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Interviewee: Jim Dickinson
Interviewer: Jacob Rabinbach
Location: Dickinson's Home
Collection: Stax Museum Oral Histories

[0:00]

Jacob Rabinbach: Let's get my stuff together here. Well, now that we're on tape let's try not to censor ourselves too much. Let's try not to censor ourselves too much. It's funny when you talk to people, it's like as soon as the tape goes off I find with a lot of these musicians, they tell you the best stuff.

Jim Dickinson: Oh, sure.

Rabinbach: All of a sudden I'm getting this story about how Isaac Hayes decided he didn't want to have a small plane anymore because Johnny Taylor decided to fuck with him when he was stoned and say, "Hey, man, you know what they did to Otis because he was getting too big Your role in this was obviously not as Stax session player or anything like that?"

Dickinson: No, I was a complete outsider. If you go all the way back to the beginning before they came to the McLemore location

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they were in a farm behind a Dairy Queen in Brunswick Tennessee and they called the first label satellite because it was a satellite sign in front of the Dairy Queen. The missing piece in the puzzle is between Estelle Axford and Jimmy Stewart the original partners in Stax. If you knew these people then especially it would be hard to imagine them coming up with the idea of recording black music that's because of Estelle's side of this idea who to me was the missing piece of the whole puzzle. The first record they cut was the Largos which was the big bad Largos which was the band from the Plantation Inn and that was

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Where the Memphis sound came from which was the small section of small horns, your keyboards, guitars, and with simple keyboard and guitar rhythm section was a copy of the Branch in Largos which was the band that played in West Memphis in the Plantation Inn which was a white club with a black band, but that's where all the white musicians, certainly my generation, that's where we all saw it and you know. When I couldn't get in I'd stay in the parking lot and listen to the music through the public address system.

Rabinbach: How old were you when you were going?

Dickinson: 15, 16 the first time. Cropper, Trolley Freedmen was a really great Trolley Freedmen God rest his soul, who really formed a band and became the Mar-Keys all of them you know we all went over there to hear the music and that was the first...

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Packy was the sax-phone player of the Mar-Keys brought the Largos to the studio when it was a bar and brunch of Tennessee.

Rabinbach: Now was it Packy's idea to go to West Memphis or did everybody just go-?

Dickinson: Well, everybody said to go to West Memphis. That was the place to go. But that was the first record they made. This is a long way to get around to the second record they made which was Charles Hives who was the singer in my band.

Rabinbach: The Regents.

Dickinson: The Regents, yeah. He and Ronnie Stooves, who became Ronnie H, who toured with the Mar-Keys. But Charles is now the minister of music at the Bay Church down on Winchester who you ought to talk to...

Rabinbach: Oh we called him. We're in touch with him already.

Dickinson: Good, good.

Rabinbach: Yeah, I really want to talk to him.

Dickinson: Yeah, good because Charles was...you could see the direction that Jim wanted to go from Charles Hives you know. He had the [Inaudible] image, he was the pretty boy... almost operatic voice. And Chip's woman cut that record "Prove Your Love" which was the A Side to "Us Around Here".

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Song Charles wrote and the other side of the record Chip wrote. I can't even remember the name of it. But this was like, Chip was another thing that they'd barely even speak. There'd be no Stax with Chip. Chips produced the first three, four records with Jim Stewart, then he and Jim had a falling out. Chips split off and formed...

Rabinbach: What was the falling out over?

Dickinson: Oh I don't know. Had to be about money. I've heard the story through both sides and that's not a story I feel comfortable telling.

Rabinbach: Sure.

Dickinson: Yeah, but suffice it to say at that point, Chips and Anna Bell discussed forming a label at that point. It was already at least the beginning of a notion in Anna Bell's mind to become a partner in this thing. The whole point of this for me is that Stax wasn't a black record company

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and the miracle that happened at Stax was the partnership. The idea of a rhythms section was half white and half black. That's what soul music was. Soul music was biracial. When it stopped being biracial it stopped being soul music. Which depending on who you talk to...Like [Doc John?] will tell you that "Who's Making Love" is the ultimate soul record but beyond that there's no statement you could possibly make. I personally made a living for two years playing soul music but you know. Who am I to argue with [Doc Don]? It was in there somewhere. Then of course the death of Martin Luther King affected everything racial. And something definitely was [unclear]. But Stax, to me, the historic importance of Stax was those early years where they basically were inventing

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what they were doing, not copying somebody else. And where it was truly a biracial endeavor. Making a record is a collaborative effort. Nobody makes one alone- I mean some people do but most people don't and it was a unique thing that happened there? If you think about Booker T and the MGs. These were men who would not even have known each other had it not have been for music, much less have ever interacted creatively in the way that they did. The American rhythm section, which was all white, were guys who might have played gothic. These were men who might have known each other socially. That wasn't true at Stax. And that made it really special and interesting. Even though Sam Phillips's idea had been the cultural collision of black and white,

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an idea which was not uniquely his, certainly, he still did it. He has white people performing black music. And black people performing music basically for a white audience. And the combination didn't really occur there. I mean you have to understand how segregated the world-Memphis certainly- was at the point. But for the influence of Jimmy Phillips I think in Memphis things would have been radically different.

Rabinbach: And what was that?

Dickinson: Jimmy Phillips, of course, is the person historically credited with playing Elvis on the radio for the first time, which he was. But he'd been on the radio since 1948 or 49. If there was a place where Elvis got the idea for what he did it was from Jimmy's radio show. The idea of the country

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Song on one side and the black [inaudible]. Where do you think Elvis heard "That's All Right Little Mama"? He heard it on Jimmy's radio show. Again, history will have you want to believe that Jimmy didn't know who Elvis was when he played that record. This is not true. Elvis knew Jimmy. He knew exactly who he was at that point. And that idea that was on those Elvis records.

Permeated this whole community. And still continues to. The Memphis city mayor, who is black, quotes Dewey in the newspaper all the time, and I don't think he even knows he's quoting Dewey. It's just in his mind because he grew up here in town then and Dewey is in everybody's mind who was here then. Because Dewey was that big a thing. And Stax certainly grew out of the idea that was Dewey Phillips. Rufus Thomas

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I think would probably even have admitted that.

Rabinbach: And he was also a disk jockey.

Dickinson: Yeah. If there was a black side of Dewey Phillips in Memphis it would have been Rufus Thomas.

Rabinbach: And why was Dewey so big?

Dickinson: I don't know. When he left here and went to Little Rock. He thought he could do it there and it didn't work. I do know, too. It's why Stax was great. It's because he organically developed. He had it naturally. It just started little and it got bigger and bigger and bigger. Until other radio stations would go off the air when Dewey was on the air in Memphis- it was huge. He was a completely natural human being. Before he went on the radio, when he used to sell records and sheet music to the dime store on Main Street. Then he picked Mule Train.

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He knew Mule train was a hit. He had a sense of what was happening, what was hip, what was cool. And he was just this drug addicted redneck guy who was really hard to...it was hard to be friends with Dewey, especially in the later years. But his concept of humanity was so overpowering that you couldn't resist him and that came across on the radio. At the time, in the late fifties ...mid-fifties there were three maybe four white radio stations playing white music for white people. There were two radio stations from Memphis playing black music for black people. Dewey... the first thing he said when he came on the air was "Ho, ho, good people" and that's who Dewey was talking to was good people. He played good music for good people and that's what he did. And he played Sis. Rosetta Tharpe and then he'd play Hank Williams

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back to back because to Dewey there was no difference. To Elvis there was no difference. It got to where that was an idea that people were experimenting with and not just from the white side. Certainly Johnny Hayes was playing to a white audience. Ike Turner was playing to a white audience. Rosco Gordon was playing to a white audience. They were trying to cross over from their side as Elvis, Billie Lee Riley, Sunny Burgess was trying to cross over from their side and they banged in the middle and rock and roll happened and that's what it is. It's white urban punks trying to play black music.

Rabinbach: And it happened in Memphis.

Dickinson: It happened specifically in Memphis. I don't think it could've happened anywhere else.

Rabinbach: And why is that?

Dickinson: Dewey.

Rabinbach: Dewey.

Dickinson: Whatever made Dewey happen. There's something about Memphis.

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Even the W.C. Handy thing. The blues... the Delta blues musicians that came to Memphis to record. There's something about Memphis and music that just works. And it's about recording music. It's not about bars. It's not about concerts. It's not about venues of any kind. Because Memphis is a wretched place to perform, music live.

Rabinbach: But West Memphis was not like that.

Dickinson: West Memphis was not like that then. It's not a very friendly place now. But then Memphis...I'm talking about a Memphis where there was no liquor by the drink. Where there were blue laws and rigid curfew and a very different Memphis. Memphis now sort of like latter day Stax the museum is catering to tourists. And Memphis music has been made into a tourist commodity. Before Elvis Presley died

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No one ever spoke the word tourism in Memphis because there was nothing to come here and see. Then all of a sudden there was.

Rabinbach: But there were people coming down to be a part of what was happening here.

Dickinson: Yes.

Rabinbach: People who were hip to what was happening here.

Dickinson: Looking for the music. Looking for the music. Yeah. They come here probably since the Indians and the buffalo. There's something about Memphis that draws them, unquestionably.

Rabinbach: Robert Hughes says it must be the barbeques sauce.

Dickinson: I don't think the barbeque hurts anything. What is barbeque? If you think what barbeque sauce is, it's not in the meat. It's like, dripping down over the meat. And that's sort of like soul music. It's the think that happened to you. It oozes down over you or comes up through your feet. I'm not sure where it comes from.

Rabinbach: So it sounds like... I mean, and this is sort of what I think as well, but it sounds like from what you were saying, Dewey Phillips sort of invented inadvertently, just because this was him, this sort of idea of this sophisticated

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musical idea. This idea that country music and rock and roll music and Tommy Dorsey and all these things, they exist together...

Dickinson: Could all be one thing. And there was no race to music. There was no color to music. Which was, and you can't understand how revolutionary that was now because the world changed.

Rabinbach: Because as soon as that happened, everybody thought that.

