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Sanabria, Bobby

Mark Naison

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Bobby Sanabria Interview Transcription

Interviewer: Mark Naison

Interviewee: Bobby Sanabria

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Dr. Mark Naison (MN):

Hi, okay. Today we're honored to have Bobby Sanabria, a world-famous composer, musician, working at the intersection of jazz and Latin music.

Bobby Sanabria (BS): And I'm a drummer and percussionist and arranger and educator.

MN: -and the co-director of the Bronx Music Heritage Center.

BS: Yes. Yes.

MN: So a man of many hats and today we are interviewing Bobby for two initiatives. The Bronx African-American History Project, which has been around for 16 years and the newly formed Bronx Latinx Oral History Archive and the director of that, Angel Hernandez will be joining us shortly.

BS: Great! Great.

MN: So a lot of this interview is going to focus on the making of Bobby Sanabria from childhood. So I'm going to sit- which is what we do with a lot of the people here.

BS: Sounds like I'm going to go through Freudian therapy (Laughter) .

MN: Well you'll be fed at the end.

BS: Oh good. So Jungian (laughter).

MN: Yea so the first question, I always do this in the interviews, is tell me a little bit about your family and how they ended up in the Bronx.

BS: Well my mother Juanita is from a coastal town in Puerto Rico on the East Coast called *Yabucoa*. Which has been in the news lately because that's where hurricane Maria went through. Devastated the island. And my father is from another coastal region of Puerto Rico, *Guanica*, which is famous because that's where the United States invaded P----uerto Rico in 1898. So it's more in the central part of the island, on the coastal - on the coast. And both cities parenthetically were famous for sugar cane refinery. Especially *Guanica* because that would-

they had the largest sugar cane refinery. My mother was the only one in her family that had the gumption, the bravery to say "I'm gonna leave the countryside" because she was what we call a "*Jibara del campo*" which is a peasant farmer girl from the mountains of *Yabucoa*. She's from a barrio known as *Chacaras* and this is as raw as it gets. It's beautiful up there you could see the coast of- the eastern coast of the island etc. But it's really rural. Her father, my grandfather, Ramon was a farmer. The whole family, all is 13 kids, basically lived there and she was the one after high school she said "I'm coming to the mainland to make a life for myself." And after graduating high school. My father comes from a family of 15 brothers and sisters. My mother from a family of 13 brothers and sisters. Eight of them made it to the mainland the rest either died when they were ---. A lot of these families had a lot of kids because that was part of the tradition but also a lot of them didn't survive either childhood or past their teenage years because of various diseases. So, eight of them made it to the mainland. The first one that came was my uncle, my oldest uncle *Gumercindo*, which to the relative name to that name in English would be Gomer. So, we used to just call him *Cindo* for short and he came to the United States I believe in 1938-39. Either he was drafted or enlisted in the army and he served in the Pacific as a cook. And that's what he when he came back from World War II that he worked in the food service industry. I think he worked at eventually CW Post College, running the whole cafeteria services there in Long Island. But in any case, he planted the seed on the mainland in New York City in the Bronx and then subsequently --

MN: So, he was in the Bronx in the late 30s?

BS: Yep.

MN: Wow!

BS: Well you talk (about 38 to 39.

MN: Yeah okay. And not in East Harlem? He was a regular --

BS: I really don't know because probably --would it well--- not probably--every Puerto Rican came in through Brooklyn first.

MN: Really.

BS: Through Red Hook by ship. And then from there they either stayed in the Brooklyn area, there's a community there as you know and then the subsequent community in East Harlem which became big. And then everybody followed the migratory patterns of the subway, the two, five, and the six train. And came to the Bronx because that was the place where working-class people had middle class upper aspirations.

MN: Right.

BS: So, he came to the Bronx at a Hunts Point area. And then subsequently all my father's brothers and sisters came. My father was the last one to come. He was the in the family the Sanabria family, he was the penultimate. His younger – the youngest was Ray and since he was the youngest, my grandmother *Tomasa*, wanted him to come right away. And he was the kind of felt abandoned. He was left behind but then he finally came. And when he came the Sanabria clan was basically living off Fox and Beck street.

MN: Sure.

BS: In the in the Hunts Point section. And then my father met my mother at a house party. And the story goes-- and it's documented on film because they were part of a documentary series on PBS called the *Latin Americans*. And there's a segment on Puerto Ricans and the Puerto Rican migration, my mother and father were interviewed. So, in there he talks about it and my mother talks about how they met. He was --- they came to a house party, he was after another girl, the girl gave him the brush-off and then he looked at my mother and he says it was love at first sight. He walked her home. He tried to kiss her in the stairwell goodbye, but on the lips, and she slapped him in the face.

MN: (laughs)

BS: So, he said this is a woman of honor. So that's how that started.

MN: And this was all in the Bronx?

BS: All in the Bronx

MN: Wow!

BS: But when he came, he was already a teenager so he enrolled --- they enrolled him in Morris High School and he spent a year there --- or either a year or a Semester.

MN: Is this the late forties?

BS: No. Early fifties.

MN: Early fifties. Ok.

BS: ...So he wanted to learn a trade --- actually he wanted to eventually go to college but unfortunately the guidance counselors back then steered all the Blacks and Puerto Ricans to the trades. They told them “You don't want to go to college,” and this that and the other. My father was very well-read --- may he rest in peace --- and I inherited that love of books from him.

MN: Uh-huh

BS: So, in any case --- So they told him you need to learn a trade or whatever. So, there was no --Morris was not a trade school. So, he transferred to Bronx Vocational High School, which is Alfred E. Smith High School.

MN: Alferd E. Smith. Right.

BS: Right. So that's he went and he learned the trade of machinery. Machinist.

MN: Okay. So that was a school which had a great automotive and---

BS: ---Everything

MN: Machine tools there.

BS: Machine. Carpentry. Automotive.

MN: Right.

BS: Basically, all of the mechanics, plumbers, carpenters and machinists that you see in New York City most of them came from Alfred E. Smith. And my father he learned that trade. And when you look at my father's yearbook, he was basically the only Puerto Rican in the class. There were a few blacks, mostly Irish and Italians. So, he really didn't know English that well. So, I asked him “how did you learn English,” he goes I got lucky. In the homeroom class there was an Italian-American guy sitting next to me and he spoke Italian and I spoke Spanish, very similar languages so that he kind of coached me and taught me and they became friends.

MN: Wow!

BS: And then what happened his first job was in Brooklyn. He worked at a machine shop ---where that Williamsburg--- or was I think it's Williamsburg or Williams Bridge Bank is---

MN: The Williams --- yea--- the Williams Bridge Bank on Flatbush Avenue.

BS: Right. They call it --- the Brooklynites called it the Daily Planet building.

MN: Right. Yea.

BS: It looks like where Superman worked. And he worked in a small machine shop there. And then eventually he worked for another company and then eventually he worked for a machine shop that was larger and they moved to Long Island. And he kept the job and he --- and unfortunately for my father I would say it literally --- basically almost killed him because he had to travel two hours a day to work and two hours a day --- two hours in the afternoons to come back. So, his ---

MN: And this was all by public transportation?

BS: Right. He'd go down to take the --- What is it? The Grand Central or Penn Station to take the Long Island Railroad and go out there.

MN: So, he would take the subway to the Long Island Railroad?

BS: Exactly. Exactly. But, I would find out later. I didn't know it at the time my father would always have these fits of anger and moodiness etc. etc. He didn't drink. Thank God. He'd have a have --- he was a lifelong Yankees fan. He drank Schaefer beer because the Yankees --- Schaffer was the beer the Yankees. But he would be very moody etc and have anger outbursts and everything and then later I found out from my mother that he was going through a lot of racism and bigotry at the job.

MN: At the job. Yeah, I would think so.

BS: They would call him spic. They'd go --- *Mira! Mira!* come over here and help me with this or whatever and I remember when finally, the company moved out even farther. He could not continue it would be a three hour --- so he quit and he brought his machine tool box to our apartment which was ---- we --- when I was very very young just born I was born in St. Francis Hospital, which no longer exists. We lived on Fox and then Becker according to my mother and then in a tenement and then the dream of every working-class person at time was to move to the projects.

MN: Right. See this is what my students are now learning.

BS: Right. So, back then these high-rises looked beautiful. Some of them actually--- some of them later on would have balconies.

MN: Yeah.

BS: And the interiors were --- as anybody who has grown up in the projects knows we're very basic. Just break --- the lighting was not that good so but you lived in an apartment. And we lived at 281 Cortland Avenue on Eastern at 53rd Street and Morris Avenue

MN: Right.

BS: Right where the Italians were. That was all Italian at the time.

MN: Right across the street from the Italian neighborhood.

BS: Exactly.

MN: And that's where the Melrose houses went up.

BS: Right and then you go up the hill I--- we lived there until I was about four or five and we lived in apartment 6a and I remember it distinctly like it was happening right now. A young child--- we heard a scream and I actually --- I was looking out the window and I saw a body fly down it was a young child who was like a baby or a toddler, had fallen out from above--- fallen to the grass the grassy knoll there and died. And that's when the city instantaneously--- almost like it was like the week after --- started putting guardrails on the windows.

MN: Windows.

BS: Yeah. And then we moved to 12a, apartment 12a up the hill to 681Cortlandt Ave.

MN: Right. Also, in the Melrose Houses.

BS: Melrose Houses, right. Yeah right, so we went to a higher elevation and it was great for me and my sister because we could look out and we could see the East Bronx but it was sad too at the same time because the fires started. And I could tell you --- my life is interesting because I was born in 1957. Right. So, 1957 Sputnik happens the Cross Bronx Expressway the Bruckner are starting to be built you know Tito Puente's dance mania had just come out. It was a good year. And a lot of other things---

MN: Now. Is your sister older or younger?

BS: She's younger than me. She's two years younger

MN: Okay. So, she's born in fifty-nine and you're the first child.

BS: Right. I'm born June second nineteen fifty-seven.

MN: And what year did they move into the Melrose houses?

BS: Well it must have been when I was like three years old. So, that's like 1960.

MN: Okay so they moved into Melrose in the early sixties.

BS: Right.

MN: So, you were born in Fox Street?

BS: Well I was born in St. Francis Hospital.

MN: But the apartment was in Fox Street.

BS: Right.

MN: Do you have any memories of the apartment or your first memories are in Melrose?

BS: I have--- my first memories are in Melrose. I have no memories of Fox Street or Beck Street or any of that. We have pictures of my uncle my father my various uncles except my aunts in that time period. My father was a dapper dresser. I still continue that tradition today.

MN: Yea. Yea.

BS: My uncles they were all dressed always impeccably. My uncle Ray, he was a fan of James Dean so he dressed in a leather jacket and he could ---- he looked like he was in the Wild Bunch or something like that except he didn't wear the hat. My uncle Ray also was a boxer. He was a golden gloves champion.

MN: Wow!

BS: So, he had a little bit of ghetto celebrity status. The interesting thing about my family--- all the Sanabrias moved to the projects.

MN: So, everybody--- what are the other projects they moved to---- they all went to Melrose?

BS: No. They were --- there was Patterson.

MN: Yeah.

BS: And then there were secondary and tertiary Sanabrias that moved to different--- Jackson and to other projects ---

MN: So, but that was the dream. If you were living in one of those walk-ups with a fire escape to move to public housing.

BS: Exactly. Exactly. So, when we got there, I remember vividly Morris Avenue because it was Italian. Now there was an uneasy alliance between Morris Avenue and the projects because obviously New York is very territorial. The territorial imperative in those days was in full effect-- from you know--- it's depicted somewhat obviously in West Side Story and that was real--- it was a real thing. In fact, people don't realize how real it was --- how West Side Story depicted it --- was very real. So, when I got older --- my --- when I was old enough to go to the store by myself and when you when you grow up in the projects or anywhere in New York City you grow up pretty fast.

MN: Okay. So, how old were you when you first went to the store by yourself?

BS: Probably, I was eight or nine.

MN: Okay and how old were you when you first went to school by yourself?

BS: Six.

