

ORAL HISTORY T-0034
INTERVIEW WITH SINGLETON PALMER
INTERVIEWED BY IRENE CORTINOVIS
JAZZMEN PROJECT
NOVEMBER 9, 1971

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This is Irene Cortinovic of the University of Missouri, Oral History Program. This is a tape with Singleton Palmer, a jazzman from St. Louis. I show on the first part of the tape how I, usually, talk to my interviewees and attempt to put them at ease. In this particular case I used a book, *A Pictorial History Of Jazz*. and asked Sing to identify as many people as he could in the photographs who were not already identified; and, he did identify quite a few.

CORTINOVIS: [pages turning] Let's see, I passed him, I have a whole section on [Count] Basie. I've written so much in this book, now, I had to buy them [the UMSL library] a new one. It's called the "Kansas City Shuffle," that's the name of this chapter about Basie. Well, there's the Bennie Moten Band.

PALMER: Oh, the Bennie Moten Band, yeah, he had the Oklahoma Blue Devils.

CORTINOVIS: You know Martin McKay has been out here; and, he played with Bennie Moten.

PALMER: Oh, McKay, drummer.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, drummer and vibra. . .

PALMER: Yeah, he works, I think, a type setter for the Argus, I believe...

CORTINOVIS: Right, and these are all...

PALMER: Yeah, she [Mary Lou Williams] just came out of retirement.

CORTINOVIS: She's singing again, Mary Lou Williams?

PALMER: Playing the piano. She went out of circulation for about 4 or 5 years; so, she's booking, you know...

CORTINOVIS: Do you know that Martin McKay's wife was Delloyd McKay? Really, a very well known jazz pianist, she went to Europe in the 30's with Lou Leslie's Blackbirds. They took Europe by, really, storm and Louie Armstrong went with them, too; but not the first couple of years.

LICATA: I've always wondered, why is it that the Russians seem to go crazy over jazz?

CORTINOVIS: All the eastern europeans do. . .

LICATA: Is it because the never have anything like that?

PALMER: I guess so, or I presume so...

LICATA: They go berserk.

PALMER: We ran into some fellows from Finland, they were here with the, oh, its been about four years ago now, with some symphony group like. We were playing, then, down at the Brave Bull down on 12th and Washington and they still correspond with me.

CORTINOVIS: Do they? Here Len, I'll let you take the notes today; since, you'll probably be doing this. The Brave Bull, that's was the name of your place?

PALMER: That was, but it's closed, it's not open anymore.

CORTINOVIS: But Len's going to write down the names and check with you for the spellings afterwards. Today is November 9, 1971; and, this is Irene Cortinovic of the Oral History Program. Today I have with me Singleton Palmer and Len Licata of the Oral History Program. We're talking about jazz for our Jazz Project. And we were just looking at this book, A Pictorial History of Jazz, and had Singleton identify his compatriots on a photograph. How about these on the Basie band; surely, you must have played with Tab Smith, some time or another?

PALMER: Oh, yes, I played with Tab Smith back in the early 30's with Eddie Johnson's Cracker Jacks.

CORTINOVIS: Oh; You were with Eddie Johnson and the Cracker Jacks? Number 1 or Number 2? I know there's a couple of them.

PALMER: Number 1, there's been a...

CORTINOVIS: The one that Eddie got together.

PALMER: Yes. At first there was Oliver Cobb's, he was a trumpet player and played, well, similar to Louie Armstrong. So, Oliver, I don't know, just split up some kind of way. So, Eddie took over his band and he got me in it, you know.

CORTINOVIS: Well, you and Eddie have really found the fountain of youth, because I think just to see both of you, to think that you were playing in bands in the 1930's. Have you met Eddie Johnson? Yes, you met him the day he was out here. Just think, that was nearly forty years ago; It's really incredible.

PALMER; Well I was playing in bands in high school, that's one reason I didn't get out of high school. We were playing with Eddie Johnson in a place called the Pine Night Club on Jefferson and Pine in the Grand Central Hotel. We played from 9 o'clock at night til 4 in the morning and then try to get up and go to school.

CORTINOVIS: A little hard to go to school. And were you going to school in St. Louis?

PALMER: Yes, this is my home; I was born here.

CORTINOVIS: You were born in St. Louis.

LICATA: Was it true that the only school Blacks were allowed to go to was Sumner?

PALMER: That's right.

LICATA: So, no matter where you lived, you...

PALMER: No matter where you lived you...If you lived in Kinloch, Kirkwood, Elmwood Park, you had to come, too. And they talk about the busing now, but you know. . .

LICATA: It's nothing like the busing back then.

PALMER: Well, they say they called it transportation then; now, they call it busing.

CORTINOVIS: Did anybody bring the kids in from Kinloch or from Kirkwood or did they have to get in themselves?

PALMER: Then they had to get in themselves.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, there was no busing or anything, no.

PALMER: There was no busing, but they still had to come all the way from. . .

CORTINOVIS: Well Vashon came later then?

PALMER: Yeah, Vashon was, I don't know, later.

CORTINOVIS: Could I ask what year you were born?

PALMER: November 13, 1913.

CORTINOVIS: Ah, your birthday next week. . .

PALMER: Next Saturday, this Saturday.

CORTINOVIS: Oh yeah, this Saturday, right. So, then you went to school here?

PALMER: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: And where did you learn to play?

PALMER: Where? Actually, I started on trumpet when I was 11 years old and I took trumpet lessons until I was 14. And I was playing with a band called Mose Wiley, I forget the other part, but anyhow it was Mose Wiley and I was one of the trumpet players in it.

CORTINOVIS: When you were 14?

PALMER: Yes. And, so, he didn't have a bass and I was playing second trumpet; so, I guess I was the one that had to go. He asked me how would I like to play bass; so I told him, "I guess it's o'kay, you know, but I don't have a bass." So he said, "Why don't you go home and get your daddy to buy you one?" And it was a pretty rough question then, because times were real hard.

CORTINOVIS: How much would an instrument cost, then, a bass?

PALMER: Then? Well, I think my dad paid \$125 for it, and then it was, you know, a cheap one; American standard but. . .

CORTINOVIS: That's a lot of money in these inflationary times, let alone then...

PALMER: Yeah, but. . .

CORTINOVIS: When the average salary maybe. . .

PALMER: Oh, well, according to what people were making then.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, it was an enormous amount.

PALMER: Sure, you'd be lucky if you made 2 dollars a night or 3 dollars a night.

CORTINOVIS: Could you buy instruments on time? Then?

PALMER: Yes, in fact I had a couple, what do they call it, replevin?

CORTINOVIS: Yes, letters from the President, or something like that.

PALMER: Right from the 100th Music Company.

CORTINOVIS: I remember while I was growing up in the depression my father wasn't working and, we still laugh in our family because we, there was some furniture company downtown that my mother bought a chair from; and we use to always get letters from OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT and inside they always said, "Pay for your chair:" but outside it looked so official. Then we used to say,' Well, here's President Roosevelt writing to us again:" [laughter] Well, I'm really interested. Singleton, in the fact that you played so young; and, a lot of other fellows played at such an early age. Where were you playing when you were 14?

