

**PHIL WILSON:** ...and your red note would be the fourth degree because that would anticipate where you're going to one. And this goes on and on and on. And meanwhile, I would be going out teaching at all sorts of universities all over the country playing with the jazz band because of my records with Woody [Herman]. And then I would do classes in these various places during the day. And then, in the summer, all of us--Herb [Pomeroy], John LaPorta, et cetera, et cetera--went out and did what are now the Aebersold Clinics. [Jamey] Aebersold was a student in those days.

**FRED** Right. Now he's got his own big thing.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Absolutely. It's an extension as to what we were doing in the sixties.

**FRED** Amazing.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** And we would go out and we would teach almost a semester's worth of material in five days. In these arranging classes. And, you've got to remember, in 1965, "jazz" was still somewhat of a dirty word.

**FRED** In academic circles, certainly.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah, it was feared by a lot of teachers who could see the writing on the wall.

**FRED** Oh, the legit people must have been quaking in their boots.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** They were.

**FRED** It's like, you know, Louis Armstrong would take a solo and the Roger Voisins of the world would say, "Well, we can't play that."

**PHIL WILSON:** Except Roger.

**FRED** He could.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Roger actually was in the Army with Bobby Hackett, and they were very close friends. And Roger used to tell the story on himself that Bobby had to miss a gig... somewhere, you know, and asked Roger to fill in for him. And Roger did, and he says it was pretty bad. [Laughs] Yeah, Hackett was a friend of mine.

**FRED** Wow, what a beautiful cat.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Absolutely.

**FRED** Some of my best recollections of jazz in Boston was going up to the Scotch & Sirloin, when the seats were held down by the Drootin Brothers or Maggie Scott, or a few other people. And you know, the house band was top-notch and very often they would invite in Dave McKenna and Bobby Hackett. Or from the Cape...

**PHIL WILSON:** And Vic Dickenson.

**FRED** And Vic Dickenson! Indeed. Wow.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah, when we ran Sackbut Week, we had a plaque made paying tribute to Vic Dickenson from the International Trombone Association. 'Cause you know, Tom Everett who runs the Harvard band, he was the founder of the International Trombone Association.

**FRED** [to camera crew] I hope you guys are rolling here. Oh, good.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** So Vic, who I had known since I was fourteen, 'cause I once--I told you earlier today, that I collected autographs.

**FRED** Mahogany Hall.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Mahogany Hall. And Vic--actually it was before Mahogany Hall, he was at the Music Box. And the Music Box was the same room that George Wein took over later as Storyville number two in the Copley Square Hotel. And what I would do as a very naive child, I would read in the newspapers [for] who was appearing in Boston, and I would write them a letter asking for their autograph. For instance, I've got probably five or six of Louis and Duke's whole band and all of this sort of thing. And I used to hear these radio checks at 10:30 at night out of the Music Box. Vic Dickenson, Bobby Hackett, Pops Foster, Gene Sedric, clarinet, Claude Hopkins on piano, and Buzzy [Drootin] played drums, of course. And so I wrote Vic Dickenson. Vic to me was one of the really classy trombone players. Jack Teagarden was one of my huge influences. And Vic, Vic played what he meant to play. There were no accidents when Vic played. And he could get to the emotional center of any song. Whether it be humorous or sad, he could get to the emotion center of any song faster than anyone I know of. So I wrote him a note, a letter from [Phillips] Exeter to the Music Box. "Hey, Mr. Dickenson, could I have your autograph?" And nothing came, nothing came, three weeks went by and I'm very unhappy. And then came this business envelope with a two-page letter apologizing for taking so long and: "Thank you so much for inquiring. And I thought rather than just have my autograph, you would like to have the entire band's. We were having a PR sheet published and it just came out. Here it is." And there's Hackett and there's Gene Sedric and the whole band right there.

**FRED** Good gosh!

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** And he said, "If you're ever in Boston, please come down and see us." Well, my dear friend Tom Gallant, who was a piano player, he and I basically grew up together. He was two years older than I; I was fourteen, he was sixteen. He had a '35 Roadster, you know, Ford Model A, with the convertible and spare tire on the rear deck and all that sort of stuff. We immediately snuck out of Exeter on Saturday night, driving in a terrible rainstorm, holding the roof down. And we came down to Boston and caught the first set at eight o'clock. Remember the blue laws in those days? They had to be out by quarter of twelve. And we would hear the first set. I introduced myself to Vic, thanking him for the autographs. And he said, "Boy, did you bring your horn?" "What?!" I damn near drove back to get it, you know. But I didn't, because I had a curfew; I had to be in by eleven. So we would race back and I would hop into bed so nobody knew we were missing. And the next Saturday I did bring the horn down.

