

TRANSCRIPT - LONNIE HAMILTON

Interviewee: LONNIE HAMILTON

Interviewer: KIERAN TAYLOR

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KIERAN TAYLOR: Mr. Hamilton, just for the sake of the recording, would you tell us your name and when and where you were born?

LONNIE HAMILTON: My name is Lonnie Hamilton, III. I was born right here in Charleston and went to school at Burke High School and graduated from Burke High School in 1947. After that I went to South Carolina State. You do the numbers for me. I went to South Carolina State College, I graduated from there in 1951. Went into the Army for two years and after I came out of the Army I wanted to be a professional musician, but the registrar at the school said to me what you should do is teach for a couple of years and then if you decide that you wanted to go on the road then you can go on the road.

So, I taught for two years at Sims High School in Union, South Carolina. Fell in love with teaching and I was encouraged to come back home. I taught at Bonds-Wilson High School which is no longer in existence for twenty years. While I was in the classroom I taught 3,600 students. I sent 131 of those students to college. I taught music.

Recently, one of those students died by the name of Alphonse Mouzon. He was one of the top drummers in the country. He was internationally known. He had cancer and he died about a month ago. That student came out of that group of people that I

taught. During the time, most of those kids were matriculated at South Carolina State College.

At one time, the majority of the people out there almost had at the band of South Carolina State College came from Bonds-Wilson High School. Our school was a very well-known school. We put out quality students and most colleges would take them without even having an audition. Just send them to me and we'll take them and give them a scholarship. Most of them went on to do real well. A lot of them came out of college and went into the service.

Some of them were in the Navy, some of them in the Army, some of them in the Air force. We've had generals out of that same group; we've had colonel's (00:03:01) and then we've had lieutenant colonels out of that same group of students. But, they weren't expected to do well. They were motivated to do things and they went out and did a lot of wonderful things.

KT: You had mentioned graduating from Burke, but you spent a lot of your childhood in North Charleston?

LH: Yeah, I lived in North Charleston. Let me explain this to you. When I came up, this was before integration, came out of elementary school there was not a high school in the North area. The only school that you had was Burke High School for Blacks. One school. Then if you did not live in the city proper you did not qualify to go to that school. You are not eligible to go there.

So, I lied about my address in order to go to high school because other than that I would not have been able to go to high school. My address, if you go to Burke school today, you'll see that my address is 128 Congress Street. I never spent one night in that

place. But, when they asked me what's your address and I knew I had to have an address I said Congress Street and I met a girl who lived at that address. After that I went back to the lady and told her what I did and asked her would she give me permission to do it. They lied and said yep, you can stay here and this is your address. Never spent one night. So, that's what happened and that's how the system worked during those days.

KT: How did you get from North Charleston then down to Burke every day?

LH: I walked. I lived at Silver Hill, that's just north of Mount Pleasant Street and I would walk there every day, walk to school, and I would walk back. If it rained during those days, you walked in the rain if you wanted to go to school. During that time, they had school on busses, county and city on busses for white students only. So, since I was not white I could not ride the bus, so I had to walk back and forth to get to school.

KT: Your earliest memories then would have been during the Great Depression. Can you say a little bit about that, the Depression Era experience in Charleston?

LH: Charleston, at that time, you must understand that back during the days of slavery nine of the richest individuals in the United States lived in Charleston. Charleston had its own society and because these people had all that money and the money came from cotton and rice that's where they made the money. I hope some of you younger guys must understand that sometimes I talk about these kinds of things and it upsets people for the simple reason that they feel that you are blaming them for what happened. That's a period that occurred, you had nothing to do with it. So, please don't take it personal when we talk about these kinds of things because if it did not happen to me I don't know what would have happened.

If I had taken it personally, I don't know what would have happened to me. I

never took any of this personally because the two people that encouraged me most was my grandfather and a white guy that I worked for by the name of Carter. He lived on Rutledge Avenue and he would observe me and he would say you've got natural talent. He says you should go to college. I knew nothing about no college. I'm just trying to make it.

I never thought beyond high school because I had so much trouble getting to high school and getting out of high school. So, during those days most of the work was done. I had three opportunities I could be an undertaker, I could be a preacher, I could be a teacher. That's it. Or I could go into the labor force and I was not structurally built to carry those four hundred pound bags of whatever you are producing in the fertilizer mills north of me. So, those are the three opportunities I had.

I decided then that I wanted to go to college, encouraged by this guy. My teacher took me in the car and took me to the school. That's how I got a chance to go to college. I loved music. I would go to concerts and stuff like that. You sneak in. You're small you can get under the fence and stuff like that, you sneak in and you will go to a concert and watch the people play and you'll say to yourself I like this. I like that.

