

FRED Al Vega, one of the Boston legends of music, is with us today in our opening interview for the Berklee Library
BOUCHARD: video documentation project. Nice to have you aboard, Al.

AL VEGA: Thank you, Fred.

FRED You don't mind if we interview you for educational purposes?
BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: No, that's great.

FRED Nice to have you here.
BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: I have survived all these years without any--everything helps, I've found in this business.

FRED Right, you never know, any contact might just...
BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, word gets out and you know we're at Lucky's [Lounge, Seaport] now, we're at Remington's [Boylston St.] and Lucky's is packed every Saturday and Sunday, but Remington's on a Wednesday night is a little harder to fill up; so we're starting a series of open mics for singers and some other projects.

FRED That's great. Well, projects for singers is something you've been working with for a long time.
BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, my daughter was in New York and she said, "Dad, why don't you try the talent show idea?" And this was 1975. I was at the Pier [Four] Union Oyster House, which was across from Anthony's when I started my first talent show. We had about three or four people. Lenny Vortel was a fellow we were talking about; he won the first show. Well, there was no winners; we just did it. But the boss hired him and right away he started working with us for the next couple of years. And then when I went to the Hilton a little while later in '75, the Boston Globe wrote it up. Now I went from five or six people to dozens of people. Since we were working six nights a week at the Airport Hilton, I could screen the people during the week and have the talent show. We had it on a Friday because that was a slow night in the hotel; the business men had checked out. And also, one of my regular singers was Karen [Cameron] and she wanted a night off.

FRED Karen was terrific!
BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, so I says, "Yeah, because you make the other singers sound bad!" You know, so I don't need a singer here. But I did start hiring Dick Johnson and Teddy Casher, and in those days the guys were busy on Friday so I ended up hiring even Bobby Mover and a young sax player and his brother who was around at the time.

FRED Oh, the Holiday brothers, Chris and Richard.
BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: I had a trumpet player and then the sax player popped in, and he was like fifteen. So I had some great players, a lot of the people who are on the faculty here at Berklee. So they made the singers sound better, plus we get a chance to play. On Friday they were scheduled, I'd say, "Come back." If somebody auditioned and they weren't too good, I'd say, "Come back in a month or two," and then I'd schedule them for a month later and they'd get all their friends in and it became a very successful night. I even ended up having a steel band there, some guys brought in their own group. So that thing was quite a thing. I had Harry Allen from Rhode Island.

FRED Oh, yeah.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Harry was a highschooler and his parents came in, I remember saying to the manager one night, "This is Mr. and Mrs. Allen. They just had dinner, they checked in for the night, and now their son's going to get up and play for free." How can you beat that?

FRED If you're looking for young horn players you might want to get young Miss Grace Kelly from Brookline. She's an
BOUCHARD: alto player, fourteen years old--she's hot.

AL VEGA: Yeah, so at that time... The talent show started in '75 and we kept doing it. I was there at the Hilton for five years then I went to Paris 26 Club, we hadn't mentioned that, in Newton. I had found Rebecca Parris by then, and she was working with me, and I used to use Dick Johnson whenever I could, and Teddy Casher.

FRED That got her launched.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah. Well see, I gave Rebecca every Monday, she was a rock singer. I went to Casher one night and said, "I'll give you a jazz job." She could do it naturally. And I had people like Donna Byrne, Amanda McCoy, and different horn players. So that was a lot of fun--but I guess you want to go back to the beginnings.

FRED Well, you know as we sit here in Berklee's premises here at 150 Mass Avenue, we look around us and a lot of the
BOUCHARD: former nightclubs and jazz joints that you worked in were right in these couple of blocks.

AL VEGA: Next door was Sherry Biltmore, that was a hotel. In those days they had trios. After I had started my trio at the Hi-Hat and worked Storyville, I went to work at the 123 Lounge in Boston. That was seven nights a week. You know, the kids don't have anything like that now. That was two trios, three singers, seven nights a week, I stayed there for three years. I didn't want to take too many nights off because we were working on a two week notice thing so we just kept working. I still kept teasing them because I didn't know how long the gig was going to last. If I had known it was going to be three years I probably would have cut down on the teaching, but I was doing all that. I had started doing that in the 50's when I started my trio. I was working seven nights a week at the Hi-Hat, opposite Erroll Garner, Oscar Peterson, Charlie Parker, Lester Young, Sonny Stitt, you know, on and on, Count Basie's small band. I didn't tell you that--the Basie small band included Buddy DeFranco on clarinet, Wardell Grey on sax, and [cornettist] Thad Jones the first time. The second time he came back he had Mumbles there, what's his name, you know?

FRED Clark Terry.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Clark Terry, yeah.

FRED Wow.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: And Marshall Royal instead of Wardell Grey, and Connie Kay on drums. I got a chance to play with Basie, and he was a very humble guy. Like he'd say, "This singer wants to do a sit-in, I don't know the tune." You know, what the hell! I say, "Yea." I had been trained in general business, including playing thousands of tunes a week, you know. So anyway, I was going seven nights there, going to [New England] Conservatory and teaching at Schillinger House, which is now Berklee. And the other building on Fenway, Boylston Street, what's the other street, Hemenway?

FRED Hemenway, yeah.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: That was the Bostonian Hotel, and I worked that room and it was the Jewel Room, that was a beautiful room.

FRED Nice mahogany paneling? They use it for a recital hall now.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: They all had baby grand pianos you know, that was before keyboards. Finally another thing that comes to mind. In '61, I was so tired of playing the beat-up pianos around town, I told my trio, "I got to find a good piano. You guys don't mind if we don't work steady for awhile?" They didn't care, because the girl was a housewife too, we had on bass. The drummer had a day job. So I went to work at Storyville across from the Metropolitan Theatre, the Wang Center now and was the Bradford Hotel which is the whatever they call it now. So that was the last Storyville. The first Storyville was Buckminster Hotel, the second one was Copley Square, and the last one was the Bradford Hotel, downstairs. George Wein had gone to New York, so I was emcee-ing the room. Ruth Shapiro was running the hotel, her father owned it, and I actually ended up working with Ruth a couple years ago when she had the Baker Sisters and we ended up working together again. But at the time, she was running the room and I was emcee-ing and playing solo piano. When Betty Carter or someone came in, I got my trio to back her up. She was straight ahead then, so it was no problem. We had Chico Hamilton, George Shearing Quintet, which was top notch.

