

ART PEPPER / SO IN LOVE

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STRAIGHT NO CHASER / DIANE

Recorded 2-23-79, New York, NY

ART PEPPER

alto saxophone

HANK JONES

piano

AL FOSTER

drums

RON CARTER

bass

BLUES FOR BLANCHE / SO IN LOVE / STARDUST

Recorded 5-26-79, Burbank, CA

ART PEPPER

alto saxophone

GEORGE CABLES

piano

BILLY HIGGINS

drums

CHARLIE HADEN

bass

The first job I had was with Gus Arnheim. He wrote "Sweet and Lovely" which is his real legacy. His life was worth living because he left that. He had the first band I played in. It had Joe Mondragon who was a great bass player until the studios messed him up. I had a job playing clarinet, alto, and clarinet lead. It was like Glenn Miller except more schmaltzy. Gus used a baton to conduct. There were people dancing and we played all the songs, even Dixieland. But I wasn't interested in those things, so I quit the band. I was only sixteen. I came back to L.A. and I didn't know what to do, so I went

back to Central Avenue - it was like the 52nd St. of L.A. - and found a job with a trio. Victor McLaglen, the actor, had a nightclub in L.A., on Riverside Drive I think. Somebody asked me if I wanted a job playing at this place so I said "Yeah." They had to figure out some way to get me into the union because I was so young. On the job we were just blowing — jam sessions — and I faked through it. I didn't know how to read really. I didn't know anything about scales and chords. I just tried to learn the melody. That's why people say today "Boy, the way he plays a melody is just like his own."

SUPER HiREZ
POWERED BY ACOUSTIC SOUNDS

The reason for that is that I never really knew the right melody to a lot of things. I would remember hearing the melody or the piano player would play it for me and I would get as close as possibly could to it and then maybe what I would play would sometimes sound better than the actual melody. Now I know the melodies and that's made it harder. When I got smart, when I learned about music after I got with Stan Kenton's band, then for a while it became harder to play. Before that I had no idea what anything was and I just played any note and it sounded great to me.

When I was nine years old I had a teacher named Leroy Parry. He was very casual. He had everything together, including his music. He had no children, a nice wife. I remember that once a year he would drive from L.A. to Detroit and pick up a new car and drive it home. Sometimes a Plymouth, sometimes a Chrysler. He had a little diamond ring on his finger. And he was real warm. That was very important to me. I could just see the love in his face when I was with him. When I'd be playing my lesson, he'd look at my grandmother and I would be looking at him out of the corner of my eye and he'd look so pleased. He was like a father to me; my own father wasn't living with us. Parry would come once a week and he would come right on time. When I moved to San Pedro he would drive all the way down just to give me a lesson. My lessons were real easy. Right before he came I'd run through the lesson, say page nine to fifteen. I'd run through it and never had any problems. The playing was so easy that later people told me "Don't learn chords and things like that." I said "What's a chord?" They said "Don't find out." I knew different people at the time who played great, and they didn't know anything about chords. When you first know a chord, it really limits you. It really does. Until you get to the point where you overcome that, which I finally reached. When you first start to learn, you're really hung up, watching yourself, but the more you know the more you can combine your knowledge with freedom. Now I can just throw the chords totally out of my mind. I can even throw the melody out of my mind and just play. In that trio job though, sometimes I'd start a piece and get off on something and never know how to get back. Sometimes I would go into a bridge that wasn't the bridge of the tune. And a lot of times the rhythm would just go right along with me and no one would know what

tune we played. That really happened. Someone would say "I thought that was so-and-so." Russ Freeman - he was playing piano - would tell us where he thought we started and what tune he thought we ended on. Russ was with that group and sometimes Hampton Hawes. I also played with Claude Williams a little, and Carl Perkins. He was on the Omega tape. That session was Perkins' last session and he didn't know anything about chords. But he could play a Monk tune and play by ear all the little scales that Monk used.

Everyone was together at that time. Myself, I didn't know what prejudice was. The first time I heard of it was through my dad, when he realized where I was going at night. He flipped when he found out what Central Avenue was and that was involved with black people. In Mingus' book, he tells of the prejudice, what people did to him and how he's going to fight it. Well, I never saw anybody do anything to Mingus except admire him. Myself, I played in Lee Young's band. He was a drummer and Lester Young's brother. We played at the Club Alabam, one of those old time clubs like the Cotton Club. They had movies and vaudeville and people dancing. It was a big nightclub on Central Avenue — almost all black — and I was the only white guy in the band. There were no problems. Later I joined the Benny Carter big band. Again was the only white guy in the band and again there were no problems. But I had to leave that band when it went on a tour to the South. They couldn't travel with a mixed band. Benny Carter had to tell me and I didn't know what he was talking about. A lot of times Benny wouldn't start playing with the band at the beginning of the set. He would be maybe having a hassle with a chick. He was involved with Savannah Churchill, the singer in the band, and they were having problems. Well, when he wasn't on the stand I would play lead alto. I would play Benny's part and I would play his solos too. At that point I still didn't know very much about chords and the arrangements were very difficult. That got me so that could read almost anything. My ear was already developed but it developed even more when I played Benny Carter's parts and then listened to the way he would play them. I marveled at him. I listened to the way he played the part that I had played the night before and he just flowed. He never made a mistake. So Benny Carter taught me a lot and

I was shocked when Benny told me I couldn't travel with them. So that's how I heard about prejudice, except as said, what I heard from my dad.

