

FRED BOUCHARD: Welcome, once again, to the Berklee Oral History Project. Happy Thanksgiving to everybody here in 2008. Today, we're talking with Tiger Okoshi, who is one of a long, distinguished line of Japanese people who have come to the halls of Berklee College of Music. People like Toshiko Akiyoshi, Sadao Watanabe, Tiger, Makoto Ozone, Hiromi, and lots of others. Tiger, you've had a long, long trail from Osaka to Boston, and you keep going back and forth-- it's like a double life for you.

TIGER OKOSHI: It's great, you know, because when I go to Japan, I feel like I'm coming home, and after I finish my work, I feel I'm coming home to here.

FRED BOUCHARD: You're a true citizen of the world. [Okoshi laughs] That's a nice way to be for a musician.

TIGER OKOSHI: I think so, I think so. Me and my wife, we created this life and it's time for me, for both of us, to look back at how we did this. It's quite the adventure. [Laughs]

FRED BOUCHARD: Absolutely. When you first came to Boston, you were just married and really young, and you were on your honeymoon? And you came to Berklee because?

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, Sadao Watanabe suggested me--I was studying with Sadao in Tokyo. That was 1972. and I told Sadao, "I'm getting married and go to the States and traditions." And he said, "Why don't you go to my school I graduated, Berklee, and take a one hour lesson, trumpet lessons? Here's a name you can call." He gave me a Japanese name for me to contact. So I was contacting and I came here--Greyhound bus, I took a Greyhound bus from the other side to this side. That was a decision time for me. Something happened during that time for me.

FRED BOUCHARD: You mean just driving across the United States on a bus?

TIGER OKOSHI: It's like it still--I write the music when I'm flying or driving. It's something about the moving. Yeah, and I felt like--I didn't have my name "Tiger" back then, my real name is Toru, and I was riding the bus eighty-miles-per-hour or something, and going over the Rocky Mountains or something, and I see my wife sleeping beside me. I had my trumpet--this is on my honeymoon--and I felt like none of the people who are riding the bus together know who I am. So I feel I don't have to tell the truth to them, in a way. So if somebody asks me, if I could understand the English to begin with, I would say, like, "My name is Max, yes, I am a sushi chef." If I said back then, probably they didn't know what sushi was. [Laughs] But I felt like, oh my god, this is like in this country, I have no past, right? And the bus is going towards that direction. [Gestures forward] It looked like a time tunnel coming to me--time warp. And I said, "Wow, this is like, only in this country, I only have to think about the future." And I start to think, what kind of future do I want? What kind of human being I wanted to be?" Blah, blah, blah. So when I got to Boston, I was already thinking about that this is something already happened to me inside.

FRED BOUCHARD: Like a deja-vu, almost.

TIGER OKOSHI: Well, no, not that way, but something. My fire already started, and I didn't know what that was, but we talked about, me and my wife, talked about what this was. And finally we came to the school. I looked at Berklee and blah blah blah, and there was a chance for me to become a student--1972. Although I was as a visitor, as a tourist. So I took a chance, I canceled the airplane tickets on the way back, paid the tuition, and paid the deposit to my apartment. And then I called my father and my wife's parents, and I said, "I'm sorry, but we've made up our minds; give me a year or two, I want to study at Berklee." And four years or so, I graduated and went back to Japan to get the Green Card.

FRED BOUCHARD: Wow. I know what you mean about traveling doing something to you, it generates the imagination, and musical spirits start bubbling up and you think only of moving ahead--the next line, the next phrase.

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, well for me now, even during this interview, if we look at this interview right? You talk, I talk, and there is music going on--the perfect music. Those are--the film scoring people will find it. And I may be able to find it, too. I hear the melody all the time. This is becoming a little stressful sometimes. [Laughs] And I still wake up at three, four a.m. and try and sit down and write before I come to Berklee to teach.

FRED BOUCHARD: So what made you decide that Berklee was the place? Was it the people on the faculty or some kind of this spirit?

TIGER OKOSHI: Well, when Sadao, who graduated from Berklee many years ago and I was studying, he brought Herb Pomeroy's Line Writing [course] and everybody was like opened eyes and open minded--and it was like, wow! There is this theory behind all those bebop lines, and we thought we were just doing it by ear. So I was very much fascinated. Although I just graduated from another university. I had a bachelor degree in economics, and so my father had a different life planned for me. So if I went back to Japan after the honeymoon, probably I would be doing something different. But again, I trusted my guts, and gut feeling instincts. When I met my wife, I was eighteen years old and I felt something right away, so after two months after I met her, I proposed to her. I could feel she's the one. We are still happily married of course.

FRED BOUCHARD: That's beautiful. People do have to learn to trust their instincts. We'll probably get to more of this later. Who did you study trumpet with at Berklee?

TIGER OKOSHI: When I came here it was Ray Kotwika was the teacher, who I thought was very nervous. He was like pacing around. And as soon as I start to play one note, he goes, "No no no! Not like that! Play like." [Exhales] Now I really understand, but since then appreciate it. [Laughs] And Wes Hensel, Lou Mucci were there too. Lou Mucci who played in the Gil Evans Orchestra with Miles [Davis].

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah, he also did all that avant garde stuff with [John] LaPorta in the fifties.

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, a lot of stuff. John LaPorta gave me a lot of his material right before he passed away. And he told me, "Tiger, these are yours, because nobody wants to publish those books, because they're too hard." [Laughs] And you know I still use those duets books. And I said, "John, how did you write this? Because you didn't have any recording mechanics and technologies or computers. But it's really complicated."

FRED BOUCHARD: I remember those, I had an old red Fantasy LP. Red plastic, with Lou and John playing those crazy duos. [Whistles]

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, some of those tempos are up there. And he was like, "Tiger, I just heard those lines. I heard them." You know, that's great. That's what we have to do.

