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Richard C. Riederer

Mr. Riederer was a member of Local 43 (White) of the American Federation of Musicians, Buffalo, New York. On April 27, 1994, he invited me to his home, Buffalo, New York, for an interview. His son was also in the house during the course of the interview.

Q: Can I have a biography on you, sir?

R: Born in Buffalo, June 25, 1938. Joined Local 43 in July 1954. I play trumpet, piano, and drums. I originally learned music from my father, who was a trumpet/viola player. The rest was self taught. I played with many bands and orchestras in Buffalo over the last forty years. I was an executive board member throughout most of the '70s (Local 94). I was vice president in the late '80s and re-elected in 1993. I currently serve in that post.

Q: Where, um...Relationship with 43, 533. How would you describe it, sir?

R: My personal relationship?

Q: Your personal and, and what you perceived on a whole. You can give me your personal one first and then how you perceived the relationship between the two locals.

R: I think it was a very open relationship.

Q: Uh huh. In what sense?

R: Uh, if I recall, it was never...If we raised our...Now I can't really put my finger on whether there was anything mandated in this, but I think everytime we would raise the scale or change the working conditions...

Q: Uh huh.

R: ...that our Local seemed to take the, uh, the initiative, you know, but...And whatever we did, they went along with it. They would, you know, make the same recommendations and, uh, they all seemed to comply. Because it seems to me that the scales were almost always the same.

Q: Yeah, that's what I've heard. That everything seemed to be pretty similar.

R: Yeah, there was never any kind of _____, uh...

- Q: Nobody undercutting anybody. I heard the undercutting came primarily from non-union musicians...
- R: Well...
- Q: ...as opposed to say 533 or 43.
- R: Well, all the guys that belonged to our local undercut as well. So, it had nothing to do with what local you belonged to.
- Q: Sure.
- R: I'm sure the guys in 533 undercut, too.
- Q: Sure.
- R: But, it had nothing to do with the local itself.
- Q: Yes.
- R: Or your particular affiliation, which member, which local you belonged to.
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: The working relationship was fine. There were mixed bands. A fair number of them, I would say, over the years.
- Q: Nothing permanent.
- R: Oh yeah. There was. Uh, for instance, I worked at the Town Casino for awhile, which was a big club. A Vegas type is the only way to describe it now is a Vegas-type club. It's where the Pfeiffer Theater is.
- Q: Uh huh. Town Casino?
- R: Town Casino.
- Q: And where's that? Downtown?
- R: It's where...It's now the Pfeiffer Theater on the, on, uh, Main Street. It was a huge night club. It would seat, oh I betcha, a thousand people. Had a big bar out in the front that also had its own entertainment. But they would have headliners in the back, uh, kinda equivalent to like what you see in Vegas now.
- Q: Hmm.

R: You know, acts like Sammy Davis, Wayne Newton, those people.

Q: They played bandstand stuff?

R: They were playing the shows.

Q: Playing shows.

R: And then there was dancing in between.

Q: Uh.

R: Uh, In that band, uh, at least on one occasion, I can remember the house band was there. Seven, seven guys was the basic band. And out of those seven, two of them were, uh...Now this was, yeah, this was prior to the merger happening.

Q: Uh huh.

R: Uh, two of them were 533 members...

Q: Hmm.

R: ...of the seven in the basic house band. The band would expand depending on the act. If you had a headliner, like even Andy Williams, like they use to add strings, and they'd beef up the...They had full brass section and sax section.

Q: Uh huh.

R: Full brass section.

Q: So that went on for a period of time?

R: Uh huh.

Q: When was this about? Do you remember the years?

R: Well, when I worked there it was between, uh, '60 and '64, maybe.

Q: So, those four years you had, uh...

R: Over that four-year period I worked as a permanent player as well as an extra at other times. It closed in '64, I remember that.

Q: Oh it did? [Tape Indescribable]

R: And it, they had a summer counterpart there called the Glen Casino...

Q: Uh huh.

R: ...in Williamsville.

Q: Hmm.

