

University of Washington

Women Who Rock Oral History Project

Transcript

Daphne Brooks and Sherrie Tucker

Narrator: Daphne Brooks and Sherrie Tucker

Interviewed by: Sonnet Retman

Transcribed by: Alex Catchings

Date: February 17, 2011

Place: Seattle, WA

Sonnet Retman (SR): Can you guys introduce yourselves please?

Daphne Brooks (DB): Sherrie?

Sherrie Tucker (ST): Daphne?

SR: And tell us who you are, so yeah.

DB: Can I look at you?

SR: Yeah

DB: Okay, um, yeah this is fine, right? I'm Daphne Brooks. I'm forty-two years old. I teach at Princeton University in the Department of English and the Center for African American Studies. I've written two books, one on transatlantic black performance in the 19th century and another on the late, great Jeff Buckley, and I work on race and performance studies and black feminist theory and write about popular music culture. And I'm working on a book right now on black women, sound subcultures and modernity, and I've just finished the liner notes for the Aretha Franklin box set for Atlantic Records at Columbia for 1960 through 1968, so yes, that's who I am. And I'm from California, I'm from the Bay Area, so Sherrie...

ST: Yeah, I can't wait to hear about this now book. I've heard you mention it

DB: You're a big part of that Sherrie Tucker, so you're gonna help me with that book!
[laughter]

ST: Well I'm from California, too.

DB: No way!

ST: I'm from California. I'm not from the Bay Area but I lived in the Bay Area for many years

DB: I know you did, I know you did, right

ST: Yeah, but—

DB: Where are you from in California?

ST: I'm from Arcata,

DB: Oh wow

ST: Arcata Eureka

DB: Oh yeah, come on. Pass that going on the way going over grapevine

ST: Right, going, yeah kind of

DB: Right, kind of

ST: You pass it going

DB: You see the signs going up—

ST: Going down

DB: Oh right, I'm thinking going up

ST: Three hundred, yeah highway 101—

DB: That's fascinating

ST: Very, three hundred miles north of San Francisco

DB: Wow

ST: Yeah, but I currently live in Kansas

DB: Yes, you do

ST: And teach in the American Studies program now a department at the University of Kansas and Lourdes.

DB: That's cool

ST: Yeah, and I do work on jazz and lately I've been working a lot on swing as war memory. Swing culture as war memory for Americans and about Americans

DB: Oh that's so cool. You didn't say the name of your groundbreaking, field-defining book. What's up with that?

ST: [Laughing] I wrote a book called Swing Shift: "All Girl" Bands in the 1940s

DB: Which I had heard about from Herman Grey when you were finishing your Ph.D. at Santa Cruz and he said, "I have this student who's just gonna blast out of the water."

ST: Awww.

DB: That, you know, right, so your reputation preceded you.

ST: You know, that book took me to school. I was not a scholar before I headed into that research. It took me, it still feels like I'm kind of... I don't know.

DB: Yeah, so are we talking now? Because I just want to talk to Sherrie.

SR: So that's totally find to talk to Sherrie.

DB: So tell me more about that. Like how did you—no I'm serious, how did you end up getting to that project? Getting to Santa Cruz to do that project? Did you grow up listening to jazz. Are you a musician?

ST: I grew up listening to jazz. And I was kind of a musician, I was never that good. I played the flute, which I hated the flute, I hated the—why didn't I ever switch to another instrument, I don't know. But I had mechanical problems with the flute, I had like this double joint here, so there's certain things—see—this finger would get stuck and if you're a flautist you really can't. But somebody should have stopped me, but it was the girls' instrument, you know, so that's what I played so I think that's kind of the deep psychological reason to why I got into—

DB: To do, right the academia to kind of work within the broader space of jazz culture beyond the flute.

ST: Right, and I was a jazz fan and a jazz disc jockey for a long time. And I was a secretary, I worked, I had worked 9-5 as a secretary for many, many years in the Bay Area. And worked fill-in at KJAZZ, the old KJAZZ

DB: Oh you're kidding!

ST: No, and I loved jazz and I was like, my dream was just to like do something connected with jazz but I had no interest in women with jazz. It hadn't occurred to me that the only artists I listened to were men.

DB: So who were the artists you listened to?

ST: Oh, Eddie Lang, Chad Davis, I mean there were certain sounds that just really grabbed me and spoke to me and I always liked... I don't know, I always liked kind of avant garde music and I got to—a lot of my favorite times to fill in were late nights where you really got to stretch out

DB: That's incredible. You know my sister's a DJ, have we talked about this?

ST: No!

DB: Yeah, well you were in the Bay Area for a while. Her name is Ronell, she goes by One Name, and she had the morning show on KEML for many years and then has her own station, well not her own, but KISS was kind of constructed around her classic soul and R&B and she's the announcer for the Giants at the ballpark. But I know that kind of life of a disc jockey, because she started out doing a graveyard shift and being a women, and that history is just crazy

ST: That's ridiculous. Yeah I was a disc jockey in Monterey and there I could be on the air, but once I got to the Bay Area I just wasn't good enough to get on the air.

DB: Well it's a crazy market.

ST: I got hired as a secretary with no secretarial skills or training or anything by the radio station the day I walked in with a tape.

