

- FRED BOUCHARD:** Well, good afternoon once again. Today we have a unique experience in inviting to the Berklee Oral History Project, Mr. Oscar Stagnaro, who is a gentleman from Lima, Peru, who's been on the Berklee faculty teaching electric bass and Latin rhythms for twenty years. Welcome aboard, Oscar.
- OSCAR STAGNARO:** Hey, Fred. Thanks so much for inviting me. For me, it's a real pleasure and I hope I could be of any help in this program.
- FRED BOUCHARD:** Your career has been a really fascinating one and a rather encompassing one because you've been doing a lot of world traveling with Paquito D'Rivera, and your abilities on electric bass encompass a very, very wide range of Latin styles and rhythms. Perhaps you could get us started by talking about growing up in Lima, Peru.
- OSCAR STAGNARO:** All right. Yeah. Well, we started with my brother Ramon back, probably-- well, like I mentioned before, playing surf music, which is probably for many people, if they are not familiar with that term anymore, it was the music from the band called The Ventures. And we used to work and ran, wiped out all these tunes from that area.
- And we used to have a trio with no drums-- that was interesting part-- only acoustic guitar because we couldn't afford to buy electric guitar, believe it or not. I'm talking, you know, late or sixties, early seventies.
- FRED BOUCHARD:** Would you provide the percussion with your hands on the body?
- OSCAR STAGNARO:** Not really. I just play the bass part, you know? Which is-- [SINGING RHYTHM]-- pretty easy, but you start learning forms, you start learning tempos, you start learning how to tune the guitar. Simple stuff.
- My brother is a very accomplished guitar player, so he showed me how to play the bass, you know? And we started with that.
- We played in political parties. I used to have a friend that belongs to the party that is now running the country-- my country Peru. It's called the APRA. It was sort of like the Democrat party or the Republican Party, so it's one of the few parties that is still alive in Peru. And we used to have play there once a week, you know? And at that time, I didn't know any politics, I guess. We just had fun playing there, you know?
- FRED BOUCHARD:** Tell us how you got The Venture music together.
- OSCAR STAGNARO:** Excuse me, what?
- FRED BOUCHARD:** How you got The Ventures music.
- OSCAR STAGNARO:** Oh, The Ventures. Okay, the way-- because in that time, probably the cassette was not invented. I'm not sure, but at least we didn't have. So the way that we learned it was we turned on the radio and then look in the dial for the tune that we wanted to learn-- especially my brother. And then the tune started, so then we played four or five six bars. The tune was over, so we have to switch to another station that the same tune was played, or wait and they'll cap the whole tune. And then slowly, we put it together, and then slowly we learned the tunes.

FRED What was available on Peruvian radio? American rock?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED And what else was there? Classical music?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Of course. And eventually, we were very lucky in that time because we have classical stations, we had Peruvian music, we had Cuban music. In the mornings, I remember my dad used to turn on the radio to listen, like, Sonora Matancera, Celia Cruz. From six to eight, they played every day that stuff. Then an hour later, they played all popular music, and then Top 40s from then on. So you could really look whatever you wanted to have there.

Now, I don't think the people there is that lucky, that I used to be able to listen to all types of music.

FRED You were lucky that your father turned the radio on?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. Yeah. [LAUGHS] Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED Most of us get some kind of music from our dads. My dad gave me a clarinet and a Benny Goodman record when I was ten.

OSCAR You see? Yeah. So he was a radio. And then no-- he was a person that was always in a good humor, so it was very, for us, was very helpful, you know?

FRED So you associate good humor and smiling manner with music? It's a logical connection.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. Well, you know, we grew up with my dad only since I was three and two, so we have to put a smiley face to life since the beginning, you know?

FRED I see. And so you and your brother had a team? You had a band?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. So we-- my brother had a guitar for probably when he was twelve-- you know, like a small guitar. And then the one that I got was when I was fifteen, fourteen, because I didn't want to get involved with music at first. I didn't think it was the right thing.

Music in that time in Peru-- or musicians, in a way, were not looking a professional way because most of them, they didn't look good, they didn't know how to dress, they drink a lot, and dun, dun, dun, dun, dun-- all the extras.

FRED So it was like--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR So being a musician was not a profession.

STAGNARO:

FRED Like Andean flute players drinking too much pisco or what?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR A lot. [LAUGHS] Not too much. A lot. And not only Andean because in Peru, it's interesting. The music that probably you know the most is Andean music, but that's not the style that we play in the Coast, you know? I'm from Lima, which is in the Coast and the Pacific Coast, and we hardly played that. That music is from people from the Andes.

FRED Okay.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR So the people that did like música criolla, or Black music that is becoming to be known now, that's what we used to play in Peru. And most of the musicians are street musicians, so they live like a street people. So it's like a lot of partying, a lot of things, a lot of that. They always in a good mood, but the life doesn't-- it's like circles in a way. Now it has improved a lot, but at that time, musicians were not looked at as a nice people, if I could say the least.

But that's why my dad didn't want us to be musicians, so he fought it for a long time. And then he gave up because my brother and me became musicians, and later on, we'd bring them to the party, so then he had fun. So we were all three together going to the Christmas parties or New Year's playing in different bands and he was always there.

FRED Tell us about your first gigs and how you got caught.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR My first gig-- well, my first gig-- how can I put it? My first recording-- let's start with that-- my first recording, it was for a brand of tuna fish with Gold Compass-- C-O-M-P-A-S-S-- Compass. And a friend of mine, a drummer that his dad was a violin player from the Symphony Orchestra in Peru, he was a very talented musician, arranger, and drummer. He wrote a tune that he only had one stop in the whole tune, you know? So we recorded live, all the musicians, on the old tape, the 2 inch tape that was in the studio.

So we played a tune, and I missed a stop. Three, four, five, ten times I missed the stop on beat one. So everybody split, and then I have to stay there with my friend, you know? And he called me-- 1, 2, 3, 4, stop-- and then I stopped in the right place finally. But that was a wake up call for me to start learning how to read and rhythms and all that stuff.

FRED How did you learn? Did you get a teacher?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Well, I went to [inaudible] Conservatory first. Wait, but this is interesting because we used to play with an organ player that he was the organist for the Cathedral in Lima. He was the only guy that could play with foot and all that stuff. And he used to be the teacher for the army band in Peru, for the Air Forces-- and the air-- all the armies-- the Air Force and the Navy. They all conglomerate and he was the teacher.

But when he played, he never told us what key, what rhythm-- you know, he count 1-- and then he played anything. You have to watch his hand-- so where he wants you to learn where he was. And then we told him, hey, Carlos-- and Carlos Pickling was his name-- said, "Carlos, when you show how to read music? Or what music theory?" And then he talk, and for me it was like he was speaking Chinese because I didn't know anything he was talking about. I didn't relate whole notes, half notes, major chords-- nothing.

FRED All by ear?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Nothing. I couldn't understand what he was talking about. I don't know if was the way that he was talking, oh, my
STAGNARO: ears, they were locked. But then I picked it up later on.

So that would showed me a lot of little details on how to teach because when you think that you're talking something that makes sense to you and the other person is understanding, maybe that's not the case, so you have to make sure and try it and back and forth until it clicks. Then, somebody turn on the light as-- bing-- I got it. But that was not the case with him. That was very weird.

FRED When you have to start from square one, sometimes you learn a better way than if you get it spoon fed. Like,
BOUCHARD: transcribing four bars at a time by ear off The Ventures records.

OSCAR Yeah. So then your ear is super open, you know? Pretty open. Any key, anything is like any rhythm. It's like, okay,
STAGNARO: let it come to me and then I'll play it.

FRED Yeah. That's not the conservatory method.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. That's-- yeah. [LAUGHS] But then our gigs, we had another band. We had a few bands. So that was-- the
STAGNARO: first band that we had with my brother in the trio was called The Sailors because that was probably one of the first English words that I knew-- you know, sailors. Okay, let's be The Sailors.

Then they other one was called-- then we add another guitar, and then we started playing Top 40s at that time, and it was called Los Frutos-- the fruits. Okay. So you know, it was like evolution.