The instruments, I like this and I like that. My grandfather started taking care of me and he said to me for Christmas, what do you want for Christmas? I said I wanted a saxophone. I didn't even think about it, I just thought that that was the name and I was going to say a saxophone. So, he bought me a saxophone for Christmas.

I was in Burke school and I started taking private lessons in the afternoon. I started right after Christmas so I had until the summer in order to do what I was going to do. I was serious about my music until after that first maybe four months, they put me in

the band and I concentrated only on music. All of my friends were musicians. I had nothing to do with other people that much. If you didn't play I didn't want nothing to do with you.

So, that helped me until when I got in the band then started being around people and during those days they had Jenkins Orphanage Band. Jenkins Orphanage Band was the top band that they had in the South East at producing students. So, I would hang out with the band. The band would go up and down King Street on Saturdays to raise money. I would go and the guys would ask me would you hold my music?

It was the greatest thrill I had in the world that I got a chance to hold the music for these guys. During those days, most of the people in the orphanage came from away; Chicago, Philadelphia. Places like that because the parents would send them south to get their check from the government. The government paid the orphanage to keep orphans. So, the people would send their children south so that they can get that check and they had nothing to worry about because the orphanage and all the rest of it took care of all the kids. Then the government then decided that what they were going to do the kids would have to return back home. They could not stay in the orphanage any more so they had to return back to their place of residence. That's how I got a chance to get in the band.

They needed a saxophone player and I had gotten to the place that I could play pretty well. The guy said come on Lonnie, join us. So, I went and joined the band. Well, I didn't want people to know that I was not an orphan because I thought that if they thought that I was not an orphan I would not be thought well of in the area, so I played the game of being in the orphanage just to be with them. In that two years, I travelled two times with the band all the way from Charleston to New York and we would go stop in a

place called Tasley, Virginia and we would play for the wealthy people in Virginia because they would have rickshaw races. They would go there for maybe two weeks and have a good time.

They would take care of the band and give us money. We would go to New York and play on the street. We'd play on the street in New York and sometimes we could not get a permit to play in New York. When we did not, we'll play and the cops will come and run us off the streets. So, we'd have to leave the street, but other places that we'd get a permit and they'd welcome us. People would gather around and people would give us enough money so that we could come back to Charleston and give that money to the orphanage.

KT: Tell me, who were some of the players you were playing with in the orphanage band at that time?

LH: The only famous one then was the drummer with Duke Ellington and the drummer with Rufus Jones. They call him speedy Jones. He was one of the top drummers in the entire world. He came right out of Charleston right out of Jenkins Orphanage. He was one of our friends, so when he got to be famous we would go to see him. In 1946 Lionel Hampton [Big] Band came to Charleston.

I had gotten to the place then that I had made a name for myself and he had heard about me and he sent for me. I went to see him, I went to a place called the St. James Hotel on Spring Street. He sent for me and he sent for a guy named Leon Jones. I went and he said bring your horn. So, I played for him and he said I want you to meet me Monday morning in Charlottesville, Virginia; you got a job. I was happy.

I ran home to momma and I said momma I'm going to be famous. I'm going on

the road; Lionel Hampton has offered me a job. She said you are going to college. My mom was law and order. You are going to college. I knew that was the end for me.

She said I don't want you out there on the road because guys on the road will have a tendency to start with drugs and I don't want to out there with that kind of stuff. So, I said okay momma. Then Leon Jones took the job. Leon Jones met Lionel in Charlottesville, Virginia at the University of Virginia, that's where he was playing. After that I was watching television one morning and here's Leon with Lionel Hampton on the Today Show. I'm saying look at Leon.

Two weeks later, Leon who came from Charleston was found in New York nude in the snow where he had OD'd. He went and got with Lionel band and started hanging out with the guys on drugs and he died. My momma said you see what I told you? So, I went to college and that helped me. I had no desire then of going back on the road.

KT: Heroin was a problem in the jazz community even then?

LH: Heroin killed him. See, how they started off they want to give you free drugs and I wouldn't take it. I said no. I would take a drink. I would drink beer and I started later with taking a shot, but never cared that much for it because I started off with a Tampa Nugget cigar.

They wanted me to try drugs and I said no I'm not going to do that. So, they said well take this cigar and I took the cigar and I smoked the cigar not knowing it I swallowed all this juice with the cigar and it made me so sick. I was so sick I didn't know where I was. I said if it's that bad I don't want to mess with this stuff no more. So, I kept away from most of it.

