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## Fernandez, David

African & African American Studies Department. David Fernandez  
*Fordham University*

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Anna Ambrose(AA): I am going to start recording...I am Anna Ambrose and I am going to be recording David Hernandez of the WHEDco School and you work at... which schools do you work at?

David Fernandez(DF): I work here at P.S. 2 in...the South Bronx, New York. I work part time for WHEDco and I teach percussion and music theory to the kids.

AA: Thank you. Can I ask you little bit about where you grew up?

DF: For the first part of my life I grew up in BEDFORD STYVETON, Brooklyn on PULASKI Street. My folks then packed up their bags and we went a long journey to Ohio where I would spend the rest of my life over there. I would finish high school... I would then go on to college and major in music...uhh...composition and arranging, jazz studies and um contemporary music. I then from there went... I had moved to Puerto Rico. I lived there for five years and then I work with several artists out there in Puerto Rico...um...and here in New York a via Puerto Rico, I got to collaborate with Mark Anthony, I got to collaborate with...um...with ANDY MONTANYEZ who was a well-known salsa singer, international, well-known salsa singer, he came out of the band in GRAN COMBO. I was able to collaborate with Omar Sosa who is a well-known jazz pianist from Cuba. I was able to collaborate and or work with several artists, I was able to...just give me a minute, my memory...sign of old age... um... I was...I was able to collaborate with RAUL CARBOLER, who was a famous actor in Puerto Rico. Here in New York City, I was able to perform and work with...uh...the people's from the New York Knicks with...ah...Madison Square Garden. I have a Band Zon del Barrio. I am the musical director. That is with a Z-O-N D-E-L B-A-double R-I-O. You could check us out. We have website and a Facebook page. Um...I was fortunate enough to work with a lot of people...you know when I was living in Puerto Rico...when I went to Saint CROY where I was heading a four-piece R and B...uh.. pop-rock group called Tough ENOUGH and..um...we toured all over the islands of SANT CROY, SAINT JOHN and SAINT THOMAS and that was a real gas for me. And then...um..from there I came back here to New York to do...further my studies...to

find my...my New York roots where I was able to...you know...form my own band. Um...actually it's not my band I am just the musical director of the band. I...I do all of the arranging, I do all of the musical writing. Um... the leader of that band is ARORA FLORES who is a...uh... public relations...uh...person par excellence. She is a music composer, she is a performer, a singer, in her own right...um...she was the first woman...uh...correspondent for Billboard Magazine in the early seventies...um she studied with the late FREDRIC ZIMMERMAN who is the upper-most authority on the acoustic bass in classical music. His book still sells to this day on how to play classical base, the CONTRA base..uh the base FIDDER they would call it...um and that journey continues on to this day. We are lookin' at several projects...um including a trip to France in September. We'll be going to Paris.

AA: You mean, you?...your band?

DF: Yea, the band, yes. We will be going to Paris in September...um recently came back from the French Caribbean, MARTINIQUE and GUADAPE, beautiful! Beautiful!

AA: I'm sure!

DF: Um... there with ah.. oh I forgot to mention...I fortunate enough to collaborate and I continue to collaborate with...uh... the actor Matt Dylan.

AA: Okay.

DF: He loves Latin music, he loves percussion and he's taking CONGA lessons...um...and I was just with Matt a' couple of weeks ago...um...because we celebrated the birthday of an iconic Afro-Cuban Trumpet player who turned eighty-four earlier this month, EL FEREO CHOCOLA MENTEROS.

AA: Yea.

DF: ...who Matt also happens to be a good friend of, he showed up. And um... we had a great time. So...um I'm doing those things up to this day. Um...LUIS GUISMAN is another actor who I have collaborated with.

AA: Yea

DF: Um...ahh...oh gosh...If you give me some time the names will start...

AA: No, yea, that's okay. We can go in order, if you want.

DF: Yea, yea no that's fine. Go ahead.

AA: Yea. Um... I was just gunna ask you...so...um...you have said so much and I really want to get to all that, you education, all the people you have collaborated with... Um...I just wanted to talk a little bit about...um...your experience moving from you said...Brooklyn to Ohio.

DF: Um huh

AA: Where do you feel...and that was all before you graduated high school.

DF: Yea, yea.

AA: So, um... where did you feel...how was your like...where did you experience music then and was your family involved in music...what were those neighborhoods like?

DF: Interesting, very interesting...all good questions. I tell you first...um...leaving Brooklyn, New York to YOUNGSTOWN, Ohio was a total culture shock for me, of the worst kind, for a nine-year old, for any nine-year old...it's it's a huge culture shock. I didn't know where I was gunna go at the age of nine...um...my family...um... was going through a lot of financial...ah.....changes at the time. We had to leave New York, but in YOUNGSTOWN, what was good about YOUNGSTOWN was that it has a university called YOUNGSTOWN State...um...it had a great professor of Jazz Studies by the late...the name of the late ANTHONY LEONARDY...who was from here from New York, from Syracuse, from Upstate New York. I studied Jazz with him and with...um...SAM DIANGALO...who I studied composition and jazz studies with SAM DIANGALO. Those guys saved me. They saved me along side with an African American gentleman by the name of Mr. ROBERT BILL. He saved my life because in Youngstown there was not much going on. It was a town...ah...it had just...the steel mills had just recently closed...crime was

getting from bad to worse....they were closing down steel mill after steel mill...then it were closing down schools...from schools to schools. I was able to survive by getting involved in the jazz community there with Youngstown State as a young teenager. I was able to play with a few local Latin bands form down there...from the Youngstown-Cleveland area. And...um...many jazz was what saved me, though I went to every clinic that I could growing up down there. I remember my father taking me to the north side of Youngstown, was were Youngstown State University still exists, to this day. I was the only non-college student, who was still in middle school and high school playing in the jazz ensembles.

AA: Wow.

DF: So, that's what saved me and that's how I got around the music there. And...um...as far as the Latin music, I had a lot of records. My dad had a lot of records, so that kept me playing percussion.

AA: Your father...

DF: My father...yea my father is a guitarist...

