

FRED John, great to have you on board, man!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Nice to be here!

FRED Too bad we can't light up some Cubans!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, or some Dominicans! [Laughs] We could get some good Hondurans too, they're cheaper.

FRED [Laughs] John has been regaling me for the last couple of days with childhood memories of growing up in
BOUCHARD: Bernardston, Western Mass[achusetts] and attending UMass [University of Massachusetts]. Let's start at the beginning on the right roll. Give us a drum roll!

JOHN RAMSAY: Well, Bernardston by the way is on the Vermont border, you know. So it's just south of Brattleboro, Vermont. It's the last town in Massachusetts that you would hit before you hit Vermont if you went up Route 91 which, you know, goes all the way north-south highway, all the way up to I think to Canada. So I grew up, literally, on the Vermont border next to a farm. So you know there was no jazz around in those days but of course, you know, having been born in 1950 and then coming of age in the sixties, it was the whole rock'n'roll thing but even prior to that, I remember in--must have been high school or junior highschool we called it then--having sort of a brush with the high school marching band. But I came into that through a friend, my best friend actually from that town, his name was Hughie Der. And I was thinking about this the other day. I don't know how it happened, but he could already read music and I didn't. So it must be that I came to it late in the school system so I never really learned to read. So when I got in the high school band it was to play the bass drum, and even that's like, you know [mimes playing a bass drum]. You know, quarter notes or something, I couldn't really read it. So my friend Hugh, who was playing the snare drum would, he'd go nudge me when I was supposed to hit the bass drum or he'd play the part for me. But I was just in hindsight thinking about: how was it that he could read music and I couldn't? But, you know, that was kind of my first foray into formal music orchestra and what not. But the other part of the story was that my friend Hugh and a couple of other friends in this small town owned drum sets and I didn't. So I would always go to their house wanting to play their drum sets. I remember this friend, Hughie Der, he was a Chinese American, he had a red sparkle Ludvig drum set, which he had long since lost interest in. But when I would go to his house I would be more interested in playing his drums than anything else. He would wanna go outside and play, you know, war or something.

FRED Even though he was playing snare in the band?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, yeah. For him it was, you know, it wasn't something he did it, I guess, maybe starting in elementary school, but he was kind of moving away from it. He wasn't really interested in the drum set. And there was another friend in our town who played in a local band. And so I would go to this band's rehearsals. And this is how I eventually became a drummer was this guy, Dave Senior was his name, played in the town sort of band, rock band, called The Links at the time. We're talking like 1962 or something. And I used to go to the rehearsal 'cause again, I was interested in, you know, playing the drums when he would let me or whenever. But these guys were playing in a local battle of the bands in Greenfield, Mass[achusetts], it's the next larger town next to Bernardston. And so, Dave, the drummer, wanted to sing a song, but he couldn't sing and play at the same time. [Laughs] I remember the tune, it was by the Kinks, it was called "A Well Respected Man." So, they said, "Okay, you'll go up to the microphone and Ramsay will come out and play drums on that one song. [Laughs] So I'm like, "Yeah! Okay!" 'Cause, you know, I was just a kid hanging around the kid, would jump on the drums and

FRED You were like fourteen?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Twelve, thirteen, yeah. And these kids were a little older than me. So anyways, the battle of the band comes, you know, we're pitted against the big Greenfield bands, we're little town kids and we wanna beat The Royals! Which was the Greenfield popular group of the day. Anyways, push comes to shove, Dave gets up, he goes to the microphone, I come out of the wings, I sit down at the drums and we play the Kinks right? After the song is over, he goes back to the drums, I go back in the wings. Anyways, the thing ends and the voting comes in and the Greenfield band, the local favorites, won and we came in second. So, I remember this as clear as day. Today, I can still see it. Dave, he takes his drumsticks, he throws them down in the trap case and he goes, "I quit!"

FRED Didn't want to be number two!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: He goes, "That's it! I quit!" And he didn't only mean the band, he meant drumming. And he really quit drumming and never again in life played a drum. And so there I was instant band!

FRED Woow, you could just step right in.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, I'm like, "Wow!"

FRED Inherited the kit and everything?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Not the kit, but you know, I had to call my dad the next day--'cause my folks were divorced--I had to call my dad the next day and say, "Hey dad, if you buy me a set of drums I can be in a band!" Now these guys were working already, I mean besides the high school teen dance stuff, they were playing in the local, what's it called, The Moose Club in bars really, and they were kids. And then, you know, high school dances, college gigs, so I was an instant professional. You know, I went right to work! 'Cause they had gigs, we were on the road up in... all my early gigs were up in Vermont, New Hampshire, all the colleges. There was a booking agent up in Manchester...

FRED Close your eyes and tell me what was in your first kit!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Oh, it was a Kent drum set which was the equivalent to kind of the modern day Taiwanese, very cheap, very you know, not well made.

FRED Yeah, crappy cymbals.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, silver sparkle, no floor tom, snare drum, tom-tom, twenty-inch bass drum maybe, probably 265 bucks in those days, but you know, it got me going, thank you dad! And I mean, I started working. Never a lesson, all self-taught by ear and maybe one--'cause my mom actually worked in the bar in the town--well, maybe there were two, but there was a big inn called the Bernardston Inn, which we lived across the street from. My mom was a bartender and a waitress most of her life. And she would actually let me come over in this Bernardston Inn, downstairs they had a big nightclub. And there was a band that played there in the sixties from Greenfield called Beedee and the Bowmen. And so Mom would let me come in at the beginning of the night and hear like the first part of their first set, you know, so I at the end of the night...

FRED What was it back, rock'n'roll?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: You know, in those days it was everything, 'cause I remember this drummer's feature was "Caravan." And I didn't know "Caravan" from, you know, "Wipe Out" then, but I knew it would feature the drummer and it had all that crazy zing zing zing kind of tom-tom stuff in it, and the drummer went nuts and so I was right there. And I mention this because I think maybe I had one or two, my mom arranged for me to have one or two lessons with this guy early one night before the band started, you know. I don't even remember what it was but, you know, "This is how you sit at the drums" or something. [Laughs] So that was the extent of my formal training. And that band, I mentioned that I joined on that fortuitous night at the battle of the bands, I was in that band for the next ten years!

FRED Same cats?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: More or less, I mean, there was a couple of personnel changes. There was a kid that moved from Greenfield to our town named John Sullivan who was a Beatles fan, he was a Beatles--to this day, he's still writing and playing music that sounds like Beatles stuff.

FRED Hey, that cover stuff still goes over.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: So, I mean, I was in that band until about the age of I wanna say twenty-two 'cause like I said I started then when I was twelve or thirteen.

FRED So GB [general business]?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: No, I mean, the music of the day then. We played Led Zeppelin, we played John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers, we played Beatles, we played Grand Funk Railroad, we played the James Gang. It was all that stuff, you know, the music of the time. This was the Jimi Hendrix days, the Janis Joplin, you know, Jim Morrison and the Doors era.

FRED So, big ears, lots of covers.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Big ears, not knowing what the hell I was doing. Big ears, I mean, to play rock beats, I don't wanna denigrate rock and roll 'cause it gave me my start but, you know, basic stuff like [plays rock beat on table]. You know, when you're a kid, you can figure that out!

FRED Go a long way!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Pretty quickly! [Laughs]

FRED Move your booty!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: So that's kind of the formative years of John Ramsay as a drummer.