R: That closed about a year later, but, uh, that year it existed, it didn't have that Big Show policy in there. But, those were going for years. I mean, before I was there.

Q: Hmm, I didn't know that. It's news to me.

R: The mainstay, uh, drummer, who was there for many years, was a member of 533.

Q: Hmm.

R: A guy by the name of Pete Suggs.

Q: Pete Suggs.

R: Uh huh. A very well known guy. Played in a lot of black bands in the '30s, like Fletcher Henderson and very well known in musical circles.

Q: Pete Suggs, S-U-G-G-S, I assume.

R: Uh huh.

Q: Well, that's [Tape Indescribable]. Continue the story.

R: I'm surprised that Ange didn't mention that, did he?

Q: No, he didn't say anything about Town Casino.

R: 'Cause Angelo was there before I was.

Q: He said there was mixing, but he didn't, um, um, recollect any, any specific names.

R: [Tape Indescribable]. Pete was there for years. He was one of his buddies.

Q: Is that right?

R: Yeah. [Tape Indescribable]

- Q: Must, uh, must of just, um. Well, he was there, you know... We'd get, he'd get a phone call, and kinda do things at the same time...
- R: Yeah, maybe he was not thinking straight.
- Q: So maybe that's why.
- R: Yeah.
- Q: You know, 'cause I, uh, and, uh, so I didn't want to press... 'cause he was at work and everything. I really didn't prod him too hard for, uh, for names or anything like that. I never heard him mention the Town Casino. He did mention that there was mixing, which, uh, I...It seems that the more interviews I do, I find out that there was really more mixing than I had originally perceived. You know, I thought that there was some mixing, but it was not much and it was temporary.
- R: Hmm.
- Q: I really wasn't aware that there was quite a bit. From, from all the stories I get, there was quite a bit of mixing.
- R: Well, I, I guess. I don't know how to define quite a bit. It's just even in my lifetime. I've been there almost forty years...
- Q: Yeah.
- R: There wasn't that much permanent work period.
- Q: Yeah.
- R: I mean the majority of work, uh, over the years has been temporary things, a show came in town for a week...
- Q: Yeah.
- R: Uh, club dates, you know the society, which use to be society work, which is practically non-existent...
- Q: Uh huh. Sure.
- R: ...in this day and age. But those were all one nighters. You know, I mean...
- Q: Yeah.

R: ...you get a job and its all over, you get your bread and you're all done.

Q: That's, that's really what, what my, how my thesis kinda raps up, is that it boils down to the economy. It's not so much a black white issue. Or civil rights issue. It boils down to the economy more than anything else. There just wasn't any work there.

R: There definitely was separations, but I don't think it was based, necessarily on anybody not wanting work. I don't think it was based on any kind of racial feelings towards anybody. It's just the way it felt, uh...

Q: Uh huh.

R: ...those guys had their friends, and uh...

Q: Uh huh.

R: ...and whatever. And they were, like there were other clubs around Buffalo that were pretty much controlled...

Q: Uh huh.

R: Their leaders had, what, the, uh, the Moonglow...

Q: Uh huh.

R: ...and the place that just burned, Montgomery's on Michigan Ave. And those would be black leaders. Now they use to use white people...

Q: Uh huh.

R: ...in the band there. Uh, you know, they had their gigs it seems and the white places had theirs.

Q: Uh huh.

R: Town Casino was a white leader.

Q: Uh huh.

R: But at times he would use one of theirs.

