Oral History Interview of
Bob Livingston

Interviewed by: Andy Wilkinson
October 29, 2008
Austin, Texas

Part of the:
Crossroads of Music Archive

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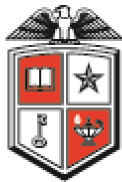

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Interview Series Background:

The Crossroads Artists Project encompasses interviews conducted by the Crossroads of Music Archive Staff members. They hope to document the creative process of artists and songwriters from all across the Southwestern United States.

Transcript Overview:

Bob Livingston reflects on the influence of his older brother Donald on his music, and his interaction and inspiration from Joe Ely. He then switches to discuss the music he wrote in India and the process he went through integrating themes of West and East into his performances. He closes with thoughts on the creative process he follows when writing songs. He delves into the formation of the Lost Gonzo Band, recounting the cut records and tours and frustrations that would lead to the band breakup. He concludes discussing his reunification with the Ray Hubbard band and Jerry Jeff Walker

Length of Interview: 02:54:17

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Andy Wilkinson (AW):
This is, let's see, October the twenty-ninth. Is that right? It is Wednesday, in any case, 2008. Andy Wilkinson with Bob Livingston. Our second set of go a rounds. Talking about Bob's life in his own words. Let's starts; you mentioned about wanting to start talking about your brother and his impact on you.

Bob Livingston (BL):
Yes. My brother was Donald Lawrence Livingston. Is Donald Lawrence Livingston. Likes to go by Don, I suppose, but I always call him Donald and he always calls me Robert. And then when I moved to Lubbock I changed my name to Bob. I was thinking how—because music—it just seemed like there was always a guitar from the first time I remember because my brother played.

AW:
Yeah and for the tape, your brother is older?

BL:
He's older. He's seven years older. By the time I came along I suppose he wasn't but maybe at eight or nine he was already starting to wanting to do that and has some tapes of mother taking him down town and how you could get those little L—not an LP but it was a real thin—

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AW:
Little acetate.

BL:
--Acetate, a real thin blue acetate or something and so he made a couple of those and maybe even with an instrument, and so he played and I always had access. Access means I couldn't figure it. I was too small to be able to play any chords at all but it was always there, and he always was playing music. He had all the forty-fives and he also loved Bo Diddly and people liked that.

AW:
What other kinds of music was he listening to?

BL:
Apache, all the guitar things. He was learning the guitar just like everybody did. See, I think there was an era when that happened. The Apache and what are some of those—

AW:
The Adventures.

BL:
The Adventures, The String Alongs, all those bands had these instrumental hits and Donald learned them and I didn't learn them because I wasn't paying the guitar yet. I think if they were in that—when I was finally learning to how to play guitar, maybe, I wonder I'd have ever become a better guitar player I guess is what I'm getting around to. Because Donald Diddy could play pretty good and play blues and stuff. Had some soul. Played pretty good harmonica. So I always remember Donald being there as a musician and when we moved to Lubbock I started playing the ukulele. And I think my brother, you know, showed me, "Look the guitar, you can play the chords almost the same way. You're just adding these two top strings and take the two-if you don't want to do it, take that E and A off and just play it like a Uke," So when I finally got a guitar, and he showed me some of the chords. He wasn't as demonstrative and showed me maybe because it's a brother thing, but he encouraged me and found out that I can carry a tune and I could sing. So by the time we got to Lubbock—

AW:
So you're what age again when you get to Lubbock?

BL:
I'm like nine and by the time I was eleven or so, maybe, that's when I got the ukulele, and so I started to sing and Donald was going to Tech and he was no longer in the house. So my brother had moved out and moved on and started playing in these bands.

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AW:
What were some of those bands that he played in?

BL:
He played in a band called The Raiders and Charlie Hatchett had formed the band and then Earl Hatchett, his younger brother, was the lead guitar player. Gary Blakely was the drummer. Do you remember who Gary Blakely was? And Gary I think, maybe, had been, somehow, an original Sparkles Drummer or something.

AW:
Okay now is Gary kin to Jimmy Blakely and the Blakely family that has a palm room?

BL:
Maybe. Maybe, maybe, maybe. These were older guys than me. I didn't know and my brother played bass in this band. So, it was Earl Hatchet and Gary Blakely and they had a trio and they could play the officers clubs and frats and stuff like that to make some money. And so I knew he was doing that as a professional musician and pretty soon he got a job as a guitar teacher at Herod Music Company. So, vicariously, I was still learning stuff and I saw what he—the way he

would teach is to just learn a song. You would just come in and he say "What song do you want to learn?", "I want to learn such and such by the Beatles" or whoever it was at the time. A lot of Everly Brothers and stuff. So he collected the forty-fives. He has a vast forty-five collection. And he collected those forty fives and would learn those songs and then teach them to kids and stuff. For years he worked at Herod Music Company. And then I played a few assemblies in high school but I was a football player and, at some point, my brother suggested we played some dates together and it was the Livingston Brothers.

AW:
Really, so you were what ages? You were in high school or junior high?

BL:
No, I think by this time [sighs] it's either just got into college or something. I have a picture of it. And see that's what I've got to get. I've got to ask him, I was going to call and ask him what these dates were and how many gigs we played, but we actually had a promo shot made. I've got that somewhere and so I remember playing, we played "Classical Gas," we played some Everly Brother stuff. My brother could really pay that "Classical Gas thing." [Hums tune] We would do that. And so it was fun and I didn't know what to think because—I just don't—it's just going by and is this important? Am I going to be a musician? At this point I still don't have a clue what I'm going to do, but then my brother one summer—once again it's just hard for me to know when this was. But remember the band the Rhythm Masters? There was a, either the drummer or some member of that band had that name and came to my brother and my brother said "Look we got this gig all summer," and it was either Plainview or somewhere like that at the officers club or something like that. "And why don't you play bass in this band?"

AW:
Says it to you.

BL:
Says this to me. Bass? He goes "Oh its real simple. It's just I-V-I. Once it's tough, I'll show you some stuff." And so my first—I must have mentally blotted this out because when people ask me when your first job was I said "Murphey handed me a bass guitar and said lets go to Texas." But it was really my brother that handed me a bass guitar, and we played. And so one summer I guess we played, it's either every other week or every weekend or something like that, you know several gigs. So I had this background and learning how to play and I didn't, I still didn't have much of a concept of kind of playing with a drummer but I just—I wasn't even thinking. Nobody was telling me too much to listen to the bass drum. Where now I would say out of expediency sake, but I was sort of; just whatever we did we did it. And then, as far as my musical situation with my brother, we did not play together again. At that point I started playing solo and going off, and the Livingston Brothers were disbanded. I guess Donald taught a little bit longer. My

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parents when I ended senior year in high school—so this is maybe when it happened because my parents moved back to San Antonio and my brother and I lived together. And so we had a little place and he was, kind of, supposed to be watching over me. Taking care of me and that's when I believe these Livingston Brothers thing might have happened.

AW:
Just out of curiosity where was your place in town.

BL:
Well I think it was on 23rd Street over there by the school.

AW:
Lubbock High?

BL:
Yeah, by Tech and Lubbock High. Like, okay, 19th street goes by Lubbock High right? And then University Avenue does this? So University goes out towards 23rd Street, right? And you take a left and that was—little rent house. And we had a dog and the dog got poisoned. I don't know why I'm laughing. It was terrible. It was my brothers' beloved German Shepard, but he barked.

AW:
And the neighbors—

BL:
Neighbors did him in, you know. The blues came early. So I'm just trying to remember, those are the things that really made it easy for me to just start, because I heard music and I heard him play so he's really my first biggest influence. He distilled a lot of the current musical stuff and I learned it from him sort of. I didn't really ever learn to become a lead guitar player or anything but Bo Diddly and B.B. King were his idols and he knew all that funky way of playing, you know. So I got to hear it.

AW:
Just for the completeness of the story. After you start going off doing your solo thing, where does Donald go? Is he still in Lubbock teaching at Herod's? Is he through Texas Tech?

BL:
I think that he was still at Herod's, and when I went off to—here's how we intersected. Because once again I followed my brother to Aspen, Colorado. When I got the good draft lottery number.

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AW:
He was already there?

BL:
He was in Aspen at a place called, I can't remember the place but he was right there at the base of the mountain. A little knell and the mountain you'd float right in there. There was a restaurant, bar and there was a lounge and my brother played every night. You know, sort of, great gig for him. He loved it. Mainly cover stuff. Playing some of his own things. Everybody loved him. He remembers—the thing about my brother was like you would come in and it would be like Andy and Curtis and you guys show up at the door and he goes, "Hmm." And so after he takes a break he sits down he goes "Hey guys. You know, I haven't seen you in here before. What's your name?" "Andy and Curtis.", "Ok Andy, you guys have any requests?", "Well yeah what about 'Solitary Man' by Neal Diamond?", "Well I don't know it Andy, but you come back tomorrow and I'll play it for you." And then they would come back and he'd see 'em in the door. "Andy come on in man. I got that song for you." So what are you going to do but come back and back and they would have different couples that would come in, and so, wherever he would play, he learned how to do that. So I moved to Aspen, I got a job playing aprés-ski in that same thing. And then he and I played together. We'd play some songs together that night and John Denver came in. So we reprised the Livingston Brothers in Aspen too. I'm just remembering it. This is amazing. And that's when the guy, Randy Fred, walked in and saw me play and said, "I can get you a record deal in Los Angeles."

AW:
Didn't offer your brother a record deal huh?

BL:
Didn't offer my brother a record deal. He said "Well it's not an offer. I'm a manager. I can get it." So no he didn't. And I left, and that was it.

AW:
So where does your brother go after that? Did he stay in Aspen?

BL:
Well, once again, if I can remember any of that. He did do Aspen. Oh no so here's what happened. So I go out to L.A. and I get this manager. And he's trying to line something up for a record deal but mean time but he had been this guy, Randy Fred, had been a big time agent for people like Jack Palance, and Peggy Lipton, and Eddy Albert, and he would drive down the road and go "Anthony!" and Anthony Quinn will roll down the thing and go "Hey Randy." I mean it happened and so I was like "Wow! This is too weird." But he was a hippie, kind of dropped out—I think, and acid, and dropped out of this whole system so he was back trying to use his

connections and he was trying to set something up, meanwhile he's broke. So let's get my client out on the road and make us some money. Because he kept me alive for a while when I didn't have any gigs at all and it's like now—and so he put me and he got me these gigs in this place, The Rubens Restaurant Chain, while we're waiting for some kind of record deal, you got to play. And it's not go out and play. I'm not in a band. I didn't know what the folk scene was, I had no records, so it's not like I could go and play McCabe's or anything. I'm really green. And so I need to play and got me a job at this restaurant chain that had restaurant once again and the lounge, and so I played that. Well I call my brother and I said "Donald this is what I'm doing," blah-blah-blah. But, you know, I'm trying to get this thing but you would be good doing this. This is a big thing for you." So he came out to Los Angeles, met a guy who booked all of them named Joey Gallow.

AW:
[Laughs] The—

BL:
It was a different Joey Gallow.

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AW:
Okay. I was going to say "Wow." This really is a good story.

BL:
This Joey Gallow, who knows what he could be because he was an Italian guy but he was also a pretty fair musician himself and he played the piano and he would do like the entire "Man From La Mancha."

AW:
The whole set.

BL:
[Sings] "I am I, Don Quixote, the Man from La Mancha." For is show or something. He'd do Broadway tunes and he played the bigger show rooms. And he booked the whole system. He met my brother. Gave him an audition because I told him—because the guy told me, "I really like you. I think you're good and everything but just don't ever lose sight of that fact that if The Beatles couldn't sell booze they wouldn't sell a record." [Laughter] He goes, "That's your job to sell booze." And so he was telling me that, and I thought that means he wants me to be an entertainer. He wants me to play cover songs. He wants me to—

AW:
Now was it Joey telling you that?

BL:
Joey told me that. And I said "You need to see my brother." And so, when Joey met Donald they became friends and he booked the fire out of Donald. All over. Up and down. From San Francisco all the way down to—[Long pause] what's that little town there just north of Tijuana? San Diego. And there was a bunch of gigs down in San Diego and I got to say. I went and I filled in for him and I had the most fun. Because after he had already been on the circuit he needed me to play a month and, one of the wildest, most fantastic times. Just going down there and being footloose and fancy free, and I'd already had the record deal by that time. I hadn't made the record but I had some money sitting. I had this gig and beautiful, all kinds of great things. So there was my brother up and down and he then went to Hawaii and worked for that chain in Hawaii. Married a Hawaiian girl and came back to San Diego, I guess, and lived there and he started playing in this San Diego band. And he had an interesting thing. My brother was the guitar player singer. They had a drummer that played bass and the guy would play touch bass and it was fantastic. You'd turn your bass amp up really loud.

AW:
So you just hit it with your finger.

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BL:
And the guy was going [hums walking bass line] anything he could do, he couldn't do—it was a lot of country stuff and then I think they had a keyboard player. A pretty good keyboard player and they played country and they made really good money. And he got into the scene. The production end and they played in a band. They played and things kind of started. My brother started making hats. He became a hatter out there as well.

AW:
Like making Cali lids or regular hats?

BL:
Cowboy hats. He's got LonghornHatters.com right now.

AW:
Really?

BL:
Yeah. He makes hats. Does a lot of those straw hats like that one down there? Palm leaf and he does raffia straw, but he's just slowly breaking into; he's not in Malone's, I'm not going to say league, but he's not in Malone's, the type of people he's trying to reach I don't think. He's trying to still keep he's prices pretty low. Malone's pretty expensive, and rightly so I guess. And he can

sell to all those German Tourist. Germans and Japanese. As I went on and got my record deal my brother was kind of in and out playing that scene too.

AW:
Cool. So did y'all ever get a chance to play music again?

BL:
From time to time we've done—but mainly it was like a sit in. I playing somewhere and he sits in or he's playing somewhere—another thing he did, when he moved back to San Antonio, he started realizing that he was getting more of the business end. So he ran Dicks Last Resort down the river and the Lone Star Café down there and he always had music there and he played the music a lot of the times. But he became a manager and a cost cutter and he's tortured now because he can't look at a plate of food without going "That cost thirteen cents for that salad and then this over here cost—" So he'll mentally calculate how much the dinner really cost and how much he's paying he's really hard on waitresses and, "She doesn't deserve a tip," and all that. So, he became soured on the—because he never got a record, he never became a star. He put out a couple of records on his own and he always talked about it as a star. Him and Tucker. Tucker's like, "Rock star. I'm going to be a rock star."