FRED They were very hot then.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: [inaudible] trio. Cannonball Adderley. Josh White, the folk singer. I remember he came in and he said, they introduced me to him, he said, "I brought along three people, Peter, Paul, and Mary." I says, "OK, I'll run the lights for him. We didn't make it till Christmas, it folded. But the place was packed! You know, to a musician it looks like the place is, we're doing great, but they were getting so much money by that time. Some of the big stars were working, you know, Symphony Hall and working the festivals. So if they didn't do like ninety-nine percent capacity, even if they did that, they probably couldn't break even. So that was the end of it. It's a shame, because they kept us working, the local trios, once in a while or whatever, but that was a great venue for the names.

FRED We should back up a little bit. You know what? Why don't we back way up.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: To high school?

FRED BOUCHARD: People think you're Italian. They see the last name they say "Vega?" They think you must be Italian, but you're Armenian.

AL VEGA: My father would use that name. He was an artist, a sign painter, and he went by Vega Signs. So you couldn't put Vegramian on a marquee, especially in the fifties; they didn't use ethnic names. I said, "I'll be Al Vega." So that's why I did the recent jazz festival with Maggie Scott and John Baboian. Maggie Scott Venasian I think it is. We're all in the IAN class. Everything but Indians!

FRED BOUCHARD: So when you were just a wee tot, your parents had you practicing, working?

AL VEGA: Yeah I was playing classical piano at five, until in high school I said, "Enough of this playing Beethoven and Bach!" In those days it was real cut and dried. There were no songs you knew, it was all the masses, so I said, "That's it! I'm going to be a baseball player!" But I heard Phil Saltman on the radio and the piano club of the year, and I said, "That sounds interesting, I'll take a few lessons." I saddled in in the harmony, popular harmony where you read the chords, and popular styles. Next thing you know, my friend Roddy, the two of us, we were playing with bands all around town. Finally we had our own band that we let whoever wanted to get a gig front. Finally, I said well, we can get on there and call it The Esquires and different guys would lead it. We ended up working with McMenemy twins from Northeastern, which was near the Roseland Ballroom and Taunton, and we ended up doing music with Jimmy Lunceford, one of the great all-time bands. It was just a bunch of kids you know, but we were playing Basie in those days. I think Varty [Haroutunian] used to like Glenn Miller and Tex Beneke. I said, "Wait! You can't listen to that, Varty! Come with me, I'll let you hear a real player. Listen to Lester Young with Basie." So we turned him on to that.

FRED BOUCHARD: You guys had a pretty thriving time of it working the beach ballrooms up and down the coast.

AL VEGA: In those days--I'm talking '38 and '39--we were still in high school. Every beach had a ballroom. Revere had a couple of Spanish gables. Wells Beach would have the Wells Beach Casino, Ogunquit Casino in Maine. Then the South Shore had its stuff and Sun Valley, the movie Glenn Miller was based on that. And Sun Valley was on Route 9. So there was gigs. Sly Schimmel was at local, he'd call up and say, "Al, we need a band, Basie's bus broke down; he won't be able to get here for the gig tomorrow." So I'd call up all the guys--and we were all loyal to the band, even if we had a little joint job, we'd send subs in and play with the big band.

FRED BOUCHARD: And you were playing for dancers?

AL VEGA: Yeah, this was all dance music, yeah. The Roseland Ballroom was on Mass Ave over here, down across from the Christian Science [Center], the block before Symphony Hall.

FRED BOUCHARD: But the arrangements were such that you could loosen up a bit and take solos?

AL VEGA: Oh yeah, they were Basie arrangements, this was all swing stuff, you know. They were Basie arrangements and later on Glenn Miller arrangements. They were little stock arrangements, later on they had the full page, more script style. So we were doing all the covers of all the big band things. That was a lot of fun. So we were doing that real hard. Then I graduated high school, and I was going to Northeastern, I was going to be an engineer. So we kept doing that. Then I get drafted in '42, I was at Fort Devens for a while. I remember the audition was to play "One O'Clock Jump," which you know I started playing and it took about ten chords and the guy said, "Enough already, you're all set, you can go right to Boston base." So I stayed there for a few months and I kept playing with the band. But then I get on the train and we kept riding all night and I says, "It's taking a long time to get to Boston Harbor," and I ended up in Virginia! And then a couple guys started getting drafted and that was the end of the band. So luckily, I did play some music in the army, and I get into Schillinger. He had written a book, Kaleidophone. So when I get discharged in '46, I looked up Larry Berk, he was down the street here on Mass Avenue. Larry Berk and Harry Smith, the piano teacher. I told Larry I wanted to get into more of Schillinger, and they had the two big Schillinger books, they were about a few inches thick. So I studied with Larry for quite awhile till we finished book one. We got into the second book, and they had different teachers come and they'd get sidetracked, I don't think anybody had gone through the book before.

FRED They were faking it on the second volume.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, well they start saying, "Before we finish the book, we'll get into Rimsky Korsakov, he was the regular." Well, I knew that stuff from the Conservatory, I wasn't looking for that. Same way with the other students. But Larry said he was starting the Schillinger House, and he asked me to be on the original faculty with people like Lee Daniels, vocal, and also Joe Viola.

FRED And his brother Tony.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: And then Tony came later I think. So that was on Newbury Street, the same block, on Commonwealth Avenue with the Phil Santman School.

FRED What's that around Exeter or Fairfield?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah right, I think it's Fairfield. Couple of blocks before Mass Ave. So Larry Berk, as I say, I was teaching then. Things get a little slow, they started telling the teachers they had to be exclusive with Schillinger House. He didn't bother me for a couple of years, because I'd known him from way back. Some of the guys, they had to give up... Finally, a couple of years later, he said, "Al, you got to be the same as the other guys, you got to give up one of your own people." You know they were worried about people not coming to school.