Q: Had a lot of times to do with, uh, the fact that 533 musicians did cater more to, to jazz as opposed to BPO?
[Tape Indescribable]

R: Oh yeah. [Tape Indescribable]

- Q: So that it, it, it, was also the music factor. I mean 43 catered mostly to different classical side music and stuff like that.
- R: And just by sheer numbers.
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: Uh, there was a big bulk of work, for instance, in Buffalo, uh, that was ethnic.
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: There is still a certain amount of it, but at one time when I was a kid, I mean, God, there was a lot of work amongst the, the, uh, four big nationalities of Buffalo...Polish, German, Irish, Italian, and needless to say, these band leaders would be of that ilk for obvious reasons. First of all, they knew the people and, second of all, they knew that they were familiar with the music.
- Q: So...
- R: And a lot of those guys that played in those individual bands were of that persuasion. Just because they did know, you know...It was a, a custom type thing.
- Q: So that they had their own styles of music, Polish...
- R: Yeah.
- Q: ...some Irish...
- R: Yeah.
- Q: ...some Italian.
- R: Yeah.
- Q: Those are in great populations.
- R: Yep. That's what it was based on really.
- Q: Huh. That's kinda interesting, too. I've never heard that mentioned. Any other details that, uh, you can think of about the relationship with 533?
- R: Uh...
- Q: Open? Everybody taking care of their own business?
- R: Well...

Q: There was mixing.

R: Really, the trouble with a lot of guys [Tape Indescribable] a lot of open rehearsals, which they still have a policy somewhere, but...

Q: Uh huh.

R: But, uh, they had guys. Their, their own people would rehearse. Uh, they wouldn't know if they were guys from 43 or I was invited there.

Q: Hmm.

R: You know...

Q: You're talking about the Colored Musicians' Club now?

R: Yeah.

Q: On Broadway.

R: The mixing mattered then even more, uh, heavily weighed, like with white or black probably just because if, you know, they didn't have that many people.

Q: Yeah, it didn't.

R: In numbers, I mean...

Q: They had 100 to your 400.

R: [Tape Indescribable]

Q: [Tape Indescribable] what 1,000?

R: We had over 1,000. They had something like 92.

Q: Hmm.

R: I mean, not to, to play on words, but it became Local 92. Maybe that's why they called it Local 92.

Q: Could be.

R: We never could figure that out, by the way.

Q: Is that right?

R: As you rather noticed in the other, uh, northern locals that merged, they kept their...

Q: Like Chicago 10-208.

R: Uh huh.

Q: Yeah, I don't, uh...

R: I don't know if there was any, any other local that they did this, uh. I know the Federation was pissed off at us. There was an element there because they, they came up with their merger plan, it wasn't accepted here.

Q: Yes.

R: And they took a personal steam. It was obvious at the one meeting they had. They really were ticked off.

Q: Yeah. What the Statler Meeting?

R: Uh huh. Because all the guys were questioning what they were doing and, uh, when they just came out with this, "Now this is the way it going to be, and we want you guys to do this."

Q: I was told that, uh, the old 43 officers prior to '68 were responsible for it in the sense that they had been negotiating with the National, with 533, and really hadn't informed the general membership that they were working out details for a merger plan. All of a sudden the new officers were installed in '68, and it's all plopped before you. You know, "This is, this is what we worked out and..." Do you remember it that way?

R: I remember that they recommended it for adoption. It was rejected, like some outrageous number, like...

Q: Yeah.

R: ...703 to 3 or something.

Q: Yeah.

R: 'Cause there was a huge number. I never saw a turn out like that for any kind of a meeting.

Q: Hmm.

R: Or election, or any that had this kind of numbers. It was bizarre. We had the Terrace Room of the Statler. It was packed.

Q: Wow.

R: And, uh, a lot of those that come down on opposition, obviously.

Q: Uh huh.

R: And these guys stood up there. Well, they were very brazen. You know, "This is the way it's gonna be, and we've worked it out, and you guys should adopt this," and Buffalo membership didn't adopt it.

Q: Hmm.

R: You know...

Q: Hmm. That s interesting. So prior to that, everything was okay?

R: Well, it was no, no problems...

Q: Nothing you could do.

R: ...no working conditions, no. I mean no, uh, I mean that there may have been a couple little petty, uh, dislikes...

Q: Uh huh.

R: ...but it was certainly no, uh, no problems.

Q: Did you have any problems with, uh, some of the, uh, establishments. With, uh, that you can remember. You know, maybe you wanted to use, uh, uh, um, somebody from 533, but that particular theater wouldn't allow a black musician?