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AW:
So your brother wanted to be?

BL:
He did, yeah. He was good but he couldn't—whatever happened, he did not get signed or I don't even know if he was in a situation. Nobody knew how to get into a situation to get signed. It just took some dumb luck, like in my case, to have somebody walk in and hear you and go, "Meet me in Los Angeles. I'll get you a record deal."

AW:
Yeah, there's not a yellow brick road to follow.

BL:
No. You know Joe Ely. There's one of my claim to fame that maybe I'd like to—can I do a transition here?

AW:
Oh yes.

BL:
Because Joe Ely is probably my second influence because I look at influences by—let's say my mother, she's standing there next to me. She influenced me. She's got a pretty voice. I'm at church. I'm singing. That's my first. My brother being a musician kicks in there but then when I'm in Lubbock I went to see Ely. And live music—I've gone to see Paul Revere and the Raiders at the Coliseum. Remember when that happened? And Gary Lewis and the Playboys.

AW:
Because one of my friends that worked at the grocery store. A girl he was dating, they arranged for her to be the date for Mark Lindsay.

BL:
Oh, are you kidding?

AW:
No, and so it broke up my friend and his girlfriend because he didn't want her going out with Mark Lindsay and of course all the rest of us were just happy to know the guy whose girlfriend had been taken by Mark Lindsay. [Laughs]

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BL:
You know, I went with Penny to that thing and I took Penny to see The Turtles at the Village Swinger, and we're right there in the thing and I'm just digging The Turtles.

AW:
That's what I meant. I love The Turtles; I hated missing that one.

BL:
The bass player starts looking at Penny and going [makes motions] and she's going [makes motions] and she's smiling and going, "He's so cute." And I'm going "Oh yeah?" [Laughs] This guy was like coming on to main, and he could have taken her [snaps] just like that.

AW:
Yea well it was—I remember I didn't get to go see the remainder of the sets, I was working or something but that was the big talk around grocery store. The Piggly Wiggly.

BL:
Yeah. Well, which Piggly Wiggly?

AW:
Monterey Center.

BL:
Oh yeah, well, I remember going to see Paul Revere and The Raiders and all that really digging it live. That's pretty big in my influence scale as well because it was just so fantastic and to see that guy. Remember how he'd play and he'd have that hat and it was just hilarious. It was fantastic and spontaneous and everything. Really loved it. So I went to some of those shows.

AW:
They were glam rock before there was glam rock, weren't they?

BL:
And they came to Lubbock which is really fantastic. But I saw Ely at the Altura Towers and that did it. I saw him and I immediately went out and—I told that story in another

AW:
Last time we were talking.

BL:
But I want to just add a little addendum to the story. So years later, I was in-- you know I had gone out to California, I had done the thing and I came back. And I was in Lubbock or I was somewhere and I can't remember exactly where but, what's the lawyer's name for Ely? Johnny Hughes. Johnny Hughes walks up to me and he goes "Here Bob." And he hands me a cassette. And I'm saying this for all the world to see it if there is one thing that I want to come out of this interview is this story. He hands me a cassette and he says "This is really great. You got to listen to it." I listen to it and its Ely, Caldwell, Lloyd demo. [Sings] "You know why the trees bend at the west Texas border." The best thing I'd ever heard. I thought, "This is absolute magic." So I had this tape and I played it for Gary. Well we're in the Lost Gonzo band so we're on MCA and in Austin at some sort of BMI conference or something like that at the Hilton and this guy, Jack Parker, was Vice President of MCA. Head of Country Music. We had met him because he had been a promo guy out there getting us, setting up radio interviews and in stores and that kind of thing for MCA. We were always friends with him. Jerry Jeff was kind of strange to him but he paid the band. Jerry Jeff didn't have much use for promo people because, for some reason they-- he wanted to do what he wanted to do. If there had ever been a smart promo person it would just be like "Okay what do you want to do?" Everybody would be a lot better. Because it basically is anyways. It's what he's going to want to do so he didn't do much promo. It's amazing that he came to this point but, we made friends with Jack, and so here was Jack Parker in Austin and he says "I'm new Head of Country Music for MCA, and I can sign three acts immediately. I want one of them to be from Texas. Do you have any ideas?" And Gary was there and he went "Bob." And I go "Yeah." And both of us said "You got to hear this tape." So I went and got it and went up in the, whatever floor it was, that had all these MCA guys were at. And Jack says "Let's hear it." And I believe, and this would be wrong, but I'm going to go ahead and have to set the scene

with this, but somebody was smoking some pot with these guys, so it was very loose, happy situation, and I put on the Joe Ely tape and I had a cool little cassette player. And I think the first song is [sings] "Do you know why the trees bend at the West Texas border." And when it comes to Lloyd's lead, it is pure magic. He was so in the moment. It still almost brings me to tears because it's a perfect recording and when these guys were hearing it and Lloyd came on I started grabbing my heart strings like this. My chest you know and they start going [makes motions] and they bent into the tape recorder. They couldn't believe it. And they said "That's unbelievable." And then we listened to the whole tape and he said "Where can we see this guy?" And in a couple of days they had gone to the Cotton Club and figured it all out and gone to see Ely. So, the story goes on. They go to see Ely, they want to sign him. One of these Vice Presidents calls me up, completely different guy, and he says "Now Bob, I want to thank you first of all for turning us on to Ely. I think we want to sign him but we've got to get something straight here because you know—let me tell you what happened. This guy Johnny Hughes came to the party, or came to Ely and he said—he came up to us, he says he's his manager. He's his manager? and I go "Well I think so." And he said "You know those hand buzzers?" I go "Yeah." And he goes "Well when I reached out my hand, he had that hand buzzer. So I kind of laugh, oh, okay. Maybe the first time, but then the second time and the third time and he kept coming up to me. And I think the guys crazy." [Laughs] And he said "Not only that. He's asking for a hundred thousand dollar signing bonus. We don't have that, we're not going to do that. We love him, we like Ely but we're not going to pay him any big amount of money and he just thinks he's worth—" he said "Your manager Michael Brofski, do you think you could get Brofski interested in handling Ely?" I go "Well let's do it." so we go over to Brofski's house. We play the record. He goes "Yeah, Yeah, Cool, Cool." You know Brofski? You ever hear him in person? And we said "Yeah and MCA wants to sign." And Ely goes "Yeah." And he says "No no. We'll set up a bidding war. We'll have Warner Brother, Capital, MCA. We'll have 'em all eating out of our hands." And Ely just took one look at it and he didn't want a part of it. It was too complicated to him and he just called 'em up and said "Just don't screw me. Get me a good deal."

AW:
Called MCA.

BL:
And basically signed and they found some sort—and they took him and they loved Ely. Never sold a lot of records for him. They told me that. They said "You know he's never sold many records but we just love him on the label. It's great to have him." So he gets his record deal.

AW:
That's a cool story. So by this time you made Johnny and Brofski mad right?

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BL:
He doesn't do Brofski but Brofski ends up being his manager.

AW:
Really?

BL:
Yeah. And Brofski handled Guy Clark, Jerry Jeff, Gonzo Band, Ely and a couple of other things. And they went in to sports. They had Tony Dorsett. There was a guy—

AW:
Is that how they met Witt?

BL:
Witt Stewart.

AW:
Stewart. Was he part of all that? Because he handled—

BL:
He handled that sports thing I think. Yeah they merged or something. Free Flow Productions and they got production deals for Fire Fall and Carol King and they made Christopher Crosses first record. The one that had six Grammy's or whatever.

AW:
San Antonio boy right?

BL:
Free Flow Productions. So he gets a piece of it, of everyone sold which is a lot of records. Yeah Brofski stuck his finger in a lot of pies here in Austin. Just kind of came here and filled a vacuum.

AW:
Yeah because when he got here, there was no one doing that right?

BL:
It was not much happening, you know, and once again, Jerry Jeff, was believing I could make a record in these primitive conditions and it'll be—I've already told that story, right, about the studio? Yeah.

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AW:
Yeah, Andy Sangria. The tub of Sangria.

BL:
The Sangria. The Sangria showed up twice. That record and *Viva Tirlengua*. [Laughter] And then Lemonade and Cayenne Pepper and Maple syrup started showing up at sessions because it was that master cleanser. Jerry Jeff went completely, where he would fast for twenty days, twenty five days. Just drink this stuff and he was skinny as a rail and he's running like five to seven miles a day. His eyes were just like [makes motion]. It was pretty amazing. We use to run a lot on the road.

AW:
Yeah, I know being on the road it's hard to have any other kind of exercise regimen but walking and running because there's nothing to do.

BL:
There's nothing to do. I've got to get it together and start doing more.

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AW:
Oh, me too. Last year I had some minor surgery that threw me off my schedule and I haven't gotten back to it yet and I'm getting fat. It's just scary because you get to our age and it ain't quite so easy to get back.

BL:
No, its not. The only thing you can do is stop eating.

AW:
Yeah and what did we just do. We had lunch but you at least had vegetarian. I had some beef.

BL:
Well it's still a lot of calories.

AW:
Well I think when I start getting this transcribed and I start putting these blocks of things together there may appear holes where we need more stuff and I'll call you on those. I think we've got this pretty well covered up through the Jerry Jeff years and so on, but this morning, I'll savor the tape. Curtis Peoples and I came out to watch you, and Richard, and Bradley.

BL:
Oliver, and Anu.

AW:
Anu do Cowboys and Indians at a grade school and it was big fun and we'd been out last night to see you do your solo thing at and Derver City Grill in Marble Falls. And you did a lot of the same songs which is even more fun because I now know the difference between a bar patron and a kindergartener and the answer is: there is none. [Laughter]

BL:
That's right.

AW:
But the blending, Iris, you're welcome to sit in and join us. We're going to be talking about India. [Iris Enters Room]

Iris Livingston (IL):
Well I'll stand around.

BL:
Ok do you want to come sit down. Go ahead and sit there.

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AW:
I find the cross-cultural thing, of course, is so important to music anyway. We all know that music comes about because two different musicians from two different cultures can't speak a word of the same language. They don't have the same background but they get together and play and they each take away something musically from that experience. And, listening to what you were doing on stage today and you talked in a biographical way, the last time we were together about going over to India, Iris and the boys there and you get a chance to play some music and how this thing sort of happened in a biological, chronological sense. But, can you talk a little bit about how the idea of putting the music's together; bring your music to people in that culture and then connecting those two settings to bring them back here. How does that come about? I mean we were talking a little bit last night and you were talking about the cablo players or the sitar players. You were talking about the difference in the way we count things and such and that two different cultures. Talk some about that would you?

BL:
Well my whole experience suddenly I was able to play with these Indian musicians in India. You know the State Department tours I started playing and I really loved the sounds. And one thing I said last night and I'm not sure if I got a chance to say on this tape, but it was always up to me to make the blend of the east and west happen with these Eastern musicians. Maybe I would show up and the guys playing—I remember one time in Pakistan, he was one of the last sitarist in Pakistan because Pakistan had systematically tried to stamp out that Indian influence, and I don't

know how heavy handed they were but he was saying "I've got a University job but I'm one of the last here." And he was just saying "No East and West can't meet. We play different time signatures, different modes." And a lot of tabla and a lot of drummers said the same thing. Iris, I'm going to talk about you in a minute so don't go.

IL:
I just saw the policemen there and I thought he was going to notice inspection sticker' not on.

BL:
Oh so you're going to run out and through yourself over the windshield. [Laughter]

IL:
Don't look yet! Well, I was going to go on.

BL:
As soon as they heard I'd played at Buddy Holly [hums toon] that's all I'm asking you to do. "Oh you mean that beat? Ok" [AW laughs] because the primal beat in all cultures was that Bo Diddly, Buddy Holly somehow. It was just, "Oh, ok," and that was always the ice breaker with all these musicians. Well I wanted to try to figure out how to do that in Texas because there was a; one of my models was a guy Will Taylor. Isn't that his name? He was a violinist and he had written a grant to the cultural contract city of Austin and when I started looking at what he did, he was able to get a grant to go into schools and play and it was like "I'd like to do that with maybe Indian musicians." Well found ourselves back in India and I was talking to Iris about it. And she and I started talking about the concept of this and at the time it really didn't have the name Cowboys and Indians. The working titles was the Wild East.

AW:
That's a pretty cool title too.

BL:
You know, and they had said that in the Muslim paper "Bob Livingston's Wild East," which I thought was cool. So Iris and I, and I still have the notebooks, and it came up as sort of a mission statement. I can't remember if Bobby and I had already written the songs. Had we already written the songs?

AW:
For the tape Iris is shaking her head no.

IL:
Oh, no no no no. No, he hadn't.

BL:
But it was like—

IL:
You mean the Cowboys and Indians song?

BL:
Um-hm, The feeling it—

IL:
Oh, you had that one.

BL:
Oh, okay, so what had happened was, just to get it chronologically correct. I came back to Texas. I'd heard Will's record. I went to Bobby and I said "I think we could do something and maybe try and maybe get a grant for it. I don't know. And I want to write some songs and I've got these ideas of the East and West." He and I wrote" Cowboys and Indians" and "Mahatma Gandhi and Sitting Bull."

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AW:
Why did you go back now to work with Bobby or talk to Bobby instead of Gary P. or instead of—

BL:
I mean I wasn't with those guys anymore. I was basically either playing with Jerry Jeff or being in India and I had come back fresh after a tour and maybe the reason I was here was because the Jerry Jeff tour was fixing to start. But Bobby just lived right down the—you know Bobby lived over there and I'd go over there we wrote "Cowboys and Indians" and we wrote "Mahatma Gandhi and Sitting Bull," and so we had two songs kind of. And then I came back to India and there was a writer there whose name was Reed Wood. He was a Sanskrit scholar, sort of, who was an American who had kind of—

IL:
Settled.

