Bertha Hope-Booker interviewed for *Allegro*, January 13, 2010

By Todd Bryant Weeks

Todd Bryant Weeks: You and I have had several conversations about your years in L.A. and we've talked about some of your more recent engagements around New York City. I got a chance to see you play at the Jazz Standard last year which was amazing, such a wonderful experience and the music was so great. I took the liberty of looking you up in a jazz encyclopedia and I was surprised to see that it was written there that you're from Vicksburg. Is that true?

Bertha Hope-Booker: [Laughter] It is so wrong. Even when I read it I said "Vicksburg?" I don't know anybody from Vicksburg. The only people I know from Mississippi are Mulgrew Miller and Cassandra Wilson and I don't think either one of them are from there.

TBW: How could they have done that?

Hope-Booker: That just shows you the power of the press to be wrong, and it's really my fault that I have not gotten in touch.

TBW: It was in *All Music Guide.*

Hope-Booker: I have read it myself in a bookstore, and I wrote it down on a 3 x 5 card. I have got to get in touch with these people and get this corrected.

TBW: Yeah, because you never struck me as a Deep South kind of person. I thought you must have left when you were a baby. You know who was born in Mississippi though? Hank Jones, and then went to Michigan when he was very young.

Hope-Booker. I know some other people who are from Mississippi and just came up for jobs, up to Detroit, and you never hear about the Mississippi connection and after a while they just say I'm from Chicago…(laughing).

TBW: Well, we're talking about something that's not real, so, but it's interesting.

Hope-Booker: I am not from Vicksburg.

TBW: I'm glad we got that straight…

Hope-Booker: Now that you brought it up I'm going to make that phone call and get that corrected.

TBW: You were born in Los Angeles? Right?

Hope-Booker: I was born in Los Angeles.

TBW: And your parents were also born there?

Hope-Booker: No, my parents were from the South. Actually my father's mother went west before my parents did, and my father was stationed—my father's history is like from the Spanish American War. He was a horse soldier in the 10th Cavalry with Teddy Roosevelt. He was one of those people who helped rescue Teddy in that little four-month war.

Hope-Booker: I guess at some point he decided he wanted to have children and he married a woman much younger than himself. And so there were almost twenty-five years difference between them. He was born in l882. My mother was born in l904.

TBW: What's your maiden name?

Hope-Booker: Rosemond.

TBW: And what's your mother's family, what's the maternal name?

Hope-Booker: Meaux.

TBW: That sounds like a French name.

Hope-Booker: Yes, my grandfather on that side was from New Orleans.

TBW: No kidding. Were there musicians in those generations?

Hope-Booker: Not that I know of, not on that side of the family. On the other side of the family, my father's side, there were musicians. His brother. And his sister was a singer who taught piano, and my father had a glorious voice, he had a career in Europe, singing. He was there for about fifteen years.

TBW: And what was your father's full name?

Hope-Booker: Clinton Rosemond. And these are the people he hung out with: Jack Johnson, Sidney Bechet, Josephine Baker, Brick Top, Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes, they were all in the same circuit.

TBW: Roland Hayes is the only name I don't know from that group.

Hope-Booker: He was a tenor, a singer in a classical vein who did that same kind of Italian bel canto and German lieder that was the in the repertoires of concerts which ended with this body of Negro spirituals, mostly Hall Johnson and Harry T. Burleigh arrangements. That's what they often did, Marion Anderson did a classical repertoire of art songs and then they always ended with a tribute to black spirituals, what they call Negro spirituals.

TBW: Right and the spirituals would be in the tradition of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. But by the time you were born was your father still involved with music?

Hope-Booker: When I was born my father was not traveling so much any more. They traveled in Europe until the crash of ‘29 and then came back when it was obvious that work was going to dry up, and that being an out of work artist in Europe was not going to be a wise thing to be in l929. So they came home. They came home to New York, and my father then traveled on the TOBA circuit.

TBW: In what capacity, what kind of performances?

Hope-Booker: The same music—the classical lieder, bel canto. And when my older sister got old enough to go to school my mother stopped traveling with him and they settled in LA, which was where his mother already was. They’d already brought themselves west, from Arkansas, actually, my father was born in South Carolina and they lived in Arkansas, very rural, dirt floor kind of beginnings, sharecropper kind of thing. You know, not too many years out of slavery.

TBW: It sounds like we could spend the whole time talking about your father. He sounds like a very interesting person. Where did he get his musical training?

Hope-Booker: He was classically trained by the same people that Roland Hayes and those other artists had, they all pretty much shared the same vocal teacher.

TBW: Did he get his training in the North?

Hope-Booker: Some of it was here in New York with Edward Boatner, a name people would know, who was still alive when I got here and who I also took vocal lessons from. Many, many people know who he was.

TBW: So the classical world was really your world growing up, at least in your early years. You had classical training as a child?

Hope-Booker: I did. I mean there was a really healthy appreciation for all the arts in the house and in the family. The kids were encouraged; there was a piano in every relative's house, and we were encouraged to take piano lessons. My brother also took flute, we all sang, my mother was an opera fan, we learned arias, we would produce little shows in the living room and invite the neighbors in and sell lemonade and cookies and do our presentations (laughing).

TBW: What was the address in Los Angeles?

Hope-Booker: 1520 West 36th Place. That house had a deep lot, we had a long, big backyard. My father's gardening instincts took over right away. He made a great garden in the back, flowers in the front and vegetables in the back so, when times were lean we ate great.

TBW: Sounds like the family was pretty tight.

Hope-Booker: A very close family. I remember my father having a few odd jobs but he was mostly there, he was mostly home. He and I were very close. I learned how to help him with his solfege, so slowly I learned how to play for him. He taught me how to play for his vocal exercises, and I eventually started to learn the spirituals and to learn some of his repertoire so when he did church concerts I would be ready to play for him. So one of the first jobs I ever had my father hired me and paid me seven bucks!