DB: My god, so then how did you make that leap to women and jazz

ST: Okay, general ed. I mean this is my thing that general education, I think it's fantastic. I was a returning student while I was a secretary, I was taking creative writing classes, but I got to a point where I thought maybe someday I'll get my bachelor's degree. And I was—you know—I was a returning student, and I'd go take one class at a time and I got to the general ed requirements and I took a class called, well, I took several, I mean the most interesting classes I took were general ed requirements. And all the ones I wanted to take were the ones where I wrote about my angst like in my creative writing class. So I took a class... you could take a Marxism cluster as your general ed requirements

DB: You have to do that. If you're at SF State you've got to do that. Yeah. I want to do that right now. Can we do that? That's awesome.

ST: I was fed up with being a secretary, it kind of spoke to me and I took a class. I got into Marcuse, and my professor said, "You know that Marcuse's most brilliant student teachers here," and then I started working with Angela Davis and I wouldn't have—I honestly wouldn't have taken, you know...

DB: Oh my god, look at that. That's amazing. That's amazing, wow

ST: So the assignment—the first class I took with her was the history of African American women, and the assignment was to write about something in history that African American women had done, and I thought well I know a lot about jazz, but not about women in it so she encouraged me. And I started interviewing people and I started writing.

DB: That's incredible. You know, so my mom is eightyfour, and from Texarcana Texas. Saw *The Sweethearts*, you know, I think she saw them, and she has all these memories, and so does my dad, about the bands you write about. And a while back I told her about the book and she got really excited. She's very cute.

ST: That's so cool. So tell me about, how did you get to your research?

DB: I don't know what I did here... I wanted to be a rock critic when I was a kid. I grew up in a house filled with parents who came from Texarcana and Arkansas, Jim Crow South, came to the Bay Area when my dad came to the grad school for education at Berkeley and my parents had three kids that were spaced very far apart. So we were like, have lived through different points in black history. So my brother's seventeen years older than me and my sister's ten years older than me. And the thing that's significant about that is that we're a very musical household. So I'm coming along way late in the game and I'm hearing everything. I'm hearing post WWII black popular music culture just coursing through my home. From my dad and mom listening to swing and loving big band and kind of also loving Miles, my dad really loved Miles, but also the black pop of the sixties and bubblegum pop, if we deign to call it that, sister embraced. J5. My brother loving *The Temptations*, and for me, my identity politics by the time my parents moved from Berkeley to, moment of silence, Menlo Park, California and next to Stanford, most boring place on earth. But, was to kind of figure out a way to articulate who I was at that particular moment in time although I loved all that music I was hearing. And for me it was kind of playing around on the radio at night and literally crossing over from KSOL, from KJAZZ which my parents would have on and finding like, you know, the different rock stations. KEML was a rock station when I was a kid. I could list all the—KOME from San Jose—and I listened to a lot of classic rock in the 70s, but then also being intrigued by this other thing that was happening and I had just finished reading, I was telling *Sonnet Ret*—the great *Sonnet Retman*—this other night, last night that I'd just finished reading from cover to cover Greil Marcus's *Lipstick Traces*, which

I've never read the whole thing. And he's, and I have a very interesting kind of weird connection with Greil because he also grew up in Menlo Park and went to Berkeley and all of his work is about coming out of Berkeley and the free speech movement. And that's like really embedded in our family, the Berkeley narrative. And for me I kind of discovered punk and new wave on my own. I started going to Tower Records in Mountain View reading rock music criticism because there's nobody else to talk to about this. My brother and my sister made fun of me for discovering, first, unfortunately Journey, which is, right? And loving The Police and loving Prince, which he was not initially embraced in the black community. My sister thought he was weird and he wore underwear on stage and stuff. So I really, rock music criticism kind of nurtured a sense of belonging, and even though these were guys that didn't think about me as a fan at all, it gave me kind of a language for better or worse to think through the sounds I was hearing. And that's what I wanted to do, I'd always wanted to write since I was like in the first grade and it was the post-civil rights narrative, you have to do a Martin Luther King Jr. essay, and everybody does, and mine won and my parents gave me a typewriter and I was like, oh I'll be a writer, and I love the San Francisco Giants so I was like, I'll be a sports writer. And then I discovered music and it was just like, I want to write about music. And that's the way it was, and it just kind of connected to loving African American literature that was around my household all the time and trying to figure out how to make all those worlds connect. And that's what happened, and still I wake up everyday and think it's really strange that this happened. And I was lucky to have incredible, brilliant friends in graduate school who felt similar to me and wanted to collaborate and do great things, Sonnet Retman and I did a great conference I'm still very proud of at UCLA on popular music culture. That was in 1997, it was a precursor to EMP, the music conference. Anyways, that's what happened.

ST: Did you have any contact with the rock critics that you were reading?

DB: That's a great question. I didn't, I idolized them from afar. I didn't even know Greil's personal history until I met him at EMP when we were literally flying on a plane together to go to a planning committee meeting in Seattle for the second EMP, and I'm like oh my god it's Greil Marcus, and he's like, "Well I'm from Menlo Park" and it turns out he lives down the street, he grew up down the street from where I grew up. But I didn't know him until Sonnet and I came up with this idea to do this conference. And we partly did it, and we would have to do an interview with her, with Professor Retman, but I feel like a lot of our conversations were about loving certain writers, especially somebody like Ann Powers who really encapsulated just kind of the feminist politics that we were coming into consciousness dealing with in graduate school, and writing about it and putting into kind of this popular discursive voice. And we wanted to meet her. I know that was, you know. So we put together this conference and met a lot of people through that initial conference and then that's kind of the amazing thing about how life works, that the EMP became later on like, what? Five eight, nine years on. Nine years on to reconnect with these people we'd idolized in graduate school. It took me years to get over Ann saying, "Oh, I read what you write," when I was like, "What are you talking about? I read what you

write.” So yeah, and to really now, to have a community now where we can share our work with each other. It was really powerful. So how do you feel like, Sherrie, how do you—it’s kind of a leap, but I’m interested in what you think of the state of jazz studies today. Where are we at? Especially in terms of thinking about gender and jazz studies. A lot has happened in the past decade.