**FRED** Oh, that must have been a galvanizing experience.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** No kidding, big time. And Vic said, "Boy, you got your horn? Come on up and play "Darktown Strutters Ball." And then they played "The Saints Go Marching In," and that's an amazing event for these guys, 'cause that's always the last tune at night, you know. Because I was there, they played it the last tune of the first set.

**FRED** Cool.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** And that's how I got to know Vic and we became friends to the very end. I played actually at his memorial service. And Hackett, I worked with Hackett for one summer for six weeks when he was up in Laconia, The Margate Inn. I was teaching at Phillips Exeter in the morning--a history of jazz class, running the music department during the summer of 1970, '71 and '72. And then I would come down in the afternoon and teach students at Berklee in the afternoon. And then I would drive about 120 miles up to Laconia and play with Hackett 'til one in the morning. Then back to Exeter, you know.

**FRED** While we're taking a break here, let me just preface the whole encounter by saying this is the fourth in the series of Berklee Library's video historical archive series. And we're welcoming today Mr. Phil Wilson who's been a member of the faculty for thirty years.

**PHIL WILSON:** Forty-one.

**FRED** Forty-one. And we're happy to have him sharing his views and memories, innumerable as they are, with us today. And we're obliged to ask you if it's okay, since we don't have a release form, if it's okay to use this for Berklee's nefarious purposes.

**PHIL WILSON:** Absolutely. [Both laugh]

**FRED** Well, we jumped in medias res, and I guess we'll just keep going.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Well, you know, where I was going earlier with the organization of materials that was really developed here by John LaPorta and Jack Petersen and Herb Pomeroy. In the summers, there really wasn't much happening in the summer schools in those days here at Berklee. And in order to make some money in the summers, we went out with what was once called the Stan Kenton Jazz Clinics. They became the Stage Band Clinics, and I'll give you an example: the summer of '66, I went out and I did a week in the University of Seattle-Washington, in Seattle. Then the next week we were at Sacramento, California. No, Portland, Oregon, that's right. And at one time or another, we'd been at every university or college in Portland. Five of them, you know. One campus one year and the next year we'd come back and do another. And then we'd go to Sacramento then we would go either to--it was Long Beach, that's right. And then to University of Utah, the University of Illinois in [Springfield]. And then Bloomington, Indiana, University of Indiana. The last week would be in Storrs, Connecticut. In those days it was really one of the very few places where young people could study jazz, the music that they were interested in. I'll give you an example. I had a rhythm section at the University of Illinois in 1973. My rhythm section for a student band was John Riley on drums, Steve Rodby on bass, James Williams on piano, and Pat Metheny was my guitar player.

**FRED** Good heavens!

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** I know.

**FRED** Those guys are top pros, teachers--whatever you want--ever since then.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** That's right, exactly. But again, there weren't many places in the country that you could study jazz.

**FRED** So these were talent magnets.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah, yeah. And that was going on at each one of those weeks. And it's funny, I can remember specifically the University of Washington. We were not allowed to play on that piano, no jazz on that piano. Don't contaminate that piano! And you can't use this recital hall, you can use this one, this is our secondary one. And that sort of attitude permeated many of these places, where we indeed were aware that there were faculty members of many of these schools who were not happy to have us there. The administration generally was, because it usually brought something like 10,000 bucks into the coffers of individual universities by running these clinics. So they were happy to have us.

**FRED** So how did you guys cope with this sort of back-of-the-bus, second-class citizenry attitude?

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Well, I suppose we were used to it. We'd really... This is also how the materials that are now taught all over the world were spread. Again, I would do an arranging class every morning, nine to eleven. And then I'd do a trombone clinic from eleven to one. We would break for lunch. Then my ensemble would be two to four. And then small jazz groups would meet four to six. We would break for dinner and then the faculty would put on a concert. And the faculty, I can remember one concert was Jimmy Garrison playing bass, Mary McPartland playing piano, Alan Dawson playing drums. I mean, Charlie Mariano, Herb, John, all these guys. Ron Carter was with us, Dave Baker, Aebersold came along after a while. I mean... Gary Burton, Gary was wonderful. It's really quite a sea of riches. And we, for some reason, we knew we were onto something after a while. I don't remember anybody really complaining too much. After all, we were involved with teaching the music that we loved, and indeed that's the right word. And if there was something to complain about, it would be, in those days, the amount of money we were able to generate to support our families. We all had to play the theaters, supplement our income.