KT: Did you come from a musical family?

LH: No. No one played music in my family. My brother started. When my grandfather bought the saxophone for me my brother said I want a trumpet. He bought the trumpet. My brother kept it two weeks and he sold it because he had no interest in it at all. No one in my family played music.

KT: As you are developing not only as a saxophonist, but also clarinet, right?

LH: No, I never developed that well on the clarinet. You must understand that when I came up things were really bad. My mother had a third-grade education and my father I don't know how high he went in school, but they did labor work. So, you didn't have that much wealth that you can get the things. Most of it would be out there working and hustling and trying to get it.

That's what kept me from doing a lot of things, even my teacher. My teacher was a trumpet teacher, he didn't know anything about saxophones. You took a book and he knew how to read music, but he did not know anything about the saxophone. I took a course at Indiana University on Henry Gulick, was one of the top clarinet players in the world. Everything I did and everything I was doing according to Henry Gulick was wrong. I'm saying oh my God, but he was right. The trumpet player never knew anything about saxophones and about techniques and stuff like that and he did the best he could.

KT: This is Mr. Daniels?

LH: Yeah, Mr. Daniels. Mr. Daniels did it. He did the best he could at the time because he knew I wanted to play so bad. But, after that I got to the place that had a desire to learn and after Gulick criticized everything I did and he was right. He was right, everything I did was wrong, but after you've done it that long it's hell to change. So, many of the things that he told me to do it was very difficult for me to do.

But, I went on and I played for the Today Show when it would come to Charleston. They would call me and say I want your band. After I started playing I got to know other musicians then people would start calling me and ask me about doing jobs for them. I did the Today Show. I did a movie called *Rich in Love*, I guess in the 1990s I did this movie.

And how I did that, I was at a place called Henry's on Market Street. Let me tell you this, before Henry's I met some white boys who thought my name had gotten big enough that we should take that name and go into business. So, what we did then we did Lonnie's in 1982 I think it was. We opened Lonnie's. I wanted to really get my own band and own my own club.

I got with these guys right in Charleston, got with these guys and we organized Henry's. The bad thing about Henry's was that we had too many cooks. So, it did not really work out well for the simple reason that with so many people being in the kitchen my wife and I would go and we would do the book keeping. We would take care of paying the payrolls. The club was in my name. The lease was in my name. Everything was my name.

The reason why I did it, I thought that white people would not accept me beyond Calhoun Street. Didn't know it until I opened the club. When I opened the club one night the nine of us who owned it. They had nine of us and we would have people line up to get into that club. Governors would come, everybody would come to the club.

I found out later because of a confrontation that the chief guy, he was a lawyer, had with some of my patrons and they told him. It's white people saying this now, we don't like your partners. We come here because of you Lonnie. I said I'll be damned. I

spent all my time thinking that I would not be accepted. I was at 110 North Market Street. Now that's the very famous restaurant.

KT: Peninsula?

LH: Peninsula. Next door to Peninsula. That's where this club was. I'm thinking that these people are not going to let me come down here. Not knowing that it was alright. So, I'd waste my time doing that and then we decided later to go to Henry's and Henry's was down the street at 40-something and I stayed at Henry's nine consecutive years playing at Henry's.

Everybody who was somebody came to Henry's. So, you learn these things the hard way. What encouraged me during those days was there was a man than owned channel two, his name was Drayton Hastie on the station and he heard me saying that I wanted to leave Charleston because I would never be famous in Charleston. He called me and he said I don't like what you said. You said you'll never famous in Charleston. He said you can be famous in Charleston.

I said how am I going to be famous in Charleston? He told me I'm going to have you to sign a contract with my station and I'm going to have you on television two times a day. You will come on at 7:00 o'clock in the morning and you will come back on 11:30 at night. Sure enough I signed a contract and I stayed on television until I wanted to go back to school to get my Master's degree in music. Then I tried to enroll at the University of South Carolina and they told me we are not accepting black people.

So, I said alright. I said I've got a G.I. bill. I'm going to exercise my right to go to school. You turn me down and then I'll sue you and then I'll get a chance then to go and get the Master's degree. Well, they didn't want to be sued, so they agreed that they would

help me to get the aid to go to any school in America that I wanted to go to and they will pay the difference from the University of South Carolina to that school.

So, I went to Indiana University. Indiana University is a very classic school and they dealt mostly with classical music. I wanted to teach kids how to play music. The best school that they had then that had been recommended to me was one called VanderCook College of Music in Chicago. It's a small school, but it dealt only with training teachers.