ST: It really has. It really has, and it’s something I haven’t quite, I mean, I haven’t figured it out, but I do think about it an awful lot. One of the things that I notice is that there’s more recognition of, say women in jazz. But it’s still the kind of recognition that pulls women out of jazz. Norma Coates, which I love, so we still have, I still find myself invited to speak on women in jazz panels and it’s a strange thing. I end up doing a performance on those kinds of panels that I don’t think really works, where I sit on the panel and I end up sounding like I’m critiquing the people who put it on. Which is not a good thing to do. So it is really an interesting moment, and I got to spend a year at Columbia as the Louis Armstrong Visiting Professor in Jazz Studies.

DB: When was that?

ST: it was 2004, 05. It was unbelievable. I can’t tell you how unimaginable that was because I had just been attacked, I had just been shredded on the jazz research listserv by people ripping my book apart. No, seriously, you could write about gender—the thing is if I had just written about women in jazz, but because I thought everyone should think about gender when they write about jazz I got ripped to shreds on the jazz research listserv. I was on a research trip and I was on the listserv just reading about myself and I was still, I mean, I didn’t have a job, I was on the market, I didn’t have a job and I thought oh my god I’m never going to work because they were ripping me apart. And then the next year I got invited to be the Louis Armstrong professor at Columbia and I think in part it’s because people at Columbia were going on that listserv and defending me

DB: Thank God

ST: And I don’t know, I never asked what connection. But it was weird. You know, you go from literally the market to...

DB: Right, I know. How fantastic, and it’s such a great community

ST: It was a wonderful, it was amazing. That was the first time I was in the position of saying okay, I’ve got some institutional support, what do I do? And I tried to put on a panel called—they wanted me to do something had to do with my work—to do a public presentation, so I thought I’d do a panel called Women Jazz Musicians who are tired of being on Women and Jazz Panels.

DB: That’s great, so who was on that?

ST: It was, well, because the women were really uncomfortable the only person who liked that title who we invited who accepted was Carlene Ray. She said, "I'll be on that panel."

DB: That's great! Nobody else? Come on!

ST: But other people did get on the panel, and talked about the questions that we raised. I don't know how successful it was, but I thought here we are having a space, taking a space, and not really doing something different, so the women who were on the panel were great. They talked about their careers, but then I keep thinking what else can we do with this?

DB: I know, where do we go? But then you have this fabulous anthology, *Big Ears*, right? You co-edited that, do you want to talk about that? Sherrie doesn't want to give it up.

ST: You know what, again it was like feeling I was in isolation. And then meeting Nicole Rustin who had written this amazing dissertation on Charles Mingus and we just connected and we started presenting together and we started finding other people and then we thought let's just put something out with this new work.

DB: That connection is amazing. IT really marks what's happening in the field, your influence, its got such a range of scholars, really established scholars like Farrah, and newer people like—who's that chick—our colleague, Krista McGee?

ST: Right, Krista McGee

DB: I think of you work when I look at her book and I'm like oh my god, we've got another generation of women doing great work on women and jazz. But that's really a great, fantastic volume. I'm looking forward to teaching it. Lara Pellegrinelli who's in it... yeah you know. No, that's good stuff.

ST: So tell me how you think about the state of...

DB: Oh yeah, of popular music studies. Wow. Yeah. That's a good question. I wrote a, I was part of a thing that, oh boy, guitar guy... Steve Waxman—he did a special issue of, it would be good if I remembered which journal, but like *Popular Music Studies*. I get them mixed up. And I wrote about the state of the field and I was trying to talk about—well I was trying to talk about a few things. I was talking about black studies as being entwined with popular music studies and stretching back to DuBois, but we could go back to Frederick Douglass too and just trying to re-historicize how we even think about a field and how that could open up new projects and also open up new avenues for people who don't consider themselves popular music studies to do this kind of work. It kind of seems like we're there, in a way. Josh—the great Josh Kun said to me at ASA, he said, and he's right now co-editing a special issue of *American Quarterly* with Kara Keeling—the great Kara Keeling—on sonic culture,

and he said, “Didn’t it feel like ten years ago there were only like four of us doing this, and now there’s like four hundred of us doing stuff on sound?” But I will say I said to him, “A very famous black feminist scholar” and I respect her a great deal, but I saw her at this black theatricality conference and she said to me, “You know everybody’s working on sound now but I’m going to just keep working on visual culture,” and I didn’t know how to take this, you know. I mean, one or the other? I think that we’re kind of in an interesting crossroads. A lot of people seem very excited about working on the sonic but trying to figure out how to sharpen the way we talk about race and gender in popular music culture so that we don’t kind of replicate the same methodological problems that have been handed down to us in the field. And, you know, I will say the other thing that I think is happening. It’s big in the humanities obviously, for a while now, affect studies. I think it will be interesting the ways we can make that work in productive new ways in popular music studies. To write about feeling in relation to sound. And there is a great generation of feminist scholars. Alexandra Vasquez, Karen Tongson, Christine Balance that have been coming to EMP over the years, who really kind of, that’s embedded in the form and content of their work, so I think that’s really exciting. But it’s still a period of time we’re in. I teach a class on history of rock music criticism at Princeton and the first time I taught it it was sixteen guys and two women, you know. And the second time I taught it the numbers, we made it an even smaller class and it was still heavily weighted men versus women. And getting, and it was not racially diverse either. But getting a real diverse cross-section of students to be invested in the project of popular music studies as an epistemic kind of project, as a project that reaches beyond kind of certain kinds of simplistic ways they think about the path of popular music culture, I think that there’s still a long way to go.