FRED Big ears.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Well, certain imaginations, certain taking chances. Maybe he was not hearing it. You know what I mean? I like that. Beethoven, all the great classical composers--I love Rachmaninoff, and those guys--didn't have any of that. Did they hear every note? They say they did. That's the great part of it! Some parts, we just dump the paint and let's see what's happening.

FRED Jackson Pollock. Let it fly.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, not all the time for me, but I still respect that.

FRED Right, so you play inside, then you play a little bit of outside stuff.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Let's see what's happening.

FRED Balance it off a little.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Nowadays, with all the computer's stuff, you write it and you can hear it. And that diminishes the possibility of happy accidents. "Whoa, that's what I wrote?" [Laughs]

FRED Yeah, I see what you mean.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: I still keep it that way. I write everything on a grand piano now.

FRED Cool. Who else was inspirational in your student days?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: When I was a student? Well, of course, Herb Pomeroy was a big influence on me. Big influence.

FRED Writing as well as trumpet?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Writing, I studied all that, and the trumpet as well. And Joe Viola and Lenny Johnson. [Laughs]

FRED Yeah, yeah. I remember seeing him with the big band at The Stables.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, oh really? Wow. That was those people. And I think, because of 1972, still Miles was coming to Jazz Workshop / Paul's Mall. And others like John Scofield was here, Mike Stern was here, and Pat Matheny came back in town. Bill Frisell was with me, and Kevin Eubanks was doing his thing.

TIGER OKOSHI: These are your classmates now?

FRED Yeah, yeah.

BOUCHARD:

FRED How did your band, Tiger's Baku, evolve from this?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Well, after I graduated from here, I got the call from Buddy Rich. And I went on tour with Buddy and came back after I got fired. [Laughs]

FRED You got fired?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, yeah, I always talk about this. Whole band, he fired the whole band.

FRED You want to talk about Buddy?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Well, it's passé, everybody talks about him. But the good thing I can say about him is he signed a petition for me to receive the Green Card. Yes, as well as Tony Bennett did that, too. And after the tour was done I heard that big driving sound of Buddy Rich, and I really wanted to recreate that in a smaller version. And I was doing some weekends gig with Bill Frisell, and Bill was driving me, we were doing weddings together. And all the time after the gig we were sort of depressed, you know. We thought we had a better future--not saying wedding gigs are bad or not, we had to do it. And one day, in front of me, before I get out of his car he said, "Tiger you can write, right?" So I said, "Yeah." And he said, "Why don't you put a band together?" He said he thinks I should do it. But I don't know, I don't know how to get the rhythm section. And Bill Frisell said, "All right, let me find the musicians." So he found the musicians, and we started Tiger's Baku in 1976. That was the year my first son, oldest son, was born. Yeah, that's the beginning.

Yeah, Bill Frisell and Connie Driscoll and Tommy Campbell and Frank Wilkins. And we used to rehearse every day. Every day. We had a mini-Moog synthesizer and all the Berklee students [were] like, "What is this?" I had a little setup myself with all the pedals and octave dividers and vox, they called. I got the bass clarinet sounds coming out, and octave dividers, and people were like so surprised to see that. I used to drill the pickup on my bells or lead pipe or mouthpiece and tried experimenting, and we made the CD, a demo tape, but the demo tape, one song was like forty minutes long. Nobody'd buy it. [Laughs] I brought it back to Japan and my record company say like, "Whoa, we can't do this." Said they'll try to help me out, but

And then we tried to book some gigs in the Boston area, but my music was too crazy for the local jazz clubs such as Pooh's Pub in Kenmore Square. And they said, "Tiger, those are the kind of music--after you get famous, you can do anything like this. No one knows who you are and you cannot do this!" And I asked Berklee, "Is there any way I can use the BPC?" I think that was very new still. And they offered me. And okay, we booked the Berklee Performance Center way before we played the local places, and we packed the place. I think the library still has a video. Was filled up. I was totally surprised. And everybody said, "Tiger, you never pay attention." Because I really didn't care about what people, how they're receiving, I just rehearsed my band, and rehearsed it, rehearsed it, carried the Fender Rhodes up the stairs, down the stairs, rehearsed it. And I noticed when we rehearsed outside of our rehearsal rooms in 150 [Massachusetts Avenue], it was packed with people. Word of mouth, so to speak, I guess. And when we came out here, it was packed. And we invited--not me but somebody else, my friend--invited local jazz club owners, they were in the audience, they were totally surprised to see. [Laughs] And right after that they said, "Tiger, why don't you play, come and play?"

FRED So Pooh's Pub and Michael's...

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, Michael's was--I didn't play at Michael's with my band, because we were so loud and so wild.

FRED Where else, what were the other venues? What were the other clubs around town?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: This was about it, and maybe later on some other places.

FRED Zircon? No, too small.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: I think Zircon was one of them. And in Cambridge--what was the name of the place? I don't remember. I played once or twice, but those are later on.

FRED Downstairs in Harvard Square? The performance center?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: The Jonathan Swift, we played some, with the McCoy Tyner too. But those are the later years, I think. So Pooh's Pub was our main joint around this area though.

FRED Another band that emerged simultaneous was Stanton Davis--the Ghetto Mysticism. You guys had the the two

BOUCHARD: hot electric bands.

TIGER OKOSHI: Wow, you remember that?!

FRED Sure, sure. Stanton, he's still down in New York and he worked for the union for many years....

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, I played with him, I used to play. I just missed the George Russel's eightieth birthday, I couldn't make it! I had my own big things going on. And I totally missed it. But he is in that band that Stanton plays.

FRED Yeah, you were both in that band.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, so we hung out a lot, and now we talk about those days a lot too. Those were good days. Because again like, Keith Jarrett was coming here, you know, and if you're a Berklee student it's three dollars. And we could see Keith Jarrett and Paul Motian

FRED At the [Jazz] Workshop, yeah. Gary Peacock? No....