FRED When did you get your ears on to jazz?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Well, again, it's all, you know, time related here. The period was, we're talking about the sixties, and then towards the end of the sixties, the early seventies, was the advent of jazz rock--now we call "fusion," right? So once I'd kind of outgrown that band and that local neighborhood and that music, I naturally sort of gravitated south to the UMass Amherst area where there was a much more sophisticated music scene and musicians who were really towny guys, but they were already listening to Miles and to make a long story short I ended up in a group with a bunch of guys from Amherst: Jim Bridges, who was a great guitar player, ended up playing with Max Roach for a while. Plays a lot with Stan Strickland now, or he did but... plays bass as well. But anyways, those guys were already into Gil Scott-Heron, Stevie Wonder. So our band really was kind of a more early rhythm and blues, funk fusion kind of group.

FRED But electric piano?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yep, we had two keyboards.

FRED Filles de Kilimanjaro stuff?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, Donny Hathaway stuff. We played some of that early electric Miles stuff.

FRED Headhunters?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, that kind of stuff. '70, '71, '72 around that time.

FRED Bill Summers?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: All of the stuff that was happening, you know.

FRED What about New Orleans with The Meters and cats like that?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: No, unfortunately we didn't get that--I mean, the influence may have been there, certainly, maybe their more known hits. But Aretha Franklin--we had a female vocalist. This band had two keyboard players, tenor sax who did tenor/alto, a conga player, drums, bass. I don't know if you've ever heard of Dave Gage, but he's like the king of the bass repair guys in New York City now. He apprenticed with a guy named Treagor who used to be the guy. But everyone from Ron Carter to Christian McBride to, I mean, all those guys take the bass to Dave now. But he was the bass player in our band called Real Tears back in the day. And, let me see, two keyboards I mentioned, vocalist. We all kind of sang but

FRED Were you getting college gigs as much as dances?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Oh yeah. We worked for Ted Kurland who is now a huge agent in Boston and manager for everybody I think, from Pat Metheny to But back then Ted had a company called All American Talent. [Laughs]

FRED Was he located in Boston?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: In Allston, yeah.

FRED Still in Allston?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, that's how he started. And so we eventually hooked up with him. Dave Gage, who I mentioned, and myself were also the business agents of the band, so we did all this hustling to get gigs. We came to All American Talent, they started booking us to, you know, colleges and stuff out in New York State and so yeah, musically that was right in the period where, you know, if you came to jazz from the jazz-rock side you had to go to the other side, the jazz side, to see where that came from. So thank God I was there at that time, and influenced by these other guys who, by the way, we're talking early seventies now, were already enrolled at the University of Mass at Amherst. I was not. I was in the band with them but I would go to their classes and kind of hang.

FRED Oh, you mean sit in?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, I would now we're getting into the Max Roach era. So, that was around the time, maybe '73, '74, that Max Roach came to UMass, but he came there upon the invitation of Fred Tillis, who started the first ever Afro-American music and jazz degree program at the University of Mass in Amherst. And in those days, that faculty was housed in these mobile units. They weren't even looked upon as, you know, as legitimate Music Department faculty who had lush lovely offices with grand pianos. I mean, these guys were kind of like second-class citizens. This is when Archie Shepp came to the Amherst area, Max Roach came and Max brought Reggie Workman and a few other people. This is probably around the time when, what's his name, Yusef Lateef came, so. But not only did these guys come to teach but all of these students like John Betsch I mentioned to you before, there was a saxophone player who since moved to Paris: Sulaiman Hakim. They all came because Max was there. And so here I am, kind of the local kid and, you know, there is this influx of jazz music and musicians that came and like I mentioned, the guys I played in the band with were students there. So I would go to Max Roach's ensemble. And here's a great story. I'm not giving you the chance to ask many questions.

FRED No, go for it! This is great.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: But I would go to the small band ensemble that Max directed with my friends. He knew me as a local kid, I won't tell you what nickname he referred to me as but, we'll leave that out of it, but he would call me by my nickname and he would say, "Come and up play!" I remember one time I was at the drumset and I was [mimes playing drums]. Remember, I came from the rock perspective. But I was starting to get this [mimes jazz ride] thing, you get the idea. So I remember playing in his ensemble and he came up behind me and he said, "No, no!" He said, "Don't play it like that! Play it like more like Art Blakey would play it!"

FRED Can you demonstrate?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Well, I don't remember what I was doing, but the punchline here is I actually had to turn around and say, "I've never heard Art Blakey." And he said, "What?!" He said, "You better get busy!" And so of course, I ran out and I got I think the first actually later, one of the first Art Blakey records I had was called Buhaina Buhaina but the, you know, the funny thing about the story was if that was say 1974, '75, five years later I'm playing in Art Blakey's big band, so if I didn't know then, you know, I certainly found out down the road!

FRED Boy, I guess you did, yeah.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, Max was you know, Max never taught he wouldn't teach private instruction. I have some thoughts on why that is but at UMass he taught a small group ensemble, he would kind of come and do guest directing of the big band from time to time, he had a percussion ensemble and he had a jazz history class which really consisted of him telling Charlie Parker stories. But the percussion ensemble I remember, this is how the class started. He would say: "Okay, everybody. Do this." [Drums on his chest] This is gonna kill your mic for sure right? And we later learned that it was really all the stuff that he did with his percussion ensemble M'Boom. And they, you know, after we had class with him years later we saw M'Boom perform right? And lo and behold, how did they start the concert? [Drums on his chest] You know, seven guys doing this! [Laughs]

FRED That was a great band! It was something else live.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: There's another story involving M'Boom that years later, we talked about I will go back in a minute and talk about how we got to that point, but when I was playing in Art Blakey's big band, we were playing in Torino, Italy, in a soccer field. And the interesting thing was, the day before or that day, I don't remember, I was having lunch in the hotel with Art and Kenny Clarke was there. 'Cause he played either the previous night or the next night or something. So, I'm having lunch with Art Blakey and Kenny Clarke! 'Cause Art was like, "Johnny! You know who this is?" And I'm like, "Not really." "It's Kenny Clarke!" And I went, "Ohh" And so, during lunch Art says to Kenny Clarke, "Hey, you wanna sit in with us tonight?" Now, I'm already the second drummer in the big band with Art Blakey, and he's like inviting Kenny Clarke. So that night I'm in the back. We're on this huge soccer stadium, and these kind of concerts and festivals, you know, you're on the stage in the middle of the field and the stands are like, looks like a half a mile away! There's this big sea of people and flashbulbs, but you're in the middle of the field. Anyways, I'm sitting back there and we're playing and I look and I go, "That's Art Blakey!" And next to him, "That's Kenny Clarke! That's Art Blakey What am I doing here?" [Laughs] Now, I'm talking 1980 now but as I'm back there, you know, trying to contain myself.

FRED Kenny had his big band with Francy Boland during that, right about that time. A few years before.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Anyways, I'm looking at this right, and I'm confused. I look at the stage entrance back, you know, a fence on the field or something. I see Max Roach walking across the soccer field. He comes up and actually Roy Haynes was there that night too, 'cause I think he played on the same set on the same night or the next night. And so, here comes Max Roach walking across the field and then Freddie Waits and Joe Chambers and I'm realizing

FRED It's M'Boom!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: It's M'Boom, you know! So they're probably on the same festival tour. And so, I'm, you know, it's the way you're supposed to play music going, "Oh man, it's Max Roach! Oh, that's Roy Haynes! Oh! It's Kenny Clarke!" You're not supposed to be, you know, impressed by that, you're supposed to be thinking about the music! Anyways

FRED There was all three of you with three kits on the stage?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, Kenny Clarke, Art Blakey, and me.