BL:
Settled in India. Had a Indian wife, arranged marriage, the whole nine yards. And this guy, he's got to be a genius, and he translates Sanskrit and ancient works and Malayalam and all these languages in English and he's got a lot of heart. He and I wrote fifty songs and a lot of them were kid's songs and I have a kid's record out called *Open the Window* on Gentle Wind Records.

AW:
I need to get a copy of that.

BL:
Yeah, I'll give you a copy. I have one here. So we wrote all these songs, and so the things were happening and I was with Iris and the boys over there, so we started talking about how to put a show together and Iris was really helpful and kind of the vision of it. "The feeling it engenders," I remember she said. With these performances—some of the first publicity or the way we captured the idea of what it was came out of when we kind of put that down.

IL:
Yeah, remember that quotation we did?

BL:
Oh yeah and Iris found a quotation by Edward Markham. She had a book of poetry and so she was reading all this stuff, and this is what it said, "There is a destiny that makes us brothers. None goes this way alone. All that we send into the lives of others comes back into our own. I care not what, his temple or his creed. One thing holds firm and fast that into his faithful heap of days and deeds the soul of man is gassed." And it was this beautiful poem and so we said, "We'll say that." And we will have glitter "The soul of man is gassed." So were actually thinking about—

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Iris:
That use to be the first thing you do.

BL:
Yeah it still is, sometimes.

AW:
To open your show you would do that poem?

BL:
We would do that poem.

Iris:
Haven't seen that in a long time.

BL:
Well I do do it sometimes but sometimes I don't. But yeah that's the way it would open and it cast a magical spell sort of and that's why the glitter [makes noises] "The soul of man is gassed." And then we had another one—

AW:
Sort of in the way that you use the incense [inaudible] I thought that was very effective. I don't know if it effected the kids but it affected me.

BL:
Well, I think that it's something special that kind of weaves some kind of magical spell or something. And I couldn't remember what all I was supposed to say about that incense. I had it, you know when we do, the show you know at like the hobby centers. For these Indian communities. It's a special thing that we've basically came up. Let the insects raise our senses. Its more poetic but that's where the kernel for this—still it wasn't called "Cowboys and Indians" and I came back and I wrote this grant. And I think it's, in some cases, Iris would say it was my downfall because I became obsessive. What I had to do, I had one of those little Macs with a little thing about that big.

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AW:
Yeah the Happy Mac.

BL:
The Happy Mac. I think Bill Oliver had given it to me or something, but that was my computer and you had to get all this information into this big of a square. So I would just obsess, obsess, obsess, obsess late at night, late at night. Iris would, I remember, come in "Are going to come to bed?", "No I got to do this, I got to do this." I was driven and I used grants that I'd go down to granting department there at the city and I'd get all the grants that were successful and all the grants that didn't work. Why was this successful? Why didn't this work? What were there—

AW:
So was this your first experience at writing grants?

BL:
Yeah.

AW:
Did you know anyone else who had written them?

BL:
Only this guy Will Taylor and I had his grant that he won, that was successful. Why was his successful? Why was this one or read what the peer panel said about these. So I kind of educated myself. Basically, you tell them what they want to hear, and also the mission can help—I mean, there was all these buzz words. "Youth at risk," education was big. All that kind of stuff and so you had to incorporate that stuff in sort of a poetical exciting way into a small and all these different. And so I had to do it and so we didn't even have the band—I'm getting chilly. I don't know about you guys [slides door] but I'm sitting over here starting to shiver. Let me get a little [walks away from recorder]—so we lived over in Barton Hills at the time. [Long Pause] And we used to get a sick cats. My cats in there. I hope he doesn't pee on my stuff. But we were living over in Barton Hills and so I wrote the grant, and so the peer panel, these people that are on this arts commission have to come and they have to do a site visit. We had no gigs, so I got John and we had a party at our house.

AW:
John?

BL:
John Inman and Iris made Indian tea and stuff and we invited these three members of the Arts Commission to our house because they had to do a site visit. And I had these "Mahatma Gandhi and Sitting Bull", "Cowboys and Indians" and Reed and I had written a song called "I Believe It." It's on that record and we had maybe four, five, six songs including [Sings] "Love is real not fade away." Because I knew it worked in India. It was the stuff that kind of worked there. And we had this part just like we're sitting around here, and John and I played them with me talking and explaining. And this is what you'll hear; Tablo [makes noises with mouth] I was making sounds with my—and we got funded. They said "This is great." So that was in 1995. I've been funded every year since, so you would think that it would have been further developed to the heights but it's still, from the initial presentation and the working on it and all that stuff. It has developed, it has developed, but it's still basically the same. We haven't taken it into any major different directions.

AW:
Does it need to be taken in different directions?

BL:
Well the way that we have taken it—I say that but it has developed because Oliver doing that thing, which you thought was fantastic. Oliver comes out and he does an Indian folk song. Indian Country song. He plays that drum and you should have seen him today, Iris. I put the cowboy hat on and he walks out into the audience and Anu is out there dancing and people are—so its effective.

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AW:
It was effective. Can we stop for just a moment and get Iris to talk about why you were in India in the first place? Because I know that Bob came to India because you were there. You'd gone there. Would you talk about that just a little bit if you don't mind? Seems terribly interesting to me.

IL:
Well, I first went there when I was about twenty-one and I stayed three months and then I just sort of fell in love with India [inaudible 00:51:49].

AW:
But why did you go when you were twenty-one? Were you interested already or did you just have to go?

IL:
Yeah I was interested. I was interested in the philosophies and all of that, and I was just really fed up with life here and I wanted to see something more. I don't know how I found myself over there, but—

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AW:
Yeah and why India as opposed to Tibet or—

IL:
Well I was really drawn to India. That had more to do with just personal experiences and dreams and things that I just felt pulled there. So, I went there and then when I came back I just didn't feel the same about anything anymore. Just such a different culture and it just affected me in such a deep way. I couldn't—

AW:
So it was transformational?

IL:
Yeah for me. For me it really was. It was like finally coming home. Because I didn't know what I was really searching for for a long time. And so I—

AW:
But you don't have any family history? Any genetics?

IL:
No

BL:
Not in this life. [Laughter]

IL:
Not in this life. I just remember arriving at the airport—

BL:
[Gets up] Excuse me, I'll be right back. [Leaves room]

IL:
--And just the smells and stepping out of the plane there was—you had to get out on the runway to walk to the building back then. And just the first thing, that first breath of air; it was incredible because I felt like [breathes sigh of relief] oh finally. Oh my gosh. Of course. It was just so familiar but I wasn't really having conscious thoughts. It was just this incredible reaction to it, and so I was only going to stay about a month and I ended up staying three, because I wanted more time to soak everything in. Attended some concerts and I was really attracted to the traditional south Indian dancing and all of that and singing. [BL returns] But anyway, I don't remember why I had to come back. I guess I just thought I had to come back at some point. I guess it was my parents. But anyway it just never left me. I just kept wanting to go back.

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AW:
Ok so when this happened it was before you and Bob were married right?

IL:
Yes.

BL:
But we knew each other.

IL:
But I knew him.

AW:
Where did you grow up Iris?

IL:
When I was over there I was thinking "Oh I'll never see that guy again."

BL:
But the thing is, what I remember is this; at the Armadillo World Headquarters, Halloween night, she walks up to me and her face in painted like a cat.

IL:
It wasn't a cat. It was actually just all these strange designs which really struck because when I saw the kathikali players in India I was like, you know they're all painted like that and it was almost like I had some intuitive feeling to paint my face that way.

AW:
Did you grow up in Texas?

IL:
Yes. Irving, Texas. Couldn't wait to get out.

AW:
Long way from India.

IL:
Yeah, I was born in L.A. and I was raised in Irving and then came to Austin and started going to U.T.

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BL:
And she came up to me on Halloween night and said "I'm leaving for India in the morning."

IL:
I didn't exactly say that [AW Laughs]

BL:
--And disappeared into the crowd and I went, "Wow."

IL:
No I didn't exactly say that, right away, did I?

BL:
Well in any case she sure went.

IL:
I thought I said—anyway yeah maybe I did. I know that I said I was leaving and I didn't give any explanation because I felt this incredible magnetic—it was just like, you're going to do this; I took all my student loan. I took everything I had and just said, "That's it."

AW:
That's a big step.

IL:
Yeah, it was huge and I was really kind of terrified right before I got down into Bombay, I was like, "Oh my God." But you know because it's a huge—anyway I had a really good experience there. It was very—it felt real familiar. Really familiar. Just like a flash back, I was remembering when I was in my childhood that I'd always sneak into the kitchen and my mother hardly ever made rice but whenever she did, she'd leave some in the pot and when everybody was gone I would sneak in there and make little balls of rice and eat them in secret. Later I felt "Why was I always doing that?" Didn't want anyone to see me. Well then when I got to India that's how they were eating. They did the rice and make it into a ball and you eat it with your hands and your dip it in the curry and all and eat it all. So anyway all these things were sort of flashing through my mind. "Is this what I was always looking for?"

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AW:
But now, I heard y'all mention in the sixties, I was listening to vinyl albums by Robby Shankar, we were listening to it. Because we'd heard of him because of George Harrison. And we listened to a lot of that for a while but yours was something completely different. It wasn't listening to The Beatles or Robby Shankar. It was—

IL:
Well I listened to all of that but I was reading a lot of Zen Buddhism and I was just looking at different philosophies and then I attended a class at UT. I didn't really attend it. I just visited a class one day at UT by Roger Rawl he was a famous writer. He's gotten all sort of awards. Indo-American awards for writing and he was giving a class in Mahayana Buddhism. It wasn't even about what he talked about. I just had this feeling when I came into that classroom that was like "Yeah, what is that? What feels so attractive here?" So I kind of found out about a place I could visit through him. Because I didn't want to just be a tourist and it was south and that's where I had that weird feeling. It was just so normal. It felt so normal. It's such a different—it was like being on another planet after being in Irving and Austin and settling here in South India in the rainforest in a village near a river, and everything—

AW:
So you weren't staying in Bombay.

IL:
Oh no I went south to Karala. I went to stay in Karala and then I went to a village in Karala.

BL:
Real rich musical tradition as well.

IL:
Yeah, everything, all the real Indian traditions are kept up in the south more because they're not as westernized. They've always kind of resisted all that more, and now I'm sure they're getting more westernized but I can look. They were keeping out the great ethics were actually enacted out and danced in a mime dance called Kavakli which was a really ancient dance—

BL:
You've seen the pictures probably.

IL:
And it costumes and the story told and showed with expressions and midras.

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BL:
Incredible music.

IL:
And yeah the music. I remember the first time I saw it, it's an all-night thing. I found myself weeping during parts of the concert but not knowing why, because I didn't understand what they were singing. But then later I found out what the story was and why It was it so touching even if you don't know the language. That actors were so incredible. They're very stylized, it was all very stylized, but very deep meanings. But there were mayana and the Mahabharata, you know, those things, the epics. They take those stories and act them out. The art is really a high thing there. It's an offer to the Gods. It's never like, "Oh here, I'm going to get up and entertain you." There's always the offering to some God.

BL:
Yeah and that's a big difference. "I'm not up here to entertain you," but I mean when they walk on the stage—

IL:
It's a worship. Their dancing is worshipping. Their dancing is a worship. Their performance.

BL:
It's a beautiful thing to see them, the musicians the way—like if the actor comes on stage and you're the musician and you're standing there holding the instrument. The guys coming up there coming like this. [Demonstrates] Taking it in, and even before that walk up to the stage, like this is the stage. It's this.

IL:
Yeah and they're honoring each thing about it.

BL:
And they take it and it's so catching. You know to see that it's like tuning the room. I heard it described one time that when a guy was tuning his veena, not only is he tuning his instrument but he's tuning the room. You know it's those long tuning things. [hums tone] It's just a different vibe with their music.

AW:
Kind of like here where you go in and there are like three different sports games on TV.

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IL:
No there it's so serious. Those people who attended those concerts, all that Kathakali it was like a big experience for them. I mean, their kids would go sleep on the blankets. It was an event. It was like a great thing to be able to attend that. Any musical concert too. I actually took Kathakali. I was so completely blown away by it that I wanted to learn it, so I started learning, and for about two months I was learning form a teacher, and that's where I learned that it was an offering. That whatever you're doing, it's not about you. It's an offering to the higher thing. It was so hard to work in. It's that kind of training. You usually don't start doing that when you're twenty one, you start when you're ten because you have to get your joints and muscles in certain ways and you have to be extremely strong.

BL:
And it's the fact that we were able to be in a society where that was available. Those kind of arts and that kind of acceptance of us—

AW:
That was going to be my next question. How did they accept you? They probably don't see too many people like you coming through really like that.

IL:
No, no. I don't know how. I don't know why. I just asked, "Can I study?" And it's like this man was just so open and he was, "Yes." And he already after a few lessons, he wanted me to tour

with a woman who'd been studying there—a young woman from Russia who had been studying there for a while and I was just flabbergasted. I thought. How can I? And after sometime you'll be able to do that. He was really wanting me to totally take it up.

BL:
There are Anglos there.

IL:
It was so physically painful. The practicing. The physical movements were the way you have to stand, the way you have to do certain things, and I was just—you have to get up and four o'clock in the morning. Put oil all over your body to loosen all your muscles up so you could stand the kind of strain you're going to go through and just do those same steps over and over and over and this and that. And then sometimes it was just facial expressions, concentrate on that for a while. And practice it, and practice it, and practice it, because certain expressions meant anger, certain expressions were love, certain were sadness. It was like all the human emotions had to be portrayed only with your face. And, of course, there would be music somewhere telling the story but you had to show. You had to act it. You had to not only do the dance but act it. So anyway, I was in acting when I was younger, so it all felt so exciting and natural to me but it became so exhausting. And I just wasn't prepared for that rigorous training, and I had to stop because I was just in too much pain all the time. And I was never getting any sleep or anything. But anyway, they are very open to teach people the tradition because they don't want it to die out and especially if a foreigner's interested. Wow.

BL:
There is a school there—

IL:
And my younger son studied it for years. Kathakali. And he was good. But he left it because there weren't enough boys in the class and that made his only gotten now. That made him embarrassed.