MN: Six. Yeah. So, that was normal, same with me. So, the store is ---

BS: Kindergarten went --- my parents took me. Once I learned how to walk --- get to first grade-- - my mother still picked me up but I could basically ---

MN: Did you go to Catholic school or public school?

BS: I went to public school PS1 right there on Cortland Avenue. 97 and 53rd. I saw everything there and I saw the school being built because they used to be a PAL there and they tore it down they built a school and they and I saw that we saw the construction workers working on the walking on the girders and everything and it was hilarious because what happened was the teenage boys with once the windows came into the public school they started breaking them--

throwing rocks at the windows. Probably they were pissed because the PAL had been taken away so then what happens that's they put they put metal grates right on the windows to protect them here.

MN: Yeah we had those in my elementary school too, you know at the lower floors.

BS: Yeah so so anyways so they built a huge cement park we called it High Park, and behind the project of where I grew up the complex there was already a part that was a New York playground that was built there as part of the housing complex so we call that Low park so people would differentiate the two. So the interesting thing about the Melrose projects was because it was a predominantly African-American

right and there were some Italians and Irish still there. The first friends I had in first grade and in kindergarten there were blacks and Puerto-Ricans but there were mostly Italians and Irish.

MN: This is a PS1?

BS: At the Immaculate Conception that the Catholic school that I went to. Immaculate Conception is famous because it's the oldest Catholic Grammar School so so in the Bronx.

MN: So what age did you go to Catholic school?

BS: Well I went to kindergarten when I was five and Catholic school when I was six okay so you went to kindergarten first and--

BS: Yes, right and then directly to Immaculate Conception first grade and because they--

MN: And then you stayed in there throughout elementary school?

BS: I stayed there to the fifth grade because I was given the opportunity to take a test and take an interview for a progressive school in the archdiocese called Monsignor William R. Kelly that was run by these progressive, leftist, Franciscan brothers and this is talking about this goes to the fact of still racism and prejudice and bigotry even though there was this uneasy coexistence between the different ethnic groups the test and the and the opportunity for you have to take the test first then you got the interview the test was only given to white kids. And my mother found out about it. My mother was, God bless her, and she went to the principal and said no no my son is smart I know he's smart you know, this this is not right except. So they let me take the test and I was the only one that passed it. And I got the interview. If my mother hadn't have stood up from yeah I would have been still been in you know in this school and the school was great,

Monsignor William R. Kelly, because one it was in Manhattan was out 83rd Street between Broadway and what's the next Street Amsterdam ave. and I had to take the subway every day by myself

MN: Starting in fifth grade or sixth?

BS: Sixth seventh and eighth grade/ I had to be basically independent at that time and that was 1970 no 71 is when I went to high school so 19--4 years be 3 years before this you're talking about '69 '68. and this is the beginning of this the city starting to take a downturn because of malfeasance and crime going up and the soldiers coming back from Vietnam as junkies and everything else in the Bronx is burning so and the graffiti culture started come out in full force. Just little Inklings of it little by little and and I had to take the Iron Horse man every day down to 280 third street. I took the number two train and then I took the one train and I had to do that by myself and it was a requirement of the school that you had to wear a tie and a jacket so then I had to deal with the bullying of that because they they be calling you a faggot or this that and the other you know because you you know you were a Catholic school boy, so I learn how to defend myself little by little. And I remember there was a 600 school which most people don't know what that is but a 600 school is where they basically took kids that were incorrigible and then--

MN: Incorrigible, right, them all.

BS: Right yeah a New York City public school system whether they were they sold drugs, when they did drugs, whether they had mental issues whether they were gang members whether there was a six hundred school next-- near where we were in Monsignor William R. Kelly, so they would try to mug us and one day a couple of --a guy-- said give me your money and you know I I just said fuck you man you know and and I threw my book bag down and the guy was bigger than me but he was just shocked that I would stand up to him and he backed off. He backed off. So I learned how to defend myself. In that case it was verbally, but sometimes I had to physically defend myself and to give you an example of the the racial climate back then everybody was living near each other right and everybody was coexisting but that didn't meant that it was all harmonious. People ask me all the time--when was the first time you ever got applause? You know when the first time I ever got applause was? I was in a lunchroom in first grade, you know, I hear all this laughter so I sit down okay what's so funny? And they go what's so funny? You! You spics you're full you know you so you guys are so stupid you know what I don't know why they were talking up about Puerto Rican

MN: And this is the Irish Italian kids?

BS: Yeah this is in first grade.

MN: In Immaculate Conception?

BS: And this is first grade you never would even hear kids think of kids talking like that in first grade anywhere today. So I just like I'm I'm listening I and everyone's laughing and I just sat back like I'm sitting now and I don't know where it came from but I said we're stupid? I speak two languages. How many languages do you speak? And all of the sudden there was silence and everybody obviously Oh shit, Sanabria whoa! And everybody started a that's the first time I ever got any applause and then the nun comes on--hey what's going on-- in with that Irish accent and some of those nuns said because they were you know --what's going on here?-- you don't and that would that was a few like weeks into the school you know I mean first grade was a little bit traumatic for me simply because I got pneumonia and I almost passed away and we-- believe it or not--we used to get milk delivered to us we had a little canister and we used to get milk delivered to us it's like we were in the suburbs, but in the South Bronx on the 12th floor we used to get milk delivered to us. We had a stop eventually because of junkies would come by and start stealing the milk, but I always remember that distinctly and I hadn't I got I caught pneumonia and a doctor came --the doctors made house calls back then in the projects-- and I heard one heard them talking in the hallway they did they forgot that I had the door a little bit open and they was talking about how I might not make it you know so you know I started to cry and everything my mother's realized what happened and she comes in and goes no he doesn't know what he's talking about you're gonna get better and I did and I missed the first month of school.

MN: Wow.

BS: So when I came into the first grade I was behind and I remember the woman like it was yesterday, sister Johanna, she was so kind and loving, she was very young you could tell she was very young and she probably represented a new group of newly initiated nuns and priests and brothers that you know were college educated and probably very and very progressive and probably against the Vietnam War and she goes what-- hi Robert you know and she goes do you have a nickname? I go yeah well everybody calls me Bobby you know so she goes okay, you know, sorry come with me it's you I'm standing in front of class she goes, hi everyone this is Bobby say hello to Bobby--hi Bobby, these are all your friends these are all your friends in class. You don't have to worry about anything you know and she was very loving. The second year, and I caught up, the studying, and because I had because my father's love of reading. I had-- I could read already-- I was reading the newspaper in the first grade so "See John Run" was like nothing for me you know but my second year that was traumatic, because it was sister Josephine and she was like like she'd rap you on the knuckles with the ruler. She was like one of those--the iconic image that you have of a catholic school nun, right yeah she was mean and this she was a good teacher but you know she was all about discipline and whereas the sister Joanna was all about love, she'd hug you, and I don't even know she she could do what she did back then today could they be say no that's inappropriate she loves--she kissed you on the forehead oh I

was fantastic you know come over here let me give you and everything was love everything was love. And --English-- I remember another incident in second my second year with this woman with this nun there was a student in the front of the class he was fat and he was very quiet. He didn't speak English. I knew because on Melrose Avenue there was a meat deli and it was run by Germans and my mother-- I remember going in there with my mother--and they just do sign language and basic English, and he was there working with the family and he was a school and he didn't speak English. He couldn't read so when it was the tradition and those days I don't know what they do now each person reads a page a book or whatever you would say--

MN: Those are the old days.

BS: Yeah he couldn't do it he couldn't do it. Everybody's laughing and I was in the class going he goes he's laughing everybody's laughing making fun and she's yelling at him. And I yelled out -- stop stop he doesn't speak English he speaks German! And she's-- I get punished for speaking out in class I go to the back of the room stand in the corner and she went on to the next person you know but I stood up for him and that's where my civil rights think is right you know so don't. I remember those experiences vividly because they represented opposite ends of the spectrum-- love and then unfairness. And then talking about Morris Avenue when we used to go to the Italian deli everything was cool but when I started going by myself you know like nine, ten years old, as soon as you get to the Avenue "yo spic, what are you doing, go back to the projects."

MN: Now is this from the kids or the older people?

BS: No, the teenagers, the teenagers who were like 15 so yeah yeah they're giving you shit. So I used to go to the deli I'd tell the guy can you and watch me when I run back to the corner? Because I had to run because we're going running all the way up the hill to the right so you very to get a bottle thrown at you or anything. But that was just that it was like normal and you know my I used to tell my mother Ma, but you tell me go to the deli the Italian deli I said Ma please can you you know come with me and she goes what's wrong with you you're a coward, and it was like in Spanish everything sounds more dramatic so the go to you is she goes listen if somebody throws up bottle you you grab a brick or whatever you want and you hit him in the head you throw it, know it was that whole survival of the fittest kind of thing which today in this PC world if you heard a parent telling a kid that they'd down the parent but that for being like that but that's just the way it was it wasn't and that was nothing abnormal because every parent in the hood said the same thing-- defend yourself --therefore--

MN: Oh, I have the same thing growing up.

BS: Don't be a punk yeah defend yourself yeah you know stand up you know let's stand up no don't be a coward right you know.

MN: Right. Now did your parents talk to you in both languages?

BS: No. No. My mother talked to me in Spanish all the time and my father spoke in English sometimes you know because he was out there. You know what? My mother taught me all the the Rosary in Spanish in the act of contrition in Spanish. I can't remember it now but you know but I used to recite it all the time. My mother's still to this day very religious she's a devout churchgoer and then what happened was a woman in the building because ever in see in those days it was like you know what Jane Jacobs talks about that everybody that knew each other in the tenements, well because there were so many families and they were and there was not this whole thing of like a single parent hadn't started yet right everybody basically knew each other the Sanabrias basically all lived in the projects between 681 281 and 305 which are the numbers of the buildings so I could go to my aunt's and have a you know lunch or whatever right they're looking out to see you know you know like. I remember one time I didn't go to church on Sunday I played basketball and my mother found out.

MN: Well they're spies, they're spies! You couldn't do anything!

BS: This father yeah couldn't do anything and all of a sudden and the guys playing basketball he go oh shit Bobby your mother! She comes over and embarrasses me in front of everybody slaps me in the head grabs me you know come on you know this that the other yeah you know because I dishonored her by doing two things-- lying to her and then not going to church-- but that was just the way it was back then in there . I think I wasn't the only one that went through that yeah I mean if you got the most embarrassing thing was it for police officer caught you doing something and they walked you back home. And it was great psychology because if they walked you back home the whole neighborhood saw it because there was a series of tenements just before the Melrose Projects are the people that live there so you they're looking out the window and then when you get to the projects there's usually somebody hanging out or whatever and then the word starts spreading around and before you know it everybody in the neighborhood knows it and then of course what happens is people expound on the story and make up things or whatever you know so where you got caught maybe writing your name on a wall or something it was it comes out as Hey Howard, did you did you that you held up a bodega? I go what? So so in any case those those are the kind of memories from others that I have brought up

MN: Now what kind of food was in your--?