I went there and the last year when I am about ready to graduate with my Master's degree the University of South Carolina wrote me a letter and said that we are now accepting black people and we are demanding that you come back home. I'm getting ready to graduate. I said what. So, I told them no, I was not coming back to South Carolina and if they tried to prohibit me from getting my degree at VanderCook I would sue them. Well, they didn't want no suit, so they then allowed me to finish school and that's how I got my Master's from VanderCook.

KT: The state of South Carolina over the years paid probably in the millions of dollars to protect segregation, sending African American students, paying for their tuition to go out of state.

LH: Dr. Taylor, with that bill I went to six different colleges. I had a good time. Places that would have never accepted me. My daughter went to Duke. I looked at Duke and I said God this is a beautiful place, but I knew that they wouldn't take me.

But, they spent billions just to keep me from going. Listen at this, and then after I came back and I was doing so well the Chamber of Commerce gave me the star teachers award because my students have been so successful. Gave me that star teacher award and all this. The University of South Carolina sent me a letter and asked me to please allow

them to have all of my papers. My wife — the ceiling almost came off that house.

She said you are not going to send your papers to the University of South Carolina when they would not accept you. You are not going to do it. So, I had to refuse to send it there and now my papers are down at Avery.

KT: Can you give us a sense because you are playing in the marching bands, you're playing on the street with Jenkins, but then also doing a lot of club music in the 40s and 50s; I don't know whether you'd call it early rock and roll.

LH: The early music that you had here in Charleston, we had been different places and we took and brought different ideas back and then you had this Charleston flavor of things that we brought from other places and put together the things that we were doing here. I heard somebody say the other day about George Gershwin. George Gershwin came to Charleston and he hung out in the black community and he hung out with all these guys. The guy who came out of the orphanage's son, he wrote some music that sounds exactly, in fact, I've got plenty of nothing George Gershwin stole that idea from that guy. That guy came out before Gershwin and Gershwin had put I've got plenty of nothing in there.

If you listen to his music than ten years before Gershwin I said Lord, and that's what happened. But, George Gershwin had a name, this guy didn't. So, we then had a chance then to blend things among ourselves. Now, because of segregation the white people could not play with the blacks. That was a thing that was taboo.

You didn't do that. Then later when we got to the place that the union came in. The union tried to keep all of the black musicians from being able to play by saying that they wanted to unionize the clubs. If you unionize the clubs, the clubs can only hire white

musicians. Well, the white guys didn't play jazz like we did at that time because we were not allowed to associate with each other to have any connection with each other, so we were not getting ideas from each other.

They were doing their things and we were doing our things. And then later they started to have afternoon jazz sessions at some of the restaurants on Sunday afternoon when they are closed so that they would not have the people to be known that white and black people are having that kind of —

KT: Here in Charleston?

LH: Here in Charleston.

KT: Do you remember the first time you played with white musicians?

LH: The first time I played with white musicians, I don't remember the year, but I hired the first white musician to play with me. There was a guy that came in town and you might have heard of him, Joe Wilson came to town out of the Navy. Joe Wilson didn't have any friends here, didn't know anybody so we helped to find him a place for his family. He was a good guitarist. Helped him find a place for his family and in order for him to have money since he didn't have any money.

In order for him to have money I hired him. I let him work with me. It's a funny thing, I got away with murder, what I mean by racially murder for the simple reason that a lot of people would not challenge anything that I would do. I'll give you an example, down on East Bay Street you had the yacht club. The yacht club would hire musicians, all black, then the yacht club would not allow them to come through the front door.

They had to go through the back door to get in. I had gotten to the place that my band had gotten to be known and well respected and I demanded that my guys dress well

because I found out that that's the way that you could get extra money. The way you looked, the way they paid you. So, they said to me that they didn't want the guys to eat and even when I integrated the band they didn't want them to eat in the yacht club and they couldn't come through the front door. I rebelled against that. My guys came through the front door and my guys ate and I got away with it because I said to them if you don't let my guys do this then I don't want to play.

KT: About what year do you think that was?

LH: That's in the 60s.

KT: Was that before the Diplomats?

LH: That's before the Diplomats. The Diplomats came up at Henry's time.

KT: Do you remember your first-time hearing jazz in a club?

LH: Oh yeah. The first-time hearing jazz was not in the club. The first was a group called Silas Green Minstrel. The Minstrel would come to Charleston and they had some of the swingiest musicians you ever want to hear. I would go there and I would die. Those guys could play. They could really play and that's when it first started.

