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Leonard "Lenny" Davis: Dayton Music History Project

Leonard Davis

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WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
Dayton Music History Project
Interview with Leonard Davis, February 22, 2019

Interview Information

Interview date: February 22, 2019

Interviewer: Matthew Mercer (MM)

Interviewee: Leonard “Lenny” Davis (LD)

Interview Transcript

Matthew Mercer: Alright, so, just to start, I’m Matt Mercer. I’m doing this, uh, interview series for my Capstone, for my master’s here at Wright State. We’re just going to ask some questions, have a nice conversation.

Leonard Davis: Okay.

MM: Leonard Davis here with us. So, to start off, can you give us some personal background information? Where were you born, what year?

LD: Okay, I was born in 1936, December 7th. And, in Springfield, Ohio. I went to Springfield High School, lot of people called it Springfield South. But when I went it was only one high school, so. Um, I was in the Navy. When I was in the Navy, I kept going with my music which I started in high school, in junior high. And with some choir and special services, drum major, drum bugle corps, Navy drum bugle corps. My first public solos in front of an auditorium were in junior high school. Uh, my teacher was, music teacher was Gertrude Stein. And the first two solos I did were “Trees” and, “Goin’ Home” from New World Symphony. And somehow you remember things like that.
[laughs]

MM: Yeah, it’s just the minor details sometimes, they just stick out.

LD: And, when I came home from the Navy, that’s when I met my manager, Floyd Whitehead. And, uh, I worked for Floyd. I took other artists out on the road and promoted them for a few months. I met him at a small recording studio, on the West side of Dayton. There was an article in the paper, he was auditioning. So, I thought I’d go for their, and audition for him, because I wanted to record. And so I sat in this little room, singing to records and he, he was somewhere, I guess behind in another room, watching me.

LD: But he had Sonny Flaharty in one of the studios recording his songs, "My Baby's Casual" and "Our Love is Real". So, he came in and he says, "Can you do vocal backing?" And I said, "Yes." So, I went in and was on Sonny's record, and I was supposed to be there auditioning. You know, so anyway, I got to be on my first record the night I was auditioning, and it was Sonny's. And I took... Sonny was only 16, and he was one of the people that I took out on the road, promoting his record, and it was Cleveland, uh, Columbus, Baltimore and Washington. Kind of made a circle.

MM: mhm [affirmative]

LD: And, ah, so I didn't think I was getting anywhere because I was just promoting other people. And I went to New York for a year and beat the streets auditioning there. I did the Copacabana a few times, and the manager, Doug Caddy, kept saying, "Keep trying! You'll have a show that fits what you do." I kept auditioning for the Copa Singer, for the productions with the Copa Girls and, uh, so I came back home a year later- my grandmother was sick, so I decided to come on back- then as soon as I get back there, I hooked up with Floyd Whitehead again and he took me to Nashville right away, and I did some songs and got some records out.

MM: Yeah.

LD: Formed a band, I called them "The Megatonnes".

MM: "The Megatonnes"?

LD: Because the megaton bombs were real popular in the news, you know, so I called them the "Megatonnes". Five guys, and we did a few gigs. They were- they were rockabilly, it was a rockabilly band, so I had to convert them to supper club, so- and that worked out pretty good. I didn't think it was going to. I taught them enough standard stuff that they got by, because they were good musicians, but, uh, I made part of my show Country- a hillbilly show. And, of course, they were excellent at that, and the people just thought that we built a show of Country music from a pops band, but it was just the opposite. We built a country band within the pops. We went down to Jacksonville, Florida, playing down there, a place called the Golden Earring. NAS Jackson, in Mayport, a Naval station. And it went along til all their wives came down and grabbed a hold of them and brought them right back to Dayton.

MM: [laughs] Yeah.

LD: So, I was sitting down there with a trumpet player and that was it. The band broke up. So, I worked the Naval bases with another band for a while, uh, March Wilson and the Raincoats. Came back and, uh, I met a group called "The Debutants". They were playing at the Turf Club bar on North Main Street and they were there because they had just come off the road because the mother in the group- there was a mother and two daughters and another girl- and Nina Kindig got sick, so they were waiting for her to get well again, and they were ready now to go back on the road. So, they had their itinerary and, uh, gave it to me. And I met up with them in Nashville and then they said, "In about

a month we're gonna be in Columbus at the Everglades" so I went to the Everglades and sat in with them. And the owner, Tony Delawese, came up to me and says, "My customers like seeing a boy work with these girls. You interested in working?" So, he hired me right then. So, when the Debutants were there, I was their boy- but a singer. And, uh, when they left to go back on the road, he said, "I've got another group coming here from New Jersey next. You wanna sing with them?" [laughs]. So, it worked out real good.

And then when I formed my next band, ah, he hired me right away. And then I went from the Everglades to... I sat in with Betty Green and the Cascades, right after she bought that. I had already sung with her, at the Brown Derby on Main Street, I sat in, so she knew me. And she hired me that night when I went to sit in. So, I was at the Cascades for, like, two years. And [clears throat], my friend, who was also my roommate while we were working at the Cascades, he became bartender and then one of the customers who was also our age- he was a lawyer, and his name was Bob Mann- and he asked Joe Craft and I if we would be interested in opening our own club. That was 1965, and we opened The Forum. At our grand opening in November- and we were open for twelve and a half years, something like that- and we wanted to have a feeling in the club, like the piano bar, where you could sing and hand clap. You know, just have fun. And we wanted that feeling, but at the same time we wanted a feeling of real professionalism. Spotlights, gowns, tuxedo's, you know. And also we wanted to make sure that our entertainers were all local, and we developed them into... people thought they were pros right off the bat, because they looked the part, they acted the part, and they sounded the part. And when we hired someone at the Forum, we hired them until they wanted to leave. Like Big Red, Bobbie Gordon, Dottie Jean. Bobbie Gordon, she later on went to- went on the world tour with The Gallingtons, so. Tommy Fletcher, who opened the club with us, he was a customer at the Cascades, and he would come in maybe once or twice a week. He knew two songs, and Betty would have him do 'em, and he was basically just funny, a gimmick. He would sing "Hello Dolly" like Louis Armstrong, and a limerick song. And he didn't tell any jokes. She- Betty- didn't like anyone to do humor because she was the comedian. And I asked her, I said "Why don't you ask Tommy to come in and rehearse a few more songs?" She said, "He does just what I want." Betty. Betty called a lot of people up from the audience to do things, and she had singing waitresses and a maître d, and that's how she worked her singers. She had organ and piano.

LD: And, uh, so when we opened The Forum, I said, "Tommy, you wanna be our singing maître d' on the weekends?" And he said, "Yeah!" And I said, "Well, why don't we try that?" Rehearsed a few more songs and he told a lot of good jokes. He was a natural at telling jokes, whereas I could tell a joke and people would stare at me.

MM: It's all about delivery. It's all about delivery.

LD: All delivery. Tommy was there a little over a year. He was grabbed up by an agent right off the bat. And he went on the road. He didn't work... he didn't work stateside very

long before he was on the ships, and he was on every cruise line in the world. And he just retired about three years ago and he's living in Thailand.

