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JJ: Tell us about the creation of your new album, *Maverick* —the creation and or

selection of repertoire.

CM: Ok, I'd say *Maverick* became *Maverick* along the way of its own process. It all started in the winter of 2003 when my friend and bass player, Duke McVinnie, from my old fusion L.A. group "Your Own Space" (the band existed in between Beach Boys tours), invited me to play on his solo record *Flying Lessons*. The recording took place at a studio called Allaire which is a top notch setup located in an old mansion at the top of a hill overlooking a lake in Shokan, upstate NY, very close to Woodstock. Duke's engineer and producer for the session was a young man by the name of Brandon Mason, whose respect I gained very quickly. I notice not only his dominium and inventiveness on the technological aspects, but also I was really impressed by his musical sense and intuitive connection with the musicians. Basically, Brandon was like having another hip and creative musician on the set but working resourcefully from the other side of the glass, or rather the other side of the monitors. So, at the end of the two day session I approached Brandon to ask him if he'd be interested in co-producing and engineering my next album project. Of course, Eddie Gomez and I had been already working together and the idea of having Jack DeJohnette on the session (an idea that Eddie and I had discussed previously) also came up in the conversation. Brandon had worked with Jack previously and also with Don Byron. From that conversation we went on planning and exchanging ideas via email and by the fall of 2004 we were all gathered at Allaire for the *Maverick* recording session. That was, you could say, the successive aspect of creating *Maverick*.

Creative wise, having the canvas or scenario in place along with players from which to create a new CD, the creative process of defining a concept and choosing material began. Since I never got a formal education in music, at some point in my life while living in California, I enrolled in college to study a career in film making (in some strange way I made this choice out of my own love and respect for music and to keep my playing free from academic nuances). There I learned certain aspects of film making and especially for directing, that became analogous and very useful aids for the process of creating music and projects in general. One such concept that I borrowed is the *Mcguffin*, a concept coined by the film director Alfred Hitchcock that refers mostly to a device; like a thread that catches your attention and runs throughout the whole movie. The other one, and the one that I chose to use with *Maverick*, is the *Mise-en-scene*, which allows plot and character to be seen as foregrounded aspects. What that meant to me was having *Maverick* players doing what they did best, or choosing the material that would best feature the players. For example; when I

composed “Entre Nous”, I could hear Eddie's ubiquitous (in a good sense) playing, along with Jack's signature cymbal work. On the other hand, *Maverick* was a tune that I wrote in the early 70's which I had named differently. It was called “Goza Nova” and it was originally meant to be played in the form of a bossa. But still, with a change of beat, I could “visualize” Jack's and Eddie's energetic playing bursting out on that tune. Jack and Eddie's on the spot arrangement ideas certainly made the tune happen and David Sanchez of course was a real natural choice to up the ante even further. “A Cool Night in the City” was also scrapped from my early 70's writing and it worked like a charm from the go. The take we used on the CD wasn't even a take...I was just showing the tune to Eddie and Jack with the tape rolling and they just played along...and that was it! I can't say for sure that I exactly hit the mark with all of the tunes, but I'll leave that to the listener. As for the name concept, I could say that the term maverick evolved for me as the process went along. The name first came on a semi sleep state to my mind's eye in big letters and from then on the concept of what defines the term maverick became central to the project. During that visualization, maverick evoked for me strength and independence. A quick Google-search confirmed its meaning, and I knew I was on track. The liners that I wrote honoring my heroes sealed the concept. As I went on and researched maverick even further, I also found out that the term was also being referred to as a movement of composers basically associated with big cluster chords and avant - garde music, which seemed appropriate enough...at least for the first 9 seconds of the track! From a simple and straight forward perspective I could say that central to creating the *Maverick* project was my innermost desire to take my recordings to the next level. This meant continuing the work with Eddie and also adding the dimension of working with someone like Jack, whom I had admired and identified with since the mid 60's, when he played with the Charles Lloyd Quartet. I can give you a big' all impressive eloquent essay of how I planned this and that and how everything came out brilliantly according to plan, but the simple truth is that it is love and honesty that allows beautiful things to happen. I wouldn't like to see striving musicians out there buying the myth that a great work of music is as predictable as some artists egotistically tend to describe as they do with their own work after the fact. It is true that the best possible choices should be made beforehand to maximize success and a sound degree of direction, experience, knowledge, talent and an adequate budget will help, but I would still hold love, passion and allowing things to flow in tandem with an ideal as the source for a great work of art.

JJ: Could you talk about dialogue that you might have had with bassist Eddie Gomez , drummer Jack DeJohnette, or Don Byron clarinet during the creation of the CD that made a significant impact on you?