PALMER: Well, I was playing for dances in a place called the Dance Box . It was, then, on Ewing, between Olive and Pine. In fact my daddy use to come down and bring me home after I got through playing. I think that he was enjoying the music more than I was, in a way of speaking.

LICATA: Well, how did you go about getting in touch with the men that owned these bands or that started these bands? You were only 14 years old; and, I'm sure you didn't frequent the

same places that they did.

PALMER: Oh, no, they had a band here called the Longfellows Band and Mr. Langford. . .

CORTINOVIS: Harvey ?

PALMER: Not Harvey, his dad. Anyhow, they had band rehearsal every Wednesday. So, they would have the kids, the younger ones, on the first floor and the older musicians upstairs. Then maybe after about a half hour of teaching, then we'd go up and join the older fellows.

LICATA: Oh, I see.

CORTINOVIS: He was a music teacher, Harvey Langford's father?

PALMER: Oh, yeah, he wrote music; a wonderful talented man.

CORTINOVIS: Whose idea was it for you to take up the trumpet, you or your mother?

PALMER: No. I'm the only musician in my family, that I know of. I just liked music and I..

CORTINOVIS: Thought you would like to take lessons. When you were playing in a place like, well, of course, it wouldn't be allowed now, would it? To have a fourteen year old play?

PALMER: Oh, no.

CORTINOVIS: It was a kind of night club, wasn't it?

PALMER: It was.

CORTINOVIS: So, that's a school in its own? Were there any other, really, children playing in your band?

PALMER: Well, now...

CORTINOVIS: You were playing with Mose Wiley at this time?

PALMER: Yes. The other fellows were, well, they were, we were all young. About the oldest one in the group, actually was Mose; but, the rest of the fellows were still in school, practically.

CORTINOVIS: You must have been a pretty good trumpet player; in fact, wasn't there a lot of competition at this time?

PALMER: I was, not bragging; but, I was a pretty good trumpet player and sometimes I wonder if I had kept on with the trumpet; but, I always did like the bass. I use to hear this bass player with Coon Saunder's Band, Elmer Krebb, they called him Chief, I believe. He was one inspiration; and, then, by me playing trumpet it gave me a little more dexterity on the tuba.

CORTINOVIS: For the fingering?

PALMER: Yes. For the fingering and the triple tonguing and so forth; whereas, the average bass player, he, just plays the regular bass part.

CORTINOVIS: Then, you were in high school?

PALMER: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: So, how come you quit? Did you go on the road then?

PALMER: Well I use to go on the road almost once every two or three weeks with Eddie Johnson.

CORTINOVIS: How old were you when you started with Eddie?

PALMER: I was about 16, I guess, because Eddie's only about a couple of years older than me now. We use to go up to Cincinnati and get stranded.

CORTINOVIS: Those were the days, huh?

PALMER: Yeah, oh yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Who else was playing with you when you were that age?

PALMER: Well, let's see. Freddie and Walter Martin, the twins, saxophone Earnest Franklin on tenor sax, Hal Baker on trumpet, James Telphy on trumpet, Lester Nichols on drums, Bennie Jackson on banjo and guitar and, that's the whole Cracker Jack Band.

CORTINOVIS: That's a pretty big band then, wasn't it?

PALMER: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: What kind of places did you play in?

PALMER: Oh, we played in night clubs and dances, you know, dance halls, here.

CORTINOVIS: And, what kind of music were you playing?

PALMER: Well, we were playing jazz, actually, it wasn't Dixieland. I wouldn't say it was ^Dixieland, but it was the jazz for that era.

CORTINOVIS: That would be around '30, '32?

PALMER: Around '33, yeah, and we played about three seasons on the Idlewild Steamer.

CORTINOVIS: Oh yeah, that's one thing I wanted to ask you about—the riverboats. You played on the Idlewild?

PALMER: Yes. We used to go from here to Louisville, Kentucky.

CORTINOVIS: Out of St. Louis?

PALMER: Well, yeah, we'd get the boat up in Alton and, say, we'd leave St. Louis tonight and play, you know—to go up the river and come back and let the people out. Then we'd steam on down the river to, maybe, Cape Girardeau; then we'd play at Cape Girardeau—just make stops until we go to Louisville; then we'd stay in Louisville, maybe, a couple of months; then we'd head back up, you know—do the same thing back to St. Louis.

LICATA: Was the Idlewild a Streckfus steamer?

PALMER: No, I don't know who it . . . I'd have to get the name of the people who owned the boat, but they lived in Hardin, Illinois.

CORTINOVIS: It was Henry Meyer, wasn't it?

PALMER: Yes, that's right, you're right.

CORTINOVIS: Yes. I remember Martin McKay telling me, because he worked on the Idlewild, too, but later after you worked on it. Well, what kind of music did you play on it?

PALMER: We played regular dance music; the tunes that were popular in those days.

CORTINOVIS: Sweet music?

PALMER: Well, mostly swing, though.

CORTINOVIS: Swing?

PALMER: Yes. It was quite a feat. I enjoyed it very much. Then, I did play on the Streckfus Steamer two seasons with Dewey Jackson, when he had a band on there. But we went to Pittsburgh, I never did go to New Orleans.

CORTINOVIS; You mean you went out of Pittsburgh?

PALMER: We did the same thing, make towns between here and Pittsburgh. We'd go down to catch the Ohio River .

. . . CORTINOVIS; Then go up?

PALMER: Then go up to _____. Then we'd stay up there all summer, then come back.

LICATA: What was your day like on the steamers? What traveling . . .

PALMER: Well, it was almost like an army thing—breakfast at seven and rehearsal at twelve, and we'd play at night. And after the boat let the people off and the boat docked; well, you could do whatever you wanted to do after that.

LICATA: So, was it a pretty carefree life? You kind of enjoyed it?

PALMER: Oh, yes.

CORTINOVIS: [to Licata] Yeah, you ask him more about the boats, I'm going to go into Stephanie's office and get this picture of the Cracker Jacks, because I don't have them all identified.

LICATA: I wanted to ask you, since you were a musician and the men you traveled with were mostly musicians, did you find any difference in the way you were treated than in the way the average black person would have been treated back then? Think that made a difference?

PALMER: No, I would say as a musician, we've been treated pretty well. I don't know maybe, I guess, the people recognize your profession and your talent, and so on. We didn't have too much...the only thing, you couldn't stay, you know—where you wanted to. . .

LICATA: For instance, if you went to Pittsburgh there were certain places where you couldn't stay?

PALMER: Yeah, yeah.

LICATA: So, how long did you play on the boats down the river?

PALMER: Well, the season with Eddie Johnson, Dewey Jackson—oh, I'd say about five years.

LICATA: About five years?

CORTINOVIS: Here's a picture of the St. Louis Cracker Jacks the Eddie Johnson gave me.

PALMER: Yeah, there's me.

