

Date: 2005-13-05
Interviewee: Jim Dickinson
Interviewer: Interviewer
Location: Dickinson's Home
Collection: Stax Museum Oral Histories

[0:00]

Jim Dickinson: -one thing that'll never be in the Stax museum.

Interviewer: Have you been to the Stax museum yet?

Dickinson: I swore I'd never set foot in it but I broke my word I went to one of the Memphis music functions there.

Interviewer: The Last Monday event? Which one did you go to?

Dickinson: When Ray Flemming was giving his speech about- no it wasn't one of the concerts it was when Ray Flemming was giving his presentation for whatever that bank thing is-

Interviewer: Suntrust?

Dickinson: Suntrust yeah. I've tried to point out the irony of being at the Stax facility and talking about-

Interviewer: The whole banking thing.

Dickinson: Yeah. About lending money to musicians that's exactly what put them out of business.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Dickinson: But no one get it, no one saw the irony.

Interviewer: I'm real excited that you're going to come and-

D it wasn't as bad as I thought frankly. There is of course fill in misinformation.

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I just don't like the idea of music museums.

Interviewer: Really?

Dickinson: Music is alive and museums are for dead things. I refuse to accept the fact that the Memphis music industry is dead, but that's the way it looks

Interviewer: Aw, yeah.

Dickinson: It's not as bad as I thought it would be.

Interviewer: It's pretty amazing thought the people that just come in they don't know anything.

Dickinson: I know but that's because it's supposed to be a mystery, that's what it is a mystery. And John Fry and I argue about the school aspect. "Well if you could just see the look on those children's face." Well yeah take a look on their faces when they get out of school and can't get a job. They're preparing them for something that doesn't exist, they're fostering a myth. See the ad they do on television with that little girl, "I wanna be a singer."

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Yeah, well you're not gonna be one, I'm sorry, it's a hard business.

Interviewer: it is a tough business

Dickinson: And there's already too many people in it.

Interviewer: You wonder how much is talent versus luck.

Dickinson: Oh it's like- oh you know what they say about luck or brains: give me luck anytime.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's true. Well, we are bringing Dylan to Stax. And most people- I don't know. I left you this phone message did you get that?

Dickinson: Well, we get very spotty...

Interviewer: There's been a press release, but if you got the paper. Did you see the paper? I'll send you a copy.

Dickinson: We don't get the Memphis version of the paper down here that often and we miss the current y'know.

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Interviewer: The question that I'm getting over and over and over because there's this buzz about it "y'know Dylan's coming to Stax." That's great, but what does Dylan have to do with Stax, what's Dylan have to do with soul music? That's kind of what we're trying to answer here.

Dickinson: Yeah, I figured that. I talked to what's his name Nashid [inaudible]. How do you pronounce his last name?

Interviewer: Madyun.

Dickinson: Madyun.

Interviewer: Nashid Madyun.

Dickinson: Yeah I kind of got the idea that that's what this was and there is of course a very logical connection because of the protest aspect of what Dylan did, what he calls his songs of accusation. Which he doesn't think of himself of a protest singer and he kind of resents it when people nail him with that but that's the connection. Because if you want to hang a handle on Stax,

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it was soul music, I mean that's what they call it themselves, but there's a difference between soul music and R&B. R&B music is black and soul music is biracial. And there was a protest element to what they did. Some of Mac Rice's songs were definitely protest songs, not "Mustang Sally" but certainly "Money Talks". The Staple Singers of course were doing flat out protest political material which was itself folk rock which was what Dylan basically invented. I think there's a real- he would see a logical connection.

Interviewer: Dylan would?

Dickinson: Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah, that's the burning question so-

Dickinson: Y'know it's an easy thing for naysayers to say, "Oh well what does Dylan have to do with Stax."

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Back in the '60s we were all pretty much in it together, that was sort of the point. Certainly the point at Stax. Are you actually gonna try and get Dylan to show up

Interviewer: Yeah well that's- it's going to be interesting... he's playing in Memphis while the show is up which is just an incredible fluke that it happened that way but it's a nice thing that it happened.

Dickinson: I'm sure that Fleming's taking credit for it.

Interviewer: Yeah [laughter] Yeah, but we are being honored to have him come through. Feel a little nervous about it.

Dickinson: You have a lot better chance than trying to get him by himself than the other way. He pretty much doesn't like photography so that's going be-

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I think he would be more interested in seeing Stax than you know-

Interviewer: Than that Kramer exhibit? Yeah, those photos, those were taken- all of them were between '64 and '65 so they're early, early Dylan.

Dickinson: That's the real stuff.

Interviewer: Yeah so you've worked with him, can you tell us about that a bit?

