1994

Interview; Leslie Davis Jr.; 05-02-1994

William Kayatin, Jr.

Leslie R. Davis, Jr.

Mr. Davis was a member of Local 533 (Black) of the American Federation of Musicians, Buffalo, New York. He invited me to his work place, Roswell Park Cancer Institute, Buffalo, New York, on May 2, 1994 for an interview.

Q: Here we go. Alright. Your full name, sir?

D: Leslie R. Davis, Jr.

Q: And your birth date?

D: Uh, 3/11/35.

Q: And were you born and bred in Buffalo?

D: Born and raised in Buffalo.

Q: Alright. You'll have to excuse my southern expressions. Uh, when did you join the Local, Local 533?

D: I joined Local 533 in 1950.

Q: 1950. Prior to that you had gone to school...

D: Yeah. Buffalo Tech High School.

Q: Music wasn't your, your occupation. You're, I think, you're a biologist?

D: Yeah, microbiologist.

Q: Microbiologist, and you...

D: No, I went to school, Public School 17, and, uh, to, uh, Tech High.

Q: Uh huh.

D: And, uh, UB, Canisius, and back to UB. Uh, we are a long time Buffalo family. We've lived in Buffalo since 1844.

Q: And so you joined Local 533 in 1950, uh, which also made you a member of the Colored Musicians' Club.

D: Exactly. At that time it's the only way you could become a member of the Club...

Q: Yes.

D: Was to be a member of 533. Club membership was automatic. It was the only way you get to be a member of the Club.

Q: And the instrument you play?

D: I play just piano, basically.

Q: Just piano?

D: I fool around with other instruments, but piano's the only one I really like.

Q: Yeah, it's your...

D: Yeah.

Q: ...your forte'. What bands did you play with while a member with 533?

D: Oh, that's...God that's...Practically everybody who had a band, uh, just any/every band. I played with Elvin Shepard, uh, Freddy Silmon, uh, the Crump Brothers, of course. Later on the Hackney Brothers, it was Lou Hackney, in particular.

Q: Uh huh.

D: Uh, Willie Dorsey's Band.

Q: So you played with, uh, with all of them?

D: Yeah, piano players have always been scarce around town so you didn't have to be that good. You just had to be on the scene, so to speak.

Q: Uh huh. Did you, uh, did you ever have your own band?

D: Well, I've had several small groups. But, I've hired Anderson's Band off and on as my own.

Q: Okay, yeah. I visited with him, Mr. Anderson. He's a real nice fellow.

D: Yeah, he's also welcome down at Local 92.

Q: He and, he and, uh, Mr. Riederer, both. I visited both of them way back in, uh, I think it was January. Okay, let's see, what um...

D: Legge is another person I would consider a prime source on the information about the merger and whatever went on in the Club and 533.

Q: I visited with him, too.

D: Great guy.

Q: [Tape Indescribable] Mr. Dorsey, as well. Your best recollection of, recollection...What kind of relationship, uh, did you have with 43?

D: Uh, they were there, and we were where we were. There were a lot of individual friendships, of course.

Q: Yes.

D: But as far as the two locals operating together, it just didn't happen.

Q: Uh huh.

D: It's, uh, the segregated thing never, uh, it just never melted into, to one organization until such time as the merger did come along.

Q: I've heard there was mixing pending on the engagement.

D: Sure.

Q: Uh, because there were jazz musicians, uh, in 43. Of course, I've been told, and, and you can confirm this as others have, have done, there really wasn't a whole lot of mixing because 43 was mostly popular and classical music.

D: Well, I don't know if that's true or not. Uh, true enough that the symphony musicians were members of 43, but there were a lot of other members of dance bands. A lot of them were still around. You know, like, uh, let's see, Ange Callea, for example.

Q: Uh huh.

D: Who's still the, uh,...

Q: I've talked to him.

D: ...uh, secretary. And, uh, I can't, can't think of anybody....No, I can't of, I can't think of any of the names, but they're good jazz musicians.

Q: Yes.

D: There were members of 43 like Larry Cavelli, uh, and, The Azzarella Brothers. There were a lot of...Sam, uh, Sam Noto, uh, Sam Cal, uh, all good musicians, but, yeah, we mixed freely 'cause the interest was in music and not so much where you played. It was what you played, i.e. type of music.

Q: What you played, so...

D: Of course, we also did a lot of engagements which were outside of the, the, the jazz realm, so to speak.

Q: Uh huh.

D: A lot of dance engagements, and those kinds of things, where dance bands were sometimes mixed.

Q: I see. I see. So, you would, uh, say the relationship with 43 was, was genial.

D: Oh yeah, definitely. Definitely congenial.

Q: No problems with policy and jurisdiction, nobody stepping on anybody's toes?

D: Yeah, I think not. At least, not that I know of.

Q: Everybody took care of their own business.

D: Yeah, exactly, yeah.

Q: So, when, uh, what I've heard that, uh, 533 was, uh, doing pretty good back in those years.

D: Yeah, I think it was doing quite well, as a matter of fact. In many respects, I think we were doing better than 43.

Q: That's what I've been told on both sides, actually. That, uh, 533 had a, a good business. They were, uh, they were black? DAVIS: Yeah, and mostly thanks to Lloyd Plummer.

Q: Uh huh.

D: He was the, the secretary of our local parameter, and, uh, there were people like Perry Gray.

Q: Yes.

D: Nice man, who was also an international leader in the National and International, and, uh, they took pretty good care of business, i.e. Federation.

Q: Right.

D: And then you had people like Bill Kelly, as well. You can go way back with some of these names.

Q: Ray Jackson's still around.

D: Ray Jackson, yeah.

Q: Was a force?

D: Oh, definitely a force. In fact, Ray Jackson was a major force. In fact, the, uh, construction of the Constitution and by-laws for Local 533...

Q: Was that right?

D: Jackson and Kelly, and, let's see who, Carey Rector...

Q: Uh huh.

D: Uh, in fact, those are the people who made the Club an independent entity from the union.

Q: Way back when.

D: Yeah. There has been a lot of discussion as to why they did it, but they did it. They foresaw some situation, later down the road, uh, which was going to dictate, uh, loss of union membership, which would allow upstairs to remain as a club, so that they set that up in the Constitution. The Club would always remain separate from the union.

Q: [Tape Indescribable]

D: And, ultimately it did pay off.

Q: Yep, exactly. Uh, moving, uh, into the merger years, the Federation started encouraging mergers, uh, before 1964.

D: Uh huh.

Q: But, with passage of the Civil Rights Act, they were now were mandated by law?

D: Uh huh.

Q: And so, uh, every local process, uh, was, uh, sped up. However, 533 and 43 didn't, uh, merge until 1969.

D: Uh huh.

Q: Do you want to talk briefly about that?

D: Well, uh, I have to resort to memory, uh, just because I wasn't involved that much politically with what was going on.

Q: Yes.

D: But, I do remember when back when I was the assistant secretary under Lloyd Plummer, and that goes back to '51, '52, and '53. Yeah, 'cause I, I went into the airforce in 1954, and I didn't return home until '59.

Q: Uh huh.

D: And, uh, but there were merger talk was in the wind then. 'Cause I think if, I don't know, when the merger existed with the locals in Los Angeles.

Q: Yes, '50, uh, '54, I think.

D: That was a few years earlier, yeah. So, I think it was flying around the Federation there would be, uh, mergers in St. Louis, too, I believe.

Q: Uh huh. Shortly thereafter, yes.

D: But, uh, it was always the topic, and, uh, but, like I said, I didn't...I wasn't that involved so much with politics though because I was, I was going to school, and I was working, you know.

Q: Sure.

D: In fact, [Tape Indescribable]. So, uh, not a heck of a lot I can tell you except, uh, I do know there was some sort of a, but this I think was after the, after the merger, that there was kinda like a, a double board. There was a Board of Directors...called the Executive Board made up from members of Local 533 who worked in concert with The Board of Local 92.