CORTINOVIS: The second one?

PALMER: Yes. Now, that's Freddie Martin, me. Earnest Franklin...

CORTINOVIS: Let's write these down...

PALMER: This is Walter Martin...

CORTINOVIS: Let's see, this would be left to right, o'kay, the first one is?

PALMER: They're twins, that's Freddie. . .

CORTINOVIS: Freddie Martin, and then you. . .

PALMER: Yes, and Earnest Franklin, Earnest "Chink" Franklin.

CORTINOVIS: "Chink?"

PALMER: Yes.

LICATA: Nobody knows how he got that name I bet. [laughter]

PALMER: Walter Martin, Lester Nichols. . .

CORTINOVIS: N-i-c-h-o-l-s?

PALMER: Yes. Benny Jackson, Windfield Baker, James Telphy...

CORTINOVIS: Do you know how to spell that?

PALMER: T-e-l-p-h-y. Hal Baker, Eddie Johnson.

CORTINOVIS: Well, good because Eddie sent that to me but I haven't had a chance to ask him. No, I guess Chick Finney sent me that.

PALMER: 1929.

CORTINOVIS: Yes. [pause]. Good.

LICATA: How did it come to be called the Crackerjack Band, do you know?

PALMER: I don't know how Eddie arrived at that.

CORTINOVIS: You mean, when Oliver Cobb had it, it didn't have a name?

PALMER: Let's see, I've forgotten what Oliver did name the band; what the name of the band was when Oliver had it.

CORTINOVIS: I think it, probably, wasn't the Crackerjacks, because I know that was Crackerjacks number one.

PALMER: No, it wasn't Oliver Cobb's. Eddie really had the first Crackerjack Band, because it was the nucleus of our, you know, Oliver Cobb's Band.

CORTINOVIS: Right. And, then Chick Finney was the leader after that.

PALMER: Yes. There might be some, little discussion about that, but I—

CORTINOVIS: About who was leader, you mean?

PALMER: About who was first.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, about who was first. Oh, no, Eddie Johnson was first.

PALMER: Yeah, I knew that. Yeah, 1929—

CORTINOVIS: So, that's been a long time ago. Do you see any of these fellows?

PALMER: Well, Freddie, I see him; and, Eddie I see. Hal Baker, he's deceased; Benny

Jackson, deceased; Windfield, the trombone player, he's deceased; Lester Nichols, he's out in California.

CORTINOVIS: I'll have to get Gus Ferryman out here, too. He's one that played with a lot of the bands around. O'kay, I guess, we left them on the excursion boat?

LICATA: We were on the Idlewild Steamer.

PALMER: Idlewild and the, t forgot the name of the Streckfus boat I was on.

CORTINOVIS: With Dewey Jackson?

PALMER: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: I don't remember that they ever mentioned it.

PALMER: It was the St. Paul, but they changed the name of it to...the Senator.

CORTINOVIS: Oh. Druie Bess, I guess, was on the Senator, too. I remember he mentioned the Senator, too.

PALMER: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: At the same time you were on, or not?

PALMER: No, I never played on the boat with. . .

CORTINOVIS: Well, Druie's much older than you are. So, it was probably before. So, then who did you play with? You started to travel then, nationally, didn't you?

PALMER: Well, after I left Dewey, I went with George Hudson's Band. I worked with him for about eight, nine or ten years, I guess.

LICATA: That seems to be a pretty long time. I noticed that most of you fellows; three or four years or maybe five is about the length of time that these bands, usually, stayed together. So, ten years is a pretty good length of time.

PALMER: That's why I did quite a bit of traveling with George.

CORTINOVIS: Was that a St. Louis band?

PALMER: Yeah, he still has a band; he's got a good, wonderful band. I think he has about fourteen, fifteen pieces—whatever the job calls for. Most of them are school teachers, though.

CORTINOVIS: You mean, that play with George, now?

PALMER: Yes. Music teachers.

CORTINOVIS: Well, it keeps them practicing and brings them a little money. You mean, now that he's in St. Louis, because when you traveled. . .

PALMER: Oh, no. This has been recently, you know—because George doesn't travel. George teaches school, himself, now.

CORTINOVIS: Now all those years that you were with George and traveling, were you married?

PALMER: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: And how often would you come back home?

PALMER: Well, as often as possible and a lot of times I sent for my wife to, you know, come.

CORTINOVIS: So, where did you play?

PALMER: We played in New York where, I think, our first job out of town was New York.

CORTINOVIS: In New York City?

PALMER: Yes, in the Savoy Ballroom.

LICATA: Savoy? That was a pretty famous place, wasn't it?

PALMER: Yes. And we played opposite, we were on one bandstand and Tab Smith's Band was right, you know—as soon as we would finish a number he would start out.

LICATA: That's the way those band marathons. . .

PALMER: Yeah. Sometimes he'd be playing something like, maybe, "Honey Suckle Rose" and no sooner he'd stop and we'd start right on the same thing.

CORTINOVIS: Show him up, huh? (laughter)

PALMER: Yeah.

LICATA: Blow him off the stage, that's what Druie kept saying.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, is it?

LICATA: Yeah, you'd have to blow somebody off.

PALMER: Well, sometimes you had to blow to deep a job.

LICATA: He talked about that, too. Was there a lot of that—someone coming up and saying to the bandleader, "Well, I can play a better bass."

PALMER: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, that's the reason you, really, had to stay up; stay up on your instrument, because they would blow you out of a job.

CORTINOVIS: Well, by that time, this was in the '40's, wasn't it?

PALMER: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: Around the war time?

PALMER: Yes, and then most of the band worked out at Scullinks, too, during the war under the leadership of William Rawlings, he had a 45 piece, well, concert band.

CORTINOVIS: From Scullin Steel Company, he had a 45 piece concert band?

PALMER: Yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Where did you play then?

PALMER: We played during lunch hour, we gave concert every day for the employees out there.

CORTINOVIS: Gee, I never heard about that.

LICATA: What kind of program was that?

PALMER: Well, band music and light overtures and things like that.

LICATA: During lunch hour? I'll be damn.

PALMER: All in our overalls and sand all in our shoes.

CORTINOVIS: Really?

PALMER: Yeah [laughing].

LICATA: Well, was this a pretty common thing for big industries to have a band play for their. . .

PALMER: No, I don't know. In fact, well, here in St. Louis Scullin's was the only one I knew that had a band.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, this is the first I've heard of that.

PALMER: Then we played all the, we played in any number of parades—like, the Armistice Day Parade. . .

LICATA: Did you play as the Scullin Steel Band?

PALMER: Yes, the Scullin Steel Band—we had uniforms, pretty brown.

LICATA: This man, William Rawlings was the man that started this program?

PALMER: Yes.

LICATA: Was he with Scullin Steel?

PALMER: Yes, in fact he's been dead, now, about three or four months, I guess. In fact he still had part of the band[^] going, which is all union now, a union band.

LICATA: By this time, during the was was the Musicians' Union pretty prominent, or was it pretty strong, or was it still kind of wide open in those days?

