

FRED Today we have none other than Joanne Brackeen. Hi, Joanne!

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, thank you! I'm very happy to be here.

BRACKEEN:

FRED We are certainly glad to finally get you in the hot seat. Even if we've reversed our seats. Because we've been trying for a year to find the right date.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, I can't say that the hot seat is in Boston. It's so much colder here than in New York.

BRACKEEN:

FRED We were talking about fashion: Let's talk about fashion. That's a great place to start.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, this is my Banana Republic outfit; half of it was already in the dressing room from someone left before. I couldn't have found this. Anyway, I know Esperanza [Spalding] was, if you went in to buy online, there was a big picture of her in the Banana Republic for a while.

BRACKEEN:

FRED That's right. That's right. She was on the back of a couple of magazines.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yes, and I just saw her at the Mary Lou Williams Competition, where there were five women pianists. Usually they choose them from all over the States, but it turns out that four of them were either my current or past students, and only one I didn't know...

BRACKEEN:

FRED ...of the five.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE So it was very interesting. Dr. Billy Taylor and I kind of coached them.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Sweet. Who were some of the people playing?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Now I need the last names. You didn't tell me you were gonna ask this question.

BRACKEEN:

FRED That's okay, we don't have to go there, as long as you know them and they know you. Did people play Mary Lou Williams' compositions?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE They also played their compositions, yes.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Did they play any stuff by Mary Lou?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yes, they did; the first day they had to.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Cool.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE And no, there were two, there was another group there that did a concert the second night I was there. That was
BRACKEEN: Deedee Bridgewater.

FRED Oh, wow.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Grace Kelly the horn player.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Yeah, oh yeah. I had her in class last year.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Esperanza, and Terri Lynn Carrington, and Geri Allen. And so they played a whole set of Mary Lou Williams.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Brilliant!
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE It was.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Geri is a knockout!
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE She's just great. And as for their group playing, you can't beat it.
BRACKEEN:

FRED That's true. I've seen her take the piano seat in a jam session.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE and the empathy or something. She just does all the right things that you wanna hear.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Absolutely. Back to fashion. You've been noted for your great collection of clothes, and it's almost been like a
BOUCHARD: trademark for you to wear something dazzling.

JOANNE It's gotten greater since I discovered that Banana Republic had a tall department.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Really?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, because I'm six feet tall, so, I took advantage of that.
BRACKEEN:

FRED I saw a Monk video recently where some German critic said, "Monk, you have this big hat collection: does it make you play differently?"

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE My hat collection. Well, if I'm wearing a hat, I really feel like wearing a hat, yes, I feel like everything goes into your playing. It's the energy, I mean, the energy flowing through you is what makes you--or me--feel like wearing a hat or a dress or a skirt, or whatever. It's also the same thing that makes me feel like playing the piano. So, it seems connected.

FRED How does this, where does this energy come from?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I don't know. I would assume it comes from our breath, 'cause if we don't breathe, well...

BRACKEEN:

FRED You mean, inhale/exhale? Yoga stuff?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, just human. We have to breathe.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Is that part of your pedagogical...

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I feel everything comes from the air, yes, I always tell people. They say, "How did you learn to play the piano?"

BRACKEEN: And I just say, "From my breath." Because when you breathe, you connect with every other being. At least on earth, where else? I didn't look into that. I guess that's for astrologers, but I felt like I would get information from all different countries, long before the Internet happened. I don't know what life would have been like if I was born in the last five years. I think it's just fantastic!

FRED You approve, you love this interconnectivity that everyone has?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I do! Who knows if I love it just because it's something new? We always like something new, or if, I don't know,

BRACKEEN: it's exciting.

FRED Some people are saying that excessive interconnectivity, or having so many electronic toys keeps people from being out of the moment, and withdrawn into screens instead of observing life around them. There was an interesting story in the New York Times.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, they just need to go and take a little vacation in Rockport, and don't take your computer with you[Laughs]

BRACKEEN: That's what I do.

FRED Yeah. So you have to balance it out.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, I like to be really quiet and just hear the birds. And, well you know, Marco--I have to think of his last name--

BRACKEEN: Pignataro. He took a bunch of us to Puebla, Mexico, and then we went to see the pyramids at ten thousand feet. And when you are there, the air is so clear and when the birds sing, you hear another kind of a song.

FRED Absolutely true.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Even though there's beautiful Boston and Rockport and New York birds, it's another kind of sound. And also the
BRACKEEN: light up there is dazzling.

FRED I haven't been to Puebla in Mexico, but I have been to Tikal in Guatemala, went to the Mayan ruins there, and
BOUCHARD: from the tops of the temples we heard the most amazing bird songs. And I'm really into that stuff, like Messiaen, you know.

JOANNE Well, that's music. The way they phrase. I know you had Tom [Plsek] here before, but Stephanie [Tierney]'s a
BRACKEEN: good friend of mine. Well, they have six birds, but the famed bird is Bobby Bird, and he sings these songs. He'll do like a song, and if the atmosphere is right, he might run around on the floor, and sing an improvisation of the same song, to each person a different one, in a different mood for each person.

FRED What kind of a bird is that? A mynah?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE No he's a little bird, a cockatiel?

BRACKEEN:

FRED Is he all white?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Do I have the right name? No, he's gray and yellow and red, and he's about like that.

BRACKEEN:

FRED We'll have to ask Tom and Stephanie. I'm curious.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Oh, he improvises.

BRACKEEN:

FRED I love that. I have a little parrot but she just squawks and sometimes she'll say "Hiii"

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE This one says "Hi, Bobby Bird," and maybe you could make out some other words but that's the name..

BRACKEEN:

FRED So is it safe to say that this is one of your--

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE It's amazing music.

BRACKEEN:

FRED So one of your major inspirations is from nature?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Are there any other sources that you draw from you when you're playing or writing or teaching?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, twice in my life--and this really happened one time when I was about--no, I had just finished recording a solo CD in the Black Forest in Germany, and I was just laying in the bed and then all of a sudden I was in a silent silence, but when you are there, you don't know it until you come out of it...

BRACKEEN:

FRED Like in an echo chamber, like one of those things that is completely devoid of sound?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I don't know. It was total void, but I was there. I was not awake but not asleep, and then: all the sounds that then started coming in as I was coming out of that state was like different tones... like an orchestra, so all sound, I had been where there was no sound.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Mythical Magic, 1977.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE That's right. And when I came into it, I heard all the sounds come gradually, come like they are now. It was fascinating.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Black Forest.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE And that happened to me one other time when I was driving with someone, all the sound left and. so I love all that feeling of silence because I feel like all sound comes out of that.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Absolutely, yeah.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE So, I don't know, I haven't read up on that.