ST: There is a question I’d like to ask you now that I have the opportunity.

DB: Man, is there some wine here?

ST: But I’m really interested in your practice as a writer because you write a lot of different kinds of pieces for different audiences, and I’m interested in how you see your practice—how does the scholarship and criticism work?

DB: Thanks for asking that. I just had a—this might seem like—well, so I’m at Harvard this year for the Radcliffe Institute and I went to this class. Did I tell Professor Retman this story? Oh yeah, this is a good one. They asked me to come—a former colleague of mine from Princeton teaches the intro methodologies course in American Civ, the Ph.D. program, and they read my book and she wanted me to come and talk to the students. And they all had to post the night before, and it’s all white students except for two people of color who are in the new class. And I know those two people of color, one is the great Scott Poulson Bryant, who’s one of the founding editors of Vibe Magazine and went back to grad school. Sweet guy, totally brilliant. The other is a fabulous Dominican feminist scholar who came out of Yale undergrad. But all of the others young scholars are white and from different parts of the country and they posted ahead of time on the website and they said, “This is, this

book is so—” this is my book bodies in dissent, which is my performance studies book, “This is a really—I can’t understand this book. And it’s too filled with jargon and it’s really theoretical when it doesn’t need to be theoretical,” and this says a lot about which archive they think should be theorized, but I came in and I was like, “God damn, I thought I was like one of the accessible scholars.” But I also thought it was kind of a great moment to talk about—I didn’t have any problem with it, but the colleague who taught the class was all mortified and I’m like hey, this is cool, let’s roll up—let’s do it! Come on! Right? And the two students of color were like traumatized, like, “I can’t believe this is happening.” But I was like, you know, I think that there are two things happening here, so getting back to your question this way, I both want to talk about the different voices that I write in, and I sent them like I have pieces that I’ve done in The Nation on Amy Winehouse and Beyoncé, right, and so I want to talk about the different voices I write in, but I also want to talk about what it means to be an interdisciplinary scholar, and to be able to read in and through different voices. And in terms of professionalization, I was like y’all are in an American Civ program? You’ll have to be reading shit in sociology and history and polis ci and everything once you’re on faculty. I guess for me kind of the evolution of my voice has largely come from continuing to read music criticism and to be a part of the EMP, I meant it’s amazing what kind of an impact that community has had on my style as a writer. It’s been about, and just the way I think as a scholar, because I came through English and eventually had a specialization in performance studies, and started to think more about the performative within writing and just really felt like I wanted to be able to merge form and content that some of my heroes had already done. Somebody like Greg Tate, coming out of rock music writing. Somebody like Fred Moten who’s like a giant in performance studies. Being able to turn your written project into a piece that emulates the sounds that you’re writing about. And that’s kind of been, that’s been something that has really had an impact on me and continues to sort of challenge me in certain ways as a scholar. But I’m not sure with this new book what the voice is that I’m going to write in, I haven’t figured it out because so much of the book looks like it’s going to be about voice, I really want to, you know both have fun with this but be careful with how, what kind of work my own voice is gonna do in conversation with the arguments that I’m trying to make. So I kind of answered your question, I think.

ST: Yeah, really. I think it’s really interesting.

DB: What kind of a voice do you feel like you write in, and how important is say improvisation or different aesthetic within jazz in particular to how you write?

ST: Well, I’ll tell you what. I think that I started out as a creative writer and I still feel like a creative writer and that’s really important to me. And I know that sometimes I’m really slow because I do want to have the discovery happen in the writing, I don’t want to have the argument first. You know, I know that its’ really better to do it that way. IT takes forever. I write in circular... I write, I write write write write write to discover what’s happening. Then I read out loud, and that’s definitely.. the sound... the sound will always, the sound doesn’t lie. My reading a sheet of paper can lie, but if I need to take a breath then, yeah. So I read out loud

DB: Yeah, do you ever write with, this is going to sound too, what do I mean? Do you write with music, or do you read with music when you're writing, like read out loud while you're playing music. So here's what's behind this. So there's this thing that happened at EMP that's now circulated called critical karaoke that I was involved in, but it's started by Josh Clover the poet who copyrighted the term and is very litigious and won't let other people use it, so other people called it different things, but it's happened at EMP and has been published and reprinted, but to me, one of the grad students Kerry said she loved that project, and I said it's my favorite piece of writing I've ever done. But part of what made it so special, and it's definitely had a huge influence on my writing, is that Josh, who's a taskmaster said that you should pick a song that at some point in your life—didn't have to be for long, or could still be—but was your favorite song of all time. And then I want you to write about it, why it was your favorite song, but it should be, doesn't have to be a combination of memoir and theory, and I want you to write about it and it has to be put to the length of the song, and we're going to play the song as you read your piece and it can't be any longer than the exact length of the song, right? And it was such an incredible exercise to me, and it was like doing poetry, and I am not a poet, as I was saying earlier today, right? It was about being economical with your prose but being elusive and metaphorical and colorful and you know, just really forcing you to kind of work very creatively within a certain, you know, period of time and trying to deliver an idea about music. And so just even when you were talking about kind of working through discovering your argument in the writing process, I think there's something about that project that was about, you don't even completely discover what you're saying about the song until you're forced to write through... it's a great pedagogical tool. We cannot call it critical karaoke or Josh will sue us, but I encourage everyone to use it in their writing, so.