TBW: How old were you?

Hope-Booker: About 12 or 13.

TBW: But you had been studying piano since you were quite small?

Hope-Booker: Three.

TBW: I'm sorry; you said you had a brother who played the flute and a sister?

Hope-Booker: Right.

TBW: And then other siblings as well?

Hope-Booker: No. That's all.

TBW: And you are where in the line?

Hope-Booker: In the middle. The cursed middle child.

TBW: Ah, the middle child. Well, I would like to be the middle child in that family but I think it's hard to be the middle child in any family.

Hope-Booker: It's difficult. The oldest is the preferred position, girl or boy.
The oldest and the youngest get a great deal. The middle one is the one that has all the protections are off. The second one you're a little more lenient with but you might lose sight of them. When the baby comes along the middle one is lost, on his or her own.

TBW: What about school in Los Angeles; where did you go to school? Did you go to public school?

Hope-Booker: Oh yes, there was no money for private school and in fact I don't even remember any scholarships.

TBW: What school?

Hope-Booker: I went to a good public school basically, I went to junior high school from 1948 to 1951, and high school from 1951 to 1954. I was in a transitory kind of place where kind of a solid working class community was becoming a black community; there were a few Irish and German and Italians still there.

TBW: People owned their own homes?

Hope-Booker: They were all homeowners.

TBW: What kind of work did people do?

Hope-Booker: I remember there was a big Coca Cola bottling plant. I remember a lot of government work, postal workers, a big mix, teachers. There were some lawyers in that neighborhood, some doctors, it was a neighborhood in transition—and a lot of artists. Eddie "Rochester" Anderson had a house a couple of blocks away. Quite a few other artists were in that neighborhood. Nobody of color was living in Hollywood or Beverly Hills yet. There were still some pretty vicious restrictions.

TBW: Oh yeah, and LA cops were tough and still are. I once read that a lot of the racism on the West Coast, it may have always been there but it was heightened or exacerbated by an influx of poor white folks from Oklahoma.

Hope-Booker: That's right, absolutely.

TBW: The racial attitudes, the backward attitudes from those places influenced what was going on in LA?

Hope-Booker: Yeah.

TBW: Perhaps the police force was also filled with people like that.

Hope-Booker: Same category. They were rough, they took delight in harassing, I would say. I remember working some of those gorgeous little rooms in Beverly Hills and having to drive through that area to get back home, and four out of five times a week I got pulled over for no apparent reason except that I was in Beverly Hills. "What are you doing driving through here?" the cop would demand. "I'm on my way home, and this is the fastest way to get there." Yeah.

TBW: Did you play jazz or any other form of popular music as a teenager?

You grew up when R & B and Rock 'n' Roll was coming on, right?

Hope-Booker: Yeah, right in the 1950s, I was a teenager in the middle 1950s, and I had a very good ear, so I took what I knew and I was able to translate it into what was on the radio and I got invited to all the parties to play all those popular songs but that's not where my heart was. Because right around that same period I started to listen to *jazz*, you know. I started to be introduced to the records of some of the people on the West Coast and then some friends of mine gave me some East Coast stuff, there was this big division of what the sound was made of. Even though there were musicians with an East Coast harder edged style there already, there was this kind of a dichotomy between their music and the music of Chet Baker and Shelly Mann and Gerry Mulligan, whose music I loved. I was listening to them, and trying to play and incorporate their sound into what I already knew. And then I heard Bud Powell. He was the first. He was the first artist I heard that had a different sound, a different combination of notes and harmonies and intrigues for my ear. And right along in there was the sound of the Horace Silver Quintet, that hard edge, really clear melodic, very rhythmic sound. But it was Bud Powell…

TBW: They do talk about Bud Powell as being the father of the hard bop. Like the progenitor of it. Him and Art Blakey. Blakey was a little later. But you think about Bud Powell's feel, he does have like you say long, beautiful melodic lines. But he's also funky in his own way. In the left hand?

Hope-Booker: Well, he had this conversation going on between his left and his right hand, this very punctuating left hand, a rumbling left hand. And rapid fire right hand. Although he was capable of beautiful ballad writing, but what I remember from my adolescence was that sound of his rapid fire right hand with his kind of conversational punctuation in the left hand. And it's interesting, out of the three pianists, I ended up

marrying Elmo Hope. But I heard Bud first, and Bud led me to Monk, and Monk sort of led me to Elmo, in terms of how I progressed in experiencing them on records.

TBW: Did you hear Elmo on record and say, "Oh, that's Elmo Hope," and then meet him? Or did you meet him and not know he was a pianist?

Hope-Booker: No, I heard him on record first and then he moved out to LA. He was out there for a while because he came with Chet Baker, I think, and they were touring the West Coast. So I met him, but that was after having met him on record, and I was trying to play what I was hearing. During this period, I had studied theory and harmony at City College around the time that Eric Dolphy was a student there too.

TBW: Los Angeles City College?

Hope-Booker: Yes, LACC.

TBW: So you had the chops, you had some of the chords under your fingers.

Hope-Booker: I had some Bach chops at that time. That's what I was really studying. The piano teacher that I had at that time was really into finger independence and Bach is one of the most prolific, and most creative, what you can do with the melody, and change a little bit here and little bit there, based on the same thing but it's different but the overall structure was very much the same, but she was very much into that kind of thing. So I had not a lot, but enough to try to listen to that music and play it.

TBW: Well, the counterpoint alone is really impressive with Bach. There are certain passages with Bach where you can hear the notes just rolling over each other in such a beautiful way that's just so much like jazz. Or like Bach!