I really loved my dad. He ran away from home when he was ten. I was raised by his mother. She was cold, cold. She never put her arm around me, never kissed me, never did anything except feed me good. She was nice, but she didn't give me what I really needed, which was love. I needed that more than anything. It was more than I can put into words. (My mother) was 15 and he was 29 when he had to marry her. But I always wanted to reach him, you know, really get to him, as two men. I succeeded only twice. There's a lot of violence in my family. One night when I was just starting to learn how to drive my father got into a fight with another member of the family. He came at my father with a hammer. I grabbed my father and I pulled him to the car, got the door closed and took off. He was trying to get out of the car and I was holding him and trying to drive. As we took off we heard a crash and this hammer had come through the window. If I hadn't moved the car it would have gone right through my father's temple. So I drove him home and took him to the bathroom and wiped his face and put some bandages on him. And all this time he was just looking at me. I couldn't even meet his eyes. It was too much for me. It was so wonderful I would have given anything in the world if it had never ended. I couldn't look at him later because I couldn't stand not getting that look again. So I just had to live in fantasy. For a long time I wouldn't look him in the eye but I made up my own private world where whatever I needed I could give myself. The other time I impressed my father was when I was in San Quentin. The last time they put anybody in the gas chamber they gassed three people, including Ma Duncan, who hired two Mexicans to kill her son's wife because she loved her son. The wife was pregnant. The two boys hit the woman but she didn't die so they threw her in a hole and covered her over and just ran. She suffocated. Well, I was working in the paymaster's office then, which was right by the gas chamber. The first time my father came to see me

in San Quentin he was scared. When I was a kid I used to get into fights and wait till my father visited and I would see that I would start bleeding so he would think I was tough, you know. Well, while he was at San Quentin they brought these three people into these private rooms, special places you could see through glass. The death chamber. My dad looked over and I said "That's Baldenado and Ma Duncan. They're going to gas those suckers." I was real tough, you know. My dad said, "Are you okay in here? Are you safe? Are you in trouble?" I said, "There ain't nobody living who could mess with me." I was like a king. I was okay in a place that he was scared of.

Benny Carter's manager also managed Kenton so he got me a job with Kenton. I came up at a good time. It was easier to get a name in those days, although I got a name for drinking and taking dope



too. I wanted everything at one time. I was one of those people who never stopped running. At one point every morning when I woke up I immediately grabbed a drink or some cough syrup or pill. Sometimes before I got out of bed in the morning I was already wasted. I believed that if I called the right person and went to the right place something would be really happening. It was really going on, all I had to do was find it. I would get up and go round pounding on people's doors at four or five o'clock in the morning, searching. The last time I was in prison I thought I would die there. So I started investigating religions, you know. I felt I could survive if I knew for sure that there was life after death, that I wouldn't be just forever in a box, living day after day for centuries. I tried

everything imaginable. Once I was locked up in the hole for getting loaded. They locked me up for 14 days. No cigarettes, just water and a little slop twice a day. Nothing whatever to do. It was over Christmas and New Year's and was really a very hard time for me. I read the Bible all the way through and I was praying that I could find something there for me. There was nothing, nothing at all. Now I realized that nothing is going to happen unless it happens within me. Now I've become more settled, a little more relaxed. When it gets late at night I realize nothing is happening anywhere except that people are getting tired, losing strength. That's the biggest thing I've learned in life. So I hardly ever go out. I have only a couple of friends.

I was living in Studio City, a nice place in the valley. I had a real nice car and all sorts of clothes. I must have had ten or eleven two or three hundred dollar suits. People wore suits then. I had shoes and shirts, socks, sweaters in all beautiful colors. I had all the horns. I was strong. I was getting my color back. I looked great. I was very handsome. I stopped taking every thing except drinking, smoking and taking some uppers and downers, which would have killed most people but for me meant that I was really together. I had just played a studio job with Marty Paich. I played a solo on "Blues in the Night" behind Jesse Belvin. It was beautiful. During the whole first part of the tune I played on the clarinet with just a bass behind me. Everybody said "Wow Art." So I was driving home from this record date. It was six or seven in the morning and I was going down the freeway. Ray Charles is singing something lonesome on the radio. I was real nostalgic, and I say "Those people don't really dig me." And then I thought about my old lady. I never really loved her, never wanted her. She would never travel with me. She just sat home working crossword puzzles. I had no one. Totally zero. All of a sudden I got off the freeway and said "I'm going to where people really dig me." In about an hour I had scored a quarter ounce of heroin. I was surrounded by my Mexican friends, all speaking Spanish. They were looking at my car and hugging me, saying "Here's Art." You know, I never learned Spanish. I didn't want to. They'd be talking to me, and I'd just growl softly in reply. I had all this stuff — clothes and car — and I didn't want it, and I wasn't happy. So I grabbed these people and said "Oh god, at