BL:
And the local villagers were really—there's Americans, French, Israeli, Argentina. There's some people that are in this certain little area that are all there for the culture and there's a school there that people come from France to study these arts and—

IL:
Yeah there was a school a few minutes away from where I was.

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BL:
Yeah so there was a lot of that going on it seems. I just remember when you say how they think about us. Once, I was leaving, and you give your clothes to a guy to go wash. He's called a Dhobi. And he takes them off and then he washes the clothes and he's supposed to bring them back. Well he's invariably late. He didn't bring it back. I didn't have anything to go back with. And I'm going, "You've got to find this guy." He goes [in an accent] "I will tell him. I will tell him. No problem." And this is just this guy at the gate and he goes, "I will find him." And I go, "But how are you going to tell him who it is?" and he goes "Oh I just simply tell him its particaron." I say "What?" "Particaron. Long singing man." [Laughter] And so that was my name in the village. Particaron.

IL
And he was like—boy he got some looks you know with his coloring and all. So anyway my children, after we married, I wanted to take Tucker there and he was about a year old. And then, he loved it and then when my second son was born we both went there. And then they were always saying "Well when are we going back there? I mean, this is ok, but when are we going to go back?"

BL:
Back to India.

IL
So they were so drawn to it themselves. They loved all the culture. And there were no video games or TV or anything. They just read books, and played and went to the river and were pretty much homeschooled and attended these concerts. That had a big impact on their lives. Big impact.

AW:
Oh, I can imagine.

IL:
Huge, really beautiful cultural things they were able to see and experience and surround them.

AW:
How do the Indian people with whom you work in "Cowboys and Indians," how do they look at this music and what you're doing? Is this just a gig for them or do they see the importance of blending the culture?

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BL:
I think, no they definitely see and they do it themselves. I mean both Oliver Rajmani on tabla, you know he's a very good, very good musician in his own right. Singer, player, he's done a lot of fusion. I sang "Forever Young" on his—we did a duet of "Forever Young" on his record that's just surrounded by all this wild Indian music and gypsy sounding stuff. So they definitely—they see it and Anu of course, it's new for her because she was just a bharatanatyam dancer, but the fact that she is interpreted some of the lyrics with this style of dance. I think there's a very fine line that you don't want to cross, and I hope that I haven't crossed it. And I wonder sometimes am—I because the song—it's not a [long pause] it's just you don't want to—my son for instance, Tucker. When I ask him, you know he's in India now. He's taken up playing the veena and I said "Well I'm going to try and make this record. I don't know if I'm going to get much done on it but you know it's a shame you're not here." and he goes "Yeah I'd really like to play." And I said "Well I can email you the files and you can put some veena on it." and he goes "No, no I'm not going to be playing veena on it" And he's already seen that it's too pure of a thing for him to be—especially not being as proficient as he would want to be, he's not going to do anything just because I said "Oh, it just can be evocative." You will just hear those sounds and it's so great and I've heard him play anyway. I know he can play to get what I would think and probably 99 percent of the people would think sounded fantastic, but because it's so close to him and he doesn't want to offend his teacher, or that whole culture maybe, he said "No, I won't play the veena. Get me a guitar. I'll do that."

AW:
Well, the other fine line that you walk and I think, well, is the fine line between parody and sincerity. You know, you could be parodying Western music, Buddy Holly or the other parts of the Bo Diddley beat. On the other hand, you could be parodying the Indian—For instance, when Oliver puts on the hat and plays the drums—that could be a vaudeville act—

BL:
A cheap trick.

AW:
—instead of what it turns out to be when you see it in person like we did today. It wasn't like that at all, but that's got to be a very delicate line to tip-toe up to.

BL:
It's true, but in Oliver's own case, one of the reasons I put the cowboy hat on him and I didn't get a chance to tell him because there's not a bass guitar in the room, but one of the Cowboys and Indians shows we did, he had always said "My dad, my father—" he comes from a gypsy family. This tribe that he is from ended up being the Romani gypsies and all that good stuff. They originally came from India. So, his father loved Johnny Cash and he goes, "If you go to

America, you need to play bass in a country band." So, one of the shows we did, I had my bass and I said, "Now we're going to have Oliver do it and his father's going to want to see him and we're going to video tape it." So he sang. I taught him the second verse and the bass part and we did "Ring of Fire." [Singing] "Love is a burning thing," [laughs] and Oliver sang it and put the cowboy hat on. Was that a parody? It was real to him.

AW:
No, I don't mean to say that it was a parody. I'm just saying that it could very well be—someone could take the same idea, "Oh yeah, this will be fun," and the fun is, it's a parody. It's taking lightly rather than taking seriously, but that's not what I saw today. I mean, even when you went the outrageous thing of him having the hat on and playing the drum was not a parody. The other thing is you could look at the kids. They didn't take it as a parody. I mean, if kids understand parody, they would know when to laugh and when not to. They were just digging it. So, how do you do that? What's the process you go by or that you let guide you? Or even in your case, Iris, learning the dance could also be "I want to do this because I want to go back and do Western dance differently?"

IL:
No, no, I didn't feel that at all. I just thought that the art was so—I was just so taken with it. It was such a deep art. I'd never seen anything like it anywhere in the world. You see actors here acting out in musicals and all that, but I'd never seen such a deep, moving, transforming kind of—

BL:
It's a spiritual kind of thing

IL:
--experience from watching and just following these expressions of these actors. They were really becoming these characters. They weren't just, I'm a good actor—

BL:
And the characters are Krishna, Rahma, all the epic—

IL:
Which I wasn't even familiar with. Even as I watched it, I thought "What is this?" As I read later, I was like "Oh," that's what they were bringing to the people. They were bringing it to the common people. For a long, long time immemorial, you know long, long ago when it was first started, was so that the ones who could read the scriptures, they could come and see it performed and get that richness of a culture and the tale and the myth and all that.

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BL:
One of the tours I did—

IL:
It was so fascinating, I mean it was just something—you couldn't even really describe it to anyone. I just wanted to try to do it. I wanted to feel what it felt like to do those steps and be that person and make that expression. It was an experience for me. It was like "I'm going to learn this and I'll go back and show this funny stuff to people." I, at one point, imagined showing it as what it is, but thinking "How can anyone here understand it?" But later I realized that troupes had come here before. So it wasn't that same kind of—I didn't want a fusion anything. I was just really relating to the culture. I really related to it, I didn't know why.

BL:
See, in that case, like for an example, this Mahabharata—which is the longest epic ever written in the history of the world and ten times longer than The Illiad and The Odyssey—and it was either the Rhamayana or the Mahabharata that was shown on television? Which one first? Rhamayana?

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IL:
Mahabharata.

BL:
Oh, I'm sorry, Mahabharata. So it was shown once a week. There's one television channel, nine hundred million people doing Dharsha, all Hindi. They started showing this and it was the culture of India in this thing and it was a serial. "They're dressed in all the wild costumes!" Just this incredible thing and they're speaking Hindi!

IL:
Good actors—

BL:
Great actors. The whole country would shut down at two o' clock on Sunday afternoon or whenever it was on. The whole country. You'd see lines of people in shops looking over their things, looking at anybody who had a television set. This was really important to their whole society.

IL:
It's their whole basis of their spiritual culture is all those stories, so-called stories that they say aren't just stories. Everything was built on that, so it's really their whole culture. That's what makes them stand out from anyone in the world. Their culture is the spiritual. That's what they

want to keep going. It's not that you find everyone being a spiritual person over there, but they want you to know—

AW:
Well, it's like asking many Native American people—not all, but many Native American people—about their religion and they look at you quizzically because they don't have a religion. They have a life that's a religion the way it is. What we would call a "religion" is a part of it. Over here, we have different boxes—we all know that story. So then, if you feel that spiritually about that, how do you this blending, this connection—not blending necessarily—but how do you go about that connection?

BL:
Well I think that when it went—because I saw that it worked in India and that no one that I played with—I mean, I was in Pakistan. A man was playing a sarangi—forty string bowed instrument. Couldn't speak a word of English, I couldn't speak Urdu and we did an Islamic Heritage Folk Life Center workshop. So I played a couple of songs, he plays, and we play together. He just said "We are speaking a universal language here. We are brothers." That kind of thing. So when I saw that that was accepted by the most staunch of the—and all these Indian musicians, they're always like "Okay, this is cool." I'm not feeling that this guy is— that's the thing; I had utmost respect for their music and it wasn't me like—I just wanted to be part of it. It's like that thing, the feeling that's engendered by those sounds is something I wanted part of my—at least for the big part of this "Cowboys and Indians" thing. I don't know that much about Indian music myself. One time I applied for a grant and it was like "He doesn't know anything about the background of Indian music. We don't know why he's doing that," but I do know about the background of it, which is sort of a spiritual background, I think, but I'm not doing what Tucker did, or is doing.

IL:
Not studying classical.

BL:
And that's doing classical.

IL:
However, we did take a few singing lessons.

BL:
Took some singing lessons and I took some drum lessons on this drum—

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AW:
Did you learn to ululate over your lessons or any of that?

BL:
What do you mean?

AW:
The [high pitched] Oo.

BL:
No. "Ululate?" Is that what it's called?

AW:
Yeah, ululation. That's what that's called.

BL:
The women all do that with the marriages and the big, auspicious occasions.

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AW:
Yeah, Native American tribes, a number of them do that as well. It appears in a lot of cultures around the world.

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IL:
Yeah. We were just learning the scales, you know, like do-re-mi in Sari Gama and inaudible 01:20:52] and so we were just learning that scale and all these exercises. It was really fun.

BL:
Should've done more and I always think I'm going to do more and I always think I'm going to go back and really try to do it and try to study more. I just love the sound and I think that I'm enough—I'm respectful of it enough that it hasn't been a problem with most people that see me.

IL:
You know, I just think that what I remember about the music—I'm not a musician, but I feel like I am inside, and what I remember is it goes into you. You're there and you hear it and it just—it goes into you, it gives you another perspective and enriches your feelings about music. You hear these unusual tones and you can't help but absorb some of that. You love it because you get certain feelings from listening to it. I always feel that it touched him so deeply that it came out in his music. When he was trying to bring the two together, there was something more than just "Oh, I want something to sound a little Indian." It was more from the feeling, something from the heart.

AW:
Yeah, because the other observation that I make especially hearing it live is that it doesn't sound Indian at all. Your music still sounds like your music and the Indian music still sounds like the Indian music, yet there's still a connection. Yet my question to you would be—following up on that is—Is it important that you be classically trained in either side to understand the connection?

BL:
No, but I think that it would be good if I knew how to play one of those instruments myself and could just maybe really rip it off. One of the big differences is these people are playing mainly unity, mainly one note. It's a drone. They're not doing chord changes, and so this music is troubadour based, but it's with accents on that—because I do a lot of that open E and droning thing, especially on "Cowboys and Indians" and the "Mungalom Song"—it's sort of an Indian scale that's naturally built in the chord the way I play it. It's like, Mungalom—

AW:
Is that your song?

BL:
Mungalom? No, that's actually Ravi Shankar.

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AW:
So it's a traditional song?

BL:
It's a traditional song, but I believe he arranged it and—

AW:
I thought when you were introducing it today that it was a traditional song. But then you had to adapt it to use guitar—

BL:
Yeah, we were definitely adapting it. But in that case, we're just playing one—I mean it's all unity. It's just one chord, the whole song.

IL:
Yeah, but there's all this—what about the improvisational thing that they do in India. You know, you watch a concert and they don't—they just improvise and they go to all sorts of heights.

BL:
But they're never varying from the root. It's always a drone.

IL:
Well, the drone is there, but there's more than that.

BL:
What I'm saying is if you—of course there's more than that.

IL:
There's so much improvisation and free flow and up and down and around.

BL:
One of the things about South Indian music that has opened up a lot because they were very improvisational and the North Indian, Ravi Shankar writes about in his book, that when he heard the Kharnanic players play, they're much freer. They're so much more improvisational.

AW:
The ragas are—

BL:
The ragas are real prescribed, but then there's a part where they can—and it's kind of like—it used to never be that way. He was studying the tradition where it had to be just exactly like this. You could play the fire out of it, but then when he said he heard—

AW:
Like classical music in the West. Mozart really—therefore—

BL:
You got to play it.

AW:
Play it that that way, too.

BL:
But they changed. They became more improvisational. They have a part. They always go back to the head and stuff. I just mean that the reason it sounds like, like you said, my music, even though it sounds like Indian stuff, is because we have a lot of chord changes. I don't have that kind of voice either, and I'm not singing. I'm singing troubadour-based sort of melodies.

AW:
I'm saying that as a compliment, not as a—because you're not doing what your son is afraid of doing, which is letting one corrupt the other. What I hear you doing is letting one add to the other.

BL:
And Tucker is not one—as absolutely 1000 percent for it when he's on a guitar. Some of the best shows we did were me and Tucker through all these countries.

AW:
I know what you mean because I know when I'm recording one of my projects, I could play enough mandolin to do some chops. But what's the point? Why not get a real mandolin player who understands what they're doing? So I know what you're saying. I was just very impressed with how—to me it's a very delicate line to walk, not only the parody versus the sincerity, but also how does one keep from trying to become the other yet still make the marriage. So, you talked to me a little bit the other day about how the music, when you're touring in the Far East and the Mid-East, how the music affected your audiences. Would you talk about that a little bit again and then let's talk about how it affects audiences over here. Because, again, last night, we were sitting in a bar of the River City Grill and I'm sure there was at least one redneck in the audience, and I was so struck this morning by noticing that you're doing some the same things and it's having the same effects on the kids as it did on the bar crowd.

BL:
Well, you know, when I first did the tours, I didn't have those songs the "Cowboys and Indians" and I remember John Inmon and I went to India and we did. Right off the get-go, I saw that if we could put them in the scene—because I was trying to bring the West to them. If I could put them in the scene of that young cowboy that's out there on the prairie and he's so sad and lonely and they can all relate and something happens and the cobra jumps up and bites him right between the eyes and he falls down there in the dust and his life is just oozing away. As you're telling them the story, they can hear you saying that and pretty soon it's real. The way they saw it, which was with innocent ears, they were like going, "That poor cowboy! Why couldn't you bring him home?" So it affected them like that because they would think that—it just brought that—if there was anything that these audiences were interested in, it was the West. Cowboys and Indians, they knew that. "What's that like? Tell me stories about that," and they'd never heard of Willie Nelson and Hank Williams or any of those people, never heard of any of that music. The big one was Jim Reeves; I might have touched on that the other day.