Hope-Booker: Right, but not only that. There are three or four melodies going on at the same time. And I found out later that Elmo and Bud were into Bach. They played a lot of

Bach themselves for each other, and what they did for finger exercises and practice, in fact somebody told me somebody wanted to take lessons from Bud Powell and the first two or three lessons were turning the pages of the Bach etudes while Bud played.

TBW: But who wouldn't want to do that?

Hope-Booker: I would have done that myself, I would have been happy to do that.

TBW: So did you have one on one with Bud Powell at some point?

Hope-Booker: No, unfortunately, no I didn't. But with his brother, Richie Powell, I studied with him. He was there and that was a pretty wonderful period of my life. Because that was Max Roach, Clifford Brown, who didn't live that long, I just feel like I was so lucky to hear that band. They rehearsed at Eric Dolphy's house and he was a neighbor.

TBW: They made some records out there too, I think. I was reading something years ago, Ted Gioia, I think, about the West Coast sound and then you've got these records that Clifford and Max made with some of these West Coast musicians. And this whole notion of those two schools kind of going up against each other. And Clifford and Max were East Coast, people, though, right? Max is from Brooklyn and Clifford is from Delaware, right? So they were here rehearsing and were touring?

Hope-Booker: They were in LA putting a band together and I don't know what they had done before that. [Tenor saxophonist] Harold Land who Elmo was working with—that was a very tight relationship that they had, that produced some records.

TBW: Under Harold Land's name?

Hope-Booker: Yeah, "The Fox."

TBW: Oh yeah, I have that record.

Hope-Booker: That's a fabulous record and Elmo did a lot of the writing for it, at least three songs, I think. But about the band with George Morrow—[Max Roach Clifford Brown Quintet—TBW.] that Max and Clifford were putting together their traveling repertoire, I guess, and they were rehearsing at Eric Dolphy's house. Eric and I used to carpool, we went to City College together; his car one day, mine the next. And I used to go over to his house and hang out until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning listening to this band rehearse.

TBW: Wow, talk about being in a hot spot, being in the center of something incredible.

Hope-Booker: Just amazing, it was mind blowing. The main purpose for them all being together was to play. Eating was kind of secondary and sometimes they fell asleep in their clothes, only to just get up. I had to go home, but I would be back after I did my homework the next day to hear it all over again (laughing).

TBW: Cause you were still in college at that time?

Hope-Booker: Yes, Eric and I were both in school.

Hope-Booker: Yeah, that was pretty amazing. Just amazing.

TBW: Again that's something that we could talk about all day, that period. And I remember reading about Eric Dolphy's practice regimen; he had incredible dedication.

Hope-Booker: He played scales almost all day long. He had all kinds of permutations for the scales: chromatic and thirds and fourths. He was just phenomenal, and he was a high energy, very intense kind of person. You could just see the music pulsating through him. He was brilliant. And he had classical leanings; what he really wanted to be was in the Philharmonic, but the racism prevented him from being there. But he was better than half the people that he had to audition against. Hands down.

TBW: I'm trying to remember, there's another prominent black reed player [Buddy Collette—TBW] who was very involved in the black local out there, he may even have been the president of the black local, he may have also played flute, his name is not coming to me, but he would have been older. And Max was older, too, right? Was he a little bit older than Clifford?

Hope-Booker: Yeah, Clifford was about 24 or 25. I'm talking about 1954, 1955 and he died at the end of '56 and he was 26. That's why I feel so fortunate to have been at that place at that time and to be able to listen to how they put that band together.

TBW: Your relationship with Elmo started a few years later?

Hope-Booker: About 1957 is when I really met him.

TBW: But you were together as a couple out there before you came to New York?

Hope-Booker: I met him when he had come there, he had been there a while before I met him. We got married in 1960, but we hung out for about two years together while I just kind of watched him write music and listen to him and the Harold Land's band. I don't remember when "The Fox" was done.

TBW: It's later. Harold recorded with Max and Clifford. Was it Harold replaced Sonny in that band? Was Sonny the tenor saxophonist with Max and Clifford? No, it was the other way around; Harold left and Sonny replaced him. But I think Harold began making records as a leader after his association with the band ended. There was one with the Watts Towers in the background—that's a great record.

Hope-Booker: Yeah, "Harold in the Land of Jazz." I don't know if Elmo's on that record.

Hope-Booker: But all of that period was just a learning period for me, you know. I hardly knew what to do with all the incoming information; it was really all about being able to discern what you needed to get out of it. There wasn't any formality to it; it was just great to be there.

TBW: And when did you start, you said you had been playing parties and playing popular music and taking stuff off the radio and reinterpreting it. But when did you start playing hard bop or bop in public?

Hope-Booker: Probably not until maybe about 1960, because…and then I didn't have any real formal recognition that's that what I was doing. I was just lucky to be in the right place at the right time and get some information, and put it together with the theory and harmony that I had studied and to have Ritchie Powell pass on some real exercises and some real open and close voicings that I could use. And he just stressed doing them in every key, and so did Eric. So I guess 1960 because 1961 is when I did the LP with Elmo. That was at the very beginning.

TBW: Did you do duets on that?

Hope-Booker: Yeah.

TBW: The whole thing wasn't duets?

Hope-Booker: No, there are only two and the rest of them are solo.

TBW: That must have been very exciting.

Hope-Booker: It's still a great record ["Hope-full: Elmo Hope—Solo Piano and Duo Piano with Bertha Hope, Riverside 1961]; somebody called me the other day and said they had just heard it for the first time, and that how amazing. It's a collector's item, you've got to look for it.

TBW: Has it been reissued?

Hope-Booker: It's been reissued on a CD. When I went to Japan somebody went back home and got their original and had me sign it and then a promoter came to that same club and gave me a limited edition that they had redone so I guess the Japanese remastered it and brought it out in a very small number.