FRED What was Larry like as a teacher?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: He was very meticulous, you know, he was a brain. At that time he was my link to the Schillinger thing, which is mathematical, like I said, two big books that are a few inches thick. By this time I had my own gigs, and I was coaching baseball and Little League and later on Babe Ruth League. So I wanted to be my own boss. I figured that was more secure then, when things get tight, I mean naturally the [inaudible] is going to come before the talent.

FRED BOUCHARD: Did you have any notable students while you were on the faculty at Schillinger House?

AL VEGA: Yeah a lot of pretty good ones. Lot of times some of the people wouldn't get--they couldn't practice, they'd come in, I'd give them solfege or something like that so they could get something for their money. But I found Charlie Mariano there, in the band that I, back when Billy Eckstine...

FRED BOUCHARD: Oh, yes.

AL VEGA: Do you have a picture of that? I used Charlie and that was six nights a week in those days. When Billy Eckstine came in for a couple of nights, we added some other instruments, so it was like a ten-piece band.

FRED BOUCHARD: That was at the Savoy?

AL VEGA: No this was actually down Revere Beach at the Rollaway Ballroom, which was back by the next street over, there were two skating rinks there and the Rollaway started booking people in like... I saw Duke Ellington there, a lot of people were there. But I had the house band at Red Roof Cafe they called it, but it was part of the Rollaway Ballroom. So my basic band was Charlie Mariano and Duke Childs, the tenor man whose wife, Rosemary, played bass, who later worked in my trio. Marty Goldmore was the drummer then, he later played piano, he passed away recently. But Charlie Mariano would write the bebop things, I would write some other stuff. Benny West was teaching here at Schillinger House and he wrote some straight ahead stuff. So that lasted for that summer anyway.

FRED BOUCHARD: And now we're up to what, '50...?

AL VEGA: Yeah well going into, this was just before '50, that was like '49. In '50 I got a chance to work at the RKO Theatre which had the RKO and the Metropolitan Theatre. They had traveling bands like Duke Ellington, Basie and people like that. That's why when we had the sessions at the Kent Club, the true session was you'd never hear the band. If you wanted to hear Red Allen in his all-star band--which included J.C. Higginbotham and on trombone, number one trombone player in those days--you had to come at night. On Sunday afternoon, they'd mix everybody together because there was always great people in town like the Basie Band. So my first time that I sat in, they don't let everybody sit in, but Varty was very forward and he told them you know, "This guy's good," and all that, so they let me sit in. Ralph was here who later went to Hollywood, wrote for Woody Herman before that. So we sat in; and the first time I sat in I remember I looked up--Jo Jones was on drum because Basie was at the Metropolitan Theatre.

FRED Right across the street!

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, across the street. The Kent Club was on the corner of Washington, but back of the Bradford. Jo Jones was there; I look up, I see J.C. Higginbotham and I look over there, Red Allen, and I just put my head down before I get too scared. I'm in high school then, you know. So that went on, that was the place to be every Sunday.

FRED Yeah, you said that you played with Ted Goddard there and he was quite a talent.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Surprisingly, when I got out of the service in '46, I got a gig there with Ted Goddard who was a great sax player who'd just come off Claude Thornhill's great band. And Charlie Bean on trumpet and Pete DeRosa on drums and Sonny D on bass. We were doing "Donna Lee" and all those fast bebop things, we were playing that every night. Later on, Mary-Lou Williams came on with the trio and worked opposite us for a week. One night, Claude Thornhill was in town, so who comes in? Lee Konitz on alto, Gerry Mulligan on bari, and Barry Galbraith, the guitarist, and Billy Exiner the drummer. Yeah, I got a pretty good memory. And they all sat in. I remember saying to Lee Konitz, he sounded great and he said really, like they weren't used to compliments. I said to Gerry Mulligan, "You wrote this 'Jackie's Jump,' I know your work."

FRED This is just about the time that they recorded with Miles Davis in New York, that Birth of the Cool album, what, '49?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Ted would get nice write ups from DownBeat-ers, an alto player, but he played great tenor. I think he could have been another Stan Getz, but the decision came to whether he should go with Woody Herman or Vaughn Monroe. Vaughn paid more so he went with Vaughn. If he had gone with Woody...

FRED He would have been one of the first Herds.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: He could play, I don't know what it was. Well, I know what I was. When he played with Thornhill he was having Gil Evans writing and Gerry writing and no matter what tune we played, he knew beautiful lines. He had all this--he was ahead of us hearing lines and playing great harmonies, being around those guys. Anyway, 1950 came. So that lasted for a while then it was the end of that, so I had to go start playing with the society bands in Boston which were Ruby Newman and Harry Marchand and them guys. Society means you play boom-chick boom-chick, you know you play "Misty." I'm trying to play all the good harmonies, but it's flying by, I can't, I mean you got to play simple.

FRED And then one chorus and you're on to the next one and you do ten tunes in a row.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: You haven't got time for music because the guy just goes two and the next thing you know he's playing "Just In Time" and the next thing he's playing "Why Do I Love You?" and Cole Porter and all that. You had to know 9,000 tunes which was great. I remember I played with Phil one night and I don't think he played any bridges, I played the bridges on everything. But anyway, so I did that for a while. Then in 1950 I had a chance to go in the RKO Theatre, which I said was like the Met, and I would have been playing theatre stuff for years, but I took the other job which I'm glad I did, at the Hi-Hat as house pianist. Thelonious Monk was the house pianist, I took his place and that meant I was going to be working opposite Billie Holiday, Erroll Garner Trio, later on and Oscar Peterson Trio, Charlie Parker Quintet, Dizzy Gillespie's group. So I ended up sitting in with those guys for one reason or another--maybe the piano player got sick or he was getting high outside and then come back--and they'd say, "Come on over and play." Sometimes they gave me the band, like they'd say, Georgie Auld is coming in, they tried a band they didn't like so they say get the band out like a Joe Gordon. So maybe another time I get Sam Rivers, they were all in [inaudible] they were all in town.