BS: Oh let me go let me finish this-- the way my mother learned English. So in those days and you know this from your research you could go at the Catholic school they would open up the gymnasium after school so you can hang out but unfortunately the older boys would take over that then at Immaculate Conception there was a building right next to the main school and we

found out that there was a bowling alley in there-- a two lane bowling alley that had been built in the 1930s or whatever and you had to set the pin so we snuck in there, we used to sneak in and play and play etc and then we played all the street games-- Chinese box ball, off the point, or people call it stoop ball, we called it off the point in that neighborhood, stickball... See what people don't understand, all these games, even though there's an uneasy like tension between all the different ethnic groups the games brought you together. So if you could play a certain game, like a team game, like stickball and you were a good batter or whatever they wouldn't give a damn that you were Puerto Rican or Dominican I get Bobby he can well or whatever even though he's a freakin spic but whatever you know so though those kind of situations were always happening and of course the neutral ground was always the pizza place, the barber shop, the candy store, and the gym dance. and they were all and invariably what always happened is no matter what ethnic tension there was or racial hatred a lust-- teenage lust-- that always won over. So if you all of a sudden you're like an R&B record like "Hey there lonely girl/ Lonely Girl/Know this lonely boy loves you" you'd hear something like that you want to slow dance right but then whatever they happens to some Italian guys are there why did I hate these frickin mulenons, these bastard black people whatever but there's always one guy that sees wow yeah she's fine man fuck yous, I'm gonna ask her to dance, you know, and what's the dream of every young teenager to get close to a young girl your hormones are raging, it's like you know this the better it's the closest thing to sex you're gonna have legally, you know dancing with a girl and then all of a sudden they're either secretly going out or and it would happen amongst the Jews, the Italians, the Puerto Ricans, everything you know so I remember that vividly you know that was the neutral ground. Remember the scene in *West Side Story* with the gym scene? That's a very real thing because in the gym scene if you notice, it's the only time when both groups that hate each other or collectively experiencing ecstasy and they're experiencing it through what? Latin music. And it's an interesting trichotomy because never because you got the whites dancing in mambo, you got the Puerto Ricans dancing mambo, and mambo is Cuban it's not Puerto Rico, and it's being played in a modern hip way in New York City yeah and it's bringing everybody together so that was a very real thing for me, and then it started disappearing because --oh so getting back the long way around to my mother learning English --she in those days, the gyms at both the Catholic and public schools would be open afterwards so the kids could play and then they closed them so you could go eat dinner sometimes they'd reopen them later after dinner around eight to ten minute for the older kids but most parents didn't want their kids hanging up that late because they wanted to go to sleep so they could go to school the next day. So my friend of my mother's in the building while would volunteer and she told my mother's nickname was Jenny my mom's nickname is funny my mother's name is Juanita but all her friends called her Jenny. So Jenny why don't you come in if I help out volunteer you know in this then we watch the kids and she started doing that and then later somebody told her you know if you become a teacher's assistant you could get paid for doing this so she started training and she had with a teacher and she had to fill out lesson plans and all this stuff so she really had to learn English. She knew English on a rudimentary level but she had a heavy accent so I would help her. I

helped her doing lesson plans and I'm reading the stuff which you can look and she says "que lo significa"--what does this mean?" I know what this means that you know you want to show this lesson, reading lesson, and this thing so I remember I had to get her out of the habit of saying shit because I she would pronounce sheet of paper like "a shit of paper" I go no no no no she and she couldn't pronounce sheet she would say shit and finally she got it. To make a long story so nothing my mother learned how to speak English and become a great teacher this is it she was offered a scholarship money to go get her degree and become eventually become a teacher a full-fledged and she said no you know I my kids me me me oh oh wow but she worked for like over 30 years.

MN: In the public school system?

BS: Yes, she worked over that but at school--PS forgot the number of it I think it's 84 right near the concourse villages, PS 155 no is it 150 I don't know I forgot the number but she worked it with special ed kids right Eddie and that which is rough

MN: I think Arlene Shanta from the Chantelles used to teach there.

BS: She probably knows my mother my mother knows but but my mother was always very loving with but very strict with us and thank God for that. She was very strict to the point of like you know yeah every kid gets to a point of hating their parents because when you get to be a teenager that's when you stop rebelling but she gave me because I went to that school for gifted kids I had freedom because I had to go by myself to the subway and I ran you know I did all the things that kids did in those days the the platform is too filled with people and the subway cars because of somewhere people read the gate under between the some kids I used to push it and climb in and add now when I think about us and man I couldn't got my legs chopped off huh I wrote the back of the subway surfing I never trained surfed on top guys that did that-- they were crazy. A guy that I knew when I was in grammar school in Catholic school Paddy Maloney this is his real name I think his name in real name was Patrick but then everybody called him Paddy because he was Irish he did he would do crazy things like that he was fearless mm-hmm there was a bridge that connected Cardinal Hayes high school with Morris Avenue took it they've deteriorated with the malfeasance in the city they'd have the money to maintain it and rebuild it so they they took it off because one day the legend was somebody fell through the concrete now because it was so just you know we saw it deteriorating little by little I said I even sent on that man something's gonna fall through there one day and we're Paddy Maloney a man walking with this guy joy Balsamo in this guy Frankie Graziano and Joey Graziano they were brothers these are my friends when I was a little kid notice nobody is Puerto Rican or african-american we're walking across that bridge and we're talking and we go oh shit where the hell's Paddy? So we look up he go he yells at us and Patty's on top of the bridge walking across on the top on the top like nothing man so so I don't know what he's doing now. I hope he's still alive right those are

the kind of guys that becomes like fighter pilots. So so that was my existence I mean back then but I always had an intellectual side to me and that came from my father.

MN: Now how did your father introduce you to books, was it he was reading?

BS: Yeah I saw him reading and I wanted to be like my father and saw him reading and and, and the reason he read was because my father bought himself a lazy boy chair and when he my mother would tell me what told me when your father comes home from work don't bother him, he's tired he wants to relax he's gonna sit in that chair and he's gonna listen to music and he's going to smoke a cigarette have a beer and he's either gonna sit back it close his eyes, listen to music or read while he's doing this

MN: Did he read in English or in Spanish?

BS: English. He read in English he read in English.

MN: But he could read in Spanish?

BS: Yeah he spoke in Spanish fluently.

MN: Now wow, but so how much education did he have in Puerto Rico?

BS: He got up to a grammar school and then he got to high school he graduated from high school anyway you know no I graduated from Bronx Vocational. from Bronx Vocational I remember his his high school diploma instead of Jose said Joseph, they changed his name which was he worked.

MN: Was he a member of the Machinist union?

BS: Yeah yeah it was all that.

MN: So you know that's a that's a decent paying job so I guess you put up with this yeah that's why yeah yeah it's a much better paying job than a high school graduate will normally get.

BS: He didn't he like I said right I used to I used to be pissed off. Why is he yelling why is he doing this why is he you know but then I invested my mother would told me we had a confrontation one day and it was over something trivial-- making the bed-- and he was in the army, he was a sharpshooter in the army he made corporal, and they wanted him to continue to officers training school noncommissioned officers trained and he said hell no. He told me the whole story later on I learned more about my father the last ten years of his life back then then

when I you know when I was a kid so he he I was in high school and I had blacklight posters on my walls I had a poster Jimi Hendrix I had a poster of Carlos Santana yeah and my room was my domain and he started talking to me because that's not how you make the bed and he started showing me like the way they made it in the army and I'm going and I finally talked back to him I said Papa I don't give a damn how you made it in the army who cares it's my bed and he got mad and we almost got into a fistfight and I actually took a swing at him and luckily I missed, he ducked and he grabbed me and he says calm down in Spanish calm down calm down and I think then he just then he just let me go.

MN: Was he as big as you were at that time?

BS: No, he was shorter,

MN: So like five five?

BS: No, he's like, I'm five eight five nine he's like five seven so was I was I was a teenager so I was I'm still short, so he says calm down in Spanish and he didn't say he was sorry or anything he just put me on the bed sat me down calm down and he's like I'm like almost crying basically because I couldn't take it anymore --the bullshit--than and he walked out of the room and he never fucked with me ever again about that or anything so so and it was interesting because he made models so I made models and everything but this the combination of the job and the streets you got it you have to understand the city was deteriorating the environment in the projects was deteriorating I mean this is like late sixties early seventies yeah I mean it's just people that you knew like hey whatever happened to so-and-so and then you find out the whispers they got arrested for either doing heroin or selling heroin. People would stop hanging out in between the projects, they had some sense that they would make community spaces like park benches right yeah and people I remember distinctly the people sitting there and talking my parents, well, me and my sister played tiddlywinks or whatever marbles whatever, and people are talking the other kids are playing and it was really an interesting time period because there was a community.

MN: Yeah and this is like the early 60s mid 60s, and then it deteriorate late sixties early seventies.

BS: They got to the point I remember one time my uncle Ray was a boxer well he was not a professional boxer he was a Golden Gloves champion a guy tried to rape my one of my cousin's in the elevator he took his his penis out put her against the wall she started screaming so luckily the doors opened she ran away and she and they lived on the 10th floor we lived in the 12th floor and we could hear screaming like like from up there you know yeah well it was the summertime and you could and my mother says hey what's going on and we went down stick my mother goes

come on with me because my sister and we walk all right it was during the day and we go downstairs my cousin Daisy is crying and everything and she finds out you know my uncle what's going on he had company he we waited until he came from work and he tells her he goes what he was coming with me he grabs her and they start looking for the guy and they find them in the the between 305 and 681 the two buildings, they find him and he starts running he grabs him he gets him and he starts beating the shit out of him, and the whole neighborhood-- everybody starts coming out the cops come and this and they they they put my uncle in cuffs on the side and he you know it's like a big you you know scene and he goes he tried to rape my daughter in the elevator and everything and he's going fuck you to us and the guys yelling and screaming before he was african-american so that tension starts happening and then my cousin Daisy says yes he's the guy and my uncle says I'm a trained boxer my hands are lethal weapons you know. And to make a long story short they let him go.

MN: They let your uncle go? And they arrested the guy?

BS: Yeah but not that day and they arrested the guy, it was like in those days it was different because the cops knew the neighborhood, they look you know some of them you know them by their first name or you just said hello and they would say hello back etc. so it was different and they were. And the interesting thing about the incident was that the two cops that came were black, they were African-americans.

MN: And these were Housing Authority police? So the Housing Authority police knew all the people, they arrested again you know he was you know so so my my cousin Daisy was all traumatic you know yeah like post-traumatic not equal a post-traumatic stress well you know somebody always had to be with her all the time why I get called up hey can you walk her to the store yeah that's --

MN: Yeah, well that's rough stuff .

BS: Yeah and I got mugged I remember it was a sign of upward mobility for a young man to get a leather jacket and I got a--it was like the leather jackets that you see Run DMC use those are old-school that was like the thing you get you had to get a leather at what we call the leather and you got them down in Delancey Street yeah so you saved up money and whatever and you got one when you stole it or you whatever you know you got it so then I had a little job, I got a little job working in a bodega helping out and I made some money and my mother gave me some extra and I went to Delancey Street with my friend Marvin and I got like a motorcycle leather jacket with a belt and everything so one day I going to the elevator it was my fault because by that time you should be looking out all the timem two guys walk in.

MN: That's not good one two guys welcome to and they get me up against one guy has a gun to my head the other one has a knife to my neck give it up so I gave em the leather jacket and I'm breathing hard like this I walk into the house and my mother goes what happened what happened and I told her what happened she calls the cops not those two black cops were two other black cops come they start interviewing me they you go we want you to look at these photographs and see if you recognize anybody here they saw something a photograph and you recognize anybody? Yeah I know him, and basically three quarters of the building was in that.

MN: Holy shit wow.

BS: And everybody was either selling pot or cocaine.

MN: This is early seventies.

BS: Yeah yes selling powder heroin or have been arrested before doing it and I'm like cracking I'm you know to me it was like shocking because I go oh my god you know him you know like I just swwho are the guys who the guys and I go and I picked two guys out and you know but they never quote you know because you I catch the people with the stuff in their hand and what they they will probably junkies and they sold it so but right yes.

MN: So looking at this you were one of the few people in the neighborhoods going to like a gifted program like either Catholic or Bronx Science?

BS: Well I I know that one thing I was the only person at least in my project-- I don't know in the other buildings-- that looked at a life beyond the projects. I looked at a life beyond the projects. In other words the I had already become enamored with two things: sports and music. My dream when I was younger was to be the second baseman for the New York Yankees and the Yankees was so bad in the 1960s that we called them the Horace Clarke years --Horace Clark was the bowlegged second baseman of the New York Yankees and Gerry Kenny he was the shortstop and the bat Rocky Colavito I think played first base I mean even in the Joe Peppertone some of those Yankees it was like it was post Mickey Mantle they were under the climb and everything but then music took over and and that was it.

MN: yeah well I I want before we get to the music so did you did you play on school teams or was all like you know.

BS: there was no school did he know school teams we had intramural teams at Monsignor William R. Kelly I learned a little bit about hockey. I never played hockey in my life.