TBW: So you have it now?

Hope-Booker: I have that. I have all three of them. I have the CD.

TBW: Where did you record it? In LA?

Hope-Booker: Here, in New York, at Riverside.

TBW: So you had to make the trip east?

Hope-Booker: A lot of that was all pivotal to coming. By that time I had my daughter Monica. I took a road trip east, right in the middle of the civil rights freedom rides, we came route 66 from the west to the east, and the last job on that road trip was supposed to be in New York but it got canceled because of things that happened along the way, and I got stranded in Florida…so we just made a decision about what we should do next. Elmo had some offers on the table from some eastern record companies, and he wasn't working with Harold anymore and he never really took to the LA climate of being able to move around and just hang out with people. He was kind of ready to come back to New York anyway.

TBW: Had you been to New York before that?

Hope-Booker: No.

TBW So that must have been quite a change for you.

Hope-Booker: Oh God, I think I was giddy probably, but I was ready. He wanted to come and he decided that I shouldn't come all the way back to LA if he really wanted to come because, you know, reestablish himself or at least get some record contracts under his belt. So that's what happened. He decided to meet me in New York with the baby. So I took a bus up from Florida and he flew from LA.

TBW: So you were traveling with the baby?

Hope-Booker: No, I left the baby with him and my mother; we lived about six blocks from each other.

TBW: And when you came to New York you came to stay?

Hope-Booker: Yeah, the idea was to kind of stay and reestablish ourselves.

TBW: Was that hard to break away from your family and your friends? Was your family supportive of your move?

Hope-Booker: They didn't have a problem with the moving except that my mother had moved from the East Coast to the West because she figured like raising her children in the west was a better deal and so she had a little problem with me wanting to raise kids on the East Coast, so it was kinda backwards. And a lot of people said to me "You're leaving God's Country?" That was how Californians referred to it.

TBW: Well, you could get a house in LA and here you'd probably have to rent an apartment.

Hope-Booker: Yeah, well actually before we left we were renting an apartment in the Hollywood Hills with a great view. So we never really did have, we hadn't gotten to that point where we moved to a house, couldn't even afford to move into a house.

TBW: Were you married at that point?

Hope-Booker: Yeah, we got married in 1960.

TBW: So you were here at a very exciting time to be in New York City in the early l960s; there was so much stuff going on and a lot of change, too.

Hope-Booker: And Rock 'n' Roll. I mean there were so many things that had intervened to really transform the music scene. And the other thing was that Elmo had lost his cabaret card a long time before and that had a lot to do with being able to work in the club scene so I think he was really hoping that he could travel more.

TBW: To get tours out of New York?

Hope-Booker: Yeah.

TBW: And you had done some recordings with him, but since you're a pianist you weren't going to be part of whatever touring unit he might have been working with, you wouldn't have been doing that. Were you pursuing your own performance career at that time? You were a mother also.

Hope-Booker: And a wife. Yeah, well the thing is I didn't get into too much jazz; I did do some gigs around Boston, mostly Boston. But I worked at Sylvia's Blue Morocco up in the Bronx, I worked with Jimmy Castor, I worked with Jimmy Norman, right before it he broke…into a different level of prominence with a couple of big hits. But he was working that circuit.

TBW: So you were doing different types of music?

Hope-Booker: I did all kinds of stuff, and I worked for recording studios transcribing original material. I did that.

TBW: Didn't you tell me that you did a tour with an all women's band at some point, an all girl orchestra at some point or did I make that up?

Hope-Booker: Well, I did, but that was way later. That wasn't in the early years. I did with my own band and then with the band that all the women used to pass through here that would have been in the 1980s. That was Skip McClure's band that toured Japan. We did a couple of tours, that was the women's band that I belonged to. And the other one was one that I put together myself, it's kind of a band that I'm working with now is an outgrowth of that band and I still have some of the same colleagues. The very first women's band I gigged with was an all-girl "Cuban" band in Boston. My cabaret card name was Tonita Alvarez! We were all supposed to have hailed from the islands!

TBW: That's hysterical. You have a daughter who is a musician?

Hope-Booker: Yes.

TBW: And she's the only other musician of your children. And she performs with you?

Hope-Booker: Yes, she really is. Well, she's performing with me now, which is kind of exciting. We're thinking of some projects with other mother daughter and mother sons who have children who at least caught some of the artistic bug. My daughter also has a secret desire to be a lawyer. But she's got a great performance sensibility.

TBW: She's a singer?

Hope-Booker: Yes, and a songwriter. She writes contemporary music and she's really good at it. We worked at the Lenox Lounge not too long ago and she was really well received. And there's a couple of things on now you can hear her at "Booker's Celebration of Life," on Youtube. She's very talented.

TBW: What's your daughter's name?

Hope-Booker: Monica Hope.

TBW: And she goes by Monica Hope?

Hope-Booker: She just goes by Monica Hope. So this is a new phase for me to kind of watch and help my daughter, through some of her dreams to perform. She's gone through the stage of wanting to perform all the time, but I don't know, I just took my lumps; I took a big step out to decide that I really wanted to follow my bliss. Because I did teach for about 14 years at a Headstart center and I had a great time teaching little kids about music.

TBW: And you still teach?

Hope-Booker: I still teach but in a very different way, one on one, small groups, not any classroom situations any more.

TBW: But in your performing career, it seems like you're actively pursuing performing now. It's important to you to continue to do that.

Hope-Booker: Well, it's always been important. I'd rather perform than anything. It's just getting a lot more challenging to do it. There are less ways to do it and I'm older, you know, and the Internet and youth are married to each other. But I'm looking now to do a little bit more writing. I really want to write a little bit more, and so I'm actively involved in trying to learn how to be a better business person and see if I can attract some money to the kind of projects that I have in mind right now.