FRED How did you keep out of their way? I mean, how do you complement each other?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: This was probably midway through the tour of the Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers Big Band, which was the two drummers: Art and I. And, I mean, that was kind of my role to observe and to stay out of his way, you know! Or he would nod at times when he wanted me to fill or he would have me start a tune with a solo. But, you know, I would certainly not fill when he was filling. And it was just, you know, I had to really pay attention to what he was doing.

FRED It must have been an extraordinary... there's two guys

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: He would stop playing sometimes and smoke a cigarette. [Laughs]

FRED I mean, would Kenny be on brushes or something, or would it be all sticks?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: You know, that's so long ago and it was such a--I mean, awe of distant memory now, I have no idea what any of us played but, you know, the impression of being there with Kenny Clarke there, Art Blakey there and me back I mean it's just like

FRED Overwhelming.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Had I known then what I know now, you know, it would have been probably I would've gotten more out of it. But anyways, I kind of sprung ahead because we were back in the classroom with Max Roach in like 1974 where he said that line to me, "No no no no, play it more like Art Blakey!"

FRED So you did your homework, you went out, and shredded with the records or?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Well, you know, it's a process. Over the next few years certainly I did, but you don't get Art Blakey in one listening. But to kind of fill in the gap between that period and the night with Kenny Clarke oh, the other thing with that night in Torino. When we came off the stage, Art was over leaning on the fence talking to Max, you know, and of course I'm gonna walk over. I'm walking over and Art goes, "John, you know who this is?" And Max goes, "Oh man, of course, this is one of my bambinos!" he says, you know. [Laughs] But anyways, to get back to UMass, I kind of have two periods of time that I had a sort of an affiliation with UMass. 'Cause again, I was a local kid, right? So, at that early period, like I said I wasn't a student yet, but I was hanging out in all the classes. I would play in the big band when John Betsch couldn't make it. Fred Tillis would allow me to play. Now mind you, I still could not read music. I was still a self-taught guy primarily, hadn't really started to study yet with Alan Dawson, and so when John Betsch had a guy or something, he was out of town, Fred Tillis would let me I would sit behind John Betsch and watch the chart, and watch what he did, to try and figure out what those black dots and what those little funny things on the chart but I had no clue, really, I mean. I had ears, of course.

FRED So you had monster ears and pretty technique, obviously.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Enough to get by, you know. Enough to I had good ears, yeah, sure, I had a good natural innate musical sense. But anyways, that was the early seventies and after that. Well actually, around that time I mentioned that Max wouldn't teach private lessons so I'm like, "Man, can I get a lesson? Give me a lesson, you know, can I study with you?" And he was like, 'No, I don't really do that.'" And I've always kind of theorized that he didn't want a bunch of Max Roach clones running around, any more than there were already, you know. But he said, "Well, you know, there's this guy in Boston, you should check him out, Alan Dawson. He's a teacher." And so, around 1972, '73, I remember driving down to 1140 Boylston St. building, where I have an office now, and going up to the second floor which was where the Percussion department was then. And I "Hey, where's this guy, Alan Dawson?" I found his office, I went up, I knocked on the door. [Knocks on the wall]. This guy comes, he's in kind of a leisure suit, you know, half jacket with matching corduroy. Very dapper guy. Very, you know, delightful.

FRED Well-spoken.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Well-spoken, I knock on the door, "Are you Mr. Dawson?" He said, "Well, yes." I said, "Do you take students outside of Berklee?" and he goes, "Well, as a matter of fact, you've come at a good time because--it was like in two months or three months--I'm gonna be leaving Berklee and I have a private practice at my home out in Lexington, so here's my number, give me a call!" So I was like [celebratory gesture]...So that's how it started, the next ten-year period really of studying off and on with Alan.

FRED What did Max have to say about Alan? Do you remember anything specifically?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, he would, they would always Max would say, "Man, you know, when we have to go up to Boston to play and deal with Alan Dawson, we're all kind of shaking our boots," kind of thing. He would always say that Alan was a force to be reckoned with, kind of thing, and he said, "Whenever we play in Boston we have to play behind Alan Dawson." It's something to, you know

FRED You must have found out pretty quickly that he was the first call drummer in Greater Boston at Sandy's, Lennie's.

BOUCHARD: When any single horn player came through, he was the guy to call.

JOHN RAMSAY: Oh yeah, yeah. And also we knew that, you know, he was the teacher of Tony Williams and Harvey Mason and Clifford Jarvis and So anyways, it started my 180-mile-roundtrip-every-other-week association with Alan 'cause I was coming out from Amherst, Northampton area. And I think back then, Alan was getting like twenty-five dollars an hour or something like. Thirty dollars for an hour lesson.

FRED It was a regular routine?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: It was the first formal and, you know, regular drum lessons that I ever had in my life.

FRED You were twenty-something?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: I was around twenty-two, twenty-three. And here's the life-changing moment with Alan. Somewhere like, along my second or third lesson with him, you know, I asked him for an evaluation. Now, I was already a hotshot from, you know, the Western Mass area, everyone knew who I was and my band was like, one of the popular bands from even Boston to Western Mass so I asked him for an evaluation and I wanted him to say, you know, "Wow, you're just like Tony Williams! You're gonna be the next Tony Williams!" And Alan in his typical Alan Dawson, he said, "Well"--you know, very diplomatic--he said, "You're a proficient drummer. You've been playing for about ten years. But you're really a beginner." I was like, crestfallen. "What do you mean? A beginner?" He said, "Well, you don't know any rudiments. You don't read." He said, "You only know one style, really." And I was like, "Oh my god..."

FRED Rudiments, what the hell are they?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, well I mean, I had taken a couple of lessons so I was starting to find out but, you know Man, can you imagine if I didn't have that humbling moment and I didn't hear that? That honesty set me on the right path, you know, and it was what I needed to hear.

FRED It was about that time that I did a feature story on Alan for Downbeat. It was probably '74, '75. And I haven't
BOUCHARD: seen that story in years, I don't have a copy of it. It's in the library here and I gotta go check it out. We should go look at it! [Laughs] You would have been mentioned in it, who knows! [John laughs] I went to his house and he gave me a drum lesson so to speak, well, kind of like that. But, I mean, he was a phenomenal presence and committed huge respect internationally though he--this was his focal point, he hardly left town. Just the kids in Flossie, the Berklee gig, his own little... He was a very big fish in a small pond.

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, not so small a pond, but I mean. So I'm still trying to kind of wrap up the Amherst scene and connect it to Blakey. But it was around that time that I was going back and forth studying with Alan, you know--and this was a relationship that went on from about that time, I would say '72, '73 until 1984, which is a couple of years after I started teaching at Berklee. During that same period, Sonny Stitt came to UMass to do a three-day residency thing, in fact, Alan came out to play the concert with him. But part of that residency was, he was going to play with a student band, so--now this is later, this is like 1977, 'cause after I had studied with Alan for a couple of years or a year or so, I ended up going on the road, and I lived in Miami for a couple of years. But, when I came back, in fact it was, I was playing in the Hotel Fontainebleau on Miami Beach, six nights a week in the Poodle Lounge. [Laughs]

FRED This place is famous! The food was incredible! They had a wine list to die for!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Well, I mean, in this period it was kind of in its decline, you know? And so, I remember playing in that Poodle Lounge. In Miami you would play from like nine o'clock at night to four in the morning. And I remember being in that Poodle Lounge six nights a week, week after week, month after month and going, "Man, there's gotta be more than this. I don't think I can do this for the rest of my life." You know [sings] "Feelings"

FRED Who were the singers?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: [drums] "... Nothing more than feelings" I was working with a great singer from Miami. Her name is Addie Williams, and she's a sweetheart. Up to this day, she's like my big sister. But you're playing commercial music!

