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Rob Bowman, 2012

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Interviewee: Rob Bowman

Interviewer: *Lavonne* Williams and Deanie Parker

Location: Stax Museum of American Soul Music, Memphis, TN

Collection: Stax Museum Oral Histories

Notes:

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Bowman: I'm Rob Bowman, I'm being interviewed by *Lavonne* Williams and Ms. Deanie Parker, that deserves a drumroll. [drumroll noises] And it is January 23rd, 2012 in the year of our Lord. And we're at the Stax Museum of American Soul Music, a place I have a particular interest in, as does Ms. Parker and as does Mr. Williams.

Lavonne Williams: Alright, Mr. Bowman, I want to start a little bit at the beginning of your story. If you could tell me a little bit about, being that you're Canadian, you're from Toronto, Ontario, tell me a little bit about how you first came into contact with American music in general.

Bowman: Well, it was real simple. I mean, Canada, I'm an hour and a half from Buffalo, you know. American media's all over Canada. It feeds in across the border, so even before I cared or thought constantly about music, I'd be hearing American music on Top 40 radio, also a black station out of Buffalo that we'd be, okay, I can hear all the time. So, that

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stuff was part of the background, if you will, the soundscape of my life. But for me, I was seven years old and I first heard the Beatles, and it's not like life was bad before that, but suddenly life was infinitely brighter. Every day there was a reason to get up, there were Beatle records. You know, the first Beatles song that excited me, it fired my imagination like nothing in my life had, was 'Twist and Shout.' Now, of course, you might know that's actually an R&B song done originally by the Isley Brothers. Took me a few years to find that out. But there was something about John Lennon's voice, that passion, that emotion, that intensity. Now, I might talk about the timbre variation that he would use. It took me again several more years to find this out. [phone rings] I'll pick it up from there. Is it gonna stop or is it gonna keep going? Should we unplug it or just stop every time it happens? It's okay.

[voice in background]

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So it took me a few further years to figure out that sound in John's voice, that in that particular song, he was getting from the Isley Brothers, is a sound that comes out of the African American church. Gospel music was the root of a lot of this. Anyway, so, the Beatles just excited me in a way that I'd never been excited before. I was a maniac. Anybody'd come to the house, one month I liked the Beatles and the other ones, no, why not? They did what their favorite songs, and I wanted them to sing it with me. I

mean, I was a cute seven year old and probably a real pain in the butt. A year later, the Stones hit me. And of course, the Beatles have a lot of black American influences, and some white American influences, but they weren't a blues band. And through the Stones, I was hearing covers of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf. And one of the things about both of those groups they always, in interviews, would talk about their sources. They were fans before they were musicians. They cared passionately about American music. Specifically about

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African American music, and they wanted to credit it. And the Stones recorded a version of "That's How Strong My Love Is," which is a great, great record that came out of Volt by Otis Redding. Actually, originally, done by O. V. Wright and another Memphis label, Gold Wax Records. I don't know if Mick ever knew O. V. Wright's version, but I remember Mick in an interview talking about Otis Redding, and that song I adored more than any other at that point. So I went to my local department store, the equivalent of a Macy's but in Canada, it was called *Eaton's*, and I asked if they had any Otis Redding records. They had one single, and it was his newest single at that time. I had just turned ten. The song was "Try A Little Tenderness," which is still probably my favorite Stax recording. I took that record home. I was excited to hear this, after all, here's an idol of Mick Jagger's, and I adored this one song the Stones had done of Otis'. And I put it on my little turn table, and I just remember, as nearly like yesterday,

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the sound coming out of the speakers. I didn't mean the Stones were no longer great, they still were, in my opinion. So were the Beatles. It's not like I deserted these earlier influences or my past life, remember I'm only ten, but it opened up sort of oceans of musical possibilities that had been outside of anything I had ever heard before. It's close to a perfect record for a whole lot of reasons. I do three hour lectures on that song now. Literally. It's one of my most popular lectures that I do. Anyway, that started me off after other Otis records. And I started hearing on radio, I was hearing things like Pickett's "Midnight Hour," which got played a lot in Toronto. I started to hear Sam & Dave records, and I'd be buying these things, not making the connection. Otis was on Volt, Sam and Dave were on Stax, Pickett was on Atlantic, but all these records had a lot in common. It turns out, of course, what they had in common was the same house band, Booker T. and the MG's and the The Mar-Keys, later the

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Memphis Horns were behind it all, and they were all cut 1960s McLemore in this handcrafted studio that sounded unlike any other studio before or since. Gradually, I became aware that these records had a commonality to them.

Williams: And what led you to that awareness?

Bowman: Well, the first big thing was, I picked up on Albert King, I picked up on Johnny Taylor. And of course, I began to notice a number of these things were on Stax. Wasn't too much I was picking up on on Volt, there wasn't a whole lot coming out of Volt that was really hitting hard, except for Otis at that point. But then, there was an article in Rolling Stone. Rolling Stone was one of the first magazines to write about rock slash soul and other popular music with any seriousness. Started being published in '67, and early in '68, they did an interview with the MG's. And it was a long, in-depth profile, not like magazines now which are these short, little sound byte kinda things. This was in-

[6:00]

depth, many, many pages, and the MGs talked about sessions with Otis. They talked about sessions with Sam and Dave, they talked about Rufus and Carla Thomas. And they talked Eddie Floyd, and of course, I'd heard "Knock on Wood" by then. And that article told me that all these guys and women were cutting in the same place. It was the same musicians, it was all this entity called Stax Records in Memphis, Tennessee. Your question was originally, how did I become knowledgeable about American music, but I think what you really were driving at is, how did I come to be so passionate about Stax? But I'll tell you something, it wasn't just Stax. By the time I was twelve, I saw Muddy Waters when I was twelve with my own money on my own volition. I mean, these are things I was going after. Because that was also part of what I was getting out of the Rolling Stones. So Howlin' Wolf, when I was twelve or thirteen. I started doing interviews when I was fifteen. I lied about my age and got a job in a magazine while I was still in school, and my first interview was T-Bone Walker. I don't know if you know T-Bone Walker, "Stormy

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Monday." An incredibly important post-war African American blues musician. My second interview was John Lee Hooker. I don't know what those guys thought of me. I mean, here's this fifteen year old white kid who, I thought I knew a fair bit, because I'd become voracious, I was reading everything I could. There wasn't much to read then. There were virtually no books at that point on blues or rock or soul. Couple of 'em started trickling out at the end of the sixties and early seventies, which is when I started writing, I was fifteen in '71. But there wasn't very much.

Williams: What was the name of the magazine that you worked for?

Bowman: It was a Canadian magazine called *Beatle*. In many ways, it was kind of like a pun on Rolling Stone down here, so this was Beatle up in Canada. And some of my first interviews were blues guys. By the time I was sixteen, I had my first cover story, which I [INAUDIBLE] with Pink Floyd and the Dark Side of the Moon Tour, which is a long way from the music we're talking about, but not so far as you might think. You know, one of the things Roger Waters of Pink Floyd told me was,

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he was a blues fanatic. Lead Belly and Bessie Smith for him, and he said so much of what was in Pink Floyd's music came out of the blues. And I wasn't sophisticated enough to get that immediately. I was like, "Like what?" And he started pointing out things that actually are now really obvious to me. "Money" from Dark Side of the Moon, which was a new album at that time, was totally a blues song. I mean, it was steeped in that stuff. Anyway, I had voracious interest in buying blues records, I started buying jazz records, I was *singing* Nat Coleman and Charles Mingus by the time I was fourteen or fifteen. I was traveling to festivals on my own or with friends, when I was sixteen. I had a life, it was a great life, but I had a life where I was very independent and supporting myself very, very young, and I was working four jobs when I was fourteen, and that was because I wanted money to buy records and to go to concerts. And it started with rock.

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Moved to blues and soul music and then to jazz. Eventually to gospel. Eventually also to country. I mean, I interviewed Bob Marley when I was twenty and became a reggae fanatic for several years. Interviewed

most of the important artists out of Jamaica. One point, was gonna do a book on that and then reggae went to dance halls and I lost total interest in what happened there. So, my interests are diverse. They're all over the place, but it all starts with the Beatles when I was seven.

Williams: I see.

Bowman: We just bored Deanie Parker all to heck. She's walking out of the room. Sorry to do that to you, Deanie.

Williams: When you talk about these influences and your interests, what led you to then take the step of moving to Memphis, being ensconced in the city itself. What made you make that decision that when you got ready to write about Stax...let me back up a little bit. What led you to being involved with Stax on any level

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beyond some of the articles you were doing to where you were getting involved in writing liner notes for the reissues of the Stax. Am I getting the chronology right?

Bowman: I think I know where you're going. But I interviewed Carla on the phone, this is funny. Interviewed Carla on the phone-

Williams: Carla Thomas.

Bowman: -CarlaThomas on the phone when I was sixteen or just turning seventeen. It was about Wattstax, so it would have been sixteen if it was right around Wattstax, would have been seventeen if it was when the movie was coming out. But I did a phone interview with Carla Thomas, which was actually my first Stax interview. It's kind of funny, but I had no idea I'd be doing what I ended up doing at that point. But this is what happened. I went to university, majoring in music, I'm eighteen years old. First day I'm at school I'm taking a course, "African and African American Music," and the professor is talking about Howlin' Wolf, great blues musician, Ornette Coleman, a great jazz musician, and the music of the Pygmies of the Ituri Rainforest, Western Africa. And he's making connections between all of this. I thought, "This is

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insane. This guy is unbelievably hip." I couldn't have made those connections. I found he's an ethnomusicologist, and I began thinking reasonably quickly that, if I did not make it as a rockstar, maybe I might want to become an ethnomusicologist and write about and teach about this music I love. And I became a bit of a man with a mission, because I began to think, "I'm taking classes in classical music," which by the way I know really inside out, I can teach and have taught, "I'm taking courses on jazz, I'm doing courses on world music, but there's no course on blues, R&B, soul, rock." Of course, funk was coming in at that point. Nothing. And I thought, maybe I should do something about this. So I did my M.A., then it came time to do my Ph.D., because in order to be a professor you need to get a Ph.D. Plus, I love learning. And there's eight places in the United States then who had a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology.

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There were none in Canada. I actually teach a Ph.D. program in it now in Canada. So I was going to come to the states to go to school. Best school was in Champagne-Urbana just south of Chicago, University of

Illinois. There's one in Bloomington, Indiana, of course. Up in Washington. But, I felt that, if I was going to live in the States for a few years, and of course, being a student I'd have a Visa, you can't just decide to live here, especially then, I wanted to live in the South. I wanted to live where the roots of the music that I cared the most about had come from. I mean, I cared about a lot of music from the west coast, the north, but it's all historically rooted in the black South. And I had thought actually about going to Tulane in New Orleans, but Tulane's program had fallen apart, and that left what was then Memphis State University,

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now the University of Memphis. And that was interesting to me because Memphis, as you know, is an unbelievably rich city, not just because of Stax. The post-war gospel quartet tradition in this city was unbelievable. The '20s jug band tradition in Memphis- fascinating. Cannon's Jug Stompers, Will Shade, those guys. Could have done a dissertation on either one of those topics. Could have also done it on B.B. King and Bobby Blue Band. Interviewed B.B. when I was sixteen, by the way. That was one of my early interviews. And later, when I was thirty, I interviewed him again. I could have done it on High Records, because I loved those recordings, all those Al Green, Ann Peebles, Don Bryant things, and of course a totally different sound that was happening at Stax, even though it was the same city and right around the corner nearly.

Williams: The same musicians, and a lot of...

Bowman: And, you know, we're talking a lot about black music,

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which makes sense. I spent most of my life working primarily with black music. But just not to give any bit of the wrong impression, I could have done a dissertation on rockabilly. And, in fact, I did the most in-depth interviews ever done, with Roland James, who was the house guitarist at Sun Records. With James and then even the drummer with Jerry Lee Lewis at Sun Records. With Johnny Bernero, who was a drummer – Elvis didn't have drums in the first two and a half singles, but Johnny Bernero played in the next two and a half. That's five singles that came out of Sun. I know that stuff inside out as well. Don't know if you knew that, Deanie Parker. Oh yeah, my interests are broad and wide. When I was here, I published articles on Al Green's preaching style, on Johnny Bernero's drumming in the general country music. I mean, I did a lot, and I could have easily been interested and written books on any of them, but I'll tell you why it became Stax. Probably, and it's hard now to really think back and put myself in that position, the odds were

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probably it was going to be Stax all along. When I moved here, I remember the very first day, it was August 1983, drove down from Toronto with a U-Haul. I don't know how long that drive was, it seemed like it was forever. And the heat is insane, of course, it's late August. I unpacked this U-Haul with my friend who's helped me move down here. We're in this really terrible apartment at [INAUDIBLE] Gardens, and then we need to eat. We drive around the corner and there's a pizza place. We, on Lamar, go into it. This white waitress comes up to me, she's probably twenty-two, twenty-three, and she goes, "Ah, y'all not from here, are you? Where you from?" And I said, "Toronto." "Why here?" "Well, I'm doing my Ph.D. Blah, blah, blah." "Now, what are you going to do it on?" I said, "Well, there's a few

possibilities, but I mentioned Stax first." She goes, "What's that?" And I'm like, "This is August '83. This company went out of business, depends what want to say, December '75 or January '76. Padlocked December '75, judge-ordered January '76.