FRED So Monk was the house pianist at the Hi-Hat for what, a couple of months maybe?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, I really don't know how long he was there, but I know I went there for his closing night.

FRED Did he have a beard?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: You know the owners of the Hi-Hat were chicken men, they knew how to make chicken with a secret recipe and all that. No cover, no minimum in those days. Seven nights a week and like plenty of music from eight right up till one o'clock, nonstop. I do twenty as solo pianist, then they do forty. I kept saying to the boss, "Give me a trio." They say, "You don't need a trio." Then finally he says, "Al, you got the trio. Charlie Parker's manager called and that Bird doesn't want to do more than a half hour." So that means for me to do a half-hour I could use a trio, so I said, "Great!" and they kept a trio after that.

FRED Who was in the trio, the original trio?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Jimmy Zitano on drums, later went with Herb Pomeroy's band. Jack Lawlor on bass. Jack went with Chet Baker overseas.

FRED Those are the guys who made your first album on Prestige.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: They were on that cover you probably show. That was recorded for Prestige. That was quite a fellow because Prestige was recording Miles Davis, Sonny Stitt.

FRED All the New York cats.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: All the big names. The only local names were Charlie Mariano and myself. We'd get paid, you know, it wasn't like now. [laughs] I mean they didn't give you the right royalty count like everybody else would. They were so crude about it, they'd say you sold from one to 220. The next count would come in from 400, what happened to 300? The bookkeeper wasn't even very precise, but they sent me boxes of records to ease their conscience. I'd get all these ten- inch LPs they sent me.

FRED You sell them off the bandstand?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: No I kept them, they were great stuff, but not mine, different people. All these European groups they were recording. So I got a whole bunch of those which is good to listen to, educate myself. So anyway, came '52, they wanted me to go back to a single and I said, "If I do that, I'll never have the trio again." So I went to work at the Buckminster Hotel, Storyville, the first Storyville, for George Wein. I was playing alone there for awhile, but George had a trio which I ended up playing with most of the time. Roy Haynes on drums and Slam Stewart. Slam was living in a hotel, so sometimes he'd have a little too much to drink and he was zoom, zoom, zoom! And he'd do that for about five minutes then he'd start again. George would say, "Get him off!" Next time he goes "dadada" and I'd go, "dada" and get him off. But it was a great trio.

FRED Was Roy doing all these fancy licks? We just celebrated his eightieth birthday at Scullers a couple of months ago.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, he still remembered my theme song which I use. He whistles it, I can't whistle it. I'll be celebrating my eighty-fourth birthday June 22.

FRED And Slam was about the same age as you guys?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, was he a little older maybe? Seemed like it. Like I say, Roy is old, he's eighty, so I had four years on him. I know he'd been working around Scullers, we all did that thing.

FRED Oh, you mean for the theaters and the strip joints?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: The joints were all around, yeah, there was little clubs. But later on of course I had Alan Dawson in my trio--can't forget that!

FRED Right. That was a couple of years later.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah that was all by, which was Alan, Alex and Al. You know Alex, that's why it's "All by Al."

FRED Three Al's.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: When you said Al, everyone looked up, you know. Al, no not Alan, Alex, or Al.

FRED Alex Ehrenfried the bass player came from Cincinnati, right?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, the home of Bill Berry and Gordon Brisker and all those guys who made names of themselves. So that was a lot of fun. Because I'd been listening to Alan Dawson since Sabby Lewis and I always said, "I got to get that drummer someday," and I did.

FRED He worked for Sabby in the forties?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, while I was in high school parties there was a club in Everett -- Chelsea actually -- by the Parkway Club--not the Parkway--anyway, I used to catch them near my house on Route 16 there in Chelsea. So later he was with me and we even ended up working at The Frolic in Revere. I told him we were a Latin band because Alan could play anything and I knew my Latin stuff. So we were supposed to be on the roof, but the summers got so windy that most of the time we'd go there and tables were blowing around and they'd say, "Forget it, go down and play between the shows," which meant we played twenty minutes. And then we'd go down to the basement, and Alan would have his pad and be practicing, and I'd be doing writing or something, and the bass player would practice. Then we'd say play at the end of the show. If the show went right up to one, we didn't play, but weekends we played the DooDoo Room downstairs.

FRED The what?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: They call it the DooDoo Room. I don't know what. But the roof was usually too windy to play, it was supposed to be the mambo roof. But we worked that and then we worked The Businessmen's Club which was out past the Hi-Hat, which was on Mass and Columbus where that little island goes to the right, and The Businessmen's Club was there. That's when Mae Arnette came on the scene, Johnny McIlvaine was related to her. He brought her in and she worked with me, so we were the first ones to work together.

FRED Was that the first time you worked regularly with a singer?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Well no, I had... After I left Hi-Hat and Storyville I went to work at the 123 Lounge with three singers. So we put two on a set, so I got plenty of practice playing, because with girl singers you got to play in different keys. So I got fluent at that. I'm still doing it.

FRED Transposing all the time?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, girls can't know everybody's keys in town. So I was playing for two singers each set. So that was that. Later on we were working with Ray [Santisi] at the Professional & Businessmen's Club.

FRED That wasn't private?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, it was really a private club, but nothing like--Sarah Vaughan or somebody working Symphony Hall, they'd come in. Lot of times Alan would be practicing in the kitchen, there's a piano on the second floor I'd be practicing. Then all of sudden, say, people came in, you know after we'd been practicing for an hour, and then we'd play. Lot of professionals came in and that was nice. Yeah, that was before The Frolic. Then in the Frolic I wanted to keep the group, so we did that thing at the Frolic and we ended up playing less than we did the other place.

FRED

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, actually, I must have been the first one to work a hotel with a mixed group, you know with Alan, with the mixed Black and two Whites. We worked the Hotel Touraine, which is not too far from where I am now at Remington's. Touraine was on the corner there of Stuart and Boylston, right? No, Tremont and Boylston.