PALMER: It was strong, we were all union; but, it was separate, two separate unions.

CORTINOVIS: What Local was it?

PALMER: Ours was 197 and Whites' was number 2, In fact they just merged in January.

CORTINOVIS: Right.

PALMER: Of course, it was on both sides—some didn't want it; you know, some in our local didn't want it and some, I understand, some of the Whites didn't want it, either. But it's working out good; in fact, I've gotten more jobs since it merged then I did before.

CORTINOVIS: I've heard other people say that, too.

PALMER: Why sure. I've played with any number of White groups.

LICATA: This strikes me as funny, because it seems that the one place where there has never been any prejudices has been in the professions of this sort—whereas, the musicians would, rather than recognize a man's color, recognize a man's talent.

PALMER: Yeah.

LICATA: Now, why is it that for so long the unions were so remiss?

PALMER: Well, it goes way back to when Union, let's see. . .it was Union 44; it was a colored union and, I think, it was organized back in the early 1900's. Well, something happened and they took the charter away from the colored union, then they formed the 197. They used to meet from house to house until they got up enough money to rent a hall for a regular meeting.

LICATA: Yeah.

PALMER: And I hate to say, there was a lot of things happening, you know—they put excessive fines on us that you, actually, couldn't pay back in those days.

LICATA: So, then you fellows split up the union.

PALMER: And finally, Elijah Shaw was, actually, instrumental, I believe, in getting a charter for 197.

CORTINOVIS: From the American Federation of Musicians.

PALMER: Yes, from New York.

CORTINOVIS: So, after the war then, did you start traveling again, nationally?

PALMER: Yes; well, I joined Count Basie in 1947; I played with him from 1947 to 1950—2 1/2 to 3 years.

CORTINOVIS: Now, was he really a well known band then?

PALMER: Oh, yeah. The only thing, big bands were on the way out then.

LICATA: After the war?

PALMER: Yeah.

CORTINOVIS: You mean this was a big band in numbers?

PALMER: Oh yeah, yeah. Basie had 18 pieces. In fact dark Terry was instrumental in me getting into the band.

CORTINOVIS: Do you mean this is a younger Clark Terry?

PALMER: That plays on the Tonight Show.

CORTINOVIS: That plays with Doc Severensen, yeah.

PALMER: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: Well, isn't his father's name dark, too; the one who tauhgt to many musicians?

PALMER: No, I don't think so.

CORTINOVIS: Professor Terry, isn't his name dark?

PALMER: No.

CORTINOVIS: No?

PALMER: No. He called me up one night, he's a very likeable fellow and he likes to joke, you know—and carry on a lot of foolishness. He called me up one night from New York and asked me, he said, "How would you like to play with Count Basie?"

So I said, "Oh, stop pulling my leg:" So, he said, "No I'm not kidding. Basie needs a bass player and I recommended you. You catch the next train out." So, I did. I had to borrow the money from my mother-in-law for train fare and I left. I got into New York about seven o'clock that morning and he had rehearsal at ten and we starred at a placed called the Royal Ruse. I hate to say it—then I was a little better musician I am now, because I've been off of

playing, you know—reading. He had an easy book for bass.

CORTINOVIS: What do you mean by that?

PALMER: Well, then most bass players weren't playing so much complicated things that they play now; probably, like guys like Richard Davis and this guy that was with Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown, Jimmy Blanton; of course, they were , practically, virtuosos on the bass violin; but, Basic's book was, all he wanted a bass man, practically, to do was just keep the rhythm for the band; you'd have a solo every once in a while.

CORTINOVIS: Yes.

PALMER: But I never was a good bass violin player as I am a tuba player; I'm better as a tuba player.

CORTINOVIS: So you prefer the tuba?

PALMER: Yes; then the people like it. At first I was using both of them in my And group until sometime I get up and play the string bass and they'd say, "Oh, get back on the tuba—play the tuba!"

CORTINOVIS: So, besides this one place that you mentioned where else did you play when you toured with Basie?

PALMER: Oh, we played so many; most of the things were one nighters—we lived out of the bus, practically.

CORTINOVIS: Do you mean you had a bus of your own?

PALMER: Well, they chartered.

CORTINOVIS: And they toured in that. Did you go to colleges or what?

PALMER: No, mostly nightclubs and dances. I traveled a couple of more ground territory with him then I did during the whole time I was with George, for the three years I was with him. I just got kind of fed up with it; we'd work a couple of weeks and be off a week—bookings were bad. So, when they'd have a layoff, they'd layoff in New York. Most of the guys in basic band were from New York, Terry and myself were, practically, the only one's that wasn't, actually, from New York. So, after I woke up to myself, I said, "Why spend two weeks up here in a hotel and would it be cheaper for me to just get on a train and come on home until they started working again and go on back and join them." So, I came home a little before Christmas and a fellow by the name of Dittie Bow Hill called me and asked if I could make a gig with him. He played for Chevrolet Place over here on Natural Bridge. When I got through, he gave me \$45; so, I asked him. "Is this kind of money floating around in St. Louis?" And he said, "Yeah, pretty good." So, I went back home and my wife and I talked it over; so, I said, "Well, I guess. I had better write Basic and tell him I wasn't coming back."

LICATA: So, did you start playing with. . .

PALMER: We, then, started playing Dixieland jazz sessions every Sunday at the Universal Dance Hall on Delmar and DeBaliviere.

CORTINOVIS: So, now this is what some people call the revival of jazz, starting in the '50's...

PALMER: That's right.

CORTINOVIS: This is around 1950...

PALMER: That's right.

CORTINOVIS: at the Universal.

PALMER: It was Barbara Sutton on piano...

CORTINOVIS: That's Ralph Sutton's sister, isn't it?

PALMER: Yes. This fellow, Al Guichard, on clarinet; John Orange on trombone; Norman Murphy on trumpet; anyhow—it was an integrated group and we had a ball. So, Bobby Swain called, he booked all the bands into the Forest Park Hotel, and he got a bad booking—anyhow, one of the bands couldn't make it—so he asked me if I would get a group together for two weeks until they got another; so, I told him, "Yes." He asked me who was in the group; so, I told him who was in the group; he said, "Well, I don't think we could work it like that." That's when I Elijah on drums and Dewey Jackson on trumpet.

CORTINOVIS: You mean, he didn't want any integrated band there?

PALMER: No, well, there were no integrated bands—not in big places here in St. Louis.

CORTINOVIS: Besides Barbara Sutton, who else was white in the group that you mentioned?

PALMER: There's Norman Murphy and, let's see, another trombone player. Sometimes on Sundays they'd have different musicians, but the nucleus of the group was me and Barbara and Guichard and Elijah.

CORTINOVIS: So, this was a mixed group but playing in a Negro place.

PALMER: Well, no, it was a white place.

CORTINOVIS: At the Universal?

PALMER: Uh huh.

CORTINOVIS: I don't remember that, I don't think.

PALMER; Well, it was upstairs, you could look out the window almost straight down DeBaliviere.