R: I don't remember that.

Q: I, I think I came across some of the Shea's, Shea's that were drawn when, um, Great Lakes, some of those places, didn't allow...

R: That could have been, but that had to be way back. Those places didn't even have any musicians when I joined the union.

Q: So as far from your...The time frame you were dealing with...

R: The only theater that was going in Buffalo that had any musicians working was a burlesque theater.

Q: Uh huh.

- R: And I worked there also for a couple years. That had four people. Um, I certainly don't think there would have been any objections, I don't remember any guys from 433 or 533 working there.
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: Let me think here for a minute. They wanted us, there was never anybody there on a steady basis.
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: But I never heard anybody say he wouldn't. There was, there were a lot of black people who were employed in that theater.
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: In different capacities.
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: Usherettes, uh.
- Q: It was a strip joint.
- R: It was a burlesque place. But the other places you mentioned, like the Hippodrome and Great Lakes...
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: Uh, even Shea's Buffalo. The Buffalo was probably the only place that would have intermittent music. Like there'd be a show come in a couple nights, or something like that. The other places were gone.
- Q: [Tape Indescribable]
- R: Yep.
- Q: [Tape Indescribable]. Hmm.
- R: That may have existed prior. I mean, I'm not saying it didn't. It may have. I don't know.
- Q: Do you recall, moving into the merger years, um...I'm sure you're aware of, you know, the Civil Rights Acts of '64. There was, uh, the pace was stepped up by the Federation's attempt to merge...
- R: Uh huh.

Q: ...the locals across the country and they correspond with, I found in the minutes with 533, saying, "Look this is what's going on. You guys need to get together and start working on it." Do you remember any of those things mentioned in the meetings from say '64 on. I'm sure you're aware. You remember when the Chicago 10-208 merged. Do you remember any correspondence, anything read, um, say, you know, when the Civil Rights Act [Tape Indescribable].

R: It was lightly touched on.

Q: Lightly touched on.

R: Almost, almost to the point that it was one of those things you knew was there, but it was talked about as if it was something that was so far down the pike, and, uh, well, it's, uh...I think one of the reasons that attitude was, was, uh, taken on by people was because there never was any problem. I mean it came not as a result of any conflict. It came from above someplace. There's no, there was no problem.

Q: So the three years it was just lightly touched on whenever something would come through.

R: Uh huh, as I recall there was never any big heavy, uh, heavily debated item.

Q: Not 'til '68.

R: Not 'til stuff started really getting, coming in from the Federation.

Q: That's when the pressure came on.

R: Yep.

Q: '68.

R: I think at one point in time, I, I'm sure, um, if you went back far enough in the by-laws, it probably would have said that, uh, you know if you were black, you couldn't join 43. Talking prior to '19 in the teens.

Q: Really?

R: Yeah, because that's when those black locals were formed.

Q: Yeah, I think...

- R: I think, however, I've never seen printed. I mean, I've heard it just by stories.
- Q: Yeah, I've, I've, I've come across the same stories. They wouldn't allow them in.
- R: But at some point in time, that, that stipulation was taken out because I remember a couple white guys that belonged to 533, and, uh...
- Q: Do you remember any names?
- R: Yeah, one guy, his name was Victor Einach.
E-I-N-A-C-H.
- Q: E-I-N-A-C-H.
- R: Believe it or not, he played the viola. That's just one I could think of, but I'm sure there were a few more. It wasn't in big numbers.
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: It almost seems to me now that we had a couple black members, too, and I can't...
- Q: Can't remember names?
- R: No. I mean, it wasn't [Tape Indescribable]. In other words, what I'm saying is, they wouldn't deny membership to somebody. But if a guy hung and played in those circles, he would join where, where you were. So it was...Membership was open.
- Q: Music, friends. So by the time, '50s, 60's, it wasn't so much if you wanted to belong to a musician's union, you went to, you went to where your friends were. You went to where the music and so that's why you have all liberation.
- R: Yeah, prior to, uh, I'd have to say maybe this big influx of people from the South, you know, which was in the '50s...
- Q: Yeah.
- R: ...and those black people who were here for many generations, just like the white people were, they'd follow up in their own little...
- Q: Sure.