CM: Truthfully, we basically had fun. We all had our little daily life story to tell. We talked about dogs, birds, heartburn and (of course) Bush and other maladies. When we were having our cover picture taken on the grounds outside of the studio by my

wife Katira, Jack and Eddie were reminiscing and goofing on the funky, but very popular photo that was used on the album *New Directions* they did with Lester Bowie and John Abercrombie. I guess our photo session had an air of that old shoot. In between all the chatting we did have some substantial conversations about social injustice and spiritual connectivity. Jack is an ultra conscientious human being and he stands fully vertical with important social issues. I found it highly stimulating listening and sharing with him. On the other hand, Eddie and I have really stimulating conversations but in a whole different and pragmatic way; he is really a funny guy and keeps me on the laughing edge. He doesn't try to be funny-- he just is! He is also one of the warmest and caring people that I've ever met. Don Byron kept pretty much to himself. My co-producer/engineer Brandon had warned me that Don likes to have his parts charted beforehand, but that wasn't on my agenda for this type of project; I wanted it all to be intuitive and spontaneous. Anyway, he did a fine solo on "Three Little Steps to Heaven".

JJ: How did the creation of this album expand your artistic development and musical understanding?

CM: *Maverick*, like other recording projects did in the past, gave me the platform to take it all to the next level. The expansion is more like a catharsis which works for me as a bridge leaving some old stuff behind and creating a new space for ideas to come. On every one of my recording projects, with the exception of *Live at Carli's Vol.1*, I have managed to include songs that I composed many decades ago and that has liberated me from holding on to them, at the same time allowing me to conceptually move forward. Every project I do gets me closer to creating new ideas and new material. But I see a long road ahead of me because I have many songs that I'd written in the past which includes crossing over genres and they are still active underneath like a volcano waiting to erupt. As far as musical understanding, it is an everyday thing for me. Not having come from a formal music education, I evolve musically by being on a constant path of discovery. Also, I've been fortunate enough to have been playing live practically every night for many decades, by myself, duo, trio and with a variety of musicians and that's what has really contributed to keep developing my musical understanding. Artist development, I could say, started for me 45 years ago, when I first got paid to play on a stage. So this is just a continuation of the same process. On the other hand, it would be blind and arrogant on my part though to deny that this project with its outcome and the alchemy of gathering such great musicians has been a major catalyst in advancing my career—and I'm grateful for that.

JJ: What is it about working with bassist Eddie Gomez that you find inspires your creative energy?

CM: Eddie Gomez is the personification of $E=mc^2$. All I can say to that is that if the

energy released by an object is equal to the object's mass times the speed of light squared, every bit of his body mass is used when he plays. When we first started to play together, it wasn't easy for me because I would get overwhelmed by his energetic (creatively and physically) playing. At some point I realized that I shouldn't listen directly to what he was playing or else I could get thrown off. Later on as we played more often, I got to a better understanding of where he was coming from and the more we played, the more I felt on the level and got to savor more and more the joy of playing with him. You could think of it as driving a Ferrari; you get a little surprised at first, but eventually you'll really get a joy ride... you just have to stay on your toes.

JJ: What were the challenges and benefits that you experienced as the keyboard player for the Beach Boys for many years?

CM: When I first started playing with The Beach Boys in 1970, they had an impressive band with some great musicians, especially in the horn section. Some of these were: American trombonist Glenn Ferris, who later in the 70's migrated to France; Sal Marquez on trumpet, Joel Peskin on reeds and other LA and NY session players from that time. The rhythm section was respectable, but I also was able to bring in musicians of my choice such as bassist Potter Smith, drummer Bobby Figueroa and percussionist Robert "Rogi" Kenyatta, whom I had enjoyed playing with before. At the time I was tugging between Hammond organ, electric and acoustic piano and I was able to stretch out from time to time. My relationship particularly with Carl and Dennis Wilson was magnificent. We had a deep and nourishing personal and musical interaction. Also another two great musicians; drummer Ricky Fataar and guitarist/lead singer Blondie Chaplin from South Africa, joined the group in 1972 and we also became very close friends and collaborators. For a time the ethnic composition of the band was Jamaican, South African, Filipino, Mexican, Polish, Irish and Puerto Rican; we used to kid about it and regard ourselves as the United Nations band! We got voted "Best Concert Band" by the *Rolling Stone Magazine*, and we certainly were—within the rock concert genre. In all, I contributed with the Beach Boys in song writing, producing and arranging. Also I was billed as opening act with the band performing my own compositions in some of the concerts. It was a great experience in many levels; the depth of their music (although sometimes over simplistic), the great arrangements, the great vocals—the heart felt relationships—Brian's relentless perfectionism-- the a cappella singing used to kill me...I liked the Beach Boys! I grew up in San Juan in a beach community where surfing, bonfires and hot rods were popular and the Beach Boys were part of that scene. Also, as I matured musically, I was able to appreciate their musical depth even more. So I was happy to be asked to play and later contribute with them; a sojourn that lasted until 1981, when I chose to move on.