TBW: What kind of things do you want to work on?

Hope-Booker: Well, one of them is I want to write the story of my life in music, which may or may not have a narrative to it. And then I have an idea for a large scale orchestra piece that is more spiritual. I'm not really by any means an orchestrator or a big band arranger but with all the technological things that you can do now where you can play in

the whole piece that's what I'd like to attract somebody to be able to sit down and do that and write this piece that's—

TBW: For a large ensemble?

Hope-Booker: Yes, a large scale piece. I'd like to be able to find the commission to write that and then to be able to present it. And so part of it is to just sit down and get focused on how to get that done, 'cause I think you have to be inventive and creative about how to continue to do your work in an age where there's an influx, a huge influx of kids, you know, and the schools are producing more and more kids.

TBW: You're talking about musicians.

Hope-Booker: Yes, musicians, and some of them are really wonderful. And there are fewer and fewer places even for them to play in the places that we grew up knowing we could play at.

TBW: It's strange, it's like there's this machine that's churning out great musicians but there's no place for them to play.

Hope-Booker: Yeah, it's almost like anything else. All these wonderful ideas happened, but there's always something missing, it's like the guy who invented dynamite who was excited about the explosion but didn't know where it should go.

TBW: Or he didn't have a fuse.

Hope-Booker: Right, or you get this great thing, but then you think God, I never did want to kill anybody with it.

TBW: I see what you're saying. It's a great idea, but…

Hope-Booker: It's a fabulous idea but the other pieces are missing. It's kind of part of the human condition in a way, I think; something is always going on that's a little in front

of what's left behind, which is the machinery to make good use of it right now. Twenty years down the road there might be thousands of places. But the other thing is that our culture has never really embraced jazz as its voice. All the rest of the world seems to get it. So part of what has to happen is that more and more other places besides the places we used to think were the only places to play have to happen. You know, every library, every school auditorium, every church.

TBW: The music should be taught. You know, if we were in Finland…the folk music, or the national music of Finland whether it's themes by Sibelius or actual folk melodies are taught to the kids when they're very young. It would seem to me that every elementary school or every junior high school should have a big band and be studying Ellington or Basie or something that's accessible. Or Elmo Hope, for example.

Hope-Booker: Right, if that were the case

TBW: And that should be the national music, how great would that be, to create the identity, the recognition and the connection to the culture, whether they became musicians or not.

Hope-Booker: Right, That's the whole idea, is that if it were mandated that everybody get exposed to this music then I think that that generation would also produce audiences for it and those business people and those administrators, you know, that come out of that would perpetuate it in other places; every place should have this experience.

TBW: It's expensive, probably the augment would be that it's expensive to keep a large ensemble, provide instruments for a large ensemble. It didn't used to be, because that was all there was. But now if you can put a kid in a room with an electronic keyboard or an electric guitar or a computer and that becomes the music lesson.

Hope-Booker: That's fine too as long as the music lesson has something to do with the basic culture. If that kid was learning Ellington on the computer at least he would get that in addition to whatever is popular. I mean, I remember when we cleaned the house on Saturday whatever was on the radio matinee, whatever was the popular culture music, but I was also exposed to something else, I was also listening to Ellington, and listening to Elmo.

TBW: But Ellington was much more in the air then than he is now.

Hope-Booker: Well, the argument that I'm making is that there's no real good reason besides the fact that it's so separated out, that Ellington shouldn't be in the air here. And then that would sort of, Ellington, and Armstrong and pieces of the music that led, that have this background, this jazz background, this marriage between what's Afro-centric and what's Euro-centric, if there were some recognition given to that I think it would change so much about what the acceptance is for the music to be treated in a different way, if you will.

TBW: I think it's looked upon as difficult also. Because it's complex, a lot more complex than the pop music that kids listen to today. But then, engaging with complex forms—that's essential for development. There's an elementary school in my neighborhood in Brooklyn that features chess as part of the curriculum—all the kids learn to play chess. Well, if a five year old can learn to play chess, probably by the time they're seven if they started at five, they could learn to play "A Train," they could learn that chord progression.

Hope-Booker: But it could also be the other way around because the studies are in now about what music does in terms of opening up your neural synapses, that when you are

studying music at five, if you want to be a doctor or anything else, a scientist, you're going to have some finer nuances there in your participation in that other field than if you had not been exposed.

TBW: It makes perfect sense.

Hope-Booker: So that same kid—if they started them out at five on Duke Ellington, I'll bet you dollars to donuts that by seven they could play jazz.

TBW: But I heard a criticism of that idea, something to the effect that well, we shouldn't be short shrifting the music by selling it as a path to other disciplines. That the music should stand on its own merits.

Hope-Booker: Well, OK, I can handle that, but what's happening now is that because somebody's interest has been piqued and because some real facts are at your disposal that I think it's useable material now. It has broader implications. It just does.

TBW: I think maybe I'm drawing too fine of a distinction, given the dearth of American vernacular music or jazz in particular that is taught to young children. You get it at the college level but then it seems like it's a little too late.

Hope-Booker: And by then, you've decided on that yourself. I'm talking about the flood that should exist from nursery school or daycare centers on up, that that's part of what you will expect to be exposed to. It's like having a tricycle in the classroom or the computer.

TBW: You know the computers are there.

Hope-Booker: The computers are there and I'm saying that the programming on the computer should also include what is part of this country's spit and glue, you know. That's what I believe.

TBW: Maybe in twenty years, who knows, maybe we'll get there. We're not there yet. This hue and cry, I think, has been taken up for a long time. There are people who have been trying to engage with these ideas or disseminate these ideas for a long time. But it seems like we are moving forward, I don't want to say jazz is being taught more than it was, I think it is being taught more than it was.

