

RALPH ROSEN: Well I'd just like to say how honored we are to be in Phil Wilson's office, our first time being here, and this is part of our little series of doing interviews with some of the wonderful teachers, musicians around the Berklee College of Music. So I just wanted to say how happy we are to be here, Phil.

PHIL WILSON: It's nice to be here.

RALPH ROSEN: You're here a lot.

PHIL WILSON: I've been here thirty-five years, just sitting in this very chair.

RALPH ROSEN: We were just talking just while Yamil was setting up the equipment, you're originally a local?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, I was born out in Belmont, Massachusetts. My background has no musicians in it, it's all mostly teachers in the Ivy League prep schools. The Belmont Hill School out in Belmont, Mass--actually the first principal of Belmont Hill School was my mother's father, my grandfather. And that's where I was born. And then I have three sisters and we were a large family in 1937, when I was born. And we moved from Belmont, the Belmont Hill School where I was born, to the Phillips Exeter Academy in 1941, 1942 I guess it was. It was after the war began. So I was really raised up in New Hampshire in Exeter.

RALPH ROSEN: At the school?

PHIL WILSON: Yes, at the school. And basically I'm a rural type of person. I'm very comfortable out in the country, less so in the city.

RALPH ROSEN: And you deal with the city?

PHIL WILSON: Well, you have to because of my work, so that's the way it is. So I was raised up in Exeter and I went through Phillips Exeter, I was fortunate enough to be able to go through Phillips Exeter. It was a wonderful, wonderful education. And I stayed there until I was eighteen years old, when I was accepted into the Conservatory as a trombone major. And I stayed there for two years.

RALPH ROSEN: Your first instrument was actually piano, you were saying?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, since I was four years old. You know, first with the fists and then picking out triads from church hymns. Of course we were here--at the King's Chapel is where we used to go to church, the family went to church. And I'd pick out these triads and after a while, it was not long at all before I started improvising melodies because that was a strength of mine from the very beginning. I started taking lessons when we moved up to Exeter when I was five. And I took piano lessons until I was ten years old, where a very wise woman who was my teacher discovered I had a reading disability which later became known as dyslexia, of which I have a mild case of dyslexia. And she could see that I couldn't pick up big blocks of notes quickly, and so she suggested to my mother that I take a single line instrument. And what I really wanted to play was the trumpet because I love Louis Armstrong and Roy Eldridge and Becks Bitaback[?], people like that. But we couldn't afford one at the time and there was a trombone in the loft of the Phillips church, so I became a trombonist at that point. I got my trombone on Christmas Eve that year and went out and played a carol song immediately.

RALPH ROSEN: Not even...

PHIL WILSON: I'm still alive, so it must have been okay.

RALPH ROSEN: You got through your first gig with no problem, with like that was your first time, just about the first time you played the horn?

PHIL WILSON: Very close.

RALPH ROSEN: Wow.

PHIL WILSON: It was interesting, I lived in a dormitory for the first eighteen years of my life because in the Belmont Hill School where I was born, dad was a headmaster of a dorm, a small dorm, but nevertheless a dorm. We moved to Exeter, he was master of a very large dorm, it was sixty-four freshman every year coming in. Yeah it's another way of looking at life you know. It was a large apartment, it was lovely, it was very comfortable. And then the basement of that dormitory, some wealthy young man left a set of drums which stayed in the basement and nobody claimed it in ten years, so guess who gets them? When I was nine years old I had my first set of drums and I used to sit up there and practice to Buddy Rich playing with Tommy Dorsey's band. And actually I'm a fair drummer for about three minutes.

RALPH ROSEN: Were you listening to Tom, when you listened to the Buddy Rich things at this point, were they 78s?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, oh yeah, of course they were.

RALPH ROSEN: They would have to be because this was the forties.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah this would be nineteen if I was nine, it would be 1946.

RALPH ROSEN: You were practicing along with the 78s?

PHIL WILSON: And I also started writing for a bunch of junior high school folks, just simple pop songs of the day. And we had in my living room, we would rehearse, and among the niceties of the group were these five young ladies from junior high school playing clarinets into metal waste baskets so they would sound more like a saxophone.

RALPH ROSEN: Who's idea was that? Was that your idea?

PHIL WILSON: That was my idea.

RALPH ROSEN: That was your idea.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah.

RALPH ROSEN: How'd it work?

PHIL WILSON: Terrible.

RALPH ROSEN: They didn't sound exactly like Ellington?

PHIL WILSON: No, no. Glenn Miller was what I was into. You know, when the end of a semester at a prep school in those days--and still I'm sure it goes on today--ends, everybody leaves these dormitories. Well, in those days the student body was about 800. And the faculty brats, of which I was one, would go and rummage through these empty rooms and pick up leftover comic books and records and things that were left behind. So, I actually ended up with a sizable record collection.

RALPH ROSEN: Just left behind stuff.

PHIL WILSON: Just left behind stuff. You know, there was a lot of, and still are a lot of, wealthy folks who go to these schools as you well imagine. It's a private school, it's a little more expensive than a public school.

RALPH ROSEN: So you had the benefit of, you were kind of born into a situation where you had a great education and the price was right.

PHIL WILSON: Absolutely.

RALPH ROSEN: That's wonderful.

PHIL WILSON: Unbelievable. But it also had its disadvantages of course. When you're used to--I mean, I would go to breakfast every morning as a child, the first eighteen years of my life and sit at a faculty table and sit among faculty members, good teachers, I mean really fine teachers, and listen to them discuss students problems in a very genuine matter you know. "What are we going to do about this guy? He's not able to reach this plateau," or something like that. And when I started going to various music schools which I experienced in my lifetime, I found that it was not the same. Often you would run into faculty members who were more interested in their own career than they really were in imparting information or educating students. You know what I mean? And I found that to be almost a disease.

RALPH ROSEN: At that school?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah.

RALPH ROSEN: As good as it was?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, at music schools in general.

RALPH ROSEN: Well that's, I understand, I mean I've seen that myself from my own practical experience. I'm not going to get into it but we talked about someone who is a good example of that who we both know.

PHIL WILSON: That's right.

RALPH ROSEN: So at eighteen, you went on to New England Conservatory, and don't talk to them about jazz.

PHIL WILSON: That's right. Jazz was not really a commodity at New England in those days that the powers that be wanted to have around. We couldn't even use the word "jazz" in those days, it had to be the pop department. And when I went to--the reason I went to New England was to study with a wonderful trombone teacher named John Coffey. Legendary trombone teacher. Almost everybody who is anybody from that era studied with John Coffey. He was the guy. And New England had him as a trombone teacher, and they fired him that very year, that summer I was going to head there. Without telling any of the prospective students who were coming in that he was gone. I mean that's a major name, major name. And so when I got there they said, "Oh, you are going to--Mr. Coffey's no longer here, you're assigned to Mr. Gibson." That was Bill Gibson, who was the new lead trombone player in the Symphony. And I figured, well that's probably pretty good. Well, he used to sleep in my lessons. You'd be playing and all of a sudden you'd hear...Not conducive.

RALPH ROSEN: I can identify with that because I've had that problem too. I've taken lessons with a teacher who used to do that. Just about nod off, be sitting on a chair and almost fall off.

PHIL WILSON: Absolutely, unbelievable.