Then the third one that we had was called The Elemental Music Group, so you know-- and that was like '71 or '70. And then we started composing then because we used to cap a lot of the Grand Funk, Led Zeppelin, and then this-- I mean, and then Carlos Santana.

FRED You were thinking from The Sailors to The Fruits-- maybe you were like [inaudible]

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. We were like, we are hungry sailors. [LAUGHS] Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED Were you listening to any of the stuff from Brazil?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR No. No, no, no.

STAGNARO:

FRED You didn't have any access to it?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR No. I only knew "The Girl from Ipanema." Period. And not the original version.

STAGNARO:

FRED So the Andes were very high?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Oh, yeah. Yeah. But I played with a lot of singers, so they call them tunes, but I never heard the original version.

STAGNARO:

FRED Okay.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Do you know what I mean? So they played bossa, okay, I just make up my own line. You know? But then when I came, move here in '79 is when I really started learning the real way-- or the authentic way to play each style.

STAGNARO:

FRED Okay. But you did mention there was a band where you had to play a little of this, a little of that?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. So after the third band with my brother, we went to a contest, and we lost the contest because the band in that time, they were playing Santana, and we already passed that and we playing Grand Funk. So we were ahead and the people didn't understand what we were playing, so the band that played Santana won a bass or something. And it was after that we were discouraged, you know?

STAGNARO:

But then we still had the band together and we started playing with sort of like a dance band. This dance band played tropical music-- or salsa, if you want to say a simpler way to explain it-- and then we played rock. So they were-- we played half hour sets.

And we had twenty-five or something gigs in December because that's the promotion parties for schools, you know? Like, big graduation parties. So we played a lot, so we make some money, and now we bought equipment finally, we bought lights. So our show was with lights and very, very, very nice stuff.

Then my brother got offered to play with one of the top bands-- rock bands in Peru at that time, but he was underage, so he couldn't go to these parties. So he has to play behind the amplifier also. So they were-- these guys were a trio, and my brother was the guy that played all the solos, so he was behind the amp playing the song, [LAUGHS].

Because it was dark, you know? And those times of the seventies, like the Fillmore East when they played the concert, it was all dark and lights-- so you know, somebody's playing guitar, you don't even know who's doing it, and he was the one.

So then I quit-- I'll tell you, I went to play in a nightclub also. When we were sixteen with my brother-- sixteen and seventeen-- of course, we were underage still-- we played sort of like a ritz, you know? I don't want to explain what was there. But we were not allowed supposedly to be there, so when we played the show, they only put the light from the chest down so they didn't see the faces. So we played there for three nights until my dad found out, and that was the end of it, you know?

So I quit music for a couple of years, and then I went to study industrial engineering. And then I got offered a gig two years later, and then went back to the same gig, and then that's-- music was my love and my passion after that.

FRED Your father just said, "Okay, do what you want?"

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. Because he can really fight-- it's like me with my son. Well, I'm very lucky that my son is studying at
STAGNARO: school, but I couldn't force him, you know? I could just guide him. But then he has to find himself, and then I have to support him. I cannot tell him what to-- I have to support him one hundred percent. And that's-- like I'm saying, very lucky that he choose music. But not everybody is that lucky. [LAUGHS]

FRED So tell us how it was that you-- you said that you were really busy in Lima?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED Playing jingles, working nights? You were like a top session guy?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED And you had all the cool gigs as well.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED Why leave?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Okay. Okay. So I'll back up a little bit. After I play in the nightclub, I got called to play with this band called Black
STAGNARO: Sugar. It was sort of like a Chicago blood, sweat, and tears band with five horns-- we were like 15 pieces-- but we also play all the Willy Colon or [INAUDIBLE] that was at that time very popular-- so that way we could work. So we work every night-- I mean, twice a week.

And then with that band, there was a guy that came here to Berklee to study. His name was Jaime Delgado Aparicio, and actually, he was a Keith Jarrett's roommate when Keith Jarrett studied here. Check that out.

FRED Wow.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR So then he went back to Peru, and then he formed a band called Orquesta Contemporanea. It was sort of like a
STAGNARO: Boston Pops copy. And then we played only one concert a year for, like, a hospital benefit for a hospital, and then I got called to do that gig. And that was something that still was one of my first-- probably my most valuable recordings with that band.

And after that, it was Black Sugar, then Jaime, and then I started recording with a lot of singers. In Peru at that time, there was a big market-- you know, singers, salsa or Peruvian music, or pop also.

And then with my brother, we had a quartet called Lima Contemporanea also. It was sort of try to imitate Chick Corea. And then we played with a big band, we played with singers, and then also jingles. So I was very, very busy. It was a period of, like, 1975 to 1979 before I moved here, so I was working a lot.

And the way that I explained before, how did I get interested in jazz, even though I heard Bill Evans and Paul Chambers, Ray Brown, was through Chick Corea. His pain and Jaco, Weather Report-- Heavy Weather-- that was a crucial point for me to say, this is when I wanted to learn. How do these guys play like that?

FRED BOUCHARD: There was a big transition when jazz was going from acoustic to electric with Miles' breakthroughs as well.

OSCAR STAGNARO: Yeah. So for me-- for us, it was a wake up call, you know? If you want to get there, you have to practice and you have to know a lot. I mean, you study theory and improvisation, so I have no clue, you know? I mean, I could read, but I didn't know any theory.

So slowly, we got some books. We studied. But really, you couldn't study. There was no school. The conservatory was, but there's no improvisation courses there, or jazz harmony.

FRED BOUCHARD: Yeah.

OSCAR STAGNARO: You know? So we had to find a lot ourselves.

FRED BOUCHARD: But you did. You did discover a lot on your own.

OSCAR STAGNARO: Oh, yes. A lot. Yeah, yeah. Can't complain.

FRED BOUCHARD: But then you came to the U. S. anyway.

OSCAR STAGNARO: Yes. Yeah, the way that I ended up here is because my wife-- we're married for twenty-eight years-- Teresa-- and then in Peru, we were going out for five years, so this is a very long relationship.

When I first, going out with her, I used to take it to all my recording sessions and concerts, so she knew the life that we had to live, which our schedule is not fit. It's very variable. So you say, I have a recording from six to eight or six to ten-- that's a lie. Because you end up working three or four hours until the music comes out good! So you stay there forever, you know?

So I took her, and then a few sessions, and she said, "Okay, I know what you're talking about." And then we have a good trust relation.

And then she told me after a few years there, she says, "If you reach the top and if I don't move from here, you're never going to leave." So then she left in '78 to Boston-- to New Orleans, then to Boston. So I follow-- I told her, you know, I'll be here in a month, and I didn't get the visa in '78. So a year later, I came in '79. So, yeah.

FRED She was already established here with her family?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. Yes. Yes. But it was a long period for her waiting, you know? It was like-- I don't know, you know? Somebody
STAGNARO: was watching for us.

FRED So when you got here, you didn't join the Berklee right away?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR No, no, no. But I played-- I was very lucky. Actually, that year when I came to Miami-- through Miami, I didn't
STAGNARO: bring my bass because I only got a visa for fifteen days. And then Teresa's uncle, he signed me-- he co-sponsored me to study English at ELS-- I don't know if you remember ELS here on Commonwealth Avenue?

FRED Yeah.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Okay. So I went there and I got to the exam, and then I went to level five, which all the people was from
STAGNARO: someplace else and they didn't speak English, so we were in the same boat. And for me, it was like I don't know what I'm doing in this school because everybody has the same problem as me. So I decided to quit school and then bought a dictionary and went to the music stores to learn English with American people.

I used to remember a few guys. There used to be a store in Mesa called Pantaloons right there where Best Buy is now. So I went in the store and I started speaking English-- my English-- and the guy says, "I don't know what you're talking about." So I opened my dictionary and said, "How do you say this word?" "Oh, okay." So I repeat it. And that way, you know, I learned the right pronunciation. So it took me while.