FRED There's a Starbucks on the ground floor there.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, there's a Starbucks there. So the Story Room was in there, Hotel Touraine. I don't remember any mixed groups working in there, you know the hotels. So I probably started that.

FRED But the audiences were mixed?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Oh yeah, the audiences, all the hotels, you know like this one here, the Sheraton Biltmore and the lounges, Eliot Lounge further up on Mass Ave. So I did all of them. It would be nothing for me to walk outside the 123 Lounge, we were there seven nights in three years, they took a night off the boss would say, "Kid, where were you?" Felt guilty taking a night off.

FRED Even if you got a sub?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, it was supposed to be Al Vega Trio. They expect you to work like 350 days, a leap year too. But anyway, we walk out on the sidewalk and there'd be fifty musicians going by because there was the Stuart Manor going down the street on the other side of Tremont. Park Square there was the Number 3 Lounge, Saxony Lounge, and later on the Playboy Club there, before that The Sands, the 76 Lounge, The Cave around back of the alley there where A Studios was.

FRED And all these places are playing swing and bebop?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, well they're playing swing, you know they were pushing Sinatra then, but the girls were doing all the standard tunes so it wasn't merely Sinatra. The girls would say, "Oh, you're singing my tune."

FRED Working with three singers at the 123, then you started working with Mae Arnette at The Businessmen's Club...

BOUCHARD: So this is like you're getting into your...

AL VEGA: When I got to the Hilton there was one girl, Karen Cameron, for six nights, then she said she wanted a night off, so I did the talent show the night with her there. In '75 I started the talent shows. Then the next year she wanted more time off so I just gave her one night, and I found Rebecca Parris and gave her Mondays. Tuesdays I would have different people, whoever was in town. And then weekends maybe Semanya McCord, Donna Byrne, or whoever else was available. And once in a while a male, but mostly females were singing then.

FRED

Yeah, I do remember they were mostly women singers.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: That one guy--well, the females, the idea was if you had a girl singer, guys would come. But then when I had Lenny Martell I found that having a male singer, he would attract about fifteen, twenty girls, so that was better than having one girl sing, you had fifteen girls out there and they would attract the guys. They kept the thing going. You have to be a little bit of a businessman. In those days they were more clever, even then.

FRED

And you have to learn how to break the news gently, going with woodshed kids, you know.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, well it's like cutting a kid off my baseball team. If you got the minor leagues to go to it's okay, you know, get some other gigs for him. Like the numbers in baseball, there's not enough to have a whole minor league system. Because now you got soccer and everything else going on. But anyway, get back to music...Yeah, so I certainly got experience, even Basie would say, "Al, play for a singer," because I knew the tunes from the general business days. Because once my wife said, even though I recorded for Prestige, my wife said, "If you're going to travel..." Nat Hentoff--I'd actually gave him a few lessons, he was writing for DownBeat before you--he said, "Why don't you go on the road?" My wife said, "You're going to go on the road." I'm from North Carolina. She said, "You'll have to sell the house, I'll go back." I said, "I'm working here, I'm happy, to heck with it. I'll coach Little League and have my son there." So I stayed here. The point was once they decided to stay here, I said I better be able to play any kind of music if I'm going to survive. First at the Hi-Hat, we were talking about before, when the boss said you got to take a few weeks off because I only have a trio, and I said to him, "Okay, I got to hire a band because it's only three people." He went by numbers, I say, "Okay, well who's coming in?" He said, "Erroll Garner Trio and after that Oscar Peterson." So in other words to him, there were only three people, he didn't realize that these three people would fill the room anyway.

FRED

He was looking at sheer number of players on the bandstand.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah he figured if he got a six-piece band, that's nine people if I have Al Vega, only three and one, that's four. But when I got the trio, finally because I kept saying, "Let's have a trio, so I'll keep the people here, now that I've got the trio, if I get a trio." They said no, they finally said, "Al you get the trio, Charlie Parker's coming in and his manager called and said Bird is only going to do half an hour, he's not going to do forty and twenties, he only wants to do thirty." I don't know what was going on with Bird, but he got a notion for that. The boss, since I was going to have to do thirty, it made sense to him to have a trio. I could have done ten more minutes, most of the time those guys are sitting with me anyway. So he said you can have the trio and then once I get the trio, I said let me play opposite Oscar and so I talked him into that.

FRED

You got to play with some great bass players?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah that brought to mind... Before I got the trio, I was playing solo, but on the broadcast, we had an hour broadcast, actually it was like a three hour broadcast: twelve to one was music, from one to three was interviewers.

FRED What station was this on?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: I don't know, some on WCOP, some of the local stations.

FRED WMEX?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: And Steve Allison. Yeah might have been that. What was good for him after the music stopped, he'd look out into the audience, there'd be three or four singers, couple of jugglers, dancers, because there was people coming in to have some barbecued chicken after work in Providence, around Boston, all kinds of people. But on the actual broadcast the band would do a couple of tunes then he'd say, "Now the house pianist, Al Vega," and I'd ask the bass player and drummer, most of the time there was a combo. And the bass player might be Percy Heath there with Charlie Parker or George Duvivier. If it was the Erroll Garner Trio, it would be his bass player.

FRED Vernel Fournier?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: And Basie's group with Connie Kay, the great drummer with Modern Jazz Quartet. And if it was Oscar, the bass player would be Ray Brown. So I'd say, "Do you mind playing?" They were all nice guys, they were up there anyway, they'd say, "Yeah, just stay up here for a couple of tunes." If it was the trio without the drummer, I'd get my own friends would sit in, Jimmy Zitano, Sonny Taklof, any of those guys. So I ended up playing with all the greatest bass players and drummers in the world probably. So that went on until I got the trio. So it was an education.