RALPH ROSEN: Can't get anything done.

PHIL WILSON: And he hated jazz. And so, it's interesting, I started playing jazz bands when I was twelve. I've even got a small LP of us at Phillips Exeter before I was even in the school. I was part of the Phillips Exeter Jazz Band, you know, Dixieland band, trad band. And I got pretty good at it quite early. Again, my ears were always very good, it was my eyes that was the problem. And, so at the age of fourteen, I actually played in Boston with the Williams College Spring Street Stompers because they had won the Arthur Godfrey talent scouts in New York, and they had got a gig for two weeks at the Savoy Club down here. And I was always a large person, so I could pass. And you know, I didn't drink, I just, they'd let me in and play. So, I actually started playing jazz clubs when I was 14. I went to New York and played Nick's the very next year with the same band, the Spring Street Stompers.

RALPH ROSEN: Where were they from?

PHIL WILSON: Williams College. And there were rival bands in those days. All these colleges had trad bands. Yale had the Eli's Chosen Six and their trombone player was Roswell Red and Stan Ruben who's still playing and was the leader of that band who's playing at the Red Blazer in New York to this day. Wonderful experiences, though.

RALPH ROSEN: So you knew Roswell back then? I knew that he had played that kind of music.

PHIL WILSON: Oh, he's a great trad player. I liked his trad playing a lot better than I liked some of the stuff he did of an avant garde nature later on.

RALPH ROSEN: Well, he's an interesting player, individual. So you studied with this Mr. Gibson and...

PHIL WILSON: For about a month.

RALPH ROSEN: And he would be dreaming about maybe being in Hawaii or something like that, or who knows.

PHIL WILSON: Nobody ever did find out where he was really thinking about. It was just not on the students at all. And there was a wonderful teacher at New England in those days. There were two that meant a lot to me actually. And one was Bill Gibson--no not Bill Gibson, Bill Tesson, who died a few years ago, very sadly. He was a guy who was of an eclectic talent. He had played on Von Monroe's band, he had arranged for Von Monroe, he worked with Goldovsky in the opera. He conducted, he did all the local shows that came to town. And he could handle me basically, that's what it came down to. And he was a wonderful teacher, he was very strong, he knew what I wanted and he knew of my strengths and weaknesses and I'm very thankful to him. I wish he was around to this day. He was a victim of severe Alzheimers, ,actually, at an early age. And then there was Roland Nadeau, who you used to see him on Channel 5.

RALPH ROSEN: And his radio show.

PHIL WILSON: NPR right. He was an excellent teacher and was sympathetic to some of the needs of those folks who were interested in jazz as well as normal, classical music. We had some wonderful talents in this school at the time. Roger Kellaway, the pianist was, oh man, great pianist and composer. And there was a young trumpet player who died very early because he got mixed up with drugs, heavy drugs. His name was Al Bacon.

RALPH ROSEN: I knew Alan[?].

PHIL WILSON: Did you really?

RALPH ROSEN: Yeah, yeah sure, I jammed with him. I met him through Gray Sargent. I met him in the seventies and I remember Gray calling me up letting me know that Allen died

PHIL WILSON: Did you really, that's very interesting.

RALPH ROSEN: Yeah, I met him in the seventies, there were times when he would not sound good and Gray would explain, Ralph, he used to be very heavy. And then you know, like he'd come back the next week and he'd just be focused and he'd sound very powerful. So, it was up and down and he was a very nice man. And then I got the call from Gray, it was around 1980?

PHIL WILSON: Mid seventies, I think.

RALPH ROSEN: Well, that's when I knew him, I think it was '78, '79, somewhere in there when he passed on.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, I used to work with Herb Pomeroy's band and we'd be down playing Copley Square in the summers, in open air and Al would come down with this big staw hat and sit in front of the band, clothes kind of tattered and all that. Now, the story goes somewhere that his father had something to do with the invention of sonar and when he received the first royalty check, which was huge, he left the family and therefore his mother, who had some very strong, severe illnesses, was left to raise Al. So there was no strength there.

RALPH ROSEN: Yeah, yeah, so this had something to do with it.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, it had a lot to do with it.

RALPH ROSEN: But he could play.

PHIL WILSON: Oh man he could play, melodic. We had a group together, trombone...

RALPH ROSEN: Oh you and him?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah. Trumpet and trombone. We used to do the Father O'Connor Jazz Show on WGBH and it would be Al and myself and a bass player, John Neves and his brother Paul Neves sometimes on piano. And I can't remember the drummer's name--George! I'll think of it one of these days.

PHIL WILSON: Where I really spent a whole lot of my time in the fifties, '55, while at the Conservatory, was not at the Conservatory--it was at the Berklee School of Music because Herb Pomeroy had a band at the Stables down in Copley Square which was the place to go. It was a great band that had Joe Gordon in it, trumpet player.

RALPH ROSEN: Oh, great player.

PHIL WILSON: Ray Santisi, the pianist, Jaki Byard who as you know...

RALPH ROSEN: Playing tenor or piano?

PHIL WILSON: No, playing tenor, playing tenor saxophone.

RALPH ROSEN: Who we just, we just lost.

PHIL WILSON: We just lost is right. Oh man, that's just...

RALPH ROSEN: Indescribable.

PHIL WILSON: Right, tragic. Jaki was one of the major soloists of the band in that he was perhaps the most individualistic soloist of the whole band. There was Charlie Mariano and Dave Chapman playing lead, great lead alto player, great lead alto player.

RALPH ROSEN: I met him in the seventies... He's on that Boston Burnout, or what is that, Band in Boston...

PHIL WILSON: Band in Boston album, that's right. But, you're not talking about that album, you're talking about the small group that came out, I think it was under Serge's name, Serge Chaloff, which had a small group. Ah no that was Boots Mussulli on alto and Herb playing trumpet and Ray Santisi, wonderful album. And any given night you might see, the big band was there once or twice a week Tuesdays and Thursdays, other nights it would be, Herb would have his small group in there which usually had Charlie Mariano playing alto, Gene DiStasio, wonderful trombone player playing trombone and Ray, John Neves playing bass, and the drummer was a wonderful drummer who later went to Texas and I can't think of his name right now. But wonderful drummer, it was a wonderful group. And then across the street, this would be 1954-55, after Herb came back from Lionel Hampton's band, you'd see Dick Twardzik playing piano at times.

RALPH ROSEN: He's a great player. Died in the fifties and we have a CD, thank God, of his work in the Media Center. Great player.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah there was an article that was just written about him in the current, it's the current Boston Magazine. There's an article, my wife read it to me this morning on Dick Twardzik.

RALPH ROSEN: So you got to, you knew him, you played with him?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, yep. It was an interesting time in Copley Square. It's not like it is now, you know. The Western Hotel wasn't there, none of that was. On the corner of, what is that, Huntington and Dartmouth was the SS Pierce, big store. Then you just walked up a few door fronts and came to the Stables where you walked downstairs, and it was a real jazz joint.

RALPH ROSEN: That's just what I'm thinking. I mean you said downstairs...