JJ: Who were some of the key musicians that you met in Los Angeles that helped shape your direction—and could you cite something you might have learned from one or more of those that made a memorable impact on you?

CM: An encounter definitively worth mentioning was meeting organist Jimmy Smith. We met back in the mid 70's at Dante's, a club in North Hollywood where I had been performing with my in between Beach Boys tours fusion group Your Own Space. He had been in the crowd listening to me, which I wasn't aware of, and when I finished the set he sent me a note with a waitress to come and meet him. When I finally came up to him he put his arms around me and lifted me into the air asking me; “Who do you listen to: Mc Coy or Herbie? It was a pretty crazy encounter; he would only talk about music! That same evening he invited me to hang out at his club in the San Fernando Valley . There he had a spinet piano behind the stage where he had his legendary Hammond organ set up and drums, and we hung out and played throughout the night. It was on the piano where he went off to show me his vast knowledge of harmonic structure and interweaving improvisations; an aspect of his musical knowledge that was rarely expressed through his organ playing—a real feast. There were many other musicians that impacted and influenced me in different ways like drummer Jerry Zitro, who knew the meaning of free avant garde playing (and living); bassist Potter Smith, whose vast knowledge and unique playing graced my first trio in the early 70's; late pianist/singer John Larkin's passionate and energetic approach to jazz made also a lasting impact on me. Pianist John Hartman, who for a short time was my roommate, was the first person I saw dissecting a song for improvisation -- Pensativa on F#, was such an example. Freddy Hubbard once gracefully asked me to join his touring band—unfortunately I had to decline because at the time I was committed to another touring band but the invitation alone inspired me to write some tunes with Freddie's ensemble in mind that later became some of my favorite tunes to play. One time I had a near death experience seconds before the arranger-conductor Jimmy Haskell told me “not to worry, the orchestra will follow you” after I confessed to him that I didn't know how to read music and I was about to perform a piece with the LA Chamber Orchestra as a gift from Dennis Wilson (Beach Boys) to Christine Mc Vie (Fleetwood Mack) on her birthday! Al Jarreau impacted me with his talent, his passion, inventiveness and risk taking and with his perseverance showed me that anything was possible; I will always cherish his friendship. *Maverick* musician/composer and friend Van Dyke Parks has also been a great influence and of course Brian Wilson, whose legacy on being a musical genius is no hype at all. There were many other better and lesser known musicians that crossed my path leaving something with me that I would treasure and that would certainly have an impact on my future development as an artist and as a human being.

There were also experiences on the negative side. One example is when I was touring with the R&B king, Wilson Pickett, and somehow rumors got to him I that I had other plans. So he had me escorted to his room (this was in Las Vegas), where he sat in the middle of the room on a stately chair wearing his red silk robe, flanked by his valet

and bodyguard, and threatened to cut my fingers off if I'd stop touring with him. I left even sooner than expected...thankfully he never caught up with me!

JJ: Could you discuss how your associations with several musicians with whom you have been involved—for example, George Benson, Les McCann, Chico Hamilton, Wayne Henderson, Charles Lloyd—and the significant understandings you have gleaned from one or more of those associations?

CM: My encounter with George Benson was short, but sweet. Before he ever started singing on records I was a big fan of his guitar playing and when he started singing on his recordings I was one of those disappointed fans, not because I thought his singing wasn't good, but because his playing was so extraordinary that it was hard for me to conceive the two together at the same level—wrong! It took destiny to put me on a recording session with George Benson to prove me differently. Before the beginning of the session, I think it was at Ocean Way on Sunset Boulevard; Benson wanted to jam so we could get a feel for each other and loosen up some. At first he just played his awesome George Benson guitar playing, trading solos, etc., but then at some point he started singing, and it totally blew my mind! From that point on I knew how wrong I had been on my judgment about his choice on singing. Also, at some point during that first jam, I tried to open the structure a little towards the outside with suspended chords. George definitely didn't like that-- I guess he liked staying inside within a tight harmonic structure. I also drew wisdom from that. Wayne Henderson, who was the producer on that project, was saying to Greg Phillinganes and to Benson emphatically that he thought I was the most sensitive pianist he's ever heard and wanted to place me on double piano with Phillinganes on one of the ballads that Benson was recording. If I've ever reached the apex of the art of minimal but tasteful playing, that was it! I never heard the track commercially released, but it did caused a roar at the studio.