Dickinson: Well I met him socially first of course it was one of the only real ambitions I've had left- to work with him. I was a fan before the first record came out. I heard a tape

Interviewer: Before Dylan's first record?

Dickinson: Yeah, I heard a tape a buddy of mine had at the University of Texas, it was a life changer.

Interviewer: You went to school there?

Dickinson: I went to school at Baylor a hundred miles away. I was studying drama. There was quite a theatre there in the early '60s. I had these two friends at the university of Texas

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that were taking the first folklore class that had ever been taught in America outside of Harvard. One of them had been a high school friend of Caroline Hesters. Which is where Dylan was discovered on the Caroline Hesters session. However, I don't know how he got this [inaudible]. He called me one day. It was the last summer I was at Baylor in summer school trying to stay out of the draft. This guy's name was Floyd Campbell. He later taught English at Memphis state and went on to be the editor at Easy Rider Magazine which sounds like an odd thing but it fit him real well. He called me up and said what are you doing Saturday. I said, "nothing." He said, "well come down I got something you need to hear." I got to house, he lived off campus and he led me inside without saying anything which was not like him. I thought something was going on. He sat me down between the two speakers and the stereo set and without saying a word turned on the tape recorder.

Interviewer: Very dramatic.

Dickinson: Yeah, and here came this voice. The way I got to know this guy was by playing folk material and he was, like I said, in this folklore class. I was playing with this harmonica rig like Jerry Reed, you know, so it was really close. Really close. But not so far- he had thought of this thing that I hadn't thought of. I sat there with tears running down my face I thought to myself my God, his voice is actually worse than mine.

Interviewer: What was the thing?

Dickinson: To write your own folksongs. It was right there and nobody thought of it. That's not what folksongs are, y'know, but in the early part of the... Like Dylan I played rock-n-roll in high school and when I got to college I thought music was over for me.

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Then folk music started to come along and it was so easy I had to do it- just get drunk and sing kinda thing. Ramblin' Jack- I was right there with him. But he was lightyears ahead of me because of that one idea. which he talks about in the book how he thought of it. And like I said it was right there in front of anybody, write your own folksongs. Nobody did it. Especially with what he brought to it. But when I heard that tape I made a copy of the tape. Brought it back and proselytized. I mean I played it for everybody I could find.

Interviewer: Do you still have it?

Dickinson: No. I mean somewhere in here. Maybe.

Interviewer: Yeah, that'd be a nice thing to find one of these days

Dickinson: It was the first record with a few more cuts, there were some more things. I don't even remember what they were. When I finally got thrown out of Baylor,

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finally come to Memphis state, staying out of the draft. The next summer which would have been '63 by the time the record was out but still nobody knew about it until "Blowing in the Wind." Very few people were aware of Dylan.

Interviewer: Maybe especially here.

Dickinson: Well yeah for sure here. Two friends of mine and I ran this old theatre in the Old Curb Market in Cleveland and I just played the tape constantly. What we would do- we had one folk act and a one act play. That was our scenario it was called the market theatre and we would do a- excuse the expression- "hootenanny." Which I never care for once a month two nights a week which I played through the whole thing. '63, folk music was blowing up. Again, I would play the tape for anybody who came through the door.

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By the time I made I guess what was my first- my first record that came out.. it was a hideous thing I made for Bill Justice and Nashville Party Records called Dixieland Folkstyle. It was Folk songs for Dixieland that were really really bad. But I was all like the A players it was very classy it just wasn't any good. Anita Curb Singers and the Jordanares- they were the real voice and I was the folk. They brought me in to be the folk. The end of that summer- this is way off Bob Dylan- the end of that summer to pay my bills at the theatre, I was the first person to "rent the shell" we put on what we called Memphis' first annual folk festival. One ad in the newspaper, one spot on tv and I sold it out.

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Dollar a head, I sold it out and got this publicity in the paper with a picture of me in the harmonica and the whole thing about the crowd and the cops that came and all that kind of stuff. The story ran in Nashville, Bill Justice saw it, one of his musicians, a trumpet player had gone to high school with me so they called me to sing on this hideous record. Shelby Singleton who is just a commercial schlockmeister was the supposed producer. He wasn't even there for two days. But he was the supposed producer of this album. We cut "Blowing in the Wind" for the record and I tried to get him to cut "Don't Think Twice It's Alright", and his quote was, "Oh you'll never hear of that Dylan guy again."

Interviewer: Famous last words.