PHIL WILSON: Then up another few doors was, oh man, what was that... Something like the Stage Door, something like that. I cannot remember quite the name, Show Bar maybe? That's not correct, but anyways, Sabby Lewis would be there with his band and if Alan Dawson would be playing with Sabby Lewis. Oh definitely. And if Lenny Johnson wasn't playing lead trumpet for Herb, great lead trumpet player, for Herb and the big band, he'd be Sabby's man up a few doors. Then you cross the street and you'd have two more jazz clubs. One was George Wein's first club Storyville which was in the Copley Square Hotel. And then down below, underneath the Copley Square Hotel was the Mahogany Hall where Bobby Hackett and Vic Dickenson and Gene Sedric, Claude Hopkins, Pops Foster and Fuzzy Drewton[?] would all be playing. And it was always a, for me it was always a quandary when I came down to Copley Square which I did a lot, whether I wanted to go trad with, Vic was a very dear friend of mine since I was fourteen years old and a huge influence on me trombone-wise, or Hackett, melodic genius, or if I wanted to go hear the new cats over at the Stables. I'd spend about half the night in one, usually at the Stables, and then I'd go over and see the last set at the Mahogany Hall.

RALPH ROSEN: When jazz clubs were jazz clubs. More than one jazz club in a city.

PHIL WILSON: Oh man, then you went down to the corner of Huntington and, not Huntington, Columbus and Mass Ave and the Hi-Hat would be there, and you were liable to see Bird there and Lester Young and Woody Herman's band and things like that. Then up a few doors on Mass Ave, across the street from where it is now, was the original Wally's where I used to sit in--that's the oldest ongoing jazz club in the world.

RALPH ROSEN: Is Wally's.

PHIL WILSON: Isn't that amazing? And then a few doors back towards Symphony Hall was the Savoy, and this was another swing club where you were liable to see Wild Bill Davis or actually Lester Young would play there and Vic, the swing people would be playing there.

RALPH ROSEN: You heard all this. You got to hear Pres[?] when he was playing in the fifties.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, he was always playing. I don't remember a time when he wasn't.

RALPH ROSEN: Yeah, yeah.

PHIL WILSON: Wonderful memories.

RALPH ROSEN: So then, so you went to NEC for just two years?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah. I went out on the road with the Dorsey Brothers' Band. I got a call in 1957 to join the Dorsey Brothers' Band in Dallas, actually. I took my first flight, which was like the milk run in those days, no jets, which, under a stormy day started in Boston and went to Philadelphia, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, man we hit every, Jacksonville, Birmingham, it was really the milk run. All the way down to Shreveport, where I ran into the band. And for this very naive twenty-year-old, it was the first time I really witnessed segregation when I got off the plane in Shreveport, Louisiana, and I had never, ever seen white and black men's rooms and drinking fountains and things like that. Just sad stuff. And then Tommy had died of an overdose.

RALPH ROSEN: Dorsey? Really?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah he died about six months prior...

RALPH ROSEN: I had no idea that he had a problem.

PHIL WILSON: In New York... No, no, no, no, no, well... He was a juicer and it went something like this: they had a rehearsal for his summer TV show. They were replacing for Jackie Gleason, and they had finished the rehearsal and, as musicians are liable to do, went out to an Italian restaurant and eaten a rather large meal, went home and took a prescribed dose of seconal, sleeping pills. And he basically threw up in his sleep and didn't wake up so he choked to death. Sad stuff. And when I joined the band, Jimmy had died three weeks prior of throat cancer, I think it was, it was cancer due to smoking. And so the band was just still intact, it was a very good band.

RALPH ROSEN: Who was in charge?

PHIL WILSON: Lee Castle was in charge, trumpet player. He was almost like a third son to Mr. and Mrs. Dorsey. The father was the one who taught Jimmy and Tommy and when Lee joined Tommy's band, he had a reading problem so Tommy--who liked his jazz playing, it was very melodic--sent Lee to live with his father for a year to get his act together and then joined the band. That was in the thirties. So he was like a third son.

RALPH ROSEN: So he knew the music?

PHIL WILSON: Oh, backwards, right.

RALPH ROSEN: He was more than well equipped to do what he had to do.

PHIL WILSON: Somewhat sad because Mrs. Dorsey was still alive at the age of ninety, and so she actually outlived every member of the family and she would show up for certain jobs. They lived in Pottstown, Pennsylvania and when we played the Starlight Ballroom at Pottstown, she would always be there. Also Hershey, Pennsylvania we used to play that big ballroom in Hershey. It was the half-open skylight, all you could smell was chocolate. And you knew on Thursdays that Reese's Pieces were being made because it smelled the smell of peanut butter.

RALPH ROSEN: That must have been nice.

PHIL WILSON: It wasn't bad.

RALPH ROSEN: That's like the Necco factory across the river.

PHIL WILSON: Right.

RALPH ROSEN: When they get cooking over there, that's it, you know. Because when I first moved here I used to walk right across the street from there and I'd be smelling it you know while I was working. And I got back into Necco Wafers, buy me some. It was like here I am in grad school eating Necco Wafers.

RALPH ROSEN: Now let's see, you were playing in that band. This is up until...

PHIL WILSON: 1957, we were. And we had a full itinerary. I mean the band was fully booked at that time. And I actually stayed on that band more or less for a year or so. Then I left to come back to try to make some sense of the school thing. But you know, how are you going to keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paris?

RALPH ROSEN: Yeah, yeah.

PHIL WILSON: It's not the same. And then they kept calling me back out when a trombone player would leave: "Hey, can you come and play for a few months until we get somebody else?" and I'd go back. And then in, I guess it was, '59, I was in the band and we lost a piano player and they couldn't--we were in Iowa, and we were playing the Val Air Ballroom in Des Moines, and we lost the piano player. Actually Jack Jenny's brother, Bob Jenny ran a music store in Atlantic, Iowa, and he could come on and play trombone, so I went over and played piano. And I ended up playing piano with the band for about six months, and screeched trombone on "South Rampart Street Parade." Well that got to be very frustrating because obviously the trombone playing was not what it should be after playing piano every night. It was fun playing piano, but... So I left the band and joined Al Belletto's sextet in 1959, and I became Al's piano player and trombonist, and I sang bass. And next to me was a tenor player named Don Menza who was eighteen years old at the time, playing great.

RALPH ROSEN: At eighteen.

PHIL WILSON: At eighteen, he was just marvelous. And a trumpet player named Billy Hunt, was a marvelous trumpet player, who later came on Woody Herman's band. And Bobby Pike, a young drummer from Denver, Dave Sibly who sang lead. It was a jazz group--Al played alto--but it also was a Four Freshman-type singing group. I worked for about a year with him really, until I got drafted into the army. But I found that to be frustrating, too, because I was really doing more piano playing than trombone playing, and as much as I do enjoy playing piano, it was not the right thing--the trombone playing was suffering.

RALPH ROSEN: Because of that lip thing, partially.

PHIL WILSON: Sure, it's a muscle, you got to keep with it, that's right. And they actually recorded a tune I wrote called "Basically Blues," the first recording of that tune--which I wrote back at the conservatory in '55 for the opening of a show--was recorded by Al Boletto for the first time. Since then, I'm so glad I wrote that thing, I've been receiving royalty checks on that twice a year for, ever since, actually.

RALPH ROSEN: No kidding.

