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Braithwaithe, Kwame

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Interviewee: Kwame Brathwaite

Interviewers: Dr. Mark Naison, Maxine Gordon

May 17, 2002

Dr. Mark Naison (MN): This is going to be the 112th interview of the Bronx African American History Project. We're here at Fordham University with Kwame Braithwaite, longtime activist, photographer and expert on the history of jazz in New York City. My co-interviewer is Maxine Gordon and this is Fordham University...and this is May 17, 2002.

(MN): Let's start off with your family background. How did your family come to move to the Bronx?

Kwame Brathwaite (KB): Well, we were living in Harlem at the time. We were living in Harlem for about four years. I was born in Brooklyn. Spent about a year there and we moved to Harlem. We had two apartments in Harlem, one at a time, at 238 W 129th St. and then 226 W. 139th.....129th, that's before they knocked down those buildings and projects there, right by Salem church, between 7th and 8th. And then, my father, who was a tailor, had a pretty good tailoring business and dry cleaners in Harlem, right across the street from Small's Paradise...we bought a house in the Bronx, on Kelly Street, between Longwood Avenue and 156th. And at that time, black people were just starting to move into there, and you know that was a block of all private houses except for the buildings on the corner. And right up from Prospect Hospital and St. Margaret's Church was down on the corner. I guess we were about the third or fourth black family to buy on that block and the houses there were---I don't remember the architects name---but they had been

built in I guess, I'm not sure...the early 1900's. And you know... nice houses. And my parents bought it from a German fellow who had owned the house---Mr. Jandell. I remember Jandell. And with the house came the dog, Dusty.

(MN): Now, did your parents find out about this house through an advertisement or where did----?

(KB): I have no idea. I have no idea how they found out about it.

(MN): Did they have other friends who lived in that particular neighborhood?

(KB): No, no, nope. They came there and, you know, and well we didn't know anybody until we arrived there.

(MN): What year was that?

(KB): 1943.

(MN): In 1943. How old were you when..?

(KB): Five.

(MN): You were five?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): And what is your recollection of the atmosphere on the block when you first moved there and how did it compare with Harlem?

(KB): Well, it was a very mixed block. You know, I mean we had a lot of Jewish families; there were some Italian families there. There was an Italian family across the street---Mingy and Ducky. Sammy. Sammy was Irish. Paul...I think he was Italian. And these were all the guys...all and us. And Jay and Warren--Jewish family next door. They were our age and younger. You know, about the same. And then, of course, a number of black families. The guys across the street in 754. They had the whole

building, except the downstairs. They rented that to another black family and that was Eddie Deo and his mother and brother. And on the corner, in the apartment building were William Fear...and then on the other side, the corner going East, was a Jamaican family, the Mouchettes, and there was Charles...Charlie and his family.

(MN): Were most of the black families from the Caribbean or there were some African-Americans?

(KB): No, matter of fact, other than the Larriers down our block (740)...Mrs. Johnson, no I don't think she was from the Caribbean. The Hinkstons were, which was 2 blocks...were 751. 755. They were from the Caribbean. The guys were from the Caribbean. And those that were in the apartment building, they were not. They were from the States here, South.

(MN): Now are most of the houses on the block that you grew up on still standing?

(KB): Yes.

(MN): So the block is intact?

(KB): Yes, it is.

(MN): Now, did your family go to church in the Bronx?

(KB): Yes.

(MN): Which church?

(KB): St. Margaret's.

(MN): Now, in Harlem, were they a member of an Episcopal church?

(KB): I was like five years old, so I don't remember. I think we used to go to Salem, across the street, but I don't really recollect. Salem Methodist.

(MN): Right.

(KB): But we were like Protestant-Episcopalian with St. Margaret's. The altar boys... Colin Powell was one of the acolytes, altar boy, and he also went to school, PS 39 with us.

(MN): Now where was PS 39 on...?

(KB): On the corner of Longwood and Kelly Street. Longwood and Kelly to the Northeast, uh, the Northeast corner there which is now part of that Bronx...what is that? It is no longer a public school now. PS 39 is...matter of fact Fordham had a lab up there. That fish lab, developing the recycling with fish and algae. They had it when, I don't know if it was Bronx Council, Arthur...it was one of those Bronx organizations. They have that building now, PS 39.

(MN): So it's not a school anymore?

(KB): No, it's not. It was a public school up until sixth grade.

(MN): What grade did you start there? Did you start in kindergarten or first grade?

(KB): No, first grade. I had gone into the first grade at PS 157 in Manhattan, but we moved like in the spring, so we started the first grade again there and, you know, before we got skipped.

(MN): Was education very heavily stressed in your family?

(KB): Always. We managed to get to school on time and what not. And you know we never had any problems with grades. As a matter of fact, we loved school. (Inaudible) Later on my younger brother Johnny, who was five years younger than us.

(MN): Did your family sit down to a formal dinner?

(KB): Yes, except for my father, since he had the tailor shop. He worked six days a week. His only day off was Sunday. He would get in late because that was the business.

Matter of fact at one point he had two tailor shops. The one there on 7th, between 134 and 135th. And the other one about 7th and 137th Street. And when he was at one shop they were stealing from him and so he had to close up one of them and just keep the one on 134th Street.

(MN): What sort of discussion took place at a Brathwaite family dinner?

(KB): Well, some things, family things, family history, things in general, how we were doing in school and what not.

(MN): Was there much discussion of politics in your family when growing up?

(KB): Not there. When my uncle came to start living with us, in winter, when he moved into the house, he discussed more politics. Uncle Lionel, who we used to call Uncle Lie. Some things with the Garvey movement and stuff like that.

(MN): So that was more his influence than your parents?

(KB): Well both. My mother used talk about it 'cause her first cousin Clenem Wickem, in Barbados, was a radical there. He had to leave the island and went to Grenada to work with Theocris Marrishaw. (Inaudible) could tell you more about the details, who was one of the real radicals at that time, you know. He couldn't even stay in Barbados because of, you know, the political thing. Course, it was still under Columbus.

(MN): Now, were both of your parents from Barbados?

(KB): Yes, both, yeah.

(MN): Did they meet in the United States?

(KB): In the United States, yes.

(MN): In Harlem?

(KB): Yes, in Harlem I guess. Or in Brooklyn, maybe. I guess they were both living in Brooklyn at the time, not in Harlem.

(MN): Now, was your family's social life mostly with other Asian immigrants or was it more diverse?

(KB): It was diverse, but we used to have a lot of family come over, you know. Come over and pinch the cheek... But, yeah, our friends were...my parents, well mostly my mother because my father didn't have social time. We were friends with the Powells. But mostly around the church. We didn't come visit each other or anything like that.

(MN): Were there any Barbadian or West Indian associations or fraternal organizations?

(KB): No, we didn't belong to any. Of course, they had some, but we didn't belong to any. My father didn't belong to any groups, again, because he just worked so many hours so that he didn't have time. And my mother she was basically a housewife and didn't work. It wasn't like, you know, two working people in the family.

(MN): Now, what about music and cuisine? Did your mother cook in—

(KB): Sure did!

(MN): What were her cooking and culinary influences? What are the kinds of foods you ate?

(KB): Of course, from Caribbean, from Barbados. And she used to make the best coconut bread ever and coconut was coconut and dough and they used to make it in two forms...either like in a bun or in the pan. She used to sell them. Everybody used to come around here.

(MN): She used to sell them in front of the house?

(KB): Not in front of the house. People used to come by and place the order.

(MN): Place the order for coconut bread.

(KB): Oh yeah. Of course she would cook some...there was...cucu...cucu was an ochre dish from the Caribbean. I didn't eat that a lot. And sometimes sauce, which is pigs feet, which I didn't eat. I was very picky about what I ate. If I didn't like the sound of it...ochre or squash or asparagus...

(MN): You didn't like those harsh words?

(KB): Maybe that was what is was, I don't know.

(MN): Ochre. Asparagus.

(KB): Squash and broccoli? No. String beans was my green things. Rice. But I got beans and potatoes and things like that. I was a real chubby kid. Especially in school I would never like to speak. Be a public speaker. Class was alright because I had the answers, but getting in front of large groups, that was not my thing.

(MN): What about music? Did you family have a---I guess in those days they called them victrolas?

(KB): But of course. Yes.

(MN): And what sort of music usually listened to?

(KB): Their thing was not so much the Calypso. She didn't have a lot of that, but we good get that, I guess a little later, when we started hanging out. Because at the time, we used to listen to all kinds of music. Do-wop, Caribbean, you the Calypso, the Latin and all that. At that time we didn't make any distinctions about music. We went to a dance, it was down at the Embassy Ballroom, a church dance or the Hunts Point Palace. We might have Tito Puente, Fats Green, who was Caribbean, and we might have had the Orioles.

(MN): Sonny Toe (???) and the Orioles?

(KB): Yeah it was a mix.

(MN): Satch Green?

(KB): No, Fats Green.

(MN): And he was a Caribbean from the Calypso style?

(KB): He used to play all types of things. He could play the other stuff too, you know.

(MN): And he used to play around Hunt's Point?

(KB): Hunts point palace was...this is when we were teens now. Calypso Rose. People always used to hire them for dances and what not. When you went to dance, the whole family went. The family would go and they would bring their chicken and their potato salad and...

(MN): This was at the Hunt's Point Palace? People would bring food?

(KB): Oh yeah. And most of those dances at that time, whether it was Rockland Palace, in Manhattan, or Hunts Point or Embassy Point.

(MN): And they brought their children as well?

(KB): The children would be there at the dances. The whole family went to the dances. And most of the places didn't have liquor licenses. They would sell you a set-up---ice bucket and some soda.

(MN): And they let you bring in your own liquor?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): And they didn't sell food either?

(KB): Sometimes they had, but there wasn't a big thing with selling food because people used to bring their own and they brought their own. And you could go around, you know. People were at other tables. They would share food.

(MN): Describe to me what the inside of the Hunt's Point Palace looked like during a dance. Did they have tables?

(KB): Oh yes, they had tables. See, when you bought a ticket, you would pay separately for a table.

(MN): You bought a ticket to get in and then you bought a separate ticket for a table?

(KB): Right. They had limited amounts of tables.

(MN): Ok, so how many tables would there be?

(KB): I couldn't guess.

(MN): Would you say a hundred?

(KB): No, because...it would be mixed. Oh you need a table for four, I need a table for six, I need a table for eight. They would make up the tables right there. So you know, I'd say maybe a third of the place would be tables and the rest of the people would just come in and stand.

(MN): How many people could you fit in there at once?

(KB): Hunts Point Palace? I'm not sure. Hunts Point was a large one. Maybe a thousand. It wasn't Rockland Palace, in which you could fit 4000 people, 4200 people, in Rockland Palace. It was in Manhattan.

(MN): Maybe a thousand in Hunts Point Palace?

(KB): I would say so.

(MN): Was that the biggest place in the Bronx?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): So Embassy was smaller?

(KB): Embassy Ballroom was smaller.

(MN): Embassy was on 161st Street?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): How old were you when your parents started taking you to dances?

(KB): I guess I was about 7, 8, 10, something like that. You'd go to a dance. We'd go to a church dance or to a ballroom.

(MN): Did your father dance?

(KB): Not a lot.

(MN): It sounds like he worked pretty damn hard.

(KB): He did. He did. Long hours. We...once we got to about, I guess, 10 or 12, we would work in the shop on Saturdays too, even though we were hanging out and what not. We would go in and help him.