AW:
But they had an idea of the West and the cowboy?

BL:
Yeah, they did. Everybody saw Cowboys and Indians and they maybe even knew who Roy Rogers was even there. There was something about that American cultural identity with Cowboys and Indians that they could kind of relate to somehow.

AW:
So you had an audience who was already, in some ways, ready for what you do because they had an interest in that. I would suspect that there's not the same degree of interest here about India.

BL:
No.

AW:
So how do you get this audience to understand about "Cowboys and Indians?"

BL:
Well, when I say "No," I think I spoke out of turn there. I think there is. If you go down to the Indian Classical Music Society and one of these singers or sitarists comes to town, the place is packed and there's a lot of Anglos there as well wanting to listen to it. I think I know what you mean and—

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AW:
—because you were going to places in India or Pakistan that are the equivalent of Lubbock. If you take Indian music to Lubbock, it's different than taking it to Austin, right?

BL:
Absolutely.

AW:
So how do you reach the—

BL:
Well, you saw like last night when they hear that. They first thing I do is this guy John Greenberg comes up to me, he's that guitar player and they had played and he goes, "Now, if you call me up to play, I want to play on 'Original Spirit' with you. You play a few songs, but I want to play 'Original Spirit' with you," and I go, "You know, John, unless you want to start right off the get-go because that song just locks me into a groove. It's my sound check groove song." I can get the crowd, I can have them tapping their feet. I can start pulling them in on that song right off the bat because it's somewhat—it's saying something different than they normally hear. "'Original Spirit,' what does it mean?" I don't know what they think of the song, but I know I

usually start getting them in and then the second song I usually do is "Cowboys and Indians" and I have them going that "Ooooh" just like today. They're all singing. So once they're singing, we're becoming more than just a musician playing for an audience, they're a part of the show too. They sang the whole time last night, didn't they, on those choruses?

IL:
I can't believe that. I wish I'd seen that.

AW:
And I was sitting back there in the back looking at this crowd thinking, "These people on another night of the week would've had on bowling shirts, you know?" They were there singing "Ooooh"; I was very impressed. [Laughter]

BL:
I know and they do and that's the thing. These people—almost any audience—

AW:
These are the same people that wouldn't do "Kumbaya" in a sing-along, but they were doing "Original Spirit."

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IL:
Well, I think they feel something, you know. It's just like in India they felt something when he sang about the poor cowboy "Don't Bury Me on the Lone Prairie" There's some common human element. There's something that relates to that emotion that comes up, and they find themselves singing. They don't even know why.

AW:
So, if I'm correct in hearing you—or if I'm hearing you correctly, the way that you reach this audience is by taking those songs that you know pull them in and because if you started some other way, because they're not sitting out there waiting to hear about—

BL:
They don't know who I am. I goaded every audience almost. There were some people that had been there the time before.

AW:
But they were mainly the fans of Walt and John, weren't they?

BL:
Well, there were some people over there that had come the time before. A guy came up to me and just said—after the show, there were some people who came up. For the most part, nobody's ever heard me and I've got to do something immediately and I found that "Original Spirit" at least gets their attention and by the time I do "Cowboys and Indians," they go "This is different." I'm singing this thing and then I start telling stories and if I can keep communicating, some people go "When do you ever take a breath?" Maybe I do that too much, but I feel—you know when you do those shows and they're just sitting there listening to them—I feel I have to do something; I can't be like Rambling Jack. Jack is the master of silence in another way. Have you ever seen him do the—He's telling a story and he's continuing this story and talking about this and he decides to tune his guitar and he's going to reach for that glass again and he might get it to there and he puts it back down and pretty soon, I'm totally obsessed! When is he going to drink it? When is he going to drink it? Through a couple of songs, he finally takes a—

AW:
Yeah, I've watched Jack tune many a time and he starts off with a guitar that's in tune. The tuning is just part of a routine, and so is the changing capos fifteen times. But you're right, they're all props. The other thing was that you did a rap with Chaucer and here's the same bowling shirt audience digging the Chaucer.

BL:
Because they probably had their misunderstanding for English who drummed it in. I've had so many people that they'll go [gestures] and they start looking at their spouse and going [rapping] and they're remembering it to.

IL:
Some of them had to learn it.

BL:
Some of them had to learn it.

AW:
I didn't have to until college. I did have this wonderful English teacher at Monterey who introduced me to the Rubaiyat. Here's a great circle of life story: some years back, I was at a used book store, which is one of my favorite sins is to buy used book. I need to be in a twelve-step program because I've got so many used books. But I was in there, in the used book store in Lubbock and I find this really nice copy of one of the better translations of The Rubaiyat and I open it and it had been hers, my English teacher. I had to buy it; I didn't even look at the price. It was very amazing. It was the copy of the woman who taught me. It was my first real

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transformational experience with poetry. It was what turned me into a person interested in poetry was the Rubaiyat. Isn't that odd? Because it's such an odd kind of poetry.

IL:
Not really. That was one of the first things I read when I was a child. My mother, she liked that book and she said "Have you ever read this?" I picked it up. It really kind of impressed me. I thought "Who is this?" then I never looked again.

AW:
I'd never seen it and then, of course, as part of the age when you're that age, "A loaf bread, a jug of wine, and thou," and you're saying "Whoa, I get that." Anyway, here they are understanding that in some way and it was very interesting to watch.

BL:
Yeah, well of course they've never hear any—a lot of them have never heard of Middle English, so I'm sure it's an oddity for them, but they—when I do [speaks in Middle English] I always do this [gestures], so they laugh at that. And then my other thing—it's cheap tricks—but I go, "In sondre couth, in sondre loundes…In sondre couth, in sondre loundes, yo!"

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AW:
That brought down the house last night.

IL:
Yeah, I've seen him do that. It was hilarious.

BL:
People always come up to me and go "Is that on that record? I've got to get a copy." I've got to cut it.

IL:
You've got to cut that! It's too fun to miss.

AW:
But it's a YouTube video. It will never work on record. I don't think the way it works live—because it needs the Bob Livingston experience in person.

BL:
We'll see all those things that come up and you can do in a performance, you know. That just came up because I learned it and I knew it, so why not try it? And that other poem that I did—I didn't do it last night—but I came out of Texas Bragg's "Hell in Texas," it's a great one. I did

that all in the Northeast and you can bring them "This is how hot it is. You guys are so lucky." So when I do the show now—"Cowboys and Indians" is definitely one thing. I do a lot of the same songs, but in my solo show, I can still do those songs, but I can do songs like—"Original Spirit" I don't really do in the Cowboys and Indians show. I should, but I don't do it that much and stuff like "Raining for So Long" I don't do in the Cowboys and Indians show.

IL:
It doesn't really fit.

BL:
Hm?

IL:
It doesn't really fit.

BL:
No.

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AW:
Where do you want to take Cowboys and Indians?

BL:
Just recently—

IL:
To Broadway.

BL:
To Broadway. Recently, Dave Stakely, who is the artistic director of the Zachary Scott Theatre, about a year and a half ago came to see the "Cowboys and Indians" show at the Continental Club. We played the Continental Club, of all places. Somehow or another, one of the members of his board, Diana Zuniga said, "You need to go see these guys." So he did, and he said, "I love this and I would like to maybe present it and work on it as being a play." So Bobby and I had written those two original songs and so we got together, we wrote some new songs, and have written basically the first act of this play, A Cowboy Goes to India. It's sort of magical, it starts really crazy. Since we turned it in to him, he has not read it, this guy Dave Stakely. He read the first draft and he said "Yeah, continue with it." So when I got even further, he said "We're just so busy, I can't read it." But I'm hoping that I can get his interest peaked again and he can at least give me some notes and say "I think you're on-track here. I don't think you're on-track on that." Because, that guy is—I don't think you've ever seen anything he's done.

AW:
No. Now, are we talking about the Scott Theater in Fort Worth?

BL:
Zachary Scott Theatre here in Austin. He is fantastically—you know, he did an adaptation of "Jesus Christ Superstar" that's all in Spanish, Chicano, Chicano in the Barrio. It was the best thing I've ever seen. He's done a lot of good plays. He's real sharp and he's revolutionized Austin theater, sort of. So I've got a good connection with him; it's just getting him to have the time. It's hard getting anything done, so I want to do that. I'd like to get to actually do the play, but I'd also—the pieces of the puzzle are all there for "Cowboys and Indians," not just in Texas, but all over in other schools like this. For one thing, we haven't gone into many showcases, because that's how I was reading last night the way so many people did it. They just hounded those folks' showcases for years and then they got gigs.

AW:
How do Indians in America react to—

BL:
They like it; it's positive. We just played that show in Dallas—

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AW:
You and I've been talking about trying to getting it to Lubbock. We have a ton of Indian people in Lubbock.

BL:
I don't know how many kids were in the second show, but the first show today, there were tons of them.

AW:
They're all doctors.

BL:
Yeah, I know it; Doctors, folks, patrons of the arts. A lot of these people, too, want their kids to have an appreciation of their own culture and they use us—

AW:
Yeah, because their kids speak mall-talk; They don't speak Hindi or anything else. They have a little differ complexion, but they're as much ordinary kids as the ones sitting next to them with freckles, so I can see where that would be an interest.

BL:
Yeah, they want us then to say—just like today. The first show especially, there was tons Indian kids in the audience and two or three of them were Anu's students. They come to our—

AW:
Did you get to talk to them afterwards? Did you detect any difference in the way they approach this?

BL:
What do you mean?

AW:
The kids, the performance, did you have a different bond with them in the performance because they were of Indian descent?

BL:
I always have a bond with anyone from India. I'll go out of my way to—you're driving down the road and you'll see a woman and she's wearing a Sari and walking and you'll go "Oh, I wonder where she's from? She looks like she could be from—" if there's somebody in a store or there's some kid that is obviously Indian with an Indian mother and the kid is going, "Like really, ma?" and we'll just go, "Oh, isn't that a shame that she's losing her culture?"

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AW:
Of course, our kids all lose our culture for a time. They have to come back. [Laughs]

BL:
I know, but the kids will be really excited to let their parents know that that kind of thing happened.

AW:
Well, I wasn't there to watch the older kids during this part, but I was there for the whole show for the younger kids doing this, they just instantly—when Anu was dong that thing where it [makes sound] I was standing in the back of the room and it was fun to watch. I don't know if the older kids were that—

BL:
Oh, the olders were even more demonstrative. The one thing that Anu did in the first one that I wished we'd gotten a part in the second one was when—she did this really cool way that she presented it. She said, "Everybody knows how a fairy tale starts, right?" and they go "Once upon a time," and she goes "Once upon a time," and everybody went [shivers] and she goes "A

princess was going—" and the kids—and she kind of told this really kind of quick little fairy tale and all the kids were doing this thing. By the time she got to the Sanskrit, she was saying Ognian and then we said "Try to follow along during the song." We didn't tell them to do it the second time. They were even more demonstrative. Everybody was doing fire and bhudakahm, the waves. It's really cool. We've got some really good video of that, all this little sea of hands. So it's nice to be able to present. What a guy wrote for me, the head director of the—when I first started getting all these grants—That's another thing I've been sort of remiss about because I do a template now, though the grant's still really difficult to kind of do because mainly budget—you know have to—every penny you're going to spend, you have to do an itemized why you're going to spend it and where it's going to come from. That's the hard part, but when I wrote the thing at first, it was all more idealized "How we're going to do it." I can't remember; I lost my train of thought talking about the budget. There's a point I wanted to make but, I can't remember what it was. The whole idea has changed, but it hasn't changed. We've been more like getting Mungalom in, getting Oliver's Song in, getting cowboys and cowgirls all over the world where Oliver sings the song. Those were changes we made when we did the Hobby. We did the Hobby Center in Houston. We were able to play eight shows and sort of get it straight. Paul Pearsee played with us; really miss him.

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AW:
Let me ask one more question and then let's take a break and come back and talk about the creative process. We'll need a break before we do that. Aside from the development of "Cowboys and Indians," does it lead you to other things? I know Bobby has his—hunter and trapper and mountain-man thing and is it leading you to other large projects like this?

BL:
Well, one would hope. I don't think that Cowboys and Indians itself—one of things I'm going to say is the puzzles are in place, but we haven't been able to really get out and do—

AW:
So you still have a lot more left to do?

BL:
There's a lot more left to do with this and mainly it's like—

AW:
It's not on automatic pilot by any stretch?

BL:
No, it's not on automatic pilot and a lot of stuff needs to happen. So much of it is up to me to get it together, but it's also—because I have these grants every year and if I use it wisely, there is

money in there that could be used for things like—I don't even know what this would mean but, further development whereas perhaps I could employ, as a consultant, a theatrical person to come in and, "Okay, we're going to do a laser fifty minutes here, and this is what you say and this is how you do it." A lot of it now is just whatever comes off the top of my head. We move it, we keep on going with it; it's not like any dead air or anything. But I just think that it could be more theatrical and just even for the schools and see what is it—one of the things we haven't sat down with—we get evaluations, but I haven't really sat down with teachers in a long time and go "What would you like to see?"

AW:
Yeah, or what information can I give you to do follow-up discussions or those kind of things.

BL:
And workshops. We've done a few of them, but it should be the rule. We have curriculum. The University of Texas did send it to them—further develop that curriculum. There was a woman there tonight, today from One World who was there as a representative of One World to see us, but also she's writing curriculum for their overall kid show. We're part of it. Whatever she meant, I don't know, but Oliver Rajmani is also sponsored in his own programs by One World. Anu used to be, but she opted out from One World. She has also shows she does in schools. There's just so much more I could be doing. For instance, I saw this—

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IL:
It could be seen a lot more.

BL:
Huh?

IL:
It could be seen a lot more. It's not seen enough.

BL:
Yeah, it could be seen a lot more.