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Charlie Haden, I think back then. Yeah, it was seven nights a week, you know. And that was the time I brought my trumpet and sat in and played with Freddie Hubbard. [Laughs] I couldn't speak English and I was terrible. And I think that George Cables was on piano. And nobody sat in on piano, so he had to stay in the band stand, and I was playing some kind of blues or something, and he was yelling at me like, "Hey you, take it out, take it out." But I didn't know what that meant! I thought he wanted me to play more. So I just kept on playing! [Laughs]

FRED So instead of playing out, you kept playing the blues.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, longer. I thought he wanted me to play longer. [Laughs] Or like in Sonny Rollins' band I sat in, I knew Sonny too, the place was packed, and I was the only one who wanted to play and sit in. And Sonny made me wait for a couple of songs then all of sudden said, "Come over." And he didn't tell me what song, just--Bob Cranshaw and Billy Higgins and

FRED You have a guitar player then? Not Jim Hall...

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: No, Maso. Maso Yoshiaki. We were good friends so he invited me. And they started to play one of Sonny's original tunes. I was already on stage, it was too late for me. [Laughs] And right after one chorus that he played his original song, he just handed over to me.

FRED Instant changes, oh my god. [Laughs]

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah. Besides that, I was so nervous. [Imitates trumpet] But those are good memories, I guess.

FRED That's right after, that's when you were--you weren't on the faculty yet. You didn't join the faculty for a while.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: No. Right after--I taught here right after I graduated in 1978, I guess, '77, for a little while, and Gary took me, Gary Burton. And he was teaching here too, back then. And we both sort of quit teaching here for a little while because he wanted to take this group. And that was a big time for me.

FRED Did he ever have another trumpet player in his band? I don't think so.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: No, I was the first one. He always had--before me was John, John Scofield. And he had Mick Goodrick and Pat Metheny before me. And I think, back then Cricket was his wife and Cricket recommended me. And I really, I'm still thankful for her. And once in a while I see her and we still talk about those days. Cricket is doing great.

FRED She lives around here. Newton?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: I think so, yeah. Yeah, that was a big, big decision for Gary as well, I think. And I was using the pedals you know, wah wah pedals, echoplex, and tape was going around, and all that stuff. And he kind of thought that as interesting.

FRED He always liked a little bit of an edge. You know, when he did those things with Larry Coryell, those were always

BOUCHARD: a little bit edgy and a little avant garde.

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, creative. [Laughs]

FRED But Steve Swallow and Roy Haynes, man what a band!

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, that was amazing. I was starting to rehearse with him, and one day he said, "Tiger, what are you doing next Sunday?" So I said, "I'm not doing anything." And he picked me up and drove me to New York, and he said he was going to rehearse with Roy because they have a recording project for ECM. That's the rhythm section for Stan Getz. And I said, "I can see that?" And he said, "Yeah, bring your trumpet." And I was watching those guys, and they took a break. And after the break Gary said, "Tiger come on, bring your trumpet. Let's play this song together." So I played it. And he goes like, "All right, next week, we have a gig." I said, "What? Gig with this group?" He said, "Yeah. And week after that we have recording and I want you to play on the records." I was like wow, it was the beginning.

And during a recording session in New York, this is what happened. You know Manfred right? Manfred Eicher, from ECM records, president? His flight got delayed or some kind of things, he had a problem coming in because of a passport problem or something. Meanwhile, we have to record. So we start to record "Decembrants," Keith Jarrett tune. [Scats melody] I was hearing the rhythm section right. [Imitates rhythm section] It was like the smoothest rhythm section I have ever heard. Before I get nervous--you know, I was on this Rolls Royce. [Laughs] Before I get nervous about being in the car, I was already riding. And of course that made me play like I knew everything or something. It made me play like a totally experienced trumpet player. And we had recorded a few songs before Manfred Eicher came in. And Manfred Eicher came in and stopped it. [Waves arms] He says like, "What is this trumpet player doing? I don't want him. I don't want this trumpet player." Right? And Gary said, "What are you talking?" And I was right there. This is true story. Manfred said, "Gary, if you want trumpet player, how come you didn't contact me? We have Kenny Wheeler. Kenny Wheeler is the ECM trumpet." And Gary said, "You know what, I didn't mean to Kenny can't play time. He can play time." And I was like, "Thank you, Gary!" Anyhow, the conversation heated up, but I just--you know the record. It's a good record.

FRED Yes, it is, it is. But Manfred likes that floaty stuff. Like Tomas Stanko, and Enrico Rava. Float float float. [Laughs]

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Float stuff. But on this one Gary wanted to be right on it, because the rhythm section. And it was good.

FRED Yeah--with Roy, man, and Steve, they can turn on a penny, never mind a dime, they can turn on a pinhead.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: It's like you are driving a car, you feel you can easily drive ten thousand miles without getting tired. I felt like I could play forever. And another funny story on that Times Square CD, was another Keith Jarrett song called "Chorale." Pretty song. [Sings] And Gary wanted to feature me. And so I played it. First take, I thought I played great. He said, "Ah, you can play better." Second take, third take, fourth take... He said, "Tiger, you're playing too many notes. You have good sound. Hold some notes. After six or seven takes, I get tired of me playing that. And I held some notes and held some notes. And like, I was young--sorry Gary, to say this--but I had my own ego, and own belief in something I did. And I felt so miserable after that, right? I came home, I told my wife, "I didn't like it, I didn't like it. He told me exactly how I should play." So I didn't listen to the CD for about maybe a year. And people started to talk about it, it came out, and talk about that CD and how good it is. And I listened to it. Surely, the best cut was the "Chorale." The song I thought I didn't like it. And so I felt so little. And since then I started to really trust in peoples' opinions. Experience shows. Gary's direction was right on it. Gary's instruction was right on it. Gary's instinct was right on it. It took me a little bit to experience that.