- R: ...streams of families and whatever, and, uh, if you look in the Buffalo book way back, you'll see these families. It was primarily, uh, the members were just passed on from father to son...
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: ...[Tape Indescribable]
- Q: Hmm.
- R: And the business in those days.
- Q: Hmm. Yep.
- R: So you, you'd see family names and theirs worked in the same way with smaller numbers, of course.
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: And the sibling would naturally gravitate to 533. 'Cause their fathers, grandfathers were part of the origin of that stuff.
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: But then things changed and you got a lot of outside, you know, people that really didn't come necessarily from the same kind of musical lineage.
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: You know, not just, not just in 533, but even 43 members...
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: You kinda see that somewhere that was lost, that passing on from generation to generation. It still goes on, but no where near to the extent that it did.
- Q: Yeah. That's interesting. That's real interesting. You really, you really remember a lot of stuff. A lot more than a lot of folks do. 'Cause I've interviewed about a half dozen people.
- R: Well, I talked to Ange, and I asked him about Lloyd Plummer. He thinks he's still living.
- Q: Thinks Lloyd Plummer's still living. I don't know. He told me that and everybody else is telling me he's dead.

R: You know what...

Q: See I thought I was done interviewing people and all of a sudden the damn burst open and, uh...

R: And he's, uh, lucid. He's the guy that use to...He's in his hun, he's over a hundred. He was the secretary of 533 for a long time. He use to talk about not being...

Q: He's the big gun. Yeah.

R: He use to be, uh, the talk about...

Q: Let me call, while you're looking through that, I m going to call, so he doesn't worry about me. 'Cause I told him I was going to...

[START OF PHONE CONVERSATION]

Q: Hello, Mr. Callea. How ya' doing? I'm here at your buddies house. Uh, yes, sir. So I will, uh...Well, what time do you go to lunch, 12:00? You are? Ok, well I'll be down there shortly. I'm just finishing up here. I'll probably, I imagine around noon time. I'll swing by. Does that sound good? Alright. We'll see you then, sir. Bye bye.

[END OF PHONE CONVERSATION]

R: Just see if I got a response. This is where I kinda recall him being.

Q: See I, back, back in the winter time, that's when I did my interviews, and I was told, 'cause I said, "Is there anybody else that I could talk to?" And they said, "No, they're all dead, they're all gone." You know, and then, uh, all of a sudden, uh...

R: This guys up there [Tape Indescribable] He was a real quiet, laid back guy.

Q: Nothing wrong with that.

R: Yeah, he was always very, very respected.

Q: Yeah, that's what I heard.

[START OF PHONE CONVERSATION]

R: Uh, hi. I'm just inquiring. Is Mr. Lloyd Plummer still, uh, a resident there? Uh, can I ask you a

question, maybe off the record? Is he reasonably lucid if someone visits him? Yeah. Uh huh. Thank you.

[END OF PHONE CONVERSATION]

Okay. Lives on the third floor, gets his newspaper everyday, gets all his mail.

Q: Wow.

[PHONE CONVERSATION CONTINUES]

R: Uh, hi. I just got a question about, uh, Mr. Lloyd Plummer. Uh, is he able to receive visitors? Uh huh. Is he reasonably lucid? Uh, my name is Dick Riederer. I'm an old musician friend of his from, uh, he use to be the secretary of, uh, the Local here in Buffalo. Uh huh. Uh huh. Well, thanks very much. Okay. Bye bye.

[END OF PHONE CONVERSATION]

She says his neighbor comes and sees him and he responds's to the visits. That was the nurse.

Q: Is that right? Now where is that place, sir?

R: He's at the Episcopal Church Home which is on Rhode Island under the Peace Bridge.

Q: Church Home on...