IL:
I don't think he has enough venues to—

BL:
And even the organization—like one day, there's a children's entertainer. His name's Joe McDermott and he's in town. He plays for kids. He plays school shows, and we were playing a Cowboys and Indians show, and we were tearing down and it was the end of the day and here's

Joe McDermott just kind of coming to school and he's rolling this big suitcase down the hall. I just go "Hey, Joe, what's going on?" and he goes "Oh, CDs." And I go "What do you mean?" and he goes, "Oh yeah, at the beginning of the year, I send flyers home with all the kids to get ready for the Joe McDermott show. I get with the PTA and we have a fundraiser, and these CDs are fifteen dollars and the PTA gets five bucks, I get ten bucks, and I sell about 350 to each school."

IL:
That's really good.

AW:
[Laughs] yeah.

IL:
Why don't you start that?

BL:
I know it. I just don't have it to guide—

IL:
Go ahead and think of it, it's not like you—

BL:
He's got it as a business. I don't. That's the thing. Just tell me where to go and I'll come do the show, but all this other stuff. I had to be there last night, lug all that stuff in myself. The biggest mistake I made last night was I did that out there and then I had to come all the way back here to get my stuff and then immediately turn back around and go the other way. It was all in rush-hour traffic, so it's all that kind of stuff. I have to book it, play it.

AW:
I know as a solo performer if I could fire me as an agent, I would. [Laughs]

BL:
I know. [Laughs] I can have these spurts where I do it, and right now, it's one of those times. It's just so—

IL:
It would be good if you could sell.

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BL:
I'm at a really cross-roads right now in a lot of ways, and I have to creatively "We can end on this note and we can take it up," but I need to understand the creative process myself a little better. I need to write, finish up these songs I'm working on. I've got to find my new direction that I'm springing out to because I have to come up with a new album and I'm fixing to turn sixty and it's got to be relevant.

AW:
I just did.

BL:
You just did? When?

AW:
June.

BL:
Wow, happy birthday.

AW:
Thank you. I don't feel any different than I did at fifty-nine.

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BL:
I don't feel any different. That's not it. I'm just using it as—it's kind of a hard thing to me. I'm going "Sixty?" and I've got to have another record or something.

AW:
I got to tell you, forty didn't bother. Thirty didn't bother me. Fifty didn't bother me. The round numbers didn't. But I remember thirty-two, for one reason or another, was a tough year. It was just like one of those years in your forties, like forty-six or seven, it was like—I don't know—like, "How did that sneak up?"

IL:
Yeah, like "I don't want to have a birthday this year." That's how I felt when I was forty-seven. It's like, "Oh, please!"

BL:
Yeah, forty-seven is some daze.

IL:
I didn't like that one. I did not want that birthday.

AW:
Yeah, it was those sevens and eights. First of all, everyone thinks you're lying, that you're really older. Let me shut this tape off real quick.

[Pause in recording]

AW:
For this tape, this is Andy Wilkinson again. It's later on in the same afternoon. Talking to Bob Livingston at his home in Austin, the twenty-ninth of October. It's about the middle of the afternoon and we're going to be talking about Bob's art. And by that, I mean his creative process. We've been talking a lot so far about the process of your life, you know, what's happened when and where and with whom and how the events unfolded and so on. But, let me preface this by saying the first time I heard your music was when I was living in Lubbock as a cop, and I bought "Geronimo's Cadillac" right as it came out. And, there's Bob Livingston. I knew who you were because we were close in school years. I was at Monterey, you were at Lubbock High. I know we had mutual friends and so on. So, here's someone I know that's on a record album and I'm thinking "This is very cool," and I listen, and here is all this great music, some guy I'd never heard of before, Michael Martin Murphey, whom I just get to learn through that record. So, I began to pay attention and follow what you do. And, next I know you're in this "Lost Gonzo Band" and I hear a Jerry Jeff record and I'm in Colorado now and I see, "There's Bob Livingston again." [Laughter] So, I've been sort of a distant admirer for a long time. I was thinking last night and this morning, listening to—you're two different types of creativity. One is that you write and create and the other is the music that you interpret and you create through your interpretation. It's interesting to me that when I hear a song that you sing, if I didn't know who wrote it, I would think they were all your songs. Because, you make them into something that is yours even though it may not be the song that you actually wrote. I'd like for us, for the next however long you want to talk about it, to talk about those two kinds of things. About the art of interpreting, what do you do when you take another song, why do you take it, and what do you do to put your own stamp on it? Not that I necessarily think that you want to put your stamp on it but, how does it become a Bob Livingston song even though it's written by someone else? And then, how do you go about creating a song? When it's time to write a song, how do you know that's the time and so on and so on. And we can start with either one of these issues that you like.

BL:
Well, of course, I think my background around a church camp campfire really jumpstarted me as far as making a song mine. You know, you're struggling with your first chords, you're playing "Kumbaya" and people are singing and "Michael Row the Boat Ashore" and just mindless chord

over and over again. And you're learning, you're learning how to play it. But, I started singing, I realized I could carry at tune and so, I think that I've just really sung songs that I like. I've been a victim of mass marketing like anyone. I learned songs that I heard on the radio or the songs of my brother. And I always gave them my own twist because I never analyzed them like some people did. Some people listened to those things and played every lick. I'm playing Keith Richards' biography which is interesting. He was just analyzing those old Howlin' Wolf records and playing exactly the same lick. My brother did that to a certain extent and a lot of players did, that's the way they learned. But I just got the gist of the song and sometimes playing the wrong chords with the wrong words, but making it sort of my song. I think that, now—

AW:
Now, why did you belet to do something different than your brother or Keith Richards, who went and wanted to learn them exactly? Why was that important?

BL:
Probably laziness, you know? I would just say, "Well, I can play that song." I was able to play by ear so, G, E minor, C, and D seemed to make almost any song in the world work. Even though, if they were the wrong chords some time. I would probably play an E minor instead of—it was supposed to be something else. But, it sounded okay for me and so—and for whoever I was playing for, it was really a low expectations. It was owning your own expectations, I never felt like analyzing that song. The only reason I analyze a song was to try and write the words down. If I had to really learn it, I would stop and start it and stop and start it. Until sort of recently, I guess when I became a session guy, when I started playing with bass and playing with other people did I really have to think about how the song really went [laughter]. Because you can play it different. I was playing things different last night. I slaughtered a couple of songs pretty bad.

AW:
Which ones?

BL:
The new one I was doing, I sort of walked away and—

AW:
Of course, I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know that if it's new.

BL:
Yeah, I played the wrong progression. Walt was right there looking at me this close and it was making me nervous. I kept thinking, Okay. When a person writes a song, that's the thing with my own songs, I don't know what the creative process is. I don't know what I go through. Something

comes to me, I'm trying to make it more autobiographical, for this record at least. You know, trying to have it actually mean something rather than—like a song like "Cowboys and Indians," which is pretty contrived.

AW:
Okay, maybe the way to approach this is for you to tell me how—just go through what transpired to write that song, "Cowboys and Indians."

BL:
Well, I came to Bobby and I had the melody. I basically had [sings] "Some cowboys and Indians were riding cross the land." It changed to sands but—[hums melody] and I'm kind of singing the melody, and I'm saying I would want to write this song and we want to put in East and West.

AW:
So, did you set out to write the song on the idea or had the phrase and the melody come to you and you wanted to develop that?

BL:
The part [sings] "Cowboys and Indians" I had that progression and it's really almost just like something [hums] you know, almost? But it's those chords, it's a little different, but it's sort of those chords and I remember writing a song with Hubbard's once that I ripped off [sings] "Don't bring me down. Don't let me down." Whatever it is, John Lennon.

AW:
"Don't Bring Me Down" yeah.

BL:
"Don't Bring—[Sings] "Life in the pines makes it worth while." There are so many melodies everyone imitates and grabs what you can, I think. And, in the case of "Cowboys and Indians," I had [sings] "Some cowboys and Indians were riding cross the land." I didn't know what else to say. Bobby started getting real philosophical and said, "It's got to say something. You got to have a spine and you hang each thought from it like a book." And I'm going, "I don't like the spine, I don't know, it needs to be more esoteric!" And somehow Bobby was throwing out stuff and I would change it. And so, like the second, "On a blood red painted desert, lone equestrians." That's quintessential Bridger. "On a blood red painted desert, lone equestrians." And I might have said [sings] "Sometimes red is black and black is white." Bobby goes, "Mortal colors vanish from your sight, but not the Cowboys and Indians." And that sort of set it. It was going to be sort of mythological. It was going to be, maybe some time travelers, who knows. But they're ghosts, they're spirits, they're coming to us, they're positive energy. OK, we don't know what they are. And the next verse, it says, "Visionary drifters on a timeless caravan, sticking close

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together when things get out of hand." They're buddies, you know. "Sharing in an unspoken word that each and every one of us had heard the cowboys and Indians." Now whether the unspoken word is the cowboys and Indians, it's ambiguous, but it's really, it's an unspoken word. They're in maybe some sort of secret society. I don't know. It was just always—Bobby was just trying to pin it down, what it is and I was saying, "No! It needs to be cosmic. I needs to stand—" And then, "The sacred, almost holy." Bobby said, "Sacred and holy." And I said, "No, [coughs] they're almost holy. [Coughs] They were here before me and carry on." Our ancestors, I don't know. "Through the lost horizon," I said, "Went into disguise, and carried on." So it's just still, it's just sort of poetry, we don't know what it's about. Then the, "Never without focus always on the sacred trail." It's like the deontic, it's Indian philosophy. "It's absolutely guaranteed their steps will never fail." Which they say, depending on who you listen to, that's the truth. If you are focused, your steps will not fail. Bobby said, "The wheel is turning, it is standing still." Which I thought was incredible. "And the wisest men know never to reveal the cowboys and Indians." It doesn't have a—you can't really say what it's about, but there's some feeling there, so that was the first one we wrote. We kind of just threw lines back and forth and tried to hammer this thing out. Bobby's never sung it. He doesn't do it in his show or anything. He'd probably be hard pressed to sit down and do it. I don't think he knows the chords or anything. But, it was something to hang an idea on, "Cowboys and Indians." There, we had it. And the "Mahatma Gandhi and Sitting Bull," that whole idea of Sitting Bull joins Buffalo Bill's Wild West and everything, and the story was that Sitting Bull did go to London, but he didn't go. There's pictures of him, cartoons and everything, of Sitting Bull and Buffalo Bill in a gondola in Venice and he was supposed to be on that trip but he never made the trip. But who made the trip was Gandhi in 1898, Gandhi was in England.

AW:
With Buffalo Bill?

BL:
No, Buffalo Bill shows up and Queen Victoria comes to the show. This was a totally fanciful thing, but it was what would have happened if these two guys would have met.

AW:
I once wrote a poem about Einstein and Powell Clay meeting because they were in the same town together as young college students. So, why not, I guess they could have. That would have been fun. Well, okay, so it's a great, fanciful notion. How do you turn it into a song?

BL:
Which? "Cowboys and Indians?"

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AW:
No, "Mahatma Gandhi and Sitting Bull."

BL:
Well, "Mahatma Gandhi and Sitting Bull," I had this progression and, let me get my guitar. [Gets up and moves]

AW:
Perfect.

BL:
Which was basically just kind of a drone-y round-y kind of thing. Ok, let's see, hopefully there's a big—

AW:
Incidentally, your guitar last night and today sounded really good.

BL:
Really, did it? Good, good, I'm happy.

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AW
And it's a newer—it sounds like an older Gibson, but it's a newer one, right?

BL:
[Strums guitar] Yeah, it's about a '92 or something. It used to belong to Jerry Jeff

AW:
Oh did it?

BL:
[Plays chords on guitar] So somehow there was a melody in there, you know? [Sings] "Mahatma Gandhi and Sitting Bull were lying in the sun around the swimming pool." Bobby goes, "Talking about breaking all the rules and listening to the river flow." And I changed it to "Listen to the radio." and Bobby's just like, "And Mahatma winked, and he flashed a grin. He said, 'The wild east is where I been,'" and I think I said, "If you've seen it once, you got to see it again, you got to see the Himalayan snows." We wanted to make it about the two just sitting around and talking. [Sings] "Well Sitting Bull he said, 'Gandhi-Ji,'" Gandhi dash J-i which is the pronunciation

AW:
Not Gandhi, comma G-E-E

BL:
No, see that's a thing I tried to get through because Gandhi-Ji is what they say, it's a reverence, respect.

AW:
Yeah, but you see that works because in the Western side we go it's like—

BL:
"Gandhi, gee,"

AW:
"Bob, gee whiz" you know? It still connects there.

BL:
[sings and plays guitar] "So Sitting Bull said, 'Gandhi-Ji' it's the great plains for me," Bobby was saying this, "Chasing buffalo and living free and watching all the children grow." And I went, "Gandhi pulled his weaver's thread—" No, Bobby said, "Gandhi pulled his weavers thread," and I said, "He spun some yarns then he said," Bobby goes, "'No need for the Tibetan 'Book of the Dead to know which way the spirit goes.'" Which is, it was not Gandhi, it was the Tibetan "Book of the Dead," not the Hindu "Book of the Dead." But I think he somehow—because I think he wanted to say The Egyptian "Book of the Dead" or something. I said Tibetan "Book of the Dead," They were both the same. Then there was this little melody [hums and plays guitar]. And we wanted to mix it up. I said, "East is West and West is East." [Strums and sings] "East is West, and West is East, we're only one planet and that's the test. We're just passing through we got no address." I said, "Awakening what we don't know." And that's the whole thing that you're supposed to have this knowledge and in my case the chord that struck in "Norwegian Wood" that I heard this sitar that was awakening, something was awakened, and they say that you know all this but it's just awakening.

AW:
So did the lines come out that easily or did you—

BL:
No, we were throwing it back and forth. And Bobby's really—

AW:
He's a word guy

BL:
--Analytical. And he could say, "Okay let's keep it," and he's writing down, and I'm more like "We need to spread it out, it can't be so specific." Why? I don't know. And then the last thing is [strums and sings] "West is East and East is West we're only one planet and that's the test. We're just passing through, we got no address, awakening what we don't know." We turned around. "Sitting Bull and Gandhi too, they share a pipe with me and you. They both knew how to break the rules and listen to the river flow." And so that was it.