MM: Oh.

LD: I talk to him on Skype all the time.

MM: Yeah. Not a bad place to land.

LD: Huh?

MM: Not a bad place to land.

LD: No, and it's inexpensive to live there, that's why he went there. But he became really successful, and he was a garage door salesman when I hired him. But, uh, that's how we worked. We worked with a lot of agencies and organizations. I mean, in town, like cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy. We did a lot of stuff with Kenley, um, John Kenley wanted to try something, in 1976. He wanted to try, uh, food down in the basement level of the memorial hall, before the performance upstairs. Are you familiar with the Kenley Players?

MM: Uh, no.

LD: You don't know what they are?

MM: No.

LD: The Kenley Players were really popular in Ohio. Uh, they played Dayton, Columbus and Warren, Ohio. That's... and they were Broadway shows. He would hire names and they would do the three cities, and they would do a whole series during the warm months, and so he wanted to try doing this, um, meal, you know, down in the lower level. And he wanted a show with them. So, he asked Joe and I- Joe Graf, my partner- if we would put together a show for down in the lower level. And the people that were in the show- they were all young people- would do the waiting on the tables, and at a certain point they would get a signal and they would leave everything and go backstage. We were about fifteen in the group, and they were called the Backstage Players. And that was really nice, and they would... of course, brought them out to The Forum and had them do shows out there. Big Red was our big headliner. Norma Paulus. And when I- when I went to the Cascades, I wasn't, uh, a stage musician. I was a singer. That's what I wanted to do. Betty talked me into accompanying with her when her piano player left. And she said... and I said, "I can't. I'm not an accompanist." And she said, "Well, you know chords!"

MM: [laughs] Yeah! That's all you need.

LD: Yeah, yeah. [laughs]. "You know the chords. All I need is oompah, oompah, oompah. Keep time." she says. "And now we'll yell the chords from over your shoulder." And that's how I started accompanying. And she trusted me because I was a band leader and I could call shots. And when we decided to open the Forum Club, Red had already left the Cascades. She and Betty had an- a disagreement. It was all over comedy.

MM: mhm [affirmative]

LD: And she went down to the Brown Derby and worked with Johnny Spicer down there for two or three months, and Joe kept going in and kinda prodding her, and see if she would come to The Forum. And she says, "Well, who's gonna play? Who's gonna play the organ?" And she said- he said, "Lenny's gonna do it." "He can't play!" [laughs] But anyway, she finally came. I learned on the job and it ended up being pretty good. I'm a self-taught musician, I didn't take any training on anything, really. The drum majoring, the singing, support playing. So, I did pretty good at it and, uh, also I worked with the Dayton Playhouse, and produced six musicals with MIDI- musical instruments digital interface. Done with computers. You're familiar with that, aren't you?

MM: Yeah. Somewhat

LD: Music is dubbed...yeah.

MM: Yeah.

LD: You'd like play each part, record it, we did, "La Cage aux Folles", "Man of La Mancha", "Hello Dolly", "Mame", "Oliver", and "Scrooge". And we did all of them. And the orchestrations really sound good, you know? Six keyboards, two computers that I use live. That was another experience.

MM: Yeah.

LD: And then when I went out to DC in 2000 or... 1998 I went up there and I went up there to do choral work, and in 2002 got to sing at the Kennedy Center Honors for Elizabeth Taylor, with Burt Bacharach, Dionne Warwick. So that was a nice experience, too. You've got all that in that envelope of newspaper articles.

MM: Yeah

LD: [sighs] You got any questions? Maybe I can...

MM: Yeah. Yeah, I've got loads of questions.

LD: Oh, I'm just talking away.

MM: Yeah, yeah, no. That's what we want. Just conversations about anything and everything. Um, but what about your parents? Are they from around here? They have any musical background?

LD: My parents, uh, well, I know my Mom... I think they were both born in Springfield. My dad's family is from West Virginia. Family is basically Irish, Welsh and German background. Uh, on my Mom's side... I grew up, I had two Grandmas in the house. Great-grandmother and a Grand, Grandmother. Great-grandmother lived to be 99. Emma Shell-Ray. And she is from a family of- they're name was Shell, and they're from Kentucky. And she had an uncle that had just lived to be over a hundred. The age is, uh, was all different ages when you Google it up. You know, he's in *Ripley's Believe it or*

Not, the oldest man in the world. And several articles- like he knew Daniel Boone, he tried to get in the civil war when he was in his 70s, and Lee wouldn't let him because he was too old, but he ended up living a lot longer.

LD: Some of the statistics on John Shell are just amazing, you know? You have to read 'em to... he had a, just a young kid, a child, when he died. His wife was, his last wife was in her 20s. He... I can't remember statistics on him, but I got it all. I got all those articles.

MM: Yeah.

LD: Uh, they were really interesting. But a lot a longevity in my family. I hope it wears off on me. [laughs]

MM: Yeah. [laughs]

LD: But my dad's mom, she lived to be 99. I was lucky enough to have three grandmothers. Two grandmothers and a great-grandmother that I knew. My grandfathers had both died, I didn't know them. Dad's family, they were all coal miners from West Virginia. Dad was the machinist. My mom was the baker. She started working as a baker when she was twelve years old... uh, pardon me. In a pie shop in Springfield, called Miller's Pie Shop. Her name, the lady's name was Mrs. Miller. That's all I know. But all they did was pies.

MM: Mhm [affirmative] That's my kind of place. I love pies.

LD: Yeah and they were wonderful pies. [laughs] And it was one of those old bakeries. They with these great big pots that tilted to hit the... for boiling the starch and all. Mom would load up this panel truck, an old Chevy panel truck, around noon and go around to International Harvester and all the other...and the guys would of course come and buy those pies. Gobble them up. She sold a lot of pies. And that was an interesting place. My grandmother worked there. Both grandmas worked there, and my aunts worked there. Almost all the women in the family worked there. And there was one time when the kettle tipped over, and it tipped over on my grandma and my mom ran in and pulled them out. They both got burned real bad. I was really a little boy at the time. And I remember one morning I was in bed, and we heard- I heard this tramping on the porch and it was Mrs. Miller. And she came in, told my grandma, she says, "The pie shop burned down last night." And my mom got up and jumped up and down in the bed. [laughs]

MM: [laughs]

LD: Yeah.

MM: Ah, do you remember, was there any, like, music in the house growing up? And what kind of music?

LD: Uh, my dad played guitar or any string instrument. My sister was a trumpet player, and a real good one. But every boy she dated, she dated band members, and whatever

they played, usually they'd give her their old instrument, and she would learn how to play that.

MM: Nice.

LD: She could play any instrument that she attempted. A keyboard, uh, she played guitar real well, and she had a wonderful voice. So did my dad. Um, they would- mom and dad would take us kids to the old people's home, lodges, and we would sing. And they would play. Mom would emcee. She would tell them the only thing I could play is a Victrola.