FRED Yeah, it can be humbling, but it's a good lesson.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Great lesson!

FRED And you also talked about listening to other people's opinions and you talked about when you were rehearsing

BOUCHARD: Baku really hard and all of a sudden the Boston Music Awards came out and you looked up, they have--how did you describe it? The page in the [Boston] Phoenix?

TIGER OKOSHI: Oh yeah, yeah, that was, I think that was Phoenix FNX, or some kind of radio station award. I won a few things from Boston Music Awards, too. International Best Trumpet Player, international side was Miles, and Local Best Trumpet Player was me. And both pictures side by side on one page.

FRED And your reaction was...?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Well, I was feeling so good. You know, again, I'd never been so busy looking around what other people think of my music. Most likely, like the Pooh's Pub in Kenmore Square, what I want to do was confuse people so they can come back to figure it out. [Laughs] You know, "Maybe we should go back again next time because I didn't understand that." And everytime we'd play, the place was packed. And I was so ridiculously into perfecting my music. So like sometimes I would stop the band, middle of the song, first set. After the second song, some mistakes was going on, mistakes, and I was like, "Stop the music! Sorry people, could you wait about ten minutes? I gotta have a meeting, we gotta have a little talk." And go into the back room and said

FRED Huddle, a huddle.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah. Back room and said, "We rehearsed everyday for that? For that? Come on! Please do that, please think ahead. Think ahead, don't drive your vehicle looking down on the road, look ahead. Looking down and seeing what we're doing is audience." Blah blah blah. And went back and let's try it again. So that was my experimental time. And same time, I'm experimenting myself too, how serious I was. I left my country for no reasons. My father ejected my name, me, from Okoshi family, because he thought I would come back from honeymoon. [Laughs]

FRED You had to make it up with him later.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: He paid the tuition for me to receive this bachelor degree in economics from the Japanese university.

FRED So you had to look ahead because you couldn't look back. [Both laugh]

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, so to speak, yeah. And I really wanted to see what I can do in this country. And what I can do, who I was, and what do I have. It's my life and I knew I took a chance not to go back to Japan, not for just like mediocre group, and I really wanted to do that. Pat Metheny was there, and he helped me out all the time, he was in the audience. And most recently I started to play with Branford [Marsalis]. And Branford, now he tells me he was there every time I was playing in the Pooh's Pub!

FRED He was a student right after you?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah. So I think there were a lot of people interested in what I was doing back then.

FRED For sure. And when you did go back to Japan, you were like a hero. Eventually.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Well, thanking Gary again, I joined Gary Burton's group. And Gary decided to take his group back to Japan. But when I went back to Japan, '77, I believe, I was called Tiger. And none of the Japanese people know who Tiger Okoshi was. So they were confused. [Laughs]

FRED They thought you were somebody else?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: They thoughtbut they figured it that one. They told me later, they're like, "This Tiger Okoshi who plays trumpet with Gary Burton--is this the same guy who split?" [Laughs] Because I was in about four or five different groups in Tokyo. I said bye to my group and I said, "I'm going to record like a lot of live jazz in the States and bring it back after the honeymoon." And I never came back. So they were talking about what happened to that guy. "What happened? Is this the same guy?" kind of stuff. So that was very interesting. It was like a big, big thing. And after that I introduced my music, and that was a big, big reception I received from Japanese people.

FRED So when you went back there with Gary's band, you played a couple of festivals or big gigs, and then people

BOUCHARD: finally said, "Well, this is the same guy." Then you started bringing your own bands back, a year later or something like that. And I don't know if people understand the difference between looking at a musician in the States and looking at a musician in Japan. It's like you were not just a musician, you were like an icon. You were regarded as a celebrity.

TIGER OKOSHI: I guess back then, even before me, there are some people who came to New York, or Sadao, too... but everybody learned something or experienced playing with the famous jazz musicians and came back. So I thought I should stay there a little longer. And I always had that attitude, if I become the chef cooking the Italian food, probably I would be living in Italy, serving my Italian food to Italians. That's my, sort of, idea. So I wanted to blend with this culture. And the first few years I thought, "I cannot, because I never paid attention to country music. I should pay attention to country music." Then, back then, "Oh, I did not feel Vietnam War. I should pay attention to Vietnam War, to be able to blend with the culture here, and the people so I could be welcomed even better." So I sort of went through that to be able to live here longer and really find out what I can do for this country as a jazz musician, kind of insane idea. [Laughs] But now, it's working very well, I think. And there are few, small amount of people who really respect my trumpet work in this country. And now International Trumpet Guild, I'm a big part of International Trumpet Guild conference. I just did the masterclass and the performance in Banff, Canada, last June. And I'm a big part of the big trumpet world, I mean worldwide. Still, I'm Japanese. [Laughs]

FRED BOUCHARD: Maybe we could back up a little bit and talk about how you forged your teaching career here. You became on the faculty in the eighties, seventy, eighty-something.

TIGER OKOSHI: For about one year, I think. That's all. And I went on tour with Gary for two and a half years or so. And after that my own career started. And I came back 1977 [1997?]. Actually '75 [1995]. I started to teach a Five-Week program. And that was the year I experienced this huge earthquake hit the Kobe area and killed more than seven thousand people. I was there, and I experienced all that. And even, I dug out a dead body, and I have to tell this person that--the old man's wife--that her husband didn't make it and all that stuff. And that was a big decision. That was the day Larry Monroe was in Tokyo, and that was the day he was supposed to take a bullet train to Kobe to meet me. And I connected with Koyo, Koyo School of Music. Now it's one of the biggest BIN schools of Berklee. And I connected those two in 1995, and that was the year Larry came, but he couldn't come to Kobe because there was no way. Kobe was destroyed.