AA: So, that is what he did? That was how he made a living? When he was here.

DF: Yea! When he was living here that's how he made his living. My father was very popular back in the day...never made it to the charts...but um...my father did back up a lot of artists back in the day...back in the late fifties when he came here from Puerto Rico...all throughout the sixties and into the mid-seventies.

AA: Yea.

DF: Because after that we had packed up and leave...went to Ohio. I just wanna clarify something about Ohio.

AA: Sure!

DF: Um.. a lot of people have the misunderstanding that Ohio is mid-west. If you look at the map, it is really north-east. I don't know why New Yorkers, or anybody else would consider it Ohio...geographically

speaking the Southern part of Indiana is what's considered mid-west...and the western part of Indiana...and the eastern part of Indiana is still considered north-east.

AA: Did you feel like you considered them the same? Was there a similarity?

DF: Yea, well yea...because of the time change.

AA: Yea...oh I see! [Laughs]

DF: You know what I mean? So, I just wanna clarify that.

AA: Yea, no. Of course.

DF: It irks me really, Anna. "Oh! You're from the mid-west!" No. Mid-west is from...GARI, Indiana down to Chicago, that's mid-west. You know?

AA: Yea.

DF: But um...Ohio is so north-east. It's...we're eastern-standard time. You know?

AA: Yes. [Laughs]

DF: But in Ohio I was able to do a lot of jazz gigs, playing CONGAS and BONGOS, playing percussion, before I got into piano. Piano I got into when I was fifteen.

AA: I see...so you started off with other instruments before.

DF: Yes, yes. I started on percussion, before I got into piano. And then I knew I wanted to arrange already, when I started taking piano. I wanted to be GERSHWIN. You know...I wanted to be like a GEORGE GERSHWIN or a GLEN MILLER or...you know...guys like that, composers like that. CARLA BLAY who was a, who continues to write her butt off to this day, know who what I mean, she's awesome. You know people like that...those were my influences.

AA: Yea.

DF: So many influences from Latin to Jazz...um some hip-hop...many classical, much classical. And...um... I consider myself to be known-around. I am open to all genres of music.

AA: Yea...I see. And you think...um...you got a lot of that from school or like...from your dad. How did your dad influence that?

DF: Both, both. No, dad, dad was a major influence, just by him singing around the house all the time. Singing around the house and playing the records...that's how I got into it. At the age of four, I remember him buying my first pair of bongos. That's how I started, playing along with the records...you know?

AA: So, music was always kind of around. And he...did he...you said he was from...Puerto Rico...so do you think that had a lot to do with what music he played?

DF: Absolutely, yes, dad, he was, his father played the accordion, so that's how that all started.

AA: Oh, that's great!

DF: [Laughs]

AA: So, did your siblings do that? They all, do you have siblings?

DF: They...um...my other siblings they just...they sing at home...they do it as a hobby...some of them are music teachers. Some of them are real estate investors...the rest are still in the military. So it's a combination. They all play music at home. They do it at home, but as a hobby. I am the only one who has taken it...like as a formal career.

AA: Yea! And can I ask you...you lived with your dad and your mom too?

DF: And mom too.

AA: What did your mom do?

DF: Mom sang.

AA: She did? She did!

DF: Yea. Mom sang. Especially during Christmas time. She would sing but my mom was a hard worker. She, you know, she worked in the retail stores and the garment stores. She worked at S&M in...GRAND

AVENUE in Brooklyn for many, many years before our departure to Ohio. From there on she kinda retired. She stayed at the house. She became a full-time house wife while my father continued to work until, you know, he retired. Dad was, we went to Ohio thinking that dad was gonna work in the steel mills...we didn't do the research.

AA: Yea.

DF: Unfortunately...you know, 'cause that's what he was gonna start doing. But, you know, he...he did miscellaneous things over there in Ohio, there wasn't much happening. He became a bus driver, so he did that until he retired. So ,you know, it wasn't too bad for him.

AA: Yea, but he also got to do music out there and he...

DF: Yea! He still continued to perform out there. He joined another group and then as I was growing up, I then joined him in the group too, so I accompanied my dad. And we did a few things together out there in Ohio.

AA: Do you still play with your dad?

DF: He is still alive! He is over there, he is still singing.

AA: That's so great!

DF: He is retired, but you know, he sings at home, but you know, he is living the life, he is living.

AA: He is in..?

DF: He is in Puerto Rico.

AA: Oh, wow!

DF: I tried getting him back here but he won't, he wants to stay out there so...

AA: [laughs]

DF: So...can I ask you, so...you talk about a lot about your experiences growing up. When, where did you go to college? Did you go to college in Ohio?



AA: Youngstown.

DF: Okay, you went there.

AA: Um, and your major? What did you focus on?

DF: I majored in composition and arranging. Yea, I majored in composition.

AA: And how was that? How was that experience?

DF: It was an adventure. It was an adventure. I feel that I had the best teacher in the world, SAM DIANGALO. He taught me the up's and down's and the in's and out's of musical composition. Um...he has taught me some of the short hands that I...now studying with the SHYLINGER Method...I was telling you earlier about that. Sam, has also, I was one of his favorite students so, he also gave me a stack of books that he didn't need anymore.

AA: Yea.

DF: And I took all that stuff with me to Puerto Rico. I still have some of that stuff with me that I use to work on.

AA: Oh, that is great!

DF: And you know music, Anna, it's like being a doctor; it is a constant practice, especially if you are a surgeon of any kind. It is a constant practice. You never, with music you never stop...you never say "Oh, I've learned everything that I needed to learn about music." That's a myth; it's a fallacy.

AA: Yea.

DF: You are always learning something new, always.

AA: And you feel like this...um...the fact that your always learning something new, do you think that helps you with your teaching, right?

DF: Yes, 'cause it gives me new ideas all the time. All the time. It never fails. Even, Anna, when I'm not thinking of a new idea, it just...[snaps fingers]...it just pops up, because it is constantly on my head. And I

am like “Holy crap! I just figured something out! Okay! Let me take a note of this and add this onto my method.”