MM: mhm [affirmative]

LD: Yeah, you know what a Victrola was?

MM: Yeah, only because the house museum I work at during the summers actually has one.

LD: Yeah? And Dad would go- he had a thing he did on the weekends. He'd go from bar to bar with his guitar. He wasn't hired, he just went to the beer joints in Springfield. He'd start on the east end of Springfield and work his way back home. And he would play for beers and, they would throw change in the hole, the acoustic hole in the guitar. And if he took any of us kids- me or my sister, or my little cousin- if he took any of us with him, he would make more money, because they liked to see the kids sing, too. Of course, we'd get Cokes and stuff. And we'd go home and have fun taking the money out of the guitar and helping dad count it. And that was how I first started singing in front of people. I had a natural thing with reading. I remember in second grade, you remember how they would have you pull out your music readers, remember? In school?

MM: Um, well, a lot of... once I hit, like, the fourth or fifth grade, they really started limiting music classes, when I was growing up. So, we only had... after that it was basically you could join band, or it would just be like another lesson.

LD: Oh, yeah? We started real easy music readers, like in second grade, and the rhythm bands. Bring in all the noisy things and keep time.

MM: Yeah, we just, we'd have those, and we'd have the little plastic recorders. Those are pretty much what they just gave everyone back inside of grade school.

LD: Yeah, at the grade school I went to, uh, Grayhill Elementary in Springfield, and this, this was early 40s. This was... this was war time.

MM: Yeah.

LD: Uh, they would come in with this record player, and 78s, and it was the wind-up record player that they would use for us kids, and they had this box full of the rhythm instruments, you know. The little drums, and claves, all kinds of stuff. And I had forgotten about that old wind up Victrola record player.

LD: Anyway, we one time- one time when the teacher- this was second grade- pulled out the music readers and told us pull them out, she started on this song, and I was singing, and the rest of the class was singing. Anyway, she says, "Okay Leonard, drop out." She says, "We know you know this song." [laughs]

MM: [laughs]

LD: And I- and I was just naturally reading the notes. You know? But, uh, and she realized I didn't know the song after that. And she used me to come up in front of the class to sing, you know, new songs after that. And so, that let me know that I was- I really wanted to sing, make it my career. Anyhow, I don't know how I got back there in the second grade, but ask me another question. [laughs]

MM: [laughs] Uh, do you remember the first album you ever bought?

LD: First what?

MM: Album

LD: Album?

MM: Mhm [affirmative]. Album. Recording.

LD: That I did, or...?

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: That was at the Forum Club. Uh, 1968, and it was "A Funny Thing Happened at the Forum".

MM: That was- that was the first one you recorded?

LD: Yes.

MM: Okay.

LD: And it was with all of us at the Forum.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Uh, wasn't just me.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And I did a few more albums on the road after that.

MM: Uh, who would you say were your early musical influences?

LD: Who what?

MM: Were your early musical, uh, influences? Like, influenced- like influenced your musical style, as well as what you really kind of gravitated towards, uh, listening wise?

LD: Oh, my- my influences were, uh, prior to rock and roll. Even though I liked rock and roll. Uh, Sinatra was not one of them even though I did Sinatra songs. I didn't... there was something that I didn't like, uh, that Sinatra did. And that was I didn't like, uh, the adding of words and notes in songs. I liked to do songs straight, you know?

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Uh...

MM: So, between the two of Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin, which one would you lean towards?

LD: Sinatra

MM: Sinatra? I know that's a big- that's a big hit or miss with people sometimes.

LD: Yeah. Uh-huh. I did a few of Dean Martin numbers, but I- I didn't care for all that slurring that he did. Uh, "Everybody Loves Somebody," and "That's Amore." I think those were the only two songs I did of, of Dean Martin's. Uh, but, I did most of the Crooners style. So, I liked the Crooners that I grew up with. And I liked the big band stuff. I- I just, uh, I just liked the old style stuff at first. And then, of course, I had to learn, you know, what came along.

MM: Mhm [affirmative] Evolve with the times?

LD: Yeah. And I wouldn't, you know, I wouldn't just do any song that came along. It had to... the public had to really- the whole public had to grasp a hold of the song before I would have it done in the club. It is something that is hit and miss, and the crowd is bored with it.

MM: Yeah.

LD: And some things, some songs, that you listen to, and you think, "Ah. That's such a great song." And it is, but then you learn it, and you do it on stage, and you look at the band, and we all know we're not going to do that song tomorrow night.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Same with the show. We worked on a show at the Forum... We had been doing, uh, our format at the Forum Club was we'd have two of three singers on the bill. Each one would do a show, and then after that, we all did a show together, a skit-type show. And our first one was, "The Roaring Twenties." We did a roaring twenties show, and it was really successful, because there was a lot of fast stuff and fun stuff in it. So, we decided that was so successful, let's do a "Gay Nineties" show. We had all these costumes made, and girls they were in velvet bustles, big ostrich feathers. That's the style back in the gay nineties, 1800s.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And we started working on the music, and it was all slow stuff, and waltzes and there were only a few numbers that were, you know-

MM: Fast paced.

LD: Fast. "Hello, My Honey..." you know, but the only saving grace that we had for that show was that we opened it on St. Patrick's Day, and the gay nineties has a lot of Irish songs in it. So, people thought we did that show just for St. Patrick's Day, and that made it successful and talked about. Though we didn't do it after that.

MM: Yeah. Yeah. It definitely seems like, uh, a reading of the energy of the room kind of situation. Where you could make... like, do it like a once a year kind of thing.

LD: Yeah. Yeah, that's right. But the next totally successful show we did was with the Davis Division, and that was a '50s show, "Fabulous Fifties." And I know we had learned close to a hundred numbers, and ended up with about two sets of really hot '50s numbers, and the rest we discarded or just left there, in case people requested it or insisted, you know? Uh, that was the next real successful show we did, and then we did- we did a Beatles show. Which was, uh, in three segments: early Beatles, uh, what was in between? The last one was "Abbey Road." Anyway ... oh! Sergeant Pepper's. Early Beatles, Sergeant Pepper's, and then Abbey Road. And we did the clothes changes with them. And that was good. That was successful, but not as successful as '50s. We reverted right back to the '50s. We had some fun things happen, uh, we had our disasters. You know?

MM: Yeah.

LD: All bands do. Uh, not disaster in a way that we were hurt, but we also had- we had this fog machine, uh, that our light man built. You know, a great big trash can that he would fill with water, and heat it all night until the show, until it was really hot water in there and he had this tray that fit inside the lid that had a motor on it, and the tray, of course, held dry ice. He had a couple of slabs in there broken up. And he would put chunk by chunk in, you know, whenever it was needed. And then when they turn that fan on top, and it just suck it out through that hose to the stage and had a lot of smoke. Anyway, we were getting ready to do the Abbey Road thing, the last part, and we were rushing to get on stage, and our drummer was late getting on stage, and the organ, like, it was already playing the intro on the organ, and Joe tripped on the hose of the fog machine. And all of the dry ice went down into the hot water.