SR: You guys can keep going. I'm making that face because I just. I won't say anymore but. Josh might sue me.

DB: Can't you bleep it out? He'll never know about this. Except that he considers himself a feminist rock critic because he writes under the pseudonym Jane Dark and didn't think it was a problem that he didn't tell people that he's a dude when people thought he was a chick. But anyway, we love you, Josh. His book 1989 is pretty great. Um, well yeah, so there's writing. What about teaching music? What do you most enjoy about teaching in the field that you teach in? Is there something particular about teaching jazz studies that you're drawn to?

ST: You know, I'll tell you something terrible. I don't really like to teach.

DB: Really? That's great that you admit that! Yeah! Where's the wine!

ST: I don't really want to do it. But I really don't like it. I feel inarticulate, I'm very introverted, I was the kind of graduate student who never spoke in class. So there's

something about... sometimes it's wonderful, but I think I'm very hit and miss as a teacher.

DB: I think we all are!

[Transitional audio break 32:45-33:46]

ST: You know, what I'll say instead of talking about my teaching because I'm feeling kind of like a rotten teacher right now.

DB: You shouldn't feel that way, because I can say some things about being a rotten teacher, so.

ST: Oh, well I like... music is good because students can have so much knowledge and investment. And that's what wonderful about it. But I like collaborative writing. That's my newest thing, and that's a connection with improvisation.

DB: So tell me a little about that. What kind of collaborative writing have you done?

ST: Well the first, I think the first time that I've ever rally collaboratively wrote something was the introduction to big ears with Nicole, and we had such a great time writing. We had such a great time. It was wonderful to, when you get stuck, pass it along.

DB: Pass it along, no I think that's so great.

ST: And then I've been doing some Google Doc writing with groups. I was in a group that Deborah Wong organized where a bunch of people wrote on a topic and I loved it. At the end we weren't sure what to do with it and no one wanted to edit it and there was no way to publish it sort of the way it was

DB: But there was. That's something we should be teaching more. We had a project, the dance scholar Tommy Defrantz at MIT, he and I, well he and I, he does a, every two years he does a black performance theory conference and he has a co-coordinator and I did it with him at Yale a couple years ago. But there's a volume coming out about these different conferences that we've done. And what he wanted us to do was submit these papers and also have a conversation with somebody you're paired up with around the pieces that we did and have the other person read the other person's piece and either have a conversation live or Skyped where we talk through that work and it's transcribed. And I thought there was something really lovely about that, and the pieces continue to grow. Enough of this academic stuff, though. What's your favorite musical memory as a young person? Like from your youth?

ST: Okay, I'm having a little bit of trouble narrowing it down and thinking of something that I could... let me ask you first

DB: Oh sure. Um, well I have a favorite and I have an earliest, so I'll give you both. My earliest concert memory is my parents taking me to, well, my family went to, we were at Disneyland, and Frida Payne was giving a concert, Frida Payne Band of Gold, and my dad, I had to have been about three, and he had me on his shoulders. And I remember being on top of the world as it always is in those situations and kind of really processing a live sort of musical event in my little mushy three-year-old brain, and it still sticks with me as being incredibly joyful. And then my first concert that—I went to a lot of shows with my big sister I was talking about, and my family, like we saw in the Bay Area, we'd go to the Circle Story theater and see Tony Orlando and Dawn, right, you know? And then when I got obsessed with New Wave and Punk, and I really love The Police who are not New Wave and are marginalized in terms of being musicians who could play and all that kind of stuff, and the arrogance of Sting, but I love Stewart Copeland, the drummer. But I begged my parents to take me to see The Police open for Santana at the California State Fair. That would've been when I was in like the seventh grade, during the Ghost and the Machine album. And the great thing about that experience that I really, that moves me now you know, as an adult, I have friends who have kids, I don't have kids, but my parents who—older parents—were sitting on a park bench at the fair and they'd go on to [inaudible 38:06] and they were waiting for me when I came out of the concert and I'm like, man yeah I was lucky. That was a [inaudible 38:12] in a lot of ways but that was really just an extraordinary moment to be in this kind of collective space and hearing a band that I'd grown very fond of. So those are some of my childhood memories associated with music. How about you?

ST: Well it's funny because I talked about hating the flute but when you said that I realized that some of my earlier memories had to do with playing. And those moments where I would not be in a space about playing the wrong thing I would be playing with friends. And we would just, all of a sudden it was like there was this heightened experience where we were just together and I just really loved that. And I remember singing as a young young person, and singing in my room by myself and just feeling like I really know who I was.

DB: That's really an interesting formulation. To sing and really feel like you know who you are. That's great.

ST: Yeah

DB: They need to use that on Glee, and they really need to diversify Glee. That show really pisses me off. We could talk about that.