Now speaking of Wayne , I don't remember who originally told Wayne Henderson about me, but the first time we worked together I had gotten a call on his behalf to show up at a recording studio to play on a record (Nomad, Electra) that he was producing for Chico Hamilton. I think it was at the Total Experience studios in Hollywood where we first met and when we first saw each other we both started laughing hysterically as if we had made a major discovery. The experience was like the meeting of kindred spirits, and that is what our relationship was like from then on. Wayne , being the soulful and expressive person he is, was probably who most inspired me to come out of a shell. I used to be extremely inward and introspective and I suppose that it showed on my playing at the time (hence the great sensitivity on ballads!). He used to egg me on to playing more aggressively and that became a lifelong revelation to me, I loved working with Wayne ; he certainly knew how to get the juices flowing on either direction! Les McCann was another positive force on my

playing. In the late 70's Les was putting together an all keyboard trio (quartet with the drums) and again someone made a recommendation and he hired me. The concept was Les and I on piano switching between Rhodes and acoustic, another keyboard player doing bass on moog (I can only remember his first name Andy), and a great drummer by the name of Kevin (Moon) Calhoun. During the concert tours, Les was more than generous on sharing the lead spot with me and while I had a lot to draw from his soulful playing, the mutual admiration and respect was ever present.

JJ: What was it about Puerto Rico and its music scene that motivated you to return in 1985 ?

CM: Creating one...I'm not kidding! There have been many exceptional jazz players that came from Puerto Rico and develop there (here) but they don't stay; some current examples that come to mind are David Sanchez, John Benitez , Miguel Zenon and Edsel Gomez. It is an island 10 by 135 miles (I know Manhattan is also an island but a lot closer to mainland!) and the jazz mentality does not prevail. From the moment that I returned to San Juan , I formed a jazz trio and I was fortunate enough to keep the trio working regularly. For that I had to work mostly at the big hotels because the jazz clubs ceased to exist by the early 70's. During the 50's and the 60's there was a healthy jazz scene in San Juan but with the popularity of rock and then disco for the final kill, only a handful of clubs managed to survive. My efforts paid off. As new large hotel complexes were spouting around the island, a demand for more jazz music developed. Meanwhile some newer and more progressive restaurants were hiring some form of jazz on certain nights of the week. At some point my trio was drawing a respectable crowd and became high in demand. In December of 1998 I opened the first hip and dedicated restaurant/jazz club ever known in the island, Carli Café Concierto. It was an immediate success and to date, it remained the #1 option for live jazz with fine dining in Puerto Rico for the seven years that it's been operating.

JJ: Who are some of the players with whom you play in Puerto Rico that are an integral part of your creative efforts?

CM: When I first started playing professionally in the early 60's, there were a good number of great veteran jazz musicians that were actively playing at the clubs, and that was my school. Although I was very young, I was taller than most for my age and during the summer school brake I wore a suit every night to look old enough to be allowed in the clubs. Eventually I got familiar enough with what some of these cats were playing and got my first shot at playing with them. Playing with cats like drummer Monchito Muñoz, Cuban conguero Sabú Martinez, bassist Freddy Thomas, Juancito Torres on trumpet, jazz diva Myrna Pagan and drummer Joe Morello as a frequent guest gave me some of my earliest experiences playing jazz. These older players were helpful and demanding-- often through tough love pushing me to the

limits. Sabú and I got to be particularly close and I learned much from him. Although there has been quite a gap between 1963 and 1985, when I came back to Puerto Rico I hired drummer Monchito Muñoz to play with my first trio since my return to the island. It was a way of returning something back, but also Monchito handled the brushes masterfully and had great swing; which I liked and fitted very much what I was doing. The bass player with that first trio back in San Juan was Eddie Guagua, who is known mostly for playing salsa, but who also has a great swing and could play jazz very well. When Guagua left the island, again I auditioned a young bassist by the name of John Benitez that I thought was promising. The only problem was that he didn't own and also didn't think he could play an acoustic bass. I told him to borrow, rent or steal one, but that there would definitely be no compromise. He borrowed one and for the first few weeks he played it awfully out of tune. His playing was so out of tune that it incited other senior bassist to come close to the stage while performing and yell insults at him! If that wasn't enough, he didn't own a suit or dress shoes, didn't own an amplifier (I advanced him money to buy one) and had the tendency of showing up late with half a dozen excuses. As much as my good reputation was on the line, I hung in there for John, and he eventually got it all together (when he sees me he warmly calls me maestro!). Eventually he migrated to NY and now John enjoys the well earned status of being rated one of top jazz bass players in the US . Among his many accomplishments and accolades he was chosen by the United States Information Agency and the Kennedy Center to represent the United States as a Jazz Ambassador on a tour of South America . Later on, I experimented with other more seasoned players such as master contra bassist Federico “Freddy” Silva, who had an incredibly unique way of playing and who was a master with the bow. Besides playing trio, we also played a lot of duets and played many years together until he sadly retired when he became ill with Parkinson's disease. It was playing with Silva that I met Eddie Gomez ; they were friends and shared mutual respect for each others playing. Another major player back in San Juan and kindred spirit that I enjoyed most and who became one of my dearest friends was Lucille Dixon. She passed away in the summer of 2004 at the age of 81, but she did allow me and our grateful audience to enjoy the last three years of her life playing regularly with me at Carli's. Her playing reflected her rich and deep history in jazz. She had performed with the best throughout the 40's the 50's and the 60's and had led her own band with players such as Taft Jordan, Tyree Glen, Fats Navarro, Buddy Tate, Sonny Payne and many others who spiced the decades of the 40's and the 50's in New York City. A true maverick; she is featured and honored on my CD, *“Live at Carli's Vol. 1”*. Besides Lucille Dixon, several other bassists have worked regularly with me at Carli's since I opened the club. Among some promising young players who have evolved with my trio are Ricky Rodriguez, now playing the New York scene, talented young Gabriel Rodriguez, three and a half years now with my trio; drummer Gonzalo “Gonchi” Sifre, almost six years with my trio, and now I'm beginning to groom another young talented bassist, Juan Carlos Acosta. Friends and “semi-local” colleague players on the move like Eddie Gomez , David Sanchez, Miguel Zenon, Edsel Gomez, Benny