AW:
So Bobby got his river flow line in eventually.

BL:
He got it in there. So there it is, those two songs, and then I wrote a song called "I Believe It" in India with this guy Reed. And it was like three songs that were the show.

AW:
Yeah, okay. Pick a song that you wrote without any co-writer and talk about it. What would that be? Any one, it doesn't matter to me.

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BL:
Well, "Original Spirit." Well, let's don't do "Original Spirit" because there are—which is an interesting story in itself. Let me take some song that I wrote all by myself. Maybe this new one—

AW:
One you're still working on that you played last night?

BL:
Yeah

AW:
Yeah, that'd be good because it's all fresh in your head, right?

BL:
Yeah. It's getting there.

AW:
I mean about how it started and all.

BL:
See, it's the up-tempo one is the one I'm thinking about the Christmas night, it's like [strums guitar and sings] "I saw a Christmas night on the dance floor. She was a-rockin' like I never seen her before." I had this progression [plays chords on guitar]. And it sounded like something I didn't know and I had another song, I had a song, "Wilderness song," that had a similar sort of progression. So, I started thinking, "I saw a Christmas night on the dance floor," because it was a true story, and then I had part of the first verse and I met a singer-songwriter, his name was Steve Martinique and he's the one that wrote that "Raining for So Long" song that I do, it's on the record. "It's been raining for so long." He's a carpenter and he had this—and he and I started writing this song with the same progression that went [strums and sings] "On the trail of dust, why don't you keep your mouth shut? No need to talk about it, don't matter who saw what. What's the use of talking? We can't stay here and if we don't start walking, we'll never get there." And it was going to be about these bandits, you know? So we worked on it, had two different songs of progression, and then, recently I started thing that I would like the idea of "Let's go dancing for the holidays." That turned into, "Let's go dance like it's a holiday."

AW:
Yeah, how did it turn into that?

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BL:
Well, I had that idea and then when—the two ideas and Freddy Kurt said he liked the more universal, "Let's go dance like it's a holiday." So, even though it was "Let's go dancing for the holidays," to me, it became, "Let's go dance like it's a holiday." And I've tried that line out on a couple, like Keith Sikes went "Oh, definitely. Let's go dancing like it's a holiday." You know, there's some people, the way they write, Davin James, do you know him? You've heard of him?

AW:
Yeah.

BL:
And so, Davin—I'd be driving down the road with Larry Joe and the phone would ring and he would go, "Hey, yeah? Read the two lines. What would you say normally? Well, how would you say it another way? I kind of like the first way." And, Davin's writing a song and he's calling up, bouncing lines, "I've got this new song and you know I can't decide, do you think it sounds too wimpy," or whatever. So, I think that's great. I don't have anybody that I'm close to like that, with the exception of this guy in India. Or Bobby. It's nice to find a collaborator, you know? To be able to do it, to make it complete. I wrote "Wilderness—" public Domain was a co-write with Gary Nunn, so, I've done a lot of co-writes.

AW:
Yeah, that's a great song. Well, finish talking about "Christmas Night."

BL:
Ok, so the "Christmas Night" song. So I had this song, the first verse. So I said, well if this is going to be about this, it's got to go somewhere. And the hard thing for me is coming up with that second verse. Is it going to be a story? I can do these paints—I can do these swatches of—now it's got to be serious, now we've got to make it a real song and it's got to go somewhere.

AW:
How did you decide which song to give this nice chord progression to?

BL:
Because the other one's a little obscure and it didn't have a chorus and when I was thinking "Let's go dance like it's a—" it was about Iris, and I liked the line, "She spun him round so fast he broke his left hand." Because it's a true story. And I also like a line that says [strums and sings]

> "I saw a Christmas Night on the dance floor, she was a rockin' like I'd never seen her before. She was romantic, she had a nice grace. I was the luckiest guy in the place. The joint was jumping and we made a connection, I was mesmerized by her rhythm section. I saw her dancing with another man. She spun him round so fast, he broke his left hand. Watch it! Let's go dance like it's a holiday, let's go dance like it's a holiday. Watch me dance, I've got something to say. Let's go dance like it's a holiday."

So I had that much, and every once in a while I'd play it to myself and I was getting closer. I need a song, I need a kind of upbeat song for this record. You know, necessity is the mother of invention and it still is. That last record I did I was writing a couple songs at the last second, it's like, "I got to come up with something!"

AW:
Okay, so, if you've got to come up with something, how did you come up with the rest of that song?

BL:
Well, I said, "Okay, they're in the place, what happens now? What happens now? They got to get out of there." So, [strums and sings] "At a quarter to four, we had to dance out the door because I knew a backstage that she'd never been before." It's like, okay, we're going to go someplace, and it'll to be a backstage. Not many people get to go backstage, so maybe it is interesting for someone. My inner judge, "Is that a stupid line? 'A quarter to four, we had to dance out the door,' is that petty? We've got to get out of there." Ok, so I'm thinking. "A quarter to four we've

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got to dance out the door because I knew a backstage that she'd never seen before." Then, okay, we go, we have some breakfast and we're back to my place. She said she stared at the hunger in my face. So that's two allusions to the thing, you know, it just kind of came. Then it's when I wanted to say something was going on because it was really happening. We were The Gonzo Band and we were in Austin. And I say [strums and sings] "Austin was moving with musicians and poets, revolutionaries that didn't even know it. A new year was coming with opportunity knocking, we opened the door and it was absolutely rocking." Or, "We opened the door—" I'm still on that last line, I'm still trying to get it. "We open the door," or do we have to open the door? I just saw "A new year was coming with opportunity knocking." It sure was for me, you know? Things were looking good, I'd met Iris and we were just kind of, anything could happen. Because, like you say, when you read, "Okay, here's this guy Bob Livingston, he was from Lubbock and he went to that thing." And that's right, I, all of a sudden, lucked in to being in a series of—to me it's a progression, why did you go here and why did this happen? Suddenly I'm on a guy's record. It's been a fortunate, I might have thrown myself out there but—

AW:
Don't you think that you may not have had any more opportunity than, say, I did, but I didn't even pick up a guitar until I was a senior in high school. You had started thinking about music a lot sooner. And so, in a sense, you were prepared for the opportunities that came along. Is that a piece of this?

BL:
Well, that's kind of valid. At any one time, you have to get up and play, you're only as good as your demo. You're only as good as the song I'm singing for you now. And so, something had to happen where the guy said, "I'll get you a record deal." So I had to have something but it seemed to me—I was really good at essay questions and I was not good at fill in the blanks. I felt, and still feel, to a certain extent, that this is just one big essay question. Because I'm still bullshitting to make this thing happen.

AW:
The rest of the world is fill in the blank, though, isn't it?

BL:
It seems like it. It seems like it. I don't have a process, because, other people have asked what your creative process is and I don't know how to—I have had to work and grind out lines but most of them are so insignificant. I like the line that says "Austin was moving with musicians and poets, revolutionaries that didn't even know it." I liked that because that's what it was.

AW:
Did that line happen easily or was that one you had to grind out?

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BL:
No, it happened easily.

AW:
What's a line that you had to grind out?

BL:
I'm still grinding out the last one. "Opportunities knocking, we opened the door." What do we see there? It's got to rhyme with rocking or knocking and it's got to be rocking, it seems like. And so, the way the song goes to me is, because I'm still trying to finish it, [strums and sings] "We open the door and it was a dancing and a rocking," Don't make quite sense, so I'm trying to—we opened the door, all together it was rocking. I don't know yet. [Strums and sings] "We opened the door and—" [hums rest of melody] But it goes into the chorus. [Strums and sings] "Like it's a holiday." So now they're in—the New Year's coming, so that's why I was going the next verse--the last verse is—

[Pause in Recording]

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AW:
[guitar playing in background] Well, we ran out a moment ago—SD card. So I'm trying to see what we—because I was engrossed by what you were saying, I wasn't paying attention to the machine when it went out. I think we were talking about grinding out that last line. Let's talk about another song or two just to kind of get more—because the more you talk about it the more it makes sense to me about how you write. Talk a little bit about, before we go to another one that you wrote yourself, talk a little bit about "Public Domain." I want to hear you talk about it because that's one of those songs that I heard with, I guess with Jerry Jeff singing it, right? And it knocked me out because I was just starting to try to be serious about picking up the guitar and writing songs myself. I've been writing songs for a long time and I'm thinking, I really would like to do this. And here's this song that, it talks about the whole life of song writing. [Laughter] And I listened to it and I went, "How do these people know what I'm going through?"

BL:
"Public Domain" does?

AW:
Yeah, talk about it, how did it come up?

BL:
Well, it came about because Gary and I were, we wrote a couple of songs for Jerry Jeff and we were thinking—and we didn't write specifically that one. But the one we wrote specifically for

Jerry Jeff was "Roll on Down the Road." But I will talk about "Public Domain" because that was the most give and take. We wrote it quick and it was like we were making fun—"Public Domain" was what we called this place that Gary lived in. It was over on this sixty-four hundred block of North Lamar, right there behind this motorcycle shop. As you drove, back in there, there was a compound. And there was a main house, a rock house, it must have been there since the twenties or something, way back, and a bunch of little houses around it and some storage sheds and stuff. Gary had found that place and Murphey had moved in with him. Then, they built a rehearsal room and that's where we rehearsed and we called it "Public Domain."

AW:
With a double entendre about the idea of public domain in the song writing which is, either no one knows who it was or it's been so long

UPS Man:
[Knocks] UPS

BL:
Hello. How are you doing?

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AW:
Let me put us on pause here for a second.

[Pause in recording]

AW:
Okay, back

BL:
So what were we saying?

AW:
Well, the double meaning of—

BL:
Of public domain, yeah. It all belongs to everybody.

AW:
So, a good joke, and a good description of the place too, right?

BL:
Yeah, and this is public domain incorporated. I tried to get—when I chose a name for a publishing company—because it's kind of high spousy idea of Public Domain Inc. and so I tried to get Public Domain as a publishing company and they wouldn't let me do it [Laughter].

AW:
I'll bet that's right, they could see lots of pit falls on that.

BL:
But it started out, [plays guitar and sings] "*I've got my irons in the fire down in Texas. Got me a toe hole in Tennessee. I got my foot in the door*" Because I was out there "*In that California store, but I'm up to my ears in me*." Is what I—that was my verse. And then, Gary's going, [plays and sings] "*Don't be concerned if the song sounds familiar*." Yeah, yeah. "*Don't be concerned if it all feels the same.*" It just felt right then and there, "*Just be concerned*—" We went policies, prophesies, and politics. [spoken] "That your policies will kill you and it's all just public domain. Well I took a bite of the Big Apple." Is when we went to New York. "Yes I dabbled in that forbidden fruit." This was just saying what the record company was doing. "Where they promised me points and they slit me through the joints, but I've yet to see any loot from the man in the high heeled Gucci shoes." And, you know, what is that guy that wrote "Lone Wolf," Lee? He was a song writer in Nashville, he wrote a hit, he wrote a couple of things. Anyway, he had a song that in it went, "Keep me away from the lawyers, keep me away from the news, keep me away from them gambling men and their high heeled Gucci shoes." So we ripped off Gucci shoes from him, and I almost said his name again. You would know him. Anyway, I had that. And then, this is where it gets interesting because, "Yes I sang in that Red River Valley." Because all the melody is [plays chords and hums] So it was public domain anyways so we could take "Red River Valley" really is a song with a minor in there every once in a while. But the last verse said [plays and sings] "*I took a bite a bite of the big apple. Yes I dabbled in*—" No. "*I sang in the Red River Valley, I drank wine with the poets in Santa Fe*." That was that Richard Brautigan. "I ran from the snuff queens in Dallas." This is Gary. "I ran with the snuff queens in Dallas," is ran with it or from it, I always thought that was weird. Snuff queens? And he's going, "No, yeah, it's snuff queens, man. It's snuff queens." [Laughter]. "Like I ran from Snow White in L.A." Well, I had a girlfriend, and that's what I was thinking about. Some people thought it was about cocaine or something, but, this woman, her name was Jan Smithers and she ended up being on WKRP-Cincinnati. She played the character Bailey, really beautiful. So for a while I got to hang out with her in Los Angeles, she was an actress. And that was Snow White, it can be now told. [Plays and sings] "*Like I ran with Snow With in L. A.*" And then Gary said, "*I've broken all my vows to DeMolay*." See, he was a DeMolay.

AW:
That's hard to imagine. [Laughs]

BL:
And I don't even know what it was. I wasn't in it. It was some Mason thing, right?

AW:
Yeah it was like the Junior Mason.

BL:
The Junior Masons.

AW:
They recruited all of us over at Monterey High to be in the DeMolay.

BL:
Well, I think Gary too. I had heard of it, but I never did it.

AW:
Well, I didn't ever do it either but it was like—that was the sixties, it was—

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BL:
Because I always thought it was a secret cult, Masons, it's got a weird secret. And I didn't know what to think of that and it was a young thing. And they said they had to do these vows and all this weird kind of stuff and I wasn't big on that at all. I didn't think about it. And then when Gary said, "I've broken all my vows to DeMolay" it was cathartic kind of going, well good. I didn't have to worry about it. Because when he's saying "Snuff Queens," and I'm said "And I ran with Snow White in L.A." he's probably thinking—who knows what he's even thinking as the co-writer. He's going, "Oh, broken all my vows to DeMolay!" And then it was, of course, prophecies, we were thinking of Nostradamus. And politics, which was whatever. So we had a song, it was kind of Texas swing and Jerry Jeff—we sang around campfire and when Jerry Jeff would see someone else would like it he would go, "Oh, you know, let's do it." So it was one of the few songs—he actually did "Public Domain," a lot of times the first song of an encore or something. [Hums drum] Just slam banging you know, so he liked it and he knew it. "Head Full of Nothing" was another one that we did and that was written with Rick Fowler. And that was the kind of a song that I had the first verse and the melody and some of the chords and Rick just kind of ran with it.

AW:
So, songwriting and performing aren't the only kind of arts that you have done, am I correct? You were interested in visual arts.