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But, either way, we're talking about eight years earlier. It's recent history. She's twenty-two, twenty-three, she was cognizant, has to have seen media, and yet, she knew nothing about it. And forget the closure of the company. This company had meant so much. Those buses really like rocking by here. This company had meant so much to local community, and I assumed, naively as it turns out, that local community was all of Memphis. Didn't realize just how divided this city still was, you know, what, eighteen years after the Civil Rights Act was signed. It was a very divided city then. Still is, somewhat. But, it was a lot worse then.

Williams: So was this the first time you had spent in the States at large?

Bowman: Oh no, I'd been in New York a billion times. You know, I flew to California, I'd been to Washington. I hadn't been in Memphis.

Williams: Can you talk to

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me a little bit about your impressions?

Bowman: Well, let me just finish.

Williams: I'm sorry. Excuse me.

Bowman: So, I'm just astonished she has no clue even though this has meant so much to the community, but forget the community. This had meant so much in terms of an influence on music worldwide. I mean, ZZ Top had just a year or so before that, had a massive hit with Sam & Dave's 'I Thank You,' 'Cold Blood,' he had a hit with 'You Got Me Hummin' by Sam and Dave. The Stones have covered 'Walking the Dog,' 'That's How Strong My Love Is,' it's not like this was obscure. She had no clue, and the more I was in Memphis, the first month or so, I ran into so many people that didn't understand anything about it. I had eight books on Motown on my bookshelf then. There's now over forty. But I had only eight at that point. There was not a single thing written of any depth on Stax. Now, while I was here, three years later, Peter Guralnick's *Sweet Soul Music*

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came out. That's got about a hundred and fifty pages on Stax, and Peter, without me knowing it, he and I were covering some of the same ground. His book was a larger portrait of soul, Stax being a part of it, and Peter, and I really love Peter, he's a friend, so this is not a put-down, but Peter was interested primarily in what most white music writers have been interested in. A version of soul music which ties directly just to Otis, Sam & Dave, and that ilk. It was a music that crossed over to a degree. The '70s, we were talking about Dramatics, Isaac, that stuff they saw as somehow less authentic, less interesting. I was interested in the whole picture.

Deanie Parker: [Inaudible]

Bowman: Yes. Okay, fair enough, good point. There was a black writer named Phil Garland, and I did have that book, and it's called- Is it called *Soul's Soul* or is it just called *Soul*?

Parker: *Soul's Soul*

Bowman: Okay. A book called *Soul's Soul* and I think Phil published that in '69 or '70,

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and it had a lot of stuff on Stax, but the book wasn't just on Stax, and the other thing is, and I later met Phil actually through when this museum opened up, I believe the opening weekend we were on a panel together. And I really liked her, it was great meeting her after all these years, and I had read all these other things she had written. Magazine articles and so on. But Phil's book was not in-depth. Phil's book was a journalistic snapshot of a moment in time. It was great for me to read it as background, but it wasn't what I envisioned. What I felt is, "Okay, there's all these people locally, don't have a clue, there's this stuff on Motown, somebody needs to give Stax Records the community that was involved in making this music." That doesn't mean just the stars and the session musicians, it's the engineers, it's the producers, it's the office staff, it's people who marketed it. Stax really was a community in many ways. Some might say different communities over time.

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But I felt that that music, those people, this company deserved to have its story told with as much richness and dignity as humanly possible. It needed to be preserved. I thought, "Okay, here I am. I'm the right person." Or maybe, I just hoped I was the right person. But I was here at the right moment. I'd already met a lot of people, and I thought, "This is what my mission is." Not certainly in life I didn't know I'd be talking about it 30 years later, or 28 years later, but this was a mission that I needed to accomplish. That's what started me off, and the further I got into it, and it was hard. There were a lot of people who didn't want to talk at first. Lot of bitterness, because of the way Stax ended, and bitterness not only over the way it ended, but the kinds of things people wrote about it as it was ending, after it ended. The kinds of questions people'd want to ask members of the Stax community had left a lot of people with an unbelievable sour taste in their

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mouth and little desire to talk about it, especially for print purposes. Probably helped a lot that I was doing a Ph.D. dissertation. Certainly with Jim, if I was doing a book, never, ever would have done the interview. And I respected Jim enough that once I did the dissertation, and I realized that this can and should be a book, I asked his permission if I could use the material that he'd given me. Because I knew he only did it because it was for a dissertation.

Williams: You're referring to Jim Stewart.

Bowman: Yes. And he respected that it was for a dissertation, and it was his alma mater. That's probably the only way I got that interview. But Jim's been happy to have the story told, so that's all good. But, I may have lost my train of thought there and I apologize.

Williams: It's no problem. So what were the first steps that started you as far as writing your dissertation? When do you begin doing the reissue liner notes. When does that begin?

Bowman: Okay, well, I start interviewing for the dissertation in '85.

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Had to do coursework first. I did do a couple preliminary interviews. I interviewed Rufus at length for one of my courses, and it wasn't just about Stax, it was about his time at WDIA, at Sun, his time with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels. And it gave me a sense of just how rich his story is. Understand, as well, I could nearly have done a dissertation on the Rabbit Foot Minstrels. That stuff is so fascinating. And Rufus was a key into part of that world. Most of that world was gone. Most of those people had passed away, even by then, and I kind of regret I didn't do anything bigger with that, but you can only do so many things so many times. But, in '85 I started doing interviews with the express purpose that, "This is going to be my dissertation." I think William Bell first, the next day Luther Ingram, because they played together at the Belle Mid-South Fair and so Don Dortch promoted that, put me in touch, they both agreed to do it. Estelle might have been the third. After that, I can't remember because

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I was going after everybody, and some people took a long time to get, some people were like, "Sure, what are you doing next Thursday?" Kind of thing. And before I did this, I had a pretty good record collection. I got a massive record collection now. But I had, you know, part of proper preparation for doing a dissertation is know the material that you're going to be working with. So, I had started collecting assiduously every Stax record that I didn't already have in my collection. That meant all the obscure groups that most people have no concept of. Groups like The Charmels or The Epsilons. And it also meant all the white product and Hip Records, the comedy stuff on *Par-T*, the oddball labels, and I don't mean oddball pejoratively, but like respect that I didn't even know existed till I started getting further into it. And plus, no internet back then, right? I was writing collectors around the world and getting tape copies of records that were impossible to find. And I had people

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getting me magazine articles from all sorts of obscure places. One guy in Australia was a gold mine of early writings of Stax that he had collected. So, I was amassing all this research material, so when I went to do the interviews, it wasn't like, okay, how did Stax records start? I was asking questions that shocked people, or shocked might be too big of a word, but really surprised people. Cause I knew the stuff really well, and I wanted to know more than the skeletal, basic story. I wanted to go in-depth. And also, I told you about my diverse interest. Luther Ingram, I remember very much. When he started telling me about influences, he said the Swan Silverstones, he says Claude Jeter, who's the lead singer of Swan Silverstones. Luther's like this, "You know that?" Like, you know, this white kid, what does he know about black gospel music? I know those records really well, too. And that passion I have for that stuff and the fact that I put all those hours into learning it

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made people like Luther open up in a way that he might not have otherwise. I mean, it's no secret, but a lot of people get interviewed, and most interviewers know very little about what they're doing. They ask the same obvious questions, artists go on autopilot, they're bored, get it done. You know, promotional purposes, whatever. But most people figured out I was doing something different, and they were really generous. They gave me hours and hours and hours. Most of my interviews went at least two hours,

many of them went three, four. Some of them were done over several days. Homer Banks I would meet every morning at the Four Way Grill over days and days and days to get the stuff done. A few, like Jim Stewart, did seven hours in one shot. Isaac, it took me a year to get him, but I was going through his hair dresser. I tried through his lawyer. I had some girls who knew him in some context trying to lobby for me. Isaac was really avoiding

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me, but he finally agreed and I get there, I drive to Atlanta. By the way, I have no money. I'm really quite poor at this point. I'm a student, it's not like I had a lot of money. I had a car without any air conditioning, which used to just blow people's minds in the South at that time. But, you know, it's what it is. So I drive to Atlanta in my beat up, old car, and I'm eating carrots out of my cooler and drinking Coca-Cola, that was what I was subsisting on to fund my research. So I get there, and I've given directions to a gas station. This is a funny story. I said, "Well, why don't you just tell me where I'm going?" I'm dealing with Benny Mabone, who was Isaac's right hand person for years. Benny goes, "Just meet me at this gas station. Call this number when you get there." So I get to the gas station, I call the number. Benny drives, it's literally, "What are you going to do, blindfold me and take me?" But no, I just followed his car. And Isaac had just moved into a condominium, and they put me in the recreation room, and Benny says, "Isaac will be here in a minute." Now,

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I've been waiting a year for this. Isaac is so key to everything I'm doing. I mean, Isaac was one of the finest writers of classic soul music ever. Sam & Dave, *Soul Men*, 'Hold On, I'm Coming,' you know, 'May I Baby,' 'When Something is Wrong with My Baby.' I mean, the Soul Children material. Isaac was so important as a writer, as a producer, and then, of course, as a soul artist, he just changes the whole possibility of black popular music. Changes the whole political economy of the black music industry. I mean, Isaac is so key. So, I've been building up, I have a ton of questions, you can imagine. And I get there, put me in this room, it's 45 or 50 minutes later before Isaac shows up. And I'm like, nervous, I'm twiddling my thumbs, and I'm not nervous because I'm scared of Isaac. I'm nervous because of how important this is to me. And Isaac comes in, he goes, "Okay, we have an hour." and I go, "An hour?" And I'm trying to explain to what I'm trying to do, he goes, "Well,

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let's do an hour, we'll see where we're at." We talk for six hours that night. And it was great. Benny Mabone would check in every once in a while and he kept going, "You guys still going?" And, you know, I don't suppose this matters in this tape, but Isaac said to Benny, "Well, he's a walking motherfucking dictionary." I think he meant encyclopedia. And I'd brought all this stuff with me, I mean, I had this massive notebook, before computers, right. So, that really was done by hand. I had this massive notebook where I got charts of every single song Isaac had written and produced for, you know, groups like Jeanne & the Darlings, groups like The Charmels. All this, Mabel Johns, all this insanely obscure stuff compared to the big hits, and Isaac's just like looking at this, going, "Oh yeah, I remember doing that." And he'd just start talking stories about it. Then, he'd go, "Do you have these records?" Isaac had nothing. So I put together tapes for him of everything he'd ever produced and written that he was

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obviously thankful for and incredibly gracious about, but it's, again, how did we even get to that? What was your question?

Williams: Well, I was just trying to get an idea of what your impressions were of Memphis...

Bowman: Oh, how it started! How it started and how I first started doing the interviews.

Williams: Well, that actually takes me to where I'm trying to go here. Like, your interview process, can you talk to me a little bit about that? Did it change over the years? Did it change with each artist that you or person related to Stax that you dealt with? Like, in your mind to prepare to do this, what was that line of thinking like?

Bowman: I was lucky. I'd been doing interviews since I was fifteen. Interviewing is an art, and it's an art like playing guitar or it's an art like writing, but it's an art, it's a separate art. You can be a great writer and a poor interviewer. Be a great filmmaker and a terrible interviewer. So, my early interviews with T-Bone Walker and Howlin' Wolf and Pink Floyd and so on, they're mediocre when I look back on them. I really don't want anybody to read those things.