Green, Gonzalo Rubalcaba , Al Jarreau and John Benitez do show up at the club on moments notice whenever they visit Puerto Rico and we have a blast.

JJ: Could you discuss some of your experiences working as a sideman that have given you a direction to pursue as a leader?

CM: I did a lot of side work when I was living in L.A. and it was bitter-sweet. I did perform with a lot of excellent unknown bands and also at times with some middle of the road ones so I could eat and pay my rent. There was a time when I was working three gigs at a time on one night and they were all at funky topless joints and nude bars. My schedule then would be 8pm till 1am, then 2am till 6am, then 7am till 11am. Some of these bars were owned by mafia and I remember one of those mornings getting paid with a hundred dollar bill that turned out to be fake when I innocently gave it to the cashier at the Farmers Market on 3 rd and Fairfax, and I had to leave the food and I was so upset and tired that I sped back to the club, stormed into the private pool parlor upstairs where the bosses would gather and with kitchen knife demanded my money. If that wasn't enough motivation to want to pursue a new direction, I don't know what is! But even in the worse case scenario, I was always working with good musicians, relative to the music genre. I even played with a country western band for two years, which I really enjoyed. These guys were a lot of fun to be with and they really cared about the music, and each other. Some of the players were great improvisers: like North Carolinian Brantley Kerns on the fiddle – a great musician. Part of what was interesting is that in country western swing all the lead players get several rounds of solos in every song – like in jazz, and it gave me the opportunity to develop a more linear way of improvising which has been beneficial to date. I had to keep up with the speed of the banjo, the fiddle and pedal steel, and gel with the blues nature of the harmonica, the guitar and the mandolin— it was really cool! I even became a part of a small bluegrass unit of the same band and that was even more challenging...but it was still a gig and I was composing a lot and eager to move on, do my own projects and lead my own group. I distinctively recall a time when I swore to myself that no matter what, including starvation, I would not play again for hire, unless for a major group or artist that I really liked or with my own group; It just had to be something I really believed in or necessary for my development. I nearly starved for three month. My diet became rice with ketchup and when lucky with a fried egg on top. My girlfriend got very sick, but the call finally came and from then on it snowballed.

JJ: Tell us about the development of the jazz club that you operate,,Carli's Café Concierto.

CM: At the time of conception, I was living by myself in Old San Juan, and in between gigs I had plenty of time to wander about the old city and catch on to the

needs of the city dwellers. In a way, it was a self serving idea to want to open the restaurant because many times I couldn't find a real cool place to hang out. There are some very good restaurants and many funky little water holes and some of them had live music occasionally, but there wasn't a real hip and permanent restaurant/jazz club in the island, let alone in old San Juan . The level of the dining was also real important to me, since I dine out a lot and really enjoy the experience. But at the same time I didn't want it to be stuffy, but highly professional, artistic and classic at the same time. After having spent a year creating a concept, I met my partner Jim Bonbright, and we secured a historic local with a plaza overlooking the San Juan bay. I gathered my closest friends who were mostly artist, sommeliers, and chefs, and in a loving joint effort created the logo, remodeled the room, painted the walls, built a new classic bar, equipped the kitchen, trained a staff, created a menu, selected the wines; a process that lasted at least six month, and finally with the hanging of some of the (artist) paintings and some of my own stuff like a gold record, some of my paintings, pictures, etc, the place came alive...not to forget the Steinway 9' concert grand that I rolled in from my apartment! The place was successful beyond my expectations from the first day it opened, but we did go through our growing pains; there are so many details to handle in the restaurant business on a daily basis that it is some times overwhelming. It is certainly not a get rich scheme—at least for a right brain thinking artist like me. Many times I have felt that I've just been doing a public service; if it wasn't as rewarding as it is in regards to seeing the costumers leave as happy and satisfied as they do, I would have thrown the towel long ago. It has been the management skills of my wife Katira during the last five years that has enabled us to stay open and to keep moving forward.