KT: Where would that have been?

LH: That was an open field down near Burke school and they would set up the circus out there and have the animals out there. The show would be Silas Green Minstrel. You hear some good music and that's the thing that encouraged us. Musicians during those days would hang around with each other. They would pal around, have a good time with each other and it was not this competition thing. I want to be better than you.

I'm 89 years-old now and he said to me the other day he heard me play. He said you can't play as fast as I play. I said yeah, I've got arthritis and all these (00:34:22) you

know, but if you had met me when I was 30 I'd got you behind. That's the difference now. We honored all of the older musicians.

We hung out and for them to come, you know what they would do, they would give us reeds and mouthpieces and stuff like that. We thought that was the greatest thing in the world to be in their midst. We were honored to be among them. Today it's different. Younger guys don't want to have that much to do with older people and as a result of that they miss so much.

I was playing with a group and they asked me to play songs. I met Louis Armstrong and Louis Armstrong said learn the melody. Most of the young people who are playing today a single melody line they don't want to do it. They get beyond their audience. My audience made me. They came to see me.

In that nine years at Henry's I made \$390,000. Do you realize that I've got a good friend in Orangeburg right now that played with Count Basie band for forty years and the largest amount of money that he made in salary was \$27,000 and he'd been all over the world. I made better than that right here in Charleston. But, I made mine by understanding that the people made me. I was never above the people. I was there to serve and to have them to be happy about what I was doing because without them I would have not been there. As a result, with that attitude things went well.

KT: In terms of composing, I'm wondering how important was it to you to compose your own music?

LH: It was very important. This, back in 1990-something MGM came to Charleston. There is a woman on Isle of Palm by the name of Josephine Humphrey. She wrote a book about the Citadel Cadets. Back in the 60s and I was at Henry's. MGM came

to town because they liked the book.

They wanted to do a movie on the book. They wanted to send back to Los Angeles to get a band to do the music for it. The group came one night to Henry's and heard me play. They went back and told the director. Have you all ever heard or seen the movie *Driving Miss Daisy*? Anybody? Well, *Driving Miss Daisy* was a movie that was directed by a guy named Bruce Beresford.

They came to Henry's and heard the band. Some of the staff went back and told Bruce the director about the band. The next night they came again. Then I got a call from Bruce saying that he wanted me to do a movie. I said to him what you want me to do a movie? He said yeah, I want you to do a movie.

So, I thought he was pulling my leg. I said yeah and I want to go to the movie. He laughed and he said no, I'm serious. I want you to do a movie. He said the group is coming back to the club Saturday night and if you can get together we want you to do the movie.

So, they came, liked the band and then said to me Bruce will call you tomorrow. Bruce called me and Bruce said do you have anything original that I can put in that movie? I got a spot and I've got to have some music. So, I said no I don't have anything that I think would be used for the movie, but I said I'll tell you this. I can write something. So, I wrote a blues thing — what does it say there?

KT: "Ugly Ways Blues" by Lonnie Hamilton. Performed by Lonnie Hamilton and the Diplomats.

LH: What I did, I wrote that in an hour. I wrote it in an hour and he said he liked it. He said put it together for the band and play it. So, I played it. Then he said I want it.

Send me the music.

I had the band play it and sent it Los Angeles. First Bruce said to me you get yourself an entertainment lawyer because you are going to make some money out of this thing. Well, I am thinking the man is crazy, I never had a lawyer before to do anything, but I called around and they told me that there was a lawyer in Greenville, South Carolina. I want you to know I got credit in the movie. After I got the lawyer named Bailey out of Greenville, he sent it to the Smithsonian, had it recorded and all that stuff and I got royalties off that song for ten years.

I get money from Malaysia, from Hong Kong, from every place that they showed the movie I would get money from. For ten years, I got that money. For one song. The lawyer he set that whole thing up for me. My momma saw it, you get the credits you know how they roll up and give the credits.

In the movie, and I've got a copy of the movie, in the movie it shows my name Lonnie Hamilton, III "Ugly Ways Blues" as it's rolling. She says son look at that, look at you. So, I did get a chance to be famous in her sights. But, it was very good because I got paid for the movie and plus I got my royalties. Now, here's the difference.

During the period that the book was written The Citadel guys used to hang out in the black community over in Mount Pleasant and it was a speak easy place. They'd go over there and drink that stuff and get drunk and raise Cain and all that stuff. All that is in the book. The band that I had is an integrated band at that period. So, I took the band and I recorded the music with the integrated band, but when I showed the face on the movie I had to bring in fillers.