FRED Again, self-taught, like the music.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED You do it from scratch.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR And then another guy, Mike, he used to work in the store for repair instruments here at Berklee, you know? And
STAGNARO: Mike-- I don't know his last name-- and he says, "Man, I still remember you--" I'm talking about twenty years later, you know-- I still remember you when you couldn't talk a word. Say, I'm still working on it. But it was good.

What I learned here, it's like-- in a different country, probably you don't have that kind of respect for people, that you still remember the guy and you still respect him from the beginning to the end how he was. It doesn't matter he got money or no money, he still respect me, he gave me a chance to learn. In my country, they go out. They throw you out of the store if you come with that attitude.

So he gave me a chance. That's the chance that you get here. And other people-- many people doesn't know that, or say no, the other side, that they shut the doors on you in your place. As easy as it is here, you get the opportunity, you have to be able to take it or learn and then continue with the progress now. So that's the good thing about moving here.

FRED Yeah.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR See? Always there's an open door.

STAGNARO:

FRED That's true.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR You have to know how to walk in and what to do when you're there.

STAGNARO:

FRED It helps if you're a type A--

BOUCHARD:

[OSCAR LAUGHS]

In the US, I mean. Everything else is secondary. You have ambition and desire?

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED You'll at least get a chance.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. I believe in the power of knowledge more than the power of money, in a way. The more you know, the richer you are and the richer your spirit is.

FRED Absolutely.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. So that's my belief. That's the believe that I told my kids.

STAGNARO:

FRED That's very important for music people and for teaching people-- for professors in any field. And musicians-- all musicians.

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED The richness of knowledge and tradition takes you a long way. It's like gold.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. We're very lucky in the profession. This kind of profession, you never stop learning. You know? So it
STAGNARO: refreshes and you always have something new to learn, something new to share-- which keeps you going. And your spirit is happy, everybody's happy.

FRED I've been a big fan of Thelonious Monk my whole life. I've been teaching some of his bio and some of his music in
BOUCHARD: one of my classes. Last night, his biographer, Robin Kelley, gave a lecture here, and he told us stuff about the life of Thelonious Monk that nobody knew, and you would never learn from looking at the jazz books or looking at the movies-- *Straight, No Chaser* or anything else--

OSCAR Right.
STAGNARO:

FRED Amazing.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. Yeah. Lucky that the guy-- somebody was there with him.
STAGNARO:

FRED That's right. He did all the work and now we're the benefit of it.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. Yes. So you know, when I came over here, I was really lucky. I auditioned for a band-- because I brought
STAGNARO: some tapes from Peru. They asked me, hey, do you have any tapes to listen to you? So I brought some tapes.

And then I did an audition-- that was the only audition I had ever done in my life, the first band that I played with, and it was called Fortuna Bay. And they-- actually, Alizon Lissance, that was-- and Danny [Morris] is a Berklee teacher. He was the first bass player that I met here.

FRED Oh, cool.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. And Alison used to be in that band, so when I used to live in North Scituate by South Shore, and then when
STAGNARO: I came to Boston to work, I stayed at Danny's house with Alizon-- with that band. Yeah, so I stayed over and all that. So this guy from Puerto Rico but born in New York, a New York-Rican, he got a gig playing in the Virgin Islands for two months-- one in Saint Croix, one in Saint Thomas. And at that time, I didn't have my papers, you know?

FRED Who was the pianist? I'm sorry.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR The pianist was Alison Lissance. She teaches here at school.
STAGNARO:

FRED Oh, Alison.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Alison. Yes.
STAGNARO:

FRED Right. Of course.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. The leader of the band was Adrian Montejo, and he was a guitar player. And the band goal was-- the band's
STAGNARO: name was Fortuna Bay. All right?

So we went to the Virgin Islands and I asked him, so am I going to have any immigration problems when I come back? He says, "No, this is like a colony or a state with the United States. It's no problem." So for two months, I was very happy, you know?

So the final day when we have to come back-- half of the band decided to stay for three more days and I have to come back. And when we were going to pass immigration, I saw that these guys were requiring passports.

Okay. My passport, I put it in my bag and it went to luggage to the cargo side of the plane. And because I don't look Peruvian in a way-- because my heritage is Italian-- I was very lucky that when they asked us-- they started asking the guys-- Alizon, says, "Are you American?" "Yes." "Are you American?" "Yes." They ask me, "Are you American?" "Yes." And they went on to the plane. So I was very lucky up to that point.

So then we got to stop in New York. So we got there, we were going to deplane, and then we hear by the speakers, says, "Mr. Donny Silverman"-- I remember the sax player-- "Mr. Something, and Mr. Oscar Stagnaro, please go to the door." And then we see they got three FBI guys there, and Donny the sax player was already there.

And they said, you know-- and then they took Alizon, me, and Donny to different rooms, believing because we're coming from the Virgin Islands that we have some drugs or some stuff like that. And by my bad luck, I had a powder talc in one of my bags.

FRED [LAUGHS]

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR And they took me to immigration-- to FBI and say, where is your passport? Say, it's in my bag-- which was true,
STAGNARO: you know? And where is your visa? It's in my bag. And luckily, in that time, they couldn't get the bag when it was in transit from plane to plane. There was a law that they can't touch it, you know?

FRED Right. Right.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Okay. So one of the guys went out to get it-- to get it the bag, you know? And then they stripped me, and then
STAGNARO: they took all this apart, and they say, what is this? Says, man, do you think that there was something else, I would be here? With that, I would be a millionaire-- I told the guy that. [LAUGHS] He got even more upset. I said, "Get the bag!"

So an hour later, the guy come back with no bag, and the guys who started-- then both of them started an argument and says, "Ah..." then they let me go. Yeah.

So I came back here, I pick up my stuff, but I was so paranoid after that. You know, I was looking in the bag-- they found the whole thing for a while. Until I got-- you know, we got married, and then the year after in 1980, I got my citizenship right away. So after that, everything was cool.

But it's funny to think the way things work, you know? I really-- that's why you appreciate when you move to a different country, people that really helped you out, and people are willing to give you a hand. Sometimes here, you don't really have to suffer, or-- yeah. Then when you realize that you-- you say you're at the edge. It's very cool.

FRED So that was a professional association that you cultivated at Berklee with Berklee people.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED What was it like being on the faculty here? A lot of people, especially back in the eighties, were former students
BOUCHARD: who came on the faculty. A guy like Greg Hopkins--

OSCAR Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED Guy like John LaPorta, they were different because they were not Berklee trained.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED You were not Berklee trained.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED What was it like coming into the environment?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Okay So a little bit before that, like starting in the eighties, I started working with people from here-- Kenny
STAGNARO: [inaudible], I sat in with the big band when you have the big band in Marshfield. So I started meeting friends, and then I had a band with people from Berklee. Ed Uribe was already teaching here, I guess. Then John Douglas, Ernesto Diaz-- we have a Latin jazz band.

And then at the same time, I was playing with Janet Grice in Brazilian music--

FRED Sure. Janet, the bassoonist.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. So you start connecting very fast because the bass players are-- we're very fortunate because we're
STAGNARO: always in demand, you know? Especially if you at least can read or play and have a good attitude.

That's why always the definition of a musician, that is a great musician but is still an amateur, or a good musician is a professional. It's matter of it's a package. It's not how well you play, it's how well you are, how on time you are, how much you complain or not complain, how well do you get with our people. What is your participation in the band? There's a lot of--

FRED A lot of factors.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Professional-- that's a very fine line that I decide-- I mean, that you could see musicians that are great, but
STAGNARO: they're not professional, or they are semi-professional only when they want.

But a professional is like a doctor. Cannot make a mistake when he's doing something. So he's a professional, or a guy-- or an architect that is going to build a building, and they got to do it right. This is 100% professional.

The same with musicians. You got to do it right. Doesn't mean that you have to play right, but you have to have the right attitude all the time, you know? And then you make-- you have more gigs, of course. If not, you're history.

That's what they say, you know? The second call is more important than the first call.

FRED Indeed.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED That's right.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Anyway. So I used to play with them, you know, and then I played with Brad Hatfield for a few years.