Q: They wanted that, but they didn't get.

D: Well, what actually, it did exist for a couple, about two years. If I'm not mistaken, I think Willie Dorsey was on

it because it was such a confusing situation, where they were trying to assure that there was a smooth transition from the double union situation to the single local situation. Uh, uh, I'm trying to think of...If I'm not mistaken, Dick Riederer was on that Board, too. And, uh, I'm pretty sure that, I know, Willie Dorsey was on. But what exactly their function was, I don't know.

Q: Yeah.

D: I don't know exactly what their function was and how they operated, but I do know that they, Legge, Dorsey, Gray, and, who else...Plummer. 'Cause if I'm not mistaken again, I think Plummer was also the secretary of Local 92.

Q: Uh huh.

D: In its, its first years. [Tape Indescribable]

Q: Think he'll remember much of the, the heat during the merger years [Tape Indescribable]? 43 and 533 both kinda procrastinated because they were pretty much content? That's the...

D: Yeah, but nobody, nobody knew which way they wanted to go.

Q: Yeah.

D: And nobody knew exactly what they were going, they were going to take erase two locals and create a third, another local.

Q: Uh huh.

D: So everybody, I think at the time thought it was going to be either 533 or 43. And, uh, 43 did not deserve that power. But, uh, that was just a thought...Nobody knew what they were going to be asked to give up. And nobody would even get in return. So, it was just a question, of, uh, loss or gain of power. Yes, we had, we did, indeed, have a certain sovereignty.

Q: Sure.

D: We had complete, uh, control over our musicians, our contracts. We also had certain control over traveling musicians who were coming into Buffalo. At that time, it was jazz, a big jazz town, big dance town. See a lot of black bands were still coming into Buffalo, So, when they paid their work dues...

Q: In the '60s.

D: ...effectively they were coming into 533's jurisdiction,...

Q: Yes.

D: ...as opposed to 43s jurisdiction. So that we made money. And, of course, they were also coming in from black locals in other towns. So that was basically the, I don't know if it was just a traditional thing, but, when a black band came into Buffalo, they dealt with Local 533. And a lot of the members of the traveling bands about that time were members of 533, and, therefore, it was also a great rest stop. It was the place to meet anybody who ever came to Buffalo. It was a world of jazz or, or swing, as whatever the case might have been for any given group in those days.

Q: Hmm.

D: R&B, I guess as it was called.

Q: Do you remember any of the...when the merger finally did occur...

D: Well, the major issue seems to be that, uh, I think a lot of members of 43 thought the Club was going to be part of the merger.

Q: I've heard that.

D: You know, so, and, uh, we thought we were better off. That was our perception. 'Cause we were very proud of the fact that the old timers had seen fit to retain things, uh, with the club as a separate entity. This club was still ours since we had it. There was no problem, there was no animosity, black or white, you know. Uh, it was, uh, there was no issue there--That is the fact that we had a Club and 43 did not have a club.

Q: Yes.

D: So we had a club room.

Q: They were still renting, 43 was?

D: Yeah, as far as I know they're still renting.

Q: They're still renting on Franklin. Yes, they are. So you don't think it was so much of a black white issue?

D: Well, it had never been a black white pride issue.

Q: Yes.

D: You know, something which, which you really couldn't point your finger at. You know, I don't think anybody actually vocalized it per se.

Q: Uh huh.

D: We had some musicians whom I think probably did. You know, the idea, "Well, were not going, were not going to give them our Club."

Q: Yeah.

D: You know, that kind of thing. And it's a...I guess I kinda felt it myself, in a sense; when I can say that, uh, the old timers had foresight enough to know how to go about to keeping this thing separate. Put it in terms of, uh, preservation of property and work jurisdiction, as well.

Q: Uh huh.

D: Which is what a lot of places, uh, that we were playing, which were really, I guess, in the jurisdiction of 43. And after the merger took place, this massive, now this one massive territory, which bounded the jurisdiction of Local 92. And, we were all collectively members of 92, at least officially, but there was the, uh, I have to admit, the idea that, "maybe you shouldn't be playing here because this is not, uh in your jurisdiction." Well, I think what happened is you got...I think we have a lot of influx of younger members...

Q: Uh huh.

D: ...and, uh, some of the attitudes were a lot different than those of the older players.

Q: Heard that.

D: Yeah, it's, uh, just like you have different attitudes now. [Tape Indescribable]

Q: I heard some of the other members were like, you know, there's no reason to have two locals.

D: Uh huh.

Q: Most of the older members felt otherwise. Say, "Hey, we're doing okay."

D: Yeah. Not only that, they came from an era where existence of two locals was, uh, predicated on laws. They existed, see in the '20s and '30s, when the Federation themselves said, "Okay, you will have separate...

Q: Segregation laws

D: ...sets of locals, you'll be segregated locals." And, uh, it was kinda universal. Those guys, those old timers, they fought and fought and fought to get 533 to where it was, and I think, in their own minds, I think they were actually right in that sense. They weren't willing to give anything up. They, they gave it up grudgingly. Plummer could see advantages, for example. But, he was also well aware of the disadvantages.

Q: And what were some of the advantages?

D: Well, the advantages were that, uh, you'd have strength, and, uh, you'd have union strength because of the numbers, just in shear numbers.

Q: Yes.

D: And just what sheer numbers gave you, also it gave you a certain, uh, affiliation with the symphony musicians. Again, that's another strength issue. And they have that today, of course. That's probably something you'd probably rather not have because the symphony musicians have seemed to become, uh, separate. It's a union within the union.

Q: Yes.

D: And, uh, of course, I think now, there's been little effect on symphony musicians relative to what's going on in Local 92.

Q: Uh huh.

D: I think, I think right now also Local 92 is probably weaker than it's ever been here.

Q: Yes.

D: In this town. It's almost ended. But, I think back now on things that occurred while in lesser engagements. Going back, that a lot of guys objected to, uh...Let's

say you were playing some place like, uh, one of the larger hotels around town, the Statler was going full blast or we, uh, played at the Lafayette Hotel. You might run into a, a guy telling you he wanted to check the cards. This is where guys would say, "You don't know me? Well, hey, I know you. Are you a, you've got a union officer's card. Well, why should I show you my card? Who are you?" This kind of thing. Or...Well, we all used it if we played a gig, Perry Gray would walk in or Hank Roberts would walk in, somebody we knew. So, it was a question of, do you reacquaint yourself with people or get acquainted in the first place with people you haven't met. The officers a lot of us didn't know. Oh sure, like I knew, uh, oh people like Patty Scime and, uh, oh, Ange Callea, of course. So there's people I knew playing, but, uh, in terms of some of the officers we had a tendency to say, "Well, okay. You know, if you guys don't... you don't have...Your booker doesn't have a card, you're going to have to stop playing, you know. This was kind of a garbage thing for us. I don't care what band you find, somebody in that band, even now, their card is lapsed, or he's maybe a month overdo on paying his dues, or something like this. And sometimes he'd give us a hard time. But there...But we kind of objected to that.

Q: Hmm.

D: Miss Betty Great would give us a hard time in saying that she's...

Q: [Tape Indescribable]

D: The union rep would say, "Okay, I want to see you at the union hall in the morning. You take care of this otherwise you're (tape indescribable. You'll be fined or something dumb. So we took care of it because they, we took care of it within our, our own daily work, and it was a little tough getting use to having a much larger union and different people, in affect, controlling it. Because we didn't, indeed, really lose that control. We lost the control because there, there, there were not any black officers there except for Plummer.

Q: Uh huh.

D: And, uh, in terms of the presidency, vice presidency, and Board of Directors, uh, beyond the fact that we had a little Executive Board, which was kind of a, strictly a, it was more like a nominal thing...

Q: Uh huh.