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But, I was learning on the job, so to speak, and by the time I was doing my dissertation, I'd done interviews for years, so I was reasonably good at it. I think I'm probably better now because I've done hundreds more since then, but my point is this, there's a couple tricks to doing interviews. I mean, they're not really tricks, but they're basic principles. Research, know your subject inside out, backwards and forwards. I mean, not only was I getting these magazine articles from guys all over the world, I'd gone to the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress in Washington, because they had all sorts of obscure stuff. Remember, Eddie Floyd picked me up there, and I was telling him about all the stuff I was reading about him in these obscure British magazines, like "Hot Buttered Soul" published for like a year and a half, and Library of Congress had six copies, and so I read everything in them. And I'm telling Eddie, "I just finished reading, you know, I had to get off..." But my point is this, there was no stone unturned, so when I got in front of people, I knew

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pretty well everything that had ever been written about them of any substance. Now, knowing that, when you read interviews that are done with people before, you try to figure out their personalities. You try to figure out what kind of people are they? What kind of interviews are they? What kind of approach can you use to get them to be comfortable with you and want to go deeper? And another part of it is, you know, interviews, filmed interviews like this, you saw me do a film interview yesterday. Film interviews are different. 'Cause then it really is, question, response, and as an interviewer, you're quiet when you get the response, because you don't want to be talking over your subject. When you're doing interviews for research only, I would jump in all the time, 'cause I'd jump in because I'd be excited, but it would get people excited. Isaac would be talking about some record, and I'd go, "The bass line on that." And Isaac'd go, "Oh my God, yes," and he'd start

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singing the bass line, or I'd sing the bass line, and that gets people excited. And again, it tells them a) you're really serious, but it also gets them excited. The trick is to try to become, it becomes a

conversation, not question and answer. And, I go in there, I'll spend weeks and weeks and weeks preparing literally for interviews, and I'll have written out questions, it could be, hundred questions, hundred and twenty questions. I have them broken down into modules in my mind. I have to show my grad students, my actual notes before interviews. So you look at my Steve Cropper notes, and it's got a whole section on songwriting, and it's got all these key songs. It's got a whole section on guitar playing, whole section on engineering at Stax, studio equipment. It's got some personal history stuff. These are all modules. I memorized this stuff. It was a lot of work. A lot more. Again, film interviews you don't have to do that, you have questions in front of you. I had that yesterday, too. But not if you want to get inside peoples' lives

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deeply and get into a conversational flow and have them go to places where they generally don't go. You can't be looking at questions. All in my head, and these modules are numbered in my head, and the questions within those modules are memorized. And so, you see that we go on tangents. People do that all the time. So I'm talking to, let's say, Cropper about x, module number two, let's say, third question, and his answer has gone over to what's in module number eight for me, sixth question. I've got it all in my head, and I'm doing these computations as he's doing this, thinking of follow-up questions for what he's asked, do I go back to number two the next question, or do I flow into number eight, figuring we'll pick up module two later? All this stuff that's going on up here as you're doing it, if you're doing it at that level. You didn't know I was doing any of this when I talked to you, did you, Deanie?

Parker: I have a question.

Bowman: Yeah.

Parker: 1983, you were at Memphis

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State University.

Bowman: Yes.

Parker: How did you select your advisors, what was the receptiveness of Memphis State University in '83 to your wanting to do a dissertation, get your Ph.D., and use Stax Records as the subject, given that it is a Memphis institution and a part of the fabric that was responsible for forcing Stax Records into involuntary bankruptcy?

Bowman: You're going to be disappointed with my answer. It was really easy. David Evans, who was not from Memphis, from the Northeast, or California? I can't remember, but did his schooling in the Northeast. David Evans is a folklore artist. He's running an ethnomusicology program. Memphis State underfunded him, underfunded the program. In many

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ways, I didn't tell you this. School – this might get people upset – the school was low-quality compared to what I was used to. My Ph.D., the coursework, was at a lower level than my M.A. in Toronto, and I was going to leave here after one term. I actually went up to Urbana-Champaign, sat in on classes, they offered me a position and a scholarship, and there's one thing that changed my mind. A fellow student

of mine from Toronto was there, we're talking, he's been there a year and a half at that point, he'd seen one musical performance Buddy Guy'd come to play on campus from Chicago, and I, every weekend, was seeing crazy stuff happening here. At juke joints, I was going down to Fife and Drum Picnics in Senatobia, I was going down to the Blues Festival in Clarksdale. I was going to Al Green's church every Sunday, and I thought, "Okay, I really got a decision between a school of lower quality than I'm used to and, I had straight-A average, I was

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a desirable student, I could go virtually anywhere. So I could go to a better school, there was a great library, better students, better professors, better resourced, or I could live in the South and have an experience in a community that I couldn't get up North at a school like Urbana. I made the decision to stay here. Best decision of my life. But anyway, David Evans resented Memphis State, resented the fact that his program was underfunded, but was also really open. He was fine with it, there was never a question about it. He wasn't much of an advisor for me, and I don't mean that disrespectfully. He didn't know anything about it. His whole thing is pre-war blues. So, other than being able to read it and edit things grammatically, which is not like I needed a whole lot of that, but everybody needs a bit of that, he wasn't really hands-on. And the rest of the committee might as well not have existed. I mean,

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nobody gave me a hard time, nobody knew or cared. And I did it basically on my own. Which is fine. I was quite happy. But there was no resistance, there was no antipathy to the idea. "What do you want to do it on Stax Records for?" Here, the program in ethnomusicology was a specialty in Southern regional studies, and how could Stax not fit in to that? So. Anyway, there's your answer. You'd asked me about interview techniques, I've probably given you enough, but I think you get the sense that I take this to the wall and back. And people picked up on that and opened doors for me. People who didn't want to talk to me initially, once I finally got them. Deanie Parker's first question, to me, is, and this is like six in the morning, wasn't it? Couldn't believe she made me get up at that time. I had to meet her at six in the morning at some office building, weren't you working for a politician or something down there? Deanie doesn't want to answer. Anyway, and I'm sitting outside a locked door, six in the morning,

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Deanie's not there. And finally, clomp clomp clomp – women's shoes, right? On one of those hard floors. She comes around the corner, and I'm anticipating, Deanie's pretty important, right? Longest employee at the company, the only person who was there longer was Jim, and he wasn't an employee. And Deanie obviously, besides being an artist, ever heard 'Mary Lou, Can You Do the Bumble Bee?' Anyway, besides being an artist, she'd worked in the record store, she'd done publicity, she'd done Stax Facts magazine. Deanie, I saw as very key to what I wanted to do here. I thought, "Everybody's as interesting," but Deanie was a key player, very much so. And so, she comes around this corner, if looks could kill, I'd be a dead man. She didn't want me there. She didn't want to be there. She only agreed she told me later, because I'd pestered her for so long, and that was tricky, too, you know? How to keep phoning people without being so obnoxious they tell you to get lost. But to keep them until finally

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they give in, they get that you're sincere, or maybe they just give in so you'll go away. Anyway, Deanie and I started, she asked me the first question, I didn't ask her the first question. And she goes, "So what do you think of Memphis?" And you know, I've got an interesting situation there, right? It's a city that's so screwed up in so many ways, the racial divide is really ugly in this city, 50:50 black:white at the time, only 5% integrated housing. For the record, I deliberately lived within an integrated area because politically that, to me, is the only way to change things, is for people to do that. Anyway, what do I answer to her? I don't know if she's a civic booster, she wants to hear me tell her how great Memphis is, or shall I be honest? I generally take the pause at being honest. And so, I told her, how problematic I found the place, and how screwed up, and she actually cracked a bit of a smile partway through it, and at that point, was willing to talk to me. How did we get onto that?

Williams: I was just asking you about your interviewing techniques again

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and just your...

Bowman: Oh, I know what it was. People began to realize I was sincere, and I think they believed I had integrity. And so, people would phone other people. Al Bell was unreachable, Peter Guralnick could never get Al Bell. Believe it or not, Al Bell at one point didn't want to talk to people. Larry Shaw picked up the phone, phoned Al Bell, 'cause I asked Larry Shaw, what was Linwood? Do you know what Linwood was?

Parker: A church?

Bowman: No. Linwood was a holding company of cattle farming that Jim and Al had set up briefly, and I'd gone through every issue, and again, this is before it was searchable. Every issue of Billboard, week by week, scanning pages on microfilm to find any mention of Stax or any Stax artists, and somewhere in there, Linwood popped up. It was a corporation that Stax owned. I asked Larry Shaw about that, and Shaw's

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going, "How the heck do you know about this?" He said, "Hold on." He phone Al Bell, he goes, "I found the person. I've found the person." Apparently, Al and Larry'd been talking about how somebody needed to tell the story of Stax. And Larry, at that moment, thought that I was the person. And Al agreed to see me instantly, which of course was huge, because Al's pretty important to this whole story. So things like that kept happening. Artists would phone artists. Muscle Shoal's Jimmy Johnson wouldn't talk to me. He just didn't return my calls. I left messages with his secretary for months. And that was funny, that wasn't an artist, it was a writer. Peter Guralnick phoned Jimmy, and the same day, Jimmy's secretary called me, "When do you want me to come to Muscle Shoals?" So it's people, it was networking of people beginning to feel they could trust me, you know, I don't know why, maybe I was just a good seller of myself, but I think, maintain that trust with everybody – and that's another

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tricky thing. There's relationships, some good and some not so good, between all sorts of people and negotiating that, I'm on good terms with everybody except Sam Moore's wife. And many people have that problem. As Deanie rolls her eyes. And Sam loved me to the point where he wanted my first kid

named after him. We were very close for a long time. In fact, when my kid broke, my kid wasn't named after him, when my kid was about four, he broke a table in Sam's dressing room once. So even that was good for many, many years. But that's a long story I can tell you about later if you want. Doors would open, people'd believe in me, and things happened. And I felt very lucky that so many people were so generous. Couldn't have done it without that. And people had to believe. I'll tell you one more story. William Brown. You know who William Brown is? Mad Lads and later an engineer.

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William stood me up twice. Coulda killed him. You know. Sitting there waiting for him to show up to breakfast, waited for an hour and looking pretty pathetic. And finally, paid for the coffee you've had and go home and go, "What's this all about?" I've run into William at Ardent when I'm doing something else. I said, "Blah, blah, blah, you know you stood me up twice, what's?" And he goes, "You want to do it now?" I said, "Sure." He goes, "Okay, we'll go to your place. Got beer?" I said, "No," but we stopped and bought him beer. So we go back to my place. We talked for four hours. And William was funny because he was shocked, blown away by what I knew and how far I wanted to go with this. He said, "I've been waiting for years for somebody like you." And he goes, "And now you're here, and you're white." He was really disappointed that I can't do anything about that, but I am here and I am sincere.

Williams: Well, that's a...going into William Brown is a good segue into what I wanted to ask you about this. Obviously, he was very close to Ms. Estelle Axton.

Bowman: Sure.

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Williams: With him and other people that you interviewed, was there ever a sense of, obviously there at some point came a point where she was no longer involved with the Stax Record Company. From people that were really close to her, like William Brown, was there a sense of what they felt the company would have been like had she stayed on? What was lost when she left?

Bowman: I never- I'm just thinking through- I never spoke with anyone who didn't love Estelle. I'm amazed the way people spoke of her. You know, there's various song writers, I don't think I'll call names here, who are disparaging about Jim and Al for different reasons. But they loved Estelle. The artists loved Estelle, people who worked here, you know, Lady A, Miss Personality. I loved Estelle too, by the way. Estelle was unbelievable. First day I interviewed her, she gave me all this stuff from her garden to take home. But some people spoke with a little bit of

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causticity about Estelle being edged out of the company. But nobody spoke of, "If only Estelle had stayed, the place would have been perfect." People did speak about the transformations that happened in the late '60s when Don Davis was brought down here, when Booker T left here, when a lot of production started being done at Muscle Shoals, when the company started expanding at a tremendous rate. And for a lot of people, the magic that had existed during their three, six, eight, nine, 10 years at Stax, depending when they came to the company, was going, or was gone, and they were bitter about it, and felt it didn't have to happen that way. But, nobody said, "Well, if Estelle had been here." Cause Estelle never ran the record company. Estelle was the face of the place, in some ways.