MN: They played hockey at the school? Roller hockey or ice hockey?

BS: No, no. We played just with no skates with the sticks in the gymnasium and it was brutal. It was brutal man it was it's like but those those Franciscan brothers who were left us, they were brutal also they they were like we were doing advantage we had was we were taking in high school and college courses. I took a film course for two semesters with a guy named Brother Damien and he walks in in a three-piece suit he looked like a hip dude and because I had Brother Damien I'll be your instructor and we're talking about the you know the German school of filmmaking in the 1930s special effects this and then they show us they showed us Roman Polanski's Repulsion and then we had to get waivers we had to bring the parents in because there's nudity and it's dealing with schizophrenia and all this and you know the parents were going it's an r-rated film with they showed us Rosemary's Baby. I mean they were like it they were they were showing us all this heavy stuff that was adult but kids I took political science I didn't even know he will pull it off I said what's political science you know.

MN: it's funny I didn't even know that school existed and I was living in the Upper West Side.

BS: Yeah, Monsignor William R. Kelly if you look it up it's called De Le Salle Academy now okay.

MN: And it still exists?

BS: Yeah and the guy that founded it brother Brian Carr, is still the principal. And he was a mean son of a bitch and no no no none of the teachers none of the brothers wore clerical garb and they were lay teachers men and women teachers and we took biology with cutting up frogs we're doing all this stuff there was a chess club that was but all the kids were ghetto kids I'm talking about hardcore ghetto kids that were intelligent.

MN: Okay and they were from a lot of different backgrounds?

BS: black Puerto Rican everything some white kids but we were all basically disadvantaged knew kids that were given a chance and the goal was to try to get us into prep schools so--

MN: You mean boarding schools?

BS: Yeah like prep schools that you know - yeah so which I didn't want to do you know to begin with and I went to Cardinal Hayes simply because I made all the high schools that I applied for, but I went to Cardinal Hayes for only one reason. I could walk to it. That's the only reason. I crossed that bridge mm-hmm and come back I could have you know they were telling me to apply for Bronx Science and all this and they said yeah I don't want to take the subway anymore I was sick of the subway man huh I was like a little hardened New Yorker by the time I was in

the eighth grade mm-hmm I mean I saw shit on the subway that you wouldn't believe and like that's why I was like it enamored with the get-down and I'm an hour and with this new show called the deuce on HBO yeah cuz I'm like laughing my ass off so I'm like you know like on the deuce when I was a kid there was a pimp on rollerskates in the in the area so when I would go to Manny's music to buy drumsticks I'd see the guy--

MN: This is by the West side or--

BS: He was right in Times Square in Times Square you're talking about from Times Square all the way up to 50 50th Street right the music stores were on 48th Street and so there were the three card monty guys there were the pimps this guy was a pimp on roller skates so he had a if he had a green suit he would the shoes for the roller skates were green if he had a red suit like a red jacket like you have then they were completely red had a red hat with a feather and he had red roller skates it was hilarious man I saw him beat the shit out of a guy one time you know like he just punched him in the face and because the guy bumped into him and he punched him right in the face cold-cocked a guy you know and then it was it was pretty it was it was like Disneyland but run by Lucifer back then yeah .

MN: Well yeah I have some acquaintance with that.

BS: Then when I became older after college that's that was still happening in and I'm doing studio work in all those recording studios were near there I remember I did an episode of *Twin Peaks* I I played on the soundtrack for it Angelo Badalamenti was the composer the studio was right there was a porno theater xxx and right next it was a stairwell and I go away this is the exercise I woke up and there's the recording studio yeah like a and Angelo Badalamenti was there and I got to meet the director what was his name he was married to a famous Italian actress anyways does it make it that would those all my experiences you know growing up no but I mean but 42nd Street the deuce and they became known I would go to the karate movies I saw a dude get thrown off the balcony one time in one of the watching a karate movie I remember seeing the Texas Chainsaw Massacre today with a bunch of high school kids watching the Texas Chainsaw Massacre and of course everybody's commenting on the action and this that and the other so and then I remember kung fu became yeah Bruce Lee yeah man everybody had new chucks nunchucks it's amazing how hood culture I call it hood culture or ghetto culture how instantaneously grabs onto something and it within a week everybody's doing it and you know I ran track for Cardinal Hayes high school okay I was good at it I was very soon.

MN: What was your distance?

BS: I was a quarter-mile or not and half mile right I pictured myself a sprinter but I was really a middle distance runner, I was very good my I broke five minutes in my first race I mean doing

the mile, but everybody was great that's like the first race I was doing cross-country at Van Cortland Park, you know I was so such a newbie didn't know anything that the coach didn't tell me it was like 150 guys on the line in cross-country and I goes when he did say when the shot goes off run like freakin hell because you're gonna get trapped he just say that so this is the shot goes I hope people will be jogging all of the sudden get trampled on so I to survive I just broke through and I wanted to being like 9th or something I'm coming in everybody screaming and yelling and I just you know out of fear and everything I just I did I just did well but and I was always running again there was these two guys that ran against me Ian Suite was from Jamaica he went to Rice High School and Matt Centriwitz who went to power Rock Central which was famous yes his son his son became Matt's entrance me and aunts we were always one two or three Wow and I hated him because he he played always dirty he'd be at the starting line we'd be at the indoor track at the Armory in Manhattan, he goes on your mark you suck Sanabria you know like I think he'd be doing stupid shit like that and then at the end like when we came and would be golfing or wherever he goes yeah good right good race man I fuck go you man you know but I I followed Matt when he was you know and then he became a track coach and and his son a man I saw was.

MN: So his son was the one who became yeah yeah he was in the Olympics.

BS: Matt was in the Olympics he didn't place or anything but that was my high school years but then my sophomore year I totally devoted my myself to music quit the track team I remember Mr. Robinson the the coach he was African American easy Sanabria why are you doing this? and all those people on the track you have a future in this I go to the future what you can't make money at this maybe once at the Olympics you know whatever anyway I was so obsessed with music that I 24/7 constantly yes music yeah.

MN: So well that's interesting 'cause we haven't gotten into how music grabbed you. Were your parents very much into music?

BS: My father, because when he would sit in that lazy boy chair he would listen to everything from Mantovani to you know Harry Belafonte live at Carnegie Hall to Pete Seeger - to machito Puente, to Mexican music, Mexican ranchera music you know everything man, Percy Faith, I mean it was like he was very cosmopolitan. I remember he, the first three records I remember listening to when I was a kid 78 Oh 3.0 Vega Barino from Puerto Rico called recuerdos de navidad, is what we call guaracha, so there's the song I was enthralled by it because of the guitar picking and the bongos, the bongos going *imitates bongos and sings* so I would play that 78 over and over like if I were autistic or something my mother was like yelling at me take turn the record off already I know then the second record I remember listening to was I'm in with the I'm in with the in crowd by Dobie Great my father bought that 45 and the third record I remember listening to my earliest memory is Reach Out by it by the Four Tops

MN: Right, "I'll be there."

BS: I'll be There, you know those are the first three recordings I remember listen so interesting and one is a typical puerto rican mountain kind of music with a comedian trio and the two uh african-american artists

MN: Right, now in the Melrose houses was there a lot of music coming out of other apartments and you know...

BS: Well there was from ours there was, then there was a family that lived across from us down the hall la familia Monge--m o n g e, but everybody used to call him the "mun-geez" when the monkeys came out there the kids used to go hey they're the mun-gees but they were interesting because they were a Puerto Rican family I remember the mother Mary and and the father did just used to call her Monge, because Puerto Ricans and Cubans I guess Dominicans - they just call you by your last name, hey Sanabria you know, wait so he had I think he had like nine or ten kids and the New York City Housing Authority let him get a few extra bedrooms they they they there was an older woman that lived next to Puerto Ricans she's the babysitter so her name will come to me in a minute she lived alone so she only needed her bedroom so she had two bedrooms, so they busted the wall we arrested it and they gave him she had three bedrooms and they gave him the two extra bedrooms so that the rest of the fam could be there. And everybody they were a popular family amongst the guys because they had these beautiful daughters and wherever there's beautiful women around young men seek them out. So I remember one guy he was a dope dealer and he was in love with a girl named one of the sisters named Lucy and one night like a like a wolf howling we hear like three to two in the morning "Lucy! Lucy!" they had to call the cops or whatever man he was waking up the whole frickin building because he was so enamored with her I don't know what happened maybe they had a tryst and he broke up with her or whatever and there was a there was a woman girl named Millie...who else... well there was there was a few and then anyway two of the younger brothers Joey, Albie, and Manny, they became my friends, and we hung out who can't we had like a posse together and we hung out a lot. And they were all into music because the older members of the family they were already in their 20s they they were into everything James Brown like everybody was and they had the hip records and everything right then there was a guy who lived on the ninth floor Marvin Mattei the Mattei family he had an older brother named Rene and through him I got into Latin Boogaloo Joe Burton and right so we would listen to his records in the in his bedroom we put them on yeah between my father's stuff and then at the same time radio was the hippest ever ever was you have Frankie Crawford, you have WWRL you had Jonathan Schwartz at WW and all those really hip hippy DJ's Allison Steele right yeah Schwartz, Dave anyway then all those guys I remember listening that's how I got the heard Matt Miles Davis bitches brew for the first time Alison Steele would come out at like midnight or something ten o'clock eleven o'clock she was

this is the Nightbird Alison, and she come on that's how I heard John McLaughlin in the Mahavishnu Orchestra first she opens up with birds of fire by the Mahavishnu Orchestra I freaked out yeah so radio was the best that ever was we had w every other jazz station less Davis and he's still taking it at serious yeah

MN: Now were there still people playing drums?

BS: Yeah, very freaking night in the in the park across the street and the entrance of PS1 there were little steps and guys would play congas in and I would come watch, the drum always attracts people, and nobody was saying it

MN: And these are mostly Puerto Rican guys?

BS: Not mostly --all--

MN: All Puerto Rican guys playing drums almost every night.

BS: There was this guy who was a friend of mine he was an electrician his name was Cheeky, he was whiter than me yeah red hair and green eyes and he had a badass Timbales, the repetitive rhythms you play on the congas, and he could really play congas he was a good friend of my cousin John-boy so I met him and and one day I'm watching them playing and there was his kid playing the cowbell and he couldn't keep up. The rhythm he had to play was This *taps out rhythm on desk* right so you gotta play that while then on top of it is *imitates other rhythm/instruments* so he couldn't keep up and I'm watching and I'm like eleven, twelve and then I could do this like I could do this I could do the better I'm scared you know what to say anything so finally yeah you know I think getting frustrated I guess and I just blurted it out "I could do it I could do it" and Cheeky goes ahh you can't do it you know whatever this said I could do it I could do it any so because they give me the combo so we they stop playing I stop playing okay then can't get that but that I could I was doing the rhythm but the Bell was clanging it didn't sound like like the sound that the other kid got out it's like clang clang clang clang so I go like what the Freak so they Stop and say "I told you you couldn't do it" and then another guy that lived in my building along with Cheeky, he was a black Puerto Rican guy I and I don't remember his name my mother knew him to this day he goes no no no no he's doing it because kid there's a crack on the seam of the bell that's why it sounds all clanging grab it at the top and squeeze so I go start again, and *imitates rhythm* you can hear the rhythm and innovation and if for this.

MN: Had you ever done percussion? *Bobby shakes his head no* So this came out of just you felt it and you did it?

BS: Yeah but I was messing around it's another interesting thing-- only in the projects man there was a --they started doing things like quality of life things and the projects to make them that people feel better. So they started putting tiles in all the bathrooms they put tiles in the bathroom so when I took a shower and I I hit the wall like that all of a sudden you get booom it sounded just like a conga drum so I used to watch the co-and I would be good I'd stay in the shower

MN: In the shower against the wall?

BS: Yeah my mother was like going how long you gonna stay in there--in Spanish-- you know I was practicing congas on the wall, and then you practice on the car bumpers.

MN: And this is this is all before you actually-- so you're at ten years old?