FRED Lounge music!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, lounge music! One night in that Fontainebleau Poodle Lounge we heard that The 5th Dimension was playing for an IBM convention or something in the big ballroom down the hall. So, you know, I'm like, "Oh man, on the break, I'm gonna run over and sneak in and I wanna hear The 5th Dimension!" So I run down there in the break and there they are, there's a bunch of conventioners. It's The 5th Dimension, you know! One of the hits. [Sings] "This is the dawning of the age of" All of that stuff, right? With a huge band! And a drummer, and so, I go, sneak around the back and I'm watching the drummer. I'm going, "Well, he's not that much better than me!" [Laughs]

FRED [Laughs] Where's his rudiments?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: I'm like, "How come he can get that gig?" You know, he's probably making what, 500 for the night and I'm over there in the Poodle Lounge for like, what, seven hundred a week or something like that. So anyways, I'm like, "Hey! We're down in the Poodle Lounge, why don't you come down and sit in!" You know, so he's like, "Yeah, yeah we'll be down!" So the musicians from The 5th Dimension came and hung in the Poodle Lounge and the drummer sat in and I'm like

FRED Did the patrons notice?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: I don't know. I mean, these are sidemen, you know. But anyways, so I'm talking to the guy, and I go like, "Man, so how can I get a gig like that with The 5th Dimensions, you know?" and he's like, "Well" he said, "you have to be able to read!" [Laughs] And I'm like "Oh yeah," 'cause I could read then because I had been studying with Alan a little bit, but not really, I mean. Big band chart interpretation is more than just reading notes. So anyways, now I'm thinking, "Oh man, I gotta get that together," you know? So what do I do? I quit the Miami scene and leave, determined to go back--in fact, I actually enrolled in the University of Miami. Had an audition with Fred Wickstrom who was the drum teacher down there.

FRED They had some heavy cats in Miami, didn't they? Wasn't Jaco there then or a little earlier?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: A little earlier, but Dixie Dregs guys were there, Rob Morgenstein, one of my faculty now, was there. But I actually auditioned, and there was some snare drum piece with a bunch of rudiments, and you know I'm thinking, "Man, I really gotta play this well." And I played the thing for Wickstrom, he's like, "Come with me!" And I'm going, "You know, I'm sorry I had some mistakes." He said, "Look, I wish everybody played it as well as you did!" And he drags me over to Admissions. Anyways, I ended up getting into the University of Miami with his sort of, you know, push. And I don't think I ever attended the class because in the meantime, there was funny stuff going on in Miami. There was a murder two houses away from where I lived in Coconut Groove. And I was with my wife and baby at the time and I said, "I'm getting out of here, I'm going back to sane Massachusetts."

FRED There was a big Cuban invasion by then right?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: It was after that, but you know it was just there was the cocaine scene going on down there. You know, it was the funnel for South American, North America, for all of that in the eighties. This was really like '75, '76...'76. So anyways, what happened in the end was that I said, "Man, I'm going back to Massachusetts. I'm gonna enroll in the University of Mass legitimately this time. I'm gonna be a student there, and I'm gonna get this reading thing together. I'm gonna go back, I'm gonna study with Alan. I'm gonna get it together." Because I think it occurred to me that you could sort of be the kind of musician who, you know, was at the mercy of whatever gig came along. If it was the Poodle Lounge six nights a week you had to take it because if you wanted to eat. Or if it was, you know, thirty bucks on a Tuesday night at Ryles, you had to do it.

FRED You got a wife and two sons at this point?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: At that point, yeah, two kids. So it just dawned on me, and probably Alan's influence too, that if you had your shit together you could kind of pick and choose and, you know, well I don't have to do that gig 'cause I can do this other gig over here. Anyways, that's when I officially enrolled at the University of Massachusetts. I was a twenty-seven-year-old freshman. [Laughs] So that's 1977 we're talking about now.

JOHN RAMSAY: But in, and I've been trying to fill in this gap the whole time. This particular period was when Sonny Stitt came to UMass to do a residency. And so I was kind of the first call student drummer at that time, 'cause John Betsch had long since moved on and moved to New York or whatever, so I got to play with Sonny Stitt! And so, I remember the piano player was Bruce Sklar who's now living up in Vermont and, he's actually from Newton, great jazz piano player even then and he was into Horace Silver and all that stuff. So anyways, I'm gonna play with Sonny Stitt for this little workshop for the students, right. So I remember the day, we're all assembled in this room. Max was there, Archie Shepp was there. And I think Alan might even have been there 'cause he was playing the next night, might not have been there but anyways so we're all waiting for Stitt. So where is he? The room was full, you know, of students and audience and we're all students musicians. Where is Sonny? Finally, the door blows open. Here comes Stitt, obviously inebriated. And he's got a kid who was assigned kind of as his valet towed behind him, you know, and towed behind him carrying his saxophone case. So I remember this

FRED His roadie.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: this scene, yeah. So Sonny comes in: "All right, all right," you know, "Okay, yeah, all right, well. All right, Joey, bring my horn, bring my horn!" So Joey, one second, [stands up] bends down, and he opens up the tenor case, pulls out like a fifth of vodka. And Stitt goes, "No, no, no, not that! Don't let the baby see that!" And the kid puts it back in. Now, probably every other time that Stitt had asked him for the case, it was for the bottle, you know. So the kid is thinking, "Well, he wants the bottle again!" you know. In front of everyone! [Laughs] And so I'm watching this. Now, I come from a long line of generations of alcoholics so I know one when I see one, right? But still, he got me anyways because now he's, "No, no, the horn! Give me the horn!" He takes the tenor, he starts playing, he walks over to the rhythm section, I don't know, we start playing, you know.

FRED Some standard.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: "Star Eyes" or something like that. So we're playing and all of a sudden, he turns around and he's looking at me with the horn, and he takes the horn out of his mouth and he goes, "I'm gonna take you to Africa, boy!" And I'm like, stunned! And I look at the piano player. And he's actually tearing up, Stitt is like, he's got tears in his eyes. And I'm like, "What?" I look at the piano player, Bruce, and I go: "What did he say?" [Laughs] "I'm gonna take you to Africa, boy, you wanna go to Africa?" And I'm like I'm still, you know, young and dumb from Bernardston, right. I'm like, "Oh my God! This is it! It's my big break!" [Laughs] And I just can't believe this, you know. And I'm looking and now I'm really shook up, I don't know, how can I even play, but it's... So anyways. And then he goes on, we play a few tunes, you know, we talk about whatever. It's an educational, academic environment, right. So now, after the clinic I'm like waiting. I gotta talk to him. What's he talking about, he wants me to go to Africa? And so, he goes into like the green room, there's a little anteroom there. And, there's people crowded around him and he and Archie Shepp are sitting down on the couch and they're passing the jug. It's like, "Archie, give me the jug!" and "Stitt, give me the jug!" you know, they're... And I'm like staying there, I'm waiting to talk to the guy but no way. I mean, they were gone. Him and Shepp. So finally, you know, they adjourn and Stitt comes out, gets the valet, and they're going to the hotel room, or wherever, and I'm going, "Ah, Mr. Stitt!" I said, "You know, remember me? Africa?" He goes, "Oh yeah yeah yeah, you, you come to my hotel room tonight and we'll talk about it." Now, I lived about thirty miles north of Amherst in an even smaller town than Bernardston called Colrain, also on the Vermont border. Beautiful town but, I mean.