R: Twenty four Rhode Island. I think you have to get there by going down the...Do you know the entrance to the, to the 190 is? Or if you go down to Niagara Street and you got to the left and you, you want to get on the 190 or the Peace Bridge, you stay straight?

Q: Yeah, I think I know where you're talking about.

R: You go down there, and then you follow _____.

Q: So I'm going towards the Falls then actually?

R: No.

Q: You went away from Buffalo.

R: No, you're going towards Buffalo.

Q: Going towards Buffalo?

R: Uh huh. On Niagara Street.

- Q: So it's just up here. Is it...
- R: It's not very far at all.
- Q: ...from my campus?
- R: You're on what campus?
- Q: Uh, the Buffalo State Campus.
- R: Oh, you're at Buff State?
- Q: Yeah.
- R: Oh I thought you were at UB. Okay.
- Q: No.
- R: Uh, Do you know where Niagara and Ferry is?
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: Okay, going south from there. You follow signs as if you're going to the Peace Bridge 'cause you'll...Niagara will veer off this way and you're going to stay straight, and you got an option once you stay straight. You get on the 190 South or taking a little left angle, that brings you on the Peace Bridge entrance.
- Q: Uh huh.
- R: And you make a left as if you're going to the Peace Bridge, but now you're going to have the Church Home on your left, and you turn left on Rhode Island. You can't get there any other way 'cause it's a one way syndrome.
- Q: I see.
- R: You have to get there
- Q: I see.
- R: And that's where he is.
- Q: Church Home. And does he have a number?
- R: Well, here's the main number, 884-6500.
- Q: 884-6500, and he's on the third floor, ha.
- R: That's what she said.

- Q: I'll be darn.
- R: I never heard of him dying that's why when you said he died...
- Q: He's, how old is he?
- R: He's got to be over a hundred. I'll betcha.
- Q: I'll be darn. I thank you very much.
- R: Ask Ange what his age is when you come. He's got a card on him.
- Q: That's news to me. I should go visit Lloyd Plummer.
- R: Yeah. I thought he was still living.
- Q: Do you think I should call and set something up with the nurses? Think that would be best? What's your advice on that?
- R: Maybe. He doesn't have any family.
- Q: Maybe I'll talk to the nurses. Tell them what I'm doing and who I am...
- R: Or just stop in there. If they talk on the phone, it's easy to get rid of you.
- Q: Yeah, that's true.
- R: They don't _____. 'Cause she just asked me who's calling and I asked if he's lucid.
- Q: How could I set the time, though.
- R: I don't know if you have to do that. Tell them who you [Tape Indescribable] as a result of, uh, we're just sitting here and talking, and...
- Q: I'll do that. Now, 'cause I know you got to go. I don't want to hold you up too long. Um, getting to the merger. 43 didn't have a problem with it, ha? When it finally came down to, when the wait finally came down, said, "Look, you guys gotta do it. There's no choice."
- R: If I recall, we went through this. Well, I don't think they disagreed, uh, disagreed with the merger itself. I think they disagreed with the recommended plan.
- Q: What about the plan that did 43 not want?

R: Um, some reason I'm wrong...According...It seems that we're going to set aside whatever assets. 533s assets. And those guys keep that.

Q: I heard that.

R: And we were just taking our...I may be wrong on the assets, it's going back. I know there was a couple of rules that they felt was unfair.

Q: I heard something about, um, having, like, two sets of officers...

R: Uh huh.

Q: ...and they'd be paid...

R: Well, they had sets of officers for assets combined. The assets, as you know, [Tape Indescribable]. I think there's an exception to that someplace. Well, this is the actual thing itself.

Q: That's the merger plan, isn't it?

R: No, this is the, uh...

Q: That's, that's the one that went down in the by-laws, ha?

R: Yeah, this is the proposal. [Tape Indescribable]. Yeah, they wanted to seat some members. Have some members seated for _____.

Q: Yeah.

R: I'm not sure of that. As it wound up, they wound up getting four members [Tape Indescribable]. So it went from one extreme not the other, but maybe it could have come out a little better _____.