last I'm back home." It felt so good there were no words to describe it. You know, these people were much more open, much more friendly. I still would enjoy their company but I've got something I've got to do. I have to play music and I don't have long to do it. I take methadone now and it's bad for your liver. But I feel that I'm going to change my mind. You know, for a while there I never wanted to play again. Ever. I was in Synanon. It was just too many dues to pay. I felt that I couldn't play the music and be cool and survive. The only way I could play music was to get loaded, just wasted all the time. I worried about everything. Are there going to be any people there? Will the owner make enough money to where he'll want me back again? And when I'm playing, I'm fighting a war.

One night in Chicago, Eddie Harris came to sit in. I'd never seen him before and then there he was and the audience was really excited. And he played really well. From the moment I heard his name I changed totally. I had been just working a job, playing the best I could. When he started to get out his horn the whole thing changed. My face became drawn and my eyes sort of crazed and I looked at him and just stared. I looked at his face and at his body — he was strong, healthy. My mind was like a computer. I heard everything he did and knew why he did it and studied what he was going to do next until I had him figured out. And when I figured him out I realized he was really playing. And then I became so serious that it was painful. I played nothing like I had been playing. I figured that if I changed my playing I would have him. Because he was playing all his little clichés, the type of thing Laurie puts me down for playing. Everybody does it, sometimes you have to do it. You can't create every minute. It's too difficult. That's why I got loaded all the time, because I couldn't create all the time and I couldn't handle not doing it. So after I played, I stopped and was shaking all over and I could feel his eyes on me. So I kind of glanced at him and that was it. When he saw my eyes he really got a strange look in his face. I stopped all their joking. It was more like a life or death battle.

Recently I've played with rhythm sections made up of guys like Roy Haynes and Hank Jones and Ron Carter and Al Foster - Cecil McBee and Stanley Cowell — guys I've heard of for years and years. And all of a sudden I'm the only white cat. I'd

walk into the dates and these people had never seen me, never heard me probably. All I was to them was some old west coast player that's been in jail. You know, real nothing. So when I get there I walk in and put my case down and take my horn out and my mind is like putting itself in some trance. Then I observe these musicians and say, how can I reach this one? What do I have to do to get this one? I've got to battle, to knock them out. I want them to realize, man, this guy can blow. Or even, for a white boy, he can play. Better yet, no white or black about it — boy, he's dangerous. It's not always like that but it's always a battle. Al Foster was beautiful. When we set up, he lowered his cymbal so that he could watch me when we were playing. And I hadn't met him before. He was so warm that I knew he was totally on my side. He wanted to play with me, seeing and hearing me. Cecil McBee and Stanley Cowell were on another date. After the first day we recorded I felt terrible. I was miserable because I thought I played terrible. I wanted to fire Roy Haynes because I thought he was rushing. If only I could reach these musicians, just as people, rather than having to battle them with instruments, having to force my will on them. And it was hard to get to them sober, nothing, no drugs, except the methadone. But they came around when we did the tune "Patricia" which is a ballad I wrote for my daughter. That's one of the best things I've recorded so far. We played "Patricia" and all of a sudden it was like magic. We finished it and we went to listen to it and everybody was there listening and everybody said it was a masterpiece. And it was because of the battle that I was able to do that. When I'm playing at a club, my struggle with the musicians is only the beginning. I have to deal with everyone who's sitting there — the people at the bar who make noise when I'm playing a ballad, the people who walk out in the middle of a set, or the people who don't really look at me when I'm playing or who don't really listen — all those things. So then I would be looking for a guy with some thing I could take to make myself feel better. You know, really, the first battle is getting to the job on time. You drive to the club and look for the cars — if you can't find a parking space, that's good. And then there's the fear that you won't be able to play. Sometimes you just can't. The more you play, the higher the level of competency, but you're still not happy if you're not playing your best, even if most of

the people in the audience can't tell the difference.

I'd like to play more, because when we went to Japan I got to rehearse and perform with George Cables and Billy Higgins and Tony Dumas and it was marvelous hearing that rhythm section develop and listening to the chords that George plays. I've learned so much playing with them. If I could play every night, if I had the strength to play every night, with those musicians, I would hate to say what might happen. But I put myself through too much when I play. I've learned that I put too much pressure on myself. I am beginning to accept things. You know, recently someone said to me "You're one of the five or six best jazz players alive." Now if someone had said that to me before, I would have thought it was a drag. There would be four or five others, you know. But I've been to Tokyo, London, and New York, and I've seen millions of people who would love to be one of the five or six best something's in the world. So all of a sudden I thought "Wow that's great. I should be happy grateful." I enjoy communing, communicating with people. Yet I don't have many friends. I don't understand that. When I get with a new person, I can be so overpowering, so different . . . so demanding, that I scare people off.

These words are Art Pepper's. They were said in the presence of his wife Laurie and in response to questions by Michael Ullman on August 20, 1979.