BS: Yeah eleven, I'm like when those guys the older guys cuz I didn't have a drum, you know none of us did the older guys had the drums and they'd go out there so when I did that and I played everybody started applauding and going yeah yeah and Cheeky, who resented me, or just probably just giving me my shit because he knew my cousin, you're all right kid already taps me on the head all right kid you know like but I again, getting ghetto celebrity status the people in the neighborhood started talking-- hey, Juanita's kid he's got some talent --you know this thing

MN: Wow and this is when you were 11 years old?

BS: Yeah yeah so so that guy he did two things: he gave me self-confidence you know three things he stood up for me gave me self-confidence and he also taught me something because the bell was cracked in the normal, funny, but it was cracked on the side the scene had to be welded together to like so you know so this day when I hear a bell like in it I know I could tell it's cracked.

MN: And you went to schools without music programs?

BS: Yeah, and I was begging my mother please put me in public school because they have music in public school.

MN: So you were in a Catholic progressive school with no music, and then you go to--

BS: I was in another school before that one yeah so my junior year use I'm that progressive school yes and forgive the kids yeah

MN: And you get academics but not music, and then you go to Cardinal Hayes you have sports and academics but no music well --music program at a music program

BS: And I was in the marching band with Mr. Ryan and the concert band oh and that's how I learned the rudiments of learning how to read music except

MN: Okay so did you try out for the band is that how you got--?

BS: I didn't try out, I just requested it I said I gotta be in band

MN: Okay and this is what was like ninth grade to tenth grade? You knew already that you wanted to do music--

BS: I had bought some drumsticks I was like my heroes when I was a kid with Buddy Rich Gene Krupa Louie Bellson I'm watching them on TV and Tito Puente. And that was the Rubicon, when I was 12 years old Tito Puente came to our neighborhood. There were a lot of free concerts being done by the parks department because they knew that music would soothe the so-called savage beasts and right oh man there's a lot of craziness that we're going on with the gangs and everything so Tito Puente set up a stage right on the corner of East under 53rd Street that corner stood there the bodega is still there out of the wall right there they set it up-- Ricardo Ram, Bobby Cruz, the hottest band they were from Brooklyn they were out of albacore halahala Boogaloo they were hot, from Brooklyn he graduated from the Juilliard School right at the elbow technique and and Bobby Cruz a great singer they opened up then Cedar Point they came out -- I'm sorry machito came out and he's doing *sings* and then they there's a part where the saxophones stand up and they do the sax Mambo *sings* when I heard that it did was the trumpets being like oh my god we --me and Marvin we were looking at the window from his ninth floor parents bedroom apartment because at my side a 12A we couldn't see so he called me come down you could see it from here so we were looking and I go we gotta go down we gotta go down, he goes no man stay up here because we could throw spitballs at people and so I go fuck that man you know so excuse my language my French but this is for a historical posterity so we run down by the time we get that Patina Pointers playing *sings* and I'm going oh man and he's like he looks he points to the Saxophones, they stand up and then he takes the climaxes his big timbales solo and I'm going oh shit man this is what I want to do for the rest of my life, you know and that's that's how it that's basically that was the rubicon.

MN: So that was like a few about 12 or 13 when you saw Tito Puente--

BS: I was 12--I live, and then eventually we became friends and I became he played on my first recording and I played in the band I used to sub in his band.

MN: Damn. Okay see you're 12 years old that you now know what you want to do, and where did your parents have any conception of music as a career?

BS: My mother-- they tolerated it you know like my father my poor father man he was so you know like he was so I guess you would call it post-traumatic stress syndrome from the job that he had. What saved my father was the company that he worked for moved even farther out to Long Island, so he couldn't work so for two years my father didn't work. We were on food stamps. My father had a depression like he was like he's the man of the family, he's a proud Puerto Rican man he had survived;

MN: And he had a great job, well paying...

BS: Yeah hey well I was but we want food stamps we were on welfare and finally there was this man gentlemen Mr. Lugo who also lived on the ninth floor I would see him every day with his postal carriers uniform-- he was a postal carrier-- he delivered the mail yeah he talks to my father he says Joe my father's name nickname it Jose the nickname for Jose in Spanish is Joe--tu eres veterano, you're a veteran--I bet that I know allow you your veteran right who's yeah why don't you take the post office exam you could you know you pass it and you get extra points yeah Ariya veteran so my father built himself this little bird cubical house you know different compartments in it so he can practice sorting and I would help him and that was timing you know what would've stopped once

MN: So then that's part of the test?

BS: Ya know because he had to be able to sort mail.

MN: I didn't know that that that was part of the test!

BS: Yeah he built it. I wish then he would have saved it-- he threw it out I mean I he would have been nice for the archives for the family. But anyway he passed the test and he got the job and for the next-- until he was 78 years old cuz he wouldn't retire he worked at Madison Square Garden that big huge post

MN: Yeah. Right.

BS: And then he worked the last three years of his life and a post office that was what they call a relay station further down in the twenties, thirties, but he that's what he did that and then you know it was he got his manhood back his pride everything but that was just a conversation Mr. Lugo yeah oh yeah everybody helped each other those

MN: Yeah, no, that's an incredible story about your father you know and I'm just thinking about what it must have been like for him you know in that job where he's taking this abuse and he's

traveling two hours each way and he's making this good living and yeah he puts up with it right and that's just that just very...powerful.

BS: And we did things... yeah I thought the things that were really interesting like he like I tell people these were working-class people with middle-class fathers they wanted their kids to go to college they wanted them to--

MN: Your sister went to college?

BS: Yeah yeah yeah. She didn't graduate but you know she became she she's lives in Chicago he's been living in check out for the last 25 years he had this great job working for this Japanese shipping company she knew about Japan and everything but in any case for example we had and every project is the living room and the biggest window is the window in the living room because it faces out so everywhere you could all the light comes from it. So my father got somebody to come in and put in venetian Blinds. They had to drill in and and-- not venetian blinds --like theater curtains yeah so you pull the rope little rope and they opened up and and I remember that the neighbors were pissed because there are freakin guys drilling and they came in that they started like 5:00 in the afternoon and you know dinnertime everybody's going what that was going on so now I breathe you know so anyway he did that because he wanted to have a sense that we were living a middle-class life. And that big chair that the lazy boy chair also represented that. We bought he bought our console TV and remember was RCA and it wasn't color it was the black and white but it had a stereo on one side and am/fm--

MN: Yeah I remember those, right.

BS: But he couldn't afford the like the extra hundred dollars or whatever to get the color TV, so we just it was just black and White, but that stereo I've wore it out playing everything from Santana to Tower of Power to Machito to everything, it was like Mahavishnu Orchestra everything King Crimson I mean and I have my father to thank for that that electric taste and also being lucky enough to have grown up during that time period where New York radio was so great. Because I learned one thing-- Frankie Crocker he came up with his moniker for WBLS-- the total black experience in san--

MN: I remember

BS: So I read that's when I got into like oh he's playing the final all-stars right after Gladys Knight & the Pips so that must mean that the finals of black music that must mean it must come from Africa as African, you know so that was the beginning of me getting culturally involved.

MN: Wow so you're at Cardinal Hayes you're in the band and how are you now figuring out how to position yourself in terms of a music career?

BS: Because there was a guy named upon, it there was a guy named David Carjon, there was a gentleman by the name of David Carjon, he was close to Regan and he went to school with me at Monsignor William R. Kelly, and we were the only ones that were into the band. People took band at Cardinal Hayes so they can get out of gym, so we would only serious ones so we were-- I was the one after school practicing snare drum, whatever, I begged my father--here's another interesting thing-- I begged my father for a drum set. So we go to Manny's, the biggest music store in New York City the most famous one - on 48th Street there's a guy behind the counter named Buzzy--a veteran jazz drummer, and he starts showing us and how much the drum sets are like professional drum sets by Gretsch look they're like 500 bucks you know for an EMF I was looking at and he he can't afford it so Buzzy sees that and he goes look his son really looks like he really wants to play sir you can get this low-end model that the Goodwin company makes it's called look week standard it's like one plywood reinforced with fiberglass on the inside but you'll be able to practice and play and we couldn't afford the whole drum set so that got Buzz he goes yeah part of it he's a good salesman it was like you get a hi-hat, a bass drum, a mounted TomTom and I'll throw in a cheap pair of high hats a cymbal, and the cymbal stand for like forgot what it was like 300 bucks, 250, that was a lot of money back then but I noticed Manny's was like amazing because all the pictures and there were musicians there you know so he got the drum set for a half drum set yeah.

MN: But so you're practicing in your apartment?

BS: Yeah and I would put towels on top of this so I wouldn't bother the neighbors. Wait here's another thing, there's another thing, there were musicians living in the neighborhood. Kako from the from the Allegre All-Stars, the team I would play right I used to play basketball with his nephews uh-huh and stick one every so one day they go to me hey you want to see my uncle's suits and you know who's your uncle he goes you ever heard of Kako and I go oh my god you're the team bother play--your uncle is Kako? Yeah, so we go up to the his apartment they had the key, we go inside we always they open up the closet and he's got like 30 different sharkskin suits. Orange, canary, yellow, blue, powder blue, purple, maroon, I don't like what sharks did yeah like what you see it in the movie with Robert De Niro, Vegas, casino whatever. So then I go wow wow and then also we hear the door turning, and it's Kako, and he walks in, "hey, what the--" you know and he talked like some African King so cuz he was black, black Puerto Rican, so isn't it so what are you doing one of them cuz I was just showing him your your suits do you know uncle goes "Okay you like 'em? Put 'em" on so he gets us to put on the suits you know and we're like you know with little kids so that the the mangas the sleeves are all over all right he's like hilarious man, so he's laughing his butt off and he goes in he says I only wish I had a Polaroid camera to take a picture because all right put 'em back you know get out of here you

know so that was like a brush with celebrity local celebrity then, in my building, Candido Rodriguez was the timbales player for Ricardo Ray and Bobby Cruz that's why they played in front of our projects he lived there and he had two twin sons-- little kids-- and when he used to see this playing congas in the jury they used to war plan they went to the Cardinal-- I mean to Immaculate Conception too - they walk by and they go my father could kick your ass on congas, tumbow, and bongos you guys suck you know hey cuz that's just the way the branch was back then these little kids, eight years old saying that shit you know

MN: So how old were you at this point?

BS: I'm like eleven, twelve you know so anyway he and his wife used to do my mother's hair so he had a big afro he was what we call a grifo, and a grifo, that's what we called a light-skinned guy like me but with kinky hair records at that so he one day he came by, he just by --look Kako used to get his hair processed by Ruth Sanchez who was Tato Rivera's sister so he used to get his hair in curlers, to get straightened out so he had any curlers and he had it in a handkerchief and a kerchief, and he's coming out of the bodega he said into the 3rd Street with groceries and Candido is coming out with groceries at the same time with his big afro and there's these two guys playing checkers while a little bit of music is coming out from a speaker from the bodega and one of the guys that and I'm like crossing the street and I see what's going on and they-- the one of the guys that's playing checkers in Spanish goes "Quien prepara la cena esta noche?" who's making dinner tonight like 'cause they look like a married couple. That's hilarious. So that's that's another experience I had and then also in 305 the building across from us Howard King lived there and he was he was a child prodigy on drums and he was at music in art high school and he was 16 and he was already playing with McCoy Tyner and Gary Bart's and the N2 troop. So my cousin John knew him he was hey don't you like drums? I want you to meet a professional drummer. So he comes over I --John walks me over and there's a guy with a small car. I think it was a British mg or something, I don't know, or Mercedes or whatever, it was it was just a small car. So he's putting drums in the car and I see that's the first time I ever saw an 18-inch bass drum which is the standard size that a lot of jazz drummers were used for bebop and he introduces me to him and the whole thing and I go Wow you know how you know "Nice to meet you Mr. King," "Oh man just call me Howard," this, that, the other. So so we John and him were just talking and everything and he goes and so that was that was I met him and then I saw him on TV on PBS playing with Garry Bart's and the N2 Troop, live from the Montreux Jazz Festival, right so it was another person that lived in our neighborhood. And then one night I swear to my mother 3:00 in the morning 3:00 in the freaking morning man in the summertime you hear this *drums* loud as all fuck.