AA: I am just gonna ask you a little bit about your experience in Puerto Rico and then we can talk about the Bronx and we can talk about your teaching here. So, um...you moved to Puerto Rico. Do you know what year that was?

DF: This was from 1996 to 2000.

AA: Okay, and did you live with family there or...?

DF: Yea, I lived with family. I lived with family for the first eight months until I got myself settled. And then I got my bags from my parents and then I rented a house in San Juan, where I would live there the rest of the time. I had a whole house to myself, a whole house to myself, Anna, you know?

AA: Wooh! Yea!

DF: A whole house! I was like “Oh my gosh! I’m only paying \$200 a month here. I love it!” A whole house, just for me, no family, an upstairs, a downstairs!

AA: [laughs] A kitchen!

DF: Nobody wanted this house. All I had to do was...you know...it was pretty much abandoned. All I had to do was...an older woman...there was an older woman at the time she was already, like, in her 80’s. “My son! I will rent it to you for \$200! Just clean it up! It’s furnished and everything. And I had everything there. So I would stay there until my departure to Saint CROY. And that was another adventure.

AA: And you...what did you do? You played music there?

DF: I played music there.

AA: Did you teach?

DF: No, I never taught in SAINT CROY, I just played. I played in Saint Croy just like I played in Puerto Rico. In Puerto Rico, I did a lot of percussion out there. I did a few recordings out there, with a group called HIBARO JAZZ, which is...what was...the concept was American Jazz with Modern Puerto Rican music, which consisted of the Puerto Rican called QUATRO, which is a guitar, let me get this straight...the QUATRO is composed to ten strings, ten double-strings, in groups of two's but in a row of ten. Okay? Um...the name QUATRO...I don't know where they got the name quarto, that means four. I don't know where it came from because it is a group of ten strings, just doubled.

AA: Okay.

DF: You see what I am trying to say?

AA: Yea.

DF: It's like, it's like...um...that's...it's kinda like the MANDOLIN, it almost sounds like a MANDALIN ], but not quite, not quite.

AA: Do you play that here too?

DF: I know of quarto players that play that. I don't play that myself.

AA: Did you play at, like, night clubs? Or did your family help you find places to play or how did you get your start?

DF: My family would spread the word for me in Puerto Rico.

AA: So, you played with other people?

DF: Yea, then I played with a cousin of mine who got me into the HIBARO JAZZ. He is well known in Puerto Rico. So, he connected me to a lot of these groups and I was able to mingle and perform and/or record with a lot of these groups in Puerto Rico...um...including some jingles. I did a jingle...I did jingles out there for companies out there, like soap companies, like companies out there and things like that. Nothing really major. My major thing out there, I tell you Anna was when I recorded with Marc Anthony,

I did one track with him, just one song and this was on a compilation album that was released in 1999 or in 2000, just before I left and it was called...it was from...you are familiar with the Banco Popular's you see here in the Bronx?

AA: yes.

DF: Okay. Banco Popular, they are everywhere in New York. Banco Popular, every year, they have they release a new video at Christmas time.

AA: Okay.

DF: Mine was in 1999/2000, and it was called POR LA MUSICA POR DENTRO or "The Music Inside of You." That's the translation, if I got it. POR LA MUSICA POR DENTRO, yea. "The Music Inside of You," and ...um...I am on that recording as well as on that video tape. This was just before DVD's became booming, you know? So that was my biggest thing out there, but I worked a lot out there, I worked with IBARO JAZZ. I made a living just playing out there.

AA: Yea.

DF: You know, I was able to pay the rent. I was able to pay the bills. I was able to care of a few cars.

AA: I understand. What a difference here.

DF: Yea, Yea. But then...um...things started getting a little rough out there for me. Let me see...September 11<sup>th</sup> happened; that shut everything down, tourism and everything. I packed up my bags and went to Saint CROY. Why did I do that? Because things was getting bad in Puerto Rico. I had an acquaintance out there, I was looking for a keyboard. I it is not mine. Youknow, I played percussion in Puerto Rico, but I still had my skills as a pianist. I never stopped practicing, never. I never stopped practicing the piano. And he tell me, "You know David, I need a pianist, I need a keyboard." [Mr. T, the director of the WHEDco After-school Program at this location, opens the door and looks for papers in the room."]

Mr.T: Sorry about that.

DF: No problem, Mr.T. “ I need a keyboardist to hire.” And I am telling him, “But dude, you know, I have been playing out here for the past five years. I’ve been playing percussion and my hands are swollen. Even though I still, I play, but my hands are like, I don’t know.” And he tells me, this, and here is the catch ,Anna, he says “ well, if you want the job, it pays between \$400 and \$600 dollars a-week. And you have to learn thirty songs in thirty days. That is a song-a-day because our first gig is at the DIVIE CARINA CASINO AND RESORT on this day. So, do you want it?” And I said, “Man, my hands are swollen man.” That’s a song-a-day, one song-a-day. Thirty days, man. One song-a-day. What he didn’t tell me was, “David, you have to play two keyboards, not one. It’s two keyboards.” [claps hands]

AA: [laughs]

DF: Holy smokes! I it was too late because I already took the job. I already took the job. I was already, I was positioned there in Saint CROY. I was internalizing and absorbing the beauty of the island, the beauty of the blue waters. And I said, “Okay. I can learn thirty songs, in thirty days. I can do this.” Of course I had so many glitches ‘cause my hands were so swollen from playing skin on skin. It will swell up your hands. Um...but I did it, I did it. I did my first gig. I it was sometime in August of 2000, sorry...it was in August...um...wait a minute, no...let me get this, September 11<sup>th</sup> was a September...October, I was a December. It was in December of 2001. That was my first gig in Saint CROY, at the theater DIVIE CARINA. And from there, Anna, I stayed on piano, I never went back on percussion.

AA: Wow, because you really like it?

DF: Oh, I have always like it, I have always liked it. I just found that in Puerto Rico, I had more work as a percussionist, whereas in the VIRGIN ISLANDS, [Mr. T leaves the room, door closes] I had more work as a keyboardist. So, it worked out for me.