Dickinson: Everybody eventually changed their mind. If you travel the world, the image of Elvis Presley is everywhere. He's probably the most recognized human figure on earth. And L Square. He symbolizes American freedom. Our freedom isn't symbolized by political figures—outside of America. The idea of freedom is not symbolized by even religious figures outside of America. It's symbolized by rock and roll music which is personified by Elvis Presley and it's an undeniable fact.

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Rabinbach: It's like John Frye told the story of how he saw this concert of Paul McCartney performing in Red Square and that was the first time that he had seen an audience respond to something like that since Stax went to England.

Dickinson: It's the same idea. Same idea. When Elvis Presley shook his way it gave us a freedom we hadn't had before. And it forced you and the audience to make a choice. When you saw Elvis Presley either you liked him or you did not like him. You had to make a choice.

Rabinbach: What'd you think?

Dickinson: Oh, it was one of the most amazing things I'd ever seen in my life.

Rabinbach: And had you heard R&B music before?

Dickinson: Oh sure.

Rabinbach: And it was still that amazing.

Dickinson: Oh sure. It was different than that. I mean seeing him in person was different than that. Because he transcended the music. Elvis himself, by that point when I saw him in '56, the first time he played in Memphis with a drummer. He literally-

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well they opened up both sides of the auditorium. He recorded "Hound Dog" the next day. He performed it for the audience; it was unbelievable. He was playing to both sides of the house at once. I never saw anything like it again. The Beatles, the Stones, whatever you want to compare it to. There is no comparison. Just walking onstage before he played a note...that's all he had to do. And one of the magic things about Elvis, proved from the movie and his latter career, is that Elvis could sing crap! He could sing anything and still be Elvis. And once Carl Parker figured that out, he had a whole lot of crap that he owned half of that Elvis got to sing for no better reason other than he could. And the early records, the idea that was Elvis on Sun disappeared. You know, that idea's not on the rest of the...there are little glimpses of it here and there but the specific idea, of a black song on one side and a country song

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On the other side, which was revolutionary, disappeared. But not before it had its impact.

Rabinbach: Now this is the tradition that you were basically born into.

Dickinson: Yeah.

Rabinbach: You were born into the time when this was just happening and that's sort of why you became one of these people that really...you sort of helped Dewey Phillips' mission a little bit in sort of bridging that cultural gap.

Dickinson: Well, I didn't realize until I went to school in Texas that I had this arcane knowledge. I figured—the other thing Dewey would say before he played a record was "It's a hit!" And then he'd play the record that nobody who lived 300 miles from here had ever heard of, but I didn't know that. So I figured-- I had a band in high school and I figured—it seemed impossible to me...if you see Elvis, anybody who tells you they saw Elvis and said "I could do that" is lying. I mean Elvis could inspire you but not to try to do what he did because obviously you couldn't. When I saw Billy Lee Riley and Sunny Burgess, taking nothing away from them, I thought,

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"Hey, maybe I could do that." So I had a little high school band and we played around and we had some fun but I figured it was over when I went to college. I went to Texas and the first people I met were musicians and I realized that I knew more than them by 100%! And I couldn't get away from it. I ended up playing drums in a pit band in a college production within two weeks of being there, and then when I came back to Memphis, by that time the Mar-Keys had happened and they were the band just younger than my band. Again, it seemed like okay it was possible for them. Maybe it's still possible, you know? And they started playing sessions and it just opened up and happened. Fortunately, because God knows what else I would have done, but I treaded for years on nothing but the knowledge I got from listening to Dewey Phillips. I'm completely self taught. I still don't know any music, but soul music in particular was structured

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in such a way that it was lines and patterns and I could figure that out. It played very simply and the simpler you played in the studio, the better it works.

Rabinbach: Now, what was your first instrument?

Dickinson: Piano. My mother played piano in the Baptist church and her father played and her grandfather played, but they were all trained musicians. I have real bad vision, multiple vision and I still can't read music. I'm basically self-taught. It was an old white piano player in Memphis named Dishrag. Dishrag...and some of the old-timers can tell you about him. Dishrag showed me the structure that I still play which is a measure triad kind of thing. Real simple.

Rabinbach: When did he show you that?

Dickinson: Oh, I guess I must have been about eleven. Ten, eleven.

Rabinbach: And then you'd just go find these people?

Dickinson: No, you couldn't. That was the thing, you see. I saw the Memphis Jug Band in downtown Memphis in what was probably '51.

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And that was the beginning of it all for me. Because I had never seen or heard anything like it. This was Will Shane, Charlie Burch, and Good Kid and a violin player whose name I could never figure out. I never found it. It took me years to find out who they were, because that's how— I mean they were right there—but they were inaccessible to me because I was white. How I learned to play on the white keys, I mean that's how segregated music was, you know. But the barriers gradually you could chip away at. The first one of the old men, old blues players that I met was Gus Canon. We found him and he led us to Furry Lewis. We found Gus Canon by following the trail that Sam Charters made when he came to Memphis to research his book *The Country Blues* because this stuff hadn't been written down at that point.

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You couldn't go to the library and look it up. Now, of course, you can. I mean, most of the information is wrong but at least it's there. But it hadn't [unclear] at that point. Even having seen the jug band as a child, I saw Allie Wolf as a child on a radio station in West Memphis. It seemed to me there was a barrier that you couldn't cross. I couldn't get there. It took me years to get there. And the idea of playing mixed was radical- and not particularly popular with some parts of our society.

Rabinbach: What would happen when you would go with a mixed band?

Dickinson: The cops would follow you and there was occasionally a hassle from a club owner or something like that. But it was part of the deal. It was part of what you were doing. I guess the first really

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organized mixed gigs in town must have been the Mar-Key gigs after the Mar-Keys officially broke up. The real Mar-Keys were all white but—the touring band was all white—but after they quote broke up then a couple of Mar-Keys and a bunch of other musicians would be you know—

and I played a lot—some—of those gigs and they were great, some of the most fun I ever had was playing those gigs. And we would play mixed and occasionally there would be a hassle and the police would follow you. If they saw you in the car together they'd follow you and hassle you.

Rabinbach: And the Mar-Keys didn't have a lot of songs at that point.

Dickinson: They had, well they could play [unclear] and they brought on a singer, Ronnie Stewch [?], Ronnie H. There were two albums, well I guess there were four albums in all. There were two albums worth of material they pretty much anyone that called themselves a Mar-Key

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could pretty much play. Those gigs were great. I played one Mar-Key gig—a latter day Mar-Key gig—and it must have been '64 or 5—with Packey and Johnny Keys, Bongo Johnny on piano, that was in the old Stax studio, up in Missouri somewhere and Packey was the only horn player on the session and he wasn't even playing on a couple of sets, he'd just stand there. Some drunk redneck kid came up to the band stand and said "I been to Memphis. I've seen the Mar-Keys and you ain't them." Packey looked out at that kid and said, "I don't care where you been and what you seen. I am the Mar-Keys." And Packey was one of the most racially enlightened people I ever knew. He was maybe beyond Dewey Phillips.

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Rabinbach: You were close to him.

Dickinson: That was the reason that I didn't spend more time with Stax than I did, because it got to a point where you could be a friend of Packey's or you could go be at Stax. But you couldn't do both those things.

Rabinbach: Why was Packey blacklisted?

Dickinson: I don't know. Nobody knows that's still alive but Jim Stewart, but there were a series of incidents.

Rabinbach: What sort of a personality was old Packey?

Dickinson: He was great. He inspired great faith; I don't know why. My wife, who was very particular about me going on the road—although she did encourage me to be a musician, it wasn't like that, she just didn't want me going on the road—she let me go anywhere with Packey. And Packey would show up—we were living in the veteran's housing on the Memphis State campus—Packey would show up Friday night,

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knock on the door dead drunk, we'd be going God knows where. It would be dark, he'd have his sunglasses on and he would be driving and my wife would just say, "Oh yeah, go on its Packey. It's okay." Packey was magic. He was amazing.

Rabinbach: That's what it sounds like from everything I've read.

Dickinson: Yeah. He learned to play the saxophone so fast that he never developed any tone, so he could play his butt off but he had this wretched tone. It was like a curse. He got some great instrumental records, though. He would cut stuff after they banned him from the studio at Stax. He would come over to ours and cut sessions with Johnny Keys using like this rhythm section. It was Carlie Cunningham and Flick, and Teeny Hodges—the Hodges brothers—and Woolie Mitchell's son, Hubby. And they had a name that I can't tell you on camera.

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Rabinbach: You'll have to tell me when I turn it off.

Dickinson: They would cut these instrumental tracks, really simple instrumental tracks and Packey would sell them by the hitch, literally to independent record companies. He would label them like "medium slow junk" you know what I mean? Packey was amazing.

Rabinbach: And when did you start cutting sessions all the time?

Dickinson: I didn't truly know what record production was. I had met some producers and been produced but I didn't truly know what it was until I met John King who was Shawn Frye's partner. Same period of time, my wife and I were both going to Memphis State and living in veteran's housing, you could jump the fence to get in the ditch, walk about a block and a half

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and be at Shawn Frye's house where he had a full fledged recording studio in 1964. He considered himself retired having cut himself some records as a kid and basically being out of it. Well that was too close for me. I had done some work with Chips on the first [inaudible] album. I played a couple of sessions for Dawn Knicks and other people like that and Phillips and I made a couple of records myself for Beal Justice and Warren Peace's sun.

Rabinbach: How did you get involved playing for tSun?

Dickinson: There's no way to explain who Teddy Paige was. He's in prison now in London, supposedly for life, for attacking somebody with a sword. He had a band called The Chesters that Sam Phillips' son was in, Jerry Phillips, Knox's little brother. I knew Teddy

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from playing garage gigs around Memphis. And The Chesters had a singer named Tommy Minga and this was in the lighter days of Sun. They had a Randy the Radiance record, a couple other records, nothing serious and this group The Chesters that Jerry was playing guitar in, Teddy Paige's group, had a singer named Tommy Minga and Sam hated his voice. Sam wasn't gonna put on a record as long as it was Minga singing, so Paige figured this out and calls me up and says "Will you come down and play piano on a session—demo session?". I said "yeah sure, Teddy" because I liked Teddy. He played primitive music; we had similar tastes. So we got to the session and nobody called Minga so there was no singer, right? And this is a demo and this was Knox's first session

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which I didn't find out for a while. Knox is engineering so we're going to go on and cut and then "Okay Chip here are the lyrics. Why don't you sing and we cut four sides just like that, that night, one of them being "Cadillac Man" that came out. And then Sam liked it. He didn't like Minga but he liked my voice and I had already made one record, my "Jug Man" record in the New Beale Street Sheiks for Justice in Nashville and we cut that at Sun... Phillips. So, I was under contract and Sam calls me up and puts Judd on the phone, his brother Judd who was even crazier than he was and they start talking all this stuff about payola and going on tour and how they were excited about this record, they really wanted to put it out. Sam gets back on the phone and he says, "Boy, you gotta cast your lot." And I said "Sam, I'm afraid my lot is already cast." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I'm under contract to Bill Justice."