MM: Oooh.

LD: All of it, two big slabs. They were broken up and whoooo! All of the smoke went out. You couldn't see anyone. [laughs]

MM: [laughs]

LD: It was- it was funny to see on stage. You couldn't see the musicians for a long time. There were a lot of laughs, though. [laughs]

MM: Hey, a couple more decades, you could have had just a really cool laser light show.

LD: Yeah.

MM: Like the- like the Rush concerts.

LD: Oh, yeah.

MM: Have you ever seen like the Rush concerts?

LD: We didn't, uh, we didn't have any lasers.

MM: Yeah. Yeah.

LD: We had some strobes

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: But, uh, yeah, we did an "American Tribute" for a long time up until, uh, when the Vietnam War got heavy. We had to stop it for about five to six years because people didn't agree with us, you know, doing all this American Tribute, and the flag dropping-

MM: Yeah.

LD: -with strobes on it like a battlefield

MM: Yeah. Mhm [affirmative]. So, you brought up the Beatles. Uh, what would you say the Beatles impact was here in Dayton on the music scene?

LD: Well, I think the Beatles had a impact everywhere. Uh, when I first recorded, early '60s, when they were coming in, and of course we weren't too cool on the hair at first.

MM: Yeah.

LD: You know?

MM: Yeah.

LD: Uh, my manager, he didn't care. He liked all that stuff. He was a chemic person, and at one point he wanted me to dye my hair purple and call me "The Blueberries," and I said, "No. No. [laughs] I'm not going to do that." But you know, it probably would have worked.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Because at that time, it would have been ahead of most people. Uh, I kind of kick myself. I could have let my hair grow back out.

MM: Yeah.

LD: You know?

MM: Yeah.

LD: But I was too straight.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: To do that. I like the old stuff, uh, and he was working me into the new stuff.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: So- but the Beatles, yeah. They had some nice stuff.

MM: What would you, uh, do you have a favorite song of theirs?

LD: Um-

MM: Or a particular album that you love?

LD: Um, well, I liked singing, "Yesterday", and "Michelle." Uh, "I Want to Hold Your Hand,"- I like that.

MM: Yeah. That's a good one.

LD: And those songs really sound good when they're orchestrated, you know? Sometimes, most of the time, I like other people doing Beatles.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]. Have you ever seen the movie, "Across the Universe"?

LD: No.

MM: It came out, I believe in like the late 2000s, but it's all Beatles music, but it's sung by, uh, other people. It's basically- it's- it just follows this one main character and his life pretty much. But every now and then, like it will jump right into a song, and a number. Like uh, is it Joe? Joe Cocker? Joe Crocker?

LD: Joe Cocker?

MM: Yeah, Joe Cocker. He does, uh, what is the song? He does a cover in that. But it's- aw, it's amazing.

LD: I like-

MM: If you like-

LD: -Joe Cocker.

MM: Oh, if you like-

LD: "Bathroom Window," yeah-

MM: Yeah. If you like Beatles covers, you should definitely check out that movie, or at least the soundtrack. The soundtrack is really good.

LD: And what's the name of the movie again?

MM: Uh, "Across the Universe."

LD: "Across the Universe."

MM: Yeah, and I'll write it down for you or I can send you-

LD: Okay.

MM: Or I can send you a link to your email.

LD: Yeah.

MM: Oh, it's really good.

LD: Yeah.

MM: Yeah, uh, me, I've always loved, "Blackbird", just because of the guitar picking in it. I love guitar picking all the time.

LD: I like that.

MM: So, I love that song.

LD: Yeah.

MM: And I've tried to learn to play it a few times, but it's just been a disaster every time. I'll get it one of these days, though.

LD: Uh, oh, shoot. What was the concert that we... up in New York? Uh, I'll think of it in a minute. Go ahead with your-

MM: [laughs] Oh, okay. Oh, and it was, "Come Together" was the song that he-

LD: Oh, yeah. I like that one.

MM: He covered that song in that movie. Um, so did you ever actually like go to see concerts, or were you just too busy with-

LD: Too busy, I didn't go see very many concerts at all.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]. Are there any in particular that stand out?

LD: Well, let's see. The Supremes concert over in, I think it was at Hara Arena. Uh, they introduced little Stevie Wonder that night. And he came out in t-shirts and jeans and played harmonica and sang, "Fingertips," his first hit. And that was the first time that we'd seen Stevie Wonder. So that concert was, uh, that was a good concert and the Temptations were on it. But it was also when the Supremes were starting to have their battles and getting ready to break up.

MM: Break up.

LD: Florence and the manager came out to the Forum after their show. Uh, but Diana Ross didn't, or Mary. We had a lot of stars come into the Forum while we were open. Basically, from Kinley on Wednesday nights. The manager, Bill Hunter, he would bring

them out and we promised that- and we shouldn't of- we promised him that we would not bother the stars. We wouldn't take their pictures and stuff like that.

MM: Yeah. Yeah, that's hard to promise.

LD: We shouldn't have. We shouldn't have promised that.

MM: [laughs] That's a hard thing to promise.

LD: Yeah. But George Hamilton came in one night from Kinley, and Joe- this was when Lyndon Johnson was in- was President. And uh, he was dating Linda Bird, the daughter.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And Joe, my partner, went back stage and Dottie Jean was getting ready to come on to sing. And Dottie was- we called her "The Saucy and Unpredictable Miss Dottie Jean", because she was.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And you never knew what she was going to say or do. He said, "Don't say anything to George Hamilton about the White House or Linda Bird."

LD: She said, "Okay." [laughs]

MM: [laughs]

LD: After about the third song, she says, "Hi, George! How's everything at the White House?" [laughs] He just laughed. But Joe was worried that he was going to get upset.

LD: I'm sorry, I- I digressed again.

MM: No, no. Perfectly fine. Perfectly fine.

LD: [laughs] We were- we were at Joe Cocker and I jumped to the Forum-

MM: Yeah.

LD: Again.

MM: It's all good.

LD: [laughs]

MM: Um, where would you say was, um, your favorite venue to play? Did you prefer like smaller gigs or in the kind of like the dinner club kind of performances, or-

LD: I- I liked the clubs that were about, uh, 150 people, that size. We had- we could, we seated about 200. That was- that was really nice.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: You know? I like that size, but, uh, little clubs are fun, too. Because you can get into conversation.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Stuff like that. I worked in a lot of small clubs. Uh, yeah, the first small club I had a band at in Dayton was Little Mickey's, and that was right across from the police station on Third Street.

MM: Okay.

LD: It's not there anymore.

MM: Yeah.

LD: That Little Mickey's moved down on Fifth Street, further down towards the Oregon.

MM: That's- that's where I go to catch most of the live music around here anymore.

LD: What's that?

MM: That's where I go to, uh, listen to a lot of the live music that they have-

LD: Yeah.

MM: -in the Dayton area. Just because-

LD: It's... the clubs down there are intimate.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]. Yeah, yeah. Smaller, and you can bounce around to the different bars and get-

LD: Yeah.