Hope-Booker: I haven't visited enough of these programs to know what their real goals are, but they're hopefully learning the business of the music also so they can also manage themselves. I'm not sure I see that evidence yet because I know a lot of young kids who really are wonderful and they're just floundering.

TBW: I'm just thinking back. Didn't Cannonball Adderley do a whole series of things for kids, and didn't Leonard Bernstein do jazz for kids? There was the notion—

Hope-Booker: Yeah, well, Cannonball was a teacher; I think he did get involved.

TBW: I think he made some recordings that were about turning kids on to jazz. I know that Wynton Marsalis does that.

Hope-Booker: He has some great children's programs.

TBW: Let me ask you about the commercialization of jazz today in terms of the way jazz is marketed. I know that a lot of musicians have expressed great frustration with the way the market is sort of, it's a very narrow market. It seems that there's a lot of I don't want to say payola, but there does seem to be it's not what you know but who you know kind of thing. People get reviewed on the basis on the amount of advertising space they can afford in certain magazines. Do you find that disparity or is that a loaded question?

Hope-Booker: Oh, God. You already know the answer.

TBW: I know, but I'm wondering what you think about it.

Hope-Booker: I think it's grossly unfair and just shows that the business side of it really tips way over beyond what creativity is…or forward motion around the music. You know there's a place that's kind of like the edge, there's this sound that gets commercialized, and there's a piece that's a little bit more traditional that's left out, kind of piece that's more progressive and forward thinking and more what they used to call avant garde or just trying to move the music to a different level, give it some different shape. That doesn't get a fair hearing. It's true you pick up a magazine and it's a face you recognize or it's a bowl winner or it's somebody who just won a contest. That's who gets the press. And I guess that must be predicated on the fact that those are the people that are going to buy tickets. You know, people get made. It's like okay, so we're going to press X amount for you and you'll do this tour.

TBW: It's almost like they get created by the powers that are internally driving the marketplace. Not necessarily by the audience.

Hope-Booker: No, they'll create the audience; the audience will be there for whoever it is that they decide needs to be heard, that's going to make money for them, the advertisers, the agents, the big venues.

TBW: But we're primarily talking about, when we talk about those venues, we're primarily taking about New York, right? I guess we can talk about Los Angeles and San Francisco. There's the concert circuit, I mean, people will go and play colleges. But when you talk about jazz as a viable marketplace it seems to me that this is still the center.

Hope-Booker: Yeah, that and where the festivals are. And wherever the places are that can promote and support that kind of advertising that are in the big cities. And the rest I think probably are the college campuses. But I don't know how much jazz is going on on

college campuses. ‘Cause what they call jazz on college campuses whenever I see what the rundown is, is like well, when did that group get to be known as a jazz group?

TBW: Maybe like Medeski, Martin and Wood or something like that.

Hope-Booker: Yeah, those sounds that have become a little bit more commercial. There’s an expansion to what they’ve been calling jazz. I don’t know, people of my generation are kind of lost in that definition.

TBW: But it does seem that every big city, you’re right, seems to have a jazz festival because it’s sort of hip to have a jazz festival. From the point of view of the city fathers, they want to be able to say “Well, we have our jazz festival.” The notion of a jazz festival, there’s something popular about that, and it seems to keep renewing itself in some ways.

Hope-Booker: I think because the larger jazz festivals made it possible to find your audience in a big city, on a big city campus.

TBW: People will come in to the city specifically for a festival.

Hope-Booker: Yeah, it’s good revenue if you can find your major headliner who’s going to bring people in. My point is that usually that person is not a jazz person.

TBW: Right. Like the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, last time I was there, which is now l5 years ago, the leading headliner was a band called Nine Inch Nails, which was an alternative rock band, at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival.

Hope-Booker: That’s my point, exactly, and in a little tent on the outer rim is the poor jazz group that you get to see it on your way to the popcorn machine.

TBW: As a matter of fact, the few times I went down there to the festival I don’t remember going and hearing much jazz. It was mostly New Orleans sound, R & B,

Professor Longhair, that type of stuff, and gospel music. I think probably would have been mostly traditional jazz that was probably being played down there in that setting. What about all of this hullabaloo that's been happening around here with *Justice for Jazz Artists*? You were very eloquent on the dais back in September when you generously agreed to come up and speak on short notice and did a wonderful job. We have to find our way and it's a thorny way. What do you think will happen with that? But when you think about it, because you have a lot of experience with this type of stuff, what do you think is going to happen?

Hope-Booker: Well, I don't think anything happens without momentum and great pockets of leadership not from the top down but from the bottom up that is sort of like cells of people who have to really understand the losses of the long-term and what needs to be built to get a larger understanding of what the discrepancies and the disillusionments and the disenfranchisements have been and make it a mass priority to turn it around. And without that will which is like internal politics and all the stuff that goes on in any organization where somebody's pressing to get something done that has been resisted for so long, there has to be great momentum, there has to be the will to change it.

TBW: That's pretty much the nail on the head. But in the end it does have to do with resources, with whether the administration is willing to devote resources to it, whether the political favors are called in because when you call in a favor for one thing you might not be able to get a favor next time on something else. It's about prioritizing.

Hope-Booker: It's a priority, right. If this is going to be a priority and at what cost, cause there go your resources, at what cost are we going to really work to move this situation to the front.

TBW: But the other side of it too is the complexity of the issue and the fact that if you don't have the solidarity among the musicians who are working in the field, and you don't have the full support of people in the field either because they're not educated about it or because they've had bad experiences with the union in the past or because they just don't believe in it. Then how can you convince somebody for instance to not play in a club? If you are booked into a club and then they won't honor your terms and so you decide you're not going to play there. Somebody else is going to waltz in and just take that gig; they're not going to honor your sense of the injustice, the way the injustice is being portrayed.