AA: I see.

DF: It worked out for me, and coming back to New York, I decided to stay on the keys. I found more work as a keyboardist.

AA: I see.

DF: And I continued to do that on the side, to this day.

AA: I see...thank you. I was just going to ask you now about after you moved from Puerto Rico. Can you, do you know what year that was?

DF: When I left Puerto Rico...?

AA: Yea, the year...

DF: That was near September 11<sup>th</sup>, it was right in around that time. So, let's say September 11<sup>th</sup>. I would say by the end of September, by the beginnings of October I was already in Saint CROY.

AA: So, now, you live in the Bronx today.

DF: Um hum.

AA: And you work at this school and P.S. 2?

DF: Well, this is all the same building.

Chris Nieves: It is all the same building. Oh, wait I have a correction to make also!

AA: Okay!

DF: It was not in December, I left at the end of September to SAINT CROY. My first gig was at the end of October because I had thirty days, remember? So, it was around Halloween time of 2001...was my first gig in Saint CROY. I left at the end of September to SAINT CROY, which is only...Puerto Rico to SAN JUAN to SAIN T CROY is only a twenty minute flight on the same plane.

AA: Okay, so that is not that far.

DF: It was not that far at all. It was quite convenient because whenever I didn't have work in SAINT CROY, I was able to get on the BLANK PLANE for only forty dollars to San Juan, rent a car or have somebody pick me up and take me to my parents to spend the weekend. So, it was...it was cool.

AA: And, what did you do in SAINT CROY?

DF: I just played.

AA: You played.

DF: I just played. I was gunna work at the oil refinery in SAINT CROY. I was gunna work for the Hesse oil refinery, Hesse is in SAINT CROY.

AA: Yea.

DF: Nobody knows that.

AA: I did not know that!

DF: Nobody knows that but it is in SAINT CROY.

AA: But you didn't leave?

DF: No, no I came out here.

AA: And what year did you start working here in the Bronx?

DF: I just started recently working with WHEDco; this was back in September...October? Yes, about September.

AA: Okay, and before that did you work anywhere else in the Bronx.

DF: Yes, well I was in the New York City Public Schools for the past eight years. I was a crisis para-professional. I dealt with kids and, you know...with needs. Whether they were disabled in a wheelchair. I have dealt with kids in crisis management with behavioral problems, to kids who literally needed their diapers changes and their butts cleaned. I have done all that, so... [claps hands] That was my job for the first eight years coming back to New York and then playing part time.

AA: I see, so you didn't, that program at school didn't...you couldn't use your musical there? You used it separately.

DF: Yea, I used it separately. Although there were times I was fortunate enough, there were teachers there who knew who I was and they would give me special privlidges to teach a class in music. And so, that felt good and all the kids loved it. I gave and a historical overview of Latin Jazz and Latin music. And the kids; they ate it all up. They loved it.

AA: Yea, you feel like you had an big influence on them.

DF: Yes, I had a big influence on them. My biggest challenge in the public schools wasn't even musical. One day...you know, there is a shortage of teachers every day and thanks to Mr. Bloomberg, he laid me off, for no apparent reason. KUDOS to him for that, but...one of the biggest challenges I had at the public schools, there's a shortage of teachers.

AA: Yea, of course.

DF: Now they are getting smaller. I was hired as a substitute para-professional at the Norman-Thomas high school on 33<sup>rd</sup> Street. [directs his question to Chris Nieves] Okay, you know where that school is? It's a wild school. A lot of teachers of teachers were absent that day. Now mind you, I am a para-professional, I have no degrees in teaching. I was asked to give a crash-course on AIDS prevention. Now mind you, I never taught this. I never spoke about it. I know of it because I had family, I lost family members from that horrific disease, that illness. Mrs. Blount. I will never forget her name, Mrs. Blount. I thought, "how am I going to give a course on AIDS prevention?" She was like "honey, you will be fine." But I was like "but Mrs. Blout, I don't have the qualifications. She says, "son..." She called me "son," she was an older lady. She says "we are short of teachers. We have to give this course and you are the only person that I have today." So I sat there, Anna, in front of all these kids, mostly girls too.

AA: Younger?



DF: Yes, younger, mostly 13 and 14. I gave them everything that I could, as to what not to do. "Don't have sex until you're a certain age and if your gonna have sex, please use protection. But if not, don't do it at all. You never know, that person next to you could be ill. Don't use drugs. Don't use IV needles. You have any questions?" It all started out with an open question.

AA: Yea.

DF: So, that was my biggest challenge for me. The kids, after I was done...I was like "wow! I got through this." And the kids embraced me until they transferred me to another school.

AA: Oh, wow! Because you...they moved you somewhere else?

DF: They moved me somewhere else. I had another student who was a notorious drug dealer on the west side of Harlem. 16 years old...he was a brick house. Big kid, man, scary looking kid. 16 years old. They couldn't find anybody to handle this kid, so they get me and I said "you know what, this kid needs special attention. He is wild. I can't knock him down. He will kick my butt. So, I used psychology. I said, and I never took a course in psychology, I got special permission from the principal. I said, "if my boy has a tantrum, do I have your permission to take him out of the school premises, just so we can walk and have a smoke break?" Okay. They said, "sure, Mr. Fernandez, for you, anything. If there is anything you can do to save this child, this kid." And that was the first day with this kid. And today, this kid works at the YMCA. He is a drug -counselor.

AA: You're still in contact with him?

DF: Yes. He's in Harlem.

AA: Yea.

DF: Yea.

AA: That's great.

DF: I feel good about that.

AA: Yea, I'm sure you do.