STAGNARO:

FRED Oh, yeah.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. And then--

STAGNARO:

FRED Wonderful keyboard.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. Yeah, yeah. Great friend also. Great people.

STAGNARO:

FRED Terrific writer.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. Yeah, yeah. And Gay Tolland[?] his wife. So we play for Berklee Christmas parties for, like, four or five years,
STAGNARO: so I made the reach, and then all the whole faculty see me play-- and at that time, I was playing a lot of fusion, I had a lot of effects. So it's a different periods of my Boston career.

But then when John Neves passed away, me and Danny Morris-- Danny and me-- we apply. And then when I came here, this is funny-- I brought out all this, the records-- the vinyl that I record in Peru-- so I brought this with my package-- program, pictures and all this stuff-- so I put it here.

And then I did an interview with Rich Appleman and John Reppucci. I'm talking about 1987. And they said, "Okay, we'll call you next week," you know? And then next day, I ring the phone and they say, Rich, he says, "You want to start teaching this semester?" So the next day they called me up. Yeah. Very cool.

FRED Just like that.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. And I really, you know, again, I appreciate the people that opened the doors, you know? So you have to--
STAGNARO: I'm very thankful for both of them that they give me an opportunity to develop and to grow teaching.

FRED Did you know John Neves?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. Actually, I knew him because I-- yeah, I used to rehearse at school with different players, and I know him,
STAGNARO: you know? And he used to teach here on Saturdays. I walked by--

FRED Yeah.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED I mean, did you have any--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR No.

STAGNARO:

FRED Personal contact with him?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR No. But I know who the guy-- I present myself, yeah. It's a lot of history that all this-- you know, I've been here for
STAGNARO: twenty-eight years-- that different bands, a lot of players, a lot of friends that they went to different countries, which is good in a way because when I go there, I could meet them. I know a lot of people in Puerto Rico, in LA, or Brazil. Yeah, so it's interesting how this works here.

FRED But you coming from South America with your varied background, you, like Mili Bermejo and like Victor Mendoza,
BOUCHARD: you bring something different. How did what you have come out in the way you taught? How was it received? How did you develop it?

OSCAR Yeah. Essentially, what I think is you should never lose your identity. That's one thing, at least to me. I always
STAGNARO: have some Peruvian music that nobody knows-- that those are my cards, you know what I'm saying?

FRED Your ace in the hole?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. So they are there whenever I need him because this stuff that I grew up with, that I learned through
STAGNARO: experience, through watching other people that always I could be used anytime.

But also, I really respect music from all the countries, you know? So I try to learn the repertoire, and the composers, and then the instrument, how do they play, what they play, you know? And then what occasions because the music in Puerto Rico, they only play in Christmas-- the same in Venezuela-- so you really have to understand the cultural side of music, not only the music by itself. What purpose-- dancing, like the band that I have from Peru.

So it really helps to understand the whole picture, not only your bass part. And it really helps in the future how to explain.

So I have a bass player who tell me, oh, you should learn Brazilian music and you should learn this tune, but not the bass. Listen first the melody. So you start learning the melody-- that's first of all. Then you listen harmony, and then the bass is like the support of that.

But you can-- it's hard to go back from the bottom up. For me, it's very easy to remember a melody, then you relate the bass part to it. Because the melody by itself will dictate in many cases the rhythmic vocabulary of the style. You know what I'm saying?

FRED Good point. Absolutely.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR So, [SINGING RHYTHM]-- you know? Against, like, [SINGING RHYTHM], you know? So all these rhythm
STAGNARO: connotations are already there. So you're learning twice as fast with the melody than only the bass line.

FRED What about the lyrics?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. Well, the lyrics in Peru is very important, and it's very funny because we have a Creole music, which is a
STAGNARO: music mix with Spanish and Indian and Black Heritage, that the lyrics are very sad all the time but the key sometimes is major, so it's very ironic how things work. In Argentina, the tangos are always like in minor when it's sad tangos, but in Peru they are mixed, you know?

But the lyrics are very essential. Definitely. And you learn a lot of poetry and a lot of messages through the lyrics. Especially in the tangos-- I don't know if you're familiar with that-- the composers have very deep stuff. The same with Brazilian music-- it's poetry involved. And the same with Peruvian, it's a lot of things that happen to people, or fantasies, you know?

There was a composer-- her name is Chabuca Granda-- that she composed a lot of nice lyrics in waltzes that talks about mountains or when the light went to be a shadow, then the Indian was born-- something like that. Very deep stuff that is very nice to hear. Now I'm appreciating that more than ever. Yeah.

FRED Now that you mention it, most of the tunes or the musical vocabulary from America's popular cycles, both Tin Pan
BOUCHARD: Alley and the rock thing, is about love, romantic love, and sex, and getting stuff, and being one better than the guy next to you.

OSCAR Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED That's a very, very different cultural background. Nothing is dark. Everything is always on the bright side, you
BOUCHARD: know?

OSCAR Yeah, but it's like boleros also. They talk about love a lot. That's what it is, the boleros.
STAGNARO:

FRED Oh, yeah.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Broken loves or happy endings--
STAGNARO:

FRED But that's only one piece.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.
STAGNARO:

FRED There's a lot of other stuff, as you're mentioning.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah, yeah. Oh, yes. Like poetry or fantasy situations. Or how the country could be better, or positive messages.
STAGNARO:

FRED Sure.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah.
STAGNARO:

FRED I mean, I know listening to Luciana Souza, they sing settings of Pablo Neruda.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. Yeah.
STAGNARO:

FRED Or Octavio Paz, or even some other poets, like Elizabeth Bishop. There's a lot running below the surface that we
BOUCHARD: don't necessarily get in a lot of the American mindset.

OSCAR Yeah. There is one composer in Peru-- I know this waltz-- he's called El Plebeyo. I don't know how you translate
STAGNARO: that-- *plebeyo*. It's like a second class citizen?

FRED Like a citizen?
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah, but like a second class citizen.
STAGNARO:

FRED Oh, second class.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. So he's talking about a history that the guy falls in love with a lady from the high society in Peru, and then

STAGNARO: he's trying to get her. And he's singing to himself, and he's saying, God, why-- if we both have red blood, why are we both different? Because supposedly, you are the same-- we are humans. But he's trying to understand the situation, you know? How come I cannot be in love with a person from different heights--

FRED Difference castes in society. Yeah. Wow.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Because we are all the same. We have the same blood. It's very-- that's around 1920s waltz. And at that time, it

STAGNARO: was very marked the difference-- the economic-- or the social status in Peru. We don't have racial discrimination, we have status economic discrimination.

FRED Yeah. I don't know if that's creeping into this society or not--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Oh.

STAGNARO:

FRED You know? But the haves and have nots are getting further and further apart, I think.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR That's why music is good.

STAGNARO:

FRED Yeah. That's right.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Make everybody happy.

STAGNARO:

FRED Yeah. Well, a levelling influence. We should talk a little bit about some of your associations with people who are

BOUCHARD: really famous and wonderful, like Mr. D'Rivera.

OSCAR Paquito? Yeah. The way that I got into Paquito's band was very casual. I recorded with Victor one time-- Victor

STAGNARO: Mendoza-- in one of his albums, and he got Paquito as our guest. But before that, I was playing with Janet Grice and Jonathan Swifts-- I don't know if you remember that club--

FRED I do.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR We used to open up for Tania Maria or Airto[?] or Paquito, and I got to meet Lincoln Goines, bass player--

STAGNARO:

FRED Sure.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR In one of those nights, you know?

STAGNARO:

FRED Terrific.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. Great guy. Oh, yeah. So he came to my house, we play, and so on, a few things. Then after two years, he
STAGNARO: called me up, says, "Man, do you want to do a session-- I mean, "Suffer Me" at a regatta bar?" I'm talking about 1989 or something. And he said, "Sure, yes, who's the band?" "Oh, Paquito's band." And Akira Tana was playing, and then Claudio, and then Danilo was already in that band. That was one of Danilo's-- first Danilo's gigs.