(MN): What sort of work would you do in the tailor shop?

(KB): We wrote up the customers clothes. You put the cleaning tags on it. At that time you didn't have the cleaning plant or anything to send it out to---the commercial cleaners, Lichtensteins, what's the other one? I forget the name. And you always had to mark it and they you'd have to go and tag that so you could, you know, put the ticket number on it.

(MN): So you all were good enough in math to take care of the cashier and all that stuff?

(KB): Oh yeah. And then, of course, when the clothes came in, you had two levels and you had to get the poles to get the clothes down. You know, if they were on the upper level.

(MN): When you came home from elementary school, did you get to play in the street?

(KB): If you did your homework. Yes.

(MN): OK, so your mother was home, so she said first you do your homework and then you can go out.

(KB): Um, umm.

(MN): And did she...

(KB): No, first you changed your clothes.

(MN): First, you changed your clothes. You had school clothes and play clothes?

(KB): And then you just take a shower and just change your clothes.

(MN): OK, you would come home from school, take a shower, change your clothes and then do your homework?

(KB): Then do your homework and then you could out and play.

(MN): And how long would it take to do your homework in elementary school, let's say?

(KB): I guess it depends on what grade. I guess it gets longer and longer. Homework was never a big problem. Getting it done or needing help.

(MN): Now, when you went to play outside, did your mother tell you, "be where I can see you," or did she trust other people to look out for you?

(KB): She pretty much trusted, so didn't have to worry about that so much. It was a private block. That block was all private houses. As a matter fact, it was so much so that they called it "sissy Kelly," because all the others, was, you know, apartments.

(MN): Tenements, so they were the tough guys and you were “sissy Kelly.”

(KB): Yeah. Of course, since we had the house there, we occupied the two top floors. We rented out....Oh the beginning, we had the top floor and we rented out to whites. The other two floors. Then we took the two upper floors and rented out. The basement, my father made into a finished basement to be used. And he built a huge table where we had our Lionel Trains and he would work with that.

(MN): So you had a whole, big train set?

(KB): Oh yeah.

(MN): Now, was this something that he had been into, or he got into this?

(KB): I don't know how it happened. I don't know if we asked him for it, or he got the idea. You know, he was good with his hands and building things. He would work in the garden too.

(MN): Right. So what did you have in the garden?

(KB): Oh, we had sunflowers, we had peaches...

(MN): Peaches?

((KB): Yeah. A peach tree. You know, you could buy a peach tree. Peach tree, apples, currant jelly, we had currant sales. My mother would make currant jelly and what not.

We had...hmmm, what else did we have?

(MN): Now, so the back yard...were you allowed to play in the back yard?

(KB): No, we didn't play. It mostly was the garden.

(MN): That was garden. So you played in the street?

(KB): Yeah, we played right out in front of the house.

(MN): Did you have a stoop?

(KB): Yes.

(MN): Did you have games you played? What were some of the stoop games?

(KB): Well, first of all there was stoop ball.

(MN): Uh uh. You used a Spalding?

(KB): Spalding?

(MN): The pink ball?

(KB): All right. And then there were seasons for games, too. Of course, we would play cards. There would be “nucks.”

(MN): I remember “nucks.”

(KB): “War.” You know things, games like that. There was marble season. There was kite season.

(MN): Oh! There was kite flying?

(KB): Oh yeah. There was bike season. There was...I said marbles, right? And of course we use to play “lowdies.” You know “lowdies,” right?

(MN): Oh yeah. Did girls and boys play together or separately in your block?

(KB): You know something? ‘Cause I think about it. There weren’t many girls in the families there. I mean, there was...she was...she was Marlyn, that was into guys. There was Margaret, Charles’ older sister. So they were a little older than us.

(MN): You remember mainly guys playing together?

(KB): Oh yeah.

(MN): Stickball...Did you play pitching to a box in the wall or hitting in the street? And hitting two sewers was...

(KB): Oh, I could hit.

(MN): You could hit? Could you hit more than two sewers?

(KB): Oh yeah.

(MN): Could you hit three sewers, or not quite?

(KB): I don't think it's three.

(MN): But more than two?

(KB): Oh yeah.

(MN): Now, did you play punch ball?

(KB): Punch ball? Yeah, we played punch ball.

(MN): Did you play punch ball in the school yard also?

(KB): Thomas Nolton. PS 52, in the school yard, yeah. Softball in PS 39.

(MN): Ok, you played softball. Now, who supplied you with the balls and bats and gloves?

(KB): Oh, we used to go out and buy the stuff.

(MN): So all the kids had their own equipment?

(KB): Yeah, at one point we did this thing with the PAL. Because down there...was that I56 and Fox?

(MN): Right, yeah, so there was that PAL Center.

(KB): Lynch Center.

(MN): What?

(KB) Lynch Center.

(MN): Yeah, the Lynch Center. Do you remember your block as...what did they call it? Sissy Kelly. Was it a safe place?

(KB): Oh yeah.

(MN): So was everybody kind of looking out for each other?

(KB): Yeah, I'd say so.

(MN): Was there ever an issue at school with kids from other blocks because you came from that block? Was there this insipient class difference?

(KB): No. We didn't have that. When we were early teenagers we had this stickball team and we'd play groups from other blocks. And it would be like what they'd call a money game. I remember there'd be times when... what was the name of that group? I don't remember. Our team was Shabazz. We'd go back to that (inaudible) that name. I remember, I guess the seventh inning...whoever was leading would hold the money. All right? So the other team was leading, so you'd see some tough guys, and they were holding the money. And we came up bashed up, right, you know. They had their last turn at bat. A guy came and struck out, turned around and (inaudible) it off with the money. And so it was bike season. There was a bike rental place around the corner on Longwood Avenue. At that time we didn't own our own bikes. Our parents would give out money. They had to go the first time to sign for you. They'd allow you to come in, then you could come in, you could take the bike out. You had paid for it, you know. One time a group of us got together. We chipped in so we could all ride the bikes and what not. We did that and one guy says...he wasn't from the block. He said "Ok, you go first." We rode down to the end of the block. It was his turn again and duh, duh, duh...and down the block all we could see was him disappearing. Our parents had to pay for the bike.

(MN): Wow! Now, when you were at PS 39 were there any black teachers in the school?

(KB): In 39? No, none 'till we got to '52.

(MN): Was that an issue for either you or your parents? Were you ever on the receiving end of negative treatment from teachers?

(KB): No, not that I could say, no. I would say, no. That didn't come until high school.

(MN): Were you brought up with a race consciousness? Was this something that was very much part of your family?

(KB): Race pride, but not, you know, divisions and stuff like that.

(MN): It wasn't a problem for you, being in a multi-ethnic, multi-racial neighborhood?

(KB): No. Except I remember Jay Warren one time...I think it was Jay, hit either me or my brother. Of course, we hit him back and he ran to his mother. "He hit me back. He hit me back." Like we weren't supposed to defend ourselves. Shortly after, he moved to Pleasantville or something like that.

(MN): Was there a point at which you became conscious of whites leaving the block? Did that happen very gradually?

(KB): It began to happen. That's how, I guess, we all got the houses. What did they call it at the time? What's the term for that?

(MN): White flight?

(KB): No, it was block-busting.

(MN): Do you think there was a conscious block-busting strategy by landlords in that area?

(KB): Might be. Probably so. At that time, I had no recollection of that. I didn't know what that was about. We got along pretty well except for one time. I think it was...Sammy, yeah. He hit one of us and my mother had happened to see it. She came down and decked him, you know.

(MN): Was he an older guy?

(KB): Oh yeah. He was about five or six years older. And a couple of those guys that went off to the Korean War...Mingy and Ducky, who were the Chinese guys that lived in 748. Ducky was the older one and he had gone off to Korea and also did Sammy. I think both of them were parrot troopers and both of them got killed in Korea. They were coming down. Parachuting down...

(MN): When did your interest in the arts start to develop? Was that in elementary school or when you were older?

(KB): We took music lessons. Professor Phillips used to come by and he would teach (inaudible) piano and I was clarinet.

(MN): Professor Phillips? Where did Professor Phillips come from?

(KB): Oh, he was from the Caribbean. I don't remember which island. Old and very proper and very thin. I was playing clarinet, you know. It was a bar clarinet, you know. He would wet the reed to give it to you. And he'd talk like "I was too scornful to play for my parents, too scornful."

(MN): Did he live in the Bronx?

(KB): No, I think he came from Harlem.

(MN): He came from Harlem?

(KB): To teach us...

(MN): And how many times a week did he come?

(KB): I think it was once a week.

(MN): Did your mother make you practice?

(KB): How many times a week did you have to practice?

(KB): I don't know. I don't think it was set that rigid.

(MN): Were there music programs in PS 39?

(KB): No, not that we took. But when I went to 52, got into the band there.

(MN): Oh, they had a band?

(KB): Yeah we had a band. And I could read music pretty well.

(MN): Were you in a special music class at Junior High School 52?

(KB): I wouldn't call it special music, but we took music, and you know you could even borrow the instruments.

(MN): And you could take them home?

(KB): Yes, you could take them home and practice.

(MN): How much of your recreation after school was in the street and how much of it was in organized programs, either at the PAL Center, the church or the school?

(KB): In the summer, there were mostly PAL programs in the summer.

(MN): They had summer camps?

(KB): Softball and we would just get there. We had a team, too, and we bought the cleats and everything else. We out, not in the school yard, but out in the...softball, you would go out...St. Margaret's had a team. They had two teams. They had a softball team. They had a basketball team. Matter of fact, Colin Powell was the center of the basketball team. I got a good shot to show you...the team.

Maxine Gordon (MG): Oh yeah?

(MN): Do you have pictures of the team?

(KB): Yeah, with Powell in center, myself and Elombay.

(MN): We might want to post some of your pictures on our new website. What was Colin Powell like as kid? Honestly.

(KB): One time he called Elena a nigger and Elombay had to chase him up the stairs of PS 39 and punch him in the mouth.

(MN): This was in elementary school?

(KB): Yeah, 'cause you know, he was from Jamaica, you know. They had a light and dark thing, you know. So they got in an argument, he called Elombay nigger and he chased him up the stairs.

(MN): Was that kind of color issue something you were aware of as a kid, or it wasn't a big deal?

(KB): Not aware of, and it wasn't a problem...especially when we were younger. When you got into the teenage years, you were more aware of it.

(MN): Did it come up more it dating or things like that, or, not even that?

(KB): Well, dating, when it came to ...really after high school. Not even in high school. You know there were people that you had crushes on, but there was nothing in it. We used to have dances at our house, because we had the basement. And even for me in high school, a lot of the folks would come over. That's how our house became like a center.

(MN): So your house was like a social center?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): When you threw a party at your house, were your parents there to chaperone?

(KB): Nope.

(MN): So you could throw a party without your parents there?

(KB): No, they were upstairs.

(MN): They were upstairs. Were the girls' parents worried?

(KB): I have no idea. Blue light, green light, red light, thing, the grind-em-ups and all that stuff.

(MN): So you had some grind-em-ups at your house?

(KB): Um-um.

(MN): So what about, like, at St. Margaret's? Did they have dances?

(KB): Oh yeah. There were no grind-em-ups...

(MN): So people danced differently in a church than they did in an apartment?

(KB): Yeah, with the church, you mostly had the church folks there. Not high school friends and stuff like that.

(MN): Oh, so it was a different...the St. Margaret's crowd and your high school crowd was a different crowd?