DF: So, you know. They have all these teachers in the rubber rooms because they have been busted, fondling young girls, you know, all and this. They have them in the rubber room, yet they lay me off? And all I have done was, the right thing? Kind of bothers me. But ,you know, I have WHEDco. I am finally able to do what I like the most, which is music. And, um...right now with this program and with this project that WHEDco has in mind, I am going to be able to do much more. I am able to , possibly write a book on my system of teaching. That's my next goal. I wanna write a book on the system, because, you know, it's frustrating to the kids. You know, you know how you have a kid, says "Oh, piano is boring, and you have to learn all this music theory and all this and all that." Well, that is because the instructor does not know where to go with that theory. If you break it down to them in simple terms, they will be like, "Gee! Now I get it." And that's what it boils down to. Music should not be something that should be of a big challenge to the student. It should be something that is fun, that is educational, yea and, and, and you know need to know this stuff if you want to play any instrument but make it fun. Math should be fun. They don't make it fun. They make it hard. Right?

AA: I agree. [laughs]

DF: So, these are some of the things that I am trying to accomplish as a music instructor to make music either, music...playing piano or any instrument or, or theory, composition and arranging, or music appreciation that much more appreciative, if you catch my drift.

Chris Nieves: appealing...

DF: That much easier for the student to internalize and say "this, now, this is not so hard. It is not so hard as what they told me it was, because teachers make it hard, especially the professors in these schools, they make it hard. I criticize them all the time. "Oh, well your just..." Well, yea, I am David Fernandez, but , you know what? One day, you are going to hear about me and you're going to hear

about my system and you are gunna see that all of your students are gunna start coming to me, you know, because of this. You know, I know great performers, awesome performers, and they have the highest teaching positions in some of these schools here in New York City...they are the most horrible teachers. They cannot being to explain what goes where.

AA: Yea. Well, it is different. I mean it is different thing.

Chris Nieves: Yea, a great musician is different than a great teacher.

DF: Yea, I tried to balance the scale. Yea, I prefer to perform but yes, I also teach. I don't want to be known as one more than the other, I like to be even.

AA: I see.

DF: You know what I mean?

AA: Can I ask you...

DF: um hum...ask me.

AA: So, right now, your position at WHEDco is what? What is it that you do?

DF: My position at WHEDco now is percussion but soon to be music theory.

AA: I see, so...this is all part of the after-school program?

DF: Yes.

AA: Okay, and what...

Chris Nieves: Music instructor, cause I don't want to just limit it to percussion.

DF: Yea.

Chris Nieves: Because the things that you have worked on...you know, you have worked on singing, you...

DF: yea, have done the choral stuff with them. They did a performance up at Radio City Music.

AA: yea, Chris told me, yea!

DF: Yea and so I, you know, I worked with the kids everyday Monday through Friday getting their parts, getting their harmonies together, or, you know, whatever it was, the dancing and all that. All of that is very important.

AA: Yea! Um...I see Chris has told me that you work with, your partner is Oreste Obrantes

DF: Yea, Oreste Obrantes.

AA: Can you talk a little about your collaboration with him?

DF: Oreste, I met Oreste through one of my band members, Matthew Gonzalez. He brought him into the band when I was making changes in the band with certain players. He introduced me to Oreste and Oreste was a fresh 18 year old kid at the time who had a big sound on the conga drums. I mean, 18 year old kid, he had such a big sound. He has such a strong, old school sound. He sounded like he was in his 40's already, he is was from the 60's from back in the PALELIAN days. You know what I mean like the way he played, I am like, man. He is an old soul, man and when I got layyed off from the public schools, he had told me about WHEDco. WHEDco was looking for another music instructor and I said "well, here I am! Take me to your leader." [laughs]

AA: Yea.

DF: Basically, that's how that worked.

AA: Yea.

DF: And Mr. Chris over here interviewed me and he opened the doors for me here. And the doors continue to open.

AA: Yea. I see with this new program!

DF: Yea, with this new program.

AA: So, you work with him in this after-school program. What days...how many days a week does it go?

DF: Five days a week.

AA: Five days a week.

DF: Yea, it's part time.

AA: So, it's 2:30 till...

DF: Uh....it's

Chris Nieves: Well, the after-school program runs from 2:30pm till 5:30pm, 6:00pm. But the actually enrichment activities are from 2:30 to 4:00, 4:15.

AA: And how old are the kids that you work with?

DF: Fifth grade, yea.

Chris Nieves: Yea, like, 8 or 9, 10, 11, 12.

AA: Okay, so can you talk a little about working with that age group?

DF: Oh, it's not different because remember, I already had experience in the public schools, I worked from elementary schools to middle schools to high schools. So, I was already used to it. The music teaching, is like, for the first time for me.

AA: Yea, I see.

DF: You know. The only other time I taught music was only on my own, in private. Having private students.

AA: I see. So, How was that adjustment period, because I know you said you really like to balance your own...musical ability...talent...musical talent with your teaching skills, so, how was that adjustment trying to figure out what's the best way to teach?

DF: First, I needed to get to know the student. I needed to know where the student was. I needed to know where the student level of thinking was. For example, "Oh, I really want to learn how to play piano" or "Ah, I really don't want to learn how to play piano." I want to get how the kid is feeling before I start teaching. Just so, that I'll know how far I am going to get with the student. A lot, of very gifted kids

here. A lot of them. A lot of them. Most of them don't know it until they sit on that piano, and they say "wow, I can really do this." And I say, "you can do anything you want." And again, my system of teaching works. We are waiting on a few more key boards, but...

Chris Nieves: She has the lists. [laughs]

DF: But, as soon as I get them, I already know I have a list of kids I know I am going to recruit because I know where these kids are. I know the kids who really want to learn. You know, so that's how I start.

AA: yea, I see.

DF: I start to feel them out and really get to know where they are coming from before I start.

AA: Be personable. So, can I ask you did you want to add anything about your own method of teaching? You have talked about it a lot but, anything you wanted to add about any kind of methodical things like...you said you start off with the students skills.