BRACKEEN:

FRED It's like a Buddhist precept, almost, you know.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I don't know what it is, but it is. And if it happens to you, there is something else that happens. So I think I hear the most music when there is no sound. It's before the sound. It's not like there isn't music, but the music is the reflection of the state that I like to compose from and be in.

BRACKEEN:

FRED So the flipside of having a hectic career teaching/commuting is to decompress, get away, be quiet in Rockport, be quiet in Ocean Grove, New Jersey, and just seal yourself away and regenerate?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I mean, that's the easiest way. I mean, you can be quiet anywhere but that's the easiest way.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Have you ever actually gone in for meditation or yoga or any of that stuff?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE No, never. I never went for anything.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Well, this is a fascinating beginning here. Could we maybe revisit your childhood in Ventura, and your first musical remembrances or influences?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, the first thing I think of is the sun, the air, and the ocean, because I was born in Ventura. And the flowers, the color of everything, beautiful, and so I am always, I guess maybe recreating that way in Ocean Grove and Rockport. There's a certain kind of light, in the sunlight, if you are within the ocean, I don't know if it's a fourth of a mile or what it is, but there is a certain kind of lighting.

FRED Reflected on the water?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE No, I don't know what it is, but it's there.

BRACKEEN:

FRED So you had a happy childhood in Ventura.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, I did, and it was very musical. We had--it was just a grammar school but they had talent shows. And there was one drummer that used to play there, his name was Freddy-something and he played drums. I loved the way he played, I like rhythms, I remember that. And then on the radio in that era, the neighbor that lived across the street, Judy and Bobby Worthly, they always had the radio on to some kind of boogie woogie, and I thought that was totally amazing. So then, I wanted to play the piano, and my sister wanted to play the piano, and we got a--we had a grand piano for a short time, I don't know what happened to it, and then we got a smaller piano, and they gave us piano lessons--our parents gave us piano lessons--and of course, I expected to learn what I heard on the radio. I didn't break anything down into parts. It's like I heard that--that's what I wanted to do. So this is in essence how I teach people now. I only break down what has to be broken down. And usually when people teach, they start from the roots and build everything up, but I know some people are like, they're gonna be like I was. They came with it built another way so they need to learn another way. So I took lessons for about six months, maybe not even that long. I wouldn't practice because the music was like [*Sings simple lines*]. And I thought, what is this? I'm spending all this time looking at these lines and spaces to get that out of it with one hand?

FRED No boogie!

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE So I wouldn't practice and they let me quit. Then meanwhile, they had gotten some recordings of this piano player who was from Rhode Island, Frankie Carle.

BRACKEEN:

FRED I remember him. I'm a Providence boy.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah, he wrote that "Sunrise Serenade," and it's obvious to see that Fats Waller was one of his idols. So he was playing stride piano, and they also had Carmen Cavallaro, and I liked the tunes that he played, but I liked the way Frankie Carle played better.

FRED BOUCHARD: A little more syncopated.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: These were on the LPs so they had about maybe seven or eight tunes. And so I just went to the piano, I learned the lines and the spaces in that three-year, six-month period, and I wrote out all the songs so I could remember them, and I memorized them. So this was when I was eleven, so in six months, I went from not playing the piano at all--only wishing I could--to actually performing at school and at the Lions Club.

FRED BOUCHARD: Performing boogie-woogie? Pop tunes?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: No, the Frankie Carle tunes that I learned. So when I learned all those tunes, I knew like seven or eight tunes. I knew all the chords, but I remember at age six listening to the radio, and hearing songs, and some of them--very few of them--went the direction I wanted to hear them. So I don't know what that is. I would hear a song and I would say, "Ooh, this is great!" I'd hear it for a few seconds, and then it went the wrong place. I have no idea what that is.

FRED BOUCHARD: After the melody, you lost...

JOANNE BRACKEEN: No, not after the melody! In the middle of the melody. The melody didn't go where I thought it should go. So, that I remember really distinctly, because it was upsetting.

FRED BOUCHARD: You wanted it to go in a different direction?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yes.

FRED BOUCHARD: And if you started playing it, you'd make it go.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: And I could hear where I wanted it to go. But we had no piano, I never played the instrument, it was just what happened.

FRED BOUCHARD: So that was the seeds of compositional thought in your mind.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Probably, yeah.

FRED BOUCHARD: Once you learned the Frankie Carle tunes, did you start improvising on them or varying the left hand patterns?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: No, I just played them. And then, well, no, I had a friend, and her name was Joanne Zering and she later played on the Lawrence Welk program. She liked to sing and play country music and play accordion. And we were good friends so we used to just play together, and we also worked together, so we would go around and play these little jobs, and...

FRED BOUCHARD: So you learned the country tunes from her?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: I'm eleven and I think she's ten or something like that. We're very close in age...

FRED BOUCHARD: So you taught each other tunes?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah, she--one of the tunes she sang was "Some of These Days."*[Sings]* I thought they were kind of corny, but you know she was my friend, and we could play, and this was fun. And then I would do some of my stuff, so.

FRED BOUCHARD: Now what was your stuff becoming, after the Frankie Carle?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Well, it was these different Frankie Carle things. That was in Ventura, where there weren't venues for jazz and there still are not. I would love to go back there and play, but there is no venue there.

FRED BOUCHARD: Nope they don't have a Trident, like Sausalito.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: No. They got much bigger: they got like 17,000 people, now it's well over 100,000.

FRED BOUCHARD: And still no clubs.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: And still no jazz clubs.

FRED BOUCHARD: Bummer.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: That's what I've heard from people that email me and say, "Why don't you come?" But there's nothing here in Ventura.

FRED BOUCHARD: Where do you play when you play in California?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Where do I play?

FRED BOUCHARD: Like what clubs do you play?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: The last thing that I've done a couple times, was the Jazz Bakery. The last one was a duet I did with Greg Osby.

FRED BOUCHARD: Sweet.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Before that with duets with Ravi Coltrane. And I'd played there before. I think I did solo piano a couple of times, yeah. I've done quite a few things there, if I remember. The Monterey Jazz Festival.