(KB): It was a different crowd, as a matter of fact. Probably when we started doing...probably didn't go to many of the St. Margaret dances. It was when we were smaller.

(MN): At the Hunts Point Palace, did people, because there were kids there, dance differently than they would have in an apartment, or they were pretty...or was it mostly fast dancing?

(KB): No, when we talk about the family thing, that's before we got to the teenage years--when we used to go alone.

(MN): Right.

(KB): All right. But it was mostly Calypso. And mostly Mambo. And ball room dancing. I remember Mr. Carrington, down the block...he was down in 740. The Larriers and the Carringtons were in 740. He was older then, and you'd see him coming from work. He was walking and he'd get down the block. You'd go to the dance at the Embassy Ballroom. He was always...Zip! I mean he was all over the floor!

(MN): Were you given lessons in ballroom dancing?

(KB): No.

(MN): So you never got formal dancing lessons. Just music lessons?

(KB): Music lessons, yeah.

(MN): How good was the band in Junior High school 52? Would you say there were a lot of good musicians there?

(KB): I'm not sure if they were in the band, but some Latin musicians came out of there. Some that really made big names for themselves.

(KB): Right. I know Eddie Palmieri came out of there.

(KB): But, the band played...they didn't play, like, jazz and that stuff that I would like to play. You know, it was just that stuff right out of the...

(MN): Yeah. In the late '40's were you starting to listen to the radio a lot, to get popular music? Were there any radio disc jockeys or shows that made a bit impression on you.

(KB): Well, when you say late '40's, we're talking about '48 and what not. I don't think that happened until the '50's...early '50's.

(MN): Any shows or radio personalities that made a big impression on you?

(KB): Well, once we really started listening to the radio, listening to jazz, or that was when we'd listen to..Moon dog used to come on. And then there was Symphony Sid and then...and some of the R+B things.

(MN): How old were you when you first started becoming interested in jazz?

(KB): I think it was about 1955. '54 really, '54. Elombay was a senior there and they didn't go to senior prom. What they did is they went to Basin Street East.

(MN): Where did Elombay go to high school?

(KB): The School of Industrial Art.

(MN): And where was that located?

(KB): It was located on 79th Street, east of 3rd Avenue. The annex, which you went to for, was it 11th and 12th the Senior...and the 10th grade you did at the annex, which was on 51st Street, between Park and Lexington. The old..

(MN): How did you find that school...?

(KB): Old Civil War Hospital...

(MN): Now, you're at the Junior High School 52 in the Bronx. I guess your zoned high school would have been Morris?

(KB): Yes, Morris, or they'd try and get you to go to a vocational school and what not. Your grade advisor would try and get you...

(MN): Like a Gompers or some place like that.

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): What was the advantage of going to the School of Industrial Arts.

(KB): Well we were both good in art. My brother first. He had gone there. And I'd followed. He was good in cartoonism. He had to pass a test to get into...

(MN): So this skill as a cartoonist...

(KB): My father used to paint.

(MN): Oh, ok.

(KB): He used to take us to Sack Harbor as a kid and we'll all sit down with oils and paint the scenics.

(MN): Did he know people who had a house at there in Sack Harbor?

(KB): Yes, and there were these summer rentals and stuff like that.

(MN): So you used to rent in Sack Harbor?

(KB): Yes.

(MN): Do you remember what street or what neighborhood?

(KB): Nope. All I remember is a big Ming Choi...a big chow dog they had there.

(MN): So your family would rent in Sack Harbor for the summer?

(KB): Not for the summer. Two weeks at a time or something like that.

(MN): Did you go anywhere else for vacation or that was the vacation experience?

(KB): Basically, that was...Green Haven, Sack Harbor, like that.

(MN): Did you go by car? Or bus?

(KB): I think...probably by car. I think my father had the car by 1948.

(MN): What year did your father get his first automobile?

(KB): I think it was a Hudson and 1948 I think it was.

(MN): OK. So he 1948 he bought a car.

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): And he parked it on the block?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): In front of the house?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): Were there many cars on the block?

(KB): Yeah. It was a two-way street, too, at that time before they changed it to a one-way street.

(MN): I guess this was...private houses so more people would have cars.

(KB): When did you get your first television set? Before or after the car?

(MN): Before the car. Yeah, before the car. We moved there in 1943. The war was over in '45. Maybe somewhere around there, but I don't remember exactly.

(MN): Now, you had been painting from the time that you were fairly young?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): And also Elonbay?

(KB): Um-um.

(MN): Now when did the cartooning talent manifest itself?

(KB): I guess when he went to SIA.

(MN): So he didn't do cartoons at Nalton?

(KB): No. I don't think he did.

(MN): Did you take any art classes in the neighborhood anywhere?

(KB): Not in the neighborhood, but we had art in school. Mr. Brooks was a black teacher. He was Art and he was English.

(MN): And this is at Thomas Nalton?

(KB): Yes. Fisher was English. He was Art and maybe music. Mr. Brooks. And Ms. Fisher, who was another black teacher that we had and had a bony finger. And she pointed and you'd know...you're in trouble.

(MN): Right. Who were the teachers in elementary school and junior high who made the biggest impression on you?

(KB): There was a math teacher, Mr. Chiketty. Ms. Fisher, of course. Brooks. I don't remember some of the others.

(MN): You mentioned that you became most aware of racism when you went to high school? Or did it happen before then?

(KB): Well I think thing that...is the case of Russell Corley, who was one of the tougher kids that lived on either Stewart or Dawson Street. He was also get into some kinds of problems, but... the police had his hands up against the wall—we didn't see this, but heard the accounts of it right after---PS 39, on the Kelly Street side, and just shot him in the back, killed him. And that's when we first got any thoughts or ideas, hearing about police brutality.

(MN): How old were you when this happened?

(KB): Maybe 10 or 12, I think. I'm not sure.

(MN): So this was a kid from the neighborhood. A tough kid who...

(KB): And a friend of ours, yeah.

(MN): And this was somebody you knew? How old was he?

(KB): He was about our age, a little older.

(MN): So this was a thirteen year old, maybe?

(KB): I guess so. I'm not sure. Maybe it was a little later. As I think about it. I'm not sure.

(MN): Were there any picket lines or protests or marches in the station house?

(KB): No, there were no marches like that. There was all the talk around the block... things like that, and around the neighborhood. But nothing, no. It wasn't the protest era yet.

(MN): When did you first hear about heroine coming?

(KB): You used to see guys nodding. They would be at a 45 degree angle and never fall. You heard and knew about drugs then.

(MN): How old were you when you first started hearing this?

(KB): I guess it was when I was 10 or 12 years old.

(MN): So in the late '40's, early 50's, you were already becoming aware that heroine was an issue?

(KB): Yeah. That's why I said, when you said it was the early '60's, it was before that.

(MN): In your neighborhood, yeah. In Patterson, it hit in the early 60's.

(KB): But not...I mean you used to see it. But on the block you would seldom see it. But in the area, around the neighborhood...

(MN): Was it more in the tougher tenement blocks, would you say?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): What about gangs? Were there gangs?

(KB): Oh yeah. There were gangs. The gangs were even before, when we were younger. But the gangs weren't on the block. I forget the names of all the gangs. There

were gangs in the Bronx, there were gangs in Brooklyn, you know. They were pretty well known and pretty notorious.

(MN): Were careful about where you walked around the Bronx? Like, there were certain neighborhoods you avoided or certain blocks, or it wasn't like that?

(KB): When we were younger we didn't really venture out too far. After we lost that bike, our parents bought us a Schwinn. So we had a bike, so we would ride. And sometimes we would ride up to Southern Boulevard and up to the Castle, that area over there where the White Castle was and stuff like that. Cross the draw-bridge and stuff like that. And of course that's when we started encountering some of those white gangs and what not. They used to chase us out of there.

(MN): What neighborhoods do you remember being chased out of?

(KB): Well, over there by White Castle.

(MN): Up on Fordham Road?

(KB): No, that's up in the Eastern part.

(MN): Oh, you mean down by Bruckner Boulevard?

(KB): Yeah, yeah there was a White Castle up there. Past the draw-bridge.

(MN): OK, I know exactly where. Near the Bronxwood Houses.

(KB): I guess. That's before they build the Bruckner Expressway.

(MN): Right, but there was a White Castle there as early as the '50's and if you went down there you could get chased

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): What was The School of Industrial Arts like for you as an experience?

(KB): Oh, The School of Industrial Art was a great experience. You know, it was a very mixed school and we had a lot of friends. At lunch time, they would have dances.

(MN): Dances in school?

(KB): In the school yard, yeah. In the, in the...

(MN): Lunchroom?

(KB): It was a combination...it was a large area. It wasn't the gym. It was the lunchroom...

(MN): You had girls in the school?

(KB): Oh yeah.

(MN): It was a co-ed school?

(KB): Oh yeah.

(MN): And what sort of music would you dance to in the school?

(KB): We would do R+B and some of the Italian kids would do some other thing with the Lindy Hop. I remember...who was this? Oh goodness, I can't remember some of these guys' names. Gallow? I think it was Joe Gallow. I don't know if it was the same Joe Gallow. But he was a very good dancer on that side, you know. I remember...and this was mostly in Elonbay's class. His senior year. It was during the time of the China war.

(MN): Korean War?

(KB): And there was this French guy, Donovan Cramp. I don't know, Elombay'll probably tell you more about that. And there was this Chinese guy named Wong. And you know, as the headlines come up, they would be taunting each other in the school yard. A guy, he'd wait every day to see what was happening as, you know, you'd read

the headlines. And then finally when they had the French surrounded and the thing was saying, they said tell them to surrender or die. At lunchtime he came down there and Wong was on one hand and he was trying to say “Le Cramp, Le Cramp! Surrender or Die!” We all broke out laughing!

(MN): Did Bob Gums also go to school there?

(KB): Yeah, he was two years behind.

(MN): Is that were you met him or did you know him from the Bronx?

(KB): We met him there, at school. And after that, that’s when the guys got together...after school. Several of us. Artists and some other friends.

(MN): Did kids tend to hang out with their own sort of racial, cultural, group at School for Industrial Arts? Or it wasn’t that clear cut?

(KB): It wasn’t that clear cut, no. Because even a couple of the white girls would come up to our house when we had our dances and what not.

(MN): So you had white kids come to your house for dances?

(KB): Yeah, but none of the white guys, but a couple of the white girls that came...We used to have

END OF SIDE A, CASSETTE ONE

(MN): ...house parties?

(KB): All of what you’d call the bird groups. The Orioles, the Sparrows, the Rens. You know, those types of groups.

(MN): The Platters?

(KB): The Platters.

(MN): The Chords, or that’s a little...?

(KB): Yeah, I think so. Let me see. Of course, The Orioles. Of course, anytime around New Year's Eve, you know you would have the Orioles at Hunt's Point Palace. What are you doing New Year's Eve?

(MN): I know in 1953 they and Thelonius Monk were at the Hunts Point Palace.

(KB): That's right. That's the kind of thing. You would have Monk and you would have...

(MN): Did you have friends who sang in the corner, who tried to harmonize?

(KB): Oh yeah. Even in SIA. There was one...Percy. Percy...what's his last name? He used to write songs. As a matter of fact, he had written one of the songs for one of the groups that was recorded. So he was like, a song writer, in high school. What was Percy's last name? I forget. It might come to me after. But, yeah, during the lunch hour...

(MN): So people would get up and sing?

(KB): Yeah. We'd have what you'd call a do-wop corner.

(MN): Oh, you had a do-wop corner in the school?