DF: yea, I start off with the student by having the student look at the key board. I let the student know that they need to acknowledge that the piano has a set of black notes and it has a set of white notes. And then, I ask them to look at the black notes. And then I ask them, "can you point out the set of two's and the set of three's in the black notes?" And they point it out to me and then that's where the fun begins because I tell them, okay now find me any two sets of black notes. And I say "the first white note that you see that's below the first black note that you see is your middle C. Play that note." And they play that note and I said "the next note after that one, that is going to be D." And I say "play that note." And I name 'em each by name. Right after that, and they learn it real quick. They go "CDEFABC." I show them, "you went from this C, now look where you ended up." I say, "now what note is that?" Some of them figure it out and some don't. They say "I don't know Mr." And I say "well look that the two black notes above that white note." And they go "Oh, this is C. " Yes, it's the same one. It's just a higher one. But it's the same note. And they start to understand. Then they start to do this, it's like a high five. When

I ask them wiggle your fifth finger. I said “your pinkie’s your fifth. Your fourth finger is your fourth. Your middle finger is your third. Your index is your second and your thumb is your first, on both hands.” They get it right away. And then I tell them, okay. “Let’s do the crab. This is the crab.” This is the crab. You are going to take the fifth, your third and your first finger on your left hand and you’re going to play C. You are going to skip D. You’re gonna go to E. You are gonna skip F. You’re gonna go to G. You just learned the C major cord.” “Wow!” They are, like, having fun. They are just going like this. [opens eyes wide]. “Listen, now do the same thing with the other hand. Your third and your fifth. Now alternate it. You just learn the key of C. Now, let’s move up a whole step. Let’s move it up, stay in that same position. Boom, now you just hit a D-minor cord.” “Oh wow, I just learned two cords.” And then I just keep going up and down. They keep going up and down. And I stop there, that is there first lesson. And I keep it there for them and the next lesson is, they are gonna go back to that C-major cord. And I tell them , now look “you are going to move your third finger in both hands, we are going to move it up a half step.” Guess what happens when you play that cord? Now it’s a minor cord. And they really didn’t have to do much. Whereas other teachers, “okay, we are going to learn this cord and we are going to learn F. And we are going to learn G today.” No, I disagree with all the crap.

AA: They figure it out themselves.

DF: Yea.

AA: Yea, that’s great.

DF: It makes it that much more fun and that much easier for me and the student.

AA: I see. So, you feel you have more of a connection with the student’s because of the way that you teach.

DF: Yea, and they relate to it.

AA: how long do you work with these kids that you have?

DF: About an hour.

AA: I meant, sorry, over...you have them for a year and then they move on or...

DF: It depends how long they are in WHEDco, right Mr. Chris, it depends how long they are in WHEDco.

Chris Nieves: So, like a fifth grader would only have him for a year, if they start at fifth grade because they graduate to go to high school. But if they start at WHEDco in third grade, they can go all the way to fifth.

DF: Then they will be with me in two years and they will be doing a lot with me in two years. [laughs]

AA: I see, and the only other thing I was going to ask...how do you feel about musical education in the Bronx. That is very broad but you have already talked about the way that teachers teach and it's very academic. Do you have any solutions to, you know, what would be better?

DF: Yea, we need more WHEDco.

AA: More WHEDco!

DF: You know because when, not to get too political...

AA: No, please get political.

DF: But when the Regan/Bush administration took over in 1980, I was twelve years old. That was 1980, I was 11 years old, or ten years old at the time. Something like that. I remember we had a lot of music in the public schools, here and in Ohio. By time those guys took office, they took away all of the arts from the schools. That was the first thing they did. They took all the music away. They took all if the extra cirriculars utilities from the school. That was the first thing they did. This was the beginning of the end of the education system in the united states. It started with the "Reganomics." You know, and it started going down hill since. Good thing, the good thing is, non-profit organizations like WHEDco are bringing the stuff back up. They are bringing the arts back. They are bringing music back. They are bringing music, they are bringing dance, they are bringing drama. You know, to the neighborhood kids who



cannot afford to go to LaGuardia, who cannot afford to go to Mid-town Manhattan to, you know. But because of WHEDco they can have jazz studies. They can have classical studies. They can learn...they can even learn how to orchestrate. For as long as I'm around, I'll be teaching that stuff because there isn't, there really isn't anyone teaching this stuff unless you go to LaGuardia, unless you are in a...Berkley College of Music, or Julliard. And it's a drag to try to get into Julliard. "You mean to tell me I need to know all this stuff just to get into Julliard. Why don't I get a private instructor who can give me all that good stuff just to sing. And I will go out there." And that's how I did it. I mean, yea, I had Youngstown State University but I also learned from the streets. I learned from the streets. I'll give you an example. I studied with the late JACKIE BYARD. May he rest in peace. And I remember living in Staten Island I would take the ferry to New York and then take the train to HOLLACE, Queens. His house was in HOLLACE, Queens. Not too far from where RUM DMC was, okay. And he told me one of the most profound things about the piano. He says "Daivd, don't let any of these jerks tell you otherwise. The most important cords on the piano, whether you are playing jazz or classical or you salsa music or whatever, the most important cords are the triads." Those are the cords I showed the kids. And then he showed me why. And he says "well, lets go to C. Let's go to C major. Well, this is C major but if you add this to you left hand this is a left-nine." I was like "wooh! And this is all just by adding my first finger on the left hand. Now this changes..?" And he said, "yea!" He says " don't let all this theory and all this other hogwash confuse you." And see, Jakie Byard, he had a system of teaching and I have to say I had adopted some of his teaching into my own teaching because he is no longer around. He had an untimely death before he finished his book. Now his book is lost. Somebody has that book but it has never been published.

AA: You will publish yours.

DF: Okay, so um... I learned a lot from him. He was an alumnus of the CHARTING MINGUST Orchestra. He also played with LEENA FERGUSON back in the 40's, with DESI GALESPI and CHARLIE PARKER.

AA:Yea, I do.

DF: So, you know this man was already up there, you know, in the 90's. So, you know. I studied with him in 1989 and 1990. And I say he had an untimely death, was murdered in his own house in Harlem, in the same couch I used to sit in, man, and I would wait for him to come down the stairs. Yea, so yea, so I have adopted some of his techniques into what I am using today 'cause nobody's unsung it. Nobody is using it. I was also fortunate enough, he trusted me with some of his works...I still have the works so I'm using some of his stuff in my own teaching. I'm always talking about him. I'm always talking about JACKIE BYARD because nobody else is talking about him, not even in the schools, not even in Julliard, not even in the jazz cats that I used to hang around when I used to go to the village vanguard. No one is talking about Jackie, you know and the legacy he has left behind. And that's sad because no one should go unheard of. You understand what I mean?