PHIL WILSON: Well, I mean that, it has been recorded so many times and of course, well, we'll catch up with that story in a minute because I was drafted into the army. I went in December '59, and I ended up at the Navy School of Music. Army element at Anacostia, Washington, outside of Washington. And I was there for about a month and was shipped out to the NORAD band. Actually, it was a funny, a funny situation occurred there. While I was there, the commander in charge of the Army Element at the Navy School of Music had a bill in Congress to set up an Army School of Music in Indianapolis, and he asked if I would like to set up the arranging department of this new school. And so he had to figure a way to keep me at the Navy School of Music an extra sixteen weeks. I had already been on the road for awhile and obviously had some skills, so I was going to be shipped out pretty quick. And the Pentagon called him and said, "Do you have anybody there who can play organ in the Protestant and Catholic services that we hold everyday at the chapel at the Pentagon?" And he says, "Maybe I do," because usually during the lunch hour I would come and play piano outside of his office, because that's where these beautiful grand pianos were. And so he knew I played keyboard. And so he called me in the office and said, "Do you want to do this?" And I said I'd give it a try.

So the next morning a limousine comes up and I'm just a private, you know. And I walk out and get into the limousine, and I'm taken to the Pentagon. And at twelve noon in the Protestant chapel, I slip behind this kind of a Conn organ, I guess it was, and play a hymn for the Protestants. And then at 12:30, they strike the trees, they take the Protestant and in walks the Catholics, and I play a hymn for them, and they go through that. One o'clock the bell rings, you got to go back to work. And the Jews were in the basement, you know. And so I at the end of the day declined, I said this is not what I want to do.

RALPH ROSEN: Not your bag.

PHIL WILSON: No, no, I couldn't imagine doing that for sixteen weeks, I'd be a basketcase. And the following Monday, I received orders to go out to Colorado Springs to join the NORAD Band which was a brand new band run by a gentleman who was ingenious. His name was Mark Azzolina and he was a colonel. And he figured a way of putting a multi-service band together. The idea was to put together a band of the cream of the crop, so you know, this is the line, from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and the Royal Canadian Air Force. And he was just putting it together, just getting it started, and the rivalries between the top bands in the military, I imagine to this very day, are very strong. And nobody could have pulled this off had they been in the music department of one service or another. They would have, the other--Colonel Howard, in those days, from the Air Force--would have just put a stop to it right away. But he was smart enough to figure out that Colonel Howard and these guys couldn't touch him if he wasn't in the music department, if he was in the public relations department. So he was in the public relations department.

And our reason for being on the North American Air Defense Command was to publicize the defensive mechanism of our country, which in those days was centered in Colorado Springs at the Ent Air Force Base, with this underground command center in the Cheyenne Mountain. And SAC was the offensive bunch of our military, NORAD was the defensive. So essentially for two years, I spent three months of the year out in Hollywood, recording. I became one of the arrangers for the band. I was a soloist, trombone soloist. I also played vibes for the concert band when they need the George Shearing sound, you know. And a lot of good musicians came out of that.

But, you can imagine being three months every year, for two years, recording in Hollywood in the big studios where he'd record us. I made all my connections there for my career. Milt Bernhart, the trombone player, took me under his wing, would take me to all the sessions where I'd run into Frank Rosolino and Dick Nash and George Roberts. Eventually we got some of these guys like George to come over and record with us as soloists and all that. You know they took a real liking to us. It was, of course, God, the musicians out on the West Coast in those days were just marvelous. I mean, it was kind of the hey-day. Conrad Gazo, great lead trumpet player, would be going maybe three or four sessions a day. We'd go out there and do the Steve Allen TV show. We'd do the rehearsal in the morning, and that would be Les Brown's band with Gazo playing lead. And he'd come back at night for the 6:30 taping of the show. He had done two sessions between the morning rehearsal and the evening taping. And by the time we started taping, you'd take a look at his chops and they'd look like hamburger.

RALPH ROSEN: Like how long do you do that? I mean did it...

PHIL WILSON: He did it for years.

RALPH ROSEN: Really.

PHIL WILSON: All of these guys, Dick Nash, again, Rosolino, all of those wonderful, wonderful musicians.

RALPH ROSEN: What year was this around?

PHIL WILSON: That was 1960-61.

RALPH ROSEN: We actually have a video of Rosolino from '62. I think it was black-and-white film, TV [show] called The Jazz Scene. And the guys playing with him are, I mean it's a West Coast program with Oscar Brown, Jr. is the emcee.

PHIL WILSON: I did it myself later on, in '63 and '64 with Woody.

RALPH ROSEN: Okay. Such a thing might be available at some point. We have Stan Kenton on that show. But the stuff that we have is from '62 and it does include, I know that the guys that played with him are from some sort of staff TV orchestra or something like that. Nick Martinez is the drummer, and a guy named I think Bob Woodrow on bass. And I can't remember, it might be Michael Melvoin on piano.

PHIL WILSON: Oh man, Michael Melvoin went to Dartmouth, and he used to run the Barbary Coast Jazz Band up there in 1955. And he hired me as an arranger, and I used to go up and rehearse the Dartmouth Barbary Coast, and they would play some of my very first charts. Isn't that funny?

RALPH ROSEN: That's something else.

PHIL WILSON: It's a small world.

RALPH ROSEN: And then his daughter, Mike Melvoin's daughter, ended up with Prince. playing guitar [both laugh] like fifteen years ago or something.

PHIL WILSON: It is a small world, boy, it gets smaller by the day. And you can imagine with us out there recording in Hollywood at the government's expense, staying in the Knickerbocker Hotel, was pretty nice. And we spent another two months of those years in New York City doing exactly the same thing. Playing Carnegie Hall. And it was a wonderful way, I mean you can see, it was a great way to spend your time in the military, you know. I mean what, thank you, Lord, you know. And other guys who were in that band were Paul Fontaine, who teaches here, a marvelous trumpet player. But Phil Teele, Jim Trimble, Dave Wolpe, the musicians they could--Bill Prince--the musicians that came out of that band were awesome. And really gave us time to get our act together for a career. I've been supplying musicians from Berklee to these various military bands for thirty-five years. Among them Mike Crotty, who was the chief arranger for the Airmen of Note for twenty-five years until he finally retired. Great musician, wonderful arranger. And you still have to...

RALPH ROSEN: They were here.

PHIL WILSON: Yep, oh beautiful band. And I keep trying to talk some of these young, wonderful players that we have here today into considering the military. Like the Army Blues or the Navy Commodores, I think it is, or the Airmen of Note for a career. Because if you, let's take a young trombone player who's, you know, first class trombone player, graduates from here at the age of 22. He goes in the military and he gets into one of these bands, they're great bands. All they have to do everyday is to appear and rehearse at ten o'clock in the morning till probably three or four, go home, live off base. And they tour occasionally, you know, nothing too strenuous. And they record a lot. And then at the age of 42, they retire with a pension. You can live on that.

RALPH ROSEN: I'm too old to do that now.

PHIL WILSON: You can see the advantage, you've got the pension, then you can afford to go any route you happen to want to go. You've got a steady income coming in. It's a nice way to go.

RALPH ROSEN: It certainly sounds it.

PHIL WILSON: A lot of people you know, like Sammy Nestico, wonderful writer, he...

RALPH ROSEN: ...played his charts.