So I came-- I prepared, you know? Said, "Paquito, what are the charts?" He says, "There is no charts." "What do you mean there's no charts?" But I know his music, you know, because I already played it. I already transcribed the stuff and I was prepared. I was waiting for him.

Yeah, he's just like, okay, let's play. We start playing. Two tunes and he calls off the rehearsal, you know? I said, "Paquito, what's going on?" He says, "[SMACKS LIPS] You know the tunes. Welcome to the Mafia," you know? And then he gave me a jacket that I used to have, and that was it. "Welcome to the Mafia." That was the welcome. After that--

FRED What did he mean?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Welcome to the musical mafia.

STAGNARO:

FRED Ah.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR You know? But welcome to the Cuban mafia. Because that's slang for a group.

STAGNARO:

He doesn't hire many people that have a different mind, you know? You have to have an open mind. Not restricted to play one style.

FRED But he said-- you said, you don't know the tunes? Or you do?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR No. You know the tunes, we don't need--

STAGNARO:

FRED Oh, you do know the tunes.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. You know the tunes, we don't need to rehearse. And I was like, come on, the gig is tonight, man. I don't--
STAGNARO: you know? He said, "Welcome to the mafia," and that was it.

FRED I got it. I'm sorry. I didn't hear part of it.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR So since then, I started working with him. He's like 18 or years or so.

STAGNARO:

FRED Wow.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Many, many occasions, many anecdotes, and great situations. Very happy.

STAGNARO:

FRED What-- where have you been with him? What have you done?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Oh... man. We've been all over. We used to do gigs-- like, we don't tour as much anymore, but in like '95, we play like five weeks or four weeks tours. One time we did East Germany, a few gigs in East Germany, going by train like nine hours, playing one night-- all one nighters-- then getting up. Go to bed 2:00 AM, waking up at 6:00, taking another train, and going-- it's like, I don't-- but I always had a good experience.

STAGNARO:

We usually find out, even though we were very cranky after the nine hour trips, as soon as we start playing, I mean, music took over and the magic came through. It's very weird. And I would talk to Paquito, man, what happened? We were all smiling. We were like tired, no food, nothing, and smiling. It's like something is wrong here. Yeah.

FRED It's great to be around somebody who is always on, who's always upbeat, and pretty cheerful.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. What I admire of him is he always gives guys in the band an opportunity to grow. Unlike many other bands that the leader is the only guy there, he always gives you-- to bring some tunes, to come up with arrangements, to give you ideas. He's very open to any--

STAGNARO:

FRED Really democratic.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED That's true.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. Very democratic. And always leaning to open up and give music from all the countries involved with Latin jazz.

STAGNARO:

I mean, jazz is the only music that I think is a bridge to all of the styles. You cannot mix [inaudible] from Lima with mambo-- it don't fit, you know? Because it's two strong cultures, and rhythmically, they have their own identity super strong. But by jazz, harmony, and improvisation, then you could link them. Yes, change the rhythms, you know? But you use a jazz concept.

Because in Latin music, as you know, it's like-- from top to end, it's like one volume, one way, you know? And the same with Brazilian. But don't break it up. The jazz concept is like, you listen what's going on and like democracy, it comes to be a part of the same situation-- of the musical situation, so everybody speaks. Not at the same time-

FRED It's sort of like-- it's a real Pan American thing. And that shows up-- it showed up in Dave Samuel's band--
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah, the Caribbean.
STAGNARO:

FRED Caribbean Jazz Project.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah.
STAGNARO:

FRED And you have a pan player, and you're drawing music from--you know, Dario's playing Argentine...
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. So that was one of the best mixes that we went through because Andy brought all the Calypso and soca
STAGNARO: and all the stuff. Then Dave, a lot of it is the jazz that he knows-- Paquito, his stuff. Then from Peru, then-- I mean, Dario, so we had a whole mixture of things. It was a great experience.

FRED Yeah. It still wears well.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah, yeah. I believe it's already twelve, thirteen years. Yeah.
STAGNARO:

FRED Coming from your background in coming to this school, what were some of the biggest challenges you faced as a
BOUCHARD: teacher teaching what you know to a bunch of kids who maybe only grow up with a little rock and roll or didn't have much exposure to world cultures? How do you open the door for these kids?

OSCAR Yeah. Well, since I started teaching-- at the time that I was teaching, I was playing a lot of fusion here with trio of
STAGNARO: Bruce Bartlett, and-- Ryles, we did, like, for two years every Tuesday night. So I had a lot of people that came to work knowing me because I was playing fusion.

FRED Oh, great. Okay.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR So that opened the door.
STAGNARO:

FRED I forgot about that. Where? Ryles?
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah, yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED Oh, okay.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR So that opened the door to do a lot of slap and all these pyrotechnic stuff. You know? That is impressive. But then

STAGNARO: I have students that came through.

But there was a Berklee teacher, Irving Cancel, in that time that he was teaching some Latin course-- or Latin lab-- and then he quit-- he went to Puerto Rico-- and Rich asked me-- my first audition, when I came to Berklee, I'm not going to teach Latin music because I know it, you know? I said, "I want to teach slap, I want to teach all the stuff."

But then he felt the need at the program to have a Latin musical opportunity for people to learn. He said, "What about if you take that course and start teaching?" So I started transcribing stuff to be prepared for that.

But I know how to play it. I know how to explain it, like many people. So for what I thought was the beginning level for any player, it was not that. The beginning level for me was here and the beginning player level's here, you know? So I have to slowly bring it down, bring it down, bring it down, until I hit right the spot that we should be taught at the beginning. So through school, I learn how to teach that.

And then there was the principal steps when I started writing the book, because I already tried the material.

FRED How did you learn? By trial and error, or by watching other teachers?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR By watching the kids' difficulty. Each week, I was simplifying the material and try to come up with ideas--

STAGNARO:

FRED Break it down into components so they could pick up one at a time.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. So for me, the anticipation of bass line is not a problem, but for many people, they have no idea. So I started breaking it down-- okay, let's simplify this. Let's simplify that. Let's simplify that. And then you start, and you come to where it begins.

But no, I don't think there is any book that teaches you that-- until I came out with a book-- that teaches this is the way you should approach this music-- by rhythm first. Especially the bass part. Then you grow up, you have variations and all-- so you have, I call it, a rhythmic flexibility-- how to move around the beat. So after that, then I found it, you know, where to start.

In spite of the concept, first of all, it's not how complicated this is, it's where is the concept. When I started with Jerry Bergonzi, for example, I wanted to know what licks he played, I wanted to know how he developed the concept of studying-- because how do you study Coltrane? Or how do you study McCoy? Oh, learn the pentatonics. Yeah, but how? What rhythms do you use?

And the concept was very simple. You take one bar at a time and run it through the cycle or whatever, and then start with triads-- so he has a system that is perfect. So through that, I could learn to improvise anything.

FRED The system that he taught you for learning--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Like for example, try to-- giant steps. How do you--

STAGNARO:

FRED Yeah, okay.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR So you take one lick-- transcribe one bar of Coltrane, learn it, and then play the whole tune with one idea. Then

STAGNARO: two, then three-- have ten variations, for example, and then write your own.

FRED Okay.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. So then when you know how it works, then you write your own because you cannot always copy. You have

STAGNARO: to be creative.

FRED Cool. So then you took that and you said, okay, I'll apply this to kind of a modular theory of the bass instruction?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. To anything that you want to learn, you have to have the concept first. It's like the ideas for, like, the Volkswagen, what was the idea behind the Volkswagen when they created it? We need a car that doesn't need water because we have to go-- these wars in the Egyptian-- in the Sahara, so all the cars are breaking down because they run out of water. So the Germans came like, oh, let's build up a car that doesn't use water. So this is a concept of what to create. You know what I mean?

FRED Sure.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. So then when you create, like in this case, the bass course, you have to create a concept. How are you going to start teaching that? What is the beginning of it? How to approach it? How to explain it? What tunes to recommend? What parts are necessary for a student to learn? What rhythms? So you then break it up in ten rhythms, twelve rhythms, a simple harmony.