(KB): Yeah. And also there were four of the guys that were very good dancers...Latin dancers, and...Richard Rambert, uh...You ask Elombay about them when you talk to him.

(MN): So these were black guys who were great Latin dancers?

(KB): Oh yeah. They would go down to the Palladium and stuff like that. We would go down to, but they were like...

(MN): Now when was your first exposure to Latin Music? Were there any, like, Puerto Rican families on your block?

(KB): Oh yeah, Puerto Rican families. Next door, one of our good friends was...because we were 751 and 752...was Peter Barnes. Who else can I think of on the block?

(MN): Did anybody play drums on the street? Did you ever hear congas or bongos?

(KB): Not on the block. But, there were some guys that played in 52.

(MN): In the school yard, or actually in the school?

(KB): Yeah, I don't recall in the school yard. We mostly played ball in the school yard.

(MN): Did you play sports in high school?

(MN): Not high school sports, but we used to play a lot of sports at the time. As a matter of fact we used to use the playground, the PS 39 playground, and we were very good at softball. I would knock it over the fence. We would use the whole block. As fat as I was, I could climb the wall and catch. If you hit anything over where I was, I would get it.

(MN): Did you have a thing about roofing the ball in punch ball?

(KB): Oh yeah.

(MN): How high was PS 39?

(KB): Not in punch ball. No cause, PS 39 was the whole block.

(MN): So that was one of those big schools.

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): You'd try to roof it in stickball, or just throw it up there?

(KB): We didn't play stickball a lot in the school yard, but occasionally we had. But we could knock it over the fence and sometimes we did play stickball. You could hit it on that building on Fox Street. Because it ran from Beck to Fox.

(MN): I want to segway a little bit into the Jazz arts Society and then I'm going to hand it over to Maxine. How did you start getting interested in the idea of promoting jazz in the Bronx?

(KB): Well, as I said, Elonbay's graduating class...I went with them. And we went to Maison Street East.

(MN): How old were you at the time?

(KB): I was sixteen. He was seventeen. Graduating, right? I wasn't supposed to be there, but I went along with him you know, because I wasn't old enough to get into clubs. Being that it was a graduation party time thing...and it was Max Roach, Clifford Brown and...quartet.

(MN): And what year was that?

(KB): That was 1954. That was their last gig. And after that was when they got in the automobile accident.

(MG): Ritchie Powell.

(KB): Ritchie Powell. And there was Max, Clifford, Ritchie Powell and Harold Lan (inaudible).

(MN): When you went down there, did you know who all these guys were?

(KB): Just beginning to hear about them. I had my senior year, in '55, when... I hadn't seen him, when Charlie Parker died. And that's when the interest really woke up. We had been to see Manson, you know, Clifton and what not. That was like the shocking part. Especially the guys from Harlem that lived in Harlem. They knew more about it. Especially some of them lived near Minton's and stuff like that. So when they said, "Charlie Parker died...", you know, "Who's Charlie Parker?" And then we started

talking about it. So that was, like, a shock, senior year in high school. So when we graduated—Elonbay graduated in '54. He went to cartoonists' and illustrators' school.— I graduated in '55 and went to Hartnett School of Music. You ever heard of Hartnett?

(MG): Yeah.

(KB): Hartnett School of Music was a private music school down in the 40's.

(MN): And what were you going to music school for?

(KB): The tenor sax. And then there was learning Louvre arranging, the Schillinger system and stuff like that.

(MN): So you wanted to be a professional musician?

(KB): I wanted to. I could read the music, but I couldn't play like Bird. I couldn't improvise like Bird.

(MN): When you were in high school, were you playing any gigs?

(KB): No, not yet. The school band, the auditorium thing...

(MN): Was there a difference between the jazz guys and women and the do-wop people?

(KB): Yeah. Because were the progressive, you know, we started moving out from that. And we used to go out. Wayne Fair, who lived in the building on the corner. He had a cousin in Brooklyn—Rosaly. Was it Hargrave? Yeah it was Rosaly Hargrave that later changed. And she had a lot--she was about a year or two older than us—and she had a lot of jazz records. So Sundays, we used to go out to Brooklyn. 380 Lewis Avenue. And we'd all gather there. The community in Brooklyn, and us that came from the Bronx, and we'd be listening to these jazz records...

(MN): Did you see yourselves as a little hipper than the other kids?

(KB): Oh yeah. Jazz folks was much hipper than the do-wops.

(MN): Ok, did you dress differently? How did that difference manifest itself, other than in the music you listened.

(KB): Well, once we started listening to the music, we started going to the clubs. I remember... I think one of the first places we experienced was The Pad. Pad was 7th Avenue South. Bob Risner used to give us Sunday afternoon things. And had these guys come up from, you know, it was like a jam session like they used to have Monday night at Birdland, but it was like on Sunday afternoons. And that's where I first saw Wayne Shorter and his brother. They came out of Newark. We're talking 19...we wanted to start doing jazz concerts. So it was 1956. We got together some of the guys from Industrial Art. Myself and Elonbay went to Industrial Art. Robert Gums went to Industrial art. Frank went too. Frank Robinson went to Industrial Art.

(MN): So you were all at the same school? And you were all from the Bronx?

(KB): Right. That's where we got to know each other. We were different parts. They were up by Lyman Place, Frank and Robert. Anybody else from...

(MG): Shirley.

(KB): Ok, the guys got together. Along with Philip Mungen, who didn't go to...did he go to...no he didn't go to Industrial Art. Andy Barren. He went to Industrial Art. And we started to be more conscious about our dressing because we saw us as musicians. Some of us would start having our own suits made. One button suites and stuff like that. Ok..we had...we're talking 1956, ok? 1956 or so we got together, and Bunny Granby's apartment...Bunny and, oh goodness. It was the three Granby's---two guys and a girl.

(MN): Is this the people who eventually owned the funeral home? Granby's funeral home in the Bronx?

(KB): Now you know, I'm not sure. Robert might know more than that. 'Cause they were friends with Robert. They lived in that area, alright? I think we first met at Granby's house and we got a place right across the street there. It was down there. It was a couple of steps down. There was a beauty parlor and right down next to it there was a space that we rented. I don't think we paid any money for it. They probably let us use it. And we had a meeting there and we decided we were going to form this group.

(MN): Was this is the Bronx?

(KB): In the Bronx, yes—

(MN): What street was it on?

(KB):--Prospect Avenue, up there by Freeman Street.

(MN): So it's right around the corner from Lyman?

(KB): Yeah. So then we needed a big place so we said we would start having the place at our house. At that was about August or something. We don't know the exact date, but we used Garvey Day as the marker, so we say August 17th, loosely. We had the meeting there. That's about the same time that we started going to Harlem and ran into the African Nationals' Pioneer Movement, Carlos Crooks.

(MN): So this is all happening at the same time? Like 1956?

(KB): Yeah, '56.

(MN): Your first meeting with Carlos Crooks was '56?

(KB): First, yes. Seeing him out on the street corner, speaking about Africa and speaking about the conditions and what not.

(MN): Why do you think that touched a chord with you? This person...obviously thousands of people passed him everyday.

(KB): Right. Some people passed and “..talking that old Africa shit and all that thing,” you know. But you know, everything made sense. And it was stuff that, you know, I guess deep inside you felt and you heard some goods things about the Garvey movement that parents had talked about it. And they were Garveyites. He was keeping Garvey’s name alive.

(MN): So you had been exposed to Marcus Garvey in your family?

(KB): Yes.

(MN): From your parents and your uncle?

(KB): Not heavily, but yes, we got some knowledge of it, yeah. And when we would go to the movies...because when you went to then on Prospect Avenue-- the Prospect or the Franklin or the Lower East or the...I’m losing it. (Inaudible) I mean...

(MN): Maybe the Freeman or something?

(KB): No. But, he’d always have, like, two preachers and a newsreel, the (Inaudible) News and what not, you know. I can remember seeing...you’d see there, they were talking about...which war was that? It must have been...that was when we were real young, so it was the Second World War and what not. And you’d see “...And French troops are landing...” and you’d see this big old jumbo thing, the back...and you’d see all this black guys and...”that ain’t French, man.” That was the St. Louis, you know. All that was the St. Louis, they were using in wars, and what not. When we’d watch movies with cowboys and Indians, we would root for the Indians.

(MN): That’s interesting. So you remember as a kid rooting for the Indians?

(KB): Oh yeah.

(MN): Was that a common thing in your neighborhood, or among African-American kids?

(KB): I don't know how, but I know lots of us did, you know. So it was always somewhere there. That consciousness. What was the question from before?

(MN): So you meet Carlos Crooks. You're having these meetings. When did you decide that you're going to try to bring jazz artists to the Bronx and how did you decide on club 845 as the venue?

(KB): Ok. Prior to that, we got together and we said, we wanted to start. We wanted to start doing...the organization. The Jazz Arts Society. Now they were all guys except for...oh, Carl Anderson (inaudible)...Carl Anderson, one of the original guys. We needed to have formal meetings.

(MN): Now you were all artists?

(KB): Mostly all artists.

(MN): Graphic artists, painters...?

(KB): Yeah. And some guys, they just like to party. Getting into the jazz thing...Philip Mungen, Vincent Beezer and what not. So we decided that we were going to give this dance, but it was going to be jazz. It wasn't going to be a dance. It was going to be a jazz concert. And so we arranged to...and at that time when they had dances and things, they used to have an intermission with a floor show. A floor show was an exotic dancer or a stripper or something like that. Most of these things were. And we said, we're going to do it, but we aren't going to have that. We're going to have an African dance group. And there was a girl named Tina Carter, and they wanted to audition for us, so we went up to audition them.

(MN): When you're saying they had exotic dancers, this was at the Hunts Point Palace?

(KB): Any place you went. The Dawn Casino, The Hunt's Point or...the...you know. If a group (inaudible) thing, the end of the floor show was---

(MN): Chorus girls or strippers?

(KB): Well not chorus girls. Probably one or two...shake dancers, it was called, strippers, exotics, dancers...things like that.

(MN): So how far would they strip down to? A bikini?

(KB): Something like that. Yeah. So we went to 2404 Barnes Avenue----Tina Carter's house---where they had a finished basement too. There was a house...their parents' house. They auditioned for us, so we hired their group. And then we arranged for this, our first affair, December 24th, Christmas Eve of 1956, A Small Paradise.

(MN): So your first even was in Harlem?

(KB): Yes. And we had art shows, we had art works on the walls, down the steps. And we had Lou Donaldson and the (inaudible) Quartet. George Braith, Bobby Capers---was a young guy, like 16 or 17 years old, was playing jazz at the time---Oliver Beaner, Tina Brooks, (Inaudible)...I think Alex Lane was on base. I'm not sure.

(MN): This was in your first concert?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): Now how'd you find these guys?

(KB): By starting to go out to the places. You know, some of the jazz places, like in the Bronx---you had Freddy's Lounge. It was on Boston Road. And you had Silvia's Blue Morocco. They opened about that time, but we didn't go there a lot. That was mostly R+B. That was Sylvia from Smithy and Sylvia.

(MN): So there were more an R+B kind of place---

(KB): ---yeah, like occasionally they would have some jazz. Mathew Wilson started out there.

(MN): Right. Now Freddy's was more jazz?