D: And, uh, other than that, we had no real control over what was going on. And plus, the other thing, there were fewer of us, so we had very little say of what was going to be said. Our vote didn't mean a heck of a lot. And, uh, at least if it was something that was relative to our particular interest, of what was going on in the east side of town, there was always the east side/west side concept.

Q: I didn't know that.

D: Well, when you think about it, 43's on the west side.

Q: Uh huh.

D: 533's on the east side. Of course, there was an area where like 533 skipped, I mean 43 skipped over. Like if you went to the far east side, but the people who played places like the Polish Village, places like that, those were the members of either Local 43 or probably no union at all. See, but I think there was also a Lancaster union, where some of those people belonged. But I also played the Polish Village.

Q: You did.

D: As far as I know, I was the only black guy who played the Polish Village.

Q: That's, that's nice. Any other disadvantages you can think of? You talked about representation. How did it affect, uh, work? Cliques? Now you've got 92, you know, and you've got, uh, it controlled mostly by the old 43...

D: Oh yeah.

Q: ...officers. Uh, they've got their cliques. Did they exist?

D: Yeah, sure, sure they existed. In many ways it manifested itself.

Q: You being called in for work?

D: Well, we never got much work in terms of that. That's the other thing. You could always go to 533 for work. If you needed a musician or if your looking for a job, you could post it on the board or look for an ad posted on the "at liberty board." So, uh, the major thing, uh, I think the major work assigning function they had was through the MRF Projects, which we call Projects, which

were paid for by the Musicians' Recording Fund. Okay now to this day I don't think...

Q: Performance Trust Fund.

D: Yeah, Performance Trust Funds, yeah. I don't think we ever got a fair share of those.

Q: After you were 92?

D: I don't think we got our fair when we were in 533.

Q: Yes.

D: Uh, but again that was I think the fault of the Federation.

Q: Uh huh.

D: When we became 92 certainly the percentage of "project work" shifted heavily to 92. I mean to, yeah to 92 with the 43 faction of 92.

Q: Now aside from say cliques that, uh, were there, do you think the economy, too? I mean people don't want to pay for live musicians anymore.

D: Well, I think that's true now. But if you go back historically, you find out that when the economy fell apart...

Q: Uh huh.

D: ...musicians worked. That's when the musicians seemed to thrive.

Q: Is that right?

D: I don't know what the demographics are on it, but I do think that, well at in least black communities...No; it's true. I think it's true, all over. Musicians and hookers work when the economy 's bad for some strange reason. I don't know why it is that--That's a good time. I think maybe people are saying, "Okay look, I can't pay my bills. I don't have enough to pay <u>all</u> my bills, so I'm going to take this $20 bucks and go and just have a good time." So they go out. Uh, you find it's even true now. The economy's in a lousy state, but, uh, you find more musicians working, I think, in 1994 than were working in 1992.

Q: Hmm.

D: That's a...That's just a personal thought. I don't have any statistics to prove this. It's just my observation.

Q: In your opinion, you got, uh, a lot of jazz clubs, you know, down here in Buffalo, especially in the '60s. Did it start to wane in the 70's? You heard about the Jazz Triangle Project?

D: Yeah, well I was, I was the secretary of the Jazz Triangle Project.

Q: You were?

D: Yeah.

Q: If you want to talk a little about that... Give me a.

D: That, uh...

Q: I talked to Mr. Dorsey about it briefly

D: Yeah, he was vice president of the Project, uh, at one time. President for a time. That thing was side tracked by politics, just plain politics. Uh, we had a lot of good ideas, but I think my observation as the project waned was that we'd, we'd never get anything done. Things were being dictated as to...Okay, <u>if</u> you get a grant, when you get this grant, this is what you're going to do with it, which was not our idea. Do you know the basic premise of the Jazz Triangle?

Q: No.

D: The Jazz Triangle was designed, actually it was a four base triangle, which is kind of a strange concept. But it was designed to take Dan Montgomery's, Little Harlem, uh, the Moonglo, and the Musicians' Club and create a jazz zone. And, like I said, it was a four base triangle, which is a rather unique concept.

Q: Yes.

D: But, only three of the four were still standing because of redevelopment in the Exchange Street area, but we were fighting, fighting, fighting. We did manage to get a hold of The Moonglo, though. Through one of the grants that we did receive, but it got to me--my spirits. I thought, "everytime you got a piece of money, there's a pie here." And there was a slice for some architect from out of town, or there was a slice for a, a lawyer from out of town, or a slice for an organizer from someplace. And they were talking about, okay, matching grants. And

bringing in advisors. "Now this is the advisor we recommend."--So they would send in an organization. So that, in effect, uh, you had to pay these people off. Pay them big bucks, and these are the people who're going to get you "matching funds." Okay, these were fund raisers. "I know how to get this money for you." We'll get $92,000 together for you, and we'll put a project together. We'll buy you the Haggar Furniture building, which is now Macaroni Warehouse Restaurant. We had a good shot at that. We were stuck, well, we wound up getting the Moonglo for $35,000 which consumed basically the whole grant that we had; which was a grant that was a "bricks and mortar" grant, but the fundraisers-matching grant development funds which were supposedly forthcoming, never came. That was strictly a "bricks and mortar" grant. We did manage to put some of the money into The Musicians' Club, things like heating, new windows, some renovation, some redecoration. But, uh, we had grand plans for expanding it by buying the lot, which is next door, which is now the, uh, Buffalo Printing, Buffalo Daily Law Journal parking lot. The area between The Musicians' Club and the next building is now a parking lot, which belongs to, uh, someone else--Onetto Peanut people. We should have been able to get all those. Of course, we had a lot of deterrents, too. We had a lot of in fighting between some of the members of the Club and the Board of Directors of the Jazz Triangle. Uh, I think it was a perceived power struggle which didn't really exist. But it was a perception, "Okay you guys are trying to take over the Club," which was not true. But I think what little funds we did get a hold of, we did manage to funnel some of it to the Club. A lot of them felt that when we bought the Moonglo, we were taking money which should have gone to develop the Club, and, uh it was being squandered on Moonglo. The truth of the matter was that that's what Jazz Triangle was designed to do, to develop the area; and, to develop the area, you first had to acquire the property. So, uh...

Q: When did it finally...

D: Well, it hasn't, hasn't died yet. It's still alive.

Q: Still alive?

D: Yeah, it's, uh, relatively inactive, but we just meet often enough to keep our charter in tact, and, uh, we discuss some plans. Uh, we never get enough money. We take, we take the concept, it has to be kept alive because it may be the only 501C-3 organization, that's a tax, tax-exempt organization, which is capable of administering grant funds. Because the Colored

Musicians' Club is not a true tax-exempt organization, they can't receive certain grants which The Jazz Triangle would have been eligible. So remain affiliated with the Colored Musicians' Club, in what is a very loose affiliation, but most of us are still members of both groups.

Q: Are you still a member?

D: Oh, yeah. I'll just be a Club member forever. It's, uh, it's in blood. Ah...

Q: Do you still play?

D: Oh yeah. I still play.

Q: Still play. That's great

D: Not as much as I like to.

Q: Sure.

D: I just don't have the time.

Q: That's understandable. I think it's terrific. So..

D: We do more rehearsing than playing.

Q: That's what I heard. That's nice. I, I've been down to, to the Club. It's, uh, quite comfortable.

D: Yeah, it is.

Q: Yeah.

D: It's...

Q: Relaxing.

D: You're there five minutes, and you're home.

Q: You can't beat it.

D: Yeah.

Q: So you talked about the disadvantages, the advantages of, uh, 92. Overall do you think it was a good thing to do?

D: Yeah, I think it had to come.

Q: Had to come.

D: It, uh, it was a national phenomenon, international phenomenon. The idea, again, is strength, there's strength supposedly in numbers.

Q: Uh huh.