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Sam says, "No man! Bill Justice won't care!" And sure enough, Bill didn't care. So we put the record out and that was how- I don't even remember how- oh yeah, yeah, how did I get to Sun Record. That was it.

Rabinbach: Anyway, so you'd been playing some sessions around when you did the Sun session.

Dickinson: Yeah and uh the first time that I ever went to Stax it was still Satellite. It was with Brunswick and the Reeses went out there and the tape record wouldn't record but they bought the equipment.

Rabinbach: So the Reeses would've had a "45 at Satellite in the museum maybe...?"

Dickinson: And Packey [unclear] this is when I met Packey. He was the engineer and he would have to stop and go cook burgers in the Dairy Queen if a client, a money client came.

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So where was I? We could see it on the meter but we couldn't make it record. That was discouraging to me and next time that I went to Stax it was over on Macklemore. They had just got the building. It was still gutted. There was nothing. No acoustic. There was no heat in fact. And Chips was auditioning musicians for his quote "jazz band" unquote and Chips had about the same idea of jazz that I did which was you play misty in C, not E flat so you know I auditioned for Chips at Stax and that was my next... But over the years of playing phony Mar-Key gigs with Packey and that kind of stuff I kept my...on the outside looking in. And in the latter day I played a couple of Village sound and their various white groups because they always wanted a white artist. It was always, you know, people used to say "the man who can bring Stax a white hit

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could write his own ticket" well it wasn't true.

Rabinbach: Well it never really happened, did it?

Dickinson: No, never happened. But it explains a lot of things in terms of I made a record on the group that became Black Oak Arkansas that signed—as nobody else has their original name—signed to uh to Stax then—again it was Jim's dream to bring home a white artist. But they got, I don't know, the early records to me were the great records. The Atlantic distribution set up was the perfect...that was working. I mean it why fix what ain't broken but they felt compelled to and the idea of self-determination I guess just overpowered them.

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It's the same thing that took Sam Phillips out of the business really. It was the conflict between the majors and the independents.

Rabinbach: Right. Now you worked for Chip's Moment in America

Dickinson: Yeah it was my first real job.

Rabinbach: And how did that come about? You had already auditioned for him.

Dickinson: I'm sure he didn't remember me by that point. I had encountered him a couple of other times. It was a Mar-Key tour of Europe that was supposed to happen I guess in '65; it never happened. And uh they asked me to play it and I told them I wouldn't and it got known that I wouldn't tour. So when Chips, when he and Don Cruise took American from Seymour Rosenberg, American Studios, he cut a couple of records and the first successful thing that he had was "Keep 'Em Dancing" by the Gentries.

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The Gentries was a high school band, still in high school most of them, who had won a talent contest. Chips, who was painting garages at the time-- it was significant to him that he wasn't a house painter, he was a garage painter. I don't know why it mattered to him but it did. He had his paint clothes on; he was in Baretta's one night and he saw this bunch of long haired kids sitting in the corner and he went over and asked if they wanted to make a record and Raspberry thought he was looking for a fight, you know. So they made "Keep on Dancing" and it became a reasonable hit and they got a MGM contract. Well same period of time my wife and I were living in the Vet's Village and this phone call comes about nine o' clock one night. It's Raspberry and his voice is up like two octaves. "Hey Jim I have a terrible problem." "What's the matter?" Well, my record's number fifteen with a bullet and I need to cut an album and Chips—and half my band just quit because they won't go on the road. I mean

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he had a saxophone player that was a girl and this was when it wasn't hip to have a girl in the band. They had all quit and he said "And Chips won't start to make the record until I've got a band." And I said, "Well, Larry, that's understandable." He said, "Will you call the [unclear] the Gentries?" I said "Hell no Larry!" He said, "Well, will you come down here and tell Chips you will?" And I understood exactly what he meant. I said, "yeah sure, Larry."

Rabinbach: What did he mean?

Dickinson: He meant if you come down here and tell Chips you'll go on the road maybe we can start to make a record and whatever, you know. I said "yeah sure Larry I'll do that." I took my wife, Linda, and went down there. Chelsea and Thomas, middle of the ghetto at 11 o'clock at night by then you know. And Chips says "you mean you'll go on the road with The Gentries?" I said "yeah sure" so then I start talking to the other musicians and before I knew it, Chips had locked the door and he didn't let us out till then the next day by which time we had made The Gentries whole first album and half of the second. And Chips said "oh, boy, you too good to go on the road with The Gentries." I said,

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"yeah, Chips, that's what I think." So I had a job.

Rabinbach: And that was the same group that were the Dixie Flyers?

Dickinson: Oh no, that was way before the Dixie Flyers. The whole, at that point the whole American Rhythm section was Tommy Cogboe [?], me, and Terence Nelson, who was the black guy that had to sweep up. There was only one pair of earphones.

Rabinbach: And what was the relationship between the American Rhythm Section and what later became known as the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section?

Dickinson: None other than jealousy and hatred.

Rabinbach: I see.

Dickinson: Now some, on the early Muscle Shoals, on the Recalls some of the early Atlantic hits, they called Wexler called Chips to contract the band.

Rabinbach: I see.

Dickinson: And Chips and Cog..[?] like Mustang Sally there's like three guitar players and there's like multiple. Roger Hawkins is playing drums and all stuff though that but what became known as the American Rhythm—which was just after I quit,

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not just actually, there was another keyboard player in the middle there who would go on the road with The Gentries I believe.

Rabinbach: So you left before all those major hits started coming out?

Dickinson: Oh yeah, I never played on any hits for Chips. I played on everything from but not including "Keep on Dancing" to "Born a Woman" but not, you know, one of those which were both hits. I played on a bunch of stuff but never that ever, you know, amounted to anything.

Rabinbach: Okay.

Dickinson: And I quit Chips to work for Frye because I thought I wanted to engineer. Again, I was not knowing what producing was. And I figured Chips would never run the board which he had built himself. I was wrong. The next person Chips hired was an engineer, so yeah. I've made a lot of great decisions. And Frye had actually told me he says, "Jim, I don't think you're psychologically suited to be an engineer." He was right. Gave me nightmares. I ended up in Freudian analysis

[38:00]

After engineering. It was terrible

Rabinbach: And so-

Dickinson: But then eventually John Kinney told me what a record producer was. And having experience Chips and Sam Phillips at that point, I started to put together the pieces.

Rabinbach: So when did you produce your first record?

Dickinson: For Frye. It was Lawson and four more...uh Bobby Fisher who rents a music store in East Memphis called me up, same thing over at the Vets Village, "Oh we should move back there. That was a very creative period in time." Called me up and said "can you uh...have you got a song- have you got a Kinks song? A song like the Kinks." I said "no but I'll write you one." He said "So I found this group they're all fifteen years old and they play great." Both of which were a lie. But the band was Lawson and Four More, and Terry Manning was the keyboard player. And uh, I wrote the song in forty-five minutes and...

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got Fisher to take me over to Frye's and ended up producing the record.

Rabinbach: Where does it take to write a Kink's song?

Dickinson: Motivation. Two chords and motivation.

Rabinbach: Yeah. So then how did you end up down in Miami with the Dixie Flyers?

Dickinson: Well, when I worked for John I guess about a year a half to two years. I'm not sure how much; I kind of lost touch with linear time on purpose. And I've been wildly successful. Uh, when I finished up the "Nobody Else" album [unclear]...I quit John and tried to sell it- to no avail. Uh, then the next quote "job", Stan Kessler had a little makeshift studio in a tobacco warehouse called "Sounds of Memphis". He had Charlie Freeman and Sammy Krissen and Tommy McCure

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we're working there pretty much as the [inaudible] section. And Charlie and I had been friends since high school really, and he and I with Charlie one day and we said to Kessler, "do you need another engineer?" And he said, "I just hired B.B Cunningham Jr." The voice of "Let It All Hangout" for The Hombres. He said, "I just I wished you talked to me a week ago. I've just hired B.B." Uh, and I said to Kessler, I said, "well what about as a musician?" He cast around and looked at me and says "Chip, I don't even think of you as a musician." Which has been my problem ever since. But he said, "Hang around." He says, "I've got- Welland Rogers has an Albert Colin session coming up and we already got James Hooker Brown playing keyboards but hang around." And I hung around and I started playing the Wurlitzer on the song and Welland Rogers, God bless him,

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put the mic on the Wurlitzer and that was on the session. The record which was "Trash Talkin" was nominated for Grammy. About a year later, I was taught a mythology by Packey, Chip, and Kessler, which was if you had the Atlantic account it was all you needed, which was not true. The Muscle Shoals that this point happened when the Atlantic broke away from Stax they actually figured that they can do the same thing somewhere else with some other crazy white boys which they found Muscle Shoals and they recall that they broke away from him, they formed Muscle Shoals Sounds with money they borrowed from the Atlantic then the rest was history as they say. Well as Wexler in the pattern of his life, looking for an ever cheaper way to do the same thing,

[42:00]

he figured if he could do it in Miami where he lived, it would a lot easier. So he and [inaudible] in Miami of criteria of what they call Atlantic South this is in 1969, working a band named Cold Grits, the band that cut with Georgia, made of a bunch of crazy white boys and it turns out they were too crazy. So, [inaudible] looking for some more crazy white boys so Thanksgiving 1969, while the Wexler family was having Thanksgiving dinner with Stanley Booth, a rock writer from Memphis, which was my friend and at Thanksgiving dinner Wexler was playing the record and "Trash Talkin" and Wexler loves to play music for people. Wexler says, "baby I wish I knew who that was to try to move that band over to Miami." And I had already met Wexler at Eddy Wexler's house down in Muscle Shoals

[43:00]

And we had gotten along real well. [Unknown] that's Dickenson's band which wasn't true it definitely wasn't my band. It wasn't even the same musician, but it worked. Wexler comes to me that day, sit down for Thanksgiving dinner. We no long lived in Vet's Village, lived in the old house out on Yates crossing the cemetery. The phone rings and Stanley said we got someone here who wants to talk you. "Baby!" Wexler sounds like a Jewish Elmer Fudd. This is perfect description. He said baby this is [Unknown], do you want to come to Miami and be a rhythm section. I said that sounds good let me call the boys. And at this point, Charlie has been barred from Sounds of Memphis for life for shooting his shotgun in the control room. Although, Kessler would have probably gotten over it. It was really important for me to play with Charlie.