MM: -a wide variety of-

LD: Mhm [affirmative]

MM: -genres, which I love.

LD: Yeah.

MM: So-

LD: Another small club I worked at in the early days was the Peppermint Lounge, which was out on West Third, way out. It was when the Peppermint Twist was, uh-

MM: Mhm [affirmative] Uh, did you have any local airplay over the radio with any of your bands?

LD: Any what?

MM: Uh, airplay. Like, on the radio?

LD: Well, the songs that I had out got some airplay.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And, uh, I used to go down and sat with Gene Berry quite a bit, Gene 'By Golly' Barry. And, uh, we just got along, just had fun talking. And if I took my records down there, he would play my records. Uh, early in the 50s, he played a song on the air by Baker Knight called, "Anytime at All." And I did that song on our album because I really liked it, too. And so he played that on the air. But, yeah, I got some airplay and did record hops. You know what record hops are, don't you?

MM: No, I do not.

LD: Uh, the disc jockeys in town used to have record hops all over the country, and it'd be like on Friday night. Like Lesourdsville Lake. Anywhere that, you know, that they wanted to do promotion. They would advertise all week long, "We're going to be at Lesourdsville doing a record hop this week." And the kids would all come out to dance.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And then he would play all the records that were popular, plus new ones. The promoters would go to the disc jockeys, and give them new records that were, you know, from the distributors. You know, that's what I did with mine. You know? Uh, we would get my records out to the disc jockeys, and sometimes they would get thrown in the trash can. But a lot of times what they would do is they take all those records that were given to them and give them out at record hops. So, that's what happened to a lot of records.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: You know, some of them were hit worthy, but they didn't make it to a hit.

MM: Yeah.

LD: You know? That's how, uh, Dick Clark, you know? They were called records hops, the Dick Clark Show.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: But that was big scale, you know, television. The disc jockeys local did it without being on television. They had a big one in Indianapolis that I did. And that was at the speedway, and that was kind of fun. I didn't like the song that I did.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: But, I did it anyway, And the girls, they don't care what the song-

MM: Yeah.

LD: -sounds like. They just want to scream-

MM: Yeah.

LD: -and get autographs on their shoes, arms, and foreheads.

MM: Right. Just everywhere.

LD: Yeah [laughs]

MM: Everywhere.

LD: Crazy.

MM: Anything they could bring. Uh, so it sounds like you traveled around a lot, for playing. What would you say- where would you say is your favorite place to perform?

LD: I- I think that the favorite place that we performed was, uh, in D.C., right outside of D.C., in Springfield, Virginia. Right on the beltway.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And it was out of a big Hilton, and it was, uh, West Indies Trading Company was the name of the club. We played there quite often. And, uh, Youngstown. We played there a lot, and it was a real nice room, nice stage, and a wonderful following. Those two rooms were really nice. And then one of the concerts was the- there were some nice places like Kennedy Center Concert Hall, and the Opera House, George Washington University, places like that.

MM: What would you say was like the high point, or greatest success of your musical career?

LD: Well-

MM: Besides the Kennedy Honors, of course.

LD: What's that?

MM: Besides the Kennedy Honors, of course. That's-

LD: I think the-

MM: That's pretty up there.

LD: I think the Forum.

MM: The Forum?

LD: The Forum Club, yeah.

MM: Mhm [affirmative] Just the overall life span of it, or is there any particular year, or...?

LD: The first five years, especially, were just tops.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: They were both doors, front and back, full all the time, every night. The house was always full, the shows were fun. Uh, but then there was a point in the career of the Forum, around 1969 or '70, we had the race riots in Dayton. Had the Vietnam War. A whole lot of, uh, strikes at GM, places like that. All these things started playing with the night club industry. As far as the race riots, our clientele from Kettering and Oakwood stopped coming north. They- the ones we knew- would say, "We're not going to go past Third and Main." You know? Uh, the strikes, they always happened right before Christmas. Ruined everybody's Christmas that worked there, and the retailers. Right around the same time, the daylight savings time kicked in, uh, you're in this area, and no one came out in the daylight. [laughs] and it didn't get dark until 10:00 or 10:30.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: It-it-it really played hell on the nightclub industry. And that time, bands worked six nights a week. Musicians worked six nights a week, at least five hours. Now, it's one night a week-

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: -for three hours, something like that. And the funny thing is, the pay's the same. You know, back then it was what you get now, so you still don't make anything. But the 60s, uh, and the 50s were wonderful years for having fun, playing music. Especially the 60s. Now, when I first got on stage- I wanna say like, with the Debutants- I didn't play an instrument, but I picked up the claves and the maracas, and played them with the band. So, I didn't feel stupid standing there.

MM: Yeah.

LD: And immediately, a union man came up and said, "Are you a union person?" Of course, I said, "No", which I wasn't at the time. He says, "Well, you cannot play those instruments then. I'm gonna be back next week and you better be. You better have a card". And so, that's how I got in the union. They were really strict back then. And if I would've been older, and joined in the 40s or early 50s, or before that, I would had to have sat down and sight read a whole lot of hard music, which-

MM: Mhm [affirmative]. Just to play the maracas?

LD: Anything. Whatever you played, you had to sight read music.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And then they got to the point where people were improvising everything, and they couldn't enforce that anymore.

MM: Yeah, yeah. Uh, do you still go out for any live music at all, or catch any music?

LD: Yeah, I go out. Not very often.

MM: Yeah, do you have any particular places that you like to go around Dayton anymore?

LD: No, wherever- wherever the band is.

MM: Ah, what bands do you particularly-

LD: Well, uh, my friend Kathy, she's got like, four, five bands.

MM: Yeah, yeah she does.

LD: She just- she just, uh, whatever it calls for she puts it together.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And so I like to go hear her, whether it's solo, duet, trio, big band, whatever. She's- she's really talented.

MM: Yeah, she can do that.

LD: And she's had a lot of experience.

MM: She gave me a CD when she came in, so I would listen to that in my car, drive around, pretty good.

LD: She can play.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And, she also worked for me in my studio, when I had it. The Midi - the Midi Suite. She did, she and her husband, Gary. Uh, he's not her husband anymore, but they worked in the studio, and did my MIDI arrangements for my night club work, when I had a club called Stargate. And I had that name before the TV series came out, by the way. [laughs]

MM: [laughs] Have to write them a letter.

LD: Yeah, and that's the Stargate you can hear that on my YouTube. Stuff I did at the Stargate.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And she's really good at programming. You know, if she goes out and plays solo, you know, she's got her background on...

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And she plays, too.

MM: Um, so Dayton has a pretty prolific music history. Do you think there's anything specific about the region, the area, the city, people, that makes it so prone to good music?

LD: I never could figure that out. It... I used to tell people, and I said, "There was no sense in hiring people from out of town, or stars, because the area is just overloaded with

talented people who can't get a start, no one will give them a chance." And I said, "That's what we wanna do here. Mentor these people who've got talent".