Dickinson: Yeah, but that's... I mean '63 just shows what was happening with folk music. It was not only spreading but commercializing

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at the same time and Dylan, genius that he is, grew beyond it. Plugged in and let it rip. It's all folk music. All folk music. Rock-and-roll music is folk music. R&B is folk music. Souls music is certainly folk music. What the hell is it if it isn't folk music. Like Louis Armstrong said, I mean I've never heard a horse sing. I'm mad. It was music of the people, it was music up from the streets. And if Stax was anything besides a mistake or an accident it was that it was a door from the street. Which is what's missing from Memphis now. There's no door out either which Stax had a little problem with their door out. Even at the end when it was very different which it turned to something, in my opinion, quite ugly it still had the door open.

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You could still get in the door and sing your song for somebody. As folk music that's what it was all about. Of course, the King assassination changed everything. I still maintain that if that had happened anywhere else in the New South, it would've burned that city to the ground. Despite what happened afterwards, I still think that the only true integration that took place took place in music and primarily in Memphis. It had more to do with Dewey Phillips than it did Stax, but Stax was the result of the same thing Elvis was the result of, the collision of the two races.

Interviewer: Do you play the records regardless.

Dickinson: He created the mindset that I still think is pervasive in Memphis today. Harrington has quoted Dewey Phillips in the newspaper and I don't think he even knows he's quoting Dewey.

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But he grew up here, and Dewey is in his head just like he's in mine. But Dewey was the most racially enlightened person I ever knew and the second most racially enlightened person I ever knew was Packy Axton. And, I mean, you won't hear anybody say this at Stax but if you mention Axton or you mention Stewart it would be easy for you to see that it wasn't their idea to record black music, it wouldn't have ever crossed their minds. It was Packy's idea. Packy took Ben Branch and the Largos which was the band that played the Plantation Inn up to the Old

Studio in Tennessee and recorded them. It was a bar it was behind a Dairy Queen. and that was it that was the beginning of Stax.

Interviewer: Packy's idea.

Dickinson: Yeah sure it was, who else would have thought of it, y'know.

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Jim Stewart wanted to make hillbilly records because he was- taking nothing away from Jim Stewart- he was a violin player. I still think Jim made the best records that anyone made at Stax... By accident. Which is the way the best stuff happens. The second record which was Satellite, because there was a Satellite neon sign in front of the Dairy Queen which they put the studio in- a bar behind the Dairy Queen- they bought the Dairy Queen the bar was just there and Packy would be cooking hamburgers and he'd be engineering. He was cooking burgers the first time I was ever at stacks it was Satellite then. That happened. The second record they put out was Charles Hines's "Prove Your Love." It was a white pretty boy duck tale who was the singer in my band. Chips [inaudible] produced it. Another name you don't hear too much associated with Stax.

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Interviewer: Some, but you're right, yeah.

Dickinson: Very little. Chips picked out the building.

Interviewer: At Macklemore.

Dickinson: Yeah he found the building. Him and Jim virtually built this thing, y'know. They had a fight about money and chips went back to American, but the first records. First, at least three, maybe more, Chips did them. Nobody knew what a producer was. They didn't give producers credit on records then. Hell, he was just making the record. They didn't know what a producer was.

Interviewer: And had the title. They were just making records.

Dickinson: Yeah, He was just a guitar player. He wasn't anything else.

Interviewer: Now they still use some of the same studio musicians, right? American and Stax and High is that true?

Dickinson: No, [inaudible] was the only one that could go both places. They'll tell you this stuff now but it's just crap, it's just not true.

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If you were in one band you stayed there. And it was like the nucleus band Booker T. and the MGs was basically Dachau and Steve Booker didn't play on a lot of stuff. He was in college and if you go back and check those records [inaudible] Kayes playing keyboards- and the big

difference when you listen to the Stax review, the thing from Europe, the big difference is it's Booker T. playing keyboards. It's different it's not better or worse it's just different, although the tempos are faster. But Al Jackson was the drummer, y'know, and he played with Willie at the Manhattan Club live gig- and see, Duck played at Hernando's Hideaway a white band. These were men who wouldn't have even known each other but for music. The American rhythm section all played golf together.

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What became known as the American rhythm section was Tommy [Cogbull?] me and Clarence Nelson who was black but he had to sweep the floor. Man, it was different. But Willy, that was the Hodges brothers, three Hodge's brothers, and Al Jackson, and Al was the only one who truly these were people who were working for a hundred dollars a week in some cases and in some cases kicking it back but it was still a job and if you had a job working like Doug did in Hernando's Hideaway and at Stax you could just about get by. That was just about the only real job in town.

Interviewer: You're doing what you loved. It's hard.

Dickinson: It was a way to be in a racially mixed situation and get away with it.