FRED BOUCHARD: I love Monterey.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: There's a jazz festival near Griffith Park in L.A., I don't remember. They had all different kinds of music and jazz was one of the kinds that they did there.

FRED BOUCHARD: But anyway, here you are now, twelve, and...

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah, so then we moved to L. A. And there was a college--it didn't live, shortly--Westlake College of Music. I got into that when I was thirteen or fourteen. You had to have this little test where they would test--they had the vibrations of the tune, of each tune, and they'd say, "Which one is higher, which one is lower?" But it would be like, 440, 442! *[Fred whistles]* So I mean it was really--like that. And I got that all correct, and then I guess I had learned tunes by that time, because I remember them doing another test and they were playing "Stella By Starlight" and they said, "Well, play that melody in another key." And I thought, "Well, what's that mean? I guess you want me to just start the melody in another place." And I could do that right off.

FRED BOUCHARD: So you had all that down.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: I never practiced it, that was what I did. I played it on piano. I don't know what I did, I can't remember. It would be interesting but, I don't know. And then: I was six feet tall when I was fourteen, so people started calling me all over for jobs.

FRED BOUCHARD: Thinking you were of age.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yes, and I had a few friends that would change the driver's license.

FRED BOUCHARD: Oh, I did that!

JOANNE BRACKEEN: I didn't do that, I couldn't get that till I was sixteen.*[Fred laughs]* So meanwhile it was a little hard, but I looked like I was old enough, and when I was sixteen I got my driver's license.

FRED BOUCHARD: Your parents were totally cool with this?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: They didn't know. I mean, they knew a lot of things, and I told them whatever I thought they would agree with.

FRED BOUCHARD: I see, but they...

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah, I was nice. I thought school was a waste of time, but I always got my A's, because I knew that's what they wanted, so.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah. So you got to get out and play, and gradually worked into jazzy-type gigs. Who were some of the first people you worked with?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: I didn't start meeting the people in the jazz world until I was about sixteen or seventeen. You'll probably remember Herbie Lewis, the bass player. We played together all the time. And we had to rehearse in the church because they didn't allow black people with white people. Even in the school.

FRED BOUCHARD: '54 in L. A.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: We didn't think anything of it, I mean, we just did it. I mean, we can't do it there, we'll do it here. And then I met Bobby Hutcherson and Charles Lloyd and Ornette Coleman and Don Cherry and Scott LaFaro, and...

FRED BOUCHARD: That's right, yeah, all those cats who were recording for Contemporary or World Pacific.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah.... so we were always riding around, recording. Billy Higgins we were always transporting each other here and there.

FRED BOUCHARD: Did you get wheels, by the time you were sixteen or seventeen?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Oh sixteen, yeah, I didn't have my own. Since they didn't give me a car, they let me drive their car, my parents. 'Cause you had to drive there.

FRED BOUCHARD: So what did you pick up at the Los Angeles Conservatory?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Well, they gave me a scholarship there. I went for about four days. I thought, "Well, it's fun to practice here in the conservatory, but I know I don't really have to go to the conservatory to practice." Because I knew everybody there, and they all liked me and used me on jobs and things. I thought it was very boring. But I did--there was one piano teacher, Mr. Vorhees, who was my classical piano teacher, and I liked him, so I continued on with him, but I dropped all the classes after four days.

FRED BOUCHARD: So you had tutoring in classical training, playing Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, that stuff.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah it only lasted about four months; it could only last the length of the scholarship, because I just dropped out.

FRED I see.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, I thought, "They're just putting all these different names on things I already know. I'm wasting my time. I
BRACKEEN: could be learning something that I really need to know." You know, that was what I felt.

FRED So you didn't have any interest in Chopin Études, necessarily?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, I did play those--I like Chopin.
BRACKEEN:

FRED But what did you need to know, that you weren't getting at the conservatory?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Oh, about jazz? To further my how I heard.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Who were some of the--who did you have your ears tuned to when you were out on the West Coast? Like Elmo
BOUCHARD: Hope, Herbie Nichols?

JOANNE Well, you know, Elmo was nice, but I think Bud Powell was one of them, and of course McCoy Tyner came along,
BRACKEEN: and John Coltrane. I really liked that. And Red Garland a little bit, and Wynton a bit. I thought Wynton was very creative in that style.

FRED Wynton Kelly, we have to tell 'em.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah and Red Garland was you know really swinging.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Yeah, definitely.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, and Horace Silver for his compositions.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Ooh, definitely.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, everybody played very different there. And one of my favorites of course was Monk, Thelonious Monk. I just
BRACKEEN: thought he played like the earth. The sound of the earth.

FRED The earth. Yes. That's very good.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Did he sound like that?
BRACKEEN:

FRED Yes, very rooted in his own wacky way. What did Horace Silver sound like?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I never went that much to hear him play, but it was his compositions that we all liked.
BRACKEEN:

FRED How did they speak to you?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, everybody--that wasn't my thing, everybody learned these tunes as soon as the album came out so I had to
BRACKEEN: learn them, too, because we were all playing together.

FRED They sure are some great songs.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, very, a lot of different things. And he was--I liked Hampton Hawes.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Ooh, yeah.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE But Hampton Hawes loved Horace Silver and, you know, Horace Silver wasn't my favorite piano player, but I
BRACKEEN: loved the way he wrote. And Hampton Hawes would play it so much like I like. I used to hear them with Red Mitchell, bass player.

FRED Yeah some of those voicings, and harmonies, very fine.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE All the little licks that were in the feeling. The time feeling was very special.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Yup, Hampton was a gas.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE But he told me--I took one lesson with Hampton Hawes, and he told me his favorite piano player was Horace
BRACKEEN: Silver, so. Isn't that like Monk being able to play just like Bud Powell but never doing it? It's interesting.

FRED Having learned all those Horace Silver tunes, later on was that an entrée for working with Art Blakey?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I don't know, I think everything I did was an entrée for everything else, that was a small piece of it. There was a
BRACKEEN: lot going on.

FRED Too big, too big.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE All the time. Because we used to go out and play every night.
BRACKEEN:

FRED What were some of the clubs that you liked? Or that were available?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, I'm remembering Club Intimé, and there was another club, that later on it was the Zebra Lounge. I worked
BRACKEEN: there six nights a week with Teddy Edwards and George Morrow and Frank Butler. That was the West Coast rhythm section comparable to--who would you say here?--the top people. Yeah, they were great. And Frank Butler, the drummer, used to get up--he could play anything, any speed, any tempo--and he was a real goof-off. *[Fred laughs]* But he also could sing. And so we'd be up there playing some blues, and he'd just make up lyrics on the spot, that were hilarious, and they all rhymed.