And after that I came back to Boston. And I was sort of confused. I quit trumpet, I canceled the Canada tour, and I just couldn't function too well. And I remember I didn't like what I was hearing, and I hated what I have done in my past. And I couldn't talk to anybody. I felt I should be with those victims in Japan so I could heal my pain with being one of the victims myself. But I came back here and I felt so alone. That was a time, sort of, Toru Okoshi and Tiger Okoshi start to separate again and talk to each other. "What are you gonna do?" Tiger said, "I'm gonna quit. I'm gonna quit the trumpet." And Toru says, "So what are you gonna do?" And Tiger said, "Find other music. I don't like jazz. Jazz people are everybody's talking about themselves. I don't want to hear the personal opinion anymore." And myself serving myself, so to speak, and I went out and purchased many, many world music, American Indian music, and cultural all around music. And showed it to Tiger and he said, "No, no, no, no, no." And in about two months, I was crying everyday, didn't touch trumpet. And all of a sudden, I heard this Rachmaninoff Vocalise. And Tiger really loved it. I think I felt like I was held by the mother again. I was so, like, newborn baby again. And I could see what I call "human river." It's okay, everybody's different skin, different culture, different luggage, but we are all going into the universal directions. And that sort of different way of thinking.

FRED BOUCHARD: Mental process. Is this where you're starting to emerge with that sort of Zen concept of the master and the idiot?

TIGER OKOSHI: All that stuff start to come together. And when I spoke with this dead man's wife, I was so unready. I just raised myself a jazz musician, I just raised myself a trumpet player. And I was not grown up. I was not--I don't know what to say.

FRED Mature--you weren't a complete person.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, mature human. And that experience sort of put the little gap in my spine bone. Here is the missing part. So I felt like, oh my God, now I can see the things better.

FRED So you started to emerge a more complete person after this?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: I think so, and I think Tiger and Toru Okoshi's relationship was very interesting. Master and Idiot lives in me. And the Master is what I'm supposed to know, who knows what we're supposed to be doing. Idiot always make mistakes, but Idiot is so charming to Master that the Idiot still respect the Master because he is so perfect, so intelligent. But I started to put those together so I could walk straight, so I can be one person on the stage, off the stage. I'm always centered on what I wanted to do.

FRED Yeah, you always have to balance these diverse influences and polarities in our existence. You know, you have the good angel on one shoulder and the bad angel on the other. One tells you to be saintly and work hard, the other one says get drunk, be stupid, make mistakes, take a chance on life. And you need the two to align you.

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, so you don't have to be smart, but you are so centered and comfortable about yourself, and same time you can have maximum happiness and you can hang out with people and you can smile like a baby. And that's the kind of person I wanted to be, yeah. [Laughs] This guy went [vocalizes] this way.

FRED How do you get these kinds of concepts over to the students? I mean, they come to you for the technical advice, the trumpet, the scales; then there's this whole other side of hanging out with the teacher and learning who he is, and how to become somebody who can make a decision for himself.

TIGER OKOSHI: I deal with a lot of private lesson students now because I think I'm good at it, with understanding individual needs. And also I do the clinics and I have a class, too. But, because the sort of life experience I have, and also I have three sons the same age, so I have more chance to understand the immediate problems, the immediate needs that the individual has. And sometimes I spend more time preparing the teaching material than actual teaching. So my students know I'm prepared. I always think about my students all week long. If you do that, you come up with good material.

FRED So something that will suit an individual student who needs to improve technical, sound, whatever it is.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Well, typical things like--we have beautiful other teachers can do, too, of course. I'm hoping that, when I associate with my own students--they cannot go online and assign themselves with me now, they have to come see me to take lessons. And I really want them to understand what kind of concept I have. And I want them to be influenced by me. I want to listen, I want them to exchange the conversation with me. And I want them to look at me when I'm playing. I really, I always say look at how I play. If you want to stop me middle of it, go ahead. If you want to tape the whole lesson, go right ahead. I'm here to give the best I have, I don't save it.

And one of the best things is so that they can prepare for next journey, so to speak. I tell them that performance is not--performing the arts, performing the music-- is not the only performance we have to do. Life is a performance. Some perform very well in life. So we talk about a few years ahead. And I ask them to have a little more clear pictures of themselves, what they want to be. And this is, for example if this is the movie you're looking at, and in the movie somebody has to be a fireman or something. And the producer says, "Okay, this is the fireman," and the movie actor becomes a good fireman and the story is whatever. And that's the way we have to look at it. And in this life, I chose to play a role as a jazz musician. I'm the director, I'm the producer of this movie, and I really wanted to film myself in a good way. And I tell, "No, Tiger, don't walk like that; don't talk like that. I want you to talk like this: blah blah blah." And that's the way to perform ourselves in this life, I think. And it will change after the student graduates from here, a different movie happens. And always the producer themselves, and the director themselves. And guess who's--the co-actors and supporting actors are different, but who's the main actor or actress? Themselves. So they really have to see that. No matter where you go, there you are, you got to face it. And you have to see yourself from a little distance. If you know how to deal with those two, you can see where you are. And perform; you have to perform. You cannot say, "This is the way I am," no, no, no.

FRED BOUCHARD: So it isn't just playing the trumpet, it's talking to the audience, it's perceiving the whole set, it's directing the band, it's calling a huddle when you need to. And the great players all could do all of this stuff. People who you admired were complete people. Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis--who else were your idols on trumpet?

TIGER OKOSHI: [Laughs] Wow, here it comes. Lee Morgan, you know, of course.

FRED BOUCHARD: Kenny Dorham.

FRED BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Kenny Dorham, his lyricism I learned, and I don't know, articulations from Clifford [Brown], and the firing concept and hip stuff from Freddie [Hubbard]. Freddie came to hear me when I was playing with Tiger's Baku in Seventh Avenue House in New York.