FRED Boy, I'll say. You know, you were talking about putting together baseball bands when you had the big band?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Like I said, I was working the 123 then, that was after I finished the Hi-Hat and Storyville. I got bookings for my trio, and we used to do half-hours. Instead of doing half-hours, I remember the other group was an accordion group, I didn't want to listen to them, so I said, "Let's do forty." In fact, even later on, there was one group where we said, "Keep playing until I get back, the other guy says I'll do the same thing to him." But we were doing forties, I must have started the forty minute set. Between sets, I'd grab something, the live guy at the bar would say, "Let's take a ride up to the stable." I'd go up there and talk to Herb and Varty and Joe Gordon, Johnny Neves--they're all baseball, you know, love to play--I'd say, "We got a softball game with Woody Herman's band tomorrow, or some other band." The next day I'd pick up a couple of them, Herb would pick up a couple or whatever, and we'd end up having a nice game.

FRED Great. Just one of those sandlot fields?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah the field there across from Mass General, I remember that was one field we used. Most of the time that was available. The Woody Herman band, they had a band to play, a team to play all the time with Chubby Jackson, all those guys, they loved to play. So that was fun and they gave us a chance to mix with some of the other musicians.

FRED BOUCHARD: What would you say are some of the things that prepared you best for your career? The things that you did in your life that helped you...

AL VEGA: I guess, like we said, the early training and playing in different keys. And also, I just touched on the fact that when my wife said, when I decided not to travel, I knew I had to play all kinds of music. So when I did have those couple of weeks off, I could work the Savoy, which was a big dixieland spot up the street from the Hi-Hat. While I was there playing alone, something would happen--the piano player would have to leave, sickness or death in the family or an argument with the band leader. I'd end up working with Lee Castle and Bud Freeman, their group or another band, Max Kaminsky. And then I hear some other piano players like Willie "The Lion" Smith with the big cigar and some of those other players.

FRED BOUCHARD: Real old traditionalists.

AL VEGA: So I kept up with that stuff.

FRED BOUCHARD: He taught Duke Ellington.

AL VEGA: Yeah I know; that's unbelievable. You know he had the cigar in his mouth. So I heard these people and I kept up with that. And also I could do a week at the Park Plaza, what was it? That was the Statler Hotel. They had the room there, the Terrace Room?

FRED BOUCHARD: Swan Terrace?

AL VEGA: Yeah, something like that. So I ended up working with Victor Lombardo there which meant I had to play that corny stuff. In fact, when I went in there the guy said, "Hey, we understand you worked the Hi-Hat, let's have a jam session." I said, "What! Okay." So after we hang around for an hour, half-hour, we went in the room. I remember the next night Victor Lombardo says to me, "Why don't you play some of that jazz, I hear you're a good jazz player? I said, "Are you kidding? You're playing Mississippi Mud with a tuba." I said, "I don't feel like playing Thelonious Monk," or whoever I was playing. You know you go with the flow, you can't be a Thelonious Monk in a Lombardo band. Some guys try to do it, but that's why I had to play all styles, so I could do a gig like that.

FRED BOUCHARD: Did you have a pretty thriving weekend wedding business too?

AL VEGA: Yeah, that was the other thing. On the weekends in those days, I didn't do too many because I was working all the time, but if I had some time off I'd take off. But Sunday afternoons, I didn't work the Hi-Hat. They had afternoon sessions, but the band didn't play together, they were truly jam sessions, mixed everybody up. Every club, like the Italian American Club in Watertown, some other club in different cities, had jam sessions. The reason for that is that was before NFL football. See now that killed it, people stay home and watch football or they go to the games. Those days that wasn't on TV. So I'd get J.C. Higginbotham and Dick Wetmore who were in town at the time, two horns, my trio and we'd work a few hours in the afternoon.

FRED They tried to relaunch that at the place in Revere?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Well, Revere did it, The Caravan on Saturday, which makes a little more sense because Sunday is still--you can't do nothing on Sunday because the football is too strong. In the afternoon especially you know the Patriots are on at one o'clock most of the time, there's always a good football game. Before they got to be champs, they had all one o'clock games. But in those days we had a jam session every Sunday. We'd be going all kinds of jazz, swing, bebop, "Saints Go Marching In," and the guys would be walking around the room, the whole bit you know.

FRED Other than being a pianist, you also had to have your business chops together, too.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Well I was fortunate that a lot of my friends were into advertising and the PR thing so I picked their brains.

FRED You mean how to promote yourself?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah how to promote and how to get publicity. You know I always kept in touch with you, you had a radio show. I'd do that show, do anything I could.

FRED Call the DJs while they're on the air.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: I let everybody know we were doing that stuff.

FRED Get those little fliers out, those postcards.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah I always did that. If I took a vacation to Bermuda I'd send a postcard to Ron [della Chiesa] or you guys to say I'll be back. And Ron was on five days a week and he hadn't mentioned me when I was at the Hilton, he didn't want to say "Al Vega" everyday, but he had to say, "Rebecca Parris is at the Hilton tonight with Al Vega." Donna Byrne, every night he'd say somebody else so I was getting mentioned by hook or by crook. He mentioned the artist, even the showcase. People would call him up and say, "I'm singing with Al Vega tonight," and he'd mention people, all the people that are working now. They were on my talent show, I mean they went up to the level of the other ones so I didn't hire them. In the talent show you know you had to wait in line to go on that, it wasn't every week. You were lucky if you got on once a month.

FRED And you know, having a good rotation of people, even if they weren't the greatest, they'd pack the house with their friends.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Like I'd say "Come back in four or five weeks," because there's one kid that came in with fifty people, I'd say, "We'll make an exception and bring you back next week." I wasn't stupid. But after a while they came in with their own groups even. They came in with a steel band, they had like four or five singers from a college, vocal groups, it was amazing. And they were all screened so it wasn't an open mic like some places do. See, I can't do that now because I'm just working like one night at Remington's, so I'll just have to have an open mic. At the airport, if somebody talked to me and I could tell they didn't know what they were doing, they didn't sound too good talking to them. I'd say, "Well wait until 12:30, we'll put you on." And then I'd say, "You're not ready for the show yet, come back in a month and try again." So the show was actually a schedule. It was a pretty good show.

FRED Sure beats the pants off karaoke!

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, oh yeah. Nothing worse than a bunch of drunks singing that stuff.