**FRED** How did these summer programs contrast to the regular academic year here at Berklee?

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Well there was a huge similarity, there isn't much contrast there.

**FRED** You told me your Fridays were solid with big bands.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** That's right. I used to do ten big bands a week, that's right. Unbelievable. Four on Friday, that's exactly right. And you'd have the young Hal Crook showing up at the age of fourteen writing charts for that four o'clock band on Friday afternoon, which were the equal of our very best students who were seniors. He was fourteen, yeah. And he could play the trombone, too.

**FRED** Sure could.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah. And when we were doing these summer camps, along with the clinics that I started doing for the Conn Company, all over the world, really. At least on five continents. That is how the chord scales and other materials were disseminated and began to be picked up by all of these various universities. I remember we were at Indiana every summer and I went into one of the practice rooms. In the seventies I was doing this, early seventies. And there was this mimeograph--remember mimeograph, before Xerox?

**FRED** I used to get high on the smell.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Right, right. I picked it up and here's the list of all these chord scales that we had been teaching. Dorian for two minor seven, et cetera, only they had different names. The altered dominant scale was called the "Pomeroy scale." They had different names for it, but it was the same material that Jack Petersen and Herb and John really put together in the early sixties.

**FRED** Wow, those are like patronymics.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** And I did clinics in Frankfurt, Germany, Hamburg, Malmo, Sweden, et cetera, et cetera. Guess what they're teaching? The exact same stuff now.

**FRED** Wow.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** I showed up, did a month in Perth, Australia, as an artist in residence. And they asked me to sit in on some arranging classes that they were doing there at the Western Australian Conservatoire. And it was right out of the Berklee Arranging 1, Arranging 2, Chord Scales, et cetera, et cetera.

**FRED** Credited or not?

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** No.

**FRED** Just the lingua franca.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah, they wanted me to observe it and see if they were doing it right, basically. That's what they were asking me to do.

**FRED** They wanted validation from the source.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah, that's right.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** Marvelous. And yet, you said that when you first started doing this in the sixties, there was nothing but apprehension from the powers that be here.

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah. That always seemed strange to me. The administration here really did not encourage any of us to go out and do clinics, teach. It was discouraged. "The myth is better than the reality" was the philosophy at that time. I went out as a clinician for the C.G. Conn Company and started...God, I must have been at, at least many of the major colleges and universities in this country for sure, to say nothing of overseas. And of course, as time went by, it was well into the seventies that people were encouraged to go out. And of course, now it's huge.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** You had forged yourself an international reputation through Woody's band from '62 to '65. The Swinging Herd gave you and the orchestra members, as you said, many of whom were already Berklee graduates from Jack Petersen and Herb's band, you had instant name reputation, recognition internationally. Once you started doing that at Berklee, who was following in your footsteps? What other guys were hitting the road so to speak, unofficially representing the Berklee pedagogy?

**PHIL WILSON:** I think John LaPorta was one who would go out in the earlier days. Again, John had a reputation also from Woody's band, but also working in New York. God, I remember one of the first records I ever heard of John's was Saint Louis Blues, I think. And the Metronome All-stars where he replaced Buddy DeFranco, who couldn't make the session.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** Wow.

**PHIL WILSON:** And I was thrilled to be working with John when I first came here. Just because I was aware of the records that he had made and his tenure with Woody Herman back in the great band of '45, '46.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** Not only that, he had those spikes into the avant-garde. Those things he did with [Lou] Mucci and then Charles Mingus. Those workshop things that were just full of brilliant ideas for not only teaching, but really incisive reading and playing.

**PHIL WILSON:** Right, absolutely. And there was also that famous record he did with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. I've forgotten the title, but man, that tempo was fast. [Laughs]

**FRED BOUCHARD:** Wow, didn't hear that one.

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah, I don't know if it was originally a V-disc or not, but it became available and John held his own. If you listen to the tempo it will put a smile on your face, 'cause there's some underlying reasons for that tempo being so absurdly fast.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** One of Dizzy's tunes perhaps? "Be-bop?"