CORTINOVIS: DeBaliviere? Oh, in the old Dorn Ziller Place or something like that?

PALMER: Well, it was on Delmar.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, on Delmar. So, in other words, you had to replace the white people.

PALMER: Yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Who piano then?

PALMER: Gus Ferryman. I took Gus Ferryman on piano and Robert Carter on trombone, Dewey Jackson on trumpet.

CORTINOVIS: So, you stayed a lot longer than two weeks then.

PALMER: We went in two weeks and stayed eight months. I've often wondered why, well, I don't know--I think I know why, but they got us out of there but the place was packed and jammed every night. So, they had another group come in. They had us back there again, but I think we only stayed about three months the next time. Then we left from there and went over to the Paladium over in East St. Louis. We stayed over there about 2 to 2 1/2 to 3 years.

CORTINOVIS: Still with your same group.

PALMER: Yeah—all but Dewey Jackson. Dewey, well we didn't get into nothing, but I didn't have no work to offer the men—so, Dewey got a job and we all agreed to work with him—sort of an-undercurrent there. So, when the guy called me from Paladium and wanted to hire the band, I got another trumpet player by the name of Vertna Sounders. He worked with me until we went to work in Gaslight Square, until the latter part of '58, I think.

LICATA: I wanted to ask you about the years there in Gaslight Square.

PALMER: We stayed there eight years.

LICATA: And who was instrumental in getting that place started. Gaslight Square.

PALMER: You mean, the whole area?

LICATA: Yes.

PALMER: I heard it was a guy by the name of Frank Moska, I believe.

LICATA: Oh, Frank Moska?

PALMER: Yes.

LICATA: Oh, he's got a place down on Gravois still.

CORTINOVIS: It's the same one. He used to have one downtown, too.

LICATA: Frank Moska's Restaurant.

PALMER: Well, he's dead.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, is he; well, it was the same one though.

LICATA: No, he's still alive.

PALMER: Maybe someone else. He had a place/under the bridge.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, right.

PALMER: But I understand he was, practically, instrumental in getting things started; of course, there has been quite a few people take the _____ in starting it.

CORTINOVIS: Who hired you?

PALMER: Sam Deets and Herb Glazier.

CORTINOVIS: And what was the first place that you played?

PALMER: Opera House—in Gaslight Square?

CORTINOVIS: Yes.

PALMER: Yeah. We were in that one spot for eight years.

LICATA: Well, I know on the marquee they had your name.

PALMER: Yeah, it's still out there if the building hasn't fallen down.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, that's right. Well, do you think that's about the most fun you ever had—playing down there?

PALMER: Yeah, it was quite a ball, because every night was just like New Year's Eve, practically, until it started going down.

CORTINOVIS: Well, it gave you an opportunity to play—well, you played jazz all night, didn't you? Down there?

PALMER: Oh, yeah.

CORTINOVIS: That's all you played-

PALMER: That's all.

CORTINOVIS: —because it wasn't for dancing, it was just for listening.

PALMER: No, no, no—just for listening. In fact that's all I like to do now. We don't, I don't care to play for dances.

CORTINOVIS: Don't you?

PALMER: I don't know, it seems like playing for dances distracts from our playing, I mean as far as I'm concerned. But it's fun to sit up there and look at the expressions on people's faces, then to get a little applause after you get through playing which you don't get too much when you play for dances.

CORTINOVIS: No, maybe a little polite patter, but not really—

PALMER: Yeah, yeah.

CORTINOVIS: So, that what you like to give now is mostly concerts?

PALMER: That's right.

CORTINOVIS: Well, that's really what you were giving down at Gaslight Square.

PALMER: That's all.

CORTINOVIS: Well, tell us what you played down there mostly—what songs and how you played it.

PALMER: Well, we played tunes like Muskrat Ramble, Tin-Roof Blues, Memphis Blues, Way Down Yonder in New Orleans, Chicago, When My Sugar Walks Down the Street, you know-all tunes.

CORTINOVIS: All up tunes. Did you ever have a vocalist down there?

PALMER: We have a trumpet player, he does the vocals now.

CORTINOVIS: Who's that?

PALMER: Bill Martin. He came in when we started on Gaslight Square, because the other trumpet player, Saunders, had infected gums and he couldn't hold it.

CORTINOVIS: Well, over the years you probably changed your personnel during the eight years down there?

PALMER: Well, only through deaths. That's all.

CORTINOVIS: Still talking about the Gaslight Square experience I would really like to know about the music some more—not only what you played, but, also, what you think makes jazz different than other kinds of music.

PALMER: Well, I think one thing is that it is an understandable thing and we try to stick mostly to the theme of the tune—well, we're not that type of musician that go way off, but we try to stay within the theme of the tune—and I think people enjoy listening when they can recognize the tune. You take the Muskrat Ramble—it can be played so that you wouldn't recognize it by a real modern jazz band. But I still like the modern jazz, I even like the rock-

in-roll bands—I like music period.

CORTINOVIS: Can you classify the kind of jazz that you played down in Gaslight?

PALMER: Well, actually, they called our band a Dixieland band, but to me it isn't—it's just a swing band. Of course, Dixieland does swing—it's got a beat. Most of ours is two beat rhythm.

CORTINOVIS: Well, for someone who's not really musical and doesn't play an instrument—what would be the difference between swing and Dixieland?

PALMER: Well—

CORTINOVIS: That's a question! [laughter]

PALMER: Well, now, Benny Goodman had a swing band, but he didn't have a Dixieland band. Of course, within his band when the four or five of them would play—the rest of the band would play acoustics—I still wouldn't call that Dixieland, it was just a swing band. A lot of people associate Dixieland with old timing; of course, the tune is old timing, old tunes. We try to dress them up, not too modern—at our age we can't dress them up too modern. [laughter]

CORTINOVIS: So, do you think you would classify what you play now as more modern jazz? Progressive jazz?

PALMER: No, it's not progressive jazz—definitely not. Our type of jazz, although they call it Dixieland, is different than in- New Orleans—they play their tunes slower. We have a tendency to play ours a little up; same way with the Chicago jazz—they play theirs faster than we do here. The fellows here got quite a bit of the New Orleans jazz from going down on the riverboats. We still have St. Louis jazz, I have to hold up for St. Louis.

CORTINOVIS: Do you think there is such a thing as St. Louis jazz?

PALMER: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: It's unique, is it?

PALMER: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: It's the sound, or what?

PALMER: Yes, it's the sound and it's different musicians and different parts of the country have a different way of playing that distinguish a Chicago musician or. . .of course, when they all get good they all sound alike to me—for instance, Al Hirt, Doc Severenson, Don Goldie-only difference you can tell in those fellows is the tone, they play with such flexibility.

CORTINOVIS: I'd like to hear a little more about your Gaslight days—about who came, do you have fond remembrance of Gaslight?

PALMER: Oh, yes. Johnny Carson, Ed McMahon, and Vincent Price—I met a lot of celebrity people down there. Of course, you shouldn't live in the past, but I'd like to live those eight years over again.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, those are really fun times, it is really too bad.