PHIL WILSON: Right, he established himself as an arranger for the Airmen of Note and for the Air Force. What's the name of the tenor player who wrote for Doc Severinsen's band?

RALPH ROSEN: Tommy Newsom?

PHIL WILSON: Tommy Newsom came out of the Airmen of Note, that's where he...

RALPH ROSEN: Great player.

PHIL WILSON: That's right.

RALPH ROSEN: I mean, great musician all around.

PHIL WILSON: Absolutely.

RALPH ROSEN: Could really play, could really arrange.

PHIL WILSON: Right, yeah.

RALPH ROSEN: And did the Tonight Show thing.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah.

RALPH ROSEN: Wonderful.

PHIL WILSON: After that experience, I went with Woody Herman's band. And that happened...

RALPH ROSEN: '62 right?

PHIL WILSON: But the interesting thing, back in 1955 when we were all in Boston playing with Herb Pomeroy's B band, wanting to play in the A band, there were people like Bill Chase. I told you when I was at New England [Conservatory], I really spent most of my time filling in vacant trombone chairs in various Berklee bands because there was always a need for trombone players. And in Herb's B bands in 1955, it was Bill Chase, Paul Fontaine, Jerry Lamie[?] who helped, later was one of Bill Chase's assistants, lead player in Woody's band. Jake Hannah was the drummer, Gordon Brisker, wonderful tenor player and arranger. Jimmy Mosier, Bob Rudolph, trombone player, Eddie Morgan, a great trombone player who lives in Cincinnati. Twelve of us were in Herb Pomeroy's B band.

Well, in 1961, we were playing the Detroit State Fair and I had a ten-trombone group that used to play "Holiday for Strings" with purple light for the NORAD band. The big NORAD band, the concert band, was 110 strong. And we'd take the ten trombones out in front, wearing these white shirts, and we had ribbons on the end of the trombone and a purple light, the lights would go down and we'd play "Holiday for Strings." Unbelievable.

RALPH ROSEN: Unbelievable.

PHIL WILSON: But we also had Warner Barker's arrangement of "Lassus Trombone," which was a very famous arrangement and some pretty hip stuff with the ten trombones. And Woody was playing at the Roostertail in Detroit with a small band. He had been reduced to a small band because the band he had in the late fifties was really not his usual high standards. So, he was using a small group which consisted of Bill Chase playing trumpet, Gordon Brisker playing tenor saxophone, Jake Hannah playing drums, Charlie Andres who just died recently playing bass, Nat Pierce playing piano and Woody. And he was playing...

RALPH ROSEN: That's a good band.

PHIL WILSON: Oh, it was an excellent band. They came out to see us at the fairgrounds. And I could see Chase, being an old friend from Herb's B band, so I called a rehearsal of the ten trombones behind stage. And we played a few of these charts just to remind--in front of Chase--just to remind him that I hadn't lost my chops yet. And it was about a month later--I told him that I was going to get out, and it was a month or two later that I got a call from him saying, "Woody's thinking of putting a band together, do you want to play?" So it worked. And sure enough, come, I think it was May '62, I had been home since March '62, I started with Woody's band. And Woody was just putting it together. And twelve of us in that band were from Herb Pomeroy's B band in 1955. So, there was a cohesiveness in that band that was there from the very beginning, and you couldn't miss it. We were all hungry and besides the twelve from Herb's band from Boston, there was Sal Nistico, giant tenor player playing tenor and, God, so many of us came from Boston, there weren't really many others. Nat Pierce of course was the manager and the piano player who wrote most of the book, which was marvelous.

And that band attracted attention right away. And we somehow ended up at the Metropole in New York, I think in October, somewhere in there, '62, and there was no mistaking it. This was one of his better bands. It was tight. And the discipline of that band was remarkable. Chase really was a musical leader in there, particularly of course in the brass section. He really was an amazing lead trumpet player who could also play jazz very well. And Nat Pierce was the manager and really the musical director. But, nobody really screwed up in that band more than one night because if you screwed up twice...

RALPH ROSEN: You were out?

PHIL WILSON: You were damn near out, yeah. And that brass section...There is a real disadvantage to having played with a band like that if you wanted to look at it that way, because you'll never experience a band like that again. And you keep looking for it. Every night for three and a half years, that band was tight. I've...

RALPH ROSEN: Was Carmen...?

PHIL WILSON: Leggio was there.

RALPH ROSEN: Was he in there?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah he was, he came in in '64.

RALPH ROSEN: Okay because I'm just, I'd like to ask him one question about this. There is an album, and I believe it's on Phillips, the Phillips label and I think it's just called Woody Herman: 1964.

PHIL WILSON: It is.

RALPH ROSEN: Is that the band that you're speaking of?

PHIL WILSON: Absolutely. That was recorded the day Kennedy was shot, the day. It was, the recording session had been set up, there was too much money involved.

RALPH ROSEN: So when you did that album, you had already heard the news?

PHIL WILSON: Absolutely. A&R Studios was right across the street from the Bristol Hotel where I stayed, Paul Fontaine was my roommate. And I was coming down in the elevator in the Bristol Hotel at one o'clock when the intercom, the music you know in the elevator, was switched on to Walter Cronkite and it was announced that Kennedy had been pronounced dead. "What?! And we walked out and went over to the studio, we had to record. And as I remember, we were playing the Metropole that night. We went in and we actually started to play and the whole Broadway was really shut down. We didn't, I don't think we finished the first set, they just closed up. It was an amazing...

RALPH ROSEN: But earlier that day you did that record?

PHIL WILSON: Was it the 22nd of November? If you look on the back of that record, you'll see it. Freaky when you think of it, you know.

RALPH ROSEN: I have it at home. Well, solid as a rock.

PHIL WILSON: Oh man, that band was like that, every night for three and a half years starting in October. I mean you listen to that Woody Herman: 1964 album, modestly called "The Greatest Big Band Ever" on the front cover. And you listen to Sal play "Sister Sadie" and the tightness of that band, I mean nobody's kidding, nobody. And you can hear the cohesiveness, and that cohesiveness actually came from the fact that we all knew each other for so long. Even though it was totally an accident of history.

RALPH ROSEN: That everybody was in there together.

PHIL WILSON: And it stayed together, you know, 'till it began to fall apart, oh, 1965. I remember we were playing Birdland, it was Christmas week, 1964, the first week of '65, and we were playing Birdland opposite John Coltrane and that quartet he had with McCoy Tyner and Jimmy Garrison and Elvin Jones.

RALPH ROSEN: Stand around and listen to some of that...

PHIL WILSON: Oh, no kidding.

RALPH ROSEN: It must have been really something'.

PHIL WILSON: Absolutely.

RALPH ROSEN: Really must have been something'...

PHIL WILSON: And it was about three or four months after that the band began to kind of mean, it's very difficult keeping a band of that quality together. And we worked, in 1963 and '64, we worked 360 days straight.

RALPH ROSEN: Every day...

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, playing, you know, going three, four hundred miles a night. Sometimes more.

PHIL WILSON: I remember playing down at, where was Governor Faubus? You remember? It was.

RALPH ROSEN: Orval Faubus,

PHIL WILSON: Yeah. What state was he?

RALPH ROSEN: Definitely like Louisiana.

PHIL WILSON: It was a southern state.