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And on Sunday nights at the Forum Club, starting about 11:30 or 12 o'clock, I didn't have to do a thing.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: We had so much talent in the audience, we would call them up one at a time. Musicians and singers, and we would go past 2:30 'til about 4:00 in the morning, with all the jamming.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And we were the first club to open on Sunday nights in Dayton, 1965. Entertainment club.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: I'm talking about- I imagine there were bars, but my partner- my partners and I sat down before we opened the Forum, and they asked- we talked about what day we wanna close, or how many days do we wanna close. And I had already been working the clubs, and I said, "Well, Monday's dead."

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Doesn't matter where you go, Monday is dead. And it's hard to work with no one to sing to or play to. I said, "Why don't we open on Sunday?" And they both looked at me and said, "You can't sell liquor, that's why". I said, "We can sell 3.2 beer, until midnight." That was when they had 3.2.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: You know what that is?

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Low-power beer.

MM: Yeah.

LD: I said, "We can sell 3.2 beer. At midnight, it's Monday. So, we can start selling liquor at midnight." And we milled that around, they finally said, "Okay, we're gonna- we'll open Tuesday through Sunday." And our first Sunday open, we were worried-

MM: Yeah.

LD: Because there only a scattered few people in the club.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: But at 11:30, they just started streaming in, because the entertainers in town had a place to go, the waitresses and waiters had a place to go, Finally, the bartenders and the club owners, all these people who never had a place to go on Sunday night, all at once had a nightclub with entertainment to go to. And they knew how to tip and spend.

MM: Yeah, yeah.

LD: So, our Sundays became the second biggest night of the week. And it was only from 11:30 'til 2:30, three hours.

MM: That's all you need sometimes.

LD: Yeah.

MM: That's all you need. Uh, do you see any big differences between, uh, the music scene of Dayton now, and then back with the Forum?

LD: Well, yeah. There's... there are no show clubs any more.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Uh, the bands, can't do what we used to do. The shows they gave, just-

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Relax and play, one number after another. When back then, that was... there were so many clubs. Suttmiller's, The Tropics, Annarino's, uh, Turf, Green Derby, Brown Derby, uh, Cascades. There were so many places you could go. If a man had a client come in town, he'd say, "I'm gonna show you a good time tonight."

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And you could. You could, and you walk in a club, if you were a business owner or something, and we would remember these people, and you'd call their name out or something, from the stage, and they loved that sort of thing.

MM: Yeah.

LD: You know. Uh, an example, like Steve Zacks, who had a Holiday Health Spa, you know, call him out. And when you do a benefit, when we do a benefit, we would always have raffles throughout the evening, and people like him, he would donate a life membership to Holiday Health Spa.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: You know, we'd sell a lot of tickets, for muscular dystrophy-

MM: Yeah, yeah.

LD: ...or cerebral palsy or whatever. And, uh, they don't do that anymore, you know? NCR, at the Sugar Camp every year, and they would bring all these people from club to

club, and if you didn't have fun at one, you'd go right up the street and have fun with that one.

MM: Yeah.

LD: Yeah, there's a hell of a lot of difference. Plus, Dayton used to have a whole lot of piano bars.

MM: Mhm [affirmative], yeah.

LD: You're familiar with piano bars?

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And piano bars were fun, back then. Now, try to find one.

MM: I only know one, and it's at the, uh, Crowne Plaza.

LD: Yeah.

MM: It's not even really a piano bar, they just have a piano that a person comes and plays every once in a while.

LD: Yeah.

MM: And it's hit or miss on whether or not there's even gonna be people there.

LD: Uh-huh. Yeah, if you didn't want to see a show, you could go to a piano bar. And there were a lot of places where there were country bands, you know?

MM: So, would you say it's more- besides missing out on the, like all the different venues you can go to, it's kind of just missing that... that personal connectedness to the area as well?

LD: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, there's not much of that anymore.

MM: That's why- me personally- I've always kind of shied away from going to the big concerts, where you have just crowds and crowds of people. Like, that's a cool atmosphere-

LD: Uh-huh [affirmative]

MM: It's a great feeling, and like I can bet the performers love it. But me, I've always loved, uh, just the personal feel of a-

LD: Personal touch.

MM: -small venue, and you just get a more, closer connection with the people performing.

LD: Yeah.

MM: And they don't have to magnify the sound to go across an entire field. Just fill one room.

LD: Yeah, and- well, you mentioned that- the arenas, when they first started in the 60s, when record artists started going to the arenas, the bigger rooms, and stadiums. Then Suttmiller's lost their stars, and had to take semi-stars, people who couldn't fill a stadium, you know?

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Instead of getting Frank Sinatra, he would, uh, get someone... Bobby Rydell, you know what I mean?

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And every one of the clubs that had big entertainment had to go to something else. Uh, a lesser star, and that hurt.

MM: Yeah.

LD: That hurt all the clubs, the arenas. Because these stars could go into these arenas and sell the tickets, make a lot more than they could at Suttmiller's.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: You know, a nightclub. Yeah. That was my thing on...[laughs] But that was another way it started hurting clubs.

MM: Mhm [affirmative] Yeah. I've just never been a fan of arena concerts. They're just not... it's one thing to, like, with a smaller performance, the way they're kinda painting it is that it's a more personal performance that you're almost a part of. But when you're at one of these giant concert halls, or-

LD: Yeah.

MM: -arenas, you're just, you can see, like, you can see behind the curtains, it's all just a performance.

LD: Yeah, yeah.

MM: And you can't really... kind of the reason you're going there is to kinda lose yourself and enjoy the music. But with those, you can just kinda see all the strings getting pulled, and it's not as fun.

LD: Yeah.

MM: To me. But that's just- that's just me. Um, what would you say are some of the best bands to come out of Dayton?

LD: Out of Dayton?

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Oh, no, I can't remember the names.

MM: Oh, it's okay. It's all good.

LD: The bands, stable bands, like Suttmiller's band, I can't remember the band leader. The thing of it is, with bands, they just evolved, and musicians evolved, and it's always the band leader or the name of the group that stays stable. Johnny McCoy's Orchestra was pretty strong for a long time. The band at the Colony Club, I can't... Don Reynolds, I think was his name. That was stable for a long time, but there again, the musicians turned over. The Davis Division, my group, was really strong, for about four years, 'til the Dirk brothers left, and there again, our group, what we did for our show was, everybody was an individual. Uh, in the scrapbook you've got, you'll see advertisements, but you won't see... you might see the roaring '20s skit, a picture-

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: "Roaring '20s", "The 50's", but they're all skits, and the rest of the pictures are all the individual people that sang in our show for five hours, and not called a band.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And that was the same at the Cascades. That's how they advertised each individual. Well, now you got surrounding area people like the McGuire Sisters, they were from Middletown, or Miamisburg. Uh, but I don't know. I can't- can't remember. I was too busy doing my own thing.

MM: Yeah. That's alright. Um-

LD: Well, uh, Just In Time, and they're still in existence, Just In Time. Really good cover band. Rock and roll, country rock. They're still in existence, but not- only a couple of the original guys.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: There were five of them at one time. Like, well- I can't remember the rest. Bands.