D: And, uh, I think, uh, there are certain advantages. It's going to be a real good solution to solving musicians problems. Uh, you could have problems on a national basis. For example, you can be working in a traveling band, for example, and somehow you find yourself stranded in Timbuktu.

Q: Uh huh.

D: Uh, and as a member of Local 92, you're still an American Federation of Musicians Member. The fact you're a member of the International Federation. So there, uh, there is certain support available for traveling musicians no matter where you are. There's a strong alliance between, uh, the American Federation and the Canadian Federation. If you look at the, uh, the American, the INTERNATIONAL MUSICIAN, the magazine which is the national paper, there's always a page in there, uh, relative to, like over Federation Field is one section and the other section is Canadian Music.

Q: Uh huh.

D: And, uh, there's a strong interplay there.

Q: One thing I wanted to ask you as well, sir...I'm sure you're familiar with Dr. Cornell West and his book, RACE MATTERS.

D: Yeah, he was here about two weeks ago.

Q: Uh, he, he stated that, uh, although many black organizations were separate, they weren't separatists.

D: Uh huh

Q: Define that relative to the 533 Colored Musicians' Club. What do we come out with, in your opinion, from your experiences of being a member of 533 in the '50s? It's a different time.

D: We had, uh, like, we had several white members in 533.
Q: Do you remember any names?

D: Oh sure. Let's see Victor Einach, for one.

Q: Victor Einach?

D: Yeah. Uh, let's see there was, uh, Audrey Ladow.

Q: Audrey Ladow.

D: Uh, Oh God. Let me think. There was Fats Wilson.

Q: Fats Wilson?

D: Yeah, I never...I don't know what his real first name was. Everybody called him Fats Wilson.

Q: Let me turn this over real quick.

D: Let's see. Off, Off hand, I can't think of any more

Q: That's alright.

D: But there were members of 533 as well as members of 43. So it, uh, you and I, you and I agree, we were separate not separatists 'cause everybody was welcome. You know, we had jam sessions. I don't know if you heard about the jam session on Tuesdays and Sundays, which were...

Q: [Tape Indescribable]

D: ...were dynamite. Musicians came from all over.

Q: That's what I heard.

D: Yeah, they were black and white as well as, as well as the patrons. So it was a question of the Federation establishing...

Q: Yes.

D: ...separation, not musicians. And that was prior to the '50s the '40s. I think this was established probably in the '30s.

Q: Uh, actually the 43 musicians did kinda establish it, uh, back in 1918 because black musician in Buffalo then wanted to get into 43 and they couldn't. It was based on color back then, and that was a problem throughout the country. So, you're right. So eventually , you know, the Federation...

D: I'm trying to remember when 533 was established, uh,...

Q: 1918.

D: '18, Okay.

Q: '17, 1918.

D: See, the Club was established in '34, I think.

Q: '34? Are you sure?

D: [Tape Indescribable]

Q: That's when they...But I was told that, uh, although the Club wasn't official until '35, as far as the charter.

D: Yeah.

Q: ...it existed (tape indescribable) from, from the 533. It was...

D: Yeah. I think it existed from the time there were two musicians.

Q: Yeah, yeah. Any other recollections? Anything important that you'd like to add that you think is, uh, that I need to know? Stories, uh, opinions...

D: No, I can't think of anything off hand.

Q: Can't think of it off hand.

D: We covered a lot of stuff here.

Q: We did. We went through a lot of stuff. I think I've got all your bi...biographical information. Did you ever hold any offices?

D: Yeah, I, ah...

Q: On the Board of Directors of the Club?

D: Yeah, I was secretary treasurer of the Club for somewhere between five and six years...

Q: Do you remember...

D: ...under Jim Legge.

Q: Do you remember time frame?

D: And, uh, probably, probably from '75 to '83 and '85 to '86.

Q: Uh huh. What about 533?

D: Uh...

Q: Did you hold any offices?

D: Just, I was assistant secretary, which is kind of an unofficial office job. They just...It just was a flunky job. They needed somebody...

Q: Uh huh.

D: ...just, and I was a young guy, I was like Mr. Plummer's errand boy.

Q: Uh huh.

D: It was a learning experience.

Q: Do you remember the years?

D: Yeah, that would have been '51, '52.

Q: Uh huh.

D: I never did much. I was getting pretty busy.

Q: Sure, understandable. So we got all the bi..biographical information on you, I think. Unless there's something else. Again, I hope that, uh, if there's something that comes up, you know we can visit again.

D: Sure.

Q: And, uh...

D: It's been most enjoyable.

Q: If you could, if you could quickly. I don't want to tie you up. Repeat that about the, uh, Sheridanaires? You mentioned some other names.

D: Okay, uh, Harold Wallace, and I think maybe Terry Crawford had been a member of that group. Uh, I think Benny Johnson was a member of the group. But they stayed at the Club Sheridan, which is now, uh, Fanny's. Uh, they stayed there for 11 or 12 years. Uh, and McVans, Freddy Silmon, France Gilliam, uh, Bob Crump. [Tape Indescribable] They played there, I think, 10 or 12 years.

Q: Lilly white.

D: Those were lilly white areas.

Q: No problem.

D: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Just played.

D: Just like Duffs at Millersport and Sheridan. C.Q. Price played there for years and years. So you had black musicians playing in areas which were suburban at the time, and they'd stay there for extended stays. So there was certainly no animosity between the unions and the, uh, and the patrons, or at least the owners and musicians. Also there was no problem with the unions either because it was well known that the musicians were playing there. It was no secret.

Q: That's interesting. Thank you.

Jesse E. Nash, Jr.

Mr. Nash was a member of Local 533 (Black) of the American Federation of Musicians, Buffalo, New York. On May 25, 1994, he granted an interview in his Canisius College office.

Q: I'm just going to set this right here. Okay, sir, your full name?

N: My full name is Jesse...

Q: Uh huh.

N: E. Nash, Jr.

Q: And your date of birth?

N: I was born February the 22nd, 1926.

Q: Uh, place that you were born?

N: Uh, the city or the actual place?

Q: Whatever you prefer. Here in Buffalo?

N: I was born in Buffalo.

Q: Born in Buffalo.

N: Yes.

Q: Raised?

N: I grew up in Buffalo.

Q: Alright. And education. Where did you go to school at? Did you go here in Buffalo?

N: All of my, uh, education was inbred.

Q: Uh huh.

N: Uh, everything here in Buffalo, uh, elementary, secondary, and higher ed. All in Buffalo.

Q: Where did you, uh, go to college? Here at the University of Buffalo?

N: UB

Q: UB. And you got your Ph.D. at UB?

N: I don't have a Ph.D.

Q: Is that right?

N: That's right.

Q: I didn't know that. I thought, I thought you did.

N: No.

Q: So you got your masters degree?

N: Yes!

Q: University of Buffalo?

N: Yes and I have a, an honorary doctorate.

Q: Honorary doctorate. From UB?

N: From here.

Q: From here. From Canisius?

N: Yes.

Q: And your occupation. You are a professor of sociology.

N: Sociology/Anthropology.

Q: Terrific. Terrific. That about covers, uh, the brief bio that I wanted to do unless there's something else that you wanted to add?

N: No.

Q: No? Uh.

N: I'm me.

Q: You're, uh...

N: It always interests me when I go to the bank and have to identify myself. I tell them I'm me. They don't seem to accept that. They always want a picture.

Q: Is that right.

N: Yes.

Q: Now when did you join Local 533 of the American Federation of Musicians [AF of M]?

N: Oh, goodness.

Q: If you don't remember the exact date and year...

N: Yeah, I, uh, I would, I would not remember the exact date or year. Maybe '45 or '46. Something like that. And, and at that time, '45, '46, '47, I had to, uh, make contributions on my dues. That was when I worked. So, uh, I had to take a part of my, my income from playing to put on my dues.

Q: Yes.

N: We weren't working that frequently. So, uh, [Tape Indescribable]. Fascinating exercise, enterprise. You know, I...Well, I was working for the union rather than for myself.