[44:00]

So, I called Charlie and said look, Wexler Blah Blah Blah.... what are we going to do? He say, Tarp Tarrant had actually played on the Albert Collins session because Sammy Creason had a kidney stone attack in the studio that day, he was carried off in an ambulance. So, Tarp actually played on the record. And I said to Freeman, "should I call Tarp?" He says no it's Sammy's job. Well it wasn't Sammy's job, it was my job. I just gotten it and I should've called Tarp, but I didn't. So, the Dixie flyers went to Miami, and I went crazy and came back.

Rabinbach: Why did you go crazy over there?

Dickinson: Because it's something here that I need and I didn't know it yet.

Rabinbach: Something in Memphis...

Dickinson: Something here that I need musically. It happened to everybody down there musically, but Tommy.

[45:00]

Tommy could play right away, until he went crazy later. That had to do with women and stuff.

Rabinbach: So, it's different for how you to play anywhere, but here huh?

Dickinson: It changes what I do radically. After about ten days, my left hand starts to be really funny. What I do is so simple that it's easy to tell. When I first figured out there was a geographic variable was with Splinter Allman. A keyboard player who's a much better keyboard player than I am and far more sensitive to environmental changes. I thought listen to this. Here's splinter in New York. Here's a tape of splinter in Nashville, Splinter in Muscle Shoals. Splinter in L.A. There all different. And the best is from Memphis. Isn't that weird? Maybe, I should listen to my own stuff. I listen to my own stuff and there it is- it's obvious. Over the years I developed a way of playing in Los Angeles or I wouldn't have been able to make a living, but it isn't the same thing I do here.

[46:00]

And it happens to everybody. That's what I mean about Memphis. There's something that happens here.

Rabinbach: Huh. And do Muscle Shoals count?

Dickinson: Muscle Shows is very much the same place. It's like a seesaw. It used to be the old days. If Memphis was up Shoals were down. Vice versa. And I know people who were trapped in what they use to call the Delta Triangle between Memphis and Muscle Shows in Nashville. They just drive that triangle trying to make a living playing sessions. There's a similarity in Muscle Shoals, but it's all hype. It's different.

Rabinbach: Did you get anything done in Florida?

Dickinson: No, we made fourteen albums in six months before things went crazy, which was kind of a lot. We resurrected Aretha Franklin, which was not a popular thing for me to say, which I was told.

Rabinbach: Tell me about that.

Dickinson: "Spirit in the Dark", "Don't play that Song."

[47:00]

That was Grammy. We spent two weeks with Aretha. She never spoke a word to us. It was amazing. She's quite a presence.

Rabinbach: She didn't talk to you.

Dickinson: It has been a while since she recorded. She walked in and saw a room full of crazy white boys, but then we can play and it worked. We had that same reaction from a couple of them of course. But, as soon as they heard us play, like for Sam and David, it's like being home. My favorite record we made down there was Carmen McRae because she was such a high caliber artist and was different musically.

Rabinbach: What record was it?

Dickinson: Carmen McRae, "Just A Little Lovin'", very hard to find. Her manager hated it.

[48:00]

Then Roberta Flack did the same thing basically. A jazz singer doing rock songs. It was a cut of the Beatles something. It's pretty amazing.

Rabinbach: Do you have that record laying around?

Dickinson: Yeah, I got it [inaudible] somewhere.

Rabinbach: I would love to hear it actually.

Dickinson: It's something the beginning of my piano solo turns into King Curtis and from King Curtis it goes into New York symphony string players.

Rabinbach: you like that? And then he came back. So, now it's around the time when you, Lee Baker, and John McIntyre started doing the blues festival.

Dickinson: Well, the blues festival happened in then 60s. In fact, the same exact band that played the Albert Collins album with James Hooker Brown playing the organ and Tarp playing drums had the soldiers with cross playing the '68, '69 blues festival.

[49:00]

Well uh, Baker was in prison. See the blues festival had started I guess in 1966. Lee Baker and I.. I boycotted the second festival because of a difference of opinion.. He was right and I was wrong.. about playing mixed on the blues festival. I wanted to keep it separate so that the black music would be pure. I thought it was important to present the music of the blues festival. It appears for me that I was utterly wrong. Lee was completely right. But, point being since [Inaudible] crossed way with Lee Baker and me, they all played these blues festivals to the 60s, but never together. When they came back from Miami, Baker had a group called [inaudible] that had been on Stax.

[50:00]

White blues band, they were fabulous. The tradition that was the blues festival turned into a hippie amalgam called the Dream Carnivals. At this point, Furry was still alive, Buck [inaudible] was still alive. They would perform, [inaudible] would perform, I would perform. We were still separate.

Rabinbach: Who were you playing with ?

Dickinson: Whoever I had at that point. So, I did one of them solo even. [Inaudible] would be solo and [Inaudible] would do a puppet show or some hard thing. But, this all grew together to where it was Halloween of 1972, which was the beginning of Mud Boy and the Neutrons. This was the four of us together. We were at that point like the white boys from the blues festival literally the missing piece of that puzzle. The original Memphis country blues festival was put on by Charlie Brown

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who ran a coffee house. Bill Barth, who was founder of the Insect Trust, the band Bob Parker played in. I fought Barth tooth and nail over the concept. He was right and I was wrong. A hybrid community was formed by the festivals between old legendary blues players and the Memphis Bohemian underground. Without which, things would've certainly, been different. It certainly wouldn't be John Spencer or the White Stripes. That idea literally came from there,

Rabinbach: That sounds to me it was really important and incredible. It's really a big part of what we are talking about here.

[52:00]

It's sort of bringing the culture together. Even though rock and roll had already been formed, something new happened when you went back even further and pulled Fur Lewis out.

Dickinson: I realized there wasn't a difference. It's the same old thing. Reverend Robert Wilkins Family Band, Big Son and Baby Son was the greatest thing I ever saw in my life. It was encounterable. The three or four years he played, the third one was by far the best. He brought more people in and it changed. The people that he got to see.... it was never a big ground and never was full. This was at the Overton Park shell, the same place Elvis played. It would never be full, only at some nights with bigger shows. A little guy from Japan came every year.

[53:00]

I remember seeing him stand by the speakers and cry, while Furry was playing. This guy came from Japan every damn year. He told that didn't change his life. It changed everybody's life that saw it. It created the mindset like Dewey Phillips had in his own way that Mud boy and the neutrons played to for twenty- three years. That's who our audience was. People who were trying to relive those experiences.

Rabinbach: Did it happen?

Dickinson: Limited success, there were moments. The corporate takeover of rock and roll can be seen in both these stories. Elvis and Stax

[54:00]

When Elvis took Dewey to the west coast,doing movies, Dewey really embarrassed him. When Elvis started pulling away from Dewey, I think that's the beginning of the sellout of rock and roll. I think you can see it right there. It started to turn into a posture and a cliché.

Rabinbach: Don't do anything embarrassing.

Dickinson: Yeah, this man who had literally invented the idea. It was hard to be in the room with Dewey. Even Elvis Presley, who was he to be embarrassed by Dewey Phillips?

Rabinbach: That's a good question.

Dickinson: That's the question Elvis should've asked himself in the middle of the night somewhere.

[55:00]

What's it about anyways?

Rabinbach: What's it about for you?

Dickinson: I don't know I just keep doing it. I got to help all my children do it.

Rabinbach: They're doing really well huh?

Dickinson: Yeah, they're better than me that's for sure. I moved to Memphis in 1949. I was conceived here and born in Little Rock and raised in Chicago, which is why I talk funny. Maybe, it gave me a different racial view point I don't know. I saw the world change in front of my eyes in Memphis in the 50s for the better. Some people liberated. I saw what Sam Phillips did with his artist

[56:00] and Jim Stewart to an extent. I think if you woke Jim Stewart up in the middle of the night and ask him what he was trying to do, he'd say I'm trying to be Sam Phillips. Sam Phillips had encouraged people to be themselves who had never been encouraged before, who have never been told anything, but shut up, sit down, and get out. He encouraged these people to be

themselves creatively. Stax encouraged the races to mix and see what happened. Both of those things were clearly worth doing. They are symbolized to this day by that music. That music is not nostalgia- It's still good.

Rabinbach: It really holds up.

Dickinson: It's what makes the difference.

[57:00]

It's like the Delta Blues. Think about the Delta Blues. This was like thirty- thirty-five men. Tops, music that was supposed to be disposable and that music won't go away. The vintage music from Stax won't go away. The music from Sun won't go away because it is art. It's not pop culture. It's transcended pop culture.

Rabinbach: Im going to change tapes...

Dickinson: As awful at that is.

Rabinbach: But, it's good to mass to go along without it. Right?

Dickinson: Yes, it's stronger. It's like the Delta. When they built the damn casinos in the Delta, I thought, ok, that it, thats over. The Delta has been unchanged for sixty... ninety years. It's over. It didn't have any affect at all. Whatever it is, it's out there in the bushes.

They'll talk to Robert Johnson. Tonight, is still there and it's stronger than those damn casinos.

Rabinbach: Still talking...

Dickinson: Still talking, that's right.

[58:00]

And the same thing in Memphis. You walk down Beale Street and as awful as it is, you can still feel something. Walk in into 706 Sun Studio and you feel it unquestionably. And it's as phony as a three-dollar bill in there and you still feel it.

Rabinbach: It's a ghost in there.

Dickinson: That's why I won't walk into Stax. That's why I'm not going there because that is not Stax.