PALMER: Fun and then for the monetary part, too.

CORTINOVIS: You wouldn't mind that either? [laughter]

PALMER: No.

CORTINOVIS: Was that the biggest money you ever made?

PALMER: Well, yeah, for the longest—

CORTINOVIS: Steady.

PALMER: Steady, yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, right. And without the expenses of traveling, too. Who owned the place that you played in?

PALMER: Herb Glazier and Sam Deets. Sam was brother-in-law to the fellow that owned the Crystal Place, Jay Landesman.

CORTINOVIS: Landsman, yeah.

PALMER: Herb Glazier is a pharmacist by trade.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, yeah: The Glaser Drugs.

PALMER: I don't know whether—he spells his name G-l-a-z-i-e-r, I believe. I understand he's gone back to pharmacy again, out in one of the big discount stores—Walgreens or one of those big places, I believe.

LICATA: When did Gaslight Square start to go downhill would you say?

PALMER: I'd say about '64 or '65.

LICATA: What do you think caused it?

PALMER: Well, they didn't police it right, I mean; I don't know. They started letting everybody come down and at first it looked like every other person down there was a policeman and they kept things in order and straight. Then the yippies started coming in and sitting around on the curb and different places. Certain proprietries, they come in for they fast buck, the fast kill. I understand you weren't getting your money's worth for your drinks.

CORTINOVIS: The go-go girls and all.

PALMER: And then the go-go girls.

LICATA: So, it to be that quite a few of the places where clip-joints.

PALMER: Yes.

LICATA: And people stopped coming down and it's really a shame, because instead of coming down to appreciate the good music and other things.

PALMER: Yeah, and at one time they must have had at least fifteen bands down there—all types of music.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, it was really fun. Especially on a nice evening like in the summer or spring. It was so much fun to walk up and down and you stop in a place and have a drink. It was really fun and there isn't any place like it now.

PALMER: Oh, no. They're trying to make the riverfront, but I don't think they have enough traffic—walking traffic. And then in the winter, no place to park, if you get on the levee, you might slide in the river or something in ice and snow, Actually

CORTINOVIS: Do you mean the boats down there? Well, those are nice. Do you know, actually the same thing has happened in New Orleans to the French Quarter?

PALMER: Yeah and the same thing happened in San Francisco and, I understand, that Chicago Old Town.

LICATA: I was up there not too long ago. It's not quite as bad as here.

PALMER: Oh, no: I don't see how anything could be as bad as Gaslight.

CORTINOVIS: Well, there's nothing to Gaslight now.

PALMER: No. They have a few places over there. Most of them are go-go places or something like that.

CORTINOVIS: Well, Smokey Joe's was about the last good restaurant. They're closed now, too.

PALMER: Oh, yes. He committed suicide.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah. . . Well, that really was too bad, but I know—I've been to New Orleans recently, within the past year or so, and the same thing has happened to the French Quarter pretty much. People are afraid to go down there, clip-joints for \$3 drinks, and stuff like that. People are willing to put out, but they're not willing to be ridiculous.

PALMER: They tell me there's a good thing going in Atlanta—the underground.

CORTINOVIS: Right. Well, maybe they'll learn from the experience of other cities and keep it good.

PALMER: Yeah, yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Well, let's see now there must be some other things. . .Well, you didn't tell us much about what you're doing now; then after Gaslight closed, what did you do?

PALMER: We started jobbing around. We went to the Brave Bull down on 12th and Four Washington. We didn't stay there too long, I'd say about, months. They had been used to a different type of music down there; although we thought we were building up the place, we had pretty good crowds.

CORTINOVIS: Is it still there, the Brave Bull?

PALMER: No, they're closed, out of business. Then we left from there and went down on the Golden Rod Showboat for Frank Pierson. We were down there for about two, two and a half years, something like that.

LICATA: They still have group playing down there.

PALMER: Yeah. Well, they have the Ragtimers.

CORTINOVIS: They had Jay Tichenor out there.

PALMER: Yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Even the Golden Rod's going to move; I understand that it's going to move to St. Charles.

PALMER: Oh, I doubt that.

CORTINOVIS: Do you? It seems like an awfully dumb place to put it in St. Charles.

PALMER: Well, I understand they're building up things in St. Charles.

CORTINOVIS: Well, yeah. Main Street is really interesting-it's got a couple of nice restaurants and a lot of antique shops. I guess it's the new Gaslight maybe.

PALMER: I know I read in the paper where he was talking about moving.

CORTINOVIS: Where are you playing now?

PALMER: Just jobbing around.

CORTINOVIS: Do you get those jobs yourself. Singleton, or what?

PALMER: Oh people call me. I don't have no agent or anything.

CORTINOVIS: Have you ever worked with an agent?

PALMER: No, no.

CORTINOVIS: How are the jobs?

PALMER: Good.

CORTINOVIS: Now? Oh, good. Well, I guess, there's nobody in St. Louis that has the reputation you do.

PALMER: Well, I don't know. I do better now than, actually, I did when I was on the Boat. Of course, we worked two nights a week down there, Fridays and Saturdays; but now we can get four or five jobs a month and make more than we did working regular out on the Boat.

CORTINOVIS: Do you have to travel?

PALMER: No.

CORTINOVIS: You mostly play around St. Louis.

PALMER: And they're all private engagements—like Bellerive Country Club, Algonquin, and places like that. Now tomorrow I have to go out to, what is it.

CORTINOVIS: Grant's Farm?

PALMER: Cabin?

CORTINOVIS: Grant's Cabin, yeah.

PALMER: He wants us out there Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving.

CORTINOVIS: Who's playing with you now?

PALMER: Gus Ferryman, Lige Shaw, Robert Carter, Bill Martin—trumpet.

CORTINOVIS: Well, do you do anything else as a job?

PALMER: Oh, yeah. I have a porter at Fact, Incorporated at 1706 Washington. This month I'll have been with them 19 years.

CORTINOVIS: Well, and you've been able to work steadily all that time—well, that must have been after you stopped traveling then?

PALMER: Oh, yes.

CORTINOVIS: You mean, all during the Gaslight, days and everything you stayed with them.

PALMER: What I would do is to leave Gaslight and go right down there.

CORTINOVIS: Good heavens, when did you sleep?

PALMER: I'd get off from Gaslight at one o'clock and get down there by one-thirty and I'd

work until nine.

CORTINOVIS: My gosh!

PALMER: I did that for eight years.

CORTINOVIS: Are you still doing it?

PALMER: Yeah. It's kind of difficult now, because I always like to carry my instrument home when we get through playing on a single engagement.

CORTINOVIS: Instead of leaving it in your car?

PALMER: I don't have a car. I never drove a car a day in my life.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, that's right—you told me that. I don't know how you've gotten along.

PALMER: Well, I've got good friends.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, that's right! They must love you.

PALMER: I guess so.