FRED BOUCHARD: Crazy. Great

FRED BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Crazy. And really much triplets--lyricism from Kenny Dorham and I can, yeah, appreciate that. But I knew, I always tell my students like, Shakespeare didn't grow up with reading Shakespeare novels. Or Clifford Brown was not listening to Clifford Brown CDs to become Clifford Brown you know. [Fred laughs] And I believe those people, even like Miles-- Coltrane was playing right beside him, but I knew that Miles, when he played it, he loved himself. And those talented people do, I think. You've got to find your talent, in the most sincere way. So you accept everybody else's talent with wide open arms. But when themselves play, they knew what they had. And those are the steps you have to go through. And nowadays I tell all my students, "Write, write, write the original song." That's one of the best ways to face who you are.

FRED Writing music? And words too? Or compositions?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, well, words? Mostly compositions. Like one note, you going to move half-step lower, half-step higher? It's your decision. And do you have that taste? Do you have the guts to move one note half-step higher or lower? Do you have the sensitive ears to do that? And you just face it. You know, it's like, with humans when you look at clear skies middle of the night and you see millions of stars, but you're aware you're only human. There are more stars outside. Same thing. I am a trumpet player. If I don't play trumpet, I can see so many notes. But I'm trumpet player, so I can see it, but I cannot play that note. And here, I can't play that note because I'm a trumpet player. But when I say, like I see so many notes and say "Hello, like, G minor," many notes disappear. And middle G, I will never miss it. Some other Gs, B flat, and Ds, and you see the whole G minor universe. And you practice this G to this B-flat has a distance. Distance means energy. Right here I'm going to bring this B-flat here. And you make a constellation--that's a melody. And you look at the melody and you say, "Have a C-sharp." Those guys disappear and a C-sharp triad shows up. So we really have to know that, too. We have the universe. Those are the concepts.

FRED And you always have to reach further than you can get. You have to

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: You have to understand what the interval means. From one star to another planet means energy. That's the energy audiences receive. So if you play [sings], that's the energy audiences receive. And you have to learn that, how to make a balance of chromatics and energetic intervals. That's exactly what the audience receives the energy from, I think.

FRED When you talk about being a human and looking at the stars, this brings me back to a concept you were talking about a little earlier, and that was the animal instincts--how people spend too much time on their computer, not enough face time, not enough living energy. And they diminish their powers by not being a complete human, a complete animal.

TIGER OKOSHI: You know, music is a human thing. Am I wrong? [Laughs] And if somebody says, like, "I love to listen to the ocean," and I say, "That's great, me too, please go. I go, too." We cannot compare birds with human music. We can maybe mix it once and a while, and I do it, because it's a sound thing. And something effect more to ourselves, natural sounds. Always one of my favorite sounds I hear is in springtime, when the snow starts to melt, and the water goes down the gutter. I put my ears there [imitates rhythm of falling water], other gutter [imitates rhythm of falling water]. You know? So I always pay attention to the sounds around me, and color around me, and all that stuff, but it's a human thing. And we got to sort of, I don't know, we got to maintain that instinct part of it. And especially Music Minus One CDs, which is not the human and they don't react to how you saw. Like the students have the tendency to learn how to speak, but not so much communications going on. And, sometimes I teach duets, and sometimes I bring a tennis ball in to throw to each other. This is all about the duet. [Mimes throwing a ball back and forth]

FRED A little musical ping pong.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, which means--people say jazz is a call and response, but nowadays they don't call enough; they know how to receive it. The player plays and they kind of do that, but what does "calling" mean? There are a few phrases, there are a few rhythmic ideas, those jazz giants left us. You listen to it, that's calling, that's responding. But somehow, the story sometimes tend to be like one after another, long [vocalizes] and don't allow the people to react. And learning the jazz vocabulary of calling is very important. That's an animal thing to me. And I really wanted to do that. So I do use the Minus One CDs as usual, as always, but I have become the drummer a lot of times. [Laughs] And they go like one, two [imitates bass] and the students play but I go [imitates drum]. And if the students play certain things [imitates drum] "Repeat that! Repeat that again!"

FRED So you get a call and response going even with the recording, I see.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: I try to do that. And especially like in duets or solo performance, you got to have a big imagination. You have a rhythm section going behind you and all those imaginations. Or like those classical composers back in 1800, they used to compose like seventy, eighty, ninety-piece orchestra without any of those, and just wrote those. Those are the human things, we were born with it. And I respect that. Those are thel don't know, it's really important experience you have to experience. It's like, "What does this sound like? I can't hear. I can hear three, four lines, I can hear four lines now. Oh, Jesus, I can't hear." Only thing is you have to write and experiment, you know? And I'm sure those composers back then, they did that, and people said, "How did he do that?! Those crazy things?" Probably he was surprised too, you know? And that's the kind of part. And I think for the listener as well, what they are listening for is I think human agreement from music. "I feel the same way, I feel the same way, I feel the same way."

FRED Make them get on your wavelength. Make them get the same vibe that you

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, yeah, away from knowledge. What is that note? Woah, that's a beautiful line they play. Something like, "Oh, Tiger, the second song you play, I was listening, okay I was listening, but I started to think about my mom." Or "Man, you made me think about my friends I haven't talked to in a long time."

FRED Yeah, don't analyze: dream along with the artist.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, we live different lives, and if I have four hundred people in front of me, or ten people in front of me, they have their own lives. And I just, you know, enrich their lives, and that's what humans do, human music do. So, on the other hand, when I listen to even a student perform, or a professional perform, I always look at, "What's the message behind this?"

FRED Yeah. [Tiger laughs] We should talk about all the projects you're involved with, so many projects: The Autism Band, The Sapporo Clinic, The Japan Society. Maybe you could just tell a little bit about the terrific things you're doing outside the Berklee framework.