JJ: How does the club provide you with an opportunity to expand your own artistry?

First of all, I get to play almost every night for a live audience, I play basically what I want, I get to experiment and get audience feedback, I get to bring in other players, I can try a new composition or arrangement, and I can't get fired.

JJ: Could you talk about the evolution your recording *Both Sides Now* ?

CM: My original idea was to record a series of sweet songs like “Little Girl Blue”, “Surfer Girl”, “Very Early”, etc, with the trio format to follow on my previous CD, *Love Tales* . During that process, Eddie Gomez came to my club and when I mentioned to him that I was planning on coming to New York to record my next project, he offered his involvement. He said that he liked what I was doing and he was interested in playing and co-producing. We agreed and after exchanging some ideas over the phone and emails, in the days to come I took a short trip to New York to do studio and piano shopping. We selected the big room at Clinton Studios in mid town

Manhattan , and The Studio downtown in Soho for some additional duet tracking. Hiring Joe Chambers on drums and Jeremy Steig as guest on flute was Eddie's suggestion. During the session we did record “Little Girl Blue” and “Very Early” but we chose other tracks for balance and continuity. To me, the highlight or my favorite is the understated track “Remember Bill”. It was my most current composition and had the mood that I really wanted to create for the record. I also like the duet on “The Morning After”, which I wrote in the early 70's along with “A Cool Night in the City”, which I recorded later on *Maverick* . These two compositions were part of a three piece suite—the third one was lost in time.

JJ: Could you discuss your plans for the continuing series of recordings, *Live At Carli's*?

CM: The *Live at Carli's* CD series came out of the clients request for a...souvenir...or better said a “to go” piece of the experience at Carli's. Capturing moments like my trio with guest performers such as the legendary bassist Lucille Dixon and other guests, became a natural thing to do. I actually have hundreds of performances recorded on DAT and login them have been really time consuming, but worthwhile. There is some really good and spontaneous stuff there...particularly with just the trio on fire! We dedicated *Volume 1* to Lucille Dixon because such a great and contributing musician had to be honored and she was running out of time. *Volume 1* was pressed, delivered and played for Lucille in New York three days before she passed away. We all have missed her very much. Sometimes I like to leave periods of no recording to just experiment freely and to get out of the box-- I can still get self-conscious at times while I'm recording and occasionally fall in the pit of playing it safe; something I'd like to fully overcome. But we keep on recording while the means are available and keep collecting plenty of exciting releasable material for many years to come. The next *Live at Carli's (Volume 2)* that I have planned for release will feature my trio “on fire” doing standards along with some originals.

JJ: What were some key lessons that you learned about human nature and business as a result of your varied music industry activities?

CM: Hmmm...ok...The dichotomy that we are alone and at the same time we are dependent on every single human being we come in contact with; that everyone is afraid and most people are afraid to admit that they are afraid; that everyone wants to be loved, but it is only the fortunate few that deem themselves worthy of receiving love—hence much less are they capable of giving it; that success in a jazz career lies in a gap somewhere between power and humility; and that most of the musicians jokes about club owners are terribly unfair and untrue.

JJ: Some people “think from the end” contemplating situations that they imagine themselves to be in. What if any kind of vision did you have about your career in jazz early on?

CM: From an early age I was a wanderer. I used to constantly entertain existential questions in my mind – I was an introvert full of my world of fantasies. I had terrible grades in high school because I wasn't really there—I was either in my musical, sexual or existential fantasy. Somehow, early on I envisioned myself as a trumpet player—it was a romantic and melancholic view of self. At another time, I fell in love with a big bright baritone saxophone sitting in a store front next to my school. I really wanted it! I even took a lesson with a rental and I was so frustrated for not being able to get a sound out of the reed that I tossed it away and that was it for sax. Then I wanted to be a drummer, because I “knew” that I could play them. See, I grew up playing rhythms out of anything that I could put my hands on that had acoustics like the fender or the hood of a car. In those days, the 50's, cars were made of steel, unlike today plastic composites and bogus metals and they sounded really great. There is nothing groovier than the sound of a 1950's Cadillac, a big Old's or an old Packard! Those were some great jam sessions. Also throughout school I would lay my head on my desk and those desks sounded great too. They had a metal face in the lower front and the wood on top, and with my head down pretending I was asleep with my ear right on the wood I could turn out a real jungle party. Even today I always notice “playable items” everywhere I go—like at the supermarket; the cracker containers, etc. Sears is one of my favorite spots whenever I have to go to the mall. In the hardware department they usually have rows of paint buckets and they all sound different because of the different fluid content in them. I feel that I would be a true drummer because I am that all the time. It is hard for me to conceive of professional drummers that don't play on other surfaces; it is for me like they are missing out—the world is a drum! If I had convinced my dad when I was eleven to buy me a set of drums that I really wanted instead of the piano I got, I would have been an incredible drummer – I know it! I guess that was my vision, at least for a time. But in all, I think that I was too busy enjoying the moment to have a conscious vision of the future back then. Once the piano became my main tool of expression I guess I could formulate a better picture of what I wanted. In all, my ultimate vision since has been I think to have people at large be touched, moved or be positively affected by what I do or have to offer. I'd like to contribute to a better world.