FRED Oh, man! *[Laughs]*
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I never really went...at that time do that.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Did you ever go to The Haig?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Wait, are you talking about in Europe?
BRACKEEN:

FRED No. H-a-i-g, the club in L. A.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE No, I, there's another one.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Chet [Baker] and Gerry [Mulligan] played there.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Where else did we play? There was another one on Washington Boulevard. You know, the one who you need to
BRACKEEN: talk with is Ornette Coleman. He remembers all of these clubs. "Oh don't you remember? We used to work there and I saw you there" and I'm like: "Oh yeah"

FRED Total recall.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, he does, of those times. I used to hear him and Don, and Paul Bley was the one who used them as his
BRACKEEN: group but actually they were a group. They were already a group.

FRED Yeah, that's right, that was that first recording on Contemporary.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE But that's Walter Norris. That was their--who they picked to play with him, but Paul Bley had picked them to play
BRACKEEN: with him. Interesting. And Red Mitchell, I think, was responsible for some of their success too. So there were a lot of things going on.

FRED Yeah, what a scene. I didn't get up there till way later.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Dante's, we played at Dante's, too, with Stan Getz later on.
BRACKEEN:

FRED What happened next? Did you start traveling?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, then I had four children. No, I had three in L. A. And then we moved to New York--my husband, then Charles
BRACKEEN: Brackeen, was from New York. Actually he was born in Oklahoma but he lived in New York and came to California.

FRED Did you work together?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE We used to play together but we seldom worked together.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Do you wanna get into the family stuff or let it drop? It's up to you.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I am real happy I had the kids. They're all very musical but no one's making their living at that, but all four of
BRACKEEN: them are very musical.

FRED It's gotta be in the genes. With two super musical parents you gotta
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah. I just remember the girls, for instance--I remember I did this too with my sister--but they would hear one
BRACKEEN: song one time and they could sing the whole thing. And then I remember one son, he not only would sing the song, he'd sing all the parts to all the pieces in the band in any song that he liked. And then the other one played piano and wrote tunes and played Chopin études and stuff. So they never went into music but they all really liked it.

FRED I think Charlie Haden's triplets had some of those skills too. It's in the genes or the environment. Maybe just
BOUCHARD: being around the music all the time.

JOANNE Yeah, they would be sleeping when we'd be playing.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Tiny tots in the cribs, you're absorbing all kinds of energy and ideas before you know it. In L. A. you worked with
BOUCHARD: Dexter Gordon, Harold Land, Teddy Edwards, Don Cherry, Charlie Haden, Charles Lloyd, Joe Farrell, Sonny Stitt?

JOANNE *[Nods]* Well, Sonny Stitt was in New York.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Back in New York.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Scott LaFaro was another bass player that we played with. That was fun.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Huge influence.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, it was.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Were you listening to Bill Evans, too?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE No, no. Isn't that strange?
BRACKEEN:

FRED Well, yeah, I guess.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I think this was maybe a year before he joined Bill Evans. My favorite piano players were like Bud Powell and
BRACKEEN: McCoy Tyner.

FRED McCoy I can hear.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Then later, I really liked Chick [Corea] and Keith [Jarrett]. It was more what I was hearing...
BRACKEEN:

FRED Should we continue on with your can you tell us about your year or two with Blakey? With Woody Shaw and Dave
BOUCHARD: Liebman, in one context?

JOANNE Well, Dave Liebman and I didn't play with Art Blakey, but--what did we do?--we've done jobs together. know we
BRACKEEN: did something at the--is it called Foxwood Singhouse? That's the last one I remember we did.

FRED Who was in the Blakey Band? Bill Hardman?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Bill Hardman, yeah; it was supposed to be Randy Brecker, but then Mike and Randy got a tour that was gonna
BRACKEEN: overtake that, 'cause we had a six week tour, in Japan and Korea, and so on. So that didn't happen.

FRED I first saw the Brecker Brothers at the Oread Jazz Festival, in Lawrence, Kansas, they were a college team,
BOUCHARD: college band, this is 1964-5. I went off to graduate school to get a master's, and here are these hot shots playing in a college jazz festival. I said, "These guys might win it." *[laughs]*

JOANNE Yeah. They're amazing, and Randy still is, and, boy, Mike certainly has left his influence.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Oh man, I mean after Coltrane...
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE BRACKEEN: I mean they're so smooth, like, beautiful people not all musicians used to be, they used to have a little edge to them.

FRED BOUCHARD: I got to hang out with Randy and Mike in Switzerland when Fritz Renold drew a bunch of people over there and saw what a mensch he was. What a sweet, loveable, funny, delightful chap.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yes, he is. We played at Dizzy's [Coca Cola]. I had a quintet there about a year and a half ago.

FRED BOUCHARD: Oh yeah. Was that the big celebration thing?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: I had Greg Osby and Randy.

FRED BOUCHARD: Was that your celebration?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: No, that was at the Jazz Standard. I had a different group each week, so the other one was with Eddie Gomez and Adam Cruz, and Randy Brecker and Greg Osby. That was at Dizzy's, yeah.

FRED BOUCHARD: Going back to the Blakey thing, what was that experience like for you?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: That was great. We went to Japan, and maybe, I don't know if this was the first concert or not but we played a concert in Tokyo. I think it was the first concert, and so there was no rehearsal, and so he would just call tunes and we'd play. And after about four tunes with the band, he suddenly announced that the piano player was going to play a solo! *[Laughs]*

FRED BOUCHARD: Oops!

JOANNE BRACKEEN: It was a big concert, it was about three thousand people there. And I'm like, "Oh goodness! I didn't prepare anything." So that was how I found out I could play solo piano. That was great, it was great.

FRED BOUCHARD: Trial by fire.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: And you know, you're playing with great energy, for three or four tunes, and then all of the sudden it's just a big Yamaha piano.

FRED BOUCHARD: What did you call?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: So I played "Just One Of Those Things"--it was great. And I never had a problem to play solo piano, and I figured that was it: because I never tried.

FRED BOUCHARD: Did you give it a little Latin vamp or something?

JOANNE No I played it fast. *[Fred laughs]*. "Oh, okay." I just felt like a lot of energy, like what I felt, but I'd never felt it

BRACKEEN: from other people, ever.