TIGER OKOSHI: Well, since the earthquake event happened in my life, that was the George Russell Orchestra. Earthquake happened in the middle of January, and I quit trumpet until end of March. And the first gig I did was the tour, I was with George Russell. And in Paris, doing the rehearsal for the recording for La Belle Bleu and Living Time Orchestra CD. And in Paris Conservatory we rehearsed and one night I just told everybody, "I have to spend a little time with Tiger--no, Toru, or whoever." [Laughs] And I went to this restaurant in France, and started to--it was a Greek restaurant. And a Greek band playing some odd meter stuff. [Vocalizes]

FRED Bouzouki?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Bouzouki kinda thing. I was eating by myself, and a group of tourists having a good time asked me to come over and take a picture of them, so I did, and they asked me to join them, so I joined them. And they asked me to dance with them and I said, "I don't dance." And I said, "Tiger, go ahead, this could be your new life." And I was dancing and I recognized the song, it goes "I lost the fire." [Sings] It's from Middle East, and I kind of knew the lyrics, the Japanese lyrics. And those are the people from Egypt, the tourists. They said, "I thought you were from Japan." And after that I came back from the hotel and said, "I'm Japanese, living in United States, gigging in France, eating Greek food, and dancing with Egyptians." Right? [Fred laughs] I felt, this is it. This is it. This is it. Those are my blankets. Those are secure feeling. And I came back here, I was ready to serve for anything. And as I said, when I heard Rachmaninoff, I saw human river. I want to help something, I want to find something out besides the music which I chose. And I want to find something else, somebody else chose me to be in this world.

And I saw this Boston Higashi school in Randolph, they teach autistic children. And then I was invited to come to their annual event. And I thought, I couldn't believe what was going on. I was more impressed by the faculties behind them. They would be playing a vocoder or something, all of a sudden one student starts to poke their eyes or something, and the teacher, instructor, behind them just holding the hands. They are like shadows or something. And right after their event I went backstage and introduced myself--of course they kind of knew who I was--and I said, "Is there anything I can help?" They said "Of course, Tiger, please." And since then, I became the official jazz trumpet soloist in jazz band. We formed jazz group, and I still do performance with those kids. And I wrote the school song for them a few years ago.

FRED The kids have autism but they play music? They have their own instruments? And do you teach them, how do you...?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, I don't teach them, I don't have much time. They have a teacher, a music teacher, we always talk what song we're going to do. And when I have time I visit them. Last month I visit them about two or three times, I guess. And they told me whenever I play with them, they act different. I have seen a little different. And if they think that I am helpful for them, then here we go. They found me useful. [Laughs] And I went back to Japan, I think ten years ago with Gary. Gary was very much interested in what I was doing, and we committed--Gary and myself--committed to stay in the same hotel for one month in Hokkaido and get all the autistic kid and we did a whole bunch of wonderful things for them.

FRED Wow, there was a connection between this institute here and in Japan?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: No.

FRED No, separate thing?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: I thought, here in this country the public is little more open to handicapped people. I see--I live in Needham, and there is a grocery store, sometimes Downs Syndrome people will carry the groceries out. But if you do that in Japan, probably Japanese people will not go shopping in that place.

FRED So they keep these people away from everyone else.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah. So I brought this topic in public, and they found out a lot of people are pushed, kids. And the kids are treated like the weird kid in regular school, they have no special schools. And yeah, so I wanted to help them.

FRED How did you and Gary help them staying in Hokkaido? What were you able to do?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: I created the small volunteer group called Small World. And I studied how to deal with those children from the people from the Boston Higashi in Randolph. And I pretended I can deal with it. So the people in Hokkaido found those people who are interested in. All of the sudden all the TV cameras around and newspaper guys. But--well it's a long story though, a really long story. We did about an hour and a half every day for three or four days a week, and we did what we can do. After one month I was about to leave, but the people, the Small World people said, "Tiger, all the parents of the children really want to speak with you before you leave." Right? So I said, "What did I do?" [Laughs] And they came to my hotel room before I checked out, the parents came and they thanked me. And they said, "Tiger, you dealt with our sons and daughters about an hour, an hour and a half, that's about it. But we dealt with them everyday. And we saw enormous change in our kids." Right?

FRED Music is magical. It has healing powers.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah. And one parent said, "Tiger, I have never seen my son sitting down in one place drawing for two hours. This is the drawing. And do you know what he was saying when he was drawing? He was going 'Tiger, Tiger, Tiger, Tiger, Tiger, Tiger.'" Right? And other parents said, "Started to play some music, singing 'Tiger Tiger.'" Some said like, "My daughter was riding the bicycle alone singing 'Tiger Tiger.'" Everybody had some kind of story. So I said, "All right, here we go." You know, they made me realize something--they said something about me, something about me helps the kids enjoy.

FRED Beautiful. You know, with a normal audience you don't see how subtle an effect you have, but when here it's so
BOUCHARD: obvious. It makes you feel good.

TIGER OKOSHI: And I noticed--after that, I cannot be there all the time, so I sort of created other music teachers, but they didn't listen to other teachers. And I noticed when I was there too, I cannot do this, so I have to leave and come back to Boston. So I asked someone else to do the same work. I was watching. See, he was trying to do it, but all the kids are all over the place. Because I see he was not performing well. He didn't have something like don't know what that is but, you know? So I am so thankful for the people who found I have something else to offer in this life.

FRED That's great. Beautiful.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: That's one of the things.

FRED What about The Japan Society? This is another chance to be a cultural ambassador, both here and abroad.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Well the president of Japan Society of Boston, Peter Greely and I, are really great, good good friends. And when Seiji was here, he was on the board, too.