FRED Good bird life.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Bird life. [Laughs] That's about it. So I drive home and the whole rest of the day I'm thinking, "Man!" And that was the night he was gonna play in the UMass Performance Center with Barry Harris I think, Alan Dawson, I don't remember who the bass player was. So, I'm thinking: "Okay, seven o'clock, I'm gonna go to the campus center hotel and I'm gonna, you know, meet Mr. Stitt, and we're gonna talk about going to Africa." So I drive down, I go to the hotel, I go up to the room, I knock on the door. [Knocks on the table] Nothing. [Knocking louder] Nothing! By the fourth or fifth time I'm banging on the door, I hear [slurring]. He comes to the door. And the guy is like, he's in the bag, man, he's gone. And he [Stitt] goes, "Oh yeah yeah, drummer, come on in, come and have a seat over there!" And I look and on the nightstand, on both sides of the bed, there's like ten to fifteen empty fifth bottles of vodka or whatever it was he was drinking. And one maybe half-full. I mean, I'm not exaggerating. He must have been there a day, two days and all these empties. And he's like, "I'm gonna finish my nap, you have a seat in the chair there and..." So I sit in the chair and I'm seeing all of this and I'm going, "Okay, I get it now. I'm not going..."

FRED The Africa of his dreams!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: I'm going to Colrain, I'm not going to Africa! [Laughs] Anyways, you know, I'm polite, so I wait, he wakes up and he goes, "Yeah boy, yeah. It may not be Africa, but you're gonna play with me some more." Something like that. Now I'm like, "I know this scene," you know. "I know this, never trust an alcoholic!"

FRED This is not Randy Weston and Tangiers.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: So anyways, that was my first brush with Stitt. I think it was probably two or three years later, the same piano player says, "Listen." You know, he was friends with Art Blakey's son Gamal Buhaina," who lived up in Waitsfield, Vermont. And there was a guy up there, who's name I can't remember right offit will come to me though, who owned an art gallery which was also a restaurant. This is like a former New York City guy who had some money and had an art gallery in an old barn like in the center of Waitsfield, Vermont that he also had a French restaurant in. So, he wanted to start bringing jazz in there. So he had John Hendricks up there, he had Art Blakey, of course, because Art's son, you know, he was like the mayor of the town up there. So anyways, Bruce tells me, "Hey! There's a two-week gig in Waitsfield, Vermont with Sonny Stitt!" I'm like, "You want me to play?!" "They need a rhythm section, you know, you wanna be the drummer?" I'm like, "Sure!" So it was me, Bruce Sklar on piano and Santi Debriano was the bass player who was living in Boston at the time. But bear in mind, I'm still pretty much primarily a Western Mass, right? Young, dumb, green behind the ears, cow poop on my shoes. [Laughs] So now I'm going to Vermont to play with Sonny Stitt, right! So we go up, and we're staying at Gamal's house, Art Blakey's son's house, which was Art's house when he was married to Gamal's mother, Diana. You know the Wayne Shorter tune "Sincerely Diana?" Well that was Art's ex-wife, the mother of Gamal. Anyways, so, make a long story short. We play two weeks with Stitt and it was recorded every night, by the way, sort of surreptitiously or whatever, by the guy who owned the restaurant, and I used to have copies but I don't know where they are now. The interesting thing about it was Sonny Stitt was stone-sober. And he told us, he said, "I just came out of a coma." He said, "I fell down, and I hit my head and I was in a coma for twenty-one days." He said, "I had to learn to tie my shoes all over again." Yeah. So needless to say, he was playing his ass off. And it was like, you know, this is my first real brush with really playing real

FRED Hard bop

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Hard bop, straight ahead, you know, he called some tempos too and I'm like holding on First thing he says, "How's your foot?" And I'm like, "It's okay." But anyways, and so, we played two weeks with him and it was great, I mean it was, he was great. He was sober. He wouldn't even eat some of the stuff on the menu if it had been cooked with wine. So, there was no mention of Africa. But anyways, the good fortune of that gig was that that's where I met Art Blakey's son. And I don't know if it was two months, three months, six months later, whatever, he calls me up and he goes, "Hey, my father is starting a big band and he wants to use two drummers. And I want you to audition!"

FRED Wow, this guy is literally the mayor of Waitsfield or just a popular guy?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: No no no no, I referred to him as it because he knows everybody there. He's like a six-foot-two- or three-inch guy with a face like Art Blakey. Art was like five-foot-five or something.

FRED Is he still up there?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Oh yeah, yeah. He's still there. But it's just everybody knows him and he's such a bon vivant, is that the... kind of guy that, you know, everybody knows Gamal. But anyways he calls, he says, "My father is starting a big band, he wants to use two drummers and I want you to audition." I'm living in Northampton now right so but anyways, so I said, "Well, okay, but who else is auditioning?" He goes, "Well, Keith Copeland and Michael Carvin." Now, those are already named guys; Keith had played with Stevie Wonder, his father was Ray Copeland, a great jazz trumpeter. And then Michael Carvin. I remember seeing Michael Carvin with Rahsaan Roland Kirk at The Jazz Workshop.

FRED Ray recorded with Monk.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah. So anyways, I'm thinking, "Well, you know, these guys are like heavy hitters but I will still audition, you know, but I don't hold out much hope of beating those guys." So anyways, two days later he goes, "I'll call you back with the information you still have, you know, you gotta audition and stuff." Couple of days later he calls back, he goes, "What's your shirt size?" And I'm like, "Well, so and so." And he goes, "What's your passport number?" Now, the strange thing was that for some unknown reason, maybe six months before that, maybe it was the experience with Stitt, you know, with the Africa thing, I don't know, I had applied and gotten a passport. No plans to travel anywhere, but I just thought I should have a passport. So here's Gamal and he's like, "What's your passport number?" I'm like, "Well, hold on a second," I go, I get him the number. He goes, "What's your jacket size?" And I'm like, "Why?" He said, "Well, my father's [inaudible] with the other two guys because they're haggling over money or something like that." He said, "So you still have to audition but I think you got the gig." And I'm like, "Man, what am I hearing here? Maybe I am going to Africa this time!" [Laughs] So anyways, to make a long story short I came down to Black Bean Studios in New York City. It was owned by Dom Um Romão. You know him? The Brazilian drummer?

FRED Terrific.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: And so, he had a rehearsal studio that he rented. And so I go in there, and there's these guys up on the stage. Billy Pierce, Wynton Marsallis, Branford Marsalis, Robben Eubanks, Kevin Eubanks, Charles Fambrough and James Williams. Not Art, right. And they're up there running through tunes, arrangements. And so I just kind of quietly came in, I sat, there was like tables that were I sat at the table. Kind of listened. There was a drum set up there but I was, you know, I wasn't going near that I was just gonna wait for Art to come and, you know. So

FRED So they were playing all the stuff with no drummer?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, they were playing "Wheel Within A Wheel" [sings] It's like a Bobby Watson tune, great tune. Did I mention Bobby?