And through blues-- everybody knows the blues, supposedly, then it's very easy to relate and not to worry about the harmony, so you just worry about the rhythm. So that's-- one, somebody can play a blues in any style, it means that he's already familiar with a little sense of the rhythmic vocabulary of that style. Then he could move on to learning different harmony of the same style.

FRED Okay. So once you figured out that, your teaching job became a little easier?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Not really, because then I wanted to do-- this is a period that I went through that you become to be responsible
STAGNARO: for the student's homework. It's very weird the way it works because you want him to succeed, so you start doing his homework instead of him doing the homework, you know what I mean?

So I learned that after five years, okay, this is it. I help you out, but when you do the exam, you are they one to do the exam, not me, you know? So I was playing the examples and all, and the class was me playing but not the student.

FRED Oh, yeah.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR You know what I mean? So then I said, okay, that's it.

STAGNARO:

FRED It can't be just a performance.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR No. And I said-- after that, I said, "Okay this is the homework. Next week, I want you to come with that."

STAGNARO:

FRED Yeah. Give them the tools and let them figure it out.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. By playing, I thought I was helping him out, but he was just-- it was like a clinic for him, but he wasn't not doing it horrible[?]. Said, man, you sounded great. I said, "Next week, same problem." He didn't get it solved[?].
STAGNARO: So then in class, now they do it.

FRED Do you have mostly private lessons? Or do you get some ensembles mixed in?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. I have four labs-- like sight reading, then repertoire-- like Cuban repertoire for Cuban-- then style. So those are three, and then one Brazilian.

STAGNARO:

And then I created one, which is a-- we call it the Latin Jazz Masters. It's all the bass players from Cachao, Bobby Rodriguez, Alma Kivon[?]. A few-- twenty-five players in a course.

FRED Nice. So they listen to performances of each?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR DVDs. Yeah, DVDs and performances. And I have transcriptions, history.

STAGNARO:

FRED That's a lot of work.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED That's one semester?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. I write for a magazine, like I told you, like *Musica Pro*. It's in Spanish. So I did first, like, ten Cuban rhythms--
STAGNARO: like history and little explanation. Then I did bass players. So I already done like twenty-five of them. So that magazine article helped me out to develop the course.

FRED Brilliant.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. It's very weird. So in the future, it will have an encyclopedia of this material.

STAGNARO:

FRED So you're--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. I'm compiling stuff because generally the books, they don't have-- they have a history, they have pictures,
STAGNARO: but they don't have any music written. So it is not-- it's not complete. They're like-- these are dictionary of Latin jazz, we have the list of the CDs. He played here, he played there, but there is no examples of the guy playing.

FRED Who are the most important guys in your estimation in the history of Latin bass development?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR For example, if you go back and you analyze when the bass was involved in Cuban music, Brazilian music, or
STAGNARO: Argentinan music, you see the difference in the years. Like, in Cuba, they start incorporating the acoustic bass in the 1910, 1920s.

FRED They would take it directly out of a string quartet or string orchestra.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Through the sonnets. The Danzon is a rhythm in Cuba that was created in 1891, but it was played by a marching
STAGNARO: band. When the Danzon moves from the plazas through the ballrooms, then they orchestrate the different parts of the ensemble with strings and wooden flutes and all that stuff, and then the acoustic bass come to take a part on it.

Then after Danzon comes the song[?] which also the acoustic bass-- I'm talking about 1910, 1920. If you see in Argentina and if you see in Brazil, the bass was not a part of the folkloric music-- I mean, I'm talking about popular music-- until thirties or forties.

FRED Why the delay?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Because in Brazilian music, the chorino [Choro] was popular in the thirties and forties.

STAGNARO:

FRED So it was a different form and different role for that music.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR And the classical music-- of course, they have it in classical music, but it was not incorporated until probably the
STAGNARO: Bossa Nova or a little bit before that. You know? '40s--

FRED They'd have a little in the chorinos, perhaps?
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR No. The chorino doesn't use bass. No, they use the seven string guitar.
STAGNARO:

FRED Ah, okay, okay.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR But it comes because in the Second World War Two, those are like an American Air Force base in Sao Paolo, I
STAGNARO: guess, that they brought the big band there, you know? So they have Glenn Miller and they have Cole Porter--
that's why the bossa nova grew out of that. Yeah, that's what you hear the close relation with standards, jazz
standards, and Jobim tunes. So that's why samba's like, take the a-train. You know what I mean?

So they have this very close harmony because they copied-- or they-- I mean, they were influenced-- I don't want
to say they copied--

FRED Influenced.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Influenced by the composers.
STAGNARO:

FRED Oh, I didn't know the Americans put it that way.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR And that was funny because the United States asked Argentina and Brazil to have a base in each country, and
STAGNARO: Argentina didn't accept it but Brazil did. And then you see the evolution of the music.

FRED Wow.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah.
STAGNARO:

FRED Because the Argentines have their own classical traditions, and those have grown into the tango.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. But you see, the harmony is very different--
STAGNARO:

FRED Very different.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR From the bossa nova.
STAGNARO:

FRED Very different.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR If you analyze--

STAGNARO:

FRED Old fashioned and rigid, or symphonic, or something.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah, more classical. Yeah. But if you analyze all the countries in Latin America, the closest to jazz standards are the bossa novas.

STAGNARO:

FRED Sure.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR That's why.

STAGNARO:

FRED That's why Stan Getz and Charlie Byrd went crazy--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah, because they feel at home. They feel at home. Yeah, harmonically they say, oh, this fits all what we play.

STAGNARO: It's just a different rhythm.

But then going back to that, the tango-- for example, the tango at first was only guitars, you know? Then I think 1930s, then they start putting the tango, typical orchestra, with five bandoneons and violins. And the acoustic then was there.

So the most influential guy in Latin bass-- if you want to say Latin American bass is Cachao out. One of the first ones to take the development of the bass to another level. In Cuba, the evolution of the bass was first like the Botija. It's like a big container they used to bring the olive oil. So they play-- it has two tones, you know? Like, [BLOWING AIR]. And it's like the bass player was only playing one key all the time.

FRED [SINGING RHYTHM]

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah, yeah. It's like a big hoodoo, but with sound. And then the marimbula, which is still used in Cuba in some parts, and they use it in Jamaica in the mental music-- so it's like a big box that has like five metal pieces, and they have-- it's a pentatonic scale.

FRED Not a cajón?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR It's like a big cajón. Yeah. It's like a big kalimba.

STAGNARO:

FRED Oh, wow.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. Big kalimba. So they play like that. But he also, he played only one key, in two keys.

STAGNARO:

So that's why the musicians were not accomplices. They sent it to play the bass. It's oh, go play the marimbula, you know? You can't play anything else, go play that-- until the acoustic bass takes a part in Cuban music. Then it started development.

So if you see that, then you see the evolution of the bass. Then you see the influence of the bass tumbao in all Latin America through that music because Cuban music is probably the one that would travel through Latin America very fast. In the thirties, we have Cuban musicians in Peru, in Chile, and Argentina because there was the music-- the popular music that was here in the radio and was probably one of the first traveling bands. Like Lecuona-- you know Ernesto Lecuona?

FRED Sure.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. He used to have a band called Lecuona Cuban Boys, and they used to travel. They play all this stuff that you could hear.

STAGNARO:

FRED There were even-- the Cuban music was hugely popular in the U.S.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED And because of some of the early things--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Recordings, yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED That went on with--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR RCA record a lot of the Cuban musicians there.

STAGNARO:

FRED There was even a women's group, Anacaona.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Anacaona, yes. Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED They were big for a while.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED Go to Paris. They go all over.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR So it's interesting to me how the development is-- the bass? Now I understand and I could explain better when
STAGNARO: somebody say, how to play this style? Well, how to play this style? You got to go back to listen how they play their music in 1920s to understand how the development is. You cannot just learn here.

Like for me, when I started learning how Chick Corea or Sonny Clark plays, I liked it a lot. I said, "I want to play like that." But you have to remember, or analyze how he learned how to play like that. Who did he listen, you know? So then you have a better understanding how to start.