RALPH ROSEN: Definitely a southern state, I think Louisiana.

PHIL WILSON: We were playing his party for him one night and two nights later we were in Harlem. And we were playing pretty much the same music for both, but...

RALPH ROSEN: Charles Mingus had already written "Fables of Faubus."

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, oh, yeah, we knew what was going on, but the funny thing is we were playing the same music for both, but down there for Faubus we would play in two until 10:30 when everybody had been lubricated enough, and then in Harlem we'd just start it right out in four. You'd play in two for Faubus until 10:30, then you'd go to four. And then in Harlem, you'd just start out in four.

RALPH ROSEN: [laughs] What a story.

PHIL WILSON: Isn't that funny. [laughs]

RALPH ROSEN: That's really something else.

PHIL WILSON: So, in '65, I left. I had been on the road by then since 1957. That's a long time. And it's not the healthiest situation in the world. And I certainly needed to get away and lose some weight. I had gained a certain amount of weight. I mean you're eating steaks every night and all that sort of thing. And also, I really had in mind to raise a family, I am a family man. And so, I left and there was an opening at Berklee. Jack Petersen left, he was a guitar teacher, a wonderful guitar teacher, who left here in 1964, that left a slot open on the faculty. And there really was no trombone "don," so to speak, here. You had Joe Viola for saxophones, Ray Kotwica for trumpets, but there was no trombone don as part of the faculty. And so there was a slot for me. Obviously, with my arranging abilities and things like that I could teach arranging, and so I became a member of the faculty of the Berklee College--School of Music at that time--with a student body of 419. Now, it's 1999, and our staff and faculty is about 400.

RALPH ROSEN: Yeah, yeah, maybe even more.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, and it's three thousand students.

RALPH ROSEN: Yeah. Now, at the time, was this all at 1140 Boylston?

PHIL WILSON: No, no. This didn't exist. This was the Hotel Bostonian still. We were at Newbury Street. And, right on the corner there. What was it, 280, or something like that? And, I was on the third floor in the back. Right next to my room was a small little closet that Freddy Buda, the drummer for the Boston Pops, was teaching percussion. He had somehow managed to cram in that tiny little space, a xylophone and a snare drum, I think--you couldn't put a full set in there, it was tiny. About as big as that bathroom, probably was originally a bathroom.

RALPH ROSEN: [laughs] Really?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah. But the vibe in that school was so strong and positive. The teachers were really into it, which impressed me to no end and made me very, very happy, and very much at home. When you think of my background, and having grown up with all those teachers at Phillips Exeter, etc., etc. You run into John LaPorta, who in his own way never ever gave up on a student, he always could see the silver lining. He wasn't one of these people who if you weren't already a great player, you know, "Later with you." John would work until he could get the best out of a student that he possibly could. And Herb, Herb was a person who had always been "mind-expanding," as students would often say. And Ray Santisi, and Alan Dawson, and a little later, Andy McGhee, these guys, and Joe Viola, and Ray Katwika, Ted Pease.

RALPH ROSEN: Fantastic musicians, fantastic teachers.

PHIL WILSON: And, of course, jazz was a dirty word in most universities and colleges, still. I mean it wasn't like today where it's often the money maker, or was in the eighties and nineties for these college music departments, it was not wanted on many campuses. And so we...

RALPH ROSEN: It was like that naughty boy or something. It was like something bad that still had that stigma. That's so funny because that's kind of the root of the word is something that, you know, is unwanted.

PHIL WILSON: That's right.

RALPH ROSEN: And it was even then.

PHIL WILSON: Absolutely. And the feeling that all of us had even though it wasn't something you talked about, it was just something that was unspoken of, we were on the cutting edge of something important and fresh and you know...

RALPH ROSEN: As jazz education at that point was still sort of a baby.

PHIL WILSON: Absolutely. I mean these guys like John and Herb wrote the book on a lot of the-- well, for example, the, we have a course here, "Chord Scales and Arranging," "Voicings in Fourth," and things like that.

RALPH ROSEN: Right, right. The drop 1 and drop...

PHIL WILSON: That whole, oh, that reminds me of another thing. But, the chord scales, original chord scales manual was written by Ted Pease, and today it still is the clearest organization of materials that can be understood by an ordinary person. It was rewritten 3 years ago by a lot of present day teachers who are excellent, but they got their favorite little things in there and now it reads a little more like a lore book and actually loses some students because it's a little too complicated. Whereas, the original outline that Ted Pease wrote was clean, understandable, and could be understood by a normal...

RALPH ROSEN: It made arranging and so forth something that was very systematic and very learnable...

PHIL WILSON: Probably the best book I've ever seen on vertical structures. Just beautifully done. And then, you know all of this, chord scales that are now the vocabulary of a jazz course: dorian mode, ii-7, etc., etc., right?

RALPH ROSEN: All your dominant scales...

PHIL WILSON: That's right. That was all organized back in the early sixties by John LaPorta and Jack Petersen. And it went something like this: Jack would come in, he'd probably be working out at Lenny's on the turnpike, and he'd probably, it's possibly he might have had a hangover, and he'd come into the faculty lounge, and there was a dean back there, his name was Richard Bobbit. And they were trying to organize this stuff and, you know, "What are we gonna, how are we gonna say what notes are available on a five-chord?" And, obviously, you've got one, three, five, and flat-seven, but how are you gonna organize this? And Jack would kind of say, "Well, how about the mixolydian scale?" "Yeah, that gives you the nine, thirteen, yeah. What are you gonna do about that C, though? What are you gonna do about the fourth?" "Well, just call it an avoid note, a red note, you know." And the next day, "How about the two chord?" "Well, there's a dorian mode you could use, that gives you nine, thirteen, eleven. But, you can't use that thirteen, though, because it anticipates the tritone of the dominant, so what are we gonna do with that?" "Well, call it a red note." "Oh, yeah." And this kind of went on, it's being written down, right? And pretty soon it becomes the way this stuff is taught.

And then I told you about those summer camps we used to do. Well, those summer camps were intense. We'd go out there and teach, have an arranging class, I would teach one semester of arranging in one week.

RALPH ROSEN: Really?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah. I'd go so that chord scales thing. And it was intense. From nine to eleven everyday. Ten colleges across the country. And Herb was there and John was there. David Baker from the University of Indiana was there, all of these guys were out there, and man, we were all into it, you know. And, years later, I remember going out in the late, early seventies, maybe, going out to the University of Indiana and I was teaching there for a week and was in a practice room, and on the floor was this mimeograph sheet, remember mimeograph?

RALPH ROSEN: Sure...

PHIL WILSON: It was before Xerox. And I picked it up and here are these scales that they're now teaching as part of the curriculum at the University of Indiana, and here's the altered dominant scale, that has been labeled, is now called the "Pomeroy Scale." And here is all of this material that was actually organized by Jack and John LaPorta, with the assistance from others. Now if you go into Frankfurt, I taught at the Frankfurt Conservatory, they're teaching Chord Scales--they're being taught all the world. And the thing is the people who organized that never got any credit for it. Which was Jack and John, really.

RALPH ROSEN: You know, we, our first interview was John.

PHIL WILSON: [smiles] Oh, I didn't know that. I love that guy, you know. I think the world of him. He was one of the first persons to encourage me to keep teaching and to stay with it.