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Because it was literally illegal to do it. I've never played in the real Mar-Keys. Well I did but I was never a real Mar-Key. In fact, I played with them when their original name was the Royal Spades if you can imagine that. Ronny Stoope had become Ronny Angel who was their singer and the one man art department at Stax was the other singer in my high school band. Stoope and Charles Hodge were from the regents which was my band from White Station High School. Stoope for a while sang with both bands and then when the Mar-Keys went on the road and I went to college, he went with them, and although I never played although I played at Neal's Hideaway with them. Smoogie Smith of course was on the records in the touring band. When the band broke up at that point Ray Brown the booking agent in Memphis. One of the big things

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that's missing now when Ray Brown died a lot of things changed because there was no real booking agent in Memphis. He booked everybody he was very professional. He would take any one original member of the Mar-Keys and four other people and put them on the road. I mean they'll all tell you the story. Sometimes there'd be two Mar-Keys bands in the same town. He'd try to avoid that if he could but not too hard. So that's when I started, I came back from Texas and started playing with them. I remember when I came back. I'll show you this I never forgot this. I came back from Texas the second year this was Packy's [inaudible].

Interviewer: You got it laminated.

Dickinson: Yeah the Mar-Keys were playing at the [inaudible] Club I guess it was New Year's Eve of '62 and I watched them and I thought,

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“my God, I’ve made a terrible mistake.” Because when I left town they were just a ragged band just like me, they had horns. They were just y’know a ragged frat. Fraternity type band. And there they were man, they were dynamite. Wayne Saxon and Don Nix on stage were the funniest thing I’ve ever seen white people do on stage. Big tall skinny Don Nix, little short Wayne Jackson. Wayne would look up at him, it was just dynamite. Their comedy was just as good as the music. They were spectacular. That’s how they got away with playing at the black circuits. Was Ray Brown he did the same thing with Bill Black. People thought the Bill Black combo was black, and they sound about as black as the white keys on the piano but if you come from north of here I guess it’s different but the Mar-Keys could’ve gone either way and he would book either one of them in the chitlin circuit, I mean all black y’know.

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And Don and Wayne just started doing this shtick to get across and they were great.

Interviewer: I’d love to see some film of that.

Dickinson: There is a tiny little scrap of film which they show which I was surprised at, which shows Packy. They don’t point out that it’s Packy of course, but there it is. I’m not getting you Packy Axton was really something.

Interviewer: Well you know we have his suit up now, I don’t know if you’ve seen that.

Dickinson: Yeah, I’ve still got my Mar-Key tie. I don’t have my Mar-Key suit anymore. You had to have that Mar-Key suit.

Interviewer: I love that suit. So yeah we have to do more with Packy and I think that, y’know.

Dickinson: He’s the untold story of rock-n-roll he and [inaudible] Philips are the untold story of rock-n-roll. You can see the whole thing that happened in Memphis through Packy, y’know.

Interviewer: Well this is maybe a different interview, a different day,

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but we want to do another exhibit at Stax. Pioneers of black radio. I think that there’s many untold stories- there’s a lot of women in radio, and I think that Dewey Philips, that story needs to be told as well.

Dickinson: There’s a new book that I just got an advanced copy of. I can’t remember the guy’s name. I interviewed with him a few times I wish I remembered. And it’s really good, I didn’t think it was going to be.

Interviewer: And it touches on the radio?

Dickinson: Oh yeah it’s way into it and it’s mostly Dewey. But Sleepy-Eyed John, several of the other characters. And you know about the documentary that’s been made about WLLK and

there's a lot of that that didn't make the final cut I mean there's more there. That girl did a real good job.

Interviewer: Yeah, Joanne Self.

Dickinson: Yeah, she did a real comprehensive job and talked to a lot of people.

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WLLK, when I signed my first record deal it was with Rueben Cherry's home of the blues on Beale Street I was certainly the only white artist. My producer quote unquote was Gene "Bowlegs" Miller who was the trumpet player at Willy's and my manager quote unquote was Hunky Dory who was the disc jockey at WLLK and one of the early problems of my early career was when I called WLLK I never knew whether to ask for Hunky or Mr. Dory, y'know.

Interviewer: That's a great dilemma.

Dickinson: I never knew his new name.

Interviewer: I think I'd go with Mr. Dory.

Dickinson: Several times i would- the best example I guess when I would be one of the only two or three white people at these various events y'know. At the El Flamingo Room they had presented Rufus and Carla

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with the father and daughter of the year award. There were three white people there. Me, Steve Cropper, Mayor Loebe. Steve who couldn't have been a bigger racist, Steve and Mayor Loebe were sitting at the dais. I was sitting at the table with Bowlegs Miller and his wife. Both Cropper who I have known since I was 15, and both Cropper and Mayor Loebe were looking at me like what are you doing there.

Interviewer: Couldn't figure it out.

Dickinson: It was very different those Mar-Key gigs which I started this tirade about. That was the only thing that Ray ever booked mixed back then, we would play these gigs and it was literally illegal for us to be there.