Hope-Booker: I don't think that's ever happened. I mean you can be talking to a blank wall when you tell somebody about your experience if it doesn't have any reality for them and their rent.

TBW: So it's economic.

Hope-Booker: A lot of it is, very much. And the other is not wanting to step on somebody's toes for the next gig. Or for your colleagues. So that there has to be some consensus about this is what *this* is and these are the only places that have contracts with the union to treat you fairly. But with this influx of musicians who are out there passing the bucket and opening up every other club on every other street where the owner says "Here you can come in, I'm not giving up anything but the night."

TBW: “I’ll agree to let you use this space. You bring everything including the business for him across the bar.”

Hope-Booker: Everything, and you won’t get any of the bar, you’ll only get the door charge.

TBW: And you might not get much of the door either.

Hope-Booker: And because people you know, there’s this whole philosophy of “Keep the horn in your mouth, don’t stop playing, just play anywhere”—that’s a problem as well. One of my greatest teachers, a person that I loved very much lived by that philosophy. Don’t stop playing, “Keep the horn in your mouth,” he said to me. And with so many musicians it has to be on both sides. You have to educate the younger musicians and you also have to also try to fight the little club owners who don’t think that the band should be a business expense.

TBW: They also were able to evade their responsibility as the employer and they don’t want to be construed to be the employer.

Hope-Booker: I don’t know what the answer is, it’s a serious dilemma.

TBW: And educating people about why a union is important. This has to happen. But I remember even when I joined Actors Equity in my early twenties, I just needed a card. I knew that I needed a card to work. I didn’t care about the other stuff that was associated with a union. Because I had no education, no one explained it to me.

Hope-Booker: But that’s usually what happens, you need a card to work. When I first joined the union, I think by the time I joined, the unions were not segregated; I joined local 47 but I just needed a card so I could work in Beverly Hills. That was it.

TBW: By the way, did you do solo stuff in Beverly Hills?

Hope-Booker: I worked until I was eight and a half months pregnant.

TBW: Were you doing like cocktail gigs, or private parties?

Hope-Booker: Those little elegant, boutique kind of rooms, solo piano, anything I wanted to play, all the new things I was learning. As long as I played Avery Parish, as long as I played "After Hours," the blues solo, after I played that I could play anything else I wanted to. If I played that I could also play all these other things that I was experimenting with. They were mostly pretty much more cocktail lounges even than they were restaurants. I did some of that.

TBW: Did you also perform in South Central in your own neighborhood that you'd grown up in?

Hope-Booker: No. Like the Club Alabam and the Blue Rock? No, I was a little too young.

TBW: It was after that, that scene had already passed, right?

Hope-Booker: I used to go over there to meet all those people who were coming in to town. My father would take me over there to meet Josephine Baker and Lionel Hampton 'cause that was the hotel [the Dunbar—TBW] where they stayed when they came.

TBW: And based on that map it wasn't really very far from where you were living.

Hope-Booker: No it wasn't very far, it was actually across town but you can see it on the map, it's kind of like 45 minutes.

TBW: There were still things going on on Central Avenue when you were a kid, right?

Hope-Booker: Well, yeah, but I wasn't privy to them. The one thing—because we didn't go to a lot of those shows—but I do remember going to see—how old was I? It was at the end of the war, because my father took us all to see Lionel Hampton's show in the theater

there next to the Dunbar on V-J Day. And I'll never forget the wild scene at the end. The band was on stage playing "Flying Home" while these B-52 bombers were on the screen, and the whole place was in the aisles and yelling, 'Yay! The war is over, the war is over!' And just dancing their hearts out.

TBW: That would have been like summer of 1945? V-J day is August…

Hope-Booker: August 10th. Yeah, the end of the war. I'll never forget it. The war was the Red Cross, to me, the war was learning how to put the splint on, and being an air raid warden, and you know from a child's point of view, blackouts and flames overhead and thinking you were going to get bombed any minute.

TBW: Your father was a veteran you said from the Rough Riders' period, the Spanish American War. Did he have any involvement in World War II?

Hope-Booker: No he didn't have any involvement.

TBW: He'd aged out. You really should think about doing a book.

Hope-Booker: What's the guy who just finished Monk's book? He said, "Bertha, start writing a book."

TBW: Oh, Robin Kelly. Well, you know you can just talk into a tape recorder.

Hope-Booker: I need to do that.

TBW: Although it's good to have somebody in the room to bounce ideas off of, or at least change up.

Hope-Booker: You want to do that with me?

TBW: We could talk about it. It would be fun. Because that period, that West Coast period. I don't know that much about Eric's music, I have a bunch of it. I have some recordings of him with Booker Little. And those are incredible recordings but I haven't

heard him in all of the contexts that he recorded in, but I have a great reverence for him as a musician. And Harold Land is really still my favorite saxophonist. I just love the sound that he got out.

Hope-Booker: Very warm and sharp. He had a little sharp edge, a big warm sound.

TBW: Who did I get to see who just passed a few years ago. …Teddy…

Hope-Booker: Edwards. Now that was somebody that I worked with in LA when I was a kid. I hardly knew anything but he heard something and he hired me for quite a few gigs. He and Vi Redd, who was the woman that I knew who played saxophone in that period of history, I didn't know another woman in LA who played alto, who played any horn beyond clarinet and flute. I had that whole school experience. We started talking about my school experience but we never…

TBW: LACC you mean?

Hope-Booker: No, I mean before that—all the instruments that I got exposed to and the wonderful dedicated teachers. I went to the local, the equivalent of the Music and Art High School here in New York.