ST: Oh we could talk about that.

DB: Do you watch Glee? Oh my god. Well you go first, what are your feelings about that? I have lots of feelings about Glee, I know, yeah.

ST: Glee, well you know Glee fascinates me.

DB: Mhm, totally fascinating.

ST: Fascinates me because I'll start to give up on it, and then all of a sudden there will be this moment of hope.

DB: A smidgeon

ST: And right now I'm waiting for the kids to organize to get the policy changed in school so Kurt can come back.

DB: Well that's important.

ST: But are they going to?

DB: Are they? We don't know? Could they, when they do that, could they have a policy that it's better to have black people be around with black music, instead of black music without black people? Especially black boys. Where are the black boys in Glee other than the like, the football player who's totally homophobic? But I'm really like, oh my god, this is like the oldest popular music narrative in American culture. The ways in which, you know I've got to sit through Gwyneth Paltrow doing Umbrella? You know, and Fuck You? Yes, the title of the song. I mean I really, you know, what's upsetting about it, right is it's championed so much as being this kind of narrative about outsiders. And it's part of this, I always think about it as like a post Civil Rights irony where if you say something fucked up, then it's okay because you're saying, "I know it's fucked up so it's really not fucked up," you know? So it's the way that, say Mercedes gets to operate as like the gracenote diva singer who's made fun of, but it's okay because we all know that we're making fun of her and she's in on the joke. And it's like no, we're just repeating the joke again about, you know, heavyset black diva who's totally marginalized and can only do one thing, which is like hit those grace notes. We're really supposed to believe that Lea Michele is like the best singer out of all those students? My voice is rising now. Oh my god! And Corey Monteith? I'm like are you kidding me? I don't know, you know. I mean, so it's unfortunate because it's such a great opportunity.

ST: It is—

DB: I really. I just, if I have to see one more tune where it's like white lead singers singing black pop hits. Let alone the f'in teacher who's horrible, who does raps and stuff. I'm like so, okay. That was my Glee moment. Archive that for a thousand years

ST: Right, a thousand years. It's a performance of consent.

DB: It is, right exactly.

ST: I think that's the, that's how, I think that you nailed it there, that the irony is operated in a way of just sort of vindicating

DB: There's a lot of that. And I wrote about it at the end of *Bodies in Dissent* in the epilogue where I wrote about *Avenue Q*, the musical, I don't know if you know that musical with the Muppets and stuff. Maybe that's what they were doing with Cee-Lo and the muppets on the Grammys, like an *Avenue Q* thing. That probably is what they were! Because in *Avenue Q* there was profanity and stuff. Geeze. But um, there's a generation that grew up kind of understanding the lexicon of terms linked to multiculturalism and diversity, right? And therefore feel like because they know those terms and those ideas that they can both mock them and say, "I'm not this or that because I know these terms. I know what multiculturalism is so I can't be a racist," but there's all these artists like Wes Anderson who hasn't made that many films lately, but like the *Royal Tennenbaums* and there was *Bottle Rocket* where that kind of understanding race and he's from Bogata, Texas, but not understanding his white entitlement in talking about race in certain ways. And I feel like *Glee* kind of does that, and I hate to say it but Ryan, their director sort of occupying the space of marginalization as a white queer man but not being able to talk through his privileges as a white queer man.

ST: That's really profound

DB: *Glee*. Anyways.

ST: But I meant the outsider. Who are the outsiders? The outsiders in *Glee* club?

DB: Right, they did that episode where Jane Lynch had them divide up by race, right? And then it ended up just replicating everything f'ed up about that. But, yeah, so what do we think are some examples in popular music culture of people doing really smart things with race and gender. Are there artists that stand out to you? Hey! I want to ask you since we're coming off of the Grammys how you feel about Esparanza.

ST: Oh my god, I am so excited. I can't figure that out.

DB: Yeah that was kind of wild.

ST: That really surprised me.

DB: And the Bieber fans who tore up her wiki page.

ST: Yeah, a thousand years, you need to know this.

DB: "The Bieber? What is the Bieber?" You know, I kind of like him, because I feel free. Like I'm old and, I do—you can put that on tape. I feel like I'm old enough to not

care about him. Like, "This too shall pass." You know? Like we had to wait out Britney a little longer than we thought, but it passed. This is gonna pass.

ST: So were you surprised by Esperanza?

DB: I was. But I was like, what are the alternatives? You know, Bieber and Drake. The way I heard people dividing it up was like Drake and Bieber, Canadian, but like totally different fanbase, weird. But people said people voted that way, or people voted for Mumford and Sons and Florence and the Machine because they're British, but also completely different artists. So I think I'm saying to you, no I have no idea how that happened. But I'm thrilled for her, I wish Janelle had been nominated, that was totally wrong she was left out.

ST: Yes, yes it was.

ST: But Esperanza and Nate Chinen in the Times did a report on her and I thought it was really on point, because he's like, she's interesting and her recordings have been uneven but she's virtuosic in a way that the Grammys kind of are drawn to, and he wanted to draw a line between Norah Jones and Esperanza, that people are kind of drawn to this idea of jazz virtuosity.

ST: Right, that's interesting. Yeah, I was wondering, I know that she's been doing a lot of tours with, I don't know, kind of college circuit, so there's a—

DB: Right, so a sort of hipster, bohemian set of supporters, right? Yeah, but that was exciting in its sort of way. She's cute. I love the do.

ST: Mhm.