(KB): Yeah, Lou Donaldson was would play up there quite a lot. And what else? There was another place...but those are the places we'd go to. 845...now prior to us starting the concerts at 845 there was a modern jazz club...a modern jazz society that used to have occasional concerts there. And that was how Eastman and (inaudible) and Beezer...we used to call him stretch, he was about 6.5, 6.6, maybe taller...I don't know...stretch...and they would give concerts. But we started, after we did the Smalls thing, because 845 was the type of the place that it was, we spoke to the manager there. His name was Joe Tucci.

(MN): His name was Joe Tucci?

(KB): Yeah. And 845 was among those groups. The Palm Café, 845, there was Palm 2 and I don't know if the Baby Grand was part of that, but you know...Italian controlled. Ok? And Joe Tucci...nice guy, you know, he was the manager there---

(MN): ---Now these other places. They were just bars? They didn't have music?

(KB): They had music too, but not jazz concerts like that, you know. Palm Café, there was British going out of Palm Café. What was it? I don't know if it was Jocko or...was it Jocko...I thought it was----

(MG): They had---

(KB): I think Symphony Sid did somethings out of there occasionally too.

(MN): The Palm Café?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): What street was that on?

(KB): 125th. 125th and 8th. Yeah. But we would, you know, go to all of the jazz shows. And when to book, to find musicians, we found out that there was a place called The Turf. It was a bar and restaurant on 49th Street and Broadway. Regular spot. Anytime, around 11:00/12:00, the musicians that were in town, jazz musicians, they would congregate there.

(MN): Right. So it was a good place to meet people.

(KB): That's where we would go and meet and we'd get introductions to those that we didn't know. Or we wanted to book the concerts, we'd say all right, we need a tenor player. Oh there's Johnny Griffin, you know. Or, we need a trumpet player. Bill Hartman, Lee Morgan or somebody, you know. Where it was at, we were always ready for a gig. Philly Joe Jones. Whoever was going to be in town on that date, we would then sign them to do this concert. And you couldn't even do some concerts without having to go and get a permit. Do you remember the permit?

(MG): Uh, huh.

(KB): OK. And of course, the musicians were supposed to have a cabaret card at the time. That was the thing. So you know, I'd always have to go down, and if it was a dance or a thing, go get a permit...to do this thing. And then the club owners were supposed to look and make sure you had a permit before you can. You had to pay a nominal fee for that. I guess that was how they tracked the money too, so you had to pay taxes on that.

(MN): Uh, huh.

(KB): So anyhow, we would put...these Sunday afternoon jazz concerts and what not. They were pretty well attended. Very good attendance.

(MN): Hm, Hmmm. How—

(KB): --That time, I remember it was that same spring. I had gone to school for advertising art. And one of those fellows that was a year behind me, David Giddens came. And he came, this was 1957, and he shot some pictures. He used a camera...(inaudible)...no flash! So alright, next week he came back and had these pictures. George Braith, Albert Beaner, Tina, I think we even had...oh, what was his name? Saxophone...trumpet player that was very popular, but he was from the be-bop days-

(MG): --Little Benny?

(KB): Who?

(MG): Benny Harris?

(KB): No. Oh goodness, I'll think of it. Anyhow, so he brought back these pictures and I said "Man, I like these!" They were grainy and what not. It was super double x film. This was before tri-ex or anything like that. So I had gotten a camera for graduation, but it was August of '75 was when...fixed focus....Fox got cameras—

(MN): --Right.

(KB): Where you plugged the flash into and then you put a number five flash bulb in there, and you had to use flash, or you were out in the sunlight, you know. And it wasn't adjustable settings. It was not something that I could take in the clubs with...it didn't have adjustable settings or something like that. So my uncle, (Clyde), who used to work in a factory, had been involved in an accident, in a press. He was cut—these four fingers

off, on his right hand. So part of his therapy...he was taking a correspondence course at New York institute of photography, where he had some books and equipment. And at that time what they were developing was Supta (??) film. You know, you had to be in the dark. Well anyhow, I started reading some of these books. He started giving me some tips and he had a camera with adjustable settings. It wasn't a single lens reflex, which I needed, but it was (inaudible) flat, (inaudible) that opened up and then you had adjustable settings, so I could use that and learn how to gauge the exposures and stuff like that. So I started taking pictures, but then I had to try and get something by 1958, was when I got that thing. Now, I started in '57, I was going to Baruch. I had gone back to the school to see Robert, Robert Gums who was still there--that was his senior year. He was still in class, so I had some time to kill, so I had gone back. I went up to the office to look at my records, 'cause you know, when in '55--when I was about to graduate--my mother wanted me to go to City College, you know. I had gotten good grades most of the time, you know. 85 students. And my homeroom teacher, Mrs. Abrams, was also my math teacher. My senior year I was getting 80's, 80's, 85 and what not. And I wanted to bring up my grades, so I said "I can do better than that." And at some point in that senior year-- in the final term of senior year—she got...she was out. I don't know what happened to her, but she was out. And we had a substitute teacher. We had four tests during that period. I'd gotten two 100's, a 98 and a 95. So at that mid-term point, I that I got a 95, as opposed to an 85, on my mid-term report card. And Mrs. Abrams came back. And when she came, and in the final thing I'd still got good marks on there, when I saw my final report card it was 85...it was back down to 85, you know. So this was just before the graduation rehearsal. I can remember some of us were up on the balcony there. You

were supposed to come down and the music was playing. And then I saw Mrs. Abrams and I asked her about, you know, how come I'd gotten two 100's and a 98 and a 95...how come my final grade was 85. And she says that's a good enough mark for...to get—

(MG): UH, huh.

(KB): And I had liked her, all the time, you know. I don't know what had happened, why she was out, but when she came back it was a different person. That hurt. I felt... I mean, I was sorry...but all I could hear was that music playing. So I said nothing. You know I'm thinking about having to get left back in (inaudible). So I just...I grinned and beared it. And just continued with the rehearsal for graduation. But that was the first time that I really felt any racism from teachers in the school. So now, fast forward back to '57. So I got this...Oh...so I went to the SIA and I'm waiting around until Robert had a break. I went up to the office and I look at my records and I saw that my grades were good enough that I could have been in City College for two years now. So I then enrolled in Baruch—at night school, because right now I'm very active. I had a little job. I forget where I was working then. I had a little job so I didn't want to leave there so I went to school at night...at Baruch. I was studying business administration. And...let's see. I bought a Yashika camera. I remember the (Haussleblau??? inaudible) was the camera of the day. It was 600 dollars. Big price. And I said, well maybe if I pinch and got help from my parents--from my father rather, because my mother didn't work—that I could get this. I said, should I get this Yashika...this twin lens reflex? Or should I get this single lens reflex, which was much more expensive. It was the (Haussleblau inaudible), which was like the state of the art camera then. I looked at the filter for the

Yashika---I think it was like \$2.80, or something like that. And I looked in the other case there and I saw the filter for the (Haussleblau??) was \$25. I says, "OK." I made my decision right there.

(MG): Uh, huh.

(KB): I said I might get the camera and then camera then anything I need for it is going to be way out of line. So I got the twin lens reflex—the Yashika—and I started taking shots then. And I started working with The Reporter, the newspaper at Baruch. And as a matter of fact, I was doing pictures for the reporter and the year I was voted as photo editor—I think that was '59—I didn't continue.

(MG): Can we stop for a minute because I want to_

__Break in Recording__

(MG): As I was saying...wanted to continue the conversation about The Jazz Arts Society and jazz in the Bronx. Listening to what you were saying, and when you started having those dances in the basement on Kelly Street, did you charge?

(KB): Well...they were mostly parties.

(MG): Parties? So you didn't charge anybody for the party?

(KB): No, we didn't start charging anything until we started doing, like, the things at Small's Paradise.

(MG): That was the beginning?

(KB): Yeah.

(MG): 'Cause there's something about you and your brother, very clever, about, going...you know the idea that you went downtown, you went to 49th Street, you talked

to the musicians and that they trusted you enough to come, on a Sunday, between 4 and 6.
They didn't know you and how old were you?

(KB): Shoot. 18, let's see '57?

(MG): And Elombay's a year older, right?

(KB): So we were 19. 19, well, '57 yeah. So I was 19. Elombay was 20. I was born in '38.

(MG): So what do you think it was about you that made them want to come to Bronx to play Club 845 on a Sunday?

(KB): Hey, you got to make the gigs, you know?

(MG): Uh, huh.

(KB): We promised to them, you know. So we was there and we'd pay them.

Sometimes we'd come up short and we'd pay them what we had and dig it up and meet him and pay 'em the (inaudible). But we, you know, we'd always see that, you know, we'd make a deal. I forget what it was. I know leader was double. That was thing in the band. Sometimes they would...there was skill, what was skill from the union and what not.

(MG): Did you have to have a union contract?

(KB): There were times that we did have a union contract, but basically no.

(MG): And nothing ever came up about Cabaret cards, did it?

(KB): No, nobody ever came to check on that. But, we would get our permits. We used to have to go do--I forget where it was--it was way downtown, to get a permit. Which we had to pay for, to do, whether it was a dance or a concert and what not...and of course

they had to have, their cabaret cards, but I don't remember us asking anybody at any time ourselves. You just had to have it in case that the union guy came around.

(MG): Uh, huh. But the union guy never came to Club 845 that you recall?

(KB): There, yes, see I was—

(MG): --But the delegate would come?

(KB): Oh yeah. I remember the guy. I don't remember his name now. He was a black guy that used to come to us and handle all this. It was a short guy. I don't who remembers now.

(MG): Uh-hum.

(KB): But, it was close-cut or a bald head. And he used to come, you know, gives them a little hell sometimes. But he never stopped anybody from playing, so I don't know what happened then. But, yeah, the union delegate would come.

(MG): Because they would have to pay a fee. They would have to pay a little tax on that gig.

(KB): Yeah, yeah. We did things by the book.

(MG): We did things by the book. I remember one time we were there and I told you this story one time before. And Monk came up. I forget who was playing. And you know, this is our little Monk story. He came to us and he said, "come here." We were inside Club 845. Now 845 is...you could say it's L-shaped, where the entry's on Prospect and the back door here is on 160th Street. And there were stores between there and the corner.

(MN): Oh, so they had another entrance on 160th—

(KB): --It's not an entrance. It was the back of the place, but it—

(MG): --It was the back room.

(KB): It was the back of the...the concert hall was, like, here. The stage is here and the people face here and it was like an elevator so—

(MN): --And the bar's up front.

(KB): And the bar is here.

(MN): Wow!

(KB): It's how you come in and you go through the...there was a separation, where there were people using the bar.

(MN): Got it.

(KB): So Monk took us out, walked us around the back, to the back of there. You could here the music playing and he said, "That's good." And that was it. So that was, you know, he took us all the way around there to just tell us that, to say that. So that was our little Monk story. (Inaudible) Thelonius Monk!

(MG): Did you know that that Monk used to be in the Bronx, on Lyman Place?

(KB): I did know. And used to hear, but I didn't know where he was.

(MG): You used to hear about that right?

(KB): Yeah, used to hear that.

(MG): Did you promote the talent from the Bronx? Did you have particular Bronx guys?

(KB): Most of the guys I got. Bobby Capers, George Braith and those guys. They had lived in the Bronx at the time. That's where we started. That's where got to know the guys. But once we started, we started going out because, you know, the people would hear what you're doing. We started getting to know the top names at the time.

(MG): Now Bob Gums said that your graphic artwork on your posters was really, like--

(KB): It was revolutionary at the time.

(MN): Yeah. Do you have any copies of those posters?

(KB): We have some copies. We're trying to get together on this now because next year is our 50th anniversary. Right and we're to get things together. Chris was spearheading that. Chris Hall.