Interviewer: Insane.

Dickinson: It was, it was. There's a story in the new Mojo Magazine, Robert Gordon's got a piece and it tells the story about the cops following us from a Mar-Key gig, y'know.

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Interviewer: That's just... nah. Thinking of.. Kind of wrapping back up to Dylan, some of the protest songs that he did although that's not what he liked to call them. Opening those doors certainly helped....

Dickinson: Oh certainly. Dylan like me, when you get to the thing in the book about me this is what he kind of points out- we had the same background. I started playing rock-n-roll, white rock-n-roll in fraternity party type thing and kinda came up on the circuit and when folk music came along Jack Elliot the whole- a real parallel there which, apparently, he sees. Although I didn't record with him until "Time Out of Mind" when [inaudible]. You probably don't know this about me but I was in the Memphis rhythm section that became the Dixie Flyers which was Atlantic's House Band in the early '70s

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and we left here in January of 1970 and Dylan was looking for us already by the time he found us quote unquote.

Interviewer: I was going to say 15 years later right? 17 maybe?

Dickinson: By the time he found us we were at Atlantic, we were at Atlantic in Miami we had a Dylan session scheduled. At the time if you made record for Columbia, you had to use Columbia's studio union engineers. the two union engineers showed up. Two guard with cases which obviously had guns in them showed up and Dylan didn't show up.

Interviewer: Why the guns? Why the security?

Dickinson: It was that much of an issue in 1970 I guess. And nobody knew what reason he didn't show up was... He was [inaudible] managed by Albert Grossman.

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And Grossman and Wexler from Atlantic were fighting about the rights of the music for the Woodstock album and none of Grossman's artists ended up on the album and Grossman to get his revenge held Dylan back from this session. Well it was literally when Dylan didn't show up for that session it was the beginning of the end of the Dixie Flyers with Atlantic from then on it would've been very different, I'll put it that way, if we had recorded Bob Dylan.

Interviewer: Yeah, it would've had to have been.

Dickinson: Again, I didn't cross paths with him again until the late 70s we met socially. He was actually by that time a big fight between me and Wexler and he actually made peace between me and Wexler which is another thing I owe him. Bumped into him a couple times socially and then finally, "Time out of Mind" the Lennox album

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I went down and did that and it took.

Interviewer: So, he sought you to come in and how does that work? Did you get a phone call from Dylan or his people?

Dickinson: It took six phone calls to get on the plane, I had never talked to Dylan at that point and he apparently... By the time I got there, there were twelve musicians, there were three complete bands on the floor, there were three sets of drums, it was insane. One of the craziest sessions I've ever been on and I've been on some crazy sessions.

Interviewer: and all twelve played?

Dickinson: Not on all the songs but on several songs, yes. It was truly bizarre.

Interviewer: That's a lot of music.

Dickinson: The drums alone was crazy. There were six guitar players, there were two pedal steel guitars. Even in Nashville I've never heard two pedal steels playing at the same time. And one was Sydney Cashdollar for gosh sakes, she wrote the book! If you went up to get the book on steel guitar it would be her book, y'know. So it was quite a session,

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and Dylan was in unspoken control of twenty-three people. Anybody who tells you Bob Dylan doesn't know what he's doing is crazy.

Interviewer: Some people say that.

Dickinson: Oh yeah, they'll they oh this is a mistake this is a fluke it's all crazy. No, he was in utter control of what was going on.

Interviewer: You think it always is or it was just that?

Dickinson: I don't know, my money would be on Bob. He appears and disappears, like he all of a sudden is in the room, and all of a sudden, he's not in the room.

Interviewer: Literally?

Dickinson: Yeah, I caught him doing that, I saw what he was doing but it works, y'know. Bob Marley did that too. There he is and there he's gone.

Interviewer: Why would you do that, appearing and disappearing?

D it's the element of magic, the control element to get...

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the only think I can compare it to, if you see him at Stax you'll see this, when he walks into the room it's like he sucks up all the air, I mean it's like everything changes, and the room is all of a sudden full. The only other person I ever saw do that was Miles Davis. Just walk in the room and

not say a word. Just walk in a room and bam. The rooms full. And Dylan, I was amazed of his knowledge of this area and musicians from this area. And apparently, I only believe this because I heard it from three or four people and read it in print and Lennox himself said it and believe me, Lennox did not want me there, but when asked about me in Harp magazine, Lennox said, "Lennox told me if you get me Jim Dickinson, that's all I need." Which, of course,

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couldn't be more flattering. He said the same thing about my group, Mud Boy and the Neutrons. We played three times outside of the city of Memphis. We only made two records. They only released in Europe, we were obscure on purpose. He asked me about Sid Salvage, one of my partners in Mud Boys, "whatever happened to that Sid guy whoever sings those folk songs." I said, "No, he's in a group with me but you can't know about that." He says, "Oh yeah, Mud Boy and the Neutrons. That's a great band nobody can find." In that moment, we succeeded, because that's what we wanted.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness.