FRED If you get... I know you made the decision, you know, that your wife laid down the law and you decide not to travel.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, well, she said, "You can travel if you want, but sell the house." So it would be a major decision.

FRED Are there any career moves you wish you made that you didn't get around to?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: I've had a great life. I mean I ended up playing with all the great bass players, all the great drummers and working opposite icons.

FRED And you had a happy home life?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, and I won a few championships with the baseball team, which that article in the Globe said I'd won, but I was in the middle, the city series in there, plus the playoffs.

FRED Did some of the people who've come up through your ranks over the years either as singers or players, have some of them gone on to fame and fortune?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah Harry Allen's working all around. And of course Rebecca.

FRED You said he came up with his parents from Providence when he was twelve or fourteen?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah he used to come up once a month with his parents to do my talent show. His parents would rent a room, buy a dinner and Harry would play, and he had a chance to hear Casher or Dick Johnson while he was there. That didn't hurt. People like that, the Holidays and Bobby Mover and some of them. Some of the singers did well, they're all over the country. I still get CDs and stuff they send me.

FRED From who? Just name a couple.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: There's a guy Jan Slow; he's in Jersey. He's more of a blues type thing. My drummer Joe Architelli in Vegas, he's been there. He was on that All by Al album, when Alan played vibes, he played drums on a couple of tunes. And a lot of the singers, they're all over the place, I don't even realize it. I did a show for the Dana Farber Cancer thing the other night for Freddy Taylor, and they had a couple bands, and they had three dancers. Stan Strickland was playing tenor there, I had my trio and then Stan played with us. He said, "That girl says she's steady with you at the studio." I still have a lot of energy--I don't know where--but I hang around and listen. We get through at eight and I hang around and listen to bands. Then at 10:30, I went to Storyville to Scullers and heard The Yellowjackets. We'd do some funky stuff, I wanted to brush up on that. The week before I went with Cassandra McKinley, one of my proteges, to see the Funk Brothers.

FRED BOUCHARD: Oh yeah, I was at one of those shows.

AL VEGA: That was an energy show.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah, Cassandra's pretty good.

AL VEGA: Yeah, well Cassandra studied with me. Then I used her quite a bit. So I still listen.

FRED BOUCHARD: That's important, keeps you fresh.

AL VEGA: That always bugged me that some of the guys in town were supposed to be pretty good players. If I'm working opposite Jamal, George Shearing, [inaudible] with Cannonball Adderley. You mean to tell me they shouldn't be at some time or another at that series, shouldn't be every piano player in town there listening to them? And I didn't see a lot of them. Not to just support it, just to learn something. So I still go, you know I'll be eighty-four.

FRED BOUCHARD: That's what keeps you young, keep those ideas popping.

AL VEGA: Yeah so I listened to, I wanted to hear what the--like I said the Yellowjackets, see what they're up to because we do some funky stuff on some of the nights we work.

FRED BOUCHARD: And it depends on what the singers call for, too.

AL VEGA: Yeah that's why I still play, I still watch, I get home from work last night and even though I knew I had to meet you at nine this morning, I watched the American Idol show I had on my tape. My TIVO -- which is a new digital recording thing -- records two shows at once, so I got all kinds of stuff on there.

FRED BOUCHARD: You might maybe even learn a few tricks from MTV and VH1?

AL VEGA: I listen to all that stuff because if I want to do open mic and stuff, especially at the Hilton I was doing show tunes, jazz tunes. The next day, Ellen O'Brien at Ryles recently, she's around, I used her at Remington's. She started with me, she was in high school.

FRED So you keep updating your book and you have to learn new tunes though, some of them come in with a lead
BOUCHARD: sheet and say, "Let's do this one." It'll be something you haven't heard before or maybe by a band you hadn't run into before.

AL VEGA: I'd get an idea of the different styles and stuff. I still listen to a lot of the different piano players, see what they're up to. Listen to showtunes once in a while. I mean I don't bother to learn all the--at that time in the years, I was at the airport Hilton from '79 to '84. So I was keeping up with the new showtunes. But I did work the Ritz for a while and I had to play Tea Dance, I had the trio and the violins. And I was playing Vietnamese waltzes and all that stuff. Society style for the dance and we did that quite a bit.

FRED Did you ever work the pits? The pit orchestras at the theater?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, a few times I filled in. Like I say I could have been in the pit at the RKO, but I went to the Hi-Hat, fortunately. I could have been buried in the pit there.

FRED But I mean no matter how much new material comes out, there's still a lot of room for reinventing the old
BOUCHARD: chestnuts. The Tin Pan Alley stuff from the thirties and forties, it's timeless.

AL VEGA: Recently I took a thing like "Angel Eyes" where I used to play it slow, and at the Lucky's I do an instrumental. I can't start off with a slow tune. So I did it, moving harmony and do like a funky beat. You know then get into the swing.

FRED After 1956, when Charlie Byrd and Stan Getz introduced the Brazilian music to the country, everybody wants to
BOUCHARD: hear a bossa nova or a little samba beat. I mean that's--every drummer's got to learn those licks, and you got to learn all the material.

AL VEGA: Yeah talking about that... When Freddy had the jazz workshop in Paul's Mall, that was in '65 to '70, I did five years on Route 9 in Framingham at the Marador. I used a trio and singer. And that was the hard area, but I had two months off, January and February, I finally could take a vacation because I had a contract for the rest of the year. So I'd go on a cruise or something like that. Then I'd do a week or two at the Jazz Workshop, Paul's Mall usually. I worked with Flip Wilson, the comedian, and Horace Silver was in the other room. I knew Horace when Stan Getz came into The Hi-Hat and said, "Who's with you this time?" I said, "Well, I picked up a rhythm section at Hartford." So you know, everything goes around. I had a chance to do Paul's Mall a few times. At that time I think what happened was--see the old days, the fifties, when you went to the Hi-Hat, if a guy said to me, "Who's there this weekend?" I said, "Gene Ammons," I'd say, "I don't know him." I said, "Well, come hear me and you'll like this guy." When they went, no matter who was there, you could tap your foot to it. The rhythm was there, you got melody, rhythm, and harmony. The harmony was listenable, wasn't avant garde or real bizarre. Good harmony, good rhythm. You didn't know the melody, it was usually something you could relate to.