FRED Bobby, I love Bobby.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Great writer.

FRED Great writer.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: And so anyways I'm sitting there, I don't know, for thirty minutes, an hour or something. Then the door blows open--and I'd never met Art Blakey--The door blows open, light comes in and there's this little short guy standing in the doorway. First thing out of his mouth was, "Where's John?" And I'm like, "Here I am!" And he says, "John! Get up there, and play. Don't worry about a thing, you have arrived. All you've got to do is play."

FRED He never heard you?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Never heard me, sight unseen, you know. His son knew a guy that played with Sonny Stitt, he was okay. So now, here comes his son and there was another road manager at the time.

FRED This is Gamal?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: I think, yeah, Gamal and I forget the other kid's name but So, I go up and I start playing with the tune the band was rehearsing, 'cause I had been sitting there listening to it, so I kind of made my way through. And now they're setting up his drums next to this other drum set. He's kind of directing, but I know he's listening too. And so then he's all set up, he looks over at me and goes, "John, everything I do, you do!" [Laughs] And you know, I'm here now, like, "What? How am I supposed to do that? You're Art Blakey!" So anyways, there it began and then, you know, I was the

FRED How long was that gig for? Did you get... six months?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: It was a short-lived sort of gig because it was, you know, he was departing from his normal sextet or whatever.

FRED This is a big tour?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: It's like an eleven-piece big band, yeah, small big band. I think we had like two or three-week tour of Europe booked, you know. First gig was in Kongsberg, Norway. I remember that and I mean, we went to Germany, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Spain, Switzerland. We played the Montreux Festival and the North Sea Jazz Festival in Den Haag in Holland and there's actually a recording of Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers Big Band.

FRED Timeless?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Timeless, very good. Wim Wigt. He sold that company. But there's a combination of live recording from Montreux and Den Haag that made up that album, so. I mean, so here we go. Look, the first time I'm going out of the country really, we're on an airplane, right?

FRED You have your passport, where's your passport?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: I had my passport, and you know, Art's sitting next to me, he goes, "Fellas. Look at John. He's scared!" [Laughs] Now how he knew this I don't know. But you know, we're in a 747 or whatever. And he goes, "John, don't worry about a thing. Wherever I go, I got two angels, they go everywhere with me. One on this shoulder, and one on that shoulder. Only place they don't go is the shithouse!" [Laughs] And I'm supposed to feel better now, right? [Laughs] "Art, whatever you do on this flight, don't go in the bathroom!"

FRED Art, let me borrow one of those angels!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: "I got, wherever I go, I got two angels, one on this shoulder and" Oh my God. So anyways, after the big band disbanded he went back to his small group. I made the tour, you know, there's many stories but I wanna kind of move along for you. After the big band disbanded he went back to his small group. Maybe two weeks later, I get a call from him. He goes, "Art!"---er, "John!"--I'm getting confused. "John! I need you to go to Europe with me. Gamal's up there in Vermont and I can't find him anywhere." So he's asking me to replace his son as a road manager. And his son was in Vermont and he wasn't able to be found because he didn't want to be found after that big band tour working for his father. And I think this was the first sort of long-term exposure that he had to his dad because he didn't grow up with his dad. 'Cause their parents were divorced and Art was always gone. So, I think after two or three weeks on the road with his father he was like, "Nuh. That's not the life for me. I don't want to work for that guy, I don't wanna be around him." There was some tension and stuff and some ugliness that happened. So, when Art's calling and he's going, "I can't find Gamal anywhere," I'm going, "Yeah, he doesn't wanna be found." So anyways, I'm like, "Well, how long are you going for?" He goes, "I don't know John, you gotta call Jack Whittemore." Jack was one of the...

FRED Jack!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Jack Whittemore.

FRED What a saint, what a great guy!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Big time jazz promoter, booking agent, manager.

FRED He was salt of the earth.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Benny Carter, Ron Carter, Stan Getz, he had everybody, you know, at one time!

FRED Direct, personal. Cool man!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Anyways, it started a two-and-a-half-year relationship as Art's road manager for me. And that's where I was able to write the Blakey book that we had here.

FRED Oh yeah, let's hold that up for the public to see. Can you see that? [Holds Art Blakey's Jazz Messages to camera]

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: You asked me what I learned from these guys, right, and the only way I could answer your question is what I've learned is in there, you know. [Flips through book] But, I mean, that's basically a kind of analysis of Art's style. But, you know, after two and a half years of being on the road with him, he would work fifty weeks out of the year sometimes. Sitting there watching him play every night, you know, it was like, "Ahh." And I kept notes, you can actually see in here there are some scans of those notebooks that because I was the road manager, I had to keep track of band draws and advances and stuff like that. Interspersed, you can actually see them here [displays book] amongst those, you'll see "Charles Famborough, ninety dollars, Amsterdam. Billy Pierce, hundred dollar advance in San Francisco," whatever, you'll see these little notations of drum stuff, you know. Those were almost three years worth of little notebooks that I carried around as a road manager and kind of the seeds for this book.

FRED So you managed to document his style on paper for posterity?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, yeah. It's all in there. You can hear stuff that he played in 1948, his sort of identifying figures and personality, licks and stuff that he played. You can hear him play them on the recording with

FRED Horace Silver?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Horace Silver, and there's another one here. It's very early, I can't really go right to it. [Flips through book] Here we go, yeah, this is it. No, that's not it.

FRED His first go around with Monk? Would have been '50, '52.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: There's some of that here, but this one is from Thelonious Monk, yeah, The Genius of Modern Music, Volume 1. Maybe it's around the early fifties, but the stuff you hear him play in 1948 or 1953, you go up and listen to records that he made in 1991 or something, he's playing the same stuff, his stuff. But it just, it always sounded fresh with him. But you could hear his vocabulary over the years kind of form.

FRED People don't really reinvent themselves, they continue doing what they do and refine it or for the most part.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Well, that's what he said, you know, he would say when he was beating me up for playing bad or something, he'd say, "You put on a record. That's Max Roach! You put on a record. That's Elvin Jones! How do you think it got to be that way John? You have to identify yourself!" And it's just his passion about being who you were and never, you know, just kind of giving half efforts. He was like, you gotta make your statement.

FRED Yeah, he was full of great quotes.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: The greatest thing I ever learned from him though was over at the 1369 Club in Cambridge. Long after I'd stopped being in his employ. He came up to get an honorary doctorate from Berklee and of course he's like, "John, where are we going?" He wanted to hang out with me and Billy Pierce that evening. So we said, "Okay, we'll take him over to the 1369 Jazz Club." I think they were having a jam session that night. So we take him over, you know, Art Blakey walks into a place like that, the sea parts [gestures] and, you know, you walk. Anyways, we ended up down in the office with the club owners sitting around, telling stories and whatever. So, I'm sitting there, Art is next to me, Billy Pierce is there, Bob, Jay Hoffman, those guys who owned that club, they were all So, at some point I got up and I went upstairs. I was just gonna go to the bar and get a couple of drinks. In the 1369, the stage was right here and then the door going down to the basement was right behind the stage, really.

FRED Looked kind of steep sometimes.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: So I come up the stairs and Grover Mooney was up playing drums, you know.