FRED Seiji Ozawa?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Seiji Ozawa, yeah. And this association was founded 105 years ago or so. It is one of the oldest in this country, and founded by a lot of Harvard University-related people. And they invited me to their group, and now I am sort of heavily involved in that. And the state of Massachusetts and Hokkaido are sister states. And I'm involved in that a little bit. When I do my clinic in Sapporo, they support us. And every opportunity I like to help whatever I can do musical-wise. And now the Red Sox have [imitates pitching] Daisuke [Matsuzaka].

FRED Right, twenty years after Hideo Nomo.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, yeah. And when the first year that Daisuke came, they talked about, "Let's do something together." And Boston Jazz Week was happening in April, and I was featured artist in Boston Jazz Week that time. So, Boston Jazz Week and Japan Society of Boston. Red Sox said, "how about we do some jazz to welcome Daisuke?" Nobody but me, my name came up. [Both laugh] And Yamaha and Berklee, they said, "That's great, that's great." So I talked to the Red Sox and said, "I don't want to go ahead and play the national anthem by myself, I want to introduce Japanese culture by assembling something interesting with Japanese taiko drummers."

FRED Beautiful.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, and originally I was going to have ten trumpets and five trombones and a few taiko drummers, but ended up with twenty trumpets and ten trombones and eight taiko drummers. And I arranged a big thing and we recorded here at Berklee, and sent to Red Sox. In one section, I play the solo, they were scared, totally scared! [Laughs] They call me the day before our performance at Fenway, they said "Tiger, one minute and twelve seconds into the song, the next fifteen seconds, I think American people really want to hear the national anthem the way it is." [Both laugh]

FRED This is Opening Day?

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Yeah, no, not Opening Day, second maybe. It was one of the first Yankees' game. I picked.

FRED I remember Phil Wilson's band was playing over at the BPC that night. He goes: "Where's my trumpet section?!"

BOUCHARD: [Both laugh] They were late for rehearsal!

TIGER OKOSHI: It's great! If you are there, faculty is playing in my group, and the students are playing, and I'm inviting alumni players to play. It's like a reunion, instant reunion. And all the trumpet players like, "How are you? Oh, man!" It's just the greatest thing. And they give us tickets to the game and hung out and all that stuff, you know.

FRED Yeah, that's sweet.

BOUCHARD:

FRED Let's, we have to finish soon. But why don't you tell us about this Sapporo Festival you've been involved with for some years now, and all the nice ramifications it has with Branford and Delfeayo Marsalis?

TIGER OKOSHI: [Laughs] I don't know. Well, Delfeayo When I was doing the acting chair here when Tom Plsek is the regular Brass chair--he took one year off, and I did the acting chair, I started again inviting a lot of artists and... And who came? I don't know, Lucian Bavoline and Maurice Andre, no, no, Maurice was a flute. What was his name? Morris Brown, trumpet player from New Orleans came. And Delfeayo was one of Coung Vu came and Randy Brecker came, and I think Dave Douglas came. And anyhow, Delfeayo, that was the first meeting and felt really comfortable.

FRED He's a beautiful cat, I love him, yeah.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: And he was working on this Ellington's Such Sweet Thunder into a five-horn arrangement, featuring a bunch of different players. Branford played and Jason played, Jason Marsalis played a few songs...

FRED Oh, yeah, that's one of Ellington's most creative scores. I just love that...

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: And when they call me and say, "Tiger, we want you," and I say, "You must be kidding, [laughs] Duke Ellington is still there, there's already great great guys who can play there in New York."

FRED Cootie Williams, Clark Terry, all those cats, wow...

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: They are so kindly, they said, "Tiger, we want you. We want you to do your thing." So I took it, you see, it's a really great experience. First concert we did in Annapolis, when the sounds spread, and we did a lot of rehearsals and during rehearsal, Delfeayo called Wynton. Wynton is great for the orchestrations and Wynton was telling Delfeayo, "Tell Tiger to switch the part without saxophone in that section, or he should be playing with a cup mute" and all this stuff. The CD is coming out next year in March, March '09 I think.

FRED BOUCHARD: Great, at Marsalis Music right here in Cambridge. But what about the Sapporo Festival? This is another big coup. You've been doing that for quite some time.

TIGER OKOSHI: Which one? Festival or my jazz camp?

FRED BOUCHARD: Jazz camp.

TIGER OKOSHI: Jazz camp, yes. Next year is the fourth year, and about ninety people from all over Japan come, young people. And I bring John Berkian on piano, Jim Odgren on saxophone, and Yoron Israel on drums, and Dave Clark on the bass. And since the first year, we just fell in love with each other. [Laughs] And they love what we do, and we found a really musical don't know, valuable things we do. And I've been talking to Larry Monroe's international department of scholarship office, and we can select two or three people and we can write recommendations for scholarship to the Five-Week program. And if they can take them, they will take those guys. And they're coming here and some of them are already regular students and they are doing so well. So well.

FRED BOUCHARD: Now if you had to just say one thing about the difference between a Japanese high school student and an American high school student, what is the difference in the way they're brought up through the system? I mean, what do you have to bring?

TIGER OKOSHI: It's so, so hard for me to say, you know, because Japanese education itself is you have to blend, so if you're really good, they [gestures]

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah, make everything even.

TIGER OKOSHI: So they're really good team workers. That's where the team happens.

FRED BOUCHARD: So you have to bring out the individualism.

TIGER OKOSHI: Right. Here [gestures up], this is great. And this [gestures down] gotta go up. But teamwork sometimes is not as good as Japanese.

FRED BOUCHARD: Good, great. Tiger thanks so much for coming aboard.

TIGER OKOSHI: You know, you are so good, because sometimes I'm answering these kind of questions, but people are not listening to me or doesn't understand exactly what I'm talking about.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah. We have to do the next session over a nice glass of cabernet sauvignon. [Both laugh]

TIGER OKOSHI: Anytime!

FRED We'll do that for Thanksgiving. Thanks so much, it was a blast.

BOUCHARD:

TIGER OKOSHI: Thank you.