AA: Yea, no I definitely understand.

DF: This guy influenced, you know, keyboardists. I mean if HERBIE HANCOCK was here he would talk to you about the wonders of JACKIE BYARD how he has influenced a lot of pianists today. So, that's just an example, but I use his method, I use some of this teachings and I incorporate my ideas into the teaching. And what was influential about Jackie...Jackie was not a pianist at birth he was a drummer, who then became a pianist at his old age. So that was an influence for me because I was also a drummer who was getting into the piano, so he was a major influence on me and this teaching works with the kids because, triads, even though I don't like to use this terminology, they're "baby cords." But these are the main cords for any genre of music. I don't care if it's rock, classical, jazz, salsa, avante-garde whatever, it's triads. Triads are the most important cords on the piano. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. If they tell you otherwise they are full of themselves. [laughs]

AA: I was just gonna ask about, I know you are excited about this new program at WHEDco. Do you want to talk a little about that?

DF: The new program, I can't wait! I can't wait! I can't wait! I'm counting the months and the days. I understand that it is going to be erected sometime between April and May of next year, right Mr. Chris?

Chris Nieves: That's in the works.

AA: And just for clarity, the Musical...

Chris Nieves: The Music Heritage Center.

AA: What is this program that you would be working on?

DF: It would be the Music Heritage. It will be the Music Heritage.

AA: And what would you like to do there.

DF: What I would like to do is start a whole new curriculum. Okay. A program that has to do with piano and/or theory like, I would like to have a course in piano and I would like to have a separate course in musical arranging or music appreciation or music history, aside from the piano theory, piano. I can teach either or, or all. I would like to start a curriculum, alongside with Oreste, of percussion, drums, Congas, Bangos, TIMBARAS, Latin Percussion, Classical percussion, how to play the Tympani Drum. There is an art to playing the TYPMANY drums. It's not just banging the heck out of it and making noise. There is an art to that. But the TYMPANY drum is a very musical instrument, you have a pitch pipe and you tune it according to the key that you're playing, that the song you are playing in is in. That's the TYMPANY. It's a melodic instrument, just like VIBRAPHONE, just like the MARIMBA, just the ZYLAPHONE and just like the piano. It's a percussion instrument. And people look at me and say "David, how can that be a percussion instrument?" Well, Jackie said it best, he said "you know those little hammers that are inside, that's what makes the rhythm. That's what makes it a percussion instrument. And it makes sense because

you're banging on it. Okay so, that is a melodic and harmonic percussion instrument. Most people don't know that.

AA: I did not know that! Thank you!

DF: Hey, you know not a problem, Joseph SHININGER said it best in his first chapter of his book. "The theory of all music, of all musical forms, starts with the theory of rhythm. Without rhythm you have no music. You can have any melody, or you can have any harmony or you can have any kind of special effect or sound without the theory of rhythm. Life started with rhythm. When you walk, you walk in rhythm. When your heart beats, it beats in rhythm, isn't it? When you speak, you start speaking in rhythmic phrases. You may not know it but you are. You understand what I'm saying?"

AA: Yea.

DF: So, it starts with rhythm. Life is a rhythmic pulse. If we don't have this rhythm, we would not be alive. You understand? The cosmic forces of the universe would not function without rhythm. That is also in its own rhythm and time. It has its own time signature. You understand what I mean? [laughs]

AA: yea, thank you so much. The only other thing I was gonna ask was about your own personal music aspirations and what you would want to talk about WHEDco and then beyond that, personally with your band. Anything you want to add.

DF: We are working on a CD. Our band is working in a recording. We'll start that process very soon. Probably, as soon as next month, if not before. Um...like I said we have a few things going for us. We'll be going to France in September. Um... we are opening the Puerto Rican Day parade in June. We are having an R&B, what we call a "Salsoul night." Salsa and soul music...um...we will be going side by side with a classic R&B group called the intruders. And another classic R&B group called Black Ivory. We will be performing in COROLLA, Queens in about two weeks from today. We have that, we have the parade in June. We have...we have France in September. We have something in August and I can't remember.

So, it's still in the works. So that's not affirmative. So, then we will be opening up in July. We will be opening open in battery park opening up for a very famous well-known salsa singer by the name of LA INDIA. I don't know if...she is very well known in the house music world and in the salsa world. She goes by INDIA. Not to be confused by India ARE. This is LA INDIA. So she is... LA INDIA. You can look her up, you can Google her. We'll be opening up for her, July tenth in battery park. And, we got a thing or two in August and then off to Air France to go to Paris in September. And by then we should have the CD done, already processed, mixed, done, ready to sell. Um...and we look forward to after Paris, a whole bunch of other things.

AA: Yea.

DF: Oh, I neglect to mention one thing. I want to tell you one thing. And it's only in the process. It's in the process. Okay?

AA: Yea, sure!

DF: We will be opening up sometime...I think, I don't know if it's in the end of this month May, or in the end of June, we are going to be opening up for the EXMENUDOS. The EXMENUDOS, um...this will be unfortunately, without Ricky Martin or Robby Rosa. This will be the other guys that were with them. Okay? This is called "LA RENCUENTRO". The reencounter. Our band, ZON DEL BARRIO, is going to be opening up for DE RENCOURNETRO DE EXMENUDOS, which is already making some noise. So, the process is being done. The negotiations are being talked about and it looks like an 85% go. So it looks like it's a happening. So, that in itself, it's gonna boost up our band, Zon Del Barrio, which Oreste Obrantes is a part of. It's because of him I have this job. It's because of his through Mr. Chris that I'm here. It's because of him. I have to tell you this Anna. I left resumes with every school, music school, performing arts school, in the city. No one has paid mind to me because I didn't play with Beyonce, I haven't played with JAH RULE, I haven't played with Ricky Martin. I am going to tell you this and I find