Rabinbach: It's a shame about what happened there, the fact that it got torn down.

Dickinson:[Inaudible] black church because they were ashamed of it.

Rabinbach: They were ashamed of it?

Dickinson: Sure.

Rabinbach: Why?

Dickinson: It represented a part of black history. Why didn't they tear the Beale Street? Why didn't they level the entire course of Martin Luther King's march for the Cleaborn [inaudible] The entire thing has been destroyed. It destroyed black history. Even the black church of Memphis is ashamed

[59:00]

of Memphis's black history.

Rabinbach: Why?

Dickinson: I don't know. You got me. The real story that happened there will never be told.

Rabinbach: Why?

Dickinson: There's too many people telling the other story for one thing. It's pointless.

Rabinbach: Do you feel like you know it?

Dickinson: I know more of it than I should. I did a record for the man. The man [Inaudible] Bank who pulled the cord and bankrupted Stax. He was truly visionary, and Bill Matthews is dead. After he bankrupted stax, he started feeling guilty. He thought possibly he had done the wrong thing and wanted to pump some money back into the Memphis music community.

[1:00:00]

To make a long story short... Eventually after two or three other people, they hired me to this documentary record called Beale Street Saturday Night. In the process of doing that record, I worked at a [Inaudible], also dead. He was the axe man who chopped, took Stax out. Between those two men, I learned more than is really healthy to know about the actual bankruptcy. When Clive Davis was running CBS, he had business people from Harvard run a survey to see what could make it bigger. He was the record business at that point. They said you have everything, but a black independent company.

[1:01:00]

There are two; Motown and Stax. Either one are for sale. That wasn't right because they both were for sale, which he found out. He bought Stax, the plan being with the way the deal was structured, they wouldn't be payed royalty they would be payed based in reshipment on sold merchandise, which would more than likely put them out of business for six months. In time, CBS would soak them up. Well it didn't happen. It continued not to happen for these long periods of time- four years atleast. Stax kept not making any money and, yet staying open and nobody knew why. How? By the time they finally did go out of business, Clive Davis was going from CBS and everyone who was involved with the deal was gone from CBS. The deal basically didn't exist anymore.

[1:02:00]

There was a loan officer at the bank, who in covering up other misdeeds continued to loan Stax money, basically unsecured, to keep their books out of court. That all fell apart when they caught Johnny Baylor at the airport with all the money in the briefcase. The IRS got involved. It fell down like a house of cards. This was all structured around loans from Union Planters Bank. I was told in that period of time when I was working on this record. There was sixty million dollars on paper. It disappeared into a blackhole like in space. The person who told me said it was his experience that you can generally double the figure.

[1:03:00]

That much money was sucked out of the Memphis music community all in once. The year after Stax bankrupted, my personal income, which had nothing to do with Stax records, went down sixty percent. This happened to of course everybody in the city. I never expected this day would come back. It is truly a miracle of nature that there is a Memphis music community today.

Rabinbach: What are you saying here?

Dickinson: What do you mean?

Rabinbach: I mean, this money disappeared from the music community.

Dickinson: Well, it just disappeared from Stax.

Rabinbach: When Stax went out of business that's what happened. It killed the whole community.

Dickinson: Well, they were paying the song writers every other week I guess. They were sending money out through mail. This was just from the publishing company. They moved to the bank because it was the only thing they could figure out

[1:04:00]

that was worth anything. The songs were basically like real estate. The first time they came to payroll, they said we aren't sending the checks out through the mail. You have to come to the bank to get your check. Half of the people didn't come because they weren't people. Rent-a-cars disappeared. I don't know what it all was.

Rabinbach: Nobody seems to really know.

Dickinson: No. Money was being cleaned obviously.

Rabinbach: It wasn't just a savory organization at the end.

Dickinson: No, it had gotten pretty bad at the end. When they sold out to [inaudible] they took a real radical commercial change. The name that no one would speak, Johnny Baylor, came and everything changed.

[1:05:00]

Rabinbach: A lot of people are speaking of Johnny Baylor these days,

Dickinson: Now that he is dead.

Rabinbach: Yeah, people are speaking about him. From what I know that's been a big part of it.

Dickinson: That was a huge part.

Rabinbach: That was around the time when you were working on a record with Alex Chilton.

Dickinson: Stax was going out of business, that's why we were working on it for so long. We figured if we kept working on it then go out of business, we'd have that on a record. Well that's what happened, but then we couldn't sale it. It's exactly what happened. If you find a demonstration disc on Big Star's 3rd, it has a Stax serial number on it.

Rabinbach: How was that like? Was that an experience for you?

Dickinson: Yeah, it was great. It was one of the most greastest experiences of my life.

Rabinbach: It's good to hear that.

Dickinson: Mostly, mostly what you hear about that the record is an exaggeration.

[1:06:00]

Some is not, but most of it is. We did get a little sketchy towards the end.

Rabinbach: I think for John Fry, who's running the studio it seems...

Dickinson: It seems tragic for John Fry. I didn't really understand, until it was over. It was the last record we did from top to bottom. He was the best I had ever worked with. I worked with guys who were supposed to be the real guys and they couldn't carry John Fry's slide rule in. He was the best I have ever worked with. There is a sonic sensability on that big star record that I have been able to recapture.

Rabinbach: There is a reason everyone is still talking about it.

Dickinson: Carl Marsh, also the arranger on that record was never credited. He is one of the heroes of the record for sure.

Rabinbach: Say the name again.

Dickinson: Carl Marsh. He worked with Cropper for years. He was Cropper's session boy. he did all the string arrangements. He played all the oboes and

[1:07:00]

Saxaphones.

Rabinbach: What were the individual sessions like? Because everything was in such dissaray.. was always bringing in different people.

Dickinson: Most of the session was cut with just Alex and Jody. Yeah, me and Frye were in the control room, but mostly it was just them playing. Occasionallly, it would be more then we would build from there. The people that say we made it up in the studio and all that stuff...I had demos for everything with two songs. Alex gave me demos for the whole record.

Rabinbach: You knew exactly what you were doing.

Dickinson: Yeah, we changed lyrics on one song and we changed directions on a couple of them. It was not like we were sitting there and making it up. It was a body of work. When he brought it to me. What I think I did.. Up to that point first by [inaudible] by Fry in Big Star,

[1:08:00]

Alex had been oppresively produced. I think removed I removed the yolk of oppresivvely production from Alex. [unknown] was an artist first. He had been raised creatively in creative family and had specific creative ideas. He was told to sit down and shut up by everybody. Alex would tell me... Lets's do the snare drum with a basketball. Okay Alex let's go get a basketball. That's what we basically did.

Rabinbach: Which track did you use that on?

Dickinson: " Downs". Fry made a mistake by saying he liked the song. So Alex butchered it. That's the only one we really did butcher. I think that record represents Alex's last consistent set of performances. That's another big part of the magic.

[1:09:00]

Rabinbach: What do you mean by that?

Dickinson: Well, after that Alex could be destructive... he can get down to the end of something and not quite deliver. There is none of that on Big Star Third and that happened later. Alex was still caught up in the idea of doing it well, you know, to deliver. I don't think he ever did again consistently. You can see moments of genius in every thing he does. To sustain it as long as he did in Third, never happened again.

Rabinbach: It's a long record and a lot of songs on there.

Dickinson: All that stuff wasn't supposed to be a record. It was never supposed to be a double record which some people say. We just kept cutting, like I said.

[1:10:00]

Some of it obviously wasn't suppose to fit in. We had very different ideas on what should be included and what should be excluded. Which is why I refused to sequence it a couple of times and so has Alex. I know it's suppose be first . I know it's suppose to be last.

Rabinbach: What was first and last?

Dickinson: First it's suppose to be "Thank you Friends". Last, it's suppose to be "Take Care." Alex had seen this as a positive statement. Everybody says the record is dark. It's only dark because of the way it was sequenced. Everytime it is put out people lump all the romp material and the arty stuff together and that's the way it is presented, it always ends on a down. It is not the way Alex saw it. The record has geography. It took me fully twenty years to figure out. You can walk through Midtown Memphis and see that record.

Rabinbach: Tell me about that.

Dickinson: A lot of it has changed since then.

[1:11:00]

Rabinbach: I know Midtown pretty well.

Dickinson: Overton Square, Cooper, and Madison that's "Nighttime" by were the Laugh Factory use to be is "Nighttime", I can see it with the scarf. Lisa Aldridge, the girl that the record is about- her family home- "Holocaust" is about her mother, its not about Lisa. Again, I didn't figure it out for years. I was talking with Jody the drummer after I figured it out. I said, "Jodie, the whole record was about Midtown" and he said oh, yeah. Jody is a trip.

Rabinbach: Yeah, I want to talk to Jody too. He was out of town.

Dickinson: I always thought because the way we couldn't. The two of us, it was tight. I always thought they had rehearsed. Jody didn't even hear the demos. He was hearing it all for the first time. Alex said he as so intimidated. Without a bass player, it was so much space.

[1:12:00] He had to really hammer it and perform.

Rabinbach: He really did a lot of that on "Kangaroo".

Dickinson: See "Kangaroo", that was me playing. That's another thing. The days Jody didn't show up I played drums. So all the stuff that sounds like the guys falling over is me. "Femme Fatale" was me. When Alex was on I was going to cut it. Jody wasn't there so I played.

Rabinbach: What was he like when he was on?

Dickinson: It was magic. It was just magic. Alex is really a performer. When he wants to sing, he has really a sweet voice. You can hear all of the Memphis stuff. The point of "Gorgeous Book", which I would've never thought of in a million years, was taking conglomerated black and white bohemian community and lumping it all together, and having Alex be the pinnacle.

[1:13:00]

It would all lead up to Alex. I would've never seen it.

Rabinbach: It was the intersection of everything that had happened.

Dickinson: Many things.

Rabinbach: The Beatles coming to America as well.

Dickinson: He was smart enough through Fry and Terry Manning and all these other people who really. They all knew each other, but to bring it together in one thing that was Alex.

Rabinbach: I think people still don't understand how that happened. I think people who listen to music and they ask me about my music and say well what are you doing. Well it is a lot about this idea the intersection of avant-garde rock and roll and black rhythm and blues. They say how does that work? I say haven't you heard Big Star.

Dickinson: Yeah, like Talking Heads.