**PHIL WILSON:** Oh yeah, it was one of those. And they were giving John a run for his money and John measured up.

**FRED** Who else besides LaPorta was hitting the road?

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Maybe Alan after a while, Alan Dawson. Because Alan was just an incredible drummer. And he would go out with Duke Ellington's band when a drummer left the band, Alan would go out and kind of do the interim 'til they got a regular band drummer in. And Charlie [Mariano], Charlie eventually really left the school with everybody's blessing, of course. He would go out and do some of these clinics. Ted Pease, interestingly enough, who wrote some of the really first class workbooks that we did, including the Chord Scales class. That course that Ted wrote was first class. It was very precise and clean. It didn't have any daydreams like you get in the Walter Piston book, or things like that. And it was easily understandable by the student. And Ted would do clinics on arranging, of course he was a fine drummer himself. I can't think of anybody else. Of course as time went on. There were 419 students when I first came here and maybe, just maybe, twenty full time teachers. Now there's 4,000 students and 400 faculty. Wow.

**FRED** Wow. A geometric leap over a generation or two.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** It's amazing. And now of course, you have people like Larry Monroe running the international department, doing clinics all over the world. We are really sought after to do these clinics.

**FRED** And there are clone schools popping up among some of the more distinguished graduates all over the world.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** That's right.

**FRED** I had an email from a friend this morning, a guy named Steve Carbonara who went to school here, opened a school in Paris maybe twenty years ago. And that's a music school. His sister sent me an email looking for information about some of his former colleagues. But I mean, again, five continents! Singapore, Tokyo, all over Europe. A lot of people have jumped on the bandwagon so to speak.

**PHIL WILSON:** Absolutely, it's amazing. And very satisfying, Fred.

**FRED** Coming back to town, maybe you could expand on your personal relationship with the founder of this school.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Larry Berk and Alma Berk, wonderful people, I loved them. I mean, when you think about how this place got started, the Schillinger School, then Larry being the business manager for Schillinger. He died, Schillinger, and Larry took over the school, and Lee Berk was born in 1945, I believe, and they changed the name from the Schillinger School to Lee Berk backwards, Berklee, spelled exactly that way. And Larry, he valued musicians, good ones. He could get into battles with them, but he had such respect for quality musicians, that's really true. And a love of what he was doing. I perhaps could give you a picture of Larry Berk that always has remained with me. The Dues Band was one of the premiere ensembles at school. Larry would come with Alma to every concert, and he always sat at the same place in the auditorium. And afterwards he would approach the stage with such love that it was just written all over his face.

**FRED** I remember that beaming smile well.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Absolutely. It was as genuine as you could possibly imagine. And I think I was telling you earlier, I would go up to his office for one reason or another. and we'd sit down, we'd start talking. And we'd start talking about approaches to teaching, progress of students. He knew the best students in school and he loved them and followed them. Al Kirk, Tony Lada, Makoto Ozone, Sal Spicola, Richie Cole--all of these guys who came through here, he followed with genuine interest and love and support. And as the school grew, Alma was made publicity director. This would be in the, I think, late sixties. And there was a little closet on the second floor after they bought the 1140 building; there was a little closet in the corner which was her official office. [Laughs] And she would call around to all of us teachers saying, "Give me all your contacts." Which we did!

**FRED** She built up a massive mailing list.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Oh, my God. In those days, Berklee was not supported by the major papers here in Boston, so she went to all of the local papers and fed them endless material, thank God. And it grew, it grew until pretty soon the bigger papers, The Globe and the Herald, couldn't ignore it.

**FRED** I probably have some yellowed press releases signed by her in my library.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** I wouldn't be surprised. I do. She was wonderful.

**FRED** She had that enthusiasm and that grit to follow up on things.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Absolutely, yep. Those two were marvelous. You know when they bought the Loews Theatre here, which is now the [Berklee] Performance Center? I remember when one of the early Berklee Jazz Festivals, Larry had rented the old classy movie theatre here to put on the festival there. What he had in the back of his mind was to buy the building, and that was always a point of some dispute. John LaPorta would say, in those days, "Dammit, Larry, why don't you pay us more instead of buying buildings?" [Laughs] But I remember walking through the old theatre with Larry, and he just started pointing out that, "Well, now listen, we can move these seats over here and the stage would be this and that, and up" just describing what he was going through in his mind. And he did buy the building, thank God he did.

**FRED** I remember there was a fuss about how the place was going to be able to manage the seat expansion with that long, narrow profile, and still have good acoustics and, by God, they solved the problems, one way or another.

**PHIL WILSON:** They sure did.

**FRED** The place really got better as they owned it. They kept solving problems.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Right, that's right.

**FRED** Pretty damn good performance space.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** I think so, I've been very happy with it. I was just trying to think...