CORTINOVIS: I've got friends too, but I don't know if they'd be carrying me around all the time.

PALMER: Oh, I pay them though.

CORTINOVIS: Oh well, that's different.

LICATA: So, you've held down these two jobs all these years.

PALMER: Yeah, I've always had two jobs. Even when I was playing with George Hudson—played the Plantation Nightclub when it was up on Enright right off of Grand; I played up there about four years from 9:30 at night till 4:00 in the morning,

[end of side one]

PALMER: [side two] —she graduated from St. Louis U. in—she's almost as old as I am.
[laughter]

CORTINOVIS: Your daughter?

PALMER: Yeah, 38.

CORTINOVIS: What does she do?

PALMER: Raising a family after I sent through college—she got married the next year.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, how about that.

PALMER: She's got four kids; they'll all be here Christmas. They live in Maquon, Illinois. She's got a nice husband. I don't know what he's doing with his money.

CORTINOVIS: Spending it like all young kids.

PALMER: Well, he's not all that young, that's what I tell him.

CORTINOVIS: Well, have you been satisfied with your life?

PALMER: Oh, yes! Very much.

CORTINOVIS: That's good. You wouldn't do it over any differently?

PALMER: I don't know—maybe if I had it to do over again, I wouldn't do it as well.

CORTINOVIS: But you said you were the only one in your family who is musical, but somebody must have been interested in that to pay for the lessons and all.

PALMER: Well, actually, the lady that lived under us when I was a little boy by the name of Daisy Hartiman, she was a piano player—she played in the church. Actually, she's the one who got me interested in music. I used to go down and listen to her play the piano and when I was playing trumpet she used to take me to her church and I'd play trumpet solos and all different programs and things; even at my own church. Lane Tabernacle.

CORTINOVIS: But you had to get your dad interested in paying for the lessons.

PALMER: Oh, yeah. Well, they were 35 cents but 35 cents then was—

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, it was like about \$2.50 now days.

PALMER: Yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

PALMER: Oh yeah, I have three sisters and a brother. I'm the oldest. I have one sister in Ogden, Utah; my youngest sister. My oldest sister lives down in the projects and the one next to her lives on Palm—she works out at the Record Center, she's been out there about twenty years—twenty-one years, I guess.

CORTINOVIS: Did you marry a St. Louis girl?

PALMER: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: Somebody you've known a long time?

PALMER: No, that's the funny thing about it—I met her October and I married her in June.

CORTINOVIS: Well, that's long enough!

PALMER: Yeah, I guess.

CORTINOVIS: And you just had the one child?

PALMER: That's all.

CORTINOVIS: Well, Len do you say, do you think there's anything we've missed?

LICATA: Well, I think we've covered just about everything.

PALMER: That's good; that's really interesting. I'm nervous—I don't know why.

CORTINOVIS: The tape recorder, I think, is a little intimidating. Here's a bunch of Count Basic's Band, I wonder if you know anybody. I don't just when. That's Andy Kirk; I guess this is Basie over here. This is Basie here at the top and down here, too.

PALMER: Yeah, I know the bass player, Walter Page.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, that's Walter Page over there. Let's write—

PALMER: Tab Smith.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, I knew that was Tab Smith in the middle. This is Walter Page? Is he any relation to "Hot Lips" Page or is that the some one?

PALMER: I don't know, but I think they spelled their name the same way.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah. This is Basie, isn't it?

PALMER: Yes. [pause] 'Jack a . . . I can't think of his last name. Well, that's Harry Edison back there I know on trumpet.

CORTINOVIS: E-d-i-s-o-n?

PALMER: Yeah. That's Dicky Wells on trombone.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, yeah—Lester Young here, that's Lester Young.

PALMER: Yeah. Jack Washington on baritone, he's dead.

CORTINOVIS: Let's see, the saxes are—

PALMER: That's Buddy Tate, I believe.

CORTINOVIS: Buddy Tate, yeah. Tab Smith, Jack Washington, Lester Young, and on trombone are Vic—

PALMER: Vie Dickenson.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, Dickenson.

PALMER: He plays that, what they call now the World's Greatest Swing Band with Bob Haggard, Ralph Sutton.

CORTINOVIS: Playing in New York, Ralph Sutton?

PALMER: Yeah, but they've got a ten piece band, I think, and Billy Butterfield— they fell into a good thing. Some millionaire out there in Denver or some place picked up on them and they've been good ever since.

LICATA: It seems like you keep mentioning the same names; it seems like there is a group of about twenty of you guys and that's about it, kind of a last of a breed.

PALMER: Yeah, well, it's a dwindling art so far. Now, this is Thigpen here, he was drumming with me, in fact he was buried about a month ago.

CORTINOVIS: Ben Thigpen was his name? Right here in the middle?

PALMER: Yes, with Andy Kirk. He took Lige Shaw's place when we were in Gaslight Square, I made a change.

CORTINOVIS: You mean, here with the vibes?

PALMER: Yeah, but he's a drummer though. That's him up there too.

CORTINOVIS: Do you recognize anyone else on there?

PALMER: No, I didn't know too many of Andy Kirk's men.

CORTINOVIS: Where's Mary Lou Williams singing?

PALMER: Well, I imagine she's working out in New York.

[pages turning]

CORTINOVIS: Oh, here's Miff Mole! [to Licata] Remember Druie [Bess] was talking about him?

LICATA: Yeah, he said he patterned himself after Miff Mole.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, I had never heard of him. Do you know Doctor Pruett, Hubert Pruett ?

PALMER: Oh, yes—sure.

CORTINOVIS: Have you ever been out at his house?

PALMER: Yes.

CORTINOVIS: My gosh, Len, if you'd ever go out to his house! This man has 15,000 jazz records. [Len laughs] I'm not fooling. Hasn't he? And 1,000 ragtime piano rolls.

PALMER: And sheet music.

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, sheet music. He's got Tom Turpin, he's got Joplin, Louis Chiffon, he has everybody. I took Gill Ostrander out there, we went out there this summer. Gill was really out of his skull, honestly—he got so excited he was just like a kid!

PALMER: Do you know he used to be a ball player?

CORTINOVIS: Did he!

PALMER: Yeah, he used to play with the old St. Louis Browns.

LICATA: Who's that?

PALMER: Doc Pruett.

LICATA: He did.

CORTINOVIS: He's still going strong, [to Palmer] Here why don't you autograph that picture for us? If you would please, [sound of writing] That's where it says that you got refund. You know—when you didn't know you were lost. [laughter] Well good, thank you very much. I bet you'd know a lot of other people in here. [A Pictorial History of Jazz]

PALMER: Oh, yeah—it takes you back when you look through a book like that.

CORTINOVIS: There's a lot of books on jazz, but I find some them go into the realms of exaggeration—but this is a book that really has the pictures and they don't go off into these esoteric things. Do you have any old pictures?

PALMER: Yeah, they're all just thrown around the house and it's a same I haven't taken care of them any better. I have that picture that's with Eddie Johns on—I have a big one.