DB: So other people right now that you're excited about? Or even beyond that, what you're listening to, whether new or old?

ST: Mmm... you know I hate to be blanking out here, but I haven't really been listening to very much lately. I have to say, I've been trying to finish and I've been interested in, but I shouldn't be blanking out. There's such great artists. Um, but you go.

DB: I'll go and then I do want to hear more about the project. I definitely want to do that. Um, right. So beyond Janelle, I finally listened to Florence and I feel like an old crabby old lady because I'm like, "Oh, I like Polly Gene Harvey" who just had a great album she just released. As though there can't be two countercultural British female singers. But I ended up liking her record. I liked her record, and I, you know I feel very mixed about the new Adele. I haven't heard the whole thing. I really liked the first one, I was like thank god for Adele because Amy Winehouse had traumatized me so badly. So I'm excited about her record. And then one of my favorite bands, Radiohead, just announced that they're putting out a new record this

weekend. And they were just so gangster about it. The Grammys go down and then the next day they're like, "Uh, we have a record that's gonna drop this weekend." You know, they're just, they're fantastic. So I'm excited about the Radiohead. And my other favorite band is TV on the Radio and I just bought tickets to their show which is gonna be in April and they're incredibly exciting to me, and interesting and both Radiohead and TV on the Radio, just to bring it back to this Oral History Project—hugely influenced by Alice Coltrane. Hugely. And actually the strings on Amnesiac, one of Radiohead's fine fine albums came straight from, they said they were listening to lots of Alice Coltrane. So there's so many stories of these incredible indie rock bands who are listening to alternative women of color musicians, you know. And somebody like Alice Coltrane having an impact on two of the most avant garde indie rock bands of this generation? That's a story that needs to be told.

ST: It sure does, it sure does, yeah.

DB: So anybody you wanna give a shout out to music-wise?

ST: Well you know, I listen to, yeah Janelle Monae, I love Janelle Monae. And you introduced me to Janelle Monae's music and

DB: That's so funny

ST: Yeah, I just totally love her.

DB: She's incredible. Have you seen her live yet?

ST: Yes, I saw her live in Kansas, where her whole family was in the balcony of Liberty Hall. Her grandma, I'm being serious

DB: Oh my god that's incredible.

ST: It was so wonderful, and the whole family had, I mean it must have been at least three generations of family holding balloons with her face on the balloons, and it was just wonderful.

DB: She's marvelous, and she's the only artist right now who will get up on an awards show, and this was the Soul Train Awards earlier this year and said, "I'm doing this for young women." I think we really want to support young women and young women of color in particular to think differently and to feel like they can be different and that's okay. And you never hear that. You never hear that and I'm like oh my god. She's amazing. Her shows are incredible, she's going back into the studio right now, that's why she can't do this thing with me in April. And I worry about how the label's handling her, but I'm crossing my fingers. So what's our time like?

ST: We must be almost. Twelve minutes.

DB: Oh, I want to hear about the new project. Oh, you were going to say a new artists or somebody else you want to talk about?

ST: Oh, yeah, so I listen to, I still listen to kind of to free. And I hate to say that because it's creative and improvisation, but I also am really interested in performance, kind of performance, people who do improvisation and performance art with technology and stuff. So Tomea Hans and Pica Pica. She's just, she's got this playable instrument that's a costume and an Anime character

DB: Oh, come on

ST: And she's a dance theorist. You know, so to me she's just brilliant. I love what she does and ifind what she does very exciting. And I like the artist, the time of my year where music is well, I go to a jazz festival every year.

DB: Where's that at?

ST: It's in Ontario, and it's an out festival. But they do things like they had Anthony Braxton come and give a theory class and then conduct his music, and then we got to hear the score that he had explained to us. And it's a community even, it's free, it's a small town so people from the community come. It's called the Guelph Jazz Festival. I think in the United States you couldn't do that, but in small town Canada it seems to work. It's called the Guelph Jazz Festival, and it's out music and

DB: I wanna go

ST: [Miam Asayoka?] plays and George Lewis. It's just a wonderful event.

DB: That's great, that's really great.

ST: But my new project, I write about music that I don't really love. I write about swing, and that's not my main thing.

DB: So why swing?

ST: I think swing is fascination. It probably has to do with being a daughter of people who very much identified around that kind of music and having records around the house, and I think besides playing my earliest memories are records.

DB: Yeah, absolutely. What they look like, not just what they sound like

ST: What they looked like, what they smelled like...

DB: Yeah, because I'm an old Fogey now, I'm like, "We don't have that anymore."

ST: I know!

DB: It's so sad. But yeah, actual objects you can hold and touch and yeah

ST: Yeah, flipping through them. And those people who would share records with you. It's so different than sending a file. But the people who I was in a summer repertory company when I was a teenager and one of the actors—and I grew up in a small town in California—one of the actors from San Francisco had all these records and he would play them for us and we'd have cassette tapes, he'd make us cassette tapes, and that's the first time I heard John Coltrane, and hearing about the music, why it's important, the way that generosity—Travis Jackson writes a little about that, even, that there's this culture kind of hoarding and there's also this culture of exchange.