JJ: How do you strive to develop your own voice - given the impact that these and other overwhelmingly influential artists might have upon your conscious or subconscious awareness?

CM: I never had a teacher, I never learned anyone's solo, and I look at songs as a sketch. I rarely learn a song exactly how it was done – I do like to demystify

something that seems difficult at first glance. I've been working on developing a concept of macro playing, where I look at improvising from a wide angle view looking over at the big picture of the song structure. I sing, I know the lyrics to most of the songs that I play that have lyrics, if not—I invent them. When improvising, I follow the advice of the Yellow Pages; “let your fingers do the walking”. If I catch myself thinking, I breathe. Once upon a time I visited a very wise sage at the top of a hill and when I asked her what the meaning of life was, she said to me: “A wet bird does not fly at night”. And I went on: “you mean that I traveled this far, give up my possessions and climbed up this hill for you to tell me that a wet bird does not fly at night?” and the wise sage... puzzled said, “Do you mean that a wet bird...does fly at night?” To me this old joke illustrates the frailness of absolute truth and meaning... especially in music. It may be obvious that I have listened to the jazz masters and I have great respect for them. They have been, including the entire range of instrumentalist and vocalist, my inspiration to play jazz. But I hear music my own way. Since I try to be as open as I can when improvising many influences may creep in and I don't try to avoid them -- it is just the language— a combination of known words and phrases, and then we invent some here and there, and with it we tell our own story. I've never transcribed a solo, or even think myself capable of playing anything like anyone else.

JJ: What words of encouragement or support, from one or more influential artists, have you received that has inspired you and or expanded your awareness or understanding of the music or human nature?

CM: The most significant recollection of inspiring words said to me is “just have fun”. I think it was Charles Lloyd who said that to me in a concert just before going on stage. That really made a world of difference!

JJ: As accomplished musicians, we know better than critics do, when our music is at the level we want it to be, or if it fell short. Critics cannot possibly understand what the artist might have been thinking. And, compliments or criticism like perfume are meant to be inhaled not swallowed. Could you comment on the impact critics have on your efforts?

CM: That is true, criticism and compliments are about as solid as a handful of water. But not unlike like any other judgmental interaction; sometimes it hurts and sometimes it helps. I've been so far pretty much cruising under the radar so I haven't been fully exposed to the front lines of that battlefield...yet. It is like the fellow who by some questionable actions gets himself called an ass; if it happens once— he should disregard it. If he gets called an ass again and yet by someone else, still is probably of no concern. If he still gets called an ass for a third time; then maybe he should wear a saddle. But I guess different artist have different thresholds. Masters

such as Ornette Coleman had the strength of character to go way beyond early criticism and continuous rejection. In all fairness other than being outrageously pretentious or contrived (where the death penalty could be handy), I think that a performer should be allowed to be where they are and who they are at any given time and place. Pressure from criticism itself could hinder what otherwise would be a great and honest performance— an irony, isn't it? And in a world where media rules we learn to tame the beast—unfortunately.

JJ: What pitfalls must we be vigilant about encountering or succumbing to in our lives as we pursue life, career, and creativity in music?

CM: On life and career I'd say; self pity, rightfulness, and bad breath (you can get bad breath from self pity and rightfulness); now on creativity...mmmm...laziness, dishonesty, trying figuring everything out, lack of rest or sleep, bad company and cheap coffee.

JJ: Would you like to share some foundational philosophies, or ideas by influential authors, artists, thinkers, that help you stay balanced—as an artist, as an individual?