MN: Only in the Bronx.

BS: But nobody's saying anything nobody say hey shut up-or whatever, but it was it was so funky you know like that *imitates rhythms* so he-- it's Howard-- it's like 3:00 in the morning he must have like come from a gig or something he just was hyped up it

MN: So he's in his apartment and you could hear it?

BS: Oh yeah, his parents' apartment you know like like and he's just playing the shit out of like a funk beat like that, and a half hour passes by and I'm in the bed like like listening I'm going like that my mother was wakes up because "dios mio!" you know like you she's like going and I tell her in spanish, "don't call the cops please! no you let him keep playing," so so then he finishes and then you hear like 10 seconds of like oh five seconds of silence and then you hear somebody yelling out --"yo man! Why the fuck did you stop? That shit was funky man!" yeah--somebody else goes yeah bro! Howard! So only only in the Bronx man yeah I mean maybe that same scenario happened somewhere else another city it probably did but it have it for me it happened like so that those kinds of experiences besides the craziness that's happening, the entropy that's happening, at the same time the neighborhood's like that

MN: And you're watching the fires, yeah.

BS: But it was interesting because the junkies would have respect for the elders. The junkies would have, they would open up the door for my mother--

Angel Hernandez (AH): Yeah I was about to get into that.

BS: Yeah at that time and then my mother would say why are you doing--ahhh senora, I can't help it, I think that kind of it.

MN: This even happens today with the senior citizens in public housing.

BS: Well I'm glad because you know now it's like with these do with these like gun-toting thugs a lot of that is kind of gone you know.

MN: Even with some of them it's still there.

BS: Yeah it's good because even though these guys lives are destroyed they they still had some sense of dignity and respect for the elders, you know, you know like I remember there was this woman --Puerto Rican woman --that lived on the eighth floor, la familia celpa, her husband was a like Inspector Gadget, he could fix anything anybody that needed a toaster fixed anything then you went to him and he would fix it and you give him a couple of bucks yeah like a little side hustle, you know so she was coming in the foyer of the projects we grew up in, and she was and

this guy was coming in and with a grocery shopping cart and she was like she was a big woman she was fat, she was fat and he's and he said something like to the effect come on you fat bitch move you know and she fucking took her pocketbook and she hauled off and POW right in his freaking face man right in his figure, to the point that he he he went on one knee and there were other people there and they all backed her up and they say hey what's wrong with you man and respect people you know what the hell's wrong with you this and that, he got up and he's going I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry you know and you know like so that doesn't happen today you know like but but I those are the kind of experiences that I oh--I have to relay this to you because everybody asked me why didn't you get into drugs? The reason I didn't get into drugs is because when I went to school my first my first year at Immaculate Conception anybody that lives in the project she knows if you live on the upper floors when you go to school in the morning it's like a logjam with the elevators 'cause those they're industrial-strength elevators, they're made to go slow and last a long time so you either had to get up really early and wait and wait and wait because all the floors are being you know right yeah Yeah so what I would do is I would take the stairwell and run down but of course the junkie sometimes would be shooting up in the stairwell and they nod off and they sleep there and the way you knew it was they took out the light bulb. So I'd run down it was like a ritual, and maybe that's why I was good at track because for years I did that, (1:34:48) just run down and then the stairwell you got like maybe to the ninth floor and the stairwell is blackened so you know somebody's there so you go to the other side on the step you're the other stairwell on the other side of the project and you keep running down but then what happens when both of them are out? You got to just go through it so you hear some moaning and then I go shit, I see a couple of guys man they're just sleeping or whatever and one guy lights a lighter and I remembered because it was an army lighter he must have been a vet a Vietnam vet and you see the other guy with the needle and they're still in his arm like this I don't know and you know the guy with the lighter yo man you fucking up our high you know that's the worst thing you could do to a junkie it's like two people having sex and you interrupted so I go excuse me I gotta get to school the other guys oh yes it's lady Juanita's kid you know come on man hurry up man about hi so go through there and that's good to yeah I never wanted to. I never could see the logic why are these guys not knowing that when you talk to junkies they talk about shooting up like it's sex like it's orgasmic.

AH: Did you have friends Bobby that you know either performed with you if you grew up with them...?

BS: Yeah well presently yes of course you know and I've had to fire guys from my own bands and brilliant musicians you know because what happens is somebody is an alcoholic or a junkie abuser of any drugs there's always gonna be that day and you hope it never comes but it usually does, when you least expect that they're gonna drop a bomb on you, either they are not gonna show up for the gig or they're going to show up late and an important thing event or whatever or just not be able to perform and and you can't you can't just have it. That's why Frank Zappa

would disapprove drank--smoked pot everything but as far as hard drugs and all that he could not tolerate it in his band mm-hmm as the music is so difficult to begin with to play with you have a rock guy who's employing classical music techniques and jazz techniques in his band and and everything they did was memorized, so so that's what scared the shit out of me, I mean, and I drank--pot--and all that you know cocaine and but but heroin doesn't-- forget it

MN: Yeah no I have the same same reaction, I tried everything else but not that. I saw too many- - especially up here when we were doing community during the Vietnam War I just saw people destroyed.

BS: Which is ironic because I'm diabetic so I have to inject myself all the time when I take my insulin, but that when I saw that it

MN: Was this from the time you were child? When did you start having to inject yourself?

BS: I was diagnosed when I was my freshman in college

MN: Oh okay.

BS: So I was like Sonia Sotomayor like we were diabetic but we didn't know it we diagnosed later on, and the guy goes to Boston at Beth Israel Hospital Boston goes how long how have you been walking around like this? Like you know like I what happened was I got the flu and it wouldn't go away and finally the composer in residence at the school Michael Gibbs, I remember him so this thing he saw me--he was from New Zealand-- he saw me in the street he goes Roberto you look terrible get to a Doctor

MN: Now what school is this what college?

BS: Berklee-- the Berklee College of Music and I went and they goes they started interviewing me do you have a history of diabetes in your family I go yeah my grandmother on my mother's side that from it and and then they finally told me and I was like very stoic I just said yeah am I gonna die from it? They go no, if you control it. And I go good tell me what I have to do and hurry up because I want to get out of here you know it was like I was very businesslike and it didn't hit me psychologically until later I got it and in those days you had a carry a vial and the syringe with you all the time and luckily they-- bicycle pouches had just come out. But now I just carry this this pen I'll show you what I carry it's like a it's like a Star Trek pen you know. I probably left at home, but you know it's it's part of my life it just is right yeah now one of the things I wanted to ask you who was your you know you described all these experiences who is the first I hear this hear this wow this is what it looks like oh so you take it on and you just and take this up in your leg well I was like Scotty would do the Captain Kirk yeah when I met Sonia Sotomayor finally they honored me at Cardinal Hayes, and she was there and she front of me

invited me on a letter to the Supreme Court and with this, we had lunch with a couple of her college buddies, lawyers, and she goes I want you to sit next to me you know I want to talk to you and then go okay you know what so she it turns out her brother went to Cardinal Hayes because what's the Cardinal Hayes right I know yet she goes you young men have a reference reputation. So I said-- I started laughing-- and I go yeah you know it's unfortunate but some of us uh you know but but not me so so we become friends and we see each other occasionally-- socially, socially but she's really cool and we talked about diabetes and the whole thing you know so I always tell people listen you you control the disease you don't let it control you most people can't believe when I tell them because they look at me and they go well you're not fat. I go who told you that diabetics are fat? I mean someone someone look like me and some yeah yeah there's even some rock stars that are you know

MN: One of my former students found out he was diabetic when using the Navy in the Persian Gulf. He's in great shape you know basically but he has to it's part of his life.

BS: Something as well is I got to eat breakfast lunch and dinner and you know so I got to do this yes. I mean there is a psychological hump that you have to cross because it is you know it is a thing man you're actually injecting yourself with a foreign substance. But luckily now insulin has become so refined that genetics. The closest thing that you can get it with the insulin was pork insulin that was genetically akin to human insulin and now it's like synthesized that the genetic makeup is completely the same as humans so we basically maintain a good stable blood glucose sugar level but I have to watch out like I was playing but I was playing last night and at the 55 Bar with this great jazz singer Gabriela Andres and she finished the first-- what I thought was the first set and she and she goes we're gonna do one more tune Annessa because i felt it i was getting a little blood sugar and I didn't have a candy bar Hershey bar anything then I said Gabi you know give me an orange juice from the box--wait -- and how to get it because I was starting to sweat and and a few more I could have gone unconscious.

MN: Yeah, so you gotta be aware all the time?

BS: Yeah yeah and awareness gives your discipline so yeah and I'm pretty disciplined so but I've had some harrowing experiences when you have low blood sugars sometimes you can hallucinate. So I kind of like know what somebody goes through when they have an LSD trip. One time I was hallucinating at JFK Airport I got off the plane from from where was I I was in I was in Paris I think it and I came back got off the plane I thought I was in London and I'm actually talking to myself going what am I doing here in London and then finally this woman who works at City Law she doesn't work there anymore, Marcy.

MN: Yeah I remember Marcy.

BS: Yeah she saw me-- she goes Bobby how are you! I go what are we doing in London? What are you doing here in London? She goes London... that's when she realizes something's wrong so you know I was diabetic you need something right so she brought me over to them and I got some McDonald's, thank God that that I've had some close calls like that, you know so so things like that have happened one time I was dating this woman she I was finished with my New Year's thing she insisted that I go see her and I said look I'm going home I'm tired and she goes come on I want you to see you it's New Years okay so I drove over to her place and one of the things about diabetes when you've had it for so long you have to watch out because certain symptoms trick you like if you're very tired it might be that you have a low blood sugar. So I was I had my foot on the brake I'm listening to Eddie Palmieri I it's I'm at the light and I was looking for a parking spot to see her and I hit I have my foot on the brake and I wake up in an ambulance.

MN: Oh shit!

BS: Two cops were behind me. One was Puerto Rican--a girl there was a Anglo American cop they were behind me and I went to red when the light turned green they said what the hell's wrong with this asshole? They honked I didn't move see they came out they came out and they saw me like this. They busted the window but I had a minivan at the time they get me out why Eddie Palmieri is going, I look up at them you know like--

Voice: I remember that song.

BS: And and I wake up in the hospital and they told me what happened and the whole thing I go man thank you so much the only reason they found you because I had this (necklace) on it tells them I'm diabetic so they they were trained you know hey he's unconscious to see what the because somebody else would they just waited for the ambulance so so and there's those were in the days of cellphones not the flip phones just right and they were going through all my numbers calling people. And then finally, I'm coming out of it in-- the eye I've no I didn't wake up in the hospital I woke up in the ambulance I woke up in the ambulance and I said call up Marlene her name she's my girlfriend and they had called up my ex-wife so my ex-wife shows up she shows up so it's a Bronx Tale.

AH: A soap opera.

MN: Yeah so I want to know what was the first mentor you had?

BS: Mr. Ryan Ryan saw the talent at the--

MN: At Cardinal Hayes?

BS: And the guy I told you about that never got to David Carmona. He lived in Manhattan near the Manhattan School of Music a few blocks down like like near with George Carlin grew up. He was in Monsignor William R. Kelly with me and we were budding musician he played trumpet he was much more advanced than me he could read music he's at Cardinal Hayes we're both in marching band and concert bands together and what and Mr. Ryan, and we formed a band

MN: At Cardinal Hayes?

BS: Yeah. No, no, no, we formed the band before Cardinal Hayes, we called it Orquesta Suprema. We used to rehearse at my cousin Sylvia worked at this little office that was a community liaison office for the city or whatever on Cortland Avenue yesterday-- hey, you could rehearse in there. She opened up up front we rehearse in there and we we did we tried to do covers of Eddie Palmieri music and Santana music and we got some gigs! We played on the Lower East Side we played some dances. Aurora Flores Soros, when we were kids the whole thing and because--

MN: So this is when you're like 13 14?