Rabinbach: Talking Heads, exactly.

Dickinson: Busta Cherry who is Baker's protégé.

Rabinbach: Is that right?

Dickinson: Oh yeah.

[1:14:00]

Michael use to say if , "I ever get famous I was going to tell people Lee Baker has turned me out."

Rabinbach: What was it like working with Lee Baker?

Dickinson: Baker was utterly unique. The stylistic thing he did, he had done since childhood. The first time I heard him as a teenager, he was doing that weird interval thing. That probably prevented him from being a success, but nevertheless defined his style.

Rabinbach: He's probably one of the best guitar players I have ever heard.

Dickinson: Spontaneously in the moment, he was unbelievable. There is a thing we did together that I could never do with anybody else. Even my son. I just can't do anymore. I played with Ry Cooder for years. I got to where I can anticipate him. I knew if he played "A", he was going to play "B". So, I could either play it when him, play before him, or after him.

[1:15:00]

One way or the other, it would sound like we were playing together. That's kind of the primitive way people do it, but don't know anything about music. Baker he would play of those non-sequitor intervals of his and I could go to it then try to get beyond it. Then, he would go to that and get beyond that. We would be going up and out. We could just keep going to where it would be insane. Yet, we would be spitting it back and forth at each other and it would still be musical. I can't do it with anybody else.

Rabinbach: You guys played with each other, until he died.

Dickinson: Yeah. He was murdered.

Rabinbach: It was a real tradgedy.

Dickinson: I see his influence in my son and in Sid Salvage's son. I think is something Baker wouldn't really have thought about that he was influencing players on what he was doing.

[1:16:00]

He was truly remarkable.

Rabinbach: And Dan Penn, you had some creative differences with.

Dickinson: We had some creative differences.

Rabinbach: How did you meet Dan Penn?

Dickinson: He was the first person from American Studios to come to Ardent.

[Phone call ...]

Dickinson: Hey man. Oh sure. Ok, bye.

[1:17:00]

Dan had an 8-track machine and they were still cutting 4-track, Dan wanted a place to put his strings and horns. So, he brought the second boxtops album to Ardent. I had quit Ardent by this time, but I was still hanging out there.

Rabinbach: This was Cry Like A Baby.

Dickinson: This was "Cry Like A Baby" album, which was a brilliant record. There was stuff on there Alex won't talk about. I don't see why he's not proud of that music. "Deep inKentucky" and "Leaping Anolea", tha's the best pop music ever cut in Memphis. It ws right at the same times as [Inaudible] in Memphis.

[1:18:00]

Within months with each other. They have the same rhythm section, same players, and the same studio. That's the epitome of the Memphis sound. You want to talk about the Memphis sound

that was it. That was the good as it got. Dan was a pure Alabama redneck. He would wear a cowboy hat, sunglasses, and pajamas pealed out of his brains. He would come in there and mix up stuff himself. I would sit outside in the lobby and listen. He didn't know who I was at this point. I don't remember how we actually met. It may been at the Muscle Shoals. He had beautiful sounds. He opened a studio over on Highland and cut what became the "Nobody's Fool" album.

[1:19:00]

He had a single out on "Nobody's Fool" and "Brotherly Love". [Inaudible] offered him a lot of money for it and he wouldn't sell. When we came back from Miami, in that period of time, I started hanging around Dan, and encouraged him to put creation of stuff together as an album. I went with him to Nashville to put it together. He had nothing left, but a 7 and a half copy, but I think it was great work. Over the next few months, Lee asked to produce his next album, which I should've known better. I've done two records for [Inaudible] I was working in a pretty high level. I was in Los Angeles with musicians that I only dreamed about until then.

[1:20:00]

Rabinbach: Like, who really knocked you out, playing out there?

Dickinson: Keltner. One of the great blessings of my life was to work with Jim Keltner. Anybody I wanted, I'll just call up there and we would work. Dan asked me to produce his next record. I quit Cooder, which was some quite financial laws, to produce what was called "Emmet the Singing Ranger Live in the Woods". We did some sessions in Muscle Shoals and some in Nashville as well as two in Muscle Shows. Dan said it was traveling record Jimmy. Some of it was pretty amazing. We reached our creative differences. He took on and quote "finished it" and it never saw the light of day.

Rabinbach: What did you guys differ over?

Dickinson: We both wanted the same thing, a lot of money.

[1:21:00]

He was a frustating man and an amazing, amazing singer. Like most artists, he would never want to give it up like most artist. Almost most of them in that way, get to the microphone and they don't want to give it up. Once they do, it's not theirs anymore. It is collectively owned, and I think that bothers Dan. He was a lot like Dylan.

Rabinbach: Well, how so?

Dickinson: They are even physically similar. In a way of distrusting the process, which I trust, think you have to, and neither of them do.

[1:22:00]

Live music does nothing for me. I had this problem when I was working in the theater. I talked to my friends who were actors and they would talk about how they loved the audience and that they feel the love coming from the audience. I feel nothing coming from the audience. I look at the

audience and I feel mild annoyance, which I recognize is unhealthy. So, I try not to think about it. When i'm playing on stage I am there for the other musicians, the music and the audience... they're there. I can't help this the way I feel. When I'm in the studio, I'm utterly aware of my audience. So, there seperated from me by timeand space. I know them, I can feel them, and I can sense them. I can place them; I know I can. When I'm in the studio, so I trust the process. Again, its theatrical, to honor the process.

[1:23:00]

Honor is probably a little much for rock and roll musicians. Trust is probably the farthest you can go.

Rabinbach: What's it like working with Dylan?

Dickinson: Amazing. Bob Dyland fills the room. The only thing I can compare it to is I saw Miles Davis once he walked in a green room at Ocean Way and used the telephone at Ocean Way, that was comorable. When Dylan enters the room, you don't see him go in and you don't see him go out. Bob Marley was the same way. They appear and disappear. On the "Time out of Mind" session in Miami, which was the same studio I worked with Atlantic, which was really weird, Dylan was in unspoken control of 23 people. There were 12 musicians on the floor. It was remarkable.

[1:24:00]

Rabinbach: And what songs were doing for that record? You did the whole record?

Dickinson: No, that's Oggie Myers, I was mostly Whirlitzer. No, the little unidentified atmospheric sounds was mine. As Cooder says I'm a color player.

Rabinbach: Yeah, he is great. I actually had to play with him the other day.

Dickinson: What do you play?

Rabinbach: I play guitar and sing. He was talking about Willie Mitchell. You don't hear Willie you feel him. You didn't even know he was playing.

Dickinson: Yeah, you can hear him if you stopped.

Rabinbah: So, Dylan unspoken control took 23 people, but you feel like he worked those sessions and he made that sound.

Dickinson: He was using me as a stick to hit [inaudible]. It was his revenge on [inaudible] for the other album

[1:25:00]

they had done together. They got in a fight. Like, they literally fought about one of the songs that isn't on the record. I got to say, in my opinion, if you are doing a Bob Dylan session then he should be on the page of Bob Dylan. I don't know that's just my primitive, country way of

thinking. They went back to an alternative cut for the record, I think it was “Cold Heart” that they argued over. Its not on the record. There’s another song. It was one of the best songs we recorded that's not on the record.

[1:26:00]

It's called Girl From The Red River Shore. It's an amazing song

Rabinbach: Where can I find that?

Dickinson: You can't. There are only three outtakes of the record. So far, they don't appear anywhere. I tried to get copies. Also, the song Sheryl Crow recorded, “Stayed In Mississippi”, we had a cut of that.

Rabinbach: “Stayed In Mississippi A Day Too Long?” that that came out on Love and Theft. I would like to get a cut of that.

Dickinson: Yeah, I would too. Lin Huas brother was video taping this session and [Inaudible]. He stopped a couple of times. There was a bizarre of six guitar players. There was two pedal steels. I had never heard two pedal steels at once.

Rabinbach: That's an amazing album . It took me so many times of listening to get it.

[1:27:00]

Dickinson: That's because there is no mix. That’s my problem with the record.

Rabinbach: Is what?

Dickinson: There's no mix. At least three songs were a playback from the night we cut it. I can get I think forty percent of a record or a mix. It's insane not to mix. I understand why Lennua does it.

Rabinbach: Sure, but did you realize how successful it was going to be?

Dickinson: You can tell everybody in the room knew what was going on.

Rabinbach: This was going to be his best record in thirty years.

Dickinson: There were old songs. So, he had been saving those songs for six or seven years. He told me a great story. He said to his manager Kramer. The first thing he said was I wasn't going to write anymore songs. I decided there are enough Bob Dylan songs in the world and there starting to get confusing. I'm not going to write anymore.

[1:28:00]

Kramer, of course dying insides says alright Bob. So, a few years after that he went home to go to [Inaudible] He says I got a lot of houses and I have to go home. It's a pretty good line. Imagine Bob Dylan coming up with a good line. He went home and he got snowed in, couldn't get out he

called Kramer and says I got snowed in. He says I have nothing to do and I'm writing songs, but I'm not going to record them. Years go by. Finally, he said my band ain't playing very good and there starting to get better. I noticed these young people in the audience and they are new. They need new songs. He had those thing written out in pencil on notebook paper like everyone else in the world.

[1:29:00]

In between cuts, he would be leaning over the equipment cases working on his lyrics with a pencil. God man it's fucking Bob Dylan!

Rabinbach: And that's from you who played on "Wild Horses."

Dickinson: Well, I watched Checker right "Wild Horses" in forty-minutes.

Rabinbach: Now, lets talk about that.

Dickinson: Well, actually I saw him "Brown Shirt" in forty-five minutes. It probably took a little longer. There was a chorus. I guess there were verses because I'm not sure. When Keith sings you can't understand the words. [Nonsense].. And then Jagger writes it down, that's how they do it. Kieth's son Marlon who had just been born, was who the song was originally about was a lullaby to his kid, "I don't want to leave..." well

[1:30:00]

Marianne Faithful had just married Lord Pleshbottom or whoever he was or whoever the old duffer was she married. Jagger was like a high school kid about it. It's very weird to see. So, he rewrote the song to be about Marianne Faithful. You can go through line for line and tell what the song is about. That may have taken him a hour, but I watched him write it and it was disgusting. He had one of those green steno pads and he would turn the page and right a verse then turn the page. When he had three pages it was a song. He wrote "Brown Sugar" as fast as he could write it down. It was all coming out of me right there.