**FRED** Could we go into the history of the Dues and Rainbow Bands?

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Sure!

**FRED** Which have spawned so many great players over the years.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Oh yeah... 1965, again, I started an after-hours band which went through a number of different names. One of them was the Animal Band. Another was the Thursday Night Dues Band, and that stuck for awhile. The idea of the name Dues Band was--many of the students in those days seemed to think that once they got out of college, that life would be rosy. And I was trying to make the point that life begins for real when you get out of college, you will start paying your dues. And that's where the name came from. And in 1965, '66, '67, good Lord, we had four trombone players: we had Hal Crook when he got out of high school, Tony Lada--great players--Rick Stepton, saxophonist Richie Cole and he--Richie Cole was a tenor player in those days. And to me, the tenor was Richie's voice, not the alto, which always surprised me. And the second tenor player in that band was Billy Pierce at the age of eighteen. Tony Germaine was the piano player, drummer named Gene Roma. Some of the best lead trumpet players in New England: Joe Giorgianni, Larry Piatt were the two of the trumpet players out of that band.

**FRED** Mike Piepman came later?

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yep, oh yeah; that was ten years later. I mean if we go through the list, it's long. Guitar players like, oh, what's his name?

**FRED** [John] Abercrombie?

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yep, absolutely, I forgot about him. No, I can't think of his name right now, it's one of the top guitar players today Scofield! John Scofield.

**FRED** They were buddies.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah, John was in there for I think four years.

**FRED** He just did a wonderful Ray Charles tribute.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Really?

**FRED** Yeah.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** I'd like to hear that.

**FRED** I'll loan it to you, I'll get you a copy.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** There's also that acoustic album he did about four years ago, four or five years ago that was magnificent. I can't remember the name of it.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** He also did an album of ballads with a nice, rich octet behind him, called Soft or something like that. He's always got a concept.

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah. You know it always surprised me a little when he went with Miles because when he was here, I don't think he was into what you might call "Black music" when he was in school. He was a marvelous player and, of course, I've always been into Black music. And I've always tried to push people, expose them to that resource. And when John showed up in Miles' band so successfully and wonderfully, it put a smile on my face. To me, it perhaps reflected what we were doing in class while he was in school. That was very satisfying. Piano players that came through this band are just amazing right through today. I've got a young kid right now named Chris Enright from Maine who is a superb pianist. But of course you've got Makoto and you've got Cyrus Chestnut and I mean... Renato Chico from Austria, magnificent piano player. Mamiko Watanabe, Chihiro Yamanaka, I mean these... God, they just don't get any better.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** Yeah.

**PHIL WILSON:** And I know I'm leaving some out...

**FRED BOUCHARD:** It's Okay.

**PHIL WILSON:** But the list is long.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** How about bassists?

**PHIL WILSON:** Going back to Paul Kongella. I'll give you a little story about Paul Kongella, who no longer is a full time bass player. He's a rather successful--into sound--engineer. But back in 1970 or '69, there was an African bursar named Margaret who was on the switchboard one Wednesday afternoon, right around two o'clock. And I was in an ensemble downstairs in the 1140 Building with a beginning band we used to call the Parapalegic Band. The band had Abe Laboriel, playing bass, who was getting his reading chops together. And a young drummer named Craig Oakley who was a wonderful talent, worked with Woody years later. And the rest of the band were just really beginners playing beginning music.

But with Abe, of course, Abe was a monster talent and this drummer. And the piano player was always too scared to show up at this ensemble, so I would play piano. And we would get a groove going, like a vamp at the beginning of the rehearsal for about ten minutes, and this band--five trumpets, five trombones, and five reeds, none of them who could play particularly well--would start getting all riled up because we were just smoking with this, with Abe and Craig. And the band would finally come in playing some of these kind of less-than-musical-charts and they would come in like a ton of bricks! [Vocalizes] You know what I mean! [Laughs] It was hysterical. And most of those guys have never since or before played with a rhythm section that strong. And as a result, the lead trombone player was so happy with that ensemble, just on the strength of Abe and Craig, that he gave me a free pass to the Sherry 123 Theatre for six years because he was the head usher there as his regular job. And he'd never ever experienced anything like that.