FRED Moon unit!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: So I come up out of the dungeon and Grover's, "Hey John, you wanna sit in?" I'm like, "Yeah okay, yes." So I sat in, I played a couple of tunes. Now the stage, right under the stage is the office. I didn't really think of it at the time, but unbeknownst to me, when I was playing, Art was down there and he leans over to Billy and goes, "Billy, who's that playing up there? Sounds like John." So he's hearing this stuff through the floor right? And this is the kind of ears and mind he had, you know. He knew it was me! So I come down after I sat in and got the drinks or whatever. I go back, sit back down next to him and he leans over to me, he goes, "John, you know, when you play you don't have to prove nothing. All you've got to do is swing!" [Gapes] Now, I mean, this was his wisdom, his musical savant genius. He heard all the way up there, and probably I'm thinking, "Well, Art Blakey is down there, I really gotta play some shit," you know? And, I mean, he just pulled the covers off. It was like, you know, "when you play you don't have to prove anything. All you have to do is swing." That hit me so hard because it was so right on, you know.

FRED You felt like you had to show him something, prove something?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Well I probably just played that way, you know.

FRED Subconsciously?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, it was something that, you know. Imagine that! I was like, "Oh." It just took the weight off my shoulder too you know. To be able to approach music that way. Okay, all you've got to do is swing. It's what I'm good at anyways, you know, so. And that was his philosophy, but to hear that through the floor and, "Who's that, that sounds like John up there," and then just hit me like that was like, "Oh man." That was the greatest lesson, so to speak, for me. There were many others but Where do you wanna go next?

FRED Let's go to Berklee!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Oh yeah, well, here we go. After two years of being on the road with this guy as his road manager, I was like, "I gotta get out of here." I remember being in Chicago. I remember being in Chicago and just being tired of the whole road manager thing. You know, with him it's like you're at his beck and call twenty-four hours a day, and this dude, he would stay up all night.

FRED It was like Dinah Washington. She was tough. Tough on her people.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: "John! Get the van and pick me up!" I'd have to be there.

FRED He was insomniac?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: He was a dope addict. I mean, this is a guy who for as great as his talents were on the one hand, and they were great. As great as a musician and even a person he was, he had an equal dose of the dark side over here.

FRED That's why he had two angels.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: [Laughs] Yeah! And you know, he was a Libra too--which is, you know, the scales--and he would always play this one on me, he would go, "John, you and Billy, you're both Libras. You're just like me!" And there was some truth to that, there was some truth to that. But anyways, I remember one time going up the elevator in the Whitestone [Blackstone] Hotel in Chicago, the Jazz Showcase. And I was saying, "Art, I gotta go. I gotta get back to playing. I can't do this anymore." He goes, "John, you stay right where you are. The important thing is to have the knowledge." And there I was, I was hooked for another six months or whatever it was, you know. But I mean, that last year, last six months, I was like, "I'm not playing, I gotta get back, I can't do this anymore."

FRED You were wiped out?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: At some point I had mentioned to Billy Pierce and James Williams that I had done some teaching at UMass in their--it was kind of their community outreach program there. And James and Billy said, "Look, if you like to teach, you should go to Berklee."

FRED They were already on staff here?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: They had been on and then off again. They could--both Billy and James went to Berklee in the seventies. And then went right from being students to teaching here. But then they went on the road with Art Blakey so they left their teaching positions. Billy came back. Billy came back the same year I started in 1982. But through their advice I came to Berklee. I said, "I wanna get off the road, I need a job." Now at that point I was working on having three kids. And so, I remember going up in the office with Lee Berk and Bob Share who was the they didn't call him a provost then but it was something like that.

FRED Like a dean or something.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: A dean, yeah. Dean of Faculty, maybe. And I remember sitting in the chair just like this, with Lee and Bob and I remember Lee Berk saying, "So, you know. Why do you wanna teach?" "Well, you know, I love to teach, I love teaching." And I remember--you know, here I was, I was coming from Art Blakey, so that was a pass. That was enough. Even to this day you can get hired at Berklee because you have a master's degree, or you have what they call service to the profession. So if you have been out there in the industry, especially on that level then it is kind of an equivalent to a master's degree. So I remember Lee saying, "Well, you know, we have however many hundred students at the time here. We have everything from the very bottom to the very top and a whole bunch of people in the middle" as, you know, students. So I had the interview and I started in 1982 as a part-time teacher, I was still living in Northampton, Mass, for eight dollars an hour, and I would drive in and I would teach about thirty hours a week. 'Cause back then there was no union. Up to thirty hours I think was considered part-time, but when you get to thirty hours it was full-time. The first year or so I was coming in, I was staying with a friend in Winthrop. I'd stay overnight, I'd teach my day and a half or two days or whatever, I'd drive back to Northampton. That went on for less than a year and then, you know, the hours started to accumulate and here we are what, twenty-six, twenty-seven years later.

FRED What do you remember about Berklee at that time?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: It was a lot smaller.

FRED What was the drum faculty like?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: The faculty then was Joe Hunt, Ed Uribe, Skip Hadden started the same semester I started. In fact, Ed Uribe, Skip Hadden, and I all started the same semester, it was like January 1982. Joe Galeota was here, Dean Anderson was the chair then, Ed Kaspik was here then. Gil Graham was a teacher then, he's long gone.

FRED Was Joe doing his Afro-Cuban thing then, was he playing congas and stuff?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yes and no, because he had been here prior to that time when Gary Burton was still on staff. And Gary kind of, in a way said that African drumming has no bearing on what we do here--words to that effect, and Joe was let go.

FRED Whoa!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: But he was hired back. And this, I mentioned to you earlier that Ed Uribe started the whole Latin percussion curriculum here around that time, and so it was starting, there was the whole Latin influence and fusion and stuff, Brazilian. So Joe kind of came back in through that new sort of development of "world" influence. I think Bob Kaufman was teaching here then. But the department was very small and Joe was kind of the elder statesman. You know, I was the new kid.

FRED Was it all strictly traps, rudiments, basics?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: No, no, Ed Saindon was here then, Dean Anderson taught the orchestral percussion, the total percussion we called it, that we still have. There were mallet, there was vibraphone principle. I don't think there was a marimba principle yet, but it came later. And then, like I said, Ed Uribe started that hand percussion curriculum and program, and that led to Giovanni Hidalgo being hired. And so that attracted a lot of hand percussion students in those days. That was the beginning of what we have today. So, maybe less than twelve percussion faculty, I don't know, two or three hundred students? Now we've got forty-three faculty, we've got on average about 650 percussion students most of which are drum set. We've got a marimba principle instrument, a vibraphone principle instrument, a hand percussion principle instrument, a drum set principle instrument, now steelpan is our latest and newest principle instrument

FRED Good old Ron Reid.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: and we have a staff of four: a Chair, an Assistant Chair, an Administrative Assistant, and a Technology/Equipment Manager. And the school has just exploded! We have four thousand students now. Then, if it was a thousand So that's the biggest change, it's just the growth. Now my department is spread over two buildings, two floors and one in 1140 and then the 921 basement over there, so that's a big change.

FRED How has the instructional program evolved along with that? Are you doing different on traps now that you weren't doing in the eighties?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: I think if you look at the faculty, that kind of gives you a glimpse into that because we have Rod Morgenstein, we have Kenwood Dennard, we have Kim Plainfield, we have Jamey Haddad, we have Mark Walker, we have Terri Lyne Carrington, we have Neil Smith, we have Yoron Israel. And so hopefully what that kind of illustrates is that the stylistic thing just went up and out. Rod is like, you know, top of the rock drummers, progressive rock drummers. Kenwood is known as a fusion guy, so the stylistic thing just really expanded. I think back in the day of Alan, and even Gary Chaffee to a degree, the school was primarily founded and the department was built upon the jazz drum set thing, But now, we've got African drumming, we've got so that whole stylistic thing just blew right open, you know.