FRED So what was Blakey like?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE That was what he was like.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Intensity.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Energy, yeah, he was great . He used to call me his adopted daughter. And he had the same native name as my

BRACKEEN: father. Yeah, Art. So that was funny.

FRED You were what, just a kid, right?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, I was young.

BRACKEEN:

FRED What, twenty?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, I don't remember what age when everything happened. So that was fun. I really learned a lot. And one

BRACKEEN: thing that was funny I always remember was that the band used to get together after the job and come to my room-- ='cause I would have this little 33 1/3, and it played records, and I'd have all the Miles Davis on there. Miles Smiles and things like that. So one day Art came by--bam bam bam on the door--and I let him in. And the whole band is there, so he's like feeling left out. So he sits down and listens a little bit, and for the next three nights he played nothing but what Tony Williams played!

FRED Whoa! Just sucked it right up and spat it back out again.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE He already knew it, and then he'd see the band recording, and he'd say, "Why are you listening to last night's

BRACKEEN: thing? Didn't you hear that last night?" *[Fred laughs]* So that was Art Blakey.

FRED Wow. What a guy.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Eventually I came to know what that meant, but around the time it was like: "Oh wow, okay..."

BRACKEEN:

FRED It was always this bursting with energy, always protective of his band?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Always filled with stories. He could tell you any kind of a story that could be the most absurd thing that you knew

BRACKEEN: couldn't be true, and you would believe it.

FRED Total straight face and totally bullshit.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yes, oh yeah. What do you call that? I don't know.
BRACKEEN:

FRED I guess it's learning how to survive.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Could be.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Might have to jive people to get by.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE And he had so many bands. He got almost anybody that could play, went through his band.
BRACKEEN:

FRED That's true! He was an amazing clearinghouse of talent.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE He knew when to hire them and when to get the new ones in. So a lot of people really learned a lot from him. He was a universal leader.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Yeah, it was like a big step ladder. Guys would get to the top and then they would just fly off on their own and become leaders. You were a leader not too long after you worked with him.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE That's right, everyone was calling.
BRACKEEN:

FRED You were doing trio dates under your own leadership in the seventies?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yes, I did.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Snooze, '75. 6/8 '75 or 6. Tringaling, '77.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, that was the one with Michael Brecker and trio and rhythm section, Billy Hart and Cecil McBee.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Is Cecil still around?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, he is.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Is he in New York?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah.
BRACKEEN:

FRED You ever, you guys work together?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Oh yeah, sometimes. Sometimes the little hidden jobs. Actually I like to do concerts with him too, when they want
BRACKEEN: a duet. I think we make a great duet.

FRED Oh, he has such a big beautiful warm sound.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah he does.
BRACKEEN:

FRED And he can bow.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE And he's crazy. And I like that!
BRACKEEN:

FRED Yeah, you gotta be a little crazy to survive in this business.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE To create, yeah. I don't think it's surviving, we can all survive. To be alive you need to be a little crazy.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Now that we're up that far--you're starting to write some pretty amazing pieces of music.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I was writing all along, you know I wrote a whole lot in California. And somehow we lost the recordings, we didn't
BRACKEEN: actually write them down, we just played 'em, so...

FRED Oh, you mean the tapes got lost?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah. So I had a lot of tunes before I even, before we moved to New York.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Do you have a Joanne Brackeen Songbook?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE BRACKEEN: No, they've been... Yeah, one company, Globart was trying to do that and we actually, finally, after about two years, found somebody that could put my tunes on the computer. 'Cause they're not easy to put on, even now, here, it's very hard. We were trying to put African Aztec on it and I think one measure took two hours. *[Fred laughs]* And it never did look right, so I'm like, "Well, this needs to be written so that a band member could play it easily, because you don't always have a chance to rehearse." So they'd gotten about our or fives tunes ready and they were gonna do a songbook and I would play with a rhythm section, so on. And 9/11 happened. And they were right there--so they exploded--they moved up to Vermont somewhere. And that never happened. They still wanted me to do it, but I never had time to go up there, fly back and forth.

FRED BOUCHARD: That's when I talked to you for Berklee Today, and we had that little interview segment for the Berklee alumni magazine. I'd just asked you about--you were right in the middle of the maelstrom down there.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah, my apartment was too, but it didn't. Somehow I always close doors, and close windows when I leave and nothing got into my apartment. Because I was on the right side--on the correct side, the back side, the look-at-the-river side. The people who were looking out at the street, they got it. So this big building they were in was really contaminated or whatever anyway, they moved, so, no longer in New York and very difficult to do.

FRED BOUCHARD: Can you explain some of your precepts or your compositional techniques, how do you dream up something like ADB or Green Voices of Player, that kind of stuff?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: It's just, I feel a certain energy, and I usually go to the piano and just find it. It feels like there's already a tune there, and it feels like there's already a part of it in my hands. And so I just go and find it. I have over three hundred compositions, but you know, a lot of them are just on tapes. But there's about, maybe there is hundred that I would play now. Any of those. I keep writing, but I don't usually go back into getting old ones and pull them up. I just, you know, keep writing more.

FRED BOUCHARD: So you don't necessarily--if you have an old favorite, you would just leave that as something to build on.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: I don't even know that I'm leaving it, I just get new ideas and just write new ones. I wrote about six or seven last summer, and there was about three or four of them that we're using. Sometimes it takes the band a little while to get them.

FRED BOUCHARD: Is it the kind of material that takes a lot of work with your bass and drummer? Adam or Ugonna Okegwo, or whoever you're working with?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: It can. I mean, everybody does their own, on their own. I just give them the music. I hire people that I know can hear into the sound of the compositions.

FRED BOUCHARD: They just learn them and?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah, then we work together.

FRED BOUCHARD: Build it up, and give them some jumping off spots to solo on.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: I like the--to me, it's really important the energy that is running through someone and how they feel about life and music. Not how they say they feel. I'm not that interested in words because I'm used to just looking and seeing, maybe like the birds or something else. I can look and see.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah. It's extra-sensory.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Like in the first grade, Look and See. Dick and Jane. It sounds simple but I can do that. And you can see their whole thing if you look. So then that's how I meet people and run into them. Otherwise you've got a very difficult situation--perhaps impossible. I already teach at Berklee, so I don't need to teach so much. When I have a group, I like something that is kind of current and spontaneous, and we can talk right now about whatever occurs to us right now musically speaking. So they get to improvise, on the tunes like that, too.