FRED How did Chick--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR You know, Chick was a percussionist. He played with Mongo Santamaria.

STAGNARO:

FRED That's right. That's right.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Well, he was seventeen or eighteen, so they played Latin music. But then he listened to Art Tatum and Bud

STAGNARO: Powell and-- you know, so it's not--

FRED And Monk.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR And Monk. So it's not like, oh, he-- he's nobody. Like, a fifteen-year-old without studying anything, he's going to
STAGNARO: play it like that. Maybe Mozart, so.

FRED Yeah. Some other influences are coming in. Maybe Al Di Meola[?] is listening to flamenco.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah, yeah, yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED Probably.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR But in general, you have to analyze how did they get there? Not just copy this stuff.

STAGNARO:

FRED Right.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR So you are-- you--

STAGNARO:

FRED If you know what their path was, you can make yours shorter.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. And then you have a better grasp on how to develop your own style, not only copy them. It's good to copy
STAGNARO: them, but to analyze the concept-- again, how did they-- because not all the stuff that they learned, they use it. They shape it in a way that they want to shape it this way. Even though they could play traditional, he doesn't play traditional, maybe, but he could play it.

I saw once a Eddie Gomez clinic and he could be like Paul Chambers, but when he's solo, he doesn't play like that.

FRED No.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR He plays like Eddie Gomez. That's the next step. Once you know all this stuff to have your own-- still your own
STAGNARO: voice, and don't lose your identity. That's always the challenge.

FRED Yeah. And it becomes more and more valuable. As you get older, you want to find your own thing more, you take
BOUCHARD: more of those little Peruvian cards out of--

OSCAR Of course.
STAGNARO:

FRED Your shirt.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. Of course. But for example, when I do some clinics and I play like 6/8, you know, one time Harvie Swartz he
STAGNARO: was watching the clinic, and I said, "Man, what were you playing there? A 6/8?" Because he never heard. I was playing Peruvian stuff and he never heard that. He says, "Man, that's weird. What were you playing?" And I couldn't play. I got lost. Said, "Yeah, I'll show you someday, you know?" But I can't do it. That's under the rug.

FRED With a lot of people that I've talked to in this series, faculty or nonfaculty, they were involved in the local jazz
BOUCHARD: scene. When you got here in the eighties, there was already a burgeoning Latin jazz scene-- and you already mentioned a couple of people that you work with. Maybe we could talk a little bit more about that because I think that might be really interesting to people who don't know.

OSCAR Yeah. Actually, it was a lot of movement and nice atmosphere for Latin people. At that time, Latin bands, there
STAGNARO: were a few dance bands and they were a few Latin jazz bands. One of them was Elegua[?] and it was confirmed from-- Ray Monteiro[?] was a Dominican trumpet player, and then another guys-- I don't remember the names-- I believe it was a piano-- the drummer, and John Douglas, the piano player. It was like a quintet-- I mean, five horns with a rhythm section. And we played at the 1369 in Cambridge in Inman Square for many, like two or three years.

FRED Across the street from Ryles, for those who don't know.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Then that was one of the bands. Then I played with-- La Tropica was another band with Edgar Nevarez. I subbed
STAGNARO: for them. Then I played with Janet Grice-- so it was a Brazilian band that I played with.

FRED Who was in that band besides you?
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Man. Tomas San Miguel was a piano player from Spain, and then-- man. I don't remember who-- many drummers.
STAGNARO: Jun Saito, who's a Japanese guy.

FRED Janet was an American who played bassoon, but she was flipping over Brazilian music. And she was at the
BOUCHARD: conservatory?

OSCAR Yeah.
STAGNARO:

Yeah. Then she moved to New York. And then-- what I say? I play with this band in Lima, we used to open for Johnny Ventura, Cuco Valoy[?] There used to be a lot of bands that come here in the early eighties to play.

FRED These would be traditional dance bands, and the people would turn out in big, big numbers, like Roseland or the
BOUCHARD: Totem Pole-- hundreds of Latino couples would come in and dance.

OSCAR Yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't see that-- that's something missing these days in Boston.
STAGNARO:

FRED Yeah.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah, the vibe of that. And of course, around the Berklee area used to be like four or five jazz clubs, so it was a
STAGNARO: lot of movement here. You know Pooh's Pub, Michaels?

FRED Yes.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah.
STAGNARO:

FRED And there would always-- there would frequently be a Latin component in the scene. There was even a disco on
BOUCHARD: Commonwealth Avenue called Orozco Po where a lot of electric salsa bands would play.

OSCAR Yeah. Then I started with Mili Bermejo. We played with his band with Gary Chaffey, Bert Seager. Then with Victor
STAGNARO: Mendoza, I played with him for a while.

FRED Now they have both two Mexican people who are on the faculty.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.
STAGNARO:

FRED And they have their own very distinct styles.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.
STAGNARO:

FRED And Victor models himself after Tito Puentes, Malik--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Cal Tjader.

STAGNARO:

FRED [And Tjader. Mili [Bermejo], I don't know who she models herself on.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Well, [INAUDIBLE] salsa mixed with Sarah Vaughan, Leny Andrade[?] because she sings a lot of Brazilian stuff
STAGNARO: also.

FRED Oh, that's true. That's true. And they're both on the faculty. You're on the faculty.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes.

STAGNARO:

FRED Let's talk a little bit about the ALF.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Oh, yeah. The ALF is some idea that came up with when I asked one of my colleagues, you know-- I said, "You
STAGNARO: know how many Latin teachers are we at Berklee?" She says no. And then I asked one student, a Latin student, said, "You know how many Latin students are at Berklee?" She said no. Nobody has any idea. It seems like--

FRED No numbers.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR No. It's like Latin America. Everything is great but nobody knows what's going on.

STAGNARO:

So I got together with these guys, Peter Alhadeff, for the business, and then I proposed Jane Segovia to do a presentation for Latin Week of 2006 about what's going on in Berklee, what are the courses-- Latin courses, how many people is teaching, and what are they teaching?

So we found out it was a few departments that should have Latin teachers, you know? But--

FRED Fernando Brandão?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. But they were a couple of departments that still we need help there because in the ensembles that I teach,
STAGNARO: sometimes a guy comes in and they can't-- doesn't know how to play, doesn't have any help from the department because there is nobody there to teach that styles. So there's no-- there is no phrasing, there is no repertoire, there is nothing there, so we have to start from scratch.

So with that in mind, we have a little conference, if you want to call it that way, to talk about what do we need as a faculty to be together. So five people came to the meeting from the faculty, and only one student and five administrators, so that was the great part. I think Tom Riley was there, and then Larry Bethune, a lot of-- So they saw the conference and they were there. And we talked-- sometimes not in a nice way-- or what we felt was missing.

So after that, I talked to Peter-- we have to reunite, you know? And then he sent an email-- we identified the members of Hispanic Heritage that teach at school, and we found twenty people. Twenty people. So we sent emails to get together this association, and then we came to a statement-- called a mission statement?

FRED Yeah.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR And then we formed off in 2006-- in November 2006-- right before Cachao's tribute concert that we did here. And
STAGNARO: now we have a web page.

FRED And there's a Latin week every week? Every year?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Every year in November. Actually, I wanted to have-- instead of one week, I proposed to have it in three weeks so
STAGNARO: it would be better not to concentrate four big concerts and we are competing with ourselves to try to get people there instead of doing it each week.

So we formed this association, and then we are now twenty people, and then we have one meeting a month to see what's going on, to help each other out, to see what are the projects for the year. And then we're very closely working with the students now, so they have their own club.

So now our goal is every clinic that any Latin player or Latin clinician is coming here, to have a pact. That was the case. The last events that we had, they were packed because we make publicity among ourselves, and there's a lot of people that came.

Also, we put together a band that went to the Latin Grammys last year. I came up with the idea of the confirmation of the group, like sort of half classical, half pop.

FRED Oh, yeah.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR And they went to the Grammys and they performed great. And also, I produced Rosa Passos show last November
STAGNARO: also.