So here we've got the bursar up there on the switchboard, of African descent, and Duke Ellington calls the switchboard: "Hello, this is Duke Ellington." Whereupon Margaret damn near passed out [both laugh], you know what I mean? "Is Mr. Wilson available?" Margaret finally got herself together to send somebody down to Room J in the basement to get me. Knocks on the door, opens the door, and this is that ensemble I just described to you. And the guy says, "Duke Ellington is on the phone," you know. [Laughs] Well that had a reaction in the band right there, you know. That might have been worth another year at the 123. So I went upstairs and there had been so much commotion around the switchboard at that time that Duke had said, "Please have Mr. Wilson call tonight at midnight," and left a number. Well midnight, he was calling from Las Vegas, midnight Las Vegas time is three in the morning our time. But, this is Duke Ellington! I stayed up until three o'clock, dialed the number, Duke Ellington picks up the phone in his hotel and said, "You have a bass player named Paul Kongella, and word is getting around that not only is he a good bass player, but he writes in the style of Duke Ellington and knows almost everything that Duke ever did," which happens to be the truth. And I said, "Yes, he's excellent." And so Duke said, "Have him call me tomorrow night at midnight." [Laughs] So, I get Paul out to the house-- was living in Arlington at the time--and we stayed up until three in the morning, dialed the number. "Hello? Where do I send the tickets?" He joined the band. And Paul Kongella at that point, he was a twenty-two-year-old Polish descent bass player, Polish descent, and he ended up playing with the band for two years.

He got dropped off the band because they were going on a tour of Japan and when he got to immigration, leaving the country, immigration wouldn't let him out of the country for fear he would avoid the draft. It was during the Vietnamese war. So he got dropped, and they picked up Jimmy Woode real quick.

**FRED** That's another tale. Jimmy, wow, just passed a month ago.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah, I know, sure. So Paul went from there onto Buddy Rich's Band. And of course, Buddy and I were friends since I wrote Mercy Mercy for him which was the last big band recording to get on the Top 40 Billboard charts. That's the last big band chart, recording to hit the Top 40. And that got me a Grammy nomination. And I wrote "Chelsea Bridge" and "Mr. Lucky" and a bunch of tunes for him over the years.

And I like Buddy Rich very much. I didn't see any of the legendary tirades that you hear about. To me, he was a warm, smart, wonderful person. We used to, Pat and I, would go out and visit him at the local Sheraton Hotel out there on Route 128, where he stayed. And he was playing Lennie's on the Turnpike, things like that. I supplied, actually, a lot of musicians to Buddy. Ernie Watts I got on the band. Ernie was a fiery alto player when he was at school. And he was--oh, there's some really funny stories about listening to him practice. I had one trombone player who was a very tall, untalented trombone player, who would come in with tears in his eyes explaining he was in a practice room practicing "Reuben Reuben" [vocalizes], where Ernie Watts was in the next room [vocalizes]. He says, "Man, that's too depressing." I mean [Laughs] And Ernie, after a while--I mean, he was the man in those days--he just got tired of the school I think, and he wanted to go out. Buddy had an opening for the baritone chair, and so he went on the band playing baritone. And of course it wasn't very long before he ended up playing lead alto on the band.

**FRED** So, we were in medias res talkin' about Dues and Rainbow Band alumni Paul Kongella, Ernie Watts...

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Oh, the tenor player, Donny McCaslin, was a wonderful tenor player. Roy Hargrove, Cyrus Chestnut, who I didn't mention earlier. Greg Gisbert, a trumpet player, Tiger Okoshi. And to this day, the band's very much--we're going to be playing the Martha's Vineyard Jazz Festival, which is called Vineyard Vibes, in August this year, and the band I have under me right now is every bit as good as any other band I've ever had in forty-one years. They just are marvelous.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** I was here for a Berklee faculty group, right in this very room, a couple months ago, when you were about to do one of your Rainbow Band specials. And the young guy in Syncopation, the singer...

**PHIL WILSON:** Jeremy Ragsdale.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** Whose father was an arranger for you.

**PHIL WILSON:** Scott Ragsdale, and he was a trombone student of mine.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** I said, "Well, I'll go see what Phil's up to, I'll catch a couple tunes and then leave." I sat there totally riveted for an hour and finally managed to drag myself out of there. Through Jeremy's set and a couple of other great charts.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** It's state of the art teaching and it's always a blast.

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah I'm with you.

**FRED BOUCHARD:** I mean if I'd been like Larry, if I'd been sitting in the front row, I would have been grinning my head off.