FRED BOUCHARD: Can a lesson with a student also unfold that way, if the energy's correct, so that you don't have to impart, but just exchange?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Very rarely. It could happen; that would be rare, but a lot of them have that potential, so you know, you go through the processes.

FRED BOUCHARD: Of drawing it out of them.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah, so I do at Berklee, for the structure, what they have to have there comes first, and then they know that. I'll give them anything on top as long as that's in place.

FRED BOUCHARD: So in terms of the Berklee lessons, you're following a code of...

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah, there's a certain structure that they need here.

FRED BOUCHARD: What is that? What does that include?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Oh, they give them scales and they give them certain chord progressions and things like that. So if they're really advanced, it should be really easy. And if it's not, sometimes it's hard. Had one student who played really well couldn't play scales. So it took him almost a year, but...

FRED BOUCHARD: So they could improvise but they couldn't do the drills?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah--he sounded like Herbie Hancock, but then he had troubles with the scales, but then he got them of course.

FRED BOUCHARD: Scales means just not sequences in octaves, but knowing the...

JOANNE Being able to play them correctly.

BRACKEEN:

FRED A-flat major, whatever they are.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Everybody comes at different points and I just try to teach, and I look in to see what it is, and I just try to teach

BRACKEEN: from there. So if they are really serious about learning, then we have a great time!

FRED You mentioned something when we were having a late coffee that you had students that were remarkably adept

BOUCHARD: in some areas but were hurting in others.

JOANNE Yes, they had the concept of how they wanted to sound--exactly--and in this case they both went for the same

BRACKEEN: tunes. Very interesting. We always start out with Keith Jarrett's The Cure to transcribe. Hopefully Keith doesn't mind that. He's a friend, but he is so amazing, he needs to be spread around. So they both chose "Woody'n You"--which is not an easy thing. For someone with a lot of technique and tremendous perception, then it could be easy. These people had that concept of perception, but they hadn't learned to play the piano with the touch and the technique, so that they could play it.

FRED This is Keith Jarrett's trio version of the Dizzy Gillespie song, "Woody'n You."

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE And so they transcribed his solo from the intro on to the end.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Yeah, that's an album that came out after.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE And one piano player just--the first one that did that, Jeon, from Korea, he still couldn't play it by the end of the semester but I could hear what he heard, and his improvising, just his own improvising on other tunes and touch, got so much better, that he got like a top grade. And then he came in and played it yesterday; he came in and played this. He hadn't done the intro before, so he did it this time, a short bit and spent more time. But he actually didn't have the technique to play even and fast, and now he's gotten it, in one semester. And then Jeffrey came in a level below what they'll even allow for my class, but he talked me into letting him in. He said, "I can do it, I know I can do it." And so he transcribed the same song. That's a tremendous amount of work for them. But the first one has actually learned how to displace phrasings and do things, just not in the way that many piano players and horn players play--which is what Keith does, he plays what's flowing through him now. He is one of the greatest spontaneous improvisers that I've heard.

FRED Do you think that you might be sympathetic towards students who hear things going in different directions, as

BOUCHARD: you did as a six-year-old? Hearing a tune on the radio, saying, "Nah, this should go this way, not that way?" I mean, you were thinking

JOANNE No one came in saying that. No, I know, I think I'm, I think I mean I just figured I was different. Because I couldn't

BRACKEEN: find anyone like that, but I'm sure there are many, there's millions of people here--billions. So I'm sure there are duplicates.

FRED You've also said that you've seen the bar raised in the student body over the last four or five years. I've seen it

BOUCHARD: too, in terms of kids who could write or can't write.

JOANNE Or the level coming in is higher and then they learn faster. And they're very excited and they will work hard or,

BRACKEEN: you know, do a lot of focusing.

FRED I was impressed with the fact that you became your own business person and manager back in the eighties, and

BOUCHARD: took care of all your own bookings and other stuff. Was that a big leap, in terms of?

JOANNE No, because after I was working with Art Blakey and Joe Henderson and Stan Getz, then people just started

BRACKEEN: calling me. So I would just accept or not accept, or whatever.

FRED There was no advantage of having someone that you had to go through or that you had to filter through?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Not really, but now you can't do that. They all expect--even the clubs--that you have a manager that books you in

BRACKEEN: there, so I do.

FRED Could you talk a little bit about Stan Getz and Joe Henderson?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Both amazing! So prolific, both of them had photographic memories. What can we say? Stan was like a singer, so

BRACKEEN: when you accompanied Stan you had to play exactly what sounded good with him. You know, the top note on the accompaniment, everything needed to be in the right mood, the right time placement, and...

FRED He had such a sweet cantabile kind of way of playing, legato...

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Over the top, but beautiful melodies. So the rhythm section kind of had an unspoken regime where we would see

BRACKEEN: how far out we could go with him, and then it would still sound what we thought was good and like Stan.

FRED Was he tough to work for?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Sometimes. I didn't think of him as tough, because Billy Hart was already in the band and he already told me

BRACKEEN: everything about Stan. You know, "Don't do this. This is good. That's not good." It was fun, because, I guess--I know everyone is psychic but I was used to using mine just for everyday, learning music and so on, and it turned out that Stan was that way too. So there was this thing going on; it was very funny.

FRED What about Joe? How was he? Is he a rugged individualist, or just a different kind of character?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE He really liked a lot of different subjects, like sports and countries, different languages, he could speak parts of--I

BRACKEEN: think at one time I counted up, it was seventeen languages. Not the total language, but enough to get by, and with no accent.

FRED Great ear!

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah, great ear, and I remember riding in a van, going places, and somebody would like sports, we'd be in Europe or something, and then Joe would go back to 1940, 1950, would know every player in the game and all the moves that happened. I don't know about sports. But then it would be funny because he would know, he'd have this person's attention. And then I could see something in the person, so I don't know anything and then I would bring up another subject and it would be equal with what he did. So there was always this funny thing where his was from this amazing memory, and mine was from intuition, but we had a real way of communicating with people, both musically and personally. He was a really good friend. He used to call, then about eight hours later, "I have to go now." *[Laughs]*

FRED BOUCHARD: You'd just hop from one topic to another.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Never ever boring.