Dickinson: He knew incredible stuff about this area, on the way to a session when the roadie picked me up in the airport in Miami, I got the don't look at him don't talk to him all that star treatment. The first night I was in the parking lot smoking a joint

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and here comes Bob Dylan, "Hey, you know Sleepy John Estes?" "Yeah." What was I going to do, say no?

Interviewer: "I'm not supposed to look at you."

Dickinson: "Don't look at me, please, oh no." I saw him cut people off, but what celebrity doesn't, I mean its Bob Dylan for God's sake. He's got the burden of a whole generation on his shoulders he never asked for.

Interviewer: Yeah, I don't think he wants it.

Dickinson: He doesn't trust the recording process, he's uncomfortable the whole time.

Interviewer: He doesn't trust recording process?

Dickinson: No, he's obviously had too much control, [inaudible] taught him over the years. Those were rundowns, that whole album. Maybe second, third takes, that's it. He would go back and take the rundown for every cut. There are places on that record where I can hear the beat turn over,

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but that's what he wanted.

Interviewer: He won a Grammy, obviously.

Dickinson: "My Heart's in the Highlands", the seventeen minute long one. That's the rundown, there are two cuts of that that are technically better but he didn't want that he didn't want to hear them. His manager asked him when it was over, he said, "Hey Bob, you got a short version of that?" He says, "That was the short version." There's not way you're going to top him, there's not getting by him. That's what I think the whole recording process is, he sees it as an attempt for other people to control his art.

Interviewer: And he's just not going to have that.

Dickinson: Just doesn't want that, yeah. Those songs have life, I mean he told me that some of those songs he had for six years.

Interviewer: He wrote every song, right?"

Dickinson: And he's still, well I saw him, this was so reassuring, he had a notebook paper

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written in pencil, like some kid wrote 'em in study hall, and he would lay over the top of the percussion case, and he would work on the lyrics in between songs.

Interviewer: So a work in progress then wasn't it? How long did that session take?

Dickinson: Ten days. We only really worked nine of them. The last day was overproduction in my opinion. Exercise in futility. They actually talked about Dylan about getting on the radio, I couldn't believe that.

Interviewer: Like getting an interview on the radio you mean?

Dickinson: No, like changing the material or the song or the presentation.

Interviewer: to make it more playable.

D yes, to be radio friendly. I couldn't believe it.

Interviewer: how did he handle that?

Dickinson: It was really complicated, he put them in their place, I'll put it that way. He cooperated.

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He said, "Ee cut this song in E flat, we cut it in B flat, I don't know, it was really good." He ended up saying, "If I had payed more attention to people telling me how to sing, I probably would've had a career." After he said that, the session was over, we had just gone too far.

Interviewer: Pushed him a little too hard.

Dickinson: A little too far.

Interviewer: Did you know how successful that was going to be, I mean did you have a feeling about that?

Dickinson: Well there's a thing. Every studio musician will tell you that everybody in the room knows when you've really hit one, y'know? And the whole session was like that. There'd be like two hours of sheer chaos like this and then like ten minutes of just beautiful clarity, and then you'd go on to the next song, y'know? Yeah, I pretty much knew it...

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Interviewer: So you play keyboards.

Dickinson: Keyboards, yeah. Me and [Inaudible] Myers. Most of what you can hear that's me on the record is Whirlitzer and electric piano, because it's all swirling together, you can't tell what the sounds are. It was a forest of microphones, they were just sticking up in the air, it was totally insane.

Interviewer: Sounds like a pretty nice studio though.

Dickinson: Well in a way, ironically, it was the same studio and the same room where we were set up to record him in 1970.

Interviewer: No.

Dickinson: Yes sir. Criteria. A Studio at Criteria. Which was full of ghosts for me anyway.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Dickinson: That's where I recorded at Atlantic with Charlie Freedman, my friend and partner in the Dixie Flyers who taught Steve Cropper to play, who's band the Mar-Keys were. Dead now, of course.

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He was there, [inaudible] could see him [?]

Interviewer: I wonder why Miami though?

Dickinson: They started out to record the record at Oxnard where Lennox's studio is and Dylan didn't like it. He said, "You can't get nothing to eat at Oxnard, you can't even eat no Mexican food." Dylan apparently went around looking and he liked Miami for whatever reason, and it is a good studio, Criteria is an excellent studio. Always was.

Interviewer: Miami has such a different feel too it, y'know?