Rbinbach: It's a good way to write songs.

Dickinson: It's amazing I think for sure.

Rabinbach: Some people take a long time. There's two types of writers.

[1:31:00]

Dickinson: Well, like you said it's rock n roll so don't you think it's a bit much. I asked does he take it seriously, he says I think it's a bit much. At the time, they were talking about their stage setting. We were at Muscle Shoals and Jagger says, "what are you... you have blue lights and red lights!" and now they have dolls and giant penises...

Rabinbach: That was a big tour. That was a big revolutionary tour. Playing with that band?

Dickinson: It utterly changed my career and created what career I had. Up to December 1969, I started to experience limited success as a session player from playing soul music basically. We were doing the same thing everyday with interchangeable artists.

[1:32:00]

The way they did at Stax, where they did it American, the way they did it at assembly line, which was playing lines in patterns or playing until you got it write. That's the assembly line technique of recording. I went down there and started watching the Stones. I watched them record, You Gotta Move, Brown Sugar, and then Wild Horses, which had taken three nights. They could barely play their instruments. When they got to an end of a cut, they didn't discuss it. They might've played it back and listened to it. Nobody ever said, "Can we do that better, Do you think we can do that again?". Those words weren't spoken. They took the first cut they got through without a major mistake. I sat there and thought who do you suppose who was doing it right and wrong. I think maybe they're right.

[1:33:00]

That's were I learned about spontaneity and seizing the moment. They created spark. I asked Keith about it, and he said, "Oh it's the way we always do it, so it [inaudible] you got to learn to play the bloody song." I didn't know why I got to play for ten years. Ian Stewart, their road manger and keyboard player, was there. In "You Gotta Move", there's no bass on there that's why I have been playing electric piano. They had been doing it on stage as a duet so its not big deal. "Brown Sugar" it's Stu who had been playing. He's a great boogie-woogie piano player. While they start "Wild Horses", he gets up from the piano start to pack up like they're going to leave. I had been hanging there for three days.

[1:34:00]

I'd been playing with Kieth, country, so they still think I am a country musician. They just met Gram Parsons, and they couldn't get that out of their mind.

Rabinbach: They're knocked out by him.

Dickinson: Yeah, so Keith would be playing this country stuff and I'd play along with him. Hell, I'm not that much of a country player, but I learned how to play Floyd Kramer [inaudible] so this guy in Texas they used to play with down there, Ramsay Horton, who could play Floyd Kramer with his toes, he was amazing, he could out Floyd Kramer Floyd Kramer, it was like a trick to him. So that was [inaudible] a couple of things I learned from [inaudible] is how I knew about playing country music. So anyways, start playing "Wild Horses" and Jagger says, "Well I suppose we need to keep [inaudible]." That's one of my big stories and I get money from this story from all these groups saying, "tell me about the Stones." That's one of my big money stories, so I go around and I try first the Country Grand, they're so out of tune, there's no possibility.

[1:35:00]

It's not like you can say "Keith, baby, this is E. E, Keith." That's not gonna work, I didn't see him touch the pegs of the guitar in three days. He picked it up and played it, that was it. So, I go over to the Whirlitzer, thinking, maybe sometimes on the Whirlitzer you can bend the notes. No.

Back in the back of the studio was an old tack piano, an upright piano with dead rusted strings and tacks in all the keys. Its out of tune and the Overton is so dead from the rust, that I found literally an octave and a half where I could play with them. And they had only one outsider with them, Tony their bagman who was carrying their dope. He stashed it in the piano, so he wakes up and moves the dope when I start playing the tack piano and that was a little moment that was kind of interesting, you know. And I'm plucking along,

[1:36:00]

I got this chord sheet, Keith had just learned to write a Nashville chord sheet, so he thought, in numbers. One, three five, that kind of thing. So he wrote out this chord sheet, and I'm back there planking along and I finally find a place that's properly out of tune and I realize the chords are wrong. And he wrote the song, y'know? So Wyman comes over and he says to me, "where'd you get your chords." And I said, "I got them from Keith," and he says, "Pay no attention to him, he has no idea what he's doing." And then he said a line that I'll never forget that I use all the time, he says, "He only knows where he put his fingers yesterday." And what he'd done was, songs in G, starts in B minor. Well, which is like minor third, right? He called that one. So chart was up a minor third so some of them was right and most of it was wrong. So me and Wyman worked out the chords which I still have in Wyman's hand

[1:37:00]

and we continued to cut. I'm playing along and the way they did the songs Jagger would stay on the floor, hand held microphone, singing the song into the earphones until the band learned the song and he would go to the control room and work on the sounds as the band played the songs instrumentally. In "Wild Horses" were big spaces where there was nothing happening but me, and on the record you hear an overdubbed steel guitar. It's the only thing overdubbed, everything else is live from the floor. So Jagger's in the control room at this point, he's getting the sound set up and I'm plucking along on my little [inaudible], curse him Ramsay Horton. And I hear the click-punch of the talkback and its Jagger and he says, "Ay, Keith, what do you think about the piano." And I think "Oh god here it comes." And Keith says, may God bless him forever, "It's the only thing I like."

[1:38:00]

All right! I'm Floyd Kramering away now. But again I still didn't know why Stu did play this song.

Rabinbach: You think maybe Keith had said something to him?

Dickinson: Years later I was in New York to have- wait until you have a meeting with Keith. You go check into a hotel and you wait for him to call you, and its like days. Third night, four o'clock in the morning I got the call, we went and had the meaning. But, one of those days where nothing was happening I was sitting in the bar of the Plaza Hotel in New York talking to Stu waiting for Keith and I said, "Look man, this is by no means a complaint because my whole career hangs on that one song, why didn't you play "Wild Horses"? Stu said, "Minor chords." I

said, "Minor, what do you mean?" He said, "I don't play minor chords. When they're called on stage, I lift my hand in protest." Why he doesn't play minor chords I don't know but..

[1:39:00]

Rabinbach: That's incredible.

Dickinson: My career was born because he didn't want to play B minor.

Rabinbach: That's a brilliant thing. Now what about when you produced the Replacement's record "Please to Meet Me," who are sort of like the 80s inheritors of Big Star.

Dickinson: In a way, yeah, that's certainly why they came to me. They done some demos with Alex and it hadn't really worked out. I can't imagine why. [Laughter] But when I had recorded them they had never recorded with their amplifiers in separate rooms before. They were so obnoxious, people would try to help them and they'd, "well fuckin', yeah exactly!"

Rabinbach: Which is why those records sound so..

Dickinson: Yeah, exactly. "Let it Be" is a better record but you can't hear it. He didn't give me an anthem, the little bastard. Twenty-eight songs and he didn't give me "Kiss me on the Bus", "Bastards of Young."

[1:40:00]

Any of those that would have done. But they were amazing. I'm sure I learned more from them than they learned from me. Tommy Stinson is one of my favorite musicians ever.

Rabinbach: Is that right? Why is that?

Dickinson: He is rock-n-roll, man. People say it's Keith Richards, it's Tommy. Keith had a choice, Tommy had no choice. Tommy said, "I'd be sitting there, my brother would put a bass in my hand and hit me until I played."

Rabinbach: Yeah, he was fourteen. Unbelievable.

Dickinson: He made no choice, that's what he said, "That's why I wake up in the morning and I still wonder if I shouldn't be a bass player." Because he never made a choice, Bob just made him do it.

Rabinbach: Huh, that's wild.

Dickinson: I wish I'd had Bob. I wanted to call a record "Where's Bob?" They didn't think that was funny.

Rabinbach: Why, what happened?

Dickinson: I didn't know at the time, he was under some sorta house arrest. Some sorta sex charge he couldn't get away from and they were using it as an excuse to break his contract. As Tommy would say, "if you don't think I'm serious, I fired my brother."

[1:41:00]

Rabinbach: Yeah, and Paul didn't want-

Dickinson: Paul was literally taking the band away from... He'd say, whenever I'd say, "Bring me Bob," he'd do the sign of the cross, I still have nightmares about Bob.

Rabinbach: What was it like working for Westerburg?

Dickinson: Oh, Westerburg was great, he was by far the most sensitive artist there that I worked with.

Rabinbach: Is that right?

Dickinson: Yeah, he'd spit on me for saying that but he is definitely.

Rabinbach: You can hear it.

Dickinson: At the end of "The Ledge" he's really weeping... that's a live tracking vocal. And the band track was very, very screwed up. He came out of the vocal booth, he said, "I don't have to do that again do I?" I said, "No, Paul, I'll fix it." And I did, I fixed it. But yeah, he's amazing. But that voice went away. He turned into another personality.

[1:42:00]

The record that he put out at Fat Possum- the blues record, have you heard that? That's the closest thing to the Paul that I know, that sounds like real Paul.

Rabinbach: You didn't see him when he did the solo tour years ago did you?

Dickinson: No.

Rabinbach: It was pretty incredible. You don't realize that you go see somebody like this and he still has all this stuff in him.

Dickinson: Sure.

Rabinbach: He sings all those songs and he had that crowd- y'know.

Dickinson: Well he's great, he's truly great. He's a great player too, he's like Alex. It's the same thing, y'know, no one ever talks about either one of those players, they're both great guitar players.

Rabinbach: He's one of my favorite guitar players. I've learned a lot from him. What I was gonna ask is where did you get this idea to put the Memphis Horns on and sort of make this hybrid between 80s punk rock and this.. You know?

Dickinson: The Horns actually were the record company. The strings I'll take full responsibility for- which Westerburg is still pissed off about.

Rabinbach: Oh is that right?

[1:43:00]

Dickinson: I think so. It's because he didn't go all the way back to the Box Tops. He was copying Big Star and I wanted to go all the way back, y'know. At least on this one song.

Rabinbach: "I Can't Hardly Wait."

Dickinson: Yeah. I got a telegram from the ANR guy at the record company that day we started which they delivered to me in front of Westerburg so there's no way I could not show it to him. Paul Arns says Memphis Horns can't hardly play. Westerburg hated the idea so much that I had to gradually get him used to... I brought in Prince Gabe to do the saxophone on "Night Club Jitters." He was an old top for the Racetrack, he used to work in Lansky Brothers. Just this good old black guy, and they loved him, y'know? The applasue you hear at the end of that is the replacement applauding Prince Gabe as he walked back into the room but its off of the live [inaudible]. So then I got him gradually up to the Memphis Horns.