that to be a little bit prejudice, or like, well it's judgmental because of "well If you haven't played with these people's, that is to say that you are not worthy of." I am thankful of WHEDco, because they are giving me the opportunity. And WHEDco is going to benefit. WHEDco is going to help me and I am going to help them. So we are in a win, win situation here because they believe in what I am going to do and in return I am going to put WHEDco on the map because of what I am going to do. Kids are going to start coming out. When this really blows up, Anna, kids are going to come out and say, "Mr.D," that is what they call me here Mr. D or Mr. David, "Mr. D, he rocks! He taught me piano and now I am doing this and I never thought I can do this." I am gunna have adults knocking on my door. [knock on a desk] Or knocking on the WHEDco program. I wanna learn with Mr. D or Mr. David, whatever and that's the satisfaction that I'll get knowing that my system is working and I am teaching the most mediocre person who does not have an ear for music, I am having this person play a song. And believe, even if it's a little baby song, it doesn't matter, Anna. The joy that they are getting inside of them, the emotion, the satisfaction of knowing that they can do this will be rewarding for me on the inside because I know I have accomplished something. I know I may have accomplished that person's frustration. How many lessons did that person go through and the teacher just wasn't the right teacher for that? You know what I'm saying? So, that's, that will be my satisfaction, Anna, that will be my satisfaction.

AA: So, you feel like music and musical education really helps some of these behavioral problems.

DF: Absolutely, Yes! Yes! And when I was in the public schools I did some of that with the kids! Some of them are doing their own music, some of them are rapping and they are staying out of trouble. They graduated from high school. Heck, I have one student that just got accepted to the Berkley College of Music.

AA: That's exciting.

DF: [claps hands] that makes me feel like jumping for joy. Okay? So, and I told her, I said “listen, honey, you stick with the program. By the way, the Berkley College of music is the old SCHILINGER house. Joseph SCHILINGER opened this college back in 1940 until his untimely death in 1943. And it stood as the SHILINGER house of about another ten years or so, and Boston, the city of Boston took over and renamed it the Berkley College of Music. Now, I would dare say this and I’ll put myself on the line.

AA: Sure.

DF: The theoretical approaches to that Berkley College of Music is teaching to their kids is the SCHILINGLER Method is disguise and it’s not fair. It is not fair because they’re taking the credit. And because SCHILINGER never had any children, he was married but never had any children, on one claimed this.

AA: There was no one to protect his work.

DF: Yea, no one did anything to protect this. That would be my other goal in life: to bring this method out so that everyone can write and play an instrument because the ultimate goal for Joseph SCHILINGER was to break every barrier of musical knowledge and his guarantee was, and it works to this day, was that ,any musician that studies his theory and every musician that starts his or her own music will not be the same as the other students that have studied under his theory. Everyone’s music will be different, no two musics will sound alike. You cannot compare GERSHWINS music to GLEN MILLER, you cannot compare GLEN MILLERS music to BENNY GOODMAN, you cannot compare BENNY GOODMAN’s music to JOHN COLTRAIN, you cannot comopare JOHN COLTRAINE’s music to MILES DAVID. You know, they are all different. These are all apprentices, alumni of SCHILINGER method, or theory. Like I said, the course is still being taught but it’s online. I am not a computer savy person, I still write with my hand, with my pencil. I do!

AA: [laughs] Yes! No, that’s great!

DF: I am very old school that way. That's the way I do things. So, I am not really computer savy, I have a Facebook page and I answer questions, you know and that about it. You know, I am not one to be sitting at the computer all day. I am one sitting the computer all day, I am one to be sitting the piano all day just practicing for several hours. That I'd rather do, but I don't have an email, but I'm working on one right now because I know that I gotta catch up to the times, and not still live in the flinstone era. I am finally, at my old age of 43, I am now getting into the computer age.

AA: Yea! Is there anything else that you would want to add about your musical experience, your aspirations, you influences.

DF: My influences were a lot of the ones I just mentioned, like Jackie, John Coltraine, you know all of the swing cats from Benny Goodman, all of the Bee-bop cats from Charlie Parker, Desi Galespi, Herby Hancock, Charles Mingues, oh my gosh, there are so many influences, the list, if I...we would stay here another hour if I started...john Cage...he was an avant-gardist, Carla BLADE, Rebecca MARLEYON, ELISE REGINA, who was a phenomenal jazz singer, Brazilian, she steals my heart to this day, she steals my heart to this day, even after her untimely death she still steals my heart, Charlie PARLIMIRE, EDDIE PARLIMIERE, OSCAR HERNANDEZ, oh my gosh, and MARLIO RIVEBERA, BARRY RODGERS, TOMMY LOPEZ, I mean I could just keep going on and on. I have a whole mess of influences that have inspired me to become what I am today as far as my musical knowledge. And like I said my ultimate goal is to have everyone play music. Even the most mediocre, even the most frustrated... "why can't I get this, why can't I get this!" Well, don't worry you will, just follow these few simple rules and you'll be playing. Adults as well as kids, yes, absolutely, it works, it works. I have started teaching the SCHILINGER theory of rhythm to these kids and it's already helped them with their math. Yea, it has, it has because I start using multiplication, I start using addition and subtraction with the beat notes. Say for example, in 4-4 time, I mean, each quarter note gets one beat, 1 plus 1 is 2, 2 quarter notes equals 2 beats. Now, if I had



four, 1 plus 1 is 2 plus 4 is... like that, I am using SCHILINGER, SCHILINGER uses that because he was a mathematician, scientist, musician. He, that's another thing I forgot to mention about his method, he uses mathematics. He uses numbers, and it works. And he breaks down math in the most easiest, the most rewarding way in music, in the most amazing way. You can look it up. You can look it up online, have samples and read about it, just so you can get a general idea of what this man was and what he did musically. I love it. It works to this day. He died in 1943 and this system is the most perfect system. None of us are perfect but I would dare say this is most perfect system.

AA: Thank you so much, if there anything you want to add?

DF: No that's it, if you have any more questions...I would be happy to..

AA: Thank you so much!