English. And I was—I took a—I fooled around graduate school there for a year. But then I went to the University of Pennsylvania for one year and got a master's degree in English literature.

DuPre: What city was that?

Williams: Philadelphia. While trying to resist jazz but going out and hearing the music several times. Quite—got into one period there for months I was going—and Sidney Bechet was playing in a club there. He played twice during this period. And I saw him on the bandstand one night. And I came to this really—it was a really—an epiphany for me. Because I saw him up there playing so passionately. It was probably a slow blues, but it wouldn't have to be. And I realized this thing in a flash, that the man and the instrument, and the sound coming out of it, and the passion in the man and the music were all one thing, in this kind of aesthetic miracle. That was the first time that it'd ever come through to me, something like that. And it took someone of his stature to do it, I suppose. And I was just staggered. And I still didn't listen.

The next year I was in New York, at Columbia, pretending to myself that I was still a graduate student. I worked very hard in Philadelphia. I was not working at all at Columbia. I was not doing the graduate work. After about a year or so, I was terribly at sea about what was going to happen to me and my career, my future. But I began to write

about jazz, probably because I needed a little self-confidence, in this collectors' magazine called *The Record Changer*. And then I really began to get very serious about it. I seemed to—you know, I had the guidance of literary critics, whom I respected. I was really drawn to literary criticism. In fact, in my mind I was going to be criticism.

DuPre: You know, I want to ask, later, about the New Criticism and how that influenced you, later.

Williams: Yeah—well—it did. And I learned—I—it just seemed to me—well you know those—they are trying to talk about the novel as if it were a novel. About a poem as if it were a poem. About a play as if it were a play. Why don't I—that—that's the only way I know. If this is really artistic the way we're saying, then that's the way to do it. Now, I didn't spell all that out too consciously, but that's really what I was up to. And I remember one of my fellow graduate students, who was a trombonist. I don't know whatever happened to him. His name was Osborn Duke, and he used to play with some of the name bands. And he wrote a novel called *Sideman*, which I've never been able to locate—him.³ I've looked—tried to find him a few—you know—in subsequent. . .

Anyway, he said to me once, reading something I'd written that I showed to—he said, well you're writing about this the way we write about literature. And I thought, yeah, he recognized it. That's what I'm trying to do, you know. So—but *The Record Changer*, I should add, was very “moldy fig” oriented. You know what that means. It was very conservative. It really liked the old music best. And when I began to take it seriously and tried to be analytical, I went through a kind of “moldy fig” thing. I—I—I did because I—I

³ Osborn Duke, *Sideman*, (New York: Criterion Books, 1956). From the novel's dust jacket: “Born in Texas with degrees in English from Texas Christian and Columbia, Mr. Duke hopes now to devote his full time to writing. His short story, ‘Struttin’ With Some Barbecue,’ originally published in *New World Writing* and included in Martha Foley's *Best American Short Stories of 1953*, brought high praise from the critics and was adapted for television. / Mr. Duke is married and lives in New York. He is at work on his second novel.”

had to start teach—I guess I needed to teach myself the basics, and I had to go about that music analytically. So I was rejecting anything I wasn't really concentrating on, for a while.

DuPre: When was that? This is grad studies?

Williams: This was—this was in the early fifties.

DuPre: Do you know the year when you first got it in *The Record Changer*?

Williams: Oh fifty-three or four. I was writing record reviews—yeah. Then it became obvious that I was not going to be an English professor. And the way it became obvious was complicated [laughs]. First of all, every fall, just before classes were supposed to start—and I was teaching freshmen—I'd have an attack of laryngitis. And it took me three years to figure out what this was saying. But it's obvious, shut up, this is not your subject. I was a good teacher, and I am a good teacher still, I think. I think I am really a good teacher, in my way. But the subject was wrong.

And then I took my oral exams, goaded on by a love affair I was having at the time. And I flunked them ignominiously. And I deserved to flunk them. Now the rule at Columbia is—in the English department anyway—if you flunk—was then—if you flunked your orals, that's it. Goodbye. You don't get the degree. It's over. But they gave me this reprieve. I mean I could come back and take another set of orals. And I still could, I guess.

DuPre: They did—they did like you as a teacher, obviously.

Williams: You know, that was it. I was doing well. Although in my own mind I wasn't doing well, because I wasn't satisfied. And there were a few things I was bluffing on, and a few things I was fuzzing up, you know, and fudging up. Cause I wasn't even doing the

right kind of work toward the teaching. And I was not patient with the students when they weren't doing well. That's still a temptation of me, by the way, to be impatient with students. So, anyway, at this point, when crisis was there, Whitney Balliett had been writing about jazz in the *Saturday Review*, in the recordings issues for the editor of that section of the *Saturday Review* who was a classical critic, Irving Kolodin. And Kolodin, by the way, had always recognized jazz in his way and praised it.

DuPre: Just for the twenty-first century maybe we can spell their names. Whitney W-H-I-T-N-E-Y. B-A L-L-I-E-T-T.

Williams: Yes.

DuPre: And Irving I-R-V-I-N-G.

Williams: Yes, K-O-L-O-D-I-N, Kolodin. And Whitney I think, first suggested by Nat Hentoff—but certainly with inclusion, so to speak—recommended to Kolodin that he take me on. And I went to see him. And I took some of the stuff I'd been writing at *The Record Changer*, and he said, okay you can have the job.

DuPre: How did you meet Whitney Balliett?

Williams: I didn't meet him till after this.

DuPre: Oh he just knew about your work? Is that. . .

Williams: Yeah. He—he—he, I think, as I say, I think Nat had showed it to him—shown it to him. But—but yeah. We met—we met at the time—I don't know exactly—and I think I met Nat Hentoff for the first time at the time. He was just reading me, you see. Reading. . .

DuPre: So this was fifty-seven, is that right, when he went to *Saturday*?

Williams: I think it was fifty-six the first time. And I stayed for a couple of years, and then it seemed to me that my copy was being tinkered with in the wrong way. That—not that it was being improved, but that my ideas were being softened and changed and—you know—and—and my interpretations were being jiggered around. And I didn’t—I wasn’t gonna—I didn’t wan—so I quit. And I could ill afford to. I mean, I had no money [laughs]. I didn’t know how. If you asked me to look back and—and tell you how I was managing to live, I do not know. I don’t know [chuckles]. So I can’t tell you in detail how these things happened.

But at about that time, *The Record Changer* was sold. No, no, no, no. A large collection of records was sold to a guy named Izzy Young, Israel Young, who had something in New York called the Folklore Center, you know, which was really ended—I mean it was really oriented in the folky thing that, you know, had its swell in the sixties. And he was kind of an early participant in that, or his shop was. He was—Izzy—Izzy was a terrible business man, and the shop flopped more than once. Anyway, he bought this record collection from Bill Grauer, who had been the publisher of *The Record Changer*, and who had subsequently started Riverside Records, with Orrin Keepnews.

DuPre: That’s G-R. . .

Williams: G-R-A-U-E-R, Grauer. Gosh that’s easy enough to check. Go look at an old copy of *The Record Changer*.

DuPre: Just want to have it right there instantly for anybody listening.

Williams: Okay. And *The Record Changer* had been sold, meanwhile, to Dick Hadlock, who had not kept it up very well. And it had sort of gone down the drain. And I was—I had been writing for him. And he was outraging every—all these “moldy figs” because, I mean, here I was talking about Monk and Bird and [chuckles]. You know, they didn’t want to hear that. Not at that stage [chuckles]. You know, at the same time, I am talking about Ma Rainey and, you know. The same person—while he can’t—obviously whatever he says about Ma Rainey has got to be wrong, because [chuckles] he likes Charlie Parker.

Anyhow, Nat and I started this magazine. Well, I—Bill Grauer told Izzy that he should sell this collection by direct-mail auction and, to do it, he should start a magazine like *The Record Changer*. *The Record Changer* had been supported by record auctions, in the back pages, run, actually, by the magazine itself. Although anyone could advertise in it. The major auctions were run by the—of old records, to collectors—were run by the editors of the magazine, Grauer, actually. And that’s what supported it. And it was what had supported him until Riverside Records. So he suggested to Izzy that he do the same thing and—and to get a hold of Hentoff and me. And I said, Nat why don’t we really start a mag—a serious jazz magazine. Why don’t we start a jazz review? And that’s how that we—and we sort of conned Izzy, because he never advertised any auction records in *The Jazz Review*. Because we filled it up with copy every time. And he was—Izzy was not the strongest man I’ve ever dealt with. So he just sort of went along with this. And of course the prestige that that magazine got and the people who flocked to write for it, I mean, it was just kind of fabulous. Gunther Schuller, musicians like Cannonball, Bill Crow, and Art Farmer, and on, and on, and on, you know. And we uncovered all sorts of good critics.

DuPre: Izzy was handling all this business as far as it was going.

Williams: Yeah, he was supposed to be the publisher of the magazine. Publisher of the magazine, right—right.

DuPre: And you were—were—you were handling putting people together and getting the space and. . .

Williams: We were handling soliciting articles. I was handling soliciting record reviews, and we used some British people, some outstanding ones like Max Harrison to review. Albert McCarthy. And we used—we found a lot of Americans, and we found a lot of musicians.

DuPre: That was what year?

Williams: When was *The Jazz Review*? 1959, 60, 61.

DuPre: The three years.

Williams: I think, yeah. During—I left out one thing. After I left the *Saturday Review*, I was writing for free in a very prestigious classical magazine called *The American Record Guide*. And I kept that up for a while during the time I was writing for *The Jazz Review*. And in the meantime *Down Beat* had come to me and said, would you write record reviews. And I said yeah, and. . .

DuPre: Who was editing then?

Williams: At that point Hentoff had been let go and it was Don—it was—was it Jack Tracy and then Don Gold? I think that was it. I have forgotten. Now I think, as I remember, *Down Beat* was paying all of fifteen dollars for record reviews. Maybe less, I don't know [chuckles].

DuPre: Big bucks.

Williams: How in the world I lived, I do not know. I can't tell you. Anyway, I began to get the—a reputation among my contemporaries. You see, Bryant, I'd never—it took until J. R. Taylor's generation and Gary Giddins's generation of critics for me to have any credibility as a critic. Because—and—and except for people like Nat and Whitney, who did like me. Whitney doesn't like my writing. He never has. But—you know, he likes my ideas—but aside from a few people, I mean most of the writers about jazz who were my contemporaries or older thought I didn't know how to write. George Frazier tried to give me lessons in how to write once. And I kept trying to explain I'm not trying to write that kind of—of—of criticism. I'm trying to do something else, you know.

And they used to say, does Martin Williams really like jazz? Because I wasn't bubbling over with the kind of, you know, adolescent enthusiasm, if I can put it that way, that they were used to. And that they—they did themselves. I was trying to say something, I hoped, a little more substantial. I was probably so damn full of myself and so egotistical I was insufferable to them, too. Let's throw that in. But, anyway, that was a good side of it that I really thought, you know, I'm going to treat this with as much respect as I know how, if I—if it's really as good as I think it is. I mean if I'm going to say that this is really something special, then I better talk about it in a special way. So it was hard for me to get jobs. I mean I can't tell you how many editors, when I was freelancing—as I was all this time—would tell me, oh you don't—people don't want to read about that. People don't want you to discuss jazz that way. That's why, along about this time, came another important job. And that's why it was important. Because I was taken on at *The Evergreen Review*.

Now *The Evergreen Review* was a magazine that was dedicated to the young, “hippie” writers, people who surrounded Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg and were Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg. And *The Evergreen*—first thing I wrote for *The Evergreen Review* was a long piece on Thelonious Monk. And I wrote what I felt were sustained, critical essays on a number of people for that magazine. And that eventually became my book, *The Jazz Tradition*, which I think is my heaviest book. And—and most people agree with that. I mean that’s the basic substance of what I have to say about the music. And I was lucky, you see. Because here I was writing these essays about these great figures from all periods and all styles. I wrote about Jelly Roll. I wrote about Charlie Parker. I wrote about Monk. I wrote about, you know, Count Basie and Lester Young and Duke and—and they let me take that kind of approach. And my models you know, as I say, were literary critics. Some guy write an essay on Henry James as a novelist. That was—that was great—or, you know, Shakespeare. . .

DuPre: You have some names of some people?

Williams: Whom I read as critics?

DuPre: Yeah, the literary critics that you thought were good.

Williams: Well, I thought the best essayist, the kind I was trying to be, was T. S. Eliot. Oh yeah [chuckles]. But there were all sorts of people writing *The Partisan Review*, and *The Hudson Review*, and those literary magazines, you know, that I read, and I was influenced by, but I can’t give you any. I mean I—I—I just have to give you generalizations, not particular examples. But Eliot was the one that really. Oh—and—oh—and another model in—in a—at—at—at another kind of—I realized this only after some years. But always James Agee’s film criticism had been a model to me. And I was doing it without even

thinking about it. And then I stopped one day, re-read a little Agee for some reason, I don't know what. And I said, oh my gosh, I've been very influenced by this guy. That book called *Agee on Film*, which collected all the stuff he'd written for *The Nation* and *Time* into one book, came out, you see, first. And it's still in print. It's been in print ever since. And I said, wow, that's another way to do it without being so heavy-handed about it, but being very serious at basing—at base, you know.

So—and it's—when you're writing occasional reviews, it's a tough job. I mean, you know, you—if you're given a record—say review this—as I was at *Down Beat*. At *Saturday Review* and at—at *The American Record Guide*, I could just review the records I felt inclined to write about. But when you're given—say, review this, review this—unless you say, I just can't, you know. And—and you manage to get off the hook. What you have to do is—George Orwell said this very well once, you're—you're writing about stuff to which you have no reaction, no—that—don't necessarily have any reaction worth committing to paper. That's no reflection on the thing you are writing about, or yourself. It's just, you know, I don't feel, right now, that I have anything to say much about Erroll Garner that everybody else hasn't said. I'm not, you know, or this record, you know. And you just—you're not inspired, which is not—you—you love Erroll Garner, but, you know, whoever the subject might be. And you're constantly faced with that, with that kind of reviewing. And it's—and it's—I think it's totally understandable. But—there is this something—I lost the thread of something there, but. . .

DuPre: Well, we were talking about different models. And you gave—you gave Agee's example. And I was going to ask you about Auden. I don't know if that was just an impressive speech.

Williams: Auden? W. . .

DuPre: Auden yeah. Seeing him—did that affect your lecture style as—you are—a teacher, beyond, you know, just writing. I mean an in-person teacher. What was that like? That was 1948 at—at U.Va. you heard him live, do some lectures?

Williams: Yeah, I heard him give a series of lectures, yeah.

DuPre: Were they meaningful in style to you?

Williams: Oh yeah, you know, the intellectual discipline and—and getting to the point. That's the thing about—that's the thing about those guys. They get to the essence of what they want to say. And they can—they—they are so—I think they both—I know they are both trained in *précis* writing. That—that is absolutely invaluable.

DuPre: I'm sorry, what writing?

Williams: Writing P-R-E-C-I-S, *précis*. Where you take an essay and you boil it down to a paragraph and even, eventually, to a sentence. That's the greatest training in the world, and I had some of it. So that you know the essential points of what you—when you begin to write, you—you—you—you know to—how to get to the point. That's something Hentoff once said about me, and I've been grateful to it—to him ever since he said that I get at essences. And I think I do. That doesn't mean the essence of the thing, but only my idea of it, of course. But I do know how to do that. So I don't beat around the bush. I can get to the point, and I—if I don't have a point, I don't want to say anything. But sometimes you're forced to if you're hacking, you know. So in the mean time here I am foolishly getting married and [laughs] having babies.

DuPre: You met somebody—met at *Americana* or *Britannica*?

Williams: Yeah I was working for the *Encyclopedia Americana* on what turned out to be a temporary [chuckles] job. And I met her, you know.

***DuPre:* Well, names?**

Williams: Her name was Martha Coker. C-O-K-E-R. Her father was Francis Coker, who was a Yale professor of political science. And she'd been raised in an academic community in New Haven, or in Hamden, which is a suburb. And she was an editor of the *Americana* and we [laughs]. You wanna hear all these stories.

What happened was I had to answer an inquiry on somebody who was obviously trying to win an American Legion contest on what is patriotism. So I went to something called *The Dictionary of—of Political Science*—yeah I think that was what it was—and looked it up to see what it would have to say about what is patriotism. And it was a very sophisticated view, you know. You don't have to be—have to give blanket approval to all—all that your country does and all of its policies to be patriotic. Well that's not the kind of thing the American Legion was interested in hearing at that point. But I sent her that essay and—whatever this woman, or girl, was, trying to win the contest in New Jersey, somewhere. But I looked at the signature on it and it said Francis Coker, Yale University. So I thought, I wonder if that woman over there whose name is Coker knows this man. So I went over and I asked her. I said, I just read something very impressive, it was signed Francis. She said, that's my father. And that's sort of how it started between us [chuckles], you know.

***DuPre:* You were talking about essence in your writing. How about André Hodier?**

Williams: Hodeir. When he came along. That's not Hodier by the—his name. Hodeir.

DuPre: I don't—I'm not going to speak French. Sorry.

Williams: No, if you spell it out, it's got to be Hodeir.

DuPre: Hodier. H-O-D-I-E. . .

Williams: E-I-R.

DuPre: E-I-R. Okay.

Williams: See, that makes it Hodeir. I-E-R would be Hodier. Yeah, *Jazz Its Evolution and Essence* was a very important book to all of us. Because here's a guy who can get at essences.

DuPre: Now what year was that? Fifty-four?

Williams: I can cross the room and pull it out of the shelf and get the date.

DuPre: You just keep talking, you just keep talking.

Williams: Dammit. You—you—you—it'd take you forever to find it. But come on Bryant that kind of thing can be checked very easily by somebody who really wants to know—when did that book first appear in English. Come on.

DuPre: Got it.

Williams: Anyway, that year—yeah I was impressed. And it was about that time I got a big assignment, by the way. I get a big assignment. And this was important to me too. Riverside Records decided to put out the Jelly Roll Morton Library of Congress records, which they had gotten by having temporarily acquired Circle Records, which was Rudy Blesh's moldy-fig label. And this was going to come out in the same editing and the same

—with the same flaws as—as Blesh had issued it on—on Circle. They were going to reissue the twelve L—on twelve LPs, twelve volumes of Jelly Roll, which were badly edited, I think. And also which had not gotten the speed corrected, and a lot of them were rolling too slow. But, anyway, they asked me to write the notes. And I wrote all twelve volumes. And I wrote—wrote it at a bargain price for Riverside, believe me. But that really put me in business.

I mean that—I concentrated on that music so hard and really tried to discuss it in music. Because everybody had been trading on Jelly Roll Morton, the colorful character, braggart, pimp, and I said this guy is a major composer and probably the first one that music ever saw. And I'm going to talk about him as a musician. And I did. And that was an awakening for me. Cause, you know, I'm saying things [chuckles] you don't—you've never heard anybody say. Jelly Roll improvises on *The Pearls* AABBBCCACC—you know, this kind of thing, whatever it was. And no one had ever said that kind of thing before, as far as I know, in print. No one, you know. And I was learning plenty. By the way, I'm going to put those notes, finally, in a book [chuckles], cause I've been waiting for the Smithsonian to reissue those Library of Congress records in some point. . .

DuPre: Somebody's—somebody's got something on the market.

Williams: They've been bootlegged many times—many times. But they've never gone back to the sources at L.C. Never recorded. They have had the speed corrected. But what they are doing is they've been working on dubs that were made in 1948 or something. And I know how I think they should be done, but there's no hope for it. So I'm going to put the notes in the—in the—in the book that's coming up in a couple of years.

DuPre: Well you—you learned a lot from that experience—doing that. Would we be getting out of track here if we ask how you generally get your theoretical knowledge? Cause it's pretty amazing.

Williams: [Chuckles] you mean why I would [chuckles] know about music?

DuPre: What you put together. I mean to, you know, to talk about Dolphy doing substitute licks, you know, on a chord progression.

Williams: Well, all I know about music, Bryant, I have learned from asking people the terms for what I'm hearing. And from talking to people about what I'm hearing, what they're hearing. I—I just gathered it, you know, on a pretty practical level all along. I, you know—I have always resisted learning to read well. I'm still a lousy reader—reader of music. But I've always wanted to make myself hear well. And if I don't know, I'll ask. And I've, you know, gone—I've called up a musician and say isn't that. . .

DuPre: Flipping this, it's the same day here—flipping the tape over.

Williams: Yes, I shouldn't have said that. Many—that was an unintentional pun there. Yes, go.

DuPre: So you were—you talked to some musicians.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: Did you ever sit down at a piano and—and you know learn intervals and—and practice?

Williams: No, no, no, no I never have. I'm always—I'm—whatever I can do I can do by ear. Now, you know, people tell me, musicians told me I have very good ears.

DuPre: Amazing.

Williams: In many ways I do, in many ways I don't. Some things I can't hear right. But the thing is—the gratifying thing is they seem to be getting better, and better, and better. I can hear voicings better, and better, and better all the time. Maybe that's going to stop [chuckles], as old as I am. But that—that really has gotten—and the hardest thing for me to be able to hear was voicing then, and the texture of orchestrations and things like that. That was the last thing I learned how. I can hear cycles, I can hear chord progressions. I can hear changes, you know. I spotted the fact recently, which has got a lot of people upset. But it's absolutely true, that Lester Young's *Tickle Toe* is really the first piece that Ellington had any success with, that's *Jig Walk*. Right down the line that is *Jig Walk*. That's where Pres got it. *Tickle Toe* is *Jig Walk*. And I told—I told Gunther. . .

DuPre: I'm sorry the progression or the—I didn't?

Williams: The progression. And actually, when I told Mark Tucker about this. He found out that one of the two stock arrangements of—of *Jig Walk* that was out that has that descending triplet figure as a counter-melody [laughs]. But—so, you know, I—I—I taught myself to listen from the bottom up, cause that's absolutely necessary in this music. And, listen, by the way, in passing, I'll say this. I will not name names, but there is a very well-known writer on jazz who does not know—cannot recognize any standard American popular song. And I'm not talking about the chord progression. I'm talking about the melody. I've sat beside him at concert after concert, and he said, what's that? That's *Body and Soul*. "What's that?" That's *The Man I Love*. And I'm talking about the opening theme statement, now. He doesn't recognize.

DuPre: Does he keep himself in wraps of—from causing danger?

Williams: Well there was a period when—when we weren't—I wasn't telling him. And his wife who tells him now wasn't telling him, because she was pregnant, when he just didn't mention—he wrote reviews and never mentioned one single tune unless it was a blues, now he's always been able to recognize the blues. I'll tell you off the mic who that is. I'm not going to tell you now.⁴

DuPre: Yeah, but that—I mean it's, you know—a lot of—you've done a lot of different things in jazz and in other fields and there are a lot of different people who've gotten their hands in a lot of things, like Barney Josephson, who was one of the most important people of all time, and he was not knowledgable about music in many ways.

Williams: No, no.

DuPre: But you have been as knowledgable as anybody, technically. Gunther Schuller, okay, but. . .

Williams: Well, no, because I can't spell out a chord. I can't even name it. I just know, somehow, if it's got a lot of chromaticism in it and if it's a substitution, I can usually say. But. . .

DuPre: Yeah, and you might know what somebody learned, voicing-wise, from Monk or something.

Williams: Yeah, I can hear all that. But I can't spell it out for you at all.

DuPre: You don't have to. So—so you—you don't need to.

⁴ That critic was Whitney Balliett.

Williams: [Laughs] but I mean I couldn't spell it out for anybody. You know, and when I re—you know, a few years ago, when I revised *The Jazz Tradition* and I added a chapter on Tatum, I—it took me thirty years to have the chutzpah to write about Art Tatum. I thought, you know, I can't do this. I'm not up to this. I had already had the chutzpah to write about Art and I didn't like it, where I wrote for—in the new edition of *Jazz* there is another chapter.

But, anyway, what I'm getting at is, I wrote this thing, and then I had next—I woke up the next morning and I said, you're crazy. You don't know what the hell you're talk—you can't play the piano. You can't spell out any of these chords. You can't name them. How dare you write, you know, all this stuff about his harmonic language and all that stuff. What do you think—who the hell do you think you are? So I send it to a local friend, excellent pianist, John Eaton. And I said, what did I do?

DuPre: Now wait—there are three John Eatons that I know of. But you're talking about from Yale University.

Williams: I'm talking about the Washington pianist.

DuPre: Yeah, John Eaton, E-A-T-O-N.

Williams: Yes, yes. The Washington D.C. piano player—piano player [chuckles], our John Eaton. Not the—there are two more.

DuPre: Yeah, there's—there's another piano player I heard with Eleanor Jacquet in Washington D.C., John Eaton.

Williams: Yeah, and then there's a—the composer, Prince—Princeton type, I think.

DuPre: So what did John Eaton say about your Ellington writings?

Williams: Yes. What John Eaton said was—not Ellington, Tatum.

DuPre: I'm sorry, Tatum.

Williams: He said, yes, you've got it—you've got it right. Everything is fine. And he was even enough—kind enough to say you've made me realize something about him I've never thought about before. So it's just the way my head works. You see, this is another thing I should say about me. It is the way my head works, Bryant. Because someone, another critic, one of my contemporaries, was approached by *Britannica*, about nineteen-six [phone rings]. . .

DuPre: We'll just stop for a moment. Just a brief telephone interruption there, and you were saying about somebody who. . .

Williams: Yes, a colleague got an offer from the *Encyclopedia—Encyclopedia Britannica*—this was about nineteen-fifty-nine or sixty—to write a new entry on jazz for their new edition. And he said, in effect, no I can't do that. Get Martin, he can do that. Well, he was right. I could or, at least, I had the gall to think I could. And it's true that he couldn't. And that always struck me as kind of funny, because he was writing, and quite successfully about jazz, and being fairly well-paid for it. And yet he said I cannot sit down and write a basic survey essay on the subject. I don't think I would like to feel that, if—if—if it were me, you know.

In any case, I did write the entry, and I wrote several entries for several encyclopedias subsequently, general entries on the—on the music. I've not—not—instead of bios, I've done that too, but not much of that. I don't really like to write biography. But that—I guess it is, as I say, the way my mind works. That I do want to be able to write about the

music in some kind of scheme and theory. That was the important thing about Hodeir, you see. What he said about Louis Armstrong, which was absolutely true. But he was the first one to just spell it out in—in—in print and say it.

You know, when I grew up, the history of jazz was a lot of style names and—and—and, you know—and journalistic catchphrases and geographical locations, you know. New Orleans style, Chicago style, or splitting the up- and downtown, or East and West, or whatever the heck it was. South or North, and that just meant black and white, actually. And then it became New York style Uptown, which was black, and Downtown, which was white. And then it became Kansas City style, blah, blah, blah, and Cool and all that. And that doesn't mean anything. It—really. If you talk about musically, what does it mean? Well, it was New Orleans [chuckles]—it was Louis Armstrong, and it was Jelly—it was Jelly Roll Morton and then Louis Armstrong, and then—and then Duke Ellington and then Charlie Parker, you know. People make the music change, not—not—not geography. So I very much under—under—under—André's influence, worked out my idea of how the music had moved and who the big, really important movers were. And, you know, I've been writing out of that bag ever since—I sure wish somebody would come up with a better theory but [chuckles], anyway. Maybe—maybe it was a good one, I don't know. But that—that's—that's the way my head works. I like to step back and try to look at the woods in addition to trying to count the trees.

Let me say something about biography too. When I had—someone that I knew—actually, someone I had met at the *Encyclopedia Americana* invited me to be the general editor of a series of books, which were originally supposed to be paperback originals for something called Collier Books, to be called the *Jazz Masters* series. And they were to go by decades. That was his ideas, not mine, by the way. They turned out to be hardcovers for

the parent company, who bought Collier Books, Macmillan. And this was the *Jazz Masters* series.

And I got Dick Hadlock to do the twenties. I did New Orleans. I used Rex Stewart's writings as the thirties. It was originally—had supposed to have been written by Hsio Wen Shih, who was the publisher—he was Chinese—S-H-I-H—H—he's Chinese American. H-S-I-O, W-E-N, S-H-I-H. Now that name is put in Caucasian, English-speaking order, or Western order. In Chinese you put the last name first, so the family name is Shih, put at the end, the way we do it. He was supposed to write the *Swing Era*. But he didn't. And he disappeared. And we assume he's dead. We don't know for sure. It's a long story which I won't go into. There is only one of his essays in the book, which had been published in *Down Beat*. That's all we could find. His manuscript disappeared. So I used Rex's writings.

Anyway, what I'm really trying to get at is when I had to write the biographies of the—the New Orleans people in the book that I did. That was new for me. I had never before tried to write about a person, a human being. I learned a lot from that. I learned a lot, not about writing, so much. Maybe I learned something about writing. But it was really a personal—it was a matter of personal growth with me. And I'm sure glad that happened to me. It was also—and this is significant—at about the time my children were beginning to emerge as—with personalities of their own. They were tiny.

DuPre: Want to mention their names and when they were born?

Williams: Alright, yes. Gosh, why did you ask me [chuckles].

DuPre: I'll ask the neighbors.

Williams: Oh, they don't know [chuckles]. Because this was before I lived here. Charles and Frederick, twins, born two minutes apart, in that order, in 1961. Male twins. Frank born two years later, approximately, 63, male, individual [chuckles]. Single, I should say. They're all individuals. Twins are not identical. So in the early sixties when they are beginning to walk and talk, I'm working on this New Orleans book and trying to deal with people, for their personalities, their characters, and their individuality.

***DuPre:* When was the project initiated? When did it first start in that Collier form? Any idea?**

Williams: About sixty. About the time I was ma—no—yeah, about the time I was married—maybe a little before—yeah, about that time, about sixty. Yeah.

***DuPre:* So you're working on—on the New Orleans book yourself at this point. Your sons were coming along and. . .**

Williams: Yeah, my idea about those books was I wanted—I wanted everybody to put as much music in them as they could. I said, I want you to use the biography as an excuse to discuss the music, I said. Cause we don't want another one of those books about those colorful old characters that made jazz, and what interesting alcoholics they were or whatever the hell else you—you know. I just pulled that out because twenties people did a lot of drinking, who didn't in the twenties [chuckles]? And I, you know—I said—so I said, let's put as much about the music and—in it as we possibly can. And everybody in his own way followed that. I didn't say that to Rex because, of course, Rex's was not part of the series. Rex Stewart's contribution on the thirties was a compilation, after he died, of stuff he had written.

DuPre: *Down Beat*, whatnot.

Williams: Oh yeah. Mostly—it's *Down Beat*, *Evergreen Review*. I got him one—one thing at *Evergreen* when I was there. Couldn't get the thing he wrote for *Playboy*. They kept exclusive rights. Mostly there but a couple of other places. So. . .

DuPre: Talking about writing the biographies.

Williams: Yeah, that—yeah, well, that's all I've got to say about that.

DuPre: You said you learned a lot from that, writing it.

Williams: Yeah, I learned a lot. Yeah, I learned a better way to look at people, and a way to look at—to learn to look at and write about musicians as people that was new to me. I hadn't tried to do that. And trying to do it you learn more about people.

DuPre: And wasn't Goldberg kind of insisting on doing that from the start, with his book? Joe Goldberg writing the fifties.

Williams: Yeah, well Joe was the one who was not—who was not going to be heavy on discussing the music, like the rest of us.

DuPre: And talking about divorces and whatnot. Didn't he want to mention that, that kind of thing?

Williams: I don't remember this particularly, no.

DuPre: I see. I think Sonny Rollins—about that.

Williams: Well, Joe—Joe—Joe—Joe was writing profiles, you know, and—and as such. But that's I mean—I—that wouldn't have anything—I don't mean that critically—I'm

just saying that that would be his approach. Everybody's upset cause he left out Stan Getz. I don't think they can accuse Goldberg of anti-semitism in that context [laughs].

DuPre: Yeah, just anti-Getzism.

Williams: Right. And—and I, you know—and—and I would be too, really, I mean, in a way. Although I didn't say anything about it, nor did I—I said, sure, fine, okay. I don't know what I said. I shouldn't say what I said, but, anyway. That—that's what it is. I don't have much more to say about that.

DuPre: All right. Well, many things we can pursue in this line of jazz, but do you want to talk about some of the other fields that you commented on—television, comics, things like that? And what was going on, development-wise, in the fifties and forties to get you into these things. I mean the comics are recent things you put out in the Smithsonian, very recently. And, but still things were developing in your mind at this time.

Williams: Yeah, well, I started writing about television, first of all, because I liked what I was seeing on television at that period. It seemed to me that television was really coming into its own in the early sixties in several ways. But also because most of what I read about television seemed to me so snobbish. It—it—it—so much of it seemed to say, as a kind of subtext, you know, “how dare they ask me to watch this,” you know.

Of course most television is bad. Most of anything is bad. If you had to read every novel written in the course of a year, what would you think of the state of literature [chuckles]? I mean. And yet somehow if all television isn't first rate, people who make a living writing about television can't wait to tell you that. And you know, how many people do you know? “Well I never watch television. Of course I do see *Cheers*, isn't that

wonderful?” What [chuckles], you know, you get this kind of—you still get this kind of stuff about it. This—this snob stuff.

Anyway, I—I also had a more practical purpose. I wanted to show people that I could write about something besides jazz. And I really—I was desperate for work. I was desperate for work and income the whole time I lived in New York. And here I am at this point, you know, with three kids. Children and a wife and—and I was writing for the *Voice* at the time when the *Voice* didn’t pay anybody. I wrote all that stuff. . .

DuPre: How do you mean that they didn’t pay anybody?

Williams: They did not pay. They did not pay. I mean that—read my lips. They did not pay (chuckles). No they didn’t pay anybody, except staff, money. But contributors were not paid at the *Voice* at this point.

DuPre: And you were never on the staff.

Williams: No, oh no, no, no. And I was sending it in, and they were publishing it. I also learned how to write better. I wrote more tersely. I wrote—I learned how to condense, cause I didn’t have much space. I wasn’t allow much—first time I’ve ever really been restricted on space and—and felt I—and felt I was learning something from it. Boy, I’d like to get half the movie critics around these days who write like Pauline Kael and say, you’ve got half the space. They get—learn to get to the point, you know. Anyway, I just—yeah, I—and there’s where Agee really came to my aide—my—my reading of Agee writing about TV.

Also I want—I really was conscious at that point of writing for a different kind of an audience than I had tried to write before. And I—I was not trying to write down to anybody or write—I just—differently, you know, than I’d written about jazz. I learned a

lot through that. But—and most of those things were—I wrote a few things about television elsewhere, in other places, longer pieces, in *The Evergreen Review*, actually—several places. But, as I say, that's how that happened. And—but in general—yes, and since—when I got—the way that the Smithsonian comic anthology started was when the—when the jazz—when the *Classic Jazz* album—this jumps way ahead in the story. But let's jump.

When *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* came out and was a success. It seemed to me that we—that is, the Smithsonian—could recognize and deal with other aspects of American culture that had a similar status in intellectual thinking the same way, to both enlighten and please a large audience. That is to say that we could take the next thing that interested me, newspaper comics, put together a book along the same lines, make the same kind of statement, and have it also succeed. When it did, of course, I was delighted, because I've said all these things I've always wanted to do—my God, they're selling, you know.

Now I must say that I did that in collaboration with—with a man named Bill Blackbeard, the selection of the newspaper comics. And that book doesn't entirely satisfy me. Because Bill, it seemed to me, was constantly trying to move it in the way of a sampler and a survey and a, you know—that was historically important, which was exactly what I was not trying to do with *Classic Jazz*. Then subsequently, working with Mike Barrier, we did a selection of comic-book comics.

But what this all comes down to, Bryant, is that I think that we are—that our country and, particularly its intellectual and academic classes—we do not understand quite the real significance and originality of our culture. First of all, I think that a country of any importance—a new country of any importance needs a new culture. And I think we've produced one. And I think that without, I hope, being nationally chauvinistic, or without

exaggerating or blowing it up—I mean, we haven’t produced any Beethovens, and we haven’t produced any Shakespeares—I’m not trying to say that at all.

But when—if one works in a traditional European genre, the novel, theatrical plays, whatever, and he’s good, we will give him the respect that is due him. But if he works in a genre that we have created in this country, or sub-genre, if he writes or makes excellent films, then we might like it—we’ll recognize it, but it’s a pat on the head kind of recognition. It’s a lower category. I would like to be able to live long enough to go into the drama school at Yale, let’s say, or at Northwestern, to take two important ones, and ask the faculty, who was the great American dramatist, and have at least one person on the faculty not say Eugene O’Neill or, among the younger ones, not say Tennessee Williams, as one of the younger ones is sure to say, but say John Ford, D. W. Griffith, one of the great film directors. Say that’s our drama, really. It is, of course. That’s our drama. Now if John Ford were producing nothing but trash, I hope I would not want that to happen. But the truth is he wasn’t producing nothing but trash. And I’d like to see that. I think that—well, this is the tough one, because most people don’t know about this. But the man who originated the character of Popeye who died in 1938, E. C. Segar.

DuPre: How do you spell his last name?

Williams: S-E-G-A-R, was a—was an—a genius. Now I’m absolutely serious about—when I say that—working in that idiom. Now the problem there is that the—the character was continued by other people. It was made into those awful cartoons, and it’s still around. It’s totally corrupted from what I’m talking about. If you read Segar’s version of that character, when he was doing it, in that fabulous period of—from 1929, when he introduced it, until 1938, when he died. You will see something very special. For example, in 1934 or 35, he wrote a satire on totalitarianism that was so perceptive. It’s low comedy,

it's raucous low comedy. But it—it says something about the nature of dictatorships. Well, it ends up with Pop—Popeye is a victim of this. And he—he's running this country and he gets the—the economy so hopelessly screwed up that he—the only way out is to s—is to s—declare war against the neigh—neighboring company—country, and—and—and save his neck that way, with a wartime economy. Does that sound familiar? [Chuckles], well.

DuPre: That was thirty-five.

Williams: Yes, that's right. You know about this?

DuPre: I didn't know about that. No, I didn't know that—that—that issue was dealt with by him.

Williams: Oh yeah, oh yeah. He started out with—doing satires on monarchy.

DuPre: It was—that was something in print? That wasn't something that—that Paramount. . .

Williams: No, it was a daily comic strip. Oh, it had nothing to do with silly cartoons.

DuPre: Zukor or any of those things, yeah.

Williams: Oh no, nothing to do with those silly cartoons, which all had the same plot, over and over, and still do. Even the ones that have been reproduced for television have exactly the same plot [chuckles], every one of them. Now that—that's one example. I could go on, and on, and on with things like that. That's going to be my next book [laughs].

DuPre: That is your next book? You—you might have a couple of books coming. You're working on a few things right now, or just that one is the—the very next one?

Williams: Well, there—there will be another jazz book. The one you—I gave you a moment ago, which is just about to appear, is called *Jazz in Its Time*. There will be another one after that called *Jazz Changes*. And that's it, no more jazz books. That's quite—that's far too many for one—one person.

DuPre: Wait and see, wait and see. Something else comes out you want to comment on or, sort of, deal with.

Williams: No, no. Come on, it's up to other people. God [chuckles].

DuPre: [Laughs] just wait and see, wait and see. Well you were mentioning about some of the other things you did. You didn't even mention writing a book on D. W. Griffith.

Williams: Yeah, I did.

DuPre: You—oh you did. I mean you mentioned his name. I didn't know about a book.

Williams: No, I didn't mention it. No, no. I did—I did write a book on him, yeah. The way that came about was someone came to me. I forget who recommended this. But it was someone from Knopf and said that, you know, she was producing—she was editing and publishing “juveniles,” as they're called. Books for young people. And would I like to write a book—first she said a book about Woody Guthrie, and I said no I don't. And she said well, you know, he's such a great popular folk singer. And I said, you know something, he's not. I said that was a very restricted audience, and the folks out there who were listening to Roy Acuff and the Carter family—they never heard of him. It was a political phenomenon. And that shook her up. And I said, you know, whatever his talent—and I'm

not going to discuss it with you—that was not traditional music at all. It was—it was propaganda music, you know. And it did not have a mass audience by any means. And I don't think he could have made it for a minute at the Grand Ole Opry [chuckles]. Not five minutes, not one minute, not thirty seconds. But I said. . .

And she said well, you know, one other thing. There are so many kids out there now with cameras—this was before home video cameras—who are making their own movies. Teenagers, who are interested in making movies and—this was before Stephen Spielberg, too. And how about a manual on film technique? And I said, look, all the techniques for making movies. A-L-L come from one man—one American. Let's write a book about him. And she went for it. Well, to make a long story short, the editorship changed [phone rings] by the time I handed the manuscript in.

***DuPre:* Stop this. Script.**

Williams: Oh yeah, the Griffith—yeah. And the new editor and I did not get along. She didn't like the book, at all. And I withdrew it. And some years later when I was at the Smithsonian, I was trying to persuade them to do a film series. And I pulled out what I had written about Griffith's *Intolerance*, this incredible epic spectacle that he produced. And used it—rewrote it, as a part of the presentation for this film schedule that never came—for this film series that never happened, by the way. But I liked it, and I sent it to my editor at Oxford, and I said, what do you think of this? And he said, that's the best thing I've ever read about that. And I said okay, let's—let me write a book about Griffith. So he did. By the way, I should tell you also that the Griffith book and the television book haven't sold at all. Not at all. They are flops. They have not paid off their advance. But my jazz books, finally, now, sell pretty well, for a jazz book, I mean. It took all this time for my jazz book to sell, by the way.

DuPre: Well here, it is 1989 which ones are still in print? It's a pretty good record.

Williams: All of them are in print, one way or another.

DuPre: Really?

Williams: Yeah, yeah. The—the anthology *Jazz Panorama*, which was an anthology drawn from *The Jazz Review* has not paid off its advance. But all the others do—do pretty well. And—but, you see, it's taken until now, when I'm sort of the grand old man, if you will, for—for that to happen. I—the reviews I used to get in the beginning. And the reactions I used to get were all very bad, in general, yeah. Now—but now. . .

DuPre: Talking about—talking about to *The Jazz Tradition*? Being, by that time, the reviews were bad of that?

Williams: They weren't very good.

DuPre: Who was writing them?

Williams: You know, just people out there.

DuPre: What—what functions? Just not—not jazz people, but just people dealing with books?

Williams: I'll tell you. When—when the new edition of *The Jazz Tradition* appeared, and Gary Giddins reviewed it in the *Village Voice*, in a long piece on that and one of Whitney's books together.

DuPre: And one of Dan's books, too, I remember.

Williams: Just the two of them, I think.

DuPre: Oh really. I—I thought it was a three thing. Anyway.

Williams: No I think it was just Whitney and me. And he—he wrote that about me. He liked the books, and he said wonderful things about me. But my point is that the first time that I have read anything from anybody in print that said to me what I've been trying to do all this time. That really said, I hoped, I was about. That's the first time anybody had ever done that. And that—that review, of course, is responsible, more than anything else, for the attitude that people now take toward my work.

DuPre: Giddin's thing turned the tide.

Williams: Yeah, oh sure, no question. No question. That's what I meant when I said, earlier, that it's taken until Gary's generation, J. R.'s generation, for people to, you know, for—for me to be received as in the way I hoped I would be. In other words, they understand what I'm about. But. . .

DuPre: Well he cut his teeth on—I'm sure he was influenced by you.

Williams: Oh exactly—exactly.

DuPre: And I think he said something in there about that—about the whole thing. And he was writing about people who had influenced him.

Williams: Yes, and people—people tell me that now. Students tell—the most wonderful thing that can happen to me is when a younger student will come up to me and say, you taught me to listen. Oh boy, there's nothing better than to hear that. And they're not trying to get—polish the apple, or anything. They're just telling me the truth. I can tell

the difference, I hope. They're not trying to flatter me. They are just saying, you know. And when—when—when a musician younger—would-be musician or student tells me that, then I—then I really feel good.

Because as I say, and I didn't say this earlier, when I first started to write, the fact that Gunther Schuller took me seriously was very important to me. Because, look, I mean nobody had ever—people weren't writing about jazz this way and I thought maybe I was nuts. I mean I felt wrong somehow, and I felt—I felt, for a long time—I felt unqualified. And I felt like a phony. Because I didn't know music. I didn't know there's any techniques. I couldn't read worth a damn. Still can't. And yet here I was presuming to talk about this music as music. And I—and when Gunther and—in the early days, I realized he was taking me seriously. That was very important to me. Because that was a conformation.

DuPre: How early was that?

Williams: Huh?

DuPre: How early was that when you first. . .

Williams: Well, about the time of *The Jazz Review* when I knew that. And, you know, when—when I realized that I've taught him things. I—I played him his first Jelly Roll Morton record. I played *Black Bottom Stomp*. He was staggered [laughs]. Yeah. Oh yeah.

DuPre: That must have been earlier than fifty-seven. I mean, that must have been. . .

Williams: No, why?

DuPre: No, I don't know. I just—just assume you might have hooked up with him before that.

Williams: No, no. It was about the—about the time of *The Jazz Review*.

DuPre: Well, do you think, outside of influencing people to listen better, what do you think about—and we're getting ahead, we might as well touch on it—what do you think about what's going on in the jazz world with different generations of writers? And what do you think is happening with their style and—and, more broadly, what do you think is happening with their purpose? You think that's been influenced by—by people like yourself? Or, outside of influence, what do you think of where things are going?

Williams: Among write—jazz writers?

DuPre: Jazz writers, yeah. Their purpose and then their style with that purpose. Or do you want to let that one go?

Williams: I might want to let it go. I would say that I wish there were more of them. I—I think that among those of Gary's generation, outside of him, that the one who is probably going to leave the strongest impression and the most lasting one is Stanley Crouch. And he's a slow starter, but this thing he wrote about Charlie Parker in *The New Republic* recently. The point of departure was the movie *Bird*, but that really wasn't what that was about. It was about Charlie Parker. And he's supposedly working on a book on Charlie Parker. I think that's substantial and important. That's a marvelous essay, and it's beautifully written, by the way. So—but I wish there were more of them. I guess that's really all [laughs].

DuPre: Okay, you don't have to go too far in that.

Williams: No I think that's all I'd say about that.

DuPre: Because, I mean, outside we talked about your style, you know, technical things or whatnot. But, I mean, there is a purpose beyond, you know, New Criticism, whatnot. There's a purpose in it that's consistently seen through your work. And I think that anybody dealing with jazz then—or anytime—has a—an understood, I assume, purpose in this culture. We keep it from getting watered down, keep it from getting—from dying.

Williams: Yeah, well. Well, thank you. I—I—the thing—cause a lot of think that the way I write about jazz, when I'm—when I'm writing critically, is—is boring. So I've tried, you know—I've learned to do other kinds of pieces like, you know—you must know that I've written a lot of—of little—some people call this a New Journalism. I don't think it's that—but, you know, I go to a record date. I go to a rehearsal. I go to a night in a nightclub—an evening in a night club, and I write about what happens for a few hours, and just put it down as a narrative story.

DuPre: Like the Jimmy Giuffre rehearsal.

Williams: Yeah, or—many of them. Monk at rehearsal. Monk at a nightclub. Gerry Mulligan making a record. Art Farmer making a record—on and on. I've done dozens and dozens of those pieces, and there—there are some, you know—there have been some in several books. And there will be more. And then I learned to write short profiles for the union magazine *The International Musician*. So I would profile John Lewis, Jaki Byard, Thad Jones, Lee Konitz. There's—many of those in the new book *Jazz In Its Time*. And they are not critiques. And they are not even music—they—they—they are just pure brief personality pieces and appreciations. I'm not trying to, you know, do any—any kind of critical thing there, except statement of their general stature and—and, you know, maybe some outstanding performances. But I'm not trying to sift through everything.

And—so, I mean—and that—I’ve—so I’ve—I’ve tried that kind of writing too. And I’ve done that kind of writing.

I’ve also learned a lot of styles [chuckles]. Yeah, you know, once I wrote two—I was writing a column in *Down Beat* for a while, and I also wrote the same column in *Metronome* for a while. It’s called the Bystander. And I wrote some parodies of my colleagues, pretended I was writing about a Beatles record in the early days of the Beatles. And I—how this, this, this, this, and the other reviewer, whom I named, might have written about this record. And then I made up a folk singer for the next bunch of parodies. And I wrote how—I named him Bobby Dyllie. And he had a LP called *Freedom Now from Murph the Surf* and—you don’t remember who Murph the Surf was. But he was a guy that stole a whole diamond from the Smithsonian. This was long before I came—well, it was before I came to the Smithsonian. And, you know, I wrote the way Ralph Gleason might have done it, the way Whitney might have done it, the way Hentoff might have done it, the way, well, a lot of people. And [chuckles] they—Nat was good. He said you really got me. But what I’m saying is I learned to imitate the styles of each one of those guys in parody. And I was trying to prove to one of them in particular that I could write anyway I wanted to write, you know. If I—if I put on the mask and—he particularly disliked what I said. He said well you got those other guys, but you didn’t get me right. They said I got him right [laughs].

DuPre: And those were in the *Bystander* from *Metronome* and *Down Beat*? Still out there.

Williams: That’s—yeah, either sixty-four or sixty-five, I did that. The person involved who didn’t like what I did is the same person who can’t recognize the standard tunes, by the way [chuckles]. He told me that—and don’t—don’t misunderstand. I consider him a friend, you know. And he does me too. So. . .

DuPre: And he—he does—he does—he’s found his niche. That’s for sure.

Williams: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

DuPre: You—you know so many other things here I—I’ve seen some things and information I have here that you’ve done some acting.

Williams: Yeah. At one point in my life I—when it was—I was really desperate for income and future. And I was getting nowhere. And I wasn’t, you know—I was writing this stuff in the *Voice* about television. And nobody was asking me to do it for money. And I couldn’t keep that up either. And I just was there. And I asked myself, really, you know, what do you want to do?

And I remembered, when I was a kid, the first thing that I was aware of wanting to be, you know—you ask what do you want to be when you grow up—and I said I wanted to be a comedian. But that was the only kind of acting I knew, because I knew it from radio, from comedians on the radio, the way they are now on television. And listening to them. And so what I really meant was I wanted to be an actor. But—so I said well maybe I do. So I had—I dabbled a little bit. I got in a production of that thriller called *The Desperate Hours* at the YM—West Side YMCA on sixty-third street in New York. And I was good. I really was. Pete—the director thought I was a professional. Cause I can—I can do it. And then I talked about it with a—and they said well, you know. . .

DuPre: What, I’m sorry, what year was that—when was that about?

Williams: Gosh, why did you ask me that? That’s sixty [sighs]—the—*The Desperate Hours* must have been the year before I was married, so that would be fifty-nine or sixty. Yeah, I was about to—I was going with Martha then. Yeah, you know, fifty-nine or sixty. And so

when I came back to that and said, well you know, maybe I can do this. Maybe I can start all over again. And someone said to me, well why don't you go to an acting class and test this thing in the real world. Why don't you, you know—you can go down to the HB studio, the Herbert Berghof studio with the—what's her name, the actress, the great actress who—I can't remember. But anyway—and—and join an acting class, and—and get to do a scene in front of the students and see if you could do that. And I went down, and I did a scene from a Pinter play with this young man. And, I'll tell you, I was fabulous [chuckles]. Well, I mean, the instructor said, it was a superb beginning.

DuPre: This was the act—famous actress who lead the school, you're talking about?

Williams: Well it was the instructor in this class who—who—he was—he was one of the instructors. His name was Robert Elston. He died recently, unfortunately, rather young, still acting. New York actor.

DuPre: Alright. You did well on that Pinter play.

Williams: Yeah, I was—I was something. But it was—it was an accident in a sense, because I never did another decent thing in that class. But I got a job in summer stock. I—I went to Cornell and we—it was not full-time, six-seven-nights-a-week stock. It was a weekend stock. We did a new play every weekend for three or four performances, I forget how many. And I was not good there. And what I learned was that I'm very good—if I'm good—I'm good on camera. I can act to a film camera—movie camera or a television camera. But to try to project to a house out there as an actor, I can't do very well. I'm not good on stage.

DuPre: What have you done behind camera, or on mic? You've acted on TV and film?

Williams: Yeah. I've acted—I've done extra-work in movies. Yeah, I wrote an article about that.

DuPre: Any—any radio—any radio, radio acting?

Williams: Well I've done a lot of radio.

DuPre: But radio acting?

Williams: No, not. A little bit. I did some promos for the Smithsonian once, playing parts and things like that. Not much. But I can. I know I can do that, to that microphone. I mean I'm acting now. All this is baloney. I'm just making this up, you know. This is [chuckles]. . .

DuPre: Clove—cloves in the back of the head, and pineapple in the face. But anyway we—they can look that one up too, later on—so you acted in films and extras.

Williams: As an extra.

DuPre: And you said you wrote an article about—about something. What was that?

Williams: I wrote an article about—it was called How to Be A Nobody for Somebody in Movies—about my extra-work. I did an extra—two scenes in a Barbara Streisand movie called *On A Clear Day*—probably the worst movie she ever made, or one of the worst. And Vincente Minnelli was the director. And I was in the movie that Elaine May directed, with Walter Matthau. And they cut my scene out of it. I spent a whole week working on that scene [chuckles]. They cut my scene out of it. It's an old story of the business, apparently.

***DuPre:* What about in television—on acting?**

Williams: No, I've done a lot of interviews. And I've done some narration. There's a video over there of me narrating a Smithsonian workshop in the blues, with Dave McKenna and Don Ewell and—who's the—who's the—the surviving boogie-woogie pianist—not one that. . .

***DuPre:* Well, Sammy Price.**

Williams: Sammy Price, thank you. Yes, Sammy Price. Three of them. And I'm good, if I do say so. I mean I can talk to the camera.

***DuPre:* There's a camera. Camera goes up to you on that too. It's not just a voice over their hands.**

Williams: Oh no, no, no, no, no. I'm on camera. I'm on camera, yeah, a lot. I even recite some blues verses. I wouldn't presume to sing them. Although I'm not a bad singer. I—I haven't gotten. . .

***DuPre:* You—you can maybe put on a southern accent if you were called upon, right?**

Awakened at night.

Williams: I can put on—I can put on any accent you name. I'm good at—I'm a good mimic. I can speak French or Italian with very little accent, with a little practice. I may not know what I'm talking about in Italian [chuckles]. I can speak French pretty well. And I can speak it with little accent—with, you know, if I work on it, I can—I have very little accent, cause I'm a good mimic. But—and I can do regional British accents. And I can do regional Texas, even, east versus west [chuckles], if I work on it a little bit, so. And

“I can talk like a New Yorker. That’s very easy. No effort at all [chuckles]. I lived there for twenty years” [accented]. I mean, what do you want, yeah, you know.

DuPre: [Chuckles] well, you were up there—when—when did you?

Williams: But people don’t understand the difference between Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn, but I can do that, you know?

DuPre: People up there telling you about it. . .

Williams: Well, I mean, “in Brooklyn you talk this way, you know what I mean? I mean that’s Brooklyn, everybody know that, yeah, lose them. My name in Brooklyn? ‘Mon. Yeah? First meal of the day is breakfast” [accented].

DuPre: Just shifting a tape here, and it’s still February the twenty-eighth. Just made a little joke about Stan Getz going out on the road really young and—he started in the Bronx—that why I was. I think, is that right?

Williams: I don’t remember. I have to look that up. He doesn’t—he doesn’t—he doesn’t sound like “a New Yorker” [accented] to me.

DuPre: Maybe I’m wrong. But, anyway, he’s a world citizen, and we are going into talking about some of the things that we haven’t talked about before. Mentioned about your being able to do a lot of accents—and acting experience. Also writing, though, for TV, radio, and stage. Now, you wrote a puppet play.

Williams: [Chuckles].

DuPre: Right, is that for the Smithsonian? Is that right?

Williams: Yeah, when I—when I first came to the Smithsonian—and we haven't talked about that event, but. . .

DuPre: Yeah, we would go back to that.

Williams: The—my—the division I was employed in was called the Division of Performing Arts, as you well know. And one of the things that they did was have a puppet theater for children, and I wrote a puppet play based on the second *Oz* book, the first of many sequels by the original author to *The Wizard of Oz*. This is called *The Marvelous Land of Oz*. And I wrote a puppet play on that, which—which was—they did. *Oz* is an interest of mine. You'll see all the books up there.

DuPre: Oh yeah.

Williams: Do—dozens of them [chuckles]. It's a long series. So I also was, briefly, a researcher for a New York-based news documentary called *The Eye*, E-Y-E, on New York. That was done by the CBS station in New York.

DuPre: WCBS.

Williams: Not—not—not the network, right.

DuPre: Right, back in sixty-six.

Williams: I—I didn't have that—I didn't keep that job long. It bored me. Boy I needed the income, but I—I came home everyday with a headache, so I figured I better not do that. So.

DuPre: What—you were—about the puppet play—you were saying.

Williams: Well I just—I just wrote it. I mean—based on the second *Oz* book.

DuPre: And what's been done with it? It's performed at the Smithsonian?

Williams: Well it was performed by the Smithsonian and toured by the Smithsonian Puppet Theater for a while. That's all. Nothing else to say.

DuPre: Well, maybe—just—somebody go and hear it—see it.

Williams: Well you can't. It ain't being performed now. I still got a script around somewhere [chuckles]. I guess somebody has. I don't know.

DuPre: Well, the job at the Smithsonian came about—well, I mean you—you paid a lot of dues with—with freelancing and. . .

Williams: Yeah, let me—let me tell you about that, okay? How that happened. The—I'll say—I didn't know this at the time. The Smithsonian had a Division of Performing Arts that was run by a man named Jim Morris. And their—their most prominent thing was the Folklife Festival. And I was invited to come, by Jim Morris, and run a jazz program. He had heard about me from several people, and he figured I was the person to do that.

Now, I must tell you something. I know very well that no one but someone like Jim Morris, and probably specifically him, would ever have invited someone like me to come to the Smithsonian. There's no question in my mind about that. But subsequently Morris and I had a very, very rocky road and some fundamental disagreements. I won't go into that, except I would, privately, to you. But I won't do that for this tape. But I'll just say that I'm still at the Smithsonian, and he is not, anymore. I understand he's in television production locally.

I will also say that the—the idea that we were going to do that *Classic Jazz* record album came from him. Not the content—it's something I'd always wanted to do. But the suggestion that we could do it was his. I fully—I've said that every time I—that subject's ever come up. So not much for that. Now, I think that he thought of jazz as a kind of an American folk music. I have very big reservations about the whole idea that this country has any folk music in the traditional European sense. We are not an aristocratic and peasant society. Those categories simply don't apply to me. And I could talk for a long time, and I intend to write a long chapter in my next book on this. But I seriously question, whether there is any such thing as an American folk music, by any traditional definition or explanation that I know of. I don't think there is. But, in any case, it seemed to me that jazz did not belong with that. So what I was doing was to stay out of the Folklife Festival.

And I also, you know—I—so I was producing concerts. And I also produced some with blues singers and some popular song concerts and some musical theater stuff. You know, I did a [chuckles]—I did a production of a theater—let's see—a concert version of all the music ever written for *Show Boat* that we could find. It was quite an evening—took two hours to perform. And we narrated the plot and connected the songs. I loved doing that. Boy I'd love to do many of those things, still.

***DuPre:* Was that with the new stuff that was—there are some new things from *Show Boat* that recently pulled out.**

Williams: Well they aren't new things. But they—they—they've discovered many of the songs that we discovered, yeah. And they got a little more than we did. But—you know something? The Kennedy Center owes it to this country to install—and they should do this unpretentiously and modestly first, until they can build it up and get it solid. But in

the Terrace Theater there should be a resident company of people doing the classics of American musical theater in repertory. And they can be done. And they are worth doing. And they should do it.

If the Viennese can put on our musical theater in their Volksoper—in the Viennese opera building, god knows we ought to be doing it. And we're not doing it. And you—boy, you could do Roberta, to stick to Kern. You could do so much Gershwin. You could do Porter. You could do on, and on, and on, and on. You could do the operatic stuff that the Viennese like, like the old, you know, Victor Herbert, Rudolf Friml-type stuff. You can do the modern operettas like Rodgers and Hammerstein. You can do the jazz-oriented stuff of Gershwin, and Porter, and Berlin and those people. You—we really ought to be doing this. And we're not doing it. I would love to see that happen. That's one of my pet hopes.

DuPre: It might even survive.

Williams: What?

DuPre: Economically.

Williams: Oh, yes it would. I'm sure it would. Look, if—it is disgraceful, Bryant, if, in this city, the Arena Stage can put on an enormously successful pair of Marx Brothers shows, old Broadway shows by the Marx Brothers—the second of which ran forever—what's the name of it?

DuPre: Well—three. *I'll Say She Is, Animal Crackers, and Cocomanuts.*

Williams: Yeah. *Cocomanuts* ran, and ran, and ran. It was—the closing was postponed three times—it was kept going. If they can do that, why isn't the Kennedy Center—why aren't

they taking the lead in that? Why is it that—god bless the Arena for doing it, but why are they the ones doing it, you know? What kind of a national theater is that—that's not doing that kind of thing?

DuPre: Well, I guess they are so big that their ears are—are different.

Williams: Well, they, you know—they think they have to put on a big lavish production in the Eisenhower Auditorium and take it to Broadway. No they don't. In fact they shouldn't. They can't do that. They don't know how to do that. But they can do it with the right kind of leadership at the Arena Stage.

And, by the way, I—very soon, *Show Boat* will be—opera companies will be doing *Show Boat*, and you can do it, with all the music, and cut down the script, and do it in a reasonable length. Because there's authorized versions of how to cut the script down. I know—I—if you compare the movie versions, of scenes with the stage version and stuff like that, and take out some of the repeats of the songs. And—and you can do it in two-and-a-half, maybe two, hours, as an opera. And we should be doing that. And the wonderful thing about *Show Boat* is it calls on the cast for every kind of American singing, you know, operetta-type, opera-derived singing for the two leads, jazz-oriented singing—for one of the black characters—operetta-oriented, opera-oriented singing for the other—and the spiritual tradition for the other, the male black character—vaudeville-type patter songs for the two dance—the dance couple—and on, and on, and on. All the kinds of singing we do—torch singing from one of the female leads, you know, the Helen Morgan character—mulatto character. There it is. It's all sort of singing we have. And we've got the singers. We've got the [groans]—and it's a good show. We ought to do it.

DuPre: Well, maybe. Before this ever gets. . .

Williams: Are we—are we off the track [laughs]?

DuPre: No, well, I mean I think, you know, some people are sharing that—I mean Gary Giddins wrote some things about some of the recent discoveries. And how much he praised their potential. So maybe something will get in—in gear. And I know you’ve been a mover and shaker in a lot of things. And institutions and outside of institutions, just doing it on your own. And I’d like to jump back, if we could, and talk about some of the limbs you’ve gone out on—you’re one of the first people to support the music of Ornette Coleman.

Williams: Yeah, that was just about immediate, you know.

DuPre: So immediate that—did you know about what he was doing in L.A. before he came to New York?

Williams: No, I heard those records. But—funny thing—I didn’t hear those Contemporary—the ones on the Contemporary label until after he’d come to New York.

DuPre: Once he came to New York—you mean with Paul Bley?

Williams: No, Paul isn’t on the—the studio one.

DuPre: What was he on? He was on one of the first ones, though, in fifty-eight?

Williams: No. That—that was stuff recorded live, that he had recorded, they put out later.

DuPre: I see.

Williams: That was an actual—that was a gig.

DuPre: So that wasn't going on at that time.

Williams: Well it was going on but it wasn't on records.

DuPre: Wasn't—wasn't the one released.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: So, where did you hear him? Did you hear him at the Five Spot?

Williams: No, I heard him at the School of Jazz, first time, live. I heard the Atlantic record, the first one, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. And then I heard him at the Lenox School of Jazz, outside of Lenox—in Massachusetts, live. And I took the first Atlantic record to—to the—what's his name—the guy who ran the Five Spot. I'll think of it in a second—know him very well. And I said, this is what you should have in here. You have Cecil Taylor and you have these people. This is what you should have in here. I took a test pressing, cause I was doing the notes. I took the record to him. Joe Termini, that's his name. He's in Richmond, Virginia now, by the way. My hometown. And I said—and he said—he borrowed the record—he said, I'd like to play this for a couple of other people. And I said, good, and he booked him. And that brought Ornette to New York. And Ornette wanted me to be his manager. Now anybody ask me to be his manager. . .

DuPre: Oh he was totally—he was totally out in L.A. when you did that?

Williams: That's right, that's right.

DuPre: I see.

Williams: He'd been to the School of Jazz, but he hadn't come to New York to work, and—and been out of work.

DuPre: Now that—that school. . .

Williams: And anybody ask me to be his manager, you know, you might as well ask me to be your—your minister, or something. I mean, but I—I tried to do it for about a week, and I said, Ornette, this is not my gig [laughs]. And I shouldn't, you know—a critic shouldn't do that anyway. But—but go ahead. What were you going to say?

DuPre: Well, I just wondered about some other people. Of course, the school—John Lewis was—wasn't he doing something with the school—he and Gunther Schuller, too when you all—you guys must have gotten together?

Williams: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. A beer company—yeah—the second year of the school, a beer company, the Schaefer Brewing Company, put up some scholarships for students to attend the school. And they had ten scholarships they were going to give. And they were going to give them in universities where their beer was advertised on the local radio station, so I was sent around to scout. I was employed—god I needed, I sure could use the money—to scout and do the preliminary sifting and, you know, sign, you know, get him interested in—in getting—do the preliminary selection. And—and the faculty of the school made the final selection. I was very flattered that they chose me to do that.

And somebody told me—off the record—that John was—was the one who made the final decision, when they—they were discussing who they want to get to do this, you know. So—and Steve Kuhn was one of those people, by the way. And—and several other—Ian Underwood the flute player, who was—worked with Frank Zappa all those years. And a lot of people you've heard of since. That was a year before Ornette came there, by the way.

DuPre: Fifty-eight? And he came in fifty-nine? Is that right?

Williams: Yeah, yeah. Now, the—fifty-nine was the last year they had that, yeah.

DuPre: So, when you—when you heard him you—I—I can remember some of the things you've written later. I don't know about right off. But, well, you know, what were you thinking about—the—the far-reaching concept that he was laying out there.

Williams: Well, the things I said in the liner to the Atlantic—first Atlantic record, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. I—I had some technical. . .

DuPre: Those are the re—the reactions right there. That's what you felt right off.

Williams: Yes, that's—that was my reaction, yeah. I—I had some—I made a couple of technical errors in that liner. It's in the new book, by the way, and I didn't correct the errors—I don't—I think I didn't. I just left it pretty much the way it was. Because that was my response. And I—I'd—I—it was an immediate recognition with him to me. The only great figure that I didn't have an immediate recognition for was—was Bird. Bird and Dizzy. That bothered me at first. Sonny Rollins I. . .

DuPre: But you were so much younger then.

Williams: And inexperienced, but—for whatever reason. No, I don't think it was that reason. I'll tell you why it was, in a minute. But I—right away, Sonny Rollins, first time I—that's a great musician. Bang, like that—knew right away. Bud Powell, bang, you know. Modern Jazz Quartet, bang. Charlie Mingus, bang.

DuPre: Dophy.

Williams: Eric, yes. Oh yes. And I heard him after Ornette, yeah.

DuPre: And you called a lot—when he came in—when he with Chico Hamilton, you called up people and said, you got to hear this guy.

Williams: I—I sent a letter to Prestige Records and I said, you got to—this guy has got it. And they said, what has he got, we've already signed him [laughs].

DuPre: Wow.

Williams: Charlie Parker. I'll tell you what that was. It had to do with what that music was saying. And I don't think I've heard anybody say this in print. And I've never said it in print. Now, you've got to understand. I'm a southern kid, at this point. And I've still got all that latent stuff in me that I haven't dealt with and resolved, you know. And I'm still living in this paradox. That sounded, as I put it then, arrogant. It sounded uppity, as southern people put it, you know about that. It—but it was—you see what—what it really was saying. It was saying, I'm somebody here. And I'm not going to come on like the way Louis Armstrong'd do it, which was making this wonderful, benign joke out of it.

Now the joke is really, in Louis—the joke is on the bigot, really, if you understand it. I'm treating you like a fool. I'm not a fool. I'm treating you like a fool. That's what's going on, under the surface of Louis Armstrong. But there was none of that in Bird and Dizzy. It was just: this. Now it isn't arrogance. But you know that—how it struck me, as a southern-raised kid. I was only twenty, or whatever, at the time, and pretty immature twenty if I—I later learned that that wasn't the real quality. But that's how I—that—and that's why it bothered me, more than anything else. I said, earlier, it was a technical stuff and the new phrasing, and I couldn't follow the changes and—that was all true. But what really bothered me was that. So, now Ornette, I can't tell you. I can't pinpoint that in

anyway, except I just knew right away. This is really something. This is very very important, you know.

DuPre: And Dolphy.

Williams: Yeah, Eric too. I loved him. What a beautiful man he was. Beautiful young man, yeah?

DuPre: You got to know certain musicians very well. I mean Ornette Coleman obviously didn't dislike you or distrust you when he asked you to be his manager.

Williams: No, no, no, no, no. Ornette told me something pretty wonderful. He said, when you—when you liked. I've been reading your record reviews in *Down Beat*, and when you liked what I was doing, that meant something. That was very important to me, he said. Your—your belief in this. It was sort of like my talking about—what I said about Schuller earlier, you know. He said—he told me that once. And I appreciated it very much, of course. There are some people that I consider friends, whom I don't see or necessarily communicate with very often, if at all. Dizzy Gillespie, I consider him a friend. I mean we embrace when we see each other.

DuPre: How about Jimmy Giuffre?

Williams: Oh, Jimmy is a close friend of mine. I'm in touch with Jimmy. I'm in touch. . .

DuPre: You know his wife just got over. . .

Williams: I do know.

DuPre: Yeah, she's—she's in remission.

Williams: Yes. But I, you know, I'm—I'm talk—I talk to them all the time. I consider John Lewis a friend. Percy Heath. Miles knows who I am. And, you know, we've been friendly. Until [chuckles] that last piece—I don't know about that. But, you know, that's. . .

DuPre: That's in the piece in your new book here?

Williams: It's in there, yeah—it's in there.

DuPre: Looking forward to that.

Williams: But you may have read it in *Jazz Times*.

DuPre: If it's the stuff on "fusica," then I read that. Yes, sure did.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: Well, that brings us to another subject, in terms of, you know, purpose of writers. And we can talk about purpose of musicians, and then maybe producers and everybody else. And fusion, or whatever you want to call it.

Williams: Oh, I didn't say Monk. You know I was one of the people—I think Monk. . .

DuPre: Yeah, you—early on, fifty-six, yeah.

Williams: Oh yeah, oh yeah. That was—that was the beginnings of his—when he signed with Riverside. And I just—I—I really got—I said—I decided to co—try to come to terms with that. And I—once I did, I mean. I used to live in his neighborhood. I guess I told you that. I lived. . .

DuPre: Around Lincoln Center?

Williams: What is now Lincoln Center wasn't there. They—they uprooted me and removed me into another building [laughs].

DuPre: Robert—Robert Moses said he'd want Martin Williams out.

Williams: Yeah [chuckles], that's right, among other people. Yes, so. . .

DuPre: Well, you also lived on ninety-sixth street, though. Cause you. . .

Williams: I lived in a lot of places.

DuPre: Cause you—the place—you sent me these—these bio-information sheets on is—is where my girlfriend lives now, right in that very building.

Williams: Right, right.

DuPre: But you also lived down where Monk's place was.

Williams: Yeah, I lived on sixty-third street. And I saw him in the neighborhood. I had a couple of experiences with him out there.

DuPre: But you were early on, in fifty-six, in writing about him.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: I mean there are—there have been other people who'd write things. But they were not like deeply rooted in the aspects of the music.

Williams: Well, there was a—there was a wonderful essay by Herbie Nichols. And there was one by Paul Bacon in *The Record Changer*, very early, when he was making the Blue Note records.

DuPre: Gottlieb, I think, did something. And George Simon, of all people, did something.

Williams: Yes. Yeah, I didn't know about Simon. But yeah.

DuPre: Yeah. I think he put it in *Metronome*.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: And he—he was really respectful and everything. And he asked him his opinions on—cause I don't think he treated him like some novelty figure, or anything like that. He let him say what he wanted to say.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: And he did—it was not critiquing his music, as I remember.

Williams: Right, right.

DuPre: But in fifty-six you were.

Williams: Yeah, the one—the record that was my breakthrough into print about Monk was the one called Unique Monk—that collection of standards, his second Riverside Record. That one was the one I honed in on. That's going to be in the next book [chuckles], by the way, that record review.

DuPre: For the Monk.

Williams: Go back to my beginnings, yeah.

DuPre: So we were talking—unless you want to say something more about Monk.

Williams: No, go ahead. You—you—I got you off the track.

DuPre: I was wondering—wondering about what's been going on with fusion and—and such. You have the article, which is in *Jazz In Its Time*—the one—“How Long Has This Been Going On?” And that was printed in *Jazz Times*, recently. And then people like Wynton Marsalis are representing a certain concern about this—do you want to—you want to speak about that? What that makes you feel about what's going on? People like Gary Giddins who have a strong stand and—and others too. What do you feel?

Williams: Well, I've—I've already—I've said in print what I feel. And I don't—I don't feel that, you know—I don't want to go through that, now. But I will tell you this. I tried, for nearly two years, to get what that—what became that piece published. And I first wanted it to—I first sent it to the *Atlantic* and *Harper's*—no, I first sent it to Gary at the *Village Voice*, in an outline. It was going to be a very, kind of, different piece.

You see, the first thing I wrote, outside of the jazz press and *The Evergreen Review*, was a piece in *Harper's* when Ornette first arrived. It was called “The New Thing in Jazz.” And I wrote about that in *Harper's*. It was published in *Harper's*. And I wanted to do the same kind of piece for the same kind of audience about the, basically—the arrival of the World Saxophone Quartet and why I thought that was important, and what had been going on for the last twenty years, and trying to sift through that and evaluate—which is what became that piece you're talking about, “How Long Has This Been Going On?” I could not sell it to anyone.

Now I tell that to Gary, and he says, you mean—I—he said, I would think anybody would want a piece by you about jazz. That's total delusion. And it's not true now, and it

never was true. So I ended up chopping it up and writing it very differently. And—and putting it in *Jazz Times*, and it's gotten into that book. But I just want to say that, you know, I still could not discuss that in any—oh *Down Beat* turned it down. All the jazz publications turned it down.

DuPre: When Lange—Lange was editor? Did you send it to him?

Williams: I don't remember. I don't remember—couple of years ago, three years ago, four years ago—whatever. We don't do that kind of piece—they had just nominated me for some all-time muckety-muck award, by the way. And I didn't win it. But they wouldn't publish me [laughs]. It's kind of funny.

DuPre: Well, I mean they—the—the business in these magazines, publications is affected by the ads. And fusion deals with a lot of expensive electronic instruments.

Williams: Well, but you know—you know—you know all—but you know what—what effect—where it was effected by ads—and this is the only time I ever had that experience. There's another piece in the book, called "This Fellow George Winston." It's never been published before.

And I'll tell you what—I will tell you what that says, cause it's kind of funny. But I sent that to everybody. I wrote it, cause I had to write it. And I sent it to—I didn't send an outline. I sent the piece. And they all turned it down. And they turned it down on that basis. And that's a first time I've ever had that happen to me. We can't publish this because it'd be offensive to our advertisers. Bryant, I have never heard that before. What it is was—I didn't know anything about George Winston, except I kept seeing his signs in record stores, you know.

DuPre: Windham Hill.

Williams: Windham Hill back in stock. Yes, we have George Winston, blah, blah, blah, blah. So there's a guy at work and I figured, he would know about this. He's onto—anything fashionable he knows about, to do with any kind of music. So—he even liked Philip—he even likes Philip Glass [chuckles]. Anyway, I said, you got any George Winston around? He—he said, oh yeah. I said, would you tape me, LP? So he goes home and he tapes two LPs on a C-90, right? Up one side, down the other. I brought this home, and I played it a couple of times—a little bit of it, I mean, couple of pieces. And I said, okay. And I didn't really think it through at all.

And I was at a party, sometime afterward, and it's not—I don't go to cocktail parties. But I was at one this time. And this woman comes up to me, apparently knew who I was. I never saw her before, and she said, blah, blah, blah, George Winston, I was blah, blah, blah, George Winston, blah, blah. And there was a pause in this, and I said, do you play the piano? She said, no. Do you touch type? Oh, yes. And I said, I mean all ten fingers, the way you're supposed to. Oh yes I can do that. I can get my speed up. I'm very good. I said, well I'll tell you something, you give me three hours, and I can teach you to do everything George Winston does, just about as well as he does it, almost. And I don't play the piano or touch type. And she said, really? [Chuckles] I said, yeah, really. And she walked off, of course. And the next day I had some remorse, so I call up a couple of local pianists, and I said this is what I did, what do you think? And they said, yeah, that's absolutely right, anybody could do it. You know that.

And, so I wrote this up. Oh and I gave the guy his cassette back, and I said, B. C., I want to thank you for this. I don't want to seem ungrateful, but I want to give you this back. And if you ever mention this again, our—any relationship between us is over [laughs].

DuPre: B. C. May?

Williams: Yeah, it was he.

DuPre: I see.

Williams: So, I sent that piece to everybody. And they turned it down. Offensive to their advertisers. New experience for me.

DuPre: Well, maybe they weren't saying it before. But I think they're getting a little more blatant about it now. It's quite obvious what's hap—it's, you know, it's the economic stuff. It's very unfortunate. But, I academia and certain institutional parts of society. I mean you can others have really gotten things accepted. And it's, you know—maybe you can push beyond—it—now, like, I mentioned Gary Giddins getting his American Jazz Orchestra, and he hopes to, you know, have the music going on. For many reasons, aesthetic reasons—John Lewis would like to do certain things with tempos that didn't get done in dance halls. And then Gary Giddins talking about having the music survive, just on economic reasons, for doing that.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: And repertory, groups are going around.

Williams: Oh I think—I expect, frankly, to see—that's not the first step of a direction of repertory, as you know. I expect to see it happen in major cities before I die. There will be resident orchestras doing it. It's going to happen.

DuPre: Now, as you write about jazz you've written about it being a pop art. Does it change the status then? Getting, you know, getting funded by people who sleep during their—during their season ticket.

Williams: Well, of course it changes—of course it changes its status, and it takes all the risks that are involved. But you've got to take those risks, you know. It's like putting it in colleges. Terrible risk—putting any aesthetic activity into college. Anybody who's had a boring lecture on Shakespeare should know—boring lecture on Mozart for that matter—knows about that.

DuPre: You think it can do both?

Williams: What?

DuPre: Coexist both ways, as pop art at the same time it's doing that.

Williams: Well, I—I don't know what a pop art is anymore. I used to know. I don't—so I don't even use that term. But—cause I think it, again—it's—when we come up with something that is an original genre, as I was saying earlier. I think we tend to call it popular culture, or pop art, and that's condescending. It's just our, original culture. Yes it was a dance music. Yes it has had periods of enormous popularity.

DuPre: And you dance too, right?

Williams: Hell yes. Dance now, want to see me [chuckles]?

DuPre: Sure.

Williams: Put on a record. But—I don't know how—Brahms did—I think Brahms played in a whore house [chuckles].

DuPre: Yes, supposedly.

Williams: Yeah, and Scarlatti used to play at county fairs, on the platform, you know.

Domenico, not the other Scarlatti—so, anyway, someone asked me when I first—young, high school daughter of a friend—when I first came to the Smithsonian, where did you study jazz? Meaning in school. Well, you know, at that moment I had this big realization. Wait a minute, you can do that now. And you couldn't in my day. And maybe, what Gunther and I and a few other people did has something to do with it being the schools. Good god, what a frightening thought, you know. Well, I didn't say—it wasn't a frightening thought, except it has to be frightening in a sense. Because, you know, as I say, in the wrong hands—and it must fall into wrong hands many times, any artistic activity is going to be, you know, pretty well turned into something boring.

DuPre: Well, it might also survive for different people to get to it. That might be one way to getting through some economic barriers to get it into the schools.

Williams: Yeah, after all, you know. In the early seventies, the major critic, music critic, for the *New York Times* finally came to the realization that Scott Joplin was an important American composer. Well I congratulate him. At that rate, it will only take til the middle of the twenty-first century for the *New York Times* to realize that Ellington was maybe the major American composer, or close to it, you know. So we'll have to wait [chuckles].

DuPre: Well, you—you wrote at the *Times*, right? You didn't mention that. . .

Williams: I wrote for the *Times*, yeah. Yeah, for a while, yeah.

DuPre: Were you on staff there?

Williams: No, they—they fired me cause they said their readers couldn't understand what I was talking about [laughs]. Maybe they were right, I don't know. Maybe I didn't understand what I was talking about.

DuPre: Well, we covered a few things. But we were talking about Jim Morris before getting into the Smithsonian.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: We sort of got sidetracked talking about what went on later, you know, about the Folklife Festival. But you—you didn't talk about the formation of the department itself. The jazz division of the Smithsonian Division of Performing Arts.

Williams: Well, there wasn't any formation. I did it all by myself, when I first came. I had no guidance. I had never produced a concert in my life.

DuPre: He wanted you to be part of the Folklife Festival, sort of.

Williams: He never said that directly. But it was evident that, you know. . .

DuPre: We were just talking about the formation of the department, the jazz division, that is. And you talked about it being evident but not spoken out directly that Jim Morris wanted—Jim Morris wanted you to be part of the Folklife Festival.

Williams: I felt so. He may have a different feeling about that. I don't—but I don't think Ralph Rinzler wanted it—at the—as part of the Festival. And I didn't—he—he was running the festival. Ralph—Ralph was a folk person. And I—I didn't think it belonged in that. So I was doing concerts, and I never produced a concert before. And, you know, in the beginning, I was—one of the reasons I was so terribly grateful to you was I had no

official help. None. I didn't even have Peggy Martin, in the first season at all. I had no help—didn't even have a secretary, nothing.

And I didn't know. I mean, everybody—every—the—the staff, complete, for publicity, for house management, for backstage management, for everything was me and Manny Melendez.⁵ And I knew nothing about this. I have never done this before—one—one college thing, where I had all kinds of experienced help around me. That's all. And I didn't even know what the problems were—were to be. And Manny was doing everything from publicity to selling tickets. And I was trying to do all the rest of it. It was crazy.

DuPre: Wow, and then you had to deal with sound and. . .

Williams: Oh, I didn't know anything about any of this. And I got no—I got no guidance at all. None.

DuPre: Did you choose those Bose speakers? We're talking Baird Auditorium.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: Right.

Williams: No, I didn't choose them. The Bose, that was B. C., I think.

DuPre: B. C. May? He chose those?

Williams: [Chuckles] yeah, I think so.

DuPre: Interesting choice. And so you did learn. You learned well. And they were very successful.

⁵ Manuel "Manny" Melendez.

Williams: Well, they—let me tell you—let me tell you the best thing about that. We had no budget. And I was not given a budget. And I was not told how much I could spend. So I just set a fee, and I said, I think the best way to work this is—what would seem to me the easiest way—I will have a flat fee. And I will tell everybody this is the money I have for artists. This is all I have. I hope you'll come for this fee. I call up my friends, so to speak. I call up Sonny Rollins. I call up John Lewis. I call up Giuffre. I call up Jim Hall. I call up Art Farmer.

***DuPre:* Lee Konitz.**

Williams: Lee Konitz. I call up—you name it—a lot of guys now. But, you know—and Diz—got to Dizzy. Basie band, the whole band. The Woody Herman band. I gave them all the fee. And I said, this is it. And they call came. Now when I'd first started I said, I'm going to run out of friends very quickly, this way. I never did. I never did. And that was so wonderful, you know. Because, I mean, these guys get Thad Jones to come in, Dizzy Gillespie to come in. The Bill Basie band—but, you know. The Modern Jazz Quartet, who, you know, got heavy, long, graying hair [??], you know. And that was pretty great, to—to discover that, you know, they were willing to do that. Now, for some of them, that was good money. Lee Konitz can't charge big fees. He has no big following, you know.

***DuPre:* He's getting—he's getting—getting there now. He's getting respected, finally.**

Williams: Well. Well, he should be. So, of course, I'm not taking bows for that. It was the Smithsonian name—was the most part of it—it was the larger part of it, sure. I know—I'm not a fool. I know that.

***DuPre:* How long did those concerts go on? How many seasons?**

Williams: I did nine seasons. And then Jim took it over [chuckles].

DuPre: I remember the transitional stage—trying to get people from around here on that—that stage.

Williams: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And that was—that was the last season that he did. And then the Division of Performing Arts was broken up.

DuPre: A lot of it got recorded, by the way. Right? I don't know about release. But there were tapes?

Williams: No, no, no.

DuPre: No tapes?

Williams: I was against that, because people were bootlegging tapes in the audience. And I figured if this shows up on a German LP, I'm going to get the—the Smithsonian is going to get the blame. I'm going to get the blame. So we officially were not recording.

DuPre: I see. But you did—you did put on. . .

Williams: Unless the artist asked for it, or did it himself, as many did.

DuPre: You put them on—some concerts—on tour, right?

Williams: Yep, tried to. No success. Couldn't get a taker, not one taker. I was trying to get good but not name people to college campuses. Randy Weston. Who did I have?

DuPre: Bob Wilber.

Williams: Bob Wilber. Oh that was—that was a repertory ensemble. That's another thing. But I was trying to tour Buddy Tate, Claude Hopkins, yeah.

DuPre: Yeah, and that—and the—the videos and records from them.

Williams: No, the—then we—I was trying to build up from a small repertory ensemble, doing, you know, the New Orleans format, to build into a—a repertory band. And the—the small ensemble toured, but there was inferior personnel there—wasn't the people we had at the Smithsonian. The guys that were touring weren't any good—weren't good enough. And a lot of other problems. Jim took that over, too. They did tour for one—one season. And they got some work, and that was good.

But no, the early idea—my idea was we should persuade campuses to take people like Randy and those people I mentioned because they are not names, but they are all very capable and more than that and—better than that and, you know, if we go to them and, you know—I mean, after all—and a string quartet of no particular renown but of—of good ability can tour the college campus, why can't we do this with jazz? Got nowhere with that. I hope that—hope that will change.

DuPre: Well you—about the records—releasing the records. Now you, by the way, just tell the years of the jazz division and then when you started with the press. And then just, after doing that, talk about the records, how that proliferated. So when were you—when were you in the jazz division? When was that?

Williams: Well it started in the fall of seventy-one. The concert started in the following season. Started working on the record album that same time. And I was there for nine seasons, so what will that be? Seventy-two plus nine.

DuPre: Eighty-one?

Williams: Yeah, but it wasn't eighty-one—it was eighty.

DuPre: Eighty. And then you went in to . . .

Williams: Then the—when I came back—I was in limbo for a year. I was an outcast. I was called a cultural historian and stuck in an office in the American History Museum. That had to do with Morris's and my disagreements, let's say, which I don't plan to discuss on this tape [chuckles], you know. I'll tell you off the record. And then the Division of Performing Arts was shut down, its functions dispersed. I was, god bless him, employed by Felix Lowe to be an editor at the Smithsonian Press. I had done work for them, you know. In addition to the comics anthologies, I have gotten them to publish that book about Eric Dolphy.

DuPre: You were an Acquisitions. . .

Williams: Well, I—well, don't—don't ask me that. I—I was—I'm officially called a—Editor of Special Projects. I work on recordings. They took over the recordings programs. That was assigned to the press, and I work on books and records. But—I'll come back to that Acquisition stuff. And I voluntarily continued, or started, to produce jazz concerts. But this time for the resident associates program. And this is my last year being involved with that. I'm doing only one concert this year. And that's it. And—what's his name—is taking that over. Oh this is terrible of me. I know his name as well as I know my own. Come on. I'll come up with it. Anyway, those concerts are—are different. There's a lot of repertory involved in them, and a lot of local people. The budget arrangement is different than that. So, now—where—what was. . .

DuPre: Back to the record. Now you talked about the years now of the different divisions and departments. And then the record. That was a milestone in the jazz world. For somebody to have the wherewithal to get an anthology put together from all labels.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: And that was *The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz*, which originally was an eight-album—is that right?

Williams: No, six-record—it's now seven. It's now seven. The revised version is seven, yeah.

DuPre: And that was quite a big thing. And that came out in 1974.

Williams: Was it—did it? [Laughs] I've forgotten.

DuPre: Either three or four, I think.

Williams: Yeah, three or four. Yeah.

DuPre: And, it just—everybody was either extremely impressed or envious of the—let me just get in that position. You made all the final decisions on. . .

Williams: Oh yeah.

DuPre: Cause, I mean, you got advice. But you—you had the final approval.

Williams: Yeah. I think if anything like that had been turned over to committee or, you know, anything like that, it would have been a disaster. It wouldn't have worked. You can't do those things that way. Can't do them. I—I absolutely am opposed to doing project like that by committee. It will not work. And, well, I think I—I think I know when I need

advice and what on. When *Big Bands* came along, I knew that I had shortcomings there and that Gunther Schuller, with whom I did that album, could compensate.

DuPre: That's the album *Big Band Jazz*.

Williams: Right, right. Which has been almost as successful as *Classic Jazz*, by the way.

DuPre: Yeah, you—you got a Grammy for the liner notes there.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: And if I may—let me just make one quick—quick comment. One of the few instances people—of people in the formal jazz world acknowledging a debt to dancers for having funded and supported that.

Williams: [Chuckles].

DuPre: I mean you made—you said they should not be—they—they. . .

Williams: Oh yeah. Those—those paragraphs are mine, by the way. I wrote—I wrote. . .

DuPre: Oh yeah?

Williams: Yes, that—those—those are mine.

DuPre: Dancers should not be forgotten. Anyway, that's enough for my comment.

Williams: Okay, you're welcome [chuckles].

DuPre: So you—*The Smithsonian Collection of Classic Jazz* was—was a big success.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: And it was. It's accepted internationally. And it's been bought by a lot of institutions.

Williams: A lot of textbooks are written around it.

DuPre: Yeah. A lot of lectures have been given around it. I'm sure people grab it and. . .

Williams: [Chuckles] yeah.

DuPre: And do that.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: And so that's spawned a lot of other things, a lot of other recordings, coming out.

How many records, now, have been released?

Williams: Oh, I can't give you a count. But I'll tell you something. Nothing sells except the box sets. Nothing else. We cannot do singles, can't do twofers. They don't sell.

DuPre: How about *Big Band Jazz*? That doesn't sell?

Williams: That's a—that's a six-record set.

DuPre: Oh, that's a box set, you called. I see. But *Louis Armstrong Earl Hines* and *Jelly Roll Morton*.

Williams: No, nothing. Zilch. Nothing.

DuPre: But you have more coming out.

Williams: Some. . .

DuPre: More records are coming out.

Williams: Yeah, oh yeah.

DuPre: Okay.

Williams: I'll now tell you something else about that. And I'll speak very honestly. There was another bit of friction in the recordings program. Between the recordings program and the person who was running it, and me. And that person was trying to exclude me from the recordings, and was planning, with me sitting right there, and not even telling me, much less asking me. That person was planning some jazz albums. And, for reasons I don't know enough about to be able to discuss on this occasion and on this tape, that person was replaced as running the recordings program. And he had planned I mentioned to you later—earlier, I think off the tape.

But, anyway. He had planned an album of New Orleans and its offshoots of, so called, Dixieland Jazz, the classics of that. And he had gotten a hold of a local person to program that. And the guy had submitted a program. And I looked at it, and I said, I'm sorry, this is not good enough. This won't do. He had a lot of those revivalist people from the—from the forties and fifties. And Lou Waters, San Francisco school, he had a lot of those people, you know—that went down to New Orleans and recorded some old timers who are supposed to be authentic. They weren't. And I just said, this won't do. And the guy who had submitted that plan wrote an angry letter back. I, at this point, was assigned to write that guy a letter, rejecting his plan. Suddenly I have re-entered the picture. Felix Lowe asked me to do that. He reinstated my—he ins—he instated my supervision of all jazz recordings and my knowledge of all theater recordings that they were going to do in the future.

So I had to write that guy a letter and say, sorry. He wrote back an angry letter to my boss, Felix Lowe. And one of the things he said was, does Martin Williams think that he can do this better than anyone? Well, you know, I decided to face that question as honestly as I could with myself. No, he said, does he think he can do everything better than anyone else. That's what he said. And my—the best honest answer I can come up with was—I'm being very frank about this—no, of course I don't think I can do [chuckles] everything better than anyone. But I think when I need advice I know the kind of advice I need and—and where to get it, cause I got a lot for the piano album, for instance. But, that being granted, clearly I can do this better than most people. And I mean that. I can. So that my was response to that, you know—that invective that was hurled at me [chuckles]. I think that's—that's my honest response. And if I'm—if I'm. . .

DuPre: But you were reinstated.

Williams: Oh yeah. But if I'm—I was just talking to myself here. And I'm telling you what I—went on inside me. I said, you know—I said, what would you say in answer to this, Martin? And that's what I would say. Now that can be wrong, but that's as honest an answer as I can come up with.

DuPre: Well, he chose you.

Williams: Well.

DuPre: He reinstated you, didn't he?

Williams: Oh, yeah, yeah. But, of course he doesn't know whether I know what I'm doing [chuckles]. All he knows is he gets results, I mean. He's not an expert. But, you know, if

he asked Gary Giddins or Whitney or Gunther or you know the—I'm—I'm sure they would say, sure, he knows what he's doing. Or musicians. Ask Dizzy Gillespie [laughs].

DuPre: Yeah. And you would be Secretary of State if Miles was Vice President. He's President, right? Going back to that. . .

Williams: Under—under Miles [laughs] oh no, no, no. Not now.

DuPre: Well, I'm just going back to the sixty-four campaign. And he was—wasn't that the deal? He was President and Miles was. . .

Williams: Oh, oh when the—Dizzy Gillespie for President?

DuPre: Yeah, right Miles is Vice—Vice President.

Williams: Oh, I don't think he'd be Dizzy Gillespie's Vice President or anybody's Vice President. Not Miles.

DuPre: I'm sure. I'm sure he wouldn't. But we—we covered a number of things now. What about the term Acquisitions Department? You were going to go back to that.

Williams: No, there—well, there—for what I do at the press I'm just using the title Acquisitions Editor. That's not officially my title. But that's what I do. And an acquisitions editor at a university-type press, which is what we are, an academic press, goes out and finds or uncovers manuscripts. In other words, he acquires a—a respectable manuscript, has it read by experts and approved. That's—that's the job. And that's what I do. So I just decided to use that title for practical purposes. That's all.

DuPre: I see. I see. Now, at some point, I want to—I want to read these things onto the tape. These resumes you've given me. Two articles and—I won't read the articles. But I want to read the resumes onto the tape. Now are there any major things that—that I have not given you opportunities to talk about? You want to look over the sheets here? Just any major areas?

Williams: All right.

DuPre: Yeah, just—we can get that. We're looking at a couple of resumes—Mr. Williams, and—want to read something on that.

Williams: Yeah, well, you know, I could say, Bryant, that one of the things that is very gratifying to me is that I can talk to musicologists and academics. And I think that—I—I know they are taking me seriously. They're not being polite. I mean they do do that, you know. I can go into an academic situation, and I can discuss jazz with them. And they will listen to me, up to a point, of course. But I mean, and I don't think that's true of a lot of jazz critics. I mean Dan can do it, sure. And Gary can do it, but I mean that's, you know—I can't imagine many people doing that. And certainly few of my predecessors. That's—makes me feel good. I can give college-level courses. That makes me feel good. I know that. I can do that. And I plan to do a lot of that from now on, by the way. I plan—I hope I can make that a major part of my life starting in about a year. And, I mean, I've given seminars with all my musical—technical shortcomings, you know. That makes me feel good to know that. And I—I'd like to go on record as saying that.

DuPre: You taught at The New School?

Williams: That's where I started teaching jazz history. But I've given seminars at—at the University of Maryland and at Brooklyn College, the Institute for Studies in American Music, the Wiley Hitchcock one.

***DuPre:* When you say musicologist, I mean—by definition, where—how are you excluding yourself if you're saying—if I go talk to them.**

Williams: Well, I'm not a mu—musicology is a profession. You have to have a Ph.D. in it. It's like, I can't call myself a physician. That's the same thing. I know that Ira Gitler now calls himself, or The New School catalogue calls him, a musicologist. He's not a musicologist. He can't even read very well. I mean he's—that's a—you can't appropriate that term.

***DuPre:* I guess—I guess I was just referring to, like, if you write a certain piece, it could be the function of a musicologist.**

Williams: No, no. I mean I can't—I'm not—I'm not. But that—I've often had academic people talk to me about my research. I don't do any research. I hate research, in their terms. I hate sitting in libraries and going through the whole things. I never do that. I mean, I—it was a chore for me to do the research for the *Jazz Masters of New Orleans*. I'm glad I did. But I sit there with the records and I say, gee, what do you know? And I look up the bio somewhere if I want to know—I—I depend on other people's factual research.

***DuPre:* Thank god for Chilton, right?**

Williams: Bore the hell out of—oh yes. Except that recitation of one gig after another gets very tiresome after—you know. And if you know those clubs, I mean. What are they? They are hole-in-the-walls—some basement of some building in New York that was

crumbling at the top, I mean. And he would, being English, he doesn't know that. Thinks they were at the Copacabana or something, you know [laughs], anyway.

DuPre: He was a very—very thorough guy. And Rust, too.

Williams: Yeah, god bless him. Thank god. And, you know, one of the most incredible jobs of musical research in all of American music—it's just staggering—is Walt Allen's Hendersonia, on Fletcher Henderson. I mean that is worth ten Ph.D.s. And he's not an academic in that subject at all. He's—he taught ceramics [chuckles]. And he's not. He has no music credentials at all, you know. But, you know, let one of them do that or something near it. They don't.

DuPre: So, looking over there. . .

Williams: Children's literature. We haven't talked about my interest in children's—I'm not going to do that.

DuPre: Well, no. But, you didn't mentioned about the Griffith book being at one point perhaps—perhaps directed toward being a children's book and then being changed.

Williams: For juveniles, yeah. But I'm—I'm talking about my interest in American—Oz books and Raggedy Ann, Peter Rabbit.

DuPre: You didn't talk about that much. No.

Williams: No, no. Well. . .

DuPre: You just talked about your puppet show being based on a certain version.

Williams: Yeah, yeah. But I've written critical articles on—on L. Frank Baum, the author of the Oz books—in an encyclopedia of children's literature on him—on the subject of him, and on the subject of Johnny Gruelle, who wrote the Raggedy Ann books. I've written on the American version of Peter Rabbit, written by a guy named Thornton Burgess. And I've done that—oh, the guy who's now producing the concerts at the Smithsonian for the resident associates—who's taking over for me is Dave Robinson. I knew—he's. . .

DuPre: I see. He's the new guy.

Williams: Yeah. It's disgraceful the—I've got the name now. Thank god. Dave Robinson is doing that. He's a local teacher, musician, trumpet player and a very, very nice man, and doing a very nice job. Yes, where was I? Oh, when my children came along. I remembered some books that I've enjoyed as a kid. And I wondered how good they were. And I went back and re-read them, and it struck me that we may have, in this country, a body of children's literature written by Americans for American children that is neglected, that isn't very highly thought of.

So I read all the Raggedy Ann books. And—and I came to the same kind of conclusion. Two or three of these books are absolutely first-rate. They are wonderful. They are superb children's literature. And the rest of it is a mess. It—you wouldn't want to read them once, much less twice. And sifting through that now, I think the same truths—is true of the Oz books and their author. There's a book he wrote that's very neglected. I think it's the best children's book he wrote, called *Queen Zixi of Ix*. But only the insiders know about it, and so forth.

I mean, I'm going at that the way I go with everything. Do we—do we really have—is there some artistic stuff here that's worth, you know, preserving and—and taking seriously

and—and, yeah, I think there is, in the unexpected places. The funny thing is now, still, you know, if you talk to people about American children's literature, the next thing you know they're talking about British writers, or they're talking about translated French writers. And they don't know that. They start talking about Lewis Carroll and the Alice books, but that's English. And it's fine. I'm not arguing with it. It's wonderful. But they—they don't understand that that's not American literature. It's just, you know, something we read and love as much as the English do. But—and so forth. So, that, in brief, is what that's about. And I want—that will be a chapter in the next book, by the way, the next non-jazz book. Do we have a children's literature? Is there such a thing as American folk music? Why—how about Fred Astaire as a great genius, which he was. And stuff like that. So. . .

DuPre: And, another cup of coffee. Do you—do you have any interest at all in talking about the Navy? I don't want to, you know, dig out unpleasant story, you know.

Williams: No, it's not an unpleasant story.

DuPre: But I mean—bullets whistling and—and things—pretty philosophical situation at the time. You went in at what age, into the Navy?

Williams: What was I? Twenty, or something like that, yeah.

DuPre: Born in twenty-four.

Williams: Yeah, so. . .

DuPre: And you went in at forty-two?

Williams: I was eighteen when I went in. But, I mean, I wasn't sent to the Pacific until forty-four. And, as an Ensign on a—on the APA, which was an attack transport, which was a ship which carried landing craft, small landing craft on its decks, and carried troops to a beachhead. So the first place we went was to Iwo Jima, to—for that in—invasion. And there were marines on that ship. Let me tell you something about that.

It's one of the powerful experiences I've ever had in my life. When I joined that ship there was—there was—they were—the ship was overcomplemented with officers. That was part of the training, actually. They would—when you've got out of midshipmen's school in—in war time, they would put you on a ship that had too many officers. And it was really ineffective. It was an additional part of your training, although that wasn't officially said. So I had no place to live. I—I—I could not live in the ship's officers' quarters, so they put me in a large bunk room where the marine officers, the—the officers of the troops we were carrying, were housed. So I was in this large room with all these guys, and I befriended a couple of them very closely—very close relationship.

Now these guys, of course, knew that they were going into battle, and they had no idea whether they were going to survive. And the survival rate, at that point, for the people who had to go in to make a beachhead was not high. Before we finally sailed for Iwo Jima, we were in Hawaii for a long time, couple of weeks, waiting to get the orders to sail. I was taken by a couple of those guys to a marine officer's club on the beach for liberty one afternoon. You know, we got off the ship, we went ashore. And they took me to this marine officer's club. This place was full. It was a swarm with these young commissioned marines. They were all college boys. Of course I was, too, but the room was full of people saying to each other, "Harry it's you, I thought you were dead," and literally meaning it. That kind of thing was going on all around me.

Being young and absolutely foolish about such things, I drank a lot. I never felt it. The power of being there about those guys was so strong it's as if it blotted out all effects of the alcohol on my brain. When we got to Iwo Jima we were there for ten days. That's average for a ship of my kind—of the kind I was on, I mean. Before we had discharged all the troops and all the supplies and the vehicles and the food, and the Coca-Cola that we had brought with us. We'd send it all into ship in our—in our boats. We had about twenty little boats, landing craft. And we sat there for the ten days, and they were there. In fact, I happen to be looking at the Mount Suribachi, as it was called—Suribachi, Suribachi, whichever it was—when that flag went up, the one that the famous photograph of the flag—I happened to be looking when it went up.

DuPre: Whoa.

Williams: Yeah, I couldn't—it was far, far away and all I saw was a little dot. But I didn't know how dramatic that picture was that the guy took, but I saw it. We were shot at a little bit. I mean flak would fall around, and all of that. But I never felt in danger.

DuPre: But you were.

Williams: Yeah, but I mean nobody we shooting directly at us trying to sink us. It was just they were shooting in the direction of a let—let us say a cruiser, or a battleship, that was also circling the island. And they—and they—and we just happen to get—something happened to drop on us. Anyway, it's a very funny thing to me. I have never looked up any of those marines that I knew, and a couple of them I was very close to. Somehow I—I guess it never occurred to me to do that, to find out whether they lived or died. That may sound funny. It's anything but callous. But—it may sound callous, but it isn't. It's as if, you know, that was that experience. And sending them in and that was the end of that

experience. I've wondered about a couple of them, of course. But I've never been compelled to find out.

DuPre: Do you remember their names?

Williams: No, I don't—I don't. I don't remember their names. I may have them written down somewhere. I remember the names of the people on my ship that, you know—that I knew well and liked. And I remember lots of experiences on the ship.

DuPre: Well, that—that went on for how long on the front. I don't know how you would say, in Navy terms, what the front is.

Williams: Well, we were, as I say—we were there at Iwo Jima for ten days.

DuPre: Right.

Williams: And then we—then we moved on, having emptied out. . .

DuPre: You did go to other—other battles too, of course.

Williams: Yes, oh yeah. Yeah, well from there we went to a lot of places in between. But the next place we went was the Philippines. And that had been retaken officially, and that battle to recover the Philippines was over when we got there. But there were still snipers in the hills. And there were still holdouts here and there, you know. But we—that was not very dangerous, really, and we went ashore there. And the next action I was in was the—was the Battle of Okinawa. And that was very dangerous, because—for us. Again I never felt any fear, but that was when the Kamikaze were diving all over the place. The suicide airplanes, they never hit anything. That was one of the most inefficient operations, apparently, that the Japanese ever got into.

DuPre: But you saw them.

Williams: We saw them around us at night. It was only at night. We'd see the flames, and we'd see the, you know—but you never really—you never really were aware of them until they were very close. And I'll tell you a funny one having to do with jazz. We were each ship—each one with a—with a what was called a TBS radio, that was Talk Between Ships—was given a code name. And we would be, you know, Farmer Brown, or something like that. And that was changed. But it was always some little silly epithet. But right in the middle of a Kamikaze dive that came very close to us, suddenly the TBS radio went on. It wasn't us. It was one ship calling another. And what it said was, Hello Count Basie this is Missus Jones, please come in. Hello Count Basie this is Missus Jones, please come in [chuckles]. I'll never forget that, of course.

DuPre: Indelible.

Williams: [Chuckles] yeah.

DuPre: That's a lot of irony there with, you know, the war situation with Japanese being so involved with jazz now, so respectful of jazz.

Williams: Oh yeah.

DuPre: And I know that there is a funny story. Frankie Manning, the great Lindy dancer is—is very well respected there, in certain circles. He was in the jungle fighting against Japanese. He—he was, like, in a cave or something for, like, months or something living off things just so he—he wouldn't be caught or something.

Williams: Roots, yeah.

DuPre: Yeah, that kind of thing.

Williams: Bugs, too.

DuPre: And you—and you yourself I'm sure you've had some Japanese translations of your name that you've been shown.

Williams: Oh yeah the—the books—been translated.

DuPre: Into Japanese.

Williams: *The Jazz Tradition* is in Japanese.

DuPre: Yeah. Do you feel good about that? I mean that—that this come-around there.

Williams: Well, I can't feel bad about it, no. But, you know. . .

DuPre: I mean is that due to the fact that you especially—connected in that particular war arena.

Williams: Oh no, no.

DuPre: Do you feel good that you would be on the end of—of a better—better situation, you know, a calmer time. And. . .

Williams: Yeah, it's nice to be a part of it. Yeah sure, sure. But I mean I've never been translated into German [chuckles].

DuPre: I guess that's just because you didn't fight against them [chuckles].

Williams: [Chuckles] nor French. I translated a French book, by the way.

DuPre: Oh yeah?

Williams: Yeah, a book—a basic introductory book by André Francis called—just called *Jazz*. It's just a little short history.

DuPre: I—I didn't know. It doesn't say translation here.

Williams: No, I didn't. Not everything is on there [chuckles]. Not everything is on there. I guess that's—that's all there is to say about my wartime experiences on the military side. I already told you about my visits to L.A. and—San Francisco too. I heard the Lou Waters band, live in San Francisco. I didn't tell you about that. And—but that's, you know—well I guess the other thing about the military thing. After the—the armistice was signed—oh we were very near the second—the dropping of the second atom bomb at Nagasaki. And we had to sail up a channel to the city of Nagasaki soon after that. And that channel was mined. That was a very dangerous trip, and what we were going up there for, I don't know. But we were very close to that city once it—it'd been wiped out. Then we were in the harbor at Tokyo. . .

DuPre: How soon after it was wiped out, if I may ask? You know?

Williams: Within three or four days.

DuPre: I mean, that radiation.

Williams: Well, we didn't know. Nobody—oh they lied to us. . .

DuPre: But I mean, you're still—you're still with us.

Williams: Well I didn't get that close to it. I mean we didn't get that close to the radiation. Apparently [chuckles]. And then we went into Tokyo briefly. I set foot on Tokyo for—for a few minutes, right after the peace treaty was signed. But then we became a transport ship carting guys back—discharged soldiers, sailors, marines back—to the U.S. Pick up another and go, come back, pick another.

DuPre: What was the name of your ship?

Williams: The Rutland, named for the city in Vermont. The U.S.S. Rutland, for Rutland, Vermont.

DuPre: I see.

Williams: They were—all those ships were named after cities.

DuPre: So when were you discharged? When were you finally let go?

Williams: Forty-six.

DuPre: Forty-six.

Williams: Yeah, and I went back to college eventually. Took the summer off, and I shouldn't have. It was a mistake.

DuPre: What, a mistake to take a little time off?

Williams: Yes.

DuPre: I see. And went back to the University of Virginia. . .

Williams: That was a mistake for me because I have broken some ties with my family and their ways. And the ways of the people I was raised with. And I should have left them broken, and what I did during that time was tie them in again. And it took me a long time to get a loose after that, long time and a lot of struggle. I didn't want to go back to school. I want—I had this strong urge to go to Europe and see if I could do something to help refugee people. I didn't do it. Maybe I should have. There were several organizations doing that now, trying to relocate people and reunite families and—and, you know, get people new countries who had to have them. And I wanted to go help with that but I didn't.

I hung around all summer and played the wastrel debutante's delight and went back to the University of Virginia in the fall. I, at least, should have gone back to college right away. Cause I could have gone for the summer semester and stayed away from the family and that life in Richmond. That was a mistake.

DuPre: Well did your folks ever begin to approve of what you're doing? I mean they didn't see a lot of what you did.

Williams: It's funny. A young friend of mine said to me a few years ago something that I had never quite realized. He said, you know you've done everything your family would have approved of. You just didn't do it in the field that they approved of. It's true.

DuPre: Well I'm sure they would have. They would have approved of it, eventually. Smithsonian and whatnot.

Williams: Not the field. Not the field. They accepted it. But if they really thought about it, you know. I remember my mother said something to me. I told you before that I was taught—because, you know, they were snobbish people, pretty bluntly—that I was taught

never to use that word. But once I dragged my mother back to my room. I was about sixteen, seventeen. I guess I must have been sixteen. I played a Louis Armstrong solo on a record, and I thought it was so beautiful, and I just said, isn't that beautiful. And she just looked at me and said—she used the word she never used—she just looked at me and said, Martin, you've got nigger blood.

DuPre: You should have said thanks. You should have said thanks.

Williams: And I should have said—I should have said—well, I should have said, you ought to know [laughs].

DuPre: Oh boy. Well, I think, Lester Young when he was caught for smoking pot in the army. In all this army pressure one of the biggest thing on his mind was his father finding out. That's—that's what I heard.

Williams: Yeah. Yeah, I'm sure.

DuPre: One of his friends saying about that. Well, let's, you know I—I tend to think they would be—they would be real happy. I just want to relay a very funny story that a—this is not significant, but all these great things that people have said about you and—and will continue to say are different than what somebody else one time. . .

Williams: Should we quote some of the other things they've said [laughs].

DuPre: Here's—here's—but here's one, you'll like this one.

Williams: Yeah?

DuPre: I was talking to somebody, who was performing at the, what I call the “pillbox,” the Hirshhorn—you had concerts at the Hirshhorn, too.

Williams: Right.

DuPre: And this is—it’s a great musician. And he’s not real tight on names, and he admired you for—from speaking to you. I don’t if he’d read your stuff—but speaking to you personally. And he—he’s—he really liked Dan Morgenstern by the way. And he—some other people, he didn’t like. But he liked you and said, hey, he’s a real nice guy, said some special things to me backstage. And he just summed it up and said, I like the tall man. And that was Illinois Jacquet.

Williams: [Chuckles].

DuPre: The short man said that.

Williams: Yeah, yeah.

DuPre: That’s what he remembers.

Williams: Well, yeah. That—that was a good occasion, because, let’s see, he had Slam Stewart. . .

DuPre: Yeah, Alan Dawson.

Williams: Yeah, and we would talk. . .

DuPre: Richard Wyands.

Williams: Right, and I knew Richard from the Five Spot. He played with some groups there. And I knew Alan Dawson from covering a couple of record dates. Jaki Byard—

what's in that book there. And we were talking backstage, and I told him how wonderful that record of *Robbins Nest*, by Hank Jones and Tommy Flanagan was—that did just come out, the duo record. Have you ever heard that?

DuPre: I haven't heard that.

Williams: Oh you must. That's one of the classic—that's one of the great LPs, that duo record. It's called *Our Delights*. It's on Galaxy. I'll show it to you in a minute in the shelf. And I was telling him how great that was, and Jacquet kind of beamed, and I said to him, after concert—I said, man, you don't ever coast, do you? You must have played that damn *Flyin' Home* twenty-thousand times, and you played it as though it were the first night.

He said, well I—I think you ought to give the audience everything you've got, that's professional to me [laughs]. That's pretty good. Because, I mean—I—some people just have to learn how to coast, you know. Cause you can't survive. I—the biggest shock to me was once going to hear Monk during the period of his success at the Village Vanguard. And I thought, Monk is coasting. If anybody had asked me if Monk would know how to coast, I would say, no, he can't do it. But he was that night, you know.

DuPre: He learned it.

Williams: Yeah.

DuPre: Art Pepper too, just blow it all out, much as he could.

Williams: But Jacquet wasn't doing it, you know. And we were not giving Illinois a very big audience, I mean. We didn't get a good house for him in that—Hirshhorn, you know. Dizzy Gillespie said a wonderful thing. This is one of the remarks I cherish, too. And I'll quote it, I'll be shameless. He—I was giving a talk on Dizzy. And he's sitting there, and

next to him is his—is his—his ex-bass player Christopher White. And, at one point, he leaned over and said something to Christopher—to Chris. Dizzy and I have talked about this since. So afterward I said, what did he say to you? And he said, Dizzy said, this Smithsonian sure got the right man for that job. [Laughs] I thought—I thought he'd said, you know, what is that son of a bitch saying about me. He doesn't know what he's talking about—talking about my music. What does he know? You know. But, no, that's what he said, according to Chris. And I checked that with Dizzy. He said, yeah, that's what I said. I said, I didn't even know you knew who I was. We've been around each other a lot. I—I know who you are, sure. Saw him at the Lenox, blah, blah, blah, you know. So. . .

DuPre: Well, that's quite a bib. You have some recordings you wanted to. . .

Williams: I was going to show you that duo. You want to cut the tape off?

DuPre: Yeah.

Williams: Okay.

DuPre: Unless we want to—want to say some more. I think that other people may come to you. And, you know, maybe—let me say one thing right now.

Williams: Yeah?

DuPre: Will you give me dibs on—next, say twenty-five-year installment, we'd do it after twenty-five years. Would you give me dibs on that? Now I don't say keep other people from doing it, but will you let me crack at talking to you after twenty-five years?

Williams: Yes, I will be ninety years old [chuckles].

DuPre: Will you—will you let me—will you. . .

Williams: Oh yeah.

DuPre: I mean, people say things facetiously, you know what I'm saying. And they think, oh this is just, you know, talking in the dark or something. But, seriously, let me have a chance to talk to you again twenty-five years from now and update things.

Williams: [Chuckles], if you think. . .

DuPre: Now—now you're starting to think of contracts and what's going to mean. . .

Williams: No, no, no. If you—no, I'm just thinking, what the heck. Yeah, I plan to go for another thirty years. I've decided that.

DuPre: Okay.

Williams: And. . .

DuPre: If I can make it that long, I'd like to do another tape.

Williams: [Laughs] you'll—you'll make it a lot longer than that.

DuPre: I've inhaled some asbestos so. . .

Williams: Oh have you?

DuPre: Yeah, and I won't cough it up here. I mean we all have, no I mean—I just. I'm just being facetious there. But that, chances are. . .

Williams: I—I thought you might be. I thought you might be, yes.

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