FRED BOUCHARD: That's beautiful.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Stan didn't do that, but he was also very interesting, and just amazing--that pitch, that sound, the timing for what he did, and, he was amazing.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah, where else could we go here? What about the--is there a sorority of female jazz pianists? Is there a pipeline between you and?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Oh, we tried to make one together, a week or two ago, up at the Mary Lou Williams', where they had the five pianists.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah, I mean, is there some kind of a concrete connection between you and Lynne Arriale, Marilyn Crispell and Jessica Williams? People like that? You don't have any?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: No, it doesn't seem to work, no.

FRED BOUCHARD: Do you find that

JOANNE BRACKEEN: The way that I look at music is so different. Like say, if you take Geri Allen for instance, she'll talk about music for four hours, and I just want to hear her play. When she plays for three minutes, I know everything that she's said and that she is going to say. So her communication is mostly through words, as where mine is better if you hear the way I play. So that's just an extreme example, she's very--from my point of view--very scholastic and very accurate that way. And she would probably be appalled at what--if she were ever to know--what I don't know. Because I really don't know anything. You can not know anything, and know everything, if you relate to the energies that create everyone. And I don't mean in a church and religion and all of that. That is for people that have a problem to do that. From my point of view, because I think the natural state is everybody is already in church, they couldn't be here if they weren't. So I'm just, I don't meet any people too much that know that or want to be associated with things like that. But what I do today, it requires that.

FRED What do you mean?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE What I do every day requires that. When I am used to giving people and relating also when I play...
BRACKEEN:

FRED It's not through concrete fact, it's not through book learning.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE No, it's through the moment.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Inspiration and touch, and...
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE It's through what you got given to you--maybe before you were born here, I don't know, but I just say born here,
BRACKEEN: 'cause I don't remember before.

FRED Do you find--I don't wanna get into the women's thing too much but do you find girls play different than guys?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yes, still, but it won't continue. I mean the strong points will continue, but there are some weaknesses that seem
BRACKEEN: to reign more in women than men, and they're dissolving.

FRED Please be specific if you can.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE The rhythmical element and the phrasing, that seems to be not as strong sometimes as the men. But it's
BRACKEEN: disappearing.

FRED It's not a physiological thing.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE I don't, I never think of things like that. All I know is that in the students it is really disappearing.
BRACKEEN:

FRED That's good.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, it is. They're becoming something that's very much the same.
BRACKEEN:

FRED On the other hand, do women already come in with certain strong points or certain intuitive?
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE They do. They're more intuitive, and sometimes more daring and creative. But of course, it doesn't work without
BRACKEEN: the whole picture, so you know...

FRED More daring and creative.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Sometimes. I mean, there's reversals. You can't say... But I mean those five women, I was just thinking of those...

BRACKEEN:

FRED It's fresh in your mind, I mean, it was just last week.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE We have one of them that is strong with time, and if the others had that they would have everything. So I do my best to try to develop those. Whatever quality that somebody might need strengthening, I try to do it in a way that's fun for them.

BRACKEEN:

FRED As the world is shrinking, and the walls are coming down, are you finding, there seems to be a big influx of young performers from Asia who have a lot of chops, knowledge, and stick-to-it-iveness, to become terrific instrumentalists. I mean, we can go back to Makoto Ozone, thirty years ago, but we can also talk about Hiromi, and some other people more recently. What's your comment on that?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, if some of them had Hiromi for their idol--which I had one last semester, who actually went into YouTube, and I didn't even think that she wrote out the solos that Hiromi did. She actually just learned them so she could play them on the piano. Which is astounding, just the technique! So I told her, "That is great! Hiromi has an amazing technique. But what'll happen if we add this to that technique, and that?" So, you know, I I got her--she sounded much better at the end of the semester, if she were playing something else.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Yeah, that's good.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE But I also said, "Hiromi is playing this fast and you know that's the technique bar, now everybody's gonna be reaching for that." Because I don't think there was any woman who played that fast in jazz accurately and clearly and creatively, and using odd meters and different things than Hiromi. I mean, there could be, but I didn't hear that personally. So that's amazing.

BRACKEEN:

FRED This is kind of an example of you reaching a student where they're coming in.

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, reach for the stars! But keep your feet on the ground! *[Laughs]*

BRACKEEN:

FRED Right. Like Monk!

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah! Exactly.

BRACKEEN:

FRED Do you have any philosophy of teaching? Any pedagogical rules that you haven't already expressed?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE BRACKEEN: No it's really quite simple, the way that I teach. It could be very difficult for me to teach someone else to teach how I teach, if anybody would even be interested. But when a person comes in, sometimes I can hear the song that they just were practicing, in the practice room, I'll say, "Oh, why don't we play this? Let's do this." And they'll say, "Oh, I was doing that!" I could actually, yeah--so I just love to be in tune with them. And it takes a certain...you have to sleep at night and eat well. It takes a certain refreshment, in your dedication to your being, to be able to be in that state when you teach, but I work for it, I try.

FRED BOUCHARD: Is your own practice regimen a pretty stringent one?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: *[Laughs]* I don't have anything that I call regimen and astringent; those words wouldn't work too well, but I know what I am working on, yes.

FRED BOUCHARD: And you give it a certain amount of time, on a regular basis.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: That's right. I can't always do it on the piano, but I can always do it in my head.

FRED BOUCHARD: Oh, that's cool.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Preferably at the piano, that's more fun, and a little easier actually.

FRED BOUCHARD: What is, what are, some of your happiest moments as a performer or teacher? When do you feel most in tune?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: When I'm performing. That's when I'm performing. I had a little tiny job with a drummer named Victor Jones, and a bass player from New Jersey, Gary Mazzaroppi. It was about two months ago. And it was like pure joy from the beginning to the end. They didn't know my music, and they played very differently, and I had to wonder--I didn't ask, but I don't think they'd ever played together--and they both played totally different ways, but they just worked!

FRED BOUCHARD: Wait--where was this?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: At this little club called the Shanghai Jazz Club. It was something I wouldn't normally do, but I did it.

FRED BOUCHARD: They played your tunes?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Oh no, that wouldn't have worked.

FRED BOUCHARD: So you played standards?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Oh, yes, and that was a high, that worked! I would have never--it just worked that we just got whoever could make it.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah, why did you get a charge out of that?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Because it was music! Nobody knew anything, that anybody else was gonna play, everybody was playing at the top level they could, and listening at the top level, so it was three people operating like one person, and of course the audience went crazy. They loved it.