[1:44:00]

I brought in teenage Steve Douglas who did the baritone on "Nevermind", right? And he was like they're just punks to him. He made fun of them because they wouldn't smoke pot, yknow. They knew who he was from Spectre and the Lats so they respected him. Then when it came time to do the Memphis Horns they left and it was like Westerburg saying, "Ok, you have to do this, I really hate it. So Im gonna leave, y'know?" And they came back and Tommy... had written a song called "Trouble" which- I recorded two songs on Tommy which no one has ever heard.

Rabinbach: Do you have those?

Dickinson: I wish I did. Somewhere, I have copies. I gave copies to Tommy which he probably told me two days later he had lost. The record company ltierally did not even want to hear it. By far the best things we recorded, by far.

[1:45:00]

Tommy's song was so new, so fresh. It was like years ahead of Westerburg. He played all the instruments. He was so mad it sounded like he was gonna chew the fucking microphone. It was remarkable.

Rabinbach: That's unreal.

Dickinson: One song, the song "Trouble", about me putting on the Horns. The other song was about his girlfriend who was a considerably older woman- who he ended up marrying for a while- moving into his apartment. And no two lines in this song rhymed. It was complete blank verse. It was brilliant. Nobody even wanted to hear it.

Rabinbach: I sure want to hear it

Dickinson: Yeah, I'll see if I can find it. I've got it somewhere.

Rabinbach: What about the "Dixie Fried" record lets go back a little bit.

Dickinson: Well, "Dixie Fried"... in a real live sense I was losing my mind in Miami. I made a deal to leave the group, and I came home and converted six months of my employment agreement to an artist contract and then made "Dixie Fried."

[1:46:00]

Rabinbach: I haven't heard that because the only copy I've ever seen is at Shangri La for 80 dollars.

Dickinson: I'll give you one. I'll give you a CD.

Rabinbach: Cool.

Dickinson: I've seen it from everything from 150 to 49 cents and its worth every penny of 49 cents.

Rabinbach: I believe it, I believe its worth 20 too. What was that record about?

Dickinson: Well, the name is suppose to tell the story but no one ever gets it, y'know. I was dixie fried, that's for sure. Everybody starts out wanting to be an artist, y'know? I had pretty much forgotten about that. Then by the time the record had actually came out, I cut it in '70, '71, it didn't came out until late '72. I was already involved with Cougar. So I never toured the record, I never considered it artistically. But it's a good record, there's some stuff on it I still like.

[1:47:00]

Rabinbach: And what are you working on these days?

Dickinson: Mostly just with my son these days and family friends. We're starting another record, we've done preproduction.

Rabinbach: You and [inaudible]?

Dickinson: [inaudible] Allstars. I think I'm gonna do a record with [inaudible]. I don't know, y'know, I don't say yes as much as I used to. I used to be like a two dollar whore on Saturday night. My phone would ring, "yes, I will! Yes, I'll be there." But I slowed down.

Rabinbach: You're getting comfortable these days.

Dickinson: Yeah

Rabinbach: You writing songs?

Dickinson: Not unless I have to. Writing has always been an assignment for me.

Rabinbach: Really.

Dickinson: And I did it for Cooter for the movies when we did movies. I like my songs, but I actually recorded them- If I do another record it has to be [Inaudible] if I let another record escape it'll be those songs, those songs I wrote Cooter and John [Hayek?]

[1:48:00]

Rabinbach: And those are on Cooter Records now.

Dickinson: No, they're mostly on movie soundtracks. I've got three songs on "The Border" the Jack Nicholson movie. What else? [inaudible] John Nelson. [Aloe Bay?] had a song in there. Song in the "Long Riders" soundtrack. It was all for movies. No, Cooter never recorded any of my songs on his own records. "Cross the Border" which I wrote, which Cooter says himself I contributed to the artistic soul to "Cross the Border" which Springsteen sings and Jackson Brown sings and Dylan is the encore.

Rabinbach: Is that right?

Dickinson: Yeah the first time, Dylan did it at [inaudible] and that impressed me.

Rabinbach: Did you ever work with Bruce.

Dickinson: No.

[1:49:00]

He called it the song of the decade in Rolling Stones. It's a good song, but I wouldn't call it the song of the decade.

Rabinbach: That's probably because you wrote it.

Dickinson: The third verse nobody knows.

Rabinbach: Yeah, is that the best one too?

Dickinson: Nah, the best one's the second verse, that's the artistic side. What still don't understand.. Most people that sing the song don't get it... don't get that it's about death, but Dylan obviously understands the song.

Rabinbach: Well Dylan sings a lot of songs about death which aren't necessarily about death. He's big on that.

Dickinson: Yeah there was quite a mortality factor down there in Miami.

Rabinbach: Yeah I bet. He'll deny it though. "No man I wasn't thinking about death I was just making a record."

Dickinson: That's the reason he had so many old musicians.

Rabinbach: Get 'em all in there so they could all understand, y'know. Its funny maybe it's the reason some of those songs didn't translate well live because those musicians were too young to understand.

[1:50:00]

Dickinson: They didn't get it, they couldn't get it. It seriously was. Those three bro kids.. There's no way they could play that music live. We all knew as we were doing it theres no way.

Rabinbach: There's no way, yeah, although I saw them play "Not Dark" yet a couple times... really, he did it right. It was funny when I first heard that record I was at an acting school and my acting teacher- I said I don't know if I like it that much and he goes well, "you're too young to like it. You've never been divorced and you're not worried about death."

Dickinson: That's right you havent begun to appreciate this record. That's true. "Not Dark Yet" was the end of the session, that's the alternative cut. We cut it once. Man, its hard to believe, but people talk to dylan about things like the radio. Apparently they started recording the record in [inaudible]. They started doing it as a trio and Dylan didn't want to do that. He'd tell [inaudible]. So Dylan walked out on the session,

[1:51:00]

and they'd apparently already cut "Not Dark Yet" in a different version where Dylan was singing in a real high register. Well if you notice every song on that record is pitched low, every song. And he played a lot of keys, Dylan is much more of a musician than anyone gives him credit for- just in terms of playing. So they wanted to recut that song because they're talking about the radio which I almost fainted when they started talking to Dylan about the radio! So they cut the rhythm section down where Kelpner was the only drummer and most of the guitar players were gone. The guy from Nashville, Bob- whaever his name was, he was still there. It was pretty basic. Lennox himself plays every note of every bar on the session, which another thing I have a little problem with.

[1:52:00]

So Lennox playing like [Inaudible] and they called the cut-down band in to recut “Not Dark Yet.” And they call the band in an hour early before Bob comes in because they want to get sounds. I’d stay away from the Concert Grand because it was over in Dylan’s territory, and also because it was too sharp for classical music and I didn’t particularly like it, and he didn’t like it either, and I’d figured out if I wanted to be heard had I’d better make atmospheric sounds. So I was over across the studio with a pump organ and a Whirlitzer piano making atmospheric sounds. On this song, Lennox says to me, and Kelpner and I both were there because of Dylan, Lennox didn’t want either one of us there.

Rabinbach: Dylan specifically asked for you? Where had he heard you?

Dickinson: All the way back with the Dixie Fires, the beginning of the end of our ten year at Atlantic

[1:53:00]

is when Dylan didn’t show up for a scheduled session.

Rabinbach: Woah you guys were going to do a session with Dylan. For which record?

Dickinson: I guess it would’ve been ‘70, I don’t know what that would have been.

Rabinbach: It was right in that period when he was just starting ot making records.

Dickinson: Yeah, and he had sought us out, the high [Inaudible] and us, and at the time Grossman and Wexler were arguing about the royalties rights to “Woodstock” the album, and Grossman’s revenge on Wexler was to pull the plug on the Dylan session. At the time, a Columbia artist had to work with Columbia engineers, was a union regulation. Two Columbia engineers were there ready to start the session. There were two guards there with cases that obviously had machine guns in them and Charlie Freedman and I walked in the door that Monday morning and they were talking on the phone. Could’ve been pulled.

[1:54:00]

From then on, Dylan says some incredible things about me that I didn’t believe until they reprint it or somebody repeated it to me but he had specifically sought me out. Kelpner as well. Neither one of us made Lennox comfortable, I’ll put it that way. We’re both in the band that’s been retained to do “Not Dark Yet”, right, so Lennox tells me go over and lets get sounds on the real piano in case Bob wants to play it, so I’m over here, and Bob appears like he does in the room. All of a sudden he’s there. Im trapped at the piano and he standing behind me, and Lennox is trapped across the room on the [inaudible] microphone that he had been using to cue us with the earphones and we start to record that way which is the reason I’m playing piano on that cut. It’s the only piano on the record as far as that goes.

[1:55:00]

And that’s one of the ones that’s a damn playback. That is. A [inaudible] of the playback of the night completely unmixed. There after this other, this high vocal thing from Dylan, so they wont

come out and say, “Bob we want you to sing in a higher vocal register” they say, “well why don’t you try out another key?”

Rabinbach: They’re still trying to do that?

Dickinson: Yeah we change the key at least four times, seriously four times. Each time we change the key Dylan changes his voice down. So finally Tony, this bass player, we called Tony in the control room as if he’s not gonna figure out. So Tony comes out and he’s looking pretty sheepish and he says to Dylan he says, “you know back in Oxford you were singing that song in a higher register?” And Dylan says, “Tell me, how many times have you heard me sing?”

[1:56:00]

And Tony says, “Well what do you mean?” He said, “You heard me sing a thousand times Tony?” He says, “well yeah.” “ You heard me sing ten thousand times Tony?” He says, “yeah.” “You ever heard me sing the same thing twice?” And Tony says, “Well no, boss.” “Well you know if I payed more attention to people telling me how to sing, I might’ve had some kind of career.” The session was over at that point. Can you believe that? Kelpner and I were just sitting looking at eachother like.

Rabinbach: Wow, that’s a good one to close on.

Dickinson: Yeah. I might of have some kinda career.

[1:56:48]

[END]