Dickinson: A weird vibe. God knows what he does when he's not working. Although, this is the way, maybe he might be vulnerable to this in terms of getting him to Stax... he told me at want point right when we were not talking, I was not looking at him and talking to him, he said,

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"Say I to Memphis, man, I'd come down," I can't tell you where he checks in, and he says, "[inaudible]." And I say, "What do you do?" He says, "Well, I like to walk around, man." Well, "Well where do you walk around?" He says, "I like to walk around in the park." Oh God, I told him, I tend to say the wrong thing, I tend to just blurt things out, so to Bob Dylan I blurted out, "Oh God, man, don't walk around in the park man, it's not safe." He says, "It's okay, I pull up my hood."

Interviewer: [inaudible] Superman or something.

Dickinson: And I guess that's how he learned so much about Memphis and he apparently does.

Interviewer: He's incognito, with his hood. That's a great story.

Dickinson: This one, I'll tell you, I almost don't like to tell this one because it means so much to me, this is where he got me. Talking about Memphis, he said,

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"Last time I was in Memphis, I went to Hube's Highschool." He didn't tell me why, he didn't have to tell me why, but still he didn't say. "Went to Hube's Highschool," he says, "the school is going on they let me walk around in the halls, I went to the auditorium, I stood on the stage, and then I found a lucky penny." My heart, it just, he got me for life. It just doesn't. Bob Dylan is still in awe of Elvis Presley, as he should be, none the less, he is.

Interviewer: Yeah, Elvis is just complicated, y'know. At Stax, he recorded at Stax, and there's some mixed emotions about that you know what I'm saying.

Dickinson: There were then, but he was Elvis, y'know?

Interviewer: Yeah.

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Dickinson: You can hear it, the few times that he came back to Memphis to record, you can definitely hear the difference.

Interviewer: Especially at American, y'know?

Dickinson: Oh yeah, well Chips, he... You hear people talk about when Sam sold his contract and how stupid that was. You see, Sam was recording an idea, you look at the six Sun singles, on one song there's a black jump blues, on the other side there's a country song. That, in 1954, '55,

was an idea. Literally, a revolutionary, as Carrie Hardy says, unpopular idea. By the time Sam sold Elvis, that idea was almost gone, because look at the rest of Elvis' career, and it's not fair.

Interviewer: Oh, with the RCA?

Dickinson: It's not fair, the little glimmers of it every once in a while, "One Night With You,"

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something like that. Until he came back and recorded with Chips, he didn't sound like a Memphis boy, it wasn't there. The Dewey Philips thing.

Interviewer: That's true.

Dickinson: The black and white thing without which, certainly Stax could not have happened.

Interviewer: Well hopefully we'll be able to tell that story soon.

Dickinson: I'd sure like to see it because my major criticism of not just the museum but the whole presentation is that they're emphasizing a period of Stax's history which didn't produce the great music, which really isn't the idea that it all started with, because it became a very racist situation. There's no denying it, y'know,

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and it was anything but that when it started. All this crap about brotherhood and it's a big family, that's all garbage. But the kinship between those musicians, and the idea that was being presented to the public, that's all utterly true, y'know. It was a different world then, you can't expect people who were what they were to have been something else. There's no way, there's big difference between Duck Dunn and Jack Kennedy, y'know? There'd have been, I'd venture to say, no Stax records without Duck Dunn. A lot of people will tell you a lot of different stuff. Some of it's true, but it doesn't change the facts. To me, the period of fluorescence was the period they were at Atlantic,

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and it pretty much goes up to "Midnight Hour" and then it starts to change. And even Duck, or Steve, will say that it was going smooth until, "Who's making Love?" and something changed, I think it changed before that. They know more than I do, they were there and they saw it. I had very little contact with Stax after Packy was ostracized, which he was. He was literally banned from the building. At a certain point, you could either work at Stax or you could be friends with Packy but you couldn't do both things, and I was friends with Packy. There's a dichotomy there for sure, but that's what makes the story good.

Interviewer: It is a good one.

Dickinson: If it was all peace and love and all it wouldn't be nearly- and there wouldn't be the edge on the music there is. You hear competition, you hear, "oh yeah?"

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I mean that's where it's at. Also, the part they don't talk about, not Stax but Memphis, per se, as the races collided, and I think basically went beyond each other after Stax, you hear about the white musicians reaching for the black culture, you never hear about the black musicians reaching for the white culture. And yet, that's clearly what Johnny Ace was doing, he was trying to sing like Frank Sinatra for God sakes, he was reaching for a white market. As was Ike Turner, who will tell you that, as was Rascoe Gordon who, until he died, would tell you that. You had to get to a white audience to get across, to make any money. Hell, Charlie Patton who invented the Delta Blues who was whiter than he was black, was reaching for a white audience, and that's the part of it they ignore. As you tell the story of the radio stations, WLLK and WDIA,

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yes certainly they were playing black music for black people, but white teenagers were listening. I don't think they could have succeeded playing music to mates and chauffeurs, which is what it was in 1952.