(MG): Oh, he was?

(KB): Yeah, he was, kept on asking, "When are we getting together?" And maybe he knew something too. He died yesterday.

(MN): Oh, God!

(KB): At quarter to three.

(MN): 'Cause if you want to, like...if you want to host one example of this, we have a website you can put stuff on as a way of advertising what you're doing.

(KB): Oh yeah, we're going to do that. We're going to have a big thing. Matter of fact, we talked about doing things, but (inaudible)...In '57 also, in the summer, we wanted to have something that wasn't enclosed like, you know, 845. There was a place on 225th Street, East 225th, called International Park Games.

(MN): That's what Bob gums mentioned.

(KB): Yeah. And it was a bar, but it had a big backyard with a gazebo out in back. So we did a thing called "Jazz and Barbeque: Pick a Rib and Dig a Riff."

(MN): "Pick a Rib and Dig a Riff!"

(MG): I think it's time to do it again.

(MN): I think it's time to do another one.

(KB): Exactly! And that's what we said we're trying to do. I don't know any places like that, so we're thinking about maybe getting a grant and doing the outdoor picnic thing free. You know, people come and barbeque. I don't know if you could do this—

(MN): --Might be at (inaudible)—

(KB): Hey, that might be. I was thinking about Crotona Park, which was like a center there and that's where they have that Brownstone and—

(MN):--We also know...we've worked with the park administrators, so you might want to work with us on this.

(KB): Yeah. So if we could get a grant so that we could hire the musicians and do the promotions and do all the things then, that's one of the things that I want to do for next year.

(MG): And I know that the first gig you ever did, you had Lou Donaldson. So it would be very nice to have Lou Donaldson again.

(KB): Well—

(MG): --Didn't you work with Pucho?

(KB): Oh yeah. Well, I said there's several things we'd like to do during that 50th anniversary year. Now the first thing that we did was that December 24th, that Christmas Eve, in '56. I want to do a Christmas Eve 2006, too. And Lewis too, a plan. We'll see if we can get Lou. Bill English...I had run into him. He's up there on 138th Street. I've run into him several times up in the mornings at the McDonald's over there. I'm going to try and catch up to him. And see if he's still...I know he's still playing, but I don't know if he's doing any lives gig. Tell him to get himself together, you know. George Braith is still around. Bobby Capers is dead. Pete Larocca...you're in touch with him. I believe--

(MG): Pucho, right?

(KB): Pucho we did for several gigs and what not. I will try and see if we can get as many as are still living for that concert. Then for the Pick a Rib and Dig a Rib: Jazz and Barbeque, I want to see who again, now most of the present people are gone. Cannonball was on that. He's gone. Philly Joe. He's gone. Paul chambers. He's gone. Curtis Fuller's still around. Hank Mogely was on there.

(MG): How successful was it when you did it?

(KB): Oh, man! That was a jam! Yeah, Miles came up. Miles and Francis. Matter of fact, I saw Francis the night before that. Francis...Francis Taylor, who he was married to. When I was shooting the Ailey, Alvin Ailey (spelling?) ...the gala the other night. I was sitting, waiting for people to come in there and I here this guy talking about, "Francis Taylor coming, you know I have to see her right now." So I turn around and say, "You mean Francis Taylor?" He says "Yeah," he says, "You know her?" And I says, "I wouldn't have recognized her when you come." Of course this is like 50 years later... '49, '48. And he said—

(MG): --She's on the cover of Someday My Prince Will...no, no that's Sicily. She's on something.

(KB): Sicily...I don't think that was Francis on it, but Francis was a dancer. Yeah, you think she was on one of them?

(MG): Yeah, she's on one of the covers. Yeah, I think...Anyway, she was married to Miles.

(KB): Yeah. So I ran into her, I met her, and we talked...called one night. Went by the house there---881 10th Avenue there. I forget which son it is, that...she mentioned his

name. I got pictures of him and Miles in the house and her. He had on his cowboy outfit. He was about four or five years old and what not, and I was talking to her about that. But anyhow, yeah, so I ran into Francis Taylor at this address last Thursday.

(MG): When you guys decided to begin this jazz arts society, and you started meeting in the basement of the house on Kelly Street, could I have the names of the members?

(KB): It was Elombay, myself, Robert Gums, Philip Mungen, Andy Barren, Bernard McEwen, Frank Adou—I'm not sure if Frank was in the service then, but he was considered an original member because it was within months, or something like that.

(MN): We spoke to somebody named Shirley Daley, who said she got involved as a secretary?

(KB): Yeah. So we got together and we had gatherings straight over there. So all these guys would get together and...Oh yes, Carl Anderson. Carl Anderson—you know, we were saying that we needed to get some records—Carl says, “my sister’s a court stenographer---Shirley.” So Shirley Anderson, now she was a couple of years older than us. We wanted to form this...formally. Also in order to form the organization, formally--it wasn't a corporation, but still had the paperwork of a company---Jazz Arts Society. At least one person had to be 21 years old.

(MG): Oh.

(KB): And she was 21, all right? So she was one of the people that was the...founding officers when we went to officialize it, you know get it..with the city. I had run into her some years back, my 80 thin years back, but I hadn't been in touch with her.

--Examines Picture--

(MG): Which one was that? Uh huh, and where's this from this picture? PS what?
What does it say?

(MN): I think it's 54.

(KB): Prospect Junior High School.

(MN): No, it's Junior High School 40?

(KB): That was Prospect? Junior High School 40? I never knew the name of it. We
knew 40, we knew 60, we knew 52.

(MG): So was she the only girl in the group?

(KB): Isn't it something, yeah?

(MG): That's great.

(KB): Mostly white guys and black girls in this picture here. Well, for the most part,
yeah.

(MG): Yeah, and many more girls.

(KB): Yeah.

(MG): So you had this idea to have more or less a formal organization, because you had
paperwork and everything. Was it formed to promote jazz or to do other things too in the
visual arts?

(KB): Well, really to promote jazz and jazz artists and artists, period.

(MG): Artists, period. In the Bronx?

(KB): Well, it didn't state that. No, no.

(MG): But then, what was the reason that you started doing jazz at Club 845 on the
Sundays?

(KB): Because that was available.

(MG): It was available.

(KB): And at that time, especially...The Bronx...there was a lot of jazz bands in the Bronx and those were the people that we would come into contact with. I'm sure there were some in Harlem, but that wasn't our crowd. We didn't know that.

(MN): Would it be fair to say that the Bronx had almost become like a suburb of Harlem? Were there a lot of families from Harlem—you know, upwardly mobile families, who had moved out to get better housing and better schools?

(KB): Yeah, because they had private housing instead of tenements. You see? And the thing is that they call it the “boogie-down Bronx” now, but we called it the “be-bop Bronx,” you know. ‘Cause that jazz then. The be-bop Bronx.

(MN): Really? The be-bop Bronx.

(MG): Where could you hear jazz in the Bronx, other than the ones we know of? I mean, we hear about Club 845 and we hear about Goodson's, Freddie's, and what--?

(KB): ---(inaudible) attended dance halls. As opposed to clubs. There were a couple of other clubs, but there were not ones that we frequented. There was a Boss (inaudible) Ballroom, which we didn't go to that much, but they would occasionally have the same type of mixing, dances and stuff like that.

(MG): Do you recall the first live group that you heard in the Bronx? I know you heard Max and Clifford Brown downtown. Do you remember what you heard?

(KB): Well, we brought them up to the Bronx. That's what we heard.

(MG): Before that.

(KB): I'm just trying to think. Modern Jazz Quartet, what...Modern Jazz Society...what concerts that they had done that we attended or I attended. I just can't recall. I know

they had MJQ up there at one time. Modern Jazz Quartet was at the Modern Jazz Society.

(MN): And what theater would be...that?

(KB): That was the 845.

(MN): That was the 845? They had Modern Jazz Quartet there?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): Now what about—a couple of other places—McKinley Ballroom?

(KB): I'd heard of McKinley Ballroom, but it was not a place that I remember going to.

(MN): There was something...we saw ads in the '40's for a place called Murrain's.

(MG): Oh yeah. M-u-r-r-a-i-n. No--

(MN): --No.

(MG): Ok.

(KB): In the Bronx?

(MN): Yeah.

(MG): And what about for Latin bands? Would you go just to hear Latin music?

(KB): Oh yeah. We used to mambo.

(MG): Where would you go?

(KB): Well, it was basically the same kind of place, 'cause those are the ballrooms.

(MN): Did you ever go to The Tropicana, on Westchester Avenue?

(KB): No, not I. Tropicana?

(MG): So what year's did you do the...did you do every Sunday, Club 845 for a certain period? What would be that period?

(KB): Oh boy. Mostly I think, spring through...I don't recall, really. I know throughout the summer. And we might not have done it during the winter. I just don't recall.

(MG): But it's a couple of years that you were doing it, right?

(KB): Oh yeah. From '57 to about, I guess '61, '60, or so that we did that.

(MG): When did you move to 125th Street?

(KB): October, 1st 1961.

(MG): Is that we you changed the named of the organization?

(KB): Yes, officially. We had been... 'cause we started doing some things with some Latin groups and African...affairs also and at the time we were doing the 845 thing, so some things would say jazz on society and other things would say African jazz on society.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

(KB): --(cut-off) the 18th annual Marcus Garvey Day celebration. No, it was not the 18th annual Marcus Garvey celebration, it was—that started in 1941—it was '43, so it was the 20th annual Marcus Garvey celebration. But the 18th annual Ms. Natural Standard of Beauty contest, something that they caused to (inaudible) in 1943. Every Garvey day they would have this contest to select a woman that would be crowned Ms. Natural Standard of Beauty, and they could not wear any straightening in their hair or any make-up. It was natural. That year Clara Lewis, who was a Harlem resident—I think she was from South Carolina, very beautiful, black, really jet black and beautiful—she won the contest. And Elonbay said...oh before that! She won the contest. Now, the girls that competed, their hair was natural, but they didn't wear their hair naturally, normally. The members of the organization would select girls and convince them and convince them to

wash their hair out for this contest and not wear any make-up and compete. And they also had to answer some questions, you know, on African history or things that were really racially based answers...to test their racial awareness. The contest would be held on August 17th. It was a Tuesday or a Thursday or whatever day of the week it is— Marcus Garvey's birthday—that's when they celebrated it. So now the hundred dollar prize, which was a big prize in that day, they would get on the Sunday night meeting after Garvey Day. All right? The first Sunday after Garvey Day. That's when they would come and they'd get their prize. By that time, their hair was straightened again. It was because they were going back to school or work and what not, and they didn't feel comfortable wearing their hair naturally. It was only because the members had asked them to do it. So Elonbay said, "We got to do something to make them feel comfortable wearing their hair up natural." And what we did is we got together and we started and got Clara Lewis and then we got Black Rose, who was wearing their hair naturally—very few people who were actually wearing their hair natural...couple of people in African dance groups, but most of them in African dance groups did not. Helene White, Priscilla Bartonele, Mary Toussaint, Marty Toussaint—sings now. I don't know if you know Marty.

(MG): Uh, huh.