BL:
Well, I have done some paintings. One of the ways that I can sort of rationalize spending time on the computer not doing something more important is to make posters for my gigs. It's a little creative thing I do.

AW:
But you thought about majoring in art, right? And your girlfriend in high school was an artist and still is an artist.

BL:
Yeah, and I did take Life Drawing and a couple of painting classes at Tech.

AW:
So, the reason I'm mentioning that is, do you see parallels in approaching a painting to approaching a song?

BL:
Well, I think that approaching a painting, you have to have an arsenal of—I needed someone to show me what the mechanics, the process, because colors and all that kind of stuff if you just start slapping—

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AW:
The technical side.

BL:
The technical side. And, with a song, it's very non-technical sort of, because three or four chords could get you a million melodies and it's just what's in your head. And I don't have to play it, I can sing it. I have a sense of melody and I try to sing those melodies, but I couldn't play them on the guitar to save my life. I just don't come from that. It's almost like an infinite variety of what's in your head, where as a painter, Van Gogh, I always heard it said, didn't have to go "Ok, paint Starry Night," you know? It's like, I can get up and whatever the interpretation was last night. I thought that one of the best shows I've ever done was one of the house concerts I didn't this time out in New Hampshire and it was something right. It was just me and a guitar and the people were clued in. And so I did songs, like some of those new ones, I didn't make mistakes. I was listening to myself and I could really concentrate because somehow I just got in. But I can be easily distracted and I think I was distracted a little bit last night.

AW:
It sounded pretty focused to me.

BL:
As far as that new song, I was nervous, the "I Have to Leave You Now" song.

AW:
Well, new songs are always a bitch, so—

BL:
Yeah, I know. And you've got to do them live or practice them all the time.

AW:
Well, even if you practice them all the time, you don't know them until you've done them live.

BL:
I know. We can say that, Andy, but Jerry Jeff, his recording process was not like that. Murphey's was, because Murphey had done them live. But Jerry Jeff, in many cases, is making them up on the spot. And the Gonzo Band fell into the tradition for a certain extent because we never had a chance to play them live that much. So, it's really in the studio. That's why some of those Gonzo records are not as good as they could have been because live we were a killer band. But, in the studio, like you were telling the story of the guy with the snake. In the studio, I didn't consider the microphone a snake, but I was sure self-conscious. Somehow.

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AW:
Yeah, we're more afraid of our mistakes in the studio than we are on stage.

BL:
Absolutely, and things become mistakes if you have a producer like Lloyd, that I wouldn't think as a mistake but Lloyd's going to correct it. "Oh, that was a little flat Bob, you're a little—" Well, I didn't hear it. "Believe me, trust me."

AW:
And then, when you go back and try to prove Lloyd wrong, you figure out he was right.

BL:
Yeah, but then you change and you have to make it right and you get into this really weird thing and I just wish I sang as on pitch as Natalie Maines or Chet Baker. You know, Chet Baker is the guy that, when he started singing, just because a singer didn't show up in the studio that day and he goes, "Well, I think I can sing that song." And he never really tried to sing before and he had perfect pitch. And he never even knew what key they were in, even when he was playing trumpet.

AW:
But, wouldn't it be a tough life to have perfect pitch. There'd be a lot of lives that was wrong, wouldn't there be?

BL:
Well, I hear it. And I also hear things that other people don't hear and Jerry Jeff kind of liked my harmony sense because of that. Because I remember when we went [sings] "Just letting it roll letting the hard times carry the load. Living my life easy come easy go." Whatever harmony line I sang on roll always made him smile. He said, "That is so weird! I love it!" I can't even remember, but maybe it's the way I heard it. Bradley Copp had to call me down the other night saying, "That's not the way it goes, that harmony line doesn't fit in there." But I hear—like, even in that song I'm going—working on now. [Plays guitar] You know, that has that little melody? So I hear this counter melody for the lead [plays guitar and hums melody]. That's not necessarily in the chord, but I hear it. And he goes, "But it's not in the chord, then you'll have to play a different chord." Well, maybe you'll just have to teach me that chord.

AW:
Yeah, in a minute I'll play a song that I had the same struggle with, Kenny Maine's [inaudible]. Now, Lloyd heard it and it was fine but I'm playing a chord that the note is not in, but it was in the chord before. To me, it's one of the things that makes the whole song happen, you know. But you're right, there's some people who will say, "You can't do that."

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BL:
You can't do that, there's always somebody saying it. And you know, what happens in studios, it makes me so self conscious that I can't do it. Because I know for a fact that there's so many live shows that even that the Gonzo Band did that were just so much better than any of the records because we weren't thinking about it.

AW:
Here's one of the sad things in the world, the people who say, "You can't do that," are usually the ones who own equipment.

BL:
There you go.

AW:
But don't you remember when we were in high school? I'm sure you had friends like this, I did at Monterey. Usually they were the older siblings of my friends, but they were the ones who had money and had a stereo, a hi-fi. And I started recognizing that the more they knew about their record player, the fewer records they had.

BL:
Oh yeah?

AW:
If they knew a whole lot about the signal to noise ratio and all this kind of stuff, they only had a handful of records. It was the people who really didn't care much about it but had a lot of records. It was a big difference.

BL:
Even to the point where, if I've had a personal recording device that goes any further than this one does, like I remember having a four-track cassette, I could never make any head way because I'd lay down the thing and then I'm trying to—I lay down a basic track, and then I'm trying to lay down some lead part and I don't like that, so I redo it and redo it and redo it. And pretty soon, half a day has passed and I'm barely four tracks into something and—just the process of recording has never—I love to do it, but I want someone else, I thnk, to run the board. I know Lloyd, I guess, has learned to be an engineer.

AW:
Oh yeah, he's a good engineer.

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BL:
He's a good engineer.

AW:
He is. But I think you're right, I think he learned how to do that.

BL:
He just learned about it, just being in so many sessions.

AW:
Well, Lloyd learned that because he knew he could make a little bit more money if he was engineer and—[laughs]

BL:
"You pay me a basic rate, I'll play steel guitar, engineer, whatever."

AW:
Thank goodness too because I take advantage of that all the time.

BL:
I need to. I need to. As far as the creative process, I wish I knew. There's, of course, any number of ways to jump start it, and right now, for me, I think about last night, I turned off the radio when I was driving in and I had my little iPhone with this recording—do have a good recording program on your iPhone?

AW:
No, I've looked, there are about a half dozen out there. Which one are you using?

BL
I'm just using one that's just—it's not bad and it's free.

AW:
Freeware?

BL:
And you just press record and it makes a file and you can rename the file.

AW:
I love it, what's the name of it? Do you remember?

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BL:
Well, it's right here. iRecorder.

AW:
iRecorder, okay, I'll look that one up. Because I looked at those when they first came out on the app store and there were so many of them, my mind was all dazzled I couldn't tell—

BL:
I've tried another one, this is so simple. It's just record and stop and play and stop.

AW:
iRecorder, I'll write that down. Because I'd like to have one too.

BL:
I had written that "Christmas Nights" song, the way I made headway on it, is driving to like to New Mexico or something and having that little tape recorder. I got a little bitty Sony thing. I actually worked on a couple of songs and made headway on it as I'm driving down the road. And then, when I got this, I realized "Well, now I don't even have to have that."

AW:
Well, like today when you said, anybody have a camera? Well, I didn't have my camera but I had my iPhone.

BL:
Yeah [laughs]. Will you send me some of those pictures if they show up?

AW:
Yeah, I'll e-mail them to you.

BL:
Good.

AW:
Well, we're going to stop this in a minute, or we're just going to stop it for this afternoon, because I want to show you what I do because I think that you will find it—and here's what I'll stop it with, I think the only reason you don't know your process is that you haven't developed the vocabularies that describe you process.

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BL:
Oh.

AW:
Stop and think about when you talked about being an ear player, and so am I, and when I had to learn how to score a piece, when I started writing musical theater, I realized I knew all that stuff. I just didn't have any language for it. And so, once I learned the vocabulary that these other people were using then, you know—and listening to you describe it I think you're going to say, oh, I know exactly what I'm doing.

BL:
I hope so. Because, I was telling you that this guy Brian Burns and Tommy Anderson, they want to do a songwriting sort of thing and I don't know what to say to anyone.

AW:
Ok, I'm going to show you. Because, when I had to start teaching, not only teaching songwriting, which is pretty obviously, but I taught a course on Art in Sense and Place and all my students, they were honors students, but not in art. The were pre-law, pre-med, engineering. But I have them do an art piece, because I think all people are creative. You watch those little kids today and they're very creative and very into it. We tend to smash the creativity out of people as they get older. So I thought, well, I'll just tell them what I do. And then I thought, "Well, I kind of

know what I do but I don't know how to tell anybody about it." So I started trying to describe what I do, but also to read about how other people describe creative process. I've since become firmly convinced that, while creativity is innate, and not learnable, the process of using that creativity is imminently learnable.

BL:
Okay, good.

AW:
And I had inklings of this all along. I went to the very first songwriting workshop ever at Kerrville Folk Festival. I was there, I was a student. And our instructors were David Amram, Peter Yaro, Bob Gibson, Gary P., B. W. Stephens. It was incredible. And the best instructor out of the whole bunch? Head and shoulders better than everybody? Gary P. We could have spent the whole week with Gary P. You know, it was cool hanging out with Amram, he was really interesting, B. W. never said two words the whole week, he just played songs. And Peter Yaro was a fuss bucket. He was their maiden aunt that you—you know, wanted to make you try all the clothes that he's just given you for Christmas. He just had that kind of thing. Gibson was pretty cool, but Gary P., he had practical things. And one of the things he said was, "You know, when I'm stuck, I close my eyes and stick the cable on the neck to the guitar, and where it lands, I start working from there. Just to get myself out of the rut." And so I realized, hey, one of the things that I need to do as a writer is, when I get stuck, just to do something completely different. I won't necessarily create a song, but what it will do is it'll get you out of—like sticking the board under your tire when you're in the sand. It will get you moving again. Gary P. had all kinds of things. My favorite, and I need to tell him this next time I see him, is, we had this one kid in my class who was so convinced that someone was going to steal his stuff—we'd all sit around and swap tunes, Here's what I'm working on. He'd go off by himself and he'd play. And if you'd walk over by him, he'd quit playing. Every question he had was, "How do I copyright this, how do I do that?" And finally, Gary had—the Jeepster just had enough, he said, "Look, look," he said, "It's damn near impossible in this world to give away a good song, don't expect someone's going to steal it from you." [Laughter] I've always remember that, you know. It's hard enough to give away one.

BL:
Gary knew a good song when he heard it.

AW:
He was really very helpful in that class. I really picked up a lot from him, a lot more than I did from the rest of those guys. It was fun being around those guys, but you learned something from the Jeepster.

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BL:
Do you know that song "Well of the Blues"?

AW:
No, I don't know that.

BL:
Jerry Jeff cut it and it's a Gary song. [Sings] "The well of the blues never runs dry. Never gets full enough of whiskey and rye."

AW:
Wow, what record is that on?

BL:
It may be on *Riding High*, it may be on *For Singing*.

AW:
I know I have the record then. I'll have to go back and listen to that again.

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BL:
And it's about his grandfather, it says, "Grandma badmouths the bottle, Mama pours it down the drain. Grandpa keeps it within reach, to ease his favorite pain." He said he used to have this bottle of whiskey and he used to stick it way in the back behind the cleaners and stuff like that, he tried to hide it. Gary's a very talented guy, I've got to say. It was just great seeing him. He was a killer keyboard player.

AW:
Yeah, he did a little keyboard when we were in that workshop. This would've been 1980—

BL:
And, you know, the song that he wrote that [plays melody on guitar]. It was a keyboard. The "Song of the South Canadian River" which was on *Cosmic Cowboy*. And he wrote the music and Murphey just wrote all the lyrics.

AW:
I didn't know that. I thought it was a Murphey song all the way.

BL:
No, Gary. The reason that song, according to Gary, you'll have to ask him, but when the band blew up, it was this whole thing of getting paid and everything, and I told you about that and we

called the union and stuff. Gary was right there with us, but when we left, he stayed because of that song, the "Song of the South Canadian River," he was convinced Murphey would jerk the song off. He thought that there was a possibility that Murphey will take this song off the record, he was so mad. He said, "I could not jeopardize my intellectual property" so to speak about that. And he said, "Someone had to stay with Mike." And he did, and he got "London Homesick Blues" out of it. We all went back. And because of that song. It's an incredible piece of music. He wrote everything and I think—and he wrote it at the piano as an exercise. And he had the whole piece and he would play it to us.

AW:
The reason I never even looked at the credit on that one is it had that kind of odd Murphey melody thing.

BL:
It was Gary.

AW:
Really? Wow that is so cool.

BL:
And it goes like this on the piano. [Plays song on piano and sings] "Drink life one drop at a time." And then the part that goes [plays melody on piano] Very Beatle-esque.

AW:
Yeah.

BL:
[Hums with piano melody and sings] "Drink life" Just to be able to play it. It was all orchestrated, we had to be able to play it in a very prescribed manner, but it was really in about the first or second take on that record.

AW:
Well it was just one that, when I heard it, I thought of, having that same sort of twist in the melody like "Boy From the Country," not like "London Homesick Blues".

BL:
You should hear some of these tracks I've got. "Nonny's Birthday" The missing Lost Gonzo album, I've got the basic head-on two-track masters, they bulk erased everything else when we lost our record deal with Capitol.

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AW:
Right, we talked about that last time. What kind of shape is this tape in?

BL:
I've got it all digitized.

AW:
Okay. Cool, Very cool, I'd love to hear it.

BL:
Yeah, it's good. There's some stuff that we wrote and there's stuff—the problem is, on a lot of it, it was all scratch vocals and so that's there. In my case, I took the words "scratch vocals" very seriously and I was always trying to screw around on it, you know? Trying to get the track out, but I wish I'd of taken it more—I wish they hadn't called it "scratch vocals."

AW:
Like Preliminary vocals.

BL:
Yeah, this is it! Sing it like you mean it every time. But there's all that stuff. Yeah. And Gary was pretty cosmic. "Nonny's Birthday".

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AW:
Yeah, very cool. Well let's take a little break and we'll talk about—

BL:
Okay.

End of Recording