RALPH ROSEN: Amazing musicians.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah.

RALPH ROSEN: He just recorded that CD, during the summer of these duet things for guitar, you know, with the rhythm section, with Joe on, and Jim Stinnett's playing bass, and...

PHIL WILSON: We played a jazz club in Vienna last April.

RALPH ROSEN: You and John?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, with a local rhythm section. And, he's what, seventy-six years old? To me, one of the nice things about this profession of ours, is that if you've got your health together, there is no time when you don't stop developing. I mean, if you've got your health, which is everything. John is a perfect example of that. I mean, he's just playing better than ever, you know? We were actually in Vienna for a Woody Herman concert with Jeff Hamilton, Flip Phillips--obviously John was playing Woody's part on clarinet--myself. So, they booked John and I into a jazz club the night before and we had just a great...

RALPH ROSEN: A ball.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah. That's right. Yep.

Chapter 11

RALPH ROSEN: He's something else. When they were doing those duets, they played them a couple of times down the street at the Uchida building and I said, "John, you got the charts for that stuff?" He said, "Sure, I'll make a copy for ya." Not easy stuff. The band itself had to really work hard to get it, you know. But, intriguing. Very intriguing.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, I use a lot of his materials right here, duets, those that he...

RALPH ROSEN: He's done Intermediate Duets, but not all that stuff is intermediate.

PHIL WILSON: I understand that, I know. [Gestures] There's the book right over there underneath my trombone. One of them.

RALPH ROSEN: Yeah, he gave me Intermediate Duets, the book that was published with the CD, where you can play along, and then he gave me more of the stuff which is covers, things that this particular band has recorded or performed, and it's amazing, you know, and difficult.

PHIL WILSON: And it's a wonderful teaching tool because I can sit here--an awful lot of young musicians are not unlike myself when I was young. They can play, improvise beautifully on various levels, but the reading area is weak. They trust their ears like I did more than they do their eyes. And so we can sit here and put those CDs on, and I'll play the one on the top line, they'll play the bottom line, and they're written independent of each other, you know what I mean. So that the guy has to read what's in front of him, he can't lean on what I'm playing. A matter of fact, he can't pay any attention to me.

RALPH ROSEN: Yeah, right, exactly. It's not like nice third and fifths or something, it's all over the place.

PHIL WILSON: All over the place.

RALPH ROSEN: You have to hear what you're playing, you can't worry about what the other guy's playing, exactly.

PHIL WILSON: Right.

RALPH ROSEN: Exactly.

PHIL WILSON: That's really very useful.

RALPH ROSEN: That stuff will kick one's butt into being a better reader.

PHIL WILSON: Absolutely.

RALPH ROSEN: And then he suggests things for improvising changes and things, some of the stuff is based on standards.

PHIL WILSON: And then the guy can show off a little, if he feels good about that, then he's gotta come back and read.

RALPH ROSEN: And read.

PHIL WILSON: Have a nice day.

RALPH ROSEN: You know, I looked at those things, boy, those are tough ones.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah.

RALPH ROSEN: So, here you are, you're teaching at Berklee.

PHIL WILSON: Thirty-five years.

RALPH ROSEN: And, I was reading up on you. You did a record with someone, I think it was Al Cohn. And I'm curious as to when that was done, a little bit about it, and is it commercially available.

PHIL WILSON: Well, you see that record behind you? [Gestures] Over there? Phil and Vic Dickenson with Butch Miles. I think that was 1978 and that's for Harry Lim, who owned Famous Door Records in New York City. Two years prior to that he had had me up there to do my first album for him with Al Cohn and Milt Hinton playing bass, and it was a nice band. What more can be said?

RALPH ROSEN: It was like driving a nice car, or...

PHIL WILSON: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

RALPH ROSEN: Who drummed?

PHIL WILSON: I was trying to remember, who's the drummer on that date. I think it was Mousey Alexander, actually.

RALPH ROSEN: I've heard him play...

PHIL WILSON: Oh, he's a good drummer. Yeah, he's a fine drummer. Years later I had his son in class, Tracy, when I had a summer jazz program at Chote, speaking of private schools. "Six Weeks with Phil Wilson" in 1970--oh, I guess that must have been '72, '73, '74, I did three years. And, Mousey sent his son there, had the same trouble, couldn't read, played wonderful.

RALPH ROSEN: Was he a drummer?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah. He was a good drummer, too...

RALPH ROSEN: He could play, but neither of them were good readers, but they could play.

PHIL WILSON: Oh, they could play. Yeah, Tracy was a wonderful talent. There's another drummer in New York right now named Ben Perowsky, who's Frank Perowsky's son. Frank Perowsky was a tenor player, a studio player. His son Ben is probably one of the finest young drummers you ever heard. Marvelous talent.

RALPH ROSEN: No, I know of him. Yeah, I heard a thing that he did, some funny kind of thing where it was like a soundtrack, but it was him on drums with trumpet, tuba, and guitar, and the guitar's all slide guitar and it's actually beautiful. Very nice, very nice. Different styles that they played...

PHIL WILSON: Ben Perowsky was a student here for years. I had a group for a while, the small Rainbow Band with Peter Herbert, a bass player who I helped get here from Gratz, Austria, marvelous talent. He's now in New York City. Alex Deutsch, who is also from the Gratz Conservatory. I actually helped him get here. I used to do clinics at the Gratz Conservatory and do concerts out there and Ben Perowsky was the drummer and young tenor player, marvelous tenor player, one of my favorite alums, shall we say. Donny McCaslin. Just a giant tenor player.

RALPH ROSEN: Yeah, great player.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah.

RALPH ROSEN: He's played here a whole bunch.

PHIL WILSON: And, as a matter of fact, the piano player was Danilo Perez at that time. Boy, it just...I mean that's one of the--I mean I've got a group right now, I rehearsed this morning, that's as good as any group I've had in thirty-five years and that's...

RALPH ROSEN: Is that a small band or a big band?

PHIL WILSON: It's a small band, it's eleven actually. A young talent, extremely talented composer from Switzerland, Emanuel Perovitch[?]. He's writing all of the material, most of it, except for a Swedish woman named Osta Reunfeld [?], who's another really strong talent. And then we've got a young tenor player, Bob Reynolds, Scott Boni on alto, and Mike Schob[?] on trumpet--eighteen-year-old trumpet player from San Francisco. A vocalist who sings just beautifully, Elke Verandlay[?], from Austria.

And the rhythm section is Chihiro Yamanaka from Japan, as good as a piano player--she just placed very high in a competition in France, classically trained, plays great jazz, swings as good as anybody. Yoshi Waki, who's bass is right behind me, twenty-nine-year-old, former--he's got his B.E. in Engineering from Tokyo, out of the University of Tokyo, marvelous bass player. Drummer from Gratz, Yorg Mecula[?]. It's a miracle I can remember these names, there was a time that I couldn't. And, oh yeah, Moto China[?], from Japan playing guitar. And these guys are as...