DB: Of circulation

ST: Yeah, there's always someone in a group who owns a record store, or who works in a record store

DB: And those are very powerful narratives. Only part of *Almost Famous*, what a missed opportunity that film was, the only part I like was Zooey Deschanel, the whole film should have been about her, but being the older sister and leaving these records behind for her younger brothers, the Cameron Crowe figures, I'm like oh, that's such an important and powerful gesture. And I felt like I had that with my sister. Just such rich stories that need to be told. Yeah, you should write a memoir about that. That is such a unique child. And just growing up in Arcadia and having like a figure like that around who exposed you to that. That's incredible. I'm serious! What? I'll write about *Glee* and you'll write about that. My hatred of *Glee*..

ST: But you have an MTV story.

DB: Yeah, okay I'll tell the MTV story. I was obsessed with the Police. I mean, my parents probably shouldn't have taken me to that show, but I loved Stewart Copeland the drummer, and I think the sad thing is during the grunge era, when Sonnet and I were going to shows all the time, and Veruca Salt one of the bands who's not around anymore but had a one hit wonder, "Seether," right, we went to see them, and they're led by these two awesome white women who were feminist, and at the show they did some prints. And one of them's Jewish, Nina Gordon, and she was like—they did the cross. Prints of like, Jewish, not feeling the lyrics but love me some friends. And the great moment for me with Prince, Nina Gordon said, was "when I stopped wanting to fuck him and I wanted to be him." And I was like, yeah, and I wished that I had crossed her just playing the drums instead of being crushed out on Stewart Copeland. But because I was crushed out on Stewart Copeland I sent like hundreds of cards to the new cable channel at the time, MTV, for their contest to see the Police backstage, a day on the green in San Francisco, and I won the contest and my parents, because I was such a shifty little kid who climbed out of her window and shit. They thought I rigged the whole thing. And I was like, no I really

won this contest. The TV cameras are going to show up. There's going to be a limo and they're like, "What?" And my parents are interviewing the chauffeur and like, "Is this a scam" And it's like, no we're actually on live TV. And this is right when I'm like, it's the beginning of the sophomore year of high school and so all these people are calling me saying can I go to the show with you? And it ended up literally being in back of the stage instead of backstage hobnobbing with the group, and it's at the Oakland Coliseum so it's kind of a nightmare. It's like obstructed view, and I met like the redheaded guy from Thompson Twins and one of the members of Madness and then missed most of—we tried to go outside to see the Police but there were so many people, it was like massive you know, and I got passed over because I was freaking out about getting crushed, and so I got passed over to the Red Cross area and got separated from my friends and we ended up in the third deck watching The Police on a jumbo monitor and I cried. So right, maybe the whole narrative behind this is that I'm somehow still trying to meet Stewart Copeland still as a rock critic. Why not? You know. So, five minutes? Okay. Well my project, which I want you to help me with is on black women and sound in modernity. And I haven't figured it out completely, but I'm committed to trying to tell a story about the way in which black womanhood has been affected by and has also influenced the construction of womanhood in relation to modernity from the late nineteenth century through the present day. So like, ooh that's a small topic, right?

ST: Ohhh

DB: So like, I'm interested in mainly talking about it through—well maybe I shouldn't say that—I keep coming back to voice, but I know that instrumentality and not just the level of a voice can prove central to some aspects of the project. The work that I've done on Aretha, I was mainly doing in the fall, not just with the liner notes, but I did kind of another part of the work on her, another part of the project for my Radcliffe Lecture, just thinking of her as a pianist. How we don't think enough about how that's shaped and informed her vocal aesthetics. SO I have kind of just a lot of different pieces that I'm trying to weave together now that I've been getting over time. It took me a while—you talk about writing through something—it took me a while to kind of look up and go oh, I've done all these lecture, this is what my book is about, even though I still need to really refine it. But I wanted to try and do—I didn't want to call it a history of black women of popular music culture, although at cocktail parties I do that because it's easier to explain that. But I do want to cover some ground in terms of thinking about the centrality of black women's sonic aesthetics across time in relation to modernity and popular music culture. And I'm really careful about thinking about the heterogeneity of what we mean when we're talking about black womanhood and the different ways that class and sexuality and region affect the way we talk about black womanhood. But I think there is a story to be told about these clusters of artists in different genres who are working through intersectional issues of race and gender and the ways this has shaped their sound, and I'm interested in it in relation to the larger story of black folks and the recording industry. So all of these kind of moving parts working together. But it's taken some interesting turns. I got asked to do a very short piece

on Zora Neal Hurston singing, which I just, it was like what? And it was incredible and I was like, oh yeah, this is kind of exactly what I'm trying to get at. I'm trying to challenge the idea of Mercedes on Glee as being the one way in which we understand and hear the sound of black women

ST: This is wonderful. I saw the table of contents for that

DB: You did?!

ST: and I saw you did that.

DB: How did you see the table of contents?

ST: I don't know, somebody sent it to me. We're running out of time now.

DB: Sherrie Tucker, you are just the coolest person. And I don't think we even met until—in person until the thing in Montreal, but I've admired you from afar.

ST: I've admired you too from afar, and I got so excited when I got to meet you at Chip's thing.

DB: What was that?

ST: Montreal. Feminist Theory and Music project.

DB: So this is a really great project and we want to thank the technicians who keep this whole thing running because this is a really powerful forum that you all have.

ST: without the technicians we wouldn't have this a thousand years from now.

DB: No we wouldn't. They wouldn't have to deal with the Bieber question. Aaaand, we're out.

Sherrie Tucker would like to correct an inadvertent exaggeration in one of her statements. She did have a job when Swing Shift was shredded on the Jazz Research Listserve--but she didn't have tenure.