MM: Uh that's alright. So, I know you and Kathy still get together and play cards, she talked about that last week. Uh, does anyone else you've played with, back in the day, do you guys still get together, hang out?

LD: Uh, well there aren't any. They- they're all gone.

MM: Whoever is left around.

LD: Yeah, most of the people that I played with, most of the people that were at the Forum Club, they've passed away.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Big Red, Dottie Jean, Bobby Gordon, uh, Sammy Dobson- wonderful organist. Lincoln Berry, they're both on some of my YouTube stuff. Um, most of 'em have passed away that I worked with.

MM: That's- that's one of the big reasons why we're doing this whole interview series, is just trying to get-

LD: Yeah.

MM: -everyone's story while we can.

LD: And uh, that black, nice stack of 8x10s- that of the entertainers, some of the entertainers that we worked with. We had, in that twelve years, around 200 musicians and singers that we worked with in the club.

MM: So, theoretically here, you're talking to someone that's not from the Dayton area, that's not really heard about Dayton at all. How would you describe Dayton's music scene, and Dayton's music history to somebody?

LD: Well, first off, it-it's, a lot of talent. A lot of talent here. Uh, but I don't know where they're going now.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: There just aren't that many bands, and some are... and the bands are small, they don't do shows. But I don't know how to explain it, uh, because I don't go out much anymore.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: I go out to see Kathy and her groups. That's about it.

MM: Yeah, there's some, uh, some good programs on NPR, WYSO, where they have local bands come in, it usually starts around, like, between like one and three, Monday through Friday.

LD: Yeah.

MM: They usually have pretty good-

LD: I put that on every once in a while, you know-

MM: Yeah.

LD: Not all the time, but I-

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: -that's the station I listen to.

MM: Yeah. Yeah, like, I haven't listened to the regular radio in years. Just because, like, pop music is okay for what it is, I understand why they make it- it sells records, it puts people in, in concerts- but just popular music is fallen to the wayside for me, and that's

what I love about NPR, and like WYSO. They just have... they have stuff you're not going to hear, all the time.

LD: Mhm [affirmative]

MM: Which-

LD: Yeah, they have a lot of the local songwriters.

MM: Mhm [affirmative], yeah. And then she'd have them like come on and perform live, too, which I think is-

LD: Mhm [affirmative]

MM: -really cool, just because you don't really get to hear a lot of live music sometimes, if you're not really going out to hear it. The one cool thing, um, is the Levitt pavilion that they built downtown.

LD: Oh yeah. I haven't been there yet.

MM: It's- well, it's amazing. It's a really cool scene. And just because, uh, they're free concerts-

LD: Yeah.

MM: -is one thing I love. Because they're really trying to... there's a really big push in the last five years to really kind of re-vamp Dayton's music culture. Like, uh, I really saw it start with the Canal Street Tavern-

LD: Yeah.

MM: Downtown, how it used to be a really big music venue, but now it's- it was closed for at least two years, before it turned into the bar it is now. But-

LD: It's open now?

MM: Yeah, but it's a, it's an arcade bar. It's, uh, it's just one of those microbreweries that opened up in town.

LD: Oh, I see.

MM: Yeah, that's- they don't have shows there anymore, but everyone that works there I know is in a band, [laughs]- that I've seen.

LD: [laughs]

MM: But that's, that's one thing I love about Dayton these days, is that they're really pushing more for... to bring back, just places for people to come out and play. And that's what I like seeing with the Levitt Pavilion, for sure.

LD: Yeah.

MM: It gives an opportunity.

LD: Yeah, uh, I read all about the venue down there.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Sounds wonderful.

MM: Mhm [affirmative] It's really cool because it also gives bands opportunities to come out and actually put on concerts for people.

LD: Yeah.

MM: And, I mean, bring people together. It's what music is supposed to do.

LD: Yeah, uh-huh [affirmative]. Friends of mine that played every year down there for the Ladies in Jazz at the Dave Hall, Before the Pavilion was built. Connie & Kenny Trio. They started at the Forum. Yeah, we ended up making it a career. Connie Lawson, uh, do we have time for another little story?

MM: Yeah, absolutely.

LD: Okay. At one point, uh, I had hired Sammy Dobson to play organ along with me and the piano player Hazen Brown. And, uh, we had Branda Galloway who sang- she was kind of a Diana Ross-type singer. And we had a girl named Vi August, who had a low register. Actually, she sang in the exact same register as me.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: People thought she was a drag queen for a while. But she wasn't.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And then I hired Connie Lawson, who was the cashier at Rikes. Hired her to be, to be our cashier at the Forum club. Singing cashier. Because she came in on Sunday nights and sang a couple songs, got up as one of our guests. And I said, "How would you like to be our singing cashier?" And she said, "on the weekends", and she says "yeah, I'll try it". And I put a Coke case behind the bar, by the cash register, she, a microphone that hung down, and a baby spotlight that we would turn on. And she'd sing from the- well, it got to the point, Joe says, "You know, we've got our own Supremes here, we got three girls who sing."

LD: So, we got these friends of ours who were hairdressers, [laughs], they sewed up costumes, and big wigs for these girls, And they were knockouts, and we called 'em, "The Satin Dolls", and we opened them on a Friday night, built a show- uh, a set, one set- to see how it would go, and they were so good. The audience, it was a crowded house. We always opened everything on the weekend where had our best customers, you know? And, anyway, uh, this ended kinda funny. Uh, Joe and I were at the bar- I didn't have to play right then because Sammy was playing- and the Satin Dolls finished, and Joe says, "Where's Connie? I need her behind the cash register." [laughs]

MM: [laughs]

LD: And we sat there and sat there, finally here comes Connie down the hallway, still in her gown and her wig, and she came up to the bar and sat down beside Joe, and she says, "I'll have a martini". And she looked at Joe and says, "I'm never ever going behind the cash register again".

MM: Dang.

LD: "I know what I'm going to do."

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And-

MM: Yeah.

LD: -that was it. She never did anything but sing after that.

MM: It's hard to go back once you get a taste of it.

LD: Huh?

MM: It's hard to go back once you get a taste of it.

LD: Yes, and it-it worked out wonderful. She and her boyfriend- who also worked at the club, later on- was an organist, and a drummer and Connie- called the Connie Kenny Trio and they went all over the world.

MM: Mhm [affirmative] Nice, that's awesome. Uh, so, one final question, it's kind of a, just a theoretical one. If you could go back to any concert performance, like maybe a night at one of your clubs, where- what would be your dream concert to go to?

LD: It would be at the Forum

MM: It would be at the Forum? Is there any specific night in particular?

LD: No.

MM: Just all of 'em?

LD: It was- it was just fun all the time. Especially on Saturday and Sundays.

MM: Yeah. A packed house. The one on, uh, the St. Patrick's Day one sounds like it'd be a pretty good time.

LD: It was always fun.

MM: Yeah.

LD: St. Patrick's, and we decorated for everything. Balloons were cheap.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: And crepe paper that just made everything-

MM: Yeah.