BS: Yeah yeah yeah it was hilarious man and but I knew I said them as a man I need to study music I need to like know the mechanics of what the hell is going down and everything else and I was inspired by Tito Puente on the album's that said composed and arranged by Tito Puente so I said wow and he plays vibes and he plays-- so that was my goal to become like him--a schooled musician.

MN: Now did you get any musical training before Berklee?

BS: So no no--- yeah! In high school in high schools

MN: From Mr. Ryan

BS: Yeah because in the class it was we would meet and we're just doing marching band music yeah but no but as I'm so out of tune because nobody gave a we were the only ones that gave it me and David so and there was a guy named John Johnson-- African-American guy he could play lead trumpet he could screech like Maynard Ferguson this guy was so talented I was remembered him because he had a sick sense of humor like Robin Williams yeah that kind of Robin Williams energy--yeah, I remember him because he worked at a movie theater and he got stills of The Exorcist and born into banquettes oh man I'm revealing all this stuff hey guys check this shit out look at this man her head turns around and she says your mother sucks you know whatever and he's making us laugh and he's showing us the picture the stills of like Linda Blair and all this like holy shit, but anyway he was very talented he was he loved Maynard Ferguson

one of these this open question area may be coming so anyway to make a long story short he would have been a professional musician too he got mugged and he got stabbed right in his lung he collapsed lung oh and that killed his career as a trumpet player,so so we were the only three guys and he was older,and there was a guy named Eddie Hernandez?...I forgot. Anyway he was older and he plays drums and he and he has a sophisticated technique and everything but none of these guys were obsessed like we were we were obsessed with everything that was happening at the time from Milo to Santana to Tower of Power the Miles Davis - to everything Grandma Funk Railroad James from everything to end it up linking the Jazz Messengers so we would always be talking about music-- hey check this record I'll check that record up you know we call each other up talk about music so Mr. Ryan would notice all that kind of stuff with us so David one day walk into the bedroom early to practice some snare drum and he has a catalog he's reading and this is Berklee College of Music hey what's that Berklee College man this is a way that Quincy Jones went to study all these guys to career and really Wow man we got to go there yeah how's the audition whatever and I saw a picture they had black and white photos very rudimentary and I wrote to the school it turns out they have different they had different-- a catalog of music books so I bought two books from them one book was called "A Manual for the Modern Drummer" by Alan Dawson who was the head of the percussion department and another book was called "Multi-Pitch Rhythm Studies" by Ron Dell, it was how to do melodic drum solos written all written out like timpani solos and something on the drum set so I started practicing them in every end the book for a manual for the modern drummer had transcriptions of the licks of different famous drummers our Blakey Chick Webb and Buddy Rich Max Roach and an analysis of historical analysis of each one why they were so special. So then Mr. Ryan's noticing all this and then we're playing with this band I'm getting calls for play with all the local bands this that David is getting calls so finally but really we really wanted to really learn the nuts and bolts of jazz we thought we could play jazz but it was we were just you know neophytes so Mr. Ryan sees that we're you know very serious about music because I I got my first timbales through Mr. Ryan he bought him from Brahmins for me the music storm which was on for him you know I remember that yeah this Brahmins supplied all the instruments for all the high schools in grams in junior High's so and we saw him we admired Mr. Ryan because we saw him play trumpet-- he'd go give me the trumpet I'll show you how it's supposed to sign you play it then he'd take the saxophone we playing the piano goes Sanabria no it sounds like this-- then he'd take the drumsticks he was a really good band director and he did gigs so he sees us one thing because you guys are really serious, serious serious about you one really want to be professional you really want to go to college right I see you're talking about the Berklee College of Music goodness you're never gonna make it you're never gonna make it you never pass the audition. And we're going you know looking at each other going why is he doubting us so much for any good thing unless I help you you'll never pass the theory exam. I'll make a deal with you stay out of detention that's what's called jug-- Judgment Under God which was you had to stand there for like an hour and not do homework or anything and military style and then they switch then you and you could sit down stay out of the attention and I'll teach your theory three times a

week Monday Wednesday and Friday after school. You meet me here and I'll give you a theory lesson for an hour Wow and then he gave us a book or program text for music and it taught you he says the major scales you have the minor scales I have relative minor scales a harmonic minor scale etc all these different scales the modes a oh I only in Aeolian Dory and all that stuff in a program when we go through that book then he'd write things on the board then we you know like we do a little bit of what we call solfage sightseeing I mean I had never done that before so we got to be examined Berklee we passed it with flying colors it was because they know, so so he beat he was my first mentor. Well he wasn't my first mentor my first mentor was my father throw the music expose beats the second winner was Mr. Ryan then my freshman year there was nobody at Berklee that could play congas, timbales or bongos or Brazilian percussion and I knew those instruments from self-taught on them yes streets so they told me hey there's a guy here Michael Gibbs he's the composer in residence the artist in residence at the school and I knew that name because I had I was a fan of the John McLaughlin of Mahavishnu Orchestra and they had done an album with the London Philharmonic and this is arranged by Michael Gibbs so I knew that name. And they said he wants a percussionist in the band but there's another guy that's interested he's also a student and so I went so I interviewed for the position basically and the other guy was Tony Tedesco. He was older than me he was a senior or junior, but he played besides jazz drum set he played vibes marimba classical percussion. So what Michael Gibbs wanted was he had seen weather report, and they had a hand percussionist, so that's what he wanted in the band and the band was made up of teachers and the best students so he wanted what I could do which was play those instruments going out on wrong timbales and presenting percussion so he told Tony I'm sorry but I want what he can do it so I got it and we've rehearsed in this room I think it was called a five was in the corner you go up the small reading on the corner and was a large room and there the first rehearsal there was like 50 people outside looking in on the rehearsal because these were the baddest cats at the school, teachers and everything. So next to me is a guy with big hair and a beautiful Gibson hollow body guitar in a lumberjack shirt. The bass player-- what was his name?... Kermit Driscoll-- he went on to become famous - anyway week passes and there's an two weeks pass that same guys the third week a new guy is in there the new guy's name is Bill Frisell who became famous. So I asked Kermit hey what happened to the guy with the big giant hair man he was good. He goes that guy admit I was Pat Metheny man because he's on tour he just got site to ECM he's on a world tour man. So so that I mean I go home because we didn't talk maybe just played we just you know and and Michael Gibbs you know his he was very a modernist he was like Don Ellis, very futurist, so he composed jazz like Stravinsky he would have like a bar a bar of seven followed by a bar of nine and he would and then even go can you come Roberto can you come up with a rhythm for that I said sure you know and I knew how to count and I had been exposed to Don Ellis through PBS and I know he was into odd meters and everything will require me to soul oh and yet I got a New Zealand Australian whatever accent, maybe it's all brilliant brilliant you know whatever so that I was in the elite ensemble at the school everybody got to know me. But I was still getting my together on the drum set and I had this teacher Bob Wagner he was a good guy but he wasn't

giving me what I wanted I needed to learn my my get my mechanics together so I asked for another teacher that's what he's got Bill Noreen and he wasn't giving me what I wanted either and then finally I'm all distraught I'm in the lunchroom same thing like just talking all this my whole life is based on a community and talking the guys at lunch go to me oh man you need to study with Keith Copeland, I go who's Keith? Man he's Allen Dawson's protege-- Alan Dawson developed a method to teach jazz drumming just shortly so they would free all the limbs complete coordinated independence so like you keep you're keeping the rhythm again and and the bass drum you know and the right hand and the left hand are talking so you saw it four guys at the same time. So so Alan-- every every everybody everybody wants to study with him but he didn't have a degree in music and he was the head of the percussion upon he was African-American to any so they told to him the administration said we will want you we want somebody in the position yes for a raise and then he said well you don't have a degree in music and he goes you know he had studied architecture and mechanical drawing but he was this genius jazz drum and educator and he did every jazz drummer that studies today it studies his method whether they know it or not, so he had developed this pedagogy. So he quit he quit because he said I can make more money just teach him privately and he did so he put in his place Keith Copeland who was his protege, he was black. And it was a them my friends in the lunchroom going yeah man he he's from New York like you he's African-American and it's then the other so I I go to the office and I go I want to study with him man teacher to Keith Cole he's got a waiting list like for two years or with I got a study with him well if you talk to him maybe hope what you want to take you on as a student so I'm looking for I'm looking for and finally I find them on Massachusetts Avenue like a block away from the school they go that's Keith right there Oh Mr. Copeland, Mr. Copeland no matter but I gotta study with you I gotta study here calm down what's your name Roberto Sanabria-- oh yeah yeah alright my schedule so let me see what I can do the next day I get a slip of paper in my thing-- in my mailbox you are now the student of Keith Copeland, so he saved my life I go into my first lesson it was okay Roberto it was only one drum set now traditionally, when you take lessons with anyone there's two drum sets so the teacher plays and you play but in those days you only had one drum so there was a beautiful sonar drum set the most expensive drums in the world. I walk in and he goes ok so where you from? I go the Bronx, yeah yeah yeah I'm from Queens I'm from Jamaica Queens so I grew up with Billy Cobham in honey and Lady White you know Wow alright sit on a plate for me so he said hi so I took the seen one like this hey hey hey you guys what the fuck are you doing man? That's like that and I go what do you mean what the am I doing man I'm this seems too high you know usually you should say cuz man listen those are my fucking drums when you sit on anybody sitting on anybody's drums you don't adjust jack shit! How would you like it if I came to where you lived in your house and I was sitting in the living room and I said man I don't like the way the furnitures set up it's my fucking house those are my drums my house sit down shut the fuck up don't touch anything and play for me you know. In my head I'm going wow I finally got the right teacher, and I played for him some some funk stuff you know. I went back to Howard Kim what he did, right that night I started playing that I'm I played for about a minute and then he was

ok ok there's something we got a lot of work to do but there's something there, there's something there. And so he gave me these exercises and everything and within a week I was swinging like playing like a real jazz drummer like Max Troy oh my god and he gave me this the the bedrock of technique that we use is this book by child of them but he was a genius Charles Wilcox and he has a book or 150 rudimental drum solos. If you go through that book your technique is gonna get like super righteous mm-hmm genius you know and I mean just Keith changed my life. And then I find out Ray Copeland-- his father-- was one of the three top the trumpet players in New York City in the 50s he and he's on Tito Puente albums that I have. So I met him and then he had a protege Terry Lynn Carrington girl drummer, she was 13 and he took me and he took Terry Lynn and he took us to public schools and we would do clinics with him and he would show us off. And Keith knew how to play congas and since I played theme ballads and I hope like the amazing play congas sometimes I play drums he played drumset and then then in short Terry Lynn was now very famous and everything she's a Grammy winner and all that teaches at Berklee. And I learned how to do clinics and I mean he changed my life he made me the professional that I am - he - Hey Roberto I'm playing at the whatever this hotel come by and I see him playing backing up a singer and I go wow you know he's you know seeing how he switches to the brush it it was like everything was. And then he started recommending me for gigs so I remember the first gig he recommended for me I didn't have a car man so I had to take a cab. I'm going to Roxbury which is the black section of town at the time

Voice: I lived in Jamaica Plain

BS: Yeah there you go so I go to Roxbury I get there everybody's black everybody. We got the door it's like a VFW or whatever you know they but it was everybody's black so they the guy - who are you I go I'm the drummer oh yeah you Italian I go now I'm Puerto Rican oh okay cool you know and eh goes habla espanol he goes and I go segura que yo hablo espanol--i okay you know he wanted to confirm this. I walk in with the drum set the drum set that my father the half drum right my father bought me in the mean time I had finally got the extra TomTom cymbals. I'm going it everybody's black on stage everybody so all the tenor sax player comes him you do young man Keith sent? Yeah oh yeah he goes he said you're qualified and yes I am, you know so okay we playing dance music remember Four-on-the-floor no bottoms me not this ain't don't bebop band playing dance music, Count Basie whatever, so when he meant for on the floor when you play for dancers like in swing music you keep pulse with the bass drum like that and you keep in time with the cymbal two and four with the left hand and you're like ornamenting with this hand you know emulation to the music [Music] like that so bebop would be completely conversational. Like that. So that's you know that you're not keeping pulse you're just talking yeah all of us and everything so I did it and he turns you know the main thing you know when the musicians turn around that they had these are older black musicians yeah they're not going to go any song yeah it sounds great there's no gee whiz you something you either nod your head or the said they say nothing they say you sound good yeah you know then again they're never gonna

say great, because there's there's no great. It's just you know that's unattainable you know. So I mean but and if they they don't like something don't let you know right away so and like the way I teach not today it might not be politically correct but I don't give a flat fake because this is just this it's a hard-knock life out there as a musician, and I don't want you to go out there and be mediocre, I want you to be excellent. So Keith was sending me to these gigs I'm getting all this great experience and at the same time I've re-formed my group that I had with David in college and I called it "Ascension" and you know and I will do giggin' I got a big reputation in Boston with the band but when I gra- and then you know what I would do in the summer times that come back to me but nobody would hire me because oh man you're gonna go back to school I would do gigs freelancing things but no steady band, behind, you're gonna leave again in September so. I so finally I graduated after making this big reputation in Boston. I graduated and came back to the city, and I get the gig with Momo Santamaria, and that's that's the beginning

MN:Wow, so how did he find you?