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She ran the Satellite Record Shop, she had various moments where she caused great things to happen like Albert King being signed, the Mad Lads being signed, certain records coming out. Even the last night, Jim wasn't going to put it out, Estelle did a whole lot of lobbying and maneuvering for that to come out. There's other records like that. But, it's not like Estelle staying would have changed in a dramatic way in that nobody ever spoke about it as such, what the future of the company would be. But I have to say this, too: I mean, anybody listening to this, if they know anything about Stax, no one I'm talking about, if anybody's read my book, they know the kinds of changes I'm referring to. And it's easy, you know, we're really talking about changes that Al Bell brought about. And Al being this very dominant, take care of it, quickly became really the person running the ship here, and Al Bell's expansion as he

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envisioned, he wanted this place to go beyond the mom and pop company it was when he came here. And he was unbelievably successful. Whatever you might think about Al Bell or anybody else might think about Al Bell, he had the magic touch for a while. People got hurt personally, emotionally, egos got hurt. And Al could have, and by his own admission, if it had been many years later, might have handled it with greater sensitivity. He made mistakes, he knows that. People with vested interest in this company that he'd been with from the beginning, and they don't get over those mistakes, and I understand that, and I can empathize with that. But, you look at the sales, if you're really talking about black music and the success of this company, and you see where Al took the Staple Singers, as opposed to what Steve Cropper had done with them. I love the two Steve Cropper produced Staple records. I love the Staples records on Vee Jay in the '50s. I love anything that any of the Staples

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have even gone near. I'm seeing her next week. But Al took them to a place nobody else could have even thought to. I think Hayes is an artist. Jim never wanted Isaac as an artist, never saw it that way. Frustrated Isaac to death. Al not only gave Isaac a shot, but said, "Do whatever you want. And, you know, go ahead, you want to do an album with four songs on it, one eighteen minutes long, want to do an album that fuses a sort of MOR ballads, soul music, rock guitar, classical strings, jazz improvisation, whatever. Isaac told me, he felt no pressure at all. He didn't have to sell it, didn't matter, he could do whatever the heck he wanted. Creates *Hot Buttered Soul*, which changes black music completely. Shocking what that record did. Not just at Stax, but throughout the industry. So, you know, look at The Dramatics. He brings in these outside producers like Don Davis, who most Memphians resented,

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they felt, why do you bring an outside in here? We built this company. Should be Booker, should be somebody else in Don Davis' position. But Al was, naively, thought that Booker and everybody else could be happy, and Don Davis could become just another piece of this pie that was getting bigger and bigger and bigger. And he didn't handle it with the sensitivity he might have, but he was right about what Don Davis could bring to this company. Johnny Taylor records. Johnny Taylor did okay in '66, '67 and early '68, when Hayes and Porter were producing him, but look what happened with 'Who's Making Love,' the first Don Davis single. Like, what happened with the next 14 top-ten records that Don Davis produced with Johnny Taylor? Al Bell in many ways was a genius at being able to think through what

might work in the marketplace. And Stax, it's kind of funny, I told you, I said the thing earlier about *Sweet Soul Music*, which basically is, Stax dies in '68, Otis dies in '67,

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Stax dies in '68. That's what a lot of white rock critics talk about in terms of soul music period. Black music period. [INAUDIBLE] '70s black music became inauthentic, because there was only one way, a monolithic idea of what African Americans can do musically. Well, if you look actually at sales numbers, it's arguable that Stax meant more to the black populace in the early '70s than it did throughout the '60s, if you're only talking about sales. So, this comes out of, what happens if Estelle Axton had stayed? Nobody talked about it in those terms. Everybody just felt that she was an unbelievably wonderful woman and that she got screwed. But nobody talked about how she would have changed the future of the company.

Williams: Okay. I wanted to ask a little bit about, I'm kinda going to get into a few particulars, one being, not only did you talk to artists, not only did to producers, songwriters, you also talked to people's entourages.

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Two particular individuals that stood out to me in the book were Johnny Baylor and Dino Woodard. And one thing, it's very interesting to me how you wrote about Dino in particular, since he was the one that was there to give interviews. His style of speech.

Bomwan: Boom!

Williams: Yeah. I was like, "Boom, you know, pay me a lump sum."

Bowman: Well, these guys had to be talked to and "Boom!" you know, they had to understand.

Williams: So talk to me about those interviews, getting in touch with these people.

Bowman: Okay, this is the deal. There were certain things- I care about music. And that's where I started. And I care about how music relates to community. And that's also where I started. Drugs, sex, gangsters, not so interesting. And if you look at my book, I know who had relationships with who, I know all sorts of stuff because people just tell you the stuff, you don't have to ask about it, it comes out. I don't write about any of that stuff,

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because it's not important. The only reason I'd ever write about it is it somehow it affected the music. So I avoided the whole Johnny Baylor/Dino Woodard gangster-ish aspect, and people really warned me to stay away from it, too. People warned me that, you know, Johnny's a dangerous man, you don't want to go there. Johnny was still alive when I started my work. So, there's nothing about it in my dissertation. Might have mentioned it existed, but I didn't interview him, I wasn't going to go into it deep. Seemed to me not so important. As I started taking things further, and my book's really a combination of 12 years of work, as I took things further, various people at Stax who'd now become friends of mine really felt I needed to expose this stuff. And that I needed to go there. People told me stories of being intimidated with guns to their head, Johnny Keys had told me about being beaten to within an inch of his life,

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pistol-whipped in a hotel, I can't remember what city now. Tim Whitsett told me stories, Marvell Thomas had told me stuff, and they all felt that, if I'm going to do this right, I needed to go there. Johnny had died, that made it safer. Dino was now a preacher. I don't think a preacher probably going to want to have me killed. I'm sort of joking, but a lot of stuff people told me early on, people who weren't necessarily part of Stax, but were one step removed, had friends in Stax. People told me all sorts of crazy stories. Conspiracies about Stax going under, conspiracies about the murder of Al Jackson, unbelievable stuff about Johnny and Dino. Some of which was true, but much of it wasn't. Ideas about money being laundered out of

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this company and Al Bell being really rich. I saw where he lived in North Little Rock. Wasn't rich, and if he was, I don't know what the point of it was, because he wasn't using the money for anything. People told me lots of stuff. Well, I'll say this. Jim Dickinson, who unfortunately has passed away, never played a session at Stax, but Jim Dickinson's a bit of a legend in Memphis. Jim Dickinson's a great storyteller, very quotable. Lots of people interviewed Jim, and Jim happily would give interviews. Jim told me all sorts of conspiracy stuff. Very early on, Jim was happy to talk to me for hours. Right near the beginning of my research. It took me years with a lot of stuff, 90% of what Jim told me wasn't right. And I know it wasn't right because I either found paperwork or I got deep inside with people who could give it to me right. And I don't think Jim was deliberately misleading me at all.

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I think Jim liked romantic stories, and he believed anything he'd heard, and happily would repeat it and dress it up. There'd be some people in this town that'd not like the fact that I said this. Jim was a nice guy, and he was always nice to me. But I couldn't use most of what he told me, but in the beginning, I'm starting with this stuff. So anyway, this Johnny/Dino stuff. I finally said, "Okay." So I phoned Dino up, he's at the Abyssinian Baptist Church up in Harlem. He's reticent, but I convince him why I want to talk to him. They're part of the story, Johnny's dead, I can't talk to Johnny. And I said, "Look, I've done all this research, I can't even tell you," and I gave him some basic facts about Johnny. When and where he was born, I can't remember if that was one of them. But basic stuff that even for context I needed, and that he was the guy who could tell me the stuff, no one else could. So Dino agreed, and I go to New York, take the subway uptown. I got a backpack on with a couple thousand bucks of

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tape equipment, and I'm thinking, "I'm going to interview a former hitman." This is something I never thought I'd be doing. What's this got to do with music? I get there, and Dino is the only person who made me do this. Dino made me agree that I would not print anything, any quote from him, without him getting to vet it. And I didn't have a problem with that, because I'm honest. If you ask me not to print something, I won't. And I'm really careful my transcriptions are accurate. But, I still didn't really like it because, well, I was worried he'd want to interfere in other ways. So, we agreed to that, and I'll tell you that story in a minute. We do our interview, and we start talking about Johnny and Johnny's background. Doing the soft stuff first, right. Getting as much information as I can. And, I don't know if, well, you've read the book, so you know this. They first came down here because there was some guys

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shaking Stax down. A guy named Chicken and a guy named Sam Armor. And I had a guy, what's his name? Suhkara Abdul Yahweh. Do you know who that is? Suhkara Abdul Yahweh. Well, Saqira did a lot of research for me on the Chicken/Sam Armor stuff. Talking to us, he referred to the players from his past life when he was Sweet Willie Wine Watson, I think. I verified a lot of stuff from the other side, as well as I got it from the Stax side. Anyway, I'm asking Dino about this, and Dino's giving me details about their meeting in the park. He's like, "You know, they thought they were tough, but boom! There's tough and there's tougher, and boom! We just had to tell them the way it was going to be." I mean, Dino was quite a character. He's like, this black guy but out of an Italian mafia movie. It's like an Italian caricature, I've never met Italians who speak that way. But maybe in the mafia

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they do. I haven't done mafia interviews. So, I get a lot of stuff, and Dino's amazing. He's really giving me a lot of stuff. And then I start telling him stories, or saying, "Look, I need to verify things people have told me." I say, "Marvell Thomas tells me that Johnny put a gun to his head in a rehearsal in Cleveland." And Dino goes, "Well, Marvel deserved it." And starts saying, "Marvell's a little uppity" or this or that and blah, blah, blah, and they had to keep order. It's just like- Oh, I also got great promotion stories out of them. Deanie's going to fall out of here. Then I keep going further, and Dino starts getting uncomfortable, because I'm asking stories directly about beating people within an inch of their lives, threatening their lives, that people told me. He gets up and he puts his jacket on. Now, it's kind of funny, he hasn't said the interview's over, but body language tells

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you, somebody gets up, they put their jacket on. And I just keep asking questions, 'cause this is my one shot, right. And Dino's got his jacket on, he's done it up, and I'm still asking questions, the tape's still running, but he says he has to go to an appointment. And he wasn't going to answer any more questions. So that was fine. When I write the book, I do as I promised, I fax him the pages that I quote him on, and he looks at the quotes, he phones me up and leaves a message on my machine. "Rob, it's Dino. We got a problem." I'm thinking, oh, great. So I call him back, I want this, what's going to happen here? No problem with any of the quotes, but on one of the pages that I'd faxed to him, I said in an FBI report - it's interesting, by the way, the Freedom of Information Act, I requested what they had on Johnny and Dino. Paid my money and stuff, told me they had nothing. I wrote them back and gave them their case file number,

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because it was included as part of the court records for one of the Stax lawsuits. I spent 16-hour days going through court documents, which gave me a lot of stuff, unbelievable stuff, in fact. All the Ed Pollack stuff. So, in one of these documents that I'd found the FBI'd compiled, they talk about research on Dino and Johnny, and that these guys were pimps, they had been involved in racketeering, they were involved in drugs, they had extorted, and probably killed two or three people. So I quoted this, and Dino didn't like it. But you know what the interesting thing was? What he didn't like was the drug reference. He goes, "We never dealt drugs." I've got a lot of stories that say otherwise, but I don't care. I mean, my

interest is not whether Dino and Johnny dealt drugs. I was setting the FBI file as part of the Stax lawsuit thing.

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But, none of the other stuff bothered him. His attitude was, he was working in a street ministry and kids shouldn't know that he ever was involved with drugs. So I said, "Look, I can't change the document." And he goes, "Well, I don't know how you do your fancy research, but blah, blah, blah, we were never..." And I said, "Could you live with this? Can I simply write that when you reprise this FBI report in 1996 or '97, whatever year it was, that you stated emphatically that you and Johnny had never been involved with drugs?" He said, "That'd be fine." That's what's in the book. Which kind of blew my mind that, none of the other stuff bothered him, but that was upsetting. And you know what?

Parker: Did you stay in touch with him?

Bowman: No. I sent him a copy of the book.

Parker: You haven't been in touch with him since then?

Bowman: No.

Parker: I've seen him several times. Any time I'm in New York, I'll go and we'll connect.

Bowman: Have you ever brought up the book?

Parker: Nope. Whenever he's

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in Memphis, he'll get in touch with me.

Bowman: Wow. No, it's not like anything bad happened between me and Dino, but we did that one interview, he was okay with what we agreed to on the phone, and it's just never been any sort of relationship. But if you see him again, say hi. And if you ever find out what he thought of the book, if he ever read the whole thing, I'd be curious. I mean, I'm thankful for Dino. It's stuff a lot of people would have just refused to talk about. His life's a different life, he's a minister, why does he want to go into any of that? But I think he did get the idea that I was doing this because the story deserves to be told. Same way that Deanie got that idea or William Bell or Mabel John or Jeanne of Jeanne & the Darlings. Ron Banks of The Dramatics. Any of them.

Williams: Alright, we're going to go ahead and take a break there just so I can figure out how we're doing on time.

[background voices]

[1:03:00]

Williams: Did you need to take a break at all?

Bowman: I'll just have a sip of Coke.

Williams: Ms. Parker, you doing alright?

Parker: [laughs] Sure hard to contain myself.

Bowman: You're falling out occasionally.

Williams: Yeah, we're kind of bouncing all over the place, and please forgive me for that.

Bowman: Oh, I don't have a problem. I bounce all over the place, too. And you know what? If interviews become conversations, that happens. That's why I would have all these modules in my head and you do someone like Isaac, for six hours with that, it's mind-numbing. I used to just be exhausted after doing these things. It was worth it. Couldn't have got this book any other way.

Williams: Alright. Are we ready?

Bowman: You need to at some point ask me the problems of getting the book published.

Williams: That's in one of my modules, but we just haven't gotten there yet. But, you know what? Let's talk about it. Talk to me a little bit about the process

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of getting the book published. Talk to me about the wrapping up of the book, everything that goes along with that, and what went into trying to get it published and that process? Please.

Bowman: I don't remember the year, but at some point, I felt, "Okay, I've completed 95% of my research." And I could have published the book seven years earlier, and it would have been 80% as good as it is, but I kept wanting to push further. And I kept finding out more stuff and going places. And doing all those box sets was great, too, cause that gave me a chance to interview on somebody else's dime, Fantasy Records paying for it, Atlantic Records on the first box. Especially a lot of more far-flung artists living in disparate places, artists that weren't of primary, secondary importance even, were still part of this process. So, I was very lucky, I had a lot of projects along the way to help get me stuff that I could also use in the book. But, I phoned

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Peter Guralnick, we'd become friends ever since *Sweet Soul Music* had come out, and he gave me his agent. And his agent thought, [INAUDIBLE] he goes, "Okay, this is how you do a book proposal. Give me a table of contents, brief chapter-by-chapter summary, sample a little bit of a chapter." And he goes, "We'll have this sold within a month." Took two years. Nobody wanted it. They kept saying, "Where are the stars?" Didn't even know Isaac Hayes, Otis Redding. They'd go, "No, no no, where's the Diana Ross or Marvin Gaye?" Isaac and Otis weren't big enough. It was really, really interesting. He'd thought it would be such a slam dunk. I didn't know if it'd be quite that slam dunk, but I was eminently convinced that this would be pretty easy to do a book deal. We found one publisher, one editor who would take a chance on it. And I didn't get a massive advance whatsoever. I got an advance

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that wouldn't even cover my research costs. But I didn't care. If I was in this for money, I would have done it on Diana Ross, I guess. Or Marvin Gaye. But, you know, that's not why I was doing this. And so, at that point, I had a contract. Typical book is 90,000 words. I think my contract was 120,000, maybe it was 100,000, I don't remember. But whatever it was, I started writing. And I got up to 65 and I'd written

60,000 words. And I phone up the editing guy and said, "We have a problem." And I remember, I was going to write it in three stages. Up to 65, 66, up to 72, and then the ending. And so the first stage and I was at 60,000 words. And I said, "You know, my contract states that I can buy my way out of the contract by simply repaying you my advance, and I can't keep it to 90 or 100,000 words, whatever we had signed,

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so, I'm happy to do that, but if you want, you can look at what I've written and you can tell me if you agree that it deserves this kind of length. Bless his soul, he took it. He thought it was great. Rewrote the contract, no more money, but rewrote the contract. He said, "180,000 words." I said, "200,000. Look, that way if I give you 180, you're really happy. We say 180, I give you 200, we're fighting." He said, "No, 180." I gave him 222,000 words. He was not happy in some ways, but again, my attitude was, my contract, whatever paragraph three, subsection c, whatever it was, you don't have to take it, but here's my way out. I'll pay you. And at one point, we fought about a bunch of other things, too. The book was a little overdue time-wise, and he was trying to rush it out, so he didn't have it legally vetted in the proper way.

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I was a little concerned, especially about the Al Jackson murder, whether we might have some legal issues. So I said, "Well, look." And I wish I hadn't. But I said to him, "Why don't you have the lawyers just look at those few pages?" Because of course, you sign this contract, and any lawsuit is my problem, not theirs, right. Ultimately, I pay their legal bills, which would bankrupt me if it was over a lawsuit. And they looked at that, but they looked at everything quickly, and they had a bunch of problems. They didn't like that I had a quote about Al Jackson's wife, Barbara Jackson, refusing to look any of the M.G.'s in the eye at the funeral even though that comes directly from Steve and Booker, I believe. Few other small things, but the big thing was, if I remember correctly, I referred

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to Jerry Wexler and the Stax contract where Stax lost its back catalogue. I had got a copy of the contract, and it's a master purchase agreement right on the front page. It's quite clear what it is. Jerry always said the lawyer slipped it in somewhere, some clause deep within it. Jim told me, when I finally read the contract, I was so stunned – I had known Jim for a few years at that point – and I said to Jim, "It's right on the front page. Did you never read this?" And he goes, "No." And I said, "Oh, I gotta ask you why not." And he said, "Because his friend and mentor Jerry Wexler had told him what was in the contract. It was a master lease agreement, and the contract was being signed for Jim's protection, in case Jerry and Ahmet should ever sell Atlantic Records. For Jim to have taken it to a lawyer or to have read it would have been insulting to his friend. Never even occurred to him. He trusted

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Jerry implicitly. So I quote all this, and I quote the contract, and I said "Jim's friend and mentor," and I put friend in quotes, and I think I had a line that, "clearly Yankee carpet bagging was alive and well in 1965 when that contract was signed." I became emotionally involved in this stuff. Now, I'd write about it, I'd get angry. I remember my then-wife called me up one day, and I answered the phone really gruffly, like, "Hello?" She goes, "What's wrong?" And I said, "Al Jackson just got shot." And that sounds

corny, but it's like an interesting emotional journey when you're writing something like this. Especially when it's come out of all those years and all those interviews, and I felt very beholden to all the people who'd given me interviews to represent stuff properly for them and for the community. And I felt that way about Jim, I feel very deeply about Jim, feel very deeply about a lot of people. And I hated Jerry Wexler for what he did.

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It was wrong, and it was deliberate. I don't believe for a second that it was accidental. Unless Jerry never read the contract, either. I'm not a lawyer. It's on the front page and in several other places. It's very clear what this contract is. And lawyers working for companies don't change contracts. They don't write up contracts that completely represent some other thing that the owner of the company's told them to do. Anyway. So they wanted to remove the full sentence about "friend and mentor," they wanted to carve it back, and I said, "No." We argued for two hours on the phone, and he said I was committing suicide because I said, "I'll just buy the contract back," and I said, "I'll just give you money." They said, "It's like you're lying down in the middle of the highway." I said, "No I'm not, I'm just getting off at a different exit." I remember that very clearly. And his attitude was, "We can't do that, we spent money promoting this already." Said, "Too bad, the contract

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says nothing about those monies. You're not changing this, this is honest, this is accurate, and it's not libelous." The only thing I agreed to is, the compromise was we had to take the quote marks out, so I think it just says "friend and mentor" rather than friend in quotes. But that's how far I was willing to go to get this out the way I thought it should be. Deanie.

Parker: Did I tell you that Jerry Wexler, of course, was one of those people with whom we had numerous conversations about artifacts for the museum. This is right before 2003, right. In one of my conversations that I had with Jerry personally, I was so disappointed at what he sent to us that's in the archives.

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It really isn't worth anything, I mean, well it is, but it isn't. He asked me, "You ever talk to Jim?" I said, "Yeah. Pretty often." "How is he doing?" I explained to him that he was doing very well. "Well tell me," he asked, "does he ever say anything to you about me?" And I said, "No, not especially." He said, "I wonder how he feels about me." And I said, "Jim has never said anything negative about you to me. But if you really want to know, I think you should call him up and have a conversation with him. Would you like to have his number?"

Bowman: What'd he say?

Parker: He didn't ask me for it.

Bowman: Tells you all he needs to know, doesn't it? He knows. He knows, and I was the first person to ever call him on it. Jerry and I never spoke

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again, obviously, when the book came out, and that's okay by me. The other thing about Jerry, and you know, it's interesting, I interviewed John Gary Williams, and John Gary Williams and the Mad Lads was living in a pretty horrible state. He'd had a really bad run in his life at that point, and it was pretty a terrible place he was living in. I remember, he was afraid for my safety to even come over there, but I was easy. But it was pretty bad. We had this great interview, a few days later, I'm on a plane flying up to New York, I'm taking a bus from New York to the east Hamptons where Jerry Wexler's going to meet me at the bus station in his Mercedes or whatever. He's driving me to take me to his mansion for our interview. And, I thought, this is the perfect snapshot of the music industry. Jerry did great things. Not with Stax, but Jerry did great things

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historically. He was responsible for those Ray Charles sessions, the Aretha Franklin sessions. Jerry's a cultural hero in many, many, many, many ways. But, what I'm saying is, here's a guy who doesn't play an instrument, can't sing, and he's in this unbelievable mansion. We have an Asian, nearly like a servant, serving us lunch, and John Gary Williams, this great singer, is living in this horrid situation in Memphis, Tennessee. One created music, one was in the business.

Parker: He has a second home in Miami.

Bowman: Oh yeah, he has a second place in Miami. And there were other things, too, that I don't think I'll say on tape about that encounter with Jerry that afternoon. But his interaction with his staff, shall we say, I found shocking. I would not interact with human beings like that.

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And there was a...well, I've said enough, I think.

Williams: You mentioned John Gary Williams. There's an episode in the book during the breakdown of the company where at the East Memphis Publishing Company, where he...

Bowman: Had his hand in his jacket, and Tim doesn't know if he's got a gun or not.

Williams: Right. It's Tim Whitsett. Was that something that you spoke to Mr. Williams about when you interviewed him?

Bowman: The first interview, no. cause I hadn't talked to Tim yet. So I didn't know the story. Tim, who's an amazing interview, and a great guy. We never talked about Tim, but Tim was wonderful to me, and his wife, who also worked at Stax, had just died of cancer when I first met him. But Tim took hours. Anyway. Tim was great. Tim told me that story, and I can't remember,

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but I'm sure I must have, well it would be unlike me not to, I don't remember specifically talking to John Gary about it, but I can't see myself publishing that without having phoned John Gary and saying, you know, "Tim was telling me stories. What's the deal here?" And my memory is real vague, I probably have this one on my tapes, I got hours of Stax interviews, you imagine, with boxes of these tapes and completely, virtually all phone conversations. Not if I just called casually, but if I was interviewing somebody, I'd record them on the phone, too. So it might be on one of those somewhere, but my vague memory is John confirms the story, but I can't remember if he told me that he did have a gun or didn't.

If you remember the way I wrote it is Tim goes, "He had his hand in his jacket. I didn't know if he had a gun or not, but I knew he sometimes packed a piece, and I didn't want to find out."

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And I can't remember if John told me he had a gun or not. What was this all about? This was about when the bank had taken over East Memphis and Tim was put in charge of East Memphis and Stax, of course, was falling apart. People aren't getting paid. And people like John Gary Williams felt, well there at least has to be songwriter royalties that I'm owed. And the reality is that there probably was next to nothing. Because if records don't sell, and aren't getting played on the radio, there's no money getting paid to writers. But John went in there to tell Tim, basically, "Give me my goddamn money," and Tim basically told him, "Royalty checks are issued, blah blah blah, and there isn't any money." And John was trying to intimidate Tim, is the nature of the story. But you know what? I think John told me, again, I hate to say this on tape, because I can't remember precisely, and I have to go back to my tapes,

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but he was mad, he was angry, everybody was. Everybody was sad, frustrated, emotionally distraught. People had families, there was kids. You know, so people in those situations, sometimes act in ways they might not have otherwise. And, John grew up pretty rough. John was no stranger, he'd done time if I remember correctly. Or at least was charged- You know what? I think he-

Parker: Military. He had just done Vietnam, and there were-

Bowman: But had he done prison time, too?

Parker: His mother was murdered.

Bowman: Woah, I didn't know that.

Parker: That was...

Bowman: But did John do time in prison for the Memphis Invaders thing?

Parker: Hm?

Bowman: Did John do time in prison because of the Memphis Invaders?

Parker: I don't remember that. He might have.

Bowman: I think I remember the Mad Lads temporarily being on hold.

Parker: He might have, but he's had a very traumatic life.

Bowman: Oh sure.

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I mean, your mother murdered and the whole Vietnam experience anyway. John's a good person. And I would have checked that with him. I would have checked just out of integrity, but I'd also check it because John's a good person and doesn't deserve things written about him that aren't true. The other

thing is, Tim Whitsett's a good person, Tim Whitsett's got an excellent memory. So, I was pretty confident the story was true.

Williams: Speaking of Mr. Winsett-

Bowman: Whitsett.

Williams: Excuse me, sorry, Whitsett. Speaking of him, there's another passage in the book that talks about the sort of lines being drawn between Stax Records proper and East Memphis Publishing, where-

Bowman: Late in the day, yeah.

Williams: -where Tim comes over and not only is he asked, he's nearly begged to come over to Stax-

Bowman: For that meeting at the church.

Williams: -for a meeting.

Bowman: When Al Bell skewers him publicly. What about it?

Williams: I was just asking you, what was Mr.

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Bell's reaction to that? I know in the book, it states that he says, your thoughts as an author, as an objective viewer of this, how do you feel about something like that?

Bowman: Well, I'll tell you this. There was a day where I called Al Bell up. I'm writing the book. A lot of people have things to say about Al that aren't so complimentary. Some of it is based on facts and their feelings about those facts, some of it is based on nothing but rumor and hearsay. But some things that were based on facts, I needed to write about. And I know that Al Bell trusted me. You saw Al yesterday, Al still loves me quite a bit. I consider Al a friend, but I consider Jim a friend, I consider lots of people friends. And I phoned Al and said, "Look, Al, you kind of think of this book as your book. Cause I knew Al felt that way, it was going to be in the great final telling of the Stax story

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where Stax gets screwed and Al Bell gets screwed, he gets indicted for fraud when he never, ever participated in anything fraudulent. And was exonerated, but it had already destroyed his life, and helped destroy Stax. Al wanted that story told badly. Al was also very proud of his accomplishments, how he built this company, what he'd done producing the Staples, all that stuff. But I knew Al had a big, I mean, everybody had a vested interest at some level that their story gets told. But I knew Al's was bigger than many. And, as opposed to, let's say, Deanie Parker, who might have had a vested interest in the Stax story being told, but I don't have any negative things, or not many, from people, and the few things somebody might have said to me, there was no need to use it. It's separate from the story, as I see it. It's interpersonal silliness. But with Al, there were too many things that weren't separable from the story, like the Tim Whitsett account of that horrible meeting in that church,

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where Tim was pretty abused by Al publicly. So I phoned Al and said, "Look, you've known me a long time, I think I've always handled myself with integrity and honesty, so I need to talk to you about this. There are things people say and they're not always complimentary. And this book is the story of several hundred people, not just your story, and you just need to know that." And he said, "Well," I remember him saying, "like, what kinds of things?" So I gave him some examples. Don't remember if the church story was one of those examples. He said, "Okay. I understand. Just the only thing I'd ask is that anything that isn't complimentary, that you give me a chance to at least give you my version or to explain my actions." I said, "Of course. I don't have a problem with that." Most

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of it we'd talked through anyway at various times. So, I don't now precisely remember what he had to say about the church thing, but my vague memory is, he affirmed that it happened and he probably explained that he was angry at the time, he felt that Tim was being used by Union Planters, by *Roger Shellabarger* in terms of East Memphis putting pressure on Stax, and he had a need to rally the morale of those still at Stax. And he very much was portraying things as good versus evil, and in biblical terms, and that's the way that meeting was run. So, that's my vague memory of Al's response, which basically just affirms what Tim said. And if you look at the way I wrote it, I talk about how things were clearly beginning to be framed as this biblical struggle. And as a good versus evil thing. Which, of course, ties to Al and his whole preacher training background, and it ties to also Al's personality,

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in terms of the struggle David versus Goliath, good versus evil.

Williams: The reason I was asking about that, not necessarily was because of that specifically, just the idea of you as an author looking at it from an integrity standpoint, like the difficulty that you may have faced being objective when you are sort of having this personal, vested interest in it, whether it's with Stax or with Jerry Wexler or with Union Planters. You're trying to tell an objective story, and how do you sort of parse out your personal feelings as you're going through the process of writing this book?

Bowman: I'm doing my best, yes, to tell the story objectively, but if you've done any study of historiography, you'll know that there are no objective histories. It's impossible. Everything's written from a vantage point. Now, to do my best job, I talked to a couple hundred people in-depth,

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tried to get as many perspectives as possible, and tried to be able to tell it from the most rounded vantage point I could. And when people disagreed with each other, which happens all the time, I tried to get other people. I tried to get documents. I tried to get anything I could to let me know what really is the story. And, of course, often, and a simple example is The Mar-Keys' 'Last Night,' that there's about eight different versions of it, and they all swear up and down to it, and it'll never be reconciled, so I told various versions. I said, you know, through the mist of time and memory, Smoochy Smith feels this, Duck Dunn feels that, and you know, the reader can decide for himself. Now, that's in some ways unimportant. It's pretty important in terms of being a massive hit record and people caring about credit, but in some ways, in the grand scheme of history, maybe not as important as what happens to Stax as being pushed under

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and people's lives are being destroyed. When it comes to that, I interviewed Wynn Smith, the lawyer for the bank. I think he's a scumbag. I'm being honest with you, but I still gave him a chance to tell me his version of the story, and I still used quotes from that. I tried to interview other people at the bank. I have feelings, and I feel that what happened in Memphis was pretty despicable, and it tied to race in the most ugliest sense of the word, and I have a sense of good and bad, and right and wrong, and I do have an agenda for which I was writing that part of the book. It's still, if you read it, I try to, fact after fact. Some of the language I use might

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give an interested reader a sense of where I stand on the issue, but you know what I feel? That objective history, totally impossible one level. You do your best. But at the same time, I also feel an obligation. An obligation to tell this story for the community as best as I could. And that meant calling a spade a spade and talking about what the bank did, and the way I did talk about it. But I tried to understand the bank. I tried to understand, what's going on here. It was a bank that was totally out of control. *TS Control and Courtesy* was threatening to shut it down. Figure that out. You're running the bank, you're about to be threatened with a cease and desist order, you're beholden to shareholders in the very upper echelons of Memphis power, which then happens to be all white. Well, what are you going to do?

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What are you going to do? Are you going to do the right thing? Well, what is the right thing? Right thing for whom? I know what the right thing is for the people that I believe in, but the bank's actions were understandable, not condonable. But you can understand what led to this absurdity. And so, I did my best to objectively explain all of that, and I backed it up left, right, and center. But I think I again have an obligation to tell the story, as ugly as it is, as straight up. It's one of the reason I got into big arguments when this museum was being built, because Andy Cates and the board did not want to tell that story. Because he had friends who were in the upper echelons of that bank. My attitude is, it's kind of like slavery. I'm white. Trace my family's history, I don't know what you'd find. Maybe not lots since I'm from Toronto, but that's just because we didn't have the same sort of agricultural base, and we didn't need that slavery in the same

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way. But the reality is, slavery was an ugly, ugly historical fact. Inexcusable, non-condonable, it's important we recognize it and know about it, but I don't feel guilty about it. And I don't just because you work at Union Planners right now that you had to feel guilty because of what some people did at Union Planners back in 1975. In other words, just because I'm white doesn't mean that I had anything to do with slavery, and I know who or what I am. So I disagreed with Andy. Even if the people did have some relationship, truth needs to be told, but I thought he was totally wrong about that. And if their nose gets a little out of joint because you're talking about something that people in a company did 28 years earlier, I don't really care. The story is right. You know, when I started writing, I got my contract, I had a big issue at first. I couldn't write for the first few weeks. I never had a problem writing. Never, ever had a problem writing. But I couldn't write because I had to figure out

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who I was writing for. I was a new professor who needed tenure. Do I write an academic book? It's what most professors would do, make sure I get tenure. Be a slightly different book if I had. That's what everybody told me I should do for my career. Do I write it to sell copies? Do I make a sensationalist book? I got lots of juicy stories I could have put in there, with the idea of maximize sales, make money for my kids, my family. Do I write it for this community? Ultimately, I knew what decision I was going to make, and it really wasn't about selling books. It was either, how do I balance my career getting tenure and writing for the community. Finally decided, to heck with it, I just had to realize I was writing for the people gave me that music before I met any of them, and for the people gave me

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entrée into their lives and all those hours and hours of interviews. That's who I had to write it for. So I'm writing about the bank, there's no problem. I know who I'm writing this book for. When I'm writing about Tim Whitsett versus Al Bell at a meeting at Stax, I do have a problem, because I'm writing it for Tim and Al, and that's why I phoned Al to let him know that I had to tell these stories and he needs to know about that rather than being shocked when he reads it, thinking it's the Al Bell story, because it's not. It's the Stax Records story, which is partially the Al Bell story, partially a whole lot of other peoples' too.

Parker: Paul Isbell.

Bowman: Yeah.

Parker: When did that situation happen in relation to what happened at the church with Tim? Can you put that together?

Bowman: I cannot.

Parker: I can't either.

Bowman: Why do you ask?

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What are you thinking?

Parker: Well, I've always wondered, and I've never really wanted to ask him. I've always wondered what that situation might have done to Al.

Bowman: Affected him greatly, I'm sure.

Parker: I'm sure, but...

Bowman: I don't know, either. It's a good question, and I probably should have asked it.

Parker: At some point, you have an opportunity. I really do need to know that. I really do want to know that. Because, as I remember, he never went through the grieving process.

Bowman: No. He just kept going.

Parker: Just kept going. And that's crucial, because that was the second brother, remember?

Bowman: Oh, he'd lost, the other one before 'I'll Take You There' back in '71.

Parker: Similar situation.

Bowman: It's a good point, I hadn't thought about the relationship there. But,

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I mean, the pressures that Al was under in those last two years were hard for any of us to even begin to imagine. Deanie, you were there and I don't even think you can imagine it. It was his ego, his identity, so many people's lives.

Parker: One suicide.

Bowman: Yep. Absolutely. You know, he was young, too. We always forget, he was 25 when he came to Stax. He was out doing all of this when he was unbelievably young. You know, I was thinking about this yesterday, I interviewed Al yesterday, as you know. Al's 71 now. Well, I'm 55. I met Al when I was 29, and he was 45. And it's so weird to me, because Al seemed

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like an older man when I met him. 45 seems young to me now. And yet, he'd been out of the business for so long when I met him. Had this career that ascended to Mount Olympus, and then to the pits of hell, and was eight years past it and still grieving in some ways. Hard to understand, he's only 45 years old. It's amazing that actually, he, at the age of 71, can still be as upbeat and as positive, as survived in some ways.

Parker: Seventh Day Adventist.

Bowman: Yep, that's right. He went to a Seventh Day Adventists school, too, did you know that?

Parker: Yep.

Bowman: Well, whatever. A lot of people are dead now, tons of people that I interviewed. Nobody could do this book again, ever. Nobody could have started this process. But it's wonderful that people like Al and Jim, let alone Deanie Parker

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and Booker T and lots of other people are still alive and many of them are actually surviving pretty well, considering what they all went through. And I'm grateful for that. I miss a lot of people, too. Miss Rufus greatly, miss Isaac greatly.

Williams: Well, that leads me to what I was going to ask you. You said you wrote this book for the community, the community of Stax and I would assume the larger community of Memphis, correct?

Bowman: Well, black Memphis primarily, but Memphis secondarily.

Williams: What was the response upon the release of your book? What were the responses you were getting from this community that you'd invested so much time and energy into?

Bowman: Why you shaking your head, Deanie?

Parker: Because your response, I am certain, from the community for which you wrote the book, is a lot like the response that we have gotten having worked to get the Stax Museum here. Now on

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any given day, you can walk in this neighborhood and not find a person who can tell you what is here.

Bowman: That's interesting. I mean, that's sad, but that's, I might have given a slightly different answer, though. When the book initially came out, Deanie Parker actually helped organize the release party down at B. B. King's. It was a great night. Bar-Kays played, Steve Cropper led a band, various Stax alumni. J. Blackfoot sang. Can't remember if we had Carla up there. I know Rufus was sitting with me, Estelle was there even though she'd had a stroke, but she was still there. Jim didn't come, of course. But it was, from my perspective, as good given what had all gone down,

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as it could be. I did a signing at, was it Burke's? Burke's Books? No, Davis Kid. I did a signing. Sam Moore was there for the first hour of the signing, Steve Cropper came for the second hour, and so I signed for two hours. And there was over 200 people, the line was out the door before we even started. I don't think they'd had a book signing like that ever before. That kind of intensity. I remember being on WDIA with Rufus Thomas, this is great. It was Bev, what's her name? Bev-

Parker: Johnson.

Bowman: She still around?

Parker: Only two are there. In fact, there are only two staff people period-

Bowman: Everything else is taped?

Parker: -at WDIA. Bobby Ojay and Bev Johnson.

Bowman: Is the rest taped? Or syndicated?

Parker: The only other staff that there are, are with K-97 and

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the Gospel Label, because of this consolidation with Clear Channel.

Bowman: That's disgusting. Anyway, Bev interviewed Rufus and I, and came up about the ending of Stax. I spoke about Union Planners very plainly, spoke about CBS Records, that's easy, there's no Memphis connection, spoke about the United States government. But, I remember there's call-ins afterwards, and this one woman called in, and she said she'd never, ever heard a white person speak so directly about these kinds of matters. And...

[siren in background]

Parker: *It's a conspiracy*

Bowman: Yeah. That's white Memphis shutting us down. [INAUDIBLE] Anyway, she said she'd never heard a white person speak so

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Directly and explicitly and to the point in those kinds of terms. I just pointed out what racism was involved, and how and why this all happened, and she was grateful. And I don't know who she is, never met her. But I got stuff like that. I get emails. I still get emails once every week or two from somebody about the book. Literally. I got tons of emails and cards, 'cause people know how to get me through York University. So they just send it to the music department here and I get it. Email's easy to find me on the web. And I got lots of stuff from Memphians I've never met, who went on about how grateful they were for this story being told and told in the way that I told it. So, I felt good in terms of that I had done something that did- Even if nobody had responded except for the people I interviewed, if they were happy, I'd be cool.

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You know, it's ultimately them, that's the core community, then we radiate out. But I got lots of stuff from other people. I got great stories from people I wish I'd had before the book came out. You heard one yesterday, I think, because I think I was telling Al in between taping about a firefighter who'd come up to me, did you hear this story? About how he lived within four blocks of Stax, comes home from school one day as a kid, and his mom goes, "Come on! We got to walk down to Stax," 'cause Isaac had got his gold-plated Cadillac and his mother wanted to take her son down to see, "Look what can happen." You know, this man's from our community, and look what he's done. Look what he's got. She's basically saying, "This could be you." I would have loved to have had that story in the book.

Williams: Are you sure it's not in the book? Because I recognized it yesterday when you spoke about it.

Bowman: Maybe it is in the book, maybe I got that story before.

Williams: I think it might be in the book.

Bowman: Then I might be getting confused. I thought that came after the book.

Parker: I have to say this for

[1:42:00]

the record, though, in many ways, what you experience at Stax Records as a visitor is in large part because of Rob's research and documenting important –

Bowman: You mean of the Stax Museum?

Parker: Yes. Absolutely. Because we used the book.

Bowman: Well, Deanie, for the record, if we're going to talk about the record, I introduced you to Staley Cates and *Cheryl Wellmont*. I put Stax and the money together. I also wrote the original vision for this museum. It's a 100-page document in 10-point size font, single space, except for gaps between paragraphs. It's a massive document. It specifies every room, every exhibit, what the audio should be, what the video should be, what artifacts we

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needed, what the wall narrative should tell us. Now, building a museum is a little like making a film. You might start with a vision, there are a lot of other hands that get on that vision. Some things got watered down. Some things didn't happen the way I would have preferred. Some cool things happened I hadn't envisioned. But for the most part, I'm not taking anything away from everything you did, but for the most part, the vision for this place- Deanie'd wanted a museum forever, and that's why I put her together with Staley Cates who was the anonymous money that started the whole thing rolling, because he felt that Memphis had screwed up his heritage so badly. He felt he was in a position to maybe do something about that, and got the idea when my book came out that maybe rebuilding Stax and turning it into a museum could be part of it, but I wrote the vision for this place. This place wasn't just built on my research. And that gets left out

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of the story here all the time.

Parker: I think I still have those original papers.

Bowman: I got it. It's on my computer.

Parker: I'm not sure that I've ever turned it over, but you have the original galleys to the book.

Bowman: Oh, you're talking about the wall narratives? Those galleys?

Parker: Yeah.

Bowman: Oh, I'm talking about before that. I'm talking about the vision. This is when we first had Looney Ricks and Kiss involved.

Parker: I know what you're talking about.

Bowman: Yeah. There's two different stages. There's that and then writing the original version of the wall narratives that got dumbed down.

Parker: Oh, that is, oh, that's another whole story.

Bowman: Yes, it is.

Williams: When you say "dumbed down," can you talk to me a little bit about what you mean when you say that?

Bowman: Well, I referred to it earlier. Do you want me to say this stuff on tape about Andy and stuff? Or would you prefer not?

Parker: There are things that we'll see – You have shared something tonight that I have never shared, because

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there've been some things that I have kept very private. But say it because we don't have to make it available. I'm gonna be working with, I mean, there's some things we're just not going to make available.

Bowman: If you're not going to make them available, what's the point of saving them?

Parker: Say it.

Bowman: I've been ordered. You know, I wrote the wall narratives much like I wrote my book. You need two things. A, depth. B, I was gonna tell things as I thought they should be told. Andy Cates, who was Staley Cates's brother, a real estate developer born in Memphis to lots of money, but doing real estate development in Dallas, was brought back to the city by Staley. Partially to get this property and the properties around it. He was very good at doing that. Did his job very well. He also had a lot of connections and was good at going after grant

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money. And that was his purpose. But, Andy became, in my opinion, enamored with being part of the creative team, as well. And I don't feel he should have been. He brought in a friend of his from high school to produce the films. A guy in New York, what's his name?

Parker: Crosby.

Bowman: Oh, Crosby. Mark Crosby. I'll tell you this, Ms. Deanie Parker. I know all the filmmakers who produced those. Well, I don't know all of them. I know a number of the filmmakers. Mark cost this museum ridiculous amounts of money that didn't need to be spent, 'cause he didn't know what he was doing producing film. But because he's a high school buddy of Andy Cates, who's a real estate developer, neither one should have been part of any creative team. Mark gets involved, I can give you, I don't know if they'd let me,

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I'd phone 'em first, because I can give you names of the filmmakers who told me this stuff. The stories are absurd of the money-wasteage and ridiculousness. But back to the narratives. Andy did not want the Union Planters story told the way it really happened. The other thing is, and Deanie and I don't know where you really fell in this, so you might not like what I'm going to say here, but I'll be gentle. There was a sense that your average visitor to the museum was not going to want to read things in-depth and was gonna want things really simple. Grade eight style simple. Now, your average American, probably true. But you know what? When I go to an art gallery, you see people, some people walk through, they look at the paintings, they keep walking, go,

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"That's cool." They keep going, they enjoy their experience. But they didn't read the wall panels. They didn't even read the titles of paintings necessarily. That's the experience they wanted. Other people read every word. They think about it, they contemplate the paintings, they go back to the narrative, try to see what that narrative says about light and brushstrokes and color, and they get a lot out of it. It's their choice. You know when I did the first box set, nine CDs, 33,000 word liner-note, the attitude was, "This is insane." I could tell you great stories about how we sold that. Warner Brothers didn't want to deal with it. Said, "This is crazy, no one's going to buy a nine CD box set." It was the first one like that for any kind of black music. Except for maybe some jazz ones. But four CDs was it from rock and R&B. So we went to *We International*, cause Warner's US didn't want to deal with it,

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And *We International* said, "Well, if we can sell 20,000 copies, we can break even, so guarantee us 20,000 sales and we'll greenlight it." Went to England, said, "How many do you want? The Japanese are taking 10." England took 10. Went to Japan. Said, "How many do you want? The British are taking 10." The Japanese took 10. Went back to New York, this is all phone, it's not traveling. Said, "There are your 20,000 advance orders. We did it." We did it the way we wanted to do it, although it got even better when we did the second and third. First one's lightweight compared to the second and third. We got two Grammy nominations lining up, saying, "Historical reissue." That box had sold enough to go gold. Nobody thought anybody'd want to read 30,000 words. But they didn't really care, because they had their sales to break even. That's all that mattered. And you know what? I'm sure some people buy those box sets and don't read those liner notes. It's a chunk of reading, it's one-third of a book. But I

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know tons of people read them. Reviews talk about them. People like Chuck D would have his box sets in the studio, I told you this story yesterday, but he took the liner-notes out and put them in plastic on the bookshelf separately so nobody in the studio could mess with the booklet. I believe, and I think my liner note work has shown it – and the book sold long beyond what *Schermmer* ever thought it would sell. It's done quite well. So, I believe that if you give people depth, a number of people will embrace it. Number of other people maybe will get their toe wet and be intrigued enough to keep going, and go beyond what they would have. This would have happened with this museum. But, it's not the way everybody saw it. And so, lots of the wall panels got rewritten, they got simplified. A few facts got sort of fudged along the way, and the museum's a 7.5 out of 10, at least in terms

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of what my vision of it was. It's amazing it's here. It's great it's here. Means a lot to a lot of people. You saw Al Bell talking about how important this museum is to him. I ran into Don Nix yesterday, of all people, when I came back to see you. Don's busy taking some out of town friends through the museum, and going on and on and on about it. I'm glad it's here. It's a victory it's here, it's incredible it's here. So when I say it's 7.5, I personally know it could have been better, but I'm not putting it down. I think it's still incredible that it exists. But, I must say, bitter might be the wrong word, I was severely disappointed and didn't even come to the opening, actually. Glad I did, 'cause a lot of my friends from the community were here. But, I felt that, clearly I've lost control over anything here, and

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Andy Cates had won the war. You know, makes sense, he comes from the same Planter aristocracy, long-term money, same thing as Union Planters. And so, for a long time, I distanced myself from this place. And it wasn't just Andy, it was a couple of other people involved, too. But I thought, "Okay, I've written the book, made a documentary in France, won a Grammy, been nominated for five, did 75 Stax CDs reissues, made it the most reissued independent American company dealing in black music. More than even Motown at the time. And it's time to move on." I don't ever completely move on, because I keep getting invited to do Stax stuff, and I love it when I do it, and I love working with friends from the community. But, this place, it's got a little weird vibe to me because of that history.

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Parker: I can't respond because we don't have enough tape.

Bowman: Sure you can.

Williams: How are we going? I'm sorry.

Bowman: How much minutes?

[voice]: 37.

Bowman: Oh, but there's so much more you want to ask me.

Parker: But you deserve, because you have taken your time with this oral interview, to let me just, I'm not going to go into depth, but I'm just going to highlight some things. I remember those experiences because I went through them with you, we went through them together. And when I talk in terms of how this place got started, I will say, without calling your name, that I got a call, and I didn't...

Bowman: Why did you say without calling my name?

Parker: I just haven't done it.

Bowman: Oh, the way you talk about it. Yeah. I know there's something written down in the early part of this.

Parker: Because I have never

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done an oral interview, would you believe that?

Bowman: You did one with me.

Parker: I haven't done one with the museum, okay? And there are some things that I am not prepared, you know, I wouldn't hesitate to make that a part of it, but there's some things that I've just not shared in detail. But, when I got the first call, I remember that I was at the Med, and I was on my way back to Memphis in May, and I just put the number in my- that you had given me- the name and number, put it in my day log, and went through about 30 days when I got a second call, and I know exactly what I was doing, where I was, I can see it. And I said to you, "No, I still haven't done it, but I'm gonna do it straight away, and I did. First meeting,

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first time I had met this person, because we had not yet...

Bowman: Staley Cates?

Parker: Yeah. We had not had our gold record ceremony that Bill Belmont-

Bowman: Yes, we did. That was at my book release.

Parker: Was that before or after?

Bowman: That was before, it was the night I met Staley.

Parker: The night that you met him.

Bowman: Yeah, and Staley asked me what I thought of the idea and could I help him.

Parker: Okay, but I didn't know him.

Bowman: No, but the gold records were before that.

Parker: Actually, I didn't know *Cheryl much.*

Bowman: No, I know, I put you together with him.

Parker: So when I called, you're right, I called that same week, I met them in a secret place. We must have talked for four hours. One of the reasons that we decided to get the whole block was because I said, "If we're coming over here, if you wish to do this,

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first of all," I said, "It's not gonna interfere with what my initial dreams are or what I have attempted to do. I will help you regardless. It isn't about who gets the credit with me, it is about getting it done." And so, we moved forwards from that and decided that we would attempt to get the original site back. And I said, if we succeed with that, we need to get the entire block, because it is the only way to control what it is that is gonna happen around you. So that was kinda sorta the impetus of that. This was before I became a member of the board.

Bowman: Well, the board didn't exist.

Parker: It didn't exist, but they had formed the board before I became a part of it.

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It was *E. Wharton*. And so, in gallops the guy in the white Bronco who, you're right, totally uncontrollable.

Bowman: Andy Cates.

Parker: So while you were getting your anxieties, imagine for the five years that I sat and worked across a desk primarily. On a daily basis. The anxieties that I experienced and paid a hell of a price in many aspects, because my objective was to get it done. And if I had to cut a deal with the devil, I was prepared to do it to get it done. And yes, I think I still have your original, and I know you say you have it, but I think I still have the original papers, but

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I couldn't be everywhere all the time. And yes, I agreed that, if we had to include the kind of detail in the panels that mirror what was in the book, it would have been too much.

Bowman: Wouldn't have mirrored what was in the book. It was obviously much simpler than the book.

Parker: The way that we interpreted it, it felt to us as though what you were trying to have us to do was closely – and we had to be selective. And again, the other thing is, we were changing things on a daily basis, because, not only did we not have a professional film producer, LRK had never built a museum

before. So everything we did here was unorthodox. And then, my best judgement, I made a conscious decision that this place was not going to be

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right until the day that I could walk through it and have an emotional experience. And that was what I had to do. So you know, I had my own private war going on with a few demons, you know, and so on. And then, of course, the most salient thing that I remember that the two of us went through was the end of the story and the panels. And we spent hours on the phone between Canada and Memphis, dealing with that. And you know how painful that was. And we understand why that happened the way that it did, because one of the original board members from Union Planters had infiltrated the organization and said, "There's no need in bringing up past history and the resurrecting-"

Bowman: Not when you're building a museum, why'd you bring up past history?

Parker: No, but what was happening was,

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they were in the midst of trying to do a merger with Regents, and they didn't want the publicity.

Bowman: None of it surprises me. Anyway, I felt like I got x'd out, which I did, in the last, final stages of it. When I went through on opening day, somebody asked me, I don't even remember who, [INAUDIBLE], had left, too, at some point. Somebody asked me if I noticed any mistakes, if I could please note them. I found over 100 mistakes on the panels or on the labeling of the artifacts. Over 100. Shockingly inept. Deanie, when you and I first met, you asked me what I thought of Memphis, part of your whole thing was, how poorly things were often done in the city. This is still, it's great it exists, but I thought, unbelievable,

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after all these years – it opened in 2003, I'd nearly been working on Stax for 20 years at that point. And this opens with over a hundred mistakes, 'cause nobody let me see the panels to even proofread them.

Parker: But I thought we had an arrangement with you to come in and do that, did we not?

Bowman: No, I got x'd out. I never proofread anything, never saw it until the opening of the museum. I should have. Those mistakes wouldn't have been there. Then, when I pointed them out, I was told, "Well, there's no money to fix it," so for a long time, those mistakes still were there. They may still be in there now. I haven't read the wall panels since then. It was too painful. Some of this may seem self-serving, we all have our own emotional agendas, baggage, and so on, but I really believe this museum wouldn't exist, maybe something would have existed eventually, it's hard to say, if I hadn't,

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in 1983, decided somebody needed to do something about what people knew about Stax Records. Staley Cates got the idea because of my book. My book wouldn't have happened if I hadn't decided to take on that mission, fund it totally myself, and against lots of obstacles, kept fighting to do it 'cause I thought it was the right thing. Especially when I got totally x'd out, cause as I saw it, I was telling the truth, by white money power, elitist entitlement, I just thought, "This is unbelievable. It's like, I invested

too many years in this.” So that’s why I just had to sort of walk away and not even think about Memphis or Stax or the museum for quite a while afterwards.

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You asked me this stuff, I didn’t know we’d get to any of this.

Parker: Well, this is good. We need to document this.

Bowman: And I’m easy. I’m totally easy.

Williams: I’d like to talk a little bit about what you’ve done since the release of *Soulsville, USA* personally. Not necessarily as far as your family, but did you feel a weight lifted off you, having written the book, having finished this 12-year journey? What was next for Rob Bowman after the book is out, people are reading it, you’re getting good response from the community that you wrote it for, now what happens?

Bowman: Okay. Well first of all, it got optioned for a film. It’s been optioned several times. It’s come close a few times to getting produced. It’s not happened, which is unfortunate. John Singleton optioned it. That was an interesting story. He let the option go after a couple years, tried to option again a few years later. I wouldn’t give it to him,

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because I didn’t trust him. But it’s been through three options, I think. So I kept thinking, okay, that’s gonna be the next step, but that didn’t happen. Keith Richards fell in love with the book. Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones. And Deanie should probably hear this, ‘cause it’s a good story. If you remember, it was the Rolling Stones that turned me on to Otis Redding, which led me to Stax. So, in 2002, Keith is reading the book at Rolling Stones rehearsals. They’ve already voted, as a corporation, and the Stones function as a corporation, they’d voted to do their own autobiography in their own words. They wanted to do it about their art. They didn’t want to do it about sex and drugs, that’s been written about forever. So, they asked their office to figure out who should be the interviewer. As Charlie Watts, the drummer, told me, “They gave us ten names, and they were all shit. Except for one, who happened to be dead.” Which was Robert Palmer, who’s a great writer actually, from the South,

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who wrote for New York Times for years, and unfortunately died, and Charlie goes, “At that point, we realized we had to figure this out ourselves.” And Keith was reading *Soulsville, USA*, and Keith goes, “This guy seems perfect. He understands music. He goes depth. Let’s find him.” Funny thing is, they’re rehearsing in Toronto, where I had live. They have no idea I live in Toronto, and the Stones end up taking me on the road with them for three weeks to do their autobiography. That came out of Keith Richards reading *Soulsville, USA*. So that’s one thing. But you know, there’s been a billion things. I’ve done tons of CDs, not just Stax stuff. Do you know who the group the Band is? I’ve done twelve projects with Robbie Robertson. If Robbie wants to do anything, he calls me. I have the relationship with Robbie that I had with Isaac, or that I had with Jim Stewart or whatever. You know, I did a box set with

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Lou Reid. I do lots of non-soul things. Did work with funkadelic, did a couple great projects with funkadelic. That's just insanity. The P-funk guys are out of their minds. George especially. George Clinton. But, they were fun projects to do, and they're great. The Definitive [INAUDIBLE] Funkadelic, it's all mine. I got stuff from them, and was able to figure out that crazed history in a way that nobody'd done before. So, I've done a lot of things separate from Stax, still teach as a professor. Just taught a course on black gospel music last term. I'm thinking somebody needs to do a book on Reverend James Cleveland. I don't know if that will be me or not. I've been talking to some gospel people about it. A lot of it's just been doing lots of music projects. I'm working now on a traveling eight-room exhibit going to museums called "The Science of Rock."

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And it's about rock, not R&B, these guys wanted to do a rock project. I can do that easily, too. It's gonna go in science centers. It's going to start in Kansas City next October, and it's going to Utah. We'll see where it goes from there. I write part of the rock n' roll hall of fame induction program every year. Done that for years. Started when the Staples were inducted – connects to Stax. Also did Isaac when he was inducted. I think those are the only Stax people I did. Booker T were inducted, and so were Sam & Dave before I was doing part of the program. The Al Bell thing yesterday was part of a project that will probably go on two or three years of doing these in-depth, four or five hour oral histories for the Rock n' Roll Hall of Fame. I've been doing tons of music documentaries. Believe it or not, the last five being on the British Invasion. But, before then, I did one on Curtis Mayfield and the Impressions. One of my favorite groups. Wanted to do a book on Curtis Mayfield, Mavis was gonna put us together-

Williams: *Movin' On Up*

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is the Curtis Mayfield documentary you were talking about.

Bowman: Yeah, *Movin' On Up's* the Curtis Mayfield. That's mine. You got it here, I think.

Williams: Yeah, we do.

Bowman: You got my Otis Redding one here, too. I co-produced both of those. Did all the research, all the interviews.

Williams: The Curtis Mayfield one is great, just wanted to throw that out there.

Bowman: Thank you. I know where it could be a little better, but I'm glad you like it, 'cause Curtis deserves- He's never gotten the recognition that he does deserve, and he deserves at least that. So I continue, and have, to work in various media: print, film, radio, museums, on all sorts of American music. Stuff that moves me deeply. Much of it African American, some of it Euro-American. Much of it soul, plenty that's not. The United Nations flew me to Jamaica,

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this is an interesting thing, you don't know about this. WIPO, W-I-P-O, World Intellectual Property Organization, which is an organization that United Nations has created. Jamaica had hired WIPO to help them rebrand the country to be something other than drugs, sex, and sand, and sun. So, they flew me down to Kingston to talk to Jamaican government leaders and business leaders of building a museum on

reggae. And of course, I used this as a model for what was possible. It hasn't happened, Jamaica's very [INAUDIBLE] come kind of place. Jamaican government gave us land for it in downtown Kingston, and part of the idea here was also to get tourists to do something besides just going to Negril, Otro Rios, and Montego Bay, and get them down to Kingston, which is a challenge. But the Jamaican government would give us the land, but they wanted business to fund the museum, and then the government changed. It's not totally dead,

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but, that was 2007. So it's in January. So it feels kind of dead to me. Maybe one day it will happen. The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan was at one point talking about having me work on a Beatles installation of some sort. So, I teach history of popular music courses. I wrote an M.A. thesis on jazz in the '20s. King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band, the first black jazz band to be seriously recording in 1923. Louis Armstrong's first band, the band's really the definitive band for New Orleans jazz, and I exploded all the mythology about collective improvisation that everybody had written about New Orleans jazz. So my interests are diverse. I've become forever associated with Stax because I took this as far as I took it, and I mean, it's important to me. It still is important, but it's not the only thing I do.

Williams: How do you feel that impacts your legacy,

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People that are coming behind you. Like, younger authors that are coming up having read this book. What's the response you get from them? Are they looking at your research as a model? Are they looking at what you did with *Soulsville, USA* as a model? Any of the other projects that you were working on? Are these things that people are saying to you? Even students that you teach, what's their response to hearing your breadth of knowledge of these things?

Bowman: It sounds self-serving to answer that question, but I get tons of response from people who are pretty stunned because, remember I told you about the professor I met when I was 18 who could connect Howlin' Wolf to Ornette Coleman to the music of the Pygmies of the Ituri Rainforest? I can do that now. And I can do that for a billion things. I can talk about sanctified singing in the '20s, and I can talk about country music in the '50s. I can talk about dub music in the '70s in Jamaica. And I can talk about all this stuff with pretty detailed knowledge, because it's

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my life's work. "He not busy being born is busy dying." I want to keep busy being born, I want to keep learning. And I've been very, very blessed. My job as a professor, that's why I decided I wanted to be a professor. It's a way of earning a living and continually learning as I do it. Getting paid to learn. And that's what happens there. I have students who are professors all over Canada. I was the first person in Canada to ever teach a course on rock n' roll. First person in Canada to ever teach a course on rhythm and blues. First person to ever teaches graduate courses on popular music. And that's first in Canada, but I was one of the first in the world in all of those categories. You Americans beat me in terms of the rock course. I'm not sure, maybe one person beat me in terms of the R&B course. But I was pretty early on all of the stuff. Now, people I've taught, and I've taught through Ph.D.s are professors. And how do they teach the stuff? They teach it the way I figured out how to teach it, 'cause people hadn't done it before. I had to

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figure out from scratch. So, I feel really good. I feel I made some sort of positive contribution in that world. And I've influenced writers, I get, as I said, emails all the time from people. But that's not as important to me, I'm glad and I feel honored when people say that my work had this huge impact on their life, but still, and I mean this sincerely, the thing that's most important to me is with any of my work, but certainly my Stax work, but not just my Stax work, it's as important with my work on The Band, with my work on the Stones, it's, have I done justice to the music and the people that made it? And how have I created knowledge that didn't exist before? Is there purpose to what you're doing? It's not solving cancer. It's not bringing world peace.

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It's really minor compared to any of that stuff, but it's major and important to communities and to people. And so, it gives, for me at least, a sense of purpose, a sense of, I did something in my time on this planet that has some value. I think if I'd just been a banker, not that I ever would have been, or if I'd done lots of other jobs, I wouldn't feel that way. So, I feel very lucky and blessed.

Williams: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Bowman. I appreciate it.

Bowman: Did we answer half the questions you had?

Williams: About half. If we can do a Part Two when you come back.

Bowman: If you ever want to, I'm game. I'm easy.

Williams: Alright. That sounds good to me.

Bowman: And I hope it was of some use for you or the museum, whoever.

Williams: It definitely was.