CORTINOVIS: Do you have a scrapbook or anything?

PALMER: Yeah, but that's just what it is too—a scrapbook. [laughter] I don't even have them pasted in or nothing.

CORTINOVIS: You know that Eddie loaned us his scrapbook and so did Lige and I had them put on microfilm, because they wanted them back. But your's would fall apart if they're not pasted in. [laughter]

[pages turning]

CORTINOVIS: There's Basie when he was just a young fellow, that's Benny Moten. As I recall, Martin McKay told me that Basie came to Kansas City first with Benny Moten and they got stranded there—because I asked him, "When did you join Count Basie?" and he said, "Well, Count Basie joined me." [laughter]

PALMER: Yeah, I remember meeting Basie in Little Rock, Arkansas—I think we were all

stranded there.

CORTINOVIS: So what did you do when you got stranded?

PALMER: I don't know—just make it the best way you can. Most of the time, though, people would send for me. I'll never forget I got stranded in Coffeerville, Kansas with Eddie Johnson—well, I got stranded with him several times, [laughter] I don't know whether he told you though.

CORTINOVIS: Yes! [laughing]

PALMER: Some of the fellows hoboed home; they caught a freight. So, naturally, I had the bass; so—

CORTINOVIS: Yeah, that's a little inconvenient!

PALMER: So, they did scuffle up on bus fare and I brought the drums, my bass, and the music on the bus. The rest of them hoboed and got back the best way they could.

CORTINOVIS: You'd get stranded when the promoter didn't pay you.

PALMER: Yeah, and sometimes you'd go to a place that didn't even have a job— they didn't know nothing about what you were supposed to do there. And the unions weren't so tight then. We jumped all the way from Evansville, Indiana and Northfolk, Virginia with Eddie Johnson—and we didn't have nothing.

CORTINOVIS: Oh gosh, how terrible.

LICATA: Those are the times that tried men's souls.

PALMER: Don Stoval was with us, he played with Red Alien; he just died this year. I never will forget Don. We went to Tab Smith's in Torpin, North Carolina or somewhere with Eddie's Band. Tab told us, "You better bring an extra suitcase, so you can bring your money back in it" [laughter] I think we got stranded down there, too! [laughter] He lived better than anybody, because he was at home, you know.

CORTINOVIS: Well, did you mostly play with colored bands all the time—did you ever play with any other white men?

PALMER: No, just since the Dixieland Era started back again. Well, there wasn't any mixing then—in St. Louis, anyhow.

CORTINOVIS: Did you ever play with any women besides Barbara Sutton?

PALMER: No.

CORTINOVIS: She was really unusual.

PALMER: Oh yeah, she was wonderful. To me, she plays as much piano as Ralph.

CORTINOVIS: Does she?

PALMER: Yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Does she still live around St. Louis?

PALMER: No, she lives out*in California. We hear from her every once in a while—one of those resort places out there.

CORTINOVIS: So many people speak so fondly of her—she must be a really great Girl!

PALMER: Oh yeah, she is really wonderful! They were from St. Charles.

CORTINOVIS: I know Lige [Shaw] was just crazy about her.

PALMER: Yeah, she was wonderful. Her Mother and Father used to have us over for dinner all of the time. Speaking of playing with the White groups—I played a job out to Norwood Hills Country Club. In fact, they had two bands. This has been recently—about two or three years ago. They had our band and a White band. I forget who the other white band was, but I knew all the White musicians. So, we were talking on one of the breaks. In fact, we were all having a few highballs and things. So, one of the musicians said, "Well, Singleton, do you remember the old good old days? Grant Central Theater and all?" I said, "What good old days?" I had had me two or three highballs and I said, "What was so good about it?" He said, "Well, you know, playing in the pit bands." I said, "You kidding: They wouldn't even let me in the show to hear you."

CORTINOVIS: You couldn't even pay to get in.

PALMER: No.

CORTINOVIS: Let alone, you be playing in the pit band.

PALMER: Yeah, I could probably go down and sweep out the pit, you know. [laughter]

CORTINOVIS: What do you think was the hardest thing for you along in the music business—now that you made your whole life career in the music business?

PALMER: Well, my hardest thing was being away from home so much. I didn't particularly care for that. I liked the music, you know; but I, really, didn't like being away from home too much. But that's the way it was.

CORTINOVIS: Well, I imagine the accommodations were pretty bad sometimes, too, weren't they?

PALMER: Yeah, they were. Well, with Basie—everything went up; because when you went to hotels, rooms that were maybe \$5 a night went up to \$7, you know. [laughter]

CORTINOVIS: Well, that had to be some recognition you were in the big time.

PALMER: Yeah.

LICATA: Did you enjoy being in bands more, or being the director of bands more?

PALMER: I, really, did like a big band than I do a small group. I like to hear a broader scope of instruments—I like a full band; although, I make my living with small groups.

CORTINOVIS: Well, to handle a big band now and to book a big band...

PALMER: Well, it's almost out of the question.

CORTINOVIS: Does anyone have a big band anymore?

PALMER: Well, nobody but; well, yeah, several—like Basie, Duke, Woody Herman.

CORTINOVIS: Do they still carry a lot of men?

PALMER: Oh, yeah. But they have good bookings, though. And Basie's doing real well.

CORTINOVIS: Is he?

PALMER: Yeah.

CORTINOVIS: He's been up and down and up and down.

PALMER: Yeah, but he's up now—so is Duke.

CORTINOVIS: They play more at college dates now, aren't they?

PALMER: Yeah, yeah.

CORTINOVIS: Well, Duke Ellington is really almost in the class of a really serious classical musician with his composing and all.

PALMER: Yeah.

CORTINOVIS: I don't know if I mentioned to you or not, but, next week the Union _____ is going to send us a band out the Trust Fund and they're going to play here for the kids. Eddie Johnson's going to be the leader.

PALMER: Oh!

CORTINOVIS: He's got Bill Martin, Martin McKay, and Eugene Thomas—I think he plays with Eddie now.

PALMER: Bass, yeah.

CORTINOVIS: And I forgot who else, but they're going to play for the kids at noontime in this building, downstairs. They're going to sort of demonstrate jazz; like they're going to play Dixieland, and progressive, and modern, and swing, and then blues. And then, they're going

to do a section on Duke Ellington's compositions. He said they'd do about 15-20 minutes of...

PALMER: I'm supposed to play, as soon as I get the conformation—I'm supposed to go up to Champaign and play with a jazz band up there. Just playing by itself.

CORTINOVIS: University of Illinois. Do you mean some band is going to make an appearance up there?

PALMER: No, I'm supposed to play with the University of Illinois Band.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, are you: Oh, that will be fun.

LICATA: You'll have to get a ride up there then, won't you? [laughter]

PALMER: That's all taken care of—the ride, the food, and everything else.

CORTINOVIS: That's good: Say, speaking of food, how would you like a Coke or something?

PALMER: Well, I'll take a Coke.

CORTINOVIS: OK, let's go on downstairs. Well, thank you so much for coming.

[End]