FRED Yeah, that was great.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. So you have the opportunity to help out a lot. And I mean, there is no way to do it. We have to work as a
STAGNARO: team. And one people, it's like, no, it doesn't work.

You got to get involvement of everybody.

FRED Who else is involved? There's Leo Blanco? Eguie Castrillo?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Eguie's not involved.

STAGNARO:

FRED He's not?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR No. Bernardo Hernandez, Victor {Mendoza}, then Leo [Blaco], then Peter [Alhadeff], then Consuelo [Candelaria-Barry] has come. Then from Alejandro Rodriguez-- he's an engineer from Cuba-- he's teaching in the MP&E [Music Production and Engineering].

And then even there was a lady that used to be the conductor for the Peruvian Symphony Orchestra that teaches here at school. I didn't know.

FRED Wow.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. So after three years, I finally met her. I couldn't believe it, you know? She was here for three years, I never met her.

STAGNARO:

FRED I heard that that Peruvian kid did a great job at Symphony Hall. They had some young Peruvian--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Oh, really?

STAGNARO:

FRED Group?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED Was it the Peruvian--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Venezuelan, probably?

STAGNARO:

FRED Venezuelan?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah, yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED Sorry.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. The Orquesta Juvenil[?] in Venezuela. Yeah, those are-- they are great. Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED And you get some heavy hitters around town-- like Osvaldo Golijov lives in Brookline and he's got a lot of big works coming at Symphony. He did a couple of big things for Yo Yo Ma.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Wow.

STAGNARO:

FRED They premiered two works of his earlier this year. That's good for the Hispanic vibe in general.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. So I think Berklee has the value that this incorporating all these cultures together. But also, we have to find who we are and then work as a team.

STAGNARO:

FRED Sure.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Because if not, doesn't matter. Berklee gives you opportunity, but you don't do anything.

STAGNARO:

FRED You get lost in the shuffle.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. So we found out that there are like forty-five Latin related courses that are being taught at school. So eventually, hopefully sooner than two years, we could have a Latin Studies minor or track to concentrate all those courses in one direction.

STAGNARO:

FRED The woman who teaches Spanish, Deborah Bennett, is opening up a Spanish 3 and 4 course this fall. I am going to step in and get some literature down. I think she's a very dynamic teacher.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. Oh, excellent. Excellent. Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED Some people might want to slide in that way, get the language thing going.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR If the students know about it, probably they will. Sometimes the information gets lost because it's too much information around school.

STAGNARO:

FRED You heard it from me.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. [LAUGHS] Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED No, two new courses in the fall. I've got to figure out when I think I can handle the workload. Well, I'm sure, you know? I mean, Spanish is beautiful language.

BOUCHARD:

FRED Yes, it is.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR And it's easy to learn. There's one pronunciation for each vowel, not a problem.

STAGNARO:

FRED Easier than French and Italian--

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yes. Yeah, yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED When you come right down to it.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR But besides, you could communicate with three more times of amount of people than the Italian, probably.

STAGNARO:

FRED More.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED Yeah.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR So you know, there's a lot of potential here at school to get it together, because I don't think any other school is

STAGNARO: teaching what we do here.

FRED No, no.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Ensembles or concerts or courses. The variety of and quality of teachers is very essential for school. Super

STAGNARO: important.

FRED Who are some of your favorite or most famous students?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Famous students? Wow, I don't know.

STAGNARO:

FRED You've been here quite a while. Some of the guys that have come out and done good things, going back to their

BOUCHARD: countries and started new programs or anything like that?

OSCAR Yeah. In Ecuador, this one guy, Esteban Molina--

STAGNARO:

FRED Who?
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Esteban Molina. He's a flute player, they have--
STAGNARO:

FRED Molina?
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Molina, yeah.
STAGNARO:

FRED I have an Anna Molina. Is she his kid sister?
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR I don't know. Maybe. She's from Ecuador?
STAGNARO:

FRED She's from Quito.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Oh, maybe that's who.
STAGNARO:

FRED Anna Molina.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah.
STAGNARO:

FRED Cute little brunette.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Maybe. I'm not sure. Yeah.
STAGNARO:

FRED I'll find out.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. And then a few guys studied with me, like the teacher at school, Fernando Wargo is one of them.
STAGNARO:

FRED Sure.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. Then in my ensembles, I've been like Leo Blanco, you know? Rebecca Klein, I know her from Puerto Rico that-- I'm teaching at Puerto Rico like every year since-- I mean, for like 14 years, so most of the kids that come from Puerto Rico, they went through this school.
STAGNARO:

FRED Some great people came through. Miguel Zeron?

BOUCHARD:

FRED Yes. Yeah, Miguel Zeron. Yeah.

BOUCHARD:

FRED And who else?

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR STAGNARO: Tony Scarpa. You know, he's a drummer that played with Ultima Ola, and then also-- what's his name? The pop singer that-- Ricky Martin. He plays with him.

There is a lot of guys that they are playing in different pop scene in the States. One guy-- what's his name? Cuevas-- Fausto Cuevas, that he's playing with percussion with Stevie Wonder. So there are a lot of kids that they are doing great.

FRED Great.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR STAGNARO: And that's a good thing about Berklee, that they teach you somehow values that they don't realize it until they get out of school-- to respect the stuff that they do, to keep their identity, to keep the direction of their career so they don't lose it.

FRED Yeah. And always to stay original. Stay true to yourself.

BOUCHARD:

FRED BOUCHARD: Yes. That's very important. You got to be true what you learn, and you have to share it also. If you don't share this thing, it's like, what's the point? When you pass away, you're not going to take the information with you.

Herb Pomeroy is one of the examples. He shared his knowledge with so many people. That's why so many people is grateful with him also.

FRED And however many people you tell, they're all going to do something different with it.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah.

STAGNARO:

FRED They're not going to copy you, they'll do something crazy, and it'll be nice.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR STAGNARO: Yeah. We all have different ways of expressing, and that's the advantage. That's what we keep refreshing. And here, it's great. We meet people from all over the world. Very lucky to be here.

FRED BOUCHARD: I think maybe we've come to a good point here. I know you've got another interview this afternoon with the Boston Neighborhood Network.

OSCAR Yes. It's BNN. Yeah, it's a Spanish cable program that I'm going to present a band that my son co-leads with
STAGNARO: another guy, Kalani Trinidad, that he's a full scholarship-- presidential scholarship at school. He's one of the only guys from the program from Puerto Rico. And they lead these bands, like Latin jazz band, that they're going to be representing Berklee a few events this year-- one in Monterrey and then one in the Duke Ellington Festival in October. So slowly, we're getting these kids to move along.

FRED And speaking of Latinos in communication, we shouldn't forget Jose Masso--
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Of course.
STAGNARO:

FRED He's been around for twenty plus years, and he's been promoting Latin jazz and the concerts, and emceeing all
BOUCHARD: the time.

OSCAR Yeah. He gives great opportunities to all the music from here. And he comes here quite often to emcee the
STAGNARO: festival, the Latin cultural festival.

Yeah.

FRED And then there's Villa Vitoria, Alex Alvarez[?]
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR All the time.
STAGNARO:

FRED The IBA.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. There was La Plaza also.
STAGNARO:

FRED La Plaza.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR PBS, they help out a lot.
STAGNARO:

FRED They sure do.
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. Danilo's band was one of the first ones to play there.
STAGNARO:

FRED Whose?
BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Danilo Perez' band.

STAGNARO:

FRED Sure.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Yeah. With Natasha Stevens[?], she gave him the opportunity, you know? And the bad was-- Garcon was in the
STAGNARO: band, Giovanni, Hidalgo, you know Diego Urcola it was a great band.

FRED It was indeed. Yeah.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR So, you know, time flies when we're going up, I guess. Yeah. [LAUGHS]

STAGNARO:

FRED Oscar, thanks a lot.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Oh, a pleasure!

STAGNARO:

FRED This was great.

BOUCHARD:

OSCAR Thanks for having me here.

STAGNARO: