

**Allison Miller Interview for Jazz and Jazz Stories**  
**Interviewed by Bob Danziger and Dan Ouellette**  
**1/11/19**

- **Bob Danziger** - --got some pretty weather. Allison, just to give you a little bit of context here you are going to be coming out for the Next Generation Festival and be with them on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. The Thursday before that you will be giving a concert with Derrick at Cal State Monterey Bay. Last year what [2018 Artist-in-Residence Tia Fuller] did is an open rehearsal in the afternoon with the master class from the undergraduate program, and also students from the adult education program in the audience. Then there's a dinner and after that the concert. Tia Fuller and Ingrid Jensen were last years Artist-in-Residence and it's going to be you and Derrick this year.

So this is the second year of the [Artist-in-Residence of the Monterey Jazz Festival also giving a concert and master class at CSUMB] program which has been permanently funded now, so it's going to be happening every year.

Just briefly the undergraduate program at Cal State Monterey Bay is designed for people who are the first in the history of their family to go to college. So half the students will be in that kind of category. In the adult education program - this is an area that's obviously a major tourist area so we have people who come there from all over the world and many figure out how to move here after they retire. So we have a steady stream of retirees from all over the world who come here every description, from somebody who may be a fireman all of the way to people who have some wealth. So it's an interesting group and they love to take classes and they love to learn about stuff and I think you'll enjoy them. So those are basically who your students are going to be.

- **Allison Miller** - Okay. There is a program at the new school called the Institute for Retired Professionals and it kind of sounds similar to what you are mentioning.
- **Bob Danziger** - Yes, although we also have a lot of people who were secretaries or warehouse workers - just a really broad range of people.
- **Allison Miller** - Interesting.
- **Bob Danziger** - Not just professionals, yeah. They saved up, came here on a vacation and said one day I want to retire there and they figured out how to do it.
- **Allison Miller** - Right. Well, kudos to them, right?

**Dan Ouellette** - Basically Bob's going to be using some of the stuff that I gave him from our conversation a couple of months ago and he's got this really great idea in terms of artists as real people and that's what we wanted to kind of dig down into the questions we wanted to ask you now; it goes into a little different direction than what I did. ([Link to Dan's Article in Zealnyc, December 7, 2018](#))

- **Allison Miller** - Great.
- **Dan Ouellette** - Bob, do you want to add, yeah?

## Walter Salb

- **Bob Danziger** - Sure. I think that's right. So, for example, one of the things I'm really interested in is Walter Salb [Allison began studying drums with him at around 11 years old]. I watched a video on him and heard you talking about him and you mentioned that his father and grandfather were also musicians.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah.
- **Bob Danziger** - Yo-Yo Ma's father said that it takes three generations to make a great musician and I was just curious because you also describe [Walter Salb](#) as a grandfather and best friend. So I was sort of curious what his growing up was like musically? What kind of stuff did he listen to when he was a kid 12 years old or 10 years old and how that influenced the work that you guys did together?
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, you know that's interesting because I don't know if I ever talked to him about what he was listening to as a kid. I know he was very submersed in music because his father was a musician. I'm pretty sure his father was doing like more kind of cabaret engagements, and professional--they call them club dates in New York, you know those kind of engagements, things through the union.

I know his father played a lot on the radio, radio musicians worked a lot back then. You know and I am assuming with the way that Walter, Walter really loved classical music even though he didn't play it so I think he grew up listening to mostly classical. I know that's very broad to say "classical music" but I know that he was very influenced by [classical], and the early swing big band music. When I think of him as a musician, I really think of him as a lover of the early swing and listening to a lot of like Woody Herman and Gene Krupa.

DC was also a really segregated city back then. I mean it still is, I think. When I think of him and especially him at a younger age, I think he was mostly running around with the white musicians you know like the white swing musicians of that time in DC. I know there wasn't as much integration as there obviously was when I was a kid.

Really that's an interesting question. Because I'm surprised I never had more of an in-depth conversation with him about that. You know a lot of the times that we hung out we didn't talk about music. You know he was a very engaged in politics, and he wanted to talk about what was going on in the news. He read the New York Times from front to

back every day, and so a lot of times we were hanging out we would just be kind of sitting around his kitchen table smoking cigarettes and cigars and talking about politics.

And for me, it was fascinating because here we are really outside of DC in suburban Silver Spring, Maryland and talking about what's going on in the world - as a kid, and that really wasn't going on in my household. Not that my parents weren't totally showing up for me, but I wasn't having real substantive conversations about politics and social justice and broader topics at home. So to be able to go over to his house and sit around and talk about things that I honestly probably didn't even really know anything about was great because I was learning from him. Other times we wouldn't talk at all and we would just listen to records, and a lot of times it was Gene Krupa, Woody Herman, Benny Goodman, a lot of older material.

- **Bob Danziger** - Did you ever smoke any cigars or cigarettes with your parents?
- **Allison Miller** - No, unfortunately.
- **Bob Danziger** - They may have opened to some kind of conversation.
- **Allison Miller** - Right, right, if we had partaken in smoking anything together maybe that would have opened up some.
- **Bob Danziger** - Yeah, yeah.
- **Dan Ouellette** - It sounds like almost that Walter almost had kind of like a club because everyone kind of gravitated there, right? Because they could be naughty.
- **Allison Miller** - That's kind of true in a way. Anything kind of went over at Walter's house, but it was all centered around being very present and engaging in social activities actually like having a conversation and a dialogue and even getting into some debates about different topics. He never had a TV on - ever - and for me growing up and being a kid in the 80s and early 90s it was kind of like I feel like almost everybody's household in suburbia Maryland had a TV going all of the time. So really a breath of fresh air to go over to Walt's and you know you never hear a TV, you never see a TV. You are just there to hang out and you are either going to hang out around the kitchen table and talk about politics or/and basically kind of listen to him. We were just kind of listening to him honestly - but or we are going to have some beers and listen to some music. It really was very focused. It was a focused naughty hang.
- **Bob Danziger** - Nothing better as a kid, right? I mean what else could you possibly hope for?
- **Dan Ouellette** - If there's one take away from that whole time with Walter what would it be, why it was so important to you?

- **Allison Miller** - You know I think Walter was my first introduction to the importance of community and kind of chosen family. I think he was my first introduction to that, and I kind of followed that model, social model, the rest of my life really because Walter really was the center of a community and when he--really as much as he drove everybody crazy, because he really did you know, he was ornery and you know surly, and he could be just downright offensive but he really brought together community and there was no discrimination against age or sex or color. He really did just bring everybody together and he insulted - I mean everybody had equality from him as far as how much he insulted them and degraded them but somehow, we all kept coming back for more so we must have at least accepted our role in his community.
- **Dan Ouellette** - Was he married?
- **Allison Miller** - He was married, when I started studying with him, I think I was 11 or 12 and at that time his wife was still alive. He was married to this Jerry Ann for years. They have two kids and he was very, very committed to her. She had Alzheimer's for years, and he stayed with her through that, and then she passed. I think she died when I hardly got to know her, I think I was maybe 14 when she died.
- **Bob Danziger** - When he died, he willed you his drums and I wonder what was going through your mind when you found out he had given you his drums.
- **Allison Miller** - You know, he kind of told me he was going to but, you know, obviously I was really honored. He's given me more than the drums. He gave me my piano. I have a beautiful baby grand piano that was his that I write all of my music on. I have his drum set which is what I still practice on, it's in my drum studio now.

Even more special than all of that, I don't know really how it could be more special, but he also gave me his complete library of music from his big band. So I have his whole 18-piece big band - all of the music, all of the books, and every single chart was handwritten and arranged by two arrangers that were in the band. So that is really huge and in fact you know one of these days I'm going to have to suck it up and hire a copyist to actually take all of the music and get it into the computer before it gets damaged because it's all handwritten. I mean it's incredible. There's about 180 songs, 180 charts.

- **Bob Danziger** - That's a huge issue for a lot of people now, how we archive some of those old charts is a big issue.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, yeah.
- **Bob Danziger** - There's a woman out here who has all of Glenn Miller's charts and she's trying to figure out how to deal with that and it's a similar kind of issue. It's a potential role for Cal State Monterey Bay to be an archive for those kind of things although they are still trying to get their feet under them so we'll see what they do.

# Allison Family/Growing Up/College?

- **Bob Danziger** - Sort of switching over to your family for a moment. Your mom was a choir director and that sort of stuff for a long time and your dad sang in the choir as well. I guess my first question is what brought your family to Texarkana [where Allison was born]?
- **Allison Miller** - Well you know my family's--wow, that's a good one. We [my family] have generation after generation living in the South. So mostly when my family and my distant relatives moved from Europe, came over from Europe, they settled mostly in Tennessee, and worked kind of Tennessee and then Oklahoma shortly thereafter, and so I still have a lot of family in Oklahoma and Tennessee.

And you know I think Texarkana wow--. My parents met at OSU, Oklahoma State University, and my dad was then moved to Texas to get his doctorate in computer science. He didn't finish his PhD I think primarily because he all of a sudden had three children and you know had to make money. And at the time he was also really into photography. He's always been--my dad has always been a real kind of renaissance man not just doing one thing. So he's a recording engineer, he's a photographer, he paints, he does all kinds of things and at that time in Texarkana, he decided to open a photography store. So we moved there so he could open a professional development and photography store. So that's what we were doing there. I don't know why he picked Texarkana--. I mean of all places.

- **Bob Danziger** - Yeah, not a tourist destination.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, right.
- **Bob Danziger** - So then what brought them to Maryland? Why did he go to Maryland after that?
- **Allison Miller** - Well, then yeah, I mean from there it was kind of like chasing the job that would pay for these three children. So from there, he got a job in Virginia. We lived in a town called Chesterfield, Virginia which is outside of Richmond for about a year and a half. Then from there he got a job working for a company in Prince Georges County, Maryland just kind of outside of DC. And then which for me was--I mean it was great. Once I finally discovered jazz and started playing jazz, I loved living near DC because DC had such a fruitful jazz community at that time.
- **Bob Danziger** - Just briefly what part of Europe did your family come from?
- **Allison Miller** - Well, we are like European mutts. I know this now because I did my DNA test recently but we are Miller - used to be Mueller - so we are part like a lot from

Germany. We have some relatives from Luxembourg, and then my mom's side is Scotch Irish.

- **Bob Danziger** - There's an artist here in Monterey whose great, great, great, great, great grandfather was George Washington's drummer.
- **Allison Miller** - Whoa.
- **Bob Danziger** - He was the chief drummer for the Continental Army and all of the DNA stuff, genealogy stuff I've heard of descending from kings or whatever, blah, blah, blah. Being George Washington's drummer - that's the coolest ancestor I've heard of. He was at Bunker Hill and all of that stuff. Pretty cool.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, I mean, wow.
- **Bob Danziger** - One of my favorite questions I ask everybody whether they're a musician or not is: What lullabies your parents or grandparents might have sung to you, and what lullabies you sing to your kids?
- **Allison Miller** - I mean my answer is just kind of funny because not that my parents didn't love me but I'm the youngest of three and my mom popped them out very quickly. So I think by the time I came around I'm not sure how much lullaby singing she was doing to me at night. I think she was just tired and you know she was like, "who is my third?" I mean I think I have a lot of alone time because I really don't remember her really singing to me. What I do remember is, you know I'm a real '80s kid, and my dad was really a computer scientist so he was really involved with computers since the late '60s and as a kid, I grew up with one of those really old mainframe computers that took up a whole room. We had one in our basement - and a recording studio which is incredible.

But then I also had one of those--back when RadioShack was really popular in the 80s, they had their own computer brand which was Tandy and so I had one of those Tandy computers in my room from the time I was like maybe eight, and my dad taught me how to basically write all of the commands in the LDOS system, you know? And so I would kind of hang out in my room and experiment with my computer before bed and I just remember spending a lot of time alone. And I think my sisters, I have two older sisters, and I think they just made it a sport to either ignore me or make fun of me.

- **Bob Danziger** - That's normal.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, that's pretty normal, right?
- **Bob Danziger** - Yeah, that was the TRS-80 computer I think, and it had way you could do sound substitution where you could use an audio trigger if I remember correctly you could use an audio trigger to substitute one sound for another.

- **Allison Miller** - Yeah.
- **Bob Danziger** - I think.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, yeah.
- **Bob Danziger** - So your dad was an audio engineer. Did you have like 2-inch tape machines in the house and all of that kind of stuff or was it digital or what kind of stuff did he play with?
- **Allison Miller** - When he really started doing it you know he started recording mainly jazz artists from in DC, which is how I met so many greats. He was recording mostly to wow, what was he doing when he first started--? Way back in day he did 2-inch tape but then in our basement he was doing remember ADAT?
- **Bob Danziger** - Yeah, I do remember ADAT, sure.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, he was doing ADAT and then yeah--.
- **Bob Danziger** - That's a name from the past.
- **Allison Miller** - I know. And then he got and then of course once--. I think he did some stuff to tape but not a lot, and then of course when digital recording started he jumped right on board really quickly.
- **Bob Danziger** - You know because Herbie Hancock was--he studied electrical engineering so that really set him up well to do the synthesizer stuff when that came along.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, of course, yeah.
- **Bob Danziger** - By the way, I found Etta Jones, Houston Person and Keter Betts on YouTube including one that I think your dad recorded.
- **Allison Miller** - I wouldn't be surprised. Yeah.

## Biomimicry

- **Dan Ouellette** - Hey, Bob, let's, let's turn the conversation over to - because I found really fascinating which I didn't know it all but about the jellyfish and that kind of stuff.

- **Bob Danziger** - Yeah, cool. So I noticed in one of your interviews I think it was maybe the one with Christian McBride you were wearing a jellyfish T-shirt, and also that you named one of the albums you produced “Biomimicry.” That was a big thing at Stanford back around 2007, 2008. I was teaching there at the time and in my other world we were doing a lot of biomimicry stuff so that caught my attention. I was curious why you chose that name and also, I wanted to ask you about the children’s choirs on that album.
- **Allison Miller** - That record came about through the nonprofit side of the Biomimicry Institute which was started by Janine Benyus, the scientist, and she’s a genius. She has written many books but the book that kind of hooked me and made me want to be involved with them in the project was just her first book on biomimicry. I really fell in love with the concept. The songwriter is the one that approached me to coproduce that record with her and she wrote the music. I kind of spearheaded the instrumental side of things so I helped her to arrange the music, I hired the musicians. Basically arranging and logistics. We also, for that record, we really wanted it to be as close to nature as possible which is also something that excited me because I really love nature, and I miss it because I live here in New York. I think that’s why I have developed and maintained such a presence on the West Coast for the last 25 years. I think there’s definitely half of me that is wishing I was living on the West Coast somewhere.

## **Explored the Peninsula, Ansel Adams connection**

- **Bob Danziger** - Have you had a chance to explore the Monterey Peninsula yet?
- **Allison Miller** - You know, I have. I have. I used to go, I used to have a girlfriend whose family lived in Carmel so we would spend a lot of time in Carmel and Monterey and I love it. I love it out there. It’s beautiful.
- **Dan Ouellette** - Big Sur, too?
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, her grandfather is Ansel Adams so we used to go to his house.
- **Bob Danziger** - A couple of blocks away from me and I have a picture of him in a giant tree across the street.
- **Allison Miller** - I never I didn’t get to meet him because you know he died in 1984, but you know I got to meet his wife and I knew their family really well.
- **Dan Ouellette** - Yeah, cool.

- **Allison Miller** - I really want to take my kids to the Monterey Aquarium because they have definitely never witnessed anything like that.
- **Dan Ouellette** - Wow, wow.
- **Bob Danziger** - You know Stanford has a campus next door to the aquarium. So maybe one of these years when you do your Stanford Jazz camp you could have it here. The aquarium is actually built on Stanford land. Yeah. That will be wonderful, they will love it. They've got great stuff for kids at the aquarium, that's for sure.

## Derrick Hodge Quote on Lullabies, Very early life

- **Bob Danziger** - I had a good talk with Derrick Hodge a couple of weeks ago and I asked him that lullaby question and I thought I'd read you his answer and maybe you could comment on it.
- **Allison Miller** - Sure.
- **Bob Danziger** - Derrick said:

“First of all, my biggest musical influence was my Mother. From what I hear, [as an infant] I just always gravitated to the music. She said I was beating the rhythm to music that was playing in the car. . . Day care called her out of her job to come pick me up because I was breaking all the bottles on the crib playing. The older kids, the 3 year olds were singing lullabies. I was in the one year old class beating the rhythm and breaking the bottles.

During that phase she would always sing to me at night – it was often gospel influenced. She'd sing “Yes, Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so,” (sung by Derrick) - songs that are rooted in spirituals, traditional types of songs. She would always sing that type of music to me. You know, it kind of stuck with me to this day.

We didn't have a lot coming up and the biggest thing she would do [is] turn on the radio every night and I would go to sleep listening to music, wake up and the radio would still be playing. And she would always tell me, for the meanwhile to listen. Listen to every part if it, just listen to whatever you can, and every night it would revolve between 5 or 6 stations for that week. From Gospel Highway 11 (1100 am) to Power 99 (fm -Philadelphia's Hip-Hop and R&B station). And that ended up being my biggest regimen for my career: listening and wanting to listen.

Later, when I got in to college you'd have to write on your entry form your influences. Aside from someone who played my specific instrument, it kind of blew them [away] because I would write down singers. Like Nancy Wilson. I think it was indirectly the influence of my Mother hearing the importance of melody and the way she would sing to me all the time. And at that same time it kind of coincided with her making sure I was always listening to music. That informed my decision making as an artist."

That was his response to that question. Do you see parallels in your own growing up? I know you talk to about thinking you know you're a drummer in the womb.

- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, I mean you know I come from a very musical family and especially the maternal side of my family. I'd say almost all of the women on my mom's side of the family are musicians. They are either musicians in church or they are professional musicians outside of church but mostly sacred music.

And so you know music was just always a part of my upbringing and from the very beginning. **My mom would always tell me that even when she was still pregnant with me that I would beat, I would kick to the beat of the music when she was directing the choir at church.** And then when I came out, she said the same thing. Like I just was always moving, fidgety. Any time music was on, which is basically all of the time at my house, I was beating - beating along with on top of the table and playing as much as possible. And she said that once I started talking I just always said "I want to play drums, I want to play drums, I want to play drums."

And you know one thing that she did for me that I am really eternally grateful for and I know is a huge reason of why I am where I am and why I'm the kind of musician I've become is because she actually prohibited from me from learning [drums] until I could play piano. So she taught me piano at a really young age.

She had me singing in church from the time I was probably three. We would - me and my sisters would - we would sing trios and duets from the time I was very small and we just had music going all of the time. I mean I was in church probably four days a week growing up and Sunday was, of course, church day but then there was Wednesday night choir practice and I was there. And when I got older, I became the babysitter for church choir practice and then I was there for youth group and we were always, we were always doing music and doing productions in that group. Then usually I was there Friday night too doing some kind of outreach in the community. So I think church had a lot of influence.

I mean I wasn't raised on gospel. I was raised in the Episcopalian church, but it had a lot of influence for me and then at home we listened to mostly jazz and classical and some kind of you know, some limited 70s funk or 70s soul and funk like Earth, Wind and Fire and some James Brown and stuff like that. I mean was pretty much like classical jazz and Earth, Wind and Fire and James Brown.

- **Bob Danziger** - I love it. That's a great combo. Earth, Wind, and Fire used to have their studio out in Carmel Valley.
- **Allison Miller** - Wow, I didn't know that, that's great. Yeah, I mean you know **for me music was just a part of our household and so it was just expected to play music and I never thought twice about it. We were always singing. We were always making up beats. On the kitchen table for me and my three sisters, all three of us we all played multiple instruments and sang. It just it was kind of what we did. Like I never even second-guessed it. It just seems to be like oh, this is what you do, you play music. And I don't think it's as much of like a conversation that we had. I don't think they really needed to have it with me because once I discovered music and once, I was drumming especially, I just was completely, completely emerged into it.**
- **Bob Danziger** - You were born. You were born to do this, there's no question about it. You are an amazing drummer and your creativity is astounding and I love it to death.
- **Allison Miller** - Well, thanks.

## What Lullabies do you sing?

- **Bob Danziger** - I'm glad you made the decision you did and it's great. Can I just ask you what lullabies you sing your kids?
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah. You know I sing, I sing, I don't know if they're lullabies but I sing like Puff the Magic Dragon. We do a lot of making up songs. My wife is a singer and she's a great singer, and my daughter loves to sing so we kind of just make up songs. Sometimes she'll give me a topic and we just do it. And she likes to sit at the piano and just kind of improvise. So we do a lot of that. I'll sing sometimes - I like to sing Prince songs because I like some of his slow [songs]. I don't really know like traditional lullabies but I sing some of my favorite slow songs and one of those is Prince. I [also] like to sing *The Nearness of You* to her. Those are kind of my go-to's. It changes, you know. My son is one now and so now I'm kind of in the mode of singing to him but he's a very different kid. You know he's like we read two books and I maybe do a little humming of a song and he's like okay, good night.
- **Bob Danziger** - So different.
- **Allison Miller** - It is different, they're all different.
- **Bob Danziger** - I love that. That's a beautiful story. That's a really beautiful story.

# Prince

- I have a Prince story if you'd like to hear it, I'm sure it's one you've never heard before.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, tell me.
- **Bob Danziger** - So Prince was one of my investors in my alternative energy company early on and when he fired all of his management and changed his name to the symbol-- We had the problem how do you write a check to a symbol? So and he also changed management periodically so whenever he did you had to call him up and get his personal approval to send a check you know other than where he had approved to send it before. So on this occasion, I call him, the phone rings and I'm trying to figure out what to say because I didn't know what name to call him he would because he was a symbol now. His real name is Prince R. Nelson, Junior. So I call and he answers the phone and I said "Mr. Nelson?" and he said "yes." And I explained the problem, and he said just keep sending them to Prince Nelson Junior. So while he was the artist formerly known as Prince, he was the guy getting the check still known as Prince Nelson Junior.
- **Allison Miller** - That's great. I love that you could just call him directly.
- **Bob Danziger** - Yeah, that was a business thing. He was quite an astounding talent in so many different ways. Love that guy.

## Value of Improvisation Education

- **Bob Danziger** - You know I hope when you're out here sometime we have a chance to have a real conversation. I don't want to take up all of your time but I'm just fascinated with your drumming and your arranging and your whole approach. I was Cecil Taylor's first electric bass player and I didn't go to undergraduate college. Most of my real mentoring, my real learning about life and the things that have been most important to me was when I was in the Cecil Taylor Orchestra at Antioch where with William Parker and Andrew Cyrille and they were just a huge influence and benefit to me. I'm an example of where learning jazz and learning improvising is an extraordinary benefit to your life even if you don't end up doing it professionally. I'm sort of an example of that.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah.
- **Bob Danziger** - Cal State Monterey Bay gave me their first honorary doctorate in music for music, invention, and pioneering sustainable energy and in my speeches, I was able to talk about the value of your going to do something that's never been done before - In

my case with some alternative energy stuff, being able to improvise is the crucial skill and not being scared of it. Going to work every day and improvising every day. You know that was the training that allowed me to do something that had never been done before.

- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, I think like being able to engage in improvisation in various aspects of your life is really important and it opens up a side of, a part of your brain that I think a lot of people don't get a chance to explore. Yeah, I would totally see that.
- **Bob Danziger** - I wish we had some form of improvisation for every college kid you know for two years where they have to do it every day for a while and it would just, I think actually improve their lives tremendously.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah. I mean I think it would improve people's lives down to just engaging in ordering a coffee in a café. You know I mean these days I feel more and more that people are disengaged when they are communicating with other human beings.
- **Bob Danziger** - That is so true, so true. Just listening for the echoes somewhere.

## Moving to New York

- **Bob Danziger** - I read that you moved to New York when you were 21 and engaged ever since in music. I moved to New York when I was 20, I turned 21 in Washington Square Park listening to Charlie Mingus.
- **Allison Miller** - Nice.
- **Bob Danziger** - Yeah, he was playing under the arch at midnight. What was it like being 21 in New York?
- **Allison Miller** - Fabulous. I mean I feel like I kind of moved into the tail end of an era, the mid-nineties. But it was pre-cell phone so I was fortunate enough to experience New York without cell phones. So I feel like you know people had to hang out and engage in conversation to play and to work. And it was such a great, fruitful community of music happening.

When I first moved to New York they were all like the Vanguards and all of that, but there were all of these tiny clubs in the East Village in the lower east side that were having jazz every night. And so one of the first nights I was in New York I went to this place called La Linea and there was a gig going on. The drummer basically was nodding out because he had just shot up and he was nodding out and he couldn't really play. And then someone [asked] was like you can play? Who can play? And I was like, "I will." So I just like jumped right in.

Then, I think the second time I went to that club I got to hear Denis Charles for the first time who I hadn't heard of. Here I walk in and he's playing a drum solo. He's missing a thumb and he is swinging harder than anything I've ever heard. And I was like who is this man? He was playing a drum solo based off of like - not pomp and circumstance, what's the wedding song? [Wagner's Bridal Chorus?] He was playing this incredibly swinging but free drum solo based off that melody and it just blew me away. And then, of course, I'm like Denis Charles, who's that? And then I go and look up Denis Charles and it's like he's played with all my favorite downtown musicians you know, but I didn't know who he was.

And you know New York just became this treasure chest, a treasure chest of jazz gold for me. I loved it.

I also loved how you at that time you could really live here cheaply and I didn't have to get a day job. I worked really hard, I practiced and you know **I played in the subways**, I did whatever needed to do to just be able to play music and it was great. I mean I just ate it up.

I also liked how kind of nothing, nothing is odd in New York. Even today I was on the subway today, I think I was at West Fourth and I was waiting for the train to come back to Brooklyn, and there was this guy well I guess, I mean born a man but he was dressed up like in this kind of really kind of grandma, kind of an old fashion grandma dress, and he had a wig on and some lipstick. He had this whole set up and he was singing and sounded like Billie Holiday. He was singing and he had an acoustic guitar but they also had like a whole elaborate set-up.

He had a little train track set up with elephants going around - it was just out. Even for me who's been here for so many years - I hadn't really seen that version of this [New York craziness] before. I was just like New York is great, and no one's batting an eye no one cares. You know what I mean? And it's like anything goes, and I loved that about New York once I landed.

**And you know this will give you some idea about how in some ways green I was. I graduated from college and grew up in Maryland and DC my parents never--we never went to New York once, and so I had never been here and I was really fortunate enough to like pretty early on get calls. I got called, Rachel Z called me early on and I ended up coming to New York to work with her.**

But my first visit ever to New York was to come and hear her this great guitarist originally from DC Paul Bollenback play and he was playing at Blues Alley, and he's a friend of mine, and he was kind of a mentor of mine. He started hiring me when I was really young and so I came up to New York but I was so scared to drive into the city, so I parked, I parked my car in New Jersey and of all ways the first come to New York I took a ferry over from New Jersey and we got off at like 34<sup>th</sup> St. like where Javits Center is. And I was all of the sudden on the island of Manhattan and it was like kind of like a real

story, like a storybook kind of journey of New York for the first time because I landed, we landed and we walked onto the island and it was just super sketchy back then, sketchy part of New York and I just immediately fell in love with it. I was like there's a jazz musician, there's like a trans person, over here, what's over here. It was just like so much to offer. I loved it.

- **Bob Danziger** - I love it, too. My own little version of the story too. It was the first thing I was driving one of those u-drive cars from LA to New York and all my stuff in the back the springs were gone and I pull into this street and I don't know what's going on, and the first thing I see, like right across the street and there is a guy pulling a chair on a leash and he was periodically turning around and screaming at the chair for not walking with him.
- **Allison Miller** - A guy pulling a leash pulling a chair on a leash, that's amazing.
- **Bob Danziger** - And screaming at it "how come you're not walking?"
- **Allison Miller** - That's amazing.

## Cecil, etc

- **Bob Danziger** - Yeah, that was. The outcome of the other thing I have some great memories of that. We moved in with a French horn player and drummer on Chambers Street and Broadway, and Cecil Taylor lived across the street and Alice Coltrane lived on Green Street I think and Pharoah Sanders had a place in all of these different people and we go up on the roof at night and play and other people would go up on their roofs or open up their windows and play. And we didn't know but we always imagined it was Alice Coltrane or somebody we always wanted to play with. We always assumed it was them and summer nights in New York doing that was wonderful. And then playing with William Parker and other people in Jemeel Moondoc's and other bands around at the time. It was only about six months but it was a wonderful time.
- **Allison Miller** - I went through a real William Parker phase where he was like all I listened to. It was about maybe 15 years ago I just really went in with William Parker.
- **Bob Danziger** - He was wonderful to me. I mean he was like this wonderful, positive, loving presence when I was around. I was just I had only been playing 10 months when Cecil picked me up to play with the band, and probably because I broke my back and I learned how to play lying down so I played really weird, and I could make my bass talk by playing with two slides. So I could make my bass talk, and I guess that's what they liked because I didn't know anything else and William was just--he treated me like I actually knew what I was doing --and really helped me a lot. I only knew him briefly but I have a tremendous gratitude to him. And actually one story just affirming your melodic

approach to drums for people like me who love it but maybe aren't that good as part of this Cecil Taylor big band thing, he broke us off into a trio with me, Andrew Cyrille and this guy Raphe Malik, a trumpet player. Andrew Cyrille was playing tympani and orchestra bells and we're playing and I'm thinking Bob, you've never played so good, you sound great. This is amazing. Then a string broke or something and I stopped playing and it still sounded so good because Andrew was doubling my lines on the tympani.

- **Allison Miller** - Wow. That's incredible.
- **Bob Danziger** - Yeah, it was. I mean that foot, the key to change the tuning on the tympani with your feet in real time like that was . . . but anyway they were just supportive of me as a musician, as a young musician and teaching me about rhythm and teaching me about things. By doing that you know he elevated my game so much. To experience that is something that here I am 45, 50 years later and still makes me feel good all of these years later. I just really want to affirm your approach to drums and composing, and I hear a lot of the Cecil Taylor in your piano players actually.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, I love Cecil. I love Cecil Taylor. Love, still love. I remember seeing him back in the day when I first moved to New York and I was playing, hanging at the 55 Bar all of the time and he was always there.
- **Bob Danziger** - He only said two things to us. We rehearsed 10 hours a night seven days a week and he would you know he'd come in, he'd listen or he'd play and do whatever he did and he come over to you and he'd say, "That sounds, man." Or, "That doesn't sound, man," and those are the only two things he said. It was like if you got a, "That sounds, man" you felt really good for a while.
- **Allison Miller** - I guess we're losing those people you know? I really feel I was just talking about this with somebody just the other day because I teach at the new school and I feel like a lot of these young drummers that are coming in that I'm teaching they-- I feel for them because they aren't getting a chance to hear the real masters because there aren't that many alive anymore. And it's a special thing, like I was saying, when I first moved to New York I would just go like hear Billy Higgins for seven nights in a row at the Vanguard and you know they would just let me in because I was a young musician. And then I would like scoot over and hear Andrew Cyrille, or than I would hear Elvin Jones, Tony Williams. **I lived on upper West side and Max and Elvin and Paul Mosh all lived up there I would pass them on the street. And it was like so life-altering to hear those drummers on a regular basis. I feel like a lot of these young players aren't getting a chance to hear that, and there's something in hearing that live - like hearing Elvin hit his ride symbol once was life-changing. And I think a lot of these young students they don't realize that there should so much depth and space in the drumming of those masters and not just drumming - in all of those musicians. And I feel like the music is really shifting and changing because that mentorship and the lineage of the music is shifting because the creators of it are all dying.**
- **Bob Danziger** - And even just the way they talked and walked and moved was different.

- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, exactly. And it was a real community.
- **Bob Danziger** - You are a worthy successor though. You truly are, Alisson. You bring, you bring your own special thing to this and you know--.
- **Allison Miller** - Thank you.

## Back to Derrick/Quincy Producing God line

- **Bob Danziger** - And all of that is reflected in you and I'm sure you're going to pass it on with your own flavor to the next generation because you do actually have something special. So does Derrick by the way - remarkable - you're going to love the melody of his voice also. He's really special, the way his mom taught him to listen - he listens - unlike anyone I've ever been around.
- **Allison Miller** - That's why he's a great producer.
- **Bob Danziger** - Did he ever tell you the story about co-producing an album with Quincy Jones? And after they were working, he was trying real hard, and I'm paraphrasing, but he said he said Quincy said to him "look your only job is to be honest, do the best you can and be honest. He said don't worry about perfection, leave some room for God."
- **Allison Miller** - Wow.
- **Bob Danziger** - Yeah, when he said that I said hang on a second, I've got to think about that before we go on.
- **Allison Miller** - Right, right.
- **Bob Danziger** - That was - what a great line.
- **Allison Miller** - That is a great line. First line was great to your only job is, to be honest. I mean that is deep and that can be taken on so many levels you know, and applied in so many different ways.
- **Bob Danziger** - Yeah, exactly.
- **Allison Miller** - "Your only job is to be honest." I mean, wow - if we approached every aspect of our life with that in mind it would be a beautiful place - or maybe not a beautiful place [laughing].
- **Bob Danziger** - Exactly you know nobody knows the future so you do things today you don't really know what they mean over time, but what else are you going to do? And I

felt that that's what I learned from Cecil, same thing. It was like if you're not putting absolutely 100% of everything there is about you into this note it doesn't sound.

## Conclusion

- **Bob Danziger** - Well, listen, Allison, I loved talking to you and I loved hearing your stories. I'm going to try to transmit to the students that we've got this pretty fabulous human being coming into play for us and I look forward to it. So we will see you actually the day before the Next Generation Festival, and then we will see you at the Next Generation Festival,, and we'll see you when you come back for the Jazz Camp and Monterey Jazz Festival.
- **Allison Miller** - Great.
- **Bob Danziger** - Thank you.
- **Allison Miller** - Yeah, thank you, Bob. Have a good night.
- **Bob Danziger** - You, too.
- **Allison Miller** - Okay. Bye.