BS: Somebody-- the guy that played bass in the version of the band that I had he came in through town in Boston playing Doug Harris the tenor player was the musical director at the time was asking because Steve Barrios who was playing with Mongo went over 20 years was having problems he'll always fight the Mongo asked for more money and because he had a certain skill playing drums and timbales that nobody else had he'd keep the gig over would have to acquiesce and give him more money but finally was coming to a head and they said we lookin for somebody he told Lenny and then he told him I know this guy Roberto Sanabria Bobby he's Puerto Ricans from New York but he graduated just good and you know he he calls me he calls me up oh no Jack Cook's manager calls me-- "You Bobby sanabria?" that's the way exactly what you told Jack Cook was the accountant for who was the guy Alan Freed right back in the day yeah and Jack was a silent partner at Birdland he also worked for more Morris Levy Ohio everything he was mom was manager for years and he goes yes Bobby you got a passport I go small more subtle his manager we're leaving in three days to go to Europe for four weeks I don't know but I can go get one he goes I call him back I get that's when you could get a passport in one day. I stood on line for hours got the passport and I call him back the next day because I you know he kissed and made up with Steve Barrios you know so he's it but they call me like three months later and I got the gig.

MN: And what year was that?

BS: You're talking about 80 No 81, but in the meantime that year I graduated 79 in 80 I was working with Gianni Cologne I was teaching at the East Harlem School of Music I started working with Marco Ruizo oh the famous pianist of Randy-- I Love Lucy a show and brought the music Victor Venegas the famous bass player --Mongo Santamaria's first bass player-- he got me that gig. They needed somebody that could read and play big band music you know how to

do it so in that band is when I became a studio musician because excuse me everybody that was anybody do a studio was in the Band-- Roger Rosenberg, Lou Marini, Mauricio Smith, Moose Olaf Jon Faddis Ronnie coober it was ridiculous Roger Rosenberg Victor excuse me picked up bass it was the elite most of the guys were on Saturday Night Live who's the elite elite I remember. I did the gig Jerry Dodger it was the lead out so played for the Village Vanguard Orchestra and the lead out support player from Marco he turns the run he goes like that yeah a kid you know like that cuz I was sight reading everything nailing it ain't going you know kicking the shit out of the band. So anyway you're Smith comes up to me and goes hey kid you just to do studio work? And I had only done demos and things and this stuff that I'd done in college I said of Course all right we had no no recording studios tomorrow not at 8:30 in the morning we start at 9:00 we're gonna record some jingles so I know the recording studios Nola's with Charlie Parker recorded and everything so it's right in the Steinway building mm-hmm so I get there early, set up the timbales. So the engineer goes your're Bobby get it great you know so you're gonna be playing drum set and timbales, you know. So I get in there and there's a young a small short man behind the conductor's podium and I will open the door and I walk in and of course I make some noise and uh hello I'm Bobby Sanabria, because Oh Bobby how are you he was Chico farm and when he nice to meet you! Mauricio speaks highly of your looking anyway so we start setting up they make me the team balance I go to the drum booth get some sign they're all little by little deuce all folks it Lou Marini Victor pass you know Ronnie Cooper and then Ronnie Cooper goes to me you look familiar man yeah he was just fucking with me, good that they here he saw me the day before they started laughing there I go and I'm like nerve getting nervous because this is the elite of the studio and you know I did great and I'm getting every week I was doing in the studio to the studio were and then mobile call me and it was great because I got to travel we played the first week we played at "Fat Tuesday's," a nightclub that was one of the premier clubs that no longer exists, and then what else that we play the second week we went to Boston and then on a four-week tour Europe

MN: Had you been to Europe before?

BS: No, this is your first time in Europe, and then a couple of weeks on the west coast. And I was newly married it was hell on my marriage, it was hell. And it was you know but it was different because we were treated with this supreme respect in Europe and and I just recorded, oh that's a the other great thing I recorded with him right away I did an album called "Mongo Magic" and Marisela was the arranger and then I did another album called "Espiritu Libre" and I took a big timbales solo on that recording and everybody started talking about me. They started talking about me for the first recording a Marisela ivo hurtin my then-wife was was in the control booth cuz I invited her and she said you know they were talking about you in the booth it was saying

MN: Wow you know this is on the album Mongo Magic?

BS: Yeah it was, I remember Vita tells me yeah they were talking about you in the booth yeah Momo-sayin' yeah he he likes the way you play and Marty was showing yeah this guy is really professional because they had should be observing weirdo check it out on different - besides playing drums and timbales-- and then here's the other thing I was deeply involved in something here at the time and in something here you have a Padrino and you have a *spanish* your godmother and my godmother was we turned out with Mongo's madrina also so like but we didn't know that now then all of a sudden you know we're talking and we started talking about and Rosa comes to see me play with Mongo and Mongo salute so you know and everything any good and voz that goes there ah have you seen in Spanish oh so so unless you have my godson you've employed him anyone and then you know so me and Mongo were very tight but then the relationship soured because Mongo was very insecure Art Blakey was like a very secure individual. If you had your own band on the side you go great keep the music alive and you know when you're not working maybe you're working with your Group. Mongo he didn't want anybody to work with anybody else or have their own bands because that was a competition to him and he started and then all of a sudden get a phone call from Jack after about a year and a half--Sanabria, it's Cook--I go yeah Jack what's up his real name was Jack Horowitz, and he goes yeah Mongo they equals a mango mango mango is uh you know he's pissed off at you I go why because cuz you got your own band I go but what the fuck you want me to do man I gotta eat when I'm not working with him and sometimes we don't work for a month yeah he you know so you know Narita and finally it got to a point where I quit after two years I quit

MN: And now was Santeria always a part of your family or not something you know?

BS: No but it was always part of the culture because you heard-- Momo was one of my heroes I heard the music I and there were you know my kids did my mother would go see a spiritualist or whatever and there was a big besides the civil rights movement african-americans would really get trying to get in touch with their roots in Africa so part of that a lot of them became salteros you know this you know so

Angel Hernandez: There's also music there as well

BS: Of course of course and the conga drum the record comes from Africa and everything so I mean I remember one time this is an interesting aside. We were playing at "Concerts by the Sea" in Redondo Beach in California and these two guys walking me and Mungo it was a club that was underwater literally under sea level and-- beautiful club --after a break and playing, Mongo and me were talking--these two african-american guys walk in there dressed in full Yoruba begin it with cufi hats dashikis the pants the same coat and they come in and go yo Bongo Django bro you know I was like laughing man cuz they mispronounced everything with a southern accent you know like they're supposed to say *incoherent* they going-- you know-- so what was like

smiling at me laughs yeah yeah yeah yo Mongo we did the way you you know always keep Africa in the forefront man you always keeping it real and Mongo goes yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah but but I am Cuban too you know. And they go no no but you African man you have no no but I have Cuban too you know and I go and I'm proud to be Cuban, you don't like anything good no and they're going back okay what's wrong with these idiots don't understand I'm CUBAN. They they couldn't get in their heads that part of our being is that we are all African really biologically and our culture is from Africa musically mixed with Spain but that in the Mongo's case he's Cuban and I'm you know I'm a New Yorker but I'm also Puerto Rican and I'm proud of that shit you know. So so they they couldn't get it in their heads and and you know one would just and so he just wake him off and everything but they were like still talking about it you know why is he saying he's Cuban man it is a yeah and I and I finally said to them because young men you don't understand I'm Puerto Rican, Mongo speaks Spanish with me we're proud of our cultural identity from those islands. He's not--he's not saying that he's not proud of being African who did culturally I'm African rooted to even though my skin yeah it's white it's about not about color it's about culture so we had a nice conversation you know I can dig it now you know like this that the other you know so but it's all it's all cool we're all brothers

MN: Yeah well we've been going for two and a half hours--

BS: That's cool--

AH: So I have just a couple of questions

MN: Why don't you ask a couple questions and then I'll get the food

BS: Right, how could we if we want to do another session

MN: Yeah another session, why don't we do another session?

BS: I'm sorry I'm sorry that I that I kind of like went off these secondary

MN: No no no no I think it's but if I gotta but it's part of me yeah when I'm gone cuz I should do another session so we would mark this like the the background yeah of Bobby singer Bobby

AH: Because there are questions because we've worked together in the past and there were some innovative stuff Bobby has done

MN: Yeah well--

AH: Right exactly and--

MN: You know I just want to bring you and also given the fact that I don't want to keep him away from food for too long oh yeah no they said there's another thing to this my wife was my high school sweetheart my first wife, she was Ecuadorian, and she was she represents the beginning of the influx of people from Central and South America coming into New York right, so when I dated her I thought when I first met her you know, my sister's auditioning for West Side Story at Cardinal Hayes and I sat behind her to see my sister audition and the reason I went down only to see if I give a support but Mr. Ryan told me we have some professional musicians coming they're graduate students at the Manhattan School of Music and they're going to be in the pit band so you could see them how they work right so I sat behind Vita and I had never seen anything as beautiful as her in my life because she was brown skin straight hair like the straightest hair I'd ever seen and she was Indian, and she never had looked like any other Puertorriquena that I had ever seen--I thought she was Filipino, and I started to count you know that's how we started like she was auditioning also and she goes I'm nervous something and she was talking with her girlfriend I think her girlfriend's name was Amy and she said oh no and that started I don't be nervous my sister's up there and he goes oh bow-wow you know are you filipono? You guys know she was like offended, and I was I go Ecuador, wow so anyways that's how it happened but but we became highschool sweethearts and she went through we were married for 14 years and we had a beautiful son whp was an actor uh-huh but the the business the music industry being too young we got--I got married the day after my 21st Birthday, and then you know where we got married St. Patrick's Cathedral and when we walked out people thought that we were some dignitaries from South America or something they were taking pictures I was tourists and all yeah but anyway so that that's my life of

MN: Okay okay so let's we'll set up another interview which you are the lead person because you have all these questions-- no I did my usual BAAHP interview--childhood and let the person you know talk and it was amazing right Carlos this is one of the best interviews, it brings a neighborhood and a community as well as your life to light.

AH: One of the questions I think you actually you answered it how were you inspired because you know your talent stayed there vast?

BS: It's not just--

MN: Listen keep going I'm gonna get food people and why don't you guys talk and then--

BS: I'm going to make sure I mean I was I was into the Beatles and all that stuff like we all were at that time but the things that excited me more were like Duke Ellington and Buddy Rich and the drummers I'm gonna look at the you know, I'm sitting Ringo playing "she loves you yeah," I'm okay but when I would see people like Buddy Rich or Louie Bellson on TV Oh Gene Krupa

okay well Sam Woodyard or whatever right with Ellington I go oh my god this playing is on a different level one together and then Tito Puente once it was the bridge because he was like the Puerto Rican Buddy Rich yes...