So, you saw people in the movie acting like they are playing music. Acting like

they are playing the instrument, but they weren't playing there were fillers. My actual band which was an integrated band they did the recording. Because you could not show the face of a mixed group during those days the guys got paid. My white boys got paid, but they couldn't show their face. But it was a lot of fun.

KT: I'm going to open it up, what questions from the floor are there?

Male Voice: I think a lot of movies and books depict that The Temptations were the first group to break the color barrier to play music for an audience that didn't look like them. Would you say that is true or?

LH: A lot of The Temptation music appeared in these movies, but like you are saying they didn't get a lot of credit for. Like right now, you remember Motown? Motown was very known and famous. The bass player for Motown came off the island, right here. Never got no credit. Everybody is going out there doing his thing, playing his music and because he did not have an entertainment lawyer like I had he got nothing. Yeah, a lot of stuff was stolen during those days like that.

KT: Other questions? Shout it out.

Female Voice: So, you said that Drayton Hastie was the one who helped you, is that the Drayton Hastie of Magnolia Plantations?

LH: Yes ma'am, that's him.

Female Voice: So, after that and helping you move forward, did you remain in contact with him?

LH: Yes, I did. Remember now, I had a contract with the station. He did it right. He had me to sign a contract. I was a contract musician with the station.

I got all the credits and stuff like that, but you must understand this, in America

and in Charleston in the society you know your place. Drayton Hastie is a multimillionaire, what is he going to do with Lonnie Hamilton? You understand? He encouraged me and he sent me on my way. You still have that today right here. That type relationship. He saw the opportunity to help and he helped.

KT: Is there a unique — Charleston sound within the jazz community?

LH: It used to be, but you've had some much interrelationship with a musician coming from different places now. I like something that you did. I watched the guys right now. In my days, I could come into the hall and I could hear a musician playing. I didn't have to see their face, I knew who they were. Today it's altogether different.

Why? Because everybody wants to play like one person. I wanted to be different. They will tell you right now, I play a Mark VI Selmer saxophone. The day before yesterday we went up to a nursing home to play for some people because there were some people up there who hadn't had anybody to come to visit them in two years, not one person.

So, we went up there just to play some music for Valentine's day. Three people were crying in there because they had nobody that had been to them in three years. You go around and you see these things and everything starts, you like some of this and you like some of that, but our thing was to be unique. To be our own. Today it's altogether different.

KT: How would you have described that Charleston sound?

LH: The Charleston sound, to me, there is a dispute between what happened in New Orleans and what happened in Charleston. If you go, there you will see similarities. Ours are much more the true jazz that I think in terms of. Because they start mixing the

music there with the creoles and all that stuff coming in. But, I would say that ours was the first to — we had all the money. We can buy everything, so we had a better opportunity than they had down there.

KT: You feel like in the 30s, the 40s what you were hearing here was pure jazz?

LH: Yeah, pure. Why? Because the older guys would say to you “jazz is like a conversation”. You are going to say what you think in the conversation, you’ve got an opinion. The other person has an opinion and when you do your solo you are speaking your opinion. So, that’s the way it went. With a person coming up and saying this is the way I would approach it, the other person saying I would approach it and my way is the best way.

KT: Questions? I have loads if you don’t.

Male Voice 1: Do you ever remember when Elvis Presley came to Charleston?

LH: I remember Elvis, yeah. But, you must understand that I liked some of the songs and stuff that Elvis did because I go back now and I’ll take one of my good singers, Dion from Canada.

KT: Celine.

LH: Celine Dion. She did an Elvis thing the other day, it was incredible. So, that’s the way it was. I was not actually into the Elvis thing. I think for the simplicity of it. My mind was more complex musically than what Elvis was doing. But, Elvis had us slinging it and it went well for him.

KT: Would you have played Mosquito Beach and Riverview?

LH: I did Mosquito Beach.

KT: For those of us who were never there, what did that look like? What was it

and what did it look like?

LH: (laughing) The scene was an open top screen wire around. It's nothing but sticks up with something shelter over the top. Nothing attractive. It's just nothing. But, the people would go there and have a good time. They'll go there and get that scrap iron and they'll have a good time. Now, because the best liquor was made in that Moncks Corner area up there and they'll bring it by the jug. The homemade liquor they put it in jugs. They'll bring the jug down and man they'll have a time.

KT: Those are good audiences to play for?