Q: Instruments that you played? That you still play?

N: Oh, goodness. Uh, I was sorta like a, a utility musician. My first instrument was French horn. And I started playing with the, uh, Local 533 marching band when I was in high school, French horn.

Q: Uh huh.

N: And, uh, that was the time when my uncle was directing the, uh, marching band of Local No. 533.

Q: Ray Jackson?

N: Ray Jackson.

Q: Uh huh.

N: I, uh, played. Trumpet, trombone, saxophone, clarinet, drums, bass, and, if need be, I could sit in on the piano. You didn't have to be a tremendous pianist.

Q: Uh huh.

N: So, uh...My two major instruments were trumpet and saxophone, uh, in Al Williams group, where all of us played more than one instrument. Uh, Georgie Holt played trumpet and valve trombone. I played trumpet, uh, baritone sax, clarinet, uh, Irving (Bo Peep) Green played bass and baritone horn. Eugene (Heads) Adams played alto sax, baritone sax, and alto horn.

Q: Yes, sir.

N: So we had an, an eight piece orchestra which sounded like a, uh, a 20 piece group. [Tape Indescribable]. It was the greatest experience I ever had in my life.

Q: Terrific.

N: See I played most of the instruments, and, uh, with my sons I played trumpet and congas.

Q: Music a hobby more than an occupation.

N: Uh, I played with my sons, uh, for about four or five years in the, uh, '80s, and, uh, played trumpet and congas.

Q: So, for a time there, you had your own group with your sons.

N: Uh, they allowed me to, uh, sit in with them.

Q: I see. And the name of this group?

N: Uh, hmm, uh, the name of that group. We had two names. I'm trying to think of the one name that they used. We called it the Nash Trio one time, but, uh, uh, I don't remember. Something like Extensions, or, uh, Expansions. That was what it was, Expansions.

Q: The kind of music that you played?

N: All of our music is good music.

Q: Jazz?

N: Uh, I would say. I don't know what other people would say. That's a funny call. Uh, [Tape Indescribable) that came out of the '40s and '50s. And then played a lot of the fusion stuff that fit in with the contemporary times of the youngsters.

Q: Uh huh.

N: Uh, so, uh I would say it was in the jazz idiom. Yeah, and of course, with my sons moving, moving toward, toward fusion.

Q: Did you, in the course of your membership with 533, did you hold any elected offices? Did you serve on any committees?

N: I was a member of the Board of Directors.

Q: For the Club or the local?

N: For both.

Q: For both.

N: Uh huh.

Q: Do you recall the years?

N: No.

Q: No?

N: No.

Q: '40s, '50s?

N: I could tell you the names of, uh, a couple people who were on the Board when I was. If you do more research, you might get the, uh, dates. Uh, see on the Board of the Local was a fellow who was very important to me, Carey Rector. There was Percy Stewart. There was, uh, Perry Grey, uh, and, uh, fellow named, uh, Turpin...

Q: Uh huh

N: And, uh, uh, Hank, uh, Hank Roberts, a piano player and band leader.

Q: Probably Ridding.

N: No.

Q: No? Les Davis?

N: No, No, No, No.

Q: No?

N: No, no.

Q: How about Enoch, Victor Enoch?

N: No. Victor Enoch, uh, was an honorary member. Uh, he played violin. He liked to come down and be with the guys. That was also, uh, the case for, uh, Maynard Ferguson. He and his mother use to come down to the Club on Sundays before he was Maynard Ferguson. And, uh, a trumpet player. But, uh, [Tape indescribable]

Q: Was it Hank Roberts?

N: Yes.

Q: Okay.

N: That was it, Hank Roberts.

Q: I've heard his name mentioned.

N: Yeah. He had many of the contracts for [Tape Indescribable]. Kleinhans Music Hall and some of the hotels for organizations, and, uh, at that time, uh, there were about five of us on the board. Uh, but Carey Rector is the name that stands out and I think Turpin was the president, uh, Sylvester Turpin was the president at that time. [Tape Indescribable]

Q: So you served on the Board for a period of time. Do you recall how long? Was it pretty much, '60s, '70s?

N: Uh, no, we were up in the '40s.

Q: '40s?

N: Yeah.

Q: How about, uh, in the '60s? Did you serve on the Board?

N: No, no. Uh, I was not active with the Boards either of the Club or the, or the Local after the '50s.

Q: After the '50s. So your active membership ended in the '50s.

N: In the '40s really.

Q: In the '40s.

N: Yeah because...Okay the '50s. I left Buffalo in '50.

Q: And where did you go?

N: I went into the army. Yeah. And when I came back, I did not have a, uh, active association. I went to the Club and maintained my personal friendships.

Q: Yes.

N: But I didn't play anywhere.

Q: Uh huh. So this ended in the '50s. Now, your best recollection during your active membership, and even afterwards, because you said you maintained your

friendship there at the Club, and so I'm sure you heard, uh, discussions about various issues that surrounded the Club and the Local, especially with the coming of the merger in the '60s and the mergers going around the country. I'm sure that was discussed frequently within the Club, I would think. What kind of relationship did 533 musicians have with Local 43?

N: Well, I remember two, uh, situations. One was in the mid '40s where there was a very direct effort to attempt to bring about a change in our membership. One of the things that we were concerned about was that Local 43 was recognized as the Buffalo Musician's Association. Local 533 was known as the Colored Musician's Association. So if, uh, black musician's came to town (They were Negro at the time.)...

Q: Yes.

N: Uh, they would not be accepted in the Buffalo Local 43. They would be referred to Local 533. That does seem to me to be what happened in the case of Ortis Walton, who came to Buffalo and played bass with the Buffalo Philharmonic and ultimately went to the Boston Philharmonic. Left Boston and went then to Kenya to study medicine. Married, uh...

Q: Where did he go to study?

N: Kenya.

Q: Kenya to study medicine.

N: Yeah.

Q: Okay.

N: He ultimately married, uh, Carol Dozier, whose brother is a reputable architect in the nation, and also was a niece of Al Williams by virtue of his marriage to her Aunt Gwelda Smitherman of the prominent newspaper family, the Smitherman family, ran a newspaper known as the Buffalo Star which later on became the Empire Star. Uh, Carol Dozier married Ortis Walton and they moved to Boston and ultimately to, uh, to Kenya. Uh, he was referred to Local 533. That didn't make any sense to him or us. He, uh, didn't know about Local 533. Uh, he came to join the local, and they said, "Your local is over there." Then there was a great fellow, whose name I've been straining to try to recall. It seemed like his last name was Wolf, W-O-L-F. Great fellow. He was, as I recall, was, uh, white. Uh, I think he played tenor sax. I remember the

name very, very vaguely. Uh, he wanted to join our union. And, uh, Jimmy Petrillo was the president of the American Federation of Musicians out of Chicago at that time, sent a letter to Local 43 and to us indicating that Local 43 had received whites and Local 533 would, uh, receive blacks. And, uh, Wolf did not join, uh, 533, and, uh, if he wanted to be in the American Federation of Musicians he had to join 43. My recollection is not as clear as it ought to be, but I was one of the young mavericks who wanted to see us integrate back in those days, and, uh, Jimmy Legge was one of them also, and we went up to 43, which was located on Sycamore and, oh my, Oak Street, I think. Uh, we went upstairs and, uh, we wanted to have a meeting with them about setting up the basis for having a discussion about integrating. Uh, we didn't get anywhere at all. Uh, 43 wasn't interested, and when we came back to 533 we found out a lot of the older guys in 533 were opposed to it also. The argument of some of the Local 533s against integrating was that, uh, right now we have representation in the American Federation at the National Conventions. If we integrated, we would lose our representation. Uh, we would also lose our positions, such as president, secretary, treasurer, uh, we would also lose club membership, uh, if we integrated, uh, it would be taken over by the white organization, and we would lose all our recognition and investments. But, Jimmy and I argued 43 controlled most of the good jobs, and, uh, if we were in an integrated union that would provide expanded opportunities for, for work. Well, the fellows who opposed us were the older guys [Tape Indescribable] and, uh, the established guys over in 43 and we just let it go, gave up on it. But it was an effort which was, uh, worked on, uh, with the younger guys at that time in the 40s. The second item about the two locals coming together was, uh, related to the fact that Local 533, with the foresight of those older musicians, created the Musician's Club _____. For me, this was a phenomenal idea coming out of the depression, uh, coming out of a time when things were not very positive for many of us in terms of work. To develop this idea involved economic development, really. It was a forerunner of black capitalism, if you will. Uh, that, uh, put the lives of these musicians in such a direction as to see that we went beyond simply being a, a local. From the Local we could have a spinoff of a business. This, to me, was just tremendous, a phenomenal idea. Uh, it caught on and it, uh, got organized. And, uh, any guy who was a member of the union was automatically a member of the club, and they had rights and so forth and so on to, uh, privileges to participate in the Club's activities. And I can recall, we had a baseball team, with uniforms, purple and

yellow, uh, insignias with the musician's symbol and stuff on it. Had a tennis team. The guys'd have a picnic and we use to go to Fort Delouise, Canada [Tape Indescribable]. It's just amazing what, what was done organizationally. But the point I want to make is that the, uh, musicians in Local 533, which had been referred to as the Colored Musicians Union created a business enterprise, which, if you take a look at the Colored Musicians Club, is still in existence today, 145 Broadway. But, the Local 43, which was the Buffalo Musicians Association, uh, had nothing comparable to the Colored Musicians' Club.

Q: Can I close the door?

N: Sure. So the, uh, big question which was raised over and beyond president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, representatives to conferences and conventions at the American Federation of Musicians was: What happens to our Club if we integrate with this group that doesn't want us? We have a business here, and, uh, if we integrate with 43, what are the legal relationships to the Club. Does the Club continue as the Local 43 Club? Or Local 533 Club ____? This was quite a discussion, and, uh, we were very, understandably, concerned. Uh, the men who led that discussion, uh, had been, for a lack of a better term, men of foresight. Uh, they were way ahead of their time, if you will, in terms of economic development. And they did not want the venture to turn into a relationship with an organization which by its history did not want us, did not want to be with us, and then give over to them all of this effort that had been put forth to develop, uh, an economic effort which went beyond playing the horn or playing the drums somewhere. Uh, there was also the possibility of a spinoff politically, which never did develop. That never did catch on, at least to the best of my knowledge. So, um, the Local 43, as I recall, had moved over on Delaware Avenue, and we went over there, had a meeting with them, sort of a social kind of thing. And, I remember one of the guys from our local saying, "God, this is all you got?" And we're going to integrate with this? Uh, these guys don't have nothing. But, they had all the jobs, the basic jobs. We were restricted to William Street, uh, Little Harlem, _____, uh, down on Seneca Street, maybe and McVans on Niagara, Niagara Street.

Q: Uh huh.

N: We had the Vendome Hotel on Clinton Street. But, uh, the, the Local 43 was, was the big deal.

Q: See, I've been told, that...You're talking about job access...

N: Yes.

Q: ...through 43 because the two local unions catered to different styles of music, that it wasn't that big of a factor. I may be wrong. This is what I've been told by different individuals on both sides that 43 catered more towards classical music, philharmonic, society music. Whereas 533, jazz. And so there wasn't too much of a problem, uh, with, uh, with jobs.

N: This is why when I said that it's a matter of perception. And I think you would be able to talk to people on both sides about the issue of integration. [Personal Interruption]. Uh, the perspectives of individuals are going to be related in their headset. Uh, so, I point out to you that some of the blacks were opposed to integrating and for good reasons.

Q: Uh huh.

N: I've given you some of the reasons that I was familiar with. We would lose position, we wouldn't have opportunity to participate in the conferences and the conventions at the national level, and most important, we might lose the Musicians Club. What's going to happen to the Club if we integrate? We would lose it. Now, this business about 43 playing one kind of music and, uh, [Tape Indescribable] the colored musicians playing another kind of music, uh, is a contrivance for me. For me it's a contrivance. And, uh, I studied French horn with a Mr. Jepson, who played first French horn with the Buffalo Philharmonic. And I remember very clearly him saying to me, "Too bad you could never play in the philharmonic." Why?

Q: You can't join the union.

N: Okay. Jimmy Legge could tell you the same thing. Jimmy and I were very good friends. Many of the men who, who were in the so called Colored Musicians Union were there for a variety of reasons. One of them certainly being income. But none were there only because they played jazz. To make sense out of that discussion, I would have to understand: Why jazz? And that's a whole 'nother thing. It doesn't relate to your study directly, but had the social situation been different, then it's quite conceivable then there would have been spirituals, and there would have been blues, and there would have been jazz. But the existence of a colored musicians union was

reflective of the racial attitudes. Not, not the professional capability or the, uh, or the artistic tastes so that one was this and the other was that. But I remember hearing that sort of stuff and, uh, that's why I often do as I did when I was talking to you. Someone says, "What is your instrument?" I'd say, "French horn." "French horn? You play French horn?" Well, uh, you haven't probably heard the name, Stuff Smith.

Q: Yes, I have.

N: Okay. Stuff Smith invited me to play French horn with him. Of course, you know, Stuff Smith was wild. He was a wild man. Uh, he played violin. He could play on one string more than many musicians could play on four strings. Uh, but he had an idea of using a French horn in his group, which had a flute, and a cello, and I don't know what the other instruments were. And, uh, we rehearsed downstairs at 145 Broadway. I never did, uh, get into this thing that he had in his mind. His piano player was a guy named Bobby Benson. I forget the girl who played cello. But the thing that I'm saying is people would see us and wouldn't think of French horn. Trumpet you could, yeah. Clarinet, maybe. Saxophone, yeah. Drums, of course. Piano, yeah, yeah, you know, but French horn? Not hardly!

Q: But if you're black, you weren't supposed to play French horn.

N: You weren't going to be a Wynton, uh, a Marsalis, a Wynton Marsalis. He goes both ways, and shows people that if you're a musician, you're a musician. You're not circumscribed to one style if you're a musician. And that's what Wynton Marsalis, for me, has done so, so clearly and so marvelously by, uh, getting the accolades of those who appreciate classical trumpet as well as those who appreciate jazz trumpet. And for a long time, I can recall hearing people from the Philharmonic saying, "Gee whiz. How do you do that. Man, that's tremendous." And then guys from your groups might say: "That guy, man, he's really clean, isn't he. Oh, he can really cook." That's a bunch of bull, but a lot of folks bought into that stuff, and, of course, a lie believed is truth in effect so much so that it perpetuates itself and then you get guys saying, "Yeah, they were, uh, in the classical stuff and we were in jazz." Until you find, uh, jazz lovers coming down to Local 533, uh, from the Philharmonic. Uh, not many people would know that they were most likely from Local 43. Uh, I remember a guy that played bass with Mary McPartland when she came to the "Downtowner" in Hotel Statler (in the 1970s). He

played bass for the Buffalo Philharmonic. They also spent a lot of time, uh, down at Local 533. He would listen to Jimmy Legge, he would listen to [Tape Indescribable]. He would listen to a lot of the guys who played bass, and, of course, he'd listen to records and pick up style and all that sort of thing. But, uh, I think of a guy like Pete Suggs, who could have played drums in the Philharmonic. I could have played, uh, French horn in the Philharmonic. The social conditions which separated us on a racial basis were real. I guess that was why Jimmy Legge and I tried to see if we couldn't bring about integration. This is middle '40's.

Q: And it didn't work.

N: Oh gosh no. I told you that there was opposition to integrating the locals on both sides.

Q: Did you leave it alone?

N: Yeah.

Q: After your initial...

N: Yes, oh yes.

Q: ...try?

N: Oh yes. [Tape Indescribable] we got the letter from Chicago.

Q: Never found that letter.

N: We got the letter from the office of Jimmy Petrillo, President of A. F. of M. Chicago. Maybe Lloyd Plummer of Local No. 533 could tell you about it. The letter said that we could not accept whites in Local No. 533. There was a guy named Wolf. I can't think of his whole name. Wolf was a white guy who we were going to take into our local, but we had to send him to Local 43. And, uh, uh, the idea was that Local 43 would take whites and Local 533 would take blacks. But, the, uh, point came up again by Ortis Walton, who played bass with the Buffalo Philharmonic. He was a black guy. And he comes here and his whole union [End of tape--side 1]. I think Ortis Walton was probably the only, uh, recognized and visible black that the Buffalo Philharmonic has ever had, but, uh, for our guys a lot of them didn't think they could pass the musician's test to, uh, get into the union. I remember several of my friends feeling they couldn't pass the test to be in the musician's union. A lot of guys, uh, didn't join the union, but played outside in the

peripheral, non-union places because they didn't think they could pass the test. But, I do know we had guys in the union who had good eyes. Could read that stuff and could play that stuff. So, uh...

Q: So Ortis Walton got into 43.

N: Ortis Walton, I do believe, was in 43. I do believe that, uh, through Buffalo Philharmonic. I do believe that is the case. I'm not sure...

Q: So they made the exception with him.

N: If you can, uh, find out what transpired, then, ok, fine. The experience of Walton is woven into the historical social conditions, which separated the two locals.

Q: I see.

N: Uh, I say, if the guy is a musician, he is a musician. You know, an eighth note is an eighth note. A sixteenth note is a sixteenth note. Are you a musician? Which instrument?

Q: Guitar.

N: Alright. A C chord is a C chord. A G 7th is a G 7th. Uh, fascinatingly, you talk to a lot of the guys in the Philharmonic and mostly they had theory. You say we're going to, uh, take this up three keys. They're lost. Ah, we're going to change this from a G 7th to a B 7th, going to E minor dropping down to A minor 7, you're ok. Then someone says you can't end that way, you can't end with a D diminished. Uh, Uh, Tchastakovich can do that, Prokofier can do that, _____ can do that, _____ can do that, uh, but if you're a real musician, you know you don't play certain progressions. You know certain things don't follow certain things. [Tape Indescribable] well that's ok. You understand, Ok. No problem. Of course, you would never have had a Dizzy Gillespie if he stayed conventional. You would never have had a Charlie Parker if they were stuck with, uh, 1, 4, 5, 1 chording, you know. Uh, and could not make an augmented, uh, 5th or 13th, or whatever the case may be. Uh, we got outside of that framework. Nobody can tell me that Dizzy Gillespie couldn't play with the New York Philharmonic. Who's the guy, the director of, uh, of, uh, the TODAY SHOW who's now, uh, with Buffalo, uh, Philharmonic?

Q: Doc Severenson.

N: Doc Severenson. What's his background? You know...Clark Terry, _____, Miles Davis--They played jazz. That's a bunch of crap, you know, but both sides have bought into it. Both sides have bought into it.

Q: But there was some mixing.

N: How's that?

Q: There was some mixing.

N: Yeah. Harry Kravitz I remember, uh, uh, in Lenny Lewis's Band. Uh, I played in Lenny Lewis's Band. Play [Tape Indescribable]

Q: That was a mixed white and black band.

N: [Tape Indescribable]

Q: Was it a white band?

N: We're talking about mixing now.

Q: Yes.

N: Yeah.

Q: So...

N: So we were mixed. We were mixed. Lenny Lewis had been given a clarinet by Artie Shaw is the story. Lenny couldn't play too much. Yeah it was a mixed band. Uh, nine white and nine black.

Q: That was okay?

N: We travelled like that, uh, and we played like that. Uh, I was going to say, one of my very best friends in that experience was Harry Kravitz, a tenor sax man, and Eddy Kaye, another tenor sax man.

Q: White?

N: Yeah. Yeah. We were beyond that. Uh, Bobby Pratt, trombone player with no teeth from England. Just an amazing guy. He had such a touch. Uh, he could play trombone with his foot and he also put the trombone down and played with his foot. And Bobby Pratt could write. He could really write. Do Do Greene sang with the band at that time, and, uh, Al Shephard had just brought bop to Buffalo after a stint with Lucky Millender. I can remember hearing him now playing Stardust. And the, the

epitome of the, uh, Stardust solo at that time was Artie Shaw's version. Nobody could play Stardust like Artie Shaw until I heard Shep playing it on trumpet. And what Shep did on trumpet made me ask, "Gee, what in the world is this." It was, oh, it was just beautiful, just beautiful. And then later on, Shep switched over to, to, to saxophone, tenor sax. And, uh, stayed with the tenor for the rest of his career. But, uh, Lenny Lewis's group was a mixed group, and we travelled extensively. We made records down in Cincinnati in King Studios. And, I would have had records from those recording sessions. I got, uh, masters, which, uh, were throw away masters, and I allowed a guy named Harold Tinley, who is dead now, to bring those masters home for me while I was out on the road. I never got them again. Never saw him again. So, uh, those recordings by Lenny Lewis would have been made about 1948 on, uh, uh, the King Label in Cincinnati. And in that group was C. Q. Price, you've heard of C. Q. Price?

Q: Yes, sir.

N: Yeah. C. Q. was a tremendous musician. Tremendous writer. And tremendous human being. Uh, Charlie White played tenor sax. Uh, I mentioned Georgie Holt. Uh, who played trumpet with Lewis. A player I see on television quite a bit seeing with, seeing with, "a one-a-and a two-a and a three-a and a four." Champagne, orchestra, uh...Isn't that something. What is that guys name? Uh, the Champagne Orchestra. "A one and a two and a three and a four." That's awful. Anyway, I see him. I see the trumpet player who used to play. His name is Charlie Parlatto. He also does some singing. Uh, anyway, we were about evenly divided white and black. Lewis' band played in Vermillin, Ohio, Erie, Pennsylvania, all down the, uh, east coast, uh, east coast. I'm trying to think of the drummer, Charlie Lee. You've heard of Charlie Lee, I think. He could have played with the Philharmonic, I'm sure. Charlie was an excellent drummer, excellent drummer. Uh, the guitarist's name escapes me. We had a black guitarist, what was his name, and a white guitarist. Have you heard of Lenny Lewis's Group?

Q: Yes I have.

N: Yeah. Worked very well together. And, uh, of course Lenny's gone. Uh, most of those guys are gone. I'm thinking of Harry Kravitzs, uh, coming to my rescue, uh, at a place where I was trying to get something to eat, and they wouldn't, wouldn't serve me, and I was raising and they wouldn't, wouldn't serve me, and I was raising all kinds of craziness. And he, he ordered the food, and

he got it, and he said, "Give my man a dish." This was in a place where we were playing as a dance band.

Q: Was that here locally?

N: No.

Q: That was out of town.

N: Yeah. That was out of town. Yeah. Uh, Harry Kravitz was actually a tenor man. We got to really enjoy each other. When I think about Bobby Pratt, you know, the guy with no teeth from England, trombone player, uh, just a funny guy. Made everybody laugh all the time. He was always into something. Sometimes he played the wrong tune. Uh, "What are we playing now?" The guy says, "Uh we're going to do _____." Says, "Uh, man I just got finished playing that." That guy was so funny. Uh, he was, he was a great guy. But, uh, then the guys used to get together in jam sessions all the time. Uh, nothing unusual for guys from "Name Bands" to come up to the Club and get involved in jam sessions. Eddy Kaye was one of the most prominent white guys up there for a long time on tenor sax. Uh, the Musician's Club on Sunday afternoon was always open to everybody, and you had not only mixed musicians, you'd have mixed audiences, uh, up there. That went on for a number of years. I didn't think it would ever stop. It's amazing how the curtain just came down and it was all over, but there was a time when there was, uh, very active participation--whites and blacks up there. And, now, of course, I understand there are a lot of young white musicians who come up there now. Uh, more so than, uh, young blacks. In fact, it's interesting to note that many young blacks don't play jazz. They have been given the impression that jazz is too difficult and so intricate that it's beyond their ability. Uh, I also remember the guy who use to do some arranging for Lenny Lewis. He was the son of the Superintendent of Music of the Buffalo Board of Education. He wrote and arranged in the Schillinger System, which was a mathematical, uh, system. Uh, so he use to write a lot of beautiful stuff, but he had no perception at all of the instrumentation or, or the capability of the instruments. And, sometimes he would write too low for the baritone sax or too high for the trombone, that kind of thing. I thought I had his name. His name came and, and left me. I guess I'm finding out that at my age, a lot of guys names are gone.

Q: One of the last things that I would like to talk with you about today, and maybe we can do this again, you know, when things open up...

N: $10,000 an hour sure.

Q: Sure. Uh, your uncle. Can you tell me a little bit about your uncle? His role. Ray Jackson.

N: Uh, he was one of the moving forces behind the existence of 533 as a local, and as one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Club. Uh, there were three individuals whose names stand out in my mind in relationship to 533. Uh, Silas Laws, uh, Bill Kelly, is another one, and my uncle, Raymond Jackson. There were others...Percy Stewart, too. Uh, Carey Rector. But these three guys and Lloyd Plummer, can't forget Lloyd. His favorite phrase was: "In the good ole days," and, of course, the good ole days then were not so good, but in the good ole days, "We didn't do it like you're doing it now." Uh, but he's the living history of the organization 'cause he was the secretary. He was the one who knew people, knew the names of all the bands, etc. My uncle, uh, had, I guess, a couple of bands, and, uh, he was an active musician. Uh, he was a hard-driving individual. Uh, a person of, in my mind, tremendous foresight. Uh, he foresaw the political potential of the union which never, never did evolve or emerge. Uh, he used to fantasize or romanticize about the possibilities of the organization becoming a political force. Uh, he was able to draw from the band, the Musician's Marching Band, to use them as a marching band for the Shriners, and, I think that several of the musicians became Shriners because of that. My uncle around 1936, uh, was appointed by James Petrillo to be an International Representative of the A. F. of Musicians. And, uh, I don't know a whole lot about what the job description entailed or what the job required, but I do know that he drove all over the entire United States in carrying out the duties of the International Representative of the American Federation of Musicians on behalf of James Petrillo. And, in that process, besides learning to become an automobile mechanic out of necessity, uh, he was able to, uh, use those trips, not only for organizing and for troubleshooting on behalf of black musicians, but to also strengthen, uh, his position within the Shriners. And, I think, uh, based on the fact that he was travelling the entire United States, he was able to build up his reputation and ultimately became the Imperial Potentate of the Shriners, and, uh, remained in that position for a number of years, uh, while also maintaining his position on the Board of the Club. Uh, he tried to hold a very tight reign on the Club. That was very important to him to see to it that, uh, things were done properly and were done efficiently and effectively and had, uh, a viable economic base for

whatever it was that they were doing. Uh, he sort of spent more of his time with the Shriners in the '40s and the '50s than he did with the Club, but the Musicians Union, I believe, was the base of his development within the Shriners, uh, at the national level because he had become the International Representative of the Musician's Union. He never talked about, much about integrating. Uh, he was very, uh, proud of what "the colored" musicians had been able to accomplish. Uh, my uncle would have been one to say that there really was no need for two, uh, locals had the racial climate been different. But, since it was as it was, it was important that we had our own. He was a very prideful man. Having our own was very, very important to him, and he wanted to instill that pride in the musicians, pride in having their own. And his language would be something like, "Well since we're not wanted, that doesn't mean we can't have respect for ourselves. We're not wanted. That doesn't mean that we can't find ways to be constructive and productive." That would be the way he would talk. Big guy. Huge guy. Big voice. And he loved _____. He liked to speak. He liked to preach, I guess. Uh, the Club and the way it evolved was a point of pride for him. He never said much about it, uh, publicly, but I could detect that he had just tremendous pride anytime he walked into the Club. "This, this is mine. I did this or we did this. And we could do more." But, he never got beyond that. He really believed after having created or gotten the, uh, Club to go that they could have done other things. It never did happen. I don't know where all that came from 'cause I'm thinking again about the Depression and, uh, the conditions just weren't conducive to, uh, that kind of, for me, positive outlook. They were much more gutzzy then than they are today. So maybe the old notion that out of necessity comes invention and maybe out of adversity comes, uh, development. Uh, I don't know. Maybe that's what's necessary, but those men were way ahead od the times in terms of economic development, uh, way ahead of the, uh, people today who just don't seem to be able to get it together. They don't seem to have any way of catching on. So it may be that the more, uh, the illusion of integration, the less the ability to concentrate the resources, the limited resource, to develop something like the Musicians' Club. So it suggests that the more segregated we were, the more likely we would be able to develop something like the Club. But the more integrated, the more dispersed the resources, the less the rationale for having something of our own because now we are part of the larger framework. We no longer need our own. This is the kind of thinking that some of the black colleges are running into right now this very moment. Uh, it's time that we stopped all

of this business about black colleges and get on with the business of determining whether or not the college is good or bad. Uh, we know which one is going to be the bad one. Close up the bad ones and give everybody an equal opportunity to get a good education, but, uh, I think, that, that, the ability to, to create the Club was a reflection of facing racial reality in society. And the more of the illusion of integration, the more of the illusion of full participation and opportunity, the less the heavy concentration of resources that are necessary to produce something like the Club because there's no apparent rationale for it. 'What do we need a club for?' some might ask. Uh, we, we could go to any club in the city, but the illusion is what is important. And you should mention this. And that's why I started off talking about perception. Uh, Al Tinney said to me, I went to his birthday party, down at the Calumet the other night, and it was fascinating. My wife and a friend of ours were the only blacks in the place. I was absolutely flabbergasted, in fact. I had heard that we were going to celebrate Al Tinney's birthday. I said, "Hey, let's go down."

Q: I need to get in touch with him.

N: Yeah.

Q: Do you have his phone number?

N: No I don't.

Q: Is it in the telephone book?

N: No, I don't...No, no. Mark Goldman would probably give it to you. Mark Goldman owns the, uh, Calumet. Al Tinney is playing there on Saturday night so I'm sure they know how to get in touch with him. But, uh, what I'm saying is that I went there to celebrate Al's birthday. He's a black guy, who looks like a white guy. The audience, with the exception of us, was white, and Al worked that audience. Jamie Moses was there. Moses's mother was singing with the band. She's a friend of Al's. And Joan Lorenzo, who I think is just absolutely marvelous on vibes, played along with Sabu Adeola on bass, and Al Tinney, of course, playing piano. But, I would have thought, I would have thought celebrating Al Tinney's birthday would have attracted a different kind of audience, but, of course, a lot of it has to do with where the place is located and what people's perceptions are. Uh, Al Tinney is a living legend among us in terms of jazz. And, in my view, he deserved more than that, but, he's a big man in small stature. Just a huge man,

a giant. And, I guess there's no real way, uh, you're going to get the kind of outpouring of love and affection that I think ought to be coming in. All that has been eroded. And it has been eroded, even to the point where, as I mentioned earlier, a lot of the black youngsters think that jazz is too difficult and too intricate. Jazz has been done well over the years, but it's all kind of crazy to me now. The job's been done. Society is "integrated," the resources are limited and dispersed, and we're just hanging on, trying not to get hung while hanging on a nasty hook which is embedded in a shaky foundation. It's hard to swing on that.