FRED And if they hadn't heard Jug before, they'd learn about Jug.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah. Now you go to, you go into the seventies and you go to hear some of the groups at the workshop. You know Andrew Hill's there, he's got a piece of music like that and he's looking at it and he does one tune for twenty minutes and sometimes the people have no idea what the melody is, no idea the harmony, a little too much for them. And some of the groups coming in weren't playing any rhythm to speak of, nothing you could tap your foot to. The guy coming in who was not educated in music, you know he doesn't know what to relate to. So that sort of killed it.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah the avant garde stuff was for a very, very small percentage.

AL VEGA: Yeah they were all doing the modal thing which is okay, but I want to hear a guy play the changes of "Shadow of Your Smile" sometime instead of doing four tunes in a row where they're playing on two chords.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah, that got tiresome.

AL VEGA: You know I want to hear Bill Evans, that'd be great playing that, or harmonic stuff. But the next five groups come in, they're all playing two changes all night. No matter what the tune is they're playing.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah that's too much.

AL VEGA: Yeah I mean on my CD, I got "Wave." I go into a modal thing, but that's the only tune I do it on. If I'm playing "Mr. Lucky" or some other tune, I'm playing the changes. It's a challenge and then people could relate to it because there's rhythm there. But that period there made it tough.

FRED BOUCHARD: What's the secret of your success and longevity?

AL VEGA: Hanging around smoked filled clubs for sixty years. You couldn't see anything!

FRED BOUCHARD: But I mean--keeping fit, diet, exercise? You play tennis, don't you?

AL VEGA: I used to play volleyball then I had a sports injury; I had to stop. Going out with young girls, my wife passed away in 2000. And I have a few drinks--well now they come out and say it's good to have a couple of drinks. I was trained to drink because when business is bad in the club, you felt like, "Geez, I'll have a few drinks at least if the boss can't give me money to help pay for the band," you know. So I still do, you know. A lot of guys, like the rest of the trio, they don't even drink. They actually should have said art or something, you know, do that. If you come in and I know you can't afford it, I'll say no forget it, I can get a free Coke, I'd just as soon have it you know. But somebody can afford it, it puts money in the tip for the band. Secondhand smoke, you know you couldn't see ten feet in front of you. But maybe the next day going out with my baseball team, pitching, batting practice, hitting balls for a couple hours, the fresh air, maybe that's cleaned me up. So I'm in pretty good shape for being eighty-four next month.

FRED BOUCHARD: God bless.

AL VEGA: And I'm still coaching, I'm still thinking young. I don't think about age. I did feel old last week, my daughter called up and said, "Dad, it's my birthday." I said "Great. She said, "I'm going to be 60," I said, "Wrong number." Diane's great. She's been here lecturing, she's teaching music therapy and has her doctorate in New York. She graduated from Emerson, went on the road with Burt Bacharach and sang around town performing professionally before that. Then went to New York, worked the Improv Club, got to know all those, J.J. Walker and Gabe Cavanaugh and they'd get her on Mike Douglas TV Show. She did the Playboy circuit. Then when her daughter started growing up, she settled down. She got her masters at NYU and her doctorate. Now she lectures all over the world on music therapy.

FRED Wow, they should bring her here to Boston to Berklee.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah she's been here. She lectures all over the world. She's going to Australia next month and been to Italy a few times.

FRED Wow, that's a hot subject.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: She's one of the pioneers, she's got a doctorate and books coming out. She bought a house in the Hamptons, so I guess they're doing alright.

FRED That means they get up this way then.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Well, I get up there in the summer. You go to a restaurant there and you see Billy Joel or somebody coming out, Seinfeld. They just moved from Brooklyn to Central Park West. Her husband's an advertiser so between the two of them they're doing good. And my son's at Transnational.

FRED Where is that?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: TNT, right back of Fenway Park. If you want to go to Europe or you want to go to Aruba or Cancun and all that.

FRED Oh, he does all the bookings?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah the wholesale house. So ask for Al Vega, he goes by that too. He calls me up, "Oh, this is Al Vega." "Oh yeah, I used to hear you, that's my father."

FRED So you got any advice for young musicians, the young people coming up?

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah well, try to play all styles, that still applies.

FRED Don't paint yourself into a corner.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: I know a lot of jazz guys who can't do gigs because they don't know the tunes or stuff for the other kind of job. There's not that many societies out there, but you still will have to be able to play for singers, be able to play in different keys. I've seen some singers of mine, piano players sound like Oscar, but then she'd say, "I'm doing B flat," "Oh I can't play it in that key, I need the music." You're a musician, so you know. But some guys sound phenomenal and then they--when I was going to different schools I went to, you'd hear a guy playing great, say, "Wow, that was Art Tatum." I'd say play another chorus--that's all they know, that chorus, it's written out. You got to be able to do other styles and not just play somebody's chorus. You got to know tunes. During the days of the talent shows, people come in and the horn players had to play Kenny Wenzel, Dick Johnson--they could play anything, even somebody singing an original, they could hear it. But then play an instrumental and have to hire some kid from one of the schools here and they'd say, "Name ten tunes," and they didn't know five. Finally they'd say, "Pick a tune, what tune will you play, and we'll play yours." They'd have to get the book out, but they didn't know it.

FRED Yeah, the fake books probably extended a few people's careers.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, well, we didn't have fake books in the forties and fifties, so we spent time copying tunes from each other. Just learning them off the record without ever seeing the music.

FRED You have to have a good ear and good memory.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Yeah, well, like I said, we take time copying songs from each other. But now you got all these books, you got choruses, you got everything you know. No excuse for not learning them when it comes down to it.

FRED Well, this has been a pretty upbeat session Al. It's nice to kick off this series with a livewire like yourself.

BOUCHARD:

AL VEGA: Livewire!