FRED BOUCHARD: I did one of these surveys for DownBeat, about five years ago, one of the last IAJE's, and I interviewed briefly, thirty or forty professional musicians--you know, Phil Woods, Brian Lynch, Maria Schneider. And I asked them all pretty much the same question: "If you were teaching,"--and a lot of them weren't--"what would be the thing that you would like to get over? What's the most important thing to get over for the students?" And most of them said what you just said: "Get 'em to listen." How do you do that in the classroom?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Well, we did that yesterday. The piano player was playing and the bass player was taking a solo, and the piano player got off. He had enough information on the tune and the situation to have never gotten lost. But I just stopped him, told him how to listen. I said, "You have to listen. There's three people here. You have to hear them all together, as though it's all you, or it's all them. You have to hear one thing. And that way you won't get ever lost." If you thought you were lost, you'll still know where you are, because you could hear the bass player's solo, you'd know where he is, what he is thinking. So I will stop immediately if they don't listen. You can hear right away.

FRED BOUCHARD: Is it a tough lesson for people?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: No, they don't know it's tough. They don't know. They come in, they just wanna learn. And often you're able to teach them a lot because they don't know something is supposed to be hard or not hard. It reminds me of something Bob Winter said. Oh, he came in and I played this tune. "Well, it's in E-flat. Why don't you play it in E? That's even easier!" So he'll pick a key like a half a step away, and they come back and they play it!

FRED BOUCHARD: You gotta do that with singers sometimes. "It's my key!"

JOANNE BRACKEEN: That's right! *[Laughs]* That's true.

FRED BOUCHARD: Anyway, is there anything else we could talk about? The lure of the ocean. Why do you find the ocean--I mean, you were raised by the ocean. I think we started with that.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yes. It's great.

FRED BOUCHARD: Do you have any pets or hobbies, or any other things you like to do?

JOANNE I study qigong. I love that.

BRACKEEN:

FRED What's that?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well, qi means energy. In Japanese they call it qi, but for the Chinese it's chi. And gong is the air, so "energy in the air."
BRACKEEN:

FRED Oh is it like?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Well I studied with a master from Shanghai that lives in Toronto. Dr. Chu Chow.
BRACKEEN:

FRED That's a tune!

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Yeah, so he teaches; but I love it because there's really not any words spoken. And he can tell what you got and what you didn't. But I can tell what he got, what he didn't, too, so it's really fun. But he is the master at that.
BRACKEEN:

FRED How do you describe it?

BOUCHARD:

JOANNE It feels like--backwards. If you play a concert, there's a certain feel. You are feeling great: the concert that you just played, it feels like you sit back and somebody takes all that energy you gave out and puts it right back into you. And you're just sitting there, and you can feel it come in--exactly as though you had just played it. That's what it feels like to me, so if you can imagine that. He uses it for healing, so, but I just go up there all the time, just for strengthening the body.
BRACKEEN:

FRED There's an awful lot of magic that goes on, or at least what appears to be magic, in performance, and in life, and being able to tap into something that's beyond the simple visual or heard is I think it's a constant source of amazement, in regeneration for people. We've just been reading this book by Victor Wooten the bass player, called The Music Lesson. He talks a lot of these airy imponderables and has a guru who seems to be pulling these things off without any sleight of hand, just has these amazing powers. And the students are learning these things one by one as you go through the book.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Well, I can't say you'd learn Dr Chow's one by one, you might get like fifty by fifty or three by seven, you're definitely not just gonna have one thing going on. But he is now in the process of teaching someone to assist him. But when I was up there, I'm a little bit psychic, and so he likes to double check things through me, so he was like asking me to talk with, who he wanted for his assistant, to make sure that was good, so we're talking. Meanwhile a patient comes in, meanwhile he's trying to teach her at the same time that we are talking, so the lady comes in and she can't walk, and she has this cane. And the doctor says, Chow says, "You watch. In about twenty minutes she'll come out and she'll be walking." So she goes in and in twenty minutes, she comes out, she's walking out. And the assistant had told me about one lady who was eighty-one that came in that only could see from here up. But she couldn't see anything down here. So, he put one needle somewhere in her forehead, and instantly she could see. This goes on every day. But he would never talk about it. I knew he could do that. In fact when I met him, he just was giving me acupuncture, and I could see that he sent energy from here to California, and so I asked him about it, and he looked a little surprised, like because he didn't tell anyone, and he was doing that. And then I could see in the mountains in China, where he was getting some other reserve things and I would check it out and that was it. It's really strong what he does. And also there's a photograph, that he sent me energy. It's very strange, and I was in Sydney, Australia, in a dark club and some people had found out that he was one of my friends--that's all they knew, that he could do qigong. And they took a photograph of me and they actually caught the moment that he was sending energy to me. And in this picture, you see these white circles coming down like that, and then spreading over my head. And he has that in his office.

FRED BOUCHARD: The photo?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: But the people who took the photo--without any flash, nothing, in a dark club--they seemed to know what that was. 'Cause I mean, if you just looked, the ordinary person, "No, no! that's no good, it's got this big white mark." If you look you can see the circles going like that, but that's ten thousand miles away. And that is just his ordinary thing, he's not trying to heal me or anything. Yeah, so his stuff is very amazing. But I don't know how large he wants to spread this, because now the government in China has discovered him, and his healing now is getting like that. They want him to go with the top healers to Shanghai in August, and he goes, "It's too hot in Shanghai in August!" *[Laughs]*

FRED BOUCHARD: He's divorcing himself from it.

JOANNE BRACKEEN: He just wants to take it easy. So I don't know, I think he likes where he is.

FRED BOUCHARD: Well, and you like where you are? Berklee suits you?

JOANNE BRACKEEN: Yeah, it's definitely--the most interesting students are here. Where can you go to find students that interesting?

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah, I get that impression, too.

JOANNE And that really want to learn that much so that you feel a value, you feel like you're really giving something that
BRACKEEN: makes a difference, I think that's what we're all here to do.

FRED Yeah, Joanne! Thanks, this has been a charming, informative, and visionary hour for us. I hope that everybody
BOUCHARD: who watches the video enjoys it.

JOANNE I hope so, too!
BRACKEEN:

FRED And if you don't understand anything, get back to me or Joanne, we'll try to clear it up.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Okay.
BRACKEEN:

FRED Thanks again.
BOUCHARD:

JOANNE Absolutely, you're welcome.
BRACKEEN: