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## Lenard Bowie

Lenard Bowie  
*University of North Florida*

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*University of North Florida*

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- C: Today is April 4, UNF oral history project. I'm interviewing Dr. Lenard Bowie, professor of music at UNF. Lenard, would you start by telling us your sort of personal professional history before coming here?
- B: Maybe I should start out by saying how I got started in the field of music?
- C: Where did you grow up?
- B: I grew up in a little town called Big Sandy, Texas. The town was so small it didn't have a band. So the kids who graduated from the elementary school were transferred over to Gladewater, where they did have a band. By the time I got there, the parents decided to send our children to another little town because Gladewater happened to have been a wet town, so they sold alcohol and the other town didn't. Because of that, they decided to send the elementary kids to Hawkins. Knowing I wanted to be a musician, even at that time, I wanted to start studying music. All of my brothers had been in music before me in the band. So the band director told me, if you can get here, I'll teach you.
- C: So your whole family is musically inclined?
- B: Yes. I have three brothers and they're all band directors. They're all retired now. I have two sisters who both played an instrument. My sister played the flute, and my older sister played the timpani.
- C: What about your parents?
- B: Neither one played an instrument, but they loved music.
- C: They must have.
- B: Yes. But anyway, I hitchhiked to school every day. I hitchhiked to school for three years and didn't miss a day. I learned how to play the trumpet and I won about five contests within a three-year period. Therefore, I got a scholarship to Florida A&M. So I went to Florida A&M. I got involved with a lot of activities there and became president of the band. The then department chair, Dr. William B. Foster, called and I became Florida A&M's premier soloist, the first professional-level soloist that they had there. So I played a lot of solos with the band, going on tours with the choir and things like that as a featured soloist.
- C: Does that mean you sang as well as playing the trumpet?
- B: No, no, just playing the trumpet.
- C: You were soloing as a trumpeter.

B: Yes, touring with the choir. Then I went on to graduate school for a Master's of Music in New York and got my Master's there. I came back, and I became the Associate Director of band at FAMU. Stayed there for a couple of years and went back to graduate school to work on my doctorate at Yale. Following my slow journey through Yale, I returned back to Florida A&M and it wasn't so long before I got a little antsy, felt like I needed to leave. So Bill Brown happened to call me, the famous Bill Brown, our good friend. He called me and told me that they were hoping to have a position open as a band director. I wasn't really interested in becoming a band director, but anything to get me out of FAMU at this point in time. So I applied for it, and I got the job.

C: What year was that?

B: That was in 1980. So I came here in 1980, the fall of 1980. After my third year here, Dr. Yessin decided to step down. Then M. J. Palmer, the choir director, moved into the chair. I don't think he liked the administration too well. After one year, he resigned. So I applied for the position, myself and Ken McMillan, from the Art Department. Tough trial, I would hate to have been Ed Healy, who was dean at that time, who made the decision, and he went along with me as the department chair.

C: This would have been 1984?

B: 1984, right. Because he kept me very close under his arm, and I appreciated that so very much. During that period of time, I happened to be able to work with yours truly, Dr. Crooks, as dean out of the College of Arts and Sciences.

C: How long were you chair?

B: On my first tour I was chair for six years, from 1984 to 1990. After I left the chair, the searches they had didn't bear any fruit, so they had to appoint someone as interim chair. No, I'm sorry, Dr. Yessin came back as chair after I retired. He came back and he served as chair. Then when he retired, the search for his position didn't bear any fruit, so they appointed me again as interim chair. I served one year there.

C: That was around 1996 or 1997? What were the major things happening when you were chair? Was that the time when the jazz program came in?

B: Yes, a pretty rough time. The year that I applied for the position, an article came out in the newspaper, *The Spinnaker*, "Have you Heard Your Fine Arts Faculty Member Today?" The Department was a laughingstock. Unfortunately, it was the laughingstock of the campus.

C: Why?

B: In their view, we had all these *prima donnas* who came to work at 11:00 a.m. and would go home by 1:00 p.m. and who did not take on any extra people, did not teach outside their field. Just a lot of negative things of that nature. So we had to come in and make a lot of unpleasant decisions.

C: Was this both the art and music people?

B: Right. I think it happened more with the art people than it did with music. But in music we only had twelve majors at the time, although Bill Brown had about twenty-some-odd students on his roster as voice majors. Gerson had about sixteen on his roster in applied music. So that was of particular concern because so many kids were taking lessons who were not majors. Applied music was supposed to be strictly a professional preparation kind of thing.

C: When you become chair it was Bill Brown in voice, M.J. in choir, Gerson with piano, Art Bloomer with organ, Charlotte Mabry with percussion, and you became the first brass player.

B: Right. I became the first instrumentalist, started the instrumental program. Now, the program started before I became chair, the instrumental program. During that time I was instrumental in getting permission to hire two other specialists. I was a brass specialist, but we needed a woodwind specialist and a percussion specialist. So we were able to get two searches, and on one of those searches we got Bill Denza who came in as the clarinetist and saxophonist, he played both jazz and classical. Tremendous musician. Charlotte Mabry, who's still here and doing a fantastic job.

C: So how did you shape up the department?

B: We had to make a lot of decisions that were not too popular. One of the first things we had to tackle was trying to get a more well-balanced schedule. The whole idea of people coming to work at 11:00 a.m. and leaving by 1:00 p.m. had to go. There were two courses we had offered in the evening in art. I think Louise Freshman Brown taught a course at night and also Ken McMillan. No courses were being offered at night in music. So we had to have somebody teaching at night. That was not very popular. I put my band at night. It was a community band, so that was not a good time, for them to rehearse at night. As a result of that M.J. agreed to put the choir at night. They were already practicing late in the afternoon. So that was the way we started gradually progressing to night classes. That kind of smoothed things up a bit. The whole idea of summer employment, that was a big problem. So I went through and totaled up all the cumulative teaching credit hours based on the number of years the person had been teaching and then divided those through and developed some type of average, the average for teaching summer school, and with that set up a kind of formula which determined a rotating system of who would be eligible to teach. At that point the person knew, I've got three years before I'm teaching again,

then I'll be teaching again next year. That worked out pretty good for a while until we started getting new people in, which kind of upset the apple cart. By that time, I had left the chair of the department. So Gerson had to make some changes, too, now. Another thing we did was come up with the plan, we developed a faculty handbook. We'd kind of operated out of everyone's hip pocket. Gerson having been the chair and the founder of our program, and he kind of knew what he was doing and everyone kind of accepted it. Not having an operative manual except for the university's so we developed a faculty handbook that coincided with the student handbook. It was like an extension of the student handbook. One of the main things that we outlined was all of the areas of requirements for instructors, of assistant to associate professor, full professor. We worked all that out. That took a lot of time, but we finally worked it out. The other things were promotions and annual evaluations. We came up with the mathematical formula for that. I'm very proud to say that these things are still in use in the department right now. The formula where we go through and get the total number of courses that you teach and come up with the total number of hours and how the students evaluated you on that particular course, get a rank, a number out of that, and that number gives you your quotient for the year. That has worked very well. Everyone is very pleased with that. It's very difficult to argue with numbers. When we do it subjectively we always had problems. But everybody participated in putting it together. Those were the biggies with the department.

C: Did the jazz program come in when you were there?

B: Right, yes, during the start of my third year. You know that the Kogers have always been behind the arts in Jacksonville. He really wanted to have a presence here. This is especially after he and the Symphony had a split where he pulled his marbles from the Symphony. So he had to find some other place to put his eggs. So he wanted to get a presence here at the university. To help us get going in the arts. He did several things. We hired Willis Page, the former conductor of the Jacksonville Symphony, to come in as a Distinguished Professor. Willis came in and did a couple of things, he did a couple of lectures about music appreciation, and he took a small group of Symphony members and did a lecture group in the auditorium. Then the St. John's River City Band was organized, which was also developed with funds from Mr. Koger. Willis was hired as the first director of that group. I was asked to come play with them, but I was the only person in the band who didn't have to audition. Dale Blackwell, a band director from Jacksonville Community College at that time. Now Willis is conductor of the River City Band and also Distinguished Professor at the university. We were able to work out a couple of things. We had the band that played here and Willis conducted concerts here at the university. So that worked out very well. Then we started the program trying to get strings. The new conductor of the Symphony, Roger Nierenberg, his wife [Claire Jolivet] was a string player. So we started a program with her. And it didn't work out too well, although she's a great musician. But, she picked up players from New York, they

came down, and in some instances they were not very well rehearsed. Some of the attitudes of the players were not too good. I guess they underestimated the people. I remember one of their performances where they made some mistakes, they actually sat up there and started laughing on the stage. That was very embarrassing, not only for them but for the whole faculty. So I withdrew my support for the program and Willis finally figured we could do something better with the money. So they had the River City Band brought in, which played with Rich Matteson as a soloist, and it just knocked everybody's socks off. So when that happened, Ira [Koger] invited him and Willis and all of us to go out on his boat. Rich had the great gift of gab, and Ira loved to talk and joking gig. So they hit it off and became very close friends. They had him back several times, so Ira Koger made him an offer to have him become the Distinguished Professor of Music, and made a pledge out of stock, not out of cash. This went through I think the year that I left the chair. At the reception of Dr. Herbert as President, Ira Koger announced the maturity of the Koger Foundation.

C: Working with Ira Koger, did he work with you in setting this up? Or did he work with Curt McCray?

B: Strictly with the upper-level administration. He got my advice about some things to get the lingo and all that kind of stuff. But as far as getting permission for setting up the various parameters, that was strictly worked out with the senior administration and him.

C: Is that also true of Willis Page?

B: No, that was done primarily through Dean Healy and myself with, of course, final approval from the Vice President.

C: Then the River City Band was independent?

B: Right, that was an independent group. Not necessarily a part of the University of North Florida.

C: Then the jazz program came in just as you were leaving in 1990.

B: Right. That caused some problems because we had done these other three things, these two major projects with Willis Page as Distinguished Professor and then with Roger Nierenberg's wife [Claire Jolivet]. So that didn't work out too well, and people were pretty incensed about it. So the faculty were not willing to entertain anything else coming from Willis Page. So we said, look, that man wants to put some money behind this program. Because these two programs didn't work, that doesn't necessarily mean this won't. Why don't you put the money behind some things that are already happening? We talked about Charlotte's program had already taken off in percussion, and we really had no

jazz people and no students. So we figured out that would be a way of recruiting students. We had a person to do that, Rich Matteson.

Anyway, we had a meeting down at Gerson's house. Bill Brown was one of the first to embrace the idea to bring this program on. I made the point, this is going to be a great boon for recruiting, although the program may be centered around jazz, as the reputation of a jazz program gets out, other people are going to want to be here, the fans, the girlfriends and boyfriends, they're going to come here also. So that would be a great recruiting sell. Gerson would say, if anybody wanted to give you some money, you'd better damn well take it. So coming from that meeting, we decided to go wholeheartedly [with jazz], embrace it and bring it home.

C: This was a major new direction because most of your teaching was not in jazz, it was in classical.

B: No jazz courses at all.

C: Did Willis do any jazz?

B: No.

C: So this was a totally new direction, and it's because Ira Koger became very fond of Rich Matteson?

B: Right. His whole idea was to bring Rich in. The thing that brought Rich in was that he would have a free hand in establishing his own program.

C: How did that affect the Music Department?

B: That was another thing because he's going to come in and be able to hire and fire on his own. He might want to decide to fire some of us because if we have no positions available and say, I only have three students. What's my defense? He could come after my position and hire another jazz person to come in. But we talked about those kinds of things and he said, no, I wouldn't do that. And he did not. He never impeded on the classical program. As a matter of fact, he tried to make sure that jazz students took these courses. Now, although they took the courses that were not jazz, music theory and music history and all these kinds of things, he insisted that they got in on these courses on time.

C: That would make them better performers because they had the intellectual background on music as well as the performing.

B: Now we had some problems with that, with kids going out on trips, and sometimes they would rehearse late at night and wouldn't show up to class. That caused a problem. That was not our official policy, it was just an everyday

problem that you would have in any program. But because our faculty was particularly suspect and a little bit thin-skinned, they complained about it an awful lot. But that was the main thing that helped to bring this department to some maturity. The offering of that jazz program.

C: What happened to the classical side after Rich got here?

B: We began to recruit more people. Unfortunately, the monies that we just had gotten for scholarship was taken over by the Vice President's office and redirected to the jazz program. I had just gotten this money to recruit band members. So that was a real hard blow against me. After the first year, they used that money to bring in the first-year jazz students. After that they began to make it up. We got enough to recruit ourselves a brass quartet, a woodwind ensemble, stuff like that. We dabbled and dabbled until we had enough to have a wind ensemble. That's about all we had when I left that program, which is like a twenty-some-odd piece group. A pretty good group though because some of these kids, although they were doing specialties in jazz, some of these kids were very good classical players. Therefore, they had played in a concert band. Basically, the way we had set it, we had them do it in their first year. We didn't get to have the expertise all the way through except unless they had some time to devote to the concert band.

C: The Koger stock collapsed after a while. How did that affect the jazz program?

B: Well, it didn't collapse, it materialized.

C: But the company went bankrupt.

B: But it didn't affect us because the money had already, the stock had matured.

C: Oh, it had been sold before, okay.

B: Right. It didn't affect us. Thank God. [laughter]

C: So in your years here, what have been the highlights of your time at UNF?

B: I would say helping to develop a structure for the department that's still being used today, scheduling, a concert concerning Kenya, promotion and evaluation, that infrastructure for both faculty and students, developing student organizations like the band fraternity and music sorority, those kinds of things are very dear to me as things we were able to do.

C: Did this draw on your experience from A&M?

B: Somewhat, yes. Like I said, when I went up for the department interview, that was one of the things I was asked, are you going to try and turn this department



into another A&M? Some things I learned at Florida A&M but some things that happened there I would be the first person in the world to stay away from. So it's good to know it, what to use and what not to use. I'm not here to try to turn the band into a Florida A&M marching band. As a matter of fact, I'm sick of marching band. That's why I had to get out of there. I was sick of marching band. No more.

C: Did you hire people like Bunky Green and Bill Prince? Or did that come later?

B: Bill Prince I did, with Rich's recommendation. Bunky was hired my last year as chair when John Bardo was here. I don't know how much of this is going to be written down, but Rich Weiner was the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and I was having such a hard time, and he called me over to his house one Sunday afternoon. He said, you're not the only one that's having a hard time. He said, they're killing me, about to kick me out of here. Tom Leonard had given Rich a heads up, he was working on the preliminary study for SACS, the accreditation, which came out of the Vice President's office. Anyway, he kind of gave Rich a heads up on the QT. He said, you have got to watch it. So he says, the word is out that the Vice President has a New York Jew as a dean and a militant black as a department chair, neither one of which he's satisfied with, and they've got to go. So the handwriting was on the wall.

C: When you were appointed as Chair Ed Healy was Dean?

B: Right.

C: So you worked for Healy and then Weiner. Did you have good working relations with both of them?

B: Very good. Like I said, Ed really took me under his wing. Sometimes he'd stay over until 6:00 or 7:00 p.m. and had me work through a lot of things. Rich was a real dear, such a hard-working guy, great intellectual. But things began to soften up a little bit when you came on as a dean and then Radonovich came on. I couldn't believe that the resources had gotten so much better in the short time I was between my two periods [as chair]. To the extent that when I came back as chair on the interim basis, I kind of wanted to apply for the position because it was so nice. We had funds to work with. We had a dean who could pull strings and get things done. We had a new Vice President then also which made a big difference.

C: You didn't work with Afesa Adams at all when she was Dean, did you?

B: Yes, I forgot. She was the person who kind of let me burn. Like I told her, if you let this happen, they're going to be after you next. Sure enough, I bit the dust like this year, and the next year, she bit the dust.

- C: When you were appointed Chair, John Minahan was Vice President I guess, was he not?
- B: Yes.
- C: Did you work with him at all?
- B: Yes, in fact, John applied for some special funds from the state to enhance the curriculum. So we got the funds to bring on a program in graphic arts, photography, instrumental music, and theater. Of course, theater never really got a foothold on campus. Theater is a very costly program.
- C: Was it hard for a musician to work with the non-musical arts?
- B: Not really. When we had problems, especially when I had problems was in working with the upper-level administration because Ed Healy was very open minded, and he heard everything I said. He didn't necessarily approve everything I said, he was very open minded. By the time we get to Minahan or the next vice president, Merwin. He was only there for a short time. A good example, on faculty loads, they had to be educated. Why do you have classes with only one person in it? How can they keep a class like that open? Because it's a private lesson. You can only do it on a one-on-one basis. It has to be done that way. So a lot of things like that happened. Can't you get more people in this brass quintet? Well, it's a quintet! It's just little things like that. You would think that they would understand that, but they were scuffling trying to get these numbers up. They just had to get these numbers up. So as a result of that, what happened was that other programs and other classes had to start supplementing to make up for the whole conglomerate of classes offered. But the whole thing, I just figured on the basis of the FTE coming out of the music program, we're going to show a minus. The whole College of Arts and Sciences or the whole department will have the numbers go up a little bit.
- C: Did you teach music theory or music appreciation?
- B: Music appreciation.
- C: Did that draw numbers?
- B: Right. In fact, I very seldom had less than seventy-five people in that class. Seventy-five to 150 people. That was the program that started the program in African American music. That's one of the areas I am extremely proud of, starting the program in African American music.
- C: Let's talk a little more about that. This was when you were chair or as a professor?

B: When I came out of the program as chair.

C: This would be 1990?

B: Right, 1990. I felt like I needed to have some kind of perks coming out of chair the way it was done. Afesa Adams was the Dean.

C: She's the one that kind of eased you out.

B: Yes, so she kind of gave the going a little easier for me, so I asked to be able to teach for the next two or three summers. To break me away from that rotation and to get my time in summer school. She brought me on until she left as Dean in the summer. Then after that the people like Beth Clements handled the schedule of classes. But my class stayed because it pulled so many people every summer. In fact, they're still asking for that class now.

C: Which class is that?

B: The African American musical heritage class. It would always draw big numbers. Even before that I had an appreciation course in jazz, "All That Jazz." Usually it would draw big numbers. Of course, we started trading that around so everybody would get a little piece of the pie. When that happens it just killed the class. So I didn't want it to happen to this class, so I was very protective of this African American music class. In fact, I had to go to Dean Radonovich because Gerson wanted to sign on, and have it go around. I said, no, I wanted him to look at the numbers. I had to say, the last time I taught "All That Jazz," we had eighty-five people in this class. When it went to another professor, it went down. The numbers just kept showing lower and lower. I said, I don't want this to happen to this class. He said, it's really true. He showed that my load teaching that course, conducting the band and something else, that I was producing almost half of the department's FTEs.

C: What were you conducting?

B: Teaching a course on conducting. Teaching students how to conduct.

C: Did you and most of the musicians also play independently on your own time?

B: Oh, yes. Like I said, I played with the River City Band, I played with the Jacksonville Symphony. The only thing that stopped me playing with the Symphony, after the group came into being, was that Willis had the bad time at the Symphony. He didn't want me to play with both. He made a rule that If you played with the Symphony, you could not play with Willis' band. So since I was playing with the Symphony only on a part-time basis, they offered me the full-time position with the River City Band. After Matteson came on after a couple of years, they decided to have the whole band go jazz.

C: The River City Band?

B: Yes. That's when they almost lost their shirt. The band under Willis, Paul Chiaravalle and Sam Fricano, they appealed to the elderly people and the retired people. They would go out on a Sunday afternoon to Metropolitan Park, and it was a great thing. So they started changing to make money. After Willis withdrew his funds, they had to make their own money. They became very commercial and trying to do things more commercially feasible. So there were young people in the front office who said, there's too many old folks in the band. So they got rid of all those old farts out of there. We need to have a younger image, so they started playing a lot of jazz.

C: So that didn't work? This is off on a tangent, but does the River City Band still exist?

B: I guess it does. I saw a picture the other day, something about the world's greatest concert. I know they were trying to buy this building downtown, a Methodist church building.

C: But they couldn't, it went bankrupt. Did you have a favorite kind of music that you performed?

B: Classical. A lot of classical. I have a group now that we've been working at my church, a brass quintet, for the last ten years. That's an unusual thing, we have it set up as a concert group in residence at Bethel, so we get a regular salary and play the first and third Sundays.

C: So a nice parallel to the Ritz, the group that started out playing at the Ritz Theater but now plays at the Terry Hall, a classical music group?

B: Patterson. Yes, in fact, he came to me with a grant proposal, and wanted someone to sponsor him.

C: The Ritz Players.

B: Right, when they started working over there they couldn't make enough money. The hall only holds 400 people. And they couldn't fill the hall up. So they had to try elsewhere. Trying to make more money. A good group, but it takes a lot more money when they import people in from all over. This cello player, where he's coming from, you've got to pay his fare round trip, plus you've also got to pay for a cello because they can't put those things in baggage, had to buy a seat for it.

C: Other stories? Did you have much contact with Bill Merwin when he was Vice President?

B: Not a lot. Bill was very on top of things. Things that you didn't know that he knew about. Almost every week, you'd get a note about something: I understand you did such and such and such a thing, congratulations. It just made you feel good. It made you feel good about working here. Somebody's watching. The same thing, somebody's watching, I'd better straighten up.

C: So you served here under McCray and Adam Herbert as Presidents, and Anne Hopkins. Did you have a strong working relationship with any of them?

B: McCray and Herbert. I think what happened with McCray, we got along very well. In fact, on his installation as President, we had the big processional, he sent me a note, he says, thank you, Lenard, when I heard that brass quartet playing, I felt all right, everything was in good hands. But anyway, he always wanted the community band to play for commencement. So one commencement, it happened in December, and it was just cold, cold, cold. These were adults with their own instruments and they said, I'm not going out there on the field in the cold with my clarinet. This thing cost me \$3,000—go out there and have it crack up. And they wouldn't do it. So I had to tell Curtis, I'm sorry, we just can't play. He never forgave me for that. He said, can't you get a handful and go on out? No. You call yourself a band, you only have six people out here? That would be embarrassing.

C: It's hard for administrators to understand the musicians' point of view.

B: That's what I was saying earlier. During that time, my biggest job was trying to sell the administration. That thing I was saying about that article about "Have You Heard Your Fine Arts Faculty." That's one of the things that Bardo was concerned about. He said, you've got to get the fine arts faculty to come on and join the rest of the faculty. We can't do that, we're arts people. You had to be creative. You can't be creative when you're following somebody else, there's no way. So you had to do things within certain parameters. You can't go lock, stock with everybody else because everybody else sees the light turn red and stops. Somebody might see it as being a deep shade of orange, or purple and go off somewhere else and come up with something new. So we just can't do that if you're going to be a good musician. You've got to see other things.

C: Did Adam Herbert support the arts?

[End of Tape A, Side 1.]

C: You were going to say, with Adam Herbert?

B: Adam was very supportive of that. But Bill Brown was not as trusting of him as you would think that he should have been. He was always saying, watch that man, you better watch him. So anyway, we were doing so well with the African American music program, so he asked us to come up with a program and he

wanted the African American music program to be the one out front carrying the ball with this thing. So we got all this stuff planned out, he said, don't worry about cost. Got right down to the end, he said, well, we don't have the money. I thought you said, this would be taken care of? [He said], that's great, but we ran out of money. If you can find a way to get the money. Maybe you can get the money by getting program endorsements. I said, We can't wait for that. He was thinking about bringing in the great actor, James Earl Jones. No, you don't wait two weeks before he's supposed to be here to call him and ask him to come. You can't do that. So it's those kinds of people that we had on that program. That was one of my biggest disappointments that we couldn't pull that program off.

C: How would that program have worked? Would it have been acting and drama as well as music?

B: Well, he was going to come in like a keynoter, a one man show. Kind of a lecturer. He came to town this past fall or last year.

C: Bishop Tutu?

B: No, he spoke for the Women's Board of the hospital.

C: Cosby? No.

B: James Earl Jones. That's what we were going to ask him to do, like a one man show. He was so good. Who else did we have on that list? Cecily Tyson, Patti Labelle, Luther Vandross.

C: It would have been a series of performances over time?

B: Right, for the whole month. It was going to be outstanding. Also, the same with black artists. Have you seen Jonathan Green? Have you seen any of his works? Fantastic works. His colors are very deep, rich colors. All his subjects deal with African American things, like this section hand, the guy working the railroad and picking cotton and the scene in the church, preacher preaching and ladies out there just shouting and jumping up and down. It's so graphic, so visual. It was almost like you could see and hear that preacher and hear what they were doing and all that shouting. It's outstanding. Such a great painter. Very realistic.

C: You mentioned your positive feelings about introducing African American music. Any other achievements here, any things that you did here that you look back with fond memories particularly?

B: That one ensemble. I have some tapes and some pictures. I'll pull those up and pass them on to you also. But that was our first instrumental ensemble.

C: At UNF?

B: Yes.

C: When would that have been?

B: Well, we started the instrumental program in January of 1981 and we performed with the UNF brass quintet. We started with that group. Then the next year we started out a full community band. In my first year here I was working over with the band director over at FCCJ. At the end of that year, he left and went to Atlanta to go do a band up there. So I had all the kids come over here. I had a full band. We had a good group going. When they started the Bulls band, the Bulls football team, most of the people wanted to go into the Bulls game free, so they cut out on us and went down and started rehearsing with the Bulls band so they could go to the football game for free.

C: That was one of the pro teams before the Jaguars came.

B: Right.

C: So there was a band here in the early 1980s that subsequently ended because of outside factors?

B: It actually didn't end, it just lost all the majority of the players. We depended heavily on the community people because we didn't have enough money to give scholarships to all the various instruments that we needed. So we had a couple ladies that played bassoon. We didn't have any kids who could play bassoon. French horn. A lot of my students who had been with me up at FAMU were happy to come out and play with me again. We had a pretty good presence. Because of that, some of those people were really good, put on a good concert.

C: Is there still a concert band now?

B: Yes.

C: Who directs it?

B: Dr. Brock. He actually has two bands now. There's a wind ensemble that Dr. Brock conducts and a new guy, Dr. Tinnin, who took over the concert band. Two bands now.

C: There's a string group now too, right?

B: Right. The string group that started under Marguerite [Richardson], with the Symphony, she was an adjunct.

C: So the classical program has expanded?

B: Right. All this basically has come from the push for the jazz program. The funds we were able to get for jazz, some of these people branched out and started coming in, and some kids came in on their own just to be around these other guys. But as a result of that, we were able to begin to raise more money, and able to offer more scholarships.

C: When did you retire from UNF?

B: June of 2004. My wife had been ill for over a year. The doctors had given up on her. I was scheduled to teach that summer. In fact, I went in for the first class, and I had to miss that very first class because I had gotten word that my wife was back in the hospital, and for me to come as soon as I could. I asked someone to take the class roll and told them why I had to miss that class. So when I got to the emergency room, I met her doctor and he said, Len, I know it's a hard thing, but why don't you take her home and put her in a hospice, because she's not going to make it. Put her in a hospice so she could have a better life. So I said, I'll do better than that, I will go ahead and resign and stay with her for whatever time she has left. She lasted two weeks. Then she passed. Now I don't have anything to do. I really started to come back, but I was just too hurt. So I went on a big trip. I bought a new car and went on a trip all the way out to Texas. I went to Vermont and just got away. I started practicing the horn again, that's why I went to Vermont to take a lesson, and get some mouthpieces made and stuff like that.

C: So you taught here from 1980 to 2004.

B: Twenty-four years and that time went by so fast. In fact, I was here longer than I was at FAMU. I was at FAMU twenty-two years.

C: The committee asked me to ask this of everybody, who was the most unforgettable character that you've met here at UNF?

B: Unmistakably Bill Brown. I loved him to death.

C: Describe Bill. I wish he were here to interview. Describe Bill for someone who has never met him.

B: Bill, when you hear him sing, you figure he's one of the biggest snobs in the world because the, HEY, BROTHER MAN! comes off like somebody from the bucket of blood down in the joints somewhere. But he was a voracious reader. He read everything. He knew a lot about what was going on, whether it was politics, the arts, people talking about the Oprah Winfrey reading list, he said, I've been reading that stuff for years. He was just a fantastic guy. He met no



strangers. He was no stranger to anybody and he called himself in the classroom, most of his students didn't know what his real name was, he called himself Dr. Feelgood in his classes. Do you feel good today, child? Come on into this class, I'm going to make you feel good, I'll make you feel good. They call me Dr. Feelgood.

C: I'd never heard that before.

B: Yes, that's Bill Brown. Maybe not the greatest teacher in the world, but he could teach that voice. But not when it came to classroom teaching. Frankly he just didn't have the interest. His interest strictly was voice, performance.

C: What was your experience as an African American in a predominantly white university like UNF? Were there times of discrimination on race, or were you reasonably well accepted? Would you share a little bit about that?

B: You know, the only time I heard anything, or even felt anything was when Tom mentioned this thing to Rich Weiner about the New York Jew and the militant black. I'll be very honest, that's the only thing I heard about there being any kind of racial whatever at this institution. Even from the constituents or people that came to concerts. Everybody had been extremely nice to me. I guess it was because of that concert band and we were one of the first, beyond the choir, to have a regular presence in the community. One of the good things was in order to get an audience, we started having concerts with different elementary schools to bring their kids in. That was nepotism because I used my wife's choir. Wherever those kids are, the parents are going to come. So that way I could get the parents to come by using the elementary choir. They're thrilled to know that their kid is up there on the stage singing with a university group. So that was good. So we had a good presence in the community. Sometimes I'd go to the different churches and somebody would come up, Dr. Bowie, so and so and so, you may recall me and my daughter. They go way back, years back. So I feel very good about that. But thank God I have not had any negative [racial reactions].

C: Colleagues or students or administrators. That's good. Because there have been some faculty who felt discrimination.

B: Yes, and I've heard several people, faculty members. I won't try to excuse anybody, but a couple of people it seemed it was like an issue with them. They may or may not have imagined something. What somebody said is not what they may have meant, but it's somebody whose skin is so thin.

C: That's good. One of the things that I personally wanted to see in understanding the University of North Florida is that in this time of our history, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, this is a university that is both open to and inclusive of both women and minorities, hopefully.

- B: I think that's another thing, because the majority of the faculty who were here when I came here were people who had just finished these major liberal arts institutions in the 1960s and 1970s. That was your faculty, people like Dale Clifford, and you and Jane Decker. These are great people. They don't take no bullshit. I remember one time, I raised a question and got a little hold in the meeting. I forgot what it was, I was going to make this joke about the arts and sciences mafia that I had heard about, and you kind of challenged me, Lenard, go ahead, what were you going to say. I said, oh, no, I'm not going to have that mafia come and get me. But that's about the only thing was the arts and science mafia, that they kind of tend to run the faculty. But that's not a negative thing because all the people that I have heard associated with it are people with strong academic credentials, great moralists like yourself, Rich Weiner, Ed Healy, Dick Bizot. I felt great just being in their presence.
- C: How have you felt about the music program here compared to other music programs you've known? Another question that we have is, you can say or I can say that we think that UNF has done a good job, but one of the ways you determine that is by comparing it to other schools. What is your experience in comparing our music program with others?
- B: When I first came here, like I said, I really began to have some questions about it. I left the FAMU program and all this happened and came here where they have nothing, and only 12 majors. I really thought that I had made a mistake. I'd go to concerts over at JU, and they were great concerts and things that we didn't have. I thought, will we ever get this thing going. And sure enough it began to happen. So at first it was not anything to compare with, but we were a young university.
- C: That was before we had freshmen and sophomores too.
- B: Right. But now, especially since we've got the concert band going now and the choir, M.J. all of a sudden just came out of the woodwork with that choir. That choir is dynamite. Brock has done a great job. He did the opposite of what I did. He started bringing in other groups, other college groups to help. They'd bring in one college group in the spring, and in the fall, they'd bring in a high school group, so hopefully by next spring the high school kids will want to come here. And we've had a few kids come from other colleges and transfer to UNF. That's worked out well. So now I would say that they put the program on par with, just speaking musically, course-wise, course content, curriculum-wise, I'd say it's on par with the average school for sure. We have a real ways to go before we can compete with the likes of speciality schools or conservatory music schools. But as far as state universities, I think we are on a par with them.
- C: The fact that we draw students from all over makes their caliber pretty good, too.

- B: Right. Our jazz program has given us a lot of visibility in that regard. There's no question about it, the fact that UNF has one of the strongest jazz programs in the country, that includes some of the conservatories, because a lot of those schools don't really push jazz that much. That's mostly state institutions—University of Miami, North Texas State, Ball State, those schools have great jazz programs, and the University of Wisconsin. In fact, one of my students is going to be over at Douglas Anderson tonight, a former student. He's director of the jazz program at University of Kansas.
- C: In your career, did you have direct contact with jazz or did you stay strictly with the classical?
- B: At FAMU, I was the chair of the instrumental program, so all those groups came under my leadership and the faculty came under my leadership. So I didn't have any hands on with the jazz group, but setting up the policies, setting up the curriculum and programs, yes.
- C: But here you've been more with the classical?
- B: It's the same thing as far as setting up programs, because we had to design the program even when Rich Matteson came on. Because Rich was kind of like a baby when it came down to that—he didn't know what to do. So basically it was me and Bill Prince who did it. But, Bill was not the greatest writer, he said, I don't want to do all this. So he just didn't have the patience. I said, just write down the ideas, I'll put it on paper for you. But basically Bill Prince and I set up and designed the curriculum for the jazz program.
- C: Well, we've covered a lot of ground. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you'd like to share about your career at UNF?
- B: I don't know why I didn't do it, but I had planned to bring, not a resume, but a biography. I have a biography written up as a trumpet player and as an administrator. I planned to bring both of those. It gives highlights of my life, not only here but also I taught at FAMU, Florida Community College, Edward Waters. Right now I am teaching over at Albany State College on Thursdays. They're looking at me coming down to Bethune-Cookman next year to teach trumpet. So I'm kind of getting around and doing a few things.
- C: Would you like to put that in the mail to me?
- B: I could send it to you in email.
- C: Okay, that would be fine. Let me give you a card.
- C: In fact, Eileen, who is in charge of the Archives here, would love to have any materials that you'd be willing to share, whether it's tapes or pictures or articles

or whatever. In fact, we can talk to her about that. Anything else you want to say about your career at UNF?

B: No, I think we covered everything.

C: Thank you very much. It's been very interesting.

[End of Interview.]