(KB): Esther Davenport...Beatrice, was it Gra...she had a sister...I trying to remember which. I think it was every...I think it was six. Six or eight... I might be missing some two people. But anyhow, Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln, who we had run into and Abbey was wearing her hair natural, they were very interested in what we were doing. So Abbey agreed to be a star attraction. A singer and commentate the show. And Max

Roach would play piano behind her to accompany her. We had been doing fashion shows since 1958. Not as jazz, but with Lou Borders. Lou Borders—he had a clothing shop on 116th Street. And he used to do fashion shows. And it was Lou Borders—he said he'd do some shows---and the Continental Male Models. And one of the models was a friend of ours, who used to hold, co-sponsor—when I co-sponsor, it was because he was very popular—you know, not put up money, but his name would also appear as a promoter of the jazz shows in Club 845 on some of them. Jimmy Abu. Jimmy Abu was a fight trainer, he was a drummer and he was a male model.

(MG): How do you spell his last name?

(KB): A-b-u. It's actually James Williams, all right? Jimmy Abu. He was jet black. Proud...he used to wear his clothes...and at that time, in the fashion shows, you would not get black males selected as models, all right? If they weren't light, like the popular guys at the time...Thomas Harold, who later on became an actor and was theatrical. But Jimmy Abu could train a train a girl. If she came in there walking on her ankles, in a half hour he'd have her modeling gracefully. So he used to be the choreographer of all the shows, even though in most of the shows...they had all light-skinned girls and what not. They used to have to come and get Jimmy Abu. So of course, they had to put him in the show too, and he would wear this scummy—I mean he would wear suits and everything—but he also had some African wear, whether it's Toma, like a Kinte cloth wrap, or something like that, or some other African wear. So he, like, pioneered that. And he would have some other male models wear it too. So Jimmy Abu...and we used to model in some of the shows also---Elombay and I. We decided we were going to do..Oh, Pucho used to play for a lot of those shows and we had him up, not for a dance,

but as a jazz man at Club 845. Pucho now was the house band at the Purple Manor, which was on East 125th Street. And he would be there every Sunday, but he would bring in different attractions, different things, every Sunday to, you know, keep it fresh. So he had asked Elombay, “Why don’t we do a show up there?” You know that we deal with fashion shows and stuff like that. And he says, “Well, why don’t you do a lingerie show?” Doing lingerie... ’cause Pucho was like that, you know?

(MG): Hmmm-hum.

(KB): So Elombay said, “Yeah, we’ll do a show, but it’s not going to be a lingerie show, all right?” And we started getting these girls together, wearing their hair natural and wearing African attire, as well as European fashion with an Afro centric flair. It could be a gown with red, black and green, but mostly on an African motif. So we put together the first show, called “Naturally ’62: The Original African Coiffure and Fashion Extravaganza. Designed to Restore Our Racial Pride and Standards.” That was the subtitle, all right? So it was “Naturally ’62.” And every show it ’62 would be Naturally ’62, then it would be Naturally ’63, and it would carry that name and what not, so we had different versions.

(MG): How long did you do it?

(KB): We did it on a regular basis to either ’78 or ’79.

(MG): Oh, wow.

(KB): And then we did an ’82 show, a ’92 and a 2002. So it’ll be like, 10th Anniversary when we do that.

(MG): I was talking to Danny Dawson about the black arts program. About Rockwell, Larry Neil (names inaudible) and everybody. He said that when they started up, they thought that they were first. They were, like, wait a minute—

(KB): --They didn't think they were first. They came to Harlem because there was a black arts movement there. What we had done. We had started in '56.

(MG): Right.

(KB): And then...what we started doing at that time—'55, '56—when you went and saw a poster, it was these big, block letters, you know and what not. They might have a lobby shot of the musicians there, but it was...no design. It was just this big, block thing, including Apollo and everything else. So our people were graphics people. So we started designing our own posters and instead of getting a letter press, we would go and have them printed off-set. So we had the flexibility to design and everything else. There was a black printer that had color-tone greeting cards, up in Mount Vernon. Boone Press. Ed Boone. And he became our printer.

(MG): Did Jazz Mobile use him?

(KB): I don't know, but—

(MG): --Jazz mobile had a black printer also, 'cause I remember going there.

(KB): --Where? That was in Manhattan?

(MG): Maybe he was on the west side of Manhattan.

(KB): Oh, no. You're talking about 20th Century.

(MG): Yeah, exactly.

(KB): So we started doing graphic design. And our flyers were not like a sheet of 8 and ½ by 11 sheet of paper. They were like a fold, 11 by 17, folds of four pages. So not only

would we have pictures and designs on the cover, but we would have, you know, writing in this thing, talking about what we were doing and talking about it there. Promoting it and talking about the people and what not. So it was more like a program---the flyer that we would give out. But it was very well designed. Sometimes it was in color—not the photographs in color. The photographs were in black and white. But basically we were using red, black and greens—

(MG): --When they came uptown—Black Arts Movement—did they come to you?

(KB): No, they didn't come to me.

(MG): For any kind of direction or..?

(KB): No, no, no.

(MG): Was there any kind of tension?

(KB): Well, yes. When they came up, there wasn't tension between us. We had set the tone so that...a black thing, you know, that when Leroy Jones—because that's what he was called at the time—came out of the Village.

(MG): Yeah, Lower East Side.

(KB): He came and he had his white wife and he saw a lot of white girls. And the black women in Harlem ran him out, not us. They ran him out and that's when he went out to--

(MG): --To Newark?

(KB): To Newark, yeah. But, there was a black arts movement there. They, I believe, started in '65 or something like that.

(MG): What about now? When you see him do you ever—

(KB): --Oh no, we're good friends. We're good friends. As a matter of fact—

(MG): --Is he involved at all in the Jazz Arts Society or African Jazz Arts Society?

(KB): No, he wasn't.

(MG): Do you remember him doing anything with you all?

(KB): No, I don't recall that. But I do know—

(MG): --Because you remember he did the poetry and jazz thing.

(KB): Yeah. And we would have poetry during—

(MG): --Oh, you did? Who did you have?

(KB): Oh, well we would use poetry, but not...some original poetry, but mostly we used like Garvey's poems, Dunbar and what not. We had formed a jazz repertory theater company, which had become the (inaudible). And that was from the very first show, where we had Frank Adou, David Ward, Gus Williams, Ernest Baxter.

(MG): On the same show as the jazz groups?

(KB): Yeah, see when we did our shows, we had the models and our thing was unity. So it wasn't like the runway shows where everybody comes out one at a time. The models came out together. Did a routine that Jimmy Abu had...you know, that they did together...that was in unison. And then they would model individually...come out and model individually. So they were all changing at the same time. So in between we would have these skits—satirical skits. That the Ages Repertory Theater Company would do.

(MG): Wow.

(KB): See. It could be solo, poetry thing. It could be a skit, like for instance one thing called "Fantasy in a Barber Shop." At the time, black men were going out, Sugar Ray's to the (inaudible), getting their hair combed and all that. So we went and did a satire on that and it was pantomime. Because we were doing, like, a large place, because by then

we were getting the large enough ballrooms. I have to talk about how we got to that stage, up 'till then. Fantasy in a Barbershop is about a guy going to the barbershop. And he goes and he's, you know, indicating in pantomime, that he wanted his waves in there. Right? So the barber would come in and he would big up this big, blue jar, where everybody knew that was the j-bar, and the thing was just lye, you know.

(MG): Huh, hum.

(KB): So then he goes "put it in." So then he goes and gets these rubber gloves and puts them on his hands, before he puts his hands in there, and this is all pantomime. And he snaps it in the guy...and you know all that kind of thing. People are howling, you know, because they know what they're talking about. By the time they finish, we had by that time slipped the mask on him, a white mask—you know it could have been Nixon or somebody like that—and a wig and they'd come out there and so, you know, that would be like one of the things. We would have poetry by Garvey, If We Must Die, by you know—

(MG): --And what about Langston also?

(KB): Langston Hughes...oh yeah. We'd use anything that was positive and there would be Gus Williams...Garvey's Black Woman was our opening always. And it was usually done by Gus Williams until he left the group and then Frank Adou and what not.

(MG): What did older Garveyites think?

(KB): Oh yes, they used to come and—

(MG): --They supported you too?

(KB): Listen, what we had was a mix of ages that came to that show. Not kids and what not, but, you know, a mix of ages. We had certain people that...they used to compete to

sell more tickets. We had people like Bobby Lafore, he was a Bronxite. He had a lot of people and friends. He would have a table of twenty people, thirty people. John Greenwich out of Brooklyn. He would be maybe the same. Kenny, oh goodness...I see his face. I remember, I'm going to have to give it to you because it is important. Kenny, he's passed now. He was a school teacher. He would, you know, also be a big ticket seller and what not. And he was out of the Bronx and he was friends the guys from the Modern Jazz Society, so he had been involved from the beginning. And there were just people...I mean one time...one girl. This was at Rockland Palace, when Rockland Palace was a big place. What we used to do, even though it held four thousand people—that's if you had the dance floor on the floor—we'd have banquet tables lining the dance floor. I don't know if you know Rockland Palace Arts Center?

(MG): Uh-huh.

(KB): Well, it's a long place. It had a balcony.

(MG): Where is it?

(KB): It was 155th Street and 8th Avenue.

(MG): Autobahn, I know.

(KB): Yeah. You could order a table for four, six, eight, you know, like that. And if you wanted your group to sit together, we would put it together. We had a table of 107 people.

(MG): Wow.

(KB): Yeah. But anyhow, we would—

(MG): --You were making money!

(KB): At the time, we would do maybe two or three shows a year, and that would maybe be able to pay the rent for the studio, you know, until we get—

(MG): --What was the address of the studio?

(KB): 243 West 125th Street, right next to the Apollo.

(MG): And the landlord was Shiftman?

(KB): Shiftman was the landlord in the beginning until he sold the building to Rodeo management. And we were there from October 1, 1961 until spring of 2001 or 2.

(MG): Wow! That's a long time. Do you remember how much the rent was?

(KB): When we started, the rent was a hundred dollars a month. When we ended it was eight hundred a month. But when we really ended there, we weren't using it for the last...property. We were using it for storage and what not.

(MG): It's too much for storage.

(KB): Yeah, I know. And I think after 19...maybe '97 because we were using it for the African Liberation Support Committee, we were using it for panels...If you're talking about the '60's, the Liberations Club...that was the key.

(MG): That's when Leoma really made his move to be in the African Liberation Movement, right?

(KB): Yeah. He was not speaking, he was becoming an expert.

(MG): Yeah, he is one of group experts.

(KB): We would, you know, start traveling. Since '68 when we made our first trip to Africa. We went to nine countries and what not.

(MG): Does the big brother, like, take the lead or is it just kind of like he—

(KB): --From the beginning he was the leader and spokesperson.

(MG): But, for you also?

(KB): I was the one that got the work done. I was the one behind—

(MG): --He's the one with the big ideas, and you...make it happen?

(KB): Yeah. The spokesman, he could remember everything...he knew all...they called him the walking encyclopedia. I was the one that--

(MG): --Do the work?

(KB): Yeah, that had to get things to the press—I was chief of publicity. My thing was photography and the writing. I was always contributing to newspapers and what not.

(MG): And he's with the big ideas and the—

(KB): --Yeah and he would write. He would either write like things, like the brochures and what not. .he was, like, heavy stuff. And then I would disseminate some of that stuff or I would create some other things—

(MG): --Why do you think, you know...I wanted to ask you about this jazz thing—

(KB): --As well as work with the models and the shows.

(MG): And the producing. You're more the producer, right?

(KB): Yeah.

(MG): In terms of the details, of like, when you had the Sundays, getting the band there.

What time and all that...would that be you?

(KB): Yeah. That would be me.