RALPH ROSEN: You're just coaching them?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah. Actually, I'm playing with them. I'm the trombone player because Manuel is conducting, and yeah, I am the coach, just as my father was a coach for a hockey team at Phillips Exeter, you know. And we just played out a church gig in Belmont last Sunday, where they got a standing ovation. And we're going up to New Hampshire to do another concert for a former teacher who used to teach here, by the name of Tom Gallant, piano player who died at the age of 63 of pancreatic cancer. He was as close, if I ever had a brother, it was Tom Gallant. Because Tom was two years older than I. When he was eleven, I was nine. We first met at the ruins of the old Unitarian Church in Exeter, New Hampshire. And we soon found out that we both had an interest in music and so starting the next year, we would meet in either my living room or his after school every day and play standards for two hours. And that's why I'm really most comfortable playing with good piano players, like that album I did with Makoto Ozone or Paul Schmeling. When you're with the right piano player, you can trust each other rhythmically and harmonically. You have infinite freedom. No drummer is sitting there trying to get you to put notes where you don't want to put them. [laughs]

RALPH ROSEN: Oh, I heard that. I'll remember that, being a drummer I'll remember that. I've actually had the pleasure of playing with you.

PHIL WILSON: Oh, yeah.

RALPH ROSEN: I might have made you play some wrong notes.

PHIL WILSON: No, you didn't. That was a very pleasant experience, it was.

RALPH ROSEN: With Bob Meyers. And his charts, which are not like anything I've gotten to...

PHIL WILSON: Have ever seen.

RALPH ROSEN: Yeah. You just need like five stands.

PHIL WILSON: That's right. It just keeps going.

RALPH ROSEN: He likes to write.

PHIL WILSON: That's right.

RALPH ROSEN: Good for him.

PHIL WILSON: But now you see, it's the things like that that has made my career here, thirty-five years, so pleasant. I love to play. It's very, very simple working with those kids, that band every Wednesday morning meets, it's awesome.

RALPH ROSEN: You guys gonna play here?

PHIL WILSON: Yeah, we have a concert on the 20th of April. We'll be in the David Friend Center at 7:30.

RALPH ROSEN: I'm looking here to see what day of the week...

PHIL WILSON: That's a Tuesday night.

RALPH ROSEN: Here it is. Well, if I'm in town...

PHIL WILSON: I've heard that song before. [laughs]

RALPH ROSEN: . [laughs] I'll be there.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah.

RALPH ROSEN: I'll be there, I'll be there.

PHIL WILSON: You will enjoy every minute of it.

RALPH ROSEN: I'm sure I will. So, are you thinking of, or do you have anything in the works for another recording that features your trombone playing?

PHIL WILSON: Indeed I do. I'm waiting right as we sit here for a tape to come from Germany. I've been one of the writers for the Norddeutscher Rundfunk, that's North German Radio in Hamburg, since 1984 and I wrote a suite based on the show Pal Joey. And I'm waiting for the DAT tapes to arrive so that I can have the CD put out on the Capri label-- the same label that did the Wizard of Oz suite for me, which has done so well. And that also was with the North German Radio big band with Herb Geller playing alto, Walter Norris on piano, and Danny Moss playing tenor. It's a marvelous tape. So that will be out in the next, oh, six months. I've actually been waiting on that tape for a month now.

RALPH ROSEN: Let me know when it's available. We'll pick up a copy and we'll keep it downstairs in the Media Center.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah. And then, I just recorded in November in Frankfurt with the Frankfurt Radio Big Band, a new suite I wrote based on Stephen Foster's music. It's a suite, eight movements, eight songs. It lasts about an hour and 20 minutes. It's called the Jazz Face of Stephen Foster and it features a jazz whistler, named...

RALPH ROSEN: Ron McCroby?

PHIL WILSON: No...no, he's excellent, but this is Brad Terry, who's a jazz clarinet player also. And we did it with the Fall Together band,two of the movements this last October, it came off great. But the full thing--I'm awaiting for a copy of that tape, also--they're thinking of releasing that in Germany, right at the present moment. And then about a year ago, two years ago, I wrote a suite of Woody Herman, for Woody Herman for the Hamburg Radio Band, and I'm hoping in the future that will be a CD. So there's lots in the can, so to speak, and there's actually no hurry. We do put the Pal Joey suite out when it gets here, and we've got everything assembled. My son Paul does the album covers for these things. He's an excellent artist. He works for Mystic Scenic design right now, which does drops and backgrounds, scenery and props for Walt Disney, the Boston Ballet--he's currently working on a big drop for some show coming up, worked on some of the props for The Nutcracker. He's excellent.

RALPH ROSEN: That's really something. Well, I can't wait to hear these things when they come out.

PHIL WILSON: Well, I'm looking forward to it, having them in my hands to lay on you.

RALPH ROSEN: No, I want to hear them, yeah.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah.

RALPH ROSEN: Well, is there some other things that we're skipping or anything?

PHIL WILSON: Not really...

RALPH ROSEN: Because in your case, you're a pretty busy musician.

PHIL WILSON: Yeah.

RALPH ROSEN: Because you're obviously, I mean, the thing that's great is that you're a writer, arranger, player, teacher...

PHIL WILSON: Playing and teaching has always been the same to me. I don't separate them. It's all in a matter of communication and I don't think of one over the other, I think they are the same.

RALPH ROSEN: Is there any advice like to send off to close this with, to anybody who's trying to learn the art of music or the art of improvisation?

PHIL WILSON: Don't give up. Playing to me is worth--I've often said this--is worth millions of dollars in psychiatric care because you can blow it out your horn, so to speak, you know, and it's a wonderful outlet, and I wouldn't trade it for anything. It would be difficult to live without it, if I would be alive today, you know.

RALPH ROSEN: Don't give up.

PHIL WILSON: Don't give up is right...

RALPH ROSEN: That right there is, because I don't think that what we're talking about here is something that is learned one way. Different minds pick this stuff up different ways.

PHIL WILSON: That's right.

RALPH ROSEN: You know, and when one is developing, you hear different things about, "Well, I do this" or "You mean, you never studied this?" and "Oh, gee", and then you might think, "Well, maybe I should learn it that way," but the fact remains, as long as you keep at it and stay with people who are positive and who are going to support you, you'll go forward, you'll move forward and there's no finish line.

PHIL WILSON: No.

RALPH ROSEN: Hal Crook told me, he said: "There's no finish line."

PHIL WILSON: There is no finish line. That's my point about John LaPorta: he's seventy-six, he sounds better than ever. He's just marvelous. I'm very proud of the Berklee College of Music. I mean when I first came here it was 419 students. I think Maynard Ferguson once walked through the school and said, "Man, this is a supermarket for big bands." Well, I mean, look at the new therapy department and that's a tremendous, tremendous field, and it's tremendously important and look at what we've done in the last...

RALPH ROSEN: There is no place like this.

PHIL WILSON: No.

RALPH ROSEN: There's no place like this place.

PHIL WILSON: No, there isn't.

RALPH ROSEN: And that's not a joke.

PHIL WILSON: No, it's not a joke at all. And the current administration, I mean Gary Burton and Lee, have really done an incredible job at keeping this right on the cutting edge of the art and I'm forever grateful. It's true.

RALPH ROSEN: Well, this has turned out to be a great interview.

PHIL WILSON: Oh, it's been fun.

RALPH ROSEN: I knew it would be. I knew it would be. And of course, it was easy and all I can say is thank you very much.

PHIL WILSON: You're most welcome, Ralph. It's been a pleasure.