LH: Listen, those were the greatest audience in the world. You never had people to go and want to do anything harmful. The musicians were treated like Gods. Jesus, man, I've had the best treatment that you'd ever want to have, all because I could play the horn. Now, if I couldn't play that horn I was in trouble, but if I had that horn oh I was in good shape. I could go anyplace.

I could take that horn and go. How do you think you got a lot of integration? That horn integrated a lot. They'll say we don't want black people in here. Oh, Lonnie, let him come. I wasn't black because I had the horn, but if I didn't have that horn I couldn't even get in there. Today it's still the same. That horn will take you into any place.

Male Voice 3: Yeah, you said you served in the Army?

LH: Yeah.

Male Voice 3: Sometime in the 50s?

LH: I was in Korea for a year-and-a-half.

Male Voice 3: What was that like?

LH: Well, the war was over when I got there. The war was just over, but all the

remnants of war and Seoul was a dump. I went back to Seoul ten years ago, and the Americans have built a beautiful city there, I mean gorgeous. But, when I was there it was a dump because they bombed it to the ground. That was the difference there. That's why I was glad that when I got there it was not during the time of confrontation where they were fighting. I stayed in Korea a year.

KT: What took you to Union County? Were you in Monroe, or were you teaching out in the county?

LH: No. How I got to Union County was that the registrar. You see, the registrar was a jazz lover. She loved to hear me play. She wanted to get me a job where I could be some place in South Carolina. So, she found a job in Union for me. I had never been to Union, never heard of it.

She said I've got this job for you, go and take this job. If you don't like it, try it two years, and if you still got that thing about wanting to go on the road you do it. I was glad. That was the best advice that anyone could have given me at that time. I thought the road was heaven and it wasn't because I've had a good life.

Going on that road I'd have been in trouble, but I got here and I started teaching. I got to have a family because all the kids that I taught they would come back and we would have reunions and stuff like that. I was so happy with the family that I built with the kids that I taught. In 1970 they integrated the schools. I am a very well-known teacher with a lot of success and when they integrated the schools they decided it would be best not to have me to teach white kids.

It would be best to have me to be a vice principal. So, they offered me vice principal at five different schools. I had already selected the school that I wanted and then

the superintendent came back and said Mr. Hamilton funny things happen. They want you to stay as a teacher. I said who do you mean when you say they; you mean the white people? He said yes.

I said well have you explained to them my feeling on discipline? He said no. I said well you better talk to them about that first before we talk about putting me back in the classroom. So, they had this big meeting. Not one black person in the meeting; all white people. We had a good meeting.

At the end a white woman held up her hand and said Mr. Hamilton. I said yes? She said I heard that you've got a paddle. I did, I would paddle my students and said yes ma'am I do have a paddle. She said well, the paddles got to go. I said, okay, we'll find a way to handle that.

They integrated the school, they brought in 70% white kids, 30% black kids and that's how they integrated the schools. Nothing changed for me. My relationship was the same with my students to the extent that one of my white students and her boyfriend wanted to get married. They were at the University of South Carolina. Susan who was the white girl's father had separated from her mother. They only father she knew was me. So, she said I want you to give me away.

I said Lord have mercy. I went over and I told my wife. I said Susan wants me to give her away. She said can you talk her out of that? I said, no, you know Susan. Susan is strong headed and what she wants Susan will do that. So, I agreed to give Susan away and they had the wedding at the University of South Carolina where they were in school.

They had it at the chapel. They didn't have anything in there black, none of the machines were black. I am in there sitting down, I'm going through the ceremony and

when they got to that part because she wanted that part who gives this woman away and I said I do. When I said that you could hear a rat eat (00:58:07) on a piece of cotton.

Everything got quiet. People are saying you? But that's what Susan wanted.

Susan and Ron are still together. They are still married to each other. Ron is the superintendent of a school and Susan is the head English teacher at the school. That was a time in my life that it was really serious stuff. They didn't care, I was still their daddy. Today, I got white kids that I taught, I'm daddy. But, other older people didn't understand that relationship. So, that's the kind of stuff that we had during the day of integration.

KT: Because he just passed away, tell me about Alphonse Mouzon and what kind of a student do you remember him as?

LH: Alphonse Mouzon came to me from Union Heights. We were at Bonds-Wilson which was up on Liberty Hill. When I met him first he had two sticks beating on a tin can. He wanted to be in the band. So, I took him in the band and I had just taken a lesson from a guy named Haskell Hall, one of the top percussionist teachers in America.

So, that's why I went to that school to get my Master's degree. I took him, I gave him a real drum, I taught him how to hold the drumsticks and took him through the rudiments of playing. He won for three consecutive years he won the all-state band. What I mean by that, all of the high schools would participate in what they called the all-state band. They would take the top musician from the band to make up the all-stand band.