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah, yeah. You know, there was a time in 1985, '86, '87, where the second Rainbow Band--I have two you know, one of them is called the Big Rainbow Band, an extension of The Dues Band. We changed the name in 1985, as a matter of fact, from the International Dues Band: we used that title to underscore what was going on in the school, representing seventy-two foreign countries. I mean you looked at the band... I'll tell you maybe by example of today. The front saxophone section, the first guy is thirty-six years old from Newcastle on Tyne. Sitting next to him is a--the image of Fat Albert--a guy whose name is Godwin Louis, a marvelous saxophone player who's probably nineteen now and you pay attention when he plays. Right next to him in the middle from Tel Aviv, Israel, is Nir Namin. Next to him, Okahiro from Japan and next to him on baritone sax is a woman from Saint Johnsbury, Vermont, Linda Little. And when you look at that band, it's a rainbow. see what I mean? So I just wanted to underscore that looking at the band is a rainbow of ethnic backgrounds, really. And it has a common language and that language is music. And that brings people together.

You know it's an interesting fact, when I took the Rainbow Band, a small band, on a tour of Latin America in 1985. And I discovered through--this was under the auspices of the United States Information Service. And they pointed out to me an interesting fact that during the Cold War, the program that was blocked in the Eastern Bloc countries was not the political programs, it was the jazz program. Interesting! Willis Conover.

And I can tell you another funny story in connection with that. When we were in Guyana, Georgetown, Guyana, and when we went into each one of these cities, like Tegucigalpa, Honduras, we would sit in with the local musicians. So they would be exposed to us. Now this is a band, a small band with Cyrus Chestnut playing piano and Greg Gisbert playing trumpet, a wonderful small band. Marty Richards was the drummer. I played trombone and Carl Carter played bass. We would sit in with these local musicians so that they would be exposed to what we were, and then they would show up the next day at our clinics. And at the end of the week, we'd do a big concert somewhere. Well, we went down to the Xanadu Club in downtown Georgetown. Now downtown Georgetown had a blackout happening at least several times a day. The only place in the whole city besides the presidential palace that never had a blackout was the Xanadu Lounge [laughs], which was probably run by the Guyanese Mafia. So we sit in, we're talking to the musicians, trying to communicate and trying to find a tune that we can play with them. And after a while, "Take The A Train" came up. "Take The A Train?" "Oh sure, yeah, yeah." So we started doing "Take The A Train" and I, forgive my singing, I'm going to show you exactly what we got. [Sings] You got the idea? They didn't know the bridge! They just played the first eight bars over and over and over. And we're looking at each other going, "My God, how did this happen?"

**FRED** I guess it's the world of reggae, kind of: they simplify things or something?

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** No, that's not the reason. The reason was the Voice of America broadcast with Willis Conover, only played the first sixteen bars of "Take The A Train" at the beginning of each broadcast. They never got to the bridge. So they didn't know the bridge existed. Isn't that funny?

**FRED** That is funny.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** You should have seen the expression on Cyrus's face when it was evident that we were going to be playing the first eight bars for a long time. [Laughs]

**FRED** Wow. That is funny.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Right after that period, I changed the Rainbow Band into the Caribbean Ensemble. And that was '86. There was a trombone player--actually it was a bass trumpet player who was studying with me, who was older, he was about twenty-seven. Chris Gistillian is his name, and he was actually a professional entertainer from Nassau. And he was a tall, good looking guy, he could sing, he could play all sorts of instruments. And between the two of us, we put together an ensemble of all sorts of guys who came from the islands that were in school: Richard Reid, Abraham Laboriel, Jr. was our drummer. Roy Hargrove was our trumpet player. And we had--oh, I wish I could remember his name, an award-winning pan player from Trinidad at eighteen years of age. Just a wonder, you know--pans.

**FRED** Yeah, sure.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** He would play pans you know, regular, and then as part of the act, he would lie down on the floor underneath the pan and play them from underneath. [Laughs] I mean, you know. This was back where the cafeteria concert series had not--was just starting. And Chris Gistillian wrote all the arrangements; we had costumes; we had a professional dancer, Patrick. I'm not going to come up with that name, a real professional dancer. And three or four women who were making their costumes, dancing. And we would put on Caribbean Night in the cafeteria. There was a woman from the islands on the kitchen staff, and she would put together a chicken and rice and you know, some Caribbean food, and put it out, and we would put on these dances downstairs in the cafeteria, which got to be immensely popular.