FRED What I'm thinking of the samba explosion. How back in the sixties nobody knew what a bossa nova was.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Joe Hunt.

FRED He was on the ground floor with that?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: He played with Astrud Gilberto and Stan Getz and Gary Burton when that whole thing was happening.

FRED So he introduced that to the school, sort of?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: I don't know if he Certainly, Berklee has always had its ear to the ground and eye to the current trends in music. That's why we have survived, I think, as we have. So that was happening, you know, in the industry then. But surely, Joe was that pivotal sort of person in carrying that forward, I guess.

FRED I guess there's no more emblematic department of performance in the school than drumming that shows the explosion into seventy-five different countries that the school draws people in. I mean, a lot of kids are coming from different countries to learn how to play jazz drums but equally

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: They're bringing their own folklore music, yeah, for sure. Brazil is a big Puerto Rico. There's even a few Cuban kids here now. Dominican Republic, yes, certainly. I think if we look at the music scene, you know, in Mass, so to speak, or internationally, that's what's happening in jazz. All of these other influences: Middle Eastern, Brazilian, and Cuban--which has always been the case. Dizzy Gillespie with, you know, Chano Pozo, and Art Blakey with the Drum Thunder Suite with all the... Chano Pozo, Patato Veldes, and all those guys. So there was always that Cuban--Bobby Sanabria's a great guy to talk about this-- connection that happened, you know. Sabu Martinez played with Art

FRED Armando Peraza played with Shearing in the fifties.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah, so I think that's always been a part, but maybe you see it more realized here at Berklee because of that huge international community that we have.

FRED We'll see it even more when they opened up Cuba. Which won't be long. We'll be smoking those guans again.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: That's right. Fred and I were in Havana together.

FRED That's right! I don't wanna don't tell them what happened at the airport!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: You know who I met there, right? Because there was all of this talk and, you know, Latin drumming influence and, "Play a mambo, play a cha-cha," and, you know. I'd do gigs around here with guys and they'd say: "Well, this is a mozambique, play mozambique!" And I'd play a mozambique, or what I thought was a mozambique, and a guy from the Dominican Republic would go, "That's not a mozambique!" You know, I'm like, "What a minute, your country is merengue, so what do you know?" So I went to Cuba because there was so much misinformation about Afro-Cuban rhythms, of which there are dozens. And I said, "Look, I need to go and sort this out for myself, 'cause, you know, we got this guy saying this, and this guy saying that and this guy is from Guatemala, and this guy is from Columbia, and they're talking about Cuban rhythms!" So that's what led to me going to Cuba four times.

FRED Is there anybody on faculty who has written a book about it yet?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: About Afro-Cuban rhythms?

FRED Yeah.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Well, Ed Uribe had one. Mark Walker has a great book now that has much broader Latin music.

FRED He would be a heavy cat for that, sure.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: He's got everything: Tango, Columbia, Argentina. Mark is, you know, he's a

FRED Oh, and Bert!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Bertram?

FRED Bertram!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Bertram Lehmann, he's another

FRED Yeah, he's doing that Afro-Cuban history class. I sat in on one of those, it was amazing!

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Both of those guys are fountains of knowledge of all things Latin and World and African and Indian and That's our faculty, that's our community here, you know.

FRED Reflecting on your thirty years as a teacher here, John, who were some of your primo students who came down

BOUCHARD: the line.

JOHN RAMSAY: Well, you know, the well-known ones are guys like Antonio Sanchez. And he's always tipped his hat to me and I love him for that. Another guy who's always been, who mentions me in his DVDs and stuff is John Blackwell. These are the big name guys that everyone knows about, but there's been so many over the years. John Lampkin, who played with Terence Blanchard; Donald Harrison, I think for a while, was another student.

FRED Sure, I remember seeing him over at Wally's, knocking everybody out.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: He was the straw boss there for the longest time, even when he moved to New York he kept control of that Wally's jam session.

FRED It was quite a draw.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: I got a call the other day from a guy who lives in L. A. now. His name is Nathaniel Morton, Nate Morton. The rock guys would know him because he was on that television program INXS when they were looking for a vocalist and they had a house band, Nate was the drummer for that, but he played with Natalie Cole. He called me the other day and he goes, "Look, I'm kind of getting..." he said, "I've been at Ceasar's palace for the last three years, playing for Cher." And he said, you know, "I'm kind of getting tired of this inconsistency touring, on the road, off the road thing and not knowing where your next gig is and" So he gave me a call, Nate, I hope I'm not giving this away. He's thinking about settling down, he's got a son now. And so, there's guys like that too, you know. He's played with everybody. There's been so many, it's hard some of my students are faculty now. Larry Finn was one of my students, he's on the faculty now. Ricardo Monzon was one of my students I think, probably in a class or something, but

FRED What is involved in your methodology over the years? What's consistent, and what has shifted in terms of what

BOUCHARD: you're trying to impart?

JOHN RAMSAY: Well, the foundation of my teaching was always that book you're holding there [The Drummer's Complete Vocabulary As Taught By Alan Dawson]. It really was Alan Dawson's method because there was no better method or delivery than the way and what Alan taught, you know. That's why I called the book, The Drummer's Complete Vocabulary, because Alan just, I mean, he covered everything: musicality, technique, you know, song form and... So that was always at the core of my teaching, but I think what's changed over the years is probably my attitude towards it in that at some point I learned that students learn best about that which they're most passionate. So, you know, being able to find out what the student really is into, and, you know, finding a way to come at it from that. I think the other thing too that really maybe changed my teaching over the years was studying piano with Charlie Banacos for ten years, because he was another master teacher that, you know. I told you the story the other day when I'd go to my lesson, I hadn't had enough time to practice the piano and I'd go to Charlie and I'd play poorly whatever my assignment was, and I'd go, "Oh man, Charlie, I'm sorry, you know, I just... Man, I'm doing terrible today." He'd look at you and go, "What, man? What do you mean?" He said, "You're still a good person." And you just go, "Oh yeah. This is my music. This is my identity. There are two separate things," you know? "I can't beat myself up because I've made a mistake or..." And so that was Charlie's influence.

FRED 'Cause you can't hear that one note on, what was that, the ear training thing?

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: Yeah we would do his ear training 1-4-5 [sings 1-4-5-1]. Then he'd hit one note and you'd have to be facing the other way and identify the note. And there were legions of guys who would work with Charlie over the years and work up to seven notes at a time. I was on... I can't even admit how long I was on one note! But that was Charlie- and plus just the whole thing with studying the piano opened up the whole harmony thing. I mean, even though Alan taught that, but for me it was Charlie. It's like, Terri Lyne tells a story about when she was playing with Wayne Shorter. [To the camera man] You out of film there? [To Fred] And she had the same experience, she said, "Oh Wayne, I'm sorry I played so badly tonight." You know, it was, "Please, forgive me," and Wayne looked at her, he said, "What? It's only music!"

FRED [Laughs] Lots of variables. John, thank you so much.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: You're welcome, my pleasure.

FRED This was a little bit more of a historical detail and good stories.

BOUCHARD:

JOHN RAMSAY: We'll do the Boston part in part two. [Fred laughs]