(MG): That'd be you. Because I know somebody has to be producer to keep this going. You could do it once or twice, but if it falls apart and the people don't get paid and things aren't right, they don't come back. So I know it must have been very together.

(KB): Oh yeah.

(MG): You know, I wanted to ask you. What do you think, this early interesting jazz, and then having, like, your boys who would go downtown, listen to jazz and became, like hipper...because we know how we are jazz fans. We think we're hipper than everybody...and we are.

(KB): And we are.

(MG): How do you think that early interest in jazz combined with the political and cultural activity later? You see some way that works together?

(KB): Yeah. It worked together very well. It was a special niche too, because some of the jazz artists were not in the same mode...because they were more, like, you know—especially the one's that had went to Europe and what not—our thing was a black thing. They stayed away from that because their thing was working for them. More integrated. More so than what was happening in the country here. So they did not...I mean they would listen, but their thing was not what we were doing.

(MG): But they didn't oppose it?

(KB): No.

(MG): I never heard of any jazz musician who—

(KB): --They were friends and—

(MG): What I think is just the fact that you are a jazz musician is already something political. Because, you already starting with the idea of a black man being an artist in America...that's already a political stand, right?

(KB): Our whole thing in the beginning was to help promote black jazz artists because most of the other guys...jazz artists and what we used to call watered-down jazz, was making all the money. Even though the black jazz artist was...the name...everybody

knew him and their just creators and what not...they weren't getting as much as the white guys that was just coming along. So from the beginning one of our things was to promote those jazz artists, you know. There was a thing that Max was trying to do at one time—he just couldn't get the guys to go along—and that was for the guys to get together and get their own club—say like, in New York—and book each other in there a certain amount of weeks a year and book other artists in there. And then do the same thing as Philadelphia and then do the same thing in Washington, and all the places where there's a lot of black folks. And they could be booking themselves in their own clubs, instead of having to settle for the prices that the clubs wanted to give them and the conditions that they had...the kind of the back stage, you know the dressing room stuff and all like that. By then they would have their own clubs and they could just rotate and just play their own clubs and making their own money! Just have a manager handling it!

(MG): Like now there's this kind of nostalgia. You know, I went to an event—It's called Lost Jazz Shrines—downtown. So they were honoring the Village Gate. And so they made it about who played there and Simone and you know, how great, and you know Randy Weston played and I was like, "Excuse me, did you ever go backstage in that hellhole?" You know when I spoke to the man, it's Willard Jenkins, who does this series, I said, "You know, I'd like you to do Club 845." As part of this...and he was like, "Huh...Where?" Which is another discussion I wanted to have with you because this idea of jazz shrine, but also this idea of young black men promoting black jazz groups in the Bronx, in this time, is very interesting. It's very unusual. I think, although it may be happening in Chicago, Detroit and we don't know. You know, ACM and all like that, but it's much later. I think later. Mark, I could just tell you what I saying to Kwame is...the

people I know who come in the 60's into black arts—with Barocco, Larry Neal, Danny and the other people we know who are like ten years behind them—they said when they got to Harlem, they were like, “Oh yeah, they need us, we here” and then “we're like wait a minute. They've been here for ten years doing this.” Right? But when you read about it, you don't hear so much about this African jazz. You know, people know about it locally but outside—

(KB): And they were doing some good things, now!

(MG): Oh yeah.

(KB): They were the black arts movement. You know, Larry Neal and Barocco...they were doing some great things. And they did some things... the new Lafayette Theater they were doing some of them. Ed Burns on that. Good theater. It was good theater too. They were more theater and poetry than they are graphic art, 'cause I would say after us, the Twentieth Century art creators—which turned into the way you see (inaudible)—they were the ones that were doing the art, and just visual art.

(MG): What was the group that Bearden had where the artist's all worked together?

(KB): Well, that was probably spiral.

(MG): Spiral, yeah. That was is the '50's also.

(KB): I think so. I think it was '57 and what not. Spiral was Romeo Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, Ernie Critchler and Emma Amos (the only female in the group) and several other artists and what not.

(MG): They have a connection to jazz too?

(KB): Oh yeah. They was big to jazz. Romeo was you know..his thing was—

(MG): --When they moved from the Bronx to 125th Street where they had studios, the same building as Romeo Bearden's studio—

(KB): They would have already left before we got there. It was the same building. I was talking to the super just the night before last after I saw him. No, that was yesterday morning, or the day before yesterday...Anyhow, I was trying to identify--which he didn't know because he wasn't so—which space there was Bearden and—

(MG): Third Floor.

(KB): It was the third floor? Then it was up on our floor because that's when we had two flights up. It was the third floor.

(MG): Above the video store now?

(KB): Um-humm.

(MG): Was there a video store?

(KB): Above the video store?

(MG): Yeah. Bearden.

(KB): Have you ever been to the place?

(MG): Yeah, I've been to the video store. All the time when—

(KB): No, when they were there.

(MG): No. But I know it's that building.

(KB): We're above the video store.

(MG): Oh. Well then you all must have the same space.

(KB): That's what I'm saying.

(MG): Oh.

(KB): And we had from the front right on to the banner. Straight on there. It's about four hundred square feet. So I'm thinking it was down on the second floor, which...or at the top of the stairs...oh...well, say hey! Maybe that's what it rubbed off.

(MG): Let me ask you something about Oliver Beaner and Tina Brooks. They always are identified as being from the Bronx? They lived in the Bronx?

(KB): I'm not sure.

(MG): And worked in the Bronx?

(KB): I know that they—

(MG): --I'll find out.

(KB) --that was their discovery. These were the new young guys—

(MG): --From the Bronx?

(KB): Yeah. And their thing...their base was the Bronx. I believe they lived in the Bronx. Robert might be able to tell you better.

(MN): I think they do.

(MG): They lived and worked!

(KB): Right.

(MG): When they came downtown, you people would say "Oh, they're from the Bronx."

(KB): Yeah, I'm sure of that. I'm sure of that.

(MN): The Marshalls said that they knew Oliver Beaner. They were the people that we interviewed—the Marshalls, who came from Franklin Avenue.

(KB): I'm pretty sure that they both lived there.

(MN): Now, they were also involved in drugs.

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): You all seem to have been fairly clean cut guys. How did you deal with the drug issue with the musicians.

(KB): Hey man, that was their thing. We stayed away from that. And all of our members. Not a thing that we just decided to do. It was just, that's how we—

(MG): None of them got into drugs?

(KB): None of that. Maybe... I didn't mention David and I thing...no I'm not sure it was that...no, but I would say none. And we knew what guys were doing and we never condemned them. That was the thing. You would have to just wipe up jazz entirely if you did that.

(MG): And Leoma said that—his brother said to me—that when they started bring groups to Club 845, the people were like those people are not showing up!

(KB): Yeah. Oh Yeah!

(MG): And they would tell them, “We got Jackie, but clean. We got Philly Joe Jones.” They were like, “Yeah, sure.”

(KB): Yeah, right.

(MG): But they never had a problem. They never had problem. They did show up, they all played and...

(MN): Well this is really a major contribution to recording a part of history that has not been claimed. And I think the challenge is to get recognition for it, you know, in a lot of different ways. I mean, your celebration is one way. One thing, we could do, is use our website to alert people. This phenomenon is part of the history we want everybody to claim.

(Kb): There needs to be a catalogue. There needs to be some printed documentation.

We had started what we called, The Black Standard Publishing Company, which we had done some publications around the Naturally show and the Naturally '63 portfolios. And also a book on the Civil Rights Movement: Color is Colored.

(MN): Well, one thing we can do...We can get the money to do a pamphlet series. So if there was a pamphlet—The Jazz Arts Society, A pamphlet on Club 845—and put them out as pamphlets and then eventually collect them as a book.

(MG): As a chapter in a book.

(MN): But start off putting them out as pamphlets, which we then sell and distribute. I mean, that's definitely a possibility.

(KB): A lot of things are possible.

(MG): Don't forget. He's a photographer. He took pictures, if he can find them, in the Club 845 on all those Sundays.

(KB): I didn't have all the Sundays.

(MG): No, but Bob Gumbs said that you were always taking pictures of everybody. You know where they are?

(KB): Oh yeah.

(MG): Because we could have a...

(MN): A photo...an exhibit. I mean there's a lot of possibilities. Some of this we should probably just talk about not on tape.

BREAK IN RECORDING

(KB): -- (Cut-off)--you talking about...same people not going to show up.

(MN): Alto Madness!

(KB): Alto Madness was at Hunt's Point Palace. It's a show that we gave in 1958. Lou Donaldson, Jackie Maclean, Gigi Grice, Sunny Stit and Cannonball, I think it was.

(MN): Had you changed the name yet, or this was still the Jazz Arts Society?

(KB): It was the Jazz Arts Society doing it, but the name of that particular concert was Alto Madness.

(MN): Alto Madness, that you promoted, and was at the Hunt's Point Palace in 1958.

(KB): Right.

(MN): Are there any posters of that?

(KB): We're looking for them now. As a matter of fact, as I told you, I was playing clarinet prior--when I was in high school--and by the time I got out of high school I had switched to tenor sax. My father bought me a King Super 20 at Wurlitzer, which was on 42nd Street, was the biggest music shop there. So I was playing around with, but I never really played you know, or tried to play professionally. So I wanted to get a faster...you know an alto maybe it's because—

(MG): --Right.

(KB): So anyhow, I traded my King Super 20 with George Braith, for a Selma Alto and I never really got back to start playing it and what not, but I loaned it to Jackie Maclean for this Alto Madness concert. Because he needed to rehearse or what not, you know Jackie was on drugs at the time. Came to this show, everybody showed up, it was a huge success, and after the show I was going to get the horn from Jackie and he said, "But I got a gig, I got a gig. Can I hold it for the gig?" And I said, "OK." That's the last I saw of my alto.

(MN): So that was pawned for—

(MG): --Whatever.

(KB): I don't know, it was probably just used, maybe—

(MG): But his son, Rene, told me that the Trans-Arts Society, the first people who ever gave him a gig...that you gave him his first gig he played in the Bronx with Oliver Beaner—

(MN) --This is—

(KB): --Yeah.

(MG): Jackie's son plays tenor.

(KB): And Jimmy.

(MG): And Jimmy always was on the gig.

(KB): Yeah.

(MG): When he was a teenager. He worked gigs that they gave him when he was 14, 15, right?

(MN): So he played gigs for you?

(KB): Yeah.

(MN): Do you remember what clubs they were at?

(MG): 845.

(KB): 845, yeah.

(MN): Ok, did you have any contact with St. Augustine's' Presbyterian Church and Elder Hawkins?

(KB): St. Augustine's down in—

(MN): --On 165th and Prospect.

(KB): Oh, 'cause there was two saints. One was St. Christine's and one St. Augustine's.
Same thing and what not.

(MN): There's also the Catholic church up on Franklin and 167th.

(KB): Right, but then down on Avenue D there was another.

(MN): Oh, there was another Saint?

(KB): Our softball team at St. Margaret's used to go play there. YPF—the young people's fellowship.

(MN): But did you have any contact with him?

(KB): Not really.

(MN): Because he was one of the more political figures.

(KB): Yeah, up in that area, yeah.

(MN): You didn't do concerts there? At the church?

(KB): No.

(MN): OK.

(MG): Do want to ask what happened to the block and when they sold the house at the end of what happens? Or are you going to...Mark is that going to be your part. Or would you just like to leave—

(MN): Let's leave it...

TAPE ENDS