For three consecutive years, he made the all-state band. Not only that, I had one sousaphone player that made Macy's All American Band. That was unheard of. That was a good experience for the simple reason that when George Brown made the all-American

band they only select two students from each state. For that black boy, back in the 60s to make that all-American band, he was good.

So, Revelli who was the conductor of the band sent me a letter saying that he has been selected for the band and told me that I should get in touch with the Post & Courier to let them know that the boy had made the band. So, I ran down to the Post & Courier to publicize this. They said that it didn't merit being published. I sent back to Revelli to let him know that they wouldn't publish it because he came from a black school and was a black boy. So, Revelli took a picture with him.

Revelli sent the picture to the Post & Courier and they published it. Well, the intent was to not connect the picture with Charleston and the black school, but to connect the picture with Revelli and the United States. But, he got his picture in there and he played in the Macy's Parade and to Tournament of Roses in California. After that, after they wouldn't publicize anything, they didn't want to show anything about it he gave up and stopped playing. They broke his heart.

But, he was something. He was a giant and he was a giant in the twelfth grade. Those are the kinds of things that really hurt. That paper did some heck of things. I was surprised when they published the fact that I was selected as a teacher of the year. But, hell, I had done everything.

My name was known up and down the east coast for putting out good students. What could they do? But, it was difficult for them to do it. That hurt a lot of people. It broke the spirit of people. A lot of people who would have been successful because everybody wants a pat on the back sometimes and to say you did well.

That's why I admire what you are doing here as a teacher. These kids wouldn't

understand this until they get off, ten years from today they look back and say damn. Dr. Taylor did a good job with us. He helped us, he opened us up to a lot of things that happened. It doesn't come instantly.

KT: Other questions? Who was your favorite person to play with? To share a stage with?

LH: You mean locally?

KT: A local person, a national person.

LH: National people, what we were doing during the time that we were playing, we didn't get a chance to go on the stage many times a play with. The best time that I had was the ones that I opened for. When my band was really well known in Charleston in doing well and in demand. I opened for Dizzy. Dizzy was from Charleston and for Dizzy to sit down and listen to my band and want to eat fried chicken with me, it said a lot to me that Dizzy approved that band and that band opened.

For those who don't understand opening, what a band does is normally when a big name comes to town you'll get somebody to warm up the crowd for that person and that's what you call an opener. I would open when Take 6 came. I notice Take 6 had been here the other day. I opened for them. Nancy Wilson came. We would play to get the crowd warmed up for them.

That's the way we got our chance to be among the big names. We didn't play that much with them. The other day I did a recording for the College of Charleston with Houston Person, he is a tenor saxophone player who comes from Florence, South Carolina that is well known internationally. Houston came and we did a recording together for the College of Charleston. I think we did six sides.

There was a recording studio in Mount Pleasant that we did it in with the Charlton Singleton group. We made a recording. In Charleston one day I made the highest amount of money that I made as a side man was \$1,200 a day, right here in this town.

KT: Any concluding thoughts or maybe something that I didn't ask that you wanted to talk about?

LH: No.

KT: Any final reflections?

LH: I'm just thrilled at the idea that I got a chance. I like young people. I feed off young people. I like to be around them because I learn so much from them and at my age you still learn. When you get my age, younger people don't want to hang around too much. It was good this morning to have me to get up at 5:30 and say I'm going down to The Citadel to be with the guys because I remember when I did the movie and they had fillers to come in from the college.

Then I remember that I was allowed to come here to do graduate studies. They didn't tell me they were not accepting blacks. But, prior to that I had good relationships with the school, General [James A.] Grimsley has asked me when I was chairman of County Council. See, I was in politics and that helped a lot too. I was the highest elected official in this county one time.

That meant that I was the chief elected official for the entire Charleston County. The office building that you go to pay your tax now, if you live in Charleston is named the Lonnie Hamilton, III Public Service Building. That's because my colleagues, and they were all white people, thought enough of me to want to name that building in my honor. Some time ago, they built the building and they named it for me. They tried to

keep it secret because they didn't want me to know that that's what they wanted to do.

They said they wanted the building to be named in my honor because I stayed in public office, I stayed in County Council for twenty-four years and never got a nickel. I did all public service and that's what the building is named, public service. Now, all my colleagues are multimillionaires because they got the money. That's what politics is all about, they get the money.

KT: Well, we look forward to having you back. Thank you so much.

LH: I enjoyed it.

End of recording.

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