LD: -festive. And, uh, we enjoyed doing the fundraisers, we were good at that, and we also did, uh, a spring dance, and a Halloween party for the handicapped in Dayton. We'd bring in all the cerebral palsy kids, and the blind and deaf and the mentally retarded kids. They bus them to the Forum, and we did a show for them.

MM: Yeah.

LD: And they just, they just loved it. The only complainers in the group would be the deaf people.

MM: Yeah

LD: And, uh, they complained because we were too loud, and they couldn't tell the vibrations. [laughs] A lot of the times they could tell what we were doing by vibrations. Stuff like that.

MM: Yeah.

LD: That was always a highlight. And we'd go out. I would take the group out to, like, Goodwill, places like that. Any time we did something like the spring dance and the Halloween party or go out to these places, I always tell the singers who had never done them, I said, "You're probably gonna cry." I said, "It will get to you at one point." I said, "Just go ahead, get it over with, and then get on with your music". And it always happened, because it just- it was sad to see some of these kids, you know? Couldn't talk or anything. But they loved us, uh, because we did that for them. And when we finally sold The Forum and went on the road, and came back home to play, and we played in several clubs when we would come back in town. One of the stipulations was at one point we'd wanna bring in the handicapped to do a show for them for a fundraiser. But other than the regular nights- Saturday, Sunday, worked normal- was always fun and exciting. Those- the fundraisers and the shows for the handicapped were hot nights.

MM: It definitely does sound like it'd be a good time, for sure.

LD: We did, and we did a couple great shows like, uh, 50th anniversary for homecoming. Our 50th homecoming, uh, for UD. We went out there and did that, and we did our 50s show. And also, we did the 50th- uh, the centennial, the bicentennial, what was it? In 1976.

MM: That would be the bicentennial.

LD: Yeah. They had it out at, uh, Wright Field, Wight-Patterson. And the field where the, museum is and, they had the Boy Scout camp Jamboree. They wanted us to play for that and, uh, they had six flatbed trucks down there. It was a stage at the bottom of the acceleration runway, you know what I'm talking about?

MM: Yeah.

LD: And all the Boy Scouts were on the acceleration runway sitting down, uh, and then a place in- in Fairborn, I can't remember the name of it, but they gave us motorcycles to drive to the stage. So, we went up the side of the acceleration runway and rode back down through the center to the stage to do our show, and the scouts loved that. And that was fun.

MM: Mhm [affirmative]

LD: Things like that. I keep remembering different things. But those were nice, and they were here in Dayton. And they were both while... those two things were both while we had The Forum open.

MM: Yeah. That's- those are all the questions I have. Um, do you have anything else you want to discuss, talk about?

LD: We did, uh, talk about the Hopple Street Exit a while ago. We decided we were gonna put together, uh, a play-like thing with them, and we decided we would do a rock version of The Wizard of Oz, that lasted 45 minutes, I think. Half hour to 45 minutes, I can't remember. And we did a few of the songs from The Wizard of Oz, the original, and some of the songs were written by Harry Urschel- who just passed away- and Billy Albert, who was the drummer. Original songs. And it was a rock version of Wizard of Oz and it packed the house every time we did it. But we thought- Harry wanted to take it to Atlanta to do a showcase on it. What a mistake. [laughs]

MM: Yeah.

LD: You know what a showcase is for bands?

MM: Yeah.

LD: Some of the best bands, club bands, in the country go to these showcases. Then they play the latest stuff, and there we get up there. Oh... we just looked silly.

MM: It just didn't work out?

LD: Oh, no, the people just kind of looked at us, like, "What the...?" And probably the worst part about it was that they had a B3 organ- which I was really glad of, because that's what we used at The Forum- and I get up there to play, the organist did not tell us that he had detuned his B3. You can open the back of B3, and you've got all these wires, but you gotta do them all. There's a whole bank of them you have to change. and he had detuned it. Half a step- I can't remember what it was up or down- but I started to play that overture with the rest of the band. That was the most awful sound you have ever heard. Never could find out where I was going on it. So, I dropped out totally and didn't... went back and got my Tin Man outfit on and came out and [laughs] ... it was such a flop.

MM: Yeah. [laughs]

LD: We felt so bad. We got in the cars and drove off and one of the guys in the band threw all the costumes out the window on the way back. [laughs]

MM: But you still got paid, though, right? You still got paid, though, right? Did you get paid?

LD: Oh, no. Not for showcases.

MM: Not for that?

LD: You don't get paid for showcases.

MM: That's- that's heartbreaking.

LD: Oh, yeah, yeah. We did a showcase when we were in DC- or Springfield, Virginia- at the Hilton, and we had to drive all the way to Cincinnati on Sunday, or Saturday night, with our equipment. Of course, then drive back to play again on Monday in Springfield, and that was another flop. They all ... Big Red, I took Big Red, and they looked ather like, "Who the hell is she?" You know, because it's all these rock bands and Sophie Tucker. [laughs] Old style. Didn't work. We had two or three things like that. We had a manager put us in the wrong places a couple times. Put us down in Bowling Green, Kentucky, one time, at a place called Runway Five. It was right by the airport. Big place, and we opened on "Beer Blast" night for Bowling Green University, and Big Red doesn't fit Beer Blast, you know? And we had these Bose speakers, that sounded good in most of places we went, except that the dance floor with all these lights, and they had six of the same Bose around the dance floor, made a real nice sound, "boom, boom, boom". And we had two of them, "squeak, squeak". [laughs] And it just- he came in one night, the manager, and I went over on break and I said, "What are we doing here?" And he said, "Well, I had to fill in, fill a spot." I said, "I think we should rather have stayed at home because this is wrong. These college kids don't understand us at all. They'd rather listen to the dance music, DJ music." Things were bad with that guy, that booker.

MM: Gotta have the right manager. It's definitely a key.

LD: Huh?

MM: It's definitely a key to have a good manager.

LD: Oh, yeah, yeah. I fired him.

MM: Yeah. Well, understandably at that point.

LD: Right after that. Yeah. He bumped us in Tampa, Florida, one week before we were supposed to be opening down there. They canceled us and went to DJs, and we had our itinerary out in our mailing list. We always sent out a six-month itinerary and people from the Dayton area were going down there for vacation. And some of them went. Didn't know we were not going. That was one of the reasons why I fired him. And I got out of the union, too, they- they didn't help me. I said, "Why don't you, uh, you know,

take care of this, collect our money?” We have to find a place to work. And they never did it. So, that's a lot.

MM: Yeah.

LD: I got off on another tangent.

MM: It's all good, tangents are ... tangents are a good thing. Those fill up time. That's ... those are all the questions I have. Um, just wanna thank you for coming in, sitting down for all of this. It's been, it's been a pleasure meeting and talking to you and everything.

LD: Uh, now those pictures I brought in, all those pictures, there are no names on them, so at one point, I'd like to come in and go over all the stuff I've given you.

MM: Yeah, I can shoot you either, um ... [end of recording]