TBW: So you studied multiple instruments?

Hope-Booker: I studied clarinet, cello, violin, viola, all that family except the bass. It's too bad I never moved from the clarinet to any other [reed] instrument because that wasn't happening, women didn't get invited into that. But then I went into the percussion section. I learned how to read classical drum music and played everything from the timpani to the triangle through the whole orchestra.

TBW: It would seem that you'd be a natural composer; you have all those voicings in your head.

Hope-Booker: I do, but I haven't ever really committed to a big piece. And it's a matter of really focusing discipline at this point, it's like I have this tape recorder in my head and I may get down twenty-five percent of it on the page and the rest of it gets lost. But I truly hear music almost all day.

TBW: We didn't get a chance to talk about Walter. You were married to Walter Booker for many years, and you lost him in 2006? You all recorded together, performed together?

Hope-Booker: Yes, we did. I learned a lot of music from him, I really did learn a lot because he was a very hands on kind of person who'd sit down with you and play with you and then say "OK. Lets go back and do that again." And he was a warm, funny man.

TBW: Bob Cranshaw always speaks very highly of him.

Hope-Booker: Oh yeah, he was a wonderful man and very, very giving. He had an underground studio for years, where kids learned how to work the reel to reel tape recorder and record their own stuff and he never charged anybody anything. He had a whole group of kids from the Music and Art High School who did their homework over there. T.S. Monk told me himself that he learned who is father was by his association with Booker, because Booker had this open door policy; "Come on in, you guys, I'm gonna turn on the tape recorder and I'll give you the same experience that kids who have money have." Like that. And he was working all the time and was able to get a housekeeper to stay there when he went on the road and that studio became a real haven for I don't know how many.

TBW: Where was that studio?

Hope-Booker: On 87th and Amsterdam.

TBW: In an apartment?

Hope-Booker: In an apartment, a ten-room apartment. And sometimes those kids wouldn't even go home. He had to hire somebody to help keep them organized because they were still going to Music and Art. T.S. Monk says that he was maybe a little distant from his own father's music but he adored Booker and he could see what he was learning from him. One day Booker came and said, "Guess what, I'm gonna be playing with your Daddy!" And T.S. said, "What? You're going to be playing with my father?" "Yes," he said. And Walter said, "It's gonna be a wonderful thing for me, it's amazing that he hired me," And T.S. said, "My God, let me go back and listen to my father."

TBW: That's great.

Hope-Booker: Well, T.S. was just a kid. He was off into his own thing and I guess as a kid I could see how he could have been off into another aspect of music, and he was studying at Music and Art and he didn't really understand the connection between this guy, this bass player who was giving him the freedom in his studio and knowing his musicianship—and his famous father. So he said it kind of opened his eyes. I thought it was interesting, too. He said, "It made me open up my ears to hear what my father was doing because," as he said, "Uncle Bookie was going to be playing with my father!"

TBW: It was really that his father was playing with Uncle Bookie.

It gave his father some credibility. That's too much.

Hope-Booker: But they were Monk's gigs. I think it was right around that era

TBW: So this was going way back?

Hope-Booker: This is before I knew Walter Booker.

TBW: The middle 1960s? And Monk recorded for Riverside but there were bunch of things on Riverside and that was Elmo's first label also?

Hope-Booker: Oh, no, no. Elmo had done stuff back even before those jazz dates on Atlantic and Decca and Prestige and Blue Note. And maybe a lot of not so many under his name but you can see him having recorded with other people. Elmo goes all the way back to "Drinkin' Wine Spo-Dee-O-Dee."

TBW: A lot of people recorded that.

Hope-Booker: He recorded that but I'm just saying that in terms of his Atlantic records, Elmo was with a traveling band where I think he met Johnny Griffin and Billy George. They called it "The Territory Band." That's why he was off the New York scene.

TBW: Where is he from originally? Elmo?

Hope-Booker: Oh, he's from here. His parents were from the Caribbean but he was born here.

TBW: Do you have any contact with his extended family? Brothers, sisters?

Hope-Booker: Yeah, but they for the most part didn't really follow—there was really only one brother that followed him around and drove him around out of a fairly large family. They were just like quite a few other families that if you're off into jazz and you're not looking too prosperous. You know: "Go get a real job."

TBW: What about your father with you playing jazz? He was all right with it? You were very lucky.

Hope-Booker: I was. He didn't have a problem with anything I did. He really didn't.

TBW: Did you have any interaction with Mary Lou Williams in New York City?

Hope-Booker: Very little.

TBW: She was around through the l980s?

Hope-Booker: Yeah, by that time she had gone to teach at Duke, but I think I met her in the early 1970s, I used to go down to and hear her when Carline Ray was playing bass with her. I think Michael Fleming played with her for a while but I don't remember Michael, but I wasn't able, I had kids and I was trying to finish school, too. But she would always say, "Don't let these men discourage you, you go ahead with your music, girl. And any time you get a chance to come up, come on up, we'll play together." I never could really get that together.

TBW: She had kind of an open door policy and Bud Powell and Monk and other people may have spent some time with her.

Hope-Booker: They all did, but I wasn't ever part of that.

TBW: Well, you got it through them.

Hope-Booker: And I got it through Evelyn [Blakey] who used to tell me about Mary Lou, 'cause she used to encourage Evelyn the same way. But I heard other people talk about those days and how she would tell Thelonious and Bud, all of them and maybe Elmo, too, I don't know, "That's some nice stuff you all are playing, come up to my house so I can tell you what it is and what you can do with it next."

TBW: That's great. Do you have any favorite pianists, could be contemporary or way back? Do you ever listen to stride music, like James P. Johnson?

Hope-Booker: I like James P. I like Hank Jones. I like it all.