Interviewer: Because?

Dickinson: Because it's in segregation.

Interviewer: And the money.

Dickinson: Yeah, and the money, absolutely. My first meaningful musical experience in Memphis was seeing the Memphis jug band in what must have been '51, '50 or '51, in an alley in downtown Memphis. And this was Will Shade, [inaudible] Brimmer, I didn't know who they were then of course and it took me years to find out. But there they were, right in front of me, but there was a barrier between me and them that you could not penetrate in 1951. It took that long, that I eventually Will Shade, had a lot of life changing experience with him. He was a genius

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that played the gutbucket, and lived right on Beale Street. The thing they don't talk about when they rebuilt Beale Street, when they tore Beale Street down they tore down a community. There was four-thousand people living there. They all had to go somewhere.

Interviewer: Yes, I know.

Dickinson: The same thing was true about Macklemore. When Stax, and they ain't going to tell you this either, when they went into that theater it was a white theater. It was a mixed neighborhood. The grocery store was white, but-

Interviewer: Just sort of in transition.

Dickinson: Just starting to go. That's not part of the story you hear, and the world changed, but Hell, that's the point, the world changed. And anybody who says... I live in Mississippi, and I take the heat all the time, "Oh, you live in Mississippi." Anybody who says it's the same in Mississippi, wasn't here then. Believe me, it's different,

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and I think the music did it. Politics didn't do it, religion didn't do it. The music did it. And just because some white guys wanted to play with some black guys, it was really that simple.

Interviewer: It changed the world.

Dickinson: Yes sir, it's a certain thing you learn as a white musician playing with black musicians, that you can't learn any other way. You go to school forever, you study the rest of your life, you won't learn as much as you would learn in one night at Currie's Tropicana. If Ben Brains turned around and looked at you like that you would know you just screwed up and you better not do that again. Too much school and I had to go to stay out of the army.

Interviewer: Did you succeed?

Dickinson: Yeah, I stayed out of the army. I minored in anthropology,

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which is a very unpopular thing to say now and totally politically incorrect, because there's not supposed to be a difference, but I'm sorry, there's a difference. There's a rhythmic difference in the way the dotted 8th note is handled that defines rock-n-roll. On one side of it is black music and on the other side there's white music and the line is there. And by pushing the two things together, creating tension, that's how the most exciting music of the 20th century was created. That music, which spread Democracy and the idea of interracial brotherhood to the damned world, from here, not anywhere else. They weren't playing soul music in Motown, I don't care what they say.

Interviewer: Yeah, no, they weren't.

Dickinson: Those are about half white there too as well, which they don't want to tell you.

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Interviewer: It was a little more commercial I think.

Dickinson: Sure it was, it was slicker, they didn't have the funk. New Orleans, Memphis, Detroit, I mean look at where we were, we were right there. It's a little too funky down in New Orleans. Much as I love it there, it's a little too funky. Memphis has got it, we are right where we need to be, it still happens.

Interviewer: It's a special place.

Dickinson: It certainly is, it certainly is for music. The future of Memphis music is out there in Orange Mountain playing in a garage tonight. They're musicians, world famous musicians in Memphis sitting at home watching television waiting for the phone to ring, and it's always been that way. Never been any different. Back to Bob Dylan.

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Dickinson: He knows. He knows. What do you suppose he feels when he's walking around with his hood up. He feels Memphis.

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You can still feel it, you walk around Beale Street, as bad as it is, especially early in the morning when there aren't many people there. You can still feel something because it's still there. As hideous and artificial as all that crap is, there's still something there that I maintain is a spirit, and I don't want to get too metaphysical on you, but I maintain it's a spirit.

Interviewer: Well it's something.

Dickinson: And that it's restless, it comes and goes.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Dickinson: But so far, it has always come back, and it never really leaves. There's always a little bit of it there. Like barbeque, you can still get a couple of good ones. Go to Payne's, it's not cold pepper, but it's good.

Interviewer: Alright.

Dickinson: [Inaudible] buddy guy's in town cutting at Willy Mitchell's and Don Smith, an engineer buddy of mine from LA is in here doing a session and we were having breakfast the other day

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and I took him to the studio. Willy walked in Willy jumped up and hugged me and all this and I mean, it's here, it's still here. They can't defeat it, I don't think.

Interviewer: Let's hope they don't.

Dickinson: Yeah really, well, good luck with Bob.

Interviewer: Thank you, let me turn this-

[END]