**FRED** No doubt.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** And that was always an important time of, in my view. The school in the early days was known as "the chord factory" amongst the teachers: Herb and John and myself, others who were working the shows down at the Wang Theatre. When we left at eleven at night, Herb would yell, "I'll see you at the chord factory." [Fred laughs] Now, if you buy the definition of jazz as the unlikely marriage of two huge musical cultures--obviously the European diatonic tradition, which hasn't changed since Mozart's time, and the African rhythmic traditions, hypnosis through stacked rhythms, which is even older than the diatonic tradition in Europe--if you buy the fact that the unlikely marriage, through the unfortunate event of slavery, of those two huge musical cultures, is a good definition of jazz, you would find that this school was heavy on the European side and not so heavy on the African side, and it needed to be emphasized. And it has indeed, I mean you look at, look at what's going on now with Eguie Castrillo.

**FRED** Oh, sure.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** That whole side of our college has come to fruition.

**FRED** It's the left brain versus the right brain, but now they're starting to get together.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Right.

**FRED** I know Matt Jenson's got that Bob Marley Project going, and that's another good sign.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah, that's what we were into. We were doing Bob Marley songs with a Caribbean Ensemble. And it was one of the first, one of the elements that helped push the school into that area.

**FRED** Another thing that you had a great connection with was the contacts that you made early on with the military bands. And maybe you might mention how you've been grooming some of your players who are right for it, into the Army and Marine careers.

**PHIL WILSON:** Oh, God, yes. I just, in March of this year, I did a wonderful concert with The Army Blues in Buckner Hall, outside of the Arlington Cemetery, you know, Washington [DC]. They did my Wizard of Oz Suite which is my, perhaps my best selling CD.

**FRED** It's a beaut, on Capri.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah, that's right.

**FRED** I reviewed it.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** You sure did. And we're going to be doing it down at the Vineyard Vibes. What we did in Washington with The Army Blues Band, great band, please believe me, that is an incredible band. What they did is, they dropped a screen above the stage and they showed the movie starting, The Wizard of Oz movie, starting with the tornado and they just ran the movie as we played the suite underneath them.

**FRED** Fabulous.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** And the band is just incredible. These guys are top of the line. And when I was in the military myself, I was in the NORAD band which was a multi-service band representing the Army, the Navy, Air Force, Royal Canadian Air Force, et cetera. North American Air Defense was the defensive mechanism of our country whereas SAC was the offensive mechanism of the military. And we represented NORAD from Colorado Springs. Well, the NORAD band was supposedly the cream of the crop, that was the handle of military musicians from all these services. And I spent three months of 1960 and '61 in Hollywood, recording. And I made all of my contacts right there. And another two months of the year in New York, recording also and playing Carnegie Hall and all that stuff. And I got a good working knowledge of all of these military bands, The Airmen of Note, the Navy Commodores, the Army Blues, the Folkinaires out of Colorado Springs. I just played a concert in New Orleans two weeks ago with another one of the military bands which I was not aware of, and they were killer. I'm ashamed I can't remember what it was, it's one of the West Coast bands.

**FRED** Gosh.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** So for me, there's always the question comes up with young talented players: how am I going to make a living? Well, I'll tell you one thing you could do, is you go in and get yourself a job with one of these bands. You've got twenty years of playing good music with top musicians and when you get out, twenty years later, you've got a pension for life. You could do anything you want at that point.

**FRED** You've done wonderful things for the ears of your fellow servicemen.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Darn right. But musicians like Mike Crotty, Kenny Schmuckle, Mike Schmuckle another one, who went into these bands. Mike Crotty came out of the old Dues Band, the one when Hal was in it and Tony. He was a trumpet player at that time. I got him his job as a chief arranger for The Airmen of Note and twenty-four years later, he's got a myriad of great recordings. He's a great writer and he can do anything he wants now. He wrote for Dizzy, he wrote for all sorts of people, you know.

**FRED** Gosh, that's great.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Yeah, wonderful musician. And to give you an idea of how that worked, back when he was in school, he was a trumpet player, fourth trumpet in the band. And he went on from there playing alto flute and all the saxophones as well as being a superb writer. When he was in school, he was in the same band as Hal, and Hal Crook used to give Mike arranging lessons on the side just to get him cranking.

**FRED** Phil, this has been a delight and I think we're probably running a little short on time here, and if we had the time,  
**BOUCHARD:** we'd slip another cartridge in and keep going. But we'll have to say for the moment that this will be continued one way or another.

**PHIL WILSON:** It's been a pleasure, Fred, thank you so much.

**FRED** It sure has. Thank you for coming in and we'll look forward to volume two.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Great, Fred.

**FRED** Thanks a lot.

**BOUCHARD:**

**PHIL WILSON:** Sure.