CM: My foundation was Catholic which eventually sent me on a spin when I started demanding some real answers out of life. Eventually I could reconcile many of the contradictions that would surface during my quest, but certainly not all of them. Like most major religions; Catholicism has been plagued from within being responsible for some very dark events in history, but it did give me a solid spiritual background in which to remain unscathed through my perilous journey. I enjoy reading about Edgar Casey. I say about him because he really never wrote a book. I think that although controversial for some he was one of the most remarkable human beings in the 20 th century. The book on his life “There is a river” is a real gem and one of the most inspiring books I've ever read. Yeah...I remember myself in early grade school walking around the neighborhood kicking stones and wandering if anyone else really existed. I also remember having heated discussions with some of the other kids about the existence of God. I would argue to tears that God existed—(but then the same thing happened with Santa Claus!) and then growing up didn't change my inquisitiveness and longing to know where I came from or where I was going. As the “problem” matured with me getting older, instead of the question being “where did I come from” or “where I was going” the question became “where am I”; or “who am I”. With that in mind and being a rebel and an adventuring musician surrounded by the LSD culture, my quest for self discovery only augmented. It wasn't until I...mm...trying to use an analogy... I can only describe it as a moment of singularity when everything came clear to me. With that experience I was clearly able to “know” that I am a spirit having an earthly experience and not the other way around. Even a more significant realization was that the person next to me is also a spirit or a light (whether they realize it or not) that deserves all the respect and recognition that we so

often overlook because we just see a physical mass of flesh or body often reacting with animal like impulses. That moment or realization changed my life. That was the first time that I really could feel connected and able to come out of myself. I used to read a lot of books about eastern and western philosophy, theosophy, occultism and all religions, and for periods of time I would practice different kinds of meditation and a variety of disciplines, although always trying to remain independent of any particular cult or organization. I guess like music; I reached my own conclusions, made my own rules, created my own discipline and chose what I thought worked and discarded what didn't work for me. My quest "ended" when I realized that the quest never ends, so then I just went on with my everyday terrestrial life. For a time I got into stuff like EST in the early 70's and then Life Spring much later on. I found it intellectually stimulating and challenging hanging out with guys like Warner Earhart, John Hanley and most of all with Alexander Everett, who was the precursor or the major forerunner of the large group awareness trainings. Also, after I landed, I became hungry for a different kind of knowledge

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which I soon enough connected to my old metaphysical findings. This allowed me to look at the same concepts, but from a different angle. I became interested in physics, but in a conceptual way. Today my library is brimming with books on physics, physics encyclopedias and biographies of physicist, in addition to the other stuff I was reading. Physicists became to me something like what a sports hero is to a sports fan! Besides connecting the fine line between physics and metaphysics, I discovered the concept of mind aerobics for myself. When I started reading about physics I was pretty much in the dark, but as I went along my mind expanded exponentially. Sometimes I would carefully devour a book way beyond my ready capacity to comprehend it and if the book was well written, I would go beyond the mathematical formulas and was able to grasp the underlying concepts, which I found fascinating. One of such books was *Order out of Chaos* : by Ilya Prigogine. My favorite and most challenging all time book became *Gödel , Escher , and Bach : an Eternal Golden Braid* ; written by Douglas Hofstadter . This book brought brilliantly together in analogy everything I love in the most elegantly and stimulating way. What keeps me balanced? ...Lemme see...let's start with breathing—most people don't breathe to full potential, but learning is easy. A yoga instructor, vocal teacher or a professional singer can share or teach proper breathing techniques; moderation in diet; regular

sleep; remaining passionate about music but allowing sufficient time for doing other necessary things— got to smell the flowers! Also, regular walks or a swim with my companion; not taking myself too seriously; allowing love to come my way and reciprocate; not committing to doing more than is reasonably possible; having a goal but avoiding expectations; and most of all keeping a state of *Grace* helps me stay balanced. Of course this is my own version of grace and I will show you how you can do it too: in Spanish, to say “thank you” you say “gracias”, which literally means “graces” or “grace”. So, if I am constantly (and you can get used to it) saying in my mind gracias or thank you for everything (be specific), and I mean *everything* , then I figure that I am in a constant state of “Grace”. Pretty cool ha...try it! It may sound silly and over simplistic but think about it—on that mode not only are you being grateful for whatever much or little you have, alleviating the stress of constantly wanting or rejecting something (of course you have to mean it), but you are also simultaneously wishing well on to others and creating a super good vibe of appreciation. Can you go wrong with that?

JJ: No. That was great, Carli! If there is one for you, what is the connection between music and spirituality?

CM : To me spirituality is simply being connected to or being conscious of source. Music on the least is the expression of soul and I look at it as a corridor or vehicle, subtle but powerful enough to connect us with source. We musicians are like transmitters spreading the signal of intangible and otherwise elusive messages that penetrate our emotional vehicles and our higher consciousness. That message moves our being; makes us love sic; makes our hearts tender; brings us joy; makes us sad; makes us smart; it'll get us inspired; motivates soldiers at war; helps stop wars; enhances patriotism; makes rebels; we could be starving, sick, abused and even dying and music will redeem us; makes us fly; yes... I think music is connected to spirituality.